MEDICAL SCIENCES BOARD

Code of Practice for Research Student Supervisors

(Revised October 2021)

This Code of Practice for Research Student Supervisors in the Medical Sciences Division incorporates the requirements of **all** supervisors as set out in the Policy and Guidance on Research Degrees[1].

Any supervisor accepting a student is thereby accepting the obligations set out in the Policy on Research Degrees and by the Medical Sciences Board, as follows:

Eligibility to Supervise in the Medical Sciences Division

The Supervision Team

The Core Team

All research students in the Medical Sciences Division must have at least two[2] supervisors, both of whom must be established academics and meet the following criteria:

- Have a record of recent publications (i.e. within the last 5 years)
- Have an appropriate contract of employment to the completion of the student's studies, or have the agreement of the Head of Department to act as a supervisor[3].

In addition, at least one member of the core team must previously have supervised a student to completion successfully (either at Oxford or elsewhere).

Furthermore:

- It is expected that supervisors will only accept a student if they:
  - Can ensure there will be sufficient funding from within the department to cover the project costs
  - Have the subject knowledge necessary to guide the student's research
  - Have sufficient time to supervise the student
  - Will be in post long enough to ensure continuity of supervision
  - Recognise and accept the responsibilities both to the student and to the relevant department and the Division implicit in the supervisory relationship (further details under **Responsibilities of the Supervisor** below).
- Divisional policy is that no individual may supervise more than six full-time equivalent students at any one time and that all students must have at least two supervisors. Co-supervision of a student within Oxford is counted as half, regardless of the total number of supervisors.
- DGSs will also take into account submission rates when appointing supervisors
- First-time supervisors should not take on a second student until the first student has successfully passed transfer of status within the timeframe set out by the Examination Regulations and the Divisional Board.

Within this "core team", one supervisor may have overall responsibility for the student and where this is the case, the other supervisor(s) will provide back up, to ensure continuity of support for the student.

[1] This *Policy and guidance* sets out the framework the University expects to see underpin the provision of its research degrees at Oxford. The *Policy* supplements the requirements for research degrees set out in the *Examination Regulations*.

[2] If not identified at the time of recruitment, both supervisors must be identified and listed on the student's record, not later than the end of the student's first term

[3] Such agreement may only be permitted for one of the two supervisors

Additional supervision

A post-doc can be added to the supervisory team and this may have advantages for the student, the post-doc and the project. DGSs can decide on a case-by-case basis whether a post-doc is ready to co-supervise, bearing in mind the above criteria. Post-docs should in general be limited to supervising no more than two students at any one time.

Supervisors external to the University of Oxford

External supervisors – e.g. from another HEI or Industrial partner – may be part of the supervisory team, in addition to the "core team". In some situations it may be appropriate for an external supervisor to be the second member of the core team, in which case the student would count as full-time equivalent against the Oxford-based supervisor's quota. But normally both core supervisors will be Oxford-based and external supervisors will be additional.

The criteria given here should be understood to be the Divisional minimum; departments have the flexibility to expand upon or extend the criteria to suit their own practices. You may therefore wish to contact your departmental Director of Graduate Studies (DGS).

Supervisor Training

New supervisors[4] must complete the online DPhil Supervision at Oxford course. All supervisors are required to complete this course prior to taking on their first student and thereafter at intervals of not less than 3 years. Training can also be obtained via the Medical Sciences Division Skills Portal.

Conflicts of Interest

Supervisors are **prohibited** from forming close, personal or intimate relationships with their students (including, but not limited to, marital, sexual, romantic, or emotional relationships; see also the University's staff-student relationships policy). If such a relationship develops then it is in the best interests of both the student and the supervisor and of their immediate colleagues for this to be reported to the DGS or Head of Department, and for alterative and independent supervisory arrangements to be made, without detriment to the student. This does not preclude the supervisor and student continuing to collaborate scientifically with one another, but the formal supervisory responsibility must cease. If it is found that a supervisor has not reported such a relationship then they will not be permitted to supervise any further students.

Where a close personal relationship exists or develops *between co-supervisors* of a student, an additional senior academic colleague should be identified to act as a source of independent advice and support for the student concerned. This should be an individual of sufficient seniority to resolve any issues effectively, normally either the relevant Head of Department or Head of Unit.

Supervisors must inform their DGS or Head of Department if they are reviewing an application for admissions or funding from a member of their immediate family (or a person with whom they have a close personal relationship).

[4] Applies to any member of the supervisory team, including post docs

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Responsibilities of the Supervisor

Enquiries from Prospective Students

The Medical Sciences Graduate School website has a wealth of useful information for prospective applicants about programmes, funding and how to apply:
https://www.medsci.ox.ac.uk/study/graduateschool

Please ensure that prospective applicants who contact you and who wish to be considered for admission:

- Are aware that if they wish to be considered for a funded place (in MSD), they must apply by the early January deadline at the latest
- Know that their qualifications must meet the requisite University and departmental entry requirements in order to be considered
- Are also directed to the Graduate Admissions website for information about how to apply: http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate

If you are asked:

- Give an honest answer as to whether you have capacity to take on a student
- Give guidance as to whether their proposed project is likely to be compatible with your lab
- Give advice as to who else they might approach (e.g. Director of Graduate Studies)

DO NOT accept or reject the student yourself. The applicant must make the judgement as to whether or not they meet the admissions criteria (with advice on academic standards from NARIC if necessary) and proceed through the proper University admissions process if they choose.

Prior to arrival and first meeting

Where possible, one of the supervisors within the core team should assign the student some directed reading before arrival. This might be of a general background nature so as to put the student in a position to discuss the topic with the supervisor soon after arrival, or it might form the start of a survey of current literature. A supervisor is required to meet their student not later than the second week of Full Term.

The initial term

The supervisors should ensure, in co-operation with the student, that the main framework for the student's studies is established as speedily as possible during the first term.

This may include all or some of the following:

- Ensure that the student attends the college and departmental induction sessions offered to them
- Establish the means by which student and supervisors will communicate
- Establish the arrangements for scheduling meetings, recording their outcomes, reviewing work plans, and monitoring progress. You should ensure that the student knows how much time they should expect from each member of the supervisory team.
  Note that in the Medical Sciences Division:
    - Formal meetings outside of the lab, at which one or more members of the core team should meet personally with the student to review their research progress, evaluate work plans including skills training, and discuss the content of their supervision reports, should take place at least once a month. Other supervisory team members are required to meet with the student at least once a term.

  - Students must have regular meetings with the member of their supervisory team who has day-to-day supervisory responsibility, which may be a post-doc. A minimum of once a fortnight on average across a year is considered a good guideline.
  - Each department has an approved statement of provision for graduate students which specifies the expected frequency of supervisory meetings. Supervisors must ensure that they are familiar with their departmental statement and that the agreed schedule of meetings with the student meets the requirements of the statement.
- Establish who else will be involved in the supervision of the student (post-doc, external supervisor) and what their role is. The core supervisors should ensure that at the start of the project it is clear to the student who in the supervisory team is their main point of contact for advice and guidance, and ensure that respective responsibilities are clear both to academic colleagues and to the student
- Where a student undertakes research as part of a team or group, the supervisors should make clear the way in which the student's own contribution fits into the work of the remainder of the group
- Work to establish a clear project proposal with a good prospect of completion within the required time scale, and to identify the initial stages and early objectives of the project, taking account of the sponsor's requirements where appropriate
- Where completion of an initial research training course is required, identification of the structure, timetable and requirements of the course
- Preliminary identification by the student and supervisors of the skills, knowledge and aptitudes (including Academic English) which are likely to be required for the successful completion of the research programme, and arrangements for supporting their acquisition or development
- Identify appropriate resources to support the research project and how these are to be accessed (including consumables, staffing and working facilities); where the student's research forms part of a funded research programme, the supervisors should ensure that sufficient financial support will be available for the duration of the student's period of study: if there is any doubt, he or she should agree with the student an alternative fallback project at an early stage
- Make clear any specific health and safety requirements for your laboratory and ensure that appropriate health and safety training in undertaken by the student
- Advise at an early stage on experimental design and the effective collection and storage of data
- Draw to the student's attention the need to consider any ethical issues which may arise during the course and any requirements for ethical approval
- Identify (in consultation with the Director of Graduate Studies for the department) colleagues, where during his or her first year of research a student wishes, in addition to contact with his or her supervisors, to have limited consultation with one or two other academics, and to arrange for an approach to them by the student. In some departments this advisory group constitutes the student's thesis committee.
- Make clear the expectations regarding the student's working hours and vacation arrangements:
  - The normal expectation is that students should be working full-time. Interpretation of what this means will vary but supervisors should ensure in all cases that students do not feel obliged to work beyond the legal maximum which applies to employees of the University i.e. a maximum average working week of 48 hours, including overtime (calculated over a 17 week reference period). (Supervisors should also ensure that, in the interests of equal opportunities, they are reasonably flexible regarding hours, e.g. to ensure study can be compatible with having dependent children.) At the same time, hours should be by prior agreement, and

arrangements should not be so flexible as to allow students to think that they can habitually miss days or turn up late.

- The supervisors should make clear that the student is expected to take a reasonable amount of time off for holiday. Divisional policy is that students should receive a level of leave commensurate with employees of the University, i.e. 38 days of leave per annum inclusive of bank holidays.
- Students should have sufficient free time to make the most of the wider University and College resources.
- **Importantly**, some students may wish for professional reasons to undertake paid work in addition to their study as students – for example locum clinical work or consulting in industry. Such work should not normally exceed 1 day per fortnight, including weekends. Any paid work should still allow students to spend at least 40 hours per week for a minimum 44 weeks of the year on their studies.

Throughout the Programme of Study

Supervisors should:

- Meet with the student regularly in accordance with divisional and departmental guidelines and as agreed with the student
- Avoid unnecessary delays in the progress of the research
- Assist the student to work within a planned framework and timetable, (in particular by conducting regular reviews of the student's progress); and request written work as appropriate and in accordance with the plan and milestones discussed with the student and return submitted work with constructive criticism within a reasonable time
- Consider any requests for part-time or flexible working and do their best to accommodate such requests, including supporting formal application for part-time registration.
- Assist the student with the preparation, timetable and submission of material relating to applications for transfer of status, for re-admission after completion of preliminary research training or other course, and for confirmation of status, and to provide appropriate feedback, especially where the student has failed to meet the required standards. Research students must complete the process for transfer of status not later than the fourth term; DPhil students must complete the process for confirmation of status not later than the ninth term
- Advise the student on the composition of their thesis and on the timing for thesis submission, and read and comment on the thesis text itself
- Consult with the student in order to make recommendations for the appointment of examiners; DPhil students must submit their thesis not later than the twelfth term; MSc by Research students must submit their thesis not later than the ninth term
- Be accessible to the student at appropriate times when advice is needed and respond to requests for advice within a reasonable timescale
- Discuss the student's training needs with them and monitor their ability to write a coherent account of their work in good English; advise them where they might find training provision - the Division provides a website detailing or linking to all opportunities for student training outside of individual departments: http://www.medsci.ox.ac.uk/study/skillstraining
- Pursue opportunities for the student to discuss his or her work with others in the wider academic community (including the presentation of research outcomes where relevant) at University, national and international level.

Progress reports

It is the responsibility of the supervisors to provide the student with regular information as to the student's progress (to ensure that the student feels properly directed and able to communicate

with the supervisor), and, where problems arise, provide guidance and assistance as to necessary corrective action.

Furthermore, the completion of the quarterly supervision report, to which both student and supervisor now contribute via Graduate Supervision Reporting (GSR, access is via your eVision account), is mandatory for supervisors. The discussion of the contents of the report should be viewed as part of a regular review of progress. You should strongly encourage your student to submit a report on their progress although it is not compulsory. All those submitting reports through GSR should be aware that what they write can be viewed by other people with direct responsibility for the student, including the student, all supervisors, the Director of Graduate Studies, the student's college advisor, and a small number of administrators.

Each report should also state the nature and extent of recent contact with the student, and, if there has been none, state why this is so. At the end of the first term, the supervisors and student should review not only academic progress, but also how well the student has adjusted to his or her new work environment, how well the environment is meeting his or her needs, and plans to remedy any deficiency. The supervisors should alert the Director of Graduate Studies to any problems experienced in supervising the student.

Cover for absence

The supervisors should avoid absence or leave without appropriate temporary supervision having been arranged for the student. (Leave will not normally be approved without such arrangements being in place.) Heads of department should take this requirement into account when managing requests for sabbatical leave.

Students' Skills Development & Career Progression

Supervisors have a role in ensuring that students develop the research skills, transferable skills and understanding of career options that they will need to progress in their careers; they should encourage the student to obtain knowledge and information about career opportunities and should alert the student, where necessary, to other services provided within the University and elsewhere.

The completion of Training Needs Analysis (TNA) forms is now required whereby students identify the training needed, this is signed off by the supervisor and the training undergone is monitored. TNA form submission is required for transfer and confirmation of status.

Supervisors should also:

- Incorporate discussion of skills training (including at the induction stage) into their formal (at least monthly) meetings with the student and ask the student to provide a progress report for other supervisory team members at least once a term.
- Ensure that students acquire the research techniques they need for the successful completion of their project
- Encourage students to take part in the life of the department/institution
- Encourage students to make presentations on their research
- Encourage students to publish
- Encourage students to attend national and international conferences
- Approve reasonable requests from students to participate in public engagement and outreach activities
- Encourage students to take up the teaching opportunities available to them.
    - https://canvas.ox.ac.uk/courses/30310

- Encourage student to take up the skills training opportunities available to them
  - https://www.medsci.ox.ac.uk/study/skillstraining
- Encourage students to practise their English (if their spoken or written English is poor)
  - http://www.lang.ox.ac.uk/

Health and safety

Supervisors of all students should consider carefully the safety implications of their students' research. Those supervising students are responsible for all aspects of safety under their control, and in particular for the safe conduct of all experiments carried out in the course of their students' research. In the event of an accident, inadequate supervision may render the supervisor liable to prosecution. Supervisors should also ensure that their students are aware that in the event of injury to other persons as a result of their negligence, the student could be subject to civil claims for damages. Advice on the legal responsibilities for safety may be obtained from the University Safety Office. For their part, students must carry out research with proper regard to good health and safety practices.

Supervisors and students should be aware of the need for adequate health insurance and health precautions when travelling abroad. In case of doubt, reference should be made to the University Medical Officer.

Other responsibilities

The supervisors are expected to:

- Have reasonable familiarity with institutional, national and international expectations relating to research environments, research supervision and research training (see especially the relevant sections of the UK Quality Code)
- Engage in continuing professional development to equip them to supervise research students, and to meet requirements for continuing professional development.