



UK Research
and Innovation

A New Deal for Postgraduate Research

Response to the
Call for Input

September 2023



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Foreword



I loved my PhD years. The opportunity to pursue a research project, stepping into the unknown, exploring ideas, learning skills and developing new understanding is an extraordinary and enriching experience. Of course, precisely because you are stepping into the unknown it is also quite stressful - maybe you won't find anything interesting, maybe your carefully designed programme will fail for technical or logistical reasons. In my case, plants got eaten

by pests, tissue cultures got contaminated, enzymes failed to work the way they were supposed to, and when all the experiments worked beautifully, they often proved my favourite idea was wrong. So there was lots of re-doing and re-thinking things. My PhD supervisor had a menu of quotes to help when that kind of thing happened. Research is 1% search and 99% re, he used to say.

And challenging research is not the only thing that can make life difficult for research students. The Call for Input we held last year provided a comprehensive overview of the many issues that need addressing. I am very grateful to everyone who contributed to the exercise and was pleased that we were able to publish an analysis of the rich information you provided earlier this year.

As you might expect, the picture that emerges is complex. Students who are self-funded can have a very different experience from those who have a funded studentship. Provision by different funders and higher education providers varies. Some students are employed (particularly, for instance, those working in healthcare), while the majority are not workers or employees and therefore have more limited statutory support.

This can make it very hard for students (and staff) to navigate what help is available to them.

That is why it is important that across the sector we work together to ensure that every postgraduate research student gets a high-quality experience, with the right level of financial and practical support. We need to be vigilant and ensure all our programmes are open to people from diverse backgrounds, and that they provide enough flexibility to support people with different needs. And because the vast majority of students will be looking for work after they complete their degree, it is essential that students get the advice they need to make the most of opportunities from the full range of fantastic careers that their study opens up for them.

The New Deal for Postgraduate Research offers us an opportunity to address these issues in a prioritised and coherent way, working with all the different players who need to contribute. We welcome that funders, degree providers and arms of government are coming together to look at the issues that face PGR students in the UK.

For UKRI students, our work on the New Deal is a core part of our new collective approach to talent.

Our priority over the past 15 months has been to help them as best we can with the rapid rise in the cost of living. We have invested an additional £90 million to increase the minimum UKRI stipend by just under 20%. Many other funders and research organisations have followed suit and increased the stipend for their own students.

Our next immediate priorities include looking at the support we provide for groups of students who might face particular challenges, especially people with disabilities, who care for children, or who have other caring responsibilities. Again, we are pleased that many key parties in the sector are working with us on how changes might best be delivered for other PGR students.

We are also committed to projects to develop and embed best practice in postgraduate

research. For example, building on the sector's focus on recruitment, Research England and the Office for Students are investing £8 million in projects focussed on the recruitment and retention of students from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds. The Next Generation Research SuperVision Project (RSVP) will bring together experts from industry and academia to evaluate how professional development for research supervisors can best help them to support PhD students across a wider range of models, such as part-time study. UKRI's research caucuses are also exploring how to remodel the PhD to best meet the needs of both students and the UK's research and innovation system.

In partnership with the devolved administrations we are reshaping incentives within the research system. For example we are currently consulting on the detailed design of an expanded element in the Research Excellence Framework covering people, culture and environment.

This all builds on much good work that has already happened within the sector. This report is another step on the path, as we work with our many partners to develop the New Deal for Postgraduate Research.

**UKRI Chief Executive,
Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser**

September 2023



1. Introduction

1.1. For over a century, the quality of the UK's postgraduate research (PGR) system has played a fundamental role in attracting people from home and abroad into research careers. As part of their PGR training, talented individuals are given space to develop their research skills, pursue new ideas, create knowledge, and apply existing ideas in original ways. However, high quality PGR is not static. PGR must evolve to ensure it continues to meet the needs of government, funders, research organisations (ROs), employers across the whole economy, society, and the researchers and innovators themselves. The support offered to those undertaking PGR must continue to attract, develop and retain people, tapping into the widest possible talent pool.

1.2. The New Deal for Postgraduate Research (the "New Deal") was first proposed by government in the 2020 Research and Development Roadmap (BEIS 2020). It is intended to encompass a range of policy and funding measures to support the government's longstanding commitment

to research as a means to drive innovation for the good of society. Since then, the government has created the Department of Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT). It remains committed to the New Deal and its role in supporting the talent and skills vision of *The UK Science and Technology Framework* (DSIT 2023). The New Deal will support the UK to become the most innovative economy in the world.

1.3. To be effective and benefit all UK-based PGR students, the entire sector needs to work to deliver the ambitions of the New Deal. In 2021, the government announced that long-term work on the New Deal would begin with a cross-sector consultation, led by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) (BEIS 2021). This 'Call for Input' (CFI) was open from February to May 2022 and considered how students are supported "both financially and practically". We are immensely grateful for the 422 responses received from PGR students, Research Organisations (ROs), grant holders, and supervisors, as well as many others. Many responses were submitted on behalf of

multiple stakeholders following workshops and conversations held throughout the sector. We have published an analysis of the CFI on our website (PyeTait 2023).

1.4. This report summarises the recommendations of the CFI analysis and how we (UKRI) are responding to them. We hope that it, alongside the CFI analysis report, encourages other actors to consider their own role and responses, recognising this report is not a sector wide or DSIT response.



Our role

1.5. UKRI is a non-departmental public body, accountable to DSIT. In 2022, we published our *UKRI Strategy 2022 to 2027: Transforming Tomorrow Together* (UKRI, 2022). Our strategy stresses the importance of world-class people and teams and sets out how we will prioritise work to:

- Make the UK the most attractive destination for talented people and teams from around the world.
- Develop the breadth of skilled people and teams essential for the future of the R&D workforce.
- Shift research culture to support, rather than hinder, talented people and teams to pursue their ideas.

1.6. UKRI is the largest single funder of PGR in the UK but not the majority funder. Our research councils support around 20% of PGR students but the proportion within each discipline varies considerably. As a funder of PGR, we play a key role in realising the ambitions of the New Deal. The scale and breadth of our work as a funder, and proximity to government, means that we also play an important role as a convenor - bringing together voices from across the research and innovation community to encourage and support PGR training. We do not however regulate or generally deliver PGR training opportunities.

1.7. As a funder, we currently intend to invest over £1.3 billion in PGR between April 2022 and March 2025 across our seven disciplinary research councils. This funding

takes the form of training grants to a broad range of ROs who are then responsible for recruiting students, often supplementing this with their own income or funding from industry and other third parties. In addition, our council Research England provides quality-related Research Degree Programme (RDP) supervision funding to English higher education institutions. This provided £671 million across the 2022-23 and 2023-24 academic years with an indicative budget for 2024-25 of £344 million.

1.8. We are also progressing other work that intersects with the New Deal:

- Under a programme called Collective Talent Funding, we are working to simplify and harmonise how our research councils invest in doctoral training and work more collectively. The programme aims to reduce the bureaucracy of accessing, awarding and managing our training grants and strengthen opportunities for interdisciplinary training while retaining the ability to support the needs of individuals and disciplines. As Collective Talent Funding is considering the investment infrastructure we use for doctoral training, it will support



a number of the actions outlined in this document.

- Research England is, in partnership with the devolved administrations, leading the 2028 Research Excellence Framework (REF) exercise. The exercise will reshape the incentives within the research system and rethink what should be recognised and rewarded. As part of this, REF 2028 will expand the definition of research environment so that we can ensure the people, culture and environments that underpin a vibrant and sustainable UK research system, including PGR, are appropriately recognised. The aim is to contribute to a positive research culture that enables talented, diverse people and teams to thrive. This work will complement Research England's planned review of its approach to strategic institutional research funding. This review will include consideration of all Quality related Research (QR) funding streams, including the effectiveness of RDP.

1.9. As a convenor, we have been working with the sector on the response to the analysis of the CFI. Funders and representative bodies from the research organisations

of all sizes have come together as a PGR Funders and Providers Forum (see chapter 13). This is looking at those areas of common interest raised in the CFI over the course of 2023. We are also very grateful for the continued input from colleagues across central government, the devolved administrations, the higher education sector and PGR students themselves.

Structure of the report

1.10. This document outlines our response to the CFI analysis, presenting our considerations and the actions that we intend to take within our two complementary functions as both funder and convenor. To provide context we briefly summarise the CFI analysis in each of the sections below, with the full analysis available on our website (PyeTait 2023).

1.11. The chapters of this report are structured around the ten areas that were identified through the analysis of the CFI. These are:

- Reviewing funding
- Increased flexibility in PGR models
- Accessibility and outreach
- Consistency in supervision

- Boosting support
- Support for international students
- Preparing students for the future
- Facilitating collaboration with employers
- Reviewing the status of postgraduate researchers
- Looking ahead

1.12. In addition to the future actions we will take, this report provides information on actions we have already undertaken that may already go some way to address the issues raised in the CFI. We have also referenced further evidence we have gathered as part of our work on the New Deal and indicated where more may be required to support future policy development.

1.13. In conclusion, chapter 12 provides a summary of actions and highlights where some activities we will undertake support several areas.

2. Reviewing funding

2.1. Many respondents to the CFI highlighted issues with current funding arrangements. Some were concerned with the level of support provided directly to students, whether as a stipend or other financial support. Many other respondents, including ROs, shared these concerns, and also suggested UKRI should look at the amount of funding provided via quality-related research funding (QR) or access to funding from UKRI's research councils.

2.2. Ensuring that PGR is funded appropriately is key to delivering value for money for funders, providers and students alike. As a funder, we aim to provide sufficient support to allow people to pursue their ideas, and to make the UK an attractive destination for talented people from around the world including from within the UK. This must be balanced with the need to fund the breadth of people required across research and innovation sectors as a whole.

Support for PGR students

2.3. Not all PGR students in the UK receive financial support. Based on the Higher

Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data, we estimate that over a third of doctoral students received no external funding to support their studies in 2020-21. Self-funded PGR students may be supporting themselves through one or a combination of part-time work, a loan (such as the government's Postgraduate Master's Loan or Postgraduate Doctoral Loan), through savings or other means. The majority though may receive funding from their RO, a charitable funder, public body, the private sector, their home government (in the case of some international students), or from a combination of sources. The financial support they receive may include payment for fees and a stipend for their living costs.

2.4. The level of stipend was consistently raised by students responding to the CFI. To some degree, the concerns raised in the CFI should be put into context of rising inflation. The CFI ran from February to May 2022, during which period the 12-month Consumer Price Index (CPI) rose from 6.2%, to 9.1%. It peaked at 11.1% in October 2022 (ONS 2023), though inflation is yet to return to the government target of



around 2%. UKRI and many other funders have undertaken work to support PGR students through this period, but we also acknowledge the concerns about stipends predate the rise in inflation to some extent. Reviewing the approach that we use to set stipend rates periodically will ensure that it continues to support the objectives of our investments in PGR.

- 2.5. Respondents to the CFI noted that students who are not employed are not eligible for certain benefits in the same way as workers or employees. The CFI particularly highlighted students with disabilities or with childcare and other

caring responsibilities. For example, where a couple have a child and one of the couple is a student, with neither an employment contract for the student nor a qualifying self-employment arrangement, neither parent is eligible for government-mandated shared parental leave pay or tax-free childcare, and in England they are not eligible for the full 30 hours free childcare.

- 2.6. Students with disabilities or children may be eligible for Universal Credit, but if the student is in receipt of a stipend, nearly its full value is deducted from any award. This may mean that the PGR student, though technically eligible for Universal Credit, could receive no benefit or less than people on employment contracts. The CFI analysis responses suggested that this may mean, alone or in combination with the general level of funding available to postgraduate researchers, that the support available to undertake PGR studies is less attractive to people with a range of individual circumstances.

Funding institutions

- 2.7. Some institutions responded to the CFI stating that they would benefit from more QR funding for PGR students. Under the UK's dual-support system, QR funding is allocated by national funding councils in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and decisions on both the total amount of funding and how this is allocated are devolved.
- 2.8. Some ROs, notably those that spend less on research or that are smaller or more specialised, responded to the CFI stating that their access to research council training grants was challenging.
- 2.9. Responses to the CFI noted that ROs recover less of the cost for PGR than they do for other forms of research. Our own analysis indicates that ROs recover just under half (47%) of the cost of PGR from other funders¹. This could indicate that funders expect ROs to co-invest more in the PGR grants they provide compared to other grants. It may also reflect changes to costs over time through, for example, increased expectations for the wider PGR environment within which the funded



¹ Based on UKRI analysis of data from the Transparent Approach to Costing (TRAC), the methodology used by the higher education sector to help cost its activities. The TRAC data does not take account of QR funding. Note sector-wide cost recovery data is not directly comparable with the proportion of the full economic cost funded on any individual grant or studentship.



studentships sit. It may also reflect ROs' and their departments' decisions to invest their own resources in training PGR students. Further work to explore what the contemporary costs of PGR are will aid our and the sector's understanding on the cost-effectiveness of and incentives created by current investment strategies. We are also considering our approach to awards that require collaboration with third parties as discussed in Chapter 9.

As a funder, UKRI has:

- Increased the minimum stipend such that the 2023-24 level is nearly 20% more than 2021-22, meaning that in real terms it is likely to have around the same value as it did in 2020-21. UKRI has reprioritised and invested around £90 million to support the uplifts to stipend and fees in financial years 2022-23, to 2024-25.
- Adapted some funding approaches to better support the diverse range of ROs in the UK. For example, Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) have both incentivised consortia applying for Doctoral Training Partnerships (DTPs) to include smaller ROs. Research

England, through its Expanding Excellence in England Programme, supports small and excellent research units and departments in higher education providers across England to expand and increase their activity where they have potential to grow.

- In 2022, we announced that Research England would increase the research degree programme (RDP) funding element of QR for 2022-23 by 9.9% compared to the previous year.
- In 2023, we published the *Assessment of UKRI's Terms and conditions of Training Grants from an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Perspective* (Advance HE 2023), which provides a series of recommendations on changes to the UKRI Standard Terms and Conditions of Training Grant (the "training grant T&Cs").

As a funder, UKRI will:

- Review how we set the UKRI minimum stipend. If we determine any changes are required, these are likely to be phased in from academic year 2025-26.
- Review Advance HE's recommendations on the training grant terms and conditions in respect of the

financial support available to UKRI funded students, particularly those with disabilities, children or caring responsibilities. Some small changes will be introduced later in 2023. We are currently commissioning further evidence where this is required to underpin options for change, with a view to implementing further changes from Q3 2024.

- As part of our work on Collective Talent Funding, review how we invest in training grants to achieve a balance between providing greater consistency and fairness and meeting the needs of individuals and disciplines. The review will be completed in 2023.
- Commission work to understand the full cost of doctoral training, by Q3 2024.
- Research England will initiate a review of its approach to strategic institutional research funding in 2023 with a view to consulting with the sector on any potential changes from 2024. Any changes are likely to be implemented

from the following year. This work will be integrated with REF 2028.

As a convener, UKRI will:

- Through the PGR Funders and Providers Forum, work with other funders and ROs to consider whether there should be a common

baseline level for stipends and how this might be set. This aims to report in Q4 2024.

- Work with other funders, ROs and central government to develop our evidence base and understand the options available for a wider



3. Increased flexibility in PGR models

- 3.1. **The analysis of the CFI indicates appetite within the community for greater provision for part-time PGR, distance learning and flexibility of duration of funding. Advance HE's assessment of UKRI's training grant T&Cs also suggested that part-time study is likely to have an impact on diversity, with part-time PGR students being more likely to be older, to be women, and to have childcare responsibilities.**
- 3.2. PGR provides opportunities and benefits for people with a wide range of personal circumstances. For example, part-time or flexible study can provide support for skilled people from diverse backgrounds and careers so that our future research and innovation workforce flourish. In line with our five-year strategy (UKRI 2022) and our separate Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) strategy (UKRI 2023), we continually review our approach to ensure diversity is supported and advanced in the best way possible.

Mode of study

- 3.3. In 2021-22, across the whole PGR population, around 17% of first year PGR and 24% of all PGR students were registered as part-time. These vary considerably between ROs and by discipline. An average of around 17% of all PGR students from the more research-intensive ROs were part-time while around half studied part-time in the more teaching focussed or smaller and specialist institutions². Across disciplines, 6% of people undertaking a research degree in physical sciences were part-time, compared to 17% in computing or veterinary sciences, 20% medical sciences, 33% social sciences and 67% education and teaching.
- 3.4. By comparison, UKRI funded students are less likely to be part time – around 6% in 2021-22. UKRI's training grant T&Cs currently require our training grant holders to offer students the option of studying on either a part-time or full-time basis, with a minimum of 50% of full-time equivalent



required. However, a small number of responses to the CFI noted that some institutions limited the choice they afforded UKRI students to either 50% or 100%. Students who highlighted this in the CFI felt the binary choice was overly restrictive.

- 3.5. Responses to the CFI underlined that PGR students are undertaking part-time study for a variety of reasons. One disabled

² Full data on Who is Studying in HE, including an institutional break down of full and part time rates, is available from: www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/whos-in-he

student stated that their disability meant they could only work limited hours and part-time was the only option available to them. Some have responsibilities such as childcare which prevent them from studying full-time. Others study part-time and work part-time in order to fund their PGR or because PGR forms part of their professional development.

- 3.6. There is a risk that a lack of guidance for ROs on how to interpret legislation on part time PGR may inhibit innovation in the sector. The British Universities Finance Directors Group (BUFDG) has issued guidance on the legislation (BUFDG 2022) noting that legislation and tax guidance does not appear to be drafted from the perspective of the RO. Different definitions of eligibility and references to part-time education in wider legislation on rights and benefits are likely to be an underlying source of confusion that can make PGR students' legal rights and obligations difficult to navigate.

As a funder, UKRI has:

- Commissioned Advance HE to analyse the UKRI T&Cs from an EDI perspective (AdvanceHE 2023), which has made recommendations on flexibility of support including part-time study

and return to study after a period of absence.

- In 2020, the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) announced four doctoral mobility pilots to test new approaches to attracting and supporting people from non-academic backgrounds to undertake doctoral study (EPSRC 2020). Now in their third year, they aim to support social and career mobility by reducing barriers to entry to doctoral training from different groups and providing opportunities for lifelong learning.

As a funder, UKRI will:

- Review Advance HE's recommendations on the training grant terms and conditions in respect of the mode of study and phased return to study. As in Chapter 2, we are currently commissioning further evidence where this is required to underpin options for change, with a view to implementing with any changes from Q3 2024.
- Through the PGR Funders and Providers Forum, we are working with our partners to understand why some limit the part-time provision for UKRI students. We will consider what

changes may be required to how UKRI profiles training grants to ensure part-time study is not discouraged.

- Commission a project *Breaking with tradition – remodelling the PhD as level 8 training*. The project will explore ways to develop UKRI's higher skills training offer which meets the needs of industry and provides a more flexible offer. It may consider more flexible or modular ways of delivering postgraduate training so that individuals can, for example, develop portfolios of key skills they require that built up to a doctoral qualification rather than following the normal full-time route. It is being commissioned through the Innovation and Research Caucus which works with UKRI to increase the use and influence of robust evidence in the development of funding.

As a convenor, UKRI will:

- Work with the government and BUFDG to better understand the impact of tax legislation and guidance and seek to remove barriers to part-time PGR study.

4. Accessibility and outreach

4.1. Responses to the CFI were clear that more needs to be done to ensure that the PGR training is accessible to individuals regardless of background or personal characteristics. Specifically, feedback was given that improvements are needed to recruitment practices including greater transparency in the decision-making process. The importance of outreach with wider promotion of PGR programmes and the availability of more information for potential prospective students was also emphasised.

4.2. EDI is core to the UKRI vision for the R&D sector and increasing diversity at all career stages is priority within UKRI's five year strategy (UKRI, 2022). Our EDI Strategy sets out our strategic objective to include and support diverse people and ideas through our funding and partnerships (UKRI, 2023).

Programmes to support access and outreach

4.3. In some respects, the overall domestic UK PGR population reflects the UK

working age population. HESA's data on the personal characteristics of all PGR students in the UK (HESA 2023) shows that, overall, around half (51%) of all UK domicile PGR students are female. In 2021-22, 20% are recorded as having a known disability compared with 22% of the working population (DWP 2023). HESA's ethnicity data also shows similar proportions to the UK working population (ONS 2023) with around 77% of UK domiciled PGR students identifying as white, 5% black, 8% Asian, 4% recorded as mixed race and 3% other.

4.4. Nonetheless, personal characteristics vary significantly depending on the discipline that the PGR student is studying or how they are supported. For example, the Royal Society of Chemistry notes that only 1.3% of chemistry doctoral students identify as Black (RSC 2020). While around 53% of all UK PGR students are 29 years old or younger, our data indicates that this figure was 82% of UKRI funded PGR students. UKRI, along with colleagues in the sector, has been working for some time

to understand and address the issues that may contribute to variations.

4.5. While some CFI responses noted that the level of support available can impact how attractive PGR is to some people (Chapter 2), some responses saw EDI as primarily an issue with accessibility and outreach. Many ROs are actively working to address inconsistencies with access to PGR and set out the programmes they are already running as part of their responses to the CFI.

4.6. We agree that accessibility and outreach are important areas. While there have been significant improvements, there is more to do to build on the steps we have already taken, working with our investments and the sector more broadly to support change. For example, in 2021, a survey we conducted of around 200 UKRI grant holders supported activities that improve access and awareness and suggested that more should be done to share best practice across the sector.



Requirements for a pre-existing master's degree

- 4.7. Some ROs require that potential students applying to PGR already hold a master's degree. These requirements can impact potential applicants and disciplinary areas in different ways, for example, because of the availability of funding for master's courses. For some subjects, master's level undergraduate degrees exist (which can be supported in the same way as other undergraduate degrees) while other disciplines may have standalone master's courses that do not tend to attract grant funding. Research indicates that the introduction of the UK master's loans in 2016-17 has improved access to these - González and Wakeling (2020) found that since the loan's introduction, students from previously underrepresented socioeconomic groups were reaching similar levels of participation in master's degrees as their counterparts. That said, Advance HE's analysis for UKRI (Advance HE 2023) notes that, at the current time, there is no Sharia compliant postgraduate loan.
- 4.8. While many potential students may wish to enter PGR training immediately after completing another higher education

course, others seek to access PGR later in their careers. They may not have a formal qualification but have developed the equivalent experience while employed. Requirements such as having a master's degree, can limit access by such candidates, imposing an additional hurdle (in terms of both time and money) to re-entering higher education if their experience is not recognised as part of a recruitment process.

As a funder, UKRI has:

- Embedded EDI as a core requirement for our doctoral training investments conceived widely to include socio-economic background as well as legally protected characteristics:
 - An EDI strategy is a required part of the application and progress reporting for all UKRI doctoral training investments
 - We provide ringfenced funding for recruitment initiatives as part of EDI strategies when there is evidence of under-representation or disadvantage
 - Required all doctoral training investments to provide EDI data on and applications and awardees to UKRI

- Worked to identify and support good practice in recruitment and participation:
 - In 2021, Research England and the Office for Students (OFS) announced £8 million funding to 13 projects aiming to improve access and participation of Black, Asian and minority ethnic students. Initial findings have been published (OFS 2023)
 - Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) published *Best Practice Principles in Doctoral Recruitment* (NERC 2021)
 - Conducted a survey in 2022 of around 200 doctoral training investments to understand practice and approaches to widening participation

As a funder, UKRI will:

- As part of UKRI's Collective Talent Funding programme and working with the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) in Q4 2023 we will review the data requirements for UKRI students and how best to collect it.
- Adopt the revised NERC guidance on training and recruitment for all UKRI training grants, across all of UKRI's research councils, in Q4 2023.



- Expand the annual diversity data we publish on our students to include, from the next data release in Q4 2023, intersectionality between gender and other characteristics.

As a convenor, UKRI will:

- Share good practice information across the sector, for instance on recruitment and transparency in the decision-making process, including:

- Outputs from the joint Research England and Office for Students Funding programme to improve access and participation for black, Asian and minority ethnic students in postgraduate research through the publication of annual evaluation reports. [Improving access and participation for Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups in postgraduate research: Evaluation - Office for Students](#)

- Supporting the EPSRC Sharing Hub funding opportunity. The hub will provide leadership and coordination to support sharing of EDI good practices and what works across the engineering, physical and mathematical sciences research community. [EPSRC equality, diversity and inclusion sharing hub – UKRI](#)
- Through the EDI Caucus, which provides high-quality research evidence on EDI that informs policy and practice in the research and innovation system. [EDI Caucus – UKRI](#)
- Establishing the UKRI Good Practice Exchange to create connections, build the evidence, and champion culture change across the R&I sector. [Research and innovation culture – UKRI](#)



5. Consistency in supervision

5.1. **Around one in five respondents to the CFI raised issues relating to the perceived need for training and support for supervisors and noted that, when the relationship falls down, this has a detrimental impact on all.**

5.2. Good supervision is fundamental to getting good outcomes for the PGR student, research team, RO, funder and future employer. All PGR students should have access to high quality supervision and ROs should ensure that everyone in the supervisory team is well supported, including through induction for new supervisors and Continuous Professional Development (CPD).



Continuous Professional Development for supervisors

5.3. The Quality Assurance Agency states that “supervisors should be provided with sufficient time, support and opportunities to develop and maintain their supervisory practice” (QAA 2020). However, the UK Council for Graduate Education (UKCGE) *UK Research Supervision Survey* (UKCGE

2021) found that only around 66% of supervisors have mandatory induction training with 29% having mandatory CPD as a supervisor.

5.4. In *Supporting Excellent Supervisory Practice across UKRI Doctoral Training Investments* (UKCGE 2022) UKCGE discussed the types of CPD that was needed for supervisors of UKRI funded students and explored this

with supervisors, students and doctoral training directors. Its report set out areas including mental health awareness, EDI, data protection, coaching, how to give constructive feedback, and having difficult conversations. Supervisors may also benefit from training on asking for and constructively handling feedback from their PGR students, for example, aligned to the Office for the Independent Adjudicator

of Higher Education's (OIA) good practice framework (OIA 2022).

- 5.5. UKCGE's work has highlighted that ROs are better placed than funders to provide CPD for supervisors. We agree, though through our engagement, we have also heard that some smaller institutions may not be able to access the same external resources as are available in larger institutions. We recently announced funding for *Next Generation Research SuperVision Project (RSVP)* whose consortium will develop a suite of bespoke supervisory resources, maintained by UKCGE and available open-access to supervisors and academic developers from all organisation types. In addition to providing supervisors with CPD, ROs may need to consider any further steps to ensure supervision of PGR is appropriately recognised and rewarded.

Handling feedback and complaints

- 5.6. Overall supervision works well, with 87% of PGR students responding to the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey reporting they are satisfied with their supervisory experience (AdvanceHE, 2022). However, the OIA reports that it has consistently received a disproportionately high number of complaints from PGR

students, many of them regarding their supervision (OIA, 2023).

- 5.7. Responses to the CFI were notable for calls for independent mediators. The OIA notes that it is good practice for ROs to "permit students to be supported, advised or represented by third parties, for example an officer or adviser from a student representative body." Also to "make sure students have access to well-resourced sources of advice and guidance" on making complaints (OIA 2022). Where internal complaints procedures do not satisfactorily resolve an issue, students in all four nations of the UK have access to

an independent complaints scheme (see Box 1).

- 5.8. For UKRI students, UKRI's training grant T&Cs also require that students and supervisors have access to effective procedures for resolving problems. Following recommendations from the review of UKRI's training grant T&Cs, we are considering what further updates may be required. As part of our wider work to support a positive research culture, we are in the process of updating our policy with regards to bullying and harassment in the separate *UKRI Terms and Conditions for Research Grants*. We will consider

Box 1: UK student complaints ombudsmen

England and Wales

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA)
www.oiahe.org.uk

Scotland

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO)
www.spsso.org.uk/how-to-complain-about-public-service

Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO)
<https://nipso.org.uk>

More advice on complaints

The Quality Assurance Agency lists a number of other sources of help for those wishing to make a complaint:
www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/how-to-make-a-complaint

reflecting changes to the terms and conditions for research grants in those for our training grants.

- 5.9. A recent High Court judgement in the case of *Oxford University Innovation Ltd v Oxford Nanoimaging Ltd* (2022) highlighted that, at least for some PGR students who are not employees, consumer protection law may apply. This legislation could require ROs to take steps to put things right if the PGR student can demonstrate that they were not provided with teaching with appropriate care and skill. Guidance on responsibilities stemming from consumer rights are noted in Chapter 10.



As a funder, UKRI has:

- Funded the UKCGE UK Research Supervision Survey and the UKRI Commissioned Report on Research Supervision.
- Assessed RO's approaches to providing supervisory training as part of the competitions for some new training grants. We are considering whether we can apply this approach more widely in the future.
- Announced funding for the Next Generation Research SuperVision Project (RSVP) which will facilitate discussions across the sector about how to properly recognise, reward and professionalise doctoral research supervision (University of York, 2023). Partners include York (lead), Sheffield Hallam University, Nottingham University, King's College London, Coventry University and UKCGE.

As a funder, UKRI will:

- As part of our work on Collective Talent Funding, we are developing a UKRI core offer for all our future training grants, within which we will more clearly set out our expectations for supervision. Grants awarded through

funding opportunities launched from 2024 will be expected to implement this core offer.

- As a first step on complaints, in 2023 we will amend UKRI's training grant terms and conditions and associated guidance to reflect that there are ombudsmen in all four nations to handle student complaints. We will also draw attention to the OIA Good Practice Framework.
- Consider mirroring research grant terms and conditions and guidance on bullying and harassment in training grant terms and conditions by 2024.
- Through the Research England Development Fund, fund *The Next Generation Research SuperVision Project (RSVP)*. Led by the University of York, the £4.6m project seeks to enhance doctoral supervisory practice and widen the pool of confident, trained supervisors able to support an inclusive culture and the next generation of researchers (University of York, 2023)
- Research England's review of its Strategic Institutional Research Funding will include the effectiveness of Research Degree Programme (RDP) supervision QR funding.

6. Boosting support

6.1. The physical health and mental health and wellbeing of PGR students is a key concern raised by respondents to the CFI. In addition to financial support, some suggested a more robust system of pastoral or wellbeing support is needed and that UKRI possibly create and promote formal networks of support.

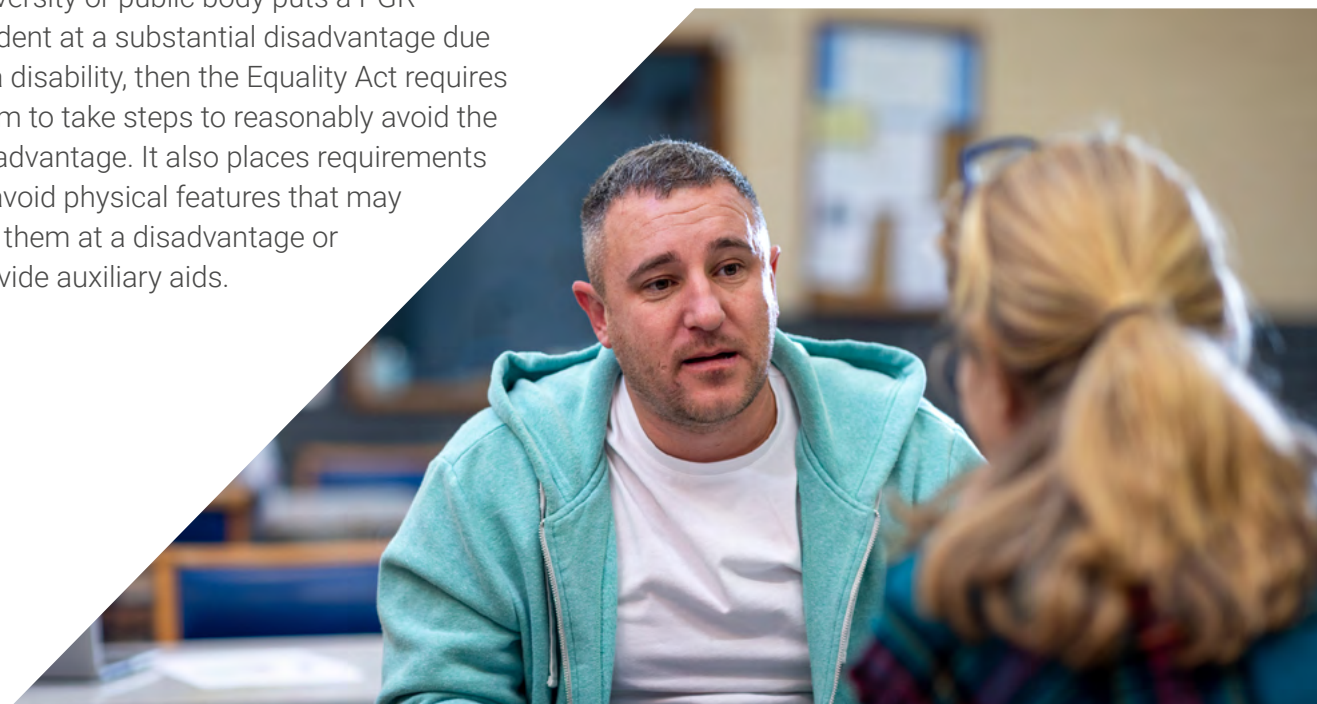
6.2. One of our priorities is shifting research culture to support talented people and teams to pursue their ideas. We want to ensure that our training grant holders are enabled to build a positive research culture, working with their wider organisation to support PGR students.

Legal requirements regarding physical and mental health

6.3. Under the Equality Act (2010) the definition of disability is a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on an individual's ability to do normal day-to-day activities³.

This broad definition covers a wide range of health issues so long as they are substantial and long-term – for example stress, anxiety, depression and other neurodivergence and physical disabilities. If a provision, criterion or practice of a university or public body puts a PGR student at a substantial disadvantage due to a disability, then the Equality Act requires them to take steps to reasonably avoid the disadvantage. It also places requirements to avoid physical features that may put them at a disadvantage or provide auxiliary aids.

6.4. UKRI outlines what financial support we will provide for the PGR students we fund via our training grant T&Cs. These include requirements on ability to take leave and return to study periods. As set out in the



³ More guidance on this concept for England, Wales and Scotland is available from gov.uk: [Definition of disability under the Equality Act 2010 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/definition-of-disability-under-the-equality-act-2010). Different legislation applies in Northern Ireland: [Protection against disability discrimination \(Northern Ireland\) | nidirect](https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/guidance/protection-against-disability-discrimination-northern-ireland)



chapters above, we commissioned an external analysis of the training grant terms and conditions from an EDI perspective and are considering where we can implement recommendations over the course of the next year. We also provide a Disabled Students Allowance scheme for the students that we fund, which provides additional funding to training grant holders to support certain reasonable adjustments. The scheme seeks to mirror the government Disabled Students' Allowance scheme for students in England⁴.

As a funder, UKRI has:

- Included in the application for training grants a requirement to outline what

support systems will be in place to protect individual's physical and mental health and wellbeing.

- Between 2018 and 2020, Research England and the Office for Students (OfS) jointly invested £1.5 million in 17 projects supporting mental health and wellbeing in postgraduate research students (OFS 2020). In October 2020, Vitae and Universities UK (UUK) published an evaluation of the programme (Vitae 2020). The evaluation made 25 recommendations to ROs, their staff, PGR students and the wider sector, including funders. The report reflected UUK's Stepchange

framework: Mentally Healthy Universities (UUK undated) which supports universities as they adopt mental health as a strategic priority, seeing it as foundational to all aspects of university life, for all students and all staff.

As a funder, UKRI will:

- As part of our work on Collective Talent Funding, we are developing a UKRI core offer for all our future training grants which will more clearly set out our expectations for student welfare. Grants awarded through funding opportunities launched from 2024 will be expected to implement this core offer.
- Review our training grant T&Cs as set out in chapter 2, which will include consideration of revisions to our approach to reasonable adjustments by Q3 2024.

⁴ Student Finance England (SFE) administers a Disabled Students' Allowance scheme for students eligible for its support. The scheme is open to students on first and postgraduate degrees where they are eligible for SFE funding. See: [Help if you're a student with a learning difficulty, health problem or disability: Disabled Students' Allowance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/help-if-youre-a-student-with-a-learning-difficulty-health-problem-or-disability/disabled-students-allowance)

7. Support for international students

7.1. Responses to the CFI highlighted that international students may have a different experience of PGR from home students depending on their visa type, with additional costs and restrictions on their ability to undertake paid work or take time away from study.

7.2. Attracting international PGR students to the UK is critical to ensuring that we appeal to research talent at an early stage. As our strategy states, 'the UK's success in research and innovation has been underpinned by its ability to attract, develop and retain international talent. As competition for global talent increases, we must ensure that the UK has an ambitious and attractive talent offer' (UKRI 2022).

Patterns in global mobility

7.3. HESA reports that in 2021-22, 42% of students starting PGR in that year had an address outside of the UK immediately before starting their course. The proportion of PGR students from the European Union (EU) has declined from around 13% in 2012-13 to 7% in 2021-22. The proportion

of PGR students from the rest of the world has increased from around 32% to 36% over the same period.

7.4. As with home or domestic students, international students may be internationally mobile and choose to work in another country after qualification. This can still provide benefit to the UK, supporting the international networks between research teams that are often key to good research. Some international students – particularly those funded by their home government – may even start their PGR with this in mind. However, for many, the UK will become their long-term home and they will contribute directly to research here, and indeed the UK's economy.

What support is there for international students?

7.5. Before 2020, students living in EU countries could apply for funding for fees but not a stipend. This arrangement stopped when the transition period between the United Kingdom and European Union came to



an end in 2020. Since 2020-21, we have allowed all training grant holders to fund international students on UKRI training grants. This means that international students can receive a full stipend and the RO can draw a fee (and some other costs) from the grant at the rate of a home student.

- 7.6. UKRI currently caps the number of international students who can be funded in this way at 30%, to ensure sufficient funded places are reserved for home students. We have recently reviewed the implementation of the cap and will provide further guidance to its grant holders.
- 7.7. International students face higher costs to study in the UK compared to home students as they may incur costs such as a visa fee, the Immigration Health Surcharge (IHS), additional travel costs, and international student tuition fees. Visa and IHS costs are the policy responsibility of the Home Office. International PGR tuition fees for are set by individual ROs. In setting their fees they may consider how they wish to prioritise attracting international talent to their institution. While funders vary, we do not support these costs through our doctoral investments. Currently the overall

number of international students funded by UKRI appears to be rising though the trend is not universal, with a reduction in EU PGR students. We will keep our overall support for international students under review.

- 7.8. International students must ensure that they comply with the requirements of their visa. For international students who are in the UK on a student visa, in order to undertake placements during their studentship, the placement must be 'integral and assessed'⁵ to the course. This may restrict an international students' ability to take placements during their doctoral training. The student visa also has restrictions on the number of days an international student can take for sick or parental leave. ROs should work closely with one another and their international students in order to ensure that they are supported in undertaking placements where possible, and that they are able to access appropriate support for example when sick, in periods of maternity or where they have direct caring responsibilities.

As a funder, UKRI has:

- Amended UKRI's training grant T&Cs in 2020 to allow international students

to access full UKRI studentships, and up to 30% of all UKRI students may be international.

As a convenor, UKRI has:

- Commissioned research from Universities UK International to assess the contribution of international PGR students to the UK science and research base, which consists of a bibliometric analysis of the contribution of international PGR students to the UK science and research base in terms of scientific output, impact.

As a funder, UKRI will:

- Provide ROs with guidance on the operation of the UKRI cap on international students on its training grants in Q4 2023.
- Consider amending the training grant T&Cs guidance to highlight where international students or RO staff may need to consider visa conditions (noting that UKRI is not able to provide regulated immigration advice) by Q3 2024.

5 [Student and Child Student \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

8. Preparing students for the future

- 8.1. **Around one quarter of the responses to the CFI suggest that the quality of careers advice for PGR students is either insufficient or too focussed on academic careers. PGR students called for more continuous professional development (CPD), placements and the ability to build wider skills. Notably, some responses to the CFI, including from some supervisors, suggested that the focus of PGR should be solely on the research project.**
- 8.2. UKRI aims to help develop the breadth of skilled people and teams essential for the future of the R&D workforce right across the public, private and third sectors. Longitudinal Education Outcomes data indicates that the majority of doctoral graduates (over 60%) will be employed outside of higher education after graduation (LEO 2023). While a very small minority of PGR students may not require careers advice, the vast majority will benefit from being able to demonstrate that they have experience with the wider set of skills and competencies for which their future employers are likely to be recruiting.

Careers advice

- 8.3. A minority of students will be undertaking their doctorate while also on an employment contract – for example, as lecturers or technicians within universities, clinical practitioners such as nurses and doctors, or people working towards professional doctorates. Employers paying for the PGR may reasonably expect the candidate to remain focused on their career within their institution for some time after qualification. A very small number of self-funded students may also be undertaking PGR for their own personal achievement rather than with aspirations for their career.
- 8.4. The vast majority of PGR students are not employees and are likely to have to apply for work after qualifying. UKRI funds the number of PGR students that we do because we recognise that the technical skills and the ability to contribute to knowledge through original research or applying existing knowledge in original ways, contributes to organisations right across the private, public and third sectors.



- 8.5. All employers are likely to be looking for evidence of a range of skills or competencies. Ensuring that PGR students have had the opportunity to develop these is critical for them to fully realise the benefits of their PGR training. This is increasingly true within academic careers, where researchers often need to be able to work as part of teams and collaborate across disciplinary and sectoral boundaries. Funders including UKRI are keen to support researchers and teams who demonstrate a broader range of skills through their funding applications, as set out in the *Résumé for Research and Innovation (UKRI 2022b)* and the *UK Government R&D People and Culture Strategy (BEIS 2021)*.
- 8.6. Within structured doctoral programmes there is an expectation of professional and wider skills development opportunities for PGR students including some career-related learning. This is largely provided through graduate schools and by researcher development teams. However, much of this tends to be focused on academic research careers. Many good initiatives exist, but these are not consistently available to PGR students on all types of training programmes, creating unequal access even for researchers within the same institution. There are, however,

Box 2: Skills and competencies resources

Vitae Researcher Development Framework

Sets out the wide-ranging knowledge, intellectual abilities, techniques and professional standards expected to do research, as well as the personal qualities, knowledge and skills to work with others and ensure the wider impact of research.

[The Vitae Researcher Development Framework \(Vitae Website\)](#)

Prosper: a fresh approach to postdoc career development

With resources aimed at postdoctoral researchers, managers of researchers and institutions, Prosper's portal provides tools and resources to help career development. The tools have been piloted and tested. Prosper was developed by the University of Liverpool, working alongside the University of Manchester and Lancaster University, and funded by the Research England development fund.

[Prosper Portal - Prosper](#)

The UK Council for Graduate Education's (UKCGE's) Good Supervisory Practice Framework

UKCGE's framework is designed to set expectations for all supervisors, and to support supervisor development programmes, including Supporting candidates' personal, professional and career development (section 7). UKCGE's resource library provides an up-to-date source of information on supporting candidate development.

[UKCGE | 7. Supporting candidates' personal, professional and career...](#)

The OECD report *Promoting Diverse Career Options for Doctoral and Post-Doctoral Researchers*

The OECD report provides a review of literature on career development for PGR students.

[Promoting diverse career pathways for doctoral and postdoctoral researchers | OECD](#)



resources that may support discussions around careers advice (for examples see box 2) and we have recently invested in projects aligned to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers (see actions below).

- 8.7. We recognise that members of the supervisory team may have limited experience of recruitment and employment beyond higher education. Where this is true, it may be unhelpful to expect them to provide direct advice to PGR students about careers in the wider private, public and third sector. However, it is reasonable to expect supervisors to encourage PGR students' curiosity about the full range of careers open to them and to proactively direct them to helpful information. Many institutions have specialist staff within their careers service available to support PGR students, who are better placed to provide information about the full range of potential careers. The extent to which PGR students are aware of and engage with such provision varies widely.

As a funder, UKRI has, for example:

- Developed the UKRI Policy Internship Scheme (UKRI 2023b) which provides three-month funded internships for UKRI funded students at a range

of influential policy organisations supporting the development of their transferable skills and understanding of the careers open to them.

- Provided funding as part of our doctoral training investments for students to undertake internships as a core part of their studentship for example, BBSRC Professional Internships for PhD Students (PIPS) and ESRC Research in Practice Placements.

As a convenor, UKRI has:

- Funded work that considers porosity of skilled people between academia and the wider private sector, which may provide a framework for future developments for PGR students, such as:
 - Prosper, which has developed a new model for postdoctoral career development and with further UKRI follow on funding is starting rollout across universities from summer 2023. [Prosper \(liverpool.ac.uk\)](https://liverpool.ac.uk/prosper/)
 - The Centre for Postdoctoral Development in Infrastructure, Cities and Energy (C-DICE). The centre brings together 18 higher

education institutions to enhance the development of postdoctoral researchers, provide access to funding, world-class facilities and membership of an collaborative network. We support C-DICE through a £4 million, four year investment from the Research England Development fund, plus £3.4 million in cash and in-kind commitments from partners. [C-DICE \(cdice.ac.uk\)](https://cdice.ac.uk)

As a funder, UKRI will:

- As part of our work on Collective Talent Funding, we are developing a UKRI core offer for all our future training grants which will more clearly set out our expectations for professional and career development. Grantholders who receive funding through opportunities launched from 2024 will be expected to implement this core offer.
- Work with Vitae in 2023 to review the current provision of careers advice to PGRs to identify how careers learning and skills development during PGR in the UK could be enhanced.
- Publish a review of the BBSRC PIPS programme by the end of 2023 to outline the impact of this initiative on doctoral student career development, supervisors and internship host organisations.



9. Facilitating collaboration with employers

9.1. In responses to the CFI, PGR students and supervisors called for more help in creating networks for collaboration. Multiple UKRI council reviews have also indicated that PGR students can benefit from experience of working with external partners.

9.2. Collaboration between ROs and partners in the wider private, public and third sector may yield significant benefits, for example providing PGR students with access to greater data, resources and experience outside of their RO. It also helps UKRI realise our strategic priority of developing the breadth of people required for the future workforce.

Collaboration between business and universities

9.3. For PGR students, collaboration across the private, public and third sectors provides them with novel combinations of skills and expertise and a wider understanding of how their research may have an impact in different settings. As part of their collaborative doctoral training, the PGR student may develop knowledge

and skills to operate in interdisciplinary environments. They may have access to placements, secondments, and mentorship, and develop skills to help translate research into commercial settings.

9.4. UKRI already invests in collaborative activities, for example, through Higher Education Innovation Funding (HEIF), delivered by Research England and the OFS, which provides £260 million annually to support and develop a broad range of knowledge-based interactions between higher education providers and the wider world. We know from past research that ROs often use HEIF to support PGR (Technopolis Group 2022). It is possible that equivalent funding in other parts of the UK is similarly used to support students. We also support collaborative training through our research councils, across all of our doctoral funding routes.

As a funder, UKRI has:

- Funded collaboration with employers through many of its training grants, through collaborative studentships and placements (see chapter 8). In

some instances, employers are formal partners in delivering our Centres for Doctoral Training and Doctoral Training Partnerships. Some councils also have specific collaborative awards such as iCASE and Collaborative Training Partnerships, that give a partner flexibility as to which RO they work with. Some EPSRC funded students are working towards an EngD, a professional Engineer doctorate, where the student spends the majority of their time in a company.

As a funder, UKRI will:

- Through Collective Talent Funding we are currently reviewing our provision for collaborative doctoral training, seeking to better define the needs and benefits and looking at how we can support non-academic stakeholders in leading or supporting PGR. Our aim is to enhance and simplify our offer for funding opportunities launching from 2024.

10. Reviewing the status of postgraduate researchers

10.1. There was extensive debate among respondents to the CFI as to the relative drawbacks and merits of placing more PGR students on employment contracts, but without clear consensus. While ROs, who are ultimately responsible for deciding whether they employ students largely oppose the idea, many students felt that there would be benefits, particularly for disabled students or students with children or caring responsibilities.

10.2. We believe postgraduate researchers can often be best supported to pursue their ideas as students (without an employment contract), with their learning and development based on their individual needs and ambitions so they can pursue the breadth of career options open to them. While the rights and support for workers have expanded over the course of several decades, those changes have not always also been reflected for PGR students. We will work with stakeholders to consider, where it is appropriate and possible, how to address any gaps.

Legal status

- 10.3. There is no common definition of the term “student” in UK law. Instead, whether an individual is eligible for certain state provided benefits, and to protections afforded to workers, employees or consumers, is largely influenced by whether the student meets the legal definition in the relevant legislation.
- 10.4. Some PGR students are employed and paid a salary while they work towards their research degree. Such students’ terms and conditions are likely to be governed by legislation on employment rights and they will have the same access to government provided welfare (such as Universal Credit or shared parental leave pay) as other employees.
- 10.5. Most PGR students are not workers or employees. If they are receiving funding for their training or living costs, the extent to which they get leave or other benefits is often determined by their funder, who reasonably needs to have some limits on how funding (including public funding) is

used. Where the student is self-funded, they may have relatively little support.

- 10.6. PGR students have access to some state provided benefits. For example, they may be eligible for Universal Credit if they are disabled or care for children. However, the full value of any grant they receive may be deducted from their Universal Credit award which, depending on the value of the grant, may mean they cannot receive that welfare support.
- 10.7. Students who are not employees may be protected by consumer legislation (see Oxford University Innovation Ltd v Oxford Nanoimaging Ltd (2022)). This may mean that greater consideration needs to be given by ROs to the application of the Competition and Markets Authority’s (CMA) recently updated advice on consumer protection law for UK higher education providers (CMA, 2023).

As a funder, UKRI has:

- Made provision for UKRI funded students to have reasonable leave and other entitlements.

- Commissioned Advance HE to undertake Assessment of UKRI's Terms and conditions of Training Grants from an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Perspective (Advance HE 2023). The report also compares general statutory provisions for workers and employees with provisions for UKRI students contained in the UKRI training grant T&Cs.

As a funder, UKRI will:

- As set out in chapters 2, 3, 6 and 7, we will review UKRI training grant T&Cs with a view to considering where it is appropriate to give UKRI funded students similar welfare arrangements to those provided to workers and others in society, with changes implemented throughout 2023 and 2024.

As a convenor, UKRI will:

- Work with PGR Funders and Providers Group to review the wider sector offer. As set out in chapters 2, 3, 6 and 7, we will use the AdvanceHE analysis as a guide, to identify any gaps in current offers and establish a baseline level of support for all PGR students. The group will also consider how best to communicate with students and those

who they work with to ensure that PGR students have the right information about support available to them with the work completing in 2024.



Looking ahead

11. Looking ahead

11.1. Respondents to the CFI generally welcomed the New Deal and that UKRI had engaged openly through the CFI. There were calls for further engagement as the work progressed, including with ROs, PGR students and the sector more widely.

11.2. The *UKRI Strategy 2022-2027* commits UKRI to involving a broader range of people and organisations in the design and delivery of research and innovation. We want to continue to build on the research councils' excellent engagement with their training grant holders to ensure that the needs and views of people from across the sector are involved in formulating future PGR policy.

Engaging with purpose

11.3. We welcome all feedback that we receive and recognise that many people care passionately about PGR in the UK. We are committed to continuing to engage widely with our communities.

11.4. We are also actively considering where engagement with the community is likely to actively benefit decision making. It may sometimes be necessary for us to prioritise how we engage and to ensure that we only proactively seek the community's input where we can make good use of that work.

11.5. Recognising that UKRI now funds around 3000 training grants with 1000 training grant holders, and around 28,000 PGR students⁶ across 2022-23 (UKRI 2023c), we will also consider how best we can ensure that we are communicating openly and transparently with the whole community.

As a funder, UKRI has:

- The Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), EPSRC, ESRC, and NERC have reviewed their investments in PGR, with representation from students, supervisors, training grant holders and others in the sector.

- Convened a PGR Funders and Providers Forum, consisting of many major representative bodies and funders, to work on areas of common interest.

As a convener, UKRI has:

- Run the CFI on behalf of government, receiving 422 submissions from a range of students, individual RO staff members, ROs and the wider sector.

As a funder, UKRI will:

- Bring together best practice from across the research councils on engagement with their funded students and ensure that their voice contributes to UKRI policy making.
- Commission focus groups and other engagement activities with students to inform our policy making processes.

⁶ The UKRI Annual Report and Accounts sets out the number of research council students registered for at least one day in UKRI's 2022-23 financial year. The figure is not directly comparable to HESA's Open Data on student numbers.

12. Summary of actions

- 12.1. PGR training continues to play a vital role, not only in the careers of thousands of students each year, but also for the future viability of ROs and government ambitions from science and technology to creative industries and beyond.
- 12.2. The analysis of the CFI structured recommendations into ten broad topic areas and we have mirrored that structure in this document. The table in this chapter summarises the actions presented in this report. In a number of cases, the actions that we will take will cut across a number of the CFI report's topic areas. The table provides a mapping to CFI topic areas to reduce duplication.
- 12.3. Through this CFI response, we have outlined some of the activity that we have already been undertaking to help deliver high-quality PGR in the UK alongside the future activities we will undertake, either as a funder or convenor, to bring about further positive change. A number of activities do not commit to a definitive timeframe for action. This recognises that we are one of many actors in the sector and that the timescales for some activities will need to be driven by other parties or require us to develop a collective view.
- 12.4. We will publish a two-year review of progress against the actions listed below in 2025.
- 12.5. We continue to welcome the involvement of PGR students, ROs, employers, and all those within and beyond higher education who are working to help deliver high quality PGR.

Action	CFI Analysis Topic	Due date
<p>Through the PGR Funders and Providers Forum, we will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ work with other funders and ROs to consider whether there should be a common baseline level for stipends and how this might be set (chapter 2) ■ consider why some ROs limit part-time provision for UKRI students and whether any changes may be helpful (chapter 3) ■ review the wider sector offer on support for PGR students' rights and welfare (chapters 2 and 10) 	<p>Reviewing funding</p> <p>Increased flexibility in PGR models</p> <p>Reviewing the status of postgraduate researchers</p>	<p>Initial project completed with implementation schedule in 2024</p>

Action	CFI Analysis Topic	Due date
<p>Working with government departments, we will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ consider the wider package of financial support, particularly for PGR students with disabilities, children or caring responsibilities (chapter 2) ■ together with BUFDG, seek to remove any barriers to part-time PGR study (chapter 3) 	<p>Reviewing funding</p> <p>Increased flexibility in PGR models</p>	<p>2024</p>
<p>Through our Collective Talent Funding programme, we will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ review how we invest in training grants to achieve a balance between providing greater consistency and fairness and meeting the needs of individuals and disciplines (chapter 2) ■ review, working with The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), our data requirements for training grants and studentships and how best to collect these (chapter 4) ■ develop a UKRI core offer for all our future training grants, within which, we will more clearly set out our expectations of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • supervision (chapter 5) • student welfare (chapter 6) • professional and career development (chapter 8) ■ review how UKRI supports collaborative doctoral training and opportunities to enhance and simplify our offer (chapter 9) 	<p>Reviewing funding</p> <p>Accessibility and outreach</p> <p>Consistency in supervision</p> <p>Boosting support</p> <p>Preparing students for the future</p> <p>Facilitating collaboration with employers</p>	<p>UKRI will set out its approach later in 2023, with funding opportunities for new training grants expected to begin implementing the changes from 2024.</p>

Action	CFI Analysis Topic	Due date
<p>We will consider the outputs of previously or newly commissioned projects which look to encourage and support PGR training, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>Breaking with tradition – remodelling the PhD as level 8 training</i>, commissioned through UKRI's Innovation and Research Caucus, with outputs expected in 2024 (chapter 3) ■ the 2021 £8 million Research England and Office for Students Widening Participation in Postgraduate Research investment. This year, initial findings have been published. These projects are currently live and will run until 2025 (chapter 4). ■ the Next Generation Research SuperVision Project (RSVP), support through the Research England Development Fund, from 2023 to 2027 (chapter 5) ■ working with CRAC-Vitae in 2023 to review the current provision of careers advice to PGRs to identify how careers learning and skills development during PGR in the UK could be enhanced. Delivering in 2023 (chapter 8) 	<p>Increased flexibility in PGR models</p> <p>Accessibility and outreach</p> <p>Consistency in supervision</p> <p>Preparing students for the future</p> <p>Looking ahead</p>	<p>Various</p>

Action	CFI Analysis Topic	Due date
<p>Following the analysis of our standard Training Grant terms and conditions, we will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ review the recommendations made by Advance HE in respect of the financial support available to UKRI funded students, particularly those with disabilities or caring responsibilities. ■ commission further work where more evidence is required to underpin options for change, this will include work with students and ROs ■ consider where it is appropriate to give UKRI funded students similar welfare arrangements to those provided to workers and others in society (chapter 10) ■ amend our terms and conditions as necessary. Changes may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provision of financial support (chapter 2) • mode of study and phased return to study (chapter 3) • reflecting complaints procedures and requirements in respect of bullying and harassment (chapter 5) • boosting support and reasonable adjustments (chapter 6) • clarifying what support may be available to international students or where alternative provisions may be required (chapter 7) 	<p>Reviewing funding</p> <p>Increased flexibility in PGR models</p> <p>Consistency in supervision</p> <p>Boosting support</p> <p>Support for international students</p> <p>Reviewing the status of postgraduate researchers</p>	<p>Initial low or no cost changes to be implemented in 2023.</p> <p>Further changes require additional data to evaluate options with any changes to be implemented from Q3 2024.</p>
<p>To explore the contemporary costs of PGR and the direct support that we provide for students' living costs, we will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ commission work to understand the full cost of doctoral training, by Q3 2024 (chapter 2) ■ review how we set the UKRI minimum stipend (chapter 2) 	<p>Reviewing funding</p>	<p>If any change is required, to be phased in from 2025/26</p>

Action	CFI Analysis Topic	Due date
<p>To increase awareness and promote accessibility and outreach, we will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ adopt revised NERC guidance on training and recruitment for all training grants across all UKRI research councils (chapter 4) ■ share further good practice on outreach and recruitment (chapter 4) ■ expand the annual diversity data we publish on our students to include, from the next data release, intersectionality between gender and other characteristics (chapter 4) 	Accessibility and outreach	2023 and ongoing
<p>Following our review of how our international student cap has been implemented by ROs, we will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ provide ROs with further guidance on the operation of the cap for our training grants (chapter 7) 	Support for international students	Q3 2023
<p>To ensure student voices contribute to UKRI policy making, we will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ bring together best practice from across the research councils on engagement with their funded students (chapter 11) ■ undertake, or commission, engagement activities with students and focus groups to inform our policy making processes (chapter 11) 	Looking ahead	Ongoing
<p>Within UKRI, Research England will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ in partnership with the devolved administrations, lead the 2028 Research Excellence Framework (REF) exercise. The exercise will reshape the incentives within the research system and rethink what should be recognised and rewarded. As part of this, REF 2028 will expand the definition of research environment so that we can ensure the people, culture and environments that underpin a vibrant and sustainable UK research system, including PGR, are appropriately recognised. The aim is to contribute to a positive research culture that enables talented, diverse people and teams to thrive. ■ This work will complement Research England's planned review of its approach to strategic institutional research funding. This review will include consideration of all Quality related Research (QR) funding streams, including the effectiveness of RDP. 	<p>Reviewing funding</p> <p>Consistency in supervision</p>	Implemented from 2027 onwards

13. Annex A: Forum members

13.1. UKRI invited all large charitable funders and university representative bodies to join the forum. University bodies were also invited to include a small number of representatives from their member organisations to support the conversations.

13.2. *Cross-sector PGR Funders and Providers Forum* current member organisations:

- Cancer Research UK
- Coventry University
- Falmouth University
- GuildHE
- Harper Adams University
- Manchester University
- Newcastle University
- The Department for the Economy, Northern Ireland*
- The Leverhulme Trust
- The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama

- The Royal Society
- The Russell Group
- UK Research and Innovation
- Universities UK
- University Alliance
- University of Sheffield
- Wellcome

* UKRI is also working with the Scottish Funding Council and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales.



14. Glossary

C-DICE The Centre for Postdoctoral Development in Infrastructure, Cities and Energy (C-DICE). The centre brings together 18 higher education institutions to enhance the development of postdoctoral researchers, provide access to funding and world class facilities and afford membership of an exclusive collaborative network. C-DICE is supported through a £4 million four year investment from the Research England Development fund, plus £3.4 million in cash and in-kind commitments from partners.

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[C-DICE \(cdice.ac.uk\)](https://cdice.ac.uk)

Centre for Doctoral Training (CDT)

See “Training grant”

Collaborative Training Partnership, CASE, iCASE

See “Training grant”

Collective Talent Funding

A cross-UKRI programme bringing together the research councils’ spending for talent, largely for fellowships and studentships, into a single budget line of £2 billion, covering the 2022 to 2025 spending review period. For further information see: [How UKRI will transition to collective talent funding](#)

Doctoral Training Partnership (DTP)

See “Training grant”

Funding council

Government bodies that distribute block grants to universities in each of England (Research England), Scotland (Scottish Funding Council), Wales (Higher Education Funding Council of Wales) and Northern Ireland (Department for the Economy Northern Ireland). Research England is the only funding council that is part of UKRI.

HESA

The Higher Education Statistics Authority.

[About HESA](#)

PGR student

Someone working towards a research degree. Students may be working towards their qualification as part of an employment contract, or they might not be a worker or employee (e.g. a consumer of education).

From time to time it is necessary to reflect that in the UK people who meet the legal requirement of either an employee or a worker have certain rights that are not enjoyed by PGR students who are not employed. This distinction is made clear in the text.

Postgraduate Research (PGR) In this report, PGR refers to the research and other activity that contributes to a research degree, including research masters and doctorates. Doctorates are commonly referred to as a PhD, though some universities instead award DPhil and professional doctorates such as EngD.

Protected characteristics

In England, Wales and Scotland, the Equality Act (2010) sets out certain legal protections and duties in respect of the following characteristics: age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation. Similar legislation applies in Northern Ireland, which also protects political persuasion.

Quality related Research (QR) funding

QR funding is paid as grants to most registered higher education providers by their funding council. For example:
[Research England: how we fund higher education providers](#)

Research councils

The 7 discipline specific councils which, alongside Innovate UK and Research England, form UKRI. See UKRI for more details.

Research Degree Programme (RDP) supervision fund

One of the elements of Quality-related Research (QR) funding in England. More info: [Research England: how we fund higher education providers](#).

Research grant terms and conditions

Formally referred to as the UKRI FEC grants: standard terms and conditions of grant. These apply to UKRI's research grants; separate terms and conditions apply to training grants. The terms and conditions and guidance are published on our website: [Terms and conditions for research grants](#).

Research intensive

A term used to describe a group of universities which gain significant income from research activity. In England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, these could be considered those universities in TRAC Peer Groups A and B – the [TRAC website](#) sets out how it groups universities.

Research Organisation (RO)

Universities and other non-profit organisations that perform research such as UKRI's research institutes, centres and units.

Though many PGR students are based at a university, not all have research degree awarding powers, and the RO may therefore have a relationship with a suitable approved university.

Stipend

The stipend is a sum of money paid (e.g. by ROs) to students to fund their living costs while they undertake PGR. Funders, including UKRI, often stipulate the level of stipend, and many ROs use UKRI's rate as a baseline. A stipend is not normally subject to income tax or national insurance.

TRAC

The Transparent Approach to Costing (TRAC) is the methodology developed with the higher education sector to help cost its activities. It is an activity-based costing system adapted to academic culture in a way which also meets the needs of the main public funders of higher education. For further information see: [TRAC](#)

Training grant The grant awarded to an RO or a group of ROs to support PGR training. UKRI's research councils have different forms of training grant, such as the broadly discipline focussed Doctoral Training Partnerships, more focussed Centres for Doctoral Training, or awards that are focussed on collaboration between sectors such as the Collaborative Training Partnership, CASE or iCASE.

Training grant holder(s)

When UKRI awards a training grant to an RO, a named member of staff will lead on the grant. UKRI may refer to this person as either the Principal Investigator (PI) or the Training Grant Holder.

Training grant terms and conditions

The Standard Terms and Conditions of Training Grant and the UK Research and Innovation Training Grant Guidance inform training grant holders of UKRI's expectations of them in respect of their training grant. This includes some of UKRI's expectations with regards to student welfare provision. The terms and conditions and guidance are published on our website: [Terms and conditions for training funding – UKRI](#)

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), UKRI council(s)

UKRI is a non-departmental public body that reports to DSIT, comprised of nine councils:

- Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)
- Biotechnology and Biological Science Research Council (BBSRC)
- Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)
- Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC)
- Innovate UK
- Medical Research Council (MRC)
- Natural Environment Research Council (NERC)
- Research England
- Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC)

Through these seven disciplinary research councils, Research England and Innovate UK, it currently invests around £8 billion public money in R&D each year. More information on UKI is available from UKRI's website.

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