University of Southampton

Supervisor & Postgraduate Researcher (PGR) Partnership Agreement

Contents

Introduction

This Partnership Agreement provides a framework for research students and their supervisory team to discuss and agree how they will work together during the doctoral research project.

What is the aim of the agreement?

This Agreement aims to ensure that a solid foundation is built between the student and supervisor early on in the research project. This relationship is key to ensuring the successful completion of the research degree. Healthy, constructive and supportive relationships with mutually agreed expectations are what we should strive towards.

Research students and supervisors both have a part to play in this relationship. The purpose of this Agreement is to ensure both parties have a mutual understanding of how they will work in collaboration to achieve the following aims:

→ That the research is delivered to the required standard and within the expected timeframe (Unless special considerations are granted).

→ That the student's training and development needs are clearly mapped out (via the academic needs analysis) and appropriate training undertaken.

→ That the doctoral research environment is supportive of the wellbeing of both student and supervisors; respects the characteristics of each individual; and is equitable in nature.

→ That both parties recognise that setting and agreeing clear expectations is a process that will continue throughout the PhD programme.

How should I use the agreement?

This partnership agreement was developed to assist in conversations about topics including working patterns, mental health and equality, diversity and inclusion.

We strongly encourage working through this agreement in the first few weeks of the PhD project. Setting expectations is crucial to creating a good relationship between the PhD researcher and supervisor and avoiding a mismatch of goals.

It is important for this agreement to be flexible (while ensuring the PhD is completed on time) as a lot can change in four or more years, both in research and in life. Therefore we advise that you revisit this agreement at least yearly.

Should either the student or the supervisors feel that the agreement is not being met, this should be raised and discussed during a regular supervisory meeting.

If expectations regarding this agreement continue not to be met (on either side), this can be discussed with the relevant Doctoral Programme Director.

Find out more

Email: doctoral-college@soton.ac.uk

The Supervisory Team

Working collaboratively with a supervisory team is essential for completing a doctorate as it provides multiple perspectives, feedback, support, and resources.

Supervisory meetings allow an exchange of views regarding the research direction, provide the space for developmental and constructive feedback, and an appropriate setting to raise any concerns. Each member of the supervisory team will have a distinct role and bring essential skills to the team. It is important to establish a common understanding of everyone's roles, responsibilities and how communication will take place between the whole team. We suggest referring to section 10 of the **Code of Practice** when understanding the responsibilities of the PGR and the supervisory team.
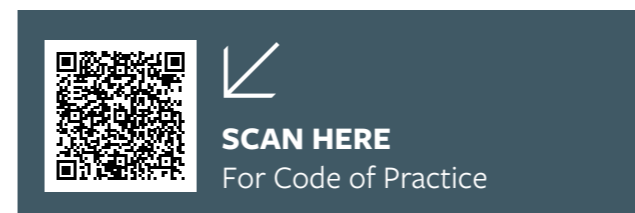
These reponsibilities could change over the course of the research programme but it is broadly understood that supervisors will have the below responsibilities:

Main supervisor: The main supervisor has responsibility, in collaboration with the rest of the supervisory team, for the supervision of the design and progress of the student's research project and for providing academic advice to the research student. They will be available to provide guidance and direction on a regular basis.

Second supervisors: The role of second supervisor is to provide additional academic and pastoral support. The role of the second supervisor(s) will vary according to the nature and stage of the research student's progression and the makeup of the supervisory team.

Coordinating supervisors: The coordinating supervisor will ensure administrative processes are completed in a timely manner throughout a PGR student's candidature. In most cases your coordinating supervisor will also be your main supervisor.

SCAN HERE
For Code of Practice

In partnership, discuss with each member of the supervisory team what they will contribute to the research project and how often you should expect to be in contact with them.

Supervisor	Role within the supervisory team	Responsibilities in the research project
Main Supervisor		
Second Supervisor		
Additional Supervisors (if applicable)		
Coordinating Supervisor (please confirm if your Main supervisor is your Coordinating supervisor)		

Supervisory Meetings

The Code of Practice states: "the frequency of supervision meetings will depend upon the stage and nature of the research and the needs of the research student, but it is expected good practice that, for full-time research students, these meetings should take place at least once a month, and more frequently at the start of the candidature." Notes of these meetings should be recorded and uploaded to PGR Manager by the student.

In partnership, please discuss the frequency and arrangements for supervisory meetings, the preferred methods of communication and how feedback is provided. This will most likely change over the lifetime of the research project, so this discussion should reflect only the first six to nine months (regardless of whether the student is in full time or part time registration).

For discussion	Agreement
How frequently will our meetings occur?	
What will be the duration of our meetings?	
Who will set up these meetings?	
Will these meetings be in-person, online or both?	

	Student Agreement	Supervisor Agreement
How should I prepare/get the most out of supervisory meetings?		
Feedback and constructive criticism is part of the supervision process, it's important to consider how this will be communicated. How will we approach contrasting views regarding the direction of research?		

SCAN HERE
For PGR Manager

SCAN HERE
For Code of Practice

Working Pattern

The Code of Practice states: "research students should commit sufficient time to their studies in order to complete their degree within the maximum period of candidature. For a full-time student, this might be expected to translate to, on average, around 35 hours per week. However, the nature of research means that longer or shorter periods of working may, on occasion, be required. The initial expected working pattern should be agreed between the research student and their supervisors."

In partnership, please discuss working patterns and ensure that these are sustainable and maintain a healthy work/life balance.

For discussion	Agreement
What working pattern will the student follow? (Monday to Friday and if this is on campus or from home)	

	Student Agreement	Supervisor Agreement
What are the shared expectations for reading and responding to emails outside of the agreed working pattern?		
For both student and supervisor, when should annual leave be taken and how will absences be communicated (e.g., built into the project plan / Gantt chart)?		

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Conducting research can have an impact on mental health and wellbeing and, often, research students may be studying challenging and sensitive topics.

We encourage students and supervisors to discuss how to maintain good wellbeing, and the steps a student can take if they start to feel their mental health and wellbeing decline. If students have a pre-existing mental health condition, they may wish to discuss this with their supervisors and the support that might be required.

The University has wellbeing support available via the Student Hub. **The Wellbeing Team have a SharePoint site for Postgraduate Researcher** support with tips, this includes workshops and support groups.

SCAN HERE
For Wellbeing Support

In partnership, please discuss the potential risks that the research project might pose to mental health and wellbeing, the early signs of these and what support arrangements can be put in place to mitigate the effects.

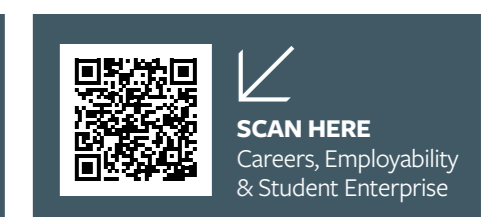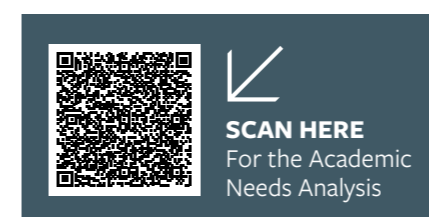| For discussion	For consideration
Maintaining a positive work-life balance during a PhD can be challenging, but it is essential for your mental and physical well-being. Discuss the top tips opposite and how these might be implemented while ensuring progress is made on the research project and the PhD programme.	– Set clear boundaries: it's important to set clear boundaries between work and personal life. This can include setting specific work hours, taking breaks throughout the day, and avoiding work-related activities during personal time. – Prioritise self-care: make sure to prioritise self-care activities such as exercise, healthy eating, and getting enough sleep. – Stay organised: staying organised can help reduce stress and increase productivity. – Take breaks: taking regular breaks throughout the day can help improve focus and productivity. Consider taking a short walk and making sure you leave the office during your lunch break. – Stay connected: maintaining social connections with friends and family can help reduce stress and improve overall wellbeing. Consider scheduling regular social activities or joining susu clubs.
Discuss general signs of poor mental health and wellbeing. e.g, "When I start to feel stressed, I get overwhelmed and therefore fail to respond to emails." Everyone will experience and display different signs in response to stress, the most common ones are listed opposite.	– Decreases in productivity: A decline in the quality or quantity of work produced. – Increased absence: Taking more time off than usual, or arriving late to work. – Changes in working patterns: Difficulty concentrating, making decisions, or completing tasks. – Withdrawal from social situations: Avoiding colleagues or social events. – Irrational fears, paranoia or anxiety: Experiencing intense fears or worries that interfere with daily activities.
Discuss how to communicate if issues arise and how the research project can be adapted to support positive wellbeing.	Supervisors should ensure they have open communication with their students and create a supportive environment that enables students to raise issues if they arise. The best way to identify signs of stress is by being observant and proactive, both for yourself and those around you. Be aware of changes in behaviour, such as decreased productivity, increased absenteeism and changes in working patterns. There is lots of support available from the University, as detailed in the PGR Handbook: **PGR Handbook - Support and Wellbeing**

PGR Development

Undertaking doctoral research is a learning process, both academically and also in terms of your personal development. To ensure your development is initially planned for, research students must complete the Academic Needs Analysis on PGR Manager within the first three months of starting your degree program. This will help identify areas of both personal disciplinary and professional development.

In partnership, please discuss the research students personal and professional development.

For discussion	For consideration
Discuss any personal, professional and career goals the research student would like to achieve over the course of the research (if these are known at this point).	Career aspirations may not always be academic. It is important for PhD students to reflect on their goals and aspirations and to work with their supervisor to identify the skills they need to achieve them. Start by thinking about long-term goals and what is hoped to be achieved with the degree. Think about interests and what kind of work is most enjoyable. Nothing needs to be set in stone at this stage but think about resources such as career workshops and networking events that would either support these aspirations or help define them.
Are there any conferences/events that would be useful to attend and at what point during the research would it be best to do so?	Attending conferences is a valuable experience for PhD students. It helps with networking and building valuable contacts, overcoming fears of presenting and gain confidence in the research, hearing other presentations and gaining clarity on your own work especially keeping it clear and engaging. It may be that presenting at a conference will not take place until later in the PhD, but it is useful to identify which conferences should be attended or kept up to date with.

For discussion	Agreement
Discuss the options available for teaching/demonstrating (including training) and when it would be appropriate to do so.	

SCAN HERE
For the Academic Needs Analysis

SCAN HERE
For PGR Manager

SCAN HERE
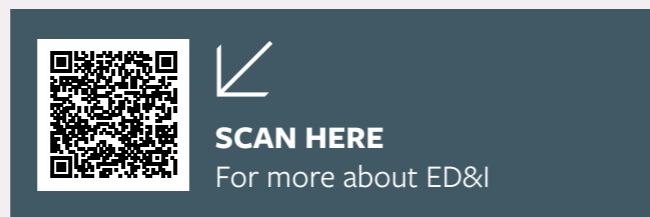Careers, Employability & Student Enterprise

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

It is important to consider how one's identity can impact on one's experience of accessing, succeeding in, and progressing from postgraduate research. In partnership, we encourage you to discuss any of the below protected characteristics (and their intersectionality) that either student or supervisor should be aware of, in a safe, welcoming space. In recognising power differentials, students should feel able to raise any issues they have experienced, and supervisors should feel able and empowered to support them however best appropriate.

The University and Students' Union have several networks and societies dedicated to providing representational spaces for staff and postgraduate researchers who share protected characteristics. These can be found on the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion intranet pages.
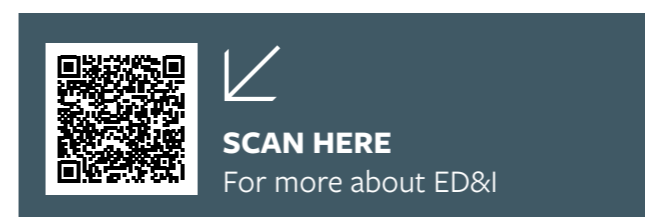
SCAN HERE
For more about ED&I

Protected Characteristic	For consideration/discussion
AGE This includes age discrimination, age-related bias and microaggressions. These can occur towards both older and younger individuals.	– Consider that every student will vary in age. Some will have started a doctorate having never left education while others may have returned to the academic environment from industry or professional environments. – To value the knowledge and experience of all PGRs and supervisors regardless of age. – Be aware of assumptions linked to age.
GENDER Gender identity relates to one's internal sense of being male, female, neither, both, or another gender. We encourage students and supervisors to discuss gender and whether there any concerns linked to this.	– Understanding and using correct pronouns to refer to one another. – Awareness around issues related to sexism and gender bias in your field/research area.
DISABILITY (INCLUDING NEURODIVERSITY) The term disability also relates to learning differences. For example, neurodiversity describes how people experience and interact with the world around them in many ways. Disabilities and differences should not be viewed as deficits unless the individual perceives them as such. We are aware that not all students and supervisors will declare they have a disability at the beginning of the student's doctorate and that this is a personal decision. However, throughout completing their research they may require support.	– Students should make supervisors, the University's Student Disability and Inclusion team, or their Faculty aware of any accessibility issues linked to your workspaces. – Students should make known any specific support requirements for PGR milestones and access to wider opportunities (e.g. training, professional development, conferences). – Students and supervisors should consider their working and meeting environments, preferred methods of communication and amount of notice/time required to prepare for meetings. – Students and supervisors should consider that social expectations can cause anxiety and worry.
RELIGION Religion relates to faith or a spiritual practice, meaning there may be certain practices or celebrations observed. Respecting and understanding a person's practice of faith is important to discuss in how this may coincide alongside completing the PhD.	– Proactively understand different faiths and religions. – Discuss any adjustments to working hours or supervisory meeting times/dates based around religious celebrations and/or prayer times.

Protected Characteristic	For consideration/discussion
CARING RESPONSIBILITIES Having caring or childcare responsibilities will impact student and staff experiences and capacities. We encourage both parties to understand and flexibly support one another when trying to balance these duties.	– Students and supervisors should have open conversations around how caring responsibilities may impact on a person's daily life. This includes flexibility around working hours, opportunities to work online/remotely, being understanding of last-minute changes and, where relevant, signposting to maternity/paternity/shared parental/adoption leave policies.
RACE AND ETHNICITY Students and supervisors who belong to different racialised identities should seek to understand how race and ethnicity can bring challenges. Where Black, Asian, and other racially minoritised communities face systemic issues, the supervisory relationship should seek to ensure these can be minimised at both a micro and macro level. Advice can be sought from the EDI Team based in Human Resources, students and staff can contact at any time with queries. Contact the team via email: **diversity@soton.ac.uk**	Healthy and supportive cross-cultural/racial supervisory relationships include: – Listening to (and validating) racialised concerns. – Increasing knowledge and understanding of the types of challenges faced by racially minoritised students and staff within academia. – Awareness around microaggressions toward racially minoritised researchers. – Being aware of wellbeing concerns that can arise from racism or other challenges experienced, particularly where racial diversity is not well represented.
SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND Recognising diverse socio-economic backgrounds raises awareness around financial concerns, access to education, and differing levels of social and cultural capital to navigate higher education.	– The supervisory team should be responsive to any financial support needs by signposting to University services (including the Research Training and Support Grant RTSG). – There should also be sensitivity if opportunities arise which require students to be away for long periods or attend conferences/events, as there is a financial element involved into pursuing these.

Next Steps?

This agreement is a partnership between the research student and their supervisors and all parties should ensure they are satisfied with the discussion had and agreements made. Once completed the research student can upload this document onto PGR Manager as an attachment to one of their supervisory team meetings to keep a record.

The Doctoral College wants to ensure our researchers have a positive supportive student experience that quips them with the skills to become experts in their chosen field. However if students experience challenges we encourage accessing university support services. The PGR Handbook has a Support and Wellbeing page with details of support available.

SCAN HERE
For more about ED&I

SCAN HERE
For the PGR Handbook