University College Dublin
Ireland's Global University

UCD Graduate Studies

Staff and Student Guidance and Policies on Graduate Research Degree Programmes

Academic Year 2025/26

Contents

Introduction

Welcome to UCD

This handbook provides guidelines on research degree programmes in UCD and includes University policies and procedures. However, as we are continuously seeking to improve our programmes, these policies and procedures may be subject to change from one year to the next. Research students should consult this handbook each year, as it will be updated before the beginning of each academic year in response to evolving University regulations and ongoing programme review.

It is essential that each research student is aware of the requirements for undertaking a research degree. Moreover, it is the responsibility of each student to be proactive in relation to progressing in their research degree. If you require clarification about any of the content in this document, you should first contact your supervisor, your Research Studies Panel, the faculty member with responsibility for overseeing graduate research programmes in your School, or the School Graduate Administrative Coordinator or equivalent (contacts are listed in the next section).

The University has six Colleges containing 37 Schools. The specific requirements placed on students pursuing a research degree varies slightly from one School/Programme to the next. However, all programmes fall within the framework of this document, which provides core guidelines for Schools in relation to research degree programmes. A checklist for research students is provided in **Appendix 1.**

Key Contacts

UCD Graduate Studies

Tierney Building, Room 0.14

✉ **Graduate Studies Connector**

☎ 01 716 4045

Student Adviser for Graduate Research Students

L109, First Floor, James Joyce Library Building (above the Careers Network)

👤 Eamonn McHugh

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Career and Skills Consultant for Graduate Research Students

Careers Network, James Joyce Library Building, Ground Floor

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College of Arts and Humanities

School of Art History and Cultural Policy

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School of Classics

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School of English, Drama and Film

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School of History

👤 Claire Gibney

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☎ 01 716 8375

School of Irish, Celtic Studies and Folklore

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School of Languages, Culture and Linguistics

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School of Music

👤 Dr Matthew Thomson

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UCD Clinton Institute of American Studies

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☎ 01 716 1560

College of Business

School of Business

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College of Engineering and Architecture

School of Architecture, Planning and Environmental Policy

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School of Chemical and Bioprocess Engineering

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School of Civil Engineering

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School of Electrical and Electronic Engineering

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School of Mechanical and Materials Engineering

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College of Health and Agricultural Sciences

School of Agriculture and Food Science

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School of Medicine

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School of Nursing, Midwifery and Health Systems

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School of Public Health, Physiotherapy and Sports Science

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School of Veterinary Medicine

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College of Science

School of Biology and Environmental Science

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School of Biomolecular and Biomedical Science

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School of Physics

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College of Social Sciences and Law

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School of Economics

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School of Education

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School of Geography

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School of Information and Communication Studies

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School of Law

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School of Philosophy

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School of Politics and International Relations

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School of Psychology

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School of Social Policy, Social Work and Social Justice

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School of Sociology

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Essential information
for graduate research students

IT

UCD IT Services provides support for set up and ongoing computing requirements, including registration of new laptops/PCs to the UCD network, email addresses, research servers, and device and file encryption etc.

For more information, please visit the **IT Services website**.

UCD email address

Any official UCD email sent to students will be addressed to their UCD Connect address according to university's **Student Email Protocol**. UCD registered students are automatically given a UCD network username and password when registering with the University. Check the **steps** to update email preferences. Contact the Helpdesk at 01 716 2700 or **www.ucd.ie/ithelp** for assistance.

The official email address will be maintained in each student's record, from which distribution lists are compiled. Students can arrange to have their UCD Connect account redirected to another address or service provider, but it is their responsibility to ensure that this alternate mailbox is viable and that all emails are redirected. Students are responsible for regularly checking their UCD Connect email account and, where necessary, acting upon emails in a timely manner.

UCD IT Services will never ask for your username, password or any personal credentials by email. Visit the **IT Services security webpage** for more information on 'phishing'.

Research ethics

Research ethics applies to all members of the UCD community who conduct research that involves human and/or animal subjects. Prospective researchers must read the **policies and guidelines** on the research ethics website.

Research integrity

UCD is dedicated to upholding the highest standards of professionalism and rigour in research conducted by its staff and students. This commitment extends to ensuring the accuracy and integrity of research publications.

> **Research Integrity training is compulsory for all graduate research students.** For doctoral students who have started their programme after September 2024, they must complete the Research Integrity Training in Stage 1 of their research programme.

To meet the university requirement for **Research Integrity Training**, students can enrol on an online Research Integrity Training course in Brightspace. This course comprehensively covers all stages of the research process, highlighting the complex issues that can arise during research planning, execution and reporting. There are no credits associated with the online course.

Alternatively, students can choose the module SCI50020 Research Integrity Online, which combines online training with in-person workshops discussing specific case studies. This module attracts five ECTS credits and is most suitable for science and engineering graduate research students.

Research Programme

Research degrees

A **research degree** (i.e. a Master's by Research, PhD, MD or Professional Doctorate) involves the sustained and in-depth study of a specific topic, which is then written up as a thesis for examination. Research degrees involve students carrying out their own research and academic study under the supervision of a Principal Supervisor, and Co-Supervisor(s) if relevant. The regulations for graduate research programmes are available in section 7 of **UCD Academic Regulations** with additional regulations for professional doctorates and the MD programme in sections 8 and 9.

The Research Master's programme

The Research Master's degree award is a coherent programme of supervised research that requires the student to successfully complete Master's-level research, the principal outcome of which is a submitted thesis in acceptable form and deemed to be of a satisfactory standard. The primary purpose of Master's-level research is to develop the skills and competencies required to conduct research.

The UCD PhD programme

The UCD PhD enables students to achieve the best possible experience of graduate research and training. Making a substantial and original contribution to knowledge, normally leading to peer-reviewed publications, remains the core objective of doctoral studies. The UCD PhD includes several innovative measures designed to support you in achieving your academic and professional objectives. Assessment for the award of a PhD is made on the basis of a thesis and *viva voce* (oral) exam.

Professional Doctorates

A Professional Doctorate degree is awarded where the outcome of the research makes a significant contribution to knowledge, is deemed publishable in a peer-reviewed journal and where the candidate has demonstrated the capacity to apply knowledge within a professional practice setting. There are three professional doctorates admitting students in the University and they are the Doctor of Veterinary Medical Specialisation degree (DVMS), Doctor of Educational Psychology degree (DEdPsych) and Doctor of Clinical Psychology degree (DPsychSc).

MD

The degree of Doctor of Medicine (MD) is provided to encourage the development of advanced research skills in medical graduates and the medical profession. The primary purpose of MD-level research is to develop in the student the skills and competencies required to conduct effective research and to make a significant contribution to knowledge and understanding in the theory and/or practice of any area of medicine or medical science.

Supervision

Supervision is an essential part of research training. The relationship between the supervisor and graduate research student is a crucial feature of graduate education. The role of the supervisor is to encourage, challenge and support the student to ensure they develop the relevant skills and attributes. Both the student and the supervisor contribute to this relationship – good, open communication is the key to managing the relationship between them. At the beginning of the research programme, both parties should negotiate how the relationship will function. For more information on this please see **Appendix 2**.

Supervisor responsibilities

The main duties and responsibilities of the Principal Supervisor are to:

- Act as the main source of research supervision, providing mentoring, guidance and advice for the student throughout their research degree
- Meet regularly with the student
- Participate in the Research Studies Panel.

Student responsibilities

In undertaking a programme of supervised research, a student should:

- Engage with their research as well as with the mentoring, guidance and advice provided by their supervisor
- Meet regularly with their supervisor
- Participate in the Research Studies Panel.

For further information, please refer to the **Policy for Supervision of Research Degree Students**.

Research Studies Panel

The purpose of the Research Studies Panel (RSP) is to support and enhance the supervisor-student relationship, to monitor the progress of the student through their research studies, and to provide independent advice and support to the student and supervisor(s). The members of the panel should be nominated when the student is approved for admission.

Membership

The RSP comprises:

- The Principal Supervisor
- Any additional Co-Supervisor(s)
- A number of advisers (at least two but normally no more than four). One of these will be Chair.

Meeting frequency

The **Supervision of Research Degree Students Policy** states the following:

- The RSP 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

- In addition to the first meeting, at least one additional RSP meeting should be held in Year 1 of the student's registration, and for PhD students an RSP meeting should normally be held approximately two months before the Stage Transfer Assessment (see p.9) – scheduling of these RSP meetings should be the student's responsibility. An RSP meeting should take place at least once a year every year after Year 1 as per Regulation 7.36

- The student or another member of the RSP 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.

Scope

The main duties and responsibilities of the RSP are to:

- Enhance the supervisor-student relationship by the provision of advice in accordance with the University's Policy for Supervision of Research Degree Students.
- Ensure quality, rigour and equity of the supervision process.
- Advise the student on their professional and personal development training and monitor progress against their Research and Professional Development Plan (RPDP.)
- Review on a regular basis, the progress of the student against their research plan and support doctoral students in preparing for their Stage Transfer Assessment and thesis submission.
- Provide appropriate academic expertise and where appropriate facilitate an interdisciplinary

perspective.

- In the event that a principal supervisor is unavailable due to unforeseen circumstances, Academic Regulations state that the Head of School should ensure that arrangements for the supervision of a student are in place. The RSP should provide temporary support to the student, if a co-supervisor is not already identified, where a Head of School is required to identify a new supervisor.

- Seek to resolve any difficulties that may arise in the supervisor-student relationship. Where matters are unresolved, they will initially be addressed at the local or School level and ultimately be referred to the Chair of the relevant Governing Board if escalated.

- Offer additional specific support for students or supervisors which the Governing Board may request.

Research and Professional Development Plan

The Research and Professional Development Plan (RPDP) is an integral part of the UCD PhD programme and is valuable for graduate research students. The purpose of such planning is to ensure that your work is clearly focused on achieving your research and professional development goals. This will play a major part in informing the trajectory of your research, and in your training and development as a researcher. Your plans will form the basis of discussions at your meetings with your supervisor and your RSP, and will be central to the preparation of the mandatory reports from these meetings. Guidance on producing your RPDP is available on the **Graduate Studies RPDP webpage**.

There are three main components to the RPDP:

1. The Research Plan – This provides the student with a clear research focus and a coherent research plan

2. The Professional Development Plan – This enables the student to identify the skills important to their research and career

3. The Research Studies Panel Meeting Record – A mandatory outcome of the RSP meetings will be a formal record of the student's research and professional plans and progress to date. This will also form part of the Transfer Assessment.

Meeting reports

The RSP should ensure that the student is developing and maintaining their RPDP in consultation with their supervisor(s) and RSP members.

- Prior to each RSP meeting the student should submit Part 1 of the online RPDP Form via their SISWeb account, outlining the training they have undertaken and their progress to date. A guide to the online RPDP Form is available to download from the Graduate Studies RPDP webpage.

- Subsequent to each meeting, the Chair of the RSP should complete Part 2 of the RPDP Form, including the key recommendations of RSP meetings. In most cases the reports should be brief, but where there are issues relating to the student's 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 RSP meeting should be arranged. If a problem is detected at the RSP meeting, the Graduate Coordinator (or equivalent role at your School) should be notified by the RSP Chair or Chair of the relevant meeting. Further information about **working with your RSP** (in addition to the **Terms of Reference of an RSP**) can be found on the Graduate Studies website.

Mandatory 30 credits for PhD students

UCD operates a credit-based system for accrediting taught modules acquired during the PhD programme. All PhD students are required to take a minimum of 30 taught credits to be accumulated throughout their doctoral studies programme. The aim of these taught modules is to facilitate research as well as to provide you with important transferable skills, enhancing your career development. Your School or programme may recommend or require certain modules, please check with your supervisor. Unless your School or programme stipulates specific courses, you may choose from the full range of modules available throughout the University in consultation and agreement with your Principal Supervisor and your RSP.

Module registration

Please make sure you register for every module you participate in, you will not be able to register retrospectively for any modules. September-start and January-start PhD students can register for taught modules online via their SISWeb account. Both PhD students who started their programme in May and Research Master's students can request to register for modules via a Google Form available on the Graduate Studies **Taught Modules** webpage.

You must consult with your Principal Supervisor on your choice of modules, even those selected via online registration.

Information about module registration in each College can be found on the Graduate Studies website:
College of Arts and Humanities
College of Business
College of Engineering and Architecture
College of Health and Agricultural Sciences
College of Science
College of Social Sciences and Law.

Being fully registered to a module means that you must attend classes, complete assignments and assessments and you will earn credits for this, which will be shown on your final transcript. Students may be able to take modules for audit, which means attending classes but not doing the assessment or assignments, but DO NOT receive credits for this. Enrolment to a module for audit **requires the prior agreement of the relevant Module Coordinator**.

Please note that once registered for a module, if for any reason you do not complete and have not officially withdrawn from this module within 12 weeks, a grade NM or ABS may be entered and appear on your record. To withdraw from a module, please contact your School office within 12 weeks of the commencement of the module. **NO RETROSPECTIVE CHANGES CAN BE MADE.**

For detailed information on any module, including assessment strategies, please follow these instructions:
- Go to **UCD Course Search**.
- Select Search all Modules.
- Filter by subject, module level or keyword.

Module levels
The first number of the module code indicates module level. Most research students find Levels 4 and 5 (Master's and PhD level) academic and research skills modules most useful. However, a limited number of Levels 1–3 modules may be appropriate in certain cases: for example, if you need to upskill in a discipline from outside your undergraduate degree. Students must consult with their supervisor before signing up to modules.

Modules at other institutions (concurrent learning/external credit)

With prior approval from their supervisor, research students may register to modules outside of UCD for credit. As with modules taken within UCD, supervisors must sign off on the module as being appropriate for the academic development of the student. The institution must also provide official confirmation of successful module completion. The School will then make a recommendation to the Governing Board that the student receives appropriate credit toward their mandatory 30-credit requirement. If a student or School is in any doubt about whether the Governing Board will sanction credit for a specific external module, they must check in advance before proceeding with undertaking the module. Details of these modules will appear on your UCD record. Further information is available in the **External Credit Form**.

Recognition of Prior Learning Policy

UCD's **Recognition of Prior and Concurrent Learning Policy** applies to graduate research students, and any application for recognition of prior learning (RPL) needs to be discussed with your RSP and be approved by the School and Graduate Research Board. The policy on prior learning recommends that graduate research students do not seek RPL during the first year of their programme. The Graduate Research Board will consider applications from students in their first year if they have had both of their RSP meetings for that year. Further details can be found on the **Recognition of Prior Learning webpage**.

Please note that conference presentation or attendance will not be considered for credit; this is a normal part of ongoing doctoral student activity. For similar reasons, research visits and lab work at another institution will not normally be considered for credit unless there are specific assessments associated with them.

Students should use their RPDP to record details of any courses or modules they take outside of UCD.

Transferable skills for research students

UCD offers short courses and **workshops on transferable skills**, which are targeted at students' professional development. These are listed on your Certificate of Participation, which is downloadable via SISWeb, but they do not count towards the mandatory credits of the PhD programme. Topics include data management, career development, innovation and entrepreneurship, project management and ethics approval among many others. In addition, **UCD Careers Network** has a dedicated Career and Skills Consultant for graduate research students, Ms Tara Hughes (**tara.hughes@ucd.ie**), who is available to provide advice and support.

Students Supporting Teaching and Learning

UCD students play a vital role in supporting education across undergraduate and graduate programmes. Teaching support activities include tutoring, demonstrating, fieldwork, marking, grading assessments/exams, and assisting with accommodations for students with additional needs. All students receive full financial compensation for their work, including preparation time and mandatory training. Teaching opportunities depend on academic needs as determined by the School. Graduate research students may be assigned up to 150 hours of teaching support per year (including preparation time). See relevant **Policy** for full information.

Expenses

'Workday' is the brand name for the University finance system. All expenses or advance on expenses are processed within the Workday system.

Graduate Research Students who are in receipt of payment associated with a project will automatically be provisioned with a Workday account and will be assigned with Project Resource security access on that project only, which means they will have the ability to raise an expense report and raise requisitions. Students (including PhD students) cannot approve transactions unless they are also employees of UCD with an active UCD Connect Staff Account.

Further information can be found in the **Step Guide for Students**.

The Graduate Research Board

The **Graduate Research Board** (GRB) is the academic governance board for all graduate research students within the University and meets monthly to consider policy and strategic matters impacting graduate research students. Membership of the GRB includes academic representatives from across all Colleges as well as

student representatives. If you have an interest in being involved in this activity, then please email grb@ucd.ie for further information.

Stage Transfer Assessment

All doctoral students are required to undergo a formal assessment step in order to progress from Stage 1 to Stage 2 of the PhD programme or to transfer from a Research Master's programme to a PhD programme.

Stage 1 is an initial period of advanced education, training and research. Stage 2 is largely dedicated to carrying out a body of original, publishable research, required for the award of a PhD. In order to transfer to Stage 2 students are assessed by a Stage Transfer Assessment (STA) panel, which makes a decision as to whether a student has made sufficient progress towards completion of the PhD research. The STA panel will be convened by the School and will contain at least three members of faculty, at least one of whom is a permanent member of faculty; however, it will not include the supervisor(s). Stage 1 doctoral studies must be completed within five trimesters by a full-time student or within seven trimesters by a part-time student from the date of registration or as approved by the Graduate Research Board.

For doctoral students who have started their programme after September 2024, they must complete the Research Integrity Training in Stage 1 of their research programme.

The STA panel will review the student's progress in deciding whether the student should transfer from Stage 1 to 2 of the programme. The panel will base its judgement on:

1. Supporting documentation from the candidate as determined by the School
2. A review of the student's RPDP from the most recent RSP meeting
3. A written progress report from the Principal Supervisor
4. An interview with, and presentation by, the student.

The STA panel will consider the student's progress in deciding whether the student should transfer from Stage 1 to 2 of the programme. The assessment panel will make one of the following recommendations to the Graduate Research Board:

a. That the student should progress to the next stage or year of the doctoral programme
b. That the student should not progress to the next stage or year of the doctoral programme, and that:
   i) The student should resubmit for assessment within

six months (with an indication of the month/year in which the subsequent formal assessment of progress will take place). This option is only available on a maximum of two occasions after which option (ii) or (iii) must be recommended
   ii) The student should apply to transfer to another graduate programme utilising, where appropriate, any credits already accumulated within the doctoral programme
   iii) A recommendation be made in line with the University's continuation process to Academic Council or its relevant committee that the student's registration be discontinued.

(See also 7.40 of the Academic Regulations for transfer outcomes from a Research Master's to a PhD programme application.)

The Graduate Research Board will consider the recommendations of the School at their next available meeting. Students who successfully progress to Stage 2 of their PhD or who are asked to transfer to another programme or who are not able to continue with their programme will be notified shortly thereafter of the outcome. Students have the right to appeal the final outcome of an STA.

If the recommendation of the panel is 'Resubmit within 6 months' then, in addition to the feedback they will receive from their assessment panel, an email will be sent to the student on behalf of the Governance Board as a formal confirmation of this outcome. This communication will be sent promptly to allow students time to prepare for their subsequent assessment.

Leave of absence

Students who need to take time out of their programme for any reason can apply for a **leave of absence**. A student on leave of absence is not fully registered to the University, and so cannot be active on the programme (i.e. they cannot engage in supervised research, attend lectures, access the library or receive grants/scholarships). However, students will continue to have access to their UCD Connect account, including email, during this time.

A leave of absence should not normally exceed one third of the length of the programme and must be a minimum length of one trimester. A leave of absence can be applied for online via SISWeb.

Extensions

PhD students who are entering their fifth year (full time) or seventh year (part time) and Master's by Research students who are entering their third year (full time) or fifth year (part time) must first apply to extend their registration in the programme because they have exceeded the maximum registration period stated in the **Academic Regulations** (7.10, 7.11, 8.11 and 9.10). Applications for **thesis extension** can be submitted via SISWeb and the School will review them before referring extension requests to the Graduate Research Board.

In the event that an extension is sought on the basis of extenuating circumstances, a 'no fee' extension can potentially be sought. Such extensions are typically sought/granted by trimester. Please note that it is normally expected that students seeking such extensions will have reached the period of maximum registration for their programme.

In the event of a student seeking an extension on the basis of extenuating circumstances, supporting documentation must be provided that confirms the period of time they were unable to work on their programme.

Before applying for an extension, students must first discuss the matter with their supervisor(s). After discussion with the supervisor(s), the student must apply via the School for an extension, with supporting documents, in advance of the **thesis submission deadline**, and it must be approved by the relevant School and the Graduate Research Board. It is suggested that students make such an application at least two months before their original submission date to allow for a timely response. The granting of an extension to registration is a separate matter from any stipend students might receive. Students should consult their supervisor or funding agency about the status of a stipend (if applicable).

Working hours and leave entitlement

Working hours

Due to the range of programmes across university, there is no such thing as an 'average research week'. How a research student's week is arranged will depend on a number of factors, including:

- Subject area (very different work patterns will emerge if you work in a lab or do fieldwork, for example)
- Learning style
- The stage of the research programme (the week will be structured very differently when you are writing up and there will be peak times in activity)
- What you have agreed with your supervisor.

It is recognised that graduate students are not paid employees and therefore do not have contractual working hours; however, students should bear in mind that a public servant's standard working week is 35 hours. Note that this applies to full-time students. Part-time students are typically expected to complete two-thirds of the amount of work of their full-time counterparts per week.

A research student should be self-motivated to work such hours as are necessary to achieve their objectives over the course of three to four years (for full-time PhD/doctoral students). In cases where a student is funded, there may be additional obligations required by the funding agency in relation to meeting certain milestones that must be taken into consideration when working hours are agreed.

In consultation with the supervisor(s), it is the student's responsibility to decide the appropriate working structure for them as early as possible in their programme so that a plan can be agreed that suits everyone. Students are expected to develop a professional approach by attending all meetings and other relevant activities that are advised by their supervisor and/or beneficial to their programme/research.

Annual leave

Holidays can be taken at any time in each year but must be agreed in advance with the supervisor(s), bearing in mind a student's individual funding terms and any teaching or research commitments. The normal holiday entitlements should be no more than four weeks in one calendar year. In the case of part-time students in paid employment, supervisors should be informed of any annual leave arrangements that may impact the student's research programme.

Sick leave

If a student feels unwell and needs to stay at home for a day or two, the supervisor(s) should be informed. If a student is unwell for a longer period of time, they should try to maintain regular email contact with their supervisor(s) to keep them informed of their health, and they must provide a medical certificate for the period of illness. In cases where students may be requesting a 'no fee' extension due to illness, relevant supporting documentation must be provided. In some serious cases, it may be advisable for the student to apply for a **leave of absence**.

Pregnancy Related Leave

Students are advised to consult the **UCD Policy on Pregnancy Supports for Students** and the associated **Guidelines for Students** if planning on taking pregnancy-related leave from their research programme. Normally, students will apply for a leave of absence during the period of their maternity. If you are in receipt of external funding, you should engage with your funding agency to establish any necessary specific, funding-agency-related steps that are separate to those required for your registration.If a period of leave causes issues with funding, students can apply for a 'no fee' extension of registration at the end of their programme but must be aware that there is no University provision for payment of stipends during an extension period.

Guidelines for thesis preparation

To produce their thesis, students should work closely with their supervisor(s) to ensure that the research and presentation meets the standards expected by the University. The student submits their thesis to the University for examination as a PDF document via the eThesis Examination System. The Principal Supervisor must approve the submitted thesis, indicating that they are satisfied that the thesis is ready for examination. If you are of the opinion that this approval is being unreasonably withheld, you can appeal in the first instance to the Head of School.

Theses in graduate research programmes

All theses submitted must include a statement on plagiarism in accordance with **UCD Academic Integrity Policy**. Research theses can only be submitted if student registration is current, **fees** are up to date and the degree is compliant with University regulations (e.g. minimum period of registration).

Thesis embargoes

As part of the preparations for the submission of your thesis for examination, you should consult with your supervisor as to whether a **thesis embargo** will be necessary. Upon award of a research degree, a digital copy of a UCD research thesis is automatically deposited in the Research Repository UCD (RRU) and, without an embargo being set, is immediately publicly available to view. The default position of the University is to not place an embargo on a research thesis. An application for an embargo can be made if there is a valid reason for such a request (e.g. future publication plans). Such a request should be made before you submit your thesis for examination and must have the support of your supervisor.

Thesis examination

In order to submit a thesis for examination, a research student must have been registered to their programme for at least the minimum period of time specified for their programme in the Academic Regulations. In addition, all PhD students must have progressed into Stage 2 of the PhD programme and have completed the mandatory 30 credits of taught modules satisfactorily. **Research Integrity Training** is also a compulsory element of all research degree programmes. For doctoral students who have started their programme after September 2024, the Research Integrity Training must be completed in Stage 1 of their research programme. PhD and Professional Doctorate theses are always examined by a *viva voce* (oral examination), whereas Research Master's and MD theses are normally examined without a *viva voce* examination, although the Head of School or Examination Committee can request one. In that instance, the procedure will be similar to that for the PhD. Please follow the **eThesis submission guidelines** to submit your thesis for examination.

Organisation of the thesis exam

Your supervisor and School will organise the nomination and approval of your Examination Committee about three months in advance of you submitting the thesis for examination.

The *viva voce* examination will normally be held within two months of receipt of the thesis by the examiners. It is the responsibility of the chairperson of the *viva voce* to make all the arrangements for the examination. *Viva voce* examinations are normally held on campus. However, partially virtual *viva voces* may be appropriate in certain exceptional circumstances. **Guidelines on the *viva voce* examinations** can be found on the Graduate Studies website.

PhD theses are examined by a PhD Examination Committee consisting of an external examiner, one internal examiner and an independent chair. The external examiner must be a recognised expert in the disciplinary field.

For Research Master's theses, the internal examiner can also act as Chair of the Examination Committee. All Examination Committees are nominated by the School and then approved by the Graduate Research Board and the Academic Council Committee on Examinations (ACCE). This applies when a viva voce examination is not taking place.

Preparing for your viva

You will need to be prepared for a general discussion of your research area and a detailed explanation of your research and its conclusions. You also must be prepared for the examiners to approach the thesis from a different starting point than you and to emphasise different aspects of the thesis than you have considered. You will be given the opportunity to defend your thesis in every respect. You should enlist some help from your supervisor in your preparation.

PhD examination

A *viva voce* oral examination is compulsory for doctoral degrees. The *viva voce* provides you with an opportunity to defend your thesis and it assists the examiners in deciding whether or not you have met the requirements for the PhD degree. The Examination Committee will examine:

- The originality of the work described and the theories developed in the thesis
- Your familiarity with the published work of other authors in related areas
- Your ability to summarise the work of other authors and to synthesise a theoretical framework within which to position the work described in the thesis.

The theses is assessed in accordance with the **Guidelines for Preparation, Submission, Examination and Dissemination of Research Degree Theses**.

Once the *viva voce* is completed you will be invited by the chairperson to withdraw from the room so that the examiners can deliberate. In most cases you will be invited through the chairperson to hear the examiners' provisional recommendation, which is subject to approval by the ACCE.

Where a Research Master's or MD is examined through a *viva voce* examination, this will be conducted in the same way as a PhD viva.

Outcomes of research programme examination

The examiners will generally compile a joint report that is submitted to the ACCE. The thesis will either be deemed:

i) **Award Degree** – no revisions required

ii) **Award Degree** – revisions required

iii) **Revise thesis and submit for re-examination** – in this case the student must register for the period (at least one trimester) necessary to resubmit the thesis for examination

iv) **Do not award Degree** – recommendation that the candidate transfer to an appropriate graduate programme. In practice this recommendation is generally used for PhD candidates who are recommended to transfer to a Research Master's programme, and students submit the thesis for examination for this award

v) **Do not award Degree.**

In case (ii), the student is registered as 'for assessment', there is no fee implication, and the student continues to have access to UCD facilities such as the library and UCD email. Once the corrections have been completed, the student should contact the internal examiner (or whoever has been charged with overseeing the corrections) to arrange for the revised thesis to be reviewed. After the student has uploaded the revised thesis to the eThesis Examination System, the nominated examiner certifies on the system that the revisions have been made in accordance with the instructions given. Only the nominated examiner should certify these revisions

List of important policies

- Academic Regulations

- Academic Integrity Policy

- Dignity and Respect

- Research Integrity Policy

- Progression in Doctoral Programmes Policy

- Supervision of Research Degree Students Policy

- Recruitment, Support & Development of Graduate Research Students Supporting Teaching and Learning Policy

- Split-Site PhD and other Graduate Research Degree Arrangements Policy

- Conflict Resolution for Supervisor(s) and Graduate Research Students Policy

- Guidelines for Preparation, Submission, Examination and Dissemination of Research Degree Theses

- Policy on Research Thesis Embargoes

- Virtual Viva Voce Guidelines

- Leave of Absence Policy

- Pregnancy Supports for Students Policy

- Student Mental Health and Wellbeing

Find all the above policies in the **Graduate Studies Document Repository**.

For further information about **student complaint policies and procedures** and **student conduct and academic integrity**, visit the UCD Student Engagement, Conduct, Complaints and Appeals website.

Submission of final thesis

Following each meeting of the ACCE, UCD Registry shall notify candidates of the authorisation of the award of the degree by the ACCE. Following award of the degree, the candidate's thesis will be transferred from the eThesis Examination System and uploaded to the University's open access repository: Research Repository UCD (RRU). The thesis will then become automatically available for public viewing, unless a **thesis embargo** has been previously approved by the relevant Graduate Research Board.

The ACCE does not require candidates to submit a hardbound thesis as part of the examination process. However, the award requires that candidates submit one hard bound copy of their thesis in order to be eligible for conferral. The hardbound thesis can be lodged with the **Student Desk, UCD Registry**. This archival/preservation copy will be held in a closed store in the library.

As a courtesy, the candidate shall normally also present a hardbound copy of the final thesis to the Principal Supervisor and/or the Head of School.

Alternative thesis format

Note: This format may not be available in every School.

Peer-reviewed papers may be incorporated into a thesis submitted for the award of a research degree, to avoid any duplication of effort, if the following conditions are met:

- The work described in the papers is substantively that of the candidate and has been carried out during the period that the candidate has been registered for the research degree. Work published, accepted for publication, or submitted for publication prior to candidature cannot be included in the thesis.
- The thesis contains:
  - » A general introduction that incorporates an independent, original and up-to-date review of existing work in the field, which contextualises the candidate's research in relation to the present state of knowledge in the field
  - » Chapters containing the published work in a cogent sequence that support the main findings of the thesis
  - » Independent and original general discussion that draws together the main findings of the thesis in the context of their original contribution to current knowledge, establishes the significance of the work and outlines the needs and prospects for future research.

Work that has been submitted but not yet accepted for publication or work in preparation for publication may be included in the thesis but must be clearly distinguished from work that has been published or accepted for publication, and the level of readiness of the papers must be stated.

Where the papers presented in the thesis have been jointly authored, the nature and extent of the candidate's contribution must be precisely identified in the **Acknowledgement of Authorship Form** that delineates the nature and extent of the candidate's intellectual input to each paper and their direct contribution to the work reported (e.g. which figures or passages of text represent the original work of the candidate). This exercise should be carried out for each chapter that is based on work that is published or to be published.

Thesis structure

The thesis incorporating publications must read as a coherent whole and indicate that the candidate is able to produce written work that is of the standard accepted for a traditional thesis. Each section should be referenced separately. Where papers have been published with different fonts and formats, the original manuscripts should be reformatted so that the format throughout the thesis is uniform, providing an easily read, professional appearance. Any work that is published, or accepted or submitted for publication that is referred to, should be referenced clearly.

For further information, refer to the **Principles for the Production of Alternative Thesis Format (Theses as a Collection of Papers)**.

Student welfare and student life

Apart from your Principal Supervisor, Co-Supervisor(s) if relevant, RSP and School/College, there are additional supports available to you at UCD.

UCD Student Advisers

Your **Student Adviser** is here to help you make your time at UCD as fulfilling and enjoyable as possible. Student Advisers work with chaplains, the Student Health Service, and academic and administrative staff to ensure the best outcomes for you. You can visit/consult/contact your Student Adviser in relation to any personal, social or practical issues you are having. Mr Eamonn McHugh (**eamonn.mchugh@ucd.ie**) is the dedicated Student Adviser for graduate research students.

UCD Access and Lifelong Learning

All students with a disability or significant ongoing illness in UCD have the opportunity to receive relevant reasonable accommodations and supports. These supports may include academic supports, such as awareness supports for supervisor(s) and module coordinators of taught modules, and supports for examinations such us Stage Transfer Assessment(STA) and/or the *viva voce* examination. To avail of these supports, students must provide documentary evidence of a disability and attend a short Needs Assessment with UCD Access and Lifelong Learning. Further information is available on the **Access and Lifelong Learning website**.

UCD Dignity and Respect Support Service

The **Dignity and Respect Support Advisers** offer confidential and proactive support to students and staff who are impacted by issues of bullying, harassment and sexual misconduct. Should you experience these issues while studying at UCD, the Dignity and Respect Support Advisers can support you through informal resolution options and give you information and guidance on formal options. They are located on the fifth floor of the James Joyce Library Building and offer a drop-in and appointment booking service. For appointments email **respect@ucd.ie**.

UCD Global

UCD Global provides guidance for students on living in Ireland and advice can also be sought from their dedicated Student Immigration Adviser.

UCD Student Health Service

The **Student Health Service** in UCD is located in the Student Centre on the Belfield campus. If a student is worried about a health problem, they may call to the Student Health Service, where the receptionist will make an appointment for them to see the appropriate officer. The Student Health Service can also be reached by telephone at (01) 716 3134.

There is no dental service attached to the Student Health Service and dental care is not covered to any great extent even with a medical card. If dental treatment is required, the Student Health Service can recommend a local dentist.

Students' Union representatives

Shreyansh Guptag is the UCD Students' Union Graduate Officer for the 2025/26 academic year. The role of your Graduate Officer covers all non-academic issues that you may face in your day-to-day life throughout your time here at UCD. You can contact Shreyansh by email at **graduate@ucdsu.ie** or call (01) 716 3108. Or you can contact UCD Students' Union Welfare Officer Emilia O'Hagan by email at **welfare@ucdsu.ie** or call (01) 716 3112.

UCD Sports, Clubs and Societies

The Student Centre and the **UCD Sport and Fitness** complex are the hub of student life on campus. At UCD we have a multitude of facilities designed to encourage our students become involved in **clubs** and **societies**, and to stay fit and healthy during their time here.

UCD Chaplains

Chaplains offer personal support and advice in complete confidence to students who come to them. To find a UCD chaplain visit the **UCD Chaplaincy website**.

Academic supports

Student Desk
For queries about fees, transcripts, admissions, registration, student records etc., you can call to the Student Desk, which is located on the ground floor of the Tierney building, phone (01) 716 1555 or use the **Student Desk Connector.**

Programme difficulties
Students who are experiencing difficulties with their research are encouraged to address these as soon as they arise. If your difficulty cannot be resolved by your supervisor or RSP (which can be convened without your supervisor), you can approach those in your School responsible for graduate research students and/or the Graduate Research Student Adviser.

Student complaints
Students may make **complaints** about any unit, function or service provided by the University or on behalf of the University. The definition of a complaint is necessarily broad and therefore the list provided is intended to guide users and is not intended to be exhaustive.

A complaint may relate to the following issues:

- The quality or standard of any service provided or failure to provide a service
- The quality of facilities or learning resources
- The failure of the University to follow an appropriate administrative process
- Unfair treatment or inappropriate behaviour by a student or a staff member (isolated incident)
- An alleged action or inaction by the University or a member of its staff.

Complaints of repeated bullying/harassment behaviour are dealt with through **UCD's Dignity and Respect Policy**.

University facilities and campus maps

UCD Belfield campus has shops, restaurants, cafes, and a bank.

Campus maps
High-resolution and **interactive maps of the campus** are available on the UCD Estates Services website. To make campus navigation more accessible, **NaviLens** tags are now available throughout UCD.

Library services for graduates
Avail of specialist support, study spaces and 1,000s of print and e-resources on the **UCD Library website**. Use any of our five libraries, but remember that you need your student card/Ucard to gain entry.

Services include: subject guides highlighting key resources; one-to-one research consultations for in-depth subject queries; guidance on literature reviews, systematic reviews, dataset management and Open Access; and **research training workshops**.

UCD Writing Centre
UCD Writing Centre provides one-on-one writing sessions and regular online workshops.

UCD Careers Network
The UCD Careers Network is unique in Ireland in terms of having a dedicated Career and Skills Consultant for Graduate Research Students, Ms Tara Hughes (**tara.hughes@ucd.ie**). The service provides:

- individual (60-minute) coaching and guidance sessions
- group and individual **career planning** to find a 'best fit' in terms of future roles
- bespoke class delivery of workshops and seminars to increase the employability of graduate research students
- up-to-date labour market trends and employer networking opportunities
- **My Career**, an online platform, available 24/7, which covers a wide range of resources.
- regular news bulletins focusing on job vacancies.

Security and safety awareness on campus
UNICARE is a University service designed to enhance the security of property and the personal safety of students, staff and visitors on the Belfield campus. The programme operates through the combined efforts of students, staff, the local Gardaí, UCD Estates Services and various groups within UCD. A range of services and supports are available.

24 Hour Confidential Emergency Line
Internal Telephone No: 7999 External: (01) 716 7999

You should use the UNICARE number to call for emergency assistance or to report any issues regarding personal safety and security of property on campus (e.g. an accident/emergency, fire, theft, or reporting suspicious or troublesome persons or an incident you may have witnessed).

The UNICARE emergency line is operated 24 hours a day and assistance will be provided immediately in response to your call. UNICARE red emergency phones are located throughout the Belfield campus.

GRADUATE RESEARCH STUDENTS

A quick guide to the help and supports available to you

UCD aims to provide an educational experience for our students that defines international best practice. If issues arise during your research programme, then there are a range of supports in your School, Graduate Studies and across the University that are there to provide help when you need it.

WITHIN YOUR SCHOOL

Supervisor
- Academic advice
- Info on RSP meetings
- Info on the STA
- Issues with colleagues
- Issues with funding

Research Studies Panel
- Academic advice
- Credit/module advice
- An independent support for supervision issues

School Office
- Supervision issues
- Module registration
- General advice

School Graduate Coordinator
- Supervision issues
- Other issues

If you are unsure of who this is, please ask your School office.

RESEARCH STUDENT SPECIFIC

Student Adviser
Assists students in finding pathways to deal with personal, social and emotional issues

eamonn.mchugh@ucd.ie
01 716 1875

Graduate Studies
- RPDP
- Transferable skills training
- Graduate Research Board

www.ucd.ie/graduatestudies
01 716 4043

Careers Network
Dedicated consultant for research students

tara.hughes@ucd.ie
01 716 7520

WITHIN UCD

Medical Centre
The Student Health Service provides on-campus medical, psychological and psychiatric care to registered students of the University

www.ucd.ie/stuhealth
01 716 3134

Counselling Services
Confidential service staffed by professionally qualified psychologists and counsellors

www.ucd.ie/ studentcounselling
01 716 3134

Access and Lifelong Learning
Supports for students with a disability or significant ongoing illness

www.ucd.ie/all
01 716 7123

Library
- Five libraries available
- Workshops
- One-to-one research consultations
- Bookable study spaces for graduate students

www.ucd.ie/library
01 716 7583

UCD Global
UCD Global provides support and advice for international students, including international graduate research students

www.ucd.ie/global

Student Desk
- Official documents/ transcripts
- Fee queries
- Student card queries

www.ucd.ie/students/ studentdesk
01 716 1555

Dignity and Respect
The Dignity and Respect Support Advisers offer confidential and proactive support to students and staff who are impacted by issues of bullying, harassment and sexual misconduct

www.ucd.ie/ dignityandrespect

Students' Union
Help, advice and an advocacy service

graduate@ucdsu.ie
01 716 3108

(UNICARE)
If you have an emergency please ring **01 716 7999**

Appendix 1: Checklist for research students

Year 1

Registration

To register, go online, confirm details and pay fees. Failure to do so might cause your account to be deactivated and incur a penalty. ☐

RSP

Ensure that your School/supervisor has set up your RSP. ☐

Remind your supervisor to organise your first RSP meeting within first three months (supervisor's responsibility). ☐

A second RSP meeting should be held within the first year (student's responsibility). Ensure you complete the relevant **RPDP Form**. ☐

Essentials

Set a regular meeting schedule with your supervisor. ☐

Ensure you are aware of your supervisor's expectations such as working hours, meeting schedule, holidays and absences, and also be fully up to date with regulations, policies and research ethics. ☐

Discuss relevant taught modules to improve your research and transferable skills with your supervisor. ☐

Make yourself aware of your relevant School contacts and attend orientation events. ☐

Ensure that you are aware of the **UCD email policy** and understand that communications from the University will be delivered via your UCD Connect account. ☐

Ensure you complete **Research Integrity Training**. ☐

Year 2

Registration

To register, go online, confirm details and pay fees. Failure to do so might cause your account to be deactivated and incur a penalty. ☐

RSP

Ensure an RSP meeting is held approximately two months before the Stage Transfer Assessment (STA). ☐

Stage Transfer Assessment

Prepare STA, which should be held within five (full time) or seven (part time) trimesters from the date of first registration. ☐

Essentials

Meet with your supervisor on a regular basis and record meeting notes on InfoHub. ☐

Subsequent Years

Registration

To register, go online, confirm details and pay fees. Failure to do so might cause your account to be deactivated and incur a penalty. ☐

Research Studies Panel

Ensure at least one RSP meeting is held annually. ☐

Essentials

Meet with your supervisor on a regular basis. ☐

Engage with the dedicated Career and Skills Consultant to consider your career options. ☐

Final Year

Registration

Ensure your registration is fully up to date and that you are fully fee compliant. ☐

Research Integrity Training

Ensure you have completed **Research Integrity Training** in order to be compliant before submission. ☐

Credit compliance

Ensure that you will meet the credits requirement for your programme. ☐

Extern examiners

Check with your supervisor that an extern and Examination Committee have been submitted for approval approximately three months before the thesis is submitted. ☐

Submission

Check submission deadlines, and ensure registration and fees are fully up to date. ☐

Review the Graduate Studies **Document Repository** for advice. ☐

Request **extension** (if needs be) – speak with supervisor and School. ☐

Review **eThesis Examination System webpage** for eThesis submission advice. ☐

Speak with supervisor if **thesis embargo** is required. ☐

Submit thesis via **eThesis Examination System** and go through examination process. ☐

Conferring

Once the degree award is approved by ACCE, degrees are conferred at the next available **conferring ceremony**. Congratulations and celebrate your achievement! ☐

Appendix 2:

Guidelines for good practice between research students and supervisors

This document supplements the regulations for research degrees and relevant policy documents. The combined effort of graduate research students and their supervisors is essential if you are to achieve excellence in graduate education. Because conflict and/or tension can arise in situations where expectations are unclear or mismatched, a thorough understanding of each person's role is critical to productive learning and successful outcomes. The guidelines here are intended to be advisory rather than prescriptive and may evolve over time.

The main aims of this document are to briefly outline the responsibility of the different stakeholders, and to help graduate research students and supervisors reach an agreement on expectations and establish good communication.

Clarifying expectations and establishing good communications

Good, open communication is the key to managing the relationship between the supervisor and graduate research student. At the beginning of the research programme, both parties should negotiate how the relationship will function on issues such as those listed below.

Meetings

- The time and frequency of the supervision meetings
- What is expected at these meetings

Communication between meetings

- Does your supervisor prefer to communicate by telephone or email?
- How quickly do you expect a response to an email or phone message?
- Times when the supervisor will be away (e.g. on research leave, teaching abroad or at conferences) so you can plan for this and agree how you will keep in touch
- Times when the student will be away (e.g. at conferences etc.) so you can plan for this and agree how you will keep in touch

Research direction and timeline

- An overall plan and timeline for the research, as well as how an agreement will be reached on interim deadlines
- How much direction do you expect from your supervisor?
- How much direction does your supervisor expect to exert over your research?

Expectations for written work

- Does your supervisor expect to receive your work all at once or in smaller chunks?
- Do they expect drafts to be 'works in progress' or fairly polished pieces almost ready for publication?
- At what intervals does your supervisor expect you to submit work?
- Would your supervisor prefer to receive documents in hard copy or electronically?
- How long will the supervisor take to give feedback?

Skills and development

- What kind of skills and training does the student need (e.g. health and safety, statistical or research methods, IT training, language support etc.)
- Which intellectual property and ethical issues are relevant (e.g. if you are working as part of a research team or on human/animal research)
- The student's expected involvement in School research activities, seminars, and other School commitments such as demonstrating
- The student's career development (e.g. availability of teaching opportunities and conferences)

Housekeeping

- Expectation of the number of hours the student should complete on a daily/weekly basis
- Number of annual leave days the student can take or any specific period that the student cannot take holidays
- Expectation of the student regarding desk and lab space within the School

Funding

- How long is the funding duration?
- What does the funding cover?

Responsibilities of supervisor and student

Supervisor

The Principal Supervisor takes overall responsibility for the student's research training, the conduct of the student-supervisor relationship and management of the student's research progress. The Principal Supervisor provides the necessary intellectual and pedagogical advice and support for the student. Supervisors should endeavour to make the student aware of all relevant **regulations, policies and codes of practice**.

Students

In undertaking a graduate programme, graduate research students make a commitment to devote the time, effort and energy necessary to engage in the programme. Students should demonstrate initiative in their research, recognise that their supervisors are responsible for providing guidance as well as evaluating their performance, and be receptive to suggestions and criticisms about their academic performance. Specific responsibilities are as follows:

- To gain the background knowledge and skills needed to pursue the research project successfully
- To work with the supervisor on the establishment of a realistic timetable for the completion of the various requirements of the programme of study, and to adhere to the timetable and to meet deadlines
- To meet with the supervisor and RSP when requested and to report fully and regularly on progress and on results, and to consider and respond to advice and criticisms received from the supervisor and the other members of the RSP. The frequency of meetings with the supervisor will vary according to the discipline and the nature and stage of the project, but normally interaction, which may be electronic, should occur at least once per month
- To work with the supervisor to ensure that appropriate ethics approval is obtained prior to conducting research on animals or humans
- To provide accurate and honest reporting of research results and to uphold ethical norms in research methodology
- To bring to the attention of the supervisor any matters of conflicting advice or expectations on the part of members of the RSP
- To recognise that the supervisor and other members of the RSP may have other teaching, research and personal obligations that may preclude immediate responses
- To work with the supervisor to meet agreed performance standards and deadlines of the funding organisation when financing has been provided under a contract or grant
- To acknowledge the contributions of the supervisor and others in presentations and in published material, including joint authorship, if appropriate
- To help ensure that the research environment is safe, healthy and free from harassment, discrimination and conflict
- To act responsibly upon conclusion of the project by leaving a clean workspace, returning borrowed materials, and providing the supervisor with appropriate documentation of software, data and experimental procedures so that others may continue the research.

Research Studies Panel

The role of the **RSP** is to enhance the student-supervisor relationship and to ensure the quality of the graduate research student experience in the context of structured graduate research programmes. The RSP comprises the Principal Supervisor and any Co-Supervisor(s) and a number of advisors.

The purpose of the RSP is to:

- Enhance the supervisor-student relationship by the provision of advice
- Ensure quality, rigour and equity in the supervision process
- Advise the student on their professional and personal development training and monitor progress against their RPDP
- Review on a regular basis (at least twice in the first year and annually thereafter) the progress of the student against an agreed research plan
- Provide appropriate academic expertise and where appropriate facilitate an interdisciplinary perspective
- Provide temporary support to the student in the case of the unforeseen absence of the Principal Supervisor.

What happens if I stop engaging with my supervisor and/or my programme?

Although you have to be able work independently on a research programme, it is still critical that you continue to engage with your supervisor and particularly if your progress has been hampered for reasons beyond your control.

If there are circumstances beyond your control that are impacting your research, then you should engage with your supervisor and/or your RSP to identify a solution, with outcomes ranging from adjusted milestones, a change in focus to your research, a period of leave, or considering whether your current programme is the best fit for you.

In the event of persistent non-engagement or lack of progress with your programme, it is important to note the following:

- If communications, or attempts to engage with you, by your supervisor or RSP (or your Head of School depending on how far a case has been escalated) do not receive a response over a continued period of time, then the level of communications from any of these parties may become more formal and include deadlines that could impact your future progress.
- If there is a persistent failure to meet agreed milestones and deadlines or to provide work of an appropriate standard and no explanation is provided, as well as non-engagement with all attempts to enable you to continue and/or discuss the options available to you, then the School may ultimately be forced to consider whether you should continue in this programme.
- If non-engagement with your programme, with your supervisor(s) and your RSP continues, and you are in Stage 1 of the PhD, then this will be taken into account at the time of your Transfer Assessment.
- If non-engagement with your programme, supervisor(s) and RSP and/or failure to complete work to an appropriate standard continues and you are in Stage 2 of your PhD, then the School may seek an additional meeting(s) to assess your progress, as outlined in section 7.47 of the Academic Regulations (or 8.36 for Professional Doctorates).
- There may be circumstances where, despite active engagement with your research programme, academic or research-related reasons mean that it is not feasible for you to progress to Stage 2 of a PhD. In those circumstances, a Transfer Assessment may result in a recommendation to change to a different programme. If the chance of such a circumstance arises, you should engage with any efforts by your supervisor and RSP to support you academically.

Conflict resolution strategies for when things go wrong

Given the close and sometimes intense nature of the supervisory relationship, problems are likely to arise from time to time. Ideally, attempts to resolve problems or concerns happen as early and informally as possible, with that guiding principle in mind. Don't wait for things to get out of hand. Failing to address problems in their early stages will often lead to increased feelings of frustration that will make the problem(s) more difficult to resolve. It is often useful to think of conflict resolution as a step-by-step process.

Step One – Discuss your concerns with your supervisor

Before the meeting

Make an appointment with your supervisor (face-to-face or via video conference if virtual, rather than phone) to discuss your concerns. Avoid the temptation to try to deal with issues over email. Face-to-face meetings usually generate better resolutions and miscommunications are less likely to occur.

Allow sufficient time for your meeting. Effective problem-solving takes time, so make sure you block off enough time to have a good discussion. If your supervisor says they are only available for a short time, reschedule your meeting for another mutually convenient time.

Prepare for the meeting by making notes beforehand. Ask yourself the following questions: What are the specific obstacles in the way of my progress? What steps have I taken to overcome these obstacles? What do I need from my supervisor to enable me to move forward with my work? If your list of issues is very long, prioritise your concerns – what issues do you need to resolve right away?

During the meeting

Be prepared to state your needs. Remember, your supervisor isn't a mind reader. It is your responsibility to clearly tell your supervisor what you need from them to be able to move forward.

Listen to the other person's side carefully and respectfully. Don't argue your position without knowing 'why' your supervisor is asking you to do certain things that you think are unfair. Asking 'why' and 'why not' will help you to understand where they are coming from and can help develop a common incentive for resolution based on having both sets of interests satisfied.

Identify solutions. Once you and your supervisor have articulated the problem(s), try to come up with some problem-solving strategies that work for both of you. For example, if receiving timely feedback is an issue in your relationship, what are some of the options for addressing this: Can the supervisor provide more frequent but less detailed feedback? Can you revise your schedule for submitting work? Finding an appropriate solution may require some negotiation, but both you and your supervisor will be more committed to the resolution if each of you has had a hand in creating it.

After the meeting

Summarise the key points made during the meeting. It's important to make sure that nothing gets lost in the discussion and that both you and your supervisor have reached some kind of agreement about how the two of you will try to resolve the issues you have identified. Some people find it helpful to put in writing a plan of action based on the conversation.

Ask your supervisor if they would mind if you did this to clarify the options and steps towards resolution that you have identified. If you and your supervisor have made some progress on the issue but you still have more to discuss, determine a date for a follow-up meeting.

Step Two – Seek other sources of support for resolving the problem

Sometimes despite everyone's best efforts, problems remain unresolved after Step One. If your conversation with your supervisor didn't go very well, or you are afraid to approach your supervisor for whatever reason, it is a good idea to seek help in addressing your concerns. Depending on your situation (where you are in your research etc.) you may want to consider the following options.

Make an appointment to see your RSP (without the supervisor) who will listen to your concerns and help you identify specific problem-solving strategies. They may be likely to provide you with a fresh perspective and suggest different ways for you to approach the situation.

Also approach the School Graduate Coordinator who may have some insight into the problem you are experiencing and be able to suggest solutions. If you are experiencing a lot of stress in dealing with the situation, make sure you seek out sources of support.

Step Three – Consult the Head of School

Consult the University's policies and procedures for handling disputes and the reporting structure. Make an appointment with the Head of School to discuss what options are available to you. Prepare for this meeting in the same manner that was discussed previously in this document. You should expect that whomever you consult will ask you if you have discussed your concerns with your supervisor and what, if any, steps you have taken to resolve them. At this stage you may need to make a decision about whether you wish to continue with your supervisor or whether you want to explore the possibility of changing supervisors. Whatever option you choose you will likely need to take into account your area of study and what stage you are at in your research.

For further information, refer to the **Conflict Resolution for Supervisor(s) and Graduate Research Students Policy**.

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