UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

CODE OF PRACTICE ON THE SUPERVISION AND MONITORING PROGRESS OF RESEARCH STUDENTS

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1. Introduction

1.1 It is important that, as part of the educational process, students receive appropriate supervision, that their progress is carefully monitored, and that they receive feedback in good time to enable them to adjust their patterns of work as necessary. The aim of this Policy is to recommend a systematic framework for students and staff, to ensure that these aims are achieved. The Policy sets out the responsibilities to be carried out both at principal academic unit level and by individual staff and students.

1.2 The Policy defines a minimum basis for supervising and monitoring the progress of research students and principal academic units may wish to operate procedures and requirements additional to those defined in the Policy. If particular circumstances make any requirement of this Policy inappropriate, specific approval for exemption must be obtained from the Senate or delegated authority.

1.3 Where a question of interpretation arises reference should be made to the Regulations.

1.4 It is recognised that the unit responsible for certain aspects of the monitoring of research students varies for good reason across the University and may be either the College or the principal academic unit. For the sake of brevity the following Policy refers only to the principal academic unit (except when referring to those aspects of the procedures which are clearly a University-level responsibility). All references to the principal academic unit should therefore be interpreted as referring to College or principal academic unit in accordance with practice in the particular part of the University concerned. The term “Head of principal academic unit” should be interpreted as referring to “The Head of principal academic unit or nominee”.

1.5 The term “student(s)” in this section should be interpreted as referring to students registered for qualifications that are designated as research degrees under the University’s Regulations for Research Degrees.

1.6 This Policy applies to normally registered research students, and not to those who, having completed their minimum period of study are paying a continuation fee before submission of their thesis. It is important however that principal academic units continue to monitor the progress of, and where necessary advise, all students in relation to completion of their theses.

1.7 Further copies of this document can be obtained from the Research Postgraduate Team of the Student Services Section of the Academic Services or at http://www.ppd.bham.ac.uk/policy/cop/index.htm.

2. Supervision Arrangements

2.1 The Head of principal academic unit is responsible for the co-ordination of arrangements for supervision of students. However, the Head of principal academic unit may choose to delegate the operation of such arrangements to another member of academic staff. In either case it should be made clear to all staff and students who are undertaking this task.

2.2 Each student should be provided with a lead supervisor, academic supervisory support and a mentor. The same appointments would normally be expected to continue throughout a student's full period of study.

2.3 Academic supervisory support should reflect the individual needs of the student and the context of their study. It should be undertaken by

2.3 .1 A second supervisor or a team of supervisors (known as 'co-supervision'), or by:

2.3 .2 An academic adviser

2.4 Whatever supervisory arrangements are put in place, a lead supervisor should be designated who has overall responsibility for advising interested parties of the progress of the student's research.

2.5 In the case of split location postgraduate research study, it may be appropriate for a local academic adviser or mentor to be appointed. The principal academic unit may, at its own discretion, pay an honorarium to the adviser or the mentor. The University of Birmingham retains full control over the supervision and must be the final arbiter in all cases.

2.6 When considering applications from prospective students, the Head of principal academic unit or nominee should ensure that appropriate supervisory support is available. The Head of principal academic unit should also ensure that the teaching, research interests and other supervisory responsibilities of staff are taken into account when supervisory arrangements are being made; that individual supervisors are not overloaded, and that students are appointed a lead and co-supervisor(s) from a relevant research area.

Training and Qualifications

2.7 Each member of the supervisory team should normally be a member of the University teaching or research staff, who is experienced in and actively engaged in research, who holds a research degree at the same level as, or higher than, the degree being supervised or who has appropriate equivalent experience or professional qualifications or status. If a proposed supervisor is not qualified to the appropriate level s/he shall have compensating academic experience and/or status in the disciplinary area. Individuals shall only supervise students to a higher level than qualifications permit with the approval of Senate or delegated authority. In exceptional cases (see 2.6), the academic adviser may be appointed from outside the University.

2.8 The approval of Senate or delegated authority should be sought for a proposed lead or co-supervisor to supervise to a higher level than his or her own qualifications. Approval to supervise in these circumstances would not be on a student by-student basis but would be given once to individual members of staff. Approval would not need to be sought for those members of staff who had previously supervised theses to a successful conclusion.

2.9 All staff who have not previously been involved in supervising research students should attend the University's training sessions on supervision, including: the nature and practice of research supervision, thesis writing,

responsibilities of student and supervisor, selecting research students, monitoring and reporting on progress and project management skills.

2.10 In the interests of staff training and development, it may be appropriate for a probationary member of staff or one who is less experienced in research to be appointed as a co-supervisor.

2.11 The approval of Senate or delegated authority should be sought for a probationer member of staff to be appointed as a lead supervisor.

2.12 With the approval of Senate or delegated authority, an Honorary member of academic staff may be appointed as a co-supervisor.

2.13 In instances where supervision from suitably qualified and experienced persons based in other institutions is deemed to be appropriate for some students, a University supervisor should always be appointed in addition.

Frequency of Supervision

2.14 The first meeting should normally take place within 10 days of the start of a student's period of study and should involve the lead supervisor. Discussion should normally include supervision arrangements, planning for the student's research, and the requirements of the particular degree for which they are registered, especially the time limits for completion and the criteria for the award of the degree.

2.15 The frequency of formal supervisory consultations will vary according to the conventions of the subject area; the nature of the research; the student's ability; the stage of their studies; the progress being made and whether studies are on a full or part-time basis. However, consultations should normally take place between every two to four weeks for full time students (and the equivalent part time). These supervisory consultations should be additional to those instances when the supervisor(s) and student meet on an informal basis.

2.16 It is recommended that a written record be kept of formal supervisory consultations. (Form GRS2 "Supervision Record (Routine)" may be used for this purpose.) Students should be asked to state, for example, work undertaken since their last supervision meetings and supervisors may make comments on a student's progress. Where appropriate, both the lead and co-supervisor(s) and the student should sign the record to indicate that it contains a good summary of the supervision meeting.

2.17 The first contact between the supervisor(s) and an externally registered student should normally take place at the beginning of the registration period. The supervisor(s) shall maintain regular contact (which may involve email, telephone, letter, face to face or by whatever method of communication is most convenient to both parties) with the student and shall receive, at least monthly, a report from the student.

Absence from University

2.18 During a student's period of study, members of the supervisory team and/or the mentor may have extended periods of time away from the University, for

example, on study leave, sickness, maternity leave, etc. In these cases, it is the Head of principal academic unit's responsibility to ensure that suitable alternative supervisory and/or pastoral arrangements are made. Individuals may keep in regular contact with the student via email or telephone/fax. Where possible, such arrangements should be agreed in advance of the period of absence with the Head of principal academic unit. The principal academic unit should notify the student of the arrangements in writing and a copy of the correspondence should be placed in their file.

2.19 For graduate students, the academic year runs for 52 weeks and supervision is expected to be full time. However, reasonable allowances should be made for short-term absences on the part of both staff and students (holidays or research visits to other institutions or countries). In the latter case, regular email contact is a reasonable record of supervision and a printed copy should be kept in the student's file.

2.20 Students may, with the prior agreement of their principal academic unit, take up to eight weeks holiday in each year (pro rata for shorter periods), inclusive of public holidays. The timing of holidays should be agreed with a student's principal academic unit and industrial sponsor, if applicable.

2.21 If a member of the supervisory team and/or the mentor leaves the University, all responsibility for supervisory/mentoring arrangements rests with the Head of principal academic unit. Under such circumstances, supervision will be arranged, where possible in consultation with the student, to meet the best interests of the student in accordance with 2.2 of this Policy. In some circumstances, students may be able to move with their lead supervisor.

Assessment

2.22 The lead and co-supervisor(s) shall not be appointed as an internal examiner.

2.23 If necessary, the academic adviser could be appointed as the internal examiner for the student. However, this should only be the case if the academic adviser has no detailed and/or specialist academic investment in the content of the student's work, and s/he has only been involved in providing general academic advice (see 5.4-5.5). It is the responsibility of the Head of principal academic unit to ensure that, in circumstances where the academic adviser is appointed as internal examiner, that s/he is sufficiently independent.

2.24 If necessary, the mentor could be appointed as the internal examiner for the student. However, this should only be the case if the mentor has not engaged in any significant pastoral support activities for the student concerned. It is the responsibility of the Head of principal academic unit to ensure that, in circumstances where the mentor is appointed as internal examiner, that s/he is sufficiently independent.

2.25 If a suitably qualified person is not available to act as an internal examiner (see the Policy on the Assessment of Research Degree Theses, section 4), an additional external examiner should be appointed in place of the internal examiner.

2.26 Neither the lead nor co-supervisor should be appointed to chair the viva (oral examination).

2.27 If necessary, the academic adviser could be appointed to chair the viva (oral examination). However, this should only be the case if the academic adviser has no detailed and/or specialist academic investment in the content of the student's work, and s/he has only been involved in providing general academic advice (see 5.4-5.5). It is the responsibility of the Head of principal academic unit to ensure that, in circumstances where the academic adviser is appointed as the chair, that s/he is sufficiently independent.

2.28 If necessary, the mentor could be appointed to chair the viva (oral examination). However, this should only be the case if the mentor has not engaged in any significant pastoral support activities for the student concerned. It is the responsibility of the Head of principal academic unit to ensure that, in circumstances where the mentor is appointed as the chair, that s/he is sufficiently independent.

3. Monitoring and Review of Progress

3.1 Principal academic units should have clear and transparent procedures for the monitoring and review of students' performance. Students should be notified in writing by principal academic units of these procedures and the annual review timetable, during induction and through principal academic unit documentation additional to that in the Graduate principal academic unit Resource File.

3.2 The progress of all full and part-time students, irrespective of whether they are normally registered or writing up, should be monitored regularly at principal academic unit level. The arrangements for such monitoring may vary according to the subject discipline, the size of the principal academic unit and the number of research students. However, the academic progress of students should be formally monitored at least once in the academic year for all students.

3.3 Form GRS3 "Progress Review" may be used for the purpose of monitoring progress. The process should take into account the written comments made by the supervisor(s) and student on this form. The following issues should be considered:

- Summary of progress, including inadequate progress, work not up to the required standard.
- Assessment of the above by the supervisor(s).
- Whether the student is likely to submit within the period of study set out in the regulations for their qualification and/or award of grant from a sponsor or Research Council.
- Schedule for future work.
- Any problems encountered (e.g. access to resources, personal difficulties) and appropriate action taken.
- Follow up on any issues from the previous review period.
- Progress towards meeting the skills listed in the Training Needs Analysis.

3.4 Principal academic units should establish a principal academic unit-level

Progress Panel that should have overall responsibility for monitoring and review and which should include at least three members of academic staff, the majority of whom are independent of the supervisory team

3.5 The principal academic unit Progress Panel should meet at least once in the academic year, at an appropriate point, to discuss students' academic progress, other relevant issues and to make or endorse recommendations. Such recommendations might include:

- Progress is satisfactory and the student may continue with their studies as a normally registered student, paying tuition fees.
- Progress is satisfactory and the student no longer requires full use of University facilities, and having completed the minimum period of study, may proceed to writing up status, paying the continuation fee.
- Progress is unsatisfactory and a plan of supportive or corrective action is agreed which will result in a further review of progress. The student would remain normally registered, but would not be permitted to proceed into the next year until progress was satisfactory. If progress were to remain unsatisfactory, the student may be required to withdraw.
- Transfer to a master's programme from a doctoral programme (student would have the right of appeal).
- Transfer to a doctoral programme from a master's programme.
- Withdraw: This recommendation would have to be taken in accordance with the relevant University regulation. The student would have the right of appeal.

These recommendations should be transmitted via the Head of principal academic unit to the University's Research Progress Board for ratification.

3.6 Principal academic units should provide students with appropriate feedback as part of the monitoring process, and should advise students, in writing, of the recommendations resulting from progress reviews.

3.7 Any concerns arising about students' progress outside the formal progress reviews should be raised immediately with the Chair of the principal academic unit Progress Panel without waiting for the next formal meeting of the Panel. The Chair of the principal academic unit Progress Panel and the Head of principal academic unit should instigate whatever action and/or investigations might be appropriate.

Student Feedback on Arrangements for Supervision and Mentoring

3.8 Each principal academic unit should provide students with an opportunity to comment on the standard of supervision, academic advice and mentoring received, through a variety of means that may include questionnaires.

3.9 Each principal academic unit should have clearly defined and transparent procedures for students to make representation to the Head of principal academic unit (or other designated member of staff or body) if they feel that their work is not proceeding satisfactorily for reasons outside their control, including the breakdown of relationships with members of their supervisory team and/or mentor. These procedures should make clear to students that, among other outcomes, they provide a means for discussing the possibility of changing a member of the supervisory team and/or mentor. If the Head of principal academic unit is a member of the supervisory team, representation

may be made to the appropriate Head of College. The procedures should be made available to all students at the commencement of their studies.

3.10 Such procedures should operate expeditiously in order to avoid complaints and loss of time in relation to the research or its funding.

4. Responsibilities of principal academic units

Principal academic units are responsible for ensuring that:

4.1 All members of the supervisory team, mentors and students are made aware of this Policy.

4.2 All members of the supervisory team, mentors and students are issued with safety instructions and for monitoring compliance with such instruction in accordance with legal requirements and such requirements as may be issued from time to time by the Environment, Health and Safety Executive Committee (EHSEC) of the University. Information about Health and Safety can also be found in the section on Health and Safety in the Students' Charter and The Health and Safety Unit's website (http://www.bham.ac.uk/SafetyUnit).

4.3 All members of the supervisory team, mentors and students comply with the University's Code of Conduct for Research .

4.4 All members of the supervisory team, mentors and students comply with the University's Data Protection Policy.

4.5 All members of the supervisory team and students comply with the University's Computing Policy.

4.6 All members of the supervisory team, mentors and students are aware of and comply with any principal academic unit guidelines and procedures regarding research degrees.

4.7 It is made clear to students at the time of application, or as soon afterwards as may be practicable before arrival, what personal research facilities (e.g. individual work space and support services) will be available to them and for how long.

4.8 Every effort is made in the provision of the following for full-time students:

- Access to a desk within designated, secure office space, which may be shared with other students or staff but shall not available as teaching space.
- Lockable storage for personal belongings.
- Access to computing facilities (including appropriate software such as word processing and spreadsheets, statistical and graphics packages, databases, and electronic mail) in rooms not normally bookable for teaching or meetings.
- Photocopying facilities for thesis-related work.
- Reasonable access to telephones (internal and external) for thesis-related work.
- Appropriate access to stationery, consumables for computing, postage
- Some support to enable students to attend conferences.

4.9 Appropriate arrangements are made for access to facilities out of normal office hours, taking account of security and safety of students and facilities.

4.10 Induction for all new research students (full and part-time) covers topics such as: introduction to the University; research at the University; life as a research student; the role of the Graduate Research School; supervision arrangements - rights and responsibilities of student and supervisor; the role of the mentor; research training opportunities, student representation.

4.11 Training in research techniques and in appropriate generic skills is an integral part of the research programme. The following are indicative of the range of generic skills in which most research students will be expected to acquire a basic competence:

- Advanced study skills.
- Computing skills.
- Presentation skills.
- Legal/Ethical Issues.
- Personal Skills.
- Career Development.

4.12 Students involved in teaching attend appropriate training courses.

5. Responsibilities of Supervisors, Academic Advisers and Mentors

In accordance with 2.2 and 2.3 of this Policy, each student should be provided with a lead supervisor, academic supervisory support and a mentor. Academic supervisory support should reflect the individual needs of the student and the context of their study. It should be undertaken by

(a) A second supervisor or a team of supervisors (known as 'co-supervision')

or by:

(b) An academic adviser

5.1 The lead supervisor is responsible for:

5.1 .1 The overall direction of the student's research work in consultation with any member of the supervisory team and the mentor, as appropriate.

5.1 .2 Advising the student of the respective responsibilities and roles of the members of the supervisory team and mentor as appropriate.

5.1 3. Advising the mentor of the progress of the student's research if there are any significant pastoral problems.

5.1 4. Ensuring that the student is made aware of inadequacy of progress or of standards of work below that generally expected.

5.1 5. Ensuring, as appropriate, that the students' training needs are discussed at the beginning of each year of registration and arrangements made for suitable training, attendance at meetings and courses at appropriate times. This may include giving guidance about the specialist research skills and the generic skills students should acquire and how this might be done, and, where appropriate, advice

acquire and how this might be done, and, where appropriate, advice about language training for international students. Form GRS1 "Training Needs Analysis" should be used for this purpose.

5.1 6. Ensuring that, where necessary, a risk assessment for off-campus work required of the student is prepared and that the student has arranged appropriate insurance cover for the duration of such work.

5.1 7. Establishing with the student, at an early stage, an understanding about the nature of the supervisor's responsibilities in relation to written work submitted by the student. This understanding should be in accordance with any University regulations or policy.

5.1 8. Making preliminary arrangements, in conjunction with the Head of principal academic unit, in advance of the submission of the thesis, for the nomination of internal and external examiner(s) of the thesis, and in advance of the viva, for the nomination of a chairperson.

5.2 The direct responsibilities of the supervisors to the student include:

5.2 1. Giving guidance on the following: the nature of research and the standards expected (including standards of presentation, e.g. in relation to referencing and presenting bibliographic information), the planning of the research programme, literature and sources, attendance at taught classes, research techniques required and arranging for training where necessary, progress, publication of results, intellectual property rights, ethical and plagiarism issues.

5.2 2. Maintaining contact through regular tutorial, supervision or seminar consultations, in accordance with principal academic unit policy and in the light of discussion of arrangements with the student.

5.2 3. Being accessible at other appropriate times when the student may need advice; this should normally be within one working week of a student's request unless the supervisor has informed the student that they will be absent from the University.

5.2 4. Giving detailed advice on the necessary completion dates of successive stages of the work so that the thesis may be submitted within the period of study specified in regulations for the particular degree for which the student is registered.

5.2 5. Requesting written work as appropriate, and returning such work with constructive criticism and in reasonable time (in normal circumstances written work will be returned within three weeks).

5.2 6. Arranging, where appropriate, for students to make oral presentations about their work within the University and at conferences, to publish material from their research (ensuring that proper credit is given for joint publications) and to have practice in oral examinations.

5.2 7. Liaising with the Head of principal academic unit in making alternative supervisory arrangements at times when they are absent from the University (see 2.17 for extended periods away from the University and

2.18 for short term absences).

5.2 8. In conjunction with the examiners where appropriate, providing advice to the student concerning the corrections and/or revisions required to the thesis following its examination.

5.3 The academic adviser should support the supervisor and the student.

Academic Advisers (where appointed, see 2.2/2.3)

5.4 The academic adviser should be appointed from the same or cognate discipline as the student and act as a source of academic advice on issues such as generic research skills and University requirements. The role of the academic adviser should be to foster and share good practice in research. The role is akin to the role of the mentor, but is academic not pastoral.

5.5 Academic advisers should maintain appropriate contact with their students.

Mentors

5.6 The mentor should be responsible for undertaking duties similar to those of a personal tutor for undergraduates, i.e. pastoral support. They do not need to be an expert in the student's area of research and should not act as a second supervisor.

5.7 Mentors should be available for consultations but meetings are not compulsory. Discussions between the mentor and student will remain confidential if the student so wishes.

6. Responsibilities of Research Students

6.1 Students are responsible for the content, completion and submission for examination of their theses within the periods of study as prescribed in regulations for their particular degrees.

6.2 The further responsibilities of students include:

6.2 1. Ensuring that they are familiar with and comply with University regulations and principal academic unit guidelines and procedures relating to their degree, the University's Code of Conduct for Research, relevant policies and other University requirements, safety advice, the monitoring of progress and terms of any sponsorship.

6.2 2. Ensuring that in every year of registration they meet all of the University's requirements regarding administrative arrangements, for example, completing, checking and returning registration documents.

6.2 3. Discussing with their supervisor(s) the type of guidance and comment they find most helpful, and agreeing a schedule of consultations.

6.2 4. Initiating supervisory consultations where necessary and setting the agenda for such consultations.

6.2 5. Taking the initiative in raising problems or difficulties (including illness or other exceptional circumstances), however elementary they may

seem (e.g. in relation to supervision, project work or facilities provided) with the supervisor(s), academic adviser or mentor as appropriate.

6.2 6. Ensuring work progresses in accordance with the stages agreed with the supervisor(s), including in particular the presentation of required written material in sufficient time to allow for comments and discussion before proceeding to the next stage.

6.2 7. Completing the Training Needs Analysis, in conjunction with their supervisor; attending research training and other appropriate training as directed by the supervisor(s), presenting papers within the University and at conferences, preparing papers for presentation, etc. as appropriate.

6.2 8. Providing, annually, a formal report on progress, for example GRS3.

6.2 9. Deciding when to submit their thesis (after the minimum period of study and before the end of the maximum period of study specified in regulations), taking due account of the supervisor's opinion which is, however, advisory only.

6.2 10. Ensuring that they understand the nature of their supervisor's responsibilities in relation to written work submitted (see 5.1(g)) and that supervisors have many other commitments.

6.2 11 Presenting a “Notice of Intention to Submit a Thesis” form to the Research Team in Students Services, The Academic Services at least three months before they are due to submit their theses, in order that arrangements for the nomination of examiners may commence.

6.2 12. Advising their supervisors(s) of any illness, holidays or any other occasions (for example, for urgent personal circumstances) when they will be absent from the University or from their study.