Code of practice on supervision

Appointment of supervisors for Graduate Research Students

The supervisory structure and sources of support

Patterns of supervision differ in the Social Sciences Division according to the nature of the subject or research project. In some subjects there is typically a sole supervisor; others may have two or more supervisors (particularly those with an interdisciplinary element), with one designated as the “primary supervisor”.

Departments and faculties should ensure that expectations with regard to the supervisor role, including regular meetings with students, are spelled out clearly and are understood by all supervisors. In the case of joint supervision, the respective roles and responsibilities of the supervisors concerned should be clearly established from the outset, (for example, managing responsibility for fieldwork).

The department or faculty shall ensure that each graduate student has access to one or more named persons to whom he/she can turn for support, such as a Department Adviser, the head of the relevant research group, or the Director of Graduate Studies. Where there is a sole supervisor, these other sources of support, and the arrangements for providing cover during the absence of the supervisor referred to at 3 below, are especially important.

Students should also expect to be able to approach a college adviser, appointed by the student’s college (the college advisor must not be the same person as the department supervisor). The college may also have procedures in place to monitor the overall well-being of 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/faculty reports, it may refer these in confidence to the Director of Graduate Studies in the department/faculty concerned, who will take appropriate action.

Who can supervise?

1. Someone of sufficient standing to be able to operate with credibility on behalf of the department/faculty.

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

3. Someone who is able to undertake the tasks assigned to the supervisor in the Education Committee Policy on Research Degrees including integrating them into the national and international network in their subject.

4. Someone who has sufficient security of tenure to make it likely that they will see the student’s research through to successful conclusion (particular care should be taken when appointing supervisors for part-time research degrees).
The primary supervisor

A student may have one or more supervisors, but there must be one who is responsible for overall academic progress and pastoral needs, and who is responsible for signing progression forms.

The primary supervisor shall normally be:

- A member of staff based in the student’s home department (including college fellows) on a permanent contract and who is an associate professor, reader, or professor, OR
- A researcher based in the student’s home department with an independent fellowship that lasts for the duration of the student’s degree.

The primary supervisor will be currently engaged in research in the relevant discipline(s) so as to ensure the direction and monitoring of the student’s progress is informed by up to date subject knowledge, methods, and research developments.

Nobody should be appointed as the primary supervisor if it is known at the time of appointment that s/he will not be in post for the normal duration of the student’s programme.

A person appointed to supervise alongside the primary supervisor shall normally be:

- An associate professor, reader or professor.
- A member of research staff who is grade 8 or above.
- An independent research fellow (those with fellowships secured from an external learned society, research council or equivalent). The fellow should have at least three years’ experience as a post-doctoral researcher before becoming a supervisor.
- A postdoctoral researcher with at least three years of experience of research.
- A Department Lecturer at grade 8 or above who is research-active and has at least three years of experience of research.
- An employee of an external organisation who has both a relevant doctorate (or equivalent research expertise) in the subject of the student’s DPhil, and who has at least three years of experience of working in research and development.

A postdoctoral researcher who has done less than three years’ postdoctoral research should not normally be appointed as a supervisor, however, this should not preclude informal support as part of a supervisory team.

For a student following an interdisciplinary DPhil who has two equally senior supervisors in two different departments, there should still be a single primary supervisor, who will be based in the department where the student is registered for administrative purposes. For the purposes for signing off Transfer, Confirmation and submission forms, the primary supervisor should liaise with his/her counterpart in the other department, and where this is any disagreement between the two, the DGS in the department where the student is registered will make the final decision.

A candidate should not be admitted if there is no suitable specialist supervision available.
New supervisors

Appropriate support and training will be given to new supervisors and all appointees new to supervision are encouraged to use the extensive online materials on the Oxford Learning Institute’s Research Supervision Website http://supervision.learning.ox.ac.uk.

For members of academic staff in their first period of office, departments will appoint an adviser who will, amongst his/her other duties, provide advice, support, and guidance on teaching, and supervision of research students. New academic staff will also have access to general support and advice from the Director(s) of Graduate Studies in their department/faculty. The supervision record of a new member of academic staff is included in the review prior to appointment to retiring age, and a high standard of supervision is expected.

Quality assurance for supervision

Departments should put in place mechanisms to ensure that the quality of supervision is not put at risk as a result of the excessive volume and range of other duties assigned to individual supervisors.

Normally Associate Professors will supervise four students, and Associate Professors with Tutorial Fellowships and joint (cross-departmental) post-holders will supervise three students (the notional maxima being eight and six respectively).

These norms and notional maxima are based on sole supervision and, where staff are engaged in joint supervision, would be adjusted to reflect the level of commitment involved. Adjustments may also be required where staff hold significant research or administrative posts.

The Division emphasizes the importance of adhering to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education indicators of sound practice in the provision of supervision, which state that higher education providers will:

- appoint supervisors with the appropriate skills and subject knowledge to support and encourage research students, and to monitor their progress effectively;
- ensure each research student has a supervisory team containing a main supervisor who is the clearly identified point of contact;
- ensure that the responsibilities of research student supervisors are readily available and clearly communicated to supervisors and students;
- ensure that individual supervisors have sufficient time to carry out their responsibilities effectively.

Frequency of meetings

The Division normally expects a research student to have a minimum of nine one-hour meetings (or equivalent) per year.

In addition, students with more than one supervisor may request at least one meeting with all of their supervisors together per year.
The frequency of meetings may vary according to the stage of the research programme. It follows that, alongside their other duties, a supervisor should be able to provide this typical level of support for each of their research students.

Departments are responsible for making appropriate arrangements to cover for a supervisor’s absence on leave or for other reasons, and should ensure that students are not disadvantaged by appointing a supervisor who is about to go on leave.

*Change of supervisor*

Where a student’s research changes focus such that their current supervisor may no longer be the most appropriate person to provide guidance on the revised topic, the department/faculty, in consultation with the supervisor concerned, should consider whether or not an additional or alternative supervisor should be appointed. It should be noted that such a change of research focus is unusual, and requires prior permission from the department or faculty concerned.

Where a student feels that there are good grounds for contemplating a change of supervisor, this should first be discussed with the supervisor concerned, or if this seems difficult, with the appropriate head of department, Director of Graduate Studies or their deputies, or the college adviser.

If this involves concerns over the quality of supervision, students should be encouraged to seek to resolve the matter by informal means where possible, but should be made aware of the University’s formal complaint procedures.
Annexe A

Supervisor checklist

This document provides a checklist of the main areas of responsibility of supervisors:

General responsibilities

- provide academic leadership to the student, and clarification of expectations;
- advise the student about all aspects of the research programme: standards, planning, literature, sources, attendance at classes/lectures, techniques and skills;
- undertake a regular Training Needs Analysis/Skills Review with the student;
- (where acting as a co-supervisor or part of a supervisory team) co-ordinate advice and guidance, and ensure that respective responsibilities (such as managing fieldwork etc) are clear both to academic colleagues and to the student;
- avoid absence on leave without appropriate temporary supervision having been arranged for the student. [Leave will not normally be approved without such arrangements being in place.]
- have reasonable familiarity with institutional, national and international expectations relating to research environments, research supervision and research training (see the section B11 of the UK Quality Code http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code).

Meetings and feedback

arrange an initial meeting with the student as soon as possible at the beginning of the degree, and agree with the student expected frequency and duration of future meetings, and arrangements for contact when either the supervisor or student is away from Oxford,
- meet with the student regularly (normally a minimum of nine one-hour meetings (or equivalent) per year) and agree the expected speed for the return submitted work with feedback and constructive criticism;
- where students have more than one supervisor, they may request at least one meeting with all of their supervisors together per year;
- contact the student ahead of return from suspension and arrange to formally meet as soon as possible upon the student's return to study;
- always arrange a meeting with the student as soon as possible upon his/her return from fieldwork;
- keep written records of the meetings to ensure both student and supervisor are clear on action to be taken and to help in monitoring progress;
Student Research

- assist the student in defining the topic of research which can be completed and written up within the prescribed period;

- advise at an early stage on research design and the effective collection and storage of data;

- provide an overview and guidance on the structure of the completed thesis and guide the student through to completion;

- give guidance on:
  (i) the nature of research and the standard expected (including advice on presentation and writing style);
  (ii) the planning of the research, literature and sources;
  (iii) attendance on appropriate research training and professional skills training courses, including fieldwork safety courses;
  (iv) techniques that may be needed;
  (v) other sources of advice and expertise;
  (vi) ethical issues, and the procedures for seeking ethical approval through the Social Sciences and Humanities Inter-Divisional Research Ethics Committee (IDREC), where appropriate;

- ensure that the student is aware of, and has taken appropriate action with respect to:
  (i) any ethical and legal issues connected with the research and data storage;
  (ii) any health and safety issues connected with the research, including lab-based research and/or fieldwork (see Annexe C – Supervisors’ responsibilities for students undertaking fieldwork). This includes identifying and ensuring appropriate risk assessment and training;
  (iii) issues concerning intellectual property;
  (iv) issues related to third party copyright for the hard copy and digital thesis
  (v) the need to avoid plagiarism and to be aware of University guidance on plagiarism (see also https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/guidance/skills/plagiarism?wssl=1 )
**Student progress, monitoring and performance**

- assist the student to work within a planned framework and timetable;

- monitor the student’s ability to write a coherent account of his or her work in good English;

- review student feedback and make termly reports on the student's work using Graduate Supervision Reporting (GSR), including reviewing and updating training requirements. The supervisor should discuss the contents of the report with the student;

- provide the student with regular information as to the student’s progress, and, where problems arise, provide guidance and assistance in relation to necessary, corrective action;

- provide relevant information on students’ attendance, academic progression, and performance to the department;

- assist the student with the preparation, time-table and submission of material relating to applications for transfer of status, and for confirmation of status, and to provide appropriate feedback, especially where the student has failed to meet the required standards;

- ensure the student is familiar with all examination procedures and requirements;

- advise the student on the timing of submission of the thesis and consult with the student in order to make recommendations for the appointment of examiners

**Resources**

- ensure that the student is familiar with the research facilities and activities of a department or faculty;

- advise as appropriate on financial support available, for example, funding for conferences, field trips, or other research travel;

- encourage the student to obtain knowledge and information about career opportunities

- alert the student, where necessary to other services provided within the University, for example, health, disabilities, and counselling

**Development and training**

- assist the student during the course of the first term, and at least annually thereafter, with the identification and subsequent development of skills for subject specific research training and for personal and professional purposes, including advice on teaching opportunities and appropriate training and ensure that the Training Needs Analysis/Skills Review is uploaded onto GSR;

- encourage the student to attend the Divisional student induction event provided through the Grand Union Doctoral Training Partnership and the appropriate courses offered through Divisional Skills Training Programme;
• pursue opportunities for the student to take part in the intellectual life of the department and to discuss his or her work with peers and others in the wider academic community (including the presentation, and possible publication, of research outcomes where relevant) at divisional, university, national and international level.

**Discussion prompts for first meetings with students**

To help clarify mutual expectations and establish good communication between supervisors and students, it may be useful to consider the following questions:

**Research Direction**

- How much direction do you expect to provide as a supervisor?
- How much direction does your student expect you to provide?

**Knowledge and skills**

- What skills do you expect your student to have or to acquire? (Use the Training Needs Analysis/Skills Review document to support this discussion.)

**Time management and meetings**

- How often do you expect to meet with your students?
- How much time do they expect from you?

**Feedback and constructive criticism**

- How often do you expect to receive work from students?
- What sort of feedback will you provide?
- What are your student’s expectations?

**Turnaround times**

- How quickly do you expect to provide feedback on work that students have submitted for review?
- How quickly does your student anticipate you being able to provide feedback?

**Communication between meetings**

- What medium do you prefer to communicate with students: by phone, e-mail, in writing?
- How quickly do you expect to respond to messages from students?
- What do they prefer and expect?

**Expectations for written work**

- Do you expect to receive students’ work all at once, or in smaller chunks?
• Do you expect their drafts to be ‘works in progress’ or more polished pieces?
• At what intervals do you expect students to submit work?
• Would you prefer to receive documents in hard copy or electronically?
Research student checklist

This document provides a checklist of the main areas of responsibility of research students:

General responsibilities

- an obligation to act as a responsible member of the University’s academic community;
- responsibility for his or her own research activity, for satisfying the requirements of the D.Phil. programme, and for giving the necessary time and effort to the programme;
- responsibility for the direction of and innovation in the research project as it develops, with the support of the supervisor(s);
- responsibility for reviewing skills and training needs on a regular basis with the support of the supervisor(s), undertaking any training agreed with the supervisor and department(s) concerned, and uploading completed Training Needs Analysis/Skills Review documents on GSR;
- responsibility for working with his or her supervisor(s), other staff and colleagues to maximise progress in his/her research degree.

Meetings and feedback

attend an initial meeting with the supervisor as soon as possible at the beginning of the degree, and agree with the supervisor the expected frequency and duration for future meetings, and arrangements for contact when either the supervisor or student is away from Oxford

- where more than one supervisor is appointed, request to meet with all supervisors together at least once per year;
- arrange to meet with the supervisor as soon as possible upon return from fieldwork or suspension;
- discuss and agree with the supervisor the most appropriate model of supervision, the type of guidance/comment which is most helpful, and the expected speed for feedback on written work;
- recognize the demands made on a supervisor’s time and the need to prepare adequately for meetings and to observe deadlines;
- accept the importance of constructive criticism within the supervisory relationship, and seek a full assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of any work;
- keep a written record of discussions with the supervisor, and give full weight to any suggested guidance and corrective action proposed;

Research

- define the area of research, complete the literature review, acquaint him/herself with the background knowledge needed, and produce a timetable for the completion of the research project;
- write a clear and detailed research proposal prior to embarking on the research for the thesis;

- abide by the University’s requirements with regard to plagiarism, and the legal, ethical, and health and safety guidelines related to her/his research;

- prior to embarking on empirical work or fieldwork (data collection):
  
  (i) seek approval from the supervisor;

  (ii) where research involves human subjects, seek ethical approval via her/his department/faculty and complete the University ethical approval form(s) for submission to the Social Sciences and Humanities Inter-divisional Research Ethics Committee (IDREC) prior to undertaking data collection;

  (iii) Undertake any necessary risk assessments and obtain travel insurance, and agree a plan to remain in contact with the supervisor;

  (iv) where necessary, apply in good time for a disclosure through the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) if the research involves working with children and/or vulnerable adults.

**Progress, monitoring and performance**

- in consultation with the supervisor, establish a clear timetable and programme work which is kept under regular review, and keep relevant records of all aspects of the work;

- submit written material in sufficient time to allow for comments and discussion;

- engage actively in the review process and play an active role in planning and reviewing progress;

- seek out and follow the regulations applying to the research programme, and seek clarification, where necessary;

- provide regular reports on progress where these are required (and at least once a year for the supervisor), and to inform the supervisor immediately of any circumstance which might lead to interruption of study;

- with the support of the supervisor, complete the assessed written assignments required as part of the research training programme and submit them by the dates specified;

- ensure that the standard of his or her written and spoken English is of the necessary standard for the submission of a thesis;

- allow sufficient time for writing up and pay particular attention to final proof reading;

- 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;
• (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 difficulty, with another appropriate officer in the department, faculty or with a college adviser.

**Resources**

• make positive use of University, departmental/faculty, and college teaching and learning facilities;

• make appropriate use of any guidance available relating to the student’s career after successful completion of a research degree.

**Development and training**

• attend the required courses/training, and other appropriate courses and research training as agreed with the supervisor;

• make full use of opportunities to engage in the intellectual life of the department/faculty and the wider academic community;

• make appropriate use of opportunities for personal and professional development.
Supervisors’ responsibilities for students undertaking fieldwork

Overview

Fieldwork
The University has a legal duty of care to its students undertaking fieldwork. University Policies and Procedures are in place to set out how this duty of care is to be discharged. These procedures require that risks are assessed and proportionate measures and arrangements put in place to mitigate those risks to an acceptable level.

Responsibility
Supervisors play a key role in this process in terms of a) ensuring risk assessments are carried out b) ensuring their students are properly prepared for their fieldwork, as well as c) bringing their own experience and knowledge to guide, advise, assess and check arrangements. All University employees have a legal duty to take reasonable care for the safety of those affected by their [the employees] acts or omissions. Employees, and students, are therefore expected to comply with the University’s health and safety policies. A key requirement for field trips is careful planning to reduce the likelihood or impact of something going wrong. Supervisors must therefore be able to demonstrate this planning by ensuring assessments are in place, appropriately prepared, documented where necessary, reviewed and authorised.

Specific duties of Supervisors are to:
- Be aware of relevant University Safety Policies and Departmental procedures.
- Consider the health and safety implications of any research proposal.
- Ensure their students have received training appropriate to their needs.
- Ensure that risk assessments have been made and the safety provisions relating to the work exist and have been discussed with those doing it.
- Ensure that suitable arrangements are in place for regular contact to provide support and checks on the student’s welfare while they are away.
- Review arrangements with the student after the fieldwork to identify any problems and learn any lessons

Relevant university policies, training courses and further information /resources can be found at:

https://www.socsci.ox.ac.uk/files/services/fieldwork-check-sheet-and-practical-guide-for-supervisors-final-template-17_02_17.pdf/@@download

http://www.socsci.ox.ac.uk/services/research-and-impact/fieldwork/fieldwork

http://www.socsci.ox.ac.uk/services/research-and-impact/fieldwork/fieldwork-more-information

http://researchtraining.socsci.ox.ac.uk/site-search?keys=fieldwork

http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/safety/policy-statements/s1-09/