A Guide to Research Degree Precepts

Introduction

Precept 1: Interviewing

All prospective students must be interviewed before an offer of a place is made. Interviews may be conducted as a videoconference or teleconference if it is not possible for the candidate to visit the department. The Selection Panel must comprise at least two members of staff and will normally include the Director of Postgraduate Studies or nominee. Staff not experienced in student selection or recruitment should attend a relevant recruitment and selection workshop before participating in an interview. All staff involved in interviewing students must keep up to date with current legislation and the College’s admission policies and policies to promote equal opportunities and widening participation.

Guidance
- The College provides a number of training events focusing on recruitment, selection and equal opportunities.

Precept 2: Offers/Admission

Only appropriately qualified and prepared applicants should be accepted. No offers should be made unless a student can be provided with an environment which is supportive of their research achievement; this includes only appointing supervisors who have sufficient time to carry out their supervisory responsibilities satisfactorily as well as access to necessary facilities and equipment.

Guidance
- An outline of the admissions process is available in the Postgraduate Research Admissions Policy.
- The College’s admission criteria for doctoral awards and MPhil can also be found in the Academic & Examination Regulations.
- Further guidance for handling special cases is available on the Registry website.

Precept 3: Supervision

Inexperienced supervisors (who have not had primary responsibility for the supervision of a successful student), including inexperienced clinical supervisors and/or those acting as second supervisors, must attend the Introduction to Supervising PhD students at Imperial workshop (or equivalent) and comply with the requirements as laid out in the College guidance note Eligibility for Research Degree Supervision.

Guidance
- The Graduate School provides a list of expectations for research students and supervisors.
- Supervisors should refer closely to the Code of Practice for Research Supervisors.
Precept 4: Non-Imperial Staff who supervise

Departments must have mechanisms to ensure those supervisors working in industry or professional practice or a Partner Research Institution are aware of all College rules, regulations and procedures relating to research degree supervision. These supervisors should also be offered the opportunity to engage in developmental and other activities relating to the support of their research students.

**Guidance**

- Non-Imperial staff with supervisor roles should meet the criteria as laid out in Eligibility for Research Degree Supervision.
- Non-Imperial staff with supervisor roles should be directed to the Code of Practice for Research Supervisors.
- Commitments beyond the supervisory role should be taken into account when appointing non-Imperial supervisors. Departments should be confident that potential supervisors will be able to meet the requirements of the role before making an appointment. (See Precept 6 below).
- Non-Imperial supervisors should be directed to the workshop Introduction to Supervising PhD Students at Imperial.

Precept 5: Continuing professional development and support for students

All supervisors are expected to engage in continuing professional development activities. All supervisors should be aware of their responsibilities.

**Guidance**

- Responsibilities for supervisors are outlined in the Code of Practice for Research Supervisors and Roles and Responsibilities: Research Supervisor.
- The College provides induction and continuing professional development for supervisors.
- It is expected that supervisors should help their students to attend at least one conference to present a paper during their programme.
- Details of further support that should be accessible to research students are available on the Registry website.

Precept 6: Supervisory Arrangements

All students must have a supervisor who is identified as the main single point of contact and it must be made clear to the student who is their alternative contact if that individual is unavailable. The main supervisor must ensure that adequate contact with and support for their research student(s) is maintained throughout the research degree programme. Where a student has more than one supervisor, it is important that the student understands their respective roles.

**Guidance**

- Students may have only one supervisor or may have up to three but not more than three supervisors. Where a student has more than one supervisor, one of the supervisors shall be designated the main (previously known as principal or lead) supervisor.
- Details of further support that should be accessible to research students are available on the Registry website.
- Students who are unhappy with their supervisor are advised to talk to their Director of Postgraduate Studies in the first instance. Students can also discuss this with their departmental Postgraduate Tutor or a College Tutor if they prefer to talk to someone from
outside their department.

- Heads of Department are responsible for approving supervisor appointments and must confirm that proper supervision can be given for the expected duration of the programme.

### Precept 7: Induction

Each department must have an induction day/programme for new students and must make provision for late arrivals, either in the form of a second induction day/programme or through arrangements whereby students meet individually with key staff to complete the induction programme. Students should be made aware of their responsibilities and entitlements (including financial) at early and/or appropriate stage in their research degree programme.

**Guidance**

- The College holds a central induction for all research students at the South Kensington, Hammersmith and Silwood Park campuses every October during Welcome Week.
- In addition to the College events, departments are required to hold local inductions for their students.
- Departments must ensure that a comparable induction programme is organised for students registering after October.
- Supervisors are responsible for a significant part of the orientation process. More information is available in the guidance document [Roles and Responsibilities: Research Supervisors](#).

### Precept 8: Student Handbooks

Each department must have a postgraduate student handbook, either in hard or electronic copy which contains, but is not limited to, information listed in the College’s guidelines for handbooks document.

### Precept 9: Cohort Building

Departments must make provision to allow research students to interact with their peers and should facilitate the existence of a collegial/scholarly community.

**Guidance**

- The Graduate School provides guidance on cohort building including cohort building models and an outline of the role of Cohort Leader.

### Precept 10: Research & Professional Skills Development

All students must be made aware of the Graduate School's Professional Skills Development requirement during their induction. All students should be supported in completing this requirement. Furthermore, all students should have the opportunity to engage in further activities and training to enhance their research and professional skills and receive careers advice.

**Guidance**

- Further details of the Graduate School's Professional Skills Courses are available on the Graduate School website.
Precept 11: Management/Organisation

Each department must have a Postgraduate Committee (with a minimum composition of 3 members including the Director of Postgraduate Studies and Postgraduate Tutor) chaired usually by the Director of Postgraduate Studies, to oversee the format and quality of the higher degree programme including recruitment, admissions, induction, registration, progression, assessment, student feedback, complaints, training, proposal of external examiners, submission and completion rates. The Committee must report to the Head of Department and meet regularly. There should be a written record kept of all meetings which is accessible to the staff and study body.

Guidance
- Imperial College and Imperial College Union have produced Good Practice Guidelines for Staff-Student Committees.

Precept 12: Assessments/Appeals and Complaints

Assessment procedures and the mechanisms for complaints and appeals should be clearly communicated to research students, supervisors and examiners. Students and supervisors should have a clear and mutually understood mechanism to raise concerns at a departmental level.

Guidance
- Assessment procedures documents are available on the Registry website.
- Appeals information for students is available on the Registry website.
- Procedures for handling student complaints and appeals are available on the Registry website.

Precept 13: Research Plan Confirmation

All students should produce an initial plan of study within 6 - 12 weeks of registration, and the study plan must be reviewed by at least one independent assessor. Assessors can only be selected by the Director of Postgraduate Studies, Postgraduate Tutor or Postgraduate Committee, who can choose to ask for suggestions from the supervisor.

Guidance
- Information about PhD structure is available on the Registry website.
- Further information about milestones and assessments is available on the Registry website.

Precept 14: Early Stage Assessment

Assessment of students' research ability to determine whether registration for the PhD degree can continue will involve a confirmation examination held in the 9th month (18 months for part-time students) after the date of initial registration. This is to be assessed by at least one independent assessor but normally two. Assessors can only be selected by the Director of Postgraduate Studies, Postgraduate Tutor or Postgraduate Committee, who can choose to ask for suggestions from the supervisor. Where a student fails the confirmation examination, written feedback should be provided to the student (with a copy to Registry) within one month of the examination date. Students who have been asked to re-submit must do so by 11 months of initial registration. Any decision* to transfer to the MPhil degree must be made within one year of the date of registration. A student can also be required to withdraw from the College.
### Precept 15: Late Stage Review

A further review of a student's research ability will be undertaken between 18 and 24 months (between 30 and 36 months for part-time students) after the date of initial registration. The form of review will be determined by the student's department and must be clearly communicated to students. Where a student fails to satisfy the assessors at this stage, written feedback should be provided within one month of the review date. Students who have been asked to re-submit* should do so within 3 months of their initial Late Stage Review.

* A student can also be required to withdraw from the College.

### Guidance
- Further information about the Late Stage Review is available in the [Late Stage Review guidance notes](#).
- [Late Stage Review Form](#)

### Precept 16: Student Representation

Each department should have a staff/student committee in which postgraduate research students are represented to discuss postgraduate issues. This can be the Postgraduate Committee [Precept 11] or a separate forum. A meeting including student representatives should normally take place at least three times per year. There should be a written record kept of all meetings and this should be made accessible to students and staff.

### Guidance
- Further information can be found in the [Staff-Student Committees Good Practice Guide](#).

### Precept 17: Evaluation

Regular evaluation of the department’s research programme(s) should be carried out internally. All stakeholders should have the opportunity to provide their feedback (and in confidence if appropriate). Evaluations should be considered openly and the results communicated appropriately with any decisions made by the department to implement (or not) any changes resulting from this feedback communicated clearly to all stakeholders.

### Guidance
- Every six months departments must give their students the opportunity to submit a confidential report on their experience on the programme.
- For quality assurance purposes the responses from the student surveys are considered as part of the regular and periodic review of departmental research degree training.