



PROMOTING MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING IN DOCTORAL RESEARCHERS THROUGH CO-DESIGNED INDUCTIONS: INITIAL INSIGHTS INTO IMPLEMENTATION



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Mental Health and Wellbeing in Doctoral Students

- High prevalence of mental distress in doctoral students (e.g., Byrom et al., 2020; Evans et al., 2018; Levecque et al., 2017).
- Calls for prevention and early intervention strategies (Metcalfe et al., 2018).
- The early stage of doctoral study could offer a prime opportunity for preventative measures that help to protect against the onset of poor mental health and wellbeing.

The Value of Co-Design

- End-users should be involved in design and development of interventions (Craig et al., 2008).
- Co-design harnesses the lived experience and creativity of individuals and communities to aid service design (Blonkamp, 2018).
- Our study sought to enable doctoral researchers to contribute to the design of an induction *for* doctoral researchers.

Getting Off to a Mentally Healthy Start in Doctoral Study



Aim: to generate an evidence base that can inform the development of an induction package to promote mental health and wellbeing in doctoral researchers (DR)

1. Systematic review

Systematic review published evidence on mental health and wellbeing in early-stage doctoral students


2. Co-design study


Identify the content of an induction package to promote mental health and wellbeing in DRs

1. Systematic Review





- **Aim:** to systematically review, synthesise, and appraise research that has examined mental health and wellbeing in the early stages of doctoral study.

EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION
<https://doi.org/10.1080/21568235.2021.1939752>

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group

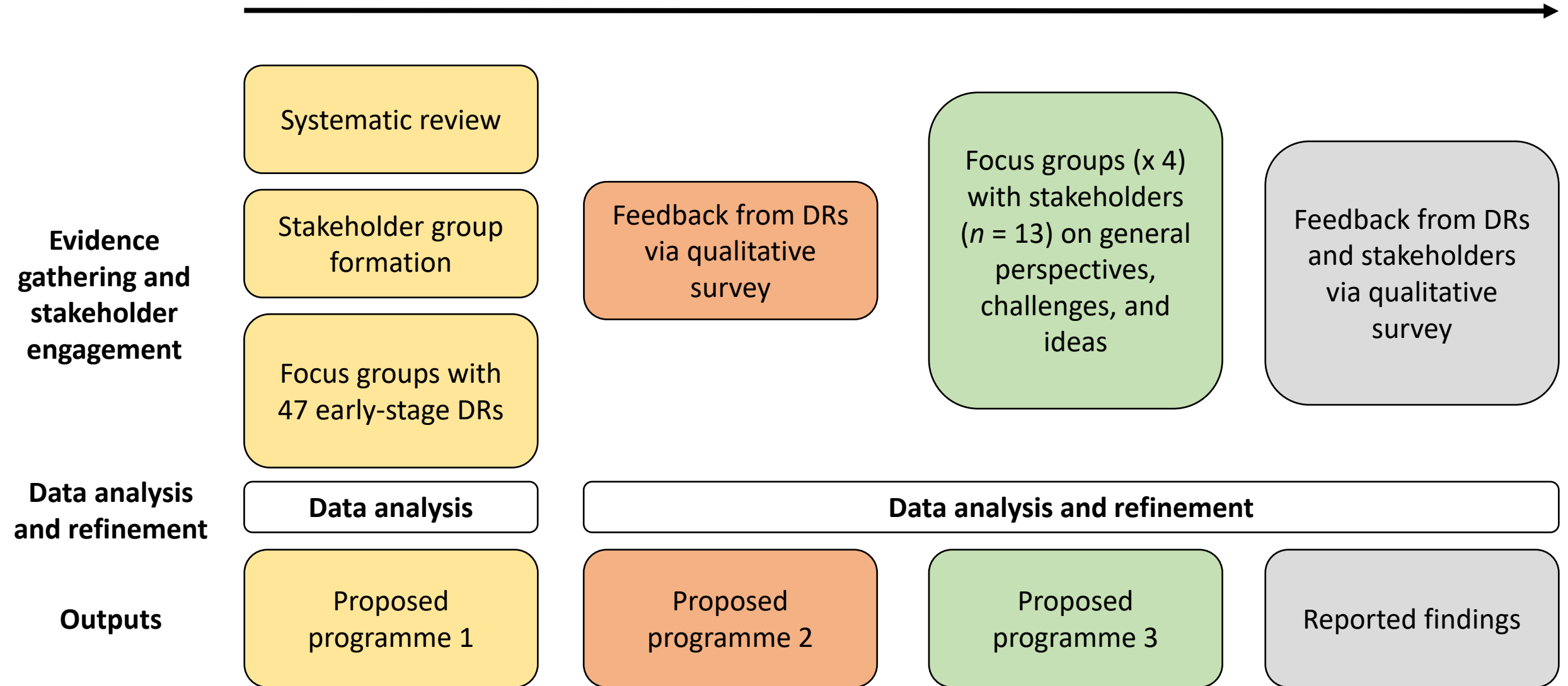


Mental health and psychological wellbeing in the early stages of doctoral study: a systematic review

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2. Co-Design Study





Connections with peers

5 PRINCIPLES TO SUPPORT NEW PhD RESEARCHERS



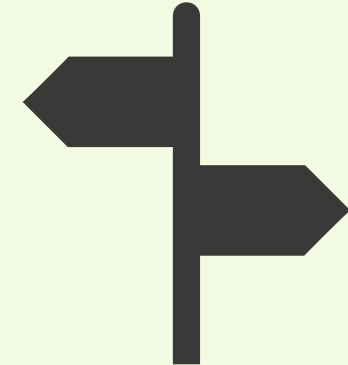
Supervisor relationships



Student services advice & support

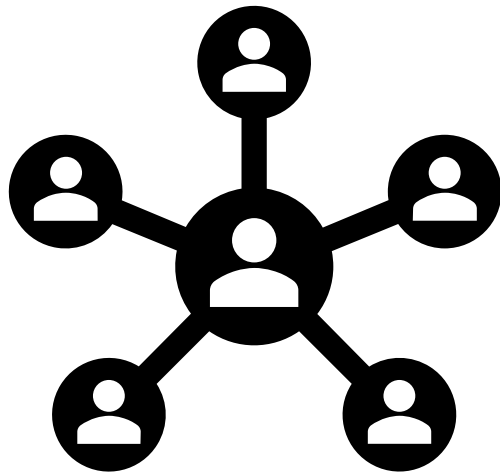


Training & development



Information & resources

Connections with Peers



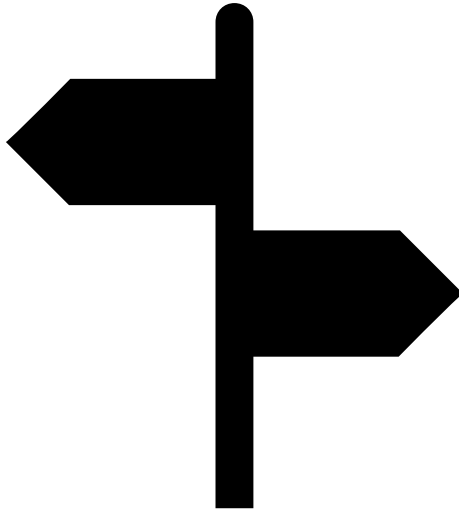
- Recommended practices include:
 - Pre-arrival socialisation (e.g., advice on accommodation)
 - Induction socialisation activities (e.g., researcher “stories”, department level)
 - Regular peer group activities throughout the first year (and beyond)
 - Peer support scheme

Supervisor Relationships



- Recommended practices include:
 - Meeting(s) to initiate relationship with supervisor(s)
 - Develop relationship with supervisor(s)
 - Embed recommended practice into supervisor training to support supervisors

Information & Resources



- Recommended practices include:
 - Pre-arrival and arrival information
 - Easy-to-navigate website with relevant information, resources, and links
 - Long, thin induction

Student Services Advice & Support



- Recommended practices include:
 - Introduction to student support activity
 - Website and resources - a dedicated area on student support/wellbeing site for DRs
 - Regular student support interactions

Training & Development



- Recommended practices include:
 - Development needs analysis - direction to resources that will help to build relevant skills, knowledge etc.
 - Doctoral development programme - consider in-person and/or online activities

General Implementation Considerations



Co-ordination, collaboration, and communication across a university is required – need a **central point**, with **localised** support at college/department level



Timing needs to be considered – depends on **intake** time point and **size** of cohorts



Implementation needs to consider **existing** activities that are in place



Activities need to be **adaptable** and **suit** the **context**



Develop an induction “**roadmap**”

Acceptability of Co-Design Method

- Six themes represented the benefits of co-design:
 - Felt listened to and valued
 - Felt you were contributing to promoting change
 - Offered an opportunity for reflection
 - Learning
 - Shared experiences and realising you are not alone
 - Psychological benefits (e.g., enjoyment, confidence)



Knowledge Translation

New guidance to support Doctoral researchers' mental health.

A team led by the University of Lincoln have developed co-designed, evidence-based principles for the design of Doctoral inductions to support researchers' mental health and wellbeing. The team is also establishing a network to support Doctoral leads and is calling for expressions of interest from those who wish to join.

[>>The Research](#)

- Website showcasing all resources: <https://lincn.ac/phdinduction>
 - Research outputs (open access)
 - Report and poster with strategies
 - Self-assessment planner
- Development of a community of practice
- Resources shared with doctoral colleges around the UK

Initial Insights into Implementation: University of Lincoln Doctoral School

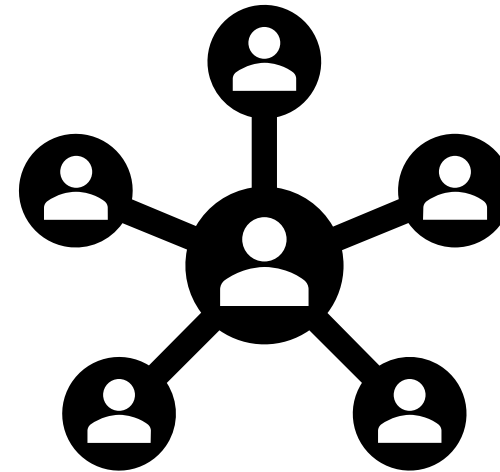
- Self-assessment tool
 - Aims of the Good practice principles
 - Recommended activities/actions
 - Implementation – fully, partially, not yet implemented
- Embed principles in activities
- Mental health is important at induction – positive focus
- Clear, accessible information – avoid overwhelming amounts of information
- Recognising that all PhD students have different needs



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Peer Connections

- Induction socialisation activities
 - PGR student panel
 - Networking event
- Local College level inductions
- Monthly writing retreats
- PGR Showcase conference
- Monthly mindfulness sessions
- PG Common Room/Study Spaces
- Podcasts
- Other on-campus events



Student Support & Information and Resources



Signposting to key
induction
information



Induction handbook



Monthly newsletter
to assist in long and
thin induction



Doctoral School
website resources



Wellbeing page on
Doctoral School
website

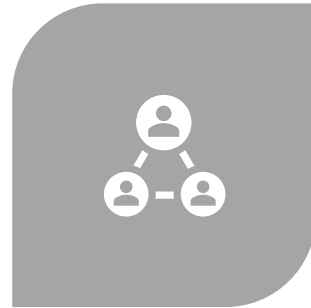
Training and development

- Regular communications to share Doctoral School's Researcher Development Programme
- T&D in schools/colleges
- T&D elsewhere in the university – e.g. Maths and Stats help
- Mentoring – Eleanor Glanville Pipeline mentoring scheme
- PGR Enterprise Bootcamp
- Life Beyond the PhD events
- Doctoral grants to encourage cross-disciplinary research projects

Supervisor relationships



SUPERVISOR TRAINING



HOW TO MANAGE YOUR
SUPERVISOR SESSIONS –
INTERNATIONAL AND
GENERAL



COLLEGE LEVEL
TRAINING –
HIGHLIGHTING
PRINCIPLES



SHARING GOOD NEWS
STORIES

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