

## Guidance for supervisors of research students

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### 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 (all be it 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 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 most students are no longer in Cambridge and 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 further 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 – guidance from the DRC is here:  
[https://www.cctl.cam.ac.uk/sites/www.cctl.cam.ac.uk/files/drc\\_guidelines\\_for\\_supervisions\\_with\\_disabled\\_students.pdf](https://www.cctl.cam.ac.uk/sites/www.cctl.cam.ac.uk/files/drc_guidelines_for_supervisions_with_disabled_students.pdf).
- 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 chat function in Teams).

## Student progress and support

- Recognise that your student's ability to work might be impacted and be prepared to alter expectations and deadlines to accommodate this. Re-evaluate the partnership with your student and be realistic in your discussions with your student about what they can achieve during this time (the College will also have a role in this). Accept that milestones might need to be changed or work adapted – see progress milestones below).
- Take account of the change in the student's environment and obstacles that they might now be facing, and the impact these may have on their wellbeing. Some obstacles may be apparent, such as lack of access to labs or archival material; others less so, such as slow internet access or caring responsibilities. 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](mailto: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 <https://www.cambridgestudents.cam.ac.uk/fees-and-funding/financial-hardship-support-access-funds>)
- If your student has a disability, contact the Disability Resource Centre for advice on what additional support might be needed.
- Students should continue to be encouraged to do whatever work they can on their research project. This will of course depend on the nature of their research and how long they have been working on their project. Students may not be able to continue their research in the lab or in the field, for example, but could, depending on the nature and stage of their research carry out other work such e.g. literature reviews, working with remote data or practice dataset to hone analytical skills or writing up.
- Encourage your student to seek training and support via the library and online or open learning resources and to engage with other experts in their field.
- Encourage your student to continue to engage with their peers and recognised them as a valuable source of support.
- Encourage your students to continue with researcher development and training. Many key courses are now available online (<https://www.rdp.cam.ac.uk/research-students/online-learning>). Now might be the time for students to complete training which is necessary but not specifically related to their research project (e.g. intellectual property).
- 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 one be required to support applications for extensions to funding and/or submission deadlines.
- Submit your termly reports via PFRS (<https://www.student-registry.admin.cam.ac.uk/graduate-information-university-staff/graduate->

[supervision/progress-reports](#)) 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 Graduate 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. Main contact details of other possible supporters of your student, including their Advisor and College Graduate Tutor and the Departmental Director of Graduate 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 starting to work on their first-year report. Encourage your students to continue to work on their report, completing their literature review and developing a plan for future study. 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.
- Where possible, arrange for your student's first year assessment to take place via video-conference. Give your student the opportunity to practice presenting their work via video-conference by arranging a 'mock viva'. However, 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 it may be necessary to consider delaying the first-year assessment.
- 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 now 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 submit by their deadline will be given an extension, but this is not always in a student's best interests, as it may have implications for their funding, visa and future career plans.
- It is possible 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 it may be appropriate to delay the viva until it can take place face to face.

- 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.
- Students who have completed all of the requirements of their degree can have their degree conferred in absentia.

## Other guidance

- Cambridge Centre for Teaching and Learning (CCTL): Supervising postgraduate students <https://www.vle.cam.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=144331>
- CCTL's new introduction to 'Moving undergraduate supervisions online' includes practical information on selecting and setting up technologies, inclusive discussions and interactions, accessibility for students with disabilities and neurodiverse profiles ([https://www.cctl.cam.ac.uk/files/cctl\\_moving\\_supervisions\\_online.pdf](https://www.cctl.cam.ac.uk/files/cctl_moving_supervisions_online.pdf))
- CCTL's guidance on supervising and conference calls: setting up your technology and your environment ([https://www.cctl.cam.ac.uk/sites/www.cctl.cam.ac.uk/files/supervising\\_and\\_conference\\_calls\\_setting\\_up\\_technology\\_and\\_environment.pdf](https://www.cctl.cam.ac.uk/sites/www.cctl.cam.ac.uk/files/supervising_and_conference_calls_setting_up_technology_and_environment.pdf))
- CCTLs guidance on remote teaching and learning (and use of recordings) (<https://www.cctl.cam.ac.uk/teaching-remotely/policy>)
- UK Council for Graduate Education (<http://www.ukcge.ac.uk/article/supporting-members-during-covid-19-coronavirus-pandemic-454.aspx>)