

Coached – REDS conference

Slide 1= We often tell our researchers to use storytelling as a way of delivering their presentations, and I feel that maybe 'once upon a time' might be relevant here.

Firstly let me introduce you to the cast of characters – myself – Michele Underwood, Researcher Development Manager at University of Warwick, and my colleague, coach, tutor and artist Kate Mahoney. Also included on the cast list is the 2400 PGR population of Warwick, all their supervisors, and my other 4 tutors and colleagues from the Doctoral College

Slide 2=

Context is key so let me tell you about the setting. As I said we have approximately 2400 PGR, predominantly full time 80% and dominantly in STEM – lab based, research team based

So our population is mostly in labs and for some the continuation straight through Education.

Our social scientists on the other hand tend to have come from employment

The Skills programme I inherited in 2016 focussed upon fairly didactic teaching approach, long sessions ,supervisors with a resistance to allow their PGRs to attend anything that wasn't on a very short list of SKILLS requirements -Writing, Teaching, Publishing, Presenting, not delivered by one of the preferred suppliers (more about this next) and certainly nothing about development

Slide 3 **What's on offer to support Warwick PGRs?**

PG Science skills training certificate, a compulsory training course for Chemistry, and highly pushed by 5 of the 10 largest departments (all STEM) - covers writing, team working, lab working and science publication –

Also we have an Arts DTC which acts as the PGR training hub for the faculty of arts which basically takes up the Classics, English, History, History of Art, Film & TV, Theatre, Writing programme

Warwick Business School have their own training programme

So no competition then...

Slide 4

Up to this point I was also unable to communicate directly with PGRs- we had several gatekeepers; I had to add my info to a generic Skills & careers newsletter, but was still falling into a perceived admin black hole. I could tweet, and had an unvisited webpage and Moodle. I had no access to our supervisor cohort and sporadic access to Directors of Graduate Studies

So we had supervisors who had a narrow list of skills concepts, PGRs with minimal time to interact, PGRS juggling work, distance, part-time around a job, caring- yet the ones we did see valued us.

Slide 5

But maybe it was me:

I have a background in outdoor education, working with young people at risk, ex-offenders, management groups from multi nationals, sex workers, national governing bodies for sport and schoolchildren.

My focus has always been on the empowerment of the individual and of the group; providing a safe space to try new attitudes, new perspectives, fail and succeed. In addition I trained as a coach, counsellor, academic developer and finally found in Dynamic Development – see Tony for more details- an educational theory which was speaking the same language as I had been trying to articulate. I don't teach skills.

So no challenge then...

Slide 6-9

And then March 17th – lockdown.

Like everyone we had no contingency plan – this was never in any risk assessment that I have ever done. Over 50% of PGRs were out of their labs, research stopped or moved to Covid. Organised programmes stopped – PGCTSS stopped, CADRE stopped, the Village closed.

Slide 10

TBH I sat and stared at my computer for days...

But for us this was finally the opportunity – the opportunity nettle – that we could grab to not deliver Business as Usual, but Business as Useful.

It was time for a re-development.

I made grand plans of 24 hour activity to support PGRs coordinating teams across the whole of Warwick; made grand plans to connect local & global universities, designed websites and pages to be used internationally. But I was sat in one country with my 5 teaching colleagues in another 4, one of whom was on Australia time. I was learning, we were learning, time to experiment. We could do what we wanted – unprecedented times

Slide 11- 14

We created a community in an online Teams site; put all PGRS there and started talking to them. We felt that we needed to prioritise those who were due to finish, go through their upgrade, keep all of them on track and support their wellbeing. They agreed.

We put them in touch with each other to help around fieldwork, peer support, practicing their spoken English and run mock vivas. We brought parents together to support and discuss how they were juggling their lives and what signs they put on their 'office' doors. We had community crafts and we chatted on Twitter. WE offered sessions across time zones so that Pacific based PGR colleagues could attend sessions in their day time rather than mine.

We talked lockdown, the new normal, post lockdown, contingency planning and what we COULD do, not what we should. We coached, we supported and we signposted to other services when necessary.

We discussed how to recognise and deal with the procrastination, the worry about what next, how to find something that would be supporting their research.

They came

Every four weeks we re-wrote the programme to reflect the global and local Warwick situation. We reflected on what we learnt in all our sessions and shared that learning amongst us, adapting to feedback from the PGRs and each other. To allow us time to learn and create, make mistakes without fear of judgement, I stopped asking for evaluation forms at the end of sessions.

But we did ask them to let us know how we were doing, to share ideas, to help us learn as well. All of the comments we have received have been from people just emailing me; people following up on sessions they've been in with colleagues, the lifesaver that a session had just been; the Viva or upgrade success.

Has it worked?

WE have seen a range from 55 to 95% increase in uptake. The lower numbers reflecting those departments who already engaged with us and the Higher numbers in the STEM labs, including Physics who we didn't see at all in 2019.

We have had parents working around their childrens' needs, part timers who would never have the capacity normally, distant learners because we are all one of those now

We've had people in sessions across multiple time zones,

We've seen people who have never been able to attend before.

We've had people complete, and do their Vivas with the help of the RDO tutors

Slide 15- 18

As we saw more and more people the message spread; they spoke to their supervisors and colleagues about what help they were receiving- focussing upon what COULD be done. .

As lockdown continued, The Doctoral College became the space where supervisors came to ask for help, updates and policy advice; and ask questions about what we were doing with the RDO – we let them have a look round to see for themselves. But also we saw that our supervisors were also needing a space a place to talk, to work out how to do this, and cope with their own personal experiences. So we developed a peer training, support space on a Teams site for them too.

Gradually the two messages have begun to combine; supervisors asking the RDO to deliver bespoke sessions for their PGRs, to ask for support with particular areas and how can we

Supervisors now coming to us from students / on grape vine – Teams site for supes

Bespoke online delivery service

Slide 19 Campus has begun to open , but we have retained our online campus for our PGRs. to end returning to some form of normal, numbers of increased uptake, people more willing to share , greater professional connections, supporting other depart, listening

Slide 20 greater collaborations are being made or are continuing from the summer. How to use Teams becomes the biggest question...PGRs finding connections, making them and nurturing them. We ARE globalised researchers, by working online , by creating and supporting online – this is GOOD practice for our PGRs future careers.

Slide 21 This was never set up as a research project, we have only retrospectively captured data, we have no idea what will happen when they can return full time to their labs, archives and offices.

Have we finally shifted the culture at Warwick – maybe...

Slide 22 It takes a village to raise a child, is the same true for a PhD researcher? Yes and no, it's not just the physical village but the attitude of the residents to be ready, willing and able. The family must know and want their involvement. It took a pandemic to make the shift for our nuclear families to leave the farm to find a new place to share and encourage a new way of thinking

Eight out of ten of our largest departments are STEM subjects totalling over 50% of PGR population, who are mostly aged 21-30

Largest is Life Sciences at 16%

Second largest is a Social Sciences depart – WBS at 9% aged between 26-40

The other 20 depts. have from 50 to 4 PGRS.

Demographics	DEPTS	Pop %
30 departments	Sciences 8/10 largest Departments Life Sciences 16%	53%
	Soc Science (2) WBS 9%, (10) Education 4%	13% 264
	20 Departments	Range from 50 – 4 PGRs so from 3% to 0.1%

	Biggest pop in age range	Gender
Science	21-25; 26-30	80% F to M
Medicine	Consistent to 40	60% M to F
Arts	26-30	63% M to F
Soc Science	26-30, 30-40,	Matched gender split

50% UK,	21% EU	28% Overseas
55% Male	44% Female	1% pnts