

Supervision Policy for Postgraduate Research Degrees

1. Introduction and Purpose

- 1.1. St Mary's University recognises the importance of robust postgraduate research (PGR) supervision and this policy reflects the University's commitment to establishing and maintaining systematic and clear supervision arrangements.
- 1.2. This policy lists the requirements and provides guidance relating to the roles within the supervisory team, the appointment of supervisors, responsibilities, safeguarding the interests of Postgraduate Research Students in the absence of or a change of supervisor and the training / development of supervisors.

2. Scope and definitions

- 2.1. This policy relates to all research degrees across the University including all Doctoral and Master of Philosophy (MPhil).
- 2.2. This policy is applicable to all members of a PGR supervisory team including Director of Studies (DoS), research supervisor, external supervisors and research advisors.
- 2.3. The policy contains information for Postgraduate Research Students and academic and professional service staff in Institutes and Faculties. Institutes and Faculties should use this document to inform any local procedures relating to the supervision of Postgraduate Research Students.

3. The Supervisory Team / Supervisory Roles

Each Postgraduate Research Student must have a designated Director of Studies. The Director of Studies will lead a supervisory team consisting of one or more additional academic colleagues or collaborative partners, who act as Research Supervisor, External supervisors, Research Advisor and External Advisors. All members of this supervisory team are responsible for working together in providing supervision.

- 3.1. **Director of Studies (DoS)** - the DoS is normally assigned to a Postgraduate Research Student at the time an offer of admission is made, and they take full responsibility for the overall guidance of the Postgraduate Research Student's research degree in addition to administrative issues relating to the Postgraduate Research Students attendance, and progress. Where two members of staff are equally involved in supervising a Postgraduate Research Student this requirement still stands and, whilst recognising the equal academic contributions, one of the supervisors must be appointed as Director of Studies.
- 3.2. **Research Supervisor**- the Research Supervisor will be appointed to contribute their specific expertise in assisting the Director of Studies throughout the development of the Postgraduate Research Students degree and may act as a supervisor of sections of the project in consultation with the Director of Studies.
- 3.3. **External Supervisor** – On occasion it is necessary to appoint a supervisor from outside the University, in which case the Institute or Faculty concerned will carefully consider its ability to hold the supervisor appointed to his or her obligations in regard to the student and the University. A number of scenarios where the appointment of an external supervisor may be deemed appropriate, at the University's discretion, for example:
 - 3.3.1. Where a supervisor leaves to take up an appointment elsewhere and agrees to continue an existing supervisory arrangement;
 - 3.3.2. Where there is a requirement for specific subject-specialist expertise which is no longer available within a department and expertise therefore needs to be brought in;

- 3.3.3. Where the student is jointly supervised across more than one university or where there is an arrangement for jointly awarding a degree;
- 3.3.4. Where an industrial supervisor is also required due to their academic judgement, levels of expertise and external collaborations.
- 3.4. **Research Advisor(s)** - an advisor can be included as part of the supervisory team. Their role not obligatory however would be to provide support and advice to the students as required.
- 3.5. In addition to the supervisory team, the **Research Degrees Committee** is responsible for implementing the Supervision Policy for Postgraduate Research Degrees (see section 5 below).

4. Appointment Criteria for the Selection of the Supervisory Team

- 4.1. The Supervisory Team will consist of a Director of Studies and, except for those on Part 1 of the Professional Doctorates, one research supervisor or a research advisor as a minimum.
- 4.2. In addition to the Director of Studies and research supervisor/s, a research advisor may be allocated to a supervisory team due to their specific subject specialist knowledge pertinent to the student's programme of research.
- 4.3. The Postgraduate Research Lead, who is responsible for the overview of the research degree programmes in each Faculty will follow the process for changing a supervisory team as outlined in the Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes and seek approval from the Research Degrees Committee for any appointment and change to supervisory teams.
- 4.4. **Director of Studies**
 - 4.4.1. The Director of Studies will be responsible for the overall direction and development of the student's programme of study. They will normally:
 - 4.4.1.1. Hold a doctoral award;
 - 4.4.1.2. Possess academic expertise in an area relevant to the student's discipline;
 - 4.4.1.3. Hold the non-probationary appointment of Professor, Associate Professor, Senior Lecturer, Lecturer, Professorial Research Fellow, Senior Research Fellow or Research Fellow at the University and have an expectation of holding such an appointment with the University for the remainder of the student's period of study;
 - 4.4.1.4. Have a minimum of one successful completion at doctoral programme level.
- 4.5. **Research Supervisor**
 - 4.5.1. The research supervisor should normally:
 - 4.5.1.1. Hold a doctoral award and;
 - 4.5.1.2. Have had prior experience of supervising at doctoral level for at least one year;
 - 4.5.1.3. Possess academic expertise in an area relevant to the student's discipline.
- 4.6. **External Supervisors**
 - 4.6.1. **External Supervisor** should have comparable research experience as that expected of a St Mary's University supervisor and should meet the same selection criteria as outlined above. Where an industrial supervisor is also required due to their academic judgement, levels of expertise and external collaborations.
- 4.7. **Research Advisor**
 - 4.7.1. A research advisor may be appointed in situations where additional expertise is required which would be of benefit to the research student and project. The appointed advisor should normally:
 - 4.7.1.1. Hold a doctoral award and be a member of academic staff or a post-doctoral researcher and/or;
 - 4.7.1.2. Possess academic expertise in an area relevant to the student's discipline.

4.7.1.3. Prior experience of supervising doctoral students is not necessary.

4.8. Compensation for supervisory duties

4.8.1. The normal expectation is that internal and external supervisors are not compensated financially for their supervisory duties. Any financial agreement with External Research Supervisors or External Research Advisors MUST be contractual and approved in advance by Dean of Faculty.

4.8.2. All staff under consideration for appointment as part of a supervisory team must fulfil the following criteria:

4.8.2.1. Director of Studies appointed should be full-time or part-time salaried employees of the University, and must have been approved by Researcher Degree's committee.

4.8.2.2. Any member of staff who is on probation, who is currently registered for a higher degree of any university, a visiting professor, a visiting fellow, a retired member of University staff, practising researchers on an Academic Teaching contract an honorary member of staff or an Emeritus professor will not normally be appointed as Director of Studies but may be appointed as a part of the supervisory team, and must have been approved by Researcher Degree's committee.

4.8.2.3. Proven supervision experience would relate to an appropriate period of involvement in a supervisory team as a Research Supervisor (normally the successful completion of one Postgraduate Research Student).

4.8.2.4. Consideration should be given when appointing a supervisory team to the length of each individual's contract to ensure that the Postgraduate Research Student will be supported throughout their programme.

4.8.2.5. The Director of Studies' contract of employment should exceed the registration period of the Postgraduate Research Student. If, in exceptional circumstances, it is more appropriate to appoint a supervisor whose contract does not exceed the registration period of the Postgraduate Research Student, a case and plan must be put forward to the Faculty Associate Dean for Postgraduate Research (or their delegate) for approval.

5. Responsibilities of the Research Degree's Committee

- 5.1. To ensure, taking into account the Postgraduate Research Students mode of study, the progress of the Students and oversee appropriate supervisory arrangements, induction, availability of resources and the nomination of examiners within the school.
- 5.2. To oversee the appointment of supervisors for each Postgraduate Research Student registered on a research degree within their School.
- 5.3. Ensure that arrangements are in place for new supervisors to be introduced to the content of the Code of Practice for Research Degrees.
- 5.4. To ensure supervisors are meeting their responsibilities around recording and monitoring the progress of Postgraduate Research Students via the University's through Moodle.
- 5.5. To ensure that procedures are in place should a Postgraduate Research Student need to consult on, and in exceptional circumstances change, their supervisory arrangements.
- 5.6. To ensure that the appropriate provision for the continuation of supervision when supervisors leave the employment of the University, are on a formal leave of absence for a significant period of time or where the relationship between supervisor and Postgraduate Research Student breaks down and a change of supervisor is requested.

- 5.7. To provide objective support for supervisors where serious concerns regarding a Postgraduate Research Student have been identified.
- 5.8. To consider the academic work load of staff when supervisory teams are appointed/approved ensuring that no member of staff supervises more Postgraduate Research Students than his or her experience and commitments justify.

6. It is the Responsibility of Supervisory Team

- 6.1. To be aware of the University's [Code of Practice for Research Degrees and Research Degree Regulations](#).
- 6.2. To agree the balance of responsibility within the supervisory team for the Postgraduate Research Student's day to-day supervision.
- 6.3. To abide by and ensure that the Postgraduate Research Student is aware of the health and safety regulations, [Regulations for Research Degrees](#), diversity and inclusion policies.
- 6.4. To instil in their Postgraduate Research Student the need to exercise probity and conduct their research according to ethical principles, and to advise on the implications of research misconduct and plagiarism.
- 6.5. To provide guidance about the nature of the research and the standards expected, the planning of the research degree, literature and sources, attendance at taught courses (where appropriate) and about requisite research techniques (arranging for instruction where necessary).
- 6.6. To work with the Postgraduate Research Student to clearly and realistically define their project from the beginning to support their completion within the allotted time of the programme, and to bear in mind the intellectual and practical competencies expected of doctoral candidates, as set out by the [QAA Doctoral Degree Characteristics Statement](#).
- 6.7. To agree to a plan of research and a schedule of regular meetings with the Postgraduate Research Student, considering any planned time working away from the University. A minimum of eight formal supervisory meetings should take place in each academic year. Supervisory teams and students should agree to the general frequency and nature of these supervisory meetings.
- 6.8. To be available to the Postgraduate Research Student for consultation and advice on academic matters relating to the degree, and to offer support and guidance on non-academic matters.
- 6.9. To record attendance and monitor the progress of Postgraduate Research Students via the University's progression points such as Annual Monitoring Reviews, Confirmation and Transfer Reviews, providing detailed advice on the necessary completion dates of each step, so that it is completed on time.
- 6.10. It is expected that meetings will take place face-to-face. However, where a Postgraduate Research Student is studying as remote engagement and is located outside of London or at the request of the Postgraduate Research Student, meetings may be conducted remotely e.g. via Zoom / Teams. See additional [UKVI attendance monitoring requirements for PGR students on a student visa](#).
- 6.11. To ensure that the Postgraduate Research Student is made aware when their progress is not considered to be satisfactory and provide them with advice and guidance on how to improve, escalating issues in line with the [Research Degree Regulations](#).
- 6.12. To agree with the Postgraduate Research Student at the beginning of the project a reasonable timeframe for the submission and feedback of submitted work.
- 6.13. To help the Postgraduate Research Student identify their specific training needs, both in relation to research skills and to the development of other transferable skills; inform the

PGR student of the means to develop these skills and monitor the PGR student's progress in these areas.

- 6.14. To agree the ownership of Intellectual Property with the Postgraduate Research Student and to respect their intellectual freedom to shape their own research.
- 6.15. To encourage the Postgraduate Research Student to present their work to staff and other researchers across the University and beyond, and encourage them to attend conferences/bid for funding for conference travel.
- 6.16. To advise the Postgraduate Research Student on the submission of conference papers and publications.
- 6.17. To ensure that the Postgraduate Research Student engages fully with the annual progress review process.
- 6.18. To keep other members of the supervisory team apprised of the Postgraduate Research Student progress.
- 6.19. To ensure that the Postgraduate Research Student is aware of institutional support services, including wellbeing services, disability and occupational health support, careers guidance, and equality and diversity support, making referrals when required.
- 6.20. To ensure, where required, that their duties are fulfilled with regard to any formal requirements from external bodies or agencies in relation to the submission of reports, training etc.
- 6.21. To ensure that appropriate agreement has been obtained with all parties, including external sponsors, in relation to the communication of research outputs.
- 6.22. To pursue their own professional development in the area of supervision through training offered at St Mary's University and/or training provision external to the institution, and to refer to the UKCGE [Professional Development Toolkit for Supervisors](#) for guidance (also refer to section 10 of this document).
- 6.23. To help Postgraduate Research Students prepare for the oral examination of the thesis (or equivalent), including the organisation of a mock viva.
- 6.24. To ensure that examiners are nominated within the deadlines stipulated in the [Research Degree Regulations](#).
- 6.25. To advise on the access restriction level of the final thesis.

7. It is the Responsibility of the Postgraduate Research Student

- 7.1. To familiarise themselves with relevant University regulations and policies. Where supervisors propose to publish work drawing on a PGR project they must ensure compliance with the [University's publication guidelines](#).
- 7.2. To maintain regular contact with supervisors, according to an agreed pattern of meetings.
- 7.3. To prepare adequately for meetings with supervisors.
- 7.4. To have a joint meeting with all supervisors to discuss progress at least twice per year.
- 7.5. To meet with their advisor at least once a year.
- 7.6. To give their supervisors due warning and adequate time for reading any drafts and for providing feedback.
- 7.7. To fully engage with and monitor their own progress in the University's progression monitoring systems, keeping adequate records of progress and the development of their own skills.
- 7.8. To develop, in consultation with the supervisor, an agreed schedule for progressing and submitting the thesis in a timely manner.
- 7.9. To make supervisors aware of any specific needs and of any circumstances likely to affect their work, and take the initiative in raising issues or difficulties as soon as they arise, particularly in relation to progression targets.

- 7.10. To attend all mandatory training and participate fully in any further training and development opportunities, research-related and other, that have been identified with their supervisors.
- 7.11. To actively participate in the research activities of the University by attending research seminars and, when deemed appropriate by the supervisory team, presenting their own research to the division/department/School.
- 7.12. To ensure that any reports and the final thesis are written in accordance with [University guidelines](#).
- 7.13. To prepare periodic progress reports on the research project as may be required by external agencies.
- 7.14. To inform the supervisor of any communications from their sponsor or other external body in relation to the research project.
- 7.15. To make every effort to provide feedback on the supervisory experience, through completion of the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES).
- 7.16. To inform the supervisor of any paid or unpaid work they are carrying out or wish to carry out in addition to their full time study, being mindful of potential UKRI or UKVI restrictions governing how many hours can be worked.
- 7.17. To inform their supervisor of any intention to take leave and discuss the timing of the intended leave in relation to academic priorities.
- 7.18. To discuss with their supervisor and seek approval for any fieldwork in support of their research, and ensure the supervisor is aware of any time away from campus for this purpose
- 7.19. To decide when the final thesis should be submitted, taking into account the opinion of the supervisors.
- 7.20. To record the access restriction level of their final thesis.

8. Absence or Change of Supervisory Team

- 8.1. Schools cannot guarantee that Postgraduate Research Students will be able to work with a particular supervisor when they start their programme or that they will have the same supervisor for the duration of their research degree, but will endeavour to ensure continuity and alternative provision wherever possible.
- 8.2. Where a Director of Studies is absent for less than three months the Research Supervisor should normally assume responsibility for the Postgraduate Research Student until the Director of Studies returns.
- 8.3. Where the period of absence exceeds three months, it is essential that the supervisory team and Head of School (or their delegate) set up alternative arrangements to ensure continuity of supervision.
- 8.4. If the Director of Studies becomes an honorary member of staff during the period of a Postgraduate Research Students degree, they can continue to undertake a supervisory role as Research Supervisor, but a new Director of Studies must be appointed.
- 8.5. If the Director of Studies retires or leaves the institution they can continue to undertake a supervisory role as Research Supervisor but an External Supervisor Engagement Form must be completed and a new Director of Studies must be appointed.
- 8.6. The Research Supervisor would normally be expected to deputise for the Director of Studies if the Director of Studies is not available. However, where a Research Supervisor does not meet the criteria for nomination as Director of Studies, and the Director of Studies is no longer available, they must not become Director of Studies by default.
- 8.7. In exceptional circumstances, with agreement from the Postgraduate Research Student and approval from the Faculty Dean (or their delegate), it may be possible for a Director of Studies

to continue in the Director of Studies role after leaving the institution. These exceptional arrangements must be in best interest of the Postgraduate Research Student and can only be approved where a suitable replacement supervisor from St Mary's University cannot be found. This arrangement can only proceed where there is a Research Supervisor at this University who is agreeable with the arrangement. A formal agreement between St Mary's University and the Director of Studies must be put in place. As a minimum the agreement must include the following and should be signed by the University and the external supervisor:

- An explicit statement that the Supervisor's new institution gives the academic concerned permission to finish their supervisory duties at St Mary's University (if applicable).
 - A statement that the supervisor must comply with the University's supervision policy in order to ensure quality control over the standard of ongoing supervision.
 - The name of the member of staff at St Mary's University who will act as Research Supervisor and formally monitor the supervisory process at this institution as part of the supervisory team.
 - A statement which confirms that any funding bodies or sponsors have been informed of any change in supervisory circumstances.
 - The notice period should the supervisor decide for any reason that they can no longer continue to supervise the Postgraduate Research Student.
- 8.8. In some circumstances, where a supervisor has moved to a new institution, it may be possible for the Postgraduate Research Student to transfer with them. In these cases the Head of School (or their delegate) will ensure that the transfer arrangements are made in an appropriate manner.
- 8.9. In exceptional circumstances (for example, the breakdown of the relationship between supervisor and Postgraduate Research Student) a change of supervisor may be requested by either party through the PGR Lead.
- 8.10. Where a change of supervisor is requested or if a supervisor is unable to continue with their duties, the dean (or their delegate) is responsible for identifying and allocating an appropriate permanent replacement in consultation with the Postgraduate Research Student and the remaining supervisory team.
- 8.11. Where no appropriate alternative can be found at St Mary's University the dean (or their delegate) should support the student in exploring options for continuing their research through registration at other Higher Education Institutions or alternatively consideration should also be given
- 8.12. Where there are early signs that the Postgraduate Research Student / supervisor relationship is breaking down attempts should be made to resolve the issues at School and / or Faculty level to whether sufficient research has been completed to enable the student to submit their research for a lesser award.
- 8.13. Every effort should be made to find alternative provision for the Postgraduate Research Student, but it may not always be possible to appoint a new supervisor and there may not be a successful outcome potentially resulting in the termination of the student's registration. In this circumstance the Postgraduate Research Student should be made aware of this as soon as reasonably possible.
- 8.14. Where a change of supervisor / supervisory team has occurred the new supervisor/s have the right to consult with the previous supervisor/s regarding the Postgraduate Research Students work/progress to date.

- 8.15. Funding bodies and collaborative partners in a formal agreement/contract should be notified when supervisory arrangements are changed and a rationale for the change should be provided.

9. Supervisor Training and Development

- 9.1. Research Services along with the Faculties are responsible for offering supervisor training and development.
- 9.2. Supervisors are encouraged to engage with the [Postgraduate Researcher Supervisor Toolkit](#). This resource, based on the UKCGE Good Supervisor Practice Framework, brings together information and guidance about all aspects of research supervision from recruitment through to completion.

Supervisors are encouraged to apply to become a [UKCGE](#) recognised research supervisor.

10. Monitoring Compliance

- 10.1. Other than the UKRI, the University aligns with the requirements of the Office for Students and the Designated Quality Body for England. From March 2023, all staff engaged in supervision and all Postgraduate Research Students, will continue to engage with and adhere to, the reference points on the research environment and the supervisory process set as out in the UK Quality Code [revised-uk-quality-code-for-higher-education.pdf](#) and the Advice and Guidance: Research Degrees [Research Degrees \(qaa.ac.uk\)](#).
- 10.2. Where a supervisor repeatedly fails to engage with the University's progression/attendance monitoring system, Faculties should have in place a process by which PGR Leads can escalate the problem to the relevant Faculty Dean and/or Head of School and notify Research Services.
- 10.3. Where evidence exists of poor support or inappropriate behaviour Faculties should have in place a process by which complaints can be escalated to the relevant PGR Director, Faculty Associate Dean and Head of School. The eventual result of this process could be the prevention of any further involvement in PGR supervision.
- 10.4. Extreme cases of inappropriate behaviour must be referred immediately to the Supervisor's Head of School/Line Manager.
- 10.5. Supervisors should be aware that the [University's complaints procedure](#) enables the Postgraduate Research Student to appeal on the grounds of inadequate supervision.

Relevant Policy Headings

Postgraduate Research supervisor Policy

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