Postgraduate Research Code of Practice

APPENDIX 2

Policy on Research Student Supervision

1. Introduction

a) This Policy forms part of the University's Postgraduate Research (PGR) Code of Practice. Other University policies and procedures which are connected to this Policy are as follows:

- Student Complaints Procedure
- Dignity at Work and Study Policy and Procedures
- PGR Handbook

b) This Policy covers the following research programmes:

- Doctor in Philosophy (PhD)
- Master of Philosophy (MPhil)
- Doctor of Medicine (MD)
- Campus-based and Online Professional Doctorates

c) For PhD by Prior Publication, the supervisor role will be carried out by a thesis adviser. Key differences between the supervisor and thesis adviser role are outlined in Appendix 16 of the PGR Code of Practice.

d) The value of a University of Liverpool research degree award is underpinned by the quality of the research supervision provided to students studying on the respective research programme. The University of Liverpool (UoL) is responsible for the academic quality and standards of all supervision of its research degree programmes, including those offered under a collaborative agreement with an institutional partner.

2. Supervision arrangements

a) All students' research must be supervised by at least two suitably qualified members of academic staff appointed by the relevant UoL Dean of School/Institute.[1] Unless specifically stated in an individual agreement with a partner institution, one member of the supervisory team must be a member of UoL academic staff. The University may accredit appropriately qualified non-UoL staff with the status of 'Recognised Supervisor'; approval of this form of accreditation is the responsibility of the relevant Faculty, or is delegated as appropriate. This status may be rescinded by UoL if performance by an individual 'recognised supervisor' is considered unsatisfactory.

b) All research students must have a clearly-identified Primary Supervisor who will be their main point of contact. The Primary Supervisor must be appointed from within the School/Institute in which the student has been registered. The appointed Second Supervisor may be from another School/Institute or Faculty. The Primary Supervisor, who would normally have the most appropriate expertise in the area of the individual project, may, under certain circumstances be a 'Recognised Supervisor'. Where this is the case, the UoL Dean of School/Institute must be satisfied that the supervisory arrangements for an individual student are appropriate and can be maintained for the duration of the research degree.

c) No supervisor should undertake the supervision of any more than a limited number of students. It is recognised that reasonable limits will vary across disciplines and research programmes, and will depend on the size and nature of the thesis, and whether or not the supervisor is a member of full-time academic staff of UoL. It is the responsibility of the UoL

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[1] The duties of a UoL Level 2 Dean of School/Institute referred to within this Policy may be delegated within the School/ Institute where appropriate.

Dean of School/Institute to oversee the resource allocation of academic staff to this function.

d) Where a UoL supervisor leaves the University, is unable to continue their supervision of one or more students, or if any other situation arises whereby it would be inappropriate for supervision arrangements to continue (such as the irreparable breakdown of the student/ supervisor relationship), the replacement of that supervisor should be considered, in the first instance, by the UoL Level 1 or 2 Director of Postgraduate Research who should recommend a suitable replacement supervisor for approval by the UoL Dean of School/Institute. The recommendation should include details of the measures that will be put in place to ensure appropriate continuity of supervision and to minimise the impact of such changes. Students should be informed as early as possible if their supervisory team is going to change and should be asked to identify any concerns they may have about the continuity of supervision. These concerns must be addressed in a continuity plan presented to the UoL Dean of School/Institute for consideration and approval. If in exceptional circumstances, after every effort has been made to appoint a new Supervisor, UoL is unable to provide continued supervision or appropriate alternative opportunities the student should be informed immediately and offered a final opportunity to meet with the Level 1 or 2 Director of Postgraduate Research. The student must also be informed of their right to submit a complaint in accordance with the Student Complaints Policy and Procedure. See link in section 10 below.

e) Supervisory meetings must be conducted in English. The written records of these meetings must also be kept in English.

PhD, MPhil and MD students

f) The assignment of a supervisor to a PhD, MPhil or MD student is the responsibility of the UoL Dean of School/Institute. The Dean of School/Institute is also responsible for overseeing the quality of the supervision provided to students, although this may be delegated as appropriate and is normally carried out by the UoL Level 1 or 2 Director of Postgraduate Research via the Annual Progress Monitoring process.

g) When appointing supervisors to students registered on PhD, MPhil and MD programmes, Schools/Institutes are required to give an indication of the level of each supervisor's respective input into the student's supervision, by expressing this as a percentage in the central student records system. For example, where two supervisors have an equal input, this would be recorded as a ratio of 50:50. Alternatively, where the Primary Supervisor might contribute the majority input into the supervision, and the Second Supervisor might play a largely pastoral role, this would be reflected in the percentage split as appropriate. No supervisor should have an input of less than ten percent. The Primary Supervisor would normally have the largest percentage of supervisory input but in any case this should not normally be less than forty percent. The proportion of supervisory input by a student's Primary and Second Supervisor may well change over time, especially if one supervisor leaves or cannot continue to supervise for any reason. See also section 3(a)(iii) below regarding instances where the Primary Supervisor has no previous supervisory experience.

Professional Doctorate students

h) The assignment of supervisors to Professional Doctorate students is the responsibility of the UoL Dean of School/Institute, who is also responsible for overseeing the quality of the supervision provided to students. This monitoring of quality of supervision may be delegated as appropriate - for online Professional Doctorates this is normally carried out by the UoL Programme Director for Online Professional Doctorates.

i) The allocation of the supervisory team will be undertaken

      i.   for on-campus students studying for a professional doctorate programme - in accordance with the PGR Code of Practice;

      ii.   for students studying for an online professional doctorate programme - in accordance with the appropriate Framework for Online Professional Doctorates.

3. Criteria for appointment of supervisors

a) The essential criteria for the appointment of individuals as supervisors, regardless of whether or not they are UoL staff and across all research degree programmes, are:

      i.   **Either,** the person is a subject specialist and currently research active, as demonstrated by a publication record which includes both recently published work and work in progress, or active involvement in on-going projects;

      ii.   **Or**, the person is an expert practitioner, demonstrated by ten years or more of professional experience in a relevant field that includes holding an appropriate senior position, and being involved in on-going research projects.

      iii.   A supervisor who does not have any previous supervisory experience will not normally be appointed as a Primary Supervisor. However, where an appointed Primary Supervisor does not have previous supervisory experience, the Dean of School/Institute must ensure that the appointed Second Supervisor does have the appropriate supervisory experience and also provides mentoring support to the Primary Supervisor in accordance with section 6(f) below. In such cases it is expected that the Mentor Supervisor will not have less than forty percent of supervisory input.

b) Supervisors should have relevant research experience and normally hold a qualification at Doctoral level or, alternatively, at least to Master's level where the Master's has a demonstrable piece of independent research associated with its award. Qualifications of PhD or Professional Doctorate should be from a Higher Education Institution providing secure academic standards for undertaking research and learning about research approaches, methods, procedures and protocols and with a research environment that offers students quality of opportunities and support. The qualifications held should be relevant to the subject matter and have made a contribution to original research.

c) All supervisors are required to engage in professional development as appropriate in relation to best supervisory practice. In addition all appointed supervisors, whether UoL staff or those appointed with 'Recognised Supervisor' status, must undertake appropriate supervisor training or other workshops which have been approved by UoL.

4. Responsibilities of all supervisors (supervisory relationship with the student)

This section outlines responsibilities that apply to all members of the supervisory team. Additional obligations (as well as some technical workflow roles) which are the specific responsibility of the Primary Supervisors are set out in section 5.

a) It is the responsibility of all supervisors to establish a professional and supportive relationship with their student(s), in order to facilitate their development as a researcher, within a vibrant and stimulating research environment. Supervisors should be aware of and act in accordance with the University's Dignity at Work and Study Policy (see section 10). Under normal circumstances an individual should not be appointed as a supervisor where they have a relationship with the student through kinship (whether by blood, marriage, civil partnership or common law), or a business relationship.

A research student should not have more than 90% of their supervision from supervisors who are related to each other by marriage, civil partnership, blood/ common law or who are business partners or where the supervisors share a close personal relationship.

b) Supervisors should provide access to the wider national and international research community including opportunities to attend relevant conferences and workshops or through dissemination via journal publications, where appropriate.

c) Supervisors should ensure that students are aware of the current developments in both specific and wider areas of research.

d) Supervisors should encourage students to question critically the existing literature around the specific subject area, the assumptions of the research project and the results they obtain.

e) Supervisors must keep up to date with changes and updates to the relevant University policies and procedures and the academic regulations governing the relevant research degree programme. They should ensure as far as possible that their students are familiar with and adhere to the content of these documents, as appropriate. They should ensure as far as possible that the students are familiar with the various professional and specialist services for students, particularly in relation to health, counselling, finance, disability and immigration. Supervisors must seek advice from the relevant parties if they are unclear about any aspects of University regulations, especially in relation to immigration, diversity and equality and matters surrounding academic compliance. See section 10 for sources of further information.

f) In their professional supervisory relationship with students, supervisors should endeavour to encourage students' engagement with their research project but should remain critical and realistic about students' progress. They are required to record any concerns they have, particularly during any formal process for evaluating a student's academic progress.

g) Supervisors should advise students on issues relating to academic integrity, provide advice and guidance on the University's policies on such matters, and take steps to assist students to avoid plagiarism, collusion and dishonest use of data.

h) Supervisors should make it clear to students that their research project is the students' own responsibility and that it is the Examiners, who are entirely independent of the supervisors, who will ultimately determine the final outcome of the award. Supervisors are expected to read the student's thesis and provide feedback prior to submission but must not engage in any activity which could compromise the independence of the *viva voce* (hereafter referred to as *viva*) examination, which includes consulting with the appointed Examiners regarding the scheduled examination (other than about logistical arrangements) or taking part in any formal examination of the thesis or research project, including attending, in any capacity, the examination.

i) It is strongly advised that, as a matter of good practice, the opportunity is taken to document in writing (e.g. an email summary) all substantive interactions between supervisors and students, however informal, to ensure that supervisors and students are clear about the frequency, content and outcomes of such supervisory meetings. Specific requirements for recording formal supervisory meetings in the University's PGR Toolbox, or other formally approved systems, are detailed in section 5(g) below.

j) It is the responsibility of supervisors to ensure that students are made aware of the consequences of not making satisfactory progress with their research project.

k) It is the responsibility of all supervisors to advise students on the processes for requesting a change in registration, particularly in relation to an interruption of study if the students' personal, financial or health circumstances prevent them from continuing on their programme temporarily. Supervisors are required to process such requests in a timely fashion and should explain the implications and the consequences of interrupting study, taking advice as appropriate from the specialist professional services. See section 10 for sources of further information.

l) It is the responsibility of all supervisors to familiarise themselves and comply with the University of Liverpool Health and Safety Policy which can be found on the Safety Adviser's Office webpages.

5. Additional Responsibilities of the Primary Supervisor

It is the responsibility of the Primary Supervisor:

a) Once the Primary Supervisor has agreed to undertake this role, and where appropriate, to evaluate the suitability of the proposed project and suitability of the applicant to undertake the project prior to formal registration of the student onto the research programme, and, where appropriate, to conduct an interview with prospective students. It should be noted that the final decision regarding acceptance of a student for registration onto a research programme is not the responsibility of the Primary Supervisor but of the Dean of School/Institute in accordance with Appendix 1 of the PGR Code of Practice: Postgraduate Research Degrees Admissions Policy and Procedures. It is recognised as good practice to involve members of staff outside the proposed supervisory team in assessing the student's application.

b) To take a lead within any supervisory team in advising students on the academic regulations governing the research degree programme, relevant University policies and procedures and all student-related processes such as registration, payment of fees (including the consequences of non-payment of fees), submission of thesis and *viva* examination processes.

c) To provide clear guidelines to students on the required timescales for completion of the relevant research degree programme, including the maximum periods of registration for the relevant research degree programme.

d) To provide guidance about the planning of the research project, set appropriate and clear objectives, targets and deadlines within the overall project plan and critically monitor the student's progress against this plan and ensure that the student's hours of work associated with their research degree studies remain in line with this policy.

e) To ensure that each student is provided with an appropriate induction to the research group, academic Department, School/Institute, Faculty and wider University, in partnership with other relevant contributors.

f) To undertake a Development Needs Analysis (DNA) with the student at the start of their programme to identify an appropriate skills training programme and any exemptions for which the student qualifies. The Primary Supervisor should monitor a student's progress against this skills training programme (including mandatory skills training) and identify to the student any issues in their performance against the plan.

g) To meet regularly with students, either in person or remotely, in accordance with the relevant programme. It would be expected that Liverpool-based supervisors would normally meet with their Liverpool-based students face to face. In other degree programmes, for example, online, or as part of a dual or joint research programme with

another institution, other methods of meeting may be used. Primary Supervisors are required to meet with their full-time students at least once per month and with their part-time students at least once every two months and to ensure that a formal record of such supervisory meetings is made in the University's PGR Toolbox or its approved alternative system. These formal supervisory meetings should have an agenda agreed in advance and a record of agreements of outcomes and targets reached during the meeting. Primary Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that their students record such supervisory meetings, as failing to provide a full record is likely to affect the evaluation of their Annual Progress Monitoring (APM) and could lead to an international student losing their current visa status.

h) To ensure that their students are enabled to complete their Annual Progress Report (APR) within the required timescales and to ensure that they themselves complete the supervisor's evaluation with supportive but critical and realistic feedback in a timely fashion.

i) To be accessible to students as appropriate at times other than formal supervisory meetings (see section 5(g) above). The expectation is that a Primary Supervisor will meet at an appropriate frequency with students outside this formal process (see advice in section 4(i) about recording such informal supervisory meetings).

j) To read the full thesis prior to submission, with appropriate feedback given within agreed timescales.

k) To convene a meeting at least once per term, to discuss with the student on-going progress issues with the research project, held in person or remotely with other members of the supervisory team, or, for online professional doctorate programmes, in accordance with the appropriate Framework for Online Professional Doctorates.

l) To arrange for students to present their work to staff and other students and to provide the opportunity to have practice in *viva* examinations.

m) To ensure that any requests by a student for a change to their registration e.g. change of mode of study, request to interrupt study, transfer to submission pending, are processed in a timely way in order that the student is not disadvantaged in any way and that their registration record is accurate and up to date.

n) To take the lead in nominating Examiners for consideration by the UoL Dean of School/Institute. Final approval for appointment of the Examiners is given by the Faculty PGR Director.

o) To inform the student of the names of the Examiners and to ensure that the student is prepared and supported to undertake the *viva* examination.

p) If the student informs them of any exceptional or medical circumstances that might affect their performance in the *viva* examination, to ensure that the Examiners are informed of these circumstances prior to the *viva* by alerting their School/Institute Director of PGR Studies (SDPR/IDPR), provided that the student has given consent to share this information. Normally the SDPR/IDPR is expected to contact the Internal Examiner in such cases.

q) Where a research student is undertaking off-site, split-site or independent off-site or split-site study, the Primary Supervisor has the following additional responsibilities (see Appendix 11 of the PGR CoP: Policy on Off-site and Split-Site Research Degree Study for a Single UoL award section 5):

i. To ensure that appropriate monitoring of the student's progress is maintained, whilst off-site.

ii. In the event that the off-site Supervisor is no longer able to supervise the student while they are located at the off-site host institution/organisation, the Primary Supervisor must work with the institution/organisation to identify an appropriately qualified replacement Supervisor.

r) Where an application for an *aegrotat* or posthumous degree is made, the Primary Supervisor is responsible for:

i. Collating material produced by the candidate which demonstrates their performance at the level appropriate for the degree. This material will normally include thesis chapters, progress reports, conference papers, work prepared for publications, and publications.

ii. Drafting an accompanying statement, explaining the nature of the submission and outlining where the material produced by the deceased or seriously ill candidate fits into the planned programme of work, and how any omissions have been filled.

iii. Working with Second and other Supervisors to supply additional information to the Examiners as part of the initial assessment and examination processes.

iv. Working with Second and other Supervisors to prepare the thesis material for examination (section 5r refers to Appendix 15 of the PGR Code of Practice: Policy on *Aegrotat* and Posthumous Awards for PGR students).

6. Responsibilities of the Second and other Supervisors

It is the responsibility of the Second Supervisor and other Supervisors (collectively referred to below as 'Second Supervisors'):

a) To consult with the Primary Supervisor on the feasibility of the proposed project and the suitability of the applicant prior to formal offer, and, where appropriate, to participate in the interview of prospective students.

b) Where the Primary Supervisor is not a member of academic staff of the University (i.e. they have 'Recognised Supervisor' status), to provide advice and guidance on the University's academic regulations and relevant policies and procedures, taking advice as necessary.

c) To assist the student and the Primary Supervisor in completing a DNA at the beginning of the student's registration.

d) To meet with students and other members of the supervisory team at least once per term, or more frequently, depending on the specific research degree programme, to discuss progress with the project and the direction that the research is taking. Second Supervisors are advised to keep a copy of the record of these supervisory meetings.

e) To be available to students at times other than formal supervisory meetings and provide general support as required to the student and the Primary Supervisor. Depending on the proportion of supervision provided to the student by the Second Supervisor, they may make more or less academic input into the research. It is expected that, the more academic input made (i.e. the greater the percentage supervision provided), the greater the frequency of supervisory meetings between the student and the Second Supervisor.

Second and other supervisors are also responsible for ensuring that the thesis is read prior to submission, with appropriate feedback given within agreed timescales.

f) In instances where the Primary Supervisor does not have previous supervisory experience, the Second Supervisor will act as a Mentor Supervisor, providing appropriate mentoring and support (See section 3(a)(iii) above). This will include:

  i. Ensuring the student is correctly informed on academic regulations and policies governing the research degree programme (see section 5(b) above).

  ii. Meeting regularly with the student and Primary Supervisor i.e. once per month for the first six months following registration and regularly thereafter.

  iii. Ensuring compliance with the APM process, in accordance with UoL's Policy and Procedures on the Academic Progress of Postgraduate Research Students (Appendix 3 of the PGR CoP).

  iv. Providing guidance on the thesis submission process, in accordance with UoL's Policy on Submission of a Research Degree Thesis for Examination (Appendix 7 of the PGR CoP).

g) Where an application for an *aegrotat* or posthumous degree is made, Second and other Supervisors are responsible for:

  i. Working with the Primary Supervisor to supply additional information to the Examiners as part of the initial assessment and examination processes.

  ii. Working with the Primary Supervisor to prepare the thesis material for examination (section 6g refers to Appendix 15 of the PGR Code of Practice: Policy on *Aegrotat* and Posthumous Awards for PGR students).

7. Entitlements and responsibilities of students in relation to supervision

a) Students registered on a research degree programme are entitled to a high quality of research supervision, through the allocation of appropriately qualified staff and exposure to the wider internal and external research environment.

b) Students have a responsibility to become familiar and keep up to date with changes and updates to the relevant University policies and procedures and the academic regulations governing the relevant research degree programme. They should adhere to the content of these documents, as appropriate. Students also have a responsibility to become familiar with the various professional and specialist services for students, particularly in relation to health, counselling, finance, disability and immigration. See section 10 for sources of further information.

c) Students are required to take responsibility for the planning of their project with their supervisors and to engage with their programme in accordance with agreements made with their supervisors prior to and during their formal registration period. The student's research project, including production of the thesis, must be undertaken and completed whilst the student is registered for the appropriate PGR degree with UoL.

d) Students studying for an MPhil, MD, PhD or campus-based Professional Doctorate are expected to undertake appropriate Research Skills training in accordance with the PGR Development Programme and any individual training needs analysis. For students studying for an online professional doctorate training will be undertaken in accordance with the appropriate Framework for Online Professional Doctorates.

e) Students studying for an MPhil, MD PhD or campus-based Professional Doctorate are required to meet regularly with their supervisors and to record at least one formal meeting per month in the UoL PGR Toolbox or other formally approved system. It is strongly advised that students and supervisors make a written record of all supervisory meetings, however informal. For students studying for an online professional doctorate, supervisory meetings (virtual or otherwise) and the form of recording these will be undertaken in accordance with the appropriate Framework for Online Professional Doctorates.

f) Students should work independently on their research and writing their thesis, taking advice when necessary. They should take ownership and responsibility for meeting agreed objectives and deadlines and ultimately should take responsibility for the submission of their thesis for examination. Students should be aware that their supervisors play no part in the examination process.

g) Students should maintain a professional and courteous relationship with their supervisors and should be prepared to receive critical feedback on their work. They are entitled to expect, however, that any feedback will be provided by their supervisors in a constructive and supportive way.

h) Full-time PGR programmes are based on an average 40 hour working week or 1800 hours per year, which includes time spent on the research project and time for personal and professional development. Actual working hours will vary for a number of reasons including the nature of the research and the timing within the programme, but it is incumbent upon PGRs and supervisors to ensure that working hours are not excessive. Where students persistently exceed the average hours noted above this is a cause for concern for student wellbeing, health and safety, equality and diversity and is in breach of this policy.

i) A student is entitled to take 25 working days per annum (plus UoL closed days and closed days of any partner institution in which the student is working as part of a split-site or off-site agreement), plus bank holidays, as annual leave in agreement with their Supervisors.

j) If a student is funded/sponsored they will receive a stipend during authorised annual leave, unless specifically stated otherwise in any partner agreement.

8. Problems with supervision

a) If a student feels that they wish to raise concerns about their supervision, in the first instance they should raise the issue with the supervisor(s) themselves or, if that is not appropriate, with the Level 1 or 2 Director of PGR Studies. If the matter is not resolved, the student should refer to the Student Complaints Procedure and seek advice as to the most appropriate person to whom they should address their concerns in the first instance, who would normally be the Level 2 Dean of School/Institute. If it is a complaint about the conduct of supervisor(s), themselves, which might make it more difficult to raise, then, depending on the circumstances, a student might refer to the Dignity at Work and Study Policy.

b) Students should raise any concerns they have about supervision during the formal Annual Progress Monitoring and ensure that their concerns are recorded.

c) Supervisors who are approached with a complaint by a student should seek advice from appropriate parties if they are unsure about how to handle it. See section 10 for sources of further information.

d) Supervisors should aim to address any concerns raised by students as quickly as possible, referring matters to other members of staff as appropriate.

9. Summary

This Policy on Research Supervision outlines the responsibilities of the UoL Dean of School/Institute in assigning suitable qualified supervisors to students and the duties of the supervisory team, including the additional responsibilities of the Primary Supervisor. It also describes the entitlements and responsibilities of the research student.

Compliance with this policy should ensure that research students are well supervised and are able to complete their research in a timely manner.

10. Sources of further information

- [The PGR Code of Practice](#)

- [Student Counselling Service](#)

- [Disability Advice & Guidance](#)

- [Student Fees Office](#)

- [International Advice and Guidance Team](#)

- [Student Complaints Policy and Procedure](#)

- [Guild of Students Advice Service](#)

- [Academic Quality and Standards Division](#)

- [Research Degree Administration Team (Student Life)](#)

- [The Leadership, Organisational, Professional & Academic Development Academy](#)

- [Diversity and Equality Policies](#)

- [Safety Adviser's Office Webpage](#)

- Faculty Heads of Education and Student Experience
  - ➢ [Health and Life Sciences](#)
  - ➢ [Humanities and Social Sciences](#)
  - ➢ [Science and Engineering](#)