

Supervision vs independence at the early stages of the research career.

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Due to a lack of regulation in the PhD-programmes, the level of independence of Early Stage Researchers (ESRs) varies from country to country and, even to a higher extent, from supervisor to supervisor. The situation spans from that of a totally dependent apprentice, only allowed to follow the “wise” orders of the Master (supervisor), to that of a junior researcher with a say in all matters that affect his/her career. Too often, being supervised is associated to a state of fully subordinated dependence, while a high degree of independence or freedom is thought to parallel a practically non-existent supervision. In my view though, supervision and independence are not opposite terms and a correct supervision should include a high level of (supervised) independence for the PhD candidate. Instead of a way of limiting ESR possibilities, supervision should be seen as a way to prepare the ESR to walk the path of a fully autonomous research career. The extent of independence should increase along with the researcher’s experience and should involve the active participation of the ESR in all decisions affecting his/her career such as the courses/training to be undertaken, the mobility paths to follow, which conferences to attend, where to present research results, etc. With appropriate advice (not orders) from the supervisor and other experienced researchers, the ESR will take his/her own meditated decisions that, in turn, will determine his/her future in the research career. ESR’s voice should also be heard when planning a research project or when discussing budgetary issues affecting his/her project, in this way the ESR will learn managing skills, which will be very useful at later stages of the research career.