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**Handout 2 – Implications for supervisory
practice**

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Introduction

Each of the changes discussed in the earlier section has had implications for supervisory practice.

Increased student numbers

As, through massification, the number of research students has risen sharply at a time when, in many research-intensive institutions, the pool of supervisors has not grown pro rata, in many cases the result has been an increase in the numbers of research students whom staff are expected to supervise.

Particularly outside the sciences, this increase in numbers has been compounded by a broadening of the research areas which supervisors are expected to cover. So, instead of supervising directly within their own area of expertise, the need to accommodate larger numbers has led to some supervisors being allocated more and more students whose research interests are peripheral to their own (see Neumann 2003, Ives and Rowley 2005).

This double bind of larger numbers and greater breadth has added significantly to supervisory workloads. As such, it has challenged the traditional view that research supervision can be perceived as a “labour of love” on the part of supervisors, an opportunity for them to work with a student within their own area of research, which is its own reward. Now, there are increasing pressures within the system to recognise that time spent on research supervision should be included in departmental workload models.

Another facet of the increase in numbers has been a shift in focus away from the traditional model of supervising students singly and towards group supervision, particularly in the early stages (see for example Graham and Grant 1997, Samara 2006). Clearly, this demands additional skills from supervisors in terms of managing groups while still ensuring that individuals receive appropriate attention.

Supporting international students

International research students bring considerable benefits, including highly-motivated and talented students, cultural enrichment, prestige, opportunities for future research collaborations, funding, and possible economic and political contacts (see for example Trice 2003 and 2005, Andrade 2006, Robson and Turner 2007, Krause 2007). But they may also face considerable challenges, not just in terms of the well-known phenomenon of culture shock, but also what Scheyvnes *et al.* (2003: 313) have described as “study shock”. The latter can include; different perceptions of academic roles; different thinking and learning styles; limited research experience and skills; cultural and language issues in verbal and non-verbal communication; producing academic writing; and gaining access to departmental cultures. Supervisors are now expected to play a role in supporting international students to overcome challenges of these kinds.

Supporting diverse home students

The need to support students to overcome “study shock” is not confined to international students, but may include domestic students, particularly those from non-traditional backgrounds who have the potential but not necessarily the confidence to succeed.

In addition, there are issues stemming from the fact that, while the composition of the domestic candidate population has become much more diverse, this is only in the early

stages of feeding through to the supervisor population, which remains disproportionately traditional. This can lead to supervisors, wittingly or unwittingly, treating some groups less favourably than others.

So, for example, there is a body of evidence suggesting that female students may variously: be given less time than men by male supervisors; (Conrad 1994); relegated to marginal problems in the lab. (Becher *et al.* 1994); be physically isolated from the main research group in their work (Delamont *et al.* 2000); be given less critical feedback (Leonard 2001); be directly discriminated against on grounds of gender (Herzig 2004); be subjected to sexual harassment (Lee 1998, Appel and Dalhgren 2003); and receive less encouragement from their supervisors to publish (Seagram *et al.* 1998, Dunham and Scott 2001, Keith *et al.* 2002).

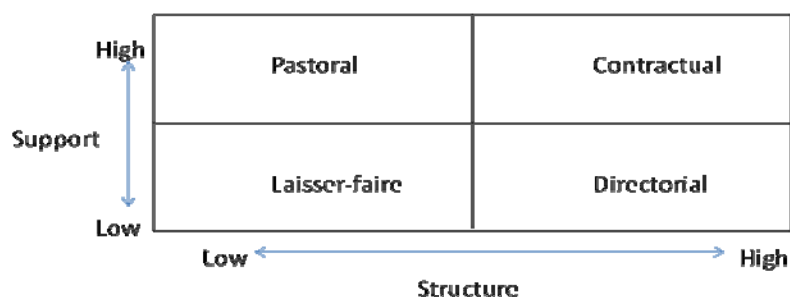
In view of this, and other evidence, for example in relation to disabled students (see for example Farrar and Young 2008), it is clear that supervisors now need to be aware of diversity issues and be able to respond effectively to them. Similarly, they need an understanding of the needs of part-time students and to adjust their practice accordingly (MCulloch and Stokes 2008).

Meeting higher student expectations

The shift away from a “master-apprentice” paradigm and towards a “provider-consumer” one implies that, rather than doing what they always have done, supervisors need to actively consider the best ways of supervising students in relation to their needs, in other words to develop the pedagogy of supervision. In particular, they need to be aware that they may have a preferred style of supervision, which may or may not fit with the needs of their students.

A review of the literature on supervisory styles by Gatfield (2005) extracted two key dimensions upon which supervisor styles have been arrayed, namely “structure” and “support”, which was used to develop a typology of preferred supervisor styles as “laissez-faire”, “pastoral” “directorial” and “contractual”.

Gatfield’s Paradigm of Supervisory Styles



In absolute terms, there is no right or wrong among these supervisory styles or reason to suggest that one is inherently better than another. But there may be in relative terms, reflecting the fact that each of these styles embodies assumptions not just about supervisors and their behaviours, but also about the needs of candidates. So the laissez-faire style assumes that candidates are capable of managing both the research project and themselves; the pastoral style that they are capable of managing the former but need support for the latter; the directorial one that they need support in managing the research project but not in managing themselves; and the contractual one that they need to negotiate the extent of support in both.

As Malfoy and Webb (2000) have suggested, as long as there is congruence between the supervisory style and the student's style, there should be no difficulties; but where there is incongruence, major problems can result. So, in order to offer quality supervision, supervisors need to be aware of their preferred styles and those of their students, and, as Pearson and Brew (2002) have argued, able to deploy a repertoire of supervisory styles which can be adopted as appropriate to meet the needs of candidates.

Clearly, in order to be adaptable, supervisors need to have some idea of their own expectations, and of the needs of the candidate. A few years ago Brown and Atkins (1988) developed a simple self-administered questionnaire to measure supervisors' and students' expectations.

You should score yourselves on the Brown/Atkins questionnaire, compare it with the score of your neighbour, and discuss any differences.

Supporting students to complete on time

As supervisors are under pressure to get students through and on time, it is important that they have a knowledge and understanding of the factors associated with retention and completion. Research by Manathunga (2002) has identified four key sets of behaviours indicating that students were experiencing difficulties during their research, namely: constantly changing the topic or planned work; avoiding communication with their supervisor; isolating themselves from their school and other students; avoiding submitting work for review. These are all forms of academic procrastination, and further work by Ahern and Manathunga (2004) has sought to conceptualise the causes of such procrastination and on that basis suggest how students might be, as they put it, "clutch-started". In particular, on the basis of their research, they classified blockages as lying in one or more of three domains—cognitive, affective, and social—and identified supervisory strategies designed to support students to overcome them.

Administering university policies and procedures

Given that doctoral supervision is increasingly situated within a regulatory framework, supervisors need to have a knowledge and understanding of that framework. As McWilliam (2004: 12) has put it:

The good supervisor is longer the thoughtful sage or mentor tucked away in a private office surrounded by sandstone and ivy. S/he is now part of a team, a dextrous and capable user of, and contributor to, the university's systems for monitoring throughput, and attentive to the changing needs of the students as they progress through the programme. S/he understands the importance of timely completion, and the special needs of each milestone in terms of what is required administratively, not just pedagogically.

Supporting students to acquire generic skills

The re-definition of the doctorate in terms of preparation for employment in the knowledge economy can be a sore subject for supervisors, and many do not think that it is part of their role (see for example Dahan 2007, Nyquist and Woodford 2000, Rowland 2003).

Nonetheless, supervisors have to be aware of the issues relating to employability, and of any roles which institutions designate for them, which may include conducting regular training needs analyses, pointing students towards opportunities to meet needs, and monitoring their progress in meeting targets.

Supervising new types of doctorates

Finally, there is the issue for supervisors of being asked to supervise different types of doctorates, including professional and practice-based doctorates.

While many institutions seem to assume that, if a supervisor has supervised a PhD, he or she will be able to supervise a professional doctorate, this does not necessarily follow. As the matter was put in one report (UKCGE 2002: 37), “Universities offering professional doctorates need to be aware that the supervision role is complex and that it is not entirely the same as the supervision of a PhD”.

One of the reasons that it is not entirely the same as a PhD is that a professional doctorate involves making a contribution to practice in the field, and one of the reasons why the supervision role is more complex is that there is usually also a non-academic supervisor from the relevant profession. This has the potential to lead to conflict between the two supervisors over the scope and nature of the research project with one pulling in the academic direction and the other in that of practice (see for example Loan-Clarke and Preston 2002), which needs to be effectively managed.

Conclusions

Until the 1980s, as McWilliam and James (2002: 117) have argued, doctoral education was a matter of the “precocious few [emulating] the master as scholar” and conducted in private spaces remote from normal teaching or industry and commerce. In this closeted world, the conventional wisdom was that the only qualification necessary to supervise doctoral candidates was to be research-active. The logic underpinning this was summarised twenty years ago by Rudd (1985: 79-80) in that “if one can do research than one presumably can supervise it.’

Over the past two decades or so, there have been dramatic changes in the doctorate which have evolved the Humboldtian model into a different form. In the process, they have also transformed the practice of doctoral supervisors. While being an active researcher is still a necessary condition for being a supervisor, it is no longer a sufficient one. As Brown and Atkins (1988: 115) have put it

‘to be an effective research supervisor, you need to be an effective researcher *and* [italics added] an effective supervisor

To be effective in a post-Humboldtian world, supervisors need also need to have the knowledge and skills to supervise more students, support international students, support domestic students from non-traditional backgrounds, meet student expectations, support students to complete and on time, administer university policies and procedures, support employability, and supervise new types of doctorates. For these reasons, as the author has argued elsewhere (Taylor and Beasley 2005), doctoral supervision can no longer be viewed as an adjunct of being active in research, but has to be viewed as an area of academic practice in its own right.

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