

GUIDELINES FOR INITIAL MEETINGS BETWEEN SUPERVISOR AND RESEARCHER

(as revised in July 2022)

The researcher representatives, along with the Law Department, have drafted this document based on a perceived need on the part of researchers for guidance on the initial meetings between the supervisor and researcher as they take place in September and early October (in the following: ‘the initial meetings’). These meetings between supervisors and researchers establish important dimensions of this relationship, including communication, identification of the needs of the supervisor and researcher and working methods, also considering that supervisors may adopt different approaches.

These guidelines should be read in conjunction with the information on [Doctoral Supervision at the EUI](#) (notably the [EUI’s Code of Doctoral Supervision](#)) and the Law Researchers’ guide (Part 1, section 2.7 on supervision). While this document focusses on the initial meetings between supervisors and new researchers, it is recommended that similar meetings take place at the beginning of the following academic years.

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION IN THE INITIAL MEETINGS

1. Expectations of the researcher and the professor: identifying the researcher’s needs and the professor’s working methods

It is important that the needs of the researcher and the expectations of the supervisor are mutually identified. Different researchers may have different needs and supervisors may have different expectations. If the different needs of each are identified early on and both parties take these into account, it is more likely that a good working relationship will develop.

2. Frequency of meetings and email communication

Researchers and supervisors will each have preferences as to communication and meetings. For example, some researchers desire more thorough guidance and monitoring, while others prefer to work independently with less frequent communication and meetings. The EUI’s Code of Doctoral Supervision assumes at least one meeting a month, but this will obviously vary according to circumstances and the stage of the thesis. Researchers may also want to ask their supervisors when they would not be available (also noting that most supervisors won’t be routinely available in July and August).

Furthermore, researchers and supervisors may discuss the frequency and practice of email communication, taking into account the different needs of both parties. In relation to response times to emails, there should be reciprocity between the supervisor and researcher, taking into consideration the commitments and expectations of both. Researchers must recognise that supervisors may have other pressing issues and therefore may at times be unable to provide immediate feedback on draft chapters (though, if this is the case, the researcher may ask for an estimated timeframe to receive feedback).

3. *Format, timing and length of meetings*

Researchers and supervisors will discuss to what extent meetings will take place face to face or via zoom/skype, especially during the periods when researchers or supervisors are not in residence. Some supervisors also arrange meetings with groups of their researchers. In order for the relevant discussion points to be covered, it is expected that the supervisor and researcher dedicate a certain amount of time for the meeting; however, it is also clear that the length of the meeting will depend on the content of the meeting (e.g., whether feedback on a draft chapter is discussed).

Researchers may want to indicate the issues to be discussed before a meeting in order to ensure that the meeting is rewarding (e.g., this can include a draft agenda). After the meeting, a summary of the meeting and agreement as to the future work plan and time of the next meeting may be prepared by the researcher.

4. *Bilateral deadlines and submission of work*

During the initial meetings, the researcher and supervisor should discuss the intervals at which written work should be submitted to the supervisor. For example, this is likely to include a mutual agreement on internal deadlines prior to the official deadlines. It may also be appropriate to arrange a meeting after the researcher has submitted written work, ensuring that problems and the relevant steps to overcome potential issues can be identified.

5. *Timing for feedback*

The timing of feedback – written or oral – on written work should be discussed both in general terms in the initial meetings and thereafter when work is submitted. When written work is submitted, it is important that supervisors provide a clear indication of the time period within which they will be able to provide feedback, depending on the scope of the work, other commitments etc. It might also be for the researcher to indicate if feedback on certain parts of the text is of a particularly high priority. The type of feedback may also depend on the stage of the project: for example, it may be of a general nature if it concerns the identification of a research question while later feedback will typically be more detailed (possibly also with track changes to the document).

6. *Research topic, research question, methodology and choice of seminars*

The topic of research will be discussed during the initial meetings. The researchers should be prepared to explain their research on the basis of which the supervisor can give recommendations and advice. It is the researcher's project, and the supervisor will respect the intellectual freedom of the researcher to take important decisions on the direction of the work but will expect the researcher to take into account the experience and knowledge of the supervisor. It should be remembered that the Law Department's recommendation at the end of the first year in favour of progression to the second year will depend in part on an assessment by the May Paper readers of the feasibility and strength of the project.

Another issue that needs to be discussed during the initial meetings is the methodology the researcher is likely to adopt to initiate the research. The supervisor and researcher should consider the different approaches available and try to identify the ones which are best suited to the project. This will also include a discussion on which seminars the researcher will choose in their first academic year as well the completion of the Personal Research Plan (PRP).

7. Relationship with other professors (incl. change of supervisor) and EUI staff

The supervisor and researcher may talk about the possibility of discussing the project with other professors at the EUI (and possibly elsewhere) who work on areas related to the project. It should also be borne in mind that the supervisor who is initially allocated is a provisionally-allocated supervisor. If it is considered that due to the topic or the focus of the research a change of supervisor may be advisable, it might be appropriate for the provisional supervisor and/or researcher to raise this issue at the initial meetings.

The professor may also provide further guidance about other persons at the EUI that can be of help for the researcher. For example, the professors will indicate the name and role of their administrative assistants to their new researchers. They may also point them to fellows and other researchers with similar research interests.

8. Specific supervision requirements of LL.M. researchers

The sections above apply equally to LL.M. researchers. In addition, it may be useful for LL.M. researchers to discuss a deadline for a first draft from the outset so that the supervisor can factor this in with other academic deadlines. It might be appropriate also to discuss the timing for the submission of the final draft, as some LL.M. researchers may aim to complete their thesis prior to the official deadline.

The meetings may also discuss the possibility of an LL.M. researcher to apply to transfer to the doctoral programme (noting that places are limited, that entry is competitive and that there is no guarantee that a place in the Ph.D. programme will be obtained; for details of the procedure see the corresponding section of the Law Researchers' guide).

CHECKLIST OF POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

- 1. Expectations of the researcher and the professor: identifying the researcher's needs and the professor's working methods**
- 2. Frequency of meetings and email communication**
- 3. Format, timing and length of meetings**
- 4. Bilateral deadlines and submission of work**
- 5. Timing for feedback**
- 6. Research topic, direction of research, methodology and choice of seminars**
- 7. Relationship with other professors (incl. change of supervisor) and EUI staff**
- 8. Specific supervision requirements of LL.M. researchers**