MATCHING EXPECTATIONS

Introduction:
A PhD study and PhD project is a learning process. It is a journey into performing high quality research and science – into learning to think critically and independently, develop and communicate ideas, design and execute research plans, make decisions, set up experiments, interpret research data, etc. Of course, this is not something that the PhD student is expected to do all alone. One of the key persons that can help him or her achieve the above is the main supervisor.

To help further this process, GSST has therefore prepared a list of suggested topics for discussion between the two of you. Please feel free to pick and choose between them as you may find them relevant to the PhD project.

Matching expectations:
To ensure that the PhD study gets off on a good start, GSST recommends that you both set aside time to discuss matching expectations to the PhD study and project. For instance this could take place in connection with filling in the initial PhD plan in the planner system.

Some of the core issues to talk about could be:

- What is the research project? How much is given beforehand (for instance, if it is part of a larger research project), and how much can the PhD student decide for him-/herself?
- Who should be the driving force of the project, PhD student or main supervisor? Should the PhD student be very self-sufficient, self-reliant and independent, not needing many meetings, supervision or help from the main supervisor, or do you prefer more of the opposite?
- How and to what extent will main supervisor be involved in the project – for instance in connection with developing the PhD project, writing articles/publications, planning stays abroad and conferences, networking, etc.?
- If there are any co-supervisors what will be the function of and roles between main supervisor and co-supervisor(s)?
- Even though you may have daily discussions on various issues, e.g. in the lab, GSST also recommends that you have regular meetings on the progress of the PhD study and project to make sure that the PhD study as a whole is on the right track.

Supervision meetings:
- How often should they be held? Are regular meetings required (perhaps planned in advance), or should they be scheduled along the way? Who is responsible for scheduling them? Should the PhD student prepare something in advance? Should an agenda be prepared for the meetings and notes/minutes be taken? If yes, who is responsible?
- Purpose of the meetings – discussion of project framework, articles/publications, methodology, experimental work, development of the project(s), feedback/professional discussions, etc.
- Besides one-on-one meetings, will there also be (regular) group meetings with other members from the research group?
What about informal meetings/discussions? Does main supervisor have an “open door” policy, or should the PhD student always book an appointment in advance?

If co-supervisors are assigned to the project: Should they be present at (some of) the meetings? If yes, how often?

What about periods leading up to larger deadlines, e.g. progress report/qualifying exam and thesis submission. Is extra time for supervision and discussion possible, if necessary?

Working hours, deadlines, cooperation in the research group, etc.:

- Working hours and presence in the office/the lab. Work/life balance
- Being in the lab – safety issues, keeping a logbook or protocol?
- Deadlines? How do you work towards a deadline, and what are your expectations to each other in that regard, for instance when finishing abstracts, papers, publications, conference papers, etc., but also if the PhD student needs the main supervisor to read and comment on a given text before a meeting.
- Cooperation within the research group – e.g. what are the traditions/expectations within the group regarding helping each other out with experiments, proof reading, etc.

Text feedback, co-authorship and code of scientific conduct:

- How much feedback will be given on texts, manuscripts, posters, progress report and thesis drafts, etc.? And how? And when?
- Co-authorship and main supervisor’s role – will main supervisor be co-author on all manuscripts or only on some of them depending on involvement?
- Code of Scientific Conduct – when and where is the right place to discuss grey areas and boundaries between what is okay and what is not okay in science?

Planning and prioritising:

- PhD Planner – the initial plan and the half-year evaluations
- How to prioritise time with regard to courses, teaching/work obligations, dissemination, going abroad/research environment change, writing articles/publications and the PhD project?
- If the PhD study consists of more than one project, how to prioritise time between different projects, and does it make good sense to have more than one project?
- Going abroad/research environment change – who should be the driving force in initiating and organising it, PhD student or main supervisor?
- Participation in conferences and development of scientific networks – when and how?
- Who should the PhD student talk to if any problems are encountered in the day-to-day work – main supervisor, any co-supervisor(s) or someone else?
- Career planning – academia, industry or something else? And how does this relate for example to courses and going abroad/research environment change?

Money matters:

- Budget for expenses related to the PhD project, e.g. lab equipment, books, courses, conferences, etc.
Practical matters:

- Who should the PhD student contact with questions about e.g. office space, laptop, computer software licensing, insurance, PURE registration, holiday and illness?

Changes along the way:

As a PhD project is most likely subject to changes along the way, and the supervision needed may differ through the various stages of the PhD study, it is equally important to discuss your expectations to each other and the project regularly during the PhD studies.

Other issues may also crop up along the way, which could be relevant for some PhD students to discuss with their main supervisor. These could be:

- How to handle unforeseen issues, which may postpone the PhD study and project(s)?
- What to do if main supervisor goes on sabbatical, ordinary leave, maternity/paternity leave or the like?
- What to do if the supervisors disagree on the direction of the PhD project?
- And finally, at times issues may crop up that can be difficult to discuss. If that happens, consider contacting the Head of the Programme Committee.

GSST is also always very willing to offer help and assistance. See our website for contact info on your PhD partner.