Quick guide: How to supervise a PhD/MD student

Academic year 2016/17
Introduction
The summary below gives a quick reminder of the various steps that you need to go through and when they need to be done. The maximum period of study for PhD and MD students is 48 months full-time and 96 months part-time. For MPhil students the maximum period of registration is 36 and 72 months for full- and part-time respectively.

One of your main objectives as a supervisor is to ensure that your students submit within the maximum period. This is important both for the student and the University. Students will normally only have access to sufficient funding to cover a defined period (often 3 years). If they go over this period the doctorate will likely become a part-time activity and they will struggle to make sufficient progress to complete within the maximum time; some will find it impossible to complete. It is important that you use your expertise and experience to help them to set tasks that are of the correct depth and rigour to achieve the test of a ‘contribution to knowledge’ whilst ensuring that the overall work programme is achievable within the time and resources available. Your supervisory time is valuable and is best deployed during the registration period. Although it is inevitable that sometimes it will take a little longer than planned, students who are in ‘continuing’ are essentially unfunded. A further incentive is that Research Councils UK requires that 80% of our doctoral students submit within the 48 month deadline. If we fail to meet this benchmark then the University would be barred from applying to certain funding opportunities e.g. Doctoral Training Partnerships.

Doctoral College
2016/17 is the inaugural year of the Doctoral College. Its aims are to ensure that PGRs, in whatever discipline, receive solid training, robust monitoring of progress, and support in order to be able to submit their thesis on time and to be well positioned for the next stage in their career. Supervisors are an integral part of the Doctoral College and over the coming year we will be developing lots of events and new online tools to help you to manage your PGRs more easily.

You will be able to see the registration details and progress histories of your students plus the dates of supervisor training on the Doctoral College webpages.

The PGR Lifecycle
All the timeframes given below are for full-time students; for part-time students double them.

Admissions:
If you are sent an application please deal with it rapidly, using the paperless system, and tell the administrator whether you are pursuing it or not. Good students will attract a number of offers and slow processes will make it less likely that they end up at Surrey.

All prospective applicants must be interviewed (remote interviewing by Skype is allowed) by two trained members of staff. The prospective Principal Supervisor should always be on the interview panel. If you have not been trained in doctoral student admissions then you CANNOT interview applicants. The training is incorporated into Supervisor Training Day 1.

After the interview fill in the relevant form and return it to the administrator for processing and generation of an offer letter. N.B. Start dates may only be prospective.

New students:
All new students, regardless of start date, will be invited to a set of University-run and Faculty-run induction events.
All new students must attend the course ‘Welcome to your Doctorate’, run by the Researcher Development Programme (RDP) team. During this course they will complete Action Planner which will identify their training needs. It is best practice for you as a supervisor to discuss these training needs with your student and help them plan a training programme tailored to their individual needs.

**Supervision:**
Each student should have at least two supervisors, one of whom must have successfully supervised a PGR student through to completion.

At your **first formal meeting** it is good practice to include the following:

- Discuss the supervisory arrangements and the responsibilities of each of the supervisors and the student
- Discuss the “Guidance on the authorship of publications and other outputs originating from doctoral research” document and make sure it is signed
- Discuss the training needs of your student, using the outcomes of Action Planner as a guide
- Set clear targets, including training, covering at least the next six months

All **subsequent** supervisory meetings should take place at least once a month. Ask your student to write a brief summary of the meeting using the [monthly meeting form](#) – this will enable you to check that they have understood what was discussed.

These meetings must also be recorded in SITS – if you do not know how to do this please refer to the [Doctoral Supervision Handbook](#). This is used by the University to check if meetings are regularly taking place.

If the student is not on campus then meetings can take place remotely via Skype or telephone.

You should also ensure that the student is given the opportunity to present their research formally at least once a year, for example at a Departmental or Research group seminar, and/or the University or local PGR Conference.

**Regular reviews:**
Formal reviews of the student’s progress against targets must take place at six monthly intervals (for both full- and part-time students) during the interim and end of year review periods. The Research Degrees Office will contact you when reviews are due and advise of you where to find the [form for these reviews](#).

Note that completion of these reviews is monitored by the Admission Progression and Examination Subcommittee. Students who do not complete a review may be put on 'unsatisfactory academic progress' procedures, which can lead to termination of registration. It is important that you ensure you review your students every six months by the deadline communicated by the Research Degrees Office.

**Confirmation**
The Confirmation process is a formal hurdle which the student must pass 12-15 months after starting the PhD or MD.

The student must attend the ‘Confirmation process’ workshop organised by RDP as training for this process.
The student writes a report and undergoes a viva voce examination with two independent examiners, who need to be approved before the examination – there is a form for this.

The outcome of the examination is recorded on a form by the examiners which should be returned to the Research Degrees Office.

**Registration changes**

If the student needs to withdraw temporarily, or needs an extension to registration then a case should be made against the grounds given on the forms. Evidence should be presented along with the form. Cases will be examined at the next regular meeting of the full APESC Committee which meets every month. It is important to note that retrospective requests will not be entertained unless there is good cause (normally medical) for the delay.

**Final submission and examination:**

The student should attend the ‘The Viva Examination’ workshops organised by RDP as training for this examination.

The supervisor must submit the ‘Exam Entry’ form to the administrator at least two months before the intended submission date so that the proposed examiners can be approved and invited. All Entry Forms are approved by the Admission, Progression and Examination Subcommittee (APESC).

In addition to examining the candidate, the internal examiner needs to make sure that the viva is run in accordance with the regulations, that the completed signed form is promptly returned to the Research Degrees Office and that the student is informed in writing of any required corrections or revisions, or of the requirements for a resubmission (i.e. ‘Chair’ the proceedings). Under certain conditions (defined in the regulations) an independent Chairperson will also be appointed.

**Forms and guidance documents**

All the forms needed for PGR students are available on the current PGR student pages.

You should ensure that you are familiar with the regulations and Code of practice for research degrees.