

Motion on Training for Good Supervision

Proposer: Mriritunjoy Guha Majumdar, Chair of Executive Committee and Vice-President, University of Cambridge Graduate Union

Seconder: Alessandro Ceccarelli, President, University of Cambridge Graduate Union

The Graduate Union notes:

1. Since 2004, there has been an increased focus on UK universities to develop students as researchers, with research centres established in various universities as well as the publication of handbooks on postgraduate and undergraduate research;
2. In Universities UK's report on *Higher education research in facts and figures 2018*, it highlights how research in UK is excelling: 76% of Research Excellence Framework 2014 submissions were 'rated either world-leading or internationally excellent in quality', the UK's field-weighted citation impact was 1.57 (ranked first out of all G8 countries) and UK research accounted for 10.7% of citations and 15.2% of the world's most highly cited articles;
3. The research community in the University of Cambridge comprises of over 1500 tenured academics, more than 3500 contract research staff and almost 4000 PhD students in over 70 academic faculties and departments and 140 University research centres and institutes;
4. Students are an important constituent in this landscape, in almost all the 12 strategic research initiatives and 7 strategic research networks;
5. There were 7092 applications made for the research degrees in 2017/18 cycle of the University itself;
6. There have been reported instances of bad supervision affecting the mental health of students. In the recently conducted Graduate Union Mental Health Report, 93% of students who reported that their supervisor has unreasonable expectations also reported mental health problems, while 25% of 1803 respondents report that their relationship with their supervisor has negatively affected their mental health. There have been cases reported to the Students' Unions' Advice Service (SUAS) that highlight the gravity of the problem;
7. In our discussions and consultations with students, issues have ranged from low frequency of meetings and research interactions, lack of clear expectations and boundaries in the project, lack of understanding and/or addressing disabilities (both visible and hidden), lack of advice on publications and career-related matters, and 'feeling lost and unsupported' during various phases of the research project;
8. In the instances when the student is not as active and close to their colleges as to their departments and faculties, the presence of welfare support in colleges and not enough welfare signposting know-how of the supervisors in departments could be detrimental to the wellbeing of the students.

The Graduate Union believes:

1. We believe that every research student must be supported in successfully completing their course of the student. As the entire education and research system for the student is intricately linked and reliant on supervision, we think this should be good;
2. While students need a good induction and training to take advantage of a supervisor, it is also pertinent that the supervisors are aware and actively working towards fulfilling these disparate needs of a student. They should be able to support in a timely manner before and throughout the project, and act as mentors;
3. Supervisors should be able to help with professional development, student learning and positive feedback, so that the research and course is meaningful to the student beyond the course itself, in their respective careers;
4. We also believe that there should be ways for the supervisees to feedback on the nature and kind of supervision provided, either by informal ways such as discussions with their graduate tutors and Directors of Studies, or more formal systems such as a centralized or department-based supervision feedback system;
5. Personal development within and beyond the project is crucial and therefore training modules and workshops must be attended by the student, and for this the supervisor should also encourage the student actively;
6. The awareness of when and how to intervene to either enact these suggestions or help the student a certain way is an important nuance of a supervisor's duty. We believe that this can be better done with supervisor training.
7. The possibility of mandatory supervisor training must be seriously considered in the University for the academic welfare of students.

The Graduate Union resolves:

1. To lobby for a comprehensive training programme for all research supervisors in the University of Cambridge;
2. To work with the University and departments to promote supervision training in the Collegiate University;
3. To launch a campaign that shall look at student consultation on supervision and work towards regulated and possibly compulsory supervisor training in the University.
4. The Graduate Union shall run a signature campaign/petition among members for lobbying for mandatory training in the University for supervisors of research postgraduate students.