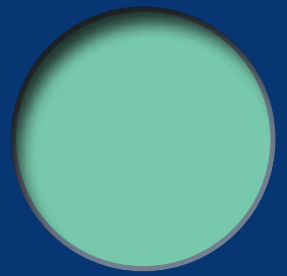


UK Council for  
Graduate Education



# UKCGE Annual Report

We enable collective leadership for the postgraduate sector.

# 2025-26

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Left and far right: EDI Conference 2025 by UKCGE.  
Centre: 2025 Strategic Leaders' Global Summit in Québec City, Canada.



# Welcome

The UK Council for Graduate Education is ‘for the sector, by the sector’. The work captured in this report reflects collective effort across our community: colleagues working together within the Council and across our membership to respond to a rapidly changing landscape for postgraduate education.

**Inclusive, future-focused postgraduate education.** We have deepened collaboration with Research England by creating a legacy platform for outputs from 13 projects addressing the under-representation of racialised groups in doctoral education. We have also partnered with Aston University and the University of Leeds on a £3.4m project focused on AI and researcher development.

**Shaping national conversations.** Over the past year, we have contributed a series of position statements in response to the Post-16 Education White Paper, REF 2029 and wider

debates about research, innovation and growth. On behalf of our members, our Director, Dr Owen Gower, represented us at the 2025 Strategic Leaders’ Global Summit in Québec City.

**Connecting stakeholders through networks and events.** Our networks and events remain central to our activities and continue to play an important role in enabling colleagues to share approaches and support one another. Amongst other things, our programme has considered supervision and researcher development, policy and institutional change, doctoral practice and experience, and equity, diversity and inclusion.

This report highlights the collaborative effort that underpins the work of the Council Thank you for your continued support and the critical role you play in advancing postgraduate education.



Dr Rebekah Smith McGloin  
Chair



Professor Tina Ramkalawan  
Vice-Chair



Dr James Bruce  
Honorary Treasurer



Carolyn Wynne  
Honorary Secretary



Dr Owen Gower  
Director



**“It’s important to put forward recommendations to our institutions for the support of racially minoritised female PGRs.”**

Photograph of Professor Donna Chambers © Bill Knight.

## Event Spotlight: Generation Delta

On September 26th 2025, we welcomed Professor Donna Chambers from Generation Delta, who presented on a four-year project to improve the experiences and outcomes for Black, Asian and minority ethnic female students in postgraduate research.

**T**O kick-off the event, UKCGE trustee, Professor Luke Windsor introduced the session and described some of the project’s background, which has been funded by Research England as part of a series of projects on improving racial equity within higher education.

He then introduced Professor Donna Chambers – one of six female professors of colour who have led the Generation Delta Project (the others are Professor Uma Kambhampati, Professor Shaofeng Liu, Professor Amaka Offiah, Professor Farzana Shain and Professor Iyiola Solanke). Professor Chambers – who is currently based at Northumbria University – is a specialist in the tourist and heritage industries as well as being a passionate advocate for equity, justice, anti-racism and anti-discrimination within the university community and the wider society.

“I’m really pleased to be here today to talk about Generation Delta,” said Professor Chambers before turning to some of the inspirations behind the project. She explained that they had all realised that there were low levels of racially minoritised women both on UK postgraduate courses, as well as in the professoriate. She also mentioned the Phenomenal Women show (an exhibition, developed by Professor Nicolla Rollock and featuring the photography of Bill Knight, which comprised portraits of the very few racially minoritized female professors in the UK, shown at the Southbank Centre in autumn 2020) as another important driver in the decision to apply for funding.

She then turned to the Generation Delta project itself, explaining that they have long-term ambitions to improve the representation of Black students at PGR level and to lay the foundations for an increase in the number of racially minoritised females gaining professorships in higher education institutions in England. She explained how the project had moved through

three phases: Access to PGR study, Retention and Progression, and Career Development and Progression. She added that it was not about “fixing” the women; they looked instead at the structural barriers at work in higher education, and made it a priority to have discussions at institutional level as well as with individuals.

Generation Delta was launched in 2022 and officially closed in January 2026. Professor Chambers took us through some of the outputs including two full-day conferences; 12 roundtables for staff from partner institutions; 12 full-day student workshops; two full-time conferences; and 12 roundtables from staff and partner institutions, with around 500 racially minoritised women having benefitted from the initiative. She quoted some of the participant feedback, noting that the idea of having a safe space came out repeatedly.

She also spoke about Generation Delta’s Brave Space Mentoring Programme which is designed to help female doctoral students from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds to navigate through key stages of their doctoral journey. The topics covered include — but are not limited to — career progression; curriculum vitae advice; difficult conversations; public speaking; time management and writing for publication.

“That’s what we’ve done so far, but we also feel it’s important to put forward recommendations to our institutions,” added Professor Chambers. She then shared a sample of these.

Questions followed Professor Chambers’ main presentation and then a breakout session was held in which participants added comments to a Padlet. At the end of the event, attendees rejoined the main session for reflections and takeaways on best practice.

*If you would like to partner with us on an event, please get in touch on [ukcge@ukcge.ac.uk](mailto:ukcge@ukcge.ac.uk).*



## News from our Networks

The UKCGE Networks have continued to thrive in 25/26, with a new buddy scheme for the PEP Network and a host of events, including a stimulating arts-based exploration of supervision from the Research Supervisors' Network and the Doctoral Deans and Directors' annual residential (held this year in Bristol).



Susanna Broom,  
PEP Network



Kerri Gardiner,  
PEP Network



Professor Craig Martin,  
Research Supervisors' Network



Dr Nicola Palmer,  
Research Supervisors' Network



Dr Nigel Eady,  
DDD Network



Professor Jane Wellens,  
DDD Network

### Postgraduate Education Practitioners' Network

The Postgraduate Education Practitioners' (PEP) Network has continued to develop its reach over the last year, encouraging engagement from professional colleagues at all career stages. As a result, membership has grown by 42% to 722 as at February 2026, building on the 46% growth reported in the previous annual cycle. The group now includes representatives from 184 institutions.

During 2025, Network co-chairs Kerri Gardiner and Susanna Broom implemented the initiatives which were planned in the previous cycle and laid out in the Network's last annual report. The following Network activities aim to deliver on Kerri and Susanna's vision for the Network (to facilitate peer-to-peer support, to spotlight career progression within this specialist area, and to champion the critical role played by network members in their institutions):

- Biannual 90-minute 'New to PGR' sessions are now well-established with good turnout. Focussing on the unique experience of PGRs and those who support them, these sessions aim to help those who are new to PGR-facing and -focussed professional roles to understand the context in which they are working. These sessions are particularly important in the current financial landscape, which is leading to the reconfiguration of workloads and responsibilities in many institutions.
- Regular PEP Network 'Clinics', which take place approximately quarterly, are now embedded in the Network's annual cycle of events and are drawing consistent numbers of colleagues to discuss hot topics and troubleshoot issues and challenges in a safe, supportive environment. Topics covered in the last cycle have included:
  - » The Postgraduate Research Experience Survey ([January 2025](#))
  - » Managing and responding to institutional change ([May 2025](#))
  - » Implementing the UKRI's revised Terms and Conditions (T&Cs) ([October 2025](#))
  - » Generative AI and its impact on PGR in relation to policy development, admissions and post-viva thesis management ([January 2026](#))

- The Network's session at the UKCGE Annual Conference in Glasgow saw the launch of its buddy scheme, which enables peer-to-peer support for colleagues new to PGR or who have a particular issue about which they need some guidance or support. While engagement to date is low (two active buddying relationships at the time of writing) this was anticipated, and given the scheme is low-cost with potentially high impact for individual Network members, and clearly aligns with the Network's aims, the co-chairs feel it forms an important strand of the Network's offer and they intend to continue to promote and support it into the next cycle.

Thinking ahead, topics which are likely to (continue to) form areas of focus for the Network over the course of the next cycle include: equality, diversity and inclusivity; reasonable adjustments; the impact of generative AI; building and sustaining communities in the post-COVID world; and navigating institutional change and a shifting funding landscape.

*[Find out more about the PEP Network.](#)*

### Research Supervisors' Network

As co-chairs of the Research Supervisors' Network, Dr Nicola Palmer and Professor Craig Martin have been incredibly impressed with how the Network's activities over the past year have been supported by the wider supervision community. There has been a generosity of spirit in colleagues offering to run events, as well as participants engaging in meaningful conversations about good supervisory practice, and the challenges. Building on our first full year of co-chairing the Network, we continue to believe in using the Network as a community of supervisory practice that engages with current debates across the sector alongside developing new insights that make meaningful change for colleagues.

For the 25/26 academic year, so far, we have run an event in December 2025 called 'Democratic Approaches to Supervision'. Led by Dr Karen Mpamhanga and Dr Suzanne Culshaw from the University of Hertfordshire, the interactive session looked at how more democratic approaches to supervision can be adopted, providing an opportunity for participants to reflect upon their supervisory approaches through the use of arts-based and embodied pedagogies.

With colleagues from UKCGE's 'Doctoral Deans

and Directors' and 'Postgraduate Education Practitioners' networks, we are co-hosting an event on April 30th 2026 looking at 'Distance Learning Doctorates'. From the perspective of doctoral supervision, we will be exploring the nature of the supervisory relationship with by-distance doctoral researchers.

For the rest of this academic year, we have an event on May 7th 2026 where colleagues from the University of Newcastle and Durham University will be looking at Nancy Kline's 'Thinking Environment' as a way to create spaces where effective PGR dialogue can take place.

Based on feedback from previous events, we are developing further events throughout the year (including the UKCGE Annual Conference in Liverpool in July 2026) that provide more of an open forum where supervisors and members of the wider supervision community can come together for 'structured conversations' on topics relevant to the Network.

[Find out more about the Research Supervisors' Network.](#)

### **Doctoral Deans and Directors' Network**

The DDD Network remains a crucial forum through which Doctoral Deans and Directors can develop their professional identities and grapple with questions and issues that few people in their home institutions appreciate.

The Network is co-chaired by Dr Jane Wellens, Director of Research & Postgraduate Research and Associate Professor of Graduate Education at the University of Staffordshire, and Dr Nigel Eady, Director of Research Talent, King's College London.

As well as the usual discussion at the UKCGE Annual Conference in July, a highlight this last year was a webinar we ran for those new to their role as Doctoral Deans and Directors. This was birthed out of a welcome session at our 2025 residential event.

There are specific nuances of each Dean and Director role, but we share many core responsibilities. Nonetheless, discharging our roles is complex! We might like to have the power to enact change by 'pressing a button' but typically any change of note requires time-consuming and careful negotiation, bringing key stakeholders on board and persuading them of the value and necessity of the change. In addition, the

governance and connectivity around us varies – understanding other models and their pros and cons is extremely valuable and can unlock opportunities that might otherwise pass us by.

The 2026 annual DDD residential was held in Bristol. The liveliness of our discussions and 'world-cafe' sessions emphasise the value of the Network and the benefit of spending 24 hours away from the day job, with headspace to consider strategic issues with peers and expert input.

As well as the perennial issue of funding and the challenges the sector is currently facing, we grappled with:

- Developments relating to UKRI's New Deal for PGRs - including early discussion of work UKRI are doing to understand the full economic cost of the doctorate.
- Reimagining the doctorate to attract new doctoral populations and respond to the industrial strategy's drive to develop the UK's research and innovation capacity.
- The changing nature of doctoral education since Covid-19, particularly in relation to 'at-distance' doctorates.

We also reprised the session for those who are new to Doctoral Dean and Director roles. Given the sector is experiencing structural changes, this sort of support is invaluable – not least, it strengthens connections across our Network, which we all appreciate as we return to our institutions.

[Find out more about the Doctoral Deans and Directors' Network.](#)

Clifton village in Bristol (far right) by Nick | Adobe images.  
DDD Residential 2026 by UKCGE.



# 2025-26 Highlights

During the past year, we have revisited the popular aspects of our events programme, such as the Annual Conference, but we have also welcomed a range of exciting new projects and collaborations.



Leeds Granary Wharf (left) by TJPhotography.de | Adobe Images. Annual Conference, Glasgow by UKCGE.

## 1.

The Bob Burgess Memorial Lecture was presented by UKCGE's Chair, Dr Rebekah Smith McGloin, at the 2025 Annual Conference in Glasgow. The title of her talk was *Building Equitable Futures: Doctoral Education as a Catalyst for Social Change*, and she began by saying that it was both an invitation and a challenge. "[The title] invites us to reflect on the social role of doctoral education, and it challenges us to ask whether our current systems, structures, assumptions, ways of working are up to the task," she said.

Her presentation called for a rethink of doctoral structures, purposes, and partnerships across disciplines, and spoke of doctoral education as an essential part of building a more equitable and sustainable society. The talk (which was illustrated with images by artists such as Maurits Escher and Martej Kren) can be accessed on our website.

[Read the lecture script online.](#)

## 2.

In 2025, we partnered with The 1752 Group on the promotion of its new toolkit: *Addressing harassment and sexual misconduct experienced by postgraduate researchers*. We ran several joint communications campaigns around the toolkit which concluded with an online launch in June.

As part of this event, Dr Anna Bull from The 1752 Group explained how new requirements from the Office for Students (known as Condition E6) had inspired the creation of the resource. She also welcomed guests from the University of Bath – Dr Rachel Arnold and Peter Eley – who shared their own systems of reporting, as well as the data-driven approach which they are using at their own institution.

[Access the toolkit.](#)

## 3.

This year we welcomed some exciting new collaborations with Research England and both Aston University and the University of Leeds.

Research England is providing the UKCGE with funding to overhaul the Resources Library on its website and to store the outputs from these projects in the long-term. The materials on offer will represent valuable work from across the sector, including the Equity in Doctoral Education through Partnership and Innovation (EDEPI) project and Generation Delta's programme on nurturing future cohorts of Black, Asian and minority ethnic female professors (see pages 4-5).

UKCGE has also joined as a partner in a £3.4m project, run by Aston University and the University of Leeds, to set up an artificial intelligence (AI) tools researcher development network.

## 4.

### UKCGE Annual Conference (Glasgow)

From July 3rd to 4th 2025, we held our Annual Conference at the Advanced Research Centre (ARC), University of Glasgow. The theme was 'Transitions and Transformations in Postgraduate Education' and we welcomed delegates from across the world to present on a range of topics from REF 2029 to managing institutional change.

Opening the conference, UKCGE Chair — Dr Rebekah Smith McGloin (Nottingham Trent University) – provided an overview of the talks ahead and said: "I'd like to invite you to enjoy the next couple of days; to engage to share your thoughts, to join the conversation, and let's see what new futures we can imagine for doctoral education: a really

important part of research and innovation in our higher education ecosystem". Trustee and host, Dr Kay Guccione (University of Glasgow), also added words of welcome along with a summary of the previous day's pre-conference event (also held at the ARC and dedicated to postgraduate researchers).

Throughout the event there was a range of keynotes, including one from Dr Francis Awolowo (Sheffield Hallam University), who presented on 'Doctoral Education as a Tool for Justice: Reimagining Equity in a Time of Transition'. As usual, the keynote panel discussion by PGRs, talking about their doctoral experiences, proved both enlightening and popular. There was also a variety of

breakout sessions throughout the two days, including an international symposium (chaired by trustee Dr James Burford from the University of Warwick) in which colleagues from London, New Zealand, Australia and the United States presented to delegates via a Zoom link. The conference also included parallel sessions devoted to topics including Generative AI, co-supervision and leading institutional change.

Finally, there was plenty of time for networking, with delegates enjoying both a walking tour of Glasgow and a meal at Óran Mór restaurant.

# 2025-26 Impact

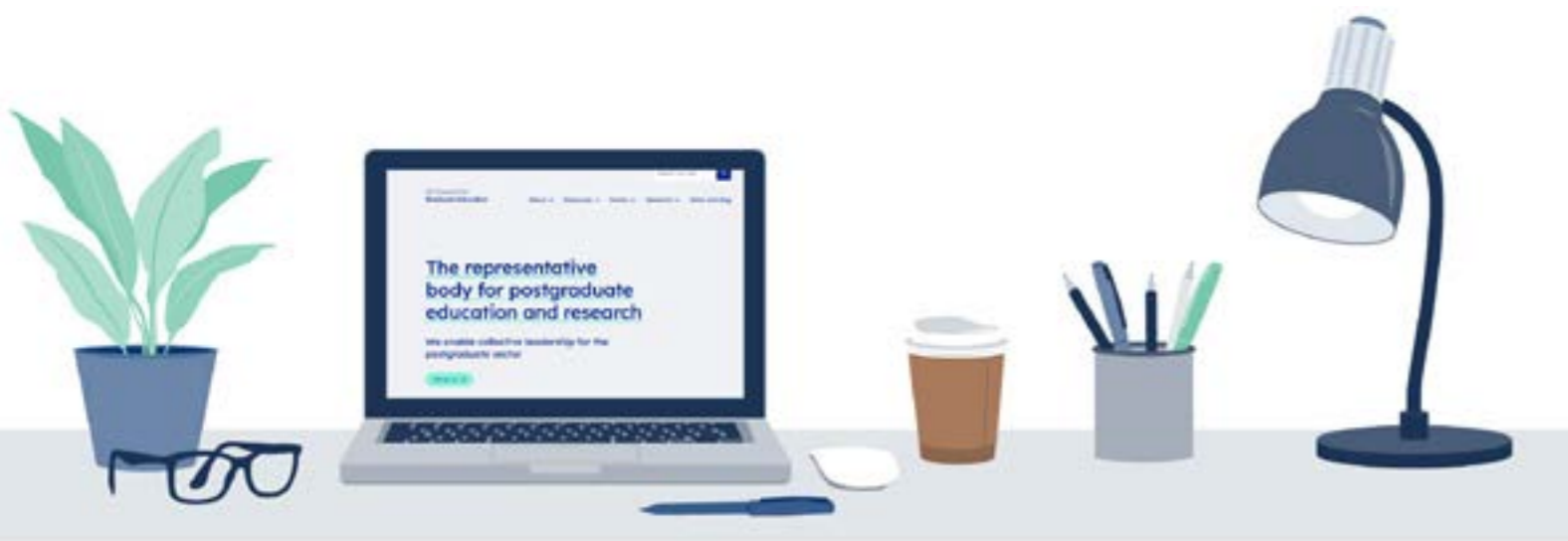
Established in 1994, the UK Council for Graduate Education is the national representative body for postgraduate education and research. We are the third-largest representative body of its kind in the world, representing 92 per cent of all UK postgraduate research provision and 85 per cent of all UK postgraduate taught provision. Here are some numbers from the previous 12 months.

22      1,356      548

Number of event write-ups published on our website.

Numbers of page views on LinkedIn.

Number of people who successfully completed the Research Supervision Recognition Programme.



"I thought it was a fantastic event, well planned and executed. More importantly, involving PGRs to bring lived experiences to the knowledge and understanding of Doctoral School/Colleges administrators - especially in the current 2025 uncertain and volatile landscape - [it] was really powerful."

100      1,642      228

Number of institutions represented in the Research Supervision Recognition Programme.

Number of individuals who attended our events last year.

Number of institutions represented at our events last year.

# Systems of Support for Navigating Community-based Reflection

In this Q&A, Sara Bellan talks to Dr Joanna Royle (Researcher Development Manager at the University of Glasgow, pictured) about how she has created support mechanisms in her institution to complement UKCGE's Research Supervision Recognition Programme.

**Can you please start by speaking on why you felt it was important to engage with UKCGE's Research Supervision Recognition Programme (RSRP)? Why do you feel recognition and reflective practice is important to supervision?**

There is growing sector recognition that the relationship between a PGR and their supervisor is among the most important ingredients in a flourishing doctoral journey. This deeply personal, trust-based relationship sits right at the heart of postgraduate research. We also know that supervisors genuinely love supervising, and they really want to be good at it. Both the original and the most recent UK Research Supervision Survey show this in spades.

But loving to do something is not the same as finding it easy. Relationships are hard, and the truth is that few HE institutions are able to offer fully scalable, high-quality, pedagogically informed structures that intimately supports people to think through the end-to-end piece of what Supervision entails. That's why I'm such a fan of the Good Supervisory Practice Framework. It is one of the best tools I've seen in the sector, because it takes the complexity of the supervisory role and breaks it down into practical, digestible, chunks. This makes it grounded, accessible, and genuinely helpful in navigating the realities of supervisory work.

Supervision is a pedagogy, but it's not like designing a module or delivering lectures. It's messier, more relational, more embedded in the dynamics of human connection. And the only way to get really good at that, I believe, is through reflective practice. What the Research

Supervisor Recognition Program (RSRP) offers is a structured way of doing that thinking, underpinned by the Good Supervisory Practice Framework.

What makes the RSRP stand out to me is firstly that it can be easily enabled and supported institutionally with pretty low resource requirements: it doesn't take a huge investment to embed, but it gives so much in return. And secondly that the award is a built-in motivator for doing the reflective practice that enables great supervisory pedagogy. It is a great carrot: especially for colleagues who are earlier in their research careers. They get an award that they can celebrate, it can be a potential stepping stone for promotion, and it can be leveraged to convince a reluctant line manager that it is worth investing their time in professional development.

**You have begun creating systems of support at your institutions, aiding applicants and staff members looking to engage with RSRP. How have you implemented communities or systems of support at your institution? What have been the challenges in creating these support mechanisms?**

When we started thinking about how to frame RSRP support at the University of Glasgow, we really considered what kind of energy it would take to do it well. That was the inspiration for designing a long-form Scotland-wide RSRP writing group. Glasgow is lucky to be relatively well-resourced for researcher development, but many Scottish HEIs are not. However, what we do all have is a highly collaborative researcher developers Community of Practice, called ScotHERD. Tapping into ScotHERD



enabled us to lower the resource burden for all institutions, support smaller institutions who might not otherwise be able to offer anything like this, and design a space where doctoral supervisors from across the spectrum from research intensives to practice-based institutions can connect and share perspectives.

At its heart, what we offer is a writing group, with an intentionally simple format. I was inspired by some great talks at the 2023 UKCGE conference where people shared how they had been running RSRP reading groups. They sounded brilliant, but while participants were finding them enriching, they didn't always lead to completed applications. However imperfect a metric, applications are proxy indicator of engagement and impact, and we all have to attest to the value-add of the development opportunities we offer. More importantly, though, I believe that reflective practice is realised through the process of writing, not just thinking about writing. So we designed a writing group that enables the reflection to happen through the doing.

The format runs from February to September (with breaks for school holidays to support researchers with caring responsibilities). We meet fortnightly for 90-minutes with each session usually focusing on one section of the Good Supervisory Practice Framework. There are a couple of additional topics such as planning your supervisor observation or engaging with the literature. The structure is always the same: a 15-minute introduction from one of the delivery team, 15 minutes of solo writing, 30 minutes of breakout discussion, and another 20 minutes of writing, coming together at the end to share progress. It's repeatable, reliable, and purposeful. By the end, you have had meaningful conversations, and you have also written something, which makes the final "writing up" sessions much less daunting.

We also built a shared literature bank on Padlet. It signposts core texts from the UKCGE website but also enables us and participants to add new papers that we find. This helps foster a sense of collective ownership and shared knowledge-building. We keep things very low-barrier. Weekly reminder emails go out, we track attendance purely for metrics (not to police engagement), and we are clear that even attending one session is still valid CPD. No one is turned away because

they missed a few. The atmosphere is deliberately welcoming and low-pressure.

The writing group supports both the Associate and Full RSRP awards. We slant the early sessions towards the Associate award, looking first at the mandatory GSPF criteria and then the electives. However, we have been really deliberate about not separating out the Associate Award track, because there is so much to gain from more experienced supervisors hearing from those earlier in their journey, and vice versa. We have had a lot of questions about Associate eligibility, so our close connection with the UKCGE team has been a real asset.

Of course, it hasn't all been smooth sailing. Attrition is a real challenge. Initially, we had over 100 signups, but by the point in the year when people are buried in marking attendance can drop to around 15. And while we used to talk about the post-COVID slump, event attendance seems to be getting worse not better. This not unique to us: it is something I hear across the sector and beyond. That said, the format helps. It is designed so that no one has to come every week. The stand-alone topics and repeatable structure means folks can dip in and still benefit.

We're now on our second iteration of the writing group. The ScotHERD delivery team has grown each year. There are now around seven of us involved in running it, and the programme is open to anyone in Scotland, regardless of whether their institution has a formal lead. From a logistics point of view, it's probably one of the easiest things we have ever run. It is all online, we just update the dates each year, so admin is minimal. A shared spreadsheet keeps track of who's leading which session. Its light-touch nature has definitely been one of the reasons it worked, especially in a time when energy and resources are stretched.

I'm really proud of this piece of work. As well as supporting doctoral supervisors, I think one of the most meaningful outcomes is how it has brought the Scottish researcher development community closer together. This isn't just a space where we discuss practice: it is something we do together. And institutions can build on that. They can choose to add bespoke sessions, fund application fees, or offer internal reviews. But the core shared space is already there.

**Could you please speak to what types of support have been the most useful at your institution? What hasn't worked as well?**

Some of our partner institutions put a lot of effort into shaping their applicants into a formal cohort and supporting them collectively to submit their applications together. At Glasgow, we took a lighter-touch, covering the cost of applications and offered feedback if people asked for it, but without creating a cohort structure or chasing completion. In hindsight, I think that didn't work as well. Institutions who actively supported participants to cross the finish line had better completion rates. And while the award isn't the point (the real value is in the reflection) disciplining yourself towards the award definitely crystallises thinking gives shape and purpose to that reflection.

That contrast has really stuck with me. I'm incredibly proud of the wide, collaborative community we've built across Scotland to deliver the RSRP writing programme. But when it came to the final institutional lift, I didn't keep the community energy going right to the end. This is something I want to shift next time, building in a more intentional peer support system around the submission phase.

Timing is another area we are looking at post-pilot. The programme is brilliant, but if you miss the start of it, or you find out a bit late, the next iteration is a year away. Speaking to schools and institutes we know there is a pool of technicians and postdocs who are absolutely doing associate supervision but didn't realise this was for them. We are planning to run a couple of shorter, targeted sessions over the next few months specifically for those groups. We want to reach the people we missed the first time around: not just to include them, but to centre their experience and show them that RSRP is for them too.

**What practical steps can institutions take to support reflective practice in supervision, and what benefits have you seen through your own initiatives?**

One of the interesting challenges with reflective practice is that even when supervisors and academics say they want it; they often don't easily engage with it.

Take Communities of Practice, for example: we have a Supervisor Community at Glasgow with the aim of creating space for connection and reflection. In reality, it is more frequently an information communication space than

a reflective one. The same goes for classic workshop formats: they rarely open the door to the kind of deeper, sustained reflective practice that actually changes how people supervise. But then if you do label an initiative as "reflective practice", attendance becomes an issue, as people just won't come.

So instead, you have to lure folks in with the practical. You offer something that looks useful, actionable—something that sounds like it will make their day-to-day better—and then you create space within that for reflection to happen more organically. That's exactly why the writing group format has been so effective. People show up thinking it will help them make progress on their application (which it does), but the reflection happens as they write, as they talk, as they listen to others. And it's been incredibly well received. We've had feedback like "best CPD I've ever done," and stories of people taking the model back to their own groups or labs to use it there. So we absolutely have evidence that this is a genuinely a format that changes how people think and act.

Another thing that has been powerful is linking supervisory reflection to the broader concept of research leadership. At Glasgow, we have made a real investment in this area: our Talent Lab houses initiatives that develop leadership in research, and researchers as leaders, and we embed reflective practice throughout. We see that investment rippling outwards. When reflection is genuinely embedded in how people think about research leadership, it starts to shift how they show up in other areas too: how they approach collaboration, how they support colleagues' careers, how they hold space for care and wellbeing even in competitive environments. It starts to chip away at some of those harder edges of academic culture.

Change doesn't happen because everyone suddenly decides to behave differently. It happens through coalitions of the willing, who model something else. Reflective practice, done well, can be the engine for that kind of culture shift. And as we all wrestle with what research culture means in a REF-driven world, I think reflective practice has to sit at the centre of it, because that's where we learn to lead with kindness, with generosity, and with grace.

*[To find out more, please visit the Research Supervision Recognition Programme website.](#)*

# Tackling Harassment and Sexual Misconduct in Postgraduate Education



In August 2025, the Office for Students published a set of conditions around tackling harassment and sexual misconduct in higher education (known as E6). In this article, Sara Bellan interviews Dr Anna Bull (Senior Lecturer of Education and Social Justice at the University of York) about a harassment and sexual misconduct toolkit, produced by The 1752 Group in partnership with UKCGE, which is designed to support PGRs and the people who work with them.

### Could you please briefly summarise some of the E6 requirements for us?

The new regulations include a range of requirements for higher education institutions relating to addressing harassment and sexual misconduct. These include stipulations on training, which needs to be in place for all staff and students so that they can recognise harassment and sexual misconduct. There are also requirements for HEIs to prevent abuses of power between staff and students. This is something that we at The 1752 Group have been researching and writing about for years, so we are very pleased to see the regulator addressing this issue.

### You recently published a toolkit to help PGRs experiencing abuses of power. Can you say a bit about what you hope to achieve with it?

We need to make sure that PGRs aren't forgotten about when institutions are implementing their requirements for E6. PGRs, of course, have quite different needs and experiences of higher education than other student groups. They also have different experiences of harassment, for example, they're more likely to be targeted for harassment from staff than other groups of students.

The toolkit is aimed primarily at Doctoral Deans and Directors, as well as PGR leads within departments or Schools, to upskill them about what should be in place for PGRs under the new regulatory requirements. We hope that the toolkit will also be useful for staff in student services or HR who are responsible for implementing these requirements, to help them think through what's needed from the perspective of PGRs. The toolkit will also be useful in opening conversations between Deans and Directors, and central student services and HR staff.

Ultimately, the goal of this toolkit is to make harassment and sexual misconduct less likely to happen for PGRs, but when it does occur, to ensure that they're supported, and that institutions are ready to handle it.

### Defining what constitutes harassment and sexual misconduct is really challenging. Could you please explain more about how the Office for Students defines it?

The Office for Students has chosen a slightly narrower formulation of harassment and sexual misconduct than they might have done. Harassment refers to harassment on the basis of

all protected characteristics under the Equality Act (that could be sexual harassment, racial harassment, harassment on the basis of gender identity, sex, sexuality, faith, disability, or age).

As well as this, sexual misconduct is explicitly named in the regulatory requirements. According to the Office for Students, this includes sexual violence and stalking and, of course, sexual harassment. We would have preferred a broader term such as gender-based violence to ensure that, for example, domestic abuse would be explicitly covered. In the toolkit, we recommend that a broad approach to defining sexual misconduct is taken, and indeed many HEIs are addressing domestic abuse as part of their implementation of E6.

The most problematic misconception in the sector about harassment and sexual misconduct is perhaps that it's rare. In fact, just thinking about sexual misconduct and sexual harassment alone, this affects thousands, possibly even tens of thousands of postgraduate researchers each year. We don't have great data on this in the UK, but internationally, around 15% of postgraduate students experience sexual harassment every year — we don't have specific data on the prevalence among PGRs. And racial harassment, again, we don't have data specifically for PGRs, but the 'Universities Challenged' report from the Equality and Human Rights Commission from 2019 documented the extent and impacts of racial harassment in higher education.

### How can institutions better support the people who report on abuses?

This is a complex area. In the toolkit we've got some examples of good practice. For example, Cambridge University has recently introduced the option of 'university-instigated investigations' as part of its staff Dignity at Work policy. This means that the university doesn't have to wait for a formal report for the university to open a formal investigation.

**“Sexual misconduct and sexual harassment affects thousands of PGRs each year.”**

It's good to see that more HEIs are taking this work seriously, but there remain significant challenges and unfortunately, we are also still seeing people who report harassment and misconduct to their institution being deeply harmed by the reporting process.

### How can supervisors better support their PGRs who might be experiencing harassment or sexual misconduct?

The biggest thing that supervisors can do is know the institutional processes and use them. There should now be mandatory training in place for all HE staff in England, and HEIs should also have specialist support for students who have experienced sexual misconduct. If those systems aren't working, the toolkit helps people to ask questions of HR and student services to support improvements.

The other thing that supervisors can do is to know how to recognise harassment and sexual misconduct. A common experience is for something to happen that's described as 'annoying', 'weird', or 'uncomfortable' but people — including staff — do not necessarily know how to label these experiences. Supervisors, if they're able to recognise and label harassment or sexual misconduct, can help with making sure that PGRs get support and advice.

### Are there steps that supervisors can take to establish good professional boundaries with their PGRs?

In the toolkit we've outlined ways that institutions can go beyond a simple compliance approach to take seriously their duties to prevent and respond to harassment and sexual misconduct. Our research has found that PGRs and other students can be subject to boundary blurring behaviours from staff, which they often label as 'grooming'. These behaviours can then escalate to sexual misconduct.

We'd like to see staff participating in discussions about what professional boundaries mean in their department or in their disciplinary community. It's important to add that professional and disciplinary societies also have a role to play in this work. To this end, the toolkit includes a case-study from the Royal Geographical Society to show the excellent work that's been done by them in this area.

### What's one step that urgently needs taking to address harassment and sexual misconduct experienced by PGRs?

One of the areas that I'm appalled that we haven't seen more progress in recent years is around what is sometimes called 'pass the perpetrator'. We are still seeing staff moving freely between institutions during and after investigations (when findings have been upheld) because we do not have safe hiring practices in higher education. We've seen cases of people trying to share information about these kinds of cases with the hiring institution and then being sued for defamation.

Luckily, we have got a readymade solution for higher education institutions for this issue, namely the Misconduct Disclosure Scheme. This is free to join and is open to all employers. It's already got over 200 international organisations signed up and all it asks is that employers commit at the point of hiring to asking whether there are any ongoing or upheld disciplinary findings relating to sexual misconduct for staff, and then to providing that information to other employers about their own staff.

I'd love 2026 to be the year where we finally stop passing-the-perpetrator.

[Download The 1752 Group's harassment and sexual misconduct toolkit.](#)

# Financial Statement 2024-25



Dear colleagues,

The UKCGE financial year runs from August to July, so this statement reports on the financial year ending in July 2025.

As you know, the Council is reliant on the income from its membership fees, grants and sponsorship, annual conferences and its programme of workshops, and increasingly its research activity which totalled £404,745 in 2024-2025, compared to £386,255 in the previous year. Overall expenditure was £385,232 in 2024-2025 compared to £324,045 in the previous year, allowing the Council to end the year with a surplus of £19,513 compared to a surplus of £62,210 in the previous year.

This puts us in a strong position to develop the Council's activities over the coming years. To build our capacity, we have already recruited an additional Policy and Research staff member, we are upgrading our web presence, we will develop our research and consultancy work, and we will invest in additional training and development for our staff.

Thank you for your continued support.

**Dr James Bruce, Honorary Treasurer, UKCGE.**

**Members in 24/25**

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## Get Involved With Us!

Council members have been creating and sharing good practice on the governance and development of UK postgraduate education for over 30 years. We need your help to continue this important work, and there are lots of easy ways to get involved. You can:

- Join one of our professional networks ([DDD](#), [PEP](#) or [Research Supervisors](#)).
- Book a [forthcoming event](#).
- Browse our [Resource Library](#).
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To find out more please visit [ukcge.ac.uk](http://ukcge.ac.uk).



UK Council for **Graduate Education**

# Thank you

Please get in touch if you have ideas for events or resources that would assist your work in the future.

## OUR DETAILS

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