This report aims to inform emerging and developing provision for PGRs and supervisors by offering further clarity on supervisors' perspectives on the boundaries of their role and the kind of support they require. The study investigated the extent to which supervisors feel willing and able to deliver on both their traditional role of shaping future stewards of their discipline and the more recent requirement to deliver timely completions while preparing PGRs for the realities of the job market. Recent developments that mandate supervisors to take more direct responsibility for the professional development and wellbeing of PGRs appear to make sense given supervisors' influence over and direct contact with PGRs. However, research indicates that supervisors may not be finding these requirements easy to meet in practice for a number of reasons.

To take one example, there is good evidence to suggest that PGRs are cautious about actions that might interfere with their supervisor's perceptions of them as a "proper academics". For example, Vitae's 'One size does not fit all' report found that PGRs neglected professional development if they believed that their supervisor would see this as a distraction from research.[10] This was echoed in the findings of Vitae's 2018 report on PGR wellbeing and mental health, which found that PGRs tended to discount institution level messages about wellbeing if they conflicted with the culture that they saw in the department and in the behaviours of their supervisors.[11] This evidence suggests that PGRs are both highly aware of how they are perceived by their supervisors and are receiving the message that directing the "research" is within the supervisor's remit of responsibilities but not necessarily developing "the researcher" in the broader sense of the term.

2.2.2 A brief history of doctoral supervision

Doctoral education is shaped by a history of expectations, representations and identities that may place constraints on how PGRs and supervisors see themselves, make decisions and behave. Arguably, PhD supervision has absorbed new agendas without necessarily dislodging older expectations about the purpose of the doctorate. As Barbara Grant argues, supervision can be thought of as a map on which you can see traces of earlier inscriptions under the new. When older and newer layers conflict, their meanings are interrupted and this can cause misunderstandings, ambiguities, and confusions.[12] With this image in mind, the following section briefly sets out some of the key changes to the doctorate which have reconfigured the supervisor's role, in order to situate some of the findings of this report in the context of the broader higher education landscape.

Traditionally, the supervisor's role was not only to help the doctoral candidate to write a good thesis but also to help them develop an academic identity as an independent researcher and academic who could contribute to the discipline. The candidate was paired with an expert in the discipline, to absorb institutional and disciplinary knowledge. Frances Kelly argues that the formation of this academic identity 'occurred not just in the discipline, but in a specific, narrow area of research: producing a Shakespearian scholar, for instance, rather than a scholar of English literature'.[13] The supervisor was a master of their or sub-discipline and the doctoral candidate was an apprentice. Supervision was not originally considered to be a pedagogy, or even work. Instead, it was thought of as a natural extension of research, which the supervisor engaged in as a labour of love.[14]

It is difficult to determine whether these expectations persist, when supervisors balance their traditional role with newer expectations for doctoral outcomes. For example, although supervision is now reflected in workload allocations models, it is said that the investment required to support doctoral candidates, not just during the programme but into their careers, is difficult to accurately account for within workload calculations.[15]

Arguably, the one-to-one, master/apprentice model of pedagogy continues as the signature feature of doctoral education today, although it is not always expressed in precisely these terms. It is, however, implicitly implied in the apparent indispensability of the viva, where selected representatives judge whether the candidate has met the internal standards of the discipline. It is also suggested in the metaphor of the PhD as "a journey", where the candidate moves from student to independent researcher and the supervisor's behaviour shifts in response to this development. Directive at first, the supervisor becomes a mentor during the middle stages of the degree and finally assumes the role of a "cheer-leader" as submission approaches. In this tradition, the supervisor is key to the identity change from student to faculty and the doctorate is less a programme of education than a first faculty position, an experiment in whether the candidate could do this kind of work in this kind of department.[16]

This link with identity and community formation may explain an attachment to the one-to-one model of pedagogy, which continues to be the signature feature of doctoral education.[17] It may also "feel right" because it emerged in tandem with the invention of the nineteenth century research university, based on a combination of research and teaching. This idea of the university continues to shape how we think about knowledge production and transmission today.

However, educational policy of the last twenty years has questioned the appropriateness of the PhD as a narrow training in disciplinary subfields. Since the 1990s, the UK has developed an increasingly knowledge-based economy, a model which redefines knowledge as central to the financial health and wellbeing of the nation.

In this context, universities take on new importance for government and industry. Alongside this, there has been an undercurrent of debate over whether the doctorate is fit for the purpose of delivering flexible, mobile and adaptable knowledge workers with a range of interpersonal and technological skills. Reflecting this changing context, opinion has been divided over whether the primary purpose of the doctorate is and should be:

- The production of a thesis, making an original contribution to a discipline
- OR the preparation of skilled and innovative knowledge workers.

While the first position values knowledge for its own sake, the second is concerned that the doctorate is overly focused on disciplinary problems, meaning that doctoral graduates are ill-prepared to tackle wider societal problems.[18] A third position would assume that it is possible and desirable for the doctorate to deliver on both outcomes.

Of these, the third seems to be the dominant guiding assumption of contemporary policy and practice. For example, in response to the findings of the landmark Roberts Report, PGRs are now encouraged to engage in at least two weeks of professional development a year.[19] Furthermore, capturing the expectation that the doctorate can deliver on both of the desired outcomes, the 2004 'Joint Statement of The Research Councils Skills Training Requirements for Research Students' states:

> *The research councils would also want to emphasise their belief that training in research skills and techniques is the key element in the development of the research student, and that PhD students are expected to make a substantial, original contribution to knowledge in their area, normally leading to published work. The development of wider-employment related skills should not detract from that core objective.*[20]

This statement stresses that the doctorate can have multiple functions, with one objective 'not detract[ing]' or interfering with the other. However, we do not yet know the extent to which these shifts have impacted upon more everyday supervision practices, nor do we know how these changes impact on supervisors' perceptions of their responsibilities for PGR career and professional development and pastoral care.

Finally, as the purpose of the doctorate evolves to encompass training for a variety of different careers within and beyond academia, PGRs are less homogenous in their needs. In recognition of the diverse needs of PGRs, there has been a recent broader sector interest in professionalising supervision. For example, in 2018 HEFCE catalyst funds were granted to tackle PGR wellbeing by implementing evidence-based supervisor workshops, training, online tools and peer support networks. Additionally, UKCGE has piloted a Research Supervision Recognition Programme, which provides a framework that addresses pedagogic criteria in addition to the administrative processes emphasised in government and institutional policy.[21] This report aims to speak to this context.

2.3 Project methodology

This project was funded by the Consortium for the Humanities and the Arts South-East England (CHASE) through a six-month placement at Vitae. It was guided by an advisory group comprising an AHRC representative, PhD supervisor/director of doctoral studies, a researcher developer, a researcher employed in a non-faculty position and two CRAC/Vitae staff members.

Data for this project was derived from document analysis of ten institutional policy documents from a range of UK universities (3.1) and focus groups and one-to-one interviews (3.2).

Document analysis is a systematic procedure of comparing published documents to trace common themes. The documents considered in this report are aimed at either supervisors and/or PGRS and are publicly available on institutional websites. The ten institutions were selected to account for variation in geography, Teaching Excellence Framework level and group status (i.e. Russell group/ pre-1992/ post-1992).

Interview and focus group participants were selected to include supervisors from a range of AHSS disciplines. This specification was made in recognition that supervision is based on different models within different disciplinary areas. Though either disciplinary model of supervision could have been investigated, policy interventions have tended to take STEM subjects as the norm because these disciplines are deemed particularly relevant and valuable to the knowledge economy. Therefore, it is beneficial to centre the perspectives of AHSS supervisors to explore how they have experienced, the evolution of the doctorate because this has not always been informed by their disciplinary values and perspectives.[22]

The research uses a qualitative approach to add depth to some of Vitae's initial findings about supervisor responsibilities, described above, which emerged through numerical data or from the perspective of PGRs. Initially, the project design favoured focus groups because this format encourages group interaction and can capture how ideas are collectively generated and subject to challenge.

Additionally, focus groups have similarities to seminars in the AHSS context in both setting and dynamics. It was therefore hoped that this format would best harness the existing analytical capabilities of supervisors because AHSS academics specialise in generating knowledge in dialogue and interrogating assumptions as they emerge in group interaction. However, respondents' schedules made group sessions difficult to organise in practice. Therefore, one-to-one interviews were offered to those who expressed interest in but were not able to make the original group meetings.

This study is small scale, drawing on data from twenty supervisors with different disciplinary backgrounds and levels of experience. Based on the document analysis of institutional policies (3.1), supervisors were asked to discuss what they enjoyed most about their role, issues of PGR wellbeing, responsibilities for PGR career and professional development and preferences for supervisor training. Anonymised data was processed using thematic coding. The resulting report aims to offer an nuanced picture of participants' beliefs, assessments and decision-making processes as supervisors.

3. Findings

3.1 Document analysis of institutional supervision policies

In the context of concern about doctoral outcomes, supervision has come under increasing scrutiny; findings consistently show that a good supervisory relationship is both the key to timely completion and the biggest factor in PGR satisfaction with their programmes.[23]

Once a relatively private affair, supervision practice is now organised with at least some reference to institutional polices and handbooks, with formal mechanics in place to safeguard PGRs and ensure progress.

Using document analysis, this section compares ten institutional policy documents from a range of UK universities to examine how national requirements for supervision have been implemented at institutional level. It also considers and the extent of variation between institutions, particularly with regards to career and professional development and wellbeing responsibilities.

The documents considered here are aimed at either supervisors or supervisors and PGRS and are publicly available on institutional websites. It is difficult to determine whether the online documents are exhaustive. Detail may be lost by not being able to account for internal communications and departmental-level handbooks. Nevertheless, these documents were not difficult to locate, which is perhaps because one QAA indicator of research degree quality stipulates that: 'higher education providers ensure that the responsibilities of research student and supervisors are readily available and clearly communicated'.[24]

Relative uniformity amongst policy documents is to be expected in light of national efforts to introduce quality standards. In 2002, the Metcalfe report was commissioned to report back to the funding councils with recommendations on how to improve standards in research programmes, with supervision key to recommended change.[25]

The report's suggestions were incorporated into the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and subsequently a circular letter published by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in September 2004 established that minimum standards would be linked to funding.[26]

The current code of practice draws from the Metcalfe report the following recommendations:

- A formal agreement between PGR and university
- PGR engagement with a series of generic skills courses
- A PGR-held log, with records of research supervisions
- Agreed action plans and recording of courses attended

These measures aim to reduce the intensity of the supervisory relationship, increase accountability, and ensure consistency across institutions.

Measures from the Metcalfe report were present across all ten examined documents. Documents itemised PGR and supervisor responsibilities, referenced a PGR-held log with action plans, disclosed complaints procedures and required annual reviews. Six of the ten institutions stipulated a maximum number of supervisees per supervisor, either six or eight at one time. There were, however, some differences between institutions. For example, minimum contact frequency ranged from termly to fortnightly. However, while all institutions required contact to be logged, different levels of formality were required. Some recorded upcoming targets and meeting dates, while other institutions left the detail to the discretion of the individuals.

A number recommended early discussion about roles and expectations; one institution required a personalised but formal contract to be submitted to the department before supervision could commence. All institutions stated the need for the supervisor to be available to contact, with feedback delivered within a "reasonable" timeframe. This wording is taken directly from the QAA recommendations. Two of the ten institutions adapted this to specify what constitutes reasonable in their context.

One key theme across documents was a shift away from single supervisors. All required multiple supervisors and eight of the ten documents referred to a "supervision team". There were some differences, though, regarding the division of tasks between primary and reserve/secondary supervisors. Some institutions required explicit negotiation between members of the team, a smaller number divided the responsibilities along the lines of the academic and non-academic, while some left the division of labour unspecified.

Overall, documents placed emphasis on administrative tasks. Some referred to duties beyond this, but such references tended to be brief and ill-defined. For example, six documents included a line about pastoral support, but these statements were more or less lifted from the QAA recommendation that the supervisor provide 'effective pastoral support and/or refer the research student to other sources of such support'.[27] Only one gave detail on what the "support" might be. An exception to this were those institutions that provided 'codes of conduct', advice and guidance in conjunction with the policies informed by QAA.

Within these documents, there was more space given to the relational and pedagogic dimensions of supervision. Two of the guides included prompts and questions, intended to encourage supervisors to reflect on their current practice. These documents referred to the individualised nature of the supervisory relationship and the ways it might change over time. For example, they outlined some of the potential vulnerabilities of international PGRs.

In terms of careers and professional development, all but one of the ten institutions stipulated that it was the supervisor's role to take a degree of responsibility. Seven referred to and/or integrated the RDF and advised that it be used at the beginning of the doctorate and then revisited at regular intervals. In six institutions, the RDF was formalised as part of the review process. Two documents drew on the Roberts Report by recommending ten days of professional development a year and stated that the supervisor should not interfere with this requirement.

However, there was variation and ambiguity over whether the supervisor's engagement in PGR professional and career development was compulsory or advisory. This lack of clarity existed across but also within individual documents. The supervisor's role was described as to *advise, encourage, discuss, personally engage in* and/or *signpost,* with little detail on what these things might mean in practice. The majority of the documents stated that professional development should be discussed by PGRs and supervisors, though it was not clear who was responsible for initiating these discussions. One institution stood out by contrast by making the explicit statement that, 'it is no longer the case that successful research students necessarily become academics – the majority do not – and even those who do follow an academic career require a wider portfolio of skills. Part of the job of a supervisor is, from the very start of the studentship, to encourage the student to be active in acquiring the key skills necessary to give them an edge in the labour market'.

Overall, the documents provided little evidence of the older model of one-to-one apprenticeship (2.2) and emphasised instead the contractual side of the relationship and a broader network of doctoral pedagogy which operates within networks and teams.

As a rule, those looking for guidance on the specifics of the supervisor's role in pastoral care and career development would find little consistent and concrete guidance as to what is and is not appropriate to the position, although this was less the case for those institutions that provided codes of conduct. One of the handbooks explicitly addressed intimate supervisory relations and advised:

> *as with any relationship, the supervisor-supervisee one changes, or should change, over time. Ideally, it should start as a master/mistress-apprentice relationship and end up as almost equal colleagues. […] this does not happen automatically. Students may need to be weaned away from dependence upon their supervisors, while the latter may need to adjust to the idea of the student abandoning the nest and beginning to fly on their own.*

This extract comes immediately after the document's introductory statement that the relationship between the PGR and their supervisor is professional, 'both agree to treat supervision in a business-like way with an agenda'. This proximity indicates that the contractual side of the supervisory relationship is not necessarily intended to displace the more personalised dimensions but to run alongside them, providing safety mechanisms.

The document analysis presented in this section is intended to provide some indication of the competing and sometimes conflicting expectations that supervisors navigate in the current doctoral education landscape.

The findings of this analysis were used to develop the prompts used in the interviews and focus groups to invite supervisors to reflect on and discuss the boundaries of their role and their confidence in signposting wellbeing services and discussing career and professional development.

3.2 Interviews and Focus Groups

3.2.1 The values and ethics of supervision

Participants were fairly consistent in their answers to the question of what they value most about supervision. The joys of supervision mentioned by participants broadly aligned with the apprentice model in which the novice is guided in the practice of independent research, though participants did not explicitly refer to this model in their answers. Participants mentioned how rewarding it was to see PGRs respond so directly to their feedback and use it to shape the direction of their academic work. However, participants expressed unease about how to supervise in response to the precarity of the academic job market and felt that that the ethics of supervision were changing. They were unsure about whether their routine supervision practices should change in the light of these economic realities.

Despite this unease, participants described supervision as one of the more enjoyable aspects of their job. They compared supervision to other kinds of pedagogy and stressed how it was *'unlike any other kind of teaching'*. One participant described how her enjoyment was entwined with the idea that the PGR is being socialised into a disciplinary and academic culture:

> *It also goes beyond the normal boundaries of teaching. For example, taking them to conferences or helping them to develop their networks. It is the socialisation aspect of being an academic and learning what the culture of academia is. That might be helping them understand the things that I have learnt over the eleven years. It feels like something that I have always known, but I haven't always known the etiquette of, for instance, writing an abstract, or publishing. It is rewarding to help people navigate what can otherwise be a very stressful and alienating experience. I had that, and it is rewarding to be able to pass that on.*
>
> *Supervisor, Linguistics*

Echoing the apprentice model of doctoral education, this participant's comment describes the joy of sharing her knowledge and understanding with PGRs who might otherwise be alienated by the rituals of academia. She also stresses that it is rewarding to be able to pass this on to a new cohort, having benefitted from her own supervisor's guidance.

While supervisors were relieved if their supervisees had taken up academic posts after completing the PhD, many suggested that the rewards of supervision were not dependent on this outcome. Participants consistently described how there was a pleasure in simply witnessing the process of change from student to independent scholar. As one participant put it, *'just having that discussion with a young emerging scholar is a really interesting thing to see'*. She described how this change was tangible, often coming all of a sudden:

> *what I enjoy most is there is this moment with every student when they take ownership and you can really see it happen; it is really tangible. They are finding their way and finding their way. And then they get the data and they get on top of the theory and they just come in one day and talk about it with certainty, I mean there is never complete certainty, but there is ownership.*
>
> *Supervisor, Education*

Supervision was spoken of as one of the most gratifying areas of participants' jobs and they took pleasure in their role in aiding doctoral candidates to develop as independent researchers.

However, despite their enthusiasm, participants described how the ethics of supporting PGRs to become independent researchers was changing because of the lack of permanent academic jobs. Participants reported that the intellectual and practical work had not necessarily shifted in the light of employment statistics; they did the same things but felt more wary and uncertain about whether they were doing the right thing by implicitly or explicitly encouraging PGRs in their pursuit of an academic career. Participants also questioned the ethics of the link between supervision and personal promotion. Others said that they had come to the conclusion that taking on unfunded students was not acceptable in the current climate.

The theme of the ethics of doctoral recruitment came up frequently in the interviews and focus groups. Participants reported that they struggled with how honest and insistent they should be with PGRs about the economic realities of the job market. Participants spoke of actively checking with PGRs to make sure they were realistic about their employment prospects following an arts and humanities doctorate. Almost all supervisors reported that they use the early meetings to have conversations about the statistical unlikelihood of academic employment. For example:

> *I think that the professional development training that has developed has been a good thing [...] But I still think there is an oversupply of PhDs. And I think it is an ethical question, when you take on a new PhD student, about whether you feel that they know what they are getting into. [...] I think it is ethical to ask, why are you doing it? And if somebody says they want to go into an academic career and I think, yes, I could see you doing that, then that is great. But otherwise I am a bit wary.*
>
> *Supervisor, Education*

> *It is one of the first things I say to students, even before they apply. It would be remiss if I didn't tell them that it's a competitive field and a field that it would be hard to get into. Certainly, it's something I highlight to them. It would be unethical not to.*
>
> *Supervisor, Historian*

Although most supervisors were keen to impart the statistical realities of academic employment at the beginning, others were taking more proactive steps to advise other, or parallel, career strategies. Two supervisors reasoned that, in light of the prevalence of casual teaching contracts, taking short- or medium-term positions in different sectors could provide the kind of financial stability necessary to maintain a publication record, which would make an academic research career more likely in the longer term. As one participant put it:

> *I am trying to sell them the idea of teaching in sixth form colleges because there is a bit more breathing space in the timetable and you can still once or twice a year go to conferences or keep up a publication record and at the same time they have got a steady job. Because the alternative sometimes is literally doing incredibly basic work because you are trying to go for these very elusive jobs. I also want to dismantle the myth that as an academic you have time for research because the time is dreadful. It's so squeezed.*
>
> *Supervisor, Visual Cultures*

She stressed that this advice was both for the benefit of PGRs and her own peace of mind, explaining that it could be emotionally difficult to see her PGRs *'wasting up to ten years of their life looking for these highly elusive permanent posts'.*

Another participant reported that she had reluctantly taken the decision to change her public-facing profile, in order to send a clearer message to prospective PGRs about the challenges of securing academic employment. She explained to the other members of the focus group:

> *my profile used to say: I am interested in this and this and this. But I have changed it to say that entering into a PhD programme at this point in time always means wanting to do it for its own sake, with the possibility of three years funding to work on something you really love. The job market is such that I can't advise anyone to do it with an expectation of a permanent job in academia at the end of it, even the best students. I am not sure whether this is the right thing to do or not. I just feel like we need to be more honest.*
>
> *Supervisor, English Literature*

She described feeling uncertain about whether this was the right message and sought the advice of other participants. She described how *'difficult it is to get the balance right, between wanting to tell the best students to just go for it and then wanting to be honest with them about the terrible difficulties that the discipline is facing right now'.*

Some participants felt that candidates embarking on arts and humanities doctorates are more likely than PGRs in STEM disciplines to have their sights firmly set on becoming academics and are therefore not well-motivated to develop their skills and invest in professional development. One participant explained that either candidates wanted to be academics or were using the PhD as a break from an already established career:

> *the students I've had fall very squarely into two groups. First group are those who want academic careers so in that sense they are not looking for skills that would allow them to work in something like high level government research or something. So, [academic skills are] discussed because part of my job is to try to prepare them and help place them in the best position they can for academic jobs. The second group are really those that have done the PhD for their own interest, so again they are really not seeing this as a steppingstone to a different career necessarily. So again, they are not after skills for a different sector.*
>
> *Supervisor, History*

This comment has similarities with other participants' views. Some participants wondered whether, with permanent academic jobs less guaranteed, it might make sense to allow the PGR to make the most of the time for pure research while that small window of opportunity still remained. In practical terms, this would mean pulling back from advising PGRs to maximise every developmental opportunity, just in case it would help them secure academic employment in the future. Some participants felt it was important to make the most of the moment, holding off questions about what would come next until later:

> *it has to be about the experience they have, while they are funded to do something really great. Some of them will get a job afterwards but some of them won't. So, it better be about the experience they have when they are here*
>
> *Supervisor, English Literature*

> *they are doing it because it is a break from their career, and they are funded to do some writing. They are just really passionate to have the time. [Describes how this was true also when he was a PhD candidate]. The common-sense that was circulating amongst my cohort was that "we are doing this thing, that gives us a chance to think and talk and learn and we are happy for that. And we very well might have to rethink what we are doing when it's through". That doesn't mean that we were all happy about that, but that's the kind of common-sense that was circulating*
>
> *Supervisor, English Literature*

The following section considers the implications of these findings in terms of supervisor support for professional, career and skills development.

3.2.2. Professional development responsibilities

The majority of the policy documents considered above (3.1) require supervisors to take a degree of responsibility for PGR professional development. Most refer to the **Researcher Development Framework (RDF)**, stating that the supervisor should encourage, signpost or help plan activities.

Therefore, participants were asked whether they felt skilled in and/or comfortable with having career development conversations and how familiar they were with the RDF.

Career development conversations

Participants noted that things had changed since they were supervised themselves. They recognised that supervisor responsibilities now needed to span beyond the thesis, if a candidate was to secure future employment. Most reported that they hold conversations about career aspirations at the beginning of the programme and explained that, if the candidate wanted an academic career, a kind of check-list mentality kicked in. Participants were highly aware of what the candidate needed to achieve at each milestone to give them the best chance of an academic career in a highly competitive environment and described a process of working to achieve particular things before the end of the doctorate:

> *if they want to continue into an academic career, I do my absolute best to make sure that they can tick all the boxes: yes they've done some teaching, yes, they've presented at various conferences and they may have a publication that they have just submitted and they have got a teaching qualification. All of those things were not making or breaking a career before, but I think nowadays they do, and I am very well aware of that.*
>
> *Supervisor, Visual Cultures*

> *if I know they want an academic job, I try really hard to plug them in to networks. I mean [the PGR] has only just finished her first year. But I am attuned to the fact that she is going to have to network like mad. I would love to just shepherd her into an academic job. But it is tough now. I feel a certain responsibility to make it happen for her. It is probably because I have the legacy of [my own supervisor] and feel it is really important.*
>
> *Supervisor, Education*

In such an atmosphere, more explorative conversations about career options seemed difficult to imagine. For some, the structural position of "the supervisor", whose role is to help the PGR develop as an independent researcher, made it difficult to have ongoing conversations about career aspirations and whether these might be changing over time. One supervisor voiced a common theme of concern that the current environment made it difficult to raise the issue of careers, particularly those beyond academia:

> *it is difficult in the current climate, where there is so much rhetoric about how bad it is in an academic job: the conditions are terrible, frankly, we are going on strike all the time. And then the job market itself, as many people know, is incredibly competitive. There are very public discussions, particularly on things like Twitter, where people are asking whether we should even be taking PhD students on when we know that they are not going to be guaranteed an academic job at the end of it. And I suppose I don't want to feed into what I see as quite a negative and unhelpful discourse by even raising it. [...] I am not actively encouraging students to think about an alternative to academia. Which, thinking about it, maybe I should be helping students to think about other things that they could be doing during their PhD to safeguard against not getting an academic job, but I don't do that... I suppose because with the students I've got I know that's what they really want, and I know that it could have quite a big influence on them if I started to cast the seed of doubt in that way. I know that I could say something without really thinking about it and that could have an enormous influence.*
>
> *Supervisor, Linguistics*

Other participants spoke in similar terms, noting that once the candidate had expressed their aspiration for an academic career, it was difficult to speak about other options in case this was perceived as a signal that the supervisor lacked faith in their project or abilities. Delamont et. Al describe this aspect of supervision as a kind of 'confidence trick'; the supervisor does the imaginative work of seeing the candidate as the faculty researcher that they may one day become, especially at times when the candidate fails to see this is as a realistic possibility.[27]

Participants were happy, and sometimes relived, to hear that the PGR was considering other options, but discussion seemed dependent on the candidate bringing up the topic of other career possibilities.

One participant made explicit that the 'confidence trick' feels especially necessary when working with segments of the graduate population who are more susceptible to imposter syndrome.[29] They stated: *'I do feel an ethical obligation to be clear about what the situation is, but I am also not interested in damaging the ability of PhD students to do their work by constantly undercutting it'.* They described trying to find a balance, in which they were realistic about the challenges while still actively championing non-traditional researchers who he felt were more likely to internalise negative messages:

> *I am worried if a student says I am going to be a successful academic at a major research university. If they said that with confidence that would worry me. [...] However, if I think that a student has overly internalised the nay-say and are thinking they don't have a chance, when I think that they are being too down on themselves I would try to say that I am not saying that you do have a chance, but there are some basic things you can do if you do want to keep that door open. And you have as good a chance as anybody.*
>
> *Supervisor, English*

They reflected on how difficult this was to negotiate because it felt unethical to suggest that a high-flying academic career was likely but equally unethical not to encourage minority voices, which the profession aims to include.

It is important to note that participants' experiences varied according to their discipline, with those working in disciplines with more obvious pathways into careers beyond academia and equally appealing alternative careers tending to find it easier to have ongoing careers discussions. For example, social scientists spoke of having in-depth conversations about policy jobs and reported that PGRs found the options before them a genuine dilemma. A supervisor in Information Studies spoke of the variety of career pathways from her subject and reported that she read job advertisements out of curiosity and so she could have more meaningful mentorship discussions. This was not the experience of participants from arts and humanities disciplines who said they felt certain that *'students coming into literature and history, [...] want to be scholars'.*

Broadly speaking, participants' who had little sense of career alternatives tended to have a bleaker outlook and a less positive experience of supervision. One participant stated:

> *we are precisely the wrong people to do transferrable skills stuff because we have no experience of that being successful for us in moving away from the PhD into something else. So that's one of the things that catches the supervisor in this strange position. We know that it is important and valuable in a sense, but it does not match up with our own experience of PhDs. And we are looking into the dark because we never had to do it.*
>
> *Supervisor, English*

Participants from arts and humanities disciplines in particular wanted someone to shine a light on career alternatives for the candidates they supervised. They wanted to know not just what these careers were but details of how these jobs might have a meaningful connection with the thesis or the skills developed through writing a thesis. Furthermore, they wanted reassurance about working conditions, recognising that some of the alternatives for arts and humanities graduates, for example in the arts and museums sectors, were equally competitive, often short-term and underfunded.

The RDF

When participants were shown the framework, some recalled having seen it before but only one had used the it to scaffold a discussion. On the whole participants had little personal connection with the RDF and took time to process its content. The interviews allowed the necessary space to develop this relationship, whether that be positive, or negative, and more than half asked to keep a copy. Considering the extent to which the RDF is integrated into supervision policies these responses are perhaps surprising. Participants' responses suggest that, in order to take responsibility for using the RDF, supervisors need time to engage with and process it and decide on whether it accords with their supervision practice. Without this, it seems unlikely that it would occur to them to use it.

Some supervisors found the RDF useful because it set out in full what they already try to cover with their PGRs in a more intuitive way. This group anticipated that the tool would prevent them from missing something.

For this group, the RDF was not perceived to offer anything different from what they would already be doing by preparing PGRs for academic careers, but they appreciated the visual way it set everything out for them. Others found the RDF alienating because it was not framed in the language of their discipline. This group felt that for this reason it was inappropriate to the supervision setting. As one noted, *'we are not a big corporation where people come in for management appraisal'*. Another tried to pinpoint her reason for not using it despite being aware of its existence, explaining that she felt it sat more naturally at the doctoral school level: *'when you meet your student there is so many exciting things to talk about'*, she reasoned, 'there is enough of this when you get a job'.

The key drawback of the tool for participants in the latter group was the universalism of the language. Some participants saw this as a barrier to use rather than recognising it as an advantage of the RDF, which was designed to enable PGRs to understand their skills as a researcher in a universal rather than disciplinary language. As described above (2.2) the literature on supervision argues that part of the role of the supervisor is to socialise the PGR in a discipline, helping them gain proficiency in a specialised research area. Therefore, there are perhaps good reasons why taking up the purposefully universal language of the RDF in supervisory discussions might feel jarring and inappropriate to the setting. Whether or not this ultimately presents an insurmountable barrier to supervisor use of the RDF remains open to question. If responsibilities for the RDF continue to be part of the supervisor's role, further thought should be given to the complexity of the supervisor's position with regards to universal vs. disciplinary language. Otherwise the RDF may be dismissed too quickly, and this dismissal could prevent more informed decisions. The fact the RDF feels counter-intuitive and uncomfortable to some may be precisely the reason that it is worth engaging in, when working with PGRs whose career pathways may lead them beyond academia.

3.2.3. Attitudes towards professional services

Participants were aware of debates surrounding the professionalisation of the doctorate, but these changes were not felt to directly impact on the more everyday practicalities of supervision. One participant reflected on how little their practice had been influenced by debates about transferrable skills in comparison with debates about timely completion: