



University of
St Andrews

Guidance on the use of external supervisors for postgraduate research students

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Purpose	This document provides guidance on the use and appointment of external supervisors for postgraduate research students.

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2.0	Regular review with minor updates and clarifications to process	Approved	Emily Feamster, Deputy Head of Education Policy and Quality	14/04/2024

Guidance on external supervisors for PGR students

Overview

This document provides guidance for situations where it becomes clear, after a student has started their programme, that an external expert is needed to assist with the supervision of a postgraduate research student. Relevant situations might include when:

- i. a member of the supervisory team is unexpectedly absent for more than three months or leaves the university;
- ii. the research project goes in an unanticipated direction which requires expertise which cannot be provided by current staff members;
- iii. there is a breakdown in relationships that cannot be resolved internally.

Schools may consult the Associate Provost Students if they are uncertain about whether an external supervisor may be used in a particular situation.

This guidance excludes situations where a pre-existing process or agreement is in place. It is not intended to be used for:

- multi-institution supervision arrangements which are part of a Doctoral Training Programme, Centre for Doctoral Training, or any other partnership whose supervision arrangements are governed by the DTP, CDT, or partnership agreement.
- external supervisors who are being engaged as part of an industrial partnership.
- Global PhDs or co-tutelles.
- Situations where external supervisors are being appointed with less than 10% of the supervisory load; such arrangements do not need to go through this formal process.

If a need for external expertise is evident from the application stage, Schools should use one of the processes listed above rather than the processes for external supervision described below. If the Director of Postgraduate Research (DoPGR) is uncertain whom to contact, an Associate Provost can advise.

Appointment process

A member of the supervisory team should contact the DoPGR as soon as it becomes clear that an external supervisor may be needed. The School is responsible for identifying appropriate and suitably qualified individuals as potential external supervisor(s), and determining whether they would be willing, in principle, to take on the role. The DoPGR will then consult with the Associate Provost Students about the situation and discuss possible options. The Schools should agree, in writing, with the Associate Provost Students the rationale for the appointment of an external supervisor, their name, and the percentage of supervision that they will provide.

Following agreement with the Associate Provost Students, the DoPGR should approach the agreed individual to confirm their willingness to act as external supervisor. Once confirmed, the Head of School should complete the [External Supervisor Appointment Letter](#) and send it to the external supervisor to sign. If the arrangement requires more detailed instructions than those included in the template letter, Schools may supplement the letter with an annex

detailing the specific arrangements and responsibilities of the external supervisor. A signed copy of the letter should then be sent to [Human Resources](#) and the [PGR Team](#) in Registry, copying in the DoPGR and Associate Provost Students. Any required [right to work checks](#) must be completed by the School.

The School may also wish to provide the external supervisor with a list of key contacts, such as the DoPGR, Head of School, School Wellbeing Officer, and Student Services.

The DoPGR must also submit a [change of supervisor form](#), indicating the percentage of supervision the external supervisor will provide.

Role of the external supervisor

There must be an internal supervisor who will be responsible for ensuring that St Andrews' regulations, policies and procedures are upheld. The internal supervisor should normally be the Principal Supervisor and contribute at least 50% of the supervisory load. Situations where it is not possible to appoint a St Andrews supervisor with at least 50% of the supervisory load should always be discussed with the Associate Provost Students.

The external supervisor should familiarise themselves with key St Andrews policies and procedures, particularly those dealing with [supervision](#), [annual progress reviews](#), and [assessment](#). Schools may ask external supervisors to engage with the online supervisor training. The external supervisor will assist with all aspects of the supervision of the student, including preparation for the annual review and submission of the thesis, through to successful completion of the research degree.

The supervisory team should discuss and agree a supervision plan with the student, which clearly assigns the key duties laid out in the [Supervision of postgraduate research students policy](#). This includes:

- a minimum of 10 substantive meetings with the student each academic year;
- timely feedback on work submitted by the student;
- an annual review of the research skills that the student should acquire, and any wider training needs;
- support in preparing for the annual review, and completion of the supervisor's report;
- maintaining a record of supervision and correspondence with the student.

The supervision plan should be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that it is still meeting the needs of the student and supervisory team.

Payment

Payment for external supervision should be offered as part of the initial conversations with potential external supervisors. External supervisors can waive the payment if they are willing to contribute their expertise without remuneration. Payments for external supervision will normally be paid for out of the School budget at a rate of £2000 per year, pro-rated based on the percentage of supervision provided (ie, £400 per year for 20% of the FTE supervisory load). The external supervisor must submit a [fee payment form](#) at the end of the supervision period, or at least once a year if the period extends across multiple academic years.

Termination

The external supervisor can end their appointment at any time by giving 3 months' notice, in writing, to the other members of the supervisory team, DoPGR and Head of School.

The University may end the appointment of an external supervisor if their expertise is no longer required, or the DoPGR, Head of School, and Associate Provost Students consider that the supervisor has not properly performed the duties at the level required.

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1.0	New guidance	Approved	Emily Feamster, Academic Policy Officer, Principal's Office	01/07/2021
1.1	Updated responsibility for right to work checks	Approved	Emily Feamster, Academic Policy Officer, Principal's Office	10/08/2021
2.0	Regular review with minor updates and clarifications to process	Approved	Emily Feamster, Deputy Head of Education Policy and Quality	14/04/2024