GUIDELINES TO HELP FORMULATE SUPERVISION AGREEMENTS

by Simon Moss

Introduction

As part of their candidature, candidates and supervisors need to construct a supervision agreement using a particular form. This agreement specifies the suggested roles and responsibilities of candidates and supervisors—such as how often they plan to meet and who is responsible for arranging meetings. This agreement should be constructed as early as possible, potentially revisited several months later, and must be submitted as part of the confirmation of candidature.

|  |
| --- |
| The supervision agreement enables candidates and supervisors to clarify the expectations of one another—but is not a legal document.  |

## Illustration

Some Colleges recommend that candidates utilize a simple template to construct a supervision agreement. The following table illustrates this template. Candidates and supervisors can adopt, modify, or extend this template.

|  |
| --- |
| **Supervision agreement**Signature of candidate\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Signature of principal supervisor \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Signature of associate supervisor\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ |
| * The candidate and supervisors will convene planning meetings, perhaps twice a year, in which they will agree on expectations, outcomes, resources, and responsibilities of all parties
* Supervisors will help candidates identify suitable literature, choose research questions and methods, write the reports, develop a career plan, and complete other relevant tasks
* The candidate will meet at least one supervisor regularly—perhaps an hour a week.
* If full time, the candidate will work 37.5 or more hours a week on their project. If part time, the candidate will work half this time.
* Supervisors will offer detailed and constructive feedback on the research within an agreed timeframe and help the candidate write more effectively in the future
* The candidate is granted the authority to reach decisions about all facets of the project—except the supervisor can override or impose decisions that could otherwise risk the health and safety of other indivduals or could violate laws, regulations, contracts, or agreements.
* The candidate will generally be the first author of publications that emanate from the thesis
* The candidate and supervisors will foster and maintain a safe, respectful, constructive and productive work environment.
* The candidate will attempt to write a complete draft of the thesis within 3 years and submit the thesis within 3.5 years
* If any of the supervisors leave the university, they should either continue to supervise remotely or organize a suitable replacement.
* The candidate and supervisors have discussed and agreed on all these clauses

  |

NB: Some colleges refer to supervisors as advisors.

## Supervision roles

In your supervision agreement, you should also specify the role of each supervisor. The following table outlines some possible roles your supervisors could assume. In addition, when completing forms about changes to supervision, allocate a percentage to each supervisor. These percentages are designed to clarify the extent to which each supervisor should contribute. Generally

* supervisors should not be allocated less than 20%; otherwise, they might not feel committed enough to your work
* if possible, at least one supervisor, but not necessarily the principal supervisor, should be allocated at least 40%; one person should be very committed to the project.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Role and percentage range | Responsibilities |
| Principal [20 to 90%] | * Responsible for the welfare, progress, and completion of the candidate
* Responsible for the effective functioning of the supervision team
* Can fulfil all other supervisory roles as well, as specified below
 |
| Associate: Subject matter expert [10 to 50%] | * Offers guidance and insight, but primarily around topic of expertise
* Delivers feedback on written work, but primarily around topic of expertise
* Assists principal supervisor or primary contact in their roles, especially when these individuals are unavailable
 |
| Associate: Primary contact [30 to 90%]  | * Is the first person the research candidates contact when they need guidance, insight, or feedback on some topic
* Delivers feedback on all written work
 |
| Associate: Apprentice [10 to 50%] | * Assumes some of the responsibilities of principal or primary contact supervisors, but under the guidance of these supervisors
* Assumes the responsibilities of a subject matter expert as well, when possible
 |

**Diversity of supervisors on the panel.** Before confirmation of candidature, the principal supervisor, in consultation with the candidate, should arrange a supervision panel that fulfills at least six of the following seven criteria. To clarify, each supervisor might fulfill many criteria. Therefore, two supervisors might be enough to fulfill six criteria.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Criterion | The panel should include at least one… |
| **Mandatory criteria** |  |
| Discipline expert | registered supervisor who has developed expertise in the relevant discipline or field of research |
| Methods expert | person who has developed expertise in the methodology or methods |
| Ongoing academic | registered supervisor who is likely to be employed at CDU during the entire candidature  |
| Experience with Q1 | registered supervisor who has published two Q1 journal articles in the last five years—or can justify equivalent quality of output in a request to the Dean of Graduate Studies. Q1 is defined according to Scimago, the Australian Business Deans Council (A\*/A), and the Deakin list of law journal (A\*/A).  |
| **Optional criteria** |  |
| ECR | one early-career researcher who could benefit from their role in this project |
| End-user | one end-user—a person from government, business, or community who could benefit from the research and help the candidate apply this research in practice  |
| Setting expert | one person who has developed expertise in the setting or industry |

 |

## Other useful clauses

To extend this simple template, candidates and supervisors should discuss some of the clauses that appear in the left column of the following table. Many of these clauses were derived from the latest research on the conditions or practices that enhance these relationships. Furthermore

* the second column presents the rationale that justifies some of these clauses.
* the third column indicates whether these clauses are essential or merely helpful: Candidates and supervisors should definitely at least discuss the essential clauses.

To facilitate this discussion, candidates could express statements to supervisors like

* apparently, I need to construct a supervision agreement
* do you feel we should modify or delete any of these clauses?
* do these clauses encompass your expectations about my responsibilities?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Clause | Justification or clarification | Status |
| **Induction** |  |  |
| At least one supervisor will introduce the candidate to supportive individuals at the university, such as research administrators, academics with similar interests, and other HDR candidates |  | Helpful |
| At least one supervisor will convey information to the candidate about the achievements, challenges, trajectory, and strategy of the university and college.  | This historical understanding has been shown to foster commitment to the institution | Helpful |
| At least one supervisor will show the candidate how to access candidate services, complaints, and other facilitates that empower candidates.  |  | Essential |
| At least one supervisor will help organize opportunities for the candidates to articulate their distinct experiences, qualities, and capabilities to other people —by organizing a lunch with relevant individuals, for example.  | Candidates feel more accepted when granted opportunities to articulate their distinct experiences, qualities, and capabilities to other people | Helpful |
| The supervisors will encourage the candidate to receive mentoring or advice from other people, including other academics or peers. |  | Helpful |
| **Meetings and access** |  |  |
| The principal supervisor and candidate will speak in person, over telephone, or over videoconference at least once a month—and for at least one hour every month.  |  | Helpful |
| If the candidate has not spoken to supervisors during the last two months, at least one supervisor will contact the candidate. Candidates may not always contact supervisors if distressed or depressed, for example |  | Helpful |
| If supervisors are unable to offer enough assistance in a particular month, they will inform the relevant manager. This manager can then arrange someone to assist the candidate during this time  |  | Essential |
| If the candidate wants to meet the principal supervisor briefly, this supervisor will agree to meet within one week, unless on leave.  |  | Helpful |
| If the candidate wants to meet an associate supervisor briefly, this supervisor will agree to meet within two weeks, unless on leave |  | Helpful |
| The candidate, if seeking answers to questions before the scheduled meeting, can email any supervisor.  |  | Essential |
| The principal supervisor will respond to emails within 2 days, unless on leave. The associate supervisors will respond within a week, unless on leave. |  | Helpful |
| The candidate should not feel compelled to respond to emails from the supervisor immediately—but ideally within a week. |  | Helpful |
| The candidate will organize the meetings. |  | Helpful |
| Any individuals, however, can reschedule meetings if Essential. |  | Essential |
| Before each meeting, the candidate will prepare some questions. |  | Helpful |
| Before each meeting, at least one supervisor will prepare some material to impart, such as information about ethics, the discipline, research methods, data analysis, writing, communication, or project management. |  | Helpful |
| During each meeting, some time will be dedicated to some discussion about the doubts and concerns of candidates—such as doubts about their capabilities or project.  | After candidates express doubts about their capabilities, doubts about their project, or other concerns, they tend to feel more resilient.  | Helpful |
| **Project planning and milestone setting** |  |  |
| To establish the research questions of this project, all parties will consider the distinct passions, capabilities, and resources of the candidate. The supervisors will help the candidate identify some of the most recent, relevant, and remarkable studies that match these passions, capabilities, and resources and could be extended  | For example, the supervisors could ask the candidate to imagine their life 10 years in the future—an exercise that helps people clarify their priorities. | Helpful |
| To ascertain the research methods and assist with data analysis, the relevant supervisor will help the candidate learn more about recent advances.  |  | Helpful |
| All supervisors will help the candidate uncover and resolve potential barriers—such as limited access to information or participants, ethical complications, financial constraints, and other obstacles.  |  | Helpful |
| The candidate is responsible for achieving milestones on time, such as confirmation of candidature. Nevertheless, to help candidates fulfil these milestones, the supervisors will offer insights on how to plan and progress effectively.  | For example, the supervisor might discuss the planning fallacy—the tendency of individuals to underestimate the time needed to complete many tasks. Likewise, the supervisor will encourage the candidate to set goals around how they will progress rather than goals around the rate of progress: These process goals tend to be more effective than outcome goals.  | Essential |
| The supervisors will help the candidate develop experience in roles that could be relevant to their future careers. They might introduce the candidate to industry partners, organize opportunities for the candidate to participate in lectures, and so forth.  | When candidates perceive their future as more certain and valid, they tend to resist temptations better and work more responsibly.  | Helpful |
| Every month, the candidate will submit some written work to at least one supervisor—usually 2000 words or more. This work could include summaries of studies, methods, limitations, or other material that could be included in the research proposal or thesis.  |  | Helpful |
| **Ethics, integrity, or support** |  |  |
| The supervisors will concede their perspective or opinions are not incontrovertible and may be biased by their experiences and philosophies.  | When supervisors demonstrate humility, candidates tend to perform more effectively. | Essential |
| If the supervisors present criticisms, this feedback must revolve only around specific behaviors the person can change—coupled with tangible suggestions on how to improve—rather than vague or unfavorable labels. | References to vague or unfavorable labels diminishes the extent to which candidates feel they can change, compromising their resilience.  | Essential |
| The supervisors and candidate will collaborate on the relevant ethics applications—and will not begin research until this approval is organized.  |  | Essential |
| The supervisors and candidate will maintain a professional relationship | Sometimes, when supervisors and candidates socialize and become too close, the supervisors are reluctant to offer constructive feedback or redress problems appropriately.  | Essential |
| Supervisors and candidates will never comment on the appearance or sexuality of one another, will never allude to sexual stereotypes, will never seek a sexual or romantic relationship, and will not engage in acts that could be construed or misconstrued as sexual harassment, intimidation, or assault.  |  | Essential |
| If any of the supervisors leave the university, they should either continue to supervise remotely or organize a suitable replacement.  |  | Essential |
| Sometimes, the candidate needs to conduct research with a community that might be suspicious or wary of researchers. In these circumstances, at least one supervisor should be a member of this community, be a member of a similar community, or be trusted by this community.  |  | Essential |
| **Preventing and resolving disputes** |  |  |
| The principal supervisor will organize joint meetings, at least every 3 months, with the candidate and all other supervisors  | Joint meetings tend to diminish the likelihood that supervisors express conflicting and irreconcilable advice | Helpful |
| During one or more joint meetings, the supervisors should discuss the topics in which they have developed expertise and the topics in which their knowledge or skills is limited. One supervisor, for example, might indicate they have developed extensive knowledge on machine learning but limited knowledge on the policies and procedures of this university.  | Consequently, if disagreements transpire, the candidates will be more certain about whose expertise should be trusted  | Helpful |
| The supervisors will not impose demands or obligations on the candidate. Instead, the supervisors will offer choices, justify all requests, and adapt principles to the needs and preferences of the candidate. The candidate must be granted discretion to reach decisions about their thesis.  | This behavior—called autonomy support—has been shown to enhance the motivation and persistence of individuals.  | Helpful |
| Nevertheless, if the safety or welfare of someone could be jeopardized—or if a law or regulation may be violated—the supervisors may impose demands to manage these risks. |  | Essential |
| The candidate should always consider the advice of their supervisors—but should also appraise and, if Essential, explicitly challenge and reject this advice as well.  |  | Essential |
| Occasionally, the supervisors and candidate may feel they cannot resolve a dispute. In these circumstances, they will seek the guidance of an independent party. This independent party should not be subservient to the supervisors. |  | Essential |
| **Academic contribution** |  |  |
| The candidate will send the relevant supervisors plans of various sections—that is, a series of bullet points that outline each section, paragraph, or even sentence |  | Helpful |
| This supervisors will provide feedback on these plans within one week, unless on leave |  | Helpful |
| After the plans have been developed, and the candidate submits the first draft of a section, within one week, the relevant supervisors will provide detailed feedback using track changes on several pages—enough feedback to identify common writing principles the candidate should apply in the future |  | Helpful |
| Subsequently, the relevant supervisors will provide more feedback over a longer duration—no more than one day per 1000 words or so.  |  | Helpful |
| At least one supervisor will carefully read every page of the thesis—but might only skim parts of the research proposal |  | Helpful |
| **Publications and Intellectual Property** |  |  |
| Although supervisors can offer advice, only the candidate will decide whether to publish papers from the thesis—either during or after candidature—unless an agreement with another organization, such as a funding body, demands otherwise |  | Essential |
| For these publications, the candidate will generally be the first author |  | Essential |
| In some circumstances, the candidate might not be the first author. For example, one paper might integrate the data of several candidates or researchers. Before submitting these papers, the candidate and supervisors must seek approval from the Dean of Graduate Studies or a delegate  | This clause prevents supervisors from utilizing their position of power or compromising the thesis of candidates.  | Essential |
| Consistent with the Vancouver Protocol, supervisors should be included as co-authors of papers only if * they contributed signficantly to the conception and design, or to the analysis and interpretation, of research in this specific paper
* they contributed intellectually to the drafting or correction of this specific paper
* they approved the final version of this paper
 | This clause is consistent with the Vancouver Protocol | Essential |
| **Evaluation** |  |  |
| The candidate and supervisors will discuss this agreement at least once a year. That is, they will discuss whether the agreement should be revised and whether all parties complied with the agreement |  | Helpful |