

College of Science Graduate School

Structured PhD Best Practice Guidelines

These Guidelines address only aspects of the PhD and Research Masters regulations that can differ in implementation practice from School to School. Their purpose is to encourage the development of common practices within College of Science Schools and Schools of Agriculture, Medicine, Nursing, Physiotherapy, Public Health and Veterinary Medicine.

They are not a comprehensive guide to compliance with UCD PhD and Research Masters regulations and accompanying policy documents. All those involved in PhD/Research Masters supervision, in PhD programme development and implementation and in oversight of PhD programmes at School level are strongly recommended to be familiar with the following:

- Code of Practice for Supervisors and Research Degree Students
http://www.ucd.ie/registry/academicsecretariat/con_r_degrees.pdf
- General Regulations for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
http://www.ucd.ie/registry/academicsecretariat/docs/academic_r.pdf
- Regulations for Research Masters Degrees
http://www.ucd.ie/registry/academicsecretariat/docs/academic_r.pdf
- Code of Practice for Conflict Resolution for Supervisors and Research Students
<http://www.ucd.ie/registry/academicsecretariat/conflictr.htm>
- Doctoral Studies Panels Terms of Reference
http://www.ucd.ie/registry/academicsecretariat/docs/dstudies_tor.pdf
- Policy on PhD Stage 1 Transfer Assessment
http://www.ucd.ie/registry/academicsecretariat/docs/doctoralp_po.pdf
- Policy for Split-Site PhD and other Graduate Research Degree Arrangements
http://www.ucd.ie/registry/academicsecretariat/docs/splitsite_po.pdf

Doctoral Studies Panel (DSP)

Purpose of the DSP process

The purpose of the Doctoral Studies Panel is to support and enhance the supervisor-student relationship, to monitor the progress of the student through their doctoral studies, and to provide advice and support to student and supervisor(s).

See full terms of Reference in Code of Practice for Supervisors and Research degree Students
http://www.ucd.ie/registry/academicsecretariat/con_r_degrees.pdf

Introducing new students to the DSP process

All incoming MSc (Research) and PhD students should be informed of the DSP process, either by individual or group meetings with the School's Head of Graduate Studies (or nominee). The student should be informed of School's policy in relation to the student's engagement with the DSP process, the timing of DSP meetings, the responsibility of the student for organising these meetings. In addition the operation of the Stage1 to Stage 2 Transfer Assessment process should be outlined, and students should be made aware that that a formal assessment may also be requested at any point in Stage 2.

Membership of DSP

The members of a student's DSP will normally be nominated by the School, in consultation with the Principal Supervisor, and will comprise the research student, the Principal Supervisor and any second or additional supervisors, and two advisors.

Of the two nominated advisors

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- At least one will have academic expertise relevant to the student's research work
- At least one will have experience in supervising doctoral students to completion.

Meeting Frequency

The Code of Practice for Supervisors and Research Degree students states that a minimum of one DSP meeting should take place each year of the student's studies. However, the DSP should normally meet within 3 months of the student's initial registration, to review the student's Research and Professional Development Plan. The Supervisor should initiate this meeting, and scheduling of subsequent DSP meetings should be the student's responsibility. In addition to the first meeting at least one additional DSP meeting should be held in year 1 of the student's registration and a DSP meeting should normally be held at least 2 months before the Stage Transfer Assessment. The student or another member of the DSP may convene a meeting of the panel at any stage (with appropriate notice to all concerned) if it is considered desirable or necessary to address any relevant issue that may arise. The Supervisor initiates the first DSP meeting and thereafter it is normally the responsibility of the student.

Meeting Reports

The DSP should ensure that the student is developing and maintaining their RPDP in consultation with their supervisor(s) and DSP members. The student should complete a report of each DSP meeting, using the RPDP document as a template, and should submit a copy of this, signed by the members of the DSP and indicating the approximate date of the next meeting, to the designated Administrator in the School. A copy should be kept in the School's records.

The Chair of the DSP should write a report on the key recommendations of DSP meetings. Copies of this should be forwarded to the student, supervisor and the School Office. In most cases the reports should be brief but, where there are issues relating to student performance/progress, the report should document the issues/weaknesses and the advice given to the student to address the problems. In such cases a follow on DSP should be arranged. If a problem is detected at the DSP meeting, the School Head of Graduate Studies should be notified.

Research Masters Panel

A Research Masters Panel should be established for all research Masters students. It should comprise the Principal Supervisor and at least one other adviser appointed by the School. The Research Masters Panel will monitor progress against the prescribed programme of research and study on a regular basis. Where the Research Masters Panel considers that progress or the arrangements for supervision of the student are not adequate, and such inadequacies cannot be resolved, the Research Masters Panel will inform the Head of School and School Head of Graduate Studies, and the relevant College Graduate School Board. Here again, the relevant written and dated documentation should be kept in the School Office.

Stage Transfer Assessment (STA)

Doctoral studies comprise two stages. Stage 1 is when the research plan is defined, research skills are developed and original research work for the doctorate is initiated. Stage 2 is primarily dedicated to continuing original research, but may also include some advanced education and training. In order to advance from Stage 1 to stage 2, the School will establish a Transfer Assessment Panel and a Transfer Assessment will take place. The purpose of the Transfer Assessment is to assess the student's progress and to evaluate their competence and capacity to complete a doctorate and become an independent researcher. While exact procedures may vary among individual Schools, it is extremely important that

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the assessment is thorough and rigorous and that only students deemed capable of completing a PhD thesis should be transferred to Stage 2.

STA Panel Membership

The Assessment Panel should comprise a minimum of three and a maximum of five members. At least one member of the Assessment Panel should have expertise in the discipline / broad area of the student's work, and at least one member should have significant experience in supervising PhD students to completion. Panel members should be nominated by the relevant School's Graduate Committee/Head of Graduate Studies/Head of School. The Chair of the STA panel should be independent of the student's DSP.

In relation to STA the DSP should ensure that:

- the student is familiar with the assessment criteria well in advance of the assessment and knows what is required for Stage I to Stage 2 assessment (i.e. required reports, presentations etc.)
- where issues arise in relation to progress, that the student and principal supervisor are fully aware of the issues and have had an opportunity to address them before presenting for STA.

Documentation normally required for the STA includes:

- Student progress report and research plan
- List of modules taken/planned
- Supervisor's report
- Transfer Assessment form.

Timing of STA & Reporting of Decisions

The School Head of Graduate Studies/ School Office should ensure that the STA panels are appointed for all students during the first year of their registration. However, it is the student's responsibility to submit all relevant reports and generally comply with the School's STA procedures. It is recommended that STA meetings be held at approximately 15-18 months (full-time students) or 24-36 months (for part-time students) after commencement of their research (ideally September start full-time students will have their STA in December of the following year and January start students will have their STA in April of the following year).

Following its consideration, the STA panel may make one of several decisions:

- that the student progresses to Stage 2;
- that the student does not progress, but may present for re-assessment at a later stage, with a date set for the re-assessment;
- that the student does not progress, may not present for re-assessment, and exits the programme.

The STA panel should write a formal report detailing the decision made and stating clearly the reason(s) for this decision. The student should receive a copy of the report on the outcome of the STA and this should be communicated in a timely manner to the student by the Chair of the STA panel.

Note: Copies of all documentation relating to the STA should be held in the School office and should include the relevant signatures and dates.

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Appeal of decision of the STA panel

If a student is unhappy with the decision of the STA, he/she may appeal this decision. The School's Head of Post-graduate Studies or the Head of School is the first avenue of appeal. Following such an appeal, a second STA panel, independent of the first panel, will be appointed and will consider all relevant reports. This new panel should normally meet with the student prior to making its decision.

If the student is unhappy with the decision of the second STA, he/she may appeal this decision to the College of Science Graduate School Board.

Assessment in Stage 2

If a supervisor and/or DSP is concerned about the progress/academic ability of a student to complete their research they should carry-out a formal assessment. This should be done by a panel that is independent of the student's DSP. The student should be given sufficient notification *in writing* of the assessment process and of the nature of the material/documents that he/she is required to submit/present for this assessment. This notification should clearly state that the assessment will consider the student's capacity to continue their PhD project and that the assessment panel may make a recommendation of a) continuation, b) termination of their studies or c) transfer to MSc programme. If the assessment finds that the student's performance and progression within the programme is academically unacceptable, that decision will require approval of the College of Science Graduate School Board. If the Graduate School Board's decision is that his/her studies should be terminated, that recommendation will then be referred to University Programme Board with supporting documentation to decide whether this student is eligible to continue, as per 5.16¹ of UCD Academic Regulations.

¹5.16 **Continuation:** Where the relevant governing board (Programme Board for undergraduate programmes, Graduate School Board for graduate programmes) of a programme deems a student's performance and progression within their programme to be academically unacceptable, the relevant governing board shall refer the case, with a recommendation and supporting evidence, to the relevant University Programme Board to decide whether the student is or is not eligible to continue in that programme.

Issues Relating to Student/Supervisor Relationship

Where there is a break-down in the student-supervisor relationship the procedures outlined in

- Code of Practice for Conflict Resolution for Supervisors and Research Students
<http://www.ucd.ie/registry/academicsecretariat/conflictr.htm>

Student Records & Administration

Records relating to student DSP and STA should be held in the School Office. Those should normally include details of all DSP meetings and associated reports (student and DSP), date of Stage Transfer Assessment (STA) and associated documentation and any Stage 2 assessments. *All communication with the student should be written, signed and dated.*