

# Doctoral Supervision at the EUI: A Code of Practice

## ***Explanatory Note***

The purpose of the Code of Practice is to set out in as clear and concise terms as possible a set of Institute-wide standards on various key aspects of the supervisory relationship. The Code is not intended to replace either the formal Institute Rules and Regulations or the various more detailed Departmental guidelines. Instead, it aims to specify a general norm that each Department should fully respect in applying its more detailed procedures.

More specifically, the Code has two principal and inter-related objectives. First, it should be *informative*. All concerned with the supervisory relationship – academic staff, researchers, external supervisors, and, where appropriate, administrative staff – should, in the course of a few minutes, be able to read and understand these guidelines, and should be able to refer to them at a glance. Secondly, the Code is meant to be *persuasive*. It is not written as a set of ‘legal’ norms with sanctions attached, but as a set of social norms to be taken seriously and internalised by all interested parties. It should be seen as a natural point of reference in guiding the supervisory relationship, rather than as a formal text only to be consulted ‘in extremis.’ As well as being made available to all existing Institute staff in the relevant categories, the Code also has a prominent place in recruitment literature and selection procedures.



## **1. Introduction**

The aim of this Code of Practice is to set out a basic framework for the relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee at the EUI. More detailed rules can be found in the general rules on the Doctoral Programme, and also in Departmental handbooks and other guidance notes. In these more detailed rules you will observe some variation between Departments, reflecting the diverse demands of the academic disciplines covered by the different Departments. However, the guidelines set out below should be read as a guide to general standards, procedures and good practices that apply *throughout* the EUI. The implementation of these guidelines, which is subject to ongoing appraisal, announces our common commitment to ensure that the excellence of the EUI as a whole is founded on the excellence of its core activity – the preparation of the doctoral thesis.

## **2. Choosing a Supervisor**

On arrival at the Institute, every researcher should already have been informed of the identity of their provisional advisor or supervisor. This is someone who can give the researcher initial advice on how to begin to organise their studies, and with whom the researcher may also where appropriate have preliminary discussions on the definition of the research topic. In particular, the provisional advisor or supervisor should offer advice on the courses and seminars that the researcher should follow as part of the Structured First Year Programme. In offering such advice, the main focus of the provisional advisor or supervisor will be on academic courses, but (s)he may also be able to offer general advice on language and library courses.

The final choice of the appropriate supervisor for the researcher should be made as soon as possible during the first year, and, in all cases, not beyond the firm deadline set by each Department. In many cases the final supervisor will be the same person as the provisional advisor or supervisor, but sometimes a different allocation will be made on the basis of a more considered assessment of the researcher's needs and plans. In any event, the choice of final supervisor should always be by mutual agreement.

In the majority of cases, the researcher will only have one supervisor. This does not of course prevent researchers consulting other Institute professors on matters relating to their thesis, and, indeed, this practice is strongly encouraged in all Departments. If the supervisor and researcher are in agreement, however, it may also be possible to assign a co-supervisor in circumstances where the thesis topic requires additional expert guidance. The co-supervisor may be another professor at the EUI, perhaps from a different department, or, may be based outside the Institute. When the need for additional supervision for a particular researcher is ascertained and someone is identified as suitable to fulfil that need, it is then the responsibility of the Head of Department to extend the formal invitation to that person to assume the role of co-supervisor.

Where the original supervisor leaves the Institute prior to the researcher completing the thesis, arrangements will be made to ensure that the researcher continues to receive adequate supervision. The departing professor should submit a report on the state of progress of the researcher's thesis at least four months before the termination of her/his contract. On the basis of this report and after full consultation with the departing professor and the researcher, the Department should as soon as possible decide on the future supervision arrangements that are most appropriate to the needs of the researcher. In many but not all circumstances, these arrangements will require the continuing close involvement of the departing supervisor, who in any case is contractually obliged to remain available for supervision of her/his current Institute researchers to the extent deemed necessary. More specifically, these arrangements may take one of three forms: (i) the departing professor continuing as sole supervisor, (ii) the departing professor sharing full supervisory responsibilities with a co-supervisor appointed from the current full-time departmental staff, or (iii) the replacement of the departing professor as sole supervisor by a current full-time departmental professor. Where the decision is made to take the first option and continue with the departing professor as sole supervisor, an additional professorial advisor will nevertheless be appointed from the current full-time staff to provide extra assistance and guidance to the researcher, and so guarantee that in all cases the researcher retains a direct link to the current Department.

The appointment of an additional professorial advisor from the current full-time staff is also appropriate where the sole supervisor, although still a full-time member of staff, is expected to be absent from the Institute for an extended period. Again, the objective is to ensure that, whichever formal supervision arrangements are in place, the researcher should retain a direct line of contact with the active academic and administrative life of the Department and Institute.

### **3. The Supervisory Relationship**

There is no formula that can specify every detail of a good supervisory relationship. Different researchers have different needs and expectations, and different supervisors have different styles – and, indeed, should be prepared to adapt their style to the different needs and expectations of different researchers. Some variation in the supervisory relationship, therefore, is only to be expected. Indeed, insofar as it reflects sensitivity to the diverse needs of researchers, it is to be encouraged. However, in acknowledging the existence of legitimate differences in approach, we should also recognize two general principles that are central to the Institute’s supervision philosophy.

In the first place, it is important that at the very beginning of the supervisory relationship, and at various intervals thereafter, the supervisor and the researcher should have a full discussion in which they communicate what they expect of one another and come to an agreement concerning the terms on which supervision should proceed, including such matters as frequency of meetings, submission of written work etc. Some supervisors and supervisees may wish to write down this agreement as a reminder of their mutual commitments. However, regardless of the form that the agreement takes, what is vital is that it be fully understood by both parties, and that it be clearly intended as the basis for a working relationship whose paramount objective is the completion of a high quality thesis within a period of 4 years.

In the second place, the supervisory relationship, including the major issues that should be resolved at the initial meeting, should be the subject of certain minimum standards of good practice. These should include the following:

\* During term time, meetings should take place at least once a month. This ought to be supplemented by Email or other

forms of communication. However, Email communication should not be seen as an adequate substitute for face-to-face meetings, except where the supervisor has a lengthy leave of absence or where the researcher is absent on an extended research mission, academic exchange or *stage*, or for any other exceptional reason. In periods of intensive preparation of work, such as the period leading up to the June Paper and the thesis writing-up period, more frequent communication is advisable.

\* Each party should always be able to make an appointment with the other on reasonably short notice. During term time, either party should be able to arrange for an appointment to take place within a week, unless the other party is absent on mission or for any other exceptional reason.

\* Researchers should be expected and encouraged to submit written work to the supervisor at reasonably frequent intervals. When the researcher does submit written work (including course work and assessments as well as drafts of thesis chapters or sections of chapters), it is vital that the supervisor gives a clear indication of the time period within which (s)he will be able to provide feedback, and that the provision of timely feedback be treated as a high priority. The feedback need not always take the form of written comments, but whether it is written or oral or both, it should involve a serious consideration of the researcher's work and of its contribution to the overall thesis.

\* All important decisions in the development of the thesis should be taken only after discussion between both parties and by mutual agreement. For example, a decision to undertake a lengthy period of field research on a particular topic, or at a particular time, should only be made by agreement. Equally, a decision to concentrate on one part of the thesis rather than another, or to pursue the topics within the thesis in a particular order, or to set a particular timetable for completion of different parts of the thesis, should be taken only after discussion and by agreement. Further, where the researcher is contemplating a significant modification of

the thesis topic or of her/his general analytical approach to the thesis, prior consultation with and agreement of the supervisor is indispensable. In all cases where key decisions are under consideration, the aim should be to ensure that the researcher retains the freedom to make her/his own fundamental choices of subject-matter and intellectual emphasis, but that in exercising that freedom full recognition should be given to and full benefit drawn from the expertise and experience of the supervisor, and proper account should be taken of the importance of making and remaining committed to a systematic and manageable research plan.

#### **4. Reviewing Progress**

The progress of the researcher is reviewed at various stages of the thesis in order to ensure that the researcher receives the best possible assistance in pursuit of the thesis. More specifically, periodical review is useful in encouraging the researcher to maintain steady progress, in offering support, advice and constructive criticism to the researcher, in identifying difficulties and permitting steps to be taken to overcome these difficulties, and in allowing the researcher access to a wider academic audience.

The Structured First Year Programme, with its various written and oral assessments and the June paper requirement, contains a number of early opportunities for checking progress. As the researcher moves beyond the foundational framework of the first year and spends an increasing period of time in private study, it becomes all the more important that, as well as making regular written progress reports and being periodically assessed by the supervisor, the researcher exposes her/his work to a wider audience. Therefore, in second and subsequent years, researchers should expect to present their work to their peers, professors and other members of the intellectual community of the Institute. Researchers should also be encouraged, where

possible and appropriate, to present their maturing work to audiences beyond the EUI. As well as providing an opportunity for useful feedback, oral presentations are useful in developing the skills researchers may need in their future careers as academics, public servants etc.

## ***5. Problems in the Supervisory Relationship***

Where problems arise in the supervisory relationship, they should not be allowed to develop in a manner and to an extent that is harmful to the progress of the researcher. Often difficulties arise out of simple misunderstandings, or out of some reasonable disagreement over the best way to achieve a shared academic objective. Often, therefore, these difficulties can be overcome simply through closer and clearer communication between the researcher and the supervisor, underscored by a shared appreciation of the need to pay due regard to the intellectual freedom of the researcher, the expertise and experience of the supervisor, and the importance of developing and maintaining a manageable research plan. In some cases, however, even where the difficulty or disagreement is not fundamental, the difference in formal status between the researcher and the professor means that a third party may need to intervene to help resolve the difficulty.

The appropriate Departmental third party in such circumstances is the Director of Graduate Studies or equivalent Departmental office-holder (except where the Director of Graduate Studies is also the supervisor, in which case the Head of Department should act as substitute). The researcher representatives can be an important support and point of confidential advice for the researcher in arriving at a decision to seek the intervention of the Director of

Graduate Studies, although the researcher may prefer to decide and act independently. On being approached, the Director of Graduate Studies will offer advice and seek to find a solution while fully respecting confidentiality. If, however, the various parties concerned come to the conclusion that it would be to the benefit of the researcher to seek another supervisor, steps will be taken to find a suitable replacement. Equally, where the supervisor has misgivings about the progress of the supervisory relationship, (s)he may also take the initiative in approaching the Director of Graduate Studies with a view to seeking a resolution of the problem or suggesting a change of supervisor. Where any of the above parties are of the view that a non-departmental perspective might be helpful in resolving a supervisory dispute, they may choose to consult the Dean of Studies on a confidential basis..

## **6. The Welfare of the Researcher**

It is both impossible and undesirable to separate broader questions of researcher welfare from the proper working of the supervisory relationship. Where there are difficulties in the supervisory relationship, these can have negative repercussions for the general well-being of the researcher, and that is an important additional reason, quite apart from concern to safeguard the academic progress of the researcher, why it is imperative that any such supervision problems are identified and addressed quickly.

Conversely, problems of a non-academic nature - where, for example, researchers are experiencing financial problems or problems in their private life - can have negative consequences for the quality of researchers' work and can affect the speed and sureness of their progress. As the supervisor is often the member of Institute staff whom the researcher feels most comfortable to confide in, the researcher may

wish to approach the supervisor directly to discuss any such general welfare problem, and should at all times feel free to do so. The supervisor may only be able to offer limited assistance, but should always be prepared at least to act as a 'gatekeeper' or point of contact to other personnel within the Institute who can offer more detailed help or guidance. Alternatively, the researcher may prefer in the first instance to seek help with welfare problems from other sources in or beyond the Institute. In these circumstances, the researcher should nevertheless ensure that her/his supervisor(s) be kept sufficiently well informed of the situation to be able to offer the researcher the necessary support and academic guidance at a time of personal difficulty and vulnerability.

