

Dear PhD students at iNANO,

The PhD survey from 2014 reported that 34% of the iNANO PhD students were unsatisfied with their supervision. As a consequence, the iNANO PhD program committee has been working to increase focus on the situation and improve the quality of supervision.

We asked you as PhD students at iNANO to provide us with examples of issues you have experienced with supervision, and from that we have put together a list of the most common problems (see attached document). We're presenting the list to you, with the aim that it can increase your understanding of typical supervision issues, make you feel less alone in your problems and motivate you to overcome them. It is important to stress, that there is likely always going to be periods during a PhD where the student and/or supervisor feels that the relationship is suboptimal, in terms of keeping deadlines, lack of time for meetings etc. Additionally, there are likely different problems encountered in different research groups, depending on the size and the communication culture in the group. However, these factors are not valid as excuses for not trying to improve the situation, both as a PhD student and as a supervisor.

A copy of this mail is not just sent out to you PhD students, but also to all iNANO supervisors. By providing the supervisors with the list of problems encountered by PhD students, they can become aware of potential issues, and thereby have a better chance of preventing and/or solving them. Additionally, the supervisors have received a mail from the head of the iNANOschooL regarding good supervision (see attached document). In case you as PhD students do not know, it is mandatory for all new supervisors affiliated with iNANO to go on a supervision course. Unfortunately, this course has only been available in Danish, but from the fall 2014, it is now also available in English. Additionally, as your PhD representatives, we've put pressure on the supervisors to commit to more than this, and an afternoon with the topic "Ensuring and enhancing supervision quality" is being discussed. All supervisors affiliated with iNANO will be invited, and we hope you will attend. As the VIPs in the iNANO committee stated; good supervisors will attend, as they will understand the immediate benefits of good supervision and always try to become even better. Targeting the bad supervisors is more challenging, as they are probably not aware of their own performance, or lack of such.

On the other hand, we would stress that you as PhD students also take responsibility to improve your student/supervisor relationship, as well as the management of your project. The PhD is an important period in our careers, and we are getting a once in a lifetime opportunity to engage in the scientific work we love. We spend many hours at work, so if we are not satisfied with our situation, or see possibilities for improvement, it is our responsibility to step in and do our best to get the most out of the situation.

In case you don't know where to start in order to make a change, we can inform you that there are highly useful tools available for you. Aarhus University is currently putting increased focus on developing the project management skills of PhDs, and a 2ECTS PhD course is now offered by GSST every semester (<http://phd.au.dk/gradschools/scienceandtechnology/courses/transferableskills/transferable-skills-courses-2015/planning-and-controlling-a-phd-project/>), providing you with hands on tools to manage your own PhD project. Another course that has received very good reviews is the "Talent Development" course (4.5 ECTS) offered by the faculty of Health at AU

(<https://service.health.au.dk/modules/Module/mycourse/viewfulldesc/courseID/661>)

This course deals with project management, personal development and supervisor relationships.

To conclude, we hope that you as PhD students and supervisors will do your best to make iNANO an even better place to be and work.

Best regards,

Beatrice and Fiona