

# DOCTORAL SUPERVISION GUIDE



# The GO-GN Guide to Doctoral Supervision

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## Introduction

GO-GN is a network of support for doctoral and postdoctoral researchers who work in the field of open education. This guide is for both supervisors and students. We explore the multifaceted role of the supervisor and provide practical advice for fostering a productive and supportive relationship. We will consider the responsibilities, challenges, and benefits of supervisory relationships; discuss setting clear expectations and offer guidance while promoting independence; and explore how to support the professional development of doctoral candidates.

The doctoral journey is often a long and challenging process, requiring a deep commitment to a specific field of study. It is often a period of intense learning, opportunity, exploration, and discovery, but it can also be marked by uncertainty, stress, challenges and shifts in perspective. As such, the role of the doctoral supervisor extends beyond merely overseeing research; it may involve providing emotional and practical support, fostering an environment of trust and collaboration, helping students navigate the inevitable obstacles they will encounter, and (hopefully) celebrating success.

Effective supervision ensures that doctoral students not only complete their projects but also grow intellectually, professionally, and personally throughout their journey. A supervisor is thus not just a manager of research progress but also a mentor who helps students develop critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and a deeper understanding of their field. At the same time, every supervision relationship is unique, just as every doctoral candidate and supervisor is one of a kind. Good practice is important, but there are also interpersonal chemistries to consider.

Doctoral supervision is a learning experience for everyone involved. This Guide is mainly written for doctoral students, but is also relevant to supervisors interested in good practice. We will examine the research supervision process and provide advice on making it more effective. We'll often be speaking in general terms about the processes as they do vary in different countries or educational traditions. Supervisors have of course themselves been through the experience of being supervised, but their experiences are also one of a kind. Sometimes many years will have passed since the completion of their own doctorate. Will what worked for them work for somebody else?

## The Doctoral Supervision Process

The concept of doctoral degrees dates back to the mediaeval period, with the first universities established in Europe during the 12th and 13th centuries. Initially, doctoral degrees were awarded in fields like theology, law, and medicine, and they represented the highest level of scholarly achievement. Unlike today's structured programmes, early doctoral candidates were often accomplished scholars who were invited to defend their knowledge in front of a panel of experts, a process that would evolve into the thesis defence.

During this time, mentorship was an informal arrangement between a master and a student. The term "doctor," derived from the Latin word *docere* meaning "teacher," reflected the role of the senior scholar in guiding students through their studies. This one-to-one mentorship laid the foundation for the doctoral supervision model, where an experienced academic mentors a student over an extended period, helping to shape their intellectual development and mastery of a subject.

As higher education became more formalised, the process of doctoral supervision took on a more structured form. The German "Humboldtian" model, introduced by Wilhelm von Humboldt in the early 19th century, emphasised the integration of teaching and research, promoting independent inquiry (Anderson, 2020). This model became the basis for modern research-oriented PhD programmes, which encourage students to contribute original knowledge to their fields. The Humboldtian ideal of academic freedom gave doctoral students autonomy in their research but under the guidance of what is essentially the modern-day supervisor.

By the late 19th century, doctoral programs expanded beyond the traditional fields of theology, law, and medicine to include a wide range of scientific, social, and humanistic disciplines. With this expansion, the need for more formal supervision processes became apparent. Universities began to introduce regulations around the duration of PhD programmes, the structure of the thesis, and the formal responsibilities of supervisors. The 20th century saw further evolution in the supervision process, as universities adapted to the growing numbers of doctoral candidates and the increasing complexity of research. In response, many universities introduced co-supervisors, departmental oversight, and structured progress reviews to ensure students were receiving adequate guidance and feedback throughout their studies. Modern research often involves collaboration across multiple disciplines or institutions, a significant shift from the single-subject mentorship of the past. Many students now have co-supervisors from different fields, which reflects the increasingly interdisciplinary nature of research. Some research projects may also require students to engage with external partners, such as industry or other research institutions, further expanding the traditional model.

While many elements of doctoral supervision remain rooted in tradition, such as the mentor-apprentice relationship and the emphasis on original research, the process has evolved to become more structured, collaborative, and interdisciplinary.

In today's world, doctoral supervision retains a balance between tradition and the practical needs of modern academia (which can sometimes result in tensions or ambiguities). The doctoral journey has long been seen as an apprenticeship model, where a student learns under the close guidance of a more experienced scholar. In the traditional model, the supervisor played a hands-on role in guiding the student through every aspect of the research process. This mentor-apprentice relationship, while still important today, has evolved to allow for more student autonomy and independence. While the historical traditions of mentorship and intellectual freedom remain central to the process, the modern supervision process is less structured. However, there are still (many!) rules and regulations to follow, and every doctoral student needs to familiarise themselves with what's expected at their own institution. We can describe the process of doctoral supervision sequentially and in general terms (although it should be noted that practices do vary by country and tradition).

- Firstly, doctoral students need to find and secure a place on a doctoral programme. This might happen without any interaction with a potential supervisor (e.g. you could be assigned a supervisor by a committee) but it's also common to approach a potential supervisor beforehand for a discussion (especially if you are already a postgraduate student in this institution). This can be a good way to get a better understanding of what is involved in doctoral study, and to explore expectations. Sometimes a combination of processes is involved, such as an interview panel which includes a potential supervisor, or submitting a proposal directly to a supervisor or their department as a first step. Each institution has its own preferred process.
- Postgraduate students often move to doctoral programmes in the same institution, and one benefit here is that there can be some familiarity with institutional processes and an existing relationship with a potential supervisor. However, doctoral study does not assume this.
- Once the programme is started, the process typically begins with the development of a research proposal, where the student, in consultation with their supervisor, defines the research question and outlines the methodology. Sometimes this proposal is reviewed by a separate committee or another academic to assess progress. A research proposal usually describes a gap in the research, highlights a relevant research question and proposes a method to answer it (Denscombe, 2012).

- It's common for there to be regular scheduled meetings between supervisor and supervisee, especially in the earlier stages. However, the frequency and length of these meetings is a matter for negotiation. Universities usually offer some guidance about expectations here. Many universities now require formal progress reviews, which help ensure that students stay on track and receive the necessary feedback to progress.
- The first year of doctoral study may involve a review of literature, refining the research question, developing a method, getting ethical approval and perhaps even collecting data, but these timelines vary a lot by subject. Supervisors are expected to assist with these tasks, offering guidance but not necessarily directly telling their students how to proceed.
- In some countries, the first year(s) of a doctorate can instead take the form of taught classes which must be passed in order to progress to the independent research component. (This is more common in professional doctorates.) In these cases, you might not have a supervisor until later on in the programme. (Some institutions that adopt this approach treat taught classes as a pre-doctoral studies programme, where students are still free to find supervisors.)
- Research data comes in many forms, and can be collected in many different ways. Supervisors are unlikely to directly participate in the collection of data for a doctoral project. However, they might suggest possible strategies for data collection and/or review progress.
- The writing of the thesis, guided by regular and timely supervisor feedback, remains one of the most significant phases of the doctoral process, and one where supervisors are often involved in providing detailed feedback on manuscripts. This is a part of the process that requires careful judgement since critical feedback can be demotivating for a researcher, since it might be taken personally even if it is intended to be supportive.
- The tradition of defending the thesis in front of an academic panel remains largely unchanged, though the format may vary by institution and country. In some places this is a public event, while in others it might take place behind closed doors with just a handful of academics. Supervisors have a responsibility to prepare their students for this process, managing expectations, and possibly offering a mock *viva* examination.
- As part of the viva process (the oral defence), external examiners (a relatively modern addition to the process) provide an independent assessment of the

student's work, ensuring that the research meets broader academic standards. Many supervisors are also examiners for other institutions, and usually you cannot act as an examiner until you have supervised at least one doctoral student to the completion and submission of their thesis. Examiners have been through the process as both as a student and as a supervisor. Most modern thesis defences include at least one internal and external examiner.

- In many cases, the supervision process extends beyond the PhD, as students maintain a professional or collegiate relationship with their supervisors, seeking career advice and collaboration opportunities. This perhaps reflects the historical tradition of academic mentorship, which often spans an entire career. However, it's also pretty common for people to part ways when the doctoral programme ends, and this would be the natural closure. Either way, once the formal supervision relationship concludes there's a different power dynamic. Any ongoing relationship is going to evolve from the supervisor/supervisee dynamic.



This overview is useful for thinking about the process in abstract, but can't really convey the intellectual and emotional complexity of what happens during the doctoral journey. This idealised presentation also looks like a simple progression from start to finish, when what typically happens may be quite different...



## Interactions with a Research Supervisor

While the historical traditions of mentorship and intellectual freedom remain central to the doctoral qualification process, modern supervision is much more structured and formalised. The kinds of interactions and behaviours that are expected within a supervisory relationship are usually described in detail in the relevant university regulations, and it's essential to familiarise yourself with these whether you are a supervisor or the one being supervised. Doctoral research usually happens over a period of at least three years. The process can take longer than this by design - for example, where a student is part-time, or the doctoral programme includes several years of taught courses - or because of unforeseen delays, like periods of sickness or intermission.

In the early phase of the doctorate, the interactions between student and supervisor should focus on establishing a strong foundation for the relationship and clarifying the research direction. Clear communication is particularly important at this stage to ensure mutual understanding of goals, expectations, and responsibilities.

Interactions between student and supervisor often include regular (face-to-face, virtual or both depending on mode of study) meetings to brainstorm ideas, outline research objectives, and develop the proposal. It's also appropriate to have a discussion about mutual expectations, boundaries, and the preferred styles of working and providing feedback. Usually there will be guidelines from the university about the minimum expected number of meetings and these will align with the reporting system that allows the university to track the progress a doctoral student makes.

There can be quite a lot of variation in the frequency and style of supervision meetings. Some people need more support and guidance than others (and that's OK!). Usually, a supervisor sets the tone regarding the frequency and style of meetings, though it should be guided by the level of support needed. It's pretty common for there to be more regular meetings in the earlier stages, when more guidance may be needed. One thing to appreciate here is that supervisors expect students to take the initiative with their own research. This can be more demanding than it might first seem! Often, a doctoral research project might be the first time that a student is in this position, and it's typically also the first experience of a research degree (as opposed to a taught degree). Some people are ready to do this right away, but others miss the structure of a taught degree like a Master's. Doctorates are unlike other degrees, and present fresh challenges to even the most confident students.



As the research proposal is refined, the supervisor plays a key role in guiding the student's exploration of the existing body of research. Feedback is often centred on helping the student critically engage with the literature, ensuring that they develop a comprehensive and relevant theoretical framework. Supervisors may also help to synthesise different sources of knowledge and recommend a course of action. The design of the research methodology is often a collaborative effort, where the supervisor advises on practical and theoretical approaches to data collection and analysis. A supervisor might also help the candidate locate expertise on design and analysis if they felt some areas were outside their specialisms. Interactions during this phase are oriented toward ensuring that the research design is both feasible, relevant to the field, and academically robust. They will also usually guide the student through the process of ethical review where their detailed proposal is assessed by a specialised panel (sometimes referred to as an ethics committee or institutional review board) who assess the proposal for ethical processes and issues and review the mitigations that have been put in place.

As students engage in primary (empirical) research (whether conducting experiments, interviews, or fieldwork) they may encounter unexpected challenges or ethical issues. The supervisor can act as a problem-solver, offering advice on how to navigate these obstacles and adjust the research plan if needed. (For instance, developing soft (interpersonal and communication) skills to help build rapport with interview participants; or advice on using specialist software for research or manuscript preparation.)

In the data collection phase, regular but often less frequent meetings might be expected. This can be structured around the student reporting progress and any difficulties. These sessions focus on ensuring that the data collection aligns with the research plan, as well as discussing interim findings. Supervisors may also provide emotional support, as this phase can be isolating or stressful. While supervisors remain available to offer guidance, they increasingly encourage students to take ownership of their research. This phase emphasises the development of the student's ability to work independently, make decisions, and take responsibility for the direction of their project. Supervisors may offer more general guidance, allowing the student to lead discussions and raise specific issues or acting as a 'critical friend'

when needed. Some people might interpret this as a supervisor losing interest in them or their work. However, this shift to a more hands-off approach is an important step toward fostering intellectual autonomy.

As the student writes their thesis, they submit chapters or sections to their supervisor(s) for feedback. The supervisor's role here is to critique the work, focusing on structure, argumentation, clarity, and adherence to academic standards. Meetings during this phase may become more frequent to facilitate the revision process, but this is often determined by the rate at which the student is producing writing for review. This process is iterative, with drafts being submitted, reviewed, and revised multiple times to ensure coherence throughout the work. Supervisors also help the student prioritise sections that need more attention and offer guidance on managing their time and work. Students are often very keen to receive timely feedback, but may overlook that supervisors usually have many other duties as part of their role. It's important that feedback be regular and timely, but it's up to those involved to agree and communicate expectations.

In the final stages of thesis writing, supervisors usually review the full draft to ensure it meets all institutional guidelines and academic standards. These interactions often involve line-by-line edits, feedback on the overall argument, and advice on responding to feedback from other reviewers or external readers. Providing detailed feedback like this is one of the most valuable contributions a supervisor can make to a research project, and mirrors the peer-review process that research usually goes through before publication as well as the examination process. However, this can be a painful or destabilising process for the student who has put their heart and soul into a particular piece of writing. It's not really in the interest of the student for the supervisor to treat their work anything other than honestly, since the examiners are unlikely to afford similar indulgences. This indicates the importance of having a relationship of mutual respect and being able to accept feedback without taking it as a personal attack. The interrogation of a candidate's work throughout the process of supervision is aimed squarely at improving the work and maximising the chances of a successful defence. The supervisor has the student's best interest in mind and it's obviously better to receive critical feedback during the study than at the end. However, supervisors should appreciate that students also need to develop a sense of progress and positive feedback is also essential. Supervisors should strive to improve their feedback literacy (Carless, Jung & Li, 2023).

As the manuscript reaches finalisation, students can expect intensive feedback on the final draft, with a focus on clarity, coherence, and polish. It is not expected that a supervisor would contribute to writing or copyediting, though they might provide advice on this or show which sections require redevelopment.

The final formal activities a supervisor might help with concerns the *viva voce* (oral defence of the thesis). This is where the final manuscript is examined by examiners, usually a combination of academics from inside and outside the university where the student is based. The supervisor might help the student prepare for the thesis defence by conducting or organising mock viva sessions, offering advice on how to respond to examiners' questions, and identifying potential areas that examiners might focus on. The supervisor may suggest strategies for handling difficult questions and tries to ensure that the student is confident and well-prepared. (It should be noted though that this kind of support can be voluntary: not everyone is entitled to a mock viva and it depends on what is set out in the relevant university regulations.) Either way, the supervisor is likely to discuss the approach taken to the viva and make attempts to anticipate where challenges might come from during the examination and suggest appropriate mediation strategies. Here there might also be a need for greater emotional support.

Interactions with a supervisor could continue after the examination. For instance, if corrections are requested by the examiners the supervisor might assist in interpreting these to offer guidance, or review a new manuscript before it is submitted. Even after the final version is filed, a relationship between a doctoral candidate and their supervisor(s) might continue. For instance, many supervisors continue to mentor their former students by offering advice on publishing their thesis, applying for postdoctoral positions or academic jobs, and developing a long-term research agenda. Some also collaborate or co-publish with their former students. This transition from student-supervisor to professional colleagues is a common aspect of the postdoctoral relationship. However, this is not universal and technically is not something that should be expected of a supervisor, since their job is essentially done. A good ongoing relationship is the ideal, but if a supervisor (or candidate) does not wish to (or cannot) pursue this then they are not necessarily in error. (By this point, everyone involved should have a pretty good idea of the kinds of expectations made of the ongoing relationship.)

In summary, the interactions between students and supervisors evolve throughout the doctoral journey, shifting from more structured, frequent guidance during the early stages to a more hands-off approach as the student gains independence. Supervisors play multiple roles throughout this process. They might act as intellectual guide, problem-solver, editor, mentor or (unofficial) counsellor, tailoring their interactions to meet the changing needs of the student at each stage. As we will note several times in this Guide, however, every version of this process is different in reality, and every doctoral candidate presents a unique set of circumstances. The nature and frequency of interactions can vary a lot, and it's important to appreciate that the important thing is whether the relationship is effective.

## Matching with a Supervisor

*"From the beginning ensure that you have a copacetic supervisor, whose priority is your success in the programme." Rory McGreal*

Finding the right supervisor is one of the most critical decisions a prospective doctoral student will make, and determines a pathway for the research project and their own professional development. When approaching a supervisor, students should consider several key factors, starting with the supervisor's expertise and alignment with their research interests. A supervisor who has strong knowledge and experience in the student's specific area of study can provide valuable insights, guidance, and access to relevant academic networks.



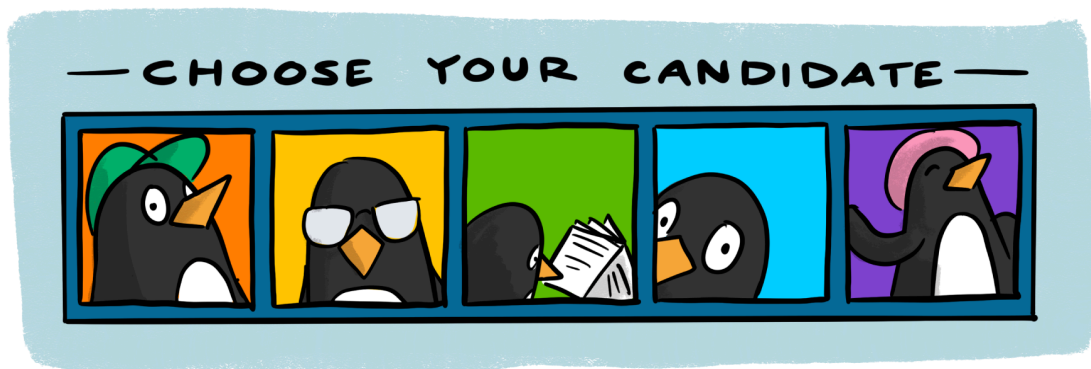
Understanding our supervisor and their work is important for supervision. Doctoral supervisors come from a wide range of diverse backgrounds, reflecting the breadth of experience and perspectives in academia. Some supervisors may have traditional academic paths, progressing through undergraduate and graduate degrees directly into research and teaching roles, while others may have non-linear careers that include industry experience, public sector work, or interdisciplinary research. These varied backgrounds allow supervisors to bring different skill sets, approaches, and methods to their mentorship. Supervisors with interdisciplinary expertise can help students broaden the scope of their research, fostering innovation at the intersection of fields. Supervisors from different cultural backgrounds may introduce students to alternative research paradigms and traditions, expanding their worldview and academic perspective (Showunmi et al., 2024). They may also bring

valuable insights into how to navigate global academic networks or how research is conducted in different regions of the world.

Association with a high-profile “celebrity” professor can be an attractive prospect, especially if they are well established as a supervisor. However, it’s important to note that such academics might manage several roles, or have many other research students vying for their attention. There can be advantages to working with someone who has a lower profile but is in a better position to support your project.

Academic fit is only part of the equation: students and supervisors should also explore their working styles and communication habits to ensure they align compatibly. Having an upfront conversation about expectations at the start of a doctorate is a good idea. Trying to align personal styles and academic interests can be challenging, since it is only through working together in the context of the supervisory relationship that interpersonal chemistry becomes apparent. Some students thrive under supervisors who take a hands-on, highly involved approach, offering frequent feedback and close monitoring of progress, while others may prefer a supervisor who gives them more independence and allows for greater autonomy. Supervisors may also have some preferences about working practices (though they may not openly express them). Some supervisors might like to get heavily involved, while others might be more aloof, seeing their role as primarily to do what it says in the regulations to the letter and leave the student to work the rest out more independently. (This suits some students more than others.)

When considering a potential supervisor, it’s also important to consider personal and professional circumstances, particularly for students from diverse backgrounds or those with specific needs. For example, international students may require a supervisor with experience in supporting students through the complexities of adapting to new academic cultures and environments. Likewise, part-time students, those with family or work commitments, or those with accessibility requirements may benefit from supervisors who are flexible and understanding of non-traditional study paths. Prospective students might also consider the supervisor’s past record in supporting student well-being, their ability to provide mentorship beyond academic issues, and their approach to inclusivity. Finding a supervisor who understands and accommodates a student’s unique needs can make the doctoral journey far more rewarding and sustainable.



For both supervisor(s) and supervisee, entering into a doctoral supervision involves a lot of work and commitment. It should be noted that no-one has an automatic right to be supervised by anyone of their choosing. Supervisors are not obliged to agree to supervise any particular students, and have a right to assess the alignment of the student's project and goals with their own interests. Although some may have a minimum expectation for supervising students as part of their work plan, supervision is often a chosen arrangement on both sides. In this, we perhaps see one of the remnants of the mediaeval system of patronage in doctoral education. It's in everyone's interest for things to work, and everyone (presumably) enters into the supervisory relationship in good faith with mutual respect. It should be noted, though, that different institutions have different regulations and processes regarding how supervisors are assigned or changed, and what is expected of the relationship. There may also be a contractual agreement that forms part of the registration of the doctoral student, or the employment of the supervisor(s). Even where entering into a supervisory relationship is voluntary, there may be strict rules in places which determine how the relationship is conducted and under what circumstances it might be concluded.



## Alternative Pathways: PhD or Professional Doctorate?

Strong supervisory relationships and well-structured doctoral programs are essential for high quality doctoral education. Just as individuals bring diverse goals and motivations for pursuing a doctorate, applicants have different options to consider when undertaking a doctoral degree. In Education, individuals can undertake an EdD or a PhD, in Nursing there are DN and PhD programs, and in Psychology one can undertake a PsyD or PhD. These are known as professional doctorates.

Professional doctorates explicitly focus on the integration of theory and practice and on continuing professional development, while PhD programs tend to prioritise theoretical and conceptual knowledge generation and contributions in the discipline. Distinctions between the two doctoral pathways are often reflected in programme objectives, research methods, delivery, and focus of the dissertation. For example, the Education Doctorate (EdD) in the Werklund School of Education, emphasises the development of research leaders who inform change and innovation in diverse educational contexts (Friesen & Jacobsen, 2021). Informed by the Carnegie Initiative on the Doctorate (CID) (Walker, et al., 2008), this EdD focuses on developing scholars of the profession, while the PhD program design focuses on developing scholars of the discipline. EdD programs tend to emphasise participatory research methodologies like action research and design-based research approaches, while PhD programs might cover a broader range of qualitative and quantitative methods along a continuum of educational research. For many graduates, their EdD dissertation aims to inform practice and generate new knowledge relevant to the profession, while PhD dissertations tend to focus on advancing disciplinary knowledge.

Professional education doctorate (EdD) programs tend to focus on cultivating scholars who can critically analyse practical challenges, develop and implement solutions, and assess innovations and take leadership across diverse organisational settings (Friesen & Jacobsen, 2021; Walker et al., 2008). Graduates of an EdD or PhD may have a different career focus, from academic to professional pathways. Many EdD students are already working full time in a range of careers, from institutional leadership to post-secondary careers, and in industry, while they complete their doctoral program. PhD programmes by contrast tend to require students to commit to a full-time residency and a program of research. Graduates from EdD and PhD programs can find career pathways in both academic and professional educational settings.

From a supervision point of view, the relationship with a supervisor is largely consistent across the doctorate. However, there are some differences in competencies which might need to be taken into account. For a PhD, students typically look for supervisors with a strong academic record in their field of interest. They seek supervisors who can help them navigate the complexities of theoretical research, who are active in the academic community, and who can offer support in publishing and building an academic career. The supervisor's specific research expertise, academic reputation, and ability to provide feedback on theoretical models are central. For a professional doctorate, students might prioritise a supervisor with both academic credentials and experience with professional development in the relevant field. Supervisors in professional doctorates focus more on the application of theory to practice. They help students integrate research with their professional experience, often guiding them through projects that have direct implications for their workplace or industry. PhD students may need more guidance in developing independent research, while professional doctorate students may benefit from supervisors who can help them balance academic rigour with professional application.

## Understanding Supervision Styles

The role of a supervisor is multifaceted, encompassing a range of responsibilities that extend beyond merely overseeing the student's research. Supervisors serve as intellectual guides, professional mentors, and sometimes even project managers, shaping not only the student's academic output but also their personal and professional development. The balance between these roles can shift depending on the student's needs, the stage of the doctoral process, and the nature of the research project. Understanding the different aspects of the supervisor's role can help both students and supervisors navigate their relationship more effectively and contribute to a more productive doctoral journey.

Here we highlight some ways of thinking about these aspects.  
(They aren't grounded in specific research data.)



## The Model: Setting Professional and Academic Standards

*"I consciously model my supervision practice after my own supervisors' exceptional practice, as well as model after experienced colleagues who have become my mentors as a professor."* Michele Jacobsen

This role highlights the importance of leading by example and modelling the intellectual and ethical standards that students will carry forward into their own careers. As a model, the supervisor serves as a professional role model, demonstrating the behaviours, attitudes, and academic standards that the student should aspire to in their own career. This involves embodying qualities such as academic integrity, ethical research practices, effective communication, and professionalism in teaching and research. Through their own actions and achievements, supervisors can inspire students to cultivate similar traits, helping them to navigate the broader academic world. By observing how their supervisor handles challenges, networks with peers, or approaches scholarly work, students can gain insight into what it means to be a successful researcher and academic. In some cases, doctorates are connected with specific research projects, allowing supervisor(s) and supervisees to collaborate directly.

## The Mentor: Fostering Intellectual and Professional Growth

*"I get a mentor, someone who I respect immensely, great feedback and advice, humour, support, encouragement, a role model who isn't afraid to learn new things."* Jessica O'Reilly

As a mentor, the supervisor's primary responsibility is to nurture the student's development as a researcher. This involves guiding the student through the complexities of their research field, providing critical feedback on their work, and encouraging them to engage with broader academic debates. Mentorship is not limited to academic content; it also involves the supervisor offering advice on how to navigate the often-unwritten rules of academia, such as how to publish papers, present at conferences, or build a professional network. The mentor role often involves a long-term view, helping the student prepare for their post-doctoral career by offering insights into job markets, grant applications, and opportunities for postdoctoral research. Effective mentors inspire their students to think critically and independently, gradually stepping back as the student becomes more confident and capable in their scholarly work.

## The Manager: Structuring the Process

*“My supervisor went out of his way to advocate for me when needed, including when navigating bureaucratic hurdles. When another member of my supervisory committee was retiring (and so would no longer meet the department criteria for committee membership), he drew on his relationships to secure another supervisory committee member, with the shared understanding that the retiring faculty member would continue to perform these duties.”* Rajiv Jhangiani

It's crucial to understand that doctoral students remain responsible for the overall management of their research. However, the supervisor also contributes to project management, providing the structure necessary to guide a student through the complex and often overwhelming process of completing a doctorate. This managerial role might include setting deadlines, ensuring that the student's work is progressing on schedule, and helping them prioritise tasks, particularly as the research project evolves. Supervisors must be aware of institutional regulations, timelines for submission, and the bureaucratic aspects of the process, such as ethics approvals and thesis submission protocols. Managing this process requires institutional knowledge, organisational skills and a practised understanding of the academic milestones that students need to reach.

## The Muse: Sparking Creativity and Original Thought

*“A research supervisor should truly be a motivator that pulls out the best idea from the student's mixed thoughts and dreams.”* Judith Pete

In their most inspirational role, the supervisor can act as a muse, encouraging the student to think creatively and explore new ideas that push the boundaries of their field. While the doctoral process often demands rigour and discipline, it also requires moments of intellectual risk-taking and creative problem-solving. A supervisor acting as a muse may stimulate the student's curiosity by challenging assumptions, suggesting alternative methodologies, or introducing interdisciplinary perspectives. This role often involves encouraging the student to step outside their comfort zone, engage with bold questions, and contribute original insights to the academic community through research discourse. By fostering a sense of intellectual freedom and encouraging creative thinking, supervisors help students develop their unique scholarly voice, a key component of producing original research that makes a meaningful impact.

## The Mediator: Navigating Conflicts and Challenges

*"About 50% of doctoral supervision is subject knowledge, and 50% is emotional support so be prepared to do the latter."* Anonymous Contribution

As a mediator, the supervisor helps students navigate challenges, conflicts, and setbacks that inevitably arise during the doctoral process. These might involve disagreements over research direction, issues with co-supervisors or collaborators, or even personal and emotional difficulties. The supervisor's role as a mediator includes providing support during moments of academic frustration or self-doubt, helping to resolve conflicts diplomatically, and maintaining a positive, productive environment. This role requires emotional intelligence and the ability to listen, empathise, and offer solutions that are both practical and respectful of the student's needs and academic integrity. Supervisors who act as effective mediators foster a supportive environment where students feel comfortable discussing obstacles without fear of judgement, helping them stay focused on their goals.

## The Motivator: Encouraging Persistence and Resilience

*"My supervisor was always willing and available to talk with me whenever I had problems related to my dissertation, always provided me with sound advice and provided me with prompt feedback on every draft I submitted (more than 10). He also helped me think outside the box and constantly motivated me to continue the process during some of the very difficult periods of the dissertation writing process."* Viviane Vladimirschi

As a motivator, the supervisor plays a crucial role in keeping the student engaged, motivated, and resilient throughout the long and often vexatious doctoral journey. Research can be isolating and discouraging, particularly when progress is slow, or challenges seem insurmountable. In this role, the supervisor provides encouragement, celebrates milestones, and helps the student maintain momentum when motivation wanes. By offering positive reinforcement and reminding the student of their achievements and potential, supervisors help cultivate a sense of confidence and perseverance. An effective motivator also understands when to push the student to meet deadlines and when to offer reassurance and support during periods of stress. This role is particularly vital during the final stages of writing or when setbacks occur in research, helping students remain focused and determined to complete their doctorate.



A successful supervisor may balance these various aspects depending on the stage of the doctorate and the individual needs of the student. Early in the process, the managerial role may be more prominent, as students need guidance in developing their research plans and structuring their work. As the student gains confidence and independence, the mentor and muse roles perhaps become more critical, allowing the student to take ownership of their research and intellectual development.

However, everyone is different! Good supervision is partly about being able to adapt supervision style to what is needed, although this is sometimes easier said than done. Some supervisors might excel at one aspect and struggle with another. Sometimes it can be helpful to think consciously about the 'mode' or register of any given interaction to try and harmonise expectations, since well-meant advice might be misinterpreted. For instance, focusing on minor issues of scholarship or a detailed discussion of research methods might provoke anxiety when a student is in need of reassurance and empathy. Striking the right tone allows supervisors to offer both intellectual mentorship and emotional support, while still maintaining the authority and objectivity necessary to offer guidance.



## Setting Expectations

From the outset, open and transparent communication is vital for building a strong working relationship. Both the student and supervisor(s) should set expectations about how often they will meet, how feedback will be delivered, and what kinds of support the supervisor can realistically offer. These expectations may be formalised in a supervision agreement, which can help prevent misunderstandings later on. Alternatively, such agreements may form part of the contract between the student and the university. Students should not hesitate to ask for clarification on timelines, deadlines, or any institutional requirements that may affect their work. It is likewise important for supervisors to be clear about their availability and preferred communication channels, whether email, scheduled meetings, or more informal methods of check-in.



The practicalities of how and when meetings take place is just one aspect of setting expectations of the supervisory relationship. The supervisor and supervisee need to become familiar with each other's personal style and way of working. Students may be keen to understand their supervisor's own process for research. This can be helpful for some, but it's not always ideal to try and model someone else's practice since a doctoral degree is about developing your own skills and theoretical perspective. Trying to emulate an academic whose work you respect is an understandable approach, but the ultimate goal is intellectual independence.

To help with aligning expectations, the University of Edinburgh has supplied a tool for supervisors and their students which could be used at a first meeting. The grid uses Likert scales to measure sentiment regarding what different responsibilities and working styles each might have. You can download the tool from [https://www.docs.hss.ed.ac.uk/iad/Researchers/Supervisors/Supervisor\\_and\\_Student\\_Expectations\\_Questionnaire.docx](https://www.docs.hss.ed.ac.uk/iad/Researchers/Supervisors/Supervisor_and_Student_Expectations_Questionnaire.docx) and a similar tool can be found at [https://www.ithinkwell.com.au/index.php?route=product/product/freedownload&download\\_id=37](https://www.ithinkwell.com.au/index.php?route=product/product/freedownload&download_id=37). (Both are based on Moses, 1985)

At the University of Calgary in Canada, there are two mandatory checklists that have been developed to help graduate students to stay on track with their supervisor (<https://grad.ucalgary.ca/current-students/thesis-based-students/supervision/checklist>). First, there is a checklist of expectations for graduate students and supervisors including authorship, conferences and publications, and wellness, and a second checklist on intellectual property, to be completed in the first two months of a student working with their supervisor.

A similar tool is provided by Ryerson University in Canada. Their Student-Supervisor Discussion Checklist ([https://www.torontomu.ca/content/dam/documentarymedia/PDFS/student\\_supervisor\\_checklist\\_2021.pdf](https://www.torontomu.ca/content/dam/documentarymedia/PDFS/student_supervisor_checklist_2021.pdf)) sets out a range of expectations regarding interactions, the research process, relevant regulations and professional development (as well as conflict resolution).

Knight (2024) collates several tools relevant to managing expectations and practical aspects (e.g., meeting frequency, drafting schedules, etc.) at <https://sjgknight.com/finding-knowledge/2024-01-PhD-expectation-setting>.

## Exploring Practice

Polkinghorne et al. (2023) recently surveyed the presentation of best practice in doctoral supervision. While the review is focused mainly on the UK, the practice elements identified are generally applicable. They argue that there are some key elements that can determine success, as shown in the following table.

Practice Element	Focus Areas
Selecting the right doctoral student	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carefully considering which students are accepted</li> <li>• Matching supervision interests</li> <li>• Identifying those with potential to succeed</li> <li>• Appropriate motivation(s)</li> </ul>
Appropriate supervisory relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clearly defined expectations</li> <li>• Established roles and responsibilities</li> <li>• Communication skills</li> </ul>
Effective power dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critical friendship</li> <li>• Comfort when challenged</li> <li>• Supervision/support becomes less intensive over time</li> </ul>
Research culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cohesive and inclusive culture</li> <li>• Socialisation / informal learning opportunities</li> <li>• Positive regard</li> <li>• Mindfulness</li> </ul>
Protecting mental health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personalised support</li> <li>• Foregrounding unique challenges of doctoral students</li> <li>• Reporting mental health issues</li> </ul>
Supervision process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide specialist knowledge</li> <li>• Pastoral care</li> <li>• Monitoring and compliance</li> <li>• Understand and implement policy</li> <li>• Adapt to changing needs</li> </ul>
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supervision skills</li> <li>• Interpersonal skills</li> <li>• Emotional regulation</li> <li>• Administrative requirements</li> <li>• Support for new supervisors</li> <li>• Ongoing professional development</li> </ul>
Mentoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop relationships of honesty and trust</li> <li>• Appropriate learning environment</li> </ul>
Progress towards completion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluating research</li> <li>• Personal support</li> <li>• Examination support (mock viva)</li> <li>• Co-publication</li> <li>• Career advice</li> </ul>

Table 1. Supervision success elements (adapted from Polkinghorne et al., 2023)

The UK Council for Graduate Education (2024a) provides a framework for good practice in doctoral supervision which similarly covers the different stages of the process. The full site is well worth engaging with as there is a detailed overview of good practice and many embedded references. The site offers some examples of the kinds of activities supervisors might be involved with at different points of the doctorate.

#### Recruitment and selection

- Publicising the areas of research within which they personally can offer supervision
- Participating in campaigns to recruit candidates from groups that are under-represented in doctoral education
- Assessing whether applicants are likely to make the transition to independent researchers
- Assessing whether applicants' proposed research projects are realisable and whether they have (or can acquire) the knowledge and skills to complete them
- Interviewing applicants
- Making a final decision and giving feedback

#### Supervisory relationships with candidates

- Acknowledging the increased diversity of the domestic candidate population and recognizing its implications for supervision
- Acknowledging the increased diversity of the international candidate population and recognizing its implications for supervision
- Discussing and agreeing expectations with candidates at the start of their studies
- Being aware of supervisory styles and their relationship to student needs and being able to align them at the start of doctoral studies
- Being aware of how student needs change over the course of doctoral studies and being able to maintain calibration of supervisory styles
- Being aware of institutional policies and procedures in the event of the breakdown of a supervisory relationship and of sources of support for both parties

#### Supervisory relationships with co-supervisors

- Clarifying roles with co-supervisors and candidates at the start of the candidacy
- Clarifying expectations of the project with co-supervisors and the candidate
- Regularly reviewing relations between supervisors and with candidates during the course of the candidacy

### Supporting candidates' research projects

- Discussing conceptions and misconceptions of research itself with candidates
- Looking at key 'threshold' concepts in research
- Considering issues of academic integrity, intellectual property rights, and co-publication
- Advising on a choice of topic
- Advising on theory, methodology and methods
- Advising on a research proposal and plan
- Advising on gaining ethical approval
- Advising on skills development in relation to the project
- Advising on issues arising in the course of the research

### Encouraging candidates to write and giving appropriate feedback

- Encouraging candidates to write from the start of their studies
- Supporting the development of academic writing
- Giving timely, constructive, and actionable feedback

### Keeping the research on track and monitoring progress

- Supporting and motivating candidates to progress in their studies
- Using supervisions to monitor progress
- Participating in formal progression events

### Supporting candidates' personal, professional and career development

- Supporting candidates with personal issues, including those relating to well-being and mental health
- Being good role models in terms of work-life balance
- Inducting candidates into disciplinary networks and activities
- Supporting their development as teachers
- Informing them about academic careers
- Supporting them to prepare for non-academic careers

### Supporting candidates through completion and final examination

- Working with candidates to finalise their submissions
- Advising them on whether the thesis is likely to pass on the basis of your experience as an examiner
- Roles in appointing examiners
- Understanding of relevant policies and procedures and outcomes
- Supporting candidates to prepare for the viva
- Supporting candidates after the viva

Supporting candidates to disseminate their research

- Setting expectations at the start of the candidacy
- Modelling the process of publication
- Encouraging candidates to publish as they go
- Co-publishing
- Establishing a post-doctoral publications plan

Reflecting upon and enhancing practice

- Using an appropriate mix of methods for evaluating supervision
- Undertaking initial and continuing professional development
- Familiarity with the scholarly literature
- Where appropriate, contributing to the professional development of other supervisors

The full framework contains lots of references for each section as well as prompts for self-reflection. The UK Council for Graduate Education (2024a) offers two forms of professional recognition for doctoral supervision (associate supervisor and full supervisor with the main difference being whether one has supervised to the successful conclusion of a doctorate). The [framework](#) is intended to support people applying for these awards and is highly structured with several templates and tools designed to facilitate self-reflection.

One thing to note here is that there is no one form of effective practice. Masek & Alias (2020) found that definitions of effective supervision can be diverse, and supervision is not a linear process. Both supervisor and supervisee need to engage with relevant guidance and frameworks to optimise their working relationship.

## Developing Scholarly Identity

Through interactions with supervisors, engagement with academic networks, and participation in scholarly activities like publishing and presenting, students begin to internalise the norms, values, and practices of their discipline. This socialisation process is crucial for developing an academic identity, as it positions students within a broader intellectual community, fostering a sense of belonging and purpose in their scholarly work. From a theoretical perspective like Wenger (1998) identity is formed through participation in a community where knowledge is shared and constructed collectively. In the context of doctoral supervision, the student gradually becomes a member of the academic community as they contribute to the production of knowledge.

For the time that one is working on a doctorate, one's academic identity may be in a state of flux. Different theoretical perspectives or research methods can suddenly seem very relevant to a research project. Rarely does anyone have so much time to explore different approaches to research as in the context of a doctorate.

Considering different ways to approach a research project is crucial, but care needs to be taken to avoid an endless cycle of adopting new theoretical perspectives.

Kandiko & Kinchin (2013) used conceptual mapping to explore how student and supervisor perspectives change over time. The visualisations in their paper illustrate how conceptions of the process did not vary that much over the course of a doctorate. Student maps did not become more like the supervisors maps over time. Supervisor maps tended to be complex and systematic with multi-dimensional areas of focus.

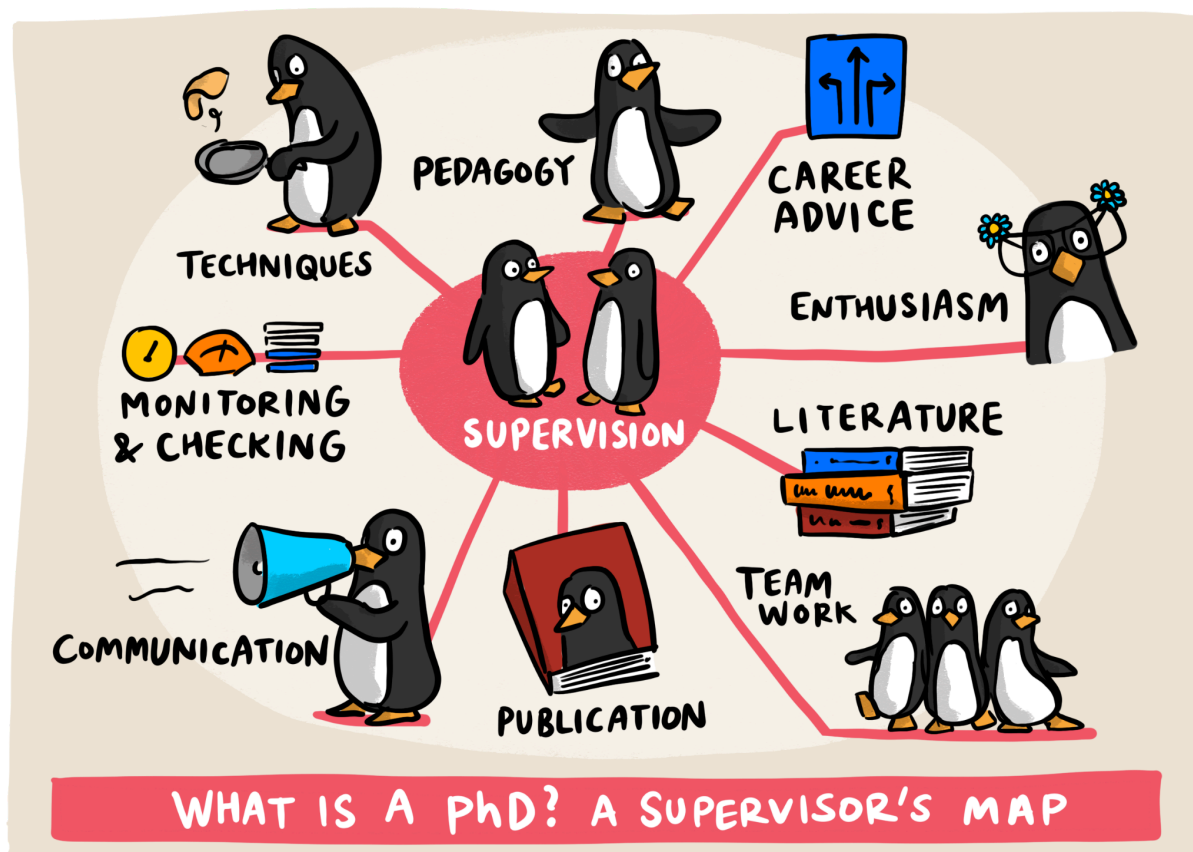


Fig. 1. What is a PhD? A supervisor's map... (Based on Kandiko & Kinchin, 2013)



Student maps tended to be more product-oriented and interpret the doctoral manuscript as a task requiring delivery rather than a pedagogical or developmental process oriented around themselves. Kandiko & Kinchin hypothesise that completing the doctorate is the beginning of the kind of professional reflection that truly develops understanding of the research process.

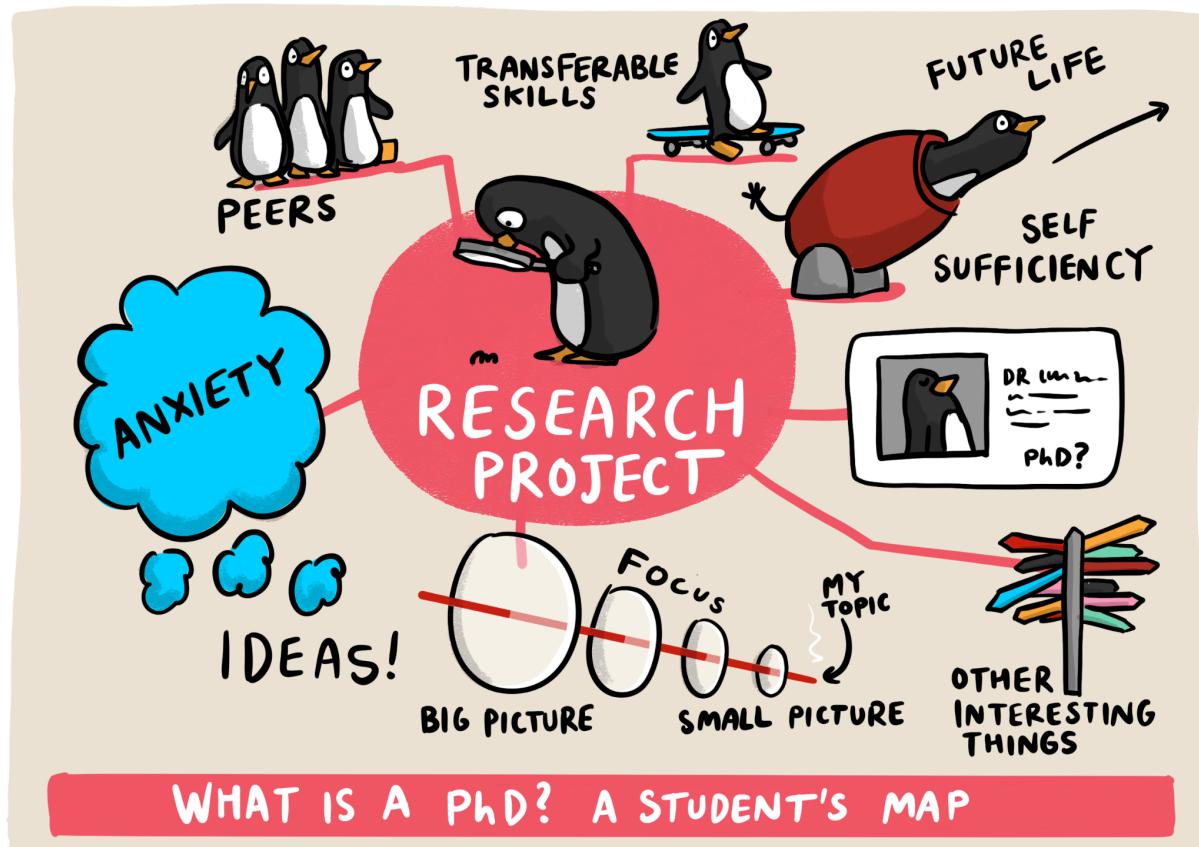


Fig. 2. What is a PhD? A student's map... (Based on Kandiko & Kinchin, 2013)

It's understandable to expect that, by the time one completes a doctorate, a strong sense of academic identity might have arrived with a concurrent preference for particular theories or research methods. However, the development of academic identity started before the doctorate and will continue afterwards. There might not be a 'Eureka' moment where everything falls into place or the path ahead suddenly becomes clear. Academic identity is an ongoing process of formation and reflection (Tülübaşı & Göktürk, 2023).

## Supporting Academic Writing

Doctoral studies are fundamentally a writing-based pedagogy, where the process of research and intellectual development is inextricably tied to the production of written work. At the core of the doctoral journey is the dissertation or thesis, a substantial piece of original research that not only represents the culmination of years of study but also serves as the primary means through which a student demonstrates their scholarly expertise. Unlike other forms of pedagogy that may rely heavily on classroom learning or practical applications, doctoral supervision revolves around guiding students through the complex process of developing, drafting, and refining their written work. Writing in doctoral studies is not simply about reporting findings but also involves articulating ideas, engaging with existing literature, constructing coherent arguments, and contributing new knowledge to the field. Through this writing-based framework, students learn to think critically and to communicate their research in ways that meet the standards of rigour for their academic discipline.

Moreover, the iterative nature of writing in doctoral programs highlights its pedagogical importance. The process of drafting, receiving feedback, and revising fosters a deep level of engagement with the subject matter and hones the student's ability to clarify and refine their thoughts. Supervisors play a crucial role in this pedagogical model, providing feedback that pushes students to sharpen their arguments, improve the organisation of their writing, and integrate theoretical frameworks more effectively. The act of writing serves as a space for intellectual exploration, where students can test ideas, challenge assumptions, and develop their academic voice. Scholarly voices are increasingly expected to modulate through different forms: traditional (publishing articles, presenting papers at conferences, or composing research proposals) and non-traditional (blogs, social media, magazines, etc).

The writing support that supervisors offer to doctoral students can be divided into two broad areas: guidance on the general act of writing and discipline-specific expertise. On the one hand, supervisors help students develop essential writing skills, such as structuring arguments, ensuring clarity and coherence, and crafting compelling narratives. This support involves addressing common writing issues like organisation, flow, and grammatical accuracy, which are critical to producing readable and effective academic work. On the other hand, much of the writing support is rooted in discipline-specific expertise, where supervisors guide students on how to engage with the specific conventions, theories, and debates of their field. This could involve advising on the use of discipline-specific language, proper citation of key sources, or the integration of methodologies and theoretical frameworks into the writing. In this way, doctoral supervision encompasses both general writing instruction and specialised academic mentorship, ensuring that the

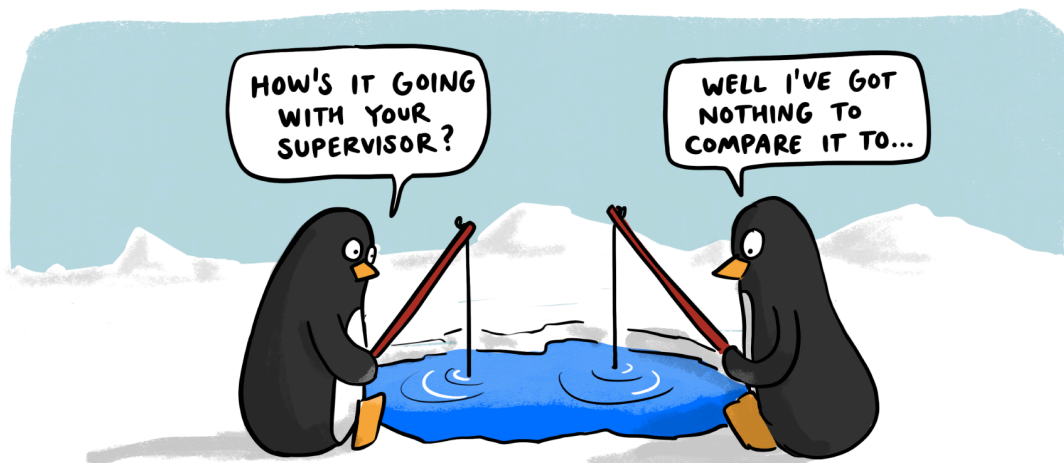
student's work meets the broader expectations of academic writing while also aligning with the intellectual standards of their field.

Becker et al. (2024) looked at ways to form a collaborative online community of support for academic writing. From their interview data they identified several factors that may support academic writing, including regular, iterative feedback; experiencing trust and community; using course structures to inspire writing; and providing diverse models and mentoring of academic writing practice.

The emergence of generative AI technologies presents both challenges and opportunities for the academic writing support offered through doctoral supervision. On one hand, these tools can enhance the writing process by providing instant feedback, suggesting improvements in clarity and coherence, and even generating drafts or outlines based on student ideas. This can help alleviate some of the common writing hurdles faced by doctoral students (especially those who work in a language other than their mother tongue). Additionally, generative AI can assist in identifying relevant literature and sources, thereby streamlining the research process. However, the integration of AI also raises challenges related to academic integrity and the potential for over-reliance on technology (Alasadi & Baiz, 2023). Supervisors must navigate concerns about plagiarism, the authenticity of students' work, and the risk that students may substitute critical thinking and original writing with AI-generated content. This necessitates a re-examination of the supervisory role, where supervisors not only provide traditional writing support but also educate students on the ethical use of AI tools, fostering a critical understanding of how to leverage technology while maintaining academic standards. Thus, while generative AI might enhance writing support in doctoral supervision, it requires careful consideration and guidance to ensure that it complements, rather than undermines, the supervision process. Having an honest conversation about the potential use of such tools is a good first step. The [Academic Integrity and Transparency in AI-assisted Research and Specification \(aiTARAS\) Framework](#) (Bozkurt, 2024) may provide a way to structure such discussions.

## Comparing Yourself With Others

*"I had heard many horror stories shared by other graduate students so I was frankly quite scared! I thought the relationship with my supervisor would be antagonistic and derogatory." Jessica O'Reilly*



It can be hard to know what to expect of the supervisory relationship, especially if you don't know anyone who has been through it, or it's your first time in a doctoral programme. It's understandable - and perhaps wise - to undertake a doctoral programme with minimal assumptions, but, if we do this, then how do we know whether things are happening as they ought to? Other doctoral students might provide a point of reference, but their experiences are also subjective.

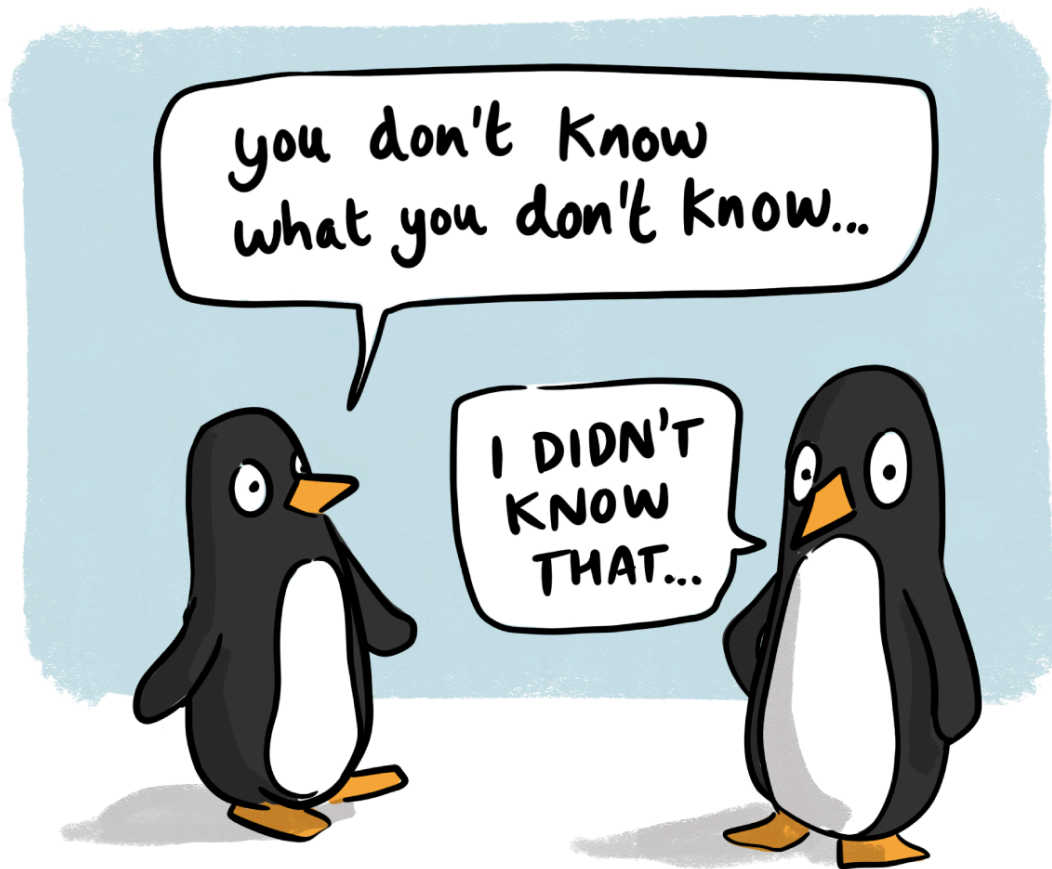
How, then, can we get a sense of whether things are as they should be? We discuss expected practices below. The point here, though, is that getting into comparisons between your doctoral supervision and someone else's comes with risks, since the people and projects are completely different. Supervisors - especially those with more experience - may also vary their approach to supervision depending on what they understand to be the needs of a particular student. The other thing to be aware of here is that supervision is basically a private undertaking, and only those involved really know what's happening. (This is one reason why documenting these meetings is a good idea.) It's not unheard of for doctoral students to present themselves as making better progress than they have, or to complain about their supervisor as a way of justifying the lack of progress in their own project. Others might be making good progress, but shy about saying so.

It's been said that "comparison is the thief of joy". Rather than getting caught up in comparisons, it's much better to focus on your own work, your own supervisory relationship, and seek ways to progress your research together.

Barnes et al. (2010) studied the experiences of doctoral students with regards to their relationship with their supervisor. They identified a range of positive and negative qualities of supervisors as perceived by their students.

Positive Attributes		Negative Attributes	
Accessible	Is flexible; will have in-person meetings and promptly answer advisee questions	Inaccessible	Unavailable for meetings or unresponsive to questions via e-mail, telephone, or in-person
Helpful	Provides advisees with programmatic information that helps the student better understand the formal or informal rules of the program and assists with degree progress	Unhelpful	Provides student with limited or incorrect information about the formal or informal rules of the program
Socializing	Aids students in extending professional networks and learning the habit of the mind for their discipline as well as encourages professional development	Uninterested	Exhibits a lack of interest either in the student academically or personally as well as in the student's research area (uninterested can be seen as a contrast to both socializing and caring)
Caring	Demonstrates an interest in a student holistically; goes beyond helping and socializing to being interested in students' academic progress and personal well-being		

Table 2. Names and descriptions of positive and negative advisor attributes (Barnes et al., 2010:39)



Features of good practice may vary with academic climate and disciplinary focus. Bøgelund (2015) interviewed 12 experienced supervisors about their perspectives on practice with a focus on the way that the environment for doctoral supervision is changing. Funding for doctoral projects is becoming more diverse, and the process is increasingly internationalised and marketised. One relevant outcome from this study is shown in the following table, which summarises positive and negative attitudes towards how the process of doctoral knowledge production can be viewed. We see here some similar attributes to those shown in the previous table.

	Academic perspective	Market Perspective	Social Perspective
The purpose of the university	To produce true knowledge and to educate graduates who have acquired this knowledge	To produce believable and useful knowledge	To produce believable and useful knowledge for a globalised world
Concept of knowledge	Knowledge as true, justified conviction  Production of knowledge is central	Knowledge as a social Element  Employing knowledge is central	Knowledge as a source of empowerment and change  Value-based, contextual exchange of knowledge is central
University as part of society	Universities must produce true knowledge and add to the collective knowledge of society	Universities must take part in creating economic growth and welfare	Universities must create change agents in a world facing global challenges
What is important or positive according to this perspective?	Good discussions and good cooperation  Professional prestige in being a PhD supervisor  Make one's mark on someone and make use of the best people in one's own system  Contributing academically in a specific field and making an engaged difference  Professional passion for the sake of the profession	Cooperation with industry regarding real problems  Contributing to local/national growth and Welfare  Resource optimization: The production of many PhDs, articles and patents  Staying updated and supporting own research with the aid of young people  Using PhD supervision for boosting one's CV	Creating positive change in student's homeland  Initiating learning for the sake of the students  Educating fully-fledged academics – critical and self-motivated  The obligation to other countries regarding the spread of problem based learning (PBL), democracy and humanistic ideals  The pedagogical challenge of helping people through
What is unimportant or negative according to this perspective?	Argumentation based on Status  Dependent and unmotivated students.  Deliverables at the cost of theoretical and methodological substance  Productivity considerations control the education of PhDs  Project management	Cultural adjustment and nursing of the individual PhD student  Prioritizing the academic challenge  The education of our most difficult students without the allocation of necessary resources  Narrow focus on university economy and national brain drain  A too large percentage of foreigners	Narrow focus on the time it takes to educate PhD students  To run things as an assembly line in a factory  Primarily using PhD students as manpower in the supervisor's own projects  Looking at PhD students as research assistants

Table 3. Ideal/typical views of PhD Supervisors on Knowledge Production in a Doctorate (Adapted from Bøgelund, 2015:41-46)



Another way of thinking about this is to consider where you might be in relation to where you're supposed to be at a particular time in your doctorate. Very few people take a linear path through their doctorate, but it's possible to be ahead/behind of where you're aiming. Lasabuda (2020) modelled different kinds of supervisory relationships and suggested that low and/or high-functioning students are associated with particular challenges. Highly capable students may be overly critical of their supervisor's attempts to guide them, or may feel overly constrained by the requirements of the doctorate. Independent students may be more tolerant of poorer supervision. Some students have high motivation and lower ability, while others have the reverse.

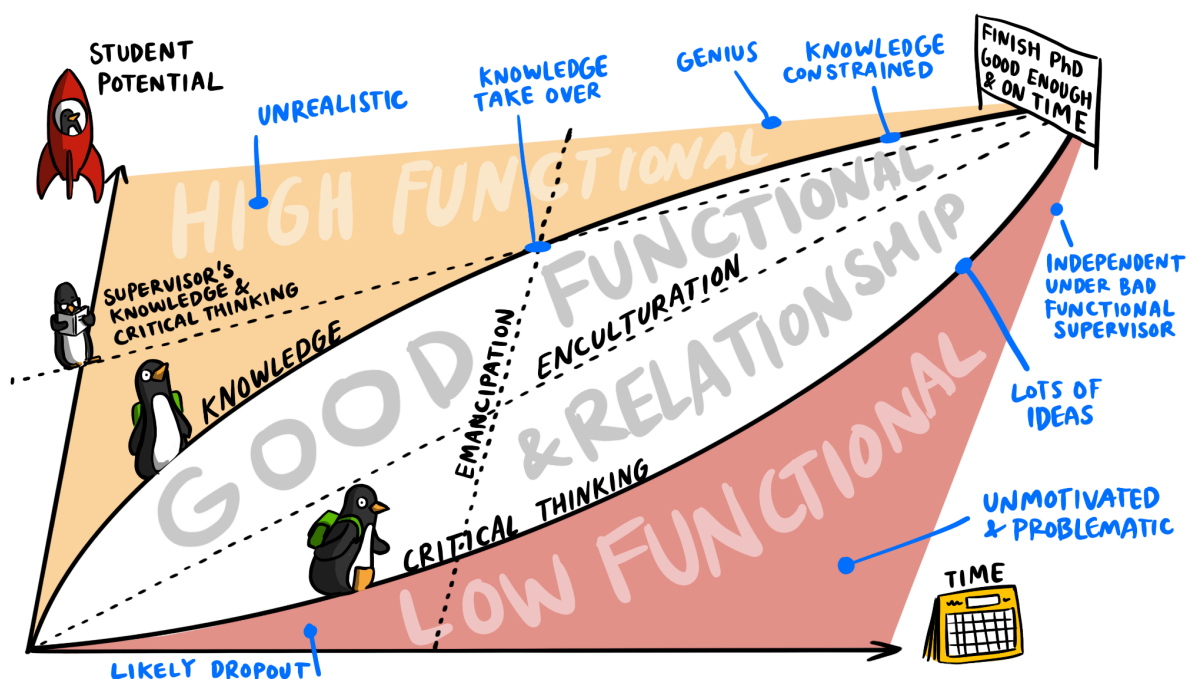


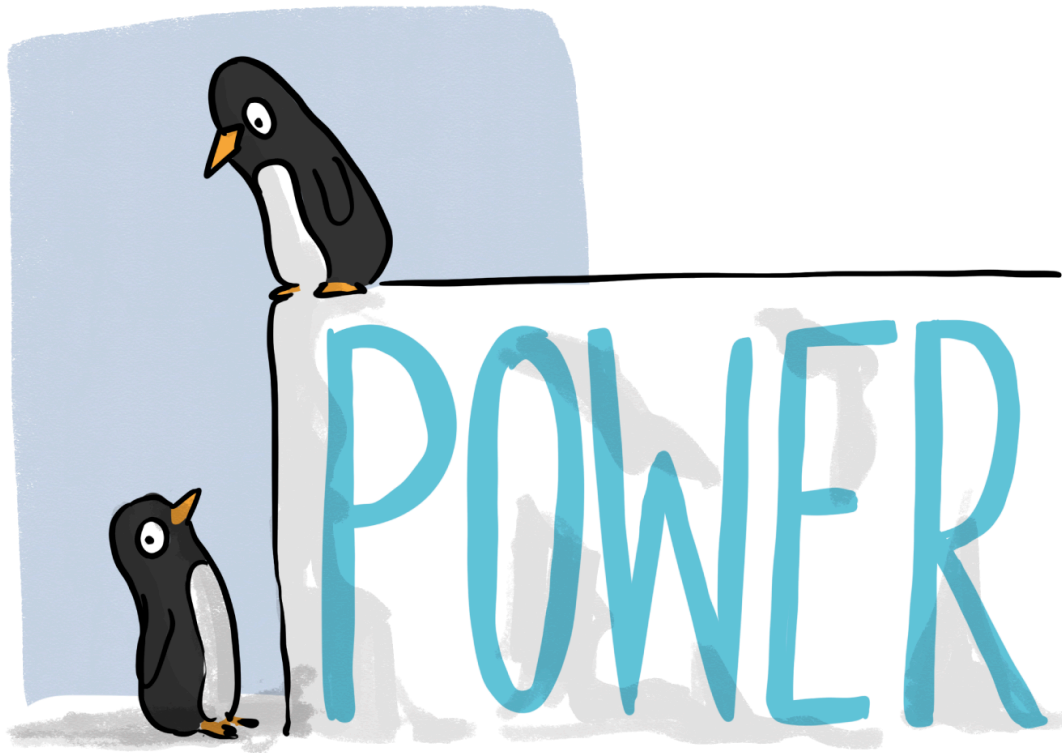
Fig. 3 Dimensions of doctoral progress over time. Based on Lasabuda, 2020.

With so many factors to consider, it's no wonder that it can be hard to get a sense of whether one is making sufficient progress. Doctoral candidates have their strengths and weaknesses. They also have perceptions of their own strengths and weaknesses (which might not correspond to their *actual* capabilities). Part of the function of supervision is to address and improve the full skill set expected of doctorate holders, which is why receptiveness to feedback is so important.



## Managing Power Dynamics

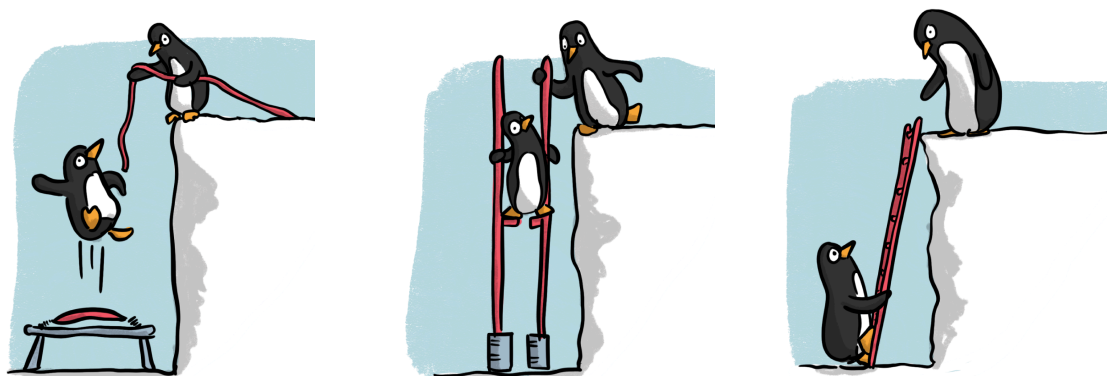
*"Although supervisors try to minimise it, supervision still has a hierarchical relationship."* Francisco Iniesto



The supervisory relationship has a power imbalance - especially in the earlier stages of the process. This is by design, and again reflects the historical origins of the doctoral degree. The power dynamic in doctoral supervision is not by itself a bad thing: rather it's a reflection of the academic status of the 'master' and 'apprentice'. The student inherently recognises the professional status of the supervisor. (If they didn't, why would they be there in the first place?!)

The power dynamic may be unavoidable, but it is rarely addressed or spoken about directly. It's more of a background and precondition for the process. Some people choose to be quite formal in their supervision style, perhaps in acknowledgement of this differential. Others are very informal, almost rejecting the traditional framing of the relationship, but these differences in approach can obscure the underlying truth about the inequalities of the relationship. Supervisors need to remain especially attentive to remaining cognisant of the ways in which power inequalities might be influencing the experience, the relationship or the research (Manathunga, 2007).

*“There is still too much power held by supervisors and too much of an old-school view that hierarchy and subjugation are most important.” Danielle Dubien*



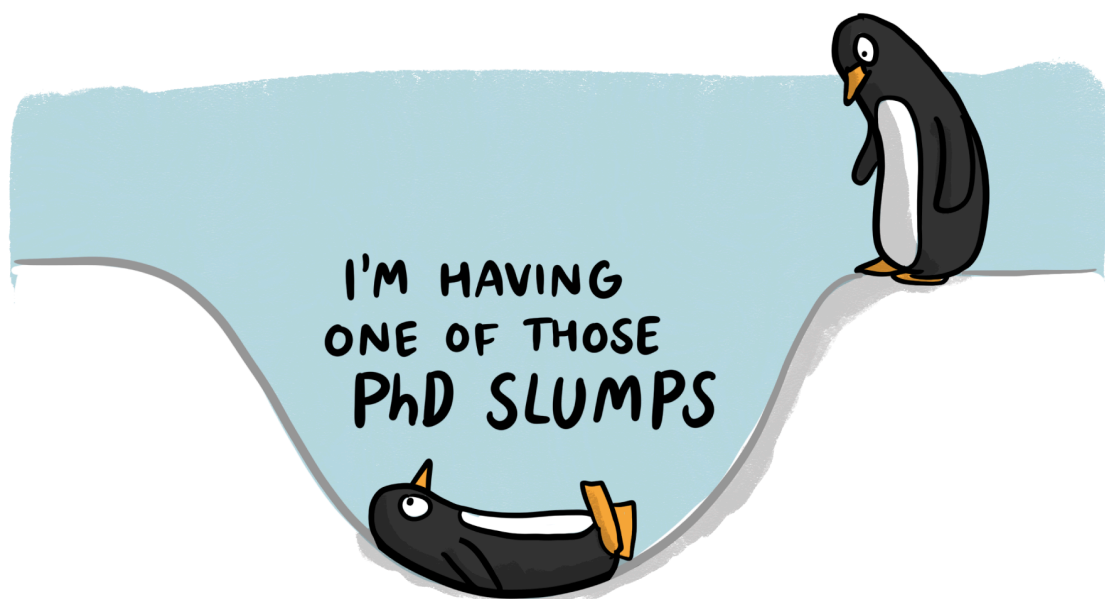
Power imbalances can sometimes lead to inappropriate behaviour, such as exploitation, favouritism, or even harassment, which severely undermines the student-supervisor relationship. Inappropriate behaviour might manifest in the form of excessive demands on the student's time, undermining their confidence, or crossing personal boundaries. Institutions must provide clear policies and support structures, including confidential reporting mechanisms, to protect students from such misconduct. Supervisors need to be aware of their ethical responsibilities, maintaining professional boundaries and ensuring that their guidance is constructive rather than controlling. Equally, students should feel empowered to seek external advice, from academic advisors, advocates, or student unions if they encounter problematic behaviour.

Cotterall (2013) completed a longitudinal study of six international doctoral students studying in Australia. It's a small sample, but the main finding was that there's a culture of silence around doctoral supervision which can prevent transparency and inhibit systematic change. When we asked GO-GN members to share some of their experiences of supervision for this Guide, several people replied that they did not feel they could participate because of the ongoing sensitivities relating to their doctorate and/or issues with their supervisor. (When we explore their stories later in the Guide, it might be worth keeping this in mind.)

## Dealing with Challenges

*"I experienced profound losses during my program of study, multiple cancer diagnoses in my immediate family, plus my own health challenges. All this slowed me down and at times, I felt ready to quit. When I was open with my supervisor about what was happening, she was better able to support me. She didn't let me quit, but she gave me the room I needed to work at a slower pace but still continue to move forward. After many years of working together we adjusted, I think, to each other's ways of working. We didn't have explicit conversations about this, but we did organically arrive at a way of doing things that supported the ultimate goal of producing a high quality study." Jessica O'Reilly*

Challenges can arise in any long-term working relationship, and it's crucial to address issues before they escalate. For example, differences in working or personal styles, delays in work or feedback, or misunderstandings about research goals can create tension. Students should feel empowered to raise concerns respectfully and seek constructive solutions, whether through honest conversations with the supervisor or by consulting additional mentors or institutional resources if necessary. Supervisors, on their part, should be open to feedback about how their style might be impacting the student's progress, and they should be willing to make adjustments if needed.



Ideally, the supervisor(s) and supervisee will work together to address issues that arise, perhaps in conjunction with any additional faculty (or committee) that work with the student. Should this prove insufficient, universities have processes in place for managing these situations where needed. These processes are typically there for the benefit of all affected parties and should be entered into in good faith. Institutions often also provide formal structures for mediation or conflict resolution, which can be valuable if the relationship becomes strained.

Something it's useful for all parties to remember is that everyone involved in research supervision is a fallible human. Doctoral study is such a long process that everyone involved is likely to go through some life changes or disruptions that could affect their ability to engage in the agreed research supervision. Not everyone gets burnout, but it can happen to both supervisors and students. Researcher burnout is associated with lack of satisfaction with supervision and low frequency of meetings (Cornér et al., 2017, Löfström et al., 2023).

In many ways, the most essential aspect here is communication. Breakdowns in communication can prevent solutions being implemented, or hide ongoing issues. Most of the time, a lack of communication can be even worse than the issue that originally caused it, because it means that the supervisor and student are no longer working together as a team.

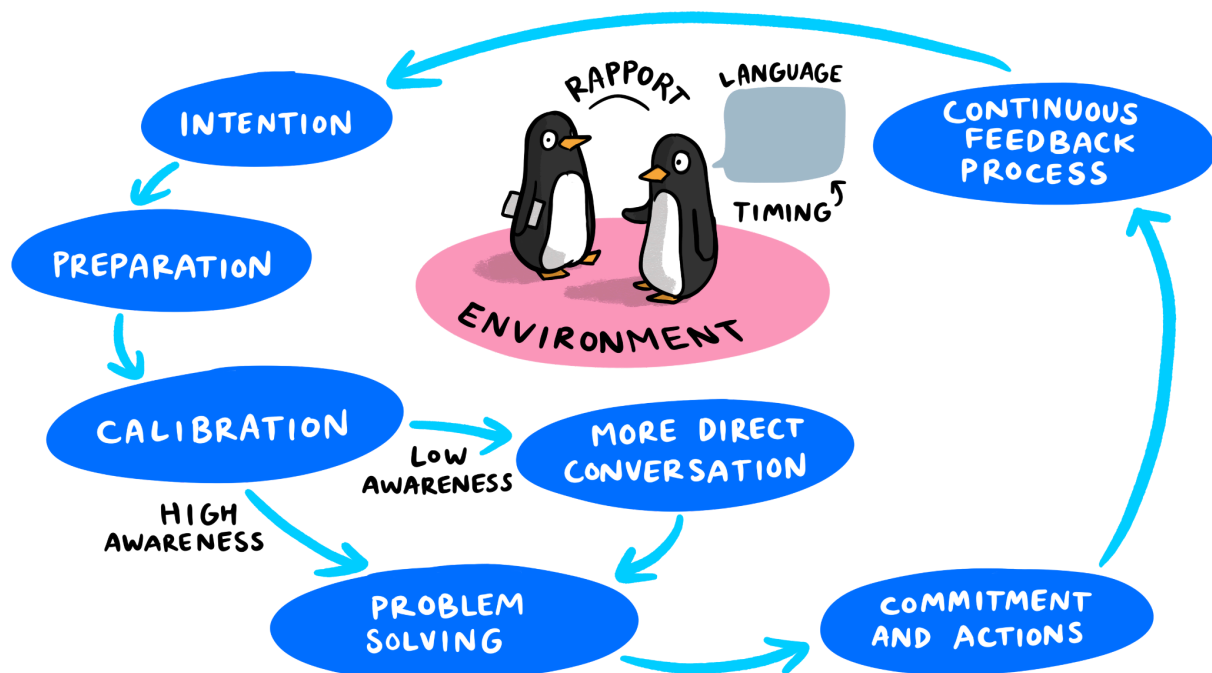
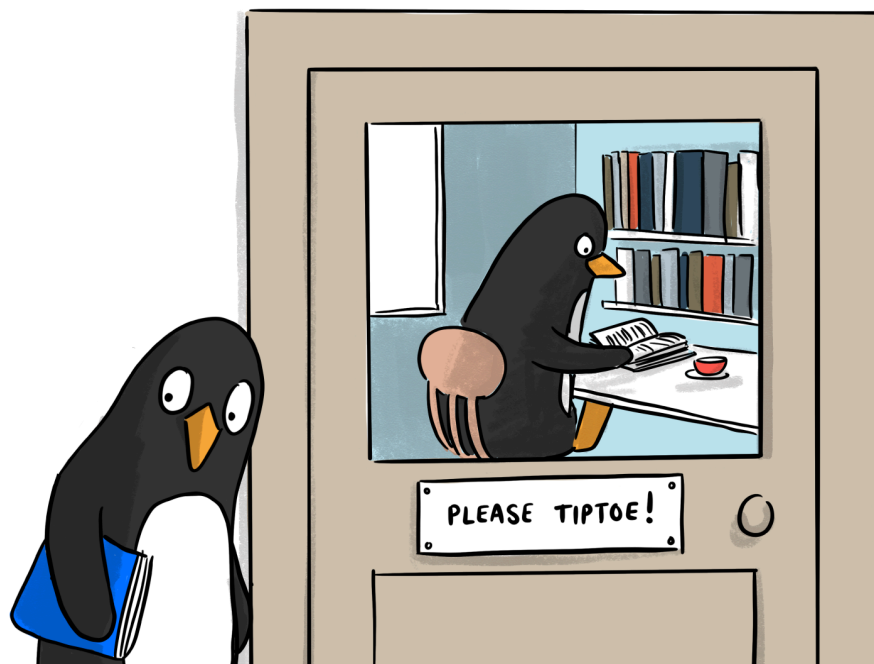


Fig. 4 Flow for managing challenging conversations (based on Henderson & Henderson, n.d.)

## What If Things Don't Work Out?

*"I was repeatedly chastised unfairly - for things I had been instructed to do. I was severely chastised for not producing a full journal article out of preliminary data that I barely was able to fashion into a decent poster presentation. The journal article would have been used to cite my abusive supervisor's recently published book; this supervisor was trying to get several students to cite her book ahead of a conference she attended. I was repeatedly humiliated and finished the program with less confidence than when I started it."* Anonymous Contribution



Casey et al. (2022) found that postgraduate researchers they surveyed (n=50) showed lower resilience and wellbeing than the general population. Factors associated with lower well being included 'supervision', 'expectations', 'support', 'balance', and 'coping'. Sometimes things don't work out in a supervisory relationship. There's a host of potential reasons for this, including:

- **Misaligned Research Interests:** The supervisor's expertise may not fully align with the student's evolving research focus, leading to a lack of relevant guidance.
- **Disagreements over Research Direction:** Conflicts may arise if the student wants to take their research in a direction the supervisor does not agree with or support.
- **Supervisor Overcommitment:** If a supervisor is juggling too many students or other professional obligations, they may be unable to provide sufficient

attention or support.

- **Unclear Expectations:** Ambiguities in what the supervisor expects in terms of work quality, timelines, or progress can lead to confusion and dissatisfaction
- **Differing Working Styles:** The supervisor's approach (e.g., highly hands-on vs. hands-off) may not match the student's preferences or needs, leading to discomfort or conflict.
- **Lack of Constructive Feedback:** A supervisor may fail to provide helpful or actionable feedback, leaving the student unclear about how to improve.
- **Institutional or Logistical Issues:** Bureaucratic or administrative hurdles, such as differing expectations from the department or institution, can add strain to the relationship.
- **Cultural or Language Barriers:** For international students, differences in cultural norms or language difficulties can cause miscommunication or misunderstandings.
- **Power Imbalance:** A supervisor may be overly controlling or unsupportive of the student's growing independence.
- **Personality Clashes:** Differences in communication styles, temperament, or expectations can result in interpersonal tension.
- **Emotional or Mental Health Needs Ignored:** A supervisor may not be attuned to the student's well-being, contributing to stress or a sense of isolation.
- **Unaddressed Conflict:** Minor issues that are not resolved early on can escalate into larger problems, creating a negative working atmosphere.

In practice, problems often emerge less neatly than a series of categories might suggest, and dysfunctional arrangements may result from a combination of factors. Situations like these might lead to the strategic decision to change the supervisory arrangements. It should be noted that feeling like one or more of these applies in one's own situation doesn't necessarily mean that everything is lost. It's easy to project onto a supervisory relationship if things don't feel like they are going well. There are bound to be tensions and progress doesn't happen evenly. One good idea here (both for supervisors and their students) is to keep meticulous records about what is happening and the agreed actions going forward as this can be a useful protection and aide-memoire.





## Changing Supervisor(s)

*"My institution matches students with potential supervisors based on perceived alignment in areas of research... I think my initial match would have set me up for a very negative experience. However, I self-advocated and basically matched myself with a supervisor who was more closely aligned with my ways of knowing, doing, being. We got on great."* Jessica O'Reilly

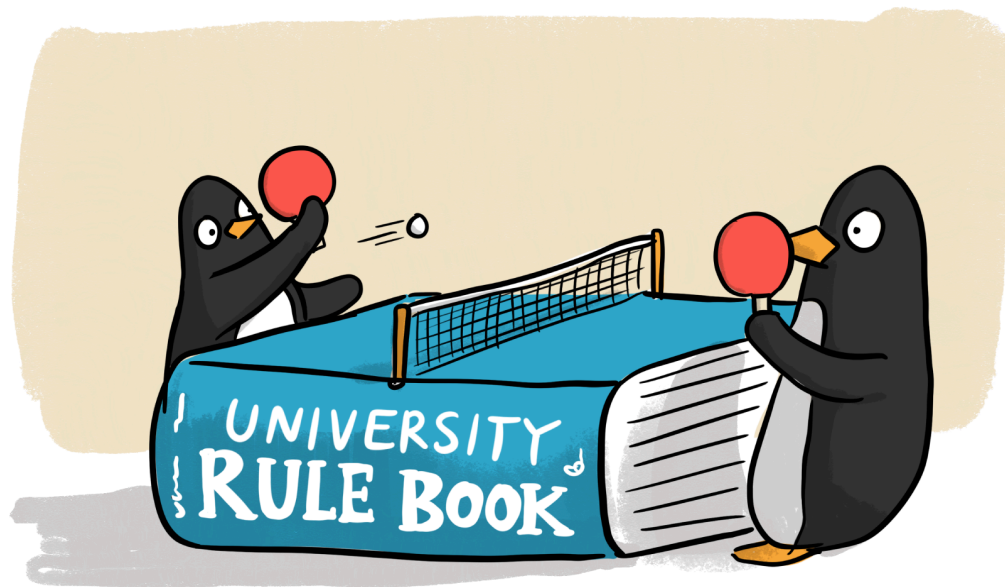
*"My dad told me that your relationship with your supervisor is the most important relationship in your life because you can divorce your spouse."* Tanya Elias



Changing a doctoral supervisor is a significant decision that can have both positive and negative consequences, but in some cases, it may be necessary for the student's academic success and personal well-being. While many challenges in the supervisor-student relationship can be resolved through open communication or mediation, there are situations where the relationship becomes untenable. In such instances, switching supervisors can provide the student with fresh guidance, a better fit for their research interests, or a more supportive working dynamic. However, the process of changing supervisors is not without risks; it may disrupt the student's progress, create tension within the department, or lead to feelings of uncertainty. Additionally, the new supervisor may have different expectations, which can require significant adjustment. For this reason, students should carefully consider their options, seeking advice from department heads or other mentors before making such a decision.



Sometimes changing supervisors is absolutely the right choice. If things aren't progressing in a doctoral research project, the idea of changing supervisors might seem attractive as a way of moving things forward. However, it's important to realise that this may not solve the underlying issues (and could even introduce new challenges). Another approach could be to develop connections to other academics, committee members or peers who could act as a 'critical friend' and give parallel feedback.



Of course, in other instances a change in supervision happens because someone changes institutions, retires, or is required to take a leave of absence. This is simply an inevitable risk. It's fairly common to maintain the supervisory relationship at some level in such circumstances, though it may become more informal. One's primary supervisor will always be based at the home institution, but the original supervisor could act as part of a supervision team while at another institution (depending on the relevant rules and regulations).

If changing supervisors (especially in the later stages) it can be good to think strategically about who might ultimately be one's future examiner. Students should consider the institutional norms regarding examiners; for example, some institutions may have specific guidelines about internal examiners, such as requiring them to be from a different department than the student's supervisor (or only using external examiners). Supervisors and examiners can't be the same, so choosing someone for one role rules out the other.

## Supporting Independence

*"I knew I would need to be independent, but I didn't realize this would also apply for all experiences related to the dissertation. Other students in my department had opportunities for publication and research groups, and I had to seek these out on my own—this was also due to the department's focus evolving more away from my work."* Bethany Eldridge



Mantai (2017) studied identity development during doctoral study. These identities can be understood in terms of interiority and external validation. Not everyone who is a researcher 'feels' like a researcher to themselves, especially during their time as a doctoral student. Most of the time we seek some sort of external validation of our activities, perhaps through presenting at conferences and publishing research. For a lot of people, these are not things they do while a doctoral student. Even those that do may not feel sufficiently 'validated' to overcome a sense of personal

inadequacy: hence the dreaded 'imposter syndrome' (Clance & Imes, 1978; Cope-Watson & Betts, 2010; Sverdlik et al., 2020).

Not everyone suffers from imposter syndrome, but everyone has a sense of internal and external validation for what they do. Some people are very sure of themselves and their own work, but without others (examiners, publishers, conference organisers) agreeing then it's hard to make progress as a professional researcher. In a doctoral supervision scenario, the supervisor(s) act as the main point of validation for the work being done until such a time as it is examined. It's essential to listen to and act on the advice of a supervisor, but if the long term goal is to cultivate independence, then at what point does one decide to perhaps go in a different direction to that recommended by the supervisor?

There isn't an easy answer to this question, since in a way it dichotomises the situation: it's either the supervisor or the student in the driving seat. Reality is more nuanced, and it's through hundreds of interactions that a researcher gradually develops a sense of independence. The award of the doctorate no doubt goes a long way to establishing the independence of the candidate, but this also marks the end of the formal supervision relationship.

Gasson et al. (2023) have recently published an (open access) book on cultivating researcher independence. They identify five main thematic areas where professional practice can support the development of researcher independence, each with some key reflective questions for supervisors (which are also relevant for students).

#### Theme 1: Collaboration

- What does collaboration look like for you as a supervisor?
- Do you collaborate with colleagues?
- Do you collaborate with your higher degree researchers?
- What might collaboration look like for your higher degree researchers?
- Who could they be collaborating with?
- Are there people you can introduce your higher degree researchers to, who they could start collaborating with?

#### Theme 2: Writing

- Where are the opportunities for you and your higher degree researchers to write, so that you normalise the cyclic process of drafting, reviewing, and having multiple iterations of a document-in-progress?
- How can you model the reading and reflection which is integral to thesis writing?

- How can you enable peer discussion of ideas and concepts throughout the writing process?

### Theme 3: Time

- What is your relationship with research time?
- How do you manage your workload to achieve work-life harmony?
- How have you explained candidature timeline requirements to your higher degree researchers?
- What is your own relationship with the timelines required by the university?
- Do you describe time in punitive terms or do you use a strengths-based approach to maximising time and energy?
- How do you discuss time with your higher degree researchers?
- How do you discuss time with your colleagues?
- Do you harness time, manage it, plan for it, work with it?
- How do you celebrate reaching goals with your higher degree researchers?

### Theme 4: Resources

- Take a moment to make a list/mind map of the resources available to you
- Is anything missing?
- Where can you go for what you need?
- How have you shared these with your higher degree researchers?
- How and with whom can you advocate for what your higher degree researchers need?

### Theme 5: The Degree

- What did achieving your research degree mean for you?
- What does it represent in the life of your higher degree researchers?
- How has the title of Doctor changed you as a thinker and a learner?
- What completion and milestone celebration rituals do you encourage and pass on to your successful higher degree researchers?

Becoming independent is not something that happens overnight. Some students are relatively independent from the onset of their doctorate, particularly if their previous life experiences have inclined them towards this. For some, it takes time and positive feedback, while others will always instinctively look for external validation. The point here is that becoming 'independent' is something that happens through social interactions and is iterative. There can be a case for a "fake it until you make it" approach while confidence develops, but it's also important to acknowledge the ongoing need for professional development that continues into professional life. Engaging with feedback is part of being an independent scholar, and should be encouraged in all research scenarios.



## Supervision at a Distance

*"Even though I have a good relationship with my supervisor I do still feel quite intimidated by their knowledge and expertise (especially having looked at their own thesis). I also always feel apprehensive before a meeting for some reason (but always find them helpful). As a distance / remote student it is difficult to find information about what to expect from the doctoral supervision relationship and what to expect."* Debbie Baff

Online doctoral programmes are increasingly common (especially since the Covid-19 pandemic). If a large part of doctoral education is about becoming encultured into a community of scholars, what does this mean for those who pursue their doctoral studies at a distance? Studying a doctoral programme part-time and/or online presents specific challenges that can make the experience more demanding compared to traditional full-time, in-person programmes. Balancing the intense academic workload with professional, personal, or family responsibilities is one of the most significant hurdles for part-time students. The need to juggle research with other commitments can lead to slower progress and increased feelings of isolation, especially since part-time students may have fewer opportunities to engage with their peers or attend academic or training events in person. Time zone differences, limited access to physical resources like libraries or laboratories, and a reliance on virtual communication can also make it harder for online students to get timely feedback and feel connected to their academic community and/or their supervisor(s).

Melián & Meneses (2024) studied how being part-time doctoral candidates in an online programme influences factors like academic integration and sense of belonging to a community. They carried out 24 interviews with part-time students, concluding that students often have a strong drive for participation which may be met by the supervisor but is rarely matched by the institutions. Online delivery has the benefit of increasing access and participation but can result in increased feelings of isolation for those on the 'academic ultraperiphery'. One of the most effective ways to combat isolation is by actively engaging with their academic community through virtual meetings, discussion forums, and regular communication with supervisors. Setting up scheduled check-ins with peers and mentors can provide structure and a sense of connection. Additionally, seeking out online communities or networks that align with their research interests can create a support system (Atenas et al., 2023).



Being networked, whether through social media groups, academic networks like ResearchGate, or specialised networks such as GO-GN for those studying open education, can be particularly valuable. These platforms allow students to share ideas, get feedback, collaborate on projects, and stay informed about events and opportunities in their field. By building and maintaining these connections, part-time distance learners can foster a sense of belonging, enrich their research, and mitigate the isolation that often accompanies remote study.

## The Value of Networks

*"I think that GO-GN does a fantastic job of building capacity for people to engage in open education research. By bringing together people from various corners of the world for in-person and online workshops, webinars, conferences, and knowledge sharing, GO-GN is supporting people in building bridges and connections with others that can further advocacy, research, and education..."*  
(Farrow et al., 2024:44)

Peer support is a really important part of the doctoral experience for many. One response to the kind of isolation experienced by some doctoral students is to network. Academic networking is invaluable for doctoral students, offering opportunities for collaboration, knowledge exchange, and professional development. One excellent example of this is our own network! Through GO-GN, students gain access to a vibrant community of scholars, mentors, and peers who can offer feedback on their research, share resources, and provide support throughout the doctoral journey. The network hosts events, webinars, and conferences that allow students to present their work to an international audience, helping them gain visibility and build their academic profile.

Additionally, GO-GN fosters a collaborative spirit by encouraging interdisciplinary research and partnerships, which can lead to joint publications and new avenues of inquiry. For doctoral students, being part of such a network not only helps them stay updated with the latest developments in their field but can also open doors to collaboration opportunities and long-term professional relationships. There are also many professional association and other discipline specific networks which are similarly available to both supervisors and their students.

Supervisors may sometimes underestimate the benefits of networking for their own practice, focusing primarily on guiding students through the technical aspects of research rather than engaging in broader academic communities themselves. They may view their role as isolated from the networking process, assuming that it primarily benefits early-career researchers rather than established academics. However, active networking can greatly enhance supervisory practices by exposing

supervisors to new pedagogical strategies, evolving trends in their field, and diverse perspectives on mentorship. Networking with fellow supervisors and participating in professional development programmes can also help them navigate common challenges, such as managing supervisor-student relationships or addressing the needs of diverse and non-traditional candidates. Engaging in these networks and professional development initiatives enables supervisors to continuously evolve, providing better support to their students and staying connected with the academic community at large. The increasing number of multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary doctorates and research positions also speaks to the value of overlapping networks and communities of practice. In any case, supervisors and supervisees should consider which peer networks are the best fit for themselves and their roles. (GO-GN may be something of an outlier in that both students and supervisors are encouraged to join the network.)

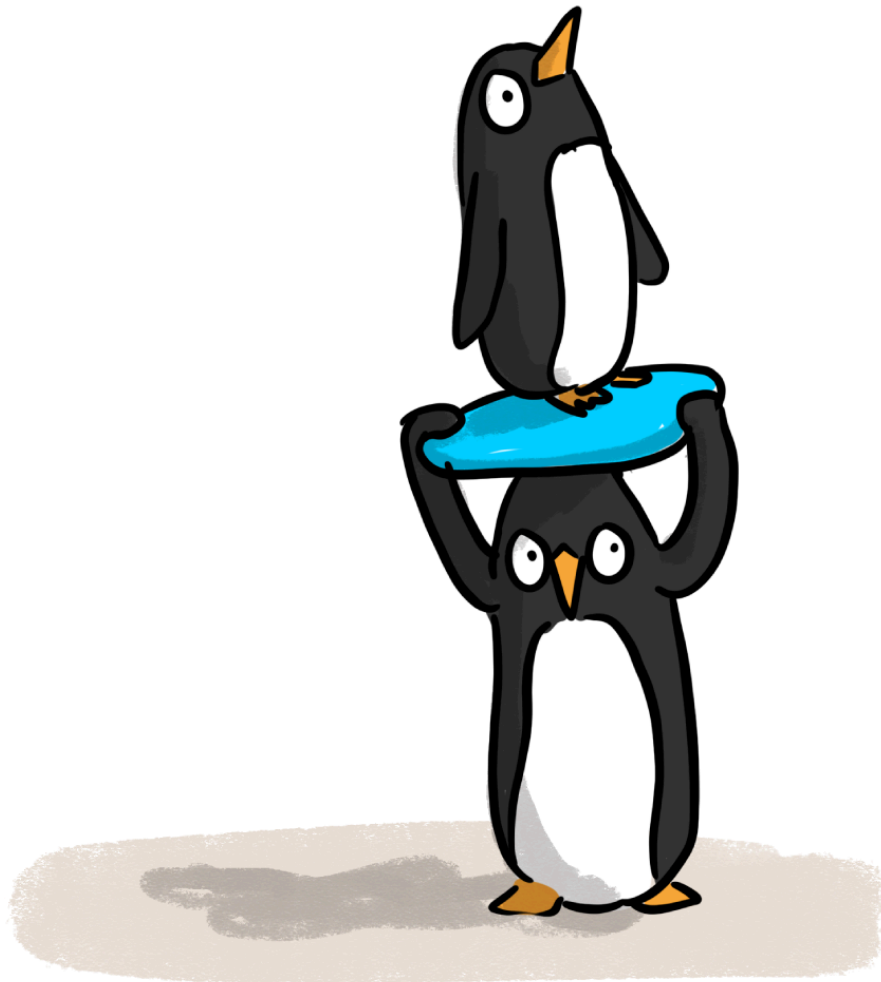
The role and impact of peer support on doctoral progress is still a relatively under-explored area of research. De Clerq et al. (2019) carried out a longitudinal study with 446 participants. They found that the main indicator for outcomes was supervisor support. For other forms of support, the outcomes depended on the stage of the PhD process. The effects of peer support tended to be stronger at the beginning, weaker in the middle, and “close to zero” at the end. The claims made in this paper perhaps reflect the fact that, even though support from others can be important, ultimately the doctorate is a solo mission that comes down to individual input.



## Supporting Career Progression

*"My experience as a doctoral student and post-doctoral scholar forged my career path into academia and set me up for success in many ways, from conducting research, applying for grants, academic writing for publication, leadership, teaching."* Michele Jacobsen

*"The PhD is the start of your research career. If you want to pursue further work in this field, it's important to continuously learn about research, ethics, writing, collaborating, presenting at conferences, and so much more."* Danielle Dubien



In many academic frameworks, doctoral supervision is seen as the bridge between academic training and career readiness, preparing students to be independent scholars, researchers, or professionals in their respective fields. Supervisors are also expected to provide career advice tailored to both academic and non-academic career paths, helping students navigate the often-uncertain transition from study to employment. In theory, this involves ongoing discussions about the student's long-term goals, professional development opportunities such as teaching experience or internships, and introductions to relevant professional networks. Students might expect supervisors to help build their academic profiles by facilitating opportunities for publishing, presenting at conferences, and networking within the scholarly community. Supervisors are increasingly called upon to provide guidance that extends beyond research and writing, including helping students navigate the academic job market, develop teaching skills, and cultivate a network of professional contacts (McAlpine et al., 2014).

In practice, however, the level of career support provided by supervisors can vary widely depending on institutional expectations, the individual supervisor's experience, and the resources available. While some supervisors excel in providing career-focused mentorship, others may prioritise academic guidance over professional development, assuming that students will acquire the necessary career skills elsewhere. If your career aspirations lie outside academia, there might be a limit to how much a supervisor who has worked in academia for a long time can contribute to this.

Time constraints, heavy workloads, and a focus on the completion of the thesis may limit the extent to which supervisors engage with a student's broader career planning. Additionally, the traditional focus on academic career paths sometimes leaves students who are pursuing non-academic roles underserved. Pragmatically, students may need to seek career support from external resources such as career services, industry contacts, or academic networks, supplementing what they receive from their supervisors. This variability in supervisory approaches underscores the importance of institutional structures that support both supervisors and students in addressing career development needs.

## Doctoral Supervision as a Research Field

The current status of research into doctoral supervision reflects an increasing appreciation of its complexity and the need for flexible, adaptive approaches that cater to the diverse and evolving needs of today's doctoral students. Ongoing research continues to explore how best to approach supervisory practices. Current scholarship emphasises the multifaceted nature of supervision, ranging from the emotional and psychological support supervisors provide to the professional and academic mentorship necessary for students to thrive in academia. Here we provide a brief overview of some developing areas of scholarship. (For a more extensive account, see [The Research Supervisor's Bibliography](#) (Taylor & Rubery, 2024).)

Given the centrality of the doctoral education process in academia, it might be somewhat surprising to learn that research into doctoral education is a relatively small - but growing - field (Jones, 2013). Research into doctoral supervision has evolved significantly in recent years, reflecting the increasing recognition of its complexity and the diverse needs of both students and supervisors.

Brownlow et al. (2023) highlighted that there is an overall need for universities to be more proactive in meeting the needs of their doctoral learners. One of the primary themes in recent research is the shift from traditional, hierarchical models of supervision towards more collaborative and partnership-oriented approaches, where the student's autonomy and active role in shaping the research process are foregrounded. This is supported by a body of literature that advocates for relational approaches to supervision, where trust, communication, and mutual respect are at the core of successful supervisory relationships (Hemer, 2012; Lee, 2008).

As such, there is increasing interest in understanding how supervisors can better support students not just intellectually but also emotionally, helping them manage the anxieties and self-doubt that frequently arise during the process (Manathunga, 2007). These challenges are even more pronounced in the context of international students or those pursuing part-time or distance learning doctorates, as these groups may experience heightened feelings of isolation and a need for additional support (Cotterall, 2013; Hazell et al., 2020; Jackman et al., 2022; Schmidt & Hansson, 2018).

Another developing body of work concerns the role of professional development in enhancing supervisory practice. This includes theoretical perspectives on how supervisors develop their approach. While in some countries it is mandatory for supervisors to undergo specific training (Karampelias et al., 2024) professional development programmes for doctoral supervision remain relatively rare and unsystematic (Taylor, Kiley & Holley, 2021). Emergent studies seek to find ways to refine, improve and formalise approaches to the continuing professional development of supervisors (Fulgence, 2019; Fossland, 2023).

The emergence of new technologies and methods, such as generative AI and virtual collaboration tools, has also spurred research into how these tools can both enhance and complicate the supervisory process. While digital tools offer new opportunities for providing feedback, fostering communication, and supporting distance learners, they also raise questions about how to maintain the integrity of the supervisory relationship and ensure ethical practices in research (Löfström et al. 2020).

Finally, researchers are examining the changing nature and boundaries of the roles in supervision and how best to manage these (Benmore, 2014; Parker-Jenkins, 2016; Parker-Hay, 2020). We began this volume by noting that, historically, supervision was often characterised by a top-down, mentor-apprentice dynamic, with limited input from external sources and a focus on the one-on-one relationship between student and supervisor. Arguably the progress of this model over time has been to become more open, transparent, networked, and participatory as the closed, exclusive nature of early supervision models has been challenged.

## GO-GN Voices: Being Supervised

*In this section and the next, we offer some reflections on doctoral supervision from members of the GO-GN network. All these perspectives originate from those involved in open education research at some level (although not everyone studied open education as part of their doctorate). This section focuses on the experiences of being supervised.*

### Expectations and Reality

*Here we offer some perspectives on the difference in perception of doctoral study:*

"I thought my supervisor's only dedication was my thesis, but I see that I was just dust on the to-do list ;) I also noticed that the more guidance I requested, the more supervision I received. It is really a demand and supply business model. The challenging part was to convince the supervisor about the arguments I generated as a part of my thesis." Aras Bozkurt

"As a mature student, I was hoping for a respectful relationship where time was committed to support me and help me succeed through the various milestones. The supervision I received far surpassed my expectations as the support I received was not just focused on the milestones, but rather my development throughout the entire process. This ranged from feedback on my writing (collaborative and independent) to support genuine care about me as a person, parent, and scholar." Sonja Johnston

"Before embarking on my Ph.D. program, my expectations regarding supervision were centered around clarity, guidance, and consistent support. Primarily, I anticipated a clear introduction to the multifaceted process of my doctoral journey. This included understanding the steps involved in conducting a comprehensive literature review, selecting an appropriate methodology, identifying necessary resources, seizing networking opportunities, and securing funding. Moreover, I held the expectation of regular, preferably weekly, contact with my supervisor. I envisioned these meetings as crucial checkpoints where I could update my supervisor on my progress, discuss any challenges encountered, and seek feedback on my work to ensure accountability and momentum in my research endeavours. My experiences as a doctoral student presented both confirmations and challenges to my initial expectations. While I had hoped for clear guidance and consistent support, financial constraints emerged as a significant challenge. Initially, I faced difficulties affording the registration fees for my Ph.D. program. Fortunately, I was able to cover these costs through my employment, but this also meant that I had to juggle additional expenses related to my academic pursuits. Conference participation fees, presentation costs, printing expenses, and data collection

expenditures added up, placing a strain on my resources. Accessing scholarly literature also proved to be a hurdle. Without institutional subscriptions to academic journals, I found myself unable to freely access indexed articles. As a workaround, I had to reach out to individual authors for copies of their work and rely on colleagues studying abroad who had access to these resources. This process was time-consuming and often delayed my progress in conducting a comprehensive literature review. Furthermore, while I had anticipated regular weekly meetings with my supervisors for guidance and feedback, the reality differed. My supervisors, like many academics, were preoccupied with departmental administrative responsibilities, making it challenging to schedule frequent face-to-face meetings. As a result, I had to adapt my expectations and find alternative ways to seek guidance, such as attending workshops and webinars to gain insights into literature review techniques and methodological selection.” Anuradha Peramunugamage

“I was admitted into an Educational Psychology (EDPS) program for the MSc/PhD which was considered a five-year pathway. It was a program expectation that one did research, wrote a master’s thesis, and then transitioned immediately into the PhD to conduct research and write the dissertation. For my master’s degree, I was expected to do coursework in the first year of the program, in a full-time residency. Coursework was completed with a cohort; I was admitted with five other master’s students in EdTech. That year, four PhD students were admitted. Some of our courses were taken with the PhD students and some were taken with other master’s degree students across several specializations, like school psychology, counselling psychology. The expectation was to work closely with my supervisor to develop an MSc thesis proposal in year one, and then do the study and write the thesis in year two. As I was finalizing my MSc thesis, I was told to have conversations with faculty members who might become my doctoral supervisor. My thesis supervisor was willing to continue but we also thought it was a good idea to take the opportunity to work with someone else. My MSc supervisor was on my doctoral supervisory committee. My doctoral supervisor was very supportive. The expectation was that I apply for a Doctoral SSHRC prior to starting the program. I was granted a large internal doctoral scholarship in my first year, and successfully applied for and was awarded a Doctoral SSHRC for my second and third years. With strong supervisor guidance, I wrote my PhD proposal in year one while taking courses, and defended candidacy early in my second year. I undertook my study, along with a doctoral fellowship placement in a school in second year. In third year, I wrote and defended my dissertation. The expectation was that I would apply for academic jobs as well as seek post-doctoral opportunities in year three. I did a one-year post-doc in computer science before being hired as an assistant professor. My expectations of doing a two-year MSc then a three-year PhD, followed by searching for an academic job or doing a postdoc while applying for academic jobs, were confirmed by my experiences. The expectation that I would be in a full-time residency was confirmed,

and I realize the privilege of being able to engage in a graduate program full-time. The structured MSc and PhD pathways were linked with applying for federal SSHRC funding to do research that spanned the master's and doctoral degrees. My masters, doctoral and post-doctoral supervisors were excellent, and provided exceptional support and guidance for my research, my academic writing, experiences as a graduate research assistant, and graduate assistant teacher.”  
Michele Jacobsen

“I expected a mentorship to help students achieve their goal, while treating candidates with respect as colleagues. I expected my PhD to be onerous and time consuming but interesting and rewarding. These expectations were fully confirmed: onerous, time consuming but interesting, rewarding and relevant.” Rory McGreal

“I wasn't really sure what to expect. I've been a practising researcher so I know where I feel confident and where I would like support. I'm in the inaugural cohort of my program so it's a learning experience on their end, as well as mine. I've felt more supported than I expected.” Stacy Katz

“Before I started my program, I thought my supervisor might reach out to me frequently during the early part of my doctoral journey. However, the onus was on me. Something I didn't consider before starting my program is that being a doctoral student is to go on a journey to becoming an independent researcher. When I connected with my supervisor, I really appreciated how up front and direct they were about how they supervise, their expectations from me, and their willingness to discuss how we communicate and what to do if I can't get a hold of them. As a result, I felt more confident in requesting meetings, asking for help, and expressing what I needed or what I was concerned with.” Melissa Ashman

“I'm really not sure I knew what to expect at all other than someone would be available as a guide, a mentor and someone to ask questions of. I had a change of supervisor about a year ago after my original supervisor moved institutions. They have completely different styles and approaches but I'd say that both have been broadly in line with my expectations (as limited as those were) and have been flexible and willing to help.” Debbie Baff

“Coming from Africa, where supervisors were regarded as ‘Lords’ who know it all and want to control the market from flooding with a lot of PhD holders, I had a lot of fear ahead of this journey. I knew I was not going to complete it if I made a mistake of not choosing a unique and relevant area of study. I expected to be a prominent person in my country after my graduation. Good ones! When I first met my first supervisor, who motivated me in my dream area of study then, I felt encouraged. I saw light at the end of the tunnel. We did a search to find a local supervisor in the

area in my country, but it was in vain. This was another source of delightful moments for I knew the drama if I found one!" Judith Pete

"It is complicated to have a defined idea, in many cases, you don't know what a PhD means until you are in your second year, but at least in the UK where you rarely get less than two supervisors (in many countries it's just one) you expect to have varied expert visions that can guide you to success and help you with any barrier you might find. There are several situations you can face, in my case I was lucky but I am aware of situations where there were conflicts between supervisors, which is problematic for doctoral students since they can get different and contradictory indications. In fewer situations, the relationship between supervisor and student can deteriorate over time. In general, supervisors are responsive, and that is why it is a good idea to have more than one because they are usually very busy, and that is generally the most common situation, lack of time in academia." Francisco Iniesto

"I expected a supervisor to listen to my ideas, value my academic skills, guide me in improving my weaknesses, and help me craft an inspiring and helpful committee." Kathryn R. Johnson

"I expected a supportive environment with hands-on opportunities to learn about education and research and to prepare me for not only current work but also for future career. I expected to be independent, but I still looked forward to guidance for developing my dissertation and for finding my place in the education research field. I was fortunate to have a good experience overall, but with my interest and focus diverging more into open education globally, I had to find my community and my hands-on opportunities elsewhere." Bethany Eldridge

"I looked forward to receiving guidance and support from my supervisors, whom I chose because of their expertise. My expectations were met. I started off with a different topic and focus, and when I changed workplaces (moved to the university where my supervisors were based), I changed topics because I also wanted my research to be related to my work. This leveraged the guidance and support I received because workwise, I was also working with my supervisors on other work projects." Tabisa Mayisela

"I expected a highly professional program that would provide opportunities to make valuable academic contributions and build my confidence as a researcher. A supervisor who perhaps thought she was being helpful was cruel, which dissuaded me from working with her except where absolutely necessary." Danielle Dubien

"I had the good fortune of working with my PhD supervisor as an undergraduate student and so had clear expectations based on that experience. In my case it was one of relative autonomy, with the option for me to initiate support and feedback



beyond a regular check-in. This earlier experience gave me confidence that our partnership would be a good fit.” Rajiv Jhangiani

“I expected someone to guide me about the process, and sources I should follow in the field of open education.” Manisha Khetarpal

## Challenging Aspects of Supervision

“I waited for many months for committee feedback. My supervisor did what she could to nudge things along, but ultimately they held up my graduation fairly significantly.” Jessica O'Reilly

“I felt somewhat alone in terms of open education research.” Tanya Elias

“Gender bias; quality of researches done before joining the program, time, culture (woman)” Judith Pete

“I did not have access to an AI assistant when I was writing my thesis. I needed help with analysing and making inferences from statistics and from my qualitative data.” Rory McGreal

“Being in sync and having the same skills or perspectives can be a challenge. While supervisors have experience in a specific field, they may fail in innovative research methodologies and thinking out of the box.” Aras Bozkurt

“The balance between agency and development is a challenge - add in the pandemic, drastic funding cuts, affordability crisis, geopolitical crises, etc., and supervision becomes an ever-challenging and evolving relationship.” Sonja Johnston

“Supervisor development is key, and also lacking – from experience, I am convinced that most faculty want to be a good doctoral supervisor. However, too many supervisors learn on the job versus through education (Jacobsen et al., 2024). There are too few formal or structured training or educational opportunities for professors to learn how to become an excellent supervisor. Most faculty learn how to be supervisors on the job, and many base their practice on their own experiences being supervised, for good or bad.

- Access to adequate funding and GAT or GRA opportunities for doctoral students so they can concentrate on their research and academic writing, and do work related to an academic career path, rather than seeking jobs off campus.
- Access to sound program designs and broad support structures across campus. Too many doctoral programs rely on independent study with a

supervisor, versus sound course and program designs, well designed research methodology courses, and structured support for academic writing.

- Access to meaningful mentoring and appropriate preparation for diverse careers – the doctorate is a pathway to many different career paths, and every supervisor deserves support and professional development on how to effectively mentor and guide doctoral students for diverse career paths, not just academic careers. Doctoral students need access to appropriate supervision, sound program designs and institutional support for career preparation.” Michele Jacobsen

“Education has grown in many ways in recent years, and shrunk in many other ways. Overall, across the board, sometimes I feel like there are few faculty supervisors who have many, many doctoral students to supervise. For example, I'm aware of other doctoral students who have significant and ongoing challenges in connecting with their supervisors and getting the support and guidance they need, such that their progression through their program has been affected. This makes me grateful for the positive and supportive relationship I have with my own supervisor. I am also fortunate that my supervisor's own research interests closely align with my own. I have seen other students who have a supervisor who is only peripherally connected to the student's area of research, and this has made it more difficult for the student to be supported.” Melissa Ashman

“I need help with writing my research question, literature review, and discussing the methodology (which is storywork).” Manisha Khetarpal

“I experience insecurity around my own abilities , not asking the right questions or simply not knowing what to ask and when to ask them. I have definitely been impacted by imposter syndrome. Sometimes it feels that my supervisor has more faith in me than I have in myself.” Debbie Baff

“Mostly you are the only real expert, so you cannot be sure your supervisors have enough confidence in the different areas you are researching, in the best of cases you have several experts and their expertise covers all your methodologies, but that is not always the case when being innovative” Francisco Iniesto

“Not sharing the same research focus as my supervisor has been difficult. While they have been open and encouraging to my interest in open education, I had to navigate this field on my own. I've had to seek external support for many of the necessary steps of the dissertation, including developing my focus to now understanding the impact of my findings. My supervisor is generous with their knowledge about the research process and is overall very supportive, but, with open education being new to them, I've had to be determined and take extra time and effort to participate in this field.” Bethany Eldridge

"I found it challenging to select a reasonable slice of my research ambitions for my dissertation topic, one that would meet departmental and university regulations and that I could build on in the future." Rajiv Jhangiani

"The biggest challenges relating to being supervised in my research is not understanding the culture and socioeconomic factors that underpin the Brazilian K-12 basic education system. However, as I previously stated this was not perceived as a challenge as my supervisor was familiar with these factors. " Viviane Vladimirschi

## Benefits of Supervision

"Someone to bounce your thoughts on." Tabisa Mayisela

"Guidance, knowledge and encouragement on the journey to the doctorate." Rory McGreal

"They can provide detailed one-on-one feedback about planning, conducting research, writing (articles), and presenting research." Danielle Dubien

"My supervisor forced me to clarify my ideas and to explain ideas in a way that was more accessible to a wider audience." Tanya Elias

"Guidance, even if the supervisors are not on top of all you are doing they should be able to help you to reflect and make decisions that are consensual and have been reasoned, exploring all options" Francisco Iniesto

"Mentorship and sponsorship, including in areas beyond research." Rajiv Jhangiani

"There are many benefits of a research supervisor. First, the supervisor can guide you throughout the process and help you view things from different perspectives. Second, the supervisor usually knows how to choose a committee that best fits your needs. Finally, if you are lucky as I was, your supervisor can open new doors, suggest networks for you to join such as GO-GN, and publish articles together with you or provide you with suggestions for publishing your own academic articles. " Viviane Vladimirschi

"I expect guidance from my supervisor during different stages of my doctorate degree in open education" Manisha Khetarpal

"If you work with a good supervisor, there is actually a great sharing of experience beyond the thesis topic. But this is only true if you have a good supervisor: if you are dealing with an inexperienced supervisor, the process can be a nightmare." Aras Bozkurt

"I didn't know what I didn't know. Navigating the academy, and especially a doctorate, is a great challenge and having an advocate, coach, and guide was crucial! The ability for my supervisor to adjust to what I needed under different circumstances (with a consistent consideration and approach) assisted me through challenge points, and had a celebrant with me through accomplishments and breakthroughs." Sonja Johnston

"In brief, supervisor's attention to student health and wellbeing matters; a good match with a supervisor matters for doctoral student success; meeting regularly matters to student progress and success; funding and recognition matters, and the supervisor has a role to play in helping doctoral students to count themselves into grants, scholarships, awards, research assistantships, teaching assistantships; safe spaces matter, that doctoral students feel comfortable approaching their supervisor for support and help, and also know who they can turn to if the relationship with their supervisor is not working well." Michele Jacobsen

"Guidance, where needed, in the process and the ability to stand back and let you figure it out yourself. However, as a doctoral student you need to own the work and not take feedback personally. Ultimately the doctorate is not necessarily the place for your magnum opus, it's an exam and you need to adopt a work-person like attitude towards it." Beck Pitt

"My supervisor is so knowledgeable and experienced in this field. She also produces a prolific amount of academic writing and is well-connected to the field though she is retired. She helped with everything!" Jessica O'Reilly

"A supervisor should be a knowledgeable person who has endured the process who can encourage and help the student as needed to maintain focus and determination to achieve their goal." Rory McGreal

"For me personally, my research supervisor has nudged me to become involved in more scholarly opportunities, such as applying for funding, writing publications, or submitting presentation proposals, which I might have shied away from on my own due to lack of confidence. Besides the opportunity to engage in scholarship, another benefit of my supervisor has been how they have helped to grow my confidence in becoming (and being) an independent researcher. My supervisor has been very good at listening to my perspectives and ideas and supporting me in making decisions that work best for me and my research." Melissa Ashman

"A sounding board is very helpful. I can imagine how difficult it would be without a supervision relationship at all or indeed if I had a supervisor that I didn't get on with. I am very grateful for the support that I receive. My supervisor has a caring, friendly and supportive approach and is very flexible with meeting arrangements. I also feel

that I am seen as a 'whole' person rather than only as a doctoral student.” Debbie Baff

“My supervisor provided additional perspectives, recommendations for contacts/literature sources, enormously helpful writing feedback, and committee selection expertise.” Kathryn R. Johnson

“Not sharing the same research focus as my supervisor has been difficult, but it has also been a major benefit in some ways. Since they are new to OER and open education, they have provided me with another perspective that has helped me to develop my ideas and make connections to the broader education field I might not have done otherwise. I have also been exposed to new ways of thinking and conducting research that allowed me to be more creative and innovative in my research. The key is that my supervisor is supportive and interested in learning, so their dedication to me as a researcher has still allowed me to grow and to develop my ideas further. ” Bethany Eldridge

## Developing Supervision Practice

*We asked members whether they had been required to adapt aspects of their own approach to supervision.*

“I distanced myself from one supervisor. Luckily, another person became my primary supervisor, and I was able to interact productively with her and complete my PhD.” Anonymous

“I have a greater need for structure and accountability than my supervisor did, so I imposed smaller deadlines on myself in between periodic check-ins with my advisor.” Rajiv Jhangiani

“I actively changed my behavior to enhance the effectiveness of my supervision relationships and processes. Recognizing the challenges of scheduling regular meetings with my supervisors, I took the initiative to update them on my progress and seek feedback through email communications. This allowed me to maintain regular contact and ensure that I was on the right track with my research. Additionally, I made sure to communicate any obstacles or concerns promptly, enabling my supervisors to offer timely support and guidance. To solicit constructive feedback and guidance from my supervisors, I started writing journal papers based on my research findings. Sharing these papers with my supervisors not only provided them with a tangible overview of my work but also encouraged detailed discussions and insights into potential areas for improvement. This collaborative approach facilitated a deeper understanding of my research objectives and enhanced the quality of my scholarly output. Recognizing the value of networking in academia, I actively sought opportunities to connect with different

networks such as GO-GN , EDEN and OWSD (Organization for Women in Science for the Developing World). Engaging with these networks allowed me to broaden my academic horizons, exchange ideas with peers and experts in my field, and access valuable resources and support. By expanding my network, I was able to gain diverse perspectives and insights that enriched my research journey.

Understanding the importance of experiential learning and exposure to new ideas, I proactively sought funding opportunities to travel and explore different academic settings and research environments. By securing funds through grants, scholarships, and fellowships, I was able to attend conferences, workshops, and seminars relevant to my research interests. These experiences not only provided me with valuable networking opportunities but also expanded my knowledge and inspired new avenues of inquiry in my research. These proactive measures enabled me to navigate the challenges of doctoral research more effectively and ultimately contributed to the advancement of my academic and professional development.”

Anuradha Peramunugamage

“As a masters student, as a doctoral student, as a postdoc, I took the initiative to build a trusting relationship with my supervisors and thus, I was able to take their guidance and advice seriously and with the confidence they had my best interests at heart. My doctoral supervisor worked with me to find graduate assistant teacher (GAT) opportunities. He employed me as a graduate research assistant (GRA). He involved me in analyzing data from his studies and then I co-wrote a chapter with him and then presented with him, so he really mentored me in all those steps of publishing and presenting. He gave me advice on how to approach the GAT work. So, obviously, I was working with a professor on their course. But when I ran into any tensions or problems, I would ask my supervisor for advice on how to deal with it, and he was always very helpful. I did my PhD and could take no courses in the Faculty of Education because I had taken all the relevant ones as a master's student. So I did courses in psychology, computer science, the business faculty, I did things on management of information systems. So, I did all of my coursework outside the faculty except for an independent study with my supervisor that worked towards my research proposal. While I was a doctoral student, I was also encouraged by [the dean] to apply for the Galileo Doctoral Fellowship, which I did. And that's how I ended up, while I was doing my research for my dissertation, also being involved in a research role with the Galileo Network at Banded Peak School. I found my supervisor to be very helpful. He wasn't a “helicopter” supervisor. He didn't hover, but whenever I approached him for help or advice, he was very helpful, or he would make himself available for a quick meeting. I was in a full-time master's and doctoral program. It was my habit to be full-time in the program and I've done that as an academic as well. And it has not always been healthy, but I was on campus Monday to Friday, I was in coursework, then GAT (graduate assistant teaching) and GRA (graduate research assistant) roles, and usually worked on weekends as well. And

when I wasn't in courses, I was working on papers for my courses or, you know, so I wasn't trying to balance graduate school and a full-time job. I always had a part-time job, or several GAT or GRA roles, but I was not trying to do my graduate education in evenings and on weekends. Many students today are engaged in full-time work and also graduate studies – I have the greatest respect for these individuals, and do everything in my power as a supervisor to support their success, their progress, and their wellness.” Michele Jacobsen

“I connected with a community of people in my field (and my external examiner) by stepping outside of my department.” Beck Pitt

“I think I got better at accepting advice that was shared to support my success in the process.” Tanya Elias

“I had previously been in grad school in a very toxic environment where I did not feel valued or respected. When I returned to a different institution decades later, I asked up front about time and availability, supervisory process and preferences, and my aspirations. I was vulnerable and open - and I received the same in response.” Sonja Johnston

“I did not need to change my behavior to make supervision relationships and processes more effective as they worked very well since the beginning. My supervisor and I had an excellent and very respectful relationship from the very beginning of the process. He always provided prompt feedback even though he mainly focused on the bigger picture as he is a very busy person. Thus, my committee later on provided me with more in-depth feedback and criticism, which helped perfect and improve the final draft of my dissertation.” Viviane Vladimirsch

“Before I started my program, I thought my supervisor might reach out to me frequently during the early part of my doctoral journey. However, the onus was on me. Something I didn't consider before starting my program is that being a doctoral student is to go on a journey to becoming an independent researcher. As a result, I became more direct and assertive in expressing my needs. The outcome was positive overall.” Melissa Ashman

“First, I had to accept that my research knowledge and skills were not to the expected standards. I had to open my mindset to acquire the knowledge and skill needed for the process. I needed academic writing skills, research and communication, as well as technical skills that could assist me in data collection and analysis. I needed critical thinking analytical skills. These were provided through organized online seminars and workshops from time to time by my supervisors. I also attended several GO-GN seminars where I could present and earn public speaking, networking and interacting with fellow students.” Judith Pete

"Towards the end I changed to make the process more efficient. I stopped resisting small suggestions that I did not find valuable and just did them to make the supervisor happy so I could move on to the final defence. I see this as part of the negotiation between the supervisor and supervisee." Kathryn R. Johnson

"Not directly. I would need to learn how to be my own advocate no matter who was the supervisor, but I had to learn this lesson earlier in order to ensure that I could study what I intended to." Bethany Eldridge

"My supervisor and I agreed to meet twice a month, and that I would submit a piece for them to read beforehand. That worked well and I'd communicate in advance if I was going to miss the deadline." Tabisa Mayisela

## Success Stories

"I completed my primary education in 1994 and being an orphan, I was forced to stay home for one year due to lack of school fees to join high school. I subsequently benefited from a government bursary and other well-wishers' support and managed to complete my high school education in 1999. However, I could not immediately continue with post-secondary education. Fortunately, after two years, I received sponsorship from Rev. Prof. Pierli Francesco, a Comboni missionary priest. This enabled me to join Tangaza University College in 2001. While at the university, I kept wondering how education could be made more accessible and affordable to all, especially the orphans and the marginalized in society. I survived through loans for my Masters. Later, I met a mentor in the name of a supervisor, who empowered me, motivated me throughout my PhD journey and provided me with the right support needed to achieve my dissertation. Irrespective of the challenges, I soldiered on, resilient and focused for I was committed to inspire the next generation, "women" that it is POSSIBLE! I believe my story is a testament to the power of determination, resilient and transformative impact of education in a patriarchal society, mostly in the Global South. " Judith Pete

"My supervisor and I collaborated on other projects that were related to my research, e.g., writing a concept document on curriculum for Digital Education Leadership for the Commonwealth of Learning (Brown et al., 2016). The call came up when I was in the middle of my PhD but my supervisors noted that I had developed knowledge and some expertise in the field of digital literacies. I also co-supervised a Masters student with each of them while I was finalising my write-up. This gave me a feel of what it's like to supervise." Tabisa Mayisela

"My advisor was always available for questions. She pointed me to a good research approach for a systemic analysis." Rory McGreal



"My supervisor is excellent and I'm incredibly fortunate. She was Provost when I started working at the institution that I'm also now enrolled in and she provided the seed funding for the open education initiative. She is always available for questions and help and pushes me to think about my research from other perspectives." Stacy Katz

"My supervisor has advocated for advancement, awards, teaching opportunities, balance, personal wellness, growth, progress, and fulfilment." Sonja Johnston

"In 2017 I was quite desperate and almost ready to give up my doctoral research as I had already begun my research and my chosen methodology was not working out. I then decided to attend the Open Education Global Conference that was being held in South Africa that year to meet my supervisor in person to discuss the challenges I was facing (that year I had not obtained any funding from GO-GN). So we met several times, over drinks and at the airport since we returned on the same flight. And while I was crying and whining during each of these meetings with the challenges I was facing, my supervisor kept encouraging me, assuring me that I would come up with a solution even though he did not at the time offer me any practical solutions. But some of the things he said turned out to be very helpful even though I am not sure he had any specific intention to do so (specifically when you are giving advice after a few drinks lol). At any rate, when I arrived in Brazil I suddenly came up with an idea to change my entire methodology even though that would entail re-applying to the University's Research Ethics Board and rewriting most of my dissertation. I ran the idea with my supervisor and he approved stating that he thought this could work, which made me very happy and provided me with the confidence and motivation I needed to get through my dissertation writing and my doctoral degree." Viviane Vladimirschi

"Despite facing a challenging situation, my supervisor's understanding and support made all the difference. During a particularly hectic period just before the Sinhala/Hindu New Year, I found myself in a tight spot. I had to apply for the OWSD (Organization for Women in Science for the Developing World) fellowship, and time was running out with only a day left to submit my application. The application process required various approval documents. Additionally, amidst this deadline crunch, I was also dealing with a petition against me regarding my PhD research. In the midst of this chaos, my supervisor emerged as a pillar of support.

Understanding the urgency of the situation and the multiple demands on my time and energy, she went above and beyond to assist me. Not only did she provide the necessary administrative support, guiding me through the process of obtaining VC approval and preparing the supervisor report, but she also offered invaluable emotional support. Her understanding and empathy during this stressful time were truly remarkable. Instead of adding to my burden, she eased my anxieties and provided reassurance that I had her full support. Her unwavering belief in my

capabilities and her willingness to stand by me in the face of adversity were incredibly uplifting. Thanks to her understanding and support, I was able to submit my OWSD fellowship application on time and navigate through the challenges with confidence. This positive experience not only strengthened our supervisory relationship but also reinforced my gratitude for having such a supportive mentor by my side.” Anuradha Peramunugamage

“There are many, but what comes to mind right now is how my supervisor behaved during my final defence. She had the opportunity to introduce me, and I was very emotional as she shared such a thoughtful, glowing biography highlighting my academic and professional accomplishments. I couldn't believe she was talking about ME! I knew she had put a lot of thought into her words, and it was such a wonderful way to start the defence. After I finished (successfully) she was absolutely ecstatic for me! She sent me a screenshot she took while I was presenting, raved on social media about me, sent a beautiful email with many, many exclamation marks, and told me she'd be travelling to the graduation ceremony even though she's out of province. It all just made me feel so special and supported. I'm very grateful to have walked with her, particularly because I am likely to be her last doctoral student. What an honour. ” Jessica O'Reilly

“My entire graduate and doctoral and postdoctoral experiences were positive and contributed to my growth, my academic success, and my confidence and wellbeing. I entered graduate school with the aim to become an academic researcher and teacher. As a graduate student, doctoral student, and then a postdoctoral scholar in computer science, I became actively engaged in many aspects of campus life because of my supervisors. Each in their own way, my three supervisors encouraged me to become a peer mentor, to attend additional seminars outside of my faculty, to meet with visiting scholars, to serve on committees, and to venture out into the field for applied research projects in schools and in the community. Strong and enduring relationships with my own supervisors, helped me to engage, grow and flourish as a new scholar, and forged my own practice as a professor and as a graduate supervisor. In addition to being well supported in carrying out my masters, doctoral and postdoc research, my supervisors supported me in developing my teaching practice and ongoing program of research. My supervisors put me forward for awards and encouraged me to apply for scholarships and grants. I enjoyed my learning and scholarly experiences in graduate school so much that I have committed to a life-long career in research and education in the academy.” Michele Jacobsen

“I always feel motivated after a supervision meeting and my supervisor always encourages me to keep in touch in between meetings. ” Debbie Baff

"After my first committee was dissolved my supervisor recommended a new committee that she knew would be responsive and supportive of my work. I trusted her in her recommendations and I believe her choices enabled my successful completion of my EdD." Tanya Elias

"My supervisor and I barely knew each other when we chatted at a conference about my potential research questions. I was terrified. My supervisor calmed me with a smile and immediately expressed enthusiasm for my ideas along with willingness to take a risk on a topic and methodology they knew nothing about. I am forever grateful for that encounter. My supervisor sustained that enthusiasm throughout the rollercoaster of my research, writing, re-writing, and final defence." Kathryn R. Johnson

"Despite not sharing a focus in OER and open education, he would share my work with people he knew and met to assist me with finding a placement for my research. One of these connections led to me developing the relationship with my current research partner. His support, despite not being embedded in the open community, still helped me to develop my research." Bethany Eldridge

"The kind primary supervisor that I concluded my PhD with encouraged me to attend the PCF9 conference in Scotland. It led me to produce my most developed article on my own (though it was only a conference article). It led to writing another manuscript that I will soon submit as a single author." Danielle Dubien

## Lessons Learned

*What kind of lessons did members learn about the process of supervision?*

"It is unfortunate that I didn't know the rights of a student when I was in my previous studies. I was not supported through a discovery of options. When I returned to graduate school, my first priority was my approach to supervision and being supervised with a discussion of expectations upfront" Sonja Johnston

"The death of my first supervisor in the middle of the process was a blow! I felt lost and lonely at some point... but I thank the Open University Management and the GO-GN family for the overwhelming support and LOVE. " Judith Pete

"Throughout my doctoral journey, I encountered significant delays in obtaining feedback from my supervisors on my thesis drafts. Despite my efforts to submit my work in a timely manner, the prolonged periods of waiting for feedback became a recurring challenge. As a result, I found myself repeatedly extending my thesis submission deadlines, which incurred additional fees and prolonged my academic journey. The consequences of these delays were not limited to financial burdens; they also took a toll on my mental and emotional well-being. The uncertainty and

frustration of not knowing when I would receive feedback or be able to progress with my research were deeply disheartening. Moreover, the prolonged timeline affected my overall academic trajectory, requiring me to adjust my plans and commitments accordingly. Additionally, the delays in receiving feedback necessitated additional rounds of review and revisions, further prolonging the submission process. This resulted in extra scrutiny from review panels and evaluators, adding to the stress and pressure of the situation. It underscored the importance of effective communication and timely support in the supervisory relationship and highlighted the need for proactive measures to mitigate such challenges in the future.” Anuradha Peramunugamage

“I will always credit my supervisors for believing in me and will forever be grateful to them for my success. However, one of the professors who taught me, and supervised me as a teaching assistant, and ended up as a toxic member of my examining committee, initially tried to lure me away from my doctoral supervisor. I had a [Doctoral SSHRC Fellowship](#), and I think this professor wanted to attach himself to my success. He had other doc students with SSHRC funding, and liked to surround himself with successful, female students. This professor was charismatic, productive, well-funded, and a predator. He told me I would not “go anywhere” with my supervisor, but that he could help me become a star if I joined his lab. This professor was suspected of having inappropriate relationships with students. His lab, or stable, included several attractive female students who were well funded. I kept telling this professor no thanks. Eventually this professor left me alone, especially since I kept telling him I was happy with my supervisor, and that I planned to stay with my supervisor. It was a difficult power struggle because the predator kept trying to insinuate himself into my life, telling me that he could help me. Reflecting back, I wish I would have told my supervisor about this colleague and his pressure and manipulation, but I was scared, and weirdly ashamed, as if I had somehow brought this unwanted attention on myself. Had I told my supervisor, then this predator would not have ended up on my examining committee, and he would not have had that power role over me.” Michele Jacobsen

“There is such a phenomenon as the PA (pompous ass) syndrome. That is not to say that PhDs are all PAs, but rather that PAs ardently pursue PhDs to complement their egos. So there are more of them with PhDs than in the normal population. I have come across some of them. One, in particular, who got his student to crawl through a hole with her research, then tightened the hole and made it even smaller, causing the student to consider withdrawing. She was advised to find a new supervisor. Similarly, a nit-picking micro-managing professor thought he was my supervisor. I assured him that I would never choose him to supervise my thesis. I chose a more open and encouraging professor. The nit-picker then insisted that I had not completed all of my pre-thesis courses and tried to block me. However, I had saved

my correspondence, including proof of completion and he had to back off. I had no further contact with him.” Rory McGreal

“I have heard from other colleagues that their supervisors were terrible and at times jealous and competitive, not providing them with the necessary support. My supervisor, in contrast, always provided me with timely support and he also helped push my research career forwards. So I am extremely thankful to him.” Viviane Vladimirschi

“I need more time from my supervisor.” Manisha Khetarpal

## Good Practice in Research Supervision

*Given the experiences they have had, how do members perceive good practice in the supervisory relationship?*

“A good plan for orientation, scaffolding, mentorship, and sponsorship that is tailored to the needs and hopes of the student. This is made possible through the development of a strong relationship, trust, and mutual understanding. The supervisor is there to serve the student, not the other way around.” Rajiv Jhangiani

“Supervisors should take leadership on establishing and building an effective research-oriented relationship with students and take steps to develop a relational practice, to get to know who students are as a person. Supervisors should find out: What motivates the student? What are they passionate about? What is the end goal, their career path? What are their expectations for the doctoral program, for the timeline to completion, for the supervisory-student relationship? The supervisor should always treat the student as capable and with respect and dignity.” Michele Jacobsen

“I’m still in the early stages, but the program was designed to include doctoral supervision seminars that meet in small groups. I think having these small meetings will be critical for achieving the dissertation.” Stacy Katz

“I see good practice as encouragement and knowledgeable guidance that clears unnecessary barriers while providing student agency and autonomy through accountable processes.” Sonja Johnston

“I believe good practices in the research supervision relationship encompass clear communication, constructive feedback, supportive guidance, accessibility, autonomy, professional development, and ethical conduct. By adhering to these principles, supervisors can nurture a positive and enriching supervisory experience that empowers students to succeed in their academic and professional endeavours.” Anuradha Peramunugamage

"Clear expectations, regular communication, a mutual understanding that you have a shared goal, and criticism is intended to support that goal. Quick response times but also realistic expectations - supervisors are paid basically nothing and shouldn't be expected to put their lives on hold when a new draft is ready for review. That said, it's so nice to receive an email that basically says "I got it. I'll review it by \_\_\_\_". Students need to be willing to listen and learn, and to defend their choices when something is a hard no for them. This is a collaborative process, but the supervisor is leading the way because they have so much knowledge to share. I hope students can embrace this and not let their egos prevent them from fully benefiting from the relationship. Gratitude is so important." Jessica O'Reilly

"A collegial relationship. A doctoral dissertation is about creating new knowledge. So, the candidate must become a (if not "the") world expert on the focus of their dissertation. So, supervisors should communicate with their students on the same level. The supervisor is not the expert on the focus of the research, he is a colleague and mentor." Rory McGreal

"Have frequent communication, even if there are times when you don't make much progress, it is important to have at least a weekly exchange of emails with your supervisors and, as far as possible, conversations at least every two weeks." Francisco Iniesto

"Building trust, explaining and clarifying everything, clear communication, setting expectations for availability and response times, listening to each other, respecting each other, negotiating, and checking in just to keep the communication flowing." Kathryn R. Johnson

"Clear, direct communication is key. It's important for students and supervisors to have an up-front discussion about expectations for communication and meeting. Knowing how your supervisor wants to be contacted, how frequently, and what to do if they are unresponsive can save students a lot of stress later on!" Melissa Ashman

"Be open and supportive of students' interests. Just because the student might not match your current work, exploring the student's interest and goals with them can be so beneficial in providing a space for the student to be creative and push their work even further. Additionally, advocating for the student is important. Their work might not be supported by the rest of the department, so being willing to stand up for the student and any special requests for their unique research is much needed and appreciated." Bethany Eldridge

"Communication is key. Allow yourself to be vulnerable - feel free to let the student know if you'd like to have time to read up on something before you could give advice on it." Tabisa Mayisela

"Establishing a good rapport right at the beginning and identifying successful ways of working, like any good relationship there has to be give and take on both sides. " Debbie Baff

"Asking good questions and consistently identifying what does not make sense as written." Tanya Elias

"Students have different research backgrounds and cultures. Creating a conducive environment for learning and growth by the supervisor. The student corporation and committed. " Judith Pete

"A supervisor who does not micro-manage, is supportive and encouraging and helpful in overcoming obstacles. A supervisor should push the student to focus on a research question and not go on a wide meander through a wide range of "interesting" subjects." Rory McGreal

"It is a good practice to separate our professional lives from our personal lives when supervisors and students interact. There is a need for constructive criticism delivered in a diplomatic manner. "Danielle Dubien

"Having completed both my master's and doctor's degree at the same University and after having had two different supervisors, it is my experience that good practice in the research supervision relationship should entail a good understanding of the student's potential and shortcomings. Some supervisors take forever to give feedback but when they do they provide excellent feedback and constructive criticism. Other supervisors give feedback very quickly but you never really know if the supervisor has given much thought to what you have written. Clear and respectful communication, constructive criticism, timely and high quality feedback are essential to establishing an effective research supervision relationship. Achieving this balance may be not as easy as it sounds. Additionally, the research supervision relationship should also include a small dose of psychological skills. That is, being able to counsel the student with regards to other problems or challenges the student may be facing." Viviane Vladimirschi

## Advice for Doctoral Students

"I would advise those starting out in their doctoral studies to choose a supervisor who has expertise (is a subject-matter expert) in the field they plan to study. If the student has specific relationship problems with the supervisor he/she has chosen they can usually request to change the supervisor afterwards. At least this was a possibility at my University." Viviane Vladimirschi

"Start your research on programs and potential supervisors well in advance of your projected start date for your degree. Reach out to potential supervisors for a

conversation, and to determine whether a match with this supervisor will benefit both of you as you undertake your degree. Be realistic when choosing your program and have more than one supervisor in mind when you apply, as the supervisor you want may have several students in mind as well. Invest in the relationship and be willing to work hard and take direction, as it is your program, and you will get out of it what you put into it. That said, if you are investing time and working hard, but you are having trouble with your supervisor, know who you can turn to for support. Do not be afraid to make a change to a new supervisor, because you deserve an effective supervisor. Establish a regular meeting schedule with your supervisor, invest yourself seriously in your coursework in writing your research proposal, make sure you meet all obligations and expectations of the doctoral program. Show your supervisor that you are a serious and committed scholar who can take direction, and also take initiative and be an agent in your own success, that you are someone who will take leadership in your own development and put in the work.” Michele Jacobsen

“Remember, that as a doctoral candidate, you no longer have a “life”! You must give something up. Be very careful in choosing your supervisor. Avoid PAs. Also choose a field of interest and focus early on your research question. Also, developing a thick skin, addressing criticisms are part of the journey: *persevere*.” Rory McGreal

“Advocate for yourself. Be proactive. Be open to feedback.” Melissa Ashman

“Compatibility in focus is important but commitment to you and your interests is even more important, in my experience. Getting them on board with your interest and your goals from the beginning will help you to continue making progress, even if you need to look outside of school for additional, specialized support on your interests. Sharing your research, your long-term goals, and your passion with your supervisor can help them to better understand the reasons for your research and, ultimately, better support you and your unique path.” Bethany Eldridge

“Communicate, demand, and do more than requested...” Aras Bozkurt

“Identify what your intentions and commitment expectations are up front. Students can switch supervisors and should be supported to succeed. Students need to be prepared to do the hard work, and know they are independent but not alone - and should target a supervisor that supports student needs.” Sonja Johnston

“Try to have an honest relationship with supervisors, do not lie, the only one who is harmed by poor supervision is the student.” Francisco Iniesto

“Establishing open and transparent communication channels is paramount. Regular meetings, whether in person or virtual, provide opportunities for the student to update the supervisor on progress, seek feedback, and discuss any challenges or



concerns. Additionally, clear communication of expectations, goals, and timelines ensures alignment and minimizes misunderstandings.

"Read your potential supervisor's work and ask yourself if the writing style, research choices, etc. align with your goals. Don't be afraid to self-advocate in a respectful way. If you have a weird feeling, listen to your gut! It's much easier to change course early on." Jessica O'Reilly

"You need to shape your own trajectory and be responsible/own your work. Feedback isn't personal so use critique to improve. Understand that you will need to write something multiple times, rewrite and combine etc. It's not a linear process (sorry!)... " Beck Pitt

"Be proactive with your supervisor and establish a good working relationship early on. Have courage to express your ideas and be transparent about your progress." Debbie Baff

"The choice of area of research must be driven by the energy from within. Thus passion, lively and with achievable goals." Judith Pete

"Seek feedback early and often. If you think your supervisor is wrong about something, trust your gut and ask someone else to potentially intervene. Remember that your supervisor is probably just trying to help you, so try not to get frustrated with them." Kathryn R. Johnson

"Your supervisor is human; you may sometimes miss the deadline or they may sometimes have to chase a deadline and not give you feedback on time, so communication is important on both ends." Tabisa Mayisela

"Speaking with current and former students of your potential supervisors to get a better sense of whether this relationship and style will be a good fit for you." Rajiv Jhangiani

"Pick the right person as your supervisor. An encouraging professor who may not be focusing on your research area, may be better than another who is 'the' expert in that field. Avoid supervisors who micromanage." Rory McGreal

"Use all the services available on campus to help you to write your thesis more effectively. Ask for resources about planning and conducting research that are clear and thorough. Sometimes, it's alright to consult with professors other than your supervisors to see what they suggest in terms of resources for guiding your research. Consult open courses or programs on conducting research. Form networks with like-minded PhD students who want to share knowledge and support each other in conducting your research and writing your thesis." Danielle Dubien

"Build the relationship" Manisha Khetarpal

## How do you see the Importance of Being Supervised?

"I see it as a mentoring relationship and am finding that as our relationship grows and my understanding improves I get more out of the supervision sessions." Debbie Baff

"Honest insight into the academic process and the trade-offs embedded in the doctoral process." Tanya Elias

"I felt like supervision was an essential travel guide through the doctorate. There are so many avenues to navigate as a PhD student and the journey is complex. The growth potential is immense and I was open to being supervised. The relationship is one in relation - being supervised and engaging supervision." Sonja Johnston

"Being supervised enriches my academic experience by providing guidance, feedback, support, resources, and opportunities for growth and development. It empowers me to achieve my academic goals, contribute meaningfully to my field, and embark on a fulfilling research journey." Anuradha Peramunugamage

"I think the hands-off nature of my supervision meant I had to grapple and sort out issues myself, most of the time. This was ultimately a benefit." Beck Pitt

"I get a lot of support from my supervisor. Whether it's encouragement, leads on opportunities, or advice on research, my supervisor has significantly and tremendously impacted my development as a researcher. Who I am as a researcher now has been heavily influenced by my supervisor. As much as they have "supervised" my research, they have really been more of a mentor, which I appreciate." Melissa Ashman

"I received guidance for the process of designing and conducting research, an advocate within my department, and a navigator of the PhD program." Bethany Eldridge

"Knowledge and expertise in the field you are researching." Tabisa Mayisela

"Knowledge that you are on the right track to meet the standards for attaining a degree." Rory McGreal

"You get the benefit of a specific person's vision of research to guide you through your research. It's a starting point from which you start to develop your own identity as a researcher. Your supervisors have their style of work, and you can develop your own." Danielle Dubien

"My supervisor is building me." Manisha Khetarpal

"Guidance, mentorship, and sponsorship" Rajiv Jhangiani

"Mentorship and empowerment for future transformation. The dissertation of course! Long term relationship and friendship. " Judith Pete

"Experience, you learn to give feedback and if everything goes as expected to publish with senior researchers." Francisco Iniesto

"A lifelong mentor who I can ask questions that I might be embarrassed to ask others about higher education, publishing, etc." Kathryn R. Johnson

"You get someone that you can use as a sounding board. You also get someone who will enhance your knowledge, expand and enhance your research skills and keep you on track during the multiple phases of your dissertation writing. You also get someone who will provide you with constructive criticism required and who will contribute towards your growth as a researcher in your field of study. Finally, if you are lucky you may get someone who will be a strong advocate of your work." Viviane Vladimirschi

## Additional Reflections

"I have worked incredibly hard, and my supervisor has been in front of me, beside, or behind me based on what my needs at the time were. I have been pushed and stretched and transformed, and I am all the better for it!" Sonja Johnston

"Overall, I had an extremely positive experience with my supervisor and the supervisor process. If I had to choose a supervisor today, it would be the same one. However, it is important to point out that you cannot rely solely on your supervisor to fix all problems. Most of the insights, ideas and plans should come from the student. The supervisor's job is to ensure that the latter make sense, are clear and well-grounded. This is exactly what I received from my supervisor (with some added value)." Viviane Vladimirschi

"Take Ownership of Your Research: While your supervisor provides guidance and support, we have to keep in mind doctoral research is ultimately our own. Take ownership of your project, make decisions autonomously, and pursue avenues of inquiry that align with your academic interests and aspirations. Do not allow your supervisor to control you. Keep them as your mentors." Anuradha Peramunugamage

"Yes, in the Ed Tech field students MUST keep up with the latest technology. They should be using reference management software. For example Mendeley or Zotero. If they are not using AI in their work and studies, they should rethink why they are in DE or any Ed Tech field. (or any other field at the grad level). For example Elicit for lit reviews, ChatGPT or Gemini for advice. Students should avoid comparisons of traditional ed with DEd. Studies on perceptions, attitudes, satisfaction etc. MUST be accompanied with hard data on learning achievement, if not they are better suited for an Ed Psych. dissertation rather than a DE or Ed Tech one." Rory McGreal

"Reflections: Passion for open learning is essential. Persevere -- You can't complete the programme without giving something up in your life. You need to become a top-level time manager -- don't procrastinate. Be entrepreneurial and plan your pathway. Plan to publish an article as quickly as possible. Popularise your ideas. Focus, focus, focus: don't try to write your magnum opus; focus on answering the one research question. Once you have your degree, you have a lifetime for your magnum opus. Don't be a snowflake. Criticism comes with the territory. Learn to accept it when it is true and to argue against it when you know better." Rory McGreal

"I still suffer from a massive disbelief in my own abilities. I know that I have come a long way since I started but sometimes it really does feel that I know nothing and the more I read the less I understand but I guess that is normal right?" Debbie Baff



## GO-GN Voices: Supervisor Perspectives

*Supervisor perspectives on doctoral research are less well researched and represented in the literature than student perspectives (Bøgelund, 2015). Here we present some perspectives from experienced supervisors working in the field of open education.*

### Understanding Your Own Practice Through Supervising

*Supervision is a form of professional development as well as a way to support someone's research*

"I learn a lot in my field (and others) from each and every student. I became a better 'expert'." Rory McGreal

"Through supervision I came to better appreciate the importance of making explicit the rationale behind specific research choices" Rajiv Jhangiani

"The research part is actually not limited to certain research paradigms; for authentic outputs, it is necessary to be open to innovative research methods." Aras Bozkurt

"Serving in a supervisory role as mentor and guide for the learning and development of new scholars in my discipline and profession is the most satisfying part of my role as a professor in education. My own experience with undergraduate, graduate, doctoral, and post-doctoral supervision (being supervised) was outstanding, which I realize now is somewhat unusual. However, my own experiences being supervised translated directly into the development of my own practice as a supervisor. In my 25 years as a professor, and in various senior leadership roles, and back into my full-time role as a professor, I have come across many students and colleagues who shared many tales of joyful and productive, and ineffective and even painful, student-supervisor relationships. In part, it was my own positive experience with effective supervision as a undergrad and graduate student & postdoc, and then with supervising my own students as a junior to senior faculty member, in combination with my role as Associate Dean during which I witnessed the opportunities, challenges and conflicts associated with supervision in our school, that led to my current focus on effective supervision and peer mentoring in my program of research." Michele Jacobsen

"I have gained a lot of subject knowledge, plus exposure to different methodologies" Anonymous Contribution

"Each dissertation widened my knowledge of the field. I learn a lot about relevant issues in my field. I get a sense of pride for having helped students achieve their goals." Rory McGreal

"You understand how other people think and it is good to realise how students start and remember you were there, so in general you become more empathic."

Francisco Iniesto

"Allow a student to navigate and try out things, and you support the journey."

Tabisa Mayisela

"I taught two doctoral students how to use qualitative data analysis tools and how to code and analyze qualitative data. I also discussed with them different methodologies. After having had quite a bit of experience with qualitative data tools and analysis, I feel very confident in providing mentoring. I also had the opportunity to review and provide feedback to several colleagues during my doctoral degree. These opportunities added to and enhanced my own practice."

Viviane Vladimirsch

## Challenges of Doctoral Supervision

*What do supervisors see as the challenges of their role?*

"Supervision is a complex and dynamic teaching and mentoring practice that combines a scholar's expertise in research and teaching in providing guidance for a developing new scholar. Every student brings a unique history, culture, languages, educational background to doctoral studies, and also has different expectations, interests, motivations, career goals, and capabilities. Supervisors have a huge challenge in developing a supervisory practice – on the job, usually without direct training or support – and adapting that complex practice to the diverse student in front of them. What is amazing is that so many supervisors are excellent; what is not surprising is that there is a proportion of supervisors who are not that good at this complex role and responsibility. Doctoral supervision occurs within departmental structures, institutional cultures and administrative structures, rules and regulations, over which the supervisor has little control. Supervisors can focus on developing effective relationships with doctoral students and focus on developing and strengthening their own supervisory practices. Doctoral supervisors and students are subject to the massification goals of universities who aim to grow graduate programs and student numbers, who seek to attract larger numbers of doctoral students, often without providing adequate funding or resources or supports for students or for supervisors, without providing adequate training and support to supervisors OR to students, and then the institution directs its gaze as "supervision"

as the problem when things go sideways. Grants and funding are harder and harder to get, and thus, supervisors and doctoral students are always scrabbling to apply for funding to do their research. Universities treat graduate education as a growth industry, a revenue stream for campus operations, and supervisors and doctoral students are caught in this context of high demand and expectations for research productivity and advancing the universities' reputation, in a context of reduced funding and limited support." Michele Jacobsen

"Timing: I have a schedule for myself and for my MA/PHD students and I expect them to be punctual so that we can move smoothly on our research schedule." Aras Bozkurt

"Student attitudes (e.g. overconfidence and defensiveness), making assumptions about their supervisor and their experiences." Beck Pitt

"Getting students to finish, and through some of the slumps" Anonymous Contribution

"The cost to students in relation to their prospects for employment." Rory McGreal

"You need to learn all the endless bureaucratic aspects, and attend meetings that were not necessary (and I don't mean the ones with the student)" Francisco Iniesto

"Time and convincing students to focus, focus, focus." Rory McGreal

"Meeting department and university regulations while prioritizing care for the individual student's journey." Rajiv Jhangiani

"The main challenge is coping with work and your doctoral supervision duties." Viviane Vladimirschi

## Success Strategies

"I hope that I support students appropriately but in a way that lets them 'own' the work and their decisions about it. (I am aware that some supervisors may insist students take a particular approach or angle etc. sometimes, which I don't think is appropriate for doctoral level.)" Beck Pitt

"My approach is to help the candidate to achieve their goal of a doctoral degree. My role is to guide and encourage them through the process while ensuring that the dissertation meets the quality standards for our field. I respect the candidate as a colleague. No challenge to overcome. I have not adapted to any further approach. I didn't change behaviour other than to be much more supportive, while being critical, especially when students were losing focus. Students achieved their goals." Rory McGreal



"I learn how to strengthen my supervision practice from my students, my mentors, and my colleagues; I was privileged to have been mentored by excellent supervisors for my MSc PhD and PostDoc journeys. As I develop my supervision practice, I listen and learn a great deal from each of my diverse graduate students and their unique pathways; it is a privilege to work alongside new researchers and to listen carefully for what they need from me. I expand my supervision practice via engagement with academic colleagues and graduate students beyond my research specialization, and beyond my faculty by collaborating with others across campus, and by serving on supervisory and examination committees. I also learn from my program of research on supervision, from online faculty development of quality supervision, the Graduate Student Experience Survey (2022 – 2024), and extensive research on peer mentoring in graduate education." Michele Jacobsen

"Generally to be supportive and practical. Students often have doubts about their ability or get bogged in minor details, so helping them to find a path through these requires emotional support and practical advice" Anonymous Contribution

"You need to be open to learning, to learn from senior supervisors and try to find your place of expertise to support the student even if it is only minor things."  
Francisco Iniesto

## Success Stories

"I have had the great privilege of working with some exceptional doctoral students. I can share that it is a special joy that comes from witnessing your student grow in confidence and self-belief as they go on to achieve success. The experience I recall most fondly is witnessing my student unhesitatingly navigate a complex research decision with a high degree of ethical integrity, which left me beaming with pride."  
Rajiv Jhangiani

"Reflecting on whether I am a good supervisor, I believe that I have learned a great deal through experience, so I would say that I am an experienced supervisor who is committed to reflective practice, and I am constantly learning how to shape and improve my practice. As a supervisor, I attended to my own scholarship and reading to expand my knowledge and expertise for supervision, and I engaged in research on doctoral supervision. I aim to be responsive, flexible & engaged in my doctoral students' research, and I intentionally get to know about my doctoral students' unique interests, lives and passions beyond grad school. Serving as a supervisor, mentor and guide for the learning and development of talented new scholars in my discipline and profession is the most satisfying part of being a professor in education. There have been some memorable moments that defined my approach

as a supervisor. My supervisors demonstrated engaged and responsive supervision and I wanted to base my supervision practice on their good work. For example, it was a transformative experience when I was funded as a research assistant on my supervisor's research team, and on other faculty members' research projects. My doctoral & postdoc supervisors invited me to collaborate on their research, co-author papers, and co-present at conferences, which helped forge my identity as a scholar. Having my work recognized & valued by my doctoral & postdoc supervisors, both of whom encouraged me to apply for grants, count myself in for awards, and to disseminate my research, was pivotal for believing in myself and my abilities as a scholar. As a professor, and then associate dean graduate programs, I have realized that most of my colleagues care deeply about becoming an excellent supervisor. My colleagues' struggles with the demands and complexities of supervision motivated me to create seminars and peer mentoring opportunities for my colleagues, and to collaborate on the development of the Quality Supervision MOOC to support faculty in enhancing their supervisory skills and practices in an online community of practice." Michele Jacobsen

"One student's open practice led to being invited to a conference in Dallas, getting quoted widely and a research grant." Anonymous

"I've had positive experiences working with other colleagues - inviting someone with some particular expertise to co-supervise or contribute to some supervision discussions." Tabisa Mayisela

"I had a student from the global south whose English was not the greatest. I had to guide him intensively through the process from proposal to dissertation, constantly encouraging him to narrow his ambitions and focus on the one question. It was very rewarding to see him produce a dissertation and pass his exam." Rory McGreal

## Lessons Learned

"A colleague, who was involved in an external project in which my student located his thesis research, became involved in a power play about authorship in the paper we were co-authoring. As supervisor, I supported my student as first author, as they had collected an original data set as part of the thesis research under a separate ethics protocol and approval. My colleague argued that he should be first author as he was the PI on the larger project and his role in inviting the student to use this site for his research. I fought my colleague on this claim because he did not fund the student, he was not involved in developing the research proposal, nor was he involved in writing the thesis. Upon reflection and with experience, I realize this argument over authorship was a power play on the part of this colleague to put his

name first and claim the students' research as his own even though it was separate and belonged to my student. This power play soured any further interactions with this colleague and made me hyperattentive as a supervisor to issues of authorship and power and fairness in writing with students going forward, and stoked a protective fire in me to ensure students' rights are protected." Michele Jacobsen

"Students can get defensive if they somehow feel wronged. It's extremely important to be intentionally clear and positive in interaction with students. Try to understand where they're coming from when they have a negative reaction." Danielle Dubien

## Advice for Doctoral Students

"While it means a lot to become a graduate student, I recommend taking the time to ensure that your supervisor will be a good fit for you. Ultimately it isn't just your work but also your well-being that will be affected by the quality of this relationship." Rajiv Jhangiani

"Start your research on programs and potential supervisors well in advance of your projected start date for your degree. Reach out to potential supervisors for a conversation, and to determine whether a match with this supervisor will benefit both of you as you undertake your degree. Be realistic when choosing your program and have more than one supervisor in mind when you apply, as the supervisor you want may have several students in mind as well. Invest in the relationship and be willing to work hard and take direction, as it is your program and you will get out of it what you put into it. That said, if you are investing time and working hard, but you are having trouble with your supervisor, know who you can turn to for support. Do not be afraid to make a change in supervision, because every student deserves an effective supervisor." Michele Jacobsen

"Your supervisor has limited time they are allowed to give research supervision (much less than you'd wish!) so help them out by being prepared for meetings, and be direct about where you need help." Anonymous

"There should be a mutual setting of expectations at the start of the doctorate. Ensure that you keep your supervisor up-to-speed with anything impacting on your doctoral work so they can support you. Understand that your supervisor(s) have multiple things in the mix and you may not be their no1. priority at a particular time." Beck Pitt

"Communicate, communicate, communicate. Be clear about what you've signed up for on the memorandum of understanding at the beginning of each year." Tabisa Mayisela

"There are two possible attitudes for a supervisor: 1. How can I ensure that only the most rigorous research done, redone and done again is accepted for the degree? For this the student must jump through several increasingly narrow hoops even before they begin writing their dissertation. 2. This student wants a doctoral degree. How can I help her/him attain this as economically and efficiently as possible in a timely manner without compromising quality? Choose the second." Rory McGreal

"Stay humble and do your best to inform and inspire your students. Always continue developing your research skills and learning new techniques so you can help your students to be at the cutting edge of research methods in effective and ethical ways." Danielle Dubien

"I would advise them to learn all they can about their supervisors before choosing them and to be prepared for a few meetings at the start of the process. Put differently, students should attend these initial meetings with at least a rough draft of their research plans." Viviane Vladimirschi

## Advice for Supervisors

"Effective graduate supervision is a deeply held commitment to support the relational development of a new scholar, colleague, and peer. Some of the greatest joy in academia can come from mentoring and guiding doctoral students; for those who do take the initiative to develop a strong supervisory practice it can be hell. Effective supervision means holding high personal regard for the students in your care. My graduate students depend on me and trust that I will do everything in my power to mentor, guide and support them in articulating and achieving their goals in research, teaching, and learning. Graduate students trust that I will care about them and be invested in their success and in them as a whole person. Effective graduate supervision involves listening carefully and observing each of my students closely to better understand what they need from me to deepen their knowledge and understanding, develop as a researcher, and to be healthy and well as an individual." Michele Jacobsen

"Know when to step-back and let the student figure it out themselves, rather than giving advice. You are (should be!) always learning from others, whilst you are the supervisor, they are becoming the expert in their area through their doctoral journey. Each doctoral journey is as unique as the person/student who is undertaking it. There are also always different challenges along the way. I wonder if sharing supervisory experiences (where appropriate) may help create a more

collegiate relationship between supervisors/supervisees? Remember to keep up to speed with regulations, necessary training etc. Look for opportunities for your students to share their work and be part of wider academic communities." Beck Pitt

"Communicate, communicate, communicate. We are human; we are part of various systems ... It's great to have a check-in at the beginning of your supervision meetings. Follow up with the student if they've been quiet for a while and/or even missed scheduled meetings." Tabisa Mayisela

"While ensuring quality, encourage, guide and lead the student to focus on an answerable research question and warn them of the pitfalls of surveys, etc." Rory McGreal

"It is a privilege to serve as a doctoral supervisor. Prioritize the journey and growth of the individual student above all else. Lead with care and if the system is designed in ways that is exclusionary or that perpetuates cruelty, advocate to change the system." Rajiv Jhangiani

"Possess good knowledge about the subject and the context that is going to be researched, be kind and respectful with students, be attentive to student's varying cultural and socioeconomic realities, provide timely feedback and constructive criticism and help students grow and evolve in any way possible during the supervisory process. " Viviane Vladimirschi

## Supervising Open Research

*In this section, members reflect on whether working in the field of open education presents distinctive considerations for doctoral research. Walsh et al. (2023) found aspects of doctoral supervision to be consistent with open educational practices in a variety of ways, including motivation, pastoral support, community and connectedness, flexibility of delivery, and soft skills. What did our selection of members think?*

“The field of open education research presents several implications for the doctoral supervision process, especially in regions like Sri Lanka where it's relatively new. Open education research often intersects with various disciplines such as education, technology, psychology, and sociology. Supervisors need to be aware of and comfortable with this interdisciplinary nature to provide effective guidance to doctoral students. They may need to draw on expertise from different domains and encourage interdisciplinary approaches in student research. Research in open education often involves innovative methodologies such as design based research, mixed methods approaches, learning analytics, and qualitative research on distance learning. As open education is a relatively new area in Sri Lanka, there may be a need for capacity building among doctoral supervisors themselves. Training and professional development opportunities can equip supervisors with the knowledge, skills, and resources needed to effectively mentor students in open education research. In my opinion, by embracing interdisciplinary approaches, staying informed about emerging methodologies, addressing ethical considerations, fostering global collaborations, considering policy implications, building capacity, and promoting community engagement, supervisors can effectively support doctoral students in conducting impactful research in open education.” Anuradha Peramunugamage

“Doctoral students and supervisors can engage in global communities of practice, can make the student-supervisor relationship more open and public, and shine a light both on excellent practice and on ineffective practice. From the time I started my own doctoral journey in 1995, a great deal of my research and teaching has taken place in the open, for anybody with an internet connection to see. Sharing my own work openly and my open education pedagogy with students reflects a deeply held commitment to knowledge building in community and democratizing knowledge. Researching, teaching and academic publishing in the open has also reflected my commitment to the horizon and disrupting the status quo, interrogating practices that are past their best by date, and ensuring that the underrepresented in the academy - in this case, a female, then mother in EdTech, were more visible and their voices heard. As a doctoral student, a professor in computer science invited us to publish all of our coursework on a website. One course-based task was to go to 12 public events during the term, and write a short

review of that event and what we learned from the speaker or the workshop. My supervisor engaged me in his internet research project, which, among other methods, involved an online survey. I carried that method forward into my doctoral research, and used an online survey with faculty on how they were adopting technology for teaching, research and administrative tasks. Engaging in online research methodology requires that one become aware of the ever evolving process and procedures with Internet Research Ethics; this line of inquiry led to a co-authored open access article in CJHE (Warrell & Jacobsen, 2014) on the policy gap for ethical practice in online research settings. Connected to my open educational practices and experiences as a doctoral student, I chose to publish my doctoral dissertation on my personal website (archived PhD) so it would be more discoverable and accessible than the lovely hardcover blue book sitting on a shelf. Openly sharing my dissertation online, while not very exotic today, given the plethora of digital repositories full of theses & dissertations, was a bit unusual in 1998 when few dissertations were OA. According to Google Scholar, Jacobsen (1998) has been cited every year since going online, so my goal of making this research more discoverable and accessible has been met (173 citations and counting). An added benefit of an open access dissertation has been the connections with a global community of researchers who share an interest in this line of inquiry.” Michele Jacobsen

“Putting my supervisor and GO-GN hat on... and beyond the usual supervisor discipline expertise (e.g. having nobody who is working in the exact area that you are (not uncommon I think and this was the case for me also)) yes, I think so, particularly around open research practices and ensuring you build these in, where you are using them, from the start. ” Beck Pitt

“I think it would be great if supervisors supported and advocated for open data collection and helped students navigate this from a Research Ethics Board perspective, also embracing innovative approaches and collaborations in ways that sometimes conflict with the traditions of the academy. That said, and this may be a contradiction of sorts, but I do think better support could be provided to ALL graduate students re: open access and also combating openness essentialism. It's good to know that there are options available, but also good to think critically about the implications of making something open.” Jessica O'Reilly

“I think this would suggest a strong bias towards open content in open access journals and public domain material. For a supervisor it is important to ensure that the student stays focused and within the field of open learning” Rory McGreal

“I believe that there are too many stories of traumatic experiences and terrible supervision that have students abandoning their programs of study and leaving their

doctorates unfinished. As a field, creating space for open access, sharing, and insights to help in the supervision process is key." Sonja Johnston

"Yes - there's a requirement in my program around depositing our dissertation in Proquest Dissertations and Theses. I have to discuss depositing it in the institutional repository either instead or in addition since I would not want my research to be restricted in terms of access." Stacy Katz

"I think having an open approach, ethos and mindset definitely has an impact on the doctoral supervision relationship." Debbie Baff

"Yes. My supervisor did not have specific expertise in open education which had impacts in terms of building committees to remediate gaps." Tanya Elias

"Yes! Especially in our context in the Global South, with a focus for women, very few have specific expertise on open education. The trend is changing though, with many women joining the field. " Judith Pete

"Nowadays open science is becoming a term of relevance for research where many funding bodies imply publishing open access and open educational practices are needed. As a field open education includes most of the values from the previous terms which benefit you in growing as a researcher from your PhD" Francisco Iniesto

"My supervisor intentionally employed open educational practices (OEP) throughout my dissertation process. The supervisor learned new methodologies, information, and perspectives from me while guiding me through the process. We negotiated outcomes that helped me grow while meeting disciplinary standards and accomplishing my research in a timely manner. My supervisor was open with me about their own, often frustrating, experiences with university administration, publishing, conferences, their dissertation, etc. This kind of openness created a bond of mentorship that helped me persist at points when I considered giving up." Kathryn R. Johnson

"Open education research field can help share best practices among supervisors, and it can help supervisors feel supported by providing resources and establishing a community for supervisors, too." Bethany Eldridge

"Yes. One of my supervisors was the leader for open education research in the Global South, and thus exposed me to the field and also employed open educational practices in our supervisor-student relationship." Tabisa Mayisela

"Other than the focus on openness in education, I don't see any other implications. I supervise students in distance education as well as open learning and cannot see any significant differences other than the subject matter." Rory McGreal



"The increasing trend of using open access journals is helpful generally. When the best of open education is used (professional and constructive collaborations, addressing education inequity in good faith, etc.) it allows students to pursue a PhD and other research work or do so more effectively. Open education can provide opportunities to attend conferences and participate in funded research activities; GO-GN and the Commonwealth of Learning provide such opportunities. When open education is promoted as a field that should promote trust, working in good faith, and building community, it can influence people to adopt these values. Unfortunately, I've observed that in some cases, leaders in open education seem to think that any form of treatment is acceptable since the results (cheaper and easier access to resources and courses) justify the means used to obtain them. So, open education can be counter-productive if it is abused." Danielle Dubien

"With open education research there is a greater desire for internal consistency across research topics, methodology, and scientific practices (including open data, open materials, and open access publishing)." Rajiv Jhangiani

"It is imperative that the supervisor be very familiar with the field and its peculiarities and varying concepts and contexts. It is also very helpful if the supervisor has some basic understanding and knowledge of the educational and cultural contexts in which the research will be carried out. For example, my research was conducted in Brazil. My supervisor had plenty of previous working experience and knowledge about the country, which proved to be a tremendous asset in dealing with the major hurdles. " Viviane Vladimirschi

"I was arbitrarily matched with a supervisor who is very well known in the field. We had one initial exchange that raised huge red flags for me. I wished to study learner perceptions of renewable assignments. I teach courses that invite students to participate in OER creation as their final capstone project, and I'd been doing so successfully for several years. The potential supervisor told me that students can't produce OER of any quality at all. I realized that we weren't on the same page and I'd be spending a lot of energy defending myself and my choices- not exclusive to the research project but broadly, pedagogically. I felt like he'd box me into a study that I didn't feel connected with. So I found a different path." Jessica O'Reilly

*Are there particular things to note about supervising research projects in open education?*

"Open and online educational research has much to offer doctoral supervision and doctoral education. There are differences and similarities in doctoral programs, doctoral supervision, programmatic and institutional contexts that impact on doctoral students and supervisors around the globe, and we can learn from these

differences and similarities through open and collaborative communities of practice, and through our open and online scholarship. There is value in interinstitutional and international collaborative research on doctoral supervision. Reflecting on advice I might offer to new supervisors is to avoid learning how to supervise on the job versus through active and intentional inquiry, mentoring and instruction. Supervision is a pedagogy that takes intentional effort, sustained practice, and commitment to do well. My advice is to form relationships with trusted peers who are strong supervisors and talk to them about supervision; Go to online and in-person supervision seminars & workshops offered by your department, faculty and institution; Engage in the plethora of online communities focused on quality supervision; Read books, blogs and research about quality supervision and immerse in learning the many topics, trends and issues that are relevant for every supervisor to know. Connect & learn with colleagues who are effective supervisors and who care deeply about student progress and wellness; seek academic peer mentors who you trust both within and beyond your own discipline. Join networks of support, such as IDERN, and create learning alliances across disciplines and institutions to embrace, value and cultivate effective supervision practice. In my [blog on the design and evaluation of online faculty development for effective graduate supervision](#), I elaborate on the pressing need for online faculty development for supervisors, and specifically support with online supervision, across disciplines."

Michele Jacobsen

"Open practice can help with support and reduce isolation of students" Anonymous

"Open education research is one field, there are many others: nothing intrinsically different about it. Supervision should be open to many different approaches and not be confined to one way, even if that way is called 'open'." Rory McGreal

"Open science practices are not just ideologically consistent with open education research--it also leads to more rigorous, transparent, and honest science. As a result, it is a responsibility of a supervisor to teach and mentor a doctoral student in this domain." Rajiv Jhangiani

"My research in the K-12 open education is unique as there is little research to date in the K-12 sector. In this sense I am sure I would have a lot to offer to those early career or beginner researchers whose focus is in the K-12 sector with particular emphasis in open education." Viviane Vladimirschi



Prompt: 3 words that summarise your experience of being supervised in your research during your doctorate (n=21)



Prompt: 3 words that summarise your experience of being a doctoral supervisor  
(n=11)

## Useful Resources / Further Reading

Babalola (2021) presents an interesting case study of power relationships in the context of a Nigerian University. [The paper](#) considers the roles of different stakeholders, how to conceptualise authority and power, and ways of approaching asymmetry in power relations.

The Canadian Association of Graduate Studies (CAGS, 2008) has provided a set of [12 guiding principles for doctoral programmes](#).

The Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning at Manchester Metropolitan University (CELT, n.d) has provided a series of [flashcards](#) designed to stimulate debate around the supervision process.

A potentially useful resource for supporting writing is [Research, Writing, and Creative Process in Open and Distance Education](#) (Conrad, 2023). This edited book brings together a range of experts in the open space to reflect on the process of writing and the difficulties it can present.

The Council of Ontario Universities (2023) has described [principles for graduate supervision](#) with the different roles and responsibilities of the supervisor, student, and other stakeholders.

[Dimitrova \(2016\)](#) examined doctoral students at Stockholm University. This study reinforced a lot of the general advice about good practice, such as the need for independence, constructive feedback and sufficient attention from supervisors. It was also found that age and gender might affect perceptions of practice. The paper also highlights the importance of a perceived creative environment as an attractive prospect for students.

Gasson et al. (2023) have written a book entitled [Confident Supervisors: Creating Independent Researchers](#) which is available CC BY NC SA. This is a professional development resource for research supervisors and trainers involved in providing workshops and resources to support practice.

This blog post (Gorup & Laufer, 2020) explores [When Relationships Between Supervisors and Doctoral Researchers Go Wrong](#), focusing on the dynamics of power and control and how this is open to abuse.

[Hidden Curriculum in Doctoral Education](#) is a blog which accompanies a book of the same name which explores interaction and support through the doctoral process (Elliot et al., 2020).

[Kearns & Gardiner \(2011\)](#) provide a short article which focuses on the responsibilities of supervisees in maintaining and influencing the supervisory relationship.

Knight (2024) collates some [resources](#) designed to facilitate the process of setting initial expectations for supervisors and their supervisees.

[Mainhard et al \(2009\)](#) explores different ways to model the supervisor-supervisee relationship, offering some interesting comparison on differences in perception from different stakeholders.

[Massyn et al. \(2024\)](#) addresses the somewhat taboo subject of when and whether to terminate or continue supervisory arrangements through a narrative approach.

Michele Jacobsen runs a blog on doctoral supervision at <https://michelejacobsen.ca/supervision-blog/> which contains lots of useful reflections and resources.

[Muthanna & Alduais \(2021\)](#) conducted a thematic review on the theme of research integrity in the supervisory relationship. They make recommendations for policymakers, supervisors and their students.

Thinkwell (2024) provides [a range of tools and templates for use by both supervisors and students](#), including planning tools for setting expectations, establishing working arrangements, providing feedback, self-assessment and more.

UCL (2024) has curated resources for supporting the supervision process, including a [toolkit](#), a [good supervision guide](#), and [diaries which detail the progress and issues raised in some doctoral projects](#).

[Tara Brabazon's YouTube Channel](#) (Brabazon, n.d.) contains many broadcasts on all aspects of doctoral supervision.

Taylor & Rubery (2024) provide [The Research Supervisor's Bibliography](#), an extensive reference list organised by theme which covers pretty much anything you can think of!

[The South Africa-Netherlands Research Programme on Alternatives in Development \(SANPAD\) Supervision Workbook](#) was originally written to enhance the quality of PhD graduates by focusing on the training given to supervisors. There is an emphasis on mentoring and coaching (Dietz et al., 2006).

[The Supervision Whisperers](#) (Miller & Mewburn, n.d.) is a blog dedicated to exploring and reflecting on the process of doctoral supervision. Mewburn's (2020) book *How to Tame your PhD* acts as a companion to the [Thesis Whisperer](#) blog (Mewburn, n.d.).

The UK Council for Graduate Education (2024b) provides a library of resources exploring frameworks and policies around doctoral education. This includes a focus on professional doctorates and industry partnerships, which are sometimes overlooked when the focus is on PhD students. There is a UK focus in these materials. You can use [this link to show the materials relevant to doctoral study](#).

The University of Cambridge (2024) has [guidance for dealing with harassment and sexual misconduct](#).

The University of Dundee shares [a couple of case studies](#) used in doctoral supervisor training (Anderson & McLellan, 2014).

[UNED](#) (2024) provides a set of good practices for supervision (in Spanish). They are designed to set up the relationship between student and supervisors.

Vitae (2024) supports the professional development of researchers around the globe with a focus on excellence and impact. They provide [a range of resources](#) organised into different categories, including supporting research through the stages of a doctorate; accommodating student needs; career advice, and more. The content is free to access but requires registration.

Wichmann-Hansen (2021) is a [short guide to the supervision process](#) which underscores the importance of setting expectations, monitoring progress, structuring feedback, and using online tools.

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