PhD supervision support

The Queen Mary Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Programmes sets out the formal requirements for supervision (http://www.arcs.qmul.ac.uk/research-degrees/research-degree-students/).

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance and support for PhD supervisors at the beginning of the new academic year given the uncertainty surrounding the Covid-19 situation. We are aware that you have all been supervising remotely for some time; this document is solely intended to provide additional support and lay out the institutional requirements.

Direct supervision during remote study

Good practice agrees that supervisors should endeavour to correspond with students regularly. The Code sets out the requirement for a minimum of ten supervisory meetings per academic year for full-time students (pro rata for part-time students) to be recorded on the MySIS Supervision Log. It is recommended that check-ins happen more regularly. Whilst some check-ins may be lost due to lack of co-location of student and supervisors at this time, supervisors should make regular contact with their research students via MS teams or other video call facility at least once every two weeks.

Please note that as per QMUL regulations an email exchange does not count as a formal supervision. However, it can be seen as good supplementary support during this time.

- Please ensure that you are checking in with your research students more regularly than previously.
- Please ensure that you continue to have formal supervision meetings and that students record a summary of discussion and actions on the Supervision Log.

The UK Council for Graduate Education (UKCGE) have compiled an excellent resource considering good remote supervisory practice that can be accessed here. This document includes suggestions for ways of circumnavigating common issues with remote supervision: https://supervision.ukcge.ac.uk/cms/wp-content/uploads/A-Guide-to-Online-Supervision-Kumar-Kumar-Taylor-UK-Council-for-Graduate-Education.pdf

Common issues in remote supervision:

Connection:

It is common for research students to feel isolated and be concerned about reaching out to their supervisors directly. There is a lack of sense of community and connection when working remotely.

To combat this it is recommended that supervisors set regular meeting times with their students and a regular format for the meetings to take place, whether this is by telephone, Skype, Zoom, MS Teams (the university official online meetings platform) etc. by agreement of both the student and supervisor. It may also be useful to consider holding virtual office hours.

In addition to this, building a remote community of research students should be a priority for schools and institutes or research groups, to ensure that students – both existing and new – are integrated into the wider university research community.

Expectations:

Students may be unaware of the level of work required for a doctoral thesis and be ignorant of the processes involved in completing a research degree. This information may usually be gleaned from fellow research students if students are unclear. However, given the remote nature of learning in the current environment, this opportunity may again be missing.

Please work to ensure that students are fully aware of your expectations of them. Please also ensure that students attend both the QMUL induction and your local school/institute induction.

The Code of Practice states the following in relation to supervision meetings:

Students will have an initial meeting with their primary supervisor as soon as possible following the beginning of their programme. This meeting will cover: [a] the nature of the supervisory relationship and composition of the supervisory team, including responsibilities and expectations; [b] discussion of the research topic proposed, initial routes of enquiry and objectives; [c] identification of initial training needs and formulation of a training plan; [d] recording supervision meetings using the Supervision Log on MySIS; and [e] how the student's progress will be assessed.

In your first supervisory meeting, please ensure that expectations are discussed, clarified and where possible followed up via an email. These might include: how often meetings will take place; whether written work will always be submitted before a meeting (and if so, how far in advance); what seminars and events the student might be expected to attend; etc., in order to ensure that the PhD student is as aware as possible of what you may expect from them and your supervisory relationship.

Producing Work:

Studying online means that students do not have regular opportunities to discuss their work and thoughts with colleagues. Writing frequently allows students to consider and formulate their thoughts, and this should be encouraged and supported throughout the research studies. Again, maintaining online/remote discussion groups will help with this, but also asking students to write short pieces for consideration and discussion regularly would help this. Written work does not have to mean draft chapters.

Feedback:

Tone in feedback is easily lost when not presented face to face. It is common for students to find feedback that is solely written to be unduly critical. It is also difficult to provide feedback in a solely written format without being able to respond to visual and non-verbal cues. A good way to combat this is to ensure that feedback is discussed at regular meetings, and ensure that this is a key part of those meetings.

Social Cohort Building

Maintaining some sort of social cohort amongst the students at this time is important. Some schools and institutes have committed to maintaining activities such as journal clubs online.

- Consider, if you have not already done so, bringing research groups online to discuss progress.

- Support informal discussions amongst students, including things like weekly coffee breaks, online discussions.
- Consider how to integrate the new cohort starting in September with the current cohort of students. Suggestions include online student speed networking, coffee conversations, reading groups and online quizzes.

Health and Safety

We need to ensure that schools and institutes are communicating with students regarding health and safety processes in place to return to campus. This is being done on a school-by-school and a building-by-building basis. We ask that students are reassured that safety processes are being followed, and also note that there is no obligation on students to return to campus at this time.

If students wish to return to using campus office space, they need to follow the process put in place for staff members. The Head of Department is also required to sign off on this.

1. Queen Mary will adhere to the advice and guidance as set out by the UK Government ('Working safely during coronavirus'). All managers (in this case supervisors) are asked to familiarise themselves with the relevant sections from this document.

2. All managers (supervisors) and staff should be aware of, and adhere, to the requirements as set out in the University's Risk Assessment document.

3. Managers (supervisors) should conduct any local risk assessments appropriate to their work settings/activities, and mitigate any identified risks before research students return to campus.

4. The individual health assessment should be completed by all staff (research students) either currently working on campus or expected to return to campus.

5. General guidance about key considerations, and the nature of conversations that all managers are encouraged to have with their staff, is available on our Return to Campus Conversations page.

If your student is returning to lab-based work, you will also need to liaise with your lab team to ensure that local health and safety procedures are adhered to.

Health and Wellbeing Considerations

The Counselling Service at ACS offers online counselling appointments to students at QMUL using video and audio software. One-off and brief counselling contracts will be offered to students residing in the UK. They can also offer wellbeing checks and phone support to students who are currently residing overseas. Please contact the counselling service if you would like to speak with one of their counsellors. They also have online resources that are updated regularly.

The Disability and Dyslexia Service can offer appointments over the phone, Skype or Zoom and face to face. Their mental health advisers are here to advise and support students who have diagnosed mental health condition, an autistic spectrum condition, or who feel their mental health is having an impact on their studies. If you would like to arrange an appointment please email dds@qmul.ac.uk.

- o Student Minds has created an online Student Space to help students access support.

- o Queen Mary Students' Union has some [helpful tips](#) to stay connected and healthy.

- o Student Minds offers further [advice and guidance on looking after your mental health](#). There is also guidance for [those with ongoing mental health difficulties](#).

- o You can also make use of [togetherall](#) for 24/7 online support and [recourses for looking after yourself during the Coronavirus outbreak](#) (requires self-registration/login but available to our students and staff - use your Queen Mary email address).

- o If students need to self-isolate, they might want to read the helpful blog for **students who need to self-isolate:** ["A Student Survival Guide to Self-Isolation".](#)

- o [Every mind matters](#) has just put together some advice particularly for those who **worry about coronavirus**.

- o **Worry and anxiety** are common problems at the best of times, and when they take over they can become all-encompassing. Psychology Tools has put together the ["Living with worry and anxiety amidst global uncertainty"](#) guide, to help management of worry and anxiety in these times.

- o [Queen Mary Covid-19 Community Support](#): this is a support group for staff and students who are in self-isolation or who need support. You can ask for help and/or you can volunteer.

- o [Report + Support](#): Anyone who is **affected by any incident of hate**, or **concerned by difficulties such as relationship or familial abuse** at all, especially during this period of social distancing, can seek support.

- o [Bereavement](#): for more information and support for those affected by bereavement.

Online Training and support

The Researcher Development team have moved their training delivery online. This is to support students to access training and development opportunities.

Information on online training and support from the RD team can be found here: https://www.qmul.ac.uk/queenmaryacademy/researcher-development/

Research student induction programme 2020/21

The Doctoral College will be running a new research student induction programme for 2020/21. This will be a series of online workshops for students run throughout the week of 29th September.

Information about these events can be found here and all new research students should be encouraged to attend: https://www.qmul.ac.uk/doctoralcollege/phd-students/training/events/

Other

New Student communications

For new students it is important to ensure that expectations are managed. It is important to ensure that students know if they will have access to physical spaces and face-to-face supervision, or if this

will be done online only for a period. This can be supported on a case-by-case basis, but communication is important to ensure students are aware of the arrangements for starting their research studies.