

## **Dissertation supervisor guidelines**

Note: this information should be read in conjunction with the Dissertation Guidelines for the course.

Each student will work with a dissertation supervisor, who will support their work on the dissertation. Students will need to confirm their Dissertation Supervisor no later than the end of the *Research Skills* module early in Lent term.

### *Dissertation Supervisors*

The Dissertation Supervisor takes primary responsibility for supervising the student's research project and dissertation.

- The Dissertation Supervisor's role is to give advice, encouragement and constructive criticism on the student's dissertation project, from development of the research protocol during the Research Skills module until submission in July.
- There will be a dissertation fair each November, where students are introduced to potential projects. Ideally, potential dissertation supervisors very briefly present available projects, although if they are unable to attend, simply sending a list of project titles and abstracts is sufficient.
- Between the dissertation fair and mid-January, students should reach out to talk to potential supervisors. A match needs to be confirmed by mid-January. At this stage, the dissertation topic also needs to be finalised, and access to necessary data confirmed.
- The Dissertation Supervisor will offer feedback on one draft of the student's research protocol for the Research Skills module which is submitted in mid-February.
- While it is the student's responsibility to obtain access to appropriate data sources in good time to complete their project, the dissertation supervisor should facilitate this process.
- The dissertation supervisor should encourage the student to keep systematic records of the research, including back-up copies of electronically stored material.
- Students should meet with their Dissertation Supervisor around monthly to discuss the research and to consider constructive comments and criticism on methodology, findings and interpretation. Frequency of meetings will vary depending on student need and throughout the year, but students should expect no more than 8 one-hour meetings with their dissertation supervisor.
- The dissertation supervisor should provide written comments on one draft of each chapter, and one draft of the full dissertation.
- Supervision meetings also provide opportunities to monitor student's progress and time management. Dissertation supervisors should regularly provide students with indications of their progress, and inform the course director regarding concerns about student progress
- The dissertation supervisor is expected to attend the biennial dissertation supervisors meeting
- The dissertation supervisor is expected to attend relevant training designated by the PHS academic committee

Importantly, while the Dissertation Supervisor should provide guidance and help the student keep the work focused, deliverable and within the scope outlined in the dissertation guidelines, the student takes primary responsibility for the dissertation. Dissertation supervisors are reminded that the submitted dissertation is not a reflection of the supervisor's capabilities, and that students are expected to take advantage of other available resources, including their course supervision group, the material provided in the Research Skills module, and support offered through the course

director's office. Please remember that the course aims to encourage peer teaching and independent learning. Dissertation supervisors are **not** expected to:

- Correct poor English, poor presentation, or reference lists, or to make substantial changes to the text (instead, supervisors might correct a single paragraph and expect students to apply this learning to the whole text, or seek support elsewhere)
- Re-teach material learned during the modules (although supervisors might recommend students revisit specific module material, or provide links to other appropriate resources)
- Clean or manage students' data
- Comment on or help write student's computer code, or help with use of computer systems or running of software
- Help perform statistical analyses
- Take on projects outside their area of expertise/comfort zone

Please remember that dissertation supervisors who over-support are generating an inequity for other students whose supervisor is sticking to this guidance. It's important that all supervisors try to stick to the guidance even when they feel they want to or should give more. Nevertheless, after submission of the dissertation, the dissertation supervisor may choose to advise the student on the possibility of co-writing a publishable paper based on the dissertation, at which point close copy editing would be appropriate.

### **Support for Supervisors**

Central support for Supervisors is provided by the University Staff Development Office which runs a variety of courses including specific training in supervision.

Any concerns or queries relating to the course should be directed to the [MPhil Education Manager](#). If appropriate, these concerns will be taken to the MPhil Academic Committee.

### **If things are going wrong**

If either the Dissertation Supervisor or supervisee feels that the supervisions or progress on the dissertation are not meeting their expectations, concerns should ideally be discussed directly with the supervisor / student involved to see if the problems can be addressed and resolved within the supervisions. If this is not possible or appropriate, concerns should be taken to the MPhil [Course Director](#) or Education Manager as soon as possible, who will work with those involved to help resolve any issues. It may be that, for a number of reasons, another supervisor may be better equipped to meet the specific needs of an individual student, in which case the course director, liaising with the MPhil Academic Committee if necessary, will seek to identify and implement an alternative arrangement.

### **Course Supervision group dissertation responsibilities**

- Students are expected to continue working with their course supervision group during the dissertation process to share ideas, concerns and feedback with their group.
- The supervision group should meet at least fortnightly in term 3 to discuss members' progress on the dissertation. By term 3, supervision groups should be working largely independently of their Course Supervisor.
- Supervision group members should assist each other to draw up viable research timetables, and members should share any valuable information shared by their own supervisors.
- The course supervision group should serve as a dissertation writing group, in which members are expected to offer feedback on drafts of each other's dissertations.