Managing your PhD (and your supervisor)

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Your PhD within the School of Informatics

Welcome!

We are glad to have you here and look forward to seeing the research you will deliver.

- ▶ At Edinburgh, our arrangements for PhD supervision are managed by a supervisory team, with a Lead (1st) supervisor, and 1-2 assistant supervisors.

- ▶ This team will provide guidance and evaluation of your research plans and your progress throughout the PhD. They will be close to your research project, and hence will provide specific guidance on developing your research.

- ▶ The IGS and the support team offer some generic training, and support when you have difficulties (extensions, interruptions, handling internships, etc). `rt+igs@inf.ed.ac.uk` is the email.

year 1: Initial steps in research planning

(for the NLP CDT this will probably happen in the 2nd year of the program)

early weeks/months:

▶ University and School admin!

▶ Meet with supervisor and the broader research group

▶ Discuss your respective *expectations* using the "Expectations Questionnaire":

  `https://web.inf.ed.ac.uk/sites/default/files/atoms/files/pgr_`
  `expectations_questionnaire.docx`

▶ Decide on an initial schedule of meetings (may change as you move through your PhD, but agree a pattern of individual and/or group meetings).

▶ Talk to your supervisor about "expectations" for working hours, and work-life balance.

The Code of Practice

https://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/copsupervisorsresearchstudents.pdf

An important document setting out what students should expect from supervisors (and vice versa)

You and your supervisor - what you can expect

▶ Regular meetings, perhaps as a mixture of group meetings and individual meetings.

  ▶ Regulations require minimum of 2 meetings every 3 months.
  ▶ Most Informatics PhD students will meet their supervisors more regularly.
  ▶ If your supervisor relies on group meetings, but you feel there is a need for regular 1-1 meetings, please ask for that!

▶ An interest in your Career aspirations, and guidance at appropriate times (internships, research visits when appropriate).

▶ Concrete help with developing the methodology, motivating the work, and directing you to related work.

▶ In the case where there is collaboration in a group, making sure you have leadership/ownership for enough of the work.

▶ Organisation of the Annual Review each year, and delivery of timely feedback.

The Annual Reviews

▶ Due by 12 months, 24 months, 36 months, of your "on program" study.

▶ Euclid - you will be prompted to fill a question and answer template about your work and supervisor arrangements, and to attach a report.

▶ IGS has a set of pages with guidance on how to fill your section:
  `https://web.inf.ed.ac.uk/infweb/student-services/igs/phd/`
  `guidance-annual-reports`

▶ Your Review Panel consists of your supervisory team, as well as an "external" member of the panel (a faculty member who is external to the supervisory team).

▶ You will have a meeting with your Panel and they will discuss your work, give detailed feedback, and decide on Progression (or not).

▶ One outcome of an Annual Review is the 3-month "Repeat review", if the panel feels there is some aspect that needs further assessment. If this is your outcome, treat this as an opportunity to get advice of how to resolve the issue.

The Annual Reviews - what's expected

(for the NLP CDT, add 1 to each year)

year 1: A report with a detailed literature review, identification of a sensible research problem (or research hypothesis), and details of some initial exploratory work and those results.

year 2: We would hope that you have seen a substantial piece of work to completion, and have this written up. Ideally this will have been submitted for publication. And you should have a plan for the remaining work which "knits" well with the completed research.

year 3: A report on the work completed, a detailed thesis plan, and a detailed timeline for completing any remaining research.

There are more details here:

https://web.inf.ed.ac.uk/infweb/student-services/igs/phd/year-timelines

How much is enough?
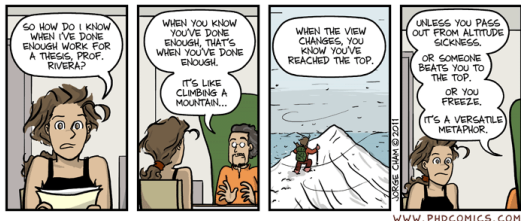

- The expectation for a PhD is that you deliver a substantial contribution of original work. The work should be publishable.

- Substantial? Some faculty would interpret this as "one paper in a top conference, and two papers in lower-ranked conferences/workshops. But not the only definition, and the key word in "publishable", not "published".

- Depends on the field. In judging this, your supervisor will guide you.

Work-life balance

- ▶ Not on the Expectations questionnaire, but should be discussed.
- ▶ It may be necessary to spend longer hours in the office in the approach to a paper deadline. Don't let this become a persistent habit (should be an exception).
- ▶ You have an entitlement to Annual leave (40 working days), plan for it, and take it!
- ▶ If you feel your supervisor is demanding too many hours in the office, discuss a plan to reduce this (perhaps on a trial basis).

Feedback - what should you expect?
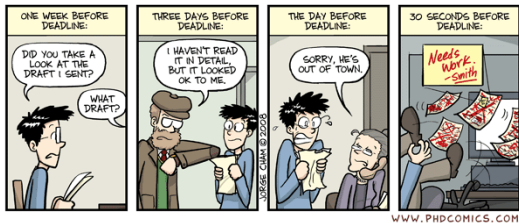
Supervisor should give (written) feedback on reports, and/or papers in preparation.

▶ Be explicit about when you have a document requiring feedback (don't expect them to incrementally check a shared space etc).

▶ Give them the document well in advance, request feedback by a certain date.

▶ Supervisors may :) be swift with feedback for conference submissions, but don't expect this, plan in advance.

▶ Maybe arrange a "proofreading exchange" with another PhD student (for 1st pass).

▶ Grammar/English language is not really the supervisors responsibility - handle this before you send the draft.

Institute for Academic Development

`https://www.ed.ac.uk/institute-academic-development`

- ▶ Deliver training in scientific writing, in presentation, research planning, and many "soft skills".

- ▶ Large collection of courses targeted at PhD students.

- ▶ We run some "Informatics specific" courses jointly with the IAD, and advertise these for booking on our student lists.

- ▶ Schedule of (Informatics specific) courses for 2021/22 is maintained on the IGS website:

  `https://web.inf.ed.ac.uk/infweb/student-services/igs/phd/`
  `training-development/recommended-training`

- ▶ Some titles include "How to do an Informatics PhD", "Preparing for your 1st year Review", "Preparing for your viva".

If things go wrong ...
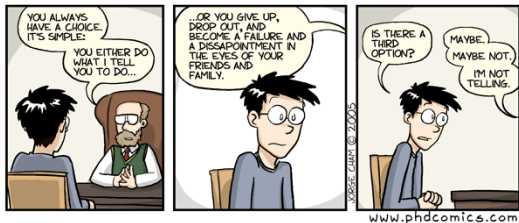
If you are experiencing difficulties with your PhD topic, with getting the work done, or if you have problems with the supervisor relationship, please get in touch.

Support through the School

⊖ **Support network and sequence of contact**

1. **Your Principal Supervisor**
2. **Your Assistant Supervisor(s)**
3. **Your Institute Director**
4. **PGR Personal Tutors** (Jane Hillston and John Longley and Murray Cole). "Drop-in" hours are offered each week (via Blackboard Collaborate) . Collaborate links are sent out by IGS on a monthly basis but feel free to get in touch with IGS if you need these links:
   - John Longley has a "drop-in" hour from 11am-12pm on Wednesdays
   - Jane Hillston has a "drop-in" hour from 4pm-5pm on Thursdays
   - Murray Cole does not operate any specifc drop in hours and is happy for students to contact him anytime.
5. **Head of Graduate School** (Nigel Topham - for issues concerning admissions and funding/scholarships)
6. **Deputy Head of Graduate School** (Mary Cryan - for all on course related student issues)
   - Mary has a regular "drop-in" hour on Tuesdays between 3pm-4pm, but can be emailed to make appointments for other times.
7. **Your PhD student rep** - To find out who that is, click here
8. **Head of School** (Jane Hillston)
9. **College Dean of PGR Students** (Antony Maciocia)

Support through your CDT

The Centres for Doctoral Training (CDTs) have an administrative structure of their own, with key contacts for Pastoral support, and resolving problems.

⊖ **CDT support contacts**

Each CDT also has additional pastoral support as listed below:

- PPar CDT: Prof Murray Cole (CDT Director and PGR Personal Tutor).
- BMAI CDT: Dr Diego Oyarzun (NB: the CDT Directors Dr Ian Simpson and Dr Meriem El Karoui both have an 'open door' policy)
- Data Science CDT: Dr Milos Nikolic
- RAS CDT: Dr Michael Mistry (Director)
- NLP CDT: Dr Ivan Titov, CDT Director (available 11-12 on Wednesdays by prior appointment over email)

Case Study

You were a strong student at undergraduate level, and have stayed on at your alma mater to do a PhD in modelling of systems. You belong to a small research group with about 5 PhD students, led by a Professor who is a kindly and supportive person who wants the best for his students. Some of the other PhD students have a less strong background than you do, and the Professor spends significant time coaching them and helping them develop their work.

You have been slow to flesh-out a detailed workplan to realise your own proposal even though you participate in the group meetings and discussions, and sometime proofread for other students. However, you are well into your 3rd year and your friends in other research groups are getting papers published and thinking about papers. You are far off that.

Thoughts?