Many HDR students choose to study off-campus part time / full time overseas / interstate / out of town / local juggling multiple responsibilities
Off-campus HDRs tend to be less satisfied than on-campus HDRs with

Intellectual climate
Skills development
Infrastructure


More needs to be done for off-campus HDRs!

Last year: ONLINE WRITING GROUPs

Good results, but…

Can we at least check in and have a bit of accountability at the start of the meeting, so everyone’s working towards a goal each week?

Face-to-face PhD accountability groups
“Mind Your Own Thesis”
Another tool to support off-campus HDRs

An online ACCOUNTABILITY group

What is an online accountability group?

www.phd-stayontrack.com
Trial

- 3 groups
- 4-5 members/group
- Matched on broad areas of study
- Fortnightly meetings by Skype
Data

- Pre-trial interviews
- Fortnightly “Meeting Reports”
- Audio/video recordings from some meetings
- Participant surveys after each meeting
- Post-trial interviews

What we expected

- Increased productivity
- Increased satisfaction with PhD experience
What we observed

- Normalising experience
- Goal setting & reporting
- Peer learning

Normalising the experience of being an off-campus student

- Socialising with peers
- Overcoming the feeling of being an outlier
- Empathising with others facing similar challenges
- Improving self-image
Normalising experience

I can’t say that as a result of participating in this group I have achieved x, y, and z… I can say I feel less isolated and that’s huge – Chloe*

Socialising with peers

* names have been changed

Normalising experience

I really hadn’t expected how isolating I would feel it to be… ‘Is this what it is for everyone, or is this just me? Because if this is just me, and I’m way out there off the scale, you know, I’m an outlier on a graph or something, am I ever gonna do it?’ But it was really clear within the very first meeting that that wasn’t the case. So it was immediately reassuring. - Jenny

Overcoming the feeling of being an outlier
Empathising with others facing similar challenges

Because we’re all part time students as well, that was a really great connection because most people I talk to are full-time PhDs and there’s an incredible difference in the immersion in your work. – Tiffany

…..normalising the doubts and pressures and sacrifices that come with parenting, working and studying simultaneously, and sharing viewpoints on the various uses of supervisor feedback. – Jenny

Improving self-image

I realised just how much I do know about what I am doing that I am actually quite organised. – Mary Ann
Peer learning

- Pooling knowledge and resources
- Enhancing project management skills
- Clarifying thinking
- Improving sense of self-efficacy

They also sent around ... some online guides and resources on literature research, for example. So that was a good resource that I was able to use. - Gordon
Rather than just approach the thesis as a total project, I worked out ways that just concentrate on the progress that is required for the next two weeks. I found that by doing it in that staged approach, little bit by little bit, you get a lot more done than if you try to approach the project as a whole. - Gordon

Peer learning

Enhancing project management skills

Sometimes just having to explain something would clarify the idea for me. And so sometimes I would be talking about something to the group and I’d also be madly scribbling notes next to me as I was talking, and thinking, “Oh! Now that I’m explaining it to you, it’s coming together, and I’m explaining it to me as well!” ... There aren’t a lot of people who are willing to sit and listen to what I’m doing! - Tiffany

Peer learning

Clarifying thinking
Improving self-efficacy

Just watching Kirstin’s process on that fortnightly basis, leading up to and then at the conference was probably confidence-boosting for me as well …. It was just that sort of sense of watching the way she handled bumps in the road and, that’s the thing, I just thought, “It’s achievable, you know, it’s realistic to say that I can go and do that as well” - Tiffany

Goal setting and reporting

- Realizing you are an outlier
- Being motivated by peer pressure
- Provoking reflection
Goal setting and reporting

I haven’t actually started writing yet, but it’s amazing that the others have. And they’ve got chapters finished and I don’t know, I suppose that made me think, you know, perhaps I should be doing some writing. So I’ve decided I will look at actually writing a chapter... So yeah, that’s encouraging, making me decide to do that. - Kirstin

Realizing you are an outlier

Goal setting and reporting

I’d approach the weekend with the idea of: ‘Must meet my goals and I might be able to tell my group, “Hey, look what I’ve done!”’ … That motivation of ‘I just want to send it, so that I can tell the group that I’ve actually sent it off.’

- Tiffany

Being motivated by peer pressure
Goal setting and reporting

It was a nice opportunity to reflect on what was going on in my own schedule and my own life…. So that was a really good opportunity for me to look at the patterns a little bit…. And I’ve been able to go to my boss and say “I’m actually not able to do the work that I need to do in a week or in a fortnight on my PhD because of stuff that I’m doing here that’s actually interfering with the PhD.” - Tiffany

Encouraging reflection

What really happened

- Normalising experience
- Goal setting & reporting
- Action
- Increased productivity
- Increased satisfaction with PhD experience?
- Online accountability group
- Peer learning
Questions and comments
juliet.lum@mq.edu.au
philip.benson@mq.edu.au