Code of Practice for Research Students

1. Students are required to comply with Imperial College London degree regulations and other College procedures and regulations, including being familiar with College safety requirements and procedures. This includes ensuring that all projects that use human subjects or human tissue have been approved by the appropriate ethical committee.

2. Students should recognise that their supervisor's role is not to dictate in detail but rather to advise, guide and oversee the research. Even if students are self-sufficient in everyday work, they will need to consult their supervisor about major matters: the back ground, methods, experimental set up of the research project, elucidation and critical examination of results, relation to wider concerns, side effects, safety and, eventually, the preparation of the thesis.

3. Students should discuss with their supervisor the type of guidance and criticism that they find of most assistance.

4. Attendance at taught courses is strongly encouraged at Imperial and all students are urged to take the opportunity to follow appropriate courses, on the advice of their supervisor, so as to consolidate and/or broaden background knowledge. Where appropriate the student is advised to take any examination associated with the courses, even though the results of the examination may not be relevant.

5. All research students are expected to complete a minimum number of Graduate School Professional Skills courses as part of their registration, together with formal training courses run by the student's host department. (Please refer to the Graduate School’s website for more details). Students are responsible for choosing the dates of the courses they wish to attend and completing the required booking process in consultation with their supervisor. All students are responsible for informing their supervisors which courses they will be attending and the dates.

6. Students should always report their holiday arrangements to their supervisor in advance. In accordance with the rules laid down by the Research Councils, no more than eight weeks, including public holidays, may be taken in each year. However, working without a break for seven days a week is likely to be less effective than hard work interspersed with some periods for rest and recreation. Research students are members of the Imperial College Union and are encouraged to participate in its activities. The Graduate Students’ Union is a branch of the Union and specifically represents postgraduate students.

7. Where students are unable to attend College because of illness or urgent personal circumstances they shall inform their supervisor or the department as soon as practicable. College regulations require that postgraduate students inform their Postgraduate Tutor if they are absent from College for
more than three days during term. If the absence is due to illness a medical certificate must be produced after seven days. If an examination is missed on account of illness a medical certificate must be produced immediately. If the absence is prolonged, normally four weeks or longer, it will be necessary to request an interruption of studies.

8. Students should maintain the progress of the work in accordance with any deadlines agreed with the supervisor; written material should be presented as required in sufficient time to allow for comments and discussion before proceeding to the next stage. Departments may require students to submit regular reports on the progress of their work to the departmental Postgraduate Officer. Where students are advised that their progress has been inadequate, they shall take steps to improve their work to their supervisor's satisfaction, otherwise they may be required to terminate their registration and withdraw from College.

9. It is not always possible to predict an individual's capacity for research on the evidence of previous academic performance. A PhD programme at the College will include an assessment of research ability based on performance in the initial 9 months of the course.

10. Assessment of a student's research ability to determine whether registration for the PhD degree can continue will be determined by an Early Stage Assessment, held 9 months (18 months for part-time students) after the date of initial registration. If the College determines that the student's progress is such that they cannot continue, the student may be required to withdraw from College at this stage. All students are then required to undergo a Late Stage Review between 18-24 months (30-36 months for part-time students).

11. Material included in the Late Stage Review may be used in the final thesis if still applicable.

12. Most students establish good relationships with their supervisors and serious disagreements occur very rarely. However if this does happen, a student should initially raise the matter with the department's Postgraduate Tutor or Director of Postgraduate Studies. Often this leads to resolution of the problem. Each research student is also assigned an academic mentor whose help may also be sought if problems arise. In a few cases, a student may wish to refer matters to the Head of Department, or to the College Tutor or to the President of the Graduate Students' Union. Where appropriate it may be possible for the student to continue the research under a different supervisor.

13. Students should have some appreciation of the financial constraints under which the College has to operate and the wider obligations the College has to train research scientists and engineers. An important part of that research training is the ability to complete work within certain deadlines. The normal period for completing a PhD at Imperial is three years, with it being possible for the examination to take place during the fourth year; ultimately however it is the student's own responsibility to determine when to submit the thesis, though the supervisor's opinion should always be sought. It is College policy that no full-time student, registered for a research degree will be permitted to
enter for the examination later than 44 months after initial registration; to submit the thesis for examination later than 48 months after initial registration will require a special case to be made to their Graduate School.

14. Students are reminded that their thesis must be their own work and all quotations from other sources, whether published or unpublished, must be properly acknowledged. Plagiarism is a very serious offence and, where proven against a student, may result in disqualification from the examination for the PhD and exclusion from all future examinations of the College. Some joint work is permitted, provided it is properly and carefully acknowledged as such. The College regulations in respect of plagiarism can be found in the Examination Regulations.

Approved by Graduate School
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