

Academic Supervision of Students in Laboratories and Clinical Skills Guidance

1. Scope

This document provides guidance for Principal Investigators (PI) and Academic Supervisors regarding the supervisory responsibility of their roles in ensuring the health and safety (H&S) of their students in the laboratory. This is not to be confused with Academic Supervision. Further information on the responsibilities for PIs and Academic Supervisors can be found in the Health, Safety, Resilience and Sustainability Policy Part 2: Organisation Document - Roles and Responsibilities [H&S Webpage](#).

2. Introduction

The university has a duty under H&S legislation to provide activity/ task supervision of both undergraduate and postgraduate students to the level necessary to ensure that they can perform the activity/ task safely (this includes activities in the laboratory, clinical skills etc).

The duty to provide supervision has been delegated to the Executive Dean of Faculty/ Head of School and to the PI's and Academic Supervisors directly responsible for the activity/ task. As detailed in the Health, Safety, Resilience and Sustainability Policy Part 2: Organisation Document - Roles and Responsibilities PI's and Academic Supervisors must:

- Ensure all people under their direction (research and non-research related activity) have adequate information about the health, safety, resilience and sustainability (HSR&S) risks and control measures that apply to their work, and that relevant resource, training and supervision arrangements are in place.

3. What does supervision mean?

Supervision for the purpose of this guidance can be broken down into the following:

- **Direct supervision** - This is a hands-on approach where a supervisor is physically present, actively involved, and immediately available to oversee and provide real-time guidance and control when the student is carrying out an activity/ task.
- **Close supervision** – This is when a supervisor is available within the same workspace e.g. within the same lab and can provide support but does not have direct sight or constant verbal contact with the person being supervised.
- **Indirect supervision** – This is when a supervisor is available e.g. separate room/ office close to where the activity is being carried out (this is not in another building or

campus) and is able to provide support but does not have direct sight or constant verbal contact with the person being supervised.

4. Undergraduate Supervision

For routine undergraduate practical activities, a risk assessment must be carried out by the PI/ Academic Supervisor. This is to ensure all hazards associated with the activity have been identified and assessed considering how things could go wrong, who/ what might be harmed and how, as well as the likelihood of something going wrong and potential consequences. Once assessed, controls need to be put in place to ensure any residual risk has been minimised to as low as reasonably practicable by the design of the activity or task, and where practical a written protocol/ system of the task/ activity.

Supervision of a practical session will be the responsibility of the PI/ Academic Supervisor. They can appoint other members of staff or students e.g. technicians, postgraduate students or post doctorates, undergraduate students cannot supervise each other (Emeritus academics are not to be considered for supervision because they are not employed by the university) who they deem competent to assist with supervision. However, the PI/ Academic Supervisor is ultimately responsible for all staff and students during the work activity.

The extent to which direct supervision will be needed will depend upon the residual risks of the activity, i.e. those which cannot be minimised by through the design of the activity. The supervisory provision must be sufficient to allow monitoring of the group as a whole, with an allowance for those elements where additional direct task supervision is required to avoid dilution of the general supervision of the group.

4.1 Undergraduate Project Supervision

The PI/ Academic Supervisor must ensure that the risks of the activity have been assessed and that it complies with relevant procedures and local rules etc. The risk assessments and any safe working practices necessary to prevent personal harm must be explained and shared with the student(s).

These precautions must include those elements of the project where direct supervision of the activity is needed for H&S reasons and who will provide the supervision. The supervisor will need to check that the student is following the correct procedures and that no alterations are introduced without consultation.

Undergraduate students are not permitted to work alone in the laboratory; it may be sufficient under certain circumstances, such as low-risk activities for close supervision by other members of the research group who are close by in the same lab, who are competent and agree to supervise the students.

Direct supervision of undergraduate students must always take place at the start of the research project and at all times for higher risk activities. As with teaching practical's this

supervision can be provided by appointed members of staff/ students. However, the PI/ Academic Supervisor remains responsible for the safety of the student(s) and other members of staff who could be affected.

4.2 Taught Masters Projects

The supervision of final year taught master's students may differ slightly to undergraduate students. This may include close or indirect supervision as identified on the risk assessment. The level of supervision required may also vary throughout the course of the project as the student may have more training and experience increasing occupational competence. This is determined by the PI/ Academic Supervisor and agreed with the student.

It is the duty of the PI/ Academic Supervisor to ensure that if the student needs to use a laboratory or research space outside of their immediate area of responsibility that the laboratory technician/ custodian has been contacted and that appropriate local laboratory H&S rules and equipment SOP and training has been provided.

5. Postgraduate Students.

The activities carried out by a research group must all have risk assessments and written safe working protocols. Postgraduates may carry out their own risk assessments for the activities. However, the PI/ Academic Supervisor must ensure they have had the appropriate training, and the training is recorded and ensure the risk assessments are suitable and sufficient. See [Postgraduate Students - Swansea University](#) for templates

The PI/ Academic Supervisor must ensure the student is aware and understands the risk assessments and safe working protocols and is aware of any inherent risks associated with the activity and the measures in place to prevent harm. Adherence to these must be monitored either through direct or close supervision of the students.

As with undergraduates the PI/ Academic Supervisor may rely on other members of the research group they deem competent to supervise/ provide instruction to the postgraduate students and may rely on feedback from them about student's adherence to safe working protocols.

As the project progresses and the students training and competence improves the level of supervision may decrease e.g. a technique requiring direct supervision in year one may not require supervision by the third or fourth year. This is determined by the PI/ Academic Supervisor and the student and must be reflected in the risk assessments associated with the activity and training record of the student.

Both the student and the PI/Academic supervisor should retain copies of the risk assessment and the students training record. By doing this it ensures the student is aware which tasks are subject to certain restrictions.

The PI/ Academic Supervisor must ensure that there is adequate supervision for research work to continue during absence i.e. conferences, sabbatical or leave the University.

It is the duty of the PI/ Academic Supervisor to ensure that if the student needs to use a laboratory or research space outside of their immediate area of responsibility that the laboratory technician/ custodian has been contacted and that appropriate local laboratory H&S rules and equipment SOP and training has been provided.