UK Council for
Graduate Education

A Guide for Doctoral Supervisors Based in Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museums

Getting Started with Supervision for Non-HEI Supervisors on Collaborative Doctorates

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About the guide

This short guide is specifically tailored for supervisors based in non-higher education institutions (non-HEIs), such as galleries, libraries, archives, and museums (i.e., the GLAM sector). It is intended to support you in starting your supervisor role; it is not an in-depth guide to all aspects of doctoral supervision.

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Introduction

Congratulations on your Collaborative Doctoral Partnership funding! This short guide has been put together to help you get started with your doctoral supervisor role. It aims to give you a bit of space to think about:

- Approaching the role with confidence and understanding;
- Planning to develop your own supervisory practice;
- Supervising with impact and compassion;
- Pre-reading for professional development.

Collaborative Doctoral Partnerships (CDP) are the gold standard for doctoral funding. Remember, no CDP exists without your organisation's input. Your role on a collaborative doctorate is vital.

It may help to understand how and why collaborative doctorates have become the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)'s vehicle for supporting doctoral research. Advanced research training, knowledge exchange, and transferable skills development in public, private, and third-sector settings have long been part of arts and humanities doctoral education. It contributes to our knowledge economies and drives up research and innovation

However, academia cannot deliver impactful research and innovation on its own. The AHRC has set the strategic agenda by formalising its doctoral funding since 2005 to support Collaborative Doctoral Awards (CDAs), designed to bring universities together with non-academic partners, most often museums, libraries, and cultural institutions. Nearly two decades later, these awards have evolved into Collaborative Doctoral Partnerships (CDPs).



What types of research are supported by the GLAM sector?

Galleries, libraries, archives, and museums can support a wide range of research activities. Projects can span curatorial, interpretation, policy, and archival activities. There are challenges in all doctoral research, but you should be mindful of stresses related to your areas. These include but are not limited to:

- Access to and availability of resources throughout the duration of the research;
- Competing pressures on your organisation for resources;
- Your time and commitment over a 3–4-year period;
- Threats to business continuity (such as environmental damage, staffing issues or systems failures).

It is a good idea to have mitigations in place at the outset. For example, plan how your doctoral researcher will access your organisation's resources over a three-year period and, if necessary, project any disruptions into the forecasts.

Finally, the doctoral research undertaken with you will explore different notions of research expertise and co-creation from those of your partner higher education institution (HEI). But remember, the GLAM sector has long built experience in partnership working, facilitating work experience, conducting research, developing policy, creating interpretation strategies, and promoting public engagement. These aspects are hugely valuable to the doctoral process.

What makes a Doctorate?

To earn a doctoral degree in the UK, a candidate must demonstrate:

1. Original contribution to knowledge: Creating and interpreting new knowledge via original research or advanced scholarship that meets peer-review standards and merits publication.
2. Systematic understanding: A thorough grasp of a substantial body of knowledge at the forefront of a discipline or practice. An appropriately critiqued and argued literature review that situates the thesis within the discipline.
3. Project design and adaptability: The capacity to design and execute a comprehensive project, dynamically adapting to unforeseen research challenges. Practice that incorporates research integrity. An ability to bring a project to a conclusion.
4. Method Expertise: Critical understanding of advanced research techniques, qualitative and/or quantitative methods, and academic enquiry. The ability to demonstrate critical thinking and explain why they chose their approach.

What can I expect when I join a supervisory team?

In UK universities, doctoral supervision is carried out by teams (sometimes called panels) comprising three or more supervisors. Supervisors are formally appointed through the university's officiating committees for research degrees and subject to local checks, usually by a presiding head of department or equivalent. Your appointment is for the lifespan of the doctoral programme, and you will be formally recorded as an 'external supervisor' on your doctoral

researcher's record.

Once you have joined a supervisory team, you may gain access to some of their IT systems for doctoral researchers. However, many universities expect the lead internal supervisor to handle most of the administration and provide input to any associated IT systems. All organisations must handle personal data under the Data Protection Act, so you will be asked to follow their prescribed record-keeping procedures.

Supervising a doctorate is usually monitored, with progress formally recorded against milestones. Your academic partners will be aware of their university's expectations and timetable for formal progress reviews. It is anticipated that many formal supervisory meetings will involve two or more supervisors. There is usually a record of these meetings kept in accordance with university requirements. But it is also possible that you will meet with your doctoral supervisee alone, especially when you are supporting their work within your organisation.

Checklist for one-to-one supervision

Doctoral researchers usually have lots of questions at the start of their programme. It can be tempting to overload them with information at the outset to make sure you answer all their questions.

One of your roles is to help your supervisee pace their time and research. It can therefore be helpful to explore expectations in an early meeting. There are several 'expectations scales' available that allow you and your doctoral researcher to reflect on which responsibilities sit with whom (e.g. Kiley & Cadman, 1997).

Also, be clear about your preferred communication methods. Ask each other how you prefer to be addressed, when you check emails or other messages, and how you like to meet.

Make clear notes from all meetings with your doctoral researcher. It is important to have a record of all advice and discussions. For more recommendations, see the Good Supervisory Practice Framework (Taylor, 2019).

"One of your roles is to help your supervisee pace their time and research."

Effective team supervision

Being a member of a supervisory team is often extremely rewarding. You will hopefully feel that you have fully played your part in supporting a doctoral researcher, optimising their experiences and sharing their successes. However, team supervision can sometimes lead to the opposite feelings. Good or bad experiences should not be a matter of luck, and you can take steps to be an effective member of a fully functional team.

1. Recognise and value the expertise and skills that you bring to the team.
2. Acknowledge and value one another's contributions.
3. Be alert for and undertake timely management of challenges.
4. Be sure to schedule periodic team meetings without the supervisee to address issues.

Role modelling research

No doctoral researcher ever forgets their supervisors! You have a significant role to play in your supervisee's development as a researcher, and in influencing their futures. So, it is important that you can role model research. Ask yourself, "What does good/effective research or professional practice look like?"

The following are learned competencies and attributes of a maturing researcher persona. These skills need to be developed over time and continually. Consider how you will support yourself and your doctoral researcher in:

- Developing a deeper understanding of research integrity and how you could support your researcher with the principles of sound research.
- Enhancing your academic research writing and how you can support the development of their research writing.
- Recognising ways to generate impact (societal or otherwise) through their research and how to help them with this endeavour, for example, providing avenues to share their outcomes.

Developing an understanding of relational pedagogy and supporting your doctoral researcher

The doctorate is a long endeavour, and the researcher-supervisor relationship has to grow and adjust over time. Viewing this learning as relational pedagogy helps, as the doctoral researcher learns from those around them, including you, over many years.

It is important to consider and discuss early on your:

- Values; this is an important way of connecting with the doctoral researcher. Values are often overlooked aspects when we meet and work with people. However, understanding a person's values, and therefore their motivation, can be very valuable in a working relationship.
- Ways of working; this is an important understanding to have from the start. For example, some people are focussed on detail, and some on big ideas. Both approaches matter in research; however, an excessive focus on one or the other can distress the doctoral researcher. Too many ideas, and the researcher doesn't know which one to pursue. Too much focus on detail can slow the project down, and the researcher can lose motivation. Supervisors need to balance detail and ideas.

It is also necessary to keep an eye on the following:

- Team supervision dynamics; it is best that any negative dynamics are addressed before they become a larger issue.
- Motivation; it is crucial over the period of the doctorate to keep an eye on your doctoral researcher's motivation, as this will wax and wane. Strong supervisory skills are crucial to guide them through periods of low motivation.

"Your values are an important way of connecting with the researcher."

Valuing continuing professional development

It is important for you to undertake regular continuing professional development. This development requires investment of your time and your employer's. The following are some aspects that you could work on developing:

- Communication skills
- Effective feedback
- Evaluative judgment
- Leadership and management skills
- Ethical and reflective skills
- Collaboration skills.

Professional development can take many forms, such as:

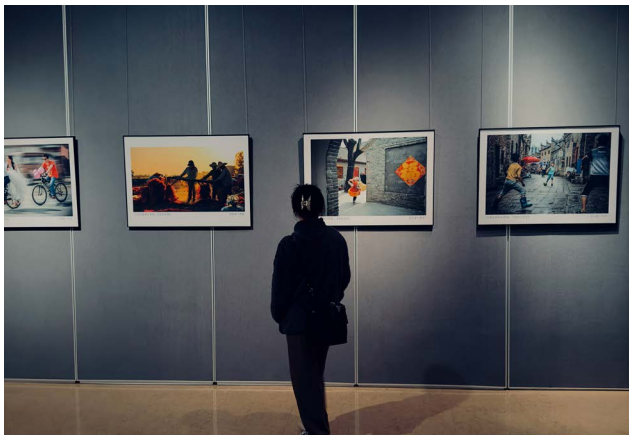
- In-person workshops
- Online courses
- Establishing communities of practice with thematic interests, expertise and insights.

Keep a record of your supervision and associated professional development, and recognise that this work can have career benefits; the skills are applicable to a range of workplace roles and situations.

Enhancing collaborative research culture

It is important to recognise that you are working in a team and you are building a collaborative research culture. The following are important aspects of that collaboration:

- Shared Values: You can build a community where academic and your specialist knowledge hold equal weight.
- Two-Way Learning: For example, you may learn new research methods and academic ways of working and university staff can learn how you innovate and engage with the public.
- Stronger Networks: Creating lasting ties between your organisation and the other organisations and universities involved.



Conclusion

This guide provides pointers on the continuing professional development needed to strengthen supervisory skills and build a more collaborative research culture. The main recommendations are:

- Recognise the expertise and skills that you bring to the team.
- Invest time in training and professional development to develop a deeper understanding of doctoral supervision skills and to bridge the organisational cultural gap.
- Establish a clear communication and expectations charter for all involved at the start of the research project.

References

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