

Filling the gap: The role of long-term online group coaching in supporting doctoral students

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Background

- Initiated in February 2023 using institutional Research England QR funding to support research culture
- Intended to provide enhanced, tailored support for the wellbeing of Birmingham's postgraduate researcher community
- Underpinned by PRES findings and recent studies

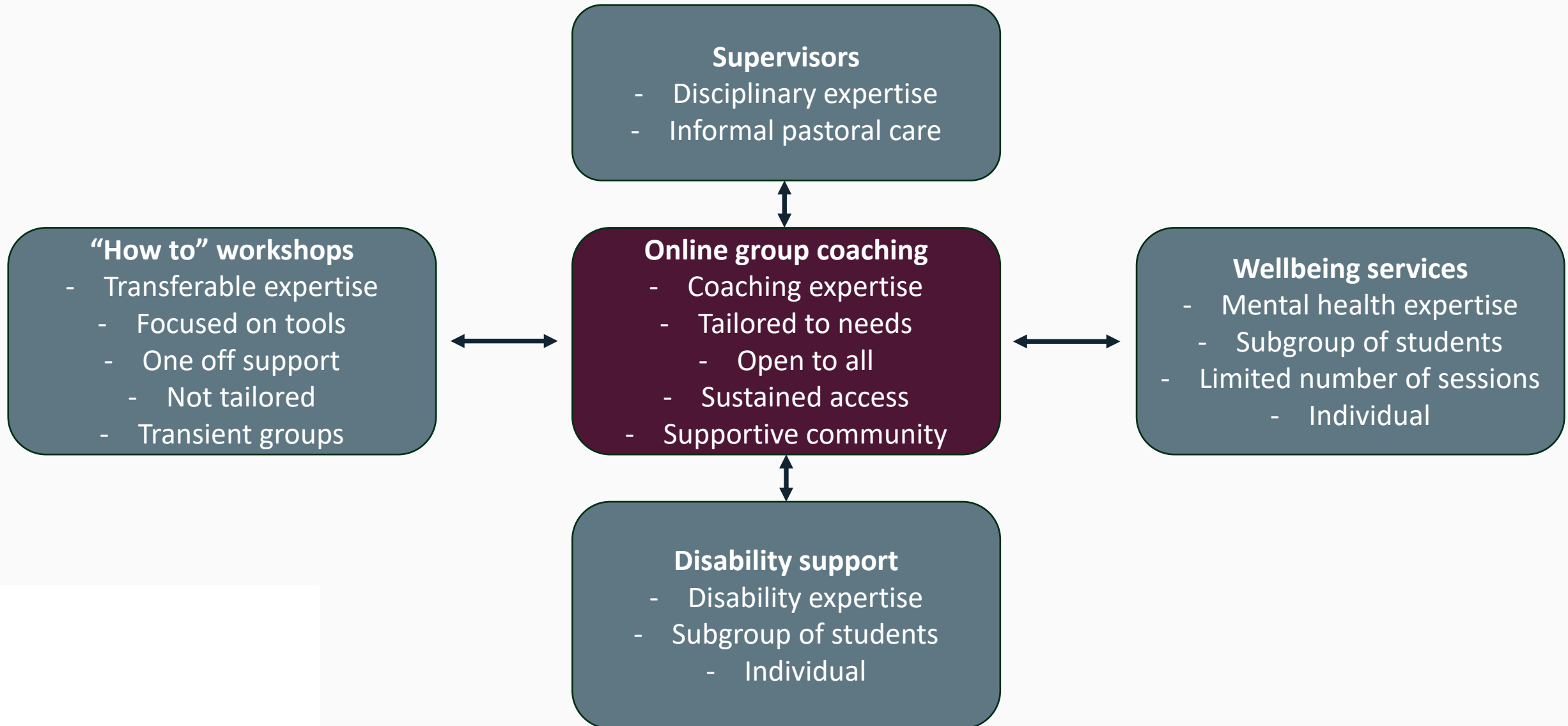


Aims

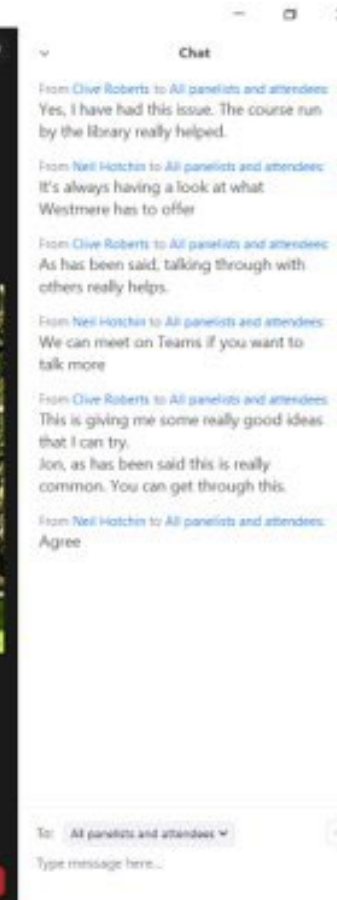
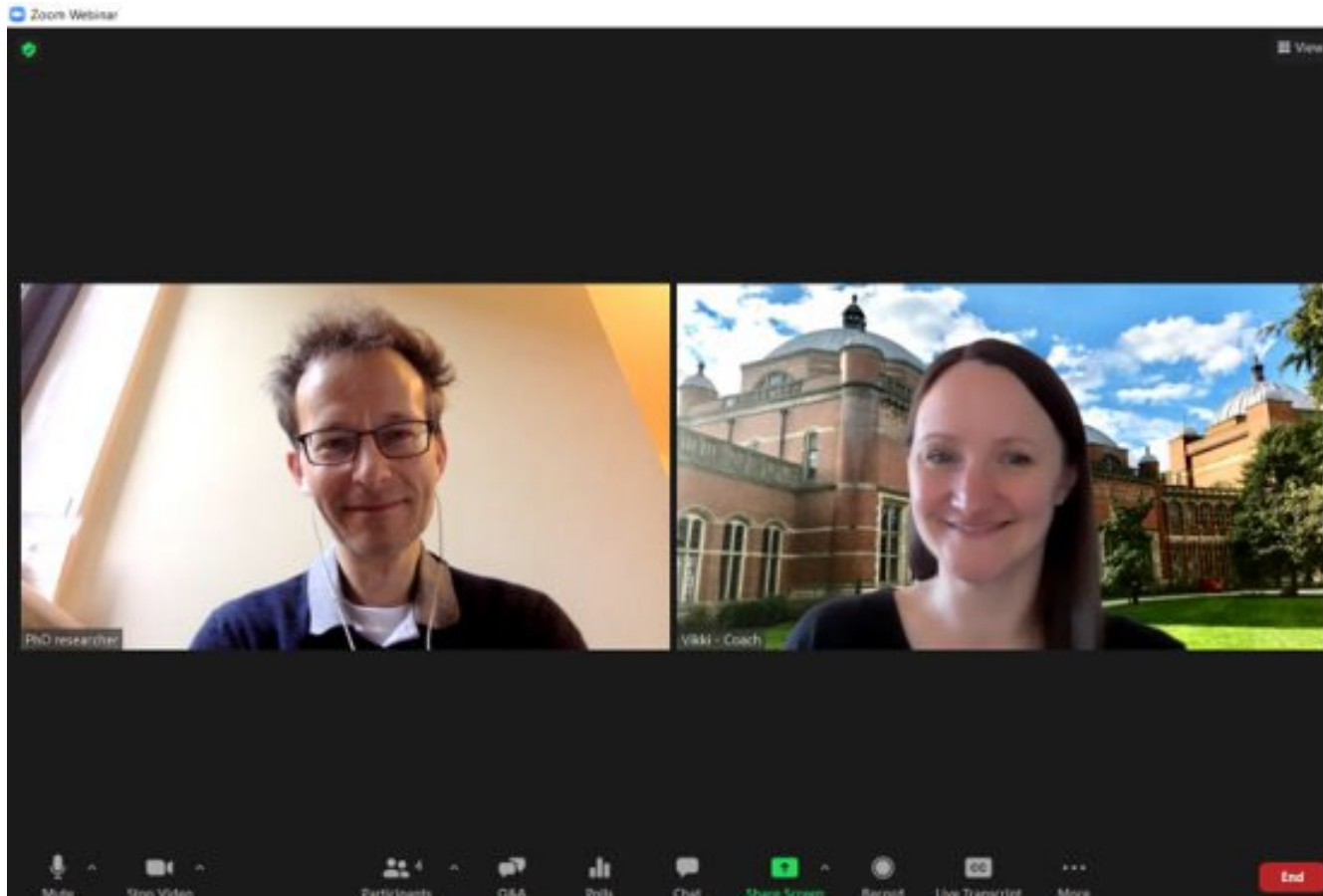
- Help PGRs develop effective working approaches and coping strategies to overcome common challenges
- Early intervention and avoid small issues developing into more serious mental health issues
- Facilitate peer support



Typical PGR student support



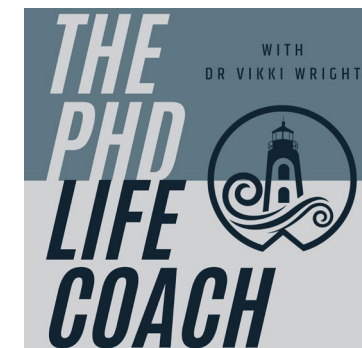
Format of the PhD Life Coach



Two sessions per week of online group coaching

Monthly workshops on specific topics, using a coaching approach to solve common issues

Slack workspace to share information and support the community



Feedback from participants

Every session I feel more comfortable, confident, in control, determined, enthusiastic, excited, hopeful and at peace; I feel less anxious, confused, worried, lost, alone and isolated. After each session, I feel more capable to take the next step in getting work done on my PhD, and I feel supported in doing it. I'm not sure that I would still be enrolled in my PhD if it were not for this absolutely essential offering by the graduate school.

It feels very positive and motivating, and also great to see that I am not alone in the journey

They have been insanely helpful. I am genuinely not sure I would have been able to write my thesis without them. It is also great to see that everyone is struggling with similar things and that it is not just me.

The coaching community is the most wonderful group of people. It is so helpful to see and hear from people who are having the same struggles and feelings as you. It makes you feel like you aren't alone and that it is possible to get through everything.

They have been such a valuable space to help me navigate challenging periods of time. Without them, I believe I would have had to take a Leave of Absence for my well-being.



University of Birmingham reflections

- Survey results demonstrate value
- Increased attendance at other Graduate School events and activities
- Growing the community
 - Through peer to peer and supervisor recommendation
 - Opportunities to meet face to face



Coach reflections

817

Session attendances

119

Engaged students

55

Received 1-2-1 coaching at least once

- Sustained transformations in mindset AND enhanced progress in regular attendees
- Vertical integration
- Hard to reach populations
- Work needed on “leaky funnel”
- Overall, excellent return on investment



Implementation tips

- System of coaching that enables group engagement, transferable learning and independent self-regulation
- Coach experience of PhD completion and supervision
- Perceived independence from university structures
- Supervisor engagement – word-of-mouth recommendations
- Selection of time slots
- Resources to offer pre-assurance
- Sustained commitment



Find out more

University of Birmingham:



[Online group coaching for PGRs](#)



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PhD Life Coach:



linktr.ee/thephdlifecoach

“The coaching has been an absolute game-changer in my academic journey. The support and expertise has been invaluable in managing my procrastination, battling my feelings of inadequacy, and mastering the art of making and sticking to plans. Through the coach’s guidance, I’ve delved deep into the self-coaching model, gaining profound insights into my own thought patterns and behaviours. Vikki’s approachability and kindness create a nurturing environment where growth and learning thrive. She empowers her clients to confront challenges head-on, equipping them with the tools and mindset necessary for success. With this help, I’ve not only conquered academic hurdles but have also cultivated a newfound sense of self-assurance and resilience. I am endlessly grateful for her transformative impact and unwavering support on this journey towards personal and academic fulfillment. I know that I couldn’t have finished my PhD without this coaching!”



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