

UKRI Consultation on the New Deal for Postgraduate Research

About the UK Council for Graduate Education

Established in 1994, the UKCGE is the national representative body for postgraduate education and research. The UKCGE champions and enhances postgraduate education and research by enabling collective leadership across UK HEIs, research agencies and funding bodies. It has a specific remit to support research supervision: for example, in 2017 it launched the first ever national award for excellence in research supervision; and in 2021 it undertook the *UK Research Supervision Survey*, funded by UKRI and the Wellcome Trust. The UKCGE publishes the *Good Supervisory Practice Framework*, the *Research Supervisor's Bibliography* and runs the UK's *Research Supervision Recognition Programme*.

Question 1: What should be the goals for contemporary postgraduate research training?

The goal of doctoral education is to produce:

“...creative, critical, autonomous, and responsible intellectual risk-takers”

Forces and Forms Of Doctoral Education Hannover Recommendations, 2019:

<https://www.doctoral-education.info/dl/Hannover-Recommendations-DocEd-2019.pdf>

This means that doctoral graduates should have, amongst other things, the ability to:

“...think creatively about the transforming nature of society within never before experienced social realities and the consequences that may flow from that”.

Barnacle, Robyn, and Denise Cuthbert, eds. 2021. *The PhD at the End of the World: Provocations for the Doctorate and a Future Contested*. Vol. 4. Debating Higher Education: Philosophical Perspectives. Cham: Springer International Publishing, p.127: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-62219-0>

Creativity, innovation and the ability to adapt to changing circumstances are the goals of contemporary postgraduate research. Formal ‘training’ is only one component in the achievement of these goals. Achieving them also requires a healthy research culture in which:

- Risks are accepted as an inherent part of research, and failure is normalised
- Postgraduate researchers are treated with respect and encouraged to be autonomous

- Work-life balance, flexible working and wellbeing are seen as critical enablers of creativity (see, for example: #TakeBreaksMakeBreakthroughs) and inherent to a progressive research culture

Question 2: Are there any additional areas that we should explore under models and access? Please state why.

Awards and Assessment

In the UK, the doctorate is already a diverse qualification, including: practice-based doctorates, professional doctorates, PhDs by publication, article-based PhDs (also known as ‘journal format’ thesis), collaborative doctorates, and inter-disciplinary doctorates.

The diversity of the UK doctorate enables the UK to offer doctoral education which appeals to a wide array of motivations, research interests, and types of participation. This diversity is to be celebrated, and any structural intervention in postgraduate research should aim to maintain and enhance this diversity.

Globally, some commentators have questioned the traditional assessment by thesis and viva model (or ‘dissertation’ in other jurisdictions). The most prominent experiment in developing alternative models for doctoral provision and assessment is being conducted at the University of British Columbia, Canada - the “Public Scholars Initiative (PSI)” (<https://www.grad.ubc.ca/psi>):

“A groundbreaking undertaking, the PSI moves beyond ‘skills training’ and extracurricular experience, and reimagines PhD pathways that legitimize and integrate broader conceptions of scholarship and scholarly products within the core of doctoral education and dissertation research. By recognizing these forms and products as worthy determinants of the granting of the PhD, UBC is promoting a renewed commitment to 21st century relevance for the academy’s highest degree.”

Public Scholars Initiative, University of British Columbia, <https://www.grad.ubc.ca/psi>

This model was part of a movement initiated by the Canadian Association for Graduate Studies “Rethinking the PhD” project. Among other things, this project found that:

“Forms of scholarly communication are changing. Communication forms outside the academy have always been diverse, but even within the academy, scholarly communication modes are expanding and transforming across all disciplines. Sales of scholarly monographs are in continual decline, journal publications are rising, informal avenues (e.g. social media and direct web publishing) are increasingly prevalent, and non-textual formats, such as video and multi-media, are common. Driving much of this change is a growing belief that alternative forms of expression can elicit more nuanced understandings of complex topics, and an increased interest in engaging potential audiences beyond the academy.

The dissertation is meant to prepare students for scholarly habits of mind. The rhetorical flexibility required for today's and tomorrow's scholars, however, is not encouraged by the exclusive reliance on the monograph mode of dissertation, which can be 'single in focus, single in method, single in genre, single in purpose, single in medium, single in mode, single in authorship, single in readership'.

In some disciplines, pragmatic and even ethical concerns have also been raised around the concept of a dissertation as proto-book. With the decline in monograph publishing, it can be extremely difficult to publish a re-worked dissertation, and the re-working involved is often substantial and market-driven. We need to question whether the historical rationale for this dissertation form continues to be valid in today's context."

Canadian Association for Graduate Studies: Report of the Task Force on the Dissertation – Purpose, content, structure, assessment, 2018, p.5 (<https://cags.ca/rethinkingphd/>)

The UK doctoral landscape is already diverse, and doctoral assessment is developing to accommodate, for example, the challenges of interdisciplinary research which may stretch disciplinary norms and research methodologies. Nevertheless, it may be worth exploring whether global experiments in doctoral provision and assessment, such as PSI, might add to the richness of the UK doctorate.

Question 3: What challenges should we prioritise under models and access?

Embed funding to promote equity, diversity and inclusion

To address the poor progression of indigenous people into postgraduate education and research, the Australian Government introduced a 'weighted completions' measure in their funding model to incentivise universities to attract and retain postgraduate researchers from under-represented groups. These means that an indigenous doctoral researcher who completes their doctorate at an Australian university attracts *twice* the amount of quality-related funding than non-indigenous doctoral researchers.

If a similar system were introduced in the UK, it would create a comprehensive incentive for HEIs to recruit, retain and successfully complete under-represented doctoral researchers. The benefits of this incentive would cascade to other areas of the postgraduate sector, such as driving the need to better collect and analyse ethnicity, disability and socio-economic data.

See: Australian Government, Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2021: *Calculating the Research Training Program Grant Amounts*, p.2: <https://www.dese.gov.au/download/10396/calculating-research-training-program/25084/calculating-research-training-program/pdf/en>

Adequate recognition of the work involved in effective research supervision

UK research supervisors are under pressure:

- 40% of respondents to the UK Research Supervision Survey (2021) said that ‘more time’ was the ‘one thing’ that would improve their supervisory practice. A further 15% said ‘reduced or more balanced workload’.
- Just over half of respondents felt that their supervisory responsibilities caused them anxiety and/or to miss sleep over the past 12 months.

Some of this pressure may be alleviated if adequate institutional policies are in place (and followed):

- Only 52% said that there was a workload allocation model in place for research supervision at their institution.
- 34% were ‘unsure’ whether there was a policy for the maximum number of doctoral candidates per supervisor, and 18% said that there was no policy in place. Among those who said that there was a policy in place (n= 1,259), 46% said the policy is not always adhered to, and 10% said it was not monitored at all.

Workload allocation models may not be a panacea, particularly if they specify an unrealistic number of hours per doctoral candidate per year. Similarly, a ‘maximum number of doctoral candidates’ policy may have to be flexible enough to accommodate disciplinary differences, and the overall size of the supervisor pool in any given department or institution.

Nevertheless, taken together, the stress research supervisors find themselves under combined with a patchy regulatory environment certainly suggests that more can be done to adequately recognise the work involved in effective research supervision.

See: UKCGE, UK Research Supervision Survey Report 2021

(<https://ukcge.ac.uk/resources/resource-library/uk-research-supervision-survey-2021-report>)

Team Supervision

Team supervision has become the norm in the UK, with 70% of respondents to the UK Research Supervision Survey ‘frequently’ or ‘always’ taking part in team supervision over the last 5 years. Of those who had experience of team supervision (n= 1,318), 30% ‘strongly agreed’ that it offers a ‘better experience for the doctoral candidate’, and a further 35% ‘agreed’. Only 7% ‘disagreed’ or ‘strongly disagreed’.

In addition to providing a better experience for the candidate, team supervision also offers mentoring opportunities between experienced and less experienced supervisors. These

opportunities are invaluable, particularly as a way of inducting early career researchers into research supervision. In UKCGE focus groups concerns have been raised, however, that it was also possible ‘to pass on bad practice by the experienced supervisor’ through this kind of informal, semi-structured mentoring. It is therefore recommended that further investments be made into formalising mentoring opportunities between research supervisors beyond and outside supervisory teams.

See: UKCGE, UK Research Supervision Survey Report 2021

(<https://ukcge.ac.uk/resources/resource-library/uk-research-supervision-survey-2021-report>)

Question 4: Are there any additional areas that we should explore under routes in, though and out of postgraduate research? Please state why.

“UCAS-style” Admissions System for Postgraduate study

Recruitment and admissions to postgraduate research is different from undergraduate entry, not least because individual research supervisors are often involved in the selection of doctoral candidates. Nevertheless, access and equity into postgraduate research might be better monitored if there were a national system for postgraduate admissions, or at least if there were national guidelines on the reporting of applications and admissions data.

See: Wakeling, Paul and Mateos-Gonzalez, Jose Luis. 2021. ‘Inequality in the Highest Degree Final Report? Postgraduates, Prices and Participation’. The Sutton Trust, p.4

(<https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Inequality-in-the-Highest-Degree-Final-Report.pdf>)

Question 5: What challenges should we prioritise under routes in, though and out?

Doctoral Training Partnership Models: Duplication and Exclusion?

Funding bodies, particularly UKRI, have increasingly opted for cohort-based models of doctoral education, such as Doctoral Training Partnerships. The rationale for switching to cohort-based models was clearly rooted in a desire to overcome social, intellectual and professional isolation among doctoral candidates by creating cohesion, collaboration, and a sense of shared experience.

Many funded cohort programmes deliver excellent training and development. But, from an institutional perspective, the requirement to provide cohort-specific opportunities can be challenging. For example, when applying for funding, bid writers often draw on the central services which exist in their institutions to support the personal and professional development of their doctoral candidates, in order to make an argument about research culture. Once successful in

winning funding, many programmes then feel compelled to run duplicate versions of centrally available courses and opportunities, in order to fulfil the obligation to provide cohort training. These competing demands risk over-stretching limited institutional resources, to the detriment and exclusion of non-DTP doctoral candidates. Some discussion has been had in the postgraduate sector about whether professional development of doctoral researchers could be ‘pooled’ across several institutions irrespective of the funding status of the candidates. The Scottish Graduate Schools achieve something like this through the opportunities they provide. The Learned Society of Wales is exploring whether this can be achieved across Welsh HEIs.

See: PhD Cohort Programmes— UKCGE Discussion Paper (2020): <https://ukcge.ac.uk/news-and-blog/phd-cohort-programmes-ukcge-discussion-paper>

Research Concentration and DTP Funding

A recent report from the UKCGE found that:

“A comparison of the number of UKRI-funded cohort-based doctoral training programmes since ... 2015 and January 2022 shows that there has been a slight increase in the participation of post-92 institutions, ...despite increased participation by post-92 universities in cohort-based training consortia, the funding allocation has largely remained the same and continues to be very focused on the universities who have historically received the majority of investment in doctoral training.”

Dr Rebekah Smith McGloin and Carolyn Wynne (2022): *Structures and Strategy in Doctoral Education in the UK and Ireland* p.22 (<https://ukcge.ac.uk/resources/resource-library/structures-and-strategy-in-doctoral-education-in-the-uk-and-ireland>)

This is problematic if, as Pásztor, Adél, and Paul Wakeling. (2018) seem to indicate, doctoral researchers from disadvantaged backgrounds are found at ‘less prestigious’ universities:

“To counter this institutional stratification, a more equitable distribution of doctoral funding is needed. There is, however, a paradox. Governments favour the concentration of research funding as a means of supporting excellence and increasing efficient use of public resources through economies of scale. Yet this concentration also fuels the processes of institutional stratification we have discussed. This suggests to us that a fuller understanding of access to doctoral study is required which enumerates statistical patterns of progression across institutions and disciplines, and replicates our approach with other institutions. The challenge remains to support merit without perpetuating inequality or cementing the social order for future generations.”

Pásztor, Adél, and Paul Wakeling. (2018) 'All PhDs Are Equal but ... Institutional and Social Stratification in Access to the Doctorate'. *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 39 (7): 982–97. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2018.1434407> .

Communicating the Benefits of Doctoral Study

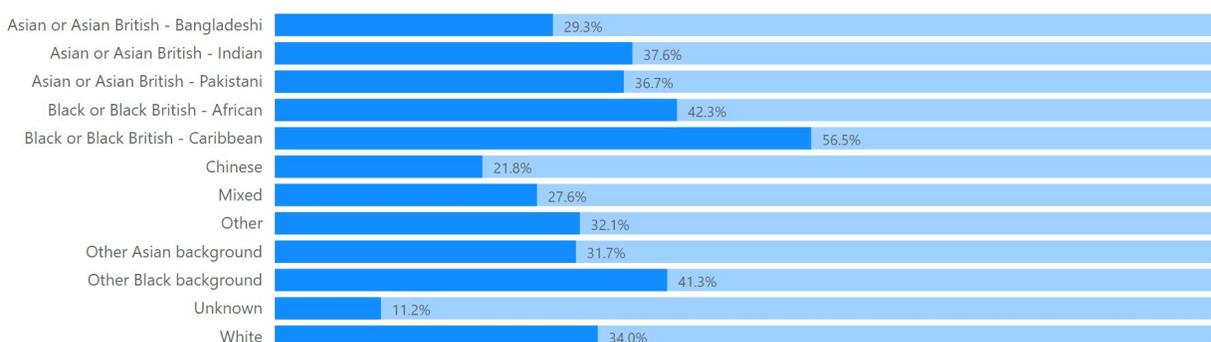
According to a study undertaken by the Scottish Graduate School in Social Science (SGSSS) in 2021, there is a paucity of accessible information online on PGR funding and career trajectories which particularly disadvantages 'widening participation' applicants.

See: Widening Access and Valuing Diversity in SGSSS 2021

(<https://social.sgsss.ac.uk/files/documents/widening-access-and-valuing-diversity-in-sgsss.pdf>)

Mode of study: promote part-time provision

According to 2018/19 HESA data, there were approximately 27,000 part-time postgraduate researchers (which is equivalent to 24.2% of all PGRs at that time). 56.5% of Black or Black British – Caribbean PGRs were part-time as compared 34% of White British PGRs. All Black or Black British Ethnicities have a higher proportion of part-time PGRs than White British PGRs – see the table below:



Proportion of part-time PGRs by Ethnicity (2018/19 HESA Data)

Part-time doctorates may also attract older candidates. According to 2018/19 HESA data, 9.9% of 25-29 year old postgraduate researchers were part-time, as opposed to 46.5% of PGRs aged 30 or over.

HEIs are increasingly aware that part-time “doctorates for professionals” are a relatively low-cost route into doctoral study since there can be reduced need for candidate stipends, and increased corporate and industrial investment in the CPD opportunities afforded by level 8 education. Research Councils, however, have a limited investment portfolio in part-time provision. Given the appeal of part-time doctorates to employed professionals, more visible investment in this mode of study would be an enhancement of UKRI’s overarching aim to make collaborative investments in a ‘research and innovation system’.

At present, innovative HEIs are leveraging funding for part-time doctoral study from the UKRI Higher Education Innovation Fund and similar “Knowledge Exchange Strategy” funding opportunities. This piecemeal approach does not recognise the advantages of part-time study for under-represented candidates, employers, and HEIs, and does not capitalise on the potential of part-time study for achieving knowledge exchange priorities.

Promoting and expanding part-time mode of study should be a priority for UKRI both when considering the equity, diversity and inclusiveness of any structural changes to postgraduate research and its capacity to significantly broaden the routes into and out of level 8 provision.

Question 6: Are there any additional areas that we should consider in our work on rights and conditions? Please state why.

In 2018 Universities Australia published *Principles for Respectful Supervisory Relationships*:
<https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Postgraduate-Principles.pdf>

These principles stated that: “A sexual or romantic relationship between a supervisor and their student is never appropriate”. It is worth exploring how these principles have been adopted in Australia, and the impact they may have had on complaints procedures and institutional culture.

Whilst some UK HEIs have clear guidance and HR policies in this area, others do not. As well as setting clear expectations for PGR students and supervisors across the sector, development of a national Supervisory Relationships code of practice for the UK would also ensure that Directors of multi-institutional DTPs can be assured of consistent engagement with all partner organisations, should they receive a complaint. Further, non-HEI organisations who host or co-supervise PGR students could also be invited to become signatories.

Question 7: What challenges should we prioritise in our work on rights and conditions?

Teaching while studying for a research degree

It is common for postgraduate researchers to undertake teaching duties during their course of study. This is a helpful opportunity, as it leads to professional development opportunities and additional income.

It would be helpful, however, if a national code of practice could be published to clarify the expectations and remunerations for postgraduate researchers who teach. For example, it is contested whether teaching responsibilities should be ‘built-in’ to institutional stipends and fee-waivers.

For an institution which separates teaching from stipends, see (Principle 6, Item 33):

<https://www.surrey.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2021-10/code-practice-for-PGRs-support-teaching-2021-22.pdf>

Question 8: Are there any additional areas that we should explore in our work on funding and financial support?

Question 9: What challenges should we prioritise in our work on funding and financial support?

Transparency about decision-making in relation to postgraduate research funding

The *UK Research Supervision Survey* asked respondents whether they agreed that: “Access to Doctoral Funding is allocated on the basis of the doctoral candidate’s research potential”. Only 48% agreed with this statement, and 27% disagreed (rising to 34% among STEM disciplines). This lack of consistency suggests that there is a lack of transparency about decision-making in relation to postgraduate research. It may also suggest a lack of trust in current decision-making procedures.

A subset of respondents (n=2,834) were asked whether: “The introduction of doctoral training partnerships or centres has improved the doctoral candidate experience”. Only 41% would agree with this statement, with 19% disagreeing (with the remainder ‘unsure’ or ‘neutral’). This ambivalence suggests a lack of confidence that the Doctoral Training Partnership funding system enhances the doctoral experience. At the least, this indicates a ‘communications problem’ for funders of DTPs: if there is a lack of trust in the DTP system, research supervisors may be less inclined to encourage their doctoral candidates to pursue resources and opportunities offered by that system.

UKCGE, UK Research Supervision Survey Report 2021, pp.24-25

(<https://ukcge.ac.uk/resources/resource-library/uk-research-supervision-survey-2021-report>)

Question 10: Are there any areas that we could usefully focus on, or other questions that we should explore, not covered within our four focus areas?

Question 11: Do you have any further comments on the New Deal?

Question 12: What factors should we consider as we develop our engagement plans for future New Deal work?

It may be helpful to convene a taskforce to consider international comparators and examples of effective practice in order to ensure the New Deal takes advantage of the latest thinking on doctoral education across the globe.