UCL Academic Manual 2023-24
Chapter 5: Research Degrees Framework

Monitoring the Supervision of Research Students

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Policy/Procedure

Principles

Whilst the demands of the components of academic roles change over time, UCL expects the highest levels of performance from all academic staff. In terms of research student supervision this includes the need to comply with UCL's Code of Practice for Graduate Research Degrees and the academic regulations for research degree students in the Academic Manual.

Research student supervision is an integral part of an academic role at UCL and in order to meet UCL's expectations, it is important that academic staff are provided proper support and feedback on their performance in this respect and that the quality of student supervision is monitored.

The Head of Department/Division has overall responsibility for the welfare and academic progress of graduate students in the Department, including research student supervision. If a Head of Department has serious concerns about the overall quality of research student supervision being provided by a member of academic staff they may, having followed due process, withdraw the eligibility of the academic to supervise students, transfer students to other supervisors, and not allow the acceptance of new students by the individual concerned.

In the case of breakdown of relations between a supervisor and an individual research student, and in other such cases where a transfer of supervisor is desirable in individual circumstances, the Departmental Graduate Tutor (DGT), in liaison with the Faculty Graduate Tutor (FGT) and Head of Department as necessary, may arrange the appointment of a replacement supervisor.

Monitoring of research student supervision

The supervision of research students is monitored by the Departmental Graduate Tutor who will keep the Head of Department informed of any breaches of the Code of Practice and regulations.

Dealing with concerns regarding the quality of supervision

Where concerns about research supervision performance arise, they must be raised with the individual concerned by the Departmental Graduate Tutor in an informal discussion in which the nature of the concerns are clarified and reasons for the unsatisfactory performance ascertained.

Concerns must be based on evidence relating to breaches of the Code of Practice and regulations. This may include some or all of the following:

- Complaints by students relating to breaches of the Code of Practice and academic regulations for research degree students.
- Referrals where there is evidence that poor supervision was a contributory cause of the referral or failure of a candidate.
- The on-line Research Student Log not being used appropriately and the student not being encouraged to submit regular reports.
- Failing to meet with the students at least once per month, or more frequently if there are Faculty-specific recommendations.
- Routinely not involving the Subsidiary Supervisor in reports and meetings associated with formal monitoring.
- Lack of formal documentation on progress reports or of meetings.
- Evidence of slow return of comments on written work.
- Poor research student submission rates.
- Preventing the student from having access to important equipment and allocated funds.

In meeting with the academic concerned, the Departmental Graduate Tutor should make clear the areas in which the individual's supervision is considered to be below expectations (explaining the grounds for that view) with the aim of identifying solutions to the problem. This might include additional training or some other kind of ongoing support.

If the following more general issues are identified they will be more appropriately dealt with under the other relevant UCL policies and the Head of Department should seek advice from the HR Division.

- Bullying or harassment (Harassment and Bullying Policy)
- Financial malpractice associated with student funding (UCL's Fraud Policy)
- Academic malpractice associated with research student projects such as condoning plagiarism (UCL's Procedure for Investigating and Resolving Allegations of Misconduct in Academic Research)

It is the responsibility of the Department to ensure that there are sufficient resources to undertake research projects and that no Supervisor is over committed and in these situations the Head of Department may refuse to agree that an individual academic takes on more supervisees.

Formal Process

If there is insufficient improvement in the quality of research student supervision or if the number of problems associated with the supervision becomes significant, the Departmental Graduate Tutor should discuss the matter with the Faculty Graduate Tutor and if appropriate they should assemble evidence and submit it to the Head of Department for consideration under stage 2 of UCL's "UCL Capability Policy - Managing Underperformance"".

If it is agreed by the Head of Department that there has been continued unsatisfactory performance, then s/he should invite the Supervisor to a formal stage 2 interview under the capability policy. If, having heard an explanation offered by the Supervisor, concerns remain, a Formal Warning will be given for unsatisfactory performance and advice will be issued regarding the improvements expected. This will be confirmed in writing by the Head of Department and placed on file for 12 months. At the interview, further consideration should be given to any additional training or support that could reasonably be provided.

If any of the issues continue, the matter should be considered by the Head of Department under stage 3 of the capability policy. The outcome of such consideration may include the removal of permission to supervise. Before the Supervisor may be allowed to resume research student supervision, a programme of training and mentoring must be put in place and permission to resume will be given only once the Department and Faculty Graduate Tutor are convinced that the Supervisor is able to adhere to UCL's Code of Practice for Graduate Research Degrees and regulations.

A continuing serious breach of the Code of Practice and regulations on student supervision could result in dismissal (subject to statute 18 procedures as appropriate).