

Chapter 2

University of Durham, United Kingdom

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Abstract

In this case study, the experience of doctoral study in the UK is examined from the perspectives of both doctoral researchers and doctoral supervisors in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences at Durham University. Based on the reports of participants, the key themes of supervision, language, and identity emerge as central to the UK doctoral experience. The chapter first contextualises the research by setting out an overview of the processes and policies governing doctoral study at Durham. It then presents the case study, in which semi-structured interviews with eleven doctoral researchers and six supervisors from various departments were carried out, transcribed and thematically analysed. Analysis reveals that the doctoral experience at Durham is highly bespoke, with variability in the experience of supervision deriving from the wide range of personal and professional circumstances of both doctoral researchers and supervisors. As regards language, the findings emphasise the dominance of English and the importance of learning the academic language and stylistic conventions of researchers' disciplines. Linked in to the two themes of supervision and language, the case study reveals the Durham doctoral experience as a journey of academic and personal identity development in which both doctoral researchers and supervisors are intimately engaged.

Keywords: UK doctoral study; supervision; academic language; researcher development; researcher identity

The doctorate in the United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom (UK), a doctoral research degree, with the generic title "Doctor of Philosophy" (PhD), is usually a 3-year full-time (6-year part-time) course of independent

study which requires a doctoral researcher to undertake a research project independently and receive specialised individual supervision, from two or three supervisors, during the process. In the Arts and Humanities and Social Sciences disciplines, the resultant research is usually presented as a “thesis”, a report of up to 100,000 words. The study is examined orally in a “viva” (a 1 to 2-hour questioning of the doctoral researcher about the research undertaken which takes place in private with two examiners.). As there are no independent doctoral schools in the UK, most if not all universities offer doctoral education which is located in individual departments and taught by ‘research-active’ staff, that is, academic staff who themselves are engaged in research and its publication.

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), which oversees higher education, recorded a continued increase in the number of doctoral degree entrants from 2006 to 2016; across this 10-year period, around 50 per cent of full-time entrants and approximately 20 per cent of part-time entrants were not UK-domiciled. Enrolments rose steadily over this period from approximately 23,000 entrants in 2006 to just below 30,000 in 2016 (Overview of Postgraduate Education, 2017). The internationalisation of doctoral education has brought considerable income into UK universities, which in turn, raises expectations for those paying for the education (doctoral researchers), and for those responsible for providing it (supervisors).

In the past ten years or more, there has also been a shift in the purpose of research degrees. No longer solely the interest of the apprentice researcher learning the trade of the discipline or field of research with a view to becoming a university teacher-researcher, the doctorate, in the wake of globalisation, has now become the focus of governments, public bodies, and public and private institutions who are in search of a professional and intellectual cadre of highly qualified people who can meet their needs and that of the knowledge economy (Boud & Lee, 2009). This shift has been accompanied by the emergence of professional doctorates (e.g., in Business, Education, Law, Theology) which usually includes a taught phase of study to prepare the doctoral researcher in research methods and the field. The research, or “thesis”, phase is reduced, usually from a 3-year period of independent full-time research to a 1–year full-time (or 2-year part-time) modular taught phase, followed by a 2-year full-time (4-year part-time) period of research. The resulting thesis is also usually reduced from a maximum of 100,000 to 60,000 words. In accordance with the need for doctoral researchers to demonstrate research potential, there is a strong expectation to publish their work. In special circumstances, it is possible for receive a doctorate by publication.

To receive a grant to undertake a doctoral research degree is a highly competitive process in the UK as elsewhere, and many doctoral researchers are faced with having to fund their own study. The situation is often similar for international students with many doctoral researchers, especially from East and South-east Asia having to fund their own education. Nonetheless, United Kingdom Research and Innovation (UKRI) support the development of doctoral researcher excellence through scholarships and researcher education. The university in this case study, Durham University, is a “Russell Group” university—a term applied to the UK’s top 24 higher education institutions (HEIs) that promote excellence in teaching and research, and who also compete favourably in global university rankings. Durham University is part of

a UKRI research consortium which attracts top UK students to compete for scholarships funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC).

Whether privately funded or funded by scholarship, doctoral education, like undergraduate education, is perceived as an expensive undertaking, and as our study shows, comes with considerable doctoral candidate expectations. For example, at the university in this case study, full-time tuition fees for the 2018-19 enrolment period are approximately £18,000 per annum for international students, although UK and European Union students pay significantly less—approximately £4,000. Fees for professional doctorates are slightly higher because they include a taught component. (Undergraduate tuition is around £9,000 per annum for full-time study.)

The context at Durham University

Doctoral research is an important aspect of education across all departments and faculties at Durham University. Doctoral researchers are integrated into the research programmes of departments and contribute to the research atmosphere and development of a department, e.g., in roles such as teaching assistants contributing to the delivery of postgraduate and undergraduate degrees, and as research assistants supporting funded research of academics. For example, the School of Education at Durham University has more than 150 enrolled full-time and part-time students, many of whom study from a distance or are international students. Approximately half are self-funded while the remainder have scholarships from their own countries, or UKRI-funded scholarships. The latter, especially, seek opportunities to further their post-doctoral employment by undertaking teaching and research support roles.

Processes of admission, supervision, and standards (outlined in the *Learning and Teaching Handbook*) are all closely monitored and regulated at policy level, overseen by a Director of postgraduate research (DPRG) in each faculty and department. While administrators deal with admissions centrally, each department has a DPRG who, guided by *Code of Practice on Research Degrees*, is responsible for admitting candidates into the programme; supporting and monitoring the doctoral programme in the department; and ensuring implementation of the University's doctoral standards.

Supervision of doctoral researchers

Durham University's supervision policy (*Code of Practice on Supervision*) outlines the responsibilities and training opportunities for staff and doctoral researchers. Doctoral supervision is accounted for within an academic staff member's teaching capacity, alongside their postgraduate and undergraduate teaching. Supervisors are expected to supervise no more than 12 full-time equivalent doctoral researchers, although many limit the number to six (full-time equivalents). Supervisors are required to have the appropriate skills and subject expertise, or undertake training accordingly as part of their probationary expectations and early career development.

Doctoral researchers are supervised by a team made up of at least two supervisors, one of whom must be on a register of approved supervisors held within each department and approved at university level. These supervisors must normally have completed a 1-year probationary period; have gained a doctoral degree or have equivalent experience of research; be demonstrably research-active; and have a good record of successful supervision, including at least one recent successful completion. Supervisory teams may vary, with one member engaged in research in the relevant field of research, and the other having more generic doctoral supervision experience. Some teams share the supervision equally; in other cases, the second supervisor may act more as a support, offering occasional advice and feedback. If academic staff have not previously supervised a doctoral researcher to successful completion, they are expected to undertake training and development, through a postgraduate certificate in higher education, or through training modules for staff within the University. Experienced supervisors are encouraged to undertake continued professional development.

The doctoral experience at Durham University

At the beginning of their programme of study, all new doctoral researchers receive an induction at both university and departmental level (organised by the DPGR), which consists of a series of meetings to inform them about doctoral research. Meetings address the supervisory process, assessment processes, the research environment, researcher training and development, academic writing and support, pastoral support, and ethics in research. Doctoral researchers are also informed about the university-delivered research skills training courses available to them to supplement their supervision experience.

Supervision

Supervisors and doctoral researchers are responsible for establishing a timetable of work and maintaining close contact throughout the period of study, usually via face-to-face meetings supported by telephone, email, and Skype communication. They should meet, at minimum, eight to twelve times per year, and keep agreed written records of progress (usually summarised by either the supervisor or doctoral researcher and covering the main points discussed in the meeting, the doctoral researcher's and supervisor's course of action resulting from the meeting, and signatures of those present). Doctoral researchers are also required to discuss their researcher training needs and ensure that these are met as part of their supervision, by attending training skills courses in the university, or drawing on available funding to support training outside of the University. These records are particularly important in the first year as doctoral researchers, together with their supervisors, adjust to the new research environment and identify areas where further training.

If a supervisor is absent or no longer available (for reasons of health, retirement, or extended leave), the DPGR arranges replacement supervision. If doctoral researchers have concerns about their supervision which they cannot discuss with the supervisor, they can approach the GDPR or another senior faculty member for support. Both doctoral researchers and

supervisors have the opportunity to request a change to supervision arrangements in the event of insuperable difficulties arising from that relationship.

Assessment and examination

The University has a centrally operated review system to monitor doctoral researchers' progress which consists of four reviews across their 3 years of study. A team of two other supervisors in the department undertake the reviews. The purpose of the reviews is to ensure that doctoral researchers make appropriate academic progress and to a satisfactory standard. If not, they may receive a warning, and then be required to withdraw from the doctoral programme.

At the end of 3 years of study, the doctoral researchers submit their thesis to the University and it is then sent to an internal and external (to the university) examiner. The supervisors, in consultation with the doctoral researcher, select the examiners. Theses are written in English, although the doctoral researchers may present qualitative data in another language (which they, or a translator, must translate). Doctorates undertaken in the department of languages have their own specific guidelines. After reading the thesis, each examiner writes independently a report which addresses the criteria for the award of the degree.

An oral examination (*viva voce*) is then arranged. The two examiners ask questions (which have emerged from their reading of the thesis) in an oral examination, or *viva voce*, and the doctoral researcher must "defend" their thesis in response. The oral examination is not a public event, and only the supervisor, if permitted by the candidate and the examiners, may be allowed in the room but is not permitted to participate in any discussion. Like all universities, Durham University expects that the study undertaken has generated an original and significant contribution to knowledge, according to the following general criteria. Examiners must answer "yes" or "no" and substantiate their decisions in a more detailed report:

1. Has the candidate shown that they are able to analyse, test and criticise ideas in an independent study of literature related to a specific theme?

YES/NO

2. Has the candidate shown that he or she understands how the special theme is related to a wider field of knowledge?

YES/NO

3. Has the candidate demonstrated mastery of the special theme, and the ability to evaluate ideas within it?

YES/NO

4. Has the candidate presented a body of independent research which contains an original contribution to knowledge, and has the potential to enhance an area of professional practice? (The thesis should include matter worthy of publication though it need not be submitted in a form suitable for publication.)

YES/NO

5. Is the style of the thesis satisfactory?

YES/NO

6. Is the presentation and general arrangement of the thesis satisfactory?

YES/NO

After the viva voce, examiners award the thesis as follows: pass (unconditionally); pass with minor corrections (to be completed within 3 months); pass with major corrections (to be completed within 6 months); resubmission in 12 months (for re-examination); awarding a lower degree; or an outright “fail” (which is highly unusual).

Doctoral researcher voice

Doctoral researchers meet with the DPRG in three staff-student consultative meeting during the year to discuss their experiences of doctoral research in the department. These meetings are official (minuted), and doctoral researchers’ concerns are responded to accordingly. While the doctoral researchers in the department elect at least one representative or self-nominate, they are all welcome to attend.

Accountability and ethics

Finally, in the research environment, “accountability” and “good practice” are valued, where all staff and doctoral researchers involved in research owe a duty of accountability to society, to their profession, to the University, and funders, and that public and private funds invested in doctoral researcher projects are carried out responsibly by both the researchers and supervisors. Thus, research that involves human subjects must be undertaken in an ethical manner, receive ethical approval from the departmental ethics committee and in accordance with ethical guidelines and practices of corresponding ethical bodies, e.g., the British Educational Research Association (BERA). Doctoral researchers and their supervisors are also responsible for keeping records throughout the supervised study to ensure integrity of the process.

Next, we discuss the study undertaken at Durham University, and then present our findings and conclusions.

The participants

The study drew on semi-structured interviews of 60 to 120 minutes with 17 participants (eleven recent doctoral researcher graduates and six supervisors) who were all recruited from within the Faculty of Social Sciences (where the authors work and study) and the Faculty of Arts and Humanities.

The eleven doctoral researcher graduates (which we label “doctoral researchers” in the study) came from various departments in the two Faculties (Anthropology, Archaeology, Education, Social Science and Health, History, Law, and Theology). Five were male and six were female. All doctoral researcher participants had completed their doctorates 6 to 12 months prior to the interviews, so the supervision experience was fresh in their minds. Two of the doctoral researchers had obtained a professional Doctor of Education (EdD); the remaining nine had obtained a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD).

Doctoral researcher participants were recruited by a range of methods which included: issuing a call for participants via email through postgraduate research administrators based in each of the relevant departments within the University (social sciences, and arts and humanities); advertising for participants in the regular student union email newsletters; advertising on university postgraduate community social media sites; and via personal networks.

Doctoral supervisors were also recruited from within the two target faculties. The participants (whom we label “supervisors” in the study) included two in a managerial role (i.e., head of department or faculty), DP4 and DP5 and four other supervisors. All were recruited via personal contacts and invitation of the authors. Four of the supervisors were from Education (one was in a managerial role, and the two others were external—one being in a managerial role). All supervisors each had 10 years or more of doctoral supervision experience. The participants are presented in two tables below (Table 1, doctoral researchers; and Table 2, supervisors).

Table 1: Doctoral researcher participants in the study

| Doctoral re-searcher | Gen der | Internation al/EU or UK graduate | Department and qualification | Mode of interview and location | First Language |
|-----------------------------|----------------|---|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| DS1 | Male | UK | Archaeology, PhD | Face-to-face (café) | English |
| DS2 | Femal e | UK | Theology, PhD | Skype | English |
| DS3 | Femal e | Internationa l | Theology, PhD | Face to face (study room on campus) | Japanese |
| DS4 | Male | UK | History, PhD | Phone | English |
| DS5 | Femal e | Internationa l | Education, EdD | Phone | Chinese |
| DS6 | Male | UK | Law / Social Science, PhD | Skype | English |
| DS7 | Femal e | Internationa l | Anthropology, PhD | Face-to-face (café) | English |
| DS8 | Femal e | UK | Education, PhD | Skype | English |
| DS9 | Male | EU | Education, PhD | Face-to-face (study room on campus) | Albanian |

| | | | | | |
|------|--------|----|----------------|-------------------------------------|---------|
| DS10 | Female | UK | Education, EdD | Face-to-face (study room on campus) | English |
| DS11 | Male | UK | Education, PhD | Face-to-face (participant's home) | English |

Table 2. Supervisor participants in the study

| Supervisor | Gender | Department | Mode of interview and location | First language |
|-------------------|---------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| DP1 | Male | Politics and International Relations | Face-to-face (participant's office) | English |
| DP2 | Female | Education | Face-to-face (participant's office) | English |
| DP3 | Male | Education | Face-to-face (participant's office) | European language |
| DP4 | Male | History | Face-to-face (participant's office) | English |
| DP5 | Male | Education | Face-to-face (participant's office) | English |
| DP6 | Male | Education | Face-to-face (participant's office) | English |

The dimensions of the doctoral experience

Here, we present our findings related to the three overarching themes as in the other case studies: supervision, language and identity. Within each of these themes we showcase the experiences and perspectives reported, first, by our doctoral researcher participants, and second, by the supervisors interviewed.

Part I – Supervision

In this first part, the overarching theme of supervision is addressed in two sections. The first section focuses on the participant doctoral researchers' experiences of supervision, illustrating three broad sub-themes emerging from the analysis: first, the competences that doctoral researchers felt they and their supervisors needed, and what they felt they learned; second, doctoral researchers' expectations and experiences of the supervisory relationship; and third, their understanding of supervisory processes and the factors influencing these. In

the second section, the participant supervisors' perspectives and experiences are presented, again drawing out three sub-themes from the data. Supervisors' individualised understandings of a supervision session, and more broadly, the whole supervisory process, feature as one sub-theme; the second is the expectations, responsibilities, and challenges and rewards they found in doctoral supervision; and a final sub-theme that emerged is what changes in the doctorate supervisors had perceived over the course of their supervision careers.

Doctoral researchers' experiences of the supervision process

The data revealed a rich picture of supervision as a highly bespoke process, experience of which varied widely among doctoral researchers. Variation arose from the different needs of individuals, different approaches to supervision by doctoral researchers and supervisors, and different circumstances such as planned or unplanned absences, or distance study coming into play. The relationship between doctoral researcher and supervisor(s) was central in all cases, with this working well for some but less well for others.

Competences needed and learned

In one emergent sub-theme, doctoral researchers talked about their own competences, and also those of supervisors. Considering their supervisors, researchers felt that supervisors need a mixture of academic and interpersonal competences to supervise well. As might be expected, many mentioned the correct subject expertise and research methods expertise as important for supervisors to possess. Described as equally important to these, however, was the ability to guide, direct, mentor and supervise doctoral researchers. Doctoral researchers talked of the need for supervisors to be encouraging, patient, flexible, understanding, and facilitative. Some individuals also mentioned the need for supervisors to be responsive, giving adequate time and attention to their doctoral researchers, and to be aware of the broader situation of individual researchers in relation to such matters as financial pressures, or the job environment and post-PhD plans.

Thinking about themselves, doctoral researchers reported a wide range of competences and expertise which they felt they needed to complete their PhD. Foremost amongst these, mentioned by almost all the participants, was perseverance, also described as resilience, persistence, tenacity, stubbornness or "bloody mindedness" (DS10, p. 5; also DS6, p. 14, and DS4, p. 20). The majority of participants also mentioned a passion for their topic as crucial in motivating them during their studies, expressed by DS1 as follows: "you have to love it. You won't finish if you don't love it" (DS1, p. 15). Other qualities seen as necessary by some participants were "discipline" (DS3, p. 17) or the capacity for hard work, research expertise, independence, patience, persuasiveness, a structured approach, and the ability to 'separate the PhD from the self'. One participant summed up her view of what a doctoral researcher needs to succeed:

You need three Ps and three Ds and then one H, you know. What are those three Ps? Patience, perseverance, and persistence. Three Ds? Diligence, determination and discipline. And then H, health, both mentally and physically. You need to be strong. (DS3, p. 14)

Some, but not all, of these skills were among the competences that doctoral researchers felt they acquired during their PhD. Most participants talked about having acquired subject expertise, as might be expected, and also mentioned having acquired other practical competences such as research skills, writing skills, and learning to be part of their discipline. A majority of participants also reported having acquired more self-confidence through the PhD. Other competences that doctoral researchers talked about having acquired through the process included self-awareness and maturity, emotional strength, time and project management skills, critical thinking and communication skills, and being able to deal with uncertainty.

Expectations and experiences of the supervisory relationship

Many of the skills mentioned above were reflected in the second sub-theme emerging from doctoral researcher interviews: their expectations about the supervisory relationship, and comparisons of these with their experiences. Participants expressed an expectation that their supervisor would be responsive, and would give them answers to their questions and feedback on, and direction about, their work. For many this proved to be the case, even if the reality of how this worked was different to their expectations. DS8, for example, reported that “I got less written comments than I had imagined I would...I think I kind of learned a lesson of, you know, feedback isn’t always written down” (DS8, p. 9). DS3, an international student, voiced her expectation (based on what she had heard about studying for a PhD in the UK) of the PhD being a lonely, unsupported process which would require a lot of independence and individual commitment. She found this expectation to be borne out by her own experience, and others also commented on this being a feature of PhD study in the UK. Some doctoral researchers, such as DS1, exemplified this skill of independence through describing how they set the agenda for their supervisory relationship themselves, making their expectations clear early in the PhD: “I basically demanded that I see them every two weeks...I created their expectations because I gave them...I made my own deadlines” (DS1, p. 4). For DS1 this approach worked well and he reported getting what he asked for from his supervisors.

Other doctoral researchers, however, talked about being let down in their expectations of the supervisory relationship in different ways. DS4 talked about expecting that the PhD would be “an educational experience” (DS4, p. 3) in that he would be taught by his supervisor, but this turned out not to be the case at all, with the doctoral researcher working independently most of the time. He attributed this partly to employing a methodology which his supervisor did not have much experience of, and objected to being called a “student” because of this, complaining “I’m not actually being taught anything” (DS4, p. 8). In another example, DS7 had a strong expectation of the relationship as being one of mentorship: “I expected to have a mentor...who would challenge me but also nurture me” (DS7, p. 8). She described feeling let

down when her experience turned out to be very different, talking about “that whole imagined relationship of mentorship and friendship” being “completely dashed to the curb” (DS7, p. 11) as a result of a supervision in her first year which she experienced as confrontational.

Significantly, a number of instances of unfulfilled expectations were related to a supervisor taking leave for research or sickness, or leaving the university, during the course of study. In these cases, doctoral researchers reported emotional and practical difficulties, but also feeling let down by the lack of support they received from departmental or university administrations. DS5 described feeling abandoned when her main supervisor left Durham two years into her EdD, moving overseas to take up a new position but nevertheless remaining responsible for her completion. At this crucial point of beginning her writing up, supervision meetings came to an end and feedback was given solely by email, often with long delays, and DS5 felt disappointed and surprised that (contrary to her expectations) complaining to her department led to no real change in the situation. DS7, an international student from the USA, experienced both supervisors taking periods of research leave during the PhD, and one also needing a significant period of sickness leave. She also felt let down that it was simply expected that she would cope, and that no replacement was appointed during these periods – particularly considering the high fees she was paying the university. In her opinion, this was a typically British approach: “others, who were predominantly British, would respond by saying, well, just get over it. Carry on. Right? And I’m like, ‘seriously? That’s not appropriate’” (DS7, p. 14).

Not all experiences were ones of disappointment, of course, and other doctoral researchers reported that their supervisors functioned as mentors, guides “they were guiding me” (DS1, p. 5), and even friends in two cases. For these doctoral researchers, friendship may have been a by-product of the supervisory relationship, but it did not necessarily mean supervision was any less stringent: “It was definitely a stretching process...It was pretty rigorous...they didn’t cut me any slack. So, I really felt like I trusted them” (DS2, p. 8). Only one doctoral researcher, however, reported feeling any kind of emotional dependence on their supervisor:

When you spent so much time on your PhD and only your supervisor is the person who knows what you’re doing...then there’s a very strong connection. (DS9, p. 10)

He himself put this down to his own Mediterranean ethnicity: “Mediterranean people are a bit more hot-blooded and they...they invest a lot in emotions, you know” (DS9, p. 10).

Doctoral researchers’ backgrounds also played into the supervisory relationship in other ways – for example, DS8’s work as a research methods lecturer at a UK university, albeit without a PhD (one factor which had contributed to DS8’s decision to pursue doctoral study at Durham), meant that she “wasn’t having to learn about the nuts and bolts of research, we were able to spend the time on...more wide-ranging discussions, more stuff around theory” (DS8, p. 8). DS8 experienced supervisions as “sort of an academic discussion” (DS8, p. 8), with supervisors playing a “facilitator role... they kind of managed me through the PhD process” (DS8, p. 11). The nature of the study also affected the dynamic of supervisory relationships in some cases: DS2, whose research and supervisory team were

interdisciplinary, described how her supervisions felt like “adult peer relationships” (DS2, p. 7), with three-way meetings between her and her two supervisors taking on a collaborative feel:

What was really great, actually, because they’re from different disciplines was that in any given conversation, I wasn’t the stupidest person in the room... actually, it really felt like a three-way collaborative process...it kind of felt more like a team project that I was doing the ground work on. You know, that we were doing between us. (DS2, p. 7)

In short, doctoral researchers recognised that the supervisory relationship can vary enormously, depending on the personalities involved and other factors, and this came out even within each individual’s experiences. At Durham University - and many other UK universities - all doctoral researchers must have at least two supervisors, and several participants described a contrast between their supervisors as being a feature of their supervisory relationships. Sometimes this was characterised as a question of formality, e.g., DS1 explained that with his first supervisor “it was just chatting...for the most part, it’s very casual”, whereas with his second supervisor “it was much more formal” (DS1, p. 4). DS3 highlighted the different approaches to feedback of her two supervisors, acknowledging the need for both:

They were almost like a day and night clash, err contrast. First supervisor constantly criticised. No praise, no encouragement, puts you down tightly you know. I mean a really tough (sic) down approach. And the second supervisor, he’s totally avert to say anything offensive as he’s just always kind and nice...You need both, you know. (DS3, p. 7-8).

This “good cop/bad cop” distinction was also noted by DS7, who said: “it was different...I could be vulnerable with her. But I couldn’t be with him. So I was able to express my fears, my anxieties.” (DS7, p. 13)

Supervision processes and factors influencing these

A third sub-theme within doctoral researchers’ interviews was the varied experience of supervision processes and structures. There was generally no set pattern or structure to supervision processes reported across the data. Approaches varied, based on doctoral researchers’ needs, the needs of the research, and supervisors’ other commitments, although for some doctoral researchers the form of their supervisions followed an identifiable pattern.

In relation to the timing and mode of supervision, some doctoral researchers reported meeting their supervisor(s) regularly and frequently throughout their PhD, whereas others experienced long periods of not meeting face to face (with phone, email or even no communication taking place instead) during certain periods, usually due to supervisor absence but in one instance, by choice of the doctoral researcher who lived at some distance from Durham.

With regard to the content of supervision sessions, some doctoral researchers, such as DS4, noted variation in the content of supervisions across different phases of study, with more questions and theoretical discussions taking place in the first and final years but more practical matters being dealt with in the middle phase of data collection and analysis: “from the first year we talked mostly just about history. In the second year, we talked [about] a lot more organisational stuff” (DS4, p. 5). Many doctoral researchers reported supervisions being based around a piece of writing that they were expected to produce for the session, whereas for others, supervisions were more just conversations about “what was happening at the time” (DS6, p. 6). Content and timing factors were sometimes linked; for example, DS2 reported the pattern of her work and focus of supervisions being organised around her two supervisors’ periods of research leave.

A range of external contextual factors affected how supervision processes were experienced, both positively and negatively. As mentioned above, supervisor absences were a significant complicating factor for some doctoral researchers. Others reported experiencing difficulties because of their own illness, financial pressures or other personal circumstances such as family crises. Student funding played a role in doctoral researchers’ approaches to their supervisory relationships, with several self-funded doctoral researchers reporting using their self-funded status as justification for demanding responsiveness and regular meetings from their supervisor. For DS1 this worked well, but for DS7 and DS3, who reported experiencing delays in completing their PhDs because of difficulties in their supervisory relationships, these arguments reportedly fell on deaf ears. In contrast, DS9, who was funded with a scholarship as explained above, described how he (and also, he suspected, his supervisors) felt, an extra responsibility to drive his study forward and complete on time because of his institutionally funded status.

Distance study did not appear to be a problematic factor in the data, perhaps surprisingly. Three doctoral researchers completed PhDs through distance study, but none experienced this as particularly problematic: DS8 and DS6 travelled to Durham regularly for face to face supervision (living close enough to do so) and the third, DS10, chose to be supervised largely remotely. In fact, DS8 described feeling very supported in spite of distance study: “what I felt all the way through was, if I felt I was hitting a particular problem, I did just have to lift up the phone and...one of them...would have been there and able to help me. So I never felt unsupported” (DS8, p. 9).

Supervisors’ experiences of the supervision process

Interview responses from supervisors about the supervision process shared many features with those from doctoral researchers. There was a sense that each supervision is unique and individualised, and must be tailored to the needs of the doctoral researcher. There were, however, clear expectations from supervisors about the duties of both the doctoral researcher and supervisor. Supervisors sometimes expressed some of their own challenges in the supervision process, whilst also acknowledging the rewarding nature of supervising doctoral

researchers. Due to their perspective, both from having completed their own PhD and from supervising those of doctoral researchers over the years, supervisors were able to comment on changes to the process over time, and give their views as to whether these were for the better. DP1 also had oversight of student pastoral care processes within Durham University's college system, which meant he could comment on issues outside of his immediate discipline, while DP4 and DP5 could both provide insight from their managerial roles.

Individualised experiences of supervision

In one sub-theme that closely matched the observations of doctoral researcher participants reported above, the supervisors interviewed commented on the highly individualised nature of supervisions, depending on the doctoral researcher and their needs at a given moment in the doctoral process. As DP6 put it: "every student is different, every discipline is different and every context is different" (DP6, p. 4). DP5 echoed this sentiment: "the nature of PhD study is one which is much more individual, in terms of the relationship between the student and the supervisor" (DP5, p. 3). DP3 also emphasised that "I don't think there is one pattern that applies to all supervisory meetings and all supervisors" (DP3, p. 3). Supervisors also recognised that the needs of the doctoral researchers might change depending on which stage of the doctoral process they were in, DP6 describing the process as one of weaning students from dependence on the supervisor.

There was, however, recognition of the fact that there is a general formula that the supervision process follows, a "textbook approach to how you structure tutorials" (DP6, p. 4). DP4 and DP5, who have managerial positions, both discussed the regulations that dictate some elements of supervision, respectively noting that "it's all there in Departmental and University Learning and Teaching Handbook Guidelines" (DP4, p. 6) and that "there's set guidelines which stipulate how many supervisions that students are entitled to, how many they should receive in a period of time and that those supervisions should be recorded" (DP5, p. 4).

Expectations, responsibilities, challenges and rewards in supervision

Supervisors' interviews contained a second sub-theme coalescing around their views of the expectations and responsibilities, challenges and rewards of supervising doctoral researchers. Supervisors had clear expectations of their doctoral researchers, particularly in terms of work ethic. DP6 underscored this, saying "I think the supervisors have a right to expect that you [the doctoral researcher] will do the work" (DP6, p. 8). Some supervisors and staff discussed the expectations of doctoral researchers entering the process in terms of admissions criteria. DP1 listed:

significant performance of the undergraduate level...evidence of commitment in the form of having done a dissertation of some kind before ...strong referees...[and] evidence of a capacity to think originally and systematically and analytically. (DP1, p. 3).

Language requirements, particularly for international students, were mentioned by DP1, DP5 and DP6. DP1 in particular expressed concern that some doctoral researchers arrive for doctoral study without being completely prepared with regard to language, which can result in delays to their studies.

As regards supervisory responsibilities, the supervisors agreed on certain statutory responsibilities of the supervisor, in terms of number of meetings and feedback provided. They also noted that the supervisor should be familiar with the topic of the PhD, DP1 considering this so essential that they said as far as they knew “overlap between the candidates proposed area of interest” (DP1, p. 5) and that of the supervisor is the only factor in allocation of supervisors.

In addition to these academic responsibilities, the supervisors sometimes alluded to the more interpersonal, pastoral role that they play in the lives of their supervisees. DP6 spoke in detail of this facet of supervision, noting the necessity of the figure of the supervisor in ensuring the wellbeing of the doctoral researcher:

there’s a strong affective element to a PhD. Time of emotional anxiety. Ups and downs. Exhilaration and anxiety, and you’ve got to sustain your student through those peaks and troughs. (DP6, p. 18)

They did, however, express reservations about the extent to which supervisors should perform this role, adding that “You don’t want to go into their private lives”.

This affective element was also reflected in comments about the challenges and rewards of supervision. For example, DP3 observed humorously “I think I have as many worries about PhD students as I have pleasure in supervising them” (DP3, p. 16) and this sentiment seemed consistent in the data. The supervisors and staff interviewed expressed some frustrations with the supervision and examination process, particularly in terms of the ways that the grading process fails to fully distinguish between drastically different levels of PhD. Although DP5 felt that the current system of examination is “as solid a way as [they] can think of enabling that process to take place” (DP5, p. 6), DP1 gave the contrasting view that “it’s very important to have the ability to distinguish between those mediocre PhDs and excellence, real excellence” (DP1, p. 7).

DP4 also discussed the way that some doctoral researcher/supervisor relationships can turn sour, drawing upon his experience in a managerial role in order to inform his comments: “because of the role I’m in, I see the relationships that have gone bad, that have been allowed to fester. I really see the worst things” (DP4, p. 5), describing most issues as being the result of poor communication between doctoral researchers and their supervisors. In contrast, demonstrating his own investment in the relationship, DP3 was keen to explain that challenges are to be expected in supervising doctoral researchers and should be shared burdens:

the straightforward PhD study is more like the exception to the rule...and I would say that every one of those challenges for a PhD student, is the challenge of the supervisor. (DP3, p. 15)

There was also, however, a feeling on the part of supervisors that the process of guiding doctoral researchers can be tremendously rewarding. DP3 remarked that supervising the studies of PhD researchers has enriched his own work: “I could tell many stories about how PhD changed my research and teach (sic) me a lot about...or that helped me develop my research” (DP3, p. 16-17). DP6 also highlighted this element of supervision, noting that particularly towards the end of the writing up process “it then becomes a learning experience for both and that, that’s a very nice experience and again very rich for, for everyone” (DP6, p. 21).

Changes in the UK doctorate over time

A third sub-theme, about which supervisor participants were divided in opinion, was the issue of whether doctoral researchers and supervision had changed over time. Some, such as DP6, asserted that the process had remained similar since his own doctorate, and others, such as DP1, suggested that both the process and the doctoral researchers entering it were radically different. One supervisor (DP3) suggested that some of the changes he had witnessed were due to the fact that he initially supervised in Norway, rather than the UK. He explained that in Norway, only funded students do PhDs and this changes the nature of the relationship between doctoral researcher and supervisor (as well as between the doctoral researcher and the doctorate itself). DP6 related to the experience of his supervisees, and commented that when he considers the experiences of doctoral researchers he supervises: “think[ing] of [my] own doctoral experience, no it doesn’t look wildly different” (DP6, p. 19). To an extent there is an acceptance that the essential nature of the PhD, centring on the production of the thesis, has remained largely unchanged.

There are also concerns, however, that doctoral studies are not as rigorous as they once were. Some of this was focused upon changes in technology, and the heavy reliance of some young people on social media, which, in the eyes of DP1, “risks changing the way and their capacity to use their brains” (DP1, p. 10) and makes the completion of a sustained project like the thesis more challenging. There was also the repeated notion that changes in funding structures in UK higher education have contributed to a change in the way that PhD supervisions must take place. DP4 argued that as a result of the time pressures created by funding schedules, “I don’t think the depth of the work that’s done in three years is what we did thirty years ago” (DP4, p. 9) and that there “is less and less room for boldness in the PhD” (DP4, p. 14). For DP3, tuition fees have fundamentally changed the nature of supervision:

the attitude has become...another student coming into your door, and you’re going to educate that student. And maybe the student has got a sort of expectation...you [the supervisor] are my teacher. (DP3, p. 15)

In summary, there were a number of overlaps emerging between supervisor views on supervision in the doctoral process at Durham University, and the perspectives of doctoral researchers, but different positionings of the two groups also resulted in divergent themes

emerging. Both groups of participants emphasised the highly individualised reality of doctoral studies, and of supervisions within them, and both recognised the centrality of the doctoral researcher-supervisor relationship in this experience. The doctoral researcher participants' expectations centred around independence and the degree of support that their supervisor would offer, and they reported widely differing experiences in reality, reflecting different individual circumstances. Supervisors' expectations, on the other hand, tended to be (although not exclusively) framed more in terms of formalised structures such as admissions criteria, processes and rules. Supervisors were also able to reflect, in a way that doctoral researchers did not, on societal and structural conditions impacting on the contemporary doctorate and supervision processes within this.

Part 2 – Language

This second part interrogates the impact of language on doctoral researcher and supervisor views of the doctoral experience at Durham University. The first section provides an overview of the linguistic profiles of the eleven doctoral researcher participants, before discussing the three key sub-themes emerging from doctoral researcher interviews. A majority of doctoral researcher participants spent time talking about the first two sub-themes of developing competence in the language of the discipline; and production of the doctoral thesis. Another sub-theme emerging, applicable to only some doctoral researcher participants, was the impact of working with or in a second language (L2), a language acquired after early childhood. In the second section, supervisor perspectives on the same three sub-themes - which also emerged from supervisor interviews, albeit with a different focus - are discussed, together with an additional emergent sub-theme of the place of language assessment in the admissions process.

Doctoral researchers' perspectives on language in doctoral study

As mentioned in the earlier section of this chapter describing the participants, of the eleven doctoral researchers interviewed, three were international students, seven had "home student" status as UK citizens, and one was a "home student" from the EU. Four were undertaking study either wholly or partly in an L2. Two of these four were international students: DS3, a US citizen with Japanese as her first language i.e. language acquired from early childhood (L1), and DS5 from Taiwan, whose L1 was Chinese. The third, DS9, was a home student originally from Albania, whose L1 was Albanian. The fourth doctoral researcher using an L2 in their study was a home student with English as his L1, whose PhD on German history involved him working daily with sources in German. The remaining seven doctoral researchers studied in their L1 (English) and comprised five home students (DS2, DS6, DS8, DS10, and DS11) and two international students from the USA, DS1 and DS7. None of the doctoral researchers was engaged in language-related studies, but two (DS3 and DS4) needed to work with sources in multiple languages for their PhDs in other disciplines. Our data, therefore, encapsulate a wide range of linguistic profiles and experiences.

Developing competence in the language of the discipline

Seven participants, five English L1 doctoral researchers and two English L2 doctoral researchers, raised this first sub-theme, discussing the extent to which they had developed competence in discipline-specific ways of using language during their PhD. The experience of DS3, who moved from a previous academic career in chemistry to do a second PhD in theology in her L2 English, encapsulates this development:

my English is fine but in humanities, it's different. It's a different subject, different way to write. And in fact, I found you know science and then theology when I moved, almost everything the opposite... (DS3, p. 5)

DS3 found that there was much more emphasis on style and language: "In science we write what... In humanities, it's how you write. It's totally different and so I mean I had a lot of struggles" (DS3, p. 11). DS1 described how "there's definitely a club... You definitely learn how to write the way that other people will receive it and the way that people like and there's always trends in the discipline" (DS1, p. 11). Several doctoral researchers linked their developing linguistic or discursive competence to their own professional identity or sense of group belonging. For example, DS8 described her learning as follows:

One of the things I learned actually a lot from the PhD was this whole thing around the language of disciplines and how we use discourse and language within our narrow discipline to...in some ways it's to give us an identity but it also...it creates this kind of closed community, doesn't it? Of people who can access that language. (DS8, p. 12)

In describing how he came to feel part of a quantitative research methods community within educational research, DS9 also highlighted the link between language and group belonging:

"They stick together...because they can understand one another...so it's almost more learning to talk like a quantitative researcher or talk like a qualitative researcher. (DS9, p.17-18)

By contrast, two doctoral researchers pointed out that for them, it was important to make an effort not to use overly specialised language. DS7 described how her supervisor in anthropology directed her to simplify her language, surmising that this is the accepted style for contemporary ethnographies: "I had to make it as lay as possible...I had to write it in such a way that anybody could read it...I think that is the nature of ethnography in general" (DS7, p. 20). And DS4, a history researcher, voiced his own personal opposition to the idea of a language of the discipline, while acknowledging that it does exist:

I'm resistant to that because I think people have to be able to explain their research in terms that any educated lay person can understand... obviously, I have picked up discipline-specific language, but...I don't see it as a big deal really. (DS4, p. 17)

Production of the doctoral thesis

Thesis writing as involving issues of language, a second prominent sub-theme regarding language in the doctoral process, was discussed at length by six participants: four English L1 doctoral researchers and two English L2 doctoral researchers. Comments about the learning achieved by English L1 participants reflected several points made by the supervisors interviewed (discussed below). DS8 described how the thesis needed a particular approach to the writing process:

People had said to me, writing a PhD is a particular type of writing...writing that huge piece of work, putting it and knitting it all together was a skill. And I think it taught me quite a lot about...editing and....understanding how I write.
(DS8, p. 12)

DS1 reported being taught how to develop his style: “You learn how to write really well... I was pushed by one of my supervisors in particular. He pushed me further with my writing than I thought I could go” (DS1, p. 5). DS10 discussed learning the genre of the thesis: “[You] learn how to write in a different way. I write papers on a regular, constant basis, but writing like this is different” (DS10, p. 3).

Of course, L2 English doctoral researchers also learned about academic style and genre, as DS5 highlights:

When it comes to academic writing, yes there are some terms, some terminology that you have to use then you have to do proper referencing. And...when you write there are certain pattern in the paragraph, there are certain patterns that you have to follow.
(DS5, p. 12)

DS5 found producing language of the required standard a challenge, explaining that “writing a very professional paragraph PhD thesis or EdD thesis. It’s difficult” (DS5, p. 6), and she dealt with this by hiring a proof reader to edit her work. In contrast, DS9 found to his surprise that he had relatively few issues with language, but he put this down to his own deliberate decision to do a quantitative study:

In terms of the writing stage of the PhD... I thought I would struggle with that because English is not my first language, but actually, for me, it went all smooth, but I think perhaps that’s because...before I started, I chose to do quantitative research as opposed to qualitative research, because I know that if I had gone for qualitative research, that would have involved a lot of word analysis and word speaking, you know?... So language for me wasn’t an issue.
(DS9, p. 11-12)

The degree to which language was an issue for English L2 doctoral researchers in their thesis therefore seemed to be linked to not only their competence, but also their research approach.

Finally, the data show that English L2 doctoral researchers were not alone in reporting difficulty in producing correct language: DS11, an English L1 mature doctoral researcher, commented that his supervisor edited his work for grammatical mistakes: “He had to teach me English ... the apostrophes was the thing ... in my thesis” (DS11, p. 5).

Impact of working with, or in, a second language

The two doctoral researchers who were working with sources in one or more L2s discussed their experiences of reading and referencing literature in an L2, and this topic forms the third sub-theme. DS4 described the impact of working with German as sometimes slowing down his work, and also complicating the organisation of his research:

It makes it harder to...categorise information and make it searchable...so I'm taking notes in English, but quoting from text in German. So then when I come to search back through my notes, if I wanted to do a keyword search or something, I'm thinking well, have I made a note of that in English or in German...I think it does make it slightly harder, but nothing that's...that's insurmountable. (DS4, p. 13)

Both he and DS3, reading biblical studies, characterised learning additional languages as “technical skills” (DS4, p. 7), or ancillary skills that researchers needed to develop. DS3 reported that biblical studies at doctoral level requires reading competence in at least four languages, and talked about her supervisor's insistence that sources should be quoted in their original language, with English translations provided as footnotes. She explained that this is partly to ensure her work can be verified by others, and partly because one purpose of the research process is to check the accuracy of others' translations: “Even if I just cited in English, I went to the source to make sure this is a correct or appropriate translation. I mean that's the purpose of the research anyway” (DS3, p. 17). For DS3, a high degree of sensitivity to language and translation issues was integral to the study of her discipline.

DS4 described data collection and analysis in an L2 as a source of stress, but also a positive thing, a source of pride. DS9 highlighted a slightly different source of language-related stress: that of his accent proving a barrier to negotiating access to research sites during his UK-based empirical data collection process. DS9 explained:

The only time language was an issue was when finding participants, because...I still have a bit of an accent. When you have a bit of a foreign accent, then you approach schools to work with you in a project and you kind of tell them that you have this better teaching method than them and you have a bit of an accent, schools are not going to one hundred percent kind of buy into that straightaway. (DS9, p. 12)

DS9 tried adopting strategies such as making contact with schools through his supervisor, or the local authority, or by emphasizing the benefits to schools of participation in the research. He found that by opening the door for himself through one of these alternative means, his accent (and his “foreign” identity) then became less of an issue for potential participants. L2 doctoral researchers therefore found various ways in which to overcome the challenges of working in an L2.

Supervisors' perspectives on language in doctoral study

Five of the six supervisors interviewed for the study were L1 speakers of English. The sixth supervisor teaches and researches in English, which he speaks as an L2. Data from interviews with supervisors reflected the three sub-themes outlined above emerging from the doctoral researchers' interviews, but with a slightly different focus, and also included an additional sub-theme, as explored below.

Developing competence in the language of the discipline

Some supervisors discussed doctoral researchers' developing competence in the language, or discourse, of the discipline through their doctoral study. Supervisors noted that doctoral researchers both L1 and L2 developed their language skills throughout their doctoral study as they gained more specialised knowledge and acquired the means to express this. DP6 described this process: "[As] you're gaining a new discourse, so your language becomes more nuanced, more, subtle, more varied" (DP6, p. 14), pointing out that "learning is mediated through language" (DP6, p. 13). The doctoral experience was described by DP2 as "a series of thresholds that students pass through, and that does result in different discourse, different language, and using the same words very, very differently" (DP2, p. 17). DP6 described aiming to achieve "a subtle change in their writing, that it becomes...more confident and more like the conventions and styles, and quality, that would be expected in the community of practice" (DP6, p. 17). Given that many of our doctoral researcher participants reported this development in their own writing, it would seem that this aim is often achieved.

DP3 connects these issues to the discourses of different academic cultures, highlighting that for some doctoral researchers who move from one academic field into another, PhD studies involve having to make the transition between "different academic cultures" (DP3, p. 10) and their associated discourses. He gives the example of a researcher with a science background moving into education, where "you need to pick apart arguments in a different way" (DP3, p. 11). This observation mirrors the reported experience of DS3, discussed above, who struggled with transitioning from the writing conventions accepted in her first discipline of chemistry into a 'new' theology discourse.

Production of the doctoral thesis

The doctoral thesis is the primary output of a PhD course, and supervisors talked at length about the process of writing a thesis, reflecting the second sub-theme also raised by doctoral researchers. Many of the supervisors interviewed pointed out that this is the area where language comes most to the fore in supervision. As noted earlier, doctoral theses at Durham are normally submitted in English, with only occasional exceptions within the School of Modern Languages and Cultures; thus, discussions in the data focused on producing theses in English. DP3 highlighted that putting across an argument effectively in an academic thesis is dependent on good language skills:

The importance of language, it's crucial. Where it is the biggest problem is in fulfilling the requirement of this academic discussion, argument writing. And

you see that when students have a problem with language, they struggle with the preciseness of the academic writing. (DP3, p. 9)

Supervisors underlined that all doctoral researchers, whether working in an L1 or L2, need training in academic writing, both in the style expected in their discipline and in producing written academic work. Regarding the specific style required, DP6 characterised “thesis writing” as a distinct skill: “They also have to learn how to write in a research-like way for a thesis, it’s a particular kind of genre” (DP6, p. 10). Discussing the fact that it is not just doctoral researchers working in an L2 who may struggle with thesis production, DP3 pointed out that even those with good language skills may have poor academic writing skills. Similarly, DP6 pointed out the link to material being publishable: “getting them to the acceptable level of publishability can be a challenge...not just international students but students of UK origin as well” (DP6, p. 18). Concerning the writing process, DP1 described many doctoral researchers as feeling “overwhelmed by the PhD as a process of writing” (DP1, p. 8), a process that is remedied through continual practice only. DP3 also explained:

“You learn by practice...you write. [Your work] is critiqued by your supervisor. And you go back and you write again, and it is critiqued by your supervisor, and you write it again. (DP3, p. 7)

While the above issues were characterised by supervisors as common to all doctoral researchers, several supervisors acknowledged that L2 doctoral researchers may need additional help with finessing their written language. Discussing the impact of working in an L2, DP2 admitted that often her L2 doctoral researchers “need[ed] extra help with writing” (DP2, p. 16), commenting that:

“the biggest impact that that often has, probably not unsurprisingly, is on the kind of writing side of things. Now, sometimes that’s more pronounced than others. (DP2, p. 15).

DP6 explained that as long as grammatical or syntactic inaccuracies do not impede understanding of the work, they can be dealt with as part of editing the document: “as long as it’s clear what their intention is, that can be done at the kind of editing, proofing stage” (DP6, p. 13). Sometimes it is supervisors who will do this. However, on occasion doctoral researchers may need more substantive help, and a couple of supervisors described how guidance is offered if a doctoral researcher’s language skills are below par, perhaps by referring the doctoral researcher to the University Language Centre for support with their academic writing, or by recommending that an academic proof-reader’s help is enlisted. DP2 commented:

When I’m reading the final version for students, I will go through almost with an editorial eye and look for things. But if there’s too many errors, then you just go, “I can’t do this” because I’m now not commenting on the substance, I’m commenting on the typos, or the spelling mistakes, or the grammatical mistakes. (DP2, p. 17)

DP2 acknowledged that recommending to a doctoral researcher that they engage a proof-reader is a difficult conversation to have, because of the cost involved. However, she noted that the end goal is to support the doctoral researcher to make their work accessible: “Ultimately, I’m hopefully helping them to pass and to be able to put something on the shelves that is worthy of them” (DP2, p. 17).

Using an L2 within supervisions

Once again picking up on a sub-theme raised by several doctoral researcher participants, three of the six supervisors interviewed for the study discussed the complexities that may arise from language during supervisions, where one or more of the parties is working in an L2. In all discussions, references were to supervision taking place in English, which usually (but not always) meant that the doctoral researchers were the ones working in their L2. DP2 described how sometimes supervising an L2 doctoral researcher required more time, where the language creates a “block”:

Occasionally though, you do find that the second language does create a kind of block...It can take longer to get places because you can see that the student is talking to me in English, but having to translate in their head, particularly when you’re looking at kind of theoretical frameworks and conceptualisation...they’re having to learn to think and practise in English, which you know just can take time to develop. (DP2, p. 15)

DP2 mentioned that additional time was also sometimes needed to develop understanding in relation to research literature in her discipline, psychology, with English L2 doctoral researchers having to read and reference literature in English. She noted that translation gaps sometimes posed difficulties, e.g., the term “self-efficacy” in one doctoral researcher’s L1 had no word for that concept: “She had to find a way in her head of getting to grips with a concept that she had no native word for” (DP2, p. 15). DP2 asserted that supervisors of doctoral researchers working in an L2 need patience, and an awareness that if the doctoral researcher is struggling to grasp something, the difficulty may be language-related. Her solution was to ask doctoral researchers to begin to write for the thesis early on, finding that this often helped her to diagnose whether the issue was one of conceptualisation or language. DP2 felt that directing doctoral researchers to start with the more basic literature, for example in methodology, can also help.

Alertness to language was also highlighted by DP6, who commented that working with a doctoral researcher using their L2 can be enriching, bringing new perspectives to the supervision, but that it can also be complicated, with conceptual misunderstandings sometimes arising in the use of terms. For DP6 the important thing is to “keep the communication line open” (DP6, p. 13) and engage in a dialogue to work through any differences in meaning across languages. DP3 described a similar process of having to work with details more, defining terms with his doctoral researchers who are working in an L2, and drilling down into intended and actual meanings:

If the students have a big language problem...it's not easy...you have to work with details very often. With students with poor language skills, you have to analyse the structure of their sentences. And sometimes, you have to go down to individual words and tell them, "That word that's almost like..." Think of an example. (DP3, p. 9)

DP3 thus uses exploring the detail of meaning with his doctoral researchers as a strategy to support mutual understanding and the researchers' development. Although DP3 himself works in English as an L2 for supervision, the question of his own language competency within supervision work was not discussed, beyond clarifying that DP3 was not required to pass any language test himself in order to supervise.

Language in admissions processes

A final, new, sub-theme that emerged in discussion about language with supervisors concerned the doctoral admissions process and the potential for language-related issues. At Durham University, as part of the admissions process, doctoral candidates need to provide proof of English ability (usually via the "International English Language Testing System" (IELTS) language test). For entry to a doctoral programme, the university requires an overall IELTS score of 7, which is roughly equivalent to the lower end of Level C1 (proficient user with effective operational proficiency) in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe, 2001; IELTS, 2018). In accordance with this process, DP6 commented that doctoral researchers found not to meet the required level are asked to attend pre-session language courses in order to address the problem. However, not all supervisors felt that the current systems were effective, and DP1 mentioned that "quite a lot of international students arrive who've passed the required English language test and yet, when they get here they are not prepared" (DP1, p. 5).

The question of whether a candidate's language skills are sufficient was described as a decision that supervisors ultimately had to accurately assess at the start of the process, when considering whether to accept a supervisee. DP6 expressed his desire to see examples of a doctoral researcher's written work in advance in order to better gauge whether academic writing skills might be an issue. DP4 described the consequences of getting this initial decision wrong:

Having been admitted, they won't then be subjected to sanctions if their supervisor...you know, you've got to make the right decision at the beginning otherwise you're just stuck with a student who can't write English. And the student who can't write English is stuck with the fact they are doing a PhD in English. (DP4, p. 10)

In summary, both supervisors and doctoral researchers raised the same sub-themes related to language in the doctoral process, but with slightly different emphases. Learning the discourse of the discipline was seen as important for both groups, although some doctoral researchers problematized this phenomenon, voicing concerns about the associated possible exclusionary

effects of such discourses, in a manner that was not evident in the supervisor interviews. Developing skills of academic writing and argumentation sufficient for the doctoral thesis was a second shared focus, with doctoral researcher concerns centring on style and genre, and for some, the challenges of developing these skills in an L2; and supervisors' comments mirroring this but with an added dimension of the need to produce publishable work. A third shared sub-theme was the challenges of completing a doctorate using an L2, although supervisors' comments on this centred on language use in supervisions and in the thesis, whereas doctoral researchers talked about their L2 language use in broader contexts such as fieldwork, data collection and analysis. Finally, supervisors raised a fourth theme of problematizing language assessment in admissions processes, which was not evident in the interviews with doctoral researchers.

Part 3 – Identity

In this third part, the overarching theme of identity is addressed as it was manifest in the interviews with Durham University doctoral researchers and supervisors. In the first section, four sub-themes raised by doctoral researchers are discussed: researchers' social identities in relation to the doctoral experience; the developing researcher identity; international or European researcher identity or lack of this; and the impact of the emotional journey of doing the doctorate on personal identity. In the second section, complementary sub-themes raised by supervisors are presented: the impact of doctoral researchers' social identities on supervision; the emergence of a researcher identity in doctoral candidates; and supervisors' own identities within the supervisory relationship.

Doctoral researchers' identities as part of the doctoral process

Doctoral researchers related to identity in a range of complex ways. Primarily, they considered their social identities and their influence on the process of the doctorate. In addition to national and ethnic identities, this included professional and class identities, which latter set of identities sometimes led to doctoral researchers resisting the adoption of 'academic' or 'researcher' identities. The notion of becoming a researcher was a strong theme throughout the data, doctoral researchers demonstrating an appreciation of the way that the doctoral process can develop this aspect of their professional identity. Views on whether studying for a doctorate at Durham leads to an international, or European, researcher identity were much more mixed. Finally, doctoral researchers discussed the emotional journey of the doctorate and its impact on their personal identity.

Social identities

The social identities of doctoral researchers had an impact on their doctoral experience. These included national, ethnic, religious, gender and professional identities.

International students commented on how self-perceived aspects of their own national or ethnic identity influenced their experience of undertaking the doctorate. One doctoral researcher discussed his struggle with adjusting to British styles of communication, explaining that “in the States... it’s super direct. It’s super comfortable just asking other people to do something without even saying please and begging and apologising several times” (DS1, p. 6). Another believed that his emotional experience and expressions of completing the doctorate were influenced by his ethnicity: “my ethnicity, I am not, I wasn’t born in this country ... Mediterranean people are a bit more hot-blooded” (DS9, p. 10). Nationality-based differences were also highlighted by doctoral researchers as influencing the way they would be viewed by others. DS9 commented that his non-British identity sometimes presented a difficulty in engaging participants during fieldwork:

When you are a foreigner... you kind of have to kind of prove yourself beforehand a little bit before they come on board. (DS9, p. 12)

DS9 connected this additional hurdle that he faced because of his ‘outsider’ positioning to his foreign accent, evidencing how for some participants, issues of identity are linked to the issues related to language discussed above.

Other examples were given in doctoral researcher interviews of participants facing ‘outsider’ positioning in the academic environment due to one or more of their social identities. DS11, a mature student who came into doctoral study through his employment in a research-based organisation connected to the university, described his own working class identity:

With the background I’ve got you can tell straight away I didn’t go to a posh school... My dad wasn’t academic he came from working class. Couldn’t afford it. Couldn’t go to university. (DS11, p. 2-3)

DS11 emphasised how this contrasted with his perceptions of ‘typical’ doctoral researchers, grounded in his early work life in a university environment: “I got an idea about what a PhD student was... and they were all posh people, they just were” (DS11, p. 4). DS11 did, however, find these expectations challenged when he joined the organisation through which he eventually pursued his own PhD: “[When I started work at *[Name of organisation]*, I think there were probably twenty PhDs at *[Name of organisation]*, and they were just ordinary people. Come to work in jeans” (DS11, p. 4). This environment allowed DS11 to reconcile the inherent conflict he had earlier felt between being working class and pursuing doctoral study.

For others, coming into doctoral research from prior careers and often with motivations connected to those careers, professional vocational identities remained strong, even dominant, during their doctoral journey. DS10, whose professional doctorate in education was pursued alongside a successful career in teaching and then education management, commented: “I was very much about vocation not academic. I’ve always had in my head that I wasn’t an academic person” (DS10, p. 1). DS10 talked about feeling intimidated by the more ‘academically oriented’ of her two supervisors, and how she saw herself as outside of the academic community. Even after gaining her EdD, DS10 resisted being positioned as an academic, stating emphatically: “I don’t use the [doctor] title. I don’t like people who use the

title” (DS10, p. 5). For DS10, the learning gained through her doctorate, which she applied daily in her professional context, was more important to her than having an academic identity.

Similarly, professional and vocational identity as a religious leader took one person into doctoral study in theology:

“the motivation for the PhD was entirely personal in that I wanted to know what effect the kind of bible teaching the evangelical churches in this country are doing...actually has. (DS2, p. 3)

DS2’s identity as Christian minister sat alongside a developing identity as a researcher. Whilst her peers were taking up part-time research and teaching opportunities that would build their academic CVs, DS2 characterised herself as remaining true to her vocational roots: “So, do I be [*name of faculty member*]’s research assistant? Or do I run a student group? That’s not that tricky for me” (DS2, p. 11). DS2’s two identities were a topic of discussion between DS2 and her supervisors:

I always found myself a bit betwixt and between. Um, because I wasn’t aiming to be a scholar. And I think by the time I got to the end of the PhD, and my and my supervisors went, “Yeah, you’re really not, are you?” You’re a pastor first, and a re- you know, a scholar second. (DS2, p. 11)

Thus for DS2, her vocational identity remained stronger than her developing academic identity. Nevertheless, DS2 described feeling comfortable in both identities, and working in both academic and pastoral spheres of life at the completion of her PhD. In that respect, DS2’s experience stands in contrast to that of DS10, who did not reconcile her vocational and academic identities.

In some instances, doctoral researchers felt that an aspect of their identity negatively impacted their relationship with the supervisor. DS6 highlighted the way he felt his gender identity influenced his supervisor’s treatment of him: “I’m transgender um, and er, one of my supervisors I think is a complete transphobe...I feel like her beliefs bled into how she then treated me” (DS6, p. 5). DS7 felt that being a mature student meant that she received less support from her supervisor:

as a mature student, he expected me just to be totally responsible for myself and do it myself and take care of myself and not being needy and not need things. (DS7, p. 10)

The identity of becoming a researcher

An important element of identity in the doctoral process, already touched on in the discussions above about academic identity, is forming the identity of “researcher”. The extent to which doctoral researchers embraced this label varied, some identifying with it fully and others being more cautious. Nevertheless, participants acknowledged that becoming a researcher held its own importance, and completing a doctorate was a step towards this, even if not fully completing the process. DS1 confidently assumed this identity, stating that undertaking a doctorate “made me a better researcher” (DS1, p. 14). Conversely, DS4 was unconvinced by the “researcher” label, stating hesitantly: “I don’t feel that I’m ... necessarily

a real researcher now. I suppose I'm a better researcher" (DS4, p. 16). In contrast, DS9, reported that a high point of obtaining the PhD was being told "Congratulations, Dr [name]" (DS9, p. 22) when passing the viva voce. Some participants balanced these viewpoints, such as DS5, who compromised by saying that she was "not expert level but junior. I consider myself a junior researcher" (DS5, p. 11).

The specific field in which the doctorate was completed also had an effect on the identity of participants. DS1, when asked about the idea of a "disciplinary tribe" (Becher and Trowler, 2001), replied: "There's definitely a club" (DS1, p. 11). One participant even described how the type of research conducted created smaller tribes within his department: "and I think that community is defined in terms of what the research method is... So the qualitative people, for example will stick together with the qualitative people" (DS9, p. 17-18). The extent to which joining the "club" occurred, varied between doctoral researchers. DS4 expressed doubts about his membership: "Whether I learned a great deal about how to be a historian, I don't know" (DS4, p. 4).

The idea of departmental or disciplinary membership became complex when participants had conflicting academic identities. Although DS3 was working in theology, she had previously worked in science. DS3 felt that her previous identity as a scientist was not always acknowledged in the theological context, but she asserted: "There are some scientists who are also theologians...I've done science [for] 30 years and I'm a scientist" (DS3, p. 16).

International or European researcher identity

When asked whether doctoral study at Durham University fostered an international or European researcher identity, responses from doctoral researcher participants varied. There was a general view that there was no automatic international aspect to the (UK) doctorate as a qualification, or as a process. Several doctoral researchers justified this by expressing an awareness that doctoral processes were often very different in other countries. Some participants expressed a tentative view that they would expect development of an international researcher identity to be connected to the field of study, with for example researchers in international relations being more likely to develop this identity than those whose studies had a domestic focus. DS1 (who is from the USA) was explicit that his own sense of having an international researcher identity derives from the fact that he is "dealing...with international topics" (DS1, p. 11) in his research. In fact, DS1 explained that he chose his topic within architectural history specifically so that he could export his knowledge back to the USA and find employment there on graduating.

DS9 (who is originally from Albania) pointed out that he feels as if he has some sort of European researcher identity not because of his doctorate, but because he is able to speak several European languages, and uses them to interact with other researchers when he attends international events. DS9 expressed ambitions to work in academia in Europe, and was the most open of all the participants to the concept of a European researcher identity, perhaps because of his own personal background. In contrast DS4, a home student researching

German history, declined to consider himself a European researcher in spite of working extensively in both the UK and Germany:

I wouldn't say I feel like a European researcher, actually, because obviously, Europe is about so much more than the UK and Germany. And as I say, I...I've...in the past I've tried to learn French, and sort of stopped with that thing, not having time. I wanted to learn Italian. I would like to learn Czech, Dutch. All these languages would be very useful for my research. If I had more languages, maybe I could...I would say I'm a European researcher...I wouldn't say that I was necessarily an Anglo-German researcher either, because as I say, I don't feel entirely comfortable with the German system. (DS4, p. 15)

For DS4, the differences between the British and German academic systems and doctoral degrees were a significant barrier to some idea of 'Europeanness'. Although they evaluated themselves differently against these criteria, both DS9 and DS4 equated European researcher identity with multilingual competencies.

In relation to the international comparability of standards in doctoral work, none of our doctoral researcher participants were aware of any common international or European standards that were applicable to their own studies, although several said this would be something positive to aspire to in the future. Having compared UK and German PhD theses as part of his own research, DS4 was emphatic that "I don't think there is an international standard at all...the results of these different systems are very different" (DS4, p. 14). DS1, in contrast, did think that the product of doctoral research, the doctoral thesis, was similar (in terms of expected content, writing process, and examination process) in the UK and in the USA, even though the doctoral experience varied significantly between these two countries. Despite what he saw as similar intellectual standards, DS1 reflected on how a PhD from the UK would affect his identity in the academic context of his home country, the USA: "Some people may well not even respect you as much as a doctor...they'll see it as a different doctorate" (DS1, p. 9).

In the absence of common international standards, DS9 explained how he approached evaluating his own work by attending international conferences:

One way for me to see what the standard of my work is, or was, was by going to these conferences and meeting with others internationally and speaking to them, finding out what their projects were and what they were doing, and then just comparing. (DS9, p. 15)

Only DS9 and DS4 talked about being internationally academically mobile in this way. Mobility within Europe as part of the doctorate or future plans was not a topic discussed by any of the other doctoral researchers in our cohort. Of course, it is not possible to say whether or not this is characteristic of the Arts, Humanities and Social Science doctoral research population at Durham University, since the data collected reflects only the particular identities of our eleven participants.

Emotion and personal identity

As a final sub-theme, there was a deeply personal element to doctoral study that affected the identities of participants. As DS4 put it: “I think the PhD, for me, has been much more of a personal experience than an academic experience” (DS4, p. 6). This personal element related to how completing a doctorate changed the doctoral researchers’ views of themselves. As with most elements of studying for a doctorate, the emotional experiences were extremely varied. These changes in self-perception could be positive, for example in terms of their self-efficacy. DS1 stated that the main thing one learns doing a doctorate is that “you are capable of doing a PhD”. There was, however, also the suggestion that undertaking a doctorate can be psychologically damaging to one’s identity. Part of this was the isolation of the process, as DS9 highlighted: “You can’t really discuss it with many people because other people will not have as much interest on it (sic) as you” (DS9, p. 4).

Another aspect was the all-consuming nature of doctoral study. DS1 talked about struggling to adapt to post-doctoral life to the extent that he could not reclaim his identity:

Right now, you’re talking to a person who is still missing or feels different in my body, in my mind, in everything. I haven’t fully adjusted to what it’s like to not, like, be fulfilled by writing. (DS1, p. 13)

For DS4, the “student” identity associated with studying for a doctorate contributed to serious problems:

I ended up being quite ill, actually, by the end; I was diagnosed with depression... a lot of that was partly the psychological effects of being a student...being stuck as a student. (DS4, p. 4)

Thus, identity played a crucial role in the wellbeing of the doctoral researchers. In some instances, the act of completing the doctorate had a positive influence on their identity, whereas in others, the process damaged their sense of self.

Supervisors’ perspectives of identity in the doctoral process

The issue of identity was particularly complex in interviews with supervisors. In contrast to the doctoral researcher participants, supervisors said relatively little about the impact of doctoral researchers’ social identities on the doctoral process; the observations that were made focussed on professional, cultural and national identities. A primary sub-theme for supervisors was the development of a researcher identity in their doctoral candidates. In connection with this, some supervisors also commented on how a UK doctoral researcher identity was perceived internationally after completion of the doctorate. A further major sub-theme, which touched upon the emotional and interpersonal aspects of the doctoral journey, was the supervisor’s own role and identity within the supervisory relationship, and particularly the acceptance or rejection of a parental identity.

The impact of doctoral researchers' social identities on the doctoral process

Supervisors' comments within this sub-theme focused on professional, cultural and national identities of students. Interestingly, no supervisors mentioned the class or gender identities of doctoral researchers within interviews. In relation to professional identities, some supervisors recognised that it was the professional identity of some doctoral researchers that brought them into doctoral studies, particularly to pursue professional doctorates such as the EdD. DP6 pointed out that where the research brings in this dimension of a doctoral researcher's experience, supervisions become a learning experience for the supervisor also: 'we're kind of asking him questions and he's telling us' (DP6, p. 7). This aspect of a doctoral researcher's identity was thus seen to potentially impact on both the motivation for study, and the researcher-supervisor relationship.

Some supervisors commented on how the cultural identity of a doctoral researcher could become relevant within the supervision process. DP6 noted that one doctoral researcher always brought food from his home country, Malaysia, to supervisions. DP6 described this practice as "part of [the doctoral researcher's] culture and tradition. He feels it's rude if he doesn't... We said you don't need to do this, he said look, I want to do this, it's my culture, and we, we like it" (DP6, p. 13). This cultural practice, introduced by the doctoral researcher, became an integral element of the supervision procedure. In relation to expectations of what the doctoral process would be like, DP2 reported "cultural differences in terms of expectations of what the PhD is" (DP2, p. 17), observing that "some of the biggest differences are like with the American students and the British students" (DP2, p. 17). DP2 attributed this to the large differences in the doctoral experience in each country. DP2 discussed academic socialisation as a dimension of cultural identity at length, observing that students coming into UK doctoral study from certain international academic backgrounds were used to "a different kind of custom and practice" (DP2, p. 16) and needed more support to integrate into the British system.

A separate point also made by DP2 was that on occasion, the national identity of the doctoral researcher (taken together with the focus of the research) could be significant for the actual written content of the thesis because of different social norms about freedom of speech: "Students who come from... perhaps more conservative countries, ... there are constraints placed upon them in terms of the way they can talk about things" (DP2, p. 18). These examples illustrate how supervisors perceive aspects of the social identities of doctoral researchers as being a significant factor in the doctoral process.

Doctoral researchers' developing researcher identity

A major sub-theme in Durham supervisor interviews, mirroring interviews with doctoral researchers, was the development of a researcher, or academic, identity through the doctoral process. The supervisors interviewed felt that the doctoral process, in a sense, altered doctoral researchers' internal perception of themselves, and of the world around them, as a result of doing research and becoming a researcher. DP6 commented on the sometimes perturbingly transformative nature of undertaking research, which can result in researchers feeling that

their worldview and preconceptions are being challenged: “As you learn more about research, it changes you... Sometimes that can be quite uncomfortable” (DP6, p. 14).

There was a sense throughout the data that the process of writing a thesis and completing a doctorate was one of developing a (new) professional identity: of becoming a researcher or academic. DP4 noted this perception was perhaps the main motivating factor for doctoral candidates: “They’re tugged on by doing research and becoming specialised scholars in a field” (DP4, p. 2). DP2 also felt that this was central to the process, noting: “They do learn about being a researcher” (DP2, p. 8). Yet, supervisors reflected that this process might not be a straightforward matter of passing the viva, and that the actual change in the doctoral researcher’s self-perception might occur later. DP6 suggested there is often a stage where doctoral researchers feel “Well, I’ve got a PhD, but I’m not a proper researcher” (DP6, p. 17). DP6 added, however, that this is usually not an enduring feeling: “when people have got a doctorate, they feel funny for a bit, but then, then they get cross when people don’t call them doctors! [laughter]” (DP6, p. 17). Despite the humorous tone, DP6 here addresses the idea that doing a doctorate can be a gradual metamorphic experience for the doctoral researcher.

Supervisors also noted that the acquisition of a doctorate can impact the social identity of doctoral researchers in the wider world:

It conveys a certain kind of status. ... It’s a very nice thing to call yourself doctor. It gives that kind of intellectual authority. A friend of mine says it’s a license to have opinions. (DP6, p. 3)

This change in how the holder of a doctorate is perceived was also noted by DP2 as a possible motivation for undertaking a doctorate, commenting that for some doctoral researchers, “the only way to get further [career] advancement is a doctorate” (DP2, p. 2). These perspectives may be transferred to doctoral researchers, alerting them to the ways in which their doctoral degree may shape their identity in the (academic or professional) workplace.

The international researcher identity of doctoral researchers was a dimension addressed by some supervisors. DP4 expressed reservations about how the UK doctorate is perceived internationally, and thus, how that might impact its value for doctoral graduates on the international stage. Referring to discussions within his discipline, DP4 stated: “Among historians, I’ve heard people say that American colleagues no longer rate UK PhDs the way they used to” (DP4, p. 9). This sentiment was reiterated by DP6: “I’ve heard American academics say, yeah, you know ‘UK PhDs, they don’t seem as substantial as the ones we do here’” (DP6, p. 18). These views suggest an awareness among some supervisors that UK doctoral identities are esteemed differently within academic communities in the US at least. Furthermore, DP6 referred to the international economic value of the doctorate, linking it to the language of capitalism: doctoral researchers completing their doctorate self-brand as they believe they now have a researcher identity which is a commodity to be sold “in a global market” (DP6, p. 3).

Supervisors and parental identities within the supervisory relationship

When supervisors at Durham were asked about the terms “Doctor-father” or “Doctor-mother”, which are terms applied to supervisors in some countries and contexts, there was a clear split between those supervisors who believed these terms represented an accurate and appropriate description of their role in relation to their supervisees, and those who rejected this identity entirely. For some, the terms captured the challenges and joys of supervision, while for others, they implied an inappropriate level of intimacy and responsibility in the supervisor/doctoral researcher relationship.

One supervisor who embraced the idea of supervising as an almost parental role was DP3, who used it to emphasise the level of connection between himself and his doctoral researchers: “You feel you have a baby born each time you have a PhD student coming through” (DP3, p. 15). DP2 even considered the way that this familial metaphor could be extended to the supervisory team, referring in one case to her male co-supervisor as being a more “maternal” figure in one supervision, while she became more paternal, or “bad cop” (DP2, p. 13), in spite of these roles not being aligned to their genders. In this example, the “doctor-father” and “doctor-mother” acted in tandem to produce the desired result, namely, the completion of the thesis. DP2’s experience of shifting roles highlights the mutable nature of the supervisor’s parental identity, in that supervisors can alter their approach as required, depending on the needs of the doctoral researcher and also the resources of the supervisory team.

In contrast to DP3 and DP2, DP6 firmly rejected the idea of the father-like role in relation to doctoral researchers, commenting that, in the terms of transactional analysis, “if you adopt a kind of parental mode, and that can kind of be authoritarian... in effect what you’re doing is you’re putting them [doctoral researchers] in a kind of infantilised role, in a childlike position” (DP6, p. 12). In the eyes of this supervisor, the doctor-father identity was not merely inaccurate, but potentially damaging to the supervision process; he believed it was his duty to avoid falling into this paternal identity trap, and instead, to form a more “adult-to-adult type relationship” (DP6, p. 12).

To summarise this part three regarding identity, a complex mix of different identity positions emerged as relevant to the doctoral process from the interviews with doctoral researchers and supervisors at Durham. For the doctoral researchers interviewed, the doctoral journey was a significant one in terms of their own identities. Participants’ various social identities impacted on the doctoral journey in a range of ways, posing particular challenges or identity conflicts for some individuals. Some supervisors also noticed their doctoral researchers’ social identities manifesting themselves in the supervisory relationship, and in the doctoral work produced, although this seemed a less prominent sub-theme for supervisors. The degree to which doctoral researchers felt they had developed a researcher identity, and an international or European researcher identity, through the doctorate varied widely across participants, and supervisor views reflected this, with some supervisors pointing out that transition into a new identity can be a lengthy process outlasting even the doctorate. All participants recognised the great impact (positive, negative, or both) of the doctorate on

doctoral researchers' personal identities – their sense of who they are as individuals and what they are capable of. Finally, supervisors shared additional perspectives on their understandings of international perceptions of the value of a UK doctorate, and on their own identities as supervisors and how these fed into the supervisory relationship.

Summary and conclusion

Perhaps in line with the extensive policies and practices in place at departmental and faculty level at Durham University—as outlined in the description of doctoral study in the introduction to this chapter—our findings reveal that the doctoral education experience is a highly bespoke process, varying widely among doctoral researchers and supervisors across the three domains of supervision experiences, language and identity.

Regarding the first theme of supervision, variation arose from the different needs of doctoral researchers, the differing approaches to and (at times, conflicting) expectations of supervision by both doctoral researchers and supervisors, and the varied circumstances in play, such as planned or unplanned absences and distance and/or part-time study. For doctoral researchers, developing researcher and employability skills and competences were key in the doctoral education experience. Yet, the doctoral experience also involved managing intrapersonal skills related to self (e.g., perseverance) and interpersonal skills linked to the close relationship established, or not, over time between supervisors and doctoral researchers. For both parties, these could be both positive and negative, and subject to personalities and expectations as much as individuals' personal life experiences.

Doctoral researchers' experiences ranged from expecting to be “taught” and, instead, having to be more self-directive, to being able to set the parameters for the research and study. Supervision structures and patterns followed the needs of doctoral researchers and their research, all of which had to be managed around the academic, teaching, and professional commitments of supervisors, and the lives of doctoral researchers. Because some doctoral researchers were undertaking professional degrees, such as the Doctor of Education (EdD), they had to balance part-time study with a full-time professional career alongside personal lives, which added to the complexity of the research and academic experience. Accordingly, some supervisors felt that the quality and nature of doctoral study differed considerably between government-funded doctoral researchers (who had usually received very high grades in their undergraduate study and were under pressure to complete on time) and self-financing doctoral researchers (who were motivated by career interest or change and who usually had to balance study alongside full- or part-time work and therefore took a more flexible approach to their study). These trends mirror the current nature of doctoral education in the UK as highlighted in the introduction.

The second theme, language, focused on the role of English, and acquiring the language of the discipline and academy. English is the lingua franca in universities in the UK, and is the

expected language of written and spoken interaction between doctoral researchers and supervisors in doctoral research and supervision. This norm stands in opposition to the trend of internationalisation which has resulted in a considerable number of international students, staff, and administrators in Durham University, and in universities in the UK more generally, who have English as an L2 or additional language. Our data reveal this complex picture, showing that language is by no means an issue that concerns only those working in an L2. Doctoral researchers whose L1 is English and whose study takes place entirely in English must also grapple with language-related issues, which, as one participant noted, could be a source of stress, and also of pride. Doctoral researchers and supervisors discussed acquiring the discipline-specific ways of using language, of becoming a member of a “club” (as one participant noted). Doctoral researchers commented on the expectations of learning to use this language, yet simultaneously, especially in the discipline of anthropology, of having to write for a lay audience.

Writing the thesis created challenges for both international and home doctoral researchers, with home doctoral researchers also reporting the need to learn the style and approach of academic writing and writing in the discipline. Doctoral researchers also expressed the need to use other languages in their research and the problems this can raise.

Similarly, supervisors noted both home and international doctoral researchers’ achievements during the doctoral process, in learning to write their doctoral theses in the required style, and in learning the language of their discipline. Where international doctoral researchers are concerned, supervisors needed to attend to their understanding and be sensitive to their language needs, although constant encouragement, emotional support, and affirmation were crucial for all doctoral researchers in developing these skills. Supervisors pointed to the importance of additional help offered by the language centre in Durham University. Our data showed that, in the majority of cases, those doctoral researchers who were obliged to use the L2 had these problems. In these cases, supervisors reported the need to give time to the doctoral researcher to translate, understand, and absorb new terminology, e.g., discipline specific terminology. An additional theme addressed English language and the admissions process, with supervisors explaining the need to go beyond relying on IELTS scores to seeing the writing of candidates prior to accepting them: once enrolled, there is a duty of care to support candidates through the journey, and to ensure that they have the language skills to reach that destination.

The final theme addressed the role of identity in the doctoral process and at its conclusion. The doctoral researchers’ and supervisors’ portrayals of doctoral researcher identities suggest a complex picture of doctoral researchers’ emergent and changing identities that bring emotional struggle and upheaval into doctoral researchers’ personal and professional lives. Doctoral researchers discussed changing identities that were both rewarding, but also damaging to a sense of self. Doctoral researchers and supervisors held conflicting views on the value of the doctorate and its recognition in society. While supervisors discussed the important process of shaping a researcher and academic identity, doctoral researchers juxtaposed their researcher identity with its reality on completion of the journey: the apprenticeship having been completed, the value of the qualification remained to be tested in

the global market place. Both groups recognised the perceived status of the doctorate, although perceptions of its value differed among individuals in both groups.

Supervisors' conflicting views regarding supervisory "parental" roles suggested that for some, the "father/mother" term captured the pleasure of supervision, yet for others, it reduced the relationship to a dependency role for the doctoral researcher. Instead, supervisors preferred an adult-to adult relationship, judging it more appropriate.

In conclusion, the doctoral experience, as demonstrated in this case study at Durham University, reveals a complex picture of doctoral researchers' and supervisors' experiences which are both highly (inter)personal and developmental. Both doctoral researchers and supervisors are engaged in managing the doctoral supervision process; in supporting doctoral researchers in the acquisition of the language of the academy, the discipline, and the writing of the thesis; and in acquiring a fledgling researcher identity. Qualities of perseverance are valued alongside requisite academic and language skills. There is little evidence of policies and processes set out by the university being embedded in and guiding doctoral research in the participants' experiences and reflections. Nonetheless, their experiences as described in this study indicate the importance of these processes and policies in ensuring the quality of the outcome - the emergence of a confident and competent researcher - and the quality of the interpersonal journey for both doctoral researcher and supervisor.

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