

Different Support Roles

Research indicates that effective support requires various roles in addition to those of content and methodology specialists. In a co-supervision or supervisory panel arrangement, it is possible for different members of the panel to take on different roles, such as coach, facilitator of the project, mentor and sponsor. Where there is no panel or co-supervision, others within and beyond the department may fill these roles.

Coaching - This is a term that is used regularly in other arenas (sport, management development). In the research context coaching involves helping the candidate develop their research expertise in the context of actually doing his or her own particular research. A range of people with varying expertise often provide coaching including:

- Other supervisors and advisors (in many instances the principal supervisor may not have all the specialist expertise required)
- Postdoctoral members of the research team provide much of the day-to-day coaching in some disciplines
- Specific assistance from technical staff and/or other students can provide additional coaching
- Skilled professionals e.g. Librarians, statistical consultants

Facilitating the project - The underlying educational strategy for research education and training is 'experiential learning' in which the candidate carries out research, and in so doing learns how to do research. Ways of facilitating the research can include:

- Monitoring progress
- Assisting candidates in the development of the following skills e.g. project management skills, time management skills, self-management skills
- Setting up peer support groups for students.

Mentoring - Many successful researchers will refer to mentors who were significant in their career. So what did those mentors do? Mentoring can take various forms and it is not always the leading researcher in the field who makes a difference for a student. Mentoring involves both advising and supporting students through their doctoral career within the framework of their evolving personal and career goals. The student is a novice researcher within the institution and within professional/ disciplinary networks. Mentoring gives her or him access to networks. Mentors can provide encouragement when needed, build confidence and open doors. Examples of mentoring include:

- Sponsoring the student in the department/research group
- Introducing them to professional and discipline networks
- Ensuring they have the necessary resources to carry out their research

Sponsoring - The role of the sponsor (akin to the sponsor of a sporting or scholarly activity) is to assist with funding and the identification and provision of resources. In research supervision the sponsor is one who, for example, will:

- Make sure that new students have access to basic resources such as desk, phone and computer
- Ensure, or advise how, students can access funding for conferences, field work, workshops, etc
- Keep students up-to-date with policies and procedures
- Identify administrative procedures that students need to follow and assist in achieving these in a timely manner.