



Meeting the Needs of P/T Students Supported by Employers

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UKCGE Workshop , University of Reading, June 2009

Overview

- Benefits of Employer-supported Research Students
- Practical Concerns
- Maintaining Employer Support
- Balancing Pros and Cons
- Tensions Pervading the Supervision Process
- Problems Emerging at Different Stages
- Beyond the Research Process
- Further Information

Benefits of Employer-supported Students



They may have:

- Insights into current real life problems
- Knowledge of a wider context
- Access to information and people not generally available
- A sense of urgency to solve a burning workplace issue
- A background in any of a wide range of disciplines
- Interest in exploring philosophical or psychological or economic or ethical or sociological or management or specific scientific or legal or multi-disciplinary perspectives.

Practical Concerns

- Matching scope of research to time and resources available
- Maintaining student motivation if the project can only address a small aspect of the work problem
- Having negotiated practicable design, ensuring it doesn't re-grow to original proportions

Maintaining Employer Support

Difficulties can arise when :

- Project is reduced in scope
- Demands a counter-cultural paradigm or methods
- Issue takes a lower priority on business agenda
- Data reveals aspects that employer finds uncongenial
- Final report has a requirement to be more or equally theoretical as it is practical.

Balancing Pros and Cons

- Dedication high but so is personal risk
- Topic may be derived from interest/experience but vision may be blinkered by professional dogma
- Passionate commitment to change has to result in dispassionate approach to research
- Range of work skills often accompanies unfamiliarity with current HE norms and styles
- Ethical professional practice (intervention) may challenge ethical research practice (neutral)
- Expertise in work communication and interview styles may be misconstrued as expertise in research communication and interview styles

Tensions Pervading the Supervision Process

- Commitment to the extra role of collaborating with employer/work-based supervisor
- Recognition of competing workplace demands and pressure
- Flexibility alongside firmly negotiated obligations required
- Clashes of availability for meetings, chapter submission etc
- Role and status issues
- Negotiating suitable campus services
- Innovation v conformity
- Complications of ethical approval
- Isolation from academic community and facilities

Problems Emerging at Different Stages

- Ownership of research problem & its development
- Conflicts of interests and philosophies
- Fieldwork advice requires some supervisor familiarity with context
- Fieldwork role conflicts for student
- Sensitivity of outcomes – professional defence mechanisms
- Confidentiality of sources in published work

Beyond the Research Process

- Promotion and effects on completion
- Seduction by academia
- Tension between publication avenues
- Threats to supervisor's blissful ignorance
- Prejudices challenged
- Eyes opened



Further Information/Sources

Issues in Postgraduate Supervision, Teaching and Management – a series of consultative guides produced by the Postgraduate Issues Network of the Society for Research into Higher Education.

Current PIN Chair and Series 2 Editor: Professor Pam Denicolo

Particular Guides used as sources:

Pam Denicolo 1999 *Supervising Students from Public Sector Organisations*, No.5, Series 1
London: SRHE

Alan Smith and John Gilby 1999 *Supervising Students on Industrial-based Projects*, No. 4,
Series 1 London: SRHE