



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

Policy Owner:

Approval Date and Body 7th March 2019 ACEC

Graduate Studies

1. Purpose

1.1 The relationship between Student and Supervisor is of vital importance to the success of the Research Masters or Doctoral experience. A conflict resolution strategy is a necessary step towards ensuring the quality of education and training at UCD. It is imperative for the minimisation of conflict and for good practice in supervision generally, that the roles and responsibilities of the student and supervisor are clearly understood as detailed in [UCD Code of Practice for Supervisors and Research Degree Students](#). It is important to recognise in addition that however friendly and supportive this relationship may become, it is fundamentally recognised as academic and professional.

1.2 It is the intention of this document to discuss conflict resolution specifically within the context of the student - supervisor relationship with the aim of developing a cohesive graduate research experience across the University. It is expected that both students and supervisor(s) contribute responsibly to the establishment and maintenance of a healthy working relationship.

1.3 Typical disputes include situations where there is differing expectations with respect to student or supervisor engagement i.e. such as frequency of, and attendance at, meetings, the appropriate and timely submission of work to the supervisor and appropriate and timely feedback on that work to the student.

2. Definitions

2.1 Conflict: Dispute resulting from actual or perceived differences.

2.2 Conflict Resolution: Conflict resolution is a way for two or more parties to find a satisfactory solution to this, ideally coming to a settlement that benefits all parties.

2.3 Principal Supervisor: The Principal Supervisor has primary responsibility for the academic supervision of the research degree student.

2.4 Co-Supervisor: The Co-Supervisor supports the Principal Supervisor in the academic supervision of the student.

2.5 Adjunct Supervisor: An Adjunct Supervisor is a member of the adjunct or visiting staff of the University, who has been specifically approved to act as a Principal Supervisor/Co-supervisor by the Academic Council or its relevant committee, on the recommendation of a School and with the approval of the Governing Board, and whose name has been entered on the Register of Approved Adjunct and Visiting Supervisors.

2.6 External Supervisor: An External Supervisor is appointed if a research student is based for longer than one trimester off campus in an external organisation including research institutes, industry laboratory or studio, government agency or non-government organisation and an approved Adjunct Supervisor is not in place. An External Supervisor must be specifically approved by the Governing Board on the recommendation of a School, and their name entered on the Register of Approved External Advisers. All such appointments will be noted by Academic Council or its relevant committee. External Supervisors may not replace a Principal Supervisor or Co-supervisor.

2.7 Research and Professional Development Plan (RPDP): Research and Professional Development Planning is an integral part of the PhD programme at UCD. The purpose of such planning is to ensure that the student's work is focused on achieving the student's research and professional development goals. It forms a major part in informing the student of both the trajectory of the research and their training & development needs. The Transfer Assessment Panel (TAP) reviews the RPDP as part of the judgement for the Transfer Assessment (see 2.5).

2.8 Transfer Assessment: Doctoral programmes in UCD are comprised of two stages. In order to progress from Stage 1 to Stage 2 of the programme, students must undergo a transfer assessment to establish that they are making progress and have the competence and capacity to complete the proposed research.

2.9 Mediation. Where conflict cannot be resolved between the parties alone, mediation is a voluntary, confidential process that allows parties to resolve their conflict in a mutually agreeable way with the help of a neutral third party.

3. Scope

3.1 This document deals specifically with issues that may arise within the domain of the professional relationship of the graduate research student and the supervisor. The document will suggest the appropriate steps to progress conflict resolution in the context of university regulations, guidelines and support services.

3.2 While this document is designed to facilitate the successful working relationship between the student and his/her supervisor, there are a number of circumstances that are already provided for within existing University Policies, such as those outlined in Section 6 below, and as such are excluded from this document. These should be viewed in conjunction with this *Policy for Conflict Resolution for Supervisor(s) and Graduate Research Students* where appropriate.

4. Principles

4.1 Collaborative working environment: Alongside the fostering of a learning environment which aspires to excellence in research; academic integrity; excellent communication structures and ensuring best professional practice with support guidelines, each contribute to a strong collaborative working environment at UCD.

4.2 Compliance with UCD Academic Regulations: Students and supervisor(s) should seek to establish good working relationships by meeting all formal requirements as stated in the *UCD Academic Regulations*.

4.3 Acknowledgement of the Rights and Responsibilities of all Parties/ Following Best Practice: Conflict resolution procedure is to ensure that the rights and responsibilities of all parties are respected and that resolutions reflect best professional practice.

4.4 Local Resolution: Disputes should be resolved informally, in a professional manner and at the lowest institutional level practicable. This is ideally at the level of the School.

4.5 Dignity and Respect: UCD supports the individual's right to study and/or work in an environment which is free from bullying and harassment, including sexual harassment.

4.6 Equality Diversity and Inclusion: Excellence in the pursuit of research degrees requires mutual respect between students, supervisor(s) and all other related parties in order to uphold the University's commitment to promoting Equality, Diversity and Inclusion for the UCD community.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

5.1 It is the responsibility of both student and supervisor to familiarise themselves with their individual roles and responsibilities as outlined in the *UCD Policy for Supervision of Research Degree Students*. The goal of an effective conflict resolution procedure is to ensure that the rights and responsibilities of all parties are respected and that resolutions reflect best professional practice. Early intervention when issues arise is seen as the most effective way to discourage the escalation of problems unnecessarily.

5.2 Both student and supervisor(s) should take a pro-active role in ensuring that regular contact is maintained between them. A schedule of meetings should be agreed at the beginning of each trimester. Good practice is that students should meet with their supervisor(s) frequently and at least once a month (outside of annual leave for either the supervisor or the student). The quality of these meetings is however more important than the frequency and all agreed actions should be recorded by notes, email and it is strongly recommended that all records of meetings be uploaded to the Research Management System.

5.3 Principal 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 professional relationship between student and supervisor is facilitated by early conversations and clarification about expectations roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders. The principal supervisor plays a role in finding a solution to any conflict that arises.

5.4 Co-Supervisor(s): The Co-supervisor(s) (if relevant) support the Principal Supervisor in the supervision of the Research Degree Student. They can play a role in assisting to find a solution to any conflict in the Supervisor-Student relationship.

5.5 Research Studies Panel: The Research Studies Panel supports an effective working relationship between supervisor and student. In the event of difficulties arising in the student-supervisor relationship, the Panel will seek to resolve such difficulties. The Panel can be called by the student, independently of the principal supervisor if necessary. The Panel will then meet with the research supervisor after such a meeting takes place to progress conflict resolution. It is important to note that the Research Studies Panel can be convened by both the research student and the supervisor independently of the other party.

5.6 Research Degree Student

The University expects that all research degree students will make all reasonable efforts to:

- Accept responsibility for their research activity and learning.

- Achieve goals and milestones agreed with the Principal Supervisor, as documented in the Research and Personal Development Plan.
- Take full cognisance of supervisory advice. Attend the agreed schedule of supervisory meetings and discuss progress with the supervisor regularly.
- Maintain a summary record of outcomes agreed at supervisory meetings as per the Research and Professional Development Plan.

5.7 Governing Board Member: In each School in UCD there is a member of faculty who is appointed as the Graduate Coordinator/Governing Board member. Amongst other responsibilities they have a role in supporting students and staff in resolving conflict.

5.8 Head of School: The Head of School supports the student and the supervisor if a conflict cannot be resolved initially after the student and supervisor have met or after the issue has been raised with the Research Studies Panel. If mediation is required, the Head of School should assist in the provision of this service to the student and supervisor. If an issue cannot be resolved at the level of the Head of School, a formal procedure can be invoked, in line with the [Student Complaint Policy process](#).

Where a Principal Supervisor for any reason, is unable to continue to supervise the research, the Head of School shall make appropriate arrangements for the supervision of the student, including, where required, recommending the appointment of a new Principal supervisor to the relevant Governing Board.

5.9 The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Unit: plays a key role in ensuring the promotion and mainstreaming of equality, diversity and inclusion throughout UCD. The Unit provides support and advice in dealing with equality and diversity matters, participates on appropriate University groups and develops strategies which support the identification and implementation of best practice policies and procedures in the University.

6. Related documents

It is important that both supervisor and student familiarise themselves with the following documents:

- [Academic Regulations 2019-2020](#)
- [UCD Plagiarism Policy](#)
- [The University's Academic Governance Structures](#)
- [Policy on Progression in Doctoral Programmes](#)
- [The Student Code](#)
- [UCD Employee Student Relationship Policy](#)
- [The UCD Staff grievance Procedure](#)
- [UCD Code of Practice in Research](#)
- [UCD Research Integrity Policy](#)
- [Assessment Appeals](#)
- [UCD Policy on Dignity and Respect](#)
- [UCD Intellectual Property Policy and Procedures](#)
- [UCD Student Complaints Policy](#)
- [UCD Plagiarism Policy](#)
- [UCD Grievance Procedure](#)
- [Mediation Alternative Dispute Resolution Policy.](#)
- [UCD Code of Practice for Supervisors and Research Degree Students.](#)

7. Version History

Version	Date	Summary of Changes	Changed by
1.0	28 Feb 07	First draft, version 1.0	Elizabeth Condon
1.1	21 Mar 07	Revision of document based on first meeting of the working group	Ben Tonra/ Elizabeth Condon/ Emer Cunningham
1.2	4 April 07	Revisions arising from Working Group Discussion with minor copyediting revisions from EC and IM	Ben Tonra
1.3	27 April 07	Revisions arising from UGPB discussions	Ben Tonra
1.4	ACEC 7 th March 2019	The Code of Practice was restructured into Policy and Procedures and updated for 2019-2020 Regulations	Janet Carton Emer Cunningham

Appendix I



Procedure for Conflict Resolution for Supervisor(s) and Graduate Research Students

A. Introduction

A breakdown within the student-supervisor relationship may have many causes, often due to differing role expectations and/or communication difficulties. This can lead to misunderstandings and tensions. The goal of an effective conflict resolution procedure is to ensure that the rights and responsibilities of all parties are respected and that resolution process reflects best professional practice, resulting in a mutually satisfactory outcome.

The purpose of the procedure below is

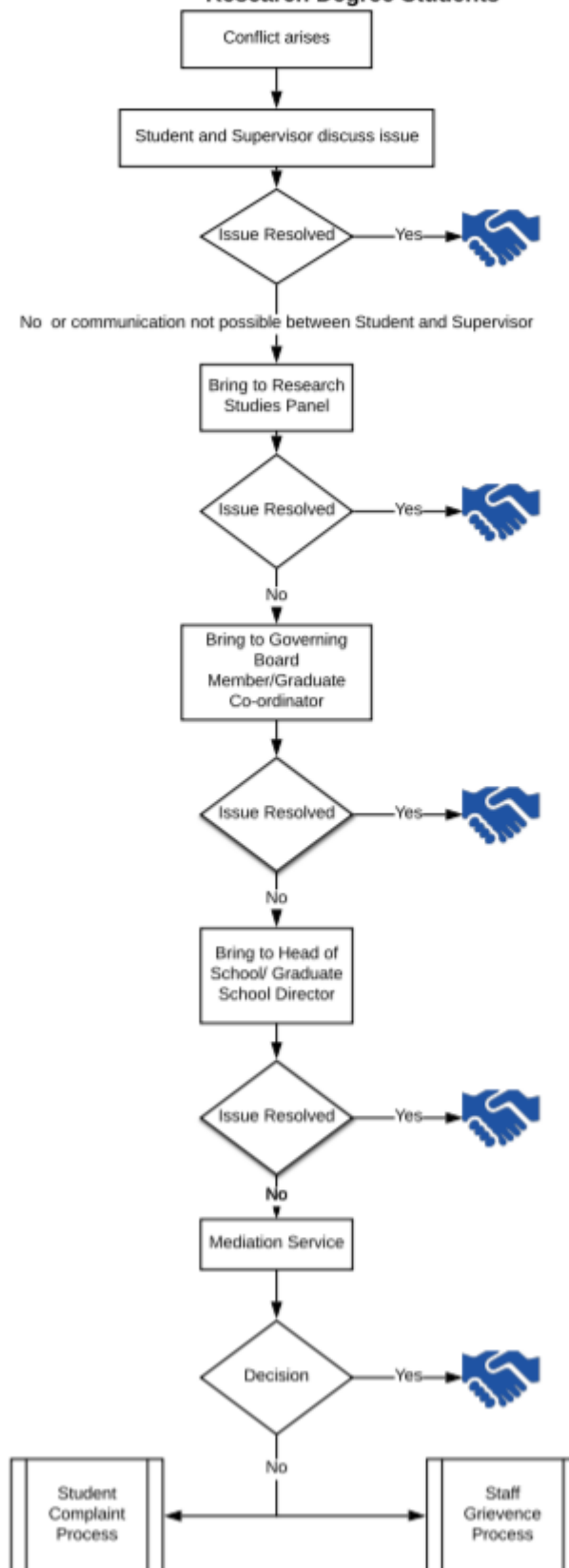
1. To produce a solution that all parties can agree to
2. To work towards a prompt resolution
3. To improve, not damage, the professional relationship between the parties in conflict.

This procedure is aligned, and to be read in conjunction with, the existing *Policy for Supervision of Research Degree Students*, the *Student Complaints Policy and Procedures* and the *Staff Grievances Policy*.

A common area where conflict can arise where there is a lack of understanding of expectations with the student's stage 1- stage 2 transfer assessment. It is the joint responsibility of the student and supervisor to ensure that both parties are aware of the need for a punctual transfer assessment with all documentation agreed in advance in line with School and College Graduate School guidelines and the [Policy on Progression in Doctoral Programmes](#)

If you are experiencing a lot of stress as a student or supervisor in dealing with a situation, make sure you seek University sources of support <http://mentalhealth.ucd.ie/>. Students can also seek help from their College Student Adviser <http://www.ucd.ie/studentadvisers/>

Recommended Flowchart for Conflict Resolution between Supervisors and Research Degree Students



B Students

Step-by-Step Guide to Early and Informal Conflict Resolution

Note: To enable prompt resolution, conflicts should be raised early and locally. The following steps are a guide to achieving this aim.

Step 1: Meeting with Supervisor

Make an appointment for a meeting with your supervisor to discuss your concerns. Face to face meetings usually generate better resolutions and miscommunications are less likely to occur. Allow sufficient time for your meeting for it to be most effective. Prepare for the meeting by considering the items on the checklist (Appendix 1) and making a note of the specific issues that you consider to be obstructing your progress. Aim to articulate the issue in two or three succinct statements to give you clarity and avoid the risk of going off the point. Consider what possible solutions there could be and keep an open mind to suggestions from your supervisor.

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. 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. Summarise the agreed plan of action and have it signed off by the supervisor. This can be integrated into your RPDP. Be aware that it may take more than one meeting to tease out a solution.

Step 2: Meeting with Research Studies Panel

If the matter is not resolved after discussion(s) with your supervisor or if you feel that you need to discuss the matter independently of your supervisor(s), you can request a meeting with the members of the Research Studies Panel (with or without your supervisor as appropriate). The Research Studies Panel will meet with your supervisor if they have independently met with you to make further efforts towards resolution.

Step 3: Meeting with Governing Board Member / Graduate School Co-ordinator

If the matter remains unresolved, you can bring the issue to the attention of your School Governing Board Member / Graduate Coordinator who will advise on options available to you. If the issue is one covered by the Dignity and Respect Policy you can approach one of the [Dignity and Respect Contact persons](#).

Step 4: Meeting with Head of School

If the Governing Board Member / Graduate Coordinator / Dignity and Respect representative discussion does not yield results, you can approach the Head of your School (unless they are your Principal Supervisor) who will normally seek to resolve the issue within 15 working days (in line with the Student Complaints Policy* section 4.2). If local resolution fails to achieve an agreeable outcome, the formal process of mediation can be instigated by the Head of School in an effort to resolve the conflict.
<http://www.ucd.ie/equality/support/mediation/>

Step 5: Meeting with Graduate School Director (or Equivalent)

Where the Head of School is also the Supervisor or a member of the Research Studies Panel, the matter will be addressed directly by the Director of the College's Graduate School.

C Supervisor

Step-by-Step Guide to Early and Informal Conflict Resolution

Step 1: Meeting with Research Student

Make an appointment with your research degree student to discuss your concerns. Allow sufficient time for the meeting so that it can be most effective. Prepare for the meeting by considering what is the issue, making a note of the specific obstacles that you consider to be contributing to the conflict.

Once you and your student have articulated the issue(s), try to come up with some problem-solving strategies that work for both of you. Finding an appropriate solution may require some negotiation, but both you and your student will be more committed to the resolution if each of you has had a hand in creating it. Both student and supervisor should agree a plan of action and sign it.

Step 2: Meeting with the Research Studies Panel

If the matter is not resolved after discussion(s) directly with your student, you can request a meeting with the members of your Research Studies Panel to make further efforts towards resolution. Supervisors can also request a meeting with the Research Studies Panel without the student being present. The Research Studies Panel will meet with the student following the meeting with the supervisor to progress resolution.

Step 3: Meeting with the Governing Board Member / Graduate School Co-ordinator

If the matter remains unresolved or it is not feasible/appropriate to meet with the Research Studies Panel, you can bring the issue to the attention of your School Governing Board Member / Graduate Coordinator who will advise on options available to you. If the issue is one covered by the Dignity and Respect Policy you can approach one of the [Dignity and Respect Contact persons](#).

Step 4: Meeting with Head of School or College Graduate School Director

If the Governing Board Member / Graduate Co-ordinator - Dignity and Respect discussion does not yield results you can approach the Head of your School or College Graduate School Director who will normally seek to resolve the issue within 15 working days (in line with the Student Complaints Policy Section 4.2). The Head of School or graduate School Director can invoke a formal [Mediation process](#) if required.

If, following mediation, agreement is reached, the mediator will close the matter with a brief written report which will be treated confidentially. The student and supervisor will be asked to sign this report to verify that the issue has been resolved. If, following mediation agreement has not been reached, the formal procedure for staff grievance can be invoked.

D. Sensitive and Confidential Information

Information provided by complainants and respondents is usually of a personal and sensitive nature. All such information will be considered to have been given in confidence, and will be treated confidentially.

E. Conflict Resolution and Ongoing Supervision

In a minority of cases, where informal or formal procedures have resolved the proximate cause of dispute, it may not always be possible to maintain a positive supervisory relationship. In cases where that relationship has broken down, but where the student is continuing to meet all other programme requirements and is making satisfactory academic progress in the circumstances, it is the Head of School's responsibility to secure alternative supervision for the student, and to help the student complete in as timely a fashion as possible.

In any attempt to secure alternative supervision for a student, the School should also consider and resolve, to the satisfaction of all parties involved, a number of key issues, including:

- A clear specification of remaining programme and thesis requirements
- A revised schedule for the timely completion of these requirements
- New funding arrangements for the student where applicable
- Outstanding intellectual property and publication/authorship issues
- Continuity of the former supervisor's research programme.

Every effort should be made both during and following the conflict resolution process to ensure that a change of supervision has a minimal negative effect on the student's career and/or on the supervisor's reputation. Thus, any possible negative effects relating to a change in supervisor(s) should not be reflected in subsequent evaluations of course work, student or staff evaluations for awards, letters of recommendation, etc., for potential employment opportunities or promotion, or in the assignment of demonstrator ships, teaching assistantships etc.

Appendix i

Checklist for Research Student to help frame discussion with their supervisor

Before meeting with your supervisor /RSP /Head of School /Graduate School Director / Governing Board Member/ Graduate School Co-ordinator, you should use the checklist below to frame your thinking

Checklist for students in identifying issues/ challenges in their research or working relationship(s)
What are the specific obstacles I have identified that are in the way of my progression? 1 2 3
Have I arranged a meeting with my supervisor to highlight my main concerns?
What help do I need from my supervisor to enable me to move forward?
Have I accessed any of the resources available to me at UCD?
Have I kept a written record of previous meetings with my supervisor and Research Studies Panel?
My RPDP is up-to date, with research and professional goals highlighted?
I have had a transfer assessment to Stage 2 and have the report to hand?
Do I need to involve the Head of School to help resolve this conflict?
Is a formal mediation process required to help resolve this conflict?
What is the desired outcome of this conflict?

Appendix ii

Checklist for Research Supervisors to help frame a discussion with their student

Checklist for Supervisors
Have I kept a written record / do I have access to a written record of previous meetings with my research student and Research Studies Panel?
Have I met with my student to discuss the specific obstacles in the way of them progressing?
What are the specific obstacles in the way of my student progressing? 1 2 3
Do I need to engage the RSP to help resolve this conflict?
Have I engaged with the student in helping them to complete their RPDP?
Has the student completed their Stage Transfer Assessment?
What issues were raised at the Stage Transfer Assessment by the Assessment Panel?
Have I raised the challenges the student is facing with the Transfer Assessment Panel?
Do I have the student's transfer assessment report to hand?
Have I accessed any of the resources available to me at UCD?
Do I need to engage the Head of School or Graduate School Director to help resolve this conflict?
Is formal mediation required to help resolve this conflict?
What is the desired outcome of this conflict?