

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX**DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY****Changes of Academic Supervisory Arrangements**

Doctoral students, even those starting on the 1+3 programme, begin their studies with a specific supervisor and, usually, a relatively well-developed project idea, often developed in consultation with the supervisor. There is, therefore, a degree of commitment to this project. In some cases, for example some projects sponsored by external agencies other than research councils and BBSRC Committee/Special/Strategic studentship awarded for specific projects, the commitment may be stronger.

Nevertheless, and for a variety of reasons, supervisory arrangements do not always go smoothly and students (and occasionally supervisors) may request a change in supervisory arrangements. Such requests may range from the appointment of a second academic supervisor for the current project, to a complete change of supervisor and project. The most difficult cases are those in which the student and/or the supervisor are unhappy with the present arrangements, but no clear way forward has been proposed.

There will also be cases in which the academic supervisor leaves the University, or becomes ill. In such cases it is necessary, according to University regulations, to appoint a new supervisor. The original supervisor may well continue to play a role in supervising the student.

Except in the kind of case where there is a direct tie specified by the funding agency between funding and a specific project, changes of supervisor and/or project are possible. However, if there are irresolvable problems on a project with directly linked funding, there may be no alternative but for the student to leave the project.

In other cases, changes in supervisory arrangements should not be requested or undertaken lightly, as they can be disruptive and may result in substantial amounts of lost time, in particular if work done before the change cannot be used in the thesis that results from the new project. A change of supervisor may be arranged if there are good reasons to think that it will be unproductive for the supervisor and student to work together. Students requesting a change of supervisor will be asked to provide a written statement of the reasons for their request, which will be considered in the first instance by the Psychology Research Degrees Convenor. Similarly, supervisors who do not wish to continue supervising a student must provide a written statement of their reasons.

The department is committed to finding supervisory arrangements that suit both student and supervisor. If, for whatever reason, it is decided that people cannot or should not work together, we will attempt to find alternative arrangements so that the student can proceed to a DPhil.

Procedures

In the first instance, students and supervisors should seek to resolve any problems informally.

If for any reason direct discussions are not possible, students should feel free to discuss at any time, and in confidence, any problems with their supervisory arrangements with:

- Student support staff
- Their pastoral supervisor (“second supervisor”)
- The Psychology Research Degrees Convenor (currently Alan Garnham)

Supervisors are welcome to discuss matters, again in confidence, with the Psychology Research Degrees Convenor at any time.

Ideally, such discussions will allow the student and supervisor to continue with the original project on a better footing.

Alternatively, if all parties are agreed (student, old supervisor, proposed new supervisor) the Psychology Research Degrees Convenor may agree to recommend a change of supervisor, after advising all concerned of the issues arising. In particular, changes of supervisor (and more importantly changes of project) do not usually result in additional funding or additional time in which to complete a thesis, and for this reason changes earlier in the students period of study are easier to agree than changes requested towards the end of that period.

Where an informal resolution cannot be achieved, the student and/or the supervisor should approach the Psychology Research Degrees Convenor with a request to review the supervisory arrangements, and a written statement of their reasons for the request (see above). Either or both may speak, at this stage, to the Psychology Research Degrees Convenor in confidence. If the Research Degrees Convenor cannot resolve the matter, the student and supervisor will be invited to present their views of the situation to a panel comprising the Psychology Research Degrees Convenor and at least one other senior member of the department from a different area of research (the mediating team), at which the student may request the presence of any other member of the supervisory team (co-supervisor / assessor). Initially, student and supervisor will be seen separately. If appropriate they will then be brought together, with the mediating team, in order to try to resolve their problems.

If the problems cannot be resolved, the mediating team will suggest alternative supervisory arrangements for the student, and, if these are acceptable to the student and the proposed new supervisor, they will take steps to put these arrangements into place.

If it proves impossible to find a satisfactory resolution within the department, the School of Life Sciences' Director of Doctoral Studies will assume responsibility for the case.

Alan Garnham

Postgraduate Research Degrees Convenor, Department of Psychology

May, 2005