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**Empowering  
supervisors to effectively  
support their PGRs**

**Friday 4<sup>th</sup> November 2022**





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# Session Outline



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- Welcome and introduction to the session
- Supervisor Training – our experiences
- Small group discussions
- Student Training
- Optional v. Mandatory Training
- Small group discussions regarding supervisor feedback
- Q&A

# Our Roles



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- Overview of our roles – BBSRC DTP
- Very few similar roles across other institutions – often a small part of an existing role
- Background in Welfare Network and Disability Support
- UoN identified that more PGR specialist welfare support was needed – things tended to be UG focussed
- Training gaps emerged – for welfare staff, academics and students
- The role has evolved from just DTP specific support to more general involvement in Researcher Academy activities

# Mental Health Awareness for Supervisors



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- How the session came about:
- A need amongst supervisors to feel better equipped to support PGRs
- The session recognises the unique nature of the supervisory relationship and how supervisors can navigate that to best support their supervisees

What we cover:

- Common mental health difficulties and how they present in PGRs
- Ways to help & effectively signpost
- Boundaries of the pastoral element of their role
- Protecting supervisors own mental health

# Mental Health Awareness for Supervisors



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How we deliver it:

- Online and in person (2 hour session)
- At PGR specific school away days (appetite from School PGR leads)
- We ran 'pilot' sessions for DTP supervisors
- We have input from specialist Mental Health services and PGR specialists from Health Sciences
- Break outs to discuss PGR specific case studies
- Looking after supervisors own mental health
- Signposting to resources

# Mental Health Awareness for Supervisors



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Some feedback:

**‘Very helpful to think about how best to handle various different mental health issues, as well as being aware of the support available.’**

**‘Important that we discuss these topics’**

**‘It raised my mental health awareness as supervisor, provided useful information and contact details shall I need them in the future, and explored good and professional ways to tackle complex situations related to mental health of PGRs.’**

**‘Unfortunately I'm seeing more and more of my PG students with some level of mental health issues, the course was a time-effective way for me to become more knowledgeable in how to approach them.’**



# Key Take Aways from the training



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- It's useful for supervisors to have a good knowledge of available University support & up to date signposting / resources
- It's important to be aware of the supportive processes e.g. support plans, interruption of studies, sick leave (paid or otherwise) etc.
- Being clear with supervisors on the importance of boundaries, what is expected of them, when it's appropriate to signpost on etc.
- Reminding them that the simple act of listening is powerful and supportive, they can't always provide the answer or solution and that's ok

# EDI Training for Supervisors



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- In 2020 we produced the ‘Supervising PGRs from Diverse Backgrounds’ Guide, to provide information and guidance for supervisors when supporting students from diverse backgrounds
- The format was an interactive .pdf available on our website and was circulated to supervisors across the University
- We developed a training session to explore some of the themes, provide context and give supervisors an opportunity to discuss case studies and ask questions
- A good starting point – we are now working with the PGR training team to embed EDI principles and awareness into our whole training programme

# EDI Training for Supervisors



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- <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/edi/documents/researcher-academy-supervising-postgraduate-researchers-from-diverse-backgrounds.pdf>

# Discussion



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In small groups we now invite you to discuss:

- What training already exists in your institution related to mental health awareness and/or EDI issues?
- Is it mandatory?
- Specialist to PGRs? Any pros/cons to this?
- Where are the training gaps – anything you wish was there?
- What are the barriers to setting this up?

**\*Feedback in 10 mins\***

# Student Training



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- Part of our package of support includes training for PGR students on self-care and looking after their own mental health
- Mind Matters – very successful training session, runs 4 times per year for all students with specific sessions for BBSRC DTP students
- Tailored advice and guidance on managing the supervisory relationship and looking after themselves as a PGR with the specific challenges that brings
- Transition to PhD Study – exploring the step from taught study to research. This session is very popular and fills up quickly
- Crossing the Finish Line – support with the thesis writing stage, with input from recently graduated PGRs

# Incubating ideas at DTP level



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Unique position of our roles means we have much more control over how we run our training programme

We have autonomy as part of the DTP team to make sessions mandatory.

We made Mental Health Awareness for Supervisors mandatory for 2021-2022. Numbers shot up from approx 20 to 80 per session with engagement from supervisors who would not usually choose to be there

# Feedback from mandatory session



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Some direct quotes:

'The negative aspect of a PhD is interesting (Permanent Head Damage). This has to be a new thing - my PhD days were easily the happiest of my life. Surely we need to identify what is different now than 30 years ago?'

'The PhD students I have that have mental health issues are ones who aren't passionate about the subject'

'Generally, if you want to do a PhD, you look for a job later on in which you have a leading role of a team. Very difficult if you start your studies with depression and anxiety'

'we get a specific time allocated for PhD student supervision per year. I think it is 120 hours a year for 100% supervision. If you have a student with problems, you reach this within the first month...'

# Discussion



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We will now invite you to break-out into small groups and discuss this feedback

What are your thoughts?

How can this be dealt with/ challenged without supervisors feeling attacked

**\*Feedback in 10 mins\***



# Looking Ahead



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- Difficult Conversations training – for supervisors, dealing with conflict etc
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Year Review – support at this critical point
- Tailored support for diverse backgrounds – raising awareness of the issues faced
- Embedding EDI and wellbeing support awareness into PGR experience so they take that into Post-Doc / Early Career Researcher (ECR) roles
- Working closely with the Researcher Academy training team to embed wellbeing and EDI into their offering to students, staff and ECRs



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**Thank you for your time**