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Protocol for a Systematic Scoping Review of Literature on PGT

Title: Current research into postgraduate taught education in the United Kingdom: methods, areas of focus, gaps. A systematic scoping review.

Gale Macleod (University of Edinburgh), Gerri Matthews-Smith (Edinburgh Napier University), Rosa Marvell (University of Sussex), Marshall Dozier (University of Edinburgh)

Background/rationale

Taught postgraduate (PGT) study is the new frontier for many topics in higher education that were previously studied primarily in undergraduate populations. This sector of higher education is increasingly the focus of research. Common areas of study include:

- widening participation (e.g. Wakeling and Laurison, 2017);
- transition into PGT (Bamber, *et al.*, 2019; Bownes, *et al.*, 2017; Evans, *et al.*, 2018);
- motivations for PGT study (Bowman, 2005; Ho *et al.* 2012; Morgan 2015)
- PGT student identity (Chapman and Pyvis, 2005; Tobbell and O'Donnell, 2013);
- the challenges facing PGT programme directors (Macleod, *et al.*, 2018; Mitchell, 2015)
- PGT student perceptions of support (Hallet, 2010);
- building PGT student communities (Schartner, 2015);
- a focus on online communities (Joksimović, *et al.* 2015; Mello, 2016), and
- blended learning (Adekola, *et al.*, 2017);
- employability (Li, 2013);
- PGT assessment (Brown, 2014; Dunworth and Sanchez, 2018) including,
- the dissertation stage (Ginn, 2014).

In addition to this expansion of research interest into the PGT domain (see Figure 1. Publication year chart) the PGT student population profile raises distinctive issues to that of UG and PGR populations. The larger proportion of non-UK students makes the experience of international students a significant area of interest (e.g. Coates and Dickinson, 2012; Fakunle, Allison and Fordyce, 2016; Menzies and Baron, 2014; Skyrme and McGee, 2016). Over 20 years ago Burgess, *et al.,* (1998) observed that overseas students on postgraduate programmes were, 'a key issue for the financial stability of many UK universities.' (1998,155). While the numbers of part-time students are in decline, in 2017/8 they still accounted for 43.8% of PGT student enrolments (HESA, 2019). These students are often returners to study and many are managing their studies alongside work and other responsibilities (Murray, *et al.*, 2014), and the issues around part-time study have also been the subject of research (e.g. Ho, *et al.*, 2012; Pratt, *et al.,* 2007).

Over ten years ago Pereda, *et al.*, (2007) suggested that it was growth in PGT provision and the function it serves as an income generator for universities that explained the increase in attention it was receiving from researchers (and we could add, policy bodies). The higher

education sector is heavily populated with agencies which produce reports, many of which contain primary data, however these reports are not peer reviewed. The diversity of the sector and its students, along with this rapid expansion of research and interest in this area, makes it increasingly difficult to keep up with developments and maintain an awareness of relevant evidence which could inform policy and practice in the area.

The aim of this systematic review is to generate an overall view of the current state of knowledge regarding the PGT sector in the UK, including the quality of the evidence, areas of focus and gaps in existing knowledge.

RQs:
1. What are the methodological features of research into the PGT sector in the UK?
2. What are the areas of focus of research into PGT in the UK in the last 10 years?
3. Where are there gaps in robust evidence?

Inclusion criteria
- published from Jan 2008 onwards
- reporting data from the UK (may be alongside reports of data from other national contexts)
- peer reviewed or grey literature or PhD theses
- reporting primary data in which data for PGT students/ sector is discrete and identifiable or secondary analysis of such data
- with a description of the sampling strategy, data collection procedures and the type of data-analysis considered
- There are no inclusion/exclusion criteria based on quality

Exclusion criteria
- No UK data presented
- Data presented but no information on how they were collected beyond naming a method
- PGT related data are not identifiable
- A purely conceptual or theoretical paper

Search strategy
Literature databases BEI, ERIC, Web of Science, and IBSS will be searched using thesaurus terms (where available) and free-text searches. The searches will be adapted for each database as required.

Google Scholar will be used for forward citation tracking of included studies to identify more recent publications meeting the inclusion criteria.

The reference lists of publications meeting inclusion criteria will be screened to identify other publications meeting the inclusion criteria.

Research into Higher Education Abstracts will be hand-searched from 2008 - present.

Grey literature: Key organisations will be identified (through professional networks) and a Google advanced search within those organisation domain names, using search strings adapted for the more basic Boolean search options, will be performed to find grey literature. Google

advanced search results (title, URL, description extract) will be scraped in bulk using DataMiner (https://data-miner.io/) and exported into Excel for screening offline.

A call for additional grey literature will be issued through UKCGE networks, JISCmail lists, and PhD theses will be searched using ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

Search terms
Appropriate search terms will be used for each database, and will include flexible formulations of the keywords 'Taught postgraduate' or M-Level or Master* as well as equivalent database thesaurus terms where available.

An indicative search for the database BEI (EBSCO) is provided here:

(TX (taught OR diploma OR certificate) N2 (postgraduate OR post graduate OR post-graduate) OR TX (master* OR m-level) OR (DE "MASTER'S degree" OR DE "MASTER of arts degree" OR DE "MASTER of business administration degree" OR DE "MASTER of library science degree")) AND (TX British or Britain or UK or United Kingdom or England or Scotland or Ireland or Wales OR GE Great Britain)

Where the database allows, a full-text search will be carried out. Searches will be limited by date of publication (2008-present), country (United Kingdom), and will be carried out by MD.

Managing the data and selection
All search results from databases will be exported to Endnote to a shared library. After duplications are removed (by Endnote and by hand) the remaining results will be exported to Excel, at which point the results of the other search strategies will be added.

Screening will be carried out first of title and abstract and then of full-text. The database search results will be split 50-50 between two screeners (GM and GMS) who will independently check a 10% sample of one another's decisions at the outset for calibration.

Screening of grey literature results will be done by a single reviewer (RM) again with 10% independent checking at the outset (GM).

Data extraction
A data extraction framework will be used to record the following information:

- Study details (authors, year, citation, country of study,)
- Methodology (aim of study, research design, methods of data collection, methods of analysis)
- Sample characteristics (size, setting, demographics [age, sex, country of origin], mode of study (full-time, part-time, online, face to face, blended), recruitment, whether intended by authors to be representative
- Disciplinary field of participants where stated
- Focus of study (e.g. employability, assessment, sense of belonging, internationalisation, motivations for study, transitions)
- Theoretical framework adopted where stated
- Results/ Findings reported
- Quality score using the appropriate Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist

Dozier is leading on developing the search strategy and search terms
Macleod and Matthews-Smith will carry out the sifting and extraction for academic literature, Marvell will lead on the grey literature sifting and extraction.

Reporting the Findings
A qualitative synthesis structured by the research questions will be produced. Some numerical data will also be presented, e.g. number of papers by topic over time.
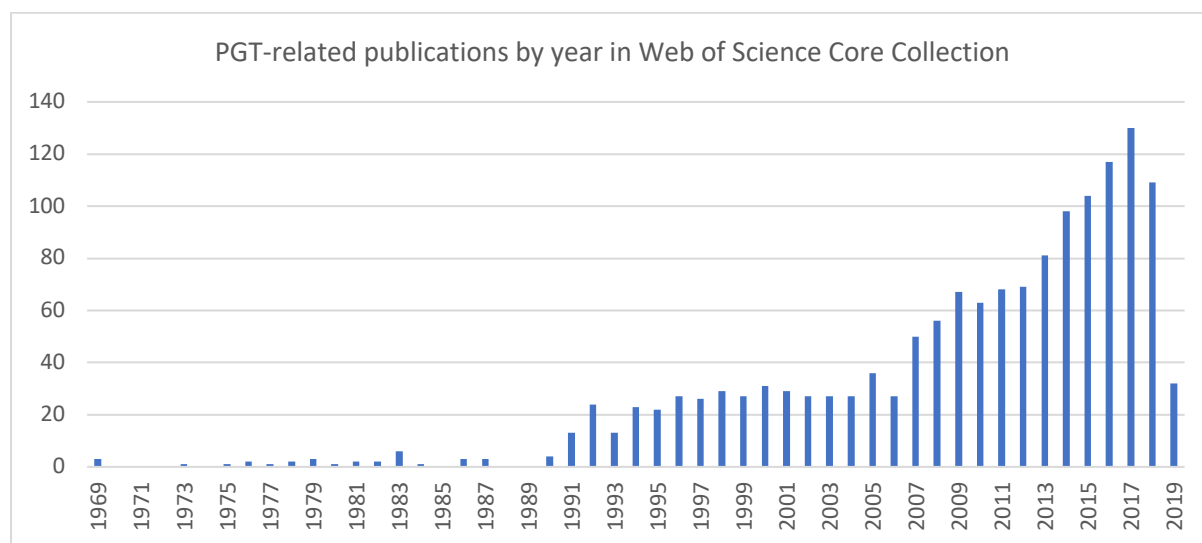

PGT-related publications by year in Web of Science Core Collection

Figure 1. Publication Year Chart. Data from Web of Science (https://wok.mimas.ac.uk) 1969-present, generated with search string: TS=(((taught OR diploma OR certificate) NEAR/5 (postgraduate OR "post graduate" OR post-graduate)) OR ((master OR masters OR master's) NEAR/5 (taught OR degree OR postgraduate OR student*)) OR m-level) AND (TS=(British OR Britain OR UK OR "united kingdom" OR England OR Scotland OR Ireland OR Wales) OR CU= (Britain OR UK OR "united kingdom" OR England OR Scotland OR Ireland OR Wales))

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