



BLASTER

FOCUS GROUPS

GENERAL GUIDELINES

## Objectives

1. To set up focus groups in 4 different institutions in order to
  - a. Identify the support systems that are in place to support students
  - b. Identify the support systems that are in place to support supervisors
  - c. Gather information on good practice
  - d. Identify specific interventions that can enhance the success of UR across institutions
2. Student Groups (A) will focus on a key question: [what is your experience of undertaking UR at your institution?](#)
3. Academic Support Groups (B) will focus on a key question: [What support systems are available for undergraduate students involved in research projects? what role do you play in these systems?](#)

## Setting up the focus groups

In each institution:

1. A focus group of 6-8 students who are currently undertaking a supervised research project
2. A focus group of Academic Support staff such as:
  - a. Supervisor (s)
  - b. Mentor (s)
  - c. Subject Librarians
  - d. Skills advisors
  - e. Any other relevant staff member who is employed to take part in UR support
  - f. Any other staff member who "indirectly" supports UR activity
3. Check your university's requirements with respect to Ethical Approval. Cathia will obtain Ethical Approval from Warwick University and the application that she submits will be for the UR pillar as a whole; however there may be local requirements that must be satisfied as well the general Ethical Approval.
4. Recruiting participants:
  - a. Send invitations to each participant, including Participant information sheet, Participant Consent Form
  - b. Decide on incentives (do we pay students? Could we invite them to the Leuphana Residential?)
  - c. Decide on data collection (tape / audio recorded)
  - d. Ensure availability of suitable environment (try to book a space that is comfortable, accessible to all participants, available for the duration of the interviews)
5. Decide on the need of an assistant moderator (recommended), who
  - a. handles the logistics
  - b. Helps with equipment & refreshments

- c. Arranges the room
- d. Takes notes
- e. Does not participate in the discussion although they may ask questions when invited
- f. Keeps track of time
- g. Transcribes notes (if needed);
- h. At the end of the focus group the assistant moderator can contribute the following: key points and themes for each question; follow-up questions to answers that seem vague or too brief;
- i. Is available for additional queries (as needed)
- j. Offers feedback on the analysis and the reports generated from the focus groups

## Provide adequate confidentiality

At the start of each focus group, draw the participants' attention to the content of the Participant Information Sheet and summarise the crucial points concerning confidentiality:

1. Describe the study, include who asked for it and why
2. Tell who has access to the results
3. Describe how the results will benefit participants or the organisation
4. Promise confidentiality by the researchers, which means no names are attached
5. Explain if / how audio recordings will be used. Who will have access to them?
6. Request that the group also maintain confidentiality for each other
7. Explain that the moderator's role is to guide the discussion and keep it on track
8. Explain that you may want to follow up with participants individually on some topics after the focus group
9. Explain that no names are wanted—so please do not mention names of colleagues
10. Tell them that you will summarize key points of the discussion at the end and then ask for their help to ensure that you've captured the most important points.

**Ask the Participants to Sign the Consent Form if this has not already been done.**

## Focus Group A (students)

### A. Welcome

- Introduce moderator and assistant

### B. Overview

- Introduce the study: decide if it is necessary to remind the participants of the research project; use the participant information sheet if needed.
- Introduce the topic of the focus group: **what is your experience of undertaking UR at your institution?**

### C. Ground Rules / Guidelines

- Provide adequate confidentiality (consult notes above as necessary)
- Emphasise that there are no right or wrong answers and that we welcome differing points of view
- We're tape recording, therefore one person speaking at a time
- We're on a first name basis
- You may not agree with others, but you must listen respectfully as others share their views
- We ask that you turn off your mobile phones
- My role as moderator is to guide the discussion
- Your role is to talk to each other

### D. Ice-breaker

- Choose a contextually-suitable, light-hearted question to warm up the participants and get them speaking to each other. For example: Write your name on the card in front of you and an adjective that best describes you; here is

mine (moderator displays her name card). A few minutes of discussion about the adjectives ensures that participants are communicating with each other.

E. Questions

- Why have you chosen to undertake a research project?
- How did you go about deciding on a research project?
- To what extent was your choice of a research project determined by the supervisor (their availability, their reputation, their expertise, their input)?
- What is your expectation of this project?

F. Individual response activity (hand out Card A1): Thinking about the research project that you are involved in,

- make a list of the support structures that are available to you
- Rate each one of these support structures in terms of how often you use them: Daily, Weekly, Monthly, Other
- Rate each one of these support structures in relation to how helpful you have found them: Extremely (3), Somewhat (2), Inconsistently (1), Unhelpful (0)
- **Moderate discussion around the students' responses. Collect Card A1.**

G. To what extent do you agree with the following statements (display A3 sheets around the room / table; use 3 colors of stickers to indicate: **Strongly agree**; Somewhat agree, **Disagree**)

- The role of an undergraduate dissertation supervisor is to **guide me through the process** of my research project
- It is important that my supervisor should be **an expert in the broad area** of my research
- It is important that my supervisor should be **an expert on the specific topic** that I am researching
- The success of my research project **depends entirely on the quality of the supervision** that I receive
- It is possible to undertake a research project with **no input from a supervisor**
- It is my responsibility to **maintain progress** on my research
- It is my responsibility to **identify the type of support** that I need for my research
- The success of my research project **depends entirely on my efforts**
- **Moderate discussion around the students' responses. Collect A3 sheets.**

H. Identifying areas of good practice and areas where more work should be done

- Describe a typical interaction with your supervisor
- What is the best aspect of the relationship with the supervisor?
- What needs improvement?
  - a. What can **you** do to make the programme better?
  - b. What can **the institution** do to make the programme better?
- Ending Questions:
  - a. All things considered: Of all the things we discussed, what to you is the most important?
  - b. The moderator reviews the purpose of the study and then asks the participants: "Have we missed anything"

## Focus Group B (supervisor / support team)

### A. Welcome

- Introduce moderator and assistant

### B. Overview

- Introduce the study: decide if it is necessary to remind the participants of the research project; use the Participant Information sheet if needed.

### 4. Introduce the topic of the focus group: **What support systems are available for undergraduate students involved in research projects? what role do you play in these systems?**

### C. Ground Rules / Guidelines

- Provide adequate confidentiality (consult notes above as necessary)
- Emphasise that there are no right or wrong answers and that we welcome differing points of view
- We're tape recording, therefore one person speaking at a time
- We're on a first name basis
- You may not agree with others, but you must listen respectfully as others share their views
- We ask that you turn off your mobile phones
- My role as moderator is to guide the discussion

### D. Ice-breaker

- Choose a contextually-suitable, light-hearted question to warm up the participants and get them speaking to each other. For example, ask each person to write their first name on the card, where they currently work within the institution, and one word that describes their role.

### E. Questions (each question lends itself to further probing by the moderator; please explore in-depth, as appropriate)

- My invitation for you to take part in this focus group is predicated on the assumption that each of you plays a role in supporting undergraduate research in your institution. Is this assumption valid? Is it accurate (does it apply)?

- To what extent do you see your roles intersecting with each other?
- Are there systems that have been put in place to enable you to communicate with each other?
- Is there a university strategy that explicitly outlines the institution's ambitions for undergraduate research?

F. Individual response activity (hand out Card A2):

- Make a list of the support structures that are available to your undergraduate research students
- Rate each one of these support structures in terms of how often you expect students to use them: Daily, Weekly, Monthly, Other
- Rate each one of these support structures in relation to how helpful you expect students to find them: Extremely (3), Somewhat (2), Inconsistently (1), Unhelpful (0)
- **Moderate discussion around these responses. Collect Card A2.**

G. To what extent do you agree with the following statements (display A3 sheets around the room / table; use 3 colors of stickers to indicate: **Strongly agree**; Somewhat agree, **Disagree**)

- The role of an undergraduate dissertation supervisor is to **guide the researcher through the process** of undertaking a research project
- It is important that the supervisor should be **an expert in the broad area** of the research
- It is important that my supervisor should be **an expert on the specific topic** of the research
- The success of a student's research project **depends entirely on the quality of the supervision** that they receive
- It is possible to undertake a research project with **no input from a supervisor**
- It is my responsibility to **monitor the progress** of the student's research
- It is my responsibility to **identify the type of support** that the student needs for their research
- The success a student's research project **depends entirely on their efforts**
- **Moderate discussion around the students' responses. Collect A3 sheets.**

H. Identifying areas of good practice and areas where more work should be done

- Describe a typical interaction with an undergraduate research student
- What is the best aspect of the relationship with a student who is undertaking a research project?
- What needs improvement?
  - a. What can **you** do to make the programme better?
  - b. What can **the institution** do to make the programme better?
- Ending Questions:
  - a. All things considered: Of all the things we discussed, what to you is the most important?

The moderator reviews the purpose of the study and then asks the participants: "Have we missed anything"



## Focus Group A: to what extent to do you agree with the following statements

(Strongly agree; Somewhat agree, Disagree)

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>The role of an undergraduate dissertation supervisor is to <b><u>guide me through the process</u></b> of my research project</p> | <p>The success of my research project <b><u>depends entirely on the quality of the supervision</u></b> that I receive</p> |
| <p>It is important that my supervisor should be <b><u>an expert in the broad area</u></b> of my research</p>                        | <p>It is important that my supervisor should be <b><u>an expert on the specific topic</u></b> that I am researching</p>   |

Focus Group A: to what extent to do you agree with the following statements

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>It is possible to undertake a research project with <b><u>no input from a supervisor</u></b></p>      | <p>It is my responsibility to <b><u>maintain progress</u></b> on my research</p>       |
| <p>It is my responsibility to <b><u>identify the type of support</u></b> that I need for my research</p> | <p>The success of my research project <b><u>depends entirely on my efforts</u></b></p> |



Focus Group B: to what extent to do you agree with the following statements

please state your role: \_\_\_\_\_

(Strongly agree; Somewhat agree, Disagree)

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>The role of an undergraduate dissertation supervisor is to <b><u>guide the researcher through the process</u></b> of undertaking a research project</p> | <p>The success of a student's research project <b><u>depends entirely on the quality of the supervision</u></b> that they receive</p> |
| <p>It is important that the supervisor should be <b><u>an expert in the broad area</u></b> of the research</p>   | <p>It is important that the supervisor should be <b><u>an expert on the specific topic</u></b> of the research</p>                    |

Focus Group B: to what extent to do you agree with the following statements

please state your role: \_\_\_\_\_

(Strongly agree; Somewhat agree, Disagree)

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>It is possible to undertake a research project with <b><u>no input from a supervisor</u></b></p>                    | <p>It is my responsibility to <b><u>monitor the progress of the student's research</u></b></p>     |
| <p>It is my responsibility to identify <b><u>the type of support</u></b> that the student needs for their research</p> | <p>The success of a student's research project <b><u>depends entirely on their efforts</u></b></p> |