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Paper 83 – Poster

A systematic search and bibliometric study of the identity of the Professional Doctorate 2008-2011

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Abstract

Professional doctorates (DProf) have increased in application and acceptability in all research disciplines. Appropriately, a plethora of different research options are provided in a diverse health-care culture, but learning opportunities are under scrutiny as funds decrease. Attrition rates for DProfs are low, which is a funding consideration, yet questions around what DProf's offer remains in question. The same rigorous apprenticeship in research and methodology applies as the PhD, but instead of preparing students for academic careers the DProf emphasises enhanced practice delivery.

The comparison between DProfs and PhDs are both mutually exclusive and rhetorical; therefore, a comparative scrutiny with traditional PhDs is not always useful. By shifting focus, this study takes a reflexive position, critically appraising the DProf against its own standards, examining claims made in terms of identity from published literature within two years. By undertaking a systematic search, it is argued that a clearer understanding will:

- facilitate staff and students during supervision and viva
- provide an award of the highest academic level, distinct from the PhD, clearly relevant to the needs of the professional working situation
- enhance partnership between doctoral candidates, their employers and University, by demonstrating the DProf's distinctiveness in supporting the scholarly professional

Mixed methods:

1. The *Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions* developed the scope of the research question
2. Synthesis tables constructed and organised data
3. Bibliometrics configured data
4. Studies selected for inclusion in the review were critically appraised using a critical interpretive synthesis (Dixon-Woods et al 2006).

Preliminary results: descriptive terms inconsistent in some papers; in others well-argued terms or contextual definition offered. There is strength in diversity and the "DProf" was not used as a panacea term. The epistemological challenge is to question whether DProf's contain a systematic set of propositions to be defined as a stand-alone term without a codicil outlining its difference to PhDs.