

Statement of Expectations for Doctoral Training

This statement of expectations is endorsed by the following doctoral training funders: British Heart Foundation, Cancer Research UK, UK Research and innovation (UKRI) and Wellcome.

For UKRI, the statement of expectations applies to all UKRI councils, disciplines and types of training grants, excluding Quality-related Research (QR) funding.

Scope

This statement replaces the [Statement of Expectations for Postgraduate Training](#) published September 2016 and applies to all new doctoral funding opportunities launched from 2024 supported by the endorsing funders.

The funders who endorsed this statement expect the research organisations that they fund to deliver doctoral training in line with this statement. Funders may vary in how they apply the expectations, for example, asking research organisations to set out how they will meet them when applying for funding, through terms and conditions attached to the funding, or other means.

The statement will:

- set out the key outcomes for doctoral training investments
- cover the research environment, support, and training and development experiences that all students should have or have access to
- provide a basis for communications to students, research organisations, co-funders, collaborators and other stakeholders on what students can expect from their funded studentship
- guide how funders develop doctoral training schemes and assesses proposals for funding within these
- influence evaluation, investment management and funding assurance for doctoral training schemes

Roles

This statement sets out explicit expectations by role for endorsing funders, for research organisations (including supervisors) and collaborators, and for students. Collaborators are individuals, communities, and organisations from the academic, private, public, and third sectors who work with research organisations to upskill and reskill people to doctoral level, to benefit from shared opportunities and to address common challenges.

Principles

Three core principles underpin the development of the statement:

- **Simplification.** Removing complexity to improve understanding and increase efficiency.
- **Flexibility.** Enabling the tailoring of schemes, training programmes, and/or individual studentships to better achieve their aims and ambitions, ensuring students' equitable access to the highest quality skills and knowledge development.
- **Equality, diversity and inclusion.** Supporting the progression of a diverse population of students into a range of research and innovation careers by accommodating diverse student needs and career aspirations.

UKRI Policy Statement

Evolved from [recent research council reviews and the New Deal for Postgraduate Research](#), the new Statement of Expectations for Doctoral Training sets out obligations for all key parties involved in UKRI funded doctoral training investments, including students. It has been developed at a key moment for UKRI, as all councils come together within Collective Talent Funding, to set out a common core offer to all our doctoral training investments. It is not a replacement for UKRI's [standard terms and conditions of training grant](#).

The statement enables delivery against *UKRI Strategy 2022 to 2027: Transforming Tomorrow Together* which stresses the importance of world-class people and careers and says it 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

To enable the delivery of this statement, UKRI will:

- commit to those expectations set out for funders within the statement
- model the funding that UKRI provides per student based on at least 3.5-years duration (full time equivalent) whilst enabling flexibility for the research organisation to set the funding period based on the circumstances of the individual student
- ensure training and development are integral to the doctoral experience; this may require a rebalancing of the student doctoral experience as opposed to expecting additional requirements
- enable sharing of good practice across the sector
- continue to evolve and innovate our support for doctoral training, including building doctoral funding opportunities to connect HEIs with industry, employers and the wider research and innovation ecosystem
- identify further ways to embed the principles of simplification, flexibility and diversity and inclusion across our entire doctoral funding portfolio

Where expectations are not met, UKRI will work with research organisations and collaborators to understand the barriers and challenges, to enable these to be meaningfully addressed. UKRI reserves the right to impose financial sanctions and/or additional measures where there is a lack of compliance with obligations as set out in the Standard Terms and Conditions of Training Grant and any Specific Terms and Conditions of Training Grant.

UKRI is committed to developing its core offer beyond the statement of expectations, focusing on providing greater parity of support for research and wider professional training, while still recognising the wider variation in discipline-related costs.

Support and student experience

Outcome: a flexible, inclusive and supportive environment which optimises the student experience and the diversity of the student population to strengthen the quality of the research.

Funders will:

- provide funding to enable training and development provision to be tailored to reflect students' varied backgrounds, experiences and motivations
- have inclusive terms and conditions
- assess how doctoral training award holders will support student experience and diverse student populations in applications for doctoral training grants.
- monitor and evaluate how doctoral training investments support a flexible, inclusive and supportive student experience, including:
 - assessing how research organisations are supporting high quality supervision and enabling the sharing of good practice
 - evaluating the impact of inclusion and diversity interventions
 - assuring there is good wellbeing and support provision and opportunities for networking and collaborative working for all students on a doctoral training grant

Research organisations, working with collaborators and supporting supervisors, will:

- [follow good practice \(UKRI\)](#) in doctoral recruitment and training (see also Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) funded project [Defining, Measuring and Supporting Success for PGRs from Diverse Backgrounds \(QAA\)](#)) to support a diverse student population to participate in doctoral study including:
 - undertaking open and transparent recruitment of students with greater focus on assessing potential excellence
 - offering flexibility within studentships, in accordance with training grant terms and conditions
- ensure students receive paid leave throughout the doctorate, with additional leave as required, in accordance with training grant terms and conditions. This may involve paid extensions to the funded period
- embed appropriate support and provision for students' mental health and wellbeing, acknowledging postgraduate research students as a distinct population in their institutional mental health strategies. See [Supporting mental health & wellbeing for postgraduate research students: Programme Evaluation \(Vitae\)](#)
- ensure a positive and inclusive culture of excellent research supervision, recognising the workload and continued professional development associated with this. Research organisations should deliver inductions for new supervisors and ongoing continuing professional support through coaching, mentoring and access to communities of practice. See also [UK Council of Graduate Education's report into supervision \(UKCGE\)](#)
- promote an open and positive culture of listening to feedback to improve students' experiences. Manage issues or complaints well and, where appropriate, in line with the [Office of the Independent Adjudicator's Good Practice Framework](#), or relevant guidance from the [Scottish Public Services Ombudsman](#) or the [Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman](#)
- ensure all students have access to networks of peers and opportunities for collaborative working.
- enable supervisors, and other forms of support, to:
 - support students to complete their doctoral training, including wider training and submission of their doctoral thesis or equivalent, within their funded period by ensuring individual doctoral projects are designed to be achievable within that timeframe
 - invest in their continuous professional development as a supervisor, including building awareness of mental health, wellbeing, bullying and harassment, and equality, diversity and inclusion issues
 - support students to take appropriate periods of leave and attain a reasonable study-life balance

Students will:

- have awareness of who funds them, what is expected of them, what is available to them, and where to find further information
- support a positive student experience for all
- submit their doctoral thesis or equivalent ([doctoral degree characteristics statement \(QAA\)](#)) within their funded period. A full-time student should typically study 35-40 hours per week, although this may need to vary to meet the specific demands of a particular research project. They will also have access to appropriate periods of paid leave

Research skills and methods

Outcome:

- ***holistic approach to doctoral training and development that delivers high quality doctoral research, integrating in-depth subject knowledge, research and methodological skills, and wider technical development opportunities.***
- ***researchers prepared to operate across interdisciplinary, collaborative, and challenge-led environments.***

Funders will:

- fund stipend and fees, as well as contributing towards the costs of research skills training and development
- mandate training and development activities to address UK needs, where appropriate

Research organisations, working with collaborators, will:

- provide access to materials, technology, and appropriate environments for research
- deliver appropriate, tailored and innovative training, guidance and opportunities to enhance students' wider research skills development. This should cover as a minimum:
 - in-depth subject area training
 - responsible research and innovation, ethics, reproducibility, [research integrity \(UKRIO\)](#) and open research methodology
 - analytical and data management skills
 - communication and project management skills
 - interdisciplinary working
 - public engagement skills
 - routes to impact including opportunities for commercialisation and entrepreneurship training. [The Research Excellence Framework \(UKRI\)](#) defines impact as “an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia”
- enable different routes for private, public, and third sectors participation in the collaboration, co-creation and delivery of student training, such as (but not limited to) placements and collaborative awards
- enable supervisors, and other forms of support, to:
 - support students in delivering high quality doctoral research projects which result in new knowledge and impact, including the management of research projects, providing timely and appropriate feedback, and supporting links to the wider research environment and context
 - encourage students to access training and development opportunities, including placements
 - encourage awareness of interdisciplinary working and operating across collaborative and challenge-led environments

Students will:

- manage their research project and training, taking advice from their supervisor
- improve awareness of and experience of engaging and collaborating across disciplinary boundaries and sectors, while developing deep knowledge of the breadth of their own discipline
- build wider networks through collaborative working within and beyond their own research organisation, to gain the skills to apply research in different contexts
- Improve awareness and experience of routes to impact, including through knowledge exchange, commercialisation and entrepreneurship

Professional and career development

Outcome: globally competitive researchers, able to use their skills to thrive across a range of sectors and careers.

Funders will:

- ensure that funded doctoral training opportunities include transferrable skills training as a fundamental part to ensure they can lead to a diversity of careers
- support career development opportunities through flexibility in how training funds are utilised and the duration of funding

Research organisations, working with collaborators, will:

- provide high-quality professional development options which recognise and promote the diversity of careers open to students, including consideration of the opportunities to commercialise and create spin outs from their research
- deliver training and development which meets students' diverse interests and experiences
- provide advice on the breadth of careers in the first year of doctoral training to enable students to make informed choices on their development
- support students and supervisors in identifying the skills and experiences required for a range of careers. The [Vitae Researcher Development Framework \(Vitae\)](#) (revised version anticipated 2024) and [Innovation Skills Framework \(Innovation Caucus \[PDF\]\)](#) are examples of tools available. The QAA's [Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Education \(QAA\)](#) guidance is also available in addition to their [Collaborative Enhancement projects \(QAA\)](#)
- ensure all PGR students can access the same learning experience and professional development opportunities as far as practical within visa and similar restrictions
- enable supervisors, and other forms of support, to:
 - support students to engage in their own professional and career development
 - encourage students' curiosity about the full range of careers open to them and proactively direct them to helpful information
 - provide opportunities to develop transferrable skills as part of student research projects

Students will:

- proactively engage in their own professional and career development, working with and beyond their supervisory team, leading to improved awareness of the transferable skills and experiences that would benefit their careers and a range of environments
- improve their ability to communicate with impact, to develop networks, and to build their leadership potential