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# A Framework for Research Skills Training, Support and E-supervision for International PhD Students



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Inspiring tomorrow's professionals

**Professor Adele Jones, University of Huddersfield**  
**UKCISA, July 09**

# Issues for University

Increase PGR  
numbers

Increase in  
international  
students

Improving  
PhD  
completion  
rates

Growth of dynamic  
research culture  
QA issues

Insularity, lack of  
preparedness for  
global markets,  
need to increase  
international links

# Centre for Applied Childhood Studies



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**Increase PGR  
numbers**

**Capacity building -  
skills and expertise  
in economically  
disadvantaged  
countries**

**Research  
enabling  
environment**

**Increasing global  
relevance**

**Developing  
Partnerships  
with  
international  
institutions**

# Issues for international students



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**Social and  
cultural alienation**

**Financial Constraints  
and cost of studying  
in UK**

**Skills and knowledge  
base differ from  
host institution and  
expectations**

**Need to undertake field  
work in home country**

**Lack of supervisory  
expertise in host  
institution for  
some topics**

# Project Aims:

To establish a *Framework for Research Skills Training, Support and E-supervision* for International PhD Students, and to facilitate inter-cultural exchange and knowledge-sharing with UK home students.

Funded by Prime Minister's Initiative for International Education and School of Human & Health Sciences

# Cross-centre collaboration

An initiative of the **Centre for Applied Childhood Studies** developed and implemented in collaboration with the **Centre for Health and Social Care Research** and extended to include students attached to all **HHS Research Centres**



Financial  
Support

Social  
cohesion  
activities

Peer  
coaching

Skills  
Training

Accommodation

Electronic  
Discussion  
Board

Mentoring

Language  
Support

Cultural  
Exchange

Face-to-face  
Supervision

E-Supervision

# Innovation



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- ❑ Addressed social isolation and facilitated integration into the UK.
- ❑ Recognised, celebrated and utilised diverse skills and cultural backgrounds through peer coaching and learning.
- ❑ Promoted cultural awareness among home PhD students in preparation for life and work in global markets.
- ❑ Established a flexible model for distance learning and e-supervision for international students enabling them to remain in their home countries for significant periods.
- ❑ A new approach to the recruitment, retention and support of international PhD students, enhancing the student experience and building research capacity in the social sciences in developing countries.

# Skills Training & Social Cohesion activities



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A 12-month programme organised in three x 3-week blocks to coincide with key PhD milestones:

- Block one - Oct (registration and proposal preparation)



**Monthly Skype-supervision and Peer-led Blackboard Discussion**



- Block two - June (data capture, analysis & ethical approval)
- Block three - Oct (progression & publication)

# Skills Training - content:

- Induction
- Cross cultural perspectives and issues
- Research paradigms & research theory
- Skills for critically evaluating research methodologies
- Research ethics in different cultural contexts
- Quantitative & qualitative research methods
- Proposal writing and research design
- Advanced literature searching/retrieval
- Software for bibliographic record keeping
- Referencing
- Doing a literature review



# Training continued

- Principles of and types of sampling
- Data gathering
- Qualitative and quantitative data analysis
- SPSS
- NVivo
- Issues and challenges from real life research
- Ethical governance and approvals
- Writing for publication
- Presentation skills
- Viva defence

# Staff who contributed:

- Kirsty Thomson
- Alison Holmes
- Sue Hanson
- Annie Topping
- Adele Jones
- Ruth Deery
- Alex Hirschfield
- Nigel King
- Graham Gibbs
- Mike Lucock
- Bernard Gallagher
- Berenice Golding
- Nigel Parton
- Serena McClusky
- Martin Manby
- Helen Masson
- Bob Heyman
- Chris Hall
- Sue Peckover
- Rachel Balen
- Ben Raikes
- Jane Morrell
- Paul Dagg
- Steve Lui
- Jean York

# Supervision & support

- Face-to-face supervision
- Peer coaching - Blackboard
- E-supervision - Skype
- *Local Advisors* from partner institutions for students based in home countries (e.g. University of Kwazulu Natal, University of The West Indies, University of Makerere)

# Students - ten international students participated

- Uganda
- South Africa
- Barbados
- The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
- Nepal
- Nigeria
- Indonesia
- Pakistan
- Taiwan

# Evaluation

## Evaluation process:

- Formal
- Informal
- Process
- Outcome

*Evaluation carried out by Jean York, Sue Hanson, Alison Holmes and Kirsty Thomson*



  
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Harold Wilson  
Building

# Increasing Global Relevance



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- HIV-AIDS and street children in Nepal
- HIV positive young people in South Africa
- Polygamous marriage and HIV transmission in Nigeria
- Mother-to-child transmission of HIV in Trinidad
- Reintegration of abducted girl soldiers in Uganda
- Grandparent care of orphans in Uganda
- Electronic systems for health care delivery
- Child protection decision making in Barbados
- Parenting and mental illness in Taiwan

# Outcomes



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- Improved skills
- Development of a research-enabling environment
- Decreased social isolation and integration into UK society
- Increased cultural awareness for home students
- Improved progression in line with projected timescales
- Increased research outputs among international students (papers at conferences, published articles)
- Increase in student numbers
- Provision of flexible learning opportunities
- Support for developing countries in building expertise in childhood studies and/or health and social care
- Partnerships with overseas institutions

# Reflections and Lessons Learned



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1. International students enrich environment for all
2. With effective support and training, numbers are increased and students' learning experience enhanced
3. The modular approach to skills training is particularly suited to international students but would benefit home students too
4. Anticipated benefits - improvements in PhD progression and completion rates - increased research outputs (e.g. publications and conference presentations)
5. Increased research expertise in developing countries
6. Students benefitted not only in relation to their immediate goals but also gained skills they would be able to use as Post-docs

# Continued...



7. Universities should view the recruitment of international students as investing in global knowledge development and international partnerships rather than simply as means of generating income
8. Recruitment strategies should take into account financial disparities
9. Despite meeting language entry criteria, providing subsequent language needs assessment and language skills support, students who lack adequate English language skills face particular challenges in meeting the requirements of PhD study
10. Students were overwhelmingly positive about the project and strongly believe the skills training should continue - for all students

# Some comments from the students



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- "Excellent teacher - engaging with students"*
- "Well-prepared, strong connections with students"*
  - "The reality of the research - REAL!"*
- "Useful information - needs to be more in-depth"*
- "Helped me to understand how to enter the field"*
- "Sharing and learning from others makes such a difference"*
  - "Very complex, needed more time"*
  - "Helpful for time management and planning"*
  - "Stimulated ideas"*
- "Session built on the previous session very effectively"*
  - "Learning from students - an excellent idea!"*
- "Excellent session, practical examples, good theoretical explanations"*
  - "Good session but links between policy and research not very clear"*
    - "Good discussion and reflection"*
    - "Everything was useful"*
- "Elucidated and clarified the use of interviews and focus groups"*
  - "Sharing and peer support is fantastic"*
  - "Everyone is really helpful and supportive"*
  - "Excellent on giving the bigger picture"*