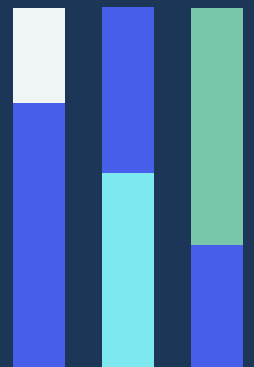


Professional Doctorates in the UK and Ireland: Trends, Provision and Institutional Strategies

A joint report from the **UK Council for Graduate
Education and University Alliance**

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Graduate Education



**University
Alliance**

Foreword

Professional doctorates have occupied an important, if at times contested, place within doctoral education over the last 30 years. Despite sustained interest from some universities, employers and professional communities, there has been relatively little sector-level evidence to help us understand their current position, purpose and future potential across the UK and Ireland.

This report provides a valuable contribution to that conversation. Drawing on institutional data and perspectives from across the UK and Irish Higher Education sectors, it offers fresh insight into patterns of provision, recruitment trends, strategic ambitions, barriers to growth and the opportunities that professional doctorates present. It paints a picture of a landscape that is diverse and complex, characterised by uncertainty around funding, positioning and long-term sustainability.

The findings arrive at a particularly important moment. Governments across the UK and Ireland are increasingly focussed on productivity, innovation, skills development and economic growth. In this context, professional doctorates offer a potentially significant mechanism for strengthening connections between Higher Education, employers and the wider economy. They provide a route through which advanced research can be embedded directly within professional practice, enabling the creation of knowledge that is immediately relevant and potentially easily absorbed into businesses, communities and public services.

Professional doctorates may have an increasingly important role to play in supporting lifelong learning and mid-career development as workforce requirements change to respond to advances in artificial intelligence and drivers such as environmental sustainability, security and healthcare. The professional doctorate offers one possible model through which individuals can develop new expertise, generate impact and contribute to addressing complex societal challenges while remaining connected to professional practice.

Perhaps most importantly, this report challenges us to think again about the future form and purpose of the doctorate itself. It implicitly poses the question of whether current structures, funding models and policy frameworks adequately support the breadth of doctoral pathways required for contemporary research and innovation systems.

The future of doctoral education is unlikely to be defined by a single model. Instead, it will depend upon our ability to recognise, value and support multiple routes through which doctoral-level knowledge, skills and impact can be developed. This report makes an important contribution to that discussion and provides a timely evidence base to inform future policy, institutional strategy and sector-wide debate.

[Dr Rebekah Smith McGloin](#), Chair, UK Council for Graduate Education

[Professor Jane Harrington](#), Chair of University Alliance and Vice-Chancellor, University of Greenwich

Executive summary

This study examines the position of professional doctorates across the UK and Ireland, offering insight into institutional strategies and a rationale behind their provision and growth. It provides an overview of current trends of provision and examines the utility and purpose of professional doctorates against broader national and international policy and government agenda and calls for more flexible approaches to doctoral funding to be inclusive of doctoral pathways beyond the PhD. For the purpose of this report, Research Professional Doctorates (RPDs) are those that are returned to the Higher Education Statistics Authority (HESA) in the UK and the Higher Education Authority (HEA) in Ireland, as a research degree. Taught Professional Doctorates (TPDs) are those that are returned as taught doctorates

160 research degree-awarding institutions across the UK and Ireland were invited to participate in the 2025 survey. 73 responses were received from these Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), representing a 46% response rate. Desk-based research was also undertaken to provide a more comprehensive picture of understanding professional doctorate provision.

Plateau of growth in professional doctorate programmes

Of the 73 responses, 56 (77%) responding institutions indicated that they currently offer Research Professional Doctorates (RPDs), while only 18% offer Taught Professional Doctorates (TPDs): a clear indication that most institutions consider the professional doctorate to be a research degree.

Desk-based research indicated that 73% of all UK HEIs offer professional doctorate programmes, along with 41% of HEIs in Ireland. Longitudinal trend analysis is difficult, but comparison with 2016 data (Mellors-Bourne et al., 2016) which looked at English HEIs only suggests that the number of institutions in England offering professional doctorates has reduced slightly from 86 in 2016 to 84 in 2025.

Only two respondents suggested that they would be developing new RPDs over the next five years (figure 2). The study therefore indicates that there has been a levelling off in the growth of the number of professional doctorate programmes in recent years.

Enrolments in professional doctorate programmes

45% of respondents who offered RPDs (n=24, figure 5) suggested that enrolments in these programmes have increased over the last five years. 26% said enrolments had decreased, and a further 28% said that enrolments had stayed the same. However, in a follow up question, 51% said levels of enrolments are not meeting the levels expected when programmes were developed.

PhD parity

Institutional regulations give professional doctorates parity with other doctoral qualifications, with 67% of respondents indicating that policies and governance practices do not differ between RPDs and PhD programmes. 64% also noted that assessment criteria were also the same.

Nevertheless, market and funder preferences are still perceived as favouring PhDs rather than professional doctorates, even though some structured PhDs are “the same in all but name”. The majority of respondents indicated that the perception of not having parity with the PhD was the main challenge in recruiting to and developing professional doctorates.

Widening Participation

There is emerging evidence that the professional doctorate can improve access and participation to doctoral study from under-represented groups: one third of respondents who offer RPDs indicated that there was improved representation from under-represented groups among professional doctorate cohorts.

Competition in attracting professionals to undertake doctorates

While the professional doctorate has typically been developed to be attractive to mid and senior career professionals, institutions are also exploring whether other doctoral pathways are attractive to professionals. For example, practice-based doctorates were also considered to be targeted towards and attractive to professionals.

Funding

Funding remains a significant unresolved challenge: funding disparities between the professional doctorate and the PhD were ranked third highest of all the challenges in developing and recruiting to professional doctorate programmes.

While 39% of respondents indicated that the majority of RPD candidates are supported by an employer or external sponsor, the majority, 61% (n=33), indicated that most of their candidates on RPDs were self-funding.

Position and place of the professional doctorate in the current Higher Education environment

Finally, the current environment is characterised by a degree of strategic “messiness”, with programme development driven as much by marketing considerations as by coherent academic design. Combined with sector-wide financial instability, this creates risks to the sustainability, credibility, and future development of professional doctorates unless clearer strategic direction and shared sector narratives are established.

About the authors

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CRedit statement

Carolyn Wynne: conceptualisation (lead); formal analysis (equal); investigation (lead); methodology (lead); project administration (equal); supervision (lead); visualisation (equal); writing – original draft (equal), writing – review and editing (equal)

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About the UK Council for Graduate Education

Established in 1994, the UK Council for Graduate Education is the national representative body for postgraduate education and research. The UKCGE champions and enhances postgraduate education and research by enabling collective leadership on the development of postgraduate affairs across UK HEIs, research agencies and funding bodies. It does this by providing learning and professional development events, commissioning research, sharing best-practice developments, and by gathering information and evidence to support policies which promote a strong and sustainable postgraduate sector

About University Alliance

University Alliance (UA) represents some of the UK's leading professional and technical universities. Our member universities specialise in working with employers to empower students with career-ready skills and develop the knowledge industries' need to innovate and thrive. University Alliance provides expertise to policy makers and supports our members and their communities to thrive through collaboration.

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Introduction

Much has been discussed about the purpose, form and format of professional doctorates over the last two decades and, while still forming the minority of doctoral enrolments, their growth and popularity, primarily in post-1992 universities, have contributed to the increase in the doctoral population. Many institutions have indicated that an expansion of their professional doctorate provision was instrumental in that continued growth (Smith McGloin and Wynne, 2022) and up until this report, there was anecdotal evidence that they have played a role in improving the diversity of the doctoral population and widened participation.

There are, however, conflicting views on what is really happening in terms of the growth of doctoral programmes and enrolments. CRAC reported in 2016 that there was an identifiable growth in professional doctoral provision in English HEIs in 2016 (Mellors-Bourne et al., 2016). In contrast, HEPI suggest that enrolments halved between 2008 and 2018 (House, 2020) with the Doctor of Education (EdD) seeing a particularly steep decline.

UKCGE, in partnership with University Alliance, therefore felt it was time to revisit the status of the qualification across the UK and Ireland with the aim of examining whether there had been a growth or decline of professional doctorates across the sector, the impact of any changes over the last ten to 15 years, as well as the current perspectives of institutions, funders, employers and candidates themselves on the qualification.

There are not only conflicting views on the growth of professional doctorates but also on how the qualification is defined and marketed, as well as its standing in comparison to the standard PhD qualification, with some institutions 'locating' and marketing their programmes within their Postgraduate Research Degree opportunities and others alongside their Taught Postgraduate programmes. Therefore, this report also seeks to understand the different types of professional doctoral programmes offered, their classification as either Research or Taught Doctorates and the longer-term institutional strategies for professional doctorate provision.

The UKCGE Professional Doctorates in UK report (Fell et al., 2011) looked in-depth at specific types of professional doctorates such as the EngD, DBA, DClinPsy, Health and Social Care, Social Science and practice-led arts, design and architecture. For this report, UKCGE used a survey approach to explore the current situation across the sector in terms of numbers of students, types of programmes, institutional strategies, as well as challenges.

Doctoral education in the UK and Ireland – the current context

Doctoral education in the UK and Ireland is currently navigating unfamiliar and uncertain territory and undergoing a phase of change as a result of shifting institutional structures, funder priorities and government policies. In and among the significant changes in the Higher Education (HE) sector, funding and value of doctoral programmes find themselves in the less visible areas of the crisis and fighting for continued investment either at the national or institutional level, or both. Changes in government in both the UK and Ireland have seen successive changes and updates to policy, investment and strategies to address national skills development and priorities, plans for sustainable economic growth and national prosperity.

There is substantial variation in programme structure, delivery and assessment across institutions, a pattern mirrored in the UK and Ireland, where professional doctorates are inconsistently classified and marketed (Acton and Flessa, 2025).

Shifts and trends in PGR population across the UK and Ireland

The PGR population across the UK and Ireland has witnessed notable shifts in both size and demographics over the last five years (HESA, 2026; HEA, 2026), which are the result and culmination of changes in policy, funding, attitudes and access

to postgraduate research degrees and changes to institutional structures as part of broadening financial crisis in Higher Education. The following sections set out some of the key changes and shifts.

The PGR population in the UK

After a small decline in the PGR population in the UK in 2019/2020 following steady growth since 2013/2014, the global pandemic saw an increase in the number of PGRs during 2020/2021, before the number of new enrolments started to decline, largely considered to be as a consequence of the cost of living crisis and attractiveness of doctoral-level study (Grove, 2024; Green, 2024). New PGR enrolments have increased since 2023/2024, which may be attributed to the ongoing work and focus on the UKRI's New Deal for Postgraduate Research (UKRI, 2022), sector-wide initiatives to improve participation from under-represented groups, and increased collaboration with international programmes such as dual award and cotutelles. The demographic of the PGR population has also changed throughout this period: women now comprise the majority of the PGR community, growing from 49% in 2019/2020 to 54.5% in 2024/2025; PGRs who declare a disability increasing from 11% to 19% in the same period; and candidates over the age of 30 increasing from 43% to 46% of the population.

The ethnicity of UK-Domiciled PGRs has also become increasingly diverse, with Black and mixed ethnicities both increasing from 4% to 6% and Asian increasing from 8% to 10%. HESA Student Record data shows record levels of 'unknown' within the ethnicity data so it is acknowledged that these statistics may not be wholly accurate. While these figures indicate both improvement and a narrowing of the gap between minoritised ethnicities at different levels of qualification, there continues to be more work done across the UK Higher Education system in promoting equity and inclusion across all under-represented groups. The Office for Students and Research England funding programme to improve access and participation saw 13 projects to improve access and participations from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students in postgraduate research, the impacts and outcomes of which will be reported in late 2026. The interim report of 2024 stated:

Projects have begun shaping university admissions and policies, with some reporting positive shifts towards diversity and inclusion. However, the pace of change is slow due to barriers such as lack of senior leadership buy-in, resistance to changing established practices, and a challenging HE environment marked by funding constraints and industrial action.

(Nwosu et al., 2024)

The population of part-time PGR has seen particular fluctuations during this period. The population grew from 26,110 in 2019/2020 to 29,265 in 2023/2024, which represented 26% of the PGR population. Numbers have started to decrease, however, with 28,375 enrolled in 2024/2025 and now representing 23% of the total PGR population, which is lower than 2019/2020. The increase in this period has been seen most in those PGRs that are over the age of 30 and those that are women.

Perhaps the most significant shift in the PGR population has been – and continues to be – in the decline of enrolments from European Union (EU) PGRs over the last ten years following the UK's decision to leave. Enrolments from international PGRs from outside the EU have continued to increase. While Home enrolments have grown from 57% to 60% of the total population between 2014/2015 and 2023/2024, 2024/2025 saw enrolment decline to represent 58%, EU enrolments have dropped 13% to 6% and International enrolments (excluding the EU) have grown from 30% to 36%.

Subjects that fall within the science, technology, engineering and mathematics disciplines (STEM) dominate the number of enrolments, having grown from 60% in 2013/2014 to 62% in 2024/2025. They are concentrated in Engineering and Technology, Medicine and Allied Medicine, Physical and Biological Sciences. Female PGRs now make up the majority of enrolments in STEM with 38,585 in 2024/2025 compared to 36,275 male enrolments.

While PGR enrolments have held steady, accounting for 4% of the total student population, the PGR demographic has changed and continues to change. This could be for a variety of reasons such as the attractiveness of postgraduate research, success in initiatives to widen access and participation, and the broadening of the research degree 'offer' to include different types of doctorates, training and placement opportunities.

The PGR population in Ireland

Since the late 1990s, research has increased in activity and focus and is more consistently viewed as an essential activity in Ireland's social and economic development. As research has taken on this central role, it has also reshaped the landscape in which doctoral education and wider professional development now sit (Loxley & Seery, 2012). Trends in the PGR population in Ireland demonstrate a similar pattern to that of the UK. However, there are some specific and noticeable differences.

PGR enrolments have increased from 10,625 in 2019/2020 to 12,435 in 2024/2025. A noticeable difference from the UK is that doctoral enrolments have increased year-on-year and PGR enrolment take up slightly more of the student population at 4.5%. The PGR population has grown steadily and has not seen the fluctuation observed by the UK. Higher Education Authority (HEA) figures indicate that women have made up the majority of PGR enrolments over a number of years, growing from 53% of total enrolments in 2019/2020 to 55% in 2024/2025.

The age profiles of doctoral graduates also indicate a shift to 'mature' candidates within the PGR community, with graduates over the age of 30 increasing from 67% in 2018 to 71% in 2021. The HEA reports that mature candidates are more likely to undertake their research in disciplines such as Arts and Humanities, Education, and Social Sciences.

While EU enrolments have remained relatively static, there has been considerable growth seen in the number of International PGRs, increasing from 24% to 32%.

In contrast, the number of Home enrolments have decreased from 67% to 60% between 2019/2020 and 2024/2025. While EU enrolments have remained relatively static, there has been considerable growth seen in the number of International PGRs, increasing from 24% to 32%. International female PGRs have made up the majority of PGR enrolments during this period, reducing slightly from 56% in 2019/2020 to 55% in 2024/2025. Despite these changes in the make-up of the PGR demographic, part-time enrolments have remained static at 18% of the total number of PGRs.

Again, STEM subjects dominate the PGR population representing 63% of enrolments in 2024/2025 and increasing slightly from 62% in 2019/2020. Male and female PGRs make up 49.8% each for STEM enrolments, with an increase in female enrolments from 48% in 2019/2020. Enrolments in STEM are concentrated in Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction; Health and Welfare; and Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics disciplines.

There has been an increasing focus on widening participation in Ireland. An additional €7.5m funding package to the Irish Research Council (now Research Ireland) for investment in 40 doctoral awards targeted at technological universities was announced by the Irish government in January 2021 (Irish Research Council, 2021), which paved the way for enhancing the inclusivity in doctoral funding both in terms of the broader pool of applicants that would be attracted to the funding, as well as the types of research that would then be undertaken. Areas such as improving terms and conditions for Research Ireland funded PGRs, including Maternity, Paternity and Adoption leave. This followed the Research and Innovation Bill of 2024 (DFHERIS, 2024) which had sought to advance the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion in opportunities to undertake research and a key component of the Impact 2030 Research and Innovation Strategy (Harris & DFHERIS, 2022).

Funding and policy landscape in the UK and Ireland

Funding and investment in postgraduate research programmes and studentships have seen, and will likely continue to see, monumental shifts in how and where it is concentrated.

The UKRI New Deal for Postgraduate Research (UKRI, 2025) has prioritised better terms and conditions for postgraduate researchers to improve attractiveness, broaden access and participation and enhance completion, over growing number of Research-Council-funded doctoral candidates. In addition to enhanced stipend levels that were equivalent to the national living wage, better provision for paid medical, parental and discretionary leave, PGRs are more aligned to the terms and conditions of employed members of staff than ever before. This change in the UK came shortly after the outcome of the National Review of State Supports for PhD Researchers' recommendations (Johnson & Cagney, 2023) and subsequent Science Foundation Ireland and Irish Research Council announcements that funded PhD candidates would receive an increase in their stipend levels from the following year, with improvements to the parental leave coming into effect in 2025.

While this shift in approach and policy has been strongly welcomed by HEIs and PGRs themselves, it remains to be seen if these improvements have sufficiently addressed the challenges faced by postgraduate researchers in the UK and PhD candidates in Ireland, or if they fall short during ongoing inflation and cost of living crises.

To date, there has been a significant and persistent lack of investment across the UK and Ireland in supporting mid to senior career professionals.

The increases in Research Council stipend levels and improvements to terms and conditions have seen HEIs seek to match at the same levels, at a time where the sector is under significant financial strain. The result of this has resulted in large numbers of HEIs reducing their investment in research and by default in doctoral scholarships (Universities UK, 2024; Grove, 2024). Research Councils themselves are also showing a slowing and reduction in the number of scholarships and institutions that they are funding through the combination of the newly branded Doctoral Landscape and Focal Awards, along with Centres for Doctoral Training and Doctoral Training Partnerships. The reduction of institutions represented in the AHRC Landscape Awards from over 70 to now 50 is indicative of this (AHRC, 2025).

It is notable that both the UK and Irish reviews almost exclusively refer to PhDs, rather than to any other doctoral or research programme. There has been an increase in growth in alternative doctoral programmes which have contributed to widening participation in doctoral study: the professional doctorate being one of them, but also an expansion of structured PhD programmes, the PhD by Publication or Prior Published Work, PhD by Alternate Thesis, to name but a few. There has also been an emerging concept of the work-based PhD that integrates research, allowing doctoral candidates to remain employed while undertaking research that is relevant to their field of work and profession.

To date, there has been a significant and persistent lack of investment across the UK and Ireland in supporting mid to senior career professionals who have much to offer the knowledge economy and the progression of research and innovation across the economy. Mid and senior career professionals are often faced with the choice of either a reduction in income should they choose to study full time or funding a part-time doctorate themselves.

This exacerbates an environment where doctoral study is the preserve of those that have the time and money to invest in doctoral education.

The OECD Skills Strategy Ireland (2023) report referred to poor investment of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and Mid-Market Enterprises (MMEs) in workplace training and people in employment engaging in lifelong learning. This led to a number of measures and proposals announced by the Government to develop proposals to enable access to lifelong learning opportunities (Irish Universities Association, 2024; Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment, gov. ie, press release, 15th May 2024). Doctoral level qualifications are not discussed in these proposals so it is not clear the extent to which this would be extended to doctoral opportunities.

Similarly, in the UK, while the UK's Modern Industrial Strategy (2025) and Post-16 education and skills white paper (2025) relay the importance of national ambitions for innovation and growth, doctoral education falls outside of the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (Department for Education, gov. uk, 2025). It is therefore difficult to see how doctoral education in the UK and Ireland can be central to sustainable growth and productivity without being properly resourced and funded, especially for those that are at the coalface of that intersection of knowledge and skills between universities, industry and society. This in turn may lead to persisting barriers and issues around access to doctoral education unless there is a clearer coherency in the funding mechanisms.

Findings from the UKRI reviews of doctoral degrees from EPSRC (Gladden, 2021) ESRC (Tazzyman et al., 2021), BBSRC (2023; Welham, 2022) and AHRC (Mellors-Bourne, 2023), all call for widening participation and exploring how those from under-represented groups can not only access doctoral degrees, but can consider a pathway into doctoral study, particularly those who have followed a 'non-traditional' academic trajectory. In addition, the reports call for identifying more flexible models of doctoral training and broadened routes of entry into doctoral study, yet it is only EPSRC that have readily indicated that the EngD can also be funded as part of funding awards. No other Research Council doctoral training award explicitly indicates in their guidance that professional doctorates can be supported. The Impact 2030: Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy (2022) report highlights the importance of nurturing, attracting and supporting research talent at all career stages, ensuring funding programmes and opportunities are available to help realise potential. The Government of Ireland Postgraduate Scholarship Scheme, administered through the Irish Research Council (IRC), includes funding for alternative doctoral pathways, including the professional doctorates in addition to the traditional PhD. Sitting alongside this is the IRC Employment-Based Postgraduate Programme which provides candidates with the opportunity to undertake research either at master's or doctoral level while also being employed, although it is noted that this did not run for 2025 (IRC, 2026).

As individual institutional investment into PhD studentships starts to tighten, shrink and potentially withdraw as the financial crises in Higher Education continues to bite, gaps and inconsistencies in funding mechanisms and strategies in both the UK and Ireland could potentially constrain the extent to which talent and skills at doctoral level can be utilised to leverage growth.

Purpose and position of the professional doctorate in the UK and Ireland

The professional doctorate in the UK

In the UK, the professional doctorate was established, towards the end of the 1980s, in response to concerns that the PhD, rooted in the 19th-century German model of academic apprenticeship was too exclusively focussed on academic employment (Bone et al., 2002), and qualifications such as Doctor of Engineering (EngD), Doctor of Education (EdD), and Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) gained popularity (Bourner et al., 2001; Donn et al., 2000). They were designed to bridge advanced academic study with real-world professional practice, prioritising applied research that directly addresses challenges in professional settings.

As the landscape of professional practice has evolved, Higher Education responded to the various research and development needs of particular professions with new titles emerging, such as DBA in Finance, Professional Doctorate in Health Practice, Healthcare Science Professional Doctorate, Doctor of Educational Psychology and Doctor of Counselling Psychology to name a few. These titles provided more specific information on an award's discipline and indicated the diversity of professional doctorates. Through offering professional doctorates, universities were able to strengthen ties with professional communities, attracting a diverse cohort

of PGR candidates to their institutions and providing opportunities to those who may not have considered a doctorate as an option, such as business and creative leaders.

Professional doctorates are widely designed for professionals who wish to integrate advanced research within their ongoing professional roles (QAA, 2020). By enhancing professional practice through research, and elevating the status of practice-led enquiry, professional doctorates empower candidates, who are often experienced professionals, to develop innovative solutions and generate impact within their industry, public sector or wider society, leading to an enhanced workforce.

Having a better understanding of the number of people registered on professional doctorates and their protected characteristics would provide further valuable insight into their impact on access.



By enhancing professional practice through research, and elevating the status of practice-led enquiry, professional doctorates empower candidates.

The UKCGE report (Powell & Long, 2005) highlights the challenge of establishing a precise, universally accepted definition of the professional doctorate in the UK, given the wide variation in programme formats and delivery across the sector. The most widely-used definition of a professional doctorate, articulated by several UK universities and supported by other UKCGE reports (Fell et al., 2011; Bone et al., 2002) and QAA (2020), is that it is an advanced postgraduate research degree equivalent to a PhD, designed for working professionals to enhance professional practice in their field using research and to solve real-world problems. Professional relevance, work-based learning, practice-oriented outcomes and applied research are some of the core characteristics of a professional doctorate.

However, Kott and Hendel (2011) undertook a comparison of professional doctorates in the UK, US, Canada and Australia and noted then that for

each of the countries studied, the relative difficulty in obtaining consistent definitions of professional doctorates ... suggests the need for continuing discussions within and across countries ...

Moving forward to 2025, consistency of definitions and the range of nomenclature used interchangeably (e.g. professional, practice based, practice led, practitioner, taught doctorates) are still an issue and one that contributes to the general misunderstanding of the professional doctorate, and its standing as a research degree equivalent to a 'traditional' PhD.

The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Doctoral Degree Characteristics Statement (2020) outlines the key characteristics of professional doctorates as follows:

- ✓ Professional doctorates include taught components that lead into a supervised research project.
- ✓ The research project is typically situated within the candidate's own professional context or practice.
- ✓ These programmes draw on both academic disciplinary knowledge and professional expertise, and the resulting research may contribute to organisational or policy-related change.
- ✓ These are assessed through a thesis or portfolio, along with an individual oral examination (viva/viva voce). The provider's classification of the award as professional or practice-based influences the assessment criteria used.
- ✓ Assessment criteria often align with those used for the PhD, with examiners evaluating the candidate's understanding of contemporary approaches in the field, including their capacity to engage with and apply relevant research methods and to demonstrate how these methods inform professional practice.
- ✓ Successful completion usually results in immediate professional or organisational change, rather than change that emerges later through the application of subsequent research findings.

A preliminary online search enquiry elicits a multitude of definitions such as:

A Professional Doctorate is a programme of advanced study and research which, whilst satisfying the University criteria for the award of a doctorate, is designed to meet the specific needs of a professional group external to the University, and which develops the capability of individuals to work within a professional context.

(Bone, et al., 2002)

An award at a doctoral level where the field of study is a professional discipline and which is distinguished from the PhD by a title that refers to that profession.

(Powell and Long, 2005)

A professional doctorate is an advanced postgraduate degree that combines taught components with independent research in a student's area of expertise

(discoverPhDs.com)

Professional and practice-based doctorates provide an opportunity for individuals to situate professional knowledge developed over time in a theoretical academic framework. As such, they have different structures from other forms of doctorate

(QAA, 2020)

When these definitions were presented as part of a UKCGE Town hall webinar in January 2024, rather than bring consensus, it was clear that each was challenged in one form or another, with different institutions and individuals taking elements to help define the programmes they offer or work with.

The position of professional doctorates in Ireland

The emergence and history of the professional doctorate in Ireland is less defined and documented, however the literature that does exist points to a similar period to the UK in the late 1990s and early 2000s, where the professional doctorate began to appear as a more common doctoral pathway. Loxley and Seery (2012), for example, note the introduction of the professional doctorate in Education in Ireland in 2004, while also commenting on the “steady growth” of programmes in the ten preceding years to 2012, while McKenna and Cutcliffe (2001) refer to the Nursing profession considering taking up professional doctorates. This period of time coincided with the launch of the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions (PRTL) in 1998 (O’Sullivan, 2005), which significantly expanded the size and scale of research that was undertaken in Higher Education settings. The Higher Education Authority (HEA, 2012) observes that PRTL and the increasingly competitive international research environment drove greater institutional research specialisation and a more strategic approach to research investment. This shift, along with a growing emphasis on linking research with innovation and professional practice, created favourable conditions for the development of alternative doctoral routes such as professional and industrial doctorates. Professional doctorates have emerged as a distinct and comparatively recent development within Higher Education, both in Ireland and, as noted below, internationally. In Ireland, 14 programmes existed by 2006, with several newly introduced that year, demonstrating rapid growth (NQAI, 2006).

Their growth is reflected in the increasing availability of such programmes across Irish institutions and more broadly throughout the UK and Europe.

According to the National Framework for Doctoral Education (NFDE) (HEA, 2023), professional doctorate programmes must cultivate researchers who are highly skilled, independent and capable of pushing the boundaries of knowledge through critical and creative inquiry. These programmes should offer candidates opportunities to acquire advanced competencies not only in research methodologies but also in broader professional development. Additionally, the design and implementation of professional doctorates are guided by the nine core principles set out in the NFDE.

These principles emphasise nine aspects:

1. Original Research Contribution.
2. Thesis of Publishable Quality.
3. Advanced Disciplinary and Methodological Expertise.
4. Research Community Engagement.
5. Flexibility and Individualisation.
6. Quality Research Environment.
7. Admission Standards and Supervision Capacity.
8. Structured Supervision and Monitoring, and Clear Examination Processes.
9. Ensuring Excellence Through Quality Assurance.



A growing emphasis on linking research with innovation and professional practice, created favourable conditions for the development of alternative doctoral routes.

Ireland has demonstrated strong outcomes in tertiary-level education, particularly at undergraduate level (NFQ Level 8), with 58% of 25- to 34-year-olds holding a tertiary qualification in 2010, compared with the OECD average of 37% (HEA, 2012; OECD, 2011). However, doctoral graduation rates (NFQ Level 10) remain notably below both EU and OECD benchmarks. In 2009, Ireland produced 1.1 doctoral graduates per 1,000 population aged 25- 34, compared with the EU average of 1.5 and the OECD average of 1.6, prompting OECD recommendations to double the number of doctoral graduates nationally (OECD, 2011). The Towards a Future Higher Education Landscape document underscores the significance of expanding doctoral education beyond traditional PhD routes, highlighting the anticipated growth of industrial and professional doctorates as integral to institutional missions and deserving of targeted research-funding support (HEA, 2012, p.8).

Prior to this, the Hunt Report (Department of Education and Skills, 2011) advocated for a broader doctoral education strategy to strengthen Ireland's research capacity, drive innovation, and supply skilled graduates across economic sectors. It further emphasised that increasing doctoral-level expertise within industry can catalyse research and development across diverse sectors (ibid.). More recently, Impact 2030: Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy (DFHERIS, 2022) reinforces the importance of sustaining a robust pipeline of doctoral talent to enhance Ireland's global research standing. Complementing this, the National Framework for Doctoral Education (HEA, 2023) offers a comprehensive structure to promote excellence, foster collaboration among HEIs, and enhance both student experience and employability (HEA, 2023).

Despite the potential for growth, doctoral-level qualifications remain a small proportion of overall graduations. Drawing on national data, the Technological University of the Shannon (2024), for example, reported that in 2016 only 1.6% of graduates (590 individuals) across Irish HEIs completed NFQ Level 10 programmes, with doctoral output declining further between 2016 and 2019 (CSO, cited in Technological University of the Shannon, 2024). The analysis also notes that PhD enrolments increased by 26% between 2016 and 2022/2023 (O'Shea, 2023), suggesting a likely rise in doctoral completions by 2028. Within this context, and alongside the expansion of professional doctorates, a strategic opportunity for Higher Education institutions to strengthen their role in Ireland's research and innovation landscape was identified. As of 2023, Ireland hosted approximately 11,000 PhD and Masters by Research students, with around 27% internationally domiciled, positioning professional doctorates as an important mechanism for engaging both domestic and global markets (Technological University of the Shannon, 2024).



The analysis also notes that PhD enrolments increased by 26% between 2016 and 2022/2023 (O'Shea, 2023), suggesting a likely rise in doctoral completions by 2028.

International perspectives of the professional doctorate

Internationally, professional doctorates are evolving to meet the complex demands of contemporary practice, knowledge exchange and societal transformation. A summary of the models showcased at the 9th UKCGE International Conference on Professional and Practice Doctorates (2025) highlight that these models are challenging traditional academic paradigms by embedding research within professional contexts and foregrounding the development of hybrid identities, ethical leadership and community impact. As highlighted by a study conducted in New Zealand by Andrew et al. (2025), undertaking a professional doctorate allows candidates to integrate and navigate multiple professional identities: those of researcher, practitioner and academic. It enables them to become more critically reflective by stimulating deeper thinking and encouraging engagement with the wider body of literature in their field. In addition, the self-directed learning element empowers candidates to develop a future-focussed mind-set, ultimately strengthening their capacity to become thoughtful, ethical and impactful leaders.

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland's (NQAI) review (2006) highlights that professional doctorates were well established in countries such as the UK, Australia and New Zealand, but remained relatively unknown across most of Europe (except for the UK and Ireland) at the time of the review.

Some examples of the emergence and models of professional doctorates, including industrial PhDs, are outlined in the next sections.



Undertaking a professional doctorate allows candidates to integrate and navigate multiple professional identities: those of researcher, practitioner and academic.

Redefining standards for professional doctorates across Europe

Recent debates on the sustainability and legitimacy of professional and practice-based doctorates have increasingly shifted from questions of equivalence with the PhD towards questions of quality assurance, governance and impact on professional practice. A significant contribution to this evolving discussion was made by Dimitris G. Assimakopoulos in his keynote address to the 9th UKCGE International Conference on Professional and Practice Doctorates (2025), which focussed specifically on the accreditation and quality enhancement of Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) programmes (Assimakopoulos, 2025).

Assimakopoulos outlined a strategic initiative by European Doctoral Programmes Association in Management and Business Administration (EDAMBA) to develop a dedicated accreditation framework for Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) programmes. Recognising the distinct nature of DBAs, often commercially oriented and subject to less regulatory oversight than traditional PhDs, the proposal aims to enhance quality assurance while fostering innovation, diversity and community-building across doctoral education. The framework emphasises developmental value, forward-looking evaluation, and peer learning, positioning EDAMBA as a complementor rather than a competitor to established accreditation bodies such as AACSB and EQUIS. The initiative responds to challenges in the DBA landscape, including balancing academic rigor with professional relevance, managing supervisory capacity and addressing “accreditation fatigue” in business schools. By offering a flexible, inclusive and globally oriented accreditation model, EDAMBA seeks to support institutions in delivering impactful, practice-based doctoral education (ibid). This approach reflects a broader international trend toward recognising the unique contributions of professional doctorates to knowledge creation, leadership development and societal impact.

Professional doctorates in the Netherlands

Debates about introducing professional doctorates in the Netherlands began in 2005, when the Minister of Education asked the Association of Dutch Universities (VSNU, now UNL) (TU Delft, 2021) to examine their potential purpose, disciplinary scope and institutional ownership. Early discussions positioned the proposed professional doctorate within the Bologna Third Cycle but distinguished it from the PhD because of its shorter duration and its emphasis on applied, practice-focused research. These differences raised questions about whether separate qualification descriptors would be needed for academic and professional doctorates (NQAI, 2006).

These debates unfolded within the context of the Netherlands’ binary Higher Education system, which comprises research universities and universities with a focus on applied sciences (UAS) (van Houten, 2018). Research universities deliver academic bachelor’s and master’s programmes and are legally authorised to supervise and award PhDs. In contrast, UAS institutions focus on professionally oriented education, offering bachelor’s and professional master’s programmes but lacking the authority to confer doctoral degrees (Jukema et al., 2025). This structural divide shaped national discussions about where a professional doctorate should be located and how it should be designed.

Internationally, professional doctorates are evolving to meet the complex demands of contemporary practice, knowledge exchange and societal transformation.

In response to growing societal challenges, increasing demand for highly skilled professionals, and the evolving role of UAS institutions, the Dutch Association of Universities of Applied Sciences launched a multiyear initiative in 2019 to develop a professional doctorate (UAS-PD). Supported by both UAS and research university associations, and encouraged by the Minister of Education, a working group produced a programme outline that was approved in 2021. Governance structures were subsequently established, enabling the first UAS-PD candidates to begin in 2023. The UASPD now operates as a state-funded seven-year pilot (2023–2029), including scholarships for 164 candidates across seven professional domains (Jukema et al., 2025).

Building on these developments, the Netherlands formally launched its first nationwide UAS-PD programmes in 2023 (Jukema et al., 2025). These programmes are aligned with the QF-EHEA Third Cycle and Level 8 of the EQF (Europass, n.d.). A national pilot led the development and implementation of seven routes across fields such as Energy and Sustainability, Leisure and Tourism, Arts, Maritime, Education, Technology and Digitalisation, and Health and Wellbeing. Defined as a professional doctorate that is “equivalent but distinct from” the PhD, the UAS-PD places a strong emphasis on practice-based research and the development of interventions in professional contexts (Hogescholen, 2021). This initiative represents a significant step toward strengthening the alignment between professional Higher Education and labour market needs (Jukema et al., 2025).

The Industrial-PhD in Sweden

Swedish Higher Education qualifications are structured into the three cycles system used in the European Higher Education Area:

- i. the first cycle includes the Higher Education Diploma and bachelor’s degree;
- ii. the second cycle comprises master’s degrees; and
- iii. the third cycle covers doctoral qualifications.

The Higher Education system includes universities and university colleges, with doctoral studies offered at all universities and most university colleges. Sweden offers two types of third-cycle degrees, each differing in scope. The Doctoral Degree is the highest academic qualification and requires four years of full-time study, while the Licentiate Degree requires two years of full-time study (Swedish Higher Education Authority, 2025).

Over the past decade, Sweden has maintained a stable doctoral population. Between 2010 and 2022, the number of doctoral students consistently ranged between 18,000 and 20,000, indicating the continued strength and scale of doctoral education in the country’s Higher Education landscape (Statista, 2025). In 2024, more than 17,800 students were enrolled in doctoral programmes, with 71% funded through salaried doctoral studentships, highlighting Sweden’s strong commitment to secure and structured doctoral employment (Swedish Higher Education Authority, 2025). With the 2024 research and innovation bill dedicating SEK 6.5 billion (equivalent to £515 million and €596.7 million) to strengthening the sector, the Government signals its determination to keep Sweden at the forefront of global research and innovation (Government Offices of Sweden, 2024).

Although not labelled as a professional doctorate, Sweden's industrial PhD programmes, 'Industridoktorand', offers a model of collaboration between universities and industry. PhD candidates in these programmes are fully employed by a company during their studies and work at the intersection of industry and academia while meeting the same academic expectations as university-based PhD students (Bernhard & Olsson, 2020, 2022). These industrial PhD programmes embed academic research directly within industry, helping to bridge the gap between the two sectors (Abu Sa'a & Yström, 2024). Similar to professional doctorates, they emphasise work-based contexts and offer opportunities to integrate rigorous academic research with practical skills development.

The scale of industrial doctoral education in Sweden remains modest but significant. In 2020, industrial PhD students accounted for approximately 5% of the country's 17,100 registered doctoral candidates (Bernhard & Olsson, 2022). By 2021, the share had increased, with 14% of doctoral candidates employed outside academia and pursuing their doctoral studies as part of their employment (Abu Sa'a & Yström, 2024). Most recently, in 2024, 8% of doctoral candidates were employed outside academia, indicating a continued, though fluctuating, presence of industrial doctoral education within the Swedish system (Swedish Higher Education Authority, 2025).

Over the past decade, Sweden has maintained a stable doctoral population [...] highlighting Sweden's strong commitment to secure and structured doctoral employment.

Industrial PhD programmes have developed as a mechanism for strengthening university-industry collaboration in Sweden. Industrial PhD education generates both short- and long-term benefits, including competence development, stronger university-industry collaboration, increased legitimacy, technology transfer and expanded networks. Over time, it also contributes to new business opportunities, industrial renewal, greater competitiveness, and enhanced innovation and competence capacity (Gustavsson et al., 2016). There is an ongoing debate about the challenges industrial PhD students face in disseminating knowledge, research supervision, managing expectations, etc. as the differing goals, purposes and organisational cultures of universities and industry can create tensions for those navigating both environments (Abu Sa'a & Yström, 2024; Tavares et al., 2020).

Together, these models, offered alongside the PhD, contribute towards an emerging discourse across a number of international contexts that reimagine doctoral education, in the context of its real-world relevance, inclusive pedagogy, and the cultivation of reflective, empowered practitioners. They underscore the need for institutional commitment to flexible structures, where meaningful and collaborative supervision is encouraged and enhances the doctoral experience, and sustained support for doctoral candidates working across boundaries of discipline, sector and identity.

However, not all countries are investing in, or evolving, the professional doctorate model to the same extent. A few studies have highlighted the challenges associated with these models such as a lack of conceptual clarity, differences in institutional cultures and academic disciplines limiting the ability of collaboration, the challenges faced by the doctoral candidates to bridge academic and practice cultures, and pedagogical and organisational challenges (Poultney, 2010; Prøitz & Wittek, 2020).

In a presentation delivered by Nordkvelle (2025) at the UKCGE 2025 conference, the factors underpinning Norway's lack of formal adoption of professional doctorates were highlighted. Despite Norway's expansive doctoral education landscape with over 20 institutions offering PhD programmes and more than 41,000 graduates by 2023, the country, similar to Sweden, has not formally adopted the professional doctorate model in name, and historical and structural factors have shaped this absence. Norwegian doctoral training, consolidated in 2003 into a unified PhD model (excluding the traditional Doctor Philosophia), remains largely academic in orientation. Although private- and public-sector PhDs were introduced in 2008 and 2014 respectively, these require institutional employment and joint funding with universities, excluding independent professionals from participation.

Attempts to introduce professional doctorates have faced resistance. Committees in 2009, 2012, and 2021 rejected the concept, citing concerns about academic legitimacy and the lack of a "researching professional". While some reforms allowed broader formats for dissertations, including artistic outputs and practice-based studies, the structural and cultural emphasis on traditional academic pathways persists. The sector's limited understanding of professional doctorates, coupled with a tendency to make emerging institutions more "university-like", has limited innovation in doctoral models. Critics argue that current practice-based PhDs lack tailored training for industry challenges, leaving candidates and supervisors without adequate support. Moreover, the requirement for full-time employment and generous funding through the Norwegian Research Council restricts access to those already embedded in Higher Education or large organisations.

This model reinforces the university's role as a knowledge transmitter rather than a collaborative partner in professional research, ultimately marginalising the potential of work-based doctorates in Norway (Nordkvelle, 2025).

In a similar approach to Sweden with its Industrial PhD, it is important to note that, while Norway has not adopted professional doctorates as a distinct qualification, it has developed a structurally related alternative through the Norwegian National Research School in Teacher Education (NAFOL). NAFOL provides school and teacher-educators with opportunities to complete a PhD focussed on practice-related educational research. The initiative was established in 2012 and funded by the Norwegian Research Council (Prøitz & Wittek, 2020) and operates as a national graduate school linking a network of Higher Education institutions. The initiative was designed to strengthen research capacity and competence in teacher education and is embedded within a national research programme aimed at enhancing practice-based educational research. Participants are typically employed as teachers or teacher educators within Higher Education institutions offering teacher education, enabling close integration between professional practice and doctoral research (ibid).

Critics argue that current practice-based PhDs lack tailored training for industry challenges, leaving candidates and supervisors without adequate support.

Professional doctorates in New Zealand

Professional doctorates have grown in prominence in New Zealand since the 1990s. The Committee on University Academic Programmes, operating under the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee, oversees the approval and accreditation of university qualifications and recognises a range of doctoral awards, including professional doctorates characterised by significant coursework (NQAI, 2006). In New Zealand, all doctoral qualifications are fundamentally research-based, requiring an original contribution to knowledge, which may be undertaken within multidisciplinary or collaborative research contexts. Doctoral awards are based on a substantial body of work, presented as a traditional thesis, creative practice accompanied by an exegesis or a combination of coursework and thesis or creative work. Three types of doctoral degree are recognised: Doctor of Philosophy/PhD (Doctorate in a specified field or discipline), the named doctorate/professional doctorate and Higher Doctorate (New Zealand Qualifications Authority 2025).

Professional doctorates in New Zealand are designed for experienced practitioners who wish to research and transform their own professional practice while remaining embedded in their workplace.

Professional doctorates in New Zealand are designed for experienced practitioners who wish to research and transform their own professional practice while remaining embedded in their workplace (Otago Polytechnic, 2005). Unlike traditional PhDs, these doctorates emphasise practice-based enquiry, professional identity development and real-world impact rather than discipline-bound theoretical contribution alone. A study by Andrew (2025) examining the Doctor of Professional Practice (DProfPrac) at Otago Polytechnic and presented at the UKCGE 2025 conference, identifies the programme as a prominent example of this approach. The programme is structured around work-based and self-directed learning, enabling candidates to draw directly on their professional contexts as sites of research. Learners typically investigate complex, workplace-derived challenges, and use critical reflection to generate new knowledge that benefits both themselves and their organisations. Transformation is a central goal of the professional doctorate. Through sustained reflective and reflexive practice, learners become more critically aware of bias, power and positioning, and develop confidence as practitioner-researchers. This transformation is not solely cognitive but also emotional, social and embodied, recognising the holistic nature of professional learning (ibid).

Overall, professional doctorates in New Zealand offer a flexible, practice-led alternative to traditional doctoral study. They support experienced professionals to generate contextually relevant research, strengthen their agency as change makers, and produce outcomes with tangible impact across professional, organisational and community settings.

Professional doctorates in Australia

In Australia, although in existence long before, with the introduction of the Doctor of Creative Arts by University of Wollongong in 1984 (Maxwell & Blaeij, 2006), professional doctorates were first referenced explicitly in the Australian Qualification Framework AQF (2002) within the 3rd edition of the Implementation Handbook which states *“There is a range of doctoral programs, in varying combinations of research and coursework and professional orientation ...”* which covers three types of doctorates: the research, the professional and the higher doctorate. Clear definitions of entry expectations and how each degree would be achieved were outlined, and the main differences noted between the research and the professional doctorate are as follows:

- the research doctorate is usually entered from a research or part-research master’s degree or a bachelor honours degree (First or Second Class, upper division) and is primarily achieved through supervised research.
- the professional doctorate is usually entered from a combined research and coursework master’s degree, a bachelor honours degree (First or Second Class, upper division) or equivalent and requires significant professional practice either prior to and/or as part of the program, which may be undertaken through varying combinations of coursework and research.

In 2011, a revised edition of the AQF was published, using qualification level types and descriptors, with doctoral degrees set at level ten. Both the research and professional doctorates qualification type were (and continue to be so within the 2013 2nd edition of the AQF which still stands today) framed within the same descriptor under ‘Doctoral Degree’:

Research is the defining characteristic of all Doctoral Degree qualifications.

The AQF goes on to define the differences between the two qualification types, which are of equal qualification standing:

Research in the Doctoral Degree (Research) may be pure, exploratory, experimental or creative while the Doctoral Degree (Professional) allows for research that may be more applied within the context of the profession.

In the early 2010s, professional doctorates were popular among the group of universities that make up the Australian Technology Network (ATN), but in more recent years, due to a shift in government priorities, investment in these types of degrees has declined with certain professional doctorates having been decommissioned.

In 2022, as part of its Increase Workforce Mobility initiative, with an investment of AUS\$296 million (equivalent to £157.5million and €182.5million), the Australian government announced the launch of a new National Industry PhD Programme (Department for Education, gov.au, 2022). This programme was designed to create new career pathways for research doctoral candidates and consists of two streams 1) Industry Linked PhD stream 2) Industry Researcher PhD stream. Even though the Industry Researcher PhD stream is aimed at “highly capable industry professionals who are supported by their employers to undertake PhD projects in partnership with a university while retaining industry employment and salary benefits” the degree is not classified as a professional doctorate but, similar to the expansion of alternative doctoral programmes that have emerged across the UK and Ireland, is marketed as a doctorate for professionals.

It is understood that engagement with professional doctorates comes predominately from the international market, however, as with the UK, the Australia Higher Education Student Statistics (Department of Education, 2024) does not disaggregate the two doctorate programmes, so it has not been possible to disaggregate the data at this level.

Professional doctorates [in the United States] are largely seen, and marketed, as a means of gaining and/or enhancing an individual’s professional identity.

Professional doctorates in the United States

Professional doctorates are largely seen, and marketed, as a means of gaining and/or enhancing an individual’s professional identity.

Having first developed in the US in the late 19th and 20th centuries, practice or professional doctorate (PPD) programmes were created to provide vocational training for specific professions which emphasised practice and application over theoretical research (Thurgood et al., 2006), which was gained through the traditional PhD pioneered in Germany (Gregory, 1995, p. 177).

A range of examples include the Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP), the Doctor of Business Administration (DBA), Doctor of Medicine (MD), Doctor of Dental Surgery (DDS), Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM), Doctor of Osteopathy (OD), Doctor of Pharmacy (PharmD), Doctor of Psychology (PsyD), Juris Doctor (JD), Doctor of Education (EdD) and Doctor of Social Work (D.S.W.).

In the early 2000s, the US experienced an expansive growth of “new kinds” of doctorate degrees, with certain fields using professional doctorates as a prerequisite qualification to enter that profession. The growth continued throughout the 2000s, with Zusman reporting in 2013 that more than 500 programmes across at least a dozen fields of study existed in the US Higher Education system, with “over 10,000 degrees awarded ... in 2021”, an expansion from almost zero at the turn of the century (Zusman, 2013).

Those that were advocating for PPDs felt that the increased growth was a response to a “growing complexity of professionals’ work environments, rapid expansion of knowledge underlying practice, and increases in technological interventions”, however, Zusman’s research interestingly concluded that the main factor driving the development of these new doctorates was attributed to “professional associations’ and practitioners’ pursuit of greater status, autonomy and control”.

PPDs are linked to professional practice and marketed to those in practice settings who wish to gain advanced skills but do not necessarily want to take on the work traditionally associated with a full-time PhD, which in the US typically takes four to seven years (Walden University, 2026) and includes periods of coursework, research and completion of a dissertation (thesis). A professional doctorate will usually take three to four years to complete, delivered via a part-time schedule, often in more recent years via online delivery, with immersive training sessions throughout the year and in some cases, but not all, require a shorter dissertation. The Review of Professional Doctorates (NQAI, 2006) characterises the professional doctorate as a distinct qualification that is not equivalent to the PhD within the U.S. Higher Education system. These concerns are echoed in more recent analyses of the Doctor of Nursing Practice. Kimani (2026) highlights that, in contrast to the PhDs established funding infrastructures and academic standing, DNP programmes often face limited access to resources and ongoing challenges in achieving clear institutional positioning.

Nevertheless, new programmes continue to be introduced, an example of which is the new Doctorate in Non-profit Administration (DNPA) at the University of Pennsylvania, launched in 2025 for registrations in 2026 onwards (University of Pennsylvania, 2025). The DNPA builds on the success of the School of Social Policy & Practice’s Master of Science in Non-profit Leadership and practice doctorate in Clinical Social Work (DSW). It is the first practice-based doctoral programme in the US that is focussed exclusively on leadership for non-profit administrators and was developed due to a growing gap in the workforce, in particular for larger scale non-profit organisations such as The Red Cross.

Perceived academic standing and how professional doctorates differ from the PhD

Within the UK and Ireland, professional doctorates are clearly positioned as having parity of academic standing with the traditional PhD within national qualifications frameworks. In the UK, the Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) descriptor for Level 8 qualifications explicitly includes “Doctoral degrees (e.g. PhD/DPhil, EdD, DBA, DClInPsy)” (QAA, 2024; QQI, 2021), affirming that both research doctorates and professional doctorates are located at the same academic level. Similarly, in Ireland, professional doctorates are positioned at Level ten of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). The NFQ recognises that “various models for Doctoral Degree programmes now exist, ranging from the traditional research doctorate to the professional and practitioner doctoral programmes” (QQI, 2021). These statements make explicit that professional doctorates are understood, at a structural and regulatory level, as being of equivalent academic standing to the PhD.

This formal equivalence is mirrored internationally, with countries such as Australia, Canada and parts of Europe articulating doctoral frameworks that encompass both traditional and professional doctoral models. Despite this clarity at policy and framework level, there remains a persistent perception within parts of the sector that professional doctorates are somehow 'less' than the traditional PhD (Birks & Watson, 2018; Lunt, 2006; Neumann, 2005). This perceived hierarchy appears to be rooted less in formal quality assurance or academic expectations, and more in long-standing cultural norms about what constitutes doctoral level scholarship. The extent of which would appear to be dependent on the individual Higher Education systems and cultural norms of each country. It should be noted that through our literature review it was not possible to quantify the levels within each country.

Several factors may contribute to this perception. Professional doctorates often include taught components, and the research output, frequently practice based or practice led, may take different forms and be shorter in length than the traditional PhD thesis. Additionally, framing within qualifications frameworks frequently foregrounds professional rather than academic outcomes. For example, the FHEQ states that "*professional doctorates aim to develop an individual's professional practice and to support them in producing a contribution to (professional) knowledge*" (QAA, 2024). While such statements are intended to articulate distinct purposes rather than hierarchy, they can be misinterpreted as implying reduced academic rigour.

This interpretation may also be reinforced by historical sector discourse. The 2002 UKCGE report (Bone et al., 2002), for example, defined the professional doctorate as one in which, "*unlike a PhD, the subject matter is a professional discipline and not academic research and scholarship*". Although not intended to imply lesser standing, such comparisons, particularly when framed in opposition to the PhD, can inadvertently sustain the notion that professional doctorates are conceptually or academically subordinate.

In reality, professional doctorates are intentionally designed for specific professional and industry contexts and cultivate distinct, but no less rigorous, sets of skills and forms of knowledge production. Their growth has played a significant role in widening access to doctoral education by attracting experienced professionals who cannot commit to full-time study, practitioners working in under-represented sectors such as policing, healthcare, education and social work, and candidates seeking applied, practice-based research pathways. In the UK, this aligns closely with the direction of recent Office for Students and Research England initiatives, including Equity in Doctoral Education through Partnership and Innovation (EDEPI), the Yorkshire Consortium for Equity in Doctoral Education (YCEDE) and the wider £8m postgraduate research access programme, all of which emphasise the importance of flexible and plural doctoral routes to diversify participation and strengthen the research ecosystem (UKRI, 2026; Office for Students, 2020).



Professional doctorates are intentionally designed for specific professional and industry contexts and cultivate distinct, but no less rigorous, sets of skills and forms of knowledge production.

The distinctiveness of professional doctorates lies in their explicit integration of professional practice with scholarly research. They are now established across a wide range of disciplines, including education (EdD), health and social care (DProf, DHSc), engineering (EngD), business (DBA), and the creative industries. In doing so, they often challenge traditional assumptions about what constitutes 'knowledge' by legitimising experiential insight and practice led inquiry. This contrasts with the traditional PhD, which has historically been associated with theoretically driven research, often aligned with preparation for an academic research career and involving more limited direct engagement with professional practice.

Professional doctorates have, from their inception, embedded structured taught components alongside the research project. These elements deliberately cultivate advanced methodological literacy, leadership capability, critical reflexivity and professional impact. The FHEQ specifies that professional doctorate programmes typically include postgraduate taught study, normally accounting for no more than one third of the programme, alongside a substantial research dissertation equivalent to a minimum of three full-time years of doctoral level study (QAA, 2024). In Ireland, the NFQ similarly notes that most modern doctoral programmes, including professional and practitioner doctorates, are now structured and include substantial taught components (QQI, 2021).

These characteristics align closely with Vitae's Researcher Development Framework (RDF), which positions professional competencies, such as leadership, communication, project management and engagement beyond academia, as core expectations for all researchers (Vitae, 2026). Since the Roberts Review (2002), and subsequent policy developments across the UK and Ireland, transferable skills training has become formalised within doctoral education more broadly. However, professional doctorates have been delivering this integrated, applied model since their earliest iterations, with curricula intentionally designed for practitioner researchers operating in complex professional environments.

The distinctiveness of professional doctorates lies in their explicit integration of professional practice with scholarly research.

The 2025 survey

The aim of the 2025 survey was to gain insight and understanding of the provision of professional doctorates within Higher Education institutions across the United Kingdom and Ireland. The aim of the survey and this report have been to provide an overview of not only provision but also gain an understanding of sector strategy in doctoral programme provision. This is particularly relevant during a period of uncertainty and change in the organisation of research degree provision, but also how doctoral education is viewed both nationally and internationally.

Ethics

The 2025 survey gained ethical approval from Coventry University for the distribution of the survey, desk-based research and the production of materials, outputs, literature and proceedings that refer to the results of this work. This report is one of those outputs.

Methodology

The online survey was sent out electronically in February 2025 to all institutions who were members of the UK Council for Graduate Education (UKCGE) at that time. This was sent as an individual e-mail inviting participation in the survey as well as via follow-up communications via UKCGE social media. Members of University Alliance (UA) were also approached via the Doctoral Training Alliance. Non-members of either UKCGE and UA were contacted individually and invited to complete the survey before the final closing date of Friday April 11th 2025. The window for completing the survey was extended once from the initial closing date of March 31st 2025.

The final response rate from those sent the survey and those directly approached and invited to complete the survey was 46% (73 responses from 160). This was similar to previous UKCGE survey response rates.

Responses were received from across the different University Groups in the UK and Ireland, Table 1 (below) indicates the responses by institution type. Respondents were able to select more than one to best describe their institution, however, due to the sample size for some of the institution types and for reporting the results, institution types have been reported as pre-92, post-92, Specialist, Irish University and Irish Technological University only.

Pre 1992	18
Post 1992	42
Specialist	3
Irish University	4
Irish Technological University	3

Table 1 – Breakdown of responses by institution type (n=70)

Table 2 goes on to summarise the number of responding institutions in bands by size of the postgraduate researcher population.

Number of PGR enrolled	Number of responding institutions
0-250	16
251-500	13
501-750	10
751-1000	14
1001- 1250	4
1251-1500	3
1501-1750	1
1751-2000	1
2001-2500	2
2501-3000	
3001-3500	1
3501-4000	
>4000	4

Table 2 – Number of responding institutions by PGR population (n=69)

Following the closing date, web searches were conducted to identify what, if any, professional doctorate provision was available at each institution. This allowed us to gain as much information and full a picture as possible from survey responses and information that was in the public domain on the current provision across the UK and Ireland.

The survey consists of three key parts.

The **first section** focusses on professional doctorates that are considered as Research and are returned to either Higher Education Statistics Authority (HESA) and included as an eligible completion for REF in the UK, or Higher Education Authority (HEA) in Ireland. In this first section, respondents were asked to indicate what Research Professional Doctorate (RPD) provision they had at their institution, what their institution's strategy was around Research Professional Doctorates (RPDs), the professional doctorate community, and the funding and organisation of professional doctorates.

The **second section** focussed on Taught Professional Doctorates (TPDs) that are not returned as Research to HESA or the HEA and were considered Taught Doctorates. Respondents were again asked to indicate Taught Professional Doctorate (TPD) provision, as well as institutional strategy, community and the funding and organisation of TPDs.

The **third section** of the survey asked respondent to comment on the main challenges faced when developing and recruiting to professional doctorates, and then to indicate the size of the PGR community within respondent institutions and the mission group and type of institution to which they are affiliated.

This survey is the first of its kind from the UKCGE, building on a short series of reports on professional doctorates from 2002 (Bone, et al.) and 2011 (Fell et al.), which cumulatively built a picture of the growth, form, value and relevance of the contemporary professional doctorate across the disciplines. The 2025 survey is the first time that the UKCGE and University Alliance have sought to gain perspectives from individual institutions across the UK and Ireland in order to provide a more detailed understanding of the current picture of what is happening in UK and Irish institutions, when the current literature offers conflicting views on professional doctorates.

Results

The desk-based research in addition to the survey results suggests that out of the 160 research-degree-awarding institutions across the UK and Ireland, 70% of HEIs with research-degree-awarding powers offer at least one professional doctorate programme: 73% (105) of institutions in the UK, 41% (7) of institutions in Ireland offer professional doctorates. The total number of professional doctorates are distributed across different institution types as set out in Table 3 and by regions in Table 4.

UK Institutions		Irish Institutions	
Pre 1992	Pre 1992	Irish University	Irish Technological University
46	59	5	2

Table 3 – Breakdown of institutions offering professional doctorates from desk-based research by institution type

England	Scotland	Ireland	Wales	Northern Ireland
84	13	7	7	1

Table 4 – Breakdown of institutions offering professional doctorates from desk-based research by region

In comparison with the figures reported in 2016 by CRAC (Mellors-Bourne et al., 2016), the number of institutions in England that offer professional doctorates has reduced slightly from 86 to 84, however, this figure also includes the EngD. To draw meaningful comparisons, we have been mindful of the conclusions drawn by the CRAC report that EngDs were widely accepted as not being professional doctorates.

73% of institutions in the UK, 41% of institutions in Ireland offer professional doctorates.

We did note, however, that survey responses and desk-based research did see EngDs listed as professional doctorates, and we did not find that institutions indicating they offered professional doctorates had EngDs as their only offer. This might indicate a shift in perception during this period. The comparison of institutions offering professional doctorates since 2016 and now is therefore considered to be accurate.

A similar dataset to review the growth of professional doctorates in the other UK nations and Ireland is not available.

The desk-based research did not establish whether the professional doctorates were categorised as research or taught professional doctorates. The survey purposefully sought to try and understand the provision of both research and taught provision, results of which are presented in the next sections.

Research professional doctorates (RPDs)

In section one of the survey, we were keen to understand the extent to which Research Professional Doctorates (RPDs) were offered, HEI strategies for doing so and what the intentions were for growing enrolments and broadening programmes over the next five years. Question one asked respondents to indicate if their institution offered RPDs.

Research Professional Doctorate Strategies, Recruitment and Future Planning

Figure 1 indicates that the majority of responding institutions offer RPDs.

Those institutions that were not intending to introduce professional doctorate programmes indicated that it was not part of their institutional strategy

Does your institution offer Research Professional Doctorates?

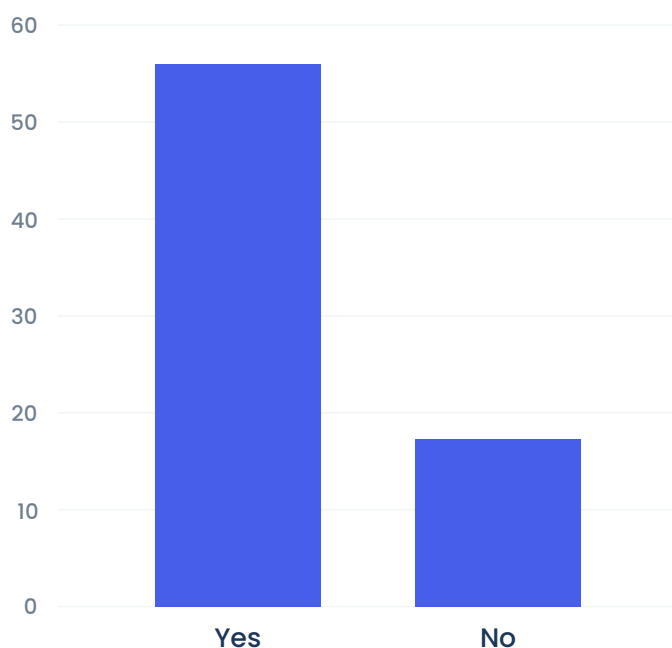


Figure 1 – Does your institution offer Research Professional Doctorates? (n=73)

Of the 56 institutions that indicated they offered Research Professional Doctorates, 53 indicated their affiliated institution types which is recorded below in Table 5.

Pre 1992	16
Post 1992	32
Irish University	3
Irish Technological University	2

Table 5 – Breakdown of responding institutions that offer Research Professional Doctorates by affiliated institution type

Question 2 then asked those 17 that did not offer RPDs, only three indicated that they had previously offered them. Question 3 went on to ask these 17 respondents if they were considering developing programmes over the next five years and what the rationale was.

Is your institution intending on developing Research Professional Doctorates over the next 5 years?

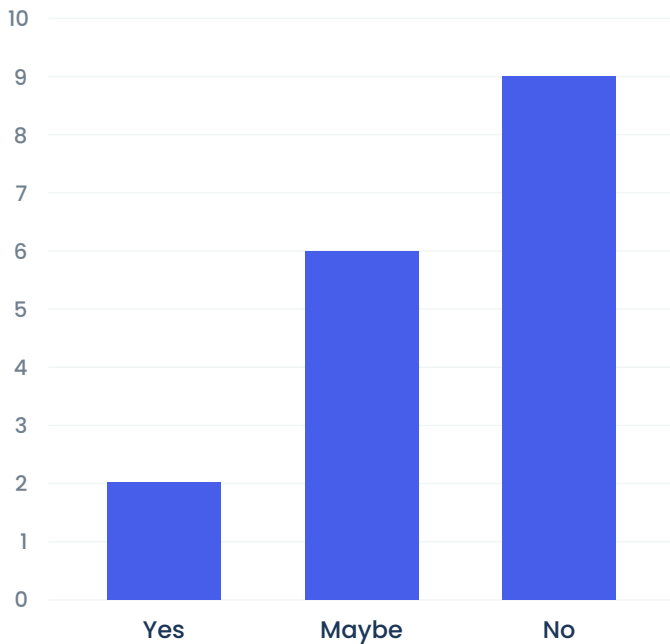


Figure 2 – Is your institution intending on developing Research Professional Doctorates over the next 5 years? (n=17)

The rationale for developing programmes highlighted institutional desire to want to respond to specific regional needs while also seeking to increase and improve recruitment across a broader range of prospective doctoral candidates. Those institutions that were not intending to introduce professional doctorate programmes indicated that it was not part of their institutional strategy to do so while others reflected on the capacity constraints within their institution, referencing supervisory capacity and level of teaching that would not permit for this to happen.

Respondents who offered RPDs were then invited in Question 4 to detail the programmes that were offered before indicating in response to Question 5 if the number of programmes had increased, decreased or remained the same over the last five years. 46% (n=25) of respondents to this question indicated that there had been an increase, while 13% (n=7) indicated a decrease and 41% (n=22) had stayed the same.

Over the last 5 years the number of Research Professional Doctorate programmes have increased, decreased or stayed the same?

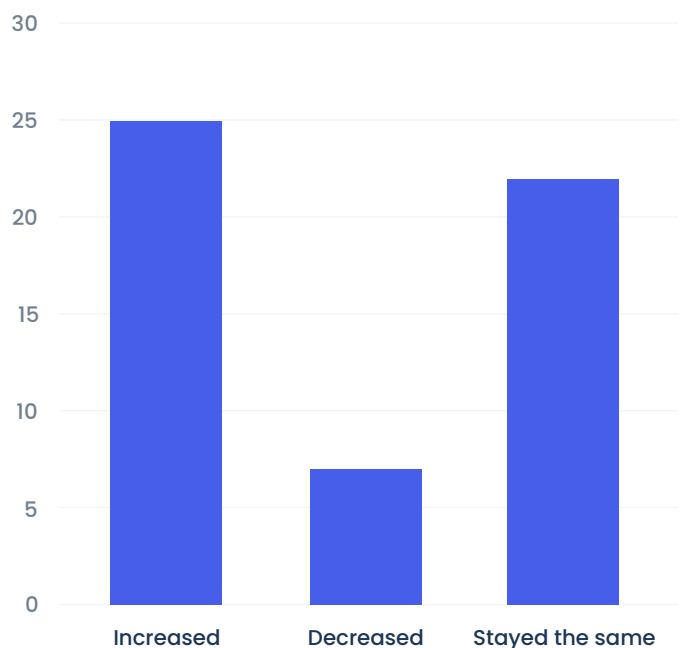


Figure 3 – Over the last 5 years the number of Research Professional Doctorate programmes have increased, decreased or stayed the same? (n=54)

Over the last five years have the number of Research Professional Doctorates Programmes increased, decreased or stayed the same?

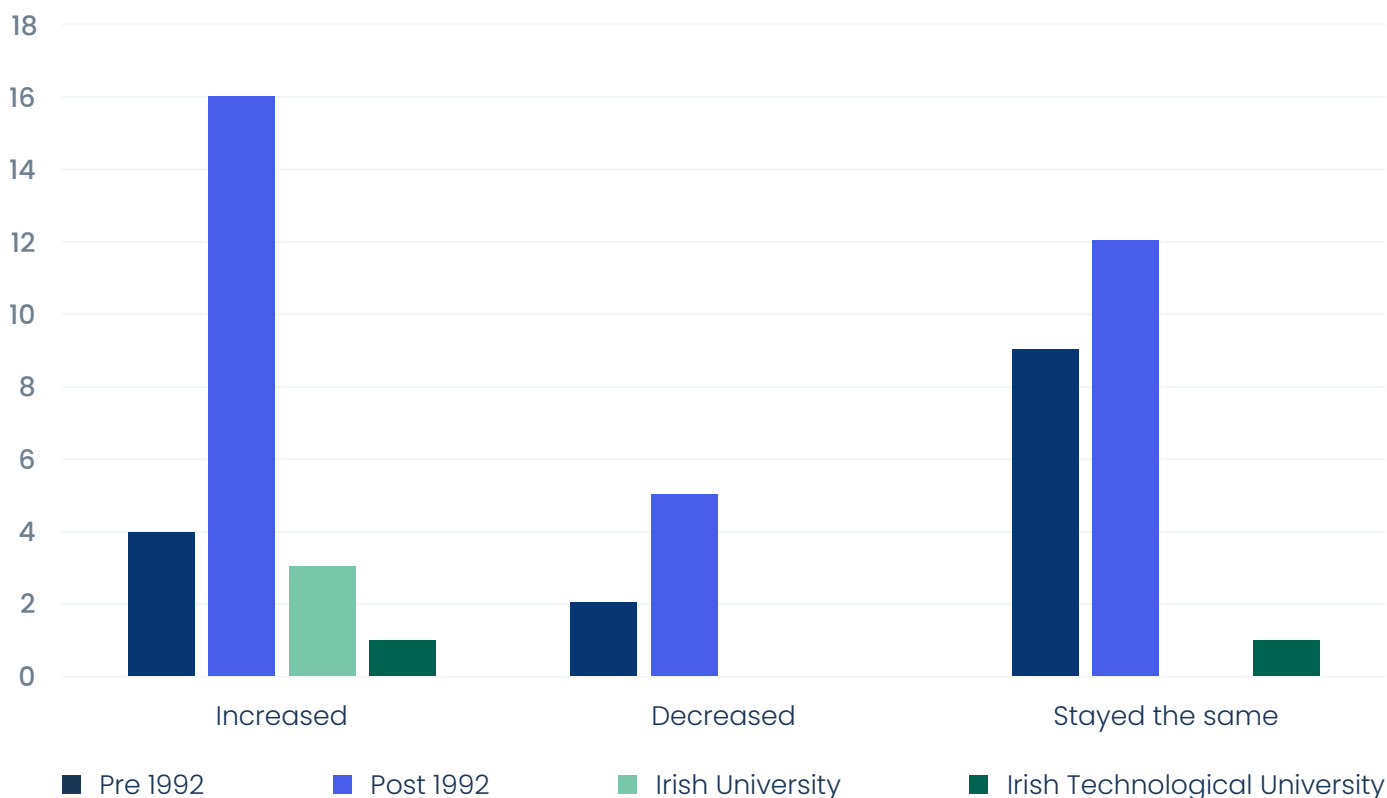


Figure 4 – Over the last five years have the number of Research Professional Doctorate Programmes increased, decreased or stayed the same? (by institution type, n=53)

Respondents were then asked at Question 6 to indicate if the number of enrolments had increased, decreased or remained the same over the last five years.

Over the last five years, have enrolments on Research Professional Doctorate Programmes increased, decreased or stayed the same?

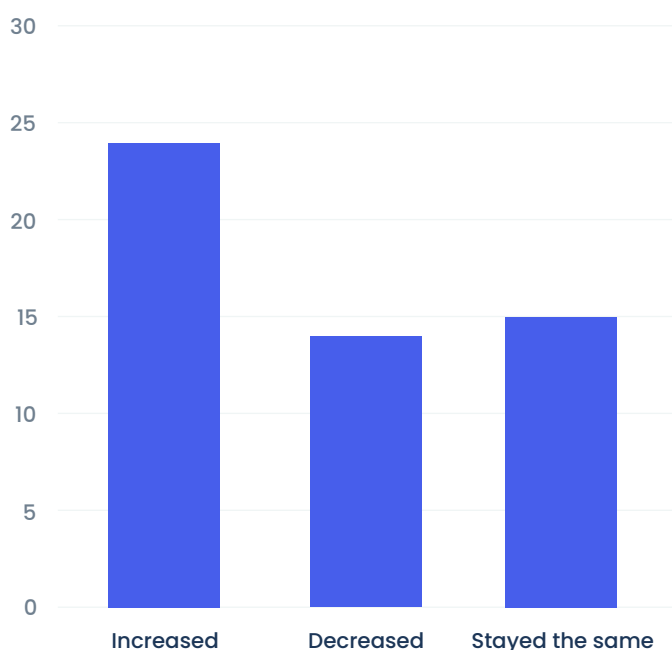


Figure 5 – Over the last five years, have enrolments on Research Professional Doctorate Programmes increased, decreased or stayed the same? (n=53)

Over the last five years, have the number of enrolments on Research Professional Doctorates increased, decreased or stayed the same?

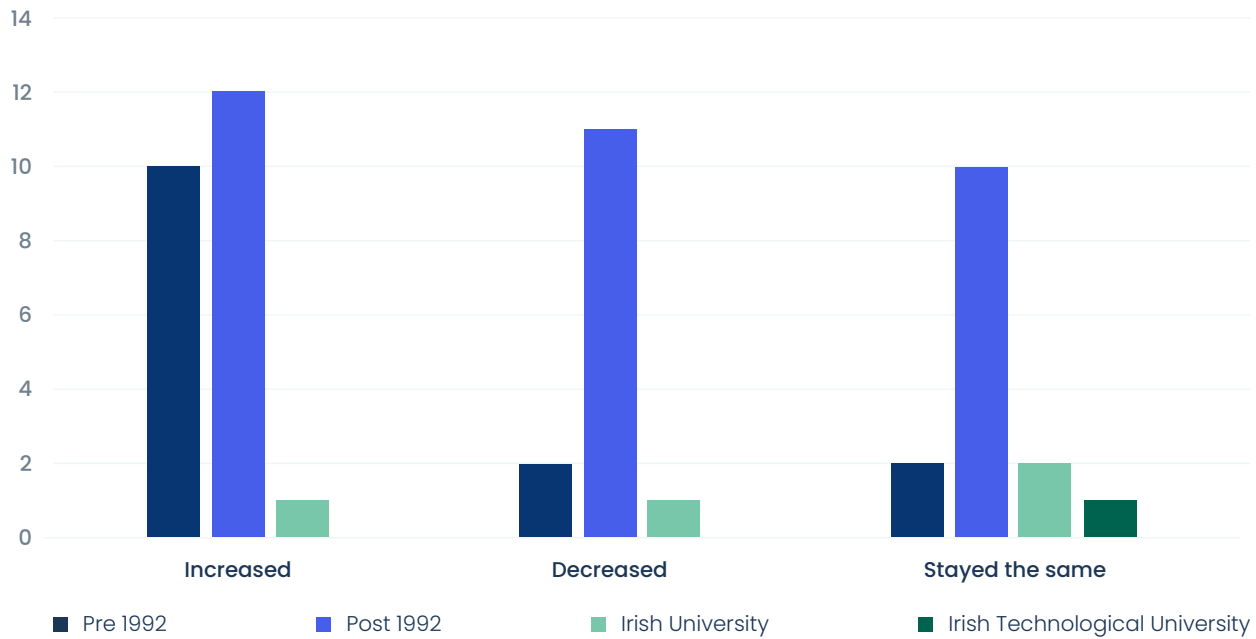


Figure 6 – Over the last five years, have the number of enrolments on Research Professional Doctorates increased, decreased or stayed the same? (by institution type, n=52)

To further explore enrolments and recruitment expectations, respondents were asked a follow-up question at Question 8 on whether programmes were meeting recruitment targets as intended when the programmes were designed:

49% (n=26) indicated that they were and 51%(n=27) indicated that they were not. Question 9 went on to explore how programmes were offered: as full-time, part-time or both. Figure 7 below indicates the proportions against this question.

How are your Research Professional Doctorates offered?

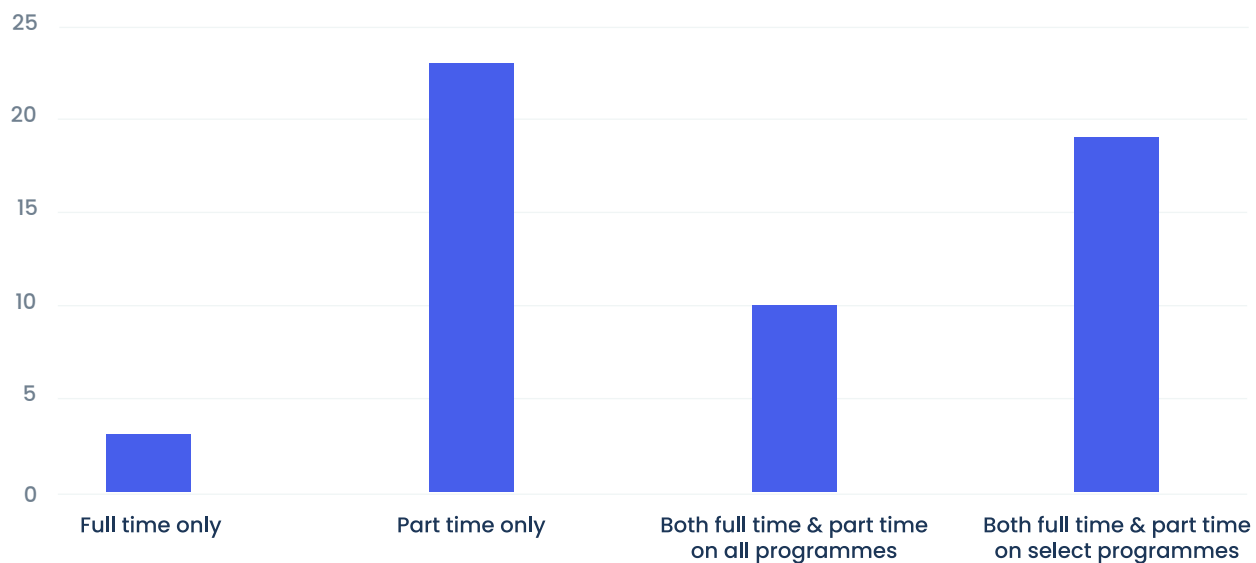


Figure 7 – How are your Research Professional Doctorates offered? (n=55)

The longevity and future of RPDs was then explored with respondents at Question 10, when the question was posed if institutions were considering closing any RPDs. Only 20% (n=11) of the respondents indicated that their institutions were considering closing programmes, giving varied rationales and reasoning for this, indicated in Figure 8 below. Of these 11, ten were post-92 institutions, with one a pre-92 institution.

Reasons for considering closing Research Professional Doctorate Programmes

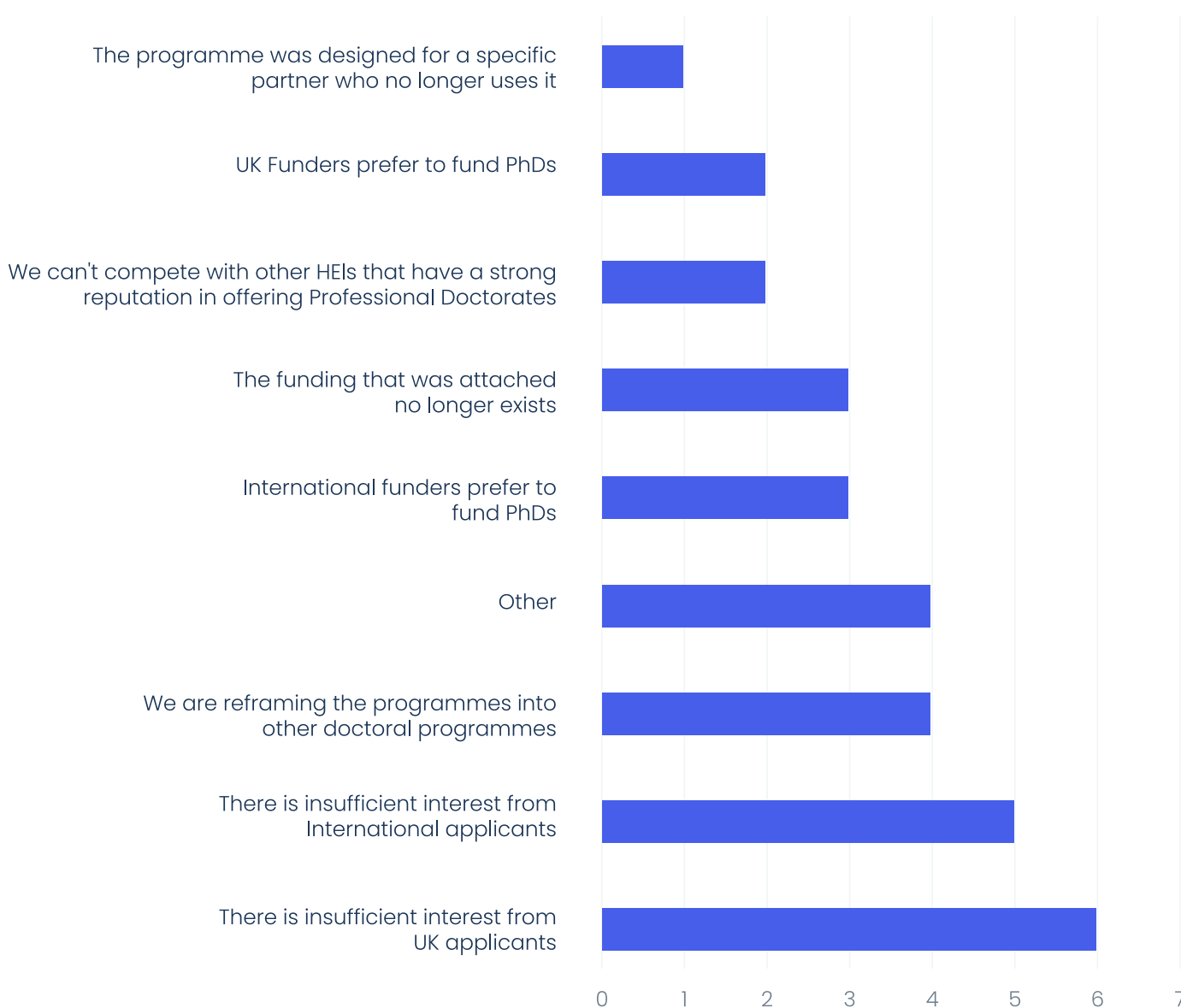


Figure 8 – Reasons for considering closing Research Professional Doctorate Programmes (n=11)

Respondents who selected “other” indicated issues such as supervisory capacity, the ability to compete with other institutions which had a strong reputation and market share of professional doctorates, and there not being the capacity or resource within the institution to dedicate to trying to increase recruitment numbers. One respondent referred to:

concentrating efforts into other research degree programmes where we know there will be guaranteed funding or indeed a better chance of having them funded externally.

Post 1992 Institution, offers Research Professional Doctorates

Those respondents who had indicated that their institutions were considering closing programmes (n=11) were asked if other doctoral programmes would be developed to replace them, with only two indicating that they would. These two respondents provided more detail as to what these programmes might be: one indicating it would be another professional doctorate that was part of a broader collaborative partnership; the other suggested that this would be a distance-based and structured PhD.

Will your institution be developing other doctoral programmes to replace Research Professional Doctorates?

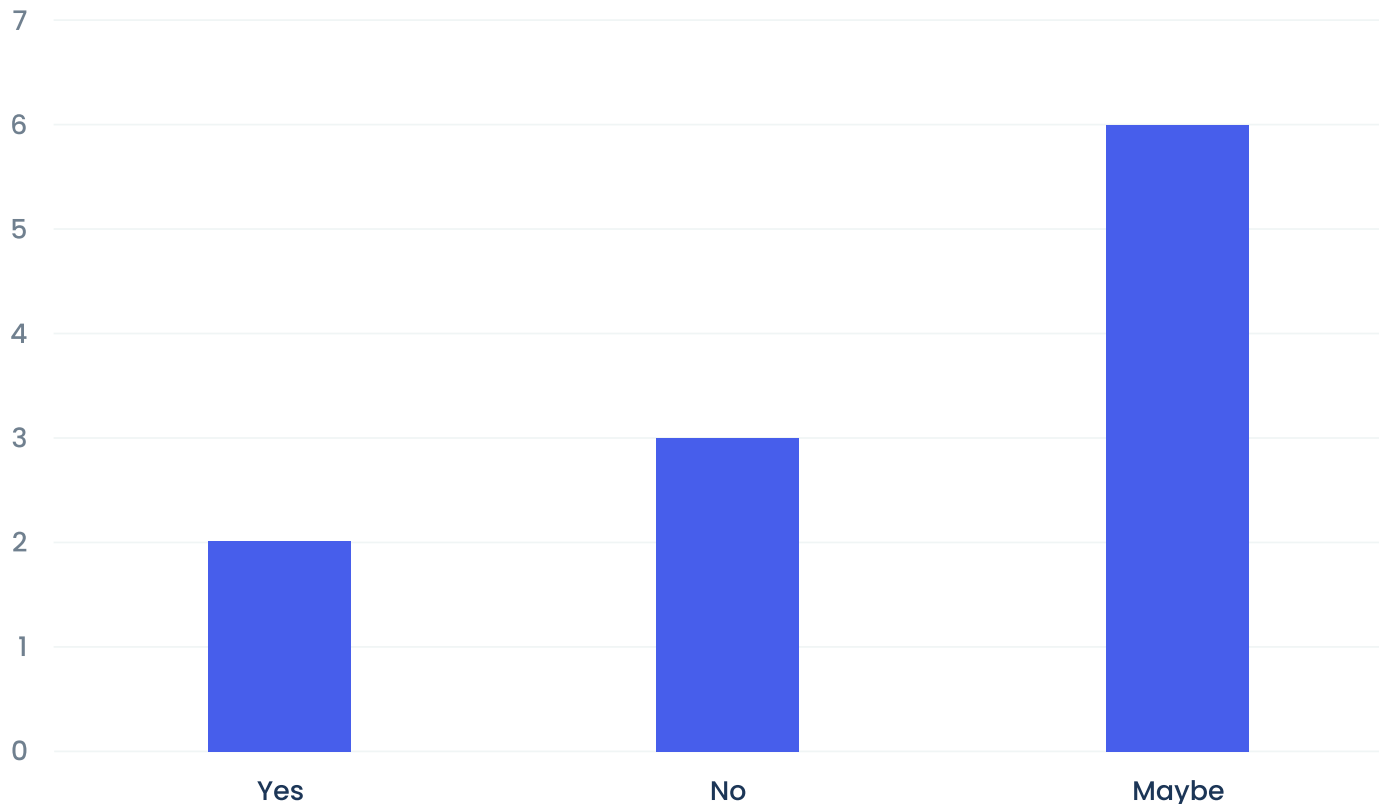


Figure 9 – Will your institution be developing other doctoral programmes to replace Research Professional Doctorates? (n=11)

In addition to future plans to replace any professional doctorate programmes, all respondents were asked if their institution had already replaced any, to which 90% of responses to this question (n=65) stated that they had not. The remaining 10% (n=7) indicated that professional doctorate programmes had been replaced with alternative PhD programmes. One respondent provided more detail on this point, stating:

We have undertaken a review of markets and funder preferences and while the demand for part time and distance learning doctorates remain high, funders are still preferring to fund PhDs. We have therefore developed a number of structured PhDs that are perhaps similarly structured as Prof Docs and the same in all but name.

Post 1992 Institution, offers Research Professional Doctorates

Another respondent also highlighted their institutional position on professional doctorates with a clear link to strategy and supervisory capacity:

It doesn't form part of our wider strategy for research or research degree provision to offer Professional Doctorates, there isn't the appetite to develop them and we would not have the staff capacity to be able to run them.

Irish University

For those respondents who had indicated that their institution offered RPDs (n=56), 28 went on to indicate their institutions were planning to increase the number of them. Where there were no plans to increase numbers, the reasons provided covered a broad set of considerations that included what might be determined as positive rationale, such as already having a broad professional doctorate provision, the wider research degree offer meeting demand and existing provision already recruiting well. Some other responses struck a more cautious tone (such as if a market was identified it would be considered; if a request from a specific subject area was made it would be considered) while others referred to the lack of capacity and resource to develop and run them, funders only wanting to fund the traditional PhD, and a sense of being *"late to the market"*.

Building on the questions relating to strategy and plans around RPD provision, Question 20 went on to consider influences upon that strategy and respondents were asked to rank by level of importance the influences in institutional strategy, and, where relevant, the influences in increasing provision.

Responses to this question (n=50) indicate that the biggest influences in strategy were related to increasing in PGR income and PGR numbers, with engagement with collaborative partners, business, industry and third sector, along with improving access to doctoral education through widening participation, also being a key consideration.

Responding to specific skills needs in sectors, expanding routes to continuous professional development and contribution to civil and social responsibility through practical research were much less influential in institutional strategies.

Please rank in level of importance, what influences your institution’s strategy around offering and where relevant, increasing the provision of Research Professional Doctorates

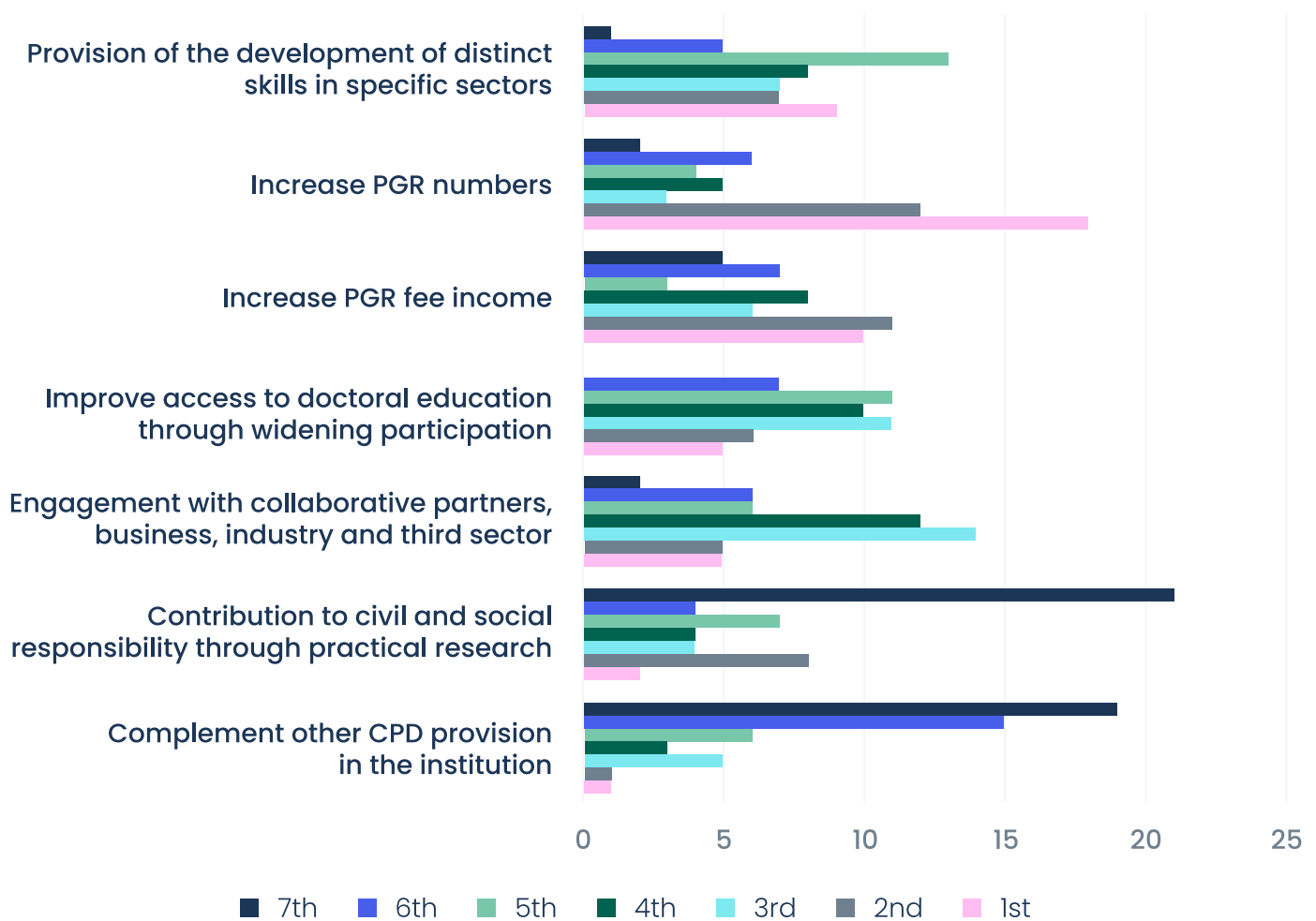


Figure 10 – Please rank in level of importance, what influences your institution’s strategy around offering and where relevant, increasing the provision of Research Professional Doctorates (n=50)

Demographic of the professional doctorate community

Subsequent questions went on to explore the demographic of the professional doctorate population as well as the primary market for candidates. Figure 11 indicates that respondents highlighted that the primary market for their professional doctorates were Home candidates.

Please indicate the primary market for your Research Professional Doctorate programmes

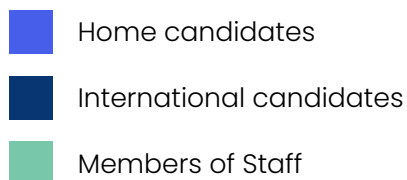
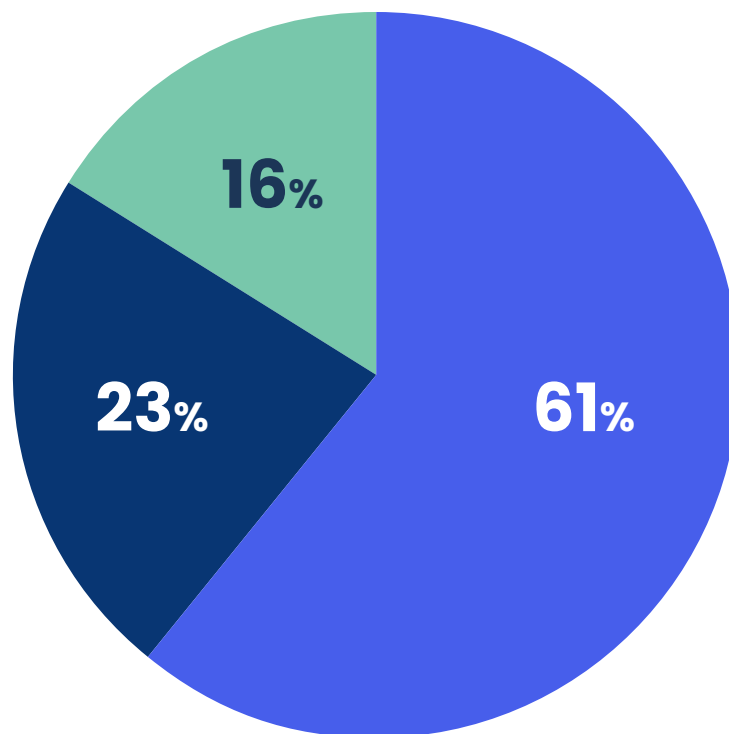


Figure 11 – Please indicate the primary market for your Research Professional Doctorate programmes (n=53)

What is the proportion of Research Professional Doctorate candidates against your total PGR community?

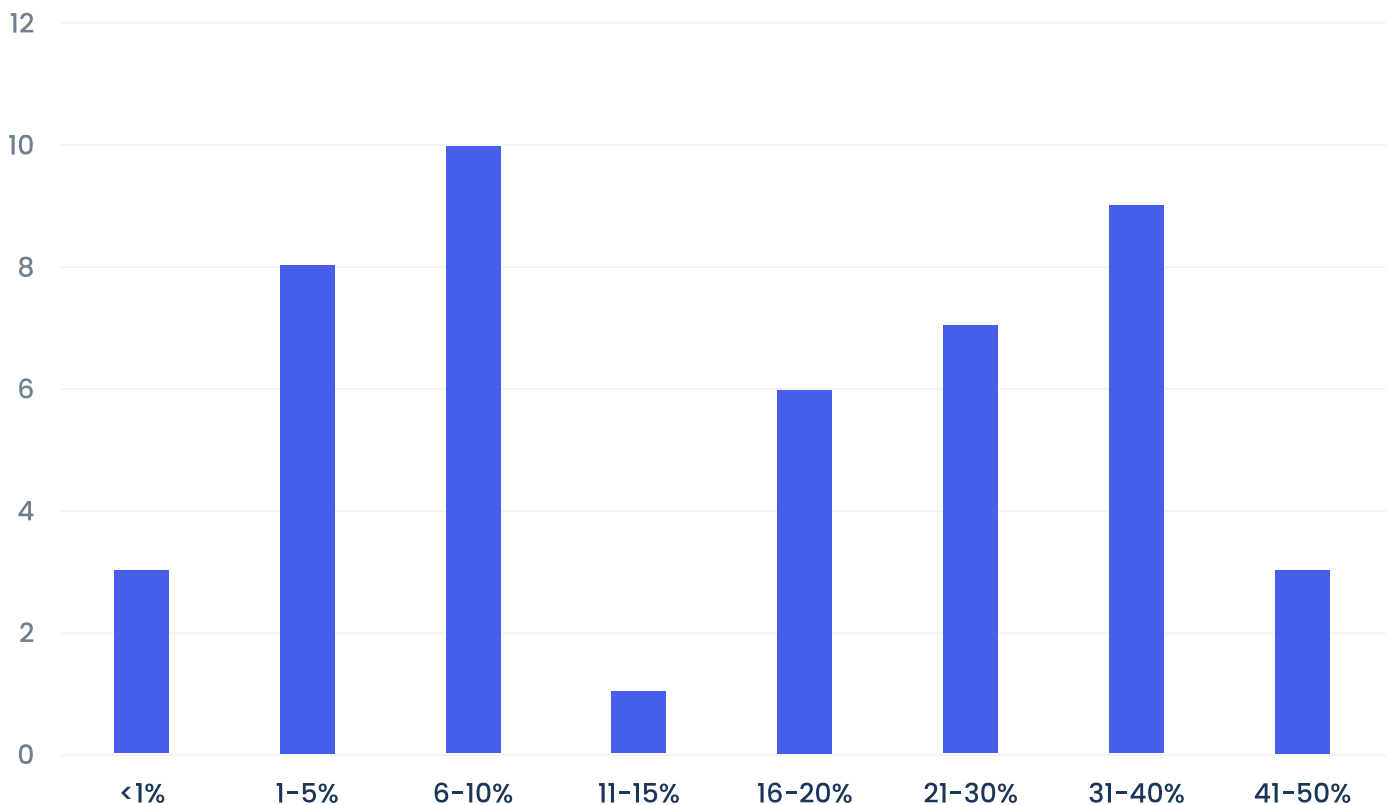


Figure 12 – What is the proportion of Research Professional Doctorate candidates against your total PGR community? (n=42)

Of the 42 responses to question 23 that asked about the proportion of the PGR community being RPD candidates, 40% reported that they constituted more than 20% of their PGR Population. Institutions reporting a population of over 20% were typically UK post-92 institutions.

Question 24 went on to explore if there was an improvement in representation from under-represented groups among professional doctorate cohorts, were a third of respondents indicated that it had improved diversity, particularly in relation to age and ethnicity.

Is there improved representation from under-represented groups among your professional doctorate cohorts?

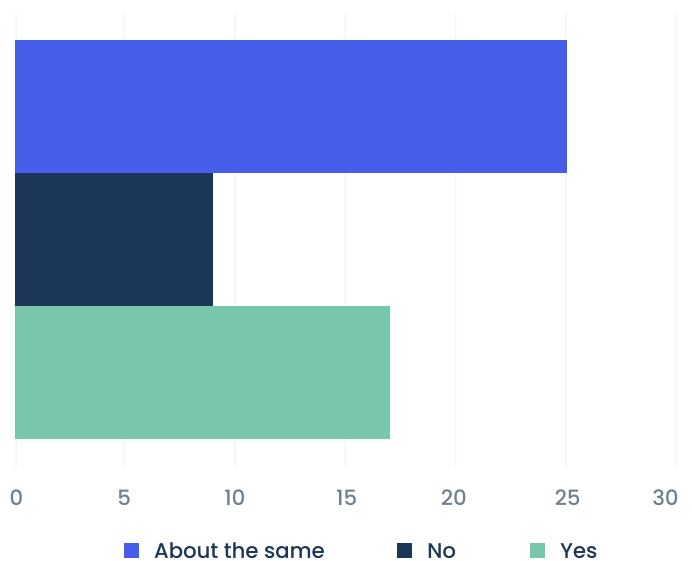


Figure 13 – Is there improved representation from under-represented groups among your Professional Doctorate cohorts? (n=51)

The institutions that indicated that representation had been improved were mainly post-92 and Irish Technological Universities. The charts below indicate this as a proportion of responses from institution type that offered RPDs.

Proportion of responses by institution type that reported that representation from under-represented groups had improved on the Research Professional Doctorate

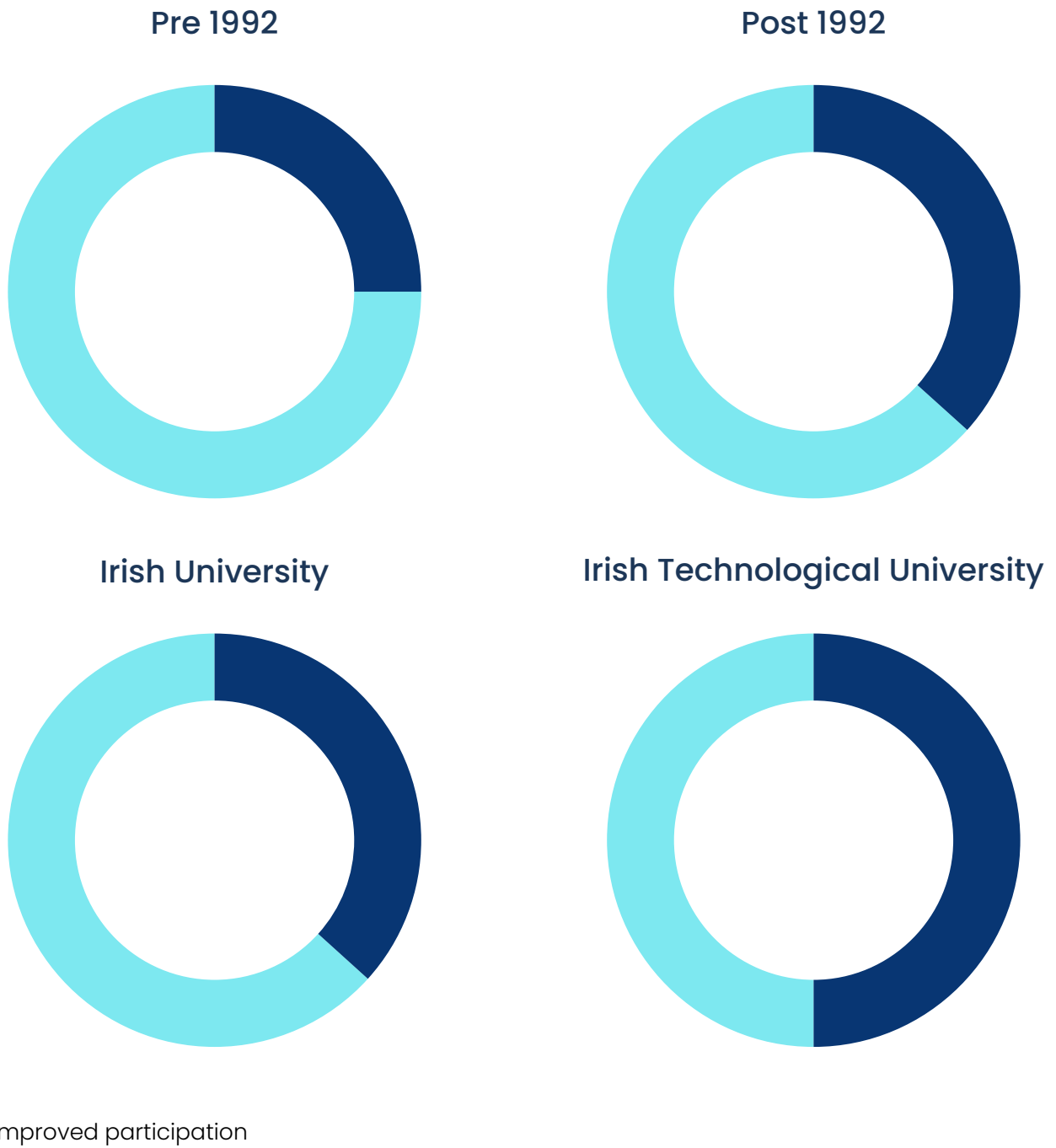


Figure 14 – Proportion of responses by institution type that reported that representation from under-represented groups had improved on the Research Professional Doctorate (n=51)

Institutional responses on how representation from under-represented groups is improved

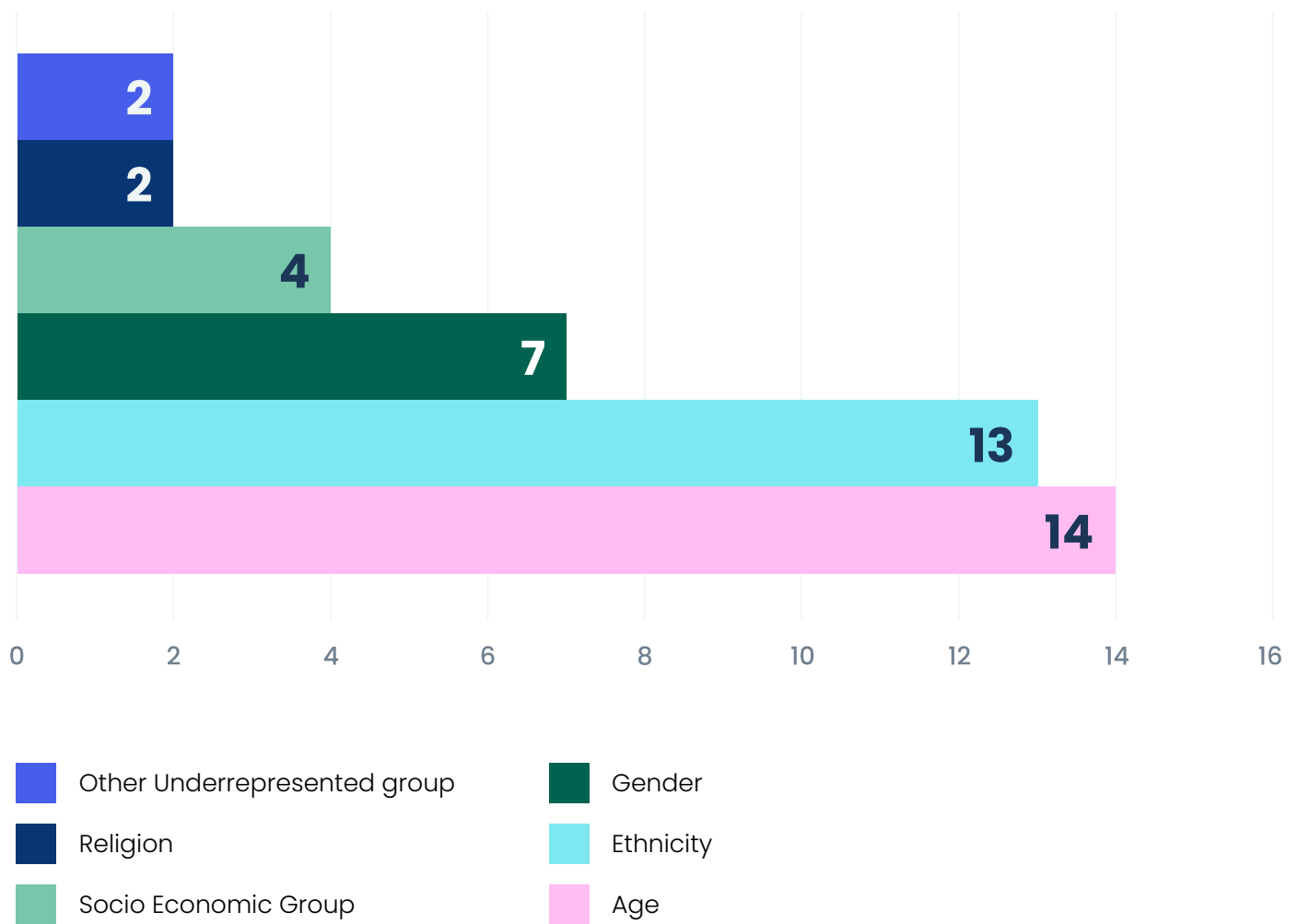


Figure 15 – Institutional responses on how representation from under-represented groups is improved (n=15)

Structure and organisation of Research Professional Doctorates

The latter section of the survey in relation to RPDs focussed on the matriculation, structure and organisation of programmes within institutions.

Entry requirements would typically require a bachelor's degree at 2:1 along with experience of working in a designated profession.

The majority of respondents (77%) also indicated that professional equivalency would be considered as an alternative to academic qualifications for entry requirements.

The majority (67%) of respondents reported that RPD programmes were included in the main set of research degree regulations, with 33% (n=18) indicating that professional doctorates had their own separate set of regulations to govern them.

In terms of assessment and viva practice, 64% reported that policies and practice in relation to assessment and viva were the same as other doctoral programmes. Respondents who indicated there were differences highlighted the different weighting of assessment criteria, particularly in the first two years of the programme following assessment of assignments. A shorter thesis length was also noted.

When reflecting on submission and completion rates, 53% of respondents indicated that they did not differ to other doctoral programmes. 26% indicated that submission and completion rates were better across professional doctorate programmes than other doctoral degrees. 21% of responses indicated that submission and completion rates were worse.

Typical entry requirements for Research Professional Doctorates

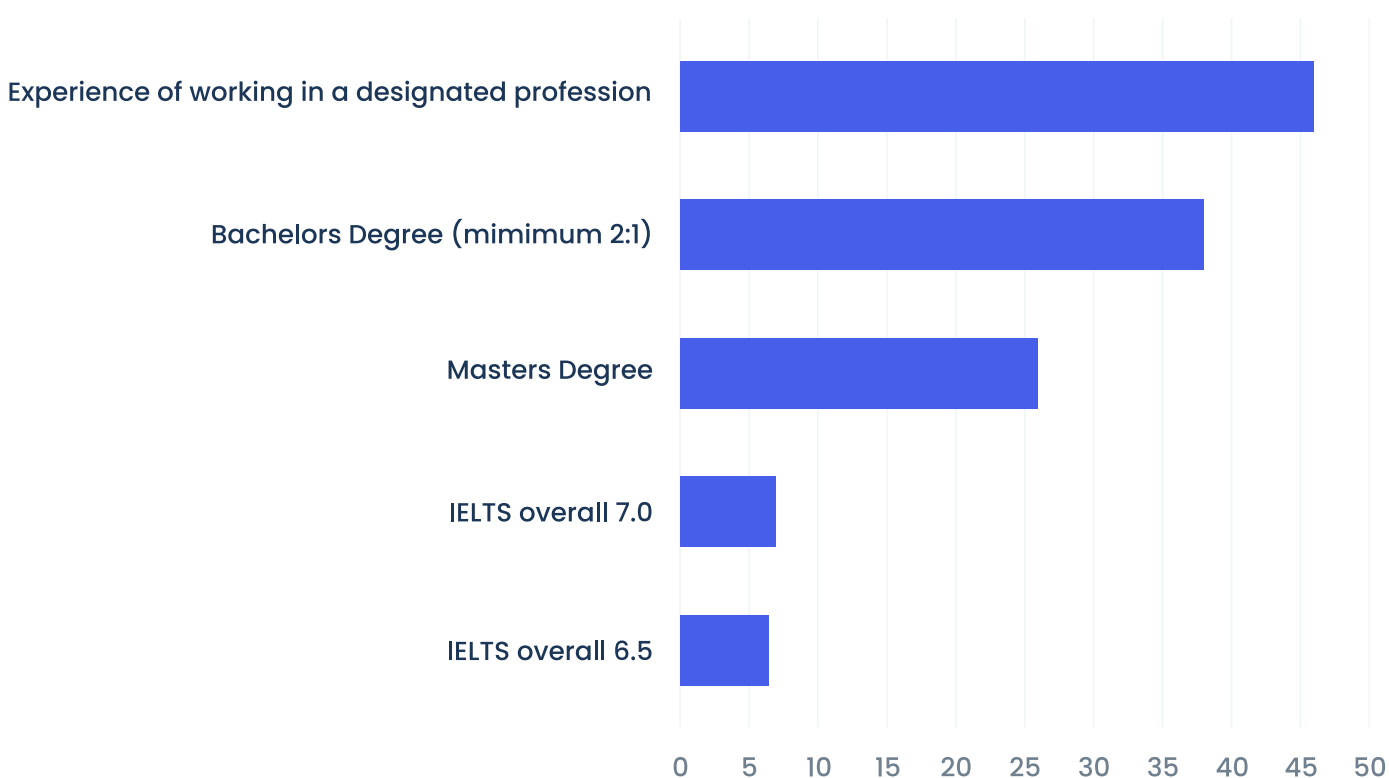


Figure 16 – Typical entry requirements for Research Professional Doctorates (n=53)

Funding and doctorates for professionals

In the closing set of questions relating to RPDs, respondents were asked to comment on funding sources of their candidates before indicating what other doctoral programmes offered at their institution were targeted at and attractive to professionals. 61% (n=33) highlighted that the majority of their cohorts were funding themselves in undertaking this type of doctoral study, with 39% being funded through an employer or external sponsor. Only 17% indicated that they had offered any sort of scholarship for RPDs which varied from fee discounts to partner institutions, staff doctorate schemes where fees were covered by the institution and industry backed scholarships.

Question 36 noted other doctoral level programmes that institutions considered to be attractive to professionals. This question was open to all respondents, not just those that indicated they offered RPDs and received 62 responses, as indicated in Figure 17 above. Among the seven that indicated that there were other types of programmes, examples such as the PhD by Practice, part-time PhDs, PhD by Alternate Thesis and PhD@Work were noted and one provided more depth to their response by stating:

All these routes address the established expert knowledge of professionals and/or provide additional structure to enable busy professionals greater opportunity to complete.

Post-1992 Institution

Doctoral programmes considered to be targeted at and attractive to professionals

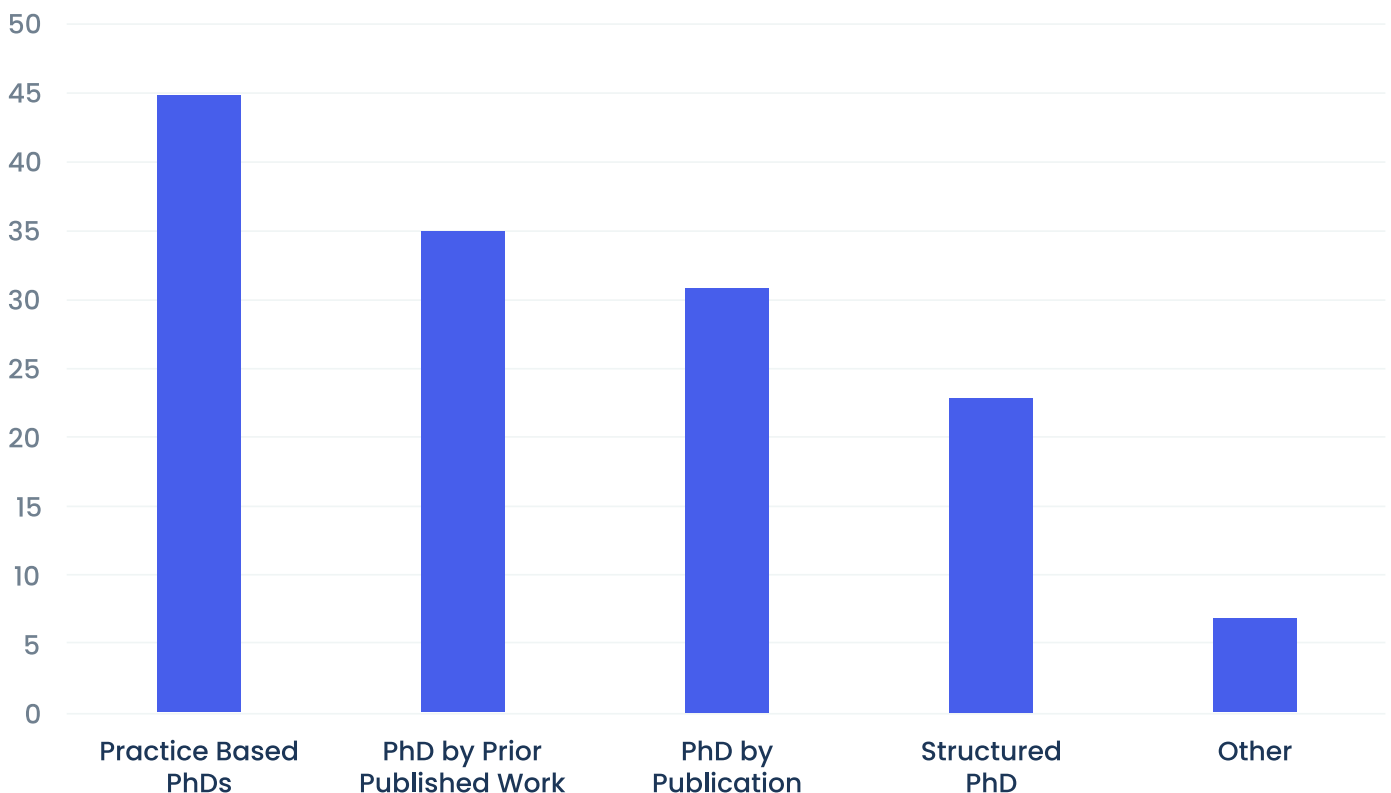


Figure 17 – Doctoral programmes considered to be targeted at and attractive to professionals (n=62)

Taught Professional Doctorates (TPDs)

Following the questions related to research programmes, respondents were invited to provide detail on any Taught Professional Doctorates (TPDs). The number of respondents that offered TPDs was significantly lower than those offering research programmes: only 18% (n=13) with a further 4% (n=3) indicating that they had offered taught programmes previously.

Taught Professional Doctorate Strategies, Recruitment and Future Planning

Question 40 asked those respondents that currently did not offer TPDs if they were intending on developing them over the next five years.

Is your institution intending on developing taught Professional Doctorates over the next 5 years?

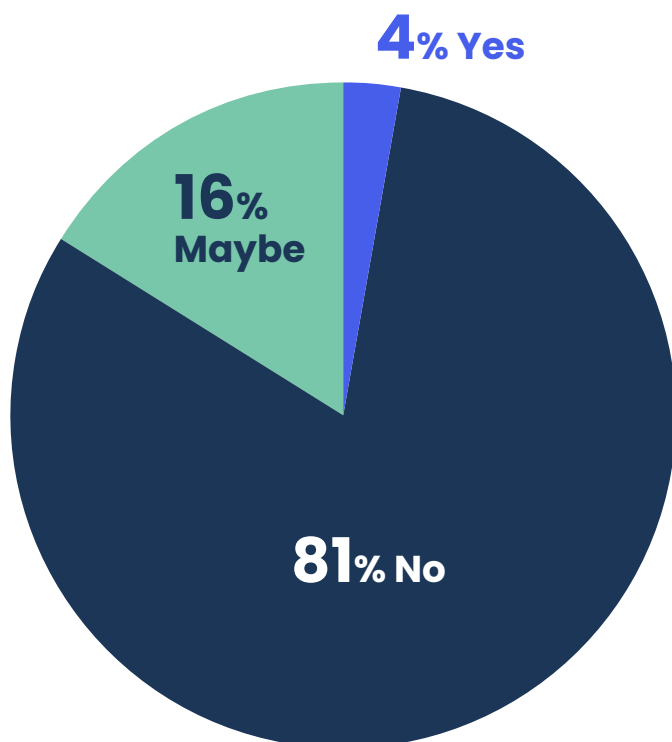


Figure 18 – Is your institution intending on developing Taught Professional Doctorates over the next 5 years? (n=57)

Respondents went on to provide a rationale for their response to this question. The rationale for many of those that were not intending to develop taught programmes over the next few years highlighted that institutional strategy was focussed on developing research programmes and developing the research professional doctorate portfolio.

Other rationales for not developing taught programmes echoed many of the comments provided in not developing research programmes that related to institutional strategy, being late to the market and not having an identified market for these programmes, as well as capacity and resource within the institution. As one respondent stated:

It is not a priority for the University at the moment amidst many other challenges.

For those institutions that had indicated that developing programmes would or potentially would be developed over the next five years, the reasoning behind this focussed on improving recruitment, addressing the needs of particular professions and enhancing engagement with other sectors. A respondent described this as being to “*creatively and responsively support evolution of doctoral programmes*”.

Of the institutions that were considering developing taught doctorate programmes (n=11) two were pre-92, seven were post-92 and two were Irish Technological Universities.

These respondents were then asked a series of questions relating to the growth of their TPDs and their plans for the future. Question 45 sought to understand how the number of programmes had changed over the last five years.

Following on from this, these respondents were asked to indicate the overall trend in enrolments on taught programmes in the same period.

Over the last 5 years have the number of Taught Professional Doctorates Programmes increased, decreased or stayed the same?

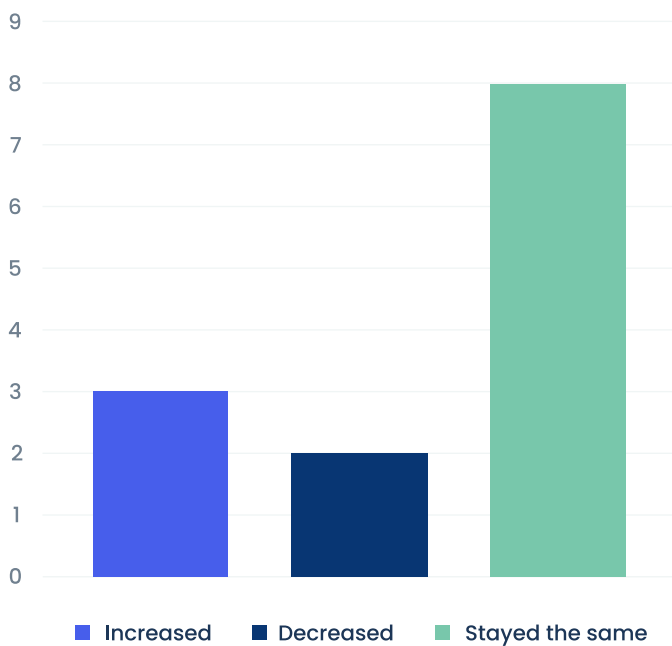


Figure 19 – Over the last 5 years have the number of Taught Professional Doctorates Programmes increased, decreased or stayed the same? (n=13)

Over the last 5 years have the number of enrolments on Taught Professional Doctorate Programmes increased, decreased or stayed the same?

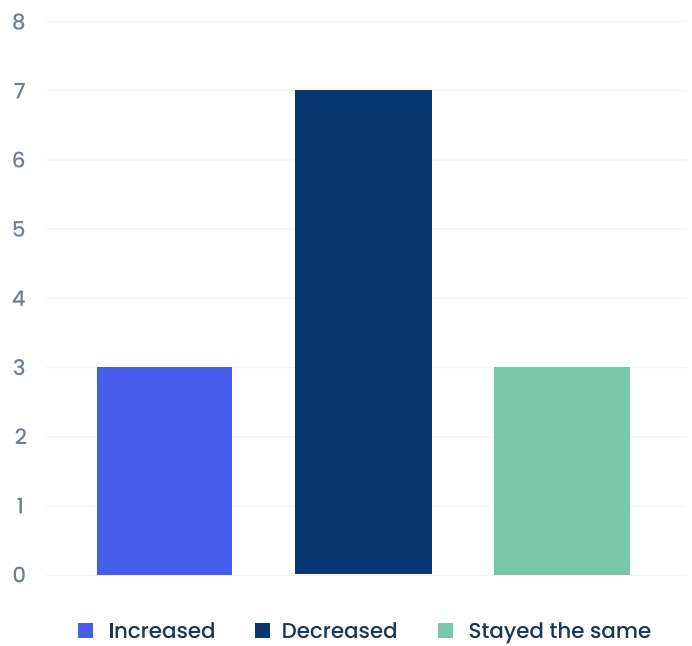


Figure 20 – Over the last 5 years have the number of enrolments on Taught Professional Doctorate Programmes increased, decreased or stayed the same? (n=13)

To follow up on this, when asked if taught programmes were meeting recruitment targets as intended when the programmes were designed, only 38% (n=5) indicated that they were. Respondents were then asked if their institution was planning on closing any taught programmes and what the rationale for this was, if so. 31% (n=4) indicated that they were, the rationales are provided in Figure 21 below.

Rationale for considering closing Taught Professional Doctorate Programmes

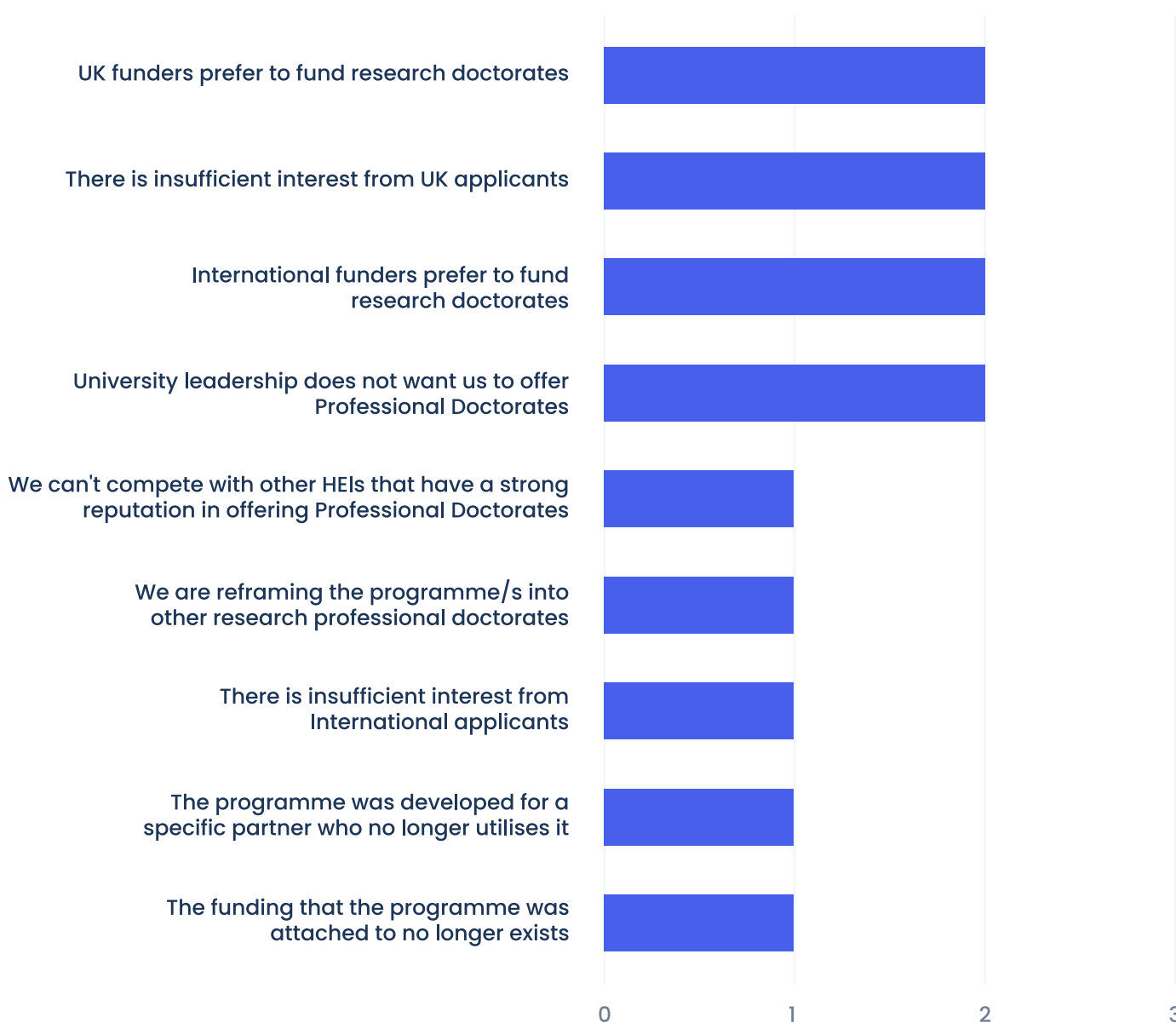


Figure 21 – Rationale for considering closing Taught Professional Doctorate Programmes (n=4)

Of these four responding institutions, only one indicated that alternative doctoral level programmes would be developed to replace those that were closed. Despite four institutions reporting that they were considering closing programmes, six institutions (46%) indicated at Question 53 that they were intending to increase the number of TPDs. Building on the questions relating to strategy and plans around TPD provision, Question 54 went on to consider influences upon that strategy and respondents were asked to rank by level of importance the influences in institutional strategy, and where relevant, the influences in increasing provision.

Responses to this question (n=12) indicated that the biggest influences in strategy were related to increasing in student numbers and fee income, with engagement with collaborative partners, business, industry and third sector, along with improving access to doctoral education through widening participation also being a key consideration.

Ranked in level of importance, influences on institutional strategy on offering and where relevant, increasing the provision of Taught Professional Doctorates

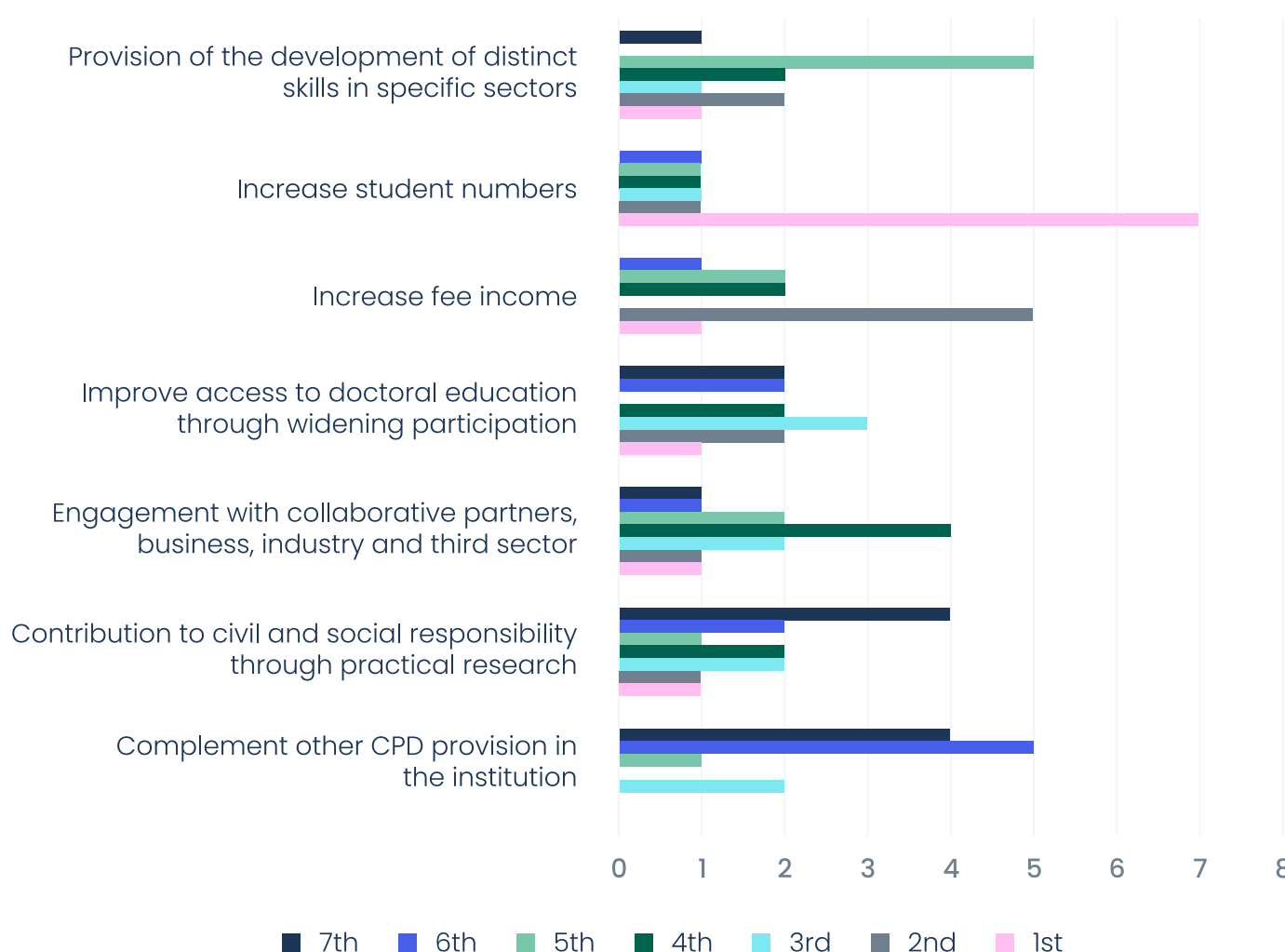


Figure 22 – Ranked in level of importance, influences on institutional strategy on offering and where relevant, increasing the provision of Taught Professional Doctorates (n=12)

Structure and Organisation of Taught Professional Doctorates

The latter section of the survey in relation to TPDs focused on the matriculation, structure and organisation of programmes within institutions.

Entry requirements would typically require a bachelor's degree at 2:1 along with experience of working in a designated profession. The majority of respondents (83%) also indicated that professional equivalency would be considered as an alternative to academic qualifications for entry requirements.

There was a small majority of 54% (n=7) of respondents that reported that TPDs had their own set of degree regulations as opposed to being included in taught programme regulations.

In terms of assessment and viva practice, 77% reported that policies and practice in relation to assessment and viva were different to that of other doctoral programmes. The differences that were highlighted related to the different weighting of assessment criteria, selection of the examiners and a shorter thesis was also noted.

In the closing set of questions relating to TPDs, respondents were asked to comment on funding sources of their candidates. 77% (n=10) highlighted that the majority of their cohorts were funding themselves in undertaking this type of doctoral study, with 23% (n=3) being funded through an employer or external sponsor. Only two respondents indicated that they had offered any sort of scholarship for TPDs, one of which detailed that this was in the form of a partial fee waiver.

Typical entry requirements for Taught Professional Doctorates

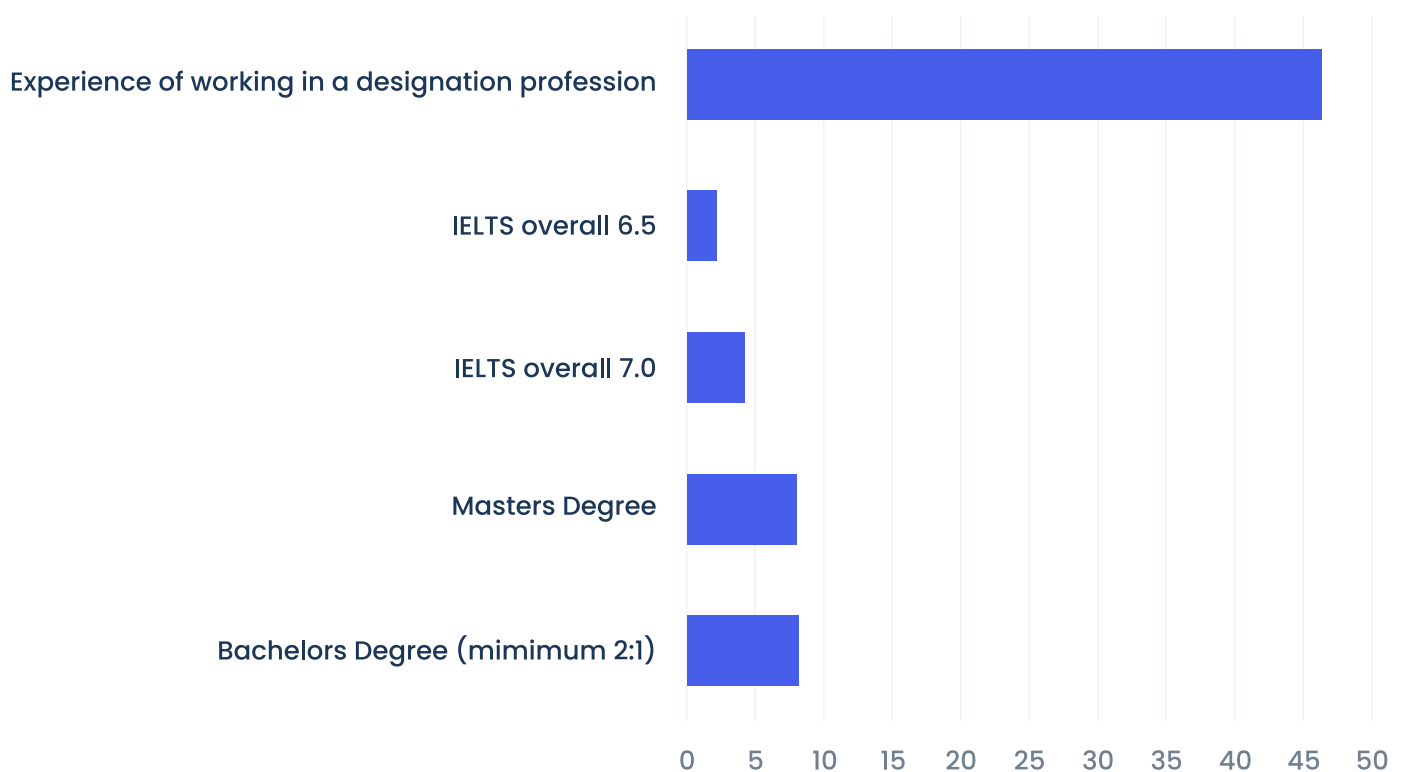


Figure 23 – Typical entry requirements for Taught Professional Doctorates (n=13)

Challenges in recruiting to and developing professional doctorates

At the end of the survey, all respondents were asked to provide their views and based on their experiences, the main challenges in recruiting to and developing professional doctorates (both research and taught).

Those that selected “other” (n=14) were invited to provide further detail as free text comments. Those that chose to leave comments highlighted many of the issues that had been noted in earlier sections of the survey, namely market saturation, the lack of institutional resource and supervisory capacity within the institution to develop and sustain programmes, particularly in what one respondent described as “*in an era of cost-efficiency focus*”.

The main challenges in recruiting to and developing Professional Doctorates

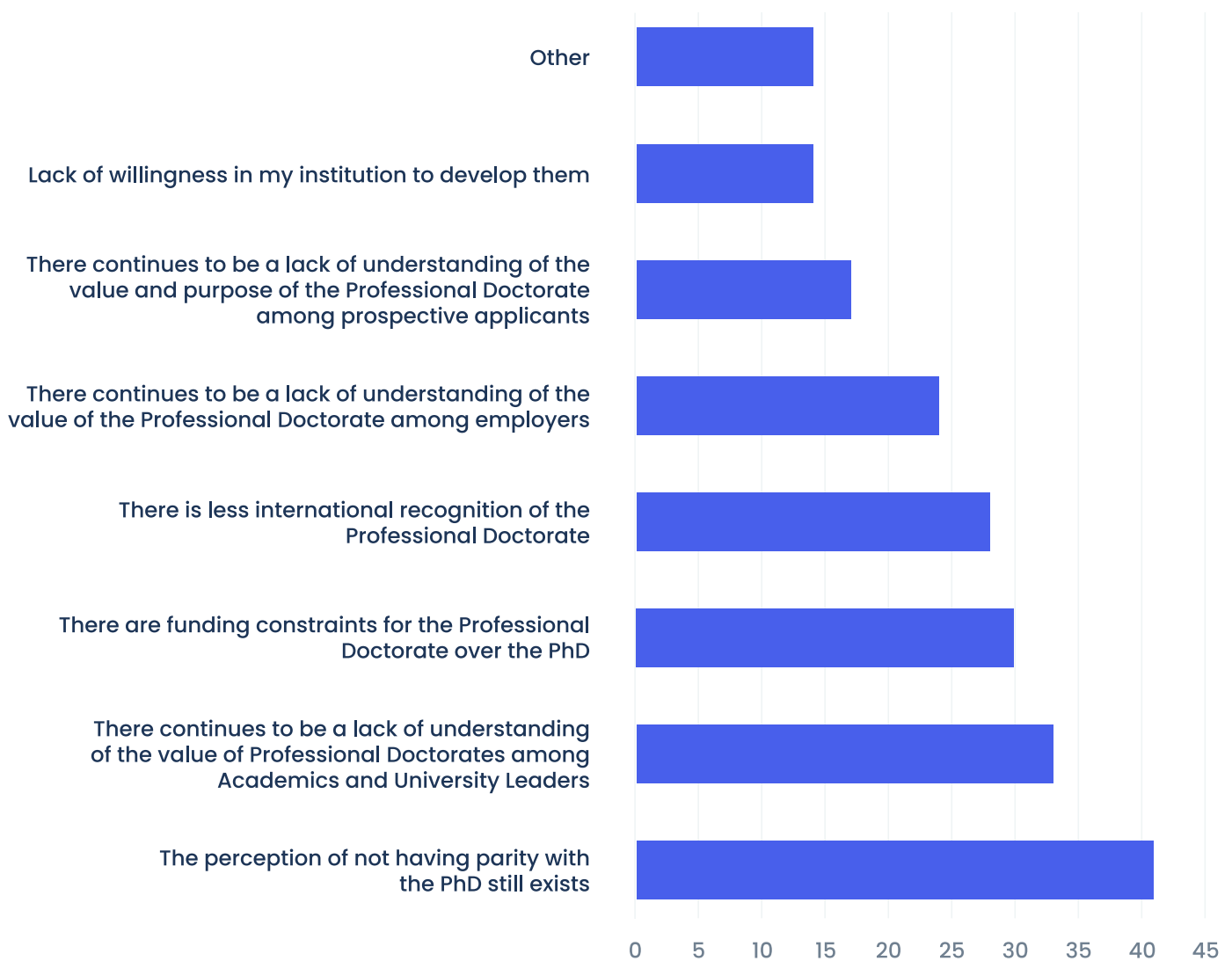


Figure 24 – The main challenges in recruiting to and developing Professional Doctorates (n=68)

The following quotes from respondents provide a sense of the feeling from across the respondents to this question.

The market is saturated and there is huge variance in quality. University leaders have different understanding of the value compared to academics delivering, particularly in terms of what resourcing is required. It is unclear what the actual value is of a prof doc is (not lack of understanding, many differing views) International market dominated by agencies who over-promise and under-deliver.

Post-1992 Institution, offers Research Professional Doctorates

There can sometimes be a lack of sector reward and recognition for the skill base and talent that is required to develop and support the professional doctorate (with a focus on the REF and 'REFable' outputs). Academia needs to be better at supporting portfolio academic / professional careers so that the skills required for the management and delivery of successful prof doc programmes are recognised and developed.

Pre-1992 Institution,
offers Professional Doctorates

Discussion, conclusion and recommendations

The aim of this study was to offer an assessment of the provision of professional doctorates in the UK and Ireland. Professional doctorates were invented to provide “*an innovative approach to enhanced graduate employability, fulfilling societal needs for lifelong education and training while also catalysing increased cooperation between industry and the academy*” (Fell, et al., p.13). The enduring stability of the provision of professional doctorates provides some assurance that they are delivering those aims: the majority of UK HEIs (73%) offer professional doctorates, and a significant minority (41%) of Irish HEIs have professional doctorate programmes is some indication that the ‘experiment’ has been a success.

Nevertheless, this study has uncovered some concerning findings:

- The perception that professional doctorates lack parity of esteem with the PhD remains a key challenge.
- The perceived lack of support for professional doctorates among senior leadership is a barrier to the development of professional doctorates.
- Funding opportunities for professional doctorates are perceived to be limited, and were explicitly linked to the lack of parity with the PhD.
- The dominant strategic driver for the development of professional doctorate programmes is to increase PGR numbers. But a significant minority (26%, n=14, figure 5) said that enrolments had decreased over the last five years, which may lead to programme closures.

Taken together, the results seemed to indicate a lack of strategic coherence in the development of professional doctorates, an undervaluing of the distinctiveness of professional doctorate programmes, and, in some cases, untapped potential in the use of professional doctorates to leverage cooperation and collaboration with business, industry and third sector organisations. Even in institutions with strong professional doctorate programmes, there remained a concern that senior leadership did not understand the value of professional doctorates. In a strong financial climate benign neglect may be manageable, but in the current financial turbulence in the Higher Education sector, professional doctorates need strong institutional leadership to maintain their distinctive contribution to the UK’s research landscape.

Even in institutions with strong professional doctorate programmes, there remained a concern that senior leadership did not understand the value of professional doctorates.

Defining the professional doctorate

Despite several decades of providing professional doctorates in the UK, respondents indicated that ambiguities remain about what the professional doctorate is, what its value is, whether it has perceived parity with the PhD, and whether it has 'market' value to professionals, and others, who may be more attracted to other types of doctoral programme. Two pieces of evidence stand out in relation to these concerns. The first is that, once again, the lack of understanding of professional doctorates within the institution creates an environment where poor definitions and misunderstandings flourish (see Figure 24: respondents felt that the lack of understanding of the value of professional doctorates among academics and senior leadership was the second largest challenge in recruiting and developing professional doctorates).

The difficulty of defining professional doctorates is also that they present a moving target. Perhaps the most telling evidence for this came from the respondent who said that they had switched to a Structured PhD which was a professional doctorate in "*all but name*".

Professional doctorates do appear to resist definition because of an ongoing tension between equivalence and distinctiveness. On the one hand, they are clearly designed and assessed as doctoral qualifications equivalent to PhDs and other doctoral programmes. On the other hand, they are intended to serve quite different kinds of doctoral populations, namely those which may have distinctive needs and applications for research skills that the PhD has not – historically at least – delivered. Navigating equivalence while being clear-headed about the value of the different offerings has proved, and continues to prove, highly complex.

To add to this complexity, market pressures involved in attracting external funding create additional ambiguity: professional doctorates may be appealing to applied research industries and sectors, but if they are automatically excluded from some Research Council funding, then that is clearly a significant market driver which works against the sustainability of professional doctorates. The question is: is that a market driver which is pushing doctoral provision towards greater homogenisation in the form and structure of doctoral programmes, or in the marketing and communication of them? The respondent who indicated that their new structured PhD is just a professional doctorate in "*all but name*" perhaps suggests one answer.

An additional confounding factor is that it is typically post-92 institutions who are likely to be those institutions for whom professional doctorates account for 20% or more of their doctoral populations. In a highly marketised sector, in which the market is highly responsive to perceived research reputation, the comparative invisibility of professional doctorate populations in research intensive institutions may have exacerbated the disparity of esteem between professional doctorates and PhDs, perhaps with the exception only of the EngD.

The lack of understanding of professional doctorates within the institution creates an environment where poor definitions and misunderstandings flourish.

A final problem in defining the professional doctorate is that the PhD itself has evolved. The lack of academic jobs, and the perceived oversupply of PhD graduates in servicing and replenishing the academic sector has incentivised innovations in PhD programmes to help diversify the appeal of PhD graduates to a wider employment market. The most visible of these developments has perhaps been the introduction of three-month work placements for UKRI-funded PhD researchers. The laudable intention behind this kind of initiative is to assist doctoral graduates to understand how their research skills might be deployed in professional contexts outside academia. But that aim is one of the defining features of the professional doctorate. So as the PhD encroaches into developing industry-ready research skills, it is thereby creating additional confusion about the position, purpose and place of the professional doctorate.

Position, purpose and place

The results illustrate a professional doctorate landscape that is both evolving and uneven, one that has been shaped by shifting institutional and funding priorities as well as broader sector drivers and trends nationally and internationally, and perceptions of value across the sector. From the survey results, it is evident that UK and Irish HEIs predominantly consider professional doctorates to be research degrees rather than taught degrees (Figure 1). This is not quite the “*abandonment*” of the term ‘Taught Doctorate’ that was recommended in the UKCGE’s 2011 report (Fell, et al., p.15), but it is at least a sign that in practice, professional doctorates are understood to be research degrees. Scrutiny of Taught Doctorate enrolments through the UK HEIDI Plus platform hosted through JISC also provides data on the downward trend.

Despite this, or perhaps because of some lingering confusion between ‘taught’ and ‘research’ doctoral qualifications, the professional doctorate is still competing to be seen as equal and having parity with the PhD. Respondents highlighted the persistence of academic snobbery and the sense that, despite their research intensity and professional relevance, professional doctorates are still not universally regarded as equivalent in status or standing. This tension plays a significant role in influencing how institutions design, resource and promote these programmes, as well as how candidates, funders and employers perceive their value.

Since the 2011 UKCGE report (*ibid*), the sector market for Research Professional Doctorates (RPDs) appears to have reached a more mature and differentiated phase. The number of programmes offered has plateaued and institutions are finding themselves in a position of having to make choices around the sustainability of their RPD provision as part of wider considerations in a contracting HE sector. These choices sit alongside decisions on continuation of specific undergraduate courses and then significant job losses in the UK, therefore reducing the supervisory capacity.

The results have indicated that growth has been concentrated in institutions with established portfolios (Figure 3), particularly within universities that have historically invested in professional doctorate provision and built strong ecosystems around them. These institutions have reported healthy recruitment, sustained demand, and in some cases significant expansion, with one respondent noting that Research Professional Doctorate candidates comprised half of their entire PGR population (acknowledging their PGR population was quite small). For these providers, Research Professional Doctorates remain market responsive, professionally aligned and strategically important.

However, this success is not universal, particularly among post-92 institutions. Several respondents, who did not have established portfolios, described declining or static enrolments, with recruitment targets increasingly difficult to meet (Figures 5 and 6). Some have begun closing programmes or considering doing so, citing market saturation, increased competition and a perception that they cannot compete with institutions offering more established alternatives. In contrast, pre-92 universities and Irish Universities reported rising enrolment figures on their current Research Professional Doctorate programmes without needing to expand their provision, suggesting that their growth strategies rely more heavily on traditional PhD pathways. This divergence underscores the unevenness of the market and the extent to which institutional identity and mission shape the sustainability of professional doctorates.

The future of funding

Funding emerged as a central factor influencing both provision and participation. The perceived disparities between funding opportunities for PhDs compared to professional doctorates should be a cause for concern for governments across the UK and Ireland. Both Governments have ambitions to grow research and innovation. Professional doctorates offer a critical pathway to the development of a highly skilled, research-informed workforce. It is difficult to see how these ambitious research and development goals can be achieved without more flexible access to funding which embraces multiple routes into skills development in the workforce.

Respondents noted that national and international funders continue to prioritise PhD pathways (Figure 8). This means that professional doctorates must continue to rely on employer sponsorship or self-funded candidates. This lack of investment in professional doctorates by funding bodies may therefore limit opportunities for mid-career professionals to access doctoral level research, with the consequent limitations that imposes on the UK economy's ability to innovate through research and development.

The limited funding opportunities also raise important equity considerations. Professional doctorates have historically offered a route into doctoral study for those who might not otherwise access it, and the results in this study bear that out. Reduced funding opportunities therefore risks narrowing participation at precisely the moment when the sector seeks to broaden it. While the respondents to the survey did indicate that employers continue to invest in the professional doctorate as a means to develop their staff, the sector is clearly vulnerable to the uncertain international economic and geopolitical environment without other sources of funding. Neither can self-funding doctoral candidates be relied upon to continue to invest in their own development when increases in the cost of living and inflationary pressures persist.

The perceived disparities between funding opportunities for PhDs compared to professional doctorates should be a cause for concern for governments across the UK and Ireland.

Recent policy developments, highlighted earlier in the report, reinforce these tensions: the Post-16 education and skills white paper (2025) and The Impact 2030: Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy (2022) report emphasise a rebalancing of skills funding towards priority sectors and technical pathways, with a strong focus on employer aligned provision and higher-level technical qualifications rather than widening access to advanced academic routes. At the same time, Access and Participation Plans (APPs) continue to require providers to demonstrate progress in addressing inequalities in access, success and progression, including at postgraduate level. This highlights a potential misalignment between national funding priorities and institutional commitments to widening participation. One of the interesting findings has been the development by some institutions of alternative doctorate routes specifically to attract professional learners, such as structured PhDs and thesis-by-alternate format, which are not marketed as professional doctorates. However, more research would be needed to discern whether these models genuinely meet the needs of working practitioners or whether they are simply a reflection of funder preferences.

Professional doctorates have historically offered a route into doctoral study for those who might not otherwise access it, and the results in this study bear that out.

Professional doctorates or doctorates for professionals: does it matter?

There is perhaps an emerging sense of a less clear distinction between a PhD and a professional doctorate. Historically, the PhD has been seen as the apprenticeship to academia, while the professional doctorate has been aimed at mid and senior career professionals working across a broad range of sectors. Calls to rethink and reimagine doctoral training to reposition the PhD as being an attractive doctoral programme for professionals is in response to scrutiny of its fitness for purpose and relevance in an environment of fewer academic roles and the need to prepare doctoral graduates for careers outside of academia (van Sebille, 2026; Matsoukas, 2025; Relajo-Howell, 2023).

The results have highlighted that for some institutions, the nomenclature of their doctoral programmes matters, while for others, this is less so. What is observed is the broadening of doctoral programmes to attract professionals: the ability to provide choice across institutions is a key focus and priority. These choices of programme include examples such as the PhD by Publication, Alternative Thesis models, Practice Based PhDs and the Structured PhD.

As Young (2025) observes:

The future of doctoral education is increasingly practice oriented, interdisciplinary and international with a great variety of doctorates. Many new doctoral models are emerging, from industrial PhDs to practice based PhDs and hybrid pathways, slowly breaking down the idea that the traditional PhD is the only route to a doctorate.

The results indicated an increase in popularity of the structured PhD from UK participants being a programme aimed at professionals while also being a programme to replace professional doctorates. This increase follows a steady growth of such programmes across the UK, Ireland and Europe since mid-2000s. Lunt (2006) highlighted that the development of Structured PhDs was to meet new and emerging demands in doctoral education following criticisms of it referred to as the traditional PhD, describing them as programmes that “*can blur distinctions between the PhD and the Professional Doctorate*”.

The roots of the Structured PhD in Ireland can be found in the OECD Review of 2003/2004 and the subsequent Irish Universities Association Reform of the 3rd Level, which aimed to secure a competitive advantage in the 21st century for doctoral education in Ireland (Education Matters, 2024). The IUA statement on Structured PhDs (2009) and subsequent National Framework for Doctoral Education (2015) acted to solidify the long-term sustainability and commitment to a structured approach to doctoral education, from which followed a now-established programme offer in Irish institutions. The Structured PhD format gaining popularity and traction in the UK is an area of exploration for many UK Universities.

The responses have made it clear, however, that the professional doctorate is one of several pathways that can provide a route to doctoral study and one that is complementary to, not in competition with, other opportunities for professionals.

Nevertheless, as institutions diversify their doctoral programmes this may be a contributing factor in the difficulty of articulating the strategic value of professional doctorate programmes. This is then coupled with the sense of snobbery around the professional doctorate that some respondents indicated was felt within their institutions and wasn't isolated to the perception of funders: the professional doctorate was sometimes seen as subpar or second class to the PhD. Matsoukas (2025) highlighted this as an intentional marginalisation of alternative doctorates and called for an elevation in status of the professional doctorate, stating:

The PhD is treated as the gold standard, the ‘true’ doctorate, while all others sit below it. But this hierarchy is increasingly out of step with the needs of society. If universities continue to cling to the PhD as the sole marker of scholarly legitimacy, they risk entrenching an elitism that is not only outdated but counterproductive.

Given the diversity in doctoral programmes, the sector would arguably benefit from more clearly and confidently articulating the full range of doctoral qualifications, and their purposes, rather than positioning alternatives by contrast with a so-called ‘traditional PhD’. Presenting these routes on their own terms, with transparent articulation of intended outcomes, benefits and career pathways, avoids reinforcing unhelpful hierarchies and enables prospective candidates to make more informed and constructive choices.

Institutional approach, strategy and view of the professional doctorate

Respondents also highlighted that institutional strategy plays a significant role in shaping the trajectory of professional doctorates (Figure 10). Many institutions, across all mission groups, link their doctoral growth ambitions to revenue generation and PGR headcount targets. For post-92 universities and Irish Technological Universities, RPDs continue to support widening participation and the diversification of the doctoral community, aligning with their broader educational missions (Figure 10). Yet even within these institutions, strategic pressures are prompting some to pivot towards the traditional PhD route, which is perceived as more fundable, more competitive or more aligned with institutional aspirations.

Enrolment patterns reflect the complex interplay of strategy, funding and market positioning. While it is not possible to draw definitive sector-wide conclusions about trends, the mood suggests a divergent landscape. Institutions with strong, well established RPD brands are thriving, while others, particularly those without a clear position or competitive advantage, are experiencing stagnation or decline. The expansion of the early 2000s appears to have levelled off, and some institutions are now exploring alternative doctoral pathways to maintain relevance and attract both funders and prospective candidates. This trend of reducing and closing degree programmes is not isolated to research degrees, and aligns with the sector where many universities have closed courses at undergraduate level in response to the contraction of the sector and to focus on their more popular and income generating courses as the grip of the financial crisis in UK Higher Education tightens.

Despite these challenges, the overall picture is far from pessimistic. Research Professional Doctorates within the UK and Ireland remain highly successful in many contexts, offering distinctive value to both institutions and learners. They continue to meet genuine demand, particularly in sectors where professional practice and research are deeply intertwined. The evidence suggests not a decline, but a recalibration; it could be said that professional doctorates are moving into a phase of selective, strategic growth, shaped by institutional strengths, market positioning and evolving conceptions of what doctoral education should achieve. This conclusion echoes the words of Ian Chapman (UKRI, 2025a) during the Innovation for Growth Summit 2025:

In my view, UKRI has historically tried to do too much. We must be clear-eyed about where we can lead on the global stage and then back those areas concertededly. That means making choices, prioritising with intent, and stopping things when we no longer think we have a right to win significant market-share in that sector.

What next for the professional doctorate: future trends?

As the sector continues to diversify its doctoral offerings, professional doctorates are likely to remain an important, if more targeted, component of the UK and Ireland's doctoral landscape. The challenge ahead lies in ensuring that these programmes continue to offer meaningful, research-rich pathways for professionals while navigating the structural pressures that shape doctoral education more broadly.

Their future is also dependent on UK and Irish Government policy, strategy and commitment to lifelong learning, where the incorporation of diverse forms of doctoral education to achieve economic growth is key, along with a maintained commitment to it. Funding is critical to this, and major funders both in the UK and Ireland play a role in supporting, enhancing and elevating alternative doctoral pathways. This should not be restricted to one type of doctorate over another, but across the breadth of doctoral programmes that are equally worthy of access to funding.

The UK autumn budget of 2025 (HM Treasury, 2025) saw the UKRI announcement of significant investment into Venture Doctorates (UK Solar Physics, 2026; Cambridge Centre for Data-Driven Discovery, n.d.; UKRI, n.d.), and provides optimism that funding may be realised. Sitting alongside other new doctoral investments such as the Industrial Doctoral Landscape Awards (UKRI, 2025b), Venture Doctorates are part of a broader shift in the funding of doctorates and provide scope for innovation in doctoral programmes and funding, for which the professional doctorate and other alternative doctorates may form part.

The ability of institutions to continue to offer professional doctorates during ongoing financial challenges will also play a role into future trends of enrolments of programme offer. Respondents articulated challenges with supervisory capacity and the resources required in order to meaningfully offer and deliver professional doctorate programmes. The cumulative effect might see the number of HEIs offering programmes reduce with alternative doctoral pathways being offered in their place, while strength and critical mass continue to grow in this reduced number of institutions that have demonstrated throughout this study that their PGR population sizes across these programmes continues to thrive and expand.

In a contemporary policy context where employability, applied research capability and societal impact remain central to national skills agendas, it is increasingly plausible to argue that the professional doctorate is not an alternative or lesser pathway, but for many candidates a doctoral route particularly well suited to professional development in 2026 and beyond.

The challenge ahead lies in ensuring that these programmes continue to offer meaningful, research-rich pathways for professionals while navigating the structural pressures that shape doctoral education more broadly.

Further work and research

The survey responses in this study are dependent on self-reported data. The limitations of self-reported data are acknowledged, and the analysis and conclusions in this report should be understood as having been drawn from responses of 73 institutions. Nevertheless, these responses were supplemented by desk-based research which indicated that there are many more institutions offering professional doctorates. While the variety of respondents to the survey did present a fair representation of the sector, conclusions and discussions concerning institutional strategies are representative only of those that responded to the survey and not of the whole sector.

The study has provided a valuable insight into the position of professional doctorates in the UK and Ireland as well as providing understanding of current enrolments and intentions of continued provision among institutions. It is clear that the professional doctorate continues to have a place and purpose in doctoral provision and features strongly as an established programme. Future work and research to build on the argument of its value should be undertaken with employers and sponsors of professional doctorate candidates and graduates, as well as candidates and graduates themselves, to better understand their current value and impact.

Other areas for further research include:

- Analysis of the investment portfolio of the range of UK and Irish funders of doctoral research to assess their commitment to professional doctorates.
- Data analysis through HESA and HEA, or other sources, on the exact proportion of professional doctoral candidates in the UK doctoral population.
- Investigation of enrolment trends in professional doctorates by discipline.
- A further exploration of the value and provision of Taught Professional Doctorates in particular professional areas and disciplines.
- Evidence gathering on the wider impact and societal value of professional doctorates.
- An investigation on how different models of professional doctorate programmes generate impact for individuals, organisations, professions and communities.



It is clear that the professional doctorate continues to have a place and purpose in doctoral provision and features strongly as an established programme.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Survey Questions

Professional Doctorates in the UK and Ireland

The aim of this survey is to gather information to inform a UKCGE report on the provision, structures and growth of Professional Doctorates across the UK and Ireland. The study is being conducted by Carolyn Wynne from Coventry University, Jennie Eldridge from University Alliance Doctoral Training Alliance and Dr. Owen Gower from the UK Council for Graduate Education.

The survey is being disseminated to Deans and Directors of Graduate Schools/Doctoral Colleges or equivalent in the UK and Ireland. Your participation in the survey is entirely voluntary. If you are happy to take part, please answer the following questions relating to Professional Doctorate provision, enrolments and institutional strategy. Your answers will help us to establish the position and popularity of Professional Doctorate provision in the UK and Irish Universities.

Your answers will be treated confidentially and the information you provide will be kept anonymous in any research outputs/publications. Where we have asked for your institution, this is for the purpose of data analysis only in identifying trends across different types and sizes of institutions. Individual responses will not be attributed to a specific institution.

You will be able to return to partially completed responses by returning to the survey link, however incomplete responses will be automatically deleted once the survey closes on 31st March 2025. You are able to withdraw your data and participation without giving a reason within 2 weeks of the survey closing date.

Your data will be held securely on Coventry University's OneDrive File System. All data will be deleted by 31st March 2028. The research was granted ethical approval by Coventry University's Research Ethics Committee under reference number P181685. The survey should take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

I have read and understood the information above?

- Yes

I understand that it is optional to provide my name and institution at the end of the survey and that in doing so, my answers will no longer be anonymised but will be treated confidentially and I can withdraw my responses of this survey from the research. I understand that if I don't provide my name and institution, my answers will be fully anonymised and it will not be possible to withdraw them from the research once I have completed the survey.

- Yes

I agree to take part in this survey

- Yes

This survey will ask you about your institution's provision of Research Professional Doctorates (first section) and Taught Professional Doctorates (second section).

Section One: Research Professional Doctorates

For the purpose of this survey, we define Research Professional Doctorates as those Programmes that are returned to HESA/HEA as a Research Degree and contribute to your institutions REFable completions in the UK. In this next section we will ask you a number of questions about Research Professional Doctorates. There will be separate section on Taught Professional Doctorates further on in the survey.

Q1 Does your institution offer Research Professional Doctorates?

- Yes
- No

Display this question: If Q1 = No

Q2 Has your institution previously offered Research Professional Doctorates?

- Yes
- No

Display this question: If Q1 = No

Q3 Is your institution intending on developing Research Professional Doctorates over the next 5 years?

- Yes
- Maybe
- No

Display this question: If Q1 = No

Q4 Please indicate the rationale for this.

Start of Block: Research Professional Doctorates

Display this question: If Q1 = Yes

Q5 Please indicate what Research Professional Doctorates are offered at your institution.

Display this question: If Q1 = Yes

Q6 Over the last 5 years the number of Research Professional Doctorate Programmes in your institution have:

- Increased
- Decreased
- Stayed the same

Display this question: If Q1 = Yes

Q7 Over the last 5 years the number of enrolments on your Research Professional Doctorate Programmes have:

- Increased
- Decreased
- Stayed the same

Display this question: If Q1 = Yes

Q8 Are all of your Research Professional Doctorates meeting recruitment targets as intended when the programmes were designed?

- Yes
- No

Display this question: If Q1 = Yes

Q9 How are your Research Professional Doctorates offered?

- Full time only
- Part time only
- Both full and part time on all programmes
- Full and part time on select programmes

Display this question: If Q1 = Yes

Q10 Is your institution considering closing any of your Research Professional Doctorate programmes?

- Yes
- No

Start of Block: Consideration of closing Research Professional Doctorate Programmes

Display this question: If Q10 = Y

Q11 We would be interested in understanding the reasons for this (please select all that apply).

- The funding that the programme was attached to no longer exist
- The programme was developed for a specific partner who no longer utilises it
- There is insufficient interest from UK applicants
- There is insufficient interest from International applicants
- University leadership does not want us to offer Professional Doctorates
- We can't compete with other HEIs that have a strong reputation in offering Professional Doctorates
- UK funders prefer to fund PhDs
- International funders prefer to fund PhDs
- We are reframing the programme/s into other doctoral programmes

Other

Display this question: If Q11= Other

Q12 If you selected “other” in the previous question, please use this space to tell us.

Display this question: If Q10 = Yes

Q13 Which programmes are you considering closing?

Display this question: If Q10 = Yes

Q14 Will your institution be developing other doctoral programmes to replace them?

- Yes
- Maybe
- No

Display this question: If Q14 = Yes

Q15 If you responded “yes” to the previous question, we would be interested to learn more about these. Please use the space below to provide more detail.

Start of Block: Other doctoral programmes

Q16 Has your institution replaced any Research Professional Doctorates with other doctoral level programmes?

- Yes
- No

Display this question: If Q16 = Yes

Q17 If you responded “yes” we would be interested in what was replaced, by what and why.

Start of Block: Institutional Strategy around Research Professional Doctorates

Display this question: If Q1 = Yes

Q18 Is your institution planning to increase the number of Research Professional Doctorate Programmes?

- Yes
- No

Display this question: If Q18 = No

Q19 If “no” please indicate why this is.

Display this question: If Q1 = Yes

Q20 Please rank in level of importance, what influences your institution’s strategy around offering and where relevant, increasing the provision of Research Professional Doctorates (1 being the greatest influence, 7 being the least influence).

- ↕ Increase PGR fee income
- ↕ Increase PGR numbers
- ↕ Improve access to doctoral education through widening participation

- ↕ Engagement with collaborative partners, business, industry and third sector
- ↕ Provision of the development of distinct skills in specific sectors
- ↕ Complement other CPD provision in the institution
- ↕ Contribution to civil and social responsibility through practical research

Display this question: If Q1 = Yes

Q21 If there are other influences please use the space below to indicate what they are and how they would be ranked.

Start of Block: Research Professional Doctorate Community

Display this question: If Q1 = Yes

Q22 Please indicate the primary market for your Research Professional Doctorate programmes.

- Home
- International
- Members of staff

Display this question: If Q1 = Yes

Q23 What is the proportion of Research Professional Doctorate candidates against your total PGR community?

Display this question: If Q1 = Yes

Q24 Is there improved representation from under-represented groups among your Professional Doctorate cohorts?

- Yes
- No
- It's about the same

Display this question:

If Q1 = Yes

And Q24 = Yes

Q25 If “yes”, please indicate how representation is improved.

- Age
- Gender
- Disability
- Ethnicity
- Socio Economic Group
- Religion
- Other under-represented group

Start of Block: Administration of Research Professional Doctorates

Display this question: If Q1 = Yes

Q26 Do your Research Professional Doctorates have separate regulations or are they included in your Research Degree Regulations?

- Separate Regulations
- Included in Research Degree Regulations

Display this question: If Q1 = Yes

Q27 Please indicate what the typical entry requirements would be for your Research Professional Doctorates. (Please select all that apply)

- Bachelor’s degree (minimum 2:1)
- Master’s Degree
- IELTS overall of 7.0
- IELTS overall of 6.5
- Experience of working in a designated profession

Display this question: If Q1 = Yes

Q28 Do your Research Professional Doctorates consider Professional Equivalency as an alternative to academic qualifications for entry requirements?

- Yes
- No

Display this question: If Q1 = Yes

Q29 Are your Research Professional Doctorate Programmes developed from a standard institutional framework?

- Yes
- No

Display this question: If Q1 = Yes

Q30 Do your Research Professional Doctorates have different practices or policies in relation to assessment and viva?

- Yes
- No

*Display this question: If Q1 = Yes
And Q30 = Yes*

Q31 If “yes”, we would be interested to know how they are different.

Display this question: If Q1 = Yes

Q32 How do submission and completion rates on your Research Professional Doctorate programmes differ to other doctoral programmes?

- Rates are better
- Rates are worse
- Rates are about the same

Start of Block: Funding of Professional Doctorates

Display this question: If Q1 = Yes

Q33 How are Research Professional Doctorate candidates mainly funded in your institution?

- Self-funded
- Employer/sponsor funded
- Research Council

Display this question: If Q1 = Yes

Q34 Has your institution offered any scholarships for Research Professional Doctorates?

- Yes
- No

*Display this question: If Q1 = Yes
And Q34 = Yes*

Q35 If you responded “yes”, please indicate what has been offered and on what programmes.

Start of Block: Other types of doctorates

Q36 Please indicate if your institution considers any of the following types of doctoral programme to be targeted at and attractive to Professionals?

- Structured PhD
- PhD by prior published work
- Practice based PhDs
- PhD by Publication
- Other

Q37 If you selected “other” please specify

Start of Block: Section Two: Taught Professional Doctorates

For the purpose of the survey, we define Taught Professional Doctorates as those Programmes that are not returned to HESA/HEA as a Research Degree and do not contribute to your institution's REFable completions in the UK.

Q38 Does your institution offer Taught Professional Doctorates?

- Yes
- No

Start of Block: Previous offer of Taught Professional Doctorate Programmes

Display this question: If Q38 = No

Q39 Has your institution previously offered Taught Professional Doctorates?

- Yes
- No

Display this question: If Q38 = No

Q40 Is your institution intending on developing Taught Professional Doctorates over the next 5 years?

- Yes
- Maybe
- No

Display this question: If Q38 = No

Q41 Please indicate the rationale for this.

Start of Block: Taught Professional Doctorates

Display this question: If Q38 = Yes

Q42 Please indicate what Taught Professional Doctorates are offered at your institution.

Display this question: If Q38 = Yes

Q43 Over the last 5 years have the number of Taught Professional Doctorate Programmes:

- Increased
- Decreased
- Stayed the same

Display this question: If Q38 = Yes

Q44 Over the last 5 years have the number of enrolments on Taught Professional Doctorate Programmes:

- Increased
- Decreased
- Stayed the same

Display this question: If Q38 = Yes

Q45 Are all of your Taught Professional Doctorates meeting recruitment targets as intended when the programmes were designed?

- Yes
- No

Display this question: If Q38 = Yes

Q46 How are your Taught Professional Doctorates offered?

- Full time only

- Part time only
- Both full and part time on all programmes
- Full and part time on select programmes

Display this question: If Q38 = Yes

Q47 Is your institution considering closing any of your Taught Professional Doctorate programmes?

- Yes
- No

Start of Block: Consideration of closing Taught Professional Doctorates

Display this question: If Q47 = Yes

Q48 We would be interested in understanding the reasons for this (please select all that apply).

- The funding that the programme was attached to no longer exist
- The programme was developed for a specific partner who no longer utilises it
- There is insufficient interest from UK applicants
- There is insufficient interest from International applicants
- University leadership does not want us to offer Professional Doctorates
- We can't compete with other HEIs that have a strong reputation in offering Professional Doctorates
- UK funders prefer to fund research doctorates
- International funders prefer to fund research doctorates
- We are reframing the programme/s into other research professional doctorates
- Other

Display this question: If Q48 = Other

Q49 If you selected "other" in the previous question, please use this space to tell us.

Display this question: If Q47 = Yes

Q50 Which programmes are you considering closing?

Display this question: If Q47 = Yes

Q51 Will your institution be developing other doctoral programmes to replace them?

- Yes
- Maybe
- No

Display this question: If Q51 = Yes

Q52 If you responded “yes” to the previous question, we would be interested to learn more about these. Please use the space below to provide more detail.

Start of Block: Institutional Strategy and Taught Professional Doctorates

Display this question: If Q38 = Yes

Q53 Is your institution planning to increase the number of Taught Professional Doctorate Programmes?

- Yes
- No

Display this question: If Q53 = No

Q54 If “no” please indicate why this is.

Display this question: If Q38 = Yes

Q55 Please rank in level of importance, what influences your institution’s strategy around offering and where relevant, increasing the provision of Taught Professional Doctorates (1 being the greatest influence, 7 being the least influence).

- ↕ Increase fee income
- ↕ Increase student numbers
- ↕ Improve access to doctoral education through widening participation
- ↕ Engagement with collaborative partners, business, industry and third sector
- ↕ Provision of the development of distinct skills in specific sectors
- ↕ Complement other CPD provision in the institution
- ↕ Contribution to civil and social responsibility through practical taught degree provision

Display this question: If Q38 = Yes

Q56 If there are other influences please use the space below to indicate what they are and how they would be ranked.

Start of Block: Administration of Taught Professional Doctorates

Display this question: If Q38 = Yes

Q57 Do your Taught Professional Doctorates have separate regulations or are they included in your Postgraduate Taught Degree Regulations?

- Separate Regulations
- Included in Taught Degree Regulations

Display this question: If Q38 = Yes

Q58 Please indicate what the typical entry requirements would be for your Taught Professional Doctorates. (Please select all that apply)

- Bachelor's degree (minimum 2:1)
- Master's Degree
- IELTS overall of 7.0
- IELTS overall of 6.5
- Experience of working in a designated profession

Display this question: If Q38 = Yes

Q59 Do your Taught Professional Doctorates consider Professional Equivalency as an alternative to academic qualifications for meeting entry requirements?

- Yes
- No

Display this question: If Q38 = Yes

Q60 Are your Taught Professional Doctorate Programmes developed from a standard institutional framework?

- Yes
- No

Display this question: If Q38 = Yes

Q61 Do your Taught Professional Doctorates have different practices or policies in relation to assessment?

- Yes
- No

Display this question: If Q38 = Yes

And Q61 = Yes

Q62 If "yes", we would be interested to know how they are different.

Start of Block: Funding of Taught Professional Doctorates

Display this question: If Q38 = Yes

Q63 How are Taught Professional Doctorate candidates mainly funded in your institution?

- Self-funded
- Employer/sponsor funded
- Other

Display this question: If Q38 = Yes

Q64 Has your institution offered any scholarships for Taught Professional Doctorates?

- Yes
- No

*Display this question: If Q38 = Yes
And Q64 = Yes*

Q65 If “yes”, we would be interested to know how they are different.

Start of Block: Challenges with Professional Doctorates

Q66 From your experience, where do you see the main challenges in recruiting to and developing Professional Doctorates

- Lack of willingness in my institution to develop them
- There is less international recognition of the Professional Doctorate
- The perception of not having parity with the PhD still exists
- There are funding constraints for the Professional Doctorate over the PhD
- There continues to be a lack of understanding of the value of Professional Doctorates among Academics and University Leaders
- There continues to be a lack of understanding of the value of the Professional Doctorate among employers
- There continues to be a lack of understanding of the value and purpose of the Professional Doctorate among prospective applicants
- Other

Q67 If you selected “other” please use this space to provide more detail.

Start of Block: Your institution

Q68 Your name (optional)

Q69 Please indicate your institution (optional)

Q70 What is the size of your PGR community (headcount)?

- <250
- 251-500
- 501-750
- 751-1000
- 1001-1250
- 1251-1500
- 1501-1750
- 1751-2000
- 2001-2500
- 2501-3000
- 3001-3500
- 3501-4000
- >4000

Q71 Which group of HEI does your institution fit into? (please select all that apply)

- Pre 1992
- Post 1992
- University Alliance
- GuildHE
- MillionPlus
- The Cathedrals Group
- Russell Group
- Irish University
- Irish Technological University
- Irish Institute of Technology

- College of Education
 - Other
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