

Models of Supervision in UCC

Supervision of Research students at UCC

Each research student (Masters or Doctoral) requires supervision by experienced members of academic or research staff who are responsible for the overall direction of the student's research programme, manage administrative issues relating to the student's registration and progress, and support the student in preparation for examination and publication of their thesis work.

From October 2017 onwards, all PhD students **and** all Masters' by Research students will have either:

Type A Model of Supervision

This consists of two or more staff members with significant responsibility for the direction of the student's research, or

Type B Model of Supervision

This consists of a sole supervisor plus an advisor.

The overall priority is to provide the best supervision for all research students throughout their research programme.

It is recognised that the above models are complemented by the current UCC process for reviews of the progress of research students, through which a Progress Review Panel including staff members other than the supervisor(s) reviews and gives feedback on a student's progress in the period under review. As well as recognising good progress and providing formative feedback and encouragement for the students under review, these reviews present a key opportunity to identify and suggest measures for resolving problems which may arise. However, the role of such reviews on a punctuated basis (e.g., annually) is different from the presence of ongoing and continuous input and support through team supervision or the input of an Advisor.

(Type A) Team Supervision Model

In scenario (A), more than one member of academic or research staff is named at approval stage as being responsible for the guidance of the research project of a research student (i.e., the student has 2 or more **co-supervisors**). A co-supervisor may be external to UCC (e.g., in another university, industry or a research organization). Co-supervisors may also provide specialist advice and ensure continuity of supervision when one supervisor is absent from the University.

This type of supervisory team may involve two or more staff members, from the same or different academic units and each member of the supervisory team bears significant responsibility for direction of the student's research. The frequency of meetings, distribution of tasks etc. should be agreed by members of the supervisory team at the outset with the student. The relative contribution made by individual supervisors should be clearly outlined for workload allocation purposes and also to recognise supervisory input for promotion and, where appropriate, authorship of publications¹. In all cases, one supervisor will be named as being responsible for administrative issues relating to the students' registration, progress and examination. This must be a member of UCC staff where external co-supervisors are involved. In the case of inter-departmental or inter-disciplinary co-supervision, the supervisor with this responsibility should be from the School/Department which is responsible for the reviews of progress for the student concerned.

In cases where the contribution of one staff member to supervision is very limited (e.g., they are contributing expertise relating to a certain specific aspect of the research project) the term co-supervisor may not be appropriate and such a contribution may be best recognised in other ways, e.g., through co-authorship of publications to which that staff member has contributed.

This model of team supervision is encouraged in all cases and **must apply** in the following cases:

1. **where a proposed supervisor for a Masters or PhD student has not previously supervised or co-supervised a Masters or PhD to graduation.**² Team supervision will enable new or inexperienced supervisors to have the support and guidance of an experienced supervisor during their first few years in the role, i.e., a named member of staff who can guide them on the important aspects of supervisory practice, and who should also have experience in the broad research field concerned. Co-supervisors should be established supervisors who have experience of supervising one or more research students to successful completion of their degree and who have a good understanding of University policies and procedures concerning research students. Inexperienced staff may also gain experience through co-supervising the student of an experienced supervisor, while bringing expertise to the benefit of the

¹ Attribution of authorship in publications should be in-line with UCC's Code of Research Conduct <https://www.ucc.ie/en/media/research/researchatucc/documents/UCCCodeofResearchConduct.pdf>

² According to the revised UCC Probation and Establishment scheme (applying to new staff appointed after September 2009), co-supervision of research students will be required for staff with no or limited previous experience, and particularly where the students' period of study will be longer than the duration of Establishment.

student in question, and benefitting from the mentoring of the more experienced supervisor;

2. **where the proposed supervisor is not a permanent member of staff.** In such cases, a co-supervisor who is a permanent staff member must be appointed. Co-supervision should also apply in cases of permanent staff members who would be retiring within the timeframe of the project concerned;
3. **where the proposed supervisor does not have a doctoral degree (in the case of PhD supervision)** (except in cases where the Head of Unit is satisfied that the staff member has significant experience of supervision at PhD level and has current and active involvement in research appropriate to the field of study);
4. **where a student is undertaking inter-disciplinary or multi-disciplinary research** involving two (or more) academic units.

The role of Progress Review Panels or Graduate Studies Committees in reviewing the progress of a Research student does not constitute team supervision, as the members of such a panel do not have day-day responsibility for the direction of the student's research. The Progress Review Panel, which is convened for the purposes of annual reviews of a student's progress, must include at least one staff member who is not a member of the student's supervision team.

Some additional points about co-supervision of students are as follows:

1. The co-supervisors play a role throughout the student's study, i.e., the student will meet formally and regularly with their supervisors to set objectives and timelines, and review progress. The supervisors will be specified on the approval form subject to sign-off by the Head of Academic Unit.
2. At the point of consideration of student applications by Heads of Academic Unit, the current workload of the proposed supervisor(s) should be considered to ensure that approval of additional students is not unfair to the staff member or student involved. The number of students that an individual can supervise satisfactorily will vary with the nature and size of the research group, and with the scope of their other duties. In cases where a supervisor wishes to have more than eight full-time equivalent research students at any one time, the Head of

Unit must be satisfied that the research group would be able to support the students;

3. Post-doctoral researchers on temporary contracts may play a role in the supervision of research students, and may be members of a supervisory team, working closely with the research student. This is to be encouraged as such researchers can provide valuable day-to-day research guidance. However, where this occurs, the exact responsibilities of the researcher must be defined and agreed by the student and supervisor/supervisory team. A researcher cannot be a formal member of a supervisory team unless their contract extends beyond the period of registration of the student in question.
4. Co-supervisors may not act as Internal Examiners for a student's thesis.

Type B Advisor Supervision Model

In cases where it is not deemed necessary, either for academic or other reasons as highlighted above, for students to have more than one supervisor, an **Advisor** must be approved (in addition to the supervisor). The role of the Advisor is to act as a point of contact on pastoral, procedural and student support issues. The main role of the Advisor is in pastoral care, in providing a person to whom the research student can go to in order to discuss any issues that they do not wish to discuss with their supervisor. The advisor should also be a point of contact for the student if the supervisor/student relationship breaks down. In this role, the Advisor should be aware of the student support services that the University offers. The Advisor does not offer specialist academic support, but is expected to meet the student twice per year at a minimum. This model of supervision may assist smaller Schools/Departments who may otherwise find it difficult to operate a co-supervision model while satisfying the requirements for independent internal examiners.

The Advisor serves the student in many different ways, including acting as a point of contact within the School/Department. They also act as a guide to the procedures of the research process and administration, and provide students with pastoral direction and information on the various student support services available. They can play a role in induction and integrate and encourage the student to engage in a variety of School/Discipline/Graduate School opportunities. They should also increase and enhance the student contact with staff and other students and advise the student on options that they have in relation to a number of potential difficulties that might arise in the supervisory process. Overall, they provide one additional 'safety net' that should enhance the student experience, retention and time to completion.

The Advisor should be named at the point of approval of a student's application, and any changes during a student's period of registration should be approved in the same way that changes in supervisor are approved. There is no limit as to the number of students for which a staff member can act as Advisor, and indeed it may prove useful for a single staff member to act as Advisor to a cohort or cluster of students. This may be the chair or a member of the local Graduate Studies Committee, but should not be the Head of School/Department.

An Advisor may be an Internal Examiner for one of their advisees unless their input to that point has been significant enough that to act in this role would present a conflict of interest.

Approved by	Date	Review Date
V.1 Academic Board	16-12-09	
V.2 Academic Board	26-10-16	01-10-18