

University of Oxford
Department for Continuing Education
Code of Practice on Supervision of DPhil Students
admitted under the Continuing Education Board

1 The policy context

This code applies the policies and guidance approved by the University, particularly the Education Committee 'Policy on Research Degrees'. Attention is also drawn to the QAA Quality Code, Part B, Assuring and enhancing academic quality, Chapter B11 Research Degrees, which underlies these institutional policies and codes of practice.

2 The supervisory structure and sources of support

2.1 Patterns of supervision

Patterns of supervision differ within the Department for Continuing Education according to the nature of the subject. The most common arrangement currently is for there to be a sole supervisor but some programmes, and some individual cases, may require two or more supervisors and others may have supervisory teams. In deciding the arrangements within a particular programme, the codes of practice adopted by the relevant Division (or Faculty/School/Department) should be taken into account.

Where more than one supervisor is appointed, one of the supervisors shall clearly be designated the main supervisor. This designation may (see 3.1 and 3.2 below), but does not necessarily, reflect a difference in supervisors' academic contribution and is primarily for clarity of communication and to indicate a point of contact for other academic (e.g. Director of Graduate Studies) and administrative (e.g. Graduate Studies Assistant) roles. It is recognised that in conducting supervision, co-supervisors may make equal contributions, supervision meetings may be joint or separate, and that at given points in the student's programme the 'main' supervisor may have less contact than a co-supervisor(s).

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 main supervisor. If for any reason supervisors are either unavailable or in the specific circumstances inappropriate, the supervisee should approach the Director of Studies for the programme. The Director of Graduate Studies for the Department can be approached if for any reason supervisors or Director of Studies are not available or not appropriate. In the absence of the Director of Graduate Studies, students are advised to contact the Deputy Director responsible for the Graduate School. The student will be provided at the start of the course with names and contact details for

these post holders. The Graduate Studies Assistant will inform students as and when post-holders change.

2.2 *The 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 its students, including a discussion of academic reports.

If the college identifies any concerns which might affect 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 is necessary in the individual circumstances.

3 Appointment of supervisors

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

In order to advise the Board on supervisor appointments, particularly in relation to levels of experience and workload (see below), the Director of Graduate Studies will have access to records of the supervisor appointments at the University of Oxford held by all the department's staff.

A supervisor will normally be:

3.1 *Someone of sufficient standing to be able to supervise 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. (In relation to the role of main supervisor, appointment of emeritus, visiting, and honorary fellows would not normally be appropriate.)

If additional specialist supervision is needed which is not available from a member of academic staff or college fellow, a senior member of research staff may be appointed as a subject specialist supervisor or, exceptionally, 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.

3.2 *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.

When a supervisor does not have 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 members of academic staff in their first period of office at the University of Oxford, the Director of Studies for the subject concerned will be available to provide confidential advice, support, and guidance to the supervisor. In circumstances where the Director of Studies is in their first period of office at the University of Oxford, the Director of Graduate Studies and the relevant Deputy Director of the Department will be available to provide guidance in relation to the supervisor and Director of Studies roles.

3.3 *Someone who is able to undertake the responsibilities assigned to the supervisor in the Education Committee 'Policy on Research Degrees'.*

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. See section 4 below.

3.4 *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.

If it is known at the time of the appointment that a supervisor is likely not to be in post at the time the student is due to submit their thesis, consideration must be given to the implications. For example, a co-supervisor may be appointed to assist continuity, the future availability of other suitable supervisors could be assessed (taking into account likely completion rates of students currently being supervised), and/or succession planning be undertaken that assesses the likelihood of further appointments being made in the field in question.

3.5 *Someone whose predicted workload will allow them the capacity to discharge all their supervisory responsibilities.*

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 cannot take on the responsibilities being asked of them. This will require consideration of both the overall workload of the proposed supervisor and the reasonable distribution of their responsibilities across research, teaching and managerial/administrative roles. Commitment to supervision of part-time students can be for up to eight years and it is only possible to make reasonable predictions. In the event of any uncertainty, the appointment should be referred to the relevant Deputy Director.

3.6 *Cover for absence during sabbatical leave*

Supervisors may continue supervision of doctoral students during sabbatical leave if their circumstances (travel, fieldwork) make this feasible. The supervisor should otherwise ensure appropriate temporary supervision has been arranged for the student.

4 Responsibilities of the supervisor

4.1 *Agreeing to supervise*

In agreeing to supervise a research student, the supervisor must recognise and accept the responsibilities both to the student and to the relevant department implicit in the supervisory relationship.

4.2 *Prior to arrival and first meeting*

Where possible, the supervisor should assign the student some directed reading before arrival. This might be of a general background nature so as to put the student in a position to discuss the topic with the supervisor soon after arrival, or it might form the start of a survey of current literature. The supervisor is normally expected to meet the student by the end of week 2 of their first term.

4.3 *The initial term*

The supervisor should ensure, in co-operation with the student, that the main framework for the student's work is established as speedily as possible during the first term.

This may include all or some of the following:

- i. the means by which the research student and supervisor(s) will communicate and how *and when* they will arrange regular meetings and monitor progress;
- ii. where there is a co-supervisor or a supervisory team, the main supervisor should co-ordinate advice and guidance, and ensure that respective responsibilities are clear both to academic colleagues and to the student;

- iii. where a student undertakes research as part of a team or group, the supervisor should make clear the way in which the student's own contribution fits into the work of the remainder of the group.
- iv. work to establish a clear project proposal with a good prospect of completion within the required time scale, and to identify the initial stages and early objectives of the project, taking account of the sponsor's requirements where appropriate;
- v. where completion of an initial research training course is required, identification of the structure, timetable and requirements of the course;
- vi. preliminary identification by the student and supervisor(s) of the skills, knowledge and aptitudes (including English for academic purposes) which are likely to be required for the successful completion of the research programme, and arrangements for supporting their acquisition or development;
- vii. identifying appropriate resources to support the research project and how these are to be accessed (including consumables, staffing and working facilities);
- viii. where the student's research forms part of a funded research programme, the supervisor should ensure that sufficient financial support will be available for the duration of the student's period of study: if there is any doubt, he or she should agree with the student an alternative fallback project at an early stage;
- ix. to ensure that appropriate health and safety training is undertaken by the student (see section 4.6.1);
- x. to advise at an early stage on study design and the effective collection and storage of data;
- xi. to draw to the student's attention the need to consider any ethical issues which may arise during the course and any requirements for ethical approval;
- xii. to identify (in consultation with the Director of Studies for their DPhil programme) colleagues, where during his or her first year of research a student wishes, in addition to contact with his or her supervisor(s), to have limited consultation with one or two other academics, and to arrange for an approach to them by the student.

4.4 Supervisory meetings

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 maybe 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 (and should take this into account when scheduling the minimum 30 days per year of University-based work).

Supervisors should:

- i. meet with the student regularly, and as agreed with the student, normally in person at least once a term;
- ii. request written work as appropriate and in accordance with the plan discussed with the student and return submitted work with constructive criticism within a reasonable time;
- iii. be accessible to the student at appropriate times when advice is needed and respond to requests for advice within a reasonable timescale;
- iv. assist the student to work within a planned framework and timetable (in particular by conducting regular reviews of the student's progress);
- v. monitor the student's ability to write a coherent account of his or her work in good English;
- vi. avoid unnecessary delays in the progress of the research;
- vii. pursue opportunities for the student to discuss his or her work with others in the wider academic community (including the presentation of research outcomes where relevant) at University, national and international level.

4.5 Progress reports

It is the responsibility of the supervisor to provide the student with regular information as to the student's progress (to ensure that the student feels properly directed and able to communicate with the supervisor), and, where problems arise, provide guidance and assistance as to necessary corrective action.

The completion of the termly supervision report, to which both student and supervisor now contribute via the Graduate Supervision System, is mandatory for supervisors. Completion of reports will be monitored by the Director of Graduate Studies who will confer with the Director of Studies for the programme and, as necessary, the relevant Deputy Director, should any action be required in cases of non-submission by supervisors. The discussion of the contents of the report should be viewed as part of a regular termly review of progress. Each report should also state the nature and extent of recent contact with the student, and, if there has been none, state why this is so. At the end of the first term, the supervisor and student should review, not only academic progress, but also how well the student has adjusted to his or her new work environment, how well the environment is meeting his or her needs, and plans to remedy any deficiency. *The supervisor should alert the Director of Studies and the Director of Graduate Studies to any problems experienced in supervising the student.* Any student who has not satisfied his or her supervisor on at least one occasion in an academic year that he or she is making progress will be liable to have his or her name removed from the register.

4.6 Other responsibilities

The supervisor is expected to:

- i. have reasonable familiarity with institutional, national and international expectations relating to research environments, research supervision and research training (see especially the relevant section of the UK Quality Code);

- ii. engage in continuing professional development to equip them to supervise research students, and to meet requirements for continuing professional development;
- iii. assist the student with the preparation, timetable and submission of material relating to applications for transfer of status, for re-admission after completion of a preliminary research training or other course, and for confirmation of status, and to provide appropriate feedback, especially where the student has failed to meet the required standards;
- iv. advise the student on the timing of the submission of the thesis and to consult with the student in order to make recommendations for the appointment of examiners;
- v. encourage the student to obtain knowledge and information about career opportunities and to alert the student, where necessary, to other services provided within the University and elsewhere.

4.6.1 Health and safety

Supervisors of all students, whether in the arts or sciences, should consider carefully the safety implications of their students' research. Those supervising students (particularly in the sciences) are responsible for all aspects of safety under their control, and in particular for the safe conduct of all experiments carried out in the course of their students' research. In the event of an accident, inadequate supervision may render the supervisor liable to prosecution. Supervisors should also ensure that their students are aware that in the event of injury to other persons as a result of their negligence, the student could be subject to civil claims for damages. Advice on the legal responsibilities for safety may be obtained from the University Safety Officer. For their part, students must carry out research with proper regard to good health and safety practices. Supervisors and students should be aware of the need for adequate health insurance and health precautions when travelling abroad. In case of doubt, reference should be made to the University Medical Officer.

4.6.2 Researcher development and skills training

The Department is committed to ensuring that students have opportunities to develop and refine a range of skills as an integral part of a research degree programme, whether these are:

- i. subject-specific skills (including any skills required for inter-disciplinary aspects of a topic);
- ii. general research training skills;
- iii. personal and professional skills.

Where necessary, support for language and academic writing skills should also be considered.

Oversight of training opportunities available to research students in the Department is the responsibility of the Graduate School Committee.

The student's skills training needs are assessed at three specific points in the student's programme: in the initial review of the student's needs, at Transfer of Status, and at Confirmation of Status. *It is the responsibility of the main supervisor, reporting to the Director of Studies, to ensure that the skills training requirements are applied.* It is an integral part of the supervisor's role, at the regular supervisory meetings, to continue to monitor and advise the student on 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.

Information about training offered across the University is available through the Researcher Training directory on WebLearn. Supervisors should alert the Director of Graduate Studies to any training needs not being met by the Department or the University.

5 Responsibilities of the student

5.1 Overriding responsibility

The University expects the student to accept his or her obligation to act as a responsible member of the University's academic community. The student is also expected to take ultimate responsibility for his or her research programme and to develop an appropriate working relationship with his or her supervisor(s).

5.2 The research programme

In relation to the research programme, it is important for the student:

- i. to programme and undertake work according to an agreed timetable, and to keep relevant records of all aspects of the work in such a way that they can be accessed and understood by anyone with a legitimate need to see them;
- ii. to take responsibility for the development of subject-specific research training and personal and professional skills, and to make positive use of the University's teaching and learning facilities, and opportunities for this development;
- iii. to seek out and follow the regulations applying to the research programme, and to seek clarification, where necessary, and to be familiar with other regulations and policies relating to him or her, including health and safety, ethical approval, intellectual property, data handling and research integrity;
- iv. to raise problems or difficulties with the relevant authority so that appropriate guidance may be offered;
- v. to carry out research with proper regard to good health and safety practices, and to be aware of the need for adequate health insurance and health precautions when travelling abroad;
- vi. to understand the demands of a research degree and to devote sufficient time to study to make satisfactory progress and to complete each stage of the degree by the deadlines set out in the Examination Regulations;

- vii. to work towards a suitable standard of written and spoken English for transfer and confirmation and for the final submission of the thesis.

It is for the student to ensure that competing demands on his or her time are managed appropriately (in the context of the regulations for part-time DPhils and, in particular, the requirement of 30 days of University-based work per year) and to ensure that his or her supervisor is aware of, and approves, commitments or periods of time when the student will be unable to make significant progress that might impinge on the research plans agreed with the supervisor.

5.3 Working with the supervisor

In order to make the most effective use of supervision, the student should endeavour to develop an appropriate working pattern, including an agreed and professional relationship with the supervisor(s). To facilitate this, the student should discuss with the supervisor the type of guidance and comment which he or she finds most helpful, and agree a schedule of meetings. The student should also be aware of his or her joint responsibility with the supervisor to ensure that regular and frequent contact is maintained, and to be encouraged to take the initiative to maintain contact when necessary. In addition to ongoing communication, completion of termly reports within the Graduate Supervision System is particularly important in reviewing progress at regular intervals.

In working with supervisors or other academic staff, students should:

- i. recognise the demands made on a supervisor's time and the need to prepare adequately for meetings and to observe deadlines;
- ii. allow supervisors reasonable time to read written work, within an agreed schedule (e.g. two weeks for substantial chapters/sections);
- iii. accept the importance of constructive criticism within the supervisory relationship, and seek a full assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of any work;
- iv. give full weight to any suggested guidance and corrective action proposed by the supervisor in the event of problems;
- v. produce detailed reports on progress at the end of each term via the [Graduate Supervision System, parallel with those provided by the supervisor\(s\)](#);
- vi. discuss their skills training needs with the supervisor, both informally during regular supervisory contacts and formally at particular times as detailed in subject handbooks;
- vii. make appropriate use of any guidance available relating to the student's career after successful completion of a research degree, for example, the [Careers Service](#);
- viii. inform the supervisor as soon as possible of any circumstance which might lead to interruption of study;

- ix. where the student feels that there are good grounds for contemplating a change of supervision arrangements, discuss this with the existing supervisor, or, if this presents a difficulty, discuss this with the Director of Studies for their DPhil programme, the Director of Graduate Studies, or with a college adviser.

5.4 Submission and completion

The requirements in relation to submission are set out in full in the Examination Regulations, however in particular it is essential for the student:

- i. to ensure that his or her written English is of the necessary standard for the submission of a thesis;
- ii. to be prepared to defend the subject of the thesis in fluent English at the viva;
- iii. to allow sufficient time for writing up and to pay particular attention to final proof reading;
- iv. to decide when he or she wishes to submit the thesis for examination, having provided the supervisor with sufficient time to comment on the final draft and having taken account of the supervisor's opinion;
- v. to be aware of the necessary steps in the examination process and the timescales required.

6 Review and dissemination of this code of practice

The effectiveness of this code of practice will be reviewed regularly by the Graduate School Committee, reporting to Academic Board.

The primary means of dissemination is via the Graduate School's DPhil WebLearn site, which is introduced to all students at induction and drawn to the attention of all supervisors.

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