

Policy for Research Student Supervision

This policy sets out the principles for supervisory teams of research degree students at Sheffield Hallam. The policy applies to all research degrees at the University, and aligns with the Quality Assurance Agency's [UK Quality Code for Research Degrees](#).

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Research Degree Regulations (in particular R6) and the Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Students and Supervisors. The Code of Practice sets out the roles, responsibilities and expected behaviours of students and supervisors.

1. Supervisory teams

The University has adopted a team-based approach to the supervision of research degree students. The requirements for supervisory teams are detailed in Research Degrees Regulations, R6.

A research degree candidate must normally have two and not more than three academic supervisors, although exceptionally, particularly in multidisciplinary projects, there can be four. Candidates on collaborative programmes can also have more than three, but this should include at least two University staff.

The anticipated benefits of the team-based approach are:

- the candidate benefits from a wider range of expertise and experience
- it provides continuity of supervision should a member of the team leave the University or be unable to continue in a supervisory role
- it reduces the impact of any difficulties in the student/supervisor relationship and supports these to be addressed at an early stage
- it provides increased opportunities for the student to interact with the University's academic/research community.

It is the responsibility of the Director of Studies to manage the effective and efficient operation of the supervisory team, ensuring that supervision is regularly and frequently maintained and that the team operates in a professional manner. It is important that at an early stage in the research programme, the members of the supervisory team meet with the student to clarify their respective roles and agree how the team will interact.

Changes to supervisory teams may be required as a result of staff leaving the University, situations where a supervisor is likely to be unavailable for an extended period, or changes in the project. Any changes to the members of a supervisory team should be agreed with

the student, supervisors and Postgraduate Research Tutor, and approved by the Research Institute Head of Research Degrees or Postgraduate Research Tutor via the RF9 'Application for minor changes to registration' form.

2. Experience and attributes

A supervisory team must have the appropriate skills, experience and expertise to advise and support the candidate to successful completion of the research programme.

At the core of the team is the Director of Studies or principal supervisor, supported by one or two second supervisors. In order to ensure the supervisory team has the necessary experience and expertise, the team must:

- include at least one member of staff who has 'significant responsibility for research' and is eligible to be returned in the Research Excellence Framework
- have a minimum of 2 supervisory completions at the same or higher level (Research Masters/MPhil or Doctorate). Note that completion of the University's Supervisor Development Programme will count as a virtual completion, but the team must still have one actual completion at the relevant level or higher.
- commit to ongoing development of their supervisory practice, including attending University training and development on supervisory skills and practice

The team should:

- be competent in supervision and possess sufficient available time to dedicate to the needs of each research student being supervised
- possess sufficient subject knowledge to provide authoritative advice and guidance on the research project
- have the appropriate skills to facilitate the production of high-quality research work by the student
- be responsible to the Research Degrees Committee for the satisfactory progress of the research project
- have knowledge in/experience of research methods appropriate to the subject.

In approving the appointment of supervisory teams, careful consideration must be given to the knowledge, skills and experience of individuals to ensure appropriate balance within the team.

The University recognises that supervision can be a valuable development opportunity for staff. New or inexperienced members of staff may undertake supervisory responsibilities as Director of Studies or second supervisor, providing the team includes more experienced colleagues and the combined experience of the team meets the minimum requirements stated above. In such teams, it is expected that the more experienced members support the Director of Studies to develop their role.

Normally, supervisors will have obtained their own research degree, usually a doctorate, but this might not always be the case. However, if an individual is currently registered for a research degree (at any institution) they can act only as a second supervisor or advisor, not as Director of Studies. This is due to the greater supervisory responsibility of the Director of Studies.

3. Training and Development for Supervisors

The inclusion of new and/or relatively inexperienced supervisors on supervisory teams is encouraged as a valuable staff development opportunity. All staff who are new to supervision should attend the University's Supervisor Development Course – contact doctoralschool@shu.ac.uk for details. Experienced supervisors who are new to Hallam may also find the course, or particular modules, useful.

All supervisors are expected to undertake continuing training and development in supervisory practice and engage with the development opportunities provided by Research Centres/Departments, Research Institutes and the Doctoral School.

All supervisors will be enrolled on the Research Degrees Blackboard site, which contains information on university processes, policies and procedures and the current versions of 'RF' forms.

Supervisors can access support and advice from their Research Centre/Department Postgraduate Research Tutor, the Research Institute Heads of Research Degrees, and their Research Institute PGR professional services team. The central Doctoral School team can also be contacted for advice.

4. Supervisory loading and Academic workplanning for PGR supervision

As a general rule, supervisors should normally not be responsible for more than 6 FTE research degree candidates at any one time. The relevant Research Institute Head of Research Degrees must provide reassurance that a proposed supervisor is able to supervise candidates effectively and equitably and is not responsible for more candidates than can be supervised as required. RDC will rely on this reassurance when approving the appointment of supervisory teams, rather than rigidly applying the general rule.

The Academic Workplanning (AWP) Allocation Manual defines the time allocation for postgraduate research student supervision. The manual gives a maximum number of hours to be shared between the supervisory team as appropriate. Individual supervisors' time allocations will be weighted according to their anticipated role and input, as determined by the Head of Research Degrees.

Where staff are not workplanned, the principles of the AWP manual should be applied to the expected time allocated to the supervision of research degree candidates.

5. The Director of Studies

The proposed Director of Studies must be a permanent member of the University's staff or have a contract of employment with the University. Emeritus and Visiting Professors cannot be Director of Studies but can be second supervisors (Regulations R6.3). 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/international/partner-institutions>

The responsibilities and expectations of the Director of Studies are set out in the Code of Practice for Research Students and Supervisors.

An appropriate schedule of supervisory meetings should be planned by the student and the Director of Studies which is sufficient to allow the team to give the student adequate guidance on the direction of the project and on the standards being achieved, as well as to monitor their progress. The schedule of meetings should also reflect the need to satisfy any University monitoring or compliance requirements.

The Director of Studies should take the initiative in developing the working relationship with the student in the early stages of the research programme. The Director of Studies should aim to strike a balance between providing direction and encouraging independence of thought so that the student's ownership of the research programme is clearly established - certainly by no later than the point at which the thesis is submitted for examination. As the candidate progresses, the emphasis should shift from direction to responsible autonomy. Achieving the transition requires sensitive management based on a clear understanding of the individual candidate's needs and abilities, and the aims and objectives of the research programme at each stage. Each supervisory situation is unique, depending on preferred learning styles and the personalities of those involved; it requires personal discretion to determine the most effective working relationship.

6. Second Supervisor(s)

At least one second supervisor must be an employee of the University or an Emeritus or Visiting Professor. Additional second supervisors may be either members of staff or external to the University. The responsibilities of second supervisors are detailed in the Code of Practice for Research Students and Supervisors.

7. Advisors

Advisors may also be appointed to support the team, for example by contributing specialist knowledge or providing a link with an external organisation. However, advisors have no specific supervisory responsibilities.

8. Code of Practice and professional behaviours

The University's Code of Practice for Students and Supervisors clarifies the roles and responsibilities in more detail. The Code of Practice can be found on the Research Degrees blackboard site.

The University's Code of Behaviour¹ and Relationships at Work and Professional Behaviours² Policy set out the expectations and obligations of all University employees. The Appendix to the Policy contains specific guidance on relationships between a postgraduate research student and their supervisor. The Code and Policy can be found on the staff intranet or by contacting Human Resources and Organisational Development.

Academic Development and Diversity have produced an introductory guide for staff at Sheffield Hallam to raise awareness of equality diversity and inclusion when working with students <https://rise.articulate.com/share/QsprQZUIchslsha7jmGe8BJ2sWzPjX1E#/>

9. Concerns about supervisory performance

Any student or member of staff can raise concerns regarding supervisory behaviour or performance. In the first instance, this should be with the relevant Head of Research Degrees. Alternatively, concerns can be raised with the Director of the Doctoral School.

Research Degrees Committee
Revised December 2021

¹ <https://sheffieldhallam.sharepoint.com/sites/3005/polproc/code/SitePages/home.aspx>

² <https://sheffieldhallam.sharepoint.com/sites/3005/polproc/relationshipsatwork/SitePages/home.aspx>