

POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH DEGREE SUPERVISION POLICY

Introduction

1. The University of Suffolk is committed to providing high quality supervision for postgraduate research (PGR) students to support their progression and timely completion.
2. This document outlines the University of Suffolk's policy on supervision of research degree students, to ensure a clear and consistent approach.
3. All PGR programmes offered within the University of Suffolk fall within the scope of this policy, including all Doctoral and Master of Philosophy (MPhil) programmes.
4. This framework should be read in conjunction with the relevant regulations and codes of practice for research degree programmes offered under the University's awarding bodies.

Supervisory arrangements

5. Academic schools are responsible for ensuring that appropriate supervisory arrangements are in place for all PGR students. The University has adopted a team-based approach to PGR supervision. A student's supervisory team shall comprise a lead supervisor, a co-supervisor and, in some cases, an additional co-supervisor, normally from the University of Suffolk. A third supervisor may be used, for example, when a student would benefit from additional specialist input or when the University wishes to support growth in supervisory capacity through providing an opportunity for a staff member new to PGR supervision to be mentored by more experienced colleagues within the supervisory team.
6. In some instances there may be an approved external supervisor, for example where suitable expertise cannot be provided internally; where appropriate as part of a collaborative research project; or where an existing supervisor retires or moves to another institution and both the student and the supervisor wish for them to remain actively involved in the supervisory team. Visiting academics (such as Visiting Professors or Visiting Fellows) may also be approved as supervisors.
7. External and visiting academic supervisors are not permitted to be lead supervisors. External and visiting academic supervisors must have completed relevant training equivalent to that expected of internal members of staff. A formal agreement between the University and the external or visiting academic supervisor must be put in place to ensure that roles and responsibilities are clearly articulated, understood and accepted by both parties.

8. The lead supervisor assumes primary responsibility for supporting a student throughout their PGR programme, including managing administrative matters related to the student's engagement and progress. The lead supervisor should ensure regular communication with other members of the supervisory team to provide clarity of direction for the student, and should ensure that the student understands the role of each member of the supervisory team. The roles and responsibilities of the supervisory team are summarised in Appendix A.

Eligibility to supervise

9. The supervisory team as a whole must demonstrate an appropriate range of academic and/or professional experience, skills and expertise within the student's proposed field of research or a closely related area, including knowledge and experience of research methods appropriate to the research topic. All lead supervisors should hold a research degree or have equivalent research experience.

10. Each supervisory team should normally include at least one staff member with Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR). Academic staff on the teaching, learning and scholarship pathway may be appointed as lead or co-supervisors where they have an established research track record and/or prior PGR supervisory experience.

11. At least one member of the supervisory team must have experience of successfully supervising at least one research degree student through to completion. The University is committed to supporting new or inexperienced members of staff in undertaking supervisory duties, as long as the supervisory team as a whole includes sufficient experience and expertise to effectively support the student. More experienced members of the supervisory team are expected to support new or inexperienced members to develop in their supervisory role.

12. Supervisors should normally hold a contract that extends beyond the PGR student's expected period of registration. Where exceptionally this is not the case, there should be a clear plan in place to ensure continuity of supervision beyond the contract term.

13. Supervisors should not be a partner or a close relative of the student or have a personal relationship with the student that might give rise to a conflict of interest. Close relationships of a personal, romantic or sexual nature between staff and students are strongly discouraged by the University. Where a personal relationship does develop, the supervisor must report this immediately to their line manager in accordance with the University's Personal Relationships at Work Policy. The supervisor must be removed from the student's supervisory team and a replacement supervisor identified.

Supervisor appointment process

14. All proposed new supervisors are subject to approval by the University of Suffolk Postgraduate Research Committee, via submission of a PGR Supervisor Approval Form and accompanying CV for consideration by the Committee in accordance with the eligibility criteria outlined above.

Supervisory load

15. Executive Deans of School and Research Institute Directors should ensure that the quality of supervision is not put at risk because of an excessive volume and range of responsibilities being assigned to individual supervisors.

16. The number of students that an individual can supervise satisfactorily will vary depending on their context, the scope of their other duties, their supervisory team percentage allocation per student, and the stage at which the students under their remit are at in their research journey. While these factors will all be taken into consideration, as a general guide it is recommended that the maximum number of full or part-time students a supervisor can be responsible for (either as lead or co-supervisor) should not normally exceed six at any one time.

17. The Postgraduate Research Committee will routinely monitor supervisory allocations and notify the relevant Executive Dean or Director if there are concerns around the volume of responsibilities being allocated to an individual supervisor.

18. Academic schools should ensure that adequate academic staff time is allocated for the supervision of each research student as part of the workload allocation model. Where staff within research institutes are not subject to the workload allocation model, the principles of the model should be applied to the expected time allocated to supervision of PGR students. There can be some flexibility in these arrangements, for example, time allocations might vary according to the stage the student has reached.

Induction and training

19. All newly approved supervisors must meet with relevant staff from the Research and Knowledge Exchange Directorate to discuss the regulations, policies and procedures for managing research degree programmes under the University's awarding bodies. They must also complete mandatory training for supervisors prior to beginning to supervise students. Existing PGR supervisors must complete mandatory refresher training at least every three years. The Head of Research Culture and Knowledge Exchange is responsible for organising and monitoring compliance with mandatory training requirements.

20. In addition to mandatory training requirements, all supervisors should undertake continuing professional development training relevant to supervising PGR students and keep abreast of any changes to PGR regulations, policies and procedures.

21. New or less experienced members of staff who have not supervised a research degree student through to completion should have access to opportunities for sharing good practice in supervision, including through mentoring provision and access to advice and support from School PGR Leads and the Research and Knowledge Exchange Directorate.

22. All supervisors should have access to the PhD Supervisors Sharepoint area, where they can access relevant PGR regulations, policies, procedures, guidance, forms and templates.

Supervisory meetings

23. All PGR students should have adequate and regular access to their supervisors during their standard and completion (write-up) period. Supervision should normally be provided until the student has submitted a final version of their thesis for the award of their degree, including any referral period or to complete corrections. The style and approach to supervision will vary by discipline and by the individual needs of the student and supervisors.

24. Supervisory meetings should normally take place on a monthly basis for full-time students. Established practice for part-time students is supervisory meetings every six weeks, although in some cases bi-monthly meetings (every eight weeks) may be more suitable for part-time students' individual circumstances. A record of each supervisory meeting should be drafted by the student for confirmation by the supervisory team via the University's online reporting system.

25. For international students, supervisory meetings should be in person unless, exceptionally, the student has secured permission from the Associate Dean of School for a period of off-campus fieldwork or study. Supervisors of international students with immigration sponsorship should ensure that they understand and support students in complying with UKVI reporting requirements, in accordance with the University's Framework of Compliance for International Postgraduate Research Students on Student Visas.

Changes to supervisory arrangements

26. Academic schools are responsible for ensuring that alternative arrangements are made for supervision when a supervisor either leaves the University of Suffolk or is on leave for an extended period of more than three months (for example in cases of long-term illness or parental leave). Where the period of leave is less than three months, the remaining members of the supervisory team should normally assume responsibility for the student until the supervisor returns.

27. Where a student's programme of research develops into an area where none of the supervisory team has expertise, supervisors should discuss this with the relevant School PGR Lead and agree an appropriate course of action and support for the student so that the student can progress their research.

28. Any temporary or permanent changes in supervision must be approved by the School Associate Dean or nominee and reported to the Academic Administration team within Registry Services and the Research and Knowledge Exchange Directorate at the earliest opportunity, via submission of the 'Application for change in arrangements for supervision of a research degree student' form. Where relevant, funding bodies must be informed of any change in supervisory arrangements.

Challenges in supervisory relationships

29. Where a student has concerns about supervisory arrangements, they should discuss this with their lead and/or co-supervisor in the first instance to attempt to find a resolution. Where this is not possible or where mediation by a third party is preferred, students have the right to discuss supervisory problems with a member of staff who is not involved in their supervision, such as the School PGR Lead or Associate Dean or staff within the Research and Knowledge Exchange Directorate. Discussions about problems with supervision should remain confidential if the student requests this.

30. Where discussion or mediation is unsuccessful in resolving the issue, students may request a change of supervisor via the Change of Supervisor Request Form. The Associate Dean of School or nominee (or Executive Dean of School where the Associate Dean is the supervisor concerned) should consider these requests fairly and without prejudice, and accommodate them where practicable, noting that it may not always be possible for suitable alternative arrangements to be made. If the student remains dissatisfied with their supervisory arrangements following completion of this process, they should be referred to the University's Student Complaints Procedure.

Quality monitoring

31. Associate Deans and PGR Leads are responsible for overseeing the quality of supervision arrangements within their school, drawing on feedback from students and staff.

32. Where there is evidence of poor-quality supervision or inappropriate supervisory behaviour, this should be raised with the School PGR Lead and Associate Dean of School in the first instance (or the Executive Dean of School where the Associate Dean is the supervisor

concerned). Any performance issues or development needs will be managed in accordance with normal line management processes.

Record keeping

33. Registry Services is responsible for maintaining an up-to-date central record of all research students and their supervisors, which should be accessible to relevant staff within academic schools and research institutes and the Research and Knowledge Exchange Directorate.

34. The Head of Research Culture and Knowledge Exchange is responsible for maintaining up-to-date records of each supervisor's completion of mandatory training requirements.

PGR supervisor roles and responsibilities

The supervisory team must:

- a) maintain regular contact with the student with at least monthly meetings (pro-rata for part-time students) until the thesis has been submitted and, if this arises, during any referral period and corrections.
- b) when supervising a student with immigration sponsorship, ensure that supervision meetings are held in person on campus to meet attendance requirements
- c) ensure that students complete and submit the online supervision record form after each meeting, for review and sign off by the supervisory team
- d) provide students with guidance about the nature and standard of research work expected, including advice on attaining that standard, together with advice on academic practice in the discipline, matters of research design, ethical issues, and appropriate health and safety issues
- e) make it clear to each research student that it is possible for the research and writing up to be completed within the standard period and provide guidance on the appropriate volume of research work for the degree in question
- f) assist each research student in developing a clear timetable of work and emphasise the importance of keeping to it
- g) request written work and oral presentations as appropriate and comment on such work within a reasonable time
- h) ensure students read and understand the University's Research Misconduct Policy
- i) ensure students have access to the facilities and equipment (or online equivalent) necessary to enable them to complete their research successfully, escalating any access issues to other colleagues within the school / research institute or the Research and Knowledge Exchange Directorate as necessary
- j) be reasonably accessible to students and advise them of any lengthy absences which will change the routine of monthly meetings
- k) keep each student well informed in advance about any prospective periods of leave and the planned supervisory arrangements during the leave
- l) support the student in identifying and recording training needs at the beginning of their studies via their professional development plan, and review them on a regular basis and at least via every annual progress review (APR) meeting

- m) keep up to date with courses and workshops available through the Research and Knowledge Exchange Development Programme, the Early Career Researcher (ECR) Network and other relevant professional development programmes, and encourage the student to book onto relevant training
- n) ensure that the student has opportunities to develop appropriate generic and research skills and that a record of course/workshop completion and attendance is kept
- o) advise students of the importance of making contact with other researchers in the field and of presenting their work to academic audiences (including advising them on the opportunities to present work to staff and fellow postgraduate students and about attendance and participation in appropriate seminars and conferences)
- p) keep a record of dates of formal supervisions with the student and of written work submitted, including the feedback and when it was provided, which can be produced later if necessary
- q) ensure that APR meetings are arranged for each student in accordance with University of Suffolk requirements
- r) report on each student's progress to the APR panel, indicating what has been achieved and advising the panel where they believe that the student is unlikely to reach the standard for the degree for which they are registered or where progress is slow
- s) warn and advise students in writing, with a copy to the PGR Course Leader and the academic administration team within Registry Services, where work is not of the appropriate standard or is being produced too slowly, and of steps that might be taken to remedy the situation
- t) encourage students to think about their subsequent employment and possible future career trajectories, and direct the student to suitable sources of training, advice and support
- u) ensure that students understand the requirements of the degree and any requirements relating to the agreed thesis format, provide guidance on the examination process, help students to prepare for the viva, and direct the student to appropriate training
- v) nominate examiners for a student's thesis.