



TRAIN THE TRAINER

Being a good academically does not necessarily mean you are good at running a research group. Supervisors need training in management, mentorship and people skills to ensure bad habits do not impact their own PhD students.



TAILORED SUPPORT

Students undertaking a PhD experience very different stressors to their undergraduate counterparts. Specific training on how to deal with poor PI/student relationships, general resilience should be considered as well as having trained professionals available that understand the stresses and strains of a PhD program.



BE ACCOUNTABLE

A large focus is placed on undergraduate satisfaction, with less weighting placed on postgraduates. Surveys to understand where the pain points are for PhD students to help improve their situation should be conducted. Exit interviews should also be considered allowing students to voice concerns after leaving the institution.



DIVERSIFY

Role models from all backgrounds are essential to help PhD students with things like imposter syndrome, yet academia is typically lacking in diversity. This along, with the limited jobs in academia, people from underrepresented groups are a more likely to become disheartened and leave academia.

With 1 in 2 PhD students experiencing mental health issues¹ during their PhD, something has to change. Often the onus is on the PhD student to 'fix' themselves. *We look instead at what universities can do to help*



REIMBURSE QUICKLY



Often students have to pay for conferences and travel out of pocket and have to wait a month or more to be reimbursed. This process needs to be quicker, or hardship funds need to be established to help those in need (or do away with the PhD student paying altogether).

CREATE A COMMUNITY



A PhD can be very isolating, and even more so having moved country to start a PhD program. Creating a sense of community by hosting social events can work towards helping this. Help for international students on how to adapt to a new culture is important.

PROVIDE SKILLS



With the majority of PhD graduates never ending up as an academic, and pursuing other careers, it is essential that PhD students get opportunity to train in other skillsets that are transferable across sectors. More importantly the dedicated time to actually develop these skills to minimise feeling of guilt taking time away from PhD research.

WORK/LIFE BALANCE



When self-worth can be so intrinsically tied to research output, it is easy for PhD students to feel they have to work 24/7, with pressure from themselves or the PI directly. The department can help by promoting work-life balance and actively encouraging students to take time away from their studies, such as running wellbeing walks.



DIGNITY AND RESPECT

Procedures and support should be in place for those that report sexual harassment. All reports should be taken seriously and treated with discretion. PIs that have been proven to have committed sexual misconduct should be removed from the institution indefinitely.

SELF-HARMING? SUICIDAL THOUGHTS? CALL SAMARITANS NOW ON 116-123

Part of the #mentalhealth series by Dr Zoe Ayres (@zjayres). Free to distribute.

Reference: 1. Graduate Student Happiness & Well-Being Report, 2014, University of California, Berkeley.