

**The researcher development
agenda down-under: case study
of The University of Auckland
Doctoral Skills Programme**

Frances Kelly, Ian
Brailsford, &
Susan Carter



21st century, the general...

- NZ govt funding based on completion
- Government funds universities 4 years only per doctorate
- Funding formula
- Desire for faster completion
- Desire for more doctoral 'output'
- Increased support
- **Change**

Changes in doctoral studies at the University of Auckland since 2000

- Establishment of a School of Graduate Studies
- Introduction of compulsory sessions for new supervisors
- Monetary award for PhD completions within four years
- Increased funding of doctoral study (through individual student accounts)
- Increased scrutiny of provisional review process
- Changes to the examination process (2003 / 2008)

Background to the establishment of the Doctoral Skills Programme

The initial work of the committee focused on:

1. working definitions of 'generic skills' and 'generic capabilities'
2. comparing the UoA graduate profile with the UK profile (UKGRAD)
3. establishing what our colleagues across the Tasman were offering, and mapping ourselves against them

Melbourne's Upskills Programme - one model for Auckland's DSP



What does the Doctoral Skills Programme look like?

The DSP consists of three elements:

- a compulsory induction day
- a set of highly recommended core courses
- and a set of additional courses

The programme is organised into:

- the early phase
- mid phase
- final phase

The induction day

The induction day is **compulsory** for new doctoral candidates (with no exceptions).

It consists of:

- question and answer session with Dean of Graduate Studies
- a taught session on supervision
- a taught session on achieving provisional goals & looking forward to career options
- library IT session
- a working lunch with the Postgraduate Students Association



Supervision

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d to take an active responsibility for
supervisory relationship

osing the supervisor's team

ate Guidelines for supervision

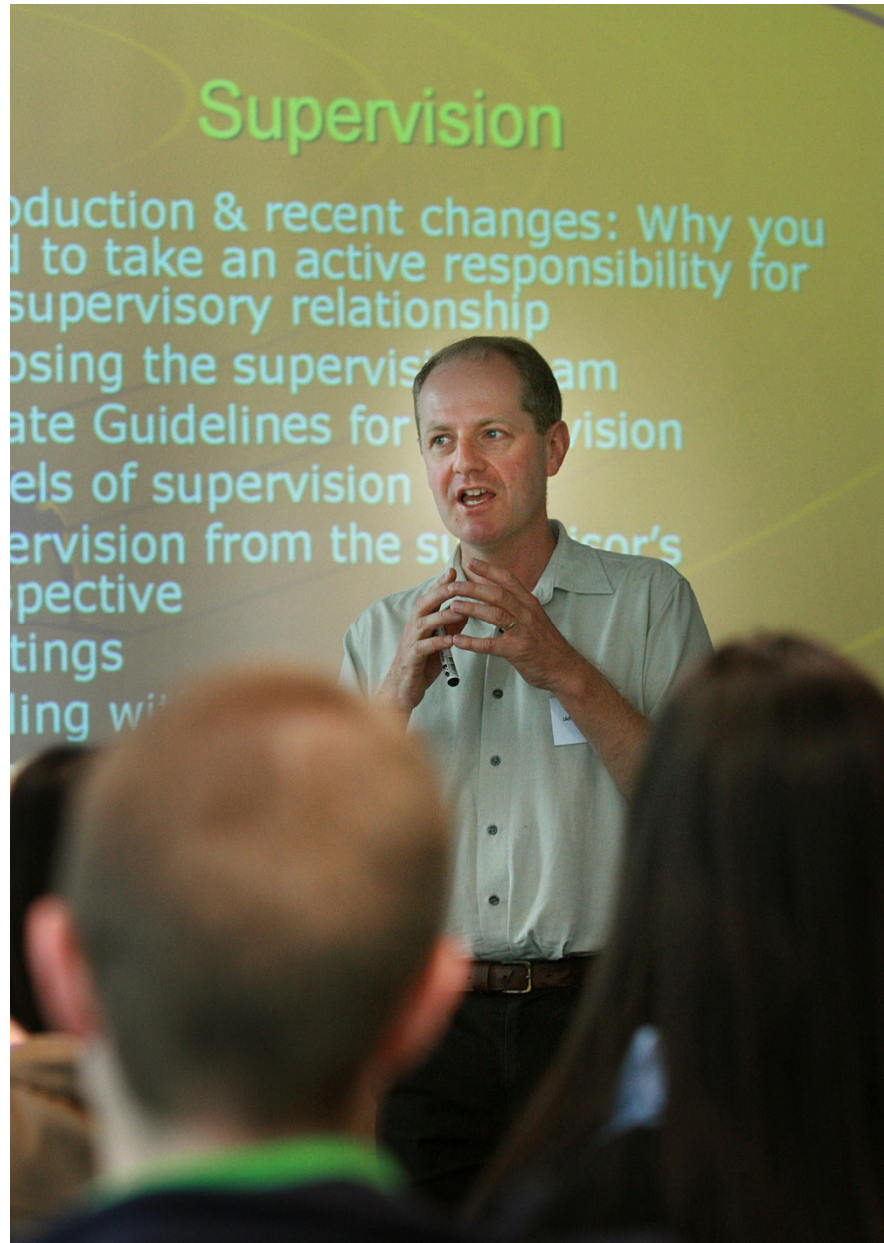
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Student evaluation of induction day

- **280 returned evaluations**
- **73 were entirely positive and liked “all sessions” or “everything”**
- **4 had nothing positive to say:**
 - **“material is mostly easily available and not particularly useful”**
 - **“no session was really worth the time”**

Earlier is better

“It’s better to let students know this program as soon as possible. Maybe it can be mentioned in the admission letter before students come to the university.”

“It should be compulsory to do it VERY early in your PhD or even while writing your DOC2 [application form] or looking for a supervisor, because it is even more helpful then.”

Metaphors

- Light
- Journey
- Showing blind spots



They liked us!

- 42 positive comments about teaching. We are:
...energetic, competent, very clear, encouraging, welcoming, patient, approachable, high quality, friendly, easy to listen to, well-informed, well-prepared, and even “lovable and informative”

They liked each other

- 76 positive comments on meeting other doctoral students and feeling part of a cohort:

“Most of the questions raised by other students were what I wanted to know and I got answers to them.”



Better than they expected

- Several commented on getting more out of the day than they expected, and becoming aware of things that they had not known they did not know: “A lot I was completely unaware of here.”

“I wasn’t expecting to get much out of it, However I got a huge amount out of it and plan to do more courses.”

How this feels to us, as academic advisors

- How do we walk fine line between preaching institutional policy and thinking critically while facilitating better/richer experiences for doctoral students?
- Putting on a 'good show' – new-found role as academic event planners

- Now that we've started...



Where to from here?

- Are we repositioning the UoA PhD from ‘thesis’ to ‘professional research training’?
- How will we know that DSP is making a difference and by what criteria?
- Should NZ be developing national support like UKGRAD programme—where would we begin?
- S.carter@auckland.ac.nz