



Procedural instructions of the University of Turku Graduate School regarding conflicts over doctoral candidates' supervision

In doctoral candidates' supervision, a conflict may occur between a doctoral candidate and their supervisor(s) or, in certain faculties, research director / person at the department responsible for doctoral training. Supervisory conflict is also possible between supervisors and/or the responsible person at the department. Conflicts can occur, for instance, over differing expectations, due to mental and financial distress, communication problems, and scientific or ethical disagreements. It may also be that either the doctoral candidate or the supervisor is unable to contact the other party, or that one of them is not abiding by what was agreed upon in the supervision plan. These various problematic issues are called conflicts in these instructions. Conflicts over supervision should be addressed as early as possible since they tend to worsen over time. The aim is to resolve the differences, not to cast blame.

The process of conflict resolution

If the parties of the conflict are not able to reach an understanding, they must contact the coordinator or the director of the doctoral programme (see Figure 1). In a confidential discussion, the person who started the process explains the situation and persons involved in the situation are identified. The threshold to initiate a guidance-oriented discussion like this should be considered low and it need not lead to further actions or even contacting other parties involved. If the situation requires further investigation, the coordinator and the director of the doctoral programme assist the parties in resolving the conflict and see the process through up until further measures are agreed upon or a solution is discovered. Assessing the situation may include, depending on the faculty, e.g. the doctoral candidate's follow-up group (advisory committee), research director or the person who is responsible for doctoral training at the department, and/or the steering committee of the doctoral programme. In conflicts, as in other stages of the dissertation process, the impartiality of those deciding the matter is prerequisite. If any measures should be required to solve the problem, they are selected based on the type of conflict in question. In most cases, a conflict can be resolved during discussions between the doctoral candidate, supervisors, follow-up group, research director / the person responsible for doctoral training at the department, and/or the doctoral programme. The goal is that the process aiming for resolving the situation is brief so that the parties of the conflict are able to continue working uninterrupted as soon as possible.

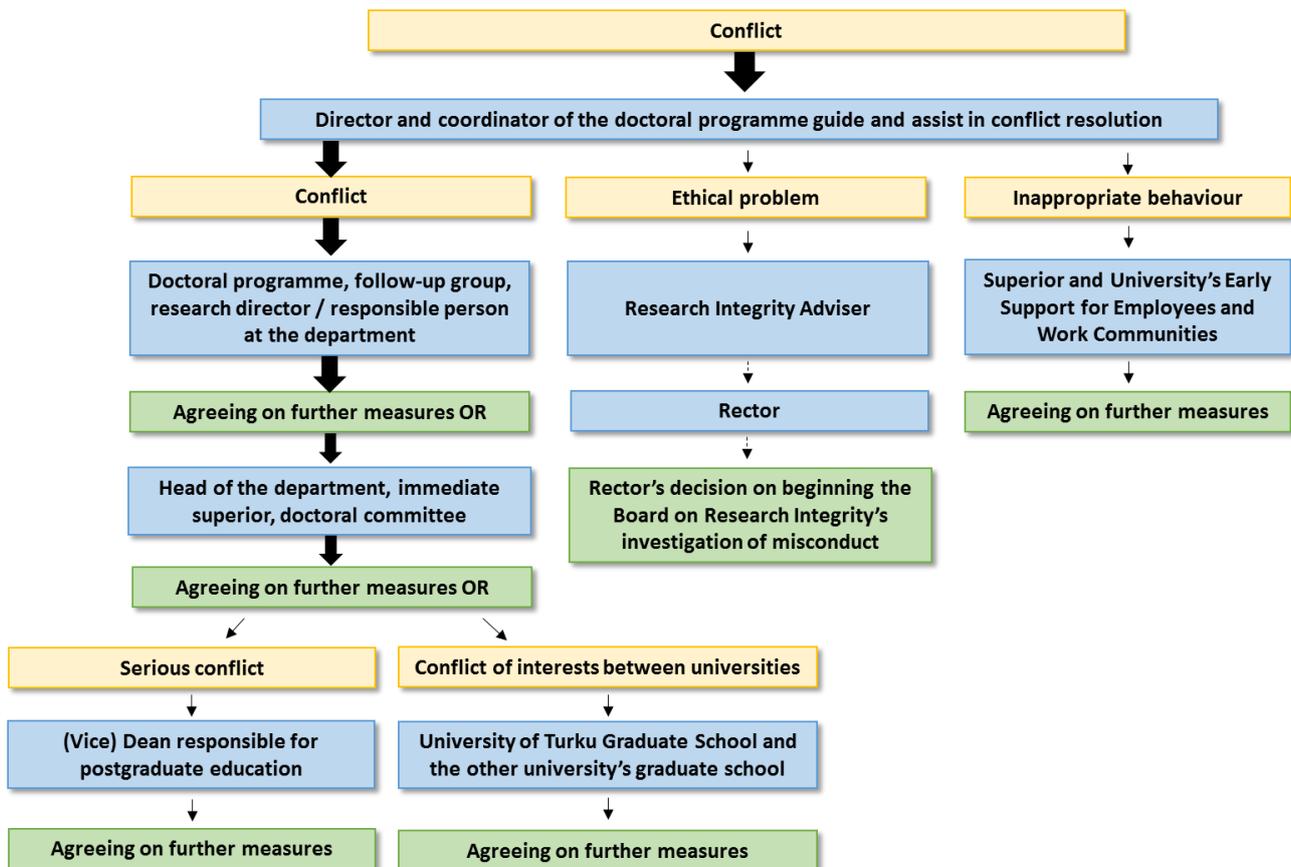


Figure 1. *The processes of conflict resolution regarding supervision*

If the on-going conflict is not solved despite the discussions, the head of the department, the immediate superior, or (in certain faculties) the doctoral committee can assist in resolving the conflict. As a last resort, the faculty's (Vice) Dean responsible for postgraduate studies suggests actions to be taken to defuse the situation. The Director and the Steering Committee of the Graduate School can also provide mediation assistance in a serious conflict. The process described above can be modified with discretion as is appropriate considering the nature of the conflict at hand. For instance, if a supervisor transitioning to another university has caused a conflict of interests between two universities, the mediation is attended by the University of Turku Graduate School and the other university's graduate school or another body responsible for doctoral training.

Work community mediation offered by the Well-being Services can be used in challenging situations and in cases where the impartiality of those deciding the case is questioned. In work community mediation, an external and impartial person, a mediator, helps the parties of the conflict through the mediation process to find a solution which is acceptable to all parties. Work community mediation is available to all University of Turku doctoral candidates and supervisors including those not employed by the University. More information on work community mediation can be found on the University's Intranet with the keyword "work community mediation".

Agreeing on further measures

It is recommended that measures which are taken in order to resolve a conflict be agreed upon in writing. The parties of the conflict are expected to respect mutually agreed measures and act accordingly. Depending on the nature of the conflict, a solution may be e.g. updating items agreed upon in the supervision plan or appointing a new, parallel supervisor. In cases where conflicts over



supervision are irreparable, the supervision relationship may end at the request of either the supervisor or the doctoral candidate if reasons are sufficient. The decision about changes to the supervision arrangements is made by the faculty which granted the study right. Should a supervision relationship be terminated, prior agreements on possible utilization of materials, research results, patents, and publications are adhered to and, if necessary, amended to reflect the current situation. Upon termination of a supervision relationship due to a conflict, the doctoral programme assists and guides in finding a new supervisor within the limits of the doctoral programme's resources.

Ethical conflicts

Solving ethical issues follows the guidelines of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK). Both the doctoral candidate and the supervisor must be aware of what is meant by good scientific practice, responsibilities of researchers and supervisors, and what the indicators of misconduct are and how they are processed as well as what the ethical norms and practices in one's own research field are. Research Integrity Advisers ("tutkimuseetiikan tukihenkilö" in Finnish) of the University of Turku offer support in everyday questions regarding research ethics. Allegations of research misconduct are reported to the Rector in writing, who then decides beginning the Board of Research Integrity's investigation if needed.

Inappropriate behaviour

The University of Turku Graduate School follows the University of Turku's instructions regarding bullying, harassment, and other inappropriate behaviour. These instructions can be found on the Intranet with the keywords "bullying and harassment". The Occupational Safety and Health Act (738/2002) obliges the superior of an employee to investigate situations threatening well-being at work. Accordingly, the party who signed the University Commitment is ultimately responsible for solving issues related to inappropriate behaviour. The University of Turku has outlined that the University's Early Support for Employees and Work Communities (excluding occupational health care services) is available to all doctoral candidates and supervisors including those not employed by the University. Because the situations that lead to inappropriate behaviour can vary in their nature, either the staff's or the students' instructions are followed where appropriate. The doctoral candidate, the supervisor, and the superior can all ask for help from the support persons of the University's Early Support for Employees and Work Communities in situations which have an adverse effect on the functionality of the work community. The University of Turku has a policy of zero tolerance towards inappropriate behaviour.