This guide aims to provide support for the planning of local events that create collegial exchange about specific issues, questions, and procedures associated with higher degree research student supervision. An example of a 2014 forum is available here.

1. PARTICIPANTS: WHO ARE THE INTENDED PARTICIPANTS OF THE FORUM?
While the main focus of this activity is on experienced research supervisors, there may be times when all supervisors and/or research students might be included.

2. TOPICS. WHAT TOPICS ARE OF INTEREST TO STAFF OR REQUIRE DISCUSSION?
There are many ways to go about identifying relevant topics. Here are some:

   a. Send out an email invitation requesting participants to nominate several topics or questions of interest, and then use this information to plan the event;
   b. Examine SREQ results and identify key issues that research students think are working well and those that need further improvement;
   c. Ask supervisors and Post-graduate Coordinators what topics pertaining to research students/theses/supervision/climate they are currently addressing or investigating;
   d. Meet with a small group of research students, supervisors, and postgraduate coordinators to elicit their concerns and ideas.

Examples of relevant topics might be working effectively with students who are: doing trans-disciplinary or practice-based research; in their first or last semester of candidature; from another country or a language background other than English; studying part-time; co-authors with supervisors on academic publications; making slow progress; writing a literature review; the Training Needs Analysis; or undertaking the Annual Progress Review. Other topics might be: the PhD curriculum – is it meeting current needs; working effectively with your student’s other supervisors; giving constructive feedback to students; and many others.

3. PURPOSE. WHAT’S THE MAIN PURPOSE OF THE FORUM?
For example, is the aim:

   a. to engage staff in collectively thinking through a particular issue or problem?
   b. to inform staff of relevant policy shifts, procedural updates, or institutional resources, and to seek their feedback?
   c. to maintain a network to keep up-to-date (e.g. what opportunities are available for research students)?

4. RESOURCES. WHAT KNOWLEDGE SOURCES AND RESOURCES WILL INFORM THE FORUM?
This might include a combination of the following:

   a. Relevant research literature (on research students, research theses, research supervision, research writing, research communities, etc)
   b. Expertise of colleagues in your Faculty/department /division
   c. Relevant expertise of colleagues in other Faculties and departments across the University (e.g. ITL, Learning Centre, SUPRA)
   d. SREQ results and reports (http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/sreq/secure/rrr.cfm)
   e. Trends in examiners’ reports
   f. Web resources such as the fIRST website (http://www.first.edu.au/)

5. ACTIVITIES. WHAT ACTIVITY TYPES ARE LIKELY TO ENGAGE STAFF IN YOUR FACULTY?
Here are some examples of possible Forum activities, but there are of course many more:

   a. an invited panel of supervisors followed by Q&A
   b. small group discussions of short student quotes from SREQ reports
   c. group critique of an academic journal article on research students/theses/ supervision

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d. presentation/discussion of new policies/procedures

e. role-plays of student/supervisor interactions

f. activities based on materials in the Foundations of Research Supervision program, such as using questionnaires on views about supervision and discussing range of answers

g. presentations by staff who have completed the FRS

6. FREQUENCY. HOW OFTEN WILL YOU RUN A FORUM?
Is one each year sufficient to meet the needs of the faculty/division?

7. EVALUATION AND FOLLOW-UP.
How will you find out whether the Forum achieved its purpose? How will you take feedback and suggestions into account in planning the next forum, or related event?

Staff from the ITL will be happy to work with you to plan and advertise your event. We may be able to run an item about it in our e-bulletin Teaching@Sydney (http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/news/bulletin.cfm) and advertise on our website. In addition, we can provide consultation about facilitating the Forum, and practical ways of following up on any issues that may arise.

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