

**Postgraduate Research Office**

<b>Policy Title</b>	Framework for supervisor arrangements
<b>Purpose of Policy</b>	Updated policy and guidance on supervisor and advisor eligibility and roles
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<b>Approving bodies</b>	Postgraduate Committee
<b>Approval given by</b>	Postgraduate Committee (Minute 23.20.2) 7 March 2023 GBEC (Minute 5755.2) 28 June 2023
<b>Date of implementation</b>	01/10/2023
<b>Date of review</b>	n/a first iteration
<b>Date for next Review</b>	2025/2026
<b>Version</b>	V1.0/final

## Summary of PGR Supervisor Arrangements

This document provides improved guidance around the PGR supervision roles to enable Degree Committees to consider more flexible approaches to supervisory teams.

It has been prepared following a comparison of current practice with practice at other institutions, regulatory and key funder requirements<sup>1</sup> and a review of some recent relevant literature. The recently published UKCGE Report on *Supporting Excellent Supervisory Practice across UKRI Doctoral Training Investments*,<sup>2</sup> which was commissioned by UKRI to advise on a possible UKRI Statement of Expectations on PGR Supervision, is taken into account. The Report recommends that UKRI issue a high level statement, and it is possible that a statement will be published in the near future, either separately or as part of UKRI's response to its recent consultation on a New Deal for PGR Students.<sup>3</sup>

The guidance has been prepared by the Postgraduate Committee and in consultation with colleagues in the Faculties and Departments, Postdoc Academy, Research Culture Office and Student Wellbeing Team. This draft takes account of the proposed roles in postgraduate student wellbeing and mental health support document prepared by the Student Wellbeing Team.

## Summary of Changes and Updates

The guidance gives greater clarity of supervisory roles and eligibility criteria, with roles and criteria detailed by supervisor role (i.e. principal and second supervisors). It also clarifies the Adviser role which has been renamed to 'Academic Adviser' to better reflect the purpose of the role.

## Overall Recommendations

1. Each student will routinely have one internal **Principal/Primary Research Supervisor (PRS)** and an **Academic Adviser**: these roles will normally be held by the same individuals for the duration of the research project.

If the PRS is from a University Partner Institution (UPI), they are eligible to act as PRS provided a secondary supervisor and Academic Adviser from the student's Faculty or Department are also a member of the supervisory team.

The student/supervisor ratios monitored by Degree Committees will only apply to PRS and not to co- or secondary supervisors.

2. The student will normally be registered in the same Faculty or Department as the PRS.
3. Where the Degree Committee agree that supervision of their research would benefit from this level of support, students may also have an:

**Internal Secondary Supervisor(s);**  
and/or  
**External Secondary Supervisor(s).**

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<sup>1</sup> For example: [ESRC Postgraduate Training and Development Guidelines 2015 \(ukri.org\)](#); [AHRC-08102021-TrainingGrantFundingGuide-2020.pdf \(ukri.org\)](#); [Recruitment and training at doctoral level: best practice principles – UKRI](#)

<sup>2</sup> [UKRI-12122022-UKRI-Research-Supervision-Report-UKCGE.pdf](#)

<sup>3</sup> [New deal for postgraduate research – UKRI](#)

‘Internal’ means internal to the University or UPI but not necessarily from the same Faculty or Department. ‘External’ means external to the University, i.e. other HEIs, research or commercial organisations

**These additional members of the supervisory team may be appointed or removed from the supervision team as the need arises or recedes.**

## **Role Definitions**

The following roles are defined below:

- A. Principal Supervisor**
- B. Internal Secondary Supervisor**
- C. External Secondary Supervisor**
- D. Academic Adviser**

Supervisors (all types) and Academic Advisers are expected to:

- be aware of mental health and wellbeing issues that might arise during doctoral study, support and signpost accordingly, including liaison with a student’s Postgraduate Tutor as the first step in any process;
- engage with ongoing CPD, including participating in central and local training and workshops for supervisors organised within their Faculty, Department or Partner Institution;<sup>4</sup>
- be committed to adhering to University policies on equality, inclusion and diversity.

Between them the internal supervisors (principal supervisor and internal secondary supervisor) are normally expected to have supervised at least one student to successful completion of a doctoral degree, although Degree Committees may at their discretion dispense with this requirement.

### **A Principal Research Supervisor (PRS)**

#### **1. Eligibility**

The Principal Research Supervisor (PRS) will normally:

- be a member of academic or research staff who is employed by the University at least 0.5FTE<sup>5</sup> or be a College Teaching Officer (CTO) who is also a member of a University Faculty;
- hold a doctorate and have sufficient expertise to in the field of study to fulfil their supervisor responsibilities;
- be conducting research in a relevant field and be apprised and able to inform on recent developments in that field;
- supervise a student for the entirety of their research project, including an agreed and limited level of supervision for post-examination corrections or revisions. Where this is not possible (for example, due to the supervisor being on a fixed term contract) the Degree Committee is expected to ensure that suitable arrangements are in place to ensure continuity of support;

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<sup>4</sup> The only exception to this is external supervisors not based at UPIs.

<sup>5</sup> Academic/research staff who are not UTOs should ensure that supervising students fits within the terms and conditions of any grant from which they are funded.

- be internal to the University or employed by a University Partner Institute (UPI). Where a PRS is employed by a UPI an internal secondary supervisor employed by the University must also be appointed;
- be or become an active examiner of research degrees both at Cambridge and elsewhere.

## 2. Training

- Supervisors who are new to supervising or new to Cambridge are required to complete the Cambridge Centre for Teaching and Learning (CCTL) New Supervisor Training<sup>6</sup>, ideally before but if not, within 6 months of becoming a supervisor.
- All PRS must complete training in equality and diversity<sup>7</sup> and in unconscious bias:<sup>8</sup> PRS will need to self-certify that they have completed this training.

## 3. General Responsibilities

- The PRS retains responsibility for guiding the student, monitoring student progress (including onward reporting of progress concerns and completing supervisor reports via PFRS), and shares responsibility for the research project with the student, but the PRS may delegate elements of supervision to other supervisors in the team.
- The PRS is responsible for ensuring that all other members of the supervisory team and the student are aware of and have agreed to their roles and responsibilities in the team and for regularly reviewing the functioning of the team during the research project.
- If the project involves an external partner or supervisor, the PRS is responsible for co-ordinating provision of resources to support the research project (e.g. access to technical equipment based outside of the university).

## 4. Recruitment, selection and admission

The PRS will normally have a role in recruiting and selecting the student for receipt of the offer of a place, but should only have a deciding role in funding decisions if they hold the grant from which the student will be funded.

## 5. Project feasibility

The PRS should establish the viability of the research topic in the light of:

- student background and aptitude;
- period of time which the student is funded for (the project length should not exceed the funded period) and the University timescale for thesis submission;
- resource availability;
- potential for the work to lead to original scholarship likely to meet the requirements for the research degree for which the student is registered<sup>9</sup>.

## 6. Academic support and researcher development

The PRS should:

- Ensure that students are fully apprised of and agree to the expectations set forth in the Code of Practice for Research Students.
- Ensure that students are introduced to the department, its facilities and other relevant colleagues and ensure that they receive a full induction.
- Direct and assist students in their research.

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<sup>6</sup> [Supervising Postgraduates | Cambridge Centre for Teaching and Learning](#)

<sup>7</sup> [University of Cambridge training - Equality & Diversity Essentials](#)

<sup>8</sup> [University of Cambridge training - Understanding Unconscious Bias](#)

<sup>9</sup> [requirements for research degrees.pdf \(cam.ac.uk\)](#)

- Ensure students' awareness of health and safety including Departmental health and safety practices and requirements, relevant policies around children, vulnerable adults and animals.
- Ensure students are informed of relevant conventions and requirements such as scholarly writing and research ethics.
- Advise on relevant literature sources and methodologies, methods and research presentation.
- Advise on the requirement to acknowledge the work of others to prevent plagiarism.
- Ensure awareness of University's expectations of research integrity and good practice and advice on applications for ethics reviews.
- Contribute to the assessment of students' developmental needs.
- Ensure that the terms and conditions of any sponsorship administered through the University are met and clarify any implications about IP ownership.
- Provide timely, constructive and effective feedback on students' work and to submit a termly supervision report through CamSIS (PFRS).
- Monitor students' overall progress within the programme, taking appropriate action as and when required to ensure that the student is on track to complete their project within the normal timeframe or whether further action is required by the Degree Committee.
- Provide advice on personal and skills development and encourage students to attend training relating to their research project and future employability<sup>10</sup>.
- Provide advice on research publication both during the student's candidacy and where appropriate post-graduation.
- Help and encourage the student to interact with others working in cognate fields of research, for example, by attending relevant conferences and supporting them in seeking funding for such events, in order to broaden their understanding and context of their own specific research domain and stimulate reflection on their research from interdisciplinary perspectives

## **7. Engagement and monitoring**

The PRS should:

- Establish and maintain a pattern of attendance and engagement for students, including arrangements for supervision, taking appropriate action as and when required to maintain academic engagement and to notify the Degree Committee and College of progress or engagement concerns.
- Agree an initial project timetable and monitor progress and review plan.
- Recommend an outcome following a first-year assessment.
- Read and provide feedback on thesis drafts.
- Continue supervision post-examination to provide guidance and support in completing corrections and revise and resubmit.
- Potentially and where appropriate co-author publications.
- Comment on applications for changes in student circumstances (e.g. intermission).
- Comment on students' self-evaluation reports.

## **8. Examination**

The PRS should:

- Nominate examiners in a timely fashion.

## **9. Non-academic support**

The PRS should:

- Provide references, where appropriate.

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<sup>10</sup> The University is committed to providing a minimum of 10 days' professional development per year, under the 2019 Concordat ([research culture action plan 2021.pdf \(cam.ac.uk\)](#))

- Provide a level of guidance and advice and/or direct the student to alternative sources of information for career development.
- Provide an element of pastoral support and in line with Levels One and Two of Stepped Care approach<sup>11</sup> (very low severity - everyday stressors and challenges and low severity – occasional distractions/interruptions to everyday life) and refer the student to their Postgraduate Tutor and/or other sources of such support, including Department Wellbeing Advocates and the Student Wellbeing Team. Where appropriate, facilitate information sharing with the College and/or University Student Support Department.

## **B Internal Secondary supervisor**

### **1. Eligibility**

- Internal Secondary supervisors may be:
  - Academic, Research or Academic-related staff in Faculties, Departments and University Partner Institutes (who do not need to be from the same Faculty or Department as the PRS);
  - Recently retired (i.e. no more than five years post-retirement). Recently retired staff can continue to supervise current students but are not expected to act as secondary supervisor to any further incoming students.
- Secondary supervisor(s) are appointed in order to:
  - provide expertise in an inter-disciplinary or multi-disciplinary project; and/or
  - support early career researchers in gaining experience in supervision<sup>12</sup>; or for any other reasons deemed appropriate by the Degree Committee.

### **2. Training**

- Supervisors who are new to supervising or new to Cambridge are required to complete the Cambridge Centre for Teaching and Learning (CCTL) New Supervisor Training, ideally before but if not, within 6 months of becoming a supervisor.
- All supervisors must complete training in equality and diversity<sup>13</sup> and in unconscious bias<sup>14</sup> and will need to self-certify that they have completed this training.

### **3. Academic support and researcher development**

It is sometimes advantageous for a student to have an internal secondary supervisor for a number of reasons, which might include some or all of the points below, each of which supports the activities delineated above that are expected of the PRS:

- Provide technical or detailed subject expertise.
- Provide day-to-day supervision.
- Contribute to the assessment of students' researcher development needs and advise on developmental activities.
- Attend supervisory team meetings to discuss the research project and review progress.
- Be a secondary source of advice and guidance on the research project.
- Provide timely, constructive and effective feedback on students' work.
- Provide advice on research publication.
- Read and provide reasonable feedback on thesis drafts.
- Provide advice on personal and skills development and encourage students to attend training.

<sup>11</sup> A link to the Stepped Care approach will be provided when the policy is approved.

<sup>12</sup> [Academic Career Pathways \(Research and Teaching\) | \(cam.ac.uk\)](#)

<sup>13</sup> [University of Cambridge training - Equality & Diversity Essentials or UPI-offered equivalent](#)

<sup>14</sup> [University of Cambridge training - Understanding Unconscious Bias or UPI-offered equivalent](#)

- Continue supervision post-examination to provide guidance and support in completing corrections or full revise and resubmit.
- Potentially and where appropriate co-author publications.

#### **4. Non-academic support**

- Provide references.
- Help and encourage the student to interact with others working in cognate fields of research, for example, by attending relevant conferences and supporting them in seeking funding for such events, in order to broaden their understanding and context of their own specific research domain and stimulate reflection on their research from interdisciplinary perspectives.

### **C. External Secondary Supervisor**

#### **1. Eligibility**

- An external supervisor will be appointed in addition to an internal PRS, if the Degree Committee feels that the student would benefit from technical or research expertise that cannot be provided internally or if a student is due to spend a significant period of time at another organisation (e.g. a CASE student, a student on the NIH programme etc).
- External supervisors do not have to be research active but should be engaged in a relevant field.
- If it is expected that the External Supervisor will co-supervise for the entirety of the research project, they should normally be involved in the initial project design.

#### **2. Training**

- External supervisors should be made aware of the University's expectations of the supervisor role and offered the opportunity to attend centrally arranged or local supervisor training.

#### **3 Support**

- An External Supervisor may advise on the non-academic (e.g. industrial) application of the research.
- An External Supervisor might attend regular supervisory team meetings and contribute to discussions about the research project and the student's progress
- If the student will spend a significant period of time, e.g. on a placement, at another organisation where the external supervisor is employed, the external supervisor should:
  - Ensure the student receives an appropriate induction and completes any necessary training.
  - Ensure the student is aware of the company's expectations around conduct.
  - Ensure any necessary risk assessment is completed.
  - Provide or organise day-to-day support to the student during their time at the organisation.

### **D. Academic Adviser**

The Academic Adviser is normally:

- Appointed by and from the same Faculty or Department as the PRS;  
or
- researching in a broadly similar research area.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Student's Supervisors may recommend particularly suitable members of academic staff and external PIs or exclude any those who are unsuitable for this role.

This could include a College Teaching Officer.

The Academic Adviser should be able to bring sufficient expertise to the team in order to carry out the following:

- act as a further removed point of contact for general academic advice for the student (after the Principal Supervisor and any secondary internal or external supervisors);
- make themselves available to discuss research progress, as well as personal and research development needs, on a regular, e.g. termly, basis in informal meetings organised by the student;
- provide general advice on research publication;
- where appropriate provide support post-first-year assessment in completing corrections or revise and resubmit.

The Academic Adviser is not normally expected to:

- provide regular, formal supervision;
- write termly supervision reports in CamSIS (PFRS);
- be appointed the internal Examiner for the student's doctoral thesis;
- provide pastoral support for the student or Supervisor, or mediate the relationship between them, although they may offer advice to either party if asked and willing to do so.

Some Faculties and Departments appoint the Academic Adviser as an assessor for the first-year assessment. Where this is common practice students should be informed of this at an early stage and Degree Committees should be prepared to appoint an alternative assessor in cases where a potential personal or professional conflict of interest is identified.