

GUIDANCE ON IDENTIFYING AND APPROACHING A PROSPECTIVE PHD SUPERVISOR

You will need two (or three) supervisors to support you in your studentship nomination and guide you through the PhD process. Usually, as a prospective student, it makes most sense to concentrate on recruiting a primary supervisor.

The primary supervisor can then work with you to recruit the rest of your supervision team, based on their knowledge of staff in their department as well as their assessment of your training needs and academic trajectory. Choosing the right primary supervisor is a critical step in your PhD journey. Here is a clear outline to help you identify and approach a potential academic supervisor effectively:

STEP 1: DEFINE YOUR RESEARCH INTERESTS

Before searching for a supervisor, you need a clear idea of the broad research area you want to explore. Ask yourself:

What research questions or topics excite me most?

What skills or methodologies do I want to develop and use during my PhD?

Which academic field does my proposed research fall under?

STEP 2: RESEARCH POTENTIAL SUPERVISORS

Begin by investigating the academic staff at your chosen university who align with your research interests. Here's how:

- **Identify Suitable Departments:**

See the relevant pathway page on the NINE DTP website (or view the table of pathways) to determine what departments/schools at which partner universities offer degrees in your area of interest. Your primary supervisor must be based in a department that contributes to your chosen pathway.

- **Visit University Department Websites:**

Navigate to the department relevant to your research interests. Most university department websites have a list of academic staff, along with their biographies and research areas.

- **Review Bios and Publications:**

Read the descriptions of their prospective supervisors' work and explore their recent publications. This will give you an understanding of their expertise, methodologies, and the scope of their research.

- **Check for Research Group Memberships:**

Some academics lead or are part of research groups (sometimes called research clusters), either within their department or across departments. These often have their own websites where you can learn more about their projects and collaborations.

- **Use Academic Databases:**

Tools like Google Scholar, ResearchGate, or Scopus can help you find the academic's publications. Reading their work will clarify whether their research aligns with your interests.

STEP 3: SHORTLIST POTENTIAL SUPERVISORS

Once you've identified a few academics whose research aligns with your interests, narrow your list by considering:

- **Research Focus:** Does their expertise match your proposed research topic?
- **Availability:** Are they accepting new PhD students? (This may not always be explicitly stated, so reaching out is important.)
- **Reputation and Accessibility:** Look for indications of their engagement with students and willingness to collaborate, such as teaching roles, supervision history, or public engagement in research.

STEP 4: DRAFT A PROFESSIONAL EMAIL

It is completely acceptable - and common practice - to cold email a potential supervisor. Here's how to write an effective email:

1. **Subject Line:** Use a clear and specific subject, such as "Prospective PhD Student: Inquiry About Supervision Opportunities."
2. **Introduction:** Briefly introduce yourself, including your current academic position (e.g., Master's student) and your research interests.
3. **Explain Your Interest:** Highlight why you are approaching them specifically. Mention particular aspects of their research that inspire you and how your interests align with their work.
4. **Outline Your Proposal:** Include a concise summary of your proposed research topic or ideas, explaining why it is a good fit for their expertise.
5. **Request a Meeting:** Politely ask if they would be willing to discuss supervision opportunities with you (this could be in person or online, depending on where you are located). Offer to provide further details, such as a research proposal or CV, if needed.
6. **Closing:** Thank them for their time and include your contact information.