

PRINCIPLES FOR SUPPORTING NEW PhD RESEARCHERS

Co-designed principles for induction programmes to support mental health and wellbeing in doctoral researchers

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This document outlines a set of strategies and key practices that can be used to inform the design of induction programmes in doctoral researchers. In line with calls in the higher education sector for the development of prevention strategies to promote mental health and wellbeing in doctoral researchers, we explored how to best support doctoral researchers in the transition to doctoral study. Funded by the Student Mental Health Research Network ([SMaRteN](#)), we worked with 47 doctoral researchers and 13 higher education stakeholders over a 9-month period to co-design principles to inform the design of doctoral researcher induction programmes. Combining the results of a [systematic review](#) with qualitative data, we partnered with the study participants to develop guidelines that set out five key principles for higher education institutes to consider when developing doctoral induction programmes (Figure 1). Table 1 presents recommended practice and strategies for each principle.

You can read the [full paper online \(Jackman et al., 2021\)](#) and join our community of practice via <https://lcn.ac/phdinduction>.

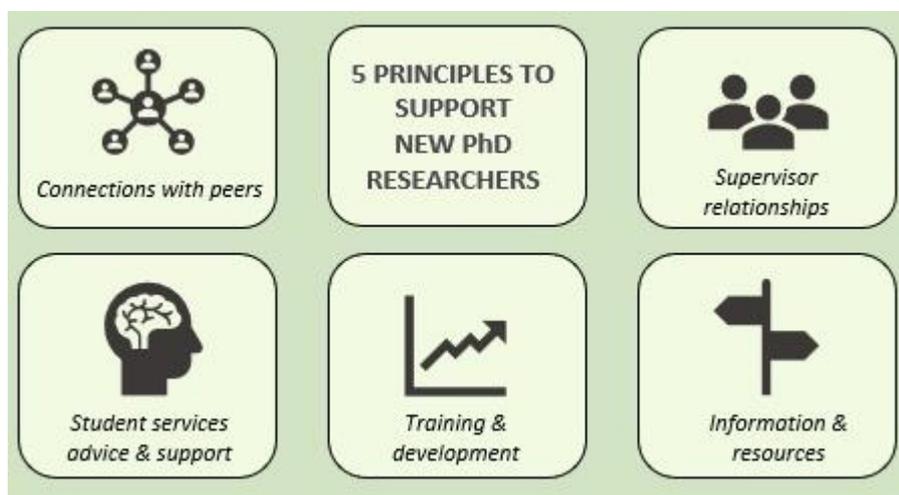


Figure 1: Principles for inductions to support doctoral

Table 1: Principles for inductions to support mental health and wellbeing in doctoral researchers (DRs)

Principle	Aim	Recommended practices or strategies	Description of recommended practices or strategies
Peer connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help doctoral researchers to develop connections, feel part of the doctoral researcher community, and get support from peers 	Pre-arrival socialisation activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule virtual activity/activities that allows current DRs in a department to connect with new DRs before arrival (e.g., can discuss mutual interests, ask questions about accommodation, societies etc.)
		Induction socialisation activity (department/lab level)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule activities that allow new DRs to connect with new and more advanced DRs, and have an opportunity to listen to insights from current DRs about the challenges of doctoral study and advice on overcoming these (e.g., as part of face-to-face or via online sessions) • Encourage / provide platforms for DRs to continue to connect with other new and more advanced DRs after induction (e.g., Microsoft Teams group)
		Regular peer group activities throughout the first year (and beyond)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Run engaging activities (e.g., in-person and virtual activities) that encourage participation (e.g., writing groups, coffee mornings) and are accessible (e.g., for international students, distance learners) • Continue to encourage the use of “spaces” (e.g., virtual, physical) for doctoral researchers to connect
		Peer supporter scheme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pair/group new DRs with more advanced peers (e.g., before arrival, point of contact in the first year) – viewed as especially important in the first six months (e.g., before formal assessment points)
Supervisor relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop high-quality supervisor-researcher relationships that help DRs to obtain the support needed to address challenges 	Develop relationship with supervisor(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect via regular, weekly/fortnightly meetings at the beginning • Supervisors to provide direction and reassurance in the early stages (e.g., reinforce progress made and identify opportunities to create perceptions of progress)
		Embed recommended practice into supervisor training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build training for supervisors into existing supervisory training. Such training could aim to help supervisors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the distinction between mental health/illness and wellbeing, the basics of self-care and academic well-being, their role with regards to mental health and wellbeing • Clarify boundary/expectations regarding mental health and wellbeing concerns • Know how to have conversations around wellbeing and how to respond to concerns • Develop a toolkit for interactions with DRs (e.g., clarify expectations, working style, build a timeline, clarify what supervisors can/cannot offer, managing supervisory change, strength-based supervisory approach, guidance on feedback, importance of reassurance in the opening stages, working with international DRs, equality, diversity, and inclusion in supervision) and create mechanisms to facilitate continual development of supervisory practice (e.g., resources, guides, FAQs forum, updating of training)

Table 1 (continued): Principles for inductions to support mental health and wellbeing in doctoral researchers (DRs)

Principle	Aim	Recommended practices or strategies	Description of recommended practices or strategies
Student services advice and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise awareness of support available, common concerns for doctoral researchers, and strategies to promote mental health and wellbeing 	Introduction to student support activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform DRs of supports available to them (e.g., wellbeing, finance, career advice, English language centre, learning support) and how to access these • Highlight the importance of protecting mental health and wellbeing during the doctoral journey
		Website and resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include a dedicated area on student support/wellbeing site for DRs • Create resources outlining practical tips on time management, self-care (e.g., exercise, taking time out, engaging in hobbies, learning coping strategies, advice on managing work-life balance).
		Regular student support activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work in collaboration with other staff to run activities that are proactive, positive, and practical (e.g., managing work-life balance, working with supervisors, time management) • Harness regular “touch point” opportunities to interact with DRs (e.g., through existing peer support or training initiatives, newsletters) to disseminate reminders of support available
Information & resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get access to relevant information and aid familiarisation with new institution and mode of study 	Pre-arrival and arrival information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide new DRs with a checklist of information needed, details on orientation/induction activities, list of societies, and information on student services (e.g., medical centre registration)
		Easy-to-navigate website with relevant resources and links	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a list of points of contact and a “who’s who?” webpage detailing names of key contacts at the institution and what they should be contacted for • Outline key information on the university (e.g., library, parking, facilities, ethics etc.) • Presents general content regarding processes and regulations, including a timeline (i.e., DR journey map and handbook), links to initiatives for DRs (e.g., societies, training and development opportunities, peer support, career advice), and a section with FAQs
		Long and thin induction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide an overview of processes and regulations – and access to resources that are immediately important - at the start, in a manner that is easy to understand • Distribute information that DRs need to know over time and at relevant points during the journey
Training & development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify areas for development and training opportunities 	Development needs analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess development needs based on assessment aligned with researcher development framework, with input from supervisory team (e.g., discipline-specific knowledge)
		Doctoral development programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create/direct to resources that will help DRs to build relevant skills, knowledge etc. in line with identified development needs, considering both in-person and/or online activities (e.g., research project management, time management, networking, presentations), with group training offering opportunities for peer networking • Offer opportunity for mentoring and highlight career support available

You can **keep up to date** on the project and join our community of practice via: <https://lncn.ac/phdinduction>. The digital object identifier to cite this work is: <https://doi.org/10.1080/21568235.2021.1992293>