TRUST ME!

Thesis Mentoring

++ a 1:1 coaching programme ++

Inspiring Leadership Leadership Foundation for Higher Education

++ Unsticking (International) Thesis Writers: talking out the unseen challenges

Dr Kay Guccione
Researcher Mentoring & Coaching
@kayguccione I @predoctorbility I #thesismentor

++ my role

researcher development

Educational mentoring & coaching design

Work with stuck students and stuck supervisors

Trying to understand the tensions and pitfalls

++ writing blocked by assumption

FROM 2nd YEAR WORKSHOPS

e.g. I'm not ready, I'm not good enough, I don't know how, I don't have enough data, I haven't got time, there's plenty of time left, it's not important right now, I'm not allowed to start yet, it's not normal to write now, I don't want to look too keen, I mustn't rush it, everyone else does it this way, I need to do 'x' first, If I do it too early I'll have to re-write it…etc. etc. etc.

Waiting for permission, a structural marker, an emotional readiness, a good role model…

++ thesis mentoring: rationale

writing myths and legends

1. Passively accepting that a thesis is one of life's great unknowns is not a sensible course of action; like any other writing task, it can, and must be defined (Murray, 2011).

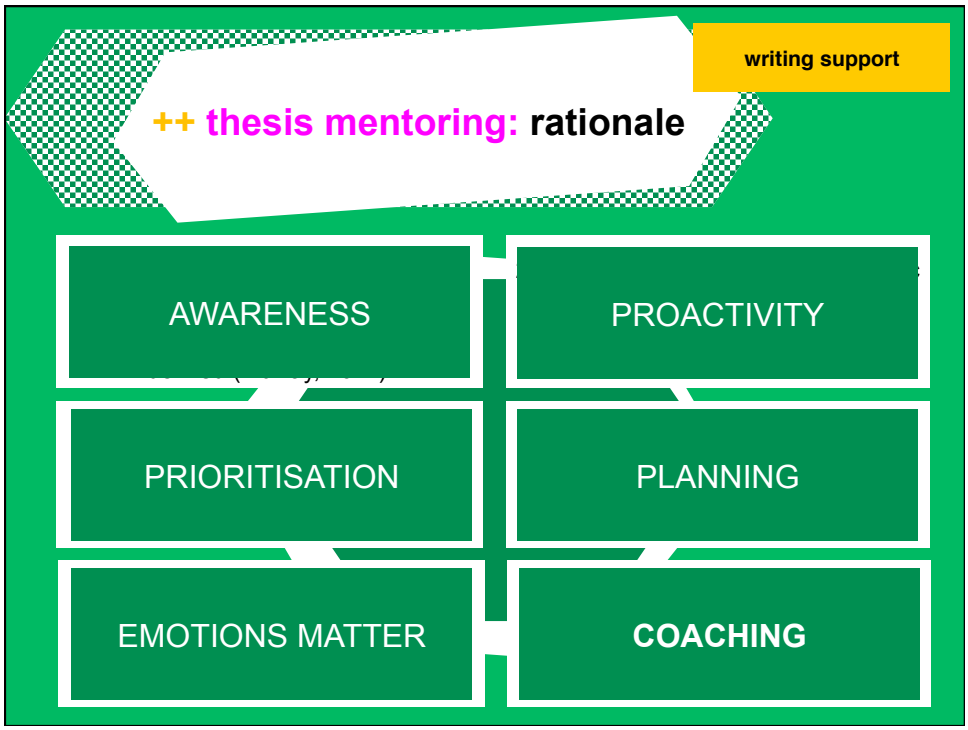
2. There is no such thing as academic writer's block. The key to writing a lot is to schedule time to do it. (Silvia, 2007).

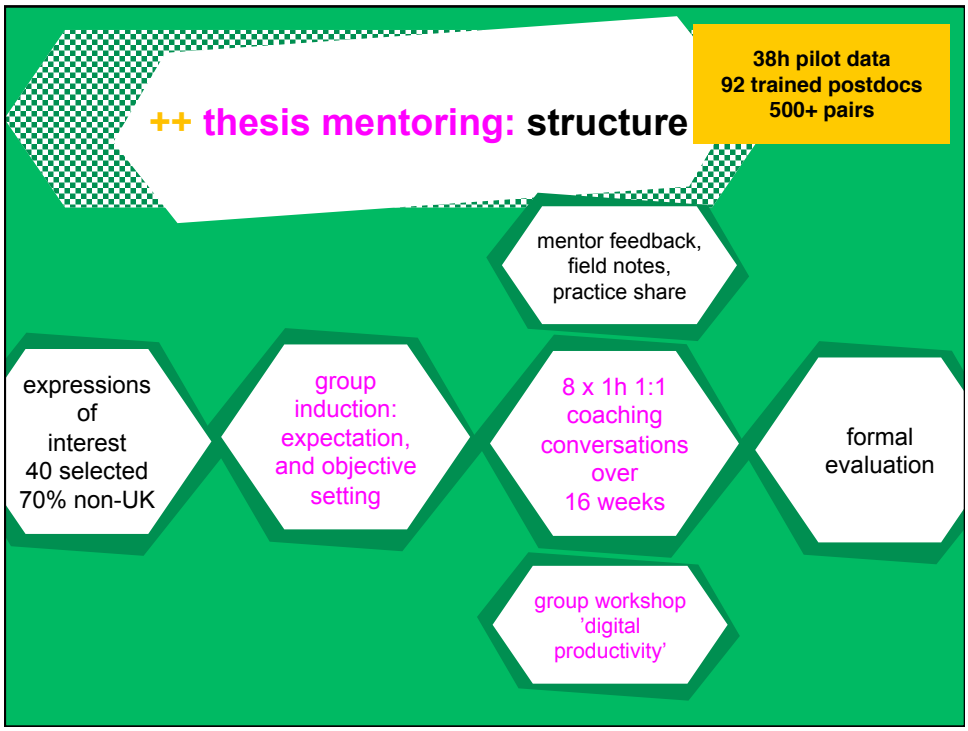
3. …disengagement from other tasks to engage with writing, repositions writing as legitimate academic work (Murray, 2013).

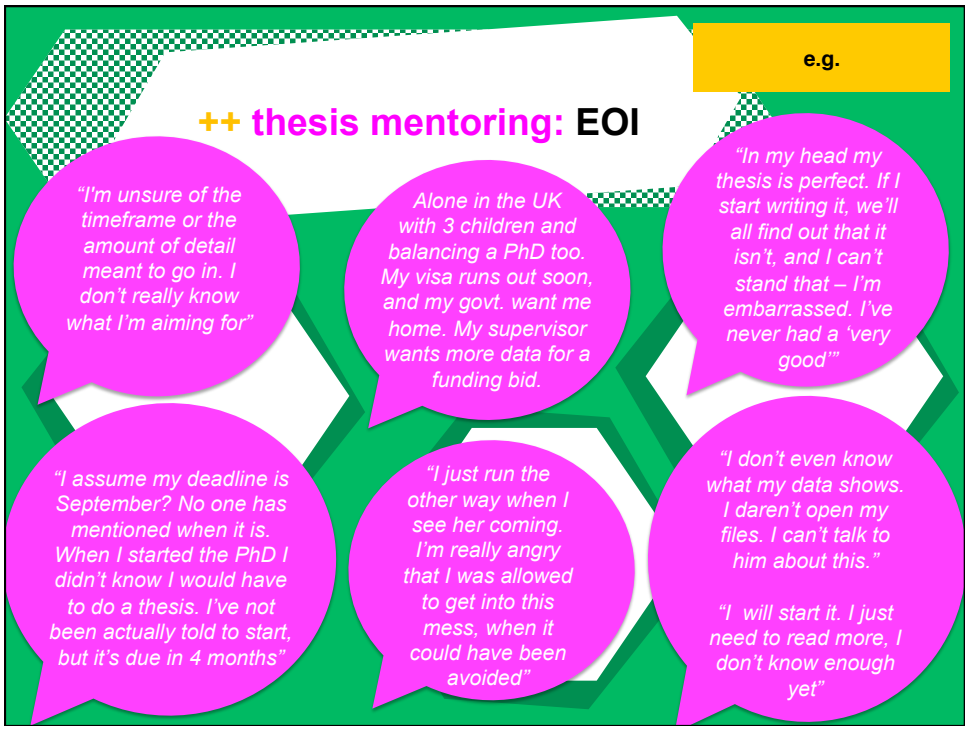
4. 'Writing up' positions the writing as ancillary, and a fairly straight forward, and mechanical act of reportage (Kamler & Thompson, 2014)

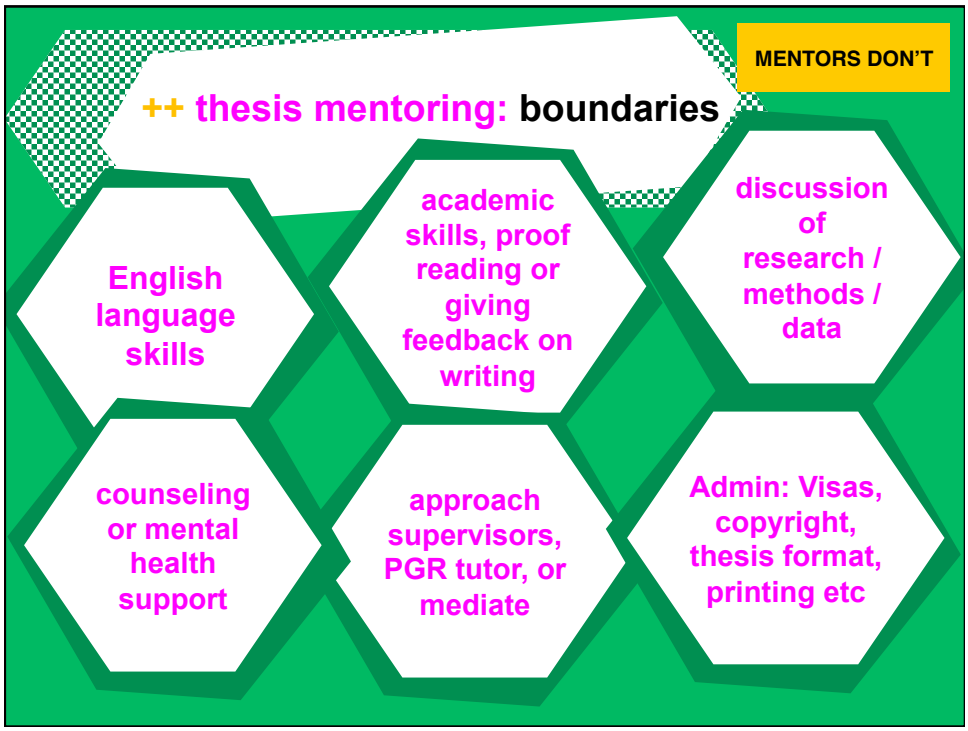
5. The positive and negative attitudes and feelings of graduate students towards writing matter in enabling them to succeed (Wellington, 2011).

6. Coaching helps PhD students to develop skills AND to manage emotions. (Kearns *et al*, 2008).


writing support
++ thesis mentoring: rationale
AWARENESS
PROACTIVITY
PRIORITISATION
PLANNING
EMOTIONS MATTER
COACHING


38h pilot data
92 trained postdocs
500+ pairs
++ thesis mentoring: structure
mentor feedback, field notes, practice share
expressions of interest 40 selected 70% non-UK
group induction: expectation, and objective setting
8 x 1h 1:1 coaching conversations over 16 weeks
formal evaluation
group workshop 'digital productivity'


e.g.
++ thesis mentoring: EOI
"I'm unsure of the timeframe or the amount of detail meant to go in. I don't really know what I'm aiming for"
Alone in the UK with 3 children and balancing a PhD too. My visa runs out soon, and my govt. want me home. My supervisor wants more data for a funding bid.
"In my head my thesis is perfect. If I start writing it, we'll all find out that it isn't, and I can't stand that – I'm embarrassed. I've never had a 'very good'"
"I assume my deadline is September? No one has mentioned when it is. When I started the PhD I didn't know I would have to do a thesis. I've not been actually told to start, but it's due in 4 months"
"I just run the other way when I see her coming. I'm really angry that I was allowed to get into this mess, when it could have been avoided"
"I don't even know what my data shows. I daren't open my files. I can't talk to him about this."
"I will start it. I just need to read more, I don't know enough yet"


MENTORS DON'T
++ thesis mentoring: boundaries
English language skills
academic skills, proof reading or giving feedback on writing
discussion of research / methods / data
counseling or mental health support
approach supervisors, PGR tutor, or mediate
Admin: Visas, copyright, thesis format, printing etc

++ thesis mentoring: outcomes

MENTORS DO

"In the first meeting we had a frank, grounded discussion about my thesis which helped convert it from something completely unachievable, into a realistic plan that I could get behind writing."

"Most of all, my mentor's friendliness, sense of humour and patience helped me find the solutions to my own problems by letting me talk unashamedly about me me me for a change!"

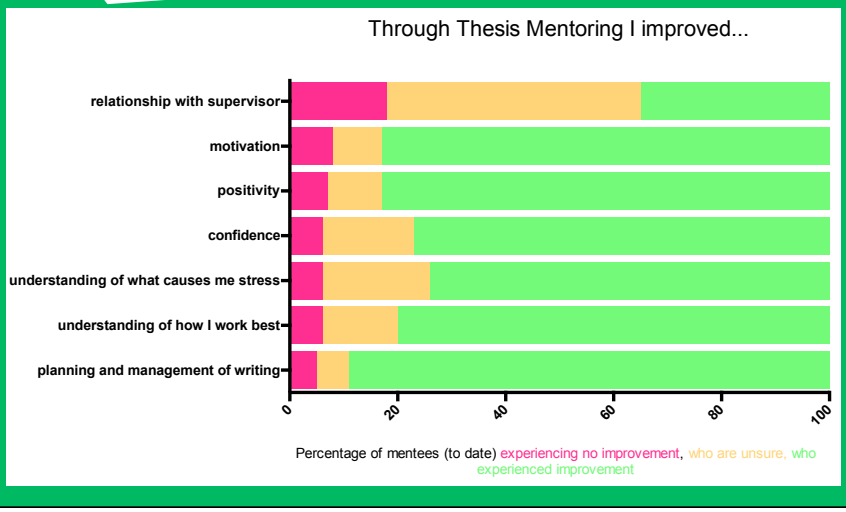
"Despite having completely different research backgrounds, we found a lot of common ground to build a beneficial working relationship. She was very encouraging and warm, always able to point out to my strengths and how I could build on them. She also helped me to recognize how the environment had an impact in my work, and focus on issues I could control instead of issues that were beyond my control."

"Meeting with a mentor proved to be the lifeline that I needed to get out and start making some positive changes. Their calm attitude and sensible advice gave me confidence that I was capable of finishing the PhD and that my concerns were not silly or unimportant, but normal things that the PhD process involves."

"It helped me identify problematic habits or thought processes that were affecting my work and helped me work out how I could deal with them by changing my working pattern and my attitude more generally."

++ thesis mentoring: outcomes

e.g.



both sides

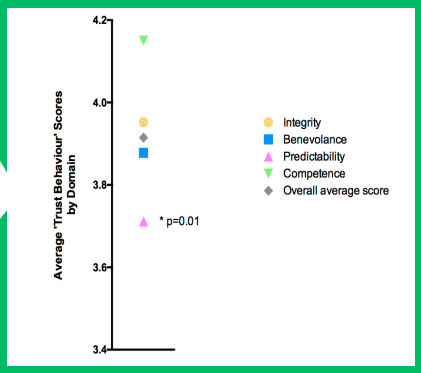
++ insecurities = vulnerabilities

Trust as a workplace phenomenon can be defined as '*willingness to accept uncertainly and make oneself vulnerable in the face of insecurity*' Hope-Hailey *et al*., 201

36 trust items on evaluation survey

++ thesis mentoring: supervisors

Predictability is a component of trust



++ supervisor worries/insecurities

why did I do this work?

"*I've tried hands on, I've tried hands off, I just don't know what they need, and they've stopped responding to emails.*"

Chase/quarry effect
What works for me
Silence is golden
More reporting?
I don't know either

++ the life and times of supervision

intense difference
transitions are hard
talking helps
people need skills

1. Doctoral development is continual identity reappraisal in response to new learning, changing priorities, and working relationships (e.g. Gardner, 2008).

2. Rapid identity shifts create feelings of confusion, conflict, and evokes an emotional response (e.g. Eraut, 2004).

3. Making sense of developmental experiences can be supported by good professional relationships (e.g. Clegg, 2008; Eraut, 2004).

4. Doctoral transition difficulties that go unresolved, are sustained and mediated by the relationship with the supervisor (e.g. McAlpine *et al*, 2012).

5. Mismatches matter. Students arrive with expectations for the relationship, mismatches lead to discontent (Holbrook *et al*, 2014).

6. Emotionally competent relationship building is required of supervisors (Jairam & Kahl, 2012).

++ the life and times of supervision

intense difference transitions are hard talking helps people need skills

1. Doctoral development is continual identity reappraisal in response to new learning, changing priorities, and working relationships (**uncertainty**) (e.g. Gardner, 2008).

2. Rapid identity shifts create feelings of confusion, conflict, and evoke an emotional response (**insecurity**) (e.g. Eraut, 2004).

3. Making sense of developmental experiences (**being vulnerable**) can be supported by good professional relationships (e.g. Clegg, 2008).

4. Doctoral transition difficulties that go unresolved, are sustained and mediated by the relationship with the supervisor (e.g. McAlpine *et al*, 2012).

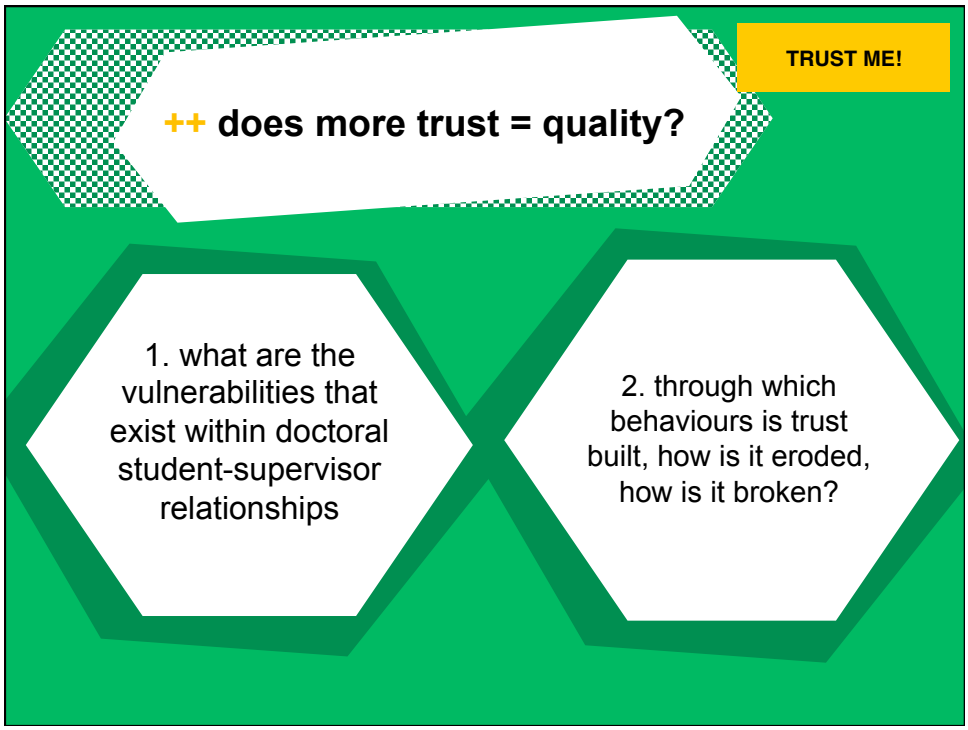
5. Mismatches matter. Students arrive with expectations for the relationship (**vulnerability**), mismatches lead to discontent (Holbrook *et al*, 2014).

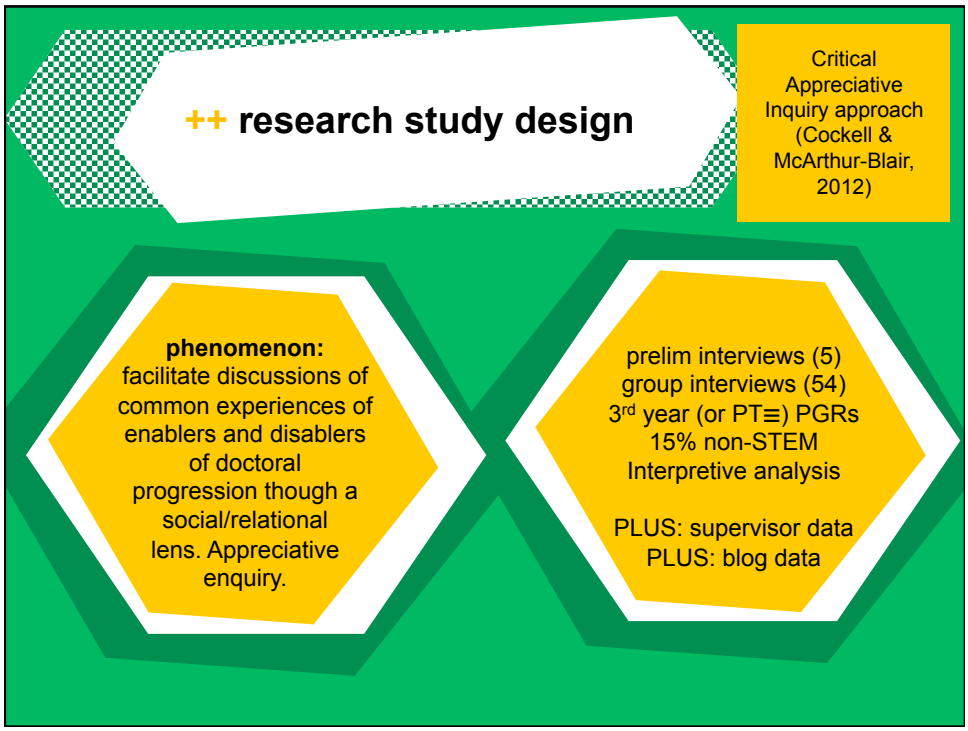
6. Emotionally competent relationship building is required of supervisors (**insecurity**) (Jairam & Kahl, 2012).

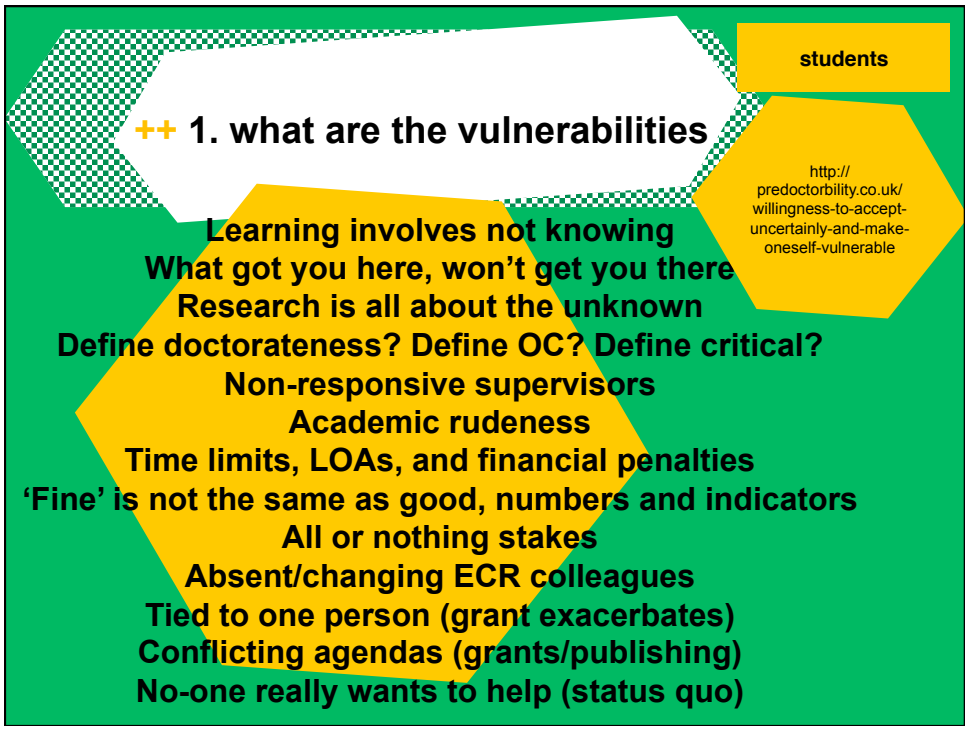
++ insecurities = vulnerabilities

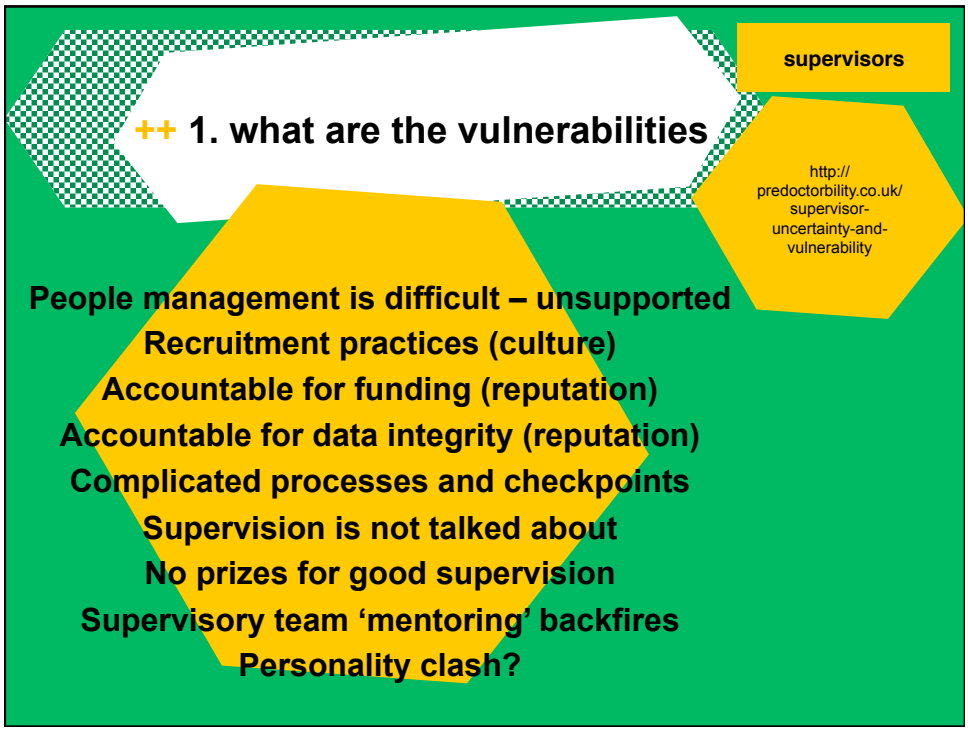
intense difference transitions are hard talking helps people need skills

Trust as a workplace phenomenon can be defined as '*willingness to accept uncertainly and make oneself vulnerable in the face of insecurity*' (Hope-Hailey *et al*., 201


TRUST ME!
++ does more trust = quality?
1. what are the vulnerabilities that exist within doctoral student-supervisor relationships
2. through which behaviours is trust built, how is it eroded, how is it broken?


++ research study design
Critical Appreciative Inquiry approach (Cockell & McArthur-Blair, 2012)
phenomenon: facilitate discussions of common experiences of enablers and disablers of doctoral progression though a social/relational lens. Appreciative enquiry.
prelim interviews (5)
group interviews (54)
3rd year (or PT≡) PGRs
15% non-STEM
Interpretive analysis
PLUS: supervisor data
PLUS: blog data


students
++ 1. what are the vulnerabilities
http://predoctorbility.co.uk/willingness-to-accept-uncertainly-and-make-oneself-vulnerable
Learning involves not knowing
What got you here, won't get you there
Research is all about the unknown
Define doctorateness? Define OC? Define critical?
Non-responsive supervisors
Academic rudeness
Time limits, LOAs, and financial penalties
'Fine' is not the same as good, numbers and indicators
All or nothing stakes
Absent/changing ECR colleagues
Tied to one person (grant exacerbates)
Conflicting agendas (grants/publishing)
No-one really wants to help (status quo)


supervisors
++ 1. what are the vulnerabilities
http://predoctorbility.co.uk/supervisor-uncertainty-and-vulnerability
People management is difficult – unsupported
Recruitment practices (culture)
Accountable for funding (reputation)
Accountable for data integrity (reputation)
Complicated processes and checkpoints
Supervision is not talked about
No prizes for good supervision
Supervisory team 'mentoring' backfires
Personality clash?

++ 2. on trust building and breaking

Everyone said

An ‘ongoing process over time’
You have to demonstrate you’re trustworthy
Within and between formal supervision meetings
Giving trust garners trust – safe to try *vs* unsafe = ‘hiding’
Giving trust garners trust – checking/snooping/monitoring
Feedback practices matter greatly
Credit, value, recognition, fairness, honesty – research integrity
Disclosure, sharing, empathy, being in it together ± success
Confidentiality *vs* ‘calling witness’ or gossip
Sabotage, being set up, bullying

++ 2. on trust building and breaking

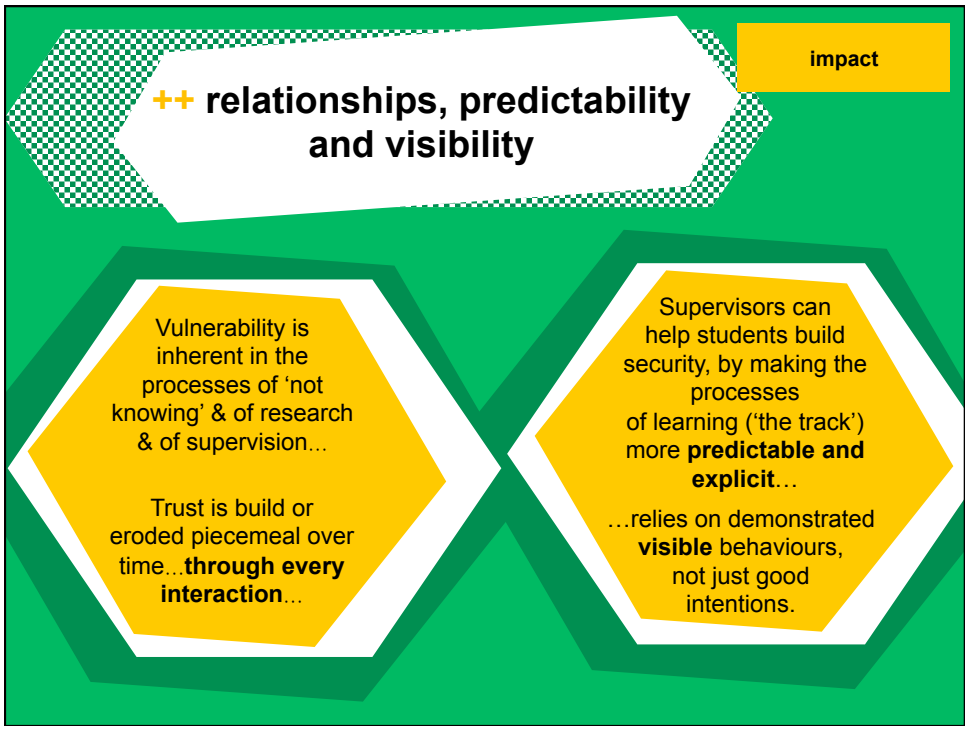
students (and supervisors) said

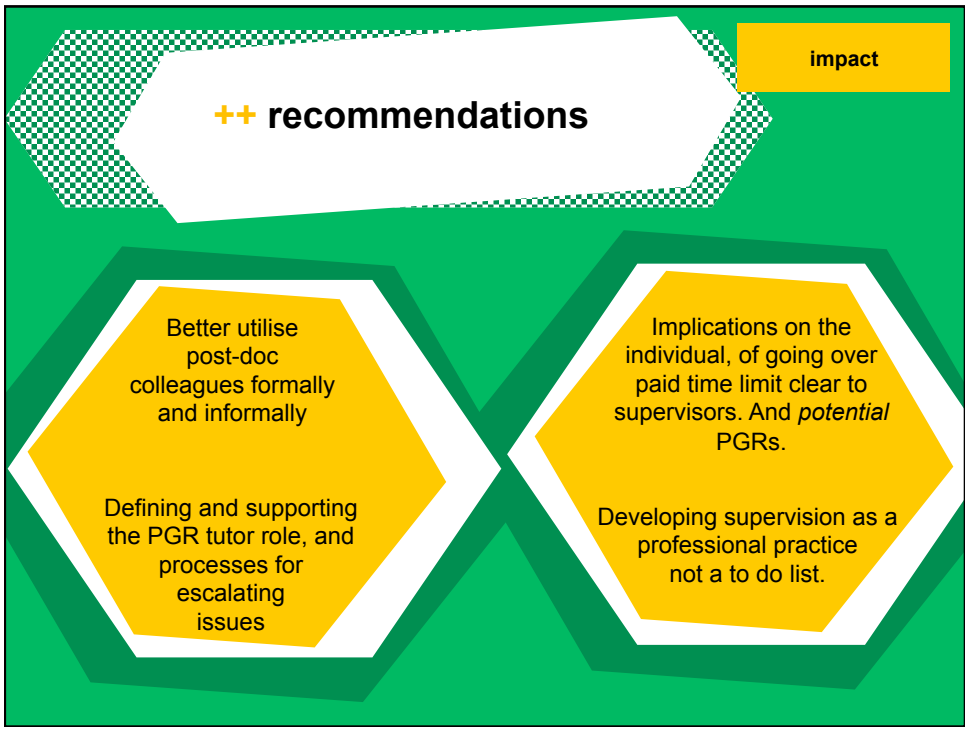
BUT!

ONLY students talked about the ‘keeping me on track’ and the ‘rules of the game’…

awareness of the processes and requirements for success…

powerless to guess without guidance


impact
++ relationships, predictability and visibility
Vulnerability is inherent in the processes of 'not knowing' & of research & of supervision...
Trust is build or eroded piecemeal over time...**through every interaction**...
Supervisors can help students build security, by making the processes of learning ('the track') more **predictable and explicit**…
…relies on demonstrated **visible** behaviours, not just good intentions.


impact
++ recommendations
Better utilise post-doc colleagues formally and informally
Defining and supporting the PGR tutor role, and processes for escalating issues
Implications on the individual, of going over paid time limit clear to supervisors. And *potential* PGRs.
Developing supervision as a professional practice not a to do list.

to consider
++ interpreting for the international context…
questions to in considering international students…
Predictability harder in a different culture?
Part of predictability is feeling someone is 'the same' as you.
Social relationship building deficit?