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Undergraduate Research Projects: Moving From Individual to Group Supervision

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Occupational Therapy honours degree programmes culminate in the completion of a research project. Often a traditional 1:1 supervision model is employed, this can be an isolating and anxious experience for the student and many undergraduate students fail to make the most of the supervision on offer (Shaw et al 2008). This master - apprentice model can also be frustrating for the supervisor who frequently has to impart the same or similar advice to each of their supervisees. In an environment of limited resources it is important to consider whether individual supervision is sustainable and pedagogically is it the best experience for the student?

Fitzsimmons et al (2003), Anderson (2004) and Shaw et al (2008) all suggest that a small group approach to supervision can provide more support to the student and alleviate isolation. The collaborative and peer learning involved is considered a fulfilling method of achieving understanding and skills. Additionally the interaction within groups develops communication proficiency, promoting acquisition of new knowledge and allows a cognitive construction of new routes for successful project completion.

This paper aims to explore current literature related to undergraduate research supervision. It will also give insight into the context for change in a Scottish university and the management of change from individual to group supervision. In addition the group supervision process in current use in a 4 year undergraduate degree programme will be outlined. Comparisons will be drawn with individual supervision and qualitative insights from the students' module feedback questionnaires and supervisors' feedback will provide an initial evaluation of the group process employed and prepare the way for further formal investigation.

Current research is limited in this area and very little information is available on models or processes of group supervision for undergraduate research projects. It is anticipated that this paper will provide insight and guidance for educators who are contemplating a more efficient and effective method of research supervision.