Imperial College London
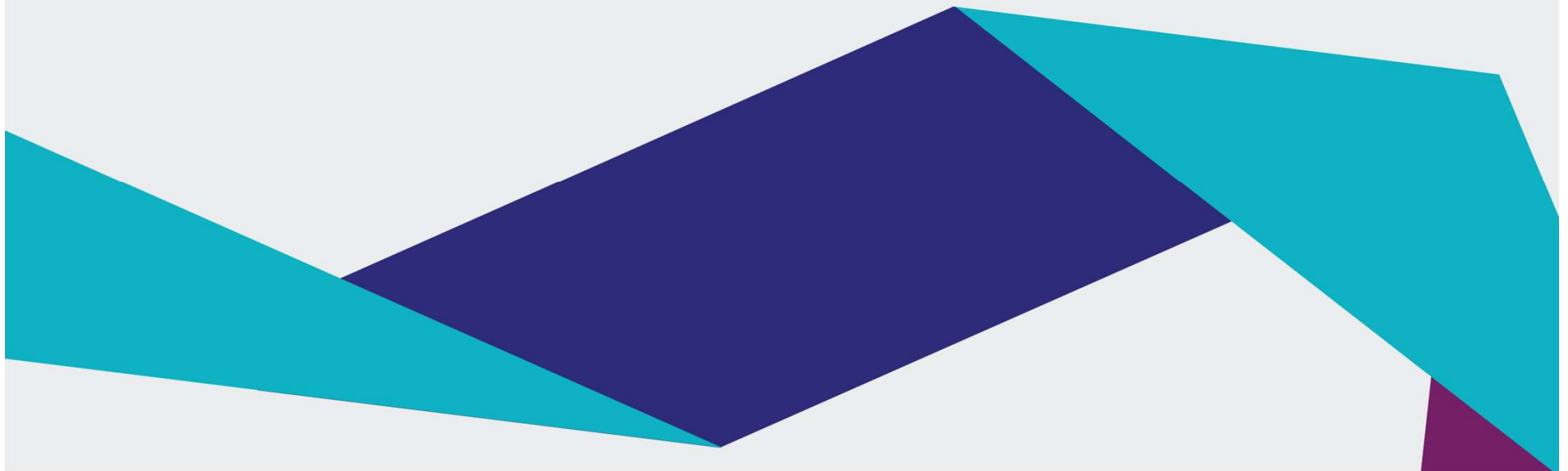
Optimising the doctoral student experience: The impact of coaching

Dr Janet De Wilde

Talk

- Drivers behind introducing a coaching programme
- Structure of the coaching programme
- Impact: experiences of coachees
- Main points arising & connections to wider support

Drivers

Institution

- Context 3500 Doctoral candidates
- Graduate School focussed on training provision for these students
- Focus on STEMM disciplines

Surveys

- Graduate School Surveys on postgraduate wellbeing 2009, 2014
- Survey ~ 1400 responses (40%) of these ~20-30% cause for concern
- About 300-400 students

Drivers: Wellbeing

Rank	Well-being top 10 most important and bothersome items	2014	2009
1	Feeling frustrated/demotivated by your results and apparent lack of progress?	33%	31%
2	Experiencing high levels of stress because of your research?	33%	26%
3	Experiencing a persistent low mood because of your research?	28%	17%
4	Being unclear about the next stage of your career after your PhD?	27%	20%
5	Feeling disappointed in your own abilities as an academic researcher?	26%	17%
6	Lacking confidence in your ability to conduct research to the necessary standard?	25%	20%
7	Having a high workload that impacts on your private life?	25%	21%
8	Feeling constantly tired and run-down because of your workload?	25%	17%
9	Finding it difficult to cover your basic living expenses?	24%	15%
10	Making unreasonably high demands of yourself in the name of research?	24%	19%

Drivers: Key points

- Institutional trends reflected trends in national wellbeing

- Analysed by stage, found that great percentage of late stage researchers were stressed.

- Note at this time the Graduate School provision was heavily focussed towards induction and the first 9 months

- Late stage researchers were quite often left to get on with writing up

- PGR admin said *'oh we felt we should leave them alone so they could focus'*

Drivers: Researching Well Together

Retreats

Thesis Support

Coaching

Supervision

Community/environment

University Awards 2017 Winner

The Coaching Programme: structure

- For the student may have four 1-hour sessions in 6 months

- Student may determine the spacing depending on requirements

- It is goal orientated coaching programme

- It is made clear that it is not counselling and adequate signposting to other support services is included.
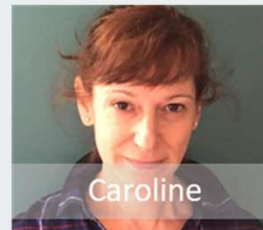
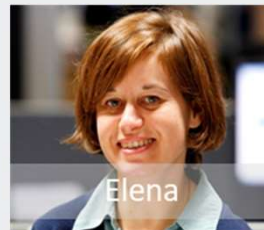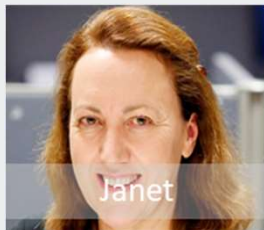# The Coaching Programme: referral

- It is via self-referral and is independent from academic departments

- Doctoral student contacts Graduate School Manager who allocates a coach - usually through discussion with coaches

- Coach meets with the doctoral student for a coffee meeting to establish rapport and suitability.

The Coaching Programme: coaches

- The coaches training
  - Five coaches are trained coaches (e.g. ILM Level 5 cert. of coaching & mentoring)
  - Two coaches are trained MBTI^{TM} practioners
  - One coach is Clifton Strength Finder^{TM} trained
  - Four coaches are trained in Belbin^{TM} approach

- Approach is mainly facilitative, with coaches having specialist knowledge in the postgraduate domain

The Coaching Programme: coaches

- All coaches are MHFA trained
- Mental Health First Aiders are embedded college wide.

- Coaches are supported by a supervisor (College Member of staff who introduced coaching for staff)

The Coaching Programme: Uptake

- We were concerned about the possible numbers that would ask for coaching
- However at any one time we are coaching around 6-8 coachees
- To date the uptake has been manageable

The Coaching Programme: Impact

- Considered impact for the student, personal experience

- Examined the themes, and explored common issues

- Limitations
  - Sample size is small
  - The participant profile information collected did not include information about factors such as socioeconomic background, prior academic achievement, ethnicity etc.

Lane, L. and De Wilde J.P. (2018) The impact of coaching doctoral students at a university in London , International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring 2018, Vol. 16(2), pp. 55-68

Student Experience: Supervisor

- **felt** "overlooked in the lab" and that their supervisor was not interested in their work.

- **reported** that they would "take one step forward and four steps back."

"coaching helped me to improve my situation because I feel able to take things forward myself."

Lane, L. and De Wilde J.P. (2018) The impact of coaching doctoral students at a university in London , International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring 2018, Vol. 16(2), pp. 55-68

Student experiences: Community

- the university can be antisocial
- the university was a "lonely place"
- the university was like "a wall"

Note we have 9 campuses spread-out around London

Antisocial

Lonely Place

A wall
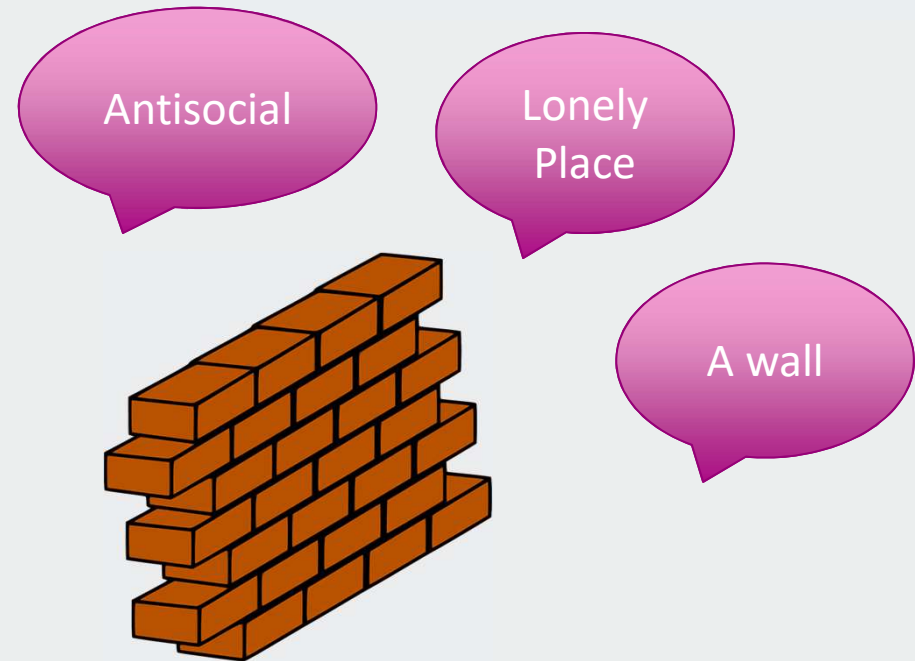
The coaching programme helped to overcome the feeling that the university was like a "glass-house."

Lane, L. and De Wilde J.P. (2018) The impact of coaching doctoral students at a university in London , International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring 2018, Vol. 16(2), pp. 55-68

Main themes

Lane, L. and De Wilde J.P. (2018) The impact of coaching doctoral students at a university in London , International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring 2018, Vol. 16(2), pp. 55-68

Overarching themes

- **Developing professional skills**
  - Time management
  - Writing Skills
  - Procrastination & Perfectionism

Thesis Writing Support

Coaching
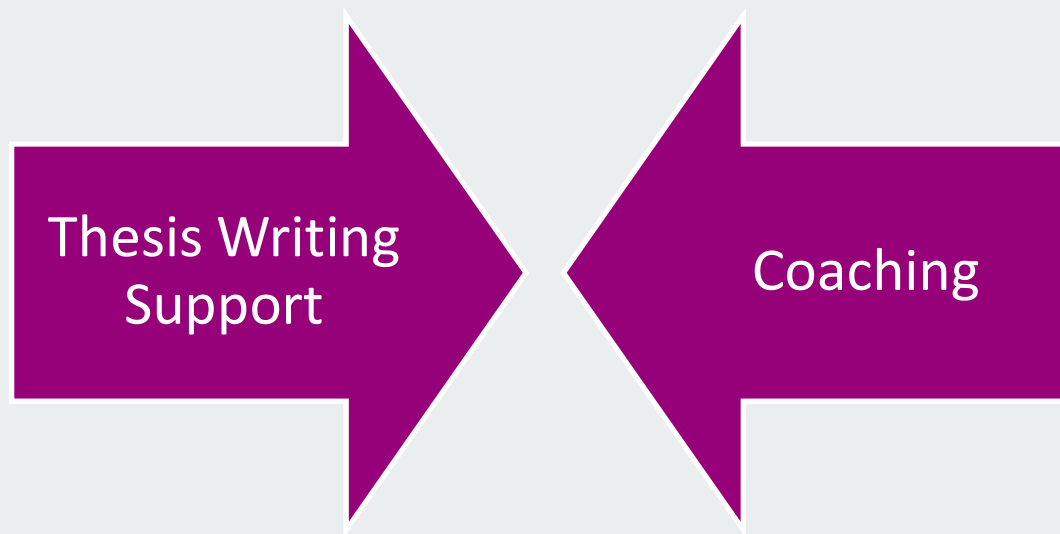
Thesis Writing Retreat

- 100k words for the thesis
- Limited writing experience, STEM students have no formal training since age 16
- 4 year deadline

- Fully supported retreat
- Students have 1-2-1 sessions with staff
- Collaboration with Academic English

Coaching themes: Interactions with supervisors

- Overcoming challenges with student supervisor partnership

  – Relationship breakdown

  – Communication with supervisors

  – Working effectively with supervisors

- Techniques that may be used during coaching

  – MBTI

  – Assertiveness development

  – Communication techniques, drama triangle

Coaching themes: Wellbeing

- Making time for yourself
- Managing working whilst studying
- Wellbeing
- Hobbies

Recommendations: Provision

It is recommended that the university

1. **continues to support** the doctoral student coaching programme as coaching has been shown to be a helpful means of support for doctoral students facing challenges at this university.

2. **continues to provide** doctoral students with the opportunity to develop professional skills.

3. Careful consideration is given to **what attributes employers require** graduates to demonstrate so that these can be aligned with professional skills development programmes.

Accredited & in alignment with employers

MARS

External Input

Roundtable Debate

Advisory Board

Royal Society of Biology — Accredited Doctoral Training

ROYAL SOCIETY OF CHEMISTRY

IOP Institute of Physics

www.imperial.ac.uk/study/pg/graduate-school/impact-influence/mars-membership
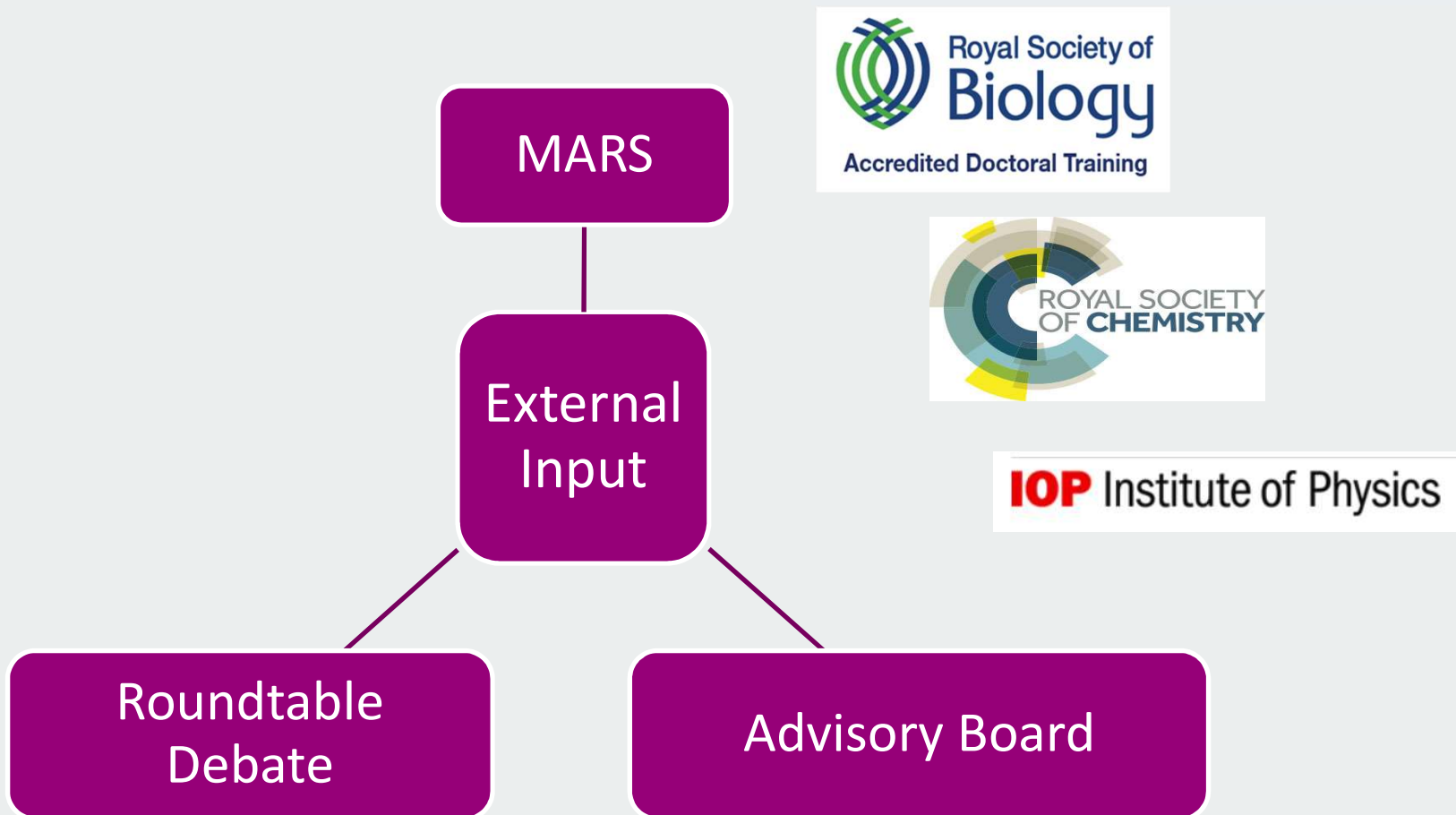
Recommendations: Supervisors

It is recommended that the university

1. **reviews the support of and mechanisms** for developing effective student supervisor partnerships.

2. **uses the results** of recommendation 2, to inform the support and development programmes for doctoral supervisors.

Best Practice in Supervision

Imperial College London

Podcast: Entrepreneurship special

Starving bacteria can eject their tails to save energy and stay alive

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Graduate School's Supervisors' Guide

Key Roles | Student Recruitment | Effective Partnerships | **Student Lifecycle** | Wellbeing | Continuing Professional Development ⊿

Student Lifecycle

College Union Opportunities for Students

Home / Study / Postgraduate / Graduate School / Staff / Graduate School's Supervisors' Guide / Student Lifecycle

Student Lifecycle

Main and co-supervisors

The College requires all new supervisors to complete a mandatory course called 'Introduction to PhD supervision' which is available either as a face-to-face workshop or an online version, depending on your experience.

Assistant Supervisors

The College has a new process in which to formally recognise the valuable contribution that postdocs make towards the student supervisor partnership.

Supervisors based at Crick

Supervisors who are based at Crick who have Honorary Appointments with the College.

Recommendations: Community

It is recommended that the university

1. **reviews how it promotes** its support services to doctoral students with regard to stress management and wellbeing

2. **considers ways in which to strengthen** the doctoral student community and improve visibility for doctoral students.

Research Community Fund

Research Community Fund

Research Community Fund Application Form and Criteria

The Graduate School's cohort building programme comprises the delivery of **tailored professional skills courses** and activities to cohorts of research students as well as the **Research Community Fund** which can be used by research students to develop research communities by funding special events and activities.

Anyone wishing to submit an application should read the criteria and additional information below carefully. Please note that applications which do not meet the criteria, or are not submitted by the deadlines stipulated, will not be considered.

Expand all

Application Criteria	+
Important Information	+
Application Deadlines	+

Apply for funding, submit your post-activity report or view previously funded activities:

Click here to apply for funding

Please ensure that you complete the online form in full. If you have any questions or queries, please contact the the Graduate School.

Submit your post-activity report

Please complete the short online form in order to submit your post-activity report. Funding will be transferred once this information has been submitted.

Previously funded activities

To view the types of activities which have previously been funded as well as post-activity reports submitted to the Graduate School, please click here.

Conclusion

- Coaching is an integral part of our support
- Retreats are significant contribution too (team, impact, thesis)
- Together Coaching & Thesis Retreat in particular they support final stage students
- The whole support system is there for all years
- Supervisor CPD fundamental part of support too