



Trinity College Dublin

Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath

The University of Dublin

Designing face-to-face and online support networks: What can we learn from the experiences of completed part-time PhD learners?

Maeve O'Regan email: gallam23@tcd.ie

School of Education Trinity College Dublin

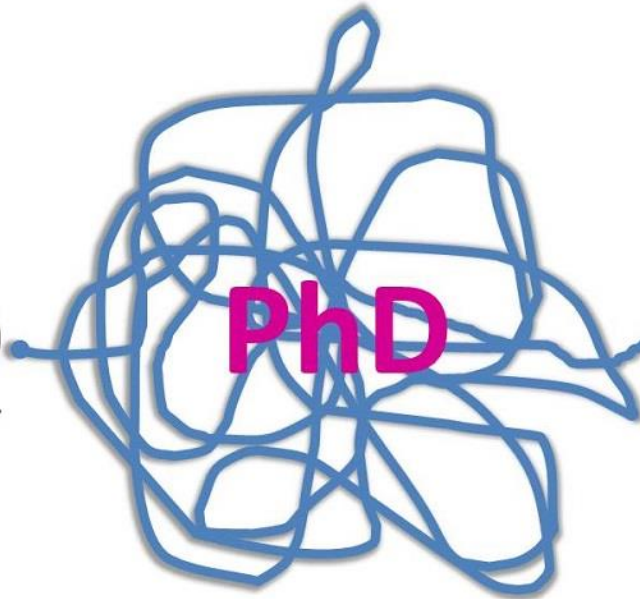
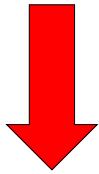
Supervisor: Dr Andrew Loxley



Research Question



How do I get **there** when I'm not **here**?



What I would like to explore

The role of  and  support

from the academic  and  

on part-time PhD learner progression and 



HE Policy objectives in Ireland

Strategy for Higher Education 2030 (DoES, 2011) identifies goals of:

- 1) increasing doctoral enrolments
- 2) supporting needs of diverse learners including:
 - online
 - mature
 - distance
 - working and part-time

So.....



The part-time PhD learner

Working

Caring

Studying



Doctoral qualification

Part-time

Mature

**Often self-funding
PhD**



Why completed PhD learners?



Pilot study findings (n=18 p/t and f/t PhD in a HEI)

Completed PhD learners had a better sense of what had influenced progression at each stage of the journey than early or mid-stage PhD candidates.



Main Study: Completed part-time PhD learners in AHSS disciplines in the university sector in Ireland.

83% p/t PhD are in the university sector in Ireland and **50%** are in (AHSS) Arts, Humanities and Social Science disciplines (HEA, 2018)



Conceptual Approach and methodology



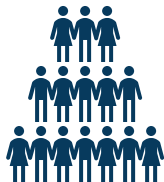
**Questionnaire based on Actor-
Network-Theory (Latour, 2005)**



**Interview based on theories
of Agency (e.g. Archer,
2004)**

**What F2F and online information
& support did you access from the
academic institution during your
PhD?**

**What, if any, actions did
you take to access
information and support
(from the institution or
personal networks) during
your PhD?**



15 p/t PhD completers from 4 universities in Ireland



Preliminary findings



- **We are a nation of talkers** and like informal communication with supervisor & colleagues
- P/t PhDs have **less access to “coffee culture”**, training and **informal networks on campus** than F/T PhD
- **Limited use of online support** and information from universities. Difficulty navigating the system and regulations. *“It’s there somewhere but hard to find” (quote from participant re data on university website)*
- P/T PhD learners accessed support **outside of the university** to progress with PhD e.g. colleagues, peers, What’s App, PhD Forums and Thesis Writing websites.



Next steps

How do we bring the academic institution to the individual student (F2F and online) to enhance learning experience, progression and completion?

- ***“Whether you are in Dubai, Sydney or San Francisco.”*** (Quote from participant)





Please email me if you are interested in this project
I would love to hear from you!

gallam23@tcd.ie

THANK YOU

