Research in Post-Compulsory Education

Routledge Taylor & Francis Group

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rpce20

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To cite this article: Jane Creaton (2021) The impact of professional doctorates in the workplace: evidence from the criminal justice sector, Research in Post-Compulsory Education, 26:3, 274-289, DOI: 10.1080/13596748.2021.1920259

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/13596748.2021.1920259

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Published online: 19 Jul 2021.

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RESEARCH IN POST-COMPULSORY EDUCATION
2021, VOL. 26, NO. 3, 274–289
https://doi.org/10.1080/13596748.2021.1920259

The impact of professional doctorates in the workplace: evidence from the criminal justice sector

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the impact of professional doctorates in the workplace in the specific context of the criminal justice sector, through a qualitative study of practitioners who have graduated from professional doctorates in criminal justice and security risk management. A thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with 25 graduates was undertaken to identify the nature and extent of impact on their workplaces. The study suggests that professional doctorates may potentially have a significant impact on the workplace, but the actual extent is shaped by three interrelated factors: the motivations of students, the role of their employer and the nature of the programme in which they are enrolled. The article concludes with a discussion of the implications for how institutions could design and deliver professional doctorate programmes in order to extend workplace impact.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 3 November 2020
Accepted 1 February 2021

KEYWORDS

Professional doctorates; impact; professional practice; criminal justice; workplace

Introduction

One of the defining features of a professional doctorate is that candidates are expected to demonstrate an impact on professional practice. The UK Characteristics Statement for Doctoral Degrees states that, for professional doctorates, '. . . successful completion of the degree normally leads to professional and/or organisational change that is often direct rather than achieved through the implementation of subsequent research findings' (Quality Assurance Agency 2020, 9). This is reflected in the academic regulations of many institutions that require professional doctoral candidates to make an explicit contribution to the advancement of practice in the relevant professional sphere. Hence, any taught element of professional doctorates will usually incorporate some reflection on practice, research methods that are relevant to practitioners and a focus on practice-related outcomes. The research phase and/or the thesis is often characterised by the use of the candidate's workplace as the research setting, the value placed on professional knowledge and the intended contribution to professional practice.

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Yet, despite the emphasis on professional practice and the promotion of professional doctorate programmes as being for 'researching professionals' rather than 'professional researchers' (Bourner, Bowden, and Laing 2001, 71), there is limited evidence of the impact of professional doctorates on the workplace. Research commissioned by the Higher Education Funding Council for England concluded that 'there is little robust evidence of impact on professional practice and changes in the workplace' (Mellors-Bourne, Robinson, and Metcalfe 2016, 67) and that more research was needed to explore these impacts. This paper explores the nature and extent of the impact that professional doctorates may have on the workplace and the factors that may influence that impact. It begins with an overview of the impact of professional doctorates in the context of current UK higher education research policy. It then reviews and analyses data from 25 semi structured interviews with graduates from two co-delivered professional doctorate programmes in criminal justice and security risk management.

The findings suggest that professional doctorates may potentially have a significant impact in the workplace, and several of the projects undertaken clearly demonstrated societal, economic and other benefits. There are a number of factors that may influence the impact of professional doctorate research in the workplace, and engagement by the employer following the completion of the project is particularly important. The data suggest that, even where the doctoral project had little or no impact on the workplace, graduates had successfully disseminated findings and influenced practice in a range of other settings and contexts. These findings have important implications for how professional doctorate programmes are designed, delivered and assessed, and the paper concludes with some recommendations about how course teams might enhance their programmes to maximise the potential impact on the workplace.

The impact of professional doctorates

There are a number of studies exploring the impact of professional doctorates, but these have tended to focus on the personal or professional development of the individual taking the programme, rather than on wider impacts on the workplace or beyond (Boud et al. 2018). This may reflect the focus on Doctorate in Education (EdD) programmes, where students, according to earlier research by Scott et al. (2004), tended to undertake the programme for reasons relating to personal satisfaction and/or career progression rather than from a desire to transform the workplace. Programmes embedded in other disciplines may have stronger connections with employers which can enhance the capacity for impact. For example, Mellors-Bourne, Robinson, and Metcalfe (2016) noted that Doctorate of Business Administration (DBA) students were more likely to have addressed

a specific work-based problem through their doctoral research, and a study of Doctorate of Professional Practice (DProf) students (Boud et al. 2018) indicated a number of ways in which a work-based professional doctorate could influence organisations and professional contexts.

The importance of impact as an intended outcome of professional doctorate programmes has become more prominent with the increased emphasis on impact through research funding regimes in the UK. The expectation that research should have an impact beyond the academic environment is arguably the purpose of much of research activity, particularly in applied academic disciplines. However, this expectation has been more firmly established in policy and funding agendas in recent years in the UK, despite criticisms of how impact is defined, articulated and measured (Watermeyer 2016; Watermeyer and Chubb 2018). Although the requirement to complete a 'Pathways to Impact' plan or complete an impact summary in applications for research funding was removed from 1 March 2020, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) has reiterated that the impact remains core to the grant application process (Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council 2020). The Research Excellence Framework 2021 (REF2021) allocates a 25% weighting to impact case studies which evidences the benefits and influences of the research on individuals and communities.

The general definition of impact used for research funding purposes is 'the demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to society and the economy' (UK Research and Innovation n.d.) and for REF2021, impact is defined as 'an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia' (Research England et al. 2019). How this definition of impact is interpreted varies across disciplines, but Terämä et al. (2016) found no evidence to suggest that any particular interpretation was more highly rewarded through the exercise. Their analysis of impact case studies submitted for REF2014 identified six types of impact: education, public engagement, environmental and energy solutions, enterprise, policy, and clinical uses. Another ongoing analysis of impact case studies from around the world (Reed 2018) distinguishes between different types of impact: understanding and awareness, attitudes, economy, environment, health and wellbeing, policy, other forms of decision-making and behaviour change, culture, other social, and capacity or preparedness.

Reed's typology provides a useful checklist for researchers exploring the full range of benefits that a project might generate, but it also offers a helpful analytical frame to consider the impacts of the professional doctorate projects in this study. Professional doctorate students are perhaps unlikely to be submitting in the REF as either outputs or case studies, and some may not even be included in the submission at all. This is because the REF uses the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) definition of a research-

based higher degree which requires that the programme comprises a research component (including a requirement to produce original work) that is 'larger than any accompanying taught component when measured by student effort' (Research England, Scottish Funding Council, Higher Education Funding Council of Wales, and Department for the Economy Northern Ireland 2019). This excludes some of the professionally accredited psychology doctorates, for example, which have significant components of supervised practice. Some funders and other organisations also appear not to recognise the existence of other types of doctoral qualification, causing confusion when, for example, funding is available to an early career researcher within a certain amount of years of completing their PhD and it is not clear whether this is intended to exclude other types of doctorate.

The research study

The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of professional doctorate programmes based in the criminal justice sector. It draws on the analysis of interviews with graduates from two professional doctorate programmes offered by the Institute of Criminal Justice Studies at the University of Portsmouth. The Professional Doctorate in Criminal Justice (DCrimJ) was launched in 2007 (University of Portsmouth n.d.) and has attracted students working in policing, counter fraud, youth justice, prisons, probation, legal professions and forensic mental health. The Professional Doctorate in Security Risk Management (DSyRM) (University of Portsmouth n.d.) was launched in 2014 and is aimed at the specialist security professional sector, including corporate and commercial security, international security, security training, business continuity and crisis management. The 2-year part-time taught element of the programme is common to both programmes and includes modules on professional development and review, advanced research techniques, publication and dissemination, and developing a project proposal. All modules are mapped to level 8 of the UK Framework of Higher Education Qualifications. In March 2019, there were 75 students registered on the two courses (51 on the DCrimJ, 24 on the DSyRM) in both the taught and research phases and there were 57 graduates (51 from the DCrimJ and six from the DSyRM).

This was a qualitative study, drawing primarily on interviews with graduates about their experience of undertaking the doctorate and their perceptions of the impact of their research. As a prelude to the interviews, an analysis was undertaken of 47 professional doctorate theses from the two programmes completed between 2011 and 2017. All but one of these (which was exempt from deposit on the grounds of confidentiality) were available on the institutional repository. The purpose was to understand how the authors had positioned themselves in relation to their workplace and how

they articulated their intended contribution to professional practice. This analysis was valuable in several ways: it provided a sound overview of and insight into the research projects that had been undertaken; it informed the genesis of the research questions; and contributed to the design of the interview schedule. It also provoked reflections on how the outputs of professional doctorate programmes may differ from those of a PhD. For example, many of the projects did not have objectives explicitly relating to the workplace, use methodologies that were practice based or explicitly engage in reflexive practice about the researcher's professional role. Some of the completed theses could not be distinguished from a conventional PhD other than by the length.

The three research questions derived from this analysis of theses and through insights from the existing academic literature were: What was the relationship between the research project and the workplace? Did the project make any specific recommendations related to the workplace? What had been the impact of the project on the workplace? The primary phase of the data collection and analysis was aimed at exploring the third research question. Following the granting of institutional ethics approval for the project, all graduates from the programmes who had completed their studies between 2011 and December 2017 (n = 43) were invited to participate in the project. The call for interviewees made it clear that the experiences of graduates who felt that, for whatever reason, their research had little or no impact on the workplace were equally valuable.

Twenty-five graduates agreed to be interviewed for the project and were sent the participation sheet and consent forms. The interviews were conducted in 2018 and all but three of the interviews were conducted online or by phone, either because the interviewee was located outside the UK or because they were fitting the interview in around their working day. Interviews lasted for approximately 30 minutes and were semi-structured, comprising a number of key questions and prompts about the involvement of the employer in the research, the research findings and how they were disseminated and the subsequent impact of the research on the workplace. Interviews were audio recorded with the permission of the interviewee and transcribed by a professional research transcription service. Each of the transcripts were reviewed for accuracy and meaning against the recording prior to analysis. A two-stage reflexive thematic analysis approach was used (Braun and Clarke 2006, 2019). The first inductive stage used text query tools to analyse the most frequently used words and concepts in the text and to identify issues and categories that emerged directly from the data. The second deductive stage involved searching and coding specific phrases and themes relating to personal and professional impacts which had been identified in the existing academic literature. Subsequent iterations of coding selected key quotations and phrases which illuminated or exemplified

specific themes that were emerging from the analysis. The interviews explored the three key research questions from the perspective of the professional doctorate graduate and the findings are organised around the three key themes that were identified through the analysis of the interview data: the nature and extent of impact in the workplace; organisational cultures; and publication, dissemination and public engagement.

Findings

Nature and extent of impact on the workplace

The nature and extent of the relationship between the research project and the workplace varied. Although all the participants had undertaken research within the criminal justice and/or security risk management sectors, some projects were not undertaken within the student's own organisation or workplace. Some were self-employed, others had not been able to obtain permission and others had not designed the project with their own workplace as the focus. For the majority (n = 20) which had done so, the reported impacts included: the implementation of recommendations made in the project, the development of training programmes based on the research, influence on policy making in government organisations, changes in working practices in their organisation and the roll out of initiatives that had been piloted as part of the doctoral research. Not all of these reported impacts would necessarily fall within the REF definition of impact. Changes in working practices within a particular organisation, for example, may be considered to be out of scope. However, as Reed's (2018) impact typology makes clear, these changes may well lead to other, more wide-reaching impacts, such as saving money or improving decision-making.

One project, in particular, reported making a major societal and economic impact through the piloting and evaluation of an initiative which led to a significant reduction in crime and savings in policing costs. This was a clear outlier in terms of the extent of impact, meeting several of the types of impact identified in Reed's (2018) typology, including significant economic, well-being and policy benefits. However, two other respondents who had been involved in projects which had reported a significant and explicit impact on their workplace were pleased and gratified. One said: 'It has had a tremendously positive impact. It was a challenging process, a long process, but I'm positively surprised about the direct and indirect impact so far' (PD2). At the other end of the spectrum, four participants explicitly stated that they felt as though there had been little or no impact: 'I personally don't feel it's had any impact at all on the organisation whatsoever' (PD3) and 'Nothing has actually moved on in that respect in the last five years since

I completed the doctorate' (PD4). In the case of PD3, a new organisational policy on flexible working ran directly counter to some findings of the research but they had been unable to challenge it: 'that's one of the areas that I've tried to speak to senior managers to make them aware of my research, but they're not actually interested at all'.

In the other 13 cases, the perceptions of impact were more mixed. Whilst the nature and extent of the impact had been disappointing, in that there had been no formal response to the thesis, report or recommendations, some participants felt that the project had been of some benefit to the workplace, through an increase in the knowledge and awareness or small-scale changes in practice. Several participants felt vindicated because changes that they had recommended were being implemented, even if it did not appear to be in specific response to the project findings: 'So, it was, kind of, practice was changing as my findings were coming out and going alongside the changes in practice' (PD5) and '... there's beginning to be a change in the dynamics of what they're doing. So it's almost like the research is being implemented but not acknowledged' (PD6).

The projects that noted the biggest impact on the workplace were those that built on existing initiatives. PD1's project, for example, was an integral part of a larger organisational strategy to assess the impact of a particular method of situational crime reduction. PD1's project comprised a 6-month trial of the method, and the findings informed a decision to roll out the method across the organisation. Another project, which focused on equal opportunities in the workplace, evaluated existing initiatives and made recommendations for other improvements, many of which were adopted (PD8). This accords with the observation by Boud et al. (Boud et al. 2018, 924) that 'the ability to influence an organisational situation and contribute to desired outcomes relies heavily upon the fit of the graduates' work to the current strategic imperatives ... '

However, not all projects based on elements of existing workplace practice were as successful. For example, a project which attempted to evaluate and improve elements of police training did not achieve any significant reforms (PD9). Another which focused on a new recruitment initiative into the police also had limited purchase (PD12). Both examples are from the police service and the influence of rank and hierarchy was noted as a significant factor on potential impact. Another doctoral candidate, whose seniority had enabled them to align their project with ongoing organisational initiatives acknowledged that 'It's not just me that does that. There are obviously others that are doing degrees and so forth in the organisation. But of course, the more senior your lead doing that, the louder the voice maybe gets heard' (PD1).

Organisational cultures

Previous research by Burgess, Weller, and Wellington (2013) has suggested that the potential impact of professional doctorate research was dependent on organisational culture, including both the support of the line manager and the receptiveness of the organisation to learning and development. In the current study, there were 20 participants who were not self-employed, and had received a range of support and engagement from their employers. Five had received full or partial contributions towards their fees, and three had received some form of study leave. In other cases, the employer had granted permission for the research to be conducted in the workplace. There were various strings attached to this support, particularly where there was a financial contribution. Fees were generally repayable if the employee left within a certain number of years of completing the degree as one participant (PD7) found to their cost when presented with a bill for the entire 4 years of support on their last day at work.

In most cases, support was contingent simply on providing a copy of the completed thesis and/or an executive summary, but there were two participants who had a significantly higher level of employer engagement than other participants. The first, PD1, was the senior police officer who had initiated a pilot scheme for reducing burglary and whose doctoral project was aimed at evaluating it. The project was fully funded and the results of the project informed the subsequent roll out of the project. The second (PD6), also a police officer, entered into a formal research agreement with the force where the research was being undertaken but although the final thesis received considerable discussion and scrutiny, the findings were not formally implemented.

The support of a line manager is clearly a very important factor in determining whether or not projects have an impact on the workplace, but the data collected from the participants suggests that the nature and extent of engagement after the project has been completed may be even more significant than that received during the project. Thirteen participants had submitted the thesis or a summary report on completion of the project, but six had not received a response and were unclear on whether it had even been read. In many cases, this was because the line manager or the formal or informal sponsor within the organisation who had initially supported the project had moved on, and their replacement was not interested or engaged in the project outcomes. This was particularly an issue in the police service, where there is a high turnover of roles. There were also several instances where the graduate had moved on to a different role, another employer or had retired and was not sufficiently connected to their previous position to know whether changes had been made.

The receptiveness of the organisation to learning and development also emerged as a strong theme from the interviews. This was particularly evident in the case of the 12 participants who worked in the police service. The police service is traditionally a non-graduate profession which held to 'a central distrust of the academic' (Young 1991, 381) which has arguably persisted despite increasing numbers of graduate entrants (Punch 2007) and the introduction of the Police Education Qualifications Framework (Hallenberg and Cockcroft 2017). One participant said:

> 'I met up with two sergeants a couple of days ago … and they were mercilessly mocking it. They were also mocking [a civilian member of police staff]. They were like, "Oh yes, he's got a doctorate as well." And then there were lots of jokes and this, that and the other' (PD8).

Another interview recalled a colleague with a doctorate being referred to as 'Dr Plod' (PD9).

However, within the police service, hierarchy was also a factor. As a consequence, some respondents did not use their doctoral title in a work context and did not disclose that they had the qualification, unless applying for a role where it appeared particularly relevant. The perception was that a person of a lower rank being better qualified academically might be a disadvantage: 'If [I] put on my application that I had a doctorate then you get nowhere, then that actually might disadvantage me because they just want people who feel quite insecure …' (PD9). PD10 also said:

> 'Now, if it had been a senior officer got it, I'm sure that it would have been publicised. And I think there's something about the rank thing. I felt that if I were to then go into a department I would outrank them all. I outrank everyone educationally there. And they would find it perhaps unsettling academically'.

These perceptions were confirmed by a participant (PD1) who was in a more senior role, and observed that whilst 'everyone would take the mickey, in a nice way, but poke fun', the doctorate 'adds real weight and credibility to the view that you give', particularly in meetings with external partners, members of the public, MPs and so on.

A respondent from the social work profession also suggested that there was a scepticism about the value of higher education qualifications, particularly at doctoral level. 'I think you can either be a practitioner or you can be an academic, and you cannot do both. I think that's the view in social work. And I guess that was the other reason why I wanted to do the research, to prove that you can still do both' (PD3). This attitude was not necessarily based on scepticism about higher education per se as all social workers are graduates. However, a profession in which all or most have a first degree does not automatically value higher degrees, and in this case, the professional experience of practitioners appeared to be valued more highly than

a further academic qualification. This perception presents a challenge for professional doctorate providers, given that the explicit aims of the professional doctorate are to promote and recognise the value of professional knowledge and experience.

Publication, dissemination and public engagement

In his independent evaluation of the REF, Lord Stern recommended that impact case studies should go beyond socio-economic impacts and also include 'impact on government policy, on public engagement and understanding, on cultural life, on academic impacts outside the field, and impacts on teaching' (Stern 2016, 23). A review of the previous REF highlighted the difference between dissemination and public engagement: 'many researchers default to a paradigm of public engagement as dissemination … The public are most often framed as an audience for research findings, rather than as experts in their own right or as active participants in the process' (Duncan, Manners, and Miller 2017, 3). This research study highlighted a considerable number of impressive outputs from the participants in the project who had published journal articles, books, led training programmes and made presentations to internal and external audiences. Many of these outputs went beyond dissemination and into a more active two-way involvement with people beyond academia, indicating that professional doctorate work lends itself well to the professional and public engagement criterion.

Professional doctorates are an important mechanism through which universities can engage more fully with the public in the ways envisaged by the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) which defines public engagement as

> 'the myriad of ways in which the activity and benefits of higher education and research can be shared with the public. Engagement is by definition a two-way process, involving interaction and listening, with the goal of generating mutual benefit' (National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement n.d.)

Professional doctorate students are ideally placed to engage in collaborative research projects with the support of employers, to share the outcomes with wider groups of stakeholders and to contribute to academic engagement activities. Furthermore, this collaborative approach has the potential to continue beyond graduation as many professional doctorate students end up in positions within organisations that might be useful partners for universities engaging in criminal justice research. Yet many participants were surprised and disappointed at the lack of longer-term engagement by the university beyond the end of the programme. PD11 said that 'One of the things that surprised me is I sent my final thesis in and they said, "Thank you very much for your thesis. You're now complete, you're done." Literally,

within two days, my access into the library was gone.' Whilst this is also the case for PhD graduates, it could be argued that the increased potential for ongoing collaboration and impact that may be afforded by professional doctorate graduates may merit consideration being given to an enhanced alumni scheme.

Nevertheless, many of the graduates had maintained ongoing links on a bilateral basis with their supervisors or other members of the department, working on joint publications or projects, facilitating access, providing guest lectures and so on. For some participants, this has led to a longer-term relationship with academia. Two participants had ended up in lecturing or visiting lecturer posts, and a further eight had given guest lectures. This suggests that the dichotomy between 'researching professionals' and 'professional researchers' used to describe the difference between the professional doctorate and a PhD may be somewhat misleading. The observation that many students pursue the professional doctorate with the intention of pursuing an academic career has also been noted on a professional doctorate in education programme (Burgess, Weller, and Wellington 2013). Whilst it might be expected that those on an education programme might be interested in a career in higher education, it is interesting to note that this is also a viable path for those studying in other disciplinary contexts.

Discussion

Student motivations

A previous study of professional doctorates (Scott et al. 2004) has suggested that the potential impact of the professional doctorate on practice is connected to participants' motivations and reasons for undertaking the doctorate and this is confirmed to some extent by the findings of this study. Discourses around professional doctorates are often underpinned by the assumption that participants are primarily motivated by the desire to develop their professional practice or to contribute to changes in their own workplaces (Boud et al. 2018). For many of the participants in this study, these did form part of their aspirations. However, participants were also driven by other motivations: to seek new career opportunities outside their current role or workplace, personal fulfilment and intellectual pleasure. For these students, the opportunity to make an impact at the organisational level was less significant than the potential personal and professional impacts, such as getting a new job, getting promoted, publishing an article, changing as a person and becoming a more reflective employee. It was also clear from the interviews that, for a couple of students at least, the primary attraction of the professional doctorate was not necessarily the practice-based element, but the structure of the programme. For busy practitioners

with a range of other commitments, the structured taught element with interim deadlines, a more manageable focussed project in the research phase and working with a cohort of like-minded professionals was a far more appealing prospect than the traditional PhD route.

Employer engagement

Earlier research has highlighted some of the difficulties in engaging employers with professional doctorate research. Neumann (2005) characterised employers as being only passively aware of the research being undertaken by employees undertaking a professional doctorate. Burgess and Wellington (2010) explored how employers can be resistant to implementing new knowledge and innovative products or practice that can arise from the work undertaken by candidates in a professional doctorate. Subsequent research (Burgess, Weller, and Wellington 2013; Costley and Lester 2012) has pointed to employers failing to grasp the relevance of the research to their organisation and professional doctorate candidates struggling to implement findings because of a perception that the research is too academic to be of relevance to the workplace.

This was confirmed to some extent by these research findings. The projects which had the greatest and most measurable impacts were those where the student was undertaking a project which was of direct benefit to the employer and had the full weight of the employer's support behind it. However, securing employer buy-in at institutional level and/or the level of the individual student is challenging. Although some of the students in the study did receive some sponsorship from their employer through fees or research leave, others were undertaking the programme entirely in their own time and at their own expense. This creates a dilemma for professional doctorate programmes in deciding what level of employer engagement is required for participation in the programme.

Professional doctorate programmes

Scott et al. (2004) argue that how a professional doctorate course positions the relationship between academic and practitioner knowledge is highly influential in shaping how course participants frame their research project in relation to their own professional practice. Despite the explicit commitment to students making a contribution to professional practice, there is a limit on the demands that universities can make on employers who are not formal sponsors of the professional doctorate student, particularly when there may be financial costs. This becomes particularly evident in the research phase, where not all students who may wish to undertake research within their own organisation are able to secure permission to do so. This

suggests that in these programmes, at least, the dominant model of integration between professional and academic remains that of colonisation, in which academic knowledge takes precedence and professional knowledge is subsumed by the 'colonising' tendencies of the university (Scott et al. 2004). This is reinforced by the earlier observations on the initial analysis of published theses from these programmes, which indicated that some did not have any explicit practitioner focus. These findings suggest that the impact of the professional doctorate on the workplace can be understood as a configuration of three interrelated factors: the motivations of the student, the extent of employer engagement and the nature of the programme being undertaken. The likelihood of students producing a research project which has an impact on the workplace is far higher where they are motivated to do the programme in order to change their immediate working practices or to investigate a problem that is directly related to their work, where the culture of their organisation supports and invests in continuing professional development of staff through funding or other support of students undertaking the programme, where the programme requires students to develop proposals and undertake research projects which have a direct impact on the workplace.

Conclusions

The purpose of this article was to explore the impact of professional doctorates in the workplace in the specific context of two programmes based in the criminal justice sector. The analysis of data from interviews with graduates from these programmes has suggested that professional doctorates have the potential to have a significant impact on the workplace, but the capacity for change may be constrained by a range of personal and professional circumstances and by the nature and structure of the programme itself. Doctoral research projects which were strongly aligned with the employers' current strategic goals or with an existing business imperative, were more likely to have a direct impact on the workplace. Employer engagement was an important factor, but notional engagement through funding the project or facilitating access to participants was less important than continued sponsorship and support from senior managers after the project had been completed. Organisations with high turnovers of staff or roles were less likely to be able to provide the continuity required for a policy or initiative to be implemented effectively. However, despite these barriers, many students were able to make a contribution beyond their workplace through publication in journals and dissemination at conferences or through practitioner networks and/or professional bodies. These activities also went beyond dissemination and into public engagement beyond academia through other knowledge transfer and exchange mechanisms.

Previous research, which suggested that there were indirect professional impacts through enhanced knowledge, confidence, and research capacity was also confirmed by evidence from this project. This research shows that many of the research projects undertaken for the professional doctorate did not have a direct impact on the workplace in which the candidate was based, but nevertheless influenced policy and practice in the relevant field. This has consequences for how programme providers deliver professional doctorates in a way which might maximise the impact of the research undertaken. As part of the project proposal, candidates might be required to consider a dissemination and impact strategy incorporating a statement on pathways to impact and recognising the barriers arising from their organisation context. Further consideration should also be given to how candidates can meet the expectation in the QAA Characteristics statement that doctoral candidates 'appreciate the need to engage in research with impact and to be able to communicate it to diverse audiences, including the public' (Quality Assurance Agency 2020, 5). The requirement at some institutions (including the one reviewed in this study) to complete a presentation as part of the taught element of the course and to give a presentation in advance of the viva do not necessarily engage stakeholders outside the university to a sufficient extent.

However, the programmes in this study also suggest some reasons why the impact on doctorates on the workplace may not be so profound as anticipated: the motivations of the students entering the programme; the design of a project which is not explicitly related to the workplace and the design of the research phase which mirrors that of a PhD, including the final assessment. If universities are serious about professional doctorates having an impact on the workplace, then there are a number of changes that could be made to programmes. First, at the recruitment stage, attention would focus on the extent to which a workplace related topic could be identified and investigated. Second, in any taught phase of the programme, more attention would be paid to developing research designs and adopting research methodologies (such as action research) which are focused on change within the workplace. Third, in the research phase of the programme, supervisors would ensure that the outcome of the research phase was more explicitly linked to the workplace, promote practice-based methodologies and reflexive practice and require that the potential impact of a project was explicitly considered as part of the project design. Reed's typology (2018) of the different ways that academic research can have an impact might, for example, be a useful tool in scoping and planning the project.

This research has focused on the perceptions of the graduates from this programme, but in arguing that the relationships between the employer, graduate and institution are all important factors in determining impact, it follows that further research is needed to explore the perceptions of these

stakeholders in order to maximise the opportunities for impact in programmes such as these.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the contributions of the 25 graduates who participated in the interviews, and the reviewers for their helpful comments.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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