

Doctoral College Strategy 2030 – Our Commitment to Our Postgraduate Researchers

At the University of Exeter, postgraduate researchers (PGRs) are a vital part of our interdisciplinary academic community and our [Strategy 2030](#) ambitions for delivering world-leading research to create healthier, greener and fairer societies. PGRs play an essential role in advancing our research and our global reputation, and in fostering a vibrant and inclusive research culture, as demonstrated by the impact of their research and contributions to society. Additionally, within departments and research groups, PGRs enrich our academic communities, often serving as teaching assistants, and bring valuable international and diverse cultural perspectives to our campuses.

The development of our postgraduate research, and success of our PGRs, is supported by the Doctoral College Strategy 2030. PGR voice shaped this strategy through consultations, liaison forums, and representative input, but also incorporating feedback from Annual Monitoring Review, PRES, Researcher Development training, and PGR Support teams. Under this strategy, a new 'Connected Doctoral College' model brings together academic and professional services staff across the university's faculties and divisions, to collectively deliver core strategic objectives for PGRs:

- A high-quality student experience
- A diverse and inclusive research culture
- An effective and supportive training and professional development environment

Our Connected Doctoral College team supports our PGRs from their initial applications, through their research and training, to the completion of their studies and future career plans both within and beyond academia. We are committed to building a dynamic and inclusive research culture to foster research innovation, inspire creativity and bring people together tackle local, national and global challenges, generating impactful and cutting-edge research. To do so, we aim to create a healthy and supportive research environment for our postgraduate students, with dedicated researcher development, international student, postgraduate support and postgraduate welfare teams. We will constantly strive to improve both the research opportunities and the support available to our PGRs, to help them achieve their research and career goals.

The below outlines our vision for how we will deliver this. Our performance against these aims will be assessed against various indicators, sector benchmarks, and PGR feedback, including PRES, Annual Monitoring Review, and Training Needs Analysis.

Our PGR Vision

- 1. Our postgraduate researchers will have access to a high-quality student experience, enabling them to thrive and ensure their success throughout their academic studies.**

To achieve this, we will:

1. Continue to ensure our supervisors and pastoral tutors are appropriately trained, supported and confident in carrying out their roles. This will involve both initial and continuing professional development training, and engagement with relevant university training around EDI and student mental health.
2. Continue to support postgraduate mental health and wellbeing. This will include providing continued, dedicated and specialised PGR health and wellbeing support, linking to both student and staff wellbeing services. We recognise the varied needs and challenges facing our postgraduate researchers and will take a whole-institutional approach to postgraduate researcher wellbeing and creating a mentally-healthy and supportive research culture.

3. Create a supportive and inclusive student experience, recognising within our policies and processes the specific needs of diverse cohorts of students, including: international, mature, disabled and chronically-ill, student carers and parents, and part-time and distance-based postgraduate researchers.
4. Ensure our postgraduate researchers have access to fit-for-purpose work and collaborative spaces for their specific studies and needs, incorporating student voice into institutional space strategies and design.
5. Support our postgraduate researchers in ensuring they have all the generic and specialist tools and resources required for their studies, in an equitable way. This will include access to labs and facilities, IT equipment, library and digital resources.

2. Our postgraduate researchers will be a vital part of our vibrant and inclusive university research culture and community, now and in the future.

To achieve this, we will:

1. Review our support for postgraduate researchers from underrepresented groups and ensure this is fit for purpose for all postgraduate researchers, with specific action plans to improve support for our disabled and international postgraduate researchers.
2. Ensure our postgraduate researchers have opportunities to enhance their knowledge by joining our interdisciplinary communities, including as part of our University Institutes and Research Networks.
3. Support postgraduate students being fully incorporated into departmental research cultures and activities.
4. Support our postgraduate students to develop their own research and professional networks, and to engage in university-wide postgraduate research community activities.
5. Develop a continued relationship with our postgraduate research community after completion of their studies as valued alumni and future partners and colleagues, including collecting data on employment destinations and research outputs
6. Work with the Guild and SU to ensure the effectiveness of PGR representation structures so that PGR student voice informs our plans and actions.

3. Our postgraduate researchers will thrive in a rich, inclusive and enabling training and development environment that will prepare them for their future careers, whether in academia or beyond

To achieve this, we will:

1. Continue to provide both specialist and generic training across our campuses for our postgraduate researchers to successfully complete their and prepare them for future employment in both academic and non-academic sectors. Further training and resources will be developed in identified areas of need, including: career skills, academic language and writing, research methods and fieldwork preparation.
2. Continue to provide our postgraduate researchers with opportunities to develop their teaching skills through postgraduate teaching assistant (PTA) roles. This will include provision of appropriate development support and oversight of PTA workload/research balance.

3. Develop a scheme that gives opportunities to some of our postgraduate researchers to spend up to 6 months as a paid member of university staff, during or immediately following their studies.
 4. Support the development of business, management and entrepreneurial skills of researchers, work with employers to facilitate future career opportunities, and increase opportunities for PGRs to connect with businesses.
 5. Continue to give access to tailored career advice for our postgraduate students for academic and broader careers.
 6. Ensure our postgraduate researchers are equipped to successfully navigate all aspects of the research environment, know how to be engaged and impactful researchers, and understand the requirements of responsible research and research integrity (including research ethics and the use of AI in research).
- 4. Our postgraduate research community will be grown sustainably through diversifying and aligning to our research strengths, recognising the need for diverse pathways and flexible degree options to suit varying needs.**
1. Ensure that we have a sustainable and cost-effective funding mode aligned to our research strengths, including diversifying funding sources for both home and international postgraduate researchers
 2. Offering flexibility in the range of postgraduate research degree models to support participation by a diverse student community, including developing new models for PGR delivery and new programmes with global partners.
 3. Offer a supportive and accessible recruitment experience from application to enrolment, with clear and timely communication with applicants.
 4. Develop a dedicated plan to increase access and participation in postgraduate research from underrepresented groups, ensuring our recruitment and admissions policies, processes and practices actively support those from underrepresented groups, and focusing university investment in postgraduate research on initiatives to support this plan.
- 5. Our Connected Doctoral College will bring together academic and professional services colleagues from across the university to support our postgraduate researcher community and deliver on these strategic objectives**

To achieve this, we will:

1. Clearly outline the responsibilities and accountabilities for all involved in the Connected Doctoral College to facilitate effective collaboration in support of postgraduate researchers. This will involve clearly communicating to PGRs where to access the relevant support for particular needs.
2. Constantly strive to learn and improve our plans, led by the Dean of the Doctoral College. This will involve engaging with and responding to PGR voice.