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# “The beginning is the most important part of the work” (Plato): Doctoral orientation across UKHE

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## Real PhD Candidate Quotes (Guccione, 2018)

*“I’m just not sure why things have to happen in the way they have to happen, I don’t know where the why comes from? It works so differently to any other workplace I’ve been in and I just can’t figure it out. I’m part of a process and I don’t know what part.”*

*“I’m angry because I don’t know how this works and that to me is scary. I don’t know the rules I’m playing by, and when I feel out of control it’s unbearable. This is a hard time in my life, nothing is constant, and I feel like I just want one fact I can pin down, one solid anchor.”*





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# Emotions and vulnerabilities of transition





# Starting a PhD is exciting and hard.

Navigating  
access &  
barriers to an  
elite  
educational  
space

Hidden  
curriculum-  
"what no one  
tells you but  
everyone  
expects you to  
know"

Loss of  
support  
systems (if you  
had one to  
begin with)

Fitting in, making  
connections and  
building new  
relationships  
while  
maintaining  
existing ones

Academic  
pressures

All heightened for those who are racially minoritised, those who have disabilities, neurodiversity or with English as an Additional Language, those with caring responsibilities, those experiencing class barriers to HE, or who have taken a non-traditional route into academia.



## Transition is EMOTIONAL

Academia has a heightened emotion register. PhD is a process of socialisation, closely tied to notion of vocation and the 'academic self' (Barclay, 2022)

New PhDs are going through the **Disorienting Dilemma** of Transformational Learning (Merzirow, 1991)

*What's going on here? What do I need to be able to do? How am I going to make my way through this? Why are my trusted learning and study techniques not working like they used to?*



# Sector conversations, expectations & pressures

Undergraduates have Freshers Week, but postgraduate research orientation varies widely across the sector and traditionally much more emphasis has been placed on the supervisory relationship – this can mean huge variance in the amount, style and effectiveness of support our PGRs receive. While:

- Supporting new doctoral candidates at this transitional pivot point is important for their long-term success in academic research (supported by National guidelines (e.g. QAA, 2018) that highlight the importance of structured induction)
- There is lots of emergent good practice in many universities

These remain underexplored in the literature and in sector conversations (Bastalich & McCulloch, 2024).

Added to this:

- Timely completions are becoming increasingly tied to funding outcomes (e.g. ESRC Postgraduate Funding Guide, 2024)
- Careers: the post-PhD landscape becomes ever more competitive
- The wider pressures the sector is under financially and the impact this is having on colleagues and PGRs

It is all the more critical that we set doctoral candidates on a strong footing from the get-go.



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# What is Induction and Transition at UofG



# PGR Induction as we plan it

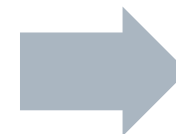
## Induction Week (October and February)

- Provides an institutional welcome
- Combines central events with local events
- Introduces key teams, services and information
- Introduces planning researcher development
- Training and community building opportunities



## This PhD Life

- One day conference following on from Induction Week
- Focuses on life as a PGR
- Surfaces many parts of the Hidden Curriculum
- Presentations from year 2+ PGRs
- Runs online and presentations added to YouTube Repository



## PGR Weekly Roundup

- Weekly newsletter from Researcher Development
- Highlights opportunities from across the University ecology
- Shares external opportunities
- Regular and recognised communication to increase engagement





# Engagement with Induction

Comes to  
some  
events

Misses  
Induction  
Week

Does not  
engage

Fully  
engages and  
attends  
everything

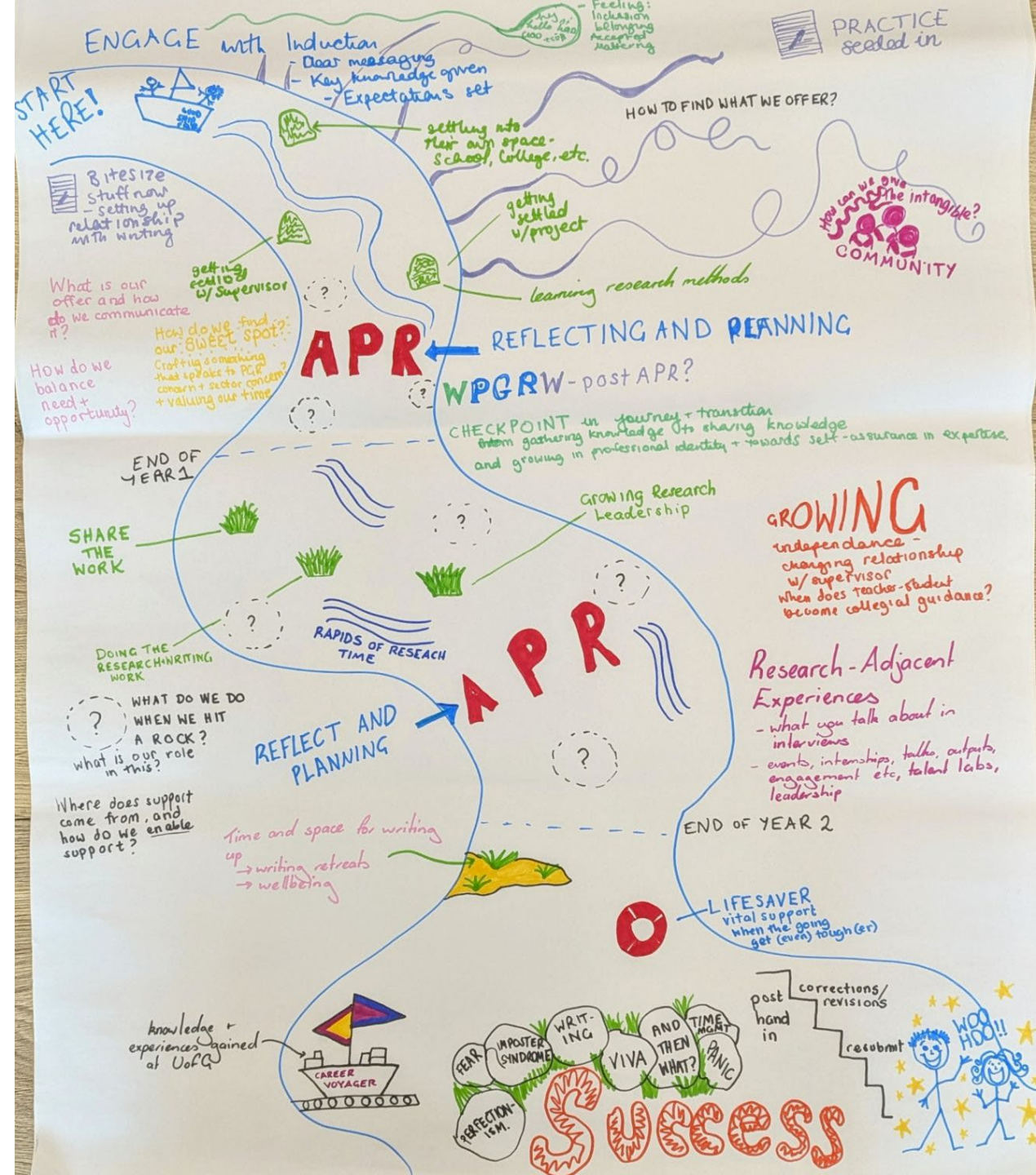
Attends  
online  
events

Engages  
asynchrono  
usly

- Pre-arrival PGR Essential Package for offer-holders
- Thinking through what we offer at transition points for PGRs
- New work on reflective practice around researcher development and project progression at Annual Progression Review
- Supporting PGRs to take ownership of development planning

# Thinking about the PGR Journey

Planning  
support at  
strategic  
points







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# What is Induction and Transition where you are?





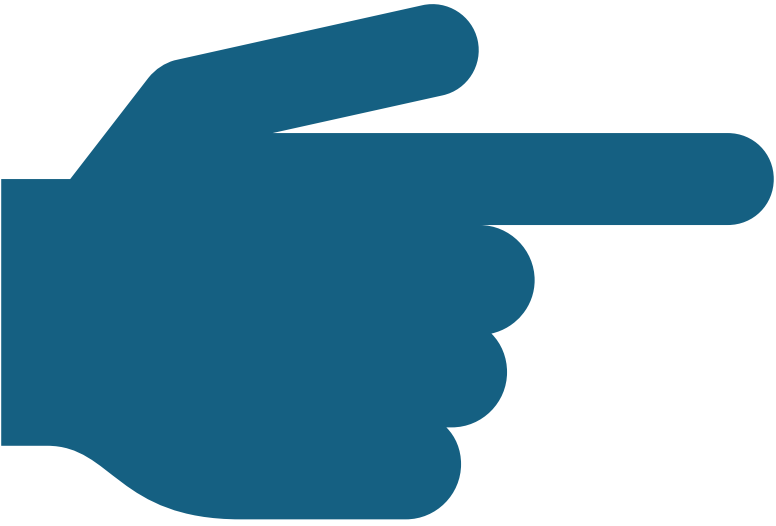


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What do  
you do at  
your  
institution?

What is  
*really*  
important?

What about  
the people  
we don't  
reach?



One useful thing  
you are going to  
think about or do?

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