PhD: assessment and examination

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An overview

- Key documents

- Joint supervision

- Improving conversion

- The first 3 months

- LNA and RDP

- Monitoring progress

- Timely submission

- Suspensions / extensions

- Complying with UKBA regulations

Key documents

- Code of Practice on Research Students
  - Definitive coverage of policies & procedures, and appropriate practice

- Supervisor Essentials
  - Summarises key information in easily accessible form

- Good practice guides for staff
  - PhD Supervision
  - PhD Examining
  - Monitoring & Assessment of student progress
  - Interviewing prospective research students
  - Postgraduate Research Studentships: Advertising and administration of awards

Joint supervision

- UK policy now states that each student must have more than one named supervisor (recorded on RISIS)

- Can be from another School, external organisation, or form part of wider supervisory team

- At least one supervisor must have supervised FT student to completion, and at least one must be 'research active'

- Second supervisor can take more of a mentor or advisor role

Improving conversion

- Research students are more likely to take up offers of a place if they have been in communication with Schools (particularly prospective supervisors) before they arrive

- Q: How can you (as supervisor or as School) best keep in touch with prospective students ??

The first 3 months: Expectations of students

- Clear understanding of expected of working patterns, time usage, milestones & deadlines, and working with supervisors
- Awareness of list of Supervisor & Student responsibilities set out in a Code of Practice on Research Students
- Attendance at University's Welcome / Induction event
- Clear idea about what research questions they are addressing, and how they are to address these
- Completion of, and feedback on, at least one piece of written work

Learning Needs Analysis (LNA)

- Enables them to reflect on existing competencies and identify areas in need of development

- Expect LNA to be a 'living document'.

Monitoring of Progress

- Should be at least an annual review of progress of each student (including PT) by agreed monitoring team (at least one of whom should not be involved in supervision)
- In yr 2 FT (yr 3 or 4 PT) takes form of Confirmation of Registration or Progression Assessment
- For each review, student and supervisors can produce separate reports
- These can then be considered by assessors who produce a joint report
- Students can also complete annual evaluation of supervisory arrangements (using standard form)

Submitting on time

- Timely submission essential. Rates monitored externally
- Students should plan from outset for completion in minimum / expected (i.e. not maximum) registration period
  - FT – 3 years: PT – 4/5 years
- Get your research students to produce work early and often. If they experience difficulties with writing, refer them to support services
- Keep in frequent contact and provide timely feedback on work

Complying with UKBA regulations

- Essential to ensure that universities do not lose licence
- Supervisors expected to know location of their overseas research students and be in frequent contact with them
- Need to discuss and agree when they will spend time away from University, including holidays

Review

Are there procedures in place for:

Selection and recruitment

Training and development

Monitoring and assessing progress

The initial supervision meeting

Learning needs analysis

Responsibilities of student/supervisor?

- What is the basis for selection of student?
- What does a good proposal look like?
- What training and development is needed?
- How can progress be monitored?
- What are the responsibilities of the student?
- What are the responsibilities of the supervisor?

Student selection

- Academic and research ability of the applicant
- Feasibility of the proposal in terms of:
  - The academic standard of the research proposed
  - The clarity of the aims and objectives
  - Any equipment/special facilities needed, and any associated costs
  - Skills and experience of the supervisor
  - Length of time the research may take

  - INTERVIEW

What should a research plan or proposal contain?

- What is the provisional title?

- What area/field am I working in?

- Why is this topic or area important? Why have I decided to study this?

- What are my main research questions? Where do or did these 'come' from?

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- What has been done in this area already? (an outline, at least, of the likely literatures)

- What is the context for the study? (global, national, institutional, personal)

- What theory/theoretical framework can I draw upon?

- What is the proposed methodology? Why? And which specific methods are likely to be used? Why these and not others?

- For an empirical study, how will the sample be determined?

- What issues are likely to emerge around: (a) access, and (b) ethics, in the course of the research?

- How will data be analysed (whether primary or secondary data)?

- What timescale, approximately, will I try to follow – and is it humanly possible?

Wellington, J. (2010). Weaving the threads of doctoral research journeys. In P. Thomson and M. Walker (Eds). *The Routledge doctoral student's companion; getting to grips with research in education and the social sciences.* London: Routledge.p.134

Criteria for reflecting on doctoral research plans or dissertation proposal

Aspect or thread	Strong proposals	Needing more work….
1. Research questions (RQs)	Clearly spelt out and focused: the terms are defined; they are answerable: the project is 'do-able'	RQs are too general; they just cannot be answered: the terms are not clearly defined; they are too ambitious, wide ranging or over optimistic
2. Methodology	Appropriate for the RQs; access and ethics have been considered; there is some idea of how the data are to be analysed	It is not clear what will be done or why; plans are not clear; not clear how the planed methods relate to the RQs or are appropriate for them
3. Summary of the literature base	Proposed study is set in its historical and methodological context; comprehensive coverage; critical review	Too descriptive (not critical); the social, geographical or historical context for this study is not clear
4. Theoretical framework/conceptual base	Shows theoretical clarity; the RQs are located in a theoretical framework	No or little theoretical framework; key terms are not defined or discussed (see 1 above)
5. General issues	**Has the potential to make a contribution to the field; has potential 'mileage', currency or scope**	**Not clear how it would add or contribute (either through its methods/process or product)**

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Training and development

- Three tiered approach
  - Locally (IfE)
  - At a broad disciplinary level (Social Sciences)
  - Centrally (Graduate school)

- Researcher Development Programme
  - co-ordinated by the University-wide Graduate school

The first meeting

- Discuss mutual expectations of the supervision process
- Agree the nature of the meetings
- Emphasise the role of constructive criticism
- Discuss practicalities
- Flag up your availability

- Research training
  - Learning needs analysis

Monitoring of progress

- Purpose:

  Internally, a mechanism
  - to ensure that students are making satisfactory progress
  - to ensure that the supervision, training and support is appropriate

  Externally,
  - Our record of completion rates acts as an indicator of our performance as a University (HEFCE, Research Councils etc)
  - Influences potential students in choosing to come here

Key stages

ANNUAL REPORT

Supervisors , students and monitoring panel

PROGRESSION ASSESSMENT

Formal transition

Annual report

- Student
  - A summary of work completed, including written work
  - A plan for the following year, including plans for publications or other outputs
  - What research training has been undertaken
  - What oral presentations have been made

- Supervisors
  - Rate of progress appropriate to the stage of the research process
  - Standard of written work
  - Appropriateness of research training and output

- Monitoring panel
  - Reviews all reports
  - Outlines any concerns
  - Suggests actions where appropriate
  - Makes recommendation as to whether registration should be continued

  - All reports are filed
  - Important reference point (Neglect of work, appeals)

Progression assessment

- During year 2 of fulltime registration
  - Is the work presented such as might reasonably be expected as a result of their having studied thus far?
  - Has the student shown independent critical judgement?
  - Has the student demonstrated that s/he understands how the research topic is related to a wider field of knowledge?
  - Has the student demonstrated the ability to produce an original contribution to knowledge?
  - Is there evidence of progress in research training (learning needs analysis)
  - Is the standard of work on target to reach a successful completion?

Responsibilities of the student

- Discussing with their supervisors the type of guidance and comment which is most helpful, and agreeing a schedule of meetings

- Taking the initiative in raising problems or difficulties

- Agreeing and observing any necessary safety precautions

- Attending appropriate training and development events

- Carrying out research in an ethical way and in line with University procedures for good practice

- Maintaining the progress of the work in accordance with the stages agreed with the supervisors, including in particular the presentation of written material as required in sufficient time to allow for comments and discussion

- Providing annually a formal written report to the School, outlining progress during the preceding year, the contents of which should normally be discussed with supervisor before submission

- Being honest when reporting on progress

- Deciding when to submit their thesis within the prescribed period of registration, taking due account of their supervisors' opinions, and informing the Exams office

- Shortly before submission of their thesis, informing supervisors of any special circumstance which they believe may have adversely affected their research

- Showing their supervisors the final draft of their thesis before submission

Responsibilities of supervisor

- Giving advice regarding all aspects of the project

- Carrying out an analysis of training and learning needs, and ensuring that students participate in appropriate training events

- Maintaining contact through regular meetings

- Being accessible to the student at other appropriate times when advice may be needed

- Giving advice on the necessary completion dates of successive stages of the work

- Requesting written work as appropriate, and returning such work with constructive criticism and in reasonable time

- Arranging as appropriate for the student to talk about the work to staff or at graduate seminars

- Reporting in writing at least annually on the student's progress to the DoR and the student

- Advising on appropriate dissemination activities (including publication), external engagement, networking etc

- When the thesis is submitted, sending a written report to the Examiners (via the appropriate office)

- Preparing students for their viva, and advising on any subsequent corrections they may have to undertake

- Undertaking training and other development events to help undertake the role of the supervisor effectively

DISCUSSION POINTS

I always arrange a date for the next meeting before we finish the current one

My research students learn quickly to embody the ethical principles and practice of this discipline

I keep copies of records of each meeting with my students

The student has to send me something to read before I will meet with them, to demonstrate that they are making progress

I note in my diary key dates for annual reports etc., so that I can monitor progress

I want my students to think critically, always to recognise flaws in articles, arguments or work that they see

(abridged from Lee, A. (2008). *Supervision teams: making them work. Issues in postgraduate education: management, teaching and supervision.* London: Society for Research into Higher Education, p.18)

Thank You

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