

Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (Included Submissions)

0288

(How) will Covid 19 change doctoral education ? A critical appraisal

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Research Domain: Postgraduate Scholarship and Practice (PGSP)

Abstract: The paper explores some effects of Covid 19 on doctoral education, from the rapid shift to remote supervision and examining, through closing campuses, to disruption of conferences and research networks and the impact of 'working from home' on doctoral researchers. It also considers what we don't know so much about: how supervisors coped, the impact on part-time doctoral candidates, how online doctorates worked prior to Covid and how different HE systems responded to the pandemic. Furthermore, there are positive elements of online supervision and events (accessibility, flexibility). Some Covid doctoral issues like isolation and funding worries are not new concerns. The pandemic has reinforced existing pressures to rethink the doctorate and the paper proposes a way of looking at doctoral researchers, universities as organisations and the kinds of knowledge seen as acceptable in a doctorate, as a holistic approach to reshaping doctoral education for the post-pandemic world.

Paper: There are several recent pre-Covid critiques about doctoral education (Altbach, de Wit, & Yudkevich, 2020; Bongaart & Lee, 2021; Cardoso, Tavares, Sin, & Carvalho, 2020). Their concerns range from 'overproduction' of doctoral graduates to unrepresentative doctoral cohorts, poor mental health, candidate attrition, lack of prompt thesis completion and absence of careers advice for jobs outside academe. Under Covid pandemic restriction, these problems remain unresolved, while some new concerns have been added to the doctoral education critique. These include the challenges of online supervision and remote examining, the lack of flexibility in many doctoral regulations and registration periods and how to overcome the impact of 'missing research data' or failed experiments and truncated fieldwork on thesis submission times and thesis defences. During the pandemic, doctoral work has been disrupted by many things (European University Association Council for Doctoral Education, 2020), including university campus closures and unavailability of laboratories, archives and libraries. There has also been the loss of many candidates' part-time jobs, including university teaching or research tasks and with it the ability to pay fees and living expenses. Travel restrictions across and within national borders have affected conference attendance (some were cancelled completely in 2020, rather than hastily moved online), made networking with other scholars more difficult to do (having a coffee after a face to face conference session is quite different from trying to establish a dialogue with someone only met on a Zoom call) wrecked many fieldwork plans and also caused immense difficulty and anxiety for international students stranded far from home. In addition, the pressures of working from home in crowded conditions with poor connectivity and/or home schooling and candidate pleas to extend funding and submission dates have also troubled many doctoral candidates. Different HE systems and types of higher education institutions have responded in varied ways, with highly marketised and very centralised systems faring much worse than others. Nevertheless, *all* HE

systems and institutions have struggled with the pandemic, with doctoral researchers often much less visible to university authorities than Bachelors or Master's students and hence not getting immediate attention (Deem, 2021b). However, while Covid 19 has brought new problems and exacerbated existing challenges in doctoral education, there are also aspects of doctoral education under Covid that we are still less well-informed about – how supervisors have coped with remote supervision, the fate of some part-time doctoral candidates, particularly those with no external funding, the effects of Covid 19 on Black and Global majority doctoral researchers and how examiners (and employers) might regard doctoral researchers and doctorates completed during the pandemic (Houston & Halliday, 2021). Notwithstanding the negative aspects of Covid 19 adaptation, not all Covid-related changes have been deleterious, thus online conferences and webinars are flexible, accessible (though diverse timezones can cause problems) and attract audiences from further afield, remote supervision can be of high quality and the use of remote examining allows a global choice of examiners and involves no visa requirements for international candidates. However, a post-pandemic doctorate should not just rely on either reverting to the pre-Covid situation or only utilising those changes made to accommodate Covid constraints. Using as a conceptual framework, analysis on how to encourage more women into senior posts in HE (Morley, 2013), which emphasises the need to seek to 'fix' the people involved, the organisations in which the people work and study and the knowledge typically used in doctoral theses, a more comprehensive approach to reshaping the doctorate would be possible and is explored in the second part of the paper. We could consider changes to the people involved (doctoral researchers, supervisors, examiners) such as reducing precarity in academic jobs, stopping bullying of doctoral researchers and caring more for their mental health and well-being. Another priority would be to refocus the organisational structures and cultures of universities as well as their main purposes, shifting from currently being often too focused on managerialism, finance, global rankings and reputation, towards stressing inclusivity, reducing inequality and focusing more on social justice in general (Swartz, Ivancheva, Czerniewicz, & Morris, 2019), as well as becoming more community centred. In addition, we could try to widen the types of knowledge and knowers that are considered worthy of being regarded as 'doctoral'. With a more holistic approach to reshaping the post-pandemic doctorate, we could yet see an enhanced, broader and more relevant doctorate emerging from the Covid ruins.

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