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PhD and professional doctorate: higher degrees of separation?

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Abstract

This thesis presents an exploration of the 'purpose and process' of doctoral education and has twin, equally valuable, purposes: to make an original theoretical contribution and to improve professional practice in this area. This work addresses the lack of pedagogical research into doctoral education at a time when changing perspectives are reshaping the doctoral education landscape.

A number of alternatives to the traditional research PhD now exist and this has generated debate as to the specific differences between the various programmes. This research explores the purpose and process of doctoral education from the perspective of the traditional PhD and the professional doctorate and uses Northumbria University as the case study institution. This research is timely since at Northumbria new doctoral programmes are being established and existing professional doctorate programmes are undergoing significant revisions to try and provide distinctive alternatives to the PhD.

The current debates regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the PhD and professional doctorates are presented and three key processes of doctoral study are critically reviewed; knowledge generation, supervision and assessment. A distinguishing feature of this research is my own position within the research setting: I am both a DBA student and a member of staff involved with the delivery of doctoral programmes. Furthermore, the product of the research itself is enmeshed with the research topic and I introduce the concept of 'compounded insiderness' to describe this situation. Methodologically, this has lead to the adoption of a constructivist ontological stance coupled with an interpretivist theoretical perspective for analysis. The subjectivity of this research and my influence on the research process has been acknowledged as a central feature, demonstrated through reflexive behaviour. The research strategy is inductive in nature with data generated through twenty-two ethically conducted interviews with purposively selected participants in the doctoral research community at Northumbria University. Software has been used to store, organise and manipulate the data that were then analysed using a combination of concept driven and data driven coding structured using Nigel King's template analysis method. Student perceptions were analysed separately within PhD and professional doctorate subgroups and then compared across the two programmes whereas the staff interview data were analysed as a whole. I argue that this research is highly transparent and has the potential to be transferable to other higher education intuitions.

This research makes an original theoretical contribution by concluding that, at a broad level of comparison, the taught stage of the professional doctorate separates the routes initially but once the research phase is underway, the PhD and professional doctorate at Northumbria University overlap considerably. Where differences exist, these are subtle and more likely to be related to the purpose of the programmes rather than any tangible differences that would be experienced by students in terms of process. Staff may see the programmes as 'notionally different', but the interpretation of the purpose of a professional doctorate is subject to debate, particularly with regard to 'making an original contribution to knowledge' and the role of theory. As a consequence, this raises serious questions regarding assessment. Professional doctorates are caught in a difficult position, since they desire to be different to a PhD and to attract different

candidates, but must maintain a level of academic parity in order to be attractive. This research aims to improve professional practice at Northumbria University by raising awareness of similarities and differences between the programmes and it has already made an impact in this respect.

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Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work.

Name: Ian Charity

Signature:

Date:

Abbreviations

AIM	Advanced Institute of Management Research
APEL	Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning
APL	Accreditation of Prior Learning
CPD	Continuous Personal Development
CAQDAS	Computer Assisted Qualitative Data AnalysiS
DAP	Doctorate in Academic Practice
DBA	Doctorate in Business Administration
DBL	Doctorate in Business Leadership
DBMS	Doctorate in Biomedical Sciences
DPA	Doctorate in Public Administration
HE	Higher Education
HEA	The Higher Education Academy
HEFCE	The Higher Education Funding Council for England
IPA	Initial Project Approval
MPP	Mid Point Progression
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PD	Professional Doctorate
QAA	The Quality Assurance Agency
RCUK	Research Councils UK
SME	Small/Medium sized Enterprise
UKCGE	The United Kingdom Council for Graduate Education
UUK	Universities UK

Schools within Northumbria University

HCES	The School of Health, Community and Education Studies
NBS	Newcastle Business School
SAS	The School of Applied Sciences
SASS	The School of Arts and Social Sciences

Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 Research purpose and theme

This professional doctorate thesis presents an exploration of doctoral education and has twin, equally valuable, purposes: to make original contributions both to knowledge and professional practice in this area. Within the research area, the theme is that of the 'purpose and process' of doctoral education.

This chapter provides the context for the research in section 1.2 and argues that this exploration is both timely and relevant in that it supplements the current debates surrounding doctoral education. Section 1.3 outlines the professional and personal motivations that led to this project and introduces my unusual position of having a duality of roles with doctoral education, followed by the impact of this in a methodological sense. The general research question and aims are presented in section 1.4. Section 1.5 outlines the key contributions that this research makes and section 1.6 describes the content of subsequent chapters.

1.2 Context and research title

There is evidence to support my claim that this research addresses current debates: *"the time is right and the sector is ready for a national debate in the UK on the nature of the doctorate, given the multiple drivers for change, multiple agendas at work, and the multiple stakeholders with an interest in both the debate and the outcome"* (Park, 2007, p.1). A recent HEA report asked *"is there even a consensus about what the purpose of a doctorate is, or purposes are?"* and states *"pedagogy of research degrees ... remains a relatively unexplored but highly important area"* (HEA, 2008, p.8). A further publication by Chris Park, Director of the Graduate School at Lancaster University and Senior Associate of the HEA, reported that *"more could be done in exploring the pedagogy of doctoral programmes, particularly for part-time students and different modes of delivery"* (Park, 2009, p.2). A 2009 report by

Universities UK also had a recommendation calling for *"further research into the motivation and experiences of doctoral researchers to improve and promote the attractiveness of the UK research degrees"* (Emery and Metcalfe, 2009). The research presented here is therefore current, relevant and supplements a perceived gap in understanding.

Within the doctoral education landscape in general, the PhD programme is well established as the most widely acknowledged doctoral qualification. In this work, the 'traditional' PhD is defined as a postgraduate programme of supervised research, typically three years full-time study, wholly assessed by submission of a thesis and an oral examination. However, in recent years there has been a re-evaluation of doctoral programme provision within some universities that has resulted in a number of alternatives to the traditional PhD being available. This proliferation of alternative routes to the doctorate has increased opportunities for those wanting to enrol on a doctoral programme but at the same time has generated uncertainty as to the differences between the various programmes. Even within the UK the routes to the doctorate are numerous: there is the traditional PhD, the PhD by publication, the new route PhD, practice based doctorates and professional doctorates. Within each type there are further differentiating features, such as the production of a thesis or a portfolio within a professional doctorate. Jolley (2007) comments on the confusion generated by the existence of a multitude of routes by referring to *"all of this muddle"* (p.223). Whilst acknowledging the potential for confusion, Edwards (2009) could be seen as adding to the 'muddle' by giving her article the title *"a professional practice-based doctorate"*, a phrase which only adds to the uncertainty, since it could be argued that this title is unclear in which specific route it is discussing.

Against the dominant position of the traditional PhD, the newer routes are still establishing themselves in the UK, and a number of publications that explore 'doctoral education' reinforce the majority view that 'doctoral education' *is* the traditional PhD by exploring only this programme and no others (examples are Lee, 2008 and Wright, Murray and Geale, 2007). Amongst the newer routes is the professional doctorate, an umbrella term for a range of differently named doctoral level qualifications, such as Doctor of Education (EdD), Doctor of Engineering (EngD) and Doctor of Business Administration (DBA). These programmes have

developed over the last two decades and are therefore relative newcomers to doctoral education provision (Park, 2005; Bourner, Bowden and Laing, 2001). The professional doctorate has developed over recent decades both in the UK and globally but *"the world of academic doctorates possesses a confused and confusing nomenclature"* (Jolley, 2007, p.227) and there is a *"lack of empirical research on professional doctorates"* (Burton, Duxbury, French, Monks and Carter, 2009, p.425). Since *"professional doctorates are complex entities; they can be difficult for the student to navigate around"* (Kirkman, Thomson, Watson and Stewart, 2007, p.63) and the work presented here sheds light on the 'muddle' of doctoral routes in general and on professional doctorates in particular. This has been achieved by exploring what differentiates a professional doctorate from a traditional PhD through conversations with those directly involved in the doctoral education process. Consequently, this work aims to inform the discussion on how professional doctorates should be understood: the title of this work being *"PhD and professional doctorate: higher degrees of separation?"*

The work forms a case study of doctoral education at Northumbria University and is the first of its type at the institution. This HE institution is the location of both my professional practice and DBA study (and is the sponsoring body). By delimiting the research to Northumbria University, the contributions to professional practice have a greater resonance than if a wider view were taken. The geographical focus of this work is therefore UK Higher Education, but a global perspective is taken initially in reviewing doctoral education debates. Across Northumbria University, the PhD is well established with significant numbers of both full and part-time students. This is not the case for professional doctorates, since provision is under development in some Schools and still evolving in others. Newcastle Business School's DBA, which was introduced in 2001, is the dominant professional doctorate at Northumbria University in terms of student numbers and other professional doctorate programmes are at the very early stages of operation making this research particularly timely. A result of the relatively recent introduction of professional doctorates at Northumbria University has been a lack of awareness of this new alternative to the PhD not only amongst potential doctoral students but amongst staff too. This has provided an opportunity to contribute to professional practice by raising awareness of the 'purpose and process' of professional doctorates at Northumbria University. An exploration of doctoral

programmes as experienced by those involved and with reference to the more widely understood PhD will benefit both academic and professional communities. Key stakeholders in the doctoral education process are students, staff and employers of doctoral students; this study considers the first two groups, primarily because I belong to both categories – as a part-time student and full-time member of staff - and I was attracted by the symmetry of this situation. This is not to say that the opinions of employers are not an important consideration, but this is beyond the scope of this research and is listed as a suggestion for further work.

Students may find this research useful for informing their choice of doctoral programme based on their backgrounds, qualifications, experience and future career paths. Academic staff, particularly those involved in doctoral research supervision, may also gain insights into how students experience the programmes and how this may vary depending on their backgrounds, circumstances and ambitions. Those staff managing and delivering doctoral programmes will benefit from discovering how both students and staff view their programmes with regard to the 'purpose and process' of doctoral education at Northumbria University, with respect to issues such as research topic, supervision and learning mechanisms.

Re-iterating the twin purposes of this work; the first is to make an original contribution to the knowledge relating to doctoral education and the second is to ensure that the case study organisation, Northumbria University, is provided with a tool capable of improving professional practice. The specific opportunities for contributions to professional practice that have emerged from this study are summarised later in this chapter. These twin purposes are ranked as equally important in my opinion, neither has priority: an approach made possible by the nature of a professional doctorate.

1.3 Research motivation and duality of roles

The impetus for this exploration came from my professional and personal experiences.

Professionally, I perceived a lack of pedagogic research into professional doctorates in general (as outlined above) and at Northumbria University in particular. Along with the PhD, these two programmes account for the vast majority of doctoral students at Northumbria University. Describing how the PhD and professional doctorates differ is *"a question that is increasingly asked and is difficult to answer"* (Bourner *et al.*, 2001, p.69) and many attempts to answer this question analyse documentary evidence such as prospectuses and programme handbooks (Bareham, Bourner and Ruggeri-Stevens, 2000). Indeed, it was the amount of research that explored the differences between the traditional PhD and professional doctorate using documents that sparked an interest in looking for these differences by questioning those actually participating in the programmes. The aim was to generate an understanding of the 'purpose and process' of these two programmes through the eyes of those involved.

On a personal level, my motivation emerged from my experiences as a lecturer involved with the delivery of a professional doctorate programme coupled with being a student on the same programme. My full-time role as a lecturer in quantitative research methods at Newcastle Business School involves delivering modules on this subject at all levels including the taught component of the DBA. I also have a strong personal connection with research programmes: I spent three years as a full-time research student over the period 1991 to 1994 and over five years as a part-time DBA student from 2004 to date. The former period resulted in the award of Master of Philosophy and this thesis is the product of the latter experience. My duality of roles (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007) as both a student and staff member of Northumbria University, coupled with personal experience of both programmes, influenced much of the methodological decision making that took place as the research strategy was being developed. Insider research *"presents unique challenges, especially in the qualitative domain where engagement in the field is a desirable, not negative, element of inquiry"* (Hewitt-Taylor, 2002, p.35) and it has been like *"wielding a double-edged sword"* (Mercer, 2006, p.1). It has brought advantages such as familiarity with the

research area and convenience of recruiting participants. However, it has also brought challenging philosophical issues to the fore, particularly relating to my influence in the exploration: concepts of duality of roles and insider research (Hewitt-Taylor, 2002) need to be acknowledged and explored. These concepts surface regularly throughout the thesis, with theoretical frameworks relating to the *"researcher-and-researched"* concept (Doloriert and Sambrook, 2009, p.36) providing guidance on ethical dilemmas in such circumstances.

This exploration has been completed under a subjective epistemological paradigm and this is consistent with my unusual circumstances as both a professional doctorate student and a member of staff delivering the same programme. This extremely close personal involvement in the area under exploration has been acknowledged and then acted upon methodologically and ethically. Doctoral study is often referred to as a personal journey (Phillips and Pugh, 2000), each student experiencing the journey in their own way and each participant recounting experiences derived from and modified through social interaction with other people. My personal experiences will have exerted a level of influence on this research at all stages, this brings the concept of reflexivity to the fore (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009). I am inextricably bound to the research area and I cannot detach myself from the topic under exploration. This issue is discussed in the research methodology chapter where clear acknowledgement is given to the *"significance of the role that the researcher plays in generating research data"* (Thomas, 2004, p.27) and how *"personal interests and values influence the process of research from initial idea to outcome"* (Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor and Tindall, 1994, p.150). This type of self-analysis is referred to as *"epistemic reflexivity"* (Johnson & Duberley, 2000, p.190) and has allowed me to become better informed as to the degree of influence that I have exerted and how this has shaped the research: *"it is necessary to address the impact of the researcher's 'self' upon the research process…an incomplete and perhaps messy process"* (Johnson and Duberley, 2000, p.191). Throughout this thesis, I have tried to show how the research philosophy, research design, analysis and interpretation have been influenced by reflexive behaviour by considering my own background, preferences and predispositions. Making such issues explicit is needed since there is a danger that *"the researcher's biases threaten validity or trustworthiness"* (Rooney, 2005, p.6) and my

acknowledgement of this has been valuable in strengthening the quality of this research.

1.4 General research question and aims

The context of the work and motivations for the exploration as described above led to the development of the general research question:

'The purpose and process of doctoral study: what are perceptions of PhD and professional doctorate participants at Northumbria University and what do these tell us about the similarities and differences between the programmes?'

Supporting the general research question are four research aims that have helped to shape the research strategy. These aims are listed below and all address the theme of exploring the 'purpose and process' of doctoral study. Following each aim is a summary of how the aim has been achieved.

Table 1.1: Aim 1

Aim 1: To explore the perceptions of PhD and professional doctorate students with regard to the programmes they are undertaking.
How this has been achieved: Eleven interviews have been conducted with students who are on the research phase of their programmes and this has allowed a picture to be built up of how the students view their doctoral programmes. An initial literature review (Chapter 2) helped to highlight current debates regarding the 'purpose and process' of doctoral education and hence to shape the semi-structured interview guide (Chapter 3). The extensive use of quotations taken directly from the interview transcripts allow individual voices to be heard (Chapter 4). The underlying methodological approach was inductive, with knowledge being generated through a subjectivist epistemology.

Table 1.2: Aim 2

Aim 2: To identify and analyse key areas of commonality and difference between the PhD and professional doctorate, as described by the students enrolled on the programmes.
How this has been achieved: This has been met by applying template analysis to the student data. The opinions of the students have been compared between programmes firstly through the development of two separate templates, which has allowed differences and similarities to emerge as the templates developed (Chapter 4). Secondly, a detailed analysis of the qualitative data using the final templates as a filter has allowed a finer level of detail in highlighting the areas of similarity and difference.

Table 1.3: Aim 3

Aim 3: To analyse the perceptions of academic staff involved in doctoral programmes to identify the key characteristics of doctoral study in general and to draw a comparison between PhD and professional doctorates in particular.
How this has been achieved: Eleven staff at Northumbria University who are involved with the provision of both programmes were interviewed using a similar approach to that used with the students. Template analysis has been used again with the final template showing the key features of doctoral study as perceived by the staff (Chapter 5)

Table 1.4: Aim 4

Aim 4: To analyse the perceptions of doctoral students and doctoral programme providers to generate a snapshot of the current mainstream doctoral education landscape at Northumbria University that could be used to inform prospective candidates, programme teams and others with an interest in doctoral education.
How this has been achieved: The findings from this research have been presented in the wider context of the current debates relevant to the 'purpose and process' of doctoral education (Chapter 6).

1.5 Summary of contributions

This research has generated a picture of doctoral study at Northumbria University through the eyes of those involved in the process and provides contributions to both theory and practice. This research is the first of its type at Northumbria University and therefore provides a valuable tool to highlight similarities and differences between the programmes at a time when the institution is looking to expand its portfolio of doctoral provision. Furthermore, my position of 'compounded insiderness' within the research itself provides a distinctive feature of this study and therefore a methodological contribution. The primary contribution to practice has been to raise awareness at Northumbria University of the similarities and differences between the 'purpose and process' of the two programmes with regard to the key areas of supervision, knowledge generation and assessment.

This research makes an original theoretical contribution by concluding that, at a broad level of comparison, the taught stage of the professional doctorate separates the routes

initially and different programme entry criteria mean that the students themselves may possess different characteristics when enrolling onto the programmes. Once the research phase is underway, the PhD and professional doctorate at Northumbria University overlap considerably with regard to the practical operation of the programmes and the specific processes of knowledge generation, supervision and assessment. Where differences exist, these are subtle and more likely to be related to the purpose of the programmes rather than any tangible differences that would be experienced by students in terms of process. It is as though staff see the programmes as 'notionally different' but the dominance of the PhD in their minds and day-to-day work means that differences between the programmes struggle to materialise. I have found that the interpretation of the purpose of a professional doctorate is subject to debate, particularly with regard to 'making an original contribution to knowledge' and the role of theory. As a consequence, this raises serious questions regarding assessment. Professional doctorates are caught in a difficult position, since they desire to be different to a PhD and to attract different candidates, but must maintain a level of academic parity in order to be attractive. This research contributes to improving professional practice at Northumbria University by raising awareness of similarities and differences between the programmes and it has already made an impact in this respect.

1.6 Thesis structure

The theme of 'purpose and process' of doctoral education is taken up in Chapter 2 through a literature review that provides an overview of global doctoral education and then presents an appraisal of the PhD and professional doctorate as doctoral routes. The purpose of this chapter is to examine current debates surrounding doctoral education provision to inform the direction of the data gathering stage and to make explicit the opportunities for adding to the theoretical base.

Research methodology and methods are described in Chapter 3, beginning with a philosophical discussion surrounding the nature of knowledge, knowledge production processes and ways of structuring an enquiry. This is intended to describe the research strategy adopted and how it provides a way of addressing the aims of this study. The reasoning behind the strategic decisions taken is made explicit and I have made clear

the importance of related studies and my own influence upon the research process. I have provided the context for the research by describing doctoral education at the case study institution, Northumbria University. My duality of roles within doctoral education at Northumbria forms a central feature of this discussion. Chapter 3 also includes a discussion of data analysis procedures, research quality and ethical considerations, all of which are provided to promote research transparency and to allow this work to guide others should they wish to embark upon similar endeavours.

Chapters 4 and 5 describe the findings of the qualitative data analysis for doctoral students and staff respectively. Within each chapter, the purpose of the analysis has been to draw together either student or staff opinions on the theme of the 'purpose and process' of doctoral education and to address the aims set out above.

Chapter 6 presents a synthesis of the debates explored in the literature review in Chapter 2 with the findings from Chapters 4 and 5. Within the discussion, I return to the twin purposes of this thesis by taking the opportunity to set out the contributions made to both the knowledge of doctoral education and to professional practice at Northumbria University.

Chapter 7 concludes by summarising the complete thesis with a focus on a review of the contributions made to theory and to practice. I have also included a personal research reflection section and suggestions for further work.

Chapter 2
Literature review

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the theme of 'purpose and process' of doctoral education through a critical evaluation of recent publications. Throughout the chapter, a particular aim is to critique literature from a 'full doctoral position', this is in contrast to other research that examines doctoral education from the perspective of the PhD only. For example, Bruce, Stoodley and Pham (2009) explore doctoral students' experiences of their research, and throughout their paper refer only to 'doctoral study' and never a named programme. Given that the students' research area is information technology, it is likely that their programme is the PhD and not a professional doctorate – although this must assumed, given no direct information. This bias within the literature towards the PhD is perhaps to be expected given the dominant position of the PhD over other doctoral routes, and the corresponding weight of numbers of students and staff involved with the PhD, but researchers should be aware that doctoral students are not exclusively PhD students, even though non-PhD doctoral students form a minority. For many topics, such as the transition from professional to student (Watts, 2009), the minority view from a professional doctorate perspective is valuable and enables a fuller exploration of the debated areas of doctoral education.

Highlighting areas of uncertainty within the research base enables justification for this exploration and this in turn establishes areas where contributions to the body of theory can be made. Following this introduction, section 2.2 reviews the perceived purpose of doctoral education and provides an international perspective by comparing and contrasting the UK PhD with PhD programmes provided in other parts of the world, such as the USA, Europe and Australasia. This initial global overview is useful to set the context of the UK situation, but subsequent discussion will focus upon literature drawn from countries whose doctoral programmes most closely resemble those in the UK. This restriction in scope is necessary given the great diversity of global doctoral programme provision and the fact that relevance to the case study organisation (a UK HE institution) must be prioritised.

Section 2.3 discusses factors that students might want to consider whilst deciding which doctorate to choose, these are motivational influences, selection of research topic, mode of study, possible career decisions and the relative status of the two programmes. These factors are included since they assist in comparing and contrasting the two programmes and are areas of current debate within the literature.

Sections 2.4, 2.5 and 2.6 consider the theoretical frameworks for three key processes within doctoral education: knowledge generation, supervision and assessment.

The summary in section 2.7 draws together the discussion of the 'purpose and process' of PhD and professional doctorate education and highlights the areas in the current debates that this study aims to supplement.

2.2 Evolving perspectives within global doctoral education

This section charts the history and development of the two doctoral programmes and begins with an outline of the history and development of the PhD and how it has come to occupy its dominant position as the most popular and widely respected doctoral qualification. The historical development of the PhD is outlined in section 2.2.1 followed by a discussion of recent developments surrounding the programme regarding the 'purpose and process' of the PhD. The specific areas that are currently being debated are *specialisation, skills training, career preparation* and *student support structures*.

The review then continues in section 2.2.2 with an exploration of the rise of the professional doctorate as an alternative doctoral route. The 'purpose and process' of these programmes are critiqued using the same specific areas as for the PhD (italicised above). The discussion is presented in this way since some of the reasons for the introduction of the professional doctorate were to address the challenges facing the PhD in these specific areas. Just as the PhD faces challenges regarding 'purpose and process', professional doctorates are not without criticism and the criticisms of these new routes are presented in section 2.2.3.

2.2.1 The PhD: historical and recent development

The section describes the historical and recent development of the PhD and begins with a global perspective. The purpose of this section is to provide background information and to demonstrate which countries are similar to the UK in terms of PhD 'purpose and process'. The focus is then narrowed to the UK situation in section 2.2.1.2 and this section concludes with a discussion of the recent challenges facing the UK PhD.

2.2.1.1 The global perspective

Doctoral degrees have existed in Europe for around eight centuries but the modern version of the traditional PhD by research, as it is known today, was developed in Germany at the beginning of the nineteenth century and then taken up enthusiastically by the USA from the 1860s. Adoption of the programme in the UK started in the 1920s when Oxford University awarded the first DPhil in science (Bourner *et al.*, 2001). Historically, the PhD was seen as a qualification to teach in a particular discipline (O'Mullane, 2004) and it came to be viewed by many to be a training course for academics and preparation for a life creating knowledge within a discipline (Perry and Cavaye, 2002; Lee, Green and Brennan, 2000). Disciplinary research was the driving force and took priority.

Today, the PhD is an extremely well established qualification within the global HE landscape: it is viewed as the 'gold standard' of university education (Jolley, 2007; Bourner and Simpson, 2005; Park, 2005) and widely accepted as the pinnacle of the higher education achievement. The degree still prioritises developing disciplinary knowledge above all else: *"a strong emphasis on preparing students for any roles they might expect to fill after completing their doctorate remains rare"* (Park, 2007, p.5). Global competition for PhD students is growing as nations try to strengthen their research capability in a competitive market: *"university research plays a key role in the development of knowledge societies"* (HEA, 2008, p.2).

The PhD itself has enormous portability through universal acceptance of its dominant position. The USA has been the traditional competition for the UK PhD but Europe and Asia are becoming increasingly involved: *"by 2010 the EU is expected to produce double the number* [of science and engineering doctorates] *that the US will"* (HEA, 2008, p.2). Many European countries offer PhD programmes in English to attract students. The rapid growth of research and development in countries such as China, India and Brazil poses a further threat to Europe and the USA (HEA, 2008).

The aim, or purpose, of a PhD candidate today is to make a significant original contribution to knowledge through research and therefore add to the common pool of knowledge (UKGCE, 2002). This criterion is central to doctoral education and it is the criterion upon which the decision to award the degree is made. The issue of knowledge generation is explored in detail in section 2.5.

Whilst there may be a shared understanding of the purpose of the PhD across providers, there are naturally many variations in the process of the PhD programme from country to country. In the USA for example, there is a *"significant taught element"* (Jolley, 2007, p.227) whereas the UK PhD may have research training but this would not be categorised as a 'taught' component of the programme. The UK model is referred to by some as the *"apprenticeship model"* (Kehm, 2005, p.15) whereby a student is supervised whilst completing independent research. Supervision is another central issue in doctoral education and is taken up in section 2.6.

There is a move in some other European countries, such as Sweden and Spain, towards to a more structured research programme involving coursework followed by production of a thesis (Kehm, 2005). Between Germany and the UK, there are significant differences in the way that a PhD is assessed: in the former country the student's principal supervisor is heavily involved with assessing the quality of the work at the final stage – indeed they are the principal examiner (Kehm, 2005) - whereas in the UK this judgement is made by independent examiners. In the Netherlands, the assessment process is similar to that of Germany: defence of the thesis is *"a public event but it only enters the public phases when the examiners are quite satisfied with the quality of the work"* (Kirkman *et al.*, 2007, p.62). This makes the defence of the thesis much less high of a high stakes event than the UK process

where the entire outcome of the can rest on a candidate's performance in the oral examination. Assessment issues are taken up in section 2.6.

In Australia, the PhD process is very similar to that in the UK in most respects, with similar timescales and supervisory arrangements (Kamler, 2008) and many Australian articles have a strong relevance to the UK debates: *"it is important to note the international standing of the* [Australian] *PhD and the strong heritage with the PhD programs developed and implemented in the UK"* (Neumann and Rodwell, 2009). One area of difference between the UK and Australia is that the oral examination present in the UK process is not always employed in Australian Universities.

2.2.1.2 The UK situation

Within the global HE landscape, the UK PhD is internationally recognised (Jolley, 2007) and widely respected: *"[the] UK PhD meets most if not all of the expectations of the Bologna Process and it is highly regarded beyond the UK"* (HEA, 2008, p.3). The PhD is the predominant doctoral programme but in recent years the programme has come under close scrutiny across the globe (Golde and Walker, 2006; Park, 2005; Kehm, 2005; Nyquist and Woodford, 2000). This has been partly due to the wider consideration of PhD provision across Europe as part of the third cycle of the Bologna process (HEA, 2008) but also due to questions from within the UK: the*"fitness for purpose of the* [traditional PhD] *doctoral qualification has been widely questioned in the UK, particularly by students and employers"* (Park, 2005, p.190). This consideration of the 'purpose and process' of the UK PhD is resulting in greater calls for its justification in the light of the diversity of candidates, their ultimate career direction and a *"changing attitude towards the award of a PhD and its value in the wider context*" (Edwards, 2009, p.1). Consequently, we are now in a period of evaluation of the doctoral education system, as the PhD is challenged on a number of fronts and this is evidenced by the recent HEA conference at the British Library titled *"2020 vision: The changing UK doctorate"* (24th November 2008). This conference enabled discussion of doctoral education around three key themes: standing, positioning and reputation of the UK doctorate, economic, social and cultural impact and the evolution of the doctorate in response to changing expectations, opportunities, challenges and reputation. This HEA conference was supported by all the major UK

HE stakeholders: HEFCE, QAA, RCUK, UKCGE, UUK and Vitae (formerly The UK Grad Programme).

Although there is much debate regarding the 'purpose and process' of the UK PhD, the continuation of the programme is not under threat (Park, 2005; Bourner *et al.*, 2001) and there is a widespread view that the UK PhD is a robust qualification (Boud and Tennant, 2006; Lee *et al.*, 2000). Park (2007) states *"there are no signs of widespread concern ... about the quality of doctoral education, either in terms of the product ... or the programmes that underpin it"* (p.6). This is further demonstrated by the programme's survival through paradigmatic methodological shifts and by proving its applicability in responding to new disciplines. The continued popularity of the PhD is helped by its flexibility: it is not a rigidly bound vehicle for doctoral study but is adaptive and responsive, and able to foster skills and attributes and generate knowledge that is relevant to the professions: *"It is possible to do an entire PhD focussed on highly esoteric subjects. However, it is equally possible to focus the PhD on aspects of* [professional practice] *that really are in need of further study and research"* (Jolley, 2007, p.229).

The flexibility of the PhD is further demonstrated through numerous variations to the traditional PhD research model that exist within the UK, examples are the PhD by publication, practice (or work-based) doctorates and the 'new route' doctorate. The vast majority of UK PhD candidates study the traditional PhD programme, with only a very small minority choosing one of these alternative PhD routes and whilst these routes are not of primary significance in this exploration, a brief explanation is provided to show how these sit within the portfolio of doctoral routes.

The PhD by publication is most often awarded to established academics who have experience of publishing research articles in peer-reviewed academic journals. The qualification is awarded for a piece of work that brings together a number of these articles. There is great variation in the requirements for the award amongst universities and this leads to concerns over status and quality assurance issues (Hoddell, Street and Wildblood, 2002). Practice (or work) based doctorates are common in creative and performing arts and can include a portfolio of evidence, such as a number of paintings, accompanied by a written component. As such, practice

based doctorates are even more highly personalised and candidate specific than other doctoral routes, particularly with regard to issues such as evaluation of learning outcomes. In nursing, such a route is *"valuable as they advocate that an original contribution to knowledge does not have to be generated through empirical research or theory"* (Edwards, 2009, p.3) but there is an associated limitation in that they *"may be judged as inferior ... as it contains more coursework and less research"* (Edwards, 2009, p2). Kirkman *et al.* (2007) confirm this view claiming *"the focus at the moment, especially in the USA, Australia and the UK, seems to be on clinical or practice doctorates ... they are seen as an easy option and symptomatic of an anti-academic culture"* (Kirkman *et al.*, 2007, p.65). The practice-based route is therefore significantly different in nature to the traditional PhD.

The 'new route' PhD is a recent response to the changing demands on the traditional PhD and is a model of PhD study that resonates with the American PhD through having a formalised taught component. The 'new route' was introduced in 2003 by a consortium of UK universities and the design is intended to counter some of the criticisms of the traditional PhD whilst still attracting candidates who see the label of 'PhD' as the pinnacle of academic achievement. Eighteen universities were offering the programme across a range of disciplines in July 2009. The 'new route' PhD is *"a national initiative to provide PhD students with the highest quality of taught materials and practical experience alongside advanced research"* (http://www.newroutephd.ac.uk, 2008). Students following the 'new route' PhD select courses from a suite of taught modules to make up their initial 'taught block'. Another area of commonality with professional doctorates is the desire to give students *"the opportunity to develop the personal qualities and advanced skills which are necessary to attract prospective employers"* as Education and Employment Minister Tessa Blackstone commented in her endorsement of the programme in March 2001. The weight given to employability in the new route (Boud and Tennant, 2006) might suggest that in the UK employability is now a concern for the traditional PhD. The documentation obtained from the website for the 'new route' PhD (http://www.newroutephd.ac.uk, 2008) makes clear that this programme is not intended to replace the traditional PhD but to supplement provision and to provide an alternative that some students may find more attractive. The programme has an added advantage for those wishing to pursue a lecturing career since qualification for the

Certificate of Learning and Teaching forms an optional part of the programme. The documentation for the 'new route' emphasises the point that the standing of the new route is identical to the traditional UK PhD.

2.2.1.3 Challenges facing the UK PhD

Variants of the traditional UK PhD, such as the 'new route' PhD, show its strength in adapting and evolving to meet the changing demands of students and other stakeholders. Even so, there still remain challenges facing the UK PhD programme which will now be considered in more detail. The following discussion explores prioritising the concept of specialisation and its impact upon employability of graduates and the provision of skills training. PhD supervision is another area of debate that is considered in detail in section 2.6.

The central aim of the PhD programme is specialisation through the production of leading edge knowledge which makes an original contribution to knowledge: this is specialisation along a narrow front (Bourner and Simpson, 2005). This necessitates effort targeted at a perceived gap in disciplinary knowledge and by definition the 'gap' is not large, so the work is concentrated on a tightly focussed area. Consequently, this specialisation exposes the PhD to its greatest criticism: the knowledge generated is specialised to the point where only a select group of disciplinary experts can benefit from the knowledge generated (Park, 2007). This has led to a view that the traditional UK PhD programme is now too far removed from everyday life, and therefore of limited usefulness, for all except those aiming for a career in academia (Park, 2005). Edwards (2009) claims *"there appears to be a mismatch between what universities are producing and what employers are looking for in terms of doctoral graduates"* (p.1) raising the importance of acknowledging the needs of employers outside academia. Employability of doctoral graduates, once seen as a non-issue (Bourner and Simpson, 2005), is now increasingly important due to evolving employment markets (Leonard, 2001). A key challenge facing doctoral education in the UK is *"need to attract high quality individuals to engage in doctoral research, and to ensure that a doctorate is seen as a viable career option"* (HEA, 2008, p.7) and the options for those studying a PhD need to extend beyond academia, especially since the proportion of PhD graduates who will progress to post-doctoral

research fellowships or lecturing positions is relatively small: Swain (2007) cites a figure of one in three pursuing such a career. There is much debate around whether the PhD experience is an appropriate preparation for a career outside academia (Fell and Haines, 2006). Questions such as *"Is the PhD too academic for the real world?"* (Swain, 2006) are not uncommon whilst other sources have reported the *"'official' expression of concern about the narrowness of the career focus of the PhD"*, as voiced by the UK Office of Science and Technology (Bourner, Ruggeri-Stevens and Bareham, 2000, p.494). There is agreement from Leonard (2001) who states that employers have tended to view the PhD as producing *"specialists in very narrow fields who were not wanted by employers because they were 'too qualified'"* (Leonard, 2001, p.57). This over-qualification stems from the specialised nature of the PhD, whether there is an associated under-qualification in transferable skills is unclear.

The strong focus that PhD research can have on the disciplinary context acts against interdisciplinary research, Parry, Atkinson and Delamont (1997) found evidence for tight disciplinary boundaries with PhD research and they report difficulties for interdisciplinary PhD students since they cannot relate to any particular body of knowledge and can therefore feel isolated from disciplinary research groups. Furthermore, reference is made to PhD supervisor comments that there are very few interdisciplinary PhDs and that the PhD is unsuited to interdisciplinary studies because students are working *"too far from the frontier…to make any serious contribution"* (Parry, Atkinson and Delamont, 1997, p.124). In a study exploring the location of knowledge generation for PhD students in Australia, Adkins (2009) proposes that *"universities and scholarly journals are still strongly imbued with the cultures of singular disciplines"* (p.175) and that interdisciplinary work puts additional demands on students and supervisors that may compromise the timely completion of PhDs. This is unfortunate, since she is of the opinion that *"the student embarking on new work across disciplines is the one who is most likely to produce work that has 'impact': that has the potential to be translated into uses in fields outside academic life"* (Adkins, 2009, p.175). These views are echoed from a UK perspective: *"the social, academic and cultural isolation traditionally associated with the British PhD is … at odds with the prevailing practice model of nursing which is multi-disciplinary"* (Burton *et al.*, 2009, p.425). A senior research manager at Nokia

Corporation in Denmark suggested that doctoral candidates who wished to work in consumer product led industries needed to develop transdisciplinary understanding (Fell and Haines, 2006). The privileging of disciplinary knowledge and the overriding quest for leading-edge disciplinary expertise may have sidelined issues of process, learning and transferability of skills. This may have had the effect of limiting the development of workplace skills and therefore opportunities for employment. This is demonstrated by the development of the 'new route' PhD, one key aim of which is to enhance the employability of candidates and much emphasis is placed on this in the 'new route' documentation (http://www.newroutephd.ac.uk, 2008).

Skills training within the PhD programme is an aspect of debate centred on whether the training provided should be specifically targeted at pure research training or whether a wider range of transferable skills should be included too (Harman, 2002). The wider applicability of traditional PhD research training is being questioned and they are *"concerns about the wider social and economic utility of traditional research training programmes"* (Burton *et al.*, 2009, p.424). The 'new route' favours a shift towards the latter, mirroring the recent QAA framework for higher education qualifications that provides an outline of the wider abilities that the typical doctoral student could be expected to have developed. These include qualities and transferable skills deemed necessary for employment both within and outside academia, such as the exercising of personal responsibility and showing autonomous initiative in complex and unpredictable situations (QAA, 2007). There is a move towards a PhD being more than producing a thesis: *"the product that the PhD researcher creates is not the thesis ... is the development of themselves"* (HEA, 2008, p3) which is leading to a change in perception of the purpose of the PhD. Reflexivity is one skill that is becoming widely regarded as a necessity and is referenced frequently in doctoral study literature both in the UK (Sambrook and Stewart, 2008; Park, 2005; Bareham *et al.*, 2000; Bourner *et al.,* 2000) and in Australia (Boud and Tennant, 2006; Stephenson, Malloch and Cairns, 2006). This concept, which can be thought of as the conscious exploration of the effects of a researcher's actions in their research environment (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009; Flick, 2009) is not explicitly addressed in the UK PhD QAA qualification descriptors and may have been an area of weakness of the traditional PhD.

This section has summarised the historical development of the traditional PhD and has outlined the recent scrutiny of the programme, with regard to its perceived weaknesses in the areas of employability of graduates, skills training and student support: these are giving *"cause for concern"* (Johnston and Murray, 2004, p.31). These concerns have contributed to the motivation for the development of variations of the PhD such as the 'new route' PhD which has been discussed and the professional doctorate, which will now be introduced.

2.2.2 Professional doctorates

The section describes the development of the professional doctorate as an alternative to the traditional PhD and is structured in a similar way to the section dealing with the PhD above. The section begins with a global perspective, followed by a discussion of the UK situation. This section concludes with a discussion of the challenges facing professional doctorates in the UK.

2.2.2.1 The global perspective

Professional doctorates were first awarded by Harvard University in 1921 and today there exist programmes with the title 'professional doctorate' in a number of countries. Professional doctorates maintain a strong presence in the USA whilst the UK, Austria and Australia have been the most enthusiastic adopters of these alternative doctoral routes. Professional doctorates have become a feature of some European and Australasian universities since the 1990s (Rolfe and Davies, 2009) with the first UK professional doctorate being awarded in 1992 at the University of Bristol (Jolley, 2007). Professional doctorates are therefore newcomers to doctoral education and lag far behind the PhD in terms of student numbers and completions. In the 2009 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey only 3.6% of respondents were enrolled on a professional doctorate against 88.2% registered for PhD or MPhil/PhD, with 0.5% enrolled on the 'new route' PhD and 0.2% following the PhD by publication (Kulej and Wells, 2009). The remaining respondents were classified as either 'Master in research', 'MPhil' or 'Other'.

There is much discussion surrounding 'purpose and process' of professional doctorates with respect to their relationship to the 'gold standard' PhD and also the recent close scrutiny of the traditional route as explained above. It would be misleading to say that a universally agreed understanding of a professional doctorate exists and the possibility of confusion arises due to the variability and diversity of provision with regard to 'purpose and process' that exists within programmes falling under the banner of 'professional doctorates'. Emery and Metcalfe (2009) confirm that *"it is difficult to provide a clear definition of a professional doctorate that applies across the range of provision and distinguishes it clearly from a traditional research degree"* (p.8). The variability between programmes is increased further as a global view is taken.

In the USA, professional doctorates are envisaged as *"a pre-service award"* (Bourner *et al.*, 2001, p.66) meaning that they are seen as training for entry into a profession, with an emphasis on taught components and correspondingly less importance placed on independent research. Indeed, in the USA, a professional doctorate *"can be a taught doctorate with little or no research content"* (Park, 2009, p.1) and *"professional doctorates exist in the US that have no defined research element"* (UKGCE, 2009). This moves the programme away from the UK PhD both in terms of 'purpose and process': it is not equivalent to the UK PhD in *"either design or level"* (Jolley, 2007, p.227). Adding to the confusion of doctoral provision are programmes referred to as 'taught doctorates' and these are *"most commonly found in the USA"* (Kirkman *et al.*, 2007, p.63). They consist of a taught phase of research training that lasts between one and three years and Jolley (2007) claims the difference between this and a professional doctorate is that the research for the latter is embedded within a practice discipline. Taught doctorates differ from the traditional UK PhD but are similar to UK professional doctorates in that cohorts of students are enrolled. However, the use of cohorts in the USA is to achieve *"economies of scale"* (Kirkman *et al.*, 2007, p.63) rather than for peer support purposes. A taught doctorate includes a *"small scale project which may or may not include data collection"* (Kirkman *et al.*, 2007, p.63) and is therefore distinct from a UK professional doctorate which has a larger independent research component that most likely includes data collection. Consequently, for taught doctorates *"there is some concern that* [it] *may exist at a lower academic level than the research-based PhD"* (Jolley, 2007, p.228).

Professional doctorates have made limited inroads into European doctoral provision, with only the UK and Austria making any significant developments in this area. The lack of interest across Europe is demonstrated by a question raised at the 2008 HEA conference: *"how does mainland Europe view professional doctorates, which are relatively unique to the UK and are seen as a step away from the traditional apprenticeship model?"* (HEA, 2008, p.3). Some evidence of the novelty of these doctorates is provided by the fact that the 1st International Conference on Professional Doctorates was held as recently as November 2009 in London. Delegates were drawn predominantly from the UK with some representation from the USA, Sweden and Australia.

2.2.2.2 Professional doctorates in the UK

In contrast to the American model, which is seen as a 'pre-service' award, the UK model of a professional doctorate is envisaged as an *"in-service award for advanced professional development"* (Bourner *et al.*, 2001, p.66). The UK model consists of some taught material, often in the form of block teaching, but still with an emphasis on independent research culminating in the production of a thesis. The UKGCE suggest a broad definition is *"an award at a doctoral level where the field of study is a professional discipline"* (Powell and Long, 2005, p.8) and the differentiation with a PhD is demonstrated through *"a title that refers to that profession"* (Powell and Long, 2005, p.8). This 'professionalisation' of the PhD hinged on the notion of integrating academic and professional practice with the result that candidates would apply academic theory and research methodology and methods to a real live professional problem (Ellis, 2005). Kehm (2005) refers to an *"emerging distinction between research degrees and professional doctorates"* (p.16) in the UK but does not elaborate on the nature of the distinction. The UKCGE report *"Professional Doctorate Awards in the UK"* (Powell and Long, 2005) outlines the background to professional doctorates and describes a survey of all their institutional members that was intended to clarify the range of nomenclature in use and to create a register of professional doctorates. Professional doctorates are well established in both pre-1992 and post-1992 HE institutions in the UK with around 200 programmes offered distributed amongst 11 subject areas (Powell and Long, 2005). Professional doctorates

can be classified as either generic or named (Boud and Tennant, 2006) depending on whether they are affiliated with any specific profession. Examples of named professional doctorates in the UK are the Doctor of Education (EdD), Doctor of Engineering (EngD), Doctor of Business Administration (DBA), Doctor of Psychology (DPsych) and Doctor of Nursing Science (DNSc). Taking the DBA as an example, the Association of Business Schools suggested that *"the dominant theme of the DBA is the development of professional practice and professional practitioners through research"* (Bourner *et al.*, 2000). In general, professional doctorates should help to cater for professionals who wish to achieve higher academic qualifications through developing their transferable skills and their ability to critically reflect on their own professional competencies (Sarros, Willis and Palmer, 2005; Scott, Brown, Lunt and Thorne, 2004). There are strong commonalities in 'purpose and process' with the situation regarding professional doctorates in Australian HE, where professional doctorates are intended for a population of qualified professionals (Taylor and Maxwell, 2004; Bourner *et al.,* 2001; Leonard, 2001) and consequently much Australian research features in this research.

Recent decades have seen the rise of the professional doctorate in the UK due to the desire to broaden the provision and therefore widen participation in doctoral education whilst simultaneously trying to address some of the alleged shortcomings of traditional PhD. In their paper supporting the PhD as the gold standard of higher research degree, Kirkman *et al.* (2007) discuss the advantages and disadvantages of various doctoral routes, but it is of note that very few advantages are listed for the PhD. Conversely, many of the drawbacks discussed above are mentioned as disadvantages of the PhD, such as student loneliness, personal cost and deficiencies in research method knowledge: *"the student becomes familiar with the research paradigm that they have used but is often completely ignorant of any other, particularly extreme opposites"* (Kirkman *et al.*, 2007, p.65). Their extremely strong endorsement of the traditional PhD should be tempered by their concluding statement: *"there is an urgent need to address the common problems associated with traditional doctorates ... [such as] ... more rigorous standards for supervision and student support"* (Kirkman *et al.*, 2007, p.66). There are strong similarities between the 'new route' PhD (as introduced earlier) and professional doctorates with both routes integrating taught modules and independent research and the similarities continue

with regard to an emphasis on transferable skills, personal reflection and employability.

A view developed that HE needed to *"responsive to needs beyond the academy (e.g. through the development of Professional Doctorates)"* (HEA, 2008, p.7) and a recent UKGCE report concluded *inter alia* that doctoral programmes should not take a 'one size fits all' approach (Fell and Haines, 2006). There was perceived to be a demand for more professionally orientated doctoral level training since *"professionals are expected to undertake ongoing education"* (Watts, 2009, p.687) and *"not everyone ... wants to do a PhD"* (Jolley, 2007, p.233). This is the gap that professional doctorates tried to address: *"professional doctorates are increasingly viewed as contributing to the lifelong learning agenda, and their development is being encouraged by the professional bodies"* (Park, 2009, p.1). This demand was thought to exist across many professional fields (Ellis, 2005) with some examples being nursing, social care, business and public administration: *"the complexity of a number of roles outside academe has grown to the point that these demand levels of formal education comparable to that achieved in doctoral study"* (UKCGE, 2002, p.11). Both in the UK and Australia, there was a question whether research capacity was being developed (but not necessarily acknowledged by academics) in locations outside the university, such as industrial settings (Evans, 2002; Lee *et al.*, 2000). Therefore, the philosophy behind the development of the professional doctorate was the creation of programmes of study that subjected students to the same rigorous academic demands of the PhD: independent critical judgement and contribution to knowledge (Ellis, 2005), but supplemented this with a requirement to demonstrate a professional impact. The aim of a professional doctorate is to facilitate the production of new forms of knowledge, with candidates based in the professions and grounding research in the workplace (Lee *et al.*, 2000). Professional doctorates can be seen as an attempt by universities to offer routes that will engage students from a wider range of backgrounds than those attracted to the traditional PhD (Johnston and Murray, 2004; Scott *et al.*, 2004; Lockhart and Stablein, 2002) and would perhaps be acceptable to those disillusioned with the traditional PhD (Park, 2005). Within the educational marketplace, institutions were realising that more diverse provision can help to attract students who form part of the *"new populations* [who] *are seeing doctoral study as offering something for them"* (Boud and Tennant, 2006, p.293).

The provision of skills training is claimed to be a strength of professional doctorates (Park, 2007) and increasing the abilities of students beyond disciplinary skills is a key aim of professional doctorate programmes. Much has been made of perceived PhD shortcomings in this area as a justification for a parallel doctoral route with emphasis on personal development (Neumann, 2005). A professional doctorate typically begins with a diet of taught components on subjects such as research methodology and methods tailored to the cohort, unlike the PhD where it *"can sometimes seem ad hoc and unrelated both to the student's own research topic and the professional discipline within which study is taking place"* (Jolley, 2007, p.230). Bareham *et al.* (2000) point out that whilst professional doctorate documentation refers to personal development as an aim, there is a *"lack of specificity"* (p.340) as to the exact mechanisms underlying this due to varying definitions of what constitutes personal development, and they give their opinion as to possible components. These include transferable skills, study skills, learning how to learn, gaining self-knowledge, reflective practice, the ability to be self-critical and developing the capacity for critical reflection (Bareham *et al.*, 2000). However, given that those enrolling on a professional doctorate may well be mature, part-time professionals they may already have some of these skills: *"doctoral students with professional qualifications are likely to bring a number of transferable skills to their study"* (Watts, 2009, p.688).

The inclusion of taught components within professional doctorate programmes leads to another area of strength over the traditional PhD and that is the *"cohort effect"* (Wellington, Bathmaker, Hunt, McCulloch and Sikes, 2005, p.10) which is claimed to bring benefits in student support, primarily by addressing the isolating effect of the PhD apprenticeship model. Having a cohort of fellow students *"must be better than the traditional PhD because it could be no worse"* (Jolley, 2007, p.229) which suggests that the PhD situation can be far from ideal. Professional doctorate students have a 'ready-made' peer group that can be called upon to provide support (Bourner *et al.*, 2000). Coming together as a cohort provides immediate opportunities for networking and other social interaction activities that can play an important role in supporting research. The 'new route' PhD employs similar techniques for improving student support. The use of cohorts is claimed to be an important pedagogic feature of professional doctorate programmes (Burton *et al.*, 2009), since students benefit

through *"learning from cycles of action and reflection involving dialogue with other managers also engaged in cycles of action and reflection"* (Bourner *et al.*, 2000, p.491) with the aim of developing reflective practitioners. When examining professional doctorate programme documentation, Bourner *et al.* (2000) found that when not explicitly referenced, reflexivity was often *"referred to indirectly through the language of "sets""* (p.485) and there is an implication that the existence of the cohort facilitates the reflective process.

This section has outlined the reasons for the introduction of the professional doctorate and how they have been interpreted in various countries in response to the changing demands being made of doctoral education. It has been demonstrated how the American interpretation of a professional doctorate presents quite a different proposition to UK professional doctorates and also how the UK model is similar in 'purpose and process' to their Australian counterparts. The key processes of UK professional doctorates have been outlined and it has been demonstrated how they attempt to address some of concerns of the PhD, such as employability, skills development and student support. However, professional doctorates themselves are not immune from criticism and the main objections to professional doctorates are discussed in the next section.

2.2.2.3 Challenges for UK professional doctorates

The notion of the professional doctorate *"remains an essentially contested concept"* (Wellington *et al.*, 2005, p.9) and as professional doctorates attempt to position themselves alongside more well established doctoral programmes, there have been a number of concerns raised by members of the academic community. This section explores the main criticisms levelled at professional doctorates, beginning with the argument that professional doctorate programmes are promoted by Universities since they represent a valuable income generation stream for the institution. Questions regarding the quality, differentiability and sustainability of professional doctorates are also discussed.

There is a view that professional doctorates have been developed and promoted by HE institutions for financial reasons, with such programmes *"merely serving as an*

opportunity for some institutions to make a 'fast buck' and process large numbers of [students]*"* (Kirkman *et al.*, 2007, p.65). This impression may have arisen due to professional doctorate programme fees being higher than those for traditional PhD programmes in many Universities (Rolfe and Davies, 2009) coupled with the use of cohorts for professional doctorates leading to the perception of greater numbers of professional doctorate students: This has led *"to some* [professional doctorate programmes] *being seen a cash cow for institutions"* (UKGCE, 2009, p.2). The enrolment of a cohort of students may give the impression of large scale recruitment and associated revenue for Universities, but finding sufficient numbers of suitably qualified supervisors for the research phase of the professional doctorate is still a limiting factor (UKGCE, 2009) and will tend to limit the size of the cohort to around 10 for many institutions (Bourner *et al.*, 2000). In a report produced by the HEA (2008) discussing the costs and benefits of doctoral programmes, reference was made to the costs associated with supporting students (through supervision) and providing formal training programmes (through Graduate Schools). Both professional doctorate and PhD programmes absorb significant staff time through supervision, but professional doctorates also consume staff time through the preparation, delivery and assessment of the taught component. Additionally, professional doctorate students are more likely to be part-time students and therefore will not contribute to teaching as many PhD students do (HEA, 2008). Furthermore, professional doctorates could be viewed as programmes that enable students to justify sponsorship by their employer on the grounds that the outcome of the research will have direct relevance to their professional duties. Consequently, professional doctorate programmes may provide valuable funds for the University since the *"income HEIs receive for* [research degree programmes] *does not cover full costs, so cross-subsidisation is necessary"* (HEA, 2008, p.8). Detailed, current data on the comparative profitability of PhD and professional doctorate programmes is scant and it is likely there are wider issues involved, as Edwards (2009) suggests when discussing doctoral level nurse education: *"health services simply cannot afford to commission the higher education sector to provide continuing professional development at this level, nor can potential students afford to foot the bill"* (p.3).

The quality of doctoral programmes will vary from institution to institution but the UK is fortunate in that *"quality assurance mechanisms for doctoral studies seem to be*

most pronounced and highly regulated in the United Kingdom" (Kehm, 2005, p.22). Ellis (2005) reports that the piecemeal development of alternative doctoral programmes has led to a lack of consensus and consequently a need to justify the value and role of professional doctorates. Farrow (2006) asks *"Is there a risk to going vocational?"* referring to *"deep concern at the tendency in some institutions to regard the research component of the doctoral programme as a patchwork of smaller projects without a common thread"* (Farrow, 2006, p.ii). It is not clear, however, whether this criticism is directed at all professional doctorates, or those employing a particular form of research output such a portfolio. This concern is not dissimilar to that raised for the PhD by publication in section 2.2.1. Some of the concerns over quality can be attributed to the phrase 'taught doctorate' (Ellis, 2005) both in the sense of confusion with the taught doctorate that exists in the USA and dissatisfaction with the connotations attached to the phrase, springing from the juxtaposition with an activity that has no place in a traditional doctorate.

There have been questions raised over whether professional doctorates have been successful at creating a route to the doctorate that is differentiable from the traditional PhD. Evans, Macauley, Pearson and Tregenza (2004) claim that the benefit of application to professional practice can be obtained through the PhD programme, so why would candidates want to choose any other programme? Part of the difficulty for any variant of the traditional PhD is to create a distinctive programme whilst maintaining much of the 'purpose and process' of the parent programme. Bourner *et al.* (2000) question whether professional doctorates can have different learning outcomes given that they are inextricably bound to the PhD and they ask to what extent a professional doctorate is designed explicitly to meet these different learning outcomes. Even when a distinction is suggested, it is unclear whether this holds in practice: *"the distinction ... [should be] ... that one route aims to produce professionals who can reflect upon and research their own practice, while the goal of the other is often to develop professional researchers – but even this does not always apply in practice"* (Wellington *et al.*, 2005, p.15). Maxwell and Shanahan (1997) identify a *"culture of theory"* (p.148) that is limiting the distinctiveness of the professional doctorate, stemming from the academic orientation of the professional doctorate rather than one grounded in the professions. They urge closer links with industry to forge professional doctorates into something more radical and further

divorced from the PhD template. They point to a lack of explicit discussion of the industry links in professional doctorate literature and the structure of coursework plus thesis appearing very 'academic' in nature, with limited acknowledgement of the 'profession' within 'professional doctorate'. Increasing the influence of professionals and industrialists in supervision and including them in assessment procedures may be examples of the radical changes needed to boost the credibility of the professional doctorate as a distinctive doctoral programme (Maxwell and Shanahan, 1997). Edwards (2009) puts forward the view that there is a *"lack of evidence of the benefits of professional doctorate education"* (p.3) and therefore implies that professional doctorates have not created a worthwhile, distinctive route to the doctorate.

Boud and Tennant (2006) suggest that the current proliferation of named professional doctorates in the UK and Australia means that further additions are unlikely due to doubts over sustainability in terms of applicant numbers. Others point to declining numbers of professional doctorate students and the impact on enrolments of the high cost of professional doctorates (Stephenson, Malloch and Cairns, 2006). Evans *et al.* (2004) and Ellis (2005) both provide evidence of this, the latter from a nursing perspective, by describing an increase in provision of the generic professional doctorate 'Doctor of Health Services' whilst the popularity of single profession doctorates such as the Doctorate in Nursing is declining. Also from the health discipline, Kirkman *et al.* (2007) recommend *"the re-introduction of the traditional PhD as the gold standard for higher degree research training"* (p.66). Their views on the professional doctorate for nurse education are forcefully put: *"we recommend the abolition of the professional doctorate in preference for a Masters level degree or making the professional doctorate meaningful in terms of level of practice"* (Kirkman *et al.*, 2007, p.66). Whether their view would extend beyond the health discipline is unknown. The extent to which the professional doctorate can penetrate the professions (and gain acceptance) is a fundamental issue: despite criticisms of the PhD on this point, Evans *et al.* (2004) claim the PhD is widespread in professional fields of study, and that professional doctorates have not had the impact that was expected of them, concluding that the professional doctorate should be removed. Achieving a balance of academic quality and relevance between the university and the profession is a challenge for professional doctorate programmes as is managing

tension between the demands of professions and the purity of intellectual advancement (Stephenson, Malloch and Cairns, 2006).

This section has attempted to present the main challenges facing UK professional doctorates as they seek to establish themselves alongside the 'gold standard' PhD. The main objections focus on uncertainties regarding the quality, differentiability and sustainability of professional doctorate provision in addition to the perception that a key motivating factor for the introduction of professional doctorate programmes is to establish a highly profitable income generation mechanism for Universities.

Section 2.2 has reviewed the development of both the traditional PhD and professional doctorates and has discussed how the latter is emerging as a response to recent criticisms levelled at the PhD. Whilst there is a consensus that doctoral education is evolving but there is little agreement on how UK provision should change, with new variants of the PhD being suggested by some and criticised by others. There is much debate around the purpose of the doctorate, as demonstrated by the introduction of the 'new route' PhD and the professional doctorate, and uncertainty of exactly how the processes of doctoral education should operate. Now that the PhD and the professional doctorate have been outlined, it is possible to consider similarities and differences between the programmes.

2.3 Making a choice: PhD or professional doctorate?

Given that overlap and commonality will occur when there are multiple routes to the doctorate (Boud and Tennant, 2006), this section focuses the discussion on factors that might differentiate the PhD and professional doctorate through considering what students might want to consider when choosing a doctorate. This is important if the professional doctorate is to be seen as a programme that is distinctive to the PhD. The areas discussed in detail are the choice of research topic and starting point, implication for career development and programme status. The aim is to explore further the 'purpose and process' of doctoral education through factors that a student might consider when enrolling on a programme. This section will also appraise previous studies that have sought to compare the PhD and professional doctorate to give further insights into where this research can make a contribution. The appraisal

of these studies extends to their research methods and methodologies in order to inform the methodological decisions made in this research.

With the rapid increase in the number of different doctoral programmes available in UK HE institutions, selecting a programme becomes more difficult and Jolley (2007) encourages students to *"shop around"* (p.233). Although there are previous studies exploring the reasons for enrolling on a PhD or professional doctorate (see Philips and Pugh, 2000 and Wellington and Sikes, 2006 respectively) there are fewer sources that consider why students select one route over another. In nursing, between the routes on offer there are *"apparent similarities and a tendency for nurses naively to regard all doctorates as equal"* (Kirkman *et al.*, 2007, p.62). There are an increasing number of books that attempt to set out the choices facing a potential doctoral student (Lee, 2009b; Wisker, 2008; Burgess, Sieminski and Arthur, 2006; Wellington *et al.*, 2005) with some being better than others at drawing out the process and purpose of the various doctoral programmes. For example, Wisker (2008) includes only a brief section headed *"Practice-based PhDs, the professional doctorate, the DBA and the EdD"* (p.26) which seems to refer to *"professional practice-oriented doctorate"* (p.26) as one category of programme when a practice-based doctorate and a professional doctorate are quite different in 'purpose and process', as discussed earlier. Lee (2009b) provides a clearer account of the processes of a professional doctorate in her text *"Achieving your Professional Doctorate"*. Even those texts that more effectively draw out the differences in the programmes admit that *"the distinction between a professional doctorate and a PhD is still a matter for debate"* (Wellington *et al.*, 2005, p.14) and are therefore still of limited use to those making the choice.

Previous studies that have attempted to compare the two routes typically consist of an investigation of programme specifications and documentation (Jolley, 2007; Park, 2005; Sarros, Willis and Fisher 2005; Sarros, Willis and Palmer, 2005: Bareham *et al.*, 2000; Bourner *et al.*, 2000; Maxwell & Shanahan, 1997). Jolley (2007) for example, used an *"informal review of universities' advertising material"* (p.225) when comparing different forms of doctorate. Whilst this type of study is useful to outline the structure of professional doctorates and to provide views on some of the theoretical, or notional, differences between the programmes, they do not address the

issue of how students and programme providers actually experience them, which may or may not be reflected in the documentary evidence. The UKCGE report 'Professional Doctorates' (2002) includes a very brief comparison of professional doctorate programmes with the PhD but only questions academics and employers of postdoctoral students, not doctoral students themselves as so is of limited use in constructing a picture of how the programmes are experienced. Neumann (2005) investigated Australian doctorates in an article titled *"Doctoral Differences: Professional doctorates and PhDs compared"* where she describes carrying out interviews with students, supervisors, heads of departments, deans, programme directors, postgraduate administrators and deputy vice-chancellors. Neumann (2005) argues that a lack of self-confidence may lead to a student selecting a professional doctorate over a PhD since there is a greater degree of structure to help in the research process, but the study concluded that there was a high degree of similarity between the 'purpose and process' of the two programmes, they were in essence interchangeable (Neumann, 2005).

The aims of the work by Wellington and Sykes (2006) overlap with those of this research and so a consideration of their methodological choices is valuable. UK professional doctorate students were asked about their motivations for pursuing the EdD and the impact on their personal and professional lives, with questions being administered via email rather than face to face interviews. Wellington and Sikes (2006) interviewed professional doctorate students and claim that their data reveals life history is very important with critical incidents, such as *"failing the 11 plus examination"* (Wellington and Sikes, 2006, p.724), playing a role in their motivations for doctoral research. They also cite the degree of structure as an appealing feature, along with clear scheduling, agreed milestones, assessment by assignments and the support of tutors and a cohort group. Being able to know when you have finished - the *"tight compartment"* (Wellington and Sykes, 2006, p.723) and orienting the work towards a professional life are key factors (Wellington and Sykes, 2006).

Ellis (2005) looked at the programme provider aspect for a range of nursing professional doctorates. She carried out a documentary analysis using all available programme documentation as supporting evidence in her study, which then went on to gather the views of key stakeholders on the role and value of the professional

doctorate with reference to the PhD. The investigation was multi-method and multi-phase, data collection was by semi-structured telephone interviews with programme leaders and postgraduate tutors for nursing doctoral programmes across forty one higher education institutions. Questions focussed on the structure and characteristics of PhD and professional doctorate programmes.

2.3.1 Research topic and impetus for the research

It might be expected that the choice of research topic might discriminate between the two programmes particularly if the predominant difference between the PhD and professional doctorate is the requirement of a professional doctorate student to *"undertake research aimed at making a contribution to the knowledge of professional practice"* (Bourner *et al.*, 2001, p.71) in contrast to making a contribution to theoretical disciplinary knowledge. Taking the DBA, the starting point should be *"a live business or managerial problem that is being experienced by an organisation or organisations"* (Bourner *et al.*, 2000, p.483). This is in contrast to the trigger for a PhD which is generally a 'knowledge gap' in the literature and the task of the student is to address this gap through making *"a significant original contribution to knowledge by focusing their efforts* [on this gap]*"* (Bourner *et al.*, 2001, p.71). These authors phrase this as a *"PhD candidate starts from what is known ... professional doctorate candidates start from what is not known"* (Bourner *et al.*, p.72) but maintain that, for the DBA, a grounding in the relevant literature is crucial to allow appropriate and justifiable theoretical frameworks to be constructed around which the research can be designed. Lockhart and Stablein (2002) agree that a DBA researchable topic should be of mutual benefit to both academics and practitioners. For a PhD, the research may be thought of *"as an end in itself"* (Bourner *et al.*, 2001, p.71) whilst a professional doctorate programme intends to place *"research at the service of the development of professional practice and professional practitioners"* (Bourner *et al.*, 2001, p.71). It is acknowledged that whilst the research area is unlikely to alter substantively once the research is underway, the research question may evolve through inductive refinement (Neumann, 2007) but there is little detail on what influences this process and this is therefore an opportunity for this research to make a contribution.

The professional doctorate student is envisaged to have industrial or professional links and (Harman, 2002) found that for Australian students this could bring the advantage of greater satisfaction with their research. However, tensions can be generated between academic and professional partners when procedures and expectations are different, such as different timescales and deadlines (Fell and Haines, 2006) and Harman (2002, p.187) found that nearly 40% of a sample of 1033 full-time Australian PhD students agreed that industry research funding could delay the dissemination of research findings. Lockhart and Stablein (2002) advise that tensions between the academic justification for the research design and the desired practitioner outcomes may have to be managed carefully – for example generalisability may be an aim of the practitioner but constraints of resources and suitable research methods may mean that this is not achievable.

2.3.2 Career development

There is a degree of uncertainty over whether possession of either a PhD or a professional doctorate brings benefits in terms of career advancement. Leonard (2001) acknowledges that data linking doctoral qualification to career development are scant and also that clear opinions are not yet formed regarding how professional doctorates are valued by employers. In a comparison between the two routes, Jolley (2007) reports that *"significantly more of the PhD group thought that their career had been advanced by their award"* (p.228). Neumann (2005) claims that doctoral qualifications are rarely cited as being instrumental in career progression and provides evidence that *"the benefit of a professional doctorate for career advancement is negative in some cases and at best marginal in others"* (Neumann, 2005, p.185). Indeed, in the field of management *"a doctorate – even a professional doctorate – could be more of a hindrance than an asset"* (Neumann, 2005, p.180) since the academic connotations may imply a preference for theoretical concepts and a detachment from the everyday professional life. The quotation carries the implication that a professional doctorate is better suited to the business field than a PhD but neither is advantageous. Wellington and Sikes (2006) report a minority view from professional doctorate students that doctoral study had impacted negatively on their work. As a consequence of their improving academic skills they were viewed with

suspicion by their peers, possibly due to a perception that they were now less committed to practical issues and more interested in academic matters.

2.3.3 Programme status

As the newer route, the general lack of awareness of professional doctorates and their process and purpose has meant that there has been uncertainty regarding the status of professional doctorates relative to PhDs, yet this issue is clearly an important consideration in choosing a doctoral programme. There is disagreement in the literature regarding the relative standing of the two programmes and this is an area in which this research can make a contribution: *"it is not uncommon to hear that* [professional doctorates] *are 'at the same level' as a PhD but it is unusual to have this explained in any detail"* (Kirkman *et al.*, 2007, p.63). This section attempts to address this issue.

Evidence for the equivalence of status has been restricted mainly to professional doctorate programme documentation but there is a growing call for professional doctorates to be recognised as equal to the PhD (Johnson, 2005) and *"there can surely be no difference in quality for the two routes, if both are doctoral programmes"* (Wellington *et al.*, 2005, p.15). Given that the UK has comprehensive quality assurance procedures (Kehm, 2005), attempting to equate quality with status in this way has some value, but this is not necessarily sufficient to drive out the perception that professional doctorates represent a lower form of doctorate: the *"academic value of the professional doctorate is 'meant' to be equal to that of PhD"* (Jolley, 2007 p.231). This displays a degree of scepticism which is echoed in the findings of Ellis (2005) who canvassed views of academics on this issue and the opinions ranged from enthusiastic, this being the most popular response (from over half the group), to sceptical. The majority of Ellis's participants held a PhD, so it is informative to note that over half were enthusiastic about professional doctorates. Some participants had doubts over whether the professional doctorate represented a lowering of standards and said that professional doctorates are designed as a diluted version of a doctorate that would be attractive to students completing a Master's degree but that professional doctorates lack the currency of a PhD. At the extreme were those who saw no merit to the professional doctorate adding it was a *"dumbing down of the PhD"* (Ellis, 2005,

p.444). A very similar phrase was reported by (Maxwell, Hickey and Evans, 2004): professional doctorates represent a *"dumbing down of the doctorate"* (p.3). Rolfe and Davies (2009) refer to the statement made in the House of Commons that UK academics should *"continue to uphold the importance of professional doctorates as being real doctorates"* (House of Commons, 2007, p.50) which demonstrates that without sustained effort the status of professional doctorates could slip.

Wellington and Sikes (2006) asked professional doctorate students to give their opinions on programme status and the participants did not perceive a professional doctorate to be of lower status than a PhD. However, a telling indication of the perception of status was given in that these professional doctorate students had reported having to convince others that their professional doctorate was of equivalent standing to the PhD: the ability to attach the title 'Doctor' was found to quickly override any notion of inferiority of the professional doctorate. The favourable view from the professional doctorate students in this case was perhaps unsurprising, given that students would be unlikely to denigrate the very programme they were enrolled upon.

Evidence of the perceived lower status of the professional doctorate comes from the 2002 UKGCE report presenting a middle management view that includes the employer comment that in future the organisation would select those with *"proper PhDs"* (UKGCE, 2002, p.41). Perry and Zuber-Skerritt (1994) acknowledge that the PhD programme is superior to the professional doctorate due to the lack of conviction amongst senior practising managers with regard to the suitability of professional doctorates for practising professionals. Ellis (2005) explains how some candidates originally enrolled on a nursing professional doctorate switched to a PhD because it was seen as more worthy and the professional doctorate offered no saving in time over the PhD. In her Australian study, Neumann (2005) claims there is *"a widely held student view that a professional doctorate lacks the international currency and status of the PhD and is of lesser quality and standard"* (Neumann, 2005, p.186). Sarros, Willis and Fisher (2002) conclude that poorer quality Australian DBAs *"will continue to compromise the integrity and acceptability of the DBA as a suitable alternative to the PhD"* (Sarros, Willis and Fisher, 2002, p.9). Their definition of a *"poorer quality DBA"* hinges on light student workload, with few taught modules and a shorter than

average thesis (Sarros, Willis and Fisher, 2002, p.9). This highlights a key point in the discussion of status and this is the diversity of professional doctorate provision: when criticisms are made of professional doctorates, which particular professional doctorate programme is being compared to the PhD and how well informed is the commentator of the 'purpose and process' of that specific professional doctorate? It is understandable that professional doctorates attract criticism when general opinions are offered, such as the broad generalisation by Kehm (2005): *"professional doctorates tend to be somewhat less demanding as regards the requirement to produce an original piece of work"* (p.25).

Diversity of professional doctorate provision means that whereas the title PhD will generate relatively consistent constructs from person to person, the title of a professional doctorate may not. An example is the DBA, a name that will naturally generate linkages with the MBA. Whether the DBA is located closer to the MBA or the PhD in the mind of the individual will depend on their knowledge, opinions and experiences. Lockhart and Stablein (2002, p.196) describe two forms of DBA, the first as an *"advanced MBA"* consisting of taught courses plus a series of projects where the tools but not the aims of academic research are taught and applied. The second is the same in structure but more focussed on making an original contribution to both theory and practice. The 'development of knowledge' aspect positions the programme above an *"advanced MBA"* in terms of status since MBA students are required only to understand and apply existing knowledge.

It has been demonstrated that there is sufficient uncertainty over the status of the professional doctorate to warrant exploration, but discussion of status of the programmes is fraught with claim and counter-claim and should be set within context. As an example of the broader issues, the question of equivalence of status and standards is not restricted to PhD against professional doctorate: *"it is certainly commonly alleged that the standard to be attained to achieve a PhD varies considerably both between and even within institutions"* (Edwards, 2009, p.1).

This section has brought together previous studies that have sought to draw comparisons between the professional doctorate and PhD. This has been useful to guide exploration both in terms of methodology and method and to highlight

uncertainties in the previous work where this research can make a contribution. These areas include choice of research topic, issues of career advancement and the relative status of the programmes. The discussion now moves to three key concepts in the 'purpose and process' of doctoral education, these are knowledge generation, supervision and assessment.

2.4 Doctoral knowledge generation: how and where?

Despite continuing developments and evolving perspectives within doctoral education, one aspect remains unchanged: the central purpose of the PhD is knowledge generation and to make an original contribution to knowledge. Any exploration must then include an exploration of how and where doctoral knowledge is generated and this may shed light on whether the PhD and professional doctorate are indeed distinctive with respect to 'purpose and process' of knowledge generation: *"what constitutes knowledge? Is the definition of 'knowledge' different ... depending on type of doctorate"* (HEA, 2008, p.5). Lack of research in this area may be a factor in the struggle faced by professional doctorate programmes to establish themselves as distinctive doctoral programmes: *the term 'professional doctorate' does raise the issue of what 'professional knowledge' might be, as compared to (say) 'academic knowledge'. A full and helpful discussion of this distinction has yet to be written"* (Wellington *et al.*, 2005, p.9). Recent attempts to explore the issue of knowledge generation from both the PhD (Adkins, 2009; Watts, 2009) and professional doctorate (Rolfe and Davies, 2009; Scott *et al.*, 2004) will now be discussed.

This section will focus on the rise of the knowledge economy and what constitutes valid forms of knowledge generation. The resulting implications for Universities as providers of doctoral programmes and the location of knowledge generation will be explored. Theoretical frameworks for knowledge generation are drawn from UK literature and from those countries whose HE environments bear strong similarities to the UK: much Australian research into knowledge generation is relevant to this study.

As the traditional site of knowledge production, universities provide a diversity of doctoral programmes with regard to structure, length, supervision and variations between disciplines, all being driven by institutional and academic cultures (Fell and

Haines, 2006). The need to support innovation and economic development is creating challenges to academic practice, challenges that should be addressed by development of the cultural practice of academics and their institutions (Boud and Tennant, 2006) and the professional doctorate could be seen as a response to this.

In recent years, there has been a realisation that the university is not the only place where knowledge can be constructed and production of knowledge from within the workplace is a recognised phenomenon (Appelqvist, 2004). Lee *et al.* (2000) suggest that the university has a privileged position regarding knowledge production and that disciplinary and formal (academic) knowledge has been prized above any other form of knowledge. An example is provided by Watts (2009) who found that amongst professionals who become students *"there is a propensity for theory to 'feel' threatening because it is produced by others who claim to be experts at generating valid knowledge that is relevant to practice"* (p.689). However, it could be argued that the university is losing its monopoly as the site of knowledge production due to the increased importance of creating knowledge through application and knowledge produced in the workplace. Such knowledge will not be bounded and compartmentalised by imposed academic disciplines but will transcend these to become interdisciplinary (Boud and Tennant, 2006; Usher, 2002).

Within recent decades the concept of the 'knowledge society' has emerged (Gibbons Limoges, Nowotny, Schwartzman, Scott and Trow, 1994) with the underlying tenet that education enables continued economic development and universities are responsible for producing workers in this new knowledge economy. Harman (2002) agrees that future economic performance will be driven to some extent by the skills and innovation levels of the workforce and that these attributes can be fostered through research training. This shifting location of knowledge production and the changing definition of what constitutes legitimate knowledge is referred to as a *"reconfiguration"* by Boud and Tennant (2006, p.294), who itemise the impacts for the university. These include the enabling of workers in the new knowledge economy; providing the skills to assimilate and transform information with the ability to be both proactive and to react effectively. Another is the strengthening of links between the university and the workplace, with an emphasis on the relevance of academic outputs.

In this knowledge economy workers rely upon their experiences, coupled with theoretical knowledge, to gain competitive advantage within the economy and this is valued more than the development of purely academic knowledge (Lee *et al.*, 2000). Whilst academic theory is necessary, for a professional to *"to bow to a 'theory' can be to deny the validity of one's own experience-based professional craft knowledge"* (Watts, 2009, p.689). Whatever 'value' is placed upon this development will depend on the perspective of those making the judgement, but there is certainly a resonance with some of the criticisms of the PhD. Usher (2002) defines knowledge in economic terms rather than epistemologically, and universities need to facilitate sustainable knowledge production if they are to fulfil their role as engines of knowledge production, thus driving economic growth. To access these new workers requires a change of focus for universities, in terms of funding, their development of external links and their operation. Universities are becoming more aligned with business practices than they have been in the past, perhaps in an attempt to regain control over knowledge generation (Appelqvist, 2004).

The central expectation of a professional doctorate that academic thought and professional practice are integrated to allow the application of theoretical approaches to problem solving in the workplace: students should produce *"a substantive, theoretically informed contribution to management practice"* (Bourner *et al.*, 2001, p.75). Pedagogical processes must allow a cross-fertilisation between the academy and the profession so that details of how and when the knowledge that has been produced is actually applied in the professions can be specified: professionals know more about the professional context than academics and must themselves identify and relate to the issue being investigated (Maxwell and Shanahan, 1997). There is a suggestion that professional doctorate students are in danger of being torn between their own professional knowledge and academia with the result that they can be left *"in the swampy ground between the comfort of their professional realm and the uncertain territory of academia"* (Watts, 2009, p.689). However, professional doctorate students are likely to have previous qualifications, such as a Master's for example, which may bring familiarity with the 'territory of academia' even if not necessary with knowledge generation. Given the flexibility of the PhD, there may be a wider (professional) application of the contribution to knowledge, but is not necessarily a requirement as it is for a professional doctorate.

Historically, the mechanism of knowledge production associated with traditional doctoral study can be classified as *"mode1"* according to the typology of knowledge described by Gibbons *et al.* (1994).

"Mode1" knowledge is disciplinary knowledge constructed within universities (Scott *et al.*, 2004) with the intention of extending the limit of disciplinary knowledge. Lee *et al.* (2000) outline the characteristics of *"mode1"* knowledge production: the process is linear, causal and cumulative, with new knowledge building upon and being grounded in that which has already been produced. Whether the knowledge can be applied to solve practical problems is not a primary concern, but solutions to social or commercial problems may well occur as a by-product of the knowledge generation process. This is influenced further if the research is publicly funded and in the public interest. Research takes a reductionist approach, with the effect that holistic and interdisciplinary research is viewed with suspicion and judgements of what constitute 'advancement' within this closed system and what is of value can only be made by those directly involved with the knowledge generation process (Lee *et al.*, 2000). Usher (2002) claims that the traditional PhD, with a narrow, specialised, uni-disciplinary focus and the development of a limited skill set excludes practitioners, leads to a non-collaborative thesis and so is consistent with a *"mode1"* knowledge production process.

This traditional view has come under scrutiny as the concept of the knowledge economy has gained recognition and acceptance in recent years. Usher (2002) investigates the suitability of the doctorate – the *"fitness for purpose"* (Usher, 2002, p.147) and asks why universities have not been spearheading the production of knowledge workers for the knowledge economy when they have an unrivalled background in knowledge production. Usher claims this is because the kind of knowledge that has been produced (*"mode1"* knowledge) is not now consistent with the aims of the knowledge economy. Neumann and Goldstein (2002) claim that traditional PhD programmes put the development of significant knowledge above tradable knowledge, a view shared by Lee *et al.* (2000).

"Mode2" knowledge is produced in the context of application, where sources of innovation derive from the wider world rather than the scientific laboratory (Scott *et al.*, 2004, p.41). The assumption of linearity between scientific knowledge and practical application dissolves as advances occur through a less systematic process, where interdisciplinary teams take an expansionist, holistic approach to problem solving (Lee *et al.*, 2000). The key feature is that the developers of knowledge will also apply it (Usher, 2002). The learning is not restricted to the university campus and the discipline expert is now one stakeholder amongst the team of researchers. Within this open system, value judgements are as likely to come from outside the academy as from within (Stephenson, Malloch and Cairns, 2006).

Usher (2002) suggests that doctoral programmes enabling *"mode2"* knowledge production are prized and asks if a *"mode2"* doctorate is needed to equip candidates with the skills required in a knowledge economy. Universities are reconceptualising doctoral education in response to external drivers such as government directives, corporate alignment and an increasingly competitive marketplace (Maxwell and Shanahan, 1997). Within the knowledge economy the tradable commodities are knowledge and skills that are relevant and have commercial value and it is the role of universities to provide programmes of research to facilitate this (Evans, 2002). *"Mode 2"* aims to bring *"change and improvement in practice, thereby enhancing productivity and performance within the actual workplace"* (Rolfe and Davies, 2009, p.1266).

The knowledge production processes of professional doctorates fall into the *"mode2"* classification, according to Lee *et al.* (2000) and programmes should align to a *"hybrid curriculum model"* (Lee *et al.*, 2000, p.127). The hybrid curriculum conceptualisation involves three spheres of influence; the university, the candidate's profession and the work-site of the research abbreviated to U, P and W (Maxwell, 2003). Representing these spheres two dimensionally as overlapping circles in the form of a Venn diagram gives a central intersection of these three circles and it is here that professional doctoral activity should take place.

At this location *"new kinds of knowledge and new ways of producing knowledge will be developed, involving new relationships among participants and new kinds of*

research writing" (Lee *et al.*, 2000, p.127). Maxwell also describes new relationships being forged through *"the realities of the workplace, the knowledge and the improvement of the profession and the rigour of the University"* (Maxwell, 2003, p.290). The learner may stipulate the workplace where the outcomes are measured, the university role includes quality assurance, elucidation of the assessment criteria by which their work will be evaluated and providing support through supervision (Stephenson, Malloch and Cairns, 2006). Whilst this theoretical concept may be desirable, Wellington and Sikes (2006) collected data from professional doctorate students showing that they valued a detachment between the workplace, professional practice and the university.

Usher (2002) sees a requirement for universities to develop *"human capital"* (Usher, 2002, p.145) within doctoral candidates and to ensure they have the correct armoury of *"soft and transferable"* (Usher, 2002, p.145) skills for them to operate effectively within the knowledge economy and lists such skills as innovation, enterprise, creativity, problem-solving, collaboration and reflexivity.

Whilst some claim that the *"model/mode2"* classification of knowledge production *"rests on a bifurcated distinction between disciplinary knowledge constructed in the University and trans-disciplinary knowledge produced outside the University"* (Scott *et al.*, 2004, p.41), others see it as an *"artificial delineation"* (Neumann and Goldstein, 2002, p.29) that does not capture the richness and diversity of the way professional doctorates have been developed and implemented. Lee *et al.* (2000) insist that each instance of research cannot necessarily be allocated completely into one category or the other – there could be overlap between them, a view shared by Scott *et al.* (2004, p.42), who add the boundaries between the two modes are blurred when *"knowledge may originate from and within the professional practice, and yet the solution for the practitioner may be found within the disciplinary practice"*. There are also criticisms of the dichotomy from other authors, ranging from the actual definition of knowledge itself and whether *"model"* is an idealistic concept (Usher, 2002).

(Scott *et al.*, 2004, p.55) expand the categorisation to four modes of knowledge: *"disciplinarity, technical rationality, dispositionality and criticality"*.

Disciplinary knowledge production shares much with Gibbon's "*mode1*": the idealised view of the knowledge production process is that initial induction into a discipline is followed by gradual assimilation of accepted and agreed frameworks, rules and other discipline specific criteria through immersion in the disciplinary community (Scott *et al.*, 2004). The rules for evaluating knowledge are known and the practice setting has no influence on proceedings. Scott *et al.* (2004) have a suspicion that some students may exhibit a strategic disciplinary allegiance without wholeheartedly committing to the discipline, for example by showing knowledge of the key people in the field and aiming to please the disciplinary gatekeepers. In executing their research, students adhere to an accepted set of academic methodological considerations to maintain standards of knowledge generation.

The degree of interdisciplinary research in doctoral studies will vary within and between programmes. Even with disciplinary modes of knowledge production, Scott *et al.* (2004) found varying degrees of integrity of the disciplinary boundaries for professional doctorate programmes, with some being more porous than others. The EngD had strong boundaries, whereas the DBA disciplinary delimitations were less clearly defined and EdD studies had fragmented into sub-disciplines.

"*Technical rationality*" (Scott *et al.*, p.45) requires students to suppress prior experiences and knowledge as they enrol on a programme and seek to acquire skills to see new ways of solving problems in the workplace. Participants acknowledge that their own practice-based experience is partial, context specific and hence not generalisable and actions are derived from what actually works in practice for a specific problem, rather than being objectively judged according to independent criteria (Scott *et al.*, 2004). To adopt a technical rationality approach may result in a programme aiming to develop better interpersonal skills, increased strategic knowledge or better technical skills.

The inclination of a student to approach a problem in a particular way, utilising a toolkit of familiar analytical techniques, can be thought of as their disposition. Developing dispositional knowledge involves teaching students how to critically examine what has been experienced already, and the related outcomes, to inform

future courses of action through the selection of a suitable approach (Scott *et al.*, 2004). Adopting a willingness to select courses of action relevant to the issue in question can be achieved through a process of critical reflection. As Scott *et al.* (2004, p.50) comment: *"the purpose of the pedagogic activity on some professional doctorate courses is to dissolve, fragment or otherwise disrupt the models of knowledge held by students"*. In common with the *"mode2"* knowledge production, successful acquisition of dispositional knowledge is demonstrated by success in the workplace, this itself resulting from the ability to draw upon large resources of knowledge sources to find problem solutions. Ellis (2005) states that in contrast to a PhD, the professional doctorate provides grounding in the full range of methodologies. Credible dispositional knowledge comes from recognition amongst professional colleagues and academics that learners select appropriate methodologies and prominence is given to personal development *"through reflection with displacement being passed to the student"*, captured by the phrase *"the candidate in control"* (Stephenson, Malloch and Cairns, 2006, p.29).

The fourth category of Scott *et al.*'s typology is critical knowledge. The personal nature of dispositional knowledge is replace by an organisation wide view, ambitions are political and change oriented in nature, perhaps with a view to making the tacit explicit, uncovering power relationships and established hierarchies (Scott *et al.*, 2004). Scott *et al.* (2004) claim that resistance could be expected as the development of critical knowledge may involve questioning established knowledge discourses, resulting in an upsetting of the traditional order. They claim professional doctorates have the power to achieve this, since they are designed to encourage intervention in the organisation and the imposition of a changed set of values and operating conditions.

Adopting a similar stance to Lee *et al.* (2000) who claim that *"mode1"* and *"mode2"* knowledge production are not mutually exclusive, Scott *et al.* (2004) suggest that universities do not construct relationships between academic and professional knowledge according to one of the four types described above but different combinations may emerge according to the stage and context of the research. A programme may employ all four modes, but with a degree of tension between the modes that can lead to either weak or strong interfaces between the academic and

professional worlds. A programme operating through a process of disciplinary knowledge production implies that disciplinary knowledge supersedes that generated in the workplace. A student may research practice from a disciplinary viewpoint but does not necessarily look to have an influence upon practice. To address this, action research is often suggested as a research method capable of bridging the academic-practice divide in doctoral research (Bourner and Simpson, 2005; Lockhart and Stablein, 2002; Perry and Zuber-Skerritt, 1994).

This section has explored knowledge generation processes and how these relate to the central PhD and professional doctorate aim of making an original contribution to knowledge. It has been shown that there are considerable debates surrounding modes of knowledge production and also how this is an area that is thought to differentiate between the two programmes. Set against the background of a considerable number of theoretical propositions, there is however a lack of empirical research in this area particularly with respect to professional doctorate programmes which provides a gap in the research area that this research addresses.

2.5 Doctoral supervision

The purpose of this section is to explore the process of supervision by drawing upon previous studies in this area for both PhD and professional doctorate programmes. This section will begin with a consideration of the recent tightening of regulations in the supervision process in an attempt to improve completion rates. The review will then move to concepts of supervision, the supervisor/student relationship and the composition of the supervisory team.

One of the central processes of doctoral study is supervision and the student-supervisor relationship. This is a well researched area from the PhD perspective and there are many previous studies to draw upon for theoretical frameworks for supervision (Lee and Green, 2009; Kamler, 2008; Lee, 2008; Sambrook, Stewart and Roberts, 2008; Li and Seale, 2007; Delamont, Atkinson and Parry, 2005; Leonard, 2001; Phillips and Pugh, 2001). This research has a similar aim to that of Lee (2008) where *"the aim was to understand how supervision is experienced and perceived"*

(p.270) but this work differs in extending the scope extended to professional doctorate supervision and including both supervisor and student opinions.

There is a consensus that supervision is a highly important process: *"supervision can make or break a PhD student"* (Lee, 2008, p.267) and poor supervision has been identified as a factor in UK PhD completion rates (Corbyn, 2007). Under the traditional PhD *"apprenticeship model"* (Kehm, 2005, p.15) the principal supervisor has responsibility for the student but supervision may be shared with other members of the supervisory team. This arrangement forms the principal supporting mechanism for students and has led to the image of the 'lone PhD researcher': *"working towards the PhD is usually an isolating and lonely time"* (Phillips and Pugh, 2001, p.54) and their *"relative isolation puts the PhD student in a metaphorical goldfish bowl"* (Wright, 2003, p.211). PhD supervision has traditionally been seen as *"a private act between consenting adults"* (Lee, 2008, p.269). This lack of support outside the supervisory team is seen as a less than satisfactory situation and has recently come under scrutiny: *"many of the problems of the PhD such as the lack of peer and supervisor support can be and are being addressed"* (Jolley, 2007, p.229). However, it is unclear from Jolley's paper exactly how supervision is changing given that he claims *"typically, a PhD student would expect to see his or her supervisor only once a semester"* (Jolley, 2007 p.232). Corroboration of this infrequency of meeting in the health discipline is provided by Kirkman *et al.* (2007): *"the student meets their supervisor at intervals determined by them both, maybe once a semester"* (p.62). Whilst this may seem to suggest rather long periods between meetings, it is likely that the frequency of meeting varies with discipline, institution and the supervisor and student's personal preferences. Universities are acutely aware of completion rates (Neumann, 2007) and are implementing changes to PhD student support processes that include more sophisticated and extensive support networks than previously existed (Neumann and Goldstein, 2002), for example by creating greater opportunities for interaction through electronic communication (Crossouard and Pryor, 2009; Butcher and Sieminski, 2006) and closer monitoring of the supervision process. Deem and Brehony (2000) explored UK doctoral students' access to research cultures through interviews with twenty six students, again all PhD students, although given the date of this publication the focus on the PhD route is perhaps less surprising, given

that professional doctorates programmes in the UK would have been in their infancy and less widely available.

There are significantly fewer explorations of supervision of professional doctorates: *"there has been very little discussion of the particular issues related to supervision of the 'professional'"* (Watts, 2009, p.690). Since there *"are no emerging frameworks or exemplars of good professional doctorate supervision practices"* (Lee, 2009a, p.644) this provides an opportunity for this research to make a contribution by providing an insight into both the student and staff perspective in this area. Previous research that has addressed both programmes, notably the UK based research by Ellis (2005) and the Australian work by Neumann (2005), have included supervision briefly as part of broader explorations. The small-scale study by Lee (2009a) explored professional doctorate supervision in the health discipline and is a rare example of research that focuses purely on professional doctorate supervision. The Postgraduate Research Experience Survey report for 2009 includes information on supervision but does not disaggregate according to programme (Kulej and Wells, 2009). Although the professional doctorate is claimed to have an advantage through increased peer support (as outlined in section 2.2.2) there has been very little exploration of how professional doctorate students experience supervision or how this compares to that experienced by PhD students. Professional doctorate students may well have quite different characteristics to those of PhD students who have traditionally been young, full-time, based on campus and recently graduated. In contrast, professional doctorate students are likely to be older (Wellington *et al.*, 2005), enrolled part-time and have extensive professional experience. For such students, it may be that supervision should evolve into a much more open process with a broader focus, for example with a greater focus on the legal and ethical liabilities of the university, with corresponding changes in the concepts of supervision.

The exploration by Lee (2008) referred to earlier explored concepts of doctoral research supervision by interviewing twelve supervisors. Lee states that the 150 students being supervised by this group *"were studying a mixture of conventional PhDs and professional doctorates"* (Lee, 2008, p.269) but there is no indication of the proportions of each type of students. For *"further illumination and to check for face validity"* Lee (2008, p.269) explains how the data was checked with doctoral students

but this seems to be exclusively PhD students: at this stage it seems that professional doctorate students were not involved. There seems to be an inconsistent use of 'PhD' and 'doctoral' to describe the students in Lee's study as these are not necessarily the same: one section is *"the tensions that PhD supervisors reported"* (Lee, 2008, p.276) when the same group were described earlier in the study as supervising both PhD and professional doctorate supervisors. These could be seen as limitations of Lee's work as there are points within the paper where consideration of the professional doctorate perspective might have been useful. For example, when the issue of *"relationship development"* is raised (Lee, 2008, p.275) it might be expected that professional doctorate students, having a different background to a typical PhD student, might approach this differently.

Lee's study proposes that the two key influences on supervisor's approach are *"their concept of research supervision, and ... their own experience as a doctoral student"* (Lee, 2008, p.267) and *"frequently* [a supervisor] *in this study described a way that their experience had informed their current practice"* (Lee, 2008, p.276). There are implications here for professional doctorate programmes since it can be assumed that none of Lee's twelve supervisors held a professional doctorate: *"interviewees were asked about their past experiences as PhD students"* (Lee, 2008, p.269). If a supervisor's own experiences form an integral part of how they now supervise other students – including professional doctorate students – it is unclear to what extent their supervision will be framed by PhD 'purpose and process' rather than professional doctorate ones. If the expertise (and own experiences) of supervisors is with the PhD, which is likely given the novelty of professional doctorate programmes, what effect does this have on the supervision of professional doctorate students?   To what extent do supervisors of professional doctorate students allow their own PhD experiences to influence their behaviour as a supervisor? (Lee, 2009a) found that *"having a supervisor who knew about doctorates and could steer a safe passage was more of a concern for students than having a supervisor of the same professional background"* (p.645) which raises the additional question about whether supervisors 'know about' professional doctorates and whether this affects their supervision. These are unanswered questions that this research aims to explore and to add to the research by Lee (2009a) who found that *"supervisors did not distinguish between the needs of professional doctorate and PhD students"* (p.645).

"Enculturation" (Lee, 2008, p.270) is one of five approaches to supervision that Lee identifies that is of interest from a professional doctorate perspective since it is concerned with becoming a member of an academic discipline. In this approach to supervision, the academic has a gatekeeping role with a strong power dynamic and there are *"opportunities for power games and argument about who 'owns' the research"* (Lee, 2008, p.272) which brings into question whether this issue of 'ownership' is compounded by the professional focus of the research necessary within a professional doctorate. Whether PhD and professional doctorate experience this enculturation differently is not clear and there may be a detachment between the academic and professional worlds since (Lee, 2009a) established that *"supervisors did not consider they had a role in helping students overcome the challenges of practitioner research or helping to integrate research within the students' practice"* (p.646).

The concept of *"developing a relationship"* (Lee, 2008, p.267) is a critical aspect of the supervision process, but one that poses challenges for researchers due to the personal nature of the interactions in the construction of the supervisor-student relationship (Morley, Leonard and David, 2003). The exploration by Watts (2009) considered the challenges posed by *"transition in status from highly respected authoritative professional to new, and often uncertain, research student"* (p.687). Watts (2009) discusses the challenges for professionals adjusting to their new status as novice researcher when enrolling on a doctorate, and although professional doctorates are acknowledged briefly, her focus is on the PhD. The rationale for sidelining professional doctorates is not made explicit and it is argued that much of her discussion surrounding skills training, choice of research topic and the supervisory relationship would benefit from a consideration of the professional doctorate perspective. Watts' faculty is Health and Social Care and there is a significant body of professional doctorate literature that is not considered (for example Lee, 2009a; Jolley, 2007; Kirkman *et al.*, 2007). Watts (2009) concludes that the *"complex process of doctoral supervision is further complicated by* [this] *dimension"* (Watts, 2009, p.690) and this has a clear relevance to professional doctorate programmes where a greater proportion of students are likely to be professionals.

In the majority of cases, the supervision for a PhD will be carried out by academics, either solely or as part of a team. Joint supervision can help reduce feelings of isolation for the student, but carries the danger of inconsistent advice or not being properly supervised by anyone since each supervisor may believe the other is taking the lead (Parry, Atkinson and Delamont, 1997). Moving the location of the research from the university to the profession requires a reconsideration of whether academics are the most suitable group to supervise a professional doctorate: *"there may be strong benefits from having teams represent academia,* [the profession] *and other disciplines"* (Burton *et al.*, 2009, p.429). Burton *et al.* (2009) suggest that *"frameworks for research supervision ... should be widened as this would consequently expand the context of the research students' experience"* (p.429) and provides examples of exposure to the full range of stakeholders: *"master-classes with externals, expert facilitated action learning sets, shadowing of key stakeholders and access to bespoke personal development programmes"* (Burton *et al.*, 2009, p.429). Appelqvist (2004) maintains that academics have limited capability regarding the application of knowledge, an assertion that may be true in certain cases but not universally since it will depend upon the background of the supervisor and the research topic. A more considered view is that academic staff may have limited exposure to industry and therefore this could hinder effective supervision of professional doctorates (Maxwell and Shanahan, 1997). Here Evans (1999) proposes that supervision is not perhaps the best description for what occurs – the influence of the academic is curtailed to advising on the process of research: the aims, goals, literature sources and so on. They should also facilitate negotiations between the stakeholders over matters such as confidentiality, deadlines and other resources: the academic ensures progress is being made towards an examinable outcome. To explore fully their own professional field will require guidance from those located within the profession and direct supervision of the application aspect of the research is only possible by professionals (Evans, 1999) because academics and practitioners will have *"their own interests, their own communities, which have political influences on the research process"* (Orr and Bennett, 2009, p.86). This raises the possibility of tensions between academic and professional influences and the balance of power between the two. There may be a perception that the academic influence, that is the drive for academic knowledge, should take precedence over the quest for contributing to professional practice. Watts (2009) identifies the potential for a related tension

"where [students] *perceive that their knowledge of the field is as strong, if not stronger, than that of their supervisors"* (p.688) for professionals who are studying on the PhD programme. How supervision operates may play a part in balancing the academic and professional value of a professional doctorate to the academy and Johnson (2005) proposes that supervision by professionals in the sponsoring organisation is desirable and others provide evidence of this being implemented in some Australian universities (Maxwell, 2003). O'Mullane (2004) highlights a potential conflict between the overlapping, competing strands of the research training aspect of doctoral education and the delivery of outcomes impacting upon professional practice and from a UK perspective *"whilst a cultural shift within both academe and practice settings is necessary to accommodate this revisioning, the potential value added gains to all parties would seem to far outweigh any initial discomfort"* (Burton *et al.*, 2009).

Phillips and Pugh (2000) tell potential doctoral candidates that *"selecting your supervisor ... is the most important step you will have to take"* (p.8) and the implication here is that the student has control over the principal supervision selection. Whilst this may have been the case in the past, and perhaps still is for some institutions, there is a growing resourcing issue in other universities that is affecting the supervision allocation process (Johnson, 2005).

This section has provided a discussion of the current debates surrounding doctoral student supervision and in general this is a well researched area since the supervision process is crucially important to student success. However, in appraising the established concepts of supervision from the less widely researched perspective of the professional doctorate, it has been possible to demonstrate how there are uncertainties in how supervision is experienced by professional doctorate students. In particular, given that the majority of supervisors have expertise with the PhD programme, it is not certain how this influences professional doctorate supervision. This work also provides a contribution by considering the relationships that are formed between supervisors and students and by exploring the composition of the supervisory team – both these areas are subject to debate in the literature.

2.6 Assessing the doctorate

Assessment of the doctorate is another central process which naturally overlaps to some extent with the issues of knowledge generation in section 2.5 since to assess a doctorate is to make a judgement as to whether original contribution has been generated. There is an abundance of literature dealing with processes of PhD assessment, namely the thesis and the supporting oral examination (for example Tinkler and Jackson, 2002) and this will be reviewed as part of this section. There has been less research into the learning outcomes of doctoral programmes, and even though the QAA lists criteria for attainment by doctoral students, more research is called for: *"there currently exists no official set of guidelines or agreed criteria for the assessment of the doctorate, other than such high-level criteria such as 'contribution to knowledge' and 'contains material suitable for publication'"* (HEA, 2008, p.5). As with the process of supervision, there are few sources that explore assessment from the professional doctorate perspective (Ruggeri-Stevens, Bareham and Bourner, 2001) and the few authors who do consider this in any detail focus on the concept of research impact (for example O'Mullane, 2004) and often from an Australian professional doctorate perspective.

Therefore, this issue provides an opportunity to contribute in the under-researched area of professional doctorate assessment. This section will focus on a discussion of the perceived learning outcomes of the professional doctorate and PhD followed by an exploration of the concept of impact. The composition of the supervisory team will also be discussed since there have been suggestions that for professional doctorates it could be beneficial to include practitioners (Stephenson, Malloch and Cairns, 2006).

It is common to see reference made to the criterion of *"an original contribution to knowledge"* (Burton *et al.*, 2009, p.424) as the learning outcome of a PhD but less common to find discussion of how vague and open to interpretation this definition is. There is difficulty in isolating the concept of a 'significant original contribution to knowledge' and no agreed precise unique definition exists (Perry and Cavaye, 2002). In some ways, this is not a disadvantage since it provides flexibility, by allowing each individual PhD student to put forward their own interpretation of this criterion. This interpretation must be justified to the satisfaction of the examining panel since

"originality is normally defined in the judgement of those who examine the thesis" (HEA, 2008, p.5). A PhD can be an original application or interpretation of current knowledge (Fell and Haines, 2006) and the research can be theoretical or applied, utilising single or multiple tasks that result in the major achievement (O'Mullane, 2004). Publication of research papers in peer reviewed academic journals can form part of the PhD process but is not a prerequisite for the award to be conferred. Publication strengthens the case for claiming a major achievement since the new public knowledge and the significance of the contribution will have been evaluated by recognised experts in the field. In order to reach the appropriate level of achievement, doctoral students should be working close to limits of existing knowledge and aiming to extend this limit in some way (Bourner and Simpson, 2005).

As doctoral education evolves the learning outcomes for doctoral programmes are coming under closer examination and bodies such as the QAA specify what holders of a doctorate, either a PhD or professional doctorate, should be capable of. These are to make informed judgements on complex issues in specialist fields, often in the absence of complete data, and be able to communicate their ideas and conclusions clearly and effectively to specialist and non-specialist audiences (QAA, 2007). It is assumed that the successful doctoral student will continue to undertake pure and/or applied research and development at an advanced level, contributing substantially to the development of new techniques, ideas, or approaches (QAA, 2007).

Examining the QAA framework for higher education qualifications is informative. It lists four criteria for doctoral level achievement:

1. The creation and interpretation of new knowledge, through original research or other advanced scholarship, that is of a quality to satisfy peer review, that extends the forefront of the discipline and merits publication;
2. Demonstration of a systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of an academic discipline or area of professional practice;
3. The general ability to conceptualise, design and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge, applications or understanding at the forefront of the discipline, and to modify the project design in response to unforeseen

problems;

4. Demonstration of a detailed understanding of applicable techniques for research and advanced academic enquiry (http://www.qaa.ac.uk, 2008)

In the above criteria, reference is made to the 'discipline' in three of the four listed, whereas 'professional practice' appears only once (and then as an 'add-on'), which suggests the writers have a stronger affinity with the PhD programme than the professional doctorate. The distinguishing factor of a professional doctorate that the research is *applied* and therefore the sponsoring organisation will benefit from the research being carried out (Johnson, 2005) is not made explicit. Some argue that the work undertaken on a professional doctorate is aligned more closely with research and development, rather than research for its own sake and reputation is built through links with industry by solving a problem and increasing profitability rather than by publications and conference attendance (Nicholls, 2001) and such a view would not necessarily map onto the four criteria listed above. This is acknowledged as an area of debate: *"some concerns were raised about the emergence of new forms of doctorate, which pose additional challenges in terms of assessment"* (HEA, 2008, p.5). Furthermore, as the requirements for transferable skills grow, the focus for doctoral level learning outcomes is not solely upon the 'original contribution to knowledge' but now on skills such as participation in the research environment, networking and team working and career management (Burton *et al.*, 2009).

Regarding professional doctorates, Bareham *et al.* (2000) list the learning outcomes applicable to the DBA, including making an original contribution to knowledge in the field of management, appreciating the contribution of research to the work of senior managers and being able to apply research findings in terms of management practice within an organisation. Ongoing personal development, developing research skills and managing research and researchers are also listed as learning outcomes. Perry and Cavaye (2002) also develop criteria which include evidence that the work is delimited to management practice, a justification of the research paradigm (but not as extensive as that for a PhD due to the intended audience of professionals and managers) and emphasis on the implication for managers in the conclusions. With regard to the issue of 'making a contribution' it should be the management implications that are evaluated and not necessarily the contribution to academic knowledge since the

development of a body of academic knowledge is not the primary aim of a DBA (Perry and Cavaye, 2002).

These different perspectives and understandings of what constitutes a valid 'contribution' to knowledge provide an area of debate and uncertainty, especially since *"the way in which doctoral examiners use assessment criteria is framed by their own professional knowledge"* (HEA, 2008, p.5). There is no argument, however, that academics are ideally placed to assess the contribution within a PhD thesis and gauge its significance and originality (UKGCE, 2002). If the expertise of examiners has a strong PhD bias, with the contribution to academic knowledge uppermost in their minds, then questions could be asked regarding whether a shift in expectations and/or perspective would be needed to examine a professional doctorate. Some suggest that due to the emphasis on developing professional practice, academics may not be ideally suited to pass judgement on whether professional doctorate learning outcomes have been achieved (Stephenson, Malloch and Cairns, 2006) and as a consequence some suggest that professionals should participate in the assessment process (Appelqvist, 2004). The argument is that professionals should assess the relevance of the research outcomes in the professional context, since they possess the in-depth knowledge of the criteria against which a successful research implementation should be judged. This strategy presents the possibility of tensions between the academics who prefer the traditional academic paradigm that they are familiar and comfortable with and innovative forms of assessment that professionals may feel are a more suitable way of demonstrating doctoral level achievement (Johnson, 2005). However, devolving any part of the assessment process to those outside academia introduces risks for reliability and quality assurance issues.

The concept of impact beyond academia is one that does not occur in the literature regarding the PhD but it is highly relevant to the professional doctorate but here there is uncertainty whether professional doctorate students actually achieve impact in the professions. Evans (2002) claims that professional doctorates have a greater potential to achieve impact since their findings will be situated in the workplace but Ellis (2005) raises doubts over whether the knowledge produced through professional doctorate study is actually functional. She uses as a measure the question whether successful completion of a nursing professional doctorate can demonstrate

'leadership' as required for the Nurse Consultant role. Similarly, when questioning professional doctorate students, Wellington and Sikes (2006) found that students would not find being assessed on changes in their practice attractive or appropriate since their practice did not change significantly as a result of their research. O'Mullane (2004) gives a key indicator of the success of a professional doctorate as the extent to which the research outcomes are actually operationalised by the graduate and raises a question regarding the developmental (research training) role of a professional doctorate and whether this improves professional practice. Ellis (2005) describes the varying understandings of what may be judged necessary for claims to an improvement in practice. O'Mullane (2004) concurs with this view that there is diversity in the forms of evidence for showing significant contributions to professional knowledge and practice, and develops benchmarks as a response, with measures of significant contribution that range from *"findings incorporated into professional practice"* at the highest level, to the *"profession is aware of the doctorate and its aims"* at the lowest (O'Mullane, 2004, p.17). O'Mullane (2004) asks if possession of a professional doctorate is a necessary and expected qualification for career progression and questions if a professional doctorate is appropriate for non-institutionalised professions such as business and management given the possible difficulties in demonstrating a significant impact. For professional significance, will the university and the professions always agree on what is a significant contribution to professional practice? In dealing with what has been achieved by the study, there may be tensions with the PhD aligned outcome of discovery of new knowledge, perhaps with academics valuing this outcome over the contribution to professional practice. O'Mullane (2004) argues that a professional doctorate should only be awarded if there is practitioner agreement on the contribution to the profession (in addition to academic agreement that this has been achieved). Furthermore, he states that there must be an active contribution made through implementation of research in the profession.

These themes were explored in the Fifth Biennial conference on professional doctorates (2004) held in Australia. In the conference proceedings introduction, Maxwell, Hickey and Evans (2004) refer to the study by McWilliam, Taylor, Thomson, Green, Maxwell, Wildy and Simons (2002) that highlighted most Australian professional doctorates had failed to develop deep links with their

professions. In the vast majority of cases, professional doctorate programmes forged only surface links since the input from the professions was only on the periphery. The five areas used for establishing deep links were:

1. Professionals are involved in defining the nature of the training and skills to be covered by the candidates;
2. Partnerships exist in delivery and supervision (with corresponding links in funding arrangements);
3. Professional bodies play a substantial role in assessment and credentialing;
4. Research training outcomes are in a form that is beneficial to the profession;
5. The learning community is comprised of both academic and non-academic participants. (Adapted from McWilliam *et al.*, 2002).

In their UK study, Wellington and Sikes (2006) asked professional doctorate students what impact their programme had had on their professional lives and found that the impact on professional life is less concerned with changing practice but more with cognitive (questioning, reflective, analytical, critical) and affective (respect confidence, self-esteem) personal growth, concluding that the professional doctorate is more beneficial to the individual than the profession.

In the UK, the PhD and professional doctorate share similar assessment procedures, in that final assessment is by submission of a thesis and an oral examination. For professional doctorates there is additional assessment of the taught components. Johnson (2005) argues that if the assessment process is the same for the two doctoral programmes then candidates will generate the same outputs making it difficult to justify two distinctive programmes. This view resonates with findings of Perry and Cavaye (2002), who compared examination report forms and notes for examiners for DBA and PhD programmes across a number of universities and found that some were exactly the same. There is an associated issue that whilst much emphasis is placed on doctoral student skills development there is a tension with the assessment processes since *"assessment of doctoral students continues to rely heavily or exclusively on examination of the thesis (product)"* (Park, 2009, p.1) with little attention to the skills that are claimed to be of importance.

The word count of doctoral theses features in many comparisons between the two programmes and there will be variation between disciplines as well as between programmes. As a broad comparison (and in thousands of words), around 90 is a typical figure for the PhD (Wisker, 2008) and around 75 is suggested as the lower limit of variation by Wellington *et al.* (2005). Jolley (2007) puts the measurement within the range 70 to 100. For professional doctorates, estimates of thesis length are given as 40 to 50 (Wellington *et al.,* 2005), 50 to 60 (Neumann, 2005) and 30 to 60 (Jolley, 2007). Neumann (2005) claims that the shorter thesis is the main differentiating feature of the PhD and professional doctorate, but to condense the comparison to a purely quantitative measure is of limited use, particularly when the upper end of the range for a professional doctorate word count approaches the lower end of the range for a PhD thesis. Sat side by side, a 'short' PhD thesis would appear very similar to a 'long' professional doctorate thesis in size and it would fall to an examination of the *"scope or extent that would distinguish the two types of thesis"* (Wellington *et al.*, 2005, p.15). Kirkman *et al.* argue propose that a professional doctorate is *"considerably shorter than in a traditional PhD ... it is hard to see how the same depth of argument can be sustained"* (Kirkman *et al.*, 2007, p.63) which may be the case if the lengths are significantly different but given the discussion above this statement will not hold universally. Perry and Cavaye (2002) believe that due to the allowed variation in the word length of doctoral theses, length is not an important difference but a professional doctorate should highlight the managerial implications of the work: the purpose of the thesis is quite different. Sarros, Willis, Fisher and Storen (2005) agree that the emphasis in a professional doctorate thesis is more focussed on outcomes that are relevant to the professional practice than methodology.

In terms of overall workload, there is a view that the demands of a professional doctorate exceed those of the PhD due to a need to demonstrate consistent standards through both the taught element and the thesis examination (Ellis, 2005; Hoddell, Street and Wildblood, 2002). The UKGCE report on professional doctorates claims that universities require a dissertation and an oral examination to the same requirements as those imposed on PhDs, which when coupled with the assessed taught elements, results in greater demands being made on the Professional Doctorate candidate (UKGCE, 2002). Furthermore, professional doctorate students need to

demonstrate doctoral level work in both the academic and professional contexts (Stephenson, Malloch and Cairns, 2006), an example being that the assessment for the Northumbria University DBA MPP requires students to show evidence that the research is of publishable quality and hence academic in nature, but also to demonstrate potential for a clear and significant contribution to practice (http://www.northumbria.ac.uk., 2009).

For some professional doctorates, a portfolio is offered as an alternative to the thesis (Maxwell, 2003). The portfolio consists of a number of smaller research investigations relevant to professional practice and executed using justified methodological approaches, which are linked by an overarching paper. Maxwell and Kupczyk-Romanczuk (2003) visualise the portfolio model in the form of a *"Greek temple"* (Maxwell and Kupczyk-Romanczuk, 2003, p.9) with a number of columns representing the different pieces of research supporting a pediment – the linking paper. In contrast, they describe the traditional PhD dissertation as *"a skyscraper"* (p.10).Whilst some may claim that the portfolio option could lead to a loss of rigour (Farrow, 2006) others maintain that it has the advantage of appealing to a wider audience since the portfolio will contain research applicable to academics, workplace colleagues and the wider professional community (Taylor and Maxwell, 2004).

In discussing doctoral assessment, this section has shown how the UK PhD and professional doctorate programmes overlap considerably in terms of 'purpose and process' for the area of assessment. Both aim to produce an original contribution to knowledge and both are assessed primarily through the production of a thesis and as a consequence the debates in the literature focus on the sometimes subtle differences between interpretations of these concepts. This research allows these interpretations to be explored.

2.7 Summary

This chapter has explored the theme of 'purpose and process' of doctoral education through a critical evaluation of recent literature from a 'full doctoral position': one that gives equal importance to both PhD and professional doctorate perspectives.

The historical development of the traditional PhD across the globe has been outlined and the recent scrutiny of the programme regarding employability of graduates, skills training and student support has been discussed. There is a consensus that doctoral education is evolving but there is little agreement on how UK provision should change, with new variants of the PhD being suggested by some and criticised by others. There is much debate around the purpose of the doctorate, as demonstrated by the introduction of the 'new route' PhD in the UK and the professional doctorate in the UK and other countries, and uncertainty of exactly how the processes of doctoral education should operate. Professional doctorate programmes vary considerably in 'purpose and process' between countries with UK professional doctorates having greater commonality with those in Australia than with professional doctorates in the USA and this is demonstrated in the sources that have been prioritised. A discussion of the challenges facing professional doctorates has been provided, these are profitability, quality, sustainability and differentiability of professional doctorate provision.

Previous studies that have sought to draw comparisons between the professional doctorate and PhD have been evaluated and it has been shown how many attempt a comparison by means of programme documentation. The aims of this research are quite different: to explore the opinions of those actually involved in doctoral study.

Processes of knowledge generation have been reviewed, showing that there are considerable debates surrounding modes of knowledge production and also how this is an area that is thought to differentiate between the two programmes. An aim of this research is to supplement the lack of empirical research in this area. Supervision is a well researched area for the PhD but less widely researched from the perspective of the professional doctorate and this provides a justification for exploring the relationships that are formed between supervisors and students and the composition of

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the supervisory team since both these areas are subject to debate in the literature. In terms of assessment, the UK PhD and professional doctorate programmes overlap considerably in terms of 'purpose and process' since both aim to produce an original contribution to knowledge and both are assessed primarily through the production of a thesis. This research adds to the debates within the literature by exploring the sometimes subtle differences between interpretations of these concepts.

The methodological stance for this work has been developed in tandem with this literature review. The uncertainties within the research topic that have been identified in this literature review and summarised in this section are taken forward into the third chapter where a specific set of research questions have been generated that form the basis for semi-structured interviews.

Chapter 3

Research methodology and methods

3.1 Introduction

The literature review has set out the uncertainties within the current debates surrounding the 'purpose and process' of doctoral education and this chapter explains how these issues can be explored effectively using semi-structured interviews.

The chapter begins in section 3.2 with the justification of my ontological stance and theoretical perspective, drawing upon the aims of the work and my own role in the research. This section will justify the adoption of a constructivist ontological stance with knowledge generated from an interpretivist theoretical perspective, operating through an inductive research strategy.

Section 3.3 explains how doctoral education operates within Northumbria University which is the case study organisation. The schools within the University are listed and for those schools operating doctoral programmes, the nature and sizes of these programmes are set out. Section 3.4 explores issues relevant to insider research that arise due to the choice of case study and my duality of roles at Northumbria University.

Section 3.5 details the data collection process, with the aim of demonstrating congruence with the research philosophy and the principles of ethical behaviour. The development of the interview guide from the literature review is included in this section. Explicit information is given regarding the chronology of the data collection stage and the template analysis process (King, 2004) is outlined. The role that the **NVivo** software has played within this process is made explicit. It is hoped that this section is sufficiently comprehensive to allow others to employ a similar method, should this be desired.

Section 3.6 is a report on ethical considerations and section 3.7 makes a case for the quality of this research by considering transparency along with three forms of validity: internal, external and pragmatic. The chapter is summarised in section 3.8.

3.2 Constructivism, subjectivism and induction

My opinion is that the philosophical approach taken must prioritise both my own influences on the research and a willingness to embrace the *"subjective dimensions of human action, that is, the internal logic and interpretative processes by which action is created"* (Gill and Johnson, 2002, p.166).

Constructivism is my ontological position: reality is socially constructed and meanings are assigned through social interaction (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 2002) where *"perceptions and experiences ... may be different for each person and change over time and context"* (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008, p.13). Of crucial importance is the view that *"people make sense of the world ... through sharing experiences with others via the medium of language"* (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 2002, p.29).

My view is that the doctoral process exists as a mechanism of knowledge production but it is understood by different people in different ways – *"meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting"* (Crotty, 1998, p.43). My aim is to ask participants in doctoral education about their view on the nature of the doctoral study process and they will have their own understanding of how the process operates. This view will be constructed with reference to their own, personal experiences: each will generate their own version of 'reality'; there is not one, universal view of the doctoral education that is applicable to all.

Furthermore, the issue of 'reality' is a vexed one. On the question of whether there is one 'reality' or 'multiple realities', and how these beliefs align with the various ontological positions, opinion is varied. Gibbs (2007) states that a key characteristic of a constructivist approach is the acknowledgement that there is not only one reality – *"the world we experience arises from multiple, socially constructed realities"*

(Gibbs, 2007, p.7) whereas Johnson and Duberley (2000, p.9) align such a view with a postmodern approach: *"there are a multitude of truths each of which vies for attention but none of which has more validity than any other"*. Given the multitude of viewpoints and nuances regarding ontological positions, perhaps what is of more importance, rather than ontologically categorising and labelling research, is an appreciation of the central role of subjectivity in the knowledge generation process: *"our knowledge is the outcome, we believe, of transactions of the social world, shaped by our methods of inquiry, and of transactions with the data we produce, shaped in turn by our ideas and our analytic procedures"* (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996, p.15). This reinforces of the role of reflexivity within a subjective exploration and raises the question of the degree to which my own views have modified the research process (Mercer, 2006, p.6).

I have taken an interpretivist approach to knowledge generation, which *"recognises the importance of the subjective human creation of meaning"* (Crabtree and Miller, 1999, p.10) and the task has been to interpret the range of constructions and meanings that present themselves in participants' perceptions. I was already in the *"everyday flow of life"* (Gill and Johnson, 2002, p.10) of doctoral education by *"direct contact with, and observation of, human subjects"* (Willis, 2000, p.112). The objective has been to try and *"see things through the eyes of respondents and participants"* (Gibbs, 2007, p.7) and the data collected under such a perspective are value-laden and generated collaboratively through interaction, and they are framed with respect to my own thoughts, preferences and predispositions: the data *"equally reflect the interplay of the researcher's and the participant's constructions"* (Gibbs, 2007, p.7). A similar opinion is held by Coffey and Atkinson (1996, p.15) who declare that *"we produce versions of the social world through our data collection and our processes of analysis"* – my background and behaviour will affect which 'version' is produced. Due to the co-operative nature of the process – the co-construction of data – some argue that the widely used phrase 'data collection' should be supplanted by *"data construction"* (Thomas, 2004) since the data are not independent items waiting to be 'picked up' but socially constructed accounts created through an interactive process. The scope of applicability of this phrase is extended further by Dey (1993, p.15) who claims *"any 'data', regardless of method, are in fact 'produced' by the researcher…data are not 'out there' waiting collection, like so many rubbish bags on*

the pavement". To support the concept of co-operatively generated data, Johnson and Duberley (2000, p.59) claim that *"all data are mediated by our own reasoning as well as that of participants"*.

Given my immersion in the phenomena under exploration through my dual roles, the possibility of an autoethnographic methodological approach presents itself. Sambrook *et al.* (2008) present an example of this type of exploration by *"considering our observations and experiences of the process of doctoral supervision as participants"* (Sambrook *et al.*, 2008, p.74) and the focus is purely on PhD supervision since the three participants were involved in this particular programme. The fact that my dual roles gives me *"complete member researcher status"* (Anderson, 2006, p.378) for both doctoral study and provision – my 'compounded insiderness' - chimes strongly with a tenet of autoethnography. However, the overriding aim of this study is not to research my own experiences, but to explore primarily the experiences of others. Doloriert and Sambrook (2009) describe a continuum of relationships from *"researcher-is-researched"* to *"researcher-and-researched"* (p.28) and I see myself located in the latter category: the research involves topics related to my everyday work, but the lens of scrutiny is directed outwards and on the opinions of others rather than introspectively. Therefore, as part of *"lively and energetic debate about what autoethnography is and is not"* (Doloriert and Sambrook, 2009, p.29), I argue that this emphasis on the experiences of others moves my research away from a pure autoethnographic position of 'researcher-is-researched'.

This exploration is inductive in nature but I see the strategy as not *purely* inductive, and I would suggest that very little current management research is conducted in such a way. My opinion is that to be credible to a business and management audience, research requires grounding in current debates relevant to the research topic. Therefore, even with an exploration in the style of the grounded theory approach an initial theoretical perspective is required. In referring to grounded theory researchers, Partington (2002, p.140) claims that it is a misconception to imagine *"all their experiences, preconceptions and knowledge of existing theory"* are put aside. Consequently very few studies can be categorised as purely inductive in nature. In a doctoral student research seminar, Professor Mark Saunders asked, in a rhetorical fashion *"does anyone do true inductive research?"* (Saunders, 2008). Further

evidence of this view is given in Crabtree and Miller (1999): *"all forms of enquiry begin with some sort of prior understanding or theory about the subject of study"* (Kuzel, 1999, p.35). It is proposed, therefore, that for any management research, it is useful to gain at least some grounding in the key themes that are likely to have some bearing on the research questions. However, one should be aware that the direction of the research may deviate from whatever initial preconceived theoretical concepts I bring to the study and these are the lines along which this research has run.

3.3 The Case Study: doctoral education at Northumbria University

The purpose of this section is to provide the background to the case study that I have chosen by explaining the doctoral education situation at Northumbria University and reference will be made to the discussion regarding doctoral education presented above. The research strategy has been influenced by the specific circumstances at Northumbria University and these circumstances are now made explicit.

Northumbria University is located in Newcastle-upon-Tyne in North East England and developed from the former Newcastle Polytechnic. Students at the University are distributed amongst nine schools, which are listed in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1: Schools within Northumbria University

School of Applied Sciences (SAS)
School of Arts and Social Sciences (SASS)
School of Health, Community and Education Studies (HCES)
Newcastle Business School (NBS)
School of the Built Environment
School of Law
School of Computing, Engineering & Information Sciences
School of Psychology and Sports Sciences
School of Design

There is also a Graduate School that has administrative responsibility for those students registered on research degrees.

Most schools within Northumbria University offer PhD programmes, NBS and SASS have large numbers of PhD students (currently around 35 and 70 respectively). The SAS and HCES also have students enrolled on PhD programmes and across all of these four schools the students are from diverse backgrounds. A number of fully-funded studentships are available and the programme duration is three years full-time or five years part-time study. Within NBS, applicants for the PhD programme are expected to locate their research project within one of the School's specialist research areas which are listed on the School website and in other documentation and similar application procedures operate in the SAS and SASS.

Regarding professional doctorates, it is currently a period of expansion with new programmes being developed and validated. The University has comprehensive documentation for doctoral programmes, including a framework for professional doctorates (Brown, 2007) that all Schools must adhere to. At the time of writing, only the first four schools listed in Table 3.1 above had any substantial involvement in the development and operation of professional doctorate programmes. The Schools of Design and the Built Environment have recently validated professional doctorate programmes that were not yet operational.

Newcastle Business School has the most well established professional doctorate programme in the form of the DBA, which was established in 2001 and currently has around 35 students enrolled, the vast majority of which are part-time. The DBA programme itself has undergone significant development during the last nine years; initially the durations were three years full-time and five years part-time. Potential candidates were expected to have a number of years of professional experience but not necessarily a Master's qualification. In 2008 the DBA was re-positioned as an advanced entry programme, so that a Master's in Business and Management was a pre-requisite for entry to the DBA. This change ensured that those enrolling on the DBA already had high level skills in subjects such as research methods. A consequence of this advanced entry status was that it was possible to reduce the duration of the DBA to two years full-time study and three years part-time study. The

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Northumbria University framework for professional doctorate programmes requires that all professional doctorates have a core 'bridging module' in advanced research methods (Brown, 2007) that build upon the Master's level research skills and extends these to doctoral level. This module forms part of the taught component of the DBA. There are two taught blocks in the first year, each covering 1 week, that include sessions on the aforementioned advanced business research methods, research philosophies and doctoral study skills. On the part-time programme, students complete a research proposal after five months and later submit a mid-point progression document. Final assessment is by the submission of a thesis (or portfolio) and a supporting oral examination. To date, the number of DBA completions is thirteen and all candidates have been assessed on their thesis and supporting oral examination (Miller, 2010). In 2009, Newcastle Business School added the Doctorate in Business Leadership (DBL) to its range of doctoral programmes. The DBL shares the same taught components as the DBA but a DBL student's research topic will focus specifically upon an aspect of business leadership. At the time of writing, there were no students enrolled on the DBL.

The Professional Doctorate in Biomedical Sciences (DBMS) was running for the first time in May 2008 with a cohort of four part-time students, who are all senior managers in the health sector enrolled in September 2007. The programme duration is four years (part-time) with two modules making up the taught component in the first year. The taught modules are 'Reflective Practice' and 'Research Skills and Methods'. The research stage is three years long with assessment at the mid-point stage in year three. Final assessment is by submission of a thesis or portfolio and a supporting oral examination.

The Professional Doctorate in Public Administration (DPA) is the first professional doctorate in SASS and was due to start for the first time in September 2008 with one student enrolled. The research stage culminates with submission of either a thesis or a portfolio and there is a final oral examination. A second professional doctorate, the Professional Doctorate in Arts Practice is currently under development.

In HCES there are Professional Doctorates in both Academic Practice and Public Health. The Professional Doctorate in Public Health is in the development and

validation stage. The Professional Doctorate in Academic Practice (DAP) is intended as a vehicle for Northumbria University staff development, and has a small number of students at the early (taught) stages of the programme. It operates as a number of taught modules, the majority of which it is possible for staff to gain exemption from through the University accreditation of prior learning (APL) and accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) systems. There is a module dealing with research methods which every student must complete. The research stage culminates in either a thesis or a portfolio of evidence and a supporting oral examination.

One recent development that should be raised is the decision of the Business School Executive in 2006 to embark upon a strategic objective of achieving internal external accreditations. This has relevance since one consequence of this aim is the requirement of academic staff to be qualified at doctoral level and to engage in research and publication (Mavin and Bryans, 2010). Therefore, within the Business School, members of staff have sought to enrol upon doctoral degrees, often at Northumbria University, in order to support this objective. A number have staff have selected the DBA, and therefore in recent years staff members enrolled on the DBA have outnumbered external students within the cohort.

The fact that some professional doctorates at Northumbria University are at an embryonic stage and others are subject to ongoing development lends support to my claim that this research can contribute to professional practice. Development of new professional doctorates indicates a belief that these are seen as valuable addition to the programme portfolio and different in some way to the existing PhD programme. The ongoing development of the DBA programme indicates that the 'purpose and process' of this professional doctorate have not been finally decided; the programme is evolving in response to drivers and this is worthy of exploration. Therefore, this study of professional doctorates will supplement the understanding of the 'purpose and process' of professional doctorates by exploration of these new programmes alongside the better established PhD.

There are a number of features of the case study situation that have influenced decisions taken in the research strategy, particularly the distribution of professional doctorates throughout the University. Only the first four Schools in Table 3.1 have

involvement with professional doctorates and so this study is limited to these schools. Furthermore, only NBS has a professional doctorate programme that has been operational long enough to produce students that have progressed to the research phase and so the sample of students for this study will consist only of DBA students. Whilst this may be viewed as a limitation of this study, this has been necessary due to this research being timely: if professional doctorates were already established in all schools then the opportunity to learn from the Business School's experiences would have been lost.

This section has described how PhD and professional doctorate programmes operate within the context of Northumbria University, with the former programme being well established and the professional doctorate as a recent introduction within the last decade: there is only the DBA that is fully operational with students who have completed.

3.4 Insider research and 'compounded insiderness'

Due to my own position as both a DBA student and a member of staff involved with the delivery of the DBA programme at Newcastle Business School, I am very much an 'insider' – being located very firmly inside the doctoral education process at Northumbria University. Researching one's own institution, or *"insider research"* (Mercer, 2006, p.1), brings a number of advantages: there is a *"convenience of writing about one's own professional environment, relationships, and culture"* (Doloriert and Sambrook, 2009, p.29) but *"traditional textbooks ... tend to gloss over the intricacies of insider research"* (Mercer, 2006, p.2). There is a responsibility, however, to examine the interplay of my roles and the effect on the research, specifically with regard to *"delicate dilemmas: informant bias, interview reciprocity and research ethics"* (Mercer, 2006, p.7). Researching doctoral education at Northumbria University as a member of staff without also being a doctoral student would place me in a similar position to Hewitt-Taylor (2002), who explored the opinions of staff and students towards a nursing course whilst delivering on the course being studied. My particular situation is compounded by the fact that I am not only undertaking such an exploration, but I am also a student on one of the programmes under study and therefore the result of the research itself is enmeshed with the research topic: I

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propose that my research is 'doubly inside' or exhibits 'compounded insiderness'. This novel and distinctive feature of my research provides the opportunity to make a methodological contribution and forms a thread through this dissertation and discussion of such issues is particularly relevant in the methodology chapter. Given such complications of insider research, the view of Brannick and Coghlan (2007) provides reassurance: *"[insider research] is not only valid and useful but also provides important knowledge about what organisations are really like, which traditional approaches may not be able to uncover"* (p.17).

Previous research exploring opinions of those involved with doctoral study using the same case as the work here is limited to one paper, that by Bryans and Mavin (2006). These authors used *"pictorial representation as an innovative and challenging new technique for exploring how new and experienced researchers interpret research and researchers"* (Bryans and Mavin, 2006, p.113) and used two groups of researchers (one DBA and one PhD) for their study. The focus of their work was an understanding of the skills and qualities to become effective researchers and there was no aim to draw a comparison between professional doctorate and PhD students, although the nature of the data collection would have allowed this had it been desired. Additionally although both authors were 'insiders', there is no discussion of this aspect of the study.

My own 'compounded insiderness' is a key distinguishing feature of my research and therefore makes a methodological contribution. Given the lack of research into doctoral education at Northumbria University, this research provides the first exploration of the PhD and professional doctorate programmes as operated at Northumbria University and therefore makes a contribution to pedagogic research at the case study institution. The following section will describe the data collection and analysis processes.

3.5 Research design

This section covers the selection, justification and operationalisation of semi-structured interviews as my chosen research method. Within the case study approach,

it covers the development of a semi-structured interview guide appropriate for doctoral study, outlines the sampling strategy, data collection and analysis processes.

3.5.1 Semi-structured interviews

The task for this section is to select and justify a data collection method that is congruent with both the philosophical stance I have adopted and the aims of the research project.

Examples of methods that could be used to construct a picture of the 'purpose and process' of doctoral education are; participant observation; storytelling; semi-structured interviewing; critical incident technique and the repertory grid technique (King and Horrocks, 2010; Angrosino, 2007; Silverman, 2006; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Willis, 2000; Crabtree and Miller, 1999; Crotty, 1998). These methods are consistent with the philosophy of allowing those involved in the doctoral education process to tell their own stories, and not to be 'straitjacketed' within the confines of the doctoral programmes as they exist in the documentation.

In aiming to compare and contrast different doctoral programmes, I argue that the comparative dimension required gives more prominence to interviewing and the repertory grid technique, since to attempt a comparison would require at least some fixed points of reference around which perceptions could be compared, so some degree of guidance as to the 'story' being told by participants was desirable. I selected the method of semi-structured interviewing over the repertory grid method due to greater familiarity with the former. I propose that this method of data construction is consistent with the aims and philosophical stance of this research. Furthermore there was evidence from previous studies to demonstrate that it has been a viable method for other researchers exploring doctoral study (Stephenson, Malloch and Cairns, 2006; Wright, 2003; Tinkler and Jackson, 2002).

3.5.2 Interview guide development

The literature review has informed the construction of an interview guide which covers the main themes relevant to doctoral study as derived from current debates. A

set of interview questions has been generated and will help to provide the structure for the interviews by generating starting points for discussion. These are shown in Table 3.2 below.

Table 3.2: Potential interview topics for student interviews

Potential interview questions	Link to debate emerging from the literature review
What stimulated the interest in joining a doctoral programme?	Motivation
What programmes were considered? What level of knowledge do they have regarding other programmes, who did they speak to? What is their perception of the status of doctoral programmes? If other programmes were considered, what were the deciding factors?	Status
What is the research addressing? How was this selected as a research area? How will the work be of benefit and to whom – who has a stake in the research?	Application, knowledge economy, Scott *et al.*'s (2004) critical knowledge, research impact
How do students see the knowledge generation process – is it discipline based, coming from within the university or from elsewhere? How strong is their allegiance to their discipline?	Modes of knowledge production, interdisciplinary research
How important is the application of the knowledge – will it be used outside the academic environment? If so, in what way? By professionals?	Integration of academic and professional practice
What roles are played by the different stakeholders in the knowledge generation process – are relationships formed? If so, how strong are the respective influences on how the research is done?	Knowledge economy, role of university & professions, hybrid curriculum
How do students solve problems? Has this changed	Dispositional knowledge

since following a doctoral programme, if so, how?	
What personal skills are being developed as part of the programme? Are these assessed? Are existing skills being developed and supplemented or a new set of skills being introduced in their place?	Skills, modes of knowledge production, reflexivity, assessment
Who supervises your work and what is the background of your supervisors? Does anyone else have an input over how the work progresses? What degree of freedom do you have over your work?	Supervision team, knowledge generation, conflicts of interest
Other than supervisors, who else do you discuss your research with? Who would you look to in times of difficulty?	Support structures, cohorts
What will you take as the main achievements from your research degree?	Learning outcomes
Can you describe the assessment process and what is your opinion of this? Who will assess your work?	Learning outcomes, assessment procedures, who assesses
When your research is complete, who will use the results? How and to what extent will they be used? Implementation?	Research impact
What will you do once you have finished your doctorate? How do you think your doctoral qualification will be viewed by others? Are you enjoying your programme, would you recommend it to others? If you were able to start again, would you choose the same programme?	Programme selection, career aspirations, status

In a similar way, a list of possible interview questions for staff is shown in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3: Potential interview topics for staff interviews

Potential interview questions	Link to debate emerging from the literature review
How do marketing strategies operate? Are other programmes mentioned as part of the marketing process? Who is the target audience?	Marketing, status
Is the programme described to potential candidates? If so, in what way – what details are given? What are promoted as the key benefits of the programme?	Marketing, status, career progression
What entry criteria are important and what characteristics are looked for in potential candidates?	Selection
Who decides the research area? What are the characteristics of a feasible research question?	Research area, research question
How is the programme structured: how does the learning take place? Who/what influences the content of the curriculum?	Modes of knowledge production, knowledge economy, reflexivity
Where do students look for solutions to research problems – inside/outside the university? How frequently does interdisciplinary research take place?	Modes of knowledge production, interdisciplinary research
What are the common research methods?	Integration of academic and professional knowledge
What skills training is there? How does it operate?	Skills, reflexivity
Who supervises the research? Within a supervisory team, what roles and responsibilities do the different members take?	Supervision, supervisory teams, role of the university, integration of academic knowledge and professional practice, research impact
What student support mechanisms are in place? Other	Support structures

than their supervisors, where can students get guidance?	
What are the learning outcomes for the programme?	Learning outcomes
What forms of assessment are there?	Assessment procedures
Who is involved in the assessment process?	Who assesses?, research impact
How will the research be used and by whom?	Research impact
Where do postdoctoral research students go?	Career progression
How is the programme likely to develop? What is driving this development?	Role of university, knowledge economy, status

The format of interviews needed to be neither unstructured nor completely structured, since the former would reduce the possibility of comparisons being drawn due to the lack of reference points and the latter approach is inconsistent with the philosophical stance of letting the participants 'tell their own story' (Flick, 2009). Being an insider to doctoral education, I was also aware that members of staff I knew well might assume some knowledge on my part and might *"assume I knew or understood certain views or events, or that events they considered everyday or mundane were not sufficiently significant to report when these might, in fact, be important data elements"* (Hewitt-Taylor, 2002, p.34). Using the same semi-structured format across all interviews helped to ensure that discussion could cover all areas. The interviewing style adopted was not tightly bound to the schedule so as to prevent conversation drifting in directions not controlled by the interviewer: the interaction between participants was to drive the interview forward (Silverman, 2006). The interview guide was seen as a starting point for discussion rather than an exhaustive list of topics to be discussed in strict sequential order but drawing together the main topics to be discussed *"to ensure that the key aspects of the programme ... being evaluated are covered"* (King and Horrocks, 2010, p.36).

3.5.3 Sampling strategy and interviewing

This section sets out the methods used for selecting participants and describes the process of interviewing. Evans and Stevenson (2010) found through a literature review of international doctoral students that within papers describing qualitative studies *"the description of the samples was rather vague"* (p.241). My aim in this section is to provide evidence to avoid this accusation for this study.

Regardless of the specific sampling strategy, the primary concern with any qualitative sampling method is that information richness replaces representativeness (Kuzel, 1999). To inform the selection of participants for the study, reference was made to the view of Silverman (2006, p.307) who states *"sampling in qualitative research is neither statistical nor purely personal, it is, or should be, theoretically grounded"*. Sampling in such a way can be referred to as purposive or theoretical with the latter selecting participants who may have information that could be used to either reinforce or contradict the theoretical positions being developed as an exploration proceeds and is closely associated with a grounded theory approach to research (Silverman, 2006). Purposive sampling is less explicitly linked with the theory generation process as proposed under the grounded theory approach, and relies on there being a clear justification as to why certain participants are selected in preference to others: *"some will be more sensible and meaningful than others"* (Silverman, 2006, p.308). Ezzy (2002, p.74) confirms that *"a purposeful sample is one that provides a clear criterion or rationale for the selection of participants"*. The justification for selection usually involves claims that the person selected has certain characteristics that make them an 'interesting case'.

I have adopted a sampling strategy that is more aligned with a purposive scheme than a theoretical one and in doing so this work has similarities with Lee (2008) who used purposive sampling in her study of supervisors' experiences of the PhD process.

My purposive sampling strategy sought to identify key people who:

- ➢ would have knowledge and experience of the areas covered by the interview guide;

- could reflect upon and articulate their perceptions;
- were ready to participate.

People who satisfied these criteria are said to be in a *"primary selection"* category and hence *"good informants"* (Flick 2009, p.123) and should be capable of offering insights into the research topic. Whilst this sampling strategy does not provide representativeness in the sense that it cannot be guaranteed that all subgroups of the population will be sufficiently represented, efforts were made to ensure that different subgroups (such as gender, ethnicity and age) are represented wherever possible whilst adhering to the criteria listed above. The critique of qualitative case studies using case studies is acknowledged (Mavin and Bryans, 2010) as are the views of Trigwell (2000) who states that sample sizes between ten and fifteen are adequate when participants are selected for variation, this approach is also promoted by (Akerlind, 2008).

I decided that participant selection should start within Newcastle Business School, primarily because here I am a true 'insider': I have a very high degree of familiarity with doctoral programmes and the associated community. All Newcastle Business School research students who were past the mid-point stage of their study were emailed (around twenty students) with brief background details to the study and asked if they would be able to participate. It should be made clear, on ethical principles, that if I had been responsible for the assessment of any work produced by doctoral students as part of my lecturer role, or had information that this might happen in the future, these specific students would have been excluded from consideration. Fifteen positive responses were received and seven were selected according to the three criteria listed above along with the wish to include a cross-section of participants so as to include those of different genders, ages and nationalities. Occasionally, this still left a pool of potential participants from which to select and then preference was given to those who had been observed to participate more freely in the doctoral community, rather than those who were more reticent to become involved in activities. I thought that doing so might yield richer information.

For the staff interviews within Newcastle Business School six senior academic staff were approached and all agreed to be interviewed. The staff were selected due to their

key roles in doctoral programmes along with meeting the criteria of *"good informants"* stated above. Although all of the staff interviews involved knowledgeable academics, a number could be thought of as *"interviews with elites"* (Kvale, 2007, p.71) due to the standing of the participants within Northumbria University.

For Schools outside Newcastle Business School, staff involved in PhD and professional doctorate programmes were sought as participants. For students, PhD students were sought but not professional doctorate students since there were none on the research phase of a professional doctorate. Outside NBS, my degree of 'insiderness' was diminished, since although still within Northumbria University, I had little detailed knowledge of the intricacies of doctoral programmes and those involved in their provision and study. Thus the application of the sampling criteria listed above was more difficult.

In SASS, the programme leader for the PhD programme was not available for interview, so staff with supervisory responsibility for PhD students were targeted. Positive replies were received from three staff (thirteen were contacted, all with at least six PhD supervisions) but only two interviews were conducted since a mutually convenient time could not be agreed for the third. A member of staff closely involved with the validation of the Doctorate in Public Administration (DPA) programme was interviewed. Fortuitously, one of the PhD supervisors who agreed to be interviewed had detailed knowledge of the DPA and furthermore was due to supervise the one student starting in September 2008. Interviews were also carried out with four PhD students, selected using a convenience sampling method: the students replied positively to a general email sent to all students asking for participants. The distinction between a convenience and purposive sampling strategy is not always well defined, as illustrated in the paper by Bruce, Stoodley and Pham (2009): these authors received eighteen positive replies to a request to students for participation and they interviewed all eighteen. These authors claim *"we were able to ensure that we had a purposive sample, broadly reflecting the diverse character of the student population"* (Bruce, Stoodley and Pham, 2009, p.206) but since no selection took place from the positive replies and they were reliant on students deciding to reply positively, it is unclear how this did not come about fortuitously. Therefore, I argue that the

description of Bruce, Stoodley and Pham (2009) aligns more closely with a convenience sampling method than a purposive one.

Returning to the selection of participants from other schools, in SAS an academic involved with the delivery of the Professional Doctorate in Biomedical Sciences (DBMS) agreed to take part. For the HCES, difficulties were experienced due to the time taken to obtain ethical clearance from the School and consequently only one interview was conducted with a member of staff here. They were connected to the Professional Doctorate in Academic Practice (DAP).

In total, twenty two interviews were carried out between May and October 2008 and Table 3.4 below gives the details of each one.

Table 3.4: Chronology of interviews

Interview number	Ref. No.	Date	School	Student details			
				Prog.	Mode of study	Age & Gender	Nationality
1	U0	9/5/08	NBS	DBA	FT then PT	33 M	Non UK
2	U1	12/5/08	NBS	PhD	PT	35 M	UK
3	U2	12/5/08	NBS	PhD	FT	28 F	UK
4	U3	12/5/08	NBS	PhD	FT	26 F	Non UK
5	U4	12/5/08	NBS	DBA	FT then PT	33 M	Non UK
6	U5	14/5/08	NBS	DBA	PT	47 M	UK
7	A1	22/5/08	NBS	Staff			
8	A2	22/5/08	SASS	Staff			
9	A3	30/5/08	NBS	Staff			
10	A8	16/6/08	SAS	Staff			
11	A4	17/6/08	NBS	Staff			
12	A10	17/6/08	NBS	Staff			
13	A14	17/6/08	SASS	Staff			

14	U6	19/6/08	NBS	DBA	PT	38 M	Non UK
15	U8	24/6/08	SASS	PhD	FT	41 F	UK
16	U10	24/6/08	SASS	PhD	PT	60 F	UK
17	U11	25/6/08	SASS	PhD	FT	31 F	UK
18	A6	26/6/08	NBS	Staff			
19	A13	26/6/08	SASS	Staff			
20	U9	27/6/08	SASS	PhD	FT	35 F	UK
21	A15	8/10/08	HCES	Staff			
22	A5	21/10/08	NBS	Staff			

For the purposes of easy reference, student interviews were referenced with a 'U' prefix and the staff interviews with 'A'. Further details relating to the participants are included as **Appendix B**. Staff were interviewed in their offices; there were no occasions when a shared office was used. For student interviews, a small seminar room in a quiet area of the Business School was booked so that interviews could take place in a neutral, comfortable, private place away from any possible interruptions.

An important consideration here is the degree to which the purposes of the research are made explicit to those participating. There are two aspects here, the first of which is whether participants should be informed that a comparison is being made between the two doctoral programmes. The second aspect is the how participants moderate their responses to align with their expectations of what I would like them to say. Both of these aspects fall under the concept of *"informant bias"* (Mercer, 2006, p.7).

On the first point, I decided not to make explicit to respondents that an aim of the research was to draw a comparison between the two programmes. At the start of each interview, a briefing was carried out to explain the broad nature of the research in addition to the covering letter sent to them (in **Appendix C**), but at no point was the comparative aspect raised. My justification was that I did not want the comparative aspect to become a dominant theme of the interviews. Rather than elicit opinions on programmes that students or staff were not involved with, I wanted to restrict their input to programmes of which they had direct experience. It was intended that any comparative discussion would emerge from the analysis method. In taking this course

of action it could be argued that I failed to give *"less than full information"* (Mercer, 2006, p.11) on my research motivations, but Silverman (2006) and Platt (1981) both argue that providing too much specific information on the research questions can be detrimental to the research process, especially when interviewing peers. On the second point, my role as a professional doctorate student might have led participants to believe that I value this programme above the PhD, and I was always conscious of trying to frame my work with regard to 'doctoral research' rather than specifying a programme. I endeavoured not to lead participants, but whether this happened in the spontaneous exchanges in the interviews is less certain. I tried to adopt a friendly, informal style of questioning and to build rapport, for example by including personal experiences where relevant to the discussion, but in doing so may have influenced the responses from participants. Passing audio recordings of the interviews to another researcher might have shed light on whether participants had been lead in their responses, but this was not done and this could therefore be argued as a limitation of this research; Mercer (2006) describes implementing such a process.

My duality of interviewer roles gave the advantage of being able to relate to each participant, whether staff or students, as a colleague or peer respectively. I felt that I moved between my roles as student and staff in the interview, not in a step-wise, dichotomous manner but in a less identifiable way: the boundaries between the roles seemed ill-defined and volatile, especially as I made comments relating to my own experiences as mentioned above. I concur with Mercer (2006) who mentions interjections of this type: *"furthering or hindering the joint construction of meaning is a moot point"* (p.9). I would add that even though my research experiences were discussed as part of some of the interviews, I tried not to introduce my own *opinions*.

The student interviews ranged between 52 and 67 minutes in duration and the staff interviews between 26 and 73 minutes. During the interviews, occasional hand-written notes on key points made by the participant were jotted down in addition to an audio recording. The written material was seen as secondary to the audio recording and provided a back-up record of the interview in case of technical difficulties with the audio recording.

The interview guide provided a number of targets for discussion rather than a rigid script, with the participants free to recount their experiences in any order they wished. Changes were made to the questions for some of the later student interviews. Specifically, discussion of the research area and research question tended to roll together on occasions, the distinction between the two being too fine in some cases. Another modification was to combine questions about motivation, enjoyment and concerns (Question 13) with that regarding changes they would suggest and endorsement of their programme (Question 15). This left one last question to address future career plans. Interviews generally closed after a discussion of their future career plans. I found that less probing was required during the staff interviews since they were better informed about the programmes and better able to articulate their perceptions. Consequently, the questions asked of staff could be closer in structure to the actual specific research questions than for the students.

Funding was available for transcription services so this was done by a third party: a short extract of a transcript from an interview with a member of staff is included as **Appendix D**. Immediately after each interview, any interesting actions, feelings or situations that occurred during the conversation were recorded in my research diary: these are the *"immediate impressions"* referred to by Kvale (2007, p.56) and were useful when read in conjunction with the transcripts to re-generate the 'feeling' of the interview.

The transcriptions provide a record of the interaction with each participant but these are *"impoverished decontextualised renderings of interview conversations"* (Kvale, 2007, p.93) since many features of the interview itself, such as the non-verbal data, were not recorded. Furthermore, the transcripts used were not verbatim transcriptions, they did not include word repetitions, stutters, mumbling, utterances such as "mmh" and accurate pause durations. The decision to exclude these was taken because verbatim transcriptions were thought to be too detailed for this study, since this work aimed to build a picture of doctoral education and therefore it was the opinions themselves that were of primary interest rather than the tone or style in which they were delivered. In addition, exploration along the lines of conversation or discourse analysis (Kvale, 2007; Rapley, 2007) was not envisaged, so a verbatim transcription seemed an unnecessary procedure and transcripts in the *"written style"* (Kvale, 2007,

p.95) were judged appropriate for the type of analysis that was planned. Therefore it is acknowledged that only a representation of the interview was used for analysis with some data being lost.

Banister *et al.* (1994, p.64) list *"over/mis-interpretation"* and *"partial interpretation"* as two threats to quality of interview data analysis. Carrying out the interviews personally, retaining the audio files for reference and employing participant validation of the transcript all helped to reduce the risk of mis-interpretation. Once a transcript was available, each audio file was compared with the transcript, and any mis-interpretations found were corrected. The language of the participant was preserved, for example grammatical errors by those for whom English is not their first language were not corrected since this allowed quicker identification of the participant by the analyst throughout the analysis process. The errors and mis-interpretations introduced through the transcription process, although not numerous, varied greatly in significance. Minor errors included transcribing '*taught* blocks' as 'talk blocks' when referring to a professional doctorate programme structure. Major errors included 'it's all good for me' instead of the actual 'it's *awkward* for me' and 'he has a mature approach' instead of 'he has a *macho* approach'. It was apparent that some of the transcribers were familiar with academic phrases such as 'viva' and 'data collection', whilst others were not, transcribing these as 'fiver' and 'debt collection' respectively. Transcripts were then returned to the participants for their validation.

3.5.4 Template analysis and NVivo

This section of the chapter explains the nature of the interview data analysis process and how this has been supported by the use of software (**NVivo**). An analysis strategy consistent with the type of data and the aims of the research was required, and I made the decision to use Nigel King's template analysis method (King, 2004). This section provides the justification for this choice of analysis method.

Coffey and Atkinson (1996) describe the use of narrative analysis to explore the lives of doctoral students and staff, and this aligns most closely with an unstructured interviewing style. The desire to form some comparison between participants according to programme and the use of a semi-structured interview style using a

thematic guide suggest that a slightly more structured form of analysis was appropriate.

Qualitative data analysis often uses *coding*, this being a mechanism for drawing together thoughts on a particular theme to aid conceptualisation of key theoretical ideas. A code can be referred to as an index, a theme or a category, depending on the philosophical viewpoint and what is trying to be achieved through the process (Gibbs, 2007, p.39). Whereas coding in quantitative work operates in a reductive way, with the aim of eventual summarising and condensing to statistics, coding in qualitative analysis adds to the data to *"enhance the data, to increase their bulk, density and complexity"* (Gibbs, 2002, p.3). However, Coffey and Atkinson (1996) are of the view that coding in qualitative work can work as a data reduction technique in certain cases, such as indexing, and in doing so reduces data to manageable proportions. *"Attaching codes as a way of identifying and reordering data"* (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996, p.29) is a key technique and these authors go on to state that in practice a combination of data reduction and data complication are often used.

Coding can be *"data-driven"* or *"concept-driven"* (Gibbs, 2007, p.44), the former having an affinity with the method of grounded theory where the phrase 'in vivo' is used to describe codes that occur in the course of interviews: the codes are constructed 'in their words' rather than constructed by the researcher (Strauss, 1987, in Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). For the work described here, in the same way that coding is used to both expand and reduce the data, *in vivo* codes and concept driven codes were used in tandem throughout the analysis process, so that all participants help to shape the findings. Whatever approach to coding is taken, an appreciation of the need to be flexible should be uppermost in the mind of the analyst. The process of coding is an iterative one and once established, codes are not absolutely rigid, but should change in response to re-reading and re-interpretation: codes are not *"set in stone"* (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996, p.32).

Thematic coding was thought to be a suitable method for exploring staff and student perceptions of their programmes. Flick (2009, p.318) states that thematic coding has been developed for studying the *"distribution of perspectives on a phenomenon or process"*, which is appropriate to the philosophy of this exploration. The particular

form of thematic coding that I adopted is Template Analysis, following the work of King (2004). King distinguishes his method from that of Flick's *"interpretative phenomenological analysis"* by the *"use of a priori codes"* and the *"balance between within and across case analysis"* (King, 2004, p.257). On the issue of pre-established codes, this is consistent with the use of some pre-established themes as set out in the interview guide which have been derived from current debates surrounding doctoral education. Regarding within and across case analysis, the distinction centres on the stage at which this occurs. Flick (2009, p.319) describes a multistage process treating each set of interview material as an individual case study and concentrating on a deep analysis of each case culminating in the generation of *"thematic domains and categories"* for the case (Flick, 2009, p.319). Only at the final step do the emergent thematic domains act as a filter for revealing similarities and differences across the cases by comparing the codes generated from each interview. In contrast, King proposes that the cross case analysis occurs earlier in the process, as a key part of developing the template used to compare and contrast different viewpoints. Template analysis *"works particularly well when the aim is to compare different groups of staff within a specific context"* (King, 2004, p.257) and again this resonates with the motivations for this research. The method falls towards the 'concept driven' end of the spectrum mentioned by Gibbs above, but this does not mean that *in vivo* codes are not used: *"the researcher will need to amend the list of codes during analysis as new ideas and new ways of categorizing are detected in the text"* (Gibbs, 2007, p.45). Ezzy is in agreement on this point:

"while the general issues that are of interest are determined prior to the analysis, the specific nature of the categories and themes to be explored are not predetermined. This means that this form of research may take the researcher into issues and problems he or she had not anticipated" (Ezzy, 2002, p.88).

When analysing the student data, templates were developed for both PhD and professional doctorate students separately since the students divide naturally into these two mutually exclusive groups. However, for the staff the categorisation into either PhD or professional doctorate was not possible since many had experience of both programmes. Specifically, nine of the staff had familiarity with both programmes and referred to both throughout the interview whilst only two staff restricted their

comments to professional doctorates. I see this as an advantage since it increases the depth of experiences and therefore the richness of the data. The method of analysis has similarities with Lee (2008) who used *"an iterative analysis of the interview scripts"* that was *"designed to look for common objects about which the interviewees had some shared perceptions* [relating to supervision]*"* (Lee, 2008, p.270). The analysis process for the student data is summarised diagrammatically in Figure 3.1.

```
                    ┌─────────────────────┐
                    │  Initial template:  │
                    │  PhD & PD students  │
                    └─────────────────────┘

        next                              next
      transcript                        transcript

   coding    ( 4 )                coding    ( 7 )

        modify                            modify
       template                          template

   ┌─────────────────┐              ┌─────────────────┐
   │   Final PD      │              │   Final PhD     │
   │ student template│              │ student template│
   └─────────────────┘              └─────────────────┘

   ┌─────────────────┐              ┌─────────────────┐
   │  Apply to all   │              │  Apply to all   │
   │   transcripts   │              │   transcripts   │
   └─────────────────┘              └─────────────────┘

   ┌─────────────────┐   Explore    ┌─────────────────┐
   │ Presentation of │ ⇐ experiences ⇒│ Presentation of │
   │    findings     │              │    findings     │
   └─────────────────┘              └─────────────────┘
```
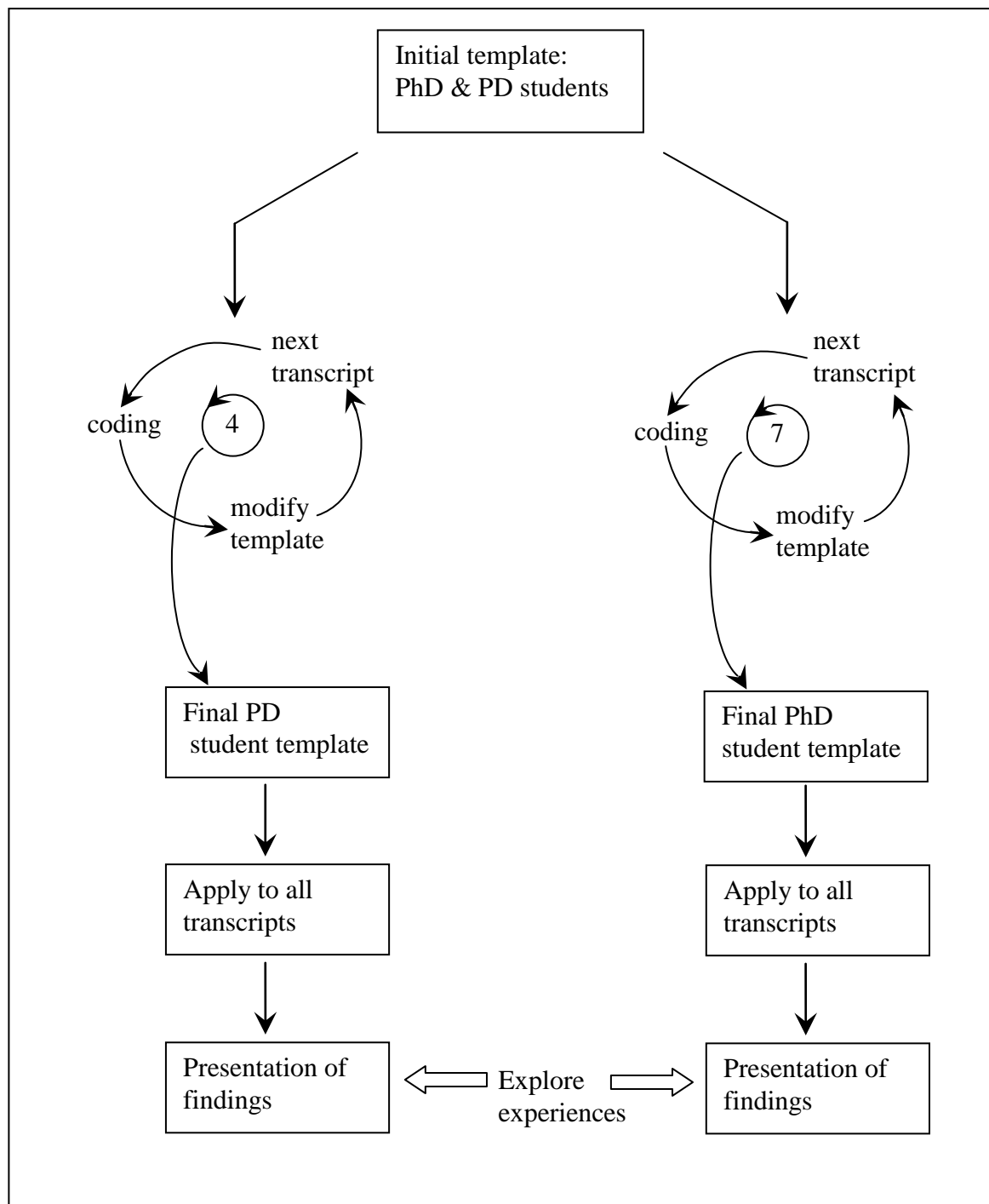
Figure 3.1: Diagrammatic representation of the student data analysis process

For the staff, analysis followed one branch of the diagram in Figure 3.1, from an initial template, through the iterative template modification process to arrive at a final staff template that was then applied to all transcripts. The initial student and staff templates were based on the interview guide are shown in Figures 3.2 and 3.3 below.
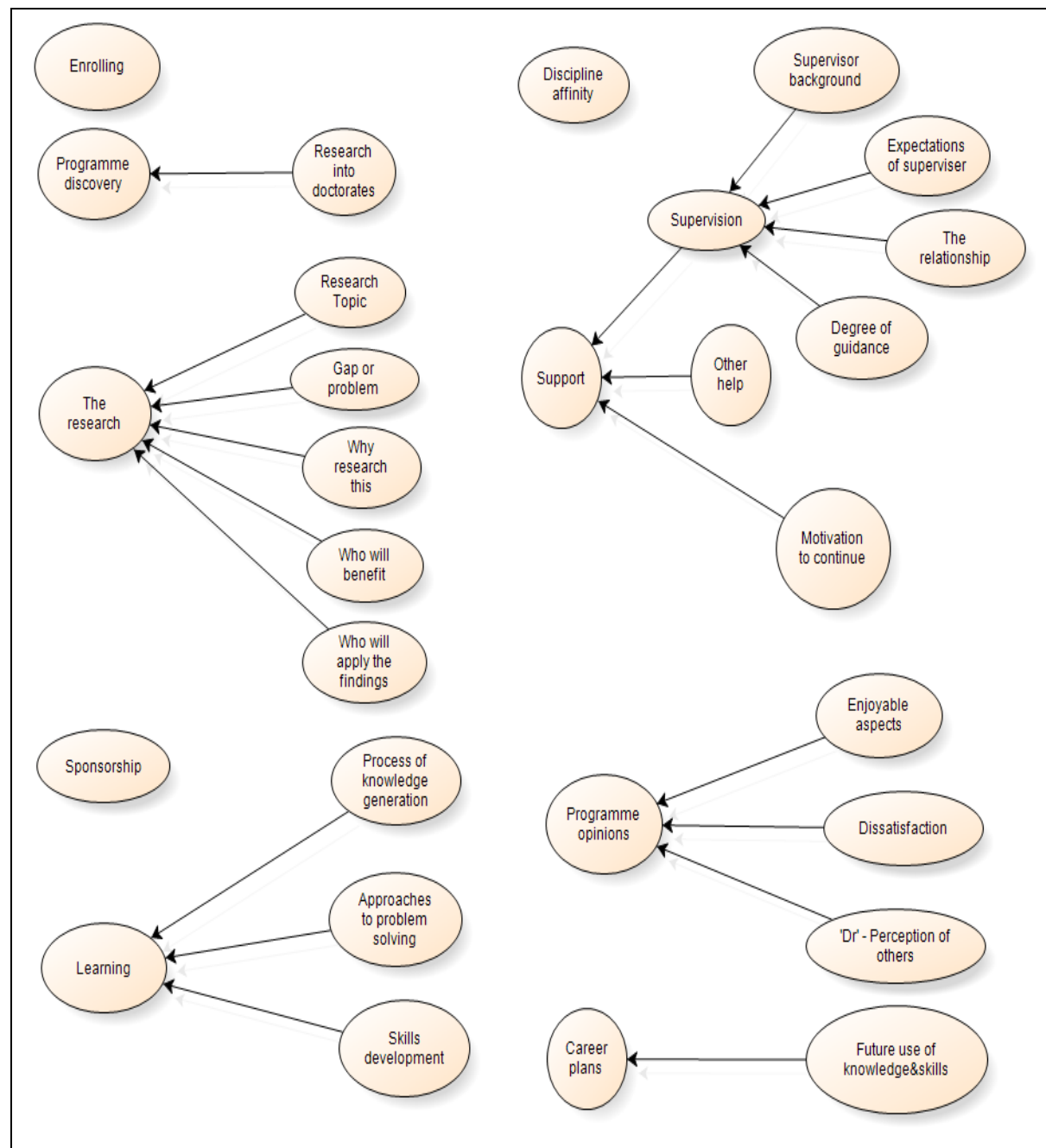
Figure 3.2: Initial template for student data
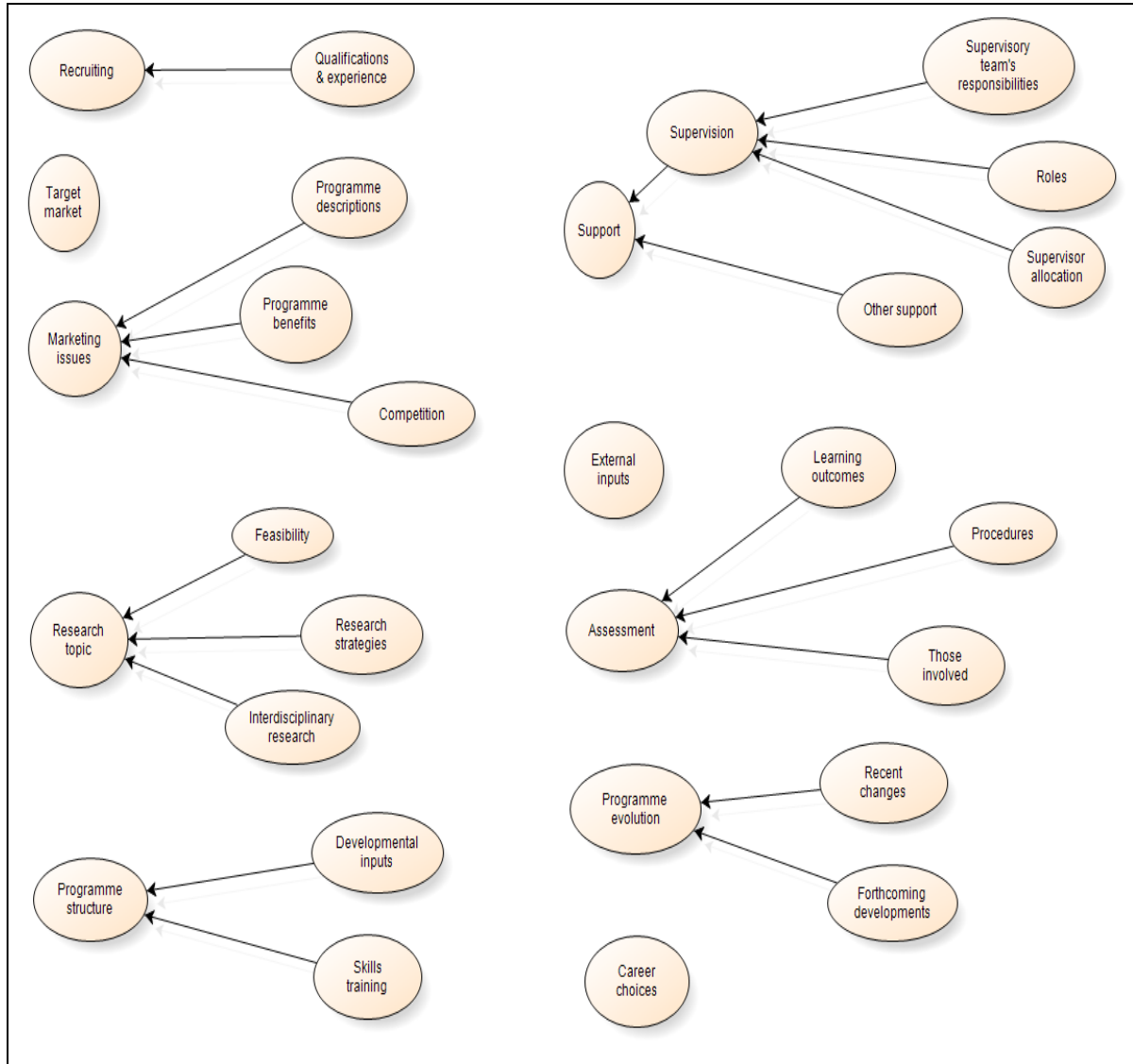
Figure 3.3: Initial template for staff data

The data analysis required all the textual data to be sifted through and this could have been done either manually or with the assistance of a software package: such software is referred to as 'Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis' (CAQDAS). Given this acronym, the overriding point to acknowledge is that no software will actually 'analyse' qualitative data (Lewins and Silver, 2007; Ezzy, 2002): the software will not synthesise conceptually or theoretically with regard to the project aims, but will *assist*

in organising and managing data in an efficient, logical, transparent and reliable way. In this work, software played an administrative role and I used it to handle and organise my data, as a precursor to the synthesis.

The primary reason for using software was volume of data (Welsh, 2002) since the total word count of the transcripts was around a quarter of a million words. A secondary reason was that transcripts in electronic form were available. Using software to store, sort, and sift through the textual data is much more convenient than working from hard copies of transcripts and King (2004, p.266) recommends using software *"in all but the smallest studies"*, where the time taken to familiarise oneself with the software may exceed the time saved through increased efficiency. The **NVivo** package (version 7) has been used for this project due to the widespread use of the software at Northumbria University resulting in training courses and support materials being readily available.

The CAQDAS user should be aware of the criticisms levelled at adopting this strategy, Bazeley (2007) lists four major issues:

1. There is a misperception that software operates a grounded theory approach, or creates its own approach to analysis;
2. Code and retrieve procedures dominate and stifle other analytic techniques;
3. Using software mechanises qualitative analysis, making it more aligned with positivist ways of researching;
4. The use of software inserts another layer between the researcher and the data, and hence distances the researcher from the data.
   (Adapted from Bazeley, 2007, p.8).

Ezzy (2002) recommends that the form of the data and the analytic strategy are both decided in advance of considering whether to use a software package, advice which I followed for this research. Identifying an analytic approach (and the underlying research philosophy) *prior* to using the software counters points 1 and 2 above. Gibbs (2007) points out that due to the increased sophistication of the CAQDAS software it is less strongly associated with any particular analytical strategy, and that a focus on

coding is appropriate since it is a central concept in many qualitative analysis strategies.

On point 3, the concern is similar to that of Ezzy (2002, p.119) who states that *"data analysis is not necessarily best achieved through the linear, predictable and clearly structured methods that CAQDAS packages perform so well"*. I took an iterative and interactive approach to analysis, with elements of theory emerging from my interpretation of the data and the drawing together of themes from the data.

For the criticism of distancing myself from the data (point 4 above), the increased ability of packages to jump between coded sections of data and the full document from which they originate means that the context is only ever a 'click' away and consequently it could be argued that the data are in fact closer, in the sense of being quicker to locate than it would be if a pile of hard-copy transcripts had to be sorted through. Furthermore, I feel that the ability to search the data quickly for particular phrases brings the data closer still.

The practical aspects of analysis will now be described with reference to the student data. The initial student template (Figure 3.2) consisted of nine main thematic codes ('nodes' in **NVivo**), some of which were subdivided to include supporting nodes ('The research' for example), arranged in a hierarchical structure. The nine main nodes – referred to as *"higher-order codes"* by King (2004, p.258) cover the broad areas of the interview guide and have varying degrees of detail, reflected by the appearance of lower-order codes that contribute to the theme under consideration. Whilst all higher order codes represent interview guide questions, the degree of detail apparent in each node reflects an initial attempt at gauging the anticipated value of each issue in addressing the aims of the research. The process of creating an initial template, and hence an initial coding scheme in **NVivo**, is referred to as *"creating a starter coding system"* by Bazeley (2007, p.32) and is consistent with the methodological decisions taken earlier.

Once the initial coding scheme had been established, PhD and professional doctorate student transcripts were analysed separately, but using the same process for each programme, which is now described. Each transcript was taken in turn and examined

for text that was thought to be associated with the nodes that comprised the initial coding scheme – this was *"topic coding"* (Richards, 2005, p.88). The order of coding of the transcripts was informed by Bazeley (2007) who suggests selecting a first transcript that *"is particularly interesting or 'rich' in its detail"* (Bazeley, 2007, p.61) so as to challenge the initial coding system. The second transcript was selected so that it *"contrasts in some important way to the first"* (Bazeley, 2007, p.61). The **NVivo** coding tools were used to assign blocks of text to the thematic nodes and coding units varied from whole paragraphs to a few words. For significant sections of text that were not encompassed by one of the existing nodes, a change to the template was required and new nodes were created at relevant points in the template, based on my judgement regarding the context of the conversation. Through the coding all of the transcripts for a programme in this way the final template emerged. At this stage it was necessary to re-code all of the transcripts with respect to the final template, with the coding of transcripts coded earlier in the process naturally requiring more updating than later ones.

This process resulted in blocks of text grouped by themes that were retrieved and exported to Microsoft Word where, theme by theme, they were re-read, re-coded if necessary and assimilated into a narrative using the retrieved material as quotations to illustrate the main points. Interpretation and reflection were the predominant processes, linkages were made between themes and questions asked of the data – software is unable to assist in this stage – which *"leads to theory 'emergence'"* (Richards, 2005, p.88).

3.6 Ethical considerations

Ethical academic exploration operates with the intention of ensuring that the work has no detrimental effects for anyone involved in the project, and that the principles of privacy and participation through informed consent are upheld. A deontological view is taken in this work (Doloriert and Sambrook, 2009) and a researcher must demonstrate *"academic integrity and honesty, and respect for other people"* (Punch, 2000, p.56).

The key ethical features of this research are:

1. Clearance from each School within Northumbria University for the research;
2. Participant informed consent procedures (cover letter and informed consent form);
3. Interviews carried out in line with Northumbria University guidelines;
4. Participant reflexivity through validation of interview transcripts.

With respect to the point 1 above, it was necessary to obtain authorisation to access each School and hence the necessary proforma was completed and submitted to the relevant committees for approval. The procedures differed significantly between Schools: some required completion of a brief form only, whereas others required a research proposal, the invitation letter and a comprehensive 'information for participants' sheet.

For point 2, each participant was sent a covering letter when they were sent the interview guide, giving some background information to the study in addition to the guarantee of anonymity. Participants signed an informed consent form before the interview started. The covering letter and informed consent form are included in **Appendix C**. The cover letter sent to staff was identical to that for the students, except the greeting 'Dear Doctoral Student' was replaced by 'Dear Colleague'.

Regarding point 3, the guidelines give detailed advice pertaining to the collection of primary data using interviews. The main points relating to information given to

participants are listed below, all of which were adhered to. Participants should be given:

- a) a description of the broad nature of the research and how the data will be used;
- b) the assurance of anonymity;
- c) the option not to answer any question(s) if they wish;
- d) no inducements or coercion other than the offer of a copy of the results;
- e) an estimate of the interview duration.

(Adapted from *"Ethics in Research and Consultancy",* Northumbria University website http://www.unn.ac.uk/central/registrar/external/Ethicpol.doc, 2007).

Items a) and e) were addressed by the cover letter and item d) was observed when setting up the interviews. At the start of the interview itself, participants were reminded of items b) and c). Permission was also requested to allow the interviewer to make notes during the interview and to produce a sound recording. It was made clear that the participant could request the suspension of both the recording and note taking at any time throughout the interview, if they so wished.

Participant reflexivity was achieved through validation of interview transcripts, which assists in minimising mis-interpretations. Each transcript was returned to the participant with an invitation for any deletions/amendments/additions to be made and eighteen replies indicated satisfaction and confirmed no changes were required. One participant made very minor changes (regarding a mis-interpretation) and three participants changed sections to a slightly greater extent. The more significant alterations were made by members of staff and involved mainly deletions. For the staff interviews, it did seem that the interviews conducted with those knew me were more open and spontaneous, this could be a manifestation of one advantage of being an insider: they may be *"a greater level of candour than would otherwise be the case"* (Mercer, 2006, p.7). Indeed, for one participant, the degree of candour was too high, and on reflection during the respondent validation stage, removed text from the transcript because the statements were 'too blunt'. This resonates with Mercer's (2006) suggestion regarding informant bias that ultimately *"pragmatism may outweigh candour"* (p.8).

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Regarding anonymity, all efforts have been made to remove identifying information from the participant list (Table 3.4) and from the transcripts.

Given my insider status the issue of power relationships should be raised since *"although power equations can be minimised, they cannot be removed"* (Hewitt-Taylor, 2002, p.35). The power differential had the potential to be greatest when interviewing doctoral students from my own School, since in my lecturer role I am responsible for assessing doctoral students (through grading research proposals, for example). Consequently, there was potential for an impact upon the sampling strategy, as discussed in section 3.3.3.

In summary, I have placed a high value on conducting an ethical exploration and I see this as one measure of research quality, which will now be discussed.

3.7 Research quality

Being able to assess the quality of any research is important, not only internally for the research itself, but especially for a DBA thesis where the value of the contribution to professional practice would be diminished if attempts had not been made to establish the trustworthiness of the research. In contrast to quantitative research, there is no universally agreed list of quality criteria that qualitative researchers can utilise (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008) and consequently trustworthiness needs to be re-framed using different concepts (Angrosini, 2007). My 'compounded insiderness' and qualitative research strategy combine to generate challenging issues here: *"[if] their research will always be coloured by their subjectivities, how can they produce 'trustworthy' research?"* (Rooney, 2005, p.6). This section attempts to address this question.

This study prioritises ethical research procedures and the concept of *"transparency"* (Johnson and Harris, in Partington, 2002, p.112) as criteria to allow a judgement of the quality of this research to be made. Transferability will also be discussed in relation to this research along with the three criterion of internal, external and pragmatic validity.

Regarding transparency, the information provided in this chapter in conjunction with the methodological discussions within the literature review provide an audit trail for the whole research process and the methods used to generate these interpretations have been detailed along with philosophical reasoning underlying this process. The justification for the philosophical and method-based decisions taken has been made explicit, for example an explanation of the sampling strategy and establishing congruence between the data analysis techniques and the research questions (Frankel, 1999). I therefore claim that this research is highly transparent.

Internal validity can be thought of as the authenticity of the work and whether the conclusions make sense to readers of the research (Angrosini, 2007). Authenticity has been enhanced by attempting to ground the analysis in the language of the participants by widespread use of direct quotations from all of the transcripts. This provides a link back to the research setting and provides supporting evidence for the conclusions that have been drawn. This has been aided by the nature of the analysis method, since a feature of template analysis is the systematic consideration of all the available data which facilitates *"contextually rich ... thick descriptions"* (Johnson and Harris, in Partington, 2002, p.112). This also affords protection against "*selective anecdotalism*" (Gibbs, 2007, p.100) which implies using a single, atypical example to make a general point and is a threat to quality. This is an important consideration given the small number of participants in this study. This research does not aim to pass judgement on whether either doctoral programme is superior, nor does it aim to gauge the quality of doctoral education at Northumbria University. I am aware of the potential for bias, particularly given my insider status, and in an attempt to guard against this I have employed a number of mechanisms in the data analysis and presentation stages. Firstly, a strength of the template analysis method is the involvement of all of the collected data. This provides a guard against the *"selection of material"* (Banister *et al.*, 1994, p.65), where certain data is selected in preference to other sections of data. The analysis involved continual reference to all of the transcripts so that material could be drawn from all sources and the derivation of claims was supported through quotations. To maximise the involvement of all of the interview data, more extensive versions of the student and staff analysis (sections 4.3 and 5.3) were created first and then condensed for presentation in this thesis. Secondly, throughout the analysis, I

kept asking myself a number of rhetorical questions, such as "what am I trying to say about doctoral study by the work that I am undertaking?" and "are my own experiences shaping the analysis and presentation?" Such questions seek to bring some awareness of how my beliefs may be affecting the research: *"what are the antenarratives that precede and influence the reported research?"* asks McKenna (2007, p.156). I followed the advice of Hewitt-Taylor (2002) who describes how *"reflexivity was achieved by abstractly hypothesising in a more detached way regarding my research questions, and how the gathered data, including my reflective accounts, gave insight into these"* (p.33). Throughout the interview analysis process, the interpretations of the data are my own and were made in the light of my own experiences, perceptions and preconceptions. In the analysis process, certain sections might have been over-emphasised whilst others might be diminished due to my latent and implicit tendencies, predispositions or preferences. This required internal validation of the analysis. The degree to which my findings these made sense to others, and were confirmable by others was explored through asking other Northumbria University academics to consider my interpretations and provide their own evaluation of my work. A number of colleagues from within Northumbria University participated in this process, some of whom had been participants and others who had not, and colleagues holding a professional doctorate or a PhD were involved. I argue that these steps give my work internal validity.

The major criterion of external validity involves returning findings from the analysed data back to each participant at the various stages of analysis for corroboration. This has not been done and could therefore be viewed as a limitation of this work and elaboration one this point will now be provided. Mercer (2006) proposes that this process *"fails to take account of the fact that the perspectives of individual informants may be ambivalent at any given moment, may change over time, and may contradict one another to such an extent that consensus is impossible"* (p.12). Silverman (2006) also has strong reservations of this criterion as a measure of validity in qualitative research. Therefore, I was wary of being drawn into a *"research process* [that] *could continue almost indefinitely, both in the sense of exchanging readings and reactions between interpreter and participants, and in the analysts shifting perceptions of their interpretations"* (Banister *et al.*, 1994, p.65).

Pragmatic validity describes the degree to which the findings are dealt with (Angrosini, 2007) and therefore has close association with the notion of implementation and impact of the research (O'Mullane, 2004). I see this as a core purpose of a professional doctorate: for the research to be valuable the findings must be judged worthy of incorporation into professional practice. I claim that this research is high in pragmatic validity and the justification of this is taken up in section 7.3 where the contribution to professional practice is presented.

A consequence of not prioritising representativeness in sampling has repercussions for the extent to which the findings from this work may be applicable outside the immediate case being studied. Transferring the findings from this work to other higher education establishments *may* be possible but universal transferability, or generalisation, is unlikely (King and Horrocks, 2010). The overriding aim in terms of relevance of the research is with respect to Northumbria University because this institution provides the support for this research. The data generated is highly case and context specific, both in the sense of being located within Northumbria University and also due to the unique nature of my dual roles within the research area. The relevance of this work is greatest within Northumbria University and outside this context, the concept of transferability may be useful, rather than that of generalisation since *"when attempts are made at generalizing the findings, this context link has to be given up"* (Flick, 2009, p.407). Those outside Northumbria University may view the findings as being relevant to their own situation, provided they are confident that an evaluation of the characteristics and culture of their own situation has shown commonalities with those at Northumbria University. Therefore, I claim that this research has the potential to be transferable.

3.8 Summary

This chapter has extended the discussion of how the research was done from ideas introduced in the literature review and has provided a justification of the methodological choices. I have proposed and justified a constructivist ontological stance coupled with an interpretivist theoretical perspective for analysis. The subjectivity of this research and my influence on the research process has been acknowledged as a central feature of this project, demonstrated through reflexivity,

with reference to frameworks of 'insider' research. The research strategy is inductive in nature, with some initial theorising helped to establish key topics for inclusion in the semi-structured interviews.

I have described how PhD and professional doctorate programmes operate within the context of Northumbria University and introduced the concept of 'compounded insiderness' to explained my position - this is a key distinguishing feature of this research. I have justified how a contribution is being made specifically to pedagogic research at the case study institution.

The data collection stage consisted of twenty two ethically conducted semi-structured interviews held with purposively selected participants in the doctoral research community at Northumbria University. The qualitative data obtained from the interview transcripts was imported into the **NVivo** CAQDAS package and the software has been used to store, organise and manipulate the data, bearing in mind the criticisms often levelled at using software to assist with qualitative data analysis. The data were analysed using a combination of concept driven and data driven coding, whilst the analysis was structured using Nigel King's template analysis method (King, 2004). Student perceptions were analysed separately within PhD and professional doctorate subgroups and then compared across the two programmes (Chapter 4), whereas the staff interview data were analysed as a whole (Chapter 5).

I argue that this research has been completed in an ethical manner and is highly transparent. The research is high in both internal and pragmatic validity and has the potential to be transferable, subject to an evaluation of the context surrounding the case to which the results of this research would be transferred.

Chapter 4
Student data analysis and findings

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to construct a picture of doctoral education at Northumbria University as perceived by those enrolled upon the PhD and professional doctorate programmes. The 'purpose and process' of these two programmes will be explored through the analysis of the eleven interview transcripts. This chapter begins with a brief description of the template development process. This is followed by the presentation of the final templates for the PhD and professional doctorate student data (section 4.2). Section 4.2.1 compares and highlights the key differences between the final templates. A detailed discussion of these key differences along with presentation of the variations between themes common to the two templates follows in section 4.3. The findings from the student data are summarised in section 4.4. Throughout this and subsequent chapters, the template themes are shown in italics.

4.2 Template development and final templates

For the student data, template development was carried out twice, once for each programme, with the PhD template being developed first. This process will now be outlined. King (2004, p.261) lists four activities relating to template revision; *"insertion, deletion, changing scope and changing higher-order classification"*. The development of the code *Progress* in the PhD template will serve to demonstrate three of these four mechanisms of template modification. Initially, there was no code to which discussion of a student's progress could be attached, thus a top level code was inserted with this name. As coding progressed, and instances of issues related to progress were noted, the code was reduced from a top level code to a lower-order code underneath *The research*, thus changing the higher-order classification. Further still in the coding process, the scope of the code was increased by adding two lower-order codes beneath *Progress* (*Rate* and *Direction*) to give a finer level of detail. Finally, another lower-order code called *Ways of working* was added alongside *Rate*

and *Direction* which was used for recording comments about how students organised their research time. With regard to code deletion, an example is the merging of codes *Who will benefit* and *Who will apply the findings* – both existed in the initial template but once analysis was underway the distinction was thought to be too fine to justify separate codes.

Once all the transcripts had been considered, and the necessary changes made to the template, the final PhD student template appeared as shown in Figure 4.1 below.
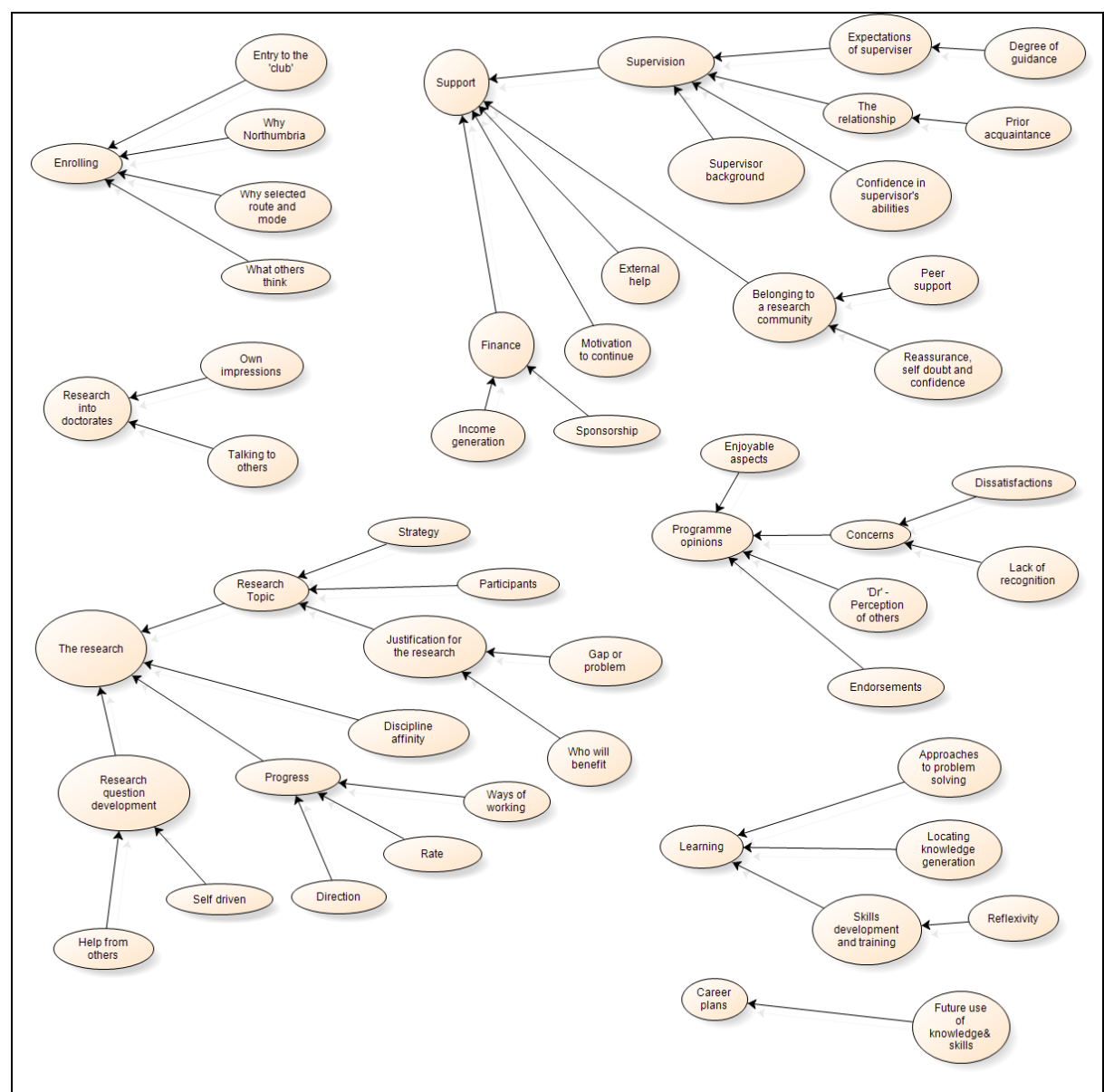
Figure 4.1: Final template for PhD students

This final template was then used as a reference in recoding all seven PhD transcripts. Due to the evolutionary nature of the final template, transcripts that had been coded earlier in the template modification process required greater recoding than those coded later, since more changes to the template had accumulated since the transcript was last coded. After all recoding had been completed a check was made on each transcript that there were no sections of text left uncoded that were relevant to the research themes (King, 2004). The same process was used to develop the final template for professional doctorate students which is shown in Figure 4.2 below.
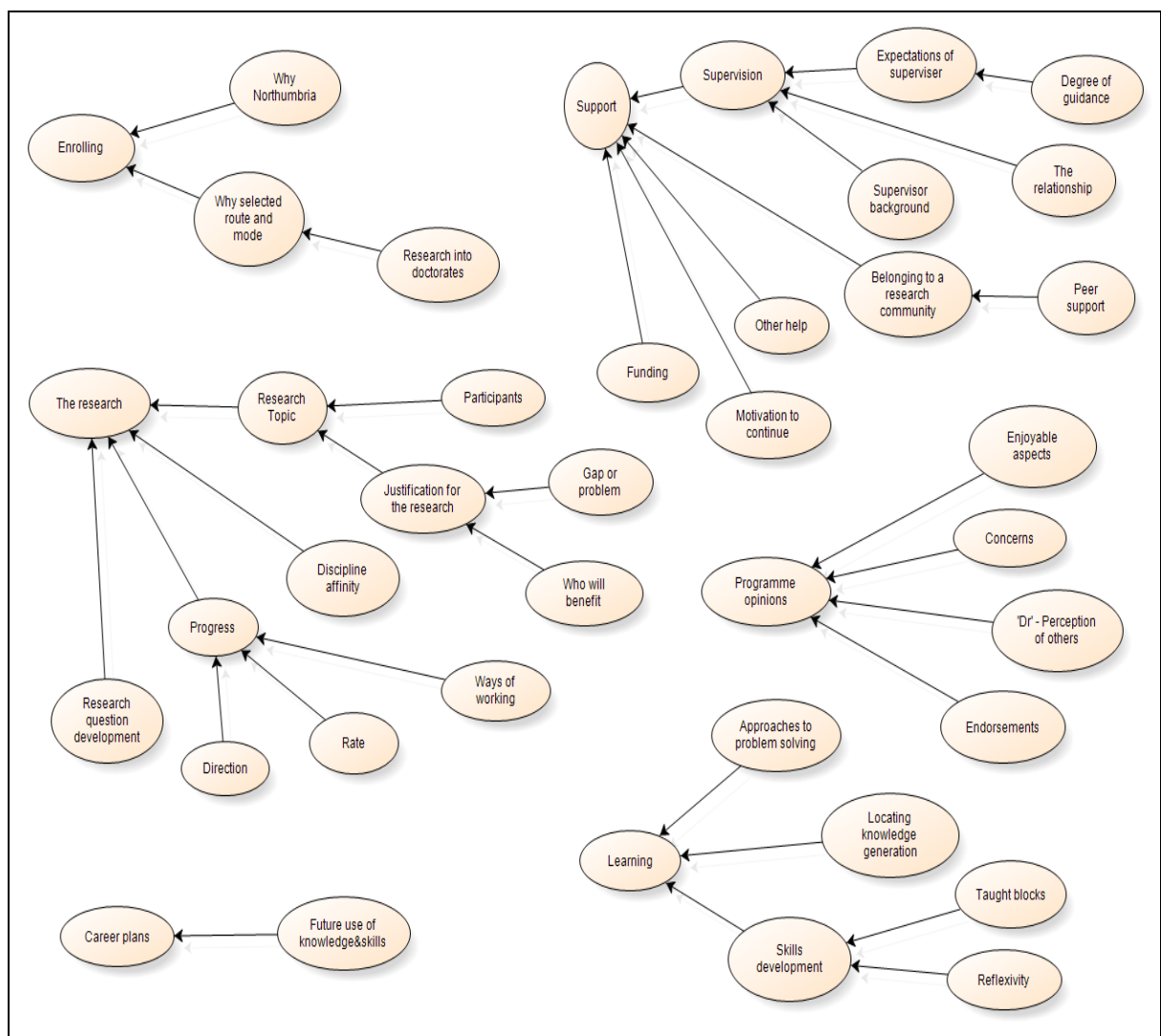
Figure 4.2: Final template for professional doctorate students

4.2.1 Comparing the PhD and professional doctorate final templates

The degree of similarity between the two final templates demonstrates the broad agreement between the two groups of students about the main themes relevant to their doctoral study, with six main themes common to both templates. A brief overview of the key differences will now be given with more detailed discussion following in section 4.3.

The main theme of *Research into doctorates* is isolated for PhD students but feeds into *Why selected programme and mode* on the professional doctorate template because it was found that professional doctorate students tend to do more research into doctoral programmes prior to enrolling than PhD students do. More importantly, the research that the professional doctorate students carry out informs their decision on which programme to choose, thus requiring the *Research into doctorates* theme to be linked rather than freestanding. The information that PhD students gather prior to enrolment comes from *talking to others* as well as their *own impressions* whereas professional doctorate students research doctoral programmes independently. PhD students see their programme providing *Entry to the 'club'* and refer to *what others think* about their studying for a doctorate, features which do not arise for professional doctorate students.

The similar structure of *The research* section in the two templates shows a high degree of overlap between the two groups for this theme. For *Research question development*, PhD students receive *Help from others* – typically the supervisory team, whereas professional doctorate students have more limited influences and greater input themselves.

The *Support* theme includes a number of key differences, one being that it is not uncommon for PhD students to have *Prior acquaintance* with members of their supervisory team and this is shown as feeding into how *The relationship* operates. Issues that are discussed by PhD students and not by professional doctorate students are the level of *Confidence in supervisor's abilities* and *Reassurance, self-doubt and confidence.* For the former issue there is a wide variation of opinions within the PhD

group of students and the latter covers both confidence in their own abilities and what exactly is required for a PhD.

The remaining three main themes show relatively few differences. PhD students discuss their *Concerns* in more depth, to the extent of requiring a *Dissatisfactions* element with one particular concern being a *Lack of recognition* as a specific subgroup of the student population. The *Career plans* section of the template is the same for both programmes, as is that for *Learning*, the only exception here is the influence of *Taught blocks* for *Skills development and training* on the professional doctorate.

The following section will discuss the findings in detail on a theme by theme basis.

4.3 Thematic comparison for student data

This section presents the detailed findings for six main themes:

> - *Research into doctorates and enrolling,* in section 4.3.1
> - *The research,* 4.3.2
> - *Support,* 4.3.3
> - *Programme opinions,* 4.3.4
> - *Learning,* 4.3.5
> - *Career plans,* 4.3.6

All of the sections 4.3.1 to 4.3.5 are discussed with reference to the supporting themes in the templates. Quotations from the participants are referenced using the code numbers shown in Table 3.4 and the discussion is structured with PhD findings preceding those from professional doctorate students.

4.3.1 *Research into doctorates and enrolling*

The reasons for enrolling on a PhD are much more varied than those for choosing a professional doctorate. Students enrol onto a PhD for the personal challenge and satisfaction: *"I enjoyed the intellectual challenge of it which I think was the thing*

probably lacking at work" (student with code of 'u10') and it can be to fulfil a latent desire for a challenge on the scale of doctoral level study. Enrolling can be triggered by a significant personal event (divorce and life-threatening illness) initiating a period of reflection and reconsideration of future options: *"I thought "no, I've had all of that, I am going to do something completely different now – I'm going to do something for me""* (u8) or the desire to enrol can build more slowly through reflection on previous academic failings. For those who already have a Master's qualification, a PhD is a natural progression and for those without, aiming for a PhD is seen as a more direct route than enrolling for a Master's programme first. A PhD increases both academic and workplace credibility and brings differentiation in a competitive job market: *"having Master's or an MBA is not enough to be taken seriously"* (u1). A PhD will boost career progression and is a passport to international work opportunities due to its widely recognised value. A PhD can provide escape from the workplace, it can be undertaken for fun or to allow enjoyment of the student lifestyle: *"I've got this love of being a student"* (u10) or can be used to justify a break from employment. Achieving a PhD will provide more than differentiation: it will bring exclusivity by gaining entry to 'the club' of PhD holders: *"there's this big mystique about a PhD ... a friend of mine keeps saying, "ooh, I couldn't do one of them""* (u8). Reasons for enrolling on a professional doctorate overlap in the areas of providing differentiation (since a Master's is no longer sufficient) and to address past academic underachievement. All other reasons for enrolling are driven by career aspirations and to pave the way for a better range of employment opportunities: *"so it's a general issue of credibility if you like, academic credibility will give you the option to try a different career if you wanted to"* (u0). A professional doctorate can be used to provide credibility as a consultant, to meet with employer expectations and to receive credit for and derive value from work already being done through their employment: *"if I was going to do research, I thought I might as well get an award out of it as well"* (u5).

A sense of loyalty to Northumbria University generated through previous experiences is the key motivation for selecting Northumbria University for students from both programmes, as one student said: *"I'm quite happy ... in terms of the quality of how are the things managed here and so on"* (u4).

The intellectual challenge of the PhD is the primary motivation that takes precedence over other reasons, such as wanting to spend some time completely removed from employment: *"I wasn't needing a professional qualification ... this is just an intellectual challenge for that"* (u10) and *"I mean, the whole point of me coming to university was I wanted to do something completely different"* (u8). Full-time PhD study is chosen to continue leading the 'student life' and part-time provides greater flexibility and the possibility to fit around other commitments. Students choose a professional doctorate to satisfy a desire to undertake practical, problem solving research rather than research for its own sake: *"you are supposed to have a professional outcome of some applicability ... the purpose of a DBA is to offer solutions on existing managing problems or something practical"* (u5). Value is generated simultaneously in academia and a professional organisation through the applied nature of the research, providing career opportunities in both: *"it also gives you an opportunity to explore your employability not only as academic but if you want to go into the industry as well"* (u0). Professional doctorates are perceived as programmes with greater structure (through the taught blocks) and better support mechanisms (cohorts of students): *"the taught aspect was quite attractive, given the situation that I had been away from academic means"* (u0) and *"I quite liked the taught aspect of the DBA. I quite like the idea that you're in a cohort of people"* (u5). Studying full-time allows maximum effort to be allocated to the research but part-time brings the advantages of allowing employment to run in parallel to help fund the study and provide easier access to the professional organisation for data collection.

Those following PhD programmes carry out limited research into what a PhD involves: *"I wasn't quite sure what it really entailed. So, I thought well having the doctor title is great, but I wasn't sure what it was all about"* (u3) and the alternative doctoral programmes: *"I didn't know that there was any other options until I started my PhD then found out more from one or two of the other students"* (u2). Securing a place on a doctoral programme can be down to luck, arising through contact with academics and perhaps through earlier studies. Indeed, much encouragement and information comes from talking with academics, the recognition given to guidance and advice from supervisors of undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes cannot be underestimated. One undergraduate supervisor *"put the little thoughts into my head"* (u2) and *"the more I found out about it the more I thought actually this*

sounds like it could be for me" (u2) whilst other academics provided encouragement *"my supervisor pushed me in this direction"* (u3), *"he said "yeah, go for it, it would be good if you get it""*(u11) and *"[the supervisor said] "you really ought to go on and do a PhD""* (u10). Once enrolled and underway, the professional doctorate programme can be discovered and for some it seems appealing: *"when I found out I thought that might be quite interesting for me as well. But, I didn't know"* (u3). The wish to develop their careers prompts students to investigate professional doctorate programmes, either through speaking to university staff or through the internet. Master's students can use their contact with the university to make enquiries.

4.3.2 *The research*

PhD students can join a research project on a topic that interests them or can self-select a research topic, and students appreciate the freedom to select their own area of study: *"I found that there was a massive amount of autonomy in it"* (u11) and *"I had a blank sheet of paper, I could go where I wanted"* (u10). Choices of topic are heavily influenced by personal interests and earlier study (either undergraduate or postgraduate): *"I wasn't going to start from scratch about something totally different"* (u10). Research participants can be colleagues or ex-colleagues or alternatively networking is used to generate participants. Data collection brings the opportunity for enjoyment, travel and the possibility of difficulties and frustrations. For professional doctorate students, the choice of research topic is directly related to their employment background. The result of their research will have an application in the workplace, but was chosen primarily for a personal interest in the subject. Contacts with organisations are important to allow access to participants; students are mindful of potential participants at the stage of deciding their research topic.

Fulfilling the requirement to 'make a contribution' dominates discussion of PhD research justification, and this is most often interpreted as addressing a 'gap in the literature'. This was mentioned by most students and even those whose main contribution was the use of novel methods felt the need to be able to claim that their work met this criterion, especially at milestones such as the MPP. Comments such as *"we obviously had to think about this in the context of the MPP"* (u10) and *"obviously I did identify a gap on my MPP"* (u11) indicate a belief that a PhD that did

not meet this criterion would not be acceptable. Hence reassurance that the work was actually meeting this criteria was welcomed *"my supervisor keeps telling me it is* [meeting this criterion]*"* (u10) and *"practitioners were saying that there was a gap so I was a bit relieved that there is a gap"* (u2) – this last comment is distinctive in combining opinion from practitioners with the notion of a gap in the academic literature. PhD students can supplement a gap in the literature and address a problem simultaneously – these are not seen as mutually exclusive targets: *"I would love to be able to bridge a little gap between the academic and the public sector"* (u9). However, conducting research that attempts to bridge this divide is not without risk and can expose the student to criticism: *"I mean I've got into a bit of a conflict with one academic at a conference a few years back on this area about criminology where he came and said "Well we're just here to produce knowledge""* (u9) and can lead to tensions with supervision staff : *"so I'm hoping a lot of this I can put into practice as it were, hence the arguments about ... academic versus practitioner kind of research and the value of it"* (u1). This conflict may be compounded further when a part-time, employed student feels under a moral obligation to their sponsor to make the research of value to them: *"I'm being fair to them and I'm trying to get something out of it for them"* (u1) especially when the student has had to argue their case to be given support to enrol on the programme: *"they all kind of dithered and you know, why do we need people with PhDs?"* (u1). Another student was under a stronger obligation to make the research of value outside the academic world, since it was only by agreeing to provide policy recommendations that access to participants was granted *"that was based on the negotiation of me providing some kind of an executive summary, see maybe how I could implement that, anti-bullying policies or maybe change it, otherwise then schools didn't want to know"* (u9).

Thus the value of PhD research can be judged in terms of personal gain, academic advancement or having an impact within a profession, or any combination of these, although there is a possibility of conflicting interests in combining academic and practitioner benefits as highlighted above. Some feel a duty to make the research of benefit to the workplace as reciprocation for co-operative behaviour through participation. One student stated emphatically that *"if I'm going to do five years of research it's going to be of value to my roots"* (u1) and as an employee of a small business they saw the work needing to have *"real value"* (u1) and *"the reader to be*

owner/managers in SMEs" (u1). Coupled with this was a dislike of purely 'academic' work – *"I don't want it to be theoretical kind of pie in the sky"* (u1). Students were encouraged by non-academics being interested in their work, and had well formulated ideas on how the research could be put to practical use *"I'm hoping to either inform the Regional Development Agencies, their tourism policies and plans"* (u2) and *"these small businesses are always struggling with everything. So they're always looking for some support which obviously I hope I can also bring a little bit to it with my findings"* (u3).

PhD research may be of benefit to those outside the university, but ensuring this happens is not a priority; students are not concerned with the extent to which such benefits actually materialise: *"I'm seeing some local authority chief executives, and if they're interested they can see it. I don't have a problem about dissemination but I'm not looking for it"* (u10). Reinforcing the idea of completing a doctorate for purely personal reasons, they added *"I'm not looking for public recognition of what I've done. I think that's where it all comes down to it"* (u10). Coming from this perspective, the student consistently underplays the wider value of the research, but is quite clear that there is potential: *"I suspect, depending on how it comes out, there might be some pressure to be published but I'm basically keeping my head down at the moment"* (u10).

Two professional doctorate students relate how their research is addressing a particular feature that they have observed in their workplace. One describes using their research to dig deeper into an area in which they are interested, namely overconfidence in decision making: *"I got looking at some what I thought was really interesting stuff about what affects people's decision making, what influences their judgment"* (u5). The research is justified as relevant to their own professional practice, in addition to having relevance outside the University, thus demonstrating how an interest in a phenomenon observed in the workplace and a curiosity to know more led to selection of the research area, whilst being able to justify the research as relevant to professional practice. The second student observed a problem in their workplace but did not have the opportunity to explore solutions whilst at work: *"you don't get that much opportunity to explore ... and your ideas are not heard"* (u0),

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arguing that the research is addressing a perceived business problem and will have the potential to be applied more widely than in their own place of business.

Using Master's level work as the foundation for their professional doctorate research means the issue of justification is perhaps less difficult, since they will have considered this in earlier work and it is only the specific extensions to the work that require a rationale. Another professional doctorate student extending their Master's level work had to justify the work to themselves through considering their career goals: *"what kind of career path do I want to follow?"* (u4).

There is a shared view with PhD students that their research is both solving a problem and addressing a gap in the literature and students see supplementing the literature as an important reason for undertaking their research. Students argue the context of their research brings originality: *"*[the research] *would address a gap in the literature because the literature is very scare in terms of credit scoring or credit Risk Management in the East, whereas there is enormous literature and enormous models and things have been done in the West"* (u0). Making an original contribution to the academic literature is seen as of lesser importance than solving a business problem by one student, whereas other students do not give relative priorities for these two aims.

There is a high level of agreement amongst the students as to the beneficiaries of their research: these are themselves, academia, and their respective professions. The students are unanimous in seeing benefits for themselves through personal development and increased employment opportunities: *"I can go into academia, I can work as a consultant, I can work in the bank"* (u0).

The application of professional doctorate research is important: *"it's not some obscure research project"* (u5) and to prove the value of the work, they explain how their work can be applied in the workplace, not just in the final stage of having a thesis, but as their work progresses *"after having collected the data and done some analysis on it, I give it back to them and say here are the results and this is what it means, this is what it could mean for your learning"* (u5). This 'intermediate application' is to be followed up by implementation of the findings from their thesis: *"one of my personal agendas is to integrate this type of work that I'm doing more*

explicitly into that part of the business group curriculum, we've got corporate aspirations and programmes being developed which will explicitly link into... outside companies" (u5). A reason for not undertaking 'intermediate application' is a fear that disclosing the work may give others an advantage: *"the thing is that the industry is such that when you are doing some specialized work you don't want other people from your area to know about that... because you might have a potential publication out of something you might find"* (u0). Another student used the promise of exclusive access to the thesis as a bargaining tool to gain access to participants: *"we had an agreement ... they give me the access to certain people, and I develop my research and later on they get the thesis"* (u4).

Current or ex-colleagues can provide a useful source of participants for PhD students: *"I have just been chatting up some of my old colleagues and getting a list of interviewees"* (u10) and for younger students without employment history a need for networking emerges to get potential participants involved, difficulties here caused a 'low point': *"I ended up with basically no participants so I had to restart contacting everyone"* (u3). Admiration for participants and their achievements is displayed by two PhD students and pleasure is derived from interaction with them. In the case of professional doctorate students, availability of access to participants was a deciding factor in the choice of final research focus: *"I've got a lot of data around me because I work in an environment where I can have access to the other people"* (u5) and ensuring that the research has some value to them is also an important consideration: *"I'm bringing the research back into the curriculum and it's the data that relates to them as well"* (u5).

Only PhD students discuss their research strategies in any depth and common research strategies such as interviewing dominate. Implementing novel research approaches can lead to difficulties; attempting participant observation and diary research within a business were not acceptable to the participants, forcing the use of interviewing, which *"is such a shame, because diaries ... would have been really nice"* (u3). The data collection phase can provide excitement and the opportunity to travel for some *"I'm doing my research in Beijing"* (u2) whilst for others it poses enormous challenges, such as described by a student researching the emotive subject of bullying (u9).

A process of 'narrowing down' is widely reported by PhD students. This takes place over a number of months, by a consideration of academic research that has already been completed, so that the work will be *"sufficiently different from what's been done already"* (u10). Instances of the research question being modified by external influences are less common, although one student recounts how anecdotal evidence from their workplace has been important and another cites an organisational strategy as helping to shape their research. Rarely does a PhD student develop their research question completely independently: *"I think I developed it on my own"* (u1), it is more common to receive help from the supervision team: *"I chatted with* [my supervisor] *... , it took up to three months, to really narrow down"* (u9). There can be input from other researchers: *"that really helped me to narrow it down"* (u2) or a greater influence from a non-academic context *"I went to see a couple of business angel networks ... just to ... focus down"* (u3). For professional doctorate students, the development of the research questions is driven mainly by the students themselves with only minor inputs from others. One lists three groups who have had some influence: *"academic supervisors, peer group, friends from the banking industry"* (u0) whilst others develop their research question independently: *"I would say I purely developed this by myself"* (u5). Other factors impacting upon the focus of the research are by studying the literature and what others have and have not done and keeping the scale of the research suitable for the resources available: *"you need a manageable project, you've got a limited timescale"* (u6).

The fear of 'falling behind' is a worry for PhD students and can lead to frustration and de-motivation: *"it was difficult. It was very frustrating. And it's just taken much longer than I thought"* (u3). Traumatic events can hamper progress, such as missing a data collection trip through being in hospital, or more everyday issues can slow progress *"sometimes I used to be in the research suite for 9 till 5 and feel like I'd done nothing"* (u2). A lower than expected rate of progress naturally has the potential to generate friction in the student/supervisor relationship. This can have major repercussions on the way the student works, for example by them supplementing their official supervision team with others. Juggling full-time employment and part-time study is an issue, especially when their work responsibilities increase unexpectedly and a full-time student looked to minimise the amount of teaching they did, to give

them the best possible chance of meeting deadlines. Similar points are raised by professional doctorate students: the rate of progress can be slowed due to specific personal difficulties or the more general problem of *"balancing conflicting demands"* (u5) as a part-time student. Fitting research around other responsibilities – *"snatching an hour or two here"* (u5) – leads to frustration and *"being part-time is very difficult"* (u6) – time management skills become fully tested: *"you have to have good time management skills; otherwise you will fail with the DBA"* (u6).

For PhD students, the questions as to who exercises control over the direction of the research seems to overlap with both the self-confidence of the student and the student/supervisor relationship. Some students see their supervisor as controlling research direction, and imagine that this is the 'correct' situation: *"I think I'm an influence ... although that might sound odd"* (u8). This displays a hesitance to accept responsibility and ownership of the work, perhaps a reluctance to challenge the perceived authority of the supervisor. Other students feel more in control, using their supervisor as 'sounding board': *"he will add some direction to it or make some suggestions towards it, but he's not one to tell you what to do"* (u11) – clearly the personal style of the supervisor influences how much personal responsibility the students feel they can take on. Other students have the self-confidence to be able to challenge their supervisor's suggestions directly and see it as their right to do so: *"I got my will and pushed in the direction which I thought it should go"* (u3). This seems to be a less common situation than unquestioning acceptance of the supervisor's suggestions. Professional doctorate students seem to take more control over the direction the research takes: the direction is defined mainly by the students themselves and the autonomy to set their own direction is appreciated: *"I have a lot freedom ...from my supervisors. Of course they give me some direction. I mean very honestly... it's not much"* (u4) and whilst they feel as though they are guiding the research themselves, the student recognises the need to confirm their ideas: *"I cross check this with my supervision team and of course with the company"* (u4). An industrial or professional influence on the direction of the research is seen as necessary by one student, in addition to comments made by the supervisory team: *"both have equal importance in my research"* (u0).

PhD Students create methods of working that aim to minimise the possibility of distractions and hence reduce the likelihood of 'falling behind' perhaps by spreading their working time between varying locations such as home, a research suite or other university facilities. Some prefer to work at home the majority of the time whilst others find too many distractions at home when compared to university facilities. Contact with other research students in a research suite is definitely a 'double-edged sword' with the benefit of the opportunity for discussion countered by distractions and lack of progress. One PhD student said *"because sometimes going into the room really benefits but sometimes it can almost be a hindrance on your research, because you try to go upstairs and work in a group of people and, you know, there can be disturbances"* (u2). The degree of autonomy to set ways of working can come as a shock to those used to a structured working day – *"I struggled with it in the beginning"* (u8) but this degree of independence and an absence of people to *"to check what you're doing"* (u8) is a widely appreciated feature of full-time study. Similarly, professional doctorate students develop ways of working that suit their personalities and also the stage at which they are working. At later stages of the research, working alone is reported: *"in the final writing up part of the research I think it is more of a solitary confinement"* (u0).

A feeling that their research draws from a number of different disciplines is held by the majority of the PhD students, and this may help to justify a novel approach and give a distinctiveness to the research: *"the way that it goes across all the fields is different, because it goes back to what you talked about sort of the niche, the distinctiveness…"* (u11). Widening a study to pull in material from other disciplines is sometimes treated with caution and trepidation, due to the rapidly increasing volume of literature to be dealt with. The range of views on discipline affinity from professional doctorate students varies from those who see their work sitting firmly within a specific discipline to those who see their work as crossing discipline boundaries: *"I would say it is cross discipline because again culture affects nearly every aspect of business"* (u4).

4.3.3 *Support*

PhD Students are well aware that the student/supervisor relationship is crucial: *"that relationship is the key relationship"* (u11), much more so than in Master's level work: *"I think back to when I did my Master's and ... I saw him once"* (u10). The type of relationship is that of 'master/pupil' (u1) or 'boss/employee' (u8) but *"what makes it different to the boss-employee relationship is that, ultimately, it's your piece of work"* (u8). Similar ages of student and supervisor can be a factor in making a good relationship but they still see elements of the hierarchical dimension mentioned above: *"I wouldn't see myself socialising with them ... there is a bit of a division there"* (u9).

An advantage of a good relationship is the security of having someone to talk to openly: *"he's there if I need him, good to talk to, we have a bit of a laugh as well"* (u11) and someone to refer to in times of crisis: *"there's only been two occasions where I've been on an almost semi-panic attack and I've called my supervisor"* (u9). This contrasts sharply with the experiences of a student who feels compelled to *"keep any problems ... away from the supervision team"* (u1) because *"if I come to them with a problem, it's a black mark on a record somewhere"* (u1). The student believes that differences of opinion early in the research process means that the supervision team *"have lost patience now"* (u1) and *"it may be that I've kind of exasperated my supervision team so early on"* (u1). Students who enjoy a good relationship with their supervisor certainly do not take this for granted: *"I've been really fortunate with my supervisors"* (u9) and *"from what students have told me about their supervisors, I consider myself very, very lucky"* (u8). A common situation arising for PhD students is to have some prior acquaintance with the principal supervisor before starting the research, which is seen as a definite advantage because *"I knew how he worked and how I worked…I knew that relationship would be fine"* (u11). Professional doctorate students report friendly, supportive and professional relationships with their supervisors, and one student puts this down to the supervisor allowing them to work in their own way *"I think my supervisor realised my style of working and we went well together"* (u4). Availability and a willingness to help are welcomed: *"when I have asked, the help's been there"* (u5) and a good relationship with a principal supervisor is enough to compensate for difficulties with a second supervisor.

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The most commonly mentioned expectation of a PhD supervisor is that they can be relied upon as a 'failsafe' mechanism, reacting against any ill conceived ideas or suggestions that the student may have: *"they keep you on the straight and narrow"* (u1) and *"obviously* [the supervisor] *would pull you up if you were going down a totally fruitcake route or you were making loads of mistakes"* (u11). Students envisage this happening all through the research: *"they should inform you on everything that should be included in the PhD, the thesis. So you know there aren't any gross errors"* (u9). Other expectations are of constructive criticism: *"where they've been critical they might provide pointers as well"* (u1), a willingness to adopt a way of working that suits the student and that supervisors are suitably qualified to supervise. The degree of guidance varies according to the self confidence of the student, which in turn often increases as research progresses. During the early stages of the research, students look for significant guidance from their supervisors, especially with issues such as narrowing the focus of the study: *"I had hoped for ... a little bit more guidance as to the focus"* (u3). As the research progresses and students develop their research skills and build their own knowledge of the research area, a growing self-confidence is displayed, and a 'transfer of ownership' from supervisor to student can occur: *"at the beginning, they were critical of the work and I'd take it ...* [now] *I'm saying "well…, that's the way it is, that's the way I see it", and I'm arguing which is what it's about because at the end of the day you've got to argue your case with your examiners"* (u1). On the same issue, the statement *"it's your PhD, you're in the driving seat"* (u1) displays a strong sense of personal responsibility for the research and a correspondingly lower expectation of supervisor guidance whilst others view the PhD process as more of a shared endeavour: *"[the supervisors said] well if I was doing it this way, I would go about it that way and I would take their advice on board"* (u9). Professional doctorate students have the same key expectations in that supervisors will point out mistakes and be flexible with their supervision style and be able to modify their supervisory behaviour so that a good working relationship can be developed: *"because I think every person ... need a different supervision."* (u4). One student has expectations of a supervisor as similar to those of a driving instructor: *"he is not going to drive the car for you, you have to drive the car the way that you feel, provided that you know the guidance all the roads in your country"* (u6) and responsibility is always with the student: *"if you make an*

accident your supervisor will not pay for it ... it will always be you responsible, they won't be responsible" (u6).

Discussion of confidence in their supervisor's abilities is a topic raised only by PhD students. Some display absolute confidence and trust in their supervisor's guidance, even when it contradicts their own instincts: *"and she keeps telling me not to* [start writing up]*, and I keep saying, "should I not be writing something by now?" – "No no, it's fine" – and I find that really quite... scary"* (u8). Students are reassured by a supervisor having a detailed knowledge of the PhD process: *"*[my supervisor is] *a very experienced supervisor ...* [and] *knows what it's all about"* (u3) and there is a perception that the ability to supervise is associated with having a doctorate. One student explained *"within my own supervision team, not one has actually got a doctorate"* (u2) and *"other doctoral students* [have] *said "are you happy about that?". In the beginning I was like "oh that's fine" ... but as time's gone on, it probably would have been beneficial if they had done it themselves"* (u2) and they concluded *"supervisors should really have gone through it themselves"* (u2). Another student had similar worries: *"people have raised eyebrows when I've said "yeah well I've got two supervisors but neither of them have been through it""* (u1). As a consequence of these doubts over the supervisors' credentials, the student felt the need to seek 'unofficial' opinions from other academics: *"I kind of say "Here, have a look at this because I don't agree with my supervisor" and, in a way it's almost going to someone who has more experience than they do"* (u1).

A well-connected, well-qualified, experienced academic with a background in the student's research area as a supervisor is perhaps the wish of every PhD researcher. A student whose supervisory team did not possess the necessary specialist knowledge reports additions to the team to address this: *"since MPP it was recommended that another person be brought in from a consumer behaviour discipline because that is where my focus is starting to go now"* (u2). The role of the second supervisor is very much an occasional supporting one rather than a guiding one: *"my principal supervisor is* [the] *greatest influence. The other* [supervisor]*... I have not seen him since my first year ... I see him in the corridor"* (u11) and another said *"I don't actually feel* [the second supervisor] *has an awful lot to add"* (u10).

For professional doctorate students, having academics with professional experience in the student's research area as principal and second supervisor would seem to be a desirable ideal situation and is reported by one student, other important features are the effect of changes in the team and how the supervision team complement each other: *"I think both together is just perfect"* (u5). Two students experienced a change of supervisor prompted by a member of staff leaving, for one it was the second supervisor and the other the principal. In the case of the former, this gave the student chance to nominate an academic who had shown some interest in their research in the past: *"he thought it might have linked back to some stuff he had done in the past"* (u5). For the latter the transition was fortuitous since the backgrounds of the supervisors coincided with a shift in emphasis of the research from the literature to the data analysis phase and had these two events not coincided then the opinion of the student could well have been less favourable.

PhD students who feel they belong to research community tend to be very proactive, being prepared to chat with people and play a role – such as student representatives – rather than being a passive bystander. One student set up their *"own little network with other PhD students who do ... related research"* (u3) and a *"leadership community of practice"* (u3) that meets on an informal basis. Building momentum and enthusiasm within a group of researchers requires significant effort, which is not always reciprocated by others. For example, another case of direct involvement was the setting up of a *"newsletter which went from about seven people down to* [one student]*" (u8).* PhD students also establish links with academic staff in addition to other students; *"they would invite me to do things and do a bit of lecturing for them and things like that"* (u10) and forge links with other academics at events such as conferences. The personal characteristics of the individual student play a major part in determining how engaged they are with the research community. One student described enrolling in online research forums to supplement the community within the university (u2), a trend that is likely to increase amongst researchers. Workspaces can have a significant impact on research communities since a change of room had *"totally destroyed that relationship ...* [interaction] *doesn't happen anymore"* (u10). One part-time PhD student experienced difficulties trying to become part of the research community with the result that *"at the moment I would say I feel less part of the community than maybe ever before"* (u1). The student attributes this both to

arrangements in the research suite and their lack of induction into the PhD process. On the former point, the student said *"although it was meant to be open access everyone had their* [own] *machines"* (u1) and that once in the room *"it was an awful experience"* (u1) and referring to the start of their programme, they said *"I didn't really get a good grounding in ... "this is the way things work" ... that's caused problems down the line"* (u1). Finding the time to participate in informal discussions regarding their research is hard to achieve for professional doctorate students and those with friends who are also researchers create a community, but through social networking rather than being research driven. Internal conferences are useful for networking (u6) and seem to be one of the few occasions when the students have chance to come together as a research community (u5, u6).

Peer support is recognised as being of enormous benefit by PhD students and those without such a support mechanism express a desire to have more: *"I think as a part timer ... I miss out on ... peer to peer discussion"* (u1) and the greatest concern for one student was *"being by myself"* (u9). However, other part-time students develop strategies to work around this *"we often try to be all in on the same day"* (u10). Personality may play a role here, since a reference to the DBA programme being one where *"you meet people; you're forced to meet people"* (u1, underlining added), indicates a natural disposition for *not* being proactive in seeking interaction with other researchers. A strong, cohesive and supportive group of researchers can be an invaluable asset providing help *"to read through things for me"* (u11) and checking specific parts of their research *"I had lots of things double checked from my colleagues in the office"* (u3). Moral support is forthcoming when progress slows: *"I think everybody gets to that stage at some point where they're having problems ... there's always somebody who's egging you further on"* (u8). The fact that peer support groups do not create themselves is acknowledged, one student displaying a strong sense of research community spirit and a responsibility to help grow the support group by welcoming new members: *"[I] still show my face and build up relationships with the other students"* (u2). Professional doctorate students have a cohort of fellow students on their research programme and this is seen as a great advantage, especially at the early stages. It is something that one student would not expect with a PhD programme: *"if I do a PhD I will perhaps want to have one-to-one contact with my supervisor. But this kind of work it gives me a great opportunity to*

meet people" (u6). Another student reflects upon how peer support, achieved through a cohort of students working together, helped motivate them: *"we've all had varying degrees of problems and issues on this ... even now, I talk to people about it* [and] *it's good, it feels like you are not alone and there's someone in the same boat"* (u5). The same student relates how the strength of the supportive peer network erodes over time and how the initial taught blocks: *"forced it to happen"* (u5) whereas in later stages *"other things tend to prevent it happening"* (u5). The student discusses creating opportunities to sustain or rebuild this support structure: *"a more formalized informal set of gatherings. What I mean is maybe three, four, five people getting together now and again and having a chat about the research ... that would be helpful"* (u5).

"This is what I find really odd about being on a PhD... you know, my supervisor goes, "oh you're doing fine, you're doing great" – well, how do we know?" (u8). This encapsulates feelings of reassurance, self-doubt and confidence that are raised by a number of students, all from PhD programmes. Some seek assurance from their supervisors, asking *""Is it the right standard?" I'm never sure, have I forgotten something?"* (u3) and even when good feedback is received from a supervisor, doubts linger: *"people assume that because they give you that sort of feedback ... that you are confident about your work, but I'm not. I'm thinking I can't do this"* (u10). To counter this, students look to expose their work to a wider audience for reassurance because they suspect a degree of 'protection' exists with their own institution: *"am I just being really sheltered and just wrapped in cotton wool? ...* [one needs] *confidence and reassurance that beyond your own institution people are acknowledging* [the research]*"* (u2).

For PhD students to receive external help with their research is not uncommon, but motivations for seeking this help differ considerably, examples are dissatisfaction with university assistance or because the expertise they require does not exist within the university. Some PhD students are very focussed on the university as the source of help and assistance and will only move outside the university once all contacts within have been exhausted. However external contacts are still generated through internal university processes such as notification of conferences and other research student events. This input may be external to the university but it is still encompassed by the wider academic community. In the case of professional doctorate students, the

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greatest reliance is on internal university support, but input from practitioners occurs in some cases and one student describes how an external practitioner has helped advance their research: *"I just recently developed a paper* [and] *he was giving some critique on it; some element was missing and so on"* (u4). Potential dangers of involving others in the research are raised by one student who suggests that a careful appraisal of the helper's personal background, ability and motivations should be made: *"you have to be very careful because with every person you ask, you get an opinion ... is it a qualified opinion or is it just something that can easily mislead you"* (u4).

The motivation to continue for PhD students is drawn from a combination of the achievement of a personal goal, the lure of career benefits, and not wanting to waste the effort expended so far. The surmounting of past research difficulties spurs others on *"I've come across so many problems and little hurdles. But I know I can somehow overcome them. It's difficult but I can"* (u3) and support from a supervisor plays a central role in building motivation to continue *"there's never been a single moment when my supervisor, especially has said "I don't think you can do this", so that's kept me going"* (u9). Non-completion of earlier studies drives one student *"a lot of the motivation when I'm having problems* [is] *to think I'm not going to let that happen again"* (u1) reinforced not by a desire to further their career but to complete the doctorate for personal reasons *"the personal goals are what I worry about"* (u1). It is internal motivation that also drives professional doctorate students, with the effort invested so far and the disappointment that would result from non-completion helping to spur them on. The career advantages brought by having a doctorate are also important reasons to continue, one student sees the advantages as better future opportunities (u6) whilst another thinks the doctorate will *"strengthen my position in the workplace and makes my job more secure"* (u5).

Key financial issues for PhD students are the payment of fees, either self funded or sponsored (or a combination of both), and the generation of additional income to provide additional support whilst studying. A freedom from constraints imposed by sponsors is mentioned by both full and part-time PhD students: *"I'm self financed, I'm not obliged to do any teaching"* (u9) said a full-time student whilst a part-time student said *"I wanted the flexibility to do it my way ... I didn't want to be tied down"*

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(u10). In contrast to the perception that having a sponsor will load the researcher with certain obligations that may damage the research process, a part-time student sponsored by their employer had no specific conditions imposed. The student saw the company benefitting through having staff members qualified to doctoral level: *"in terms of what they want out of it I think as the sort of organization it is, it is rather having people with those kind of qualifications helps them get new work, new contracts"* (u1). Some students actively seek ways to increase their income, through additional teaching (u2) or carrying out consultancy (u10), for example, whilst others would rather avoid such activities even if it means accepting a lower income. Out of the four professional doctorate students interviewed, three are completely self-funded (u0, u4 and u6) whilst the fourth is sponsored by their employer (u5). One sees the decision to be self-funded as crucially important to enable them to research a subject of their own choosing in a manner that they see fit: *"I'm self-sponsored ... that is because it's a problem if you are sponsored, they have power"* (u4) because *"the company say exactly what they expect from you and how you have to do it"* (u4). The worry this student has is of being controlled, but the one student who is sponsored in their research makes no mention of this happening in their work, indeed they describe at length the freedom they have had to decide both the research area and research strategy (u5).

4.3.4 Programme opinions

Two students are alike in that they express their enjoyment of the whole PhD process, but are dissimilar in that one recounts numerous difficulties with their research and the other does not. Other students identify specific tasks that they have found enjoyable, such as reviewing literature (u10) and interviewing (u3) whilst freedom and autonomy of both subject and ways of working are appreciated: *"I like the freedom of it"* (u8) and *"the autonomy, doing a subject I enjoy"* (u11). The general issue of personal development is important to professional doctorate students, as are specific benefits associated with the research itself, such as travel. The structure of the professional doctorate programme was commented upon favourably, students particularly liking the taught blocks, because these not only helped to generate milestones for the research but also brought the cohort together as a research group:

"I liked the taught element, I liked the phased deadlines it gave you to help you manage the workload, I liked the cohort and that atmosphere" (u5).

Training sessions for PhD students are criticised for lack of availability to part-time students (u1) and the content is questioned by others (u11, u3 and u9). Factors detrimental to the creation of a strong peer support group are also raised as concerns, for example the accommodation provided by the university. The loose structure of the PhD programme is given as a reason for both a lack of awareness of the PhD process and for creating a barrier to the formation of a cohesive support group: *"[staff should] just try to create more of a community with the students"* (u2). The difficulties of completing a doctorate by part-time study re-emerge here as a concern of the professional doctorate students. Another concern was a lack of a research group at later stages of the programme: *"once you get to the thesis stage, you lose of a bit of the cohesiveness that the group gave"* (u5). Three concerns were raised specifically about the professional doctorate programme itself. The first was the relatively short length of the MPP report when compared to the final thesis: *"the MPP should be at least 20,000 words"* (u0) and the second was the quality of the teaching for some of the taught block sessions. The third was the impact of recent changes to the DBA resulting in a shorter duration: *"this will come sooner or later, there will be people who critique and say "Hey it's not even similar standing, it's a smaller doctorate, not similar standing to a PhD" then will be the problem"* (u4).

PhD students' most vehement criticisms were regarding research student accommodation, some of the post graduate training courses and the university administration in one particular School. Dissatisfaction with the university administrative staff seems to spring from a lack of recognition of PhD students as a distinct and important subgroup of the student population with specific requirements: *"we want to be known as a particular entity and to be recognised as that because our needs are quite different"* (u11) and in terms of status, the student feels in limbo, *"we feel so isolated … we're not staff, we're not undergraduates"* (u11) and this student's impression of the administrative staff was not improved by a response given when discussing the unsatisfactory accommodation for research students at a programme committee meeting: *"one person from the administration* [said] *"oh we much prefer that you work at home, you know, it makes our lives easier""*(u11).

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When discussing what others will think of their PhD qualification, some students frame their responses with regard to views of practitioners and others with regard to family and friends. Examples of those in the former group are *"professionally I think there's better standing and better opportunities with a PhD"* (u1) and *"if I did ever do some consultancy ... it does help ... if I did have a little 'Dr' in my name"* (u3). This demonstrates the perception of value of the qualification in terms of acceptance and credibility in a professional sense. The notion of a PhD as granting 'entry to a club' re-emerges here: *"I think what will happen is the ones who have got or are doing PhDs ... there'll be a little group within a group"* (u1). Other students consider only the likely reactions of family and friends, ranging from low key to more enthusiastic. Two PhD students drew comparison between the PhD and DBA on how others understand and value programmes. On the issue of understanding, one student said: *"I don't know to what extent industry do know about what a DBA is and what in fact the difference is"* (u3) and another said *"I think people who are in the know would see a DBA maybe as a management qualification whereas a PhD is very ... open"* (u1). In terms of value, two contrasting views are given: *"the DBA people would have a little more credibility than us"* (u3) and those having a PhD may *"look down a little bit and say "well you know that's not purely research""* (u1). Professional doctorate students see building credibility and client confidence as part a career in consultancy as one advantage of having a doctoral qualification. The professional doctorate qualification itself also brings a level of expectation of behaviour *"there would be a high level of expectation in terms of future, your career progression, in terms of how you talk, how you deliver things"* (u0) and also a responsibility to maintain it *"there is this saying to get a doctorate degree might be easy but to maintain a doctorate degree might be very, very, very, very difficult"* (u0). The credibility issue is raised by another professional doctorate student: *"I think it can only strengthen that"* (u5) and the value of the applicability of the research is raised: *"it's a case of ensuring that you are not seen as being an academic divorced from the real world"* (u5) and *"If they hire somebody with DBA background it will be something valuable for the company, which is not the case with most of the PhDs. Because a lot of theories, they study...or what they're doing is not really related quite often to business"* (u4). However, there is a need for a growth in awareness of the DBA as a doctoral route: *"because the DBA...I mean of course now, we needed more*

knowledge about it" (u4) and *"I think as more time will pass more will recognise the value of the degree"* (u5).

The PhD students are unanimous in their views regarding endorsement of their programme, since all would recommend the PhD programme to others, albeit with a range of caveats. Personal characteristics are important: *"they have to be very passionate about a subject because otherwise it will just kill you, because it does take over"* (u9) and another was concerned that an older person, who is perhaps outside the 'target audience' for the PhD, would find the programme more challenging than others: *"I don't think the system is terribly good at handling elderly PhD students who actually come at it with a different motivation"* (u10).

In the same way, all four professional doctorate students would recommend the DBA programme to others, and furthermore two students already had, one said: *"well, yes I would and I have already done it actually...yes I give somebody a brochure also on the DBA in Northumbria"* (u6). Another professional doctorate student said that potential students should weigh up the benefits from undertaking the study against the significant effort and personal investment that is required: *"I think it's a really high value programme ...* [but] *you have to spend a tremendous amount of time working on it"* (u4) and *"don't underestimate how much of your time it's going to eat up"* (u5).

4.3.5 *Learning*

When faced with taking on a new research problem, most PhD students would go down the route of searching the literature in order to build up some background knowledge from which they could move forward: *"I would probably start from the point of doing a background literature search, I think that is pretty much the way I've always approached things"* (u11). A reliance on the supervisor for guidance was displayed by one student who said *"I would speak to my supervisors in the first instance or other people at the Business School"* (u2). Only one PhD student took a wider view, and explained how they begin not only with the literature but with the *"practitioner aspects of it and not just sticking with just the theory"* (u3). This student emphasised the importance of trying *"to speak to people about it"* (u3) and *"once you've got a little bit of information try to speak to someone in the field, just run some*

ideas past them" (u3). This demonstrates a more holistic approach to research, by considering external input factors in addition to academic literature. In a similar way, when approaching a problem, professional doctorate students would consult the literature first: *"that's the best way to go forward ... you can get* [an] *insight"* (u0). One student explains how they would talk through the issue with colleagues at the university and a second suggested: *"I have it as an email to my supervisor to have his answer"* (u6), perhaps demonstrating either complete faith in the supervisor's ability to help or a desire for a quick solution or both.

The distinction between 'outside university' and 'outside academia' was raised here by PhD students. Most students thought that their work progressed due to input from both within and outside the university, but still within academia. Two PhD students referred to knowledge being generated 'outside university', one in the sense that guest lectures by academics, conferences and seminars were useful (u11) and another said much the same but with the addition of an influence from industry: *"it's come from outside, you know networking, conferences, talking to people in the industry"* (u2). Students with previous or current work experience were able to use that knowledge if it was relevant to their research: *"I get a lot of influence from outside just from through my job"* (u1), though this is sometimes moderated by the supervision team: *"the supervision team ... tries to keep me back on track I guess"* (u1). Professional doctorate students describe knowledge being generated due to internal university influences on their work and also from external, professional contact. The academic contribution seems to dominate: *"a little bit of practitioners but mainly academics"* (u4) and '*mainly academic, but again I do not depend on just academic ... I have to listen to both sides"* (u6). Another said *"I can't minimise the effect of the academic because* [it] *gives you the theory to develop any practical outputs"* (u0). Links with the professions are seen as important, but play a secondary role and consist of conversations with professionals about their research: *"the industrial input is also important because it is directly linked to solving a problem of the industry"* (u0) and *"partly through discussing these ideas in sessions I run for outside managers"* (u5). Descriptions are given of how external influence is most often in the form of checking and validation as opposed to knowledge generation: *"I'm cross checking with other people, what they think and believe"* (u4).

PhD students report many opportunities for formal skills training as part of their programme, both internal training organised by the university (individually through Schools and jointly through the Graduate School) and external courses at other universities and institutions: *"you get this whole matrix of training opportunities as a PhD student and they actually work quite hard at it"* (u10). Regarding the quality of the training provision, the weight of opinion is towards dissatisfaction rather than appreciation. One recurring criticism is the focus and level of the material, it being too general and not advanced enough *"we received library training which was undergraduate library training and that wasn't directly useful"* (u11). Consequently, the matter was raised for attention *"there's a vast amount that we've asked to be changed and geared towards us"* (u11). This raises the question of the degree of awareness of the existing skills of PhD students and has links with the feeling of a lack of identity as a group. Occasionally, positive comments regarding the training sessions were made: *"networking training sessions ... were quite useful"* (u3) and *"the only really useful sessions are the ones that are geared towards your milestones"* (u11) and being able to participate in the taught blocks for the DBA programme is appreciated (u2). Informal 'on the job' personal development is also reported: *"I find I question everything now"* (u8) and students reframe their existing skills as their awareness grows: *"I've had problems with being critical on paper and it's only recently ... it's dawned on me* [that] *I do this all the time"* (u1). Professional doctorate students feel that their general transferable skills have been developed throughout their study, especially through the taught blocks. As well as generating an initial attraction to the programme (u0, u5), the taught blocks of the DBA programme structure are much appreciated as a vehicle for exposure to a wide range of research methods and skills and for generating interaction with other researchers. The use of a number of assignments at the taught stage is mentioned and it is the compulsory aspect of these that seems to be welcomed by the students, forcing exposure to techniques that they may not have used before, or may not have wanted to use and becoming familiar with a wide range of research techniques places students in a stronger position to select an appropriate approach for their own research and to appraise the work of others.

PhD students can display evidence of reflexive behaviour without necessarily recognising it as such: one said *"I've never really thought about it"* (u10) but went on

to explain *"I am interpreting what they're telling me conditioned by my background and my approach"* (u10), students seem to hold the concept of reflexivity operating in the background: *"I suppose it's always been idling away"* (u11) and *"it's something that I've heard of but it hasn't really up until this point played an important part"* (u2) and it is judged of insufficient importance to be included in their thesis: *"It's not formally or officially important"* (u3). Those that have included a discussion of reflexivity have done so briefly, *"I have touched on that in my MPP report actually – how things have changed from my IPA to my MPP. So I suppose there's a bit of that there"* (u8) or have included some thoughts from their reflective diary in their methodology chapter (u9). Amongst professional doctorate students, reflexivity can be associated with the process of learning from past mistakes: *"as a researcher have to stay open which means you have to reflect whatever you do"* (u4) and a pertinent factor here may be the strategies selected by the students for their research, since the student who had most to say regarding reflexivity was using a qualitative research strategy (u4) whereas the remainder were using quantitative methods (u0, u5 and u6).

4.3.6 *Career plans*

PhD students feel it necessary to have some ideas about their future career plans: *"the line that I used, even when I originally applied, it was suggested to me that you say that you're interested in teaching and in the academic* [career]*"* (u11), indicating that an intention to pursue an academic career is an expectation of university staff. In contrast to this 'official' response, two PhD students explain how they desire to break away from academic life, at least for a while, one wanted to *"move to a different part of the country, do some voluntary work, do something completely out of academia"* (u11) before considering returning at a later date. Another student spoke of similar plans: *"there is an attraction to do something in the line of social justice work now, which I never had before. I have recently been thinking about doing some volunteering for CAB or something like that"* (u8), showing how thoughts and experiences as part of their study had introduced possible career paths that they would not have previously considered. One student saw a lecturing career as *"the easiest choice"* (u9) but felt the academic life would be too insular for them: *"[I] like being in touch with the outside world"* (u9). Other students feel the draw of life as a lecturer and/or researcher more strongly with the chance to include their PhD research within

teaching (u2, u3). The professional doctorate student who already works as a lecturer does not express any desire to change the direction of their career after the doctorate (u5) and one other student sees lecturing as the most attractive of three options: *"I could see myself as a lecturer in the university, I could see myself as being a consultant, I could see myself going again and working in the banking environment"* (u0). Another student is adamant that they don't want an academic position, at least in the immediate future, but returning to academia is not ruled out. Consultancy is considered as a career path by other students and they see their doctoral knowledge and skills being necessary for a successful consultancy career (u4, u6), and to build credibility and respect (u0).

4.4 Summary

This chapter has explored the 'purpose and process' of doctoral programmes at Northumbria University through an analysis of the interview transcripts. It has been shown that that there is considerable overlap between the broad opinions of the students in most areas, as demonstrated through the similar final templates for the two groups of students. A comparison of the two templates has shown that the themes of *Learning* and *career plans* are such areas, with little differentiation between the students from the two programmes areas, whilst there are minor differences between the templates regarding *Programme opinions*, with PhD students voicing more concerns than professional doctorate students. The templates differ to a greater extent in the themes of *Enrolling*, *The research* and *Support*. Detailed discussion of the themes in section 4.3 has shown how these similarities and differences have emerged, some of the differences only appearing at a fine level of detail.

For *Enrolling*, it has been found that students from both programmes chose Northumbria University through loyalty to the institution, often because they had completed earlier studies there. Reasons for enrolling on a doctorate differentiate the programmes, with the greater flexibility of the PhD allowing students to enrol on them for a much wider range of reasons than professional doctorate students, who are enrolling primarily for career advancement. There is a clear difference on the amount of research into doctorates that students carry out, with professional doctorate students investigating doctoral programmes in more detail than PhD students and then using

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this to inform their choice. PhD students can sign up for their programme based on very little initial research, sometimes their interest initially is stirred by an 'invitation' from an academic. The lack of research and the 'invitation' may go some way to explaining why the PhD has an 'aura of mystery' that a professional doctorate does not; PhD students are less confident of what is required from them as they seek entry to the 'club'.

With regard to *The Research*, and specifically justification for the research, this does not differentiate between the programmes in that students claim that their research is addressing a gap in the literature with some adding that their work is attempting to solve a problem too. Other similarities with the research are that ways of working are created to suit a student's personality and the degree to which students see their work as interdisciplinary. Differences are found in the selection of research topic and development of research question, the professional doctorate students describe strong links to their employment and PhD students report more influence from the supervisory team on the direction of the research. Also, professional doctorate students place more importance of the applicability of their research, and are keen to report 'intermediate application' to add credibility to the claim that their research has a practical use. In contrast, PhD students who try to bridge the academic/practitioner spheres with their research can experience tensions with their supervisors. PhD students also place greater emphasis on research strategies and are keener to talk about the practicalities of doing the research than professional doctorate students are.

In terms of *Support*, expectations of a supervisor are similar at a broad level in that students would like a supervisor to act as a 'failsafe' against any mistakes or ill-conceived ideas and to adopt a way of working that is mutually acceptable. A difference arises in when the point of 'transfer of ownership' occurs. Some PhD students take responsibility for their research early in the programme whereas others rely heavily on the supervisory team even in later stages. Less supervisor input is mentioned by professional doctorate students, indicating a greater responsibility for their own research and therefore it could be that professional doctorate students reach this 'transfer of ownership' point earlier. Choice of research topic or greater confidence either personally or with what is required from the programme may also be factors here. Similarities between the programmes are seen in the finance and

funding arrangements, the composition and background of the supervisory team (academics) and the motivations for continuing. Also, students from both programmes recognise the value of a peer support group and whilst professional doctorate students may have an initial advantage through the accelerated formation of a peer group, the level of peer support at the later stages of the research depends more on the individual and mode of study than the programme. One clear difference is that PhD students raise the issue of their confidence in supervisor abilities and this is polarised for PhD students, with some having absolute confidence and others being critical of supervisors not possessing a PhD themselves, a criterion which students see necessary for successful supervision. Professional doctorate students did not raise this issue of the level of supervisor's qualifications. Regarding the supervisory relationship itself, it is not uncommon for PhD students to know members of their supervision team before starting their research and the hierarchical dimension seems stronger for PhD students than for professional doctorate students.

The students' overall *Programme opinions* are the same in that they are all satisfied with their chosen programme and would all recommend their programmes to others. A lack of recognition as a distinct subgroup of the student population is raised by PhD students and the provision of training programmes that are not attuned to the students' abilities is perhaps one factor which generates this view.

Learning processes are similar for students from both programmes, since the same approaches to problem solving are described – this is based on a study of literature and help from within university, including supervisors, and therefore academic based knowledge generation mechanisms dominate. Reflexivity does not play a central role in the learning process for students from either programme. Skills development is an area where differences emerge, with professional doctorate students being more satisfied with training itself and its formalised nature as part of the taught blocks.

Career plans are similar for students from both programmes, with a career in consulting or academia being the two most widely suggested intentions.

The discussion of the student opinions is extended in Chapter 6.

Chapter 5
Staff data analysis and findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents views of staff at Northumbria University on the 'purpose and process' of the PhD and professional doctorates. This view has been generated from a template analysis of eleven staff interview transcripts. In section 5.2 the final staff template is presented along with an outline of its development based on the initial template. The majority of this chapter is used to present the detailed findings of the staff views (section 5.3) which are structured around a thematic comparison between the programmes. Section 5.4 summarises the findings.

5.2 Template development and final staff template

Template development was carried out using all eleven transcripts, using the same process as for the student data previously described in Section 4.2. The final staff template is shown in Figure 5.1 below.
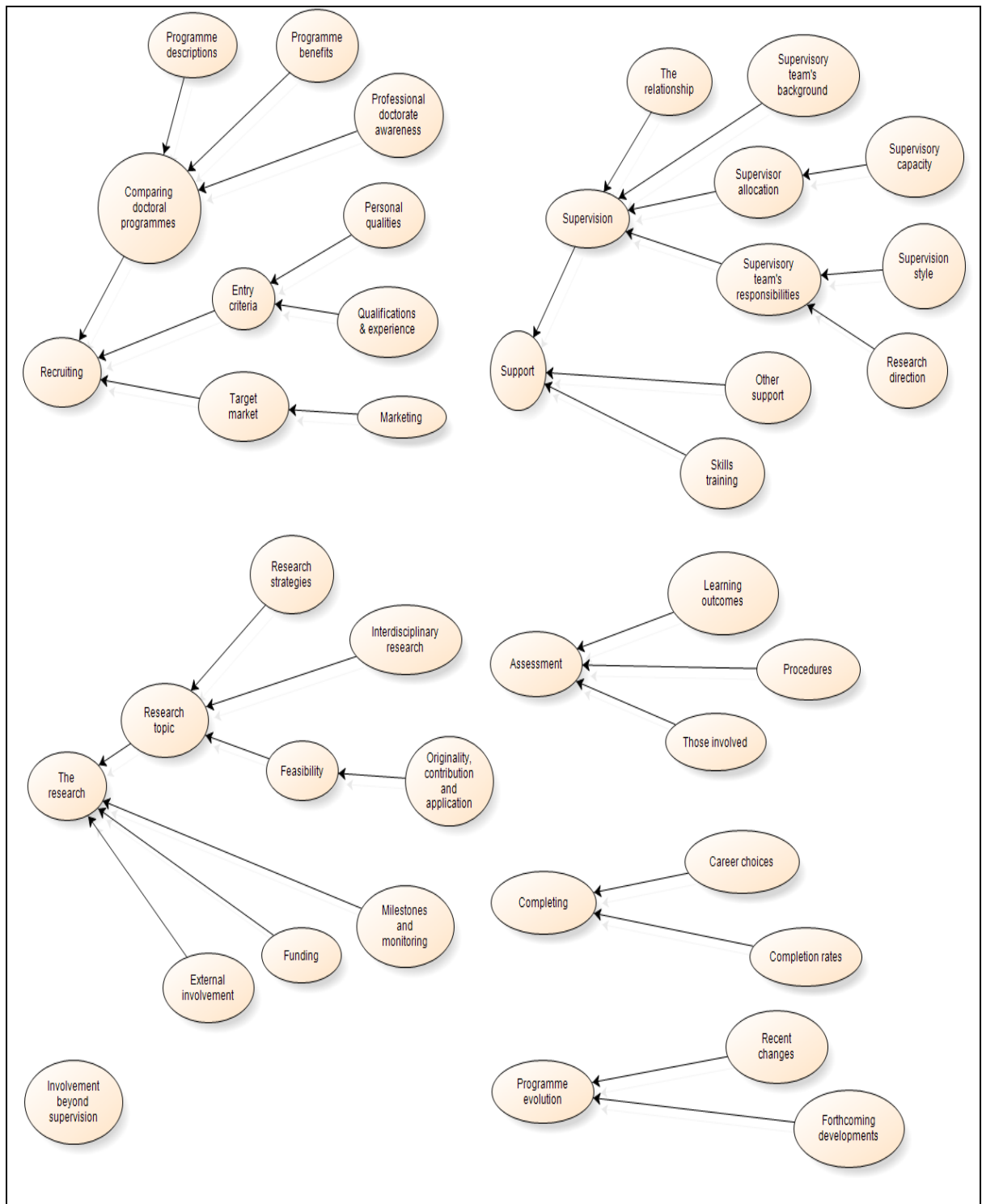
Figure 5.1: Final template for staff

The final template provides a view of the doctoral education process derived from the initial template in Figure 3.3 but modified through the analysis of the staff data. Many of the themes from the initial template remain in the final version but considerable reorganisation has taken place, together with the addition of new nodes and deletion of others.

The theme of *Recruiting* draws together discussions of the programmes themselves, the *Entry criteria* and the perceived markets for the programmes. *Professional doctorate awareness* was added to the template and the interview discussions resulted in the modification of the *Entry criteria* supporting nodes by extending *Qualifications* to include experience and introducing *Personal qualities* as an important entry criterion missing from the initial template. At the outset, it was imagined that there might have been some element of *Competition* between the programmes, but from the conversations with staff it became clear that this was not the case and therefore this was removed from the template.

The research concentrates on the research itself with *Research topic* forming the major component, focussing on how and why the student's doctoral research was done. The *Feasibility* aspect was deepened to accommodate the *Originality, contribution and application* of the research as this was an important area for discussion. Additional factors within this main theme include *Milestones and monitoring* and *Funding. External involvement* was needed in relation to *The research,* which replaced the *External inputs* in the initial template, thus providing nodes for involvement of those outside the university for this main theme in additional to *Assessment* and *Support*.

Supervision forms the most significant contribution to *Support,* with a number of nodes being created to reflect the exchanges which took place in the interviews. *Supervisory team's responsibilities* was expanded to encompass *Research direction* and *supervision style* and *The relationship* and *Supervisory team's background* were created, together these changes replaced the *Roles* node in the initial template. *Supervision allocation* was felt to be a more suitable phrase to describe the process named *Supervisor selection* in the intitial template and it was discovered that *Supervisory capacity* needed to be included. The *Skills training* node was felt to sit

more naturally in this main theme and joined *Other support* as an additional component in *Support.*

The remaining parts of the final template remain relatively unchanged from the initial version. The *After graduation* theme of the initial template was renamed *Completing* and considered *Completion rates* in addition to *Career choices* since this was an issue raised during the interviews. The *Assessment* and *Programme evolution* (originally *Programme development*) themes are the only areas that remain unchanged from the initial template; the supporting nodes were sufficient to capture the content of the interview conversations regarding these topics. The theme of *Involvement beyond supervision* plays only a minor role (evidenced by the absence of supporting nodes) and is isolated since it did not appear to have any bearing on any of the other main themes.

5.3 Thematic comparison for staff data

This section presents the detailed findings for the seven main themes and draws comparisons between the programmes in the following areas:

- ➢ *Recruiting,* in section 5.3.1
- ➢ *The research,* 5.3.2
- ➢ *Involvement beyond supervision,* 5.3.3
- ➢ *Support,* 5.3.4
- ➢ *Assessment,* 5.3.5
- ➢ *Completing,* 5.3.6
- ➢ *Programme evolution,* 5.3.7

In the same way in which student analysis was presented in section 5.3, all of the sections 5.3.1 to 5.3.7 are presented according to the supporting themes in the final template.

5.3.1 *Recruiting*

The PhD has a focus on developing new knowledge and enables student to become an expert in their research area, with the aim of *"developing new knowledge in a subject area"* (a5) through a *"specialist piece of work"* (a4). Research training is emphasised: *"it's about approaching a research job in whatever guise that may be"* (a5). The PhD is highly flexible: it can play a part in training practitioners in addition to academics and it provides a mechanism for doctoral level study for those who wish to escape from work related issues. A professional doctorate would not be capable of providing this. Even though it may be referred to as a *"purely academic piece of work"* (a4), a *"PhD could have applications too"* (a4) and this leads to a blurring of the boundaries between the PhD and a professional doctorate: *"my PhD was a very practically based PhD where I developed a framework and applied it within the context of local hospitals. So you might say it was a PhD but it could have been seen in the model of the DBA as well"* (a10). The DBA programme equips candidates with the same research skills as the PhD but employs these to address a problem relevant to business: *"through the research you will solve an organizational problem ... related to your profession"* (a5) with research training that is *"more generic and practice based"* (a6). A succinct way of distinguishing the DBA from the PhD is to say *"a PhD in effect delivers a professional researcher and a DBA should deliver a researching professional"* (a5). A fundamental question asked of DBA candidates is *"what's your contribution to practice?"* (a10) and the responses are likely to involve a description of how the research could be applied to practical effect: *"the DBA is going to take you closer to having concerns from practice, recommendations and professional development"* (a4). Coupling research training for the individual with applicability of the research also features in the promotion of the DPA: *"it's important for the individual, but it's good for the organisation ... everyone wins ... it allows the professional doctoral student to develop their own skills, but working in something that is linked to work"* (a13). The applicability of the research and hence value to the organisation helps towards legitimising doctoral study and can lessen resistance to what may be viewed as 'personal' development: *"a lot of local authority managers ... they'd be quite suspicious ... "how long is that going to take and how much is it going to cost?""* (a13). The DBMS can be thought of as a translation of the DBA to the biomedical field in the sense that the background of potential candidates

for the DBMS is such that they could be eligible for entry to the DBA too. Both professional doctorate programmes and the PhD are discussed with potential candidates, since candidates *"are still seeing themselves as scientists* [but] *they're more involved in the business aspect"* (a8). The DAP can be thought of as *"the top end of the* [CPD] *continuum"* (a15) and the ultimate exit point in *"the university's CPD programme"* (a15). Accreditation of prior learning is central to the DAP, allowing candidates to accumulate credits towards a doctorate and to bypass some of the modules on the taught stage of the programme.

The major benefit of the PhD is its wide acceptance as *"currency"* (a10) as a qualification: *"there's certainly half a dozen local authority managers that I know that have got PhDs ... I haven't met anyone at the moment in management that's got a professional doctorate"* (a13). Also, the discussions of status (to be discussed in the 'Doctoral programme comparisons' section) and flexibility (as discussed in 'PhD programme description' section) can be seen as benefits of the PhD. The DBA programme gives candidates the capability to tackle an *"in depth organizational problem"* (a5). This is not done in an insular manner, but rather by looking *"beyond their own organization"* (a5), an approach facilitated by research training. The specific focus on an issue relevant to business addresses the potential criticism of a doctorate being *"too abstract"* (a6) because candidates should be able to point to *"practical significance"* (a6). Getting value for money for an organisation is central, as the following quotation demonstrates: *"because we don't have the luxury these days of students doing these esoteric studies that have no value, why would an organisation support that? Everything has to have a return on investment and the DBA does have that"* (a6). Another significant benefit of professional doctorates is the duration, since *"having 3 years to do it* [part-time] *might be something they see as very attractive"* (a10) and *"to be able to do a doctorate in two years* [full-time] *to someone in a profession who wants to come out of working and go back in, is a massive advantage I think over a PhD"* (a3). Professional doctorates can appeal to a wider audience than the PhD due to the more integrated support structure built around the scaffolding of the taught element: *"you can take a broader spectrum of background and capacities and potentialities"* (a14). In addition to the support the structure brings, another advantage is that the work is more rigidly bound and

contained than the more flexible PhD programme, particularly when study is part-time:

"the problem with a traditional, open-ended PhD is that to any busy colleague that could easily go to the bottom of the list ... so a more traditionally structured doctorate can be more of a challenge to fit around. I think [the DBA] *makes it easier to fit, to put it in its proper place alongside other things that you're doing"* (a4).

Increased professional recognition is the main benefit proposed for the DBMS, along with the advantages and opportunities that a higher profile would bring. The strength of the DAP is its direct application to the academic profession through the linkage into the well established university APL process (a15), and the personal nature of APL systems impart great flexibility to the taught stage of the programme.

Professional doctorate awareness is increasing through more widespread provision: *"the knowledge of the DBA is much more limited outside the realms of business and management and academia, but it's gaining weight"* (a6) but the PhD is the dominant route associated with research degrees: *"if you think about research people automatically assume a PhD"* (a6). Awareness of the DBA is helped by its association with the MBA since *"[the DBA is] seen as a natural progression from an MBA to this DBA"* (a6). Even so, *"the allure of having a PhD is still there as well ... I don't think DBA is fully understood"* (a3). Whilst prospective candidates may have some idea of what is involved with a PhD, there is greater reliance on promotional material to clarify the nature of the DBA so students are able to make a choice. In the words of what a potential student might be thinking, one member of staff said:

"because I'm not really a full on academic where I'm trying to make an original contribution to theory and knowledge, I'm actually more concerned with a real problem I have in business, where I'd like to try and come up with a solution to that problem that will hopefully enhance the profession that I'm in, in terms of the similar problems that they encounter" (a6).

Whilst within academia *"the DBA is understood to be on a par"* (a3) with other doctorates, limited provision of professional doctorates is proposed as a reason why

there is a lower level of awareness of professional doctorates outside academia: *"I don't think* [the DBA is] *perceived or even known about, out there well enough yet because there are only a few places that offer it"* (a3).

Deciding which route would best suit a doctoral candidate is not a straightforward process: *"I don't see it as black and white as a PhD is for an academic and a DBA is for a practitioner"* (a5) and *"somebody can go one way or the other and there is no dividing line there"* (a10). Selection of a programme relies upon a consideration of *"individual histories, about where people have come from, their identities"* (a5) since *"different criteria impact on different individuals as to what is the right programme for them"* (a5). One staff member suggested *"if you're out there in business and you just want to do it because it's really driving you and you want to solve the problems in your organization, you want some framework, education and training then do the DBA"* (a10). One factor that does exert leverage as to which route a candidate may choose is the mode of study. The close interplay of research and the profession involved in a professional doctorate lends itself more naturally to part-time study, and within Newcastle Business School those wanting full-time study are directed towards the PhD: *"for part-time PhDs the fee income is rubbish, we don't have enough staff supervision ...* [if they want] *to do a part-time PhD, they'll have to do a DBA"* (a5) but final decisions are made on a case by case basis. Within Newcastle Business School switching from the PhD to DBA programme once study is underway is not possible (a5): it seems a 'dividing line' mentioned earlier does exist. This is most likely to be due to the fact that once the research is underway and the research topic and questions have been identified, if there is no specific reference to the application of the research then this would be difficult to include retrospectively. There is no such barrier to a DBA student transferring to a PhD. Commonalities between the programmes raised by the staff are related to the generation of applicable research and to research training but the associated support for training is different: *"[there is] far more in terms of methodology support for DBA students"* (a1). Questions of status and standards naturally surface in conversations regarding professional doctorates and there is agreement that the challenge of a professional doctorate is equal to that of a PhD, with strong feelings being evoked: *"[professional doctorates] are just as hard, in fact in many respects they're bloody harder"* (a13) and another emphasised *"it's*

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about time that we did quash any of the elitism around the professional doctorate because I think the professional doctorate is just as challenging as a PhD" (a5).

However, there is also agreement that the PhD has an elevated position in the eyes of some, particularly in academia and if an academic career is envisaged, the PhD might be preferred: *"if you want to work across the old universities and new universities, I would say go for the PhD. It has more credibility across the two"* (a10). For the DBMS, similar issues were raised: some *"see a PhD as being slightly above a professional doctorate"* (a8).

To progress straight from an undergraduate programme to a PhD is not uncommon *"they tend to be slightly younger and full-time students and have a first degree. Not very often do they have a Master's degree if they're doing a PhD"* (a5) but other staff have reservations: *"I wouldn't willingly take somebody off an undergraduate programme ... for a three-year studentship ... there is not time to develop"* (a14). A decline in the numbers of this category of student was predicted by one member of staff and they thought it more likely that doctoral students in the future would either hold a Master's qualification or have significant professional experience. One reason why a shift to selecting candidates with Master's qualifications might occur is due to better performance for this category of candidate: *"we've had an easier, more successful supervision and success at viva if the students have been with us at Master's level"* (a5). For a DBA, in addition to experience as a practitioner, *"qualifications would be MBA or Master's...we are assuming ... that you have a level of prior knowledge which will allow us to escalate you onto the advanced training"* (a5). Holding a Master's degree is expected for both DBA and DPA candidates, but not necessarily essential, since in certain circumstances candidates without one might be considered. However, this would be exceptional: *"unless they have significant professional experience with some academic background, we wouldn't normally entertain those"* (a5). For the DPA, professional experience is a non-negotiable requirement: *"we would be looking for a level of existing expertise in the workplace alongside academic ability"* (a2).

To try and generalise regarding the personal qualities a doctoral candidate should possess is difficult since *"there isn't a typical PhD student"* (a10) and there are no

differences suggested between the professional doctorate and the PhD with regard to this issue. There is agreement on desirable doctoral candidate characteristics, these being intellectual capability (a1, a4, a10), commitment (a4, a8, a14), persistence (a1, a4) and creativity (a1, a14) but there is a sense that other, less tangible qualities are required that are not easy to specify: *"I suppose I'm looking for something and it can come in a variety of forms, it can come in an interesting proposal, it can come in a first-class degree and a really good academic background, it can come in professional experience"* (a14).

Recent changes in the DBA structure now mean greater emphasis is placed on accrediting prior learning, so the DBA is positioned to attract a certain sort of person: *"there is quite a clear demarcation now, not just in terms of the entry qualification, but also in terms of the sort of person who wants to join those programmes, and the stage in their life that they want to join"* (a6). Candidates are expected to be better qualified at the beginning of their programme than a PhD student would be: *"so we're moving away now* [from the previous DBA structure], *because we are trying to get more well qualified people by giving them the exemption, so we're quite rigorous with our entry requirements"* (a6) because *"we can't afford not to have well qualified people who are up and running straight away"* (a6). It might be hoped that this strategy of enrolling better qualified students will boost retention and completion rates for the DBA and better equip them to cope with the shortened timescale of the programme. The DAP accreditation process is not without difficulties for both candidate and accreditor: *"this APEL process, it's quite a complicated process. People find it quite painful almost too, because it's not easy putting your experience on paper"* (a15).

Increasing the number of doctoral students through marketing is *"more to do with esteem* [and] *prestige"* (a6) than generating income because *"doctoral programmes are not money spinners"* (a6) meaning that marketing should therefore have a different emphasis to what might normally be expected, and should focus on attracting candidates who will enhance the reputation of the university's research community. Whilst the usual channels of communication are used to advertise the university's programmes, such as the internet (a6), international offices (a6) and general marketing (a6, a13) this is still an underdeveloped area for some: *"trying to sell* [the DPA] *to*

local authorities as a different sort of doctorate,... I'm not sure we've done enough thinking about" (a13). For professional doctorates like the DPA, marketing needs to be clear in describing the programmes effectively to maximise the chances of attracting the type of candidate with the desired characteristics: *"what we haven't done is to think about niche marketing for the DPA"* (a13). In this, the programme's specific links to professional practice could be highlighted.

The market for doctoral students is seen to be *"pretty buoyant"* (a14) due to the need for differentiation, both in the academic field and in the workplace: *"middle and senior managers are always looking to progress even further ... differentiation these days ... whether they have a doctorate"* (a6). In Newcastle Business School, increasing applications mean that recruiters are *"becoming more and more selective"* (a5) in filling the quotas set by the Research Management Team which manifests itself as being able to select those candidates whose research aligns most closely with the School's research objectives. PhD students are likely to be younger and enrolled full-time (a6) and this applies across Schools: *"the core ... is fully funded full-time studentships either internally or externally funded"* (a13) whilst part-time PhD students are *"few and far between"* (a6) and opinion varies by School on whether they make a significant contribution to income. Potential candidates for the DBA fall into three groups, the first being a *"traditional"* (a5) professional doctorate student: *"senior practising managers"* (a15) but *"that's a very hard market"* (a5). The second category is those *who have come to us to do a Master's and already have work experience"* (a5) and these candidates are imagined to make *"very good DBA students" (a5).* The third category is *"international and home academics"* (a5). This last category has tended to dominate: *"most of the students on the* [DBA] *have been academic members of staff"* (a6). It is the intention of those involved with the DPA to concentrate on the second of the groups mentioned with respect to the DBA, namely *"our Master's graduates who work within middle level management in the local public sector"* (a13). Numbers are to be kept quite low on the DPA: *"certainly it would be a fairly limited market ... we'd certainly be looking at five or six students at any one time"* (a13). The DBMS is seen to appeal to *"senior laboratory managers"* (a8) where they are *"still related to the bench"* (a8) and as such targets the first group of candidates in the DBA discussion above. The DAP is *"not just for academics"* (a15) since university staff in a support or managerial role may be eligible.

5.3.2 *The research*

There is agreement that *"the PhD is what it has always been in all the universities, it's an original contribution to knowledge"* (a4) and *"when you're a Doctor that says that actually* [this person] *has made a contribution to knowledge"* (a13). However, there are differing interpretations of all three components of the 'original contribution to knowledge' requirement and this criterion is thought to be changing over time: *"this idea of original contribution of knowledge used to be a much stronger thing,* [now] *it is a competent piece of work, well executed with some theorisation"* (a14). One opinion is that *"the criteria of what is originality is becoming less acute"* (a14) and this could be a perception based upon seeing an acceptance of a broader range of mechanisms for generating originality. This shift in attitudes means that the PhD is *"a slightly different animal now, without being disrespectful and without saying it's lesser"* (a14). Prioritising theoretical knowledge is referred to: *"PhD students generally speaking do something fairly theoretical"* (a10) indicating a focus on the academic environment rather than any direct applicability. Within the 'original contribution to knowledge' criterion, some staff substitute 'theory' for 'knowledge' to underline the importance of the former: *"I think in the PhD in particular* [should] *generate some sort of contribution to theory"* (a10) and in the purest form of theoretical development *"you are creating a substantially new theoretical framework ... develop a new theoretical position"* (a1), which is seen as beyond the capabilities of most students and consequently the contributions take different forms: *"... you might be characterizing limiting factors ... the range of applicability of the particular theory"* (a1) or *"replicating some western studies in a non-western context"* (a1). The academic importance is seen to be paramount: *"to be awarded a traditional PhD from Northumbria, the students will have to do more theoretical, conceptual work"* (a13) but this does not preclude PhD work from having an application outside academia; the perception is that this is a spin-off, supplementary feature rather than the prime motivation for the study: *"with the PhD there may be that element of practical focus"* (a6) and *"*[they may] *want to go out there and generate consultancy with it"* (a10). There is no requirement to make explicit the contribution to professional practice: *"You don't often see a PhD thesis with a chapter on contribution to professional practice, it might be a by-product ... but* [with the DBA]

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it's something that we try to pinpoint" (a6). Difficulties arise if the student is unaware of the balance between theory and practice that a supervisor expects:

" some PhD students ... all they want to do is contribution to practice... and I've had to push them onto contribution to theory and vice versa, I've had DBA students who want to do contribution to theory and I've had to push them to the contribution to practice" (a5).

Professional doctorates exploit the multiple interpretations of the PhD requirement of an 'original contribution to knowledge' by establishing criteria relevant to a professionally based research project whilst still being justifiable in terms of this definition. An example is regarding knowledge; it can be either academic or professional: *"knowledge I think is a much more flexible definition"* (a13). The context of application of the professional doctorate provides a justification for both 'originality' and 'contribution', as opposed to the knowledge itself: *"they are doing something that has been done before, but in a different context in an organisation, in a professional practice so there's an originality that comes through that, rather than the development of a theoretical model, that they might do in a PhD"* (a6) and an example might be the use of a novel method to collect data. The 'contribution' can also be derived from the organisational context: *"*[the student] *had come up with a framework of implementing an off-shoring within the pharmaceuticals industry .... there are generic frameworks but this one was contextualized and that's where his contribution was"* (a10). The applicability of the research to practitioners is seen as where the emphasis should be with a professional doctorate, the generation of academic theory is moved to a subsidiary, supporting role: *"the contribution* [is] *more in the application of knowledge rather than the generation of theory"* (a10) and *"you should take a body of knowledge that perhaps hasn't been assimilated before and put it to a new practical use ... it's a new practical use which is of most importance in a professional doctorate"* (a3). In order to be able to achieve a professional contribution, the purpose of the research, as specified by the research aims, should be grounded in a profession: *"the research aims are driven by a real research problem, something that is tangible"* (a6).

The inclusion of theory in a professional doctorate is agreed, a DBA makes *"a theoretically important contribution to practice"* (a1) and *"obviously you have to develop some sort of theoretical framework ... [a] critique of the literature"* (a10). Views are more varied on the issue of the development of theory within a professional doctorate, and in particular whether there is the need to claim a 'theoretical contribution' as there is with the PhD. Some think a theoretical contribution should be made, but not at the same scale as a PhD, and very much in a secondary role to the principal aim of contributing to professional practice: *"[in the DPA] I wouldn't be looking for some sort of incredibly detailed theoretical, conceptual discussion"* (a13). The relative importance of the practical and theoretical contributions is given in the case of the DBA: *"you will solve an organizational problem ... and by solving that problem you will make a contribution to practice and you will make a less of a contribution to theory"* (a5) and *"both need to be in there but obviously the practice is the majority contribution"* (a5). For the DPA the opinion is similar: *"it's a question of balance ... [the PhD] would be much more about making a contribution to how we understand ... the DPA would include some of that, but would also include a more flexible notion about knowledge, about process, about methodology"* (a13). Some see the theoretical contribution as necessary, even if the contribution is small: *"even if [for the DPA] it's only a tiny bit of original knowledge"* (a2), others see it as desirable but not essential: *"if [a DBA] results in a contribution to theory, absolutely great, but it doesn't require that"* (a1) and *"if you contribute to a knowledge gap then even better"* (a3). With the issue of originality, contribution and applicability, *"there is never any particularly neat and tidy distinction between types of doctorate"* (a13) and it centres on the chosen interpretation of the 'original contribution to knowledge' criterion and the justification of meeting this interpretation for the particular type of doctorate under consideration.

Many issues relating to the selection of feasible research projects are common to both doctoral routes, such as establishing a suitable degree of focus so that the project is manageable given the resources available: *"scale, scope and how many key concepts they include in the question"* (a5). Further importance of the focus is given:

"To gain a doctorate focus is key to everything ...research topics that aren't focused usually have much less chance of success ... almost without exception, every PhD or DBA that I've been involved with could be about four or five PhDs or DBAs" (a6).

In more general terms, the research *"has got to be something do-able that there is a prospect of coming up with an answer for and not just a good idea"* (a4) and developing a feasible research project is as much about eliminating the infeasible aspects of a proposal to leave the core of a possible research project:

"Some are too broad. Some ask questions that have already been decisively resolved. Some are confused. Some are internally contradictory. Some are impossible due to issues of access. ... if you avoided those problems, then you've got something which is possible" (a1).

An issue where professional doctorate students might be at a disadvantage is raised by a member of staff. This relates to the timeliness of any recommendations developed within a professional doctorate study, since with

"fast-moving goods you've got fast-moving issues as well ... maybe the things that were of importance professionally when you started might not be by the time you finish. I think the shelf life of a professional issue is probably shorter than the shelf life of an academic research issue" (a3).

There is little discrimination between the doctoral programmes with respect to research strategy, with *"interviews, survey research and observation"* (a6) being popular research methods irrespective of programme. One member of staff felt that the shorter timescale of the DBA meant that 'theory testing' research strategies were selected in preference to 'theory building' approaches: *"rather than the development of a theoretical model, that they might do in a PhD ... they don't have the time to do that, they are always drawing on existing frameworks"* (a6). Another DBA timescale related issue is the need for a student to identify a method of investigation that *"will fit* [with their] *day to day work ... you've actually got to align your research with how you operate during the day and whether you can actually get some extra value, synergy"* (a10) otherwise the demands of full-time work and part-time study may be

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more likely to overwhelm the student. If a distinction were to be drawn between the research strategies for the programmes, then it could be *"often the DBA is based on a single case organisation, whereas PhD is often doing surveys across various organisations ... it has that wider remit"* (a6) and ease of access, value to the organisation and the reciprocal nature of research are given as reasons for this. By limiting the applicability of the research to their own organisation, a DBA student can focus the value of the research directly upon the organisation as a reward for their participation.

Whether or not a research project draws on different disciplines can be influenced by factors such as research area, research questions, supervisory input and resources, which in turn may depend upon the programme but *"there's no differentiation between the professional doctorate and PhD in that respect"* (a5). Ranging across different areas is to be expected because even though *"any doctoral study is a very detailed study of a fairly narrow area"* (a6) there are occasions when *"you have to overlap in business and management with various functional areas"* (a6) and *"all of my* [students'] *topics have a broad approach ... they are not precious about discipline"* (a4). Combining disciplines in a novel way and researching at the intersection of these disciplines can help to justify the research contribution *"it's actually at the interface between the IT and ... culture ... that's where* [the student's] *contribution will be"* (a10). However, potential dangers of such work should be acknowledged: *"I think it's really quite important ... to make sure that the coherence is there"* (a10). Two opinions illustrate the difficulties associated with interdisciplinary research, in particular how it may be seen as desirable for a professional doctorate but challenging to achieve in practice. Arguing the case for interdisciplinary research, one member of staff said: *"I would say that interdisciplinarity is better encapsulated within a professional doctorate than a PhD"* (a3) whilst a second thought that *"[DBA research] tends not to be so multidisciplinary as some of the PhD topics can be"* (a6).

Some staff are constrained by School policy to supervise doctorates only if the research project *"fits with our* [Academic Development Plan] *... is it one that fits with our interests?"* (a4) since the School does not have *"an open, come and do what you want [policy]"* (a4). Ultimately the personal qualities of the researcher are more

important than the choice of research topic: *"I think if somebody has the capacity, then we can turn most topics around"* (a14). Practical considerations such as access to participants can moderate the ambitions of students when designing their project: *"you have to look realistically at a project and for all it might be fantastic and interesting ... people end up doing very bland ones because they could get access and it's not a controversial methodology"* (a10) – 'playing safe' is more common than taking risks – *"there are not many people that are doing really high risk PhDs"* (a10). It is to be expected that PhD projects addressing issues that have developed through joint funding with an organisation will overlap with professional doctorates. An example is the involvement of local councils sponsoring PhD students in SASS: *"which means that in many ways ... some of that was like professional doctorate, because they work for the council half* [of the] *time, and then the other half of their time they develop their PhD on their work at the council"* (a13). Even when part-time students are not sponsored, their research can be relevant to their profession and hence could be seen as being like a professional doctorate in this respect: *"the* [project] *about Local Government ... it's about the empowerment of managers. So again it's an applied one but it's a PhD not a DBA"* (a4). For a professional doctorate, it is a case of *"having a good appreciation of what the industry needs to know in terms of professional practice"* (a3) in addition to designing a project around their professional practice, so that synergy between research and professional work is achieved. Such ideas are clearly demonstrated with a DBMS research topic, where one student is *"in charge of the whole project ... for development of colon cancer screening programmes ... they already had things that they were doing, and it's this thing about getting recognition for things that they are doing"* (a8).

Recently, procedures that monitor students' progress have been overhauled and are now being more carefully managed and administered: *" we've looked at support mechanisms, we've looked at training of supervisors and we've looked at deadlines and we've tightened all that up to see if we can get better support mechanisms for people actually doing what they should be doing"* (a2) because *"otherwise you can get these problems of isolation and non communication and that's what kills a PhD student"* (a13).

Involving professionals in the MPP panel for a DBA *"might be a good idea, because it's then not as fatal for the student ... [and it's not as] onerous for someone who is in industry"* (a3) and *"the MPP is their first exposure to a panel like that and to have someone from industry as well will be quite reassuring for them as well"* (a3).

When discussing funding *"people being sponsored by their employers are more interested in DBA"* (a4) but there has been *"mixed success in terms of attracting sponsorship for DBA"* (a6) and for the DBMS *"two [out of four] are paying their own fees"* (a8). In the case of PhD students, funding by a private company can cause tensions: *"we've had PhDs sponsored by organizations so automatically the student's going off to practice when actually it should be theory"* (a5). Not only can the research itself be affected but the circumstances under which the research is carried out can also be influenced: *"[the sponsoring organisation] see this person as their own and they want to be as involved, if not more, than the academic probably does"* (a3) because *"effectively they are investing in training for a future employee"* (a3).

External involvement in professional doctorate programmes comes mainly in the form of guest lectures from external academics rather than input from practitioners although interaction with externals is seen as important for both programmes: *"one of my aims was to get as many external people ... as I possibly could ... having that flow of external, importing and exporting is very important because we don't have enough knowledge ourselves"* (a5). Establishing and maintaining external involvement is challenging for the programme management teams: *"we did try that with the Management Directors and Chief Execs and that was less successful"* (a5) because *"you can't bring in practitioners to address each of their needs"* (a5). Evolution of the DBA structure leading to a Master's as a prerequisite means that *"we don't actually need those professionals coming in and delivering"* (a5) demonstrating an expectation that students will gain insights into specific industry related knowledge and experiences of professionals at earlier stages of their studies. Similar efforts are made with respect to the Master's programmes that are seen as a feeder route to the DPA.

5.3.3 *Involvement beyond supervision*

Staff involvement beyond supervision is wide and varied. It includes teaching on the taught blocks of the DBA (a3 and a10), examining (a3, a13 and a14 for the PhD and a5 and a10 for the DBA), programme management (a4, a5 and a6 for DBA and PhD, a13 for DPA) and staff training (a4).

5.3.4 *Support*

The changing nature of the relationship is mentioned by a number of staff, with the degree of guidance being inversely proportional to the length of time the student has been enrolled: *"it's more directed at the start, far less at the end"* (a1) and *"ultimately a student ... should very quickly become a specialist and move away in terms of knowledge from the supervisors and the supervisor's role is mostly about process and method"* (a3). For a member of staff who is assigned to a supervisory team once the research is underway, some of the opportunity to influence the student is lost and input is diminished: *"if I had been with students from day one then maybe I would be influencing them in a particular way. At this point in time I'm having no real influence"* (a10). Regardless of the fact that the degree of guidance changes, the student should always be taking the leading role: *"if the supervisor, even at the initial stage, is doing most of the talking, something's gone wrong"* (a1).

The composition of the supervisory team should be tailored to each particular student and a judgement must be made regarding the personal characteristics of the student, their research area and the degree of support required: *"some doctoral students could fly with one supervisor ... and there are some who you could put six people on the team and it still wouldn't make a difference"* (a5). A student's research area specifies the expertise required for supervision and hence drives the decision of who to include in the team. When a principal supervisor has complete familiarity with the subject, input from the second supervisor may be reduced: *"sometimes it's just me working with a student, that's usually when I know the subject"* (a14). If the expertise required is not available in a particular School, assistance will be sought internally initially and failing that a paid external advisor could be used, for example a NHS professional (a2). For a PhD student it is likely that there will be two supervisors, both academics:

"I haven't been involved with ... with anybody who is not an academic" (a14) and where the PhD is joint funded by a third party, an advisor may be included in the supervisory team: *"we meet twice a year with the local authority manager and the student for a general discussion"* (a13). Here the frequency of meeting and the 'general' nature of the discussion indicate that this is more of an overall review meeting rather than one which is liable to have significant impact on day-to-day research issues. The composition of a professional doctorate supervisory team is seen as a significant challenge: *"my major concern about professional doctorates ... [is] the nature of the supervisory team and I don't think we've thought this through" (a13)* because a DPA student will be researching a very specific work-based issue about which there may be very little or no relevant expertise amongst the pool of available supervisors. Practitioners are rarely on a supervision team for a DBA but this is seen as desirable and advantageous since it would help to *"keep it much more contemporary ...* [by] *continually updating what the industry is actually needing"* (a3). Not including practitioners is acknowledged as *"a failing in some ways of our DBA"* (a6) and considerable thought has been given to this issue. The primary challenge is in identifying suitably qualified professionals who would be able and willing to join a supervisory team: *"the ability to get people like that is very limited because they tend not to have academic qualifications that will be acceptable to the university"* (a6) and *"it's very difficult to find a researching professional who can appreciate what it is that you're doing"* (a5). If a suitable person could be identified, they would be required to go through doctoral student supervision training: *"nobody in their right mind would do it!"* (a13). Even if these difficulties could be surmounted then tensions arise because *"the agenda that these people have ... is not necessarily the agenda that academic institutions have"* (a6) and *"we've already got one situation like that ... we had a meeting between the three of us to try and re-evaluate what the purpose of this person doing a PhD was"* (a8). Remuneration is not seen as sufficient to be the sole reward for undertaking such a role, which relies upon more altruistic motivations: *"it's really a labour of love, really, because you really want to contribute and help somebody"* (a6). With a professional doctorate, if the primary aim is that of professional knowledge development facilitated by academic means, the extent of a principal supervisor's input may be lessened: *"it's work that's rooted in their professional practice and the chances are they might move into* [a different area]*"* (a13). The programmes are *"quite different and need different supervisors"*

(a3) and the assumption that a member of staff trained as a PhD supervisor can also supervise professional doctorates may not be a valid one: *"I don't think because you're an accredited supervisor in traditional PhDs, that doesn't always easily travel to being a supervisor for a part-time DPA"* (a13). In terms of the more scientifically based DBMS, once students are onto the research stage, they will have a supervisor *"at consultant level supervisor within the laboratories"* (a8) and the pool of potential supervisors may be larger than for a DBA or DPA student. Hence supervisor identification may be less troublesome.

The ability to be flexible and adapt the style of supervision is crucial because all supervision is *"completely different ... there isn't just one way of doing a PhD"* (a4). There may be a hierarchical element to the staff-student interaction that manifests itself during supervision meetings: *"[a colleague] is very much the macho supervisor"* (a10) or there may be none: *"when we meet up it's very much a conversation between peers"* (a10). The degree of guidance provided by the principal supervisor is a function of the particular student, the stage of the research and the supervisor's individual view of how doctoral research should operate. Some see the *"responsibility as the principal is to give the main direction of the research journey"* (a5) whilst others maintain that *"in all cases it's the student who should be leading what's happening"* (a4).

For full-time PhD studentships the research topic is pre-established but for *"part-time PhDs, I'm more flexible"* (a13) and the student has a greater freedom to specify and modify the direction of the research. The degree of input from academics within a DPA project is imagined to be less than that of a PhD student: *"I would be far less directive in terms of the DPA"* (a13) due to the fact that it is the professional experiences of the student that are likely to drive the research forward. A shift in the relative contributions to the research direction away from academia and towards those in industry brings the possibility of conflicting interests: *"somebody in an organization might want to push it towards what the organization needs at the expense of what the student is trying to do"* (a4).

A principal supervisor's main responsibility is to monitor a student's progress: *"to keep the whole thing on track"* (a4), the role is an *"administrative managerial role as*

well as an academic one" (a4). A supervisor should *"be aware of your own limitations and therefore the need for the student to engage outside"* (a1) thus encouraging *"intellectual openness"* (a1). Helping to define the scope of the research is essential: *"a supervisor is critical at the early stages to focus in"* (a6) and *"it does become a skill about saying this is too wide or this isn't wide enough"* (a5). For a DBA supervisor, they need to get the student *"clear on what it is their research questions are that are going to be of practical and professional relevance"* (a3). The role of the second supervisor is similar to that of the principal but without the emphasis on monitoring and administration of the student and *"the level of support from the second supervisor has differed massively"* (a1). The relative contributions from either a principal or second supervisor change in response to how well their particular subject expertise maps onto the investigations of the student at any particular time. Third supervisors are rarely mentioned.

The number of staff able to supervise doctoral students is a significant pressure point within the university. This applies across Schools and programmes and is partly due to issues of staff retention. The problem is so acute that it is effectively blocking expansion of doctoral programmes: *"we couldn't do any more on the doctoral level with the number of supervisors we've got … we are pretty much at the limit of what we can do"* (a4) and can lead to staff who would not be a first choice for a supervision team being drafted in because other supervisors are already at their maximum allocation and are therefore unavailable. Overall, there is a feeling that the current arrangements are not sufficient to allow doctoral education to develop to its full potential and *"mass supervision"* (a14) and collaborative arrangements both within and outside the university might be a way forward to reduce the supervisory burden.

In the Business School, the allocation of a principal supervisor is *"subject specialism driven"* (a6) and the preferred allocation process has staff choice as a central tenet. However, the element of choice is not always possible due to capacity issues amongst supervisors with the result that *"I've got a mixture* [of subjects to supervise] *but being perfectly honest there is only one of them in my particular subject area"* (a10).

Integrating doctoral research students into the wider research community both within and outside the university is essential for the students' development, and guest

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lectures, doctoral conferences and social collaborative events with students from other universities are used to enable this. There is no distinction between programmes with regard to the support offered to students, but the extent to which the students benefit from them depends on mode of study, with part-time students presenting a greater challenge: *"part-time students ... are difficult to support ... it can be quite a lonely existence"* (a6). Students *"create peer groups ... whether on the DBA or PhD"* (a6) and *"peer group support is absolutely vital"* (a14). The ease of creation of such groups can depend on the subject area with students in business, for example, finding this easier than those in humanities. The adoption of a cohort system for professional doctorate programmes accelerates the formation of a peer support group and *"that's a really attractive feature"* (a6) and an advantage over PhD programmes. It also provides the opportunity to formalise peer support with peer review being a feature of DBA assessment, utilising internet based communication methods.

The inclusion of taught blocks within a professional doctorate allows skills training to be more structured and streamlined, allowing the *"very high level of skill"* (a2) of professional doctorate students to be supplemented with sessions dealing with *"analytical and critical thinking skills"* (a2) and *"advanced business research methods"* (a6). For PhD students, *"there are training courses but they're not integrated"* (a14), meaning that the students themselves must decide on what training to undertake: *"I don't direct students in that process at all"* (a1). In the Business School, training sessions as part of the DBA taught blocks are made available to PhD students as an alternative to generic training sessions organised by the Graduate School: *"we've found that a very good way of doing things"* (a6). The centralisation of doctoral training provision by the Graduate School is seen as providing a useful resource for training professional doctorate students, but concerns are raised over quality and suitability and also the worry that the generic nature of this centralised provision might stifle subject specific insight.

5.3.5 *Assessment*

In contrast to UG and PG taught programmes, for a doctorate *"[the learning] is different because the knowledge and understanding is self generated"* (a1). The PhD programme should allow a student to *"complete research training, become an expert*

in research methods ... and to become an expert in their field" (a5). Dissemination of the contribution and acceptance by the wider academic community through publication is a measure of whether a contribution has been made. Creativity and collegiality are desirable characteristics of a PhD graduate and one member of staff described how they would like to see a PhD graduate validate their skills by being capable of supervising a PhD themselves. For the professional doctorates, the area of specialism switches from research skills to the profession and a student becomes *"a specialist in something relevant to your profession"* (a3) and similarly the need to contribute to theory switches to a contribution to practice. Professional doctorate work should have a tangible impact within an organisation and the generation of a thesis in itself does not necessarily provide this – further action is needed: *"[it] must lead into some change, developed under the organisation* (a13). Furthermore, in addition to the thesis, research which develops close links with an organisation should allow transfer of knowledge at intermediate stages: *"taking knowledge back isn't just at the end ... it's actually continual as well"* (a2). Rather than claiming that a professional doctorate student should make a change within an organisation, more conservative views are expressed by others who stop short of claiming that a professional doctorate must have a tangible impact upon the organisation, saying *"it's around recommendations for what you're going to do with what you found out"* (a4). This indicates that the potential for change is the critical ingredient of a professional doctorate rather than demonstrating that the research has actually impacted upon the organisation. A PhD does not require any recommendations to be made with regard to professional practice.

The procedures for PhD examination are seen as highly secretive and public defence of the work would address this but at a cost both in terms of administration and *"a number of students would be severely put off ... [it] would particularly impact on an overseas student"* (a1). The distribution of doctoral examination outcomes is raised by another member of staff, saying *"very few people these days go straight through to their PhD"* (a14) and it is as though *"the viva is the final supervision meeting"* (a14). The reason for the large proportion receiving revisions is attributed to the relative ease with which these can be made. The option to assess by portfolio rather than a thesis is a possibility for all of the professional doctorates at the university and is commented upon favourably and draws a parallel with the PhD by publication. The concept of

compiling a portfolio of evidence consisting of a number of interrelated projects aligns more closely with the everyday work of practitioners and is a more achievable goal: *"they might have several of these smaller projects* [and] *a chapter that shows the overarching link"* (a8).

For those involved in the PhD examination process, *"there is a certain precariousness"* (a1) because *"you have in your mind what you think constitutes a PhD ... but you are, in most cases, dealing with a chair who you don't know ... they may have a very different view"* (a1). Similar points are raised by another *"you have to be careful about who examines it at the end ... you have to decide where the actual PhD* [or DBA] *will sit ... and you need to get your examiners right so they can see where you're contributing"* (a10). The context here is the nature of the contribution, difficulties can be compounded where PhD examiners assess a professional doctorate, they may not be attuned to the requirements of a professional doctorate thesis: *"I tried to explain to the external about the slightly different focus* [of the DBA], [it's] *quite a challenge in as much a person hasn't really examined anything other than a PhD"* (a10). Another said

"[Some DBA students] have certainly moved the theoretical base further forward, but it's not necessarily an expectation of the DBA and that's something that has caused us problems when we come to examine it, because most examiners have been traditionally PhD examiners" (a6).

Involving those from outside academia in examining professional doctorates is welcomed in principle: *"ideally you should have somebody who is a professional* [examining]*"* (a10) because *"if we are really saying that what we are producing is going to be of some value to that profession ... then someone in the profession should be making a judgement on that"* (a3). For the DBA, whilst practitioners as examiners might be seen as desirable, actual occurrences of this are extremely rare due to the significant challenges involved. There is a requirement that *"somebody in that role would have to also be academically credible"* (a4) and would need to be able *"to read and evaluate a doctoral thesis"* (a10) and *"would need to have an academic background as well as being a professional ... or maybe they've done a DBA of their own"* (a10). Writing a set of regulations to enable potential examiners to be filtered is

proving to be far from straightforward: *"we are struggling with this as a university really ... we've changed the* [regulations] *several times"* (a5). Given that practitioners are not used, the examiner selection criteria for the DBA prioritise academics who have links with a relevant profession or are likely to be sympathetic to the style of the research are selected: *"external examiners* [are] *chosen because they come from a school whose philosophy is much more practice based than academic"* (a5). There is a hope that the situation will be eased by a growing community of professional doctorate completions and greater co-operation between Schools and other universities.

5.3.6 *Completing*

There is a view that more formalised and comprehensive monitoring procedures are helping to improve completion rates for doctoral students: *"the completion rate is vastly improved ... because we've put very careful mechanisms in place"* (a2) whereas previous informal arrangements *"the attitude was students have to see themselves through'* (a10) had an effect on completion rates. Part of the tightening of doctoral study monitoring is about being more rigorous at intermediate milestones, with one member of staff commenting on a student being failed at the MPP stage: *"even though it's a hard decision to make, it will help* [completion rates] *ultimately"* (a5).

There is no comprehensive School by School system for tracking students who have completed their doctorates and the university is reliant upon alumni replying to general requests for information, with most information being obtained informally. There is a feeling that more could be done to involve alumni in university life, *"we don't tap in ... the university as a whole to past graduates"* (a6). Staff have a perception of where graduates may go, with academia featuring strongly for the PhD, talking about Business School completions, one member of staff said *"they're working as academics, a lot of them"* (a5) whereas professional doctorate graduates are seen to be well equipped for consultancy careers: *"they've got an opportunity to contribute to ... consultancy activities whereby their models or methodologies could be used to go out into industry"* (a10). Due to the relatively recent inception of the DBA programme, there are few completions to date and those who have completed are Business School staff as opposed to practitioners.

5.3.7 *Programme evolution*

The two key changes to the PhD programme that are mentioned by staff are the reduction in programme duration and the increase in support structures provided for the students. The trend towards completing in a shorter timescale is not welcomed by one member of staff who said: *"we will be encouraging people to complete in less than three years or less than five years for part time students"* (a1) and justifies their concern by proposing that the time taken for doctoral level studies cannot be compressed: *"people's thoughts develop over a long period of engagement in ways that are rationally undetermined"* (a1), illustrating their argument with an adage: *"the Polish have this phrase, "sleep faster, we need the pillows""* (a1). The view is that any further reductions in the standard duration would be detrimental to the establishment in the longer term and *"the pressure ... to produce quicker results is one which academic institutions should resist"* (a1). The growth in student support structures *"over the last couple of years"* (a14) are a welcome development and an improvement on the previous situation: *"it was very hit or miss the experience a student would get"* (a10) where doctoral students found themselves in a much more fragmented and ad hoc process. The provision of a tightly structured training programme is seen as essential to provide the student with the support they need to progress: *"we need to get the research training programme fairly structured quite early on otherwise the student just drifts"* (a5). The DBA is a programme that has undergone significant revisions since it was introduced in 2001 in response to student feedback *"there was a radical change last year, prior to that* [the DBA] *would change virtually every year"* (a6). The 'radical change' was the shortening of the DBA to two years from three for full-time students and to three years from five for part-time students. The longer duration allowed for a more extensive taught component covering research methods and other research skills, but since many students enrolling on the DBA had a Master's qualification already this was seen as *"going back over old ground"* (a6). This revised programme accelerates suitably qualified students towards the research phase thus increasing the attractiveness of the programme in comparison to the PhD but in doing so *"we have taken a risk that people can do what they've said on the tin"* (a5).

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Developments of the PhD programme themselves are not envisaged but *"we need to have more* [PhD students]*, and ... more supervisors"* (a13) and a greater involvement of doctoral students in teaching duties: *"we need to more formally use our PhD students as teachers"* (a13). In addition to giving the students experience of teaching, this would have an added benefit, to *"free up some of the research active staff"* (a13) so that it may be possible for staff to take on more supervision. Strengthening co-operative links between Schools with the university is also seen as important so that Schools can benefit from the experiences of others; for example *"I think our practice with IPAs and MPPs has been a bit of a model for the rest of the university to follow. They don't have meetings for IPA the way we do"* (a4). The DBA programme has entered a steady-state phase, with no further developments planned since a period of stability is needed to judge the viability of the revised programme. As the community of DBA graduates grows greater opportunities will present themselves, for example with DBA graduates perhaps being involved in supervision and examination of other professional doctorate students. In SASS, the DPA is seen as the spearhead for the development of other professional doctorate programmes in recognition that there are untapped markets in subjects such as *"arts practice, performing practice, cultural management practice"* (a2). In SAS it is imagined that the DBMS will enjoy growing popularity as a result of the 'Modernising Scientific Careers' initiative by the Department of Health (a8) and in a similar way to the DPA, it is thought that a suite of professional doctorates in the School may share a common taught component but different research issues leading to the award of differently named professional doctorates.

5.4 Summary

The development from initial to final staff template has provided a picture of the 'purpose and process' of doctoral education at Northumbria University through the opinions of staff who deliver and manage the programmes. In drawing comparisons between the programmes at a broad level, the taught stage of the professional doctorate separates the routes initially and different programme entry criteria mean that the students themselves may possess different characteristics when enrolling onto the programmes. Once the research phase is underway, however, the PhD and professional doctorate seem very closely associated in the opinions of staff,

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particularly with regard to the practical operation of the programmes. Many aspects of *The research* and *Support* are common across the programmes. For *The research*, these are areas such as *Feasibility*, *Research strategies*, *Interdisciplinary research*, *Milestones and monitoring* and *External involvement.* Similarly, many features of *Support* span the two programmes: the supervision style and the supervisory relationship vary according to the individual student, the supervisor and the stage of research and this masks any programme specific differences that may be present. Regardless of programme, academics make up the supervisory team and the primary responsibility of the principal supervisor is to keep things on schedule. The only clear differentiating aspect is that the skills' training is formally achieved through the taught blocks for the professional doctorate.

Where differences exist, these are subtle and more likely to be related to the purpose of the programmes rather than any tangible differences that would be experienced by students in terms of process. It is as though staff see the programmes as 'notionally different' but the dominance of the PhD in the minds and day-to-day work of staff means that differences between the programmes struggle to materialise. Reasons for this may be that staff are familiar and comfortable with the PhD and therefore have a tendency to frame their contact with students with reference to the PhD rather than the less well established professional doctorate. Furthermore, there are considerable difficulties in trying to implement features that would distinguish the programmes in terms of process. Two examples are the composition of the supervisory team and examination panels: staff acknowledge that including people other than academics in both of these may be desirable for a professional doctorate but is very challenging to achieve in practice.

Many of the differences that emerge at a finer level of detail are related to the purpose of the programmes, these occur in relation to *Originality, contribution and application* and within the main theme of *Assessment*. There is agreement that research carried out for either programme requires a theoretical component. Exploring the role of theory more closely, a difference appears with regard to the nature of the 'contribution' that must be made. The contribution is to theoretical development for a PhD, whereas it can be derived from the context of the work for a professional doctorate. Therefore, it may be said that staff see development of theory as a necessity for a PhD but it is not

required (although may happen) in a professional doctorate thesis. However there is by no means a clear-cut distinction that can be made. The difficulties of isolating and defining the precise purpose of a professional doctorate surface again in *Assessment*, where the staff have varying opinions on what a professional doctorate should achieve: some maintain that professional doctorate research should result in an actual change within an organisation whilst others say that the *potential* for change through recommendations is sufficient. Given the uncertainty that seems to surround this issue, it is not surprising that the examination process can be precarious.

For the themes of *Completing* and *Programme evolution*, there is little difference between the programmes, other than the fact that the professional doctorate programme has undergone more developments since it is a more recently introduced programme. There is a view that a recent strengthening of student support structures, making them more formalised and comprehensive, is helping to improve completion rates for students on both programmes. Due to there being very few professional doctorate completions, information on career choices is sparse. Finally, no major changes to the PhD and DBA at Northumbria University are foreseen in the near future, whilst professional doctorates in other schools continue to develop following their recent introduction.

The discussion of the staff opinions is extended in Chapter 6.

Chapter 6

Discussion and research contributions

6.1 Introduction

The general research question for this exploration is reiterated below:

'The purpose and process of doctoral study: what are perceptions of PhD and professional doctorate participants at Northumbria University and what do these tell us about the similarities and differences between the programmes?'

This chapter will evaluate my findings with respect to my theme of 'purpose and process' of doctoral education at Northumbria University in the context of both the current literature and my 'compounded insiderness'. To achieve this, the findings from the student and staff analysis processes (in sections 4.3 and 5.3 respectively) are discussed with reference to literature review presented in Chapter 2.

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate where the findings from my research either contradict or coincide with the findings of others as presented in the literature review. However, it is not intended that this should be seen as an attempt to furnish evidence to either uphold or reject the theoretical frameworks introduced in Chapter 2, since to do so would be inconsistent with the philosophical assumptions under which this research has been carried out. My intention is to highlight where the contributions made by this research sit with respect to the existing literature. Being a professional doctorate, this research provides twin contributions: to the theoretical knowledge relating to doctoral education and to the professional practice of delivering doctoral education. These twin contributions are developed simultaneously in this chapter.

Section 6.2 presents the discussion of the student perspective and the discussion of the staff findings is in section 6.3. Section 6.4 summarises the discussion.

6.2 Doctoral programmes from the student perspective

This section will discuss the research findings from the student perspective and is structured around the final template that emerged from the student data analysis.

This research has found that reasons for enrolling on a PhD are much more varied than those for selecting the professional doctorate. The PhD appeals to potential students for a wide range of reasons, from the personal challenge aspect to the chance to obtain a qualification that will become the passport to work or study in any part of world. A critical incident may be the trigger for a doctorate, as Wellington and Sikes (2006) found. This research has found that professional doctorate students have a much narrower set of reasons for enrolling on a doctoral programme since their overriding concern is the need to gain a qualification that not only differentiates them from those holding Master's degrees but will also help them to achieve their career aspirations. The PhD seems to have something that the professional doctorate does not - an 'aura of mystery' in the eyes of those enrolling upon it. Other authors refer to an aura of mystery when discussing the PhD oral examination, (Johnson, 2005; Tinkler and Jackson, 2004; Morley, Leonard and David, 2003) but the research presented here indicates that the mystery is not restricted to assessment, but encompasses the programme as a whole. Gaining a PhD is more than gaining a qualification and the notion of gaining entry to an exclusive 'club' recurs. Extending this concept, PhD students explain how they were encouraged to take up the programme by academics, which is like being invited to apply for membership of this 'club'. This work has found a reason why the PhD may be 'mysterious' for those embarking upon it: research into doctoral programmes is rarely done by the PhD students prior to enrolling so their knowledge of what to expect is limited. In contrast, those students opting for the professional doctorate route tend to be aware of the different doctoral options and use this knowledge to select their route.

The influence of the mode of study on the choice of programme should not be underestimated, with part-time study aligned strongly with professional doctorate research. This finding corresponds with those of Evans *et al.* (2004) and Neumann (2002). All of the professional doctorate students were studying part-time when interviewed, even though two began their programme as full-time students. One of the

two part-time PhD students was having serious doubts regarding their choice of route, and thought that their research had a greater resonance with the professional doctorate programme than with the PhD and had asked whether it would be possible to switch programmes. In selecting their route, the professional doctorate students gave weight to how the qualification will be perceived by practitioners, whilst the PhD students saw career benefits in general as a reason for doing a PhD.

For the research itself, the PhD allows for greater flexibility regarding choice of research topic. Selection is driven mainly by personal interest whereas for the professional doctorate a subject closely related to the student's current or desired career is chosen. Justification for PhD research hinges on the notion of making a 'contribution', although this is a vaguely defined term that can be interpreted in any number of ways, as highlighted by Perry and Cavaye (2002). This may contribute to the element of mystery attached to the programme. Students see supplementing a gap in the literature as one way of making a contribution, although doing so and solving a problem are not mutually exclusive. This view is shared by professional doctorate students who justify their work with reference to the same two concepts. The degree to which the research is applicable is a difference that has emerged in this research: professional doctorate students see it as crucial that they can demonstrate how the research will be put to practical, professional use. This may happen in PhD research but it is not claimed to be a priority. This is consistent with the view of Bourner and Simpson (2005) that service to the discipline (and hence the university) takes precedence. Going further, this research has found that in cases where applicability is important in PhD work, these were the cases where students see some affinity with the professional doctorate programme. I found that a part-time professional, enrolled on a PhD who attempted to prioritise the applicability of their research encountered resistance to this from their supervisors. This corresponds to some extent with the findings of Watts (2009), who highlights a potential tension in that *"the supervisor is required to gently 'bring down' the student from their professional pedestal, as a process of status 'deconstruction', in order that they can progress as a researcher"* (Watts, 2009, p.690). It may be that this particular student was encountering difficulties in this 'deconstruction' process. Some professional doctorate students describe 'intermediate application' of their research and this is a further sign that the applicability of the research is highly valued by the student. Such a process involves

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the application of the research in a profession whilst the research is ongoing and, according to Usher (2002), this is characteristic of *'mode2'* knowledge production (Lee *et al.*, 2000). For research question development, PhD students are guided by the supervisory team, whereas professional doctorate students develop their research questions independently. For professional doctorate students, there is less input from academics in research question development and very little from professionals in the inductive refinement of the research question mentioned by Neumann (2007). Watts (2009) observed a similar feature in that professional doctorate students *"are likely to bring to their study a well-developed outline of their research"* (Watts, 2009, p.688). The increased supervisory input for refinement of a PhD topic may be down to the greater flexibility of a PhD as regards the choice of research area and the need to keep the project to a manageable scale. Indeed deciding on the scale of the work is a major influence on the development of the research question for both types of student. As the research proceeds, the influence of practitioners on the work of a professional doctorate student is very limited, the direction the research takes is controlled mainly by the researcher themselves. Regardless of programme, part-time students can be frustrated by a lack of progress as they try to organise their research around other commitments. Perry and Zuber-Skerritt (1994) suggested that interdisciplinary research is more likely with a professional doctorate than a PhD and Parry, Atkinson and Delamont (1997) saw tighter disciplinary boundaries with a PhD. Fell and Haines (2006) argued that new knowledge comes most frequently at the intersection of disciplines and through communities of practice - the findings here suggest that the extent to which the research is interdisciplinary does not discriminate between programmes.

A good working relationship with their supervisor is important to support students through their study, and both groups of students appreciate a supervisor adapting to a way of working that suits the particular student. PhD students describe in greater detail their relationships with supervisors and sometimes discussions between the student and supervisor can extend beyond the direct supervision process, for example in relation to other research projects. In contrast, the professional doctorate students seem to prefer a professional relationship with a strong focus on the 'task in hand'. The influence of gender and mode of study may be present here (all but one of the PhD students are female and the professional doctorate students are male part-time

students) in that female full-time PhD students may have a greater inclination and better opportunities to foster a relationship with their supervisors. Another factor that may play a role is the effect of prior acquaintance with a supervisor, which occurs more often for PhD students than for professional doctorate students. This enables a student to be familiar with a supervisor's personal characteristics and ways of working and hence give a smoother start to the research by removing the need to build a relationship 'from scratch'. A hierarchical dimension to the relationship, for example 'boss/employee', is mentioned by PhD students in contrast to the 'expert/learner' situation perceived by a professional doctorate student. The latter prioritises the knowledge transfer aspect of the process and sees the partnership on more of a level footing, reflecting the *"peer interaction"* style mentioned by (Watts, 2009, p.689).

One feature of the PhD students' discussion that is absent from that of professional doctorate students is the consideration of the qualifications of the supervisor. Some PhD students equate the possession of a doctorate with the ability to supervise and hence have reservations when people on their supervisory team are without a doctorate themselves. These reservations seem to centre on the worry that if a supervisor has not been through the process themselves, the supervisor will not have an in-depth knowledge of the PhD process and will therefore be unable to guide the student through the process effectively: the supervisor perhaps fails to *"establish credibility"* (Lee and Green, 2009, p.619). However, there could be an association here with the notion of an air of mystery surrounding the PhD alluded to earlier. If students see the PhD process as opaque and the requirements tacit, unclear or even secretive, they are more likely to be reassured by having a supervisor with a PhD, that is to have a supervisor who has gained entry to the 'club' themselves. Sambrook *et al.* (2008) claim that the characteristic of a successful supervisor is that they *"are personally active as a researcher, belonging to international networks which (a) influence journals and conferences, (b) can provide a source of external examiners and (c) act as gateways into academic carers"* (p.72). It may be that PhD students are unsure as to how well their supervisor fits such a description if the supervisor does not hold a PhD themselves. Lee (2008) found that a supervisor's supervision style can depend heavily on their own experiences as a PhD student and there remains a question about the implications of this for a supervisor without a PhD themselves. For

professional doctorate students, this is either not a concern or students are unaware of their supervisory team's level of qualification, since this is not a topic of conversation that arose. Professional doctorate students do not comment that their supervisors should hold a professional doctorate – or indeed any doctorate. It could be that professional doctorate students are more relaxed about this because they see the professional doctorate process as less 'mysterious' than the PhD and providing a less diffuse target than the PhD. The professional doctorate emerges as a more clearly bounded programme than the PhD and this finding resonates with the description of a professional doctorate as a doctorate in a *'tight compartment'* (Wellington and Sykes, 2006).

PhD and professional doctorate students have a shared expectation of a supervisor that they can be relied upon as a 'failsafe' mechanism, reacting against any ill-conceived ideas or suggestions that the student may propose, coupled with constructive criticism. There seems to a difference between the two groups in the level of guidance expected from the supervisory team, although there is agreement that the degree of guidance varies with the individual student and their stage of study. Regarding the level of guidance, the difference seems to be about when the 'transfer of ownership' occurs, this concept has been generated from conversations with PhD students only. This is the point at which the student takes ultimate responsibility for their research and it would appear to vary considerably for the PhD students. However, this it is not a feature of discussions with professional doctorate students. Possible reasons for this could be the research topic – for PhD students this can already be set if they are joining a research group with a predefined agenda so they may not feel as though they 'own' the work. Professional doctorate students will bring their own topic for investigation, thus giving them a greater stake in 'ownership' at the outset and giving the supervisor a role more concerned with facilitation. Lee (2008) suggests that under the enculturation approach to supervision a PhD *"supervisor aims to move to a point of independence"* (Lee, 2008, p.272) and this may link into the findings from my research. Professional doctorate students may not refer to such a feature because they are not being supervised under the enculturation approach since supervisors may be less concerned with inducting professional doctorate students into the discipline and the approach to supervision could be one that is closer to facilitation as the professionally based research topic may have less direct relevance to the supervisor's

expertise. Student self confidence may also affect when this transfer occurs: those with a higher level of self confidence may take ownership earlier. Neumann (2005) proposed that a lack of confidence may lead to a student selecting a professional doctorate over a PhD due to the more structured research process and Evans *et al.* (2004) proposed that the flexibility of the PhD may be an attraction for more confident students. However, this seems not to be the case based on the findings of the study presented here, since confidence in general seems higher for professional doctorate students. Indeed, the issues of reassurance, self-doubt and confidence are topics raised by PhD students. A lack of transparency in the PhD process might be partly responsible for this and as a coping mechanism students may seek feedback from their supervisors and others to assuage their doubts over the quality and focus of their work. Over time, this cycle of seeking and receiving feedback builds confidence and allows the student to move closer to the 'transfer of ownership' point. Whilst PhD students may seem less confident than professional doctorate students, it could be the case that they are merely less confident of what is required on their programme rather than being less confident in general.

In the context of belonging to a research community, there are similarities between students from the programmes in that peer support is seen as an important feature of their research, confirming the findings of Delamont, Atkinson and Parry (2005). The primary difference is the advantage provided by the professional doctorate programme's initial taught blocks in supplying a 'ready-made' peer support group, as raised by Bourner *et al.* (2000). For PhD students, this 'ready-made' resource is not available to be drawn upon for peer support, and the creation of a similar group requires proactive behaviour on the part of the students. PhD students report that building momentum and enthusiasm within a group of researchers requires significant effort, which is not always reciprocated by others. Professional doctorate students report that once the taught blocks are completed and they move into the research phase of their programme, peer support diminishes significantly. This brings into question the claim that the 'cohort effect' is a major strength of the professional doctorate (Wellington *et al.*, 2005) since the effect seems transient in nature rather than permanent.

Regarding other or external help, there is little difference between the programmes in that assistance is most likely from those within or connected to the university, with only occasional input from practitioners. Evidence of significant practitioner input to a professional doctorate is not forthcoming, although this might be seen as a desirable feature (O'Mullane, 2004). There is also significant overlap in the motivations to continue with the study, with the personal, internal motivation being paramount, backed up by the future career benefits from obtaining a doctorate.

The area of finance and funding does not provide any significant differences: students from both programmes who are not sponsored talk of income generation activities to support their studies. Also, students from both programmes have a perception that being sponsored will bring constraints and limit the flexibility regarding scope and direction of the research, but there is no manifestation of this from sponsored students in the study described here.

Students on both programmes derive enjoyment from their study, professional doctorate students particularly like the structured nature of the programme and the collegiate atmosphere of working with others in the taught blocks along with the career development aspect. PhD students appreciate the flexibility of the programme and autonomy of both subject and ways of working, even though the flexibility and individuality may hinder the construction of a peer support group since each student is going in their own direction at their own pace. Both groups are clear that they would recommend their programme to others. The pressures of part-time study were raised by students from both programmes. PhD students were also concerned that not enough thought was given to providing them with a workspace that was conducive to both individual and group study and that this was having a detrimental effect on the creation of a peer support group. Amongst some full-time students, there was dissatisfaction and frustration with the administrative support, coming from a lack of recognition of research students as a distinct and important subgroup of the student population with specific requirements. In terms of status, they can feel in limbo, located somewhere between undergraduates and lecturers. Part-time students did not report similar feelings: they had far less day to day interaction with university life and have an identity associated with their work, so appear not to be concerned with a lack of recognition at university. Furthermore, professional doctorate students have the

advantage of being attached to a cohort and this provides a sense of identity, rather than the individual nature of the PhD.

When discussing how others will view their doctoral qualification, whilst status is important, as suggested by Ellis (2005), the status is framed with respect to the 'audience'. Professional doctorate students frame their responses with regard to career and practitioner views only, whilst PhD students also talk about the perceptions of family and friends. This reinforces the greater range of reasons for enrolling on a doctorate for PhD students. Those following the PhD programme have no worries over the acceptance of their qualification either in academia or industry but those on a professional doctorate recognise the need for a growth in awareness of the professional doctorate, as suggested by Neumann (2005) and Sarros, Willis and Fisher (2002). Professional doctorate students cite the need for the research to be applicable as the key differentiating factor that people need to be made aware of.

Approaches to problem solving were very similar for the two groups, and firmly grounded in academic approaches, with researcher training apparent in that a literature review would be the first step of any enquiry. Discussion with others in the university was also given as a part of the problem solving strategy, with some possibility of input from outside the university. Again, clear similarities exist between the opinions of the two groups in the location of knowledge generation, although pinpointing the source of knowledge generation is not clear-cut. It is not a case of a dichotomous decision of either within the university or outside it since students see their research progressing through knowledge generation in both locations. For all students, there is little evidence of a clear distinction between the modes of knowledge production described by Lee *et al.* (2000). A distinction is made between 'outside the university' and 'outside academia' – student claims of the former with regard to knowledge generation are more common than those of the latter. A difference occurs in that professional doctorate students are aware that links with a profession are important to their research but the role of the professions is a secondary one and operates as a form of checking and validation as opposed to knowledge generation: it would seem that the university still has control over knowledge generation (Appelqvist, 2004). Further evidence of the dominance of the university is provided by the opinions of the PhD students; there was a feeling that the influence of sources of knowledge production

outside the university may be moderated by the supervisory team, perhaps displaying an attempt to privilege the academic input over other sources of knowledge generation. There are noticeable differences in opinion between professional doctorate and PhD students towards the skills development aspects of their programmes, as might be expected due to the provision of taught blocks on the former. Professional doctorate students have no specific issues to raise and feel that their general transferable skills have been developed effectively throughout their study, with the taught blocks having significant impact on this development. PhD students have a more mixed view, they appreciate the volume of training courses available and find some useful (such as training for the progression milestones) but have concerns regarding the focus and quality of others. The failure to tailor training to the specific needs of PhD students establishes a link back to the lack of recognition of the needs of PhD students as a particular subgroup of the student body.

PhD students do not have the concept of reflexivity at the forefront of their minds: it operates in the background, often without being recognised as reflexive behaviour. Consequently, a discussion of reflexivity may be included in their theses, but the opinions are that it will not play a central role. Both groups of students seem to be of the same opinion that reflexivity has limited influence in their research which is in contrast to much discussion in the literature regarding the importance of this skill (for example Sambrook and Stewart, 2008 and Park, 2005).

According to professional doctorate students, the taught blocks have benefits that extend far beyond their use as a vehicle for the development of skills. The blocks provide an initial attraction to the programme and bring the students together formally as a cohort, thus providing a formal source of peer support. This provides identity and structure through assessed assignments that help students plan their work and generally drives them along. The taught stage also allows them to gauge their level of performance against others in the cohort and this has the potential to boost confidence. The power of the taught blocks is in providing benefits that map directly onto areas raised by PhD students: the difficulties of establishing a support network; a lack of identity; the unstructured nature of the programme and confidence.

The favoured career path for professional doctorate students is consultancy, but students see this as one of a range of options open to them, another being to pursue an academic career. PhD students also consider an academic career a possibility, but are less career-focussed than professional doctorate students, for example the desire to take a break and do voluntary work is mentioned. Getting value from their doctorate is common to both groups, for professional doctorate students the value is derived from the direct application of their research in contrast to PhD students who take a wider view in that the value comes from having the doctorate itself.

6.3 Doctoral programmes from the staff perspective

This section will discuss the research findings from the staff perspective and, in a similar way to the discussion of the student findings, it is structured around the final template that emerged from the staff data analysis process.

The criterion that the PhD involves an 'original contribution to knowledge' provides a point upon which staff can agree regarding the purpose of the programme. This criterion also contributes to the flexible nature of the programme through the broad range of interpretations that are possible. PhD research can be related to a student's work, can be unrelated, can have an application, or can have no application. A professional doctorate loses some of this flexibility since it should be of relevance to professional practice through applicable research. Application and recommendations for practitioners are the primary distinguishing features of a professional doctorate and promoters of professional doctorates reinforce these aims to differentiate their programmes from the traditional PhD. This is made more challenging due to professional doctorates being developed from the PhD and still sharing many elements of the PhD process, for example even those who examine professional doctorates can find the difference subtle. With the exception of those closely involved with both programmes, professional doctorates struggle to attract the prestige attached to the PhD due to their relative novelty and limited availability; they are a niche product. Possessing a shorter duration and a more structured format than the PhD may be attractive to some, particularly those who would not have necessarily thought of themselves as eligible to undertake a PhD. Getting value for work already being done

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is a recurring theme of doctoral study that sits well with a professional doctorate since accreditation is a feature of the enrolment process.

Deciding which programme would best suit a doctoral candidate is likely to hinge upon their circumstances, motivations and their intended career path. One practical factor that impacts upon choice of programme is the mode of study since there is a trend towards full-time PhD students and part-time professional doctorate students. Neumann (2002) found the mode of study to be the major difference between the two programmes. A question that might help to give some guidance on which route to choose is 'how will the value of the doctorate be gauged?' It could be that the personal satisfaction of completing a doctorate generates value to the individual or the value will be derived from career advancement. Furthermore, the perceived value will depend upon the views of those in the particular professional field who are making the value judgement.

Selection of doctoral students for either programme takes into account their qualifications and experience but having a good academic record does not necessarily imply success in the research process. Certain personal qualities are required, some less tangible than others, making the selection process as much about the person as their qualifications, a finding similar to that of Neumann (2007). Enrolment on a professional doctorate requires experience as a practitioner and this, at least, may be less difficult to assess.

The primary purpose of marketing of doctoral programmes is not to generate income but to attract students with the personal qualities and capabilities that will enable them to complete successfully and hence raise the research profile of the university. An area where more effective marketing might be able to play a role is in appealing to what is seen as the 'traditional' professional doctorate student: a senior or middle level practitioner who is looking to differentiate themselves within their profession. Boosting the numbers of such students on the DBA, for example, would help to balance out the academic staff using the programme as a staff development vehicle and lead to a more diverse cohort.

The flexibility of the PhD comes in part from the varying interpretations of the 'original contribution to knowledge' criterion, since staff provide many examples of work that would be capable of meeting this criterion. The context of the work provides differentiation between the programmes, for the PhD the priority is academia, for the professional doctorate it is the profession. Indeed it is the flexibility of the PhD 'original contribution to knowledge' criterion that allows professional doctorate programmes to use the same criterion but within a different context. There is agreement that a professional doctorate should possess a theoretical framework, matching the suggestion of Bourner, Bowden and Laing (2001) that the work should be theoretically informed. There is no agreement, however, on whether a professional doctorate must include development of theory and although this may occur it is seen as a by-product of the development of professional practice. This resonates with the claim of Perry and Cavaye (2002) who state that the development of academic knowledge is not the primary aim of a professional doctorate. Therefore, taking the concepts of 'applicability' and 'a contribution to academic theory', these are *essential* and *possible* respectively for a professional doctorate and *possible* and *essential* for a PhD. Hence these two concepts can be thought of as having a complementary relationship. This lack of agreement over whether a professional doctorate must contain theoretical development is a concern given that that there may be similar variations in expectations of examiners. The combination of an examiner who views theoretical development as an essential ingredient of a professional doctorate with a supervisor who views theoretical development as merely possible but not essential could have dire consequences for a student at the examination stage.

There are many aspects of the process of doctoral education at Northumbria University that show considerable overlap between the programmes: gauging the feasibility of the research; research strategies; the degree to which interdisciplinary work occurs; milestones and student monitoring; funding and the involvement of those outside academia in the research process. For research strategies, whilst action research may seem to harmonise with the aim of a professional doctorate to implement a change within a profession (Perry and Zuber-Skerritt, 1994), this strategy is rarely used.

Judging the originality of a proposed research topic is perhaps more straightforward for a professional doctorate than for a PhD since the often rapidly changing professional fields may present more opportunities for new investigations. Given the fact that a PhD topic can be rooted in a profession, consideration of the research topic alone does not necessarily indicate which programme a student is enrolled upon. If a difference exists with regard to research topic, it is that PhD students are often working on a research project with pre-established aims, whereas a professional doctorate student is expected to develop aims that relate directly to an element of their own practice, resulting in less supervisor input in selecting the research topic for a professional doctorate student. If the output of a professional doctorate is to have relevance to a profession, then part of the relevance will come from the timeliness of the work. Part-time students therefore need to take account of the timescales involved when planning their research, since it must maintain relevance over the lifespan of the research, which reflects the views of Jolley (2007).

With regard to supervision, the relationships developed and supervision style are both more likely to vary with the personal characteristics of the individuals concerned rather than the programme they are enrolled upon and the primary role of the principal supervisor, to monitor progress, is unaffected by programme. An area of support where a difference emerges is the amount of influence supervisors exert over the direction of the research, with the influence being reduced for professional doctorate students. This chimes with research by Watts (2009) who suggested that a student who is also a professional could be likely to exhibit increased autonomy since this is a characteristic of being a professional. The composition of the supervisory team is seen as a challenging issue for professional doctorate programme providers and the current arrangement for professional doctorate students to have a wholly academic supervisory team could be improved by involving practitioners. The wish to involve practitioners in the supervision is due to their being better placed to judge whether the knowledge being generated with a professional doctorate is actually of benefit to the profession. Academic staff feel that professional doctorate research has the potential to move outside their expertise and it might be sensible to relinquish some control to someone within the relevant profession. Whilst this change may be desirable, a point agreed upon by Johnson (2005), the practical and logistical difficulties are enormous and are sufficient to prevent this happening at the present time. Such changes, whilst

seen as desirable, may also involve an amount of reluctance to commit to this: Burton *et al.* (2009) suggest that such a move is likely to be unsettling for academics. My research also raises a question of whether supervisors can switch easily between professional doctorate and PhD supervision, which is assumed at the moment, and which was raised by Appelqvist (2004) and Maxwell and Shanahan (1997). There is debate in the literature around whether *"supervising the 'professional' doctoral candidate is a different enterprise from that associated with guiding and supporting other, often younger and less experienced students"* (Watts, 2009, p.690) and my research did not identify differences in the way that supervisors approach the two types a student. The highlights the opportunity to make a contribution to the supervisor training process at Northumbria University by raising these issues for new supervisors. Supervisor resourcing pressures at Northumbria University mean that the element of choice is not always present in supervisor allocation and this is a feature of the research by Johnson (2005) and may give rise to students being allocated a supervisor with limited expertise in the student's research area.

Staff feel that the cohort system and taught blocks of a professional doctorate are extremely useful for generating peer support and enabling the delivery of skills training, and the lack of these features in the PhD programme puts it at a disadvantage in these respects. The PhD programme has a further disadvantage in the need to provide skills training to students with diverse backgrounds, whereas there may be greater uniformity with a cohort of professional doctorate students. Centralising training may help, but this is not without its own difficulties.

Assessing the two programmes using the same procedures helps to claim parity in terms of standards and there is a risk that employing different assessment mechanisms for a professional doctorate would be detrimental to the perception of the standard of the programmes, as suggested by Farrow (2006). The portfolio method of assessment is seen by staff as attractive and relevant to a professional qualification, as claimed by Maxwell (2003), but supervisors are unfamiliar with this option. Differentiating the two programmes through assessment methods, and changing the form of assessment, could help to emphasise the difference in the aims of the programmes, a point raised by O'Mullane (2004). There are great similarities between the professional doctorate and PhD assessment processes and this, coupled with the similarities in supervision,

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provides evidence to support the claims of Johnson (2005) and Perry and Cavaye (2002) who argued the justification for two distinctive programmes was difficult. Just as professional doctorates pose a challenge in supervisory team composition, the same can occur when attempting to identify suitable examiners. Furthermore, using examiners experienced in PhDs as professional doctorate examiners can be problematic, because such examiners may bring with them expectations that are not attuned to those of the student and supervisors, potentially bringing serious consequences for the student.

6.4 Summary

This section has discussed my research findings in the light of debates arising from the literature review and in the context of the case study institution. The discussion has been structured around the final templates emerging from the analysis process and has led to the generation of concepts that that allow contributions to both the knowledge of doctoral education and to professional practice to be made. These include the uncertainties over the requirement of a professional doctorate to include theoretical development and the PhD 'aura of mystery' and 'transfer of ownership' concepts. The contributions made by my research are made explicit in the next chapter.

Chapter 7
Conclusions

7.1 Introduction

This thesis has explored the theme of 'purpose of process' of doctoral education through the lens of the traditional PhD and the newer professional doctorate and in the context of Northumbria University. The aim of this professional doctorate research has been to provide twin contributions: to theory and to practice. This research contributes to the understanding of doctoral education, around which there are many ongoing debates in the literature but a lack of pedagogic research to explore such debates. My critical position has been to take a 'full doctoral view' of the research topic, since much previous research focuses solely on the dominant PhD programme but I argue that the minority view from a professional doctorate perspective has been valuable and has enabled a fuller exploration of the topic. Both programmes aim to produce an original contribution to knowledge and both are assessed primarily through the production of a thesis and as a consequence the debates in the literature focus on the sometimes subtle differences between interpretations of these concepts. My research allows these interpretations to be explored in detail.

Taking the case study as Northumbria University has allowed me to explore doctoral education at a HE institution within the UK and this research is the first of its type at the University. This research is timely since although the PhD is well established at the University, it is a period of flux for professional doctorates with new programmes being established and existing professional doctorates undergoing significant revisions to try and provide doctoral programmes as an alternative to the PhD. My own personal interest in this topic has emerged through my own position within the research topic: I have developed the concept of 'compounded insiderness' to describe this distinctive feature of my study. The professional and academic words encompassed by a professional doctorate coincide for my research and consequently I have found that the boundaries between academic and professional contributions can be blurred. I have presented what I see as theoretical contributions in section 7.2 and

contributions to professional practice in section 7.3. The contributions to my own personal professional practice are discussed in section 7.4. Section 7.5 provides a personal reflection upon this research and section 7.6 outlines some suggestions for further work.

In setting out the contributions made by this research, it is important to reiterate that the data generated as part of this exploration is highly case and context specific and consequently the findings and conclusions have greatest relevance and applicability within Northumbria University. Those outside Northumbria University may view the findings and conclusions as being relevant to their own situation, provided they are confident that an evaluation of the characteristics and culture of their own situation has shown commonalities with those at Northumbria University. Therefore, my findings may be transferable to other institutions but it is not my aim to provide generalisable results.

7.2 Summary of the contribution to the knowledge of doctoral education

The overarching contribution made by this work is to addresses a lack of research at Northumbria University into the 'purpose and process' of the PhD and professional doctorate. A further methodological contribution is made through the development of the concept of 'compounded insiderness' which I have used to define my location within the research.

This section will now make explicit the new theoretical knowledge that has been generated at Northumbria University as a result of this exploration and draws together the principal findings from both the student and staff interviews. The following discussion presents the 'purpose and process' of doctoral education as perceived by those at Northumbria University who participated in this study.

The purpose of doctoral education is centred on the aim to make 'an original contribution to knowledge' and the varying interpretations of this facilitate the flexible nature of the PhD. The professional doctorate loses some of this flexibility due to the requirement of relevance to professional practice, achieved through applicable research. The applicability of research is seen as essential for professional

doctorate students and this is evidenced through 'intermediate application': implementing research findings as study progresses. This research has found uncertainty regarding the role of academic theory within doctoral education: the need for development of academic theory within a PhD is not under question but staff opinions of this task with respect to the professional doctorate are varied. All staff agree that a professional doctorate must employ a theoretical framework but not all staff see development of academic theory as essential within a professional doctorate although some say that it may occur as a by-product of the development of professional practice. Some staff prioritise the development of applicable research with the professional doctorate. Therefore the concepts of 'applicability' and 'a contribution to academic theory' can be thought of as *essential* and *possible* respectively for a professional doctorate and *possible* and *essential* for a PhD. There is further uncertainty amongst staff over the nature of the contribution to practice for a professional doctorate, since some staff maintain that the research should result in an actual change within an organisation whilst others say that the *potential* for change through recommendations is sufficient. These difficulties of isolating and defining the precise purpose of a professional doctorate, particularly with regard to balance of theoretical and practical contributions, have serious implications in the assessment process.

The reasons given by students for enrolling on a PhD are much more varied than those for selecting a professional doctorate. Professional doctorate students enrol to support their career aspirations, whereas this can be one of a number of reasons for enrolling on a PhD. The PhD allows for greater flexibility regarding research topic than the professional doctorate, since for the latter the research topic must be relevant to the student's professional career. Furthermore, the PhD has an 'aura of mystery' that encompasses the whole programme and it is seen as more than just a qualification – it is like gaining entry to an exclusive 'club'. A contributing factor may be the lack of research into doctoral studies that is done by PhD students and the fact that some students report being 'invited' to join. In contrast, professional doctorate students tend to be aware of the different doctoral routes before enrolling and have made an informed choice. When staff are considering applications from potential PhD and professional doctorate students, qualifications and experience are taken into account but personal qualities are crucial and some of these are less tangible than others. The

selection process is as much about the person as their qualifications. Those following the PhD programme have no worries over the acceptance of their qualification either in academia or industry but those on a professional doctorate recognise the need for a growth in awareness of the professional doctorate.

The processes of knowledge generation are similar for students from both programmes and the same approaches to problem solving are described – this is based on a study of literature and help from within university, including supervisors. The location for knowledge generation seems to be grounded in academia and academic based knowledge generation mechanisms dominate. A difference between the programmes emerges in that professional doctorate students are aware that links with a profession are important to their research. However, the role of the professions is a secondary one and operates as a form of checking and validation as opposed to knowledge generation: it would seem that the university still has control over knowledge generation for doctoral programmes at Northumbria University.

Exploration of the supervision process has uncovered similarities and differences between the programmes. Both groups of students appreciate a supervisor adopting a way of working that suits the particular student. This is sometimes made easier for PhD students through prior acquaintance with their supervisor and this can lead to a more informal relationship. Professional doctorate students tend to restrict their interaction with supervisors to the 'task in hand'. PhD students report being guided by the supervisory team in research question development whereas the professional doctorate students interviewed tended to work independently. This difference in supervisory team input continues after the initial phase, with PhD students reporting more influence from their supervisors than professional doctorate students. Some PhD students are uncomfortable being supervised by those without a PhD themselves, whereas the issue of supervisor qualifications was not raised by professional doctorate students. I propose that this is consistent with PhD students seeing the PhD as surrounded by an air of mystery and therefore seeking reassurance from someone who is already a member of 'club'. The PhD students raise issues of reassurance and self-doubt that professional doctorate students do not, leading to the impression that the latter are more confident than the former. It could be the case that PhD students are less confident of what is required on their programme rather than being less confident

in general. I have developed the concept of the point of 'transfer of ownership' from supervisor to student and this has been derived from conversations with the PhD students. This point seems to vary considerably between students, with some taking ownership early in their research and others still reluctant to do so even at later stages. There may be a link here to the enculturation approach to supervision since the 'transfer of ownership' concept is relevant to an approach that inducts students into a discipline. It may be the case that professional doctorate students are being supervised under an approach closer to facilitation because the professionally based research topic of a professional doctorate student may have less direct relevance to the supervisor's expertise. For professional doctorate students, bringing their own research topic perhaps gives them a greater sense of ownership from the outset.

To conclude, at a broad level of comparison, the taught stage of the professional doctorate separates the routes initially and different programme entry criteria mean that the students themselves may possess different characteristics when enrolling onto the programmes. Once the research phase is underway, the PhD and professional doctorate at Northumbria University overlap considerably with regard to the practical operation of the programmes and the specific processes of knowledge generation, supervision and assessment. Where differences exist, these are subtle and more likely to be related to the purpose of the programmes rather than any tangible differences that would be experienced by students in terms of process. It is as though staff see the programmes as 'notionally different' but the dominance of the PhD in their minds and day-to-day work means that differences between the programmes struggle to materialise.

The next section considers the contribution to professional practice and value of the findings of this research to Northumbria University.

7.3 Summary of the contribution to professional practice

In the broadest sense of a contribution to professional practice, raising awareness of similarities and differences between PhD and professional doctorate programmes at Northumbria University is the primary contribution that this research claims to make. However, there are a number of areas of 'purpose and process' theme where specific contributions can be made to the operation of doctoral education at Northumbria University and by making these explicit it is hoped that this will improve professional practice.

In drawing comparisons between the programmes at a broad level, the taught stage of the professional doctorate separates the routes initially and different programme entry criteria mean that the students themselves may possess different characteristics when enrolling. The allocation of students to programmes can be influenced by the student's desired mode of study: in the Business School, part-time doctoral students are perceived to be better suited to the professional doctorate.

The taught blocks of the DBA have benefits that extend far beyond their use as a vehicle for skills' development: their power is in providing benefits that map directly onto areas of concern raised by PhD students: the difficulties of establishing a support network; a lack of identity; the unstructured nature of the programme and student confidence. Professional doctorate students benefit by having a 'ready-made' peer support group, whereas creation of a similar group amongst PhD students requires proactive behaviour on the students' part: building and sustaining enthusiasm for a PhD peer support group requires significant effort which is not always reciprocated by others. However, once the taught stage of a professional doctorate is completed peer support diminishes so whilst the 'cohort effect' is strong initially, the effect wanes. Some full-time PhD students report a lack of recognition from administrative staff as a distinct and important subgroup of the student population. They lack a sense of identity and in terms of status, they can feel in limbo, located somewhere between undergraduates and lecturers. A difference between the programmes has arisen in the opinions towards the skills' development aspects of the students' study. Professional doctorate students feel their transferable skills have been developed effectively throughout their study and the view from PhD students is more mixed. PhD students

report that whilst they appreciate the volume of training courses available and find some useful, they have concerns over the focus and quality of others. The shorter duration and more structured format of professional doctorates are seen as attractive features, as is the ability for students to claim acknowledgment for work already completed.

Regarding supervision, the supervisory teams for students on both programmes are comprised solely of academics. Involving practitioners in the supervision of professional doctorate students is seen by staff as desirable but the difficulties of achieving this are sufficient to prevent this happening at the present time. As summarised in the previous section, there was little evidence that the approach to supervision varied according to programme. There is an assumption at Northumbria University that supervisors can switch from PhD to professional doctorate supervision without further training and my research has uncovered a perception that the validity of the assumption should be questioned. This highlights a specific opportunity to make a contribution to practice within the supervisor training process at Northumbria University.

For professional doctorates the portfolio approach is seen as attractive and relevant to a professional qualification but staff at Northumbria University are unfamiliar with this option. There is a danger, however, that employing different assessment mechanisms to those of the PhD could be detrimental to perceptions of the standard of the programme. The challenges professional doctorates face regarding the supervisory team re-emerge in relation to the examination panel in that some staff believe that the inclusion of practitioners on the panel would be sit well with the philosophy of a professional doctorate. Furthermore, using those experienced in PhD examinations as professional doctorate examiners can be problematic, since they may bring with them expectations that are not attuned to those of the professional doctorate student and supervisor.

The points above are intended to illuminate current academic practice at Northumbria University and to inform programme management teams as developments in doctoral education are made. This is particularly true of professional doctorate programmes, since these are a rapidly developing venture for the University. Although the DBA is

relatively well established in the Business School, the programme has seen considerable changes in recent years and other professional doctorates are at the very early stages of development, with the result that awareness of these programmes and how they operate is limited amongst both staff and students. Raising awareness of the similarities and differences of the programmes will be useful to academics and to postgraduate students or others considering doctoral studies since there is often uncertainty as to the extent of differentiation between the two. Dissemination of this work will now be a priority. Within the University, suitable mechanisms will be the doctoral conferences, the Northumbria University Conference, Northumbria University staff training materials (MARCET Red Guides, for example) and at events organised through the Graduate School (such as the Professional Doctorate Working Group). The development of recommendations for Northumbria University will proceed in collaboration with programme management teams once the work has been disseminated. One key area for implementation is the inclusion of the findings of this research in the doctoral supervisor training programme, with the aim of placing greater emphasis on the professional doctorate and its relationship to the PhD. Externally, the intention is to present the research findings at relevant conferences and to publish material from this study.

I believe that this research has had an impact upon professional practice already and I can illustrate this with two examples. The first is that I was asked by the School of Psychology and Sports Sciences at Northumbria University in November 2009 to present a guest lecture on my research. A team of staff within the School are developing a professional doctorate in Psychology and wished to raise awareness of professional doctorates amongst their staff. The feedback on the lecture was complimentary (Elsey, 2009). The second example is that one participant in the interviews commented how the discussion was helping to clarify their own ideas regarding a recently introduced professional doctorate: *"it is very helpful for me, this* [interview]*"* (a13).

In summary, it might be assumed that the provision of differently named doctoral programmes at Northumbria University suggests that they are substantially different in nature but this research has found that the overlap between professional doctorates and the PhD is terms of 'purpose and process' is considerable. Differences between

the programmes can be well concealed and have emerged only as a fine level of detail was sought. The early stages of professional doctorate programme development relative to the PhD means that much smaller numbers of professional doctorate students exist and that the PhD dominates the doctoral education landscape at Northumbria University. Ultimately PhD derived supervision and assessment mechanisms moderate any differences in the programmes that do exist, with the result that differences are more apparent in the characteristics of the students than the programmes.

The existence of different programme structures gives an impression that the programmes are indeed quite distinct at least initially, but once underway differences dissolve to leave programmes that are essentially the same at a broad level of consideration. A reason for this overlap may be that professional doctorates owe their existence to the PhD and have evolved from it, retaining a significant amount of the mechanisms and philosophy of PhD research. Staff may see the programmes as 'notionally different', but the interpretation of the purpose of a professional doctorate is by no means unequivocal, particularly with regard to 'making an original contribution to knowledge' and the role of theory. As a consequence, this raises serious questions regarding assessment. Professional doctorates are caught in a difficult position, since they desire to be different to a PhD and to attract different candidates, but must maintain a level of academic parity in order to be attractive. Professional doctorates struggle to attract the prestige attached to the PhD due to their relative novelty and limited availability.

For the programmes at Northumbria University, titles and taught blocks can only distance a professional doctorate so far from a PhD; greater differentiation is hampered by adherence to supervision and examination procedures that are wedded to established PhD practices. Whilst it may suit the underpinning philosophy of a professional doctorate to break these links with the PhD and to modify the supervision and assessment procedures, perhaps by involving practitioners more closely, this would be extremely difficult to achieve and would require a significant shift in practice. In addition, it is possible that this would expose a professional doctorate to greater scrutiny with regard to standards and could lead to a more challenging task of claiming parity with the PhD.

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7.4 Personal research reflections

Reflections have been presented throughout this thesis due to the reflexive stance adopted, particularly from a methodological perspective. Doloriert and Sambrook (2009) state that even though *"the focus of the inquiry is on understanding the researched culture ... there may be some focus on the researcher's personal reveal"* (p.37) and the purpose of this section is to present my own 'personal reveal'. This section includes some reflections in the broader sense, such as my own personal development, the choice of research area and aims, the issue of insider research, the methods I employed and my personal views on the two doctoral programmes explored.

This research work has contributed greatly to my professional development. As a lecturer involved in provision of doctoral education, an increased knowledge of the 'purpose and process' of doctoral education at Northumbria University will be invaluable in my interactions with staff and students. Explicitly, talking to current and prospective students regarding the PhD and professional doctorate, discussing and assessing professional doctorate research proposals and providing input to taught blocks on professional doctorate programmes have all been greatly enhanced through this exploration and the better awareness of the 'purpose and process' of the programmes that has resulted. Furthermore, the research has satisfied my personal desire to carry out an exploration into the extent to which the two programmes differ, a wish brought about partly by my own experiences and facilitated by my position of 'compounded insiderness'.

I have found my choice of research area to be both fascinating and frustrating. It has been very informative and interesting to research doctoral programmes at Northumbria University but as I researched professional doctorates in general I soon became aware of the diversity of provision both in the UK and beyond. This had implications for my aim of comparing the two programmes since rather than being a distinct entity that could be compared with the PhD, each professional doctorate is located at a point on a continuum which makes drawing a comparison more difficult.

I believe that my position of 'compounded insiderness' has been a 'mixed blessing', with the principal challenge being the need to take a reflexive stance at all stages to try and understand how my own opinions have shaped the research. However, taking an overall view I do agree with Mercer (2006) that there is a net gain in being an 'insider': *"what is lost on the swings is more than compensated for on the roundabouts"* (p.3). I believe that my unique position within the research topic has enabled a richer exploration than an outside researcher would have been able to achieve. Having an external supervisor is one change that might have helped to minimise bias (Hewitt-Taylor, 2002), rather than having a supervisory team comprised exclusively of 'insiders'.

In terms of the methods used, I believe that semi-structured interviews enabled me to achieve the aims I set, but I would have preferred to have had a larger sample of participants to analyse. Considering either the student *or* staff perspective would have allowed this. I feel that the template analysis method was well suited to the aims of my exploration and provided a transparent way of generating contributions to both theory and practice. My own view is that the student interviews yielded richer data and this could be due to the *"conceptual common denominator"* (Doloriert and Sambrook, 2009, p.36) between myself and the students being stronger. This is because I have experienced every facet of dotoral study as a student but not as a member of staff. For example, I have not yet supervised doctoral students.

As part of my exploration, I have seen how other researchers need to strike a balance between professional and academic influences. For me, achieving this balance was simplified since my profession *is* academia: when researchers refer to the triple locations of 'workplace, university and profession' (Maxwell, 2003) that are relevant to professional doctorate research, these collapse into one in my case which has been an advantage. I have enjoyed my DBA programme but I also feel that the research presented here could have formed the basis for a PhD project and since my intended career path is within academia, I believe that choosing a PhD would have been advantageous. Perry and Cavaye (2002) suggest the PhD is a *"professional doctorate for academics"* (p.411) and a UKGCE report (2002) claims that a professional doctorate is not designed to prepare an individual for an academic post. Jolley (2007) suggests that *"those seeking a career wholly within* [academia] *might be usefully be*

advised to undertake a PhD rather than a professional doctorate" (p.230) and I believe a reason for this is the much more consistent construal of what a PhD is when compared to the uncertainty that still surrounds professional doctorates.

7.5 Suggestions for further work

The suggestions for further work fall into two categories: work that could be carried out using the existing data and work that would require additional data.

Research projects that could use the existing data are:

- A direct comparison between student and staff opinions. This has not been attempted since it was not a specific aim of the research presented here;

- An investigation of cultural and gender aspects.

A suggestion for further work requiring additional data would be an exploration of employers' views of the different doctoral qualifications, since this stakeholder perspective has not been considered in this study. Two other potential projects in the same broad research area as the work presented here are outlined below.

- A longitudinal study, with the data collected so far forming one stage of the investigation and a repeat of the data collection adding another stage. Narrowing the focus to professional doctorate students, Wellington and Sikes (2006, p.733) propose that *"in-depth, longitudinal studies of professional doctorate students and their lives and careers can make an important contribution to understandings of professional development".* Such research would help programme management teams track how their programmes are changing over time, particularly the newly introduced professional doctorates;

- As the number of professional doctorate completions at Northumbria University increases, there would be the opportunity to investigate these cases in detail. The aim could be to investigate the impact of the research by

examining whether the research outcomes are put to practical use (O'Mullane, 2004). This would be of interest to professional doctorate students who might use the work to gauge how their own research might be used.

<u>**Appendix A**</u>

<u>**Student interview guide:**</u>

Information for participants:
Thank-you for agreeing to take part in this interview.
This research is being carried out as part of an investigation into doctoral studies by a student from Newcastle Business School at Northumbria University. Your responses will remain completely anonymous. The interview will be recorded and notes of your responses will be taken; a copy of the transcript will be sent back to you for your approval before the responses are analysed. This will allow you to correct any mis-interpretations or to make any additions/deletions. During the interview, you are welcome to skip past any questions that you would prefer not to answer, or to terminate the interview at any time.
Please let me know if you would like to see a copy of the final results.
This interview should take approximately 1 hour.

Interview guide:
Biographical data:
Gender
Age
Nationality
Doctoral Programme
PT/FT
Enrol date:
Submission date:

Question 1
Why did you choose to enrol on a doctoral programme?

Question 2
How did you find out the programme you are following?

Question 3
Did you investigate enrolling at other institutions?
Did you consider other doctoral routes? If so which ones?
If you did research alternative routes/institutions, what attracted you to this particular programme in preference to other doctoral programmes?

Question 4
What is your research area, and what is your topic within that area?
What were your reasons for choosing this as the focus of your research?
Do you see your work as addressing a gap in the literature or a problem to be solved?
Did you discuss your choice of research topic with anyone?

Question 5
What is your overall research question?
Did anyone help you decide upon your research question?
Who will benefit from the research?
    In what way?

Question 6
What application do you see for your research? How will it be used? And by whom?

Question 7
Who sponsors your study?
        What will they gain from it?

Question 8
Thinking about the new knowledge you acquiring through your doctoral study, would you say this is coming mainly from within the University (from academics, etc) or from elsewhere? What/who are the main influences on the direction your research goes?
Faced with uncertainty over your research – how would you look to solve the problem?

Question 9
Do you feel you belong to a particular academic discipline? If so, how strongly and why?

Question 10
What personal skills have you developed skills through your programme? How has this been achieved?
- reflexivity?

Question 11
How many people are in your supervision team? What is/are their background(s)?
How would you describe your relationship with your supervisor(s)?
What do you expect a supervisor to do?
Does anyone else have an influence on your work?
Where else would you look for guidance in times of difficulties?

Question 12
Do you work alone or with other researchers?
        If you work with others, how does this occur?

Question 13
What motivates you to continue?
What do you particularly enjoy about your study?
What are your greatest concerns regarding your study?

Question 14
How do you see your career progressing after you complete your doctorate?
What do you plan to do?
How will your doctorate help?
How do you think you will use the knowledge and skills you have acquired after you complete your study?
How do you think others will perceive your qualification?

Question 15
Would you change anything about your programme?
Would you recommend it to others?

<u>Staff interview guide:</u>

Information for participants:
Thank-you for agreeing to take part in this interview.
This research is being carried out as part of an investigation into doctoral studies at Northumbria University. Your responses will remain completely anonymous. The interview will be recorded and a copy of the transcript will be sent back to you for your approval before the responses are analysed. This will allow you to correct any mis-interpretations or to make any additions/deletions. During the interview, you are welcome to skip past any questions that you would prefer not to answer, or to terminate the interview at any time.
Please let me know if you would like to see a copy of the final results.
This interview should take approximately 1 hour.

Interview guide:
Biographical data:
Position:
Role:
Gender:

Question 1
What is your involvement with the research programme?

Question 2
Who do you see as comprising the 'target market' for the programme?
What are the key criteria when selecting students for enrolment?
What entry qualifications do you expect students to have?

Question 3
How is the programme marketed?
How do you describe the programme to potential students?
What do you promote as the major benefits of the programme to prospective students?
What programmes do you perceive as being in competition with yours?

Question 4
Who decides on the research topic?
What are the characteristics of a feasible research question?
Typically, what proportion of doctoral research is interdisciplinary?

Question 5
In relation to the delivery of the programme, are any inputs from external sources?
What are the common research methods?

Question 6
What are the key features of the programme structure?
What/who drives the design/development of the curriculum and structure?
What skills training is there and how does it operate?

Question 7
Who comprises the supervisory team?
        How are they selected?
What are the main responsibilities of the supervisor(s)?
If there is more than one supervisor, what roles and responsibilities do the different members take?

Question 8
In addition to the supervisory team, what student support mechanisms are in place?

Question 9
What are the programme learning outcomes?
What are the assessment procedures for the programme?
Who is involved in the assessment process?

Question 10
Do you have any information on what your doctoral students do after they graduate?

Question 11
How has the programme evolved over the last few years?

Question 12
Do you know of any forthcoming changes to the programme?
        If so, what are they & when will they occur?
        What is/are the rationale for the development?

Appendix B

Participant information

Students

Code No.	Date of interview	Prog.	School	FT or PT	Age & Gender	Nationality	Enrolled	Planned Submission
U0	9/5/08	DBA	NBS	*	33 M	Non UK	Sept 04	Aug 08
U1	12/5/08	PhD	NBS	PT	35 M	UK	Sept 06	Sept 11
U2	12/5/08	PhD	NBS	FT	28 F	UK	Sept 06	Sept 09
U3	12/5/08	PhD	NBS	FT	26 F	Non UK	Sept 05	Sept 08
U4	12/5/08	DBA	NBS	*	33 M	Non UK	Oct 05	Sept 09
U5	14/5/08	DBA	NBS	PT	47 M	UK	Sept 03	Sept 10
U6	19/6/08	DBA	NBS	PT	38 M	Non UK	Sept 04	Oct 09
U8	24/6/08	PhD	SASS	FT	41 F	UK	Jan 07	Jan 10
U9	27/6/08	PhD	SASS	FT	35 F	UK	Oct 04	May 09
U10	24/6/08	PhD	SASS	PT	60 F	UK	Oct 05	Dec 09
U11	25/6/08	PhD	SASS	FT	31 F	UK	Sept 06	Sept 09

* Denotes that the student was initially enrolled as FT but switched to PT study

Staff

Code No.	Date of interview	School	Involvement in doctoral study
A1	22/5/08	NBS	Supervises PhD and DBA students.
A2	22/5/08	SASS	Development and validation of DPA.
A3	30/5/08	NBS	Supervises PhD and DBA students.
A4	17/6/08	NBS	Supervises PhD and DBA students. Examines DBA and PhD students.
A5	21/10/08	NBS	All aspects of doctoral programmes (both PhD and DBA) and significant involvement with university wide research issues. Supervises PhD and DBA students. Examines PhD and DBA students.
A6	26/6/08	NBS	Close involvement with DBA programme (teaching and management). Supervises PhD and DBA students. Examines PhD and DBA students.
A8	16/6/08	SAS	Teaches on DBMS.
A10	17/6/08	NBS	Teaches on DBA & PhD programmes, supervises students from both programmes. Examines PhD and DBA students.
A13	26/6/08	SASS	Supervises PhD and DPA students and involved with the management of the DPA.
A14	17/6/08	SASS	Wide range of experience of PhD (supervision and examination), some experience of DBA through teaching on the programme.
A15	8/10/08	HCES	Involved with the management of DAP. Supervises PhD students.

Ethical issues report

Covering letter and Information sheet

INVITATION AND INFORMATION LETTER

Dear Doctoral Student,

I am writing to ask if you would be kind enough to take part in some research I am undertaking as part of my Doctorate in Business Administration (DBA) programme at Newcastle Business School, Northumbria University.

This letter sets out the background to the study and explains what your involvement would be. The research is concerned with investigating the experiences and opinions of those involved with doctoral education programmes. I am interested in meeting with students on doctoral programmes, doctoral programme leaders and other academic staff involved in delivering doctoral programmes. I would be grateful if you could find time to participate in one interview that should last approximately 1 hour. Interviews will be recorded and subsequently transcribed and returned to you for confirmation prior to any analysis taking place, at which stage you may change or delete any part of the transcript. The data from the interviews and subsequent analysis will form part of my thesis and therefore may be used at academic conferences and within journal articles.

Your involvement is entirely voluntary and you may be assured of complete anonymity. Under no circumstances will participants be named or any details provided to third parties that may identify participants. The results of the study are for use in my DBA thesis and journal articles only – the data will not be used for any other purpose. If you would like to see a copy of the results then please let me know and I will forward them to you in due course.

Should you have any questions or require any further details then please get in touch with me.

If you agree to take part then please contact me and we will then arrange a mutually convenient time for the interview. My details are:

Ian Charity
Room CCE1-248,
City Campus East,
Newcastle Business School,
Northumbria University,
NE1 8ST.

Tel: 0191 2437416   Email: ian.charity@unn.ac.uk

Thank you in advance for your assistance,
Yours faithfully,

Ian Charity,
Part-time DBA student.
Senior Lecturer, Business Analysis and Systems Information Management
Division, Newcastle Business School.

<u>Participant informed consent form</u>

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT RECORD SHEET

northumbria
U N I V E R S I T Y

Newcastle Business School

Dear Participant,

Thank you for agreeing to be a participant in this research.

You have been provided with an outline of the purpose and nature of this research project in the information letter that you were sent recently. This form is being used to record that you have been fully *informed* about the research you are to be involved with and that you *consent* to taking part.

By signing below, you confirm that you understand the purpose of the study, have been given the opportunity to ask questions regarding the study and that you agree to being interviewed and recorded.

Please remember that you may decline to answer any questions and may withdraw at any stage. Also, all personal details will be kept completely confidential and will not appear in any printed material.

Please sign below to indicate your agreement:

Name (BLOCK CAPITALS) …………………………………………………

Signature   ………………………………………………

Date   ………………………………………………

The lead researcher for this project is:

    Ian Charity
    Room CCE1-248, City Campus East,
    Newcastle Business School,
    Northumbria University,
    NE1 8ST.

    Tel: 0191 2437416 Email: ian.charity@unn.ac.uk
A copy of this form will be returned to you.

Please note: The University is the Data Controller under the Data Protection Act.

Appendix D

Transcript extract

Extract of transcript of interview with staff member 'a1':

Interviewer:
And if we could think about research topics for those students that you are supervising. Would you say that students came along with fairly well formed research topic and research question, or, I mean, I'm interested in what influences modify the research as it goes along. Mainly student, supervisor or other places?

Staff_a1:
My experience is that it varies enormously and the main variable is the range of influences to which the student opens themselves up. And I'm thinking about these four and the previous one which failed a couple of years before, so I guess I'm thinking about that to some extent as well. There are two parallel dangers, and I'm speaking, of course, like the good Aristotelian that I am, saying that what you've got to try to achieve is a mean between two attendant dangers. And the two dangers are either being so committed to your view that despite evidence, despite the possibility of other frameworks being more appropriate, you just stick to it and plough that field. And being open to absolutely everything such that you never specify what your area is and, therefore, how you can make a contribution. Now somehow we need as supervisors to steer the students towards a degree of intellectual openness, but not so much that they don't actually produce a contribution. And I see it very much in those terms. And at various stages, the balance between those things changes. At writing up stage, you are hoping that somebody is no longer saying, ah! Actually what I want to do is this! You can't have that. But right at the start, I do encourage them to look widely in case they can be inspired by something else or find that something else is more relevant than the stuff they thought they were doing. But you are, to draw out the appropriate Aristotelian metaphor, you are engaging a balancing act in which either side is fraught with danger, but that is necessary to your progress.

Interviewer:
Yes. That's great. So there wouldn't really be any characteristics of a feasible research question that you could point to, because, obviously, every case is individual? There maybe somebody you could maybe rule out?

Staff_a1:
Yes. I think that's what I mean. I think that's right. I think that's absolutely it. Some evidently, manifestly, are not PhDs. And you have to point that out for a variety of reasons. Some are too broad. Some ask questions that have already been decisively resolved. Some are confused. Some are internally contradictory. Some are impossible due to issues of access. And I guess there are other things as well. But, if you avoided those problems, then you've got something which is possible.

Interviewer:
There may be some way of working it around to a successful completion . . .?

Staff_a1:
Absolutely. Absolutely. And though I have done this, I mean, I have to say that my awareness now of the PhD by publication regulations having changed down to three, I think I would be far more flexible in terms of pointing students towards that as a possibility of achieving their PhD. If their work had become, let's say, had changed in its focus to such an extent that sustaining an argument within the PhD was difficult. But establishing a contribution through various publications, which are nevertheless systematic and coherent in terms of area, but not quite as coherent as a conventional PhD would be. I think I'm far more aware of that possibility. And I might be putting that to one of the people I'm currently supervising. As being something better than the conventional PhD

Interviewer:
A more suitable route? . . .

Staff_a1:
Absolutely. Absolutely.

Interviewer:
And you mentioned earlier on the idea of one of your key criteria is theory and practice linking together. Could you tell us a little bit more about that? In particular, what you see as the practice?

Staff_a1:
Let's draw a distinction that I haven't drawn sufficiently up to now. That's between the PhD and the DBA. And I need to talk about distinction here, particularly because that balance is different for the PhD and the DBA. And this is something that I, and I guess other supervisors, need to remind themselves of when they are supervising both types of fields. The contribution means something different. And, therefore, when you're looking at a DBA you're looking at a contribution to practice and, obviously, a theoretically important contribution to practice, but the focus is a contribution to practice. So in that case, the theory is something that you are not intending to develop. So you take a theoretical framework and you may be applying it to a new context, or in a new way. And that opens up the question of what does theory give you? And theory gives you different things in different areas, but what at the very least it should give you, is there are different ways to think about and, hence, to analyze the problem in terms of professional practice. If we think about it this way, what does that open up in terms of what action we can take? In that case, in the case of the DBA, it's the practice, but it's never the focus. So the person who I'm working with on their DBA is doing something which I think is very interesting. It's not directly in my area at all, which is very interesting, which will clearly impact on practice. Now it happens to be teaching practice, and it happens to be within an accountancy about which I know next to nothing. But nevertheless what they're interested in is moral development. It's how the experience of going through a placement changes the way they think about this and how we as teachers can intervene in that to help develop that and to learn from that in terms of how we teach so, there is some very interesting aspects to this study. But, it will result in some changes to our teaching practice and possibly others. And we will learn about the impact of placements on the way in which students think about practical questions. And I think it's good that we learn about that. So the focus is very much practice.

But it has to be theoretically important. And the theoretical models come from the extensive work done by [named author] and others in terms of how that we characterized moral thinking. Okay. Now, in a PhD, I think you've got to be contributing to theory. Now the contributions to theory can be of a number of different types. At best, I think you are creating a substantially new theoretical framework using the tradition that you've got. Now I am not doing that kind of work myself. I don't know of anybody who's done that work here. So, develop a new theoretical position. More commonly what you're doing is either, and you're a mathematician, so you'd be able to express this far better, but you might be characterizing limiting factors. The range of applicability of the particular theory. And so one of my students is doing -- that's my second supervising -- may find that by replicating some western studies in a non-western context, we work out some cultural limits to the applicability of that theory. So actually, that works in the west, but it doesn't work in the same way, because the conceptual apparatus is different and the culture is different, and so on. So there are some which say we take a theory, and we look at the range of applicability. Now that's a contribution to knowledge. There are others which take a theory from one context and apply it to another.

End of extract.

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