

Peer Observation – University of Nottingham

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A belief that supervision practice and research meetings had previously been 'hidden' experiences, conducted in private, led to the development of a Peer Observation project at the University of Nottingham.

Through a series of peer observations, guided reflections and focus group discussions, participants (postgraduate researchers, supervisors, research staff and PIs) have opportunities to explore different models for conducting doctoral research supervision and research project management meetings and find support in developing their awareness of generic skills. The project aims to identify good practice which could be disseminated in various ways including the development of training materials and practice guidelines.

The programme involves recruiting volunteers, briefing observers, matching observers with possible observations, gathering feedback and reflections, facilitating focus group discussions after the observations, and distilling themes and evidence of good practice for subsequent use in training and guidelines.

In the course of the project, volunteers (postgraduate researchers, research staff

and academic staff) observe either a doctoral supervision session or a research project management meeting, depending on which it is they themselves are currently engaged in. In order to preserve confidentiality, observers attend supervisions/meetings in a School other than their own. The project gives them an opportunity to reflect on their own practice and to develop their awareness and use of generic skills identified by the Roberts' Report.

Those participating in the project are briefed about their roles either through paper instructions or (for observers) in briefing sessions with their peers e.g. postgraduate researchers, supervisors or research staff. Observations are undertaken with a structured system of recording and reflecting on the experience. Observers subsequently attend a focus group with peers to reflect on some themes emerging from the observations, to consider the implications for their own approach to research supervision, and to explore the impact of the observation on their subsequent practice.

The structured process of reflection is unusual. In designing the briefing workshops for observers, Nottingham has developed innovative methods of using video clips of real episodes in supervision sessions to heighten the observational awareness of those taking part in the project.