

4. Conclusion

This study sought to include the supervisor's voice in discussions around changes to the doctorate and the purpose of doctoral education. It is important to understand supervisors' perspectives, especially if we accept that there is a link between PGR wellbeing and supervisor wellbeing.

The study found that supervisors are negotiating the structures and expectations of the older apprentice model of doctoral supervision and at the same time are accountable to newer agendas. The supervisors we interviewed were aware of the difficulties PGRs face in securing employment whether in academia or beyond, and some were taking proactive steps to promote other career pathways.

However, many felt ethically conflicted and uncertain over whether this was the right approach. Most were approaching supervision in the same way, while feeling increasingly conflicted in a context where academic jobs were far from guaranteed.

Institutional supervision policies analysed in 3.1 are vague on the topic of the supervisor's role in professional and career development and pastoral care, areas that were especially difficult to negotiate for the supervisors who participated in this project. Taking the supervisor's perspective into consideration, this report has added detail to Vitae's findings that PGRs are cautious about managing supervisor perceptions. Participants were surprised that PGRs might neglect professional development if not overly supported by the supervisor and had limited knowledge of the challenges faced by professional services including researcher developers. In general, supervisors appeared to overestimate the autonomy of PGRs and understood their supervisory practice to be responsive to PGR needs as and when they arise, with the implicit expectation that PGRs could take the lead on initiating discussions.

The current literature on higher education recommends a move away from one-to-one supervision as the primary vehicle for doctoral education towards a model in which PGRs can draw on a wider community to support them in pursuing diverse career pathways.

This requires strong collaboration between the groups involved which, at present, based on the evidence presented in this report, is far from a reality. Participants tended to imagine professional services including researcher developers as experts who provide guidance that is beyond the supervisor's expertise. However, they did not possess 'deeper institutional knowledge' of the inner workings of professional services. In general, participants cared deeply about expertise and felt that the realities of their professional role were poorly understood by their institution. Though they recognised the benefits of standardisation measures, they found that tight regulations could interfere with their ability to exercise appropriate judgements, leaving them second-guessing their intuition.

The supervisors interviewed for this project were deeply concerned about the future place and value of their profession and, related to this, the career prospects and wellbeing of PGRs. They were keen to reflect on their role but uncertain of how to deal with a variety of ethical and practical concerns in the context of changes to the higher education landscape. Finally, they were curious about, but cut off from, the wider pool of professionals in their institutions and the broader policy landscape. This impacts on how they feel about their work without necessarily reorganising its fundamental structures and changing routine practices, and the structures which underpin them.

5. Endnotes

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13. Frances Kelly, *The Idea of a PhD: the doctorate in the twenty-first century imagination* (Oxford: Routledge, 2017), p. 41.
14. Stanley Taylor, 'Changes in Doctoral Education', *International Journal for Researcher Development*, 2012, Vol.3(2), p.126.
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24. For details see What to Expect from Your Supervisor In: Getting Your PhD, www.methods.sagepub.com.ezproxy.sussex.ac.uk/base/download/BookChapter/getting-your-phd/n15.xml.
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28. Imposter syndrome refers to a difficulty in grasping one's own success, even if high achieving. Evidence shows that researchers from minority backgrounds are especially vulnerable to this phenomenon because they are more subject to stereotypes and prejudices. See Jeremy Bauer-Wolf, *Feeling Like Imposters* www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/04/06/study-shows-impostor-syndromes-effect-minority-students-mental-health



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