

OXFORD UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION

Code of Practice on Supervision of Graduate Research Students

A. The core documents

This code seeks to supplement in certain important areas the codes of practice already in place in the University, particularly the EPSC *Notes of Guidance for Research Degrees* <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/epsc/guidance/index.shtml>, and the *Memorandum of Guidance for Supervisors and Research Students (Examination Regulations, 2006, pp.892-5)*. Attention is also drawn to the QAA Precepts on Postgraduate Research Programmes <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/codeOfPractice/section1/default.asp#precepts>, which underlie these Codes of Practice.

B. Appointment of supervisors for Graduate Research Students

The supervisory structure and sources of support

Patterns of supervision differ within the Department according to the nature of the subject. The general pattern is for there to be a sole supervisor; but there may in special cases be two or more supervisors, with one designated as the primary supervisor; and others may have supervisory teams.

Where more than one supervisor is appointed, one of the supervisors shall clearly be designated the primary supervisor.

No supervisor operating under this code of practice may take on more than a maximum number of research students, that maximum for a sole supervisor normally being 5.

In all cases, the Department shall ensure that each graduate student has access to appropriate support and advice. The first point for this will be the sole (or primary) supervisor. If for any reason the person appointed to this role is either unavailable or in the specific circumstances inappropriate, the supervisee should approach the Director of Studies for the programme. In a general support role is the Director of Graduate Studies for the Department, who can, alternatively, be approached if for any reason the supervisor or Director of Studies are not available or appropriate.

The student will be provided at the start of the course with names and contact details for the holders of the three posts mentioned in the previous paragraph. The supervisor should take the opportunity to update the student as and when post-holders change.

In all cases students should also expect to be able to approach a college advisor. The student's college will appoint a college advisor, receive termly supervision reports, and transfer and confirmation of status reports. The college may also have procedures in place to monitor the overall well-being of the graduate research student, including a discussion of academic reports. If the college identifies any concerns which might impact on the academic progress of the student concerned, and which may not already have been recognised in departmental reports, it may refer these in confidence to the Director of Graduate Studies, who will initiate such action in the Department as seems to him/her to be necessary in the individual circumstances.

The person(s) appointed to supervise

The supervisor shall normally be:

1. *Someone of sufficient standing to be able to operate with credibility on behalf of the Department*

The main supervisor shall normally be a member of the academic staff of the University, or a college fellow.

Where specialist supervision is needed which is not available from a member of academic staff or college fellow, or a person holding, in the department, a substantial external fellowship, e.g. a Royal Society Fellowship or equivalent, a senior member of research staff (Grade 8 or above) may be appointed as a subject specialist supervisor, OR, in appropriate cases, a supervisor may be appointed who is external to the University of Oxford. In either of these circumstances, an experienced member of academic staff shall always be appointed as joint supervisor.

2. *Someone who has sufficient experience to be able to provide appropriate guidance to the student about the practicalities of research and, in particular, the academic expectations associated with an Oxford doctorate in their subject area.*

At least one supervisor will currently be engaged in research in the relevant discipline(s), in order to ensure that the direction and monitoring of the student's progress is informed by up to date knowledge of the subject and of research developments.

For members of academic staff in their first period of office, the Director of Studies for the subject concerned will make himself/or herself available to provide confidential advice, support, and guidance to the supervisor on teaching, and supervision of research students.

The Director of Studies will also be aware of training opportunities, and ensure that the supervisor is made aware of them. Appropriate support and training will be given to new supervisors. The Department shall encourage all new supervisors to attend the Institute of Learning's Seminar on Graduate Supervision.

(http://www.learning.ox.ac.uk/seminar_desc.php?cat=az&ls=&cc=AP/PGS&page=3&id=).

(These are arranged for Divisions, and the Director of Studies should see what opportunities are available by this route.)

When a supervisor is not a member of the academic staff at the University, or a fellow of an Oxford college, or with previous supervisory experience, an experienced member of academic staff will be appointed by the department, either as joint supervisor or as an advisor to the supervisor;

For the avoidance of doubt, a student shall not be admitted to a D.Phil programme in the Department if there is no suitable specialist supervision available in the University or its colleges.

3. *Someone who is able to undertake the tasks assigned to the supervisor in the notes of guidance and memorandum referred to in paragraph 1 above, including integrating students into the national and international network in their subject.*

In terms of academic standing and experience, this is dealt with above.

To ensure the quality of supervision, the Director of Studies will confirm, in discussion as necessary with the Director of Graduate Studies, that the supervisor to be appointed has sufficient time and flexibility to undertake supervision. Frequency of meetings between the supervisor and the student may vary according to the time of year (for example during the long vacation, when meetings may be less frequent) and according to the stage the student is at in his or her research programme. It follows that, alongside other duties, a supervisor should be able to provide this typical level of support for each research student. Contact by e-mail may be frequent, in addition to face-to-face meetings. The research student is to expect that they should have a face-to-face meeting not less than once a term with the supervisor.

4. *Someone who will provide continuity in being able so far as possible to see the student's research through to successful conclusion.*

The Director of Studies, under the oversight of the Director of Graduate Studies, should ensure that students are not disadvantaged by the appointment as a supervisor of someone who is about to go on leave, and shall make appropriate arrangements to cover for a supervisor's absence on leave or for other reasons.

A person should not normally be appointed as a supervisor if it is known at the time of the appointment that he or she will not be in post at the time the student is due to complete the programme in question.

C. **Students' skills training**

Skills training needs - both specific to the research being undertaken and personal and professional skills training - as outlined in the Joint Statement of the Research Councils on Skills Training for Research Students

<http://www.grad.ac.uk/downloads/documents/general/Joint%20Skills%20Statement.pdf>

are an important part of a postgraduate research student's programme. It is the responsibility of the supervisor, reporting to the Director of Studies, to ensure that the skills training requirements are applied for his or her students.

The student's skills training needs are assessed at three specific points in the student's programme: in the initial general review of the student's needs, at Transfer of Status, and at Confirmation of Status. It is, however, an integral part of the supervisor's role, at the regular supervisory meetings, to continue to monitor and advise the student on his/her skills training needs, and to draw to the attention of the research student, and encourage the student to take up, such opportunities that are available for the further development of these skills.

The Department has developed for the use of D.Phil supervisors a template for a Personal Development Plan, and the supervisor is required to help the student complete the plan by the end of the first term of study. Supervisors should also note that an online Personal Development Planning system is being launched by the University through the Skills Portal (see below). Students will be encouraged to use this to evaluate their own skills training needs, and are encouraged to discuss these regularly with their supervisors.

Information about divisional training and other courses offered across the University is also available through the Skills Portal at

<http://www.skillsportal.ox.ac.uk>