

HUMANITIES DIVISION

Code of Practice on Supervision of Graduate Taught Students

2023-24

A. CONTEXT

The Humanities Divisional Code supplements in certain important ways the [Policy and Guidance on Postgraduate Taught Courses](#) already in place by the University. It sets out the basic expectations governing the responsibilities of supervisors, students, and faculties and departments; attention is also drawn to [The UK Quality Code](#) which underlies all these documents.

B. APPOINTMENT OF SUPERVISORS

1. *The supervisory structure*

- a. Each taught postgraduate student shall be assigned a dissertation supervisor.
- b. The faculty shall ensure that each student has access to one or more named persons, in addition to the supervisor, to whom he or she can turn for support, such as the Director of Graduate Studies or, where appropriate, the Chair of the Faculty Board.
- c. These other sources of support, and the provision of cover during the absence of the supervisor are especially crucial.
- d. A candidate should not be admitted if there is no suitable supervision in the collegiate university.

2. *The supervisor – general requirements*

- a. A supervisor shall normally be a member of the academic staff of the University or of a college.
- b. In appropriate cases a person holding an external research post in the faculty (e.g. a British Academy Fellowship or equivalent on a fixed-term contract) may be appointed to act as a student's supervisor.
- c. Nobody shall be appointed as supervisor when it is known at the time of appointment that he or she will not be in post at the time that the student is due to complete their programme.
- d. A supervisor who retires and remains research active in the specialist field may act as supervisor.
- e. The supervisor shall have sufficient experience in the relevant discipline(s) to ensure that the direction and monitoring of the student's progress is informed by up to date knowledge of the subject and research developments.
- f. A student's supervisor shall be able to undertake all the tasks assigned to the supervisor in the [Policy and Guidance on Postgraduate Taught Degrees](#).

3. *Training and support for supervisors*

- a. Members of academic staff in their first period of office will be given appropriate support and training:
 - The faculty board shall appoint a mentor who will, amongst other duties, provide confidential advice, guidance, and support on the supervision of graduate students;
 - All members of staff, and especially new members of staff, are also encouraged to seek advice, guidance, and support on the supervision of graduate students from the Director of Graduate Studies and Chair of Faculty Board.
 - All members of staff, and especially new members of staff, are encouraged to familiarise themselves with the online resources on supervision available through the Centre for Teaching & Learning (CTL), particularly the guidance on accessible and inclusive teaching.
- b. Faculties shall put in place mechanisms to ensure that the quality of supervision is not put at risk as a result of an excessive range and volume of burdens assigned to individual supervisors.

4. *Change of supervisor*

- a. Where a student believes that there are good grounds for contemplating a change of supervisor, for whatever reason, this should first be discussed with the supervisor or, should the student prefer, with the Director of Graduate Studies or the Chair of Faculty Board (or their deputies) or with the College Adviser.
- b. Should a student's project change direction so that his or her current supervisor may no longer be the most appropriate person to provide guidance, the faculty, in consultation with the student and the supervisor, shall consider whether or not an alternative supervisor should be appointed. Such a change of focus is unusual, and always requires prior permission from the faculty.
- c. Should the student have concerns over the quality of supervision, he or she should seek to resolve the matter where possible by discussion with the supervisor, Director of Graduate Studies, Chair of Faculty Board, or College Adviser, but should be made aware of the University's formal complaint procedures, as described in the [Student Handbook](#) and the relevant regulations of Council.

5. *College Advisers*

- a. All students should also be able to approach a college adviser. The student's college will appoint an adviser, and will receive termly supervision reports. Colleges also have procedures to monitor the overall well-being of graduate students, including discussion of academic progress and supervision reports.
- b. If a college identifies any concerns that might impact upon the academic progress of a student, and that may not already have been recognised in supervision reports, it may refer these in confidence to the Director of Graduate Studies in the faculty concerned, who will initiate such action as seems necessary.

C. THE SUPERVISOR'S RESPONSIBILITIES TOWARDS THE STUDENT

1. *Preparation and induction*

The supervisor's responsibilities are as follows:

- a. To hold a meeting with the student to establish a clear framework for the student's learning and dissertation research. The supervisor should at least:
 - Agree with the student upon a clear plan for beginning research and give accurate reference to appropriate reading, sources, other research materials, making clear expectations and timetable;
 - Establish the frequency and dates of meetings to discuss in detail the student's research;
 - Discuss with the student any adjustments or variations in supervision support that might be required in order to support their individual learning needs.
- b. To ensure that the student is aware of the University's guidance on plagiarism (<http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/guidance/skills/plagiarism>), and of any ethical and legal issues, issues concerning health and safety, and issues concerning intellectual property arising from the student's planned research project.
- c. To encourage the student to attend ethics training provided termly by the Humanities Division and to complete the online Research Integrity course (<https://weblearn.ox.ac.uk/portal/site/:skills:ricourses>)
- d. To ensure that the student is aware of the resources available in the faculty and elsewhere in the University, including: libraries, museums and other research facilities and infrastructure; financial support for conferences, fieldwork, and travel; and IT support.
- e. To assist the student to become part of the academic community, by encouraging him or her to engage in the common research activities of the faculty, and to meet other students and members of staff working in the same or adjacent fields.

2. *Progress, monitoring and feedback*

The supervisor's responsibilities are as follows:

- a. To agree with the student a clear plan for the dissertation and set a timetable towards its completion.
- b. To meet regularly with a student, to review progress on the course generally and progress against the agreed plan of research for the dissertation, as appropriate.
- c. To agree with the student a timetable for the submission and return of written work, and to return work, with constructive criticism, within a reasonable time.
- d. To ensure that the student is aware of, and has taken appropriate action with respect to any health and safety issues connected with their dissertation research.
- e. To ensure that the student has sought ethical approval (if necessary) for the research. Further information is available at: <https://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/curec/>.
- f. To produce termly supervision reports.
- g. Should the supervisor become aware of any particular concerns with a student, he or she will discuss them at an early stage with the Director of Graduate Studies and, if appropriate, with the

student's college.

D. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST IN SUPERVISION

- a. The nature of supervision means that a supervisor stands in a position of authority relative to the student being supervised. Supervisors and students negotiate this dynamic to form close professional working relationships. While these close professional working relationships are essential for the progress of a student's research, supervisors are prohibited from seeking to form personally intimate relationships with their students (including, but not limited to, marital, sexual, romantic, or emotionally intimate relationships) and they may not stand in such relationships to any students they supervise.
- b. If such a relationship develops, or is foreseeably be likely develop, it creates a position of conflict of interest between the supervisor and the student whom they are supervising, and steps should be taken to manage that. The relationship must therefore be reported in writing, either by the student or the supervisor, in order for alternative supervisory arrangements to be made without detriment to the student. The implementation of alternative supervisory arrangements will not preclude the supervisor and student continuing to collaborate with one another, but the formal responsibility will cease.
- c. Reporting must take place as soon as practically possible and no later than one week of the relationship commencing, and should be made to the Director of Graduate Studies, the Faculty Board Chair or the Head of Administration and Finance.
- d. A supervisor seeking out a personally intimate relationship with a student whom they are supervising will be subject to disciplinary procedures under the appropriate [processes](#). Should a supervisor fail to disclose a personally intimate relationship with a student whom they are supervising, or with a student whom they might foreseeably come to supervise, the supervisor will not be permitted to supervise in future, and the supervisor may be subject to further disciplinary processes.
- e. Where a personally intimate relationship exists or develops between co-supervisors of a student, a conflict of interest may develop. This should be reported as outlined above. In such a case, 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 the relevant Faculty Board Chair.

Appendix 1: Norms for Master's programmes in the Humanities Division

The provision of Master's programmes across the Division has grown and evolved organically over many years in the various Faculties. The Division's Graduate Studies Committee has agreed divisional norms for the structure and format of Master's programmes, in accordance with the University's [Policy and Guidance on Postgraduate Taught Courses](#). Of particular relevance in this context is the following expectation in the *Policy and Guidance*: "The assessment or examination norm for a Master's level course which is completed within a year is traditionally the equivalent of two or three three-hour examination papers and a dissertation or thesis of 10,000 – 20,000 words."

The following norms have been agreed for the Humanities Division:

(i) Length of Master's programme

- A one-year Master's course will normally be completed in 9 months.
- A two-year Master's course will normally be completed in 21 months.

(ii) Length of Master's dissertation

- The length of the dissertation for a one-year Master's course will normally be 10,000-20,000 words.
- The length of the dissertation for a two-year Master's course will normally be 20,000-30,000 words.
- Where a dissertation is required for a Master's course involving a practice-based element of assessment, such as those offered by the Faculty of Music (which may require performance or composition) or the Ruskin School of Art (which may require artwork), its length may be lower than the divisional norm, or the dissertation may be optional. For the Master of Theology in Applied Theology, which offers training for the ministry and involves reflection on pastoral practice, the length of the dissertation may also be lower than the divisional norm.
- Where a Master's course involves the study of a language (or languages) *ab initio* the length of the dissertation may be lower than the divisional norm, or the dissertation may be optional.

Appendix 2: Supervisors' responsibilities for students undertaking fieldwork

Fieldwork

The University has a legal duty of care to its students undertaking fieldwork. University Policies and Procedures are in place to set out how this duty of care is to be discharged. These procedures require that risks are assessed and proportionate measures and arrangements put in place to mitigate those risks to an acceptable level.

Responsibility

Supervisors play a key role in this process in terms of a) ensuring risk assessments are carried out b) ensuring their students are properly prepared for their fieldwork, as well as c) bringing their own experience and knowledge to guide, advise, assess and check arrangements. All University employees have a legal duty to take reasonable care for the safety of those affected by their [the employees] acts or omissions. Employees, and students, are therefore expected to comply with the University's [health and safety policies and statement of safety organization](#).

A key requirement for field trips is careful planning to reduce the likelihood or impact of something going wrong. Supervisors must therefore be able to demonstrate this planning by ensuring assessments are in place, appropriately prepared, documented where necessary, reviewed and authorised in line with [University policy](#).

Specific duties of Supervisors are to:

- Be aware of relevant University Safety Policies and Faculty procedures.
- Consider the health and safety implications of any research proposal.
- Ensure their students have received training appropriate to their needs.
- Ensure that risk assessments have been made and the safety provisions relating to the work exist and have been discussed with those doing it.
- Ensure that suitable arrangements are in place for regular contact to provide support and checks on the student's welfare while they are away.
- Review arrangements with the student after the fieldwork to identify any problems and learn any lessons

Training

The Safety Office provide a [range of training on fieldwork](#) for both students and supervisors.