



TUS

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TUS Effective Practice Guidelines for Postgraduate Research Supervision 2025 - 2030



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1. Introduction and Overview

This document synthesises pivotal insights from extant academic research and policies on effective supervision that is available nationally and internationally in relation to Masters by Research and PhD students. It crystallises the role of the supervisor as per the *TUS Postgraduate Research Regulations 2023-2026* in relation to supervision whilst also offering definitions and critique from extant literature which are salient to contemporary supervision practice. The importance of high quality, impactful supervision is explicitly stated by the League of European Research Universities (LERU) which propounds the importance of high-quality doctoral education in the twenty-first century university:

‘Supervision of doctoral researchers is a central aspect of doctoral education, which is a core activity of universities and contributes to the prosperity of knowledge-based societies. For universities to shape through doctoral education the next generation of leaders in academia and beyond, they need to ensure that the right cultural, structural and behavioural conditions are in place’ (cf. Hillebrand and Leysinger, 2023, p. 3).

In addition, *Ireland’s Framework of Good Practice for Research Degree Programmes* (QQI, 2019, p. 11) advocates the following in relation Doctoral and Masters by Research graduates in Ireland:

‘Doctoral graduates should have the ability to discover, analyse, evaluate, manage, conserve and communicate an ever-increasing volume of knowledge from a range of sources and think critically about problems to produce innovative solutions and create new knowledge... Professional doctorates should have the ability to advance professional practice or use practice as a research method. ... Research master’s graduates should have a mastery of principles and theory of their discipline, competence in appropriate research methods, an ability to manage complexity, integrate knowledge and may contribute to the literature in a field’.

While this is not intended to be an exhaustive sourcebook on best practice, and mindful of the strength and diverse range of research and extant expertise on supervision at undergraduate and postgraduate levels in TUS, it draws together the main insights on effective supervision and what works from the following documents, as well as published research. It also encapsulates links to several documents, websites, reports and websites which can be readily accessed by supervisors. While it is aimed principally at new supervisors, supervisors with substantive experience may also find

this useful in the links to recent literature that are provided and its synthesis of research evidence nationally and globally.

It is also linked to the following policy documents which indelibly inform Masters by Research and PhD supervision in Ireland:

- *Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for Providers of Research Degree Programmes* (QQI, 2017)
- *Research Degree Programme Policy and Criteria* (QQI, n.d.)
- *Ireland's Framework for Good Practice for Research Degree Programmes* (QQI, 2019)
- *National Framework for Doctoral Education* (HEA, 2023)
- *European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity* (ALLEA, 2023)
- *Salzburg II Recommendations* (EUA, 2010).

As per the life cycle approach to Masters and Doctoral level research that is often referred to by universities and research institutes¹, this document focuses on the beginning of the life cycle, with the current socio-political contexts that affect doctoral and Masters research in universities; the role of the supervisor, identity, factors affecting student success, skills, models of supervision, reflective practice (RP) and the process of supporting students with writing and preparing for their viva voce. In addition, links are provided in the document to salient publications which you may find useful for your own practice.

2. Changing Contexts of Supervision

The context of research supervision has changed markedly in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) over the past decade. Universities are under increasing pressure to produce high quality, original researchers whilst negotiating competing interests from government, the move to the 'knowledge economy' (McCallin and Nayar, 2011), Artificial Intelligence (AI), discourses of accountability and transparency, increased mobility of researchers, drives to exploit the commercialisation potential of individual research projects and pressures to produce industry ready graduates (Duke and Denicolo, 2017). There are other burdens too, which include growing both domestic and international student numbers and critical discussions about the practice of

¹ Please see for example, Amsterdam UMC (2025) which provides a very comprehensive picture of the various activities associated with each stage of the life cycle [Research Lifecycle | APH Quality Handbook](#)

research supervision, supervision styles (Lee, 2008), pedagogies of authentic care (Kreber, 2023) and identity and emotions in supervision practice (Kumar and Cavallaro, 2017).

The uniqueness of the doctoral research journey in comparison to any other educational degree (e.g. undergraduate or Masters) is increasingly noted. Internationally, research also shows that high dropout rates, delays in completion, and dissatisfaction among research students remain prevalent (Jones, 2014). Research also shows that internationally, students are less likely to progress to doctoral education than others including care experienced young people (Brady et al 2019), Gypsies, Roma and Travellers (Morgan et al, 2024), and students with disabilities (Hannam-Swain, 2018). At the same time, Diversity, Equality, Belonging and Inclusion (DEBI) is increasingly prioritised in universities globally,

There is no singular definition of research supervision. However, the following sources underline its complexity in relation to ‘ways of being’ as a supervisor (Buirski, 2022) and its highly contextual nature (Garvis and Pendergast, 2012); Wright (2020, p. 1445) defines it as ‘the highest form of teaching for academics’ (see also Bruce and Stoodley, 2013) while Crammond (2024) states that supervision is about ‘sharing expertise and experience of academia’. McCallin and Nayar (2013) state that increasingly, supervision is about integrating research management and support systems for a diverse national and international student population (Rodwell and Neumann, 2008).

2.1 Supervision as Adaptation or ‘One Size Fits All?’

The continuous adaptation of the supervisor to suit the student’s needs in relation to changing macro, meso and micro contexts is also alluded to by UCD (2025a) amongst other sources:

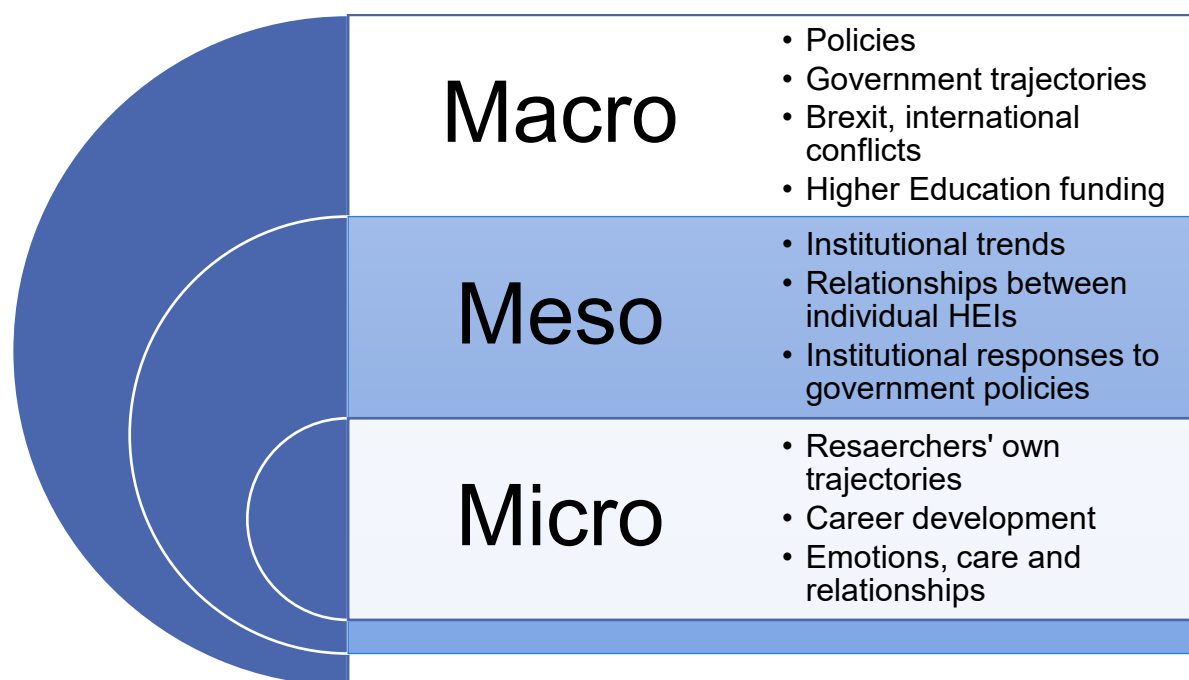
‘Research supervision is a complex form of teaching that involves a supervisor taking on a number of roles and responsibilities, often requiring adaptation over the life cycle of the doctorate’ (UCD, 2025a).

Essentially, the notion that one style of supervision fits all is very limited (McAlpine, 2018); it overlooks the contextuality of students’ needs and the heterogeneity of their learning styles as well as the dialogic and relational dimensions of supervision (Vähämäki et al 2021).² This document reflects on the meaning of effective

² This reference provides a well-grounded understanding of the supervisory relationship, analysed as sets of power relations.

supervision from different standpoints but for now, we can say that effective supervision is oriented to reflecting on the style of supervision that is most appropriate with different students at various stages of the research process. It is also about reflecting on the contexts of supervision in relation to individual learning styles and sometimes, ‘trial and error’ of ‘what works’ in relation to individual students and your own professional judgment.

While there are no ‘hard and fast’ rules about ‘what works’ in effective supervision, the literature points to several factors that affect supervision at the macro level (international), the micro (individual) and the meso level (institution, national). While the micro level is explored much more deeply in subsequent sections of this document, these factors are also tied to the macro and meso levels. In a rudimentary sense, we can think of supervision as akin to three blocks or concentric shapes where macro, meso and micro level factors are in continuous interplay.



Some of the major factors mentioned in the literature as affecting the contexts of supervision at the macro and meso levels include:

- Hyper-globalisation and Super complexity (Bahtilla and Oben, 2021)
- International Relations (IR) and international trade (Jack, 2025)
- Global conflicts and migration patterns
- Economic inequality and social class (Lynch and Crean, 2018)
- Emphasis on productivity, KPIs and neo-liberal Higher Education (HE) (Baydarova, 2022)
- Global economics
- Changing skills needs in industry and enterprise (McCallin and Nayar, 2011)
- Accommodation and housing
- Environmental concerns
- Increased moves to online and blended learning
- Professional Doctorates which are increasingly popular nationally and internationally (Park, 2005)
- Changing narratives of diversity, equality, belonging and inclusion
- Learning styles and strategies of learning that are promoted in different countries (Moran et al 2021)
- Availability of funding (McCallin and Nayar, 2011)
- Care ceilings and hidden doxas of 'carelessness' in higher education (Lynch, 2010a)
- New managerialism in higher education (Grummell et al, 2009).

Factors at the micro level also indelibly influence the meso and the macro levels (and are linked to them). Micro-level factors frequently cited in the literature include:

- Emotions and doctoral supervision as 'emotional labour' (Roed, 2012)
- Relationships of care (e.g. educate – 'to teach and to care' (Lynch, 2010b))
- Identity building as supervisors (Roed, 2012)
- Self-care practices of supervisors (Kumar and Cavallaro, 2017)

2.2 Conceptual Models of Research Supervision

Several conceptual models of research supervision also prevail in the literature which further underlines the variety, depth and scope of ways of interpreting and doing

supervision. Dr Anne Lee has written extensively on this topic, and her work is exceptionally well placed in this regard (see Lee, 2007, 2018).³ The six models of supervision that Lee (2007, p. 691) identifies are: functional, mentoring, enculturation, critical thinking, the feminist approach and the relationship building/qualities model. Ultimately, the style of supervision that is the most effective is likely to be the one that suits the context of the supervision (which is unique to each student and is highly variable). Lee's typology is summarised in the table below:

Understanding of research supervision by supervisor	Main supervision activity/approach	Knowledge and Skills
Functional	Rational, linear progression through tasks	Providing direction and signposting through different project phases.
Enculturation	Gatekeeping, cultural learning, the 'culture' of academia.	Nurturing through cultural learning, the rules of the game of academia.
Critical thinking	Evaluation, interrogating problems from different angles. Problematising, finding connections and interrogating different perspectives.	Significance of argument in academia and writing conventions.
Feminist	Emphasis on student support and co-construction of knowledge, personal experiences and intersectionality	Reflection on hidden power dynamics including the 'hidden curriculum' in higher education (Orón-Semper and Blasco, 2018)
Emancipation	Mentoring approach which emphasises empowerment, self-directedness, self-discovery, and critical reflection for personal and professional growth. Strong orientation to thinking outside the box to understand and solve research problems.	Facilitation towards personal learning and growth.

³ You may also find it helpful to access Dr Lee's website at [Dr Anne Lee Consultancy | Academic Development, Developing Doctoral Supervisors. Mentoring. CPD Policy and Practice. Academic and Strategic Leadership.](#)

Relationship development	Supervisory approach relates to personal experience; strong emphasis on growth and development through building relationships.	Emotional intelligence as intrinsic to supervision practice.
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While conceptual models of supervision tend to promote the idea that supervision styles exist independently, it is likely that most supervisors will utilise more than one approach to supervision while working with any one student and indeed, they may draw upon dimensions of more than one supervision style simultaneously.

The University of Reading (2017, p11) provides the following advice with some suggestions in relation to adaptation in relation to students' needs:

'Different supervisors inevitably have different styles. However, the same supervisor may need to adapt his or her personal style to suit the needs of students.

Suggestions: Decide on the right style for you and your student; find an appropriate balance between heavy-handed dominance and hands-off neglect. Consider the following questions as you begin your supervision practice:

- How much should you push your views as opposed to giving students freedom to learn from their mistakes?
- How much should you do for students?
- Be sensitive to how students respond to your style and be prepared to adjust it, if appropriate
- Seek help from more experienced colleagues if you have any concerns.

3. Defining Effective Research Supervision

The terms 'research supervision', 'effective research supervision' and 'superb supervision' (Haven et al. 2023) are used often interchangeably but they are defined in often differing and competing ways. Different conceptualisations of supervision prevail also, including the 'styles of supervision' by Lee (2007, 2008) and Hill's (2018) typology of supervision as *pedagogy*, as *relationship*, *management* and as *facilitating contributions to knowledge*.

UL (2025) defines effective research supervision as '*a collaborative process that significantly influences the academic and professional trajectories of both PhD candidates and supervisors. For PhD candidates, effective supervision offers critical*

guidance, support, and feedback,⁴ all of which are vital for developing research skills and successfully completing projects. A strong supervisory relationship supports academic growth, motivation, and overall satisfaction with the doctoral journey.' From this perspective then, effective research supervision embraces the following dimensions:

- Collaboration
- Guidance
- Support
- Relationships
- Trust

UCD (2025b) states that effective research supervision comprises 'strategies that facilitate progression'. The strategies for effective research supervision as per UCD (2025b) are:

- Encouraging writing and giving good feedback
- Making meetings count
- Managing common challenges
- Reflecting on supervisory practice.

The term impactful supervision is sometimes used to denote effective supervision (LERU, 2023). Essentially, this is a supervision style which embraces the following:

- A focus on impact throughout all stages of the research process, from RDP design to implementation and evaluation.
- A holistic understanding of research impact. The study is impactful then not only within the discipline or field and with academic audiences but also in terms of its societal, cultural and economic benefits. This embraces a more nuanced view of supervision practice and impact.
- Reflection on what impact means throughout the research journey and actively sharing reflections and experiences with students.

⁴ The matter of feedback to postgraduate research students has been written about extensively. The following are useful; Chugh et al. (2022) and Bearman et al (2024). On student feedback literacy, Carless and Boud (2018) is instructive.

- Encouraging students to think about their own impact in terms of their research, publications and other outputs but also in terms of community, industry, places and non-academic outputs including patents, spin-ins and spinouts.

Other hallmarks of effective supervision that are salient to supervisors as per extant research on the topic include:

- Getting to know your co-supervisors early on, and especially their views on effective supervision (McAlpine, 2018)
- Engaging in reflective practice (Hill, 2018)
- Meet students early in their research journey to establish goals, boundaries and expectations (University College London (UCL), 2019, p. 4)
- Revisit discussion about the study's impact, goals and expectations regularly and as needed throughout the study (ibid. p. 5)
- Discussing the meaning of effective supervision with your students throughout the research process; what makes supervision meaningful and effective for them as well as for you?
- Clarifying expectations with students about supervision, meeting deadlines, responsibilities and career intentions after submission (McAlpine, 2018)
- Reflecting on power and mentorship when supervising with new colleagues (Guerin, 2018)
- Reflect on the time commitment required to supervise any one student. Students' needs are heterogeneous and taking on too many students at the one-time can lead to stress and anxiety for supervisors (UCL, 2019, p. 6)
- Making meeting availability clear to students (McAlpine, 2018)
- Providing clear, timely and constructive feedback and clear deadlines (Ibid.)
- Providing guidelines to students on the main aspects of a research study, including the Central Research Question or Statement; the aims and objectives, methodologies/laboratory techniques, ethics, reading and writing (McAlpine, 2018)
- Record the dates and times of individual meetings with particular emphasis on what is agreed, action points and agreed delivery dates for outputs.
- Keep regular logs of what is agreed with students and offer support as needed.

There are also dedicated resources on supervising interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research which incites a range of other questions, including the languages of interdisciplinarity (Bracken and Bull, 2006) and transdisciplinarity, integrating diverse knowledge systems (transdisciplinarity), similarities and differences to multidisciplinary research studies and how to adequately prepare

students for transdisciplinary research (Kemp and Nurius, 2015) and the roles of non-academic stakeholders (University of Utrecht, 2025).

4. Student views on effective supervision

Research has also discerned students' views of what constitutes effective research supervision. Zuber-Skerritt and Roche (2004) identified the following as important from their work with PhD and Masters students in an Australian university ($n=13$). Concepts of effective supervision were linked to the following themes:

- Positive communication between the supervisor and the student
- Nurturing attitude
- Supervisor has expert knowledge on the topic
- Supervisor has good reputation.

In addition, Zuber-Skerritt and Roche (2004, p. 87) distils the following as characteristic of effective research supervision:

- Effectiveness
- Resourceful
- High commitment to students
- Organisation skills
- Good writing skills
- Supportive
- Non-judgmental
- Acts as learning facilitator
- Directed by the student's needs
- Works in interdisciplinary fashion.

The University of Reading (2017, p. 9) also recommends the following in relation to effective supervision:

- Make sure new students have a clear understanding of their responsibilities, the role of their supervisor(s), and the support available to them.
- Encourage students to proactively seek support when needed and to engage in open discussions about any concerns, where appropriate.
- Remain mindful of cultural differences and examine any unconscious biases you may hold.
- Take an interest in students' overall well-being, as many may be dealing with significant financial or family-related challenges.

- Be mindful that:
 - Be aware that students may hold differing expectations regarding personal space and emotional expression.
 - Be mindful that religious practices vary and strive to support and respect these differences appropriately.
 - Be aware that cultural attitudes toward time and punctuality may differ and approach these differences with respect.
 - Be mindful that academic writing can pose language challenges for students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Please ensure you and the student are familiar with the range of supports available for postgraduate research students including the [Academic Writing Centre - Athlone - TUS](#) , Chaplaincy and Pastoral Care, the Student Health Unit and Student Counselling [Student Support - TUS](#)

5. Factors affecting Research Student Success

The role of the research supervisor is frequently cited as one of the most salient factors that affect graduate research students' success (Pearson and Brew, 2002; McCallin and Nayar, 2011). Research supervision is often said to be a facilitative process which can be both supportive and challenging for students and supervisors alike (Pearson and Kayrooz, 2004). The complexity of supervision is evident in the scope, range and diversity of activities involved in postgraduate research supervision like progression, examinations, and academic identity (Brew, 2001). Park (2005) asks questions which are important to explore in supervision, about the increasing demands on academics to perform in neo-liberal universities, employability agendas and doctoral training in a research context that is increasingly dominated by calls for greater interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity.

Frequently, research refers to the following as effecting research student success. The factors cited below as identified in the literature are predominantly micro and meso level factors. However, these are indelibly affected by the macro level:

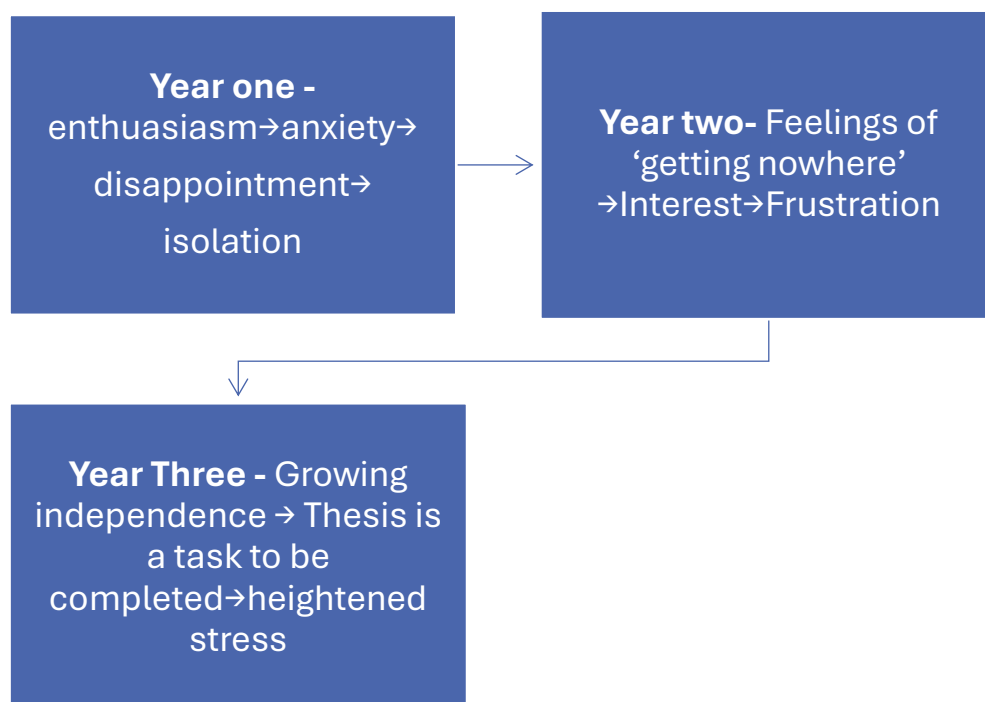
- Institutional factors, including the faculty/departmental research culture (Deem and Brehony, 2000)
- Availability of training to supervisors and students ('training culture' (ibid))
- Quality of training and supports made available to supervisors
- Institutional supports provided to supervisors including seminars and membership of professional bodies.

- The frequency of contact and direct supervision (Heath, 2002)⁵
- The relationship between the supervisor and student
- Engaging with peers from diverse backgrounds markedly broadens student's horizons (Wang, 2024)
- Introducing peer learning opportunities and student conferences and colloquia are important for knowledge-exchange.
- Supports with writing. For example, Delamont et al (2004) say there are two golden rules: 'write early and write often' and 'don't get it right, get it written' (cited in University of Reading, 2017, p. 11)
- Being aware of and reflecting on power dynamics in the supervisory relationship can significantly contribute to student success.
- Effective supervisors are characterized by their accessibility, supportiveness, empathy, and their commitment to informing students about professional networks and CPD.
- Students' previous experiences of research, and their perceptions of it
- Student characteristics including variables like gender and age and behavioural and psychological characteristics (e.g. personality, motivation) (Jiranek, 2010; Van de Schoot et al, 2013).
- Individual research projects. Until recently, this was often overlooked in research. However, the culture within an individual a project can also affect student success (van Rooij et al, 2021). This can include relational factors such as interactions with peers, feelings of contributing to 'something bigger' or being part of a career plan with prospects for future development (e.g. the potential to obtain a postdoctoral position in the same/similar field).
- The literature also identifies some of the most salient factors that affect stress levels of research students. This includes feelings of guilt and anxiety as contributors to stress (Pychyl and Little 1998; Schmidt & Hansson, 2018) and feelings of frustration (Schmidt & Umans, 2014).
- Various factors, including peer pressure, heavy workloads, deadlines, financial concerns, and the pressure to publish and present at conferences (Maysa &

⁵ Heath's (2002) quantitative analysis found that at the end of the degree those who recalled meeting more than once a month were more satisfied than those who recalled meeting less than once a month as regards guidance on: (1) topic definition, (2) research design and data analysis, and (3) literature to be reviewed. Individuals reported a shift in frequency of meetings: more meetings at the beginning, fewer in the middle, and more again near the end. Zhao et al (2007) reported the strongest correlations between supervisor's behaviour and student's satisfaction across disciplines were: (1) regular and constructive feedback on (i) research and (ii) progress. Supervisors who made themselves available when I need' help on (i) research and (ii) progress; (3) direct assessment of progress; (4) details of good research practice; and (5) information about ongoing relevant research.

Smith, 2009) —negatively impacted research students' stress levels. This stress was often compounded by anxieties about securing permanent employment and uncertainty about their academic futures, given the widespread reliance on temporary contracts (Huisman et al 2002).

- Positive social interactions with friends and peers, along with a sense of support, played a key role in students' ability to cope (Martinez et al, 2013). Peer relationships (Schmidt & Umans, 2014) and peer support groups also show effectiveness with regards to loneliness, isolation and mental health difficulties (Newlands et al, 2025).
- Encouraging students to come to the university if they are feeling isolated at home and/or online.
- Recognition should be given to the varied transitions students may encounter over the course of their research experience. Despite being a highly individualized process, Phillips and Pugh (2000) identify common patterns that students tend to exhibit at different stages of their academic journeys from years one to three (see below).



University websites also note the following as important factors affecting student success. As per UCD (2025b), the factors below are also worthy of consideration:

- Developing a sense of community and belonging among students

- Interculturalism
- Awareness of Diversity, Equality, Belonging and Inclusion (DEBI) policies in the university
- Expectations about supervisor and supervision roles
- University Supports
- Financial issues
- Knowledge of ethics procedures and policies.

In addition, other universities and research organisations note the following as important drivers of research student success:

- Guiding students to think through problems for themselves (Godwin, 2021)
- Listening to students and thinking about how your comments will be interpreted (ibid.)
- Encouraging students to be brave in their thinking.
- Skills development training for research students in leadership, commercialisation, Intellectual Property (IP) and innovation
- Providing a clear structure for the dissertation (Godwin, 2021)
- Building a culture of appreciation for supervisors and students within universities (Hillebrand and Leysinger, p. 3).

6. Supporting Supervisors and Students with the Research Journey: The Roles of Universities

The roles of universities in effecting research student success via support for supervisors are also noted extensively in research and policy. Research evidence demonstrates positive effects for students from the following:

- Dedicated training programme and community of practice (Wenger, 1998) for new supervisors. This includes informal settings where supervisors can share experiences and challenges in a supportive, non-judgmental environment. (Duke and Denicolo, 2017)
- Mentorship programmes designed to support new supervisors by drawing on the knowledge and expertise of experienced supervisors (Lindén et al 2011)
- Encourage greater knowledge-sharing on 'best practice' in supervision within and across universities.
- Encouragement of trans disciplinary and interdisciplinary thinking both within and across institutions (Duke and Denicolo, 2017)

- Institutional links with professional bodies dedicated to excellence in postgraduate research (e.g. UK Council for Graduate Education (UKCGE))
- Implementation of Researcher Development Programme within institutions (e.g. the Vitae RDP [The Vitae Researcher Development Framework - Vitae](#)) (Vitae, 2025a).
- Continuous high quality CPD within universities that is oriented to the complexities, challenges and opportunities of supervision. (e.g. on power, effectiveness of training and cultures of care).
- On the importance of RP and supports for supervisors, Lee (2008) states the following: *'Research supervisors need to be enabled to uncover the conceptions that they hold and examine them alongside other supervisors. Where a research supervisor wants to enhance their skills within a particular framework (for example: becoming more able at developing critical thinking or effective at supporting a doctoral researcher functionally in improving time management), various paths might be trod. Peer learning and support, mentoring, action learning and specialised seminars are just some of the approaches which may be appropriate'*.
- Writing workshops and writing retreats which can also alleviate anxiety and stress from writing (Jusslin and Widlund, 2024).

7. Support with Writing

Postgraduate students frequently feel overwhelmed and stressed with the prospect of writing and this tends to form one complete topic in most guides for new supervisors produced by universities. The process of writing itself and the spaces where writing happens have also attracted greater attention from researchers over the past decade or so (see for example, Carragher and Brereton, 2022; Share et al, 2023). The stresses encountered by students with regards to writing are felt particularly by students whose first language is not English (Phyo et al 2024). Some of the main areas highlighted in the literature that are worthy of consideration are as follows:

- Academic writing is a formal approach to writing. Most students will not have written using formal or technical language previously.
- Students often require instruction in grammar, vocabulary, citing and referencing, especially at the start of their studies (ibid).
- Some work describes the process of learning to write as an academic as a type of 'writing regulation' that involves 'cyclical thought-action-emotion dynamics and the individual's capacity to monitor his/her activity' (Castelló et al, 2013, p.

442). The concepts of 'regulation' and 'cyclical thought' underscores the complexity of this task.

- Many students lack confidence in their ability to write well which also affects their overall wellbeing and writing performance (Larcombe et al, 2007)

Share et al (2023) found that students are often uncertain about key aspects of academic writing, including word count requirements, thesis structure, critical writing, and the process of conducting a literature review. Their study also highlighted that many students lack clarity around the publication process, particularly in identifying suitable journals or books and understanding the conventions which are expected by academic publishers.

Sources like the University of Reading (2017) provide the following advice:

- The importance of directing students to recent PhDs/Masters by Research theses to gain knowledge of disciplinary conventions
- Encouraging summary writing of abstracts, reports and key articles/chapters.
- Providing relevant and timely feedback on writing.
- Encourage drafting of the thesis framework and chapter outlines when possible.
- Developing dedicated writing groups for groups of students within a faculty/department/discipline.
- Carragher and Brereton (2022) discuss the importance of cross-disciplinary journal clubs to support student writing. Significantly, the cross-disciplinary element also fostered critical thinking skills.
- Thesis writing circles have also shown effectiveness in building student's confidence and thesis writing identity (Larcombe et al, 2007).

8. Preparing Students for Submission and their Viva Voce Examination

There is a great degree of mystery and fear amongst students about what the viva voce examination entails and what it means to perform well enough in your examination. All TUS postgraduate research students have access to a Teams site which contains ample training and development resources on the viva voce and how to prepare themselves as well as possible for the exam. The Graduate School also provides training to students and supervisors on the viva exam.

Some of the main advice on preparing for the viva is as follows:

- Ensure that students submit their Notification of Intention to Present (NOI) document at least six months before they plan to sit their viva.

- Read the *TUS Postgraduate Research Regulations 2023-2026* and the different outcomes that examiners can present with (e.g. major corrections, minor corrections, no corrections etc) and the maximum timelines for completing changes that are associated with each outcome.
- Engaging in mentoring with ‘viva survivors’, ex-students who have successfully completed their viva exams has been shown to reduce anxiety amongst students who are preparing for their viva exams (Knight et al, 2018).
- Clearly explaining the roles of all those present at the viva (chairperson, internal examiner, external examiner and supervisors (if applicable)) is also important preparation and helps manage students’ expectations about the exam (Watts et al, 2012).
- If students have completed an ‘open door’ viva previously, they may need guidance on how this differs and is like a ‘closed door’ viva (the latter of which is operational at TUS like most Western European universities).
- Doing a practice run in advance can also be helpful for students. It can help to build self-confidence.
- There are some excellent resources on preparing for the viva. An example of this is from Vitae (2025b) which contains a viva preparation checklist [The viva - Vitae](#)
- The following resource from the University of Huddersfield is also an excellent starting point [Preparing for your viva examination - University of Huddersfield](#)
- Dr Ann M Torres from the University of Galway has also produced an excellent viva guide which contains many useful hints and tips [phd viva guide.pdf](#) (University of Galway, n.d.).

9. Other Helpful Resources

You may also find the following resources helpful in terms of reflecting on ‘best practice’.

- The University of Leiden has produced a helpful table that engages with different (yet interrelated) aspects of best practice [best-practices-for-phd-supervision.pdf](#) (University of Leiden, n.d.)
- Polkinghorne et al (2023) provides insights on the importance of the student-supervisor relationship and the complexity of choosing the ‘right’ candidate (see reference list).
- Borregaard et al. (2021) looks at the ‘X Factors’ of PhD supervision in nursing and healthcare: [The X-factors of PhD supervision ACNAP top-10 tips on choosing a PhD supervisor..pdf](#)

- Dr Stephen Gunn at the University of Oxford has also produced the following short video: [\(323\) What makes for an effective PhD supervisor? - YouTube](#)
- UCL (2025) has also produced an interesting project called ‘PhD Diaries’. You can access student accounts of their PhD journeys and those of supervisors here [PhD diaries | Teaching & Learning - UCL – University College London](#)

10. References

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