

UCD Policy for Supervision of Graduate Research Students



Policy owner	UCD Graduate Studies	Approval date: 28th May 2025 Body: Academic Council Version: 6.0
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1. Purpose

The UCD Policy for Supervision of Graduate Research Students outlines each party's roles and responsibilities governing the professional relationships between supervisor(s) and students. The policy is applicable to all research degree programmes and is supplementary to the UCD Academic Regulations.

2. Definitions

2.1 Research Degree: A research degree is an award at NFQ level 9 or level 10 characterised by a significant contribution (original contribution in the case of a PhD, MD) to scholarship, based largely on a major research project which is complemented by the development of a range of transferable and professional skills.

2.2 Principal Supervisor: The Principal Supervisor is the person with primary responsibility for the academic supervision of a research degree student.

2.3 Co-Supervisor: The Co-supervisor(s) supports the Principal Supervisor in the supervision of the research degree student.

2.4 Adjunct Supervisor: Is a member of Adjunct or Visiting staff to the University who has been specifically appointed as a Principal Supervisor or Co-Supervisor by the Graduate Research Board, and their name is entered on the Register of Approved Adjunct and Visiting Supervisors.

2.5 External Supervisor: Is a senior member of staff in an external organisation, appointed by the Graduate Research Board for a specific research degree student and their name is entered on the Register of Approved External Supervisors.

2.6 Assistant Supervisor: Is a Postdoctoral Researcher who is one year post PhD award and research active. Who has been nominated, normally by a Principal Supervisor, and formally approved by the Graduate Research Board as a mentor to a specific graduate research student, providing intellectual insight and guidance. The Assistant Supervisor role is in addition to, never a substitute for, the primary supervision of the principal/co-supervisor¹

¹ ACEC, at its meeting on 28 May, approved the proposal to expand eligibility for the Assistant Supervisor role and extend the Assistant Supervisor pilot phase for a total of five years to 2029

2.7 Research Studies Panel (RSP) The RSP is comprised of the Principal Supervisor, any Co-Supervisor(s), any Assistant Supervisor and Advisers appointed by the School.

3. Scope

This policy refers to but does not cover:

- Progression from Stage 1 to Stage 2 of PhD Programme: [Policy on Progression in Doctoral Programmes](#)
- Conflict Resolution: [Policy on Conflict Resolution for Supervisors and Research Degree Students](#)
- Student Complaints: [Complaints Policy](#)
- Assessment Appeals: [Assessment Appeals Policy](#)
- Theses Preparation: [Research Degree Examination Policy](#) and [Guidelines](#)
- Split Site Arrangements: [Policy for Split Site PhD and other Graduate Research Degree Arrangements](#)

All policy documents are available in the UCD document library
<https://www.ucd.ie/governance/documentlibrary/>

4. Principles

The University is committed to achieving the highest standards of excellence in the research training, professional development and supervision of graduate research students and expects all relevant parties to adhere to the following core principles.

4.1 Proactive engagement in forming and cultivating a positive, professional relationship founded on mutual respect.

- Principal Supervisors and graduate research students are expected to clarify their expectations of the relationship at the start of, and at appropriate stages, throughout the research programme. Specifically agreeing, how they will maintain clear and regular communication, how they will schedule and prepare for meetings, how and when feedback will be provided and how the research degree student will meet their milestones.
- Principal Supervisors and Schools must work together to provide continuity of supervision throughout the research programme. In instances where a change of supervision is needed, the Head of School will make every effort to secure alternative arrangements for the supervision of the student with minimal delay.
- Principal Supervisors and graduate research students will engage with University processes and procedures for resolving conflict. Conflict resolution is a way for two or more parties to find a satisfactory solution to conflict, ideally coming to a settlement that benefits all parties.

4.2 Developing graduate research students as independent researchers.

- There is a mutual responsibility for Principal Supervisors, Co-supervisors (where relevant) and graduate research students to work together to develop feasible research projects.
- Principal Supervisors, Co-supervisors (where relevant) and students must work together to maintain consistent progress in the research, engage in the Stage Transfer Assessment and other review processes and complete the research programme in a manner defined in the Academic Regulations.
- Principal Supervisors & Co-supervisors (where relevant) must support candidates in the preparation of an examinable thesis

4.3 Promoting a strong research training culture and environment based on an intellectual and collegiate research community.

- Principal Supervisors & Co-supervisors (where relevant) and graduate research students are expected to engage in developing and promoting a culture supportive of networking, mentoring and development, including expanding research and generic skills to support the candidate's personal and professional development.
- Principal Supervisors & Co-supervisors (where relevant) and graduate research students should be mindful about managing conflicts and competing interests in such areas as authorship and intellectual property.
- Grievances between student and a Principal Supervisor or Co-supervisors (where relevant) must be sensitively and proactively managed by Schools.
- Principal Supervisors & Co-supervisors (where relevant) and students are expected to engage in publication and/or dissemination of research findings appropriate to disciplinary norms.

4.4 Practice research according to the fundamental principles of research integrity, excellence and safety.

- Supervisors and students will promote and uphold the principles of academic integrity in the conduct of their learning and research activities.
- Supervisors and students must conduct their research with integrity and in accordance with the regulations, policies and guidelines of the university and applicable legislation.
- Principal Supervisors, in consultation with the Head of School, are expected to identify and agree that appropriate resources are available to support the proposed research activity.
- Supervisors must have an active and continuing participation in research.
- Every graduate research student must satisfactorily complete Research Integrity Training. PhD students admitted after 31st August 2024 must complete this training in Stage 1 of the PhD programme.

5 Roles and Responsibilities

5.1 Role & Responsibilities of the Principal Supervisor

The Principal Supervisor has primary responsibility for the academic supervision of the research degree student. i.e. the Principal Supervisor takes overall responsibility for the student's research training and must strive to provide an excellent educational experience for research students which defines international best practice. The Principal Supervisor also has primary responsibility for the conduct of the student-supervisor relationship, management of the student's research progress and in guiding the student to conduct their research with integrity and in accordance with the regulations, policies and guidelines of the university and applicable legislation. The Principal Supervisor has responsibility for nominating a Postdoctoral Researcher who is one year Post PhD and research active to be an Assistant Supervisor where appropriate. These responsibilities cannot be delegated.

5.2 Role & Responsibilities of The Co-Supervisor

Where appointed, the Co-Supervisor supports the Principal Supervisor in the academic supervision of the student. The Co-Supervisor may assume (where appropriate) the responsibilities of the Principal Supervisor in the event that the student's programme of study exceeds the duration of the initial Principal Supervisor's contract, and the status of the Co-Supervisor's contract facilitates this.

5.3 Role & Responsibilities of Adjunct Supervisor

Where appointed, an adjunct or visiting faculty member entered on the Register of Approved Adjunct and Visiting Supervisors supports the Principal Supervisor in the academic supervision of the student. An Adjunct Supervisor can be appointed as a Principal Supervisor or Co-supervisor and would assume responsibilities of that role if so appointed.

5.4 Role & Responsibilities of External Supervisor

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, a member of staff of the external organisation must be appointed as an External Supervisor. An External Supervisor must be specifically approved by the Graduate Research Board on the recommendation of a School and their name entered on the Register of Approved External Supervisors. The External Supervisor must be a member of the Research Studies Panel.

5.5 Role & Responsibilities of Assistant Supervisor

An Assistant Supervisor will be nominated by the Principal Supervisor, with the endorsement of the Head of School, and approved by the Graduate Research Board, and if approved, their name entered on the Register of Approved Assistant Supervisors. The responsibilities of the Assistant Supervisor will include provision of advice to the graduate research student for day-to-day research/ trouble-shooting issues that do not require intervention by the Principal/Co-Supervisors and providing research skills training and project management guidance to the student. The Assistant Supervisor is also expected to provide informal mentoring to the student, including research and professional career development as appropriate. It is expected that the Assistant Supervisor will be a member of the student's Research Studies Panel (RSP), and they will attend supervisory meetings as agreed with the Principal Supervisor. The Assistant Supervisor is not expected to be involved in the recruitment and selection of graduate research students, monitoring of their progress or supporting thesis completion or final examination. The Assistant Supervisor is expected to undertake training in supervision available within the University.

5.6 Role & Responsibilities of the Graduate Research Student

The graduate research student has responsibility for their own research activity and learning. It is expected that graduate research students will actively engage with their Principal Supervisor on an ongoing basis and make reasonable efforts to achieve goals and milestones agreed with their Principal Supervisor and Research Studies Panel. The graduate research student is expected to ensure that all or any ethical requirements associated with their research are addressed at the appropriate time and are required to comply with best and ethical practice and the regulations, policies and guidelines of the University and applicable legislation in the conduct of their research. The student must document their educational, training and personal and professional development needs as part of their Research and Professional Development Planning (RPDP). Graduate research students must comply with UCD Academic Regulations.

5.7 Role & Responsibilities of the Research Studies Panel

The role of the Research Studies Panel (RSP) is to enhance the supervisor(s)-student relationship by the provision of advice in accordance with the University's policies, practices, guidelines and procedures. The RSP will monitor progress against the prescribed programme of research and study and will meet at least twice in the first year and at least once a year thereafter. Each meeting will be documented and have an agreed action plan written by the Chair and signed off by the Chair on behalf of RSP members. RSP Terms of Reference are detailed in Appendix 1.

5.8 Role & Responsibilities of the School

The School will establish appropriate processes and procedures to monitor the progress of individual research students registered in the School. Schools will monitor the number of students that Principal Supervisors and members of the Research Studies Panels are responsible for, to prevent the overburdening of the relevant parties.

5.9 Role & Responsibilities of the Head of School

- Support a nomination and make a recommendation for admission of the candidate to the Governing Board.
- Ensure that robust procedures in accordance with University policies and procedures are in place to address any alleged breaches of academic integrity.
- Highlight appropriate supports, training and/or professional development programmes for research supervisors in their school.
- Support a nomination of an Assistant Supervisor and make a recommendation for their appointment to the Graduate Research Board.
- Make every effort to secure alternative arrangements for the supervision of a student with minimal delay should the Principal Supervisor be unable to supervise the student or where a degree of conflict has arisen that a recommendation of appointment of a new Principal Supervisor be made to the Graduate Research Board. Where alternative arrangements cannot be secured, the Head of School will submit a report with their recommended course of action to the Graduate Research Board

5.10 Role & Responsibilities of the Graduate Research Board

- Be responsible for the development, approval, and review of the graduate research programmes of the University.
- Develop policies, procedures, guidelines, and initiatives as appropriate to promote effectiveness, excellence, and fairness in the delivery and governance of graduate research programmes.
- Ensure procedures are in place to monitor trends in the progress of research students, including completion rates and progression times, supervisors, Transfer Assessment Panels, Examination Committee recommendations to Academic Council Committee on Examinations and the career progression of research graduates.

5.11 Role & Responsibilities of the University

- Provide professional development opportunities and training to ensure that supervisors at all levels and stages are able to evaluate and develop their supervisory skills further.
- Have a duty of care and legal responsibilities to University students and staff for health and safety, equality and diversity, data protection and dignity and respect. Supervisors and their students are covered by these policies:
 - [Student Code](#)
 - [Mental Health](#)
 - [Data Protection](#)
 - [Dignity and Respect](#)
 - [Authorship Policy](#)
 - [Code of Good Practice in Research](#)
 - [Intellectual Property Policy](#)
 - [Procedures for the Investigation of Misconduct in Research](#)
 - [Research Integrity Policy](#)
 - [Research Ethics Policy](#)

5 Version History

Version	Date	Summary of Changes	Changed by
1.0	12 Apr 2007	Approved by Academic Council	
2.0	28 Apr 2011	Amended and revised document approved by Academic Council	Lynn Foster
3.0	6.Feb2020	Code of Practice developed into Policy document in accordance with the UCD Policy Framework	Janet Carton
4.0	19.Mar.2020	Code of Practice developed into Policy document in accordance with the UCD Policy Framework	Janet Carton
5.0	30 May 2024	Addition of role of Assistant Supervisor	Emer Cunningham
6.0	28 May 2025	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Assistant Supervisor eligibility extended to Postdoctoral Researcher who is one year post PhD award and research active. 2. RSP TOR amended to reflect current academic regulations 	Janet Carton Ciara Cloak

APPENDIX 1 RESEARCH STUDIES PANEL

Terms of Reference

1. Purpose

Research Studies Panels are designed to enhance the supervisor-student relationship and to ensure the quality of the research student experience in the context of structured research degrees.

2. Composition of Research Studies Panel

- Principal supervisor
- Any co-supervisor(s) or external supervisor
- A number of advisers (at least two but normally no more than four)

Full regulations for the appointment of a Research Studies Panel are available in sections 7, 8 or 9 of the academic regulations (with some variations in composition for programmes referenced in sections 8 or 9 of regulations).

The Research Studies Panel must appoint a Chair independent of Principal/Co-Supervisors.

Members of the Research Studies Panel will not normally act on the Stage Transfer Assessment Panel of the student, unless prior approval obtained from the relevant Governing Board is obtained, and cannot act as an Internal examiner for that student.

3. Conduct of Business

The Research Studies Panel should meet at least once soon after the student begins their graduate research programme of study. The Research Studies Panel should meet to review progress on a regular basis, but at least twice in the first year and at least once a year thereafter.

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.

After the introductory meeting, a student would typically organise future meetings. If it is noted that a meeting(s) is/are overdue for a student then the supervisor or School should engage with the student on this matter.

A Research Studies Panel will conduct its business in accordance with relevant UCD policies and regulations, including the [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy](#).

4. Terms of Reference

The responsibilities of a Research Studies Panel include monitoring the progress of the student through their graduate research studies, ensuring the quality of supervision, and providing advice, guidance and support to the student and supervisor. The key responsibilities of the Research Studies Panel are to:

- 4.1. Enhance the supervisor-student relationship by the provision of advice in accordance with the University's Policy for Supervision of Research Degree Students.
- 4.2. Ensure quality, rigour and equity of the supervision process.

- 4.3. Advise the student on their professional and personal development training and monitor progress against their Research and Professional Development Plan (RPDP.)
- 4.4. 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.
- 4.5. Provide appropriate academic expertise and where appropriate facilitate an interdisciplinary perspective.
- 4.6. 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.
- 4.7. 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.
- 4.8. Offer additional specific support for students or supervisors which the Governing Board may request.

5. Governance

- 5.1. The Research Studies Panel is, in all activities and decisions, subject to review by the Governing Board and the Academic Council or its relevant committee
- 5.2. A Research Studies Panel may support one or more students at a time.

6. Record of Membership

It is the responsibility of the School to ensure the membership of the Research Studies Panel is correctly recorded.