GOOD SUPERVISORY PRACTICE FRAMEWORK

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The **Good Supervisory Practice Framework** acknowledges, for the first time at a **national level**, the **wide-ranging**, **highly complex** and **demanding set of roles** involved in modern research supervisors.

Research supervision is an increasingly complex activity, in which supervisors are having to respond to the growth, diversification and welfare of the PGR candidate population. However, training and development opportunities at many UK universities are limited, sometimes to only half a day (see Taylor 2018). This can leave many supervisors feeling undervalued and overwhelmed by the scale of their task and reduces the scope of those responsible for academic development.

The framework is designed to set expectations for all supervisors and to support supervisor development programmes. The framework is informed by the academic research into doctoral education and has been validated during a pilot study involving research supervisors across the UK.

How to Use this Framework
Supervisors from all academic disciplines and levels of experience will find value in the framework. For some it will reassure them that their practice already includes the activities of effective supervisors, for others it will set a standard of practice to work towards throughout their careers.

While for institutions, often with only small research supervisor development teams, the framework can be used to validate, complement and support their internal development programmes.

The Criteria for Good Supervisory Practice
There are numerous definitions of 'supervisory practice' in the literature (see, for example, Eley and Murray 2009, Wisker 2012, Grant et al 2014, Kearns and Finn 2017, Taylor et al 2018) but each contains all or many of the criteria in the Good Supervisory Practice Framework:

CRITERIA FOR GOOD SUPERVISORY PRACTICE

- Recruitment and selection.
- Supervisory relationships with candidates.
- Supervisory relationships with co-supervisors.
- Supporting candidates' research projects.
- Encouraging candidates to write and giving appropriate feedback.
- Keeping the research on track and monitoring progress.
- Supporting candidates' personal, professional and career development.
- Supporting candidates through completion and final examination.
- Supporting candidates to disseminate their research.
- Reflecting upon and enhancing practice.

Following Brown and Atkins (1988: 115), 'good' practice may be defined as the **set of underpinning attributes** that make '… [supervision] effective.' On this basis 'good' practice can be defined as **the attributes that enable supervisors to be effective** in each of these domains.

The following pages provide **overviews of each attribute** defining good supervisory practice, along with **typical examples of activities** that might be found in that practice.

Recruitment and Selection

Supervisors can be involved in recruitment activities in a number of ways, including publicising the areas within which they can offer supervision and reaching out to under-represented groups.

Supervisors should be involved in the selection of candidates from supporting intending applicants to develop their applications through to making final decisions and giving feedback.

Typical Examples

- Publicising the areas of research within which they personally can offer supervision.
- Participating in campaigns to recruit candidates from groups that are under-represented in doctoral education.
- Assessing whether applicants are likely to make the transition to independent researchers.
- Assessing whether applicants' proposed research projects are realisable and whether they have (or can acquire) the knowledge and skills to complete them.
- Interviewing applicants.
- Making a final decision and giving feedback.

Supervisory Relationships with Candidates

Over the past three decades or so, the candidate population has become much more diverse in its composition, and supervisors need to be aware of this in forming effective relationships with candidates.

In order to do this, there is a need right from the start for supervisors and doctoral candidates to have clear expectations of each other and the first task is to discuss these and, where appropriate, negotiate how they are going to be met.

Also, candidates and supervisors need to be able to work effectively with each other. Because each grouping of individuals is, by definition, unique, then each relationship will be different depending upon the style(s) of the supervisor(s) and the characteristics of the candidate, which need to be aligned at the start to be successful.

That said, the relationship can and indeed should change over the course of time. As candidates move through their doctoral studies, their needs should change, and with that the nature of support that they require from their supervisors.

However, in a few cases, there may be serious issues leading to the potential or actual breakdown of the relationship, for which supervisors need to be prepared and aware of the sources of support both for candidates and themselves.

Typical Examples

- Acknowledging the increased diversity of the candidate population — both domestic and international — and recognizing its implications for supervision.
- Discussing and agreeing expectations with candidates at the start of their studies.
- Being aware of supervisory styles and their relationship to student needs and being able to align them at the start of doctoral studies.
- Being aware of how student needs change over the course of doctoral studies and being able to maintain calibration of supervisory styles.
- Being aware of institutional policies and procedures in the event of the breakdown of a supervisory relationship and of sources of support for both parties.

Supervisory Relationships with Co-Supervisors

Historically, the model has been for candidates to have a single supervisor. But more recently there has been a move to co- or team supervision to enhance the experience of doctoral candidates by reducing their reliance upon a single individual and giving them access to a broader range of expertise and support.

However, co-supervision can have a downside. The involvement of more supervisors in the process can create a potential for disagreement and divergence within the team and leave the candidate trying to navigate different perspectives or advice, to the detriment of their experience.

Typical Examples
- Clarifying roles with co-supervisors and candidates at the start of the candidacy.
- Clarifying expectations of the project with co-supervisors and the candidate.
- Regularly reviewing relations between supervisors and with candidates during the course of the candidacy.

Supporting Candidates' Research Projects

New doctoral candidates may have little or no experience of research, and hence little or no idea of what they are letting themselves in for. Supervisors may then need to induct them into research, including the nature of research itself, the key concepts, what it involves, and of good practice in undertaking it.

Unless the research project itself is pre-determined, supervisors will have a role in advising candidates about their choice of topic and then assisting them to produce a research proposal and to gain ethical approval. Irrespective of the discipline, supervisors will need to make sure that candidates have, or can acquire, the subject-specific knowledge and skills necessary for them to undertake their research topics. These may include the relevant experimental and technological skills to undertake their research projects, in the latter case including information searching, retrieval, storage, and sharing,

If, in these ways, candidates can be started down the slipway, sooner or later they are almost bound to encounter academic problems of one kind or another. It is important that, if and when this happens, supervisors are aware and lend support.

Typical Examples

- Discussing conceptions and misconceptions of research itself with candidates.
- Looking at key 'threshold' concepts in research.
- Considering issues of academic integrity, intellectual property rights, and co-publication.
- Advising on a choice of topic.
- Advising on a research proposal and plan.
- Supporting the candidate in their choice of methodology.
- Advising on gaining ethical approval.
- Advising on skills development in relation to the project.
- Advising on issues arising in the course of the research.

Encouraging Candidates to Write and Giving Appropriate Feedback

Candidates need to produce written work throughout their studies to articulate what they are thinking, to reflect upon their findings, and to gain feedback. But candidates may prove reluctant to write particularly in the early stages and need encouragement and support from their supervisors to do so.

Once they have produced written work, supervisors have to give feedback. It is important that feedback is high-quality and that it enables candidates to progress their research projects.

Typical Examples

- Encouraging candidates to write from the start of their studies.
- Supporting the development of academic writing.
- Giving timely, constructive, and actionable feedback.

Keeping the Research on Track and Monitoring Progress

The days when, because they involved the creation of new knowledge, doctoral degrees took as long as they took are long gone. Globally, research sponsors have put policies in place designed to ensure that candidates to complete their degrees in three or four years of full-time study (or pro rata for part-time). Such policies have usually entailed financial penalties for departments and/or institutions which have failed to hit targets for completion rates and/or times.

In consequence, over the past three decades or so, one of, if not the, the key roles for supervisors have become ensuring as far as possible that candidates complete on time.

Typical Examples
- Supporting and motivating candidates to progress in their studies.
- Using supervisions to monitor progress.
- Participating in formal progression events.

Supporting Candidates' Personal, Professional and Career Development

Doctoral candidates are, of course, people and as such subject to ups and downs in their personal lives. Supervisors need at least to be aware of such issues and help candidates to be aware of the relevant professional services. They also need to recognise that they may be role model for their candidates, including in achieving a work-life balance.

Supervisors also have a responsibility to support the professional development of doctoral candidates in terms of socialization within their disciplinary community and, where appropriate, in undertaking teaching duties in the subject.

Traditionally, such activities helped to support doctoral candidates to prepare for academic careers, and supervisors have had a direct role in informing them about faculty work and life. In recent years, however, only a minority of doctoral graduates have become academics, while the majority have found employment in other spheres. Here, supervisors may have an indirect role in supporting candidates to prepare for non-academic careers.

Typical Examples

- Acting in a pastoral capacity with doctoral candidates.
- Being good role models in terms of work-life balance.
- Inducting candidates into disciplinary networks and activities.
- Supporting their development as teachers.
- Informing them about academic careers.
- Supporting the development of employment-related skills.

Supporting Candidates Through Completion and Final Examination

Once candidates have substantially finished their research projects, they have to produce a submission, usually but not always a thesis. This is likely to be the longest and most difficult piece of work that a candidate has ever undertaken, and supervisors have a key role in supporting them to complete their submissions.

Once candidates have a complete draft, the next issue is whether they should submit it for the degree. While of course there are no guarantees, supervisors need to be able to advise candidates as to the likelihood of the thesis passing, for which they need a clear understanding of the criteria for the award.

In order to support the examination process, it is important that supervisors have a knowledge and understanding of how research degrees are examined, including criteria for the appointment of examiners, examination policies and processes, and outcomes.

In most but not all higher education systems, the examination will involve an assessment of the written submission plus an oral examination. Candidates may be unfamiliar with oral examinations and one role of supervisors can be to help prepare them for their viva.

In many countries, supervisors are debarred from examining their own protégés, and while they may sit in they play no role in the examination itself. Where examiners refer submissions, supervisors may have a role afterwards in terms of supporting candidates to revise their work.

Typical Examples

- Working with candidates to finalise their submissions.
- Advising them on whether the thesis is likely to pass on the basis of your experience as an examiner.
- Roles in appointing examiners.
- Understanding of relevant policies and procedures and outcomes.
- Supporting candidates to prepare for the viva.
- Supporting candidates after the viva.

Supporting Candidates to Disseminate their Research

Giving that completing a doctorate involves making and original contribution to knowledge and understanding, it is vital that the outcomes are made available to the disciplinary and/or professional community for scrutiny and the advancement of research in the subject. One responsibility of supervisors is to support candidates to disseminate their research findings.

Typical Examples

- Setting expectations at the start of the candidacy.
- Modelling the process of publication.
- Encouraging candidates to publish as they go.
- Co-publishing.
- Establishing a post-doctoral publications plan.

Reflecting Upon and Enhancing Practice

If supervisors are to improve their practice, they need to evaluate it, reflect upon it, determine their strengths and weaknesses, build upon the former and address the latter.

As with other areas of academic practice, supervisors should undertake appropriate professional development to enhance their practice, which may include workshops and programmes as well as familiarity with the scholarly literature and its implications for practice.

Where supervisors identify good practice, then wherever possible they should disseminate it for the benefit of others.

Typical Examples

- Using an appropriate mix of methods for evaluating supervision.
- Undertaking initial and continuing professional development.
- Familiarity with the scholarly literature.
- Where appropriate, contributing to the professional development of other supervisors.

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Visit the **Research Supervision Recognition Programme** website:

https://supervision.ukcge.ac.uk

View the full references to the Good Supervisory Practice Framework's **supporting academic literature**, download the **Research Supervision Recognition Programme application pack**, the guide to self-reflection, and find out more about **applying for recognition** of supervisory practice.

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