

Guidance for supervisors of research students

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Research students are expected to be resident in Cambridge from Michaelmas term 2020 onwards, unless they are undertaking fieldwork, unable to return due to increased susceptibility to infectious disease, or writing up their thesis). It is acknowledged however that face-to-face supervision may remain unviable for some students at this present time.

Supervisors are asked to continue to refer to the guidance below when conducting supervision of research students by remote means.

Maintaining contact

- Maintain regular contact with all of your students.
- Agree and communicate the frequency and format of contact with your students.
- Where possible hold meetings via video conference. Having face-to-face (albeit via video conference) meetings will help to maintain a positive rapport with your students. CCTL have developed guidance on supervising and conference calls and on the use of recordings for remote teaching and learning (see 'Other guidance' below).
- Recognise that students with Autism Spectrum conditions or mental health difficulties may find video conferencing difficult and consider alternative arrangements for these students.
- Consider more frequent, shorter meetings. Many people find meetings by video conference more intense than face-to-face meetings and more frequent meetings will help your student structure their work and give them opportunities to raise awareness of any problems or concerns they may have.
- Be mindful that some students may not be in Cambridge and for these students take account of time zones when arranging meetings. Be aware that students may be in environments in which it is difficult to concentrate on research work in the way that is possible in Cambridge. For example, students may be sharing accommodation and broadband connectivity with family members, or may need to give time to caring for others.
- Remember to include social aspects to your discussions.
- Recognise that your student may have wider concerns which they may wish to discuss. These may relate to their health, family commitments or potential future employment. You may need to keep notes of discussions or ask your student to keep notes and send them to you. You can find useful information on recording supervisions in the guidance on online supervisions for undergraduate students (see 'Other guidance' below)

- Continue to hold group meetings to facilitate wider research discussions and maintain the group dynamic. Encourage and facilitate peer support through online groups and buddies. This will help to support the student and to ensure the sustainability of relationships during this time.
- Continue to review submitted work and provide feedback. Be aware however that a different communication style might be needed, such as coaching.
- Remember to make your meetings accessible for disabled students – see the DRC’s [guidelines for supervisions with disabled students](#).
- Ensure that you actively facilitate meetings to encourage contributions from different students. Outline expectations on joining and contributing to the meetings (for instance muting or using the chat function in Teams).

Student progress and support

- As your students return to on-site study reflect on the recent period of closure and the impact this has had on their research projects. Talk to your student about their plans to resume on-site study. For students who are not in Cambridge, recognise that their ability to work might continue to be impacted and be prepared to alter expectations and deadlines to accommodate this. In all cases, accept that milestones might need to be changed or work adapted – see progress milestones below).
- Take account of the challenges that students might face in returning to Cambridge, such as travel restrictions, and the impact these may have on their wellbeing. Recognise that some students may be feeling uncertain about returning to Cambridge. For those who are not in Cambridge, obstacles such as lack of access to labs or archival material, slow internet access or caring responsibilities may continue. In all cases students may also find that they have a lack of motivation.
- Signpost your student to others forms of support - you can find details in the [When to Refer document](#). The Students' Unions' Advice Service (advice@studentadvice.cam.ac.uk) can also provide guidance and support to students. Their College Tutor will also have a role in providing pastoral support.
- For funding support students should be directed to the [Financial Hardship Support page](#).
- If your student has a disability, contact the [Disability Resource Centre](#) for advice on what additional support might be needed.
- Continue to encourage your student to seek training and support via the library and online or open learning resources; to engage with other experts in their field; and to engage with their peers, who can be a valuable source of support.
- Encourage your students to continue with researcher development. Many key courses are now available online via the [Researcher Development site](#). The RD team are holding useful sessions relating to COVID-19.
- Continue to encourage students to keep clear records of their work, progress and the disruption experienced due to the pandemic. These will serve as a useful evidence base should they be required to support applications for extensions to funding and/or submission deadlines.
- It is very important that you continue to submit your termly reports via [PFRS](#), providing a commentary on your student’s progress and impediments to progress.
- If you have concerns about your student’s progress or wellbeing you should discuss this with the student and with their Postgraduate Tutor.

- Encourage your student to maintain contact with other students in your group and in their Department and College.
- Recognise that students who are completing corrections following their *viva* will also need support and might have specific concerns about future employment.
- Recognise also that your ability to work might be impacted and consider who else might provide support to your student. Provide the main contact details of other possible supporters of your student, including their Advisor and College Postgraduate Tutor and the Departmental Director of Postgraduate Education (recognising that the capacity of these colleagues might also be impacted). Let your students know if you are unwell or otherwise unable to engage with supervising your students.

First year assessments

- Most students who started in Michaelmas Term 2019 will be submitting their first-year report in coming months, if they have not already done so. Accept that your student might need longer to complete their first-year report or that the report might not be as complete as it would otherwise be.
- The first-year assessment can take place in person or by video conference, depending on the guidance in place at the time and the needs and preferences of the participants. Recognise that some students may find video conferencing difficult and may not be able to undertake a first-year assessment in this way. In these cases a face-to-face *viva* should be arranged if possible. If your student will be having a *viva* by video conference, give your student the opportunity to practice presenting their work in this way by arranging a 'mock *viva*'.
- Assessors will be asked to take account of the obstacles faced by the students in preparing their report. Similarly, Degree Committees will take these into account when considering whether a student has passed their first-year registration.
- If you usually require students to take specific courses during their first year, which they have been unable to do, this should not delay students progressing to PhD status, as they can be taken at a subsequent time.

Final thesis and examination

- Many students will be writing up their thesis for submission, and arrangements have been made for theses to be submitted electronically. Students should aim to submit their thesis by their current submission deadline if they can. When advising your student think critically and constructively about what work is still required for their thesis, being realistic about what might be achieved within the time remaining. Students who are unable to do so by their deadline will be given an extension, but remember that this is not always in a student's best interests, as it may have implications for their funding, visa and future career plans. Guidance on extensions can be found on the [Cambridge Students Extensions page](#).
- It is likely that your student's *viva* will be held by video conference. Give your student the opportunity to practice presenting their work via video conference by arranging a 'mock *viva*'. Again, recognise that some students may find video conferencing difficult and in some cases a face-to-face *viva* should be arranged if possible.

- Students may be required to complete corrections to their thesis following their *viva*, and will continue to need supervisory support whilst they complete them. Students who need additional time to complete their corrections can apply for an extension.
- It is not yet known when in-person degree congregations will recommence. In the meantime, students who have completed all of the requirements of their degree can have their degree conferred in absentia (these students will be able to attend a ceremony at a later date)

Other guidance

- CCTL Moodle course: [Supervising Postgraduate students](#)
- CCTL's [guide to supervisions](#) includes practical information on selecting and setting up technologies, inclusive discussions and interactions, and accessibility for students with disabilities and neurodiverse profiles
- Policy: [on recording of teaching materials / lectures, and other teaching, learning and assessment activities](#)
- UK Council for Graduate Education article: [Supporting Our Members during the Covid-19 Coronavirus Pandemic](#)