



The Westminster Doctoral Supervisor: Role Descriptors

The University's strategy, as set out in *Being Westminster 2018-23*, puts a 'vibrant body of PhD students' at the heart of its research aims and activities. Supervision is central to the vibrancy of the doctoral student body and to the experience of it for each individual student. The importance of supervision is recognised by the University through the continuation of it through research leave and sabbaticals and through the resources and support offered by the Graduate School in the training and development of supervisors. The descriptor below makes clear the serious responsibilities integral to the supervisory role and its expectations are based on the necessary accountability of all colleagues who take it up.

At Westminster all research students have a Director of Studies and at least one additional supervisor. The descriptor below sets out the expectations for each of these roles. The descriptions of the roles cannot be exhaustive and both Directors of Studies and additional supervisors may be required to undertake other duties. Normally these will be broadly in line with the listed key responsibilities.

The maximum number of doctoral candidates that any academic colleague should be Director of Studies for at any one time is 6, and the maximum number of supervisory teams that a member of staff can be a member of at any one time is 12 (including no more than 6 as Director of Studies). The expectation is that all Readers and Professors are supervising at least one doctoral student at any time.

Director of Studies Role Descriptor

Directors of Studies are responsible for the support of research students in all aspects of their research.

They are the key point of contact and support for their research students. They do not necessarily have to fill every role in their support, but they should be able to accurately advise their research students and to direct them to the appropriate areas of the university where support can be found.

The key duties and responsibilities of the role are:

- To maintain regular contact with the research student and to respond to their communications in a timely manner. A response or holding communication should usually be sent within two working days.
- To ensure that an appropriate number of supervisions are conducted each year, including at least one meeting each year with the full supervisory team. The **minimum** number of supervisions are three per year for part-time students and six per year for full-time students.
- To maintain appropriate contact with second supervisors.
- To ensure compliance with all university policies and regulations, including the key policies and procedures relating to supervision and examination, risk assessments, research ethics, research integrity and open access. (The regulations for research degrees can be found [here](#).)
- To engage with research students at the beginning of each academic year (September or January) to discuss their training and development needs for the year and to complete with the student the skills assessment form. This will necessitate familiarity with all the training and development sessions offered as part of the Doctoral Researcher Development Programme (which can be found [here](#)).
- To ensure that the research student attends the training and development sessions selected on the skills assessment form.
- To ensure that research students are appropriately informed about all progression processes and milestones.
- To support students in Annual Progress Reviews and to provide timely feedback and timely engagement with related tasks on the VRE. The Graduate School commitment is that, following submission, a decision on all APRs will be reached within 8 weeks, and the bulk of this time is given to the work of the assessor.
- To ensure that between them and their research students supervision logs are completed in a timely and appropriately detailed way for each supervisory meeting.
- To request written work as appropriate, and to return such work with constructive criticism and within a reasonable time period, usually no longer than one month.
- To support research students in the planning and arrangements of activities associated with their research such as fieldwork or archive trips.
- To ensure that the student is made aware of inadequacy of progress or of standards of work below those generally expected, including by formally raising concerns in the supervision logs.
- To ensure progress such that the research student can submit within the registration period.
- To identify prospective external examiners.

- To complete the exam arrangements form at least 3 months before the planned submission of the thesis.
- To support the student in preparing for the final viva, such as through a mock viva.
- To be aware of arrangements for welfare and pastoral support and refer students where appropriate.
- To ensure that research students are appropriately informed in a timely manner about support for their wellbeing, such as through suspensions, MCs and RAFs.
- To encourage their research students to be actively engaged with the life of the research degree community at the university, and of the wider research community at school, disciplinary or Research Community level.
- To encourage research students to engage in research communities and networks beyond the university through, for example, giving papers at conferences and seminars.
- To ensure and encourage research students to fulfil the requirements of their funders and of any doctoral training centres that they are part of.
- To support the research student as appropriate in their post-doctoral plans.
- To maintain appropriate levels of skills, knowledge and expertise in order to fulfil these roles and responsibilities, for example through engagement with Graduate School forums, briefings and symposia.
- To continue the supervisory role through any research leave or sabbaticals.

In addition to the above roles and responsibilities, the following activities are encouraged as part of the relevant school's recruitment and admissions work.

- To actively engage in recruitment of research students through their own networks and research groups.
- To engage with potential research students before formal application, including providing advice and feedback on research proposals.
- To take part in the recruitment and selection of research degree students in collaboration with doctoral coordinators and admissions tutors.

Second Supervisor Role Descriptor

The role of second supervisor is always to provide academic support alongside that of the Director of Studies. However, the role of the second supervisor varies according to the nature of the research student's research and the makeup of the supervisory team. It may be, for example, that the second supervisor is involved only in a particular aspect of the student's research. In cases of the extended absence of the Director of Studies, the second supervisor

may take a more direct involvement and more academic responsibility for the student's progress. The roles of each member of the supervisory team should be discussed and agreed as part of the admissions process.

The key roles and responsibilities of the second supervisor are:

- To work closely with the Director of Studies and any other second supervisors to ensure the research student is supported and that they are making progress.
- To maintain contact with the research student as appropriate and to answer communications in a timely manner, usually within two working days.
- To take part in at least one meeting per year of the full supervisory team and the research student.
- To read and provide constructive feedback on written work in a timely manner, usually within the month.
- To maintain appropriate levels of skills, knowledge and expertise in order to fulfil these roles and responsibilities, for example through engagement with Graduate School forums, briefings and symposia.