Postgraduate Research Supervision Policy

1.   Context

Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin, herein after referred to as Trinity, is a research-led institution which aligns its provision of research supervision with international best practice, underpinned by robust quality assurance processes. Supervision of research is a defining feature of postgraduate education at Trinity.

2.   Purpose

This policy sets out a framework for effective research supervision and clarifies the roles and responsibilities of supervisors and research students.

3.   Benefits

The practices embedded in this policy promote integrity, accountability and transparency in the University's provision of research supervision, and reinforce the core values upon which research at Trinity is conducted.

4.   Scope

4.1   This policy applies to the supervision of student dissertations at postgraduate level, whether at doctoral or research masters level.

4.2   It does not apply to essays or other written work submitted for assessment within the taught module component of a PGT course or to the supervision of undergraduate capstone projects, or research that will lead to a joint award from Trinity and a partner institution.

4.3   This policy does not apply to students who are subject to remote supervision. Remote supervision of research students operates in accordance with Trinity's Policy on Remote Supervision available here.

5.   Principles

5.1   Effective supervision is integral to research at the highest levels of learning, innovation and enquiry and, as a form of teaching, manifests the highest pedagogical values.

5.2   Research supervision reflects the University's founding values: freedom and independence of thought, respect for individual talents, and commitment to critical scholarship and innovative research.

5.3   Positive collaborative interaction between students and supervisors based on mutual respect, accessibility, open communication and ethical work benefits the research project and enhances the student experience.

5.4   On the other hand, the role of a supervisor is to assist and provide guidance to the student as the latter undertakes the research. It is emphatically *not* to undertake the research for the student, still less to take responsibility for the ultimate writing or submission of the thesis.

5.5   It is recognised that there is no such thing as a single 'supervision model' which is applicable to all student/supervisor relationships (and not least because no two students and no two dissertations are the same). Trinity's policy on supervision, therefore, seeks to ensure that there are procedural safeguards in place to enable the supervision relationship to flow effectively, but not to dictate how the relationship should operate.

5.6   To this end, Trinity has clear, transparent and supportive systems in place to minimise and resolve issues that may arise over the course of the research project but, in the spirit of academic freedom and with the aim of ensuring effective student/supervisor relationships, it does not seek unduly to fetter the manner in which such relationships operate.

5.7   Student data associated with the project (i.e. personal information, research reports, copies of theses) is subject to the Data Protection Act 2018 and the European General Data Protection Regulations (EU-GDPR). Where the supervisor is based outside the EU, the data protection legislation of the jurisdiction in which the supervisor is based will apply.

6.   Policy

6.1   Research students are supervised by suitably qualified members of academic staff in line with criteria set out in the Calendar Part 3 Sections 2.8 and 2.9. Depending on the nature of the project and their individual needs, they may work with one Principal Supervisor or with a team of more than one supervisor. In particular, it is normally inappropriate for someone to be appointed as a supervisor of any research student unless they themselves are research active.

6.2   The role of the supervisor is to provide effective supervision to the relevant student in his or her field of study commensurate with the nature of the degree for which the research is being undertaken and in the particular circumstances of the individual   supervision relationship.

6.3   The rules and criteria for appointment as a supervisor are laid down by the College Calendar. In applying these rules (and in appointing a supervisor) the Director of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate), Head of School or nominated delegate (as appropriate) must be satisfied that the proposed supervisor or supervisors will

provide   appropriate and effective supervision to the student having regard to the degree for   which the research project is being undertaken.

6.4   In addition, the Director of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate), Head of School or   nominated delegate (as appropriate) must ensure that there is some contingency arrangement for replacement supervision in the event of the appointed supervisor being   unavailable to supervise the student for a prolonged period of time.

6.5   Whereas attendance at supervision training workshops is not mandatory, equally research supervisors (especially in the early years of their careers as supervisors) are encouraged to participate and engage in formal or informal professional development to   develop and support their practice of supervision.

6.6   A research supervisor must be committed to supervising their research students. The supervisor will guide the student both in the development of the research question   which will underpin the project and also in the completion of the various chapters or   sections which will comprise the submitted thesis.

6.7   Contact is maintained throughout the research project and effective feedback is   supplied by the supervisor (s). While the definition of 'effective feedback' will vary from student to   student and from project to project, feedback should be provided in a timely and accessible manner.

6.8   A thesis committee is appointed for all PhD students. This committee comprises the Principal and any co-supervisors, and two other suitably qualified persons appointed by the School or Discipline. It is not necessary that the non-supervisor members of the Thesis Committee be members of the academic staff, and the criteria for appointment of supervisors (as outlined in the Calendar Part 3) do not apply in the selection of the non-supervisor members.

6.9   The student should be informed as to who is on their Thesis Committee and, where appropriate, the School may include the student in the selection of the non-supervisor members of the Committee.

6.10   The role of the Thesis Committee is to monitor and advise on the academic progress of the PhD student throughout the lifespan of the student's Structured PhD. Where Schools or Disciplines operate models equivalent to the 'thesis committee' model, the Director of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) should seek permission in this regard from the Dean of Graduate Studies.

6.11   An annual progress report is completed collaboratively by the supervisor and the student on the progress of the research project and highlights any problems that may need to be addressed. A supervisor will also engage with a doctoral student in the   completion of a confirmation report in the student's second year on the register.

6.12   In the first, third and subsequent years of a student's period on the PhD register, the student will submit the progress report to the non-supervisor members of the Thesis Committee for review to determine whether the student can

continue on the register. In year two, the non-supervisor members of the Thesis Committee assume the role of the Confirmation Panel in the Ph.D. confirmation process.

6.13   The School must also submit the student's progress report to the Academic Registry (AR), who require this as evidence that the student has successfully completed the relevant stage of the structured PhD in the previous year. Registration for the second and fourth year of the PhD (or the second year of a research masters) is conditional on submission of a successful first/third year progress report to AR, and registration for third year of the PhD is conditional on the student having successfully passed the confirmation process.

6.14   Beyond supervision of the thesis *simpliciter* a supervisor may assist their research student in a number of ways including (a) in completing funding and/or grant applications (b) in obtaining ethical approval for his or her research (where appropriate) and (c) in the submission of the thesis. Finally where examiners of a Research Masters or PhD thesis refer the thesis back for revisions and re-examination, the supervisor will   engage with the student in completing the revisions required by the examiners.

6.15   If a supervisor wishes to retain a copy of the student's PhD thesis beyond the examination period, consent must be obtained from the student as per the thesis submission guidelines.

6.16   All incoming students from September 2018 onwards are required to take the 5 ECTS module in 'Research Integrity and Impact in an Open Scholarship Era'.

7.   Responsibility

Responsibility for this policy rests with the Dean of Graduate Studies.

8.   Related Documents

8.1   [The University of Dublin Calendar, Part III](#)

8.2   Dignity and Respect Policy

8.3   Good Research Practice Policy

https://www.tcd.ie/research/dean/research-policies/

8.4   Research Ethics Policy

8.5   Remote Supervision Policy

8.6   Supervision of Research Students: Best Practice Guidelines

8.7   [Postgraduate Research Handbook (2018)](#)

8.8   Existing School Supervision Guidelines

8.9   [Ireland's Framework of Good Practice for Research Degree Programmes](#)

9.   Document Control

9.1   Approved: May 2017

9.2   Revised Policy approved by Council in October 2019

9.3   Date of next review: Academic Year 2022/23