

UK Council for  
Graduate Education

# UK Research Supervision Survey

2024

In partnership with:



With support from:



# Outline of the meeting

- Opening remarks  
**Dr Steven Hill**, Director of Research, Research England
- Overview of UK Research Supervision Survey 2024  
**Dr Owen Gower**, Director, UK Council for Graduate Education
- Challenges from the UKRSS 2024  
**Professor Doug Cleaver**, Chair of Trustees, UKCGE  
& Co-PI Research SuperVision Project (RSVP)
- Team Supervision & Continuing Professional Development  
**Dr Karen Clegg**, Trustee, UKCGE & Co-PI Research SuperVision Project (RSVP)
- Considerations to take from UKRSS 2024  
**Professor Doug Cleaver & Dr Karen Clegg**

*Questions and discussion*

# Opening remarks

**Dr Steven Hill**, Director of Research, Research England

# Overview

**Dr Owen Gower, Director, UK Council for Graduate Education**

# Contributors

UK Council for  
Graduate Education

Thank you to the all those who contributed to the research

## UKCGE

Dr Owen Gower, Sara Bellan, Dr Annette Rubery

## Next Generation Research SuperVision Project (RSVP):

Dr Karen Clegg and Professor Doug Cleaver (particularly for their work on the Conclusions section).

## And members of the RSVP consortium:

Dr Alex Pavey, Professor Richard Graham, Rachel Van Krimpen, Dr Connie Wan, Dr Heather Sears, Dr Nicola Palmer, Dr Gill Adams, Lucy Clague, Lewis Clark, Dr Tom Jackson and Reena Morar.

## Shift Insight

Scott Lampon, Jane Powell, Isadora Rackham, Andy Drzo.

# RSVP

Next Generation  
Research SuperVision Project



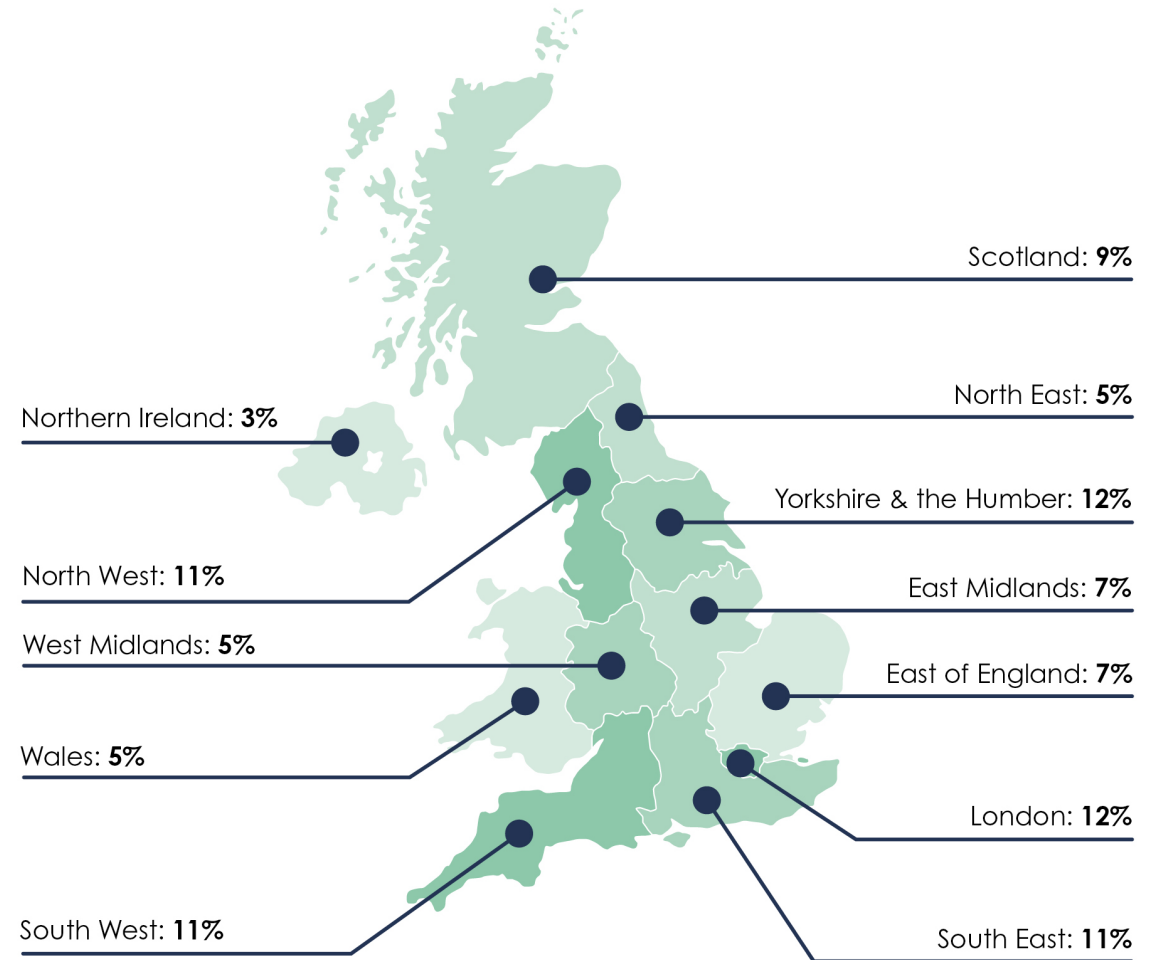
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# Who responded to the survey?

## Overview of respondents

- **5,174** usable responses  
3rd June-16th July 2024
- **141** UK institutions
- **53%** were mid-career supervisors
- **41%** AHSS – **59%** STEM
- **71%** 'pre-1992' – **27%** 'post-1992'



# What were our research questions?

## 48 questions covering the following themes:

- Characteristics of supervisors
- How candidates are recruited and selected
- Supervision workload, recognition and reward
- Support given to research supervisors
- Team supervision situations
- How supervisors perceive and approach their responsibilities
- Motivations for becoming involved in research supervision

## Research questions:

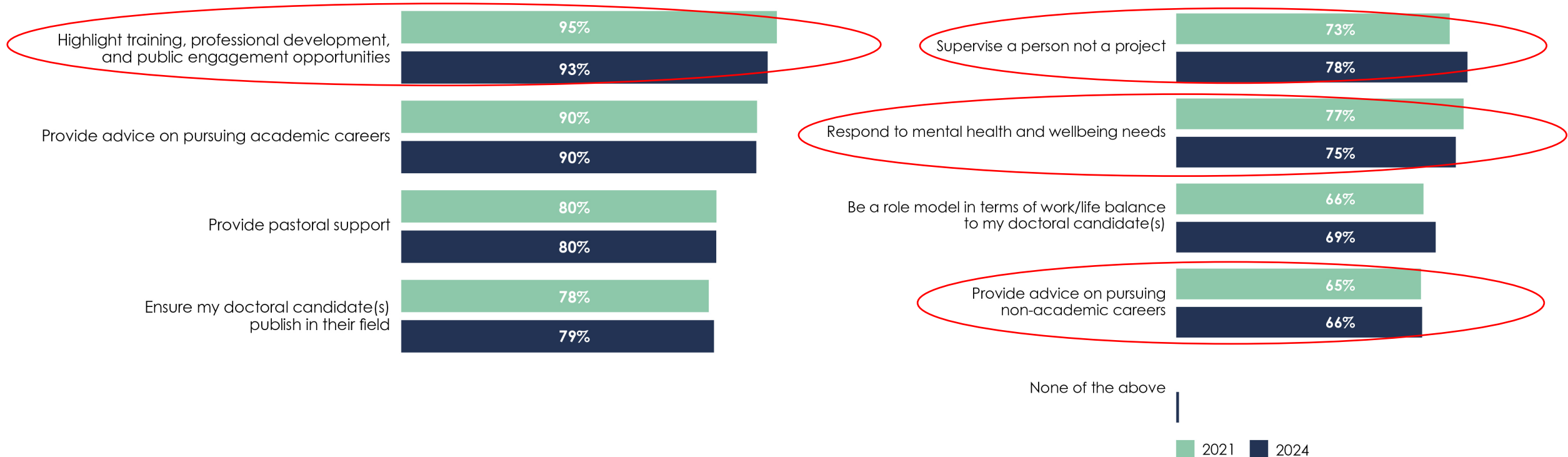
*How have the attitudes and experiences of supervisors changed since the 2021 UK Research Supervision report?*

*What is the role of doctoral supervision in building a positive and inclusive research culture and community?*

*How can institutions better support their doctoral supervisors?*

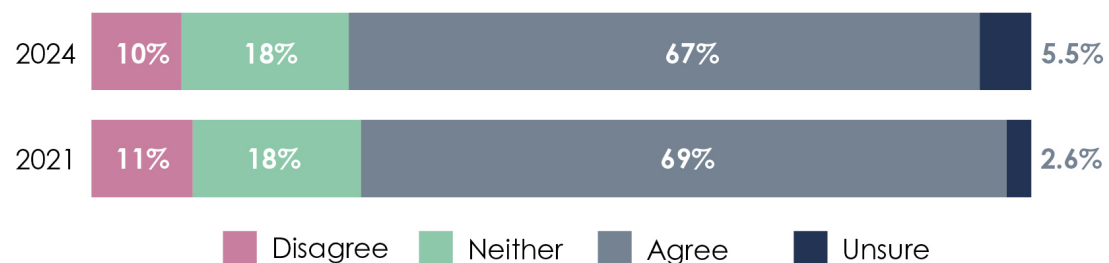
# What hasn't changed since 2021?

## Agreement about what is involved in doctoral supervision

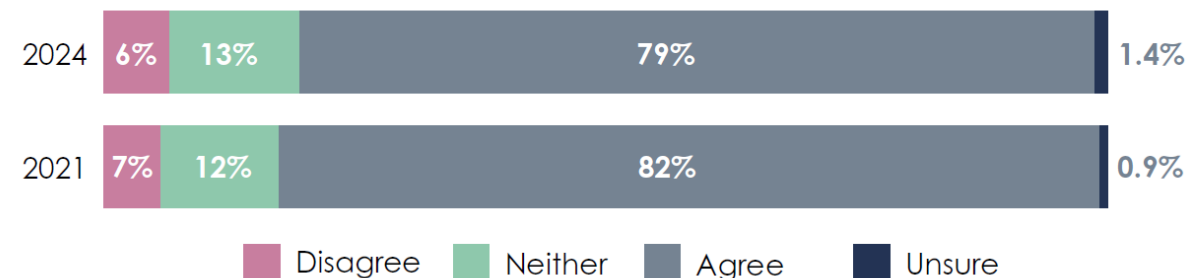


# What hasn't changed since 2021?

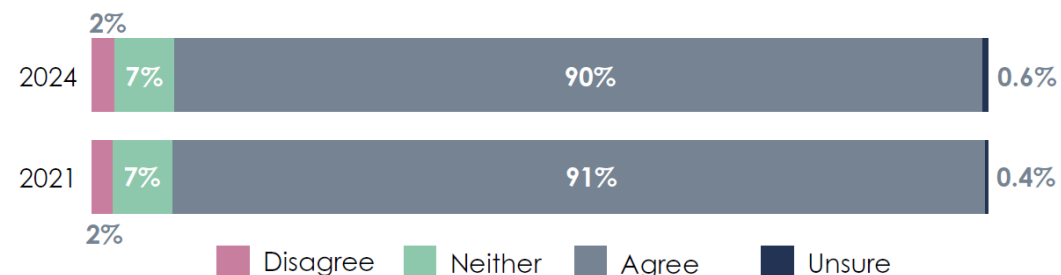
Doctoral supervision continues to be perceived as getting “more demanding” over the last 5 years



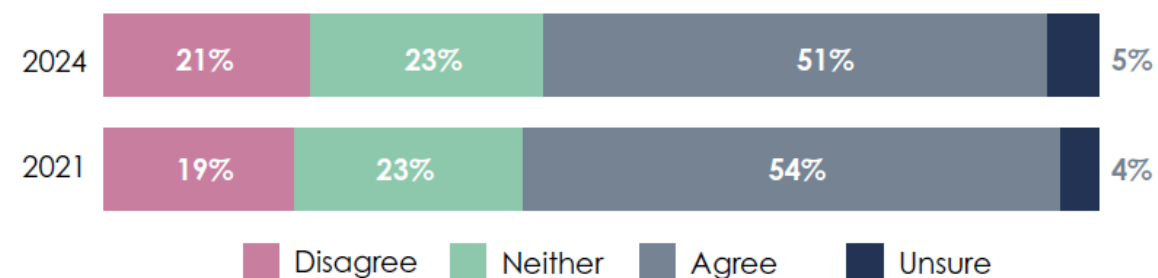
Agreement that doctoral supervision “improves the quality of my own research”



“I enjoy being a doctoral supervisor”

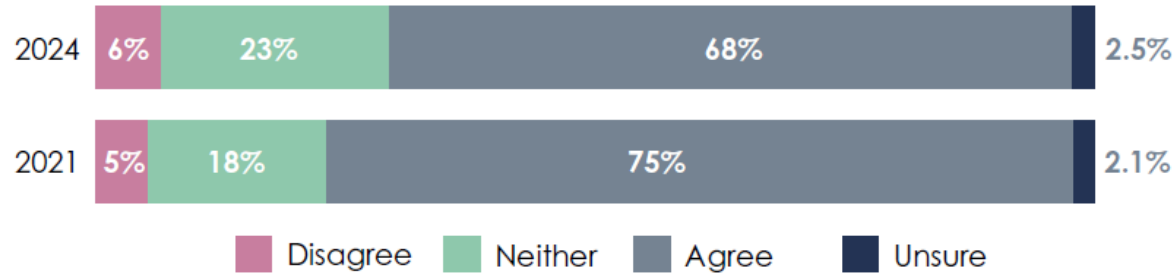


The complexity of doctoral study has increased over the past 5 years

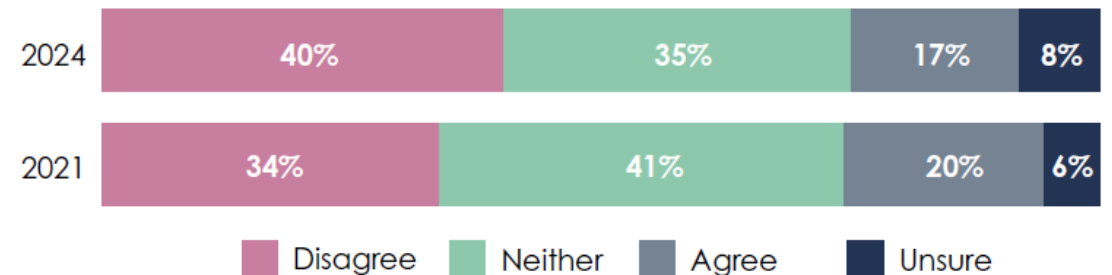


# What has changed since 2021?

Increasing the diversity of doctoral candidate populations would improve the research culture at my workplace/institution



Agreement that entrants' preparedness for doctoral study has improved over the past 5 years



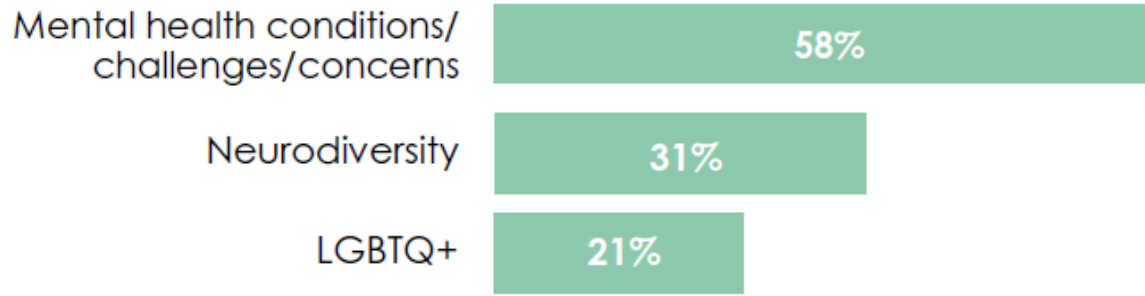
## Attitudes to doctoral funding have shifted

*76% agreed that there should be more opportunities funded doctoral candidates - up from 71% in 2021.*

***But there was a decrease in the proportion suggesting that funding should be targeted at under-represented groups: 21% in 2021 vs. 16% in 2024.***

# New in 2024

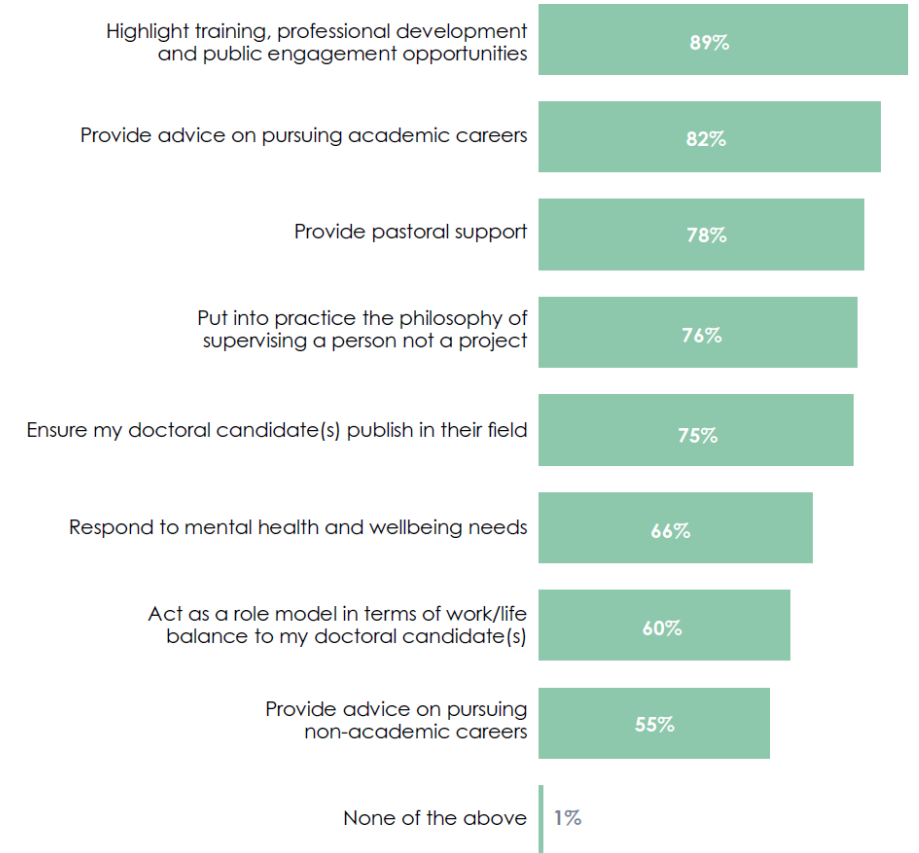
Over the past five years have you supervised doctoral candidates with the following characteristics:



Support offered by the institution when taking over a candidate previously supervised by someone else:



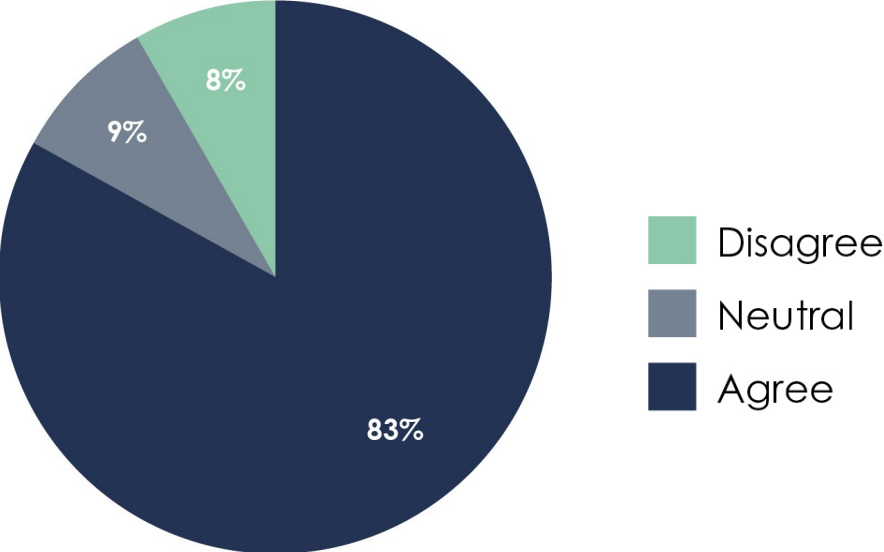
In my supervisory practice, I regularly....:



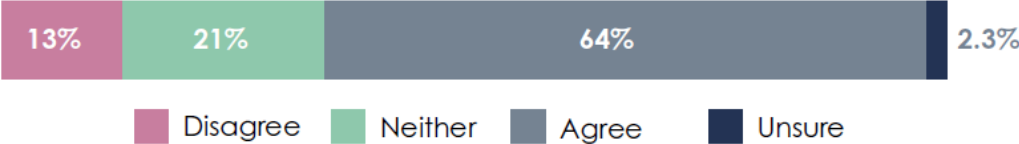
# New in 2024

To what extent does doctoral supervision in your institution live up to the following definition:

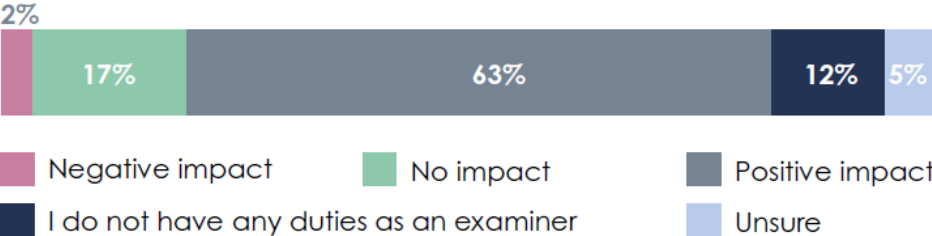
*“A positive research culture is supportive, open, diverse, inclusive, collaborative and creative”*



“The reality of being a doctoral supervisor has matched my expectations”



Impact of being a doctoral examiner on supervisory practice:



# Doctoral supervision is the best part of the job

*“I enjoy working with research students – both the creation of new knowledge and supporting their journey through the doctorate and into meaningful careers. It is the best part of my role as an academic.”*

*“It’s definitely one of the best parts of the job! You’re at the cutting-edge of research, learning along with the candidates while helping them discover their identity as researchers and develop their skills.”*

*“It is my favourite part of the job seeing my team grow and become independent researchers. I love my group and its diversity. I love the long-term impact of the training, both personal and professional development, that I can have.”*

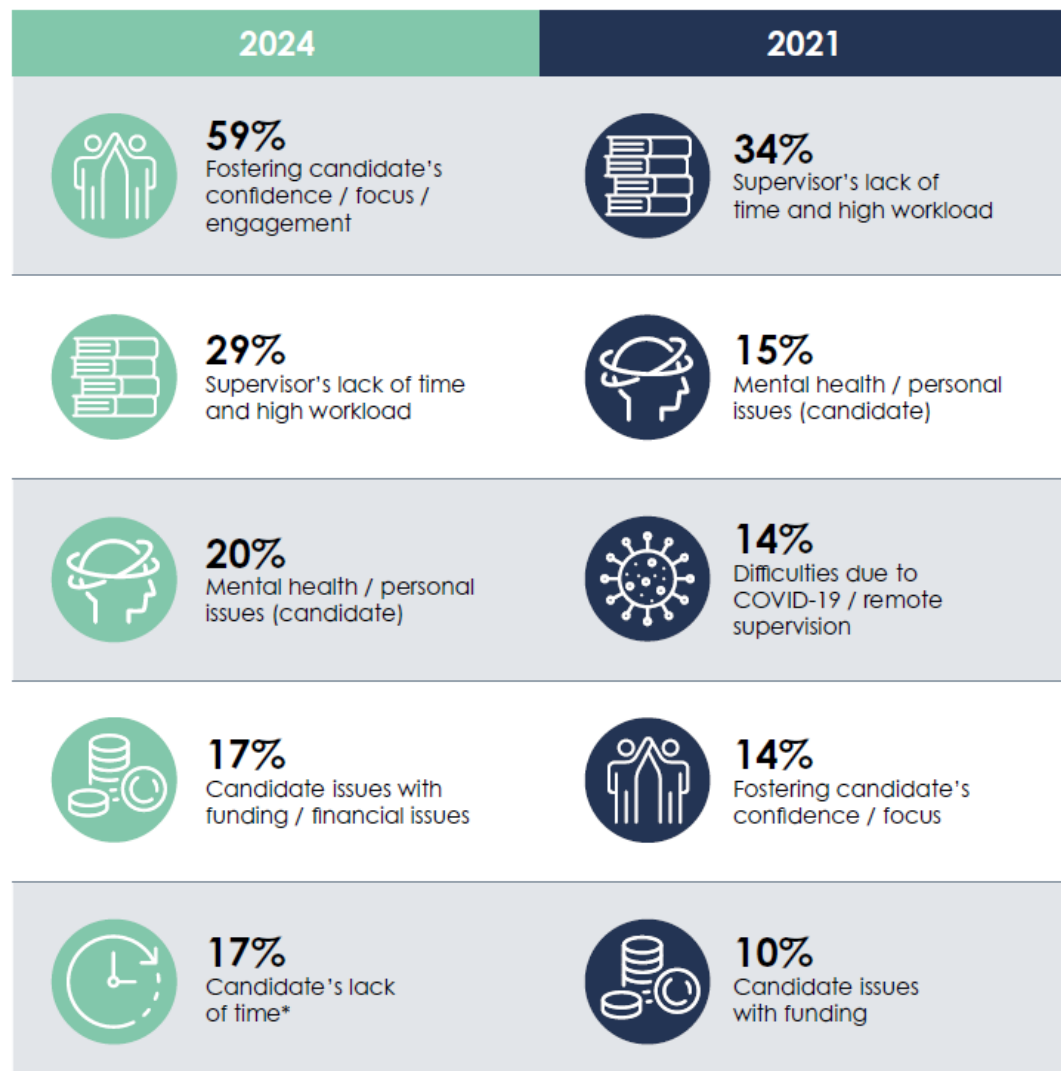
*“Research supervision is one of the best features of working in a research-active HEI. Helping to direct the growth and development of talented, intelligent and motivated individuals to achieve their potential is an enormous privilege.”* **Late-career academic**

# Challenges

**Professor Doug Cleaver, Chair of Trustees, UKCGE  
& Co-PI Research SuperVision Project (RSVP)**



# Top 5 challenges

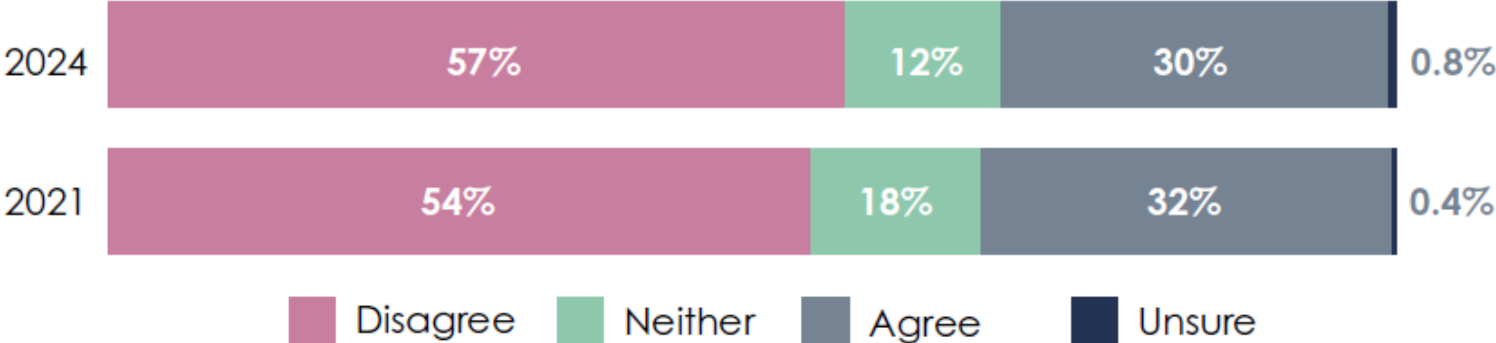


*"...Workload is provided but it is nowhere near adequate, and as expectations placed on supervisors increase, this is increasingly challenging..."*

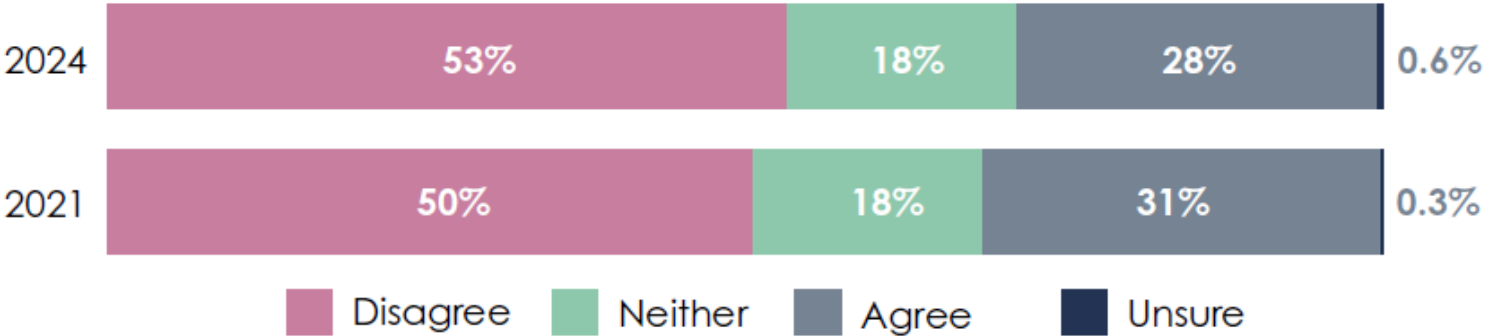
*"[We need] Better financial and employment status support for PhD candidates led by norms set by UKRI. Currently candidates are paid at a level where many experience hardship at some point during their studies and usually not classified as employees with the associated rights."*

# Doctoral supervision can be stressful

Over the last 12 months, concerns over supervision of doctoral candidates have kept me awake at night

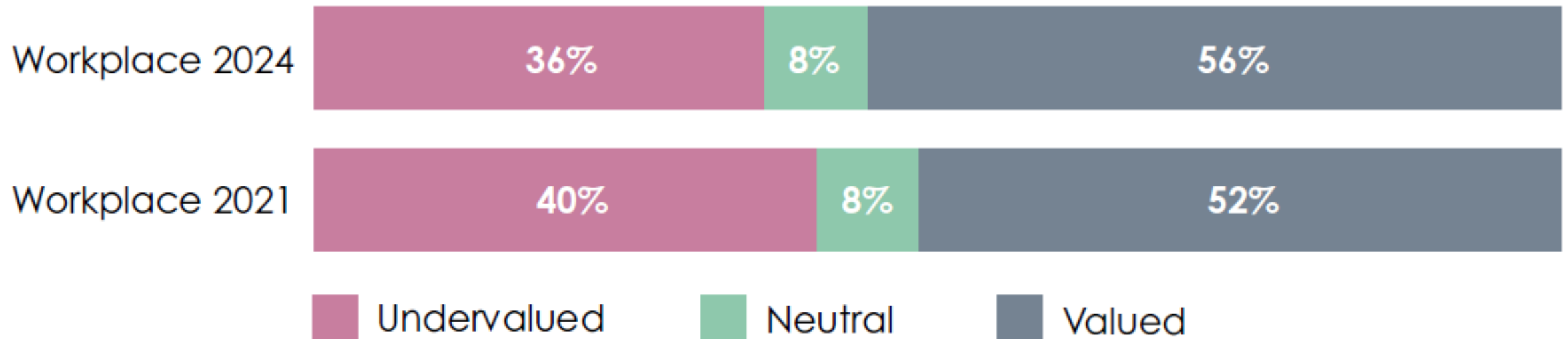


Supervising doctoral candidates makes me feel anxious



# Institutional recognition

“In your view, how much is research supervision valued by your workplace/institution?”



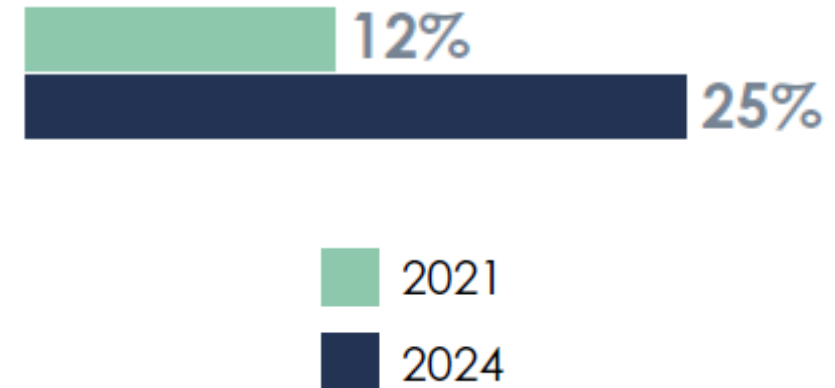
# Institutional recognition

A quarter of supervisors say institutional recognition is the ‘one thing’ that would improve supervision

*“[I need] clearer recognition of the importance of supervision in the purpose of the University, to include generous time allocation and explicit distinction from one’s own research goals, where those goals also need more generous time and space.”*

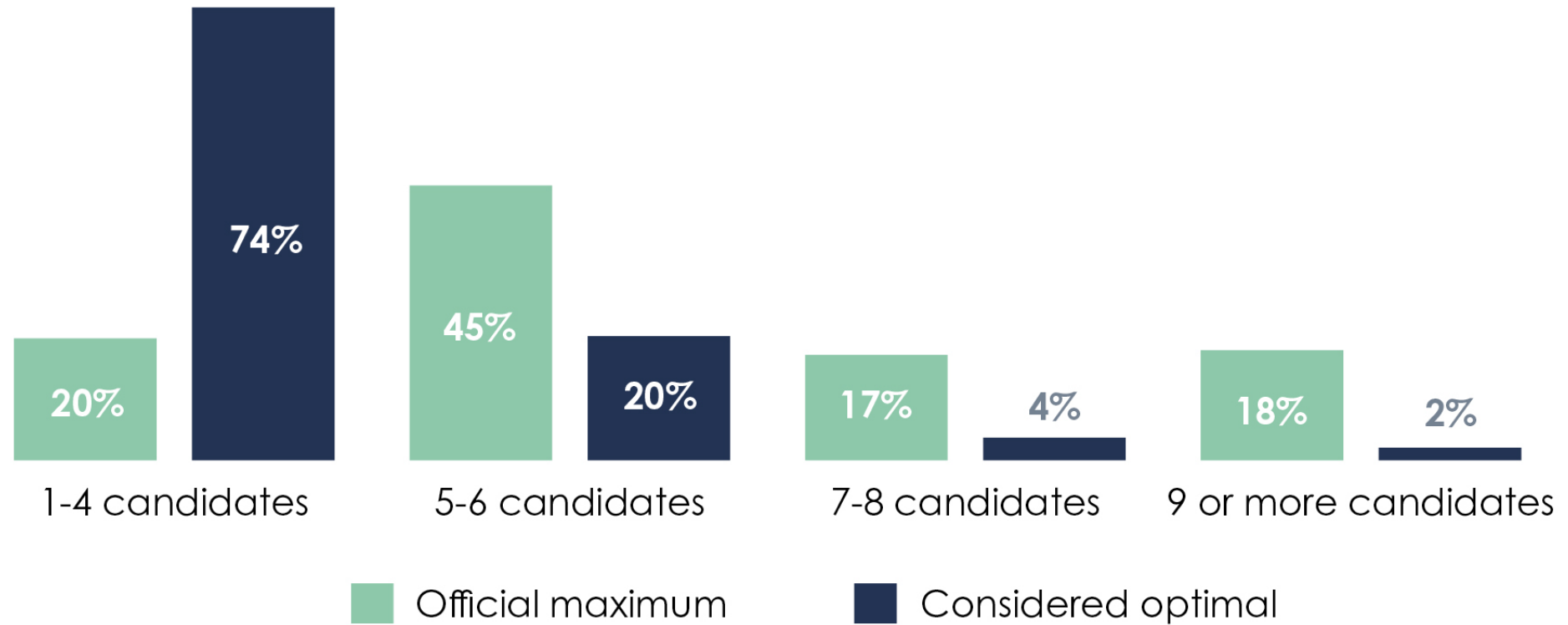
*“[I need] better recognition for the importance of the doctoral supervisor role by my University, particularly in relation to supervising professional doctorate students who are often overlooked and/or treated differently to PhD students by the University.”*

Better recognition/support from institution



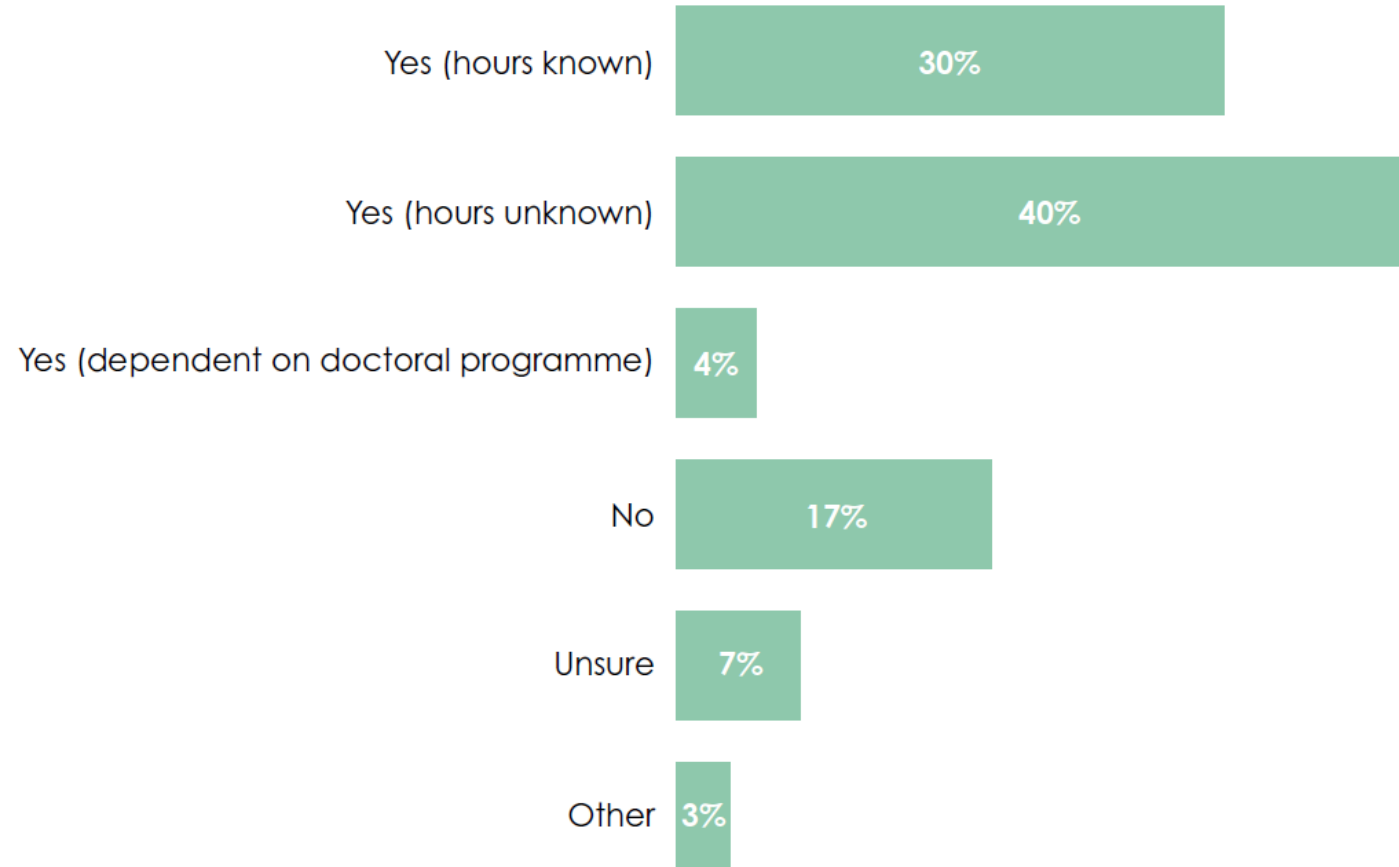
# Institutional policies on workload

Number of candidates per supervisor: official policy vs what is considered optimal by supervisors



# Institutional policies on workload

Does your institution have a workload allocation for supervision?



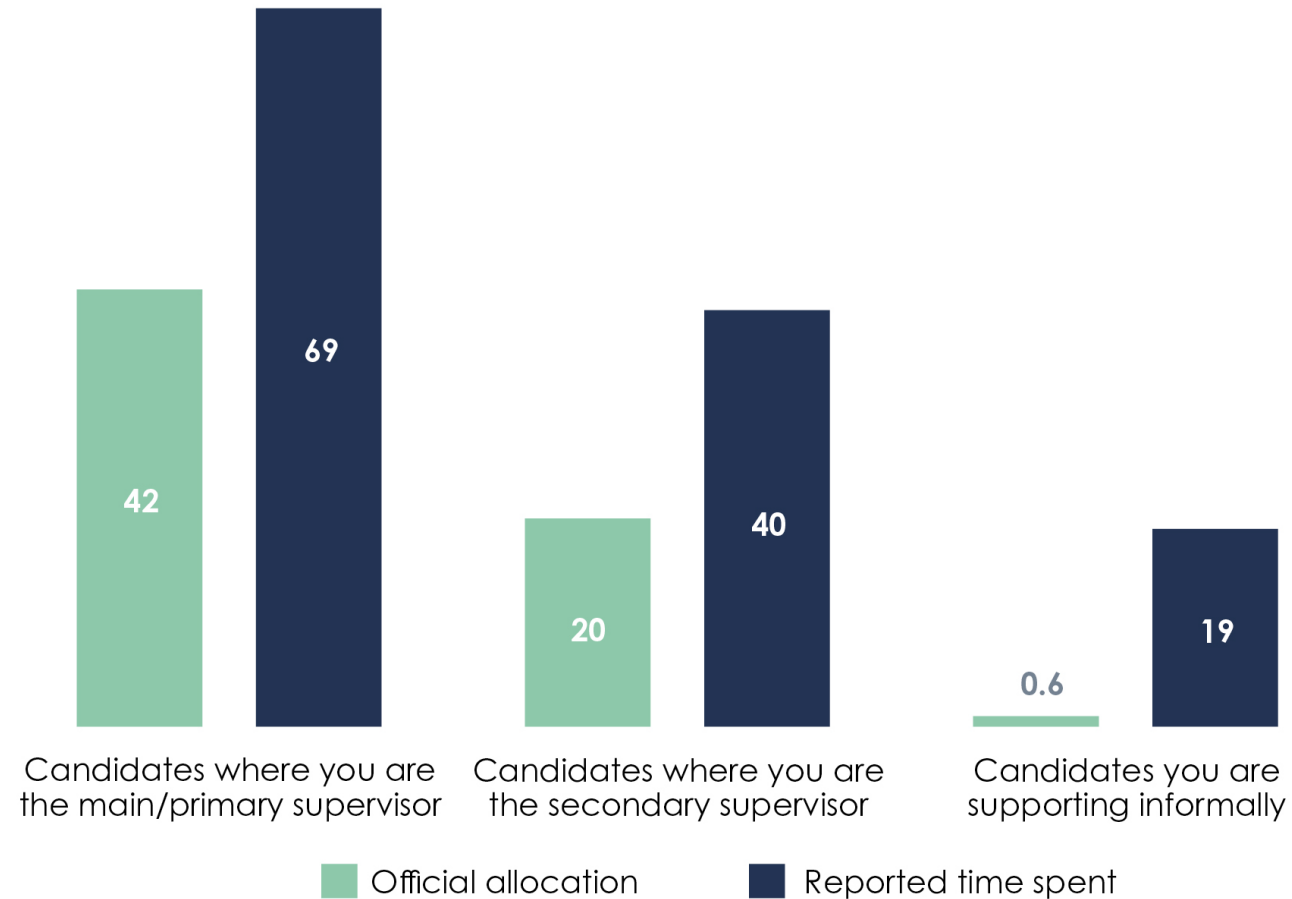
# Institutional policies on workload

Number of hours allocated in the workload model per year per candidate (where known)

Please specify how many hours are allocated per year per candidate for ...?				
	Average	Mode	Median	Base n
Candidates where you are the main/primary supervisor	42	50	40	1,314
Candidates where you are the secondary supervisor	20	10	20	1,229
Candidates you are supporting informally	0.6	0	0	489

# Institutional policies on workload

Number of hours allocated vs reported time spent per year per candidate



# One supervisor speaks...

*“Having a consistent and supportive research environment is the single thing that could be done to improve research supervision. I think we need a ‘village’ to enable doctoral and scholarship success. One or two individual supervisors cannot do it all.”*

**Mid-career academic**

# Team Supervision & Continuing Professional Development

**Dr Karen Clegg, Trustee, UKCGE  
& Co-PI Research SuperVision Project (RSVP)**

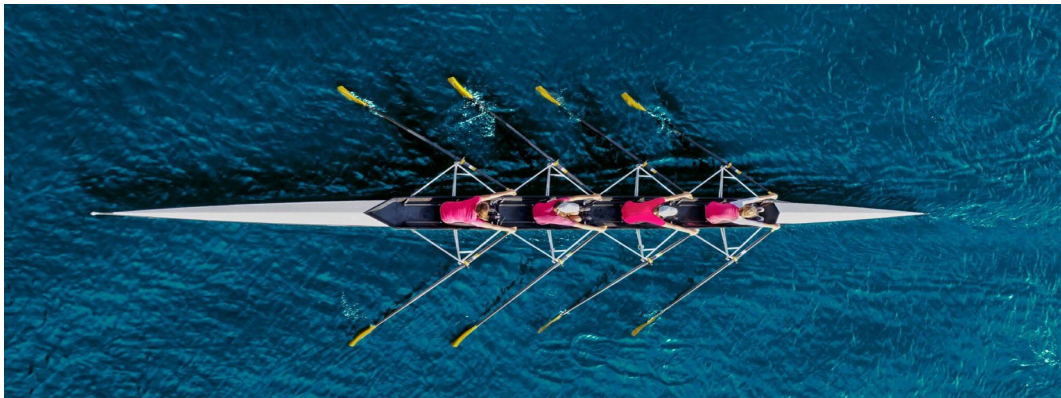
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# Team supervision has increased

76%

There has been an increase in the percentage of respondents who suggest they either 'frequently' or 'always' took part in team supervision over the last 5 years (71% in 2021, compared to 76% in 2024).

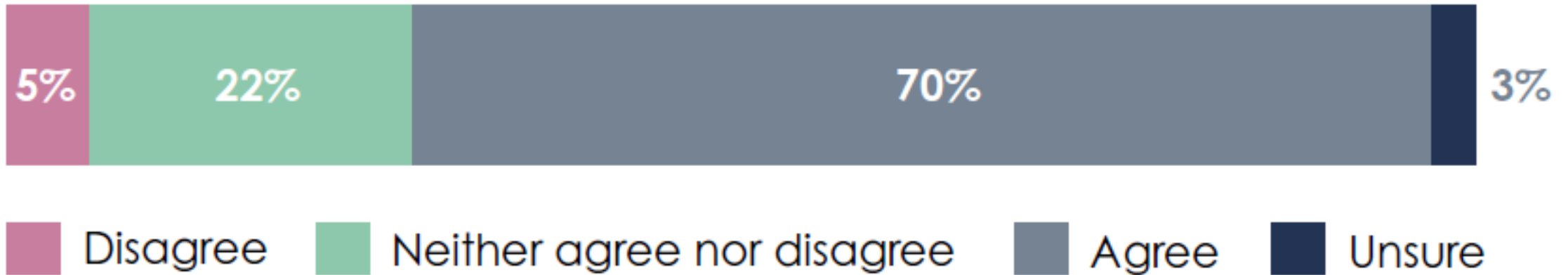


or...



# But what is team supervision?

## Agreement that supervisory teams offer a better experience

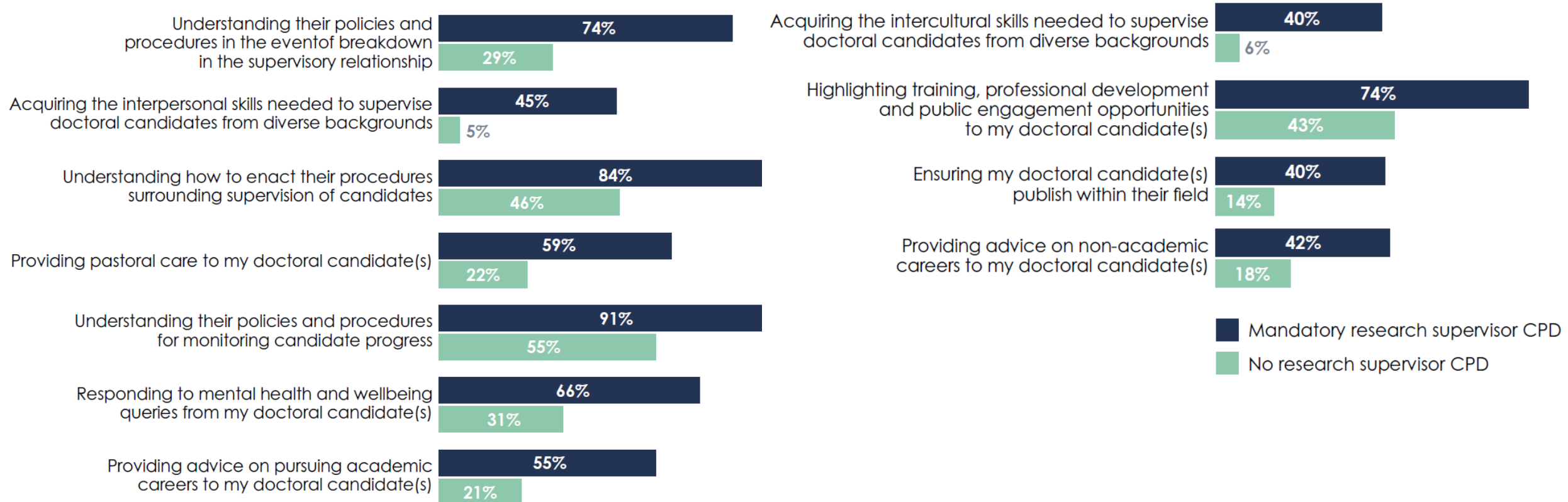


### *But:*

- *32% of respondents noted that decisions regarding team supervisory roles were made on a case-by-case basis.*
- *9% reported these decisions were made informally.*
- *8% stated they were either poorly defined or not defined at all.*

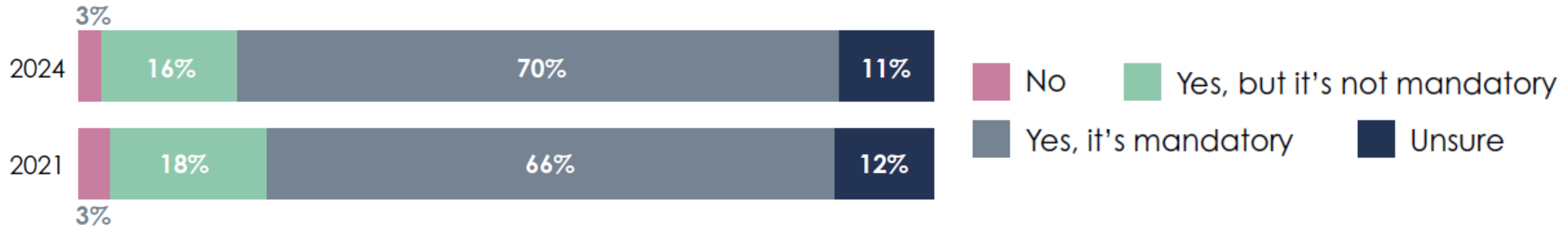
# Impact of mandatory supervisor development

## My workplace/institution adequately supports me with...



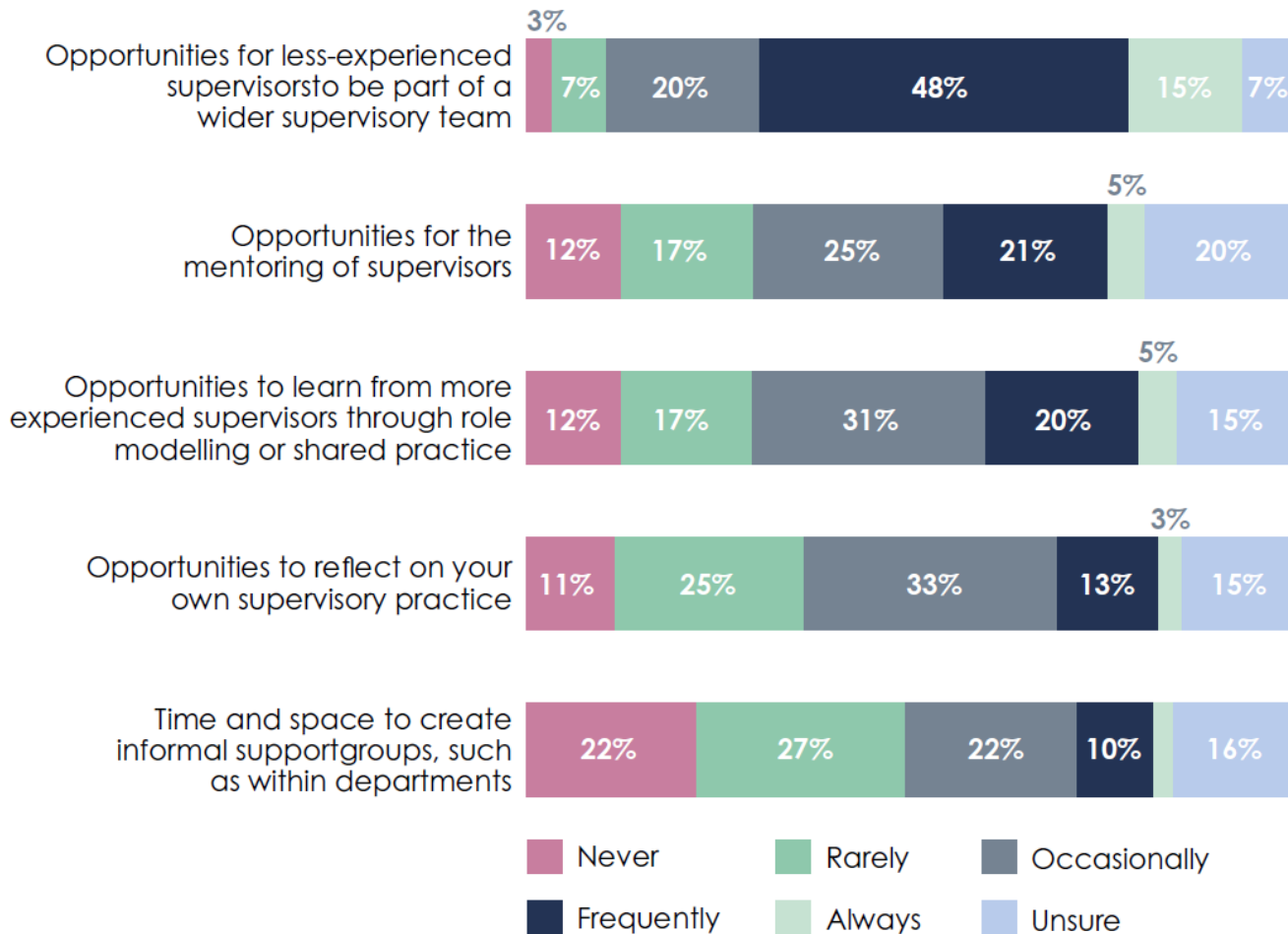
# Are HEIs providing supervisor CPD?

## Provision of new supervisor CPD



*Respondents who said **ongoing CPD** was available in their institution has not significantly increased since our last survey (73% in 2021 and 75% in 2024), but there has been an increase in the proportion who say that this CPD is mandatory and takes place on a regular basis, rising from 25% in 2021 to 29% in 2024.*

# Opportunities to enhance supervisory practice



*"One thing that would make my role as a research supervisor better is having access to additional resources for professional development and training in mentorship techniques.*

*This could include **workshops, seminars, and access to a network of experienced supervisors to share best practices.** Enhanced training would enable me to better support my students, address their diverse needs more effectively, and stay updated on the latest developments in research supervision. This, in turn, would improve the overall research experience for my students and contribute to their success."*

# Engagement with CPD

## Disciplinary differences

Supervisors in AHSS subjects were more likely than their STEM counterparts to take part in several supervision enhancement activities:

- Consulting their institution's handbook or code of practice (63% vs. 51%)
- Participating in supervisor forums (43% vs. 32%).

## Gender differences

Female supervisors were also more likely to take part in several activities than male supervisors:

- Consulting their institution's handbook or code of practice (63% vs. 50%)
- Reading scholarly literature surrounding supervisory practice (27% vs. 23%)
- Participating in mandatory updating sessions (42% vs. 34%)
- Participating in voluntary updating sessions (34% vs. 27%)

# A call for more CPD

*“[I need] More dedicated time for CPD related to supervisory practice e.g. time for training courses or to keep up to date with pedagogical literature related to supervision.”*

*“[I need] More useful training instead of just covering the regulations and procedures. For example some training in mentorship and other soft skills around supervision.”*

*“I would like to see better training being offered by my university - a wider range of trainings, not just in methods but in other areas such as ethics, social theory, epistemology, etc.”*

*“More training and support for supervisors [...] CPD –we have nothing except supervisor refresher training with very basic topics covered. I had a difficult student to supervise and there was no support [...] to help us navigate through the situation.”*

*A community of practice for supervisors to share experiences close to my own Department/School, because my own learned experiences from one or two students is insufficient to fully develop.*

*“I wish I had more support from the university on supervision. There are some vague workshops on ‘leadership’ or ‘line management’ but they really are too nebulous to offer any real advice or solutions.”*

# Considerations

**Professor Doug Cleaver & Dr Karen Clegg**

# Considerations for stakeholders

## Funders

- Maintain high expectations for engagement in CPD by supervisors of all doctoral researchers.
- Recognise the challenges associated with supporting a diversity of doctoral candidates in indicators used when awarding or assessing doctoral provision.
- Doctoral funding is a growing concern to supervisors – stipends should be maintained against nationally recognised comparators.
- Acknowledge the role that postdocs and Fellows play in supervision and make this part of grant and Fellowship applications.
- Enhance supervisors' understanding of the different routes to doctoral funding.

## Research Organisations

- Review time-allocation practices for doctoral supervision
- Consider appropriate acknowledgment of ‘hidden supervisors’ (typically early career researchers, technicians and professional service staff).
- Adopt mandatory induction processes for new supervisors.
- Maximise the use of team supervision (at least two people).
- Review how those involved in supervision are recognised, acknowledged and valued.

## Doctoral/Graduate Schools

- Structure continuing professional development for supervisors to acknowledge different needs at different career stage.
- Consider mandatory induction for new supervisors
- Develop opportunities for supervisors to learn from each other, share practice and reflect.
- Support supervisors to enable them to feel confident in signposting to mental health resources.
- Develop internal / external communications in relation to support given to supervision: prospective doctoral researchers and funders may be attracted by an institutional commitment to excellence in supervisory practice.

## Supervisors

- Reflect on your supervisory practice – find appropriate ways to share experiences with colleagues.
- Seek out ways to improve your supervisory practices – engagement with continuing professional development has been shown to improve confidence.
- Consider whether you have opportunities to improve the culture for supervision at your institution.
- Continue to enjoy the process of developing your doctoral candidates – many respondents told us it was the best part of their academic practice. Hopefully this is true for you too!

Supervisors invest time, effort and compassion into their researchers.

As a sector, are we appropriately recognising or capitalising on this investment?

