SCHOOL OF INFORMATICS

Strategy Committee

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Policy on Eligibility of Staff to take on new Principal PGR Supervisions

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Background

This document sets out a policy through which faculty and research staff maintain their eligibility to take on new principal supervision roles and sets out certain limitations on the composition of supervisory teams aimed at removing potential conflicts of interest.

Action requested from the committee
- To review, comment upon, and approve the policy as appropriate

Equality and diversity implications – None

Resource implications (staff, space, budget) – None

IGS Policy on Eligibility of Staff to take on new Principal PGR Supervisions

There are several motivations for this new Graduate School policy. It arose initially as a response to an action in the report from the last PGR Internal Programme Review (March 2020), but is also motivated more generally by:

- low PGR completion rates in SoI, which compare unfavourably with other Schools in CSE.
- concerns over levels of compliance with the School's PGR annual review policy and the challenges of ensuring all students are reviewed in a timely fashion.
- concerns about quality of supervision when the principal supervisor is no longer full-time with the school.
- the need to ensure sufficient independence within the supervision team.

The policy specifies requirements in three general areas: supervisor training, timely completion of PGR annual reviews, and availability of the supervisor. It also includes a fourth requirement for independence in the composition of a supervisory team, to avoid potential conflicts of interest.

A. Supervisor Training

The requirement to complete PGR supervisor training is not new. As this policy defines the conditions for eligibility to take on a principal PGR supervision it naturally includes a requirement for completion of training.

Ongoing training

It is a longstanding requirement that PhD supervisors take the IAD supervisor training course and repeat this **every 5 years**. Since Spring 2020, the IAD requirements for supervisor training are cast in terms of completion of the online Learn course "Fundamentals of PhD supervision", and this remains the case at the time of writing. PGR supervisors are also required to have completed the following online training modules: Data Protection, IS Essentials and Equality and Diversity Essentials.

Extra training for new hires

Incoming academic staff must take extra in-house training within the School in their first year to be qualified for supervising Informatics students. This is organised on an annual basis, either as an in-house workshop (2020/21), or as a short meeting with the Deputy Director of the IGS (2021/22).

Future requirements

It is likely that, as we exit the pandemic, the primary training will revert to an in-house workshop run by the IGS; at that point this will become the requirement every 5 years.

B. Conducting Timely Annual Reviews

It has often been observed that PGR students and/or their supervisors actively delay an annual review to allow more progress to be made before the review takes place. Regardless of where a student is in their PhD journey, annual reviews should be conducted at the designated time and neither the student nor the supervisor should be actively delaying this important review point. This is especially true if there has been insufficient progress because the panel can provide helpful feedback to the student and a progress plan can be formulated to get the student "back on track". Another advantage of a timely review is in helping identify when personal/pastoral issues are impacting on progress and thus allow the School to intervene with appropriate support. It will also help identify in a timely manner those students who are unlikely to achieve a PhD and who genuinely need to transfer to a lower degree or withdraw. Given the long-running difficulties of

ensuring timely completion of some annual reviews, this policy includes new requirements in this area.

We expect supervisors to impress on students the importance of completing Annual Reviews on time. Progress monitoring for PhD students is done via the "Annual Review" process, with tracking and reporting hosted on the EUCLID system. The deadlines for completion of Annual Reviews are at 12 months, 24 months, 36 months (and possibly 48 months, etc), with the tally of months referring to "on-program" months (*i.e.*, Interruptions are the only concession during which the clock stops). **A supervisor may not grant concessions on the timing of the Annual review to a student.**

The templates for Annual Reviews are automatically seeded within each students' EUCLID Assessment space, and need to be completed and signed-off in the following order:

1. Student → 2. Lead Supervisor → 3. Assistant Supervisors → (4. Student) → 5. Deputy Director IGS.

EUCLID sends a notification that an Annual Review is required when the template is seeded 4 months before the deadline, with these notifications going to the supervisory team as well as the student. This is augmented by reminders from the IGS, and by individual correspondence in some cases where the seeding is done manually. For example, repeat reviews may have a shorter completion window than that would be assigned by EUCLID. Further notifications are generated to inform the next person in the sequence, as the process is in train.

We are concerned by the large number of incomplete and delayed Annual Reviews each year. Hence, going forwards, **we propose to set a maximum level of recent supervisory non-compliance with the review process above which a supervisor will become (temporarily) ineligible to take on new principal supervisions**.

a) Supervisors will incur 1 point for any Annual Review (or Repeat Review) which does not complete Stage 2 (EUCLID template submitted by Supervisor) within 6 weeks of the deadline. Exceptionally, with approval of IGS, this may be within 6 weeks of the date the students' section was submitted, to accommodate rare situations where the student has been prevented from making the entry, or the lead supervisor has been absent due to illness or exceptional leave. In these cases, the supervisor must contact the IGS to report this in advance of the deadline.
b) In cases where the student fails to complete the EUCLID template before the review deadline, we require supervisors to schedule a time for the Annual Review with the panel, to happen within the 6-week window, and communicate the date to the student. If the student subsequently fails to attend, this must be reported to the IGS.
c) The points will be accrued over a rolling window of 2 years.
d) Supervisors who hold a penalty of more than 3 points will no longer be eligible to take on any new lead supervisions.

The IGS and Deputy Director of IGS will review and update the status of annual reviews each month and will warn supervisors when they are in jeopardy and will notify them when their status for taking new lead supervisions changes.

To accrue more than 3 points in 2 years means that more than 3 reviews did not reached stage 2 of the process six weeks after the review was due to be completed.

For the avoidance of doubt, points will not be accrued for reviews initiated before the start of AY 2022-23.

C. Principal Supervisor's Availability

A PGR student should be able to expect that their supervisor has sufficient time to devote to their supervision. However, when a supervisor has a reduced FTE this may become an issue. Reduced FTE may occur for a variety of reasons; the supervisor may be leaving the University, or temporarily on secondment, or perhaps reducing their FTE in the run-up to retirement. The Graduate School has observed problems with maintaining engagement (of supervisors as well as students) after a PhD supervisor has moved away. The completion rates (PhD within 4 years) for departed supervisors are significantly poorer than for the School as a whole. This policy sets out the normal expectations for supervisors to be permitted to take on a new principal supervision, and to retain existing principal supervisions for students already enrolled on their programme.

It is important that each lead supervisor has sufficient time and commitment to the student, the University, and its procedures for supporting PGR students, and is therefore able to devote adequate time to supervise the student and to lead the process of reviewing the student's progress. The issue of supervisor availability arises when the supervisor transitions to a part-time role. There may be several reasons why a supervisor may have a part-time contract. For example, they may be in the process of exiting the university, or reducing their workload prior to retirement, or on temporary secondment in industry. For a supervisors moving to part-time contracts, the time they have available to supervise additional PGR students will be considered when IGS determines whether it is appropriate for them to take on new PGR students or (in some cases) continue as principal supervisor to their existing PGR students.

Supervisors with an open-ended contract of at least 50% FTE will be assumed to have sufficient time available for principal PhD supervisions.

The number instances where a part-time member of academic staff on a contract with less than 50% FTE wishes to recruit a new PGR student is likely to be few, and each case will be different. For such supervisors the following general rules will be applied:

- In the case of supervisors going on temporary secondment and wishing to continue PGR recruitment during that time, they must obtain prior agreement from Head of School and the Director of the Graduate School. In addition, there must be a Memorandum of Understanding covering the terms under which PGR recruitment and supervision will be undertaken during the period of reduced FTE, which must include a commitment from the supervisor to undertake all administrative duties of a principal supervisor in a timely way (including the completion of Engagement Points, where required, and Annual Reviews).
- If a supervisor is already on secondment at less than 50% FTE when these rules come into effect, any request from them to recruit new PGR students will be assessed by the Director of the Graduate School.
- If a supervisor is in the process of leaving or heading towards retirement, it will **not** be considered appropriate for them to take on new principal supervisions.

Furthermore, when a supervisor departs for a new position at a different organisation, the supervision arrangements for the PGR students for whom they are lead supervisor will be adjusted depending on the time the research student has been enrolled on their program:

- If a student has completed 18 months or more on their program by the date when the lead supervisor drops below 50% FTE, we will allow the supervisor to remain as lead supervisor

for the remainder of the program. We note that this responsibility requires the supervisor to carry out timely annual reviews and attend any required supervisor training. In these cases, a memorandum of understanding between supervisor, student and IGS is expected to be agreed before the new arrangement is put in place.

- If the student has not reached 18 months into their research program when the supervisor leaves, we will require the Institute/CDT to re-design a supervisory team where a full-time faculty member takes lead supervision (*i.e.*, at least 50%) for the student. The original supervisor may retain up to 50% assistant supervision, and in some cases may remain the main guide of the research, but the new lead supervisor will have responsibility for monitoring progress and scheduling and documenting annual reviews.

D. Independence of the Supervisors

Although the University has no policy prohibiting intimate partners from jointly supervising research students, it is not considered "best practice", and in the CSE there have been some situations where it has caused difficulties for a PhD student. In this context the term Joint Supervisors refers both to equally weighted co-supervisors and non-equally weighted principal and assistant supervisors.

To avoid potential conflicts of interest we consider it a requirement that:

- Joint Supervisors should not be intimate partners (as defined by the University's Intimate Relationships Policy)
- Exceptionally, in circumstances where having joint supervisors who are intimate partners is the only way to deliver essential supervisory expertise, the student must also have an independent third supervisor with at least 20% supervision. This exception requires approval from the Director of the IGS, based on a supervision proposal that includes details of the third supervisor (*i.e.*, they cannot be "TBD").

To ensure sufficient independence we also strongly advise that Joint Supervisors should not themselves have formerly been in a supervisor/student relationship.