THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF SRI LANKA

Guidelines for Supervision of Postgraduate Research Degree Students
and
Appointing Supervisors

These Guidelines are effective from 31st July 2020

GUIDELINES FOR SUPERVISION OF POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH DEGREE STUDENTS AND APPOINTING SUPERVISORS

1. Postgraduate Research Supervision

Postgraduate research degree students of the Open University of Sri Lanka must be directly supervised by a Principal Supervisor or a Supervisory Team of qualified and experienced supervisors. The main role of the supervisor/s is to advise and guide the candidates in their research work, monitor the progress of their studies, and ensure the quality of their research work. Higher Degrees and Research Committee (HDRC) serves as the monitoring body to ensure proper supervision during the period of candidature.

This document outlines important guidelines for the supervisors in line with the the postgraduate research degree By-laws.

Important steps that supervisors are expected to follow in supervising students are as follows;

(a) The Principal Supervisor (Section 3.1) should initiate the process of supervision by guiding and training the student, facilitating the research and collaboratively establishing a clear understanding between the student and other supervisor/s on the research problem before commencing the study.

(b) Supervisors should give specific advice on the scope of research or emphasis of the research as the work proceeds where necessary. If revision to the proposal are needed, recommendation of the Faculty Research Committee and the approval of the HDRC and the Senate should be obtained.

(c) Supervisors are expected to guide students appropriately to achieve the research aims and objectives as well as the expected learning outcomes of the Postgraduate Degree programs.

(d) It is important for the supervisors to be conversant with the learning outcomes expected in M.Phil (SLQF L-11) and Ph.D. (SLQF L – 12) degree programs.

(e) Supervisors should ensure that the student is aware of the requirements of a Thesis and viva Examinations relating to M.Phil. and PhD programmes.

(f) Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that students are aware of the need of maintaining high standards of academic conduct and to avoid fabrication of results or plagiarism and that the thesis should consist of independent work.

2. Composition of a supervisory team

It is compulsory that the Principal Supervisor, or in a case where the research study is supervised by more than one supervisor that, at least one supervisor is an academic of the OUSL.

Where required, supervisor/s to the team may be appointed from an external organization.

When necessary, additional supervisor/s to the team can be appointed during the study on recommendation of the principal supervisor subject to approval by the HDRC and Senate.

3. Designation of Supervisors

The supervisor/supervisory team of a postgraduate research degree should be experienced and qualified individuals chosen appropriately from OUSL or other external organizations. The Head of the relevant Department has the responsibility to nominate supervisors to the Senate through HDRC.

The supervisors in the team are designated as "principal", "co-supervisor/s". Following are the roles and responsibilities of principal supervisor and co-supervisors of the team.

3.1 Principal supervisor

The overall responsibility of guiding and training the research student in planning and conducting the research, training the student in methodology and techniques, etc. lies with the principal supervisor. Principal supervisor should have the capacity to facilitate the research.

In the absence of the principal supervisor or, when on leave for a specific period, a member from the team nominated by the principal supervisor shall act as the principal supervisor.
If the principal supervisor is from an outside organization, the most senior OUSL member of the team is expected to liaise on relevant matters with the FRC, HDRC and Senate.

3.2 Co-supervisors

The co-supervisor is a member of the supervisory team who collaborates concurrently with the principal supervisor. If the principal supervisor is from an outside organization, the co-supervisor from OUSL, approved by the Senate is expected to liaise on relevant matters with the FRC, HDRC and Senate.

4. Nomination and Selection of Supervisors

The following guidelines and criteria are applied when nominating and selecting supervisors.

4.1 General guidelines for nominating and selecting supervisors

- Supervisors should have the necessary competence, time, commitment and access to resources to undertake the supervision.

- Individuals who are enrolled as higher degree students (SLQF L11 or SLQF L12) at any higher education institute are not eligible to be a member of the supervisory team.
- The principal supervisor is the person as explained in section 3.1.
- The co-supervisor/s as in section 3.2 may be appointed from the staff of the OUSL and /or an external organization as and when need arises.

4.2 Eligibility criteria for supervisors of M. Phil. or Ph.D. Degree

(a) **For a M.Phil.**
One or more supervisors holding at least an MPhil qualification or higher.

(b) **For a Ph,D.**
One or more supervisors holding at least PhD qualification or equivalent,

OR

A supervisor having other qualifications may be appointed only under exceptional circumstances, with justification acceptable to the Senate of the OUSL, **and** a good publishing record acceptable to the HDRC.

AND

(c) Research experience in the relevant field of study chosen by the candidate.

5. Responsibilities and Support of Supervisors

Supervision is one of the key processes that ensures the research degree students achieve research objectives and reach up to the level of learning outcomes of the study (SLQF L11 and SLQF L12).

5.1 General and specific responsibilities of supervisors

Supervisors are entrusted with the direct responsibility of guiding the students through the process detailed in this document.

Specific responsibilities of supervisors at different stages of student's candidature are as follows;

5.1.1 Responsibilities at the commencement of the student's candidature

(i) Advising and guiding on the research process.
(ii) Directing the student to apply for ethics clearance and other approvals from the appropriate committees as required.
(iii) Making students aware of the supervisor's expectations, frequency of formal meetings between the supervisor and student, the extent of the supervisor's input into the student's activities, arrangements for supervision in case of absence of a supervisor, and guiding on access to resources and space available for research.
(iv) Identifying specific areas in which students require development of their skills and referring the students to appropriate sources of assistance.

(v) Updating the student with new criteria and amendments to the postgraduate research degree by-laws promptly.

5.1.2 Responsibilities throughout the student's candidature / study

(i) Monitoring, evaluating and reporting the progress to the HDRC and giving feedback to the student.

(ii) Carrying out discussions and conducting frequent meetings with the student and with other supervisors on matters related to the progress of the study and guide students at regular intervals to ensure proper implementation of the research.

(iii) Encouraging the student to actively engage in the research programme

(iv) Obtaining approval from the HDRC in advance for arrangements for supervision during the absence of a member of the supervisory team.

(v) Ensuring that approvals are obtained if needed, from the HDRC and the Senate for any major changes in the research programme

(vi) Encouraging the student to submit biannual progress reports to the HDRC before the set deadlines.

(vii) Guiding the student to address shortcomings when the progress is unsatisfactory.

(viii) Reporting to the HDRC on any serious issues affecting the student's progress.

5.1.3 Responsibilities during the preparation of the thesis

(i) The role of supervisors in preparation of the thesis is to be a guide, advisor and critical reviewer. The student should be made aware that the thesis is his / her own work.

(ii) Discussing with the student on the format and content of the thesis, and the processes involved in planning and writing the thesis.

(iii) Assisting the student in preparation and submission of manuscripts for publication.

(iv) Making students aware of the necessity of publishing their work during the candidature to avoid possible delays in submitting the thesis.

(v) Referring the student to appropriate sources of assistance on matters related to thesis preparation *eg*. academic writing, statistical analysis and interpretation etc.

(vi) Reviewing and commenting on the content and the draft of the thesis in a timely manner and ensuring that the thesis is submitted in time with other requirements complying with the Thesis Preparation Guidelines.

5.1.4 Responsibilities in thesis defense examination and revision

(i) Making the student aware that the supervisor/s is not a co-author or editor of the thesis and will not be involved in thesis defense examination.

(ii) Assisting the HDRC and the examination division on matters that requires clarifications on diverse or / and adverse comments made by the thesis examiners.

(iii) Advising and providing feedback for necessary revisions that need to bring the thesis to the required standard.

5.1.5 Other academic support

(i) Making himself/herself as a mentor to provide support to the student on matters affecting the student's studies.
(ii) Advising students on effective use of time.
(iii) Identifying limitations of students and referring them for assistance.
(iv) Facilitating networking with other researchers in related areas in external organizations.
(v) Nominating thesis examiners by the Head of the relevant Department and the Dean of the relevant Faculty to the HDRC at least three months ahead of the thesis submission.
(vi) Advising the student on examiners' recommendations for necessary amendments to the thesis.
(vii) Encouraging the student to complete the degree within the stipulated time.

5.1.6 Support with resources and facilities

(i) Providing necessary guidance and resources to complete the research work such as fieldwork, research travel support, orientation, learning support and, prescribed training if any.
(ii) Facilitating links between the student and other researchers in related areas, in other institutions.

6. Appointment of Supervisors

The appointment of supervisor is communicated by the Deputy registrar/Academic of OUSL on the recommendation of the HDRC and the senate.

7. Changes and Revisions in Supervision

Change/revision of supervisor/s can be considered as follows;
(a) A request is made by the student / supervisor on reasonable grounds acceptable to the HDRC and the Senate,
(b) Change in the research environment such as location of research, need for advanced technologies etc
(c) In situations of supervisor's sickness / death / leaving the job, country etc.

In all situations, request should be made to the HDRC through the FRC.

7.1 Supervisor's request for changes

Supervisor/s may request changes in supervision during the student's candidature, and may seek approval of the relevant Faculty in the event of;

(a) Serious health concerns
(b) Leaving the job
(c) Leaving the country permanently / long period
(d) Change in the research environment such as location of research, need for advanced technologies etc.

Requests for changes in supervision must be made along with a nomination for a mutually agreed substitute by writing to the HDRC with the recommendation of the FRC.

7.2 Students' requests for changes

Students may request changes in supervision during candidature, and may seek advice on this from the relevant FRC. Requests for such changes in supervision must be made in writing to the HDRC with the recommendation of the FRC.

The current supervisor, the proposed new supervisor and the student must endorse/acknowledge the change of supervisor.

8. Arrangements during the absence of a Supervisor

All supervisors of a supervisory team should inform the HDRC through FRC if they plan to go on leave.

If a supervisor takes leave, an acting arrangement must be made in consultation with another member of the supervisory team and the student and inform the FRC at least a month before the due date of leave and requires the approval of the HDRC subsequent to the recommendation of the FRC.

9. Meetings with Students

The type and frequency of contact between supervisors and students will depend on experience and expertise of the students and the stage of candidature. The recommended minimum amount of formal contact is twice a month. Supervisors and students are jointly responsible for initiating discussions. If a formal face-to-face meeting is not possible, some form of contact (e-mail, telephone) should be maintained.

It is also required that all supervisors should meet regularly if possible.

10. Progress Review

10.1 Biannual progress report

It is the responsibility of the principal supervisor to advice students on the submission of biannual progress reports during the candidature. Students are required to submit the progress report to the HDRC with the recommendation of the supervisors channeled through the respective department and faculty.

10.2 Annual progress review

Annual progress review is more comprehensive, and students are required to present one-year-progress at a Faculty research forum. The review is conducted by a panel recommended by the FRC approved by the HDRC. The supervisors may be present at the review as observers.

10.3 Role of Higher Degrees and Research Committee (HDRC) in progress monitoring

Higher Degrees and Research Committee **(**HDRC) is responsible for ensuring that the standard and quality of research degree programmes are maintained and the interests of registered candidates are protected.

11. Upgrading MPhil Degree to PhD Degree

Subject to the specified entry qualifications specified in Sections 2.1 and 2.2 of the Regulations for the Doctor of Philosophy Programme, a candidate registered for the MPhil Degree in the University may, on the recommendation made by his/her supervisor/s, the Head of the Department and the Dean of the Faculty, based on an evaluation of his/her proposal and presentation to a Panel of Reviewers comprising two (02) experts in the field of study outside the University with at least one (01) from outside Sri Lanka, appointed by the Senate upon recommendation of the relevant Faculty, shall be permitted to upgrade his/her registration to the PhD Degree as specified in Section 3.4.2 of the Regulations for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree Programme.

12. Grievances of Students

Students can forward and discuss their grievances regarding matters pertaining to the study with the Head, Chairperson of the FRC, Dean of the Faculty, Chairperson of the HDRC, and Vice Chancellor in that order.