

Different Support Roles

Research indicates that effective support requires a range of roles in addition to those of content and methodology specialists, such as coach, facilitator of the project, mentor and sponsor. In a co-supervision or supervisory panel arrangement, it is possible for different members to take on some of these different roles. Where there is no co-supervision or panel, it may not always be possible for the supervisor to fulfill all these roles and it may be useful to draw on others. While the supervisor can help the student in this regard, it is equally worthwhile to encourage students to develop these forms of support on their own.

Facilitator

The underlying educational strategy for research education and training is 'experiential learning' in which the candidate carries out research, and in so doing learns how to do research. Ways of facilitating the research can include:

- Monitoring progress
- Assisting candidates in the development of the following skills e.g. project management skills, time management skills, self-management skills
- Setting up peer support groups for students.
- Ensuring they have the necessary resources to carry out their research

Coach

This is a term that is used regularly in other arenas (sport, management development). In the research context coaching involves helping the candidate develop their research expertise in the context of actually doing his or her own particular research. A range of people with varying expertise often provide coaching including:

- Other academics (in many instances the principal supervisor may not have all the specialist expertise required)
- In some disciplines, postdoctoral members of the research team may provide much of the day-to-day coaching
- Specific assistance from technical staff and/or other students can provide additional coaching
- Skilled professionals e.g. Librarians, statistical consultants

Mentor

Many successful researchers will refer to mentors who were significant in their careers. Mentoring can take various forms and can include a number of different people. Mentors provide access to networks and encouragement when needed. Examples of mentoring include:

- Advising and supporting the student within the framework of their evolving personal and career goals
- Sponsoring the student in the department/research group
- Introducing the student to professional and discipline networks

Sponsor

The role of the sponsor (akin to the sponsor of a sporting or scholarly activity) is to assist with funding and the identification and provision of resources. In this regard, the DGS or administrator may provide useful support. In research supervision the sponsor is one who, for example, will:

- Make sure that new students have access to basic resources such as desk, phone and computer
- Ensure, or advise how, students can access funding for conferences, field work, workshops, etc.
- Keep students up-to-date with policies and procedures
- Identify administrative procedures that students need to follow and assist in achieving these in a timely manner. |