



2019-20

Supervisors' Handbook



Faculty of Music

11 West Road, Cambridge CB3 9DP

Undergraduate supervision in Music: a guide for supervisors

This guide has been written for the benefit of supervisors generally and, in particular, of those new to teaching for the Cambridge Faculty of Music. It should be read in conjunction with the Colleges' general guide for supervisors which is available at:

www.admin.cam.ac.uk/committee/seniortutors/guidance/supervisors.pdf

Supervisors should also consult the Faculty of Music's Undergraduate Handbook, which can be accessed from the following link: <https://www.mus.cam.ac.uk/current-students/undergraduate>

The Handbook lists information about each course and gives preliminary reading for students. It is essential that all supervisors read the relevant sections of this document, as the course descriptions will provide a necessary framework for their own teaching. New supervisors are encouraged to attend the lectures for the course(s) they are supervising, though it is good practice to ask the lecturer in advance. If, for some reason, a supervisor is unable to attend the initial lecture, where information relevant to the course will often be distributed, they are advised to contact the lecturer in question; failure to take full account of the information made available by lecturers will almost certainly disadvantage the students in the supervisor's charge.

Details of lectures are usually published on a termly basis, and all supervisors should familiarise themselves with the precise timing of lectures; otherwise, they may find themselves offering a supervision on a topic that has not yet been covered in the associated lecture series. *NB: Problems of co-ordination between lectures and supervisions are one of the most frequent causes of complaints by students, both in the lecture questionnaires completed by students at the end of each course and in the termly questionnaires on supervisions completed by students for their Directors of Studies.*

A. The aim of supervision

As suggested above, supervisions should tie in closely with the material covered in lectures. Many supervisors use part of their supervisions to recapitulate material from the lectures, checking that students have understood the points that the lecturer wished to make. However, it is expected that supervisors should not confine themselves to the examples given in lectures; rather, they should aim to find new ways of covering the same ground and, indeed, of extending the students' knowledge. Some lecturers will assign supervision themes that are complementary to the course lectures, drawing in ideas cumulatively as the course progresses.

While students are not normally expected to read specific material before lectures, it is customary for students to prepare work for each supervision. This preparatory work may consist of set reading, detailed study of a score, or some equivalent exercise. However, for most supervisions, students will be asked to produce some written material – typically, an essay or some composition work. This material will normally be submitted in advance, and supervisors are expected to have read it before the supervision.

In selecting material for study, supervisors are urged to seek diversity among composers, poets, writers, performers, other creative artists, and academics.

While the ultimate purpose of supervisions is to prepare students for the examinations they will take at the end of the year, in many subject areas supervisions provide the primary mechanism through which students learn their craft. This is particularly true of topics such as composition. More generally, it is often in supervisions that many students will have their most intense and, indeed, most memorable learning experiences. After all, it is the supervision system which distinguishes Cambridge (and a few other institutions) from most other universities.

B. Supervision norms

Supervisions are organised by Colleges. They normally last one hour, though in some subject areas shorter meetings can be advantageous: supervisions for courses such as Fugue, for example, may take place weekly and last only thirty minutes. Similarly, it is often found advisable to arrange half-hour meetings when students are starting to develop a dissertation topic. Supervisions for many papers take place at a regular agreed time each week; in the case of project work such as dissertations, meetings are generally arranged as needed. The number of supervisions recommended varies from course to course. Between four and eight hours is not unusual; however, full details of supervision norms can be found in the Undergraduate Handbook. These have been set partly to ensure equity across the different Colleges: it is clearly unfair if some students receive more help than others. However, supervision norms are also there to ensure that students spend a sensible proportion of their time on each part of the degree programme. An excessive number of hours spent on one paper would almost certainly lead to the neglect of other areas. Should you encounter problems with covering the material in the allotted time, the relevant Director of Studies should be able to advise you.

Undergraduates are usually supervised in groups; between two and four students per group is normal for supervisions involving essays. Being taught in a group encourages the exchange of ideas and can help in developing skills of argumentation. It can also help lighten the atmosphere! What's more, group supervisions may encourage students who lack self-confidence to realise that their more forthright peers are not necessarily more acute intellectually. In the case of some disciplines – for example, in composition, performance and in various forms of coursework – individual supervisions are the norm.

While there is little to be gained by offering supervisions before the associated lectures, it is important that the start of supervisions is not delayed unduly. Many students complain of an uneven distribution of work throughout the term (and, indeed, year) and, in particular, of the bunching of supervisions towards the ends of terms. This can cause resentment, and it is educationally undesirable. Inexperienced supervisors are encouraged to discuss the pacing of supervisions with the relevant Directors of Studies.

Supervisions should take place in person. Occasionally supervisions may take place by Skype, but only in exceptional circumstances and with prior agreement of the Director of Studies.

C. Potential problems

Students are expected to attend all supervisions arranged for them; they are also responsible for notifying you if, for some reason, they are unable to attend a supervision. If an undergraduate regularly fails to attend supervisions or is having severe difficulties with

the work set, please notify the relevant Director of Studies as soon as possible (see also below).

In line with Athena SWAN principles (the Faculty gained its bronze award in 2019), supervisors are asked to guard against implicit/unconscious bias in supervisions and in report-writing. It is useful to adopt practices that prevent inequities arising, such as inviting comment from male and female students proportionately, and in preventing female students from being interrupted. Be aware that end-of-term reports highlighting endeavour rather than achievement can often be related to unconscious bias in our expectations of particular categories of student as defined by gender, class, race, ethnicity, age or appearance.

Very occasionally, a student may break down in supervision. In such circumstances, it is best, where possible, to rearrange the class and, if it seems appropriate, to consult the relevant Director of Studies. There may, of course, be reasons beyond obvious academic concerns for the student's behaviour.

It is not unknown for the relationship between student and supervisor to reach a point where continued collaboration becomes very difficult or, indeed, undesirable. In such circumstances, a fresh start with a different supervisor may well be the best way forward. Again, any such problems should be discussed at an early stage with the relevant Director of Studies.

D. Topics

It is vital to confirm the scope and syllabus of the paper with the Director of Studies and the undergraduate concerned at the start of the course of supervisions. For a few papers, the regulations specify additional requirements, such as the need to answer at least one question from two different sections, so be vigilant.

It is impossible, and indeed undesirable, to cover the whole range of most papers in the allotted supervisions. Given this, it is best to concentrate on a substantial but compact portion of the whole. You will need to prepare a list of self-contained topics, each manageable in the time available – normally, one week. Try to prepare enough topics to give the undergraduate some choice of study. Ideally, the selection of topics will recognise the principle of student choice but chart a pathway through the paper so as to give it some coherence. Please note that it is very helpful if supervisors supply a complete list of topics to be studied as early as possible, perhaps even at the first or second meeting. Many students like to be able to plan ahead, and some indication of the topics to be covered over the course of the term (or year) is much appreciated by the students, even if precise essay titles cannot be supplied.

It is important that you urge undergraduates to attend the relevant Faculty lectures. Though these are not compulsory, they are designed to assist with preparation for Tripos. This is particularly true of the Music Faculty where each course is normally defined by the associated lecture series. Lectures are a particularly valuable means of bridging gaps between essay topics and, often, of supplying information that is not available in books. Occasionally, some undergraduates give up attending before giving lecture courses a chance – perhaps on the grounds that they do not appear 'relevant' to their work. This is usually short-sighted, and to be discouraged, since the full value of the lectures very often becomes

clear only when revising for the paper. Students should also be aware that it is usually the lecturers who set the Tripos questions, and that these are often closely based on the content of their lectures.

E. Reading lists

Lecturers normally supply undergraduates with either a reading list for the whole lecture series or a sequence of lists for each topic covered. These do not necessarily define exactly what will be examined at the end of the year, though they are normally targeted to the syllabus that will be examined. Many supervisors issue their own reading lists, sometimes based on selections from Faculty lists, sometimes exploring new areas. Beware of going too far 'off-piste'; students can get nervous if the work covered in supervisions deviates drastically from the material addressed in lectures. You are advised not to set a list longer than students will be able to digest in a week; you can, of course, give them further reading at the end of each term and in the Easter Term, when most energy is devoted to revision; this will help students flesh out their understanding. First-years in particular may need reassurance that they are not expected to study everything on a long list before writing an essay or preparing an equivalent piece of work. Go through the list indicating particularly important sources. It's usually best to indicate one or two outline texts as a starting point.

F. The essay

As noted above, students should normally submit their work in advance, so that supervisors have time to make written comments in the margin and an overall assessment at the end. The Music Faculty strongly encourages the practice of writing clear, legible and informative comments about the essay; this is obviously of great value to the student. To this end, the Faculty has put together a feedback sheet with space for general comments as well as a grid in which the supervisor's response to individual areas (such as quality of argument and presentation) can be summarised. This can be found at:

<https://www.mus.cam.ac.uk/intranet/staff-utos/documents/essayfeedbacksheet.pdf>

Please note that it is not Faculty policy to expect supervisors to grade individual pieces of work according to Tripos criteria. Thus, while students can expect to receive detailed feedback on the quality of their supervision work, they will not always receive a mark such as 2i or 2ii, still less a percentage. (In the case of work produced early in the year, using criteria designed for the assessment of end-of-year performance can, of course, be misleading and unhelpful.) This procedure allows supervisors to set work with a view to exploring a topic and to developing particular skills or lines of argument; it discourages students from producing something designed simply to impress a potential examiner. It also enables students to experiment in their written work, without any fear of incurring a negative mark.

Supervisors are, however, invited to include an estimated grade in supervision reports. This tells students how they are likely to fare in the paper as a whole on the basis of that term's work, and can be a very helpful guide to students and Directors of Studies alike. In the case of dissertations and similar pieces of course-work, however, supervisors – especially inexperienced ones – should be wary of second-guessing the marks given by examiners; in such cases, it is often better to concentrate on a verbal assessment. Misjudged gradings can give rise to grave disappointment (and sometimes, of course, to pleasant surprises).

If a student does not produce the set work in time for the supervision, you are within your rights in refusing to teach that student until it has appeared. You are also within your rights in refusing to reschedule the supervision to a different day, though it is best to be flexible about this, where possible.

G. The supervision

There is no one way of supervising. Different approaches and tones are appropriate for different undergraduates at different stages of the course. The intelligence, industry, self-confidence, and articulateness of the student need to be weighed up in deciding how forceful, critical, sympathetic, wide-ranging and/or talkative you should be as a supervisor. Supervisors should always be aware that overly hostile or exclusively negative criticism can do great damage to undergraduate morale, particularly in the first year. Criticism is an essential part of the supervision process, but it should always be accompanied by suggestions and encouragement as to how the work can be done better. It is an essential part of good supervising practice to give regular and constructive feedback.

An undergraduate should come away from a good supervision with a clearer sense of three things:

1. The worth of the work submitted. In the case of essays, comment on content, range, depth, structure and, if necessary, style (clarity, syntax, spelling). You will often need to give advice on how to improve essay structure and presentation. It is important to encourage undergraduates to make a full plan when preparing an essay. Foreign students, and some mature students, may need special help here, but you will quickly become aware that the writing skills of home-grown school-leavers also vary enormously. Please note that undergraduates will often learn techniques (and gain reassurance) by reading each other's essays, so this can usefully be encouraged.
2. The coherence of the topic as a whole. You will want to evaluate students' understanding of what they have written. You will probably also ask them about matters not covered in the essay, and make connections between what they have written and what, with more thought and/or reading, they could have written. In other words, you will want to clarify and broaden their understanding. Encourage them to have their own agenda and to ask you questions. It's often a good idea to end by asking if anything is still obscure to them.
3. The limitations to knowledge. You should be aware that many undergraduates invest a great deal of themselves in coming up with the 'right' answer, and they may take criticism in a particularly personal manner. You should take care in such cases to suggest improvements in a constructive way, as well as encouraging your student to see that speculation and debate can also be an enjoyable part of the essay-writer's craft.

In general, these three goals are best pursued by discussion; a supervision is not a lecture. Do not be embarrassed if you reduce an opinionated student to silence from time to time while forcing him or her to think. Students should probably take some notes in a supervision; but encourage them also to collect their thoughts and commit them to paper immediately afterwards.

H. Supervising composition

Supervision of composition, as mentioned above, will tend to be on a one-to-one basis, rather than in small groups. It will also differ in having no set curriculum, and because of the subjective nature of the work, a sensitive approach is especially vital. The Music Faculty does not adhere to a prescribed aesthetic position, though an awareness of current compositional issues and practice is expected, particularly for second- and third-year students. Supervisors should familiarise themselves with the requirements for each of the three years as set out in the Undergraduate Handbook, and be especially vigilant with regard to submission deadlines, remembering that some recordings are also required.

While each supervisor will develop their own ways of working, in general students will find it helpful to have early discussion about the kinds of pieces they intend to write, and some idea of a basic schedule against which to plan their composing. They may also find it useful to be introduced to recent and contemporary music that offers models relevant to their own intended pieces. Once work has begun to appear, it is necessary for the supervisor to attempt to understand students' ideas from the inside, and to guide them towards a full realisation of these. Practicalities of instrumental and vocal writing should also be discussed, along with the need for a clear and stylish presentation of the finished submission.

I. Other disciplines

As Music has many different sub-disciplines, quite varied approaches can be needed when supervising. We hope the preceding sections will have provided some basic ground-rules. Should you find yourself supervising a different subject and in need of advice, we recommend that you contact in the first instance the person responsible for the associated lecture course. They should be able to answer your questions or, at the very least, put you in touch with an experienced supervisor. Please do make a point of asking, rather than trusting to luck!

J. The Faculty Register of Supervisors

Though supervisors are generally employed by Colleges rather than by the Music Faculty, many apply to register with the Faculty through an approach to the Faculty Board. If accepted by the Board, the supervisor will be added to the Register of Supervisors that is circulated to Directors of Studies at the beginning of the academic year (and, in updated form, on an occasional basis throughout the year).

Acceptance within the Register is not tantamount to official endorsement by the Faculty; rather, supervisors are sponsored by someone (usually an individual Faculty lecturer or a Director of Studies) who is prepared to vouch for the supervisor in question. As a result, being accepted onto the Register does not guarantee work. Where the supervisor does not hold a University or College post, Directors of Studies are likely to make enquiries with potential supervisors' sponsors in the first instance. Any queries or requests for amendments to your entry on the Faculty's Register of Supervisors should be directed to the Undergraduate Administrator (undergraduate@mus.cam.ac.uk).

K. Supervision reports and payment

Supervision reports and payment are managed through the CamCORS online reporting system; see:

www.camcors.cam.ac.uk

To use CamCORS, you will need to obtain a CamCORS Supervisor Account. These are registered by the University Computing Service, and in order to set up an account, you should contact the Director of Studies who first contacted you about supervising.

It is important to write and submit supervision reports some ten days before the end of Full Term. Reports are usually discussed by undergraduates with their Director of Studies and/or Tutor when they meet shortly before the end of term – hence the need for relatively early submission. Most colleges will also release the report for the students themselves to read online as soon as they are processed; one or two colleges impose a delay before release.

Supervision reports fulfil three primary purposes. The first, as indicated above, is to enable supervisors to be paid. Reports are also designed to inform Directors of Studies about the progress of their students, so a degree of candour is necessary. Finally, they also let students know how they are getting on. So, do try to include helpful suggestions for improvement, rather than simply grading (in whatever form) the term's work. If you have problems with students – these might include missing supervisions or inadequate work – it is important that you contact the Director of Studies *straight away*; do not wait until the CamCORS report is due.

If you have submitted your reports promptly, you can expect to be paid by the colleges for which you have supervised within a few weeks. Please note that late reports may result in a long delay in payment, as most colleges process payments only a few times per year.

L. Room booking

If you need a room in which to supervise, please contact in the first instance the Director of Studies who asked you to supervise; they will check if a college room is available. Please note that the Faculty of Music simply doesn't have space to accommodate more than a small number of supervisions, as rooms are often needed for other purposes such as Faculty classes and student practice.

If you have particular difficulties with finding suitable rooms in a college – you might, for example, be teaching a student who needs wheelchair access – please contact the Faculty's Administrative Assistant (admin@mus.cam.ac.uk) to find out if there is any space in the Faculty. They will first check that the supervisor's name appears on the Register of Supervisors and will make a note of the course that is being supervised. They may also ask you to explain why you need to teach at the Faculty. If space is available, the Administrative Assistant will book it for you.

Please note:

- rooms can only be booked for times when a Custodian is on duty;

- rooms may not be booked for more than one term at a time;
- Faculty rooms may not be booked for the purpose of giving private music lessons;
- the furniture in rooms must be left exactly as it was found; you cannot expect the Custodians to rearrange the room for you.

NB: failure to observe these rules will almost certainly result in your name being removed from the list of those eligible to teach in the Faculty.

M. Training, tools and feedback for supervisors

Online training is available through the University's Centre for Teaching and Learning. You can access their website here:

<http://www.cctl.cam.ac.uk/support-and-training/training-and-guidance/supervising-undergraduates>

It is also recommended that you familiarise yourself with Moodle and ask to be enrolled on the Moodle site of any lecture courses for which you are supervising.

You can access Moodle here:

www.student-systems.admin.cam.ac.uk/moodle

There is also plenty of online help available. The relevant lecturer or the Undergraduate Administrator can usually arrange for you to be enrolled on any courses for which you are supervising.

In addition, an induction session is held each year for graduate students who are new to supervising Music students. This year's event, which will take place on **Friday 11 October** from 2.00 to 2.30 pm in Lecture Room 4, is open to anyone interested in learning more about supervising; however, those wishing to attend should register in advance with the Faculty's Graduate Administrator (graduate@mus.cam.ac.uk).

N. Resources

Further resources can be found on the Faculty of Music's website; see:

<https://www.mus.cam.ac.uk/current-students/undergraduate>

A Raven password is required in order to access some documents. The process of applying for a CamCORS account (see above) should also generate a Raven password.

O. Director of Undergraduate Studies

The Director of Undergraduate Studies (DUGS) provides a link between the Faculty of Music and Directors of Studies. For the academic year 2019–20, the DUGS will be Professor Marina Frolova-Walker (mf263@cam.ac.uk).

The People section of the Music Faculty website lists all staff and their roles; see:

www.mus.cam.ac.uk/directory

P. Supervising disabled students

The Faculty Disability Policy is available on the Faculty website at:
<https://www.mus.cam.ac.uk/current-students/policies-and-information>.

The University of Cambridge has also issued a Code of Practice on reasonable adjustments for disabled students; see:
www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/education/support/reasonable_adjustments.pdf

Your attention is drawn to the Disability Resource Centre (DRC) website and, in particular, to the information provided there on supporting disabled students; see:
www.disability.admin.cam.ac.uk/teaching-disabled-students

The University of Cambridge has a legal obligation and anticipatory duty to support students who fall under the Equality Act 2010. This includes students with long-standing health conditions, mental-health conditions, sensory impairments, specific learning difficulties, high-functioning autism, physical or mobility impairments, and any other conditions or impairments. The DRC produces student support documents where required, and these give guidance on the adjustments a student may require.

The DRC operates screening for specific learning difficulties and high-functioning autism. If you suspect a student is having serious difficulties resulting from an undiagnosed condition, please raise it with the relevant Director of Studies as soon as possible, as a screening may be appropriate.

Q. Plagiarism

Supervisors are advised to familiarise themselves with the University policy on plagiarism. First-year students in particular often need advice on this topic. Some have little experience in crediting sources; others may become paranoid about referencing others' work.

University guidance on plagiarism can be found here:
www.admin.cam.ac.uk/univ/plagiarism

The Music Faculty's policy is to be found on the intranet here:
<https://www.mus.cam.ac.uk/current-students/policies-and-information/referencing-conventions-and-plagiarism>

In cases of suspected or identified plagiarism a supervisor should make both the student and their Director of Studies aware of the problem; in the case of work already submitted for examination the Director of Studies should contact the Chair of the relevant Board of Examiners.

R. Mock exams

Mock exams are entirely a college matter and supervisors offering them should clear any planned exams with Directors of Studies first.

S. And finally ...

Thank you for your help in supervising Music undergraduates. Your contribution plays a central part of their education. If you have any queries or comments, please contact the Undergraduate Administrator (undergraduate@mus.cam.ac.uk) in the first instance. Thank you once again.

Martin Ennis
*with thanks to John Hopkins and other colleagues
and to equivalent documents in other Cambridge faculties*
October 2016 (updated August 2019)