



SUPERVISORY AGREEMENT FOR POSTGRADUATE RESEARCHERS AND THEIR SUPERVISORS

Version No.	Description	Author	Approval	Effective Date
1.0	This document outlines the context, values, parties, and roles and responsibilities underpinning PGR supervisory relationships within the University.	Associate Principal Social Inclusion Education Enhancement	Senate	November 2023

Version 1.0

the place of useful learning

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Introduction

1. This Supervisory Agreement for Postgraduate Researchers and their Supervisors has been developed to assure consistency in support and guidance for effective PGR supervisory relationships at the University of Strathclyde.
2. The Agreement will apply to all PGR students, through all forms of postgraduate research study, including professional doctorates, and their supervisory teams at the University. The purpose of this agreement is to underline the values of the University, and expectations for behaviour for both PGR students and supervisory teams. It is recognised that Departments/Subjects/Research Teams may have existing agreements in place, which are wider in scope, i.e. outlining standards for engagement, review, use of specialist equipment etc. Where an existing agreement is in place, this agreement is designed to supplement not replace such agreements.
3. All PGR students subscribe to the terms of this Agreement when completing their registration with the University. Members of staff at the University uphold the agreement in their capacity as supervisors, or wider support role for the PGR student experience, and members of the University community.
4. Awareness of the PGR Supervisory Agreement shall be drawn to all new students during induction, and the Postgraduate Research (PGR) Monitoring Framework provides opportunity for reflection and review, throughout the PGR lifecycle.
5. This Agreement recognises that research students make a vital contribution to the University's research culture and international reputation and that the University of Strathclyde is committed to providing the highest quality of provision and support for its postgraduate research students to assist in all stages of their career.
6. The Agreement recognises that doctoral study offers a tremendous opportunity for an intellectually exciting journey and great personal and professional development. It recognises that doctoral education may take many forms, with doctoral research study taking place within small teams through to large, complex, research units and partnerships. The *Agreement* recognises the complex domains of power within the supervisory experience, and seeks to underpin our institutional commitment to safeguarding across the entire University community of staff and students, through [Safe360°](#). Through this Agreement, all parties recognise the importance of ensuring that their behaviour is in alignment with this, and that the supervisory relationship is conducted in such manner as to protect all parties against inappropriate behaviours or influence of action which may undermine the relationship, including (but not limited to): academic, personal, social or financial matters, whether in person or online. This is underpinned by the University's Staff Personal Relationships Policy, as detailed within paragraph 34. The University of Strathclyde is committed to ensuring that all Postgraduate Researchers (PGRs) undertake research and related activities in an environment that is as supportive and safe as possible.
7. In keeping with the University Values and the Strathclyde Community Commitment, the University believes that positive relationships between students and their supervisory team are key to a high quality and rewarding experience. This relationship must be founded on mutual respect and open communication.
8. This Agreement sets out the University's expectations relating to the supervisory relationship and the behaviour, roles, and standards expected of the student, and the supervisory team (first, second and tertiary supervisors), alongside the

responsibilities of the department/school, faculty and University, in supporting a positive study environment.

9. The University recognises that postgraduate research students operate at the nexus between the student and staff community, however, for the purposes of this agreement, an individual undertaking postgraduate research at the University is considered to be a 'student', this includes members of staff who are research associates undertaking postgraduate research study.
10. This *Agreement* should be read in conjunction with other relevant University policies, including:
 - a. The University's [Dignity and Respect Policy](#);
 - b. The [Strathclyde Community Commitment](#);
 - c. The [General Academic Regulations](#) (Postgraduate Research);
 - d. The [Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Students](#);
 - e. The [Research Data Policy](#), [Research Code of Practice](#), and other relevant policies on [ethics](#) and [research integrity](#);
 - f. The relevant Faculty or Department/School Handbook for Research Students;
 - g. The University's [Guidance for Postgraduate Research Students who Support Teaching](#);
 - h. The University's policy for [PGR Leave Support](#); and
 - i. The University's [Staff Personal Relationships Policy](#).

Institutional Values

11. The University of Strathclyde is a [values-based organisation](#), committed to supporting a people-oriented work and study environment. In the context of the PGR supervisory agreement the institution:
 - a. recognises and values staff and students for the work they undertake;
 - b. identifies and engages positively with all staff, students, and external stakeholders;
 - c. listens to, and responds to, the needs and concerns of the staff and student body;
 - d. supports professional development and encourage the personal development of others;
 - e. encourages an atmosphere of respect and tolerance in all circumstances; and
 - f. expects courteous and respectful behaviour from its staff and students at all times.
12. The University of Strathclyde believes that respect, trust, confidence, and fairness are essential elements of the student-supervisor relationship. The University also recognises that within such relationships, and the unique circumstances of postgraduate study, challenges may arise.
13. The University believes that most interpersonal problems between students and their supervisory team can be avoided, or addressed, if all parties contribute responsibly, communicate honestly, and are respectful, courteous, and conscientious in their working relationships.
14. The University expects that all parties will adhere to the standards set out in the Dignity and Respect policy, and the Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Study.

The Parties to the Agreement

15. This Agreement includes those involved in research degree programmes, and supervisory relationships, including:
- a. Postgraduate Research Students;
 - b. Supervisors of Research Students;
 - c. Members of Interim and Annual Review Panels;
 - d. Members of Progression Panels;
 - e. Examiners of Research Degrees;
 - f. The Strathclyde Doctoral School;
 - g. Research Support and Administrative Staff; and
 - h. Any other staff involved in supporting or monitoring research programmes.

Roles and Responsibilities

16. All parties agree to adhere to the values and standards of behaviour set out in this agreement.
17. All parties agree to familiarise themselves with the practical responsibilities of the student, supervisory team, and the school/department laid out in points **115-142** of the [Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Students](#).
18. All parties recognise the University's [Dignity and Respect Policy](#), and its role in ensuring that every member of the University community is expected to understand, respect and behave in accordance with our [Strathclyde Community Commitment](#). This Policy underpins the University's approach to supporting effective PGR supervisory relationships.
19. The University recognises that from time to time minor disagreements or difference of opinion may arise within a supervisory relationship, and in such cases early intervention with the support of other members of the Department/School/Research team may be appropriate. However, anything which may come within the scope of the Dignity and Respect Policy, or other Policy and Guidance referred to in this agreement, should be addressed through the appropriate formal routes.
20. Relevant parties may seek support for escalation via the following routes as appropriate:
- a. Report and Support;
 - b. Any Dignity and Respect Adviser;¹
 - c. Your Progression Chair, Head of Department, or Vice-Dean Research; and
 - d. The University Complaints Procedure.
21. Departments/Schools have responsibility for ensuring that any concern raised in relation to the student-staff supervisory relationship are addressed through the

¹ Details of the University Dignity and Respect Advisers are available at:
<https://www.strath.ac.uk/whystrathclyde/safe360/dignityrespectadvisers/>

appropriate channels, as outlined within the policies and guidance within paragraph 10.

Supervisors

22. All supervisors agree to play an active role in all dimensions of the supervisory relationship. This incorporates the commitment outlined within the University's Dignity and Respect Policy, to supporting an environment which is based on a sense of community and which is free from discrimination, violence (including gender-based), harassment, bullying and victimisation.
23. Where pastoral support is concerned, students should be directed to student support services, as appropriate, and when it is in their best interest to do so.
24. When a member of the supervisory team believes that a student's wellbeing is at risk, all agree that they should make contact with the student, be sympathetic, provide an opportunity for the student to talk and make them aware of the University's wellbeing support provision, signposting them as appropriate to the relevant support services in [Student Experience](#). PGR supervisory staff should familiarise themselves with the support and guidance available from Disability and Wellbeing, and in particular, the [Helping Students in Distress Guide 2023](#).

Students

25. All parties agree that when a student feels they cannot speak with their supervisory team about an ongoing issue or wellbeing concern, they may approach **any** of the following:
 - a. School/Department contact;
 - b. Any Faculty PGR Wellbeing Officers;
 - c. Any Dignity and Respect Advisers;¹
 - d. The Strathclyde Doctoral School;
 - e. Report and Support (as appropriate);
 - f. Strath Union's Advice Hub; and
 - g. The University's Disability and Wellbeing Service.
26. All parties agree that in circumstances where a student believes that a member of their supervisory team has acted contrary to the Dignity and Respect policy, they should approach any of the institution's Dignity and Respect Advisers. If they feel unable to do so (for whatever reason), they may approach any of the services/contacts outlined above.

Departments/Schools/Faculties

27. Where concerns are raised in relation to the behaviour of a staff or student member, these should be investigated in line with the Dignity and Respect Policy (section 3.2). Note that these processes can investigate, report and make recommendations on behaviour-related issues, however, it is important that in the case of PGR supervisory relationships, consideration is also given to any remedial actions that may be required as a result of the breakdown in a PGR student-supervisory relationship.
28. All Faculties should have a designated member of senior academic staff who has oversight for matters arising under the PGR Supervisory Agreement, for example the Vice Dean Research. In the event of a breakdown in a PGR student-supervisory

relationship, this individual will be required to provide leadership for the implementation of any actions required within a Department/School/Research Team, in consultation with the Head of Department/School, as appropriate. It is important that this member of staff has sufficient seniority to address any challenges which may arise in this context. This role performs the function of the designated officer within the Faculty for arbitrating any disputes, and working with the Executive Dean, Head of Department, and professional support services (as required) to facilitate a resolution, set in place interim arrangements or take further action, as appropriate.

29. Faculty PGR Wellbeing Contacts, in partnership with the Strathclyde Doctoral School, are available for any PGR students or supervisors seeking guidance or advice within the context of this agreement, but do not have any formal responsibilities to arbitrate disputes or resolutions.

Strathclyde Doctoral School

30. The Strathclyde Doctoral School can provide support and advice to any student or staff member who reports concerns in relation to the PGR Supervisory Agreement, however, it is the responsibility of the Department/School/Faculty to ensure that the processes are followed, as outlined within sections above.
31. The Strathclyde Doctoral School may, as appropriate, consider any general issues relating to PGR student wellbeing and support, and will liaise with the University's student support services and academic governance frameworks, as required, to support enhancement to the PGR student experience.

The University

32. All parties agree that the Faculty has a responsibility to ensure that each School and Department complies with the policies outlined below, and that appropriate mechanisms should be in place to ensure that this responsibility can be discharged.
33. All parties agree that the Doctoral School has a responsibility to provide guidance on the implementation of the supervisory agreement and the proper conduct of the relationship to all parties. In addition, it may provide guidance to the Faculties should the supervisory relationship breakdown, however, it is the responsibility of the Faculty to address any matters which may impact the continuation of study for a student.

All Parties

34. All parties recognise that staff personal relationships with students are strongly discouraged, in line with the University's Staff Personal Relationships Policy. This includes any personal or romantic relationships between the postgraduate research student and any of their supervisory team, as these may lead to the obstruction of objectivity for both researcher and supervisor during the doctorate.
35. As stated within the [Staff Personal Relationships Policy](#), *intimate relationships between staff and students under the age of 18 are prohibited and may result in criminal prosecution. Staff Personal Relationships with students over 18 are strongly discouraged. These relationships are more likely than other Staff Personal Relationships to attract concerns about abuse of power, conflict of interest, potential disruption of studies for the student and their peers and unprofessionalism due to the*

pastoral nature of the relationship.

36. All parties agree that in the event of a personal relationship developing between a PGR student and a member of their supervision team, that the involved parties must raise this with the senior Faculty officer, as designated in paragraph 28. In partnership with the Head of Department/Research Team, the designated Faculty officer will ensure that appropriate measures are taken to appoint a change in supervisor, and to ensure no conflict of interest remains for the duration of the PGR study, progression and award.

University Support for the Supervisory Agreements

37. All parties can seek support from the following services:
- a. Strathclyde Doctoral School;
 - b. Student Experience Directorate;
 - c. Human Resources; and
 - d. Education Enhancement Directorate.

Status of Agreement

38. This agreement does not replace or supplant the University's regulations, policies and codes, but provides clarity over the fundamental norms and expectations regarding supervisory relationships, and outlines the University's commitment to supporting positive supervisory relationships.