

A2.5

Inclusion at the University of Worcester



Teach inclusively Being inclusive in Supervising Final- Projects and Dissertations

What?

Offer variety.

How?

Diversify the type of final year projects and dissertations available by giving students options aligned to their aspirations following completion of the course.

Why?

A diverse student body will include students with different motivations and they are likely to be far more engaged with the project if they can link the skills and knowledge to potential future use and personal meaning.¹

Remind students of the skills they have developed to design, plan and write a project or dissertation.

Students should have developed the necessary skills for carrying out a project or dissertation, over the preceding years, if they are embedded in pre-requisite modules or more generally within the curriculum.

Reminding students of where and how they have developed project related skills will give them confidence and develop their self-reliance.

Give practical information.

Provide guidance on the structure and possible layout (<https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/resources/supervision.pdf>) including examples to look at and information to refer back to as needed.

Giving guidance from the outset about how the word count can be broken down and the purpose of each section will make it seem more manageable. This is particularly important for students with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD) who may find academic writing, organization and time management, challenging.²

Prepare students for fieldwork and lab work

Assist students in assessing any risks involved in off-site activities at an early stage, and identify measures that the student can put in place to prevent difficulties arising.

Ensuring students have planned and prepared well will mitigate against problems which disrupt the progress of the project. This is particularly important for disabled students who will need to think through additional challenges associated with their disability as early as possible.



What?

Support skill development where it is needed.

How?

Refer students to further sources of support, such as study skills support (<https://www2.worc.ac.uk/studyskills/>), for help with aspects such as referencing and keeping track of sources.

Provide support for students to make realistic project plans.

Provide examples and explicit guidance on how to be reflective, where required.

Encourage students to use text-to-speech software for proofreading their work – encourage them to contact the Disability and Dyslexia Service (<https://www2.worc.ac.uk/firstpoint/disability-and-dyslexia-service.html>) to enquire about support.

Why?

Some students may not have acquired these skills through their course.

Many students with SpLDs and autism spectrum conditions find it difficult to break down larger tasks into smaller chunks and to estimate how long each activity is likely to take.

This skill does not come naturally to some students, such as those on the autism spectrum.

Students with SpLDs and those who do not have English as a first language may benefit from hearing their work read back to them in order to check it for sense and minor errors. Professional advice on academic writing can be provided by RFL Academic Writers in Residence (<https://www.worcester.ac.uk/life/help-and-support/services-for-students/academic-writers-in-residence-rfl.aspx>), although this service does not include specific proof reading services, it will enable students consult with professional writers who may aid the development of their writing abilities.

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What?

Agree expectations.

How?

Encourage students to challenge your ideas and engage in debate with you.

Hold a clarification session with the student ³ to ensure that you both have a clear understanding of the purpose of the project.

Why?

Some students may be from cultural backgrounds where authority figures must not be challenged, so they may be naturally inclined to agree with the supervisor on everything, rather than understanding debate as a learning opportunity.⁴

Due to prior educational experience or cultural background, there may be a mismatch in understanding the meaning and purpose of research based learning.⁵

Regularly revisit the focus of the work and monitor progress.

Ensure you maintain the same vision of the purpose and direction of the project throughout the student's learning journey. Use project plan milestones to identify whether students are falling behind and identify problems early.

Through the process of reading, researching and thinking, students can change direction with their ideas and may not think it is relevant to inform you. If this change is potentially problematic, you need to know as early as possible in order to salvage the project. It may be more difficult for disabled students or those with additional responsibilities outside of university life to find the time they need to rescue a project that has gone awry or to catch up when they have fallen behind.

Encourage systematic record keeping.

Consider allowing students to use a digital voice recorder to record supervisions as this will reduce the need for note-taking.

Some students have difficulty listening, engaging fully in discussion and taking notes concurrently. This may apply to people with dyslexia, or those with concentration and memory difficulties, such as those with certain mental-health conditions.



What?

How?

Consider providing a template for students to record key points from supervision meetings and actions to complete. Recap this for action points at the end of the meeting so that both parties are clear.

Why?

Some students may have poor organisational skills and may need support to ensure they come away from supervision meetings with useful information. Providing a template ensures both student and supervisor are clear about what should happen next and provides an opportunity for the student to consolidate the main points of the discussion. Keeping co-authored notes will also give you a record of any advice given.

Support students to prioritise their time.

Be aware of students' other commitments outside of university and enable them to be realistic about the time commitment involved in a dissertation or long project. Consider using Skype if this is more convenient and saves travel time.

Students with caring responsibilities or those who need to work part-time to support themselves may find it difficult to devote sufficient time to a longer project without guidance on time management, particularly if they haven't done a longer project before.

¹ Deane, J., Hill, S., Keane, J. and Simmons, C. 2012. Rethinking final year projects and dissertations. Higher Education Academy. [Online]. [Accessed 3 September 2018]. Available from: https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/projects/gloucestershire_2010_ntfs_final_project_report.pdf

² Grace, S. and Gravestock, P. 2009. Inclusion and Diversity: Meeting the needs of all students. New York, NY; London: Routledge. See p.212 for advice on supporting disabled students with dissertations.

³ Bradshaw, M., et al. 2021. Supervising Master's Dissertations, A guide to good practice. [Accessed 12 July 2021]. <https://rteworcester.wp.worc.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Supervising-masters-dissertations-booklet-June-2021-web-version.pdf>

Bradshaw, M., Lawson, S. 2018. Making feedback on assignments effective: style guide for tutors. [Accessed 12 July 2021]. <https://rteworcester.wp.worc.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/effective-assessment-feedback-guide-august-2018.pdf>

⁴ Melles, G. 2005. Supervising international undergraduate medical students. Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia – conference paper. [Online]. [Accessed 4 September 2018] Available from: <http://hdl.handle.net/1959.3/45663>

⁵ Rowley, J. and Slack, F. 2004. What is the future of undergraduate dissertations? Education and Training. 46(4), pp.176-181. [Online]. [Accessed 4 September 2018] Available from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/00400910410543964>

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<https://inclusiveteaching.leeds.ac.uk/> ; <https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/your-university/teaching-and-learning/inclusivity>.

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