

Personal Development Plans & Effective Management of Research Students

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Organisation of Presentation

- Backdrop: international & national considerations ... implications
- Identifying & supporting research training needs
- Effective management of research students
- Outcomes: do we know what we want to achieve?
- A final question

1. Backdrop

- International – European considerations
 - EU, European Charter, & trends in Graduate Education
 - EUA Doctoral Programme Project, UKCGE activities, UK Grad Programme
- National policy & funding: do we know what we are doing?
 - Significant focus on R&D, double PhD outputs
 - Enabling funding – PRTL / SIF / Research Councils / SFI et al: develop national platforms / critical mass
 - Economic issues ... knowledge economy
- Quality considerations: IUQB & HETAC

Example

“PhDs fails to sell their
skills to employer”

UK Grad Programme Report on the
perception of employers:

*(cited in Times Higher Education
Supplement, 12/1/07)*

Is there a similar concern in Ireland?

Implications

- Challenge to the traditional model of graduate education ... what is changing?
 - The way we supervise?
 - The PhD experience?
 - Expectations of PhD candidates?
 - The level of academic support?
 - Funding for research students?
- National forums in Ireland have explored comparative & Irish experiences of graduate education ... directly impacted on policy development
- Responsiveness of academic institutions ... change can be a slow business

2. Research Training I

- What is a PhD about? ... research ... leads to the 'production of a thesis', which aims to make an original contribution to knowledge
- How does this happen? ... traditionally students worked under the guidance of a supervisor (or a supervisory team)
- The context (environment) in which the research was undertaken ... could include a broader research group providing a supportive environment & funding ... others worked in isolation

Research Training II

- What has changed ... national policy & funding
- Led to (some) change in the way graduate education is organised & managed
 - Professionalisation
 - Development of Graduate School(s) – structures
 - Development of graduate programmes – early stage structured training
 - Provision of training: generic & transferable skills
 - Emphasis on effective management of research students: supervisors & institutionally
- Developing examples of good practice in Ireland

Training Provision

- Identifying training needs
 - Orientation & induction ... the earlier the better
 - Raise awareness of training needs and opportunities among students
 - Key role of supervisors ... training requirement?
- Development of graduate training programmes:
 - institutional levels & within specific areas
- Use of Personal Development Plans (PDPs)
 - Becoming a requirement in some institutions
- Enhancing the student experience ... outcome

Training Focus

- UK Research Councils Skills Statement:
- Key areas:
 - Research skills
 - Research environment
 - Research management
 - Personal effectiveness
 - Communication skills
 - Networking & team-working
 - Career management
- Development of an Graduate Student Skills Statement underway in IUA (plus HETAC): 4th level Ireland, SIF funded project

Case Study 1

- Graduate School, University of Limerick
 - 800+ research students across six colleges
- Objective to build graduate infrastructure ... importance of SIF funding
- Developing a research training programme: international benchmarking & Training Needs Analysis – consultation
- Early stage induction ... introduction of programme ... use of PDPs started
- High take-up rate on very practically focused courses & workshops

Case Study 2

- Shannon Region Graduate Education Network: UL, LIT, IT Tralee, MIC
- SIF funding in 2006 to estab. network
- Objective to build regional capacity & increase output
- Development of common training programme and use of PDPs, plus other activities
- Early experiences positive, but implementation slow

3. Effective Management of Research Students

- Two Questions:
- What can *we* do that will help research students to manage their projects?
- How can institutions effectively manage research students?
- What was the experience in Limerick?
 - Impact of training ... early stage
 - Monitoring progress & student management

4. Outcomes

- What are we trying to achieve in graduate education in Ireland?
 - Development of highly educated, versatile researchers with key skill sets
 - An increase in the output of qualified doctoral graduates
 - Increase awareness of the skills acquired in undertaking a PhD
 - Support the knowledge intensive economy and society
- What might we do to improve research training and effective management of research students?

A photograph of the National College of Ireland building, a modern multi-story structure with a prominent glass facade and a white tiled section. The building is set against a clear blue sky. In the foreground, there is a paved area with a large, stylized white arrow pointing towards the building. The text 'National College of Ireland' is overlaid in the top right corner, and 'Thanks and any questions' is overlaid in the middle left. The website 'www.ncirl.ie' is at the bottom left.

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