ALIGNMENT TOOL FOR PHD STUDENTS AND THEIR SUPERVISORS

Why?

Aligning expectations early in the process and making clear agreements on key aspects in the project support motivation throughout the PhD study. Unspoken expectations can lead to unnecessary misunderstandings and disappointments on both sides. This tool will help you navigate all aspects of the PhD study process, make implicit expectations explicit, and to organize the work and collaboration for the benefit of both parties.

Who?

The tool is developed to encourage a dialogue between the PhD student and the main supervisor and to ensure that you cover aspects relevant for

- making a good PhD start (**Initial meeting**), page 2-3
- following-up on the process (**regular assessment**), page 4

If one of the co-supervisors is planned to carry out a substantial part of the day-to-day supervision *it is vital* that this person also takes part in the dialogue.

How?

1. Set up a meeting of approx. one hour.
2. Before the meeting, each of you makes up your mind about the questions in the guide and takes individual notes.
3. At the meeting, please discuss the questions you find relevant. Some questions might be difficult to answer early in the process. In case of differences in opinion, try to find a common ground suitable for the PhD project. Supervisors are encouraged to listen to the PhD students' input before stating their 'common practices'.
4. Please note down briefly the agreements made and keep a copy of the notes for your own use. It should not be submitted to the administration/service.

Dialogue guide for the initial meeting

1. **Roles and collaboration**
   - What is the role of the main supervisor? Does it change over time?
   - What is the role of the co-supervisor(s)?
   - What kind of support or guidance is offered from the supervisors on key tasks such as collecting data, analysing, writing articles, presenting at conferences?
   - How can the student best contribute to the collaboration?
   - How (much) is the student expected to work independently?
   - If the PhD project is part of a larger research project, how can the PhD student navigate among the different (and possibly conflicting) demands of collaborators?
   - How are decisions made in the project and who needs to be informed about the decisions?

2. **Meetings**
   - How often will you meet?
   - Who participates in which meetings (also co-supervisors)?
   - Who initiates the meetings?
   - How planned and formal do you expect the meetings to be, e.g., with meeting agendas and summaries?
   - How do you communicate between meetings, e.g., code of conduct for using mails, SMS, expected response time, ….?

3. **Planning and progress**
   - Who is responsible for making time plans in the project – and keeping them?
   - How does the PhD student give updates on work in progress and to whom?

4. **Skills**
   - Which skills needed in the project do the PhD student already possess, and which need to be developed?
   - Who (and which activities) will support the PhD student in developing the necessary skills? (main supervisor, co-supervisor, academic writing courses, etc.)

5. **Educational elements**
   - **ECTS courses**: How involved is the supervisor going to be regarding the student's choice of courses?
   - **Teaching tasks**: How will teaching tasks be arranged and how will the supervisor be involved?
   - **Going on a research stay abroad**: Which criteria are important when considering the research stay? How do you decide on the location? Who takes the initiative to contact external partners/universities and to arrange all agreements?

6. **Research environment and network**
   - How will the supervisor support the student in establishing international networks? On what terms should the student be involved in the supervisors' network?
   - How can the student make the best of (and contribute to) the local daily research environment and peers?
   - Which departmental/research group meetings is the student expected to take part in?

7. **Writing and feedback**
   - Will the supervisor contribute to the actual writing as a co-author?
   - How will you decide together on co-authorships?
   - What are your expectations for the feedback process? E.g. How long time does the supervisor need to prepare feedback on manuscripts? How drafty or polished text should the PhD student share? What is the level of feedback details?

8. **Personal issues and confidentiality**
   - How will the supervisor(s) be available to help the PhD student if personal issues arise during the PhD study?
   - In case of potential conflicts in the collaboration, how will the student and supervisor manage them?
   - Can you share confidential things, and trust that they remain confidential?

9. **Career and motivation**
   - What are the PhD student's goals and ambitions with the PhD project?
   - Will career issues be part of the supervision? If yes, how can the supervisor assist the student in thinking about your future career plans and hopes?

Dialogue guide for regular assessment meetings

Intro
- How are things in general?
- Is there anything particularly important to discuss at this meeting?

Academic progress and well-being
- Is the PhD student satisfied with his or her own performance?
- Are planned publications on schedule?
- Is the supervisor group satisfied with the PhD student's academic performance and progress?
- Do parts of the project deserve greater focus?
- How is the PhD student's well-being in general? E.g., work-life balance and feeling of integration at the workplace?

Supervision and collaboration
- Is supervisor-input well balanced with student independence? (Is it direct and instructive when needed? When is a more coaching approach timely?)
- Do the PhD student and the supervisor group find that they work well together?
- Are the roles and responsibilities allocated appropriately among the supervisors – or are adjustments needed?
- Does the PhD student find that the supervisor group supports the PhD project (e.g., by showing interest and commitment and being available to the extent required)?

Summary
- Is there anything else that needs to be discussed?
- Has anything been agreed upon at this meeting that requires follow-up? If so, how and when?