

## **Eligibility for Research Degree Supervision**

The College has agreed the following rules and guidelines with regard to eligibility for research degree supervision.

### **Imperial College principles of supervision**

The role of the supervisors and their relationships with their students are of critical importance and it is accepted that a wide range of successful student-supervisor relationships will exist. Students may have only one supervisor or may have up to three but not more than three supervisors. Where a student has more than one supervisor, one of the supervisors shall be designated the main (previously known as principal or lead) supervisor.

The role of the co-supervisor(s) (also known as second or joint supervisor) will vary according to the research project. In many cases the co-supervisor will play a major role in directing the research (for example when the project is the result of collaboration between the supervisors). In other cases the role will be more supportive. However, the co-supervisor does have a responsibility for the student's progress, and will be expected to take an active role in the supervision process. It is often good practice for there to be two supervisors for every student, as it provides back up for those situations where one supervisor is ill, leaves or falls out with the student. In addition it can provide breadth and support to the project. Some departments insist on there being a minimum of two supervisors. It is important that all supervisors are aware that they have a responsibility for the student, and there is no scope for nominal supervision.

The overriding criterion is that all students should have adequate and regular access to their supervisors who should be appropriately qualified to undertake research degree supervision. Supervisors will generally hold the position of lecturer, senior lecturer, reader, professor or senior research fellow. The College provides guidance on the web as to what is expected of research students and research supervisors and this can be found here

<http://www3.imperial.ac.uk/graduateschool/qualityassurance/phdstudentsandsupervisors>

The College recommends that limits should be placed on the number of students supervised by an individual at any one time. The number of students that an individual can supervise satisfactorily will vary with the nature and size of the research group, and with the scope of their other duties. The College has never prescribed what the limit should be but has suggested that few academic staff would be likely to have more than six research students at any one time (i.e. perhaps two in each year of the doctoral programme), and that the research group would be large enough to support the students.

A student who is shared between two departments can only have one main home in the College Records System and Outlook database and this should normally be the department of the main supervisor. Co-supervisors should notify their Departmental Operations Manager of any research students shared with another department so that appropriate adjustments can be made to the formula vote.

### **Training**

It is a College requirement that all new academic staff attend the workshop on Introduction to Supervising PhD Students at Imperial delivered by the Educational Development Unit (EDU), or an equivalent. This one-day workshop offers practical guidance on recruitment, handling the student/supervisor relationship effectively and methods to help students toward completion and emergence as an independent researcher in their discipline. It also outlines the formal stages and requirements of Imperial and considers the roles and responsibilities in the viva. All inexperienced supervisors (those that have not had a student that has successfully completed their research degree) must have an experienced co-supervisor to mentor and support them.

### **Should the possession of a doctorate be a prerequisite for a supervisor?**

This is not general College policy, although individual departments may have such a policy: the possession of a doctorate is no guarantee of good supervision just as the lack of doctorate does not mean that the individual is not a successful supervisor. What is important is for a supervisor to have acquired sufficient and appropriate research experience.

### **Probationary Lecturers**

It is the College view that most probationary academics could and should supervise research students, once they have undergone appropriate training, but always in collaboration with a member of the permanent academic staff who is an experienced supervisor.

### **Visiting Professors: Advanced Research Fellows:**

There is no objection to such persons acting as supervisors, subject to the agreement of the Head of Department, providing that they are available for the duration of the research programme and that students have regular and adequate contact with them. A co-supervisor from the permanent College staff should normally be appointed. The Postgraduate Tutor or Director of Postgraduate Studies should monitor the supervision given, where appropriate.

### **Staff (including NHS staff) holding honorary appointments and titles at Imperial.**

There is no objection to such persons acting as supervisors, subject to the agreement of the Head of Department, providing (i) that they are available for the duration of the research programme, (ii) that students have regular and adequate contact with them and (iii) that a co-supervisor is appointed from the permanent College academic staff. Honorary staff should attend the workshop on Introduction to Supervising PhD Students at Imperial and fulfil all other requirements for PhD supervision.

### **Emeritus and Retired Members of Staff**

Such persons, who may also be appointed as Senior Research Fellows, can continue to act as supervisors, subject to the agreement of the Head of Department, providing that they are still active in the field and that students have regular and adequate access to them. We would expect that in most cases such persons would be supervising those students whom they had accepted before their retirement and they would be unlikely to be appointed as supervisors of newly admitted students. In the latter case, joint supervision with a member of the academic staff would normally be required.

### **Post-doctoral Research Assistants; Academic Visitors; Clinical Lecturers; Junior Research Fellows**

While such persons may well be involved in a student's research programme, it is not appropriate that they are appointed as main or co-supervisors. However, it is acknowledged that such individuals can play a major role in supporting a research student and when this is the case the title Assistant Supervisor can be used informally to acknowledge their input. Exceptionally, however, and subject to the agreement of the Head of Department, and to fulfilling the other requirements for research supervision, it may be appropriate for a person in this category of especial seniority to have a formal co-supervisory role.

### **Joint Supervision with Staff of Other Universities**

This is permitted where there is a formal link with the university in question, either through a joint PhD or other collaborative research programme that has received College approval. In such cases one of the supervisors, either from Imperial or from the partner university, should be designated the main or lead supervisor in accordance with the requirements of the particular joint or collaborative programme. In other cases where it is wished and considered appropriate that an academic from another institution contributes to an individual research student's programme this should be done on an informal basis. Individual departments are responsible for any financial reimbursement to the university concerned. If a formal arrangement is sought then approval must be sought for a formal collaborative programme.

### **Supervisors departing to other institutions**

When supervisors leave College for other positions, arrangements have to be made for their research students prior to their departure. These arrangements will vary according to the stage an individual has reached. No action may be needed where a student has completed the normal three year programme for a PhD to two years for an MD(Res); the supervisor can still sign the various forms and offer guidance from their new position. A PhD student who has completed two years (the minimum period of registration for a full-time PhD) could opt to follow the supervisor to another academic institution, retaining the degree registration with Imperial; if the student chose to stay at Imperial for the third year, the departing supervisor could still retain an interest in the research but another co-supervisor would have to be appointed (unless there is already a co-supervisor in place). A student who had not completed the minimum registration period of two years does not have the option of transferring to another institution and keeping the degree registration at Imperial; if the student transferred to another institution to follow the supervisor, the degree registration would also have to be transferred. Otherwise the student could continue the research at Imperial with a new supervisor.

### **Supervisors and extended absence**

Where a supervisor is granted an extended absence from College (eg sabbatical leave) or has extended sick leave, arrangements must be made by the Postgraduate Tutor or Director of Postgraduate Studies for supervision to be provided for that person's research students.

### **Supervisors departing in unfortunate circumstances**

There may be rare occasions where a supervisor is dismissed or resigns from College under circumstances where it would not be appropriate for supervision of research students to continue by that supervisor. In such cases the Department is obliged to make alternative supervisory arrangements for the students affected. This would also obviously apply if the supervisor were to die.

### **Supervision by immediate relatives**

Any cases of kinship, whether by blood, marriage, civil partnership or law, between a student and their proposed or current supervisor should be declared prior to registration. A research student should not be supervised solely by an immediate relative or someone with a kinship connection. If Departments consider it appropriate for a relative or someone with a kinship connection to be involved with the supervision there must be a co-supervisor. It is important that the student's mentor is carefully chosen to be able to play an active and clear role during the period of research study.

### **Romantic or sexual involvements**

It is considered inappropriate for romantic or sexual involvements to develop between supervisors and their students. If a relationship does develop, the supervisor and student must report this to the Head of Department in accordance with HR procedures: the supervision arrangements must be immediately reviewed.

### **Supervision by persons who are married, in civil partnership, partners or are immediate relatives.**

In cases where it is considered appropriate for a student to be co-supervised by academic staff who are married to each other or who are partners or who are closely related, it is important that the student's mentor (see below) is carefully chosen to be able to play an active and clear role during the period of research study. All such relationships should be declared prior to registration. However a research student should not have a supervisor and a mentor who are related by marriage, civil partnership, blood/law or who are partners.

### **Mentor**

Role under review

### **Glossary of supervisor terms**

- Main Supervisor: The individual who has primary responsibility for supervision and in whose department the student will normally be registered.
- Principal Supervisor: alternative terminology for describing the main supervisor.
- Lead Supervisor: alternative terminology for describing the main supervisor, but may also be used in joint or collaborative programmes to designate the supervisor from the home institution that takes responsibility for the student.
- Co-supervisor: an individual who helps in the supervision of a student. This might be to support an inexperienced or honorary member of staff or because of the nature of the research project. They should be qualified to act as a supervisor, and share responsibility for the supervision.
- Second (or third) supervisor: alternative terminology for describing a co-supervisor.
- Joint supervisor: alternative terminology for describing a co-supervisor and may be an appropriate term to use when the science means that the scientific input to the project is evenly shared.
- Assistant Supervisor: an informal title to recognise the input of an individual (such as a postdoctoral research associate or clinical lecturer) that plays a significant role in the supervision process but does not have formal responsibilities for the supervision.
- Head of Department: Head of School, Institute or Department within Imperial College London.

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