Best practice: Honours and coursework dissertation supervision

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Acknowledgements

List of acronyms used

ALTF	Australian Learning and Teaching Fellows
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework
DDOGs	Council of Deans and Directors of Graduate Research
EFTSL	Equivalent Full-Time Student Load
HERDSA	Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia
HDR	Higher Degree by Research
ICOPE	International Conference on Psychology Education
InSPiRE	Inter-uni Summer-School Postgraduate Research Experience
OLT	Office for Learning and Teaching
TEQSA	Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency
WAND	West Australian Network for Dissemination

Executive summary

Fellowship overview

The issue addressed in this fellowship was the paucity of material available to support supervisors of dissertation students in coursework degrees (undergraduate, honours and masters by coursework) in Australian universities. Most universities provide policy and procedural documents relating to dissertation supervision, but limited training in the *practice* of supervision within coursework degrees. Fellowship activities focused on the identification, documentation and dissemination of best practice in dissertation supervision in coursework degrees.

Fellowship approach

The overarching approach to the fellowship was to work collaboratively with interested academics within the higher education system to identify, develop and disseminate good practice in coursework dissertation supervision. The fellowship activities to achieve this were conducted in four overlapping phases:

- Phase 1: Identification of existing knowledge, resources and scholars

- Phase 2: Needs assessment based on interviews with dissertation co-ordinators , supervisors and students

- Phase 3: Identification and development of best practice through workshops with supervisors and dissertation co-ordinators

- Phase 4: Dissemination and reporting

Fellowship outputs

Outputs from the fellowship include:
- *Guide for New Supervisors of Honours and coursework Dissertation Students*
- Annotated bibliography on supervision in coursework degrees
- Models of good supervisory practice from student and supervisor perspectives
- Vignettes from student, supervisor and dissertation co-ordinator perspective on a range of supervisory issues
- Good practice recommendations for supervisors
- Good practice recommendations for universities
- Good practice tools

All outputs are available on the fellowship website: http://www.dissertationsupervision.org/

Good practice recommendations for supervisors

The findings from this fellowship indicate that supervision is best viewed as a *negotiated practice* between supervisor and student. Specific recommendations for new supervisors are:

1. *Prepare for supervision (understand the requirements, role, responsibilities, and boundaries of supervision)*

2. *Clarify expectations with co-supervisors*

3. *Clarify expectations with students*

4. *Meet regularly to monitor progress*

5. *Ask students to send a meeting summary with actions required after each meeting*

6. *Provide timely, constructive feedback*

7. *Involve the student in working through the process of developing a research question*

8. *Teach students the skills required to write a literature review*

9. *Guide students towards appropriate literature on methodologies, methods and analysis, helping them shape their ideas into a feasible research project*

10. *Guide students in data collection, analysis and interpretation, but do not do it for them*

11. *Encourage students to write frequently and provide feedback on technical components of writing as well as content*

12. *When project issues arise, work with students to identify the sources of the issue, evaluate possible solutions and monitor the effectiveness of strategies implemented*

13. *When progress stalls for personal reasons, help the student determine the nature of the problem, decide on a course of action and monitor progress*

14. *Supervisory expectations set at the beginning of the research project may need to be renegotiated over time to maintain an effective supervisor-student relationship*

15. *Keep the time spent on supervision as close to workload allocation as possible*

Good practice recommendations for universities

The following policy and procedural recommendations arising from the fellowship are designed to address systemic issues impacting on quality supervisory experiences for staff and students. It is recommended that each university:

1. *Establish workload allocations for supervision of coursework dissertations that reflect the time required to adequately supervise students with low levels of research skills conducting research within tight timeframes*

2. *Establish a maximum ratio of students supervised per academic that takes into account the total number of students supervised across levels of programs*

3. *Provide training for new supervisors on supervisory practice for coursework dissertations*

4. *Provide refresher training for experienced supervisors on supervisory practice for coursework dissertations*

5. *Formalise arrangements for co-supervision, team supervision or mentoring for new supervisors of coursework dissertation students*

Fellowship achievements and impact

- More than 100 supervisors and dissertation co-ordinators across Australia have contributed to the development of the fellowship outputs through interviews, sharing good practice in workshops or contributing materials
- To date, information on the fellowship has been disseminated through 23 events (conferences, sharing days and workshops)
- There were over 1000 page views of the fellowship website in the first six weeks following the release of the fellowship outputs in January 2015 (over 7,500 page views by 31st October 2015)
- The materials and good practice recommendations are being embedded within Curtin University with further opportunistic adoption within other universities
- Peer-reviewed publications ensure wider dissemination of findings

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Chapter 1: Coursework dissertations[1] in the Australian higher education system

The issue addressed in this fellowship is the paucity of material available to support supervisors of dissertation students in coursework degrees (undergraduate, honours and masters by coursework) in Australian universities. Most universities provide policy and procedural documents relating to dissertation supervision, but limited (if any) information is provided on the practice of supervision within coursework degrees. The intended outcomes of the fellowship centred on raising awareness of supervisory practice issues and identifying, developing and disseminating best practice on supervision of coursework dissertation students. In this chapter I first provide contextual information on coursework degree dissertations in the Australian higher education sector. I then briefly summarise previous research and projects related to coursework dissertation supervision before providing the rationale for the fellowship activities.

Levels of coursework dissertations

The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) specifies the requirements for regulated qualifications in the Australian higher education sector (AQF Council, 2013), including qualifications that require completion of a dissertation. Dissertations may be completed as part of qualifications at Levels 7 (bachelor degree), 8 (bachelor honours degree), 9 (masters degree) and 10 (doctoral degree) of the AQF. While dissertations are not commonly completed as part of AQF Level 7 bachelor degrees, most AQF Level 8 bachelor honours degrees require the completion of a dissertation. It is also possible for dissertations to be completed as part of other AQF Level 8 qualifications (Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma). All AQF Level 9 masters degrees require a research component, which may include the completion of a dissertation. Doctoral degrees (AQF Level 10) require the completion of a dissertation.

A further distinction can be made between coursework degrees, where more than a third of the assessable components of the program are based on coursework, and research degrees where at least two-thirds of the assessable components of the program are research based (AQF, 2013). All qualifications at Levels 7 and 8 are coursework degrees, as are Level 9 masters (coursework) and masters (extended) degrees. Level 9 masters (research) and both Level 10 doctoral degrees (research and professional) are classified as research degrees (AQF, 2013) and fall outside the scope of this fellowship's investigations. Table 1 depicts coursework and research degrees at each AQF level.

The distinction between coursework and research degrees is important. Universities receive block grants to support research training for research degrees under the Research Training Scheme (Higher Education Support Act 2003, No. 149). Domestic students enrolled in these

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[1] The terms dissertation and thesis both refer to a major written report on a research project completed as part of higher education studies. The terms, while used in some countries to indicate the level of study (for example, the term dissertation is used for honours level projects in the UK but doctoral level projects in the US; Healey, Lannin, Stibbe & Derounian, 2013), are often used interchangeably in Australia. In this report the term dissertation is used throughout to refer to major written reports of research projects at undergraduate, honours and masters by coursework levels.

higher degrees by research (HDR) do not currently pay a contribution towards the cost of their education[2]. Further, HDR students may be eligible for Australian Postgraduate Awards to support their living expenses. In contrast, coursework students contribute towards the cost of their education through fees (Kiley & Cumming, 2014b) and cannot apply for Australian Postgraduate Awards to support their living expenses.

Table 1. *Degrees that may include completion of a dissertation by Australian Qualifications Framework Level*

AQF Level 7	AQF Level 8	AQF Level 9	AQF Level 10
bachelor degree	bachelor honours degree	masters degree (research)	doctoral degree (research)
	graduate certificate	masters degree (coursework)	doctoral degree (professional)
	graduate diploma	masters degree (extended)	

Note: Blue cells indicate coursework degrees; pink cells indicate research degrees.

Coursework and research degrees are also distinguishable in terms of management within universities. First introduced in Australia in 1944 (Rae, 2002), PhD programs have an established place within Australian universities. HDR students are recognised as contributing to research production (Evans, 2007) with identified responsibility for their management specified at all levels from program co-ordinators, Heads of Schools, Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies through to Pro Vice Chancellors/Deputy Vice Chancellors (Research). Performance of HDR students is under close scrutiny (Evans, Lawson, McWilliam & Taylor, 2005). A network of senior academic managers across Australian universities, the Council of Deans and Directors of Graduate Research (DDoGs), was established in 1994 and is active in advocating for improved HDR education (Evans, 2007). DDoGs have ratified *Good Practice Principles for Graduate Research* (DDoGs, 2014), providing six principles from time of admission through supervision to thesis examination. Most Australian universities specify the required levels of research expertise for supervisors, and mandate supervisory training prior to supervising HDR students, with student progress and concerns monitored through annual progress reports.

In contrast to the established and highly monitored processes for PhD supervision, most Australian universities have no specified level of supervisory research expertise required for coursework dissertations (Kiley & Cumming, 2014b), do not mandate training for supervisors of coursework dissertation students (Kiley & Cumming, 2014a) and do not have formal monitoring mechanisms. Further, coursework students seldom have the same level of access to facilities and resources as HDR students (Kiley & Cumming, 2014b).

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[2] It was announced in the 2014 Federal budget that from 1 January 2016 Commonwealth funding will be reduced and Australian higher education institutions can charge students a contribution fee of up to $3900 for high cost courses and $1700 for low-cost courses

Numbers of students enrolled across Australia

There are also marked differences in the number of students enrolled in coursework and research degrees where dissertations are likely to be completed. The most recent available figures indicate that masters (coursework) students enrolled EFTSL across Australia is 107,979, representing 12% of total student EFTSL, with a further 1% (13,601 EFTSL) accounted for by bachelor (honours) students (TEQSA, 2014; Table 9, p. 10). In contrast, PhD's and masters (Research) account for 4% and less than 1% of total EFTSL respectively.

In addition to there being approximately four times as many students enrolled in relevant coursework degrees than HDR, the trajectory of enrolments differs. As can be seen in Figure 1 below, there have been slight increases in the number of completions of PhD, masters (research) and bachelors honours degrees over the past decade, but the number of completions of masters (coursework) degrees has experienced a much stronger growth[3].

Figure 1. *Award Course Completions by Level of Course, 1999 to 2011.*
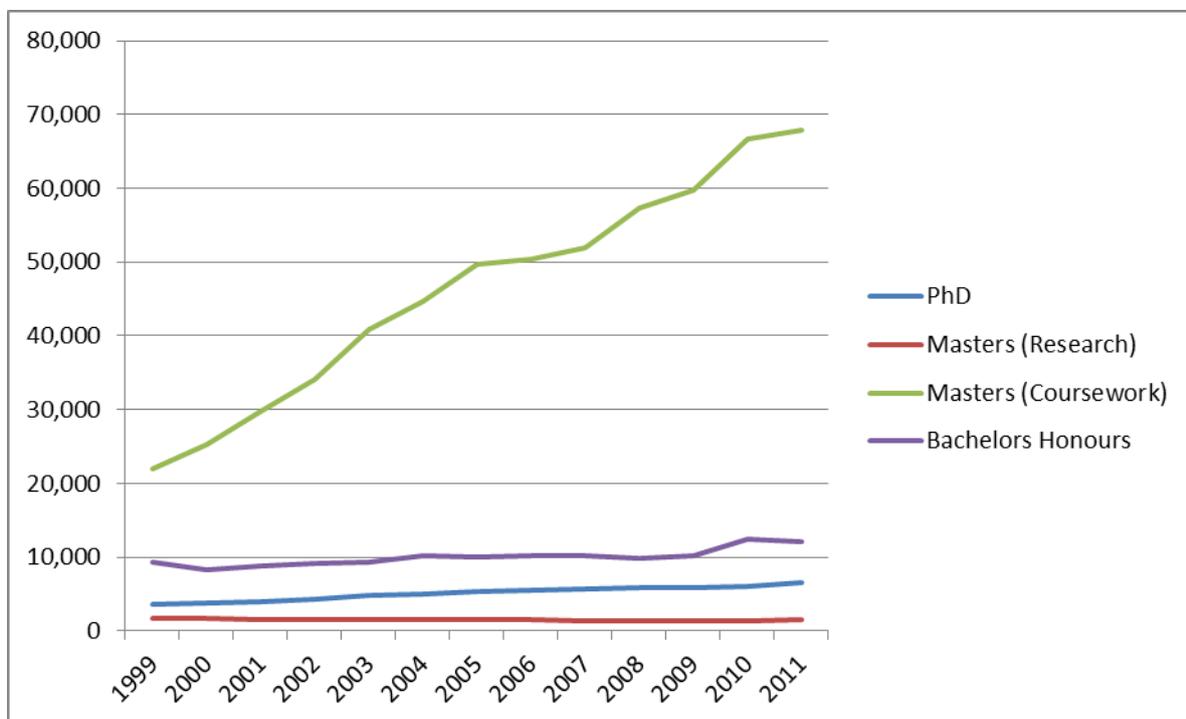
Note: Data source: Award course completions 2011: selected higher education statistics tables; Excel spreadsheet downloaded from http://www.innovation.gov.au/HigherEducation/ HigherEducationStatistics/StatisticsPublications/Pages/default.aspx

In summary, the Australian higher education system currently supports the completion of dissertations within both HDR and selected coursework degrees. Despite the number and growth of enrolments in coursework degrees exceeding the number and growth of HDR enrolments, coursework dissertation students and supervisors receive less training, resources and financial support than their HDR counterparts.

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[3] Statistics are not available for AQF 7 degrees that include dissertations and embedded Honours programs, and are therefore not included in Figure 1.

Coursework dissertation supervision

As noted in the previous section, coursework dissertations can be completed as part of undergraduate, undergraduate honours and masters (coursework) degrees. In this section research and projects relating to dissertation supervision at each of these levels is briefly reviewed.

Undergraduate

In recent years, emphasis has been placed on providing research experience for undergraduate students. In Australia, Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT) projects such as *Undergraduate Research in Australia* (http://www.mq.edu.au/ltc/altc/ug_research/index.htm) and the *Capstone Curriculum* (http://www.capstonecurriculum.com.au/0 have explored the value of undergraduate research and provided resources to support this activity. However, while these projects may incorporate dissertations, this is not the primary focus, and limited information is available relating specifically to supervision of dissertations. Published research on Australian undergraduate research similarly focuses on the range of undergraduate research experiences (e.g., Brew, 2013).

Internationally, similar projects on undergraduate research have been undertaken (e.g. *Leading, Promoting and Supporting Undergraduate Research* http://insight.glos.ac.uk/tli/activities/ntf/urproject/Pages/default.aspx). While final year dissertations are still perceived as valuable, alternative capstone projects are being explored (Healey, Lannin, Stibble, & Derounin, 2013). International research indicates that due to the pressure of numbers of students, undergraduate dissertations may be supervised in groups[4] (Baker, Cluett, Ireland, Reading, & Rourke, 2014; Healey et al., 2013) or online (Healey et al., 2013). Key areas of difficulties experienced by undergraduate dissertation students include time management and understanding expectations (Harrison & Whalley, 2008), with supervisors and students holding differing expectations regarding dissertation research (Malcolm, 2012).

Honours

End-on honours programs[5] provide a transition year where students move from course work to completing independent/group research. Honours is seen as an emotionally charged personal transition year (Allan, 2011), providing a transition between undergraduate and postgraduate degrees (Kiley, Boud, Cantwell & Manathunga, 2009) or the workplace. A previous OLT project report, *The Role of Honours in Contemporary Australian Higher Education* (http://www.aushons.anu.edu.au/), indicated that while honours is well regarded within academia, "(i)ts ambiguous status between undergraduate and postgraduate education leaves honours in an unrecognised and invisible third dimension, which can disadvantage the resources allocated to honours" (Kiley et al., 2009, p. 26). Further, honours pedagogy was summarised as "relatively invisible and relatively

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[4] Difficulties in managing group projects emerged as an issue in this fellowship. A brief literature review, vignettes from student, supervisor and coordinator perspectives, and tools for managing group projects are available on the fellowship website www.dissertationsupervision.org

[5] Not all honours programs are 'end-on' programs. Alternative models within the Australian Higher Education system include embedded and accorded honours.

unarticulated" (p. 26), with honours supervision described as a "substantially under-researched area" (p. 4).

Beyond the review of the role of Australian honours programs (Kiley et al., 2009), limited research has been conducted into the practice of honours supervision. Research that has been conducted has been based on small samples and is mostly qualitative (Armstrong, 2004; Armstrong & Shanker, 1983; Derounian, 2011; Feather, Anchor, & Cowton, 2011; Greenbank & Penketh, 2009; Hammick & Acker, 1988; ; I'Anson & Smith, 2004; Jamieson & Gray, 2006; Kite, Russo, Couch & Bell, 2011; Malcolm, 2011; Stefani, Tariq, Heylings & Butcher, 1997; Todd, Bannister & Clegg, 2004; Todd, Smith & Bannister, 2006). No resources specific to the supervision of honours dissertations could be located.

Masters

There has also been limited research conducted on dissertation supervision in masters coursework degrees. Drennan and Clarke (2009) noted that course work masters degrees are "one of the least understood or researched academic levels in higher education" (p. 483). Their research identified that students' perceptions of supervision were a significant predictor of perceived research skill development. Previously, Anderson, Day, and McLaughlin (2006, 2008) described supervisors' perceptions that supervision requires the duality of both shaping students' work to meet required academic standards and supporting the growing independence of students. Students placed more emphasis on their own personal agency in the dissertation process, with supervision seen as aiding in the academic socialisation process. More recent research from the Netherlands suggests that supervisors and students may vary in their goals, and may not accurately perceive the goals of each other (de Kleijn, Meijer, Brekelmans & Pilot, 2013), that students most satisfied with their supervision perceive feedback from their supervisors as positive and informing future steps in the dissertation process (de Kleijn, Mainhard, Meijer, Brekelmans & Pilot, 2013), and that affiliation between supervisor and student is a positive predictor of successful outcomes (de Kleijn, Mainhard, Meijer, Pilot & Brekelmans, 2012).

Increasing enrolments in Australian masters by coursework degrees highlight the importance of identifying, developing and disseminating best practice in supporting dissertation supervision in masters coursework degrees. This is particularly important at a time when some students are seeking entry to doctoral studies following completion of coursework masters degrees (see the OLT project, *I've Done a Coursework Masters, Now I'd Like to Do a Doctorate: Can I?* http://courseworkmasters.anu.edu.au/).

The need for best practice materials on supervising coursework dissertations

The previous sections have highlighted the paucity of research on supervision and supervisory materials focused on undergraduate, honours and masters by coursework dissertations. My own prior research provided further evidence of the need for these materials. In 2012 I led a teaching research project measuring student and supervisor perceptions of fourth year dissertations (honours and undergraduate) in psychology at Curtin University (Roberts, Blosfelds & Gasson, 2014). Supervisors raised concerns over

issues such as not knowing how much assistance could be provided to students. Uncertainties over supervision were magnified in a year when students' future options are determined by their dissertation grades: *"I find that it is a job that comes with a lot of pressure because it is important that you do right by the student as their Hons grade plays a large role in determining their future."* (Roberts et al., 2014). The results from this research suggest that while the importance of the supervisory relationship is strongly endorsed, supervisors and students differ in their expectations (perceptions of the degree of responsibility of students and supervisors in selecting research topics, planning out programs of work, defining the scope and depth of research and selecting an appropriate research methodology) and perceptions of appropriate guidance (Roberts et al., 2014). These results indicate the importance of negotiating and managing expectations and supporting students through the dissertation process. Comments from supervisors in relation to uncertainty about the practice of supervision suggest that best practice guidelines for coursework supervision would be helpful and welcomed.

One potential source of best practice guidelines for coursework dissertation supervision is the adoption of guidelines developed for HDR supervision. Considerable research has been conducted on doctoral supervision (for a recent Australian review see Lee & McKenzie, 2011). In addition, the OLT has previously supported projects including the development of a best practice framework (see http://www.olt.gov.au/project-best-practice-framework-inform-and-guide-higher-degree-research-training-excellence-australi) and the development of a *Research Supervision Toolkit* http://researchsupervisiontoolkit.com/). While some of this material can be used to inform supervision of dissertation students in coursework degrees, it is important to recognise that students completing a dissertation as part of a coursework degree differ from PhD students in a number of important ways. For example, they may have no previous independent research experience (Cook, 1980), may have lower interest in conducting research (Cook, 1980) and need to complete their research in a shorter timeframe (Rowley & Slack, 2004). Further, undergraduate and masters degrees may be undertaken as a route to a professional, rather than research career. This means that it is not possible to directly apply the body of literature and resources on supervising PhDs to supervising students in coursework degrees (Feather, Anchor, & Cowton, 2011).

In summary, there is a paucity of material available to support supervisors of coursework dissertation students in Australian universities. The development of a key resource on best practices in dissertation supervision in coursework degrees will provide a first point of call for new supervisors. This is particularly important as most new academics will have their first supervisory experiences with coursework dissertation students. Increasing the quality of dissertation supervision in coursework degrees will provide enhanced learning experiences for dissertation students and contribute to the research training culture of universities.

Chapter 2: Approach and methodology

Given the paucity of available resources on the practice of dissertation supervision in coursework degrees, the disjuncture between supervisor and student expectations of the supervisory relationship and the uncertainties surrounding good supervisory practice,

fellowship activities focused on the identification, documentation and dissemination of best practice in dissertation supervision in coursework degrees. Rather than prescribing the 'one best way' to supervise, a range of good practices was sought that could be utilised by supervisors across the multiple forms of coursework dissertation supervision (e.g. individual supervision, co-supervision, supervision of groups) and disciplines.

Approach

The overarching approach to the fellowship was to work collaboratively with interested academics within the higher education system to identify, develop and disseminate good practice in coursework dissertation supervision. The fellowship activities to achieve this were conducted in four overlapping phases, detailed below. The identification of existing knowledge resources and scholars in Phase 1 was conducted in conjunction with a research assistant (who completed the annotated bibliography) and included materials generously submitted by honours co-ordinators[6] across the country. The needs assessment in Phase 2 was conducted with dissertation co-ordinators, supervisors and students. A key period for input from the reference group, mentor and evaluator were in the development of prototypes for vignettes and planning for workshops (between Phases 2 and 3). In Phase 3, supervisors shared their experiences, raised new issues, commented on existing good practice materials and suggested alternatives. Conversations were held with interested academics throughout the fellowship, especially during and after conference presentations and sharing events (Phase 4).

Phase 1: Identification of existing knowledge, resources and scholars

Phase 1 of the fellowship aimed to identify existing knowledge, resources and scholars to inform the development of future fellowship activities. This included:

- A desk review of published literature, conference papers and university guidelines and documents relating to the practice of dissertation supervision in coursework programs
- A comprehensive search for relevant learning and teaching materials (e.g., measures, tools, rubrics, activities, exemplars, case studies) that could be used or be adapted for use in dissertation supervision in coursework programs
- Seeking out scholars actively involved in research/practice related to coursework supervision through a range of activities including direct emails, social media postings, and presentations at local, national and international teaching conferences.
- Emails sent to honours co-ordinators across Australian universities inviting them to contribute information on existing resource materials[7]

The annotated bibliography compiled during this phase was largely completed by my research assistant, Camilla Rajah-Kanagasabai.

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[6] While emails requesting resources were sent to honours coordinators only, all other avenues for identifying relevant materials had in scope the full range of coursework dissertations
[7] See footnote 6

Phase 2: Needs assessment

Phase 2 of the fellowship comprised a needs analysis, conducted with Curtin coursework students and academic and support staff (predominantly from Curtin), to identify areas of difficulty in coursework dissertation supervision. This included:

- Interviews with 24 current or recently completed dissertation students from undergraduate, honours and masters (coursework) programs at Curtin University about their experience of supervision and problems experienced
- Interviews with 8 new dissertation supervisors in coursework programs (less than two years supervisory experience) about their experiences with supervising and problems experienced
- Interviews with 8 dissertation co-ordinators in coursework programs to identify common supervisory problems bought to their attention
- Interviews with 3 other student guild or Curtin University employees who provide support services to students or staff

Procedure

Prior to commencement of interviews, approval was obtained from Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval No. PSYCH SP 2013-13). Semi-structured interview guides for each of the groups of participants were developed and approved. Students, supervisors and dissertation co-ordinators were recruited through email invitations and fellowship presentations. Potential participants were provided with an information sheet about the study. Prior to each interview commencing, I provided an overview of the project, explained the purpose of the interview and invited questions. All participants signed a consent form and received a $10 Curtin Guild card in recognition of their time and effort.

During the interviews, participants were asked about their supervision experiences as student, supervisor, or co-ordinator. A 'critical incident' methodology (Flanagan, 1954) was used to identify best and worst supervision experiences. This technique requires individuals to recall previous critical incidents related to the topic of interest, with data collected through interviews, questionnaires or records. The data collected is then analysed through categorizing the incidents (Flanagan, 1954), and in line with more contemporary conceptualizations of the critical incident methodology (see Butterfield, Borgen, Amundsen & Maglio, 2005 for a review), the focus broadens beyond the description of the critical incidents to understanding the context and the individual's conceptualization of the behaviour. This technique has previously been successfully used in studies of PhD and clinical supervision (Christie, 2007; Sambrook, Irvine & Bradbury-Jones, 2006; Williams & Webb, 1994). Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed and imported into NVivo (version 10) for analysis. The interview data was analysed using thematic analysis for each of three groups (student, supervisors, dissertation co-ordinators combined with support staff) separately. Triangulation of the themes emerging from the three groups was used to determine the primary areas of identified need. A summary of findings was returned to all interviewees and their feedback invited.

Phase 3: Identification and development of best practice

Phase 3 of the fellowship involved the development of best practice materials for use in supervision with coursework dissertations students. Resources identified in Phase 1 and the results of Phase 2 were used to develop good practice materials relating to each of the issues identified in the needs analysis, for use in workshops with experienced supervisors. The final set of materials for use in workshops comprised:

- Vignettes: The interview transcripts from Phase 2 were used to develop vignettes from student, supervisor and co-ordinator perspectives for a range of issues identified in the Phase 2 analysis. Early prototypes of vignettes for one issue were discussed with my reference group, mentor and evaluator and changes made to reflect the feedback received.
- Brief literature reviews (typically half to one page): These were prepared for each of the issues, using as a starting point the annotated bibliography prepared by the research assistant in Phase 1
- Existing recommendations and tools identified in Phase 1

Three half-day workshops with coursework dissertation supervisors were run in Western Australia and South Australia, with participants recruited through HERDSA Western Australia and South Australia branches and all-staff emails at Curtin University. Workshops were well attended with over 100 supervisors meeting to share their supervisory experiences, workshop ways of responding to supervisory issues, and evaluating best practice materials.

Workshops were run using *The World Cafe* approach (Brown, Isaacs & The World Café Community, 2005). This approach is based on seven principles: setting the context, creating hospitable space, exploring important questions, encouraging participation, connecting diverse perspectives, listening and reflecting and sharing discoveries (Brown et al., 2005). Following a brief summary of findings from Phase 1, supervisors were invited to list, and then discuss, issues they had faced in supervising coursework dissertation students. The results from this activity were used to select the issues for discussion in the workshop. Using the workshop materials as a starting stimulus and guided by questions set by the facilitator, participants engaged in small group discussions on supervisory issues.

Each table of supervisors selected the issue they would like to work with and assigned a scribe to record key points from discussions. Supervisors at each table were provided with student, supervisor and co-ordinator vignettes on the issue, and first asked to clarify the issues that were presented (What are the issues? Can the issues be grouped together? What are the underlying causes?). They were then invited to discuss how the issue(s) were best dealt with (What have you done in this situation previously? Was it successful? What else could be done? What advice would you give if approached by the student? The supervisor?). Each table was then provided with the relevant literature review and existing recommendations and tools relating to their issue. They were asked to evaluate the tools and recommendations (Are these suitable for use at these levels? Do they need amending? If so, how? Would you use these strategies/tools in your own supervision? Why? Why not? Are you aware of other tools that might be more suitable?).

After a short break, the process was repeated with supervisors reforming into different groups to work with another issue. Each workshop ended with a discussion of common themes arising across groups and the types and formats of best practice materials that would be most useful for coursework dissertation supervisors.

Scribes' notes were collated for each issue across workshops and combined with notes taken by a research assistant. These were used to inform my further development of the best practice materials.

Phase 4: Dissemination and reporting

Dissemination of information about the fellowship was a core activity throughout the course of the fellowship. Electronic dissemination was selected as the primary method of dissemination for feasibility purposes. A fellowship website (www.dissertationsupervision.org) was developed at the start of the fellowship. This provided the vehicle for both profile-building of the fellowship and the dissemination of findings. A twitter account for the fellowship was also established (@supervisingdiss) and information related to dissertation supervision in coursework degrees and fellowship outputs was tweeted/retweeted. The secondary method of dissemination of information about the fellowship was through direct engagement with academics in workshops, roundtables, invited training sessions and conference presentations (see Chapter 6 for details).

Chapter 3: Findings and outputs

In this chapter, the findings from Phases 1 to 3 are presented. The outputs resulting from each stage are italicised. The chapter ends with a summary table of planned versus achieved outputs.

Phase 1: Identification of existing knowledge, resources and scholars

The desk review of published literature, conference papers, university guidelines and documents and learning and teaching materials resulting from Phase 1 activities confirmed the paucity of available material that directly addresses supervisory practice for undergraduate, honours and masters by coursework dissertations.

The identified materials were summarised and presented on the project website as an *annotated bibliography* (see http://www.dissertationsupervision.org/bibliography) and *related projects* webpage (http://www.dissertationsupervision.org/related-projects). Presenting the material in this format provides easy access to the original materials through hyperlinks.

Phase 2: Needs assessment

Thematic analysis of interviews with students, new supervisors, dissertation co-ordinators and support staff were used to develop *models of student and supervisor conceptions of good supervision* and identify *common supervisory issues* across types of coursework dissertations.

Student Model of Good Supervision

Positive supervisory relationships were described by students as based on a shared passion for the topic, clear expectations and open communication. 'Good' supervision occurred within a relaxed space where students felt they were listened to, their concerns were not dismissed and they received support, guidance and reassurance. In some circumstances, the synergy of ideas resulted in better research. Students described supervisors' contribution to positive supervisory experiences in terms of approachability and availability, support, interest in the student as a person and sensitivity to students' emotions. Students described their own contributions as coming to meetings prepared, taking ownership of the research project, and in some cases managing the supervision process. Where supervision meetings went well, students reported feeling re-motivated, with increased focus and clarity about the project: they knew what they had to go on and do next, and felt less stressed. The student model of good supervision is presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. *Student Model of Good Supervision for Coursework Dissertations*
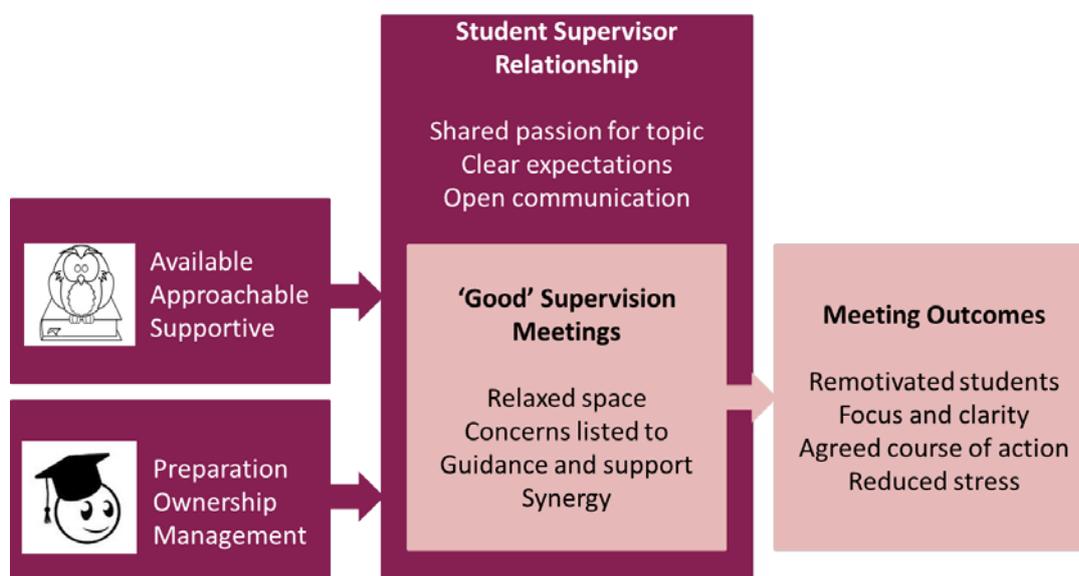
Positive supervisory relationships were described by supervisors in terms of shared passion for the topic, clear expectations and a positive group dynamic or dyadic relationship. Good supervision meetings were characterised by discussion, guidance, clarification and positive feedback. Supervisors described their own contribution to good supervision in terms of providing structure and research knowledge, being about to explain concepts in everyday

terms the students could understand and being supportive. Students were viewed by supervisors as contributing to positive supervisory experiences through being interested in the topic and taking ownership of the project. The outcomes of good supervisory meetings were described in terms of seeing the personal growth and skill development of students, and student satisfaction. The supervisor model of good supervision is presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3. *Supervisor Model of Good Supervision for Coursework Dissertations*
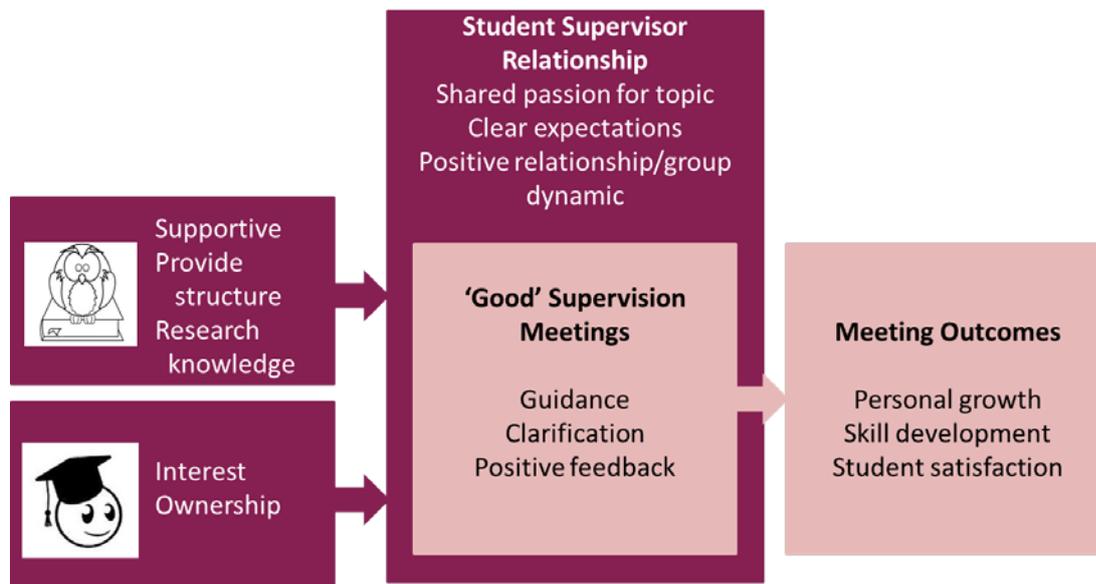
There are marked similarities between supervisors' and students' views of good supervision, but also some differences. Supervisors focused on more instrumental aspects of supervision while students focused on affective aspects. However, while there may be some differences in perceptions of good supervision by supervisors and students, both students and supervisors acknowledged that each party contributes to good supervision. That is, good supervision is a negotiated practice between supervisor and student. The concept of supervision as a negotiated practice is a key finding from this research and has important implications for the practice of supervision, which will be developed further in the next chapter. As one student participant who was sent a summary of Phase 1 findings reported:

> *I think it will be really useful for students to have an idea of what supervisors see as 'good supervision', I didn't have a clue what was expected of me when I started my honours year. It is very interesting that supervisors want their students to take ownership of their research project- I had never thought of this!*

More detailed information on the findings, including direct quotes from interviews that support the models developed, were presented at a Western Australian teaching and learning conference. The presentation from this conference, '*What Constitutes 'Good' Supervision for Course Work Dissertations'*, can be downloaded from the project website (http://www.dissertationsupervision.org/project-materials).

Supervisory Issues

A range of supervisory issues emerged from interviews with students, new supervisors, and dissertation co-ordinators and support staff. These were identified from participants' descriptions of times when supervision, in their opinion, was not working well. A summary of the key issues is presented in Table 2. The majority of issues identified were shared concerns across students, supervisors and co-ordinators (albeit from differing perspectives). However, there were also some supervisory issues identified by students and co-ordinators that were not raised by new supervisors. For example, non-availability of supervisors was an issue to students in terms of not receiving timely advice and support. Co-ordinators were also aware of this issue as the problems resulting from this were often escalated to them. However, none of the new supervisors raised this as an issue. It is possible of course that as students and supervisors were not 'matched' in this needs analysis (ie., I interviewed some students whose supervisors were not interviewed, and some supervisors whose students were not interviewed) that the supervisors about whom these types of issues were raised did not participate in the study.

Table 2. *Supervisory issues identified by students, supervisors, dissertation co-ordinators and support staff*

Issue	Students	New Supervisors	Dissertation Co-ordinators/ Support staff
Conflicting advice	√		
Co-supervision	√	√	√
Cross-cultural		√	√
Differing expectations	√	√	√
Feedback	√	√	√
Inequities	√	√	√
Interpersonal issues	√		√
Managing group projects	√	√	√
Motivating students	√	√	√
'Needy' students	√	√	√
New supervisors struggling	√	√	√
Perceived supervisor disinterest	√	√	
Power imbalance	√	√	√
Project issues	√		√
Supervisor non-availability	√		√
Supervisor workloads	√	√	√

Vignettes from student, supervisor and dissertation co-ordinator perspectives were written by me for each of the issues. Each vignette presented a 'composite account' (Markham, 2012) reflecting the views of several participants interviewed. As indicated previously, the development of prototypes was informed by feedback from my reference group, mentor and evaluator on the first set of vignettes written. Example extracts from vignettes on

differing expectations are presented below. The full set of vignettes can be downloaded from the project website (http://www.dissertationsupervision.org/project-materials).

> Excerpt from Student Vignette: *"There's an expectation I guess by the time you get to your research project that your supervisor will really guide you and really will help you rather than just facilitate a process which you're driving, so I guess it's just that I had the wrong idea of what my supervisor's role is going to be. I thought that they would probably be more driving the process and trying to keep more tabs with me rather than me managing their time."*

> Excerpt from New Supervisor Vignette: "*Mostly, things seem to be going OK. However, not so with one of my students I supervise. I saw her initially, and then I didn't see her much again. And I've dropped emails just to say "Did you want to catch up? Where are you? How are you going?" And I don't get a response. I don't feel like I'm providing enough support to her. I think she could benefit from a little bit more guidance but I don't see her and things get submitted before I've had adequate time to review them. It's perhaps a function of me not explaining my expectations clearly enough. I'm now taking a firmer line. I've now realised it's all a matter of getting those expectations sorted between the two people at the beginning."*

> Excerpt from Coordinator Vignette: *With many of the issues bought to me, I've looked at it as a difference in expectations. The student will come to me saying, "I was expecting my supervisor to do this" or "I was a bit disappointed with the feedback they gave me." I think they base their expectations on what they think a supervisor should do. What it usually comes down to is, I think, the expectations of the supervisor differ from that of their student. The main area of conflict the students are having seem to be their expectations clash so differently with their supervisors that they can't really see a way around it. I say, "The first thing you should be doing is sitting down and discussing what your expectations are, so you're both on the same page."*

Phase 3: Identification and development of best practice

A *brief literature review* was written for each of the issues identified in Phase 2. *Good practice recommendations* and *tools* for dealing with the issues were sourced where possible. This included materials identified in Phase 1, supplemented by a further set of searches of academic databases, websites and previous OLT projects by my research assistant and me. Where no suitable materials could be identified, materials were developed by me, with feedback from colleagues. These materials, along with the vignettes developed from Phase 2, were the source materials discussed and evaluated in three workshops with supervisors with a wide range of experience.

A summary of feedback ratings from evaluation forms completed after the workshops is presented in Table 3. Supporting these ratings, written comments on evaluation forms largely focused on the benefits from sharing experiences with other supervisors from a range of disciplines with differing experiences:

The café style facilitation meant I learnt from a variety of different perspectives across the university

The café style exercises - sharing/ hearing others experiences

The reflection activities were useful - especially in hearing the experiences from other schools

Table 3. *Percentage of workshop participants agreeing/strongly agreeing with statements*

	Workshop 1	Workshop 2	Workshop 3
	N=14	N=22	N = 19
Workshop			
Relevant	100	100	100
Balanced	100	100	100
Useful	100	100	100
Well-paced	93	91	100
Facilitator			
Knowledgeable	100	100	100
Prepared	100	100	100
Responsive	100	100	100
Gains from workshop			
Sharing experiences	93	100	100
Confidence	86	100	100
New ideas	86	95	100

The materials were then revised based on the feedback collated from working materials, scribes' notes from each table and notes taken by the research assistant and myself at workshops. Each workshop ended with a discussion on what kind of materials was needed and how these should be made available to supervisors across universities. Workshop participants expressed a preference for materials to be presented as a guide for new supervisors and as a set of short resources that could be easily accessed. In line with this, there are two main outputs from this project. The first is a *Guide for New Supervisors.* The guide presents material in the order that new supervisors are likely to need information, starting from preparation before the first meeting. Information is provided in a separate document for dissertation co-ordinators on *how to customise the guide* for use within particular programs. The guide and customising information are hosted on the fellowship website (http://www.dissertationsupervision.org/project-materials). The second main output is materials for dealing with a range of supervisory issues. In contrast to the supervisory guide, these materials are likely to be accessed on a needs basis, when a particular issue arises. The materials, also hosted on the fellowship website (http://www.dissertationsupervision.org/project-materials), are presented by issue, with issues arranged in alphabetical order to facilitate finding. A summary of these materials are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. *Summary of materials by issue.*

Issue	Vignettes	Literature Review	Tool/Resource
Conflicting advice	√	√	
Co-supervision	√	√	Co-supervision expectations Co-supervision issues and best practices
Cross-cultural	√	√	Cross-cultural supervision project
Differing expectations	√	√	Boundaries of supervision Clarifying expectations (supervisor) Clarifying expectations (student) Clarifying expectations (dual) Documenting student-supervisor agreements Authorder tool for determining authorship of publications Authorship agreement
Feedback	√	√	Providing feedback on drafts
Inequities	√	√	
Interpersonal issues	√	√	Effective student supervisor communication Managing students' negative emotions
Managing group projects	√	√	Template for group meetings Group charter
Motivating students	√	√	If progress is marginal
'Needy' students	√	√	
New supervisors struggling	√	√	
Perceived supervisor disinterest	√	√	
Power imbalance	√	√	
Project issues	√	√	Structured problem solving worksheet Meting summary template
Supervisor non-availability	√	√	
Supervisor workloads	√	√	

Note: Tools or resources were not available or developed for some issues. I plan to work further on these areas in the future.

A summary table of planned versus actual outputs is presented as Table 5. With the exception of preparation of journal articles (in progress), all other planned outputs were achieved, and delivered either in the planned format or an alternative format based on feedback.

Table 5. *Planned versus actual outputs.*

Planned Output	Result
Development of web-site	Achieved
Annotated bibliography	Achieved
Needs analysis	Achieved
Preparation of journal articles	Ongoing
Workshops	Achieved
Best Practice Recommendations	Achieved (*see Chapter 4*)
Online Training Module	Changed to '*Guide for New Supervisors*' and set of issue specific materials based on feedback
Recommendations for training new supervisors	Recommendations for universities developed (*see Chapter 4*)

Chapter 4: Good practice and policy recommendations

In this chapter, I first present good practice recommendations for supervisors of undergraduate, honours and masters by coursework dissertation students. However, good practice is reliant on supervisors being adequately resourced for their supervisory activities, and this is the focus of the second part of the chapter presenting recommendations to universities to address systemic issues and support good supervisory practice.

Good practice recommendations for supervisors

Supervision occurs within a hierarchical relationship between a supervisor and a student. The supervisor has the research knowledge, research skills, access to resources and authority of position to hold the power within the relationship. As such, supervision is often conceptualised as something that is 'done' by the supervisor to/for a student. The findings from this fellowship indicate that it is important to *reframe supervision as a negotiated practice between supervisor and student*, where both contribute to the supervisory

relationship. Supervisors can encourage this reframing through clarifying expectations about supervision, encouraging students to take ownership of their research projects and supporting students to make decisions about the research. Working from this perspective, specific recommendations for supervisors are presented below. These recommendations summarise the advice provided within the *Guide for New Supervisors*. The page numbers for relevant sections of the guide are provided beside each recommendation. A one-page handout listing the recommendations only and two-page handout listing the recommendations and further explanatory text are available to download from the project website (http://www.dissertationsupervision.org/project-materials).

1. *Prepare for supervision* (pp. 5-8)

2. *Clarify expectations with co-supervisors* (pp. 9-14)

3. *Clarify expectations with students* (pp. 15-20)

4. *Meet regularly to monitor progress* (p. 22)

5. *Ask students to send a meeting summary with actions required after each meeting* (p. 21)

6. *Provide timely, constructive feedback* (pp. 23-25)

7. *Involve the student in working through the process of developing a research question* (pp. 26-27)

8. *Teach students the skills required to write a literature review* (pp. 28-33)

9. *Guide students towards appropriate literature on methodologies, methods and analysis, helping them shape their ideas into a feasible research project* (pp. 34-37)

10. *When project issues arise, work with students to identify the sources of the issue, and identify and evaluate possible solutions* (pp. 38-39)

11. *Guide students in data collection, analysis and interpretation, but not to do it for them* (pp. 40-42).

12. *Encourage students to write frequently and provide feedback on technical components of writing as well as content* (p. 42)

13. *When progress stalls for personal reasons, help the student determine the nature of the problem, decide on a course of action and monitor progress* (pp. 43-48)

14. *Supervisory expectations set at the beginning of the research project may need to be renegotiated over time to maintain effective supervisor-student relationships* (pp. 49-52)

15. *Keep the time spent on supervision as close to workload allocation as possible* (pp. 58-59).

Good practice recommendations for universities

Good supervisory practice is reliant on supervisors being adequately resourced for their supervisory activities. The findings from this fellowship indicate that time allocations (where they exist) vary across universities and programs. In addition, and in contrast to HDR supervision, there is a paucity of formal training on supervisory practice available for supervisors of undergraduate, honours and masters by coursework students. This is problematic in a higher education context where new supervisors typically supervise coursework students before commencing HDR supervision.

There have been rapidly escalating enrolments in masters by coursework degrees across Australia over the past two decades. Masters by coursework enrolments outnumber masters by research enrolments in nearly all disciplines and currently account for approximately a quarter of Australian higher education students (Edwards, 2011). The increasing enrolments combined with AQF requirements for the inclusion of a research component in all Level 9 masters degrees (AQF Council, 2013) have resulted in increasing numbers of coursework dissertation students requiring supervision. Supervisors involved in the fellowship activities reported supervising up to 20 coursework dissertations simultaneously. The following policy and procedural recommendations arising from the fellowship are designed to address systemic issues impacting on quality supervisory experiences for staff and students. It is recommended that each university:

1. *Establish workload allocations for supervision of coursework dissertations that reflect the time required to adequately supervise students with low levels of research skills conducting research within tight timeframes*

2. *Establish a maximum ratio of students supervised per academic that takes into account the total number of students supervised across levels of programs*

3. *Provide training for new supervisors on supervisory practice for coursework dissertations*

4. *Provide refresher training for experienced supervisors on supervisory practice for coursework dissertations*

5. *Formalise arrangements for co-supervision, team supervision or mentoring for new supervisors of coursework dissertation students*

Chapter 5: Fellowship dissemination and impact

In this chapter I first summarise the dissemination activities conducted as part of the fellowship. Next I examine the impact of the fellowship to date, and the potential future impact of the materials developed during the fellowship.

Dissemination

Website

The fellowship website (http://www.dissertationsupervision.org/) was the primary site of dissemination for fellowship outputs. The website comprises the following pages:

- 'Home' provides an introduction to the fellowship and acknowledgment
- 'Blog' was established to engage academics in discussing supervision (this strategy was found not to be effective and postings ceased part way through the fellowship; the blog was removed prior to the publication of this report)
- 'Project Materials' provides links to resources developed during the fellowship, including
  - The 'Guide for New Supervisors'
  - Information and tools for dealing with a range of supervisory issues
  - Summary of interview findings
  - Selected posters and presentations
- 'Bibliography' provides an annotated bibliography on supervision comprising information on 48 journal articles and research reports related to supervising students in undergraduate, honours and masters by coursework degrees.
- 'Related Projects' provides links to 10 related Australian projects, 5 related international projects, and 3 blogs relating to supervision
- 'Contacts' provides information on the fellowship reference group, mentor and evaluator.

Electronic dissemination

A range of electronic media were used to direct interested academics to the fellowship website:

- Over the course of the fellowship 53 tweets/retweets were made to 33 followers. The tweet advising of the availability of the final materials was tweeted to my 33 followers and retweeted by four Twitter users to a total of 2937 Twitter users
- Emails advising of the availability of fellowship outputs were sent to more than 200 academics who had attended workshops, contributed material or expressed interest in being notified of the fellowship outcomes
- Information on the availability of the *Guide for New Supervisors* was included in the HERDSA Email news and posted on my Linkedin profile and ALTF website

Face-to-face dissemination

Table 6 summarises the range of face-to-face dissemination activities engaged in during the fellowship. This includes activities directly promoting the fellowship campaign and activities promoting the OLT/ALTF where reference to the campaign was also made. Dissemination activities have been conducted at local, national and international levels.

Table 6. *Face-to-face dissemination activities.*

Date	Event	Title/Focus	People (H Ed Inst's)	Host
2013				
July	School of Psychology and Speech Pathology Seminar	Presentation: *National Teaching Fellowship: Dissertation supervision in coursework degrees*	~20 (1)	Curtin University
Aug	WAND Fellowships Session	Panel member	24 (5)	Curtin University
Nov	WAND Sharing Day	Poster: *Identifying, Developing and Disseminating Best Practices in Supporting Dissertation Supervision: Examining Issues from Student, Supervisor and Co-ordinator Perspectives*	~30(5)	Curtin University
Dec	ALTF Forum: Professionalizing the Academic Workforce	Poster: *Identifying, Developing and Disseminating Best Practices in Supporting honours and coursework Dissertation Supervision*	~120(all)	Queensland University of Technology
Dec	ALTF Working Day	Pecha Kucha: *Supporting Dissertation Supervision*	~30(15+)	Queensland University of Technology
2014				
Jan	WA Teaching and Learning Forum 2014	Presentation: *What constitutes 'good' supervision for coursework dissertations: Student and supervisor perspectives*	~50	University of Western Australia
Jan	WA Teaching and Learning Forum 2014	Presentation: *Working towards the development of honours pedagogy: Staff and student perceptions of honours dissertation supervision.*	~50	University of Western Australia
Feb	Inter-uni Summer-School Postgraduate Research Experience (InSPiRE) 2014	Workshop: *Getting the most from your supervisor*	~50	Notre Dame University

Date	Event	Title/Focus	People (H Ed Inst's)	Host
2014 (cont'd)				
Mar	School of Psychology and Speech Pathology	Presentation to honours Students: *Getting the Most from Supervision*	~40	Curtin University
Mar	School of Psychology and Speech Pathology	Presentation to B Psychology Dissertation Students: *Getting the Most from Supervision*	~40	Curtin University
Apr	Fellowship Workshop	Supervisor Workshop 1: *Developing Best Practice in Honours and Coursework Dissertation Supervision*	~35	Curtin University
Apr	Fellowship Workshop	Supervisor Workshop 2: *Developing Best Practice in Honours and Coursework Dissertation Supervision*	~45	University of South Australia
Apr	Fellowship Workshop	Supervisor Workshop 3: *Developing Best Practice in Honours and Coursework Dissertation Supervision*	~35	Curtin University
Apr	School of Public Health	Meeting with honours supervisors and students	8	Curtin University
Apr	Quality in Postgraduate Research Conference	Presentation: *The Importance of Honours Supervision in Supporting Students Transitioning from Undergraduate Coursework to Postgraduate Research Degrees*	~50	University of Adelaide, University of South Australia and Flinders University
Jun	OLT Conference 2014: Learning and Teaching for Our Times	Poster: *Issues Facing New Supervisors: Undergraduate, Honours and Masters by Coursework Dissertations*	~200	OLT
July	HERDSA Conference	Roundtable: *How can 'Global' Supervisors Effectively Support Honours and Coursework Dissertation Students?*	6(4)	Hong Kong Baptist University

Date	Event	Title/Focus	People (H Ed Inst's)	Host
2014 (cont'd)			
July	HERDSA Conference	Presentation: *Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT) Fellowships: An Australian Learning and Teaching Fellows (ALTF) Workshop* [with Romy Lawson, Angela Carbone and Maree O'Keefe]	~30	Hong Kong Baptist University
Aug	International Conference On Psychology Education (ICOPE)	Presentation: *Supervisory Best Practices for Undergraduate, Honours and Masters by Coursework Psychology Dissertations*	~25	Northern Arizona University
Sep	School of Education	Presentation: *Supervisory Best Practices for Undergraduate, Honours and Masters by Coursework Dissertations*	~20(1)	Curtin University
Sep	WAND Fellowship Workshop	Panel member	~20(4)	Curtin University
Oct	HERDSA Rekindled	Presentation: *How Can 'Global' Supervisors Effectively Support Honours and Coursework Dissertation Students?*	~30(5)	Murdoch University
Oct	WAND Sharing Day	Poster: *Best Practice Supervision: Honours and Masters by Coursework Dissertations*	~50(5)	Curtin University
2015			
Mar	School of Psychology and Speech Pathology	Seminar for Honours students: *Getting the Most from Supervision*	~50	Curtin University
Mar	School of Psychology and Speech Pathology	Seminar for Undergraduate dissertation student: *Getting the Most from Supervision*	~50	Curtin University
Mar	Festival of Learning	Showcase: *Best Practice in Honours and Coursework Dissertation Supervision*	~10	Curtin University

Date	Event	Title/Focus	People (H Ed Inst's)	Host
Mar	Festival of Learning	Workshop: *Getting the most from supervision*	1	Curtin University
July	Australian Learning and Teaching Fellows Forum	Provocation: *Is there a Continuing Role for Honours in Australian Higher Education?*	~60	Deakin University
Jun	School of Psychology and Speech Pathology	Seminar for PhD students: *Getting the Most from Supervision*	~20	Curtin University
Jul	HERDSA Conference	Masterclass: Effective supervision of Honours and coursework dissertation students	~25	HERDSA
Jul	Workshop for Deakin University	Workshop: Best Practice in Supporting Honours and Coursework Supervision	~20	Deakin University

Impact

A summary of the impact of the fellowship to date and projected future impact of the fellowship is provided using the Impact Management Planning and Evaluation Ladder (IMPEL) Model (see http://www.olt.gov.au/impact).

Fellow

The fellowship has contributed to the career development of the Fellow (myself). Since being awarded the fellowship I have been promoted from Senior Lecturer to Associate Professor and have become a Curtin Academy Fellow and Curtin Academy Executive Member. I have restructured my research activities from mostly disciplinary research to focus primarily on research in higher education and have accepted a position two days a week as Director of Research in Higher Education with the Faculty of Health Sciences at Curtin University.

Immediate students

As part of this fellowship I have reflected upon my own supervisory practices and how I can better support the coursework students I supervise. The students I have supervised during the fellowship, the students I currently supervise (8 PhD students and 3 honours students) and students I will supervise in the future all stand to benefit from my increased knowledge and application of good supervisory practices.

Spreading the word

The final materials were released on the website on the 12th January 2015, and were accessed in 646 sessions by 536 users (1,033 page views) in the first 6 weeks. Dissemination activities continued through 2015 in the forms of workshops, seminars and conference

presentations. The impact of these dissemination activities is reflected in continuing high rates of access to the website (6,199 sessions and 7615 page views by 5526 users by the end of October, 2015). In addition, articles published within peer-reviewed journals support further impact.

Narrow opportunistic adoption:

While the focus of the fellowship was on supervisors, an unexpected 'spin-off' has been narrow opportunistic adoption in terms of providing guidance for students. In 2014 I presented a workshop for HDR students at the Inter-uni Summer-School Postgraduate Research Experience (InSPiRE) in Western Australia. Over the last two years I have presented sessions for fourth year undergraduate students, honours students and PhD students on how to get the most out of supervision. Given the high interest by students, materials subsequently adapted for use by students and were made available on the fellowship website.

Narrow systemic adoption:

The main outputs of the fellowship (e.g. *Guide for New Supervisor*) were released In January 2015. Processes for embedding the use of fellowship materials at Curtin University have been put in place, with the adoption of the *'Guide for New Supervisors'* within the School of Psychology and Speech Pathology, and presentation of the findings to the wider university.

Broad opportunistic adoption

The dissemination activities have resulted in the adoption of the materials by individual supervisors and dissertation co-ordinators in universities across Australia. An indicative comment received by email was:

> *Congratulations on the production of the guide and many thanks for sharing it so widely. I absolutely will refer to it as I step up my supervision roles in 2015*

In addition to individual use, some comments indicate that the materials will be considered for adoption within schools. At a recent conference I was approached by an academic who described how the materials had been useful in discussions between supervisors within her school in determining the boundaries of supervisor and student responsibilities in dissertations. Further indicative comments of planned adoption received in emails include:

> *Congratulations on the fantastic resource. It will be very useful to staff and we will certainly be reviewing it further to see how we can make best use of it within our School.*

> *I have forwarded it to the relevant people here at (university)*

One dissertation co-ordinator copied me into an email sent to all honours supervisors within a school, providing evidence of dissemination of the *Guide for New Supervisors* following adaptation of materials to suit a particular program. Honours supervisors were alerted to pages of particular relevance for particular stages, with local conditions/variations noted. This co-ordinator described the *Guide* as *"a godsend to honours co-ordinators!"*

While the intended audience of the materials and the focus of dissemination activities was Australian supervisors, Google Analytics indicates that the website has also being accessed by 136 users from outside Australia (New Zealand, United Kingdom, United States, Ireland, Brazil, Russia, , Israel, China, Phillipines, South Africa and Italy). This indicates the potential for broad opportunistic adoption internationally.

Whilst oriented to supervision in undergraduate, honours and masters by coursework degrees, comments received indicate that academics see these materials as useful for supervising HDR students also:

> *The documents and tools will be so very valuable to those of us who work with honours students and they will also be of assistance as I work with my HDR students. Thank you for all the work you have done and for your contribution to the support of our research students.*

> *Well done on getting this resource out for supervisors – and with such good timing with a new academic year just starting. Perfect! It looks clear, comprehensive, and with very useful evidence-based advice and practically helpful tools. Great stuff. I'm going to send this to a couple of Phd supervisors I know as I reckon most of the material works for any form of research supervision.*

Broad systemic adoption

Dissemination activities occurred both *during* the development of outputs and *following* their release. Activities focusing on wider dissemination and encouraging the systemic adoption of the outputs included a series of presentations, a masterclass at the 2015 HERDSA conference and the publication of journal articles.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this fellowship has addressed the paucity of materials available to support supervisors of dissertation students in coursework degrees in Australian universities. Outputs from the fellowship include:

- *Guide for New Supervisors of Honours and Coursework Dissertation Students*
- Good practice tools
- Annotated bibliography on supervision in coursework degrees
- Models of good supervisory practice from student and supervisor perspectives
- Vignettes from student, supervisor and dissertation co-ordinator perspective on a range of supervisory issues
- Good practice recommendations for supervisors
- Good practice recommendations for universities

All outputs are freely available to download from the fellowship website. Interest in the materials to date has been high. There were over 1000 page views of the fellowship website in the first six weeks following the release of the fellowship outputs in January 2015. The materials and good practice recommendations are being embedded within Curtin University with further opportunistic adoption within other universities. Workshops and presentations in 2015 focused on encouraging broad systemic adoption of the materials across Australian universities, with further dissemination planned through peer-reviewed publications. The materials were subsequently adapted for use by students.

Appendix A: Certification by Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic

Certification by Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic

I certify that all parts of the final report for this OLT fellowship provide an accurate representation of the implementation, impact and findings of the project, and that the report is of publishable quality.

Name: ………………………………………………………………..Date: …….……….………

      Professor Jill Downie – Deputy Vice Chancellor Academic

      Curtin University

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Appendix C: External Evaluator Report

Final Evaluation Report

Best practice: Honours and coursework dissertation supervision

Project Leader: Associate Professor Lynne D. Roberts

Curtin University

Project Evaluator: Adjunct Associate Professor Rob Phillips, School of Education, Murdoch University

Date: 22 February, 2015

Purpose of the Report

This is the final report of the evaluation of the "Best practice: Honours and coursework dissertation supervision" Fellowship in response to reporting requirements of the Office for Learning and Teaching. This evaluation report addresses summative evaluation questions about the achievement of the outcomes of the Fellowship. It is based on meetings with the Fellow and a review of a range of project documentation, including the draft final report prepared for the OLT.

Role of the Evaluator

Discussion between the Fellow and the Evaluator at the start of the Fellowship led to an agreement that the Evaluator would play a largely summative role. He provided advice and feedback at critical stages, but extended periods of planned overseas travel meant that he could not provide as much formative support as in other evaluation roles.

Overview

The Fellowship was well managed through four phases which culminated in the development and publication of a range of relevant resources. These resources are likely to improve the quality of dissertation supervision in coursework degrees, and therefore improve the student dissertation experience.

Project Management and Timeline

The Fellow managed the program herself, supported by a research assistant. The proposed activities were relatively straightforward, and were managed well by the fellow.

A plan and timeline was created laying out key project activities, notably data collection and dissemination activities. Less emphasis was placed on the analysis of the data and writing of documents. As in many projects and fellowships, the scope of data obtained exceeded the expectations of the researcher, and this led to some delays and two requests for extension.

The Feb 2014 Interim Report to the OLT identified an impact on Fellowship activities through increased university workload. This was resolved early in 2014, with the Fellow devoting 100% of her time to the Fellowship over 12 weeks. The focus in this period was on phase 3, workshops identifying and confirming best practice, building on phases 1 & 2.

During the remainder of 2015, the Fellow "worked on the fellowship when possible". While she took academic study leave in the second half of 2014, the main requirement for this period was to submit ten manuscripts to journals – an arguably unrealistic expectation which impacted on her ability to devote time to the Fellowship.

Further, feedback from participants in workshops resulted in the scope of work required for the fellowship increasing. An initial plan for an 'online training module' was rejected by workshop participants, in favour of two written outputs:
- a guide for new supervisors that provided materials in the order in which they were likely to need them; and
- materials on dealing with particular issues that could be easily accessed by supervisors without needing to wade through other material.

The Fellow adapted to these requests, but this significantly increased the workload required for phase 4 of the Fellowship. She successfully applied for extensions to account for the increase in scope and unfunded extra labour, and the Fellowship deliverables were
mostly complete by December 2014. The website materials were released on 12th January 2015.

These delays restricted the opportunities to obtain feedback from the reference group and other stakeholders within the reporting timeline.

Outcomes

The Fellowship set out to achieve the following outcomes[8]
1. To improve the quality of dissertation supervision in coursework degrees to provide enhanced learning experiences for dissertation students
2. To identify, document and disseminate best practice in dissertation supervision in coursework degrees
3. To develop a key resource on best practices in dissertation supervision in coursework degrees

Deliverables

Table 5 of the Final Fellowship Report summarises the proposed deliverables of the Fellowship, and their achievement. A brief commentary is made here on those deliverables: Website; Annotated bibliography; Needs analysis; Preparation of journal articles; Workshops; Best Practice Recommendations; Online Training Module; and Recommendations for training new supervisors.

It is clear from Table 5 (and the comprehensive materials available on the Fellowship website) that these outputs have been delivered, and expanded upon. As noted above, the 'Online Training Module' was changed to a '*Guide for New Supervisors*', incorporating the proposed 'Recommendations for training new supervisors'. The '*Guide for New Supervisors*' is organised by 'issues', with each issue accompanied by a literature review and *vignettes* capturing the

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[8] The were interpolated from the initial proposal, because they were not clearly enunciated in that proposal.

views of student, supervisors and dissertation coordinators. Most 'issues' have related tools and resources, some developed by the Fellow, and some adapted from elsewhere.

The Evaluator's judgement, backed up by initial feedback from stakeholders (in the Fellowship Report), is that these resources will be of great value to inexperienced (and experienced) dissertation supervisors. Many of the materials are also highly relevant to Higher Degree Research supervisors, and also to the range of students producing dissertations.

The only incomplete aspect of the deliverables is the writing of journal papers, and this is arguably premature, given that the Fellowship resources were not released until January 2015.

In summary, it is clear that outcome 3 has been achieved and exceeded. Outcomes 1 & 2 will be discussed further below.

Reference Group

While few formal meetings of the Reference Group appear to have occurred, the Fellow discussed issues related to the Fellowship with Reference Group members at conferences they jointly attended. Reference Group members were also consulted as individuals at various stages, providing advice about existing resources and scholars working in this area, and informal feedback about the draft resources produced, prior to their use in workshops.

The Fellow was supported by a mentor, an existing Fellow, Professor Dawn Bennett. The mentor (and, to a lesser extent, the Evaluator) provided advice on process issues related to the Fellowship.

Dissemination and Impact

A dissemination plan was developed early in 2014, and clear audiences identified for that dissemination. Chapter Five of the Final Report outlines a solid list of dissemination activities that impacted on many people across Australia, and elsewhere. However, these dissemination activities focused largely on awareness-raising *about* the Fellowship and information gathering *for* the Fellowship.

It is only since January 2015 that dissemination *of the outputs* of the Fellowship has commenced. Emails were sent to more than 200 stakeholders identified during the Fellowship. Chapter Five provides some promising early feedback about the usefulness of the resources and their potential uptake. With the beginning of the academic year imminent, it is likely that the Fellowship resources will be actively used, and further feedback will become available. However, this data will not be able to be included in the Final Report, for timing reasons.

The impact of this Fellowship to date is at the lower stages of the OLT's Impel impact framework. The Fellowship has clearly had an impact on the Fellow's career, with her moving into a learning and teaching leadership role. There has also been a concerted effort at 'spreading the word'.

Some evidence is provided of potential impact on students, and broader and systemic adoption, but much of the narrative is future-looking. Nevertheless, the Fellow's new role within the university positions her to strategically promote the outcomes within Curtin University and beyond.

In summary, it is too early to judge whether Outcomes 1 & 2 will be achieved. Certainly, the 'identify' and 'document' elements of Outcome 2 have been achieved, but dissemination of the final outputs is just beginning. While the Fellowship offers promise to "improve the quality of dissertation supervision in coursework degrees", evidence of this will require a minimum of one year to become available.

Budget

Some funds remain unspent at the time of writing, and the Fellow intends to commit these to dissemination of the completed materials, and adapting materials for use by students. Given the delays noted above, these are appropriate uses of the remaining funds, which should contribute to increased impact.

Conclusion

A great deal of work has been done in this Fellowship. Some excellent resources have been developed which are likely to be of great value to dissertation supervisors and coordinators of all levels of experience, including at Higher Degree Research level.

An unexpected outcome (which is underemphasised in the latest version of the report seen by the Evaluator) is that many of the resources produced will also be of value to students producing dissertations.

However, the amount of effort required to develop resources, which met the needs of stakeholders, delayed the release of the resources, and this affected dissemination and impact activities.

In summary, Outcome 3 has been fully achieved; Outcome 2 has been partly achieved; and it is too early to judge Outcome 1.

A mitigating factor in the lack of achievement of some outcomes in this Fellowship is that it had a different emphasis than many other Fellowships, in that it involved the development of artefacts *as well as* a program of engagement activities. Many Fellowships only concern themselves with the latter activity. In this Fellowship, issues involved in the development of the artefacts impacted on the program of engagement activities.

The Fellow appears committed to further dissemination activities, and is well placed within Curtin University to drive the adoption of the Fellowship resources, with a consequent improvement in dissertation supervisory practice.