

# Guidance on Postgraduate Research Supervision

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## New from academic year 2020-2021

The Guidance for Postgraduate Research Supervision will be reviewed annually. Changes may be made throughout the year, so please refer to the [Graduate School website](#) for the latest version of this document.

This Guidance is owned and updated by the Manchester Metropolitan University Graduate School on behalf of Academic Board. Queries should be directed to the Graduate School ([gsresearchdegrees@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:gsresearchdegrees@mmu.ac.uk)).

## Introduction

Manchester Metropolitan University produces a suite of documents that outline the formal regulations and procedures for postgraduate research degrees.

The **Guidance for Postgraduate Research Supervision** provides guidance for students and supervisors on the requirements and expectations of the supervisory arrangements throughout the student journey.

This document should be read alongside the other documents available on the [Graduate School webpages](#).

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## 1. Supervision - Overview

The aim of supervision at Manchester Met is:

- Support and develop the student to enable them to complete their studies within the agreed timeframe.
- Enable the student to develop and effectively provide and receive a critical overview of their work.
- Provide effective support and prepare the student for assessment and oral examination.
- Provide a framework in which new supervisors can gain experience alongside those with prior experience.

## 2. Supervisory Team

### 2.1 Team composition and appointment criteria

- All research degree students shall be supervised by a supervisory team, with the exception of students registered for PhD by Published Works, who instead have an Internal Advisor.
- Supervisory teams must include a Principal Supervisor and at least one other supervisor. Both must be research-focused members of the academic staff at Manchester Metropolitan University. The Principal Supervisor must be a research-focused member of a University Centre for Research and Knowledge Exchange.
- It is acknowledged that in some circumstances, e.g. for some Professional Doctorate degrees, it may be appropriate to appoint a Principal Supervisor who is not a research-focused member of a University Centre for Research and Knowledge Exchange. A case can be put forward by the proposed supervisory team and/or Research Degrees Coordinator, for consideration by the Head of Faculty Research Degrees. In these cases, the Second Supervisor must be a research-focused member of a University Centre for Research and Knowledge Exchange.
- Head of Faculty Research Degrees should take into consideration the working patterns of nominated supervisors to ensure adequate support for the student. For example, an academic working 0.2 FTE hours may not be appropriate to act as Principal Supervisor.
- Academic workload must be taken into consideration in allocating a supervisory team. A maximum number of eight students shall normally apply where the member of staff is acting in a Principal or Co-Supervisor role. In approving supervisory teams, the Head of Faculty Research Degrees shall ensure that supervisory allocation is consistent with experience and availability, and provide appropriate supervisory support.
- At least one supervisor from Manchester Met must have previously supervised a research degree, at the same level or higher, to successful completion.
- If the Principal Supervisor has not supervised a research degree student at the same level or higher to successful completion, then at least one member of the team must meet the requirement.
- Some teams may include external supervisors or advisors. These are individuals who are named as a part of a student's supervisory team to bring in specific expertise, but do not participate in the formal duties of a supervisor, e.g. recording of supervisory meetings.
- All supervisors must attend the Graduate School's development workshop for supervisors on joining Manchester Met or becoming a supervisor for the first time, and thereafter at least once every three years. See Training for Supervisors section on page 8 for further details.
- The principle aim of the supervisory team is to provide appropriate support to the PGR student. A holistic view is taken when considering suitability of teams, recognising the

requirements of academic expertise, experience of research degree supervision and pastoral support.

- An academic who is new to supervision but has the necessary subject expertise should be partnered with an experienced research supervisor. The team shall not include anyone who has a close personal relationship with the student.

## 2.2 Supervisory team appointment process

- The Principal Supervisor will be identified as part of the admissions process. A full, compliant team should then be appointed before the student commences study. The Principal Supervisor will work with the appropriate role holder in the department to identify a suitable team. This may be the Research Degrees Coordinator (sometimes referred to as PGR Lead) and/or the Head of Faculty Research Degrees. At this stage, the Principal Supervisor must notify the Graduate School of the proposed team so that the necessary changes will be made to the student's record in SkillsForge.
- The approval of the University Research Degrees Committee or delegated authority should be sought for proposed supervisors to supervise to a higher level than their own qualifications. If Approval to Supervise in these circumstances is granted, the approval relates to the specific student and project.
- Supervisors without completed supervisions, or academic staff new to the University, should attend appropriate supervisory training and receive mentoring within an existing supervisory team.
- Evidence that a member of the team has attended and passed the 15-credit unit on Research Degree Supervision and Examination offered on the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in HE will be taken into account in assessing a proposed supervisor's experience.
- At the Initial Project Review, a full team must be in place and the review panel will be asked to comment on the suitability of the team. Any concerns raised would be investigated by the Head of Faculty Research Degrees.
- Whenever supervisory teams are appointed or amended, the Graduate School will check that the team is compliant before asking the Head of Faculty Research Degrees to give final approval.

## 2.3 External supervisors and advisors

- For some research students it may be necessary to appoint an external supervisor to provide particular expertise within the supervisory team or if the research project involves a collaboration with an external organisation.
- External supervisors are required to be aware of the expectations of supervisors, and complete any required training.
- For students in a collaborative institution, the University will ensure that the partner organisation has comparable resources to support the supervision of research students through the approval and review of collaborative programmes processes, and that any supervisors from the collaborative institution are appropriately qualified and experienced.

### 3. Other key academic contacts for support

#### 3.1 Head of Faculty Research Degrees (HFRD)

The Head of Faculty Research Degrees is responsible for maintaining the standard and quality of research programmes, and protecting the interests of postgraduate research students. The Head of Faculty Research Degrees provides leadership for research degree matters within the faculty and chairs the Faculty Research Degrees Committee and Assessment Board. They also represent the faculty on the University Research Degrees Committee (RDC).

#### 3.2 Faculty Research Degrees Coordinator (FRDCo)

Within each faculty, each department has a member of academic staff nominated by the Head of department with responsibility for postgraduate research students. They will usually be called Research Degrees Coordinators (though in some faculties they are referred to as PGR Leads).

A list of the Research Degrees Coordinators is available on the [Graduate School website](#).

Their key responsibilities in relation to PGR supervision include, but are not limited to:

- Communication with research students (including at prospective enquiry and application stage), supervisors, the Graduate School and the Head of Faculty Research Degrees on academic matters
- Facilitating postgraduate research inductions and other relevant faculty events for research students
- Monitoring of the progress of research students in their department
- Providing advice and guidance to students within their department regarding local policies and practices
- Nomination of review panel members

And, through their membership of the Faculty Research Degrees Committee:

- Oversight of the research degrees programme and associated academic decisions within their faculty
- Approving decisions relating to individual research students
- Creating, implementing and reviewing faculty PGR action planning, in response to student feedback from the progression review process and the biennial Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES)

### 4. Student & Supervisor Responsibilities

#### 4.1 Principal Supervisor and the supervisory team

The Principal Supervisor is a member of University academic staff and plays a crucial role as the leader of the supervisory team. The Principal Supervisor has overall responsibility for the administration of the project and for supervision of the research student on a regular and frequent basis. The precise frequency of formal meetings will vary depending on the project and the student's stage of study, and should be agreed between the student, the Principal Supervisor and the supervisory team. It is expected that formal meetings will take place at least monthly, with no fewer

than 10 formal meetings on record per year. This requirement is the same for both full time and part time students.

The Principal Supervisor shall normally be a student's main academic supervisor. The Principal Supervisor is responsible for providing the student guidance and advice on procedural and regulatory matters as well as academic issues. One of the other supervisors on the team should be designated as the main point of contact in the event that the Principal Supervisor is not attending the University (through leave of absence, extended illness etc.)

#### 4.2 Responsibilities of the Principal Supervisor

Specific responsibilities include:

- Ensuring that the research student is aware of research governance and ethics consideration in general, and the University's ethics processes, and advise on potential consequence of research or academic misconduct.
- To provide advice and guidance to the student in planning their research project to fit within the standard timescales of the programme, and meet the expected programme outcomes.
- Project administration support for the student, from the Initial Project Review through to the submission of the thesis and the oral examination.
- Advising on an appropriate supervisory team, which may include one or more supervisors in addition to the Principal Supervisor and, if appropriate, one external advisor and/or mentor.
- Ensuring that the supervisory team is up to date and requesting any changes to supervisory arrangements using the relevant form in SkillsForge.
- Leading the supervisory team and taking responsibility to ensure that duties are allocated and performed and that all members of the supervisory team are actively involved in supervision.
- The regular recording of supervision meetings. Completing the Principal Supervisor reports for progression milestones in a timely manner to allow sufficient time for the review panels to conduct the progression review meeting in advance of the deadline.
- Ensuring that a research student enrolls and re-enrolls on an annual basis.
- Being the point of contact with the Graduate School, and with the Research Degrees Coordinator in the department or faculty.
- Supporting the student to engage in appropriate personal, professional and career development, including discussing the student's Training Needs Analysis.
- Nominating the examiners and setting up the oral examination (if it is required for the qualification).
- To be aware of the university's PGR regulations and guidance documents related to PGR degrees.

#### 4.3 Responsibilities of the Supervisory team (including the Principal Supervisor)

The supervisory team responsibilities include:

- Inducting the new student and helping them to feel at home in the department, research unit, University Centre for Research and Knowledge Exchange (UCRKE), the faculty and University environment, and, where appropriate, the wider region.
- Giving general guidance on such matters as: the nature of research; academic standards; planning; literature and other sources; methods and techniques; and ethical issues in relation to the research.

- Proposing the appointment of a suitable advisor/mentor (where appropriate).
- Assisting the research student in navigating through official procedures and administration, and ensuring that deadlines are met.
- Maintaining regular and frequent formal contact with the student. When the student has not been in contact with the supervisory team for some time, it is the supervisory team's responsibility to make contact with them. The student's understanding of 'regular' and 'frequent' should be discussed, making reference to the expectations agreed with the Principal Supervisor and supervisory team at the beginning of the research degree. (see Expectations information below)
- Providing the research student with support and informal advice.
- Obtaining progress reports and other written work, and providing prompt, constructive and critical feedback within agreed timeframes.
- Considering and advising on any training or skills development (personal, professional or career) that the student may need.
- Making the student aware, as soon as is reasonably possible, of inadequate progress or other impediments to the successful completion of their research within the standard programme timescales. .
- Informing the Graduate School if there are any problems or difficulties as early as possible.
- Ensuring that the student makes a positive contribution to promoting diversity and equal opportunities within the University and the community through their work within the University and through their choice of area of study, research methods and analysis.

How the Principal Supervisor distributes these responsibilities among the team depends on individual team member strengths and interests, and the particular needs and requirements of the research student.

#### 4.4 Responsibilities of the student

The postgraduate research student responsibilities include:

- Agreeing with the supervisors a plan of their research project which will enable them to meet the standard timescales for the programme and the expected programme outcomes.
- Developing a clear understand of research governance and ethics principals, working in an ethical manner and meeting Manchester Met research ethics requirements. This includes attending research ethics training and obtaining ethical approval for their project via the EthOS system, before data collection begins.
- Discussing and agreeing with their supervisors what kind of help and guidance is required, what form it should take and the frequency of meetings (note that the minimum is monthly).
- Complying with the requirements of university procedures and progression monitoring and submitting forms within the agreed timeframes.
- Maintaining regular and frequent contact with their supervisory team.
- Attending formal supervisory meetings and recording the agreed actions using the record of supervision form in SkillsForge.
- Informing their supervisors of any specific needs, and if there are any problems or difficulties, as early as possible and following university procedures if required.
- Proactively seeking help or advice from the supervisory team, in particular related to meeting progression expectations, and to apply for an extension, interruption, withdrawal or a change in their mode of study if required



- Delivering progress reports and other written material as required in sufficient time to allow for adequate comment and discussion, and providing evidence of progression at their progression review meetings.
- Discuss with the supervisor and receive approval for any periods of fieldwork required for their studies.
- Complete any required documentation for any periods of mobility (e.g. fieldwork, conference attendance, visiting research arrangements) away from Manchester Met, including completing a risk assessment and ensuring they are covered by institutional insurance for any travel
- Understanding the intended outcomes of the degree (as set out by [the Quality Assurance Agency](#)) to ensure their thesis demonstrates achievement of these outcomes
- Submitting their thesis to comply with the University's Regulations.
- To ensure they are familiar with the university's regulations and guidance for PGR degrees.
- Engaging with personal, professional and career development throughout their research degree, utilising established tools where appropriate (e.g. the Researcher Development Framework).
- Maintaining the My Skills section on SkillsForge to keep a record of training and development undertaken.
- Re-enrolling with the University on an annual basis, even if they have submitted their thesis but have not yet been awarded their degree.
- Checking their University email account on a regular basis and responding to correspondence in a timely manner.
- Agree with the supervisor any periods of leave from the university.
- Contributing to the understanding of the postgraduate researcher experience at Manchester Met by taking part in the Postgraduate Researcher Experience Survey (PRES).
- Making a positive contribution to promoting diversity and equal opportunities within the University and the community through their work within the University and through the choice of area of study, research methods and analysis.

## 5. Expectations, feedback and academic progress

### 5.1 Expectations

A word that recurs frequently in relation to supervision is expectations. This is usually in the context of the student's uncertainty about what to expect from a supervisor, as few students have had any previous experience of the research process. Likewise, there can also be uncertainty around supervisors' expectations of their students or of each other, as each research project is unique. Students should meet the full supervisory team within the first week to establish expectations, responsibilities and duties.

### 5.2 Giving and receiving feedback

Supervisors should ensure that they and the student agree upon when and how work will be received for review, as well as when and how feedback will be given back to the student.

Feedback should be constructive and must make clear to the student if there are any areas of their work or progress where the supervisors have concerns. Supervisors should also consider whether any advice may be appropriate on training or skills development that the student may need or benefit from.

Often feedback will be given verbally at a supervisory meeting. It is essential that all meetings are supported by the completion of a Supervisory Meeting Record in SkillsForge, and that the feedback given to the student is noted within that record.

Sometimes feedback will occur in between supervisory meetings, by email for example. Such feedback should be summarised within the record of the next supervisory meeting.

There should be at least 10 supervisory meeting records per year. It is expected that the student will initiate the record in SkillsForge, but if they fail to do so, the supervisors must initiate it and note that the student was not engaged with this part of the process.

### 5.3 Procedure to support postgraduate research progress

In the event that the supervisors have concerns over the student's progress, please refer to the [Procedure to Support Postgraduate Research Progress](#).

## 6. Support with preparation and submission for milestones and thesis examination

Supervisors support students to complete their submissions for milestones, and their final thesis submission.

The [Guidance on Milestones for Postgraduate Research](#) document details the requirements for the milestone submissions, and highlights important considerations for the student and supervisory team as the student approaches submission, such as potential applications for a thesis embargo or oral examination by videoconference.

The [Guidance on Thesis Submission Requirements](#) provides detailed information on the expectation of the student at submission stage.

The [Guidance on the Examination of Postgraduate Research Degrees](#) provides information on the supervisory team's role in nomination examiners.

## 7. Handling Challenges in the Supervisory Arrangements

### 7.1 Managing a conflict of interest

The Head of Faculty Research Degrees will consider whether there is an actual or potential conflict of interest before appointing members of the supervisory team. A 'conflict of interest' comprises a personal, professional or financial connection between a supervisor and a student that could prevent or adversely affect the impartiality of the supervision. Industrial or other professional supervisors (if involved) are included in these considerations. If any concerns in his regards become apparent after the supervisor team is appointed, this should be raised with the Head of Faculty Research Degrees at the earliest opportunity.

### 7.2 Procedures for both supervisors and students to raise issues

Supervisors should discuss issues within the team and with the student initially. If an issue requires escalation, your departments Research Degrees Coordinator would be the first person to speak to. In their absence, or if the issue requires further escalation, the Head of Faculty Research Degrees or Head of Department should be contacted, dependant in the nature of the issue.

Similarly, it is expected that students will discuss issues with concerning their project, or their supervision, with their supervisory team in the first instance. If the student requires advice independent from the supervisory team, or needs to escalate an issue, they can approach the Research Degrees Coordinator/PGR Lead for their department or the Head of Faculty Research Degrees.

Student or supervisors who feel they need to seek advice outside of their faculty can contact the Graduate School.

### 7.3 Appeals and Complaints

Every effort shall be made to address concerns informally within the faculty as soon as they arise. In the event that a student wishes to move to a formal complaint, the relevant information is in the [Student Complaints Procedure](#) applies to all postgraduate research students of the University.

A student wishing to pursue an appeal against an academic outcome should refer to the [Appeals Procedure](#).

If research students are employed by Manchester Metropolitan University in any capacity, for example as Graduate Teaching Assistants and have any complaints regarding their employment experience, they must manage such complaints through the Manchester Metropolitan University Grievance Procedure rather than the Student Complaints Procedure.

## 8. Training & Development

Research students are expected to take responsibility for their own personal, professional and career development during their research degree, taking advice from their supervisory team. The supervisory team will help their student to identify training needs via a training needs analysis, and signpost to appropriate training and development opportunities.

Training and development activities are be recorded in the Development Summary section on SkillsForge.

Students can visit the dedicated [PGR Development Hub](#) on Moodle for further information on training and development opportunities.

## 9. Training for Supervisors

The Graduate School provides training sessions and workshops on supervision, examination, training & development, and SkillsForge. For information on session and dates, Manchester Met staff members can visit the [Graduate School intranet page](#).

## 10. Copyright and Intellectual Property

Students will need to be aware of copyright and intellectual property legalisation. Details of this are noted in the [Guidance on Thesis Submission Requirements](#).

## 11. Pastoral care and wellbeing services

The [Student Life](#) webpages provide a wealth of information for students, and for supervisors looking to help their students, with a huge range of support. In particular:

### 11.1 Mental health and wellbeing

The [Wellbeing webpages](#) include information on counselling services, assessing disability, and signposting to help in a crisis.

### 11.2 Disability Support

If a student has a disability or a specific learning difficulty for which they require additional support, it is advisable that they disclose this to the University at the earliest opportunity, otherwise it may delay the provision of appropriate support. If the student is unsure about the nature of the support available, or whether or not they are entitled to disability related support, they should contact the [University's Disability Service](#) for advice.

### 11.3 English language skills

If English is not a student's first language and they wish to develop their language skills further, the [Language Centre](#) runs a variety of courses to improve English by focusing on the four key skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking.

### 11.4 Study support

The Study Skills section of the website give information of training, workshops and resources available at the University.

### 11.5 Support with Personal Learning Plan (where required)

Disabled students should arrange to meet with a Manchester Met disability advisor to discuss their needs and agree on any reasonable adjustments.

A student may have a Personal Learning Plan (PLP). The PLP may stipulate or recommend adjustments that require a Principal Supervisor's knowledge or input, e.g. extensions to work submission deadlines. However, the PLP is the student's own personal document and supervisors will not see it unless a student wishes to share it with them. It is the student's responsibility to follow up on the stipulations and recommendations made within it. Students and supervisors should speak to Disability Services or the Graduate School for guidance.

## 12. Change in Circumstances

It is sometimes necessary to change arrangements that have been approved. For example, new supervisors may be required, the student may need to take time off from their research degree, a change in programme or mode of study may be required or the student may wish to request an extension to complete their project. In addition, the student may wish to withdraw from their programme

### 12.1 Processes for making changes

The student should discuss any changes with their Principal Supervisor before proceeding.

Some processes are initiated in SkillsForge to request changes to arrangements:

- Application for change in approved arrangements for supervision - The Principal Supervisor will begin this process.
- Application for an interruption or extension of the period of registration - the student will begin this process, and further information is available in the [Guidance on Interruptions and Extensions](#).

There are also some processes to request changes to arrangements that are not administered in SkillsForge - please contact the [Graduate School](#) to enquire:

- Change in approved programme of study (e.g. switching to a different degree or faculty)
- Change in mode of study (e.g. switching from full time to part time)
- Request to withdraw from studies. The student [Withdrawal Policy for Postgraduate Research Degrees Students](#) give further information.

### 13. Additional guidance and support

The regulations, and other information to support this document, are available on the Graduate School webpages.