The PhD journey
a (biased) supervisor’s view

Michael O’Boyle
Role of supervisor

- An advisor not a boss
- Mainly a guide
  - Help you get the best out of your time
- For me
  - Help get over fear of unknown
  - Understand research landscape rapidly
  - Get you connected
  - Sounding board for ideas
  - Challenge you to be innovative
  - Support you when the rejections arrive!
  - The best part of my job
Managing your supervisor

- They are well-meaning but easily distracted!
- Make sure you see them regularly
  - Especially when things are going badly
  - 1st year - at least once a week
- Don’t wait till meeting if an issue
  - Don’t let things fester
- Expectation discussion
  - Early on - what are your goals after PhD?
  - What does your supervisor hope to achieve?
- Occasionally things don’t work out
  - Change supervisor
Be an effective PhD student ...

- PhD time is precious – manage it carefully
  - Schedule holidays and time to refresh
- Plan your research around paper submissions
  - In my area aim for one a year growing in ambition
  - e.g. 2-3 papers plus intro/related work = PhD
- Avoid rabbit holes - evidence based PhD
  - Does your problem exist?
  - Can you estimate value of your solution before you develop it?
  - Is there a market for your solution?
  - Probability of solution vs impact
Be an effective PhD student ...

- Read extensively, widely and continuously
  - Get a wide network to test ideas
  - Get feedback from supervisors and colleagues about your plans
- Learn from the best role models
  - Seek out mentors
  - Joint work/papers
- Take control of your own destiny

- Read the *Researchers’ Handbook* (Bundy et al.)
Useful Programme Information - Rules and Regulations

- **Code of Practice for Supervisors and Research Students**
  - Roles and responsibilities of students and supervisors
  - Managing the student-supervisor relationship
  - Organising supervisory meetings
  - Annual progression and review
  - Thesis preparation and assessment
  - Managing programme concessions (e.g. LoA, interruptions)
  - Other support – e.g. resolving problems

- **Postgraduate Research Degree Regulations (2020/21)**
  - Assessment regulations [https://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/pgr_assessmentregulations.pdf](https://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/pgr_assessmentregulations.pdf)

[https://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/copsupervisorsresearchstudents.pdf](https://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/copsupervisorsresearchstudents.pdf)
Staying on track = PhD Milestones

PhD Timeline (for standard 3 year PhD programmes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>When</th>
<th>What</th>
<th>Sept Start</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>Month 1</td>
<td>First Supervisor Meeting: identify career aspirations and training needs</td>
<td>September</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Month 4</td>
<td>Submit Outline Proposal and Literature Review</td>
<td>December</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Month 9</td>
<td>Submit the First Year Review Document</td>
<td>May</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Month 10</td>
<td>Formal First Year Review</td>
<td>June</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Month 12</td>
<td>Supervisor completes the formal first year review report</td>
<td>August</td>
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http://web.inf.ed.ac.uk/infweb/student-services/igs/phd/year-timelines

- **Recommended year 1  IAD training sessions**
  - “How to do an Informatics PhD”, Oct 12th, 2021, Spring
  - “Preparing for 1st year review”  March.

http://web.inf.ed.ac.uk/infweb/studentservices/igs/phd/training-development/recommended-training

- **PhD Annual reviews in years 1, 2 and 3**
  - important progression points, valuable feedback and support,
  - an opportunity to practice for the real viva.
Your PhD

- Can be the best of times
  - and the worst of times
- Tend to look back as a key stage in our lives
  - But no-one finds it plain sailing
  - So ask for help
- However,
  - the vast majority make it and are successful
- It’s the start of a research career not the end
  - avoid Magnus opus
- Fortunate to have supervised many students
  - Happy to give informal advice

Good luck and enjoy the journey!!!