



The  
University  
Of  
Sheffield.

# How valuable is the doctoral degree in the UK modern knowledge economy?

Billy Bryan – *PhD student in medical education*

Dr Kay Guccione – *Researcher mentoring and coaching*



Questions/thoughts to  
**#docvalue**

# Why Doctoral Value?

1. Marketization in HE
2. 'fuelling the knowledge economy'
3. Development funding and support
- 4. Personal experiences**



# Educational value in HE - Economic



Benefit to the  
Individual

Benefit to Wider  
Society



# Educational value in HE - Skills

## Practical skills (hard)

- Expert subject-skills
- Disciplinary knowledge
- Report writing



## Personal attributes (soft)

- Self-direction
- Commercial awareness
- Critical analysis

# Educational value in HE - Employer

*“The type of roles we have require intelligent people who have the ability to think, who can come up with novel solutions and cutting edge technology. [...] people with PhDs have proven that they can do this.”*

## **Large Employer, Research and Development Employer**

*Diamond, A. Ball, C. Vorley, T. Hughes, T. Moreton, R., Howe, P. Nathan, T. (2014). The impact of doctoral careers.*

**Gap in the literature:** what about the other way around?

Our question:

How is **doctoral value perceived by graduates** in the context of the UK knowledge economy?

# Methodology

## **The what:** Explorative interview study

- We don't know the facts yet
- Interviews – **personal views**, expertise, rich description

## **The how:** Critical-interpretive lens

- Who gets value and why? How does it work for each individual?

# Sampling and Recruitment

## The who – **Doctoral Graduates**

- ✓ Graduation < 15 years ago
- ✓ Any doctoral degree from anywhere in the UK
  - ✓ Various disciplines, job roles, and fields
  - ✓ Different genders and ethnic backgrounds

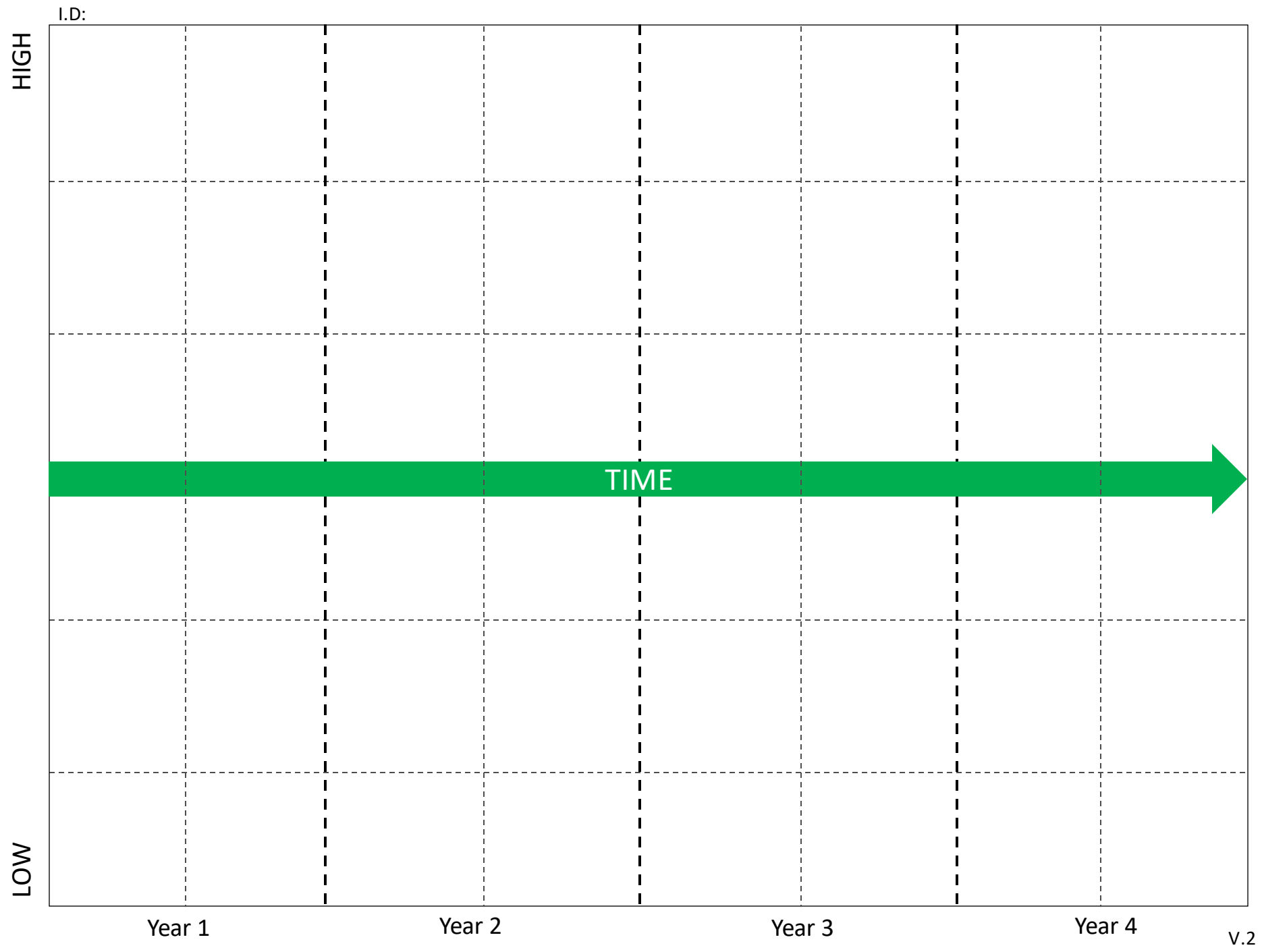


# The Interview

- Background info: demographic and career summary
- Semi-structured – free flow with a quota

## **Topics:**

1. Value – During the degree
2. Value – Since graduation
3. Skills and knowledge gained and used
4. Personal value

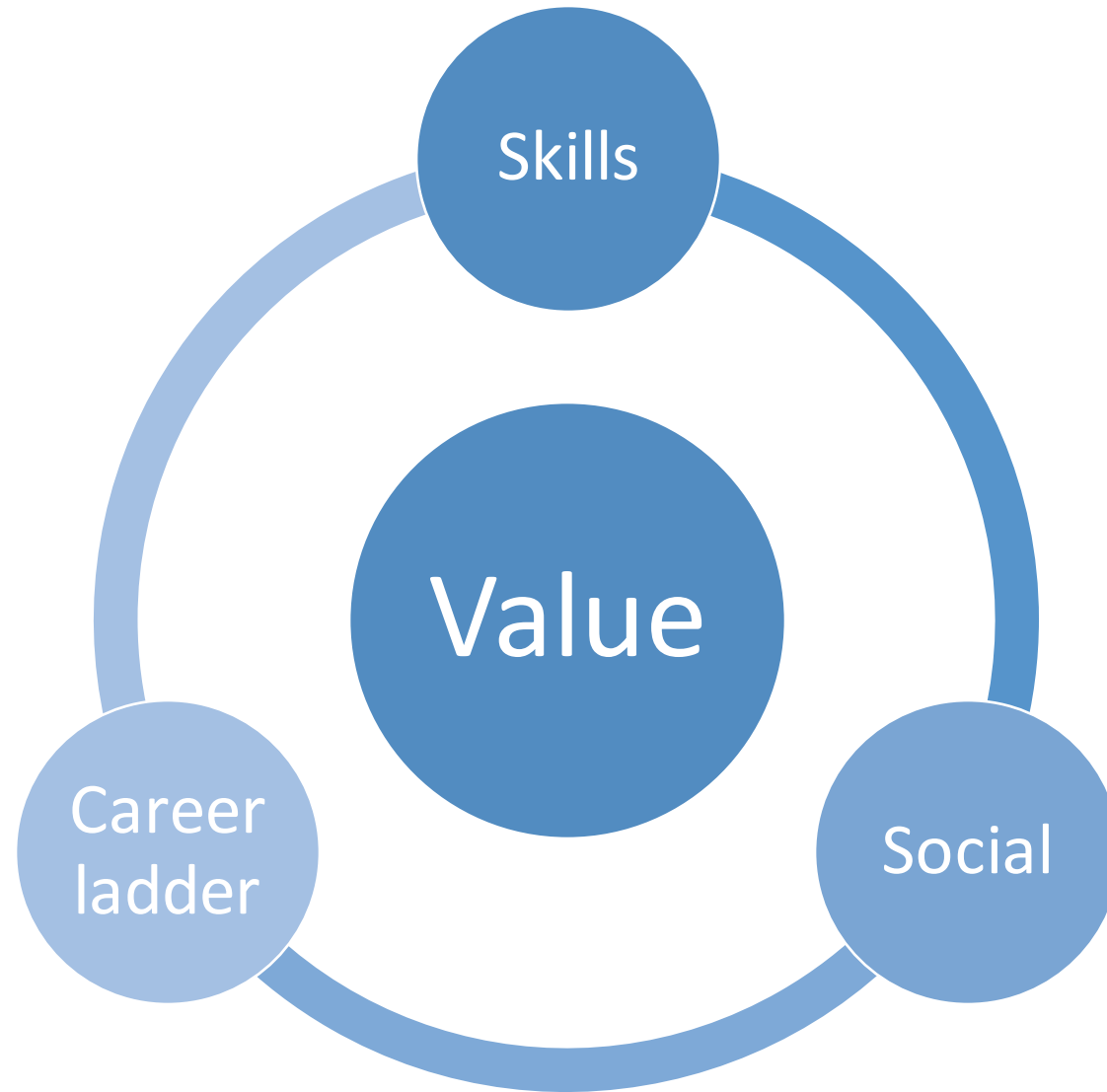


# Results - Participants

**22 interviews** plus two pilot interviews – mostly PhDs

Gender	Ethnicity	Years since graduation	Topic area of PhD	Masters degree	Area of work
Female: 10	White – British: 20	Average: 5.2 Lowest: 1 Highest: 14	STEM: 15	Yes: 13	Private: 6
Male: 12	White – Other: 1		A+H: 5	No: 9	Public: 7
	Asian – Indian: 1		Social Sci: 2		Charity: 1

# THE BIG THREE – so far...



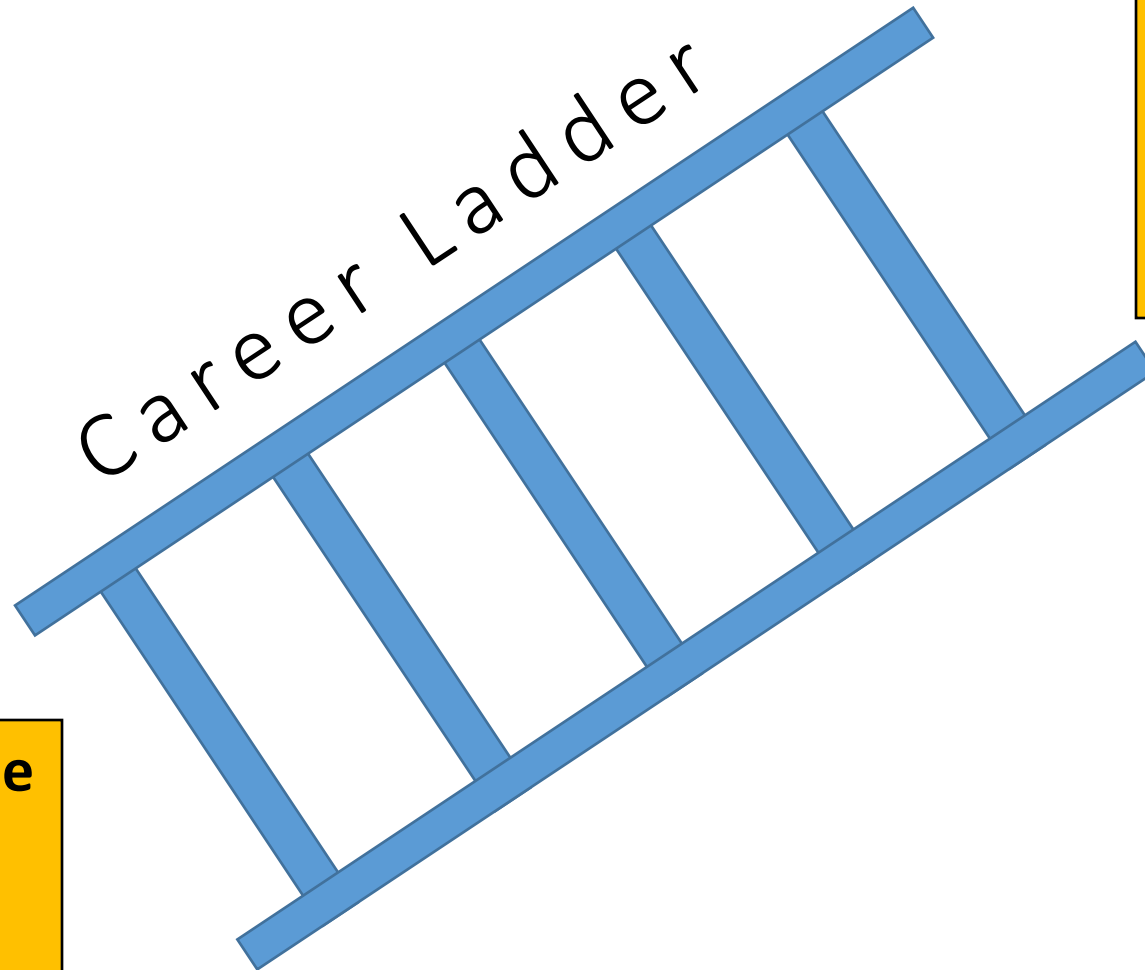
# Skills value

**Hard** – report writing, domain-specific practical skills

**Soft** – critical thinking, argument construction, problem solving, self-direction

**Personal** – Resilience, confidence, resourcefulness





### **Starting out: less value**

- CV enhancer
- Less skills used
- “Overqualified”
- No time to reflect

### **Higher up: more value**

- Skills: Managerial, abstract problem solving, strategic planning etc.
- Time to reflect
- Financial gain

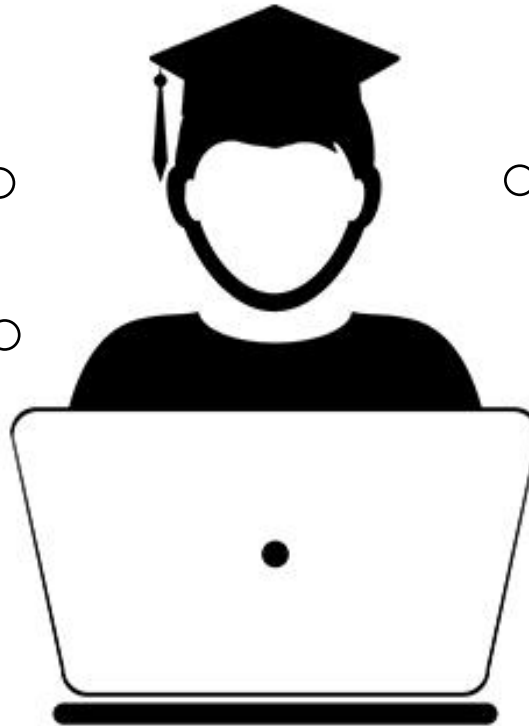
# Social value

Social and  
cultural  
awareness

Networks and  
connections for  
the future

Personal and  
professional  
identity

Social groups:  
similar  
ideologies



**Added value came from...**

Placements/conferences

Extra-curricular activities

Competitions

Public engagement

**Value judgements  
affected by...**

Supervision

Preparedness for work

Time since graduation

Money



## Some notable quotes...

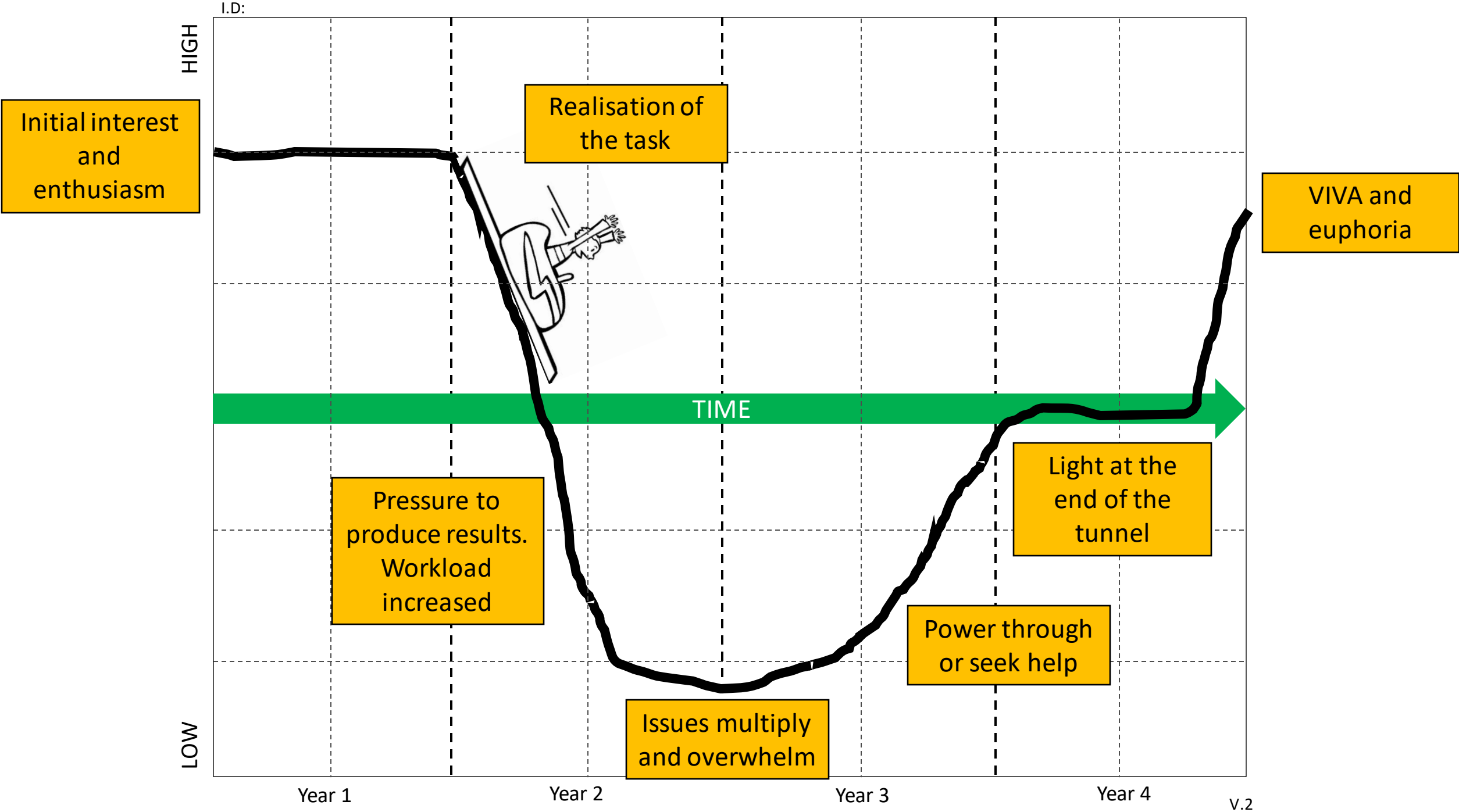
“It’s a badge of honour”

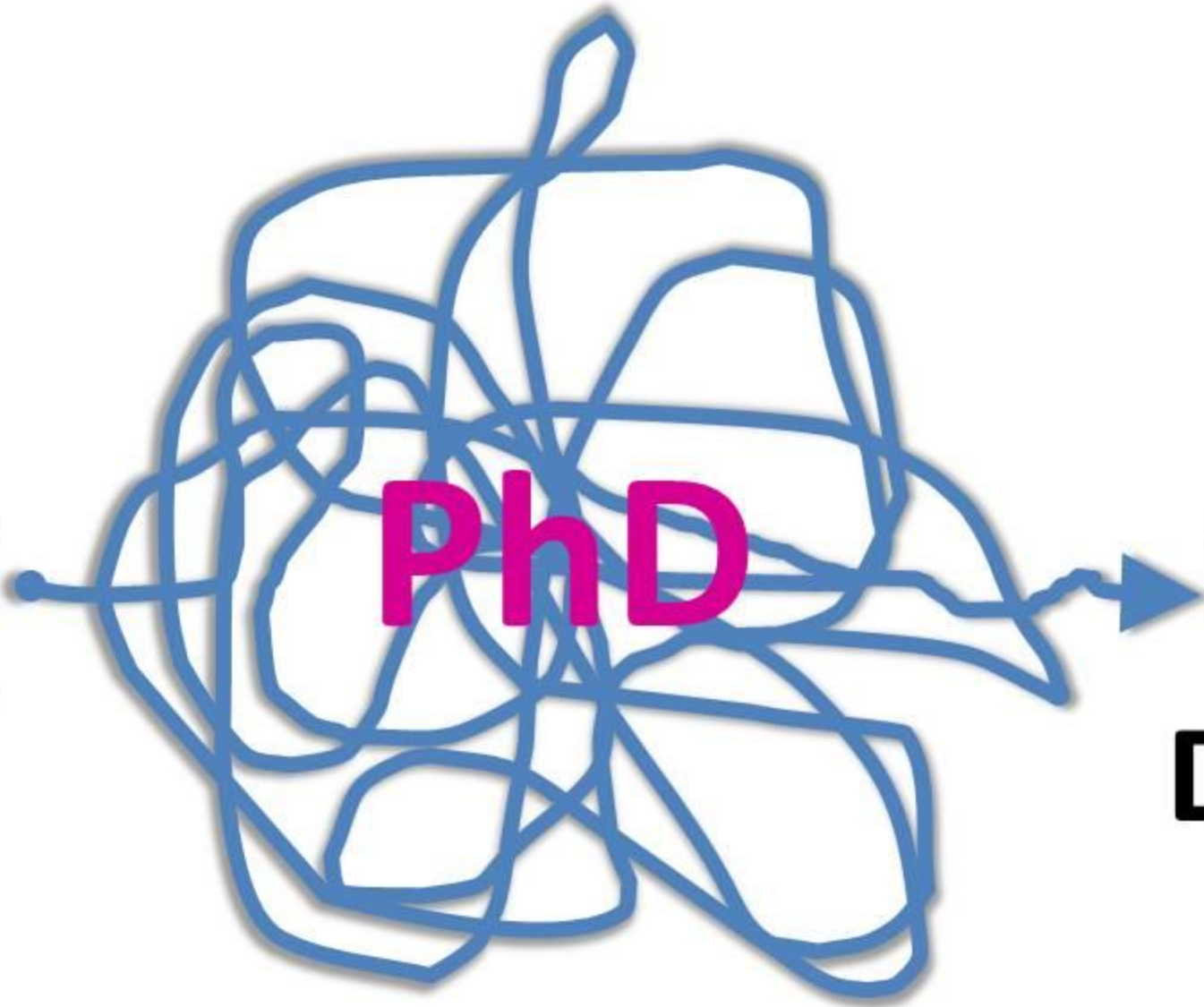
“It’s a part of who I am”

“you don’t need the PhD to do my job at the end of the day.”

“it’s given me currency and legitimacy in the environment in which I operate.”

“it’s not a golden ticket into academia”





# What's the value?

- Doctoral value perceptions are **complex and change over time**
- Graduates benefit through **skills, social capital, and career progression**
- **Resilience and self-determination** flourish out of necessity

## Implications:

- How do we support PGRs at **specific problematic stages**?
- How can we better ensure that **value is added** in our work with PGRs?

# Next steps and further work

- Fully analyse interview data
- Integrate with student questionnaire data
  - 200 responses – quantitative and qualitative data
- **Bigger scale** – Re-interview? More diverse groups, more institutions (prof docs)
- Explore demographic/cultural/contextual perspectives

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# Thank you for listening

## Questions?

Contact: [bjbryan1@shef.ac.uk](mailto:bjbryan1@shef.ac.uk) and [k.guccione@shef.ac.uk](mailto:k.guccione@shef.ac.uk)

- How do you perceive educational value?
- What value did you get from your PhD?

Let me know!



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