

# 392 Challenges and Positive Practices for Supervisors of Part-Time and Distance Learning Doctoral Candidates

Gina Wisker

University of Bath, Bath, United Kingdom

## Research Domains

Postgraduate scholarship and practice (PGSP)

## Abstract

The wellbeing and success of doctoral students is the subject of many current, recent and historical research projects, however, not all doctoral students can equally benefit from some strategies known to support their full-time, on site peers. For supervisors working with remote and part-time doctoral students there are many challenges in supervising the doctoral learning journey, encouraging intellectual engagement, working successfully with remote research and writing while being mindful of and supporting doctoral students and their wellbeing. Ongoing research and experience shared here from UK and international projects conducted (2022, 2020, 2021) and supervision experience, brings research on support for the doctoral journey, the wellbeing of doctoral students, together with work on the supervision of those studying remotely and /or part-time, either for personal development or professional development reasons, or both to identify strategies for positive supervisory practices to support doctoral student success and wellbeing.

## Full paper

The wellbeing and success of doctoral students is the subject of many current, recent and historical research projects, however, not all doctoral students can equally benefit from some of the strategies known to support their fulltime, onsite peers. For supervisors working with remote and part-time doctoral students, there are many challenges supervising the doctoral learning journey, encouraging intellectual engagement while being mindful of and supporting students, and working successfully, remotely with their research and writing. Ongoing work shared here brings research on support for the doctoral journey, the wellbeing and mental health of doctoral students together with work on the supervision of remote students, particularly those studying part-time, for personal or professional development. In particular, it considers the challenges and affordances of remote supervision of remote, part-time doctoral students, and strategies for working effectively with these students, their research and writing. It shares ways in which supervisors can support this journey and does so by building on the doctoral research learning journey work (Wisker, Morris et al 2011), more recent work on remote supervision of doctoral students (Wisker et al, 2021) and the author's own professional experience as a supervisor, researcher and international workshop presenter. We look at the three dimensions of doctoral student learning: personal, learning and institutional and consider how they're affected by distance supervision and the supervision of part-time students, recognising that the arrow straight route (Gurr 2002) towards autonomy and doctoral success is often a different journey for those studying part-time and at a distance. The supervisor support for this varied journey takes into account remote context, online supervision, the part-time nature of the students' study and in many instances the effects of these exacerbated in terms of wellbeing and mental health. Issues with wellbeing can be inflected by the very characteristics of distance, part-time research and remote supervision, since students are separated from any collegial communities which support wellbeing and collegial exchange, and from their supervisory team. For many there are competing pressures of part-time study and often fulltime professional work as well as the daunting prospects of working towards an unknown, mystifying goal (a new knowledge contribution). Such research journeys are more likely to be fractured, stop-start and under pressure contributing further to known stresses and the unknown stresses. In such contexts, the wellbeing of the remote part-time students is not only their own responsibility and that of the supervisor, but institutions need to support the students by appropriate distance library access and collegial communities eg cohorts and residential programmes to reduce isolation and demystify the research process and the production of doctoral work. Our research (2021) and experience showed that those supervising remotely need to learn to use all the strategies of functional approaches, and encouraging critical thinking (Lee, 2008) structuring regular supervisions with focused work and outcomes to keep students motivated and on course to complete their doctorates successfully.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943) emerged in the first of the research projects (2021) as a way of understanding physiological, safety needs and belonging of doctoral students were fundamental building blocks for both wellbeing and an ongoing sense of fitting in, being a successful doctoral student.

Much of our work as remote supervisors with remote and part-time doctoral students must take account of their context and time pressures supporting and empowering them to be planned and organised while demystifying the research and writing journey both for their success and our self-actualisation and wellbeing as supervisors (Wisker and Robinson, 2016) and so our own wellbeing. Suggestions for supervisors shared here come from both historical and recent research projects conducted with colleagues (2011, 2016, 2021, 2022) and my own continued practice working as a part-time distance doctoral supervisor for part-time distance doctoral students.

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