Policy and practice: for students and supervisors, by students and supervisors

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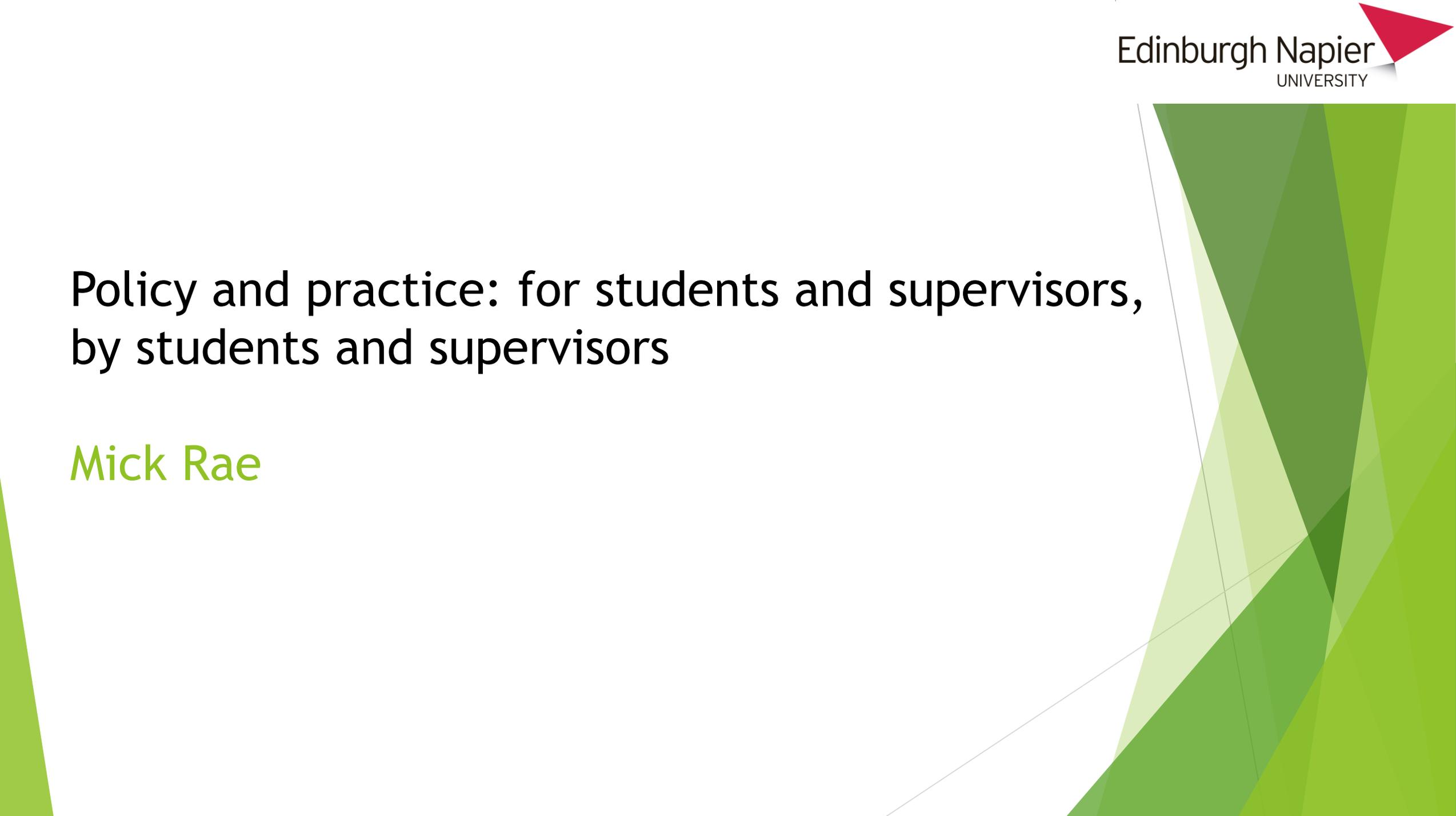
Quality and consistency: in terms of

- Research project quality

- Student quality

- Supervisory quality

- Quality of provision

- Wider researcher development

The research project team

- Each student has a Director of Studies, and a minimum of one other supervisor

- All staff who intend to supervise research students must undergo a training programme

- We place a limit on the number of students that can be supervised by any member of staff, commensurate with experience

Ensuring consistency in terms of students and supervisory quality

The Independent Panel Chair

▶ All supervisory teams are assigned an IPC

▶ This is a member of staff who has completed required training and has supervised research students, and is thus familiar with ENU regulations and practice

▶ They are NOT a supervisor! Hence they may be drawn from outside of the research field

▶ They are responsible for structural oversight, ensuring quality of supervisory provision, and will be part of a research students journey from beginning to (successful) completion

How does the IPC operate?

▶ In addition to the 'hard structural' progression milestones (determination of thesis topic, target degree etc), we have twice yearly progression monitoring

▶ Students prepare a reflective report that permits a non-expert in the research field to appreciate the progress made, and where there could be issues

▶ Supervisory teams, IPC and student meet and discuss, and thereby iron out potential issues before they become actual problems

Progress monitoring

▶ All progress monitoring is recorded at both school, and central university levels

▶ At the level of the school, this is reviewed and recorded by the School Research Degrees Committee – identification of 'at risk' individuals

▶ This is then reviewed at institutional level, in terms of school performance

The *viva voce* and the IPC

▶ Ideally, the same IPC as has been a part of the student journey will also be present during the *viva voce* examination

▶ This is a non-examining chair role

▶ Ensures that good practice is adhered to, and that all paperwork required is presented correctly. This prevents any post-examination issues such as inconsistencies between what was discussed 'live' and what examiners then ask for in writing

Monitoring team performance and identification of School-level issues

School RDC

- ▶ Chaired by of School Research Degrees Programme leader (SRDPL)

- ▶ Consists of academic staff, School Head of Research

- ▶ SRDPL has large responsibility – ensures the provision of research degrees within a school meets our quality standards, and will be the first point of intervention where wheels are wobbling – importantly, this again provides opportunity to fix before broken

SRDPL

- Through their committees, these individuals will note any school level 'potential issues'

- SRDPL's from all schools regularly meet to exchange ideas, good practice, and of course discuss recurrent issues occurring over the institution

- This ensures a pro-active approach to continued improvement of research degree provision

Institutional oversight of school performance and responding to school-identified issues

University Research degrees Committee

- All school RDPL's report to this committee, which is comprised of senior academics, Dean of Research and school PL's and research degree staff (and research student representative – more later)

- Committee business is split into two components:

1. **Student matters** – the monitoring of progression at school level, approval of examination teams etc (5 annual meetings)

2. **Policy matters** – ongoing review of policy, annual review of framework, response to changing landscapes (at national and institutional levels) (5 annual meetings)

Policy matters

▶ By having regular meetings we have within our gift the ability to modify our policies

▶ Each meeting, we will have a series of papers delivered, each examining an area of policy that has been raised for one reason or another

▶ Lively discussions ensue, and we come to consensus as to what we should do – if there are changes to policy, or changes to wording…………………

Policy discussion outcomes

▶ We will formulate any updates required, and these then appear in the research degree framework, which we update annually

▶ New initiatives, new degrees etc are similarly planned, discussed and instituted (currently improving policy on teaching training for RD students for example)

▶ By having this forum separated from our day to day Student Matters meetings, we can (try to) resolve matters of policy in an efficient manner, thereby keeping our framework agile and fit for purpose

What are current aims?

► We wish to further increase our research student numbers

► Our job on the uRDC is to ensure that we have the capacity in the institution to accommodate increased student numbers

► We have to ensure that we can do this numbers elevation without any fall in standards of supervision, student performance and outcomes

Supervising Research Degrees

- Over three days the course covers
  - the context of a research degree
  - tasks and skills of a supervisor
  - developing your supervisory style
  - dilemmas in supervision
  - giving student feedback
  - inclusivity and diversity

Responding to wider concerns

Surveys tell us what we need to hear (sometimes)

▶ PRES/ELIR identified some areas of concern:

▶ *My institution values and responds to feedback from research degree students' – only 55% satisfaction*

▶ *I have opportunities to become involved in the wider research community beyond my department' – only 57% satisfaction*

▶ We identified that we had a break in our chain

Ownership and expectation management

► In terms of poor perception of responses to students, perhaps if students are more involved in policy decisions, and take ownership of matters concerning them, then expectations are better managed, and outcomes more fit for purpose?

► In order to have sensible student representation, such representatives need to be communicating across schools

Students as policy informants and drivers

- We have tasked our students from each school, who were already represented at school committee levels, to meet and discuss perceived issues from across the university.

- This means that they are now already '*involved in the wider research community beyond my department*'

- It also means that perceptions of the institution not listening are reduced, since communications from uRDC to students now come from students.

Does this work?

▶ Its early days, but already we can see where the 'academics know best' can be improved by student inclusion

▶ Initiatives that we thought were good, and should have been effective, now receive the 'tuning' they require to actually serve the student community that they were initially designed for

▶ We are currently working through a number of student led initiatives/suggestions, and the next set of surveys will be interesting. For example, our students want a formalised structure for teaching opportunities – and so we are developing this with their requirements foremost.

In summary

- Policy must always be open to change/improvement/discussion, and we must serve the supervisor and student community equally well, by listening and working closely with both.

- Students can be excellent policy informants and listening to them can ensure that new initiatives are fit for purpose first time