

Building local leadership in research education

Scenario 1: Including and engaging candidates

As REC you have introduced a local one-day Research Induction that covers formal requirements, workshop support and roles and responsibilities of students and supervisor. The cohort of HDR students consists of a mixture of international students, part-time and working full-time and most with family responsibilities. Feedback from both full-time and part-time students was very positive. However, you have recently received some complaints by HDR students that surfaced during the mid-year review of progress. Several students complained that they never got to meet peers, discuss research plans or share information with other students. Many students, particularly the part-time and international students, felt isolated. You are fairly certain that the Dean will be keen to support you in trying to resolve the problems.

Questions for consideration

1. Who is responsible for helping students feel included?
2. What might your role be in fostering inclusion?
3. What sorts of academic and social activities might be appropriate for building peer support for:
 - a) Part-time students
 - b) International students
 - c) Bringing together local and international students?
4. How will you know if the strategies you introduced are meeting the students' needs?

Additional Information

Below are a number of issues that might be raised in discussion or, as facilitator you might like to pursue with a group. Following each issue there are a number of suggestions for consideration.

Issue: Who can be involved in developing and supporting a research culture?

While the REC has a specific role it was suggested that there are others who can be included in supporting a research culture. These include:

- Candidates with help from convener
- The Postgraduate Students Association
- Any special student support units
- The student HDR representative
- Research Centres
- Supervisors, not only of current candidates

Further resources available from www.first.edu.au

Support for this resource has been provided by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching. The views expressed in this resource do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching.

Building local leadership in research education

- More experienced candidates as mentors

To enable the development of a positive culture there needs to be a budget to allow for catering for social events as well as for specific research-related activities e.g. appropriate furniture such as lockable filing cabinets.

Issue: How might we involve part-time candidates, and particularly those at a distance, within the research culture?

Suggestions:

- Develop a series of discipline or topic-based university or national seminars which are advertised well in advance, and promoted as a way “to be known” outside your own university
- Important to make the reasons for attending very explicit, including the value of serendipity in that you never know what you might learn
- It is important that candidates are involved in developing activities
- In addition to regular residential seminars, consider seminars on Friday afternoons (over wine and cheese?) or on Saturdays
- Have an annual symposium that candidates have to attend as part of their enrolment

Issue: One of the criticisms made of a faculty’s research culture was that candidates were only involving themselves in research on specific topics, not broadening their understandings of research more generally.

Suggestions:

- A School introduced a candidate colloquium where during the year each academic had to present on a theory (or similar) and then another academic would respond to that.
- Consider a student organised seminar, where every staff member has to present to the students once a year (on their research, their career, an interesting paper etc)

Issue: Despite a lot of hard work by the REC to organise and promote seminars, some candidates are simply not attending.

Suggestions:

- Do we need to make attendance as a requirement of enrolment?
- Tell students the ones who tend to attend the most seminars are the ones to most likely pass!!!!
- Teach students how to recognise when something is innovative or...In other words, some candidates only look at the topic, not the manner of presenting, or networking etc
- One school required students who weren’t going to a seminar to write a 2000 word reason for why the topic was not relevant

Further resources available from www.first.edu.au

Support for this resource has been provided by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching. The views expressed in this resource do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching.

Building local leadership in research education

- Make HDR funding contingent on attending seminars (take attendance records).

Issue: Not all seminars need to be about someone's research, there are other ways of developing a culture.

Suggestions:

- In addition to university graduation ceremony, have a school-based one for students in that school
- Annual research conference/colloquium
- Doctoral master class, students to present their work to a visiting professor who then gives feedback – but the REC needs to convince the students it is worthwhile and then convince the visiting professor
- Get students to practice their conference presentations in advance and get feedback
- Student-led reading group where a student picks a paper and then gets peers to read and give insight.
- Also worth spending some of the time discussing the paper as a model of writing as well as discussing the ideas/content of the paper
- Example of a staff reading group as a way of developing a shared culture
- Students developed a writing group and then researched the culture by looking at the different ways in which different groups within the faculty operated as a writing group and so researched it, presented at a conference and had a journal publication as a result
- Potential for seminars by experienced researchers and/or more experienced candidates to talk about their research, their career, etc
- Particular issues when professional areas involved as students get to hear from them and get to be known by them.
- The REC having a one-to-one meeting with each new candidate
- Induction and orientation sessions
- Monthly meetings
- Social events can also be very helpful: bbqs at night or on weekends
- BYO multicultural food
- A common kitchen space

Further resources available from www.first.edu.au

Support for this resource has been provided by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching. The views expressed in this resource do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching.