

**“Training the Trainers”  
Institutional Strategies for Developing Research Supervisors**

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As regulatory frameworks underpinning the quality of research degrees become embedded in Higher Educational Institutions throughout Europe and beyond, the challenge of ensuring that Research Supervisors/Advisors are fully equipped to give effective guidance and leadership to their doctoral candidates has been recognised as a key issue in the management of research degree programmes. At its launch conference in Lausanne (June, 2008) the EUA's new *Council for Doctoral Education* nominated Research Supervisor training as the highest priority for early debate and action. In many fora a clear need has been expressed for the development of appropriate Institutional strategies for training in Doctoral Supervision, especially (but not only) for new entrants to the profession. Indeed, some Quality Assurance Agencies in Europe have established criteria for the quinquennial audit of all research degree programmes at HEI level, including *inter alia* auditing the provision made for supervisor training.

Against graduate education developments at the international level, including the potential impact of the *Bologna Communiqué on the '3<sup>rd</sup> Doctoral Cycle'* from the Ministerial Meeting in London (May 2007), this presentation will review the strategic issues faced by HEIs in establishing appropriate programmes for training in Doctoral Supervision. The issue of generic training programmes for multidisciplinary groups *vis-à-vis* programmes for specialist groups will also be considered.

The design features and key *practical* strategies for the delivery of these training programmes will be summarised, based on the Author's experience in running Workshops on *Effective Research Supervision* at more than 10 HEIs in the UK and Ireland over the past 12 years.

The key elements of Research Supervisor training programmes include:

- Discussions in small groups on the attributes of an effective supervisor – and the characteristics of the “perfect research student”
- Succinct overviews of the supervisor's role at the principal stages of the research degree programme – from selection, induction, training needs analysis (TNA), development of generic and transferable skills, progress monitoring and review, through to Thesis completion and submission, preparation of candidates for the *Viva voce* and the elements of ‘Best Practice for Examiners’
- Case Studies are a valued and central feature of Doctoral Supervisor Training Workshops – participants explore real life scenarios illustrating typical problems arising, for example, in the first year or in the process of submission and examination – these scenarios (some of them horror stories of student mismanagement) are discussed in groups of 10-12 with expert facilitation, where participants try to identify suitable courses of action to resolve the issues presented, sharing their own supervision experiences and developing an insight into the doctoral supervision process – and learning to focus on where things can go wrong
- An input by the Graduate Dean and/or Administrative Staff on the regulatory framework for research degree programmes in the particular HEI is helpful – often on a separate occasion from the main Workshop

Experience indicates that Doctoral Supervisor training should be designed to ensure maximum opportunity for participants to discuss issues and share experiences, with the minimum of formal ‘didactic’ material. Finally, it is interesting to note that a key factor in the success of these Workshops on *Effective Research Supervision* is the explicit endorsement and support given by top management in the HEI.