

FORUM

Enhancing learning and teaching

Issue 30 | Autumn 2012

Undergraduate Supervision: guiding learning



Who is responsible for successful supervision?

The role of the public intellectual

Ask Auntie Athene

Case studies

News, resources, events, funding opportunities

FORUM

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A large print, black and white version of the text in this publication is available: please contact Alice Wakely on ext 2018

Editorial



I am delighted to take up the torch as *Forum* Editor from Set Chong, and look forward to planning some interesting content in our new technicolor design, shaped by my own background in the Department of Economics.

This issue of *Forum* is focused on undergraduate supervision. In the light of increasing tuition fees, students' decisions to invest in higher education are even more likely to be based on student satisfaction ratings such as the National Student Survey (NSS). As pointed out by Ros Brownlow in our lead feature, personal supervision has become increasingly pivotal as one of the core performance indicators of the NSS, under *Personal development and support*. Being perceived as a 'good supervisor' is a delicate balance of friendliness, confidence, trust and fair criticism, as suggested on our new *Ask Auntie Athene* question-and-answer pages. Often students also need guidance about extra-curricular activities and internships: extremely important as they approach the job market in their final year.

This raises the issue of the multi-faceted role of lecturers and teachers in higher education. Their public identity, with the related impact on students, society, academic disciplines, the university and intellectual endeavour, is discussed in an article by John Issitt.

As a new member of the Russell Group, the University of York needs to continue to be competitive in providing the outstanding learning experience that comes with its status. A lot of credit needs to be given to supervisors as effective supporters of this learning experience. But, in this process, it is also important to manage students' expectations, to find a balance between availability and professionalism, and to make it clear that students also have a responsibility to help the relationship to work.

Paola Zerilli
 Editor

YUSU Supervisor of the Year Awards 2012

Many congratulations to this year's winners of the University of York Students' Union (YUSU) *Supervisor of the Year* competition. This is the fifth year that the competition has run; over 250 nominations were received from undergraduates putting their personal supervisors forward for recognition.

At a celebration event on 27 June, Dr Jane Grenville announced the winners for 2012:

- Malcolm Cresser, Environment
- Simon Ditchfield, History
- Adrian Mountford, Biology
- Anne Philips, Health Sciences
- Jonathan Wainwright, Music
- The Department of Chemistry

The following colleagues received certificates to recognise 'consistently excellent supervision':

- Pauline Ashworth, SPSW
- Kate Giles, Archaeology
- Zoe Norridge, English & Related Literature
- Martin Smalley, Physics
- Karen Spilsbury, Health Sciences
- Richard Waites, Biology
- The Department of Mathematics

NEWS

Innovative approaches and independent thinkers

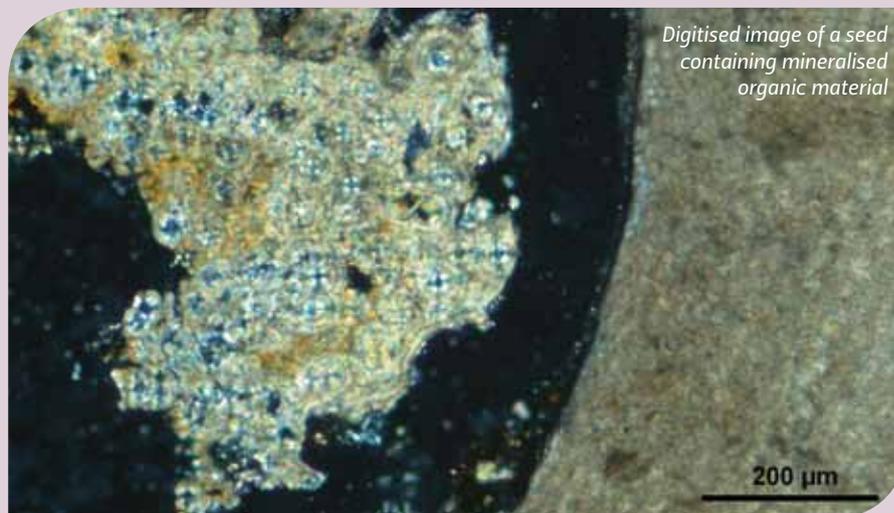
Following a call for bids over the summer, the University has funded five major learning and teaching projects, designed to support innovative approaches to learning and teaching and to encourage students 'to become independent thinkers and learners and... acquire the skills and attitudes to achieve their ambitions through further study and lifelong learning' (*University of York Learning and Teaching Strategy 2010-2015*, page 1).

- **Archaeology under the microscope.**

The grant will fund a state of the art microscope laboratory and digital collection that can be used for innovative approaches to undergraduate and postgraduate teaching in many areas of archaeology and archaeological science. It will also enhance the learning and teaching of scientific skills which are transferrable into diverse areas of research and industry. For further information, contact Lisa-Marie Shillito, email lisa@palaeo.eu, or steve.ashby@york.ac.uk.

- **York Fab Lab.** The concept of 'digital manufacturing' is about to revolutionise the way our material needs are satisfied. Rather than purchasing items from a supplier, individuals will be able to design and build their own items using digital manufacturing technologies. The 'York Fab Lab' or 'Fabrication Laboratory' concept is to establish, on campus, long term, a laboratory equipped with a comprehensive range of digital manufacturing equipment for use by undergraduates, postgraduates and staff. This grant will be used to purchase a computer-controlled router and drilling machine for the production of printed circuit boards, to add to a computer-controlled machining centre and a high resolution 3D printer already in place in the Department of Electronics. For further information, contact peter.turner@york.ac.uk.

- **Making Memories: cross-generational creativity in the community.** This builds on a partnership between



Digitised image of a seed containing mineralised organic material

Lifelong Learning and Health Sciences, through which nurses on placement at a care home have come to understand the experiences of older people better, by writing stories inspired by conversations with the residents about their lives. The stories are then published as an anthology. This project will extend the opportunity to students from a greater range of departments who would like to develop their creative writing skills and become involved in wider community engagement. For further information, contact lesley.booth@york.ac.uk or iaain.barr@york.ac.uk.

- **Software Competition System.** The project will develop an automated software competition system, to motivate students to work on non-assessed practical tasks and exercises, in Computer Science in the first instance. Students will be able to submit solutions at any time, which will be automatically evaluated and a league table periodically published on the web; students will be able to resubmit improved versions in order to improve or defend their league table position. All submitted exercise solutions will be made public after the competition ends. The system will be designed to be as open and adaptable as possible, suitable for a wide range of exercises; comprehensive documentation and a step-by-step

guide with examples will also be developed. For further information, contact daniel.kudenko@york.ac.uk.

- **Developing the Dutch Courtesan website.** Students from the Department of Theatre, Film and Television will create a website tracking and analysing the production process – from early research to final performance – for a staging of Marston's *The Dutch Courtesan*. This will form a pilot collaboration between the Department's different degree programmes, allowing students to experience the interplay between diverse skills natural to employment in the creative arts. The Department will draw on the experience to plan interdisciplinary modules which will be open to both BA and BSc students. For further information, contact michael.cordner@york.ac.uk.

Rapid Response grants of up to £3,000 are available this academic year in support of small-scale short-term initiatives or purchases to enhance learning and teaching by addressing a clearly-identified need or issue.

Further information is available at www.york.ac.uk/staff/teaching/funding-and-resources/funding.

NEWS

Supporting academic skills

Turnitin awareness sessions for staff

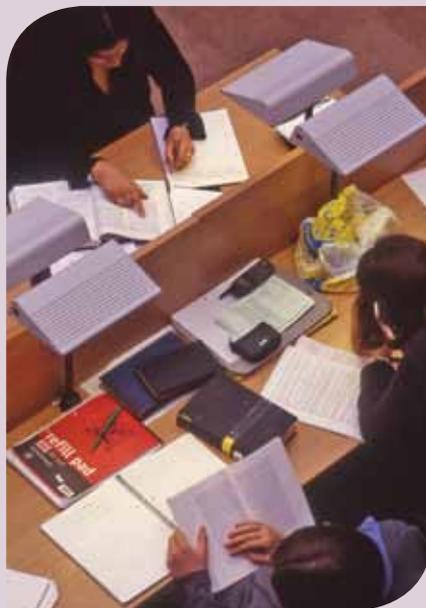
Between September and March, the Academic Support Office is offering a new series of sessions introducing staff to *Turnitin* text-matching software and its potential to enhance student learning. The sessions will explain *Turnitin*'s capabilities in assessing the originality of assignments, clarify how staff can use the software ethically with student groups, and explain the basis upon which University of York students are given access to *Turnitin* to support their learning.

Participants will examine sample 'originality reports' generated by *Turnitin* to highlight common features of poor practice or possible plagiarism that could assist them when scrutinising their students' work. The session will also explain how students are trained to use the software to develop their writing skills. There will be opportunities to discuss the practicalities of employing *Turnitin* and to ask questions of colleagues from the Learning Enhancement Team who support *Turnitin* users.

For details of the autumn term sessions, see page 12; for further information, please contact adrian.lee@york.ac.uk.

Improvements to the Academic Integrity website

The University's Academic Integrity website, www.york.ac.uk/integrity, has seen a number of improvements over the summer. The *Reference with Confidence* guides plus the A to Z sets of example



references for Harvard, IEEE and APA have been revised following consultation with departments. The revisions are intended to enhance accuracy and consistency across the resources and integrate them better with *EndNote* and *EndNote Web*. The online resources should also be easier to navigate for users, enabling them to locate specific information more quickly. The site now offers a completely new addition as well – the OSCOLA guide (for Law).

Work will continue during the autumn to complete revisions to all the referencing systems. Any questions about the Academic Integrity website can be directed to adrian.lee@york.ac.uk.

Learning on the move

The University is providing students with a newly acquired *Mobile Learn* app: once installed on an Apple, Android or BlackBerry device, this allows students to log in easily to the *Yorkshare* VLE and access courses and resources wherever they are. In particular:

- **Notifications:** announcements made through *Yorkshare* are sent direct to users' mobile devices, meaning students can be alerted to the latest updates or timely reminders anywhere, any time.
- **Blogs, journals and discussions:** students can keep in touch with class discussions on the go and contribute ideas and even media when the inspiration comes, without needing to find a desktop machine.
- **Assessment:** *Yorkshare* can deliver quizzes and tests that are compatible with mobile devices, opening up new learning opportunities, from formative practice activities to field or work-based assessment.

To access the app:

- Search for *BlackBoard Mobile Learn* in your app store
- Install the app and search for and select 'University of York'
- Log in with your standard username and password

The E-learning Development Team will be running regular briefing and training sessions to help staff maximise learning opportunities using the app. Contact simon.davis@york.ac.uk for further information.

The Employability Tutorial: taking stock

Careers have been reviewing how the undergraduate Employability Tutorial is bedding down within departments. Working through the Tutorial on the VLE, students write an Employability Plan, recording skills from their degree, extracurricular activities and future plans. Departments are asked to encourage students to share their Plan with their supervisor, and discuss it in a supervision session.

As of last term, over 1600 students have accessed their Journal/Plan. This is good progress, but there is still work to do to ensure long-term engagement from

a broad range of students. Engagement among first year undergraduates ranges from around half, to over 90% in departments such as Psychology, Management and Law.

The more successful departments have taken steps to promote the Tutorial beyond the one-to-one supervisory relationship in various ways. In Management, for example, all undergraduates and taught postgraduates undertook small group activities to promote reflection and discussion, and were then given time to access the VLE

in a PC classroom. Student feedback suggested that there could be even more interactivity, so plans have been made to reduce the amount of 'lecture' content in favour of more hands-on activities.

In Psychology, first years discussed their Plan with a small group of peers. The feedback from students varied: some were motivated by group discussion, but others did not feel comfortable with this approach. However, a variety of approaches clearly yields results.

In response to student feedback, Careers have developed a new home page for the Tutorial, making it easier to navigate, manage progress, and access useful information quickly.

A more than academic question

Drawing on two Forum workshop discussion sessions held last year, John Issitt explores the public identity of the lecturer and teacher in higher education.

Our identities as academics move beyond the institutional confines of the university in which we work. What are our broader responsibilities to students, society, our disciplines, the university and the intellectual endeavour in general? On a more personal level, how do we balance the multiple personae of teacher, lecturer, researcher, expert, critical enquirer, examiner and employee? These questions are rarely addressed largely because we are so immersed in the sheer amount of work and the immediate micro-politics of our departmental worlds.

None of us escapes the compromises of life and we all, to some degree, have to attempt to fulfil a role constructed by drivers beyond our control – a process more comfortable for some than it is for others. Yet as lecturers and teachers we do have some kind of public identity and our voices carry both weight and responsibility. We have a status, at least in the eyes of our students, and many of us make public appearances in person or in writing. During last year's Forum workshop discussion sessions around this topic, our questions centred on how we might fulfil such a public role, but before we could take that question head on, we had to tackle the foundational assumptions and expectations that frame it.

In our first discussion, the most

stark disagreement was over modern presentational forms of knowledge – the use of *YouTube*, *TED: Ideas worth spreading* and other web-based short and highly accessible means of displaying knowledge. Some felt that these were really good and to be actively encouraged, while others felt that this presented the wrong sort of immediate, easy-to-consume and unconsidered type of knowledge whereas it was our business to nurture a more considered and developed form of understanding. The discussion began to tease out a range of views about the nature of knowledge and our relationship to it.

The second session began by considering how we might find meaning and purpose in the face of what some commentators have called 'the dictatorship of no alternative'. The discourse of 'performance', 'accountability', 'managerial directives', 'audit trails' and 'metrics', alongside the commercial pressures of large numbers of 'students as customers', has seeped into our daily lives to the extent that any alternative seems to have been expunged from the realms of possibility. We increasingly have to think by means of such discourse and configure what we do in accordance its normative expectations. Many of us (and I am one such), feel that much of the language of highly managed contemporary pedagogy is counter-productive and leads not to an increase, but to a shrinkage of our intellectual horizons. Subordinated to such discourse, we become submerged within it. However, one of the most interesting features of our discussion was that while some people felt oppressed by such discourse, others felt liberated by it.

One of my own starting points is that

I think we are beholden never to lose sight of our good fortune. We have time to think, to explore, to reason and to immerse ourselves in the subjects we are interested in – this provides a richness and an intellectual space not available to many people. But with that good fortune comes a set of responsibilities, the most serious of which is to both nurture and play a role in the conscience of our society. This requires a properly reflexive understanding of the authority and potential impact of what we say and do. It may lead us to reflect on the current state of scientific knowledge and society in ways that at times might not be comfortable. It may lead us to risk ourselves and to challenge received positions but that is the business we are in.

Most of us have passions and enthusiasms whether for discovery or for analysis, or for nurturing our students, or for all of those. We are sincere in our efforts, and I am sure that in our departmental silos our passions are celebrated and given a forum for expression. The purpose of the Forum discussions was to share these passions on a broader, more cross-disciplinary stage, and the interchange of ideas was, in my view, a good one.

John Issitt is Provost of Langwith College and holds a fractional teaching fellowship with the Department of Education. A National Teaching Fellow and erstwhile Chair of the Learning and Teaching Forum, he pursues a range of literary, teaching and consultancy activities; his academic interests are in the philosophy and politics of knowledge. Contact him via email john.issitt@york.ac.uk, ext 3414.



The Super-Supervisor

Ros Brownlow explores the ingredients of successful personal supervision in support of learning, as contributed by supervisors, supervisees, departments and the University as a whole.

In the wake of the most recent batch of National Student Survey results, we are reminded that a key performance indicator on which students will be basing their decisions is personal development and support; consequently, in the '£9k a year' era, the role of the personal supervisor is coming under scrutiny like never before. The University has always viewed its supervisory system as one of its strengths, and has recently reviewed and elaborated upon its undergraduate supervision policy. Perhaps more telling, though, is the value that existing students clearly place upon the system when it is working well, borne out by YUSU's successful introduction of the *Supervisor of the Year* awards since 2008 (see page 2).

In the light of these developments, the Learning and Teaching Forum hosted a workshop last May, attended by both staff and students, in order to explore the elements of successful personal supervision from the point of view of both supervisees (with reference to comments from previous *Supervisor of the Year*

nominations) and supervisors. What follows is an exploration of some of the key points we considered.

One of the features of good supervision we discussed was the need for both supervisors and students to acknowledge their mutual responsibilities and obligations. Nominations for *Supervisor of the Year* suggested that students feel their supervisors should play a role in socialising them into academic culture and supporting their engagement in the discipline. They believe it is the personal supervisor's role to help them learn how to learn and guide them to independent learning. Our discussions also revealed that this support needs to come in the form of guidance rather than paternalistic control of learning by the supervisor. Students clearly want ownership of their own learning and gain a sense of achievement from solving problems and finding solutions, but value guidance from supervisors in the form of clear aims and goals, and encouragement to develop their skills.

Although the University of York does not have a student charter, the

Institutional Review carried out by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in February 2012 recommended that the University 'ensure that, in the absence of a student charter or equivalent document, all students receive accurate information setting out what they can expect, [and] what is expected of them' (page 2). The statement emphasises the reciprocal nature of the supervisory relationship with students, yet it was clear from the workshop that the nature of personal supervision is more commonly articulated in relation to the knowledge, skills and attributes of the personal supervisor. There were, however, examples of approaches to supervision where the students' contribution has also been considered. The Department of Health Sciences, for example, uses a 'supervisor's contract' with the supervisee, articulating the relationship with the student, managing expectations and ensuring a degree of consistency across the Department. Although other approaches to supervision discussed

within the workshop were less structured, they still tended to view supervision as a two-way relationship, requiring situational attentiveness of the personal supervisor and active contribution from the student.

Availability and consistency

It is clear from the University policy on undergraduate supervision and the QAA Institutional Review report that regular appraisals of student performance through personal supervision are important to ensure academic progress, and indeed availability was one of the key attributes valued by students in their nominations for *Supervisor of the Year*. However, it was also apparent from the nomination statements that while some students value the responsiveness and reliability of personal supervisors, others want personal supervisors to be available 24/7 – which by any measure is unreasonable. Accessibility was considered important by the majority of the personal supervisors at the workshop, but achieving a balance between accessibility and dependency was evidently a challenge. Discussion showed that an ‘open-door’ approach to personal supervision had led to supervisors being inundated, and some departmental practices had led to high levels of supervision which on occasion seemed to nurture dependence rather than independence in student learning. Key areas of difference appeared to be in relation to feedback on student work with some supervisors reading draft work for students, but others relying on module leaders to give feedback via formative and summative assessments. A consistent approach across a department and clear management of student expectations seemed key in ensuring a satisfactory balance for both the students and staff.

Although written policy can go some way to illuminate what occurs within a one-to-one supervision, how that interaction takes place is somewhat of a mystery. The role of the supervisor in helping students to improve their performance is clear, but the way in which such discussions are held is more elusive. Student feedback from the *Supervisor of the Year* nominations suggests the need for a positive, supportive approach from supervisors. Nominees were described as encouraging, inspirational, and approachable; they guided students through subject uncertainties and



Yes... I'm your supervisee... do I go for krispy krackly cornflakes or 'hi fibre low sugar bran flakes'?

instilled a real enthusiasm for study. The need for supervisors to acknowledge the emotional attachment of students to their work, and provide scholarly constructive critique rather than criticism, was evident. Conceptually this positive, supportive approach seems readily achievable, but the skills required to ensure success can be more difficult to attain. It was clear from discussions at the workshop that opportunities for supervisors to develop the techniques to engage in positive and constructive interactions and openly reflect on the effectiveness of approaches adopted, while valued, are limited. Given the importance of personal supervision in students' appraisal of their experience, the provision of more opportunities to support the development of skills for personal supervision would arguably be beneficial on a variety of levels.

Our responsibilities

As we move forward into the new academic year, the challenges for the provision of effective personal supervision are clear. In order to maintain a competitive edge, the University of York needs to ensure that students have access to the personal development and support that facilitates the outstanding learning experience it is advertising – befitting its Russell Group status. There is a departmental responsibility to ensure that appropriate arrangements for personal supervision are established and consistently employed; and individual supervisors are responsible for ensuring that all students are provided with clear and constructive feedback on their

academic progress. And at institutional level, the University is responsible for ensuring that policies guiding the delivery of personal supervision are regularly reviewed and effectively disseminated; and that sufficient formal training is provided to ensure that both policies and delivery are consistent with best academic practice.

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Ros Brownlow is a lecturer in the Department of Health Sciences and a member of the Learning and Teaching Forum's steering committee. A specialist in innovation in nurse education, Ros has pioneered the development of communities of practice within the undergraduate curriculum, and interactive virtual learning within the Department's CPD programmes. She is currently researching the experience of online learners using entertainment-education. Contact Ros via email ros.brownlow@york.ac.uk, or ext 1398.

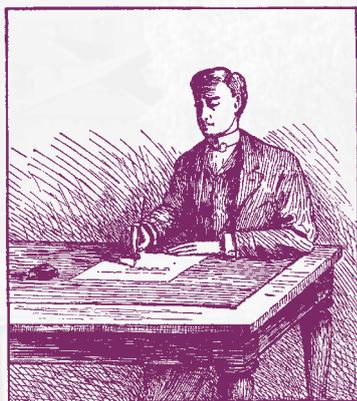




ASK Auntie Athene

We look at some real-life questions raised in relation to supervision – with responses contributed by recent YUSU Supervisor of the Year winners.

Q: *I am about to take up my first post as a lecturer at York, and am nervous at the prospect of supervising students. What would you say makes a good supervisor?*



A: This is a thought-provoking question, but perhaps not the right one to ask. If I had to give a short answer, it would have to be 'a good supervisee', but not one who is academically good; rather one who develops a truly symbiotic relationship with his or her supervisor.

Most academic staff and most students are intrinsically bright and capable of achieving much if they make an appropriate effort. How well a supervisor is perceived will undoubtedly depend upon how well a combination of friendliness, trust, and confidence in the supervisor's advice and opinions develops, and the supervisee's feeling free to discuss anything of concern, however trivial or however important. Basically, he or she has to feel the supervisor understands and the supervisor cares; that the supervisor can put himself or herself into that position and feel what the student feels.

The supervisor's aspirations for the student need to match those of the student and the help and advice offered needs to fit in with those paired aspirations. If they are, it can help the supervisee to learn to think and to build confidence. Like a bronze in the Olympics, or even just making the final or semi-final, any degree can be a real achievement if you've done your best. Once trust is established, fair criticisms leading to a positive outcome are much more likely to be positively received and pondered over. If they are, that should be enough reward for the supervisor.

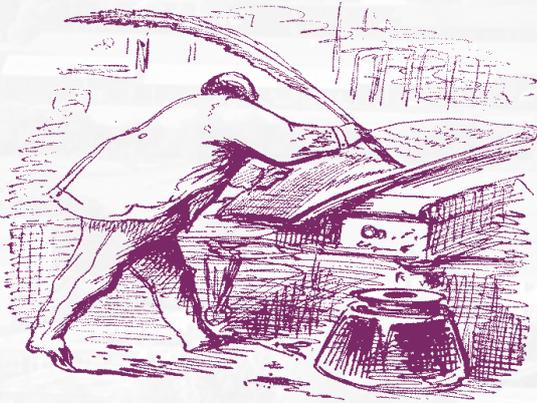
Q: *I have a bright, enthusiastic supervisee who is desperate to succeed within the programme and the career for which it provides preparation. However, she has a progressive disability, and the situation in practice placements is increasingly becoming unsafe. What do I do?*



A: I act as the Disability Services liaison officer for my Department, and work with many students who present with a wide range of disabilities. For academic programmes, all manner of disability adjustments can be in place successfully, but when a programme is balanced with clinical practice placements involving patients, the situation can alter dramatically. The need for 'reasonable adjustments' has to be balanced with safety considerations both for the students but also the patients within their care; furthermore, such programmes often involve a 'fitness to practise' requirement.

The majority of cases have a positive outcome, through team working and liaison between the student, his/her programme leaders and Disability Services, and I would advise you and your supervisee to pursue this route thoroughly first. However, it may prove that, despite all the extensive adjustments possible in both the University and on placement, the situation becomes either unsafe or untenable. In this case, you will need to work with colleagues in Fitness to Practise and Disability Services to support and counsel the student, and help them realise that their ambitions are maybe not possible on their current programme of study.

This is very difficult. My advice would be to try and adopt a 'coaching-style' approach, where you actively listen and ask questions, but without giving advice. In this way, you can enable the student to make choices about their future and reach their own conclusions in a meaningful but less directive way – and a helpful supervisory relationship can continue for as long as the student remains in your care.



Q: *I have a first year supervisee who switched to the programme a few weeks into the autumn term and has struggled to catch up ever since. He did very badly in the recent departmental exams, but I know that he is gifted and hard-working, and capable of much more. How can I best support him?*

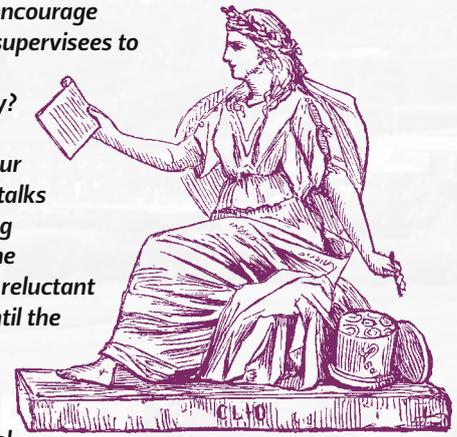
A: Although many of our students come across as being quite self-confident, there is often an underlying sense of insecurity, especially among teenagers who have just left home. Encourage your student to believe in himself, and not allow the setback in the exams to undermine his confidence.

I supervised a student in a similar position a couple of years ago. I gave her some additional help with the mathematics that she needed, and she ended up passing all her first year University examinations at the first attempt, although her stage average was well below her capabilities. At our end-of-year supervision meeting, she was clearly disappointed by her results, but I congratulated her warmly on her achievement in progressing to Year Two, and told her that, in the circumstances, she had done extremely well. She seemed quite embarrassed, especially so when I told her that she was well capable of getting a First.

In Year Two, her academic performance improved dramatically, and I supported her application to transfer from the Bachelors to the four-year Masters variant of the programme. She is now indeed heading for a First Class Honours degree. At our supervision meeting at the end of June, it was a pleasure to see her looking so happy, and to hear that she is now thinking seriously of becoming a professional scientist in the green energy sector.

In the end, I haven't done anything for her other than give her a little encouragement: all the credit for her rapid improvement is her own.

Q: *How do I encourage more of my supervisees to think about employability? It sometimes seems as if our Department talks about nothing else, but some students are reluctant to engage until the end of their studies, which is often too late!*



A: We're lucky in the Department of Archaeology that our Careers Officer organises a Summer Term week-long programme of events, including workshops with alumni – this year from the police force, publishing and legal professions as well as heritage organisations. Looking at this programme with supervisees, making sure they book on to one of the sessions, and then reflecting on this subsequently has proved to be really effective in getting them to think about using the skills from their degree in a transferable way when looking for jobs.

This is important when students are studying a degree like Archaeology, which is commonly perceived to be vocational. So many of our students are passionate about entering the heritage sector that those doing Archaeology out of interest (but as a great transferable skills degree) can sometimes feel nervous about discussing this with their peers and their supervisor. I've found that talking about extra-curricular interests and then getting students to think about how these might relate to graduate programmes, in, say, catering or marketing or law, is an effective way of prompting students. Sometimes I've spent supervision time looking at specific job advertisements with students, often via the Careers website, and discussing how and why they should consider applying. Often students just need reassurance that they have the relevant skills to make an application, or a prompt to look into gaining further experience through volunteering and internships. Printing off the Careers guidance on CVs and letters of application then and there has also proved effective in getting students to take the next step.

All this might seem obvious, but it's amazing what a difference an extra 10 minutes of chat in the Summer Term of the second year or early in the third year can make to a student's aspirations. Following this up in subsequent meetings – and of course, staying in touch with them afterwards – is very rewarding, and involving our alumni in Careers Week brings this all full circle. Students can see what they're capable of achieving – and are encouraged to talk to their supervisors before the end of their third year!



Photo by John Houlihan

Management: linking first year teaching with supervision

Linda Perriton, Senior Lecturer

In 2010, the York Management School introduced a new core first year module, *Understanding Arguments in Management*. The 30 credit module runs across the whole academic year and uses popular management texts to engage students in key debates in the subject and develop written argumentation skills. The module's seminars are delivered by academic staff to their personal supervisees in addition to their normal schedule of supervision meetings.

The decision to divide the cohort by supervisors and supervision groups was made early in the design process. NSS feedback in previous years had indicated that some students didn't feel they ever had the opportunity to get to know their supervisors. Many others found the idea of approaching supervisors during 'office hours' intimidating or that the setting was too formal. Supervisors, for

their part, wanted students to see them as engaged in their subject area, and actively supporting and encouraging their supervisees' learning from an early stage of their studies.

As the module's co-ordinator for the past two years, I've had to be realistic about the effect of putting supervisors and supervisees together in a seminar environment.

While it is wonderful to read the feedback comments from the students in supervision groups where this arrangement clearly works for all involved and for whom the experience has been wholly positive, there have been a few cases where more contact has not resulted in greater satisfaction with the relationship. It is more difficult to handle transfers of supervision discreetly when that also means a visible change in seminar groups, but you have

to be prepared for some relationships not to work out.

Supervision is demanding. While most academics develop routines over time that help them put students (and themselves) at ease in meetings, seminars where you teach and supervise at the same time demand different skills and can't be scripted. Changes to the module in this coming year acknowledge that some staff would appreciate more support in planning the seminars' content and process. Seminars are also being combined with the academic skill support sessions with PGWT so that students feel that they have access to a learning support *team* of which their supervisor is an integral part, and where the demarcation between the supervisory and PGWT academic support roles can emerge over time rather than feeling arbitrarily imposed.

Chemistry: a departmental infrastructure to support effective supervision

Nigel Lowe, Teaching Fellow

In the Department of Chemistry, we do some of our teaching in groups organised by college, and this acts as a framework for breaking down the supervision of a large cohort into more manageable chunks. Each college group has a Director of Studies (DoS) who oversees supervision arrangements within the group. Currently we have six college teaching groups and DoS, but we are moving to four DoS, each looking after two college teaching groups, where each group comprises four 'tutorial groups', each of five students. Each DoS will therefore oversee the supervisory arrangements of 40 students.

I am a DoS myself and I oversee all our supervisees' tutorial reports. We have recently introduced a system

of supervision forms that include specific reminders to supervisors about timely things to be pursuing with each year group – a 'supervisor's calendar', if you like. These are useful reminders even for diligent colleagues. We circulate messages within the group on particular students with things to watch for – for instance, with health and disability issues, we share messages about extending particular support to certain individuals at certain times.

The DoS system also means that we have a fairly well-defined system of passing complaints and queries along the line. If an individual supervisor can't answer a student query, it is passed to the Director of Studies for



The Department of Chemistry receives a YUSU Supervisor of the Year Award 2012.

that college and thence up to Chair of the Board of Studies, the Chair of the departmental Teaching Committee or the Undergraduate Office, as appropriate.

Another advantage of the system is that any unevenness in supervision can be ironed out if you have a supervisor who is away a lot or who tends to be 'less engaged' with their students, since, in such cases, the DoS can become a surrogate supervisor as needed.

Further information about the Department's approach to supervision can be found via the Chemistry staff intranet at: www.york.ac.uk/chemistry/internal/staffinfo/teachsuper/supervisors (York users only).

CELT: preparing international students for one-to-one sessions

Chris Copland, Senior Tutor

International students can be apprehensive of one-to-one meetings, partly because of the language demands but also because they can be unsure of how to relate to a staff member they may perceive as an authority figure. Levels of familiarity can be an issue, for example, whether first names or titles should be used. It may not be clear whether a tutor will set the agenda or expect the student to do so. Mentioning personal matters or using humour can also be uncertain and potentially embarrassing areas.

Within the Centre for English Language Teaching, we have developed a short video designed to help international students use one-to-one sessions to get the most out of feedback. This forms part of a practical project within the Centre, in operation over the past three years, looking at the potential of video for education, particularly with international students. Our approach has been very much to use video to *show* rather than to *tell*. As such, we have avoided the 'talking heads' which pepper websites in higher education, in favour of short, improvised scenes which learners can observe and respond to. Much of our work relates to the situations international students encounter outside the classroom; however, we have recently been looking directly at communication for study, including tutorials and supervisions.

The feedback tutorial video shows a Taiwanese student querying comments on an assignment, and can be used to elicit discussion on how to get the most out of such sessions. As the dialogue is a role play, there are no issues of confidentiality, and the scene has been shaped to give it pace. You can view the video at www.york.ac.uk/celt/feedback.

We are now working with the Department of Health Sciences on a further film, focusing on what supervisor and supervisee can expect of each other, and the cultural adjustment that might be needed for those entering UK higher education from other backgrounds. We hope to have this ready for the autumn term.

If you would like to discuss any of these projects or might be interested in collaborating on a new one, email chris.copland@york.ac.uk or huw.llewelyn_jones@york.ac.uk. In addition, we are running a one-day public workshop on 17 November on *Making Video for English Language Teaching*: details at www.york.ac.uk/celt/videoworkshop. Access UK, our video series on social and practical situations is available on the Welcome site for undergraduates in the section for international students: www.york.ac.uk/students/welcome.



Learning and Teaching Calendar of Events: Autumn Term 2012

WEEK 2	
Mon 15 Oct, 11.15am-12.45pm, L049	Staff Turnitin awareness
Wed 17 Oct, 12.30-2pm, HG21	What are we writing for? Standards in academic writing
WEEK 3	
Wed 24 Oct, 2.15-5pm, HG21	Linking teaching and research
WEEK 4	
Wed 31 Oct, 12.30-2pm, HG21	Teaching Space: Changing Rooms or Grand Designs?
Wed 31 Oct, 2.15-5pm, HG17	Lecturing skills (Arts and Humanities)
WEEK 5	
Thurs 8 Nov, 9.15am – 12.15pm, HG09	Introduction to pedagogic research
WEEK 6	
Mon 12 Nov, 12.30 – 2pm, HG17	The experience of international students in the classroom
Tues 13 Nov, 9.15am – 12.15pm, HG09	Planning assessment methods for student work
Wed 14 Nov, 9.15am – 12.15pm, HG09	Evaluation and quality enhancement
Wed 14 Nov, 1.15-5pm, RCH Lakehouse	Lecturing skills (Sciences)
Fri 16 Nov, 9.15am – 12.15pm, HG17	Plagiarism and academic misconduct
WEEK 7	
Wed 21 Nov, 2.15-5pm, HG21	Small group teaching (Arts and Humanities)
Fri 23 Nov, 9am-5pm, RCH Lakehouse	Marking and feedback – all day workshop
WEEK 8	
Mon 26 Nov, 12.30-2pm, HG21	Investing in those who teach: continuing professional development for academic staff at York
Wed 28 Nov, 2.15-5pm, HG21	Small group teaching (Sciences)
WEEK 9	
Mon 3 Dec, 12-2pm, HG21	Taught Masters SIG: reviewing the PG modular scheme
Tues 4 Dec, 1.15 – 4.15pm, HG09	Structuring and designing sessions
Wed 5 Dec, 2.15 – 3.45pm, ATB042	Staff Turnitin awareness

Key to the calendar

Events organised by the Learning and Teaching Forum. Open to all members of staff and postgraduates who teach and demonstrate. For further information, see www.york.ac.uk/staff/teaching/sharing/sharing-practice/workshops; to register, contact janet.barton@york.ac.uk

Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PGCAP) sessions. Priority is given to staff enrolled on the programme, but other staff are invited to express an interest in attending any session and places will be confirmed a week or two before the event. For further information, see www.york.ac.uk/admin/hr/academic-practice/pgcap/workshops.cfm

Preparing Future Academics sessions aimed at postgraduates who teach and demonstrate. Priority is given to those enrolled on the programme, but others are invited to express an interest in attending any session and places will be confirmed a week or two before the event. For further information, contact the Researcher Development Team: rdt@york.ac.uk

Workshops offered by the Academic Support Office. Please contact janet.barton@york.ac.uk for further details or to book your place.

Academic Integrity: Staff Turnitin awareness sessions. Please contact adrian.lee@york.ac.uk for further details or to book your place on a session.

Taught Masters Special Interest Group: for further information, see www.york.ac.uk/staff/teaching/sharing/sharing-practice/special-interest; to register, contact janet.barton@york.ac.uk

E-learning training sessions: Details of the *Yorkshire* VLE training sessions, open to all staff and postgraduates who teach and demonstrate, can be viewed at <http://vlesupport.york.ac.uk>. The E-learning Development Team also offers bespoke sessions tailored to the needs of departments: for further information, contact: Wayne Britcliffe: wayne.britcliffe@york.ac.uk.