

**CODE OF PRACTICE FOR POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH STUDENTS
AND SUPERVISORS**

2025-2026

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Introduction

Sheffield Hallam University is a national and international centre for research. The university has a broad portfolio of research degree awards at masters' and doctoral level. The research agenda at the university forms part of the University's strategic objectives and aims to promote a supportive and inclusive environment for all students. The university has three academic Colleges comprising Schools and Institutes to manage the cognate subject disciplines of its academic provision. Postgraduate Research (PGR) students are managed and supported within the College structures, which include a research-led environment for students to develop and thrive whilst studying for their research degree award.

This document is part of a suite of PGR-specific documentation which includes bespoke Research Degree Regulations (covering all awards), and a range of policies, procedures and guidance notes, which provide the framework in which research degrees and PGR students are managed. The university also has a dedicated PGR Student Handbook, outlining the key facts and resources which students need to be aware of. All of these documents can be found on the Research Degrees Blackboard site.

This Code of Practice focusses solely on the roles and responsibilities of PGR students and staff members involved in supervision and decision-making, and the university expectations around professional behaviours and personal relationships. This is key to facilitating a supportive and nurturing environment for researchers. The university is committed to equality of opportunity, experiences and outcomes for staff and students, which are achieved through the core values of equality, equity diversity and inclusion.

We hope that students, supervisors and other stakeholders find this a useful and comprehensive source of information.

The Doctoral School
Research and Innovation Services

Section 1 – The Quality Framework

i) **The Quality Framework for Research Degrees**

The university's quality framework for managing research degrees activity has been developed over time, and takes account of external regulation and good practice guidance from regulatory bodies such as the [Quality Assurance Agency](#), the [Office for Students](#), the [UK Council for Graduate Education](#), and research funding bodies. The overarching university framework is managed by the university Research Degrees Committee (RDC) in partnership with each College, and Professional Doctorates, Head of Research Degrees.

Within this context and environment, the university can ensure that PGR students are fully supported, and that the quality of the research degrees awarded are comparable in standard with other universities in the UK Higher Education sector.

ii) **Research Ethics and Integrity**

All research conducted at the university is subject to ethical scrutiny, to ensure it is carried out to the highest standards, and to protect the integrity of the research. The university has a suite of [Research Ethics and Integrity Policies](#) which also include provision for dealing with cases of research misconduct by either research staff or PGR students.

Supervisors have overall responsibility for ensuring that appropriate ethical scrutiny of their students' research occurs. Students are required to complete the appropriate proforma and obtain any necessary ethical approval via the Converis system. In some instances, students may also have to comply with ethical codes issued by professional bodies relevant to their subject area, or seek approval from an external body (e.g., research involving the Health Research Authority). Students are then required to undertake their research in strict accordance with the ethical approval received.

The university requires research supervisors to take reasonable steps to ensure the research integrity of their students' research, for example by listening to interview recording, checking lab books, or examining data sets. Directors of Study must confirm at the appointment of examiner stage, that the candidate's thesis is ethically sound and ready to be assessed by examiners. Students are required to complete a Candidate Declaration in the thesis to confirm that all research studies in the thesis have ethics approval (where necessary).

Section 2 – Staff Roles and Support for PGR Activity

The university's Colleges have specific academic staff roles to support and manage PGR activity. Each has a senior academic member of staff who is the Head of Research Degrees (HoRD) and there is a designated HoRD for Professional Doctorates. These staff are supported by subject-based Postgraduate Research Tutors (PgRTs) who provide direct support to staff and students.

i) Head of Research Degrees (HoRD) Roles and Responsibilities

The HoRD is responsible for providing local academic management, alongside administrative and pastoral support for research students and supervisors. A broad outline of the main duties and responsibilities of these staff are as follows, but may vary slightly between Colleges:

- The HoRD leads on quality, standards and operations of PGR activity, and undertakes university-wide workstreams as identified by the Director of the Doctoral School.
- They make strategic contributions to the planning and implementation of policies and regulations around PGR activity.
- They co-ordinate good working relationships between PgRTs and members of the College Professional Services teams, to ensure an effective and efficient service to staff and students.
- Additionally, the HoRD will be responsible for overseeing supervisory practice, and allocating supervision to PGR students across the College. They promote high scholarly and supervisory standards, to achieve a vibrant PGR community.
- The HoRD has awareness of stakeholder interests, and has a student-focussed approach, with a commitment to equality, equity, diversity and inclusion, and providing a supportive environment conducive to high-quality research.

ii) The Role of the Postgraduate Research Tutor (PgRT)

The PgRT provides leadership and supports the delivery of research degrees activity within a cognate subject area. The PgRT is accountable to the HoRD. The priorities and key duties/responsibilities are noted as follows:

1. Lead on the delivery of the PGR programmes within the subject area, in line with this Code of Practice.
2. Work closely with the HoRD and Professional Services teams to provide academic, administrative and pastoral support for PGR students and supervisors.
3. Contribute to the development and achievement of quality and standards in line with the 'QAA UK Quality Code, Advice & Guidance: Research Degrees.'
4. Oversee progression monitoring for the designated cohort, including Institute level approval of RF1 (application for approval of research programme); RF2a (application for Confirmation of Doctorate); RF3 (application for approval of examining team and thesis title); and management of related processes. PgRTs will act in relation to necessary changes in registration and supervisory teams and can identify potential progression issues and/or issues with supervisory delivery. They also co-ordinate cohort progression monitoring such as leading progress meetings and thesis plans for the designated cohort.
5. Support the College's PGR admissions process within the overall university admissions framework, including assessing applications, conducting interviews, and working with staff to make decisions about offers, and advising on training requirements.

6. Provide appropriate input to student experience evaluation activities including preparations for, and participation in, annual quality monitoring, the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) and any Staff-Student Committees.
7. Contribute to PGR pastoral support activity, working with the Professional Services team to advise students of the wide range of support and wellbeing services within the university.
8. Oversee induction arrangements and the integration of PGR students into the research environment; embed a supportive research culture within the College and local research centres/subject groups.
9. Liaise as necessary to ensure sufficient resources and support for PGR projects e.g., ensuring that facilities, support, training and appropriate funding are in place to support the approved programmes of research.
10. Promote equality, equity, diversity and inclusion within all aspects of the delivery of the role.

Section 3 – Supervisor Roles and Responsibilities

The Policy on Research Supervision and the Manual on Academic Workplanning set out the framework and time allocation for PGR supervision. The following information outlines the roles and responsibilities of individual supervisors and the supervisory team.

i) Responsibilities of the Director of Studies

The Director of Studies (DoS) will be a member of the permanent staff or have a contract of employment with the University. Emeritus and Visiting Professors cannot be Director of Studies but can be first or second supervisors. Where the student is based overseas on a collaborative programme, the Director of Studies may be an employee of the appropriate transnational education partner <https://www.shu.ac.uk/goglobal/transformational-opportunities-abroad/study-exchange/partner-institutions>.

It is the prime responsibility of the DoS to manage the effective and efficient operation of the supervisory team, ensuring that the team operates in a professional manner. It is important to clarify at an early stage, roles of team members and agree how the team will interact.

Other responsibilities include the following:

- ensuring that the research topic is feasible, given the candidate's abilities and the available resources.
- administering the research programme and any associated training, as agreed with the candidate.
- being accountable to the College in the first instance and to RDC for the proper conduct of the research programme, including compliance with relevant University policies e.g., acting as Project Safety Supervisor under the Health and Safety regulations
- arranging for the necessary approval of initial research degree programme approval (RF1 stage), the Confirmation of Doctorate if appropriate (RF2a stage), examination arrangements (RF3) and any other changes to registration (RF9/RFBiS) through RDC.
- being responsible for the completion of the Annual Feedback Questionnaire for the annual quality review of research degrees activity for each of their students.
- providing direction, yet encouraging independence of thought, so that the student's ownership of the research is clearly established.
- manage the operation of the supervisory process by effectively co-ordinating the contributions from the second supervisor(s) and any advisers, ensuring that supervision will be continuous.
- as the candidate progresses, to manage the transition from *directing* the student to allowing them to be autonomous.

ii) The Second Supervisor(s)

At least one second supervisor must be an employee of the university or an Emeritus/Visiting Professor. Additional second supervisors may either be members of staff or external to the university. Responsibilities include the following:

- providing additional guidance to the student and the DoS on the planning, timetable, progress and expected standard of the research output.
- providing specialist expertise that might not otherwise be available.
- being accessible to the student at appropriate times for consultation.
- meeting with the team as a whole according to an agreed schedule.

- being prepared to take over, at least on a temporary basis from the DoS, should the need arise, for example due to illness.

iii) **Role of the Adviser(s)**

Advisers may also be appointed to support the team, for example by contributing specialist knowledge or providing a link with an external organisation. However, advisers have no specific supervisory responsibilities and cannot claim a supervisory completion for their role in the project.

iv) **Responsibilities of the Supervisory Team**

In order to meet the expectations of students and to complete the research in a timely manner, the university expects supervisors to follow these steps as a guide to good practice:

- 1 be responsible for the overall academic direction and administration of their candidates' research programmes, providing pertinent, timely and constructive criticism to support the programme, while allowing the candidate to own the programme and develop as an independent researcher. Assisting the candidate in acquiring the knowledge, understanding, skills and competencies necessary to successfully complete the research programme, providing the platform for a successful future career as a professional researcher.
- 2 help the candidate to define the research programme by developing a workplan and a timetable; give guidance and advice on the nature of research, planning, requisite investigative and analytical techniques and methodologies, literature and sources, plagiarism, presentation of data, footnotes and bibliography, ethical and legal issues and information on intellectual property rights.
- 3 be accessible and available to respond to difficulties raised by the candidate at appropriate times when they may need advice or support.
- 4 be alert to the signs of isolation, loneliness, or loss of confidence which may affect some research degree candidates; and the particular difficulties faced by part-time students and overseas candidates, who may initially need very frequent contact and advice, particularly in the initial stages of their research programme. Be prepared to step in with help and advice, referring candidates to specialist support services and counselling where appropriate.
- 5 ensure that candidates are aware of, and prepared for, the demands of writing the thesis and are fully aware of the standards of work expected at the level of their award. Supervisors must make candidates aware, in a timely manner, of any doubts over their progress, or of concerns over the standard of work submitted, which might be below the standards expected. The team must agree with the candidate any necessary supportive or remedial action.
- 6 fully understand the university regulations and procedures for research degrees, and other relevant codes, policies, procedures and regulations of the University, e.g., health and safety, ethics, IPR, indemnity and public liability insurance; and ensure compliance.
- 7 assist the candidate in drawing up a training and development plan which will fully integrate into the research programme and assist in developing personal and professional attributes; progress against the plan should be regularly reviewed.
- 8 maintain regular contact with the candidate, agreeing a schedule of meetings, setting aside adequate time to discuss progress and future work, in a conducive atmosphere.
The frequency of meetings should be appropriate to the research being undertaken and the stage of the research programme.
- 9 attend and agree records of such meetings, providing a basis for the monitoring and assessment of the candidate's progress; assess progress against the agreed workplan

- and give detailed advice on the necessary completion dates of successive stages of the work, particularly the Confirmation of Doctorate stage, to ensure timely completion.
- 10 ensure the candidate makes regular seminar presentations to research colleagues of their research findings to date, attending those presentations and giving feedback.
 - 11 ensure that the candidate is introduced to fellow researchers and staff within the University, and encourage contact with the wider research community, including academic bodies and learned societies, outside the University; advise them to attend relevant conferences, seminars and research workshops, and use facilities away from Sheffield if required.
 - 12 regularly request written work from the candidate, returning it within a reasonable time (**normally within 3 weeks of the submission date**) and providing constructive criticism, using it as a vehicle to assess and monitor progress.
 - 13 be supportive in times when the candidate has changing needs or where circumstances might warrant a break in study or extension to registration and making arrangements for this without unnecessary delay.
 - 14 encourage the candidate to publish the research, advising on its form and the vehicle for publication. Such publications can be individually authored by the student or authored jointly with the Director of Studies or other members of the supervisory team, but where the student has undertaken the bulk of the work, they should appear as first-named author. Publications should follow the information provided in the [Supplementary Research Guidance](#), in particular the 'Principles of Good Research Practice for Publication and Authorship', and 'Developing a Personal Publication Strategy'.
 - 15 advise the candidate on the suitability of the final draft of the thesis for submission and on the preparation for the oral examination, arranging for a mock or practice oral if needed. **Note: the supervisor's role here is advisory only.** Arrange the candidate's oral examination.
 - 16 ensure that all the University's procedures relating to the approval of the various stages of registration to completion of the programme are followed; complete the necessary documentation for such approvals and submit to the Doctoral School by the published submission dates for consideration by RDC. **This may involve liaison with the rapporteurs acting on behalf of the Research Degrees Committee and clarifying with the candidate the decisions of the Committee.**

v) **Staff and Students Personal Relationships Policy**

The University's approach to personal relationships is guided by whether there is an imbalance of power/authority/influence and the potential for a conflict of interest to arise, and on protecting staff and students. [The Staff and Students Personal Relationships Policy](#) and specifically the guidance on [Postgraduate Research Students and Supervisor Personal Relationships](#), contain important information on when and how staff (inc. casuals, postgraduate students conducting teaching or assessment to other students, graduate teaching assistants, honorary staff, emeritus staff, governors, as well as third parties) should **declare** personal relationships.

Following disclosure of a personal relationship between a research supervisor and their student, the line manager will immediately notify the relevant HoRD so that alternative supervisory arrangements can be put in place. The HoRD will contact the student privately to ensure they are aware of the disclosure, and then outline the next steps to the student and to the member of staff. The information will be managed sensitively, and the parties treated with dignity. The main aim of this policy is to ensure that student progression on a research programme is not adversely affected, and that the student can expect to continue with appropriate support and guidance, up to completion.

Section 4 – Responsibilities of a PGR student

i) Student Responsibilities

In order to meet the expectations of supervisors and RDC, and to complete the research in a timely manner, the university expects students to follow these steps as a guide to good practice:

- 1 maintain regular contact with the supervisory team **i.e., at least every month for full-time students, around every 3 months for part-time students** (principally with the Director of Studies) throughout the research programme. Students are advised to use the supervision meeting record proforma to keep formal notes of meetings to aid progress. Also, students should ensure that their contact details are kept up to date via [My Student Record](#).
- 2 agree with the Director of Studies:
 - the topic or focus of the research.
 - a workplan or timetable for the research programme, the methodological approach, which must be confirmed at the Confirmation of Doctorate stage, and the aims and objectives of the research.
 - a training and development plan integrated within the research programme i.e., training required in generic research skills, subject-specific research skills and other skills and competencies.
 - attendance at appropriate external events, for example, conferences, meetings of learned societies and externally held seminars in the area, or related areas, of your research.
 - the amount of time to be devoted to the research at the University and elsewhere, in accordance with the plan of work, and the timing and length of holidays or any other period of absence from the University.
- 3 discuss with the Director of Studies and the supervisory team the amount and type of advice, guidance and comment that is likely to be most helpful and agree a schedule of meetings. Be well prepared when attending such meetings and take note of the guidance and feedback from the supervisory team.
- 4 fully utilise the resources, expertise, facilities and development and learning opportunities offered by the academic environment and contribute to the development of the University's research environment. In particular, students should engage with their supervisory team, other staff and research students.
- 5 be motivated to make a conscientious and positive commitment in terms of both time and effort towards the successful completion of the research programme within the prescribed timescales.
- 6 take responsibility and ownership for the research programme, recognising that the role of the supervisory team is to provide guidance and advice.
- 7 understand and comply with the university regulations and procedures for research degrees, and other relevant codes, policies, procedures and regulations of the University, for example, health and safety, risk assessment, research ethics and integrity, Intellectual Property and Guidance for PGR Students on the use of AI in their work.
- 8 attend a university induction session and other induction events for researchers organised by the College, and other training according to the plan agreed with the Director of Studies (see 2 above).
- 9 take responsibility for personal and professional development through engagement with the development needs analysis and through using the Vitae Researcher Development

Framework as a reference. This framework describes the knowledge, behaviours and attributes of successful researchers.

- 10 maintain comprehensive records of the research and of meetings with the Director of Studies and the members of the supervisory team. These records will form the basis of progress reports for monitoring purposes, required by the Director of Studies, the Head of Research Degrees or the funding body, where appropriate.
- 11 keep the supervisory team informed of others with whom you are discussing your research work.
- 12 submit written work to the supervisory team in sufficient time to allow for comment and discussion. This enables an assessment of progress, before proceeding to the next stage of the research programme, in accordance with the agreed plan of work.
- 13 make seminar presentations to research colleagues of your research findings to date whenever the opportunity arises or instigate the opportunity yourself through discussion with the Head of Research Degrees or relevant Postgraduate Research Tutor.
- 14 when appropriate, prepare research publications and be involved in their presentation at conferences. Publications should follow the information provided in the [Supplementary Research Guidance](#), in particular the 'Principles of Good Research Practice for Publication and Authorship', and 'Developing a Personal Publication Strategy'.
- 15 actively seek out the Director of Studies, or other members of the supervisory team, and take the initiative in raising any problems or difficulties **as they arise**; aim to recognise when extra help and support is needed **and seek it**.
- 16 decide, in close consultation with the Director of Studies, when to formally submit the thesis for examination, within the time allowed by the Regulations.

ii) **Notifying Extenuating Circumstances**

It is expected that at certain points in time, students may have personal, health or work issues which impact on engagement and progression with their research studies. Students are responsible for notifying staff of any difficult circumstances at the time of happening. Although this will undoubtedly be difficult, it is necessary, so that the university can act in a timely way to help alleviate and manage the impact of extenuating circumstances.

RDC agreed an 'Extenuating Circumstances Policy and Procedure for PGRs' specifically for managing short-term impacts, to provide extensions to submission deadlines. In situations where the impact is more severe and long-term, students should consider taking time out from their studies and this can be facilitated under the 'Break in Study Policy and Procedure.' Both documents can be found on the Research Degrees Blackboard site.

In cases where students fail to disclose the circumstances at the time of happening, the university will be limited in how it can help. The HoRD will have discretion to apply a break in study to any PGR student who does not have the capacity to complete the application themselves, or where students have lost communication with the university, and an enforced break is necessary to manage the student registration.

Students with long term health issues are advised to seek a learning contract via [Disabled Student Support](#). This will help to establish reasonable adjustments to study, to help with engagement and timely progression. The university has other [Student Wellbeing](#) services and resources which can be accessed at the time of need.

iii) **Student Code of Conduct**

All students within the university must act in accordance with the Student Code of Conduct as set out in section 1.1 of the [Student Conduct Regulations and Procedures](#) as follows:

- To treat all members of the university community with respect and dignity.
- To behave responsibly, including when using social media and digital platforms.
- To act with honesty and integrity.
- To be good citizens when living within local communities.
- To be mindful of differences in backgrounds, beliefs, and perspectives.
- To respect differences of opinion, including free speech and academic freedom within the law.
- To abide by the law, University Regulations, Policies and Procedures.

Section 1.2 outlines the types of behaviour which constitute misconduct and are deemed to breach the Student Code of Conduct. Any student, staff member, or member of the public can raise an allegation of misconduct against a student, and these are managed by staff in the Student Policy, Casework and Compliance Team, based in Registry Services. Students must also abide by the university's terms and conditions which include those related to [IT security](#) and [Netiquette](#) which is a collection of unspoken behaviours and expectations to follow online.

iv) **The Student Charter**

The university has a reciprocal agreement with students under its [Student Charter](#). The information presented in this Code of Practice aligns with this charter, and staff and students are expected to follow this guidance and act in accordance with it.