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**Discourse, knowledge and power: the continuing debate  
over the DBA**

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Review

## Discourse, knowledge and power: the continuing debate over the DBA

### Abstract:

The Doctor of Business Administration Degree (DBA) has been viewed as a new stage in the development of 'useful' knowledge bringing together academic and business professionals. The DBA was introduced during the 1990s along with a number of other so-called professional doctorates in an effort to address perceived failings with the conventional Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree. **The main focus of this paper is related to how students and academics in a business school perceive the DBA in terms of its purpose and value compared to that of the conventional PhD. The research methodology involved a two-stage approach in which a pilot questionnaire and short interviews with 37 students was followed by a second questionnaire to 21 academics employed at a business school at a post-1992 English university. The findings suggest that although the DBA is valued as means to develop professional knowledge and expertise, the PhD remains the premier choice for those who wish to embark on an academic career. This paper, however, recognises that the conventional doctoral paradigm may change as we revise our conceptions of useful knowledge, and move to a greater variety in doctoral qualifications.**

**Key words:** Doctor of Business Administration (DBA); knowledge production; professional-researcher; practitioner-researcher; Professional doctorate; business; Doctor of Philosophy (PhD).

### Introduction:

In February 2015, the Economic and Social Research Council in England responded to concerns about the expense and quality of the conventional PhD by reforming its funding methodology so as to concentrate its allocation to a select group of 15 'Doctoral Training Partnerships'. These partnerships were tasked with raising the quality of doctoral provision through better engagement with industry and supervising larger cohorts of students. This announcement represented a continuation of central Government policy that had developed since the 1990s. The kernel of the approach is a concern over the usefulness of the conventional PhD in the ever-changing business environment. The solution, in part, is the DBA- but should we really view the DBA as a substitute for an increasingly challenged PhD, or more properly a new doctoral qualification in its own right with its own currency for students and wider society. Park (2007: 7) raises two further questions that lie at the heart of the debate over the DBA: who owns the doctorate, and who cares? Park (2007:37) then identifies three themes that are at the centre of the debate on the future of doctoral education: What is the essence of 'doctorateness'? What is the doctorate for? How can the supply chain of doctoral graduates be sustained? This paper will explore these themes through empirical research at a business school and offer a view on the value of the DBA.

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3 According to De Meyer (2012: 479), [the traditional] model of PhD education... is insufficient for  
4 our future needs', and in particular, 'the creation of new forms of doctoral studies... may well be  
5 better adapted to the needs of lots of the emerging educational institutions in management or  
6 business administration'(De Meyer, 2012: 478). Although the past two decades have witnessed the  
7 growth of professional doctorates in Australia, **the United States (USA)** and the United Kingdom  
8 (UK), their long-term future is still open to speculation. **There is no common prognosis for the  
9 future of professional doctorates internationally. In the USA, professional associations have driven  
10 the development of these work-based qualifications in a wide range of employment contexts. In  
11 contrast, there has been little support for professional doctorates in Canada either from academia  
12 or Government. Although there was initial enthusiasm for professional doctorates in Australia,  
13 their growth has been limited in recent years, as issues relating to quality and status have been  
14 raised. The UK has also witnessed the growth of professional doctorates, not least the Doctorate  
15 in Education (EdD), but their potential appears limited as the PhD is reworked into new variants  
16 such as the 'NewRoute PhD' that adopts a structured approach rather similar to that of a  
17 professional doctorate.** Perspectives differ on the purpose, rigour and value the professional  
18 doctorate. For some critics, such as Evans, Macauley, Pearson and Tregenza, (2005), the immanent  
19 question is: 'why do a prof. doc. when you can do a PhD?' For its advocates, the professional  
20 doctorate offers us the opportunity of constructing new pathways to new forms of profession-based  
21 inquiry as well as the reorientation of insular universities outwards to the wider community  
22 (Banerjee and Morley, 2013: 174; De Meyer, 2012). The main aim of the paper is to explore the  
23 growth and development of one of the most common professional doctorates- the Doctor of  
24 Business Administration (DBA)- as well as eliciting the views of students **and academics** on these  
25 three key issues of purpose, rigour and value. In doing so, we may move closer to a tentative  
26 judgment about its *raison d'être* in the twenty-first century, and the future of this qualification.  
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34 For De Meyer (2012) the review of the traditional system of doctoral study can be traced to the  
35 perceived inadequacy of the PhD model in the twenty-first century. This 'decline of the traditional  
36 PhD thesis' is predicated on a number of drivers of change principally related to the changing nature  
37 of 'knowledge production' and the impact of globalisation. Together with these international drivers  
38 there were a range of national pressures for a re-evaluation of doctoral study, particularly in  
39 Australia and the UK. In both countries, Government policy publically endorsed the emergence and  
40 development of professional doctorates in response to the perceived failings of the traditional PhD  
41 **through the publication of White Papers in 1987.** In Australia, the Labour Government responding  
42 to concerns expressed from the professions and commercial interests launched professional  
43 doctorates in the late 1980s (Lee et al. 2009: 277). Bourner et al. (2000) trace the creation of  
44 professional doctorates in the UK to the interplay between Central Government and the University  
45 sector, in which Government policy (Harris Report, 1996; Quality Assurance Agency, 2000) had  
46 similarly emphasised the need for the evolution of doctoral study beyond the traditional PhD. These  
47 policy developments were indicative of two strands that were underpinning Government thinking.  
48 The first strand related to economic instrumentalism and the wish on behalf of policy-makers to  
49 improve high level skills, such as research and evaluative thinking, within the workforce. The second  
50 strand, more conspicuous under a Labour Government in the UK after 1997, related to an increased  
51 emphasis on widening participation in education at all levels and promoting aspiration.  
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57 The short history of professional doctorates in Australia, Canada and **the USA** and the UK (see  
58 table 1) suggests that there appears to be a market for this form of doctoral qualification outside of  
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3 the traditional clientele for PhD study. In 2009, there were 19 Australian universities offering 27  
4 DBAs of various formats (Miller, 2010: 6). In 2014, there were a reported 32 universities in the UK  
5 that offered 65 professional doctorates, **whilst Kot Chiteng and Hendel (2012: 351) reported that in**  
6 **their study of 32 American universities they found 33 professional doctorates.** In terms of the DBA  
7 as a discrete qualification, it continues to be the second only to the EdD as the most popular  
8 professional doctorate studied in the UK. There were 47 DBA degrees offered in 2014, of which only  
9 15 were offered as full-time courses. (Hotcourses, 2014). This compares to 16 universities in the UK  
10 that were offering DBAs in 2000. In part, the growth of the DBA has been facilitated through an ease  
11 of access with most professional doctorates designed to be delivered on a part-time basis or through  
12 distance learning. In Australia, the DBA appears to have been promoted across the university sector  
13 as a qualification in its own right. For many of the pre-1992 universities in the UK, the professional  
14 doctorate has also provided an opportunity to respond to the widening participation and skills  
15 agenda proclaimed by Government, without jeopardising their gold standard qualification – the PhD.  
16 **The introduction of professional doctorates has also been motivated by the wish to improve**  
17 **completion rates for doctoral qualifications, now that these are measured by Government as a key**  
18 **performance indicator of quality, and ultimately funding.** Interestingly, many of the proponents of  
19 professional doctorates in the UK have been the more traditional pre-1992 universities, not the  
20 vocationally-oriented post-1992 universities, in contrast to Australia.  
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27 Importantly, the evolution of the DBA has generated some criticism from within academia. The  
28 critique of the professional doctorate is predicated on a number of fundamental concerns: the  
29 degree of intellectual rigour required to obtain a DBA, the lack of focus on developing research-  
30 based knowledge, as well as the inconsistencies that exists between different models of the DBA.  
31 According to Bareham et al. (2000: 394) there appears to be little consensus on the core content  
32 required to obtain a DBA, 'notwithstanding the fact that the Association of Business Schools (ABS)  
33 has published guidelines on the DBA. It is important for the credibility of the DBA for there to be  
34 clarity about what the award stands for'. According to the United Kingdom Council for Graduate  
35 Education (2002: 62), the defining feature of a professional doctorate should be:  
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39 'A programme of advanced study which, satisfying the University criteria for the award of a  
40 doctorate, is designed to meet the specific needs of a professional group external to the  
41 University, and which develops the capability of individuals to work within a professional  
42 context.'  
43

44 Within such a view is the kernel of the critique of professional doctorates both from a conceptual  
45 and practical perspective. Firstly, the DBA is designed to meet the needs of a relatively new and  
46 'external' clientele who are quite separate from Faculty staff and their traditional doctoral mentees.  
47 Secondly, the purpose and value of the professional doctorate is presented in terms of professional  
48 development and not as research-based learning. Researchers across the globe have criticised  
49 professional doctorates as a poor alternative to the PhD; lacking in intellectual rigour and research-  
50 orientated skills in the UK and Canada (Winter et al. 2000; Allen et al, 2002) or a lack of quality  
51 controls over their growth in Australia (Sarros et al. 2005). For McWilliam et al. (2002: 1104) although  
52 the DBA and PhD are 'differently rigorous...', there is little consistency in how these graduate degree  
53 programmes are delivered, monitored, and evaluated'. In short, the DBA still faces a challenge to  
54 address the issues of credibility and legitimacy, not least within the academic community from which  
55 the degree originates.  
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### An International comparison of the position of Professional Doctorates

Country	Significant stakeholders	Quality or policy reviews	DBA used as a Key Performance Indicator (KPI)	Nature of assessment	Employment context
UK	Central Government has promoted professional doctorates as a matter of policy.	White Paper, 1987. UKGCE report, 2002. Park (HEA) report, 2007. Accepted at Level 8 (PhD equivalent). Growth of alternative 'NewRoute PhD'.	Yes, in completion rates.	Varies, but usual to have a research methods foundation, original research thesis and viva.	Driven by Central Government together with Government agencies linked to professions. Seen as an 'in-service' qualification.
USA	Professional associations. Universities in developing new qualifications. Accreditation bodies, such as AACSB.	North Central Association of Colleges and Schools report, 2005 recommendations on development.	NA.	Varies, but often have examinations, coursework, and short dissertation, and no viva.	Driven by increasing 'credentialism' in USA. Often seen as a 'pre-entry' qualification.
Australia	Federal Government has promoted Professional Doctorates as a matter of policy.	White Paper, 1987. Dawkins reforms, 1989. Kemp White Paper, 1999. Accepted at Level 10 of the Australian Qualifications Framework (PhD equivalent) in 2011.	Australian Business School Deans draft guidelines, 2004-07. Moved away from entry to completion data as a KPI after 2011.	Varies, but can be 66% based on original research for DBA, no viva (Wallace et al. 2015).	Originally driven by Federal Government and professions. Seen as an 'in-service' qualification.
Canada	Provincial Governments (i.e. Ontario) - absence of public funding has inhibited professional doctorates.	Ontario Government has not invested significantly in the development of Professional doctorates.	NA.	NA.	Not seen as a viable alternative to the conventional PhD.

Table 1. An international comparison of the position of professional doctorates.

**Literature review:**

The idea of a professional doctorate, as in the case of the DBA, opens up the opportunity for the development of knowledge in new contexts. As a number of observers have noted (Banerjee and Morley, 2013: 174; De Meyer, 2012: 479) Government and the private sector now recognise that 'knowledge production' takes place outside the university sector in the guise of 'think tanks', policy institutes and commercial research establishments. This increasingly pluralist context for knowledge production has important implications for universities as they have been amongst the foremost engines of knowledge production since the Victorian era. The once omniscient position of the university sector as the progenitors of knowledge is now challenged, and with this change, the unquestioned hierarchy of knowledge that was generated by universities. The changing context of knowledge production also has profound implications for knowledge producers with De Meyer (2002: 483) reporting that Singapore University has developed a three career track system that reflects emerging trajectories for professors: traditional academic, practice-based and education-focussed.

For some observers, the emergence of the DBA is indicative of a critique of the traditional model of the business school and its curriculum. For Bennis and O'Toole (2005) business schools have prioritised obtaining academic credibility from such organisations as the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) rather than engaging fully with practitioners in sharing knowledge. For a number of commentators, business schools are primarily engaged in a process of external legitimation rather than meeting the needs of the wider community (Pfeffer and Fong, 2002; Banerjee and Morley, 2013). One key contemporary driver of business schools' strategic planning is conformity with the AACSB's criteria for accreditation. During 2006-2009, AACSB (2009) refined a series of standards in order to obtain AACSB accreditation. In response, aspiring business schools across the globe then re-engineered their curriculum, quality systems and staffing policies (Noorda, 2011). In particular, the 2009 AACSB rubric sought to divide faculty membership into two categories: those with a doctorate and academic publications, described as 'academically qualified', and those with a Master's degree and substantial work experience, described as 'professionally qualified'. This nomenclature was further refined in 2013 when AACSB (2013) produced a typology of four categories: the 'scholarly practitioner' and the 'instructional practitioner' for those without a doctorate but with varying amounts of academic publications and work experience, and the 'scholarly academic' and 'practitioner academic' for those who hold a doctorate. In this respect, career pathways and appropriate qualifications within business schools are being re-engineered by market pressures originating from outside the university sector. A second driver of business schools' strategic positioning is ensuring that its external reputation is secured through the tracking of its research outcomes. In the UK, Central Government audits the productivity of business schools and measures its value through a series of key performance indicators (KPIs), not least the metrics scores of its academics along-side a number of KPIs described in a variety of league tables that are derived from assessments of institutional research outputs. Elite business schools are clearly influenced by the need to be viewed as 'research intensive' rather than 'practitioner-oriented'. The creation and evolution of the 'elite' Russell Group of 24 'research-intensive' universities in the UK mirrors their wish to be perceived as research-based institutions, as this is regarded as the most effective method of attracting external funding. Indeed, the Russell Group reports that it attracts '60% of the total income from collaborative research involving both public funding and funding from businesses to UK universities' (Russell Group, 2014). Although there are 116 universities in the UK that award degrees,

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3 it is evident that the greater amount of funding is drawn to those institutions that position  
4 themselves as being 'research-intensive'.  
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6 The preoccupation with theory-based research rather than practice-oriented development  
7 amongst leading universities has led many business schools, particularly in the UK and Australia, to  
8 project a particular, and rather limiting, message about their work. For Noorda (2011: 521-522)  
9 business schools should now consider a new stage of their evolution:  
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12 'Business schools have been leaders in the field of ranking and accreditation for quite some  
13 time now. I would like to invite them to become leading in redesign and development as  
14 well. ... A broader scope and more variety of standards would be very welcome.... Business  
15 worlds are changing, student populations are changing, and so should schools'.  
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18 For Noorda (2011) the challenge is to undertake a fundamental review of the work of business  
19 schools and their contribution to wider society. **This critique of business schools is echoed in the**  
20 **reports from Pfefffer and Fong (2002) and by the AACSB (2008) that decry the lack of impact of**  
21 **business research and the disjoint between university research and industry. If business schools**  
22 **are to produce research that has relevance to contemporary business practice, universities need**  
23 **to focus on meeting the practical needs of businesses rather than engaging in esoteric theoretical**  
24 **research.** The starting point for the next stage of evolutionary maturation should **then** be the  
25 reappraisal of knowledge-production as a process and an outcome. Building on (Schoen, 1995) ideas  
26 on professional work and learning, Lee et al. (2009: 282) argue that: 'there is a continuing need to  
27 address a continuing privileging of the idea of knowledge- particularly disciplinary knowledge,  
28 understood as disembodied, abstracted from practice, de-situated- over practice per se and its  
29 distinctive logics and imperatives'. This relationship between forms of knowledge, asymmetrical  
30 power relations and intellectual discourse has been researched from a number of opposing  
31 perspectives including that of post-structuralism and Foucault (1969) and social constructionism and  
32 Habermas (1984/1987). Although Lee et al (2009: 281-282) concede that a 'discourse of demise'  
33 appears to have enveloped the professional doctorate in Australia, they argue that reports of the  
34 death of the professional doctorate are exaggerated. At the root of the discourse on knowledge is a  
35 debate relating to the role and importance of dominant groups in society, such as universities in  
36 creating and legitimating knowledge and cultural power.  
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42 The emergence of professional doctorates, such as the DBA, could be seen as a positive shift  
43 towards a repositioning of some universities and their view of the varying forms of knowledge. For  
44 Bareham et al. (2000):  
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46  
47 'The DBA can be viewed as a form of work-based learning. From this perspective the  
48 development of the DBA represents the coming of age of work-based learning within the  
49 higher education curriculum. Doctoral awards for work-based learning imply acceptance of  
50 work-based learning at the highest level of higher education'.  
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52 This movement towards a more inclusive view of appropriate knowledge at doctoral level, opens up  
53 the possibility of engagement with a wider audience. It also offers us the opportunity to narrow the  
54 divide between 'professional-researchers' and 'researching professionals' (Bourner et al., 2001) and  
55 recognise the possibility for sharing knowledge. Erwee (2004) has reported on the benefits of  
56 developing links between universities and industry as well as Kemp's (2002) distinction between  
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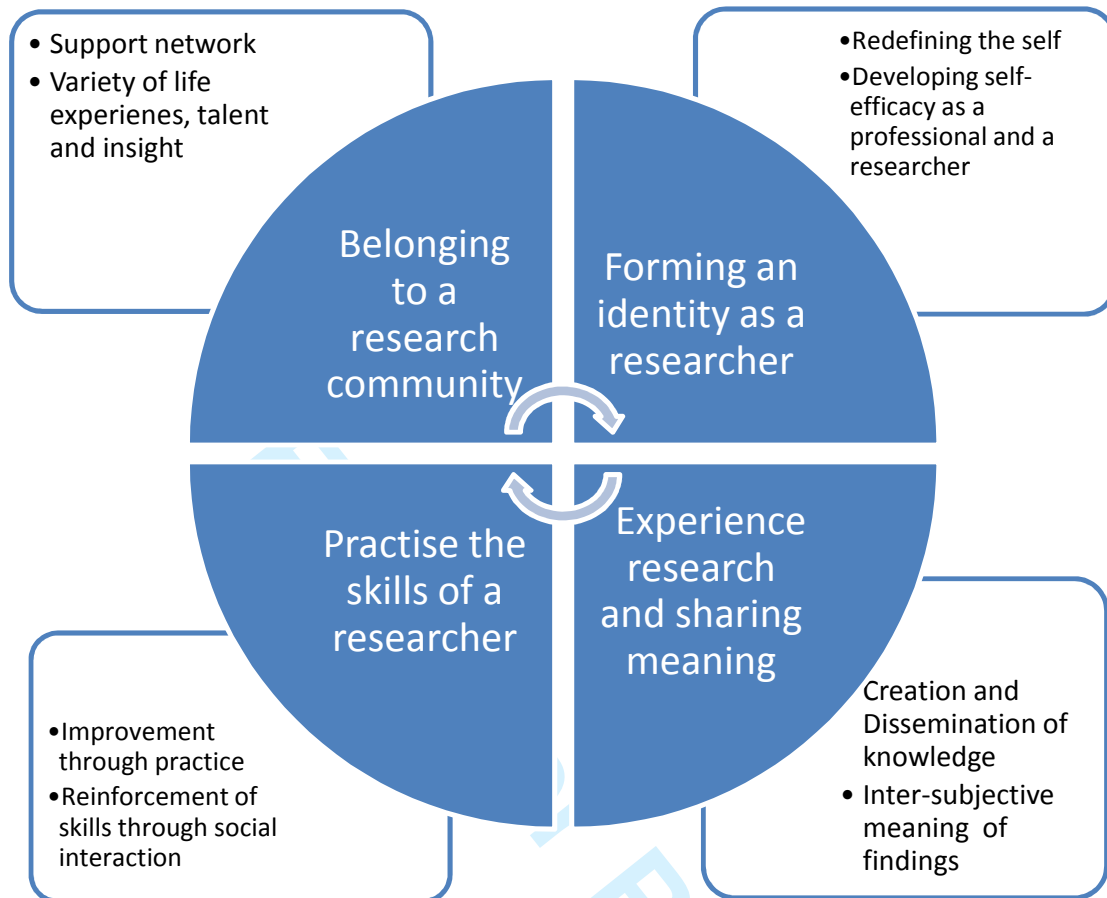
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3 'surface level' and 'deep level' linkages and their limitations. Despite differences in vested interests,  
4 the development of closer ties between academia and business is to be welcomed in an increasingly  
5 knowledge-based economy. Sarros et al. (2005: 42) argue that 'the DBA degree approaches [applied  
6 learning] mode 2 knowledge and learning styles but also incorporates the need for academic rigour  
7 as contained in the [disciplinary, research-based] mode 1 approach'. For some observers, the  
8 coalescence of professional doctorates around the twin principles of research and practice has  
9 created a new form of 1.5 mode of learning. If so, a synthesis of both approaches could address the  
10 theory-practice divide that has inhibited economic growth in recent history.  
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14 Another important outcome of the emergence of the professional doctorate is the momentum it  
15 has engendered towards the creation of communities of professional practice (De Meyer, 2013:  
16 484). Bourner et al. (2001: 75) cites the experience of English universities:  
17

18 'The cohort experience is introduced ... is intended to enhance the collaboration and  
19 responsibility expected of high level professional practice'

20  
21 'Its focus is on research in relation to professional practice, pursued with a cohesive group of  
22 professionals working together'.  
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25 Whereas universities have historically recruited and supervised individuals to study for a PhD, the  
26 professional doctorate aims to recruit cohorts of students and support them through a common  
27 research training stage. The impact of such an approach is to inculcate a mutually supportive  
28 environment in which students are able to disseminate and share their research ideas,  
29 methodological approaches and findings. This approach may also reduce the degree of isolation that  
30 is often reported by PhD students (Wellington and Sykes, 2006: 724) and facilitate a community of  
31 practice as described by Wenger (1998) and Wenger et al. (2002). Wenger's (1998) thesis can be  
32 interpreted as combining a social theory of learning introduced by Bandura (1963) with the notion of  
33 identity formation (Cote, 1996) in the development of a community of learning. Bourner et al. (2000:  
34 492), as an illustration, reported that one university established 'themed' groups that were  
35 predicated on mutual research interests. This cohort-based approach offers a number of advantages  
36 over that of individual supervision associated with the traditional PhD, not least in economies of  
37 scale, but principally in relation to the development of a community of research-focussed  
38 practitioners. An adapted model of a community of 'practitioner-researchers' is presented below in  
39 Figure 1:  
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**Figure 1. An adaptation of Wenger (1998) and the notion of a community of practice.**

The creation of communities of practitioner-researchers is a worthy aspiration for the professional doctorate and its advocates. There are, however, other developments in doctoral education that have emerged in response to the rise of the professional doctorate. In simple terms, universities have sought to remodel the PhD without jeopardising its position. In addition, to the established option of PhD through publication, universities have developed a model of doctoral education that draws ideas from the professional doctorate. In 2000 a consortium of 10 British universities, funded by Government agencies, established a new route to a PhD. According to the NewRoute PhD Consortium (2014):

The principle of the NewRoutePhD is to integrate in-depth study (often inter-disciplinary), research training, and high level professional skills training. Students gain a powerful combination of knowledge, skills and research experience that makes them highly employable in business, university teaching, government and public service.

This new form of doctoral education offers supervision in a range of 12 disciplines ranging from the physical and social sciences to sports science and humanities, as well as Business. Although still in

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3 development, the 'New Route', or 'Integrated' PhD as it is also known as, represents an evolutionary  
4 step away from the traditional thesis only PhD offered by British universities. It is also indicative of  
5 the continuing drive by Government to make the PhD more relevant to the world outside of  
6 academia, to raise the quality of doctoral supervision and to address the relatively poor completion  
7 rates of PhD students (Park, 2005). The New Route PhD also acknowledges the contribution of the  
8 professional doctorate to postgraduate study. In prefacing the research element with a preparatory  
9 skills-training phase, the New Route PhD has recognised the importance of a supportive framework  
10 within which to undertake research.  
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### 13 14 15 16 **Research methodology:**

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18 The research methodology adopted a mixed methods approach **over two distinct phases. In the first**  
19 **phase**, three target groups were identified as potentially useful informants: current DBA students,  
20 those who had rejected the DBA in order to study for a PhD, and the Head of Department of a major  
21 business school who held a DBA. This variety in research participants would, it was anticipated,  
22 provide a range of perspectives on the key issues of purpose, value and academic rigour. In terms of  
23 obtaining data from the DBA students, a highly structured questionnaire with 20 statements was  
24 distributed to the 37 students enrolled on the DBA programme. Each of the 20 statements was  
25 followed by a five point Likert scale that enabled a quick response as well as space to elicit some  
26 commentary from students to provide greater detail. Statements, such as, 'I would rather generate  
27 theory-based knowledge than practice-based knowledge', and 'I think that a DBA is easier to obtain  
28 than a PhD', and 'I hope the DBA will prepare me for an academic career', as well as 'I think the DBA  
29 is more useful than a PhD in the contemporary business environment' explored the key issues  
30 generated by the Literature Review. This research was undertaken 'in-house' with colleagues, and as  
31 a result, there were a few ethical issues to address in terms of confidentiality and process. In  
32 addition to the sample, some desk research was undertaken in order to obtain statistical data on  
33 trends and completion rates between the DBA and PhD. It was felt important that some  
34 chronological perspective be obtained in addition to looking at success rates for these two  
35 qualifications.  
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41 **In the second phase to the research, the research questions were narrowed down to four key**  
42 **issues that had emerged from the literature and responses to the initial questionnaire. This**  
43 **questionnaire was distributed to 21 academics that held doctorates. The majority (13) of these**  
44 **participants held a PhD, whilst a minority (8) held a DBA. The sampling was purposive in nature as**  
45 **one of the research objectives was to see if there was any significant difference between those**  
46 **academics who held a PhD, and those who did not, over the issue of professional doctorates.**  
47 **There were four statements on the questionnaire, together with the opportunity for a**  
48 **supplementary comment. A fifth item on the questionnaire asked for some extended comments**  
49 **on their choice of doctoral programme. The four statements were:**  
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- 52
- 53 • **The DBA is better suited to furthering professional practice than a research-based PhD**
- 54 • **The DBA is better suited to developing employable skills than a research-based PhD**
- 55 • **The DBA is better suited to developing an academic career than a research-based PhD**
- 56 • **The DBA is better suited to developing research skills than a research-based PhD**
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3 Participants were asked to respond using a seven point Likert scale ranging from 'disagree  
4 strongly' to 'agree strongly'. A seven point scale was chosen for the second questionnaire in order  
5 to provide participants with a greater range of response options, and to tease out different  
6 viewpoints between those who held a PhD and the DBA.  
7

8  
9 There were clear limitations to the effectiveness of the research. In the first phase, although 37  
10 DBA students were contacted, a minority responded albeit with useful information. **In the second**  
11 **phase, 21 academics were surveyed.** In future research a larger number of DBA students and  
12 academics from several universities could be surveyed to generate a much larger sample, together  
13 with feedback from doctoral supervisors on the DBA and PhD process compared. The feedback from  
14 the Head of Department was useful as it reflected his personal perspective both as a DBA graduate  
15 and an academic lead. Despite these limitations, the research did generate insight into the  
16 motivations of DBA and PhD students and the context within which their studies were set. In  
17 particular, one issue that emerged from the research was the degree to which the DBA was a  
18 possible substitute not for those who intended to apply their doctoral understanding directly to the  
19 commercial world, but to academia.  
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#### 24 25 Findings:

##### 26 27 *Qualitative findings:*

##### 28 29 *From the DBA students:*

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31 The findings suggest that the idea of a clear distinction between a vocational, work-based  
32 qualification and the academic doctoral qualification is too simplistic. It is clear that the majority of  
33 DBA students view themselves as 'practitioner-researchers', but do not accept the point that their  
34 DBA is inferior to the PhD in terms of intellectual rigour.  
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37  
38 'Similar breadth of knowledge, just for a different application. I anticipate that  
39 the DBA will primarily produce knowledge that practitioners can transfer into their  
40 workplace rather than extending the body of knowledge from a theoretical perspective'.  
41

42 Some students were already members of the teaching staff at the University and did not see the DBA  
43 as changing their self-identity, although they did view it as more useful than the PhD in the  
44 contemporary business environment.  
45

46  
47 'This is the real reason why I am undertaking a DBA.... This is the fundamental difference  
48 between a PhD and DBA'  
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50 There were a multitude of drivers that persuaded students to opt for a DBA, and no clear pattern  
51 was discernible. For some, as academics it was important to achieve some form of doctoral  
52 qualification as the University was applying for accreditation from the Association to Advance  
53 Collegiate Schools of Business International (AACSB) and it was deemed an increasingly important  
54 condition of career development. There was, however, no pattern that suggested an imposed policy  
55 of DBA registration for academic staff. For some students, they had been advised by their line  
56 manager to study for the DBA, for others it was solely their choice to register for doctoral study. It  
57 appears that personal circumstances and preference were the prime drivers in students' choice of  
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3 doctoral study. In terms of status, rigour and challenge, DBA students did not regard the DBA as  
4 inferior to the PhD.

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6 *Academics that held a DBA:*

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8 There was a clear coalescence of opinion within the group of academics who had graduated with a  
9 DBA. For example:

10  
11 'Basically, because it is practice related'.

12  
13 'The Professional Doctorate encourages a contribution to practice which fits well with  
14 furthering vocational practice'.

15  
16 'PDs are particularly targeted for employed people and focus on more strongly practical  
17 skills'.

18  
19 'A Professional Doctorate tend to be focussed more on impact and contribution to the  
20 professional field rather than research PhD where contribution to theory is also usually  
21 expected'.

22  
23 However, one academic made an important point about the development of a future career in  
24 academia following a DBA:

25  
26 'The challenge here is where the academic may want to publish. If the doctorate is  
27 focussed on practice there is an interest in publishing in journals focussed on a different  
28 audience which is not valued so highly by the academy- i.e. 4 star journals are not often  
29 read by practitioners'.

30  
31 The other dominant theme that emerged from DBA holders was the structured format and  
32 convenience of study:

33  
34 'I believe the DBA follows a more structured format and relates to my learning style. I also  
35 believe the DBA is an ideal route for an early career researcher as opposed to a research-  
36 based PhD'.

37  
38 'For me, the deciding factor was relevance to practice and time scales'.

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45 *Academics that held a PhD:*

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47 The viewpoints generated by PhD students differed in some key respects, namely in terms of  
48 academic rigour and professional status. In general, PhD graduates did not regard the DBA as equal  
49 to the traditional thesis plus viva examination process **in terms of intellectual challenge**. Two  
50 experienced members of staff reported that:

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52  
53 'My supervisor always told me to put PhD after my name rather than Dr before it, so people  
54 knew it was a PhD and not a professional doctorate.'

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3 'I do believe that it is more beneficial personally to link the qualifications I do to the career I  
4 want. I am looking at an academic career and therefore a PhD and its requirement for a  
5 contribution to theory is appropriate.  
6

7  
8 There was a consensus of opinion that the DBA was not only inferior to the PhD but was potentially  
9 in decline internationally as a doctoral qualification. A third PhD graduate opined that:

10  
11 'Australia is moving away from recognising the DBA as equivalent aren't they?  
12 I know that they're not the same in the USA.'  
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14  
15 One academic conceded that they had become embarrassed after ridiculing the DBA in the presence  
16 of a work colleague who was also a DBA student. It was evident that those who held a PhD felt that  
17 the DBA was an inferior qualification for a career in academia, but offered different skills that were  
18 valid in a professional context. This critique of the DBA, and indeed professional doctorates in  
19 general, was predicated on its perceived lack of rigour and theoretical insight. Whereas the  
20 traditional PhD is assessed by thesis and viva, some professional doctorates are examined by a  
21 portfolio of work **that includes a thesis of typically 50,000 words compared to that of a PhD of 80-**  
22 **100,000 words.** Criticism of the DBA partly centred on the lack of depth to the thesis and the  
23 practice of submitting portfolio work of shorter pieces of work, rather than the extended writing  
24 normally associated with doctoral study. A related criticism of the DBA, **that is present in the**  
25 **literature,** is that it does not engage sufficiently with research but instead in reporting practice. This  
26 alleged lack of research expertise is regarded by PhD informants as a major limitation in professional  
27 doctorates, and a barrier to a career in academia.  
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32 *The Head of Department:*

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34 The Head of Department confessed that he had 'agonised over whether to study for a PhD or DBA',  
35 but felt that studying for the DBA was more appropriate for him. In terms of the positive attributes  
36 of the DBA, the Head of Department felt that:  
37

38 'I would see the growth in DBA as a leadership development qualification although this  
39 will require greater differentiation from the PhD and greater focus on practical outcomes'.  
40

41  
42 And that,

43  
44 'Contribution to practice. It should be seen as a work-based alternative to a PhD which can  
45 be an effective senior leader development programme'.  
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47  
48 In terms of steering potential doctoral students to one or the other qualification, the Head of  
49 Department thought that:

50  
51 We tend to advise based on the initial topic area, background of the student and what their  
52 career aspirations are. For example, if a learner joins us to study a doctoral award and is  
53 being sponsored by an employer their topic is often very practical and a contribution to  
54 practice is essential to demonstrate return on investment- this would indicate a professional  
55 doctorate is more beneficial. If the candidate is not sponsored and maybe is studying to seek  
56 a career in academia, a PhD would be promoted.  
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The issue of steering doctoral candidates was explored in some depth as a number of academics within the Department, including the Departmental Head himself, and others had chosen to read for a DBA instead of a PhD. Indeed, it had been one of the reasons for undertaking the research- why were there so many DBA graduates working in the department when academia is supposedly the preserve of the PhD? This initial observation seemed counter-intuitive. These DBA graduates had transferred from working in a commercial or public sector background into academia, contrary to the conventional expectation. One possible conclusion to be drawn is that each student chose independently to study for a DBA rather than a PhD, perhaps because they could bring vocational experience to their doctoral studies. Finally, the Head described a difference in approach taken in doctoral supervision:

I supervise a DBA differently to a PhD. In the early and latter stages I focus very much on practical contribution. I also tend to be more practical on the methodology section.

Eisenhardt (1989) offers a procedural framework for a professional doctorate methodology. She specifically advises not to get too bogged down by the research methodology and find an approach the researcher is happy with and just get on with it.'

Although the evidence generated from the Head of Department reinforces the divide between the conventional PhD and the DBA in terms of purpose and methodology, there is no concession to the DBA being easier than the PhD, just different.

### Statistical findings:

The tables below record the responses to the second questionnaire:

All respondents (21)	Disagree strongly	Disagree	Tend to disagree	No response	Tend to agree	Agree	Agree strongly
Q.1 The PD is better suited to furthering professional practice than a research-based PhD	DBA: 0 PhD: 0 Total: 0	DBA: 0 PhD: 0 Total: 0	DBA: 0 PhD: 1 Total:1	DBA: 0 PhD: 0 Total: 0	DBA: 2 PhD: 7 Total:9	DBA: 6 PhD: 3 Total:9	DBA: 0 PhD: 2 Total:2
Q.2 The PD is better suited to developing employable skills than a research-based PhD	DBA: 0 PhD: 0 Total: 0	DBA: 0 PhD: 2 Total:2	DBA: 1 PhD: 4 Total:5	DBA: 2 PhD: 3 Total:5	DBA: 3 PhD: 0 Total:3	DBA: 5 PhD: 0 Total:5	DBA: 0 PhD: 1 Total:1
Q.3 The PD is better suited to developing an academic career than a research-based PhD	DBA: 1 PhD: 2 Total:3	DBA: 3 PhD: 3 Total:6	DBA: 1 PhD: 6 Total:7	DBA: 1 PhD: 2 Total:3	DBA: 2 PhD: 0 Total:2	DBA: 0 PhD: 0 Total: 0	DBA: 0 PhD: 0 Total: 0

Q.4 The PD is better suited to developing research skills than a research-based PhD	DBA: 0 PhD: 1 Total: 1	DBA: 1 PhD: 5 Total:6	DBA: 2 PhD: 5 Total:7	DBA: 3 PhD: 2 Total:5	DBA: 2 PhD: 0 Total:2	DBA: 0 PhD: 0 Total: 0	DBA: 0 PhD: 0 Total: 0
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Table 2. The data generated by questionnaire 2, distributed to 21 academics

The statistical data indicates that the vast majority of both PhD and DBA cohorts of academics agree to some degree with statement 1, 'that The Professional Doctorate is better suited to furthering professional practice than a research-based PhD'. This echoes many of the comments drawn from the second questionnaire. There is, however, a more diverse response to statement 2, 'the Professional Doctorate is better suited to developing employable skills than a research-based PhD'. Whereas a significant number of PhD holders reject the idea of the DBA as better placed to provide employer-friendly skills, most DBA students either 'tend to agree' or 'agree' with statement 2. There appears very little support for the notion that 'the Professional Doctorate is better suited to developing an academic career than a research-based PhD' in statement 3, with only 2 DBA graduates arguing in favour of the DBA over the PhD, and 15 in total indicating a preference for the PhD. Finally, there is also little support for the idea in statement 4 that 'the Professional Doctorate is better suited to developing research skills than a research-based PhD', with only 2 DBA graduates advocating the DBA as better in promoting research skills. These findings suggest those surveyed felt that although the DBA was relevant to investigating organisational problems, its value in developing a future academic career was limited, and inferior to that of the conventional PhD. These findings echo much of the work of Neumann (2005).

#### Discussion:

The context within which university educators work is dynamic and open to the influences of a range of stakeholders, including Government and the business lobby. The period since 1990 has seen a significant change in how universities respond to this external environment, not least with the development of the professional doctorate. In part, this response from universities has been a reaction to market forces and the drive for new revenue streams. In part, the approach has been influenced by the realisation that Higher Education should cater for a larger proportion of the population and recognise work-based learning in broader sense (Bareham et al., 2000: 398). Although we should acknowledge this movement from within the university sector towards the recognition of the value of applied knowledge, we should not lose sight of the underlying tension that permeates the debate over the professional doctorate. The critique against the professional doctorate is predicated upon the idea that in offering a DBA, universities are moving away from two of their most cherished principles. Firstly, that the DBA is inferior to the PhD because it involves less challenge in terms of research and theory- and, in doing so, undermines the supremacy of knowledge derived from research. Secondly, that education should be primarily concerned with the development of the individual and not their professional competencies (Boyatzis, 2008: 5). For those who adhere to this liberal notion of holistic education, the movement towards competency-based frameworks of knowledge is essentially reductionist in nature. The challenge for universities is to



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3 present this movement towards professional doctorates not as a reductionist approach to  
4 knowledge that is conceived solely in terms of occupational value, but as encouraging knowledge in  
5 a broader sense. It is clear that the undergraduate curriculum has changed in recent years to  
6 accommodate the drive for employability of graduates, it remains to be seen if this movement can  
7 be replicated at doctoral level.  
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10 The findings generated from this research suggest that the DBA continues to face challenges if it is  
11 to develop further as a prestigious doctoral qualification. There appears to be a constituency of  
12 opposition, even within those departments that offer DBA supervision. In part, this body of  
13 opposition relates to the nature of examination and the amount of personal research that is  
14 undertaken. In part, this opposition is attributable to 'identity-status' divide between those who  
15 have studied the PhD and DBA. The idea that the PhD is a 'superior' qualification survives and  
16 undermines the future development of professional doctorates. One of the challenges that  
17 universities must address is how to inculcate a new culture of 'doctorateness', and moreover arrive  
18 at a consensus of doctoral identity. The findings suggest that there is a constituency of support for  
19 the DBA but that this is limited to those who have advocated the development of a professionally-  
20 orientated doctoral curriculum and those who see it as beneficial for their career. Perhaps the future  
21 of the DBA resides with those such as the Head of Department who are in a position to lead by  
22 example and promote the idea of a diversified doctoral curriculum that meets the increasingly  
23 diverse needs of those who are engaged in both business and academia. Finally, we should note the  
24 contribution made to academia by those who hold professional doctorates. The conventional PhD  
25 may serve the aspirational needs of those who wish to enter academia, but it is not the only option  
26 available as is evidenced by those DBA graduates who contribute to our business schools on a daily  
27 basis.  
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### 36 **Conclusion:**

37 This paper began with three questions which lie at the heart of the debate over doctoral education:  
38 what is the value of the DBA, who owns it and who cares about its development? This paper has  
39 described the participation of a number of stakeholders in this debate: students and their  
40 supervisors, business schools and Universities as well as employers and Government. It is clear that  
41 the development of the DBA has been linked to a wider debate on the future of the PhD; in a crude  
42 sense the debate has sometimes been reduced to a zero-sum game. This reduction in the discourse  
43 over the DBA and professional doctorates more generally is too simplistic. What is clear is that  
44 Academia has engaged in the growth of the DBA partly through 'push' factors such as Government  
45 policy or business lobbying, and partly through 'pull' factors such as the educational and pedagogic  
46 interests in developing a curriculum for the twenty-first century. In short, the development of  
47 professional doctorates is the outcome of interactions between stakeholders and public policy. The  
48 growth of professional doctorates should therefore not be seen as a response to the perceived  
49 limitations of the PhD- but as a new stage in doctoral education.  
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3 A recurrent issue that underpins the discourse on doctoral education is the idea of  
4 'doctorateness'. For Denicolo and Park (2010: 2), doctorateness refers to the characteristics of  
5 holding a doctoral degree:  
6

7 'the mix of qualities required of a person who has or is acquiring doctorateness, including  
8 such things as intellectual quality and confidence, independence of thinking, enthusiasm  
9 and commitment, and ability to adapt to changing circumstances and opportunities'.  
10

11  
12 In this sense, doctorateness could be specified and established with a set of universal criteria. Such  
13 an approach would appeal to those such as Nerad and Heggelund (2008) who anticipate the move  
14 towards a global PhD. In their discussion of the 'components of doctorateness', Trafford and  
15 Lesham (2009: 308) argue that:  
16

17 'doctorateness is a jigsaw puzzle that can only be fully appreciated when all of the  
18 components are present and fitted together. Thus the whole may be greater than the sum  
19 of its parts'.  
20

21  
22 For Wellington (2013) such an effort would be unproductive as he challenges the notion that there  
23 is some 'inner essence' that defines doctorateness, either in terms of the written thesis or a  
24 quality inherent to doctoral graduates themselves. For Wellington (2013), the proliferation of  
25 differing types of doctorate together with variations in their mode of assessment, means that the  
26 idea of doctorateness is a contestable concept. Wellington (2013) suggests that we give up in our  
27 effort to define doctorateness in favour of conceptualising a doctorate as part of a 'family' of  
28 qualifications, each with differing features but sharing some characteristics, but that makes a  
29 contribution to knowledge. How then should we develop doctoral education? Is doctorateness a  
30 characteristic discernible in individuals, their thesis or wider contribution to knowledge through  
31 their professional practice? These questions remain unresolved but can stimulate further debate  
32 within academia about what we want to derive from doctoral education and doctoral graduates.  
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37 The 'professional doctorate paradigm' proffered by Bourner et al. (2001: 79) offers one possible  
38 model to explore the idea of 'professional doctorateness'. This paradigm of doctoral study has  
39 several features that distinguish it from the traditional thesis-based PhD. Firstly, the professional  
40 doctorate separates research training from research practice and is taught as a foundational  
41 programme of coursework. Secondly, students are often clustered together according to their  
42 research interests rather than isolated as individual researchers. Thirdly, the primary interest of  
43 undertaking research is to generate knowledge that can be applied within a work context. This  
44 paradigm offers up the opportunity to broaden our conception of knowledge and its inherent value,  
45 with a move to a synthesis of mode 1 and 2 learning in favour of mode 1.5 learning in which both  
46 theoretical and practical knowledge are valued as recommended by Huff (2000). It encourages  
47 universities to think beyond their research, to its applicability in the wider world. Whether this  
48 paradigm can address concerns relating to doctorateness is debatable but at least it provides a  
49 reference point for debate. The DBA is useful in that it expands the opportunity for research-  
50 informed professional development, through a community of practice (Wenger, 2002), and  
51 ultimately more effective managers. The emergence of the New Route PhD can be interpreted as an  
52 acknowledgement of the advantages of the DBA approach and its emphasis on structured support.  
53 The discourse on doctoral study continues and attracts contributions from a variety of perspectives,  
54 not least from those who mistakenly regard the DBA as an inferior qualification to the PhD. The DBA  
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3 is an alternative to the PhD, not a substitute and has its own raison d'être as identified by Bourner et  
4 al. (2001). It is within this wider paradigm and more inclusive understanding of doctoral study that  
5 we should place the DBA and its contribution to knowledge.  
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