

UKCGE Conference 2023

*Sustainable, affordable
and collaborative
approaches to experienced
doctoral supervisor
development*

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UNAM



Background

- Postgraduate research supervision is under-valued, under-provisioned and under-developed in many HEIs globally (Taylor et al., 2021). Timely doctoral completion rates are low in the UK, and in many other jurisdictions

There is a tension in the core aim of doctoral work:

- Traditional **nurture of embryonic researchers** fit to contribute to the curation and development of an academic field **vs.**
- A **scientific-technical postgraduate education** that serves wider purposes of market economies (new industry/university partnerships and a perceived need for specialist human capital to build advanced knowledge economies)?

Doctoral supervision takes place against a background of contextual, political, economic and cultural affordances and constraints but in a global higher education system.

- UKGCE has recently introduced accreditation of experienced doctoral supervisors in an effort to support deliberate systematic and scholarly reflection on, and valuing of, a wide range of aspects of doctoral supervision.



RECOGNISED
RESEARCH
SUPERVISOR
UK Council for Graduate Education

Our response: collaborative doctoral supervision workshops

- Within UCL IOE, since 2021 we are adopting a ***design research*** approach to a series of six (core) online collaborative workshops that support such activity and accreditation.
- Aims are to support sustainable and affordable deliberate and academically informed reflection on related issues, via the establishment of a genuine ‘professional learning community’ (Vescio, Ross & Adams, 2015). ***Transference to practice*** is supported by approaches adapted from Timor-Schlevin et al. (2022).
- The involvement of two external ‘critical friends’ from Egypt and the University of Johannesburg has underlined the global accessibility of such approaches and catalysed the instigation of a similar locally-informed work in southern Africa (South Africa, Namibia, Zambia) – SAUSC -, and in parallel, a comparative element to the research: SAUSC

The research

- ***RQ1: How can workshops be designed so as to support supervisor development in affordable and sustainable ways that also enhance mutual collaboration and learning across the contexts concerned?***
- ***RQ2 (for SAUSC): How do contextual affordances and constraints across the four universities involved, inform academics' supervision practices, and their reflections on, and learning about, doctoral supervision in and through such workshops?***
- ***Data collection:*** workshop recordings, participant end of intervention survey, interviews with key personnel probing workshop experiences and learning
- Focused initially around structure, people organisation, reported practices and content, but comparative interview elements around Halse & Malfroy's (2010) dimensions of supervision (the learning alliance, habits of mind, scholarly expertise, techné and contextual expertise), as well as Bruce & Stoodley's (2013) categories of supervision-as-teaching (promoting the supervisor's development, imparting academic expertise, upholding academic standards, promoting learning to research, drawing upon student expertise, enabling student development, venturing into unexplored territory, forming productive communities, and contributing to society).
- ***Analysis:*** reflexive thematic within the above themes

Workshop structure

Please volunteer for an area that is of particular interest or use to you, and use that half hour to lead group engagement and reflection focused around both experience and some relevant literature. Feel free to be fairly 'straight' or to use whatever approach you think might be stimulating for the group. Thank you!

*Note that eventual reflective accounts are required to be **'personal, recent, analytical, example-based, scholarly and systematic'**.*

UKGCE 1	Introduction, overview and developing ethical researchers
	Recruitment and selection
UKGCE 2	Supervisory relationships with candidates
	Supervisory relationships with co-supervisors
UKGCE 3	Supporting candidates' research projects
	Encouraging candidates to write and giving appropriate feedback
UKGCE 4	Keeping the research on track and monitoring progress
	Supporting candidates' personal, professional and career development
UKGCE 5	Supporting candidates through completion and final examination
	Supporting candidates to disseminate their research
UKGCE 6	Reflecting upon and enhancing practice
	Final steps for submission

Participant response to 1st iteration 'in' UCL

- The best professional development I've had in 17 years at IOE: challenging, refreshing, reconstructive of both thinking and practice
- It has been transformative to approach supervision with a parallel academic and professional lens
- A wonderfully supportive, stimulating and humbling experience that is already impacting my supervision practice
- I feel privileged to have had access to so much wisdom and experience: my thinking about doctoral supervision has deepened and grown, and my practice is both renewed and developing further

But

- Time for small group discussion of a stimulus question or case study is the jewel and shouldn't be rushed
- I should have been more disciplined about making notes on my learning as I went
- Not all initial applications for recognition were successful

2nd iteration 'in' southern Africa

- Introduction of an induction session to explain workshops but also lay out basics of the four national/university doctoral supervision contexts, as a foundation for mutual understanding
- Stronger steer on centrality of small group discussion and limited number of slides
- Stronger steer on making notes of reflections and experiences during and after sessions, to support both depth of writing and manageability of reflective account
- Active listening to, and probing for, contextual or cultural affordances and constraints on supervision practice: most students working in a second/third/... language; institutional incentives for timely completion; early academic foundations often insecure; insufficient supply of experienced supervisors; range of doctoral assessment systems.....
- Formal opt-in structure for 'educative' peer assessment of draft reflective account, so as to support greater formal recognition
- UKCGE fees funded by UCL International
- Successful participation by, and recognition for, academic colleagues well beyond the field of Education

SAUSC (Southern Africa – UCL supervision collaboration)

- Complementary activities include development of an annotated bibliography of sub-Saharan literature (in preparation) focused on postgraduate research supervision, which is at present under-recognised and under-valued in the global field,
- And a book ‘Doctoral supervision in southern Africa: from theory to practice’, to be published by Springer in Autumn 2023.
- In the words of the SAUSC book reviewers....
- *The model from the workshop will be of interest to all institutions that train their supervisors. This has global appeal, particularly if it is pitched towards a CPD audience – it will reach out to international higher education staff and researchers, and those involved in international research partnerships (R1)*
- *The framework that is the basis of this book provides an excellent example of how institutions (via researcher/educational/staff developers) can improve the professionalism of their doctoral supervisors. (R2)*

3rd iteration 'in' IOE

- Oct 2022-March 2023: ten IOE academics
- *Introduction of peer assessment, drawing on enhanced UKCGE resources. Possibly less commitment: need to take care with promotion/sign-up.*

4th iteration 'in' sub-Saharan Africa

- ***Autumn 2023-Spring 2024:*** two series of workshops led by southern African colleagues holding UKCGE recognition, with support from JG and LK. Fees funded by UCL GEF.
- Targeting five further colleagues from each of UJ, UNAM and UNZA, plus five each from U of Malawi, Botho U, Botswana, and UDS, Tanzania. These last are less technologically well-equipped, so further adaptations, e.g. to meeting platform, might be necessary.
- ***Summer 2024:*** On the basis of accumulated evidence, seek funding to establish an Africa-specific supervisor recognition scheme.

Challenges with achieving UKCGE recognition

- Some UCL experienced and successful supervisors assumed the application was a formality, and needed to re-submit with a more carefully-crafted account
- Some southern African colleagues, even after participating in the peer review process, found it difficult to be genuinely reflective about their practice, and constructively critical about the norms with which they work, so were not able to follow initial feedback on draft applications and needed a resubmission to achieve that deeper reflection. That is symptomatic of cultural norms in the universities concerned, so that accreditation represents a very significant achievement for many of these colleagues. Further such workshops in SSA will need very careful attention to building up the notion of active reflection on practice.
- More generally, I personally perceive some quite variable, and sometimes idiosyncratic, expectations revealed in the feedback after application: I suggest that needs careful monitoring.

In summary...

- Our evidence suggests short-term benefit is in two phases: directly via collaborative workshop engagement with the *supervision literature in relation to* participants' *shared and analysed experiences of supervision*, and then via *application of that to practice, captured* in semi-structured scholarly reflective accounts on development of practice in submission for accreditation.
- Expansion of workshops to low-resource supervision contexts and also across academic disciplines, suggests the approach is **sustainable, transferable, affordable**, and richly **beneficial to participants, doctoral students and wider doctoral communities**.
- The structure and facilitation of such workshops, are not rocket science, but a confident and UKCGE-knowledgeable facilitator helps. Given the UKCGE resources and structure of the recognition process, the approach should be transferable to other contexts with only moderate effort.



*Thank you for
listening.*

Questions?