VELS
INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & ADVANCED STUDIES (VISTAS)
(Deemed to be University Estd. u/s 3 of the UGC Act, 1956)
PALLAVARAM, THALAMBUR, PERIYAPALAYAM, THIRUVANMIYUR, ADYAR - CHENNAI

Policy for Grievance Redressal Mechanism of Research Scholars



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POLICY FOR GRIEVANCE REDRESSAL MECHANISM OF RESEARCH SCHOLARS

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1. PURPOSE

This Policy establishes a transparent, fair and time-bound mechanism for receiving, examining and resolving grievances raised by Research Scholars of VISTAS during the course of their research programme.

2. SCOPE

The Policy applies to grievances arising in connection with research registration and progression, including admission-related disputes, supervision and guidance, Research Advisory Committee (RAC) decisions, plagiarism and academic-integrity allegations, thesis evaluation, fellowship disbursement, change of supervisor, authorship disputes, progress reporting and cancellation of registration.

3. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Fairness, impartiality and observance of the principles of natural justice.
- Time-bound disposal of grievances at the appropriate level.
- Confidential handling of complaints, evidence and proceedings.
- Protection of the legitimate academic interests of the Research Scholar and other parties concerned.
- Reasoned and documented decisions with an appropriate escalation and appeal mechanism.
- Maintenance of records for institutional monitoring, audit and regulatory compliance.

4. FOUR-TIER GRIEVANCE REDRESSAL STRUCTURE

Grievances shall ordinarily be addressed at the lowest appropriate level and escalated where they remain unresolved within the prescribed timeline.

Level	Authority
Tier 1 – Department Level	Head of the Department (HoD) / Departmental Research Committee (DRC) Convener or DRC Grievance Cell, as applicable.
Tier 2 – School / Dean Level	School Grievance Committee / Dean concerned / Dean - Research, as applicable.
Tier 3 – Institutional Appellate Level	Board of Research Studies (BORS) / designated institutional appellate authority.

Tier 4 – Ombudsperson	Appeal to the institutional Ombudsperson, where applicable under the prevailing regulatory framework. *Ombudsman of the Institution:* Dr. R. Sivakumar, Professor (Retd) Department of English, Presidency College, Chennai.

5. CATEGORIES OF GRIEVANCES

5.1 Grievances Relating to Research Supervision

A Research Scholar may submit a grievance concerning the conduct or discharge of supervisory responsibilities. Such grievances may include lack of guidance or prolonged unavailability; unreasonable delay in research guidance, progress evaluation, synopsis approval or thesis submission; neglect of supervisory duties; coercion in progress reporting; authorship disputes; facilitation of plagiarism; financial exploitation or demand for undue payment; discriminatory or derogatory conduct; harassment; or compelling a scholar to undertake activities unrelated to the approved research work.

Allegations involving sexual harassment, discrimination, corruption or other matters falling within the jurisdiction of a statutory or separately constituted institutional mechanism shall also be referred to the competent body, without prejudice to action permissible under this Policy.

5.2 Indicative Resolution Matrix

Issue	**Initial Authority**	**Indicative Timeline**	**Escalation**
Lack of guidance	HoD / DRC Convener	3–5 working days	Dean - Research
Supervisor unavailable for more than two months	HoD	3–5 working days	BORS / appropriate higher authority
Change of Supervisor	DRC	7–10 working days	Appropriate institutional authority
Authorship dispute	HoD with appropriate institutional support	5–7 working days	BORS

Progress-report coercion	DRC	3–5 working days	Ombudsperson / appropriate appellate authority

5.3 Plagiarism, Retraction and Academic-Integrity Grievances

Complaints relating to plagiarism, data fabrication, duplicate publication, improper authorship, retraction or other academic-integrity concerns shall be examined in accordance with the applicable UGC regulations, VISTAS research regulations and relevant publication-ethics requirements. Similarity reports shall be treated as screening evidence and shall be examined in the context of the applicable exclusions, definitions and prescribed procedure before any finding of plagiarism is recorded.

Where a publication is the subject of a retraction or correction by a journal or publisher, the matter shall be reported to the DRC and the Office of the Dean - Research. Any institutional action shall follow due process and the applicable academic-integrity regulations. Records of the proceedings and final outcome shall be maintained confidentially.

6. GRIEVANCE REGISTRATION AND DISPOSAL PROCEDURE

6.1 Submission of Formal Complaint

1. The Research Scholar shall submit the prescribed "PhD Grievance Form" or a written grievance to the Tier 1 authority.
2. The complaint should clearly state the grievance, relevant dates, relief sought and supporting evidence, such as emails, RAC minutes, fee receipts or other records.
3. A copy shall be forwarded to the Office of the Dean - Research for institutional tracking.
4. Receipt of the grievance shall ordinarily be acknowledged within 24 hours / one working day.

6.2 Preliminary Scrutiny and Inquiry

The Tier 1 authority shall conduct a preliminary scrutiny to determine jurisdiction, urgency and the need for an inquiry. Where an inquiry is required, a three-member panel may be constituted. The inquiry should ordinarily be completed within 3–7 working days, subject to the nature and complexity of the matter.

- Both parties shall be given a reasonable opportunity to present their case.
- Relevant documentary evidence and written or oral submissions may be considered.
- Witnesses may be permitted where necessary.

- Interim measures may be recommended in urgent cases to protect academic continuity or the interests of the parties.

6.3 Formal Hearing and Decision

Where the grievance is escalated to Tier 2 or Tier 3, the competent authority/committee shall conduct a formal hearing, record the proceedings and issue a reasoned decision. Proceedings, minutes and evidence shall be treated as confidential and accessed only by authorised persons.

Ordinarily, parties shall present their own case before the internal grievance authorities. Where any applicable law or regulation requires otherwise, such law or regulation shall prevail.

6.4 Appeal / Escalation

If a grievance is not resolved within the stipulated timeline, or if the Research Scholar is aggrieved by the decision, the matter may be escalated to the next tier. Appeals shall be submitted in writing, stating the grounds of appeal and enclosing the earlier decision and relevant supporting records.

7. SPECIFIC PROTOCOL FOR CHANGE OF SUPERVISOR

- The Research Scholar shall submit a written request to the HoD/DRC stating the reasons for seeking a change of supervisor.
- The HoD/DRC shall consult the Research Scholar and the existing supervisor. Mutual resolution may be explored where appropriate.
- The DRC shall examine academic continuity, availability and supervisory capacity of the proposed supervisor and forward its recommendation through the Office of the Dean - Research to the competent authority for approval.
- On approval, research records, progress data and other relevant documents shall be transferred so that the scholar does not suffer avoidable loss of research time.

The process should ordinarily be completed within a maximum of 15 working days, subject to availability of an eligible supervisor and approval by the competent authority.

8. GRIEVANCE REDRESSAL COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

8.1 Tier 1 – DRC Grievance Cell (Department Level)

- HoD – Chairperson
- Senior Professor – Member

- PhD Coordinator – Member-Secretary
- Research Scholar Representative – Special Invitee, where appropriate and without conflict of interest

8.2 Tier 2 – School Grievance Committee

- Dean of the School – Chairperson
- Dean - Research – Member
- Two HoDs / senior academics without conflict of interest – Members
- IQAC Nominee – Member-Secretary

8.3 Tier 3 – BORS / Institutional Appellate Authority

- Vice-Chancellor – Chairperson
- Dean - Research – Secretary
- External subject / PhD experts, as nominated – Members
- Legal Advisor – Special Invitee, where required

8.4 Tier 4 – Ombudsperson

Appeals falling within the jurisdiction of the institutional Ombudsperson shall be dealt with in accordance with the applicable UGC grievance-redressal framework.

9. CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND RECUSAL

No person against whom a grievance is made, or who has a direct personal or professional conflict of interest in the matter, shall participate in its adjudication. An alternate member shall be nominated by the competent authority wherever recusal is necessary.

10. CONFIDENTIALITY AND PROTECTION AGAINST RETALIATION

All parties shall maintain confidentiality regarding the grievance and proceedings, except where disclosure is required for inquiry, legal compliance or implementation of the decision. No Research Scholar shall be subjected to academic disadvantage, intimidation or retaliation merely for submitting a grievance in good faith. Deliberately false or malicious complaints may be dealt with under applicable VISTAS rules after due process.

11. RECORDS, REPORTING AND TRANSPARENCY

Grievances shall be recorded and tracked to enable monitoring of status, timelines and outcomes. The DRC shall submit periodic grievance status reports to the Dean - Research. Consolidated reports may be placed before the appropriate institutional authority for oversight. Annual reporting shall preserve confidentiality and, where appropriate, use anonymised data.

12. GRIEVANCE REDRESSAL CONTACTS

Email	phdfeedback@vistas.ac.in
Telephone	044-22662513 / 044-22662500
VISTAS Student Grievance Webpage	https://vistas.ac.in/student-grievance/
Well-Being Counsellor	Kothai – 8939994134
Counsellor Email	kothai.studentcounsellor@vistas.ac.in
24x7 Emergency / Toll Free	1800-180-5522

13. INTERPRETATION AND REVIEW

This Policy shall be read together with the prevailing VISTAS PhD Regulations, academic-integrity requirements and applicable UGC regulations. In the event of any inconsistency, the applicable statutory/regulatory provision and the decision of the competent authority shall prevail. The Policy may be reviewed and amended by VISTAS from time to time.



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