

Postgraduate Research Student–Supervisor Agreement Guidance Document

This guidance draws on feedback from supervisors and postgraduate research students, and is designed to support both supervisors and students with using the Postgraduate Research Student—Supervisor Agreement.

How to use the agreement

- Completion of the agreement is a shared process to establish effective working practices and clear expectations.
- You might want to ensure your first supervision meeting is longer than usual, to ensure sufficient time to discuss each element of the agreement in detail.
- We recommend that both supervisors and PGR student read through the [Principles of PGR Student Supervision](#) before completing the Agreement, to give you an overview of responsibilities. The Agreement can then be used to discuss the Principles in more detail and agree on specific arrangements.
- You don't need to complete the whole agreement form in the first supervision meeting, take some time to reflect and revisit before signing the document.
- Either a supervisor or a PGR student can take a lead in drafting the agreement – it is suggested a draft is circulated to all involved to review before any signatures are added.
- The agreement is intended to be a live document to use throughout the research degree programme.
- You do not need to complete all sections initially, but it is recommended that supervisors and students agree when you will complete and sign each section during your first supervision meeting.

Schedule for use

- A suggested schedule for doctoral students:
 - A. Sections 1-5: Completed within one month of the PGR student's start date
 - B. Section 6-8: Completed within three months of the start date, with a review of Section 5 to ensure working practices are being embedded appropriately.
 - C. Whole form: Reviewed annually and after any change in supervision team/circumstances.
- A suggested schedule for research students at Masters level:
 - A. Sections 1-5: Completed within one month of the student's start date
 - B. Section 6-8: Completed within three months of the start date, with a review of Section 5 to ensure working practices are being embedded appropriately.
 - C. Whole form: Reviewed at 6 month intervals and after any change in supervision team/circumstances.
- The signature stage should be completed at stages A-C.
- It is recommended that student and supervisor agree where a final version will be saved so you can all access the most up to date version.

Before your first supervision meeting

It is advised that the supervisory team meet before the student starts to ensure each supervisor is clear about their roles and responsibilities. [This guidance on supervisory teams](#) may be a useful prompt for discussion.

Using the guidance document

This guidance suggests discussion topics and tips related to each of the sections of the agreement.

Where relevant, we have included some additional tips from PGR students and supervisors that were gathered during focus groups and may be relevant and helpful to your discussions.

Navigate to guidance for each section:

- [1. Research project](#)
- [2. Supervisory team and other support](#)
- [3. Supervision meetings, communication and feedback](#)

- [4. Funding and funder requirements](#)
- [5. Working arrangements](#)
- [6. Research practice and integrity](#)
- [7. Training and professional development](#)
- [8. Helpful resources](#)

1. Research project and progression

This section is included mainly for reference, but is also a useful prompt to discuss key dates related to progression (or review if anything has changed if you are returning to this document as a supervisor of an established PGR student at a later stage in the research degree).

Discussion prompts:

- What are the key dates to ensure the student's academic progress, e.g., review points and annual progress monitoring?
- Have the student's milestones, end date or submission date changed due to a suspension or other change in circumstances?

2. Supervisory team and other support

This section ensures everyone is clear on the roles of supervisory team members. Student and supervisor can also discuss the broader research-related support that may be available. Each PGR student must have at least two supervisors, therefore the main and co-supervisor sections must be completed.

Discussion prompts:

- What is the role of each supervisor? (E.g., are co-supervisors completely integrated into the supervision; do they provide specialist expertise for one component; or do they have more of a pastoral role?)
- If there are supervisors involved who are outside of the University of Bristol or from other sectors, how will they work with the PGR student?
- Who else will provide research support? (E.g., a PGR buddy/mentor, or others experienced in the techniques who can offer informal research support. This could include postdoctoral researchers or more experienced PGR students.)

Tip from our current supervisors and PGR students

Differences in research culture can impact expectations and working practices, especially in an interdisciplinary supervision team. Make sure as a lead supervisor that you explore any assumptions with the rest of your supervisory team to agree on ways of working.

3. Supervision meetings, communication and feedback

This section enables clear understanding about how things will work in practice across the whole supervisory team. Whilst there is flexibility in working practices, there are some key requirements to be aware of.

The minimum requirement for formal supervision meetings is once per month, however, it is expected that student and supervisor meet more frequently when needed (e.g., at the start of a research degree). If a PGR student is an international student visa holder, your monthly supervision meetings must be in person due to [visa requirements](#). It is also expected that a PGR student will regularly spend time on campus to benefit from wider research networks and environment (unless they are formally registered as a distance learning student).

Discussion prompts: supervision meetings

- How frequently will the student and supervisor(s) meet?
- Where will the meetings take place?
- Who will normally attend? Regular meetings could involve the wider supervisory team, or just the main supervisor.
- How will the meetings be managed and structured?

- What level of preparation and input is required before supervision meetings from the PGR student?
- How will agendas be set; who is responsible for the formal record and how will these be stored/shared?

Discussion prompts: communication

- Are there preferred ways of communicating? Are there any access requirements around communication?
- Where a student has more than two supervisors, are the other co-supervisors included in all communications or only those on specific topics?

Discussion prompts: feedback

- What are appropriate time frames for receiving feedback on submitted work?
- How will feedback be managed across the supervisory team?
- When will there be the opportunity to discuss queries or questions regarding written feedback?

Tips from our current supervisors and PGR students

To keep up momentum, student and supervisor could agree some mechanisms for the student to ask quick questions in between formal supervisions. (E.g., you could use Teams or other channels for quick messages or hold 15-minute weekly 'drop in' sessions. Just make sure you agree how these will be used and when.)

At key points of feedback (e.g., agreeing on a research plan and reviewing chapters) there may be benefit to meeting with the whole supervisory team to help ensure a clear way forward – especially where there may be differing views or disciplinary perspectives.

4. Funding and funder requirements

PGR funding can be complex and involve additional requirements. Some of these will be known but some may be unknown to the University (e.g., if a PGR student is sponsored directly).

If a PGR student is self-funding, the student and supervisor might want to discuss funding sources for conferences, and other activities.

All PGR students have entitlements (including to leave), which are set out in the [Regulations and Code for Postgraduate Research Programmes](#), but not all PGR students will be entitled to paid absence and international visa holders may find challenges to take extended leave with their visa requirements. It is therefore important to ensure everyone is clear about the individual circumstances of each PGR student.

Discussion prompts:

- What is the project's funding source (or sources)?
- If funded, what does the funding cover? (E.g., stipend; fees; travel and conferences; research costs, including fieldwork.)
- What are possible sources of funding for travel and conferences etc? (See: [Funding pots for current students](#).)
- Are there any funding terms and conditions we need to be aware of? (i.e., intellectual property (IP) constraints; reporting requirements; rules affecting how the funding might be spent, or restrictive clauses e.g., a funder requires full re-payment from a student if they do not achieve their qualification).

- What (if any) are the PGR students entitlements to paid leave, particularly where a suspension may be needed, e.g., family leave or extended medical leave
- Are there additional requirements as part of any doctoral training funding? (e.g., required training/placements).
- Does the PGR student need to complete in their funded period due to funder requirements?

Tip from our current supervisors and PGR students

If both student and supervisor are unsure of the funding source of the project, please contact the Faculty or School PGR Administrator to confirm.

5. Working arrangements

This section focusses on practical arrangements. If the PGR student requires reasonable adjustments to conduct their research, please contact [Disability Support](#), as a [Study Support Plan](#) (SSP) may be required.

Discussion prompts:

- What are the working patterns of the PGR student and supervisor/s?
- How will annual leave be requested/ agreed upon (policy available [here](#))?
- How will the PGR student be made aware of supervisor absence or unavailability, e.g. annual leave, research trips and who should they contact during absence?
- Is overseas travel required or likely?
- If work is required out-of-hours how will the PGR student's health and safety and wellbeing be agreed on and assessed?
- If an SSP is in place, a discussion on how, when, and if this is communicated to other supervisors or key partners is advisable.
- Are there any other factors that should be considered? These could include:
 - caring responsibilities
 - religious commitments

6. Research practice and integrity

A research degree may be a PGR student's first experience of research. It's important to understand how to frame and plan to deliver the research within a specific timeframe and ensure any research adheres to good research practice. It is recognised that a PGR student won't know all the answers at the start of a project and changes are to be expected as the research progresses. Supervisors are responsible for ensuring their PGR students have a broad understanding of ethical research practice, open research and academic integrity and signposting to more specialist support as needed.

Discussion prompts:

- What will the scope of the research project be? (This conversation could cover methodology, literary review and publications, if applicable.)
- What will be the main milestones in terms of the research project (This could cover any project deadlines, constraints or timelines outside of formal review milestones)
- What are the timelines and process for the creation and review of a research plan for the project?
- Has the project and its goals changed? Do the milestones and plan need to be revised and updated?

- How will we ensure good research practices throughout the project? This could cover e.g. ethics, open research, data management.
- What are the ethical considerations of the project? Is ethical approval required for any element of the research?
- Are there any trusted research implications that need to be considered?
- Is the PGR student clear on the importance of maintaining academic integrity, and where they can get advice and training?
- What are the expectations around publications in addition to the thesis?
- What is the ownership or assignation of Intellectual Property (IP) rights around the research?

Tip from our current supervisors and PGR students

Supervisors can provide their PGR student with examples of what different research degree theses can look like, to help guide students who may be new to academia or working in the UK for the first time.

Where a research project involves multiple researchers or collaborators; it is helpful to set clear expectations around authorship and publications from the start.

7. Training and professional development

As well as the training provided by the supervisory team, other training will need to be considered. This could include research-specific training, skills development and opportunities to present, collaborate or network.

Discussion prompts

- What training needs are there for the research project to be successful? These could include research methods, academic writing, project management or discipline specific training
- Can any of the supervisory team or other colleagues offer broader support or development (e.g., lab placements/rotations, research visits, training or career support)
- In terms of future career aspirations of the PGR student, what skills could be developed during the PGR journey to enhance future employability?
- What will help the PGR student think about and achieve their longer-term career goals?
- How can the PGR student develop research networks, e.g. university opportunities, learned societies, conference attendance.

Tips from our current supervisors and PGR students

Having an overview of the skillset a PGR student will need to develop throughout their degree from the start can be a useful framework to discuss both research and skills-based development.

The Careers Service offers [specific support for PGR students](#) including workshops and guidance with CV writing.

The student and supervisor may find the [Bristol Skills Framework](#) or the [Vitae Researcher Development Framework](#) useful tools to consider when discussing training and development needs. The student can also review the [research skills training](#) offered by the Bristol Doctoral College, or to School/ Faculty-specific training where available.

Teaching experience is often of interest to PGR students in terms of future careers. It can be helpful to manage expectations, as the opportunity is not directly related to the research degree and cannot be guaranteed. It is always advisable for PGR students to discuss with their supervisor(s) before taking on any responsibilities related to teaching.

8. Helpful resources

The Bristol Doctoral College website provides resources for students and supervisors:

- [Support for postgraduate research students](#) – provides guidance for PGR students, and can be used as signposting by supervisors
- [Resources on supervision for supervisors and their students](#)