These perspectives can assist Otago’s postgraduate research supervisors as well as current and prospective students in understanding what to aim for, expect and be aware of in relation to postgraduate research supervision.

This brochure comprises a summary of in-depth interviews with 40 Otago postgraduate students on their views of supervision. The research was funded by the Committee for the Advancement of Learning and Teaching (CALT) and conducted by Dr Anna Janssen, a recent PhD graduate of the University of Otago.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:
Dr Charles Tustin
Tel 64 3 479 5655
Email charles.tustin@otago.ac.nz

THIS BROCHURE IS ALSO AVAILABLE ELECTRONICALLY AT:
www.otago.ac.nz/study/phd
www.otago.ac.nz/study/masters
Supportiveness is the quality that PhD students value most highly in supervisors. This involves supervisors being encouraging, mentoring, and aware that students’ lives extend beyond the PhD. Supportive supervisors make an effort to understand how the student prefers to work. In addition, such supervisors attend to the student as a whole person, rather than purely as a research student.

Students value availability in their supervisors. This involves supervisors meeting with students regularly, setting aside adequate time for students, and being contactable through several media (e.g., email, phone) – particularly if they are not physically present.

Students portrayed the ideal supervisor as someone who is interested and enthusiastic about the student’s work. This is achieved by supervisors who are positive, empowering, motivational, and committed. Such supervisors are often in the vicinity of their students and are likely to show an interest in the student’s progress.

Ideal supervisors are those who have expertise in the field surrounding the student’s research. Students value highly a supervisor who can use their knowledge of the area to understand and demonstrate how the student’s research topic fits within the wider field. Students do not necessarily expect the supervisor to have expertise in the precise topic of their research, however. Having a supervisor with expertise in the methodologies required in their research is particularly important.

Ideal supervisors are likely to show an interest in the student’s career. They help to provide support for the establishment of the student’s career in several ways. These include having good contacts and introducing students to their network of colleagues, looking out for and informing students of conferences and seminars relevant to their research and career, and encouraging and facilitating the publication of the student’s research.

Ideal supervisors have good communication skills. In particular, good listening skills: the tendency to maintain an open dialogue about the project, its progress and problems; the ability to communicate in an open, honest, and fair manner about issues that arise; and making expectations clear with regard to matters such as the process of completing a PhD or Master’s thesis, budget considerations; and the role each party must play in performing the project research.

Students see an ideal supervisor as one who provides feedback and criticism of their work that is constructive and prompt. In addition, students value consistency in the feedback given. Some valued consistency across time.

Students see an ideal supervisor as one who provides feedback and criticism of their work that is constructive and prompt. In addition, students value consistency in the feedback given. Some valued consistency across time.

Students portray the ideal supervisor as someone who is interested and enthusiastic about the student’s work. This is achieved by supervisors who are positive, empowering, motivational, and committed. Such supervisors are often in the vicinity of their students and are likely to show an interest in the student’s progress.

Students see an ideal supervisor as one who provides feedback and criticism of their work that is constructive and prompt. In addition, students value consistency in the feedback given. Some valued consistency across time.

Poor communication and disagreements about the project. Problems arise for students when they feel unclear or in disagreement with their supervisors about what the aims of the project are or how to best use and interpret their findings. A failure to discuss the direction and progress of the research poses problems for the student and their research.

Students face problems where there is poor communication with their supervisors about what each person expects of the other. Consequences include misunderstandings between parties, wasting time, and one or more parties getting frustrated. Another serious consequence is the student possibly being faced with a project that is too large to be completed in reasonable timeframe.

Some supervisors display self-satisfaction and a lack of respect for their students. Students find it difficult to work with supervisors who only look at their own gains from the student’s research, push the research down paths that interest them but not necessarily the student, treat the student as “their property,” and expect students to do work that extends beyond the realms of their PhD or Master’s research. Students also find it concerning when they are not treated as colleagues despite being at the final stages of their studies. Students struggle when their supervisors fail to recognise and respect that they have lives that extend beyond their thesis work.

Students find clashes of personality with their supervisors to be problematic for all concerned. The majority of students saw a personality clash as the reason most likely to drive them to abandon their studies or to change supervisors.

Students portray the ideal supervisor as someone who is interested and enthusiastic about the student’s work. This is achieved by supervisors who are positive, empowering, motivational, and committed. Such supervisors are often in the vicinity of their students and are likely to show an interest in the student’s progress.

Students see an ideal supervisor as one who provides feedback and criticism of their work that is constructive and prompt. In addition, students value consistency in the feedback given. Some valued consistency across time.

Students see an ideal supervisor as one who provides feedback and criticism of their work that is constructive and prompt. In addition, students value consistency in the feedback given. Some valued consistency across time.

Students see an ideal supervisor as one who provides feedback and criticism of their work that is constructive and prompt. In addition, students value consistency in the feedback given. Some valued consistency across time.

Students see an ideal supervisor as one who provides feedback and criticism of their work that is constructive and prompt. In addition, students value consistency in the feedback given. Some valued consistency across time.

Students see an ideal supervisor as one who provides feedback and criticism of their work that is constructive and prompt. In addition, students value consistency in the feedback given. Some valued consistency across time.

Students see an ideal supervisor as one who provides feedback and criticism of their work that is constructive and prompt. In addition, students value consistency in the feedback given. Some valued consistency across time.

Students see an ideal supervisor as one who provides feedback and criticism of their work that is constructive and prompt. In addition, students value consistency in the feedback given. Some valued consistency across time.

Students see an ideal supervisor as one who provides feedback and criticism of their work that is constructive and prompt. In addition, students value consistency in the feedback given. Some valued consistency across time.

Students see an ideal supervisor as one who provides feedback and criticism of their work that is constructive and prompt. In addition, students value consistency in the feedback given. Some valued consistency across time.