

Guidance on the Appointment and Remit of an Independent Panel Member

Purpose

This document describes the procedure for the appointment of an Independent Panel Member and the remit of the role. This guidance document should be read in conjunction with DCU's *Academic Regulations for Postgraduate Degrees by Research and Thesis*. The *Academic Roles and Responsibilities in Graduate Research Handbook* may also be useful in understanding the role of all panel members in relation to postgraduate research supervision.

The Supervisory Panel

As per the *Academic Regulations for Postgraduate Degrees by Research and Thesis* (section 7.1), each graduate research student will have a supervisory panel consisting of at least one Principal Supervisor and one Independent panel member¹.

The principal aim of the supervisory panel is to participate in formal decision-making with respect to the student's progress, and provide advice, additional support and pastoral care, and escalate, as appropriate, should problems arise.

Appointment of the Independent Panel Member

As per the *Academic Regulations for Postgraduate Degrees by Research and Thesis* (section 7.1.6) one Independent Panel Member should be appointed by the Head of School for each research student and notified to Registry within three months of the student's initial registration. The Regulations also state that the independent member of the supervisory panel must be a member of "academic staff" with suitable experience in supervising research students to completion.

In order to provide continuity for the student and avoid disruption, an individual appointed to the role of Independent Panel Member should be expected to remain in the position for the duration of the student's studies. It is therefore expected that the Independent Panel Member:

- will normally be a permanent member of academic staff: if not, their contract should extend beyond a reasonable period of registration for the award in question;
- is not an *ex officio* position where the individual's role is of a finite duration and will therefore necessitate a change in Independent Panel Member during the period of the student's studies;
- is not likely to be absent for significant periods, or approaching retirement within the likely duration of the student's studies; and
- is independent

The following are not therefore eligible to act as Independent Panel Members:

- Adjunct staff
- Retired staff
- Emeritus staff
- Post-doctoral researchers
- Individuals external to the institution (including members of linked Colleges).

¹ This requirement for a supervisory panel does not apply to candidates registered prior to 2011/2012 and those who initially registered as SPD or MDI students prior to March 2016.

With cognisance of the range of duties expected of the Independent Panel Member, Heads of School should ensure fairness and equity of Independent Panel Member allocations.

Profile of Independent Panel Member

- The Independent Panel Member must have some experience of research degree supervision at the level of the award in a similar or related discipline, but is not required to be expert in the field of study.
- The Independent Panel Member may be a member of academic staff in another school, if there are not enough panel members qualified to be advisors available in a School.
- The Independent Panel Member is not involved in direct supervision of the research student or their project.

Remit of the Independent Panel Member

As a Member of the Supervisory Panel

The Independent Panel Member has a range of responsibilities in relation to their membership of the supervisory panel. This includes:

- A requirement to meet formally with the student and where necessary with the other supervisory panel members to discuss progress. See Appendix 1 for further information on the review meeting process.
- Participate in the formal annual review process, confirming to Registry if the student is eligible to progress. See Appendix 2 on the annual review process.
- Provide the student with advice, additional supports and pastoral care if needed, directing the student to the appropriate DCU supports where appropriate.
- Aid resolution, at a local level where possible, in cases of difficulties such as a lack of progression or a breakdown in the student-supervisory relationship. The separate guidance document² gives further advice on managing difficulties at School / Faculty level.
- Refer to the Head of School, as appropriate, should problems arise.

As Supervisor Mentor

As per the *Academic Regulations for Postgraduate Degrees by Research and Thesis* (section 7.1.4), for DCU academics new³ to being a principal supervisor, the supervisory panel must include a member experienced in supervision who will be in a position to take an advisory role. Inclusion of this “Supervisor Mentor” can also be deemed necessary by the Head of School for reasons other than the Principal Supervisor’s relative inexperience.

This “Supervisor Mentor” role can be taken up by the Independent Panel Member or other supervisor. The role can involve:

² DCU’s [*Guidance for Research Students and Supervisors in Respect of Resolving Difficulties Informally*](#) (Link Required)

³ Not having supervised two postgraduate research students to completion

- Providing guidance and advice to a new supervisor on DCU's procedures and process relating to graduate research programmes.
- Providing guidance and advice in relation to managing the student-supervisor relationship.
- Giving impartial guidance and opinion in cases where there are difficulties in the student-supervisor relation, and / or where the supervisor is concerned about a lack of progress or the welfare of the student.
- Advise, guide and encourage the supervisor in their development of their own good practice as an academic supervisor.

Appendix 1: Research Student Review Meetings

As per section 7.13 of the *Academic Regulations for Postgraduate Degrees by Research and Thesis*, it is the responsibility of the supervisor(s) to meet with the student (and other supervisory panel members if required) at least twice a year to discuss progress.

- Who convenes these (formal) meetings can vary from school to school but typically it is the responsibility of the Principal Supervisor. The Head of School should ensure that academic staff in their School are familiar with the local procedures for organising these meetings.
- Invitation to the first meeting by either the Principal Supervisor or Independent Panel Member should be issued Ideally around the end of Semester 1 (December to January time is typical), as determined by School/Faculty policy.
- The second of these meetings normally coincides with the Annual Review Process (May to June time is preferable to allow time to complete the online form before the July deadline)
- The student should submit a progress report to the panel in advance of the Annual Review Process meeting. A proposed template is suggested below which may be altered to suit the School / discipline.
- The full supervisory panel, including the Independent Panel member, should at least attend this Annual Review Progress meeting with the student.
- The Independent Panel Members role in these meetings is to provide independent, impartial advice and guidance regarding progression and direction of the research. They may also act as a mediator if there are difficulties in the student-supervisor relationship. In these cases the guidance document⁴ may be useful.
- During any meeting the student should be encouraged, and feel safe, in addressing issues or problem areas, as well as highlighting their progress to date and plans for the next period.
- A member of the supervisor panel (usually the Independent Panel Member) should keep a record of the meeting. This record should be distributed to other panel members and the student after the meeting to ensure there is agreement on the plan for the coming months.
- Following a meeting the student may be asked to submit an updated work plan (see suggested templated below) as agreed at the meeting.
- The online Annual Review Progress (PGR2) is only required once per year in July and should be completed only after the panel meeting with the student has taken place. This is to ensure that any agreement and/or decisions arising from the meeting are recorded fully and formally on the student's record.
- A student can also request a formal meeting with the Independent Panel Member (including the Supervisory panel if required) to discuss progress/other supervisory issues if they arise at any stage.

⁴ DCU's [Guidance for Research Students and Supervisors in Respect of Resolving Difficulties Informally](#) (Link Required)

Suggested Template for Student Reports

1. Research Question

To introduce your report, you should give a clear, concise description of the research questions you are investigating. This should take no more than two or three questions at most.

2. Research since the Last Progress Review

In this section, you should describe the research you have conducted since your last panel meeting or, for new students, since joining the programme. There are two important elements to include in this section.

- **Research Activity**

Your aim is to give the panel an overview of the research activity you have completed over the course since the last progress review.

- **Research Learning and Reflection**

You should demonstrate that you have reflected upon the nature of your research (both in terms of content and methodology) and how it relates to the published literature in your chosen topic.

You should also highlight areas which have been challenging for you. During your meeting your supervisory panel may be able to suggest possible solutions to overcome these hurdles.

3. Work Plan

The third element of your report should be a detailed work plan for the next six months of your research. A template for your work plan is included in the appendix to this note.

Here is a suggested template for a work plan.

<i>Order</i>	<i>Research Activity</i>	<i>Steps</i>	<i>Time Required</i>	<i>Start Date</i>	<i>Completion Date</i>
1					
2					

4. Training/Developmental Needs

In this final section you should address any training, education or developmental needs that you require over the coming months to aid your studies and your own personal and professional development. A template is provided by the Graduate Studies on the GSO Loop Page.

Appendix 2: Annual Review Process

As per section 8.1.1 of the *Academic Regulations for Postgraduate Degrees by Research and Thesis*, continued registration for a higher degree is dependent on the submission of a satisfactory annual progress report.


The Annual Progress Review is carried out at School level and should be commenced by a formal review meeting (see Appendix 1 above).

There is an online Annual Review System managed by Registry where a student's progress is formally evaluated and recorded.

The following steps and indicative timeline will ensure the process is completed accurately and in good time to allow the student to register for the next academic year:

- A progress review meeting is convened (normally by the Principal Supervisor) and is attended by the full supervisory panel and the student. See Appendix 1 above for further information on this process.
- Following the meeting the student records their progress online, including details of their professional development plan for the coming year.
- The Principal Supervisor completes their report which requires approval by the full supervisory panel (including the Independent Panel Member). The recommendation for progress / non-progression is endorsed by the Head of School or nominee.
- In the case of negative recommendations (non-progression) the University will take the view that the student is unlikely to achieve the degree for which s/he is registered and s/he will not be permitted to continue as a registered graduate research student.
- As per section 8.1.4 of the *Academic Regulations for Postgraduate Degrees by Research and Thesis*, a student has the right to appeal a negative recommendation made by the supervisory panel. The process for appeals can be found in the regulations under section 13.

DCU Disclaimer: Dublin City University shall not be responsible for or liable in respect of errors or omissions within this document. The University reserves the right to revise, amend, alter or delete details at any time as may be determined by DCU's Academic Regulations for Postgraduate Degrees by Research and Thesis.

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