

Defining the Roles within Research Degree Supervisory Teams

Prior to a research student enrolling at College, the main supervisor should lead discussions to agree supervisory arrangements within the supervisory team which may include co-supervisor(s) and assistant supervisors. This document is designed to facilitate those discussions, but it should not be seen as an exhaustive list.

Preface

There are key roles and responsibilities which all supervisors must undertake regardless of supervisory split but there are also some roles which can be negotiated between the main supervisor and co-supervisor(s), depending on the nature of the project. Supervisory teams may also include assistant supervisors whose role in supporting and supervising the student should also be considered.

The role of the main supervisor, co-supervisor and assistant supervisor¹ will vary according to the research project. In many cases the co-supervisor will play a major role in directing the research (for example when the project is the result of joint collaboration between the supervisors). In other cases the role will be more supportive. However, the co-supervisor does have a responsibility for the student's progress, and will be expected to take an active role in the supervision process. It is important that all supervisors are aware that they have a responsibility for the student, and there is no scope for nominal supervision.

When appointing an assistant supervisor to a student, the main supervisor should consider how many other research students are already assigned to the assistant supervisor to ensure that the assistant supervisor is not overburdened and has time in which to complete up to 10 days' worth of training and development.

There are four key principles for supervisory teams:

1. The main supervisor takes overall responsibility for the welfare and health and safety of research students, although day-to-day tasks relating to such matters can be assigned to other members of the supervisory team.
2. The main supervisor will lead initial discussions with the supervisory team to identify key roles and responsibilities within the team.
3. The main supervisor will communicate these to the student.
4. The main supervisor must lead regular communication between members of the supervisory team in order to provide updates on the research project and student progress. This is to provide clarity of direction for the student.

¹ Assistant supervisors are postdocs who have been formally appointed by the College to assist with the supervision of research students.

The following points should be considered:

1. Welcoming and inducting new students

- Who will provide students with details of the facilities available in the department and the College?
- Who will take responsibility for health and safety aspects of student research, including relevant risk assessments and for ensuring that students receive appropriate training in order that they can carry out their research safely?

2. The student lifecycle

- How often will each member of the team meet or communicate with the student?
- Who will lead on student progress, providing appropriate guidance about the nature of research, the standard expected and the milestones?
- Who will read thesis drafts and other written work produced by the student?
- Who will give guidance to the student on the systematic recording of data, theoretical calculations and advise on the importance of keeping and maintaining a clear record of all that has been undertaken?

3. Supporting the research skills development of students

- Who will take responsibility for developing the student's skills in technical writing, oral presentation, problem definition, statistical data analysis?
- Who will 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?
- Who will ensure that students are provided with appropriate instruction in requisite research techniques?
- How will the supervisory team ensure that the student has opportunity to talk about their work to staff and/or group seminars, and to have practice in oral presentations?
- How will the supervisory team ensure the student is made aware of opportunities for conference attendance and other appropriate fora for presenting, intellectual development and networking?

4. Supporting the professional skills development of students

- How the team will support the professional development of the student?
- Where a student is teaching, how will the team ensure that such employment does not jeopardise the ability of that student to complete their research?
- How will the team encourage students to take part in the wide range of opportunities available to them at the College, including Graduate School events and courses?

5. Examination

- Who will lead and advise on the appointment of examiners for the Early Stage and Late Stage Review assessments? [Download the Procedures for the Appointment of External Examiners for Research Degrees](#). (Forms can also be accessed via the [Cornerstone website](#).)
- The main supervisor is responsible for completing part two of the [Examination Entry Form](#), but what role will other supervisors play in terms of nominating examiners for the viva and helping the student to prepare for the viva and examination of the thesis?
- The student will usually be registered to the Department where the main supervisor is employed. Therefore the departmental examination regulations of the main supervisor should apply.

6. Supporting the wellbeing of students

- Who should take responsibility for the day-to-day welfare and pastoral care of the student?