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Focus Groups Report: Deans and Directors of Doctoral Schools

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1. Executive Summary

As part of the Next Generation Research SuperVision Project (RSVP) intelligence gathering activities on research supervision practice, the project has conducted six focus groups with 19 Deans and Directors of Directors of Doctoral Schools (DDD) representing 18 UK universities. With a focus on reflection on good and poor supervision practice and addressing poor supervision practice, the focus groups aimed to explore participants' experiences and perspectives concerning supervision issues in their institutions.

Reflection of supervision practice

Participants articulated the limitations of a simple good-poor dichotomy in relation to supervision practice. **Effective supervision was viewed as highly dependent on individual, disciplinary, and contextual factors**, with practices that are effective in one setting not necessarily being appropriate in another. Participants identified wider influences on supervision practice, including disciplinary cultures and the changing doctoral landscape characterised by increasing awareness of neurodiversity and disability, changing patterns of postgraduate researcher (PGR) engagement in the post-lockdown era, the use of AI in doctoral education, and increasingly multicultural supervisory contexts.

Examples of supervision practice associated with challenges for PGRs included supervisors' unresponsiveness to contact, avoidance of difficult conversations, gatekeeping of institutional and wider resources, and a lack of professionalism. Participants identified characteristics of effective supervision practice, consistent with perspectives of academic research supervisors (Quinlan et al., 2026) and industry supervisors (Li et al., 2026) pointing **to the value of adaptive and candidate-centred supervision approaches**. In particular, **supervisors' responsiveness to contact and**

structured communication practice was considered essential to shape both supervisory relationships and PGRs' experience of the doctoral journey.

Dissemination of good practice

A range of approaches were used to disseminate and reinforce good supervision practice within institutions, including:

- **Supervisor development programmes** in a range of formats, commonly with compulsory elements for new supervisors and those new to their institutions.
- **Communities of Practice (CoP)** where examples of good supervisory practice could be discussed and explored.
- **Formal accreditation schemes** which often included elements of supervisor reflection or research on their practice.
- **Awards** used to demonstrate and share good supervisory practice were intended to create a 'virtuous cycle' of good practice.
- **Newsletter communications** used to share policy changes, practical resources, PGR opportunities, and information relevant to supervision and PGR support.

Significantly, the **content of Initial and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is regularly reviewed** in order to respond to changes and outcomes of issues raised.

Barriers to reporting supervision issues

Several factors were identified as barriers for PGRs to report supervision concerns. Participants suggested that **PGRs may not always recognise poor supervision practice or be aware of what they can reasonably expect from supervisors**. Although PGRs may discuss their supervisors and supervisory experiences with each other, this does not necessarily translate into confidence or willingness to raise concerns through institutional routes. Fear of worsening an already difficult situation, concerns about potential impacts on future career prospects, and perceived (and real) power imbalances within academic environments were also viewed as significant barriers to reporting. In addition, uncertainty about reporting procedures and available routes for raising concerns could further limit PGRs' willingness and ability to seek support.

Monitoring and intervention approaches

A combination of informal and formal mechanisms were used to monitor supervision practice and identify potential concerns. Informal routes, including PGR events, and regular contact between local and institutional PGR support roles, were seen as particularly valuable for identifying issues at an early stage, especially for those reluctant to use formal reporting channels. Formal mechanisms, such as annual PGR progress review meetings, were considered less effective for surfacing supervision concerns. Across the focus group cohort, **maintaining multiple routes and ensuring PGRs feel comfortable approaching those in support roles to raise supervision concerns were viewed as central to effective institutional oversight.**

Participants expressed a preference for **informal and locally led approaches to resolving supervision issues**, related to their consideration for departmental/faculty knowledge required in specific cases, as well as the near universal requirement to act across, rather than within, official reporting routes. Formal mechanisms, such as performance management through line-management structures, remained important but were generally reserved for serious or persistent cases.

Challenges to addressing poor supervision practice point to structural and relational tensions, including gaps in departmental support, in Heads of Departments line management practices, and influences of power dynamics between staff. These reflections indicate that supervision oversight and intervention are not only shaped by established institutional structures, but also by how authority, responsibility, and influence operate in practice.

Moral authority

Despite the challenges, participants also highlighted the influence that **doctoral schools can exercise through moral and procedural authority**. Grounded in their responsibility for PGR experience, policy and regulation, this authority enabled participants to apply pressure, support departmental action, and promote both the resolution of supervision issues and the development of supervisory practice.

2. Introduction

The RSVP research project is committed to understanding and exploring four main areas:

1. The role of team supervision
2. Supervision practice in different disciplines and contexts
3. Supervising different types of research degrees
4. Understanding and combatting poor supervision practice.

This report is concerned with the experiences of Deans and Directors of Doctoral Schools (DDD)s in the UK, with the focus on the area of ‘understanding and combatting poor supervision practice’. The aim aligns with RSVP research aims of establishing baselines around research supervision practice and culture across the UK.

In order to achieve this, focus groups were designed to explore DDDs’ experiences as institutional-level managers, their experiences of and approaches to addressing poor supervision practice, and the policy changes they would like to see relating to UK research supervision culture. This data set forms part of a broader RSVP approach to understanding different doctoral supervision stakeholders.

3. Methodology

These focus groups with Deans and Directors of Doctoral Schools (DDD)s in UK universities are a part of the series of focus group discussions aimed at addressing the four core RSVP research questions. Ethical approval was granted by the School of Arts and Creative Technologies Ethics Committee at the University of York. Direct emails were sent to 51 DDDs via the UK Council of Graduate Education (UKCGE), aiming for a coverage of a variety of UK universities, including Russell Group, Post-1992s, as well as a range of geographic regions and university sizes.^{1,2}

Twenty-six DDDs responded with an expression of interest. As the focus group was designed to recruit up to 20 participants and participation depended on availability for scheduled sessions, 20 DDDs were invited to the focus group and 19 attended one of 90-minute online sessions. In advance of the sessions, participants were provided with an information sheet outlining the process of data collection, analysis, data storage, and dissemination of findings (Appendix 1). Informed consent was requested prior to the running of sessions.

¹ Russell Group universities are members of an association representing 24 research-intensive universities in the UK, known for their focus on world-class research and education (Pearson, 2024).

² Post-1992s universities refers to institutions often described as ‘new’ or ‘metropolitan’ universities, many of which became universities following the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 (Pearson, 2024).

Participants represented 18 universities across the UK, as shown in Table 1. These 19 participants correspond to approximately 15% of the UK’s DDDs. The investigators noted that several themes were raised in similar ways in separate sessions and considered that data saturation had been achieved in most areas.

Institutional Group	Number of participants
Russell Group	3
Other pre-1992 universities	4
Post-1992 universities	12
Total number of participants	19

Note. The 19 participants represented 18 UK universities, as two participants were affiliated with the same Post-1992 university.

Table 1 | Participants’ demographics by institutional groups

In total, six sessions were conducted on Zoom, facilitated by two members of the RSVP consortium. Four sessions were focus group sessions, with participant numbers ranging from two to six, and two sessions were conducted as individual interviews due to participants’ availability. All sessions followed the same question set agreed by RSVP consortium (Appendix 2). To prepare for participation in the discussions, participants were sent excerpts of the Academic Research Supervisors focus group report (Quinlan et al., 2026). These findings were used as a prompt for discussions about combating poor supervision practice from an institutional perspective. Subsequent questions explored institutional structures for managing supervision concerns, including how poor practice is identified and addressed. Particular attention was given to supervision concerns that may not meet the threshold for formal complaints but still require institutional response. The final part of discussion explored

how good or poor supervision practice was communicated within the institution.

All Zoom sessions were recorded for auto-transcription, with participants’ consent. Transcripts generated were checked, edited for clarity, and anonymised for thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Two researchers became familiarised with the anonymised transcripts and recorded initial notes for potential codes. Transcripts were then imported into specialist qualitative data analysis software MaxQDA to support collaborative data organisation, coding, and retrieval. Two researchers independently coded the transcripts on MaxQDA, after which they met regularly to compare interpretations and iteratively refine the coding framework. The process was supervised by RSVP management members. Codes were synthesised into themes and presented as thematic sections in Findings sections.

For a clear and contextualised presentation of findings, we also include eight vignettes from Section 5.2 onwards, which synthesise relevant themes about supervision oversight and intervention approaches, as described by participants. This aims to enhance accessibility of relevant findings that otherwise would appear fragmented or limited to a particular institutional context.

As role titles varied across participating institutions, specific role titles have been replaced with broader terms to reduce identifiability of participants’ accounts. ‘Local lead for PGR admin’ is used to refer to staff responsible for supporting, coordinating, or overseeing PGR provision within departments or schools, including PGR Lead, Director of PGRs, or equivalent positions. In this context, ‘local’ refers to the academic unit in which the PGR is registered. ‘Faculty-level PGR leadership role’ is used to refer to staff with responsibility for supporting, coordinating, or overseeing PGR provision at the faculty level.

4. Identifying good and poor supervision practice

4.1 Questioning good-poor supervision practice dichotomy

In advance of each focus group session, participants were provided with a pre-discussion document outlining poor supervision practices identified by academic research supervisors (Quinlan et al., 2026, Section 4.3), as summarised in Figure 1.

Good practice	Poor practice
• Setting expectations and build a framework	• Limited engagement
• Supporting independence as researchers	• Micromanagement
• Sensitivity to PGR needs	• Bullying and harassment

Figure 1 | Good and poor supervision practices identified in the focus group with academic research supervisors. Source: Quinlan et al. (2026, p.13)

This pre-discussion document served as a starting point for participants’ discussion, with some participants recognising similar issues with supervision practice from their own institutions while also contributing additional examples. The discussion also prompted participants’ reflections across the focus group cohort on the use of good-poor dichotomy to frame supervision practice, with several participants raising the concerns about the limitation of this binary and highlighting the need for a more contextual understanding of supervision practice.

Some participants noted that supervision practices or styles can be interpreted differently across PGRs:

“The one thing that strikes me in the conversation about good supervision, poor supervision, good supervisors, bad supervisors, it’s easy to fall into binaries... my take on this is that the best supervision is relational to an extent. So you find a way of working with an individual PGR and co-supervisors. That’s the best way within your institutional structure of supporting that particular PGR, and that could be quite different from PGR to PGR.” (Participant 12)

“What we have found is that there is often...blurring lines between the good and bad supervisor. You can have individuals who with some students are brilliant and excellent, and then with another group of students who are less good and that can be difficult to parse out and to kind of think about.” (Participant 9)

“This poor-good dichotomy, I struggle a little bit with [it] actually because what is very poor supervision for one PGR could be extremely good supervision for another. Actually sometimes ‘being abandoned’ is [what] some of them (PGRs) want—that they just want the supervisor to be away for a couple of months and they can get on with things. So, actually it’s a lot more complex than ‘poor and good’, so I do struggle with that dichotomy sometimes...” (Participant 1)

The same supervisory approach can also be understood differently depending on the specific stage and PGR's specific needs in the doctoral journey:

“We’re trying to get away from this good and bad because I think what can be good at one stage in the journey can be bad later on. So, micromanagement might be appropriate in the first couple of weeks, but later on it’s definitely a bad thing. So, the good and bad change positions as we go along.” (Participant 2)

Disciplinary differences, including norms around PGR-supervisor contact, PGR independence, research timeframe, and supervisory style, also play an important role in understanding supervision practices and how they can shape the PGR’s experience:

“So there’s the more Humanities [where] you’re expected to be mentoring and being collegial...[but with] the lab science people, you expect to be a research assistant and a boss...when I get all of those different types of people in the room at the same time for my supervisor sessions, they don’t get each other...and there’s fundamental differences between the discipline areas, [which] means, again, it’s difficult to define...what good is and what bad is across the whole piece when it’s context-dependent...” (Participant 19)

“There are very different disciplinary supervisory experiences which...I think it’s an important distinction to make... In Life Sciences, they see their supervisor every month. In the School of Arts, it’s likely to be a lot less than that....” (Participant 7)

These differences follow through to reporting of poor supervisory practice, which also highlights gender differences across subjects and the impact of these on supervisory practices:

“... [it] probably comes as no surprise to you that the [units] where students perhaps might be more hesitant to go and have

a conversation with their [local lead for PGR admin] are in the STEM subjects...a lot of it is down to the gender differences in those areas or the stereotypical subject areas where you perhaps might have a more caring, nurturing environment. So, if I think about our researchers in our Nursing and Midwifery areas — so, predominantly women — the subject areas, naturally, [has] a more caring, supportive environment for researchers as opposed to, say, our very engineering heavy areas which are more male dominated and might be more likely to rely on areas such as patronage...” (Participant 18)

The broader institutional context also needs to be considered:

“...if we think about that interplay in terms of practice and the individual practice you know and picking up and particularly in the question of time, I think there’s a lot for us to think about the way in which the individual practice of supervision is actually shaped and constrained by the different circumstances in which people find themselves, and that will be highly contingent on the position that they occupy within the university and the particular circumstances that, you know, any particular university may be going through.” (Participant 9)

Overall, participants’ comments emphasised the context-dependent nature of supervision practice and questioned the usefulness of a good-poor dichotomy. Participants suggested that supervisory approaches that are effective for one PGR, project, or disciplinary context may be less effective in another, emphasising the importance of considering the context when evaluating supervision practice.

4.2 Reflections on supervision practice

Drawing on their observations and complaints they had encountered in their role, participants shared examples of supervision practices that had led to challenges for PGRs. A participant described cases they have encountered relating to supervisors being unresponsive to PGR's reach for contact:

"...students being abandoned by supervisors, and I've had several cases about the last 12 months or so, where supervisors kind of disappeared off the radar, and students were worthy people, as they are, assumed that they (supervisors) were ill or preoccupied with other things, and then weeks and weeks went by, and then they (PGRs) tried to contact them (supervisors), never got any responses and so they turned to me and say: 'well, I haven't spoken to my supervisor for three months', which I'll really be alarmed at." (Participant 2)

Similar instances were raised in other focus group sessions, with participants' consideration of leading factors to the neglect such as supervisors' limited amount of work time:

"Things like neglect, for instance. The busy supervisor is something you see again and again...it may not be the seniority of it necessarily, although you do get that in the lab sciences, it may actually be a lot more to do with just the amount of time that they have." (Participant 19)

A participant described when supervisors, motivated by concern or a desire to be supportive, avoided difficult conversations with PGRs — an approach that can inadvertently contribute to poor supervision experience:

"One of the first things is that, what I sometimes call 'killing with kindness': it's about the way in which supervisors sometimes avoid difficult conversations and allow things to drift partly out of a

feeling of concern...that's an area that I think is really important to draw on, and it's a kind of in inadvertent bad practice if you want to say that." (Participant 9)

Some participants mentioned supervisor gatekeeping as the more common issue they observed, which concerns isolating PGRs from the institutional or wider resources. This was seen as disempowerment and would impede PGR development in the doctoral journey:

"I'd say that the majority of the issues that I see are about supervisors' gatekeeping in relation to their doctoral research. So, controlling information, controlling access to other information and other sources of ideas, guidance etc, that sort of desire to really micromanage and control their doctoral researcher. That's particularly poor to the extent that they kind of position them in an imaginary world where the only source of information is the supervisor, i.e. them, and they try and sort of prevent them from accessing additional information, and that includes trying to discourage them from engaging with the all the researcher development and the other expertise that sits in and around the whole process." (Participant 7)

Some participants raised concerns about the broader issue of a lack of professionalism, noting that institutional expectations or policies may not always reflect in some supervisors' practice:

"I think what I've noticed is there are two levels. So, there's the things that were identified in the [pre-discussion document] but there's also a more general...lack of professionalism relating to academics carrying out their roles. So, I think there are a lot of university level policies around how they should behave and how they should interact, which are not always coming through in their supervision, and I can only guess whether they come through in other areas. So, I think it's infrequent but it's definitely there, and I find that quite concerning." (Participant 14)

Other examples mentioned include supervisors blurring professional and personal boundaries in the supervisory relationships, being too critical at the early stages of a PGR's programme, and the lack of accountability in a team supervision setting. These comments provided additional examples of poor supervision practice to those identified in RSVP focus groups with academic research supervisors (Quinlan et al., 2026) and industry supervisors (Li et al., 2026).

DDD participants' discussion of positive supervision practices pointed to the supervisor being adaptive and empathic, as well as proactive in setting expectations and boundaries at the early PGR stage:

"I guess it's empathy really—empathetic to the pressures that the PGRs are under in their professional lives, and I think that's important because we emphasise the workloads that quite rightly the supervisors run, supervisors are under increasing workloads, but certainly in the case of part-time students in professional context, [such as] Health and Education, they will be under increasing workloads too. So I think having that sense, that consciousness, that empathy is really important, and one of the reasons why relationships break down is that you know that's not in place." (Participant 2)

"...most good supervision involves defining the parameters and the boundaries and setting expectations in the first tutorial... That doesn't mean everyone sticks to the sort of contract of expectations, and the expectations change and life happens and all the rest of it, on both sides for me, and for my students." (Participant 8)

These comments on positive supervision practice further resonated with those highlighted by academic research supervisors and industry supervisors and reiterated that an adaptive and candidate-centred supervisory approach is highly valued.

4.3 Contributing factors to poor supervision experience

Participants considered a range of factors beyond individual supervisors' behaviours that can lead to PGRs' poor supervision experience, and these responses centred on four domains: supervisor capability and preparedness, PGR and supervisor interpersonal mismatch, institutional and structural contexts, and shifting in research culture and environment. These interconnected factors were seen to create conditions that are challenging for both supervisors' and PGRs' abilities to sustain effective supervisory relationships or positive supervision experiences.

Some participants highlighted that poor supervision often stems from supervisors undertaking the supervisory role with insufficient training or limited experience:

"Certainly it's not a straight line between poor supervision and poor completion, but there is a connection, and within that, of course, is the issue of training. So, poor training equals poor supervision equals poor outcomes" (Participant 8)

"We have to realise... [that] there's a journey for the supervisors as well. So, supervisors will have different levels of experience at different stages...in the PGR lifecycle, so that they tend to only want to know things that are at the stage they're on at the moment. So they don't necessarily anticipate kind of the problems down the road...there are people who will say to me informally—when I'm allocating supervisors—'please don't allocate me so and so because I'm not prepared to work with them.'" (Participant 2)

Even though supervisors have completed doctorate themselves, their doctorate experience does not automatically equip them with the skills required for effective supervision:

"...[just] because you drink milk, it doesn't mean you know how to milk a cow."

You know, just because people have done a PhD, it doesn't mean they know how to supervise...I can't help but think about poor supervision within that parameter within that realm." (Participant 8)

Participants also emphasised that the increasing levels of disclosure of neurodiversity and disabilities in the PGR community presents challenges to supervisors as they often do not feel equipped to provide such support. This aligns with the finding of UKRSS 2024 that only 76% of supervisors felt confident responding to candidates' mental health and wellbeing needs (Gower et al., 2024). This was further amplified by the limited development opportunities available for those supporting PGRs who raise such issues:

"We said much earlier on mental health and well-being that can get in the way — it's nothing to do with poor supervision practice... and it can be very challenging for supervisors who might have the best of intentions, but just don't know how to handle mental health difficulties...I think that's one of the things I know we're not the only university struggling with this because it comes up in a lot of the Deans and Directors." (Participant 15)

"What I've noticed in the last year or so is an increase in the number of PGRs presenting as neurodiverse or having other disabilities [sic], and this is creating quite a problem between the supervisor and the PGR. So, the supervisor doesn't feel experienced, [or] doesn't feel that they have the necessary pedagogical understanding or whatever to support that PGR, and the PGR feels that they're not being listened to. So, we get these complaints that come in, and then we have to go through the process. But, as I said, there's just not enough training in that area for supervisors." (Participant 6)

"We know that we have more and more mental health and well-being issues coming to the fore with our students in

the broader sense. So, that's not always something that a supervisor is equipped to manage or deal with..." (Participant 7)

Interpersonal mismatch between the supervisor and PGR was also noted as a contributing factor, and some participants highlighted that such interpersonal tensions or different expectations for supervision could lead to communication breakdowns and contribute to perceptions of poor supervision experience:

"I suppose the most common issue that comes up...it's around personality clashes...where people have different expectations... if you're spending 3-4 years of your life working with an individual and we don't always get on with everybody all at the same time or thinking the same way or work at the same level. I suppose that is quite an important and key piece around the supervisory experience, and it's not because necessarily the PGR has done anything wrong or that the supervisors have done anything wrong and that they are practically practising supervision poorly. It's just that for whatever reason, these two people just can't make it work." (Participant 18)

"That's why I find it a bit difficult to think of there is one type of personal thing that makes you a bad or a good supervisor because it's always the marriage of the two of you coming together...some people you just click with, and others you don't, and others you're given the benefit of doubt you work with them to work through issues, and others you they just annoy you so much...that you don't want to work through the problems with them, and that's the issue. So, I'm a bit more understanding nowadays than I have been in the past about poor supervision, because I know sometimes it's just not working out and someone that's a great supervisor for that type of student, a terrible supervisor for another type of student." (Participant 19)

In some cases, the mismatch between supervisor and PGR could be due to the misalignment in the expectations of supervision. A participant who is concurrently undertaking a doctoral supervisory role reflected on their experience with a PGR:

“...for me it’s about perception. So, I was thinking...I’m such a poor supervisor, partly because the students’ expectation of my time is completely unrealistic...because she sent me a draft on Friday and wanted and expected full detailed feedback by this morning, which I had already explained was impossible. And yet, that didn’t stop perhaps a perception that she’s having poor supervision. So, I suppose the wider thing about that [is] certainly some of perception on both sides, the supervisor and the supervisee, but also expectations.”
(Participant 8)

Participants noted that some institutional contexts can bring challenges to supervision. Several participants mentioned that the staff restructuring concurrently took place within their institutions disrupted continuity of some supervisory relationships, which led to the affected PGRs feeling abandoned and uncertain about their research process. Others considered the administrative bureaucracy being perceived negatively by supervisors or PGRs and the high workload experienced by some supervisors.

A participant’s description of supervisors and PGRs’ complaints about the admin process in their university was echoed by other participants in the same focus group session:

“...we get quite a few complaints about bureaucracy...the students and supervisors will complain the university processing is far, far too bureaucratic — [for example], the forms to fill in. They’ve got to do certain things and that can lead indirectly to poor supervision practice. Of course, it’s a two-edged sword because it’s a supervisor reacting against it, and then there’s a passive aggressive response that makes them worse. But there is a challenge there

to ensure that we do keep bureaucracy to a minimum that [it] doesn’t exacerbate supervision. It’s probably a thing we get the most complaints about.” (Participant 1)

Concerns were also raised about supervisors’ heavy workload that could lead to challenges for their capacity to better support PGRs:

“It can be when there’s quite a heavy supervisory load, so the abandon[ment] —it’s not quite abandonment, but it’s just a lack of time and multiple other pressures on academics when they just don’t have the time, and they can’t handle the load that they have. Therefore, it’s the same outcome, possibly just a different cause.”
(Participant 3)

“I don’t think...that universities think through the full implications...of resource allocation that is required to ensure the sorts of good supervision practice that we want to be consistently...across the board.”
(Participant 9)

“I think with a strain on the sector at the moment around workload allocation as well...it feels like time’s going to get less rather than more because everybody is being piled with more and more things that are the best will in the world. You might do things in the right way, you just can’t fit it all in and the impact is especially for a teaching intensive university, that will take priority and that’s going to have a knock on to PGRs.” (Participant 13)

The contextual influences also concern the research culture and environment within particular doctoral schools or disciplines:

“...the overarching research culture and environment that they’re sitting in has a huge impact on their experience as doctoral candidates...” (Participant 7)

“Sub-optimal performance is often not an individual, but a culture they’re sitting in.

So, sometimes you become aware that a particular school or a particular area or a particular discipline has a particular problem, and then you can do some targeted intervention. I realised recently [that] one of our academic schools where there was a particularly awful kind of incident related to poor [supervision]... it was worse than poor supervision... unpacking all that. I now know that actually there's a background of culture which meant that person had kind of got away with things for a long period of time, despite actually being challenged, and some people tried to do the right thing.” (Participant 12)

Some participants also considered that the rapid shifts in the doctoral education landscape plays a significant role in reshaping the expectations of supervision practice. In addition to the increase in neurodiversity and disability disclosures from the PGR community, participants also pointed out PGRs' engagement patterns in the post-lockdown era, the use of AI in doctoral education, and the increasingly multicultural/international supervisory context in which supervisors and PGRs may have markedly different educational or cultural backgrounds. It was also highlighted that supervisors should be supported to actively consider these evolving conditions in the broader context to meet PGRs' needs:

“One of the challenges... for me is getting them [PGRs] back on campus since COVID. They're wanting to be distant. They don't see the value of coming in on campus, so that's also breaking down that supervisor-PGR relationship as, I think, supervisors have accepted they might not see them or speak to them as often as they did before.” (Participant 6)

“I also think as we go forward very rapidly in the next 6 to 12 months, we're also looking at AI solutions bringing in aspects of what it is that a supervisor might have done...10 years ago. So I think there's something that's moving really rapidly there around supervision and that will...even further the way in which we think about poor supervision and poor supervisors, [but] it's not really being discussed. I think that a lot of supervisors aren't really considering [and] a lot of our academic colleagues are not considering how quickly those shifts will occur and how quickly that might impact on what it is that they are expected to do as supervisors.” (Participant 7)

“...the changing landscape of who the doctoral student is, but also who the supervisor is, and what I mean by that is that very often the supervisor has had a completely different education experience to the student that they are a supervisor to... A colleague who's come from a different country who's supervising a black British-born student in England—they have nothing in common whatsoever...but there's a sort of expectation that perhaps that, you know, because they're working on the same research areas by definition.” (Participant 8)

Overall, participants' discussion reflects that supervision experience cannot be solely understood as the result of individual behaviour — the interpersonal dynamics as well as wider sectoral contexts also play a role in shaping supervisory practice and relationships.

4.4 Dissemination of good practice

Alongside the discussion of supervision practices, participants detailed institutional guidance and support to help supervisors navigate quality supervision, including strategies to disseminate and reinforce positive supervision practices at an institutional level. In general, these approaches can be categorised into supervisor development programmes, Communities of Practice (CoP), formal accreditation, awards, and newsletter communications.

Part of the wider supervisor development offering aimed particularly at supervisors who were new to the supervisory role or new to the institution, with refresher provision available in some institutions. In some institutions, attendance to the initial training is a prerequisite for conducting PGR supervision. The form of delivery of the development programme varied across institutions, including short videos, online forums, discussion-based sessions, with focus ranging from institutional procedural process to reflection on individual supervision practice. Supervisor development was also differentiated by role and need. Examples included provision for second supervisors and viva chairs. In some cases, development activities were introduced or revised in response to PGR feedback or concerns. The content of supervisor development was reviewed regularly on a rolling basis so that provision remained aligned with policy changes and with issues emerging 'on the ground' (Participant 13). Targeted supervisor development in response to PGR feedback is illustrated in Vignette 7.

The development and coordination of Communities of Practice were also discussed. Some focused on specific elements of supervision practice, informed by the PGR responses to surveys e.g. the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES). In one example, good practice from other departments was highlighted and other supervisors encouraged to share their ideas and actions to improve satisfaction rates.

Others were led by supervisors raising issues that they encountered with real case studies, such as visa issues and neurodiversity, which they wished to explore further with their peers. A multi-institutional CoP initiative was also mentioned as an action plan. Voluntary participation and uptake was a common issue raised by participants, and they suggested that the relevance of the CoP content was important for sustaining supervisors' engagement.

Other professional development included formal accreditation through the Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA), which were considered to be popular and engaging for supervisors, allowing them to attain recognition which they could take to other institutions. In a similar way, awards designated for supervisors or supervisory teams were also an opportunity to share good practice and create a 'virtuous cycle'.

Some participants noted newsletter communications sent to supervisors on a regular basis, which shares opportunities open to PGRs, changes in policies, top tips and research achievements, and practical resources. Such regular communication could also include PGR voice (e.g. PGR blogs) which was considered to help supervisors remain aware of the wider doctoral experience. This highlights that maintaining awareness of PGR communication and opportunities would filter into supervisors' practices.

Encouraging supervisor participation

In participants' discussion of supervisor development, key issues such as voluntary and compulsory participation were raised alongside creating a culture of development. The issues of mandating or allowing voluntary participation was regularly mentioned by participants, with a range of perspectives being shared. Firstly, it was noted that those who had been supervisors for a long period of time were less likely to engage with CPD and development opportunities:

“There are people who have been [supervising for a longer period of time thinking] ‘I’ve been supervising for 20 years. I don’t need to take part in this’, and they’re often the people actually who do need to take part.” (Participant 4)

However, less experienced, primarily younger staff seemed to be more willing to engage with voluntary opportunities:

“I would also say that engagement can be very difficult, and unless it’s compulsory, which we have every five years required to undergo some sort of training. Other voluntary approaches don’t get a huge amount of engagement. Usually it’s younger staff...who will engage much more openly...” (Participant 3)

Participants’ opinion was divided on the value of mandatory training, where some participants felt that forcing supervisors to attend would not be effective and that resources could be used more productively:

“...we’ll never use the word ‘CPD’ because they (supervisors) will run a mile from it.... there’s always going to be probably 25% of people will never turn up to just anything if you’re trying to force them...so I’d much rather have the 25% of people who are great supporters of us and the middle 50% who will come along if they don’t think it’s going to be too awful—[it’s] okay and focus on them.” (Participant 19)

Others felt that a mandated approach is important for supervisor development and CPD which could lead to greater engagement:

“A lot of the supervisor training, including being part of the discussion group, is purely voluntary, and I think that’s an issue..., that’s quite high up on my list to look at, to mandate a little bit more strongly for supervisors to be engaged in regular professional development...” (Participant 7)

Contextual challenges were also raised by participants, where the issue of supervisor development and CPD engagement is likely to be a reflection of research centre culture which requires additional top-down work by doctoral schools:

“...we can put all the training in the world but if somebody doesn’t want to engage in it or just turns up to tick a box...this really is a culture thing that if it’s not being led by the top that the rest of the centre’s got no hope, really. So, that’s an angle that we try and take as well...” (Participant 18)

5. Addressing poor supervision practice

5.1 Challenges to reporting supervision issues

Participants discussed the challenges associated with identifying and addressing poor supervision practice. A key area of concern was the extent to which PGRs felt able to share or report supervision-related issues. Participants recognised that, while institutions may have established structures and processes for reporting and managing poor supervision practice, the existence of these mechanisms does not necessarily mean that they are utilised:

“we can only act on what we know...there could be power imbalances, cultural issues, that mean you never...hear about these things or you might only hear in passing... how can I address it if it doesn't exist? So, I think that one of the big challenges we get is getting people to kind of open up...Yeah, quite the challenge.”
(Participant 13)

Others shared experiences of how supervisory practice was perceived to be positive, with issues later emerging of inappropriate behaviour:

“...some people are just awful and actually they may be...in some respects very successful supervisors...a long track record of successful completion, and it's only after a period that something emerges which suggests that all is not well and some other aspect of how they interact either with their PGRs or other people...and after a period of time, someone eventually complains...” (Participant 12)

Another key reason mentioned is that PGRs may not always recognise poor supervision practice.

Given the distinctive nature of doctoral study and the high degree of independence expected of PGRs, some PGRs may be uncertain about what they can reasonably expect from their supervisors and therefore may not identify certain behaviours or practices as problematic:

“It's that initial stage where students raise concerns and...are not feeling confident enough to raise concerns or not knowing what the benchmarks are. So, they may think ‘oh, this is completely normal not to speak to your supervisor for six months’, and so forth, or...to wait [for] endless weeks for the draft...and they just assume that that's normal practice... They are reluctant to complain, and usually you end up picking up the catastrophes and the disasters, and you know so it's late intervention and not early intervention.” (Participant 2)

The example below highlights how the perceived authority of supervisors can shape PGRs' expectations of supervision. In this case, PGRs regarded the limited supervisory contact they received as normal and therefore did not consider raising concerns:

“...the professor spent all of his time in America earning money...once every three months he'd come in...[and] everybody would be bowing to him... After a while he had loads of students, [and] they (PGRs) started supporting each other. In fact, it worked. They got through and they seemed to be very content with the big professor coming along once every three months to give them 10 minutes... and they would never have thought to complain about the professor because he's like god to them... They thought that was the way the world worked.” (Participant 19)

Addressing this lack of awareness of supervision practice and available reporting routes was identified by participants as an important component of PGR induction. In addition, local research centre induction activities were viewed as valuable opportunities to communicate expectations of the research environment and supervisory teams, to help PGRs develop realistic expectations good supervision practice:

“So, each centre will also do their own local induction and kind of signposting, and almost that ‘this is the contract that you have, [and] these are what we will promise to give you as a member of our research centre’...at a research centre level there will be something a lot more focused, often discipline-specific around what those different support mechanisms are and the routes to being able to raise and discuss issues and concerns if and when they ever arise.” (Participant 17)

Despite these efforts, participants highlighted that PGRs were often fearful of raising concerns about supervision as they did not want to create more friction within already uncomfortable situations. There is great fear that complaints might be relayed back to supervisors and potentially have wider impacts on the PGR and their future career:

“...PGRs are very reluctant to come forward and tell anybody...because they feel it will get back to the supervisor, that will make the situation worse. So, that’s our sticking point. If we can get it raised, I think we’ve got reasonably decent processes even if they’re relatively ad hoc at that small level.” (Participant 1)

“...there is that potential fear that ‘if I raise it, what’s going to happen? Because I want to stay with my supervisor. I just want it to work well’, and because it is a very close relationship, you don’t want to almost rock the boat.” (Participant 6)

“...it’s the same issue that however we do it,

there is maybe that fear to report a supervisor or rock the base.” (Participant 5)

In addition, participants suggested that PGRs may perceive existing relationships and hierarchies within and across departments as barriers to reporting concerns. There is a fear that staff would dismiss their complaints or side with supervisors rather than act in the interest of the PGR:

“...[PGRs] didn’t always feel comfortable speaking to the school coordinator because they felt that they would be in cahoots or friends with the supervisor...and or would...sort of close ranks and support each other...” (Participant 8)

“I would say that there are probably some very specific disciplines and differences or patterns depending on who people come to, depending on where they sit. I think this is perhaps largely due to the different academic relationships...within those centres. So, where previously a student may have felt that they need to complain, they’ve taken it to their [local lead for PGR admin] or [faculty-level PGR leadership role], but because there’s deemed to be...a close working relationship...this supervisor is friends with the [faculty-level PGR leadership role], so [they might think] ‘I know the [faculty-level PGR leadership role] is not going to do anything’, and that’s when [the PGR] comes to us.” (Participant 17)

Even when the above barriers are overcome, participants noted that PGRs may face further challenges in understanding how and where to raise supervision concerns in order to ensure that appropriate action is taken:

“...PGRs were often going straight to the SU and sometimes supervisors were telling them to do that, and they were missing out on the whole algorithm. So, it was... becoming an official complaint very quickly... The problem is not so much us knowing how it works, it’s the problems

that the student themselves knowing... what to do when they're having a very poor experience...the use of short videos, both for the supervisor and the student, but putting that into the hands of the student said 'this is the path you take' rather than 'here's a big system that's monitoring everything and through the paper what we'll find out your problem.'" (Participant 16)

"...what kind of environment do we have where a student could raise 'I'm kind of concerned that I haven't got feedback on my chapter draft for six weeks' without the supervisor immediately taking it personally — that very close relationship makes it very challenging." (Participant 4)

While participants discussed PGRs' hesitancy and limited knowledge regarding the reporting of supervision concerns, they also described a range of monitoring structures and opportunities through which PGR experiences could be identified and explored. These mechanisms reduce reliance on PGRs to initiate formal complaints and provide additional routes through which supervision issues could be recognised and addressed. For a clear and contextualised presentation of this part of findings, we have included several vignettes in the following sections which synthesise relevant themes about supervision monitoring and intervention approaches described by participants.

5.2 Monitoring supervision practice

Participants described a range of mechanisms through which supervision practice is monitored within their institutions, which can be broadly grouped into informal channels, formal review mechanisms, and representation structures (as shown in Figure 2).

Informal channels mainly relate to the open communication spaces for PGRs, which provide them with low-barrier ways to talk about supervision concerns or seek clarification outside formal procedures. A participant highlighted PGR events as an important space where doctoral school staff gain an understanding of PGRs' supervision experiences and pick up early signals of supervision issues:

"[At a PGR event] students would come in and that was also a space where things would bubble up... We also do a [PGR event] once a month, and that's a space for chatting. So I think anywhere we can do things with a light touch allows people to talk about sometimes quite difficult issues." (Participant 16)

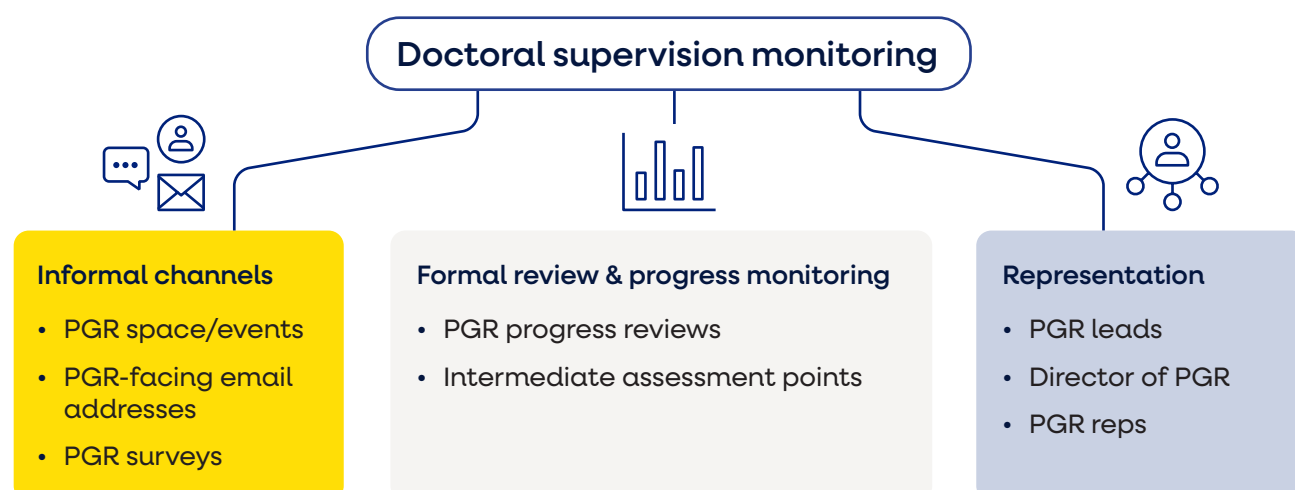


Figure 2 | Routes for monitoring doctoral supervision

“...this is one thing that we started in the last couple of years, which was student services run for PGRs a [PGR event], and sometimes they will say things to Student Services that they wouldn’t say to us, or we’ll go along and just have a coffee and a chat and we get that informal voice or just little concerns that the student isn’t sure [whether it] should be a concern.”
(Participant 15)

Vignette 1 illustrates how supervision concerns may surface through informal contexts. It highlights the role of trusted relationships and informal interactions in supervision oversight.

Online routes included central email addresses managed as a frontline for supervision-related concerns. These generic email addresses also highlight the visibility of the doctoral school or college as an avenue for support:

“So we’ve got a generic e-mail address, doctoral college rather than just a particular person...So, I think students are aware of it and use it and can go to it if they want to for that first line. Often, the advice might be that you need to talk to your supervisor or you need to talk to your school coordinator and it’s passed back in that way but I think we’ve got fairly open channels of communication in that respect.” (Participant 5)

“...generic doctorate college e-mail that will be picked up by the appropriate staff. They’ll deal with that.” (Participant 4)

Vignette 1. Value of informal contexts to support identifying supervision concerns

Raising complaints about poor supervision may not be exactly what it says in the documents that we have in university. In reality it is a lot more informal.

Students will talk to each other. They will, or other supervisors might eventually come to me and say: “oh, there’s a thing...”. I might be down the pub, or there is an event and someone might say “you know that Professor X or Doctor Y, you know they haven’t got back to that student for three months for their chapter of their thesis, that’s terrible”.

The students know within a community who the good and bad supervisor are, but they rarely would go out and say it formally to anyone.

So it’s only in those informal situations you might get to hear it. Whatever the supervisor is doing that they find annoying and frustrating. I would normally say: “first of all, go and talk to the other supervisors”. In my area, every single team has got a minimum of two supervisors, usually three supervisors in my area.

Aim	Approach
Monitoring PGR concerns informally	Being present at informal gathering and having an ear to the ground
Engaging wide supervisory team members	Encouraging PGRs to seek support with other supervisory team members

Online forums and gatherings were also considered as important spaces, significantly for part-time PGRs who may have fewer opportunities to be present on campus and connect with their peers. Participants described regular online, often informal, meetings as valuable opportunities for PGRs to share concerns and seek advice from doctoral school staff:

“...building communities as part-timers... mature students and maybe they’re not distance learning degrees, but at a distance... So, we built up those communities—what they called the [sessions]...just for a particular part-time and distance learning student ...

Once they start chatting to each other... it’s a bit of a presentation, but it’s just them chatting to each other and finding each other. Somebody would say: ‘Oh my supervisor, this does this’ or so on and so forth, and [the convenor] is able to provide informed informal advice to them.” (Participant 19)

Participants also shared the creation of physical space and drop-in sessions which provide an informal yet effective space for PGRs to raise issues. The commitment to demonstrating action from these informal spaces is the key to ensure that there are timely responses to PGRs’ concerns. Vignette 2 illustrates how the visibility and accessibility of doctoral schools can support early responses to supervision concerns.

Vignette 2. Doctoral college visibility and timely response to PGR concerns

There is a drop-in system in our doctoral school space where PGRs can meet a human being and talk about their supervision. When a PGR raises a concern, they don’t get sent away. I follow up immediately, in their presence, by drafting an email to the relevant faculty-level PGR leadership role using wording the PGR has agreed with. I do this live, so the PGR sees that action is taken immediately and that they are being supported to the appropriate institutional pathway rather than being left. It’s a quick way of doing it and it requires a tiny bit of intervention. We’ve been doing it a bit more regularly, but it’s really up to the faculty directors to make sure those teams are working well.

I think there’s always a fear that you’re going to be inundated with complaints if you’re visible, but in reality, it’s not true. Being visible to staff and PGRs, running mass meetings with staff, outlining the policy, and asking “is there anything that bubbles up?” — just dealing with it there is often the best way. I’m in a doctoral space now, and nobody’s complained in the last three or four weeks.

Aim	Approach
Providing support to preserve PGR-supervisor relationships	Drop-in doctoral school space; in-person conversations to surface issues
Timely responding to PGR concerns	Drafting and sending an agreed email to faculty-level PGR leadership role while the PGR is present, leveraging doctoral school visibility to trigger action
Facilitating communication and culture-building	Running mass meetings with staff, outlining policy, creating space for issues to “bubble up” at an early stage

Participants also viewed PGR surveys, such as the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) or internal surveys, as useful indicators of PGR supervision experience:

“The PRES, I guess, is the main mechanism through which we would get that feedback on supervision, and it’s always quite helpful to see how the different centres are performing in terms of the supervisory scores. I guess that feeds back into what I said in a previous response about the differences and the different discipline areas, because there’s a very marked difference in the levels of satisfaction that our PGR communities have with their supervision in some areas compared to others. So, that’s always a good indicator.” (Participant 17)

Participants also pointed to formal review processes, such as annual PGR progress review meetings, as an important part of the monitoring system. With the provision of structured routes, doctoral schools can have systematic oversight of supervision:

“We also have annual monitoring that’s filled in independently by the supervisor and the student, and then that’s compared by a school supervisor so they can flag issues with them.” (Participant 5)

“It’s usually picked up during that sort of monitoring when the PGR school would do their annual monitoring, which is interesting...a lot of supervisors complain about that annual monitoring to the PGR school, the centre because they see it as an administrative burden...” (Participant 3)

“We’re currently developing checklists for all our annual reviews. That is asking about the current level of supervision and how you’re being supervised, [whether it is] working for you, to the student but also to the staff member. So, we can actually have those conversations through a more formalised process.” (Participant 17)

However, participants highlighted limitations of formal review meetings as a monitoring tool. Although many institutions created private spaces for the PGR to speak to the assessor without the supervisor’s presence, some participants described this as ineffective in practice as PGRs are often reluctant to openly discuss any concerns knowing that supervisors would return to the meeting:

“In our annual monitoring progress meeting, we have an external person that reads the [PGR’s] work. The supervisors can be in during that meeting if the PGR wants them to, but they leave at one point and the [Chair] talks to the PGR about that relationship and I’m really torn by that because if it’s a poor relationship and they’ve (supervisors) left the room, I’m not sure that the PGRs [are] confident to [talk about their supervision concerns]. Even though the supervisor’s not in the room, but literally they have been in the room and they’re gonna come back in the room afterwards. So, I’m not convinced that that works.” (Participant 6)

Representation structures, such as PGR reps, were seen as a part of the monitoring landscape. Often, these representatives have regular communication with doctoral school staff or an appointed person about PGR experience and concerns:

“It’s become prominent fairly recently is the importance of student representatives. I meet them regularly...[for] an informal discussion, and they often raise issues that have been raised with them by students. So, it’s an indirect process, but often they’ve been raised in confidence. So, it can be opaque. But if there’s an issue out there, it does alert me to something that needs to be addressed. I find it quite helpful actually to get that informal information about what’s going on out there. And again, the thing is to address these things at the early stages.” (Participant 2)

“There’s a wider group that the doctoral college runs, which is called the [Group]. So all the reps were around the whole university, all 20 odd of them come together once a term, once every couple of months, something like that run by our excellent colleague in the doctoral college...it is a self-help and support group for the reps and the lessons learned there and the examples that they have are then fed back in the for the best people back into their departments and schools.”
(Participant 19)

Vignette 3 shows how regular involvement in committees and academic unit meetings can support supervision oversight. By maintaining contact with local leads for PGR admin, DDDs were able to identify emerging concerns and follow up before issues escalated.

Vignette 3. Dean’s engagement in various committees and regular meetings

Monitoring goes on through being involved in a wide number of different committees, working groups. It’s a ridiculous volume, but it’s absolutely critical to feeling that you have access to all of the key stakeholders and are then able to utilise that network to facilitate both the resolution and the surveillance of any problems that might arise.

There is a postgraduate research forum and a regular meeting that relates to that at an academic unit level. So I or a member of my team will be in those meetings. We’re just constantly in communication with the local lead for PGR admin because we’re a central function.

The local leads for PGR admin themselves have regular meetings in each college and I go along to all those meetings.

It’s very difficult with those meetings to hide issues. Because I’m in all of those meetings, you will get a feel for what’s going on. If something comes up, I will talk to the individuals directly. For example, if there’s a problem with a particular supervisor, I will speak to the local lead for PGR admin and I will follow up to find out what’s happening.

Aim	Approach
Monitoring supervision	• Participation in a wide number of committees. • Having access to all key stakeholders • Utilising this network
Responding to issues	• Speaking directly to individuals involved • Follow-up on issue resolution

Participants also noted that trusted Professional Services staff can also act as informal conduits for PGR concerns, particularly when PGRs feel more comfortable speaking to them:

“We have a [PGR development staff member] who attends a lot of our PGR training, and a lot of our PGRs actually create a connection with her and they end up disclosing information and she comes along to our monthly meetings...”
(Participant 17)

“...so quite often the informal approach to the doctoral school will be through the student support officer there. and I think that’s because the student feels comfortable talking to them because it is attached to the department...
Actually, those conversations can keep going without involving the supervisor themselves. It might require an approach to the [local lead for PGR admin] within that school and to then try and do that, but that tends to be very informal.”
(Participant 3)

Participants also reflected on the work involved in ensuring consistency in supervision oversight. This included systematic oversight of documentation and progression progress, and consideration for confidentiality:

“I sign everything off... I read the supervisor report and the assessor report, and that’s where I pick up on problems too...I read supervisory logs...sometimes supervisors... think they’re being unkind by failing by referring to the student or giving them remediation. So, the comments will be ‘This isn’t ready yet’ or ‘It shouldn’t really pass, however blah blah blah...’, and then of course, I’ve got the power to send it back and say ‘I think what you’re saying is this needs three months’ remediation’. And I do that when I think it’s relevant and they’ll often be a history or through the supervisory logs.” (Participant 8)

Overall, the monitoring system is supported by a network of informal conversations, structured review processes, and representation routes. Most institutions have maintained all three channels for monitoring PGR supervision experience.

Vignette 4 illustrates how recurring supervision concerns may become visible through informal knowledge, monitoring indicators, and repeated cases involving the same supervisor. It also provides example approaches to addressing persistent poor supervision. Section 5.3 presents approaches to addressing poor supervision practice in more detail.

Vignette 4. “Repeat offenders”

There are patterns with certain supervisors — there are persistent problems with the same supervisor who works with different students, it becomes clear that the issues are not due to a personality clash but poor supervision. These supervisors are identified as “repeat offenders”.

Institutions’ tracking of these patterns varied. Some institutions informally maintained a “little black book” of supervisors who would never be allocated new PGRs. A participant described an approach through what staff affectionately call the “naughty supervisor list” which recorded indicators such as repeated late submissions, major corrections, or multiple cases of stalled progression. There are always caveats in this type of categorisation, as some experienced supervisors joined in a supervisory team as “rescue supervisors”—supervisors who “had taken on a doctoral candidate who had previously worked with a different supervisor”, as defined in UK Research Supervision Survey 2024 report (Gower et al., 2024, p. 9), but the metrics helped departments and doctoral schools identify when something might be going wrong.

Responses to these repeat offenders were often informal and negotiated. A participant noted that “warning shots” were issued to centre directors or supervisors to just say “sort it out or we will take action” as a short-term measure but rarely a formal process. In another case, a world-renowned professor attracted many PhD applications but had a long track record of problematic supervision. Rather than prohibiting them from supervising — as it was not feasible nor desirable from the department’s perspective — additional support was provided to this professor: strong co-supervisors, clear expectations, and encouragement to the professor’s reliance on the structure. It wasn’t written down anywhere, but it worked well without triggering a formal process.

Aim	Approach
Identify persistent supervision issues	Track certain supervisors in question through internal list
Intervention for repeat offenders	Informal warning signals to prompt intervention; practical solution to support improvement

5.3 Approaches to addressing poor supervision practice

Participants highlighted that one key role of doctoral schools or centres is providing support for both staff and PGRs. Through their visibility within the university, participants described how academic staff would often approach doctoral schools for advice and guidance when supervision-related issues arose. The doctoral college is an accessible authority on supervision practice, where academics are able to check that they are following regulation as well as providing good quality supervision in a reflexive manner. More formally, participants also described doctoral colleges providing training to local leads for PGR admin, which again raises the profile and visibility of the doctoral centre:

“We’re the ones who — when these issues come up — are willing, empowered, believe it’s worth, actually addressing...issues often come to a local academic at some level in the structure...They would then often come to us and say ‘have I got this right? Can you clarify this regulation for me?’, [or] ‘Can you help me think through...I think I’m probably going to do this. Is that the right approach or are there other things I could do?’”.

(Participant 11)

“...the [local lead for PGR admin] might touch base with me...or one of my colleagues in the doctoral college if... they’re not quite sure how to move forward with it...we do provide mandatory training for [local leads for PGR admin] to support them in their role.” (Participant 6)

Doctoral colleges are also seen as neutral and independent, meaning that they are a safe space to support the resolution of issues. With this neutrality and authority on policy, procedure and practice, doctoral colleges are considered central in dealing with any issues of poor supervision practice:

“I will be contacted as the Director of the Graduate School by either colleagues who have an issue that they are struggling

to deal with in relation to supervision, or by doctoral researchers, often when the situation is quite desperate and because somebody has said to them ‘why don’t you go and speak to the Graduate School’ to act as a kind of neutral party in this process to give you independent, uncontaminated advice. And so, I’ve been pulled into these sorts of discussions and issues from different ways by different stakeholders.”
(Participant 7)

Vignette 5 illustrates how intervention for supervision issues may begin through a candidate-centred conversation, where the initial focus is on clarifying the issue, affirming the PGR’s concerns, and supporting them to decide how they would like the matter to be taken forward.

Vignette 5. Empowering PGR

Step one in the process would be exploring with the PGR if there's anything that they can do to address it and empowering them to do it. The average age of our PGRs is 34. They would rather go and tackle the problem head on and try and have a discussion to resolve things, they're mature individuals. It can feel like they're seeking permission to be able to, for somebody senior to say "actually what you've described is completely unacceptable. It's totally wrong. It is not our expectation of what good supervision is, you have every right to raise".

I use more coaching-related questions to try and to get to what they would like us to do that allows them time to go away and reflect on what they would like. We then get their permission to engage with the school and individual and then eventually try to step out of the conversation, if we think it's being organised and handled sufficiently in that space.

Some won't want to do that, so in my role I seek permission from them to escalate it. I tend to go and speak to the [local lead for PGR admin] who has responsibility for what's happening in that PGR space in their department and say "are you aware that there's this issue? The researcher has come to see me." Through that conversation, I get a better feel for what's happening in the department.

Aim	Approach
Developing an atmosphere of trust, so issues can be reported	Creating informal opportunities and relationship with PGRs
Accessibility for PGR reporting	Doctoral schools offering advice and support to PGRs, with the use of coaching to achieve outcome desired by PGRs
Responding to issues raised directly by PGRs	Empowering PGRs and validating issues and supporting action

Preference in informal intervention

A key theme emerging from the discussions was participants' preference for informal approaches to resolving supervision issues. Informal routes were seen as important because they provide PGRs with greater agency in deciding whether, when, and how concerns are raised and addressed. Rather than requiring issues to progress immediately through formal complaints procedures, these approaches allow concerns to be explored, and where possible, resolved at an earlier stage. This is illustrated by Vignette 6.

Vignette 6. Informal resolution before formal complaint

I think that the purpose of the informal conversation is to try and strike that balance of making somebody in that leadership role aware that there is an issue and there might be something more that’s going to come out of it, but also not wanting to go in too heavy-handed. So, that informal conversation puts it on the radar of that individual because they will be working with these people and seeing the interactions with the students on a day-to-day basis. So, they will probably have a greater sense of the environment in which these conversations are happening.

We work hard to avoid a situation where the only option is submitting a formal complaint, this could lead to PGR anxiety about career chances or prospects afterwards. In most cases, the issue is managed informally: I will have an informal conversation with the [faculty-level PGR leadership role] or the [local lead for PGR admin] to let them know that I’m aware there are concerns, and I will suggest that they might want to monitor the situation or open a broader discussion with supervisors. This might involve reiterating expectations and signposting supervisor to particular elements of our supervisory development framework.

The formal route tends to happen either once the PGR have submitted and completed the doctorate, or at the point where they are thought “I’ve had enough of this”, “I can’t tolerate this anymore”, or “I’m withdrawing and I’m going to go and take my doctorate to another university”. So, there’s still very much that sense of not wanting to unsettle things as somebody is still conducting their research and getting ready to submit.

Aim	Approach
Supporting local leadership roles to act on the concern	Discussing the concerns with local PGR leadership roles or faculty-level PGR leadership roles
Minimising reliance on formal complaint routes	Providing alternative to formal processes to reduce PGR’s fear and preserve relationships

Across the focus group cohort, participants expressed a clear preference for addressing supervision concerns through informal resolution wherever possible, with formal complaints procedures generally viewed as a last resort:

“...we can go through an informal phase. We have a [PGR leadership role] who can mediate, who can go into that, who’s in the doctoral college, and that works really, really well...the PGR can talk to them quite independently and they will give...advice

about how they might go forward. But we have that informal resolution and then we have a formal complaints process that a [faculty-level PGR leadership role] interviews the PGR, the supervisors, and then comes to me for final sign-off as to how we come through that...” (Participant 6)

“It would be having an informal meeting with the people involved to see what is going on here and trying to see if we can resolve things...I think 90% of issues can be resolved at the informal stage.

So, we'll be working on that. But...if it has to go through a formal stage...if it's a disciplinary issue, for example, or...a capability issue, that's quite different from an informal kind of relational pedagogy." (Participant 2)

"...a lot of it's informal, it's not process-based, it's not official but I prefer to shut things down or deal with things informally. And generally, the doctoral researchers prefer that, too." (Participant 8)

Changes to supervisory teams was an approach that participants considered to be an informal resolution to some supervision issues:

"...before it becomes a formal complaint, what I do is remove supervisors — sometimes that is the best course of action [that] we find an alternative supervisor. I've done that when the supervisor was a Head of School and more senior than me. It's a kind of nuclear option. I don't want to do it, but very often I'm doing it because it's actually at the request of the doctoral researcher." (Participant 8)

Some participants described how doctoral schools and colleges exercised moral or procedural authority when supervision concerns arose, even where the individual involved held different levels of seniority:

"I wouldn't speak to a supervisor directly, [as] that would be the responsibility of their line manager or the [faculty-level PGR leadership role] to do that. So, if a student has said to us 'I've got these real problems with my supervisor that the relationship has really broken down...I just want to change my supervisor', that would then be something that we perhaps might say to the student 'Well, we would encourage you to go and speak to your [local lead for PGR admin] or to your [faculty-level PGR leadership role] and instigate that conversation. If you don't feel empowered enough to do that, we can then do that on your behalf'. So it can kind of come from

both angles, really. It can come from us, or it can come from the student."
(Participant 18)

However, the nature of informality does pose some challenges. While allowing for accessibility, some participants described the informal approach as sometimes being 'messy':

"Sometimes [local lead for PGR admin] don't get the support from their head of school or their director of research, so sometimes they will reach out as well to the doctoral college for a bit of guidance there. I think that middle bit is a little bit messy. I don't think it's necessarily clear how that informal bit works. I think that once it reaches a formal complaint, that's really clear...but that initial bit is quite blurry." (Participant 6)

Other challenges also linked to the role of doctoral colleges and that of local leads for PGR admin, which will be future explored in Section 5.4.

Professional development and CPD in response to supervision issues

Building on their role in responding to PGR concerns, doctoral schools also play an important role in supporting supervisor development. Participants described how issues raised by PGRs were used to inform guidance, training resources, and staff development activities. In this way, experiences and concerns emerging from supervision practice were fed back into institutional support mechanisms, creating opportunities to reinforce and promote effective supervision practice.

Vignette 7 illustrates how supervision concerns can inform wider institutional learning. It shows that doctoral schools may respond by supporting supervisors, prompting institutional reflection, and updating regulations so that policy remains responsive to issues emerging in practice.

Vignette 7. Focus on CPD and supervisor development

A key point about what our processes are, how we need to be sensitive to particular things so that we can engage with training within that. We want to support supervisors in developing their skills and thinking about the PGRs of today and how we do that. In some cases, I've worked directly with the supervisors, where it seemed most appropriate, and delegated to others if it is not. For example, is it a new supervisor? How can we best support them in that space? Is it external support? A mentor? What systems do we have there?

I may go to a specified person in that area and say look we have an issue, I can't tell you who it is, but could you make some general statements? Could we look at what's happening in this area perhaps?

The other one...the passive aggressive e-mail in saying "Dear group of X, we know that something needs correcting"...It's not my preferred first option, but I think it has a way of saying, look, we know there's a problem, we know who it is, please just think about things.'

It's really hard to capture absolutely everything, but you do try and make sure that your code of practice and your regulations are kind of a living document and that absolutely everyone feels invested in it because you've listened and you've changed something. So, I would hope that we definitely do that. And you know the committee structure is there for that reason. So we could get stuff done fairly quickly.

Aim	Approach
Support supervisor development	• Utilising a range of options and structures for supervisory development. • Using border stroke and more formal approaches to highlight challenges and good supervisory practice.
Maintaining and developing good practice	Treating Code of Practice and regulations as living documents to be updated and edited in response to challenges that come up.

5.4 Challenges in addressing supervision issues

Alongside the description of the monitoring and intervention system, participants highlighted some structural and relational tensions that brought challenges to doctoral schools' oversight of supervision practice and intervention when issues arise. Participants' comments highlighted doctoral schools' moral authority, instead of operational authority, in this space. For example, a participant mentioned the limited operational authority of doctoral school due to their lack of 'inside power':

"We would possibly sit over from a quality assurance point of view, but from an actually implementing and dealing with it, that would have to happen on a more local level, because we simply do not have the local knowledge or the resource, power over resource to say 'Oh, you teach less on this module and hence you would have capacity to supervise here'. That's not something that we have inside power." (Participant 4)

More often, participants pointed to challenges linked to positioning of local leads for PGR admin who are responsible for intervention. A participant highlighted the absence of departmental support for the local lead for PGR admin in their university:

“We do provide mandatory training for [local lead for PGR admin] to support them in their role, but also they’re sometimes in quite a difficult management position: sometimes they don’t get the support from their Head of School or their Director of research. So, sometimes they will reach out as well to the doctoral college for a bit of guidance there.” (Participant 6)

Participants also pointed out gaps in line management practice, even when they were formally responsible to act on intervention. Vignette 8 highlights a key challenge where Heads of Departments may be reluctant or unsure how to act on supervision concerns.

In such cases, DDDs may use their influence to support local action and keep concerns on the agenda until a resolution is reached.

Gaps in line management also concerns supervisory teams which include external supervisors who are not aligned with the research centre:

“We do have an increasing number of perhaps second or third supervisors that aren’t based in research centres and are based in [external units] ...which brings or will bring another set of challenges around if there is poor supervisory practice from an area that...the [research directors] don’t have line management responsibility for those individuals.” (Participant 18)

Vignette 8. Working with Heads of Departments

Sometimes the local lead for PGR admin might say “We know [that] we’ve got a long standing problem with this individual supervising”. I will also go to the Head of Department if they’re finding it difficult to resolve or they’re not quite sure how to tackle it.

Often though, I find Heads of Departments coming to me saying we’ve got a problem with supervision, or this individual. I would point out that they are the line manager and there is a management process to manage this. I would say in our institution I’m more sceptical about how readily Heads of Department and the Heads of School actually do anything about this...I fear they will say “well, come on, this isn’t really a big deal”.

I find that they’re scared to do that. Even in positions of authority they do not have the skills to have a difficult conversation even with the academic staff that they are line managing. This has happened several times, including really senior academics with a lot of experience.

In these situations I end up kind of trying to coach and persuade these members of staff to resolve the problem. I emphasise that there’s no option but to resolve the problem, and then I will just keep on it until I feel personally satisfied that a solution has been reached.

Aim	Approach
Working with Head of Departments for resolution	Highlighting line management responsibilities and need for action

Some participants observed power dynamics within the academic department and line management structure that could complicate the intervention. In such cases, external authority from doctoral school is critical:

“I think there are huge problems navigating the issues when they arise because academics are reticent to reprimand their colleagues. So all of the power dynamics that exist between them within a particular area start to play out in terms of somebody's seniority, the amount of research income they have...all of those dynamics start to come into play. And of course, the person with the least power in the scenario is the doctoral researcher... My team has been able to help because we can bring in the gravitas externally and not allow the department to close ranks.” (Participant 7)

The seniority of the supervisor in question, especially when their supervisions are overseen by local leads for PGR admin who are seen as junior roles, also plays a role in the power dynamics. The academic hierarchy was mentioned as a structural barrier, which created difficulties when the local lead for PGR admin attempted to address supervision concerns:

“I think the challenge with that is often they can be junior colleagues to the person that they need to be talking to... Do they have the authority to pull who might be a senior professor up on what is deemed poor practice? So, I think we do have things in place, but it's that matrix structure is helpful at times, but in this instance can sometimes be problematic.” (Participant 13)

“I have had an instance where a [local lead for PGR admin] felt [that they were] being bullied by some senior supervisors over an issue that he was trying to help resolve for the doctoral candidate... I think it's like having that independent person that sits externally, which I think points to the value of having a Dean or Director of a doctoral school or a graduate school.

It's quite critical in that sense. So, he was able to come to me basically, be really open about what he was experiencing, and then together we were able to think [about] what's the best course of action here and how do we resolve it.”

(Participant 7)

Some universities worked to elevate the role of local lead for PGR admin by appointing more experienced academics or aligning job descriptions across departments, but their limited strategic leadership experience can bring challenges to their effective intervention for supervision issues:

“I can directly answer that for [university] where it is a problem where often the [local lead for PGR admin] in a school role is seen as quite a junior role...it's not seen as very important by the Head of School... We've tried to make the person look bigger than that... We'd be on a constant crusade to try and elevate that leadership role in the faculties. We've gone from people who tend to be [academic staff] going for those roles who are very good on a pastoral side but actually not very strategic minded—they're not people who've had leadership roles...It's been really, really difficult.”

(Participant 12)

These reflections indicate that supervision oversight and intervention are not only shaped by institutional structures, but also by how authority, responsibility, and influence operate in practice.

6. Discussion

These focus group findings contribute to a deeper understanding of supervision practice and institutional factors from the perspective of Deans and Directors of Doctoral Schools (DDD), complementing relevant findings from focus groups with academic supervisors (Quinlan et al., 2026) and industry supervisors (Li et al., 2026). While participants represented different UK university groups, the findings do not indicate that doctoral supervision issues or intervention challenges are distinctive to any particular institutional group. Across the focus group cohort, the issues reported were broadly similar, within variation relating more to disciplinary contexts, local departmental structures, and institutional mechanisms. These perspectives support RSVP's aim of establishing baselines for supervision practice and culture by offering qualitative insights drawing from different stakeholders' experience.

DDD participants' critical reflections on the framing of good-poor dichotomy emphasised the highly contextual and dynamic nature of doctoral supervision practice, shaped by broader academic cultures, which augmented the importance of adaptive and candidate-centred supervision approaches noted by the academic research supervisor and industry supervisor focus group cohorts. That is, rather than implying a fixed model of good supervision, good supervision practice should be responsive to PGRs' needs, stage of research, disciplinary context, supervisory team arrangements, and wider academic culture. This highlights that effective supervision practice depends on ongoing communication and adjustment over the doctoral journey. These reflections take on added significance in a rapidly shifting doctoral education landscape shaped by increasingly diverse PGR demographics, evolving expectations, and modes of interaction (e.g. distant communication in the post-lockdown era).

Supervisors' responsiveness and structured communication practice appeared to be an important dimension to underpinning good supervision, which shapes both supervisory relationships and PGRs' experiences of the doctoral journey.

The findings presented a range of institutional support approaches to reinforcing good supervision practice, including formal training, guidance documents, communities of practice, and ongoing refinement of supervision development schemes. In addition, several participants highlighted the importance of keeping institutional policies as "living documents", with ongoing review and refinement in response to evolving supervisor and PGR needs. Participants noted the persistent challenge in engaging senior supervisors who seemed to be less enthusiastic about participating in training schemes, which echoes the observations of academic supervisor focus group participants (Quinlan et al., 2026). Participants' reflections also suggested continuing institutional practices to encourage supervisor engagement, such as mandating training schemes for all supervisors and top-down intervention from the doctoral school. To strengthen supervisor engagement, literature points to further institutional practices including having supervisors deliver mandatory training sessions (Jackson et al., 2021), creating situated learning opportunities within supervisors' day-to-day practice (Huet & Casanova, 2022), and offering of a mix of formal and informal development activities (Pyhältö et al., 2024). These insights highlight the central role of institutional support and coordination in sustaining meaningful supervisor engagement.

Participants' discussions reflected a range of institutional structures for supervision oversight and intervention when concerns arise; both areas feature a mixture of informal and formal routes. For supervision oversight, the offering of multiple report routes was highly valued, from informal conversations to structured reporting mechanisms. Particularly, it is essential to maintain this space as comfortable and trusting for PGRs, given that perceived (and real) supervisor-PGR power dynamics could inhibit some PGRs from coming forward when issues arise. Intervention approaches demonstrated participants' preference for informal or locally mediated action, with many noting that most concerns were best addressed at a departmental level rather than through a centralised process. Formal process was typically reserved for escalation of serious or persistent cases. This emphasis on informal intervention approaches was linked to participants' considerations for the value of local knowledge and established line management mechanisms within departments or faculties. However, these approaches were generally not supported by coherent record keeping in relation to repeated poor supervisory practice.

Participants emphasised the significance of their roles in empowering PGRs, sense-checking concerns and challenging poor supervision practices. However, this influence often operated without direct line-management authority over supervisors. Instead, DDDs described drawing on moral and procedural authority, grounded in their responsibility for PGR experience and supported by institutional policy and regulation. As illustrated in the findings, participants' roles as DDDs enabled them to apply pressure, legitimise PGR concerns, and encourage departmental action, even where they had limited capacity to intervene directly. This suggests that effective oversight of supervision depends not only on formal management structures, but also on the ability of doctoral schools and colleges to use institutional influence responsibly on behalf of PGRs. The requirement for strong DDD support of relatively junior local leads for PGR admin was particularly noted.

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Participant Information Sheet

Next Generation Research

SuperVision Project



School of Arts and Creative Technologies

Participant Information Sheet – Anonymous Research

Project background

The University of York would like to invite you to take part in the following project:
RSVP Focus Groups

Before agreeing to take part, please read this information sheet carefully and let us know if anything is unclear or you would like further information.

What is the purpose of the project?

This project is being undertaken by Dr. Owen Gower and Dr. Nicola Palmer both members of the School of ACT. The work is being conducted according to restrictions that have been subject to approval by the ACT Ethics committee. The Chair of the ACT Ethics committee can be contacted ACT-ethics@york.ac.uk.

For this research project, we are interested in establishing baselines surrounding research supervision practice and culture across the UK, to inform the development of continuing professional development resources and influence broad research culture change.

In order to achieve this, we are interested in a variety of topics and groups found within the UK higher education sector. These include perspectives on supervision practice and institutional factors from Deans and Directors of Doctoral Schools. Your participation in this project will involve attending a single 90-minute focus group with other participants with the role of Deans and Directors of Doctoral Schools based at UK universities. You will be asked a series of questions, which you will be given access to ahead of the focus group, and asked to provide your reflections and observations from your experiences as managers from an institutional perspective, your experience and approaches to dealing with poor supervision practice, and the policy changes you would like to see relating to UK research supervision culture.

Please note that to comply with the approved Ethics requirements of this work, we do not intend to discuss sensitive topics with you that could be potentially upsetting or distressing. If you have any concerns about the topics that may be covered in the research study, please raise these concerns with the researcher.

Your participation in this project is voluntary. If you wish, we will provide you with access to any summary reports, publications, or other forms of research dissemination. If you would like to receive access to these, you can indicate as such on the consent form.

Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part because you are a Dean or Director of a doctoral school in the UK.

Do I have to take part?

No, participation is optional. If you do decide to take part, you will be given a copy of this information sheet for your records and will be asked to complete a participant consent form. If you change your mind at any point during the research activity, you will be able to withdraw your participation without having to provide a reason. To withdraw your participation, you need to inform project lead Liz Quinlan within 7 days of participating in a focus group, and your data and information will be disregarded during analysis and deleted.

Will I be identified in any outputs?

No. Your participation in this research activity will be treated anonymously and you will not be identified in any outputs.

Privacy Notice

This section explains how personal data will be used by RSVP at the University of York.

For this project, the University of York is the **Data Controller**. We are registered with the Information Commissioner's Office.

Our registration number is Z4855807.

What is our legal basis for processing your data?

Privacy law (the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018) requires us to have a legal reason to process your personal data. Our reason is we need it to perform a public task.³

This is because the University has a public function, defined in [our charter and statutes](#), which includes carrying out research projects.⁴ We need to use personal data in order to carry out this research project.

Information about your health, ethnicity, sexual identity and other sensitive information is called **"special category" data**. We have to have an additional legal reason to use this data, because it is sensitive. Our reason is that it is needed for research purposes.⁵ All research projects at the University follow our [research ethics policies](#).

How do we use your data?

The data collected in this research will be used to help us understand the experiences and professional development needs of research supervisors in the UK, and project outputs will be used to inform the development of new resources and UK higher education policy recommendations from organisations like the UKCGE.

³ This refers to [UK GDPR Article 6 \(1\) \(e\)](#): processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest or in the exercise of official authority vested in the controller.

⁴ [Our charter and statutes](#) states: 4.f. To provide instruction in such branches of learning as the University may think fit and to make provision for research and for the advancement and dissemination of knowledge in such manner as the University may determine.

⁵ This refers to [UK GDPR Article 9 \(2\) \(j\)](#): processing is necessary for archiving purposes in the public interest, scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes in accordance with Article 89(1) based on Union or Member State law which shall be proportionate to the aim pursued, respect the essence of the right to data protection and provide for suitable and specific measures to safeguard the fundamental rights and the interests of the data subject.

Who do we share your data with?

The raw data from this project (audio and video recordings, transcriptions of your focus group discussion, and pre-questionnaire responses) will not be shared with anyone beyond the RSVP core analysis team (Liz Quinlan and Karen Clegg). Anonymised and pseudonymised data will be shared in various project output forms (including reports, summaries, and publications) with not only our wider RSVP research network, but interested parties across the global higher education sector.

As well as this, we use computer software or systems to hold and manage data. Other companies only provide the software, system or storage. They are not allowed to use your data for their own reasons.

We have agreements in place when we share data. These agreements meet legal requirements to ensure your data is protected.

How do we keep your data secure?

The University is serious about keeping your data secure and protecting your rights to privacy. We don't ask you for data we don't need, and only give access to people who need to know. We think about security when planning projects, to make sure they work well. Our IT security team checks regularly to make sure we're taking the right steps. For more details see [our security webpages](#).

How do we transfer your data safely internationally?

If your data is stored or processed outside the UK, we follow legal requirements to make sure that the same level of privacy rules still apply.

How long will we keep your data?

The University has rules in place for [how long research data can be kept](#) when the research project is finished. Your information will be kept for a maximum of one year, and after this time an anonymised version will be kept. As this will be fully anonymous, it will not be possible to identify you in any way from this data.

What rights do you have in relation to your data?

[You have rights over your data](#). This sheet explains how you can stop participating in the study, and what will happen to your data if you do. This information is in the section 'Do I have to take part?'.

If you want to get a copy of your data, or talk to us about any other rights, please contact us using the details below.

Questions or concerns

If you have any questions or concerns about how your data is being processed, please contact Liz Quinlan (liz.quinlan@york.ac.uk) or Karen Clegg (karen.clegg@york.ac.uk).

If you have further questions, the University's Data Protection Officer can be contacted at dataprotection@york.ac.uk or by writing to: **Data Protection Officer, University of York, Heslington, York, YO10 5DD.**

Right to complain

If you are unhappy with how the University has handled your personal data, please contact our Data Protection Officer using the details above, so that we can try to put things right.

If you are unhappy with our response, you have a right to [complain to the Information Commissioner's Office](#). You can also contact the Information Commissioner's Office by post to **Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF** or by phone on **0303 123 1113**.

Question set

• Participant Instructions

- Reflect on the information presented in the pre-reading
 - “keep in mind your own definitions of both poor supervision practice (as a feature manifested at the level of individual supervisors) and poor supervision experience (which includes poor supervisory practice, but can also result from structural or managerial decisions).”

• Main Questions

1. Are the areas or themes identified as “poor supervision practice” in the pre-reading excerpt consistent with reports of poor supervisory practice that you receive in your role as a Dean/Director of Doctoral education?
 - Follow up: Are there any aspects missing from the excerpt? (Short of formal complaint-worthy behavior)
2. Within your institution, what is the lead organisational structure for managing issues of poor supervisory practice?
3. How do you (or other managers) receive information on poor supervisory practice from students and colleagues?
 - Follow up: Is there a defined process for dealing with such information?
 - Follow up: Is this information recorded, evaluated, or cascaded in any way?
4. If you (or another manager) are notified of poor supervisory practice that is **NOT** worthy of a formal complaint, what actions can be taken and by whom?
 - Follow up: Is this information recorded, evaluated or cascaded in any way?
5. How is understanding of good/poor supervisory practice disseminated within your institution more generally?
 - Follow up: In particular, how are updates to policies, training, and codes of practice informed by, inter alia, disclosures from students.
6. Are there aspects of poor supervision experience that are predominantly due to matters other than poor supervisory practice?
 - Follow up: How are these identified?
 - Follow up: How does this feed into updates to policies and codes of practice?

RSVP

The Next Generation Research SuperVision Project (RSVP) is a £4.6million, Research England funded project designed to transform the culture and practice of research supervision. Working with over 50 universities, industry, funders and researchers, RSVP is exploring what constitutes consistent, high quality supervision practice, the role of team supervision, and the impact of engagement in professional development on practice, as well as making recommendations about recognition and support.

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