

Mapping supervisor development programmes (0176)

Kelly Sisson¹, Karin Crawford¹, Fiona Denney¹

¹University of Lincoln, UK, ²Brunel University, UK

As the context of research education has changed, the demands placed on supervisors to ensure timely completions and quality outputs has increased. It is evident from early exploration that different approaches to supervisor development exist. Institutions largely develop their approaches in response to unique combinations of global, national and local drivers but it is unclear how and why supervisor development programmes are created from a pedagogical perspective and whether or not they work.

This paper seeks to explore the rationale for the development of seven different supervisor programmes as a starting point for further investigation into 'what works?' It will focus on the development of two programmes, one at the University of Lincoln which is grounded in the principles and practices of pedagogies of partnership, and one at Brunel University London, which focuses on supervisor development as part of wider support for academics as they progress through the academic lifecycle.

Paper

Widespread concerns about poor PhD completion rates, increased competition for funding and an increasingly diverse student body have raised many questions about the traditional 'master-apprentice' style approach to research supervision over the last 10 years (Kiley 2011, Taylor 2014). Universities have invariably responded by reviewing processes and regulations and instigating supervisor development programmes.

As evidence about the relationship between the quality of research supervision, completion times and student satisfaction has emerged (Denney, 2008; PRES, 2013), there has been increased focus on supervision pedagogy (Boud & Lee, 2005; McCallin & Nayar, 2012) and supervision as a specialist form of teaching (Pearson & Brew, 2002). The number of programmes to support research supervisors has continued to grow and despite the fact that many have been running for a number of years there remains a lack of research evidence about 'what works' (McCallin & Nayar, 2012).

In order to begin to understand how and why Universities are approaching supervisor development in significantly different ways, this session will present the findings of a mapping exercise undertaken highlighting key aspects of provision at seven Universities (five in the UK, one in Norway, one in Sweden). Unlike previous studies of this type (e.g. Kiley 2011) this study not only takes into account differences in national context but also includes a range of institutions that are diverse in terms of their size, profile, academic and student bodies. Data in relation to programme structure, length, mode of delivery, attendance and core programme content (including models of supervision discussed) will be presented along with brief rationale from each of the programme leaders as to why the programme was developed in this way and what the strengths and challenges of the approach have been. The aim of this exercise is to share and disseminate practice and to begin to

identify some of the many variables that could affect the impact of supervisor development programmes as we begin to explore a framework for evaluation. The paper will then focus on the approaches being used at the University of Lincoln and Brunel University, London.

As part of a wide scale review of postgraduate research regulations and processes at the University of Lincoln, work began in 2014-15 to re-design the supervisor development programme. The existing programme had received criticism for being too process driven and 'mechanistic' with supervisors asking for more focus on the relationship between student and supervisor and the pedagogy underpinning supervision. In the institutional context of revised regulations and a newly created Educational Development and Enhancement Unit, the team took the opportunity to employ a partnership approach to re-design the programme.

Engaging students as partners in their learning and the Higher Education community has become a core aim for the sector (Healy et al, 2014). The University of Lincoln has an established reputation for engaging students through partnership in the processes of institutional change, and developing learning and teaching practice, with the principle of 'Student as Producer' (Neary & Winn, 2009) underpinning the institutional learning and teaching strategy. Much of this work, however, focuses on partnership between undergraduate students and staff. There are very few published examples (sector wide) of postgraduate research students working in partnership with their supervisors, or examples of how the principles of partnership can be applied when academic staff take the role of 'students' as is the case with supervisor development programmes. This session will outline the rationale for engaging supervisors in the re-design of the programme, the process and the outcomes of the design exercise which resulted in a four part framework for supervisor development. Within the framework there is a formal training programme which will be mandatory for staff who wish to supervise at Lincoln; a mechanism for online updating with regard to amendments to the regulations or processes; opportunities for supervisors to engage in ongoing continuing professional development and College or School based supervisor forums which will be peer led and encourage the sharing of practice, concerns and ideas at local level. In contrast with many supervisor development programmes the University of Lincoln has opted not to include refresher training for supervisors but instead to build in the notion of ongoing 'good standing' in line with the Higher Education Academy's requirement for Fellowship holders. Many of the supervisors who have been involved in the creation of the framework will also be involved in the delivery of CPD sessions and running the local forums.

Brunel University London is at a similar stage in redesigning supervisor development as the University of Lincoln. A university-wide restructure in 2014 created a new centre (the Brunel Educational Excellence Centre) aimed at supporting the development of academic staff and responsibility for training supervisors passed from the Graduate School to BEEC. This provided an ideal opportunity to review the current training programme and work commenced in spring 2015 to develop two supervisor workshops, one for new supervisors, and a refresher session for experienced supervisors. Academics were consulted as part of the process and there are plans to develop further sessions as part of the HEA-accredited CPD framework commencing at Brunel on 1 September 2015. The aim at Brunel is primarily to support academic staff development throughout the academic career lifecycle, and to enable staff to feel competent when taking on new roles or developing

themselves further in existing ones. The session will conclude with reflections from the programme co-ordinators on the strengths and weaknesses of the approaches used and make recommendations for future practice.

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