Using Feedback to Support Development

Value of Feedback

Feedback is a valuable tool to help identify key strengths and areas for development. Postgraduate research students can use the information provided by feedback to create more specific personal development plans and identify relevant development areas in relation the Researcher Development Framework.

When an individual provides feedback to another, the feedback represents their interpretation of their observations. Such personal perceptions are not ‘reality’ and as a receiver of feedback you can choose to ignore or use the feedback as you see fit. However there is much to be gained by being ‘open’ and curious with regards to receiving feedback. Feedback helps to make us more aware of what we do and how we do it, thus increasing our ability to modify and change our behaviour and to become more effective in our interactions with others. We can use it to ‘test’ our impressions of ourselves and to turn ‘hunches’ into more reliable information. Over time we can begin to spot trends and consistencies in the feedback which can help us create more meaningful development and career goals.

Asking for Feedback

You may wish to seek feedback from a range of people who have known or worked with you for an extended period of time, and whose opinion you value. Depending on your circumstances, examples of people who may be able to provide you with feedback include supervisors, other students and friends, employers and colleagues.

You may have identified some particular areas of behaviour that you would like feedback about and could ask someone to provide specific feedback based on their observations.

You can also ask for feedback to help identify your strengths and development areas in relation to the Researcher Development Framework. Example questions could include:

- What do you perceive to be my strengths in relation to the Researcher Development Framework?
- What examples do you have of me using these strengths and what was the impact?
- What do you perceive as my development areas in relation to the Researcher Development Framework?
- What do you think the impact could be if I developed these skills further?

It is helpful to meet face-to-face when receiving feedback as this provides opportunity to clarify. It may be that you can receive the feedback at a meeting or catch-up that has already been arranged. When receiving your feedback, try to ensure that you will not be interrupted. The person giving you feedback may wish to provide written notes, or you may wish to write summary notes from your discussion.
Tips for Giving and Receiving Feedback

Receiving feedback
Below are a number of things to consider in relation to receiving feedback:
- It is important to listen and not to give reasons for or defend your behaviour.
- You may which to paraphrase what you have heard, in order to establish understanding.
- It is useful to ask for clarification or examples if you're not sure what is meant by the feedback.
- Some people may not be used to giving feedback and may inadvertently use a word or phrase that seems inappropriate to you. If this happens, ask them for further clarity.
- Thank the person giving you feedback as providing feedback can be as uncomfortable as receiving it.

Giving feedback
Below are some tips for individuals giving feedback:
- Ensure your comments are objective and based on your observations, using the 'I' pronoun rather than generalised statements.
- Make your comments as specific as possible by providing examples where possible.
- Focus on observed behaviour and not your perception of the individual’s personality, beliefs or values.
- Ensure your comments are respectful and non-judgemental. Think about the tone and words that you use.
- Check that you have been correctly understood and be prepared to provide more clarity if needed
- Present your feedback as perceptions and not as facts.
- Keep your feedback confidential to the person you are giving it to.