

Best practices for doctoral thesis supervision

Introduction

This document aims to provide thesis supervisors with a series of best practices and recommendations for supervising doctoral students at the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya. The document is divided into four parts: Definition, Planning, Monitoring and Assessment. They cover the main activities developed by doctoral thesis supervisors.

Definition

- **Guide students when they produce their research plan**
 - Supervisors have to provide clear guidance to students when they define their research plan and provide them with references to ensure they have a solid conceptual and methodological framework.
 - The project must fit with, complement and ensure synergies between the student's research and that of the supervisor and their research group.
- **Provide students with the necessary resources**
 - Supervisors must provide bibliographical and methodological resources to help develop a viable and high-quality research plan.
 - They must make sure the student applies for approval from the corresponding ethics board, where appropriate.
- **Select the members of the thesis committee, where appropriate**
 - It is important that the members of the thesis committee can make a real impact in developing and improving the research.
- **Select the training pathway that meets the student's immediate needs**
 - They must provide support so that the student can take part in workshops or training courses to develop transferable skills.

- **Make sure the student focuses on and develops the research work with a sustained level of motivation**
 - They need to keep themselves up-to-date with the developments in thesis supervision as required by the university.
 - They must provide the type of supervision required by each particular student.

Planning

- Student and supervisor need to **plan the research together well**, following the guidelines set in the research plan while being able to adapt to any unforeseen circumstances that may arise.
- Likewise, they need to **plan the student's training** (courses from their pathway and any other courses deemed necessary) and regularly monitor these activities and the student's progress.
- Supervisors need to **guide and advise the student on the intermediate outputs coming from their research**, ie those produced while developing their thesis. It is important that this output contribute to, not hinder, development of the thesis. Thus, supervisors must advise students not just on the frequency and type of output, but also on the best places to present it or publications to submit it to. We advise prioritizing quality over quantity.
 - **Attending conferences and seminars**
 - Guide the student about the conferences or seminars to present papers at (in terms of scientific quality, relevance for the thesis, etc).
 - Support the student as they submit abstracts to the most appropriate conferences and, subsequently, present their results in posters or talks.
 - **Scientific publications and articles**
 - Guide the students on the publications (journals, books, etc.) they should submit texts to (in terms of scientific quality, relevance of the subject, etc).
 - Support the student through the article writing, review and publication process.

- The thesis supervisor must bear in mind the **annual goals for the doctoral programme** and let the student know about them. The supervisor must help the student achieve them satisfactorily with the documents and/or activities scheduled by the Academic Committee to assess them.
- We highly recommend that supervisors take the **Doctoral Thesis Supervision** course before supervising a doctoral thesis. The course is especially designed for first-time supervisors, but it is a valuable experience for all supervisors. Other training courses and activities for thesis supervisors may be taken instead if their particular needs as a researcher so require.

Monitoring

- It is important that supervisor and student have **regular meetings**, especially during the first year of the thesis.
 - We recommend at least one two-hour meeting a week for full-time students and five hours a month for other students.
 - Supervisors can also ask students to produce a brief report each Friday (a few lines in an email may be enough) detailing what they have done during the week and any problems they have encountered.
- To make this monitoring better and more efficient, students should submit the work they have agreed to do a few days before each meeting. Supervisors need to set **clear deadlines** so that they have enough time to go over the work submitted properly.
- Alongside these meetings, it is also important that supervisors provide timely and detailed **feedback and comments** on the documents produced by students.
- For **online students**, supervisors need to establish and keep an **online channel of communication** open. The supervisor needs to take responsibility for this.
- The focus of the supervision needs to be on the **specific content of the research** (and not so much on the process). The supervisor should provide relevant knowledge and information that is up-to-date and high quality (and pinpoint this through the phases of the research process: conceptual and

methodological knowledge, databases, tools for collecting and analysing data, etc).

- **Look after the student's well-being**, accompanying them as they progress through the field of research.
- **Introduce the student to the world of research** in their field of study, aiding and advising them on possible research visits, contacts and collaboration with other researchers.
- **Help the student take part in the research group's academic activities** (attending the group's meetings and seminars, etc).
- **Have the student take part in the meetings to prepare research projects** so they can learn how to approach, draft and submit proposals and form consortia.

Assessment

- Take care in producing **formal student monitoring reports**.
- Supervisor and student must work together on the **doctoral programme's annual goals**.
- Ensure the **Activity Report**, which is required for the thesis defence, is **kept up-to-date**.
- **Propose the best possible members of the thesis examination panel** with regard to the research's subject matter and focus.
- Contact the programme coordinator and/or the tutor when progress with the thesis so requires.
- Help the student prepare for the **examination** of their thesis.