

Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (Included Submissions)

0650

The UK Research Supervision Survey: Who, What, How and Why?

Karen Clegg¹, Gillian Houston², Owen Gower²

¹University of York, York, United Kingdom ²UKCGE, London, United Kingdom

Research Domain: Postgraduate Scholarship and Practice (PGSP)

Abstract: Session Outcome: To share with SRHE colleagues the findings from new empirical data and initiatives in postgraduate research education and to inspire and create a dialogue about what research supervision looks like and could look like in the future to support the next generation of researchers and supervisors. We hope that this will contribute to the cross-sectoral consultation on the New Deal for Post-Graduate students being led by UKRI as part of the [R&D People and Culture Strategy](#).

Paper: The [UK Research Supervision Survey](#) (UKRSS) has been instigated by the UKCGE and sponsored by UKRI and Wellcome Trust. It ran during May 2021 and elicited 3435 responses from supervisors across the UK. Of these 97% worked in academic institutions, 52% were from supervisors at Russell Group institutions, the rest either unaligned, MillionPlus, University Alliance or Guild HE.

This new comprehensive empirical data illuminates who, what, why and how doctoral supervision takes place. It exposes the motivations and challenges faced by supervisors, the levels of confidence in supporting diverse candidates and the time and value afforded to those activities. In exploring the totality of the supervisory experience the RSS reveals how research supervision can contribute to a healthy, inclusive research culture. In addition to sharing highlights we will explore collectively how supervision contributes to disciplinary, institutional and individual values. The national launch of the RSS results takes place on 8 October 2021.

The RSS data shines a spotlight on:

- *Who* is supervising - including the extended team of researcher developers, professional support staff, early career researchers and mentors
- *How* supervisors approach their considerable responsibilities
- *How* supervisors have modified their practice as a result of Covid
- *What* training, support, reward and recognition is afforded to supervisors
- *What* we know about what works in building positive doctoral research relationships and inclusive cultures

Training and Support: In advancing our understanding of doctoral education the survey complements research by Lee & Bongaardt (2021) and Taylor et al (2021) by exploring, by Faculty, the role(s) that supervisors play and how they are supported and trained. The RSS data indicates that training is offered and valued but that this is not consistent. We will explore where the gaps lie and what supervisors feel is useful. As we might predict, the data indicates that supervisors feel confident in

providing academic support and feedback but less confidence in supporting careers, wellbeing and professional development. We will explore what this means for institutions looking to create robust supervisory teams and how widening the pool of those involved in the supervisory experience might be beneficial for supervisors, early career researchers looking to develop their academic practice and doctoral candidates.

Value, Recognition and Workload: In contrast to the student experience (NSS and PRES), the supervisor experience has rarely been explored. The RSS data indicates that supervisors take great pride in their work, that they value their role and that being a supervisor makes a positive contribution to their research. They also believe that their supervisees value what they do which would suggest that supervisors are making a positive contribution to the research culture of their organisations. However, the data also indicates that a significant proportion of supervisors feel undervalued by their institution, are commonly not given an appropriate workload allocation and are finding their role increasingly challenging. The pandemic has exacerbated these challenges but, as identified in focus groups, is not the primary factor. The session will illuminate what those factors are, how the role of supervision has changed over the last five years and impact on supervisors's mental health. We will explore what this means for institutions and funders and they value and recognise supervision.

Selection of doctoral candidates: We will explore, with reference to the [The Broken Pipeline](#) report into access to doctoral study and the [UKCGE's published BAME participation in PG Education bibliography](#) what the RSS responses tell us about how supervisors recruit and what they prioritise when looking for candidates and what this means in the context of inclusivity and diversity.

Differences in Disciplinary Supervision Practices: Drawing on the focus group data conducted as part of the RSS we will consider the similarities and differences in doctoral supervision in different disciplines (Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences and Sciences).

Session Outcome at conference: To share with SRHE colleagues the findings from new empirical data and initiatives in postgraduate research education and to inspire and create a dialogue about what research supervision looks like and could look like in the future to support the next generation of researchers and supervisors. We hope that this will contribute to the cross-sectoral consultation on the New Deal for Post-Graduate students being led by UKRI as part of the [R&D People and Culture Strategy](#).

References: