Handbook for Research Students and Research Supervisors 2023 - 2024

https://www.ncl.ac.uk/student-progress/pgr/

https://www.ncl.ac.uk/doctoral-college/

UPDATED AUGUST 2023

This handbook provides advice and guidance for Postgraduate Research Students and Research Supervisors and highlights key activities that Postgraduate Research Students should be aware of.

This handbook should be read in conjunction with the following:

- *[University Regulations](#)*
- *[University Terms and Conditions](#)*
- *[Student Charter](#)*
- *[University Handbook for Examiners of Research Degrees by Theses](#)*
- *[Faculty Researcher Development Programmes](#)*

Contents

Introduction and Welcome

Deciding to undertake a research degree is a pretty huge decision. Perhaps you're arriving straight from a taught degree, or maybe you're coming from a work environment. Wherever your recent experiences, and whatever field you're in, a research degree is different. It will be up to you to work out what research questions you want to address, how you're going to answer them, and how you'll present your new ideas. Research degrees are demanding. But that's surely why you've decided to sign up! You'll be testing yourself, developing your skills, expanding your knowledge. More than that, you'll be finding new data or pioneering new kinds of practice, you'll be pushing back the boundaries of our knowledge, and coming up with new answers to tough problems. That's why a research degree is such an exciting time. You'll be at the cutting edge of research in your field, and you'll be challenging yourself. So, the first thing we'd like to say is congratulations on taking this next step. It's going to be a really simulating time for you, and we're really pleased to be part of it.
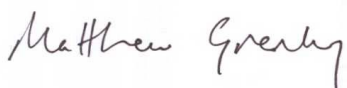
The second thing we'd like to say is that we've got your back. We wouldn't have offered you a place on your degree if we didn't think you have what it takes to succeed. But we can assure you that we have a carefully designed and very comprehensive package of support for you as you proceed through your degree. You'll find support in your School or Institute, from individual academics, most obviously your supervisors; from Professional Service colleagues whose job it is to help you navigate the degree; and of course, from other students in your community. Then there's the support in our three Faculties, each of which has a Dean of Postgraduate Studies, and a Graduate School team led by a Graduate School Manager who'll be responsible for assuring your progress throughout your degree. We also have a dedicated team based in the Doctoral College to support Doctoral and MPhil students across the University. The Doctoral College can support you to gain the skills you need to advance your goals and enhance your career prospects through the Research Enhancement Fund which provides bursaries and awards to support your development through enterprise, PGR led engagement, participation in global events and conferences, as well as the opportunity to gain additional research experience. You should also know that Newcastle University Students' Union has a dedicated Postgrad Officer, who can help you engage with the research student community and its activities and will be pleased to hear from you.

This Handbook is here to support you and here you'll find our policies and procedures, various guidelines, and our codes of practice. Some of these might not seem relevant as you start your degree but will be useful as you reach new stages of your work. Some sections are crucial reading now though, and we urge you to take a look as you begin your studies. There is advice here on choosing your topic for example and establishing good relationships with your supervisors. In fact, we hope that supervisors as well as students will read the handbook: there's great advice for everyone, including a whole section on 'Guidelines for Research Students and Supervisors'. Maybe that's the last thing to emphasise. Your experience here will be shaped by your relationship with your supervisory team, with other academics, with our postgraduate support teams, and with other students. As a research student at Newcastle, you're part of a community. It's something that will support you, but also something that you can help to shape.

So, again, welcome. We hope you have a wonderful, exciting, and enriching time here during your degree, and we wish you every success.

Professor Matthew Grenby

Prof-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Innovation

Matthew Grenby

Chirag Padmesh Kumar

Postgraduate Officer, Newcastle University Students' Union

PART ONE - SOURCES OF ADVICE AND ASSISTANCE FOR POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH STUDENTS *(UPDATED AUGUST 2023)*

Graduate Schools

Each Faculty has a Graduate School and a Graduate School Manager who leads the Graduate School team in supporting postgraduate research (PGR) student administration.

HaSS and SAgE Graduate School
Level 6
Henry Daysh Building
Newcastle University
E-mail: gradschool@ncl.ac.uk

Medical Sciences Graduate School (MSGS)
Ridley Building 1
Level 3
Newcastle University
E-mail: fmsgradschool@ncl.ac.uk

The following are examples of activities and issues that the Graduate School Managers and the Graduate Schools deal with:

- Student Registration;
- Student Progress (including MPhil/PhD upgrades, interruptions of study, extensions to thesis submission dates and academic concessions);
- PGR student Project Approval and Annual Progress Review; PGR Examinations (appointment of examiners, the PGR examination process and pass lists);
- Advice on University and programme regulations and PGR policies and procedures;
- Complaints, academic appeals, student discipline, academic misconduct;

Further information is available here.

Each Faculty has a **Dean of Postgraduate Studies** who is responsible for leading the implementation of the Faculty postgraduate strategy and its quality assurance of postgraduate research programmes. Each Faculty also has a **Postgraduate Tutor** who has considerable experience of postgraduate matters and who can offer impartial and confidential advice. The postgraduate tutor can be consulted in confidence at any stage of your research.

	Humanities and Social Sciences	Medical Sciences	Science, Agriculture and Engineering
Dean of Postgraduate Studies	**Professor Ian Biddle**	**Dr Tim Cheek**	**Dr Phil Lord**
Graduate School Manager	**Mr Ross Patterson**	**Ms Abby Davies**	**Ms Elaine Urwin**
Faculty Postgraduate Tutor	**Dr Laura Leonardo**	**Dr Peter Gallagher**	**Dr Nigel Thomas**

Academic Support

Your Academic Supervisor should be the first person you approach for help and advice, for example if you are encountering difficulties in your study or in things which affect your study. Most difficulties can be resolved easily by a supervisor, though they may sometimes suggest that you contact one of the many support services throughout the University for specialised information or support.

It is recognised that occasionally you may not feel able to approach your supervisor about a particular matter. In these situations, you should discuss the matter with your Head of Academic Unit. If for some reason this is not possible, there are other sources of advice within the University including the Academic Unit (e.g., Director of Postgraduate Studies/Postgraduate Research Student Co-ordinator), Faculty (e.g., Dean of Postgraduate Studies or Graduate School Manager) and University services (e.g., Student Health and Wellbeing Service, Student Progress Service and Student Union Student Advice Centre).

Doctoral College

The Doctoral College is dedicated to supporting you as part of our PGR community. By establishing the Doctoral College, the University has created a hub for our postgraduate researchers.

We provide information, advice and support a range of PGR-led engagement activities. We also manage a range of targeted funding to help you get the most from your research and your time at Newcastle University.

You can find us in person on the 6th floor of the Henry Daysh building, along with a dedicated study area for you. For more information on the work of the Doctoral College, guidance on application process for funding support, and signposting to a

range of dedicated support across the university, please visit our Doctoral College website here. Or contact us at doctoralcollege@ncl.ac.uk

Study Skills

University study requires you to take significant responsibility for organizing your own work. Information and advice about study skills are available from a number of sources, which may prove helpful to you:

- Faculty Researcher Development Programmes have been developed to support research students and provide generic skills expected of researchers in their field of study;
- The University Library has a wide range of resources and services to support research   students. Visit the Research Support section for more information;
- The PG Student's Hub within Newcastle University Student Union (NUSU) is your one-stop-shop for the important information postgraduates need. From events, the latest news as well as support resources, your Postgraduate Officer is on hand to keep postgraduates updated and supported whilst you study at Newcastle University.
- Specialist Learning Advisers in the Student Health and Wellbeing Service (based in King's Gate) can assist students with dyslexia and related difficulties;
- The Academic Skills Team offers support with writing skills;
- Finally, Part Three of this Handbook offers comprehensive *Guidelines for Research Students* which include a range of suggestions for study.

Health and Safety

Newcastle University offers you the opportunity to study and/or research in a wide range of subjects across many disciplines. The activities entailed can generate a diverse spread of hazards and some of these can pose significant dangers. To facilitate these activities and avoid serious accidents, it is critical that these hazards are effectively controlled. The University does this through a variety of policy and other arrangements.

Each Faculty will provide a health and safety induction and training relevant to your research activities, which you are expected to attend. The precise format and number of safety courses will be decided by each Faculty. You may not be allowed to carry out certain high-risk work activities until you have been trained.

You are encouraged to liaise closely with your Academic Supervisor, your Academic Unit   Safety Officer, other local staff or the University's Occupational Health and Safety Service (OHSS) for additional advice and guidance.

Student Services Information

Brief information on the many services available to you in the University is provided below.

Tuition Fees

Fees are payable for each programme of study and are subject to an annual increase. Further information is available here.

If your tuition fees are to be paid by a sponsor or funding body, you are asked to provide an official letter of sponsorship/funding as evidence that your fees will be paid, either during or prior to registration. A new letter may be required annually at registration depending on your sponsor. Letters from family members and friends cannot be accepted as sponsorship/funding letters for fees purposes.

If you are responsible for payment of your own tuition fees (or part payment) and you wish to pay your fees in full before or at the time of registration, you will be entitled to a 2% discount on the proportion of your tuition fees for which you are personally liable. If you do not take advantage of the 2% discount you will need to pay your fees in two equal instalments, the first instalment being when you complete your registration and the second at the end of January 2024. Further information on payment methods is available here.

Student Health and Wellbeing Service

The Student Health and Wellbeing Services provides information, advice, and guidance on a wide range of student support issues:

- Student Financial Support
- Support for disabled students
- Specialist learning support
- Support for students with long-term mental health conditions
- Counselling and therapeutic support including one-to-one sessions, group work and signposting to specialist services, as needed

The service offered is free, confidential, and available throughout the year and at any time during your University career. Further information is available at the Student Health and Wellbeing Service webpages and a session is also provided as part of the Faculty Researcher Development programme.

Financial Support

The Student Financial Support Team administers various financial support schemes to assist students as well as providing information, advice, and guidance about student finance related matters. Further information is available here.

Visa Support

The Visa Support Team (within the Student Progress Service in King's Gate provide free, impartial, and confidential immigration information and advice for international students on a wide range of visa and immigration enquiries. Further information is available from the Visa Support Team webpages and a session is also provided as part of the Faculty Researcher Development Programme.

As immigration policy can change regularly, students should check the latest official immigration guidance on the following Government websites:

- **Home Office**
- **UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA)**

Other University Facilities

Our University facilities are here to make sure you get the most out of your time as a student, whether you require a space to study, somewhere to exercise, or a place to receive support and advice. Further information on the following facilities is available below:

Library

Sports Centre

Language Resource Centre

Careers Service

IT Service

Other Useful Guidance and Information for PGR Students

Council Tax

You will be exempt from Council Tax during the candidature of your research programme, provided that are a full-time, fully registered student. Once you are fully registered, you can produce a Council Tax exemption certificate via the **Student Self-Service (S3P)**, which you can submit to your local council. The certificate calculates your start and end dates based on your registration on the University's student record system. Further information is available here.

If you are living within the Newcastle City Council area can complete an online exemption/discount form which is available here.

Registration with GP/Dentist

You are encouraged to register with a local doctor/General Practitioner (GP) as soon as possible following your arrival in Newcastle. It is also advisable for students to register with a dental practice. Further information is available here.

Procedure in the case of illness

If illness prevents you from studying at any time whilst you are a student at the University, you should inform your supervisor immediately. Where illness or other reason prevents you from studying for more than three working days, you should complete a Student Notice of Absence form. If illness prevents you from studying for more than seven working days, you should obtain a medical certificate from your GP and forward it to your Academic Unit as soon as possible, in addition to completing the Student Notice of Absence form. Further information is available here and in the Sickness and Absence Policy.

Travel and Outside Study Guidance for PGR Students

The PGR Travel and Outside Study Guidance provides specific information if you are participating in (or planning to participate in) travel and/or outside study (off-campus and abroad and outside the UK territorial waters) in relation to your academic programme) and to highlight the key factors for consideration. It is important that you undertake travel with consideration to this guidance. Information on applying for outside study is available here.

The University normally provides automatic and free travel insurance to current registered Newcastle University postgraduate students travelling overseas on official University business. However, there are occasions where the University may not be able to provide travel insurance, even if a student is travelling on official University business and students should consult the relevant policies for full details.   Further information is available here.

Crime Prevention and Personal Safety

Newcastle upon Tyne is renowned as a safe city to live in and has one of the lowest rates in Britain of students experiencing crime. It's easy to become frightened of crime when reading the newspapers and hearing stories from other students, but these often paint a worse picture than is true. However, as in any city, you must take care to keep yourself and your possessions safe. Further information is available here.

Security regularly patrol the University and you can contact them 24 hours a day, seven days a week on 0191 208 6817.

Safezone is a free app that connects you directly to University Security. If you raise an alarm or call for help, on-campus Security will be alerted so they can help you quickly and effectively.

We have a **Northumbria Police Neighbourhood Beat Manager** who works on campus and can be contacted via Security and who holds weekly drop-in sessions.

PART TWO - NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY CODE OF PRACTICE FOR RESEARCH DEGREE PROGRAMMES *(UPDATED AUGUST 2023)*

Information outlined in this Code of Practice is accurate at the date of publication, but changes to programmes and University services may be necessary, for example, to meet the requirements of an accrediting body or to keep courses up to date and in line with contemporary practices or areas of study; or as a result of circumstances outside the reasonable control of the University. Please see the University's Terms and Conditions for further information.

Where reference is made to any named University role, such references are to be read as including reference to their nominees.

This Code of Practice uses Academic Unit as an overarching term for School and Institute.

Introduction

1. Newcastle University is a leading research-intensive university with a distinguished record of advancing knowledge and understanding through the pursuit of research and scholarship. As part of its commitment to research it provides, through its three-faculty structure, a range of research programmes designed to enable you to undertake research training and to make your own contribution to knowledge and understanding in your subject.

2. The purpose of this Code of Practice is to set out the University's standards for its research programmes.

3. This Code of Practice will be used by PhDs, MPhils, MDs and the thesis element of any doctorate level programme including Integrated PhDs and Professional Doctorates. Any research degree programme wishing to be exempt will require UEC approval. (Please see the addendum at the end of the code for clarification on standards relating to research masters' programmes).

The Research Environment

4. The University will only permit research programmes to be offered where it is confident that students can be trained and supported within an environment which is supportive of research.

5. It defines such an environment as where an Academic Unit:

- Is able to demonstrate significant international research excellence as demonstrated by the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE)/ Research Excellence Framework (REF).
- Has a critical mass of staff to act as suitable supervisors.
- Satisfies the requirements of the University Quality Assurance and Enhancement Framework including acceptable submission and completion rates that meet the requirements for the Research Council in that subject area.
- Provides appropriate facilities.

6. The University defines provision of facilities to meet the appropriate standard as follows:

- **Working Space**

You can expect working space in appropriate shared office/open-plan/hot- desk accommodation, with adequate access, heating, ventilation, and security arrangements. You should be given reasonable space for the secure and safe storage of essential books, consumables, personal belongings, and research data. In addition, if you are a student undertaking laboratory/studio-based research projects you can expect access to bench/studio space and associated facilities (see below).

If you are working on a multi-disciplinary project (across different academic units and/or Faculties), there should be a discussion at the start of your studies about appropriate working arrangements, resulting in the identification of the lead and secondary sites. The secondary site should allocate appropriate facilities to you, where needed.

If there is disruption to your working space, as a consequence, for example, of maintenance or construction work, then you can expect to be advised by your Academic Unit regarding the impact on your study and can expect reasonable steps to be taken to minimise any such disruption including, if necessary, provision of alternative accommodation.

- **Access to Laboratory/Studio/Workshop Space etc. (where relevant)**

You can expect to be given bench space and facilities to conduct your approved research project, including any laboratory consumables and access to equipment and facilities agreed by the project approval panel to be necessary and within the budget for that project. Equipment approved for the research project will be provided in a timely manner and maintained in good working order throughout the project. You will receive proper health and safety training in the use of the necessary equipment and consumables and should receive an induction into the required conduct and working practices of the laboratory/studio/workshop.

- **Consumables**

You can expect to be provided with:

- Appropriate supply of normal office consumables, including paper for black and white printing on campus.
- Access to reasonable black and white photocopying, as agreed with your supervisor in connection with your research.
- Where you are using a computer workstation, it shall comply with the schedule to the Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations.
- Lab/day books as needed.
- Access to a telephone, with reasonable telephone calls in connection with your research, which may be logged.

- IT Equipment

You can expect access to a networked PC/laptop and printer, as well as access to a scanner, if and when needed. Where the research project so requires, you can expect to have access to a more powerful PC capable, for example, of handling complex, large-set data analysis, or set up with specialist software, in line with your approved project.

- NU Reflect and PGR CoP System

You will have access to NU Reflect and the PGR CoP System and are required to maintain and record formal supervisions, training, project approval and annual progress.

- Funding for Conference Attendance and Travel

You should have a reasonable opportunity to attend and/or participate in a conference, with the agreement of your supervisor and subject to available funding. You should contact your Academic Unit, in the first instance, for further information on available funding. A record of attendance should be kept on NU Reflect.

- Social Facilities

To facilitate social interaction, you can expect to have access to common room facilities, which may combine with staff common rooms if this is agreed by the Academic Unit.

7. In the case of Academic Units or research groupings which for any reason do not meet the normal criterion the University may, on the advice of a Dean of Postgraduate Studies, authorise the offering of research degrees where there is evidence that research of at least national standing is being undertaken in the applicant's specific subject and that other conditions set out above have been or will be met.

Pre-Entry Information

8. In order to enable a potential applicant to make an informed choice, the University requires that units offering research degrees provide clear, accurate and comprehensive pre-entry information. This should inform an applicant as fully as possible about the relevant programme including research opportunities, training, resources, submission and completion times, expectations and demands upon research students (including financial ones), entry requirements, the admissions process, information about scholarships, and appropriate contacts. Pre-entry information should also provide relevant information for potential applicants with disabilities and signpost to a contact in the Student Health and Wellbeing Service.

Entry Standards and Applications

9. The University defines the minimum standard for admission to research programmes as normally an Upper Second-Class Honours degree in a relevant subject or a relevant Master's degree. Any subject-specific qualification requirements should be identified to applicants via the University's prospectus or Academic Unit research grouping information.

10. In addition, if your first language is not English, the University requires evidence of acceptable competence in the language to be submitted at the time of application.

11. All applicants are required to submit the names of two recent academic referees or one academic and a professional employer who can comment knowledgeably upon their suitability for research in the relevant field.

Selection of Research Students

12. In order to assist the match between student, research project, supervisory team and institution the University requires that there should be rigorous selection policies and procedures, which should be put in writing, and which should normally include:

- a policy of involving at least two experienced and research-active academics in the selection process, normally one of whom will form part of the supervisory team and one will act on behalf of the Head of Academic Unit to approve the offer of a place:
  - who have been informed about selection of research students;
  - who are fully cognisant with University and statutory policies on equal opportunities;
  - who are aware of the support infrastructure for students with additional needs;
  - a policy of interviewing shortlisted applicants for Doctoral degrees, where practical;
  - a policy of taking up two references and, if one or more of these is not available at the time of offer, making the latter conditional upon the receipt of satisfactory references;
  - clear selection procedures;
  - making decisions on applications promptly and keeping applicants informed during the admissions process.

Letters of Offer

13. Once it has been decided to accept an applicant, a formal offer must be made. The letter of offer should be accompanied by: information on fees and any other charges; the broad research topic and the length of study; arrangements for supervision; and should direct applicants to requirements upon them (including attendance, progress reports, contact, enrolment and registration); expectations in terms of academic and behavioural conduct and performance requirements; the availability of research training; and direction to other relevant information, e.g. the institutional policy on Intellectual Property Rights. Applicants should assure themselves that they have sufficient financial support to complete the degree.

Induction into the University and the Faculty

14. The University requires that your Faculty provides you with an appropriate induction programme within three months of

registration to enable you to acquire an understanding of the academic and social environment within which you will be working.

15. The induction programme should include:

an introduction to the University including:

➢ its history and development;
➢ relevant regulations, policies and procedures relating to research degree.

an induction into matters relating to your relationship with the institution including:

➢ the University's academic and behavioural expectations of you;
➢ the typical challenges that you might face during your studies;
➢ institutional facilities available to you, including the learning support infrastructure;
➢ institutional provision for student wellbeing and other support arrangements;
➢ complaints and appeals procedures.

an induction into matters relating to your progress supported by the Graduate School and PGR Researcher Development Programme staff including:

➢ nominated contacts for support and advice outside the supervisory team;
➢ the specific facilities and PGR Researcher Development Programme opportunities available to you within the Faculty and across the University;
➢ provision within the University for student wellbeing and other support arrangements.
➢ information about the opportunities to meet other research students and staff and about opportunities to broaden your knowledge through seminars, conferences, forums, etc.

16. The University requires that the Faculty annually review the induction programme.

Induction into the Programme

17. The University requires that Academic Units make appropriate arrangements for induction into your programme of study. These should actively involve the designated academic supervisor and include an induction for you into:

- the academic standards of the programme;
- the intended learning outcomes;
- the curriculum including the PGR Researcher Development training programme and the research element of the individual project;
- methods of teaching and learning;
- assessment;
- regulations governing the research programme, including progression;
- subject-related research codes and ethics;
- programme-related health and safety requirements.

18. The University requires that you attend induction programmes.

Learning Agreements

19. The University requires that your Academic Unit ensures you have received, understood, and accepted the expectations of your research programme. These expectations should be set out in a formal Learning Agreement, which should be discussed and signed by you and by your supervisor/s on behalf of the University, within one month of starting the programme and is completed on the PGR CoP system. This will include a discussion on:

- Meetings/formal contact between you and your supervisory team, including who is responsible for arranging these;
- your training needs.

Completion of the Learning Agreement is recorded on your student record.

20. You and your supervisor/s should also discuss whether a Confidentiality Agreement is required and if so, this should be completed along with the Learning Agreement.

21. The University requires that you should inform your supervisor/s and the Graduate School about any sponsorship you have received for your research project and obligations in terms of reporting to sponsors on progress.

The Development of Relevant Knowledge and Skills – Training Needs Analysis

22. The University requires that Faculties ensure that Faculty researcher development programmes offer you the opportunity to develop a relevant range of knowledge and skills, including skills for employment. It requires that the learning outcomes of such programmes are consistent with the Vitae Researcher Development Framework.

23. The University requires that you, in conjunction with your supervisory team, undertake a Training Needs Analysis (TNA) in NU Reflect and agree a personal skills development programme. This should take into account your prior learning and experience, your needs in terms of study skills, the needs of your research project, and employment related skills. It requires that you actively seek to acquire relevant skills. Your supervisory team should make appropriate arrangements for you:

- to undertake a Training Needs Analysis (TNA) to identify your training needs;
- to identify gaps;
- to provide opportunities for development;

- to record the development of skills;
- to ensure that you are introduced to relevant academic networks;
- to advise you on opportunities to attend and/or participate in seminars, and conferences;
- to encourage you to present papers;
- where appropriate, to encourage you to publish;
- to support career development.

24. This TNA should be reviewed annually with the supervisory team, and you should maintain an up-to-date record in NU Reflect.

25. The University requires that you should have appropriate access to research training programmes and to individual advice and support and that you should complete the researcher development programme and any prescribed taught courses, and successfully complete any assessments and/or examinations. This applies to all students, including those who are part-time, have additional needs, or who are remote from the institution.

Research Environment

26. The University requires that you contribute to the research environment by attending appropriate internal and external events and normally give one formal presentation per year on your work. The University requires that these events are recorded in NU Reflect.

27. The University requires that you be responsible for helping to improve the research environment and provision by providing feedback and through representation on relevant committees and decision- making bodies.

28. The University requires that you abide by this Code of Practice. If you do not abide by this Code of Practice the issue will be addressed under the Unsatisfactory Progress regulations by an Annual Progress Review Panel.

Support for Research Students

29. A thesis demonstrates your ability to undertake original research. It follows that all research outputs (written documents, creative work, etc) produced as part of a PhD (or other Doctoral degree) or MPhil must solely be your own work. You will be examined in the oral examination to demonstrate that the research has been carried out by you; to test your ability to defend your thesis and establish whether you have satisfactory knowledge of the wider field in which the research is placed. It is crucial that the research must be an intellectual project that is conducted and owned by you, and where the theoretical perspective, methodological approach, interpretation of the data generated, and the conclusions drawn are all your own.

30. Given these considerations it is important that you are aware of the degree of support that is acceptable when conducting research. The Guidelines on Good Practice in Research Supervision and the Guidelines for Research Students and Research Supervisors (Handbook for Research Students and Research Supervisors (part three)) cover in detail the relationship between the student and the supervisory team and outlines good professional practice during the conduct of research and indicates the support that you can expect from your supervisor. If you were to contravene this guidance, it may be considered as academic misconduct, see the Academic Misconduct Procedure.

Supervisory Arrangements

31. The University requires that supervision should normally be undertaken by a team consisting of at least two members (normally two members of Newcastle staff) with the appropriate research skills and knowledge, who should be registered on an approved list of supervisors held by the Graduate School and therefore demonstrably research active. The minimum supervision percentage for a member of the supervisory team is 10%. Where for any reason this is not practical, for example where one supervisor is based outside the University, one supervisor from the approved supervisory list is acceptable provided that they also discharge the responsibilities of the academic supervisor outlined below. Where External Advisors form part of the supervisory team, the External PGR Advisor (Principles) should be consulted.

32. It is expected that you will have two supervisors at the point of your initial registration on your programme. The Graduate School will request this information from your Academic Units following your initial registration. A review of your supervisory arrangements will be carried out at the Project Approval stage and approved by the Dean of Postgraduate Studies.

33. An Emeritus member of staff may be used to provide supervision but should be added to the Supervisory Team as an External Advisor and would be in addition to the Supervisory Team members who are employees of the University.

34. Colleagues who have not previously supervised research students are required to undertake appropriate initial supervisor development, while experienced supervisors are normally expected to undertake continuing professional development relevant to the supervisory role, for example participate in University/Faculty/Academic Unit supervisory updating sessions.

35. There are different models of supervisory team within the University. In joint supervision, the supervisory responsibilities are shared equally between members of the supervisory team. In other styles of supervision, different members of the supervisory team may have different roles. There may be, for example, a lead supervisor and a co-supervisor responsible for a smaller element of the planned research; or a lead supervisor and an advisor responsible for, and able to deal with, general and pastoral responsibilities. Since arrangements may vary, the supervisory team must agree a clear distribution of responsibilities at the outset of the research and update this if arrangements change. In all instances, one supervisor must be nominated as academic supervisor and this person is ultimately responsible for the quality assurance of the research programme.

The academic supervisor:
- must be a member of the staff of the University;
- must have gained a Doctoral degree or have equivalent experience of research;

- be demonstrably research-active;
- should normally have had previous experience of at least one successful supervision, whether as academic or co-supervisor, defined as taking the student all the way through to a research degree award.

In cases where the academic supervisor does not have such experience, the supervisory team must include another member who is a demonstrably active researcher with experience of at least two successful supervisions.

36. The academic supervisor is responsible for:
- being aware of the University's Code of Practice for Research Degrees and other relevant University regulations;
- completing a Learning Agreement, Training Needs Analysis, Personal Development Plan, and any appropriate risk assessments with you, and ensuring Project Approval is undertaken;
- providing the supervisory input to Annual Progress Review;
- determining if an Intellectual Property Rights or a Confidentiality Agreement is required;
- promoting awareness of ethical and professional requirements for the conduct of research and ensuring that ethical approval is obtained for the research, where appropriate;
- being the first point of contact in the supervisory team for the University and ensuring that any relevant request relating to you e.g., extensions, interruptions is properly processed and recorded, providing pastoral support and guidance to you, and acting as a signpost to University central services;
- offering support to you in your personal and career development;
- arranging together with the Head of Academic Unit a replacement supervisor where one of the supervisory team is absent;
- arranging and co-ordinating the final examination.

37. In many instances, the academic supervisor will also be lead supervisor who will also be responsible for:
- introducing you to the Academic Unit, its facilities and procedures;
- being your first point of contact in the supervisory team;
- agreeing a suitable research field of enquiry with you;
- research project management including arranging a timetable of regular meetings in line with the Code of Practice, requiring you to keep a record of meetings and agreeing the outcome of meetings with you on NU Reflect;
- arranging a realistic timetable for submission and completion in line with any Research Council requirements and the University's maximum candidature;
- requesting written work according to an agreed schedule and returning work with constructive criticism in a reasonable time, as agreed at the outset of the research with you;
- chairing formal supervisory meetings;
- encouraging you to attend researcher development sessions within the University and where relevant externally, attend and present at conferences and seminars and signposting central services such as careers.

38. Where there is a lead supervisor, a co-supervisor supervisor should:
- be acquainted with the progress of your work and attend formal supervisory meetings at least 3 times per year or additionally as required by you or lead supervisor;
- comment on your work where required by the lead supervisor;
- provide additional advice where required e.g., supervise specific elements of data collection, data analysis and thesis preparation;
- assume the lead supervisor's responsibilities if the original lead supervisor is unable to continue (e.g., through illness or departure);
- act as mentor or arbitrator if you have any problems that cannot be resolved by the lead supervisor.

39. Where supervisors share responsibilities more equally than outlined above (joint supervision) they should collectively agree the allocation of tasks while ensuring that one supervisor acts as academic supervisor. The responsibilities of different supervisors should be recorded on the project approval form and any changes communicated to the Graduate School.

40. Your supervisory team do not automatically have ownership of the research project undertaken. If an Intellectual Property Rights agreement is required, it is the responsibility of the academic supervisor to determine this.

41. The University requires that Faculties maintain an up-to-date list of colleagues who are qualified to engage in research supervision from information provided by the Head of Academic Unit and this is maintained by the relevant Graduate School.

42. The University requires that the maximum period of absence for any member of the supervisory team should not exceed three months, following which appropriate alternative arrangements should be made by the Academic Unit and reported to the Graduate School to ensure continuity of supervision.

43. Where a supervisory team member leaves the University, the Academic Unit should inform the Graduate School as soon as possible, so that revised supervisory arrangements can be put in place for affected students.

44. In order to ensure that individual supervisors are not overloaded, the University requires appropriate limits on the numbers of research students who may be supervised by an individual supervisor, subject to a normal maximum of six full-time equivalent students. Where Heads of Academic Units allow supervisors to take responsibility for more than six full-time equivalent students, the University requires them to make arrangements to ensure that there will be adequate contact between student and supervisor and that the latter is not overburdened. The Head of Academic Unit is responsible for ensuring that the overall workload of supervisory staff, including secondary supervisions, is at a level that will allow supervisors to deliver the relevant aspects of the Code of Practice for their students.

45. The University requires that the supervisory performance of individual staff is reviewed annually as part of performance development and review.

46. The University requires that you have access to confidential advice and support from a nominated contact outside the supervisory team. It requires that Faculties should designate such contacts, which should include a Faculty Postgraduate Tutor and others at Academic Unit and/or programme level as appropriate and make this information available to you. The relevant Graduate School Manager is also available to provide advice and guidance to you. (The Faculty Postgraduate Tutor has considerable experience of postgraduate matters and can offer impartial and confidential advice and they can be consulted in confidence at any stage of your research.)

47. The University requires that Academic Units designate a nominated contact, who would normally be the Director of Postgraduate Studies, or equivalent, who supervisors can access for confidential advice and support, particularly where they have concerns about a student's ability or application to the programme. The Academic Unit should make this information available. The relevant Graduate School Manager is also available to provide advice and guidance to supervisors.

Contact with Supervisory Team

48. The University requires that you maintain regular contact with your supervisory team through agreed formal interactions/meetings. As a minimum, if you are a full-time student you should have:

- regular contact/meetings with their supervisory team, at least ten times a year, approximately monthly, with no more than an eight-week gap between meetings, while you are in candidature until submission of your thesis.
- regular contact/meetings with each member of your supervisory team, at least on three occasions each year.
- at least one meeting each year should be held with your full supervisory team to discuss your progress, usually in advance of your annual progress review.

When completing the Learning Agreement, you and your supervisory team should discuss the arrangements for the regular contact, including who is responsible for organising these.

A formal interaction is a structured meeting whereby you and your supervisory team engage in a meaningful discussion, e.g., discuss a piece of work and agree on an action plan. The interaction can take place in person, or at a distance (for example via Zoom) if you are away on fieldwork.

In cases where you are not able to meet these requirements because you are studying outside the University, e.g., in another organisation as part of a CASE studentship or undertaking fieldwork, you are required to agree an equivalent schedule of contact/meetings with your supervisory team, using for example E-mail and online meetings.

If you are a part-time student, or studying your programme away from an approved campus, you should still have regular contact with your supervisory team and should discuss and agree the number of formal interactions with your supervisory team as part of your Learning Agreement, ensuring there is no more than a 10-week gap between meetings.

The University requires that you record and confirm the outcomes of your formal interactions on NU Reflect.

49. In addition, if you are a Student Visa holder you should continue to record and confirm the outcomes of your regular contact with your supervisory team, while under examination through to completion of your studies, as a condition of your visa sponsorship. These meeting records and outcomes may be requested by the Home Office, as part of the University's sponsorship duties.

50. The University requires that you bring academic problems with your research project promptly to the attention of your supervisory team so that they can provide support.

51. The University requires that you bring non-academic problems with a bearing on the progress of your research (e.g., financial, social, domestic, or health problems) promptly to the attention of your supervisory team.

Supervisory Support

52. Over the course of the research the relationship between you and your supervisory team will change. In the initial stages of the research the supervisory team will induct you into the research field and acquaint you with the research conducted within it. As the research progresses you will gradually develop greater independence and by the final stages of the research, you will be able to operate as an independent researcher capable of actively engaging in your field. In general terms, supervisory support can include:

- Assistance with the choice of topic;
- Critical and constructive feedback on the work produced;
- Advice on the sources or literature used;
- Guidance on the methodology or techniques used and the approach to data collection;
- Discussion of evidence and results;
- Reading drafts and commenting on issues of substance.

Supervisors **will not**:

- Undertake the actual research itself;
- Write or significantly redraft papers or chapters;
- Conduct a detailed proofread of the thesis.

Changes to Supervisory Teams

53. Occasionally it may be necessary to make changes to supervisory teams where, for example, the academic focus of the

research project has altered, where supervisory responsibilities have changed, or where members of the supervisory team have left the employment of the University. If this is the result of a temporary absence of a member of staff, other members of the supervisory team will continue the supervision with responsibilities being adjusted accordingly. Where the members of the supervisory team are permanently changed, you should normally be consulted in advance. The University will take all reasonable steps to replace supervisors with suitable alternatives and may extraordinarily include arrangements for supervisors to be from a different academic unit or even from outside the University.

54. However, particularly where it is your choice to effect a change in your project or supervisory arrangements, it may not always be possible to provide suitable alternatives due to the specialist nature of Doctoral or MPhil study. In such a situation, it may not be possible for you to continue with your programme of study.

55. On rare occasions, supervisory relations may break down. In such circumstances, in the first instance, you should consult with another member of the supervisory team. If it is not possible to resolve the problems in this manner, you and/or a member of your supervisory team should report difficulties to the Head of Academic Unit. They may refer the matter, if necessary, to the relevant Graduate School or Dean of Postgraduate Studies for advice and mediation. However, you may consult directly with the Graduate School or Dean of Postgraduate Studies in confidence. Where possible, prompt action should be taken to resolve the conflict, and where necessary, you or a supervisor may request a change of supervisor from the Head of Academic Unit. In making any changes to the supervisory team due consideration must be given to the need to provide supervisory expertise that is appropriate to the project, in line with the Code of Practice.

56. All supervisory changes must be notified to the relevant Graduate School and be approved by the Dean of Postgraduate Studies.

The Development and Approval of Research Project Proposals – Project Approval

57. Research project proposals may be developed prior to the recruitment of a student for purposes of obtaining funding or subsequently by the student following registration or the successful completion of the taught phase of the programme.

58. Where the research proposal is developed following registration, the University requires that the supervisory team supports you in its development. In particular, the supervisory team needs to ensure that the project is achievable within the timescale of the programme, and to confirm that sufficient resources will be available to support it.

59. You should submit your project proposal on the PGR CoP system within three months of starting your programme, even where your project proposal has already been reviewed and approved by external peer review.

60. An impartial Project Approval Panel and Head of Academic Unit must consider project proposals, before being submitted for consideration to the relevant Dean of Postgraduate Studies. The Project Approval Panel should consist of at least two impartial University members of academic staff (one of which can be an Honorary member of staff) with relevant skills and knowledge, at least one of which should be demonstrably research-active and at least one of whom should have experience of successful supervision.

61. It is the responsibility of any impartial panel member to declare if they have a conflict of interest such as a personal or professional relationship with you, or a member of the supervisory team. The Academic Unit should consider any perceived conflict of interests when appointing impartial panel members. The Dean of Postgraduate Studies has the final decision on panel members, if any concerns are raised.

62. When appointing panel members, Academic Units should give consideration to the nature of the project, particularly for interdisciplinary projects, as well as to the composition of the panel from an EDI perspective, where possible.

63. The University requires the Project Approval Panel to evaluate research proposals against the criteria;
- that the project has clear aims and objectives;
- that you have (or can acquire) the knowledge, skills, and aptitudes to complete the project successfully;
- that the proposed supervisory team has, or will be able to acquire, the skills, knowledge, and aptitudes necessary to supervise the project to a successful conclusion;
- that the project is suitable for the programme of study and for the award;
- that it can be completed within the timescale for the programme;
- that sufficient resources will be available to complete the project;
- whether ethical approval is required;
- in cases where the project involves extended absence from the University on fieldwork or work in collaborating organisations, that appropriate arrangements will be made to support you and to monitor your progress.

64. In order to evaluate these matters, the panel will need evidence in the forms of:
- a research proposal;
- a research plan;
- a supporting statement by the supervisory team.

65. The Project Approval Panel should consider the evidence and the criteria outlined above in order to make a recommendation and written report on your proposal (on the PGR CoP system), which will be made available to you and your supervisory team once the recommendation has been confirmed by the Dean of Postgraduate Studies.

66. The Project Approval Panel has two recommendations available to them:
- Approval
- Re-submission – where the Project Approval Panel has significant concerns about the proposal, which can be in relation to any of the criteria outlined above

67. In the event of a resubmission outcome, the Project Approval Panel report should indicate the steps necessary for you to

address these concerns. The University requires that Faculties should establish maximum times for the re-submission of proposals, not exceeding three months (six months for part-time students).

68. When the Project Approval Panel is satisfied on the above matters, it then recommends the research project for approval to the Head of Academic Unit and the Dean of Postgraduate Studies.

69. All proposals that are formally approved are recorded on your student record, along with your supervisory arrangements.

70. If the Project Approval Panel does not approve your research project and/or the supervisory arrangements following reassessment of the project proposal, it should make a recommendation of 'Termination' of studies to the Dean of Postgraduate Studies. If this recommendation is confirmed by the Dean of Postgraduate Studies, you will not be permitted to continue as a registered student and your registration will be terminated.

71. The Project Approval Panel should not normally recommend that registration is terminated without having previously provided you with a Project Approval re-assessment opportunity.

72. The University requires that you take responsibility for listening to, understanding, and accepting feedback from your supervisory team and the Project Approval Panel.

73. The University requires that you take responsibility for keeping your research project on track so that it is completed within the normal timescale prescribed by your programme and candidature.

Declaration of Personal Interest

74. The University acknowledges the professional and ethical responsibility to protect the interests of our students, and that all relationships with them must feature trust, confidence, and equal treatment. The University does not accept close personal or intimate relationships between colleagues and students where there is direct supervision. All members of staff are required to declare any personal relationships with a student they are asked to supervise or are already supervising to their line manager, who will consider alternative arrangements to reduce or eliminate the potential conflicts of interest arising. (Further information is available in the Personal Relationships at Work Policy.)

75. The University requires that all research supervisors adhere to this Code of Practice. Where a supervisor does not adhere to this Code of Practice, the Dean of Postgraduate Studies in consultation with the Head of Academic Unit has the power to remove the member of staff from the list of approved research supervisors and make alternative arrangements for your supervision. Where the Dean of Postgraduate Studies and Head of Academic Unit are unable to resolve the supervision, the PVC of the Faculty will be consulted on the matter.

Third Parties

76. This guidance applies where a third party such as a professional copy editor or a proof-reading company has been employed to provide assistance, or where you receive help from other parties such as fellow students. Where a professional third party or proof-reading software has been employed to assist the student, you should make this clear in the thesis and include a statement indicating the nature of the contribution and by whom.

77. A third party may provide:
- Assistance with spelling, punctuation and grammar;
- Improve the format or layout of the work including editing sentences and paragraphs.

78. Third parties must not make significant adjustments to the work, and this includes:

- Changing, clarifying, or developing the argument of the thesis;

- Adding to the references used;

- Correcting factual information;

- Translating significant amounts of work that are integral to the thesis;

- Significantly reducing the length or substantially altering the organisation of the thesis.

Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

79. The University requires you to openly and transparently acknowledge how, why and when AI has been used to inform or support the completion of any submitted work during your research degree studies. You must use your own words when submitting work and should not deliberately submit AI generated text as your own. Doing so will be considered academic misconduct and should be dealt with through our established Academic Misconduct procedure.

80. If there is a suspicion that a student has submitted work that is not their own, the reason for that suspicion should be clearly articulated and addressed with the student at a local level. Colleagues should NOT submit student work through any AI text detection tools themselves. Further information is available here.

Progression and Monitoring

81. The University requires that your progress should be reviewed annually by an Impartial Annual Progress Review Panel, normally the same (or equivalent) panel that approved your research project and the supervisory arrangements.

82. The University requires that you submit an annual progress report on your research project to an impartial Annual Progress Review Panel, until submission of your thesis for examination. In addition, you may be asked to provide one or more of the following as specified by your Academic Unit/Faculty;

- submission of a piece of work/lab book;

- give a presentation on their research;

- undergo a viva or interview;
- evidence of research training.

Academic Units will ensure that the progression requirements for full-time and part-time students are clearly specified and made available to students, supervisory teams, and Annual Progress Review Panel members.

83. The University requires that your supervisory team should formally monitor your progress on your research programme through annual reports to the Annual Progress Review Panel, on the PGR CoP system. This Annual Progress Review applies to both full-time and part-time students. Where appropriate, reports on progress should be made to sponsors and copied to the Graduate School.

84. However, if, your supervisory team have concerns about progress, at any point during your programme, they should inform you in writing prior to a meeting. At the meeting, the written comments of the team, including any additional work that the supervisors feel is required, should be discussed with you, and be agreed along with a review date. If progress continues to be unsatisfactory, you should be informed in writing that this will be referred to the Annual Progress Review Panel for consideration. The letter should be copied to the Graduate School.

85. When appointing panel members, Academic Units should give consideration to the nature of the project, particularly for interdisciplinary projects, as well to the composition of the panel from an EDI perspective, where possible.

86. It is the responsibility of any impartial panel member to declare if they have a conflict of interest such as a personal or professional relationship with you, a member of your supervisory team or alternative Examiner. The Academic Unit should consider any perceived conflict of interests when appointing impartial panel members. The Dean of Postgraduate Studies has the final decision on panel members, if any concerns are raised.

87. Annual Progress Review Panels should consider the evidence, including annual reports submitted by supervisory teams, and determine whether satisfactory progress is being made and this progress indicates that the research project will meet the standards for the award and be completed by the maximum candidature date for the programme.

88. If these criteria are met, the Annual Progress Review Panel should recommend that registration should be continued.

89. If these criteria are not met, the Annual Progress Review Panel should indicate what you, and where appropriate your supervisory team, must do to put the research project back on track. It should set a date for further review within a period prescribed by the Faculty, normally within two months (four months if you are a part-time student).

90. Annual Progress Review Panels should complete a report, which will be approved by the Dean of Postgraduate Studies, which will then be shared with you and your supervisory team, on the PGR CoP system. In the event of the Annual Progress Review Panel being unable to make a recommendation to progress, you and your supervisory team should determine an action plan to ensure that your progress and your research project will meet the standards of the award by the date set for further review.

91. If necessary, the Annual Progress Review Panel should re-convene on the date set and consider whether you have responded to the concerns raised and whether your progress is such that the research project will meet the standards for the award and be completed by the maximum candidature date for the programme. Where the evidence has demonstrated this, the Annual Progress Review Panel should make a recommendation to progress.

92. Where the evidence does not demonstrate that the research project will meet the standards for the award, the Annual Progress Review Panel's recommendation will depend upon its judgement of the reasons for this, in terms of your potential to achieve these standards and the adequacy and appropriateness of your supervisory arrangements. Any reassessment should be recorded in the PGR CoP system.

93. Where the Annual Progress Review Panel is not satisfied that the supervisory arrangements are adequate and appropriate but considers that you would otherwise be able to achieve the standards of the award, it may seek the approval of the Head of Academic Unit to make a recommendation to the Dean of Postgraduate Studies for the replacement of all or part of the supervisory team.

94. Where the Annual Progress Review Panel is satisfied that the supervisory arrangements are adequate and appropriate but considers that you are is unlikely to be able to achieve the standards for the award, the Annual Progress Review Panel may recommend that you be registered for a lower degree where appropriate and where you are likely to be able to achieve the standards.

95. Where the Annual Progress Review Panel considers that you cannot meet the standards for either a Doctoral or a Master of Philosophy award, they may recommend that your registration be terminated.

96. Although the final decision with respect to any recommendation made by the Academic Unit is taken by the Dean of Postgraduate Studies, an Academic Unit may provide you with provisional feedback after the Annual Progress Review Panel has met.

Appointment of Examiners

97. The regulations of the University require that all research degrees are examined by two examiners, at least one of whom must be external. For staff candidates, the examination shall normally be conducted by two External Examiners, although for junior members of staff, at the discretion of the Dean of Postgraduate Studies, one External and one Internal Examiner may be appointed.

98. All Examiners should be willing to complete the process of examination normally within ten weeks of submission of the thesis.

99. All Examiners will be nominated by your Supervisory Team, on behalf of the Head of Academic Unit and should take account of points 96 to 100. You will have the opportunity to comment on the proposed Examiners. If you believe there is a conflict of interest it should be drawn to the attention of your Supervisory Team, Head of Academic Unit or Graduate School,

as soon as possible. Examiner appointments will only be reviewed if it is clear there may be bias or prejudice by an Examiner.

External Examiners

100. External Examiners are a recognised authority in their field and provide an important external oversight of the examination process. It is recommended that External Examiners should normally be appointed from research-intensive universities, to ensure standards and consistency across all Faculties.

External Examiners MUST:

- Have significant experience and knowledge of research in the subject area within which the candidate is working.
- Be independent and have no obvious conflict of interest.
- Have a research degree or equivalent academic or professional experience.
- Be research active and will normally have published in recognised outlets (or other equivalent research activity) in the discipline in the last two years. (The information provided to support the appointment should clearly detail this.)
- Have a clear understanding of the examination process normally based on experience of examining research degrees at other institutions.

External Examiners MUST NOT:

- Be a former member of Newcastle University or a former postgraduate unless more than five years have elapsed since that person left the University.
- Be appointed on a regular basis such that their familiarity with the Academic Unit might influence their judgment. Normally an External Examiner should not be appointed more than once during a 12-month period, while recognising that there be an academic reason for a subsequent appointment within a 12-month period. Such appointments would be considered on a case-by-case basis by the Dean of Postgraduate Studies.
- Have a close relationship with you or a member of your supervisory team e.g., have published with or worked directly with them to a significant degree within the last five years.
- Be an honorary member of Newcastle University.
- Normally be a retired member of staff from another University unless they demonstrably meet all the criteria outlined above.

Internal Examiners

101. The Internal Examiner is normally responsible for ensuring that the University's examination practices are followed and that the Joint Report Form is forwarded to the Graduate School.

To be eligible, Internal Examiners MUST:

- Have a contract of employment at Newcastle University and be registered on the approved list of supervisors held by the Graduate School.
- Have expertise in the broad field of the thesis under examination.
- Be familiar with the University procedures for the examination of research degrees. *(Where examiners have not conducted an examination at Newcastle they must be briefed by the Academic Unit and an Independent Chair may be appointed. However, where a proposed Internal Examiner has attended the 'Assessing Research Degree's workshop, the requirements for an Independent Chair may be waived.)*

The Dean of Postgraduate of Research may consider appointing an Emeritus member of staff as an Internal Examiner, where the Emeritus member of staff is an expert in their field and continues to be research active and an expert in their field. There would be an expectation that the Emeritus member would be involved in any appeal/complaint arising from the examination process, in the same way as any other Internal Examiner.

Internal Examiners MUST NOT:

- Have had any direct involvement with the research project under examination.
- Be members of the supervisory team that have supported your work.
- Be a postgraduate student, unless the proposed Examiner is a colleague who is undertaking a postgraduate degree under staff candidature regulations.
- Be a visiting member of Newcastle University.

Independent Chair

102. An Independent Chair makes sure the University's examination of research degrees procedures are followed. They take no part in the assessment process but ensure that the examination process is conducted fairly and equitably. Graduate Schools maintain a list of approved Independent Chairs who can be appointed by Deans of Postgraduate Research, when required.

103. The Independent Chair will be present for the duration of the oral examination, normally also including the pre-meeting and post oral discussions between examiners. An Independent Chair will not be required to take notes of the meeting for the External Examiners but will be required to provide a summary report on proceedings to the Graduate School following the oral examination.

An Independent Chair MUST be appointed in the following circumstances:

- Where two External Examiners are appointed.
- Where the Internal Examiner has no previous experience of examining a research degree.

An Independent Chair MAY be appointed in the following circumstances:

- Where the Examiners of the thesis require the assistance of an independent authority to conduct the examination process.
- Where the Internal Examiner has no previous experience of examining research degrees at Newcastle University. *(Where a proposed Internal Examiner has attended the 'Assessing Research Degree's workshop, the requirements for an Independent Chair may be waived.)*
- When the Dean of Postgraduate Studies deems, an independent authority is needed to ensure the examination process is conducted fairly.
- Where you have requested this on medical/personal/cultural grounds.

An Independent Chair shall:

- Normally be an academic member of staff at the University, normally at Senior Lecturer / Reader level or above.
- Be familiar with Newcastle University examination processes for research degrees.
- Have substantial experience of postgraduate research and examination.

An Independent Chair MUST NOT:

- Be a member of the supervisory team or have played any part in the research under examination.
- Normally be from your or your supervisory team's subject area.

Responsibilities and Conflicts of Interest

104. It is the responsibility of the proposed External or Internal Examiners to declare if they have a conflict of interest such as a personal or professional relationship with you, a member of your supervisory team or co-Examiner. This should include an acknowledgement of all papers co-authored between the supervisors and proposed external examiner in the last five years, with a clear factual statement of any relationship to the thesis, e.g., if the work would be expected to be cited in the thesis.

105. It is the role of the Dean of Postgraduate Studies to comment critically on the proposed Examiners and if there is a perceived conflict of interests, the Dean of Postgraduate Studies has the final decision in the appointment of Examiners.

106. Once the Examiners have been appointed it is the responsibility of the supervisory team to:

- Ensure that the administrative arrangements for the oral examination are in place
- Communicate to the Graduate School any health or personal circumstances that may affect the conduct of the oral examination.

Personal Extenuating Circumstances

107. The University has established procedures for dealing with personal extenuating circumstances that may affect you throughout the duration of your studies. You can apply for an interruption of studies, a change of candidature or an extension to your thesis submission deadline, via the PGR CoP system, if personal circumstances are impacting on your studies.

108. Following submission of your thesis, if you are aware of any circumstances that may stop you from attending the oral examination, these should be brought to the attention of your supervisory team and the Graduate School, to determine if it is necessary to delay the oral examination.

109. You should also contact your supervisory team and the Graduate School if there are personal circumstances that you believe could impact on your performance at the oral examination. This information will then be provided to the Dean of Postgraduate Studies and your Examiners, in advance of the oral examination, to determine if any reasonable adjustments are required.

110. Irrespective of any personal circumstances, your examiners will be expected to assess you against the assessment criteria for your relevant research degree. However, examiners might wish to take personal circumstances into account when considering the recommendations open to them.

111. By attending an oral examination, you are declaring that you are fit to attend the examination, and as such, it is unlikely that you would be able to submit a later claim that your performance was affected by personal circumstances.

Examination

112. The University requires that supervisory teams should be responsible for the nomination of examiners for research degrees, in accordance with the criteria for appointment set out above, on behalf of the Head of Academic Unit. Supervisory teams should provide you with an opportunity to comment on the proposed Examiners.

113. Examiner nominations should be made on the PGR CoP system to the Dean of Postgraduate Studies who should check that the examiners meet the requirements set out above and, if so, approve them on behalf of Senate.

114. Once Examiner nominations have been approved, the Graduate School will send a letter of appointment along with relevant information including the University's Handbook for Examiners of Research Degrees which contains information on the institutional assessment criteria for the award.

115. Where an Independent Chair is required, the Graduate School will consult the list of approved Independent Chairs and

provide details of the Independent Chair to the examiners, supervisors, and candidate.

116. The supervisory team should agree in writing the date, time, and place of the oral examination with you, your examiners, and where appropriate the Independent Chair and should then notify the Graduate School.

117. Your supervisory team should ask you whether or not you wish to have a member of your supervisory team present in the oral examination as a non-contributing observer (unless asked to contribute by the Chair). If not present, the supervisory team should be available for consultation during the oral examination. When agreeing the date for the oral examination, the supervisory team should ensure that there is sufficient time to allow for the thesis to be sent to and fully considered by the examiners.

118. Under no circumstances should the arrangements for the oral examination be delegated to you.

119. There should normally be no discussion about the oral examination itself (apart from agreeing the date), between the supervisory team and the examiners in advance of the oral examination.

120. There should also normally be no discussion about the oral examination between you and your examiners prior to the oral examination. Following the oral examination there should continue to be no direct contact between you and your examiners. If you require clarification on points raised by the examiners, this clarification should be sought via your supervisory team.

121. The University requires the supervisory team to advise you on preparation for the oral examination and where practical to offer you at least one practice session.

122. The University requires that, prior to the oral examination, examiners make preliminary written independent reports on the thesis, which should be sent to the Graduate School.

123. The University requires that examiners should not consult with each other before both independent preliminary reports have been submitted to the Graduate School, normally two weeks in advance of the oral examination.

124. The University requires that oral examinations are normally chaired by the Internal Examiner and has overall responsibility for conducting the oral examination, in accordance with the procedures set out in the Handbook for Examiners of Research Degrees. However, the examiners should discuss and agree the chairing arrangements during their pre-meeting, in advance of the start of the oral examination. In an oral examination where an Independent Chair is appointed, it will be the Independent Chair who will chair the oral examination.

125. Following the oral examination, the University requires that examiners write a joint report (except in cases where they disagree when they should write separate reports) and make an appropriate recommendation in respect of the award. Where the recommendation is re-submission, the report should include a detailed/comprehensive statement of the work to be done to achieve the award within the period allowed under the University's regulations.

126. As well as reporting on you and your thesis, examiners should be requested to provide comments on the broader issues of the research training skills and the research environment.

127. The examiners' joint report should be sent to the Graduate School for approval by the Dean of Postgraduate Studies. The Graduate School will send copies of the final joint report, along with the statement of any required corrections/revisions, to you, your supervisory team and the Head of Academic Unit and Director of Postgraduate Studies.

Criteria for the Doctorate

128. Doctoral degrees at Newcastle University meet in full the doctoral qualification descriptor contained in The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies, and are aligned with the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.

Doctoral degrees are awarded to candidates who demonstrate:

- The ability to create and interpret new knowledge through original research and advanced scholarship;
- A systematic understanding of an existing body of knowledge that is at the forefront of an academic field;
- The ability to explore critically, evaluate and test their ideas, and those of others, and to relate them to a wider body of knowledge;
- A good understanding of the research techniques, methods or approaches adopted and applied in a field of enquiry;
- The ability to conceive and implement a project which demonstrates an understanding of how to conduct research at the forefront of a field;
- An ability to produce research material worthy of publication, performance, or exhibition.

Criteria for the MPhil Programme

129. The Degree of Master of Philosophy (MPhil) is awarded to candidates displaying convincing evidence of the capacity to pursue research and scholarship and represent original work. On successful completion of an MPhil candidates will have attained Level 7, as defined in The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies.

For the award of an MPhil degree the University requires:

- A systematic understanding of knowledge that is informed by work at the forefront of an academic field;
- An ability to evaluate and critically appraise current research and advanced scholarship, and some evidence of originality in the application of this work;
- An understanding and critical appreciation of the research techniques, methods or approaches adopted and applied in a field of enquiry;
- An ability to conceive and implement a research project, which demonstrates an understanding of how to conduct

research in a field.

Normally an MPhil thesis will be more focused or limited in scope than a Doctoral degree. A Doctoral degree will demonstrate greater depth of critical enquiry than the MPhil. Relative to the Doctoral degree, the MPhil will have less emphasis on original work and it need not be worthy of publication, performance, or exhibition.

All Research Degrees

130. For all research degrees, the University requires that work presented for examination should be:

131. Authentic: The submission should be your own work and not be plagiarised from the work of others, published or unpublished, in the public domain or not. All sources used should be appropriately acknowledged using a recognised form of referencing.

132. Scholarly: The thesis should conform to the normal canons of scholarship, studying a topic in- depth, and displaying critical discrimination and a sense of proportion in evaluating evidence and the opinion of others. In written work sources should be cited accurately, consistently, and correctly in the text and in the bibliography.

133. Professional: The thesis should demonstrate you have acquired the skills of a professional researcher capable of conducting research in accordance with the ethical practices of their field, and that you possess a good understanding of your role in the wider research process. You should also demonstrate the ability to exercise personal responsibility and initiative in complex and unpredictable professional research environments.

134. Well-structured, written, and presented: The thesis should demonstrate skill in writing and presenting research similar to scholarly work in your field. A written thesis should be clearly structured and orderly in arrangement, and well-written and presented. Similarly, any composition, exhibition, artefact(s), or other products of practice arising from the research should be arranged and presented in an orderly and coherent way.

Covid-19 Impact Statement

135. Where your thesis has changed from what was originally intended due to Covid-19, you may include a Covid-19 Impact Statement to explain to your Examiners the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on your research project. Examiners will be expected to assess you against the assessment criteria for the relevant research degree. However, examiners should take the circumstances as detailed in your Covid-19 Impact Statement into account when considering the recommendations open to them. Further information is available in the Covid-19 Impact Statement Guidance.

Quality Assurance and Enhancement Framework

136. All research programmes are reviewed under the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Framework, which provides an opportunity to reflect on current practice in relation to Research Degree Programmes and provides a forum to consider the enhancement of the student experience through the sharing of good practice and feedback from external sources and students.

137. The process is conducted in two ways; firstly, an Annual Review of Research Degree Programmes is undertaken through an Annual Check-in report, which provides Academic Units with a formal opportunity to monitor the effectiveness of research degree provision focussing on aspects of this Code of Practice.

138. The Annual Check-In reports are supplemented by Review Visits to Academic Units; within each Faculty normally at least one Academic Unit is visited each Academic Year. The Review Visits are undertaken by a small panel who explore in more detail the evidence provided by the annual review process to evaluate its efficacy, ask questions of the Academic Unit under review, and meet students.

139. The results of the Annual Review and the Review Visits are reported annually by Faculty Postgraduate Research Committees to the Postgraduate Research Sub-Committee of the University Education Committee/University Research and Innovation Committee.

140. The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Framework details the full policy and process and is applicable to all elements of research programmes, including any taught components.

Feedback Mechanisms

141. The University requires that confidential mechanisms are established for research students to feedback on the quality of their learning experiences. Such mechanisms should include: questionnaires focused on recruitment, admission, and induction procedures; questionnaire evaluations of the researcher development programme; survey questionnaires, focus groups or interviews covering the totality of the learning experience.

142. Any feedback received from other stakeholders, including supervisory teams, review panels, examiners, funders, collaborative organisations, employers, and alumni should also be reviewed.

143. Feedback from these should be considered by Faculty Postgraduate Research Committees and, where appropriate, acted upon.

Complaints and Resolution

144. The University has established procedures for complaints about a service, member of staff, or another student. A complaint may be made by any student and details are set out in the Complaints and Resolution Procedure.

145. The University provides a clear three-stage procedure for students to complain about the level of service or treatment which may have fallen short of what might reasonably be expected. At Level 1 (informal stage for resolution), complainants

are expected to make every effort to resolve informally a problem with the individual(s) concerned or to seek help/advice in writing from the complainant's tutor/supervisor/Head of School, or appropriate Head of Service.

146. Only when the steps taken under Level 1 of the procedure have failed, or when the complainant considers that their complaint has not been resolved may Level 2 of the procedure be invoked by submission of the Complaints Form, together with full details of the complaint and any supporting evidence.

147. Level 3 is the formal review of the Level 2 outcome, where the complainant requests a review of the outcome of their complaint at the Level 2 stage.

Academic Appeals and Query

148. The University has established procedures for appeal against a recommendation by a progression panel and examiners of research degrees. Details are set out in the Academic Appeals and Query procedure available at:

149. The University provides a clear three-stage procedure for students making Academic Queries and Appeals requesting reconsideration of Board of Examiners/ Personal Extenuating Circumstances (PEC) and/or Degree Programme Director (DPD) / Progress Decisions.

150. Level 1 is the informal stage for querying academic decisions. Appellants are expected to make every effort to raise their assessment/progress query, in writing, with the School/Faculty directly concerned in the first instance. Graduate School Managers are the nominated contact for Research Degree programmes/students at Level 1.

151. Only when the steps taken under Level 1 of the procedure have failed, or when the Appellant considers that their query has not been resolved, may Level 2 of the Academic Queries & Appeals Procedure be invoked by submission of the Academic Appeal Form together with full details of the formal appeal and any supporting evidence.

152. Level 3 is the formal review of the Level 2 outcome, where the Appellant requests a review of the outcome of their academic appeal at the Level 2 stage.

ADDENDUM TO THE CODE OF PRACTICE FOR RESEARCH MASTERS' DEGREE PROGRAMMES

Introduction

i.   The purpose of this Addendum to the Code of Practice is to set out the University's standards for its research masters' programmes. This refers in particular to MLitt, MRes, as well as some MMus and LLM programmes

ii. This addendum to the Code of Practice is supplementary to aid staff in interpretation for the University's research masters' programmes and should be read in conjunction with the full Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes.

Selection of Research Students

iii. The University requires that there should be rigorous selection policies and procedures for Postgraduate Admissions and, where appropriate, Academic Unit or subject levels.

iv. The University requires that selection procedures should be rigorous and involve the following;

- involve at least the Degree Programme Director or PGR Director in the selection process, who will act on behalf of the Head of Academic Unit to approve the offer of a place.

- interviewing applicants, where it is deemed appropriate and possible.

- taking up two references and, if one or more of these is not available at the time of offer, making the latter conditional upon the receipt of satisfactory references.

Learning Agreements

v.   You need to have received, understood, and accepted the expectations of your research programme. This should be set out in a formal Learning Agreement, which should be signed by you and by the Research Dissertation Supervisor or Degree Programme Director on behalf of the University. Your Academic Unit will advise you on the timescale and the process for completing your Learning Agreement.

The Development of Relevant Knowledge and Skills

vi. The University requires the research programme should offer you the opportunity to develop a relevant range of research knowledge and skills, appropriate to the programme.

Research Students

vii. It is required that you maintain regular attendance on the programme. During the research project/dissertation stage, if you are a full-time student, you should have regular structured interactions and meet with your allocated supervisor at least monthly. The University requires that you should record and confirm the outcomes of meetings, normally on NU Reflect.

Supervisory Arrangements

viii. The University requires that individual supervisors are appointed for the research project/dissertation element of the programme. This should normally be undertaken by a member of academic staff, who should be demonstrably research active and on the approved research supervisors' list for the Academic Unit or faculty. You should always have a second named person acting as advisor, either an additional disciplinary expert or the Degree Programme Director or School Director of Postgraduate Studies.

The Development and Approval of Research Project Proposals

ix. Research project/ dissertation proposals should be developed prior to the commencement of the research element of the programme and approved by the Degree Programme Director or PGR Director in conjunction with the research dissertation supervisor.

x.   The University requires the Degree Programme Director to evaluate research proposals against the criteria;

- that the project has clear aims and objectives;

- that you have (or can acquire) the knowledge, skills, and aptitudes to complete the project successfully;

- that the proposed supervisor has, or will be able to acquire, the skills, knowledge, and aptitudes necessary to supervise the project to a successful conclusion;

- that the project is suitable for the programme of study and for the award;

- that it can be completed within the timescale for the programme;

- that sufficient resources will be available to complete the project.

Progression and Monitoring

xi. The University requires that the Degree Programme Director or PGR Director and supervisor should formally monitor your progress on your research masters' programme. Formal monitoring will include review of progress following any taught components of the programme.

xii. However, if at any point during the programme, the Degree Programme Director, PGR Director, or supervisor has concerns about your progress, they should inform you in writing prior to a meeting. At the meeting, the written comments of the team should be discussed with you, and a plan of action should be agreed along with a review date. If progress continues to be unsatisfactory, you should be informed in writing of the reasons and of the possible consequences in terms of being unable to progress, suspension, or termination of registration. The letter should be copied to the Graduate School.

xiii. The University requires that your progress should be formally reviewed after the taught element of the programme.

Examination

xiv. The regulations of the University require that all research degree projects/ dissertations are examined by two examiners, one internal and one external. For staff candidates, the examination shall normally be conducted by two external examiners for each candidate, although for junior members of staff, at the discretion of the Dean of Postgraduate Studies, one external and one internal may be appointed.

xv. The University requires that examiners should be demonstrably research-active in relevant fields. Examiners should be independent of the project and otherwise meet the criteria set out in the criteria for appointment of examiners set out for research degrees above. Research Dissertation Supervisors are explicitly excluded from acting as examiners for the research project/ dissertation.

xvi. The University requires that the Head of Academic Unit or Degree Programme Director should be responsible for the nomination of examiners for the research project/dissertation and should take account of points 95 to 99.

xvii. Nominations of examiners should be made on the PGR CoP system, to the relevant Dean of Postgraduate Studies, who should check that the examiners meet the requirements set out above and, if so, approve them on behalf of Senate.

xviii. Once nominations have been approved, examiners should be sent a letter of appointment and relevant information including assessment criteria for the award and profile of marks from the modules studied prior to the research project/dissertation.

xix. Following assessment of the research project/dissertation the examiners should write separate reports and make an appropriate recommendation in respect of the award. Where the recommendation is re-submission, the report should include a statement of the work to be done to achieve the award within the period allowed under the University's regulations.

xx. If the examiners determine that an oral examination is required, this should normally be chaired by the internal examiner and conducted in accordance with the procedures set out in the Handbook for Examiners of Research Degrees.

PART THREE - ACADEMIC MATTERS – RESEARCH GUIDELINES *(UPDATED AUGUST 2023)*

NU Reflect and PGR Code of Practice (CoP) System

NU Reflect

Research degrees are highly regarded by employers and academics. The essential purpose of a research programme is a period of training in research and the generation of an original piece of work. During your studies, you will also develop a range of personal and professional skills, which will prove invaluable for the transition onto your next career.

The purpose of NU Reflect is to provide a record of your personal and professional development at Newcastle University. It is designed to assist you to get the most from your postgraduate experience, helping you to plan and reflect upon your research and how it will relate to future aspirations. It will help you to identify areas of strength and those areas you feel need more attention, while improving your research and generic skills and identifying opportunities for personal development.

NU Reflect will help you to build on the learning and results you achieve and will provide you with your Individual Personal Development record that can contribute towards your personal growth and career planning.

NU Reflect will:

- Provide a record of your personal and academic development
- Help you plan and reflect on your research
- Identify areas of strength and where you need more support or training
- Record the acquisition of skills and self-development, which will be useful for CV preparation
- Help you to understand and learn from 'life' experiences and how these can contribute towards your future prospects by providing examples of skill developments
- Allow opportunities for reflection and self-evaluation on your progress and future needs
- Introduce the concept of continuous professional development
- Help you to demonstrate and be aware of all the intrinsic skills your research degree will allow you to develop

In addition, NU Reflect provides you with a way of recording your formal interactions/meetings with your Supervisory Team.

You will be responsible for the generation and maintenance of the information in NU Reflect, for which you will be expected to show commitment, planning, action, and evaluation/ reflection. All your NU Reflect content is downloadable and portable at the end of your time at Newcastle and will be invaluable in preparing your next career move.

PGR Code of Practice System

In addition to NU Reflect, the University uses a PGR Code of Practice System to administer the formal processes and milestones associated with your research degree programme as listed below:

- Full record of the approval process of your research project
- Full record for the annual progress review each academic year
- Full record of the approval of thesis title and nomination of examiners
- Full record of any change of circumstances requests (e.g., interruption, extension, outside study)

The following guidelines refer to how NU Reflect supports your personal development. All students are encouraged to maintain a personal development record primarily because it allows you to be 'in charge' of your own development.

2.   Personal Development Plan (PDP)

At the start of your research degree studies, you should identify the development/training that you will require to enhance your skills to complete your research project. Professional development planning (PDP) is a process that will help you highlight areas of strengths and areas for improvement by mapping your current skills against the Vitae Researcher Development Framework (RDF).

This can be developed by completing a Training Needs Analysis (TNA) on NU Reflect and designing personal objectives to create a personal development plan in conjunction with your supervisory team.

NU Reflect should include a description of the skills developed, cross-referenced to the Researcher Development Framework. The professional standard for recording your skills development is set out and the following is a list of 'essentials' that should be recorded in NU Reflect:

- Lab meetings, seminars, conferences attended *N.B. Postgraduate researchers are required to contribute to the research environment by attending appropriate internal and external events.*
- Any training courses attended including Faculty Researcher Development Training programme courses, which are

automatically recorded in NU Reflect.

- Abstracts presented at local, national, and international meetings with other relevant information (poster, oral presentation, presenting author etc). *N.B. You are normally required to give at least one formal presentation per year on your work.*
- Publications, including manuscripts in press and abstracts where published.
- Exhibitions and/or performance including venue, location, and duration, indicating whether it is a commission or competitive selection process
- Work experience and other information relevant to your future career (teaching/ demonstrating, work placements with industry/ business etc, time spent within other academic institutions.)

2.1 What Skills?

The following is a summary of the skills defined by the Researcher Development Framework, that you are expected to develop over your research degree. Some of the skills areas will overlap.

The RDF descriptors) are structured in four domains and twelve sub-domains which encompass what researchers need to be effective in their approach to research, when working with others and in contributing to the wider society and environment:

A: Knowledge and Intellectual Abilities
B: Personal effectiveness
C: Research Governance and Organisation
D: Engagement, influence, and Impact

Researcher Development Framework (RDF)
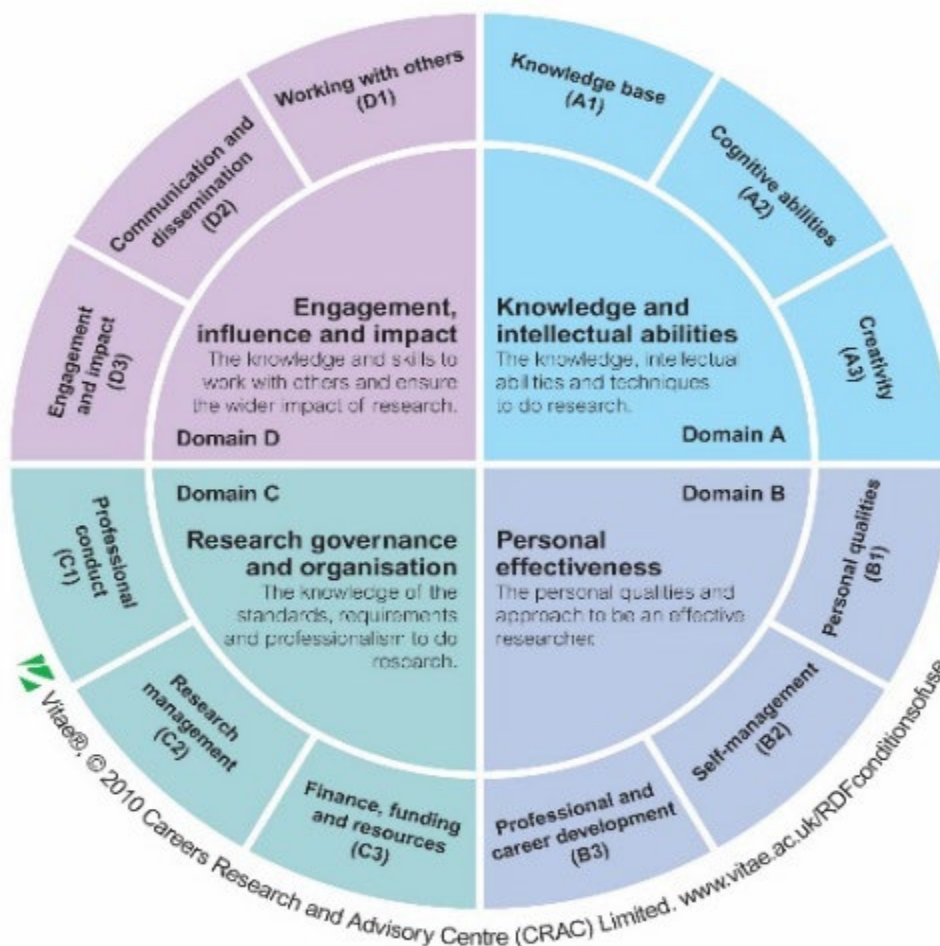
In conjunction with the skills above, the University encourages you to: develop relevant academic networks, attend seminars and conferences, present papers, publish papers, exhibit, and perform work, support your own career development, and contribute to your research environment by attending appropriate internal and external events. All

three Faculties offer extensive [Researcher Development and Research Training sessions](#) and you should include these in your PDP.

2.2 Creating a PDP

To create a PDP, you will need to assess your skills abilities, identify your specific needs/ skills gaps, and then decide what form of training can be used to meet these needs. Training can be both formal (courses/workshops) and informal (supervisors/research colleagues) and can include aspects of your research, i.e., attending seminars, conferences etc. You will be expected to audit your skills and update your PDP annually. Your NU Reflect should be continually updated with information on training related to both aspects of your research and your transferable skills. By setting goals and targets in your PDP it can keep you focussed on developing your skills. Continual reviewing and reflection will help you to determine whether you are effectively meeting these goals when used in the PDP process.

1. ***Identify goals*** – Completing your research degree and meeting the training requirements of the Researcher Development Framework.
2. ***Determine the skills required*** - Assess your skills in relation to the RDF and note areas where you need to develop or learn a new skill/ technique
3. ***Identify Training and Development Needs*** – *This is known as a* **Training Needs Analysis** (TNA) and is key to your development. The TNA should be carried out early in your research degree programme and at least annually thereafter. Identify workshops or other activities based on gaps in your skills or areas where your skills could be improved.
4. ***Create a PDP*** – The programme of workshops and other activities that you identify become your own PDP.
5. ***Record Training*** - Build a record of your skills achievement and skills profile in NU Reflect
6. ***Evaluate and Review*** – At each stage of your research determine whether you are making progress towards your goals and re-evaluate your skills

2.3 Timescales: When to use NU Reflect

Your role is to reflect on and evaluate your progress, therefore it will be important that you maintain and keep appropriate records. The PDP should be started at the beginning of your research, building on the information, experience and results you gain as you progress through your research degree. The Annual Progress Review Panel will review the research training that you have taken as part of your Annual Progress review, in relation to Faculty Research Training requirements and your own PDP and TNA. At each Annual Progress Review, your progress review panel will also discuss barriers/recommendations for self-development and training. *Please remember the generic/transferable skills aspect of NU Reflect is not a test – it is your assessment of your development.*

3. Feedback

To assist and improve the provision and quality of your Faculty Research training it is important to provide feedback on your experiences and a feedback form will be provided after session.

Guidelines for Research Students and Supervisors

Introduction

The purpose of these guidelines is to:

- Outline Newcastle's practice and expectations of Research Students and Research Supervisors
- Provide good practice for Research Student's on managing their doctoral studies and for Research Supervisors supervising Research Students

Where reference is made to any named University role, such references are to be read as including reference to their nominees.

These guidelines use Academic Unit as an overarching term for School and Institute.

Summary of Newcastle Practice

These guidelines describe the essential elements of PGR student/Supervisory Team, student/University relationships and detail the minimum requirements that you and your Supervisory Team will be expected to comply with during a research programme at Newcastle.

1. It is the responsibility of each Head of Academic Unit or nominee (usually the PGR Director/PGR Co-ordinator) in consultation with the proposed Academic Supervisor to decide whether to recommend the admission of an applicant to undertake postgraduate research in an Academic Unit. In reaching this decision the Head of Academic Unit or nominee should consider:
a) Whether the candidate is appropriately qualified for the proposed subject of study and whether adequate academic references have been received;
b) Whether the appropriate resources (e.g., library, computing, laboratory, studio/ workshop facilities or technical assistance) will be available;
c) Whether, on the information available, the subject of study is suitable for the degree for which the candidate is to be registered;

d) Whether it can reasonably be expected that the subject of study will be completed within the timescale prescribed;

e) Whether proper supervision can be provided and maintained throughout the research period;

f) Whether an appropriate programme of training and guidance in research can be offered to the candidate.

2. At the commencement of the research programme, you will have a formal induction at both Faculty and Academic Unit level.

3. The Supervisory Team will contribute to this induction by having a detailed discussion with you during which they will ensure that you have received, understood, and accepted the expectations of the research programme, as well as the scope of the proposed programme of work and an initial definition of the subject of study with particular emphasis on:

- The importance of completing the programme in the time available;
- The standard of work that will be expected from you (you are advised to read successful theses available in the [Library](#) as a guide to what is expected);
- The importance of PDP and your expected commitment to it.

Following this discussion, a formal Learning Agreement should be completed by both you and your Supervisory Team (in the [PGR CoP system](#)) within one month of registering on the programme. The Graduate School will record completion of the Learning Agreement on your student record.

The Supervisory Team and you should also discuss the following, which should form the basis of your project proposal, which will need to be approved before candidature is confirmed:

a) The overall timetable for the planning and completion of the programme of work, including any period of preliminary reading and the writing of the thesis. This should be recorded by the PGR student in the Personal Development Plan (PDP) within NU Reflect;

b) Any programme of training and guidance in research;

c) Guidance about the use of literature, other sources of information, including other members of staff, and about attendance at appropriate courses and meetings of learned societies;

d) Appropriate guidance should be provided by the Supervisory Team to enable you to avoid any possible concern about plagiarism or the fabrication of research results.

e) Good practice in relation to [research data management](#), including the storage and retention of research data;

f) Constraints, other than time, which may affect the programme of work, such as costs and the need to design and build equipment and any ethical concerns;

g) An initial consideration of potential issues of confidentiality or intellectual property;

h) A programme of regular meetings between yourself and the Supervisory Team to monitor progress on the research and to review the details of the overall timetable for the programme of work, including who is responsible for arranging these;

i) The submission of written work and/or the presentation of seminar papers while the research is in progress and the possibility of presenting work at meetings of learned societies and/or of submitting it for publication.

j) If you have a formal sponsorship, the Supervisory Team and you should discuss terms and conditions of the sponsorship, to ensure they are understood.

4. You are expected to:
- Maintain regular contact with your Supervisory Team;
- To seek the advice of your Supervisory Team on the planning of work and other matters, including the use of suitable techniques;
- Present written work as appropriate;
- Raise any problems and difficulties to the attention of your Supervisory Team, which a student believes may have an impact on progress, which includes: domestic, social, financial or health factors.
- Manage and develop your PDP

5. Supervisory Teams are expected to:
- Maintain regular contact with you and provide advice on work planning;
- Request written work as appropriate and provide you with constructive comments and review practice-bases outputs/work (where appropriate);
- Take an active interest in your PDP and offer help and guidance in achieving development goals;

Approximately once a month, you will have a formal meeting with at least one member of your Supervisory Team to review progress and are required to record and maintain records of these supervisory meetings in NU Reflect.

There should be regular contact with each member of your Supervisory Team, at least on three occasions each year. At least one meeting each year should be held with the full Supervisory Team to discuss your progress, usually in advance of your Annual Progress Review.

7. You should submit a project proposal for approval (on the PGR CoP system) within three months of registering on the programme. This should address the practicality of any fieldwork and whether there are any constraints, dangers, or ethical concerns. Progression on the programme will be dependent upon acceptance of the project proposal by an impartial Project

Approval panel. Please note that before any fieldwork or outside study is conducted, an Outside Study Form must be submitted and approved by the Dean of Postgraduate Studies and ethical approval should be in place for the activities to be undertaken.

8. Progress on the programme will be formally monitored through an Annual Progress Review (APR) (note that programmes with an initial taught component will have alternative monitoring arrangements, at least initially, e.g., Integrated PhD, Professional Doctorates). Each year, you and your Supervisory Team will be required to submit a report on the progress of the research, which will be considered by an impartial APR Panel. (The APR forms are completed on the PGR CoP system.)

9. As part of the APR, you will be required to produce at least one substantial piece of work (e.g., literature review, experimental write-up, creative output), in order to help assess your ability to proceed successfully through the programme. You may also be required to make a presentation of this work to other staff and/or students.

10. The APR report forms completed by you and your Supervisor Team will be considered by an impartial APR panel, which will consider all the evidence, including the annual report from the Supervisory Team, and determine whether progress indicates that the research project will meet the standards for the award of the degree. The APR Panel will make one of the following recommendations, as well as providing a report on progress:
    1. Proceed – that performance is satisfactory, and you can proceed to the next stage.
    2. Proceed with Concerns – the APR Panel has some concerns, which you and the Supervisory Team should note, however the overall performance is satisfactory, and you can proceed to the next stage.
    3. Re-Assessment - that performance is unsatisfactory and that a further progress review should be held normally within two months to determine whether progress on the programme will be recommended;
    4. Downgrade to MPhil (for Doctor of Philosophy students only) - that performance is unsatisfactory and that a submission for a Master of Philosophy examination is recommended instead of a submission for a Doctor of Philosophy examination;
    5. Termination - that performance is unsatisfactory and that no submission for a Master of Philosophy or Doctor of Philosophy examination is recommended. You will not be permitted to continue as a registered student for either degree and registration will be terminated.

All recommendations are subject to approval by the Dean of Postgraduate Studies.

11. If at any stage throughout the period of study you feel that the standard of supervision you are receiving is inadequate or you have been unable to establish an effective working relationship with a Supervisor/Supervisory Team, these issues should first be raised with the Supervisory Team, Director of Postgraduate Studies/ PGR Co-ordinator/ or Head of Academic Unit. If it has not been possible to resolve these difficulties, a PGR student should contact the relevant Graduate School or Dean of Postgraduate Studies for advice and mediation. A PGR student may also consult directly with the Graduate School, the Faculty's Postgraduate Tutor, or Dean of Postgraduate Studies in confidence, without delay. The APR also provides a PGR student with an opportunity to raise any issues. If there are any issues a PGR student wishes to discuss, but not include in the progression report, the relevant Graduate School should be consulted in confidence for advice.

12. If at any stage throughout the period of study the Supervisory Team feel that your progress is unsatisfactory or that the standard of work generally is below that expected, they should inform you in writing of the reasons for this opinion and you shall be given the opportunity of an interview with the Supervisory Team. Following this notice and any interview, the Supervisory Team may decide to monitor progress and/or attendance; additionally, or alternatively, the Supervisory Team may require the submission of written work in addition to that already prescribed by their project proposal and plan. If your progress has not improved within the agreed period, the Supervisory Team shall notify the Head of Academic Unit and submit a report for review by an impartial APR Panel. The APR Panel will make a report to the Dean of Postgraduate Studies on the PGR CoP system. Alternatively, following the written notice and any interview, the Supervisory Team may immediately notify the Head of Academic Unit and submit a report for review by the APR Panel.

13. From time to time it will be necessary to deal with supervisory changes where colleagues are no longer available, though normally staff on study leave will continue their supervisory duties. Where it becomes impossible for an Academic Unit to continue to provide direct supervision – for example because of the departure of the only member of staff able to supervise a particular topic – the matter should be drawn to the attention of the Head of Academic Unit or Director of Postgraduate Study. You student should be consulted about any changes, and alternative supervisory arrangements should be put in place in good time and the Graduate School informed so that formal approval may be sought from the appropriate Dean of Postgraduate Studies.

14. You required to maintain high standards of academic conduct and to avoid conduct amounting to the fabrication of research results or plagiarism.
a) The fabrication of research results includes: claims, which cannot reasonably be justified, to have obtained specific or general results; false claims in relation to experiments, interviews, procedures or any other research activity; and the omission of statements in relation to data, results, experiments, interviews or procedures, where such omission cannot reasonably be justified.
b) Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of another person's ideas, words, or work. At one extreme, plagiarism is simply a form of cheating, such as where the whole or a significant part of work submitted towards an examination or degree is the unacknowledged work of another, copied slavishly from a book, research paper or electronic sources such as the internet. At the other extreme, plagiarism may occur accidentally, through poor standards of scholarship, or may concern

insignificant parts of submitted work.

c) If you are unclear as to what use may be made of the work of others in the field without raising concerns about plagiarism, then you should consult your Supervisory Team. In most cases, the adoption of appropriate standards of scholarship will avoid such concerns. The following general guidelines may assist (and further guidance is available here):

   i. Passages copied verbatim from the work of another must be enclosed in quotation marks. A full reference to the original source must be provided. The substitution of a few words in an otherwise verbatim passage will not obviate the need to use quotation marks and to provide a full reference.

   ii. You must always give due acknowledgement to the sources of ideas or data which are not their own and are not truly in the public domain (for example, because they are novel or controversial) or are not widely held or widely recognized.

   iii. Ideas and data which are your own or are truly in the public domain may be included without attribution but should be expressed in your own words.

   iv. You must take care to distinguish between your own ideas or work and those of others. Any ambiguity in such a distinction could give rise to a suspicion of plagiarism.

   v. Where your work is the result of collaborative research, you must take care to acknowledge the source of data, analysis or procedures which are not your own.

15. The retention of accurate and contemporaneous records of primary experimental data and results is of the utmost importance for the progress of academic enquiry. You should maintain these records in a form that will provide clear and unambiguous answers to questions concerning the validity of the data or the conduct of the work that might arise at a later date. Such questions can arise during the course of subsequent investigations by you, colleagues, and others; accurate contemporaneous records are invaluable when this happens. In addition, errors detected following publication of experimental or other research results could be mistaken for misconduct if you cannot provide an accurate record of the primary data. It is important that you and your work are protected from such misunderstanding.

The following guidelines will assist you in this regard:

a) Research data management policy and code of good practice

b) Records of primary experimental data and results should always be made using indelible materials. Pencils or other easily erasable materials must not be used. Where primary research data and results are recorded on audio or video tape (e.g., interviews), the tape housing should be labeled as set out in (d) below.

c) Complete and accurate records of experimental data and results should be made on the day they are obtained, and the date should be indicated clearly in the record. When possible, records should be made in a hard-backed, bound notebook in which the pages have been numbered consecutively.

d) Pages should never be removed from notebooks containing records of research data. If any alterations are made to records at a later date, they should be noted clearly as such, and the date of the alteration should be indicated.

e) Machine printouts, photographs, tapes, and other such records should always be labeled with the date and with an identifying reference number. This reference number should be clearly recorded in the notebook referred to above, along with other relevant details, on the day the record is obtained. If possible, printouts, photographs, tapes, and other such record should be affixed to the notebook. When this is not possible (e.g., for reasons of size or bulk), such records should be maintained in a secure location in the University for future reference. When a 'hard copy' of computer-generated primary data is not practicable, the data should be maintained in two separate locations within the University, on disk, tape, or another format.

f) When photographs and other such records have been affixed to the notebook, their removal at a later date for the purpose of preparing copies or figures for a thesis or other publication should be avoided. If likely to be needed, two copies of such records should be made on the day the record is generated. If this is not practicable, then the reason for removing the original copy and the date on which this is done should be recorded in the notebook, together with a replacement copy or the original if this can be re-affixed to the notebook.

g) Custody of all original records of primary research data must be retained by the principal investigator, who will normally be the supervisor of the research group, laboratory, or other forum in which the research is conducted. An investigator may make copies of the primary records for their own use, but the original records should not be removed from the custody of the principal investigator. The principal investigator is responsible for the preservation of these records for as long as there is any reasonable need to refer to them, and in any event for a minimum period of 10 years.

16. Your Supervisory Team will advise you on the thesis in general e.g. on content, presentation and organization, however, they will not act as a proofreader. While they may read all or part of the first draft of the thesis and offer advice, thereafter it is your responsibility to revise the thesis and to decide when to submit.

NOTE ON HEALTH AND SAFETY

17. Supervisory Teams are responsible for ensuring that you follow the agreed University, and where appropriate Academic Unit, safety policy and procedures. Full details of the University's safety policy are available on the University's Occupational Health and Safety Service (OHSS) webpages and from the Academic Unit's designated Safety Officer.

Good Practice for Research Students

Where reference is made to any named University role, such references are to be read as including reference to their nominees.

These guidelines use Academic Unit as an overarching term for School and Institute.

Introduction

While the knowledge and skills that you gained as an undergraduate and/or in studying for a taught Master's degree have given you a background in your subject and perhaps some experience of and insight into the process of research, they may not necessarily have equipped you to successfully study for a research degree. As Salmon (1992: 51) has put it:

> *'Unlike a certificate, a diploma, a Bachelor's or a [taught] Master's degree, a [research degree] does not merely entail the consideration of already existing work within a pre-arranged structure but demands the creation of a personal project. To undertake [a research degree] is therefore to define oneself as having a contribution to make to the understanding of the area concerned.'*

In seeking to make that contribution, you will have the advice, encouragement, and support of your Supervisory Team, of academic colleagues in the field, and of your fellow postgraduates, but ultimately the responsibility is yours. You may have to create the project; you will certainly have to undertake the research; you have to write it up as a dissertation or thesis; you have to complete on time and submit; normally in the case of a Master's degree and certainly in the case of a Doctorate, you will have to defend your work in an oral examination; and if you do all of these things to the satisfaction of your examiners, you will be awarded the degree.

The purpose of these guidelines is to assist you to reflect on good practice in studying for a research degree. The guidelines are not intended to be prescriptive or exhaustive, just to indicate what has been identified in the literature and elsewhere as good practice.

The guidelines attempt to set out good practice in:

1.   Establishing and maintaining a good relationship with your Supervisory Team
2.   Approaching a research degree
3.   Preparing for research
4.   Where appropriate, choosing a topic
5.   Producing an initial research proposal and plan
6.   Writing regularly
7.   Dealing with academic problems
8.   Dealing with non-academic problems
9.   Reviewing the progress of the research
10.   Framing your thesis
11.   Writing your thesis
12.   Preparing for examination
13.   Publishing, networking, and developing your career.

1. Establishing and Maintaining a Good Relationship with Your Supervisory Team

Your relationship with your Supervisory Team is crucial to the success of the research project, and you need to start it off well and maintain it over time. As Cryer (2001 p58) has put it:

> *'The relationship between a research student and a supervisor can be a precious thing. Supervisors and research students work closely together over a number of years. Mutual trust and respect should develop, along with a working relationship that can continue, as between equals, long after the completion of the research degree. It is in your own interests as a research student to develop and nurture this relationship. At the very least, only a highly unusual student successfully completes a research degree if the relationship with the supervisor is poor.'*

Starting off well involves, firstly, making an early appointment to see your Supervisory Team in the first few days after your arrival; secondly, being clear about your respective roles and responsibilities; and thirdly establishing ground rules to govern your future relationship.

Until you have met with your Supervisory Team, it is not possible to even begin the preliminary work on the project. While it can sometimes seem that, with one, two, or three years stretching ahead, the matter is not urgent, in reality, the time soon passes, and it is vital to meet with your Supervisory Team as soon as possible.

At the meeting, your Supervisory Team will welcome you and, in many cases, devote at least some time to discussing your respective roles in the relationship so that you both know what to expect of each other. This is vital because, as Delamont *et al.* (1997, p 14) have put it:

> *'Relationships [between supervisors and students] have to be worked at and discussed, because most of the later problems stem from a failure to set out the expectations that both parties have for the relationship.'*

In general terms, supervisory support can include:

♦   Assistance with the choice of topic;

- Critical and constructive feedback on the work produced;
- Advice on the sources or literature used;
- Guidance on the methodology or techniques used and the approach to data collection;
- Discussion of evidence and results;
- Reading drafts and commenting on issues of substance.

Supervisors will not:
- undertake the actual research itself
- write or significantly re-draft papers or chapters
- conduct a detailed proofread of the thesis

In pointing out that it is up to you to do these things, the Supervisory Team is not being difficult, but realistic; a research degree is an award for successfully completing a personal research project, and for that to be the case you have to do the research, write it up, and make sure that the spelling, grammar, and punctuation are correct.

There are different models of Supervisory Team within the University. In joint supervision, the supervisory responsibilities are shared equally between members of the Supervisory Team. In other styles of supervision, different members of the Supervisory Team may have different roles. There may be, for example, a lead supervisor and a co-supervisor responsible for a smaller element of the planned research; or a lead supervisor and an advisor responsible for, and able to deal with, general and pastoral responsibilities. Since arrangements may vary the Supervisory Team must agree a clear distribution of responsibilities at the outset of the research and update this if arrangements change. It is important for the student to be aware of who will 'lead' on which aspects of the research project.

As well as having clear expectations about your respective roles, it is also important that you and your Supervisory Team discuss ground rules for working together. These might be as below:

You agree to: ♦ turn up on time for supervisions and give as much notice as possible of cancellations ♦ be properly prepared for your supervisions ♦ write regularly and share the draft materials/creative practice output ♦ maintain the highest standards of academic conduct, as set out in section 14 of the University's *Guidelines for Research Students and Supervisors* ♦ maintain regular contact with your Supervisory Team, particularly when studying outside the University ♦ undertake the tasks agreed to the best of your ability within the allotted time
Your Supervisory Team agree to: ♦ hold regular supervisions and give as much notice as possible of cancellations ♦ review promptly work or creative outputs ♦ provide written feedback
All of you agree to: ♦ treat supervision in a professional way with an agenda/agreed structure ♦ keep records of supervisions detailing what was discussed, what targets were agreed, and when they were to be achieved by, ideally in NU Reflect

Of course, as with any relationship, that with your Supervisory Team has to be worked at and maintained over time. In the early days, you are likely to be heavily dependent upon your Supervisory Team as you begin to find your feet in research. Once you have found your feet, your Supervisory Team will expect you to become more independent, and your relationship should develop into a dialogue in which you engage in academic debate on a basis of increasing equality. By the time you are nearing completion, you will come to know more about the work than your Supervisory Team but will still be dependent upon their expertise to advise whether the research project has reached the stage at which it should be submitted for the degree or whether further research and/or re-writing is required.

It happens that, occasionally, what should be the natural transition from dependence to relative independence does not transpire, either because the student remains over-dependent upon the supervisors, or the latter is unwilling to 'let go'. Because of these possibilities, it is useful, over the course of a research degree, for you and your Supervisory Team to discuss your evolving relationship at regular intervals. This gives the Supervisory Team a chance to flag to you that they think that you are more than ready to spread your wings and fly alone, or you the chance to ask for more space to take the research in your preferred direction.

Very rarely, research students find that they are unable to work effectively with their supervisors, and the relationship is in danger of breaking down. (See Section 11 of the Guidelines for Research Students and Supervisors for more information.)

Reviewing Practice

- Are you clear about what you can expect of your Supervisory Team and what they can expect from you?
- Have you established ground rules for your future professional relationship?
- Do you have arrangements for regularly reviewing your relationship with your Supervisory Teams?

2. Approaching a Research Degree

In order to be awarded a research degree, you have to satisfy the examiners that you have fulfilled the requirements for that degree as laid down in the University's regulations and as applied in your own subject. It is vital that, at the very start of your studies, you are aware of what those requirements are to avoid latter errors. As one of the research students interviewed by Delamont *et al.* (1997 p 16) in their study of PhD students put the matter:

'A lot of mistakes I've made are the result of not asking questions and people not putting me right. They presume I must know…I didn't know the PhD was meant to be an argument… [that] it's meant to say something. I thought it was one of those old-fashioned monographs, a collection of information. When I was an undergraduate I used to think a PhD was one of those articles you read in the journals, a 10,000 word article, I used to think they were PhDs.'

Clearly, if the student had clearly understood from the start what a PhD was, then these mistakes could have been avoided.

It is therefore worth spending some time looking at what will be the end product of your studies. Your starting point should be to unpack the University's Regulations and, where appropriate, any specific programme regulations for your research degree. You should read these carefully and, preferably, discuss them with your Supervisory Team so that you have a clear idea of what they mean.

While all research degrees have to meet the University and, where appropriate, the individual research degree programme requirements, they do this in very different ways, depending upon the discipline in which they are undertaken. It is therefore vital that you also have a clear understanding of what the relevant research dissertation or thesis in your discipline is like at the start of your studies. Your Supervisory Team should recommend you look at a couple of theses in the same or in cognate areas to your own, and you would be well advised to do this and discuss key issues – for example in the case of PhD theses what made them original or how much of the thesis was publishable – in a supervision.

3. Preparing for Research

Most new research students naturally perceive research to be as it is written up in articles and books, which portray it as a seamless unrolling of (for example), theory, hypothesis, method, data collection, data analysis, results, and conclusions. But the published account is only the visible part of the iceberg; beneath it lies the nine-tenths of blood, sweat, toil, and tears, including the ideas that were discarded, the investigations that ended up in blind alleys, the correlations that were in the wrong direction, the experiments that gave negative results, and sometimes the sheer fluke that led to the substantive advance. Research can, for much of the time, be a messy, difficult, and frustrating process as any researcher, including your Supervisory Team, will tell you.

But you can minimize, if not eliminate, the frustrations of research by thorough preparation at the start. In particular, you can ensure that you are familiar with the resources available to support your project, that you are familiar with the processes of research in your discipline and that you are personally organized to undertake the project.

You need to be familiar with the resources available to support your research, both material and human. The former includes the library, centrally and locally provided computing facilities, and any specialized equipment needed for your project; the latter includes academic staff and fellow researchers and research students in your Academic Unit. You will be provided with opportunities to attend induction sessions relating to all these resources, and it is vital that you take advantage and make sure that you know what is available, how to access them, and how to use them in ways that are conducive to the health, safety, and welfare both of yourself and others. In the latter context, you should read about the University's Health and Safety Policy and the relevant Academic Unit health and safety policy and, if appropriate discuss this with your Supervisory Team.

You also need to be familiar with what is involved in the research process and with good practice in doing research in your field, including the ethical issues that should be addressed. You must find out about the research training programme and attend; this is your opportunity to be informed about what is involved in research in your discipline by academic staff who are not only knowledgeable about the processes of research but also about the practice. As well as attending faculty events and, where appropriate, training programmes in your Academic Unit, you will also find it helpful to read through one or more of the general texts about research (see for example Cryer 2000; Leonard 2001; Phillips and Pugh 2000; Wisker 2001) or ones relating to specific disciplines where your Supervisory Team may be able to help with references.

As well as being familiar with the resources and the research process, you also need to be well-organized personally in terms of time, working conditions, and research materials.

With regard to time, if you are a full-time postgraduate research student you probably have more control over how you

spend your time than at any other period in your working life. While this can be exhilarating, it can also, as Welsh (1979 p 33) has put it, 'be all too easy for the postgraduate to spend his [her] time pottering about' and fall behind in meeting what are tight deadlines to complete the project. If, for this reason, time management is vital to full-time students, this is even more the case with part-time ones who may well be combining a job and/or a family with their research. For this reason, it is well-worth adopting explicit time management techniques (see for example Cryer 2000 pp 91-106, Graham and Grant 1997 pp 42-45).

With regard to working conditions, the demands of research are, or can be, very intense, and you need an appropriate working environment in which you can read, reflect, think, evaluate, and write. You need to establish what facilities are available in your Academic Unit or, if you undertake work at home, create a suitable space.

With regard to research materials, this covers both data and results generated during the research and sources such as books, articles, papers, and other theses. In terms of data and results and the outcome of practice-led research, particularly in experimental research, it is of the utmost importance that these are recorded and maintained in such a way that they can vouch for the accuracy and authenticity of your research. You must read, and follow to the letter, the University's requirements for the retention and storage of data as set out in Section 15 of its *Guidelines for Research Students and Supervisors*.

In terms of other sources, it is important that you index and store them so that they are immediately accessible when needed – there is nothing more frustrating than being in full flow writing up a piece of work and then being unable to find the source for that seminal point which, you have just realized, will tie the chapter together. You should assume that anything that you read may well find its way into the dissertation or thesis, take full details of the reference (preferably in a database organized in terms of whichever referencing system you will use for the final work), and put any materials into a filing system with an index which makes it easy to retrieve.

Last, but not least, there is the obvious point that, where data and or sources are stored electronically, they must be backed up with a second copy kept in another place. Research can be frustrating enough without losing weeks or sometimes months of work through failure to back up a file.

Reflecting on Practice
- Are you fully aware of the range of resources available to support your research project? Have you developed the skills to use them effectively?
- Are you aware of health, safety, and welfare policies?
- Do you understand what is entailed in the research process in your subject?
- Are you managing your time effectively?
- Do you have adequate facilities for your research?
- Do your arrangements for retaining and storing data meet the University's requirements?
- Have you organized your references and sources so that you can access them quickly?
- Do you regularly back up your work?
- Do you keep the copies in another place? Are you keeping records of and or documenting practice-led outputs?

---

4. Choosing a Topic

In many cases, and particularly in engineering and the sciences, students are often recruited to research a particular topic which has been pre-defined by the Supervisory Team. But, occasionally in these fields and frequently in others, students are recruited on the basis of their interest in working in a broadly defined area of the subject, which has to be narrowed down sooner or later to a specific topic. This can be a very difficult time for research students; as one of the research students interviewed by Delamont *et al.* (1997 p 27) said about their search for a topic:

'…the whole thing seemed very daunting, you don't know where your niche is, or even if there is one for you.'

So, you can spend valuable time searching for a niche and then, when you think that you have found one, the topic turns out to be far too ambitious. So, you find yourself thrashing around in a seeming intellectual vacuum again, and so it goes on.

It is important to remember that this is by no means abnormal and that you should receive strong support at this stage from your Supervisory Team. What they might do (or what you can do yourself) is to take an apparently promising project and subject it to the six key tests:
(i)   Is it worth doing?
(ii) In principle, could it be done?
(iii) Could it be done within the time available?
(iv) Do you have, or could you acquire, the knowledge and skills to do it within that time?
(v)   Would it sustain your interest?
(vi) If you did complete it successfully, would it meet the requirements for the research degree?

It may take several iterations before both you and your Supervisory Team are confident that you have a topic which will

meet these key tests, and which will give you a starting point for your research. It should, however, be noted that it is only a starting point; as the research develops it may change, and the final topic may be different from that with which you started out. This is by no means abnormal, but it is important, in consultation with your Supervisory Team, to keep track of the evolution of the topic and ensure that the result will still pass the six tests.

> **Reflecting on Practice**
> - Does your topic fulfil the six tests set out above?
> - Have you discussed this with your supervisors?
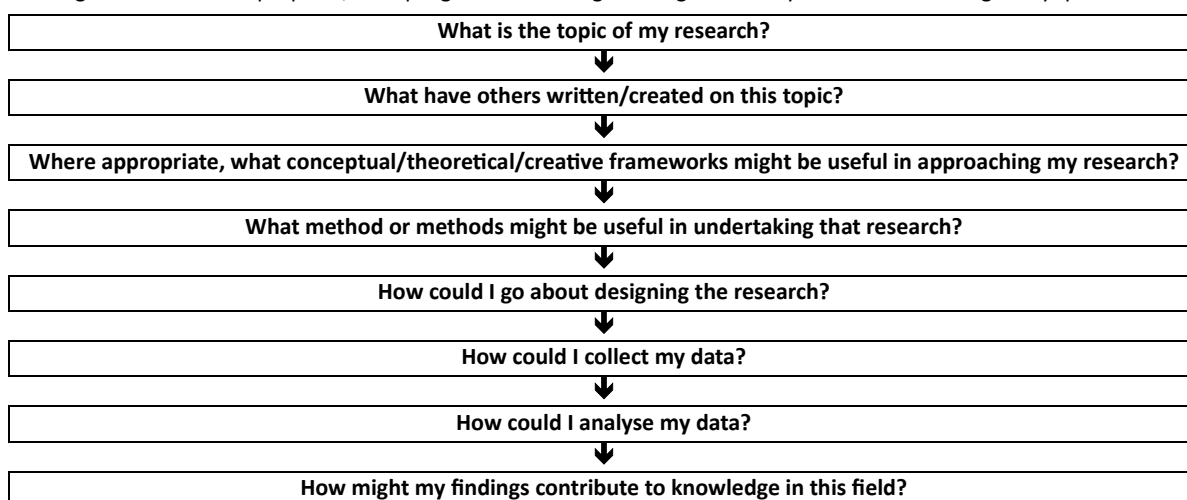> - If it has changed, does the revised topic still meet the tests?

5. Producing your Research Proposal and Plan for Project Approval

It is a requirement of the University's *Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes* that you should, in conjunction with their Supervisory Team, produce and agree your research proposal and plan for formal project approval within the first three months of registering on your research degree programme. The project proposal, plan and Supervisory Team will be considered by a Project Approval Panel, and then the Head of Academic Unit, prior to formal approval by the Dean of Postgraduate Studies.

In some cases, the research proposal may have been pre-approved (e.g., in a Research Council application), but it should still be submitted together with a project plan and confirmed Supervisory Team arrangements to the Project Approval Panel to ensure that the project is achievable within the timescales allowed and to confirm that sufficient resources are available within your Academic Unit.

At their simplest, research proposals and plans set out what research students are proposing to do in their research projects, and when they are proposing to do it by.

With regard to a research proposal, a simple guide to drafting one might be to try and address the eight key questions of:

What is the topic of my research?

⬇

What have others written/created on this topic?

⬇

Where appropriate, what conceptual/theoretical/creative frameworks might be useful in approaching my research?

⬇

What method or methods might be useful in undertaking that research?

⬇

How could I go about designing the research?

⬇

How could I collect my data?

⬇

How could I analyse my data?

⬇

How might my findings contribute to knowledge in this field?

In addition, there may be specific guidelines from your Academic Unit and/or your Supervisory Team which should be followed in writing a research proposal. The draft proposal should then be shown to, and discussed with, your Supervisory Team and amended in accordance with their comments before submitting your research proposal and plan for formal Project Approval.

With regard to an initial research plan, this involves unpacking what the tasks will be and assigning target time values to them which will enable you to complete on time. So, for example, for a three-year PhD in the social sciences, the initial research plan could be as below:

Month	Research tasks	Writing tasks
1	Reading around the research topic	Mini-reports on aspects of the research topic – identify a possible academic contribution
2	Narrowing down the research questions	Short-list of questions
3	Obtain Project Approval	Outline research proposal and plan/timetable
4-5	More detailed scoping and reviewing of literature	Literature evaluation
6	Reading on concepts, methods, and techniques	
7	Finalising concepts, methods, and techniques to be applied	Full research design

8	Preparation of pilot study (if relevant)	
9	Administration of pilot	
10-11	Preparation of main study	Evaluation of pilot study
12-24	Data collection	Field work reports
	Data coding	Reports
	Data analysis	Analytical reports
	Data interpretation	Preliminary conclusions
25-31	Reworking previous chapters of thesis	
32		First full draft of thesis
31-34		Revised draft of thesis
36	Submit	

Once you have an initial research plan, then it is important to discuss it with your Supervisory Team, check that it is realistic in terms of the allocation of time to task, and if necessary, amend it.

It should be stressed that, as with the topic, both the initial research proposal and the plan may well be subject to change over the course of the research as the focus perhaps changes as do activities and in consequence the timings. This is normal and not, in itself, a cause for concern – the proposal and the plan are intended as a flexible framework and not as a cage. But it is important that, at regular intervals during the research project, you and your Supervisory Team review the proposal and the plan and update them to reflect the evolution of the research project. This should help you to keep track of where the project has been and where it is going and, most crucially, whether you may need to step up a gear to keep the project to time.

> **Reflecting on Practice**
> - Have you, in conjunction with your Supervisory Team, agreed an initial research proposal and a research plan?
> - Do you review them regularly with a view to updating them and keeping the research project on track?

6. Writing Regularly

As you begin to make progress with your research, you should put pen to paper as soon as possible for four reasons. Firstly, it enables you to keep a record of what you have done from the start to serve as a basis for later work. Secondly, it encourages you to reflect on what you have done so far and think about where you will go from here. Thirdly, it gives your Supervisory Team the chance to see what has been done, and to advise you about how to proceed. This is crucial, and it is a University requirement, that research students following programmes that will take more than one year of study should produce at least one substantial piece of written or creative work in their first year. Fourthly, it gets you into the discipline of academic writing at an early stage rather than leaving it until later when it is more difficult to acquire.

But, in some cases, students are reluctant to produce written work. Research (see for example Graham and Grant 1997, Delamont *et al*. 1997; Murray 2002) suggests that there are two major factors which constrain research students from writing. One relates primarily to lack of experience of writing regularly at all, of producing longish pieces of work, or of producing academic writing with its demands of precision, clarity, organization, and explicit structure. The other factor is confidence. Whereas, as undergraduates or postgraduates, students outlined and discussed the work of other people, as research students their writing becomes, or should become, a presentation of their own views, ideas, thoughts, etc. This can leave students feeling very exposed and, particularly if their standard is published work, very dissatisfied with what they have achieved. For these reasons, they may be psychologically reluctant to write.

One way of ensuring that you write regularly is, as Blaxter *et al*. (1996* pp 5-59) have suggested, to keep a research diary on a daily basis recording what you have done, time spent on it, analysis, and speculation. This gets you into the habit of writing regularly, recording, and reflecting, and can provide a useful basis upon which to construct longer pieces of work.

In constructing longer pieces, you can make what may seem a Herculean task more manageable by breaking it up into smaller ones. So, initially, you might write a one-page abstract of the chapter setting out its aim (purpose), content (what it would cover), and possible conclusions (what it would add). With that thought through and discussed, the next stage would be to write a synopsis fleshing out the abstract and setting out headings and sub-headings to be used. Then, with a framework established, you can fill it in piece by piece until you have a draft chapter.

In order to improve your academic writing, you can read books on the subject (for example: Dunleavy 2003; Murray 2002), ask your Supervisory Team for examples of such writing from the literature in the field, or even pair up with another research student who will undertake to read drafts and suggest improvements in return for similar support from you for their efforts.

In terms of overcoming psychological reluctance to write, you can, as Murray (2002) has suggested, 'free-write', i.e., write it down as it comes without any attempt to structure or present it for an academic audience. This takes the pressure off you and although, at the time, you may feel that it is worthless, you can be surprised to return to it later and find that it does take you forward.

Additionally, and provided that you warn your Supervisory Team beforehand that it is a free-written draft, it can be useful to show it to your Supervisory Team and gain some feedback. Supervisory Teams are aware from their own experiences that virtually all research starts-off very rough-hewn and will allow for this, and of course most would prefer a 'messy' draft of a chapter from you rather than nothing at all.

It may be noted that, while writing is a necessary task for all research students, it is inherently a more difficult one for students whose first language is not English and who have perhaps been educated within different styles of academic discourse. Your Supervisory Team may be able to assist by discussing examples of writing with you, your faculty may offer a programme and, In-Sessional English language courses are available, which can provide support with your academic writing in English.

> **Reviewing Practice**
> - Have you started writing as early as possible in the research project?
> - Are you writing regularly?
> - Are you showing your written work to your Supervisory Team?
> - Would you find it useful to have some assistance with academic writing in English?

7. Dealing with Academic Problems

While you can be well prepared for research, it is frequently the case that, at some point during the project, you experience academic problems of one kind or another. Common ones include:

- **Drifting from the topic**
  As the research progresses, highways and byways of new exploration open up which just have to be investigated because they could be vital. So, you become lost in the maze of possibilities and unable to establish where you should be at that stage of the project.

- **Difficulties with the methodology/methods**
  Particularly in the arts and humanities and social science, the section of your thesis on methodology/methods can require you to grapple with a whole range of unfamiliar philosophical, theoretical, empirical and experimental problems, and it can be frustrating to try and identify, tackle, and resolve these, particularly when you want to undertake the substantive research.

- **Problems with the substantive research**
  You can expect a range of problems to occur as you undertake the substantive research – evidence that you can't obtain as easily as you hoped, experiments that don't work, apparently promising lines of enquiry which turn out to be dead ends, simulations which don't run properly – the list is endless.

- **Drowning in data**
  You collect masses and masses of data, start playing around with them, and find all sorts of interesting things that can be investigated in and around the topic and then even outside it. As a result, you are unable to discriminate between what to concentrate upon in your research project and what to leave out.

- **Unexpected results**
  With the substantive research accomplished, you find results which you did not expect – the evidence which is contradictory, the experiments which yield negative results, the cast-iron assumptions which are apparently falsified, the simulation results which defy predictions, variables which behave badly etc. etc.

If you hit problems of these kinds or others, it is important that you are not afraid to admit, not least to yourself, that you are in difficulties. Research students tend to have previously sailed easily through undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes and it can, to say the least, be a shock to be brought shuddering to a halt while engaging in research. Students may find it hard to admit this for reasons which Atkins (1996* p 2) has termed 'Top Gun' syndrome whereby:

> '...students are seen...as the best and the brightest. Significant academic achievement has led them to their current place. They are thus unable to admit faults or shortcomings for fear of 'showing themselves up' in the...academic community. It becomes better to struggle on with barely a clue about what is going on than to admit...that one does not know what is happening.'

If you have problems, you should acknowledge them secure in the recognition that this happens at one time or another to all researchers as well, i.e., it is all part and parcel of doing research.

In terms of resolving problems, you might start by trying to think through how you can overcome them yourself. If you feel that you are drifting aimlessly in terms of the topic, you might re-visit your research proposal and plan and re-assert the initial focus of the research; if methodology is a problem, look at other books or theses in the area for models of how to proceed; if one avenue of the substantive research has been blocked off, look for another; if you are drowning in data again go back to the research proposal and plan to re-focus the analysis; for unexpected results, see if there is a substantive

explanation – many important contributions to knowledge have come from the explanation of apparent inconsistencies.

You may also wish to consider sharing the problem with a fellow-research student, particularly perhaps one who is further on in their studies and who may be able to offer advice based on their own experience. Some Academic Units encourage such a collective approach to problem solving by pairing research students so that they can support each other. Alternatively, if you are part of a research group, it may be that one of your colleagues can assist.

You should, of course, ask for assistance from your Supervisory Team. As experienced researchers, they will be familiar with the problems of research both generally and in the specific subject area and should at least be able to help you to think through the problem and to suggest ways in which you might go about resolving it.

Reflecting on Practice
- What academic problems might you expect to meet during your research project?
- How would you go about resolving them?
- What sources of support are available to help you resolve academic difficulties?

---

8. Dealing with Non-Academic Problems

As well as experiencing academic problems of one kind or another, research students may also experience a range of non-academic problems arising from their situation. Three common ones are self-doubt, isolation, and boredom.

You may, particularly in the early stages of a research degree, experience bouts of self-doubt. These can arise from the situation of a research student; as one of the respondents to Delamont *et al's* (1997: p 27) survey put the matter:

> '…you are suspended between a student who just absorbs things and an academic who produces [them], and that [leads to] all kinds of paranoias or neuroses.'

Self-doubt often takes the form of anxiety about whether you will be able to make a successful transition from being primarily an absorber of, to being a contributor to knowledge, and it can be associated with a reluctance to write or at least to submit written work to your supervisors in case it is 'not good enough'.

It is worth noting that such self-doubt is not uncommon, and that dealing with it is part and parcel of the experience of being a research student. In terms of how to deal with it, the key thing is to write or make– no matter how mundane you think that the piece or chapter is – and show the work to your Supervisory Team. While you are, of course, bound up in the research, and are often unable to judge the contribution that you are making – in time even the most original insights come to seem commonplace to their creators – your Supervisory Team have a greater degree of objectivity. They are far better placed to ascertain how you are progressing, and to offer guidance and support for your work.

As well as self-doubt, one of the most consistent findings of the literature on research students over the past three decades (see for example: Becher 1994 143; Cryer 2000; Delamont *et al.* 1997; Leonard 2001; Phillips and Pugh 2000; Rudd 1975; Rudd 1985) is that research students can feel isolated.

At school and as undergraduates or postgraduates on taught programmes, you study a common syllabus in the company of your peers. But, as a postgraduate research student, unless you are working on a group project or in a large and active research group, you find yourself working on your own project and often without the company of others. This can lead to intellectual isolation – you are the only one in the world working on this topic – and social isolation at the workplace as you plod away on your own in the library or the laboratory. Here, Cryer's (2000 p 41) advice is pertinent:

> '...you should put effort into warding off isolation. You need to be on the constant lookout for people who both know enough about your field to be able to discuss it meaningfully and have the time to do so.
> You may find such people in your family, your social group, or in your department... However, if you have to go outside into a national or an international arena, so be it. Overcoming isolation or potential isolation must be a major objective for all research students.'

A third common feature of the life of the postgraduate student which has been identified in the literature (see Phillips and Pugh, 2000, pp 77-78) is the tendency towards boredom. This tends to happen when you are well into your research, and have reached a stage where, as Cryer (2000 p171) puts it, '*your work genuinely is excessively routine and monotonous*'. So, you're churning it out day after day, and you become bored with the whole thing and ripe for distractions which will take your mind.

There is no simple neat solution to this problem – if you want to complete you have to continue the research – but it can be beneficial to either do something else (write or re-write an earlier chapter) or even, with the approval of your Supervisory Team, take a short break.

While these, of course, are non-academic problems arising out of being a research student, you may encounter other difficulties of a personal, social, and financial character that have a bearing upon your research. You should certainly alert your Academic Supervisor, who is your personal tutor, to any such difficulties that you may be experiencing, or if you feel

this is inappropriate, then you also have access to the full range of University support services outlined in Part One of this Handbook.

9.   Reviewing the Progress of the Research

One of the key tasks of research students is to review the progress of their research. This involves variously self-review, formal reviews with your Supervisory Team, and participating in Academic Unit and University review procedures.

Research students are under considerable pressure variously from sponsors, the University, and Academic Units to complete their degrees within the allotted time. Your chances of completing on time or as near as possible will be significantly enhanced if you treat the research as a project and actively manage it to meet the deadline. The skills that you need to do this may well be imparted in your research training programme or, if not, you can consult one of the texts, e.g. (Cryer 2000; Graham and Grant 1997; Phillips and Pugh 2000).

Either way, you should find that one of the critical recommendations is that you should treat your research plan not as an exercise to be completed at the start of the project and then filed away, but as a 'live' document to be reviewed and updated frequently and regularly over the duration of the project. You should, then, consult it regularly; update it in the light of your progress to date; consider the implications for the completion of the research; and, as far as possible, act to keep the project on track. It may be noted that such self-review will not only help you to finish your research degree as soon as possible, but also enhance your project management skills and your attractiveness to employers.

As well as self-reviewing, the University requires that you also formally review your progress with your full Supervisory Team at least once per academic year, normally in advance of your Annual Progress Review. It is important that you treat these supervisions in a professional way as an opportunity to discuss the progress of your research with your Supervisory Team and that you keep a record of what was discussed and what action points were identified.

As well as the Student and Supervisory Team report on progress submitted through the PGR CoP System, Annual Progress Panels will also have formal requirements, usually involving the submission and/or presentation of pieces of work as part of the progress review. It is worth noting that, while these review procedures are intended to assure the University that your progress is satisfactory, they are also intended to be helpful to you. They give you the opportunity to gain feedback on your work from experienced researchers in your Academic Unit.

> **Reflecting on Practice**
> * Do you have a strategy for personally reviewing the progress of your research project at regular intervals?
> * Do you approach supervisions to review your progress in a business-like way?

10. Framing Your Thesis

After spending the best part of one, two or three years of your life training to do research and then undertaking the actual research for your project, you are then faced with what is the last major task of producing your thesis. This task is absolutely crucial because, as Cryer (2000 p177) has put it:

'The thesis is the culmination of [the] research student's entire research programme, and it is on the thesis that he or she will be examined and judged.'

This, of course, raises the question of 'what is a thesis?' While there is no objective definition of a thesis and there are variations between what is expected in different disciplines, one common factor is, as Barnes cited Blaxter *et al*. (1996* p 27) has put it, that:

'A [thesis] is far more than a passive record of your research and generally involves presenting an argument or point of view. In other words, it must say something and be substantiated with reasoned argument and evidence.'

So, producing your thesis involves more than throwing everything you have done into the pot and hoping for the best; it has to involve a case or point of view and be substantiated with reasoned argument and evidence.

This can be difficult to do because, to put it at its simplest, often we cannot see the wood (the thesis) for the trees (the mass of writings creative work and materials we have accumulated over the course of the research). So, in order to produce a thesis, we need to know the shape of the wood, i.e., a framework for our thesis.

There are many ways of developing a framework for your thesis, and it is worth consulting your Supervisory Team about suitable approaches. A practice-based PhD student should consult subject-specific guidelines as there is a different relationship between the creative work and the critical, contextual writing (written element) than there is in a traditional PhD by thesis. One possibility suggested in the literature (see for example Cryer 2000; Taylor 2002) is for you to think of yourself as an explorer who has undertaken a journey and who is writing a guidebook. As the author of the guidebook, you need to explain:

- where you started from
- what other guidebooks you read

- why you decided to undertake the journey
- how you decided to approach the journey
- the route you decided to follow
- for the Doctoral degrees, the original discoveries you made on the way
- where you arrived at the end of the journey
- how it differed from the starting point
- where you would go from here in future

You can literally map this on a couple of sides of paper, and then re-trace the journey. At each stage you need to ask the questions; What is it vital to say to take the reader on to the next stage?; What it is important but not vital?; What is neither important nor vital? By this process, if necessary, repeated several times, you should be able to distil the essence of the thesis (the vital) and separate it from the important and the relatively unimportant.

With, hopefully, a stripped-down and clear route, you can then begin to fill in each stage of the journey in terms of key topics which you have to address, which you use to flesh out your map. You can then apply the same tests as above – are they vital, important, or neither – and go through a similar iterative process. Then, within the topics, this can be repeated with sub-topics until, eventually, you have a complete map of the thesis.

Such an approach has a number of advantages. Firstly, it gives you an overall framework for your thesis; secondly, it divides the writing into manageable tasks; thirdly, and vitally, it can be discussed with your Supervisory Team before writing up; fourthly it highlights the key things you need to bring out in terms of discoveries (originality), added knowledge and understanding (the differences between the start and end point), and future research in the area (where we go from here); and finally may translate into the structure for a thesis. So, for example, in the case of many PhDs, the translation is:

'Journey'		**Thesis**
Starting point	-	Introduction
Guidebooks	-	Literature review
Reasons	-	Trigger
Approach	-	Methodology
Route and discoveries	-	Substantive research chapters
Arrival	-	Analysis and results
Differences	-	Added knowledge
Future	-	Directions of research

11. Writing Your Thesis

Once you have established a basic framework, you still, of course, have to write the thesis. Here the three key issues to consider are; who am I writing for? (audience); how do I actually go about writing it? (drafting); how do I make sure that it reads well? (presentation).

A research thesis, like any other piece of writing, is a form of communication, and it is necessary to consider in advance the audience that you are addressing and how you might meet their needs. Here, Cryer (2000 p 178) has some good advice:

'The crucially important audience for theses are external examiners. Think of them as individuals who are exceptionally busy and grossly underpaid and who therefore have to read theses quickly. They will expect them to be well-structured and to be argued coherently to make the case for certain solutions to specific research problems. Irrelevancies will irritate, as will having to tease out meaning that research students should have extracted themselves. Think of them also as individuals who are very able and experienced in the general area, which means that the background material should be as concise as is consistent with showing that it is known.

'However, no external examiner can be an expert in your work. By the time you finalise your thesis, you and you alone are the world's expert. So the aspects that make your work significant and original and worthy of a PhD…need to be argued coherently; each step needs to be spelled out, the outcomes must be stated unambiguously, and all their implications identified and discussed in depth.'

So, for your examiners, the thesis needs to be:
    (i) well-structured
    (ii) argued coherently
    (iii) relevant
    (iv) concise in the literature review
    (v) expansive and detailed on areas in which the thesis makes a significant and original contribution to knowledge.
Clearly (i) to (iv) above apply to all research degrees, while (v) applies particularly to Doctoral degrees.
(i) and (iii) above clearly have a bearing on what you write;
(ii) has a bearing on what you include when you write, and

(iv) and (v) have a bearing on the proportion of the thesis taken up by each heading.

So, for example for Doctoral degrees, you should certainly not aim for half of your thesis to be taken up by the literature review, a further quarter by the methodology, and only a quarter for the original scholarship.

What it can be useful to do is to produce a rough distribution of how much should be devoted to what part of the thesis. Such a distribution, produced by the University of Warwick as a guideline for PhD students (cited Blaxter *et al*. 1996* p 217) are set out below:

	% of thesis
Introduction	10
Literature review	20
Methodology	15
Research findings	20
Discussion	20
Conclusions	5
Bibliography	10

While the percentages may vary in different cases, it is crucial to plan them with the needs of the audience in mind.

With the needs of your audience in mind, it is then possible to proceed to drafting. One of the (few) common factors in the research degree experience is that it almost always takes far longer to write up the thesis than had been planned. The reason for this is that, when we finally write up, we have finished the substance of the project and now have, or should have, the benefit of hindsight, which leads us to change, amend, and modify the draft. While this is an entirely legitimate and valuable part of a research degree – it is in fact learning from what we have done – it can result in considerable delays in producing a first rough draft.

You should then review this yourself. Here it can be very useful to look at the *Handbook for the Examiners of Research Degrees*, which sets out the criteria the Examiners will apply to your thesis. You should apply these then, if necessary, re-draft the thesis and ask your Supervisory Team for comments. Following that, you should re-draft in the light of their comments, review it again yourself, and so the cycle continues until a final draft emerges.

As well as meeting requirements for the substance of the research degree, it is also vital that the draft is well-presented, for two reasons. Firstly, while good presentation cannot rescue a poor thesis, it may help a marginal one, i.e., the examiners may be inclined to take a more charitable view if the thesis is easily readable and as far as possible, error-free. Secondly, inadequacies in expression and errors in spelling and grammar are one of the most common reasons for the referral of theses, i.e., for these being accepted subject to minor corrections. It can be extremely galling to have to spend a month or two correcting elementary mistakes and errors, not just to you but to your internal examiner who will be landed with the task of checking that your errors have been corrected before the degree can be awarded. **It is important that you get this right before you go further.**

You should:
- ensure that you have expressed yourself as clearly and concisely as possible (reading out loud can often help to identify over-long sentences and unnecessary padding)
- check the grammar and the spelling (it is your responsibility to do this and not that of your Supervisory Team)
- check that you have the right words (spell checkers can tell you whether the word is spelled correctly but not if it is the right word in the first place)
- check the footnotes/endnotes, quotations, citations etc. both in the text and in the bibliography (remember, your examiners will check a sample)

Given that many of us can be blind to our own deficiencies and errors, it can be very helpful to ask a friend with some expertise in the area to comment on the comprehensibility of the draft and to also ask them to check it for errors.

With this done, it is back to your Supervisory Team for a final re-read and, hopefully, the green light to go ahead and submit the thesis for examination. If your Supervisory Team still have reservations, you can still submit – ultimately it is your decision – but you would be well advised to consider this very carefully for fear of falling at the final fence.

In preparation for submission you should check the University's Rules for Form of Theses and Submission of Work of Higher Degrees regulations and Guidelines for Submission of Theses.

Reviewing Practice
- Are you clear about the audience for which you are writing?
- Have you decided upon an appropriate balance between the lengths of the various parts of the thesis?

> - Have you reviewed your thesis using the Handbook for Examiners?
> - Has your Supervisory Team seen the draft?
> - Have you taken their comments on board?
> - Have you asked their advice about submission?
> - Have you checked the University's requirements for thesis submission?

12. Preparing for Examination

Following submission of the final title of the thesis, examiners are appointed, normally one internal and one external examiner. In the case of Master's research degrees, the process of examination normally involves the assessment of the dissertation or thesis by the examiners and in the case of Doctoral and MPhil degrees, University regulations require an oral examination, i.e., a viva.

Oral examinations are comparatively rare in undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes; in most Universities, they are only held if there is some doubt about the class of degree to be awarded, although in some they are mandatory for the award of a First.

But, of course, oral examinations are compulsory for the award of the Doctoral degrees. The implication of this is, of course, that candidates starting PhDs/MDs often have little or no experience of oral examinations. While they gain some by defending their work at progress reviews, this is still a far cry from the full rigour of a formal oral examination.

This might be of little consequence if, as in many other European countries, the oral examination was a public affair, and they could go along and experience what happened. However, the British oral examination rarely gives access to people other than the examiners. Again, this might not matter if there were published guidelines for the oral examination a, but this is not always the case. So, as Burnhan (1997 p 30) has put it '...*what occurs in the lengthy "judgely huddle"* from which postgraduates emerge either victorious or distraught is a mystery'.

In consequence, as Delamont *et al.* (1997 p 148) have written:

> 'The [PhD] student may well fear and dread the [viva] examination.
> Even when the student is outstandingly competent, and however excellent the thesis may be, the process of examination is a stressful one...most [candidates] feel worried by the indeterminacy of [the viva].'

However, you can prepare for your viva in six main ways.

1. It is important to understand what oral examinations are about, i.e., their purposes, procedures, and outcomes. These are explained in detail in the University's *Handbook for Examiners of Research Degrees* and you will find it helpful to discuss these with your Supervisory Team.
2. You need, of course, to be thoroughly familiar with your thesis. While this may seem strange since you wrote it, it is amazing how quickly you can forget what you have written, and you do need to re-read it. Often, you will find typos and other errors you have missed earlier – if so, list them and take them with you to the oral examination to show your examiners that you are aware of them.
3. You need to keep up to date with the literature/practice in your area in the hiatus between submission and the viva. If a key paper comes out during that period, your examiners may ask you about it and about any implications for your work, and it obviously creates a good impression if you are aware of it.
4. As well as being prepared for questions concerning new literature, it can also be useful to anticipate the sorts of questions you might be asked and at least think about how you will answer them. There are some fairly obvious general ones (e.g., 'Why did you do this topic?' 'Why did you study here?' 'What would you have done differently if you were doing the research now?' 'What do you think the implications of your work are for the field?') for which you can prepare.
5. You can ask your Supervisory Team to arrange a mock oral examination in which colleagues who are experienced in examining question you on key parts of the thesis and afterwards give you feedback upon your performance. Such an opportunity is invaluable in enabling you to prepare themselves both intellectually and psychologically for what is to come.
6. On the day itself, you need to be prepared for the experience. You should go to the oral examination as well-rested and fed as possible, and appropriately attired – it is a formal occasion so you need to be well-dressed but as you will be sitting down for a couple of hours and possibly more you need to feel comfortable as well. You should take with you:
   - a copy of your thesis (preferably loose bound so you can find pages quickly)
   - pen and paper if you need to jot questions down or possibly draw diagrams
   - where appropriate, a list of corrections
   - copies of any original results, printouts, or raw data which may be helpful in substantiating key points made in the thesis

Your oral examination may take place in person, online, e.g., via Zoom, or may even by a hybrid examination, e.g., yourself and the Internal Examiner in-person and your External Examiner attending via Zoom. You should be made aware of the format of your oral examination and the University has guidance for online oral examinations, which you may find useful to consult in Section 4.7 of the University's Handbook for Examiners of Research Degrees which is available here.

Following Cryer (2000 p 197), you should:

- be composed when you enter the room
- sit squarely on the chair, not on the edge
- ask for anything not to your liking in the room to be changed, e.g., your seat moved out of sunlight
- wait for the examiners to ask you questions
- show that you are listening attentively
- ask for clarification if questions are unclear
- take whatever time you need to answer the questions
- defend your thesis without becoming wholly defensive, i.e., be prepared if necessary to concede points
- be scholarly in your approach, i.e., give answers weighing the pros and cons before reaching balanced conclusions

When the examiners have finished their questions, they may well ask if there is anything you wish to say; this is an opportunity for you to clarify or expand upon any answer which you felt did not do you justice or raise any other matters concerning the examination.

At the end of the oral examination, you will be asked to leave while the examiners deliberate, and afterwards you will normally be called back, to be informed of the examiners' recommendation.

In many cases, the recommendation will be to award the degree subject to making minor corrections (usually spelling and grammar) or minor revisions to the satisfaction of your internal examiner within six months. In some cases, the recommendation may be to make major changes and resubmit within twelve months. While this recommendation may be disappointing, it is important to remember that the examiners' expectation is still that you will eventually pass, and they are required to specify what you need to do to make the grade. Other outcomes, i.e., the award of a lower research degree or a fail, are mercifully rare. But, if this does happen and you have reason to believe that this relates to unfairness in the examination procedure, you have a right to appeal, and details of the University's Academic Appeals procedure are set out in Part Four of this Handbook.

In the vast majority of cases, you should only need to do one thing after the oral examination - celebrate.

13. Publishing, Exhibiting/Performing, Networking, and Developing Your Career

There are three other areas of good practice for research students, namely publishing, networking, and developing your career.

If at all possible, you should try and publish, exhibit/perform your work during your studies; this can help to mark out your academic territory, bring you into contact with others in the field, boost your self-esteem –- it is a coup to be published when still a graduate student –- and provide a better platform for employment, particularly in the research field inside or outside the universities. Your Supervisory Team should be able to advise you about whether your work should be published and, if so, how to go about it.

Also, you should consciously network within the academic and/or professional community relating to your field. Academia is heavily dependent upon networking informally and formally, in the latter case through professional associations and conferences. You should try and establish your own informal networks, and participate in the professional ones, e.g., the postgraduate sections of professional associations. Such networking will bring you into contact with others in the same field, help to prevent isolation, offer you opportunities to attend conferences and give papers, and finally enable you to acquire skills which will stand you in good stead in your career, inside or outside academia (see for example Blaxter *et al*. 1998* pp 55-77). Again, your Supervisory Team can help with contacts and advise on professional association memberships, etc.

Last, but by no means least, you should, from the beginning of your research project, be conscious of the need to develop skills and plan for your future career. Your primary objective as a research student is, of course, to gain a research degree, and this will be valuable in seeking employment. But, in today's labour market, you also need to have the key – transferable – skills which are demanded by employers. You should use your Personal Development Plan (PDP) to highlight areas of strengths and areas for improvement by mapping your current skills against the Vitae Researcher Development Framework.

You can learn about the skills demanded by employers, through attending training and development events organized by the University's Careers Service which can be used as a benchmark against which you can develop your skills over the course of your programme.

So, at the start of your programme, you should look at the list and see which skills you have acquired already and which you will need to acquire over the remainder of your studies. You should then check out which of these skills you will acquire by attending Researcher Development Programme events over the course of your research training and discuss with your Supervisory Team the other skills you will acquire by undertaking your research. You should then audit your skills and identify any gaps – a common one for research students particularly in the humanities and social sciences is team-working – and make plans to fill them. Your Supervisory Team will be of assistance in this regard, as will the postgraduate adviser in

the Careers Service.

While all the key skills are important, it is worth highlighting the acquisition of one in particular, namely effective oral presentation skills. Such skills are vital in the academic context (a number of academic units ask research students to make oral presentations as part of progression requirements and of course you need them to make presentations to seminars and conferences) and for employment in virtually any field. You should take every opportunity to develop these skills through the Researcher Development Programme, by reading the relevant literature (e.g., Cryer 2000) and by asking your Supervisory Team or other colleagues to listen to a mini-presentation and give you feedback.

As well as actually acquiring skills for employment, you also need to be able to document their acquisition, which can be done on NU Reflect. Either way, if you can demonstrate to employers that you have acquired the appropriate skills, this will greatly enhance your chances of gaining the good job, which you deserve for all of the work and effort you have put in over the course of your research degree.

> **Reviewing Practice**
> - Have you discussed possible opportunities for publications with your Supervisory Team?
> - Have you taken steps to establish informal networks in your subject community?
> - Have you joined the relevant subject associations?
> - Have you attended Careers Service events on career planning and development?
> - Have you reviewed your skills against the University's template?
> - Have you made efforts to fill any gaps?

Conclusions

Research degrees are unique in so far as, rather than working within a pre-established framework, you often have to create and always undertake and manage a project to its conclusion. This is not an easy task but, in so far as your research will advance and/or contribute to the sum of knowledge and understanding in your subject, a worthwhile one. Hopefully these guidelines have helped to unpack what you need to do to succeed in gaining a research degree, given you indicators of good practice, and assisted you to reflect upon your effectiveness as a research student.

References

Atkins, D. (1996*). A Student Perspective, Supervision of Research Students: Centre for Educational Development and Academic Methods, ANU.

Blaxter, L., Hughes, C., & Tight, M. (1996*). How to Research. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Blaxter, L., Hughes, C., & Tight, M. (1998*). The Academic Career Handbook. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Burnham, P. (1997). Surviving the Viva. In P. Burnham (Ed.), Surviving the Research Process in Politics. London: Pinter.

Cryer, P. (2000). The Research Student's Guide to Success. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Delamont, S., Atkinson, P., & Parry, O. (1997). Supervising the PhD: A Guide to Success. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Dunleavy, P. (2003). Authoring a PhD. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

Graham, A., & Grant, B. (1997). Managing Postgraduate Research Students. Oxford: Oxford Centre for Staff Development.

Leonard, D. (2001). A Woman's Guide to Doctoral Studies. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Murray, R. (2002). How to Write a Thesis. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Newcastle University Handbook for Examiners of Research Degrees

Phillips, E., & Pugh, D. (2000). How to get a PhD. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Rudd, E. (1975). The Highest Education: A Study of Graduate Education in Britain. London: Routledge and Keegan Paul.

Rudd, E. (1985). A New Look at Postgraduate Failure. London: SRHE and NFER-Nelson.

Salmon, P (1992) Achieving a PhD - Ten Students' Experience. London, Trentham

Taylor, S. (2002). Managing Your PhD. In T. Greenfield (Ed.), Research Methods for Postgraduates (pp. 28-36). London: Arnold.

Welsh, J. M. (1979). The First Year of Postgraduate Study. Guildford: Society for Research into Higher Education.

Wisker, G. (2001). The Postgraduate Research Handbook. Houndsmills: Palgrave.

Good Practice in Research Supervision

Where reference is made to any named University role, such references are to be read as including reference to their nominees.

These guidelines use Academic Unit as an overarching term for School and Institute.

Introduction

Research supervision has been characterized by Brown and Atkins (1988, p 115) as

'...probably the most complex and subtle form of teaching in which we engage. It is not enough for us to be competent researchers ourselves – although this is vital. We need to be able to reflect upon research practices and analyse the knowledge techniques and methods which make them effective. But there is a step even beyond this. We have to be skilled in enabling our research students to acquire those techniques and methods themselves without stultifying or warping their own intellectual development. In short, to be an effective research supervisor, you need to be an effective researcher and an effective supervisor.'

As a member of the academic staff at Newcastle, you will be an effective researcher; the aim of these guidelines is to assist you to reflect on good practice in supervising research students. The guidelines are not intended to be prescriptive nor exhaustive, just to indicate what, within the literature, has been identified as good practice. But some of the matters covered do relate to University requirements, and this document should be read in conjunction with the University's *Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes* which sets out the formal framework for research supervision.

The guidelines attempt to set out good practice in relation to fifteen key components of research supervision, namely:

1. Establishing and maintaining a professional relationship with the student
2. Helping to induct them into research
3. Where appropriate, assisting with the choice of a topic
4. Where appropriate, helping them devise a research proposal and plan
5. Supporting the initial stages of the research project
6. Encouraging students to write/make
7. Assisting with academic problems with the research
8. Assisting with personal and social problems affecting the research
9. Giving feedback and reviewing the progress of the research project
10. Monitoring the progress of the research
11. Advising on drafts of the thesis
12. Advising on submission
13. Assisting on preparation for examination
14. Assisting with career development, networking, and publication
15. Working with Supervisory Teams

1.   Establishing and Maintaining a Professional Relationship with the Research Student

The relationship between a supervisor and a research student is a professional one, and it is vital that it is started off on an appropriate footing. As Delamont et al. (1997, p 14) have put it:

'You need to sort out a good working relationship with your supervisee. Relationships have to be worked at and discussed, because most of the later problems stem from a failure to set out the expectations both parties have for the relationship. A few supervisions devoted to discussing the best ways to work together will not be wasted.'

Newcastle University approaches this by requiring supervisors and students to sign a learning agreement setting out the expectations of each other, as in the example below.

The **research student** agrees to:

♦   turn up on time for supervisions and give as much notice as possible of cancellations
♦   be properly prepared
♦   write regularly and share the draft materials
♦   maintain the highest standards of academic conduct, as set out in section 14 of the *Guidelines for Research Students and Supervisors*
♦   maintain contact
♦   undertake the tasks agreed to the best of their ability within the allotted time

The **research supervisors** agree to:

♦   hold regular supervisions and give as much notice as possible of cancellations
♦   review promptly submitted work or creative outputs
♦   give written feedback

Both agree to:

♦   treat supervision in a business-like way with an agenda
♦   keep records of supervisions detailing what was discussed, what targets were agreed, and when they were to be

---

achieved by

In general terms, supervisory support can include:
♦   Assistance with the choice of topic;
♦   Critical and constructive feedback on the work produced;
♦   Advice on the sources or literature used;
♦   Guidance on the methodology or techniques used and the approach to data collection;
♦   Discussion of evidence and results;
♦   Reading drafts and commenting on issues of substance.

Supervisors will not:
♦   Undertake the actual research itself;
♦   Write or significantly redraft papers or chapters;
♦   Conduct a detailed proofread the thesis.

At this stage also, you may wish to make it clear in what circumstances you would or would not expect credit to be given in any publications arising from the research.

While this process of establishing a professional relationship is important for all students, it may be particularly helpful to international students, who may have culturally defined notions of what they can expect from their Supervisory Teams. As Ryan (2000, p:69) has put it:

'...international students...are likely to expect a hierarchical relationship with their supervisor where the supervisor exercises tight control over the research. Many international students will expect their supervisor to take the initiative and adapt a role close to being a guide and/or parent. They may expect the supervisor to make major contributions towards the research and the thesis. They will be expecting clear direction and guidance from their supervisors, whom they will hold in great esteem, and they often have very high expectations of the relationship.'

In such cases, it can be useful to spend some time discussing a student's expectations of the roles of the Supervisory Team and of what you can offer in order to clarify the relationship. Such discussions should emphasise the additional support available to international students in the early stages of their research, as well as the need for them to take the initiative in undertaking and completing the research project.

By these means, clear expectations should be established for what is to come at the start of the research. But, as with any relationship, the supervisor-supervisee one changes, or should change, over time. Ideally, it should start as a master - apprentice relationship and end up as almost equal colleagues.

Clearly, this implies a process of development over the course of the supervision from the Supervisory Team playing a directive role and setting tasks for the student to do at the start towards encouraging the student to become an autonomous researcher and increasingly recognizing their capacity to make an independent contribution to knowledge and understanding in the subject. However, as Cryer (2000, pp 5-7) has pointed out, this does not happen automatically. Students may need to be weaned away from dependence upon their Supervisory Team, while the latter may need to adjust to the idea of the student abandoning the nest and beginning to fly on their own. So, it is important for the Supervisory Team to periodically check where the balance lies, whether it is appropriate for this stage of the research, and if not, what can be done to correct it.

Reflecting on Practice
♦   What methods do you use to establish a professional relationship with the student at the start of the programme?
♦   What is the appropriate balance between dependence and independence over the course of the programme?
♦   How often do you review that balance?
♦   What can you do if it is wrong?

---

2.   Inducting Students into Research

Many students coming through to research will have undertaken short research projects either as undergraduates or as postgraduates and will be required to undertake training in research during their first year of study. There is also now a substantial literature on undertaking a research degree to which students can be directed; examples include Cryer (2000), Leonard (2001), Phillips and Pugh (2000), and Wisker (2001). However, while previous experience and the literature yield insights into research, they may not prepare students for it fully, in five respects.

Firstly, students are often still not fully aware of what they are letting themselves in for, i.e., a research degree. Again, the point is well made by one of the PhD students interviewed by Delamont et al. (1997, p 16):

'A lot of mistakes I've made are the result of not asking questions and people not putting me right. They presume I must know…I didn't know the PhD was meant to be an argument…[that] it's meant to say something. I thought it was one of those old-fashioned monographs, a collection of information. When I was an undergraduate I used to think a PhD was

one of those articles you read in the journals, a 10,000 word article, I used to think they were PhDs.'

Clearly, if the student's supervisors had explained what a PhD was, pointed the student in the direction of a few successful theses, and discussed why they were successful, the mistakes which marred the student's experience could have been avoided.

The second way in which a student may be unprepared for research stems from the way in which it is written up in books and papers in journals, namely as a seamless progression from initial idea to an addition to knowledge and understanding. But what is published is only the visible part of the iceberg; the other nine-tenths – the ideas that were discarded, the investigations that ended up in blind alleys, the correlations that were in the wrong direction, the experiments that gave negative results, the sheer fluke that led to the substantive advance – rarely see the light of day. So, it is scarcely surprising that many students expect their research to progress without incident and, when it does not, blame themselves.

Here, the Supervisory Team has a key role in forewarning and forearming. This may take the form of directing a student towards accounts of research as it really happened, pairing them with students further down the line to discuss the problems they had experienced, or even self-disclosure by the Supervisory Teams. What can be useful is for the Supervisory Team to keep all of the materials relating to a particular research project from first scribbles to final paper, and take the student through the process, disasters as well as triumphs. Such exercises can prepare them for what is to come and can have the added bonus of demonstrating how to go about problem-solving in their subject.

Thirdly, a student may not be aware or fully aware of what is entailed in maintaining the highest standards of academic conduct in undertaking their research, in particular with regard to the fabrication of results or plagiarism. A few minutes spent discussing this with the student can be helpful, and it is recommended that this is done.

Fourthly, the Supervisory Team should spend some time at the start of the project discussing the storage and retention of research data with their students. Failure to store and retain data can, at worst, mean that experiments etc. have to be replicated, at best that progress is halted until missing data is eventually found. In this context, it can also be useful to encourage a student right from the start to take full references for everything that they read in such a form that they can later be easily transferred to the text or the bibliography of their thesis. Again, this can save many hours hunting for page numbers etc. at the writing-up stage.

Fifthly, the Supervisory Team is responsible for ensuring that research students follow agreed University and, where appropriate, Academic Unit health and safety policies and procedures, and these should also form part of the student's induction into research. Again, on international students, it is worth quoting Ryan, (2000, p 73):

> *'A common problem is that supervisors assume too much of student's research knowledge. But some international students will have very little knowledge of how to conduct research....'*

Supervisory Teams might consider going through one of the texts described above (e.g., Cryer 2000) with international students, and devising mini-research projects that contribute to the PhD that are designed to enhance their experience of research.

Reflecting on Practice

♦   Do you ascertain at the start of the programme what the student knows about the degree they are about to embark upon?
♦   How do you make them aware?
♦   How do you alert the student to the trials and tribulations of research?
♦   How can you ensure that an international student has an adequate induction into research?

---

3.   Assisting with the Choice of a Topic

In many cases, and particularly in engineering and the sciences, students are often recruited to research a particular topic which has been pre-defined by a supervisor (see e.g., Delamont et al. (2000), Becher et al. (1994)). But, particularly in the arts, humanities and social sciences, students are recruited on the basis of their interest in working in a broadly defined area of the subject, which has to be narrowed down sooner or later to a specific topic.

Bright students who have sailed through their previous careers with effortless brilliance may have unrealistic expectations of what they can achieve in their research degrees.

These can often be adjusted by asking them to look through the titles of MPhils or PhDs in their subjects which illustrate the narrowness of most (if not all) research topics. But even when they have abandoned seeking a cure for the common cold or a fundamental change in our interpretation of civilisation and adopted a more realistic project, they will still need help and guidance.

Moses (1992, pp 11-12) has characterized the process of selecting a topic as involving the five stages of:

(i)   determining a general area of interest

(ii)   critically reviewing the literature
(iii)   identifying potential 'triggers' for projects
(iv)   evaluating their suitability, and
(v)   choosing at least a starting topic.

While the general area of interest should be known, a Supervisory Team can assist a student by disclosure – talking through their own experiences – and/or exercises designed to model the rest of the process. A student can be asked to read (say) a review article (which can provide valuable training in critical evaluation) and asked to identify a couple of possible 'triggers' for research projects. A supervision can then be devoted to discussing the key questions relating to suitability:

- is this topic worth doing?
- how, in principle, could it be done?
- could it be done within the time available?
- what additional knowledge and skills would be required to tackle it?
- would it sustain interest?
- if completed, how might it meet the requirements for the award?

With, hopefully, an understanding of the criteria, a student can then be asked to do this 'for real' and write brief reports, upon which the Supervisory Team can give oral or written feedback. Eventually, this iterative process should lead to the identification of a topic which will, at least, form a focus for starting the research.

Reflecting on Practice
- ♦   Do you provide students with a framework for choosing a topic?
- ♦   Would disclosure of your own experiences be helpful?
- ♦   Can you identify review papers in your subject which could be used to generate topics for exercises?

---

4.   Producing the Research Proposal and Plan for Project Approval

It is a requirement of the University's *Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes* that research students should, in conjunction with their Supervisory Team, produce and agree their research proposal and plan for formal project approval within the first three months of their research degree studies. The project proposal, plan and supervisory team will be considered by an impartial Project Approval Panel, and then the Head of Academic Unit prior to formal approval by the Dean of Postgraduate Studies.

In cases, where a student is recruited to implement a pre-determined research project, the project plan and confirmed Supervisory Team arrangements must still be submitted to the Project Approval Panel to ensure that the project is achievable within the timescales allowed and to confirm that sufficient resources are available within the Academic Unit.

Where the project is not pre-determined and planned for them, students need to manage their research projects actively. Otherwise, they can drift for months during the first year of research, and this is a major cause of drop out and also of non-completion within three or four years. Given the financial pressures on students – particularly international ones funded only for the stated duration of the programme – and of course Research Council sanctions on subjects with low completion rates within three or four years (see e.g., Joint *et al.* 2002), it is vital that they are clear about what they are doing and when they should be aiming to do it by. For these reasons, the University requires that Supervisory Teams work with students to produce a research proposal and a plan.

With regard to developing the research proposal, the Supervisory Team can assist students by asking a fairly simple series of questions. For example: What is the topic?; Why is it important?; What have others written on it?; What would the research seek to add?; What method or methods would be useful in undertaking the research?; How could the research be designed?; How will data be collected?; How will it be analysed?; How, in principle, might results add to knowledge and understanding in this field? In addition, it is still useful to show students a good research proposal and take them through it step by step so that they have a clear exemplar to follow.

With regard to planning the research, in principle it seems simple enough to plot the tasks identified in the research proposal against time. In practice, it is extremely difficult to predict in advance even approximately how long things are going to take, particularly if a student has limited research experience, and the results can be over-optimistic to say the least.

Here, the Supervisory Team should help a student to appreciate the pitfalls of planning a research project. One method for doing this has been developed by Delamont *et al.* (1997). Students are given Gantt charts for research projects in their subject which deliberately over-represent the time to be allotted for some aspects of the research process and under-represent the time needed for others. They are then asked to consider the realism or otherwise of these projections, to discuss them, and to re-plan the research. This technique can be extremely effective in stimulating students to think about the relationship between time and task and in enabling them to plan their own research.

Supervisory Teams should also encourage a student to revisit and update both their research proposal and plan frequently. Research topics can change markedly over the course of a project, and research plans need to be modified in response to this and other factors. Discussing and updating the research proposal and the research plan, will ensure that both the Supervisory Team and student are clear about where the research has got to, and what needs to be done to complete it.

> **Reflecting on Practice**
> ♦ Is there a good research proposal you could show to research students?
> ♦ Could you develop research plans for discussion with students?

5. Supporting the Initial Stages of the Research Project

Especially in disciplines where students have created their own research project, they are then faced with detailed preparatory work on the literature, the methodology, and the design of the research.

All of these can pose serious problems for a student at the start of their projects. On the literature, a student may need help in finding it if they are not familiar with the location of sources in the field, with learning how to read it critically, with notetaking, and with referencing. In some subjects, there are established and relatively less contested methodological approaches but, in many subjects, students are faced with a range of different potential approaches and may have to grapple with a range of difficult philosophical, theoretical, and empirical matters. In virtually all subjects, designing a major research project is a difficult exercise for the uninitiated, with each potential design associated with opportunities and limitations which can have profound implications for outcomes.

Such matters are dealt with in general through Faculty Researcher Development Programmes, and it is clearly important for Supervisory Teams to be aware of the content of these in ascertaining the support needs of their students. In addition, the Supervisory Team still has a role to play in relating general features of literature evaluation, methodology, and research design to the student's topic. For example, setting an exercise for a student to find a key reference in their field, produce a critical review, evidence it from their notes, and cite sources correctly, can help them to evaluate the literature; pointing a student in the direction of good discussions of methodologies in books, theses and papers in their topic area can assist with the adoption of a methodology; and asking for short briefing papers on the advantages and disadvantages of different designs can provide a basis for discussion and clarification of the options.

By these means, a student can be supported through what can be the very difficult initial stages of their research project. The avoidance of mistakes at this early stage, e.g., in the design of the research, can save much time and grief further down the line.

> **Reflecting on Practice**
> ♦ In what ways do the Faculty Researcher Development Programmes support students to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills in terms of evaluation of the literature, methodology and research design?
> ♦ How can you assist the student to acquire these in the context of their project?

6. Encouraging Students to Write

As a student begins to make progress with their project, they need to be encouraged to write as soon as possible, for four reasons. Firstly, it enables them to keep records of what they have done from the start to serve as a basis for later work. Secondly, it encourages them to reflect on what they have done so far and think about where they will go from here. Thirdly, it gives the Supervisory Team the chance to see what has been done, and to advise them about how to proceed. Fourthly, it gets a student into the discipline of academic writing at an early stage rather than leaving it until later when it is more difficult to acquire.

But, as most experienced supervisors will testify, students are frequently extremely reluctant to produce written work. Research (see e. g. Murray 2002) suggests that there are two major factors which constrain research students from writing. One relates primarily to lack of experience of writing regularly at all, of producing longish pieces of work, or of producing academic writing with its demands of precision, clarity, organization and explicit structure. The other factor is confidence. Whereas, as undergraduates or postgraduates on taught programmes, students outlined and discussed the work of other people, as a research student their writing becomes, or should become, a presentation of their own views, ideas, thoughts, etc. This can leave a student feeling very exposed and, particularly if their standard is published work, very dissatisfied with what they have achieved. For these reasons, they may be psychologically reluctant to write.

Supervisory Teams can help a student overcome these problems in a number of ways. With regard to writing regularly, Blaxter et al. (1996, pp 59-57) suggest that a student should be encouraged to keep a research diary on a daily basis recording what they have done, time spent on it, analysis, and speculation. This gets the student into the habit of writing regularly, recording, and reflecting, and gives them a basis upon which to construct larger pieces of work.

With regard to writing longer pieces, Supervisory Teams can make the task more manageable. So, initially, they might request a one-page abstract of the chapter setting out its aim (purpose), content (what it would cover), and possible conclusions (what it would say). With that thought through and discussed, the next stage would be to ask for a synopsis fleshing out the abstract and setting out headings and sub-headings to be used. Then a student can be encouraged to fill in the framework piece by piece until they have a draft chapter.

With regard to academic writing, a student can be variously referred to books on the subject (e.g., Dunleavy (2003), (Murray 2002)), given examples of such writing from the literature in their field, or even paired with a mentor in the form of a student further on with their research who will undertake to read drafts and suggest improvements. Supervisory Teams can refer students to the [Academic Skills Kit](#) for further guidance and support.

In terms of overcoming psychological reluctance to write, a Supervisory Team can, as (Murray 2002) has suggested, reduce anxiety levels by giving the student explicit permission to submit a 'messy' draft for comment on the understanding that it will be treated as a first stab and not as the definitive submission. Further, it can be worth pointing out to a student that virtually all contributions to knowledge and understanding start off as fairly rough-hewn stones which are then polished usually by several sets of hands before they become the perfect gems of publications. As suggested earlier, the message can be reinforced by showing student earlier drafts of the Supervisory Teams own papers.

Again, here it is worth considering the particular problems faced by non-native speakers of English. To quote Ryan (2000, p 74):

> *'Many international postgraduate students will have had very little experience in any kind of extended writing, and may have previously only been required to take lecture notes. They may therefore resort to an oral style, or may use writing styles that are favoured in their own country. [For example]...The use of proverbs, stories and literary illusions...are commonly used in Asian and African writing to demonstrate one's educational level and accomplishment, to win the reader over to the author's point of view, and to establish credibility. Classical sayings or poetic phrases will be used to make the writing look 'well-educated' and to establish empathy. The writing process takes a more circuitous approach, where the reader is gradually taken along a journey where the argument, or the main thesis, is only found at the very end. The thesis will begin by saying what the topic isn't before writing about what it is.'*

This, of course, is the antithesis of academic writing as practised in the West, and here there is a particular need to help international students to appreciate what is involved and help them to adjust.

By these means, Supervisory Teams can try to fulfil one of their principal responsibilities, encouraging a student to write early and often.

Reflecting on Practice
- ♦   Are your students writing early enough?
- ♦   Are they writing regularly enough? If not, how can you assist them to overcome the barriers to writing?
- ♦   How can you assist non-native English-speaking students to improve their writing?

---

7.   Assisting with Academic Problems

Research is, as argued earlier, an inherently difficult activity and it can almost be guaranteed that, at some point, a student will be faced with problems. Such problems may include, for example, exploring the highways and the byways of the topic and drifting too far away from the original focus of the research, setbacks in collecting data, inconsistencies in findings, problems with the status of results – the list is endless.

The nature of intervention in such situations is a matter of fine judgement, but Supervisory Teams should try to suggest ways in which the student can, by their own efforts, resolve the crisis.

Again, there is a good example of such thinking in Delamont *et al.* (1997, p 77), in this case covering the familiar scenario where a research student has collected a vast amount of data and is unable to organize it in a coherent way, i.e., the student is 'drowning in data'. Rather than leaving them to flounder or going out with the lifeboat, Delamont et al suggest that the Supervisory Team should arrange for the student to prepare a seminar paper or write a working paper re-stating the central questions of the research, establishing what needs to be evidenced to answer them, and re-evaluating the contribution that the thesis will make to knowledge and understanding. This, they argue, provides an opportunity for a student to re-focus the research, discard extraneous material, and hopefully avoid writing the 'everything but the kitchen sink' thesis which might be referred because of inadequate discrimination of evidence.

Reflecting on Practice
- ♦   What sorts of academic problems are research students likely to come up against in your subject?
- ♦   In what ways do you think that you could help without compromising the independence of the research?

---

8.   Assisting with Non-Academic Problems

Research students can experience non-academic problems which can affect their research. At Newcastle, Academic

Supervisors are also personal tutors to their research students, and hence the role can extend to assisting with personal and social problems as well. Supervisors thus need to be equipped to deal with problems in the same way as for undergraduate tutees although it is worth noting that there are a number of additional arrangements to support students including a Faculty Postgraduate Tutor in each faculty. Of course, there are also a range of University services for research students with which supervisors need to be familiar, and which are set out in Part One of this Handbook.

In addition to particular problems, it may be noted that one of the most consistent findings of the research literature on research students (see the summary in Delamont *et al*. 1997, p 96) is that they suffer, to a greater or lesser degree, from intellectual and social isolation. But, as the authors point out, while a degree of intellectual isolation is inherent in undertaking an original research project, '...*there is no reason for this...to be accompanied by social or emotional loneliness*' and indeed this can be detrimental to the success of the research. So, it is important for supervisors to ensure that there are opportunities for students to mix with others. These might include a regular postgraduate seminar, a postgraduate society, common development and training programmes, or participation in conferences or professional associations.

Again, in this context, it is worth stressing that particular consideration needs to be given to supporting international research students. They are more likely to feel socially and culturally isolated than home students, and they may find it more difficult for ask for support from their Supervisory Team or to make friends with fellow students. It is, as Ryan (2000 p 81) has argued, important to ensure that staff take an interest in the well-being of international students and assist them to join social networks. Also, where international students are accompanied by their families, consideration also needs to be given to involving family in social activities. They can feel marooned in an alien environment, and it is important to include them in school social activities and point them in the direction of relevant institutional societies and clubs.

Reflecting on Practice
♦ What additional support is available to research students in your Academic Unit, the Faculty, and the University?
♦ Do you actively seek to encourage your research students to mix with others?
♦ Do you pay particular attention to the needs of international students and, where appropriate, their families?

---

9. Giving Feedback

Once a student is writing, making, and showing work in progress to you, you need to give them feedback. As Brown and Atkins (1988, pp 134-37) have pointed out, a student needs feedback for four main reasons, namely:

- **to enable them to appreciate standards**

Feedback gives the student a feeling for the standards against which their work will be judged. A student is unlikely at the start or in the early stages in particular to be fully aware of the standards that they are expected to attain (see Becher *et al*. 1994, p 134) and even reading successful theses in cognate areas may give them little indication of what to aim for at an intermediate stage of the research project. One of the key functions of the Supervisory Team is to enable a student to appreciate the standards which they are expected to attain. As Phillips and Pugh (2000, pp 23-24) have put it:

'[Students] cannot get a PhD unless [they] know what the standards are...it is a vital responsibility of [the] supervisor to ensure that [they] are given every opportunity to become familiar with appropriate professional standards. It is only through this that [they] will be able to recognise and achieve them.'

Hopefully, as a student learns from feedback, they should begin to internalize the standards and become able to assess their own work critically. This, of course, is part of becoming a successful researcher.

- **to improve their skills**

Feedback can also assist in developing a student's skills, including methodological skills (e.g., research design, data collection, data analysis, data interpretation) and writing skills. A student may or may not have the expertise to design and implement their research projects, and one of the functions of feedback is to advise on these matters and, in the case of shortfalls, assist the students to acquire relevant skills. Similarly, a student's skills in academic writing are likely to require development, and this is part of the function of feedback.

- **to give them a sense of achievement**

A further, and often neglected, reason for feedback is to give the student a sense of achievement. As Brown and Atkins (1988, p 136) have put it:

'Students need to know that their work is valued and that their supervisors are genuinely interested in it.'

Being encouraged or praised is crucial to motivating a student, particularly in the early stages before (hopefully) success becomes apparent and becomes an internalized driver in itself.

- **to deepen their understanding**

The final reason is to assist a student to deepen and develop their understanding of the problem or topic that they are researching through discussion at all the stages from inception through to completed drafts.

But, if these objectives are to be achieved, feedback must be given in appropriate ways that will elicit a positive rather than a negative response from the student.

Suggestions include:

- thinking about an appropriate setting for the feedback

The setting for the feedback can have some bearing on how it is received. If you sit behind your desk with the student on the other side – particularly if they are on a lower level – then the signal is one of formal interaction between a superior and an inferior. If you are side by side in armchairs, the signal is more one of a discussion between colleagues.

- opening by setting out expectations for the session

It can be useful at the start to set out your expectations for the session. In particular, you should make it clear that the primary objective is to enable further progress in the research project (see Phillips and Pugh (2000, p 174)). It also can be helpful here to make it clear that, where appropriate, you will expect the student to challenge your views and opinions, and that this is a normal and essential part of the process.

- summarizing your understanding of the material submitted

One of the most useful things that a supervisor can do is to summarize your understanding of the material that the student has submitted. 'So, it seems to me that the central thrust of what you are saying is....'

- checking your understanding with the student

Once you have summarized, it can be very useful just to check that your understanding is the same as that of the student – 'Have I got that right?' This not only reassures a student that you are taking their work seriously but offers an opportunity to correct any misapprehensions at the start of the session.

- identifying the strengths of the work

You can then identify what you saw as the strengths of the work submitted, which is an opportunity for praise. 'What I thought was really interesting was... what I most enjoyed reading was...'

- identifying the areas for attention

You can identify the areas for attention in ways that are constructive and positive rather than destructive and negative, e.g., 'why did you try to solve the problem using method X rather than method Y?' rather than 'Didn't you realise that you could have avoided these difficulties with method Y?'

- inviting the student to respond

Once you have identified the areas, then you can ask the student to respond. Here, it is very important that you allow the student to engage with the matters that you have raised, and it must be recognized that they will need time to respond to queries about their work. You must also be prepared to listen carefully and check that the student has understood the point being made.

- summarizing the discussion

When the points have been exhausted, then it is important to summarise the discussion. You may try to draw the threads together and then check it with the student or, alternatively, you may ask the student to summarize.

- maintaining a record

Finally, for the benefit of both the student and you, there should be an agreed written record. Normally, this would be written by the student, copied to you, if necessary amended, and then agreed jointly.

By extending the work of Partington et al. (1993, p 78) to the case of supervisor feedback, it can be said that you should avoid acting:

- **as an inquisitor**

Who behaves like a TV interviewer quizzing a politician during an election campaign, rapidly shooting out hostile questions, interrupting the answers, and generally trying to score points. Such an approach may intimidate the students so that he or she is unable to respond or anger them to the extent that the session becomes an adversarial confrontation.

- **as a committee person**

Who takes the student through the material page by page questioning each matter as it arises rather than synthesising points into key issues relating to the research.

- **as a hobby horse rider**

Who has strong feelings or prejudices about one area of the submitted work and keeps returning to questions on this while neglecting other aspects of the research.

- **as a kite flyer**

Who has identified a – usually fairly tenuous – link between the work submitted and another subject and persists in exploring this to the detriment of the substance of the research.

- **a reminiscer**

Who continually regales the student with stories of their own research career to the detriment of feedback on the material submitted.

Reflecting on Practice
♦ What arrangements do you make for ensuring that feedback to research students is prompt?

10. Monitoring Progress

Clearly, one of the key tasks of a Supervisory Team is to monitor the progress of the research project formally in accordance with University requirements.

With regard to monitoring progress with the student, the University requires that the research student should have a formal meeting with at least one member of their Supervisory Team at least 10 times per year, approximately monthly, to review their progress and that the details should be recorded by the student on NU Reflect. There should be regular contact with each member of the Supervisory Team, at least on three occasions, each year, and there should be at least one meeting with the full Supervisory Team to discuss progress, usually in advance of Annual Progress Review. All formal supervisions should be undertaken in a business-like way, with a date, time and agenda agreed with the student. Supervisors should ensure that, as far as possible, they should not be disturbed while they are meeting with the student. In addition to monitoring progress formally with the student, the Supervisory Team must submit an annual report on the student's progress, as part of the student's formal annual progress review on the PGR CoP system.

> **Reflecting on Practice**
> ♦   Do you meet your research students approximately once per month to monitor their progress?
> ♦   Do you do this systematically?
> ♦   What Academic Unit/Faculty requirements are there for monitoring student progress?
> ♦   Do you meet the University's requirements for annual monitoring?

11. Assisting Students to Complete

After students have persevered through academic and possibly personal problems and completed the basic research, they then enter a new tunnel called 'writing up' their thesis. While a student may have conscientiously written up draft sections and chapters as they have gone along, they now face the task of putting it together as a whole and creating a thesis.

This would be easy if it were just a matter of throwing together what has already been written and adding linking sections but demand rather more. As Barnes (cited Blaxter et al. (1996, p27)) has pointed out, '...a thesis is far more than a passive record of [the] research and generally involves presenting an argument or point of view. In other words, it must say something and be substantiated with reasoned argument and evidence'.

Students can find it difficult to translate their work into a thesis, and here the Supervisory Team may be able to assist by giving them a framework within which to work. One suggestion (see e.g., Cryer 2000, Taylor 2002) is to ask the student to think of themselves as explorers who have undertaken a journey and who are writing a guidebook for others to follow.

As guides, they need to explain where they started from, what other guides they read, why they decided to undertake the journey at all, why they went off in a particular direction, what their route was subsequently, what they discovered on the way, where they arrived at the end of the journey, how it differed from the start, and where they would go in the future. They can be asked to map this on a few sides of paper, thinking carefully about what information must be imparted to enable someone to follow, what should be imparted, and what may be interesting but not strictly necessary.

The Supervisory Team can then give feedback on the map, both on the overall clarity of the guidebook and upon the priorities assigned to particular stages in the journey. By this means, the student can begin to construct a coherent outline of the thesis.

Once the general lines are clear, the student can then be asked to fill in more details of sections of the journey, and then sub-sections until they have a detailed guidebook. This can then be translated into the structure for a thesis, e.g., starting point (introduction), existing guidebooks (literature review), reasons (triggers for the research), direction (methodology), route and discoveries on the way (substantive research chapters), arrival (analysis and results), difference from the starting point (contribution to knowledge) and future (where research should go).

If, by these or other means, the student can be assisted to establish a framework for their thesis, they then still have to write it. Here, the Supervisory Team can give guidance at least upon four key matters, namely communication, style, drafting, and managing the writing process.

A thesis is, of course, a form of communication, and it is necessary to consider in advance the audience to which it is addressed and how the student might meet their needs. Here Cryer (2000, p 178) has some excellent advice which a student can be given or pointed towards:

'The crucially important audience for theses are external examiners. Think of them as individuals who are exceptionally busy and grossly under-paid and who therefore have to read theses quickly. They will expect them to be well-structured and to be argued coherently to make the case for certain solutions to specific research problems. Irrelevancies will

irritate, as will having to tease out meaning that research students should have extracted themselves. Think of them also as individuals who are very able and experienced in the general area, which means that the background material should be as concise as is consistent with showing that it is known.

However, no external examiner can be an expert in your work. By the time you finalise your thesis, you and you alone are the world's expert. So, the aspects that make your work significant and original and worthy of a PhD…need to be argued coherently; each step needs to be spelled out, the outcomes must be stated unambiguously, and all their implications identified and discussed in depth.'

With regard to style, it will of course be expected that the thesis is written up in 'academic writing', and it has already been suggested that a student should be pointed towards the literature and to exemplars of the style appropriate to their work.

In terms of drafting, even with a framework, students can find this a daunting task. One way of assisting them is to encourage them to write their first draft 'as it comes', and then work with you to polish and re-polish it into its final form.

Again, this can pose a dilemma for the Supervisory Team in so far as there can be a fine line between helping the student clarify what they want to say and writing it for them. There is no simple solution to this dilemma, although it can sometimes be avoided by directing the student to look at other work in which similar problems have been overcome.

In the context of advising on drafts, it is worth noting that the Supervisory Team should not act as proof-readers and should make this clear to the student.

Last, but by no means least, the student has to exercise a high degree of self-discipline to complete the thesis, particularly within a short period of time. It can be useful for the Supervisory Team to bring their students' attention to what Delamont et al. (1997, p 121) have described as the four 'golden rules' of writing, namely:

- the more they write, the easier it gets
- if they write every day, it becomes a habit
- tiny bits of writing add up to a lot of writing
- the longer they don't write, the more difficult it is to get back in the habit.

> **Reflecting on Practice**
> ♦   How do you help your students to translate their research materials into a thesis?
> ♦   What constitutes helping as opposed to writing it for students?
> ♦   Are there exemplars you can point students towards to assist their writing up?

12. Advising on Submission

The completion of the first serious draft is usually an immense relief for a student. But it can be a major headache for the Supervisory Team, who need to advise the student whether what they have done has the potential to meet the standards for the award, and if not, what needs to be done to bring it up to scratch. Giving such advice can be particularly difficult at the start of a supervisor's career, when their own experience may only be as an examinee, and they are unsure about what is looked for by an examiner.

In such cases, the starting point for the Supervisory Team is to try to determine the criteria for success or failure. The assessment criteria for the relevant research degree are detailed in the University's regulations for research degree and, where appropriate, in the individual research degree programme regulations. Once the criteria are reasonably clear, the Supervisory Team can then read the draft and try to identify the strengths of the thesis (the area where the criteria are clearly met) and the weaknesses (those where criteria are not met). The latter can then be divided into weaknesses which are minor, major, or which constitute potentially fatal flaws. Again, here it is very useful to have input from all members of the Supervisory Team.

Once the diagnosis has been made and confirmed, then feedback can be given. It can be helpful to do this within the framework set out above – criteria, strengths, and weaknesses – before advising them how to proceed. If all has gone reasonably well earlier, there should not be fatal flaws (which would necessitate further research), but weaknesses to be corrected by re-drafting or textual amendments. Subject to these being made – and the Supervisory Team should insist upon seeing successive drafts – the Supervisory Team should be able to give the green light for submission.

> **Reflecting on Practice**
> ♦   Do you know the criteria for the award of a research degree in your subject?
> ♦   What, in your view, would constitute minor weaknesses, major ones, and fatal flaws in a thesis?

13. Advising on Examination

At least three months before submission, the process of arranging the examination begins. The Supervisory Team will propose examiners, usually one internal and one external, for formal nomination by the Head of Academic Unit. It is important to consult the student about the appointment of examiners. The identification of an appropriate external

examiner in particular can, as various studies (see for example: McWilliam *et al*. (2002); Mullins and Kiley (2002)) have shown, involve some heart-searching by the Supervisory Team; should they suggest Professor X who is a leading authority in the field but is known to be fiercely critical of the offerings of lesser mortals, or Dr Y who is less distinguished but more likely to take a balanced approach to examining the student's work? The ideal is, of course, an external examiner who is distinguished and who will take a balanced approach, and if possible, the Supervisory Team should suggest the names of examiners of this ilk.

With examiners formally appointed by the Dean of Postgraduate Studies and the thesis forwarded to them for scrutiny, the Supervisory Team is responsible for arranging the date, time and place of the final examination, the viva.

Unless students have previously attended universities in which their awards were conditional upon an oral examination, the chances are that the examination for their research degree will be their first experience of an oral examination. This might be of little consequence if, as in many other European countries, the viva was a public affair, and they could go along and experience what happened. However, this is rare in the UK, and for most students what goes on in the viva has, historically, been a mystery, one which has only recently become the subject of systematic research (see e.g., Tinkler and Jackson (2002)).

In the absence of hard information, tales of oral examinations being used to inflict unnaturally cruel punishment on research students abound with the result that, as Delamont *et al*. (1997, p 148) have put it:

> *'The student may well fear and dread the [viva] examination. Even when the student is outstandingly competent, and however excellent the thesis may be, the process of examination is a stressful one...most [candidates] feel worried by the indeterminacy of the viva'*

Here, the Supervisory Team can play a role, in three main ways.

♦   Firstly, by de-mystifying the oral examination through explaining its purposes, procedures, and outcomes. In the case of Newcastle, these are set out in the University's *Handbook for the Examiners of Research Degrees* and it can be helpful for the Supervisory Team to take students through the relevant parts.

♦   Secondly, by indicating what the student should do to prepare in terms of re-reading their thesis, keeping up to date with the literature, and preparing for questions.

♦   Thirdly, and perhaps most helpfully, the Supervisory Team can arrange for the student to have a short mock oral examination in which colleagues who are experienced as examiners question them on a key part of their thesis and afterwards give feedback on their performance. Such an opportunity to   'taste' what is in store is invaluable in enabling the student to prepare themselves both intellectually and psychologically for what is to come.

> **Reflecting on Practice**
> ♦   Do your research students have any previous experience of vivas?
> ♦   How do they feel about them? How can you help them to prepare?

14. Assisting with Career Development, Networking, and Publication

It is good practice for the Supervisory Team to assist a student with career development, networking, and the publication of their work.

At one time, students undertaking a research degree, particularly a PhD, were destined predominantly for the groves of academe, and career development took the form of socializing them into the values and rituals of the relevant academic 'tribe' (see e.g., Delamont et al. (2000)). But it is no longer the case that successful research students necessarily become academics – a majority do not – and even those who do follow an academic career require a wider portfolio of skills. Part of the job of the Supervisory Team is, from the very start of the project, to encourage the student to be active in acquiring the key skills necessary to give them an edge in the labour market.

While all skills are important, it is perhaps worth highlighting one, namely the need to encourage research students to acquire the skills to give effective oral presentations because such skills are vital in an academic context.   It is important to ensure that students acquire the necessary training, either as part of the Faculty Researcher Development Programme, or through directing students' attention towards the relevant literature (e.g., Cryer (2000), and offering opportunities for students to give mini-presentations and receive feedback.

Under the heading of skills, the Supervisory Team also need to encourage students to record the skills that they acquire over the course of their research programme for later use as evidence to prospective employers, which can be done by the student in NU Reflect.

A second function of the Supervisory Team can be to encourage a student to network within the subject community and to provide opportunities for them to do so. Academia is heavily dependent upon networking informally and formally, in the latter case through professional associations and conferences (see Blaxter et al. (1998, pp 55-77)). Students need to be encouraged to establish their own informal networks of academic colleagues in their subject areas, and to join in

professional networks, e.g., the postgraduate sections of professional associations. This can be important for their research, as a counterweight to isolation, and in acquiring networking skills which will stand them in good stead in any career.

A third function of the Supervisory Team is, as soon as it is practical to do so, to encourage students to publish their work in scholarly journals. Publications, particularly those during a research degree, can help variously to mark out their academic territory, bring them into contact with others working in the same field, boost their self-esteem, give them a better platform for applying for jobs and, last but not least, enhance school publication rates. But students do need guidance from their Supervisory Team about how to write for publication, which journals or publishers to aim for, and how to go about submitting a paper or a book.

Research students' writing for publications, of course, raises the issue of whose names should go on papers submitted to journals etc. Here, practice varies considerably between and within disciplines. In some the convention is that the supervisor's name automatically goes on the paper as, if different, does the name of the person who has obtained the funding for the research. This can and does lead to friction if research students feel that they have done most of the work for the paper but are effectively credited with an equal share of the authorship. This issue should be discussed openly with the student, and one way around this which has been used in some subjects is to have a footnote indicating the relative contributions of the authors, say X the supervisor 20 per cent, and Y the research student 80 per cent.

Reflecting on Practice

- ♦ Do you encourage students to think about career development at the start of their studentships?
- ♦ Do you encourage them to assemble an appropriate portfolio of skills for employment over the course of their studentship?
- ♦ Do you assist them to acquire effective presentation skills?
- ♦ Do you encourage students to network and provide opportunities for them to do so?
- ♦ Do you encourage students to publish?
- ♦ What is the relevant policy in your discipline for the attribution of authorship in publications?

---

15. Working with Supervisory Teams

The University adopts a team approach to supervision so you should expect to be part of Supervisory Teams of at least two members with the research skills and knowledge needed to supervise the research project. To become a member of such a Supervisory Team it is necessary to be on the approved supervisor list.

Different approaches may be adopted by the Supervisory Team. In joint supervision, the supervisory responsibilities are shared equally between members of the Supervisory Team. In other styles of supervision, members of the Supervisory Team may have different roles. There may be, for example, a lead supervisor and a co-supervisor responsible for a smaller element of the planned research; or a lead supervisor and an advisor responsible for, and able to deal with, general and pastoral responsibilities. In all instances one supervisor must be nominated as the academic supervisor and be responsible for the quality assurance aspects of the research degree e.g., sign off Project Approval and Annual Progress Review.

Members of Supervisory Teams are expected to discuss the role they adopt in the supervisory team. They should liaise regularly with each other and agree who will read and feedback on pieces of work supplied by the student. The research student is expected to stay in regular contact with both supervisors, and to discuss all aspects of their research with them. It is a requirement that the full Supervisory Team should meet with the student at least three times a year. More detail on supervisory teams is provided in the University's 'Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes'.

Reflecting on Practice

- ♦ Do you discuss the requirements for a research degree with your co-supervisor(s) at the start of the studentship?
- ♦ Do you discuss ways of resolving inter-disciplinary differences and giving consistent advice to students?
- ♦ Have you and your co-supervisor(s) clear ideas of who is responsible for what in supervising the student?

Conclusions

Being an effective researcher is a necessary condition to be a research supervisor, but it is not a sufficient one; the latter requires being an effective supervisor as well. That, in turn, involves unpacking what is involved in effectively supervising a research student, reflecting on practice, and improving it. Hopefully these Guidelines will at least give food for thought in encouraging supervisors to review their effectiveness.

References

Becher, T., Henkel, M., & Kogan, M. (1994). Graduate Education in Britain. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Blaxter, L., Hughes, C., & Tight, M. (1996*). How to Research. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Blaxter, L., Hughes, C., & Tight, M. (1998*). The Academic Career Handbook. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Brown, G., & Atkins, M. (1988*). Effective Teaching in Higher Education. London: Methuen.

Cryer, P. (2000). The Research Student's Guide to Success. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Delamont, S., Atkinson, P., & Parry, O. (1997). Supervising the PhD: A Guide to Success. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Delamont, S., Atkinson, P., & Parry, O. (2000). The Doctoral Experience: Success and Failure in Graduate School. London:

Falmer.

Dunleavy, P. (2003). Authoring a PhD. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

Fitzpatrick, J., Secrist, J., & D, W. (1998). Secrets for a Successful Dissertation. London: Sage.

Frame, I., & Allen, L. (2002). A Flexible Approach to PhD Research Training. Quality Assurance in Education, 12, 98-103.

Joint, Funding, & Councils (2002). Good Practice and Threshold Standards for Postgraduate Research Degree Programmes. Bristol.

Leonard, D. (2001). A Woman's Guide to Doctoral Studies. Buckingham: Open University Press.

McWilliam, E., Singh, P., & Taylor, P. (2002). Doctoral Education, Danger and Risk Management. Higher Education Research and Development, 21, 119-129.

Moses, I. (1992). Supervising Postgraduates. Cambeltown: HERSDA.

Mullins, G., & Kiley, M. (2002). Its a PhD, not a Nobel Prize: how experienced examiners assess research degrees. Studies in Higher Education, 27, 369-386.

Murray, R. (2002). How to Write a Thesis. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Partington, J., Brown, G., & Gordon, G. (1993). Handbook for External Examiners in Higher Education. Sheffield: UK Universities and Colleges Staff Development Unit.

Peters, R. (1997). Getting what you came for: a smart student's guide to earning a Masters or a PhD. New York: Noonday Publishing.

Phillips, E., & Pugh, D. (2000). How to get a PhD. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Ryan, J. (2000). A Guide to Teaching International Students. Oxford: Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development.

Taylor, S. (2002). Managing Your PhD. In T. Greenfield (Ed.), Research Methods for Postgraduates (pp. 28-36). London: Arnold.

Taylor, S. & Beasley, N (2005). A Handbook for Doctoral Supervisors. Abingdon: Oxford.

Tinkler, P., & Jackson, C. (2002). In the Dark? Preparing for the PhD Viva. Quality Assurance in Education, 10, 86-97.

Wisker, G. (2001). The Postgraduate Research Handbook. Houndsmills: Palgrave.

PART FOUR - ACADEMIC MATTERS: REGULATIONS, POLICIES AND PROCEDURES *(UPDATED AUGUST 2023)*

The University has a range of regulations, policies, and procedures, which exist for the purpose of protecting and supporting the highest standards within the University and PGR students are encouraged to be familiar with their existence. These are subject to annual review and the complete versions are always available from the University's website, but key points of relevant policies and/or procedures are highlighted below.

Postgraduate Research Regulations

The University has Postgraduate Research regulations covering both the candidature and the examination of your programme. You should ensure that you familiarize yourself with these regulations as they provide the overarching rules for your studies and examination. The regulations should be read in conjunction with the Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes (Section Two of this handbook). If your programme contains taught elements, you should also familiarise yourself with any programme specific regulations.

If you have any queries regarding the regulations, you should contact your Supervisory Team, or your Graduate School.

Student Procedures

Student policies and procedures, which are applicable to all students are available on the Student Progress Service webpages.

In particular, you should be aware of:

- Student Charter
- Academic Query and Appeals Procedure
- Student Complaint and Resolution Procedure
- Living in the Community
- Student Parental Leave Policy
- Standards of Conduct (including Support to Study Procedure and Student Disciplinary Procedure)

University Handbook for Examiners of Research Degrees by Theses

The University is responsible for the quality and standards of postgraduate research awards made in its name. The function of examiners is to assist the University to discharge that responsibility by ensuring that the standards of postgraduate research awards at Newcastle are at least comparable to those in similar subjects in other Universities in the UK. The University expects that examiners will be rigorous and fair and that they will follow good practice. By undertaking their duties in this way, examiners not only maintain standards at Newcastle but, of course, also act as effective gatekeepers for the research community of which they are a part by ensuring candidates meet the academic criteria for membership.

The Handbook covers Doctoral and Master of Philosophy research degrees and focuses on the examination of the thesis. Additional guidance is also provided in the appendices for the examination of Integrated PhD programmes, Professional and Practice-based Doctorates.

The Handbook for Examiners of Research Degrees by Theses is available here. Further information on the Research Degree Examination procedure and forms is available here.

Standards of Academic Conduct

The University requires all students to maintain high standards of academic conduct and, in particular, to avoid conduct amounting to cheating in examinations, the fabrication of research results or plagiarism.

The fabrication of research results includes: claims, which cannot reasonably be justified, to have obtained specific or general results; false claims in relation to experiments, interviews, procedures, or any other research activity; and the omission of statements in relation to data, results, experiments, interviews or procedures, where such omission cannot reasonably be justified. Any student who is suspected of having fabricated research results in relation to submitted and assessed work which contributes to an examination or degree result, will be dealt with under the University's Academic Misconduct Procedure and may also be subject to disciplinary action as determined by the Academic Registrar in accordance with the University's Disciplinary Procedure.

Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of another person's ideas, words, or work. At one extreme, plagiarism is simply a form of cheating, such as where the whole or a significant part of work submitted towards an examination or degree is the unacknowledged work of another, copied slavishly from a book or research paper. At the other extreme, plagiarism may occur accidentally, through poor standards of scholarship, or may concern insignificant parts of submitted work. Plagiarism may involve the use of material downloaded from electronic sources such as the Internet.

Further guidance is provided in Part 3 of this handbook in the 'Guidelines for Research Students and Supervisors' section.

Code of Good Practice in Research

The University expects all its staff and students to adhere to the highest standards of integrity in research. The [Code of Good Practice in Research](#) addresses the issues involved in the proper conduct of research and provides guidance on the standards expected. It applies to all Researchers (defined here as all staff, honorary staff, students and visiting workers undertaking research within or on behalf of the University). Student research misconduct will be dealt with via the Student [Disciplinary Procedures](#), and staff research misconduct via the Policy and Procedure for Investigating Allegations of Research Misconduct.

Within this overarching framework there may be specific discipline requirements in areas such as ethics, clinical governance, data protection, legal requirements, Home Office, and other government requirements, in addition to health and safety and other good laboratory practice requirements. Some disciplines may also be subject to specific good practice requirements of external funding agencies or professional bodies.

The University has signed up to the [Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers](#) which governs working practices, roles and responsibilities of research staff.

Bullying and Harassment Policy

The University aims to promote a culture where all of the University community can play their full part in creating a positive, safe and respectful working environment for everyone. It is committed to excellence, valuing diversity, and investing in its colleagues and students.

This document gives specific information in relation to allegations of bullying and/or harassment for both the reporter and the respondent.

We will not tolerate any form of bullying or harassment, victimisation or any other act of unreasonable behaviour or unlawful discrimination.

This policy explains the behaviours that may be identified as bullying or harassment, the actions and consequences of such behaviours happening in the workplace.

The full Bullying and Harassment Policy is available [here](#).

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

We **value individual differences and the diversity that this brings**. We want to ensure that no-one is at a disadvantage because of who they are.

Through our institutional EDI strategy and Equality Objectives, dedicated working groups, events and projects we aim to create a positive, supportive culture for everyone to reach their potential. Our commitment to diversity extends beyond our duties under the Equality Act and Public Sector Equality Duty.

Newcastle University has now published its Annual EDI Report 2022, which incorporates our progress against our Equality Objectives, our equality monitoring data and our Gender Pay Gap Report.

Further information is available here.

Policy and Procedure on Public Interest Disclosure

The University is committed to the highest standards of openness, probity, and accountability. It seeks to conduct its affairs in a responsible manner taking into account the requirements of the funding bodies, the standards in public life set out in the reports of the Nolan Committee, and the principles of academic freedom embodied in its Statutes.

The Public Interest Disclosure Act, which came into effect on 1 January 1999, gives legal protection to workers against being dismissed or penalized by their employers as a result of disclosing in the public interest certain serious concerns. It is a fundamental term of every contract of employment that an employee will faithfully serve his or her employer and not disclose confidential information about the employer's affairs. However, an individual within the organization should have the right to disclose certain matters of public interest without fear of reprisal. The Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013 confirmed that the legal framework that gives protection to workers who raise public interest disclosures is intended to apply only to disclosures that are made in the broader public interest, as opposed to issues in which an individual may have a personal interest.

This policy and procedure are intended to guide and assist workers and students who wish to make a disclosure, in the public interest, about what they believe to be malpractice or impropriety in order to assist the University in the maintenance of appropriate standards of propriety and good practice. Workers and students are expected to use this policy and procedure in the first instance rather than report their concerns to a third party outside the Institution. The full policy is available [here](#).

Policy for Intellectual Property and Research Studentships

Intellectual Property generated by members of staff in the University is automatically vested in the University, provided that it relates to work that the member of staff would normally be expected to carry out as part of their day-to-day activities.

However, research postgraduate students are not members of staff, and there may be considerable variation in the nature and source of their funding. This note explains the IPR position of different types of studentships. It details where positive action is taken by University Research Office (URO) to protect IP and identifies where schools need themselves to take specific action.

Where a student is joining a large research effort with considerable and possibly highly commercialisable IP, supervisors must ensure that the IP position is reviewed immediately with the student, that the student is aware of the position with regard to IP, that they understand the problems that will arise for the University should the IP associated with a project be disclosed prematurely, and that the IP generated in the course of the grant is properly vested in the University in exchange for an undertaking to treat the student as if they were a member of academic staff with regard to intellectual property. A corollary of this is that where the student has clearly been responsible for 'inventive' steps in the prosecution of their research, and that research has led to a patent being filed by the University, the student's name shall appear on the patent.

The Confidentiality and Intellectual Property Policy Statement for Research Students is available here. Further general guidance about Intellectual Property is available from the University's Legal Services.

Copyright

The University holds a number of licences which permit staff and students to reuse copyrighted material for the purposes of teaching, learning and assessment.

It is important to be aware that the copies must be made from either:

- An original of the book, journal or magazine owned by the HEI or
- A copyright fee paid copy of a chapter / article supplied by an organisation holding a document delivery licence with CLA (e.g., British Library)

What the Licence does not cover

The following Excluded Material is outside the scope of this Licence Agreement:

- printed music (including the words)
- maps, charts, or books of tables
- newspapers
- workbooks, workcards and assignments works expressly excluded by the copyright owners

Further information is available here.

Policy on Postgraduates Who Teach

The University recognises the value to postgraduates of the teaching experience it provides and is committed to providing such opportunities consistent with its desire to deliver teaching of the highest quality on its programmes.

The Policy on Postgraduates Who Teach is available here

This policy covers teaching and learning practices for postgraduates teaching or demonstrating on modules and outlines the different teaching options available. Appointment practices, employment terms and conditions are covered in more detail by separate policies. This policy does not cover arrangements for hourly paid bought in teaching.