Exploring how doctoral candidates experience doctoral education

Ann MacPhail,
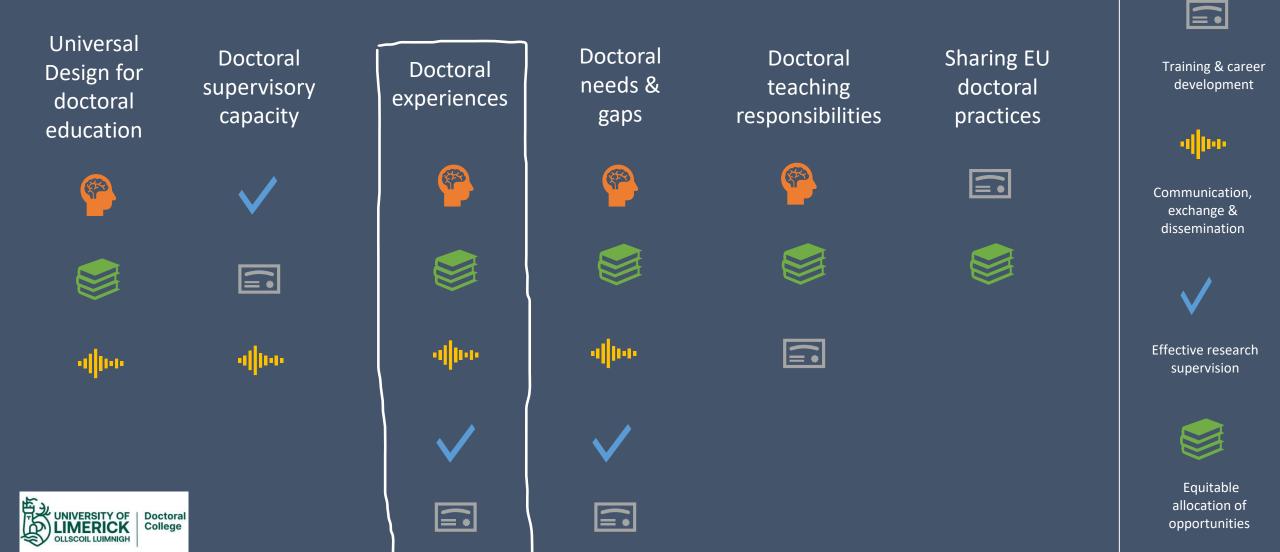
Doctoral College,

University of Limerick, Ireland

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Six aligned research studies

Universal Design for doctoral education	Doctoral supervisory capacity	Doctoral experiences	Doctoral needs & gaps	Doctoral teaching responsibilities	Sharing EU doctoral practices

Wellbeing

Training & career development

Communication, exchange & dissemination

Effective research supervision

Equitable allocation of opportunities

1. Original contribution to knowledge

2. Institutional responsibility

3. Quality of learning environment

4. Access to research and expertise

5. Learning experience

6. Discipline diversity

7. Delivery of supervision and examination

8. Quality of the final outcome

9. Quality assurance

National Framework for Doctoral Education

Revised 2023

Table 1. Irish National Framework for Doctoral Education principles.

1	The core of doctoral education is deep engagement with a question, problem or hypothesis at the frontier of knowledge, and advancement of this frontier under the guidance of expert and committed supervision. to be awarded a doctoral degree, the candidate must have made an original contribution to knowledge.
2	Successful completion and examination of the research thesis, comprising work of publishable quality, is the basis for the award of the doctoral degree. The thesis can be presented in a variety of formats
3	Doctoral education increases significantly students' depth and breadth of knowledge of their discipline and develops their expertise in research methodology which is applicable to both a specific project and a wider context. It provides a high-quality research experience, training (including a formalised integrated programme of personal and professional development) and output consistent with international norms and best practice.
4	Doctoral education is conducted in a learning community where sufficient critical mass of internationally recognised research activity exists to allow students to gain access to a training programme of appropriate breadth and to interact with peers engaged in their field, nationally and internationally.
5	Recognising that each doctorate is unique, doctoral education is also flexible so as to support students within individual disciplines or within interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary groups.
6	Doctoral education is conducted in a research environment with a high degree of academic quality and infrastructure and where it is consistent with institutional strategies. Academic quality includes quality supervision and training for supervisors.
7	The admission of doctoral students takes into account preparedness of the applicant, the availability of qualified, competent and accessible supervision and the resources necessary to conduct the research.
8	Doctoral education is supported by established structures with: - supervision by a principal supervisor(s), normally with a supporting panel approved by the institution; - formal monitoring of progress to completion against published criteria, supported by institutional arrangements; - clearly defined examination processes, involving external examiners, assessment criteria and declared outcomes.
9	A robust quality assurance system underpins all doctoral provision.

Background

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THE PhD EXPERIENCE: A REVIEW OF THE FACTORS
INFLUENCING DOCTORAL STUDENTS' COMPLETION,
ACHIEVEMENT, AND WELL-BEING

Anna Sverdlik*	McGill University, Montreal, Quebec, Canada	anna.sverdlik@mail.mcgill.ca
Nathan C. Hall	McGill University, Montreal, Quebec, Canada	nathan.c.hall@mcgill.ca
Lynn McAlpine	University of Oxford, Oxford, England	lynn.mcalpine@learning.ox.ac.uk
Kyle Hubbard	McGill University, Montreal, Quebec, Canada	kyle.hubbard@mail.mcgill.ca

* Corresponding author

Understanding the mental health of doctoral
researchers: a mixed methods systematic review
with meta-analysis and meta-synthesis

Cassie M Hazell [1], Laura Chapman [2], Sophie F Valeix [3], Paul Roberts [4], Jeremy E Niven [5], Clio Berry [6]

- supervision

- students' personal and social lives

- departmental support and socialization

- financial opportunities

- motivation

- writing competencies and academic identity

Purpose of the study

- to explore the doctoral education experiences of doctoral candidates and interrogate the extent to which their experiences reflect the principles noted in the National Framework for Doctoral Education

Participant sampling

- Invitation to participate through email invitation
- 20 structured or traditional PhD candidates within a specific Faculty

Data analysis

- Initial analysis

Individual & focus group interviews

- Semi-structured
- Peer- or lead researcher-mediated
- Three meetings over two semesters
- Interview scheduled aligned with each of the Framework principles

Recommendation 1

Enhancing Communication and Transparency

Need to ensure:

- all PhD Candidates experience high quality and transparent communication procedures with their supervisors

[Memorandum of Agreement]

- high quality and transparent communication procedures between members of supervisory teams

[Principles of engagement PhD candidate/supervisor and supervisor/supervisor]

- high quality and transparent communication procedures between the PhD candidate, supervisors and Faculty

[Operational procedures and principles of agreement between PhD candidate, supervisors and Faculty]

Recommendation 2

Enhancing Supervisor Accountability Procedures

- A safe, meaningful and effective system where PhD candidates can share feedback / concerns about supervision

[Include (or not) in annual progression; anonymised survey for PhD candidate and supervisors]

- PhD candidate-supervisor contract and associated working log from enrolment and revisited at regular intervals

[Contract; Career pathway portfolio]

Recommendation 3

Enhancing the PhD Candidate Community

- Extension of localised PhD communities attached to specific programmes / Research Institutes / Research Centres to be Faculty-wide

[Consider means of incentivising membership of PhD communities using Faculty-appointed Doctoral College PhD Scholarships; PhD community representation on committees]

Ongoing …

- Grounded theory – collaborative data analysis:

 - Experiences of different types of PhD candidates, e.g., part-time, full-time, funded, non-funded, national, international, working (in the institution)

 - Advocating for infrastructure that provides a level of equity of opportunity

- Experiences with research supervisors:

 - Informing university policies and procedures that maximise meaningful PhD candidate – research supervisor relationships regardless of context