ABERDEEN 2040

TRANSITIONING POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS: ENHANCED STUDENT SUPPORT THROUGH SOCIOCULTURAL COACHING

Dr Amudha Poobalan

14th August 2020
Story begins......do postgraduate students need support??

Any student engagement calls for academic and social adjustments; and integration
School → University → Within University...on to PG (Baik et al, 2015; Jevons et al 2018)

Are PGT students different?......Assumptions (O’Donnell V, 2009)
Mature; Experience with studying....done it all; Real world experience so will cope

Transitioning to postgraduate studies can be daunting (McMillan 2014; Bunney et al 2017)

• Gaps in studying
• Out of their comfort zone, different discipline and/or education system
  (Bennett and Turner 2012)
Living example

Theory: Autoethnography

Medic – clinician

India

Academia in UK
Self-reflection and experiences

Auto-ethnography: reflection
• Rote learning vs critical thinking
• Challenging your teachers
• Interactive seminars/oral presentations

Teaching in a HEI:
• Diverse disciplines  (Pharmacy in Bangladesh → PH consultant; Engineering → work with NGO → PH)
• Diverse social and cultural backgrounds (relationships)
• Different education systems (Only exams; no essay writing; IT skills)
SUCCESS PLUS for PGT students

• How can we support them beyond academic skills??
• Using the pathways we have travelled...... (Bamber et al 2017; Gbadamosi 2018)

Pathways travelled...e.g.

Medicine in Nigeria – trained as PH consultant
Sociology in UK – PH academic in UK
Law in UK – PH and HSR academic in UK
Psychology in Malta – PhD in UoA - City council
Retired Prof in PH – leads programmes in WHO

Socio-cultural Coaching for Careers and Employability to Support Success:
Pathways for Life Underpinning Success
What we did...

SIGN UP at the beginning of the start of Masters 2018 (2 programmes in IAHS)

• Stage 1: Questionnaire – demographics, UG degree, work experience, PG expectations, career aspirations, graduate attributes

• Stage 2: Matched with appropriate mentors/coaches with diverse career pathways; provided basic guidelines

• Stage 3: Evaluation after a year (end of 2019)
Evaluation

Aim:
To assess the feasibility and acceptability of the SUCCESS PLUS programme

Objectives:
• To assess the student satisfaction on the support received through the programme
• To assess mentor experiences and views of the programme
• To assess if the programme improved learning support and experience for students
Evaluation - methodology

- Qualitative study (CERB ethics approval) – 2 programmes in SMMSN
- Students – Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) 4 FGDs with 12 students
- Mentors – Individual Telephone Interviews - 17 mentor interviews

followed the components of the qualitative methodology
Main findings......there is a need

- There was a gap or need for this kind of programme for postgraduate taught students, because there was no support schemes within the SMMSN
- Short transition period of one year in MSc programmes; international students adjusting to the UK education system and those returning to study after a gap
- Opportunity to have conversations with mentors who have had similar career paths, and to share experiences, plus the breaking down of barriers
- In particular, the value of this in relation to understanding hierarchy and alleviating sensitivities, especially around shyness among some cultures and being used to rote learning
Relevant themes and quotes.....personal/flexible

• **Shared experiences:** Mentee-“*somebody has gone through this path before* and you don’t have to make the similar mistakes, you can work on their experiences and all of that.”

• Mentor- “Because I liked the idea of supporting international students while they are here, and *having been an international student myself*”

• **More than education on offer:** Mentee – “I also talked about slightly more personal things, not like personal, personal, *like work/life balance* and things like that and how she dealt with her relationship as well as her career at the same time, that sort of helped me”

• **Support and time received:** Mentee - For me I think *we never had like a timetable* to meet but honestly I would say he’s been very forthcoming, I know he can be very busy and all of that, but even when he’s busy with fixed appointments elsewhere in town and all of that, so for me, *I can reach him any time*. 
Relevant themes and quotes..... ALSO development

• **Pastoral care**: Mentee – “So for me, *I discussed everything, including family. I discuss everything and anything with him.*”

• **Sounding board**: Mentee - “I've never ever done anything relating to public health before and I don’t actually know what opportunities are out there for me after. My main focus was like getting a job after, so I felt like someone who is affiliated with a public health team might be able to help me in that aspect.”

• **Professional development**: Mentee – “because with him with these course internships and he told me to go about it, *I sent him my CV, critiqued the thing very seriously, sent it back to me* and we sincerely applied together.”
Areas for improvement

- **Better Tailoring:** Mentee – “I feel the future mentors should be well tailored to the needs of the student. *Some students just want to go to a PhD, even after working for years so you tailor them with someone who is in line of academia, not someone who is in the field.*”

- **Managing expectations:** Mentor – “I wonder if there’s some way of asking them a bit more about their expectations of what they want to get out of it so we’re not necessarily just matching on background, it might be situations...working parents and their challenges.”

- **Training:** Mentor – “I think it would have been useful to have a meeting of all the people who are going to be mentors, so we could have discussed what it was about and how are we going to approach it and what we thought mentoring was.”

Our vision is to improve the scheme, based on the evaluation, and explore expanding this scheme to other postgraduate programmes.
Our Core Team

- Dr Leone Craig
- Dr Lynsey Christie
- Dr Sohinee Bhattacharya
- Dr Emmanuel Okpo
- Dr Janet Kyle
- Dr Heather Morgan
References


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