

# Guidelines for the Appointment of an Assistant Supervisor Pilot Programme



## 1. Introduction

Postdoctoral researchers hold a crucial position within the research community in UCD, where they play a key role in guiding and mentoring research students in their respective fields. The designation of Assistant Supervisor is bestowed upon a specific postdoctoral researcher entrusted with aiding a designated research student in alignment with their research training. The precise responsibilities of this role are determined through mutual agreement between the Principal Supervisor, the Assistant Supervisor and the research student at the time of the appointment of the Assistant Supervisor.

These guidelines articulate recommendations for the involvement of postdoctoral researchers as Assistant Supervisors in the supervision of graduate research students. The formalisation of the Assistant Supervisor role aims to establish a structured framework that not only acknowledges the valuable contributions of postdoctoral researchers to the supervision of PhD students but also ensures that those engaged in such activities receive appropriate training and support. In May 2025, ACEC approved the expansion of the eligibility criteria for the Assistant Supervisor role and an extension of the pilot programme until 2029.

## 2. The Role & Responsibilities of an Assistant Supervisor

Normally, Assistant Supervisors can be involved in:

- Acting as an additional point of contact for the student
- Assisting the student with relevant procedures & policies
- Providing research skills training and project management advice to the student
- Liaising with the PhD student's supervisor(s) to make sure the project is carried out according to plan
- Helping the student find solutions to issues, notably by providing advice at research and supervisory meetings
- Providing advice for day to day research / trouble-shooting issues that do not require intervention by the Supervisors
- Attending supervisory meetings & Research Studies Panel (RSP) meetings as agreed with the Principal Supervisor as an additional member (this role will not replace the RSP)

- Chair/Advisers specified in the Academic Regulations of a particular programme<sup>1</sup>)
- Providing informal mentoring to the student including research and professional career development
- Providing informal feedback on written works and presentations
- Assisting in viva preparation (e.g. mock *Vivas*)

Assistant Supervisors must

- Be aware of relevant university regulations, policies and procedures
- Engage in development and training to support the role

### 3. Training:

- UCD's [Research Supervisor Support and Development Programme \(RSSDP\)](#) is open to postdoctoral researchers and those interested in an Assistant Supervisor role are encouraged to participate in this course.
- At a minimum, Assistant Supervisors should complete the online course 'Fundamentals of Supervision' available on Brightspace.
- A Mentor Training session will be provided during the pilot phase to support Assistant Supervisors

The Assistant Supervisor will not be responsible for carrying out the student's work or replacing the Principal Supervisor role

### 4. Eligibility Criteria for Assistant Supervisor Role

In order to be considered as an Assistant Supervisor, the candidate must:

- Be a postdoctoral researcher one year post PhD and research active
- Be working in, or have a skill set relevant to the PhD student's research and will normally be part of Principal Supervisor's research group.
- Be agreeable to being involved in the activities described under 'Roles and Responsibilities of an Assistant Supervisor' in section 5.5 of the [UCD Policy for Supervision of Graduate Research Students](#)
- Be appointed by the PhD student's Principal Supervisor(s), with final approval by the relevant Governing Board (Graduate Research Board (GRB)) and the agreement of the Postdoctoral researcher's line manager (if different from the student's Principal supervisor)
- A postdoctoral researcher would normally be the Assistant Supervisor for one student at a time, but could act as Assistant Supervisor for two students if agreed by the Principal

<sup>1</sup> As outlined in sections 7.23-7.25, 8.24-8.25 or 9.19-9.20, as appropriate, of Academic Regulations

supervisor(s), the students and the GRB.

- Be willing to engage in professional development and training to support their role.
- An appointment as Assistant Supervisor would normally be for a minimum of 12 months
- An Assistant Supervisor can be appointed for a current or incoming graduate research student

## **5. Procedure for the Appointment of an Assistant Supervisor**

It is proposed that the following process for appointing Assistant Supervisors be used:

- Postdoctoral researcher to demonstrate that they meet eligibility criteria for becoming Assistant Supervisor
- Discussion between supervisory team, proposed Assistant Supervisor and Research Student to agree roles and responsibilities of the Assistant Supervisor.
- An “Assistant Supervisor Nomination Form” is completed and signed by the nominator, usually the student’s Principal Supervisor, the research student and the nominee and submitted to the School Office (for signature of the Head of School)
- School will submit a request to the GRB seeking approval of the appointment.
- If approved, the GRB Support Team will alert the School and add the Assistant Supervisor’s name to the Register of Assistant Supervisors
- The GRB Support Team will then update the student’s record by adding the Assistant Supervisor to the RSP membership
- The approved nominee will be assigned Assistant Supervisor on the HR system (addition of the role to the research profile of the appointee, future system change needed here).

## **6. Procedure for the Termination of the Appointment of an Assistant Supervisor**

In the case where the Assistant Supervisor role is no longer viable (because, for example, of a change in the research direction, etc.) then the role can be rescinded via the nominator submitting a request to the GRB outlining the change in circumstances.

## Appendix 1: Assistant Supervisor Nomination Form

Please use this form if you are a member of faculty, normally the primary supervisor of the student, wishing to nominate a Postdoctoral Researcher (who has not held this role before). Please send completed form to the Graduate Research Board at [grb@ucd.ie](mailto:grb@ucd.ie)

Please consult the [UCD policy on Supervision of Graduate Research Students](#) and the associated Guidelines on the Assistant Supervisor Policy before completing this form.

| Nominee's Details                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                            |           |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------|
| Nominee's Name                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                            |           |
| Nominee's P Number                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                            |           |
| Nominee's Email address                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                            |           |
| Nominees Title                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                            |           |
| Mentor/PI                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                            |           |
| How does the Nominee meet the criteria for role of Assistant Supervisor (500 word max)                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                            |           |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                            |           |
| Is the nominee one year post PhD and currently research active?                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Y/N                        |           |
| Agreeable to undertake the role                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Y/N                        |           |
| Outline how the Research/Skill set of the nominee is relevant to the research student's research project.                                                                                                                                                                                |                            |           |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                            |           |
| What training has the nominee taken or what training is planned to support them in the role of Assistant Supervisor? Noting that the <a href="#">RSSDP programme</a> runs annually and there is <a href="#">an online programme Fundamentals of Supervision</a> available on Brightspace |                            |           |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                            |           |
| Research Student's Details                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                            |           |
| Student Number                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                            |           |
| Full name                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                            |           |
| Email address                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                            |           |
| School                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                            |           |
| Programme                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                            |           |
| Start Date                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                            |           |
| Stage                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                            |           |
| Year                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                            |           |
| Signatures                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                            |           |
| Nominator (faculty member and typically primary supervisor of student)                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Name <i>Block capitals</i> | Signature |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                            |           |

|                                       |                                   |                  |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------|
| <b>Nominated Assistant Supervisor</b> | <b>Name</b> <i>Block capitals</i> | <b>Signature</b> |
| <b>Graduate Research Student</b>      | <b>Name</b> <i>Block capitals</i> | <b>Signature</b> |
| <b>Head of School</b>                 | <b>Name</b> <i>Block capitals</i> | <b>Signature</b> |
| <b>Date of Nomination</b>             |                                   |                  |

**For Office:**

**Date of GRB Meeting:**

**Decision:**

**If approved, date of communication to School and Assistant Supervisor:**