



XIAMEN UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA

POSTGRADUATE SUPERVISOR HANDBOOK

The handbook has been set following the Xiamen University Malaysia (XMUM) regulations on the management of Master's and Ph.D. degrees. It applies to all schools/departments at XMUM.

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1. Appointment of Supervisor(s)

1.1. Policy

Every postgraduate student registered for a higher degree (Master's and Ph.D.) will be guided during their period of registered study by supervisor(s) with suitable academic qualifications, appropriate expertise in the agreed area of the student's research topic and an acceptable level of supervision experience.

1.2. Eligibility to act as supervisor

- 1.2.1. Supervisor(s) is made up of one main supervisor and one co-supervisor (if applicable).
- 1.2.2. Please refer to section 1.3 for qualification and expertise requirements of the supervisor(s). In principle, all main supervisors for Ph.D. students must be at least associate professors. If the lecturers, senior lecturers and assistant professors are awarded a grant that requires them to be the main supervisor of the Ph.D. student to fulfil/achieve the key performance indicator (KPI) of the grant, this case is subject to the approval from the top management.
- 1.2.3. According to Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA) standards, all the supervisors of Master's and Doctoral Degree by Research, Mixed Mode, Coursework must go through structured supervisor training. The training programme is designed to explain and explicate the roles, responsibilities, expectations policies and roles of the University and interpersonal challenges in dealing with personal, cultural, academic and intellectual issues through a multitude of methods.
- 1.2.4. Appointment of the supervisor(s) should normally occur prior to the postgraduate student commencing their studies but can vary according to the requirement of each postgraduate programme.
- 1.2.5. The maximum ratio of main and co-supervision of supervisor to postgraduate students is of 1:20, considering the total responsibilities of the supervisor(s), the needs of the postgraduate students guided by the programme standards and good practices.
- 1.2.6. If the main supervisor is absent from XMUM at any point during the period of registration, and this period of absence exceeds six months, an alternative supervisor should be appointed at the earliest opportunity. It should be agreed the main supervisor will cover their responsibilities during the absence and the student should be advised. In the event of short periods of supervisor absence, supervisions should continue as required with the co-supervisor.
- 1.2.7. All decisions to appoint a supervisor must not create a potential, perceived or actual conflict of interest.

1.3. Subject expertise and qualification requirements

All main supervisors must hold current faculty positions at XMUM or XMU. Co-supervisors



can be appointed from within or outside XMUM. Supervisors must have an appropriate level of joint expertise between them in the academic area of the postgraduate student's research or study. The qualification and experience requirements of supervisor(s) must follow as below:

Master's Degree by Research	
Main supervisor	Co-supervisor
i. Have a doctoral degree; or ii. If the main supervisor has a Master's degree in the field, the main supervisor must have at least 5 years' experience in teaching and research; AND has co-supervised Master's candidate	i. Have a doctoral degree; or ii. If the co-supervisor has only a Master's degree in the field, the co-supervisor must have at least 1-year experience in teaching AND research; or iii. A co-supervisor from the industry or practitioner who must have at least a bachelor's degree and 5 years of experience in the field at a level appropriate for the dissertation
Ph.D. Degree by Research	
Main supervisor	Co-supervisor
i. Must have a doctoral degree ii. Must be at least Associate Professor except special case for other faculty positions that meet the approval requirement of the University iii. Must have at least 2 years of teaching experience and research; AND has supervised Master's or Ph.D. research candidate	i. Have a doctoral degree; or ii. If the co-supervisor has only a Master's degree, extensive experience in research is required and subject to approval by the Board of Academic; or iii. A co-supervisor from the industry or practitioner who must have at least a Master's degree and 10 years of experience in the field at a level appropriate for the thesis
Master's Degree by Mixed Mode	
Main supervisor	Co-supervisor
i. Have a doctoral degree; or ii. If the main supervisor has a Master's degree in the field, the main supervisor must have at least 5 years' experience in teaching and	i. Have a doctoral degree; or ii. If the co-supervisor has only a Master's degree in the field, the co-supervisor must have at least 1-



research; AND has co-supervised Master's candidate	year experience in teaching AND research; or iii. A co-supervisor from the industry or practitioner who must have at least a bachelor's degree and 5 years of experience in the field at a level appropriate for the dissertation
Master's Degree by Coursework Mode	
Main supervisor	
i. Have a doctoral degree; or ii. If the supervisor has a Master's degree in the field, the supervisor must have at least 5 years' experience in teaching; or iii. Supervisor from the industry or practitioner who must have at least a bachelor's degree and 5 years of experience in the field at a level appropriate for the dissertation AND be appointed only as a co-supervisor	
Ph.D. Degree by Mixed Mode	
Main supervisor	Co-supervisor
i. Have a doctoral degree ii. Must be at least Associate Professor, except special case for other faculty positions that meet the approval requirement of the University iii. Must have at least 2 years of teaching experience and research; AND has supervised Master's or Ph.D. research candidate	i. Have a doctoral degree and must have at least 2 years' experience in teaching experience AND research; or ii. If a co-supervisor has only a master's degree, extensive experience in research is required and subject to approval of the Board of Academic; or iii. A co-supervisor from the industry or practitioner who must have at least a Master's degree AND 10 years of experience in the field at a level appropriate for the thesis
Ph.D. Degree by Coursework	
Main supervisor	
i. Must have a doctoral degree ii. Must be at least Associate Professor, except special case for other faculty positions that meet the approval requirement of the University iii. Must have at least 2 years of teaching experience and research; AND has supervised Master's or Ph.D. research candidate to completion	



1.4. Postgraduate student's agreement to supervision arrangements

The key element linking the postgraduate students and supervisor(s) must be interest in and appropriate knowledge of the proposed area of research or study. There should be mutual agreement on the specific research or study topic, following discussions between the parties.

1.5. XMUM Postgraduate Supervisor Appointment

It is compulsory for the postgraduate students to discuss with their supervisor(s) about the supervision arrangement. The postgraduate students are required to fill in the Postgraduate Supervisor Appointment Form and submit it to the Head of Department/ Head of Programme for review and approval. The relevant documents will then be submitted to Postgraduate Studies Unit (PSU) for record.

2. Responsibilities of the Supervisors

2.1. Policy

Supervisors will provide guidance and assistance to postgraduate students so that they may carry out their research or study and present their results to the best advantage. Every supervisor and postgraduate student will be provided with guidance on their respective roles and responsibilities.

2.2. Role of the supervisor(s)

- 2.2.1. The general role of supervisors is to guide and assist postgraduate students during their period of registered study. The roles of supervisor and examiner are quite distinct, and it is not one of the roles of the supervisor to assess the thesis.
- 2.2.2. The specific roles of supervisors may differ depending on the academic discipline and departmental practice.
- 2.2.3. Supervisor(s) is responsible for:
 - providing regular support and advice to postgraduate students. This may include guidance on welfare matters and health and safety.
 - helping postgraduate students to resolve difficulties they encounter and/or direct them to others who can assist.
 - provide postgraduate students with informal feedback on their written work and/or presentations.
 - where applicable, contributing to the reporting of progress of postgraduate students noting that the level of involvement with this will be agreed, in advance, with the main and co-supervisor(s).
 - encouraging postgraduate students to disseminate their research or work.
 - engaging with professional development opportunities to develop supervisors' own supervisory practice including any mandatory training requirements.
 - ensuring postgraduate students are aware of the availability of the policies and processes applicable to academic degrees.



- ensuring ethical and professional conduct.

2.3. Research plan

- 2.3.1. Supervisors will assist their postgraduate students to define their research topic, identify schemes and specific tasks, identify the relevant research literature, databases and other relevant sources, and to be aware of the standards in the discipline.
- 2.3.2. The supervisor and postgraduate student should discuss the research structure and plan in which (subject to research progress and considering exceptional cases) all parts of the thesis will have been written up by the student by the end of their period of registered study. The design of the research structure should not at the outset plan to include any period of thesis pending that the student is entitled to.

2.4. Advising on regulations

- 2.4.1. Supervisors should have reasonable knowledge and understanding of the University's regulations governing study and the University, faculty and departmental procedures governing study and supervision.
- 2.4.2. They are required to advise their postgraduate students on these regulations and procedures or, if they feel a question is outside their knowledge, to direct their postgraduate student to other sources such as PSU.
- 2.4.3. Supervisors also have a responsibility to ensure that other members of the supervisor(s) are kept informed of the student's progress, and any issues which may be having an impact on the postgraduate students' research progress or study.

2.5. Advising on services and facilities

- 2.5.1. Supervisors should have reasonable knowledge of and be able to advise their postgraduate students on the availability of the University's academic services and facilities (for example library and computing facilities) and how to make use of them.
- 2.5.2. The supervisors in conjunction with the postgraduate student should keep under review the facilities which are required to carry out the research and make these needs known to the Head of Department/ Head of Programme.

2.6. Supervisions

Supervisors are responsible for providing appropriate and regular supervision for their postgraduate students during their period of registered study, and for being accessible at mutually convenient times to listen and offer advice.

2.7. Format for supervisions

- 2.7.1. A supervision meeting is any simultaneous contact between the supervisor(s) and postgraduate students. It would typically include face-to-face meetings, but can also include meetings conducted by Microsoft Teams, Skype, Zoom, video-



conference session, *etc.*

- 2.7.2. It is important that at the supervision meetings the student's progress to date and the future direction of their work is discussed.
- 2.7.3. There is no specified format for these meetings so, for example, a group meeting of postgraduate students or a progress seminar with the supervisors would be acceptable for some but not all the formal meetings. In exceptional circumstances where meetings are not feasible, contact should be maintained, for example by telephone or e-mail.

2.8. Meetings, conferences and publication

- 2.8.1. The supervisor(s) should encourage and facilitate the postgraduate student to engage with relevant academics that will support their degree study and future career development.
- 2.8.2. This could be through encouraging attendance at seminars, meetings and conferences; introducing them to relevant individuals and professional networks and encouraging them to publish the results of their research.
- 2.8.3. Where appropriate supervisors should also support the postgraduate students to participate in public and policy engagement activities or undertake placements and internships that will enable them to develop their broader research experiences.

2.9. Written work

The supervisor should request written work as appropriate and read and provide constructive criticism on it within a reasonable time.

2.10. Feedback

- 2.10.1. The practice of feedback in supervisory practices is crucial. The purpose of feedback is to provide a sense of direction to postgraduate students to develop their research.
- 2.10.2. Supervisors need to be aware that research students are just learning about research and may be understandably sensitive about their emerging ideas and their drafts of academic writing. Critical feedback can be devastating to an insecure postgraduate student if the comments are delivered unsympathetically.
- 2.10.3. Feedback must be formative in nature *i.e.*, providing guidance. The purpose of feedback is to encourage the postgraduate students to discover new links and ideas and develop them in a meaningful context.
- 2.10.4. The supervisor plays the role of an experienced scholar who inducts newcomer into the academic community by encouraging a postgraduate student to develop progressively and with confidence in the field of research.
- 2.10.5. Feedback then should be timely, specific and frequent. It should also encourage reflective thinking and preserve the morale of the postgraduate student as a



researcher.

- 2.10.6. When conflicting feedback is provided, it is the responsibility of the supervisor to reach a consensus and provide well directed feedback to the postgraduate students.

3. Intellectual Properties

It is important for the supervisors to maintain, promote and practice academic integrity and ethical behaviour while achieving the highest standards of excellence in research, teaching and learning. It is expected that all research conducted at or by XMUM is of a high ethical standard.

3.1. Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a serious offense in academic writing and many students commit plagiarism without realising it. Turnitin makes it possible to check work against millions of articles in its database. Turnitin can also be used as a learning tool to ensure that any written work that is submitted to the supervisor is not plagiarised and can also be used to instruct students correct strategies in referencing and quoting previously written work. Supervisor(s) must ensure that the student has a full understanding of what constitutes plagiarism.

3.2. Ethical clearance

- 3.2.1. Supervisor(s) will need to work closely with their students when the students are considering the ethics of their research proposal and how they can ethically gather and work with research data. Students should particularly consider ethics when devising research proposals that involve human participants, personal, medical, or other sensitive data and/or the use of methodologically controversial approaches.
- 3.2.2. The student will need to weigh up, with supervisor(s)' support, consideration of risk to the research participants versus benefits from the research and to think through especially carefully the impact on participants or vulnerable groups of any data collection methods. Certain groups are considered particularly vulnerable – children, vulnerable adults, or students when they are participating in research as students, for instance – or may be placed in a vulnerable position in relation to research; some participants will have diminished ability to give informed consent and are therefore less able to protect themselves and require specific consideration.
- 3.2.3. Care will also be needed if students wish to access sensitive information, the publication or analysis of which may have far reaching implications for them as well as the research subjects. Similarly, the use of other people's primary data may need clearance or raise the need to address concerns about its interpretation.



4. External Supervisor(s)

An external supervisor (including academic and industrial supervisor) is a person with relevant research expertise who provides support to the main supervisor and student in accordance with the agreement reached under section 2.2. Where the student will be located at an external research site (such as a laboratory, medical institute, *etc.*), the supervisor must ensure that the student will be provided with the training and supervision necessary for their project to be conducted in a manner that eliminates or minimises risks to health and safety.

5. Changes to Supervision Arrangements

Changes to supervision arrangements (including supervision load) constitute new appointment and must be made in accordance with section 1. Changes to supervision arrangements may be required because of the scenarios outlined below.

5.1. Changes to the supervisor(s)

- 5.1.1. Postgraduate students seeking to make change(s) to their supervisor(s) should discuss and seek advice on the proposed change(s) with the supervisor(s), Head of Department/ Head of Programme, unless there are compelling reasons not to do so.
- 5.1.2. Except for compelling circumstances, the existing supervisor(s) is expected to continue to actively supervise the postgraduate students during transition to a new supervisor; and assist in negotiating alternative supervisory arrangement for the postgraduate student, if required.
- 5.1.3. Postgraduate students wishing to seek independent and confidential advice or support on supervisory matters may contact PSU.

5.2. Change in supervisor circumstances

- 5.2.1. Head of Department/ Head of Programme must initiate the appointment of a new supervisor where an existing supervisor is unable to carry out their duties for six and more consecutive weeks. Where a supervisor intends to leave the University, the Head of Department/ Head of Programme must take all reasonable efforts to ensure alternative supervision arrangement are finalized prior to supervisor's departure.
- 5.2.2. In making alternative supervision arrangements, Head of Department/ Head of Programme should discuss the proposed arrangements with the affected postgraduate student(s) and consider the capacity of the department to provide sufficient facilities and resources to support the student's research.

5.3. Change of research direction

- 5.3.1. A change of research direction leading to a change of supervisor(s) may occur for a variety of reasons, including, but not limited to the withdrawal of funding to access laboratories/ data sets, or the failure to obtain ethics approval for a



particular component of the research.

5.3.2. Where a change in research direction is required, the Head of Department/ Head of Programme should consider the following to minimize the impact on the student.

- Holding a meeting with the postgraduate student and relevant stakeholders to determine what supervisory expertise is required to support the new project, and whether such supervision is available at XMUM; and
- The implications of a change of supervision on any funding arrangements (for example, departmental funding or grants linked to an individual supervisor); and
- Designing the new project to maximise the inclusion of completed research and experiments from the original project; and
- The progress of the postgraduate student's research project, and how best to respond to the student's needs and expectations in progressing their research; and
- Implications of any change of supervisor for existing Intellectual Property (IP) arrangements, or existing approvals (including, but not limited to, human and/or ethics approvals and publications in progress); and
- Where the student is within their candidature – for example, whether such a change of direction will impact on any pending progress milestones; and if separate action should be taken to request an extension to a milestone.

5.4. Other changes

5.4.1. Other changes to the supervisor(s) may arise if a postgraduate student needs additional supervisory support.

5.4.2. Any changes to provide additional support should be negotiated in consultation with the postgraduate student and the supervisor(s).

6. Conflict Resolution

Unless there is a compelling reason not to do so, a postgraduate student and their supervisor(s) should in the first attempt to resolve a conflict informally and in a professional manner. In doing so, both the postgraduate student and the supervisor can refer to the Head of Department/ Head of Programme and Dean of the Faculty for advice.

Where a conflict leads to a breakdown in the student-supervisory relationship, and one or both parties seek to change the supervisory arrangement: The postgraduate student should schedule a meeting with the Head of Department/ Head of Programme to discuss the impact of seeking alternative supervisory arrangements on their programme. The supervisor must discuss options with their relevant Head of Department/ Head of Programme to minimise any potential impact on the postgraduate student. At any stage in seeking to resolve a conflict, a postgraduate student may seek independent and confidential advocacy from PSU.