



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

# Code of Practice for Supervisors and Research Students



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# Introduction

The University aims to give research students an exceptional and distinctive experience that prepares them to make significant contributions to knowledge during and beyond their period of study.

This Code provides guidance and practical advice for research students to assist them in maximising their potential. It also provides guidance and practical advice to support supervisors in undertaking their crucial roles.

Since the University has a diverse research community with a variety of practices, this Code highlights common features and should be read along with School and programme-specific information.

Most aspects of the Code are relevant to distance programmes, however where different arrangements apply these will be highlighted in the relevant programme handbooks. The Code focuses primarily on students and supervisors of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) and Master of Philosophy (MPhil) programmes and many aspects are also relevant to MSc by Research programmes. However some MSc by Research programmes may have different arrangements for supervision and assessment and these will be highlighted in the relevant programme handbook. Where students are studying on jointly delivered research degree programmes (for example

through Doctoral Training Centres), some of the arrangements for supervision, assessment and support may differ from those described in the Code.

The Code is not part of the University's formal regulatory framework. It should be read in conjunction with the formal requirements set out in the University's Postgraduate Degree Regulations, Postgraduate Assessment Regulations for Research Degrees, and other relevant University policies and regulations, many of which are referenced in the Code.



# 1. Roles and responsibilities

At the University of Edinburgh, each student is supervised by a team of at least two supervisors; a Principal (or “Lead”) Supervisor, and either a Co-Supervisor or Assistant Supervisor, who are appointed by the College.

The nature of the research project and the best interests of the student will determine the makeup of the supervisory team and the key responsibilities of each member of the supervision team must be agreed by the team at the beginning of the student’s programme.

However the responsibilities are distributed, all supervisors are expected to take an active role in supervision and all have a responsibility towards the student.

## 1.1 Students’ responsibilities

All students are expected to comply with the University’s policies, regulations and procedures which along with their programme handbook, other programme information and the terms and conditions of admission, form the contract between the student and University during their studies.

[University Student Contract](#)

Research students have particular responsibilities for:

### The research project

- Fulfilling the requirements of their degree programme (PhD, MPhil, MSc by Research or taught professional doctorate) including any requirements for annual progression review.
- Taking advantage of the facilities and supervision offered by the University.
- Working as a professional, independent researcher accountable for the development of their own research.
- Maintaining ethical standards in the design, conduct and reporting of research.
- Working diligently and effectively throughout their studies.
- Following the rules of any other university, Associated Institution (see 1.2.4), company or other organisation that they are studying with as part of their programme.

## The thesis

The thesis may take various different formats, such as a portfolio (see 4.1). Throughout this document, the term “thesis” is used to represent the assessment submission.

- Submitting a thesis, or portfolio representing the student’s research and findings. The programme handbook will give details on what is expected to be submitted for assessment.
- Producing, on time, a thesis that meets the criteria set out in the Postgraduate Degree Regulations and Postgraduate Assessment Regulations for Research Degrees.
- Taking full responsibility for the quality of the thesis submitted for assessment (while the supervisor may advise on whether they think work is ready for submission, their opinion carries no guarantee of success in the assessment).

## Supervision

- Making themselves available at times agreed and maintaining regular contact with their supervisors.
- Producing a record of each key supervision meeting and forwarding it to their supervisor for agreement.
- Discussing any proposed employment with their supervisor to ensure it does not impede the successful completion of the students’ programme of study.

## Training and development

- Taking advantage of available research skills training.
- Reflecting on their broader transferable skills and professional development, and engaging with appropriate training opportunities.
- Participating in any training that is a required part of the programme.

## Resolving problems

- Actively seeking advice and help from the sources identified in this Code if problems arise.
- Notifying their Principal Supervisor, or other relevant staff, of any special circumstances affecting their studies or assessment (see 5.4).

# 1.2 Supervisors’ responsibilities

## 1.2.1 Principal/Lead Supervisor

### Role

The Principal Supervisor, sometimes referred to as Lead Supervisor in a Co-Supervisory team (see 1.2.2 below), has the main responsibility for supervision arrangements and guidance for the student throughout their programme of study.

This includes taking overall responsibility for:

- The administrative aspects of supervision, for example submitting requests for leave of absence or interruption of studies and ensuring minimum contact requirements are met.
- Ensuring appropriate approval for any co-supervision arrangements is obtained from College.

- Ensuring the student's progress is reviewed for each year of study.
- Providing advice on pastoral support as well as academic matters.
- Ensuring the student's intellectual property is respected.
- Leading on initial and ongoing discussions with the supervisory team to negotiate and agree on roles and responsibilities for each team member.
- Ensuring the student is aware of the responsibilities of individual supervisory team members.
- Communication within the supervisory team.

### 1.2.2 Co-Supervisor

#### Role

A co-supervision model may be chosen when it is clear that the student's work involves interdisciplinary research. When this model is chosen, the Co-Supervisor will play a major role in supervising the research project. The division of responsibilities between the Principal or Lead Supervisor and the Co-Supervisor must be agreed upon at the outset of the co-supervisory arrangement.

### 1.2.3 Assistant Supervisor

#### Role

The Assistant Supervisor's role involves fewer responsibilities than the Principal Supervisor, but in some cases may include closer day-to-day involvement in the student's research. Assistant Supervisors may also provide complementary expertise, such as specialised knowledge of a particular technique, or depending on the work context, day-to-day supervision in some cases.

### 1.2.4 Supervisors in Associated Institutions

The University recognises as "Associated Institutions" a range of non-commercial and non-degree-awarding organisations with which it collaborates on teaching, research and services to the community. Staff working in Associated Institutions acting as supervisors for the University's students have the same responsibilities as University of Edinburgh supervisors, and the same requirement to attend the University's supervisor briefing sessions.

If the Principal Supervisor is from an Associated Institution, then the University Supervisor and School Postgraduate Director are responsible for:

- Ensuring that the Associated Institution Principal Supervisor has read the University's regulations and policies.
- Ensuring student progress is monitored in line with the University's regulations and policies.

### 1.2.5 Responsibilities of the supervisory team

The supervisory team should meet as soon as possible once supervisory arrangements are confirmed. At the first meeting, the team should discuss the following responsibilities and decide how to ensure that all of them are covered.

- Introducing the student to the subject area, its facilities and procedures, and to other research students and relevant staff in the School. For distance PhD students these introductions may be virtual.
- Advising the student on the key milestones of the degree, drawing up a research plan and timetable for producing the thesis.

- Advising the student on research ethics and integrity, including obtaining ethical approval.
- Advising the student on facilities required for the research and supporting the student in accessing these.
- Advising the student on how to prepare for annual progression review and the viva voce examination.
- Agreeing the frequency of supervision meetings and the means of recording meetings (see 2.1).
- Organising regular meetings to discuss all matters relating to the student's research, including feedback on written work.
- Advising on the student's professional development needs at the start of the programme and reviewing these throughout the student's studies.
- Encouraging students to develop transferable skills and to attend appropriate training courses where possible.
- Advising the student on where to find appropriate sources of additional support and signposting University student support services details included in section 6.3.
- Ensuring the student is aware of relevant health and safety policies and procedures.
- Encouraging the student to become an active member of the research community, for example by advising on attendance at relevant conferences and supporting the student in seeking funding for such events.



The supervisors should revisit the distribution of supervisory responsibilities again at the student's annual progression review and at other times as necessary.

## 1.3 The College Committee

Each College has a specific committee with responsibility for postgraduate research matters. The committee's name may vary by College, but it will have overall responsibility for postgraduate research supervision, annual progression review decisions (based on recommendations from Schools) and authorising periods of leave or changes to study periods. In practice, Colleges may delegate some of these decision-making responsibilities to Schools (for example the Postgraduate Director or Head of Graduate School). The College Committee also acts as the Board of Examiners for postgraduate research degree awards. Throughout this document the term "College Committee" is used to refer to all these roles.



## 2. Student-Supervisor relationship

The student-supervisor relationship is vital to all research degrees. Therefore close contact between supervisors and students is essential.

Respect, trust, confidence and fairness are essential elements of the student-supervisor relationship. Most interpersonal problems between students and supervisors can be avoided if students and supervisors contribute responsibly and professionally to their working relationship by being respectful, courteous, punctual and conscientious.

The University's Dignity and Respect policy promotes a positive working and studying culture which every student and member of staff contributes to and within which they can fulfill their potential.

[Dignity and Respect](#)

### 2.1 Contact and supervisory meetings

Students rely on contact with their supervisors for guidance and intellectual input to their research. Supervision meetings provide time for discussing all matters relating to the student's research and development, including feedback on written work. Meetings and regular contact may take place face-to-face or online.

If the Principal Supervisor is absent for more than six consecutive weeks, the College will ensure alternative supervision arrangements are in place.

#### **Agreeing the purpose and frequency of supervisory meetings**

Students must maintain contact with their supervisor as required and at least twice in every three month period. It is important that both student and supervisory team agree, at the start of the programme, how often meetings will be held and the purpose of meetings. It is important that students can easily contact their supervisors for advice, so supervisors may also be available for additional non-scheduled meetings. Students can initiate meetings but supervisors need to ensure that the minimum contact requirements are met.

The amount of contact between student and supervisors will vary depending on the length of the programme, how the research is being done and how much support the student needs. For example, there may be more meetings in the first few months when the research project is being defined.

Sometimes supervision will be at distance, for example if the student is working away from Edinburgh or is on a recognised distance learning programme. The supervisory team and the student will need to make sure arrangements are in place to support distance supervision, for example internet access and consider any time differences at the student's location.

### Keeping records of supervisory meetings

Recording supervisory meetings helps the student and supervisory team keep track of actions and decisions. Therefore, students should provide their Principal Supervisor with a written note including:

- The date and purpose of the meeting.
- Any problems identified.
- Action points.



## 2.2 What happens if the supervisory relationship breaks down

If the supervisory relationship seems to have broken down, students or supervisors can contact their Postgraduate Adviser or School Postgraduate Director. If they cannot resolve the problem then the School Postgraduate Director or the student can contact the Secretary or Chair of the College Committee. If there are problems with the supervisory relationship then University staff will respect confidentiality and limit disclosures to as few colleagues as necessary to resolve the problem.

If there appears to be a breakdown in the student-supervisor relationship and problems are not able to be resolved locally, the supervisor, the student and the School/Deanery Postgraduate Director should consider approaching College for additional support and advice. The University will always try to resolve conflict in a positive way. That means that the parties who are in conflict should give informed consideration to finding a mutually acceptable way of resolving the conflict. Schools/Deaneries can request assistance with this process from the College, for example through Deans of Postgraduate Research.

Support for students experiencing problems with the supervisory relationship is available from the [Students' Association's Advice Place](#).

## 3. Annual progression review

Keeping on track with research can be challenging for students. Annual progression review meetings provide an opportunity to monitor and support students in maximising their chance of successfully completing on time.

For students to benefit fully from annual progression reviews it is important that supervisors provide constructive criticism about the student's work.

Annual progression reviews provide a formal record of how the research project and thesis are going and recognition of student achievements. They also offer a structured opportunity to discuss students' professional development and career aims, and identify any training needs.



### 3.1 Annual progression review process

#### Timescale

The first review takes place within nine to 12 months of matriculation. By then students will have independently produced an identifiable body of work that can be assessed.

Progress is then assessed annually until thesis submission (or more frequently if recommended by the Postgraduate Director for an individual student - see below). The timescales are the same for full and part-time students.

#### Process

- The annual review process is supported by an online system which students can access via the MyEd portal and staff via the EUCLID system.
- The process begins when the student is notified by a system-generated email that their annual review form report is ready to complete. Once the student has completed their part, the supervisors complete their sections.

- The student prepares a presentation or report, including a forward plan of their work, before the meeting, with help from the supervisor(s) if needed.
- The review will be conducted by a panel which includes all the supervisory team and may include one or more people appointed by the School.
- The student attends a review meeting where they may need to give an oral presentation and the panel will review the student's presentation or report. (Students studying at distance may choose to attend annual progression review meetings in person. If this is not possible meetings may take place online.)
- The panel will decide whether they think the student can progress to their next year, and will provide the student with feedback.
- The supervisors will advise the School Postgraduate Director (or Head of the Graduate School) regarding the formal progression recommendation for submission to the College Committee for its approval. The student, supervisors, reviewer and School Postgraduate Director, or Head of Graduate School, then sign-off the online report before the supervisors' and Directors' progression recommendation is submitted to the College Committee for its approval (students cannot participate in the progression decision-making process).
- If the panel identifies concerns about a student's progress following any review, then it can recommend several different ways forward (see 3.2).

### **What is reviewed**

Programme handbooks will give information on annual progression review arrangements but in addition to discussing progress on the student's thesis, some of the things that reviews may include are:

- A timetable for progress agreed by the student and supervisory team.
- A record of whether deadlines have been met.
- The results of any taught elements of the programme.
- The student's report on any programme of skills training they have undertaken to support their research and any transferable skills development they have undertaken.

### **Reviewing supervision arrangements**

Sometimes a student's research changes direction and may move away from the supervisors' expertise. The annual progression review lets supervisors consider their own competence to deal with any new research area. It also provides an opportunity for the supervisory team to revisit the distribution of supervisory responsibility. If different expertise is needed to support the student, the School can recommend a change in supervisors to the College Committee.

### **Guidance and regulations**

Guidance for students on completing their online annual progression review is available on Student Systems' website.

[Guidance on postgraduate research annual progression review form](#)



Guidance for supervisors on the annual progression review system and their role is available on Student Systems' website.

### [PGR Supervision](#)

The regulations on annual progression review, including the recommendations that can be made following a review, are in the Postgraduate Assessment Regulations for Research Degrees.

### [Postgraduate Assessment Regulations for Research Degrees](#)

## 3.2 Problems with progress

Postgraduate research study is challenging and sometimes students may experience problems making progress. To help support students, it is important for supervisors and students to be open about any difficulties they foresee with successful completion. There are various options available to support students experiencing problems with progress and University student support services may be able to help with non-academic problems.

A supervisor who thinks that progress has been consistently unsatisfactory should discuss the problem with the student and follow this up with a written record of the discussion for the student. Unsatisfactory progress will also be noted in annual reports, and flagged for remedial action.

If a student is having difficulties making progress with their programme of study, this should be identified during the annual progression review. If the annual progression review panel identifies that

a student is not making satisfactory progress, then the Postgraduate Director or Head of Graduate School, in consultation with the supervisors may recommend one of the following:

- Deferment of a decision (part-time students' first year review only).
- That a further (repeat) review takes place within three months.
- Registration for a different postgraduate research or taught degree.
- Exclusion from study (when there are no other practical options).

Supervisors will provide students with a written explanation of their assessment in these cases.

The annual progression review may occasionally record serious problems, or recommend exclusion from study. If the supervisors and Director are recommending exclusion, the College will consider the recommendations in line with the University's Procedure for Withdrawal and Exclusion from Study (see Section 5.6).

### [Postgraduate Assessment Regulations for Research Degrees](#)

### [University Procedure for withdrawal and exclusion from study](#)

## 4. Thesis preparation and assessment

Writing up and submitting the thesis in line with the timescales set out in the Postgraduate Degree Regulations or programme handbook should be the priority in a student's final year.

### 4.1 The thesis

Students must submit a thesis representing their research and findings. Some submissions will be in alternative formats to the traditional thesis. The Postgraduate Degree Regulations and programme handbook specify any further requirements for designs, composition, artworks or performances and their display, presentation and documentation.

Additional guidance on some specific aspects of the thesis format and presentation, such as the requirement for a lay summary, completing the signed declaration, including publications in the thesis and thesis format is available on the University website.

[Academic policies and regulations for research students](#)

More information on typical milestones and support in preparing the thesis is available on the Institute for Academic Development website.

[Writing up your PhD](#)

### 4.2 Thesis preparation

In preparation for thesis submission, student and supervisor should agree a timetable for completing the thesis.

The maximum thesis length is set out in the Postgraduate Degree Regulations. While the University's regulations do not stipulate a minimum length, Schools or Colleges may have additional guidance on expectations which supervisors will be able to advise on.

Thesis regulations including notice of intention to submit, format, previously published material and the signed declaration are set out in the Postgraduate Assessment Regulations for Research Degrees.

## Thesis requirements

The criteria for the award of research degrees as set out in the Postgraduate Degree Regulations or otherwise agreed by the Senate Education Committee are that the thesis must:

- Be the student's own work, except where indicated throughout the thesis and summarised clearly on the declarations page of the thesis, and must not have been presented for any other degree except as specified on the declarations page.
- Present a coherent body of work.
- Make an original and significant contribution to knowledge in the field of study.
- Relate particular research projects to the general body of knowledge in the field and show adequate knowledge of relevant literature.
- Demonstrate critical judgement of the student's own work and that of other scholars in the field.
- Present the results of the research in a critical and scholarly way.
- Contain material worthy of publication.
- Demonstrate that any publications included in the thesis are the students own work, except where indicated throughout the thesis and summarised clearly on the declarations page.
- Be understandable to a scholar in the same field.
- Be presented in a clear, consistent and accessible format.

The Institute for Academic Development provides more information and advice on writing up your thesis.

### [Writing up your PhD](#)

## Additional information

More information on thesis submission, including thesis submission forms, is available on the University website.

### [Doctoral thesis submission](#)

The University's [Postgraduate Degree Regulations](#)

## 4.3 Thesis submission

Students should complete a Notice of Intention to Submit form, along with a thesis abstract and Access to Thesis and Publication of Abstract form at least two months prior to submission. Pre-submission forms are submitted to the College Office. Once the thesis is ready for submission, the student presents it digitally to the College Office including the abstract and lay summary. Supervisors and Graduate Schools will be able to advise students how to submit their thesis. Thesis submission forms are also available online.

### [Doctoral thesis submission](#)

## 4.4 Thesis assessment

Assessment regulations, including examiner roles and responsibilities, conduct of assessment, thesis regulations and assessment decisions are set out in the Postgraduate Assessment Regulations for Research Degrees.

The University's [Postgraduate Assessment Regulations for Research Degrees](#)

All research degrees (apart from MSc by Research) are assessed in two stages; the initial report by the examiners followed by an oral exam or viva voce, often referred to as the "viva".

Each thesis is assessed by at least one External and one Internal Examiner, who are appointed by the College. Internal Examiners are members of University staff. External Examiners are from outside the University and have specialist knowledge relevant to the thesis.

### **Examiners' initial report**

Before the viva, the examiners are asked to assess the thesis on the grounds set out in the regulations and as part of their report to consider:

- Is the thesis an original work that makes a significant contribution to knowledge in or understanding of the field of study?
- Does the thesis contain material worthy of publication?
- Does the thesis demonstrate adequate knowledge of the field of study and relevant literature?
- Does the thesis show the exercise of critical judgement with regard to both the student's work and that of other scholars in the same general field?
- Is the presentation and style of the thesis satisfactory?

### **The viva**

The viva, is normally held within three months of thesis submission, however the exact date will depend on:

- When the Notice of Intention to Submit form is submitted by the student.
- When the thesis is submitted by the student.
- How long it takes to select and appoint examiners.
- How long the examiners require to examine the thesis.
- When everyone involved is available to meet for the oral examination, including any visa restrictions on the student's availability.

The examiners and the student attend the viva. The Internal Examiner is responsible for ensuring the arrangements for the exam are made and for chairing the exam. Sometimes a non-examining chair will be appointed and the Internal Examiner will notify the student if this is the case. The role of the non-examining chair is included in the Postgraduate Assessment Regulations for Research Degrees. The examiners may use the viva to establish a student's knowledge of their field of research, to establish the extent of any collaboration and to confirm that the work is the student's own.

The viva is usually held in Edinburgh, but where necessary, one or more participants may attend remotely with College Committee approval.

University information on [PhD by Research oral examinations by video link](#)



## Examiner recommendations

At the end of the viva, the examiners may, if they have agreed a recommendation, indicate their recommendation to the student. It is important to note that this recommendation is not final and is subject to approval by the College Committee, and examiners will make this clear to the student. Possible examiner recommendations after the viva:

- a) Award PhD/Doctorate
- b) Minor corrections needed (see 4.5)
- c) Additional oral examination needed – no further work on the thesis required, or stated minor corrections (see 4.5)
- d) Additional work on the thesis – no oral re-examination needed – Resubmission for PhD/Doctorate (see 4.5)
- e) Substantial Work on Thesis and Oral Re-Examination Needed – Resubmission for PhD/Doctorate (see 4.6)
- f) Award MPhil
- g) Award MPhil following Minor Corrections (see 4.6)
- h) Substantial Work on Thesis Needed before Resubmission and oral examination for MPhil (see 4.6)
- i) Award MSc by Research
- j) Fail

## 4.5 Thesis corrections

The Internal Examiner will certify corrections and the External Examiner may also ask to see corrections before the degree is awarded.

### Minor corrections

After the viva, the examiners may ask students to make minor corrections to the thesis. These may be editorial corrections or to address minor weaknesses before the award is confirmed. Corrections will need to be submitted within three months (or four if a further oral exam is recommended).

### Additional work

After the viva, the examiners may ask students to carry out additional work on the thesis, which may require further supervision. These corrections, which will be stipulated by the examiners, will entail more work than is required for minor corrections. The examiners will set the period within which this work must be submitted, but submission will normally be within six months.

## 4.6 Thesis resubmission

Following the viva, the examiners may ask students to carry out further work on the thesis and to resubmit it for the same or a different degree. If resubmission for a different degree is recommended, the examiners may require minor corrections (see 4.5) or more substantial work on the thesis. Where more substantial work is required the examiners will stipulate what is needed and set a period for resubmission. Supervisors will guide students through the necessary steps to meet the examiners' requirements and continue to provide supervision as needed.

Students will get a clear written statement from the examiners, approved by the College Committee, of what revisions are required.

The examiners will assess the resubmitted thesis against the written statement on re-examination, and will not introduce any new criticisms of previously examined material.

The College Office will be able to advise on the resubmission process.

## 4.7 Final thesis submission

After students have successfully completed their thesis assessment, they must submit the final electronic copy of their thesis to the College Office. An electronic copy must also be deposited with the Library. More information on final thesis submission is available from the College Office. Information on electronic submission is available from the Library.

[How to submit the final version of your PhD thesis](#)



# 5. Absences and concessions

Sometimes students may need to have time away from the University or from their studies.

This section gives advice on ways the University can support students through a variety of situations that may impact on their study.

## 5.1 Leave of absence

Students studying on campus in Edinburgh sometimes need to conduct part of their research away from Edinburgh. This is referred to as a leave of absence. Students who want a leave of absence should talk to their Principal Supervisor, who will be able to advise on obtaining permission.

A leave of absence should:

- Be related to the research programme.
- Not be detrimental to the research and the student's development and participation in the University's academic community.
- Not conflict with any other requirement of the student's programme of study.
- Not conflict with any obligations for the student to be available for on-campus activity.
- Have a working timetable agreed by supervisors and student.
- Be accompanied by an agreed method for submitting written work

and receiving feedback, and for supervisory meetings, established by the supervisors and student.

- Be consistent with any funder requirements.

Further information on how leave of absence is approved, and student support arrangements during leave, is available from the College Office. Leave of absence does not apply to students on recognised distance learning programmes.

### Leave of absence for international students

Student visa holders are normally expected to carry out all of their study on campus in Edinburgh. However, in some cases they may need to study at another location; for compulsory and optional activities related to their programme. In these cases, students should apply for a leave of absence. The University will continue to sponsor student visas during the leave of absence, providing it can maintain sponsor licence duties, and student visas will remain valid. Leave of absence for reasons that are not directly related to studies are not permitted under the conditions of Student visas. Advice is available from [the Student Immigration Service](#).

## 5.2 Interruptions of study

Authorised interruption of study, usually referred to as “interruption”, is available for students who are unable to study for a while. This may be because of health or family problems for example, and students should notify their supervisor as soon as the need for an interruption arises. Following discussion with their supervisor, students are responsible for completing and submitting a form to request the interruption. Interruptions will be authorised when there is good reason and examples of what is considered good reason are given in the University policy on authorised interruptions of study.

Information on how to request an interruption, important considerations and where to find further advice are available in the Authorised Interruption of Study Policy.

[University policy on Authorised Interruption of Study](#)

An interruption of study may have an impact on Student visa holders. Advice is available from the Student Immigration Service.

[Student Immigration Service](#)

## 5.3 Extensions of study

The University expects that the thesis will be submitted for assessment within the period stated in the programme handbook. Extensions to this period are available in exceptional circumstances and must be agreed by the Postgraduate Director or Head of Graduate School and approved by the College Committee. For example, an extension may be available if unforeseen difficulties beyond the student’s control, have held up the research or completion of the thesis. A

strong case is required, including a plan for completion, and must be supported by the Principal Supervisor.

To request an extension:

- The Principal Supervisor submits the request.
- The academic reasons for the extension, are stated in the request.
- A plan of work towards submitting the thesis, with milestones and specific dates agreed with the Principal Supervisor is included in the request.

Important things to consider when requesting an extension:

- It must be made before the end of the student’s maximum submission date (for example, within four years for a full-time PhD).
- It may have an impact on Student visa holders.
- It may have an impact on student funding.
- It may have an impact on council tax (for example discounts and exemptions).
- There are restrictions to the amount of time that can be requested for extension – these are set out in the Postgraduate Degree Regulations.
- Additional fees will be incurred if an extension of study request is approved – see the University’s [tuition fees policy](#).

For further information and advice:

For Student visa holders – [Student Immigration Service](#)

[The Advice Place](#) – free, impartial advice for students

University [Postgraduate Degree Regulations](#)



## 5.4 Adverse circumstances affecting studies and assessment

Sometimes students will experience exceptional circumstances beyond their control that significantly impact on their research performance, attendance or assessment submissions.

The University has a Special Circumstances Policy which applies to taught components of a programme. However, for most postgraduate research students, the University offers other support mechanisms if they are experiencing circumstances that affect their ability to engage with their studies.

Students should discuss any circumstances affecting their ability to engage with their studies with their Principal Supervisor first.

Support for students with adverse circumstances that are disrupting their studies can be offered through authorised interruption or extension of study (see sections 5.2 and 5.3). However, there may be times when personal circumstances affect a student's ability to participate in an assessment, for example annual progression review or viva. If these are affected, it may be possible to reschedule or change the format of the meeting or exam.

The College Committee may also take into account any exceptional circumstances when considering recommendations from an annual progression review or oral exam. Therefore, it is important that students notify their Principal Supervisor, Postgraduate Director or Postgraduate Adviser in writing of any exceptional circumstance before the relevant assessment (for example annual progression review or viva) or the College Committee meeting.

Examples of circumstances that might have a significant impact include:

- Significant short-term physical illness or injury.
- Significant short-term mental ill-health.
- A long-term or chronic physical health condition, which has recently worsened temporarily or permanently.
- A long-term or chronic mental health condition, which has recently worsened temporarily or permanently.
- Death or serious illness of a person with whom the student has a close relationship.
- A long-term relationship breakdown, such as a marriage.
- Exceptional (non-routine) caring responsibilities.
- Experience of sexual harassment or assault.
- Experience of other types of harassment.
- Victim of a crime which is likely to have significant emotional impact.
- Military conflict, natural disaster, or extreme weather conditions.
- Severe financial difficulties.
- Exposure to a difficult/challenging home environment.
- Exceptional and significant change in employment commitments, where this is beyond the student's control.
- Significant problems with access to teaching and learning materials, for example due to connectivity, power, or equipment issues.
- Catastrophic technical failure preventing submission of an online assessment by the relevant deadline.
- Lack of access to library resources where there are no viable alternatives.

Examples of circumstances that are unlikely to be accepted include:

- A long-term or chronic health condition (including mental ill-health) which has not worsened recently, or for which the University has already made a reasonable adjustment.
- A minor short-term illness or injury (for example, a common cold), which would not reasonably have had a significant adverse impact on assessment.
- Occasional low mood, stress or anxiety.
- Circumstances which were foreseeable or preventable.
- Holidays.
- Financial issues.
- Pressure of academic work (unless this contributes to ill-health).
- Poor time-management.
- Lack of awareness of dates or times of assessment submission or examination.
- Commitments to paid or voluntary employment.

For taught courses taken by postgraduate research students, the University's Special Circumstances Policy applies.

[University's Special Circumstances Policy](#)

## 5.5 Withdrawal from studies

Withdrawal from studies is a voluntary decision by the student. Any student may withdraw from the University at any point in the year. There may be situations where it is possible for students to return to study, however, before applying to withdraw, students are strongly advised to consult their Principal Supervisor and to consider the implications of withdrawal. More information is available in:

The University's [Procedure for Withdrawal and Exclusion from Studies](#)

## 5.6 Exclusion from studies

While it is very rare for students to be excluded from study, there are some circumstances in which the University will consider this option. These include:

- Where a student has not demonstrated satisfactory academic progress at an annual progression review.
- Where a student has not submitted a thesis by the end of their maximum period of study.
- Where a student has not met any engagement requirements as set out in their programme handbook.

A student who has been excluded for lapse of time may ask the College to reinstate their registration at a later date to permit examination of a completed thesis.

More information about all the potential grounds for exclusion is available in:

The University's [Procedure for Withdrawal and Exclusion from Studies](#)

## 5.7 Vacation leave

Students can take up to eight weeks' vacation time in a year, with agreement from their supervisor. There is no need to apply for an interruption of study when taking vacation leave.



## 5.8 Student maternity, parental and other leave

Students who are pregnant, about to become a parent or guardian, or adopt a child during their study should let their supervisor know so they can provide academic advice. Flexible arrangements, such as time off, modifications to attendance or interruption of study, can be put in place to support students who are to become parents and more information is available in the University student maternity policy. Students may also be entitled to leave on compassionate grounds which for students funded by a scholarship may be paid leave. Students should contact their Graduate School for further information.

[The University's Student Maternity and Family Leave Policy](#)

## 6. Other support and information

The University offers a wide range of support services, resources and information, including academic support, wellbeing resources and skills training.

### 6.1 Resolving problems

Supervisors are the first point of contact for students if any problems arise and will either be able to offer advice themselves or direct the student to other sources of advice.

There may be times when students feel unable to confide in their supervisors. If so, they can get in touch with the Postgraduate Adviser if their subject area has one, or the School's Postgraduate Director. Contact details of key School staff are available in the programme handbook. If the problem cannot be resolved by them, the student may then consult with the Secretary or Chair of the College Committee.

Supervisors can also seek help in resolving problems by the same routes.

### 6.2 Programme handbooks

The School Office will provide students with their programme handbook. Programme handbooks are an important source of information for students. They are part of the University's academic governance framework and include programme-specific information on:

- Supervision arrangements.
- Thesis requirements.
- Research skills training.
- Professional development.
- Teaching opportunities.
- Research culture.

Handbooks also include information on programme organisation, assessment and feedback, key contacts and locations, student support services, opportunities for students to provide feedback on their experiences, attendance requirements, student representation structure, data protection and health and safety information.



## 6.3 Student support services

The University, Colleges, Schools and Students' Association provide a comprehensive range of support services to enable students to make the most of their time as part of the University community. Many student support units offer online as well as face to face services, although the range accessible to distance students may differ from those for on-campus students.

### 6.3.1 Students' Association

All students, including Postgraduate Research (PGR) students, automatically become members of the Students' Association when they join the University. As members, PGR students have access to a wide range of activities and services including student representation, student-led societies and peer support groups, and our free and impartial Advice Place.

For more information, visit [www.eusa.ed.ac.uk](http://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk), email [reception@eusa.ed.ac.uk](mailto:reception@eusa.ed.ac.uk), or visit our Welcome Desk at Potterrow.

#### The Advice Place

The Advice Place is a free, impartial and confidential advice service open to all students and run by the Students' Association. Their professional advisors can offer advice and support on a range of topics including funding, accommodation, access to healthcare, and academic life.

For more information on the advice available and how to access the service, visit [www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/adviceplace](http://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/adviceplace) or email [advice@eusa.ed.ac.uk](mailto:advice@eusa.ed.ac.uk).

#### Student voice

The Students' Association supports over 1500 student representatives who ensure that students have a voice at the University and create positive change on

the issues that matter to students.

Each year, student representatives are elected or volunteer, and after receiving training from the Students' Association, they work with staff across the University to enhance their student experience.

PGR students are encouraged to engage with student representation – whether by volunteering as a representative, engaging in elections, or providing feedback to their representatives – to ensure that the Students' Association and the University are responding effectively to the concerns of PGR students.

For more information on student voice, visit [www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/yourvoice](http://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/yourvoice) or email [makeachange@eusa.ed.ac.uk](mailto:makeachange@eusa.ed.ac.uk).

### 6.3.2 Career development

Research graduates enter many different careers both within and out of higher education. To ensure students make satisfying, well-informed career decisions the University encourages PGRs to explore their career options, and to consider their career priorities throughout their study, in the context of professional and personal priorities, throughout their study.

Early engagement with career thinking will enable postgraduate research students to develop further as researchers, and prepare for future success, whatever their career trajectory. PGR students should be encouraged to take advantage of the many opportunities they will have to gain experience, develop skills, access relevant training, engage with employers, and build their professional networks to prepare for their future career. Students are encouraged to reflect on and record their experiences so they can consider areas of strength and interest, which will help them to identify suitable professional development opportunities and to make a successful career transition.

Supplementing this with rigorous and ongoing reflection will help them appraise career options, and assess their own suitability in the context of skills, values and strengths.

PGR students can get support with every aspect of career management, culminating in a successful job search and application strategies. Students can expect: bespoke career management programmes, tailored workshops and webinars, access to employer events and fairs, as well as individual career consultations.

[Careers Services: PhDs and MRes Students](#)

### **6.3.3 English language tuition**

English Language Education (ELE) provides a number of opportunities for research students to develop their English academic language and literacies. Research students can benefit from a range of ELE courses at different stages of their PhD journey. In the earliest stages, they can choose general, introductory courses, suitable for all University of Edinburgh students. As they progress through their first year of study, they can begin to follow writing courses specifically aimed at research students, which aim to help them extend their knowledge of academic language, as well as exploring text structure, academic conventions, and examiner expectations. Supervisors can refer students to any ELE course, if they wish them to be prioritised for places. ELE also offers bookable one-to-one tutorials in their Graduate Writing Centre. For supervisors, ELE provides seminars (in collaboration with IAD), which aim to provide them with ideas and tools to help their students develop their academic writing.

[General information on ELE](#)

[Courses for PGR students](#)

[Graduate Writing Centre](#)

### **6.3.4 Library collections and services**

A wide range of library services, collections and study spaces are provided to support both taught and research elements of students' work. Collections include print and digital books and journals, rare books and special collections, artworks, images, museum items and archives. Digital and print library resources are available for students based in Edinburgh. In addition to electronic resources, printed library materials are digitised where possible for students undertaking online or distance learning.

[Library services](#)

[Using the Library for online learning](#)

### **Academic Support Librarians**

There is an Academic Support Librarian allocated to each School. Their role is to:

- Provide advice and assistance on using library services and collections.
- Demonstrate the use of information resources by arranging subject-specific information skills sessions.
- Help students' with research by arranging one-to-one advice sessions.
- Advise on research data management.

[Academic Support Librarians](#)

### **Centre for Research Collections**

The Centre for Research Collections (CRC) is the only place in the UK where researchers can access material from across collection types; from medieval manuscripts to contemporary art.

[Centre for Research Collections](#)

### 6.3.5 Computing resources

Information Services (IS) provides a wide range of advice on all aspects of computing and IT.

[IS information for students](#)

[IS information for researchers and teaching staff](#)

#### Email

All students are provided with a University email account and this is used as the official means of communication.

[University policy on the use of email for contacting students](#)

#### Computing facilities

Schools will ensure that students have access to specialised computing facilities where required, and receive appropriate training. Training will cover how to access and use computing facilities relevant to particular degree programmes and research projects.

The Research Data Service offers tools, support and training to students working with research data. Solutions for research data management and all of their data-related requirements.

[Research Data Service](#)

Research Support in the Information Services Group (ISG) offers everything students need to know about managing and publishing their research.

[Research support](#)

### 6.3.6 Disability and Learning Support Service

The Disability and Learning Support Service provides information and advice to disabled students and staff supporting disabled students. The Service:

- Determines a range of reasonable adjustments based on assessment of student needs.
- Supports students to apply for Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) or University funding if funded support is required.
- Provides a range of student support assistants (for example notetaker, library assistant, proofreader, mental health mentor, Specific Learning Differences Tutor).
- Advises supervisors and professional services staff on supporting disabled students and specific support adjustments to study, examination and assessment procedures.

Students with conditions that will impact on study should contact the Disability and Learning Support Service as soon as possible. (\*Includes dyslexia, long term mental health problems, students on the autistic spectrum, as well as physical and sensory impairments.)

[Disability and Learning Support Service](#)

Regulations on “Reasonable Adjustments” to assessments for disabled students are included in the University’s assessment regulations.

[Postgraduate Assessment Regulations for Research Degrees](#)

## 6.4 Wellbeing support services

Postgraduate research study can be stressful at times. To support students to manage their wellbeing, the University provides a variety of services.

The fully accessible Health and Wellbeing Centre is based in Bristo Square and houses the Student Counselling and Disability and Learning Support Service, the University Medical Centre and an independent Pharmacy. It offers professional one-to-one consultation rooms and a wellbeing lounge for students and staff. The Centre also hosts various wellbeing pop-ups throughout the year, dependent on lockdown restrictions. The Chaplaincy is based next door, who offer a variety of wellbeing support including mindfulness, tai chi, a PhD book club and the 24/7 Listening Service. From 2022/23, each School or Deanery will have a dedicated Wellbeing Adviser to support all cohorts of students.

### 6.4.1 Student Counselling Service

The Student Counselling Service offers one-to-one counselling, workshops and consultation, and training for staff. The service aims to help students work through their difficulty, understand themselves better and find ways of managing their situation. Options are available for meeting online by phone, or email and in person.

[Student Counselling Service](#)

### 6.4.2 Health and wellbeing

Details of a range of services provided for students by the University and throughout Edinburgh for physical and mental wellbeing are available on the University's Student website.

[Health and wellbeing](#)

## 6.5 Research and skills training and support for students

The University provides information, support and training for research, digital and transferable skills. These skills are vital for development as an independent researcher and important for life and career after the degree.

Research, digital and transferable skills are often developed as an integral part of supervision and engagement with the research community. Some students may also be able to access credit-bearing research methods courses and in some cases these are a required part of a student's programme of study.

Digital, transferable and professional skills development training is provided by Colleges, Schools, the Institute for Academic Development (IAD), the Careers Service, the Students' Association, Edinburgh Innovations and Information Services Group.

More information on the range of support available can be found on the Doctoral College web pages.

[Doctoral College](#)

Students whose programmes of studies are delivered in partnership with other universities (for example via Doctoral Training Centres) may also have access to training opportunities delivered through those partnerships. Students also have access to online and University Library skills development resources, and digital skills development resources through LinkedIn Learning, an online skills development service.

[University LinkedIn Learning information pages](#)

Students are strongly encouraged to take the initiative in their own development and record their portfolio of skills, including:

- Attendance on regular training and development opportunities in accordance with their personal development needs and the demands of their research.
- Use of online training to develop research, digital and transferable skills.
- Use of the library and online resources.
- Engagement with the research community including presenting at seminars, tutoring and demonstrating, producing publications and attending conferences.

The Institute for Academic Development (IAD) website also provides some useful information on doctoral skills development, including a training needs assessment.

#### [IAD Doctoral researchers website](#)

Annual progression reviews take account of what training and development opportunities students have undertaken and offer an opportunity to discuss future needs.

## **6.6 Training and support for supervisors and examiners**

The University provides training and events to support supervisors in maintaining expertise needed to perform their supervisory role. New supervisors are required to complete the online course, 'Fundamentals of PhD Supervision' and this should be renewed every five years. Additionally, supervisors may be expected to attend a College or

School specific session to discuss local level information and scenarios. Further information on the course is available online.

#### [Fundamentals of PhD Supervision](#)

There is also an online resource, 'Fundamentals of PhD Examination' available to support PhD examiners in developing their understanding of the examination process and their role. There is more information about this here:

#### [Fundamentals of PhD Examination](#)

The Institute for Academic Development (IAD) runs a number of optional sessions for supervisors, which cover topics such as supervising flexibly, supporting international students with writing, using your supervision for teaching accreditation.

Contact the Institute for Academic Development for more information on briefings, events and supervisor support. Email: [iad.phdsupervisors@ed.ac.uk](mailto:iad.phdsupervisors@ed.ac.uk)

The Disability and Learning Support Service runs regular online Mental Health Training sessions for staff and the Student Counselling Service hosts a range of support materials, training videos and e-learning for all staff.

The Doctoral College web pages provide further information on the range of support for supervisors.

#### [Doctoral College](#)

## **6.7 Students working during study**

Work benefits both student and employer, but good self-management is needed to make sure students meet their research commitments. It is also important for students to maintain a good work-life balance.



The University will employ full-time postgraduate research students for no more than an average of 9 hours per week across the academic year (this is University policy), and recommends that students also apply this limit to work with other employers. Students should discuss any proposed employment with their Principal Supervisor.

If students get funding for their research, they must also check whether there are any restrictions or conditions on the amount of work they are allowed to do. Most funders allow some part-time work, particularly in areas relevant to the students' research, and encourage a common sense approach to other paid work.

For Student visa holders, there are additional limits on employment set by the UK Home Office. More information on visa implications for students is available on the University website:

#### Part-time work during studies

More information on combining part-time work with study is available on the Careers Service website:

#### Build experience

The University's Policy for tutors and demonstrators is also available online:

#### Tutors and demonstrators

## **6.8 Fees and funding**

### **6.8.1 Paying fees and fee status**

Student fees and tuition costs are paid to the University Finance Department and more information on paying fees is available on their website. Tuition fee status and discount information is available on the Scholarships and Student Funding website.

#### Student Academic Fees – Finance Department

#### Tuition fees – Scholarships and Student Funding

### **6.8.2 Scholarships and funding**

Information about scholarships and financial support for research students is available on the Scholarships and Student Funding website.

#### Funding for UK students

#### Funding for international students

#### Scholarships and Student Funding

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) is the organisation which brings together the seven UK Research Councils. Their website includes links to UKRI research funding information.

#### UK Research and Innovation

## **6.9 Degree and assessment regulations and other University policies**

Postgraduate research degrees are governed by the University's Postgraduate Degree Regulations. These include regulations on study and submission periods, leave of absence, interruptions, extensions and withdrawal from study. Supervision regulations and the grounds for award of doctoral degrees are also here, as well as additional programme specific regulations.

The Postgraduate Degree Regulations are in the Degree Regulations and Programmes of Study (DRPS) website.

#### DRPS

Research degrees are assessed under the University's Postgraduate Assessment Regulations for Research Degrees. These regulations cover the conduct of assessment, including annual progression reviews, thesis assessment and viva, thesis regulations and assessment decisions.

Some research degrees may contain taught elements and these will be assessed under the University's Taught Assessment Regulations.

#### Postgraduate Assessment Regulations for Research Degrees

#### Taught Assessment Regulations

In addition to these regulations, students must follow all the other University regulations, policies and procedures. The University's student contract encompasses the policies and regulations that support the partnership between students and staff. Students should familiarise themselves with these documents, particularly those that are most likely to be relevant to postgraduate research study.

#### The student contract

## 6.10 Student appeals

The University has an appeals process to allow students to request a review of a decision in relation to progression, degree award, student conduct, fitness to practice or exclusion. Information on the Student Appeal Regulations, arrangements and timescales for submitting an appeal and where to get advice is available on the University website.

## Supervisor role in appeals

A supervisor's pastoral role continues after an appeal is lodged, even though the appeal might question the quality of supervision. After taking appropriate advice, supervisors will decide whether to assist the student in making their appeal case.

#### Appeals

## 6.11 Complaints

The University's Complaint Handling Procedure has two stages. Firstly, students should usually try to resolve any problems locally, by speaking to the appropriate staff member(s) as early as possible. If this does not resolve matters, the student can submit a complaint form (available at the link below) to request that their complaint is investigated at Stage 2 of the procedure. Students are encouraged to talk to the Students' Association Advice Place before submitting a complaint. More information is available on the University website.

#### Complaints

## 6.12 Student conduct

Advice on expected conduct is also available on the University Student website.

#### Student conduct

### 6.12.1 Academic misconduct

Academic misconduct, including plagiarism and cheating, is covered by the Code of Student Conduct. More information is available on the University website.

#### Academic misconduct

## 6.13 Links to useful resources

### **Alphabetical list of links to University regulations, policies, guidance and other useful information.**

[The Advice Place](#) – Edinburgh University Students' Association's professional advice service

[Assessment Regulations](#)

[Authorised Interruption of Study Policy](#)

[Careers Service](#) – information for PhD students

[Centre for Research Collections](#)

[Complaint Procedure](#)

[University Computing: acceptable use policy](#)

[Conduct, Student Code](#)

[Contacting Students by Email Policy](#)

[Data Protection – University policy](#) – includes use of personal data by students

[Degree Regulations and Programmes of Study \(DRPS\)](#)

[Digital Skills Training](#)

[Dignity & Respect Policy](#)

[Disclosure of information about students - guidance](#)

[Edinburgh University Students' Association](#)

[Equality and Diversity](#)

[Glossary of Terms](#) – terms used in the Degree Regulations

[Graduations](#)

[Health and Safety – University policy and codes of practice](#)

[Health and wellbeing](#)

[Including Publications in Postgraduate Research Theses, Guidance](#)

[Lay summary guidance](#)

[Library Regulations](#)

[Mental Health, Student Strategy](#)

[New students' website](#)

[No Smoking - University Policy](#)

[PhD by Research oral examinations by video link](#)

[Plagiarism guidelines](#)

[Postgraduate Research \(PGR\) Annual Progression Review Form software help \(PGR Supervisors\)](#)

[Research support](#)

[Research Data Service](#)

[Research ethics and integrity resources](#)

[Social Media, University Guidelines](#)

[Student website - University](#) (including Health and Wellbeing, Academic Life, Careers, Money and Fees information)

[Student Appeal Regulations](#)

[Student Information Pages](#) (Scholarships and Student Funding, Student Information Points, Timetabling)

[Submitting your final thesis](#)

[Wellbeing resources](#)

[Togetherall](#)

[Feeling Good App](#)

[SilverCloud online cognitive behavioural therapy](#)

### **References**

[UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#)

University of Edinburgh Postgraduate Degree Regulations

University of Edinburgh Postgraduate Assessment Regulations for Research Degrees



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