

## Safeguarding and enhancing Research students' academic wellbeing:

### A Toolkit for Supervisors and Departments in Education (& Humanities and Social Sciences)

Theme	Benefit	What research students say	Strategies
<p><b><u>Being part of the Community</u></b></p> <p>Research students find that participating in the life of their university, spending time with peers, staff and developing their own academic networks can stimulate learning, makes the experience more enjoyable and ensures they are supported personally and academically during challenging times.</p>	<p>Break isolation</p> <p>Opportunities to develop good relationships with staff and peers</p> <p>Opportunities to develop support networks</p> <p>Opportunities for discussing your work</p> <p>Exchange of knowledge and ideas</p> <p>Development of networking and presentation skills</p> <p>Opportunities to build up academic networks</p> <p>Opportunities to</p>	<p><i>'It's not a solo act, a PhD, it's a collective offering of knowledge.'</i></p> <p><i>'Being part of a community makes a big difference to how you feel about your study... your role, the part you play in the wider scheme of things.'</i></p> <p><i>'I think you need to talk to people about your ideas, you need to hear back from people what they think about your ideas and if you don't have that it can have an impact on your wellbeing.'</i></p> <p><i>'I would say that actually informal opportunities for discussion areas influential not only on my wellbeing but on my progress in my doctorate.'</i></p> <p><i>'Support from online communities has helped me a lot... especially where if I have an idea I can very quickly find other people who have had similar thoughts before and see</i></p>	<p><b><u>Supervisors</u></b></p> <p>Highlight opportunities for and encourage attendance at meetings and academic events.</p> <p>Introduce research students to relevant contacts – peers, staff and academics in their field - and suggest helpful websites / mailing lists they might join – foster networking skills.</p> <p>Encourage involvement in extra-curricular / social activities, especially activities initiated by research students – informal opportunities to discuss work are highly beneficial to learning.</p> <p>Ask for research student volunteers to help organize seminars, conferences and other events.</p> <p>Encourage use of online forums for research students or in their topic / methodology area.</p> <p>Support research students with submission of abstracts for conferences / other events and with preparing for presentations.</p> <p>Ensure you are aware of and encourage participation in developmental opportunities within the department / institution.</p>

	<p>share experiences of being a research student</p> <p>Sharing of insider knowledge of how the institution works and what is available</p> <p>Enables a more balanced experience (with social as well as academic opportunities)</p> <p>Development of useful contacts and awareness of opportunities</p> <p>Bolstering of academic, personal and professional confidence</p> <p>Resilience building</p>	<p><i>where they've taken them.'</i></p>	<p>Suggest activities research students might want to initiate / participate in such as social events, support groups, online forums, postgraduate conferences / symposia and in-house publication.</p> <p>Be aware of the support services and other facilities available for students in your institution and encourage support seeking.</p> <p><b><u>Departmental / Institutional strategies</u></b></p> <p>Provision of support for student based initiatives which contribute towards community building such as events, support groups, social groups and joint publication.</p> <p>Resources directed towards integrating research students with the academic community.</p> <p>Provision of shared work spaces for research students and academic colleagues.</p> <p>Provision of spaces for academic exchange.</p> <p>Ensure the environment is welcoming and fosters a sense of belonging.</p> <p>Provision of online forums for research students across disciplines.</p> <p>Implementation of peer mentoring schemes for researchers and research students.</p>
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<p><b><u>Academic / Personal Balance</u></b></p> <p>It can be difficult to achieve a good work / life / study balance and to maintain personal wellbeing, especially when juggling studies with paid work and caring responsibilities. Many students find that good time management is essential and that it is beneficial to have time away from studies in order to study more effectively.</p>	<p>Ensure students don't become overwhelmed by studies and "burn out".</p> <p>Encourage students to pace themselves throughout the programme.</p> <p>Encourage students to manage physical health and emotional resilience.</p> <p>Optimise chances of learning and success.</p>	<p><i>'It's important to have very good wellbeing to support you because if you don't have positive wellbeing you will be unable to keep moving in your learning and study.'</i></p> <p><i>'Wellbeing for me really means how effective you are being as a person – I think the learning happens better when you are being effective as a person.'</i></p> <p><i>'I certainly know that if I really want to be performing well as a doctoral student I need to make sure I'm socializing a certain amount during the week and making sure I'm reading other stuff, whether that's fiction or getting inspiration from creative sources.'</i></p> <p><i>'Suddenly there's more value in keeping yourself together and, you</i></p>	<p><b><u>Supervisors</u></b></p> <p>Encourage good time management when students embark on their programme of study.</p> <p>Encourage students to break tasks down into smaller, achievable objectives.</p> <p>Remind students they might need regular breaks throughout the day or time off from study completely, to come back to it with "fresh eyes".</p> <p>Help students to plan realistic milestones and deadlines.</p> <p>Encourage involvement in non-academic activities – students often find that doing something else completely can be rejuvenating, help keep perspective and stimulate learning.</p> <p>Be aware of stress management strategies and resources which may benefit students.</p> <p>Remind students that leading a healthy lifestyle – good</p>

	<p>Development of self-awareness and self-management strategies.</p> <p>Break isolation.</p> <p>Better retention and completion rates.</p>	<p><i>know, functioning because otherwise you don't reach the end.'</i></p> <p><i>'I think you have to be kind to yourself, which a lot of people aren't very good at doing.'</i></p> <p><i>'If it's getting too much, okay I can give myself a break, I'll come back and I'll have a fresh face and go at it from a different angle.'</i></p>	<p>nutrition, exercise, relaxation, sensible drinking and a good sleeping pattern - can all help with stress management and optimize students' ability to concentrate and study effectively.</p> <p><b><u>Department / Institution</u></b></p> <p>Provide training and resources for research students in self-awareness, emotional literacy, stress management and personal / academic effectiveness.</p> <p>Consider the structure of programmes and timing of assessments, especially where there may be a high level of mature students with professional / family responsibilities.</p> <p>Foster a supportive academic / research student culture.</p> <p>Provision of pre-entry support and advice on caring for wellbeing while studying at a higher level.</p> <p>Facilitation of healthy choices through catering and sports / leisure facilities.</p>
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<p><b><u>Developing personal and academic confidence</u></b></p> <p>Whether research students are continuing with your studies after university or returning to study after some time, perhaps after time working in a different field, it can take time to develop confidence. It is important to normalise this and provide opportunities and time for confidence to develop.</p>	<p>Encourage sharing of work with others and help students enjoy the learning benefits of feedback and criticism.</p> <p>Help students value the learning process and their contribution to knowledge.</p> <p>Facilitate academic development.</p> <p>Help students develop a sense of ownership.</p> <p>Enable challenge and risk taking in academic work.</p> <p>Enable personal and professional as well as academic development.</p>	<p><i>'In some ways it's definitely made me more confident and kind of stronger and I have got more faith in my abilities to manage these things.'</i></p> <p><i>'That academic self had to be validated by passing things and getting bits of paper and now I had to find a new way into that and to value the learning process.'</i></p> <p><i>'Before I would have apologized for not knowing enough about x. Whereas now... I can't know everything about everything and for the purposes of this paper you don't need to know everything that's ever been thought of in relation to x.'</i></p> <p><i>'I think I'm more confident because I'm doing this and I'm surviving and I'm passing assignments so you sort of think oh I'm not too bad and it tends to make you look at everything that's happening more deeply.'</i></p> <p><i>'I don't really make any progress until I find myself in an area of quite significant self-doubt. That's quite discomforting because the way I see the world is called into question but emerging through the other side means that I'm happier being in the zone where everything's</i></p>	<p><b><u>Supervisors</u></b></p> <p>Encourage students to keep perspective and see challenge and criticism as part of their learning curve which will help them strengthen their arguments.</p> <p>Questioning, challenging, critiquing and discussing students' work in a safe space will allow them to develop confidence and practice for presentations and ultimately the viva.</p> <p>Ensure students know their contributions to discussion are valued.</p> <p>Some research students may need regular supervisions at first while they build their confidence about and in time they may need less. Communicate with your student about how much support they need.</p> <p>Balance negative with positive feedback and constructive suggestions for improving work.</p> <p>Sensitive feedback at critical moments (when the research students might be vulnerable).</p> <p>Enable students to develop a sense of ownership of their work and make informed decisions about its direction.</p> <p>Help students to celebrate achievements along the way, no matter how small.</p> <p>Encourage students to talk to peers – they will be experiencing similar issues and they can discuss each other's work in a safe space.</p>
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<p><b><u>Positive supervisory relationship</u></b></p> <p>Research students have reported that a good relationship with their supervisor is key to their success and to their overall wellbeing. Supervisors can provide a safe space in which students' work</p>	<p>Enable students to get the most out of the supervisions.</p> <p>Facilitate students' development to help them achieve success.</p> <p>Ensure students have the appropriate level of</p>	<p><i>'I kind of set him an agenda, during the meeting I kind of guide him through what I'm looking for because I view our relationship as a kind of partnership and it's nice.'</i></p> <p><i>'For me as a learner I need to dialogue, the interpersonal relationship is really important.'</i></p> <p><i>'I don't think the [necessary confrontation] can happen if the</i></p>	<p><b><u>Supervisors</u></b></p> <p>Discuss expectations of the supervision and how it will work from the first meeting and revisit.</p> <p>Encourage students to take the initiative in organizing supervisions and setting the meeting agenda.</p> <p>Ensure students are aware of the best ways / times to communicate with you.</p> <p>Encourage students to ask questions, challenge, argue,</p>

<p>can be challenged. Students respond well when there is a positive connection and a feeling that supervisors are interested in them as a person. Keeping in touch with students and being there for them throughout the learning journey gives students a sense of security. They can play a pivotal role in helping students build up their own academic and support networks. A crucial aspect of the role is signposting students to other sources of support where relevant.</p>	<p>support.</p> <p>Enable students to enjoy the benefit of supervisors' experience.</p> <p>Ensure supervision happens and that it is a positive, productive experience for both parties.</p>	<p><i>emotional bond and the safe relationship isn't in place. A PhD has got to be about transformation, that's the nature of the work and so the relationship is so important.'</i></p> <p><i>'What was missing for me was the emotional support I suppose – "come on... it's Ok... keep doing this from time to time and that challenge about the content.'</i></p> <p><i>'It takes a second to send an email saying "how are you? How are things going?", doesn't take much time and something as simple as that for me would have made a lot of difference.'</i></p> <p><i>'I should have gone out and found people working in the area, like-minded people, but I'm shy and I was also relatively new to the country and it's quite hard to get into cliques like that, especially if you're shy... that's something a supervisor could help you with – introduce you to people, take you to conferences.</i></p>	<p>discuss and disagree with you rather than to see the supervision as a hierarchical arrangement.</p> <p>Provide constructive and timely feedback.</p> <p>Encourage students to inform you if there are any problems affecting them or their ability to study.</p> <p>Be aware of the support available for students in order to refer / encourage self-referral.</p> <p>Be aware of different cultural / educational backgrounds and ensure expectations of the relationship are made clear on both sides.</p> <p><b><u>Department / Institution</u></b></p> <p>Provision of regular training and support for supervisors.</p> <p>Ensuring academic staff have sufficient time to undertake supervisions.</p> <p>Ensure research students are aware of their rights with regards to supervision and that they know who to contact / where to go for support if any problems arise.</p> <p>Monitoring of the supervision process and ensuring students are being supervised regularly.</p> <p>Enabling students to change supervisor with the minimum of upheaval.</p>
<p><b><u>Motivation</u></b></p>	<p>Provide students with the best</p>	<p><i>'You know it's stressful and it is a big commitment in your life but then I</i></p>	<p><b><u>Supervisors</u></b></p>



<p>One of the biggest challenges of embarking on any long-term research project is keeping the momentum going. It is a valuable skill for research students to learn to pace themselves, manage their energies and keep motivated throughout the journey. It is important to remind research students that it is normal to feel like giving up at times or to go through phases of being less productive and provide support and guidance at these times.</p>	<p>chance of successful completion.</p> <p>Improve retention and completion rates.</p>	<p><i>kind of think how proud I'll be when it's done and how pleased people will be for me and the opportunities it will afford me.'</i></p> <p><i>'I get a sense of enjoyment and satisfaction from knowing that I'm learning and I'm actually challenging myself, which perhaps has been lacking in my job.'</i></p> <p><i>'Have courage and keep going and remember it's just a PhD and it feels like your whole life but remember it's a marathon, not a sprint – this is a hard thing to do but it's not a horrendous thing to do, it's a lot better than a lot of other work you could be doing but just be patient with yourself and be patient with the project and, you know, just keep going.'</i></p> <p><i>'It's changed my approach to students and the way I talk about study and learning and approach to learning and ways of learning and I'm coming from a... starting point which says you can achieve anything you want to achieve and it might take some of you longer than others and that doesn't matter and the only problem is if you stop.'</i></p>	<p>Encourage students to focus on their reasons for wanting to do this research degree.</p> <p>Remind students of the value of their research and the contribution they are making to knowledge and understanding.</p> <p>Remind students to manage stress levels, seek support and take time out if they need to.</p> <p>Help students to develop realistic short-term, medium term and long-term goals. <i>A short-term goal in the first year of a PhD might be completing a literature search; a medium-term goal might be drafting a literature review and sending to your supervisor and a long-term goal might be to prepare your proposal for transfer of status.</i></p> <p>Help students celebrate success and completion of milestones along the way.</p> <p>Remind students to pace themselves (that it is a marathon, not a sprint).</p> <p>Remind students to maintain a good work / life / study balance as far as possible and take a break when they need one.</p> <p>Suggest that students switch tasks if they are stuck – maybe put a chapter to one side and focus on a conference abstract, read an article or plan the next chapter then return to the original task with “fresh eyes”.</p> <p>Suggest ways to overcome writing blocks such as</p>
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<p><b><u>Academic Environment</u></b></p> <p>The environment in which research students work and communicate can have a profound impact on their wellbeing and ability to learn. It is essential for health and wellbeing to find a suitable, comfortable working environment and to take regular breaks. It is also essential that students make the most of opportunities for academic exchange in</p>	<p>Ensure health and safety.</p> <p>Optimise students’ ability to study effectively.</p>	<p><i>‘The pain of sitting badly is just phenomenal – it’s absolutely pain and then a panic because if you’re in writhing agony you’re not thinking about your work, you’re not producing any and the clock’s ticking.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Another thing I really value is my shared office and having that really structured space, so that I do feel like I’ve got a work identity.’</i></p> <p><i>‘To be surrounded by other PhD students, this support me when things aren’t going very well but they also make life more enjoyable and fulfilling,’</i></p> <p><i>‘I do think it’s important to have spaces where people, where there is</i></p>	<p><b><u>Supervisors</u></b></p> <p>Remind students of the health and safety implications for working with computers.</p> <p>Support students in finding a suitable dedicated workspace.</p> <p>Encourage research students to take advantage of shared spaces and academic and social opportunities whether these are physical or virtual.</p> <p>Feed back to the department if appropriate spaces are not available for research students.</p> <p><b><u>Departments / Institution</u></b></p> <p>Provision of health and safety guidance directed towards research students.</p> <p>Provision of suitable, pleasant spaces for research</p>

<p>physical and virtual spaces.</p>		<p><i>informal mixing. Whether it's a physical space within a department or just after a seminar, have a little social for people to keep up with what you're doing.'</i></p>	<p>students to work and of shared spaces for academic exchange and socializing.</p>
<p><b><u>Health and Welfare</u></b></p> <p>Some research students experience difficulties with their physical and / or mental health while they are studying or they have an ongoing health condition or disability. Others may experience basic welfare challenges such as money, housing or difficult domestic situations. Major life events such as divorce or bereavement can also have a profound impact on students' ability to study. It is essential in these cases that students</p>	<p>Ensure research students are aware of what support is available and what they are entitled to.</p> <p>Ensure any problems are properly dealt with / supported as early on as possible.</p> <p>Enhanced retention and completion rates.</p>	<p><i>'Your living circumstances are quite important. Last year I didn't feel well in the area and house where I lived, I felt that caused a lot of extra stress and I'm really happy that that's settled now.'</i></p> <p><i>'From my perspective when I'm not well and depression is bad then I just find learning really difficult. I find that I don't want to learn new things – it just seems like I've got enough whizzing around my head already and it can feel like an assault sometimes.'</i></p> <p><i>'A marriage breakdown is not an easy thing for me to face in a strange country but then because of the support from my supervisor, from my co-ordinator from the faculty, from the university, my doctor and mental health team - it's enhanced my wellbeing.'</i></p>	<p><b><u>Supervisors</u></b></p> <p>Be aware what support is available for students at the university and have the contact details and relevant literature to hand in order to refer, enable self-referral.</p> <p>Ensure you know which members of staff to contact for advice and possibly support for yourself</p> <p>Awareness of relevant disability, equality and diversity legislation so you know what students are entitled to.</p> <p>Ensure you are aware of any additional needs the student may have.</p> <p>Gain at least a basic understanding of observing signs of stress or other mental health issues.</p> <p>Encourage support seeking from within the university and / or an appropriate professional such as a G.P.</p> <p>Establish trust with students so they are more likely to disclose any problems.</p>

<p>are aware of and seek support and advice from professionals, from their university and from supportive others such as family and friends.</p>		<p><i>If I don't take good care of myself, I will be unable to do everything. I experienced three months of severe depression, I couldn't do anything. After that it is important for me to look after myself, to be healthy mentally, physically, emotionally. So that's important – I need to try even though it's not easy.'</i></p>	<p>Maintain professional boundaries and ensure students access the most appropriate form of support for them.</p> <p>Encourage students to maintain basic personal wellbeing strategies such as good diet, exercise and sleeping pattern, particularly at times of stress to aid recovery.</p> <p><b><u>Department / Institution</u></b></p> <p>Target awareness of support available explicitly towards research as well as undergraduate students.</p>
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