

Lancaster University: lecturer as coach for postgraduate researchers

Lancaster Environment Centre offers one-to-one coaching for postgraduate researchers within the department (which includes both social and physical scientists). This emerged through work by a lecturer who tried to bring coaching skills into his PhD supervision. Doing so he realised there were tensions between the role of being a supervisor and of being a coach. The rationale for one-to-one coaching was that offering coaching as a form of support, distinct from supervision, could build the confidence of postgraduate researchers and address the multifaceted issues that can impact on PhD performance, but which are beyond the scope of supervision. Consequently, supervisors can then concentrate on engaging with the academic work of the PhD.

Coaching is provided by a lecturer, who is also a professionally trained coach with regular coaching supervision. Time is allocated to coaching within the work load model. Seven coaching sessions are offered – an initial discovery session following by six coaching sessions. Students determine the content of the sessions and confidentiality is assured.

Coachee quotes:

“The coaching helped me to recognise the need and ability I have to take control of my current situation and actively ensure that I get the support needed to get me throughit was really useful to reflect upon different moods and mind-sets that I think are really common within a PhD and recognise how this makes me feel I wasn't really aware of how damaging this could potentially be in terms of mental wellbeing and productivity but also that these could be controlled and can even sometimes be important.”

“It gave me a chance to talk to someone independent who had no motive to influence me one way or another, and also to get some new and different perspectives on things. I will take away some of the imagery and metaphors to help me manage the work/life balance.”

“The sessions helped me deal with some tough decisions and made me more aware of some of personal qualities and especially strengths.”

“It has made me more assertive. I am now much more confident at dealing with issues that come up and bringing up points with my supervisors. I also have a much more structured approach to my work, setting aside time for specific parts of my studies.”

“A more positive way of looking at things and spotting ‘gremlins’ when they pop up, and also, more determination to do well and to do myself proud.”

“They gave me space to reflect on what was worrying me and some techniques to start to build my confidence while my workload didn't change, my attitude towards it started to which is a positive result.”

For further information

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