eurodoc

Supervision and Training Charter for Early Stage Researchers

FINAL VERSION

Across Europe, supervision and training for Early Stage Researchers (ESRs) has a wide range of inconsistencies and varying range in standards for research degree programmes. This has some significant effect on the expectations of ESRs who are seeking to broaden their research interests within the European research community. It is therefore necessary that this charter has been put together with a coherent set of views in terms of expectations of ESRs across Europe, which all states are urged to adopt and implement as appropriate. This will help ensure common standards for ESRs who should be trained and equipped to be 21st century professional researchers, where in some European countries their status as employees is desired.

Supervision Arrangements

Role of the supervisor – The supervisor's role is to provide guidance and advice on the progress of the ESR as an expert in the field of research. It is particularly necessary to include guidance and an agreed project plan at an early stage of the research programme. Throughout the programme, the supervisor should give a critical review of progress. Another important role of the supervisor is to discuss with the ESR their training needs, agree and act upon implementation of those needs.

Role of the ESR – The ESR is responsible for undertaking the project agreed with the supervisor and also responsible to develop their own initiative in carrying out research. The ESR should also note the procedures for formal review of progress and agree with the supervisor how they will regularly report on progress. The ESR should also actively pursue the necessary training as agreed with the supervisor, and find access to provision for their training needs.

Training of supervisors – All supervisors new to the role should receive structured training and mentoring from experienced supervisors to ensure the standards expected of them are met. It is also desirable that senior academics undertake "refresher" training courses, which can be integrated into academic leadership programmes to ensure standards are still maintained.

Workload of supervisors – The workload of supervisors should be monitored so that their supervision responsibilities are feasible alongside other teaching and research duties that they may have. No supervisor should be assigned more ESRs than is feasible.

Contact time – There should be sufficient contact time available for regular communication between the ESR and members of their supervisory team. There should be up to 1 hour per week available for the ESR to meet their supervisor(s). There is particular need for time from the supervisor(s) at induction stage to ensure that arrangements and plans are finalised at an early stage in the research. Also it is necessary in the event of a change of supervision to adjust arrangements and plans appropriately.

Appointment of supervisors – It should be ensured that supervisors are appointed by formal admission procedures where by they have sufficient experience in the research topic as well as appropriate training and mentoring if they are a new supervisor.

Planning a research programme – The ESR and supervisor should agree upon a formal plan at the start and set some key objectives that will be subject to later review. It should be ensured that the project is feasible within the time frame available and that the appropriate equipment and resources will be made available for the project to be viable.

Other responsibilities of the ESR – It should be ensured that the ESR is not overburdened with other working duties including teaching and assisting undergraduate and graduate students who are undertaking relevant projects. ESRs will not be given responsibilities that are the work of other employees unless it is relevant to their research as agreed with the supervisor.

Equipment and Resources – It should be ensured by the supervisor that equipment and resources are available and accessible to the ESR to carry out their research within the required time.

Review Methods

Regular review meetings and progress reports – Regular reviews and progress reports should be maintained as evidence of progress from both the ESR and the supervisor. The progress review should also include evidence and monitoring of the ESR's personal development for their benefit while undertaking their research.

Constructive and pro-active feedback from the supervisor to be recorded – The supervisor should give analysed critique of the ESR's progress in their research as well in their personal development and give clear goals for improvement or reorganisation to rectify any matters that arise.

Sharing and dissemination amongst peers – There should be opportunity for ESRs to share and present their research to different audiences, both to other ESRs and also to other peers as appropriate to help encourage greater dissemination of their research.

Confidential and Structured Feedback Mechanisms

Structured feedback mechanisms – There should be appropriate mechanisms in place to allow feedback that is representative of ESRs in a research department. Where part time and "off site" ESRs are also involved, feedback mechanisms should also be extended where possible.

Review, action and response methods – Where feedback via the appropriate channels has been raised, any review and action should be taken and reported back. Procedure to ensure review and action has taken place should be in place.

Impartial, accessible, transparent complaints and appeals procedures – Any complaints and appeals procedures should be easily accessible and well publicised to the ESRs so that they know exactly what action to take as soon as possible should any issues occur between them and their supervisor. Where research is undertaken outside the institution, it should be ensured that the external complaints procedures are equally accessible within the external location.

Appropriate complaints procedures at local level – All complaints will in the first instance need to be made in the department or environment within which the ESR is working. Care must be taken to ensure that person(s) are appointed to deal with any complaints such that an ESR can complain to someone who does not have conflict of interests.

Institutional and external complaints to be dealt with efficiently – Where complaints are made to the institution or beyond that externally, the appropriate body to whom the ESR may petition must respond instantly with a timetable of how they intend to handle the complaint.

Complementary Training of Early Stage Researchers

Formal induction training - There should be a formal induction training programme run to inform the ESR of the terms and conditions relating to their research programme, provide the initial training they require to begin their research and the facilities they need to be aware of at departmental level, institutional level and externally. This should also incorporate a formal agreement between the supervisor and the ESR in terms of a plan of action.

Generic skills – Appropriate skills training courses should be made available to the ESR's needs for continuing professional development. Examples of this are presenting, data processing, writing and management.

Research methods – Appropriate instruction including literature reviewing, specialist courses relevant to the subject and how to begin the research process and develop a methodology.

Writing skills – Appropriate courses should be available to assist with writing theses and publications.

Networking – The need to attend conferences, forums and other means should be encouraged to allow ESRs to network with other researchers within the research community and share information.

Management and leadership – Coordinating and organising a research project to analyse information and coordinate further data acquisition necessary. Further to this it should address the need for management and leadership in the professional world to meet the training needs of those who seek career paths outside of academia.

Time organisation and planning – Advice on how to plan research and organise time in order to meet appropriate targets and deadlines should be provided which will also assist successful completion.

Examinations - Full overview of the viva examination and what is expected of the ESR to be a successful doctoral candidate.

Teaching – ESRs engaged in teaching should undertake comprehensive staff development training in pedagogy and other necessary skills to carry out their tasks. Teaching will contribute to their professional development for which appropriate credit should be given. Fair and consistent remuneration should be applied with formally agreed contractual arrangements.

Career planning – Advice and support on seeking post-doctoral employment should be provided along with training in career planning including application, interview and curriculum vitae skills paying attention to the specific interests of an ESR training to be an experienced researcher.

Definition of Terms

Complementary Training – Training that will develop the skills and development of an Early Stage Researcher which will demonstrate to a potential employer their abilities that have transferability.

Contact time – Time spent meeting physically with a supervisor or supervisors. If there is more than one supervisor, and meetings are held separately at all, contact time will be the sum of meeting time spent.

Early Stage Researcher (ESR) – A candidate for a research degree programme.

Feedback mechanisms – Means by which to feed back comments and concerns either collectively or from an individual regarding issues that arise both at the level of the department, the institution and the place of work if professional placements are involved.

Peers – Others in the same field of research as the ESR who will be interested in their work and able to share expertise to provide further ideas and advice to the ESR.

Progress reports – A log showing evidence of progress made at regular intervals for reference by the institution but also by the ESR and supervisor to identify achievements and any further work or training needed.

Research methods – The alternative means by which information is found, that will vary according to the discipline.

Research methodology – A specific approach to research adopting a set of methods by which an attempt is made to contribute to knowledge.

Review meeting – A meeting between the ESR and supervisor(s) to discuss progress and agree plans for future work and review training.

Supervisor – An academic responsible for the oversight and guidance of an Early Stage Researcher.

Workload – The tasks assigned to academic staff including teaching, research, administration as well as supervision of students and Early Stage Researchers (ESRs).