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Professional Support for Student Advisors: The Value of Formal Supervision Meetings Delivered via the Counselling Service

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Abstract

Registered psychologists are routinely required to participate in a formal supervision process with the broad goals of ensuring that professional and ethical quality standards are maintained. Student Advisors in general advisory roles and International Student Advisors have no such requirement on them to meet registration and accreditation standards. Yet we are aware that Advisors are often in the “front line” and may be the first contact for International and other students with mental health issues. At Curtin University, the Student Advisor team (which includes International Student Advisors, Wellbeing Advisors and other Advisors) has a fortnightly meeting with a registered psychologist. In this session, Advisors are able to debrief about complex cases, develop skills, address risk management issues, and share effective practices in a professional and neutral environment. The authors are unable to establish whether this is common practice at other universities, but suspect that it is not. In this paper, the authors will discuss the reasons for establishing this supervision model and contrast the attributes of the model with the requirements of formal psychologist supervision systems. The perspectives of four different stakeholders will be presented – the Advisor’s line manager, the Counselling Service as the hosting area of the supervision, the supervisor, and the Student Advisors. The authors will argue that whilst Student Advisors are not formally qualified mental health practitioners, there is nonetheless a need to ensure that the highest quality professional service is being delivered to students. This model provides a framework for ensuring this quality.

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