

# Guidance for Supervisors

## Who may be a postgraduate supervisor?

ICS scientific staff may become postgraduate supervisors provided they meet the following criteria:

- they have an honorary academic appointment with Imperial College at Lecturer level (at least) or be of equivalent academic standing – staff of less than Lecturer level must co-supervise with a senior member, usually their Group Head; and
- that their Group Head has agreed that they may supervise postgraduate students; and
- that they are fully-funded and/or contracted at the ICS for the expected course of the studentship and there are no pre-existing plans for them to relocate
- that they have attended a PhD supervisors training course (see below)

## Training for New Supervisors

First time supervisors are required to attend a training course before or very shortly after they start to supervise PhD students for the first time. Suitable courses are offered by the MRC Learning and Development Unit ("*Supervising PhD Students*" – 1 day) which can be booked on Oracle, or by the Imperial College Educational Development Unit ("*Introduction to Supervising Research Students*" – 1 day) – details available at

<http://www3.imperial.ac.uk/edudev/workshops/introductory/supervisingphdstudents>

A short guidance note '*PhD Students and Supervisors: What to Expect*' derived from this course appears in [Appendix F](#) below.

## Interviewing and Recruitment

In order to ensure that standards are maintained, all applicants for non-MRC core studentships must be interviewed by a recruitment panel before a firm offer is made. The panel will be 3-4 senior scientists who are knowledgeable in the candidate's field, but not directly involved in the proposed project. Exceptions may be made for students who have been awarded a competitive fellowship that involved an interview by a recognised funding body (e.g. Wellcome Trust, MRC)

### Research Support Staff

Members of the research support staff may register for a higher degree on a full-time or part-time basis, if their registration is approved by their supervisor, the DPS or CSC Director, Imperial College and an ICS interview panel. On successful completion of a PhD, members of staff are expected to move on to new posts outside the ICS in order to further their scientific career.

The possibility of registering for a higher degree should not be offered as an incentive when recruiting or attempting to retain research support staff.

### **Clinical Scientific Staff**

Clinical scientific staff who wish to register for a higher degree must be approved in the same way as research support staff. These students will include staff that hold Chain-Florey Clinical Training Fellowships, other clinical fellowships from MRC, the Wellcome Trust, or another external sponsor. In addition to their two academic mentors, clinical fellows will be assigned a clinical mentor to advise them on their clinical career.

### **Staff Panel Interviews**

Staff panel interviews require submission of a research plan to the panel beforehand, and a short (15 – 20 minute) presentation on the proposed project. The panel will be 3-4 senior scientists who are knowledgeable in the candidate's field, but not directly involved in the proposed project.

### **Good Research Practice**

New supervisors should make themselves familiar with the MRC document 'Good Research Practice', available at

<http://www.mrc.ac.uk/Utilities/Documentrecord/index.htm?d=MRC002415>

### **Absence through illness**

Supervisors must inform the PSA or DPS within one week of any student absence through illness, or for personal reasons other than planned holidays.

**Absences of more than two weeks must be reported to Imperial College Registry through the PSA.**

### **Interruption of Studies**

Interruption of studies are taken for maternity leave, periods of long illness, and other personal reasons. Supervisors should inform the DPS or PSA as soon as they become aware that an Interruption may be necessary. A course of action can then be agreed and appropriate action taken.

International students in the UK on student visas may be required to leave the country if they take an interruption of studies. Supervisors should discuss individual cases with the PSA as soon as they arise.

### **Studentship extensions**

Students and supervisors will work together to ensure that laboratory work is completed and the thesis written up within the period for which the studentship is funded. Any foreseen problems with completion should be raised for consideration six months before the end of the studentship.

Extensions may be granted, but usually only for writing up. Sequential extensions are normally not permitted.

**It is an absolute requirement of both Imperial College and the MRC that all full-time students must submit their PhD thesis within 48 months of starting their PhD studies.**

Where extensions are required, the supervisor must complete the Studentship Extension Request Form, available from the ICS PSA. All extension requests require the formal approval of the DPS or Administrative Director of the CSC. Unless there are exceptional circumstances, research groups are expected to meet the full cost of extensions from their own resources.

## Appendix F: Students and Supervisors: What to Expect

(originally taken from the Imperial College supervisor training course)

Supervisors expect you to:

1. *Take responsibility* for your thesis – in the end it is your work and your supervisors are here to help you accomplish your research objectives, but not to do the thinking for you!
2. *Work hard* – PhDs cannot be accomplished with only a 9–5 effort. Imperial College is a top-ranked university and we expect that students will strive to accomplish good work.
3. *Display initiative* – ultimately, the person who drives the process and strives to understand the research area is you. We expect you to be curious about your work and to think about how other ideas/work have an impact on the research you are doing. In the light of this, it is a requirement for you to attend all laboratory meetings, work in progress sessions, etc., plus other seminars. TO BE A SCIENTIST – YOU SHOULD BE CURIOUS ABOUT SCIENCE.
4. *Write papers* (this is dependent on the field of study) before you have submitted your thesis. The process of writing enables you to develop skills which are useful when writing up your thesis, and the fact that you have had papers refereed/accepted by international journals helps satisfy the examiner that you have what it takes!
5. *Be self-critical* of your own work and results, in terms of statistical significance, and use these skills in being sceptical of results in the literature.
6. *Help colleagues* (especially less experienced ones) in the laboratory to learn through discussions and demonstrations.
7. *Keep up with the literature* in your field through searches on the computer every few months and by reading current papers.
8. *Write progress reports* every 6 months detailing your results – to this end you should be conscientious about keeping a laboratory notebook and regularly entering all your data into tables and Excel spreadsheets.
9. *Be aware of safety* in the laboratory at all times and follow safety procedures when starting to use new chemicals, e.g. filling in COSHH forms.
10. *Develop your skills* and learn new ones by attending the transferable skills courses and lectures provided by the GSLSM, your own and other College departments/divisions/faculties and by any other external providers.

In return, as a student, you can expect your supervisor to:

1. *Be supportive* of you, both intellectually and personally.
2. *Be available* to talk about research problems at relatively short notice although, at certain times of the year, you may need to give a few days' notice.

3. *Help and guide* you extensively in your first year; help you in your second year; and be a sounding board in your third year. The help is tapered as you develop confidence in your own abilities and research skills, to enable you to learn to work more on your own and to make more of your own decisions.
4. *Help develop your skills* in technical writing, oral presentations, problem definition, statistical data analysis, and critical literature reviews.
5. *Help enable you to attend at least one conference* to present a paper.
6. *Provide adequate funds* for your research.
7. *Read your thesis thoroughly* and make constructive comments on both style and intellectual content.

Together, students and supervisors are expected to:

1. Plan the project to a timetable which ensures that research can be completed, and the thesis written and submitted within 3 years of starting.
2. Stick strictly to the College timeframe which allows a maximum of 4 years between registration and submission of the PhD thesis.