

5.1 Roles and Responsibilities in the Supervision of Undergraduate Dissertations and Projects

5.1.1 Introduction

Key Elements of Successful Supervision Practices

An undergraduate learner, who is undertaking either a dissertation or a project, will normally be assigned a supervisor. Ongoing practice suggests that the key elements which lead to a productive learner/supervisor relationship include:

- i. Clarity of responsibilities
- ii. Consistency of supervision practices and procedures
- iii. Record keeping of all supervisory input/support by both faculty members and learners

The focus of this short guideline is to attempt to outline the role and responsibilities of learners and those involved in providing them with supervision and to identify the key structures which support this provision.

5.1.2 Objective

- To provide guidelines on the roles and responsibilities of the parties involved in providing supervision for undergraduate learners undertaking dissertations or projects.

5.1.3 Scope

This document is intended to act as a good practice guideline only as to how the supervision of dissertations and projects may be managed in undergraduate academic programmes.

5.1.4 Responsibilities

Programme Committee

- Ensures associated procedures are defined, documented and circulated
- Ensures a suitable supervisor is assigned and communication is managed

Supervisor

- Provides guidance and support to learner in the key aspects of producing the dissertation/project
- Ensures ongoing communication with learner and documents outcome
- Monitors learner progress
- Reads and comments on drafts or sections as appropriate

Learner

- Overall responsibility for management of dissertation or project

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- Meets and keeps ongoing communication with supervisor
- Submits drafts or sections of dissertation or project to supervisor as appropriate

Programme Director

- Chairs Programme Committee and has overall responsibility for activities
- Ensures dissertation/project supervision process is monitored, appropriate feedback mechanisms are in place and action is taken where necessary

5.1.5 The Programme Committee's Responsibilities

The Programme Committee, chaired by the Programme Director is responsible for ensuring that the procedures and criteria associated with dissertations and projects are defined, documented and made available through a range of media, including programme handbooks, intranet etc.

The Programme Committee is responsible for ensuring that a suitable supervisor is appointed to each learner, normally by the outset of the academic year. Normally a supervisor is identified within the Faculty, however, a supervisor from outside of the Faculty or the college may be sourced. In this case, the Programme Committee must ensure that there exists a suitable mechanism for effective liaison between the external supervisor, the learner and the faculty

The Programme Committee must ensure that the supervisor selected, internally or externally, is competent to fulfil their role and that they are made aware of supervision practices and procedures.

5.1.6 The Supervisor's Responsibilities

The primary function of the supervisor is to provide guidance and support to the learner and to act as a critical and rational sounding board for ideas.

The supervisor will also provide:

- i. assistance for the learner in clarifying the project or dissertation topic and its aims and objectives
- ii. assistance for the learner in the identification of and sourcing of appropriate information, literature and other relevant material/sources (primary and secondary)
- iii. advice on appropriate structures and approaches
- iv. advice on a suitable methodology
- v. advice on acceptable referencing styles
- vi. assistance for the learner in managing the timetable for the project or dissertation

The supervisor should ensure effective liaison between themselves, the learner and the faculty. They should keep a written log of formal contact with the learner. The supervisor should regularly monitor the learner's progress. In doing so they should:

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- assist the learner in identifying problems or difficulties with the project or dissertation
- ensure the learner is made aware of inadequate progress
- participate in assessment procedures and practices as specified by the Programme Committee
- The supervisor will normally read and comment on drafts or sections of the project or dissertation and return such work within a reasonable timeframe
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The above recommendations are not exhaustive. Supervisory responsibilities will inherently change in the light of the nature of the project or dissertation.

5.1.7 The Learner's Responsibilities

The primary responsibility for the management of the dissertation or project lies with the learner. Amongst the responsibilities of the learner are to:

- i. Effectively manage the communication mechanism with their supervisor
- ii. Agree a schedule of formal meetings with their supervisor and ensure that these are kept
- iii. Submit drafts or sections of the project or dissertation to their supervisor as advised and eventually the completed work in the required format and in the timeframe directed by the faculty.

5.1.8 Feedback and Monitoring of Dissertation/Project Supervision

It is important that the Programme Director, in association with the Programme Committee and the supervisor, ensures that feedback is sought regarding the dissertation/project process and any issues arising are acted upon. The outcome of monitoring and feedback processes along with any action taken should be included in the Programme Committee's Programme Review. When devising the appropriate means of monitoring, the Programme Director should consider the following:

- Actively encouraging supervisors and learners to provide feedback on progress and communicate any concerns in a timely way and
- Establishing procedures within which formal and informal feedback on quality and standards of the dissertation/project process can be received and appropriate action taken where necessary.