

# Guidelines for PhD supervisors at the Department of Law, SDU

These guidelines are part of the work to ensure that all PhD fellowships are successful, meaning that the PhD student perceives the appointment as satisfactory, that the programme is completed within the specified time frame and that the PhD student obtains a PhD degree.

A good PhD programme requires that a well-functioning collaboration is established between the PhD student, the principal supervisor and the co-supervisor from the outset of the PhD programme, in which the PhD student and the supervisors discuss requirements and expectations with each other. The PhD School recommends that joint supervision meetings in which both supervisors participate are held at least once per semester.

The guidelines contain a number of sections, each of which addresses a theme relevant to the work of supervisors. Note that these guidelines do not definitively list the duties of supervisors, nor do they specify the scope of supervision, as supervision needs may vary throughout the PhD programme.

To be a supervisor, you must have completed a PhD supervisor course. The PhD School has established PhD supervisor courses for new supervisors, which are offered in both Danish and English. Supervision courses for experienced PhD supervisors have also been launched.

## **1. General information about supervisor tasks**

In almost all cases, the work tasks involved in a fellowship will be completely new to the PhD student. This is particularly true for the research element. This means that at the beginning of the programme, the PhD student is faced with skills to be learned and some difficulties to work through. It is central to the work of the supervisor to act as a sparring partner in this regard. It is part of the active work of the supervisor to identify and help to overcome difficulties related to employment as a PhD student.

All PhD students are different – in personality and in academic background – and this entails individual needs. The present guidelines are therefore intended as general guidelines for supervisors, which means that it will depend on the individual PhD student how the content of the guidelines is to be implemented in the concrete situation.

The diversity of the fellowship programmes also means that all supervisors – even the very experienced ones – may encounter situations that have not been experienced before and in which the supervisor is unsure of the right course of action. It is important to encourage supervisors to raise situations of doubt in a forum, where the supervisor can find inspiration to move forward. Such a forum could be one or more of the other supervisors, the head of department or the department's PhD coordinator.

## **2. The supervisor must be available**

Experience has shown that PhD students do not always seek out guidance themselves. This may be because the PhD student is not aware of the need for supervision, does not know that a given problem can be solved with the assistance of the supervisor or does not think that the supervisor

should be involved in a given problem.

Regardless of the reason, observation supports emphasising that the supervisor should be outreach-oriented and in close dialogue with the PhD student throughout the entire programme in order to assess how the project is progressing, the status of the other elements of the programme (courses, teaching, stays in other research environments, etc.) and how the PhD student is functioning socially. In this connection, it is important that the **supervisor must be visible** – it is not enough to be available by email or telephone.

If the supervisor is going to be absent for extended periods, the PhD student must be informed and arrangements must be made for the PhD student to have access to the necessary support in the supervisor's absence. Such agreements must be submitted to the head of department and the department's PhD coordinator.

### **3. Supervisor's assistance with practical and formal issues**

Because of their knowledge of the tasks, the research environment and the department and its various parts, the supervisor is responsible for helping the PhD student with various practical and formal questions.

The principal supervisor must ensure that the PhD student has the opportunity to establish contacts with active research environments outside the University of Southern Denmark. When planning the PhD student's **change of research environment** at other international or national research environments, the supervisor will typically be able to use their national and international networks to assist the PhD student in establishing contacts with relevant national and international research environments.

In relation to the PhD student's **course participation**, the supervisor should actively participate in finding relevant courses and conferences that fit the individual student's project and research interests. Sufficient academic diversity in course composition must be ensured and that the planned courses are relevant and of a high professional level.

The supervisor should also advise the PhD student on how to fit **the work commitment/knowledge dissemination element** into the programme and advise on how to prepare a teaching course.

### **4. Supervisor assistance with the project – methodology and research design**

Working on a large research project is unique, and as a rule PhD students will not have experience with this. Therefore, the supervisor needs to assist with guidance in the different phases of the project, i.e. in shaping the problem formulation and delimitation of the project, choosing the research design, planning the timing of the work and in the event of questions about how the PhD student should work with the project in practice.

All elements are important, and it differs between project and PhD student when difficulties will arise. However, experience from previous programmes shows that it is particularly important for supervisors to pay special attention to the project and the PhD student when working on the problem formulation and the organisation of the research design, as these phases can traditionally cause

difficulties, and because thorough work in these areas is important for a good programme thereafter.

It should be stressed that the work on the project must of course be carried out by the PhD student, but the supervisor must take an active role and reach out in the different phases.

### **5. Supervisor's assistance with the project – material, academic issues**

The project is also the responsibility of the PhD student in terms of material, academic content. But not even on this point can it be assumed that the PhD student knows the requirements for the academic level of a thesis. In this respect, the supervisor has a responsibility for the project.

The supervisor also has a responsibility to ensure that the PhD student has the opportunity to discuss academic issues. Such discussions can take place between the supervisor and the PhD student or involve one or more other people with expertise in the relevant subject area, including the co-supervisor. Supervisors should participate in identifying the need for discussion and should assist in providing the appropriate forum for discussion.

### **6. Supervisor assistance with evaluations**

Various evaluations are included in the PhD programme. The aim of the evaluations is not to verify the work of the PhD student and supervisor, but to ensure progress in the project. This will help to ensure that the process and the outcome are successful. As a supervisor, you have an important role to play in each evaluation.

#### *PhD plan*

The PhD plan is an overall plan for the PhD project and the other elements included in the PhD programme. The plan should be prepared jointly by the PhD student and the supervisor. The PhD plan should be as precise as possible but can of course be adjusted and refined on an ongoing basis.

The PhD plan must include a statement from the principal supervisor about the plan and the PhD student's conditions in relation to it, including an assessment of whether it is realistic for the PhD student to complete the plan within the PhD period.

The PhD plan must be delivered to the secretariat of the PhD School within two months after the start of the PhD programme and must then be approved by the Faculty's PhD Committee.

You can read more about the content of the PhD plan on the [PhD School's website](#).

#### *Status seminar*

Within 6–9 months, an internal status seminar is held. The purpose of this evaluation is to ensure an initial overview of the PhD programme with a focus on the delimitation, quality and progression of the PhD project.

This evaluation takes place at the Department of Law in connection with one of the two annual Department seminars (January or August) and takes the form of a presentation of the PhD project to the Department. Two of your senior researcher colleagues will then ask more in-depth questions about the project with a view to qualification

and you will also have the opportunity to get feedback from your other research colleagues at the Department.

You can read more about the status seminar on the [PhD School's website](#).

#### *Mid-term seminar/evaluation*

After 16–18 months of enrolment, a mid-term seminar/evaluation is conducted with the participation of two evaluators – one internal and one external. The purpose of the mid-term seminar is to provide a basis for and an assessment of the project's development and results achieved, and to ensure that the PhD programme is completed on time.

The principal supervisor is responsible for appointing evaluators and setting the date for the mid-term seminar. The principal supervisor decides when to hold the seminar in the 16–18-month interval on the basis of an assessment of what is most appropriate in relation to the individual project. The evaluators are appointed by the heads of department, but it is the supervisor's task to recommend the evaluators to the head of department. Evaluators must have qualifications equivalent to associate professor level.

A status report is to be prepared *prior* to the mid-term seminar. This is prepared jointly by the PhD student and the principal supervisor. You can read more about the content of the status report on the [PhD School's website](#).

The evaluation itself is based on one or more (draft) articles or chapters that are expected to be included in the final thesis (approx. 50 pages). The material should allow the evaluators to assess the research design/methodology and the preliminary results.

The supervisor is responsible for ensuring that the written material, along with the PhD plan and the status report, is sent to the evaluators in good time before the seminar, so that the evaluators have the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the material. It is also the supervisor's responsibility to plan and lead the seminar

At the mid-term seminar, the written material is presented and both its content and design are discussed. The PhD supervisors can take part in the discussion and the principal supervisor can also permit other people who are present to participate. There is no immediate limitation on the topics that the evaluators may choose to discuss with the PhD student.

Based on the written material and the seminar, the evaluators prepare a statement about the PhD process so far and the plans for the PhD project, including strengths, weaknesses and risks of the project. In the statement, the assessors may put forward suggestions and ideas for future work. The statement is sent to the principal supervisor as soon as possible and no later than two weeks after the mid-term seminar.

As part of the mid-term evaluation, the principal supervisor also prepares an assessment of the course to date and any planned adjustments and changes to the original PhD plan, as well as an assessment of the student's ability to complete the programme according to the PhD plan. The PhD School sends a copy of the statement from the principal supervisor to the PhD student, who

can comment on this within two weeks.

The principal supervisor is responsible for ensuring that the overall material – i.e. the status report and the evaluators' statement as well as the principal supervisor's statement – is sent to the PhD School's secretariat no later than one month after the PhD seminar has been held.

You can read more about the mid-term seminar on the [PhD School's website](#).

#### *Third evaluation after 30 months of enrolment*

No later than after 30 months of enrolment, the final evaluation of the PhD course is carried out before submission of the PhD thesis. The purpose of this evaluation is to conduct an assessment of the project's progress, follow up on the evaluators' recommendations from the mid-term evaluation and review planned/completed study elements.

In this context, a 2-page status paper is to be drawn up. This is prepared jointly by the PhD student and the principal supervisor. You can read more about the content of the status paper on the [PhD School's website](#).

In order to follow up on the evaluators' recommendations from the mid-term seminar, the internal evaluator will again be involved in the final evaluation of the PhD programme. Based on a specific assessment, the Department may also choose to involve the external assessor.

The follow-up of the evaluators' recommendations from the mid-term seminar will be based on the status paper from the PhD student. The principal supervisor is responsible for sending the status paper to the internal evaluator. Based on the status paper, the internal evaluator is expected to address any criticisms/risks that the PhD student should be aware of. The evaluator prepares a statement, which is sent to the principal supervisor.

As part of the third evaluation, the principal supervisor also prepares a statement that contains an assessment of the programme to date and any planned adjustments and changes in relation to the PhD plan, as well as an assessment of the PhD student's ability to complete the programme in accordance with the PhD plan.

The principal supervisor sends their statement and that of the internal evaluator to the PhD School at the latest after 30 months of enrolment.

In connection with the evaluation, the principal supervisor, research group leader or head of department must also discuss career plans with the PhD student. The discussions must address the question of the PhD student's potential for continuing with a career in academia as well as the Department's or research group's possibility to offer the PhD student a position after completing the PhD programme.

You can read more about the third evaluation on the [PhD School's website](#).

#### **7. The role of the co-supervisor**

All PhD students must have both a principal supervisor and a co-supervisor. The co-supervisor assists the principal supervisor. The co-supervisor's tasks are agreed upon at the appointment and will usually include academic discussions on selected parts of the research project.

