



Approved by
Academic Council
23rd April 2010

Code of Practice for Supervision of Research Students

POLICY DOCUMENT



ucc

Coláiste na hOllcoile Corcaigh, Éire
University College Cork, Ireland

Introduction

The purpose of this UCC Code of Practice for Supervision of Research Students is to lay out clearly, for all parties involved in research degrees, their responsibilities and reasonable expectations, the key steps and procedures to be followed, and to help avoid misunderstandings or problems which can occur due to the lack of such guidance.

It captures key principles in a deliberately concise manner, as it does not seek to repeat material which is available elsewhere (e.g., University Calendar, Research Student Handbook). However, it is expected that students, supervisors and members of Graduate Studies Committees within academic units (hereinafter “Graduate Studies Committee”) are familiar with the broader University regulatory framework.

Responsibilities of the Student

During a research degree, research students are expected to undertake original research, under the guidance of a supervisor or supervisors, leading to a thesis which describes the outcomes of their research. In the case of a doctoral degree, the research should make sufficient contribution to your field of study as to be publishable in the relevant academic literature and the award of the degree follows a successful *viva voce* examination, in which the candidate demonstrates the ability to engage in a high-level academic discussion of their work with internal and external examiners.

In order to reach these objectives, research students are expected to take all reasonable steps to ensure the satisfactory progress of their studies and conduct their research in a professional manner as befitting a postgraduate research student. In addition, if the research is being carried out in an environment in which others (e.g., Research students and post-doctoral fellows) contribute to the project, clear explanation of the contribution the student themselves have made is essential in the thesis, and work done by others should be explicitly defined and acknowledged appropriately.

It is particularly important for students to take ownership and responsibility for their research, and engage with all the supports and advice available to them, through the University.

Therefore, it is the responsibility of a research student to:

1. Maintain a professional relationship at all times with their academic supervisor(s) or members of their supervisory team, and other University staff;
2. Maintain regular communications with their supervisor(s) and respond to requests/inquiries promptly;

3. Record plans of work, and any changes to these plans, on a regular basis (e.g., by sending a short email to their supervisor(s));
4. Fulfill any requirements of their programme in relation to completion of academic and/or training modules;
5. Read and be familiar with the University's regulations and the administrative requirements relevant to the research degree, and relevant policies including *inter alia* that concerning plagiarism;
6. Read and be familiar with the information presented in the UCC Postgraduate Research Student Handbook, and the Postgraduate Research Student Handbook of the academic unit, if appropriate;
7. Take the initiative in identifying problems that impede the progress of their study and seek solutions to these, including being familiar with the University's procedures and supports for informal and formal resolution of such issues, if necessary.

During the course of their study, research students will receive advice and feedback from their Supervisor(s), and are therefore required to:

8. Discuss with their supervisor(s) the type of guidance and feedback that will be most helpful to aid satisfactory progress of your study. This will usually involve regular formal meetings to review your research progress, at a frequency agreed with your supervisor(s);
9. Present reports or other written material in sufficient time as requested by your supervisor(s) and/or academic/administrative department;
10. Actively participate in review and evaluation procedures; annual reviews are compulsory for doctoral students and are recommended for all research students.

Responsibilities of the Supervisor/Supervisory Team

The main responsibilities of the principal supervisor of a research student are to provide intellectual and pedagogical support towards successful completion of his/her studies. The supervisor has overall responsibility for the student's supervision and research training.

Rather than a single named supervisor, supervision may be the responsibility a team involving more than one supervisor, or a supervisor and Advisor. In such cases, a principal supervisor must be named who is responsible for administrative issues relating to, *inter alia*, the student's registration, progress and examination and holds the ultimate

responsibility for the supervision of the candidate. The roles of the other team members should be agreed at the start of the research, and agreed clearly with the student.

The responsibilities of the supervisor, or shared by members of the supervisory team, are as follows:

1. Be familiar with all policies, procedures and structures of the University and academic unit relevant to research degrees and research students, and avail of appropriate opportunities for continuing professional development in this area;
2. Give guidance and support on the student's research topic, the planning of the research programme, and the academic standards expected for successful completion of the doctoral degree, including ensuring awareness of issues concerning plagiarism and other aspects of research conduct;
3. Maintain a professional and constructive relationship with the student and other members involved in the research programme;
4. Ensure the highest ethical and academic standards, by making the student aware of all relevant regulations, policies and codes of practice, including health and safety policies and procedures and obligations arising from them;
5. Ensure that the work reported in the dissertation is the student's own and is credited as appropriate. In the event that you have concerns in relation to plagiarism or breach of copyright this should be reported to the Departmental Graduate Studies Committee.
6. Maintain regular communications with the student, as appropriate for the relevant stages of the student's project, and respond to student's requests/inquiries in a reasonable time;
7. Provide advice on the selection of academic and/or training modules to be followed (where appropriate) and support the facilitation of the student's training needs;
8. Encourage the student, particularly in the case of doctoral students, to publish, participate in colloquia, seminars and conferences, in accordance with disciplinary practices, and provide advice on obtaining research funding, where appropriate;
9. Bring any planned leaves of absence longer than a month to the attention of the student and ensure that alternative supervisory arrangements are in place as appropriate;
10. Provide advice and support on the submission of the thesis and, in the case of doctoral students, preparation for the *viva voce* examination.

A key role of the supervisor is to review the student's progress in their research in a structured manner, both on an ongoing basis, formal and/or informal, and through a formal annual review process carried out in conjunction with the Graduate Studies Committee of the academic unit, which is compulsory for doctoral students, and encouraged for all research students. This reviewing role should involve:

11. Holding regular meetings to monitor and review research progress, following an agreed frequency of supervision meetings;
12. Requesting regular written work, interim reports or research results as appropriate to ensure that student is working to the agreed timeline, and providing prompt and constructive feedback on same;
13. Ensuring that the student is familiar with reporting and review requirements (e.g., for annual reviews or funding agencies) and giving advice on the necessary completion dates of successive stages of work;
14. Participating fully in the annual review process for progress of research students is undertaken as described in the policy document *The roles of Graduate Studies and the operation of progress reviews for research students* (2010).
15. Following up any negative outcomes of annual reviews of the progress of research students through the stages as described in the above mentioned policy.

Responsibilities of the Academic Unit

The Academic Unit (e.g., Department, Programme, Research Centre) in which a research student is registered and undertakes their research plays a key role in support and oversight of their progress, and is responsible for ensuring that adequate facilities and supervision are available to the Student throughout their research. It is UCC policy that all Academic Units have a Graduate Studies Committee to manage these functions.

The responsibilities of the Academic Unit are as follows:

1. The Academic Unit is responsible for ensuring that a research student has access to adequate resources, facilities and equipment for their proposed thesis topic; the Head of Department/School, by signing a student's application form for postgraduate study, confirms that this is the case.
2. The Academic Unit will also be responsible for confirming, at application stage, that adequate supervision arrangements will be in place for a research student.

3. During a research student's course of study, the Academic Unit will provide support and oversight of progress, through its Graduate Studies Committee .¹
4. In some cases, the oversight of progress of students on named structured PhD programmes may be the responsibility of a Programme Board, which will be made clear in the relevant programme description.
5. It is the responsibility of the Head of Academic Unit to assign each research postgraduate student to one Graduate Studies Committee, and students will be notified at the commencement of their studies as to which Graduate Studies Committee will monitor their progress.
6. The Graduate Studies Committee's primary responsibility, on behalf of the Academic Unit, is to monitor and support the progress of research students in that Unit. The committee interfaces with students, supervisors and the University for the purpose of monitoring student progress (including the transfer of students from Masters/PhD track to PhD programmes, if appropriate), assisting supervisors and improving the research student experience. It provides a mechanism for local identification and resolution of any problems that may emerge in relation to a student's progress.
7. The Graduate Studies Committee will identify the staff responsible for the review and verify that such reviews have taken place.
8. The Graduate Studies Committee will also provide information and guidance to supervisors and students regarding policy and procedures relevant to graduate research. In particular, the Graduate Studies Committee is responsible for ensuring that a regularly updated Postgraduate Research Studies Handbook for intending applicants and existing research students is produced and distributed.
9. The Graduate Studies Committee is responsible for ensuring that accurate records of all relevant procedures, activities and meetings, including annual reviews of student progress, are kept within the unit.
10. The Academic Unit shall have ultimate responsibility to the Student for the supervision of the research.

¹ The detailed functions of Graduate Studies Committees, and the operation of annual reviews of student progress, are described in the ACGSC policy document on *The roles of Graduate Studies Committees and the operation of progress reviews for research students* (2010)

