



Generation Delta

Retention and Progression Staff Roundtable
December 8 2023
(online)

Student Workshop

- **Date & location**

- Dec 5 2023, Leeds; 25 students from 19 universities

- **Themes:**

- Progression through the PhD: interim exams and the final viva (Prof Luke Windsor)
- Tackling racism and sexism (3 case studies)
- Actual student experiences of progression
- Support for BAME Women PGR students (Louise Banahene OBE)



1. What do you understand by 'Progression' in the context of doctoral studies?

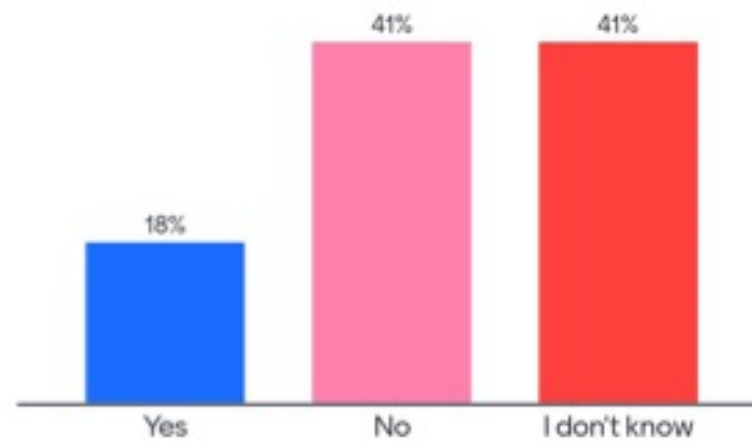
55 responses



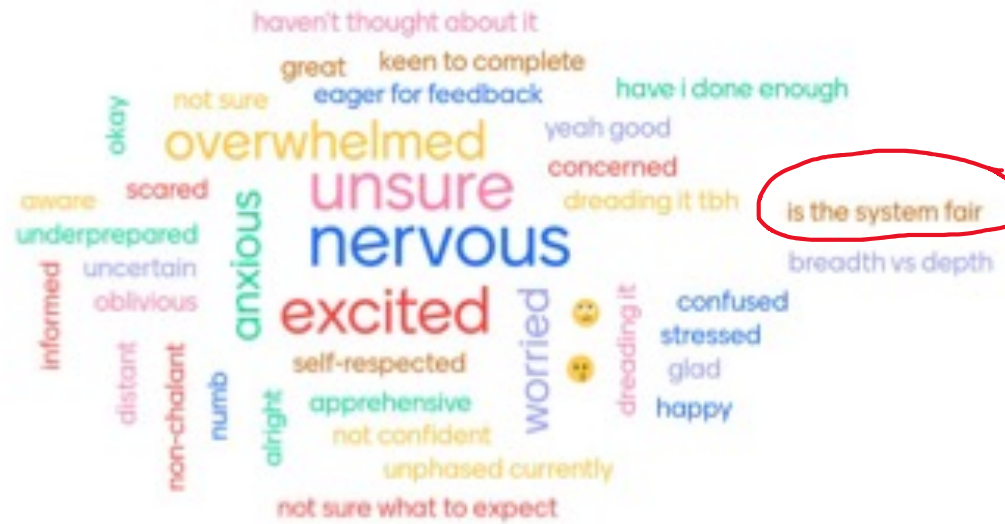
Confusion:

- Procedure?
- Knowledge generation?
- Career development?

2. Do you think your university provides enough support for interim exams during the PhD and the final viva?



4. How do you feel about your upcoming interim exam/ final viva?
56 responses



Emotional extremes!

3. What is the single most important thing your university can do to help you prepare for interim exams during the PhD and the final viva?

50 responses



- Pastoral care
- Practice
- Role models

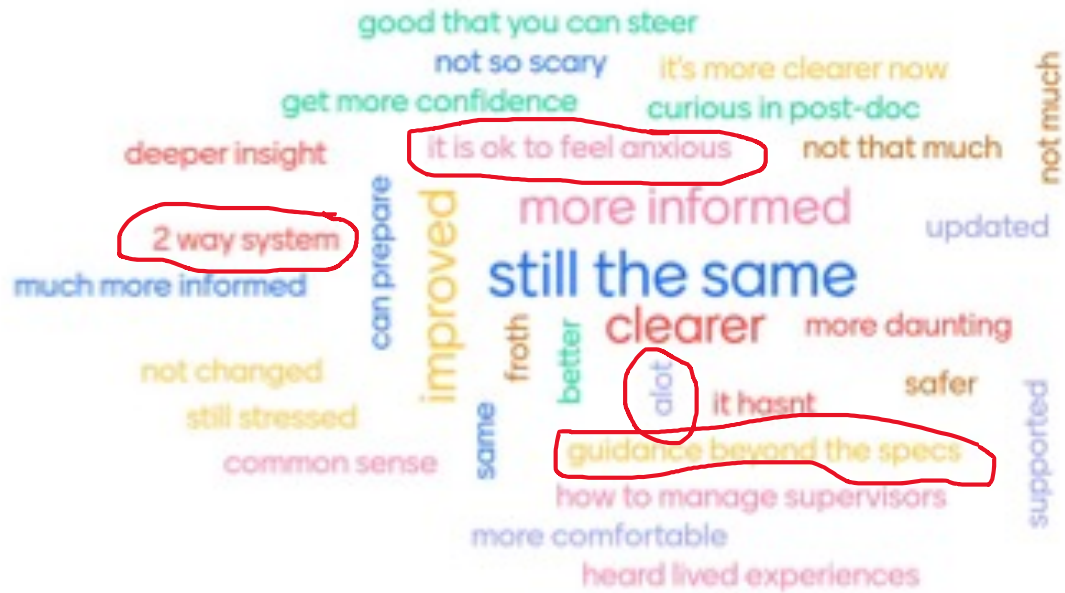
3. What do you think is the best thing you can do to prepare for your upgrade/ viva?

42 responses



- communication with supervisors and peers
- knowledge of procedure and work
- preparation
- confidence and wellbeing

1. How has your understanding of progression (upgrade/ final viva) changed?
37 responses



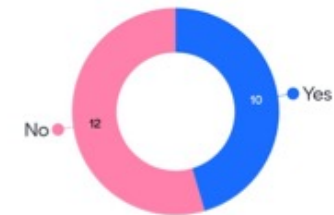
1. Have you experienced or witnessed discrimination or harassment at your institution during your doctoral studies?



2. Do you know where to go if you experience or witness racism or sexism at your institution?



3. Do you know the policy(ies) of your institution towards racism, sexism and racial or sexual harassment?



Valerie: successful viva; but told by supervisor to pursue hobby



Discussion:

- Mean on the part of the supervisor who should be helping the student to grow
- Seen as a sexist and subjective judgement rather than academic

- Newer Phd students unsure what to do; more experienced would go to the Doctoral College – but aware that this takes time and may not produce the desired outcome

- Recognition of power dynamic: Fears around reporting and burning bridges so listen to the supervisor – get an explanation on context. **Anonymous reporting?** Fear that if you are the only person of colour reporting racial bias, you will be identifiable. **Would non-BAME report racial bias?** Students surprised to hear this

Action:

- Challenge power dynamic: Valerie has finished her PhD and she is the expert. **But** power dynamic: she will be relying on supervisor for references?
- Move away from the supervisor but help the next person who is supervised by them.

Mary: supervisor recommends MPhil instead of PhD to upgrade panel



Discussion:

- The supervisor's comments would bias the process – seen as very irresponsible.
- Importance of supervisor as ally: the supervisor prompted candidate to refuse a sugg meant she could continue on her programme as planned.

Action:

- **Listen:** if supervisor is advising you not to finish need to take that on board. If clear signals saying 'this is not for you', should I be so stubborn to complete because black women are expected to be resilient?
- **Continue** with the upgrade – reflect and plan with or without supervisor based on the upgrade outcome. Also, write to the panel disagreeing with the supervisor's judgment.
- **Change** team – if no belief in candidate then it's time to change the supervisor.
- Option E: **do nothing** until panel decision because the process should be impartial. Act when outcome of the upgrade is known. Upgrade also a place where candidates can raise concerns.

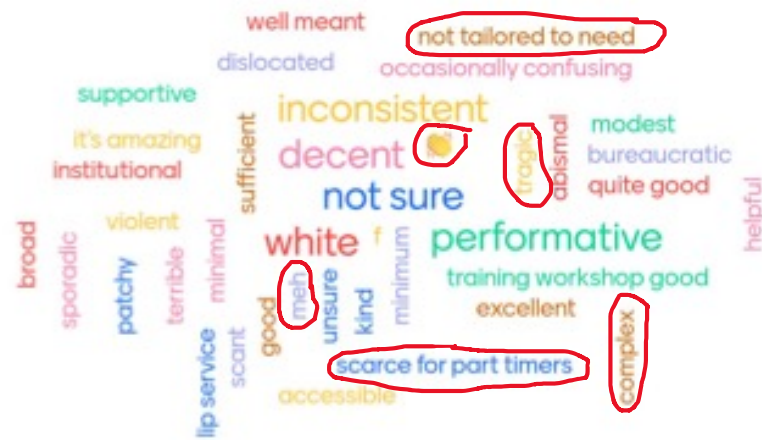
Farah: failed viva as unable to do enough fieldwork due to COVID restrictions



- Challenge: Look at all the guidelines. If the supervisor as an expert has seen your work and put you forward, challenge decision and see what can be done.
- Communicate: speak to supervisor honestly and get more details.
- Lobby: convince supervisor to work with you - seeking a new supervisor shouldn't be the first option.

2. How would you describe the support available at your institution?

44 responses



Very positive
Very negative
Ambivalent



3. What should your institution prioritise in support of BAME women PGR students?
40 responses



- Place
- Practices
- Personnel
- Politics