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SUPERVISING UNDERGRADUATE LAW STUDENTS' DISSERTATIONS: A FOUR-STEP REVIEW

JAYDEN HOUGHTON* AND ORIEL KELLY[^]

I INTRODUCTION

Students in the 480-point LLB program at the University of Auckland, Faculty of Law are invited to enrol in the 540-points LLB(Hons) program if they complete their stage one and two Law courses¹ with a 75% average.² The LLB and LLB(Hons) are undergraduate programs and the same except that LLB(Hons) students need to enrol in a full-year (two-semester) 20-point seminar course³ and a one-semester 40-point dissertation, which is assessed by a 15,000-word dissertation. Students enrol in the dissertation in their final semester of the LLB(Hons) program. Students generally engage a supervisor and start work on the dissertation in the semester before formally enrolling. Many students are already in full-time employment while completing the dissertation.

In 2020–2021, the lead author supervised 12 undergraduate LLB(Hons) students' 15,000-word dissertations. The supervision process was in four parts: reviewing the proposal; reviewing the introduction; reviewing the first draft (10,000 words); and reviewing the second draft (15,000 words). The authors invited the supervisees to

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¹ The LLB degree has four stages. In stage one, students study Law and Society, Legal Method and Legal Foundations, as well as electives from another degree program. In stage two, students study Criminal Law, Public Law, the Law of Torts, and the Law of Contract, as well as Legal Research, Writing and Communication. In stage three, students study Land Law, Equity, and Jurisprudence, as well as law electives. In stage four, students study Legal Ethics, as well as Advanced Legal Research, Writing and Communication, and law electives. Each stage equates to about a year of full-time study for students studying an LLB degree only. For conjoint students, stage two is usually spread over two years to allow students to simultaneously progress their other degree. A conjoint degree at the University of Auckland is when students study for two bachelor's degrees at the same time, but do not need to take as many courses in each bachelor's degree as students studying those bachelor's degrees separately.

² Students must maintain a 75% average across their Law courses to graduate with LLB(Hons).

³ The seminar course is assessed by a combination of internal assessment (such as participation, a research proposal and a presentation) and a 10,000-word research paper.

complete a survey on their supervision experience. This article investigates the undergraduate law students' attitudes toward the four-step review supervision process.

Part II surveys the scholarship on the supervision of undergraduates. Part III outlines the lead author's supervision process. Part IV sets out the study methodology. Part V presents and discusses the results.

II LITERATURE REVIEW

A Roles

The roles of supervision are not often clear to all participants, and some roles are more effective than others. A supervisor guides academically on content and organisation,⁴ but does much more. Mary Malcolm explains that supervisors must balance dialogue and instruction.⁵ The supervisor is variously the one who nudges, negotiates outcomes and communicates new knowledge.⁶ A supervisor offers substantial support initially, but moves away as the student becomes more autonomous,⁷ supporting students to take more initiative,⁸ ultimately distancing themselves as the student finalises the dissertation.⁹ In this way, a supervisor adapts their supervisory practice to suit the different, demanding roles of encouraging and challenging the student.¹⁰ This approach shapes the dissertation experience in a contradictory space of both leading and following¹¹ (being both responsive and directive),¹² and acknowledging the different duties of supervision.¹³ Some research has found that different roles have different outcomes. For example, students who expect their supervisor

⁴ Julia Chen et al, 'Helping Students from Different Disciplines with their Final Year/Capstone Project: Supervisors' and Students' Needs and Requests' in Bruce Morrison et al (eds), *English Across the Curriculum: Voices from Around the World* (WAC Clearinghouse, 2021) 91, 97
<<https://wac.colostate.edu/books/international/eac2018/>>.

⁵ Mary Malcolm, 'The Challenge of Achieving Transparency in Undergraduate Honours-Level Dissertation Supervision' (2020) 28 *Teaching in Higher Education* 101, 104.

⁶ Gina Wisker, 'Frameworks and Freedoms: Supervising Research Learning and the Undergraduate Dissertation' (2018) 15(4) *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice* 1, 10.

⁷ Malcolm J Todd, Karen Smith and Phil Bannister, 'Supervising a Social Science Undergraduate Dissertation: Staff Experiences and Perceptions' (2006) 11(2) *Teaching in Higher Education* 161, 171.

⁸ Desmond Manderson, 'FAQ: Initial Questions about Thesis Supervision in Law' (1997) 8 *Legal Education Review* 121, 138.

⁹ Todd, Smith and Bannister (n 7) 171.

¹⁰ Hannah Frith, 'Undergraduate Supervision, Teaching Dilemmas and Dilemmatic Spaces' (2020) 26(1) *Psychology Teaching Review* 6, 9.

¹¹ Malcolm Todd, Phil Bannister and Sue Clegg, 'Independent Inquiry and the Undergraduate Dissertation: Perceptions and Experiences of Final-Year Social Science Students' (2004) 29(3) *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 335, 343.

¹² Malcolm (n 5) 104.

¹³ Maria José Sá, Ana Isabel Santos and Sandro Serpa, 'The Academic Supervisor of Higher Education Students' Final Projects: A Gatekeeper of Quality?' (2021) 10(1) *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 152, 152.

to be a guide improve their interaction-related skills, students who expect a subject matter specialist improve their autonomy, and, finally, students who expect a proof-reader achieve less autonomy.¹⁴

Noela Murphy, John Bain and Linda Conrad cite a study that identifies different ways supervisors and students typically approach supervision:¹⁵ a *thesis orientation* focuses on efficient completion; a *professional orientation* regards the student as an apprentice and focuses on an induction into academia; and a *person orientation* is disposed to sympathetic support of academic and non-academic aspects of students' lives, and focuses on collegiality in the supervisory relationship. Murphy, Bain and Conrad suggest that focuses stem from the supervisor's beliefs about teaching and learning generally.¹⁶ These beliefs permeate the literature. Gina Wisker suggests that supervising undergraduate dissertations involves modelling, trialling, and facilitating research processes and practice development.¹⁷ Evangelia Fragouli suggests that over the course of the supervision, the supervisor may act as mentor, trainer, supporter, critic, and fellow researcher.¹⁸ A supervisor should assess the student's readiness, motivation, and situation to balance nurturing the student's development and ensuring the student achieves the required standards.¹⁹

B Relationships

The supervisor's negotiation of these roles leads to different relationships. TW Maxwell and Robyn Smyth stress that the supervisor and student are not in a teaching/learning dichotomy.²⁰ Desmond Manderson considers the relationship a mutuality — both parties learn, although it is the student who needs to become the expert.²¹ The supervisor demonstrates functional leadership involving guiding and

¹⁴ M Luisa Del Río, Rosario Díaz-Vázquez and José M Maside Sanfiz, 'Satisfaction with the Supervision of Undergraduate Dissertations' (2018) 19(2) *Active Learning in Higher Education* 159, 168.

¹⁵ Noela Murphy, John Bain and Linda Conrad, 'Orientations to Research Higher Degree Supervision' (2007) 53(2) *Higher Education* 209, 211 citing Robin Burns, Rolene Lamm and Ramon Lewis, 'Orientations to Higher Degree Supervision: A Study of Supervisors and Students in Education' in Allyson Holbrook and Sue Johnston (eds), *Supervision of Postgraduate Research in Education* (Australian Association for Research in Education, 1999) 55–74.

¹⁶ Murphy, Bain and Conrad (n 15) 229.

¹⁷ Gina Wisker, 'Getting it Right from the Start: Setting Up and Managing Good Supervisory Practices with Undergraduate Dissertations' in Roisin Donnelly, John Dallat and Marian Fitzmaurice (eds), *Supervising and Writing a Good Undergraduate Dissertation* (Bentham Science, 2013) 3, 5.

¹⁸ Evangelia Fragouli, 'Postgraduate Supervision: A Practical Reflection on How to Support Students' Engagement' (2021) 7(2) *International Journal of Higher Education Management* 1, 2.

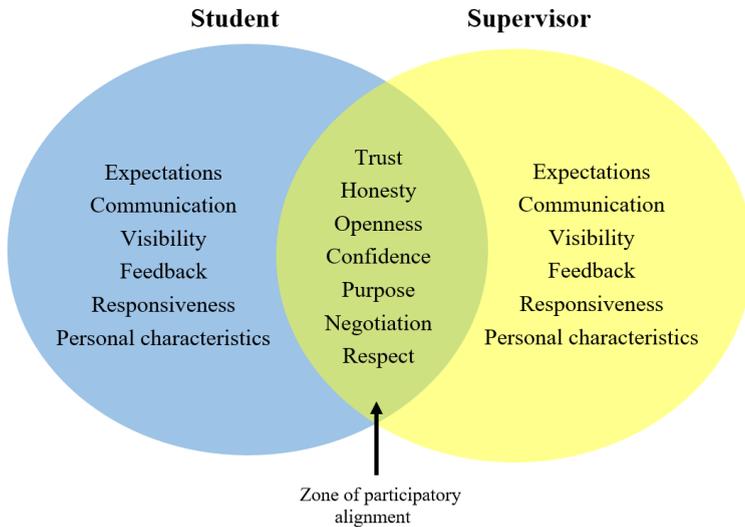
¹⁹ Ann Macfadyen et al, "'Am I Doing it Right?'" Conceptualising the Practice of Supervising Master's Dissertation Students' (2019) 38(5) *Higher Education Research & Development* 985, 997.

²⁰ TW Maxwell and Robyn Smyth, 'Research Supervision: The Research Management Matrix' (2010) 59(4) *Higher Education* 407, 409.

²¹ Manderson (n 8) 126, 128.

facilitating,²² and helps the student to develop expertise by treating them and their work with respect while not always needing to agree. Gillian Aitken and others likewise consider the supervisor and student to be partners in learning in a task-oriented relationship, with the intersection being the basis of an effective supervision relationship (Figure 1).²³

Figure 1
Participatory Alignment



Fragouli adds that a supervisor should inspire the student's passion and enthusiasm, which helps to build a relationship.²⁴ However, Ann Macfadyen and others stress that an effective supervisory relationship must change over time if a successful outcome is to be achieved.²⁵

The relationship is also an asymmetric power relationship, with trust given and received in both directions.²⁶ Trust underpins the supervisory relationship from the outset: Lesley Gratrix and David Barrett suggest that students tend to seek out supervisors with whom they already have a good relationship.²⁷ The evolving trust fosters student growth and independence,²⁸ while leaving open the potential for targeted

²² Maxwell and Smyth (n 20) 409.

²³ Gillian Aitken et al, 'Participatory Alignment: A Positive Relationship Between Educators and Students During Online Masters Dissertation Supervision' (2022) 27(6) *Teaching in Higher Education* 772, 773. See also 775, 783.

²⁴ Fragouli (n 18) 3.

²⁵ Macfadyen et al (n 19) 992.

²⁶ Sá, Santos and Serpa (n 13) 148–149.

²⁷ Lesley Gratrix and David Barrett, 'Desperately Seeking Consistency: Student Nurses' Experiences and Expectations of Academic Supervision' (2017) 48 *Nurse Education Today* 7, 9.

²⁸ Lynne D Roberts and Kristen Seaman, 'Good Undergraduate Dissertation Supervision: Perspectives of Supervisors and Dissertation Coordinators' (2018) 23(2) *International Journal for Academic Development* 28, 32; Marian Woolhouse,

interventions that protect and support without undermining student ownership.²⁹ The relationship may also involve counselling, which may mirror the supervisor's own supervision experience as a student.³⁰

C Communication

Supervisors should be responsive to student needs,³¹ which requires timely and clear communication.³² Supervisors should provide timely, constructive feedback and advice,³³ as well as emotional support, positive pressure and expectations.³⁴

Susan Carter and others, writing in the New Zealand context, suggest drawing Indigenous worldviews into supervision conversations to include whānau (family) and practice whanaungatanga (relationship building).³⁵ The authors showed that cultural knowledge can empower supervision practice, especially where it is underpinned by values including whanaungatanga, as well as tika (doing what is right), pono (doing with integrity) and aroha (doing with compassion).³⁶

D Skill Development

The supervision process also involves skill development. Wisker lists several technical and transferable skills that students develop as they become co-builders of knowledge, including project planning (including task and time management), learner independence, problem identification and solving, theorising (including selecting a suitable methodology), research skills (including information acquisition and evaluation), analysing information to draw conclusions, writing and referencing skills, and reflective activity.³⁷ More broadly, Wisker suggests that supervisors enable students to develop their identities.³⁸

'Supervising Dissertation Projects: Expectations of Supervisors and Students' (2002) 39(2) *Innovations in Education and Teaching International* 28, 33.

²⁹ See Jennifer Rowley and Frances Slack, 'What is the Future for Undergraduate Dissertations?' (2004) 46(4) *Education + Training* 176, 177.

³⁰ James Derounian, 'Shall We Dance? The Importance of Staff-Student Relationships to Undergraduate Dissertation Preparation' (2011) 12(2) *Active Learning in Higher Education* 91, 92.

³¹ Elizabeth Fajans and Mary R Falk, 'Comments Worth Making: Supervising Scholarly Writing in Law School' (1996) 46(3) *J Legal Educ* 342, 369; Razlina Razali, Eleanor Hawe and Helen Dixon, 'How are Undergraduate Students Supervised? Perceptions of Students and Supervisors in a Malaysian University' (2020) 30(4) *Issues in Educational Research* 1484, 1486.

³² Aitken et al (n 23) 779.

³³ See generally David Boud and Elizabeth Molley, 'Rethinking Models of Feedback for Learning: The Challenge of Design' (2013) 38(6) *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 698.

³⁴ See Todd, Bannister and Clegg (n 11) 342.

³⁵ Susan Carter et al, 'Indigenous Knowledges and Supervision: Changing the Lens' (2018) 55(3) *Innovations in Education and Teaching International* 384, 384, 387.

³⁶ Carter et al (n 35) 391.

³⁷ Wisker (n 6) 4.

³⁸ *Ibid* 4–5.

Jennifer Rowley and Frances Slack add that students learn to confront and accommodate dynamic and contested knowledge.³⁹ Maria José Sá, Ana Isabel Santos and Sandro Serpa add that students develop leadership, teamwork and creativity.⁴⁰ Malcolm adds independence and receptiveness.⁴¹ Finally, Razlina Razali, Eleanor Hawe and Helen Dixon add the ability to act on feedback received.⁴²

E Issues

Supervision is not without its issues. The supervisor and student should clarify their expectations in advance to avoid a mismatch between the contribution anticipated by the supervisor and the contribution expected from the supervisor by the student.⁴³ Supervision requires skills that are not necessarily taught in an academic's training.⁴⁴ Sá, Santos and Serpa recommend staff development for supervision, contending that supervision requires the supervisor to apply several strategies in the same supervision process in a short timeframe,⁴⁵ which can result in a high supervisor workload⁴⁶ that cannot be made entirely predictable.⁴⁷ Lynne Roberts and Kristen Seaman list several other potential issues: lack of interest and ownership by students; overworked supervisors and the pressure to publish; relationships which fail to evolve; personality conflicts; and forgetting that supervision should ultimately be for the benefit of the student, not the gratification of the supervisor.⁴⁸

Malcolm Todd, Karen Smith and Phil Bannister suggest both supervisors and students experience waves of 'cosmos and chaos' due to the changing nature of their roles in the process, and the ongoing tension between freedom and autonomy.⁴⁹ Further, supervisors may be supervising a dissertation on a subject they know little about.⁵⁰ Tina Shadforth and Brendon Harvey proposed two extreme types of supervision: *subject-centred*, where knowledge is considered objective and can be transferred to the student; and *student-centred*, which takes an insightful questioning and reflective listening approach, recognising the student's knowledge and experience.⁵¹ The authors concluded that supervisors generally favour subject-centred supervision and

³⁹ Rowley and Slack (n 29) 179.

⁴⁰ Sá, Santos and Serpa (n 13) 158.

⁴¹ Malcolm (n 5) 104.

⁴² Razali, Hawe and Dixon (n 31) 1494.

⁴³ Aitken et al (n 23) 774; Del Río, Díaz-Vázquez and Maside Sanfiz (n 14) 162; Fragouli (n 18) 4.

⁴⁴ Gratrix and Barrett (n 27) 8.

⁴⁵ Sá, Santos and Serpa (n 13) 155.

⁴⁶ Margaret Kiley et al, 'Honouring the Incomparable: Honours in Australian Universities' (2011) 62 *Higher Education* 619, 629.

⁴⁷ Malcolm (n 5) 104.

⁴⁸ Roberts and Seaman (n 28) 33–37.

⁴⁹ Todd, Bannister and Clegg (n 11) 336.

⁵⁰ Todd, Smith and Bannister (n 7) 171.

⁵¹ Tina Shadforth and Brendon Harvey, 'The Undergraduate Dissertation: Subject-Centred or Student-Centred?' (2004) 2(2) *Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods* 145.

considered supervising between the extremes particularly challenging as it requires nuance.⁵²

III SUPERVISION PROCESS

Part III explains the lead author's supervision process in four parts: reviewing the proposal; reviewing the introduction; reviewing the first draft (10,000 words); and reviewing the second draft (15,000 words). Table 1 summarises the supervision process. The lead author was broadly informed by the literature in designing the process, although the authors continue to enhance their supervision knowledge and expertise.

Table 1
Four-Step Review Supervision Process

Step	Review	Student's work	Supervisor's review
1	Proposal review	Proposal with problem to be addressed, research question or argument, and key sources.	Reads proposal, writes comments, returns proposal and accepts supervision.
2	Introduction review	Introduction with context, argument sentence and roadmap.	Reads introduction, writes comments (focusing on context, argument and roadmap, as well as writing style), returns introduction and meets with student to discuss.
3	First draft review	10,000-word draft (with each part at least started).	Reads draft, writes comments (focusing on argument, structure, logic and word allocation), returns draft and meets with student to discuss.
4	Second draft review	15,000-word draft (as close to finished as possible, no later than three weeks before deadline) flagging concerns and questions.	Considers student's concerns and questions in context and meets with student to discuss.

At the outset, the student contacts the supervisor and requests an appointment to discuss potential supervision. The lead author is the course director and a lecturer for the large compulsory course Land Law,⁵³ which students usually take in year four of their six-year

⁵² Ibid 145, 149.

⁵³ The course would have had around 300 or 370 students, depending which year they enrolled.

LLB(Hons) conjoint degree, and so was known to all the participants in the study. The lead author also had a preexisting relationship with most of the participants.⁵⁴ Students will be at various stages in developing the research question. Some will have attempted to articulate a research question that they wish to run past the prospective supervisor. Students more often will have one or several potential topics, or even general areas, which they are interested in exploring. The supervisor and the student then arrange to meet.

At the initial meeting, the supervisor and student discuss the supervisor's expertise and the student's research interests, and to explore potential topics and consider the student's identified topic idea or drafted research question. The supervisor outlines the four-step review supervision process, which is the framework for the task-oriented relationship.⁵⁵ The supervisor and student set expectations for the supervision within that framework.⁵⁶

The lead author's expectations for the student include that they take (increasing) individual responsibility for their progress.⁵⁷ The student will have expectations of the supervisor too. Supervisors tend to have a default supervisory approach and it is important that the supervisor explains this, and how flexible they are willing to be to meet the student's expectations, so that the student can decide whether that approach works for them. The lead author's default supervisory approach is to adopt a person orientation,⁵⁸ take a student-centred approach⁵⁹ and serve primarily as a guide.⁶⁰ However, if the supervision squares with their expertise, they may aspire to a more nuanced approach between the extremes⁶¹ which leans more into the subject matter specialist persona⁶² and a subject-centred approach.⁶³ In any case, the student should be expected to become the subject matter expert and the student should be encouraged to break new ground. Thus, the supervisor will need to be a fellow researcher at times during a

⁵⁴ Compare Gratrix and Barrett (n 27) 9. Participant 1 was an editor on a law review while the lead author was the editor-in-chief. Participants 2 and 3 were law school tutors while the lead author managed the tutors. Participant 4 was a law school tutor while the lead author managed the tutors, and enrolled in one or more of the lead author's elective courses. Participants 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 enrolled in one or more of the lead author's elective courses. Participant 11 had previously met with the lead author for guidance on a different research project. Participant 12 was related to another student who was an editor on a law review while the lead author was the editor-in-chief. The electives courses, which students can take in years four, five or six of their LLB(Hons) conjoint degree, would have each had around 40 to 80 students, depending on the courses and which years they enrolled.

⁵⁵ See Aitken et al (n 23) 783.

⁵⁶ Ibid 774; Del Río, Díaz-Vázquez and Maside Sanfiz (n 14) 162; Fragouli (n 18) 4.

⁵⁷ See Todd, Smith and Bannister (n 7) 171; Manderson (n 8) 138.

⁵⁸ Murphy, Bain and Conrad (n 15) 211.

⁵⁹ Shadforth and Harvey (n 51) 146.

⁶⁰ Students may improve their interaction-related skills or autonomy, accordingly. See Del Río, Díaz-Vázquez and Maside Sanfiz (n 14) 168. Supervisors should not set an expectation that they will serve primarily as a proof-reader, as students who expect a proof-reader achieve less autonomy.

⁶¹ See Shadforth and Harvey (n 51) 149.

⁶² See Del Río, Díaz-Vázquez and Maside Sanfiz (n 14) 168.

⁶³ Shadforth and Harvey (n 51) 146.

supervision — usually as knowledge gaps are encountered and not at a consistent stage in the process.⁶⁴ Starting the supervision with clear expectations begins the supervisory relationship in the zone of participatory alignment, with its concomitant benefits of trust, honesty, openness, confidence, sense of purpose, receptiveness to negotiation, and respect.⁶⁵ The supervisor and student should aspire to keep the relationship in that zone, which requires ongoing management of social presences and shared understandings of the project.⁶⁶

The supervisor asks the student to prepare a proposal setting out their topic, stating the problem to be addressed, articulating the research question or argument, and listing key sources they expect to need to read to advance the project. Once complete, the supervisor reads the proposal, writes comments,⁶⁷ returns the proposal and accepts the supervision.

Next, the supervisor invites the student to draft a two-to-three-page introduction with context, an argument sentence and a roadmap. The supervisor reviews the introduction by writing comments on the document, focusing on the introduction's context, argument sentence and roadmap, as well as the writing style. The introduction should be efficient, providing enough context to understand the problem and the argument sentence, but not so much that the argument sentence is unduly delayed and the reader is distracted by incidental information. The argument sentence should be clear, concise and original, such that the student can make a contribution to the relevant scholarship. The student is free to revise the argument throughout the supervision. The roadmap should indicate a structure in which the argument sentence will be logically developed (without gaps in the logic), and substantial words will be allocated for analysis and, ideally, a worked proposal. The introduction review is a good opportunity to check the student's writing style. The supervisor comments closely on the student's grammar, sentence structures and style, setting a high standard for the quality of writing to be expected in subsequent work. The supervisor returns the marked-up introduction to the student and schedules a meeting a few days later⁶⁸ to discuss the introduction. The supervisor leads on the key takeaways and allows the student the opportunity to clarify any questions they have.

Next, the supervisor invites the student to write a 10,000-word first draft. The supervisor reads the draft and writes comments using the *comment* function on the right pane of the document. The supervisor focuses mostly on how the argument has been developed, which includes flagging gaps in the logic and, usually, encouraging the student

⁶⁴ See Fragouli (n 18) 2.

⁶⁵ See Aitken et al (n 23) 783.

⁶⁶ See generally *ibid*.

⁶⁷ If there are problems (for example, because the student proposes a project that has already been undertaken by another author), the supervisor may request a further meeting.

⁶⁸ The supervisor encourages the student, before each review meeting, to clear the comments they understand and to take note of those they do not understand or wish to clarify in the meeting.

to reduce the word count for the descriptive early parts to allow more words for analysis and a proposal in the later parts. The supervisor returns the marked-up draft, and the supervisor and student meet to discuss the first draft, where the supervisor again leads on the key takeaways and allows the student the opportunity to clarify any questions they have.

Finally, the supervisor invites the student to write a 15,000-word second draft. When the student is ready to submit the second draft, ideally three weeks before the dissertation deadline, the supervisor asks the student to direct the supervisor to specific aspects and ask specific questions for the supervisor's consideration. The supervisor informs the student that this will be the final opportunity for feedback before the dissertation deadline. The supervisor considers the student's concerns and questions, and meets with the student to discuss them. The student works autonomously for the final three weeks to finalise and submit the dissertation.

Once the dissertation is submitted, the supervisor marks it and another academic independently assesses it. The supervisor provides the student with substantial written feedback. If the dissertation is potentially publishable, the supervisor invites the student to meet to discuss the next steps to try to get the dissertation published, including advice on how to address the feedback and reduce the 15,000-word dissertation to a 12,000-word paper, and suitable journals for potential submission.

During and after supervision, the supervisor is available generally to answer questions in a face-to-face or online meeting, or by a typed response, whichever is appropriate.

IV METHODOLOGY

The authors secured ethics approval from the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee for a study on undergraduate LLB(Hons) dissertation supervisees' supervision experiences.⁶⁹ The authors wanted to investigate the undergraduate supervisees' attitudes about the lead author's literature-informed supervision process, and whether what the supervisees valued about supervision was consistent with what the literature suggested undergraduate supervisees would value about supervision. The authors were approved to administer a survey and focus group to collect results. The study period started on 13 December 2021.

The lead author's 12 LLB(Hons) dissertation supervisees up until the study period were invited to participate in the study. The participants were invited to respond to a fairly comprehensive survey about their supervision experience in six parts: pre-supervision; supervisor selection; expectations when formally enrolling in the dissertation; the supervision process; supervisor-supervisee relationship; and overall reflections. In each part, students responded to

⁶⁹ The study was approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on 3 December 2021 for three years (reference number 23675).

Likert scales, open-ended boxes for students to elaborate, and other open-ended questions. The participants were invited after they submitted their dissertation. All 12 supervisees responded to the survey (100.0% participation rate).

The Likert scales had five points: strongly agree (SA) (5), agree (A) (4), neither agree nor disagree (N) (3), disagree (D) (2) and strongly disagree (SD) (1). Generally agree (GA) is SA+A and generally disagree (GD) is D+SD. The Likert scale data is reported as the percentage of students who responded SA, the percentage of students who responded GA, the mode and the median.⁷⁰ The students' responses to each open-ended question were coded. The coding process involved, for each question, creating codes by identifying themes in the students' responses, and using those codes to label and organise the students' responses. The open-ended coded responses are reported to supplement the Likert scale data where appropriate.

To help with triangulation, the supervisees were also invited to participate in a focus group. As the dissertation is the final assessment that students complete in the LLB(Hons) program, all supervisees had left the university by the study period. Moreover, being high-achieving LLB(Hons) graduates, each supervisee was working as a judge's clerk or law graduate, many overseas. The authors made several attempts to schedule a focus group with at least three supervisee participants, but this was not possible given the supervisees' busy and conflicting schedules. The supervisees had already provided detailed survey responses, taking about one hour on average to respond to the survey. The authors agreed that they had collected sufficient data to analyse and discuss the supervisees' attitudes about the supervision process.

V RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A Goals

Students were asked for their goals for the dissertation before approaching a supervisor. The open-ended responses indicate the most common goals were to score a good grade, honour the importance of the topic, produce something they were passionate about, write a publishable dissertation, and produce something they could leverage for career purposes. Students strongly agreed that the supervisor's draft review process was helpful for achieving their goals for the dissertation (SA=100.0%, GA=100.0%, mode=5, median=5). Specifically, students generally agreed that the supervisor's introduction review (SA=75.0%, GA=100.0%, mode=5, median=5), first draft review (SA=83.3%, GA=100.0%, mode=5, median=5) and second draft review (SA=66.7%, GA=100.0%, mode=5, median=5) were helpful for achieving their goals for the dissertation.

⁷⁰ The mean cannot be used as a measure of central tendency because it has no meaning: the responses SA, A, N, D and SD have a rank order but the intervals between them cannot be presumed equal. See Susan Jamieson, 'Likert Scales: How to (ab)Use them' (2004) 38(12) *Medical Education* 1217, 1217–1218.

Students were asked how each step was helpful for achieving their goals. The open-ended responses are instructive. The introduction review gave students confidence, clarified the standard that would be expected, and focused them on writing quality over quantity early on their dissertation journey: ‘It definitely got things off to a good start, and made me feel like I was making progress’; ‘[It was] very helpful for knowing what level of writing I needed in order to receive the grade I was after’; ‘[It] helped highlight areas that I should do more research in, or better discuss or understand’; ‘[It] helped me to refine my ideas so that my focus was more on the ultimate argument of my dissertation rather than just writing everything I could on the topic’; and ‘It was certainly helpful to receive feedback early and start the refinement and critical think of the big picture of the dissertation early on, when there was the opportunity to make changes and more substantive developments’. Further, some students commented that being challenged to get the introduction right made the rest of the dissertation journey easier, for example:

Without a strong introduction, I would have lacked a clear direction in my dissertation. In writing an introduction, I needed to know where I was heading. Therefore, I needed to know the structure (loosely) of my dissertation and what I wanted to say. [My supervisor] told me that once I had written a strong introduction, the writing process itself would become easier because I would have a skeleton to work on. I would understand where the dissertation was heading. He was correct.

Students reflected that the first draft review improved their argument, structure, logic and word allocation: ‘[My supervisor] helping me to narrow down my scope helped my most important arguments to stand out’; and ‘[The review] showed me where I needed to put the most work into to bring sections up to standard, as well as making sure it was packaged in a logical and compelling way’. Further:

My first draft was a bit of a mess — it had all the right content but lacked structure and argument. [The] review and discussion with me about it afterward really helped me add structure to my argument and take a more direct approach to guiding my reader through my argument which helped immensely not only with my own understanding of what I was trying to say going forward but with the strength and quality of my argument.

Ultimately, the first draft review, with its balance of responsive and directive approaches,⁷¹ gave students confidence and enjoyment: ‘It was helpful as it gave me the confidence that my work was tracking towards my goals’; ‘[In] receiving a lot of constructive comments and feedback I felt more confident in what I was writing and more confident in how I was articulating my arguments’; and ‘[My] confidence made the overall experience more enjoyable’.

Students commended the second draft review’s focus on targeted constructive feedback on student concerns and questions, for example:

[The] second review really elevated my dissertation into the A grade range, which is the only real goal I had going in to writing my paper. His review

⁷¹ See Malcolm (n 5) 104.

was extremely thorough and wherever he identified a potential issue, he was extremely diligent in explaining not only what the issue might be (seeking clarification if he had misunderstood, which in itself allowed me to tidy up my argument to avoid such ambiguity moving forward) but also how I could go about addressing it, which was invaluable. His comments were always clear, and he always explained them to me if I had any questions and even when I didn't, to make sure I understood what he meant so that my final draft could be as polished as possible. [My supervisor] also always made a point of leading with the positives so that you never felt like you were on the wrong track or doing a bad job which was again invaluable in a support sense.

Students reflected that the second draft review not only identified final weaknesses but enhanced enduring strengths: '[It] was helpful not just to ensure the stylistic polish was in place, but to help make sure arguments were as strong and thorough as possible'; '[It] allowed me to add the final touches to my dissertation and see areas where I had been overly descriptive (to cut down wordcount) and errors in my work (such as citations not matching statements I had made etc.)'; and '[It] acknowledged where the strengths of my argument were and I focused on them in order to do justice to my initial goals'. The iterative approach leads students closer to independence. By step four, the emphasis has moved away from modelling, to trialling and facilitating practice development.⁷² Further, the second draft review gave students confidence: 'I felt confident in my ability to write, and was confident that what I was writing about was important'; 'I really got to see my ideas not only come to life but start to sound good and clear. This was a great experience and allowed me to relax a bit'; 'It was helpful to get overview feedback of a piece of work that could be a finished piece, and to provide the final steer to push my work over the line for grade-related goals'; and '[It] provided me with the direction I needed to finish the dissertation to a level I was happy with'.

The supervisor provided the parameters for the four-step review process and students took responsibility for their progress through that process. In particular, students took a lead on project planning,⁷³ which included setting deadlines (with guidance from the supervisor)⁷⁴ for the introduction, first draft and second draft, and working to meet those deadlines.⁷⁵ Students generally agreed that the deadlines were appropriately spaced out (SA=91.7%, GA=100.0%, mode=5, median=5). Students believed that the review process enabled them to maintain a healthy balance between their dissertation work and other commitments (SA=66.7%, GA=100.0%, mode=5, median=5). Furthermore, students strongly agreed that the deadlines set by their supervisors were helpful (SA=100.0%, GA=100.0%, mode=5, median=5) and realistic (SA=83.3%, GA=100.0%, mode=5, median=5). The open-ended responses indicate that students found the deadlines helpful, for example: 'The deadlines were definitely helpful

⁷² See Wisker (n 17) 5.

⁷³ See Wisker (n 6) 4.

⁷⁴ See Maxwell and Smyth (n 20) 409; Aitken et al (n 23) 783.

⁷⁵ See Wisker (n 6) 4.

as self-imposed deadlines are not usually as motivating and it increased accountability to progress the dissertation'. Students were also asked whether the deadlines caused them stress, anxiety or negative emotions: only three students agreed, whereas five students neither agreed nor disagreed and four students generally disagreed (SA=0.0%, GA=25.0%, mode=3, median=3). The open-ended responses indicate that the deadlines caused some students stress, for example: 'Obviously deadlines caused stress, but it was manageable'. For some students, the stress was mitigated when students communicated the stress to the supervisor, who allowed flexibility: 'The deadlines did cause me stress when I failed to meet them due to COVID disruptions as I didn't want to let my supervisor or myself down but [my supervisor] was very helpful and kind in being flexible with them'; 'I found the deadlines very helpful and realistic in terms of managing my own time and commitments. [My supervisor] was also able to alter/extend these if I was struggling to meet them'; 'The deadlines were helpful as guidelines but were also flexible which was a good balance'; and '[My supervisor] was extremely helpful in setting realistic, manageable deadlines and communicating with me to ensure they would be reached and/or pushing them out where necessary'. Students also appreciated the supervisor's respect for the student's time and their capacity to manage commitments:⁷⁶

What I found healthy about working with [my supervisor] was that he was realistic about deadlines. He acknowledges that I was working full-time and had extra-curriculars as well as a social life. He understood that sometimes I would not make the deadlines, but knew it was better for me to have them in place (usually much earlier in advance than necessary) so I could shift them if I needed (or he could too if he needed more time). The mutual respect he generated between us as supervisor and supervisee is unmatched ... [My supervisor] created a supportive and motivating environment where I felt I could ask him questions and shift deadlines. However, I still knew he had high expectations of me and that some deadlines were non-negotiable, but only because certain expectations and deadlines benefitted me and the dissertation I wrote.

However, some students reported they would have felt stressed regardless of the supervisor's approach to deadlines: 'I think as a law student, deadlines will always cause a degree of stress'; and 'I was going to feel that way about the deadline regardless of how long I had to write the dissertation, simply because it's scary to put in so much effort into a piece of work and not know if the outcome will reflect that hard work'. Conversely, some students reported no deadline-related stress at all: 'Everything about my dissertation process was collaborative. [My supervisor] was always supportive and communicative which made the whole dissertation process easy and stress free'. Collaboration indicates mutuality. Many of the students' comments indicate that the deadlines worked because the students trusted their supervisor cared not only about their success but also their

⁷⁶ See Maxwell and Smyth (n 20) 409; Aitken et al (n 23) 783.

autonomy and well-being.⁷⁷ It was important that students perceived that the supervisor was their supporter as well as their critic.⁷⁸ Collaboration also indicates the supervision was a learning journey for both the supervisor and student.⁷⁹

Students generally reported that their experience with the introduction review affected their expectations for the rest of the supervision process going forward: most students responded that it encouraged them and boosted their confidence, whereas a couple of students responded that it did not affect their expectations. The first draft review provided some students with reassurance and made others 'realise how much work [they] needed to do'. The second draft review largely did not change students' expectations, with students variously responding that it 'put [them] at ease to know that [the] dissertation was coming together and that it would be as polished as possible' and confirmed that the supervisor was 'engaged, involved and supportive'. However, for a few students, it sank in that they would now have limited contact with the supervisor until the dissertation was submitted and graded. The supervisory relationship must change over time for a successful outcome to be achieved.⁸⁰ Following the second draft review, it was important that the supervisor enabled the student to take ownership of their submission.⁸¹

B *Progress*

The 15,000-word dissertation is the largest assessment the students would write in their undergraduate law program. The students would have written the next-largest assessment — a 10,000-word seminar paper — one or two years prior. Students were asked how much work they had put into the dissertation before formally enrolling. The open-ended responses indicate a wide spread of preparation from little work (such as brainstorming topics) to some work (such as undertaking preliminary research). Students were asked whether they had framed a research question before approaching their supervisor: four students generally agreed, two students neither agreed nor disagreed, and six students generally disagreed (SA=0.0%, GA=33.3%, mode=4, median=2.5).

Students strongly agreed that the supervisor's draft review process was helpful for their dissertation progress (SA=100.0%, GA=100.0%, mode=5, median=5). The review process allowed the supervisor to provide guidance on the dissertation's content and organisation, which the literature considered challenging to achieve⁸² but important for maintaining student autonomy in the process.⁸³

⁷⁷ See Roberts and Seaman (n 28) 32; Woolhouse (n 28) 33.

⁷⁸ Compare Fragouli (n 18) 2.

⁷⁹ See Manderson (n 8) 126, 128.

⁸⁰ Macfadyen et al (n 19) 992.

⁸¹ Ibid 997. See Roberts and Seaman (n 28) 36–37.

⁸² Chen et al (n 4) 97.

⁸³ Del Río, Díaz-Vázquez and Maside Sanfiz (n 14) 162.

At the initial stage, the student was responsible for problem identification and theorising,⁸⁴ and supervisor support was limited to developing the student's initial ideas, enabling the student to exercise authority over the project and develop learner independence.⁸⁵ In this way, the student's own vision for the project was respected and not overridden by the supervisor.⁸⁶ Students generally agreed that the supervisor's introduction review (SA=75.0%, GA=100.0%, mode=5, median=5), first draft review (SA=91.7%, GA=100.0%, mode=5, median=5) and second draft review (SA=75.0%, GA=100.0%, mode=5, median=5) were helpful for their dissertation progress.

Students were asked how each step was helpful for their dissertation progress. The open-ended responses indicate that many factors that were helpful for achieving goals were also helpful for dissertation progress. The introduction review clarified the standard that would be expected:

The introduction review quickly humbled me, but it also set my expectations about how much feedback, and what kinds of feedback, I could expect going forward, without it being too overwhelming (i.e. if the 10,000 word draft was the first opportunity to get feedback, I think it would have seriously harmed my confidence in trying to complete the dissertation, because there would have been so many unexpected corrections, changes etc.).

Students also appreciated the early opportunity for feedback on their direction: '[The introduction review] made me conceptualise the structure and argument at an early stage so that the research process was more structured'; '[It was] helpful as with slight restructuring I could easily see how the dissertation was going to flow, and also flow in a way that bolstered my argument'; and '[It] helped me properly flesh out my idea, without the commitment of having to write 10,000 words and then realising I want to change my argument'. Ultimately, the introduction review helped students to pace the dissertation journey, for example: '[It] really set me in good stead for writing my dissertation. [My supervisor's] expertise and guidance helped me ensure the scope of my dissertation was manageable'. The introduction review set an expectation about how feedback should be acted on and gave students an opportunity early in the supervision to develop that skill.⁸⁷

Reflecting on the first draft review, students valued the supervisor's feedback on how to strengthen their arguments, and prompts for more critical thought: '[T]he feedback was specific and helped me narrow down on my most important ideas'; '[It] helped to guide me more in the right direction of where I wanted my dissertation to go'; and 'It was helpful to get clarity on specific aspects of my argument and development and ensure that I was tracking towards a polished work'. Further:

⁸⁴ Wisker (n 6) 4.

⁸⁵ See *ibid*; Malcolm (n 5) 104.

⁸⁶ See Todd, Smith and Bannister (n 7) 171.

⁸⁷ Razali, Hawe and Dixon (n 31) 1494.

[My supervisor] helped me to see the bigger picture of my dissertation (as I had been caught up in the finer details of each section). He helped me to rethink my argument and the different sections I thought I needed in my dissertation to communicate my idea. For instance, he questioned whether I needed to add a case study to my dissertation (to ground it in a context and an example, rather than speaking about it almost in the abstract).

Students responded that it was helpful to discuss the allocation of words: '[It] helped me cut down a lot of my initial "background" information in the first few sections so that I could focus more on the crux of the dissertation'; and '[It helped to consider] what should be expanded, what parts he liked, what I could cut out eventually'. Whilst students appreciated the constructive feedback, they also acknowledged that the supervisor celebrated successful aspects of the work. Together, the supervisor's thoroughness and supportiveness at the first draft review increased student confidence: '[The] review and guidance really set me at ease that I was on the right track, and gave me the confidence and guidance I needed to get my second draft in to good shape'; '[It] built my confidence, made me feel like I knew enough about the topic, and had a valid argument that I could write more about'; and '[It] was very in depth and tactfully pointed out weak areas and issues in a productive way as well as celebrating successful portions which raised my confidence'.

The second draft review's focus on targeted constructive feedback on student concerns and questions gave students confidence to finalise the dissertation on their own: '[It] was extremely helpful in affirming that the case study was the right direction to take the dissertation in'; and '[It] confirmed that I had elevated the analysis in my dissertation and that I needed to make a couple of changes to reach that higher level'. Further:

[My supervisor] was able to pick up on nuances I had overlooked, indicate where points needed to be fleshed out and where things got repetitive. He was also extremely diligent in helping me identify inconsistencies/holes in my argument and how those could be addressed to take my dissertation to the next level.

Overall, the review process allows the supervisor to variously take the roles of mentor, trainer and supporter, as well as critic, as needed to progress the dissertation.⁸⁸

C *Feedback*

Students were asked how much feedback they expected to receive at the outset: 58.3% expected feedback on drafts, 25.0% expected feedback on drafts as well as on smaller issues throughout and 16.7% expected little feedback at all. Some students noted their response was based on their peers' experiences with other supervisors. Students were then asked whether, by the end of the process, they received the same, more or less feedback than they expected at the outset: 72.7% reported

⁸⁸ See Fragouli (n 18) 2; MacFayden et al (n 19) 994.

more and 27.3% reported the same. One student responded: ‘Overall much more comprehensive feedback than I expected, especially on the intro and first draft’.

Students reported receiving more in-depth feedback than they expected at each step in the review process. For the introduction review, students generally agreed that the feedback was more useful than they expected to receive (SA=58.3%, GA=100.0%, mode=5, median=5) and many students commented that the feedback was more detailed, specific and in-depth than they had expected at that point. Whilst some would have liked more direction when developing the research question, they appreciated that early feedback focused on diverse aspects of their work, including finding sources, refining the scope and argument, and enhancing the structure, flow and style. Students also valued that the feedback was honest, constructive and supportive,⁸⁹ for example:

[My supervisor’s] review process of providing comments and then discussing them with you once you had had a chance to review and reflect on them was extremely helpful and facilitated an excellent supervisor/supervisee relationship. He always managed to craft his comments in a way that allowed me to understand what he was trying to assist with but in a way that was positive and didn’t make me second guess myself. His kind honesty, helpful guidance and constant support were more useful than I ever expected.

Ultimately, students found the thorough feedback helpful for progressing their dissertation: ‘[I] felt from this feedback I had a very clear idea of how my dissertation would be set out and what it would accomplish’; and ‘[It] engaged with my work and helped steer me in the right direction’.

Similarly, for the first draft review, students generally agreed that the feedback was more useful feedback than they expected to receive (SA=83.3%, GA=83.3%, mode=5, median=5); two students neither agreed nor disagreed. And for the second draft review, students generally agreed that the feedback was more useful than they expected to receive (SA=66.7%, GA=83.3%, mode=5, median=5); two students neither agreed nor disagreed.

Overall, students described the supervisor’s feedback on the drafts as ‘very detailed’, ‘meticulous’, and ‘extensive’, noting that it was more specific than they had anticipated receiving, addressing not just the argument but also ‘resources, structure, format, conclusion, signposting, punctuation [and] racial sensitivity’.⁹⁰ Students reflected that the robustness of the feedback improved their arguments, increased their confidence that they would achieve their goals for the dissertation and encouraged them to act on the feedback they received — an important skill.⁹¹ For example:

I trusted [my supervisor] to give me the guidance I needed to progress my draft and that is exactly what he did. He catered his review to my learning

⁸⁹ Compare Todd, Bannister and Clegg (n 11) 342.

⁹⁰ Compare Aitken et al (n 23) 777; Todd, Smith and Bannister (n 7) 166; Fajans and Falk (n 31) 369.

⁹¹ See Razali, Hawe and Dixon (n 31) 1494.

needs once he had seen what kind of shape it was in and what kind of guidance would assist me the most moving forward. It was also extremely reassuring to know he likewise trusted me to take his feedback on and make the necessary adjustments moving forward.

Students also reflected that the feedback 'helped move [their] arguments to a higher standard' and 'helped [their] most important arguments to stand out', which 'allowed [their] own ideas to expand'.

D Contact, Autonomy and Guidance

Students were asked how often they expected to meet with their supervisor. The open-ended responses indicate that about half of the students expected to meet after each review and the other half of the students expected to meet as needed to ask questions and seek support. Some students noted that they expected to meet online given the supervision was during the COVID-19 pandemic. When contact was primarily online, supervision meetings would begin with dedicated time for the supervisor and student to check in with each other, and talk about life and topics unrelated to the mahi (work) at hand — a common practice in Māori hui (meetings), which helps to build and maintain connectivity.⁹²

Regardless, students generally liked the amount of contact they had with their supervisor in the four-step review supervision process. Most students generally agreed that they had enough face-to-face or Zoom contact (SA=66.7%, GA=83.3%, mode=5, median=5); two students neither agreed nor disagreed. Further, most students generally agreed that they had enough email or messaging contact (SA=75.0%, GA=100.0%, mode=5, median=5). Students were also asked whether, by the end of the process, they met with their supervisor the same, more or less than they expected at the outset: most students responded the same as expected, acknowledging that the supervision was during the COVID-19 pandemic, which made it trickier to meet. Some students believed the supervisor was more available and responsive by email or messaging than they expected at the outset. However, others noted that they would have appreciated more contact in between the formal review stages, such as '[less] formal check-in milestones to ensure progress, especially between introduction and first drafts'.

Students generally agreed that their own vision was valued by their supervisor and not overridden by the supervisor (SA=75.0%, GA=100.0%, mode=5, median=5). Respect enabled students to be curious, creative and courageous:⁹³ 'I had a strong vision for my dissertation and I was not pushed away from that at all despite it being very big picture'; 'I never felt that [my supervisor] took over my idea'; and 'I think [my supervisor] helped focus it but it remained the same throughout'. One student responded:

⁹² See Carter et al (n 35) 384, 387, 391.

⁹³ See Sá, Santos and Serpa (n 13) 158; Maxwell and Smyth (n 20) 409.

It is almost like no other supervisor knew what I was going for. But [my supervisor] completely understood my vision for it and, given it was quite theoretical/original/not substantiated, I didn't expect this much support for it. He was truly great and just allowed me to come to conclusions on my own while helping with explanations of what I was trying to say.

Another student responded:

My vision was honoured throughout the dissertation. [My supervisor] made it clear that the dissertation was my work and that he supported my vision. He provided me with constructive feedback that enhanced my research question, ideas and argument, rather than telling me what to write.

Other students commended the supervisor for trying to understand what the student was trying to achieve with their work: '[My supervisor] consistently checked in with me to ensure our thinking was on the same page, and that he understood where my head was at'; and '[My supervisor] was very aware that I was passionate about my piece, and shared the same sentiment about it'.⁹⁴ In these ways, the supervisor enabled students to develop their identities.⁹⁵

Similarly, students generally agreed they were satisfied with their self-determination and independence in the dissertation process (SA=83.3%, GA=100.0%, mode=5, median=5). Students reported being allowed to come to conclusions on their own, reflecting that the supervisor: 'allowed my own ideas to expand'; and 'was always very clear that the critical thought needed to be from my own perspective and gave me freedom to come to my own views'. Moreover, one student reported being comfortable 'asking for [the supervisor's] advice and sometimes declining his constructive criticism (i.e. making my own calls)' and reflected that this made them feel 'empowered and encouraged'.

At the same time, students generally agreed that they received sufficient guidance from their supervisor (SA=83.3%, GA=100.0%, mode=5, median=5). For example, one student commented:

[My supervisor's] approach was always collaborative. He always made helpful suggestions and offered useful guidance. He never directed me toward a certain topic or idea but rather gave me all the information I needed to make my own decision and offered his expertise and practical experience to answer all of my questions and help me settle on a manageable scope.

Another student wrote: 'We [worked] as a team'. The supervision enabled students to develop the important skill of collaboration in assessment,⁹⁶ which many law students resist at university.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Compare Fragouli (n 18) 3.

⁹⁵ See Wisker (n 6) 4–5.

⁹⁶ See Sá, Santos and Serpa (n 13) 158.

⁹⁷ See Clifford S Zimmerman, 'Thinking beyond My Own Interpretation: Reflections on Collaborative and Cooperative Learning Theory in the Law School Curriculum' (1999) 31 *Arizona State Law Journal* 957, 965, 971–975, 982–985; Dorothy H Evensen 'To Group or Not to Group: Students' Perceptions of Collaborative Learning Activities in Law School' (2004) 28 *Southern Illinois University Law Journal* 343, 368–372, 378–380, 382–383, 385–386; Mark Israel, Elizabeth

Thus, the relationship between supervisor and student changed over time,⁹⁸ creating an effective supervision relationship in which student growth was fostered through support and targeted interventions which did not undermine student ownership of the process.⁹⁹ It would appear that the approach built a trusting relationship which fostered student progress while supporting student autonomy.¹⁰⁰

E *Difficulties*

Students reported some difficulty with selecting a topic and a research question. Students were asked what was difficult about developing their initial idea into a research question. The open-ended responses indicate that students generally found it difficult to identify gaps in the existing literature, articulate their research question and grounding an interdisciplinary topic in law. Students generally relied on the supervisor for guidance, which was expected — supervisors tend to take a more leading role at the start of the supervision process.¹⁰¹ Most students felt that they were sufficiently supported when starting to develop their initial ideas into a research question (SA=91.7%, GA=100.0%, mode=5, median=5). The open-ended responses indicate that students found it helpful when the supervisor provided insight into the research process, raised potential research questions, suggested relevant resources, and assisted with formulating a research question that was 'specific and appropriate'. For example, one student responded that they 'had quite a conceptual starting point that [they] needed to refine into something more narrow and concrete'. Some students were hesitant, variously concerned about deciding on a topic, their topic being less well researched and wanting to do a good job. However, most students reported being confident that they would receive assistance and support from their supervisor.

Students generally found it difficult to structure and craft their introduction because it revealed uncertainty about the scope of their project.¹⁰² Indeed, students generally found it difficult to state their argument so early in the process, before undertaking substantial research and developing a draft. Nonetheless, some students reflected that it was challenging but 'worthwhile' to get something on paper early in the process to iteratively test and revise. Students generally valued the supervisor's introduction review, which highlighted areas for further work, assisted with the project's overall direction and made them feel like they were making progress.

Handsley and Gary Davis, 'It's the Vibe: Fostering Student Collaborative Learning in Constitutional Law in Australia' (2004) 38 *Law Teacher* 1, 8–10. See also James M Lang, 'Why Students Hate Group Projects (and How to Change That)', *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (Internet Article) <<https://www.chronicle.com/article/why-students-hate-group-projects-and-how-to-change-that>>.

⁹⁸ Aitken et al (n 23) 781.

⁹⁹ Roberts and Seaman (n 28) 36–37; Rowley and Slack (n 29) 177.

¹⁰⁰ See Roberts and Seaman (n 28) 33; Rowley and Slack (n 29) 180.

¹⁰¹ See Todd, Bannister and Clegg (n 11) 345.

¹⁰² See Wisker (n 17) 9.

Students reported that the first draft of 10,000 words presented three areas of difficulty. First, students found it difficult to source material which the literature highlights as a key skill for supervisees to master.¹⁰³ The task was more difficult than usual for these students given they were researching during the COVID-19 pandemic, including extended periods of lockdowns. If the student expressed that they were struggling with isolation, the supervisor adopted the role of counsellor to help them feel more connected and think more positively.¹⁰⁴ Secondly, students found it difficult to focus on ‘quality over quantity’ when developing the dissertation, including balancing time spent on research and actual writing. Thirdly, students found it difficult to manage their time and maintain motivation, partly due to feeling overwhelmed. The supervisor’s role is to challenge but also to motivate.¹⁰⁵

By the second draft (15,000 words), students reported finding it difficult to refine their existing work, including ‘drawing the arguments together’, ‘refining [their] conceptual arguments’, ‘ensuring [the] dissertation provided more of an argument than just a description’ and ‘getting the draft within the word count’. Some students found time management difficult, explaining that it was difficult to find the time to write and do additional research to respond to the supervisor’s provocations, and finalising the dissertation took longer than expected.

The difficulties encountered by the students are similar to those described in the literature. The supervisor’s review process generally mitigated the difficulties in ways that satisfied students’ expectations so that progress could be maintained. Some difficulties are inherent difficulties in supervising dissertations — for example, time management, particularly when the dissertation is scheduled for the final semester of the degree program and most students are working while completing the dissertation. The four-step review process keeps the student periodically accountable, which allows the supervisor to check in on the student and advise them about their progress.

VI CONCLUSION

The literature on supervision focuses primarily on postgraduate supervision. Whilst there is some scholarship on supervising undergraduates, there is essentially no scholarship on supervising undergraduate law students specifically. This article contributes to the literature by investigating undergraduate law students’ attitudes about a four-step review process for supervising undergraduate law students’ dissertations.

The article surveyed the literature related to the supervision of undergraduate law students, described the lead author’s supervision process, and presented and discussed the study results. The literature suggested that supervisees would value various supervisor attributes,

¹⁰³ Wisker (n 6) 4.

¹⁰⁴ See Derounian (n 30) 92.

¹⁰⁵ Todd, Bannister and Clegg (n 11) 343.

including passion and enthusiasm,¹⁰⁶ trust,¹⁰⁷ timely communication¹⁰⁸ and useful feedback.¹⁰⁹ The study confirms that the undergraduate law student supervisees largely valued what the literature suggested undergraduate students would value.

Students reported that each step in the four-step review supervision process was helpful for their dissertation progress and achieving their goals for the dissertation. Whilst it has other demonstrable benefits, the four-step review ultimately facilitates appropriately spaced, tailored feedback — which students considered more useful than anticipated — at logical points on the dissertation journey. The feedback improved the student's recognition of quality, enhanced their ability to evaluate their own progress and developed their feedback literacy.¹¹⁰ The iterative process, which should be transparently factored into the academic's workload, may also help to authenticate that the work is the student's own, at a time when students are increasingly using artificial intelligence.¹¹¹ The four-step review process has been successful instrumentally. The lead author supervised 12 undergraduate law dissertations in the study period and eight have been published or accepted for publication as at the time of writing, which is a respectable publication rate for undergraduate dissertations. The authors endorse the four-step supervision process for teachers who want to increase the likelihood that their undergraduate students produce publishable work.

The literature review exposes a dearth of literature on supervising undergraduate students, let alone undergraduate law students. Undergraduate and postgraduate students should not be conflated. The authors encourage others to formally study the supervision of undergraduate students so that the distinct motivations, attitudes and experiences of undergraduate supervisees are better understood and best practices for supervising undergraduate students can be developed.

Teachers are often provided training about how to supervise postgraduate research students but not provided training on how to supervise undergraduate research students. The authors endorse more formal training so that teachers are better informed about the literature on the supervision of undergraduate students.¹¹² Formal training might explain the roles that supervisors and students adopt,¹¹³ clarify the importance of iterative feedback¹¹⁴ and identify issues that often arise in undergraduate supervision.¹¹⁵ Where formal training is not available,

¹⁰⁶ Fragouli (n 18).

¹⁰⁷ Aitken et al (n 23).

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ See Boud and Molley (n 33) 703–705.

¹¹⁰ See generally *ibid.*

¹¹¹ See Michael Webb, 'Generative AI in further education and skills – the myths, the threats and the opportunities', Association of Colleges (Blog Post) <<https://www.aoc.co.uk/news-campaigns-parliament/news-views/aoc-blogs/generative-ai-in-further-education-and-skills-the-myths-the-threats-and-the-opportunities>>.

¹¹² See Sá, Santos and Serpa (n 13) 155; Kiley et al (n 46) 629; Malcolm (n 5) 104.

¹¹³ See Chen et al (n 4) 97; Malcolm (n 5) 104; Wisker (n 6) 4.

¹¹⁴ See Todd, Bannister and Clegg (n 11) 342; Boud and Molley (n 33) 703–705.

¹¹⁵ See Todd, Smith and Bannister (n 11) 336.

teachers might establish a community of interest to share literature-informed best practices. In either context, it might also be useful to discuss expectations for students in that discipline, institution or program, including what skills to expect an undergraduate student in that discipline, institution or program to enter the supervision with and develop during the process.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ See Wisker (n 6) 4; Rowley and Slack (n 29) 179.