



# The role of supervisors in fostering a positive research culture

24 March 2026

*We will begin shortly*

Registered charity no: 1147061

# Expert Webinars



Today's session is part of our 2025-2026 *Expert Webinars* series.

These sessions offer an opportunity to gain **expert insights on key research integrity issues**, along with the latest developments and examples of best practice to support your work.

Final session this year:

- **3 June '26:** Exploring *Whistleblowing and Breaches of Good Research Practice*
- Look out for new webinar series launching in August 2026

# Agenda

Topic	Presenter
Welcome and housekeeping	<b>Lesley Alborough</b> <i>UKRIO</i>
About UKRIO	<b>Lesley Alborough</b> <i>UKRIO</i>
Presentations on creating supportive environments for research supervisions <i>(approx. 40 min.)</i>	<b>Dr Owen Gower</b> <i>UKCGE</i>  <b>Dr Karen Clegg</b> <i>University of York</i>
Q&A <i>(approx. 10 min.)</i>	-
Close	-



# Housekeeping

Registered charity no: 1147061



# About UKRIO

Registered charity no: 1147061

# Our mission

Through our activities, we aim to support the UK research community is supported to produce work of the **highest integrity, quality and efficacy**.



Champion high quality research

Champion the governance, management and conduct essential for high quality and ethical research



Lead and shape conversation

Lead and shape conversations about research integrity in the UK and beyond



Offer independent advice and guidance

Give confidential, independent and expert advice and guidance on all forms of research integrity challenges and opportunities as they arise



Cultivate and share best practice

Create and share knowledge of best practice and positive research cultures and conduct

# How we do it



## Confidential Advisory Service

Confidential and independent advice to all individuals and organisations on research integrity matters



## Information and Guidance

Ever-growing hub of information and guidance to support everyone involved in research, from senior leaders to early-career researchers



## Training and Education

Training and consultancy, both in person and virtually, tailored to different contexts and audiences



## Thought Leadership and Community-building

Convening partners across the research ecosystem to connect, share expertise, and help shape practical responses to emerging and pressing issues



Discover the full scope of our activities in our **2025/2026 Work Programme**

# Today's speakers



**Dr Owen Gower**

Director  
UK Council for Graduate Education



**Dr Karen Clegg**

Reader in Doctoral Education &  
Practice  
University of York

# The role of supervisors in fostering a positive research culture

Part of the UKRIO Expert Webinar Series

Dr Karen Clegg, RSVP and University of York & Dr Owen Gower, RSVP and UK Council for Graduate Education (UKCGE)

24 March 2026



UK Council for Graduate Education

# The Supervisory Landscape

What are the attitudes and experiences of doctoral supervisors?

How do supervisors support research culture?

# UK Research Supervision Survey (UKRSS)

UK Council for  
Graduate Education

**RSVP**  
Next Generation  
Research SuperVision Project

48 questions covering the following themes:

- Characteristics of supervisors
- How candidates are recruited and selected
- Supervision workload, recognition and reward
- Support given to research supervisors
- Team supervision situations
- How supervisors perceive and approach their responsibilities
- Motivations for becoming involved in research supervision

## Research questions:

*How have the attitudes and experiences of supervisors changed since the 2021 UK Research Supervision report?*

*What is the role of doctoral supervision in building a positive and inclusive research culture and community?*

*How can institutions better support their doctoral supervisors?*

# Who responded to the surveys?

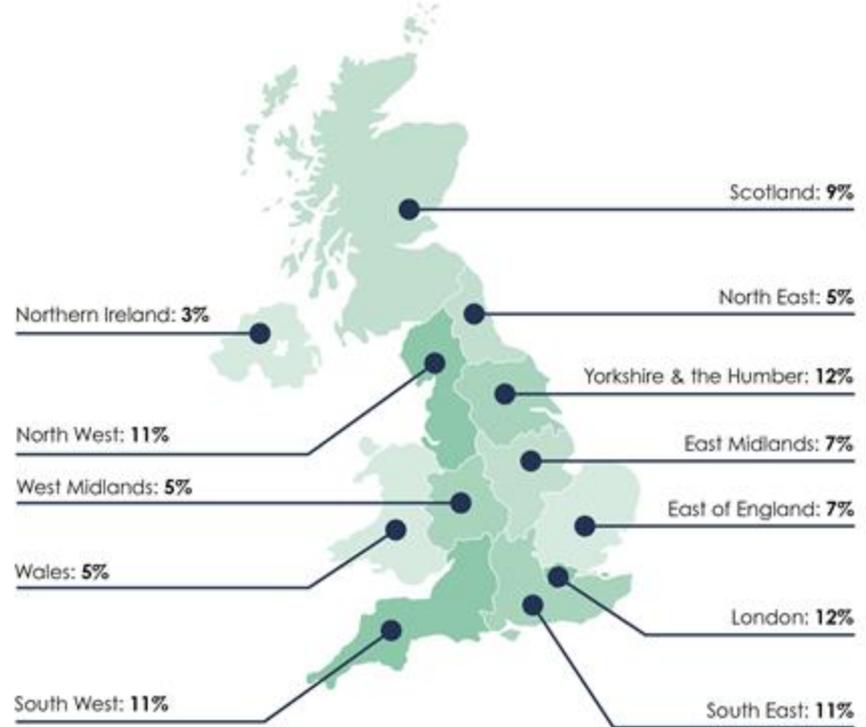
**RSVP**

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Research SuperVision Project

UK Council for  
Graduate Education

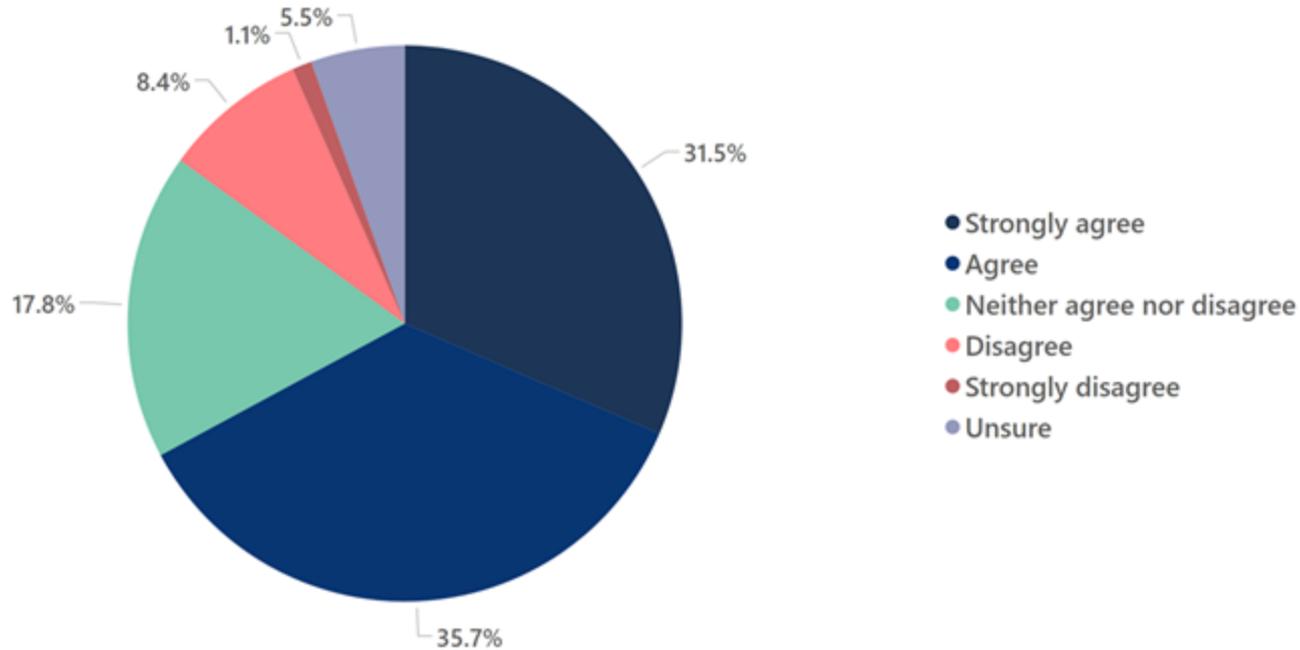
## Overview of respondents

- **Responses: 3,453 (2021), 5,174 (2024).** Will run again in 2027
- **141** UK institutions
- **53%** were mid-career supervisors
- **41%** Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences
- **59%** Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths



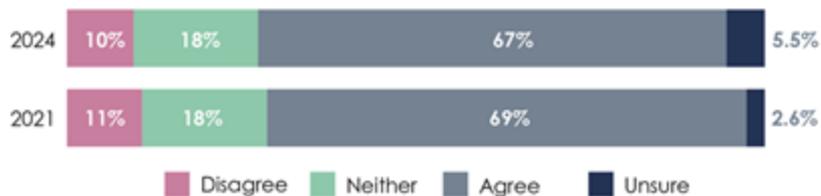
# UK Research Supervision Survey 2024

Doctoral supervision has become more demanding over the past 5 years

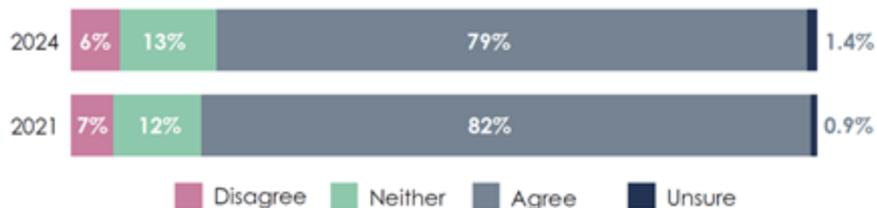


# UK Research Supervision Surveys 2024 and 2021

Doctoral supervision continues to be perceived as getting “more demanding” over the last 5 years



Agreement that doctoral supervision “*improves the quality of my own research*”



“I enjoy being a doctoral supervisor”



The complexity of doctoral study has increased over the past 5 years

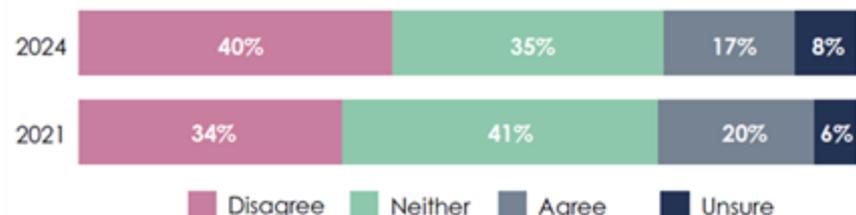


# UK Research Supervision Surveys 2024 and 2021

Increasing the diversity of doctoral candidate populations would improve the research culture at my workplace/institution



Agreement that entrants' preparedness for doctoral study has improved over the past 5 years



Attitudes to doctoral funding have shifted

*76% agreed that there should be more opportunities funded doctoral candidates - up from 71% in 2021.*

*But there was a decrease in the proportion suggesting that funding should be targeted at under-represented groups: 21% in 2021 vs. 16% in 2024.*

# UK Research Supervision Survey 2024

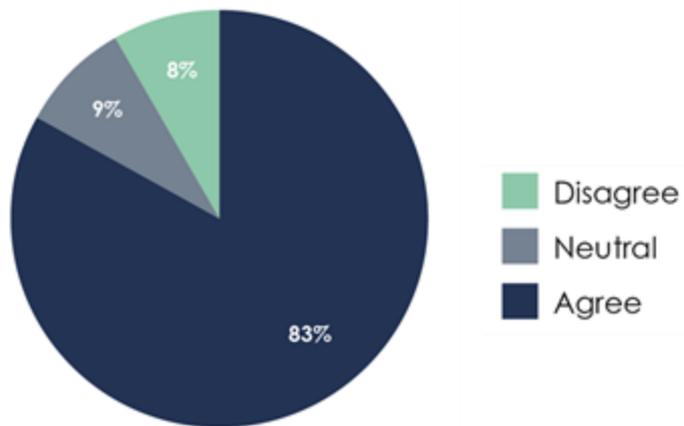
## Agreement about what is involved in doctoral supervision



# UK Research Supervision Survey 2024

To what extent does doctoral supervision in your institution live up to the following definition:

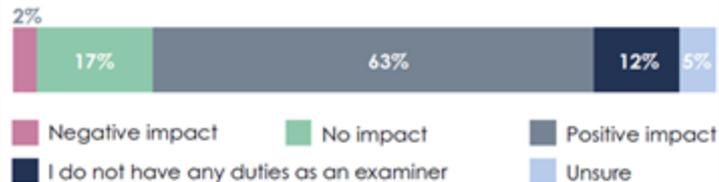
*“A positive research culture is supportive, open, diverse, inclusive, collaborative and creative”*



“The reality of being a doctoral supervisor has matched my expectations”

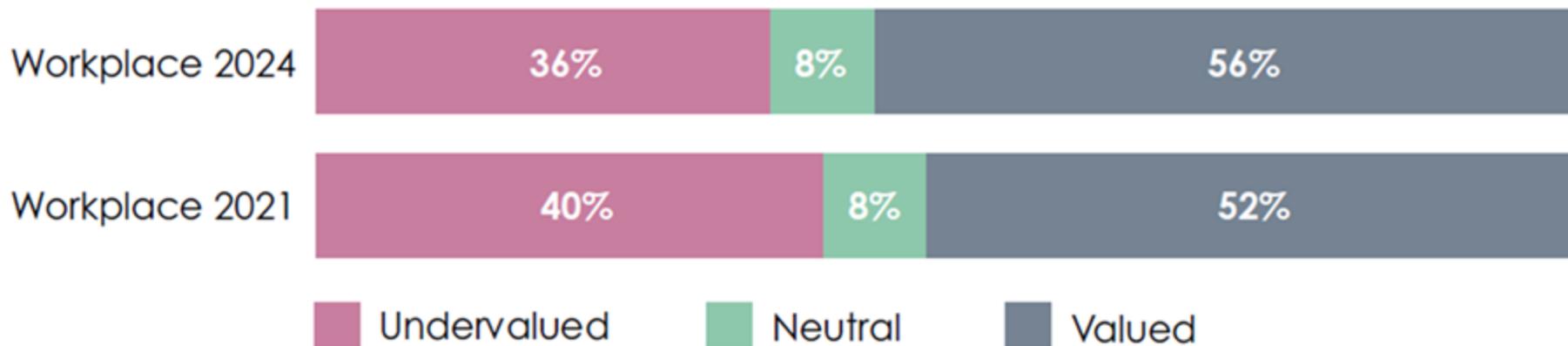


Impact of being a doctoral examiner on supervisory practice:



# UK Research Supervision Survey 2024

“In your view, how much is research supervision valued by your workplace/institution?”



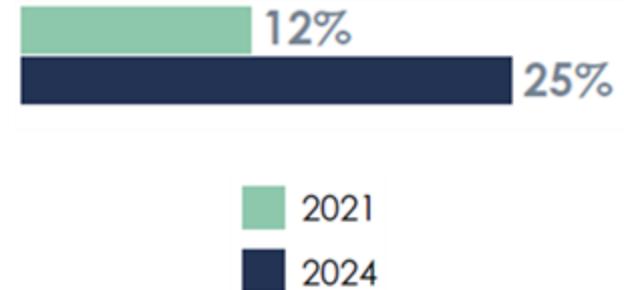
# What can we do to support supervisors to support a positive research culture?

A quarter of supervisors say institutional recognition is the 'one thing' that would improve supervision

*"[I need] clearer recognition of the importance of supervision in the purpose of the University, to include generous time allocation and explicit distinction from one's own research goals, where those goals also need more generous time and space."*

*"[I need] better recognition for the importance of the doctoral supervisor role by my University, particularly in relation to supervising professional doctorate students who are often overlooked and/or treated differently to PhD students by the University."*

Better recognition/support from institution

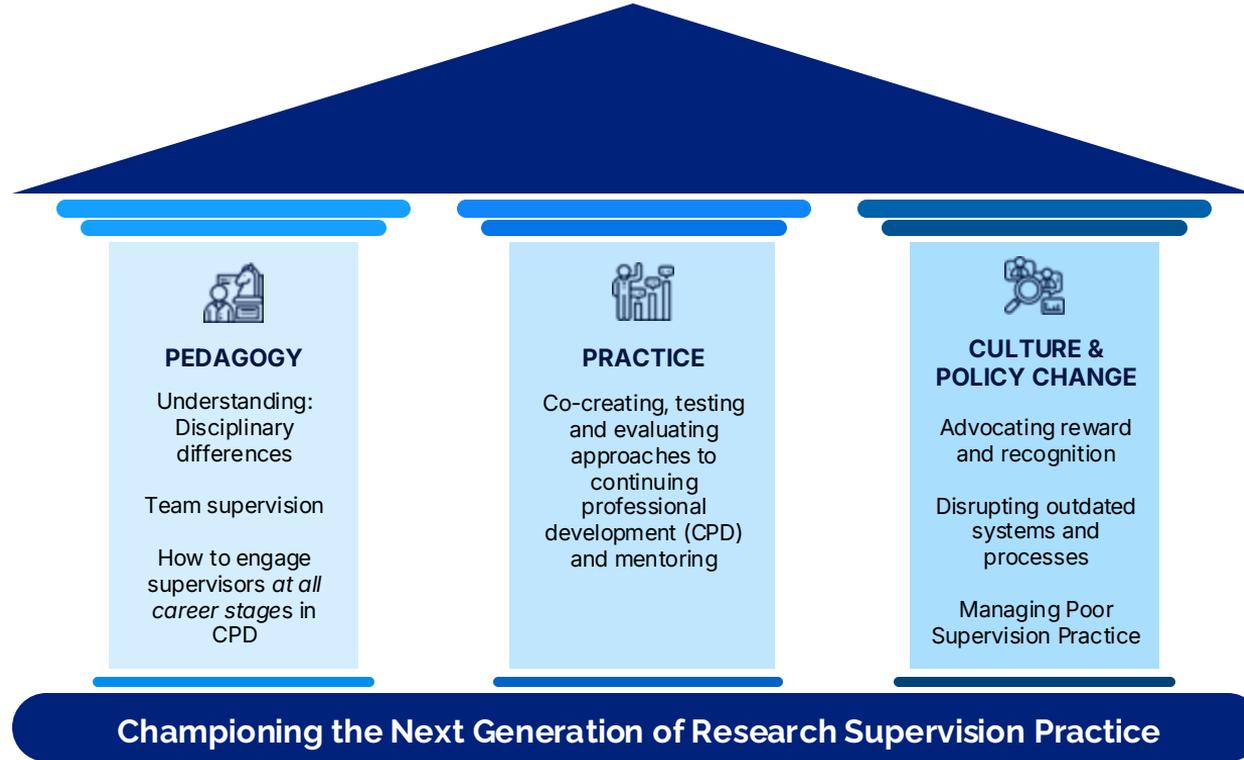


# Next Generation Research SuperVision Project (RSVP)

# Next Generation Research SuperVision Project (RSVP)

## Transforming the culture and practice of doctoral supervision

Through **pedagogy**, **practice** and **policy** we are seeking to better understand the drivers to engagement in professional development, create and test approaches to support the professionalisation of practice and produce a blueprint for good supervision.



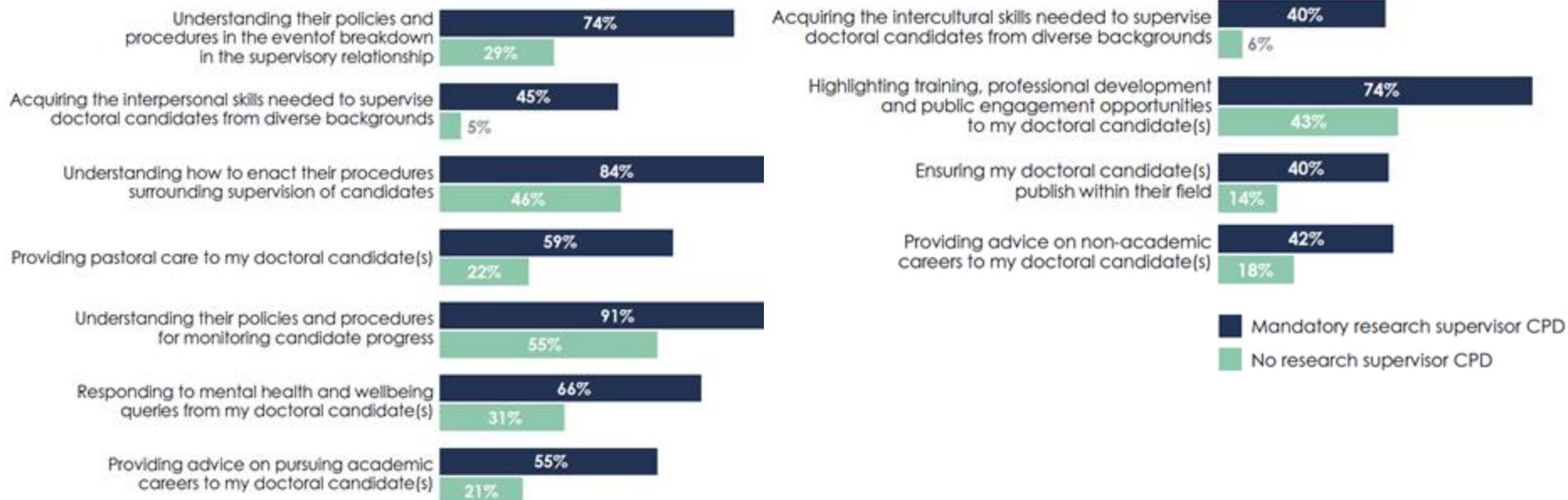
# Enabling Culture Change

Good doctoral supervision is:

- understood, recognised and valued
- underpinned by clear expectations of engagement with continuing and professional development
- demonstrated by institutional and funder commitments to consistent quality in supervision practice

# Impact of mandatory supervisor development: UK Research Supervision Survey (UKRSS) 2024 data

## My workplace/institution adequately supports me with...



**What are the  
expectations on  
institutions?**

# Supporting Research Culture and High Quality Supervision Practice

*“Good supervision is fundamental to getting good outcomes for the PGR student, research team, Research Organisations, funder and future employer. All PGRs should have access to **high quality supervision** and research organisations should ensure that **everyone in the supervisory team is well supported, including through induction for new supervisors and Continuous Professional Development (CPD)**”. URKR New Deal 2023*



UK RESEARCH  
**SUPERVISION  
SURVEY**

UK Council for  
Graduate Education



Supporting Excellent  
Supervisory Practice  
across UKRI Doctoral  
Training Investments

Technician  
Commitment



# Professionalising Supervision

RSVP

Next Generation  
Research SuperVIsion Project



The international journal of science / 23 October 2025

nature

## What makes PhD students happy? Good supervision

Supervisors who invest in positive mentoring relationships with their PhD candidates also reap benefits for their own research.

students tend to lead more-productive, more-collaborative groups and attract stronger future students than those who do not ([go.nature.com/47e6xfk](https://go.nature.com/47e6xfk)). Other studies, notably a 2022 review on the quality of academic mentoring, describe how supervisors who engage closely with their students can benefit by learning new techniques and discovering emerging fields, and say that they often feel intellectually recharged (S. E. M. Hill *et al.*, *J. Clin. Psychol. Med. Settings* 29, 557–569; 2022).

### Major concerns

*Nature's* survey also brings into sharp focus a related, but altogether darker, side of supervision: bullying and harass-

Along with subject knowledge, good supervision requires curiosity, empathy and reliability – being there for a student when needed. These are some of the qualities that make for good research, too. Time spent with the next generation of scientists is an investment. In a climate in which research teams depend on highly trained staff members, who often have short-term contracts, the returns can be considerable.

# UKRI Statement of Expectations of Supervision - Funders

*Funders will: monitor and evaluate how doctoral training investments support a flexible, inclusive and supportive student experience, including: **assessing how research organisations are supporting high quality supervision and enabling the sharing of good practice.***

*There is no indication yet of how this will be assessed.*



# High Quality Supervision – Research Organisations

Research Organisations will enable supervisors, and other forms of support, to:

**support students to complete their doctoral training, including wider training and submission of their doctoral thesis or equivalent**, within their funded period by ensuring individual doctoral projects are designed to be achievable within that timeframe and

**invest in their continuous professional development as a supervisor, including building awareness of mental health, wellbeing, bullying and harassment, and equality, diversity and inclusion issues**

**support students to take appropriate periods of leave and attain a reasonable study-life balance**



# PRES Data Highlights (sneak preview)

**What aspects of supervision did participants describe as most impactful on their research progress and milestones?**

**Strongest link to overall satisfaction are a sense of belonging and valuing and responding to feedback**

- **Quality and Supportiveness of Supervisors (34.3%)** The expertise, commitment, and encouragement provided by supervisors were consistently cited as central to research progress and milestone achievement.
- **Supervisor Expertise and Research Alignment (14.3%)** Supervisors' subject knowledge, research experience, and ability to provide relevant academic guidance were critical for advancing research and overcoming challenges.
- **Regularity and Structure of Supervision (19.2)** Consistent meetings, clear communication, and structured guidance from supervisors were identified as key enablers of research progress and milestone completion.
- **Research Community, Networking, and Peer Support (8%)** Opportunities for networking, peer interaction, and integration into research communities—often facilitated by supervisors—were important for research development and milestone achievement
- **Supervisory Team Dynamics and Continuity (6.6%)** The composition, cohesion, and stability of supervisory teams influenced the quality and consistency of support received by doctoral researchers.
- **Barriers Due to Inadequate or Absent Supervision (9%)** Insufficient, disengaged, or unprofessional supervision was frequently reported as a major obstacle to research progress and milestone completion.
- **Supervision and institutional factors (4.8%)** Effective supervision often compensates for perceived deficiencies in institutional support, research culture, or administrative processes, becoming the primary source of satisfaction for some PGRs.

# PRES Data Highlights (sneak preview)

## Positive Outcomes and Exemplary Practices

Despite challenges, numerous participants reported significant personal and professional growth, attributing this to effective supervision and institutional support.

- Supervisors who acted as mentors, role models, and advocates were credited with fostering confidence, independence, and a strong professional identity.
- Exposure to diverse training, interdisciplinary collaboration, and real-world applications (e.g., industrial doctorates, placements) enhanced employability and readiness for varied career paths.
- Supportive environments that combined academic, emotional, and practical guidance were seen as instrumental in enabling doctoral researchers to thrive and prepare for future careers.

**Supporting supervisor  
practice and professional  
development -  
going above and beyond  
compliance**

# Overview of Phase 1 interventions

## GETTING SUPERVISORS STARTED

Designing an impactful induction for doctoral supervisors

## BEING A RESEARCH SUPERVISOR

Supervisory roles and approaches: Who are you as a supervisor?

Exploring supervisor approaches: Becoming a flexible supervisor

Delivering engaging CPD on doctoral policies and processes

## WRITING AND FEEDBACK

Giving feedback on PGR writing

Supporting PGRs with writing

## WORKING WITH CANDIDATES

Supporting international doctoral candidates

Supporting doctoral candidates: How to enhance self-efficacy

Supporting PGR development beyond the project

Establishing boundaries and building rapport with PGRs

Meta-communication in research supervision

Let's talk about preparing candidates for doctoral examination

Enabling conversations: Coaching and mentoring approaches to supervision

## WORKING IN TEAM SUPERVISION

Supervising together: Clarifying the co-supervisor role

Enhancing collaboration and aligning expectations in team supervision

Giving consistent feedback in supervisor teams

## REFLECTING ON SUPERVISORY PRACTICE

Supervisor Peer Mentoring Circle Programme

Supporting Reflective Practice and Recognition of Research Supervision

# Designing CPD to meet supervisors' needs

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What we know from focus groups, UKRSS 2024, existing scholarship...

- ALL supervisors want **more opportunities to engage in discussion, peer support and to share experiences.**
- **Strong preference from more experienced supervisors for conversation-based sharing of practice and reflecting on experience.**
- Less experienced supervisors (including ECRs) welcome CPD opportunities and to be **recognised for their engagement and contribution to supervision.**
- UKRSS - just 13% stated they had opportunities to reflect on their supervisory practice.

# Feedback on the peer mentoring circles pilot at York

*“A unique opportunity to participate in ethingsom reflective with no fixed agenda”*

*“Not had training this valuable in a very long time”*

*“A space that doesn't exist anywhere else for discussing your experience as a supervisor”*

*“I feel my participation has made me far more effective in my role and given me invaluable tools”*

*“Has made a huge contribution to helping me understand my role as a supervisor”*

# Stakeholders: Industry, HEI Practitioner Partners & Funders

- Programme for industry supervisors. in development. Pilot likely to include BBSRC, ESRC DTEs plus our industry partners (may include Unilever, NPL, London Museums Trust, GSK, BBC)
- Cancer Research Trust will pilot peer mentoring circles
- Peer Observation of Supervision: 5 consortium partners
- Starting Strong: Onboarding programme for new supervisors with some of our HEI partners
- Ongoing discussions with the research councils about CPD requirements

# In Pilot

- **Peer Observation of Supervision Programme.** Supervisors at all career stages will have an opportunity to observe and be observed in their supervisory practice, to provide and receive constructive feedback and consolidate their learning.
- **Onboarding programme for new supervisors.** This four session programme (4 x 2 hour workshops) is designed for those new to supervision or who want a refresher and some initial professional development. It will be delivered online and cover the purpose and scope of supervision, supervisor identity, effective conversations and relationship building, enabling progress and independence.

# Take home messages

# Value, Recognition

Supervisors who make a conscious effort to support and mentor their PhD candidates have more-satisfied students comes from [Nature's 2025 global survey](#) of more than 3,700 doctoral students

*Universities can go further by **treating supervisory time as a matter of accountability.** **Institutions also need to train group leaders on how to be a good supervisor and reward effective supervision.** Awards are one tried and tested method that we at Nature wholeheartedly endorse. [What Makes PhD Students happy? Nature 2025](#)*

*External and Internal Recognition: [Nature Award for Mentoring in Science](#), [Times Higher Research Supervisor the Year Award](#)*

# Engagement in Professional Development & supportive practice

**UKRSS Data:** consistently shows that engagement with CPD increases a positive response with aspects of supervision practice

**PRES Data**

# RSVP

Next Generation  
Research SuperVision Project

[rsvp-admin@york.ac.uk](mailto:rsvp-admin@york.ac.uk)

# RSVP Conferences and Presentations

- 2025: Stellenbosch International Postgraduate Supervision Conference, PRIDE European Doctoral Education Conference, EfMD (European Management), UKCGE annual conference, Warwick Research Culture Conference, panel session at Vitae, workshop at the Canadian Association for Graduate Studies, REDS conference
- Forthcoming 2026: UKRO policy series March, Keynotes at the Australian Council of Graduate Schools and bi-annual [Quality in Postgraduate Research \(QPR\) Conference](#), Adelaide, April. [Nordic Conference on PhD Supervision \(CoPhS\)](#) Nordic Conference on PhD supervision, September.
- **Where else should we be? Who should we be talking to?**

Advance notice: **RSVP 'Transforming the culture and practice of research supervision', Spring 2027** (March, venue TBC)

# RSVP Publications & Outputs

Supporting Research  
Supervision Practice:  
a review of UK provision

Professor Stan Taylor  
School of Education, University of Durham

February 2026

UK Council for  
Graduate Education

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Research SuperVision Project

- Cascading practice - three 'Train the Trainer' events - in place and online
- Publications: Articles in WonkHE, Research Professional. Talking heads and case studies planned. **Benchmarking of CPD provision released February.** To be followed by reports detailed **empirical data collected through focus groups with academic, industry supervisors and Deans and Directors of Graduate Schools to be published March/April**
- **Commissioned a report from Advance HE on a deep dive on PRES data 2025 related to supervision**
- Planned 'Guidelines for Doctoral Schools and Funders' 2027.
- RSVP Blog series



# Q&A Session

Registered charity no: 1147061



# Next steps

# Engaging with our work

## Learn more

- Explore our 2025/26 Work Programme

## Stay connected

- Sign up for our monthly newsletter
- Follow us on LinkedIn

## Get involved

- Register for our upcoming events
- Sign your organisation up as a subscriber
- Reach out about projects and collaborations
- Join our expert community

## Get support

- Explore our resources hub
- Utilise our training services
- Get expert advice



## Share your feedback on today's event

Scan to complete our brief survey



# End of session

Thank you for joining!

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