UK Council for
Graduate Education

Structures supporting Doctoral Education in the UK and Ireland

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The story so far

- First UKCGE report in 1994
- Reports have tracked the significant changes in Postgraduate Education in the UK
- Comparator of changes in PG and the structures supporting them
- 2015 report specific focus on structures for doctoral education

Focus of the 2021 Survey

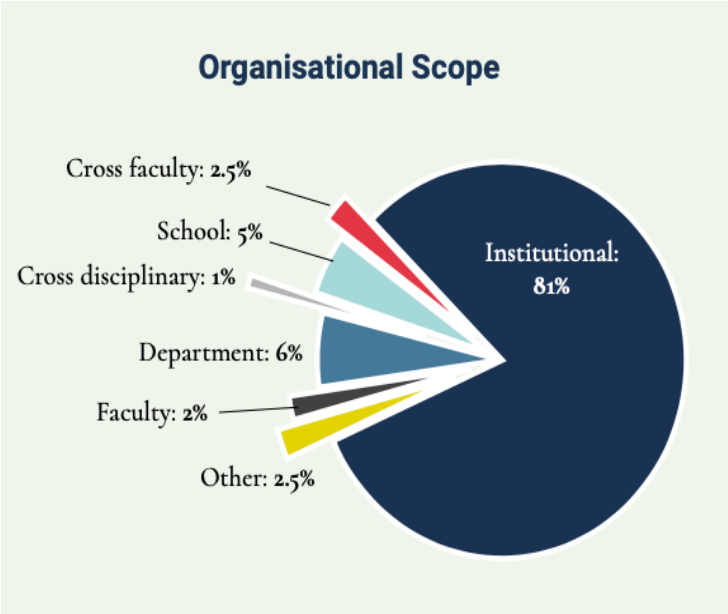
- Continued focus on PGR tracking changes since 1994
- Expansion of synergies between UK and Irish HEIs in the support and approaches to doctoral education
- Reflect on findings, predictions and policy changes from 2015 report
- Strategic ambitions and institutional vision

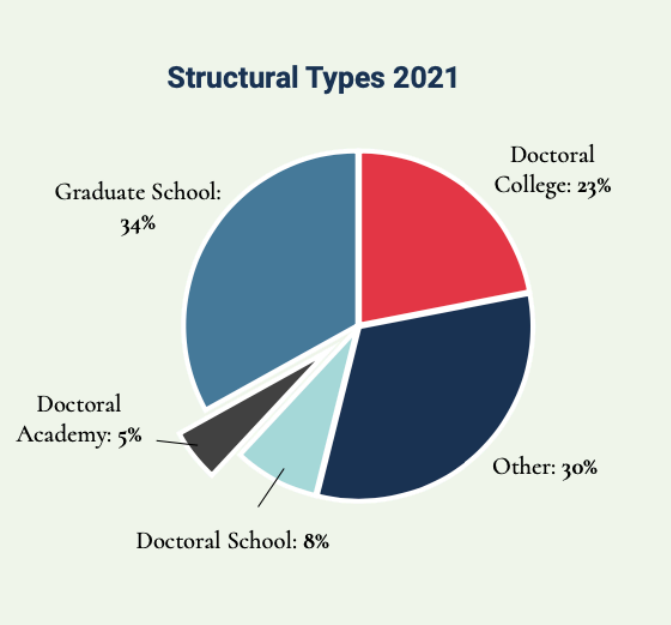
Headlines

- Graduate School structure, remit and priorities
- Organisation development
- Future role in wider researcher development remit
- People-centred nature of the strategic priorities and policy
- Commitment to widening participation
- Enduring inequality in investment in doctoral training

Structures – name and position in the organisation

	1994 Survey	2021 Survey	2021 Survey excluding specialist colleges
Percentage of institutions with a structure supporting doctoral education	38%	75%	80%





Remit– who is in and who is out?

Remit	UK institutions	Irish institutions	Total
Doctoral candidates	113 (100%)	10 (100%)	123
Masters by research students	79 (70%)	6 (60%)	85
Taught masters students	10 (9%)	2 (20%)	12
Early career researchers	46 (41%)	4 (40%	50
All research staff	30 (27%)	4 (40%)	34
Other	11 (10%)	1(10%)	12

Table 6: Which of the following groups fall within the remit of this organisational structure? (n=123)

100% support PGRs, **41% support ECRs, and 27% support research staff.**

ECR support up from 17%

Only **9% support PGT** students - a significant fall since 2015.

Down from 53%

FTE of support in Graduate Schools

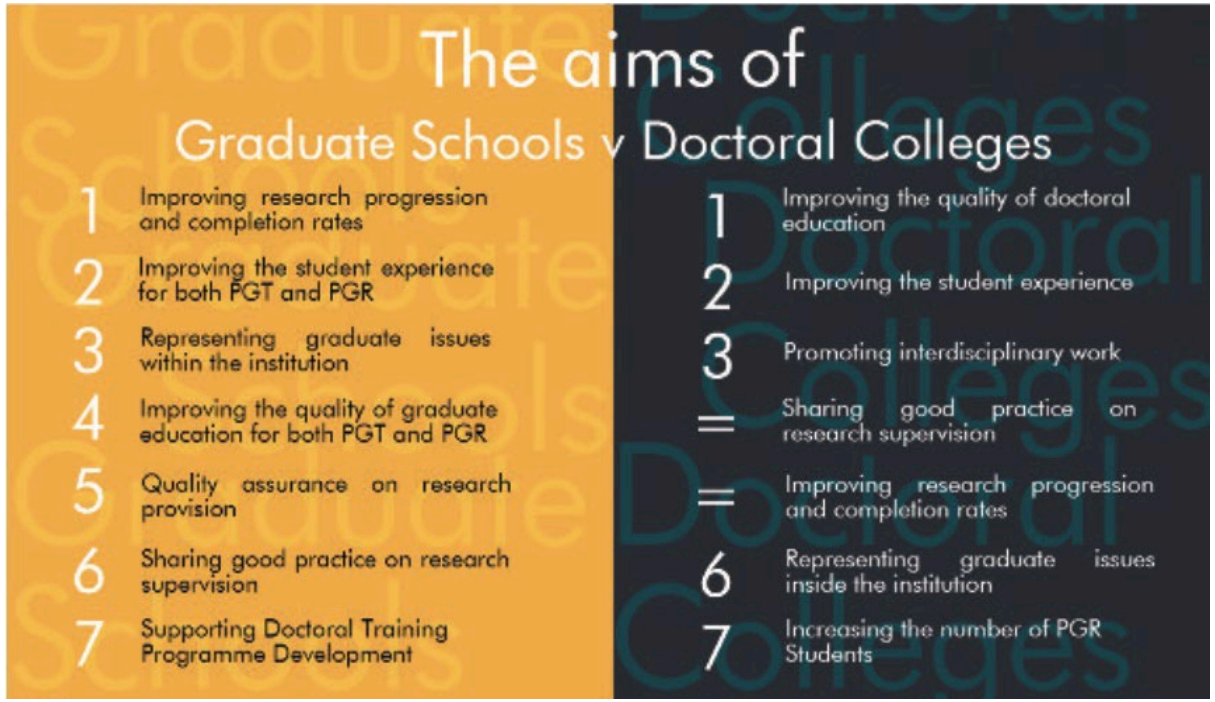
	Number of FTE staff				
Number of PGR registered by HESA/HEA Ireland	0-2	3-5	6-10	11-20	Over 20
0-500	3	8	4		2
501-1000	5	4	14	4	1
1001-2000	3	1	4	1	2
2001-3000	2		2	2	3
3001-4000		1		1	
4001-5000		1	2	1	
5001-6000	1				1
Over 6000		1			

Table 7: How many full-time equivalent staff are employed within this organisational structure? (n=74)

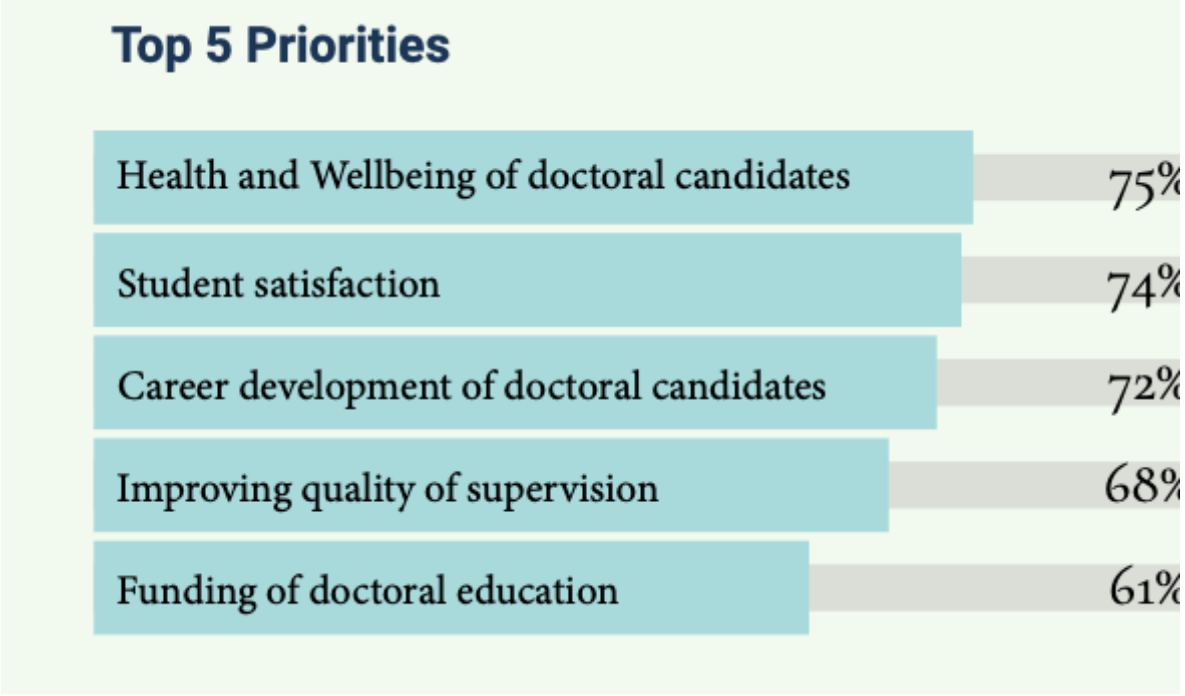
- No relationship between number PGR and the FTE of GS support
- Largest number of FTE were because there was a more integrated larger support infrastructure, smaller numbers of FTE was when support was dispersed across the institution

Strategic Priorities

2015



2021



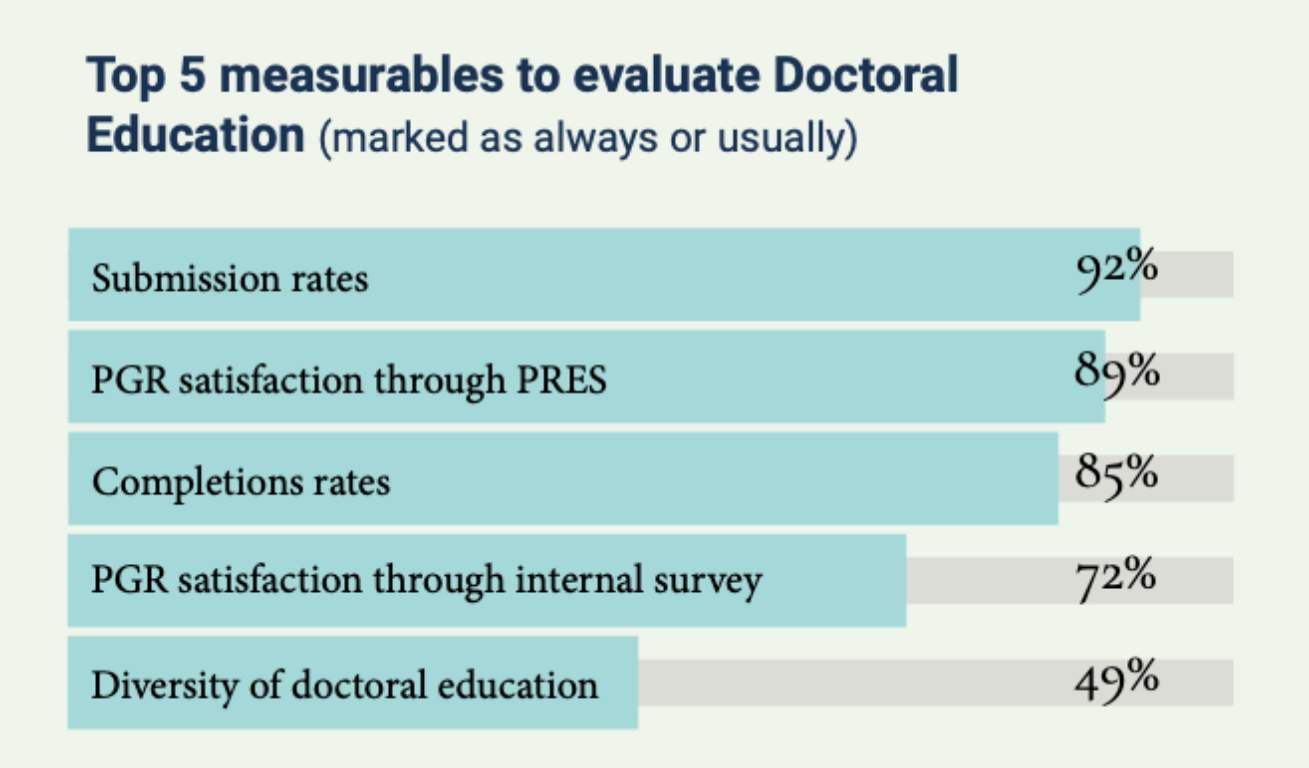
Strategic Priorities | Least ranked priorities

- Research Ethics: 42%
- Industry partnerships with doctoral education: 40%
- External marketing for doctoral programmes: 35%
- Societal Engagement with Doctoral Candidates: 23%
- Open access/open science: 23%

Most common activities with high level of involvement from Graduate Schools were:

92% Representing Doctoral issues within the Institution
92% Improving the PGR experience
89% Gathering opinions of PGR
84% Training and development of supervisors
81% Generic skills training
77% progression – submission and completion

Measurables to evaluate Doctoral Education



Respondents were asked to consider to what extent a range of indicators were used to evaluate doctoral education in their institution.

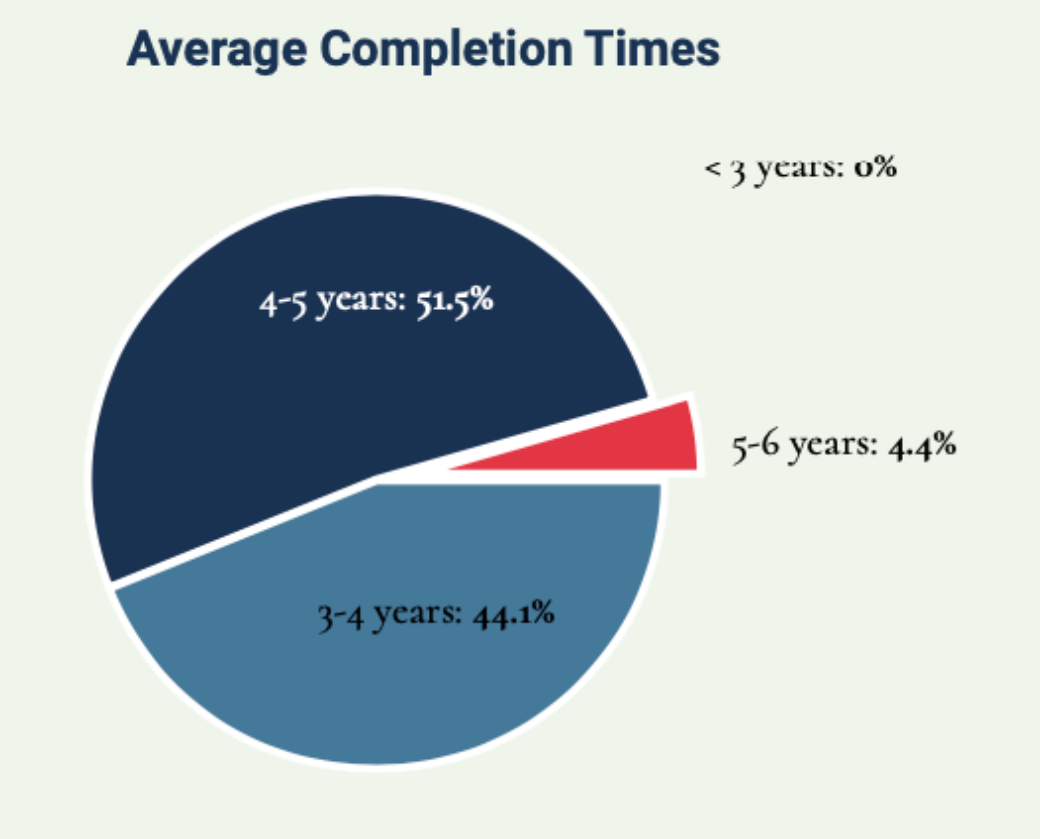
Equity, Diversity and Inclusivity

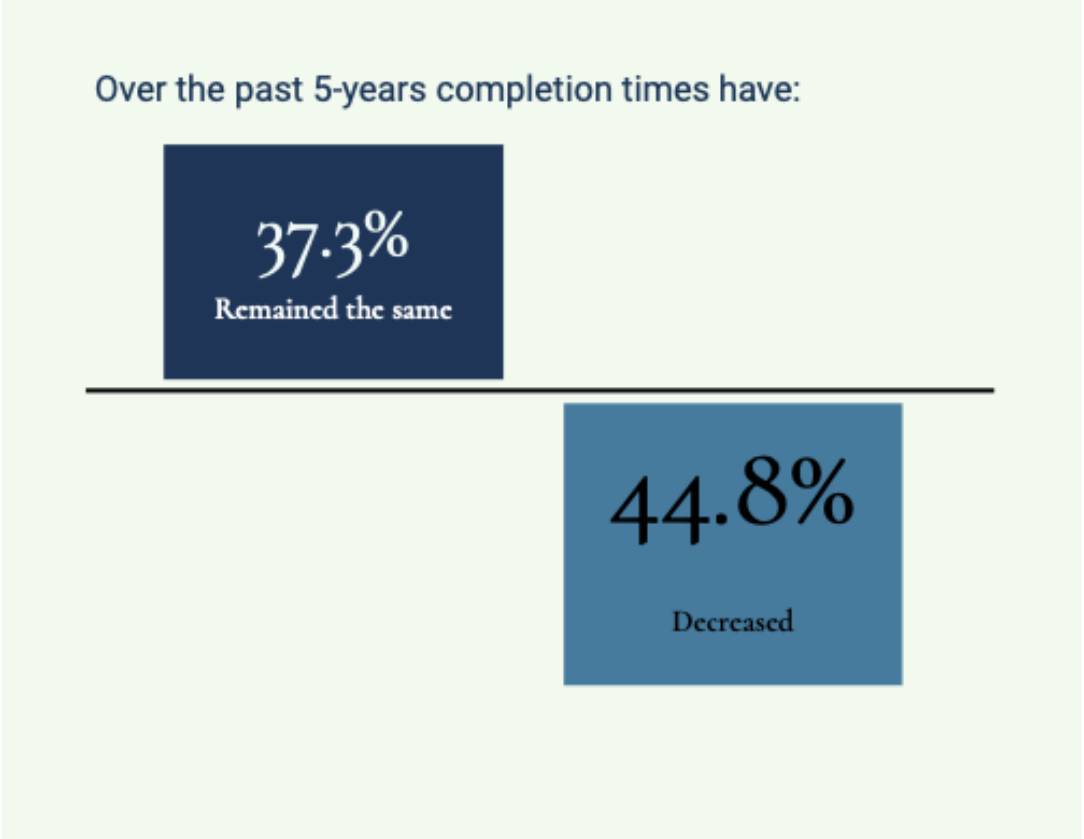
- 84% of respondents indicate the EDI considerations are used in decision making
- Embedded in the ways of working rather than a strategic priority in their own right
- Data collected to support EDI varies across institutions and metrics across protected characteristics utilized for different purposes (refer to page 51 for more detailed data)

Raising awareness of postgraduate opportunities among widening participation undergraduates	54%
Targeted funding opportunities	45%
Pre-enrolment bridging activities	22%
None	18%
Other	18%

Table 13: Measures implemented over the past five years to support equality, diversity and inclusion in doctoral education. (n=74)

Completion times

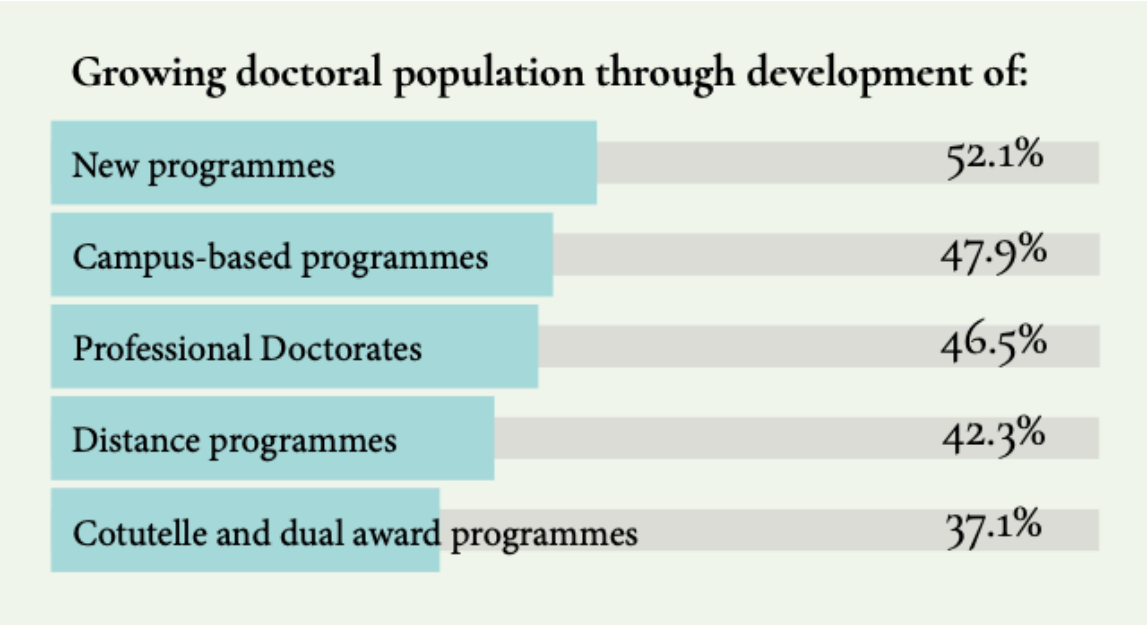




Average completion times by PGR Population size

	Average time to completion		
PGR Population	3 years or more but less than 4 years	4 years or more but less than 5 years	5 years or more but less than 6 years
0-999	46	50	4
1000+	43	52	4

Growing the PGR community



Growing PGR Numbers

78%	Want to grow their doctoral population over the next 5-10 years.
43%	Indicated an intention to also increase MRes registrations.

Where the percentage increase was specified, the mean average increase for the doctoral population was 53% (over 5 years) and 30% for MRes.

Drivers for change

Institutional reorganisation	45 (63%)
PGR recruitment strategy	36 (51%)
Support for trans/cross/inter-disciplinary research	30 (42%)
Growth and diversification of programmes	22 (31%)
Other	21 (30%)
Enterprise & innovation strategy	18 (25%)
International strategy	18 (25%)
Professional doctorates	4 (6%)
None	1 (1%)

Table 14: Main internal drivers for top three key changes in doctoral provision over the past 5 years (n=71)

Changes in national/international policy	34 (49%)
Mental health & wellbeing	32 (46%)
Equality, diversity & inclusion	30 (44%)
Changes in funding	30 (44%)
Covid-19	20 (29%)
None	12 (17%)
Industrial strategy	10 (15%)
Other	7 (10%)
Global Challenges Research Fund	3 (4%)

Table 15: Main external drivers for top three key changes in doctoral provision over the past 5 years. (n=69)

Summary of key changes

- **Greater focus** on 'Doctoral' or 'PhD' in structural **nomenclature** but 'Graduate School' (GS) still most common
- Majority GS or equivalent sit **at institutional level** and complexity has reduced from 2015
- **Support for PGT** continues to **decline**
- GS remit expanding to include support for Early **Career Researchers and all Research Staff**
- Shifting priorities towards student experience and a more peoplecentred approach
- Completion times decreasing
- Commitment to growth

Top future priorities

Collaboration	Modes of delivery	Well-being	Form and format of the doctorate
Employability	Training ‘institutions can work smarter together in coordinating more cross-institutional delivery of training and development for postgraduate researchers outside of funded consortia’.	Equitable access to funding	Graduate School support for researchers at all career stages