Appraising professional doctorates: what, who and why?

Aims of the chapter

• To introduce the professional doctorate and discuss its characteristics and history
• To critically appraise the politico-economical, social, educational and personal factors that may influence professional doctorate studies
• To identify the contextual factors influencing your professional role and research interests using a self-assessment exercise

Introduction

What is a professional doctorate? Who would study one and why? These questions will be considered in Chapter 1 through definition and discussion of the professional doctorate and exploration of the contemporary factors influencing professional doctorate provision. Evidence from the United Kingdom (UK), Australia and the United States (US) will be considered initially, to analyse the changing context of doctoral study and the nature of professional doctorates therein. Such review and discussion is considered important: to help you better determine if a professional doctorate meets your career needs
and aspirations; to consider the implications of professional doctorate study; and to help you begin planning your professional doctorate journey.

Inevitably critics will argue that actual/potential professional doctorate students will have already identified what doctoral study entails and will understand professional doctorate requirements. However, doctoral study in the wider context is adapting, and professional doctorates have themselves prompted considerable discussion in the academic community and elsewhere regarding their characteristics and purpose. It is important you have an awareness of the doctoral debate, that you make an informed contribution and are able to consider your own ideological position and professional needs. For this purpose a range of literature will be explored in this chapter, representing some of the wider commentary and analysis surrounding doctoral studies and the nature of professional doctorates (Kemp 2004; Scott et al. 2004; Powell and Long 2005; Lunt 2006; Park 2007).

This chapter will define and explore the professional doctorate before comparing and contrasting its historical context and contemporary factors influencing development. The processes and outcomes of professional doctorates will then be considered, prior to discussion of professional doctorate student characteristics and the wider factors that may influence the decision to undertake a professional doctorate. The chapter will conclude with the Circle Exercise. This is a self-assessment exercise to help you, the student, identify the factors that may impact on your professional development and ensuing research interests.

Professional doctorates are available in an increasingly wide range of subjects, for example: education, engineering, health and social care, business, marketing, art and design, musical arts and clinical psychology. Bourner et al. (2001) describe the 1990s as ‘the decade in which the professional doctorate came to England’: such programmes being found in three-quarters of the ‘old’ universities and a third of the ‘new’ universities; (i.e., those established in 1992 from the former polytechnic system). Powell and Long (2005) identified 51 different professional doctorate awards in the UK, compared to 12 in the Bourner et al. study. Such growth in provision mirrors similar developments in Australia. For example in Australia professional doctorates have developed in the context of debate in the late 1980s and early 1990s, concerning the scope of the PhD and its resonance with government policies and wider global and economic issues (Green 2005).

Within the above discussion there has been some critique and questioning of the PhD as a suitable preparation for the transferable wider skills required in the contemporary workplace. Such skills have been compared and contrasted with the in-depth specialist subject knowledge and expertise said to emerge from the PhD. While professional doctorates are a comparatively recent addition to the doctoral repertoire in the UK and Australia, they have a more established history in North America. A doctorate in education was developed in 1924 at Colombia University and an earlier doctorate in education was developed in Canada in 1894. Doctorates in nursing were developed in the
1960s in the United States some considerable time before they appeared in the United Kingdom and elsewhere (Galvin and Carr 2003).

What is a professional doctorate?

An all encompassing definition is difficult given the range of professional doctorate awards and individual subject characteristics. However, professional practice, the development and/or application of expertise directly in the practice setting and practitioner research are central to professional doctorate activities. It should be acknowledged that this situation is not exclusive to the professional doctorate. Equally a PhD student could develop and apply research in the same manner, although this is not a key characteristic of the PhD as it is within the professional doctorate.

Professional doctorates are associated with the acquisition of knowledge and research skills, to further advance or enhance professional practice. Tennant (2004) describes professional doctorates as linking doctoral education with work related challenges and questions. He suggests this situation moves beyond the application of knowledge in practice, to the generation of knowledge from within the practice milieu itself. The relationship with practice, in particular professional practice, is developed further in the definition offered by the United Kingdom Council for Graduate Education (UKCGE) (2002: 62): ‘a professional doctorate is a programme of advanced study 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’. Powell and Long (2005: 8) describe the professional doctorate as: ‘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’. To illuminate professional doctorate characteristics further Hoddell (2000) identified three key features:

1 A named subject area within the title of the award, for example education, engineering
2 Operation in a professional subject area as opposed to an academic subject
3 Inclusion of taught elements
(The final point is open to debate, as many PhD programmes also include taught elements to meet research training requirements.)

While the literature underpinning Chapter 1 generally supports the definitions above, there is some questioning of the emerging divide between the PhD and professional doctorate, perceived or real. For example Gregory (1995)
compares and contrasts the characteristics of professional doctorates and PhDs and questions the need for differentiation. Instead he suggests that the overall purpose and processes of doctoral study should be made transparent rather than discussion focusing on the relative merits of a particular programme or doctoral pathway. For example, he asks if doctoral study should be concerned with the student’s wider personal and professional development in addition to the acquisition of research based knowledge. This concern with the wider acquisition of skills such as communication and problem solving has been expressed by employers.

The concepts of ‘professional scholar’ and ‘scholarly professional’ are used by Gregory to question and explore the perceived differences between the PhD and the education doctorate, EdD, and consider the overall purpose of doctoral study. Traditionally one implicit purpose of the PhD has been suggested as being preparation or training for an academic and research career, though this situation is said to be challenged by the emergence of professional doctorates (Thorne and Francis 2001). Why the professional doctorate is evolving and its relationship to the PhD will be considered again later in Chapter 1 through analysis of politico-economic, social and educational factors influencing doctorate provision.

As suggested previously, doctoral study has typically been associated with the PhD, considered by many to be the *sine qua non* of academic expertise (Gemme 2005). However, binary distinction between the PhD and the professional doctorate does not fully illustrate the range of doctoral studies available. There are alternative doctoral approaches besides the PhD, with considerable variation in scope and purpose depending on the subject discipline. Scott et al. (2004) identify five forms of doctoral degree awarded in the UK alone:

1. The PhD
2. A practice based doctorate for creative and performing arts
3. The professional doctorate
4. The New Route PhD
5. A PhD achieved through the development of a portfolio of publications

The New Route PhD in the UK has been developed by a group of universities to meet the wider needs of the international student population, and has a significant proportion of taught components (UKCGE 2002).

Elsewhere Winter et al. (2000) appear to imply a professional doctorate type programme, when they explore practice based doctorates as undertaken by professional practitioners such as teachers and health professionals. Marion et al. (2003) by contrast refer to the practice doctorate as combining higher level clinical skill, leadership, research and professional knowledge to enhance changing health care practice in the US. First, professional degrees are studied in the US as preparation for practise law or veterinary medicine, for example, allowing the use of ‘doctor’ as a professional title (Lunt 2006).
The term ‘taught doctorate’ may also be used interchangeably with that of ‘professional doctorate’; however, a taught doctorate may imply a modular element but not necessarily related to professional practice. In addition a doctorate of science (DSc) may be awarded to outstanding academics, particularly in the UK in recognition of their distinguished contribution to research.

Understanding the nature and purpose of the doctoral award is an important consideration when embarking on any doctoral study and when planning future career pathways. In an attempt to illuminate doctoral provision on a European level the European Universities Association (EUA) undertook a project to compare and contrast the characteristics, requirements and practices relating to doctoral provision in Europe. Within the EUA project, however, it emerged that the professional doctorate as preparation for an advanced level of professional practice was not widely acknowledged.

The EUA (2005) distinguished between the individual study programme and the structured study programme as routes for doctoral study. The former may be associated with the PhD approach: supervisor and student working in an apprenticeship type model. The latter refers to the use of taught and research elements within the doctoral programme – although this combination does not automatically imply a professional doctorate. Lunt (2006) further clarifies that professional doctorates are not widely known in Europe outside of the UK and Ireland. She does describe the industrial PhD used in Scandinavia whereby an adapted PhD approach may be used to explore work related issues.

It can be seen that there are now wide ranging doctoral awards and sometimes the doctoral awards and categories are used interchangeably in the literature. For example it can be seen that professional doctorates may also be referred to as taught doctorates or practice based doctorates. Powell and Long (2005) suggest that distinctions between doctoral routes and awards are confusing and along with Gregory (1995) question why such distinctions have evolved in the first place.

However, while varied terminology and philosophical standpoints are represented in the academic discussion of professional doctorate provision, the common factor in the professional doctorate’s context is recognition of the key relationship between professional practice, the focus of study and the practitioner–researcher role. These components are complex in their own right; integration, development and application of research in and for the professional setting requires a particular expertise and determination.

The variety of doctoral studies, particularly professional doctorates, has the potential to reach wider professional student audiences; challenge accepted forms of knowledge acquisition; and explore new areas of research. Equally it could lead to confusion. Some would suggest that the growing number of doctoral titles and awards has the potential to weaken the status of the PhD (Donaghy 1996). While the PhD’s position has appeared relatively strong and clear until recent times, it could be argued that it has also adapted historically depending on subject trends, societal need and demand. The following section
will briefly outline the history of doctoral study and the juxtaposition of the PhD and professional doctorates through that history.

The history of doctoral study and professional doctorates

Bologna University is considered to be one of the oldest universities in the world, as students migrated there in the middle ages to study law and, later, arts, medicine and theology. Haskins (1957) describes university development as originating with the students’ need to be organized into a single group: as protection from exploitation by unscrupulous landlords and to be assured of good lectures, particularly at Bologna. Within that protection professors were required not to be absent without permission and not to proceed with a lecture if fewer than five students were present. Furthermore, professors were required to obtain a licence to teach, a *licentia docendi*. From this tradition the higher degrees of master’s and doctorate are said to have emerged. They were originally evidence of the professors’ knowledge and skills to be used within student teaching.

Noble (1994) attributes the first doctoral degree to the University of Paris in the twelfth century. The subjects associated with doctoral study at that time are also interesting as Bourner et al. (2001) suggest that for six centuries doctoral programmes for theology, law and medicine were used as preparation for professional practice, and were not dissimilar to contemporary professional doctorates. In essence the modern professional doctorate could be a renaissance of the higher level study originally associated with preparation for professional practice. In 1792 Haydn was awarded an honorary doctorate of music degree by Oxford University, in recognition of his contribution to music (O’Mullane 2005).

The PhD by contrast has later origins at Humboldt University, Berlin, in the nineteenth century. Its introduction was accompanied by a belief that academics had more teaching expertise to offer if they also had direct experience of the processes involved in research inquiry and were able to transmit those experiences to students. The process of research or inquiry itself was considered important and was relevant in many contexts at that time, particularly with increasing industrialization (Shaffer 1990).

Until the nineteenth century universities’ main focus had been teaching. At the time of PhD development in the nineteenth century, however, an increasing need and demand for scientific methods and systematic research skills was fuelled by the demands of industrialization. Relatively speaking the PhD itself has emerged out of educational and research trends, particularly related to industrialization. As such it is fairly new in the historical
continuum of doctoral studies. The first doctorate of philosophy was awarded by Oxford University in 1920. At about the same time, universities in the US were adapting doctoral awards to include a taught element (Bourner et al. 2001).

What does a professional doctorate involve?

Embarking on a professional doctorate is an exciting challenge. The study journey should stimulate intellectual, personal and professional development in addition to the creation of knowledge and expertise that will better inform and underpin professional practice. As can be seen from discussion thus far in Chapter 1 professional doctorate study is concerned with questioning, analysing, developing or applying new practice knowledge in the student’s professional practice setting. The student drives the process of research and inquiry which could inform the micro level of the student’s day to day professional context, or professional practice at the macro level of policy, strategy, future direction or practice. Creativity and originality are integral to doctoral study regardless of the doctoral route (Gregory 1995). However, Gregory also acknowledges that creativity is a challenge when doctoral students are possibly engaged in their first major piece of research. The concept of originality will be explored further in Chapter 2. In the meantime the processes and outcomes of professional doctorates will be explored below.

Processes

It can be seen from the professional doctorate definitions earlier in the chapter that a key element is the investigation of a professional practice issue and the generation of new knowledge and expertise, using research strategies developed and applied by the professional practitioner themselves, while practising in that setting. Integration and application within the professional practice setting requires advanced expertise; effective leadership of research in practice; the effective management of change; and skilful communication with key stakeholders. In addition to the challenges of research and professional application professional doctorate students are perhaps shifting or testing the boundaries of doctoral convention. As Green (2005) relates in consideration of professional doctorate development in Australia, the programmes have a short history, further stating that there are ‘tests of hazard’ along their pathway. In essence the process and focus of study may differ from the PhD, though the outcomes are considered the same in terms of the level of knowledge and expertise developed and their intellectual rigour.

One difference between the PhD and professional doctorate process is that
students on the latter tend to progress and study together as a cohort, group or intake, rather than by registering for an individual learning experience, as is the case for the PhD. The peer collaboration and collegiate nature of professional doctorate study therefore opens up possibilities for student support networks and the sharing of knowledge and expertise (Hoddell 2000). Many PhD programmes also encourage a student community; however, registering and working with a student group throughout the whole of the study process is still much more likely with a professional doctorate. The processes of professional doctorate study will also include the exploration and critical analysis of wider related professional issues: leadership, financial management, marketing, educational theory or advanced professional skills, depending on the professional subject studied.

Facilitation processes for professional doctorates are more likely to involve the use of action learning groups, small group discussion, workshops, residential workshops and master classes. Given technological advances and the drive towards flexible modes of study professional doctorates may also capitalize on blended learning. This combines face to face facilitation with the use of a virtual learning environment. Many universities have developed or are developing virtual doctoral schools and distance learning approaches for doctoral study. Actual attendance at a university campus may be minimal, with stipulated attendance during the study process for key assessment processes and milestones of doctoral study. This further enhances flexibility and student choice in how and where to study. Knowing your study preferences and what could best be adapted with your professional practice and personal life are key elements to consider when choosing a doctorate programme.

The focus on professional doctorate study with a like-minded student group or cohort regardless of whether contact is virtual or face to face enhances opportunities for students to share ideas and explore critical issues, receiving constructive feedback from peers and programme facilitators. Group discussion provides an excellent way of clarifying thoughts and ideas while in the long term preparing for wider professional discussion and critique of research ideas through conference presentations, academic papers and ultimately the viva. Professional doctorates offer potential for collaborative approaches to learning, sharing resources and expertise, developing critical thinking and rehearsing for key milestones in doctoral study, along with wider professional activities. Table 1.1 summarizes the processes of professional doctorate study as identified from the literature.

Outcomes

When exploring the outcomes of professional doctorates as opposed to other doctoral programmes, such as the PhD, it would appear that there is no distinction between the type of doctorate and the outcome or level of study (Lunt 2006). The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales
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Table 1.1 The processes of professional doctorate study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Source</th>
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<tr>
<td>Intake or cohort of professional doctorate students who study together.</td>
<td>Hoddell (2000)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Combination of taught and research elements.</td>
<td>Green (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Although many PhDs incorporate research modules, professional doctorate facilitated elements are also likely to focus on professionally related issues, e.g. leadership and finance, in addition to research issues.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus on professional practice issues through the development and application of knowledge and expertise for practice.</td>
<td>UKCGE (2002)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Practitioner–researchers from the professional setting undertake professional doctorates and research related professional practice study. Knowledge generation for practice, developed from practice.</td>
<td>Powell and Long (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The process of professional development emphasized with the professional subject in the title of the final doctoral award, e.g. education and engineering.</td>
<td>Tennant (2004)</td>
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and Northern Ireland, developed by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) (2001) describes the level of achievement denoted along the continuum of studies from certificate to doctoral level. It can be seen that doctorates in their widest context are concerned with the creation of new knowledge and/or understanding through original research:

The framework for higher education qualifications: doctoral descriptors

Doctorates are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

i. The creation and interpretation of new knowledge, through original research, or other advanced scholarship, of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline, and merit publication.

ii. A systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of an academic discipline or area of professional practice.

iii. The general ability to conceptualise, design and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge, applications or understanding at the forefront of the discipline, and to adjust the project design in the light of unforeseen problems.

iv. A detailed understanding of applicable techniques for research and advanced academic enquiry.
Typically holders of the qualification will be able to:

a. Make informed judgements on complex issues in specialist fields, often in the absence of complete data, and be able to communicate their ideas and conclusions clearly and effectively to specialist and non-specialist audiences;

b. Continue to undertake pure and/or applied research and development at an advanced level, contributing substantially to the development of new techniques, ideas, or approaches; and will have

c. The qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and largely autonomous initiative in complex and unpredictable situations, in professional or equivalent environments.

(QAA 2001)

It can be seen from the above that the distinguishing characteristic of doctoral study is the ability to develop original knowledge for a subject discipline or, in the case of the professional doctorate, a professional discipline. Originality is underpinned by the ensuing assessment, planning and implementation of a suitable research design to investigate the research topic.

The processes and outcomes of professional doctorate study will be revisited in Chapter 2 when there will be detailed discussion of the criteria of original knowledge and critical thinking for doctoral study. In addition student expectations of professional doctorate study and the personal toolkit that may be required will be explored. Personal strategies such as working with others and managing time and resources will also be considered.

Who would study a professional doctorate?

Given the characteristics of professional doctorates it is not surprising that their uptake is primarily by professional practitioners. Powell and Long (2005) also comment that professional doctorate provision in the UK is geared towards the public sector professions. In most subject areas, for example business, education or health and social care, professional doctorate students are typically, but not always, senior professionals who have already accrued considerable professional expertise. For example, in relation to nursing in the United Kingdom, McKenna and Cutcliffe (2001) suggest the average age of the doctoral student is 35 years, compared with 25 years in other subject areas. Furthermore the authors state that doctoral study is usually undertaken after several years spent in nursing practice, whereas in other subjects students usually undertake full-time doctoral study following a first degree. Perhaps as a
result of the need to combine professional practice with research, most professional doctorates are part-time, though full-time programmes do exist too.

Bourner et al. (2001) compare and contrast the entry and experience requirements for PhD and professional doctorate study in England. For example a professional doctorate student generally requires evidence of significant professional experience, along with a master’s degree in a related discipline, though in some cases a good first degree or bachelor’s degree is accepted. The authors found in contrast that the PhD student is usually required to have a good first degree in a related subject discipline, but no other experience of the subject is necessary as the PhD student is viewed as an apprentice researcher – unlike an experienced professional practitioner.

While the above may be a common scenario it is not the only scenario. In some subjects the professional doctorate may be considered a baseline entry requirement for professional practice. For example in the UK the engineering doctorate, EngD or DEng, has developed from the need to have a career route for young engineers into industry, combining subject knowledge with wider professional and practice related skills such as problem solving (UKCGE 2002). Bourner et al. (2001) state that the first engineering doctorate was introduced at Warwick University in 1992. Students on such programmes may have the backing of an industrial sponsor and undertake research that is relevant to their sponsor’s work area. In relation to clinical psychology, the doctorate in clinical psychology (DClinPsy) is a requirement for professional clinical practice. Such programmes are accredited by the British Psychological Society and incorporate the supervision of professional practice.

Why study a professional doctorate?

Doctoral study has perhaps been stereotyped as an esoteric activity undertaken by academics in the isolating ivory towers of academia, in some ways protected from and almost superior to the realities of the external world. Subjects for doctoral study similarly could have been viewed as theoretical and not directly concerned with the real world. However, Gemme (2005) questions this view, explaining that many PhD students seek employment in industry or commerce, particularly when the PhD has practice placements or strong links with those areas. In contrast the doctoral survey by Golde and Dore (2001) found that many doctoral students wanted an academic career following their studies.

Despite the stereotypes the doctoral landscape is changing, possibly due to politico-economic, social and educational factors. This is not the first time in the doctorate’s history that this has occurred. The emergence of the PhD in the nineteenth century as described earlier in this chapter was linked with socio-economic need and demand related to industrialization. Contemporary
justification for professional doctorates is also made in the context of the knowledge economy (Tennant 2004; Green 2005). This has been described as the relationship between economic development and the effective use of knowledge, skills and innovation as opposed to reliance on physical resources and capital (Brinkley 2006). For example economic growth and increasing technological innovation are said to be dependent on and subsequently fuelled by the need for an increasingly educated and skilled workforce (EUA 2005). The purpose of knowledge in contemporary society is said to be changing as a result of the knowledge economy. Green (2005) suggests that the professional doctorate is seen as a means of contributing to the knowledge economy through its connections with workplaces and universities. This is predicated on the belief that economic success is related to the skills inherent in the workforce along with research capacity.

In keeping with this belief the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) in Australia recommends stronger links between professional doctorate programmes and industrial or professional sponsors. It suggests that industry and commerce should be considered active owners and deliverers of programmes, having a key role to play, as opposed to being the passive recipients of doctoral students (DEST 2005). While some argue that such recommendations are beneficial, enabling programme development that corresponds to need, others are more cautious stating that the role of the university as an independent knowledge source is being challenged (Tennant 2004). Chapter 6 will further explore the relationship between knowledge, professional practice and wider socio-economic factors through examination of professional practice and professional knowledge.

Evans (1997) also identifies economic and industrial drivers as central to the way universities organize and manage their educational portfolio. For example he states that universities have adapted their educational provision and modes of delivery to meet the needs and demands of professionals who would previously not have experienced or indeed have been expected to undertake a higher degree. In essence Evans (1997) states that the massification of higher education has increased the need for university places among school leavers, while professionals are similarly seeking postgraduate qualifications in increasing numbers.

To illustrate the relationship between professional doctorates and politico-economic factors Ellis and Lee (2005) explore factors such as health modernization, the blurring of professional boundaries and the increasing demand for health care in fuelling the growth in health related doctorates. Other factors identified are the quest for evidence based health practice along with the integration of professional education, particularly in nursing, within the higher education sectors.

Discussion to date has been based on the premise that knowledge for economic growth along with politico-economic and global factors has influenced doctoral provision. Arguably it has opened up the scope of professional doctorates to a changing student audience, for a changing purpose: the
professional generation and application of subject knowledge. Indeed Neumann (2005) identified the need to provide doctoral studies for the newly emerging professions as a factor influencing professional doctorate development in Australia. The self-assessment exercise at the end of this chapter will enable you to reflect upon these and other issues in relation to your professional context and research interests.

Given the discussion to date, professional doctorates could be viewed as a positive development offering opportunities to student professionals who would not otherwise have sought doctoral study. On the other hand, it could also be suggested that they are a reaction to the pressures of international market forces and the knowledge economy. Evans et al. (2005) have undertaken a study of the PhD in Australia and argue that its position is actually strengthening with increasing student numbers and professional fields of study. Rather than developing professional doctorates as an alternative to the PhD the authors recommend that resources be used to strengthen and maintain the PhD, given its established currency.

In addition to the political and economic context for professional doctorates there has also been debate regarding educational issues and the purpose of doctoral study. For example some have explored the rationale for doctoral study, questioning whether it is preparation for an academic career or a career in another professional arena (Thorne and Francis 2001). Gregory (1995) considers the differences between the PhD and the educational doctorate EdD, suggesting that the PhD’s focus on detailed knowledge and expertise in a narrow aspect of one subject area does not perhaps meet employers’ demands for broader transferable skills. Furthermore there has been concern about the time taken to complete a PhD and attrition rates have been estimated at 40 percent in the case of some social science doctorates (Winfield 1987).

While McWilliam and Singh (2002) report that doctoral completion times and attrition rates are causes for concern in Australia, there is no evidence as yet that this is any different within professional doctorate programmes. Meanwhile in America doctoral dissatisfaction has been reported, with student concerns relating to the specialized nature of doctoral study versus preparation for other employment skills (Golde and Dore 2001). Neumann (2005) suggests professional doctorates were also viewed by the education establishment as an opportunity to enhance and widen academic recruitment at a time when the size of the academic workforce was due to decline.

McVicar et al. (2006) report that professional doctorate study is a positive option for employers, as students can demonstrate the following skills on completion:

- Development of research skills
- Development of organizational skills
- Improvements in skills such as management and leadership
- Improvements in the organization’s performance or outputs
These skills are especially desirable as they are developed and generated within the organizational or professional context, for use in that context. In summary the student’s research development has the potential to make a direct contribution to the organizational or professional context through the acquisition and application of higher level transferable skills such as research expertise, advanced communication and leadership, critical thinking and problem solving.

In addition Kemp (2004) states that the PhD has been a ‘privileged’ programme in terms of government funding: university focused and university driven, meeting the needs of universities and academics as opposed to external stakeholders. The professional doctorate is further described by Kemp as a sign of change in doctoral provision. This possibly reflects wider changes as universities are increasingly required to strengthen their relationships with industries and other partners external to the university. In England, for example, the role of the doctorate, its range and its provision in the widest sense is being explored and questioned, particularly in the context of economic development and need, combined with academic development and the challenges of transparency across Europe and beyond (Park 2007).

While this section has focused on the factors influencing professional doctorate development at the macro level, namely policy and politics, there are other factors at the micro level of personal student experience which may influence students’ choice of doctoral programme. Leonard et al. (2006) comment that research and other evidence relating to student reasons and motivations for doctoral study is scarce, as is information about how students subsequently apply their doctoral learning in their future careers. There are, however, some emerging studies relating to professional doctorate students and their motivations.

For example Wellington and Sikes (2006) identified personal and professional reasons as providing strong motivation for students to undertake an education doctorate. Their student survey found that the quest for educational knowledge and theory to underpin professional practice was one reason for study. On a more personal level students in their survey saw the professional doctorate as the culmination of their career and personal achievements, enhancing their self-esteem, confidence and personal identity. The authors also found that students had practical rather than personal reasons for such study. For example the structure of the programme, with modules, workshops and group discussion enabled some students to better combine doctoral study with their professional working lives.

The structured approach inherent in many professional doctorate programmes, along with the opportunities to link research developments within the practice setting was also perceived as valuable in a student study by Neumann (2005). This involved semi-structured interviews with 134 students and academics associated with doctoral studies.

While self-esteem and achievement featured strongly in the Wellington and Sikes (2006) study, students also reported that the professional doctorate had
enhanced their professional life, enabling wider career development, and the acquisition of more effective knowledge and expertise with which to undertake their work. Some students cited the professional doctorate as a key factor in helping them to achieve promotion. For others it had helped them become more reflective and thoughtful about their practice and how they approached professional challenges. The latter point identified by Wellington and Sikes (2006) also has resonance with findings by Scott et al. (2004), where students emphasized professional attitude, values and beliefs, and professional confidence as being enhanced by professional doctorate study, rather than focusing on the more tangible aspects such as knowledge and practical skills.

Scott et al. (2004) also identified extrinsic and intrinsic factors that influenced professional doctorate study. For example extrinsic factors influencing students’ decision to pursue a professional doctorate related to career development, exposure to wider professional experiences; and opportunities for research. These reasons may be characterized by what Scott et al. (2004) describe as ‘professional initiation’: influencing students at the outset of their professional careers, particularly if financial sponsorship was available from the students’ employers. Engineering doctorate students’ experiences are used by the authors to illustrate professional initiation type extrinsic factors influencing study. The second extrinsic factor identified by the authors related to professional continuation. In this context professional doctorate students were well established in their professional careers and wished to widen their career options and make an informed contribution to professional practice in their area of expertise.

Scott et al. (2004) also identified intrinsic motivation for doctoral students in terms of rewards perceived as self-efficacy, personal achievement and the development of personal goals and interests. With intrinsic motivation students were more likely to consider professional doctorate study as providing opportunity for a personal journey of change and development. These students were likely to be at the pinnacle of their professional career, being well established in senior, strategic positions. In addition to personal reward, professional doctorates may be viewed as bestowing professional credibility. Scott et al. (2004) also argue that while knowledge acquisition is no longer the sole responsibility of universities, given advances in technology enhancing access to information and learning, universities still have the right to award status or gravitas through their qualifications.

The following extract will illustrate some of the reasons discussed for undertaking a professional doctorate through the example of a doctorate student called Kenny, who undertook an EdD in TESOL and applied linguistics. Kenny’s background and decision to enrol on his EdD are given below:

I decided to enrol on an EdD programme rather than the PhD one because I wanted to gain specific research training in TESOL (Teaching English as a Second Language) and Applied Linguistics, to help me form my research
interests to undertake my thesis. I was initially unsure whether an EdD would be recognised like the PhD because scholars and other people still found the PhD more rigorous and research-oriented whereas the EdD was rather less valued as such. I have, however realized that they are the same and different. These two degrees are the same in the sense that they aim to equip learners with relevant research skills. The difference is EdD graduates can particularly aim to work in education related fields, as teachers, lecturers or principals, whereas a PhD graduate can become a researcher in a wider social context . . . an EdD was quite suitable for me with an MA in TELFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language), as I did not have an intensive research background . . . I also presented my assignments at national and international conferences and later had them published. I began to realise that an EdD was widely recognized.

Professional self-assessment exercise

So far this chapter has explored professional doctorate characteristics and requirements and it has considered the politico-economic, social and educational factors that may influence their current development in the context of educational debate concerning doctoral provision and purpose. The following exercise aims to help you reflect and apply the issues explored in this chapter in your specific professional context and in your developing research ideas. Reflection is important at the decision making and planning stage of your study. First, it helps you to gain insight into the wider issues affecting professional practice beyond your immediate professional specialisation. Second, it helps you explore how these factors may affect your studies overall and influence your chosen research topic. If you have more than one idea for research or if you are not sure how to focus on a particular aim or question then the self-assessment exercise can usefully help you consider a range of issues.
Student activity 1.1 The circle exercise: factors influencing professional research ideas

1. Work through the circles identifying factors which may impact directly or indirectly on your current professional practice and choice of research topic. Examples may include:
   - Professional or statutory policies
   - Professional literature
   - Reports, organizational trends or policies
   - Other evidence

2. Use the circle ‘Beyond your domain’ to consider the wider literature related to your research ideas, which are as yet outside your conventional professional and subject boundaries.

3. Keep a record of your ideas as you will need these to undertake more development work in Chapter 2.
Conclusion

Beginning the professional doctorate journey is an exciting but daunting prospect. Many students have been, or will be, experiencing these feelings. The preceding exercise can help you clarify ideas, and subsequent reading, writing and reflecting will also help you make a start. If you feel overwhelmed by your research ideas or have several ideas and cannot focus then take comfort, as Kenny says:

‘At present, I feel that I have gained more confidence about my study and attempt to complete it as soon as possible. I always tell myself that this EdD experience is like an exercise for me to learn mistakes from doing research and to learn that there is no perfect piece of research . . . I learnt that the word “focus” is very important for research students because we can become overwhelmed by large literature reviews and we do not know exactly where “relevance” is supposed to end’.

The information in this chapter represents a snapshot of the contemporary debate concerning professional doctorates. The overall aims of the chapter were to explore the professional doctorate and to analyse its key characteristics, processes and outcomes. It can be seen that doctorates in the widest sense have adapted significantly through history, with professional doctorates being related to the needs of professional groups who wish to develop research based knowledge and skills for professional practice. There is synergy in approach among developed countries, notably in the US, Australia and the UK, where professional doctorates have had considerable impact. Presenting the information in this chapter is considered important as a backdrop to baseline critical reflection and self-assessment of your own personal and professional context.

Some would argue that professional doctorate development is related to the growing needs and demands of the knowledge economy: globalization, innovation and advanced skills development. Professional doctorates have been appraised along with their context. While the name of the professional doctorate awards, programme structure and processes may vary according to subject discipline or their academic location, they share a common principle. This relates to the professional doctorate as concerned with the student’s practice context, to further develop and enhance that practice or to have greater knowledge and understanding of its implications. Related research studies could be associated with the micro level of the student’s practice context itself, or the macro level of policies or related roles and responsibilities. While this situation is not unique to the professional doctorate, as arguably other types of doctoral provision could equally achieve this, it is central to the professional doctorate.
Summary of key points

- Professional doctorates facilitate the investigation and development of knowledge and other expertise to enhance the student’s professional practice.
- Arguably they have formed the basis of professional studies since medieval times, the PhD evolving since the Industrial Revolution.
- Renewed interest in professional doctorate programmes could be related to the emerging needs of the knowledge economy and globalization.
- Doctoral level descriptors do not appear to differentiate between the academic levels of study required for the professional doctorate and the PhD. Originality and creativity are required regardless of the doctoral route.
- Professional doctorate students are perhaps more likely to have accrued a significant amount of professional experience prior to their doctoral studies, and work at senior or strategic levels in their professional settings. Some students by contrast undertake professional doctorates at the outset of their careers as a means to fast track career development opportunities.