

# A New Curriculum: The Impact of Professional Doctorates in Health, Social Work and Allied Professions

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in Doctoral Education & Training

Doctoral Outcomes: Evolution, Evaluation and  
Experiences

# Research Team

Presenting today:

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Team also includes

- Dr Hazel Chapman, University of Chester
- Dr Mridula Mohan, University of Chester
- Dr Victoria Moran, University of Central Lancashire
- Professor Rob McSherry, University of Chester

# Motivations for the study

- Close up examination of Professional Doctorate practices
- Examining practices across different institutions
- Comparing across different professions (health & social care)
- What are these experienced practitioner student's motivations for doing this?
- Impact – what difference does it make?
- What can we learn about the future sustainability of these programmes? How might we ascribe meaning to practice organisations?



Motivation

# Outline of Study – Three Phases

(ethics approval awarded by University of Chester, University of Central Lancashire, University of Salford)

## Phase 1

Scoping Literature Review  
- What is known about professional doctorates in health and social care / social work?

## Phase 2

Online Survey – focused on personal goals, effects on personal and professional development, impact on organisation and profession

## Phase 3

Interview Study – volunteers from survey (20) – CGT analysis – more depth and any questions arising from survey (Constructivist Grounded Theory)

# LITERATURE REVIEW- PROCESS



Search Strategy: A Comprehensive search was conducted using various research databases. Primary research/ original studies on professional doctorates in health and social care.



Search Sources: Pubmed ,EBSCO (including ERIC, PsychInfo and CINAHL), Science Direct,Taylor and Francis,Google Scholar



Search terms: Doctoral education, postdoctoral, professional doctorates, personal impacts, impact on profession, impact on society .

Time period: Articles published between 2000-2023

# LITERATURE REVIEW- THEMES IDENTIFIED



# Gaps in knowledge

## EFFECTS ON MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

## DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

## LACK OF WELL-DEFINED OUTCOMES

## LONG TERM CAREER TRAJECTORIES

Doctoral programmes are challenging and demanding, potentially affecting the mental health and wellbeing of students.

Lack of research on the barriers and experiences of underrepresented groups.

Lack of well-defined outcomes and skills expected out of a doctoral program.

Lack of studies tracking long-term career trajectories of doctoral and post-doctoral graduates.(McAlpine et al., 2020)

Lack of studies on the impact of mental health and support systems(Hazell et al., 2020).

Diversity and inclusion in academia is often overlooked(Swartz et al., 2019).

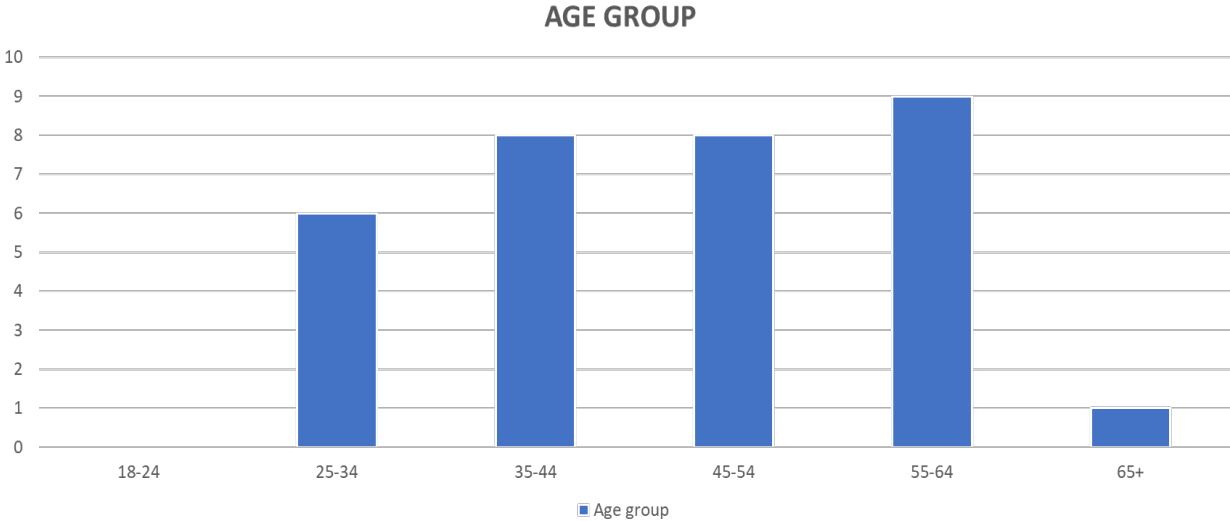
Limited studies on how these skills are acquired, applied and valued in various professional settings(Denecke et al., 2017).

Limited studies exploring how doctoral studies influence career progression, job satisfaction and salary growth over an extended period of time.

# Background Data

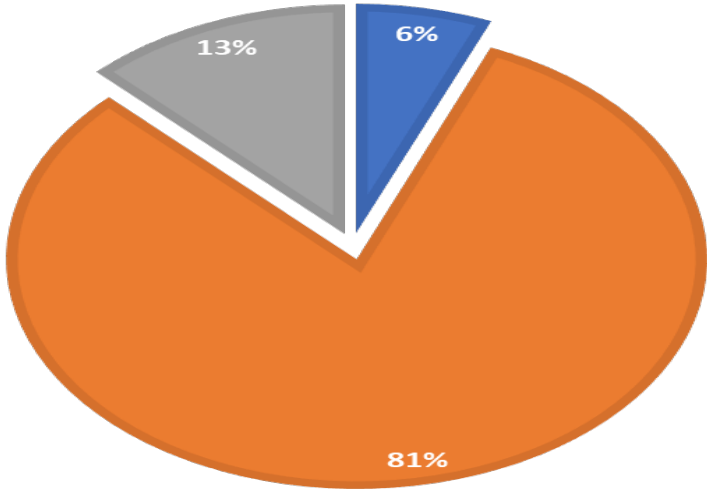
- Sample size survey n33 (respondents)
- 82% female
- ALL part time students

- Respondents
  - 61% UCLan,
  - 39% Chester
  - Salford in progress



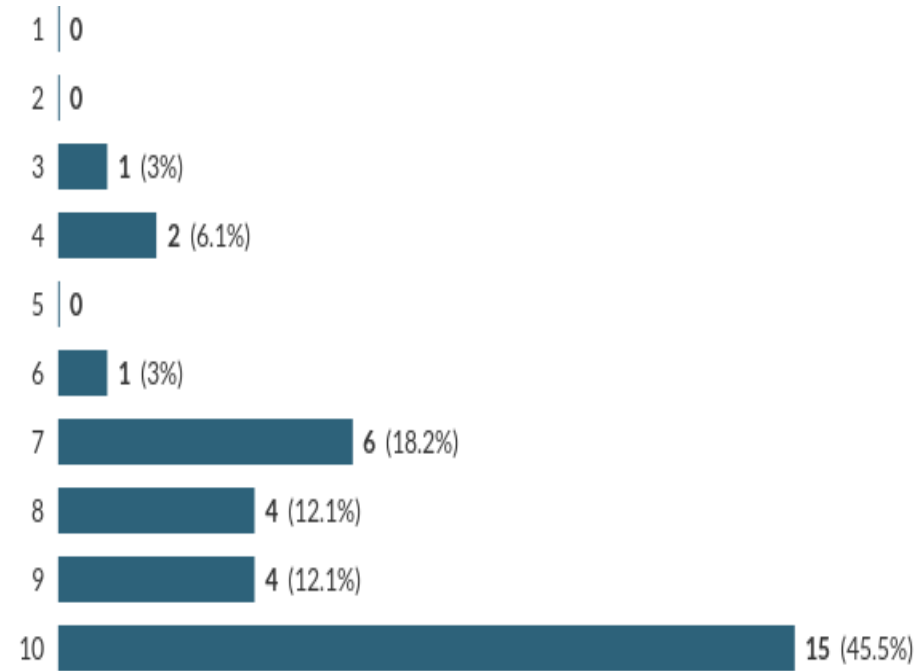
## STATUS OF COMPLETION

Completed Still on the program Exited the program

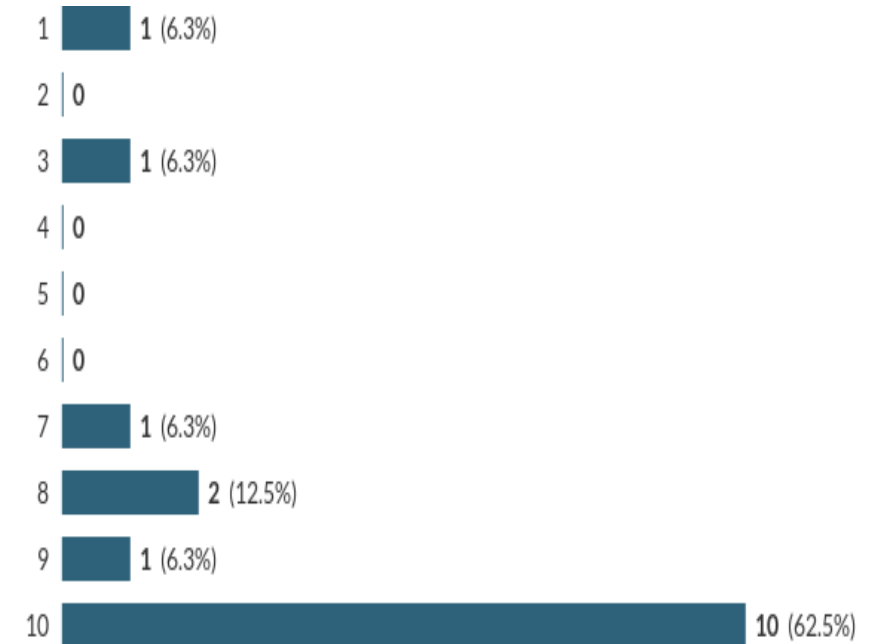


# Generally good experiences on the programme – both teaching & supervision

What was your experience of teaching on the programme? (from not at all supported =1 to very supported -10).

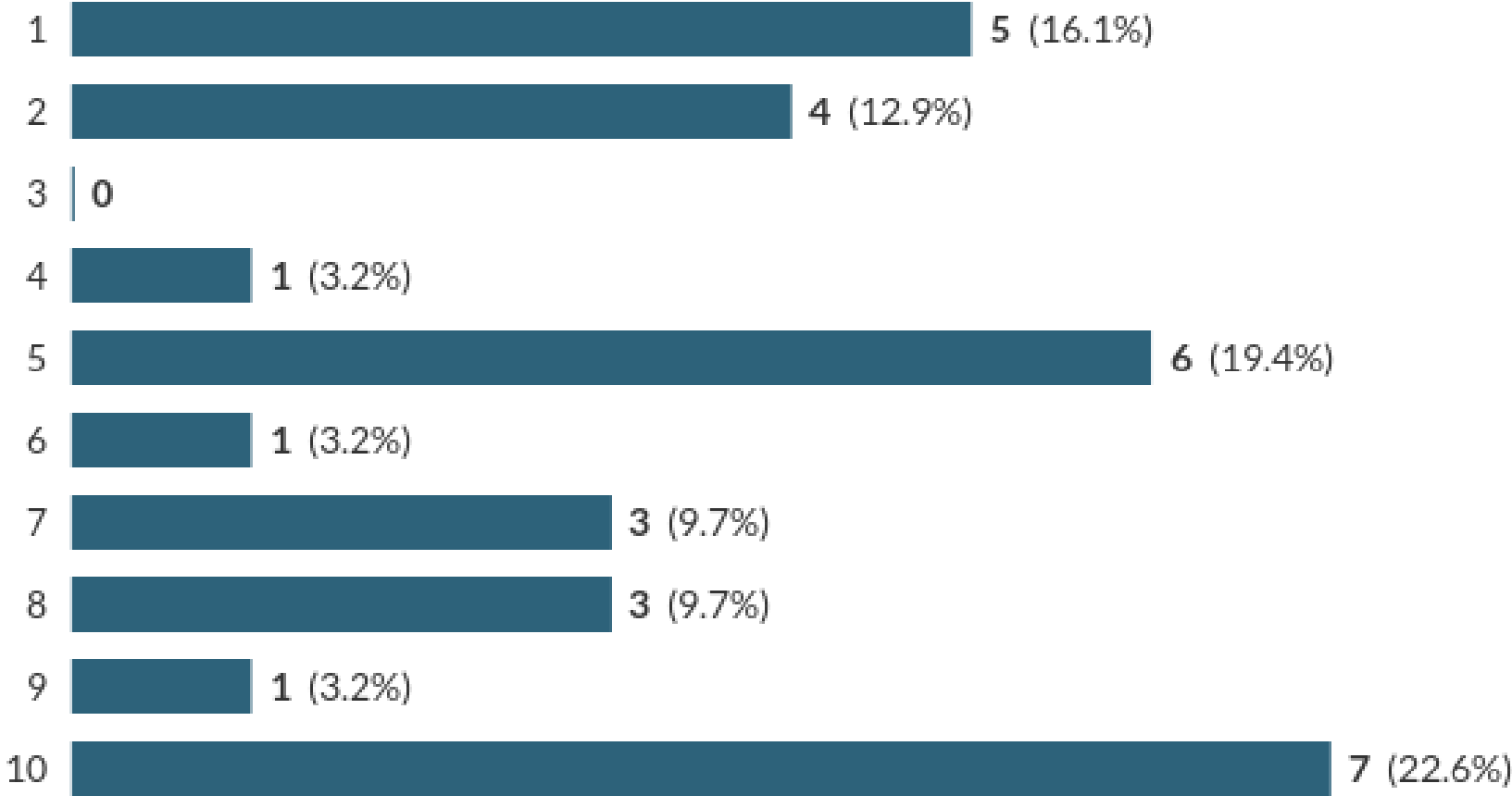


What was your experience of research / thesis supervision? (from not at all supported =1 to very supported -10).



# Wide variation in support from employer

- How supportive was your employer?
- Where 1 is the lowest and 10 is the highest



# Impact of Prof Docs on the individual.

Substantial impact on personal growth & development – knowledge, challenge, networking, critical thinking, curiosity and managing effective change, including more introspective manifestations (happiness, joy, passion & positivity)

'I talk in a different way now' and 'not everything is black and white, everything can be grey, it's a different way of thinking .'

'Deep' approach to learning – reflection, collaboration, linking research & learning – developing mastery

'You are a source of knowledge and power as well. So, you know most of the things you can do, you can prescribe, you can assess, you plan the treatment, you can communicate, you can give big bad news because that's what is needed in front, and you have experience 10 or 12 years of experience .... So, I think that is happening at this level.

Completion as career pathway not a very common issue – greater emphasis on driving innovation and change

'But it was very passionate about neurodiversity from my perspective, and wanting to really change the way that that was acknowledged and viewed and interpreted'

Significant stresses of professional role – together with emotional & financial demands on self and families - although work life balance generally managed well. Family support key.

'So that my mum and dad are my biggest fans .... My mum who's 86.. she said I want... I'm staying alive because I want to see you graduate .'

# Impact of Prof Docs on the organisation



Idea of 'researching professional' less important than practitioner leading high level change

*My view was to then take that data and take that research and then get to as many different team meetings, managing meetings speak to upper management as much as possible and almost reposition myself within the organisation as somebody that's bringing something of high value and quality'*



Significant negativity around organisational support

*So, there was all this conversation and wherever I go anywhere I'm introduced to oh and this is X and she's doing a Prof Doc. So, I'm sort of touted and that sort of thing and each time they do I look at them and I think you don't even know what it's about and you've not even spoken to me in the 18 months since we had a conversation about it '.*



'Professional jealousy' and imposter syndrome

*there's certainly some of the teaching staff that really don't understand the concept of Imposter syndrome and challenge that you know what you mean by that, and rightly so. But in my experience, that there's an awful lot of the cohort that despite this feel like an imposter '.*



But, variance for those working in (higher) education

*'But you do get some contributions a staff member so that's good and there's time allocation on my workload... So, it's useful that it is acknowledged there and you know the recognition and the moral support over everything is very much there and you know colleagues are very supportive.'*



The metacognitive map of student's skills of determination, resilience, innovation, and creative thinking to support challenges they perceived they may face from the organisation.



Students were likely to be highly critical of the organisations especially in respect to value of research/er to organisation

# Impact of Prof Docs on the Profession

Impact on profession was difficult for respondents to quantify in the long term

- *'I think I think it's very challenging yet to understand how we are going to perform as a professional doctorate within this wider role. I think I think sometimes you know it just comes when the when the thing goes wrong. Basically, it's like you learn as it impacts on the society, isn't it?'*

But, students clearly able to articulate effects of course on profession in the short term - increasing standards & research engagement and supporting professional credibility

- *'I think it would be a day-to-day impact, definitely day-to-day impact because I think the way things are at present'*
- *Yes, definitely it will impact, but it will be more like a small steps ... It will be a slow implementation of policies and slowly it will get acknowledged and ... that's where I can see the progress would eventually come, yeah.*

But some had bigger ideas

- *In my mind's eye, with the direction I'm going, I wanna change the way that the UK prison system support their neurodiverse staff. So, I have ambitions to start my journey where I'm gonna be positioned in the next two weeks or so. But then to 12 months, two years, three years from now, I'd wanna be having at least a national impact on that research being carried out at each at different sites across the country .*

# The new curriculum? Sustainability and growth for Prof Docs

- Bridging gaps, mending fences
  - Centrality of notion of 'added value'
  - Need to promote benefits to managers
  - Developing the curriculum of organisational change – practitioners' motivation
  - Is there a shift in some professions to see DProf in portfolio career pathways (moving into academia and promoting change from 'outside')?
  - Attending to internal, institutionalised challenges – the value of DProf v Traditional doctorates





# Student's last words.....

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- *I think as a result of doing this course... I feel differently about everything , I read things differently. When I listen to things on the radio, listen to podcasts... It's well just like I've learned a different language and I think I said that to one of the tutors. Yeah, it's just there was a seismic shift in how I kind of approach things really.*

Thank you!

Any questions?

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