THREE RIVERS

THE NORTH EAST UNIVERSITIES CONSORTIUM

Durham University

Newcastle University

Northumbria University NEWCASTLE

Teesside University

University of Sunderland

Report from the activities of the 3Rivers 2023 Working Group on Innovation in Doctoral Education

Challenges and opportunities for rethinking doctoral education in the modern world

July 2023

Content of the report

Aims and objectives of the working group

The aim of the working group was to provide a forum to bring together experiences, ideas and practice from all areas of student support and development (supervisors, students as well as localised and centralised training and supporting staff) from across the five partner universities in the North East of England to discuss the challenges and opportunities for innovation in doctoral training in the modern world.

The Working Group itself had three main objectives:

- To create a shared and supportive forum to explore interests, experiences, strategies, initiatives, and practices relating to the challenges and opportunities for innovation in doctoral training.

- To create a stimulating and sustainable community of practice that provides the opportunity for effective learning, the sharing of good practice, and personal development between colleagues and institutions in the region

- To bring together and present a compendium of challenges and opportunities for innovation in doctoral training at the 2023 Three Rivers Learning and Teaching Conference and to publish an online report of the findings.

Structure of the working group

The working group met three times before the 3Rivers 2023 conference.

- 27th April

- 9th May

- 17th May

- Each session started with a presentation by an expert speaker followed by discussion in breakout rooms and capturing of thoughts on Google JamBoards. There was then an all group feedback session at the end to summarise findings.

- A sub group continued beyond the three sessions to bring together two presentations for the conference, summarising the findings from the working group

Working Group Members

- Rosalind Beaumont, Newcastle University
- Helen Cramman, Durham University (WG convenor)
- Martina Diehl, Durham University
- Nyla Drisdale-Gordon, Durham University (WG co-ordinator)
- Alys Einion, Northumbria University
- Melissa Hawkins, Northumbria University
- Oto-obong Inyang, Durham University
- Mike Knowles, Teesside University
- Merrel Knox, Northumbria University

- Hanno Kossen, Newcastle Univeristy
- Mari Maya, Durham University (WG deputy convenor)
- Cristina Navarro Reguero, Newcastle University
- Roger Penlington, Northumbria University
- Lauren Shields, Durham University
- Eirini Tzouma, Durham University
- Tony Ward, Northumbria University
- Peter Whitton, Durham University

Questions

- Question 1 - what does Doctoral Education look like in the North East of England? What models do we have in our home institutions?

- Question 2 - Where do we have best practice of Doctoral Supervision, Training and Study in the NE of England?

- Question 3 - What are some of the challenges for Doctoral Education in the NE of England?

- Question 4 - What are the opportunities for improving and innovating Doctoral Education in the NE of England?

Presentation 1
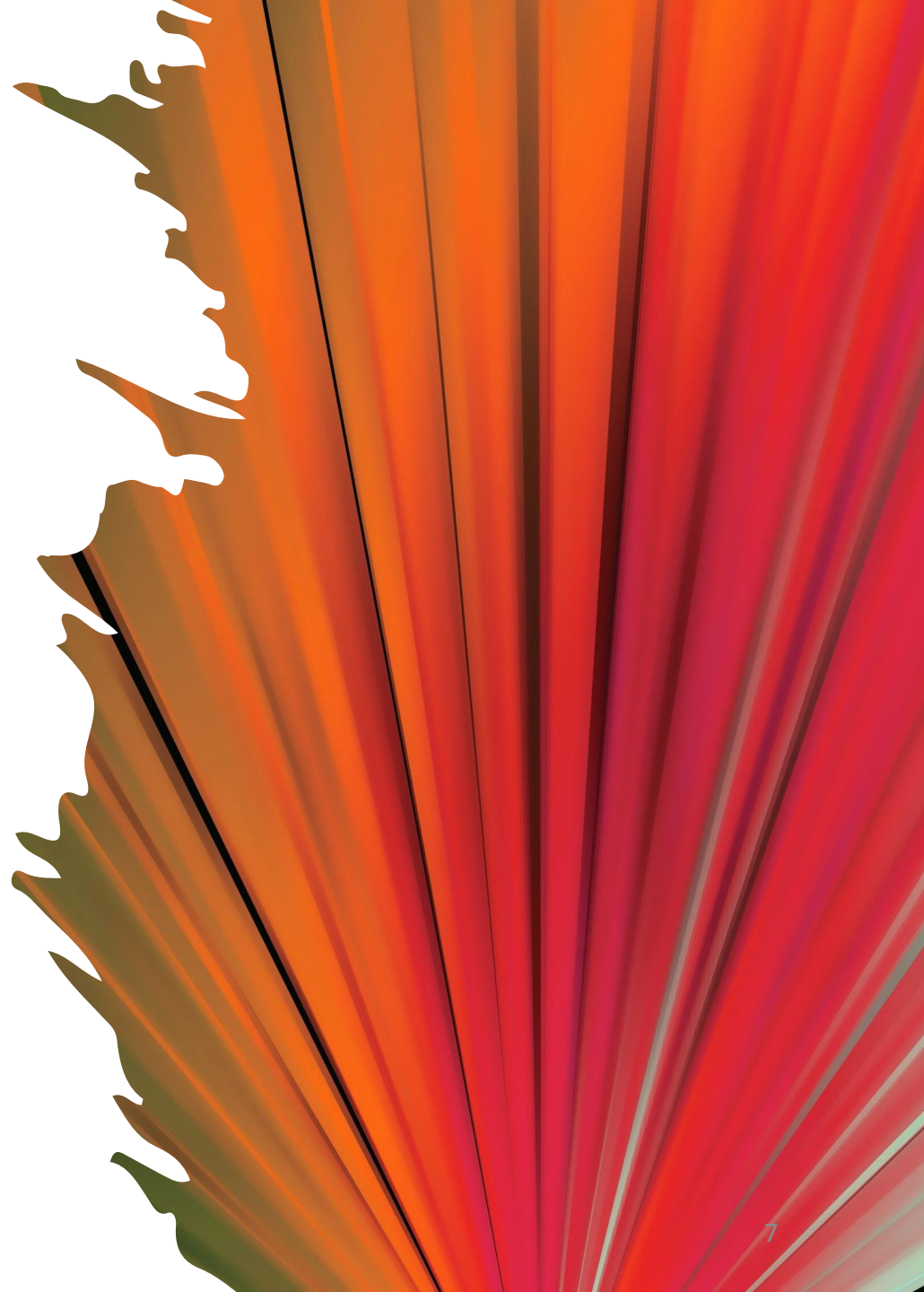
Doctoral supervision, best
practices, and challenges in
the North-East

By

**Innovation in doctoral
training working group**

Presenters

Martina Diehl
DCAD academic
development advisor
PhD candidate in Education
Durham university

Oto-obong Inyang
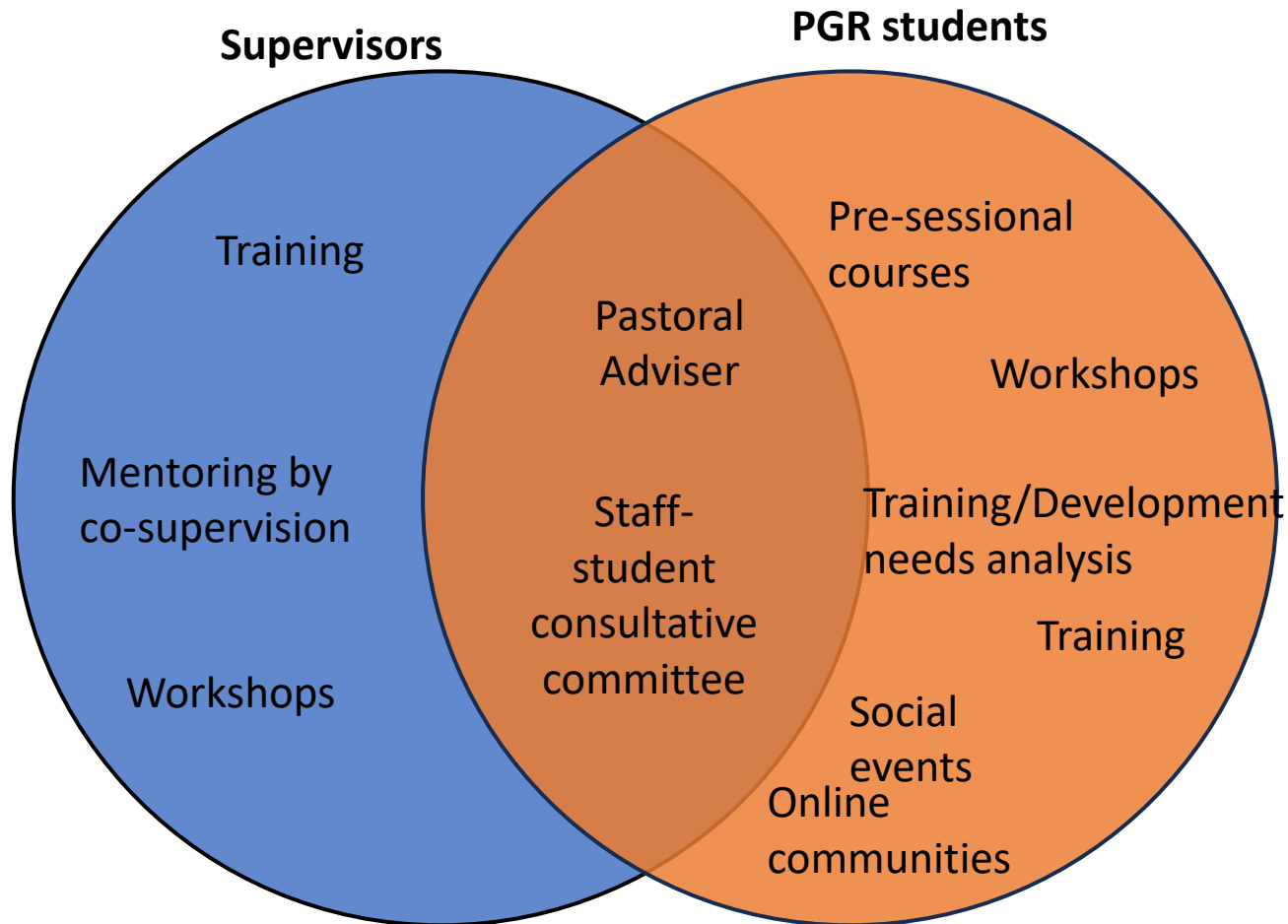Department of Physics,
Durham University.

Overview

- The picture in the North-East

- Best practice

- Challenges

Doctoral Education in the North-East

- Diverse within higher institutions and disciplines

- Three(3) or Four(4) years full-time or 6 years part-time

- PhD by research

- Professional doctorate

- Examine via Viva

- Minimum 2 supervisors

- Co-supervisor may have pastoral responsibility

- Advisers

Best Practice in Doctoral Education

Supervisors

PGR students

Training

Mentoring by co-supervision

Workshops

Pastoral Adviser

Staff-student consultative committee

Pre-sessional courses

Workshops

Training/Development needs analysis

Training

Social events

Online communities

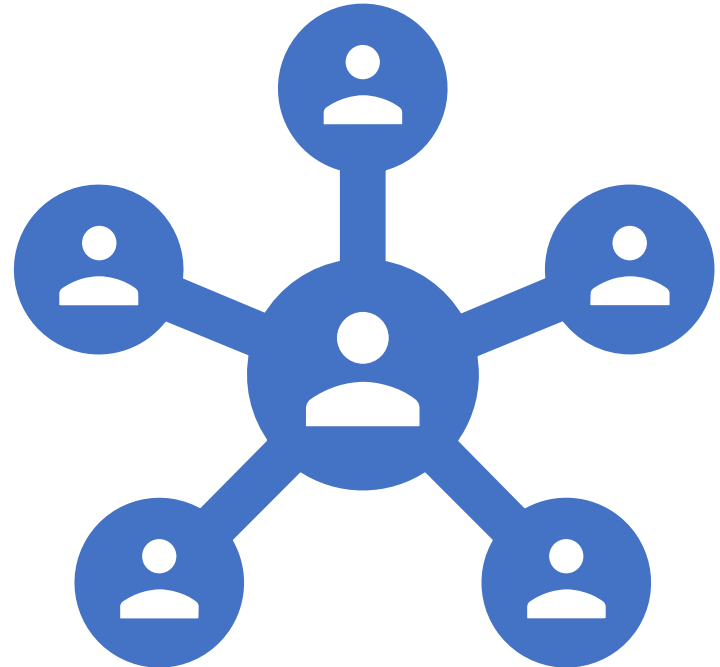PROGRESSION REVIEWS   RECORDS OF SUPERVISION

Challenges of Doctoral Education in the North-East

- Relationships in supervision
- Evaluation of supervisors
- Supervision and distance learning
- Fund availability

Relationships

- Between student and supervisor

- Between supervisors

- Between students

Evaluation of supervisors

How do we know they're doing a good job?

A balanced supervision

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Supervision and distance learning

Considerations during fieldwork?

Distance learners?

Part-time students?
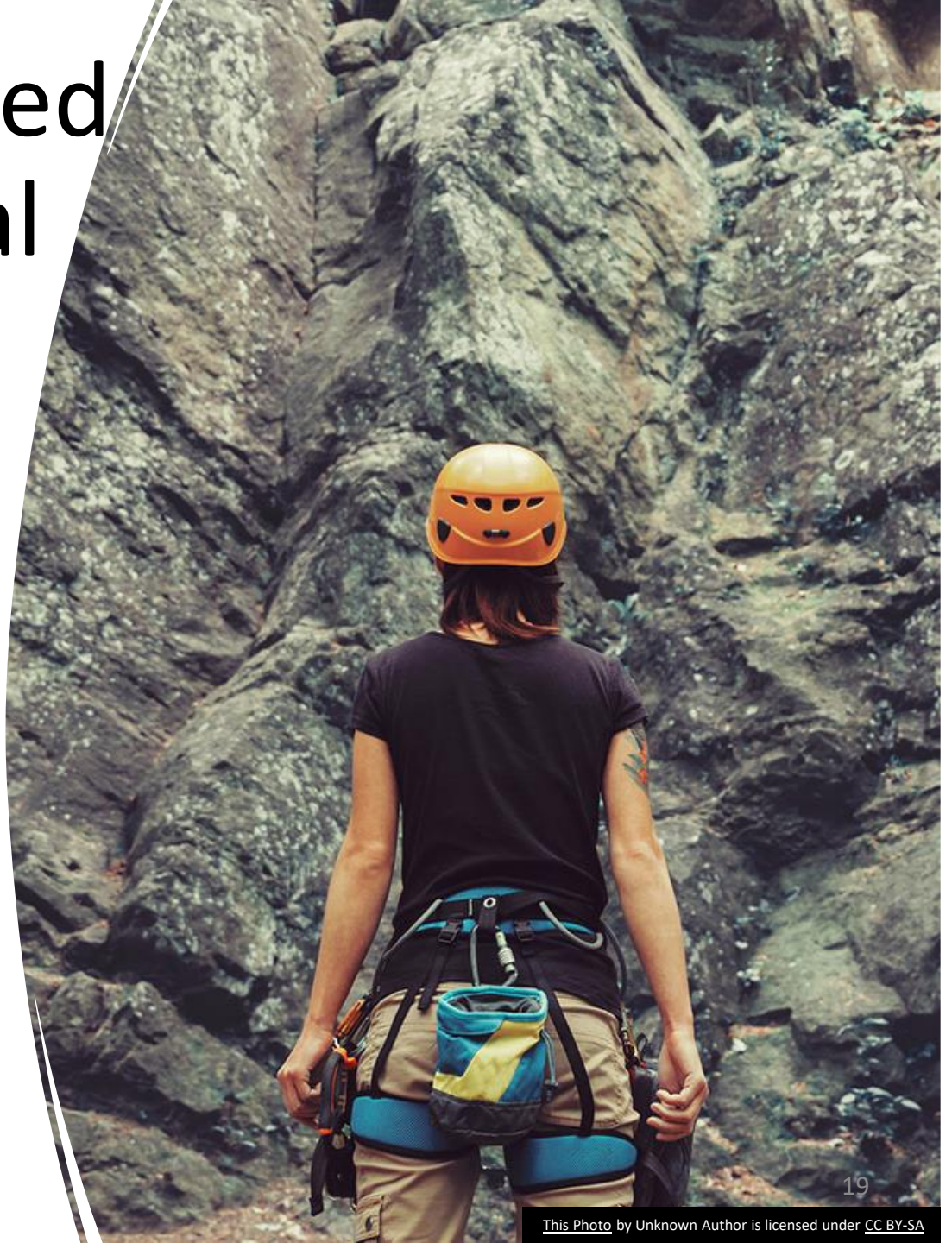
Fund availability

Cost of living

Studentship

Part-time student funding

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Challenges faced by the doctoral community

What is a PhD?

Integration of training for students

- Research Development
    - Workshops
    - Attendance
    - Purpose

Research development opportunities

- Departments; faculties and university-wide
  - Effectiveness of training?
  - Development workshops awareness
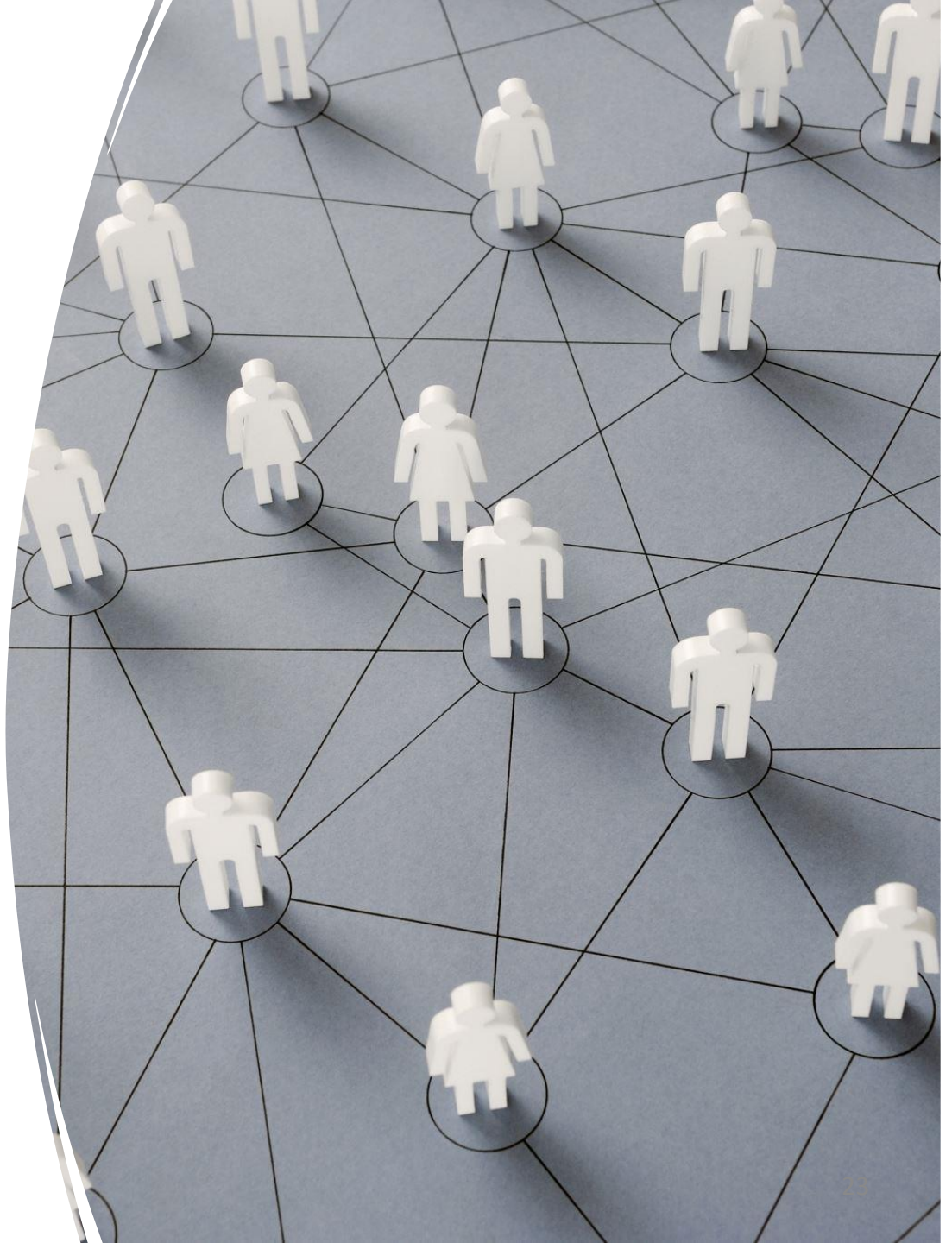
Part-time students

Challenges:

- Training needs
- Supervision time
- Community (local, online)

- Similar challenges for distance-learners

Post-COVID: a sense of community

It's returning slowly

Needs more work

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion(EDI) Challenges

- Neurodiversity
- Intersectionality
- Support for doctoral students (e.g., mature students, teaching responsibilities, employability).
- Hidden curriculum
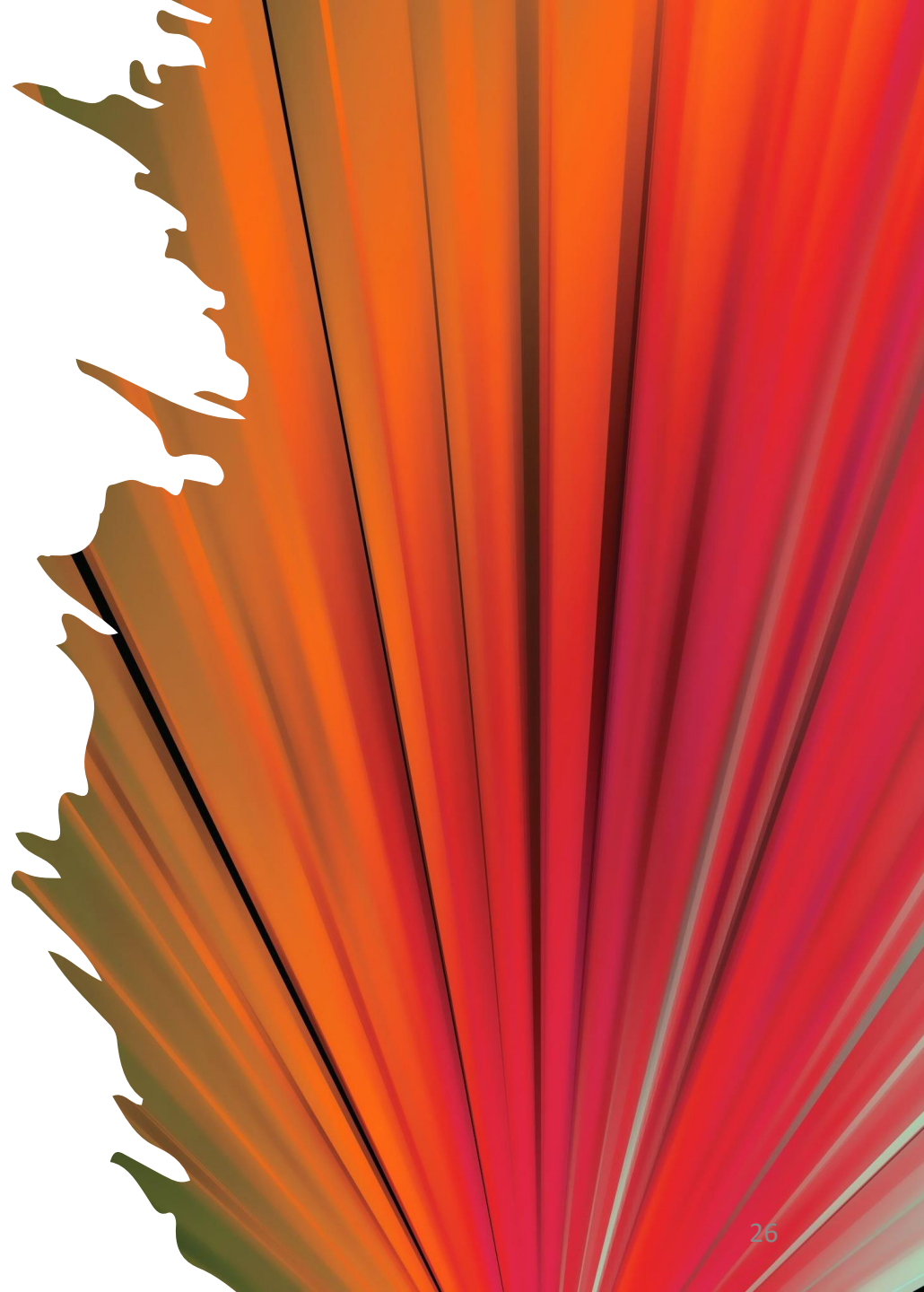- Health/wellbeing related issues

Questions & Food for thought

- How can we minimize these challenges?

- What are the available opportunities to promote best practices in our Universities

Presentation 2

What are the opportunities for improving and innovating Doctoral Education in the NE of England

Overview

- Innovations

- Training for supervisors

- Development and support for PhD Students

- Innovations in PhD methodologies, communication modes and outputs

- Collective Spaces

Innovations

- Defined by Helen as anything that comes from outside academia that can be used in our context. Innovations from other institutions (as opposed to best practice which is tried and tested)

- Systematisation of practices that have taken place on an individual or sporadic basis which then become embedded.

- Is innovation an opportunity for testing and trying?

- How comfortable are we with this?

Training and Development Support for Supervisors

- 3 categories:
1. Working Relationships
2. Inclusion
3. Evaluation

Working Relationships

- Supervisory team: identifying different roles and designated responsibilities.

- The roles can be decided based on: supervisory experience, research/academic expertise, special interest.

- Training for supervisors to work collaboratively in an interdisciplinary team

- Training for supervisors by discipline

- Supervision and pastoral support
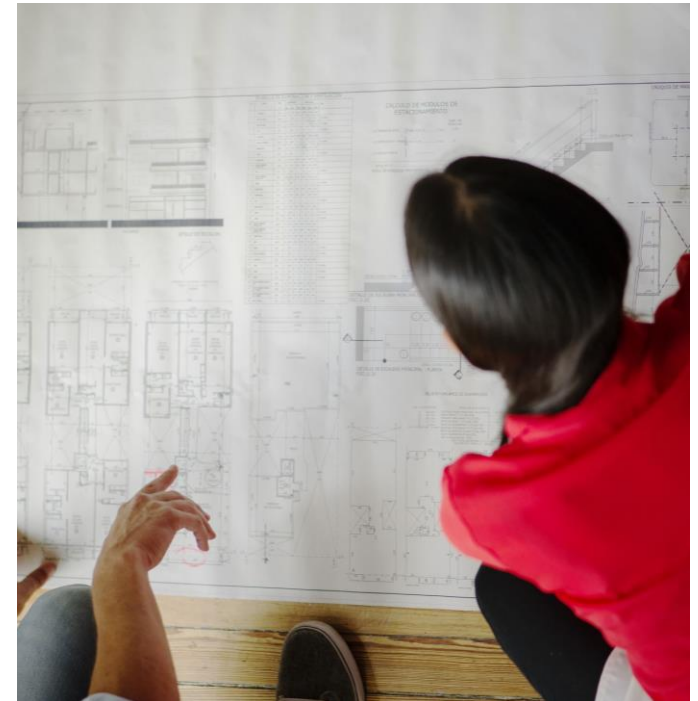
Inclusion

- Increasing diversity of PhD students – increased need for support

- Training in all aspects of EDI – race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality, religious beliefs, ability, & neurodiversity.

- PhDs are diversified as qualifications – professional pathways

- Continuous Professional Development – supervisor as a mentor.

- Active participation in the widening access project.

Evaluation

- Evaluation by students on a regular basis

- Mentoring schemes for supervisors

- Coaching schemes for supervisors

- Training on using reflexivity in the supervisory process

- All of the above can incorporate the inclusion and the collaboration perspective

Development and support for PhD Students (I)

In terms of:

- Developing their teaching skills (e.g., teaching assistants, international students):
    - Mentoring groups (e.g., reading group, Q&A).
    - Module on how it is like to teach in HE in the UK (e.g., types of students, assessment descriptors).
- Developing their research skills:
    - Writing for publication.
    - Applying for post-doctoral positions.
- Developing employability and entrepreneurial skills (e.g., humanities):
    - Replicate the models used in STEM-orientated doctorates to other disciplines.
- Catering for the different categories of doctoral students (e.g., full-time vs. part-time, funded vs. self-funded, face-to-face vs. distance, mature).
    - More affordable childcare provision.
    - Study or research leave for doctoral students.
    - A refresher module on research skills.

Development and support for PhD Students (II)

In terms of:

- Providing pastoral care:
    - A pastoral member of staff present at every supervision annual panel.

- Evaluating the process of the doctoral journey:
    - Compare and improve progression panels so students know what to expect and all have an equitable experience.

- Widening the access to doctoral education:
    - UNIQ+ Research Internships (University of Oxford: What is a UNIQ+ Research Internship? | Graduate Access | University of Oxford)

Innovations in PhD approaches, methodologies, communication modes and outputs

- Supporting students to innovate in the mode of PhD thesis to encapsulate different communication modes (videos, podcasts, presentations etc)

- Support in the use of cross-disciplinary and innovative methodologies (linked to diversity of supervision teams)

- Flexibility in timing of Eg Swedish model, four year PhD, Spain – flexibility for FT or PT.

- Greater flexibility to complete the PhD.

Intersectionality

Cultural capital – find and build on this

Bringing diversity together to build a PhD Community

Build on existing models to create our own model or toolkit of what inclusive PhD education could look like

Link to Academic development and community building (collective spaces)

Encouraging interdisciplinary research (funding bodies are driving this currently)

EDI training specific to doctoral studies for Staff and Students.

Addressing the hidden curriculum – especially around publishing

Collective Spaces

- 2 categories: Academic & Social
- Analytic distinction
- Why?
1. PhD degrees are lengthy
2. Loneliness is a very common feeling
3. Collectivity can be transformative because of the sharing of ideas and the creation of bonds

Academic

- Doctoral networks –regional or faculty based - e.g. posters, 3MT style etc.
- Thinking Spaces
- Community of practice for supervisors
- Writing circles and writing retreats/bootcamps – peer led as well as academic led

Social

- Coffee mornings – theme based could be an idea
- Away Days/Longer events
- Walking group
- Yoga Group
- Forest bathing – connection with nature
- Group sports, such as basketball
- Volunteering days – community impact

Questions/Discussion and Food for Thought

Thank you for listening and for your contributions!

Questions for discussion:

1. How can we minimize the challenges emerged from doctoral education in the North East of England?

2. What opportunities are available to promote best practice in doctoral education in and across the universities of the North East of England?

3. What are the opportunities for improving and innovating doctoral education in the Noth East of England?

Discussion following the conference presentations

Key themes that emerged from the discussion included:

- We should be seeking collectivity over competition – if one person is doing well it supports others in doing well.

- Importance of creating collective spaces.

- The importance of a community for sharing best practice.

- Addressing expectations/unwritten rules/induction:
    - Cultural differences – there are differences depending upon the background of the students as to what their expectations are.
    - There are different induction/mentoring experiences for students – how does the student learn or develop?
    - Unwritten rules – there is a need to forefront and address unwritten rules. What are the expectations for support.

- Importance of annual review processes (the development of individuals is critical as well as how their research is going)

- Additional examples of good practice for further exploration including: good experiences within some Doctoral Training Partnerships, the use of supervisor/student expectation agreements at the start of study periods.

Conclusions and next steps

- We have a huge diversity of PhDs across disciplines and institutions. This diversity brings challenges but should also be celebrated for the opportunity it brings to learn from each other.

- There are barriers to relationships being as effective as they can be (e.g. between the student and supervisor, between supervisors, between students). There is a need to understand these relationships more fully, especially to facilitate impactful community building.

- EDI within doctoral education needs to be explored in much greater depth.

- Evaluation of supervision is an area that would benefit from further work.

- The purpose, effectiveness and understanding of the value of research/academic development workshops needs further consideration.

- The discussion within the working group has been of great interest and there is a desire to continue this further. To this end, a Special Interest Group (SIG) is being created to support the community in working together.

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For questions or comments about the report or to find out more about the ongoing activities of the Special Interest Group please contact:
eise@durham.ac.uk

July 2023

Evaluation &
Innovation in
Science
Education