

## **SUPERVISION: UNDERSTANDINGS AND ARRANGEMENTS**

Once a supervision arrangement has been confirmed, invariably some discussion occurs between supervisor and student about the nature of the research process, the respective roles and responsibilities of the supervisor and student, the purpose and timing of meetings, and forms of support that may be available. Early discussion about such matters will help ensure that a successful working relationship is quickly established and then maintained.

To help ensure that an appropriate range of matters are discussed, the following 'Guidelines for Negotiating Supervision' can be used. These guidelines were developed by Adele Graham and Barbara Grant at the University of Auckland drawing on the experiences of supervisors and postgraduate students. The guidelines provide a possible agenda for discussion which is constructed in the form of a series of questions. The questions that are addressed will take into account the background and previous experiences of the student. Some arrangements may need to be re-negotiated on the way through the process.

### **SUPERVISOR/STUDENT UNDERSTANDINGS**

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#### **What is supervision**

- What is the purpose of supervision?
- What style of supervision would each of us prefer?
- What are some of the myths about supervision that it might be useful for us to talk about?
- Have you seen the University's list of mutual responsibilities for supervisor and student (Handbook for Research Degrees of MPhil, PhD and EdD at the University of Waikato pp 16-18)

#### **What is a thesis?**

- What does "thesis" mean?
- What form should a thesis proposal have?
- What is the appropriate structure of a thesis?
- What is the appropriate length?
- What referencing conventions should I follow?
- What is the difference between a thesis that passes and one that is first class?
- What are some titles of good thesis examples in this field?
- What is meant by "originality"?
- Who owns papers arising during and after thesis supervision?

#### **Meetings**

- How long shall we meet and for how long?
- Where shall we meet?
- Who has responsibility to initiate meetings (if not scheduled regularly)?

- What is the protocol for when one person can't make the meeting?

### **Advice and support**

- Development of the research proposal: how much input will the supervisor/s give; how will this proceed?
- Expectations of feedback: how much, how often, in what form, with how much notice?
- Support with theoretical content eg resources, contacts: how much can be expected, given the supervisor's knowledge of the area?
- What other kinds of knowledge are needed eg of the research process, of academic writing etc – what resources does the supervisor know of, how much help can s/he give?
- Are there relevant personal circumstances that might make the supervision or completion of the thesis difficult eg student suffering financial hardship or experiencing relationship difficulties or supervisor going on sabbatical, expecting a baby.

### **Managing the Process**

- What are the different stages in the research process?
- How long should each stage take to complete?
- Will goal-setting be part of our discussion during meetings?
- What would be a realistic completion date in view of our separate commitments and departmental policy?

### **Monitoring the effectiveness of our supervision**

- How will we do this along the way?

### **Resolution of problems**

- If problems arise, how will we raise them with one another?
- If we can't resolve them, what procedure is available within the Department?
- Has the student seen the information on 'Resolution of problems' in the Handbook for Research Degrees? (p30)

### **Joint Supervisors**

- What contributions will be made by each supervisor?
- Given the relative contributions of each supervisor, what model of joint supervisor will work best (eg co-supervisors, primary and secondary; primary and advisors/committee; primary and back-up)
- If the model is co-supervision, who will organise our joint meetings?
- If there is disagreement between joint supervisors about some issue arising from my work, how is this to be resolved?

**Examination of the thesis:**

- Will the supervisor be one of the examiners?
- How many examiners will there be?
- How will the examiners be selected? Can the student have any input into this decision?
- What do examiners look for in a thesis?

**Any other issues relating to supervisor/student understandings?****DEPARTMENTAL EXPECTATIONS & RESOURCES**

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Many departments publish a postgraduate handbook which usually includes information about many of the matters below. Before raising these questions with your supervisor, read the handbook and answer as many as you can.

**What access does the student have to**

- a study place, pigeon-hole etc?]
- tea/coffee facilities?
- photocopying, inter-loan fees etc?
- paid work eg tutoring?
- computer?
- funding/research grants? If available, how do I apply? What are the deadlines? Who can I contact for more information?
- support services eg technical, secretarial?

**What expectations does the department have of the student?**

- submission deadline?
- seminar presentation of thesis in progress?
- what else?

**UNIVERSITY REQUIREMENTS**

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Again, check your department's and School's postgraduate handbook as well as the University Calendar (or website) for this information. Note that you are expected to know the relevant regulations. However, your supervisor can help you to find out.

## **Extensions and deferment**

- What is the official; deadline for submitting my thesis?
- What are the protocols for extensions and deferment?
- In the event that I need an extension over the summer, or beyond, what will the position be regarding supervision?

## **Resolving Grievances**

What university level channels are available in the event that one of us is not happy with the progress of the supervision and the department cannot or is inappropriate to resolve this?

## **Research Ethics**

- What ethical issues need to be considered in the research project?
- Do I need to apply for consent from an appropriate ethics committee?
- How much input does the supervisor have into the application?
- When does the relevant Ethics committee next meet?

## **Other university-level issues?**

## **REFERENCE**

Guidelines for Negotiating Supervision

Adele Graham and Barbara Grant (Centre for Professional Development)  
The University of Auckland, 2nd Edition.  
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