

Guidelines for Establishing “*Focus on Best Practice in Supervision Workshops*”¹

1. Introduction and background

- 1.1 The Postgraduate Research Quality Committee (PRQC) has established a framework for the Support and Development of Imperial College London PhD Main and Co-Supervisors. The framework stipulates that the College will continue to provide mandatory training for **all new** main and co-supervisors. Main and co-supervisors with limited prior experience of supervising PhD students **will continue** to be required to undertake the mandatory full day face-to-face workshop “*Introduction to PhD Supervision at Imperial College*” delivered by the Educational Development Unit (EDU).
- 1.2 However, in order to recognise that the College appoints supervisors with a range of expertise and experience, new supervisors **who have experience of supervising PhD students at other institutions**, will discuss with the Head of Department (HoD) and Director of Postgraduate Studies (DPS) their experience and the role of PhD supervision at Imperial College. Together a decision will be made on the strategy for support; either attending the full day face-to-face workshop or enrolling on the online version of the course, developed by the Graduate School.
- 1.3 The framework also states that all supervisors (main, co and those with honorary contracts) are required to undergo continuing professional development (CPD) specifically related to supervision which, in addition to courses for new supervisors described above, involves attending a departmental “*Focus on Best Practice in Supervision*” workshop, at least once every six years. Departmental compliance with this is monitored via the College’s [Research Degree Precepts](#).
- 1.4 Finally, in order to recognise and respond to an increase in national interest in the wellbeing and mental health of students in the UK higher education sector, the Graduate School has also developed an optional online course, “*Supporting the Mental Health and Wellbeing of Imperial’s Doctoral Students*.”

¹For all Imperial employed Main and Co-Supervisors, including supervisors with Honorary contracts.

2. Focus on Best Practice in Supervision Workshops

- 2.1 Continuing professional development (CPD) is an important part of employment at Imperial College London, and as such supervisors are required to undergo CPD specifically related to supervision. As well as training courses for new supervisors described above, supervisors are also required to attend a departmental *Focus on Best Practice in Supervision* workshop, once every six years. There are three aspects to the *Focus on Best Practice in Supervision* workshop: a senior leadership meeting, a student focus group and then, the *Focus on Best Practice in Supervision* workshop.
- 2.2 Departmental *Focus on Best Practice in Supervision* workshops are led by the Department with support from the Graduate School. The content of the workshop draws input from senior leadership within the Department (HoD, DPS, the Senior Tutor (PGR) and the PGR administrator), outcomes from a specially arranged student focus group held prior to the workshop, actions relating specifically to supervision as a result of Periodic and Precept review, departmental PRES results and the Student Experience Survey and any other departmental student feedback mechanisms.
- 2.3 The cycle of participants will be decided upon by the HoD and the DPS. Attendance will be recorded and the Graduate School will provide Departments with a register of attendees in order to help assist with record keeping and to provide evidence for the Precept and Periodic Review.
- 2.4 The number of participants in each workshop will usually be between 20 and 30. The total number of departmental workshops held within the six-year cycle will need to be sufficient to ensure that each Imperial employed supervisor has the opportunity to attend a workshop at least once during the cycle. To assist Departments with planning the cycle of workshops, the Graduate School has developed a schedule.
- 2.5 The workshop itself will be co-facilitated by the Graduate School in partnership with a senior member of staff with extensive knowledge of supervision and teaching (e.g. the DPS and/or Senior Tutor (PGR)). The Graduate School will develop the content of the workshop with input from the departmental senior leadership (HoD, DPS, Senior Tutor (PGR), PGR administrator) and students from the Department. A member of staff from the Graduate School will also attend to take brief notes of good practice and themes discussed in order to inform the annual report of *Focus on Best Practice in Supervision* workshops, presented at the autumn meeting of the Postgraduate Research Quality Committee.

3. Setting up the Focus on Best Practice in Supervision Workshops

- 3.1 Before the start of each academic year, the Graduate School will write to Departments who are scheduled for a *Focus on Best Practice in Supervision* workshop that year. The email will be sent to the departmental senior leadership team. The email will provide a selection of dates and times for the senior leadership meeting, student focus group and *Focus*

on Best Practice in Supervision workshop. Departments will be asked to choose the dates which are most suitable for them.

- 3.2 Once dates have been agreed, the PGR administrator will be asked to book a room in the department for the senior leadership meeting, student focus group and *Focus on Best Practice in Supervision* workshop and to let the Graduate School know.

Senior Leadership Meeting

- 3.3 The purpose of the senior leadership meeting is to identify key topics and themes to be covered in the *Focus on Best Practice* workshop and to discuss questions which students will be asked during the specially arranged student focus group. Departments will be provided with the final version of the questions for students.

Student Focus Group Meeting

- 3.4 The student focus group usually takes place at least 3 weeks prior to the *Focus on Best Practice in Supervision* workshop but after the meeting with departmental senior leadership. The PGR Administrator will liaise with the Graduate School to find suitable venue and date and assist with promotion. It will be facilitated by the Graduate School.
- 3.5 Advertising for the student focus group will ideally start one month before the scheduled date for the focus group. The Graduate School and PGR administrator will adapt the draft advertisement to students (**Appendix 1**) and the PGR administrator will provide the Graduate School with a spreadsheet of all doctoral researchers, highlighting the PG Representatives. The Department will be expected to provide refreshments for the student focus group.
- 3.6 The Graduate School will then send the agreed advert to all research students listed on the spreadsheet. The Graduate School will also organise registration for the student focus group to maintain anonymity of students.

Focus on Best Practice in Supervision Workshop

- 3.7 The departmental senior leadership are responsible for deciding which supervisors to invite to attend the *Focus on Best Practice in Supervision* workshop and for ensuring that these supervisors attend. A template email has been developed for Departments to use when inviting supervisors to attend (**Appendix 2**). Departments are free to use the template if they wish and to modify it to suit. Departments may wish to invite a range of supervisors to participate in the workshop. Departments may also wish to ensure individuals with less experience or those who need more support have the opportunity to attend with more experienced supervisors, or those who demonstrate good practice in supervision, such as President's Award winners. The workshop benefits from attendance by members of the senior leadership. Once again, the PGR administrator is welcome to attend the *Focus on Best Practice in Supervision* Workshop if they wish to.
- 3.6 Approximately two weeks prior to the *Focus on Best Practice in Supervision* Workshop, the Graduate School and DPS and/or Senior Tutor (PGR) will issue a programme for the workshop. The Graduate School in partnership with the HoD, DPS and Senior Tutor (PGR) will facilitate the *Focus on Best Practice in Supervision* workshop, bringing together feedback



from the student focus group, discussing the themes and issues raised by the departmental senior leadership and sharing good practice.

- 3.7 An annual report to the PRQC on the *Focus on Best Practice in Supervision* workshops which have taken place each year is made. The report will highlight good practice, themes and challenges. This will usually happen at the autumn meeting of the PRQC and will be prepared by the Graduate School.

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Appendix 1: Template student focus group advert

Calling PGR Reps and PhD/MD(Res) researchers! Come and give your views on improving the supervisory experience within the Department of [x]!

The Graduate School is hosting a student focus group to hear your views about the quality of supervision in your department. The results of this focus group will be anonymised and used to inform supervisor support and development.

The focus group is not only a great opportunity for you to have your say and influence the supervisory experience within your Department but you will also meet fellow doctoral student representatives who can help to improve the research community and influence real change at College. Your views will be gathered anonymously and you will be signposted to helpful support resources. Refreshments will be provided.

Date and Time:

Venue:

Please register for the event on this link, noting that places are limited and will be available on a first come first served basis: [insert link to booking form:]

If you need to cancel your place please contact caroline.hargreaves@imperial.ac.uk

Please note that we need the information below for generic administrative purposes and it will not be used to identify you:

Name:

E-mail:

Part Time / Full Time:

Student Rep: Yes/No

(For FoM departments: Medic/Non-Medic)

Year of study:

Appendix 2 – Template email invitation from HoD to Supervisors

Dear [insert name of supervisor]

The College requires all research degree supervisors to undertake development activities relating to the supervision of research students at least once every six years. This involves participating in a *Focus on Best Practice in Supervision* workshop. Departmental compliance with this principle will be reviewed centrally via the Research Degree Precept Review and Periodic Review.

The content of the workshop is developed by senior Departmental staff and informed by a student focus group. The purpose of it is to share best practice and to talk through any particular challenges you may have with respect to the supervision of research degree students.

It is now your turn to participate in the workshop which is scheduled to take place on [insert date, time and venue].

As previously mentioned, all supervisors are required to attend this workshop at least once every six years so if you are not able to attend, please let me know. Absences will only be approved in exceptional circumstances.

Best wishes

[insert name of Head of Department]