

0:00-0:38

[Cathy Coombs] Hello, I'm Cathy Coombs, and I'm here with Stephanie Barker and four experienced supervisors and academics from Manchester Metropolitan University to welcome you, as new PGRs, and to speak to these four experienced supervisors about some of their advice for you as you start your supervision relationships.

So, can we start off just with each of you introducing yourselves a little bit please and telling us about your research and your experience of supervision. Perhaps Kirsten, you could start us off.

0:38-1:10

[Kirsten Jack] That's great. Hi, everybody. My name is [Kirsten Jack](#). I'm Professor of Nursing Education here at Manchester Met. I've been supervising students for the last ten years and I've been Principal Supervisor for six students in that time. My own research interests are qualitative research mainly and I'm interested in our students' learning experiences particularly in clinical practice, so healthcare students in clinical practice.

1:10-1:13

[Cathy Coombs] Great. Neil, could we hear from you?

1:14-2:11

[Neil Carey] Hi, my name is Neil Carey and I am a psychologist by training but a trans-disciplinary scholar with tradition. I've been supervising PhD students now for about eight years and I have currently five students that I'm on supervisory teams. My research is on queer perspectives, or taking a queer perspective, in looking critically at issues of identity and particularly issues of identity in how people think about themselves. How they form notions of how they are in the world and also how they learn, how they engage with knowledge and different kinds of knowledge.

2:11-2:15

[Cathy Coombs] That's really interesting. Thank you. Marc.

2:15-3:13

[Marc Jones] Hello, everybody. My name is [Marc Jones](#), I'm one of the professors in the [Psychology Department](#). My research area is Stress, Health and Performance. So, looking at the way we respond psychologically and physiologically under pressure. The impact that has on our health, and also the impact that has on our performance or productivity. We work in a number of different areas, we have ongoing projects with the European Space Agency, in military settings, in sports settings, and also in business settings as well.

We're particularly interested in the role of technology in work and how that can be stressful or helpful, and how that can be positive or negative for our productivity. I've been supervising PhD students for probably over twenty years now, thinking about it, that was a long time. I've supervised about fifteen to completion and currently have four PhD students that I'm supervising.

3:13-3:16

[Cathy Coombs] Great, and Cathy.

3:16-3:56

[Cathy Lewin] Hi, I'm [Cathy Lewin](#), Professor of Education and I've been supervising for around fifteen years, nineteen students have completed and I'm currently supervising nine students. My area of research is the use of educational technology in school contexts. Obviously, in the last few months, that's become quite important as schools have shifted to online learning. So really focusing on supporting teachers and the kinds of pedagogical strategies that they can use to incorporate technology into their teaching and learning.

3:56-4:26

[Stephanie Barker] That's all really fascinating, especially because there's so many of you looking at so many different things with your research. I just have a couple of questions to do with your supervisory relationship with students and your tips for them. So just to start with, could you tell us what a new PGR student should expect from their supervisor? And also, what do you as supervisors expect from your students?

[Stephanie Barker] If you're happy with the same order, Kirsten, am I okay to come to you first?

4:26-5:11

[Kirsten Jack] That's great. Thank you. Well, in terms of what I would expect from a new student, if I can start with that, I think I would expect them to have lots of enthusiasm. I think starting a PhD is so exciting. I get excited particularly at the start. So, I'd hope that the student was similarly enthusiastic and keen. I would also expect that they are willing to come out of their comfort zone a little bit. There are huge opportunities for thinking about things in different ways and learning about new things. So, I think that not being too fixed on an idea and willing to explore a little bit is really important.

5:11-5:17

[Stephanie Barker] And then what about in terms of what they can expect from you?

5:17-6:30

[Kirsten Jack] Well, I think it's a similar sort of thing, I feel excited just talking about it. So, they can expect lots of enthusiasm. We do have to bear in mind that there are lots of rules and regulations that we have to think about, so, the different milestones that students have to meet and complete, but I don't like getting too bogged down with that. It's about supporting our students to explore, it's like, a voyage of discovery that we're going on together. Let's see, let's play around, you know, let's see what we can find together. But also, I like to think that, you know, when you start a PhD, it can feel like a huge mountain to climb can't it. It can feel quite daunting sometimes. So, it's about instilling that belief in the student that they can do it, they can succeed. They often have lots of different responsibilities. My students have very often jobs, caring responsibilities, and a PhD is just one of those things that they have to think about. So I have to bear that in mind. So, on the one hand, keeping it going, keeping the project going, but also thinking that actually, they do have other things they need to think about.

6:30-6:39

[Stephanie Barker] Brilliant. Thanks. And then Neil, same question. So, what would you love for new students to be doing? And what can they expect from supervisors in your opinion?

6:39-9:03

[Neil Carey] So, for me, my expectations are really open. But they include things that align with the things that Kirsten has just said; something about that the students take their whole selves to the project. That there is a whole range of expertise by experience that will inform both the journey, PhD Journey, and the outcome of that journey and it requires a whole heap and an openness of exploration in adding that value to the PhD, in discovering knowledge. But actually, uncovering knowledge as well, knowledge that we all already take to this kind of journey.

[Neil Carey] In terms of what they can expect from me, again, I think that there's something about openness. An openness for me to challenge them and that's not me sitting in a godlike position challenging them, but also kind of working with them to be challenged with their and by their ideas. They have responsibility for the project. My responsibilities are in helping to guide, to offer advice. But making clear that they own the project and the excitement there, I think that they can expect excitement for me. Sometimes I get too excited about things and a bit like Kirsten and I'm sure my other colleagues here. PhDs are the spaces in which knowledge becomes new again, it's fresh, it can be rediscovered, it can be remade and I always think about the ways in which and I'm reminded by the privilege of working with PhD students, in working together and co-producing new knowledge or knowledge in a new way. So, I think those are some of the kind of very general sets of expectations that I engage with and encounter with new PGRs. Mostly it's about excitement.

9:03-9:14

[Stephanie Barker] We're getting an overarching theme here of excitement and enthusiasm. What about yourself Marc? So, what do you expect from new students who start to work with you and what do they normally get from you as well?

9:14-12:00

[Marc Jones] So I'd echo a lot of what Kirsten and Neil said there and I was reflecting on the question as they were both talking. I think it's actually a really interesting question. I was thinking back to the students that I've been fortunate enough to supervise and I think every

single relationship is unique and different with each of them. So, I think that's something important to bear in mind, that when you come together to work on a PhD, it's a unique time, you are two unique people, you're forming a unique relationship and exactly as Neil said, you're working towards something that hasn't been done before. By definition, a PhD is the production of new knowledge and so actually, while there are some broad guidelines to the path that you will take, it is going to be a unique path in terms of producing that new knowledge. So, I think it's just to be aware of that, that there's going to be some uniqueness and some individuality and for you to work together and to bring that enthusiasm and drive and desire to do that PhD to the relationship.

[Marc Jones] On a pragmatic note, I would say one word, which is read. Early on. I really want my students to read; in a very, very crude split to the PhD and I know this will differ across disciplines, I often say the first six months just read, the next 24 months let's collect our data, the last six months write it. But we write all the way through, but I just wanted to, you know, definite reading at the start to get a real grasp and understanding of the discipline. Even when students come with a clearly formed idea, I just say go away, read, let's get a real good understanding of what's out there.

[Marc Jones] What would they expect from me? I think I would try to give, just listening to Kirsten and Neil, I'll tried to give a little bit more than I've given in the past, I think there's some excellent suggestions there. On a pragmatic note, I sometimes think putting a PhD in front of a student is helpful for them to see what it looks like. So sometimes I often ask my PhD students, have you ever seen a PhD? And they go, no, because why would they? For them to see what it actually looks like what they're working towards so sometimes, that can be helpful. But then I think, you know, the support, the encouragement, and the guidance, I think is helpful. Your relationship changes throughout the PhD as well, and certainly can become a bit more didactic at the start and a bit more 'have we thought about this?'. I think it's really a good opportunity, or it's a good moment rather, when students as they progress with a PhD, not that they push back but they actually take ownership and say 'I think this is the way we should do this'. You can see that someone's developed then into the independent academic that you get towards at the end of the PhD.

12:00-12:17

[Stephanie Barker] We've got enthusiasm, openness, being prepared to come in and do that reading and get everything ready at the beginning, and then support from all of you as well. Cathy, is there anything that you would like to add on this? So, what do you expect from your students and what can they get from you as a supervisor?

12:17-14:13

[Cathy Lewin] I expect them to read and read and read. I really encourage my students to actually read a thesis early on, so that they get a good sense of what a thesis is going to look like and the amount of work that's involved. But I also encourage them to, or let them know that it's not a problem at the beginning, if when they're reading and they get to look at lots and lots of new ideas and it kind of blows their mind in a way and that's not a problem, because all students go through that part of the process and then you start to hone in and fine tune your ideas. But you need to do those building blocks at the beginning to help you, so really to echo what everybody else has said. What I would provide for the students is a sounding board. I like to see writing as much as possible. I think that helps when you have meetings, to have a focus and something to talk about even at the beginning. You can write notes about what you've been reading, for example. So, I will provide lots of advice and guidance. But also, I think it's a really important pastoral role for a supervisor and a lot of my students, particularly those in part-time mode, face an awful lot of different challenges over the course of doing their doctoral studies. I think it's really important as a supervisor to be there for those students and to point them to the right kinds of support that they need. To provide them with information about the choices that they can make, whether they need to suspend for a short period of time and so on. So, I think that's a really big part of being a supervisor.

14:13-14:25

[Stephanie Barker] And what Cathy for you are your top tips if a new student is just coming in to working with you? How can they build a good relationship with you and what do you expect when they turn up to that first meeting with you?

14:25-15:00

[Cathy Lewin] I think the first meeting is about talking through the expectations from both sides, thinking about how often you're going to meet. Talking about the importance of reading and writing and bringing writing to meetings. Being organised and talking about that, how you're going to organise things, so who's going to arrange the meetings? Talking about the student and the importance of completing the paperwork to record the outcomes of the meetings. They're the sort of top tips that I would give in my first meeting.

15:00-15:14

[Stephanie Barker] Getting themselves prepared and organised and being ready to commit.

[Stephanie Barker] Neil, the same question. So, what are your top tips for a new student coming in who wants to build a good supervisory relationship, and especially for that first meeting?

15:14- 17:20

[Neil Carey] I would definitely echo the kinds of fabulous top tips that Cathy has just given. Those sound like great top tips. I'd also say something about being okay with being nervous, that it's kind of human and that the PhD is also human. I'm sure that this varies across topics and across disciplines but certainly in the areas that I'm interested in producing new knowledge, nervousness is something that can be harnessed, it can be embraced because it can be productive and part of the tip is about getting that nervousness on the table, both their nervousness and my nervousness. My nervousness at being asked to work with them on their PhD and thinking about how that can be reflected back into the PhD. One of the top tips that again echoed from colleagues here is about writing, writing and reflection. It's the kind of writing that doesn't matter that it's mega academic to begin with. It's the kind of writing that records the process of the PhD from the very start and that can be refined in different ways later, in a chapter of the PhD or indeed in other forms of writing and blogs and getting your message about doing the PhD and what the PhD is producing as you go along the journey. So top tip is definitely have a pen or some kind of writing device handily available. Laptops these days, I'm so old.

17:20-17:24

[Stephanie Barker] So this is sounding alright so far, so make sure you've done your admin and bring a pen. They are the two big things that we've got right now.

17:24-17:29

[Neil Carey] Those are really, really good summaries of the advice so far.

17:29-17:38

[Stephanie Barker] Marc, what about yourself? So, what's your advice if a student's coming in and they want to establish a really good relationship with you as their supervisor?

17:38-20:03

[Marc Jones] So I'd echo a lot of what Kathy and Neil said there. Certainly embrace the nerves, get the butterflies to find information. That's one of the sayings. I think regular meetings matter and exactly as Kathy said, you work out who sets up those meetings, but regular meetings, even if it is just to touch base for ten minutes, just to say 'how are things going?', and 'everything's great, fine'. But I think sometimes it's easy to say, 'oh, we don't need to meet, we don't need to catch up', and then suddenly, it can go for a while without that sort of contact. So, I think regular meetings matter, writing matters. The problems I see, I've seen in PhDs, come at the end and people say 'I'll write it all up at the end' and I think that has been a problem for some students because it's such a big thing to do right at the end. The other thing to say is it is difficult, it's a challenge to do a PhD. When I was doing mine, I used to say it's tricky this. I'd moan a little bit and my supervisor would say, 'well, if it was easy, everyone would have one'. So, I think you have to embrace the challenge a little bit with a PhD. My final top tip is that, and I think this is the hardest thing, is you have to get used to discussion, challenge and correction, and for you to accept that in the manner it's intended. I think all of us around the table will provide that in a positive manner. My supervisor, I'll go back to him, used to say, 'Marc, I really enjoyed reading your work' and he would hand it back to me and every sentence was scribbled on or something. There was something wrong with everything that I wrote. But it was a bit of positive feedback for that. But I think academia is a world where we get challenged, we get feedback, we get papers rejected, we get grants rejected and I think it's to become not necessarily comfortable with



that but to accept that sometimes people will have a different viewpoint and for you to accept that in the positive critical manner that's suggested, rather than being defensive about it and I think that's difficult. I think you know I speak for myself, that's something I'm still working on now as I go through my career. I'm not saying it's easy, but I think it's to accept that there will be people who take a different view to the work you're doing to what you do as well. I think that's a top tip, but a very difficult top tip.

20:03-20:17

[Stephanie Barker] That's awesome. Thanks Marc, and then lastly, we've got Kirsten, so we've had excellent advice your colleagues, what would you like to add to this? What are your top tips for a new student wanting to build a really good supervisory relationship?

20:17-22:05

[Kirsten Jack] This is the joy of going last, isn't it? Because everybody has said what I wanted to say. So, I don't have a lot more to add, really. I do want to echo some of what has already been said. But the main thing is, be yourself. I would say to any student, be yourself, you don't have to take on a different persona just because you're doing a PhD. I was so well supervised and one of my supervisors said to me, 'do you know what Kirsten, this is about you finding your own voice', and I think that's really important to remember that. That it is about you creating those new ideas yourself along with your supervisor and thinking about how you can work together on that. I would echo some of what has been said in terms of the communication aspects. I do agree with what Marc said in terms of keeping those meetings regular; it can be easy to let it slide if you're busy with other things. But I think it's so important to keep that momentum going and I would echo what Cathy said earlier, and Marc in terms of reading. Just read and read and read some more and you might not use it in the thesis and I think that can be quite upsetting to students. They've done all this reading and they are like oh, I can use that and it's like, well, maybe not. I think that can be a bit upsetting. But go with the process, trust your supervisor that they've done it before and it will be okay and actually, if you're confused, that's a good thing. Confusion is great, because it means that there's change going on and there's learning going on. So, if you're confused, I'm quite happy about that. That's wonderful.

22:05-22:07

[Cathy Coombs] What a wonderful, rich array of tips. Thank you all so much for those. I hope that's really helpful for you, our audience, our new PGR students and it remains just for me to say welcome. We're so excited to work with you and look forward to your arrival at Manchester Met and your journey through your PhD. So, all the best!