Code of Practice for Research Students and Supervisors

1 Introduction

1.1 This Code of Practice sets out guidelines for the conduct of the relationship between research students and supervisors. It defines the responsibilities of students and supervisors, suggesting what each can reasonably expect of the other, and provides examples for good supervisory practice.

1.2 To ensure the Code of Practice is effective, there must be a continual process of negotiation between students and their supervisors. The code is intended to provide a framework for research in an atmosphere of scholarship and collegiality enabling students to complete their degrees successfully within the time limits.

1.3 This code is intended for guidance on good practice and students and supervisors should always refer to the Research Degree Regulations to check on formal requirements.

2 Responsibilities of the student

2.1 Students are expected to:

- Work conscientiously and independently within the guidance offered. While it is important to keep supervisors informed and to show work to them, students should be self-directed.
- Participate fully in research training provided by the University and the discipline.
- Come to supervisory meetings well prepared and with a clear agenda.
- Maintain progress according to the timetable agreed with the supervisor(s) at the outset.
- Present written material in time for comment and discussion before going on to the next stage. As groundwork for the thesis, students should write rough drafts of potential chapters as soon as possible. Those in the sciences should keep a systematic record of all experimental work attempted and accomplished.
- Ensure that their English is good enough for the presentation of a thesis. Those whose first language is not English should seek advice.
- Write regular reports, as agreed at the outset, on the progress of the project.

2.2 Supervisors can also reasonably expect students to:

- Produce a substantial amount of written work, even if only in draft form, by the end of the first year (eighteen to twenty-four months for part-time
students). The interpretation of ‘substantial’ should be agreed between supervisors and students at the outset.

- Tell their supervisors about other people with whom they discuss their work.
- Discuss with their supervisors the form of guidance and kind of comment they find most helpful.
- Take the initiative in raising problems or difficulties, however elementary or trivial they seem. Students as well as supervisors have a responsibility to initiate contact and raise questions.
- Recognise that supervisors may have many other demands on their time. Students should hand in work in good time and give adequate notice if they ask supervisors for unscheduled meetings or to provide references.

3 Responsibilities of the supervisor

3.1 Supervisors are responsible for the academic and pastoral support of their students, and for administrative matters. They should provide the guidance and support necessary for successful completion of the research project, or where relevant should advise students of other sources of guidance and support which are appropriate for their studies. Supervisors are not however responsible for the activities or the work produced by research students.

3.2 Supervisors are responsible for:

- Establishing, at the beginning of the student’s research, a framework for supervision, including arrangements for regular supervisory meetings. The stages that the student will be expected to complete by certain points in the research should also be agreed.
- Defining the role of each supervisor, if there is joint supervision. Normally a principal supervisor will be designated who will be primarily responsible for the student’s overall progress, pastoral care and any administrative procedures.
- Meeting the student regularly at the intervals agreed at the beginning of the research programme.
- Keeping an adequate record of discussions and agreements with the student, including schedules and timetables.
- Giving assistance in defining and focusing the topic of research. It is important that this is agreed between the student and supervisor(s) at an early stage.
- Making sure that the project:
  - Falls within the supervisor’s area of expertise (or the shared expertise of the supervision team)
  - Can be completed with the resources available
  - Can be completed within the prescribed period of study
  - Is suitable for the degree that the student intends to take
  - For full-time funded studentships, can be completed within the period of the studentship (usually three years)
- Making sure that students know about research training provided by the University and by the discipline, and are aware whether they are required to attend.
• Making sure that students are aware of the University’s research governance policy and the importance of any ethical and data protection procedures required by the policy and, where appropriate by their own discipline’s codes of practice.

• Advising students on any ethical issues raised by their research and on the process of obtaining ethical approval from the University or external bodies.

• Discussing any hazards associated with the research work and how they can be dealt with, and ensuring that students are aware of the need to follow relevant safety procedures.

• Checking that the appropriate indemnity cover has been obtained for the student’s research.

• Ensuring that adequate supervisory cover is arranged if the supervisor is going to be absent for a significant period. Supervisors must notify the University Research Degrees Sub-Committee if they plan to be absent for a period of time.

• Keeping to the monitoring and reporting timetable agreed at the beginning of the project. This will include the annual progress reports that are required by the University Research Degrees Sub-Committee.

• Participating in the monitoring and evaluation of research supervision.

• Ensuring that examiners are nominated in good time, so that the examination can go ahead as soon as possible after submission of the thesis.

3.3 Students can also reasonably expect their supervisors to:

• Treat them professionally, and see that they get proper credit for their work.

• Give advice about the proposed research project and the standard expected for the degree the student intends to take.

• Arrange a supervision meeting as soon as possible after enrolment. This would usually be within the first week for full-time students, but may take longer to arrange for part-time students.

• Make sure that the first meeting covers the areas set out below or, if that is not possible, ensure those areas are covered in another way.

• Suggest some directed reading before enrolment. This might be general background reading so that the student can discuss the topic with the supervisor(s) soon after registration, or it might be the beginning of a literature review.

• Offer advice about literature sources and other research resources.

• Deal promptly with any research problems.

• Take an active role in introducing the student to meetings of learned societies, seminars and so on, and to other researchers in the field.

• Offer advice about the publication of research work, and make sure that attribution is discussed before publication.

• Put the student in touch with specialists inside or outside the supervisor’s expertise. If appropriate, the supervisor should recommend the appointment of specialists as additional advisors.

• Provide support by encouragement and constructive advice, as well as criticism and adverse comment.
4 Supervisory arrangements and meetings

4.1 Research degree students at the University of West London are normally enrolled initially on the Postgraduate Certificate in Research, during which time they will work with their proposed supervisors, as well as academic staff involved in teaching the relevant modules, in preparing their research proposal for registration as an MPhil/PhD student. Students who are exempted on the grounds of advanced standing will submit a proposal for registration direct to the University Research Degrees Sub-Committee, working independently but in liaison with the proposed supervisors. At the point of registration, the proposed supervision team will be formally appointed.

4.2 Students should have at least two and normally not more than three supervisors. At their initial meeting the supervisors and the student should draw up a written agreement on the role of each supervisor and arrangements for supervisory support.

4.3 One of the supervisory team will take the role of principal supervisor, and on registration this will be reviewed by the University Research Degrees Sub-Committee. Although respective roles should be negotiated and agreed within the team, the principal supervisor takes overall responsibility for the supervision and support arrangements, and should meet with the student at regular intervals. Where external supervisors are appointed, they are likely to meet with the student less frequently, but it is important that respective roles are clarified and reviewed among the supervisors, and with the student.

4.4 Students and supervisors are encouraged to ensure regular meetings are held to provide academic advice and monitor progress. This is particularly important at the beginning of the research. It must be emphasised that the success of any research project depends on the advice and guidance offered by supervisors, especially in the initial stages.

4.5 The frequency of meetings should be negotiated with the student with regard to their individual needs. Arrangements for supervisory support, including the frequency of meetings must be agreed at the first meeting. Subsequent meetings should follow the agreed schedule and be adhered to by both parties. This does not imply a rigid arrangement, however, and the appropriate schedules should be reviewed regularly.

4.6 Full-time students should normally contact or meet with their supervisors at least once a month, part-time students should normally contact or meet with their main supervisor at least six times a year. The student should meet with all supervisors at least twice per year.

4.7 The first meeting between student and supervisor(s) is particularly important in establishing a provisional framework for future support and getting the student’s academic work off to a good start. The following areas should be covered in the first meeting:
- The role of supervisor(s)
- Expectations of supervisors and student
- Frequency of meetings
- Timetable for early meetings
- Arrangements for seeing and commenting on written work
- Monitoring arrangements and timetable
- Safety and research governance issues
- Research facilities available
- University training programmes and attendance requirements
- General framework for the whole research programme
- Detailed plan for the early stages of the programme

4.8 Regular contact, in accordance with the agreed schedule, is essential to monitor progress and agree timetables for the future. The research timetable should be documented in order that deadlines are adhered to. Examples of supervisory schedules are given at appendix 1. The Research Student Supervision Record must be completed at each supervision meeting (see appendix 2). Copies of this record should be kept by the student.

4.9 Approaches to monitoring students’ progress will be agreed between the student and the supervisors. Supervisors are required by the University Research Degrees Sub-Committee to submit an annual report on the progress of their students, and this should be taken into account when working out a monitoring schedule. Examples of monitoring schedules are given at appendix 1.

4.10 Students have the right to discuss and comment on the supervision they are receiving. Initially, any concerns should be raised with supervisors. If they cannot be resolved, the student should discuss the difficulties with the Chair, or Deputy Chair, of the University Research Degrees Sub-Committee. If the problem cannot be resolved a new supervisor can be appointed, but there may be difficulties in finding a replacement supervisor who has experience of the thesis subject area.

5 Appeal procedures

5.1 Students have the right to appeal against the decision of the University Research Degrees Sub-Committee, such as an examination result or a decision not to continue registration. Students should consult the current Research Degree Regulations for further information about appeals.
Appendix 1

Examples of typical supervision and monitoring schedules:

*For a full-time student*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Supervision schedule</th>
<th>Monitoring schedule</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First term</td>
<td>Normally weekly contact with supervisor(s)</td>
<td>Informal review of progress at end of first term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second term</td>
<td>Normally fortnightly contact with supervisor(s)</td>
<td>Informal review of progress at end of second term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third term</td>
<td>Normally monthly contact with supervisor(s)</td>
<td>Annual report to URDSC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Years 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Normally monthly contact with supervisors(s)</td>
<td>Informal reviews of progress quarterly. Presentations to peers. Application for MPhil-PhD upgrade to the URDSC. Annual report to URDSC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year 3</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Minimum monthly contact with supervisor(s)</td>
<td>Regular informal reviews of progress towards submission of thesis for examination</td>
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*For a part-time student*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Supervision schedule</th>
<th>Monitoring schedule</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First term</td>
<td>Normally fortnightly contact with supervisor(s)</td>
<td>Informal review of progress at end of first term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second term</td>
<td>Normally monthly contact with supervisor(s)</td>
<td>Informal review of progress at end of second term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third term</td>
<td>Normally monthly contact with supervisor(s)</td>
<td>Annual report to URDSC prepared.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Years 2 -5</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Minimum of six meetings per year with supervisor(s)</td>
<td>Informal reviews of progress quarterly. Application to URDSC for MPhil-PhD upgrade. Presentations to peers. Annual reports to URDSC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year 6</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Normally monthly contact with supervisor(s)</td>
<td>Regular informal reviews of progress towards submission of thesis for examination.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Approved by the University Research Degrees Sub-Committee on 26/10/11.