

Support of PhD students with the supervision of MSc and Final Year Projects

Guidelines

Often PhD students are asked by their supervisors to help with the supervision of UG final-year projects and/or MSc projects. We consider this as part of the normal activities of a PhD student and we expect PhD students to be asked from times to times to do this. We also consider helping with UG/MSc project supervision a potentially very formative experience.

To avoid that PhD students may feel overwhelmed by this task and to ensure that this is a fruitful experience also for them, in what follows, we set some high-level guidelines on what is expected when a PhD student is asked to help with supervision.

- Number of projects and main supervisor
 - PhD students cannot act as the main supervisor for a project, they can only help with supervision. The person responsible for the project is the academic who has been assigned as supervisor for that UG/MSc project.
 - A PhD student should only be asked by their PhD supervisor to help with the supervision of UG/MSc projects. They should not be involved with the supervision of students who are not working with their main PhD supervisor.
 - PhD students should not be asked to supervise more than two UG/MSc projects per year.
- Research topic of the UG/MSc project:
 - Normally the research topic of the project is decided by the PhD supervisor. However, it is expected that the topic be loosely aligned with the expertise of the PhD student helping with the supervision.
 - PhD students may suggest to their supervisor a potential project. They may also help their supervisor with drafting the project proposal, but this is not compulsory.
- PhD supervisor should always be in the loop:
 - The main project supervisor is the person responsible for the success of the project and they should always be engaged with the supervision even if PhD students are helping and are meeting regularly with the UG/MSc students.
 - PhD students should feel free to ask their supervisor for advice on how to supervise MSc/UG students. The PhD supervisor should help PhD students understand, for example, what is the right level of involvement, their responsibility and, more in general, PhD supervisors are expected to guide their PhD students so that they can improve their mentoring skills.
 - It is expected that there should be a meeting between main supervisor and PhD students at the beginning of the project to agree on the expected level of involvement. While finding the right balance is not straightforward, here are a few high-level recommendations that should help PhD students:

- PhD students should not view the UG/MSc project as their project. They are there to help not to do the project.
- A reasonable expectation in terms of time commitment is 30 minutes per week on average. This means that when closer to the project deadline PhD students may need to invest more time than the average but they should have invested less time before that.
- PhD students should also consider attending the course “Supporting Supervision of PGT/UG Students” (<https://www.imperial.ac.uk/students/academic-support/graduate-school/professional-development/doctoral-students/gta-programme/supporting-supervision-of-pgtug-students/>)

We think that overall supervision of UG/MSc projects has not been a negative experience for PhD students who have been asked to do so in the past. We also hope (and expect) that PhD students communicate regularly with their supervisors so that they can freely discuss concerns, get advice and find solutions when this experience is becoming too overwhelming for them. We recommend that PhD students contact the senior tutor or the director of postgraduate studies if issues with helping with project supervision cannot be solved with their supervisor.