
Professional Doctorate programmes in England: the current landscape and future implications

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Aims of study

- Examine existing PD provision and understand models used in PD programme delivery
- Consider HEI's strategies for PD provision and how this might change in the future within an evolving postgraduate research context
- Explore the skills and attributes that PD programmes seek to develop
- Explore impact of PD programmes on graduates, their employers and professions, and provider institutions

Data collection

- Survey of HEIs (63 responses)
- Desk research of HEI websites
- Interviews/focus groups with over 30 academic staff, and a similar number of PD candidates and alumni; and 7 senior institutional staff
- Review of literature relating to PDs in UK HEIs

Definition of PDs

A programme of advanced study and research which, whilst satisfying university criteria for the award of doctorate, is designed to meet the specific needs of a professional group external to the university, and which develops the capability of individuals to work within a professional context (UKCGE, 2002, 62)

Characteristics of PDs

- Purpose – PDs aim to develop capacity to make significant original contribution to professional practice through research
- Research focus – research within a PD directly relates to, and is rooted in, professional practice of the candidate
- Structure – PD programmes are more structured than many PhD programmes

Range and extent of PD provision

- Provision predominantly in four ‘main’ subject areas – Education; Business; Psychology; Health and social care
- PD model can be seen across a wide range of new subject areas, e.g. forensic science, public administration
- Small cohorts

JACS Subject Group	No. of institutions	No. of programmes	Key PD themes / programmes
Education	54	72	EdD
Business & Administrative Studies	38	48	DBA
Biological Sciences	37	65	Psychology, DclinPsy
Subjects Allied to Medicine	37	81	Health & social care
Medicine & Dentistry	10	13	MD, Ddent
History & Philosophical Studies	9	11	Theology
Creative Arts and Design	6	7	
Social & Political Sciences	6	7	
Law	5	5	Criminology
Agriculture and Related Sciences	2	2	
Architecture, Planning etc.	2	2	
Computing Science	2	2	
Generic/transdisciplinary	2	2	
Languages	1	1	
Physical Sciences	1	1	
Veterinary Medicine	1	1	

PD programme title	Award abbreviation
Science-related: Professional Doctorate in Architecture, Design and Built Environment Professional Doctorate in Agriculture and Food Professional Doctorate Biomedical Science Professional Doctorate in Science & Technology Professional Doctorate in Veterinary Science	DArch DAgriFood DProf DProf DVet
Computing and information science: Professional Doctorate in Data Science Professional Doctorate in Digital Media	DDataSci DProf
Social sciences and criminology: Professional Doctorate in Criminal Justice Doctorate in Criminology and Criminal Justice Professional Doctorate in Applied Criminology Professional Doctorate in Security Risk Management Professional Doctorate - Policing, Security and Community Safety Doctorate in Social Science Doctor of Public Policy Professional Doctorate in Policy Research and Practice	DCrimJ DCCJ DAppCrim DSyRM DSocSci DPP DPRP
Arts and humanities: Doctorate in Design Doctor of Creative Arts Doctorate in Fine Art Professional Doctorate in Applied linguistics Doctorate in Heritage	DDes DCreative DFA DAppLing DHeritage
Other professional fields: Professional Doctorate in Elite Performance [sport] Professional Doctorate in Sport and Exercise	DProf DSE
Theology: Professional Doctorate in Pastoral Theology Doctor of Ministry Professional Doctorate in Practical Theology	DPT DMin DPracTheol, DThM

Enrollments and completions in one academic year

- 899 students enrolled on 25 Education programmes, averaging 36 students per programme (103 completions)
- 592 students enrolled on 16 Business and Management programmes, averaging 37 students per programme (26 completions)
- 485 students enrolled on 16 Psychology and Psychotherapy programmes, averaging 30 students per programme (108 completions)
- 337 students enrolled on 22 Health and Social Care programmes, averaging 15 students per programme (31 completions)
- 287 students enrolled on 21 ‘other’ programmes, averaging 14 students per programme (22 completions)

Study experiences, impact and challenges

- 2-stage approach, with taught first stage and formal transition to research/thesis stage is common
- Taught element contains doctoral and research focused content
- Where cohorts are small, teaching of taught modules is not cost effective
- Candidates report cohort-based nature of PD is a highlight of their experience
- Challenges for institutions is providing sufficient supervision of specialist research projects undertaken by PD candidates

Institutional supply and employer demand

- Demand for PD-qualified staff from employers is relatively weak
- Candidates motivated by prospect of career change rather than progression with current employer
- Overt employer support for candidate's participation in PD programmes is increasingly rare and entitlement to study leave is decreasing

The future sustainability of PD programmes

Tensions:

1. Lack of common understanding of purpose and value of PDs
2. Difficulties in recruiting sufficient numbers of supervisors and examiners within niche areas of professional practice
3. PD programmes that enroll small numbers of candidates are not financially viable.
4. Attempts to counteract negative financial implications of low enrollments often reduce positive aspects of the cohort experience favoured by students

Looking to the future: food for thought

- How can institutions/schools within institutions collaborate in delivery of common aspects of PD programmes?
- Should the taught elements of PDs have consistent credit allocation?
- What measures need to be taken to ensure the future sustainability of PDs in your field/HEI?
- Would ‘new’ PD progs benefit your specialist area/location?