

Research Supervision: Getting Started on Supervision

These questions are intended to assist supervisor and student get started in supervision with some clear understandings between them. These questions should be discussed alongside The University of Auckland's *Senate Guidelines for Thesis Supervision*.

You may find there are too many questions for any one supervision meeting – in that case pick them off, several at a time, when they seem most relevant. Don't ignore them though because good communication is at the heart of supervision. Establishing clear understandings from the start minimises the likelihood of misunderstandings that may give rise to later difficulties in supervision.

If there are two or more supervisors, we suggest the questions be discussed by all parties together to ensure common understandings.

Supervisor / student understandings

- What is supervision?
- What is a thesis?
- Meetings
- Supervisor's advice and support
- Managing the process
- Monitoring the effectiveness of supervision
- Joint supervisors
- Examination of the thesis

What is Supervision?

What is the purpose of supervision?
What experience of supervision has each of us had and what have we learned from that about what works best?
Has the student seen the University's list of mutual responsibilities for supervisor and student (Senate Guidelines on Thesis Supervision)? Is there anything in there that needs clarification?
What are the student's future plans (ie: why are they doing this postgraduate research degree)?

What is a Thesis?

What does "thesis" mean?
Is a thesis proposal required and if so, what form and length should it be?
What is the appropriate structure and length of a thesis in this discipline?
What referencing conventions should the student follow?
In a masters thesis examination, what is the difference between a thesis that passes and one that is first class? (This may be difficult to spell out exactly but the question can be the basis for a useful discussion.)
What is expected of a doctoral thesis in order to pass?
What is meant by "originality"?
What are some examples of good thesis titles in this field?
Who owns papers arising during and after supervision?

Are there likely to be any issues with intellectual property arising during the research and if so, should they be flagged with Uniservices now? (Refer to the University's IP Policy on the Research office website).

Meetings

How often shall student and supervisor meet and for how long?

When shall the meetings take place?

Does the student have access to the supervisor outside of scheduled meeting times? If so, how is this arranged?

Who has responsibility to initiate the meetings (if not scheduled regularly)?

What is the protocol for when one person can't make the meeting?

Who is going to keep a record of the meetings?

Supervisor's Advice and Support

Development of the research proposal: how much input will the supervisor/s give and how will this proceed?

Expectations of feedback of written work: how often does the supervisor want to see written work, how will feedback be given, how much notice does s/he need in order to give good feedback, how many drafts of any particular chapter is s/he prepared to comment on? If there is more than one supervisor will both supervisors read and comment on everything? If so, will they do it at the same time or one after the other?
Support with theoretical content eg: resources, contacts, how much can be expected given the supervisor's knowledge of the area? Do others need to be consulted?
What other kinds of knowledge are needed, eg: of the research methods, of academic writing, etc – what resources does the supervisor know of? How much help can s/he give?
Is it ok for the student to go to other people for advice along the way? Does the supervisor expect to be informed?
What relevant personal circumstances might make the supervision or completion of the thesis difficult? (Eg: students paid workload or family responsibilities, supervisor going on sabbatical, expecting a baby etc)

Managing the Process

What are the different stages in the research process?
How long should each stage take to complete?
Will goal-setting for the student be part of the discussion during meetings?

What would be a realistic completion date in view of the student's status (part time / full time) and University policy?

Monitoring the Effectiveness of Supervision

How will we now that the supervision is working well along the way?
If problems arise for one person how will those problems be brought to the other's attention?
If we can't resolve the matter, what process shall we follow? What procedure is available within the Department?
Has the student seen a copy of the University's policy for Resolution of Research Problems: Postgraduate Research Students?

Joint Supervisors

What contribution will be made by each supervisor?
Given the relative contributions of each supervisor, which model of joint supervision will work best? (eg: co-supervisors, primary and secondary, primary and advisors / committee, primary and back up)
If the model is co-supervision, who will organise the meetings?

Who will make sure everyone is kept informed of decisions made?
If there is disagreement between joint supervisors about some issue arising from the student's work, how is this to be resolved?

Examination of the Thesis

How many examiners will there be in total?
If a masters supervision, will the supervisor be one of the examiners? (If joint supervisors, which one?)
How will the other examiners be selected?
Any other issues relations to supervisor / student understandings?