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Engaging supervisors to discuss research ethics with their doctoral students through tailored seminars

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Research ethics is crucial for scientific development and research integrity. The role of supervisors in shaping the ethical conduct of the new generation researchers is pivotal, and increasingly emphasised in the academic community. This calls for targeted training in research ethics of both doctoral students as well as of supervisors. We will share experiences and reflect on the outcome of tailored supervisor seminars to meet this need.

The initiative was to collaboratively implement the seminars across departments and this was carried out by TUR, the Council for Educational Development at the Faculty of Science and Technology, Uppsala University. Prior to the seminars, pre-meetings with directors of doctoral studies at the department level took place to ensure that the content was locally adapted and relevant to the specific context of each department. Moreover, a survey was conducted among doctoral students at the faculty to learn what they found valuable in their mandatory research ethics courses. The survey also investigated to what extent the doctoral students discussed research ethics with their supervisors and others in their research environment. Fabrication and falsification, data handling and documentation, plagiarism, the use of AI-generated text, as well as authorship, and intellectual rights turned out to be common themes the doctoral students appreciated in their research ethics courses.

The supervisor seminars focused on the importance of the supervisors discussing research ethics issues with doctoral students in relation to

their own research. Good research practice was more emphasised than how to follow rules and guidelines. Results from the recently completed survey among the doctoral students at their own department were presented for the supervisors.

Collegial discussions around real and fictional ethical dilemmas encouraged critical thinking to enhance supervisors' ability to guide their students effectively. The supervisors identified several future strategies for continuing the conversation in their departments and with their students and how to let ethical awareness be an ongoing part of their research practice.