

POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH STRATEGY

Vision and key ambitions

Postgraduate research students play a crucial role in sustaining our excellent research activity, and in providing the skills required by UK and overseas economies. As potential students will soon be facing large debts at the end of their undergraduate degrees, all Universities will need to articulate clearly the benefits of a research degree in order to attract future research leaders to their programmes. We recognise the need to provide a high-quality student experience from recruitment to successful completion, and want to establish a strong relationship with our PGR alumni working in a range of employment sectors. We also recognise that in order to fulfil these ambitions we will need to invest consistently in the postgraduate research environment.

We will attract the most able students by communicating our research strengths, nurturing our own talent, investing in our staff as supervisors, providing excellent support and opportunities for skills development, and tailoring the experience to different student needs. In return, we will create structures of student representation that will also enable them to contribute more to the research culture and outputs of their research group.

This strategy supports the University Research Strategy agreed in 2010 to underpin the Strategic Plan 2009-2014. We have the following objectives for the remainder of the Strategic Plan period, which will provide a strong basis for future improved performance.

1. To increase the number of research students from all domiciles studying on campus and at selected partner institutions overseas, responding to a changing market by providing the courses and fee packages that will attract the most talented students.
2. To attract high-quality research students to our programmes by communicating the excellence of our research and the vibrancy of the environment.
3. To retain our best students from undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes by offering early advice about research opportunities and recognising their loyalty with attractive fees packages.
4. To integrate our research students fully into the research communities linked to our research priorities.
5. To provide advice and support about different career options for research degree graduates, recognising the reality that less than half of them currently move into careers in Higher Education. Linked to this, we will offer a programme of tailored skills programmes relevant to each student's intended career destination.
6. To strengthen strategic relationships with employers and funders, ensuring that recruitment and skills training strategies meet their expectations.
7. To increase the number of research students undertaking internships during their period of study.
8. To develop a framework for analysing and acting upon the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) as a means for setting clear objectives and targets for PGR satisfaction.

Standards and Expectations

This strategy is an institutional framework that includes a set of expectations that will be met across the University, and has the flexibility to allow Faculties and Professional Services to tailor their activities to meet the expectations of different student groups.

While detailed implementation of the strategy will need to take place within Faculties in response to particular needs, we will ensure a level of strategic oversight, governance and monitoring that will provide a consistent approach with regard to expectations and accountabilities across the institution.

The student experience will necessarily be different between Faculties and departments, but we will provide clear guidance about what students can expect, and endeavour to deliver a consistent level of support and high-quality research supervision. Through integrating our students into the research environment, we will understand what they need and expect. In addition to frequent dialogue, we will monitor satisfaction across the University by participating in, and responding appropriately to the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey every two years.

In addition to explaining what students can expect from us, we will define what we will expect from them. This will include responsibilities for engaging in the research environment, creating their own social and intellectual communities, completing training and monitoring processes, and producing strong research outputs.

Recruitment and Selection

Attracting the best research students to the University is a fundamental requirement for improving research performance. This is likely to become more challenging over time as global competition in research continues to increase, and the UK begins to implement the policies within the White Paper for Higher Education. The strategy for recruitment will contain the following elements:

- Improving communication of the University's research strengths to potential research students, and providing clarity about what they can expect from us when they join our research communities.
- Reviewing the research degree portfolio to meet the needs of a wide range of applicants, funders and employers, and contribute to the different key priorities of the University's Strategic Plan. Priorities will include:
 - Extending the use of teaching fellowships, already successfully introduced in some Schools
 - The development of new mutually-beneficial overseas partnerships and the growth of the International Graduate School
 - Programmes sponsored or supported by non-academic organisations, including models combining overseas links and commercial partners.
 - Consideration of the role of professional doctorates - identifying potential markets, assessing whether they can contribute to research activities more widely, and defining how they should be managed in the institution.

- Defining and delivering plans for growth of funded studentships through the Planning and Performance Cycle:
 - Externally-funded studentships, including securing key Research Council doctoral training centres and partnerships, increased commercial support through CASE and sole-funded studentships, winning European networks aligned to research priorities, and creating new overseas partnerships. As with the Research Strategy, strategic collaborations with other research organisations should improve chances of success.
 - Internal investment for studentships, through earmarking income earned through other activities.
 - Continued focus on fund-raising activities specifically aimed at studentships aligned to research priorities.
- Targeting institutional resource to priority areas
 - Fees packages offered to high quality students progressing from our undergraduate programmes.
 - Prioritising University scholarships to areas with fewer opportunities for external funding (e.g. Humanities and Social Sciences)

Environment, Culture and Infrastructure

The University recognises the importance of the research environment, culture and infrastructure in supporting research excellence and will focus on integrating research students into research communities and giving them access to the intellectual, physical and social environments that enable them to produce high quality research.

- Faculties and Departments already provide inductions for students, but these will be continually reviewed to ensure that they meet a minimum standard across the University.
- Access to library and computing facilities will be provided at an equivalent level to research staff.
- Involvement for students in research seminar series within research groups, Schools and Institutes, and in discussions about the wider achievements and objectives of relevant research groups.
- An expectation that PGR cohorts should be established and supported, aligned to major research priorities in Faculties and that PGRs will contribute to the development of the intellectual environment and creation of a supportive research culture.
- Investment at institutional level and within Faculties, in facilities to support the intellectual and social environment.
- Increased involvement and collaborative support from Faculties and Schools in the Graduate School Skills Programme (GSSP) which can assist in the formation of PGR communities through events, workshops and further resources.

- Recognition and support of the growing international culture associated with implementation of the University's internationalisation strategy, and the introduction of the International Graduate School.

Supervision

High-quality supervision is required to ensure that students achieve their research potential and produce excellent research outputs. To achieve this, we will:

- Supplement supervisory training to engage supervisors in the objectives of the new Research and PGR Strategies.
- Promote supervision as a priority and recognise the level of input required by giving PGR supervision an appropriately high weighting in workload models.
- Appoint excellent researchers as Directors of Postgraduate Research who understand the elements of a high-quality research environment and set the expectations for supervisors.
- Ensure supervisors provide mentoring and support for students at all stages of their research programme, from initiation of their project to timely submission, the viva process and completion of corrections. Good practice, for example in the use of the mock viva, will be widely implemented.
- Continue to use the Personal Development Records to support student development with supervisory involvement, including the planning of skills development according to the intended career destination of each student.

Skills Development

Transferable skills development is recognised as a distinguishing feature of the UK Doctorate, and feedback on the University's PGR training shows a good level of satisfaction. The research policy environment increasingly emphasises research impact and translating research into benefit for the economy and society. As part of their research communities and through their personal development journey, research students should appreciate the importance of transferable skills as part of the research process and as a key requirement for their future employability in any sector.

We will:

- Employ the Researcher Development Framework established by Vitae, with the new Concordat Implementation Group overseeing support and development for PGRs and research staff together.
- Offer a wide range of training and development opportunities that can be tailored to individual needs based on career ambitions and are informed by input from employers and funders.
- Deliver generic and specialised skills training to cohorts of students aligned to Faculty and University priorities.
- Ensure all PGRs have opportunities for relevant work experience, arranging for growing numbers of students:

- Experience of academic teaching
- Internships in other employment sectors
- Engage with our alumni to assess how their PGR training has equipped them for their chosen career, and invite them to contribute to improvements to future training.
- Link the skills development for PGRs, research staff and academic staff so that PGRs can see a continuum for career progression and so that the university is in the best position to grow and employ its best researchers.

Support and Communication

Key to a good research experience is a responsive and professional structure and clarity about who can provide support that students need throughout their period of study. This will be delivered through a partnership approach between supervisors, academic leads and the Professional Services. We will:

- Provide clear and consistent information to students and their supervisors about processes and points of contact.
- Maintain a Graduate School presence, comprising the Graduate School Office, the PGR Skills team, the Directors of Postgraduate Research and led by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Knowledge Exchange. They will liaise with other Professional Services and academic staff and communicate regularly with the student community.
- Improve business processes with better electronic workflows.
- Have a regular timetable for discussing student issues with PGR representatives at institutional, Faculty and departmental level, and provide responses to key areas of concern. This will be linked to development of the new student representation system.