Supervision Policy for Postgraduate Research Degrees

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1. Introduction and Purpose

1.1. The University of Manchester recognises the importance of robust postgraduate research (PGR) supervision and this policy reflects the University's commitment to establishing and maintaining systematic and clear supervision arrangements.

1.2. This policy lists the requirements and provides guidance relating to the roles within the supervisory team, the appointment of supervisors, responsibilities, safeguarding the interests of PGRs in the absence of or a change of supervisor and the training / development of supervisors.

2. Scope and definitions

2.1. This policy relates to all research degrees across the University including all Doctoral, Master of Philosophy (MPhil) and Doctor of Medicine (MD) degrees and all collaborative research degrees e.g. Joint / Dual awards.

2.2. This policy is applicable to all members of a PGR supervisory team including main supervisors, co-supervisors, external supervisors and advisors.

2.3. The policy contains information for PGRs and academic and professional service staff in Schools and Faculties. Schools and Faculties should use this document to inform any local procedures relating to the supervision of PGRs.

3. The Supervisory Team / Supervisory Roles

Each PGR must have a designated main supervisor. The main supervisor will lead a supervisory team consisting of one or more additional academic colleagues or collaborative partners, who act as co-supervisor/s, and a pastoral advisor. All members of this supervisory team are responsible for working together in providing supervision.

3.1. **Main Supervisor** - the main supervisor is normally assigned to a PGR at the time an offer of admission is made and they take full responsibility for the overall guidance of the PGRs research degree in addition to administrative issues relating to the PGRs attendance, and progress. Where two members

of staff are equally involved in supervising a PGR this requirement still stands and, whilst recognising the equal academic contributions, one of the supervisors must be appointed as main supervisor.

3.2. **Co-Supervisor** - the co-supervisor will be appointed to contribute their specific expertise in assisting the main supervisor throughout the development of the PGRs degree and may act as a supervisor of sections of the project in consultation with the main supervisor.

3.3. **External Supervisor** – where a formal collaborative research degree arrangement has been approved between the University of Manchester and another institution or organisation, supervisors must be appointed at both institutions [see section 10].

3.4. **Advisor** - an advisor must be included as part of the supervisory team. Their role is to provide pastoral support and advice.

4. Appointment Criteria for the Selection of the Supervisory Team

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

4.1. Main supervisors must have gained a doctoral degree (or have equivalent experience of research) and should normally have at least three years' experience of university teaching or research.

4.2. Main supervisors should normally have proven supervisory experience[1] (for exceptions to this see 4.11).

4.3. Main supervisors must be practising researchers in an area closely related to that of the PGR's proposed project.

4.4. Members of staff appointed as a main supervisor should be full-time or part-time salaried employees of the University, except where the member of staff is on an honorary contract and a member of an NHS Trust.

4.5. Where an honorary member of staff who is also a member of an NHS trust is selected as the main supervisor the co-supervisor must hold a substantive role at The University of Manchester.

4.6. The following members of staff should not normally be appointed as a main supervisor but can be appointed as a co-supervisor:

- Those on probation;
- Those currently registered for a higher degree of any university;
- Visiting professors;
- Visiting fellows;
- Those who have retired;
- Those on Academic Teaching and Scholarship contracts (for exceptions see 4.7);
- Honorary members of staff;

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[1] Proven supervision experience would relate to an appropriate period of involvement in a supervisory team as a co-supervisor (normally the successful completion of one PGR).

- Emeritus professors;

- Postdoctoral Research Associates (with line manager approval)

4.7. In some circumstances, for example, in professional disciplines and in student proposed projects, it may be possible for individuals on an Academic Teaching and Scholarship contract to be appointed as a main supervisor. To be appointed as a main supervisor a case must be made by the head of department/division and presented for approval to the Faculty Associate Dean for Postgraduate Research (or their delegate).[2]

4.8. Appointment as main supervisor will normally end if the appointee ceases to hold an academic / clinical contract at the University unless a case can be made to the Faculty Associate Dean for Postgraduate Research (or their delegate) that it is in the best interest of the PGR for the individual to continue in the role.

4.9. Where a collaborative agreement is in place with an external organisation, the external supervisor should have comparable research experience as that expected of the University of Manchester supervisor and should meet the same selection criteria as outlined in this policy.

4.10. Consideration should be given when appointing a supervisory team to the length of each individual's contract to ensure that the PGR will be supported throughout their programme. The main supervisor's contract of employment should exceed the registration period of the PGR. If, in exceptional circumstances, it is more appropriate to appoint a supervisor whose contract does not exceed the registration period of the PGR, a case and plan must be put forward to the Faculty Associate Dean for Postgraduate Research (or their delegate) for approval.

4.11. A member of staff without proven supervisory experience (including those just establishing their academic independence)[3] can be appointed as a main supervisor if:

- A suitable and highly experienced co-supervisor is also appointed to the supervisory team;[4]

- They have completed the relevant aspects of the appropriate Faculty New Academics Programme (where applicable);

- They hold a contract that exceeds the PGR's anticipated submission date;

- Their appointment is approved by the Faculty Associate Dean for Postgraduate Research (or their delegate).

4.12. The appointed advisor must be a member of academic staff or a post-doctoral researcher. All appointments are subject to Faculty/School approval.

5. Responsibilities of the Head of School (or their delegate)

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[2] For example, a staff member on an Academic Teaching and Scholarship contract may be undertaking pedagogic research and/or have an established track record in their field (evidenced by publications or external funding).

[3] Those establishing academic independence could, for example, refer to early career researchers in receipt of a first external grant, those setting-up their first research group as external intermediate fellowship holder or a new investigator grant awardee.

[4] The strength of the supervisory team should be a robust part of the proposal's assessment. Proposals should describe how the overall balance in the supervisory team will benefit the PGR.

5.1. To ensure, taking into account the PGRs mode of study, the progress of PGRs and oversee appropriate supervisory arrangements, induction, availability of resources and the nomination of examiners within the school.

5.2. To oversee the appointment of supervisors for each PGR registered on a research degree within their School.

5.3. Ensure that arrangements are in place for new supervisors to be introduced to the content of the [Code of Practice for Research Degrees](#).

5.4. To ensure supervisors are meeting their responsibilities around recording and monitoring the progress of PGRs via the University's progression monitoring system.

5.5. To ensure that procedures are in place should a PGR need to consult on, and in exceptional circumstances change, their supervisory arrangements.

5.6. To ensure that the appropriate provision for the continuation of supervision when supervisors leave the employment of the University, are on a formal leave of absence for a significant period of time or where the relationship between supervisor and PGR breaks down and a change of supervisor is requested.

5.7. To provide objective support for supervisors where serious concerns regarding a PGR have been identified.

5.8. To consider the academic work load of staff when supervisory teams are appointed/approved ensuring that no member of staff supervises more PGRs than their experience and commitments justify.

6. It is the Responsibility of Main Supervisor

6.1. To be aware of the University's [Code of Practice for Research Degrees](#).

6.2. To abide by and ensure that the PGR is aware of the health and safety regulations, academic rules and regulations, equality, diversity and inclusion policies and the dignity at work and study policies of the University.

6.3. To instil in their PGRs the need to exercise probity and conduct in their research according to ethical principles, and to advise on the implications of research misconduct and plagiarism.

6.4. To provide guidance about the nature of the research and the standards expected, the planning of the research degree, literature and sources, attendance at taught courses (where appropriate) and about requisite research techniques (arranging for instruction where necessary).

6.5. To work with the PGR to clearly and realistically define their project from the beginning to support their completion within the allotted time of the programme and to bear in mind the intellectual and practical competencies expected of doctoral candidates, as set out by the [QAA doctoral characteristics document](#).

6.6. To agree a plan of research and a schedule of regular meetings with the PGR at the beginning of the project taking into account any planned time working away from the University. The frequency of meetings will likely be determined by the nature and stage of the research being undertaken and the

time of year. All supervisors should, however, expect to meet with their PGRs at least on a monthly basis.[5]

6.7. To discuss and agree flexible research arrangements with their PGR at least annually, giving consideration to the PGRs personal circumstances e.g. caring responsibilities alongside their ability to progress and complete within their original deadline.

6.8. To record any agreed flexible research arrangements in the University's progression monitoring system at least annually.

6.9. To record attendance and monitor the progress of PGRs in the University's progression monitoring system, providing detailed advice on the necessary completion dates of each step, so that it is completed on time.

6.10. To ensure that the PGR is made aware when their progress is not considered to be satisfactory and provide them with advice and guidance on how to improve, escalating issues in line with the Policy on the Progress and Review of Postgraduate Research where necessary.

6.11. To agree with the PGR at the beginning of the project a reasonable timeframe for the submission and feedback of submitted work.

6.12. To help the PGR identify their specific training needs, both in relation to research skills and to the development of other transferable skills; inform the PGR of the means to develop these skills and monitor the PGRs progress in these areas.

6.13. To agree the ownership of Intellectual Property with the PGR and to respect their intellectual freedom to shape their own research.

6.14. To encourage the PGR to present their work to staff and other researchers across the University and beyond, and encourage them to attend conferences/bid for funding for conference travel.

6.15. To advise the PGR on the submission of conference papers and publications.[6]

6.16. To ensure that the PGR engages fully with the annual progress review process. Further requirements are set out in the Policy on the Progress and Review of Postgraduate Research.

6.17. To keep other members of the supervisory team appraised of the PGRs progress.

6.18. To ensure that the PGR is aware of institutional support services, including wellbeing services, disability and occupational health support, careers guidance, and equality and diversity support, making referrals when required.

6.19. To ensure, where required, that their duties are fulfilled with regard to any formal requirements from external bodies or agencies in relation to the submission of reports, training etc.

6.20. To ensure that appropriate agreement has been obtained with all parties, including external sponsors, in relation to the communication of research outputs.

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[5] It is expected that meetings will take place face-to-face. However, where a PGR is studying on split-site programme and is located outside of Manchester or at the request of the PGR some meetings may be conducted remotely e.g. via Zoom / Teams. See the Policy on Progress and Review of Postgraduate Researchers for full details / additional UKVI attendance monitoring requirements for PGRs on a Student Visa.

[6] Where supervisors propose to publish work drawing on a PGR project they must ensure compliance with the University's authorship guidelines. These stipulate that a PGR should normally be first author of any multi-authored articles based on their thesis.

6.21. To actively pursue their professional development in the area of supervision through training offered at the University of Manchester and/or training provision external to the institution (refer to section 12).

6.22. To help PGRs prepare for the oral examination of the thesis (or equivalent). Normally this is done by the organisation of a mock viva.

6.23. To ensure that examiners are nominated within the deadlines stipulated in the [Nomination of Examiners and Independent Chairs for Postgraduate Research Degree Examinations Policy](#).

6.24. To approve the access restriction level of the final theses.

7. It is the Responsibility of the Postgraduate Researcher

7.1. To familiarise themselves with relevant University [regulations](#) and [policies](#).

7.2. To maintain regular contact with supervisors, according to an agreed pattern of meetings.

7.3. To prepare adequately for meetings with supervisors.

7.4. To have a joint meeting with all supervisors to discuss progress at least twice per year.

7.5. To meet with their advisor at least once a year.

7.6. To give their supervisors due warning and adequate time for reading any drafts and for providing feedback.

7.7. To fully engage with and monitor their own progress in the University's progression monitoring systems, keeping adequate records of progress and the development of their own skills.

7.8. To develop, in consultation with the supervisor, an agreed schedule for progressing and submitting the thesis in a timely manner.

7.9. To make supervisors aware of any specific needs and of any circumstances likely to affect their work, and take the initiative in raising issues or difficulties as soon as they arise, particularly in relation to progression targets.

7.10. To make their supervisor(s) aware of any changes to their personal circumstances, e.g. [caring responsibilities](#) that may necessitate a change to their agreed research arrangements, at the earliest opportunity.

7.11. To attend all mandatory training and participate fully in any further training and development opportunities, research-related and other, that have been identified with their supervisors.

7.12. To actively participate in the research activities of the University by attending research seminars and, when deemed appropriate by the supervisory team, presenting their own research to the division/department/School.

7.13. To ensure that any reports and the final thesis are written in accordance with [University guidelines](#).

7.14. To prepare periodic progress reports on the research project as may be required by external agencies.

7.15. To inform the supervisor of any communications from their sponsor or other external body in relation to the research project.

7.16. To make every effort to provide feedback on the supervisory experience, through completion of the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES).

7.17. To inform the supervisor of any paid or unpaid work they are carrying out or wish to carry out in addition to their full time study, being mindful of potential UKRI or UKVI restrictions governing how many hours can be worked.

7.18. To inform their supervisor of any intention to take leave and discuss the timing of the intended leave in relation to academic priorities.

7.19. To discuss with their supervisor and seek approval for any fieldwork in support of their research, and ensure the supervisor is aware of any time away from campus for this purpose.

7.20. To decide when the final thesis should be submitted, taking into account the opinion of the supervisors.

7.21. To record the access restriction level of their final theses.

8. It is the Responsibility of the Co-supervisors and/or External Supervisors

8.1. To familiarise themselves with relevant University [regulations](#) and [policies](#).

8.2. To meet with the main supervisor and the PGR at least twice per academic year.

8.3. To meet with the main supervisor and PGR and agree the balance of responsibility for the PGRs day-to-day supervision.

8.4. To review the progress of the PGR on the University's progression monitoring system.

8.5. To be actively involved in the supervision by making themselves fully aware of the research plan that has been agreed between the PGR and the main supervisor and by contributing to feedback on written work.

8.6. To be available to the PGR for consultation and advice on academic matters relating to the degree, and to offer support and guidance on non-academic matters.

8.7. To take responsibility for the day-to-day supervision of the PGR and their research degree whilst they are in attendance at the external organisation (external supervisors only).

8.8. To deputise for the main supervisor where the main supervisor is absent or unable to continue supervising (co-supervisors only).

8.9. To ensure that the PGR is aware of institutional-level sources of advice and support, including wellbeing services, disability and occupational health support, careers guidance, and equality and diversity, making referrals when required.

8.10. To actively pursue their professional development in the area of supervision through training offered at the University of Manchester and/or training provision external to the institution (refer to section 12).

9. It is the responsibility of the Advisor

9.1. To provide pastoral support and advice and to the PGR as required.

9.2. To be available to the PGR if they are experiencing any difficulties that they feel unable to discuss with their supervisory team.

9.3. To be the first point of contact for the PGR should any difficulties arise within the PGR/supervisor relationship.

9.4. To ensure that the PGR is aware of institutional support services, including wellbeing services, disability and occupational health support, careers guidance, and equality and diversity support, making referrals when required.

10. Supervision of Collaborative Research Degrees

10.1. The University of Manchester has a Policy for Split-Site PhD Arrangements and Procedures for Joint and Dual Research Degrees and specific reference should be made to these documents.

10.2. PGRs registered on a split-site research degree must have a designated supervisor at both institutions and the main supervisor should be based at the University of Manchester.

10.3. The institutional contractual agreement between the University of Manchester and the partner organisation will include detailed information about the supervision arrangements, particularly in relation to managing the supervisory process when the PGRs is at the partner organisation.[7]

10.4. For existing validated research degree arrangements, the main supervisor will normally be based at the partner organisation.

10.5. The co-supervisor may either be from the partner organisation or the University of Manchester, and this will be agreed on a case-by-case basis, depending upon the qualifications and experience of the staff.

10.6. All supervisors for validated research degrees must be formally approved by the home Faculty or School postgraduate research degree committee, or equivalent, before appointment to the supervisory team.

10.7. Supervisory practice for collaborative research degrees must meet all the requirements set out in this policy.

10.8. The formal agreement between the institution and the partner organisation should include details of how these requirements will be met.

11. Absence or Change of Supervisor

11.1. Schools cannot guarantee that PGRs will be able to work with a particular supervisor when they start their programme or that they will have the same supervisor for the duration of their research degree, but will endeavour to ensure continuity and alternative provision wherever possible.

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[7] In the absence of any formal collaborative agreement or registration of the PGR at the University of Manchester, any request from an external organisation for University of Manchester staff involvement in a supervisory capacity may only be undertaken on a consultative basis. The member of staff at the University of Manchester should liaise with their Head of School, or their delegate, to discuss the option of working on a consultative basis, and ensure compliance with the Outside Work and Consultancy Policy.

11.2. Where a main supervisor is absent for less than three months the co-supervisor should normally assume responsibility for the PGR until the main supervisor returns.

11.3. Where the period of absence exceeds three months, it is essential that the supervisory team and Head of School (or their delegate) set up alternative arrangements to ensure continuity of supervision.[8]

11.4. If the main supervisor becomes an honorary member of staff during the period of a PGRs degree, they can continue to undertake a supervisory role as co-supervisor but a new main supervisor must be appointed.

11.5. If the main supervisor retires or leaves the institution they can continue to undertake a supervisory role as co-supervisor but an External Supervisor Engagement Form must be completed and a new main supervisor and internal co-supervisor must be appointed.

11.6. In exceptional circumstances, with agreement from the PGR and approval from the Faculty Associate Dean for Postgraduate Research (or their delegate), it may be possible for a main supervisor to continue in the main supervisor role after leaving the institution. These exceptional arrangements must be in best interest of the PGR and can only be approved where a suitable replacement supervisor from the University of Manchester cannot be found. This arrangement can only proceed where there is a co-supervisor at this University who is agreeable with the arrangement. A formal agreement between the University of Manchester and the main supervisor must be put in place [External Supervisor Engagement Form]. As a minimum the agreement must include the following and should be signed by the University and the external supervisor:

- An explicit statement that the Supervisor's new institution gives the academic concerned permission to finish their supervisory duties at the University of Manchester (if applicable).
- A statement that the supervisor must comply with the University of Manchester's supervision policy in order to ensure quality control over the standard of ongoing supervision.
- The name of the member of staff at the University of Manchester who will act as co-supervisor and formally monitor the supervisory process at this institution as part of the supervisory team.
- A statement which confirms that any funding bodies or sponsors have been informed of any change in supervisory circumstances.
- The notice period should the supervisor decide for any reason that they can no longer continue to supervise the PGR.

11.7. In some circumstances, where a supervisor has moved to a new institution, it may be possible for the PGR to transfer with them. In these cases the Head of School (or their delegate) will ensure that the transfer arrangements are made in an appropriate manner.

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8 The co-supervisor would normally be expected to deputise for the main supervisor if the main supervisor is not available. However, where a co-supervisor does not meet the criteria for nomination as main supervisor, and the main supervisor is no longer available, they must not become main supervisor by default.

11.8. In exceptional circumstances (for example, the breakdown of the relationship between supervisor and PGR) a change of supervisor may be requested by either party through the Head of School (or their delegate).[9]

11.9. Where a change of supervisor is requested or if a supervisor is unable to continue with their duties, the Head of School (or their delegate) is responsible for identifying and allocating an appropriate permanent replacement in consultation with the PGR and the remaining supervisory team.

11.10. Where no appropriate alternative can be found at the University of Manchester the Head of School (or their delegate) should support the student in exploring options for continuing their research through registration at other Higher Education Institutions or alternatively consideration should also be given to whether sufficient research has been completed to enable the student to submit their research for a lesser award.

11.11. Every effort should be made to find alternative provision for the PGR, but it may not always be possible to appoint a new supervisor and there may not be a successful outcome potentially resulting in the termination of the student's registration. In this circumstance the PGRs should be made aware of this as soon as reasonably possible.

11.12. Where a change of supervisor / supervisory team has occurred the new supervisor/s have the right to consult with the previous supervisor/s regarding the PGRs work/progress to date.

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

12. Supervisor Training and Development

12.1. Faculty Doctoral Academies are responsible for defining any mandatory requirements for training and ongoing professional development for PGR Supervisors in their Faculty. This will include details of the potential consequences of failing to meet these requirements. Supervisors are encouraged to engage with the Postgraduate Researcher Supervisor Toolkit. This resource, based on the UKCGE Good Supervisor Practice Framework, brings together information and guidance about all aspects of research supervision from recruitment through to completion.

12.2. Supervisors are encouraged to apply to become a UKCGE recognised research supervisor.

13. Monitoring Compliance

The University is required to comply with the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's Quality Code for the assurance of academic quality in postgraduate research, as a condition of receiving funding

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[9]Where there are early signs that the PGR / supervisor relationship is breaking down attempts should be made to resolve the issues at School and / or Faculty level.

for postgraduate research. All staff engaged in supervision and all PGRs must know and adhere to the supervision responsibilities laid out in this policy.

13.1. Where a supervisor repeatedly fails to engage with the University's progression/attendance monitoring system Faculties should have in place a process by which PGR administrators can escalate the problem to the relevant PGR Director, Faculty Associate Dean and/or Head of School.

13.2. Where evidence exists of poor support or inappropriate behaviour Faculties should have in place a process by which complaints can be escalated to the relevant PGR Director, Faculty Associate Dean and Head of School. The eventual result of this process could be the prevention of any further involvement in PGR supervision.

13.3. Extreme cases of inappropriate behaviour will be referred immediately to the Supervisor's Head of School/Line Manager.

13.4. Supervisors should be aware that the University's appeals procedure enables PGRs to appeal on the grounds of inadequate supervision.

Version amendment history		
Version	Date	Reason for change
10	April 2024	Updated to include Postdoctoral Research Associates in the list of those eligible to be appointed as a PGR co-supervisor (with line manager approval) and to make it clear that when a main supervisor leaves the institution but retains a co-supervisor role, a new main *and* a new UoM co-supervisor should be appointed.

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