



Navigating the supervisory relationship: Covid-19 as a catalyst in displacing entrenched practices

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ABSTRACT

Navigating the supervisory relationship is a complex process influenced by both spatial and temporal factors. The process of supervision has come into sharp focus recently, as supervisors and students unexpectedly had to react to the changing landscape presented by Covid-19. To understand the experience from the student perspective, a qualitative survey was conducted with master's students ($n=455$) during the summer of 2020. Findings suggest that the focus created by the pandemic experience can help to overcome pedagogic inertia in the master's supervision process by foregrounding the social aspects which complement the technical. Adaptive supervisory frameworks can help to ensure that appropriate expectations are established for both parties and that a transition to a more permanent hybrid model is sustainable.

Keywords: supervision; post-graduate education, hybrid model, Covid-19, power relationships

Introduction

The higher education, the taught master's degree has grown significantly across the sector internationally. In the United Kingdom (UK), enrolments grew by 40% between 2015/16 and 2019/20, with around 412,000 students enrolled on such courses in 2019/20 (HESA, 2021). In the UK, master's courses typically last 12 months and most contain a research element or scholarly activity, normally in the form of a project or dissertation (Quality Assurance Agency, 2014) that is usually supervised on a one-to-one basis. The master's supervision period is typically short and intense, and the exact nature of master's dissertations remains ill-defined (Pilcher, 2011) with significant variation in the academic credit contribution, timeline, scope of the research, and interactions with the supervisor across programmes (Marnewick, 2020). Such diversity contributes to a range of supervisory relationships. This contrasts with doctoral supervisory relationships that are developed over several years. Attention to the supervision experiences of master's students is important in light of the annual Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) conducted by Advance HE, completed by 71,000 students at UK Universities (Advance HE, 2019), and the resulting recommendation that action to improve the level of support provided by supervisors would greatly enhance the student experience. The survey indicated that students score the question related to support for planning the dissertation consistently low at 72% satisfaction (Advance HE, 2019). The survey does not elucidate further on what support means for students, making it challenging for supervisors to know what to change in their practice.

Improving students' experiences of supervision is likely to result from a combination of factors; the dynamics of the supervision may be central to unlocking satisfaction in other areas (Harwood & Petrić, 2020). One element of the supervision dynamic is the inherent power relations that exist, and prior work has focused on how this can impact the supervision (Grant & Graham, 1999; Grant, 2005) and supervisory support (Blanchard & Haccoun, 2020). Research to date has predominantly been focused at the post-graduate research level, but increasing attention is now being paid to master's supervision (Aitken, Smith, Fawns, & Jones, 2020; Filippou, Kallou, & Mikkilä-Erdmann, 2021; Harwood & Petrić, 2020; Macfadyen, English, Kelleher, Coates, Cameron, & Gibson, 2019). Some studies have focused on the models of supervision (Dysthe, 2002), whilst others focus on the relationship dynamics highlighting a lack of clarity for supervisors (Macfadyen et al., 2019). The effect of the pandemic on supervisory relationships is starting to emerge and is currently focused on postgraduate research supervision (e.g. Kumar & Wisker, 2021; Wisker, McGinn, Bengtson, Lokhtina, He, Cornér, ... & Löfström, (2021).) rather than on the shorter, more intense, master's supervision process.

The current study seeks to investigate whether the fundamental changes catalysed by the pandemic helped to foreground the pedagogic inertia (Gore, 1995) often associated with master's supervision, amplifying calls to develop academic practice around supervision (Macfadyen et al., 2019). This case study draws on experiences at one higher education institution during the Covid-19 pandemic. Findings indicate that the situation offered new opportunities to negotiate some aspects of the relationship, enhancing the experience for students, whilst it also offered additional means for the "careless use of power" (Grant & Graham, 1999, p. 81). The implicit power of the supervisor (especially if the supervisor is the marker or perceived to be) and the facets of power in the supervisor/student relationship, remain a barrier to establishing a true partnership and may serve to inhibit student agency.

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Pedagogical inertia is characterised by a failure to respond to the environment, leading to a potential mismatch in graduate skillsets that can be difficult to overcome through changes to institutional practices and structures (Jónasson, 2016). The pace of change was significantly increased by the Covid-19 pandemic (Graham, 2020), with the immediate conversion to online delivery modes occurring across the globe in 188 countries and impacting over 91% of the world's student population (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2020). The transition to online delivery occurred in March 2020 and followed national guidance (Department of Education and Skills, 2020; Government of United Kingdom, 2020). In the UK, the transition meant that educators had to find rapid solutions, and existing platforms such as Zoom and Teams that were in use pre-pandemic became a daily staple. This transition affected all disciplines and included traditionally in-person disciplines such as medical education (Longhurst, Stone, Duloher, Scully, Campbell, & Smith, 2020).

Master's supervision

Master's supervision is a complex pedagogical relationship that suffers from a lack of conceptual models to help articulate the process (Macfadyen et al., 2019). The existing literature describes master's supervision as a "deeply uncertain practice" (Grant, 2005, p.337) or "an elusive chameleon" (Pilcher, 2011, p.29), lacking established approaches (Marnewick, 2020).

Roles

Postgraduate research supervision has been found to have four dimensions: advisory role, quality control role, supporting role, and the guidance role (Mouton, 2001, p. 17). Naturally, the percentage of time devoted to each of these components very much depends on different factors; the ability of the student, how far the student is through their studies, the supervisor as a person, the student as a person, the supervisor's experience, the supervisor's workload, and—if there is a supervisory team—the cohesion of the team. These dimensions are likely to translate to the master's supervisory context, albeit developed at pace. Perhaps in contrast to PhD supervisions, at master's level the supervisor typically takes on the role of marker (Macfadyen et al., 2019), acting as the "gatekeeper of academic standards" (Cornelius & Nicol, 2015, p. 4) adding to the tensions experienced by both students and supervisors.

Mode of delivery

The pandemic threw these, often complex, relationships into a new territory leading to mixed experiences for both students and supervisors. This has opened a new discussion: how supervision can become more student-centric. The in-person mode or "traditional approach" focused on frequent face-to-face meetings between students and supervisors (Mouton, 2001, p. 22). This mode is well suited to students who are based on a university site or who return to the site for specific days. Supervisions were typically conducted in the supervisor's office or classroom environment.

In contrast to the established approaches to online teaching, pedagogies related to hybrid supervision are emergent and often reflect a transposition of an in-person relationship to a technology-mediated relationship, either fully online or hybrid in nature. The relationship in each has its own nuances which should be recognised and addressed by both participants. The emerging model for online supervision is via a communication platform such as Zoom or Teams, with both supervisor and student attending from their place of choice. Online supervision can therefore remove the physical barriers of pairing the right student with the right supervisor, help reduce travel time and costs (Shea, Stone, & Delahunty, 2015), fit with work and caring commitments, and work well with placement-based courses. However, it has also been shown that online learning also offers an increased opportunity to disengage (Shea et al., 2015) and may mean that students miss out on informal learning opportunities that might occur in the context of in-person supervision. During the Covid-19 pandemic, online supervision became the default for on-campus students.

Social dynamics

The literature argues that the supervisory relationship is a balance of the technical and the social (Wagener, 2018), a complex form of teaching (Green & Lee, 1995). Difficulties in achieving the appropriate balance in every case can lead to communication-related problems during the relationship (Filippou, Kallo, & Mikkilä-Erdmann, 2017). In many cases, little guidance is offered to supervisors resulting in variation in the enactment of the supervision process even within courses (Filippou et al., 2021). The combination of technical, social, and communication elements can make it difficult to elucidate what constitutes good supervision, from both the student and supervisor perspectives.

The literature on online supervision identifies three specific problems (Sussex, 2008). The first problem is the degree to which supervisors and students know one another; effective online supervision needs to compensate for the lack of social cues (de Beer & Mason, 2009). This problem embraces issues of age, culture, ethnicity, gender, and personality. It has been observed that conversations can tend toward the formal in this context (Nasiri & Mafakheri, 2015). Secondly, there is an issue with information exchange. Supervision includes communicating argumentative, conceptual, factual, personal, procedural, rhetorical, and stylistic

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issues in research papers. Nevertheless, the same technology is not suitable for all of these discussions (Sussex, 2008). Thirdly, online supervision includes issues relating to the information-exchange channel.

Balancing the social dynamics is perhaps a constant compromise. Aitken et al., (2020) suggest a need for participatory alignment between the supervisor and master's student, reflecting that this is a finely balanced state where over-alignment can also lead to a lack of honest feedback. The relationship requires the establishment and ongoing maintenance of "trust, presence and critical distance" (Aitken et al., 2020, p.781). This marks a move away from the traditional 'apprenticeship' approach (Dysthe, 2002) to negotiated supervisory relationships or partnerships (Dysthe, 2002). Others characterise this balance as 'supporting and shaping' observing that it evolves throughout the supervisory relationship (Anderson, Day, & McLaughlin, 2006, p. 163). However, variation also exists in student preferences for guidance (Anderson, Day, & McLaughlin, 2008) requiring adjustment to the specific supervisory context.

Advice to establish a joint understanding, to redistribute the power away from the supervisor and enable the student to develop a greater sense of agency in the dissertation process, may be helpful for the more traditional model. However, it remains unclear if this is true of a hybrid model of supervision.

Power relations inherent in the supervisory process

Theories of power relations have been adopted to help explain the structures of academia. They can help to illuminate the complexities of the supervisory relationship.

[...] the power relations between supervisor and student, imbued by an expectation of independence and autonomy, are more complex than simply domination on the part of the supervisor and submission on the part of the student. (Grant & Graham, 2006, p. 77)

The focus of supervision is on the content rather than the process of nurturing the student's increasing research autonomy and independence. As such, academic culture does not always value the full pedagogical aspects of the supervisory process (Green & Lee, 1995). The supervision process assumes that students exercise sufficient agency to undertake the research work substantially independently, even though up to that point their educational experiences may have been conditioned by conformity (Grant & Graham, 1999). For example, the literature talks about commitment from both parties (Aitken et al., 2020).

The increasing number of master's programmes, and the resulting heterogeneity of the student body, means that prior educational experiences of students vary significantly, thereby displacing the tacit assumption of a common prior education, and requiring pedagogies that uncover the hidden curriculum (Koutsouris, Mountford-Zimdars, & Dingwall, 2021) and empower students to work independently. The inherent power relationships between academic and student are not necessarily "an evil" (Foucault, 1988, p.18) however, monitoring the boundaries of legitimate authority remains a requirement to ensure that the supervisory relationship remains within the intended parameters (Grant & Graham, 1999).

The supervisory process effectively requires conformity with the supervisor's approach (Foucault, 2020), although, at the same time, the student is not a helpless actor in the process (Grant & Graham, 1999). It is often the "careless use of power" (Grant & Graham, 1999, p. 81) by the supervisor which can hurt the student, e.g. missing meetings or being unresponsive, without supervisors realising the effect on the student. Such unintended consequences also extend to micro-management which has also been shown to result in negative effects on supervisees (Blanchard & Haccoun, 2020). It is also the case that students can assert power over their supervisors through similar behaviour including missing appointments, failing to engage early on in the process and by placing unreasonable demands on supervisors, e.g. expectations of instant responses. Grant and Graham go on to assert that the students are not as helpless as they might feel and that they can "can learn ways to manage themselves and their supervisors to facilitate the pedagogical process" (Grant & Graham, 1999, p. 81) through structured training mechanisms.

In summary, the literature supports an approach that balances the social and technical and is fully cognisant of the inherent power relations of the supervisory process. Whilst the appropriate balance may differ from supervision to supervision, it is important that those undertaking the process as supervisors and supervisees understand their roles in the process.

Methods and methodology

This qualitative study explores the unexpected move to entirely remote supervision during 2020 from a student perspective, and how this affected the power dynamics of the supervisory relationship. The study seeks to identify new opportunities to improve the supervisory process, and address challenges posed by an online or hybrid mode of supervision, to offer insights to improve student satisfaction.

Context and participants

To investigate student experiences of the supervisory process, a survey approach was adopted. Ethical approval was obtained from the University (ER/SS706/15). The survey was open during August and September 2020 as the students came to the end of their dissertations and submitted them (typically early in September). This ensured that most students had completed most of their supervision and could reflect on the process. The survey enabled dissemination to all master's students registered at the university (n=3,695). These include master's degrees covering a diverse range of subjects ranging from MSc in Accounting and Finance to MA in Digital Media. In line with the university academic framework, study is normally full time over 12 months or part-time over 24 months, and 180 credits are earned at Level 7 of the framework for higher education qualifications, of which a research dissertation normally comprises 60 credits. Other research-related activities can reduce the weighting of the final dissertation, e.g. research methods modules, and as such the variation ranges from 15 credits (online distance learning MSc) to 60 credits.

Data collection and analysis

All master's students were invited to participate in the survey via the weekly university communications. The survey approach enabled students in different time zones to read the invite and to respond at a time that was convenient to them. The survey was completed by 455 students overall or approximately 12% of the eligible population. From the students that participated, 50% indicated they were studying courses with 60 credit dissertations, with 25% on courses with 45 credit dissertations, 20% on courses with 30 credit dissertations or projects, and 4% related to 15 credit projects, and the remaining 1% was left blank. 40% of students were 18-24 years old with 34% aged between 25 and 30 (Table 1).

Table 1 Student demographics

| Gender | Respondents | Overall Postgraduate Taught Population* |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|---|
| Female (including Transgender women) | 62% | 61% |
| Male (including transgender male) | 34% | 39% |
| Non binary | 1% | |
| Prefer not to say | 2% | |
| Prefer to self describe | 1% | |

*Source: Survey results and University student census 2019/20

Overall, the number of responses is sufficient to identify common themes arising from the free-text comments. The researchers approached the analysis of the free-text comments by reviewing the interview responses to familiarise themselves with the full dataset and the research themes in a preliminary coding phase. Further analysis was performed through the systematic coding of themes. The themes concerning the supervisory process were expanded upon through a process of moving between the literature and the empirical data until a coherent fit was developed (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2020).

The literature remains inconsistent on the importance of triangulating data. Proponents argue that the corroboration of certain data from multiple sources strengthens the credibility of the study, e.g. Yin (2013) on case study methods. However, others argue that triangulation should be context specific, and the extent may rely on the strength of the qualitative data collected (Ahrens & Chapman, 2006). In this instance, the survey data was not triangulated beyond its corroboration of themes identified by the post graduate taught experience survey (PTES, 2019).

Findings

Overall, students reported a variable experience of the supervision process. Before the lockdown, most students were located at the university (76%) and the majority started their supervision during lockdown (71%) with many having to change their dissertation proposals to reflect the situation created by the pandemic. Throughout the supervisory period, over half the students reported returning to a family home (56%), resulting in 32% of students located in a different time zone to their supervisor. To set

the context, it was important to understand whether students had a comparison of on-campus supervision before the switch online.

Student experiences of supervision

Questions asked how the university could improve the supervision process and what students considered the constituent elements of a good supervision to include. The following components were found to be important to students: firstly, expectation setting or a clear framework within which their supervision would be conducted; secondly, a tailored approach to the student and the project e.g., communication modes, frequency; and finally, the importance of evolving the relationship to ensure that it is appropriate to the needs of the student.

Expectation setting

The onset of the pandemic resulted in significant uncertainty for both academics and students. As result, an increased requirement for clarity was required by students who were initially apprehensive about the process. Students reported their concerns from the start of the lockdown period in addition to their current concerns at the time of completing the survey. The responses overwhelmingly identified the importance of setting expectations between supervisors and supervisees relating to the process and providing equity across the cohort.

There appeared to also be a significant variation in the approach to meetings with students with reports of set quotas in some supervisions, and perceptions of unfairness voiced as different practices were often compared and attributed to deficits in supervision by students. It appears that the structures are often perceived as too informal which leads to dissatisfaction from students who typically expressed a preference for a clear outline framework for the supervision:

Regular meetings planned ahead, with expectations and guidance on how to plan the research early on. Follow up emails, feedback, and comments as required. It would be good to know also what the supervisors expect in return and what they can or cannot do e.g., can they review drafts?

Some of the variation in approaches may have led to students conflating different approaches with deficient supervision. Expectations around responsiveness were recurrent in the survey comments. Whilst responsiveness is a subjective measure, a supervisory framework could set a normal response rate to help manage unreasonable expectations, e.g., normally respond to email within two working days. This allows for differences in working patterns and time zones which were evident during the lockdown:

My tutor was fairly good with feedback however, email response times were disappointing. Sometimes my tutor would take 7-10 days to reply while I aimed to reply within the next day or two and this could impact my progress if I was waiting for a specific query.

Other students reported overwhelmingly positive experiences with caring and responsive supervisors who exceeded their expectations; "My dissertation supervisor is great. I did not expect her to be so contactable both through video calls and emails." In addition, some students who had experienced supervision before the lockdown noted that they could resolve small queries very easily by dropping into the supervisor's office and receiving an immediate response, often in contrast to online supervision where the student cannot capture the supervisor's attention in the same manner.

Tailoring the supervision process to the student and project

Students did articulate an appreciation that each supervision was unique by virtue of the research question and the one-to-one relationship between the supervisor and supervisee. However, many felt that there should be a framework within which the approach could be tailored, with one student observing that "Satisfactory supervision allows the student to discuss ideas, receive feedback and guidance from their supervisor. There should be a collaborative approach with the expectations of both sides made clear". It was suggested that the negotiation process should take place at the outset within the supervisory framework to ensure that the supervision was appropriately tailored to the circumstances of both parties.

Student comments about the online supervision highlighted the potential disparities for those who do not have strong and consistent Wi-Fi connection which would not be the case in a face-to-face setting. In addition, the introduction of technology as an intermediary was felt to have affected the quality of the interaction. For example, students remarked that, "There is only so much that can be nuanced in an email". This was echoed by others who felt that it was important to meet in person to develop a relationship commenting that "I think it is important to meet face to face sometimes to better judge body language and feel more at ease in conversation".

For some, the technology-mediated relationship seemed to add to feelings of stress and concern with focusing on the topic whereas there might have been an expectation of some general discussion in person before focusing on work:

Although we have had some conversations on screen, we cannot talk for long, and as I've not been as relaxed, i.e. I feel like we have to stick to work only and not waste a moment as I know they will only have a limited time.

As respondents highlighted, supervision is generally a new and uncertain experience for the student; however, the faculty member is likely to have undertaken supervisions previously, or at a minimum will have experienced supervision themselves in some form.

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However, the implicit pedagogy of supervision means that they may not be sufficiently aware of the social aspects of the process, often focusing on the more objective and technical aspects.

Evolving the relationship

When asked how their expectations of the supervisor had changed during the supervision, students reflected on the nature of the relationship: "I expected it to be less personal, however this was not the case as I have managed to build a good relationship with my supervisor". Students cited the need for adaptability during the supervisory relationship and the changing nature of their expectations as a result of the lockdown: "It's a completely different scenario so I realised it will be completely different and my expectations have accordingly changed".

Some students reported a deficit view of online education in general which may have affected the overall responses received. This may have been influenced by other students or the media reporting during the pandemic. Students articulated their impression as follows: "I think there has to be an acceptance that any online studies are of a lesser quality than those face to face. This is why we have face-to-face classes and meetings". The perpetuation of a deficit narrative could pose a barrier to developing and negotiating a truly adaptive and student-centred supervision process.

The pandemic catalysed changes to the supervisory process that goes beyond the mode of delivery. In understanding the students' experiences reported in the findings, it is important to project these into the future as educators consider the pedagogy of supervision for future academic years. Educators need to consider: the expectations of students and staff, the shifting dynamics of a hybrid model, and the possible outcomes and consequences. At a much deeper level, educators need to understand more about the shifting power dynamics of supervision and the nuances of small actions that can make a big difference to how the students feel about their role. It is important to safeguard against the "careless use" of supervisory power e.g., failing to attend meetings, lack of responsiveness, and poor feedback (Grant & Graham, 1999, p.81) which may be easier to perpetrate in an online environment.

Expectations of students and staff

The findings reveal a guessing game for students and staff related to the expectations of master's supervision in which the supervisor's power to set the conditions for the relationship has gone unchallenged. By exposing this uncertainty, the pandemic has raised the possibility of a negotiated approach to supervision. In common with Del Río, Díaz-Vázquez, and Maside Sanfiz (2018), this study found that it is important to clarify the role of the supervisor in advance. This helps shape the views of the students by influencing the behaviours of both sides and the expectations they have of each other (Del Río et al., 2018). The findings of this study may have been affected by the notion of "Campus Imaginary" (Ross & Sheail, 2017, p.839), where elements of a negative experience with online supervision are apportioned to the mode of delivery (online) by the student, rather than examining the underlying cause in detail.

Attention is required to the pedagogical aspects of master's supervision. The social aspects (Wagener, 2018) are often neglected in preference for the technical. It is important to recognise that the ongoing relationship remains fluid and subject to negotiation and renegotiation as the work progresses (Aitken et al., 2020), requiring a degree of adaptability by both participants. However, foregrounding the interactions between the social and technical is important and will help to make the implicit, explicit for students and supervisors alike. A guiding framework would be of benefit and would include establishing an open discussion of expectations and modes of communication, the setting of boundaries, and guidance on establishing netiquette (Soler-Costa, Lafarga-Ostáriz, Mauri-Medrano, & Moreno-Guerrero, 2021). It appears though that the framework needs to be agile and adaptive, recognising that one size does not fit all. This creates a balanced need for conformity and equality of experience against supporting the needs of individuals. Without clarity, students and supervisors develop their own expectations which can vary across degree courses and student groups, A lack of clarity can also feed hidden curriculum messages and unsupported power dynamics, e.g. Filippou et al. (2017) found that international students have higher expectations of a supervisor than local students.

Outcomes and consequences

A hybrid supervisory framework enables a negotiation between the student and the supervisor to establish a mutually agreed mode of supervision. This student-centric approach has been enabled or accelerated by the pandemic which required a technology-mediated response. Due to the negotiated nature of the delivery model, supervisions can move from a hierarchical position to one based on partnership (Healey, Flint, & Harrington, 2014). It is expected that at the 'forming' stage it may be messy and difficult for students and supervisors as they seek to determine the extent of the student's motivation and the optimal approach to the supervision. It is in this context that power can be used positively to motivate and encourage the student. Research suggests that intrinsic motivation is inversely related to levels of procrastination with online graduate master's students (Rakes and Dunn, 2010), and has been linked to positive examination outcomes in health sciences (Abdel Meguid, Smith, & Meyer, 2019). Understanding motivation and having open conversations about it should form part of the initial discussions, increasing transparency between student and supervisor.

Whilst the supervisory process involves unequal power relationships, both parties have an active role to change this (Grant &

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Graham, 1999). It is important to note that not all power dynamics disappear or shift because of using online technology; the shift to true partnership can only occur when the supervisor and student invest in constant compromise and remove the original hierarchy of academic and student processes (Geraniou, 2010). Shifting dynamics brought about by a hybrid framework are likely to create implications for the institution, the student, and the supervisor. These might include the training in and deployment of software to enable dynamic real time collaboration, and the creation of a supervision agreement between both parties outlining the agreed approach to supervision. Training for staff is important to support the move to a hybrid supervisory approach where there is likely to be more variation in the modes of supervision rather than the components of good supervision. Supervisors should also be made aware of the potential limitations associated with online only modes of supervision, e.g. the formality which can lead to a failure to establish student support requirements (Nasiri & Mafakheri, 2015).

In addition, it is critical that students receive instruction on what to expect from the supervisory process and where there is an opportunity for negotiation and tailoring of the process. Students should appreciate that good supervision does not necessarily equate to the same supervision for each student. This is a common misapprehension where students compare supervisory approaches and can detract from the components of supervision.

We call for the establishment of an institutional framework and associated training for both staff and students (Grant & Graham, 1999). In so doing, our study responds to de Beer & Masson's (2009) call for further research into student perceptions of hybrid supervision and how it can be shaped to meet their needs and moves beyond perceptions of online supervision as a deficit model (Ross & Sheail, 2017; Sussex, 2008).

Table 2 Hybrid supervisory framework agreement

| Topic | Range of possibilities | Student responsibilities | Supervisor responsibilities |
|--------------------------------|--|---|---|
| Number of supervisory meetings | These may or may not be specified. | To ensure they understand the number of meetings and what is required of them, before, during and after a meeting. | To ensure that the student is aware of any constraints of this nature. |
| Ethical review application | May or may not be required depending on the nature of the study. | To clearly outline their intended work and to apply for ethical review by the agreed deadline | To review the application (if agreed as suitable) and to ensure the deadlines for ethical review are clear. |
| Mode of supervision | Range from fully online to fully in-person. Agreement regarding platforms and software to support the process. This may be driven by university approved suppliers. | To outline constraints that may influence their engagement with certain modes of supervision, e.g. learning differences. To reach agreement with the supervisor regarding the mode of supervision. | To outline constraints that may influence their engagement with certain modes of supervision. |
| Responsibilities | Sharing of work in advance of the meeting. | To articulate to the supervisor their understanding of their responsibilities. | To articulate to the student their understanding of their responsibilities. |
| | Summarising the meeting discussion. | To summarise key points from the meeting. | To agree that the summary provided is an accurate representation of the meeting. |
| Responsiveness | Agreed response time. | Highlight any period of unavailability. | Highlight any periods of unavailability and who else can be contacted in an emergency, e.g. school office. |

Conclusion

The onset of the pandemic forced an immediate move to a fully online mode of supervision. This study reflects on the experiences of master's students who were catapulted into this situation during 2020, foregrounding the importance of the social aspects of supervision as part of the overall pedagogy. This is particularly important in the realm of master's supervision as the duration is

short and intense in contrast to the extended nature of postgraduate research supervisions which span several years. The study also highlights the dynamic nature of the supervisory relationship and calls for training of both supervisors and students so that they are aware of the negotiated agreement that the process entails.

The limitations of this study include, that students were surveyed during the first phase of the pandemic when neither side of the supervisory relationship had anticipated that full online delivery would be required. As a result, participants and their supervisors may have been thrown into situations with poor technology (both devices and connectivity) which may have affected their responses to the survey. Furthermore, unplanned adjustments to field or laboratory work may also have influenced perceptions of the supervisory process. The study only used a survey as its method and therefore it was not possible to triangulate the data; however, the trends reflect PTES data (Advance HE, 2019)

Biographies

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