UK Research and Innovation

UKRI Good Practice Principles in Recruitment & Training at Doctoral Level

Edition 1 published January 2024.
Builds on NERC Best Practice Principles Edition 1 published December 2021
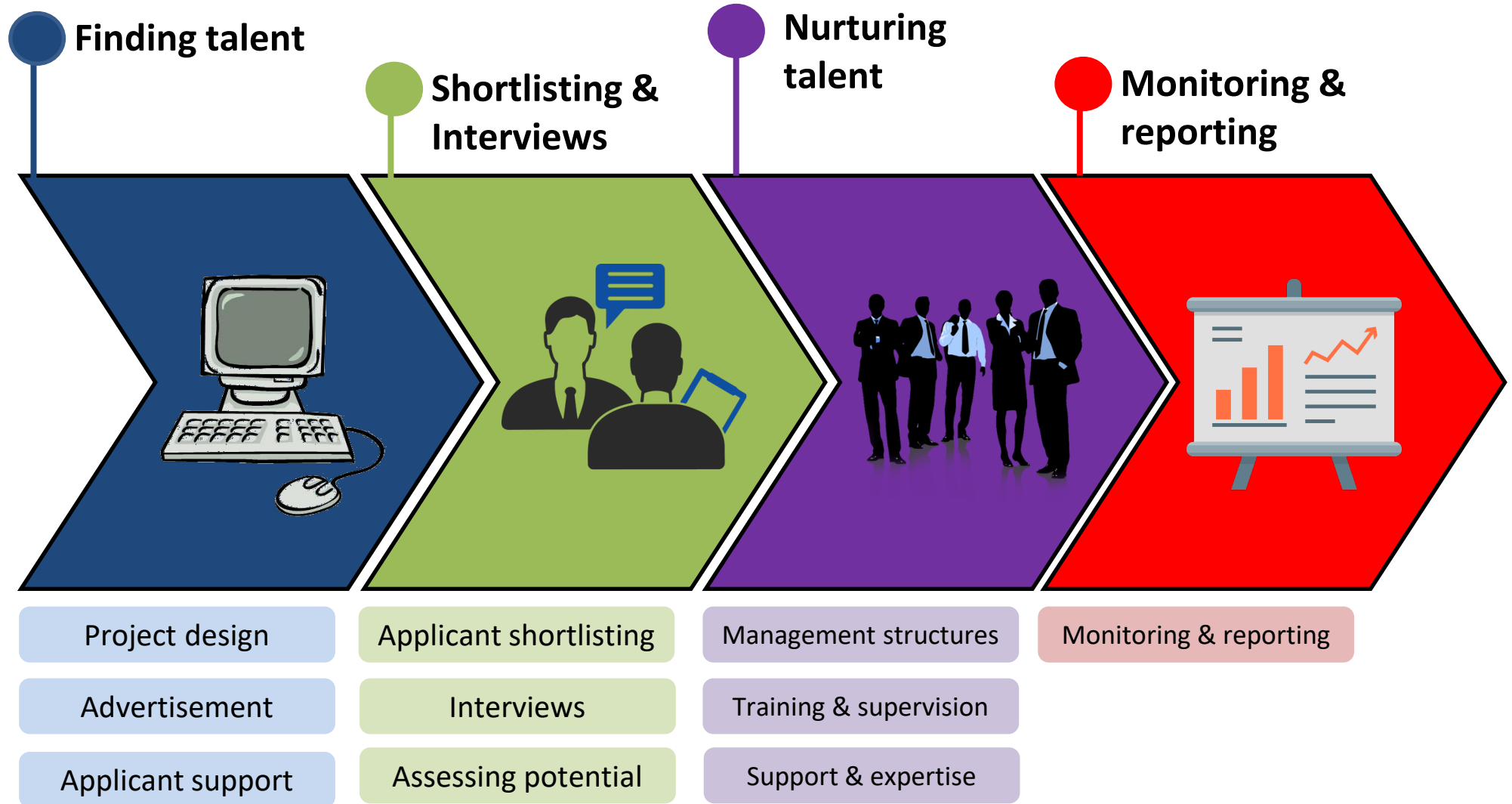
Introduction

- The Statement of Expectations for Doctoral Training sets out the core expectations for doctoral training and applies to all new UKRI doctoral funding opportunities launched from 2024. The statement of expectations includes an expectation that research organisations, working with collaborators and supporting supervisors, follow good practice in doctoral recruitment and training to support a diverse student population to participate in doctoral study.

- This document supplements the statement of expectations by providing research organisations with a set of good practice principles in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) across four key stages of the doctoral recruitment and training process.

- This good practice should be used by applicants for UKRI training grants, training grant holders, training grant managers and others involved in designing processes for the recruiting of UKRI funded postgraduate research students. Research organisations may also choose to consider this guidance when designing wider recruitment and training processes for postgraduate research.

- This good practice is based on the 'NERC Best Practice Principles in Recruitment & Training at Doctoral Level' first published in December 2021. Holders of NERC DTP2 awards should continue to implement this guidance, and those no longer recruiting should focus on changes related to the stages 'Nurturing Talent' and 'Monitoring & Reporting'.
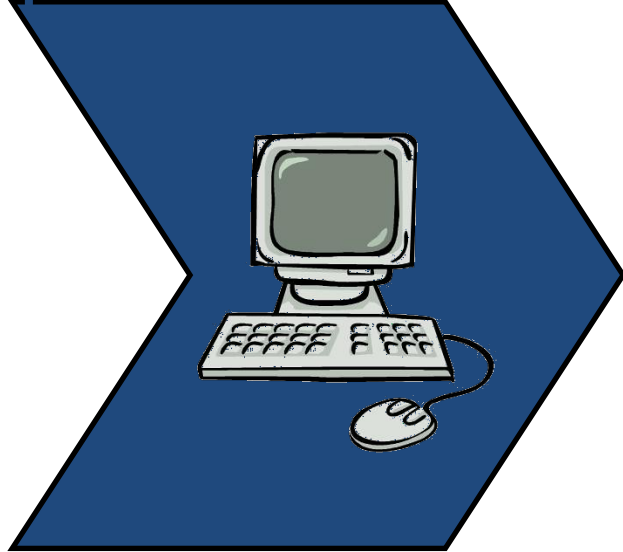
Introduction

- In 2021, responses to a survey of around 200 UKRI grant holders indicated that there was support for activities that improve access and awareness of EDI and suggested that more should be done to share best practice across the sector. In *A New Deal foe postgraduate Research: Response to the Call for* Input UKRI committed to adopting the revised NERC guidance on training and recruitment for all UKRI training grants, across all of UKRI's research councils.

- The good practice below includes a series of principles that training grant holders should consider. For each principle, we outline possible examples or other comments. It is the responsibility of the individual training grant holder to employ the most appropriate actions for their model, ensuring they are compliant with all legal and regulatory requirements that apply to them and their research organisation or organisations.

- The training grant holder should consider the planned timescales over which each principle is considered, whether that is within the current recruitment round, by the next recruitment round or through future doctoral investments.

- This version of the good practice was published in January 2024. Feedback on these guidelines can be submitted to: talent@ukri.org

Recruitment & training stages

This good practice is organised around four stages of recruitment and training. Their application may vary in different models or approaches to doctoral recruitment and training.

Finding talent

Shortlisting & Interviews

Nurturing talent

Monitoring & reporting

Project design	Applicant shortlisting	Management structures	Monitoring & reporting
Advertisement	Interviews	Training & supervision	
Applicant support	Assessing potential	Support & expertise	

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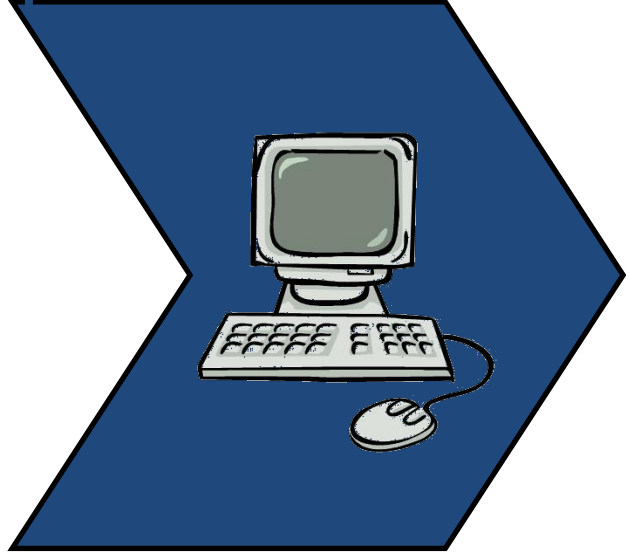
Finding talent

- Project design
- Advertisement
- Applicant support

The following principles aim to make the doctoral pathway accessible and attract potential applicants who may not currently view a doctorate as accessible to them.

Principle	Comments and examples
Collaboration with non-academic partners encouraged where appropriate.	- To improve visibility of career opportunities beyond academia and help attract applicants from more diverse disciplines. - E.g. industry, government bodies, charitable bodies or non-governmental organisations.
Clear information and communication of support available to potential applicants and throughout studentship.	- Clear information should be available to all prospective students - Clear information should be available throughout the studentship - E.g. details on course structure, fees, opportunities for part-time/remote study, flexible fieldwork, funding for disabled students' needs.
Inclusive use of language in all communications.	- Language checked for bias (e.g. gender decoder; able-bodied terminology); correct terminology/categories used; avoid loaded words e.g. 'Leaders'; staff add personal pronouns to email signatures where comfortable.
Broad advertisement networks beyond "business-as-usual"	- Training programme or university websites, FindAPhD and other commercial websites used regularly. - Support for and use of targeted networks/universities/departments; social media may help reach underrepresented groups at undergraduate level. - E.g. Targeted summer school / placements (REPs) / visits.

Finding talent

Project design

Advertisement

Applicant support

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Principle	Comments and Examples
Training programme specific doctoral graduate destination data / case studies published.	- To evidence how a doctorate can be used as a career step, what the research is contributing to and its importance. - Case studies should be reflective of different routes in, career trajectories and experiences.
Ensure imagery, case studies and personal profiles are truly reflective of a diverse community.	- To increase visibility of current diversity and associated commitments, and to encourage a broad range of applicants by ensuring they see themselves reflected in materials. - E.g. EDI statements/policies, imagery & person-profiles, diversity webpages.
The application process is transparent yet rigorous.	- To reduce inequalities from coaching bias. Transparency in assessment criteria, and candidate support provided where appropriate. - E.g. Dedicated process & contacts for applicant queries e.g. signposting visa/immigration advice & supervisor contacts; Increased transparency in application and interview process e.g. online guidance, Q&A sessions or published merit criteria; Guided application forms. - This must be balanced with the need to assess intellectual capacity via the application process.

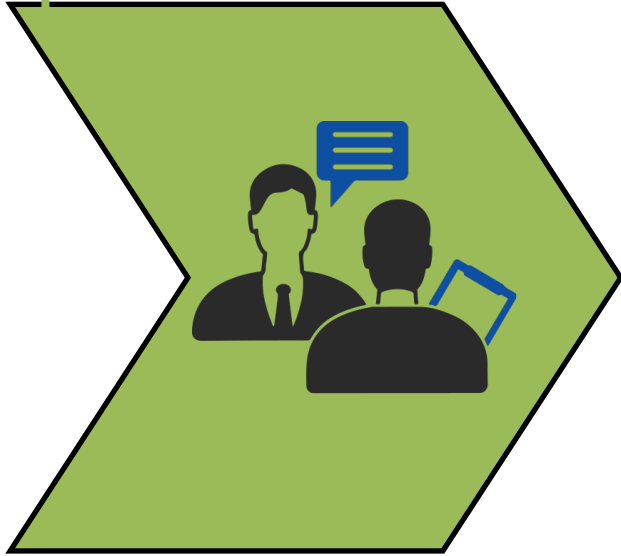# Shortlisting & Interviews

Applicant shortlisting

Interviews

Assessing potential

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The following principles aim to ensure the applicant shortlisting and interview process is fair and transparent.

Principle	Comments and Examples
Appropriate panels for each recruitment cycle.	- Consider the diversity and representation of the recruitment panel e.g. gender/ethnicity/career stage. - Consider how the panel can be kept up to date on recruitment practices/criteria. - Other examples include independent EDI observer present throughout to report on the selection process; appriopiate, mandatory EDI training.
View of 'excellence' in the applicant assessment criteria is broad and beyond standard grade-based definitions.	- To incorporate criteria based on candidate potential and suitability for PhD study. - E.g. Reduced emphasis on grades/degrees/awarding institution/references; contextualised applications via narrative descriptions of experiences/declare belong to an under-represented group; scoring criteria broadened to enable comparison of standard academic achievements (e.g. paper authorship) with non-standard achievements (e.g. working to fund studies/ industry experience); use of competency-based questions or practical tests where appropriate.

Shortlisting & Interviews

Applicant shortlisting

Interviews

Assessing potential

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Principle	Comments and Examples
The application scoring process is fair and transparent.	- Use of standardised quantitative shortlisting matrix with pre-defined scoring criteria; option for written supporting statements; consideration of the same submitted documents per applicant; justification required in systems where supervisors nominate a top candidate; consider hiding specific award types such as CASE and international awards (where used) until after final candidate ranking has taken place; anonymisation of applications (incorporated into certain stages of the process). - Clear guidance provided for those involved in recruiting process.
Applicants' needs and/or preferences met at interviews where special adjustments required.	- Consider the most appropriate interview structure. - Aim to provide as much information as possible to candidates/panellists in advance, e.g. dates & schedule, reasonable adjustment requests. - Aim to be increase flexibility and accommodate variable circumstances where possible e.g. dates; choice of remote/in-person interview provided with no bias towards either option; interview expenses covered where appropriate/possible.

Nurturing talent

Management structures

Training & supervision

Support & expertise

The following principles aim to make the student training experience as inclusive as possible.

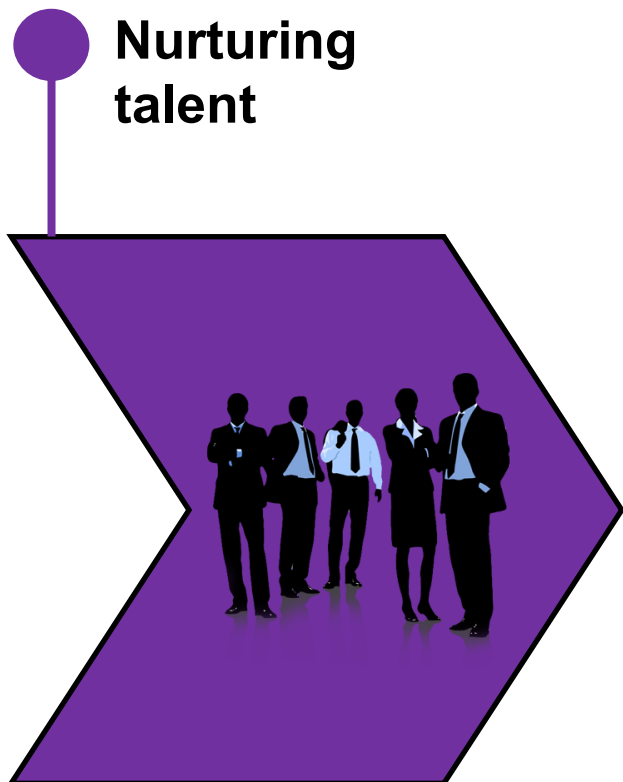| Principle	Comments and Examples
Inclusive management team.	- Consider the diversity and representation of the management team e.g. gender/ethnicity/career stage; dedicated head/team for inclusivity endeavours.
Inclusive supervision process and teams.	- Consider the diversity and representation of the supervisory team e.g. gender/ethnicity/career stage; use of co-supervisors/supervisory teams; appropriate EDI training. - Ensure mechanisms for supervisors to receive adequate support.
Appropriate EDI training for all students and staff.	- Made mandatory.
Use of mentoring where appropriate.	- Available to students and staff. - The mentor should be matched to the mentee's needs, e.g. Independent Training Advisor outside of academic supervisory team - Ensure mechanisms for mentors to receive adequate support.

Nurturing talent

Management structures

Training & supervision

Support & expertise

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Principle	Comments and Examples
Inclusive cohort training events.	- Provide as much information as possible in advance, e.g. dates & schedule, pre-work, information on physicality & reasonable adjustment requests. - Increase flexibility and accommodate variable circumstances where possible e.g. part-time students; provisions for those with caring responsibilities to attend residential events.
Appropriate signposting mechanisms employed.	- Signposting should be designed so that students can easily obtain the most up-to-date and appropriate information & support resources. - Consider the most appropriate place to publish information e.g. training programme websites vs. hosting research organisation pages. - Policies and practices easily accessible to students and clearly explained under induction and training.
Effective communication structures between students and staff.	- Between individual students, staff and grant management team e.g. dedicated email and phone contact, open meetings, regular bulletins. - Consider use of student representatives/representation groups e.g. LGBTQ+ societies, 'race champions', and their input into management team meetings.

Monitoring & reporting

Monitoring & reporting should be used effectively to foster a diverse and inclusive environment.

Principle	Comments and Examples
Full set of applicant characteristic data collected.	- At each stage of recruitment process to meet UKRI reporting requirements. - Consider a centralised application process or standardised EDI form for the training grants' applicants (rather than each hosting partner operating independently). - Clear communications around why the data is being collected and the option to not disclose.
Recruitment process kept under timely review.	- Use of mechanisms such as applicant/panel feedback; Equality Impacts Assessments for any significant changes and/or for individual students e.g. a live document throughout period of study.

Monitoring & reporting

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