

New models of supervision: opportunities and challenges for academics and for doctoral students

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Thank you for inviting me.
Overview

- The presenter and UCL IOE
- What is doctoral education now trying to achieve?
- Global developments in doctoral education and its supervision
- Impact of the pandemic on supervision and supervisory relationships
- What do we know about effective approaches to doctoral supervision – for supervisor and student?
- Some possible ways forward
- Discussion



The presenter and UCL IOE

- Mathematician, teacher and education policy-practice researcher who has worked in several roles in LMIC
- Internal responsibilities for ethics, and for PGRs and their supervision
- IOE as a faculty of UCL



What is doctoral education (now) trying to achieve?


I take 'research' to be any form of systematic enquiry that aims to *contribute* to a body of (professional or academic) knowledge or theory. ***Doctoral students are learning to do research, which entails:***

- Interrogating and to some extent, synthesising what is already known in a field of knowledge or theory, particularly in relation to similar contexts (issues for LMIC). Positioning, and critique, are central to that: scholarship (Boote and Beile 2013).
- Identifying research question(s) whose answers will contribute to that body of knowledge or theory
- Understanding the ontology and epistemology that will be adopted
- Within that paradigm, identifying research methods that might reasonably, if carried out rigorously and with attention to trustworthiness, answer the research question(s), and actively engaging with any possible or ethical issues through the lifetime of the research and beyond...



as well as.....

- Carrying out the research, maintaining an audit trail of the methods used and paying continued attention to emerging potential ethical issues
- Rigorously communicating the research and its findings to appropriate communities (Carter & Kumar 2017, Cotterall 2011)
- Throughout, developing a sensitivity and robust critique of the ethics of research situations (Löfström & Pyhäntö 2020)
- Induction of the student into a research community (Douglas 2020): ‘becoming a researcher’

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- Historically, doctoral education was aimed at **nurturing the future of our fields**. ‘The PhD is expected to serve as a steward of her discipline or profession, dedicated to the integrity of its work in the generation, critique, transformation, transmission, and use of its knowledge’ (Golde & Walker, 2006, p. 3). Even within this, ‘Taken seriously, there is a risk serious engagement with such expectations imposes intense and sometimes unrealistic emotional, physical, intellectual, and time demands given the other pressures of academic work’ (Halse & Gearside, 2005).

More widely....

- Doctoral education is **relevant** to modern societal needs as it develops transferable skills which are of value in a wide range of situations, subjects and jobs (Durette, Fournier, & Lafon, 2016). **Transferable skills**, which are among the key skills need-ed in the 21st century, enhance an individual’s employability and ability to compete in the labour market (Dimitrova, 2016; Fillery-Travis et al., 2017).
- Economic drivers in knowledge economies: the need for researchers capable of engaging in both **knowledge creation and innovation** has become a totemic dimension within policy. In this scenario, [doctoral education has become] a discourse predicated on expansionism...increasing the number of researchers is taken as a pre-requisite in maintaining or creating a competitive advantage’ (Loxley & Kearns, 2018: 828)

But... In recent years, doctoral work globally has become much more complex and doctoral supervision more demanding:

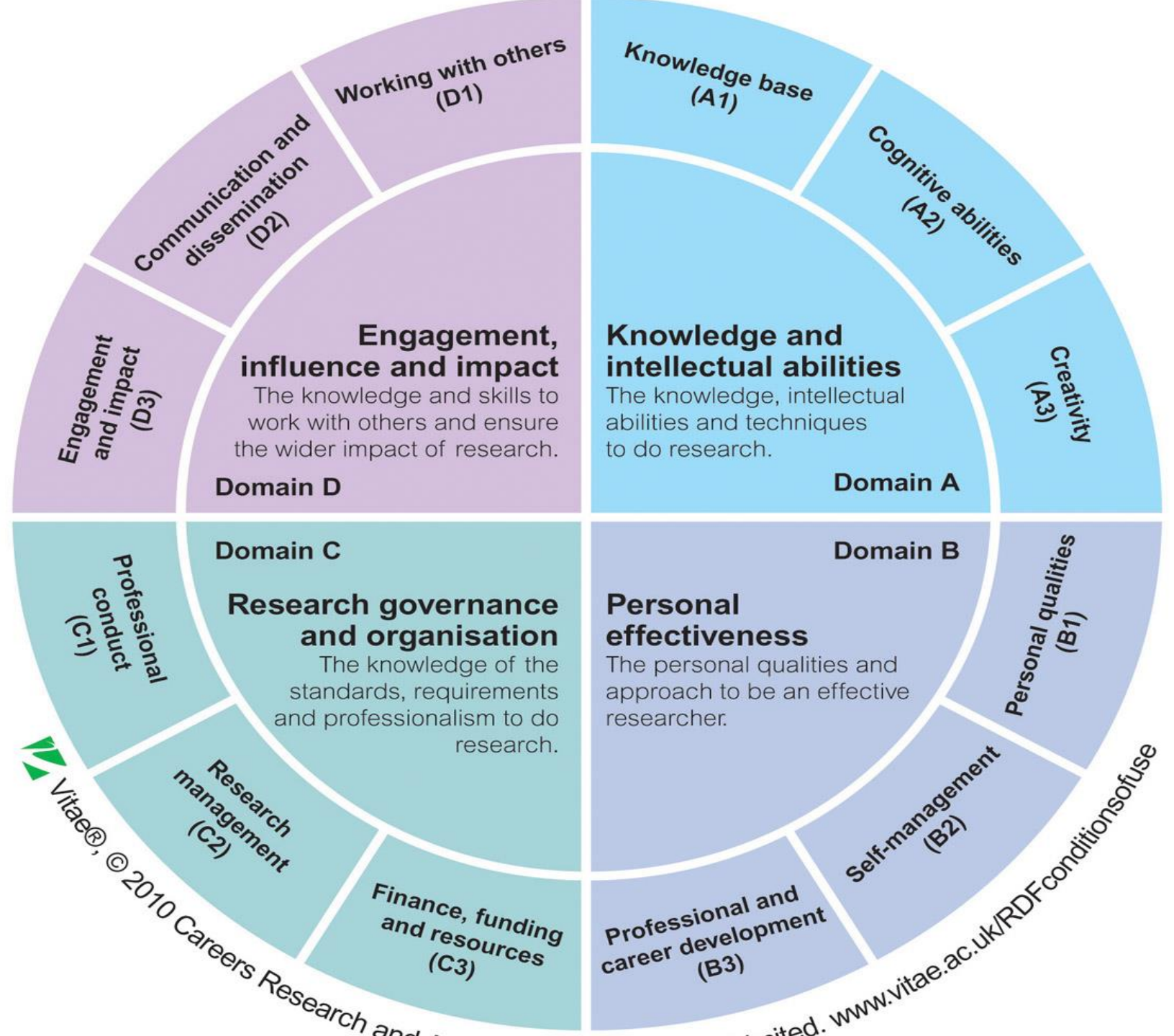
It was considered all that was needed to be a good supervisor was to be active in research, and this was underpinned in the sciences by the 'master-apprentice' model with doctoral supervisors as experts transmitting expertise to novices who observed and emulated, while in the arts and humanities it was a 'laissez-faire' model where supervisors expected students to undertake the work themselves (Manathunga and Goozee 2007: 309)

However, the last 30 years have seen

- Recognition that timely completion rates are a significant issue
- Diversification of purposes, and so structure and focus
- Diversification of modes of study: professional/ doctorates full- or part-time, face to face or remote engagement
- Growth, diversification, dislocation and increased demands on welfare of the doctoral student body
- Accompanied by an increased institutional QA, regulation and structures
- With many research problems requiring inter-, multi- and trans-disciplinary approaches

Such changes bring both opportunities and challenges, and are already pervasive globally

Vitae researcher development wheel



The traditional master-apprentice (or laissez-faire) model has moved to one of producer-consumer...



In parallel, a move to collectivisation

- Historical model one of single supervisor working with research student;
- Advantages of a single line of responsibility/source of support and guidance for the candidate;
- Risks if negligent or the relationship doesn't work or if something happens to the supervisor;
- Move towards team supervision, with many advantages but.....
- Demands on supervision numbers and quality can lead to models of cohort supervision but....



Implications for supervisors

What once seemed a relatively simple role that could be learned experientially... a role that was played out within a **'secret garden'** or **'private space'** has now become a **highly complex** set of roles which must be **learned quickly** and then played out within a **multi-featured landscape** and moulded by a **variety of influential stakeholders**.

Griffith and Warren (2016: 167)

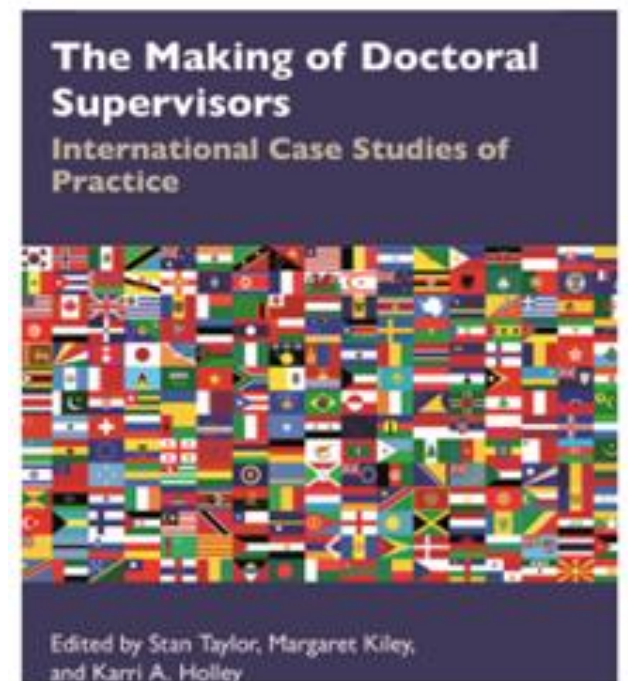


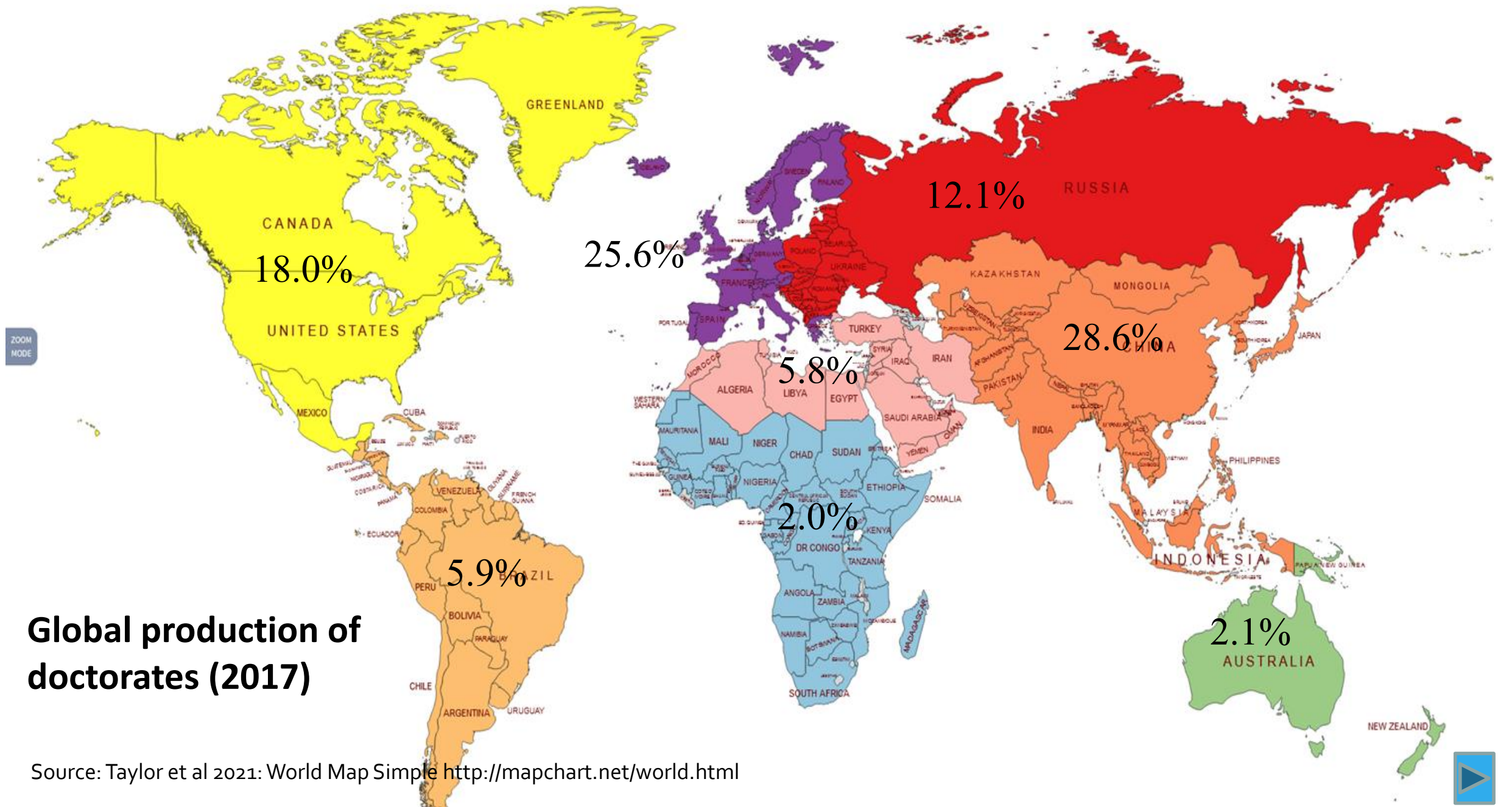
Doctoral supervision is important

There is a substantial body of evidence showing that the quality of supervision is a, if not the, major factor in determining the learning experiences of doctoral candidates and their chances of timely completion

(see for example Gardner, 2008: Amundsen & McAlpine, 2011: Moxham, Dwyer & Reid-Searl, 2013: Turner, 2015; Lepp, Remmick, Leijen & Leijen, 2016: Friedrich-Nel & MacKinnon, 2017: Belavy, Owens & Livingstone, 2020: Makhamreh and Stockley 2019: Vahamaki et al 2021).

The successful completion of doctorates is now a major global enterprise, with doctoral education provision in at least 180 of 195 recognised countries (10 of the remaining 15 are in SSA). Data are available for 149 of those. *(Taylor et al. 2019: The making of doctoral supervisors)*



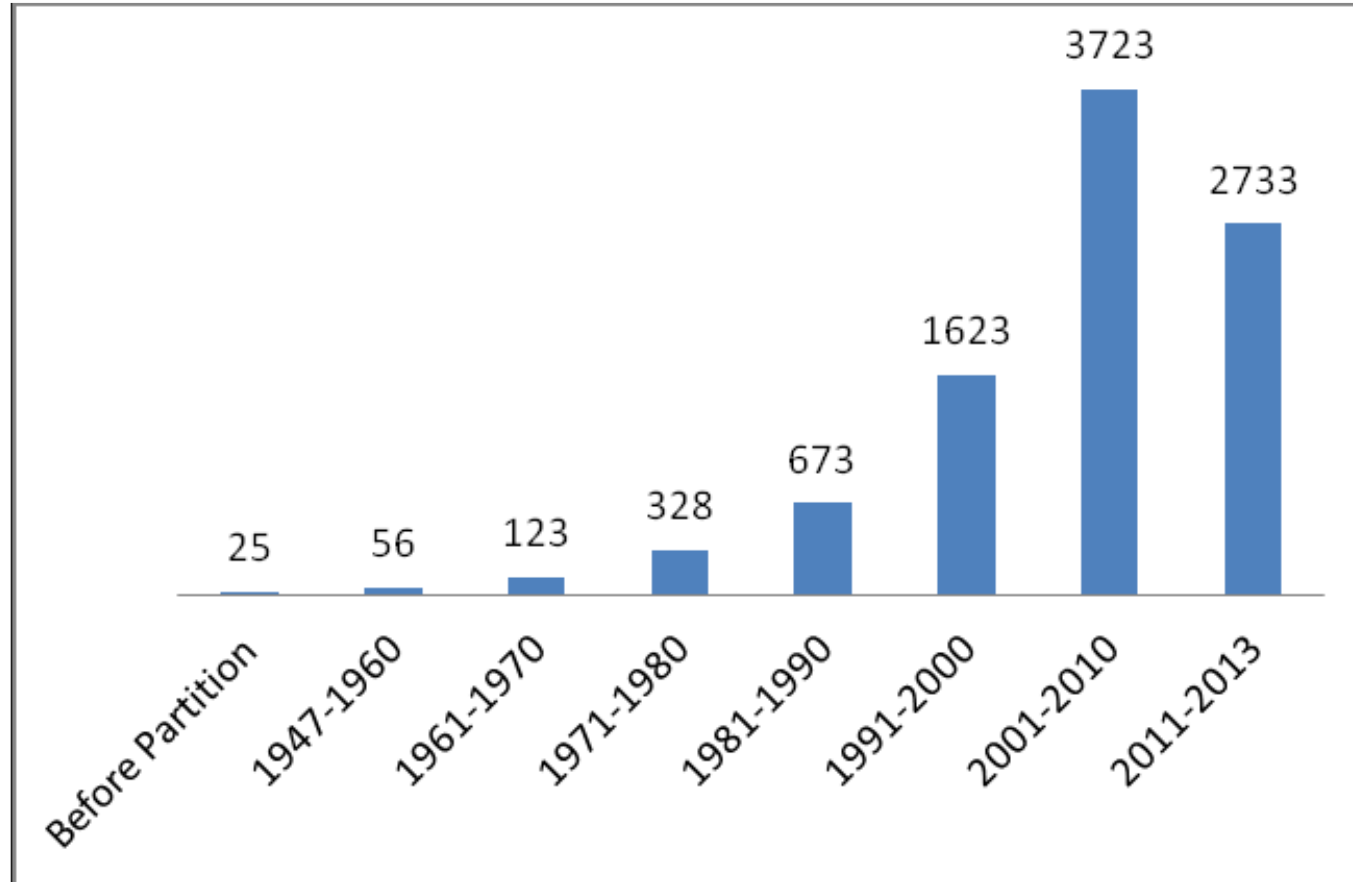


Global production of doctorates (2017)

Source: Taylor et al 2021: World Map Simple <http://mapchart.net/world.html>



In Pakistan....



PhD enrolment in 2017-18~22,000 across Pakistan (about 20% F) - ~1.4% of student population (HEC)

Approved Supervisors program: PhD students funded under HEC in-country scholarship programs will work with HEC-approved supervisors for three years.

Fast forward to 2020:

- Doctorates were traditionally studied on campus;
- Before covid, there was already a trend to studying off-campus (Maor et al, 2005);
- Since covid, near-universal move to online supervision (and often, research);
- As Kumar et al (2019) have shown, online supervision can bring major challenges:
 - Two-way connections and communication (threats of isolation)*
 - Building a professional relationship*
 - Calibrating expectations of roles and responsibilities*
 - Undertaking the research project, and especially data collection*
 - Encouraging writing*
 - Giving feedback*
 - Accessing resources, particularly in LMICs (Pakistan Research Repository);*
- *There were additional challenges due to the pandemic. But also choice and economy of time and place, and asynchronous review*
- 'The 'new normal' is still in flux, but changes in mode of supervisory contacts have highlighted intrinsic challenges in doctoral supervision partnerships – and in new approaches to research.

Evidence from the pandemic period

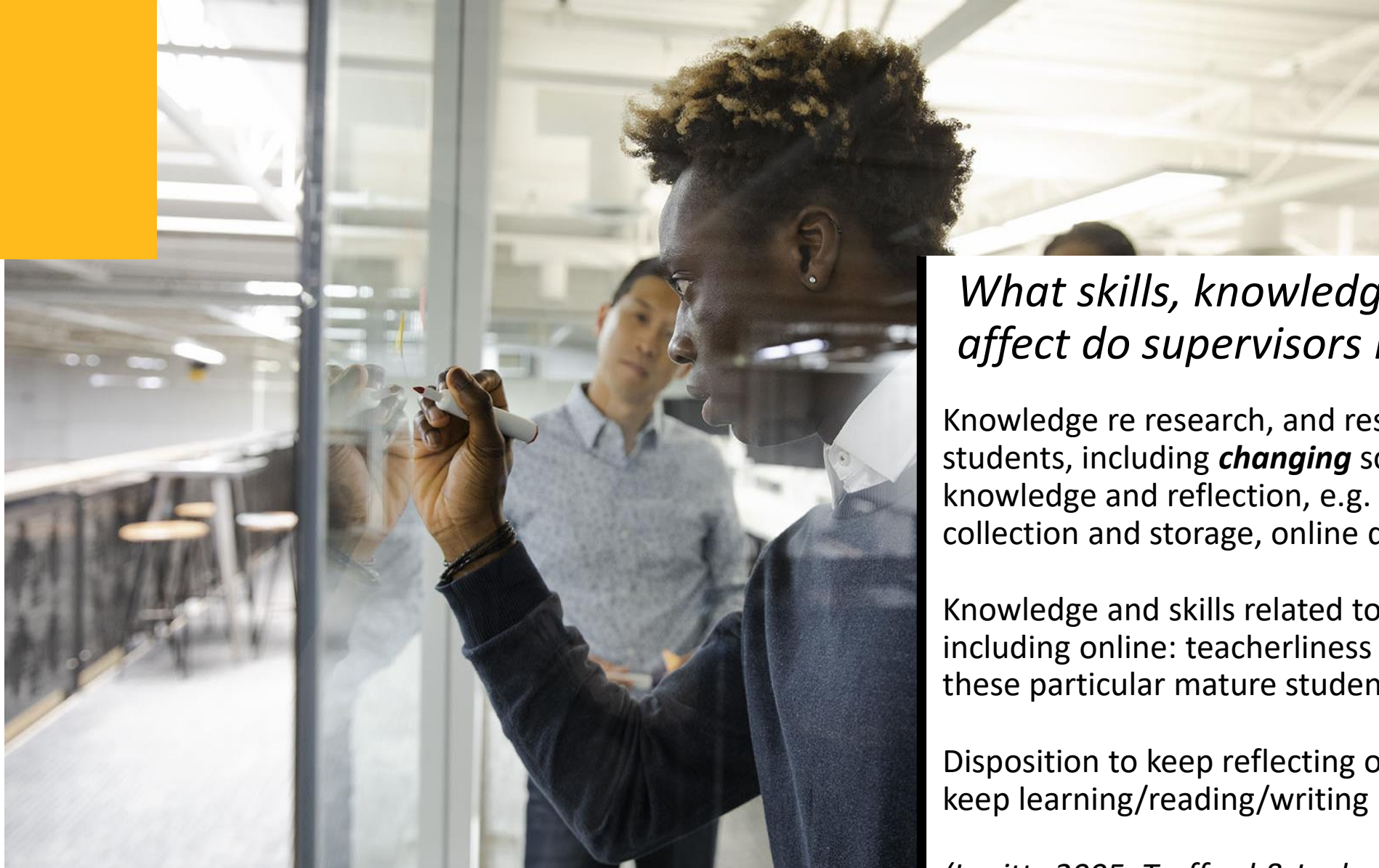
- A good **understanding of the communication process** is key.... There is curiosity, self-reflexivity and attention paid to the **power differentials** ...between *all* those involved**Picking up blind spots and developing procedural skills** is particularly tricky in the virtual context...there are few opportunities for **chance encounters**... It is much harder to notice what is *not* there, the gaps and the hesitations, and to **intervene in the moment**.... The **tolerance of risk** needs to be recalibrated (Miller, 2020);
- Three distinct competencies - **technological, contextual, and relational** – are needed by both parties(Watters & Northey, 2020);
- Online feedback is more 1-D, **lacking auditory, visual and physical cues**. May limit building of a **research community**....A planned, **structured supervision ‘sandwich’** of kindly supportive personal interactions to start and finish supervision, and engagement with intellectual work, research, writing and developmental dialogues is beneficial to candidate interaction and progress (Wisker et al., 2021);
- remote candidates require more **direct, explicit instruction** on how to develop research writing skills; best **feedback** is a combination of synchronous and asynchronous (Guerin & Aitchison, 2021) – changes in pedagogy, online
- **Online data collection** requires careful, and different, attention to research ethics and research integrity (Roberts & Allen, 2015); Newman, Guta & Black, 2021)



**Opportunities
and challenges
for doctoral
students in new
models of
supervision**

- Flexibility of approach
- Qualification inflation;
- A greater breadth of targeted outcomes supports skill, knowledge and career development;
- Supervisory relationships needs continued active attention from all concerned;
- Online opportunities bring economies and modern equipping, but also challenges: Communication needs active attention, e.g. vulnerabilities, difficulties might need to be more articulated.
- Peer group support (face to face, or via e.g. WhatsApp) can be key to survival and eventual success





What skills, knowledge and affect do supervisors need?

Knowledge re research, and research and students, including **changing** scope of knowledge and reflection, e.g. in relation to data collection and storage, online data collection

Knowledge and skills related to teaching, including online: teacherliness appropriate to these particular mature students

Disposition to keep reflecting on practice, and to keep learning/reading/writing (research active?)

(Lovitts 2005, Trafford & Lesham 2009, Parker-Jenkins 2018, Benmore 2016)

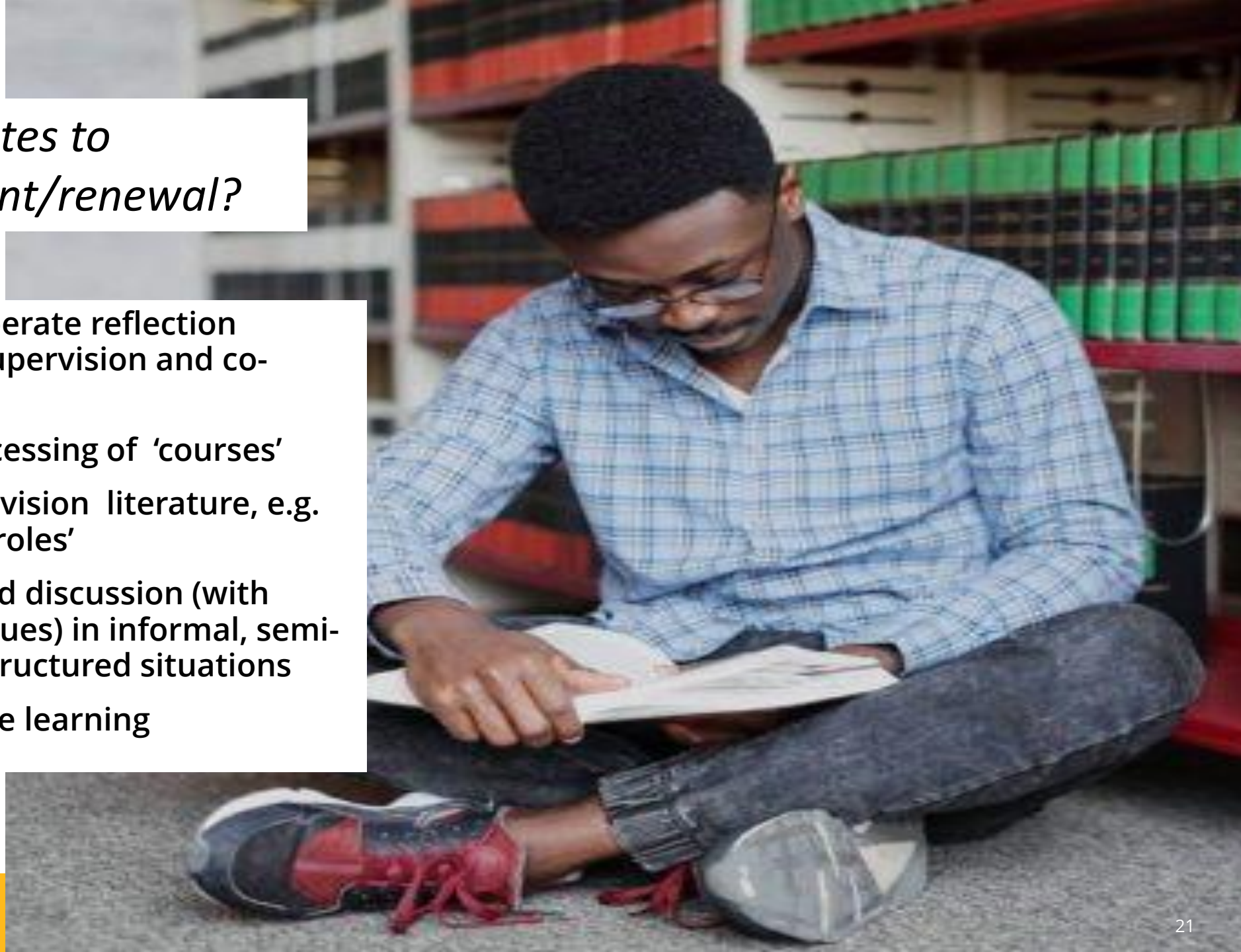


Particular issues for doctoral supervision in LMIC

- Timescales needed to develop robust academic communities able to participate on a global stage: these lead to inflated demands on existing faculty (e.g. Manderson et al., 2017)
- Insufficient supply of experienced, effective supervisors for central expectations, and arguably also, insufficient supply of well-prepared candidates (Grossman, 2016)
- Dependence on earlier phases of education that are still developing
- Access to a range of (digital) resources
- Obstacles to publishing and to recognition of academic work (including in the field of doctoral supervision) (Ondari-Okemwa, 2007)
- Current models of continuing development for supervisors are often expensive and ineffective (Cloete et al., 2015)

What are possible routes to supervisor development/renewal?

- Experience and deliberate reflection (Berliner, 2004) on supervision and co-supervision
- Formal provision/accessing of 'courses'
- Reading of the supervision literature, e.g. around supervision 'roles'
- Seeking feedback and discussion (with students and colleagues) in informal, semi-formal and formal structured situations
- Focused collaborative learning





Global approaches to supervisor development

Taylor et al. (2021) show that there is almost a common global core in terms of the criteria to be eligible to supervise, but in other respects there are significant variations in the ways that national higher education systems approach the support and reward of supervisors

One response: UKCGE supervisor accreditation and workshops

- UKCGE supervisor recognition is based on the ten-stage **Good Supervisory Practice Framework** (<https://supervision.ukcge.ac.uk/good-supervisory-practice-framework/>)
- UCL IOE has recently introduced a series of semi-structured collaborative workshops for experienced supervisors that aims to support affordable, sustainable development around ten key aspects of supervision practice, drawing on the literature on professional learning communities (Hord 1997; Vescio, Ross & Adams 2008) and using a design-based research approach (Bakker, 2019); REC 1590. Such workshops aim to underpin professional reflection preparatory to UKCGE recognition.
- Consistent with the literature around teacher professional development, initial evidenced impact of those workshops appears to be much wider than that achieved by short university-led courses or many asynchronous distance learning modules: benefits appear to derive from sustained, focused, structured and active participation in challenging discussions that draw on both the doctoral supervision evidence base and experiences of the group.
- Learning appears to be ***catalysed*** by such experiences, including the leading of one such session, and then ***crystallised*** in the compilation of a 'reflective account' of supervision that is '**personal, recent, analytical, example-based, scholarly and systematic**'



RECOGNISED
RESEARCH
SUPERVISOR
UK Council for Graduate Education

SAUSC collaboration

- Evaluation of the pilot workshops was enhanced by the participation of two external ‘critical friends’, one from UJ, and led to the formation of the SAUSC collaboration



Work comprises:

- Development of a similar series of workshops for southern African use, as one stage in the design research process, and a possible bifurcation for further development
- A comparative study of supervision practices, structures, affordances and constraints across the four universities
- Compilation of a selected bibliography of sub-Saharan African literature focused on research supervision
- Writing of an edited book ‘Experiences of doctoral supervision in southern Africa’ that aims to analyse and exemplify issues and approaches in relation to the literature (Springer).
- **Collaboration can be rich for learning**



The field of doctoral supervision is dynamic and ripe for contribution

*Thank you for listening.
Discussion and questions*

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