

Receiving feedback on your research progression: a guide for students

This short document has been put together for research students to set out expectations regarding feedback and provide some examples of types of feedback you can expect to receive from your supervisor and others as you progress through your research programme.

Expectations for supervisor feedback during your research programme

Imperial's [Doctoral Proposition](#) states that the College will provide you with a world class research programme "throughout which internationally-acclaimed academics support, inspire and challenge you as you develop into an independent researcher." As well as supporting your development, part of your supervisor's role will be to challenge your research much in the same way that your supervisor's research will also be challenged by other academics, for example during peer review of journal articles.

You can expect your supervisor, and others (lab members, other academics, your peers, postdocs etc.), to critique your work and provide constructive feedback. The feedback you receive may not tell you the answers, rather it may pose questions for your consideration which is designed to support your independence of thought. The conversation that you have with your supervisor should help you to think of options to move forward with your research. Feedback should be a two-way process of discussion and debate and should be an active learning process.

Feedback is a natural part of your relationship with your supervisor, and you should discuss mutual expectations for feedback at your earliest opportunity. The Graduate School's [Mutual Expectations for the Research Degree Student Supervisor Partnership](#) is designed to facilitate this amongst other things. It is important that you discuss and agree very practical things such as when you should submit draft thesis chapters to your supervisor, how many drafts of your chapters your supervisor will read and how quickly they are able to provide you with comments.

Feedback is designed to help you improve your research so although you will receive feedback on what is working well, time will also be spent discussing what is not working so well. Try not to worry about this, although it can be difficult, it is a natural part of academia and is normal.

You should also view your feedback discussions as helpful preparation for your viva examination where you will have to defend your research in front of your examiners and answer the challenges and questions posed to you. Before a meeting to discuss your work, consider your expectations. If you would like specific feedback on a particular aspect of your research, you should let your supervisor know in good time, so that they can prepare. It is very important to take notes so you can look back through later and check if you do not quite understand what is being said to you.

When can you expect to receive feedback and from who?

You should expect to receive feedback on your lab work (if appropriate), your written work (including draft chapters of your thesis and formal milestones), oral presentations (e.g.

internal research seminars, external conferences & journal clubs), your teaching (if appropriate) and perhaps following an internship or placement. Feedback may be verbal or written.

It is important to note that it is not just your supervisor who will provide you with feedback during your research programme. Feedback can come from; other students as part of peer observation, postdocs, technicians, the Graduate School during professional development workshops, other academic staff within your research group, your milestone assessors and finally from external colleagues should you present at conferences or submit a paper to a journal. When you receive written or verbal feedback from someone other than your supervisor, consider sharing it with your supervisor when you next meet to guide your discussions around your professional and research skills development.

After your formal milestone assessments, it is important to take the opportunity to discuss the outcome, results and any feedback with your supervisor.

Finally, please bear in mind that individuals who provide you with feedback have made time to listen to you or read your work. Their feedback should be taken seriously and valued.

If you are not receiving helpful and constructive feedback or you don't understand the feedback being given to you, don't be afraid to ask for clarification or you could summarise and reflect back to your supervisor their comments in order to check your understanding. If you are not receiving any feedback at all, try asking your supervisor for feedback on specific things to facilitate this conversation. You could also ask your co-supervisor for feedback or others in your research group. If you are concerned about a lack of feedback, talk to your department's Senior Tutor (PGR).

Sources of support

- **Coaching**

As well as the Graduate School's [programme of professional development opportunities](#), the Graduate School also offers a coaching programme designed to support effective professional development and challenges you may be facing during your research programme. More information about the coaching programme is found [here](#).

- **1-2-1 support**

The Graduate School also offers 1-2-1 tuition to look at specific aspects of professional development. Please contact the Head of Pedagogy if you would like this support:
Dr Magdalena Jara: m.jara@imperial.ac.uk

- **Centre for Academic English**

The Centre for Academic English aims to help postgraduate research students to communicate their research as accurately and professionally as possible. The Centre offers a range of courses at all levels as well as one-to-one consultations to respond to language needs related to the PhD. In addition, the Centre aims to enhance your ability to represent your work in the wider academic community, particularly in relation to publications and conference participation.