



UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

**GUIDANCE ON MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR THE ORGANISATION AND SUPERVISION OF
DISSERTATIONS FOR POSTGRADUATE TAUGHT PROGRAMMES (PGT)**



It is important to recognise that, in many cases, Schools offer far more than is included here so these guidelines simply clarify the minimum level of provision that a student can expect.

1. **Selection of dissertation topics**

- 1.1 College Directors of Education and College PGT Leads are jointly responsible for determining when topics and supervisors should be agreed with students for programmes in their College. Colleges should aim for this to be agreed at the latest between weeks 1 and 10 (and no later than week 10) in semester two of the programme for full-time students, and at an agreed equivalent point for part-time students.
- 1.2 Clear guidance must be provided on how appropriate dissertation topics are to be identified. Indicative dissertation topics and / or details of previous dissertation titles should be made available to students as part of their induction programme
- 1.3 Schools should ensure that, in comparison with UoB graduates, students who are new to the University are not disadvantaged in choice of topic or supervisor allocation processes.

2. **Allocating supervisors**

- 2.1 All supervisors should normally be members of University of Birmingham staff holding a degree at the same level as, or higher than, the degree being supervised, or have appropriate equivalent experience or professional qualifications or status. Postdoctoral researchers are permitted to act as supervisors provided that they are contracted specifically for the supervision of the dissertation. Any exceptions to this requirement must be approved by the Head of School or a designated member of staff who will report on them annually to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) or their deputy.
- 2.2 If a School wishes to appoint an external supervisor (including honorary or emeritus staff) who is not a member of the University, the Programme Leader is responsible for ensuring that a second supervisor is identified who is a University employee.
- 2.3 Each PGT Programme Leader must ensure that internal and external members of staff supervising a dissertation are informed of their responsibilities towards the student.
- 2.4 Students should be advised of the name of at least one member of staff, beyond their immediate supervisor/s, who can be approached in the event of problems arising in relation to dissertation supervision. This should usually be the Programme Director or Personal Academic Tutor.
- 2.5 The Head of School or a designated member of staff will determine the maximum number of students that may be supervised by an individual member of staff.

3. **Frequency and format of supervision**

- 3.1 There will be a minimum of a total five hours of formal, documented supervision. The ways in which this total is delivered and the frequency of supervision will vary according to discipline



and the proximity of the submission date. Each formal supervision should be documented and both the supervisor and the student should keep copies of these documents, for example on Canvas or Pebblepad. Formal supervision must take place at least once a month as a minimum (or every two months in the case of part-time students) over the period during which the student is working on their dissertation.

- 3.2 In lab-based subjects, it is likely that supervision will be an ongoing process that is often delivered as part of a team, but there remains a requirement to ensure that the overall amount of supervision meets the minimum standard and that formal, individual supervision is documented.
- 3.3 The first supervision session must include topic-specific advice on planning, time-scales, literature search and the standards required as appropriate to the discipline, including plagiarism guidance if this is not covered elsewhere.
- 3.4 Supervision meetings may be conducted by video conferencing.
- 3.5 Written communication with students must only be undertaken using the institutional Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), University email and / or other institutionally approved platforms. Communication must not be undertaken through social media, messaging apps or any other platforms that are not approved for this purpose and supported by the University.

4. **Guidance on writing the dissertation**

- 4.1 Written guidance on the structure, presentation and writing of the dissertation (including plagiarism guidance and the ethical review process) must be available to the student at the start of the programme.
- 4.2 Students should be advised of the standards required to pass the dissertation and sample dissertations should be made available to all students.

5. **Dissertation deadlines**

- 5.1 All significant deadlines should be advertised to students at the start of the academic year, including deadlines for dissertation submission and resubmission.
- 5.2 Final dissertation hand-in dates must take into account the twelve-month nature of the programme. All forms of final assessment (e.g. through submission of the dissertation or oral examination) must be undertaken/submitted within the twelve-month period of student registration.

6. **Feedback on failed dissertations**

- 6.1 If a dissertation is failed, the student shall be provided with written feedback from the examiners within a maximum of two weeks after the fail decision has been confirmed; this should include guidance on the areas of the dissertation requiring improvement.



6.2 The student must at that time be advised of the resubmission deadline (normally within a maximum of six months).

7. **Resubmission arrangements (where necessary)**

7.1 Resubmission deadlines must be clearly advertised.

7.2 A resubmission is only required where a dissertation has been marked as a fail.

7.3 Students should be offered at least one supervision meeting during the resubmission period.

7.4 Reassessment should normally be undertaken by the examiners of the original submission. If this is not possible, the comments of the previous examiners will be made available to the new ones.

8. **General**

8.1 All programmes should provide a Programme Dissertation Handbook containing all the above information as a minimum and this should be available to students no later than the induction or first day of the programme (whichever is earlier).