

UNIVERSITY OF DUNDEE

Supporting Effective Practice in Postgraduate Supervision

The Supervisor - You feel that one of your PhD students is not performing to an acceptable standard. You had high expectations of him at the beginning, based on his undergraduate achievements at the National University of Singapore which indicated his high potential as a researcher. He started off enthusiastically, but lacked maturity when it came to designing his research questions and how to go about the research. You are concerned about the lack of self-motivation that this student has, and feel he should be spending much more time working on his project. It isn't acceptable for a research student to be going off to play sport every Wednesday afternoon, and you have made it clear to him that he needs to work much harder if he wants to get a PhD. He's also indicated that he'll be off on holiday soon for four weeks but this is a joke as his whole period of study seems to have been a holiday so far. As the research project appears to be going nowhere it's becoming increasingly irritating that you're investing time in a student who is just messing about. You plan to tell him that there's a possibility his studies could be terminated, if things don't improve. You're not sure that your co-supervisor agrees with your views on this student, as there never seems to be the time to catch up properly and it's been a while since you last spoke; but as they've not expressed an opinion it seems fair enough to go with your feelings on this one, doesn't it?

The Research Student - You were a highflier as an undergraduate and graduated with an excellent degree. You were delighted to get the opportunity to undertake postgraduate study in the UK and you began your studies with confidence, expecting a successful and fulfilling period of study leading to a PhD in three or four years. But now everything feels as if it's going wrong. There have been issues with your project, and you have had to change direction twice. You feel that your main supervisor is starting to feel exasperated with you – there have been throw away comments like 'you get back what you put in' and 'this is not a 9-5 job you know'. You are starting to feel a bit unwelcome in her office - as if she has written you off, although she has not said anything directly. You feel like you will never see this PhD through to completion, and are finding it hard to buckle-down to the research. There are other things you need to think about too, such as writing that seminar paper you've been asked to present, and signing up for the skills development programme that the University runs, and planning the classes for the teaching you've been asked to do. Your thesis monitoring committee seems ambivalent about your lack of progress and they have told you not to worry about it – 'it will all fall in to place in the end'. Plus your second supervisor seems very laid back about things. In fact, you can't remember the last time she was in touch with you. But you're beginning to wonder how anyone manages to juggle all of this work and if you had known what it was really like to undertake a PhD, and how lost and isolated you could feel, you would never have started. You are thinking about packing it in.