Fail again, fail better:
Celebrating failure as a wellbeing intervention for postgraduate researchers

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This Session

1. Why failure?
2. An overview of the approach
3. Summary of key activities and practice at Salford
4. Details of the support, and opportunities ‘failure’ has facilitated
5. Generates strategies to embed failure into your institutional practice
6. Consider the ‘Failure Freedom’ Movement
#1 Why failure?

The research process can generate a wide range of experiences and emotions, including the unexpected, mysterious, organic, exploratory, frustrating and difficult. Do we share these narratives frequently or honestly enough?
#1 Sharing failures

Think of a time when you failed. Share the story of this failure with someone else in the room.

As you listen to stories of failure, think about how the narrative is framed: the vocabulary, the value judgments that the narrator makes about themselves.
#2 Reframing failure

Shifting from: “criteria that focus on what is known, which do not recognize the process of learning and how people come to know”

To being able to: “recognise emergent unanticipated outcomes” with calm curiosity rather than dismay at a plan going awry (Jackson 2005: 7)
#2 Reframing failure

Making mistakes can be a powerful tool for making discoveries and gaining insights that may otherwise have remained hidden.
#2 Changing the language of failure

Return to your narratives about failure. Retell the story in a positive light. Use the words and phrases on the handouts to help.
Albert Einstein said,

“failure really is just success in progress.”
Embedding a culture of “failing better"
Engaging with failure as a positive process:

- encourages deep learning
- offers tools for research students to learn safely how to consciously manage and successfully reproduce processes leading to creative products
- reflects the process-led nature of research and accommodates the 'unfinished' nature of the discovery environment
- mirrors real world experience where dialogue with the funder or client is required
#4 “Made to fail”

‘Error is the permanent contingency [alea] around which the history of life and the development of human beings are coiled’ (Foucault 1998: 477).
#4 “Made to fail”

Our “fail better” manifesto:

To situate failure within the academic research environment

To address the fear of failing

To tolerate mess and to see it as productive

To support the acquisition of processes that will support life-long learning

To understand that the process of failing is a productive outcome in its own right
#5 “DIY Failure”

How to fail better in your own context?

Let’s use post-it notes (themselves the result of glue gone wrong) to generate some ideas.
“Join the Failure Freedom Movement”
Delegates who are interested in “failing better” can also participate in the University of Salford’s first Failure Friday Conference on Friday 5th July, at MediaCityUK —
https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/failure-friday-tickets-60750840399

The Festival of Research —
https://www.salford.ac.uk/researchfest