Supervisory Roles & Responsibilities

All PgR students at Durham have a supervisory team. As part of the Offer procedure, a supervisory team will have been specified and will consist of your principal supervisor and a co-supervisor for the length of your research programme. There are a number of supervision models in a modern PhD and the composition and size of your supervisory team will vary according to the nature of your research.

This departmental level guidance should be read in conjunction with the University Learning & Teaching handbook (linked from the Postgraduate handbook homepage) section *Postgraduate Research Provision* and *Student and Supervisor Responsibilities.*

In the Chemistry Department a supervisory team normally comprises:

- A main supervisor, who will have research expertise in your area of study, and who will be your first point of contact.
- A second supervisor, who will play a supporting role, by bringing additional or different expertise, or by providing more general and/or independent support as you progress as a researcher throughout your studies.
- If your research is highly interdisciplinary or brings together methodologies from different areas, supervision may take the form of a joint supervisory relationship where both supervisors play equal roles. One supervisor (normally the supervisor in your principal department) will be nominated as your main point of contact.

Broadly there are three main kinds of supervision models:

- **Traditional** - the supervisory team consists of your primary supervisor and a second member of the Board of Studies in Chemistry (BOSIC). Between them,

the members of your supervisory team will both have subject expertise and experience in supervising research students. They will guide and oversee your research, and support your personal development as an independent researcher, with the second supervisor playing anything from an almost equal part in supervision to really providing a backup in the event of the unexpected and more occasional input and guidance when sought.

- **Team** – Multidisciplinary projects may require supervisors with differing specialist knowledge, who you will interact with closely during particular phases of your project. The supervisory team may be larger than in the traditional model and will be appointed to provide complementary expertise covering the whole of your project.
- **Industrial** – If there is an applied or industrially funded aspect to your research then the supervisory team will include an industrial supervisor based at the funding company rather than in Durham. You will typically provide the industrial supervisor with regular reports and meet with them frequently either in person, through site visits or via teleconference. Your project may also involve some time spent working on site at the company. They may be listed within the university systems related to supervision, but this will always be given a weighting of 0% reflecting the fact responsibility rests with Durham University staff, even if in practice you get a great deal of valuable input from this route.

Throughout your studies you should meet regularly with at least your main supervisor.

In the Chemistry Department, this often happens on a daily, informal basis. Frequency of “sit down” meetings will vary with different supervision models between different research groups and even different student-supervisor relationships, possibly as a result of the student's experience or the use of other communication mechanisms and check-ins. You should be clear from your supervisor how often then expect to meet with you, but this should be an aim to meet at least monthly. Supervisory arrangements should be discussed and documented annually.

As a bare minimum, **eight formal meetings should take place each year** (in person or online if both parties are happy with the meetings occurring this way), which should be **fully documented by both student and supervisor**; timings will be arranged in discussion with your supervisor. You and your supervisor should also complete the annual University research student progress review process annually (usually in May/June for full-time students starting in October).

The supervisory team are responsible for maintaining contact with you throughout your period of study (and any writing-up period) - although this

should be reciprocated by you being responsive to requests for meetings, updates or information.

Your supervisor is the person responsible for your use of chemistry resources and will usually be the person who oversees and guides you on matters such as health and safety (by signing off risk assessments or delegating this task clearly - see the Chemistry Safety Policy on the Chemistry Safety site for more detail); ethics and responsible research; appropriate training, IP issues (especially important in industrially funded projects), collaboration agreements *etc.* It is therefore important that you are diligent in keeping them informed about your activities within or linked to the department and discuss any new directions with them in advance, so that they can plan and exercise such oversight. If you are in doubt about whether to inform your supervisor, it usually is better to do so than not.

Typically in the discipline of chemistry, as a postgraduate student your primary supervisor and possibly other members of the supervisory team or research group will have a major academic input in work you have done in Durham and publications should be discussed in advance with them and confirm suitable authorship or acknowledgement is in place, with an expectation that authorship will follow normal scientific protocols. Where the supervisory team have made an academic input into the data collection or analysis, while it is not expected that members of the supervisory team should block any good quality publications, they will not agree to publication of such work if it is not of a sufficient scientific standard.

The supervisory team will give guidance on matters including:

- research direction;
- aspects of planning your research programme;
- appropriate literature and sources of information;
- attendance at seminars, courses, and conferences;
- help to identify particular skills or training requirements, both in terms of research-specific and transferable skills;
- organising study periods outside of Durham, where appropriate (*e.g.* industrial placements, use of major research facilities, *etc.*);
- standards expected at your particular level of study (including issues surrounding ethics and plagiarism);
- project progress review;
- health and safety issues;
- preparation of progress reports, with appropriate feedback and constructive critique;
- thesis planning, preparation, comment, critique, and submission;

- appointment of internal and external examiners;
- provide guidance and advice on the examiners' recommendations and requirements following examination;
- They will provide direction and constructive feedback (within an agreed timeframe) in all aspects of your research, as and when appropriate;
- Supervisors will encourage and help students to present their work at meetings and conferences both in Durham and externally;
- Working together with their students, supervisors will help to write and prepare manuscripts for publication of their research.

Note the supervisory team is independent of the review team or final viva examination team - support and assessment are kept separate in the Durham system.

Record Keeping Rationale

The University and QAA (the Government's Quality Assurance Agency) require that the Department maintain written records of formal supervision sessions.

In the past, students and supervisors kept records which were often paper based or blogs, and monitoring by the Department was difficult. You should be clear on how these are recorded with your supervisor and ensure that whatever mechanism is used these are securely backed up. Options might include the university's Pebblepad blogs or shared office documents.

Such supervision recording tools should be used by students as a **strategic planning tool to agree milestones** and objectives with their supervisor, to provide a **record of key discussions** and to serve as a **yardstick** against which to measure progress. In other words, *records should be of practical benefit to students and supervisors and not simply a box-ticking exercise*.

A record could also include any of the following:

- A Gantt chart or diagrammatic workplan to measure and plan progress
- Content of conference presentations given by students, together with comments from supervisors
- Draft manuscripts written by students, together with comments from supervisors

Record Keeping - Responsibilities

Students are responsible for updating their own record *following every major meeting with their supervisors and should aim for one detailed entry per month*.

Primary supervisors are responsible for reading the records and, where appropriate, adding comments. Co-supervisors are also able to add comments.

Frequency & monitoring

Students should aim to complete a new entry into their supervision record **each month.** However, it is recognised that students away at conferences or on industrial visits, *etc*. may not be able to complete a record every month. In this case, students should complete and share a **minimum of eight** entries per year.

Departmental Approach to Management of Supervision in Chemistry

(being revised)