

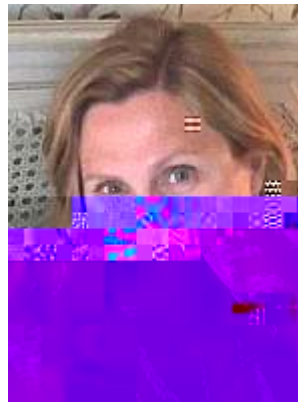


Video Call Support Groups for Doctoral Researchers

An Implementation Guide



This Guide was written by Claire Durrant, doctoral researcher in Social Work at the University of Sussex, with the support of the [U-DOC](#) Project.



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June 2020



"The thing is with PhDs, as I'm starting to see, is that it can be quite isolating....but if there was something that bound people together more strongly just intrinsically, then my feeling is that I think people would be less stressed about their position and feel like they're less imposters and stuff like that." (Doctoral Researcher, U-DOC Focus Group, Spring 2018)

"When I worked at home a lot with the PhD, I was like completely de-socialised" (Doctoral Researcher, U-DOC Focus Group, Spring 2018)

Background

This initiative is based on the experience of four doctoral researchers in the School of Education and Social Work (ESW) who set up a monthly video call support group in the first year of their PhD. Three years later, they still meet online once a month to discuss issues relating to their PhDs and to support each other through the ups and downs of PhD life. Given its success at supporting the mental wellbeing of the Doctoral Researchers taking part, a second group has been set-up in ESW and,



possible to set up a support group that meets face-to-face. This guidance can also be used for face-to-face groups.

Group members describe their experience over the last three years of participating in the video call support group as very positive. They say that it has kept them connected, made them feel supported during the highs and lows of PhD life and, most importantly, has improved their mental wellbeing. They now hope that other people can benefit from their initiative.

Potential benefits for Doctoral Researchers

"You're just doing your thing alone, without knowing a lot of things that are happening, and if you are not somebody that actually goes out to meet people, you won't actually meet other PhD students, even in the same department." (Doctoral Researcher, U-DOC Focus Group, Spring 2018)

A key benefit of the video call support group is that it guarantees that, at least once a month, members can talk to other people going through the same specific experience of studying for a PhD – an experience which is often shared by people who have not been through it themselves to understand. Doing a PhD can be a lonely and isolating



Groups should meet at least once a month – more if members want to. The meeting should be scheduled to last around an hour. If you are happy to share your phone number and the group is going well, you could also consider setting up a WhatsApp group so you can message each other between your monthly calls. For some this could be a really helpful additional support, but for others it may be too much. You will need to decide as a group what you prefer.

The video call support group is ideally made up of a maximum of four people but three could also work.

The composition of the group should be flexible but there should be as much homogeneity in terms of circumstances and interests as is realistically possible. It won't always be possible

