

# 1. Role of Stakeholders

## 1.1 Stakeholders and governance structure

The roles of various RPg stakeholders and their relationships under the prevailing governance structure are described briefly below.

An RPg **student** is one who has been admitted to a programme of studies to pursue a higher degree by research and has registered with the Graduate School. He/She must take timely actions to maintain his/her student status by observing relevant rules and regulations, enrolling for course(s), achieving satisfactory academic performance and progress, and paying fees, according to respective schedules.

An RPg student is expected to be a responsible member of the University community. He/She has the right to take full advantage of the teaching and learning facilities and support provided by the University, and the obligation to take ultimate responsibility of any of his/her academic output.

Each RPg student is assigned a **Supervisor** at the time of admission or later on when the student's field of research is confirmed. A **Co-supervisor** can also be appointed for academic or administrative reasons.

The Supervisor/Co-supervisor is a full-time academic staff of a **Graduate Division** of a specific discipline. Each Graduate Division structurally forms part of a **Faculty**. The **Board of the Faculty** coordinates the activities of the Departments within the Faculty and considers and deals with the recommendations of the Departments regarding the content of courses for the degree(s) and on the details of syllabuses. A **Graduate Panel** is set up for each Graduate Division to take care of matters of postgraduate studies. The roles of a Graduate Panel are discussed below.

A **Thesis Assessment Committee** is set up for each RPg student. The Thesis Assessment Committee acts independently according to a set of well-defined procedures, and makes recommendations to the Graduate School on the final grade of a student's thesis or on other thesis assessment matters regarding the student concerned.

The **Graduate School** coordinates all postgraduate programmes leading to higher degrees and postgraduate diplomas/certificates. The Head of a Graduate Division reports to the Dean of the Graduate School and the Department Chairperson for operations of his/her Graduate Division's postgraduate programmes. He/she also bears the responsibility to ensure compliance of all RPg programmes offered by the Graduate Division with University rules and policies.

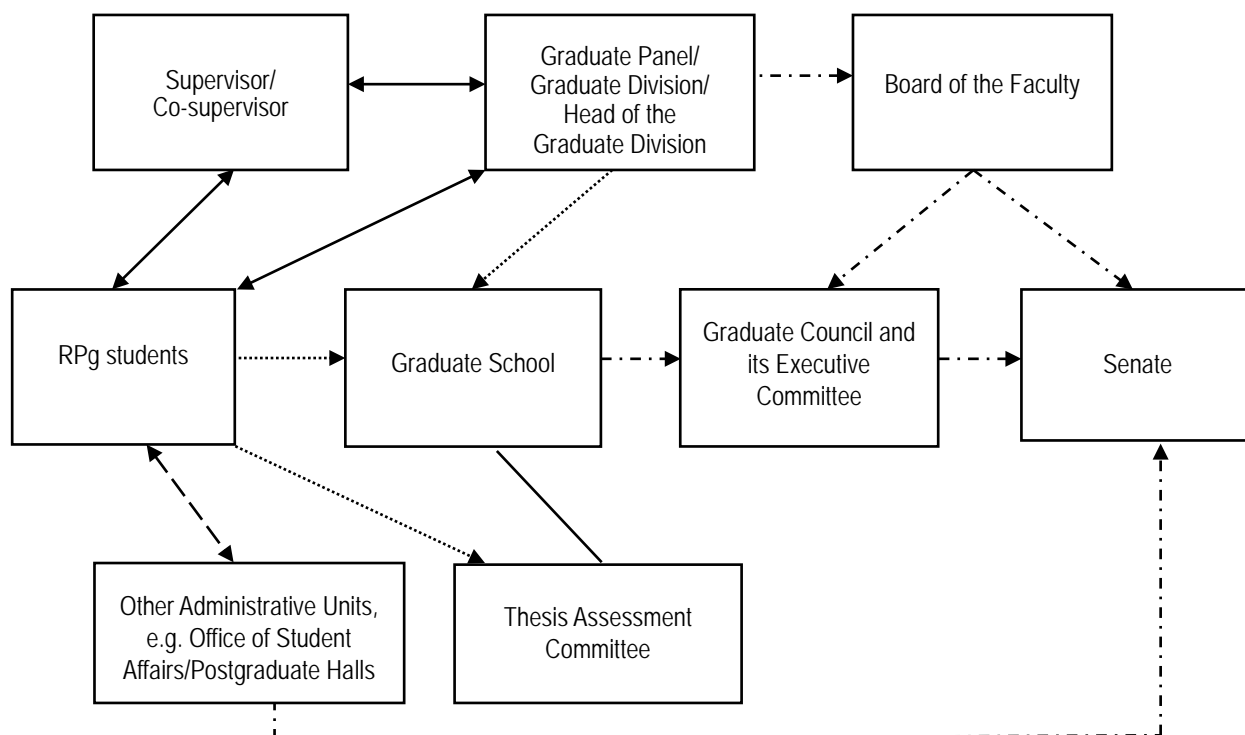
The Graduate School also provides administrative support to the **Graduate Council and its Executive Committee**. The powers and duties of the Graduate Council are (a) to advise the Senate on all graduate programmes of studies; (b) to coordinate the activities of the Graduate Divisions within the Graduate School; and (c) to consider and deal with the recommendations of the various Graduate Divisions on the content of courses and on the details of syllabuses.

The **Senate** is in control of and regulates (a) instruction, education and research; (b) the conducting of

examinations for students; and (c) the award of degrees, diplomas, certificates and other academic distinctions of the University.

RPg students are also supported by various CUHK service units, such as the **Postgraduate Halls** and **Office of Student Affairs (OSA)**.

The following diagram describes in general the relationships and interactions among various stakeholders.



Key to relationships in general:

- Teaching, learning and academic advice
- - - - - Administrative governance and policies
- ..... Progress and assessment
- - - - - Non-academic advice, services and support

Among these stakeholders, the relationships and interactions between a student and his/her Supervisor are of prime importance in RPg studies. Their roles and that of the Graduate Panel are described in more detail in the following sections.

## 1.2 Interaction between student and Supervisor

The student-Supervisor relation is the crux of high-quality postgraduate student management. Yet the situation for each student is unique, Supervisors tend to adopt a great variety of supervising styles, and there are differences in culture from discipline to discipline.

While individuality of each student-Supervisor relation should be fully respected, there are some general

principles that students and Supervisors could observe in order to make the most out of the relationship.

For an RPg student:

- (a) The responsibility of producing a quality thesis lies ultimately with the student, not the Supervisor.
- (b) Since professors have to manage many tasks simultaneously in addition to supervising research students, it is advisable for a student to take the initiative in establishing an effective and practical work plan with his/her Supervisor. Normally, this implies requesting regular meetings with the Supervisor, providing timely and accurate updates to the Supervisor on ongoing research progress, and seeking feedback and advice on a regular basis.
- (c) A good student-Supervisor relation is based on mutual respect and trust. Thus, the academic judgment and supervisory recommendations of the Supervisor should be duly respected. Following this guideline does not imply critical reasoning and objectivity is to be encroached upon, but rather that in case of academic disagreement, frank and respectful communication is always the best approach to take. In the rare instance of serious and prolonged disagreement with one's Supervisor, a student could bring the matter to the attention of the Head of the Graduate Division or the Department Chairperson for resolution.
- (d) It is important for a student to understand the expectations of his/her Supervisor. The annual research progress report is set up for this purpose. Conversely, it is also important to know the role and responsibilities of a Supervisor as well as his/her limitation. A student should always remember that while a Supervisor is expected to provide guidance and advice on research direction, no one can guarantee success in any meaningful research endeavour. In addition, while a Supervisor is expected to offer advice during the thesis writing process, there is no responsibility for the Supervisor to edit or rewrite a thesis for the student. It is the obligation of a student to submit a well-edited thesis for examination and there should be enough lead time before the deadline to allow for comments and further revision if necessary.

For a Supervisor:

- (a) A research student is not a research assistant. Provision of education to the student should be the primary goal.
- (b) As it takes a significant amount of time to supervise a research student, there is a limit on the number of RPg students that a Supervisor may supervise at any one time. A Co-supervisor can offer additional support and input to the students and is encouraged. If a Supervisor is planning to take a leave of absence, a Co-supervisor must be appointed to ensure provision of continuous supervision.
- (c) A student-Supervisor relation based on mutual respect and trust is more efficient and effective. In particular, the rights of the student should be fully recognised and protected, including rights protected under the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance and all the ordinances under the purview of the Equal Opportunities Commission in Hong Kong.

- (d) A Supervisor should only assign tasks to research students that are directly related to students' research studies. Duty assignments related to postgraduate studentship (PGS) are limited to 12 hours per week on average. Under no circumstances should a student be asked to perform duties unrelated to the University. Beware of issues that may give rise to a conflict of interest.
- (e) Communicate expectations clearly to the students. Review their progress frequently and do provide timely feedback and advice. Document any unsatisfactory performance of students in detail. The concerned student should be given sufficient warnings so that he/she can take necessary remedial actions.
- (f) As the staff in frequent contact with students, a Supervisor is expected to provide invaluable support to the students' overall educational experience at the University. Supervisors can offer advice to students facing difficulties in their adjustment to the university life or sound early warning signals for potential problem cases. A graduating student on the other hand can benefit tremendously from the first-hand knowledge and connections availed by the Supervisor.

### **1.3 Graduate Panel**

A Graduate Panel is set up for each Graduate Division with the Graduate Division Head as the Chairperson and at least two other members to be nominated by the Graduate Division Head. Its responsibility is to endorse or decide on:

- the courses of study to be offered;
- the research field for each student;
- the Supervisor/Co-supervisor for each student;
- the selection of applicants for admission; and
- any other matters related to the Graduate Division.

Regarding the research field and supervision, the Graduate Panel acts as follows:

- (a) Each student selects his/her intended field of studies within his/her Graduate Division at the time of application.
- (b) The appointment of Supervisors for each student, if possible, is made as soon as the student is admitted. If this appointment is not made at that time, the Graduate Division may arrange to have an advisor or the Graduate Division Head to serve as temporary Supervisor for the student.
- (c) The student may inform the Graduate Panel of his/her preference for Supervisor; but the final decision rests with the Graduate Panel.
- (d) A Supervisory Committee may be set up for each student consisting of one to three persons, including the Supervisor, the Graduate Division Head and/or another teacher in the Graduate Division.