



CASE STUDY

Implementing *Supervising Doctoral Studies* as part of a Graduate Centre programme at the University of West London


Background

The University of West London (UWL) has run a doctoral research programme since 1992. In October 2020, Professor Pauline Fox and Professor Maddie Ohl (Directors of studies, Graduate Centre) decided to introduce Epigeum's Supervising Doctoral Studies to complement in-person training workshops to prepare and support new and experienced doctoral supervisors with their role.

The Graduate Centre at UWL offers support for doctoral candidates during their journey, as well as training for and recruitment of doctoral supervisors. Pauline and Maddie view the supervisory position as a hybrid of pastoral and academic care, and are therefore committed to supporting students through regular and engaging staff training.

UWL first introduced Epigeum's Supervising Doctoral Studies in 2020. "We were looking for a course which was high quality, but had also been extensively trialed," Maddie says. As a small team, they felt a detailed online course would save time, as busy academics could take modules around their schedules, and Pauline could then use additional in-person sessions to address specific UWL supervisory queries.



 An informative course that underpins the university's good practice, and helps to mould a healthy research culture



Implementation

Epigeum's Supervising Doctoral Studies has allowed UWL to offer convenient and flexible training. The Graduate Centre launched the course via an email to a targeted list of current and potential supervisor staff who appeared on 'Blackboard', their online learning environment. They send reminders regularly to remind staff that these resources are readily available.

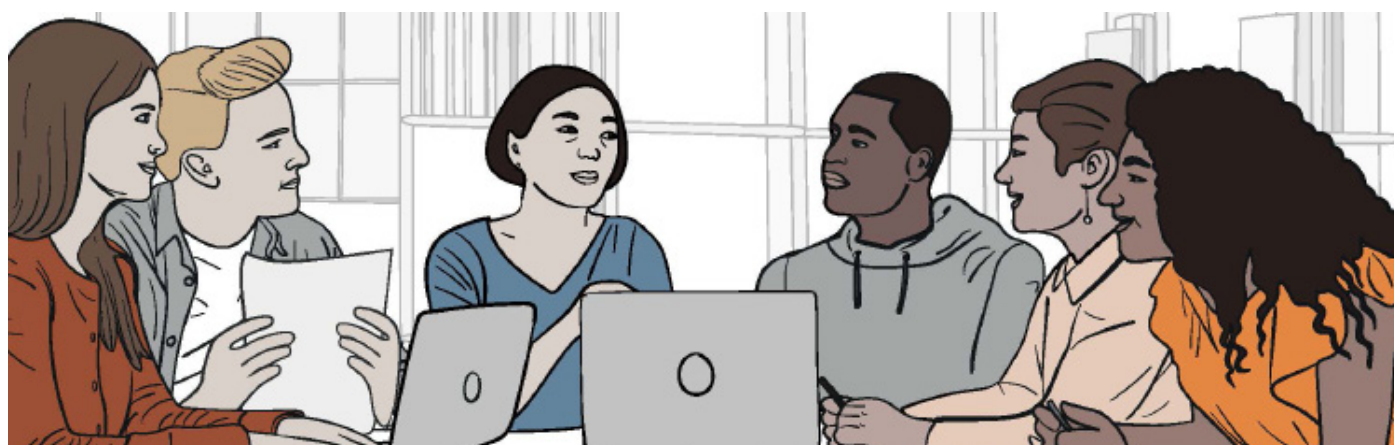
Maddie describes their implementation as a "flipped classroom approach", whereby most basic training is offered online through completing Supervising Doctoral Studies, as the course is generic enough to apply to the nine academic schools the Graduate Centre covers. In-person workshops then supplement training, covering school-specific disciplines and UWL procedures, such as PhD milestones which include a presentation and partial thesis submission.

Annual training is mandatory and supervisors either complete two online course modules or two in-person workshops. The majority enrol in more, but this scheme ensures that new and advanced supervisors are best equipped to support their candidates. This has proved beneficial for new supervisors, and academics transferring from other institutions.

UWL have enjoyed Supervising Doctoral Studies' flexibility, which allows supervisors to undertake modules in any order and timeframe. The pre-module diagnostic testing also allows academics to assess their own knowledge gaps, making the training less prescriptive. In addition, the diverse viewpoints and experiences captured in the online course offer greater scope for discussion beyond in-person sessions alone.

Outcome

Implementing this online course at UWL has encouraged higher-reported staff interaction with Blackboard. In the first year, 50% of Supervisors completed the course, whilst the attendance at in-person sessions doubled. Incorporating Supervising Doctoral Studies into training initiatives has enhanced UWL's community of practice, by giving current supervisors rich training resources to discuss, and offering essential inspiration to early career researchers considering doctoral supervision. Maddie refers to this as "passing the baton", reinforcing the rewarding impact academics at UWL experience through offering quality-assured supervision to a future generation of researchers. UWL's overall impression of Supervising Doctoral Studies is "an informative course that underpins the university's good practice, and helps to mould a healthy research culture."



Find out more about *Supervising Doctoral Studies 2.0* and how it can support both new and more experienced supervisors at your institution.