What did you Get from your School?: Case Studies at the University of Manchester, United Kingdom

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ABSTRACT

Research is an interactive process and requires the development of social as well as academic skills. A school’s administrative function is commonly interpreted as referring to managing, operating or directing an organisation in order to support students towards the completion of PhD. Some suggestions regarding the supervisory framework for supporting and defining the student's graduate programme include producing a definite plan in writing, probably different for each department, that describes the department's view on good supervisory practice; establishing regular meetings between student and supervisor, setting up adequate methods of assessing coursework, thesis or dissertation supervision record-keeping and project advancement and submitting a comprehensive annual progress report to the supervisor. Past research had shown that the most important people the foreign student encounters in solving their problems are the faculty/school, the community and other foreign students. However, the faculty/school is the major source of academic guidance for the foreign students and the foreign student goes there and feels at ease discussing his problems and asking for advice. Therefore, this research is to identify the students’ perspective on school/department responsibilities. This study is using the case study method where three PhD students from three major disciplines of study namely arts, science and social science were involved in this research. As a result, the research had identified the most important support systems that the respondents have and what they need.

INTRODUCTION

Given the length and complexity of graduate student supervision, it is understandable that various difficulties arise (Brown and Atkins 1988; Moses 1985) due to organisational or professional factors. Organisational factors could include policies and procedures established or not established for graduate student supervision (Donald et al. 1995), the manner in which these are communicated to supervisors and students, the number of students being supervised, the supervisor’s inability to manage a research group effectively, and inadequate support services and equipment. Among the professional factors are a misinformed or inadequately prepared supervisor or a supervisor whose research interests are different from those of the student. All of these issues are related to the responsibilities of the school. The school should ensure that the student has been appointed a supervisor who has a similar interest and expertise in the student’s research area (Donald et al. 1995) and should match the personalities of supervisors and students (Holdaway et al. 1995; Sheehan 1993). A school must ensure that an optimum student-to-supervisor ratio of less than or equal to 6:1 is established (Donald et al.1995). There are circumstances where a student can face a personality clash, barriers to communication, cultural or language difficulties or personal differences in the approach to work. Here, the school has to ensure that it provides the best solutions for the student (Donald et al.1995). Besides, the school should appoint an appropriate administrator to monitor the supervision provided to all graduate students and require that annual reports of students’ progress be submitted to the graduate studies office or faculty (Holdaway et al. 1995).

Phillips and Pugh (2000) and Spear (2000) agree that the school should establish a reputation for research and a real commitment to the development of doctoral students. They also state that it has to provide the students with good facilities. The benefit in having good facilities is that it can be a factor in students choosing the school to pursue their study. Other issues that the school should emphasise have to do with the mechanics of getting the work done, for example, access to laboratory equipment, library facilities, potential samples and their availability and ease of access, the amount of support from secretarial staff, photocopying facilities and in the case of survey research, the potential for help with postage. This includes study cubicles, common room, and desk in a small-shared room similar to those used
by staff members. All university or school should offer student e-mail network and access to the internet since personal computers, e-mail and internet technologies are such an integral part of research. Many factors can contribute to overseas students being unable to successfully complete their programme within the given time frame. All other aspects need to be taken into account in studying the overseas student’s experience of supervision. These include the students should properly know their own responsibilities, as well as the support of the department or school. This research studies the three PhD students’ experiences in relation to their perspectives on school/department roles. In other words this research is to identify what are the support systems that these PhD students have and what they need?

**METHODODOGY**

This paper will focus on three case studies conducted in the University of Manchester, United Kingdom. The participants represent the major disciplines of PhD students, namely the sciences, social sciences and arts. The researcher decided to choose participants who were already in at least their second year of study, because they have much more information than first year students, due to the greater experience they have gained. Initially, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with twelve participants and decided to pick three of them to participate in the case studies. These three Malaysian PhD students were then interviewed again to obtain more information about recent developments in their current year of study. Again, the researcher will not reveal the real names of the participants, as it is part of the ethics of doing research that their real background should be kept confidential.

The case studies were conducted with the subjects over a one-year period. The researcher met them a few times, interviewed them and maintained contact with them by face to face meeting, e-mail and telephone in order to be aware of any developing problems in their PhD study. These students were chosen because they could give relevant information, able to give full commitment and because it was easy for the researcher to meet them. One of them, called Azrie who represents arts disciplines. The second is Ainin, who represents science disciplines and Izzah is the third informant and she represents social science disciplines. The interviews, which were semi-structured, were taped and transcribed and then the transcripts were checked with the subjects before the data was used. The researcher decided to report the case study as a narrative. Many quotations are presented in reporting the case studies in order to give a better understanding of the story. The purpose of the case study is to gain as much information as possible about the participants’ experiences in supervision and university practices. Each of the three case studies generated large amounts of written data from the students concerning their views and experiences on school’s responsibilities and research student policies.

**PARTICIPANTS’ BACKGROUNDS**

**Izzah**

Izzah is single and 34 years old and has very good communication skills, as well as excellent in spoken and written English, as she has done all her tertiary education abroad. She did her Bachelor’s degree in accounting in a United Kingdom university and completed her Master’s degree in the United States of America, specialising in international business. She registered to study for a PhD in organisational psychology and currently she is in her final year, having already applied for a six months extension from her sponsor. She is a very independent student and likes her supervisor to give her as much freedom as possible in doing PhD research. Before she came to study in Manchester, she worked as an assistant lecturer in a Malaysian university. She insisted that she did not gain much experience of supervising students while working, because she decided to do her PhD not long after she had been appointed as an assistant lecturer. In the researcher’s view, she seems very serious in her study and a workaholic.

She chose the subject area for her PhD because of her interest in that particular field and she has discovered that the subject is not well established in Malaysia. Therefore she can make her contribution to knowledge in a new area, specifically in the Malaysian context. The reason for her choosing to pursue her study in her current university is that the supervisor that she selected is a very well known professor in her subject area. Initially, Izzah applied to three
universities in the United Kingdom to do the PhD. All the universities she selected are among the best universities in that subject area. She was looking for a university that had a well-known professor to supervise her. In the end, she decided to choose the first university that offered her a place. Another strong reason for her still wanting to be supervised by her current supervisor is that she is one of the pioneers in her field of study. After spending two years sharing a house with other students, she decided to stay in a student accommodation hall towards the end of her PhD. As a fourth year student, she has spent most of her time in her room writing up her thesis. If she has problems, she prefers to consult her friends in Malaysia by e-mail or telephone. She can be seen as a careful and disciplined student. One example of this is that she mentioned that every time she sends her written work to her supervisor she double checks everything in order to ensure that it is her best and well organised. Izzah represents social science students in this case study.

Azrie

Azrie is a 37 year old married man with three children. He has seven years working experience as a lecturer in a Malaysian University. Having gained his Bachelor’s and Master’s Degree in geography in Malaysia, he intended to pursue his PhD studies in the same field, as requested by his sponsor. His Masters was in rural hydrology, in great contrast to his PhD, which is in urban hydrology. At first, he was very confused whether his research was considered as coming under sciences or arts. He claimed that normally geography is an arts discipline, as his tuition fees are similar to those of other arts students. Moreover, the University of Manchester website mentions that the Faculty of Geography is an arts faculty. Nevertheless, some of his friends in the same faculty have to pay considerable tuition fees because they are considered to be science students, which involves working in the laboratory. Later on, he understood that the type of research can be used to identify which discipline the student belongs to.

Azrie had been appointed two supervisors for his research. The main supervisor is male and the co-supervisor is female. He seems to be very happy with both of them and maintains a good relationship with them. The main supervisor is the person who can make decisions for him in relation to many aspects related to his study. His first supervisor has appointed a co-supervisor to assist him in satellite computer applications and other technical aspects. Most of the time, the three of them sit together in meetings to discuss his research progress. Sometimes, when the discussion does not involve any technical matters, he only needs to see his first supervisor. His first supervisor has the title, Professor Emeritus, and he mentioned that this supervisor is a member of many committees throughout the UK that are involved in environmental science. There are five PhD students under his supervision, four from overseas and one from the UK.

Spending his first year in Manchester with his family was very challenging for Azrie because, at the same time, he had to act as the head of his family. He has been clear about his research since his first year and is very confident that he can manage to complete his PhD within the given period of three years. He started to collect his data in the first year of his study because he had conducted sufficient literature reviews beforehand. Unexpectedly, when he was about to register for the second year of his PhD, his wife said she wanted to return to Malaysia for good with the children and therefore she would no longer be with him in Manchester. At this point in time, he made an important decision, for, after discussing this matter with his supervisor, he decided to complete his work in Malaysia. He had managed to collect some of his data in some areas in Manchester. His plan is to go back to Malaysia only after he has complete collecting all the data. Azrie and his supervisor had discussed this matter earlier and they decided to meet every three months if appropriate. He said that his main supervisor is very supportive, knows his problems and has always tried to solve them as soon as he can. So, Azrie will represent arts students for the purpose of the case study.

Ainin

Ainin is a 32 year old woman and is staying in a student accommodation hall in the University of Manchester. She is married but has no children, and her husband is working in Malaysia. She did her Bachelor’s degree in Malaysia. Just after completing her first degree, she received an offer to join a university in Malaysia as a tutor. Before coming to the United Kingdom, she worked for a short time in one of the universities in Malaysia where she gained some experience in doing research. She came to Manchester to study for a Masters degree in engineering and chose metallurgy as her area of research. After completing her Masters in one and a half years, she returned to Malaysia for about six months before continuing her PhD under the same supervisor in the same school at Manchester University. She decided to do a
PhD for two reasons. Firstly, her sponsor insisted on her doing a PhD straight away and, secondly, her supervisor encouraged her to continue her Masters research, which would make a strong contribution to the field of metallurgy. Another reason for choosing her current university for her PhD is that it is known as one of the best universities for engineering in the United Kingdom.

Ainin mentioned that her Masters was done by coursework and that therefore she knows a number of lecturers and their backgrounds. This helped her to choose the best person to supervise her PhD. In her view, this is one of the advantages of doing a Masters and PhD in the same school of the same university. The other advantage she discovered is that she knows where to seek assistance when she has problem with her work. In fact, she did not need to adapt to a new environment during her first year as a PhD student. There was nothing new for her. As a student, she explained that she had to know what a person was like before she decided to choose anybody to be her supervisor. For instance, students must know whether the targeted supervisor is the appropriate one, bearing in mind the way they work. Ainin claimed that her supervisor is an internationally well-known professor and a specialist in her research area. He has also published a lot of books and articles. Currently, there are five PhD students under his supervision. He is said to be a very busy person and has always wanted Ainin to be independent in her research and she seems to have got used to it. However, she has unexpectedly faced a problem in her second year, due to having had to change her research material and therefore, to do her research all over again. This has made her feel very stressed. In fact, time has become one of her enemies at this current stage. During the interview session, she seemed to be a very talkative person, communicating easily about her experience during her studies. So, for this case study Ainin will represent the sciences, since her research involves experimental and laboratory work.

THE RESULTS

**Izzah on the School’s Responsibilities**

For Izzah, the most important responsibility of the school is to provide good facilities to the student. She believes that good facilities can help the student to work more effectively. However, she is not satisfied with the facilities in her school, because she has to share them with many students and the ratio per student is really low. She means that the facilities are insufficient. There should be more computers and more rooms for students to do their work in. She spoke about it:

They just provide enough facilities like photocopying, printing. The school’s facilities are not that good. I’m not satisfied. There are not enough computers, stuff like that. I share the room with other people, on a first come first served basis. But you only have about twenty to thirty tables and that is for about sixty to seventy students and there are maybe about ten computers. Half of them are not working most of the time.

Nor was she satisfied with the way the school fixed the rules so that the student has to pay for the photocopying and printing, especially in the library, because, she claimed that her sponsor has already paid a lot of money in tuition fees. However, when she reached her third year, she could print her work without have to pay anything. She said:

The first year we have to pay everything, but the second year, they gave us free printing and free photocopying. But still we have to pay if we use that kind of facility in the library. We have to share a room. I don’t think it’s going to work like that because the concept is to make everything in the school available and you know our fees are £7,500 a year…

At the beginning of her registration day, she was told that each student would be allocated an adviser. It is the school’s responsibility to arrange an adviser as someone to refer to if the relationship with the supervisor is not working. Normally, the school will choose the adviser from among it’s own academics who have a similar background to the student’s research. However, Izzah preferred to have one supervisor and not an adviser. This is because if she had to work with two persons, she would have to let both of them know what was going on. Therefore, she would have to allocate her limited time to report to these people, which is for her unnecessary. She talked about it:
There is a university regulation to give an adviser to each student. I have friends who are very close to their adviser, especially when they have a problem because, sometimes, they go to their adviser instead of their supervisor. The adviser will be appointed from among lecturers in the school who have a similar interest to the research that the student is doing. But I was told from day one from the very moment I started in the school by my supervisor and by my adviser that there is only a one-way relationship between my supervisor and me. And I’m glad because, if anybody else took part, I think I wouldn’t like it.

It is also the school’s responsibility to arrange an Induction Training Programme and a PhD meeting in the school. Izzah thinks that the way the school provides the Student Handbook to each student is very useful, as in it there is information about the format in which to present a thesis and how the student should make proposals and behave as a PhD student. She said:

The role I think includes informing students, maybe through e-mail, about the weekly meetings with other PhD students and preparing the induction training. Handbook, yeah, you can get many useful things like the thesis format. The book said that, as progress is made, it is going to be totally my work, with my supervisor just there as support. He is not going to hold my hand. That is what the book said, I think. That is why I keep telling myself that.

Izzah did not agree that attending the Induction Training Programme would allow a student to learn much about PhD life, in particular, about the responsibilities of students and supervisors. However she knew what the research student policies were all about because she had obtained a Student Handbook during her registration. She believes that students should have at least a basic understanding of their responsibilities, because they are given the handbook or attend the Induction Training Programme. For her, the handbook is suitable for use as a reference only, as people may not use everything in it because human beings are best be treated according to their ability. She said:

Yeah, I think I have read the policies. At my registration, they gave me a very thick handbook. I think so. I can’t remember the content of the handbook. I read the regulations and they also gave me the book ‘How to Get a PhD’. We had that training one day and I went to that training… I think those are just guidelines. The thing is, it involved human relationships, so it’s difficult to manage human relationships based on the guidelines.

In conclusion, Izzah was not satisfied with the facilities available in her school because her sponsor paid a lot of money, but she still has to use her own money to use some of the facilities, especially in the library. As for her school, it should create a working environment conducive to study, with appropriate facilities for each student. She attended the Induction Training Programme, but does not really agree that the training, policies and student handbook are important.

Azrie on the School’s Responsibilities
Firstly, Azrie spoke about the school’s responsibility in explaining to new students the multidisciplinary courses that can be undertaken in both arts and science faculties. He claimed that it is quite interesting that his subject area can be considered as a multidisciplinary one, which means it could be either arts or science. However, at the beginning of his registration, he was told that he had to register in the Faculty of Arts. Up till now, he has spent most of his time in the Faculty of Science as he has to do his experimental work, and his supervisor’s room is located in that faculty. As he put it:

The registration supposedly took place in the Faculty of Science but since I arrived in October, which was a bit late, I had to register in the Faculty of Arts but that was not a problem. However, in the Faculty of Arts, urban hydrology is not so technical as in the Science Faculty, so it is not a monodisciplinary subject like history or psychology, but it a multidisciplinary subject. It can be almost anywhere depending on what we want to study.

He said that, the school would determine whether a student who is doing geography should be categorised in the arts or science disciplines, after looking at the kind of research planned. Nevertheless, he seems to be very lucky in being categorised as researching in an arts discipline, because the fees are much lower than for science disciplines. He said:
You should not be surprised to see what has happened in the same courses for those who are doing geography. For those who understand it, it is not a strange thing. In my school (which is the School of Geography) there are two or three people in arts and two or three people in science. As for myself, I would like to change to science but my supervisor does not advise me to do so because the fees are quite high, more than £9000. The faculty decides whether you are in science or arts depending on your topic. I am quite lucky to pay small fees, although I do plenty of lab work.

Secondly, Azrie mentioned the school facilities. He claimed that the laboratory facilities in his school are very sophisticated, which is something else he cannot find in his own country. With the excellent facilities, he said, he could do his work better and quicker. The other advantage of having good facilities is that it is worth it in terms of the money paid to the university for tuition fees. Besides, he said that not only the service provided by the lecturers but also those supplied by the school administration should reflect the fees paid. As he put it:

In my field, the facilities are incredible, like the application of Arc View, new software for translating satellite mapping. In Malaysia, hydrology is still new, but here they are advanced. Anyway, I only got to know about it after arriving here. Therefore, its application is more advanced than in Malaysia, where it has just been introduced. Besides, it is worth paying quite a lot of money in tuition fees. Normally, the school will always serve the lecturers, but actually the same thing should apply to students, or at least, if students need anything, they should be able to go straight to the school or admin (administration) rather than through the lecturer.

He also mentioned his decision about whether to collect his PhD data in the UK or back in his own country in the light of the stunning technologies here. After discussion with his supervisor and thinking about other factors, he decided to do it in the United Kingdom. He said he would prefer to change his proposal a little as long as it will benefit him later on. He also mentioned that the research topic is a matter for him to decide. He stated that he is really satisfied with the laboratory facilities he has encountered. He made the following comments:

However, after my second discussion with my supervisor, he said this topic was not suitable for the area here and he asked me to revise it. I discussed it with him and I found two or three problems here in relation to the further study proposal. After a long discussion, he agreed with the topic, but there are substantial changes from the initial proposal. It could be done in Malaysia, the lack of logistics and lab facilities made me do it here.

Azrie also spoke about the general facilities received by postgraduate students in the school. There is a room to share with other PhD students, which has a locker and computers. Another facility is that he can access journals from home with the password he has been given, which really benefits him. As he put it:

We have a postgraduate room, which we have to share with three other people, but, after the second year, they renovated it and made it for ten people, if I am not mistaken. I am not very sure because I don’t really use that room so much, but the room has becoming a bit smaller. Computers are provided in that room but not that many, because we have computers in our lab. It is not so necessary to put computers in the room. We also have our own lockers and we are required to pay ten pounds as a deposit for the keys, which is refundable when we have completed our study. Another thing at my school is that we are given a password for access to all the latest journals related to my study. I already have twenty-nine journals for which I have the password and I can consult them from home.

Azrie also said the school has a responsibility to appoint an adviser for a student. In his view, the school should emphasise the role of the adviser towards the student. This is because some students may find some difficulties in their relationship with their supervisor, so the student should know what to do and who to go to for advice. He said the following about it:

We have to see our postgraduate adviser. He advised us to see him about any problems. He is a lecturer. He advises all postgraduate students and handles almost everything. He said I could come to see him not only for registration problems but also for other matters, like financial problems or problems in attending seminars, because he will attend to all postgraduate problems from the first day of our arrival up to the day of the viva. He will solve the problems or be a middleman. There was a case where he became a middleman for a grievance between a supervisor and a student.
In addition, Azrie told of some difficulties that he faced in the school when the postgraduate meeting was held at the wrong time, such as the time for a Muslim like him to pray. On some occasions, if there is a party in the school, he still cannot accept the fact that they provide alcohol, which is contrary to his culture. He gave an example:

My experience of studying here is that, ninety five percent of those in my school are white people, mostly from the UK, France and other European countries and a few from Asia and other continents. The difference in culture is the problem. There are a lot of rooms for discussing things like theory and methodology, but the problem is the differences in culture. We felt sidelined even though they (the faculty) call us for discussion among postgraduate students. However, there are some problems, such as wrong timing. For example, when they conduct discussions at four or six o’clock, that is the time for us to pray and we reported this. Sometimes they have them at one to two o’clock, but I have a class at two o’clock, so, it is the time for me to go for my lunch and prayers. Their system is different and there is also wine and alcohol, which are contrary to our culture. The discussions are conducted in good faith because there are good books to be read and discussed.

Azrie also talked about the responsibility of the school to prepare and provide the Induction Training Programme to new students. He claimed that, even though he did not attend the Induction Training Programme because he came late for registration, he had asked other students about its content. In his view, the student might gain general ideas from the induction training about the school as well as about the people in the school and who is in charge of certain things. He said:

I came a bit late and did not attend the induction programme. I was supposed to enrol in September, but I came in October, I had to pay a ten pounds penalty. I was given a book about the regulations but I missed the briefing. One of my close friends who is from the same school told me that, the induction took a few days, about three days. Some groups were sent to the library, and some to the registrar’s office to be told how the registration process works. Others were sent to the school to be introduced to the Head of School and the tutors for every course and for discussion with the postgraduate committee.

In addition, Azrie talked about the research student policies in the Student Handbook, which for him is very helpful to both the student and the supervisor. In his view, if the student and the supervisor take into account the contents of the handbook, the relationship between the two will be very well established. Azrie’s supervisor does not follow exactly what the handbook says, but serves him very well compared to the guidelines in the handbook. Azrie talked about it in the following terms:

I know and have read in the handbook what each and every new student will receive when they first arrive here. If the supervisor or students follow and go according to what that book contains, like the number of meetings, the frequency of meeting the supervisor and other things, I don’t see any reason for them to have problems and the student will have no problems with the study. During my registration, they gave us much information about the faculty. In the information, they also emphasised the supervisor. When I look at the handbook, the contents look like that of my former university in Malaysia. That is why I think I read it and it’s just a matter that I can’t fully remember what it is all about.

Generally, it can be concluded that Azrie is very satisfied with the facilities, especially with the technologies and technical equipment in the laboratory. The role played by school members is also important in ensuring that students will get much more benefit either from the service provided or from supervisors or advisers acting as middlemen on certain occasions. Nevertheless, Azrie seems not to have used all the facilities provided because he prefers to do his work at home. He did not attend the Induction Training Programmes conducted by his department. He also claimed that the policies stated in the Student Handbook are useful, especially in maintaining a relationship with supervisor.

Ainin on the School’s Responsibilities

She talked a little about her school, which she said has provided her with very good facilities. For instance, she mentioned that she has been given a postgraduate office, which contains a personal table and a locker where she can keep all her belongings. Besides, the staff in the school are very nice and helpful. She also claimed that the most important aspect that the school should emphasise to students is safety in the laboratory.
Facilities are satisfactorily provided here. I am quite close to other departmental staff. They are very nice and helpful. The school must provide as many and as good facilities as possible. We pay the fees to get the best facilities without any obstacles. My sponsor paid more than £10,000 a year. The facilities that they provide here including the scanner, printers, are all excellent. If we need some equipment, we can propose and order it, definitely we can get it. Besides, I have my own office, personal table, locker… Another responsibility of the school, I think, is the safety aspect. The appropriate staff should take care about it.

Ainin gave her views on the Induction Training Programme, the Student Handbook and research student policies. She claimed that there were two reasons why it was not necessary for her to attend the Induction Training Programme, read about research student policies or study the Student Handbook. Firstly she assumes that she does not need the training or information on research student policies while doing the PhD because she gained experience in doing research when working previously in Malaysia. Secondly she did her Masters at the same university, had a lot of experience and was very familiar with her department as well as the university. So, she thinks it is not necessary for her to attend the training or to familiarise herself with the research student policies. She said:

I don’t think I read the handbook. I heard about it when I did my Masters. I can remember. I knew most of the department’s staff as well as being very familiar with department’s regulations. So, I can manage myself and co-operate with other people surrounding me. Because of this, for a new student that is studying here for the first time, it’s better they do attend (the Induction Training Programme). Actually, I was working as a researcher for two years before I came here. I had to know the kind of regulations. I think I have some history that shows I am a good researcher. As for me, I have had previous experience. Maybe because of that, I think there was no need for me to come (to the Induction Training Programme) or maybe I was busy at that time. Yeah, because I have experience I think. I’m not new.

Students who are studying for a PhD have different backgrounds and experience. Therefore, as an overseas students some may encounter difficulties in their life as PhD students and some may not. A good school should provide appropriate training courses or classes for such students in relation to a particular problem, that of English language for students for whom it is not their first language. Ainin gave an example:

…I think it depends on whether the student is a foreign student or if he came from different country and speaks different language. So the school must give assistance or support to this kind of student…

In conclusion, Ainin is satisfied with the facilities received in her school. For Ainin, it is school’s responsibilities to provide courses for international students to improve their English language. She did not attend the Induction Training Programme or read the Student Handbook because she said that she already had a lot of experience from doing her Masters in the same department.

**DISCUSSION**

Ainin and Azrie claimed that the facilities provided by their school, especially in the laboratory, are very up to date. However, Izzah and Azrie said, the general facilities of students, such as postgraduate study rooms, need to improve because they want the facilities provided to be equivalent to the amount of the tuition fees paid by their sponsors. The findings show the main responsibility of the school is to ensure that the facilities provided are appropriate. This is to enable students to work in an environment that is conducive to study. In the research student policy guidelines, it is mentioned that the school or department is responsible for providing reasonable access to a desk or room in secure office space, which may be shared with other students within the department, and which is suitable if fixed with lockable storage for personal belongings. Also, the guidelines state that there should be sufficient computer terminals within a department to satisfy the demand from students. According to Phillips and Pugh (2000) and Spear (2000), the school should provide good facilities, which include common rooms and a desk in a small shared room, similar to those used by staff member. This is due to the benefit in having good facilities is that it can be a factor in students choosing the school to pursue their study. The message here is that students are increasingly looking for a high quality work environment, and not just a high quality supervisor.
The findings suggest that a good school should have good supervisory support systems. This supervisory support includes procedures for appointing an adviser from among the faculty members. Izzah and Azrie talked about an adviser, who they think is very important when the student and supervisor are facing problems. During their studies, some students may find problems in the relationship with their supervisor. To solve these, they should be able to go to someone else, like an adviser, who has a professional relationship with them to talk about their problems. This closely reflects the results of Selby and Woods (1966), who found that the most important people foreign students encounter in solving their problems belong to three groups: the faculty, the community and other foreign students, although the faculty was the major source of academic guidance for them as they go to an academic adviser if they have academic problems. In most research student policies, it is clearly stated that the adviser normally plays a pastoral role and oversees the student’s well-being. The adviser deals, in particular, with problems faced by the student, including any arising between the student and supervisor, and gives advice on formal university regulations regarding doctoral research, departmental policy on PhD students, and wider issues such as teaching and conference attendance.

This study also suggests that the school has to provide care for overseas students, who may need frequent contact and advice and have language problems. Its findings confirmed that overseas students may encounter difficulties in adapting to the new life and environment like language barriers, culture differences and inadequate supervision. These findings are supported by Donald et al. (1995), who point out that students sometimes face personality clashes, barriers to communication, cultural and language difficulties or personal differences in the approach to work. The advice that the school needs to provide should include making the student aware of the possibility of changing supervisor if the need arises.

Other support that the school should provide to students includes issuing them with safety instructions. Therefore, the school should ensure that the procedures are examined and checked regularly by the appropriate staff. In the case of science students who work in the laboratory and have machines to deal with, there should be particular emphasis on this matter. It is also clearly mentioned in research student policies that the supervisor needs to provide information on relevant safety regulations and procedures, and that students should receive appropriate training and supervision when following any procedure involving equipment.

**CONCLUSION**

Ainin and Azrie claimed that the facilities provided by their school, especially in the laboratory, are very up to date. However, Izzah and Azrie said, the general facilities of students, such as postgraduate study rooms, need to improve because they want the facilities provided to be equivalent to the amount of the tuition fees paid by their sponsors. Izzah and Azrie also talked about an adviser, who they think is very important when the student and supervisor are facing problems. All of them are aware of the research student policies, which are stated in the Student Handbook. However, only Izzah had attended the Induction Training Programme. Each of them has different views and perspectives about the research student policies stated in the Student Handbook. Ainin uses her work and study experience at the same school as her guidelines and does not see the importance of the handbook. Izzah and Azrie agreed that people will act in different ways in different situations and the handbook is only a guideline and is not necessarily to be followed fully. In their opinion, the contents of the handbook do not need to be put into practice word by word, but only depending on the situation. However, they agreed that the handbook is important for future reference.
REFERENCES


