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ABSTRACT

The wellbeing of doctoral students is an area that is well researched; however, no research has yet explored which factors of doctoral training have most impact upon trainee educational psychologist (TEP) wellbeing. TEPs across England and Wales completed a questionnaire to explore their doctoral wellbeing. Six themes were generated from a reflexive thematic analysis in relation to how academic and professional tutors can support wellbeing: facilitating relationships; adapting models of support; ensuring clear communication; addressing placement concerns; providing practical support and mediating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on doctoral study. Areas reported to have most impact on wellbeing included workload, making reasonable demands on self, having confidence in research, receiving quality feedback, and experiencing trusting relationships with supervisors. Findings were consistent with previous research and implications for those involved in the training of educational psychologists are discussed, including the need to prioritise wellbeing support in all aspects of training.

Background and rationale

Educational psychology training

Educational psychologists (EPs) apply psychological research and theory to 'support children, young people, their families and schools to promote the emotional and social wellbeing of young people' (AEP, 2020a, para. 1). Training as an EP in England or Wales involves completing a three-year professional Doctorate in Educational Psychology accredited by the British Psychological Society (BPS) and the Health and Care Professionals Council (HCPC). Applications for university placements are competitive, and there were approximately 500 funded trainees (470 in England and 30 in Wales) across the 3 years of training at the time of this research (Lyonette et al., 2019).

Trainee EPs (TEPs) spend most of their first year engaged with university-based teaching and a short practice placement. In Years 2 and 3, TEPs complete a longer practice placement, whilst also completing academic work and a doctoral research thesis (AEP, (Association of Educational Psychologists), 2020b). TEPs are well supported throughout the degree with the BPS accreditation standards for initial educational psychology

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training courses stipulating that TEPs must receive support from a 'university tutor who is a qualified educational psychologist [often known as an academic and professional tutor] . . . and a placement supervisor [a qualified EP working in the placement EP service], who is responsible for the coordination of all aspects of the trainee's practice in conjunction with the university tutor' (BPS, 2019, p. 26).

The impact of COVID-19 on educational psychology training and wellbeing

Schools, colleges, and universities across the UK were closed on 20 March 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, with most learning being moved online. Rapid response research during the pandemic indicated the challenges experienced by those in higher education included accommodation changes, a loss of income from part-time working, and changes to teaching and learning opportunities linked to the suspension of face-to-face teaching during periods of lockdown and national restrictions (Hubble & Bolton, 2020), a lack of access to technology and quiet study spaces (Yeeles et al., 2020), poorer mental health and wellbeing linked to increased stress and anxiety, a worsening of sleep quality, and increases in reported psychological issues such as depression, anxiety and social dysfunction (Drissi et al., 2020; Hubble & Bolton, 2020; Marelli et al., 2021; Plakhotnik et al., 2021; Yeeles et al., 2020).

The Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP) invited Trainee EPs to respond to a survey, which explored the effects of COVID-19 on their doctoral training (AEP, (Association of Educational Psychologists), 2020c). Questions covered a range of areas including access to university facilities, academic and pastoral support, and ability to complete placement requirements. Responses to the survey (N = 130) highlighted that the pandemic was impacting on all aspects of training, with the greatest concerns relating to practice elements of training and placement experiences. TEPs also shared concerns related to their emotional wellbeing and mental health. Given the particular challenges that TEPs experience related to their role as both post-graduate research students and trainee psychologists in practice (France, 2016), the AEP highlighted that TEPs may need 'more individualised arrangements to enable them to make progress with their academic studies, research and practice experience during the period of the "lockdown" and the remainder of their training' (AEP, (Association of Educational Psychologists), 2020c, p. 3).

Wellbeing and doctoral students

Wellbeing is an area that dominated many discussions in the media throughout the pandemic; however, there are many competing definitions of wellbeing in the psychological literature. Researchers have argued that definitions of wellbeing lack clear conceptualisation yet agree that wellbeing is linked to a range of concepts including life satisfaction, general happiness, individual functioning, personality, self-esteem, positive relationships and emotional literacy (Baik et al., 2019; Warwick Medical School, 2019). Juniper (2010) suggests that wellbeing is a 'multi-faceted and subjective construct' (Hargreaves et al., 2017, p. 5), a view also held by other researchers (for example, Plakhotnik et al., 2021).

Two perspectives of wellbeing have been discussed extensively in contemporary psychological literature: psychological wellbeing related to an individual's realisation

of potential and subjective wellbeing related to happiness and satisfaction with life (Gillard et al., 2021; Schmidt & Hansson, 2018). Whilst this article does not intend to provide a comprehensive overview of the debates surrounding definitions of wellbeing, it is important to outline the conceptual framework within which the research aims are based. This study therefore adopts a broad interdisciplinary perspective of wellbeing in relation to trainee educational psychologists, which covers a range of components including doctoral wellbeing, psychological functioning, and subjective wellbeing.

More specifically, 'doctoral wellbeing' is a concept that has received attention in recent years in relation to the wellbeing of being a doctoral student and an early career academic, focusing on the distinctive experiences of doctoral students that can impact overall wellbeing (Beasy et al., 2019; Hargreaves et al., 2017; Juniper, 2010; Juniper et al., 2012; Lau & Pretorius, 2019). Goldstone and Zhang (2021) discuss the wellbeing of doctoral students, citing pre-pandemic research findings related to doctoral students experiencing high levels of stress, anxiety, and other mental health difficulties related to workload pressures. Nevertheless, many students remain positive about their overall academic experience. Researchers have also highlighted links between poor doctoral wellbeing and engagement in research and teaching (Schmidt & Hansson, 2018), university attrition (Gardner, 2008), and overall student outcomes (Devine & Hunter, 2016). In the current study, the construct of 'trainee educational psychologist doctoral wellbeing' is based on the work of Juniper et al. (2012) and is defined as 'that part of a trainee educational psychologist's overall wellbeing that is primarily influenced by their position as a doctoral student and which can be influenced by support from their university-based academic and professional tutors and their placement supervisors'.

Schmidt and Hansson (2018, p. 11) reviewed a range of literature exploring doctoral wellbeing. They concluded by advising higher education institutions (HEIs) 'to apply a more student-centred approach when interacting [with] their doctoral students, which could increase the likelihood of these students maintaining their wellbeing'. Given the paucity of research focusing on the unique demands of a professional doctorate and Schmidt and Hansson's suggestion for researchers to explore doctoral wellbeing in fields such as psychology, the current study set out to gain a student-centred perspective about how academic and professional tutors can best support the doctoral wellbeing of trainee educational psychologists.

Study aims and research questions

It is recognised that Trainee EPs experience stresses unique to balancing doctoral-level research and academic demands alongside placement and professional learning (AEP, (Association of Educational Psychologists), 2020c; France, 2016), and systematic research is therefore necessary to understand how those involved in training can support TEP wellbeing. Seeking views from students is important to increase students' sense of inclusion and empowerment (Baik et al., 2019) and Schmidt and Hansson (2018) argue for academic supervisors to adopt a student-focused approach to supporting doctoral wellbeing.

The aims of this research were to explore key areas of concern for TEPs currently enrolled on doctoral training programmes at English and Welsh universities in relation to

doctoral wellbeing and to gain the perspectives of TEPs about how university-based academic and professional tutors (APTs) can support their doctoral wellbeing. Whilst this study did not specifically aim to explore the impact of COVID-19 on doctoral wellbeing, the timing of this research allowed for consideration about how academic and professional tutors responded during a crisis, and reflection about how these responses can drive positive change in relation to doctoral wellbeing. This study therefore hopes to offer insights to assist current and ongoing supervisory practice.

The research questions explored were:

(1) What aspects of doctoral study have most impact upon the wellbeing of trainee educational psychologists?
(2) How can academic and professional tutors be most effective in supporting the wellbeing of trainee educational psychologists?

This paper firstly sets out the methods used to gain data and then presents a combined findings and discussion section. Implications for those involved in the training of educational psychologists, including university-based academic and professional tutors and placement supervisors, are then presented, along with suggestions for further research.

Methods

Research design

This research was a survey-design, employing a mixed-methods approach to data collection in line with pragmatic assumptions (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Pragmatism is concerned with meaningful research and gives priority to individuals' everyday experience, putting an emphasis on abduction, intersubjectivity and transferability (Morgan, 2007). It offers an alternative to the paradigms of positivism and interpretivism, capturing both objective and subjective points of view and allowing for mixed-methods methodology.

Participants

Data were gained from a questionnaire completed by TEPs across England and Wales in June 2020 during the first lockdown phase of the UK Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. An invitation to complete the questionnaire was sent with an online information sheet and consent form to every Programme Director of a BPS accredited doctoral training programme for EPs in England and Wales. The questionnaire was also promoted on Twitter and on EPNET, an email list for TEPs and EPs. In total, 117 questionnaires were completed by TEPs, which reflected approximately 23% of all funded TEPs in England and Wales at the time of the research (AEP, (Association of Educational Psychologists), 2020b; Cardiff University, 2020; Lyonette et al., 2019). There was a relatively even distribution across year groups: Year 1 ($n = 43$, 36.8%), Year 2 ($n = 40$, 34.2%) and Year 3 ($n = 34$, 29.1%). Females were over-represented in this study ($n = 107$, 91.5%) in comparison to males ($n = 9$, 7.7%), with one participant not answering this question. This gender split is reflective of the profession with 80.5% of qualified EPs

identifying as female in a 2019 workforce survey (Lyonette et al., 2019). The age of participants ranged from 23 to 61 years old with a mean average age of 31.

Data collection

Participants completed an online survey comprising a Doctoral Wellbeing Scale and three open-ended questions about the role of academic and professional tutors. Doctoral wellbeing was measured using an amended version of an established Doctoral Wellbeing Scale developed at a research-intensive university in London (Hargreaves et al., 2017). The questionnaire comprised a series of statements across seven domains (Table 1) in which participants rated on a scale from 1 *(not at all important and bothersome)* to 5 *(extremely important and bothersome)* in relation to wellbeing. This allowed for identification of the areas that had the most impact on the overall wellbeing of doctoral students.

With permission from the authors, some amendments were made to the questionnaire to ensure relevance to trainee educational psychologists (see Table 2) and it was piloted on two recently qualified EPs. No further amendments were made following the pilot, and Cronbach's alpha correlation coefficients were calculated, finding the amended version of the Doctoral Wellbeing Scale to have a high level of internal consistency ($\propto$ = .977).

Table 1. Overview of the Doctoral Wellbeing Scale (Hargreaves et al., 2017).

Domain	Description
Health and Home (HH)	How issues to do with health and home life impact overall wellbeing
Supervision (SUP)	How the supervisor impacts overall wellbeing
Development (DEV)	How the opportunities for development impact overall wellbeing
Research (RES)	How the experience of carrying out research impacts overall wellbeing
Facilities (FAC)	How university facilities provision impact overall wellbeing
University (UNI)	How wider University issues impact overall wellbeing
Social (SOC)	How relationships at university impact overall wellbeing

Table 2. Amendments made to Hargreaves et al. (2017) Doctoral Wellbeing Scale.

Original Item in Doctoral Wellbeing Scale	Amendment for TEP Doctoral Wellbeing Scale
References to 'PhD'	Amended to 'Doctorate' or 'Thesis' to reflect the nature of a professional doctorate
Deletion of item in the 'Development' domain: 'Lacking opportunities to teach or tutor?' due to lack of relevance for TEPs	Replaced with new item: 'Feeling frustrated about not having developed sufficient professional skills at university before starting placement?' to reflect the nature of a professional doctorate
Addition to items in the 'Health and Home' domain to supplement item, 'Experiencing high levels of stress because of your research', and to reflect demands of the professional doctorate	Inclusion of two items: 'Experiencing high levels of stress because of your EP placement' and 'Experiencing high levels of stress because of your academic study'
Addition of item about travel to the 'Health and Home' domain	'Finding that the travel demands have a negative impact on wellbeing'
Amendment of wording in items that mentioned 'heavy research schedule'	Changed wording to 'heavy workload'
Amendment of references to 'supervisor'	Changed wording to 'supervisor or university tutor'
Inclusion of item in the 'Supervisor' domain to replace item about PhD supervisor knowledge	Addition of 'Having a tutor/supervisor who is not qualified as an Educational Psychologist'

After answering the doctoral wellbeing questions, participants were also asked to rate their answers to three questions on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree):

- Overall, my experience as a doctoral student at this university has been a positive one.
- Supporting TEP wellbeing is important to the Academic and Professional Tutors on my course.
- There's more that the Academic and Professional Tutors on my course could do to support wellbeing.

Finally, three open-ended questions were asked to help address the aims of this study:

- What are the key factors that influence your TEP doctoral wellbeing (definition included)?
- What do your course tutors already do to promote wellbeing on your course?
- What else do you think your course tutors could do to improve TEP doctoral wellbeing?

Including open-ended questions within this survey allowed for a deeper and more exploratory understanding of individual experiences (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

Data analysis

The Doctoral Wellbeing Scale was structured around responses on a Likert scale and so non-parametric statistics were used for analysis to supplement descriptive statistics. An inductive approach to reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021) was carried out on the qualitative data gathered from the three open questions. Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2021, 2022) six-phase process for reflexive thematic analysis was followed to ensure quality in the analysis: (1) familiarisation of responses; (2) an initial coding of the data; (3) generation of initial themes; (4) development and review of themes; (5) naming of themes; and (5) writing up. Themes were organised around a central concept of wellbeing.

Braun and Clarke (2021) emphasise the importance of researchers recognising and avoiding bias in thematic analysis although highlight that 'researcher subjectivity is the primary tool for reflexive TA . . . [it] should be understood and treated as a resource for doing analysis' (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 8). Reflexive thematic analysis was chosen for data analysis as it allowed for critical reflection of the researcher's position as an academic and professional tutor working with TEPs on a doctoral programme.

Ethics

Ethical approval for the study was gained from the University of Exeter's School of Education Ethics Committee (S1920-098). All responses were anonymous, and participants were reassured that individual responses would not be identifiable or shared outside the research team. No record of the number of responses from individual

universities was kept. Due to the potentially sensitive topic, signposting to university-based support, contact details for national organisations, signposting for self-help resources, and contact details for the researcher were all included on the questionnaire.

Findings and discussion

This section will present a combined findings and discussion section, structured under the two research questions. Limitations of the study, directions for further research and possible considerations for APTs and placement supervisors will then be explored.

RQ1: what aspects of doctoral study have most impact upon the wellbeing of trainee educational psychologists?

Overall doctoral wellbeing

Following the procedure set out by Hargreaves et al. (2017), an overall doctoral wellbeing score was calculated (Table 3) along with mean impact scores to represent the impact of each of the seven domains on overall doctoral wellbeing (Table 4). A mean impact score of 1 represented a domain as being *'not at all important or bothersome'* in relation to wellbeing, a score of 3 represented *'a bit important and bothersome'*, and a score of 5 represented *'moderately important and bothersome'*. Mean impact scores for each domain were slightly higher than scores in Hargreaves' study, although these scores are not directly comparable.

As shown in Table 3, there were no statistically significant differences between overall wellbeing in different years of training (H(2) = 2.814, *p* = .245).

Across all 3 years of training, factors within the Health and Home domain were reported to have the most negative impact on overall doctoral wellbeing (Table 4). The only significant difference in mean impact score between year groups was in the Research domain (H(2) = 9.03, *p* = .011) with Year 2 having the highest mean score

Table 3. Mean overall doctoral wellbeing score.

	Overall Doctoral Wellbeing Score			
	All Years (SD)	Year 1 (SD)	Year 2 (SD)	Year 3 (SD)
Overall Doctoral Wellbeing	2.61 (.83)	2.47 (.76)	2.80 (.92)	2.56 (.78)

Table 4. Mean wellbeing score for each domain of the Doctoral Wellbeing Scale in order from most to least important and bothersome.

	Doctoral Wellbeing Mean Impact Score			
Domain	All Years	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Health and Home	3.24	3.03	3.40	3.32
Supervision	2.69	2.58	3.01	2.45
Development	2.67	2.55	2.84	2.63
Research	2.62	2.30	3.05	2.51
Facilities	2.48	2.50	2.46	2.50
University	2.38	2.16	2.59	2.41
Social	2.18	2.14	2.28	2.11

A higher score signifies greater negative impact of the factor on overall doctoral wellbeing (1 = not important, 5 = extremely important)

(M = 3.05, SD = 1.19). Post-hoc pairwise comparisons (with Bonferroni correction) within the research domain indicated that the mean score for Year 2 was significantly higher than for Year 1 (M = 2.30, SD = .92). This suggests that research has a notable impact on TEP doctoral wellbeing during Year 2 of the doctorate. This is typically the year when TEPs start their doctoral thesis research; however, at the time of completing the questionnaire, many Year 2s would have been amending their research plans due to the pandemic. This score therefore likely reflects the contextual challenge of having a significant disruption to research due to COVID-19 (Plakhotnik et al., 2021).

Unlike other doctoral-level degrees, the entry requirements for the doctoral EP training programme do not require experience of post-graduate research (AEP, 2020a) so TEPs often need additional support with developing their research skills. Within the research domain of the Doctoral Wellbeing Scale, each year group reported 'lacking confidence in your ability to conduct research to the necessary standard' and 'feeling disappointed in your own abilities as an academic researcher' as having greater negative impact on wellbeing than other items. Tutors can support the development of researcher self-efficacy (a student's belief in their research capabilities) through providing direct guidance as well as encouraging students to think autonomously (voicing and acting upon their own ideas; Overall et al., 2011).

As there was no evidence of doctoral wellbeing significantly changing, based on stage of the doctorate, the data were analysed as a whole rather than by year group. Collectively, the top 10 most important and bothersome items (those having the greatest impact on doctoral wellbeing) are shown in Table 5.

These findings are broadly in line with those reported by Hargreaves et al. (2017) with 6 of the 10 items also appearing in their top 10 (items 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 9). Findings also support Schmidt and Hansson (2018) review, which suggested that factors such as workload, deadlines, stress, relationships with university tutors, and having a positive work-life balance are all important factors for doctoral student wellbeing.

Table 5. The top 10 items reported to be most important and bothersome in relation to doctoral wellbeing.

Rank/ Domain	Wellbeing top 10 most important and bothersome items – Whole Scale	Mean Impact Score (SD)	Reported as very or extremely bothersome
1HH	Having a high workload that impacts on your private life	3.86 (1.16)	65.8%
2HH	Making unreasonably high demands of yourself	3.7 (1.16)	60.7%
3HH	Experiencing high levels of stress because of your academic study	3.58 (1.13)	58.1%
4HH	Experiencing a persistent low mood because of your workload	3.57 (1.19)	53.8%
5HH	Experiencing high levels of stress because of your research	3.53 (1.23)	57.3%
6DEV	Being unclear about the required standard of work for your thesis	3.38 (1.07)	48.7%
7HH	Experiencing high levels of stress because of your EP placement	3.35 (1.30)	52.1%
8HH	Experiencing poor quality sleep because of your studies	3.28 (1.27)	51.3%
9RES	Lacking confidence in your ability to conduct research to the necessary standard	3.26 (1.28)	46.2%
10HH	Being unable to balance your doctorate with home demands	3.23 (1.34)	44.4%

Several of the areas within Table 5 can be supported through professional supervision, a key role of APTs. Exploring this domain further, the five most important and bothersome items rated within the Supervision Domain were linked to feedback, practical guidance and feeling unsupported, supporting previous research findings (Baik et al., 2019). These findings provide some helpful insight into how APTs can support doctoral wellbeing, for example, through ensuring feedback is sufficient, constructive, and high-quality, and providing TEPs with practical guidance on research so that they feel well supported throughout the course,

Satisfaction with overall doctoral experience

Participants rated three statements from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) to capture additional views about the doctoral programme. As can be seen in Table 6, 64.1% ($n = 75$) of TEPs agreed that supporting wellbeing is important to the APTs on their course although 53% ($n = 62$) of TEPs agreed that there is more that APTs can do to support wellbeing.

There was a strong and statistically significant correlation between Questions 1 and 2 ($rs = .742, p = .000$) and a higher level of agreement on Question 2 was also significantly correlated with the overall Doctoral Wellbeing score ($rs = -.301, p = 001$). This suggests that higher perceived wellbeing is associated with a culture of wellbeing being prioritised by APTs.

RQ2: how can academic and professional tutors be most effective in supporting the wellbeing of trainee educational psychologists?

Reflexive thematic analysis: factors that influence wellbeing

The question 'What are the key factors that influence your TEP Doctoral Wellbeing?' was asked so that participants could expand on the ratings given on the Doctoral Wellbeing Scale. Reflexive thematic analysis was used to identify themes and subthemes from the question. A summary of main themes and subthemes is included in Table 7.

Many of the identified themes in Table 7 have clear links back to the domains identified by Hargreaves et al. (2017). This next section focuses on the first theme, 'Role of the APT' to help answer research question two, 'how can academic and professional tutors be most effective in supporting the wellbeing of trainee educational psychologists'. Within this theme, three subthemes were identified (Table 8) and these are expanded below with supporting anonymised quotes from participants identified by participant ID number.

Relationships. TEPs placed a high level of importance on having trusting and mutually respectful relationships with tutors, characterised by 'empathy and compassion and acknowledgement of specific circumstances' [P46]. They described the importance of

Table 6. Results from questions related to overall experience.

Question	Mean Score (SD)	Agree /Strongly Agree (n)	Disagree/Strongly Disagree (n)
1. Overall, my experience as a doctoral student at this university has been a positive one	4.11 (1.12)	73.5% (86)	10.3% (12)
2. Supporting TEP wellbeing is important to the Academic and Professional Tutors on my course	3.8 (1.31)	64.1% (75)	18.8% (22)
3. There's more that the Academic and Professional Tutors on my course could do to support wellbeing	3.31 (1.42)	53.0% (62)	35.0% (41)

Table 7. Themes and subthemes identified as key factors that influence doctoral wellbeing.

Theme	Subthemes
Academic and Professional Tutors	RelationshipsCommunicationSupport and Action
Sense of Community	Belonging to course/universityDiversity and differenceRelationships
Personal and Practical	Expectations of selfOwn SkillsFinances
Placement	Supervision and supportRole of TEP vs qualified EPTravelConsistency of experienceStaying connected
Workload	FlexibilityManageable and equitable
Time Away	Hobbies and relationships away from coursePhysical space at universityWork-life balance
The Future	Changing role of the EPExpectations of being qualified

Table 8. Themes and subthemes identified as the role of the APT in influencing TEP doctoral wellbeing.

Themes	Subthemes
Relationships	Trust and mutual respectKnowing each other well
Communication	Responsive (timely and regular)Clear expectationsConsistencyTimely and helpful feedback
Support and Action	Available and approachableListening and taking action when neededFeeling supportedRegular and prioritised supervisionRecognising different starting points

prioritising time to build relationships at the beginning and throughout the course so that they feel comfortable in raising issues and concerns about wellbeing with tutors. Previous research has suggested that poor relationships with university supervisors can impact on wellbeing (Lovitts, 2001) and supportive supervisory relationships are both beneficial to student outcomes and reduce possible attrition rates (Devine & Hunter, 2016).

Communication. Communication was mentioned frequently, with TEPs appreciating tutors who 'respond promptly and helpfully' [P78], suggesting 'timely responses to emails' [P33] as a key factor in feeling reassured. Consistency in communication was identified in relation to tutors giving clear messages to students, avoiding ambiguity or 'mixed messages' [P11, P16, P78]. TEPs also suggested that wellbeing can be impacted by not having warning about any changes to timetabled sessions or assignments. Timely and helpful feedback was identified both in relation to assignment feedback and general feedback about progress on the course: 'Receiving praise for good work/efforts and practical support for areas that need more attention' [P115]. Regular communication was also highlighted by one participant 'open communication and reassurance that their situation was being acknowledged' (p. 7) even if there were no clear answers or solutions and practical communication about 'requirements, adapting tasks and changing deadlines where possible' (p. 10). This was a theme reflected in the AEP, (Association of Educational Psychologists; 2020c) survey as something that reassured TEPs in times of uncertainty.

Support and action. A theme of 'Support' was initially identified in the data although this was then renamed to 'Support and Action' to recognise the need for 'pressures [to be] acknowledged and understood and then ultimately reflected in actions' [P42], for example, tutors responding to feedback or tutors challenging discriminatory comments. However, some TEPs also commented about their desire for tutors to 'join you in

discomfort rather than [taking a] problem solving/solution focused approach' [P23]. One participant reported that, 'having approachable tutors who listen to my worries and help problem solve with me' [P86] was helpful for supporting wellbeing, with another suggesting that regular 'checking in, not just asking about research but wellbeing as a whole' [P78] was beneficial alongside regular and prioritised supervision. Shorten (2019) argues that supervision is primarily about improving wellbeing and this was apparent in survey responses.

Reflexive thematic analysis: role of APTs in supporting doctoral wellbeing

Reflexive thematic analysis was also carried out for the answers given to questions about the role of the APT in supporting TEP doctoral wellbeing: 'What do your course tutors already do to promote wellbeing on your course' and 'What else do you think your course tutors could do to improve TEP doctoral wellbeing?' These questions asked more specifically about the actions that APTs could take to support wellbeing. Whilst five participants did not give concrete examples of how APTs currently support wellbeing in answer to the first question, most respondents highlighted actions that APTs take and were positive about this support: 'I already think they go above and beyond' [P81], 'Honestly, they couldn't do more, my tutors are amazing!' [P94]. The themes and subthemes identified can be seen in Table 9.

Facilitating relationships. Having positive relationships with others is an important aspect of wellbeing (Gillard et al., 2021; Ryff, 1989, 1995), and previous research has demonstrated the importance of a good student-supervisor 'fit' on student experience (Sverdlik et al., 2018) and supportive supervisor-doctoral student relationships shown to increase student emotional wellbeing (Devine & Hunter, 2016; Plakhotnik et al., 2021). A focus on building relationships at the beginning of the academic year was a common suggestion from TEPs with one respondent stating, 'I think much of our support is in our relationships with the tutors' [P110] and another stating, 'they care, genuinely' [P49].

Adapting models of tutor support. A key subtheme linked to relationships was the various types of support available from tutors including formal and informal supervision opportunities, for example, 'check ins . . . to let us know that we are "kept in mind"' [P11] and '[their] door's always open and you can drop in for an informal conversation' [P68]. Participants also highlighted the desire for tutors to separate

Table 9. Themes and subthemes identified about things tutors can do to enhance wellbeing.

Themes	Subthemes
Facilitating Relationships	Prioritising time for building relationshipsCross departmental/wider university links
Adapting Models of Tutor Support	Supervision and tutorialsRegular check in and follow upFacilitating peer supportRegular wellbeing discussion
Ensuring Clear Communication	Regular and timelyAsking for and acting on feedback
Addressing Placement Concerns	Staying in touchCommunication with placement providersPracticalitiesIndividual circumstances
Providing Practical Support	Administrative proceduresFinance and travelTimetable and deadlinesWorkloadFlexibility
Mediating Impact of Pandemic	Reassurance and recognitionLessons learned

professional supervision and research/academic tutorials. This is a discussion revisited often in the EP profession (Atkinson & Woods, 2007). Hawkins and Shohet (2010) describe three main functions of supervision; educative (developing skills and abilities), supportive (supporting an emotional response or reaction), and managerial (ensuring ethical standards and accountability). An implication for tutors is therefore to consider the differences between academic/research tutorials, which may focus on educative/managerial aspects, and pastoral supervision which may be more focused on supportive aspects.

Ensuring clear communication. Participants expressed appreciation for tutors who provide 'regular contact [and] open communication' [P7]. Clear suggestions were made such as a working agreement with TEPs for responding to emails or returning phone calls and a greater use of technology to stay in touch. Feedback was another area of concern raised with TEPs wishing for 'more useful' [P11], 'positive' [P35] and 'constructive' [P92] feedback from tutors. In their literature review of doctoral students' wellbeing, Schmidt and Hansson (2018) reported that high-quality feedback is a key factor of student wellbeing. Additionally, Rowe (2011) stated that 'feedback serves a wide variety of functions in the lives of students, not limited to the implication of feedback for learning' (p. 343), arguing that high quality and timely feedback is a notable factor in student success.

Addressing placement concerns. Many TEPs relocate to complete Year 1 of the doctorate and then relocate again for their Year 2 and 3 placements. The loneliness experienced by doctoral students has been discussed in the literature, with students often needing to form new support systems and friendships (Cornwall et al., 2019). TEPs expressed how they wanted to feel connected to the university whilst on placement and have this recognised by tutors who 'acknowledge those who are sent miles away from home for placement' [P87]. Suggestions from TEPs included more regular contact with APTs with, 'supervision to reflect on cases or things that happen on placement' [P91]. In some cases, participants shared a wish for greater consistency 'between academic expectations and placement ones' [P72], suggesting that tutors had a role to play in mediating expectations from placement providers.

Providing practical support. Many participants were positive about the practical support offered by tutors: 'the tutor team are fantastic and always put TEP wellbeing first' [P113]. However, some respondents suggested that tutors could do more to take 'financial and travel implications more seriously and finding solutions to these issues' [P84]. Previous research has highlighted the link between wellbeing and an understanding of different student circumstances, including financial issues and diverse home situations (Baik et al., 2019). Issues were also shared around the 'frequency' [P105] and the 'organisation of deadlines' [P51] in relation to other work, and the desire for 'flexibility in response to individual circumstances' [P2]. Deadlines are a leading cause of stress for students, which can have a detrimental impact on wellbeing (Skead & Rogers, 2014). Tutors can provide practical support for students by responding to feedback and carefully planning the timetable.

Mediating the impact of the pandemic. The coronavirus pandemic was highlighted as an important influence on wellbeing, with recognition of the impact it could have on tutors as well as trainees: 'I think it's difficult in the current circumstances especially . . . I think they do all they can' [P39]. TEPs reported that tutors 'acknowledging it can be stressful . . . even if nothing can be done to change it' [P111] was a powerful way to feel supported. Other suggestions included how tutors could support in relation to future concerns: 'clarity about . . . how the pandemic will impact upon our skills' [P18] and expectations: 'during COVID reiterate that our work needs to be "good enough" not perfect' [P43]. Burns et al. (2020) highlighted the opportunities that have emerged for students including online learning and how to incorporate this into teaching practices. One TEP suggested that online teaching could be used in the future 'for those travelling long distances' [P93] and there is an opportunity for tutors to consider how technology could help to ameliorate some of the concerns raised by students in relation to feeling disconnected from the university and ensuring wellbeing support remains visible and accessible (Plakhotnik et al., 2021). Tutors could work with colleagues in other universities to develop innovative practices that ensure that future opportunities for blended learning continue to meet the wellbeing needs of students.

Conclusion

Summary of findings

The findings from this study highlight the important role that APTs can have in supporting doctoral wellbeing. Whilst many participants in this study recognised that supporting doctoral wellbeing is important to APTs, there were some clear thoughts about what more could be done to support wellbeing. This research suggests a link between the perception of APTs having a strong commitment to supporting wellbeing, with positive overall university experience and wellbeing.

Findings suggest that several factors have a positive impact on wellbeing, including:

- Having a manageable workload (academic study, research and/or placement) that can be balanced with private/home life.
- Being able to make reasonable demands of self and recognise strengths.
- Being clear about the required standard of work for the thesis.
- Having confidence and knowledge in research skills.
- Receiving constructive and high-quality feedback.
- Having tutors who emphasise the importance of wellbeing.
- Having positive and trusting relationships with tutors.
- Having clear and consistent communication from tutors.
- Feeling supported by tutors.

These findings are broadly consistent with areas highlighted in previous studies exploring doctoral wellbeing (Baik et al., 2019; Hargreaves et al., 2017; Schmidt & Hansson, 2018), as well as research that has suggested the need for students to be able to access social, emotional, and mental health support, to have more and clearer communication from supervisors, and to have supervisory support characterised by compassion and understanding during the pandemic (Goldstone & Zhang, 2021; Plakhotnik et al., 2021).

Implications for practice

There are a range of key implications and considerations for those involved in the initial training of educational psychologists. University tutors have an important role in supporting wellbeing (Baik et al., 2019; Overall et al., 2011), with Plakhotnik et al. (2021) highlighting the mediating role that tutors can have between student wellbeing and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst this research focused on perceptions held by TEPs about the role of academic and professional tutors, it is posited that these findings can be discussed in relation to the broader supervisory role of placement supervisors in promoting TEP doctoral wellbeing. All those involved in educational psychology training have a role in promoting positive mental health and wellbeing and can draw upon a range of evidence-based frameworks such as the New Economic Foundation's 'Five Ways to Wellbeing' (Aked et al., 2008) when considering support for trainees.

Furthermore, the UK Professional Standards Framework for educators in higher education (Advance HE, 2011) emphasises the importance of reflecting on good practice to enhance approaches to supporting students. Taking this into account along with Schmidt and Hansson's (2018) suggestion about student-centred planning, the following questions are proposed as a starting point for reflective conversations between APTs, TEPs, and placement supervisors to reflect on practice that has been developed in response to the pandemic:

(1) In what ways do we ensure TEP doctoral wellbeing is prioritised and promoted throughout all aspects of the course including fieldwork placements?

(2) What opportunities are there to establish positive relationships between TEPs, their university tutors and placement supervisors? How can we ensure these relationships are maintained throughout the duration of the course? Do TEPs feel that relationships and connections are maintained during Years 2 and 3 while on placement, for example?

(3) How do tutors ensure clear, timely and responsive modes of communication with each other? For example, do they have agreed guidelines in relation to email response times, and processes for when members of the tutor team are away from the university?

(4) What training and support do universities offer placement supervisors who are new to supervision? Do they routinely discuss wellbeing in supervision with trainees?

(5) How do tutors ensure the feedback they seek from TEPs in relation to wellbeing is purposeful and how do they communicate the actions taken following feedback?

(6) How do tutors ensure that practical information about university-based wellbeing support is available to students?

A key implication for practice is therefore for supervisors and tutors to initiate conversations about wellbeing with TEPs as an important first step in recognising the challenges they can face at all stages of their training. An empathic approach to understanding TEPs' individual experiences will likely build their confidence in recognising and accessing the support networks at both the university and on placement.

Strengths, limitations, and directions for future research

This study is the first systematic exploration of trainee educational psychologists' doctoral wellbeing. It clearly presents student voice about doctoral wellbeing, which has been highlighted as important when planning wellbeing support at university (Schmidt & Hansson, 2018). Approximately 23% of trainee EPs in England and Wales participated in this study. While findings are therefore not claimed to be wholly representative of the wider TEP population, they do provide a view into the impact that different factors can have on TEP doctoral wellbeing. Further research could explore a wider sample by including the views of trainee psychologists in Northern Ireland and Scotland. In addition, this study was carried out during the first lockdown phase of the UK government's pandemic response and so it is inevitable that responses on the questionnaire reflect the challenging societal context, and this must be considered in interpreting the findings.

Online surveys are widely used in psychological research as they are efficient, easy to distribute, allow wide access to participants, and offer anonymity to participants (Robson & McCartan, 2016). An online survey was therefore chosen for this research due to the geographical spread of trainee educational psychologists and the aim to seek as many participants as possible. Nevertheless, there are a range of disadvantages to consider for online methods of data collection such as sampling issues, including self-selection bias and the potential for misrepresentation (Wright, 2005). These risks were reduced through distributing the link for the questionnaire through known professional networks and by checking for unexpected comments during thematic analysis.

The author's role as an APT (and indeed a previous Trainee EP on a doctorate course) allowed for a reflexive approach to generating themes throughout the qualitative analysis. However, it should be recognised that this may also have been problematic when coming to the data with assumptions about doctoral wellbeing based on previous and current experience. Due to the careful and systematic way in which the thematic analysis was carried out, it is suggested that the reported themes have the 'potential to give rise to actionable outcomes' (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 345). Findings are broadly consistent with previous research into doctoral wellbeing and so further research with university tutors and placement supervisors to explore these findings in more detail would be a helpful next step in triangulation of findings. Research could also consider reflections from qualified EPs on their wellbeing throughout training, exploring the impact this has on their own supervisory practices.

Disclosure statement

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