

A Checklist for Supervisors: before starting a relationship

Supervising doctoral candidates is a delicate task. It requires you to be a combination of guide, mentor, coach, source of information and inspiration.

When a student approaches you requesting that you become her/his supervisor, it is wise to insert a pause between being asked and agreeing (or not) to supervise. The decision to supervise is a major responsibility and should be taken thoroughly. Sometimes a refusal or even discouragement might be fairer options.

If you have a statement of your supervisory style, give it to the student and ask them to consider it as part of their thinking. Lastly, tell them when you'll get back to them with your decision and how (by email/phone, etc).

In the meantime, consider these questions. Then, if you think you might be interested in supervising the student, invite her/him for an exploratory conversation to establish a clear and common understanding of the roles, responsibilities and expectations.

Checklist

Topic

- ± Why am I interested in this exercise? Is it the student, the project or the requirements of the position?
- ± Will this student fit in with my existing group of students?
- ± Do I have the necessary knowledge to supervise this student's research topic?
- ± Do I know enough to support the research approach / methodology required for this proposal?

Feasibility

- ± Are adequate resources available? Is funding for the student needed or can I provide financial support?
- ± How many students do I have already? Do I have enough time to accept this (additional) student? An allocation for a doctoral student is approx. 50 hours per annum.)
- ± What experience does the student have of academic research and/or writing?

The exploratory conversation

Before starting a working relationship meet with your potential student and discuss beside others these sorts of matters

- ± Awareness regarding requirements and expectations for a dissertation.
- ± The amount of direction and guidance the student thinks s/he'll need.
- ± Student's experience in performing research and evidence for it.
- ± The skills and strengths the student thinks s/he has that will be relevant to the project.
- ± Student's mode of working including her/his circumstances.
- ± Supervisor's mode of working with doctoral students.
- ± Limits of supervisor's contribution.
- ± Need for, and availability of, other input (maybe second supervisor etc).

References:

- Graham, A. & Grant, B. (1997). *Managing more postgraduate research students*. Oxford: Oxford Centre for Staff Development.
Phillips, E.M. & Pugh, D.S. (2005). *How to get a PhD : A Handbook for Students and their Supervisors*. McGraw-Hill