

GUIDANCE FOR SUPERVISORS OF RESEARCH STUDENTS

Contents

This small handbook is designed to clarify three things for staff:

- The supervisory norms that we tell research students to expect
- The norms we expect research students to follow
- The departmental procedures required of supervisors

Responsibilities of Supervisors and Research Students: This section provides a synopsis of what we tell research students to expect of their supervisors, and what we tell students we expect of them.

Supervisors are expected:

- **To give guidance** about the nature of the research process, the expected standards of scholarship, the planning of the research programme, appropriate literature and sources, the attendance at taught courses or specialist training, and the use of research methodologies and techniques. They should also encourage students to keep aware of relevant developments within their field.
- **To provide advice on writing up research**, to request written work as appropriate and to return such work, with constructive criticism, within reasonable time. They are also expected to read through a complete draft of the thesis and to provide detailed comments. Supervisors are **not** expected to provide detailed advice about grammar, punctuation, etc. If your student requires extensive advice in matters of basic grammar, you may refer them to the Learning and Development Centre, which runs various training courses on writing.
- **To maintain contact with students** through regular supervisory meetings and other types of structured communication, and to ensure that meetings are largely uninterrupted and of adequate length. The frequency of such contact should be agreed between the student and supervisor at the start of the project and should be reviewed and adjusted as needed throughout the period of study. It is expected that these arrangements will vary depending on the stage which the student has reached in their project and on the nature of the research project undertaken. **One such contact per month throughout the academic year is a generally acceptable minimum for full-time students.** Contact with part-time students will typically be less frequent than with full-time students. Supervisors are expected to ensure that part-time students are aware of the frequency with which they can expect supervisory contact and feedback.
- **To be accessible to students** at other times by arrangement, should advice on academic or personal problems be required. Supervisors may also wish to refer students to the Counselling Service, the Advice and Welfare Services or other university support services.
- **To encourage students to contact other scholars** and appropriate academic bodies and

societies (for example, by giving papers at conferences), in order to develop their career and to enrich their research.

- **To liaise with the Director of Graduate Studies** about the progress of individual students and to report on each student's progress in line with departmental procedures for monitoring progress. (These procedures are described below.)
- **To liaise effectively with the other supervisors**, and with the student, if the student is jointly supervised. The respective responsibilities and roles of the different supervisors should be made clear.

Responsibilities of Research Students: We tell research students that their responsibilities include:

- **Exploring relevant primary and secondary sources and providing drafts of written work in which this research is framed analytically.**
- **Discussing with their supervisor(s) the type of guidance and comment they find most helpful.**
- **Agreeing a schedule of meetings** and other contact during both term-time and vacations.
- **Seeking advice in an active manner.**
- **Maintaining the progress of their work** according to the stages agreed with the supervisor(s) and in accordance with departmental monitoring procedures. In particular, students should produce well-presented written work within the agreed timescales for comment and discussion.
- **Taking note of the guidance and feedback on their work provided by their supervisor(s).** Students should recognise that the supervisor's role is to offer advice on the academic content of the work and its general presentation, and **not to provide detailed correction of written English.**
- **Contributing to the research environment** of the department by taking up opportunities to present work at departmental seminars, engaging in discussion with other scholars, etc.

Departmental Procedures Required of Supervisors

Supervisors should meet regularly with their research students, etc., as described above. In addition, they must conform to departmental procedures relating to the monitoring of research students. This section describes these procedures.

Quarterly Forms

Research students must complete a 'quarterly form' every quarter. This provides an opportunity for the student to report on their progress over the quarter. It is the student's responsibility to complete these forms on time. Supervisors are however required to fill in a (short) section in which they comment on their student's progress, and to sign the form. Your student should be asking you to complete and sign such forms every quarter and you should chase them if they do not. Forms are available at the back of the MA by research/M.Phil-Ph.D. handbooks.

Skills Update Form

Students should twice a year complete a 'skills update form'. The form allows students to identify any skills or training that they think might be beneficial. The postgraduate secretary will give you copies of your student's completed forms. You should see discuss the issues raised in each form with your student. If you feel that any training would be appropriate you can recommend this to the director of graduate students.

The Progress Review Panel

All supervisors of research students meet together twice a year (January and June) to compare notes, discuss good practice in supervision and review the progress of all research students.

Supervisors should attend this meeting. In any case, and particularly if the supervisor is not able to attend, supervisors should produce a short report on the progress of their students since the last meeting. This will form the basis of discussion at the meeting. This report is one opportunity for supervisors to flag up problems in a timely fashion.

When reporting on your student's progress you should indicate whether they are progressing as expected. In particular, if the student is in their first year of full time study, they should be making good progress towards the upgrade (see below). **If they are in their second year, they should have completed at least one substantial piece of writing (circa 5,000 words)** in advance of the June progress review panel. (Part time students should complete this piece of work by the January of their third year of study.) Students in their final year should be writing substantially more than this, and supervisors should confirm whether this is the case. Part time students should each year produce at least one substantial piece of written work.

If your student is in any way causing concern it is important to register this fact in your report. You can of course also note particular achievements or other meritorious actions. Supervisors should inform their students of any resolutions undertaken at the meeting. If the meeting identifies areas of serious concern relating to a student's progress, the director of graduate studies will also meet with the student, to discuss the situation and to offer further advice and support, in conjunction with the supervisor.

The Upgrade

All students working towards a D.Phil. are initially registered for the degree of M.Phil.. This is general practice within the university; it allows departments to monitor the progress of students and to assess their suitability for doctoral research. If the student satisfactorily completes the 'upgrade', their registration is changed from M.Phil. to D.Phil. For full time students the upgrade normally takes place in the third term of their first year. Part time students should normally complete the upgrade during the first term of their second year of study. The date of the upgrade should conform to this timetable unless there are exceptional reasons to deviate from it. **The expectation that your student is not yet ready to pass the upgrade is not a reason to deviate.**

The upgrade process requires a dossier of materials, two examiners and a meeting. The

dossier consists of:

- a draft chapter (5,000 – 6,000 words)
- a 2,500 word research proposal, which includes a synopsis of the research project
- a detailed timetable for the completion of the thesis
- a bibliography of relevant secondary materials
- the History Department's Research Degree Upgrade Ethics Review

These materials are read by the two examiners—two members of the department who do not supervise the candidate. After they have read the upgrade materials they meet with the student and supervisor(s). At this meeting the examiners discuss the dossier with the student, with a view to identifying whether the topic (as undertaken by this student) is sufficiently robust as to constitute a good doctoral project. **The supervisor(s) normally attend(s) this part of the meeting.** The examiners then meet privately, first with the student, to discuss any concerns the student might have, and then, again privately, with the supervisor. After this they complete a form in which they recommend one of the following:

- that the student's registration be raised to D.Phil.
- that the student resubmit the upgrade materials and attempt to complete the upgrade a second time. Normally this second attempt at the upgrade must take place within six months of the first attempt.

If the student fails their second attempt at the upgrade the examiners can recommend either that the student remain registered for a M.Phil. or that the student withdraw. Under University Regulations 13 and 16.3(1) **students have the right to appeal against either of these decisions.**

Supervisors should discuss the upcoming upgrade with their student, and should have read a draft of the materials that comprise the dossier. **It is the supervisor's responsibility to identify potential examiners, to contact them, and to arrange the date of the upgrade interview.** It is the student's responsibility to get the upgrade dossier to the examiners in a timely fashion, and in any event at least a week in advance of the upgrade meeting. The materials should be submitted **in hard copy**. Please tell your students **not** to send the upgrade materials by email unless the examiners have specifically requested this.

The upgrade serves a real purpose: identifying students who are not making good progress in sufficient time to offer them help. It is *not* in your (or your student's, or the department's) interest to delay your student's upgrade because you do not think they are ready. If however you have doubts about whether your student will pass, then it is a good idea to raise these concerns with the director of graduate study, and possibly the student.

Graduate Conference

Full-time first year doctoral candidates who are new to the department make a presentation to the graduate conference, which takes place each year half-way through term 3. If as an MA student the

student has already presented a paper at this conference then they may defer presenting until their second (or even third) year of doctoral study. **Supervisors** are expected to attend as much of the graduate conference as possible, and, at a minimum, **should endeavour to attend the sessions in which their own students present.**

The Viva

The viva takes place after your student has submitted their thesis. At the viva the two examiners quiz the student on the thesis, an experience that allows them to submit their final recommendation about whether the thesis will pass. As the supervisor, your role in the process consists of the following:

- **Selection of the examiners.** Normally candidates have one internal examiner (i.e. a member of the Warwick faculty) and one external examiner. If the candidate is themselves a member of the Warwick staff then they must have two external examiners. The process for nominating external examiners may be found on the history department website.
- **Appointing an examination advisor,** if desired. The role of the examination advisor is to ensure that the formal and administrative requirements concerning the viva are respected. An examinations advisor also acts as minute taker at the viva. Normally responsibility for ensuring that examiners adhere to the university's formal requirements lies with the internal examiner. If however there is no internal examiner (see above) then it is necessary to appoint an examination advisor, chosen from department staff. It may also be a good idea to have an examination advisor if the internal examiner is relatively junior or inexperienced at conducting viva, or if you anticipate that the thesis may be referred. Examination advisors do not need to be appointed formally through the graduate office, and so can be brought in at the last minute if need be.
- **Soothing your student's nerves.** Students are almost always nervous before the viva. You can perhaps help a little by ensuring that they understand the procedures, and by helping them prepare. For example, you can advise them to take notes, to listen carefully to the questions, and to familiarise themselves with the contents of their thesis, while stopping short of committing the entire thing to memory.
- **Hanging about during the viva.** Supervisors do not normally attend the viva, although there is nothing to stop them doing so if the examiners and the candidate agree to allow them. Supervisors who do attend the viva must not participate in any way; they must sit quietly in the background, as unobtrusively as possible. It is however normal practice for the supervisor to remain in the building while the viva is taking place, so that they are on hand to offer congratulations, or to console the candidate, after the viva has concluded. This is particularly important in cases where the thesis has been referred, as the candidate will almost certainly want to discuss the situation.

If a candidate's thesis is referred, you are likely to be confronted with a distressed, disappointed and perhaps angry student. Your role as supervisor is to support them in undertaking the required revisions. Your student should liaise with you about these revisions. If your student is angry at *you*, you might wish to speak with the director of graduate studies about the situation.

Concluding Comments

If you have any concerns about your student's progress, your relationship with them, or any other matter (for example, if you suspect your student might be dyslexic, or depressed), you can always seek advice from the director of graduate study. Indeed, you should raise these concerns.

The complete set of university guidelines about postgraduate supervision can be found at <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/academicoffice/gsp/current>

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August 2010