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## Supervising on a PhD by Published Work route: an exploration of the supervisory role

### Abstract

The PhD by Published Work (PW) route is well established in the UK but the traditional PhD route still predominates. The PhD by PW retrospective route, where a series of peer reviewed academic papers or artefacts are produced around a coherent theme over many years, collated and submitted with a synthesis (or equivalent) and usually defended by oral examination, is becoming an increasingly popular alternative route for gaining a doctorate. The award provides researchers who have already published but not obtained a PhD award an alternative route to a PhD. It allows them to demonstrate, through the medium of their publications, that they have already undertaken doctoral level research and have the appropriate skills for that level.

Supervisors are essential for the emotional and academic support for students undertaking these PhD by PW retrospective routes as they write their final narrative synthesis and prepare for their oral examination (if required).

This paper concentrates on issues solely relating to supervising this PhD by PW retrospective route where supervision mainly occurs during the final synthesis writing stage (usually no more than two years in the UK) after sufficient eligible outputs are produced. The need to build the capacity for high-quality supervision for this new route at Leeds Beckett University (LBU) catalysed a small qualitative project which explored the role of the PhD by PW supervisor and how it differed from the supervision of a student on the traditional PhD route. Aspects of practice, the challenges, rewards, and nature of the role were explored through surveys and a focus group. Nineteen supervisor and student participants completed the surveys

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(i.e. eleven supervisors/eight PhD by PW students) and six additional PhD by PW students (who had not done the survey) participated in a follow up focus group to explore some of the issues raised from the survey findings. Identification of staff development needs for supervisors of this retrospective PW route are recommended and should focus on regulatory and process clarity, and how to address the challenges of this route's supervisory practice especially with collation of outputs, support in clarifying coherence, originality and contribution to the knowledge base, synthesis writing and emotional support for the students. Emotional and practical support suggestions for effective PhD by PW route supervision are suggested.

### **Keywords**

PhD by Published Work, supervisor, doctoral education

## **1 Introduction**

This PhD by Published Work (PW) route is growing in popularity in the United Kingdom (UK) and globally (United Kingdom Council for Graduate Education (UKCGE), 2004; JACKSON, 2013) but remains less well known than the traditional PhD route where students generate and defend a thesis of original research at a viva voce examination usually fully or partly independent from the writing and publication of papers from the student's work. Both the traditional and PW routes require original scholarly work and a contribution to the body of the subject knowledge. However, for the PhD by PW retrospective route, the students (who are active researchers and usually academic members of staff) collate a series of peer reviewed academic papers/evidence based artefacts during their careers which encapsulate their thinking and academic work around a coherent theme (often over the period of many years). This selection of connected, coherent outputs must be in the public domain (be they papers, digital outputs or artefacts) and are submitted with an additional overarching written synthesis/critical narrative which explores the contribution, impact and context of all the submitted outputs. There is then the requirement to defend the work where it is standard practice (as with the traditional

route) with an oral examination. In the UK, students usually only enrol (and pay fees) for the year when they are writing their synthesis. The PhD by PW route provides a pathway for students to demonstrate their publishing capabilities and it also gives existing academic staff a way to achieve doctoral status while managing the “publish or perish” milieu endemic to their work (JACKSON, 2013). As LEE (2010, p. 160) writes, the PhD by Publication is evidence of the doctoral student’s “capacity to articulate the outcomes of his or her research in public form, legitimised by the mechanisms of peer review.”

Research has shown that the growing diversity of doctoral programmes within a globalised higher education environment contributes to knowledge and enhances innovation (HALSE & MALFOY, 2010; LEE, 2011; BLESSINGER & STOCKLEY, 2016). Many universities, like Leeds Beckett University (LBU), which historically have focused more strongly on vocational, practice and technical subjects, are increasingly requiring new staff to hold PhD qualifications as an essential condition of appointment. Similarly, PhDs are also becoming a requirement for existing staff who may well have been researching and publishing for many years but have not enrolled in a traditional PhD programme.

Traditional PhDs are not always regarded as accessible or inclusive, and some active published researchers (particularly those who may have taken a career break) may not have had the opportunity to complete a traditional PhD (SMITH, 2015b, p. 8). The PhD by PW routes in the UK are usually retrospective and attracts “students” (the “students” are usually university internal academic research and teaching staff) who have had a record of publishing in peer reviewed journals and wish to collate and reflect back on their coherent body of existing work to enhance their education, professional development and career prospects through the acquisition of a PhD. There are a few PhD by PW awards in the UK which are “prospective” and students collate work completed around a theme within a set period of time.

There is a growing body of knowledge and literature exploring the PhD experience and the different routes of doctoral education (SLADE, 2011; HUGHES & TIGHT, 2013; McGAGH et al., 2016; CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF GRADUATE

STUDIES, 2016) as well as more recent research literature that focuses on the PhD supervisor (BASTALICH, 2015) and the emotional support needed for students on all doctoral routes (COTTERALL, 2013) but there is little that focuses on the *specific role* of the supervisor and the support they offer to students on the PhD by PW route.

Traditional routes and PhD by PW routes require rigorous research which meets equivalent academic standards for quality. The key difference for the retrospective PhD by PW model is the way the work is conducted – often over many years and frequently in many research teams in different environments with a range of colleagues, mentors and investigators, usually with the publications (sole or co-authored) being completed before the supervisor enters the process.

Unlike the traditional PhD route which involves supporting students *during the process* of undertaking rigorous, high-quality research, the supervisor for the PW route usually only formally starts working with the PhD student when they already have sufficient peer reviewed work outputs (papers or artefacts) in the public domain and are ready to register to begin on the final part of their award – the synthesis (the final reflective piece) – and prepare for their viva voce examination. The supervisors' main role is to steer the student through the process of designing and drafting the synthesis. The synthesis for the PhD by PW is referred to in institutional guidelines using a variety of terms and may take the form of a “critical appraisal”, a “narrative” or a “critical statement”. However, essentially this final piece, whatever it is called, is regarded as a critical reflection on the key research ideas from the published works and an exploration of the work's contribution, context and impact (SMITH, 2015b p. 3). The writing and examination of this synthesis can often symbolise the culmination of an established, long-term and productive research career.

This paper focuses specifically on the role and experience of supervisors for the retrospective route of PhD by PW in the UK building specifically on work about the future of doctoral study (SMITH, 2015a) and doctoral education policy (JACKSON, 2013). JACKSON (2013) explains the vital nature of supervision for

this route and the need for more information about the role and experience of the PhD by PW supervisor.

For consistency of terminology, the PhD by PW candidates will be referred to as “students” throughout (even though many are long-standing academic staff), the supervisors of these students will be referred to as “supervisors”, and the final piece for submission as “the synthesis”.

## 2 Methodology and analytical approach

**Approach:** The need to build institutional capacity for staff to supervise the final PhD by PW route catalysed a decision to explore the wider sector about this issue by exploring the experience of supervisors in the UK who had supervised this route. A broadly interpretive approach was adopted for this project with a focus on qualitative inquiry (CRESWELL, 2007). Since this project sought to explore how academic teachers in higher education perceive and make sense of situations relating to the supervision of this specific route, and given the premise that the experience of the individual is socially constructed (CARSTEN et al., 2010), a qualitative approach to investigating this area was chosen to “study things in their natural settings attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (DENZIN & LINCOLN, 2003, p. 5).

Narrative inquiry, within the context of qualitative methodology, is particularly appropriate for researching how individuals make sense of their lives by selecting and arranging information about significant episodes (COUSIN, 2009). Narratives “not only pass on information” but they also assist to “crystallize or define an issue, view, stance or perspective” (COHEN, MANION & MORRISON, 2011, p. 553).

**Survey and focus group questions:** The online survey questions to the PhD by PW supervisors and students were a combination of closed and open questions where respondents could write in free text boxes. The supervisors’ survey questions explored, i) the experience and duration of supervisory practice for the PhD

by PW route and whether they had also supervised traditional PhDs, ii) differences and commonalities between the two routes, iii) the challenges and pleasures of supervising the PhD by PW route, iv) specific emotional and practical support strategies offered during the stages of completing a PhD by PW i.e., a) supporting the students to select the outputs, b) clarifying the coherent theme, c) exploring originality and contribution to knowledge in the synthesis, d) pre-viva support, e) post-viva revisions. Student surveys mirrored these questions exploring their experiences of the stages a)-e) above, the challenges and pleasures of undertaking the PhD by PW, and any specific practical strategies they used for synthesis writing, motivation, dealing with setbacks, understanding the impact, contribution and originality of their outputs. Since the experience and challenges of supervising (and being supervised by) PhDs by PW were being sought, written and verbal narratives were chosen as the tool to allow exploration of *what* stories the participants chose to tell and *how* they chose to tell them. Written and verbal prompts were provided in the survey questions and as part of the focus group structure which focused primarily on, i) experiences of undertaking and supervising PhD by PW routes, ii) the differences and commonalities between the approach to supervision on the different routes, and iii) the challenges and rewards of undertaking and supervising the PhD by PW route.

**Sample:** 19 surveys with space for free narrative were collected from 19 respondents from nine universities in the UK. This purposive sample of respondents were accessed through knowledge of their situation as supervisors (n=11) or students (n=8) doing a PhD by PW route via contacts in academic research networks. Three had a traditional PhD but were supervising PhD by PW routes, eight had completed the PhD by PW route and were also supervising it, and the remaining eight were undertaking a PhD by PW route at their own university.

All of the individuals doing the PhD by PW route were internal staff members undertaking their own university's internal scheme – this is common. Six additional UK respondents who were writing papers and were registered, or intending to register, for the PhD by PW route at LBU participated in a follow-up focus group to discuss emergent issues from the surveys and discuss their own PhD by PW stories

and issues relating to supervisory support. Ethical approval was obtained from Leeds Beckett University Research Ethics panel.

**Analysis:** A thematic content analysis of the survey and follow up focus group data (WILLIG, 2003) was undertaken using a recursive approach. CARSTEN et al. (2010) refer to this as “inductive analysis”, in which researchers continually create and refine data to explain what is happening. To apply this analysis strategy, the lead researcher initially coded three narratives to form and refine a coding schema by identifying particular wording and definitions of the schema. This coding schema was then shared with a wider group of colleagues who had read a sample of the transcribed surveys. The coding schema focused on the experience of doing a PHD by PW, the supervisory role and how it differed from the traditional route, the main rewards and challenges, and lessons learnt. Each of the remaining narratives were analysed using the above schema. This method led to the identification of the themes (below) that are reported in this paper.

Analysis of the qualitative data relating to the student and supervisory experience specifically forms the basis for the content of this paper. The discussion is based on the following key themes which emerged from the data, i) the differences in the role between a supervisor on a PhD by PW route and one supervising a traditional route, ii) the terminology of the word “supervisor” and the essence of the supervisory role, iii) the supervisory responsibility for quality assurance, iv) the key rewards and challenges of the role from the supervisor’s perspective, v) the pastoral role, and vi) some summarised, qualitative advice which could be used as part of the staff development support for new supervisors of the PW route.

**Limitations of the methodology:** The small sample size precludes wide generalisations from the findings being made and findings are really only representative of the group surveyed. That said, three of the eleven supervisor survey participants had completed and supervised/were currently supervising traditional PhD routes as well and the remaining eight supervisors had also done a PW route themselves which offered the opportunity for a useful comparison of experiences within the sample group between the two routes. The lead researcher initiated the analysis and

did the coding but the potential bias impact of this was diluted by a wider group of experienced staff colleagues with experience of research student supervision (not involved in the surveys or focus group) reading, re-reading and coding a sample of the transcripts and discussing and modifying emergent themes.

## 3 Findings & Discussion

### 3.1 The role of the supervisor for the PhD by PW route – similarities and differences

**Terminology:** All participants were clear that the role of a supervisor for a PhD by PW was different in some ways from that of a traditional PhD supervisor. However, the value of this finding is compromised by the fact that only three supervisor survey respondents had undertaken a traditional PhD *and* were also supervising both PhD by PW and traditional route students. This reduced the opportunity for useful comparison between routes. However, half the respondents stated that the term “supervisor” for students on a PhD by PW route could be misleading when the role does not primarily focus on the formal guiding of the ethical and methodological elements of the research process (as with the traditional route). All the survey and focus group respondents viewed the PhD by PW supervisory role as a “mentor/adviser” because they were helping the student with, i) the selection of the outputs for inclusion in the synthesis, ii) the content, writing and level of critique of the synthesis, iii) clarifying the regulatory process, iv) articulating the coherence, significance and originality of all the included outputs, and v) preparation for the oral examination. However, in the UK, the Quality Assurance Agency’s (QAA) Quality Code, Chapter B11 on Research Degrees (2011a) refers consistently to the term “supervisor” for all routes, and the general literature on PhD support usually refers to anyone in a key mentoring role as a “supervisor”. Indeed, most official university documentation also reflects this terminology so, for the purpose of this paper, “supervisor” will be used to mean the same thing for PhD by PW students,



meaning the person allocated to *mentor* the PhD by PW student through the PhD process.

Although the United Kingdom Council for Graduate Education (UKGCE, 2004) comments on the increased prevalence of universities that now formally appoint an “advisor” rather than a supervisor, this report also points out that, if a university (generally a minority) regards the PhD by PW degree as one in which publications are used to support a unifying critical statement about an intellectual position, then the appointment of a “supervisor” might be appropriate. On the other hand, most universities clearly regard the PhD by PW degree as one to be awarded for the contribution to the field as made by the collated publications and summarised for the synthesis, and this would require an “advisor” to guide the student.

**The existing peer reviewed published work:** Whatever their title in the university, the role and practice for the PhD by PW route is clearly not identical to the supervisor for the traditional PhD route (who, as stated, has a quality assurance role in terms of how the emergent research project for the thesis *is conducted*). All the survey respondents commented that the supervisors for PhD by PW students may “advise” their student on the synthesis – how to bring out its coherence, theme and the originality. But they were clear that they could not “supervise” the quality of the published research because that had already been completed, written up and evidenced in the public domain. The prior peer review process of the outputs is the measure of the student’s rigour, clarity of the writing and the quality of the research. A paper output may have to go through several revisions before it is finally accepted by a journal (or equivalent) and it is *this* process that mirrors the iterative process of the supervisor working with the student on the traditional PhD route.

A PhD by PW student would usually be allocated their supervisor at the time of their enrolment for the award and typically the supervisor supports them through the year’s registration period as they generate their synthesis (QAA, 2011b). Their role is not to comment on the quality of the pre-published research but, rather, to encourage the student to be clear on the highlighting of their themes, facilitate critical reflection on their work in a wider research context, ask them to reflect on any

future research directions they can put in the narrative synthesis, and support them in the defence of their ideas for their end point oral examination.

There is some differing practice in the sector for PW routes. In some universities (e.g. The Open University), PhD by PW students are allocated a “mentor” in the year preceding enrolment for the final year of the award. Once registered, the student then moves to a more formalised allocated supervisor for the year of registration and synthesis writing.

**Quality assurance:** Key outcomes for successful completion of the PhD by PW must show that the student can assure examiners that their work is original, has had impact, contributed to the knowledge base, and is clearly structured around one key coherent thematic area. This must be evidenced in the synthesis and the PhD by PW supervisor must support the student to achieve in these areas (QAA, 2011b). It is clear that the core supervisory role for the PW route is guidance for the writing of the student’s emergent synthesis. In contrast, supervisor(s) for a PhD traditional route check the student is undertaking ethical, methodologically sound research, and is capable of collecting and analysing data effectively at the right level and depth. A supervisor for a student on a traditional PhD route has a similar role to the PW supervisor by helping to encourage the student to see how their own work links to a wider body of knowledge and supports them in the writing-up of the main thesis of this research. The key role for both is to keep the student on track and facilitate the production of high-quality research work.

All supervisors will support the individual in the preparation for the oral examination which explores and defends the corpus of work.

Despite some commonalities, the work of the supervisor for the PhD by PW is conducted over a shorter duration, has a more advisory role and cannot influence the quality of the research papers/artefacts already in the public domain.

Seven of the eleven survey respondents (the students and the supervisors) mentioned that often new supervisors on the PhD by PW route had not undertaken any training or staff development about the route, seemed unclear about the differences in the routes, needed reminding that the outputs had already been peer reviewed,

and lacked knowledge about the quality, range and suitability of non-standard outputs such as films, digital work or art work. However, they were clear that, like traditional PhD route supervisors, their role in quality assuring that the requirements for the PhD by PW award had been met was still essential.

**The context of the PhD by PW student's career and research background:** PhD study by any route is challenging and the supervisor is a key support in the process (LEE, 2008). In the UK, the PhD by PW student is allocated an "official" named supervisor after successful application for the award, and after the sufficiency of the published work has been agreed. In the UK, students will be allocated two supervisors, and very often it appears the Director of Studies (or first supervisor) might be someone from whom the student has sought advice in the past as part of their ongoing writing (but should not have been a named co-author).

PhD students on the traditional thesis-based route work with their supervisor over a longer period of time often co-presenting at conferences, defending and justifying their methodology at research seminars, and meeting with their supervisor as they learn their research skills and how to analyse their findings.

The picture is more varied with PhD by PW students. Many students are already established researchers known in their field who have simply not had the opportunity to undertake a doctorate, but whose long academic career has remained active, outward-facing and whose publications are of a PhD equivalent (i.e. original, coherent, and contributing to the knowledge base in their area). Other candidates for this award may come to their supervisor having a good range of quality outputs but have had (unlike the traditional PhD student) minimal opportunity to defend their work in public, particularly if they are mainly based in professional practice rather than based in a university.

A PhD student on the PW route may have written and submitted the papers for peer review several years before, may be writing and submitting alone and still not be part of an active research group, and may not have had the opportunity to attend so many conferences to present their work. It is arguable that this potential student should show on application – and prior to being accepted on the award for the syn-

thesis writing – that he/she is active and contributing to the field. If not, the supervisor should give the student opportunities to articulate the themes of their work by linking them to institutional research centres, dissemination networks, encouraging conference presentation, and providing a network of fellow students who can work together to hone a verbal defence of their work (SMITH, 2015b, p. 122).

### **3.2 Emotions and the doctoral experience**

All doctoral study involves a huge number of challenges – accomplishing the writing, constructing a scholarly identity, maintaining momentum and dealing with the normal life issues which occur during enrolment (COTTERALL, 2013). LUPTON (1998) describes how emotions are fundamentally implicated in all human behaviour; they shape our views, impact on our thought processes, affect our communication skills and motivate action. Indeed, attempting to understand the “emotionally laden” (SCHUTZ et al., 2006) nature of learning has prompted much research into the role of research in educational settings.

HUGHES & TIGHT (2013) relate the PhD learning and work experience from the student’s and supervisor’s view as a journey, comparing it with metaphors in the *Pilgrim’s Progress*. They write that “the message of travelling against all obstacles, through the strength of the inner spirit” speaks strongly to individualism and resilience (HUGHES & TIGHT, 2013, p. 766), and ignores how the development of good study habits, knowledge and skills are also an essential component for a successful PhD. All our student and supervisor survey respondents recognised that the entire writing process, plus the formal registration for the synthesis writing, can add up to many years’ duration; this means the stresses vary and must be dealt with over the long haul. This can be difficult – job changes, publication rejections, financial pressures, family issues, inconsistent support, and the juggling of writing with paid work can be challenging. That said, some stated the fact that the work becomes embedded in “normal life” and the ongoing thrill of publication success, and the deep satisfaction of finally receiving the award made it a rewarding process overall.

COTTERALL (2013) summarised the range of emotions which affect students on all doctoral routes and explores how motivation ensures students stick with the process until completion. Anxiety can curtail a PhD student's ability to write (CASTELLO et al., 2009), but dealing with stress effectively, and developing key coping strategies, can enhance achievement of the intended outcomes – that is, in this case, a completed synthesis and successful viva (HOPWOOD, 2010). All eight of the student survey respondents, and all those in the focus group, described similar emotional experiences to those in the literature about the traditional route e.g. resilience issues when dealing with feedback and lack of clarity over the process, creating anxiety.

Losing a supervisor along any learning route can feel like a major setback. Students on a traditional PhD route have a clear expectation that a Director of Studies and a second supervisor will remain with that student to successful completion. It can therefore be disappointing when job changes, staff moves, or changes in research direction mean new supervisors have to be allocated (LEE, 2008). However, the case is slightly different for the PhD by PW students. They would not usually meet with their official supervisor for synthesis planning and viva support until enrolment for the award – usually about one year before the intention of a completion date. This means that the chances of having a single major advisory disruption and becoming a “doctoral orphan” with its associated confidence and support issues (KILEY & WISKER, 2009) during the year (as opposed to the five years of a traditional route) are much reduced. In any case, survey respondents reported that the advisory circle for the PhD by PW student is more fluid and influenced by a much wider group (often through research colleagues and academic networks), as the ideas may grow over many years through different roles and work environments.

Three of the survey respondents mentioned that they had lost their supervisor during their year (mainly when they left for a new job) but it appeared that constructive relationships were made with new supervisors. The students developed speedily as autonomous learners and grasped ownership of their research work in order to ensure their success. Initial difficulties with the transitional stage of working with a new supervisor can involve the building of a new trusting relationship and having

to deal with research ideas going in new directions (KILEY & WISKER, 2009). One of the respondents described how a new supervisor “couldn’t get to grips with the agreed theme” in her synthesis and how the debates about it were “rather tortuous”. She described how the reallocation of a replacement supervisor allowed her to look at the work through a different lens and use the fresh feedback from her new supervisor to adopt new directions and a higher level of critique.

Institutional support and a speedy process to replace a supervisor (SHACHAM & OD-COHEN, 2009) can be vital in enhancing resilience, and in empowering ownership and success in the PhD student on all routes.

Supervisory teams and peer support with others who are writing for publication or writing up their synthesis can be valuable at all stages of the PhD by PW journey (LEE, 2008; SMITH, 2015b). There has been a significant upsurge in writing on the doctoral experience, as the expansion of undergraduate courses in many countries has impacted on the numbers taking up postgraduate research degrees. LEE’s (2008) work on a supervision model where collegial support and developmental interaction is encouraged, and GREEN & USHER’s work (2003, p. 44) on “fast supervision” – supervisory practices delivered in a context where the emphasis is placed firmly on successful, timely completion – illuminate the picture. There is a recognition in the literature that students and supervisors need to regard doctoral education as work and recognise it as such, viewing the audit needs, management needs, staged processes and institutional quality assurance as integral to the PhD process (HUGHES & TIGHT, 2013). However, OWLER (2010, p. 289) has stated that this ignores individual student needs and educational development, arguing against the contemporary managerial impulse of seeing the PhD student as a “problem to be managed” and emphasising the value of considering the individual experience of the students involved. The PhD by PW model can, if supported through skilled supervisors and committed students, successfully combine these dual approaches through clear articulation of the process and by encouraging the students to be self-reflective and critical as they discuss and plan their synthesis. The writing of the synthesis offers the opportunity to reflect on all the work and its impact

in some depth (often with other colleagues) to ensure a credible contribution to the field.

It is a balance – a sound infrastructure, together with clear regulations and processes, can do much to reduce an individual student’s stress. As one of the interviewees said,

*“The process and all its deadlines are quite reassuring actually and I really only needed to worry about being critical, being reflective, original and being focused.”*

### **Building confidence and emotional resilience**

PhD student-supervisor relationships that nurture learning can generate, “emotional scaffolding which includes the gift of confidence, the sharing of risks in the presentation of new ideas, constructive criticism and the creation of a safety zone” (MAHN & JOHN-STEINER, 2002, p. 52).

Having a supervisor who can build and maintain a student’s confidence, and offer a safe environment for critical discussion is essential and not exclusive just to traditional PhD routes. One of the student participants stated that her supervisor,

*“Can help you develop ideas for your synthesis and give you confidence in linking-up your ideas and building a picture.”*

However, feeling good about a supervisory relationship is not always guaranteed. One of the respondents commented,

*“I was allocated a supervisor who I didn’t take to – they had little understanding of the PW route and didn’t know how to help me look at my papers and help me feel confident that my work had a coherent thread.”*

INGLETON & CADMAN (2002) identified how “interpersonal experiences of acceptance, validation and support” build student confidence and enhanced their emotional well-being and performance. COTTERALL (2013) reveals that writing and supervision practices can be common sites of tension on all PhD routes and,

likewise, WISKER & ROBINSON (2012) emphasise how a high level of emotional resilience appears to be key to the successful completion of a PhD by any route.

Other issues identified by the survey respondents focused on the pre-synthesis phase – the phase when the student is writing intensely for publication and has insufficient outputs to be formally enrolled. At this stage the student will usually not have an “official” formal allocated supervisor and will not have paid the enrolment fees for the PhD by PW route which commence when the student has sufficient publications and is ready to write the synthesis. Survey participants often stated that, at this stage, they felt “lost” when articles were rejected or needed major revisions. Very often, key co-authors and/or informal advisors are hard to contact, or choose not to be involved any further. Strategies to build emotional resilience are therefore core behaviours for the student to develop during their academic writing career and participants talked honestly about using their colleagues, social networks, and university writing groups as means of “informal” support. There was also recognition from the students that once the formal allocated supervisory stage had commenced, they became more secure and confident in the legitimacy of the supervisor and being able to work within the supporting supervisory infrastructure. This liberated them to reflect on their collated work and think more creatively in the more secure supervisory/student environment.

### **3.3 Being a supervisor – the rewards and challenges**

The surveys to supervisors revealed some interesting findings. The supervisors often worked in wider supervisory teams and linked their own traditional route PhD students to other colleagues in their research centres undertaking academic papers. They also extended these links to those writing up their synthesis for the PW retrospective route. The supervisors described the value of others being “critical friends” for synthesis draft-sharing, and the value of a group of academic writing colleagues and institutional writing groups in guiding of the students, particularly with their writing style and discussions about the originality and impact of their research. Many described the satisfaction of supporting an individual student



to help them map out the direction of their synthesis and articulate and illuminate their theme or “golden thread” (SMITH, 2015b, p. 4).

Most supervisors enjoyed the opportunity to work with the students on the PhD by PW route stating that, in their supervisory role, they had the opportunity to help a researcher document and identify an often long-established and productive research journey.

One said about the PhD by PW students he worked with,

*“You get to know the individual’s career and there is often a fascinating story to tell and it is up to me to help them tell it.”*

They described the rewards of working with individuals who were experienced and had an established reputation within their own peer communities, appreciating the fact there was the opportunity for broader discussion and less time spent on the policing of the research quality which tended to happen with the (often younger) traditional route research students.

One survey participant described how he supported a staff member to collate his outputs through the PW route. The student was an artist and presented a range of alternative outputs which were available in the public domain (films, exhibits, digital material). There was little institutional experience of supporting students through the award in their production of alternative artefacts and the supervisor found it “thrilling” and “baffling” in equal measure. Indeed, lack of knowledge of the PhD by PW route and poor staff development left many PhD by PW new supervisors feeling confused and unsupported. Many explained there was lack of detail and clarity in their institutional and national guidance especially relating to the sufficiency and quality of any non-written outputs and their “public domain” status.

However, there was a clear understanding that the relationship seemed more equal, more mature, more “rewarding” and less directorial because the “student” was, in fact, often a colleague, a well published member of university staff who had extensive academic experience.

The satisfaction of the achievable, time-limited nature of this type of the PhD by PW supervisory role was evident. They spoke of the pleasure of supporting PhD by PW students who were imaginative, good at academic writing, realistic about making changes and who were mature enough to develop ideas in reaction to feedback. They talked about the essential nature of helping the students to build research networks to help share their ideas (as described by SMITH, 2015a). Supervisors often linked their students to development workshops for their final year, which helped define their ideas for, i) research coherence, ii) synthesis writing groups, iii) mock oral examinations, and iv) bibliometric advice to help with evaluating the overall impact of the collated published research work. Other supervisors mentioned their enjoyment supporting students (often the mature, mid-career academic staff working full time in other universities) who were writing syntheses at a distance through Skype or through using discussion fora on online learning platforms.

### **3.4 A summary of key supervisory advice for this PhD by PW route**

In the surveys, the supervisors were asked what they felt were the main tasks of supervising students on a PhD by PW route bearing in mind that their role was to support the student in writing the synthesis and preparing for the viva so they could demonstrate the key core outcomes for the PhD by PW route. The student's collated research around a coherent thematic strand should evidence originality, impact and a contribution to the knowledge field. The supervisors' key advice is summarised from the findings in Figure 1.

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|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• For the PhD by PW route students, setting a workable plan and rough direction for the synthesis drafting.</li></ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Supporting the students to maintain momentum, emotional resilience and commitment.</li></ul>                        |

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Checking all the material submitted for the synthesis has been properly peer reviewed and focuses clearly around one coherent theme/issue/discipline.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Alerting students to internal regulatory issues about the institutional requirements of the PhD by PW route (especially the quantity and quality of papers and/or the range of alternative acceptable outputs/artefacts).</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To enhance consistency and clarity: generating a handbook for students relating to the PhD by PW route which includes process specifics, guidance on output impact, coherence, contribution to the field and originality. Key support contact names/links should be included as well as contact details for peer support networks (if available).</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Working through, with the student, the evidence of peer review from editors and journal reviewers and then supporting the student to use this evidence as a tool for reflecting on the limitations, scope and importance of their work in their final synthesis.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ensuring any citations of students' work are gathered and analysed to assess potential impact in the field. Make sure "impact" in all its forms is considered explicitly in the synthesis.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Supporting students to go beyond descriptive reflective cycles in their overviews and delving into effective impact analysis of their research (ECONOMIC &amp; SOCIAL RESEARCH COUNCIL, 2016) and critique of their original contribution to the field.</li></ul>

- Keeping the student to their deadlines for synthesis submission and making sure the originality of their work and how it has contributed to the knowledge base (holistic and subject/disciplinary based) is explicit in the final synthesis.
- Offer regular opportunities for the students to explain impact, contribution, originality, and reflect on the nature of their work as part of the preparation for their oral examination.

Figure 1: The supervisors' views and advice for effective practice in the supervision of students for the PhD by Published work

## 4 Conclusions

This paper has sought to extend the literature on the scholarship of supervision for a PhD by PW route through the lens of the supervisors themselves (many of whom had completed this route themselves) and the students. It highlights the topic of PhD by PW supervision as one for further consideration. This paper has identified the differences (and similarities) between supervisors of this PW route and those supervising traditional PhD route students. The findings are compromised by a small sample. Future research could explore a larger sample which could usefully focus on supervisors who have supported both the PhD by PW route and the traditional route. This would enhance the clarity of the routes' differences. Findings mainly highlight opinions relating to, i) supervisor nomenclature, ii) the perceived more equal relationship between supervisor and student, and iii) the specifics of supervisory practice. In the main, the PhD by PW supervisors articulated the positive nature of supporting students through this route but some clear support and development needs were identified. It is fair to say that supervisors of the traditional PhD route can also find their role problematical (LEE, 2008) particularly in terms of similar issues regarding poor communication between supervisors and students, lack of clarity over processes, and absent staff development and support.

JACKSON (2013) also highlighted the paucity of institutional guidance for supervisors and students of the PW route in Australia and this paper describes a similar situation in the UK with new supervisors of the PW route stating that insufficient familiarity with the regulations leading to a lack of preparedness to supervise students on the PW route. This was particularly troublesome when they had to advise them about, i) the sufficiency and type of outputs or artefacts required (often in the student's pre-enrolment period, ii) the linking scholarly theme for the award, and iii) the structure and requirements of the synthesis. It is important to ensure that any new supervisors are directed towards appropriate, formal information and institutional staff development to enhance their understanding about their role and the specific regulatory requirements of the PhD by PW route. A specific need was identified to clarify the type, suitability and nature of the PhD by PW route's non written artefact outputs (e.g. digital outputs, films or art work). This echoes Sidonie SMITH's (2015a) calls for a 21<sup>st</sup> century transformation and development of all doctoral routes. She suggests specific articulation and clarity about its purpose and breadth, the need to recognise a range of increasingly more diverse and creative outputs, the need to encourage more collaboration and sharing of ideas between staff and students, and the necessity for continually reviewing and reforming doctoral education. This paper takes forward this view and, by focusing specifically on the PhD by PW route, identifies the need for, i) tighter guidance for PhD supervisors and students, ii) clarity around the suitability and range of outputs, and iii) more focussed staff development and training to clarify practice, process and regulations for new supervisors. These collective actions may then contribute to a more rewarding experience for students and supervisors of this PhD by PW route and help to support the enhancement of the continuing quality of doctoral education.

## 5 References

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