

# Contributing to a culture of effective doctoral supervision

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Lucas Zinner, November 2022



## Preliminary remark I

***“Repetition is a well-documented trigger for memory formation—the more times something is repeated, the better it is remembered.”***

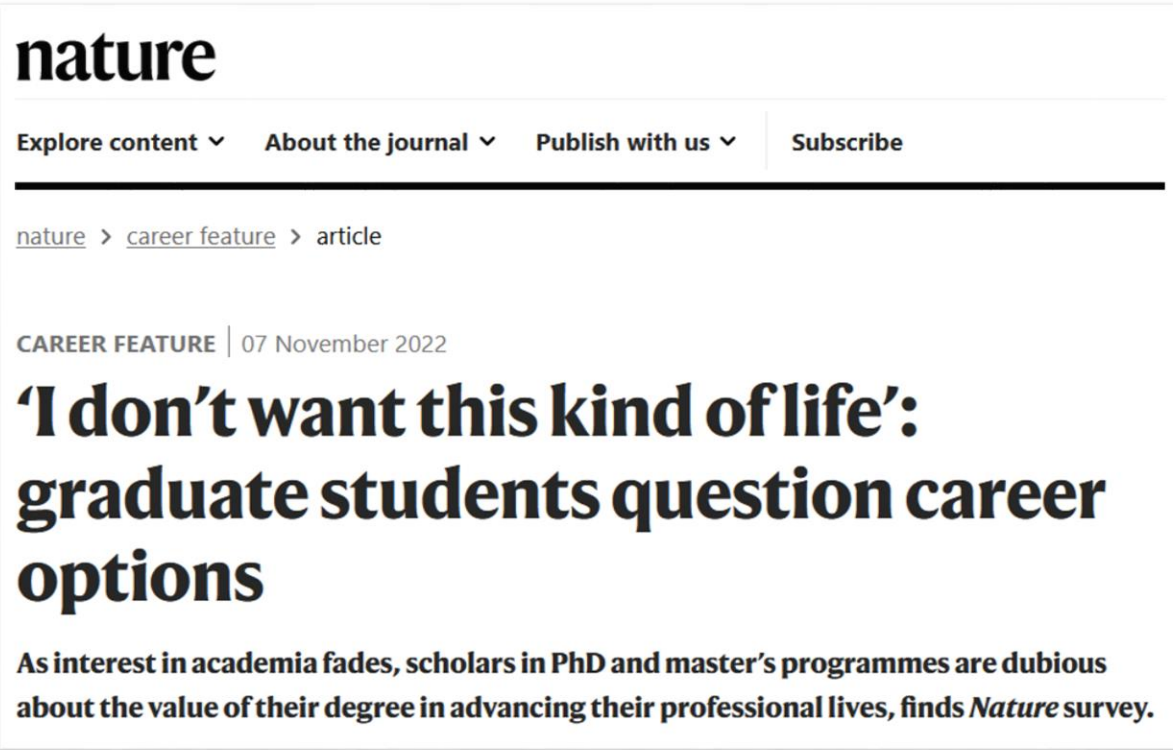
Nikolay V. Kukushkin from New York University in *PNAS*

## Preliminary remark II

*“Universities are committed to a mission that underpins their **purpose and function in society** as centres of new knowledge, understanding, skills and experience, through research, learning and teaching, leadership, outreach and service to society.”*

Steele, W., Rickards, L. (2021). The Role of the University in Society. In: The Sustainable Development Goals in Higher Education. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.

## Preliminary remark III



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CAREER FEATURE | 07 November 2022

### **‘I don’t want this kind of life’: graduate students question career options**

As interest in academia fades, scholars in PhD and master’s programmes are dubious about the value of their degree in advancing their professional lives, finds *Nature* survey.

*“Much of the pessimism around careers could be alleviated if students were **more aware of their value and of the wide range of potential opportunities**, [...] Their prospects are good because PhD students can contribute so much to society. We all live in knowledge economies. People who can think critically have much to offer.”*

## Contributing to a culture of effective doctoral supervision

- What do we consider to be effective doctoral supervision?
- What kind of culture is needed?
- Who are the contributors?

The goal is to train **doctoral researchers** to the highest skill levels to become **creative, responsible, critical and autonomous intellectual risk takers**.

Maintaining a quality culture in doctoral education: At research-intensive universities, LERU Policy Paper (2016)

<https://www.leru.org/publications/maintaining-a-quality-culture-in-doctoral-education-at-research-intensive-universities>

## What do we consider to be effective doctoral supervision?



Credits: Hans Sonneveld

## What kind of culture is needed?

***“Researchers say that their working culture is best when it is collaborative, inclusive, supportive and creative, when researchers are given time to focus on their research priorities, when leadership is transparent and open, and when individuals have a sense of safety and security.***

***But too often research culture is not at its best.”***

*“These results paint a shocking portrait of the research environment – and one we must all help change.”*

*Jeremy Farrar, Director of Wellcome.*

Wellcome Trust Report, <https://wellcome.org/reports/what-researchers-think-about-research-culture>



## What kind of culture is needed?

- Do we have a robust culture that allows risk-taking and failing?
- Are we sufficiently inclusive so that doctoral candidates become members of the community?
- What could be the role of doctoral schools?
- Are quality assurance measures aligned with the overall goal of doctoral education?
- Don't we sometimes put efficiency above effectiveness?

**‘When a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be a good measure’.**

**Providing quality doctoral supervision is an institutional responsibility.**



## Who are the contributors?

- Supervisors in their multiple roles
- Funders
- Academic leaders, e.g. top management, heads of doctoral schools, directors of doctoral programmes, heads of departments ...
- Professional support staff

## Conclusions

- Ensuring quality doctoral supervision is an **institutional responsibility**.
- The **research environment and culture** play a key role.
- It is worthwhile to continuously **reflect on the purpose** of doctoral education so as not to lose **focus on effectiveness** and replace it with efficiency.



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