HANDBOOK FOR SUPERVISORS OF POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

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(Compiled on the basis of the University of Cambridge’s Code of Practice 2014-2015)
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1. Structure

The Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies is divided into two departments, the Department of East Asian Studies and the Department of Middle Eastern Studies, and it covers Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, Chinese Studies, Japanese Studies, Hebrew and Aramaic Studies, East Asian Studies and South Asian Studies.

The Faculty has a Degree Committee, made up of academic representatives from the several areas of interest within the Faculty. It has oversight of graduate admissions, supervision, education and examining in the Faculty.

This handbook is to provide both PhD and MPhil student supervisors with specifications of good practice in supervising postgraduate students in the Faculty. Where it is necessary, different practice will be specified about PhD supervisions and MPhil supervisions.

Each PhD student is assigned an individual member of Faculty who acts as his or her Supervisor. A second person is also appointed to act in a less formal capacity as an additional Advisor. An MPhil student may have only a Supervisor and the course Co-ordinator will handle advisory issues. Each student and his or her supervisor are embedded within the Faculty or within a Department, and are under the jurisdiction of the Degree Committee.

The Degree Committee comes under the general oversight of the University’s Board of Graduate Studies, a body comprising senior academics from a wide range of subject areas plus a College Graduate Tutor and a graduate student member.

The Faculty is in the School of Arts and Humanities. The Council of the School is responsible for allocation of major resources, and has oversight of the overall academic provision in the Faculties within its jurisdiction.

Every graduate student is a member of a College. Colleges are social and academic communities, offering moral support, companionship and enrichment through intellectual diversity. They also provide some of the key practical services and the infrastructure that help graduate students to
flourish in Cambridge, such as accommodation and communal meals. These features enable the student to focus on work and to make the most of his or her time in Cambridge. Each graduate student is assigned to a Graduate Tutor or equivalent (the title may vary) at the College, who will not necessarily be familiar with the student’s subject area, but is intended to be a source of personal advice and pastoral care.

2. The Supervisor and the Advisor

Each PhD student should at least have a Supervisor and an Advisor. Each MPhil student has a Supervisor, and the course Co-ordinator handles the student’s advisory issues.

Both the Supervisor and the Advisor are appointed by the Degree Committee. In some circumstances, where the project is interdisciplinary, a second supervisor may be appointed by the Degree Committee. The duties of a second supervisor will be similar to those of the Principal Supervisor, but the main responsibility lies with the Principal Supervisor and it is with him/her that the Degree Committee and Board of Graduate Studies will normally correspond.

Throughout this Handbook, the term ‘Supervisor’ should normally be taken to refer to the Principal Supervisor. The Supervisor(s) and Advisor are supported by the Degree Committee, who may appoint additional persons as required: for example, assessors of written work.

3. What the Supervisor is Expected to Do

The person appointed as the Supervisor of a graduate student is expected to

- be familiar with the Code of Practice, which is established by the Board of Graduate Studies [http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/gradstud/policy/quality/cop/](http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/gradstud/policy/quality/cop/), the course literature and advice provided by the Degree Committee and Board of Graduate Studies;

- have attended training and support courses and events for Supervisors; for information concerning training courses, for new supervisors and academic staff development, visit:
http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/hr/cppd/programme/induction/in0339.html and http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/hr/cppd/calendar.shtml

• participate in graduate admissions as required by the Degree Committee;

• establish the suitability of the topic proposed for the degree sought, in the light of resource availability, the University’s timescale for submission of the thesis, and the student’s background and aptitude:

• establish at interview the pattern of attendance to be followed, including supervisions, training, etc., if the student is to be part-time (PhD only and only if a member of staff);

• provide regular supervisions for the student, amounting to at least two face-to-face supervisions per term for PhD students; the supervisor should help the student choose an appropriate topic, plan chapters, read and comment on draft chapters as they are written, and then read and comment on the final draft or an approximation to it in the final stage of the student’s PhD studies;

• provide at least one face-to-face supervision per fortnight during the term for a dissertation-only MPhil student; the supervisor should help the student choose an appropriate topic, plan chapters, read and comment on draft chapters as they are written, and then read and comment on the final draft or an approximation to it; the deadline for submission of the MPhil dissertation is mid-August.

• provide at least two face-to-face supervisions per term for MPhil students who do examination papers and/or alternative exercises plus a dissertation, give advice and supervisions on the courses and papers that are taking, help them choose an appropriate topic for their dissertations, plan chapters, read and comment on draft chapters as they are written, and then read and comment on the final draft or an approximation to it; the deadline for submission of the MPhil dissertation is mid-August.

• guide the student in planning, focusing and developing the study by encouraging the student to make a written timetable and plan at a very early stage to ensure that a manageable piece of work
is undertaken;

• establish an effective means of **communication with the student**; for example making clear the frequency and timings of meetings, making sure that the student knows how to make contact at other times. Supervisors should be aware that some students will not, on the strength of their previous experience, expect to make the first approach to set up a meeting, but will expect the Supervisor to take the initiative. Supervisors are advised to make firm appointments for students at least in the first instance and to be alert to the possibility of misunderstanding if the student does not make contact regularly;

• **respond promptly** and appropriately to requests from students to meet and to comment on work at various stage of development;

• make sure the student has **access to resources** required to complete the projected work. Any plan that envisages the use of resources beyond what can reasonably be made available must be discouraged;

• advise the student on **relevant literature, methodology and academic conventions** obtaining in the field;

• where relevant, advise on **ethical and safety implications** of the work;

• advise on **personal development planning and skills development**;

• encourage students to attend **training courses** provided by the University and the Faculty;

The online training resources for graduate students who supervise which have been developed by the **Centre for Personal and Professional Development** (CPPD) on behalf of the Senior Tutors’ Committee and General Board’s Education Committee, can be found at the following website location:

**https://camtools.cam.ac.uk/join/supervisortraining**

• provide an **academic commentary on students’ applications** for allowances, such as: leave to work or reside away from Cambridge, intermission of studies, deferral of submission of the thesis, restriction of access to the thesis, funding, etc;
• make sure that a Research Council or other major sponsor is informed promptly if a student’s work is delayed or seriously affected by illness or other grave cause;

• advise on publication of the research and offer advice on further study or careers in the specific research area;

• respond promptly to reasonable requests for references for his or her students;

• direct his or her students to possible sources of funding.

• make sure that his or her students are aware of good academic practice of how to avoid plagiarism. Information on the nature of plagiarism and how to avoid it can be found at: http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/univ/plagiarism/

A Supervisor must not participate in formal examination or assessment of work submitted by his or her student as part of a registration exercise or for the degree.

A Supervisor must ensure that he or she completes their termly reports for their students (required for MPhil and PhD students) for the Michaelmas, Lent and Easter Terms via the CamSIS centralised database system. See 4. ‘Monitoring the Student’s Progress’.

4. Monitoring the Student’s Progress

Every PhD student is required to undertake a First-Year Progress Examination in their first year, and they will also have to submit a Second-Year Progress Report towards the end of the academic year in their second year. The Secretary of the Degree Committee will write to the student with the details of the examinations. It is important for the Supervisor to monitor the student’s progress against the agreed timetable and plan for the work. Towards the end of each term, the Degree Committee will send the Supervisor a supervision report form for each PhD and MPhil student he or she is supervising. If a student is making unsatisfactory progress, or is in danger of failing an assessment or examination, or is not likely to make the standard for progression to the next stage, it is important for the supervisor to say so in the report. The
Supervisor should also convey his or her concerns to the student in an appropriate way. In such circumstances, Supervisors should not wait until the termly report is due to make this apparent, but should take action earlier to try to remedy the situation. Supervision reports will also be considered by the Degree Committee and Board of Graduate Studies in evaluating any applications for examination allowances or in cases of dispute. Under the data protection law, the supervision report can also be read by the student concerned.

The student’s progress is also to be reported termly through *Cambridge Graduate Supervision Reporting System* (CGSRS): for CamSIS Training document, visit

http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/gradstud/staff/pdf/cgsrs/supervisors.pdf

**Cambridge Graduate Supervision Reporting System (CGSRS)**

The Board of Graduate Studies’ online reporting system is for graduate Supervisors. These reports, once submitted, are available to the student. They are also read by the Course Director, Degree Committee, College and Board of Graduate Studies, who all take an interest in the student’s progress. Supervisors are encouraged to give an honest appraisal of the student’s progress but to do so in a manner that can be used positively to provide useful feedback.
5. What the Advisor is Expected to Do

The Advisor is appointed by the Degree Committee. He or she need not be in exactly the same research area as the student and Supervisor, nor necessarily in the same Department or Faculty, but is expected to carry out the tasks:

• act as a second point of contact for academic advice for the student;

• make him or herself available to read occasional sample work and discuss progress as reasonably agreed with the Supervisor and the student;

• provide short-term supervisory cover in the absence of the Supervisor;

The Advisor may participate in the formal assessment of progress and registration exercises but, in the case of a PhD student, would not normally be appointed as the internal Examiner for the student’s thesis.

The Advisor is not normally expected to:

• provide regular, formal supervision;

• write supervision reports required by the Degree Committee or in CGSRS;

• Act as go-between between supervisee and supervisor and deal with any problems arising in the relationship between the supervisee and supervisor.
6. Appointment of the Supervisor

The **Supervisor** is appointed by the Degree Committee; the Board of Graduate Studies has the power to question an appointment.

A candidate for admission to a research degree may specify in his or her application that he or she wishes to study with a particular **Supervisor**. Due regard will be given to the candidate’s wishes in attempting to identify a **Supervisor** who has specific expertise in the field or topic chosen, and who is available and willing to support the student for the full duration of the period of study.

The Degree Committee **is not expected** to appoint a member of staff as a Supervisor whose contract is known to finish before the end of the minimum period required for the candidate’s course, **unless** special arrangements are made for the supervision to continue after the end of the current contract.

The Faculty normally regards **six as the maximum number of graduate students to be supervised by a Supervisor at one time**. The Degree Committee pays due regard to the **load** the proposed Supervisor is already carrying, including undergraduate teaching, Masters teaching, and administration loads.

**New Supervisors** should attend induction and support sessions at the earliest opportunity.

For details of courses, visit:

http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/hr/cppd/

The Degree Committee is asked to confirm that an induction session has been booked when registering a new Supervisor for **CGSRS**.

**Experienced Supervisors**, especially those **new to Cambridge**, are also encouraged to attend appropriate sessions.
7. When the Supervisor is Away

If a Supervisor is to be away from Cambridge for an extended period, e.g. for Sabbatical Leave, he or she should inform the Degree Committee. Supervisees should also be notified well beforehand and should be consulted about back-up supervisory arrangements.

A Supervisor is not permitted to accept new students due to commence their studies during the period when he or she is on leave unless a suitable alternative is willing to stand in. Supervisions by email or other electronic means are not considered appropriate for new research students.

If the assigned Supervisor leaves before or after the student starts the course, alternative arrangements will be considered and offered if possible. If a Supervisor leaves towards the end of a student’s studies, the University may make arrangements for the student to transfer with the Supervisor to another institution, while remaining a candidate for the Cambridge degree. Alternatively, a new Supervisor may be sought, in order to allow the candidate to remain in Cambridge. This may involve an external Supervisor if one cannot be found internally, provided that a member of the University staff is appointed as the advisor or the second supervisor to attend to matters on a day-to-day basis. Each case will be considered on its own merits.

8. English Language Requirements

Please note that the Degree Committee is implementing a requirement of English language proficiency, which is higher than the standard requirement of the University. More specifically, applicants who are non-native speakers of English or have not taken a degree course in an English-speaking university are required to have an IELTS minimum score of 7.5 overall with at least 7.0 in each element; or a TOEFL minimum of 637, or 110 in iBT with at least 25 in each element, plus 5.5 in TWE.
9. Appointment of Examiners

A Supervisor is asked to nominate examiners, but it is the Degree Committee which appoints examiners for research students. In most cases, two Examiners are appointed, an External Examiner and an Internal Examiner. The supervisor is asked to approach two examiners to act and then to let the Graduate Programmes Administrator know their names, contact details etc. so that he/ she can approve them at the next available Degree Committee meeting.

9.1 Internal Examiner

An Internal Examiner must not have been the Supervisor of the candidate. However, in exceptional circumstances, an Advisor, or an assessor of an earlier progress report, would not be precluded from examining the dissertation providing the Degree Committee is satisfied that their involvement in the development of the thesis was not so great as to prejudice their role as Examiner. The Internal Examiner is expected to organise the oral examination by contacting both the candidate and the External about their availability. The date for the oral should be fixed as soon as possible after submission, and the examination held, if possible, within six to eight weeks.

The Internal Examiner also takes responsibility for making sure that the External Examiner is aware of the requirements for the examination and for ensuring that the joint report is sent to the Degree Committee promptly after the oral.

If no suitable Internal Examiner can be found within the University, a second External Examiner is appointed. If two External Examiner’s are used, the Degree Committee must appoint an Internal Chair for the viva examination in the same subject area from within the Faculty.

If the candidate is a member of the University staff, another member of staff shall not be appointed as Examiner. A member of staff of an approved non-University institution in Cambridge may be appointed if the Degree Committee deem it appropriate, or two External Examiners should be appointed.
9.2 External Examiner

The Board of Graduate Studies expects the External Examiner to:

• provide an external view of the merits of the thesis and its defence in the oral;

• set the thesis and its examination in the context of the standards for the degree in the UK.

The External Examiner should therefore not have a recent significant connection (such as employment or a College Fellowship) with the University of Cambridge or with its approved non-University institutions. The appointment of an Examiner from outside the UK will normally be permitted by the Board of Graduate Studies only if:

  a) there is no suitable Examiner in the UK;

  b) it is clear that the Examiner is aware of, and is willing to work to, the conventions of the PhD as it is understood in the UK with respect, in particular, to the length of the course and the format and status of the dissertation as an unpublished document.

10. Policy on Retired UTOs and non-UTOs as Supervisors

A UTO who is about to retire should not be permitted to accept any PhD students unless his or her contract with the University enables him or her to supervise the student for at least two years. A retired member of staff could act as an Advisor for a prospective student. An academic retired with a current PhD student is acceptable.

11. Policy on Non-UTOs in Graduate Admissions

Non-UTOs should not be appointed to supervise graduate students. Any graduate applications reviewed by non-UTOs should always be reviewed by a third assessor from FAMES.