

RESEARCH SUPERVISION

1. A BRIEF GUIDE TO THE ROLES OF RESEARCH STUDENTS AND SUPERVISORS

The primary purpose of a research degree programme in the Department of Materials is to enhance and develop your knowledge in a specific area of research, and to equip you with the research and transferable skills needed to become an independent researcher, or to prepare you to be able to adapt the skills you have learnt to pursue a career in other fields. Our aim is to provide you with an excellent educational experience, which should also be enjoyable as well as requiring diligent and focussed work. To achieve this result, both supervisors and students need to be clear about their respective roles and responsibilities. This note provides a brief guide to these roles. If you have any questions about the roles described below, do discuss these with your Responsible Supervisor or the Director of Graduate Studies.

● ***The role of the Responsible Supervisor (and in some cases the supervisory team) is to:***

1. Establish a timetable of regular meetings for detailed discussion of your progress (these meetings should take place at least once every two weeks averaged across the year)
2. Agree a research plan and programme of work, and to establish clear academic expectations and milestones
3. Agree with you a timetable for the submission of any written work and to return your work within a reasonable time
4. Advise you of your department's health and safety regulations. Supervisors are responsible for all aspects of safety under their control, and in particular for the safe conduct of all experiments carried out in the course of their student's research

5. Assess formally your subject-specific and personal and professional skills training needs on a regular basis and ensure you are aware of the opportunities available to meet these needs. A full review of your skills training needs should be carried out each year with your supervisor
6. Write a quarterly report on your progress on the Graduate Supervision Reporting (GSR) system
7. Ensure you are aware of the formal requirements in relation to transfer and confirmation of status and final submission, and help you to incorporate these into your plan of work
8. Inform the Department's Director of Graduate Studies of any concerns about your progress, attendance or other needs

● ***The role of the Student is to:***

1. Meet with your supervisor regularly and give due weight to any guidance or corrective action proposed, keeping a written record of your discussions where appropriate
2. Draw up a research plan and timetable of work in consultation with your supervisor, and to keep relevant records of all aspects of your work
3. Reflect and report on your progress at the end of each quarter using the Graduate Supervision Reporting system (GSR)
4. Take ultimate responsibility for your research programme, including the development of subject-specific, research, personal and professional skills
5. Carry out research with proper regard to good health and safety practices

6. Be aware of the University's guidance on plagiarism and of any ethical or legal issues, health and safety requirements, or intellectual property issues arising from your research
7. Pursue opportunities to engage with the wider academic community at University, national and international level
8. Inform your supervisor immediately if you need to be away from the Department, for example if you are ill.
9. Inform the Department's Director of Graduate Studies of any concerns about your progress, attendance or other needs

The MPLS Division's detailed Code of Practice on the Supervision of Graduate Research Students is provided as Appendix (VIII) to your Materials Graduate Student Handbook and also is available at <http://www.mpls.ox.ac.uk/graduate-school/information-for-postgraduate-research-students/supervision>.

Also important is Section 5 of the University Education Committee's Policy on Research Degrees (**Responsibilities of the students**)
<https://academic.admin.ox.ac.uk/policies/research-degrees/section-five>.

The Department's statement of provision for a research student is provided as Appendix (VII) to your Materials Graduate Student Handbook.

2. RESEARCH SUPERVISION & SUPPORT

[This information is also provided in Section 3 of the Materials Graduate Student Handbook 2023-24; references below to 'sections' refer to sections within the Handbook]

An effective relationship and good communication between you and your supervisor(s) is key to the smooth progress of your DPhil. You will be supervised by a single Supervisor or two or more Co-supervisors (for the case where projects involve expertise in more than one area). One of these supervisors will be designated as your **Responsible Supervisor** with primary responsibility to the Department for guiding your academic progress and providing pastoral care. You may also have an Associate Supervisor (typically a researcher with less than 3 years' experience at post-doctoral level). You could have an External Supervisor, for example if your project involves collaboration with another university or an industrial company or laboratory. Your supervisor(s) will be your main source of information and advice throughout the course of your research. Their responsibilities include:

- (i) planning the framework of your research programme (in the light of the programme structure discussed in [section 4](#));
- (ii) advising you about lecture courses, both specialist and broadening (see [section 6.1](#));
- (iii) advising you about transferable 'career skills' and more generally about skills-training courses, including those on research techniques (see [section 6.2](#));
- (iv) advising you about safety;
- (v) advising you about literature sources;
- (vi) regularly meeting with you to discuss your work;
- (vii) keeping you informed of your progress (both informally and through the formal report submitted to the University (GSR) at the end of each quarter,

taking into account the project management forms submitted at regular intervals to the Department by you (see [section 5](#));

- (viii) advising you about the content of written submissions such as your literature review, first year progress report, 2nd year talk, 3rd year poster and your thesis;
- (ix) advising you about the 'milestone' progression examinations (transfer of status and confirmation of status);
- (x) offering informal guidance on careers;
- (xi) providing pastoral care.

Continuation on the course depends on your satisfactory progress, so you should take very seriously any warnings expressed by your supervisor(s) that you are not working as well as you ought. You should also bring to their attention, in good time, any problems that are significantly affecting your progress whether academic or personal, before the situation becomes too serious. The University, Department and College carefully monitor the progress you make with your project, and copies of your supervisor(s) reports will be available to the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) and to your College Tutor for Graduates plus your College Advisor. **If you have significant concerns, of any kind, do not just tick a box on the GSR report, in addition please arrange to meet the DGS (Dr Adrian Taylor). Remember too that you can meet with Adrian at any time during your DPhil / MSc(Res), not just at the time of the quarterly GSR reports.**

It occasionally happens during the course of a research degree that relations between the student and the supervisor(s) can become strained, perhaps due to differences in opinion as to the direction in which the research should proceed. You will, therefore, be assigned a **Department Advisor** who is reasonably familiar with the field of your research and to whom you can turn for independent advice. Remember that your Department Advisor should be someone other than any of your supervisors: during your first two weeks in the Department

you need to agree with your supervisor(s) who should be your Advisor and who should be your **Deputy Supervisor** (see [Section 2](#)); if you have a sole supervisor then your Department Advisor also takes the role of Deputy Supervisor.

Of course, your **Director of Graduate Studies** (DGS) and members of the Graduate Studies Committee (see [section 15](#)) are also always available for a confidential chat. In addition, you might like to seek advice from your **College Advisor** (who will be assigned by College) or your College Tutor for Graduates. Please note that your College Advisor must not be one of your supervisors.

The Department and Colleges all work together to ensure that your time here in Oxford is as trouble free as possible. It is a good idea to meet your advisors during your first term as a probationary research student. Informal advice is available from your **JCCG representatives**. Finally, as explained at Induction, the Department has a zero tolerance policy towards harassment and several members of staff are designated, trained **Anti-Harassment Advisors** who will treat any issues you raise with them in strict confidence.

As described in subsequent sections of this Handbook, during your research programme there are two formal 'milestone' progress assessments, the Transfer of Status exam (DPhil and MSc) and the Confirmation of Status Exam (DPhil only). Your supervisor must name four members of the Faculty of Materials who could act as your Lead Assessor for these exams – the DGS will select one of these to take on the role.

Once you have agreed, in consultation with your supervisor(s), on your Department Advisor, Deputy Supervisor and candidates for the role of your Lead Assessor, you must inform the **Materials Graduate Studies Office**. You do this by entering the names on the 'New Graduate Student' on-line Questionnaire, a condensed specimen copy of which is included as an appendix to the present handbook. Make sure you complete all the items on this on-line form and submit it by the end of Week 4 of your first term for review by the Materials Graduate Studies Office. Remember too to save a pdf copy of the on-line submission and upload it to your folder in the 'Materials: PGR Progression' on-line site.

If you become concerned that your working relationship with your Responsible Supervisor has shortcomings and matters do not improve in the course of a few weeks you are encouraged to discuss your concerns with the DGS, Adrian Taylor, without delay. This discussion may be in strict confidence if that is your preference.

Information on the expectations and responsibilities of research supervision, and guidance on fulfilling these, is available as follows:

1. The Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences Divisional Code of Practice on the Supervision of Research Students can be found via the link within the webpage <http://www.mpls.ox.ac.uk/graduate-school/information-for-postgraduate-research-students/supervision> and in [Appendix VIII](#) of the present Handbook.

2. Very helpful guidance to both students and supervisors can be found at:

(i) The Oxford Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) on-line course and guidance on DPhil Supervision (Sciences) (<https://www.ctl.ox.ac.uk/online-courses>).

(ii) The Vitae guides on ‘Supervising a Doctorate’ at <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/doing-research/supervising-a-doctorate> and ‘Doing a Doctorate’ (supervision and key relationships) at <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/doing-research/doing-a-doctorate/starting-a-doctorate/supervision-and-key-relationships>.

(iii) The Materials JCCG (our staff - graduate student liaison committee) usually run an annual student-led course in Michaelmas Term, ‘Owning a Successful DPhil’, which includes guidance on the supervisory relationship. All probationer research students in Materials are strongly recommended to attend either this course or the MPLS course in (vii) below.

(iv) The University of Oxford Education Committee’s (EdC) ‘Policy on Research Degrees’ (<https://academic.web.ox.ac.uk/files/policyandguidanceresearchdegrees2022finalforpublicationpdf>). Within this document please see in particular the ‘**Responsibilities of the Student**’ section, which you can read at the end of Appendix VIII of the present Handbook.

(v) The Quality Assurance Agency's Assuring and Enhancing Academic Quality (<https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code>), see: Advice and Guidance - Research Degrees (<https://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/the-quality-code/advice-and-guidance/research-degrees>)

(vi) The UKRI Statement of Expectations for Postgraduate Training (<https://www.ukri.org/publications/statement-of-expectations-for-postgraduate-training/>).