

# Student perspectives on enhancing the doctoral training experience

Dr Debbie McVitty, National Union of Students  
Sarah Hutchinson, Oxford University Students' Union  
[debbie.mcvitty@nus.org.uk](mailto:debbie.mcvitty@nus.org.uk)  
[graduates@ousu.org](mailto:graduates@ousu.org)

UKCGE Summer Conference, 2010



# Doctoral training experience?

- Research supervision and training
- Formal professional development activity
  - Transferable skills training
  - Preparation to teach
- 'Knowledge exchange' activities
  - Within the academy (e.g. conferences, teaching)
  - Beyond the academy (e.g. in industry)
- Other experiences and activities
  - Part of doctoral training?



# To what end?

- A significant contribution to knowledge (a doctoral thesis or project) – and the ability to understand ‘significance’
- An independent researcher; a skilled professional

“a key tacit learning outcome of doctoral study is the ability to subsequently engage in high-quality research as an **autonomous researcher, without the need for close supervision**” (Park & Denicolo, ‘Doctorateness – an elusive concept?’, QAA, 2010)

“some of the PhDs I knew were completely stifled by their supervisors, while others were almost ignored. You need a balance between autonomy and support structures” (Dan Colegate, founder of Graduate Junction)

## Paradox???



# What would be good?

If PhD training takes into account where students have come from and where they want to go

If provision was flexible enough to work with other commitment

If the idea of 'professional' was built into understandings of the PhD process

If training was always rooted in student's experience of PhD research

If the aim of doctoral training was building *experiences* from which to learn and reflect (?)



# Student perspectives

- Academic representation/students' union consultation processes
- Feedback/surveys/supervision monitoring systems
- Provision for student-led initiatives
- Promoting effective networks between students and between students and other researchers
- A range of sources of advice and information for PhD students so they are not wholly reliant on a few individuals

