

Overview of University Policy: research students

The following text is based on the University of Oxford's Policy on Research degrees <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/policiesandguidance/policyonresearchdegrees/>. This policy is designed to (a) let staff know what is expected of them and (b) let students know what the rules are. The policies ensure that the University's practices comply with external requirements.

Section 1 describes all aspects of admissions. Section 2 sets out requirements for study including residency, time to completion, etc. Of note in this section is a policy on teaching by graduate students. Section 3 explains expectations for induction, 4 supervision expectations, 5 student responsibilities, 6 broader skills development and 7 examinations.

Answers to many questions that students (and supervisors) may have over the course of the degree can be found in these sections. Still, during the first term in particular student concerns often include the following.

Becoming familiar with the academic and social setting

It is important that students begin their studies with an understanding of the academic and social environment in which they will be working. This is a time of initial clarification, which will need to be revisited at different periods throughout the doctorate, as each issue becomes more and less pertinent over time. Most divisions and many departments/faculties provide an induction programme for new students (Section 3), but it is also the supervisor(s)' responsibility to ensure that their students are aware of:

- the structure of their research programme
- resources and facilities available to them
- expectations and responsibilities of students
- supervisory arrangements
- how any special needs they may have will be catered for
- methods of assessment and examination
- opportunities for meeting other research students and staff
- customs and conventions of the research group and/or department (Sections 4 and 5)

Developing good working relationships

In particular, this is a time when the student and supervisor(s) need to establish good working relationships. In addition, where there is more than one supervisor, which is increasingly the case, the relative roles of each supervisor and communication lines between them need to be clarified (see the Co-supervision page: <http://www.learning.ox.ac.uk/supervision/supervisor/co-supervision/>).

Establishing a research framework

In the initial term, supervisors and students are expected to work together to ensure that the main framework for students' work is established as quickly as possible, including:

- establishing a clear project proposal appropriate in relation to expectation of transfer before the end of 4th term and confirmation within 9 terms of admission as PRS
- setting appropriate objectives and milestones
- preliminary identification of learning and skills training needs
- earmarking of appropriate resources
- introduction to research ethics, and health and safety practices
- any support required for language and/or writing skills
- creating clear patterns of communication and working relationships

Clarifying the resources and support available

Each division provides a Statement of Provision for Research Students that outlines the resources and support that students can expect. Supervisors are expected to discuss the Statements of Provision with each student during their first term and then annually thereafter. Examples of Statements of Provision are normally available on each departmental/ faculty website, or from the Director of Graduate Studies.

Identifying skill development needs and opportunities

A doctorate involves more than completing a research project. Students will have larger career goals and learning needs than those required solely for their research programme. They will be developing professional networks and their sense of identity as a scholar-researcher. They are also open to the ups and downs of ordinary life, with the potential for health or personal problems to emerge that might reduce their progress. Consequently, it is also essential to ensure students are aware of:

- opportunities for personal and professional skills training
- opportunities for and limitations on teaching and demonstrating
- student welfare services, such as health, careers and counselling services, the student hardship and access funds, and support offered by the Proctors and Assessor
- opportunities to practice communicating their research and share their understanding outside the University, both nationally and internationally
- information about career opportunities and services

Monitoring progress

In addition, supervisors are required to report to the Board on students' work three times a year, i.e. termly supervision reports (<http://www.gss.ox.ac.uk>), indicating the nature and extent of their contact with the student and whether the student is making satisfactory progress. This should be discussed with students, who also have an opportunity to comment in the report. |