So who wants to do an EdD anyway? Evidence from the Institute of Education EdD Completions 1996-2013[1]

Denise Hawkes, Doctoral School and Department of Quantitative Social Science

Institute of Education, University of London

Sue Taylor, Doctoral School and Department of Early Years and Primary Education,

Institute of Education, University of London

Abstract

In thinking about future developments on the EdD programmes at the Institute of Education, it is important to consider who elects to undertake an EdD in the first instance. This paper looks back across the students who have completed the EdD since 1996 and the International EdD since 2001 and considers which professional settings they have come from. Looking across different professional settings, we compare completion times and other progression markers such as the completion of the taught courses across the EdD and International EdD   It is hoped that understanding which groups of professionals complete the EdD in a timely fashion and which groups take longer, will to help providing evidence as to which additional resources could be most useful to produce. In addition, such information will provide evidence as to which professional settings have the largest institutional constraints for the EdD candidate to navigate and therefore where additional support maybe needed for timely completions of the programme.

Introduction

The Institute of Education has had an EdD programme since 1996. At the time of writing there are three separate EdD programmes at the Institute of Education, EdD (Home), EdD (International) and an EdD (Dual Award) which is offered together with National Institute of Education (NIE) in Singapore. Whichever EdD programme the students follow there is a common structure to programme. In the first year the students follow four taught courses, three of which are assessed and a non-assessed specialist course. It is this specialist course which makes the EdD (Home) and EdD (International) distinct from each other as those on the International Route must undertake the International Education Course which focuses on comparative studies. The assignments from the taught courses build into a portfolio with an additional reflective statement that encourages the students to draw key points of learning from the first year and develop an understanding of themselves as researchers.

Table 1: IoE EdD Programme Structure

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4-7
Taught Courses	Research Phrase		
Foundations of Professionalism	Portfolio	IFS submission	Thesis submission
Methods of Enquiry 1	IFS Proposal	Thesis Proposal	Viva
Methods of Enquiry 2		Formal Review of Proposal	
Option Course			

During the second year and half of the third year the students develop their Institution Focused Study (IFS), their first opportunity to undertake independent research. From the middle of the third year until the end of their programme of study the students develop their thesis, finishing with between four and seven years on programme. For EdD (International) programme the students most complete a thesis that include an international element or demonstrate that their research has international aspects. For older cohorts on the programme students have had to complete more taught courses and the taught phrase of the programme has taken two years rather than one. At this time, the student's duration on programme was between five and seven years.

In this paper we will look at the completion times of those have completed an EdD at the Institute of Education since 1996 and consider whether these completion times are influenced by the student's occupation and sector of employment. The aim of this investigation was to inform future developments on the programme and how we might support our students better. Knowing our market and to identifying the key constraints and enablers for an EdD completion will help in the potential developments in terms of content, timescale and mode of delivery.

Literature review

Building on the model presented Girves and Wemmerus' (1988) most empirical papers in the field consider the student characteristics at entry and include factors such as: gender, age, ethnicity, GPA, GRE, marital status and who is paying the fees (self funded or employer funded) (Wao and Onwuegbuzi 2011, Strayhorn 2005). These student level characteristics are often supplemented by adding cohort/programme characteristics by taking the group averages of these characteristics. (Lovitts (2001), Tinto 1993, Girves and Wemmerus 1988).

Such studies find the expected results, students with good prior academic profiles, those funded by an employer and those in cohorts with a higher proportion with good prior academic profiles, finish fastest. However interestingly the very occupations and work environments in which their research

is undertaken is rather lacking from the list of covariates and this paper will include to the potential list of variables occupation and sector of employment.

Many of the papers also call for qualitative research to help explain the quantitative evidence. In this paper we shall draw on our experience working with the EdD students to provide insights into the numbers found, in the same way our students are encouraged to do in their thesis. These insights will help to identify key constraints and opportunities for the EdD students from the addition of information about their workplace that is their LAB, into the model. Once these constraints and opportunities are identified these will be used to inform the future developments on out programme.

Data

The data has been drawn from administrative records of the students who have completed an EdD at the Institute of Education since 1996. Completion times are taken as time on programme net of interruptions (time off of the programme).   Whilst the time on programme had a maximum of seven years it is clear from the data file that the maximum duration was more flexibly understood in the past than now. We have available on the data file information on the year the student completed the programme, whether they are home student or international student for fees, what their sector of employment is and their employment on entry to the programme. Other personal characteristics such as age and gender are available but are not found to be as predictive as in previous studies. They are therefore excluded from the analysis below but are available from the authors on request.
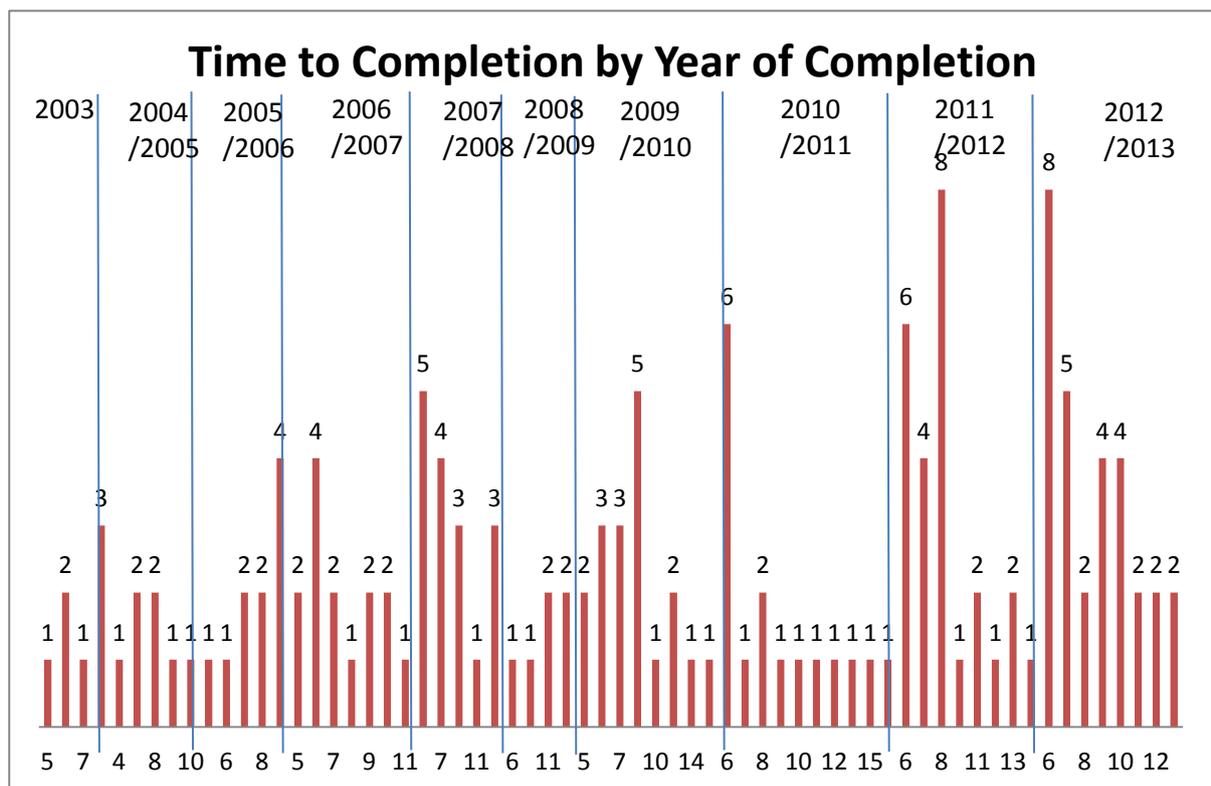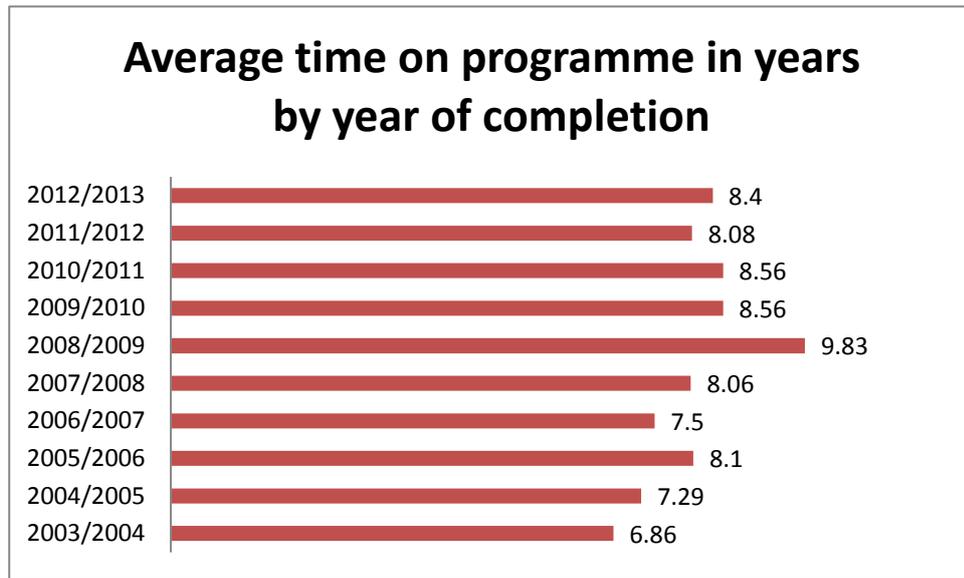
Employment sector has been coded as: higher education, further education, education, civil service, LEA and other. Other included medical and museum educators largely, not many of these in this data but a growing proportion in the more recent cohorts.

We did initially want to consider their time to intermediate markers as well as their time on the programme. However it was clear from considering the data that the vast majority complete the taught phase of their EdD in a timely fashion, with those who do not often being those who exit the programme early. The delay in terms of time on programme appears to happen, as expected, on entry to the research stage of the programme in the second year. Whilst the very recent cohorts have had a much tighter timeline for their IFS (to be completed in 18 months) these students are not represented in the data we have as they are still relatively early in their EdD journey.

Descriptive Statistics

Looking at the 149 students for whom we have information on their occupation and industry the average length of time on programme for those completing between 2003 and 2013 was 8.2 years, ranging from a minimum of 4 years and a maximum of 15 years. Looking at the completion times year by year, as demonstrated in figure 1 below, it can be seen that the time to completion has been increasing overtime. This can be explained by recent attempts to support long running students to complete the programme more swiftly. This is supported by the evidence in figure 2 below which show the time to completion by year of completion. It shows in recent years more diversity is found

in the time to completion by year as the long running students are encouraged to exit and the recent graduates finish in a more timely fashion.

Average time on programme in years by year of completion

Year	Average time
2012/2013	8.4
2011/2012	8.08
2010/2011	8.56
2009/2010	8.56
2008/2009	9.83
2007/2008	8.06
2006/2007	7.5
2005/2006	8.1
2004/2005	7.29
2003/2004	6.86

Time to Completion by Year of Completion

Home students take longer on average than those paying international fees with home students taking 8.5 years on average compared to 7.2 years on average for international fee payers. This could be due to higher fees for the internationals and could be a consequence of the later initial start of the EdD International Programme compared to the Home Programme. Those who are IoE staff and therefore fees are not payable also complete in 7.2 years, more in line with the international group than the home cohort. In the next section we will consider the institutional and occupational difference between the students which is likely to explain some of these difference between the Home and International Programmes.

Results

In this section we focus on the difference in completion times by sector of employment and occupation. In table 2 are the average completion times by sector of employment at the start of the programme.   Those from a Higher Education background are the quickest on average to complete the programme whilst those working for the Local Education Authority (LEA), in local government in the UK, are the slowest to complete.

Those in Higher Education are likely to have dedicated research or professional development time when undertaking a doctorate. In this environment a doctorate is usual expected and therefore time is dedicated to support staff to complete it.

For those employed by Local Governments many changes in the sector have meant that those who would have previously been employed full-time in a secure post have found their budgets and responsibilities tasks devolved to schools directly. Many of our EdD students who started as LEA employees have found themselves in the predicament of finding alternative employment. Given their levels of experience they have frequently set up their own consultancy businesses. Whatever the solution the change in employer has an impact with regard to their ability to self-fund as oppose to funding from their employer. This situation is enhanced for those who turn to self-employment and find dedicating time to unpaid EdD research difficult especially when faced with the tensions of not turning work away.

Table 2 Average Completion Time by Sector of Employment

Sector	Mean/Median (years)	
Higher Education	7.5	7
Education	7.8	8
Further Education	7.8	7.5
Civil Service	7.9	7.5
LEA	8.6	8
Other	8.7	7

In table 3 we consider the average completion time by occupation at the start of the programme. Looking at occupation groups' managers and administrators are the quickest to complete whilst head teachers have the longest times on the programme. For this group in education their work is fairly well defined and many find it easy at the end of the day to leave their work at their desk. This is not often the experience for many in the teaching side of the education sector, many whom define their work as a vocation which often means it is never really completely put down in the evenings and weekends.

Table 3 Average Completion Time by Occupation

Sector	Mean/Median (years)	
Manager/Administrative	7.4	7
Academic	8.0	8
Teacher	7.7	7
Head Teacher	8.2	8
Other	7.8	8

For Head Teachers devolvement of budgets and responsibilities to schools has had an impact on their abilities to take time for their own personal development. Whilst many will be in senior positions with notional amount of time set aside for their continuous professional development, the reality is that their professional roles take priority. Although our EdD is designed to be flexible, as most are, there is a need to provide a level of engagement with the materials. Head teachers frequently face the most challenges balancing their professional life with their study and personal life, by virtual of the nature of the role.

Even looking at these two broad brush groups hides diversity in the student body on our EdD programmes. Focusing on the four largest groups by sector and occupation, to ensure sufficient sample size for analysis, table 4 represents the average completion times by occupation sector groupings. Higher education manager and administrators are consistently the quickest to complete and are indeed significantly quicker than the other categories of students. The school Head Teachers are consistently the slowest, although for this same the higher education academic is equally slow to complete the EdD.

Table 4 Average Completion Time by Occupation and

Sector/Role	Mean/Median (Years)	
Higher Education/Academic	8.0	8
Education/Headteacher	7.9	8
Higher Education/Manager Administrator	6.5	6
Education/Teacher	7.6	7.5

The interesting group to consider firstly are the university academics who usually fair well on the taught phrase as it is structured and they have fixed deadlines within which to submit their assignments. The problems come when the programme enters the research phrases, when it comes to more independent work. Supervisors can be 'too kind' to colleagues and build in flexibility because of the stated demands of students' professional roles. HE academics are more likely than most students to change roles within the sector quite frequently. This makes keeping to the original focus of the research that would have be relevant to their professional role difficult at times. This leads to tensions especially when the research focus and professional roles become less well-aligned.

For this group it is clear that we should look closely at how we supervise our colleagues and peers, making sure that whilst we understand their professional constraints that they design feasible and time-limited projects. This is not a unique feature of the EdD programme and most research programmes within universities will struggle with how best to support colleagues through the process.

The Head Teachers are the most likely to request extensions and interruptions during the programme. They often report the need for more time due to: the need to respond to an OFSTED related problem, the increase in local education authority demands as more tasks are devolved and staffing issues in their schools taking time to resolve. What is clear from talking to our current intake of Head Teachers that the peer learning environment so valued on the EdD programme and the dedicated time on site is invaluable to them. Whilst it is sometime difficult to make the time to come, they often report that without the need to leave the school to come in it would be unlikely they would be able to complete the EdD at all.

What is clear from considering the Head Teacher example is that we cannot change the pressures of their professional life. We can however from the programme view encourage Head Teachers at interview and throughout the programme to reflect honestly with themselves about the time they have available for the programme and to design their research with this key time constraint in mind. As a consequence of this study we are including in our IFS and thesis workshops from September sessions in research planning and thinking rationally about the scale and scope of the research project that can be developed. Resources on effective project planning in the research stage will be developed and available both through the VLE (Moodle) and the workshops. Supervisor resources will also be developed to ensure they support the student in developing deliverable and time-minded projects. Finally with Head Teachers in mind supervisors and students will be encouraged to be mindful of the likelihood of events and planning these into their research plan. For example during the EdD, OFSTED will visit at least once and should be feature in the research plan.

The final group to consider are the higher education administrators and managers. This group has consistently the fastest completion times. This could be attributed to the EdD often being employer funded through their CPD funds which often come for this group with dedicated study time and jobs they can leave at the desk. This group, maybe due to the nature of their day jobs, have better than average time management skills and have the most feasible IFS and thesis proposals in terms of scale and scope. In terms of other characteristics they are often of an age to be able to dedicate time to their studies due to fewer family commitments and career ambitions. Whilst they may need

more support in terms of education theory and research methods, this group of students in terms of project management skills make the best completion times.

The significance of the Higher Education Manager and Administrator example is that strong project management skills are invaluable for a swift completion on any research degree. In addition it confirms what most programme leaders of professional doctorates know, that employment commitment to the student, both in terms of time and money, is absolutely vital to a timely completion of an EdD. Talking to this student group it is clear that there is scope to develop our programme through the access to more education theory and research methods training than available through the taught programme. For this reason the programmes will from the coming academic year draw their optional courses explicitly from the centrally run Doctoral School programme. This will ensure that for this group there is an opportunity to engage with education as a discipline and enhance their understanding of what doctorateness is.

Conclusion

Whilst there are many factors that influence the completion times on the EdD programmes this paper demonstrates some of the interesting relationships that can be explored when considering the sector and occupation of the EdD students. Looking at the completion times by occupation and sector it is clear the programme can be developed further to support students who have traditionally spent a long time on programme, especially Head Teachers.

Over the past twelve months the programme has undertaken a series of developments informed in part by these headline completion times and subsequent discussions with the students to understand why these patterns exits. Looking at our programme of workshops that support the first research project, the IFS, we have decided to recast the workshops to focus on the scale and scope of the research project proposed. The redesigned IFS workshops will move away from showcasing more research methods and reviewing ethics processes, which is covered elsewhere on the programme. Instead the workshops will focus on getting the students to think about the feasibility of their proposed research ideas, in terms of the precision of the research questions, alignment of theory and methods with the big picture ambitions of the project and with a particular focus on the practicalities of undertaking the project. Our students will be encouraged to build in contingency time and expected events to their time lines and to design projects mindful of the time constraint they face. For example our Head Teachers will be encouraged to block out time when LEA demands are especially high and when the next OFSTED inspection is due.

Whilst the higher education managers and administrators have great timelines for completion it is clear from discussions with the student and reading their research proposals that their knowledge and exposure to the education discipline is limited. From next academic year the limited range of option courses will be replaced with a selection of courses from the Doctoral School programme open to PhD students. This will provide groups of students from outside of academia more opportunities to engage with other doctoral students and develop further their understanding of key education theory and research methods. The selection of these courses will be made with the supervisor and help to ensure that in addition to a swift completion the students develop a good understanding of academic education research.

For the higher education academics it is clear that some guidance to staff on supervising colleagues is necessary. This year we have launched an EdD supervisors Moodle site with access to the key aspects of process and other useful pieces of information. On this site we are developing resources on supervising peers and colleagues. Supervisor training will now also consider the examples highlighted in this paper in their discussions of how to improve our supervisory practice.

Finally although not unique to occupation and sector of employment, it is clear that often life happens for EdD students making physical attendance to the university difficult. The programme team is in the process of developing a range on online resources to supplement the face-to-face teaching. This move towards a more blended approach is designed to support all of our students. For the time pressures, Head Teacher, the move towards a blended delivery would make the students more aware of the EdD programme between the taught sessions, keeping it on their mind and ensuring they devote time to it. For those needing to develop more on their knowledge of the education discipline additional online activities and the opportunity to exploit further peer learning can only be a fruitful development.

It is clear from this study into who wants to do an EdD anyway that the students who access the EdD programme are a very diverse group. Each student has not just their own personal characteristics but also has additional occupational and sectoral constraints and opportunities to be taken into consideration. However it is also clear that all of those who eventually complete this journey and are awarded an EdD are exceptional professionals with an absolute desire to finish this and add something to their field. For this we would like to end of a word of praise for an exceptional group of research students whom we have the pleasure to work with.

References

Girves, J. E., & Wemmerus, V. (1988). Developing models of graduate degree progress. *The Journal of Higher Education, 59*, 163-189. doi:10.2307/1981691

Lovitts, B. E. (2001). *Leaving the Ivory Tower: The causes and consequences of departure from doctoral study.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Strayhorn, T. L. (2005). *More than money matters: An integrated model of graduate student persistence*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Virginia Tech, Virginia.

Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition* (2nd ed.). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Wao, H. and Onwuegbuzie, A. (2011) *A Mixed Research Investigation of Factors Related to Time to the Doctorate in Education,* International Journal of Doctoral Studies, Volume 6, 2011, p115 - 134