# **Guidance for supervisory teams**

**This guidance is intended to inform supervisors and postgraduate research students about the roles and responsibilities of supervisors within a postgraduate research supervisory teams. It is important that all supervisors meet the student at the start of the studentship to discuss supervisory arrangements and clarify the roles of each individual. This document should be used to inform that discussion, and the outcomes of the discussion should be recorded and shared with the student and all supervisors.**

## ***Context***

The University of Bristol has a broad and diverse culture of postgraduate research (PGR) which has been successful in training many students for over a century. Central to the delivery of that training are the supervisory team, comprising at least two members of academic staff who share responsibility for the supervision of the student through to completion of the degree. Whilst most supervisory teams are successful, failures in this process can have significant negative consequences for the student’s progress and wellbeing. **Establishing and documenting supervisory roles and responsibilities from the outset is therefore required under the regulations**[[1]](https://ukc-word-edit.officeapps.live.com/we/wordeditorframe.aspx?ui=en-GB&rs=en-GB&wopisrc=https%3A%2F%2Fuob.sharepoint.com%2Fteams%2Fdoctoral-college%2F_vti_bin%2Fwopi.ashx%2Ffiles%2F4d1b9bc169bb43b0b04754da20321f27&wdenableroaming=1&mscc=1&hid=6D4F83A1-8076-B000-C8CF-861B1423987E.0&uih=sharepointcom&wdlcid=en-GB&jsapi=1&jsapiver=v2&corrid=438d182d-98d3-7a6e-78ed-444eb2f834b9&usid=438d182d-98d3-7a6e-78ed-444eb2f834b9&newsession=1&sftc=1&uihit=docaspx&muv=1&cac=1&sams=1&mtf=1&sfp=1&sdp=1&hch=1&hwfh=1&dchat=1&sc=%7B%22pmo%22%3A%22https%3A%2F%2Fuob.sharepoint.com%22%2C%22pmshare%22%3Atrue%7D&ctp=LeastProtected&rct=Normal&wdorigin=ItemsView&wdhostclicktime=1740045417025&csc=1&instantedit=1&wopicomplete=1&wdredirectionreason=Unified_SingleFlush#_ftn1) to ensure issues are resolved before the student is affected.

**Cross-disciplinary supervision:** There are important additional considerations to take into account when the supervisory team brings together academic staff from different disciplines. The differences in research culture and processes can create unanticipated issues which impact on the student. These include:

1. Differences in processes between schools or faculties within the university
2. Differences in research, writing and publication conventions between disciplines
3. Language and conceptual differences between disciplines
4. Different expectations of postgraduate study between disciplines  
     
   It is essential that the supervisory team explore and recognise these differences from the outset of the studentship and establish a clear framework for how these will be addressed. This might include discussion on thesis style/structure, publication/authorship conventions and which aspects of the project each supervisor will take primary responsibility for supervising.  
     
   **External supervisors:** Supervisory teams that include external supervisors also require careful management to address differences in processes and expectations that naturally occur between organisations (for example, annual progress monitoring). University of Bristol students must have a main University of Bristol supervisor who is responsible for compliance with University of Bristol regulations and processes. In supervisory teams that include external co-supervisors it is good practice to include a University of Bristol co-supervisor to whom the main supervisor can delegate responsibility if needed.  
     
   **Objectives:** The supervisory team should be constructed to provide the support and supervision the student needs, and should contain no more supervisors than is necessary to achieve this. The roles and responsibilities of the team must be agreed by all parties and documented at the outset of the studentship.

## ***Responsibilities***

Prior to, or at the outset of the student’s registration **you must** agree the roles and responsibilities of each supervisor in the supervisory team and record these in writing as a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) shared with all members of the team and the PGR student.

The following information may be useful in establishing this MOU:

### **Main supervisor**

The main supervisor takes overall responsibility for the student, working with their co-supervisors to establish a supportive environment with consistent and clear guidance on expectations. They will be the first point of contact for the student. The main supervisor is responsible for:

1. Establishing the supervisory team (as indicated in this guidance), ensuring that the team as a whole provide the expertise required to train the student and supervise the project
2. Arranging a suitable induction at the start of the studentship
3. Arranging regular formal meetings between the supervisory team and the student, and establishing a framework for organising and documenting those meetings
4. Overseeing the budget of any grant award supporting the student
5. Reviewing and approving requests for annual, sick or parental leave and liaising with funders where necessary
6. Taking primary responsibility for arranging suspensions or extensions of study where required and liaising with funders where necessary
7. Ensuring compliance with PGR processes and regulations imposed by the University, Faculty, School and funders.

Some of these responsibilities may be delegated to a co-supervisor, either from the outset of the studentship or on an ad hoc basis. It is the main supervisor’s responsibility to ensure that any such delegation is notified to the student and co-supervisor and is clearly documented.

The main supervisor is responsible for mentoring any inexperienced co-supervisors in their role. This provides an important training opportunity for junior academic staff and minimises the risk of errors impacting the student. This mentoring is particularly important for any delegated responsibilities, which the main supervisor should regularly review.

### **Experienced co-supervisor**

An experienced co-supervisor will typically provide academic input into the project, working with the main supervisor and student to ensure the student develops the skills required to complete their research. In a cross-disciplinary team this co-supervisor will take a lead on supervising research that falls within their discipline. The supervisory team should agree authorship arrangements for research publications appropriate to this input (where relevant).

In the main supervisors absence (e.g. annual leave, work travel or unexpected sick leave) the co-supervisor will typically take responsibility for any main supervisory issues that may arise (e.g. requests for sick leave) and be a first point of contact until the main supervisor returns. It is important to note that the Head of School (or nominee) is responsible for ensuring continuous supervision (Section 5.3 of the regulations[[2]](https://ukc-word-edit.officeapps.live.com/we/wordeditorframe.aspx?ui=en-GB&rs=en-GB&wopisrc=https%3A%2F%2Fuob.sharepoint.com%2Fteams%2Fdoctoral-college%2F_vti_bin%2Fwopi.ashx%2Ffiles%2F4d1b9bc169bb43b0b04754da20321f27&wdenableroaming=1&mscc=1&hid=6D4F83A1-8076-B000-C8CF-861B1423987E.0&uih=sharepointcom&wdlcid=en-GB&jsapi=1&jsapiver=v2&corrid=438d182d-98d3-7a6e-78ed-444eb2f834b9&usid=438d182d-98d3-7a6e-78ed-444eb2f834b9&newsession=1&sftc=1&uihit=docaspx&muv=1&cac=1&sams=1&mtf=1&sfp=1&sdp=1&hch=1&hwfh=1&dchat=1&sc=%7B%22pmo%22%3A%22https%3A%2F%2Fuob.sharepoint.com%22%2C%22pmshare%22%3Atrue%7D&ctp=LeastProtected&rct=Normal&wdorigin=ItemsView&wdhostclicktime=1740045417025&csc=1&instantedit=1&wopicomplete=1&wdredirectionreason=Unified_SingleFlush#_ftn2)), and the main supervisor or co-supervisor should liaise with the school PGR director or head of school about changes of supervisory team according to the rules in section 5.3. Long-term changes to the supervisory team should be accompanied by an updated MOU following discussion between the new team and the student.

### **Inexperienced co-supervisor**

An inexperienced co-supervisor will take on a similar role to a more experienced co-supervisor, but is expected to work under the mentorship of the main supervisor (or potentially another experienced supervisor). This role is an ideal opportunity for an inexperienced supervisor to build the experience necessary to become a main supervisor, so they should be actively encouraged to shadow the main supervisor and take on more delegated responsibility as the studentship progresses. Often they will be in regular contact with the student, potentially working alongside them and training them in research methods/approaches.

### **External co-supervisor**

An external co-supervisor will typically provide academic input into the project, working with the main supervisor and student to ensure the student develops the skills required to complete their research. They should not take responsibility for any University of Bristol processes or compliance with regulations. However, they may provide a different perspective on how postgraduate training is delivered elsewhere, and may offer networking opportunities. If the student participates in a research visit to the external co-supervisors organisation this supervisor will coordinate the visit and be a first point of contact for the research activities at that organisation and any logistical issues involving the organisation.

#### **Industry and other non-academic co-supervisors**

A non-academic co-supervisor will also typically provide academic input into the project. They may provide important insights into the wider context of the research and the applicants postdoctoral career opportunities. As with other external co-supervisors, they are not responsible for University of Bristol processes or regulations, but will coordinate any research visit to their own organisation.

## ***Other support outside the supervisory team***

Students have access to a range of other support beyond the supervisory team which should be discussed as part of this process. The student should have access to PGR support within their school from postgraduate administrator(s) and a school postgraduate director. The student will also be able to contact school administration and management staff for support that falls outside the remit of the PGR team. In some schools the student may also have access to a student “buddy”, PGR tutor or an academic mentor. The student may also be able to seek help/advice from other members of the research team (staff or students), other academic staff and/or external collaborators. Finally, a range of central support services are provided (<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/students/support/>).

## ***Cotutelle arrangements***

Some students are part of a formal “cotutelle” programme in which they will attend two universities and receive a dual award. In this case there should be a main supervisor and co-supervisor at University of Bristol and a separate main supervisor at the partner institution (according to their own regulations). The roles of the University of Bristol main supervisor and co-supervisor(s) are as described above, but should include close collaboration with the main supervisor at the partner institution to ensure the student is supported throughout their degree.

[[1]](https://ukc-word-edit.officeapps.live.com/we/wordeditorframe.aspx?ui=en-GB&rs=en-GB&wopisrc=https%3A%2F%2Fuob.sharepoint.com%2Fteams%2Fdoctoral-college%2F_vti_bin%2Fwopi.ashx%2Ffiles%2F4d1b9bc169bb43b0b04754da20321f27&wdenableroaming=1&mscc=1&hid=6D4F83A1-8076-B000-C8CF-861B1423987E.0&uih=sharepointcom&wdlcid=en-GB&jsapi=1&jsapiver=v2&corrid=438d182d-98d3-7a6e-78ed-444eb2f834b9&usid=438d182d-98d3-7a6e-78ed-444eb2f834b9&newsession=1&sftc=1&uihit=docaspx&muv=1&cac=1&sams=1&mtf=1&sfp=1&sdp=1&hch=1&hwfh=1&dchat=1&sc=%7B%22pmo%22%3A%22https%3A%2F%2Fuob.sharepoint.com%22%2C%22pmshare%22%3Atrue%7D&ctp=LeastProtected&rct=Normal&wdorigin=ItemsView&wdhostclicktime=1740045417025&csc=1&instantedit=1&wopicomplete=1&wdredirectionreason=Unified_SingleFlush#_ftnref1) [PGR code section 5.1.1: http://www.bristol.ac.uk/academic-quality/pg/pgrcode/section5/](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/academic-quality/pg/pgrcode/section5/)

[[2]](https://ukc-word-edit.officeapps.live.com/we/wordeditorframe.aspx?ui=en-GB&rs=en-GB&wopisrc=https%3A%2F%2Fuob.sharepoint.com%2Fteams%2Fdoctoral-college%2F_vti_bin%2Fwopi.ashx%2Ffiles%2F4d1b9bc169bb43b0b04754da20321f27&wdenableroaming=1&mscc=1&hid=6D4F83A1-8076-B000-C8CF-861B1423987E.0&uih=sharepointcom&wdlcid=en-GB&jsapi=1&jsapiver=v2&corrid=438d182d-98d3-7a6e-78ed-444eb2f834b9&usid=438d182d-98d3-7a6e-78ed-444eb2f834b9&newsession=1&sftc=1&uihit=docaspx&muv=1&cac=1&sams=1&mtf=1&sfp=1&sdp=1&hch=1&hwfh=1&dchat=1&sc=%7B%22pmo%22%3A%22https%3A%2F%2Fuob.sharepoint.com%22%2C%22pmshare%22%3Atrue%7D&ctp=LeastProtected&rct=Normal&wdorigin=ItemsView&wdhostclicktime=1740045417025&csc=1&instantedit=1&wopicomplete=1&wdredirectionreason=Unified_SingleFlush#_ftnref2) [PGR code section 5.3: http://www.bristol.ac.uk/academic-quality/pg/pgrcode/section5/5.3/](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/academic-quality/pg/pgrcode/section5/5.3/)