



**UK Research  
and Innovation**

## **New Deal for Postgraduate Research Call for input**



## Overview

The New Deal for Postgraduate Research (“the New Deal”) is a long-term piece of work that aims to improve the experience and quality of postgraduate research training in the UK.

In this engagement exercise, we are focusing primarily on doctoral training (for example, working towards a PhD), but we welcome comments on other research-focused training and qualifications.

The government’s Research & Development (R&D) Roadmap first committed to the creation of the New Deal. In July 2021 the government published its R&D People and Culture Strategy.

The strategy aims to ensure that the UK has an outstanding research culture that truly supports discovery, diversity and innovation and that values everyone’s contributions. It seeks to enable varied and diverse careers that bring excitement and recognition, allowing talent and ideas to flow freely between academia, business and other sectors.

The R&D People and Culture Strategy set out that the New Deal would:

- consider how postgraduate research students are supported and developed, practically and financially.
- consider how best to prepare postgraduate research students for rewarding careers, and address factors that contribute to precarity in early career research
- enable a more diverse range of people to consider careers in research
- consider how to attract and retain talented people within the sector and support the flow of people and ideas in the R&D system across the world.

The government’s ambition is that the New Deal should apply to as many postgraduate research students as possible.



By postgraduate research student, we mean anyone working towards a research degree or equivalent qualification.

## **Why your views matter**

We want to ensure that everyone in the research and innovation community has the opportunity to contribute to, and shape our thinking on, the New Deal.

This includes, but is not limited to;

- current, previous and prospective postgraduate research students
- supervisors
- staff supporting research training
- university mission groups
- representative bodies
- funders
- employers
- universities
- others with an interest in postgraduate research training.

For the purposes of this exercise, by “universities” we mean all higher education providers.

This exercise is conducted by UKRI, but we welcome responses from and about all postgraduate research training in the UK, including where there is a different or no source of funding.

Different activities are already contributing to some aspects of the New Deal. Many postgraduate research students, supervisory teams, grant holders and employers have already given us their thoughts through:

- ESRC’s *Review of the PhD in the Social Sciences*
- EPSRC’s *Review of EPSRC-funded doctoral education*



- UK Council of Graduate Education's (UKCGE) *UK Research Supervision Survey*, which was supported by UKRI and The Wellcome Trust.

UKRI is also engaging with a wide range of stakeholders through other means. This includes, for example, the upcoming engagement on the future of AHRC's doctoral provision.

Further information on the government's strategies, the New Deal and projects supporting this work is available on UKRI.org: [www.ukri.org/our-work/developing-people-and-skills/new-deal-for-postgraduate-research](http://www.ukri.org/our-work/developing-people-and-skills/new-deal-for-postgraduate-research)

In this exercise, we welcome views on what the goals of postgraduate research training should be and set out an approach to the New Deal for comment. We also ask how we should engage with the community going forward.

The deadline for responses is 17 May 2022.

We will review all responses and publish a summary of our findings.

## **General guidance**

The information you provide is held securely by UKRI and will not be used to identify any individual. Your data is used for monitoring processes, to help us analyse results accurately and ensure people are treated fairly and according to their needs. Information on how we use your information can be found in our [privacy notice](#).

If you would prefer to participate in the exercise in another format, please email: [talent@ukri.org](mailto:talent@ukri.org)

You can download all the questions at the link below. Responses should still be submitted via the Engagement Hub.



We are working with colleagues across UKRI to ensure that evidence collected in related exercises is also used to inform the New Deal. This includes evidence submitted to the exercises above, and the consultation on the draft UKRI Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy. Please [contact us](#) if you require clarification on which work we are able to take into account.

Please:

- Keep responses concise.
- Provide a summary of, and links to, supporting evidence where possible.
- Feel free to answer only the questions where you want to input. You do not need to respond to every question.
- If you are responding as part of an organisation or group, discuss your intention to respond with others and submit a single response.



## Section one: goals of postgraduate research training

In our engagement to date, we have heard different views on the goals and expectations of postgraduate research training, for the individual and for the wider research and innovation community.

The characteristics of the doctoral qualification are well established (see the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) [Characteristics Statement](#)), and reasons for pursuing a research degree vary.

For some, postgraduate research training is primarily a route into an academic research career. Over recent decades a research degree has become increasingly valuable for many technical, research, and other careers, across the public, private and third sectors.

Recent reviews of postgraduate research have identified the need for balance between providing more taught training or continuous professional development and time to focus on the research and outputs that will be assessed for the degree.

We want to open the opportunity to the wider community to tell us what the goals of postgraduate research training should be. For example, this might be from the perspective of:

- postgraduate research students themselves
- employers in different sectors
- organisations involved in postgraduate research training
- others who wish to contribute.

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



## **Section two: Areas of focus**

Following earlier engagement with the sector, UKRI set out an approach to the New Deal with four initial areas to focus on. These are:

- Models and access
- Routes in, through and out
- Rights and conditions
- Funding and financial support

We recognise that there are overlaps and interdependencies between these areas.

The following pages will provide details on each of these four areas before asking for your input on what we should consider, and which challenges we should prioritise.

### **Models and access**

In our work on models and access, we aim to consider current models and their respective roles in supporting postgraduate research. This might include models of:

### **Funding**

There are many funding models for postgraduate research. UKRI's Research Councils provide grants to universities which they use to fund cohorts of postgraduate research students. Other funders have different models. Research organisations also fund some postgraduate research students directly (often with support from Quality Related funding or analogous support), or postgraduate research students can be self-funded, through their own means or loans.

### **Supervision**



Models of individual or team supervision, as well as the support available to – and expectations placed upon – supervisors.

## **Award**

Most postgraduate research students in the UK are working towards a PhD or other doctoral qualification in a specialist subject, often awarded after the completion of a thesis and its defence in an oral exam, commonly known as a viva. While less common, some organisations offer more structured “integrated” programmes. Doctorates may also be awarded by publication or be practice based.

We are interested in bringing together evidence on:

- How different models can support postgraduate research students with diverse backgrounds and experiences, for example, whether some models better support people from different cultural, economic or educational backgrounds. We are also interested in whether the models themselves impact researchers’ experiences and whether this might contribute to mental health outcomes
- Whether some models of postgraduate research better support the needs of organisations in different parts of the private, public or third sectors, or in different disciplines
- What changes are needed so that postgraduate research training is meeting the future needs of the economy, society and culture
- How postgraduate research students, employers, funders and universities and other research organisations are able to engage with one another such that they can be responsive and flexible to changing needs.

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

If you have specific evidence to support your input, please provide a brief summary and – where available – any relevant links.





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

If you have specific evidence to support your input, please provide a brief summary and – where available – any relevant links.

### **Routes in, through and out**

The New Deal will consider the reasons why people do – and do not – enter into postgraduate research training, and the types of support they receive. It may also consider how part-time modes of working support postgraduate research students.

We will also consider the amount of time required to complete a research qualification and why some people do not complete.

We are interested in bringing together evidence on how:

- Postgraduate research training can actively support researchers with different experiences and career paths – bringing them into, and supporting them throughout, postgraduate research. This will include, but not be limited to, consideration of the impact of researchers' protected characteristics
- Postgraduate research students are supported so that they can go on to careers in sectors and organisations across the whole economy
- Postgraduate research students find or are given the necessary information to support them in their research and their development.

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

If you have specific evidence to support your input, please provide a brief summary and – where available – any relevant links.



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

If you have specific evidence to support your input, please provide a brief summary and – where available – any relevant links.

## **Rights and conditions**

Many universities seek to ensure equitable rights and conditions across their postgraduate research population. However, an individual's rights and conditions may be influenced by their source of funding, their particular legal situation (for example, their immigration status or if they are a worker or employee), or other contributing factors.

We are interested in bringing together evidence on how:

- Rights and conditions support postgraduate researchers with different needs
- Rights and conditions compare with other graduate opportunities, the reasons for any differences and their impact on relevant outcomes
- Postgraduate research students are enabled to continue with their research when their personal situation changes
- Postgraduate research students are informed about their rights and conditions; and that there is support in place if things go wrong.

If, when responding to this question, you refer to specific issues or problems, please also try to be clear about any matters that might contribute to their position. For example, specify if an issue relates to people in receipt of funding from a particular source or their immigration status.

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



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If you have specific evidence to support your input, please provide a brief summary and – where available – any relevant links.

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

If you have specific evidence to support your input, please provide a brief summary and – where available – any relevant links.

## **Funding and financial support**

Universities invest their own resources in postgraduate research training. They also receive funding from charitable or public sector funders. Other organisations from the private, public and charitable sectors sometimes also support postgraduate research students.

UKRI is the largest single funder of postgraduate research training in the UK, financially supporting around a quarter of the UK's doctoral student population through the Research Councils and (in England) through Research England's Quality-Related (QR) funding. Funding councils in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland provide funding to universities in their nations.

Funding can be complex, with several sources supporting one postgraduate research student. The mixture of funding might be influenced by rules or incentives from a funder, but it may also be influenced by the university's appetite to fund more postgraduate research students, or the availability of partners.

Financial support includes the support provided directly to postgraduate researchers, for instance some postgraduate researchers receive a stipend or salary via their university.

Many postgraduate researchers are self-funded. This means the university does not pay them a stipend or salary. They may rely on loans or income from other sources, such as the salary from a job.



Postgraduate research students are commonly required to pay a fee to their university. Some funders pay this on the student's behalf.

We are interested in bringing together evidence on:

- Whether the balance of funding between postgraduate research and other research and innovation investments is appropriate
- If funding and financial support for postgraduate research is sustainable and sufficiently resilient, and what financial challenges universities, grant holders and others face. The impact of these challenges on postgraduate research students
- If there is sufficient transparency about decision making in relation to postgraduate research funding and financial support.

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

If you have specific evidence to support your input, please provide a brief summary and – where available – any relevant links.

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

If you have specific evidence to support your input, please provide a brief summary and – where available – any relevant links.



## Overall approach

The four areas of focus outline an approach to the New Deal. As a reminder, these were:

- Models and access
- Routes in, through and out
- Rights and conditions
- Funding and financial support

**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?

Please state why and provide links to evidence where possible.

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



## **Section three: Future engagement**

There are currently around 110,000 postgraduate research students in the UK. Around a quarter of PhD students receive some funding from UKRI. Our Research Councils already have some well-established ways of engaging with postgraduate research students, grant holders and others who they fund.

We want to understand what more we can do to build on this work for the New Deal, to ensure that our activities are as transparent as possible and support the widest possible number of people.

We would like to know what engagement works well, where the community feel there are gaps, and how we can ensure everyone is able to fully engage and contribute in an equitable and accessible way.

In particular, we want to ensure that people who are marginalised or under-represented are given a voice.

How do we best listen and engage with a diverse range of postgraduate research students? Are there engagement approaches or existing structures that UKRI is not using or could make better use of that could be practical ways to hear the views of large numbers of postgraduate research students?

For UKRI's work on the New Deal, we will:

- Articulate our purpose, decisions, or recommendations clearly
- Show how we have used evidence and taken it into account
- Support our communities to input where desired
- Make best use of resources
- Be open to challenge and change.

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