wblchampion

How Academic Supervisors Communicate Shapes Whether Students Thrive — or Disengage

WBL Champion Launches Its First Online CPD Module for Academic Supervisors of MBA Work-Based Learning Research

Are You an Academic Supervisor? Do You Supervise Postgraduate Research? Join our free, 60-minute, online CPD.

Most academics who supervise postgraduate research were never formally trained to do it. They learned from their own supervisors — adopting what worked, adapting what did not, and developing the rest through experience. The research on this is pretty consistent: supervisors tend to replicate the supervision they themselves received, without a defined vocabulary for what they are actually doing or why.

The WBL Champion project, funded by the European Commission under the Erasmus+ programme, aims to address this gap. Its first CPD module — a free, 60-minute, online, AI avatar-delivered course for academic supervisors of MBA work-based learning research — is now available. Built on a substantial body of research into supervision, feedback, motivation, and communication, it gives supervisors practical tools for the challenges they face most often: the student who goes quiet, the feedback that disappears, and the conversation that nobody wants to have.

View CPD Course

What the Module Covers

The course is organised into four blocks, and includes three reflection exercises, two polls, three knowledge checks, and a downloadable Quick Reference Card containing six immediately usable tools.

Block 1

The Supervision Context

Understand the supervisor's role, the distinction between supervision and teaching, how the student's research arc develops, and the challenges students face as they transition from course-takers to independent researchers.

Block 2

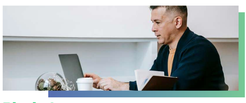
Supervisory Styles and Active Listening

Learn how to apply different concepts like Lee's five approaches to research supervision and Goleman's emotional intelligence framework in supervisory practice to enhance communication, deepen engagement, and build effective supervisory relationships.

Block 3

Professional Compassion, Mindset and Supervisory Feedback

Define the co-authorship boundary and explore how frameworks such as Fardoe's Professional Compassion model and Dweck's growth mindset approach to feedback can support researcher development, strengthen professional boundaries, and enhance student motivation.



Block 4

Difficult Conversations and Supervisory Collaboration

Identify common communication gaps in supervision relationships and learn how to apply frameworks like Thomas and Kilmann's five conflict modes and DESC to navigate challenging conversations, resolve conflict constructively, and build stronger supervisor-student relationships.

Discover More

Why This Output Matters

Effective research supervision create impact at every level, and benefits everyone.

Academic Supervisors

Supervision is one of the most consequential and least formally supported, roles in higher education. This CPD provides a structured framework for understanding supervisory practice, addressing common communication challenges, and applying practical tools that enhance student support.

Learners

Effective supervision helps students develop confidence, motivation, and independent thinking. By equipping supervisors with evidence-based approaches, this CPD supports better research experiences and stronger outcomes for learners.

Education Providers

Investing in supervisor development can strengthen research outcomes, improve learner retention, and build student confidence. This CPD offers a flexible, high-quality resource that can be easily integrated into existing staff development programmes.

Policymakers

The success of lifelong learning, skills-based education, and work-based learning depends on the quality of academic support available to learners. This CPD strengthens the supervisory relationships that help learners succeed and develop as independent researchers.

Why You Should Join

Research has consistently shown that supervisory approaches and communication practices play a significant role in shaping the postgraduate research experience and influencing student outcomes. Yet, many supervisors are unaware of the assumptions and habits that underpin their own supervisory style. This CPD is designed to help supervisors reflect on their approach, recognise common communication patterns, and develop practical strategies for building more effective and supportive supervisory relationships.

A Global Perspective on Research Supervision

Developed by an international consortium of higher education and training partners across Malta, Ireland, Italy, and Portugal, this CPD brings together global expertise and leading research in postgraduate supervision to deliver a practical, evidence-based learning experience. Free, online, and self-paced, the module is designed to fit around busy academic schedules, providing accessible professional development that can be applied across a wide range of higher education settings.

A Pathway to Research Independence

Work-based learning asks students to move between the world of education and the world of work — to treat real organisations as sites of genuine inquiry and to produce research that is both academically rigorous and practically grounded. That movement is demanding. It requires students who are capable of independent thinking, and supervisors who know how to develop that capacity rather than inadvertently undermining it. This CPD is designed to ensure that the supervision relationship is a resource for students, not a barrier to them.

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Follow us on social media for regular updates on course launch announcements, access opportunities, and ongoing WBL resources:

By following the WBL Champion project, you'll be the first to know when courses launch on the digital platform, and when additional resources are released. You'll also be part of a growing community of educators rethinking how we prepare students for real work.

WBL Champion Project partners: VITECO (Italy), KNIGHTS College (Malta), INOVA+ (Portugal), and Technological University Dublin (Ireland).

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