The Silent Majority: Meeting the Needs of Part-time Research Students

Alistair McCulloch & Peter Stokes
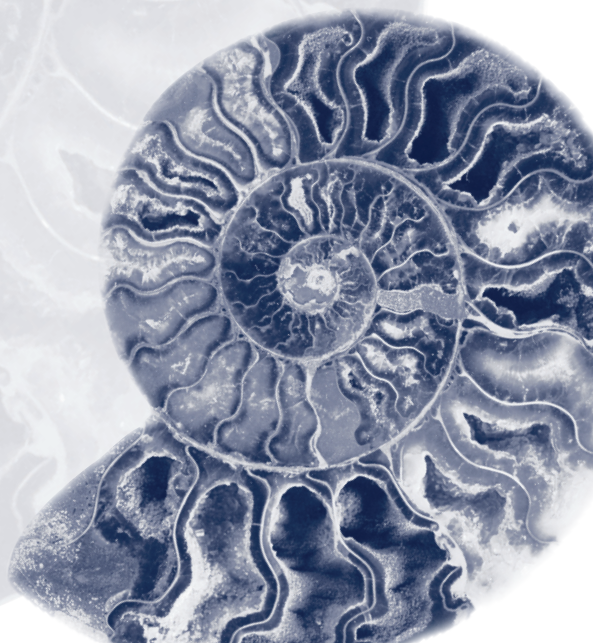**Editor: Martin Gough**

SRHE

Society for Research into Higher Education

ISSUES IN POSTGRADUATE EDUCATION: MANAGEMENT, TEACHING AND SUPERVISION

A Series of Consultative Guides produced by the Postgraduate Issues Network of the Society for Research into Higher Education

Series Two | Number Five

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FOREWORD TO THE SERIES

The SRHE Postgraduate Guides have proven a very popular series and meet a growing demand for advice and guidance on the practical issues involved in the management, teaching and supervision of postgraduates who come from a wide variety of disciplines and backgrounds often with widely different needs.

This new series of the Postgraduate Guides, launched in 2007, contains a number of new titles as well as some revisions of the most popular guides from the first series.

As with the first series the aim has been to produce clear practical guides, devoid of jargon, intended as a useful set of tools that will help deliver and support the delivery of high quality postgraduate training.

The guides are developed by the SRHE Postgraduate Issues Network. The executive team responsible for conceiving and directing this new series is led by Pam Denicolo and comprises: Alistair McCulloch, Martin Gough and Helen Perkins, Director of SRHE.

The SRHE Postgraduate Issues Network

The Postgraduate Issues Network was set up in January 1995 to help its members find out about new developments in the field of postgraduate education and to interpret these for their own use and benefit. In particular the network is concerned with: financial issues, quality issues, issues of good practice, issues specific to and independent of discipline and issues relating to employment. The network has more than a hundred members, including a number in the USA, Canada, Australia and Hong Kong, and it continues to grow.

The network offers its members much more than a series of meetings: it aims to be a true network of mutual support. It does this by:

- providing speakers at meetings to focus on a topic of general or topical interest
- ensuring that there is the opportunity for members to raise their own issues to discuss in or after meetings
- circulating material from members between meetings, and
- stimulating informal support and collaboration outside meetings.

Helen Perkins
Director
Society for Research into
Higher Education

Pam Denicolo
Alistair McCulloch
Martin Gough
Richard Race
Convenors
Postgraduate Issues Network

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FOREWORD

In this Guide, Alistair McCulloch and Peter Stokes break new ground in addressing and foregrounding the needs of part-time research students. Whereas many standard sources assume a full-time context for doctoral study, the authors highlight the situation of the part-time majority of mainly mature students pursuing research degrees. Their argument is that both institutional arrangements and system-wide policy have yet to reflect the different circumstances of part-time engagement. Drawing on their respective disciplines of political science and management studies, McCulloch and Stokes point to the power relations encountered in the doctoral process, as between the student and the supervisor, department and institution; and as expressed in what they call the cultural web of doctoral learning and socialisation. At the same time, the motivations of those who study part-time are many and complex, and the forms taken by research degrees – traditional and professional – contribute to a changing environment for both full-time and part-time study. To better the conditions for part-time students is, they believe, a way of improving the experience of all research students. And, in the same spirit, we as readers are invited to volunteer our own views on how the Guide might be enhanced and developed to connect with new models and wider audiences for doctoral education.

Professor Gareth Parry
School of Education, University of Sheffield

PREFACE

This Guide offers what the authors think is the first significant consideration of the issue of part-time research students, a group now constituting the majority of research students in the UK. It is our contention that policy and institutional arrangements have yet to reflect this changed situation.

The Guide has the following purposes:

- to establish a case for the part-time research student to be seen as bringing to the institution different qualities and characteristics to those brought by full-timers;

- to establish that part-time research students have different needs to those of full-timers;

- to establish how institutional structures and practices can be, if only unintentionally, biased against part-time research students and can fail to give voice to their concerns;

- to make recommendations to both institutions and national policy-makers as to how these biases can begin to be addressed; and

- to provide a resource that institutional bodies and also supervisors and research students (full- and part-time) can use to stimulate and develop conversations about the place of the part-time research student in the university.

In seeking to fulfil the latter purpose, the Guide contains a series of what we have termed 'reflections' which can be used, together with the text surrounding them, as prompts for discussion and (in some cases) guides to action.

We have sought to develop our ideas from models and ideas drawn from our respective disciplines (political science in the case of McCulloch and management studies in the case of Stokes) believing that there is nothing more practical than a good theory.[1] We believe that such an approach, basing the developing literature on doctoral study firmly in the extant disciplinary literatures, is one that should be encouraged and which would, if adopted widely, strengthen our relatively underdeveloped understanding of the area.

The authors would like to emphasise that this Guide has been written entirely collaboratively and that each author has contributed equally to the enterprise. We would also like to invite both comments on our arguments and also suggestions as to where the Guide could be improved when it is revised.

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[1] As declared by Lewin, K. (1951) *Field Theory in Social Science: selected theoretical papers*, p.169. New York: Harper & Row.

About the authors

Professor Alistair McCulloch is Dean of Research and Knowledge Transfer at Edge Hill University, having previously been Professor of Public Administration at the Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen. He is a member of the Executive Committee of the UK Council for Graduate Education and has been one of three convenors of the Society for Research into Higher Education's Postgraduate Issues Network since 2004. A member of the working group which revised Section One of the QAA Code of Practice on postgraduate research degree programmes in 2004, he has long argued for more attention to be paid to the needs of part-time research students. He is General Editor of the recently launched *International Journal of Graduate Education*.

Dr Peter Stokes (PhD MBA PGCertTLHE PGCertRDS BA(Hons)) is Principal Lecturer and Division Leader at the Lancashire Business School, University of Central Lancashire. His research interests include postgraduate educational processes, pedagogy, management development, and cultural and philosophical approaches to understanding management. He has held a Fellowship in Teaching and Learning at Edge Hill University and has been a visiting lecturer at Osnabrück Fachhochschule, Germany, the Senegambian Confederation in Dakar, Senegal (West Africa) and Guang Zhou and Shen Zhen Universities in south-eastern China. He is a member of the editorial board of the SRHE Postgraduate Guides series and Associate Editor/Book Reviews Editor for the *International Journal of Graduate Education*.

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: THE NEED FOR A GUIDE ON PART-TIME STUDENTS

There are a lot of 'How to...' books on the topic of research degrees. We have commented on their approach elsewhere[2] and one of the points we make is that, despite the median UK research student being one who studies in part-time mode, these books largely deal with their situation in only a few paragraphs. We could review many such books here but have chosen the following, excellent in their own way, volumes as exemplars of the field.

Phillips and Pugh's seminal *How to Get a PhD* refers to the geographical reasons some choose part-time study, the particular problem part-time students have in understanding the demands a doctorate entails, the fact that part-time study takes longer than full-time, and the need for institutions to ensure the availability of facilities for all students and to recognise their specific support needs. There is also a slightly longer section discussing the issues of competing demands, finance and time management faced by part-timers, but even this relatively good example dedicates a total of less than three pages out of 219 to this largely ignored constituency.

Pat Cryer gives more thought than most to part-time students, identifying many of the themes incorporated into this Guide and advising part-timers to revisit a number of chapters in the book for advice.[3]

In a more recent book providing a lot of valuable advice, whose title, *The Unwritten Rules of PhD Research*, suggests it will go beyond the official story, Rugg and Petre[4] write as though there was only one template for the doctorate, the full-time option, ignoring completely the differences between different modes of study (and for that matter, different forms of doctorate).

Revised in the same year as Rugg and Petre was published, the excellent second edition of *Supervising the Doctorate* by Delamont, Atkinson and Parry indexes part-time students a mere three times. One reference is to the difficulty part-time students can have clearing time to enable them to work, another to the fact that supervisors cannot assume that part-time students have access to a word processor, and the other to the need to ensure that part-time students have access to departmental information through newsletters and web pages.

Finally, in the 2007 revised edition to their book *Your PhD Companion*, Marshall and Green dedicate one-and-a-half pages to part-time students (pp.14–15), beginning the section with the warning that part-time students 'should expect a tougher journey than the average PhD student has', and concluding it by offering the advice that, if the student is 'committed,

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[2] Stokes & McCulloch, 2006. For this and subsequent references please see the Further Reading and Resources section.
[3] Cryer 2nd edn., 2000, p.220.
[4] Rugg & Petre, 2004.

well-organised and focused ... [they should] consider a full-time solution'. This brutally honest advice does, however, ignore the fact that many part-time students choose that route because of their circumstances and/or because there is no funding available to them.[5]

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[5] Those wishing to understand the experience of part-time students could do worse that look at Greenfield (2000), which has a number of personal 'testimonies' of the part-time experience by students who have travelled that journey.

Part 1 | A 'Typical' Research Student? Issues and Implications

When the primary purpose of doctoral education was the development of a thesis consisting of up to 100,000 words over a period of anywhere between three and ten years, there was little difference between full- and part-time research students apart from the fees they paid. The full implications of recent policy developments are still being worked through, but this generous approach for all research students is no longer tenable and the part-timer in particular has been 'problematised'. These developments are grounded in the changing view of the product of the doctoral degree from being the thesis to being the trained researcher. When combined with a commitment on the part of various stakeholders to improve the experience of the UK's doctoral students (not least because of unfavourable international comparisons and a perceived threat to an important national and institutional income stream they bring with them) this altered perspective has resulted in part-time students themselves being perceived as a problem requiring a solution.

This Guide starts from the assumption that the part-time student is not essentially problematic. Rather, the problem lies in the way in which doctoral education is organised within institutions. The authors' argument is that, given that the reality of the overall life experience of the part-time student is likely to be different from that of the full-time student, and given that their 'proximity' to their institution and to its facilities is likely to be less than that of the full-time student, different arrangements require to be put into place. However, rather than treating this as a way of solving the 'problem' of the part-time student, we suggest that the solutions that need to be put into place to support part-time students will also provide better support for full-time students. What we argue here is that, rather than treat the full-time doctoral student as the norm, institutions should begin from the conceit that the 'normal student' is one who is part-time. This, as will be seen, has many advantages, not least that it re-orientates doctoral education as a student-centred enterprise and has regard to the real nature of the contemporary research student rather than the stereotypical student underpinning contemporary public policy on the matter.

Who is this stereotypical research student? Arguably he (and it is implicitly a 'he') is a young, full-time, funded student who is geographically mobile, without dependants, studying in a metropolitan area and intending to pursue a career as a full-time researcher or academic. Drawing on the study of policy as an academic discipline, we can identify this stereotype in the policies, practices and official discourses governing the provision of doctoral education in the UK.

The major drivers in the development of this stereotypical research student have been

the Research Councils, the Department for Education and Skills and its predecessor and successor departments, the higher education funding councils (HEFCE, SHEFC, HEFCW) and the Office of Science and Technology (OST) as they have sought, successfully, to conflate the notion of the research degree with that of research training, principally by introducing significant elements of generic skills and formal research training into what may be termed the 'doctoral curriculum'.[6] In 2004, there was a significant move towards recognising that policy and practice had to reflect the reality of a broader range of students and student needs than had hitherto been the case. This move came about with the publication by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) of the revised Section One of its Code of Practice, relating to postgraduate research degrees. This document brought together in a single document concerns and interests that had been articulated over the previous few years in a variety of publications.[7]

The working group which undertook this revision included representatives of all parts of the higher education sector and also of the major UK public funding bodies. The earliest drafts of the Code contained reference to a requirement that all research students, irrespective of their background, area of study or future plans, should undertake mandatory generic skills training. During discussion, this requirement was replaced by one which recognised that skills training should be appropriate and that institutions should pay 'particular attention to the differing needs of individual postgraduates, arising from their diversity'.[8] Rather than the focus being on a typified research student (a typification drawn from an undifferentiated focus on the group), it had shifted to the needs of the individual student in the light of her or his life plan and the nature of the doctoral research project being undertaken.

The authors of this Guide do not wish to fall into this same error when discussing part-time students and, in a contribution to a recent book on the provision of skills training to research students, we have stated that part-time students do not constitute an homogenous group, agreeing with Green and Powell's comment[9] that 'it becomes ever more apparent that the concept of "the doctoral student" is one typified by heterogeneity (rather) than by homogeneity'. We continued that this:

> applies just as much if not more to part-time research students as it does to the entire PGR body. Some of them are in full-time employment and are pursuing a doctoral award as part of their own continuing professional development or to address an issue or project of particular interest to her/his employer. Some part-time research students are drawn from the ranks of those who are not in formal work either through redundancy or retirement, or because they have dependants to care for. Others may work part-time across a wide range of occupations. Some may move in and out of employment during their time as a research student.

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[6] It is worth noting that the enthusiasm of these bodies was generally not matched by enthusiasm from the universities, students or individual academics, many of whom have actively opposed it.

[7] For a discussion of these, see McCulloch & Stokes, 2007.

[8] QAA, 2004, p.20.

[9] Green & Powell, 2005, p.14.

Generally, part-time research students tend to be more mature and, as a result, possess significant life experience. In post-1992 universities and colleges of HE, and in the professional disciplines such as business, education and nursing where there is a strong tradition of recruiting practitioners without doctoral qualifications, some are fellow academics. Most of those pursuing the alternatives to the traditional 'big book' thesis are part-time students.[10]

Accordingly, in developing this Guide, we have sought to keep the individual doctoral student and her/his needs to the fore. To neglect this would be to run the risk of making the student invisible, which would be unfortunate given that one of the things we are suggesting policy-makers have done is to generate a typification of an ideal type student which results in resources being directed to that type while 'other' student types are at best ignored or, at worst, become virtually invisible. We do, however, have to discuss some of the features that are characteristic of many part-time students in order to make recommendations as to how institutions, faculties and departments within those institutions and individual supervisors can better meet the needs of part-time research students. (In doing this, we will try to avoid the misdemeanour which we lay at the door of others, that is, to overlay these features and combine them to form a single stereotype.) It is to this task that we now turn.

Taking account of needs, access and life

One of the key implications of the QAA Code of Practice is that, additional to the needs engendered by the research project being pursued, the needs of the individual research student (as contextualised by their life experience and life plans) should dictate, in large part, the nature of the support they require and the skills training they are required to undertake as part of their programme of study. We argue that, in addition to needs, there are two other elements requiring to be taken into account – motivation and access. Institutions have to do this when developing provision for part-time students by recognising that:

1. because life plans provide motivations and also generate needs, needs are related to motivation;[11]
2. however good the support provided by the institution in which the student is studying, the student must be able to access that provision; and,
3. needs are also generated, and access influenced to a greater or lesser extent, by current life experience or circumstances.

We believe that, without an acceptance of these points, part-time (and also full-time) students' needs will not be met as well as they could be.

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[10] McCulloch & Stokes, 2007, pp.46–47.
[11] As regards training and other learning needs, see, for example, Gough & Denicolo (2007).

Contextualising motivations for doctoral study

The idea of the typical research student as young, full-time, probably single and in the early phases of their professional lives, funded and studying science with a view to a full-time academic job does not tally with the available evidence. In 2000, Pat Cryer stated that, in the UK, 'more than half of all postgraduate students are studying on a part-time basis.'[12]   As regards just research students, by 2003–4 over 53,000 out of a total of over 108,000 studying on UK research degree programmes were doing so on a part-time basis.[13]   More recent HESA[14] data demonstrates that part-time research students have achieved the majority status in this group.[15]

One key difference between full-time and part-time research students is that of age. Table 1 shows the distributions of age ranges of first year research students in the UK in 2002–3, as proportions within full-time and part-time groups respectively.

Table 1. Age structure: First-year UK research students 2002–3 [16]

	Postgraduate Research Students	
Age	Full-time	Part-time
Under 24	62%	11%
25–29	17%	17%
30 plus	21%	72%

Part-time students are significantly more mature than full-timers and are, as a consequence, likely to exhibit a broader range of personal characteristics as a result of their differing life experiences. Drawing on our argument that motivation and life experience are related, we will move to a relatively brief discussion of motivation for undertaking doctoral study, placing it in the context of the mature research student. Because mature students are a more heterogeneous group than the general research student community, we believe that the motivations identified for them will also cover the motivations for all students.

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[12] Cryer, 2000, p.29.
[13] Green & Powell, 2005.
[14] Higher Education Statistics Agency of the UK: www.hesa.ac.uk
[15] Green & Penrose, 2007.
[16] Source: adapted from Green & Powell (2005, p.15).

Maturity, motivation and the research student

The mature research student is very different from the mature undergraduate. For a start, there is no official definition of a mature research student, unlike the situation for undergraduates where anyone over the age of 21 on commencing their studies falls into the category. In postgraduate study the definition of 'mature' is more fluid. At the very least, we can probably say that, to be considered mature, a research student should not have followed an uninterrupted consecutive trajectory (except for occasional gap years) of A levels, first degree and (possibly) masters, before taking up doctoral study. So, maturity requires having had a significant break in educational experience, with or without having undertaken a career before or at some point during that break.

A number of very different motivations may come into play for the mature doctoral student. These will relate to life experience and also to life plans – and thus will colour what the student expects and requires from the institution. They may stem from the student themselves (and hence be internally generated) or they may stem from a source external to the student, for example an employer. Understanding, for each student, motivations and their sources can help the institution to support the student in the most appropriate and fruitful way. Motivation is one of the key areas that should be explored at the point of admission. Motivations can fall into one or more of a number of categories, the most important of which we introduce here:

- **Directly work-related** – a student may be undertaking a project related to improving the performance of their employer's organisation, which may be in the private, public or voluntary sector. They will have their costs paid and, usually, be given study time. Here, there will an emphasis on what is needed to complete the task in hand and a clear focus on the research and the thesis and the knowledge it contains as product. This is, for example, likely to be the primary motivation for someone pursuing a research degree as a Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) Associate. This also holds true for academic staff employed by universities to teach in areas where there has either not been a tradition of doctoral education or where there is significant recruitment directly from practice. This is an example of an externally generated motivation.

- **Up-skilling** – a student (or their sponsor) is interested in doctoral education as a way of enhancing their high-level skills and capabilities and making themselves more employable. Here, the focus is likely to be on the process as product, with an emphasis on high-level learning across a broad front rather than just on what is needed to successfully complete the project. This is likely to be the primary motivation for a student pursuing a professional doctorate and can be either internally or externally generated.

- **Career change** – a student wants to change the direction of their career, and quite possibly seeks to become an academic. The doctoral qualification is seen as a necessary precursor to this and the student is likely to want to focus on the completion of the qualification and to seek other training only insofar as it impacts on that end. This motivation is internally generated and a student motivated to this end is likely to be pursuing a traditional 'big book' doctorate.

- **Particular interest** – a student is investigating a topic in which they have had a long-term interest and which they would like to pursue in a more structured way with access to high-quality advice and the resources that can be found in a university. This type of student may very well have retired from the full-time workforce and is likely to be highly focused on their own project and what is required to complete it. Crucially, they may well be indifferent to the requirements and rigours of a prescribed research skills programme, which they may consider simply as a distraction from their research. Commonly, these students will undertake doctoral study in the arts, humanities and social sciences. This is a clear example of an internally generated motivation.

- **Self-development** – a student views learning as a means of self-development, as learning for its own sake. They are lifelong learners.[17] They are pursuing a doctorate because that is the next, natural, route for them to take and the topic, while of interest to them, is not the primary motivation. Rather, the act of studying is its own motivator. Students motivated primarily by the desire for self-development are highly likely to be engaged with the process of 'becoming' the researcher as well as with the thesis as product. They are likely to pursue study in the arts, humanities and social sciences and, as is the case with the previous category, this is an example of an internally generated motivation.

It should be noted that motivations may well change as a student progresses through a doctoral programme. Thus, a student who begins with a directly external work-related motivation, may find themselves drawn towards the idea of working within higher education and find that career change becomes the primary motivation. The importance of whether the motivation is internally or externally generated is that the types of support offered and the types of argument deployed at particularly difficult points in the student's doctoral journey will be more effective if they have a degree of consonance with the student's motivation. At its most crude, if a student is being sponsored by her employer, then at those moments when it seems easier to drop out of studying, reference to the employer, their expectations, and their support to date can be used to encourage the student. This type of argument is obviously not there for the student pursuing a doctorate for the purposes of self-development. Appropriate arguments to encourage such a student to continue might be along the lines of their always regretting it if they stopped now. Most readers will be able to think of appropriate examples from their experience for each of the categories.

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[17] For a discussion of the place of postgraduate education generally within conceptions of lifelong learning, see Gough (2006, esp. sec.6).

It is also important to note that we have introduced the notion of different types of doctorate to the discussion. Many part-time research students are undertaking professional doctorates. They will largely be students currently in occupations, with full-time careers and, possibly, other commitments (e.g. caring commitments) to juggle alongside those of the demands of study. Others may be taking doctorates by creative work. Many, but by no means all, of these will be of the particular interest or self-development type.

The particular elements discussed above pertaining to maturity, motivation and type of doctoral degree are more characteristic of the part-time than the full-time research student community and they will impact on the ability of the student to access support, facilities and other activities mounted by the institution. Institutions will have to take account of the nature of this impact when designing for part-time study.

Maturity brings with it different responsibilities from those typically associated with youth and there are also certain specific types of life-experiences that will happen more often to older rather than younger people. We are thinking here of those associated with having and raising children, divorce and re-marriage, the fragility and mortality of parents and other relatives, and illness of the student themselves. These responsibilities, as well as those arising from ongoing employment, will impact on the process of study according to the nature of the issues faced by the student, which, in turn, have bearing upon the type of support required. This discussion points to the need for institutions to develop more flexible patterns of learning support, and of skills programme[18] and process delivery, rather than a more rigid approach which echoes the more linear view of doctoral process and which matches the experience of the full-time rather than the part-time student.

We will argue that part-time students are frequently viewed as transient or itinerant researchers rather than as 'full' members of the research community. We will suggest that this arises not only from the physical disconnectedness of them from the institution, but also from the varied and differing motivations they may have to many full-time research students. We will argue that part-time students lack power within the university structure. Their position of relative powerlessness often means that they do not readily come to mind as being a priority for use of resources at the point when decisions for allocation are being made. For example, conference attendance can be highly instrumental in shaping and developing emerging researchers and their careers. However, while full-time research students will be expected to attend conferences (and, if funded, they may have an allocation of resources for this purpose) it is much less common for part-time students to be able to access university funding for conferences. We will return to these arguments in Parts 3 and 4.

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[18] see Gough & Denicolo, 2007.

Reflection 1

Supervisors: Think of the time you spent studying for your doctorate. What would you not be able to do were you to be doing your doctoral research now and in your current life circumstances?

Older students: What do you see younger doctoral students being able to do that you cannot because of your circumstances?

Younger students: If one of your parents were to be doing your doctorate, what barriers do you think they would face that you do not?

Reflection 2

Supervisors and students: What motivated you to do a doctorate?

Students: How has your motivation to do a doctorate impacted upon the importance you have placed on the various parts of your research student experience?

Part 2   THE DOCTORAL PROCESS

Process or cultural web?

The doctoral journey is often represented as a process. A number of different options are available in the literature[19] but, given its authoritative status, we have chosen to draw attention to the processual elements implicit in the QAA Code of Practice and these are represented in Figure 1. Although it is little commented on in the literature, we are aware that process models tend to imply a linearity to a student's experience that may not reflect the reality and messiness of that experience and have written elsewhere about this.[20] The processual approach draws on the long-established practice and critique of the rationalistic tradition in much of the writing on managing and organising process.[21] Through this the processual model aids discussion and so most universities adopt it to structure the internal management of their doctoral programmes. Following the publication of the revised QAA Code and the Agency's Special Review undertaken in 2005–6, internal processes are likely to become less diverse across the sector. The model, therefore, enables us to make recommendations and offer advice regarding ways of better supporting part-time research students under a series of headings which most universities and most students will recognise.

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[19]   QAA, 2004; Marshall & Green, 2007.

[20]   McCulloch & Stokes, 2007, pp. 44–57.

[21]   See: Luffman, G., Sanderson, S., Lea, E. & Kenny, B. (1987) *Business Policy – An Analytical Introduction.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell; Alvesson, M. & Willmott, H. (eds.) (1992) *Critical Management Studies.* London: Sage Publications; Linstead, S., Fulop, L. & Lilley, S. (2004) *Management and Organization: a critical text.* Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan; Clegg, S., Kornberger, N. & Pitsis, T. (2008) *Managing and Organizations: an introduction to theory and practice.* London: Sage Publications.

Figure 1: Linear, Representational View of Doctoral Process
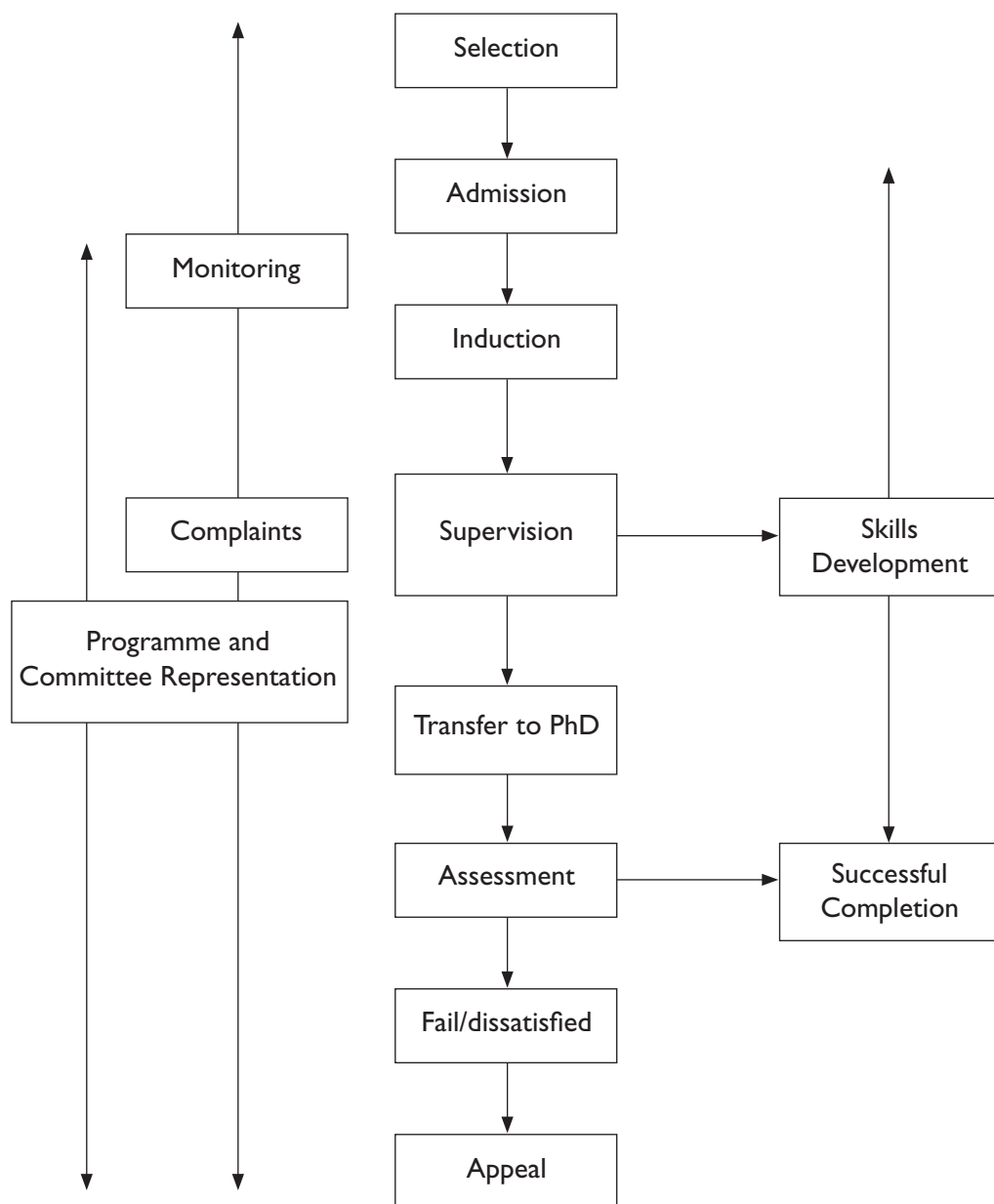
Despite our acceptance of the use of a processual model to understand the process from a broad administrative perspective, and to structure documents and discussion, we also argue and remind observers that such an approach 'normalises' the doctoral experience. In essence, it suggests that the doctorate is a linear process wherein one step follows the next in a logical and procedural sequence. This is indeed desirable, but empirical observation and personal experience suggest that the situation, particularly from the student perspective, is not always so clear-cut. Indeed, there will be considerable value to pointing up the more messy sides of doctoral process. As has been suggested earlier, this messiness is brought about by busy lives, unplanned incidents and life events. It is not unreasonable to suggest that such events are more likely to characterise and constitute the normal or usual lives of the majority of people. Linear discussions of the doctoral process do not work well at representing or capturing these aspects of doctoral lives. This less tidy, less obviously processed side of doctoral lives can be represented with the notion of 'lived experience'.[22]   Knights and Willmott note that many academic representations of organisations and their processes portray them as being super-rational in nature. This would be entirely appropriate if the individuals involved in the processes lived their lives as if they were automatons. In referring to their own work, Knights and Willmott say that:

> We refrain from treating management from the point of view of a set of theories and/or a set of techniques that examine what are assumed to be effective yet diverse ways of managing ...Instead, we seek to address managing as a vibrant, complex, challenging and even exciting human experience. Our approach is designed to counter the image of management as a branch of science or engineering, and to encourage an appreciation of managing as part and parcel of life and how it is lived.[23]

We suggest that there is value in viewing the doctoral process and the doctoral experience (which may be very different things) in a similar spirit. For all students, doctoral study may offer periods of loneliness, confusion, frustration and anger as well as happiness, sheer joy of discovery and accomplishment, and even of being praised. In essence, doctoral study is an emotional experience. We would argue that in representing the doctoral process purely as that, a process, we risk overlooking or marginalising these aspects of doctoral experience. In particular, while we have suggested that all students may at some time or another be prone to the above described emotions, it is perhaps

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[22] inter alia, Knights, D. & Willmott, H. (1999) Management Lives: *Power and Identity in Work Organizations*. London: Sage Publications.

[23] Ibid, p.ix.

more likely that those individuals engaged in the 'part-time' doctoral experience may be more likely to experience more of the difficult end of the emotional spectrum. As one part-time postgraduate student commented to one of the authors of this Guide: 'full-time job, full-time family, part-time study – one of those is too much!' In this statement it was evident that the student was directing his open frustration at the latter element, although experience suggests that it may also have been directed from time to time at those he was involved with both at work and at home. This frustration is not totally without comment in the wider literature on the doctoral process and the doctoral experience. A number of authors have dedicated space to issues such as those indicated above, although there is scope to explore this further.[24] We believe that there is scope for accounts on doctoral process, activity and life to give more emphasis to 'human' aspects of the doctorate and thus make it more obvious to institutions and many of those engaged with research students what their actual support needs are. We suggest that this can best be done by placing the messy elements of doctoral experience at the heart of the rational representation. Key moments and rites of passage (passing the first review, transferring from MPhil to doctorate, sitting the *viva*) are inevitable and important stages. However, they sit within the process as islands of administrative constancy, whilst being surrounded by a sea of messiness and non-linear experience. We sense there are greater opportunities to explore these aspects of doctoral process and we will do this by reference to a number of inter-related concepts that run throughout the entire process and which impact on the experience of all students, but particularly on those studying part-time. Drawing on Johnson, Scholes and Whittington,[25] the literature, respectively, on research degrees[26] and on power[27] and our own research into student experience, we can begin to give shape to this 'alternative topography'. The inter-related concepts are:

- Power which finds its representation organisationally through the following:
  - Stories
  - Symbols
  - Ritual and routines
  - Organisational structures
  - Control systems

and:

- Access to resources
- Funding
- Relationships
- Time, including competition for the student's time
- Socialisation into academic life.

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[24] Bishop, 1999; Delamont, Atkinson & Parry, 2004; Elphinstone & Schweitzer, 1998; Phillips & Pugh, 2000; Sternberg, 1981.

[25] Johnson, G., Scholes, K. & Whittington, R. (2006) *Exploring Corporate Strategy: Text and Cases*. London: Financial Times-Prentice Hall.

[26] See Cryer (2000), Delamont, Atkinson & Parry (2004), Green & Powell (2005) and others identified in our Further Reading and Resources section.

[27] See in particular: Lukes, S. (1974) *Power: A Radical View*. London: Macmillan; and Wrong, D. (1979) *Power: Its Forms, Bases and Uses*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

We suggest that, instead of conceptualising the doctoral experience solely in a linear fashion as is the case with the processual model, this view should be overlaid by one based on the notion of the cultural web.[28] This type of model emphasises the interdependence and interplay of the various aspects of the experience in a way that a process diagram fails to do. It allows for the messiness of which we have spoken and illustrates how the various parts overlap and impact upon the research student's experience. The model includes the elements identified previously, and is shown in diagrammatic form in Figure 2. This approach follows a long tradition in the management and other social sciences of trying to represent the reality of organisational life alongside representations of the formal structure. [29]

Figure 2: The Cultural Web of Doctoral Study

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[28] This is drawn from Johnson, Scholes and Whittington's model.
[29] See, for example, Linstead, Fulop & Lilley, op. cit.

A short excursion on power

In the literature on doctoral processes, power is a much under-explored phenomenon. There is, however, a significant literature in the social and political sciences and this suggests that power works at a number of different levels. Lukes, in a much-cited book, [30] identifies three dimensions of power:

1) The first is the direct power of one individual[31] to influence another to behave in a way which the former would prefer and the latter might not.

2) The second dimension is the power of an individual to define the agenda and thus prevent another individual from voicing their concerns, desires and interests.

3) The third dimension is systemic and relates to the power of an individual to define what counts as important or is appropriate to complain about and can, in this way, convince others to accept that they do not have anything to complain about. It operates through the process of socialisation and control over the supply of information.

Examples of each of these three dimensions of power can be identified in the student-supervisor relationship and there are also student-institution relationship issues with regard to the latter two dimensions.

The first dimension of power stems from the position of authority, or the role, held by one of the individuals in the student-supervisory relationship, that is, the supervisor. It is bolstered by the supervisor's knowledge of both the topic and the doctoral process, that is, as Wrong[32] categorises it, competent authority. The student will recognise the power of the supervisor in this regard and there is, thus, a duty on the supervisor to exercise this power (or to choose not to exercise it in certain circumstances) carefully. To state this more concisely and in very pragmatic terms, a supervisor should be very careful what he or she says to the research student because they might be believed and acted upon accordingly!

The supervisor should also recognise that with all doctoral students, the power relationship between her/him and the student might, and indeed should, change over time. Initially, the balance will be tilted towards the supervisor: at the latter stages of study, the student should have the upper hand. This reflects the development of the student as an independent researcher, and is itself reflected in the administrative fact that most

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[30] Op. cit.
[31] We talk here in terms of individuals, but Lukes couches his discussion in terms of units of social organisation. We believe that Lukes's arguments apply just as well at the individual level.
[32] Op. cit.

institutional regulations require students to get the permission of supervisors to register and/or transfer registration from MPhil to PhD, while the decision to submit the thesis for examination is the student's alone[33].

There is value also for supervisors to recognise that the part-time student may, because of a potentially less secure and regular relationship with the institution and institutional support, have a greater reliance on them than would a full-time student. There is a potential counterbalance here, however, because the part-time student may have alternative resources, in the form of their experience and/or their current situation, upon which to draw and thereby challenge the supervisor's authority. In the early stages of study, relying too much on external sources and confidants may operate to the student's disadvantage, since these are unlikely to be as knowledgeable as the supervisor about doctoral study. Again, the supervisor would do well to remain aware of this possibility with a view to exercising patience.

The second dimension of power also refers, on the individual level, to the supervisor's superior knowledge, but is also related to departmental culture. It is seen most obviously in the issue of agenda-setting regarding the student's project and the approach taken to it. The danger is that the student's choice of initial topic may be influenced more than is necessary by the supervisor's personal research agenda or by a department or research group's preferred methodological focus. This is less of an issue in the sciences where it is expected that research students will work as part of a team and will have their project determined in large part by the project leaders. In the social sciences and humanities, the tradition is very different and developing the project is an integral part of the student's doctoral studies. However, the danger of being pushed into an inappropriate topic, or of being encouraged to undertake it using an inappropriate methodology, is still there because of the power imbalance inherent in the supervisory relationship set within a departmental context.[34] The supervisor needs to remain vigilant that their position of relative power over the student does not lead to them imposing their own agenda on the student in an inappropriate way. The institution needs to find ways of identifying when this may be happening, possibly through student input into, and independent scrutiny of, the regular appraisal process which all institutions should have in place. Student unions or postgraduate associations provide another way in which a watching brief can be kept on these sorts of issues.

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[33]   The anecdotal evidence that some supervisors take *de facto* control of the final submission as well by, for example, pushing the student to submit in order to meet external deadlines, underlines our arguments.

[34]   One of the authors has seen this happen at first hand in a situation where he and another colleague took over post-viva supervision of a student in an institution other than his own to try to 'salvage' something from what had become a tragic situation. The student had registered for a research degree at a research-intensive institution and the supervisory team, in common with the department, had a focus on a relatively new methodology, which was completely inappropriate to the topic being examined. The candidate had been advised to focus a large part of the thesis on the methodology to the neglect of what was a large quantity of very high quality primary data and of more established ways of analysing and presenting it – ways which we thought were highly likely to be successful in examination. The external examiner had been scathing about the thesis and quality of supervision, and the student was finding it difficult to gain access to the supervisor, in part because of the resultant breakdown of trust. To the supervisor, this was one student amongst many and, thus, one failure would be an insignificant part of the output of their total activity. To the student, this represented 100 per cent of their academic activity.

The third dimension of power refers to the systemic aspects of the relationship between student and supervisor, department and institution. As was noted above, it relates to the definition of what counts as important and appropriate, and involves socialisation and information processes. This places an emphasis on what the student is told about their situation and how to change things should they prove to be unsatisfactory. Without information, the student cannot know what their options are. Similarly, if a student does not believe that they can do anything about an unsatisfactory experience, then they will accept whatever they are given. Finally, if a research student does not have opportunities to interact with other students, they are unlikely to discover whether their experience is typical or unusual. This exercise of power is the most insidious and damaging to a student's development: insidious because it can happen without any of the actors being aware of it; damaging because, in the long run, learning cannot take place without awareness.

Part-time, rather than full-time, research students are more likely to fall foul of the exercise of this third dimension of power. This is because, in the early stages of study, they are the most likely to have a greater reliance on the supervisor, whose main focus is likely to be the topic of research, rather than the broader departmental research context, and because they are the types of student least likely to have regular contact with other students.

Induction, interaction and information

Three areas are of particular importance in ensuring that this third dimension of power does not become a source of difficulty for part-time research students – *induction, interaction and information.*

Induction

It is vital to have some form of induction with which part-time students can engage. It is through induction that they are socialised into institutional and departmental culture. Full-time students face fewer problems with this given that they are 'in residence'. Part-timers, as has been noted, have other demands on their time. More are likely to be able to attend if they are given sufficient advance notice so that they can plan and, if necessary, rearrange their lives outside the university. It may be helpful to regard induction as an ongoing process throughout the first year of study. Rather than expecting the student to be introduced to everything they will need to know throughout their period of study in the first week, it is better to develop a staged programme of induction (with dates planned and notified to students before they officially start their programmes of study). Also ensure that these 'induction' elements take place alongside a variety of other events which involve social/informal activities, but which are focused on the experience of being a research student. This will also help address the second element, interaction.

Interaction

There is nothing like interacting with others in the same situation as oneself to begin to understand whether an experience is typical or atypical, or to formulate strategies and actions with which to address issues which are common to the group. These should involve students from different departments and different cognate areas, since the comparison of one student's experience with that of another will soon begin to point up areas of good and bad practice. Good practice is something an institution will want to encourage and share, bad practice is something it will want to eradicate. If bad practice is identified, it is important that there is some way of channelling the outcome of the discussion back to someone in a sufficiently senior position of authority who can tackle the situation. The same person should also be able to organise the dissemination of good practice as it is identified. This may be a Dean of a Graduate School or their equivalent, if that person has had the opportunity to spend a sufficient amount of time with students to build up their trust. This is probably easier in institutions with fewer research students than in those with more. The person who probably has a better overview and better relationship with the body of research students is the Graduate Studies Administrator[35] (the role carries different titles across the sector). In addition to being closer to the students, this person also has the advantage of not being as closely identified with the institution's 'power structure'. If meetings are organised by the students and formally run by them (even if the formal arrangements including refreshments, are made and paid for by the university), then so much the better. University staff can be invited to attend as the students wish, distancing the activity even further from the institutional power structure.

However, it is important to ensure that, because they will find it easier to attend, the voices of full-timers do not drown out those of the part-timers. This is a problem with many research student associations – they are *de facto* full-time research student associations. Institutions must take steps to engage part-time research students with the activities intended to promote interaction.

Information

Sir Francis Bacon wrote that 'knowledge is power' and, given that information is a particular type of knowledge transmitted (although not necessarily received), it follows that information is power. Certainly, withholding important information from an individual is a way of enhancing control over them and, if an individual fails to avail themselves of an opportunity to access information, or if access is too difficult or costly, they will place themselves at a disadvantage to others.

A good induction delivered through a number of routes and regular interaction (which can today be through supported IT-based platforms) are two ways of overcoming the problem of information supply and access.

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[35] This position may be faculty-based in institutions with larger numbers of research students.

Reflection 4

Many will be familiar with the section in Douglas Adams's *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, when the captain of the Vogon space ship charged with demolishing Earth to make way for a hyperspatial express route announces that destruction will take place in two minutes. Upon observing the ensuing panic, the exasperated Vogon captain tells the crowd:

> There's no point in acting all surprised about it. All the planning charts and demolition orders have been on display in your local planning department on Alpha Centauri for fifty of your Earth years, so you've had plenty of time to lodge any formal complaint and it's far too late to start making a fuss about it now.

One of the Earthlings takes issue with this, only to be told:

> What do you mean you've never been to Alpha Centauri? For heaven's sake mankind, it's only four light years away you know. I'm sorry, but if you can't be bothered to take an interest in local affairs that's your own lookout.

And, with that, Earth is destroyed in the name of progress.

Supervisors and students (working in separate groups): Thinking of your own institution's doctoral programmes, discuss and draw up a list of information that you think should have been provided to you earlier than it was and in a better format and (possibly) in a different place to that which it was.

After each group has done this, compare and discuss your lists.

The outworking of power

Bound up with the issues of power, and induction, interaction and information, are a variety of organisational characteristics. These are:

- Organisational structures
- Control systems
- Stories
- Symbols
- Ritual and routines.

Organisational structures and control systems

As we have seen in the previous discussion, organisational structures and control systems have both formal and informal aspects. Structures and control systems may appear to be neutral, that is, having no differential impact on different groups of students. This is not necessarily the case. If there are, for example, deadlines which require the submission of hard copies of documents signed by all involved (e.g. student, supervisor and Head of Department), it will be much easier for the full-time student in residence on campus to obtain these signatures than it will be for a part-timer who is dependent on the vagaries of staff members' post trays and administrative support staff to prioritise the document. Institutions could usefully scrutinise their processes and involve part-time students in this scrutiny, so that their perspective on the process is taken into account. We certainly encourage Departments to assign a member of administrative staff as the 'Research Student Administrator'. Part of this person's role should be to ensure that signatures are obtained in a timely manner for research students who cannot be present on campus during the day to do it themselves.

The administrative structure itself may be inimicable to part-time study. By and large, administrators seldom work outside the 8a.m.–6p.m. time slot. Their days are much more structured than are those of academics, and there are, for very good reasons, much stronger demarcations in place between their 'work life' and their 'non-work life'. For many academics, the situation is different, with 'work' and 'life' becoming interwoven and, in some cases very hard to distinguish one from the other. This can mean that, while academic support and advice is available outside normal working hours (the period when many part-time students can access that support), administrative support is less likely to be similarly available. This can also be true for other forms of support, including that relating to personal matters and also learning, through, for example, counselling and library services. Institutions could, again, usefully audit the accessibility to part-time students of administrative, social and learning support services. Again, this should be done in association with the part-time students (or their representatives) to ensure that the assumptions of staff and full-time students do not obscure issues relevant to part-timers.

Stories, symbols, and ritual and routines

These are part of the informal side of the organisation and constitute an important dimension of how people understand it. They are learned by being part of the organisation, that is, individuals are socialised into them. This generally happens through both formal and informal contact with the organisation's culture and requires that the individual be in contact with that culture for prolonged periods of time. This is self-evidently an area where the full-time student will have an advantage over the part-timer.

All organisations have stories which circulate year-on-year about culturally-defining events or people. Gabriel's notion of 'proto-stories' characterises many of these well:

> their plot is quite rudimentary, their characters are sketchy, and they hardly seem to warrant repetition or embellishment. They do, however, display the two features of the tragic story: they grow out of misfortune experienced ...and they seek not always successfully to apportion blame and responsibility. [36]

He elaborates these through a series of poetic modes and associated protagonists: Comic (deserving victim, fool), Tragic (non-deserving victim), Epic (hero) and Romantic (love object). Additional modes he points up, which may be particularly recognised by those working in academic contexts are: Humour (survivor, humourist, wizard, ironist), Cock-up (hero-fixer, wizard), Tragi-comic (victim turned unheroic hero) and Epic-comic (unwitting hero, prankster, trickster).

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[36] Gabriel, Y. (2000) *Storytelling in Organizations: Facts, Fictions and Fantasies.* Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.73.

Examples in academic settings of some of these will be the 'do you remember that student who...' and the 'can you believe that anyone would be so stupid as to assume that?' tales. These stories define the ways in which research students are supposed to behave within that setting, and have the status of fables that allow people to learn without going through the experience themselves. Organisations also have aspects that are symbolically important. Perhaps it is the invitation to the Head of Department's office for tea which signifies that the student has been identified as a 'rising star', or perhaps it is the informal approach to a research student to take on the role of department committee representative. These can be very important in terms of marking a student out. Departments also have ways of doing things which may not accord exactly with the written procedures. These deviations are one of the ways that organisational units make things work for them. In addition to the rituals and routines related to these 'formal' processes and procedures, there may also be rituals or routines associated with individual staff. For example, knowing that the department's research student support tutor can be found in the university bar or at the local cricket club every Tuesday evening is a very important piece of information. Students in possession of this information, and especially those who are also able to take advantage of it, are culturally more powerful than those who are not.

The importance of this informal socialisation process is that research students bring expectations and presumptions to their doctoral studies. Where these are incorrect or exaggerated, it is important that they be changed. The most important way this happens is through ongoing contact with the larger university community, and especially the research student community and the department, and through the provision of information, including that made available through official and unofficial newsletters. In addition to the recommendations made earlier about information provision and about providing enhanced opportunities for part-time students to interact with their full-time colleagues, institutions, departments and students should be encouraged, and given the necessary support, to develop such newsletters themselves.

One of the focuses of this activity should be on uncovering the lived experience of research student life.[37] It is by doing this that the stories, symbols, ritual and routines that pertain to the organisational culture can be demystified, unpacked and made relevant to the individual's circumstances.

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[37] See McCulloch & Stokes, 2007.

Part 4   OTHER ISSUES

Having dealt with power and its various dimensions, the discussion now moves to other substantive issues of particular importance to part-time research students.

Access to resources

Because of their different patterns of attendance on campus and their different responsibilities outwith the university, part-time students are likely to have different needs from full-timers regarding access to resources. The most obvious campus-based resource required by research students is that provided by Learning Services, or what used to be called the Library. Access to what were previously print-based resources in the form of books or journals has been revolutionised by the Internet. Whereas a decade ago, a good research library might have had 3–4,000 journals on its shelves, today it is not unusual to find non-research intensive institutions with two or three times that number. Additionally, these resources are available to students from home or via any PC linked to the Internet. Also available are resources which have been put together by academics and academic support staff and which are published on the WWW at no cost to the user.[38]

There are, however, occasions when research students have to gain physical access to the library building and there are occasions when significant amounts of time have to be spent working there. Few part-time students have space dedicated to them for quiet working and for leaving their notes, books, etc., lying about for a good length of time: the home kitchen or dining table may be required for other things! By contrast, it has become normal practice for full-time students to have this type of facility made available to them, frequently in their own Department or in the Graduate School. The library often provides this facility or, at least, offers a base for this type of working but, in order for it to do so, it must be accessible when students want to use it. This means more than recognising that research students will want year-round access as opposed to the 'term-based' access needed by most undergraduates. It means recognising that, because of the other demands on their time, part-time students will need access to libraries for relatively long blocks of time outside 'normal' working hours.

The same argument applies also to other campus-based facilities including catering and, if it is offered at all, childcare. Institutions could usefully review the extent of library opening hours, including those outside undergraduate term-time and at weekends which is when many part-time students find the time to study, and ensure that the appropriate facilities are available to part-time students at times when they need to access them. They could also usefully discuss with representatives of the part-time student community the extent to which other student support services meet their needs.

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[38] A good example of this is the excellent library of research methodology resources put together by Mary Sue Stephenson of the School of Library, Archival and Information Studies at the University of British Columbia. It can be found at: http://www.slais.ubc.ca/resources/research_methods/

The other resource to which students require access throughout the year is the supervisory team. This ongoing access throughout the year is more crucial to part-time students than to full-time students. Part-timers are likely to be less well integrated into the departmental and institutional research community and, therefore, have fewer alternative sources of advice and academic support to which to turn. Supervisors, and other members of departments in which part-time students are based, could usefully discuss, with students and each other, the issue of access to supervisory and research advice and support across the entire year, and give consideration to how best this can be provided, recognising the full range of demands on individuals who are supervisors.

> *Reflection 6*
>
> **Part-time students**: Identify the resources and provision to which you need access on a regular basis. Identify also the regularity with which you need access.
>
> Audit the extent to which your institution provides access to these in relation to your need.

Funding

By definition, research students undertake research and, as HEIs, the Government and Research Councils have recently come to understand, research takes resources. Full-time students, particularly those funded by the Research Councils or institutional bursary schemes, are more likely than part-timers to have all the costs of undertaking their research covered by their funders. (This may also be true for some of those part-time students whose study is supported by their employer, but these individuals constitute the fortunate minority.)

The costs directly associated with research in the humanities and social sciences (the areas where part-time students are most numerous) include visits to archives and the costs of fieldwork. There are, however, also costs associated with attending events which contribute to the development of generic skills, including attendance at academic conferences. This latter type of attendance is particularly important to students intending to pursue an academic career because of the networking and the career progression opportunities conferences can help promote.[39]

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[39] As a personal aside, McCulloch got his first full-time academic post as a direct consequence of attending and presenting a paper at an academic conference. The crucial, accidental, meeting took place at the conference dinner. The cost of attending the conference was, at the time, approximately two weeks earnings and he is eternally grateful to the Department of Humanities at the former Huddersfield Polytechnic, where he was working as a fractional Research Assistant, for meeting half the cost. Without that contribution, it is unlikely you would be reading this Guide today. Whether that would a good thing is, of course, left to the reader to decide!

For some part-time students, the reasons they are part-time are financial, that is, they cannot afford to study full-time. Further, for some students, actual attendance at events (both those internal to and also those outwith their home institution) in itself incurs costs, such as those for childcare or care for dependent relatives.

This has implications for institutions and for supervisors. At the recruitment phase, and this will need to be explored during the interview, the existence of these costs and their likely scale should be identified to the students. This goes well beyond telling potential students about the costs associated with 'the expected total fees, including extra charges (such as 'bench' fees) which will be levied, and any other expenditure on practical items relevant to the individual student' as is required by the QAA Code of Practice. Students need to be made aware of the costs of particular empirical research, as well as seemingly 'minor' costs, such as those associated with photocopying (unless the institution makes that available at no cost to all students). Finally, it needs to be made very clear to the student that, even in the humanities and social sciences, the nature of the topic and the methodological approach to be taken will have a significant impact on the final cost.

In advising part-time research students about the development of their projects, supervisors will want to ensure that they spell out to students the costs inherent in each of the options available. Thus, a project involving a case study of a single organisation based in the same town or city as the student will be much less expensive than one based at a distance or one involving a number of geographically dispersed organisations.

Reflection 7

Supervisors: Taking as an example one of your current or past research students, calculate the costs of undertaking a particular empirical project, including the costs of any time involved.

Part-time students: Identify and attempt to quantify any costs that you have had to meet during your time as a research student that you didn't anticipate when you embarked on your project.

Both: Discuss, together, any issues that might arise from this.

Given that part-time research students face potentially significant costs in carrying out their projects, and can frequently face significant financial difficulties in finding the necessary resources, institutions might wish to consider what these costs are to different types of students, and establish funds into which research students can bid to meet the costs of both fieldwork and conference attendance.

Relationships

The primary relationship in the doctoral process is without doubt that between the student and the supervisor. However, expectations of that relationship will vary from student to student and also from supervisor to supervisor. Indeed, differences in expectation may form the basis of a significant proportion of the issues that arise regarding the relationship, which is why expectations need to be discussed amongst students and supervisors and why expectations should be one of the topics discussed during induction.

Some students will arrive at university expecting their supervisor to be their friend. Some supervisors may also expect their students to fulfil that role. Both may be disappointed and it is generally wise to retain a degree of distance between student and supervisor, at least in the first instance until both agree on the ground rules of their relationship. If a supervisor and a student find that they 'get on' and then develop a deeper friendship than would normally be the case between that supervisor and her/his students, great care must be taken that this friendship is not misunderstood by the supervisor's other students and, thus, cause jealousies or tensions. This is particularly important where the supervisory team and research students work together as a research group.

However, the relationship with the supervisor will not be the only relationship in any research student's life and these other relationships must be seen as potentially competing. There may be relationships with:

- other research students;
- other staff at the place of study;
- spouse, partner or significant other;
- other family members;
- employer and other people at the student's place of work;
- friends outwith the university setting; and
- those with whom the research brings the student into contact (e.g. respondents and key informers).

Those relationships which lie outside the area of higher education are frequently marginalised, or even discounted, by the commentaries on the doctoral process and, yet, given their characteristics and the nature of part-time study, the part-time student is likely to have more of these competing relationships (and particularly those outwith the university setting) than is the full-time student.

The relationships other than the one with the supervisor carry both positive and potentially negative implications with which the supervisor must deal. On the positive side, students with an extensive set of relationships will find that they have a general support mechanism already in place and this is particularly the case for part-time students who will rarely have moved to live near their place of study and, hence, will remain rooted in their existing

communities. On the other hand, these pre-existing relationships place demands on the student, demands which will require time to meet and which, if not met, may well cause emotional tensions of one sort or another. There are many anecdotal accounts of doctoral students divorcing during their time studying.

One other positive element that mature part-time research students may bring with them is the increased likelihood that, because of their greater life-experience, they will be more at ease in developing relationships. This may also be reflected in the extent to which they are prepared to take on the task of managing the student-supervisor engagements and of challenging the supervisor. As was noted earlier, if this challenge comes from an informed position, all to the good. If, on the other hand, it comes from an ill-informed position, then problems may arise. The whole area of relationships recalls our discussion in Part 3 of the place of power in the doctoral process, i.e. power relations between the student and the supervisor. Finding the correct balance is something each supervisor and student will want to achieve. From the student perspective, interaction with other students and discussion at induction will help with managing relationships, balancing the demands of the academic work with the demands of life outside.

Reflection 8

Students (working in small groups of no more than three): Identify the relationships which you brought with you and hoped to maintain when you began your doctoral studies.

Discuss the way in which those relationships have changed as a result of your studies. Have these changes been positive or negative?

Feed back the results of the discussion to the larger group and have a summary drawn up.

Supervisors: Have the summary drawn up by the students completely anonymised and presented to a group of supervisors to discuss the implications for their supervisory practice.

The centrality of the student-supervisor relationship places a heavy burden upon it and this is recognised by the emphasis placed on it in the QAA Code of Practice. Despite this, it is relatively under-examined in the literature, particularly in relation to its power dimensions, and we would encourage higher education researchers to address this.

Time

Almost all research students begin their studies by thinking that having between three and five years to complete a single piece of research seems a little generous and, convinced they will have written up early, then wonder how they can fill in the final months or year before their minimum registration period is complete. Most end up articulating the view, rather, that an additional year would have been useful and wondering how they fitted all they did do into such a short time.

Time is the research student's most precious resource and constitutes one of the major differences between studying full-time and studying part-time for a doctoral degree. We have addressed various aspects of this in the previous discussion (see, for example, Reflection 1 which can be used here as an exercise focussing on time) and do not wish to repeat ourselves, but it is worth adding the following.

While the full-time student can dedicate significant periods of time each day to their research, the part-time student also has to find time for other activities such as employed or unwaged work. Additionally, if our earlier argument that part-time students are more likely to have additional competition for their time than full-time students is accepted, this means that time will be experienced very differently by different students. Given these differences, it is worth considering time not as a fixed resource but rather as something more elastic, as something which is constructed by the individual experiencing it.

The supervisor, and all those involved in induction and student support activities (including other students), can play an important role in shaping the way in which research students construct their experience of time and how they respond to the conflicting demands which all students, but especially part-timers, experience. In this way, time available can be maximised and its usage optimised.

Reflection 9

Time is possibly the greatest enemy of the research student. Anything a doctoral student can do to use time more efficiently and prevent waste of time will help them manage their studies better. The following activity might help.

Supervisors: What are the major time-wasting pursuits that research students engage in? (Think here of your own doctoral studies as well as research students you have known and supervised.) Draw up a list.

Students: What are the major 'time-wasters' that you engage in? Draw up a list.

Both: Compare your lists, discuss the similarities and differences and draw up a composite list. For each item on your composite list, identify one or more strategies that could be helpful to students wishing to minimise their 'time-wasting' activities.

Finally, on the issue of time, students need to be made aware of the utility of the administrative process that will run alongside their studies (registration, annual review, transfer) as a mechanism for helping to structure their time. Review will be at least annual and most institutions will have a guide time at which students should be in position to seek transfer. These points will allow students to gauge their progress against some sort of norm. It should, however, be pointed out to students (and to supervisors and administrators) that these guidelines and the administrative structure with which they are associated are intended to act as a support to the student rather than a hindrance or a straitjacket. If students are having a negative experience of these, then either the processes are badly designed or they are not being explained and discussed properly during induction and student support sessions.

Socialisation into academic life

The earlier discussion on the importance of a student's interaction with the larger research student, departmental, university or extra-university disciplinary communities emphasised its importance in respect of the research process. It also plays a very important role with regard to the socialisation of a research student into the life of academia – in essence, how does a research student become an academic? [40]

Tinkler and Jackson[41] refer to the socialisation function of the doctoral examination as do Rugg and Petre[42], but we would prefer to think of this function being performed by the entire process of 'becoming' a PhD (this usage can be contrasted with the phrase 'getting a PhD'). If socialisation is a process which is 'learned' through interaction, then our previous comments about the relative disadvantage faced by part-timers regarding interaction will apply also to socialisation. Institutions and supervisors will need to ensure that they recognise that part-time research students face this disadvantage and that they take steps to overcome it.

Many of the issues involved in recognising and overcoming this disadvantage have already been discussed and space (and regard for the reader) does not allow us to reiterate them. However, it is worth reminding readers that socialisation and power are well recognised bedfellows in sociology and that in the educational arena, where equity is an important guiding concept, attempting to redress potential inequalities is an imperative, not an option. Failure in effecting socialisation affects life-chances and we owe it to all our research students to give them the best possible opportunities.

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[40] It is important to recognise that, while much recent policy has emphasised the importance of providing research students with the skills for work outwith higher education, universities are the employer of overall around half of all doctoral graduates (proportions depending upon discipline). Socialisation as an academic is, therefore, an important part of the doctoral process, with the possible, but only possible, exception of those students who explicitly state at the outset that they have no interest in taking that employment route.

[41] Tinkler & Jackson, 2004.

[42] Rugg & Petre, 2004..

CONCLUSION

In developing this Guide, we have sought to offer a fresh perspective on doctoral study by focusing the reader's (and thus, we hope, university and other policy-makers') attention on the part-time student as the 'normal' student. While recognising the usefulness in administrative and planning terms of a linear, rationalistic modelling of the doctoral process, we have sought to complement this dominant representation of doctoral study through the development of the notion of the 'doctoral cultural web'. This has provided a means through which it becomes possible to envisage issues for doctoral students in an alternative way, a way which we believe has particular relevance for individuals studying part-time, but one which we believe also provides a way of improving the experience of all research students. In doing this, we have sought to generate a richer appreciation of the nature of the UK research student community. We have argued that part-time research students are more likely to be 'mature' and to be less well catered for by existing institutional arrangements and provision and we suggest a number of recommendations, initiatives and changes which, were they to be undertaken in order better to accommodate part-time student needs, would also serve better the needs of full-time research students. It is with this in mind that we offer the following recommendations.

We conclude this Guide with a series of recommendations which stem from our earlier discussion. Some of these are included explicitly in that discussion. Others are implicit within that discussion, but were not drawn out fully for reasons of space. We hope that readers and their institutions will treat the Guide as a whole and utilise both the text and these recommendations as sources for the development of ways in which the experiences of part-time research students can be improved. As we have stated a number of times, we believe that by doing this, the experience of all research students will be enhanced.

In making these recommendations, we have taken the headings used in the QAA Code of Practice (slightly modified) as the basis for our structure. We have done this because this is something with which all institutions, many supervisors and, hopefully, an increasing number of research students will be familiar.

Recommendations to institutions

Institutional arrangements

We recommend that institutions should:

a) re-examine policies, regulations and procedures related to research students from the perspective of the part-time research student, in order to assess the extent to which they meet the needs of this group of students;

b) examine the extent to which the library, learning and other support services, and social space used by research students, are as accessible to part-time students as they are to full-time students and make appropriate adjustments to opening hours across the entire year, or make alternative provision as appropriate;

c) consider providing space (through either committees, research student bodies or especially organised events) for institutional debates on the role of power in structuring the different experiences of full- and part-time research students.

The research environment

We recommend that institutions should:

a) audit the extent to which the institutional research environment, and the activities it supports, is accessible to part-time research students, and make appropriate changes in the light of that audit;

b) examine, as a matter of course, proposed changes to any aspect of the research environment from the perspective of the part-time research student, in order to ensure that there will be no resultant inequities arising vis-à-vis full-time students;

c) seek to ensure that part-time research students have similar opportunities to full-time students for interaction with other students and staff;

d) seek to ensure that part-time research students have access to the same formal and informal information as do full-time students;

e) ensure provision of a quiet, secure and dedicated base for part-time research students in which they can work uninterrupted at times of their choosing;

f) consider designating departmental 'Research Student Administrators', part of whose role would be to support part-time research students to meet administrative requirements and deadlines.

Selection, admission and induction of students

We recommend that institutions should:

a) explore, at the point of admission, an applicant's motivation for undertaking doctoral-level study;

b) advise applicants for part-time study of the cost implications of their choice of topic and methodology;

c) re-conceptualise induction as a process taking place throughout the first year of doctoral study;

d) ensure that the events and activities that comprise the induction process are as accessible to part-time research students as they are to the full-timers;

e) combine induction events (and related activities) with social events, in order to maximise the utility of both to part-time research students.

Supervision

We recommend that institutions should:

a) provide training for supervisors and others involved in the provision of research degrees in the part played by power in the student-supervisor-institution relationships;

b) provide training for supervisors on issues of research student motivation and ways in which this might relate to the design and delivery of both generic skills provision and also general student support.

Progress and review arrangements

We recommend that institutions should:

a) emphasise to students, supervisors and administrators involved with the progression and review of research students that progress and review arrangements and the administrative structure with which they are associated are intended to act as a support to the student rather than as a hindrance or a straitjacket.

Development of research and other skills

We recommend that institutions should:

a) ensure that part-time research students have broadly equivalent opportunities to access both research and generic skills programmes and activities, and regularly audit the extent to which both full- and part-time students are satisfied with their levels of access;

b) seek to ensure that part-time research students have the same access to support as do full-time students to enable them to attend and present at appropriate conferences.

Feedback mechanisms, student representations, complaints and appeals

We recommend that institutions should:

a) ensure that the representation from the research student body on formal committees of the institution does represent the interests of the part-timers as well as those of full-timers;

b) ensure that the part-time research student voice is represented within all areas of the institution to the same extent as is that of the full-time student voice in the arenas and processes through which student representation takes place.

Assessment

We recommend that institutions should:

a) ensure that part-time research students have the same opportunities to prepare for and rehearse the *viva-voce* examination as do full-time students, and audit the extent to which they take up these opportunities in comparison with their full-time counterparts.

Access to resources

We recommend that institutions should:

a) consider what the costs of carrying out research are to students with different circumstances, studying in different disciplinary areas and using different methodologies, and establish funds into which research students can bid to meet the costs of both fieldwork and conference attendance according to their individual needs;

b) give consideration to the full range of resources to which a research student needs access in order to 'become a PhD' (see page 24), audit the extent to which part-time students have access to those resources, and make appropriate arrangements as a result of that audit.

Recommendations for policy makers

Finally, we recognise that institutional practices reflect the policy environment in which they have developed and operate. For HEIs, these are the Government, the Research Councils and those organisations funding individual students (employers and other sponsors). Accordingly, we would recommend that:

a) **Government, research councils** and **other funding bodies** should recognise the significant contribution made by part-time research students to the UK's research base and increase the funding available to support them through, *inter alia*, the provision of additional part-time bursaries;

b) employers and sponsors should ensure that, wherever possible, they take account of the educational and support needs of part-time research students when finalising support packages.

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