

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

MAIN¹ RESEARCH DEGREE SUPERVISOR

This document outlines the typical duties expected of the post-holder. The descriptions of the post cannot be exhaustive and the post-holder may be required to undertake other duties, normally these will be broadly in line with the listed key responsibilities. Roles and responsibilities may also be subject to change.

For information on the College's policy on supervision, read the [Policy on Research Degree Supervision](#). This and all other key documents for supervisors can be found at the [Cornerstone](#) website that provides a one-stop-shop for further information and support.

Summary of role. As a main supervisor, you will:

- 1) Have a key role in recruiting research students
- 2) Induct students into your group
- 3) Help students to plan their research
- 4) Provide students with feedback on their written work and/or presentations
- 5) Help them to progress their academic studies
- 6) Hold regular tutorials and research/lab group meetings
- 7) Work with your student(s) to develop their research and professional skills
- 8) Ensure they have sufficient resources to implement the mutually agreed research plan
- 9) Help them resolve difficulties they encounter and/or direct them to others who can assist
- 10) Provide students with career advice, noting however that some students may not wish to pursue an academic career and that the College has a dedicated [Careers Service](#).

¹ For the purposes of this document the term main supervisor also means primary or lead supervisor

You should also:

- 1) Be familiar with [policies and administrative procedures applicable to research degrees](#) and support your student(s) to navigate and comply with the different milestones.
- 2) Discuss, agree and identify with your student(s) your [mutual expectations](#) and how you will manage your partnership.
- 3) Be mindful of the pastoral and wellbeing needs of students and be ready to sign-post to other support services when necessary.

Duties and key responsibilities:

1. Recruiting research degree students

1.1 Registration of new students

- For registration and records purposes, students are only able to be registered to one Imperial academic department and that department will normally be the department of the main supervisor. Therefore, each student will be assigned a main supervisor, even if in practical terms, there is a more even distribution of supervision between members of the supervisory team.

Therefore, the Main Supervisor should:

- Lead discussions with the supervisory team to identify roles and responsibilities. This should take place prior to a student enrolling at College. Main supervisors may find [Defining the Roles within Supervisory Teams](#) a helpful document to facilitate this discussion.
- Take responsibility for ensuring that the student knows who their supervisors are, their roles and for ensuring that there is effective communication between the supervisory team to provide clarity of direction for the student. This is particularly important for students with supervisors in different departments or Faculties.

1.2 Selection of and interviews with prospective applicants

Main supervisors should:

- Take part in College and departmental open days and recruitment activities and, where appropriate, assist with advertising and promotion of studentships within their department.
- Take part in the recruitment and selection of research degree students, for which appropriate training will be needed.

Note: A decision to admit a student to a research programme should not be made unless a department is confident that:

- a) The student is appropriately qualified*

- b) *The student is motivated to carry out the research*
- c) *A research topic suitable for that student's abilities and background is available*
- d) *The necessary facilities (e.g. computing, laboratory, adequate funding for consumables and training) can be provided*
- e) *Proper supervision can be given for the expected duration of the programme*

- Ensure when conducting interviews with applicants for research degrees, that departmental regulations and procedures are followed. Supervisors should note that the College provides guidance to prospective students on what sort of topics to discuss when they attend for interview. [Download Guidance for Prospective Research Applicants.](#)

Note: To ensure that these requirements are met, the Head of Department confirms on the appropriate form that the proposed supervision arrangements conform to the College criteria for the supervision of research students. For part-time students, the supervisor will include, on the form, whether the student will be working virtually full-time on his or her research, and thus required to meet the milestones for full-time students, or if the student will not be able to devote more than two days per week to the research and thus governed by the milestones for part-time students. In many cases it is possible, when making offers of admission, to indicate the likely research area and/or supervisor, and if so, it is preferable to provide this information.

- Make contact, if appropriate, with new students prior to enrolment to advise on general background reading and to encourage an initial literature survey on the research topic. It is strongly suggested that supervisors encourage their new student to meet other students within the research group prior to starting their programme.

1.3 Welcoming and inducting new students

Main supervisors should:

- Provide their students with details of the facilities available in the department and the College.
- Be responsible for all health and safety aspects of student research, relevant risk assessments and for ensuring that students receive appropriate training in order that they can carry out their research safely. There is general College guidance, but additional Faculty policies may apply. In particular, the latter applies to lone working and working out of hours. [View the general College guidance on responsibilities for Health and Safety.](#)
- Ensure that their students attend the departmental induction programme, including any student who commences study outside of the normal period.
- Ensure that all new research students who are not native speakers of English fulfil the [Imperial College London Postgraduate English Requirement \(PGR\)](#) as soon as possible after fully registering onto their PhD programme. This requirement is separate from, and in addition to, meeting the College entry requirements (IELTS, TOEFL, etc).

2. Managing the partnership

Main supervisors should discuss the College's [Mutual Expectations for the Research Degree](#)

[Student Supervisor Partnership](#) at the first meeting with their student. This document is designed to stimulate conversations to agree how the partnership will work.

3. The PhD timeline

Note: timepoints refer to the timeline for full-time students, unless otherwise specified.

3.1 Supporting the academic progression of students

Main supervisors should:

- Maintain regular contact with their students through individual meetings, tutorials, group meetings or at the bench. They should set aside normally a minimum of one hour per week (on average) for consultation with them.
- In the initial period, give appropriate guidance about the nature of research, the standard expected and how to plan the research to ensure that the normal expectation of submission of the thesis within three years is met (and that in any event the thesis will be submitted no later than 48 months after commencement of study).
- Ensure that students are informed of the milestones they must complete to progress with their studies, e.g. Early Stage Assessment (ESA) and Late Stage Review (LSR). Some departments may also require students to complete a research plan within the first three months of study and there may be further local assessments to complete. Supervisors are advised to check with their department.
- Impress upon students the need to complete and submit work by agreed deadlines. By 12 months, at the ESA, students should display understanding of the field of their project and their potential to pursue independent research.
- By 24 months, at the LSR, they will draw up with each research student a plan for completing the research by the end of the third year.
- A formal monitoring point, the Progress Review, must be completed by 36 months to ensure that the student's research is progressing and can be completed within the expected timescales.
- Be aware that students have different funding arrangements and will be funded for different periods of time. It is important to ensure that a discussion takes place with the student, early on, to ensure that the student can complete the research programme with funding in place.
- Encourage students to produce written work, which may often provide a basis for the preparation of the final thesis; supervisors should read thesis drafts and other written work produced by their students; and they should return such work with constructive criticism and in reasonable time (good practice would be within 2 weeks).
- Ensure that students are made aware when their progress is inadequate or when standards of work fall below those generally expected and, in appropriate cases, will report such occurrences to the department's Postgraduate Tutor and/or Director of Postgraduate Studies.

- Guide students on the relevant use of library facilities, including approaching original literature and sources with a critical attitude and will give guidance on matters related to copyright and on avoiding plagiarism.
- Give guidance on the systematic recording of data or theoretical calculations and the importance of keeping and maintaining a clear record of all that has been undertaken. Supervisors should review their students' data in sufficient detail to be reassured of its quality and integrity.
- Encourage students to publish the results of the research as they emerge and are suitable for publication. Individual departments may have local guidelines for publications in specific areas. Although publication is a desired output for students during their studies, supervisors should ensure that publishing does not compromise each student's ability to complete their research, and submit their thesis, within the normal College timescale.
- Ensure that there is regular communication between the student(s) and co-supervisors, so they have clarity of the direction of their research.

3.2 Plagiarism and Turnitin Submission

Main supervisors should provide their research students with guidance on how to avoid plagiarism. Students who started their postgraduate research degree on or after 24 September 2019 will need to follow the College's policy on using Turnitin as part of the submission process. Students who started their postgraduate research degrees prior to 24 September 2019 should follow Registry thesis submission requirements and any measures and guidance they may have in place on good academic practice.

For all research students starting on or after 24 September 2019, supervisors should:

- Ensure that their student knows that a copy of their ESA report must be submitted to Turnitin for an originality check.
- Main supervisors should interpret the ESA Turnitin similarity report once it becomes available.
- Good supervision throughout the PhD should ensure that any concerns about plagiarism are identified and addressed *at an early stage*. Right from the start, supervisors should provide guidance and support to students on how to avoid plagiarism. Supervisors are reminded that the College requires all doctoral students to complete the mandatory online training course on Plagiarism Awareness, prior to the ESA.
- For the ESA, the expectation is that the ESA should not be passed until the work had been redone and assessed as compliant with the College's regulations on avoiding plagiarism, after having been retested through Turnitin. This would normally be regarded as a matter of learning.

3.3 Supporting the research skills development of students

Main supervisors should:

- Develop their students' skills in technical writing, oral presentation, problem definition, statistical data analysis and critical thinking.
- Recommend, where appropriate, and especially in the first year, that research students attend taught academic classes, which may be undergraduate lectures, part of Master's level programme or a special course for research students.
- Ensure that students are provided with appropriate instruction in requisite research techniques.
- Arrange, as appropriate, for their students to talk about their work to staff and/or group seminars, and to have practice in oral presentations.
- Ensure their students are aware of opportunities for conference attendance and other appropriate fora for presenting, intellectual development and networking

3.4 Supporting the professional skills development of students

Main supervisors should:

- Discuss professional development opportunities with students and advise on their attendance to Graduate School Professional Skills courses, ensuring that College requirements are met. Details of [attendance requirements](#) and guidance on course selection can be found on the [Cornerstone](#) website.
- Be aware of students' career-related needs and help them achieve their potential in consultation with the departmental Careers Advisor and College's [Careers Service](#).
- In those cases where students undertake further research, as research assistants, or in the case where students teach, supervisors should ensure that such employment does not jeopardise the ability of their students to complete their research, and submit their theses, within the normal College timescale.
- Encourage students to share their research widely within the College and externally.
- Encourage students to take part in the wide range of opportunities available to them at the College, including Graduate School events and courses. Students should be reminded that the Union's clubs and societies are also available to postgraduate students.

3.5 Examination

Main supervisors should:

- Lead and advise on the appointment of examiners for the ESA and LSR assessments. [Download the Procedures for the Appointment of External Examiners for Research Degrees](#).
- Complete, as appropriate and in good time through MyImperial the [Examination Entry Form](#), including nominating examiners for the viva.
- Help their student to prepare for the viva and examination of the thesis.

- Be aware of the College's [Guidelines for Interruption of Studies for PhD, MPhil, EngD and MD\[Res\]](#) and the [Guidelines for PhD, MPhil, MD\[Res\] and EngD Students Wishing to Take External Study Leave](#).

- Ensure students fulfil the requirements of their funders and of any doctoral training centres that a student is part of.

4. Supporting the wellbeing of students

Main supervisors should:

- Be aware of the issues and challenges affecting research students and how these can impact on their wellbeing.
- Be aware of arrangements for welfare and pastoral support, and be prepared to refer students where needed/appropriate.

5. Continuing professional development (CPD)

- The College provides mandatory training for new supervisors as well as mandatory refresher training for all supervisors, at least once every 6 years. Heads of Department (HoDs) will ensure that all supervisors undergo these trainings. The College also provides a range of optional workshops as part of supervisor continuing professional development.
- All new supervisors (main and co) are required to complete the mandatory online course "Fundamentals of Supervising PhD Students". This course is also available to all supervisors as a refresher course, at any time.
- Supervisors with limited prior experience of supervising PhD students will be strongly encouraged to undertake the full day, complementary in-person workshop "*Introduction to supervising PhD students*" delivered by the Educational Development Unit (EDU).
- All supervisors are required to undergo CPD specifically related to supervision which, in addition to the training courses for new supervisors described above, involves attending a departmental "*Focus on Best Practice in Supervision*" (FBPS) workshop, at least once every six years. Further details can be found [here](#).
- *Note: Supervisors employed by the Crick but who supervise Imperial PhD students are also required to complete the online course, "Fundamentals of Supervising PhD students." Like all other Departments, the Crick is responsible for ensuring these supervisors complete this course.*

6. Commitment to College

All supervisors should:

- Ensure they act in compliance with the College's [Precepts for Research Degrees](#).
- Promote and encourage completion of the College's and national surveys to obtain student data e.g. the Postgraduate Research Student Experience Survey (PRES).

- Write references for students, past and present.
- Ensure that students are made aware of the College's [guidance on research integrity](#) and Ordinance D17; Investigation of Allegations of Research [Misconduct](#).
- In accordance with College procedures, ensure that reports are made on all students during their period of registration with the College and also prepare any additional reports required by funding bodies.
- Ensure proper records are kept with regard to student progress.
- Alert the departmental Director of Postgraduate Studies should there be a concern in terms of attendance for students with Tier 4 Visas.
- Be familiar with and keep update with current College rules regulations and procedures regarding the supervision of students.
- Ensure the long-term storage of student data following completion of studies.