Building Effective Relationships with Doctoral Students

The *Building Effective Relationships* tool aims to support successful doctoral student-supervisor relationships. This tool facilitates discussions of expectations held by doctoral students and supervisors covering issues that arise during supervision of a research degree mapped across five domains:
- Project Design
- Ownership of knowledge
- Timing
- Writing and feedback
- Public Engagement

The tool was adapted from the [University of Adelaide's Centre for Learning and Professional Development](#)[1] as part of the Natural Environment Research Council-funded project [*Viewpoints (2017)*](#) by the University of Bath's Public Engagement Unit.

Using the tool

The *Building Effective Relationships* tool is a questionnaire that should be completed independently by the supervisor and doctoral student. The responses should form the topics of discussion at a supervision meeting. The tools should be used to:

- structure a discussion about the reasons why different responses may have been selected
- decide on appropriate ongoing actions for the doctoral student
- understand how you can best support the doctoral student based on any needs identified

Context

Mismatches of expectations during a research degree is a theme in the literature on doctoral supervision. Research with supervisors and doctoral students during the Viewpoints project highlighted an emerging risk associated with supervisors and doctoral students' expectations about public engagement with research.

Supervisors reported the increased demand to support doctoral students who are passionate about public engagement, helping them prioritise activity. Students, meanwhile, told us of the increased importance of public engagement activities in career progression and the variability in the status of public engagement and, therefore, how much it is endorsed or supported by supervisors.

The Public Engagement domain was an adaptation of the *Building Effective Relationships* tool by the Public Engagement Unit to reflect this emerging trend.

The [Public Engagement Unit website](#) has material and resources to support professional development in public engagement. Feel free to [contact the team](#) to discuss this tool or any other ways we could support you.

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[1] Kiley, M. & Cadman, K. (1997) Supervision Expectations adapted from work by Brown, G. & Atkins, M. (1988). Effective teaching in higher education. Methuen, London. 146-147

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Mark in boxes 1-5 where you feel responsibility lies. For example, in question one if you feel it is the supervisor's responsibility to select the research topic select '1', if you feel it is the student's select '5', if you feel it is shared equally then '3'.

	Supervisor's responsibilities	1	2	3	4	5	Doctoral student's responsibilities
	PROJECT DESIGN						
1	It is the supervisors' responsibility to select the research topic						It is the student's responsibility to choose the research topic
2	The supervisor decides the appropriate theoretical framework						The student decides which theoretical framework or methodology they should use
	OWNERSHIP OF KNOWLEDGE						
3	Supervisors need to have detailed knowledge of the research topic						Supervisors need a general knowledge of the research topic
4	The supervisor is the specialist						The student is the specialist
5	The supervisor is the authority figure						The supervisor is a colleague, acting as a sounding board
	TIMING						
8	The supervisor should have a timetable in mind and ensure the student keeps to it						The student should create their own timetable for their research and monitor their own progress
9	Supervisors should arrange the appropriate number of meetings						Students should ask for meetings when they need them
11	Students should always adhere to agreed deadlines						Agreed deadlines are guidelines rather than absolute targets

WRITING AND FEEDBACK								
12	Supervisors should correct style, grammar and spelling as well as content							Supervisors should only correct content, not grammar and spelling
14	Supervisors should make explicit how often they are willing to give written and/or oral feedback							Supervisors should give as much feedback as the student needs
15	The supervisor should assist in the writing of the report if the student has difficulties							The supervisor advises only, and leaves all decisions concerning content, format and style to the student
16	The supervisor should insist on reviewing drafts of every section of the thesis							It is up to the student to ask the supervisor to review drafts of the thesis
17	Students need fully honest feedback even when it is very critical							Supervisors need to judge how much feedback to give
PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT								
18	The supervisor should signpost relevant public engagement opportunities including training and funding.							The student is responsible for finding out the opportunities and support available.
19	The supervisor should lead the student on which activities to take part in and how much time to dedicate.							The student can decide on how to manage their time in line with their focus.
20	The supervisor defines the purpose of the activity and identifies key audiences.							The student can decide on their public engagement activities and how much time they spend.
21	The supervisor should assist the student in reflecting on skills and lessons learnt from engagement.							It is up to the student to reflect on lessons and skills learnt.