

It is of course a redeeming feature of South African higher education that a number of outstanding scholars and supervisors can be found throughout the university system, though disproportionately located within the former white institutions; this is acknowledged.

Nevertheless, there are *systemic* problems of the kind listed below:

1. The uncontrolled growth of doctoral student numbers and the corresponding lack of supervision capacity. The pressure on institutional finances, and the incentive of subsidy income through increased student enrolment, has led to all kinds of questionable practices, for example the enrolling of large numbers of doctoral students for whom there are often few skilled and available supervisors.
2. The quality of PhD supervisors; a problem that faces the well-resourced, established universities, but especially the historically disadvantaged institutions. Few supervisors are selected on, let alone trained in, advanced methods of supervision. Appointed supervisors therefore seldom have a conceptual map of what constitutes acceptable supervision. Supervisors themselves are often the products of poor supervision, and do not therefore hold experience of what constitutes competent supervision.
3. The quality of doctoral student intake. The fact that most South African students are poorly selected and supervised at the Masters level, means that these same students become minimum-entry students at the doctoral level. In consequence, universities without strong and competitive selection procedures for PhD students, often find themselves matching a weak doctoral student with a weak supervisor. The end result is disastrous for the student, the institution and for the unsuspecting public.
4. The lack of institutional selectivity with respect to supervisors. It is assumed that an academic with a PhD will automatically be capable of competently supervising a doctoral student. Without training, and without any assessment of their supervision capacities or competence, every year scores of academics take on their first doctoral student, often without institutional support, guidance, or oversight.
5. The lack of an induction experience for new supervisors. Even if the supervisor does have potential for competent supervision, few institutions require a slow and monitored progression starting, for example, with a demonstration of competent Masters supervision as a prerequisite for doctoral supervision; or assuming the role of co-

supervisor for the purpose of learning from a main supervisor. Under pressure to accommodate ever more doctoral students, there is less and less preparation for advanced supervision.

6. The lack of internal evaluation systems for measuring supervision competence. While there are all kinds of evaluation instruments, some mechanical and routine, for measuring teaching performance and research outputs, there are hardly any institutional procedures for holding supervisors to account. Accordingly, it is not uncommon for faculties or departments to have supervisors with large numbers of students allocated to them, but without any evidence that they are actually ‘delivering’ long-enrolled students for graduation purposes.

7. *A compromised system of external accountability* for the final thesis. In several universities, a highly problematic relationship has developed among supervisors located in institutions with long traditions of cooperation, e.g., the traditional Afrikaans-medium universities. For example, there is often a tacit agreement that a friend or former student at one university would externally examine a doctoral dissertation of a friend or former supervisor at another institution, and vice-versa. The outcome of such examination, among allied institutions and academic colleagues, will normally mean a ‘pass’ for the thesis, irrespective of the quality of the final product. In this closed pattern of external examination, there is therefore no way of receiving meaningful feedback on the quality or competence of supervision.

8. The lack of an enabling departmental or institutional culture to support effective supervision. The enterprising attitude of one or two energetic supervisors is unlikely to be sustainable in an academic culture that does not create a positive departmental or faculty environment for things like research seminars, faculty development workshops, incentives for exemplary students and supervisors, conference funding opportunities, occasions for airing student’s work-in-progress, provision of mentorship resources, and release from heavy undergraduate teaching loads. It is common for an eager new supervisor to attend external workshops only to be frustrated by the lack of understanding and support from a head of department or dean to enable implementation of newly acquired supervision ideas.

Bad practice in doctoral supervision is therefore sustained by a lack of effective interventions from within, or outside of, institutions to correct these problems. To be sure, there are small-scale training programmes from various national and international agencies, in which current and aspirant supervisors might participate on a voluntary