Supervisor's continued training and reflection

What
To support supervisors in continually developing their practice, a number of different approaches, activities and tools may be used.

Why? – Gender perspective
It is a general rule in Academia, that PhD supervision is not trained or otherwise systematically taught to those who practice this. Rather, it is more generally expected to be acquired implicitly through one's own PhD project and more indirectly through one's experiences as post doc and other more junior academic positions. This places a heavy emphasis on implicit and tacit knowledge – and reinforces existing practices – frequently such practices can be biased toward homosociability and stereotypical norms within academia.

The recommendations given here aim at supporting supervisors in continually reflecting on, differentiating and developing their supervisory practices in systematic and structured ways – both in more general terms and in terms of understanding and developing gender and diversity sensitive approaches to the supervisor-PhD student relationship.

From contexts and experiences in the FESTA-project
Please take a look at the attached examples of Masterplans for Supervisor study circles on: supervisor's task, role and responsibility and Mastering the art of beginnings. Moreover, we suggest doing the attached self-reflection questionnaire for PhD supervisors.

Recommendations for good practice
Collegial learning (study circles)
A non-hierarchical collaboration between the people involved in similar functions and interests lies at the heart of the concept of study circles. During study circle sessions, participants collectively discuss the topic by presenting different ideological viewpoints in relation to the issue. This collegial learning emphasizes the equality of participants and the main characteristic of the study circle is the collective nature of learning. It is a bottom-up learning methodology in which each participant contributes to creating knowledge.

Facilitated study circles provide a confidential time-space where supervisors can process their own challenges and situations and at the same time draw on colleagues' experiences and reflections. This type of peer group or collegial 'intervision' is a well-known way to enhance participants' reflection and practice and provides access to a wide and deep pool of knowledge and inspiration.

The best result is assured by ensuring these sessions are based on voluntary participation and by having them structured and facilitated by an experienced mediator. Facilitation can be done either by a person external to the group such as a trainer or consultant, or can be executed by participants taking turns, ensuring that the adopted supervision style and approach be maintained, and thereby ensuring that the

structure and disciplined interaction and focus are upheld. A number of different supervision styles and approaches are extant and can be accessed online (e.g., de Bono's thinking systems, peer coaching method, peer group supervision). It is also possible to have a HR-trainer introduce a few possibilities and from there on make a dedication to practice and experiment with different forms, methods, and styles.

During one of the FESTA partners 'study circle, the supervisors talked about their experiences of supervision, bringing out the most critical situations encountered and also the positive elements that emerged from past relationships with PhDs students. Discussing their own supervision experiences is an important factor in providing new supervisors with information on how to interact with PhD students and reducing the chance of repeating the same mistakes as other supervisors. These discussions are opportunities for informal training for the new supervisors who engage for the first time in the supervision.

It is useful to have these meetings facilitated by a mediator who knows the subject to be explored and who is able to direct the discussion on issues considered most important to improve the practice of supervision. Below we present two scripts for facilitated two-hour sessions for approximately 6-9 participants which were developed and adopted in the FESTA project.

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EXAMPLE 1 – master plan for Supervisor study circle:
Supervisor's task, role & responsibility

2-hour session, 6-9 participants, facilitated by trainer

Time	Activity	Comments
10.00	Opening and introduction to FESTA PhD supervision – study circle 1	
10.05	Participants' presentation • Questions, expectations and wishes for the Study circle • Own thoughts on responsibilities of a PhD supervisor (homework according to agenda) + where can we improve	Spiral – the word goes round in the circle – two rounds. It is possible to pass in either of the rounds without losing the right to speak when it is one's turn.
10.20	Post-it exercise: responsibilities of a PhD supervisor	Post its, pens and flip-over Alternatively: facilitator writes up keywords from discussion on whiteboard
10.35	Plenum discussion: reflections concerning Roles & responsibilities + gendered expectations • What stands out in the previous exercise? • What will you take with you as important considerations?	Spiral
11.05	The first phase as a PhD-student • Suggestion for topics: planning and monitoring, project planning, building network, establishing good habits, establishing relationship between supervisor – student	Short introduction by facilitator (points from focus group interviews/ other FESTA material concerning start-up, UU Slides 8,10,11)
11.10	Brainstorm on a PhD student's first time as PhD and how best to support him/her	In pairs
11.20	Plenum discussion: reflections concerning Professional – personal – private arenas Handling power relations	Spiral
11.50	Wrap-up: one word – what do I take with me? Prepare next time – theme/reading material	Round

Preparation:

Literature:
- Schnaas, Ulrike. (2014). *'Addressing a gender perspective in postgraduate supervisor's training in a scholarly way – an example from Uppsala University/Sweden'*. Unit for Quality Enhancement and Academic Teaching and Learning, Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden
- Robinson, Carol V. (2011). *'In pursuit of female chemists'.* Nature, Vol. 476, pp. 273-275
- De Welde, Kristine & Laursen, Sandra L. (2008). *'The "Ideal Type" Advisor: How Advisors Help STEM Graduate Students Find Their 'Scientific Feet'.* The Open Education Journal, Vol. 1, pp. 49-61
- Dickinson, Sarah. (2008). *'Change of heart – career intentions and the chemistry PhD'*. The Royal Society of Chemistry, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London W1J 0BA

Written reflection (send in approximately half a page a week beforehand):
- Advantages and challenges in your experience as PhD supervisor?
- Does Gender figure in your considerations and experiences? If yes, how?

(Agenda and written assignment to be sent out 3 weeks prior to 1st session, list of reading material sent out at least 1 month prior to the session).

EXAMPLE 2 – master plan for Supervisor study circle:
Mastering the art of beginnings

2-hour session, 6-9 participants, facilitated by trainer

Time	Activity	Comments
10.00	Opening and introduction to FESTA PhD supervision – study circle 2	General introduction to beginnings/transitions
10.05	Gender and beginnings – reflections on Practical strategies to dealing with common problems (cover common supervisory dilemmas – handling polarities) Possible topics? - Handling frustration - getting the student to seek help when they are stuck - the student who never has enough time - treating the PhD as a job - keeping on going when the going gets tough - dealing with writer's block	Spiral
10.35	2 x 2 exercises: what strikes me the most from what I have heard today?	Gendered expectations
10.40	Short presentation of participant's cases	Write up keywords
10.55	The group selects 1 of the presented cases to dive into	
11.00	Case study: Special focus on: - "Doing gender" in PhD supervision - Professional – personal – private	Case is presented. Two groups reflect in turn, 10-15 minutes per group – 'fish bowl-style': the case-presenter listens on as if peering into a fish bowl, there is no obligation for him/her to respond or take suggestions or advice.
11.45	Wrap-up, evaluation and preparation for next study circle	Round

Preparation

- Bias test: The implicit Bias Test Harvard
- Prepare an example/case with a dilemma related to gender, beginnings or both

Training programmes for supervisors

Training programmes for supervisors are an appropriate means to prepare supervisors for the complex and challenging task of supervision – which is often practiced without any formal training.

Training should preferably include a gender- and diversity perspective in order to raise participants' awareness and reflections concerning gender- and diversity sensitive supervisory approaches and strategies.

Training programmes for supervisors might be supported by the institution in different ways: At Uppsala University, the guidelines for "Teaching and Learning at Uppsala University" states that: "If the teacher has tutoring tasks, training relevant to these tasks must be included." Thus, the Division for Quality Enhancement regularly offers the course "Supervising PhD students", see [here for more information](#).

Supervisor's self-evaluation (at the start, after one year, at the end)

The Supervisor's self-evaluation is a tool that aims to help supervisors to reflect on their own style of supervision. This tool is composed of a self-assessment questionnaire that the supervisor will complete three times during each PhD-programme: at the beginning of the PhD programme, after one year and at the end. This allows the supervisor to make a self-reflection on his/her supervision, answering specific questions that show a realistic picture of how the relationship develops.

The recommendation is to fill out the self-assessment for each PhD student supervised. Therefore it might be useful to compare the different questionnaires for different PhD-students to produce other useful reflections on the supervisor-PhD-student relationship.

The self-assessment questionnaire is divided into seven different parts:

- Activities carried out with the PhD-student
- Relationship and communication with the PhD student
- Motivation and support given to the PhD student
- Collaboration with the PhD student
- Autonomy given to the PhD student
- Conflicts arisen with the PhD student
- Reflection on own supervision

Completing the questionnaire during the three phases of the PhD program and for each PhD student is important since the answers can then be compared and the supervisor has the chance to change the supervision style based on this analysis.

Below is the questionnaire that was developed at FBK based on interviews with PhD students and subsequent study circles with their supervisors.

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Self-reflection questionnaire for PhD supervisors

This questionnaire was developed at FBK as part of the FESTA-project on gender sensitive PhD supervision based on interviews with PhD students. It has also been tested by their PhD supervisors, who found it to be a useful and helpful self-reflection.

NOTE: We recommend that supervisors fill out a self-assessment form for each PhD student they supervise – and preferably three times during a programme: at the beginning, half-way through and at the end. This allows for two kinds of comparisons: across students and at different times within each single process, thus allowing for useful reflections on the relationship between supervisor and PhD student to emerge.

Activities done with the PhD student
1) How many PhD students do you currently supervise?

☐ 1

☐ From 2 to 4

☐ From 5 to 6

☐ More than 6

2) How often do you carry out the following activities with the PhD student?

	Very often	Fairly often	Not often	Not at all
Personal support				
Motivate PhD students while performing their tasks				
Professional support				
Guidance in research activities				
Monitoring thesis writing				

3) How much do you help the PhD student to be regular in planning and scheduling their activities?

☐ A lot

☐ Enough

☐ A little

☐ Not at all

4) How often do you assign the PhD student short-term goals?

☐ Very often

☐ Quite often

☐ Rarely

☐ Never

5) Do you believe that you define in a clear way the goals that the PhD student must achieve?

☐ A lot

☐ Enough

☐ A little

☐ Not at all

6) Do you believe that you define in a clear way the tasks and the assignments that PhD student must accomplish?

☐ A lot

☐ Enough

☐ A little

☐ Not at all

7) How do you evaluate your scientific vision about your PhD student?

☐ Very clear

☐ Quite clear

☐ Not so clear

☐ Not at all clear

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8) Do you try to help your PhD student understand which are the open challenges in his/her research areas, where novel contributions can be given?

☐ A lot

☐ Enough

☐ A little

☐ Not at all

Relationship and communication with the PhD student

9) What kind of relationship do you have with the PhD student that you supervise?

☐ Very informal

☐ Quite informal

☐ Rarely informal

☐ Not at all informal

10) How would you rate your availability to communicate with your PhD student via mail and / or telephone?

☐ High

☐ Fair

☐ Poor

☐ Null

11) How often do you communicate with your PhD student?

☐ Several times a week

☐ Weekly

☐ 2-3 times per month

☐ Once a month

12) Which is the most frequent way you use to communicate with him / her?

☐ Face-to-face meeting between you two

☐ Group meetings with the other PhD students

☐ Meetings together with PHD student and co-advisor

☐ Via email

☐ By telephone

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13) Usually, how often do you meet with your PhD student?

☐ Once a week

☐ Once every two weeks

☐ Once a month

☐ When used

14) When was the last time you discussed / revised with your PhD student the submissions plan to conferences / journal?

☐ This month

☐ Last month

☐ 3 months ago

☐ From 4 to 6 months ago

15) When was the last time that your PhD student made a presentation?

☐ This month

☐ Last month

☐ 3 months ago

☐ From 4 to 6 months ago

16) Do you consider yourself empathic with your PhD student? (Do you listen to her/his problems?)

☐ A lot

☐ Enough

☐ A little

☐ Not at all

Motivation and support given to the PhD student
17) Do you think to motivate your PhD student?

☐ A lot

☐ Enough

☐ A little

☐ Not at all

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18) How do you motive the PhD student? (Enter the intensity with which you carry out the following motivating activities).

	Very often	Fairly often	Not often	Never
Consider the PhD student at their last year as a colleague				
Perform a critical review on their work, but also manifest proudness about their achievements				
Show concern for their wellbeing				
Involve them in your research group				
Listen to them when they need it				

19) Do you try to convey to him / her enthusiasm for research?

☐ A lot

☐ Enough

☐ A little

☐ Not at all

20) Do you ensure the resources for the completion of the project of your PhD student?

☐ A lot

☐ Enough

☐ A little

☐ Not at all

21) How much do you support your PhD student for the following aspects?

	A lot	Enough	A little	Not at all
Solicit publication of papers in scientific journals				
Support in the writing of the papers				
Assist in the preparation of papers for conferences				
Teach how to present the work to a public audience				
Give suggestions regarding choices for the future career				

Collaboration with the PhD student

22) Do you actively collaborate with the PhD student for the structuring of thesis?

☐ A lot

☐ Enough

☐ A little

☐ Not at all

23) Do you collaborate with the PhD student in research works outside of their thesis project?

☐ A lot

☐ Enough

☐ A little

☐ Not at all

24) Have you written papers together with your PhD student?

☐ Yes

☐ No

25) How many?

☐ From 1 to 3

☐ From 3 to 5

☐ From 5 to 7

☐ More than 7

26) Do you try to include the PhD student in the scientific community network?

☐ A lot

☐ Enough

☐ A little

☐ Not at all

Autonomy given to the PhD student

27) How much autonomy do you leave to the PhD student to conduct the research?

☐ A lot

☐ Enough

☐ A little

☐ Not at all

28) Do you encourage independent thinking of your PhD student?

☐ A lot

☐ Enough

☐ A little

☐ Not at all

Conflicts with the PhD student

29) Does (or did) it happen that you have had conflicts with your PhD student?

☐ Yes

☐ No

30) With whom in particular?

☐ Women

☐ Men

☐ People with different cultures

☐ People with different backgrounds

☐ Other (specify)

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31) Which are the most frequent reasons for those conflicts?

	Very often	Fairly often	Not often	Never
Different opinions on the work to be performed				
Different research approaches				
Skill differences				
Cultural differences				
Character differences				

Reflection on your own supervision

32) Do you accept and support innovative ideas that your PhD student proposes to you?

☐ A lot

☐ Enough

☐ A little

☐ Not at all

33) Do you reflect on your supervision style?

☐ A lot

☐ Enough

☐ A little

☐ Not at all

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34) Do you ask advice to your PhD on how to improve your relationship?

☐ Often

☐ Quite often

☐ Rarely

☐ Never

35) Do you pay attention to gender similarities/differences during the supervision of your PhD student?

☐ A lot

☐ Enough

☐ A little

☐ Not at all

36) Do you pay attention to the ethnic and cultural similarities/differences of your PhD students?

☐ A lot

☐ Enough

☐ A little

☐ Not at all

From literature and other sources

Schnaas, Ulrike. (2014). *'Addressing a gender perspective in postgraduate supervisor's training in a scholarly way – an example from Uppsala University/Sweden'*. Unit for Quality Enhancement and Academic Teaching and Learning, Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden.

Brookfield, S. (1998). Critically reflective practice. *Journal of Continuing Education in the Health Professions*, 18(4), 197-205.

Spiller, D., Byrnes, G., & Bruce Ferguson, P. (2013). Enhancing postgraduate supervision through a process of conversational inquiry. *Higher Education Research & Development*, *32*(5), 833-845.

Bias test: The implicit Bias Test Harvard