

Impact of a professional doctorate on candidates' practice and professional development (0310)

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Literature seems to have reached a consensus that professional doctorates can and should play a major role in bridging the gap between academia and professional practice because professional doctorate research is closely connected to the knowledge economy outside the university (Gill & Hoppe, 2009; Banerjee & Morley, 2013). The professional doctorate has been part of the doctoral landscape for the last two decades but it is only recently that debates as to its 'newness' in terms of rigour and validity started to subside, to be replaced with the more mature debate as to the variations in design, their impact and their role as advanced professional development for senior practitioners (Fillery-Travis, 2012). Indeed, the recent Research Excellence Framework (2014) placed a much stronger emphasis on the impact of research and assessed not just the academic impact but also the broader social, environmental, and economic benefits of research. If this trend is to continue professional doctorates should be placed in the heart of the next REF 2020 submission given the impact 'professional research' has been found to have on the wider community and business environment. But how does the professional doctorate impact on individual careers and professional development and thus on candidates' own practice? Some scholars found professional doctorate to have influence and impact on professional attitude, disposition and confidence (Wellington & Sikes, 2006) which then enhance professional doctorate candidates' leadership, credibility and self-confidence for application in the practice setting (Smith, 2013).

Looking at the nature of the doctorate through an examination of its impact on both the recipient and on other stakeholders who might be affected by it would seem to be an area that is widely researched. However, this does not seem to be the case as very few studies have been made of the impact and influence of the doctorate on the student or the wider context to which they move after its completion (Wellington, 2013). It is therefore important to both, investigate student expectations of the impact of a professional doctorate, to understand the motives for pursuing a professional doctorate and determine the profile of candidates making such decisions, and assess the impact undertaking a professional doctorate has on one's professional practice. This will provide precious insight into the market which will in turn help inform decisions about the future shape of professional doctorates.

This research study therefore **aims to investigate expected and actual impact of professional doctorate on candidates' practice and professional development.**

The following **research objectives** have been set to help achieve the aim:

1. To determine professional doctorate candidate profile
 - Literature identified that a typical candidate is at a senior level, mid-career from a variety of professional backgrounds and industry sectors (Costley & Lester, 2011; Mellors-bourne et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2011)
2. To investigate reasons for undertaking a professional doctorate
 - Commonly cited motivations by candidates were enhancement of practice, improved career prospects through promotion or directional change, deeper academic interest in their profession, sense of personal achievement, re-

engaging with academia (Burgess et al., 2011; Fox & Slade, 2013; Mellors-bourne et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2011)

3. To explore student perceptions of the impact professional doctorate will have/has had on their career and professional development and their professional practice
 - confidence, professional credibility, critical thinking, development of reading, writing and presentation skills, analytical and evidence-based approach to candidates day-to-day job, improved construction of an argument have been identified by candidates ((Fell et al., 2011; Mellors-bourne et al., 2016)

Research methodology:

A survey method is going to be used to collect data initially from students who are currently enrolled onto either DBA or EdD at Staffordshire University. This research however has a potential of being extended to provide a larger picture of the professional doctorate landscape and thus those market providers who are interested in learning more about the impact their programmes will/have had on their candidates will be given the opportunity to participate in this research. The initial internal data collection will take place in summer 2016 and its findings will be reported at the 2016 SRHE conference. This research strategy provides further opportunity to explore the issue from both the candidate's and a graduate's point of view which will provide insights into whether professional doctorates deliver what is expected of them.

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