



## **GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS: FIRST MEETING BETWEEN SUPERVISOR AND RESEARCHER**

### **(CHECKLIST OF POINTS FOR DISCUSSION ANNEXED)**

The researcher representatives, along with the department, have drafted these guidelines on the basis of a perceived need on the part of researchers for more specific guidance on the first (and subsequent) meetings between the supervisor and supervisee. This document is based predominantly on the Code of Supervision and the rules of the Law department.

#### ***Purpose of the document***

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance for both the supervisor and supervisee in respect of the initial (and subsequent) meetings. The first meeting between supervisors and supervisee is often decisive for a working relationship that will last for a number of years, and often establishes important dimensions of this relationship, including communication, the identification of the needs of the supervisor and supervisee and the working methods of each, considering that researchers (and supervisors) may adopt different approaches. This document is intended to ensure that all first-year researchers, and especially those who may be unsure of what to expect from the first meeting and the supervisor generally, can assume a particular degree of responsibility in respect of the supervisee/supervisor relationship.

In this regard, both the supervisor and researcher can expect that both are ready to discuss the points below. The guidelines are intended to serve only as recommendations for points of discussion. We think that discussing these points from the beginning will be mutually beneficial for both the researcher and the supervisor, as they provide clarity and a better understanding of the working methods of each.

### **POINTS FOR DISCUSSION: THE FIRST MEETING**

#### ***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 supervisee and the expectations of the supervisor are mutually identified. This issue should always be discussed during the first meeting. Different researchers may have different needs and supervisors may have different expectations. Most problems and misunderstandings find their roots in mutually unsatisfactory communication and divergent expectations of the supervisor and the researcher. If the different needs of each are identified early on and both parties take these into account, it is more likely that a good and fruitful working relationship will develop.

## ***2. Frequency of Face to Face Meetings, Email Communication and Timings for Response to Email***

This is an important issue which should always be discussed at the first meeting. 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 Code assumes a norm of at least one meeting a month, but this will obviously vary according to circumstances and the stage of the thesis.

Some supervisors arrange regular meetings with group(s) of their supervisees either within a Working Group format or separately. The supervisee may want to ask about these possibilities.

It is also appropriate during the first meeting to discuss the frequency and practice of e-mail communication between the two parties, taking due account to the different needs of both parties. In relation to response times to emails, there should be reciprocity between the supervisor and supervisee, taking into consideration the commitments and expectations of both.

Supervisees must recognise that supervisors may have other pressing issues and therefore may at times be unable to respond immediately. If this is the case, it would be reasonable for the supervisee to ask for an estimated timeframe to receive feedback, so that they may organise their workload accordingly.

## ***3. Timing and Length of Meetings***

The timing of meetings should be discussed during the first meeting. According to the Code, during term time, either party should be able to arrange for an appointment to take place within at least two weeks, unless the other party is on mission, ill etc. The timing of the meeting will obviously also depend on the issues to be discussed, i.e. if feedback is to be provided as discussed above; as such, there is an obvious need for flexibility. One suggestion would be that at the end of each meeting the date of the next meeting is fixed together with the work to be done by that date.

In order for the relevant discussion points to be covered, it is expected that supervisor and supervisee dedicate a certain period of time for the meeting. Generally, the length of the meeting will depend on the content. The first meeting should probably not be less than half an hour, so as to allow time to discuss the relevant points outlined in this document as well as the supervisee's research project (see point 6 below).

## ***4. Bilateral Deadlines and Submission of Work***

During the first meeting the researcher and supervisor should discuss the intervals at which written work should be submitted to the supervisor, as is relevant for and desired by both. For example, there may be mutual agreement on 'internal' deadlines, in between the official deadlines. It may also be appropriate to arrange a meeting after the supervisee has submitted written work, ensuring that problems and the relevant steps to overcome potential issues can be identified.

It is good practice for supervisees to clearly indicate the issues to be discussed before a meeting in order to ensure that the meeting is rewarding. For example, a brief agenda could be drafted and sent to the supervisor. Supervisees should not be afraid to let the supervisor know what they should like to discuss. In addition, an outline of the meeting, conclusions reached, and agreement as to the future work plan and time of the next meeting might be prepared and communicated by the supervisee after the meeting.

## **5. *Timing for Feedback***

The timing of feedback – written or oral - on written work should be discussed both in general terms in the first meeting and thereafter when work is submitted. When written work is submitted, it is important that the supervisor provides a clear indication of the time period within which (s) he will be able to provide feedback, depending on the scope of the work, other commitments and so on. It might also be for the supervisee to indicate if the feedback on certain parts is of a particularly high priority; for example, the timing of feedback might be more important than having the supervisor read all the work. The supervisee should indicate where this is the case.

## **6. *Research Topic, Research Question and Methodology***

Of course, the topic of research will be a topic for discussion during the first meeting, including the direction the researcher should take with this work and the topics to which he shall dedicate his research.

Generally the supervisee should be prepared to discuss his or her 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

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 important issue that needs to be discussed during the first meeting is the methodology the supervisee is likely to adopt to initiate his or her research. The supervisor and supervisee should consider the different approaches available and try to identify the ones which are best suited to the project.

## **7. *Change of Provisional Supervisor, Relationship with other Professors and Co-Supervision***

The first meeting provides an opportunity to determine if the research project and interests of the supervisor and supervisee are compatible. It should be borne in mind that the supervisor first allocated is therefore 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 to raise this issue at the first meeting and this should not be taken by the researcher to be some kind of 'rejection'. The provisional supervisor will assist the supervisee in finding the best supervisor, thus allowing for the best supervision from the first meeting, at the beginning of the first year.

If a supervisor is reaching the end of his contract at the EUI, this should be raised from the outset so that the supervisee is aware of the fact that the supervisor-supervisee relationship may be influenced by this.

Additionally, the supervisor and supervisee may talk about the possibility of discussing his or her project with other professors at the EUI. In this case, it would be helpful for the supervisor to give his/her opinion about with whom the supervisee may want to engage in discussion.

Issues of co-supervision should be discussed between the supervisee and supervisor, with contact with the potential co-supervisor, where relevant and appropriate. All parties must be involved in the decision-making process and kept up-to-date.

### ***8. Specific supervision requirements of LLM researchers***

The Supervisor will take into account that a researcher is on the LLM programme during the first meeting. Timescales and deadlines may be different for LLM supervisees than for PhD candidates, and it is important to discuss these as soon as possible.

The sections above apply equally to LLM researchers as they do to PhD researchers. However, in addition, it may be useful 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 LLM researchers may aim to complete their thesis prior to the official deadline.

Finally, with regards to the possibility of an LLM researcher transferring to the PhD programme, some researchers may already be considering this path from the start of the year (for example, if they applied for PhD but were only accepted for LLM). Equally other researchers may decide to apply to transfer only at a later stage. Since a PhD project is necessarily different from an LLM thesis, a transfer to PhD might in some cases imply a change of supervisor; this can be discussed with the LLM supervisor.

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2. *Frequency of Face to Face Meetings, Email Communication and Timings for Response to Email*
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