

Student Advice Service's

# GUIDE TO MANAGING SUPERVISOR ISSUES

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# MY SUPERVISOR ISN'T RESPONDING TO MY REQUEST TO MEET OR TO PROVIDE ME WITH FEEDBACK, WHAT CAN I DO?

If you have been contacting your supervisor only via email, try to see them in person and ask them to commit to a date for a meeting.

If you are still finding it difficult to get a response or commitment from your supervisor to meet or to look at your work, consider speaking to the Director of Graduate Education or equivalent within your department.

You can also [contact the Student Advice Service](#) and discuss with one of our advisors the difficulties you are experiencing. The advisor can help you consider strategies and ideas which may help you improve your situation.

The University Counselling Service runs a termly workshop on 'Improving the Relationship with your Supervisor.' This interactive workshop explores what can contribute to making the relationship between a postgraduate student and their supervisor a successful one. It covers the common difficulties that arise in this particular relationship by looking at how to manage expectations; how to develop awareness of personal relationship styles; and how to develop assertive communication skills. More information about the course and how to book a place can be found here: [www.counselling.cam.ac.uk/studentcouns/studentgroups/supwork](http://www.counselling.cam.ac.uk/studentcouns/studentgroups/supwork)

If you haven't already done so, familiarise yourself with the Code of Practice for Research Students which outlines the role of a supervisor as well as your role as a student.

[www.cambridgestudents.cam.ac.uk/new-students/manage-your-studentinformation/graduate-students/code](http://www.cambridgestudents.cam.ac.uk/new-students/manage-your-studentinformation/graduate-students/code)

# I WANT TO CHANGE SUPERVISOR, CAN I DO THIS?

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It is possible to apply to change supervisor. Your current supervisor will be one of several contacts that will have to approve this application so it will be necessary to raise this matter with them at some point. Some students find it helpful to identify in advance any potential supervisors who may be able to work with them while other students prefer to discuss the matter first with their current supervisor; the reasons you have for wanting to change supervisor as well as the working relationship you have with them will help dictate which approach may best suit your situation.

However you decide to handle the initial stages, before you actually apply to change supervisor, it is important that you discuss this application with your current supervisor as well as any potential supervisors you have identified. It is also recommended that you discuss the situation with your graduate tutor.

Further information can be found on the University's website:

[www.cambridgestudents.cam.ac.uk/your-course/graduate-study/your-studentstatus/changing-your-supervisor](http://www.cambridgestudents.cam.ac.uk/your-course/graduate-study/your-studentstatus/changing-your-supervisor)

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# MY SUPERVISOR IS LEAVING, WHO IS GOING TO SUPERVISOR ME?

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Check with your supervisor why they are leaving; is it for retirement or a new position at another university? It is often possible for them to continue to supervise you even if they are no longer at the University of Cambridge?

If it is not possible for them to continue to supervise you, can they recommend anyone else? If your supervisor is unable to help, you and/or your department should identify new potential supervisors. The search for a new supervisor does not need to be limited to your department; it is possible to be supervised by someone in another department with a similar research area to yours. If there isn't anyone suitable within the University then discuss with your department the option of searching for someone outside of the University who could act as an external supervisor.

Refer to the Code of Practice for Research Students which highlights the Degree Committee's responsibility in assigning a supervisor when a student's initial supervisor is absent.

# HOW DO I GO ABOUT MAKING A COMPLAINT AGAINST MY SUPERVISOR?

Due to the close working relationship between student and supervisor, when/if problems arise with this working relationship or supervision arrangements, these can be upsetting and disruptive. As such, it is often helpful to address any concerns you may have as soon as possible. In the first instance, you may wish to raise your concerns directly with your supervisor. If this is not possible or you have done so already with little or no impact, you may wish to raise your concerns informally with your department; you can discuss this with the Director of Graduate Education (or equivalent), the Head of Department or the Degree Committee. These individuals may be able to help resolve the issues and/or provide some advice and guidance.

You can also contact the Student Advice Service for independent support and guidance. It is usually helpful to seek advice as soon as problems arise to increase the chances of resolving the issues. Failing any unsatisfactory outcome from raising your concerns with the department, you can then make a formal complaint through the University's Student Complaint Procedure.

Further details about the University's Student Complaint Procedure can be found here: [www.studentcomplaints.admin.cam.ac.uk/student-complaints](http://www.studentcomplaints.admin.cam.ac.uk/student-complaints)

The Student Advice Service can guide you through the complaint process, including helping you present your complaint as comprehensively as possible.

If you are finding that the difficulties you are experiencing are having a negative impact on your mental health, you can seek support from the University Counselling Service - [www.counselling.cam.ac.uk](http://www.counselling.cam.ac.uk). You can also speak to your college tutor, nurse, chaplain or anyone else on the pastoral team in your college.

# OTHER RESOURCES

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Student Advice Service: [www.cambridgesu.co.uk/advice](http://www.cambridgesu.co.uk/advice)

Improving the Relationship with your Supervisor Workshop:  
[www.counselling.cam.ac.uk/studentcouns/studentgroups/supwork](http://www.counselling.cam.ac.uk/studentcouns/studentgroups/supwork)

University Counselling Service: [www.counselling.cam.ac.uk/](http://www.counselling.cam.ac.uk/)

Code of Practice for Research Students: [www.cambridgestudents.cam.ac.uk/new-students/manage-your-studentinformation/graduate-students/code](http://www.cambridgestudents.cam.ac.uk/new-students/manage-your-studentinformation/graduate-students/code)

Changing Supervisor University Guidance: [www.cambridgestudents.cam.ac.uk/your-course/graduate-study/your-studentstatus/changing-your-supervisor](http://www.cambridgestudents.cam.ac.uk/your-course/graduate-study/your-studentstatus/changing-your-supervisor)

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