



Supervision of external PhD students

For the supervisor of an external PhD student, it can sometimes be difficult to ascertain what you can expect from the PhD student and you may feel like you are investing considerable time into this supervision while it's not entirely clear if the research will result in a PhD.

To achieve a pleasant and effective working relationship for both parties, to begin with one may set the same requirements for external PhD students as one does for regular PhD students. A number of recent developments in the postgraduate degree policies of universities with regards to external PhD students are already indicating a move in that direction. Secondly the supervisor can help the external PhD students to achieve a better connection to the academic body. This involves selection, contract, monitoring, embedding and facilities.

Selection

- Think about the kind of student you want to select. Don't accept anybody who has an interesting idea.
- Be aware of how much time supervision can take. Realize what other things you could do with that time.
- Examine the reality aspect and chance of success of the proposed PhD work with the candidate.
- Discuss motivation and expectations regarding time investment, final product, intermediate milestones and supervision.
- Review recent knowledge in the field and methodology.
- Ask the candidate for samples of academic writing.
- Discuss the various options for communication (face-to-face, skype, e-mail) and the most minimal acceptable level of frequency.

Contract

- Make agreements about time investment.
- Make agreements about content, working methods, and the date for a definitive research proposal.
- The approval of the research proposal as issued by the supervisor(s) and promotor(s) is the 'go' moment.

Monitoring

- Continue to monitor progress, even if the external student can only spend a few hours per week on the PhD work.
- Ensure that a short progress report is forthcoming on a monthly basis.

Embedding

- Invite external PhD students to interesting events.
- Take the external student along to a congress.
- Set up an intervision group comprising several external PhD students.
- Discuss the available opportunities for following a course.

Facilities

- Inquire if the external PhD student has a quiet place to study, away from their regular workspace.
- Discuss options for letting the external PhD student work at university where he or she won't be disturbed and in close proximity to you, the supervisor (eg, a study hall or the library).
- Help the external PhD student obtain access to the required literature.
- Find out if the external PhD student can attend classes.
- Make it possible for the external PhD student to get into contact with other external PhD students (see above).