## Scenario 3: Building a more formal doctoral education program

In light of recent developments in the sector, your University has proposed the introduction of more formalized doctoral education programs. Some people talk of enrolled coursework in the first year of candidature leading to a Graduate Certificate in Research whereas others talk of a suite of required courses throughout candidature.

Within your Faculty there are varying views of the aims and content of these courses, let alone their structure. Some people are keen to include specialized high-level disciplinary knowledge, others focus more on research methodologies, and others on employability skills. Others feel strongly that it is the supervisor's role to work with individual candidates on the development of knowledge and skills.

### Questions for consideration

- Who is responsible for leading the design and development of a more formal doctoral education program?
- Is there an assumption that coursework will be introduced and embedded in the current doctoral programs?
- Why do you think coursework is being introduced into doctoral programs?
- What sorts of courses (disciplinary, research or employability) and what structures (formal, informal, year 1 only, throughout candidature) would you suggest? Why?
- Who would you enlist to help design, teach (and assess) doctoral programs?
- How will you know if the program you introduced is 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**: Resistance by supervisors who believe that formalising coursework is not necessary. They talk of their successful supervision experiences over many years none of which included a formal doctoral education program?

Suggestions:

- Provide information sessions that detail the various reasons for introducing more formal doctoral education programs
- Organise discussions that provide academics with the opportunity to express varying views on the introduction of more formal modules
- Talk to staff about their reasons for resisting the introduction of a more formal education program
- Draw supervisors attention to the different kinds of doctoral students in universities today and the different expectations that students and the University have of doctoral program.
- Provide examples of formal doctoral education programs in other universities and what they hope to achieve and how they are managed.

- Invite supervisors to be collaborators in the development of the program and in the individual modules
  - Draw attention to the opportunities that students will have by working with others, in small cohorts, when undertaking more formal courses and modules.

**Issue**: Concern about duplicating existing modules and activities in faculties and across the University

Suggestions:

- Enlist the support of others, both centrally and locally, to do an audit of relevant modules and activities
- Talk to people in other faculties to see how they are organising their more formal doctoral education program and discuss the possibility of sharing some existing modules
- Also consider how you might be able to draw on modules in other universities
- Also consider how you might include the many informal doctoral activities going on such as seminars in research centres and strengths

**Issue**: There might be some criticism by doctoral supervisors who believe that it is not their responsibility to develop or even teach doctoral modules, rather it is the responsibility of the student to find relevant courses within the faculty or even the University. Their argument is that students taking responsibility for finding relevant modules is a skill development activity that will be useful in their postdoctoral life.

Suggestions:

- The curriculum could be designed so that the selection of modules and activities is shared between the supervisor and the student.
- Supervisors could discuss with their student how best to choose the relevant modules.
- The development of a more formal doctoral education program is accompanied by a the design of a candidature plan that is structured to support a consideration of formal and informal learning activities

**Issue**: Some believe that there is enough doctoral education modules available online and there is no need to 'reinvent the wheel' by developing new ones.

Suggestions:

- Emphasise the fact that any new module development will be complementary to online modules and other internal modules
- Discuss the strengths and limitations of both online and face-to-face doctoral modules
- Discuss with supervisors the usefulness or not of making some modules compulsory

**Issue**: What happens when students resist participating in either formal or informal doctoral education?

- Ensure that the students and their supervisors are aware of the gains from participating in formal or informal doctoral modules
- Ensure that there is no confusion around which modules are obligatory and which are not
- You can help by providing enough information, either online or hard copy, about each of the modules and their intended outcomes


**Issue**: Should you give up or put little energy into the project if you meet too much resistance

Suggestions
- understand the introduction and implementation of more formal doctoral education program as a cultural change and that resistance is likely to be about resisting change, as much as it is about resisting the introduction of doctoral modules
- conceptualise the introduction of these modules within a changing culture frame and therefore stage the design and implementation carefully
- find some good examples in other faculties. The

Additional issues
- assessment or no assessment
- compulsory or not compulsory
- AQF requirements, that is, only one third coursework in research degrees