

GuildHE Response to UKRI Call for Input on New Deal for Postgraduate Research

17th May, 2022

About GuildHE

GuildHE is an officially recognised representative body for UK Higher Education. Our members are universities, university colleges and other institutions, each with a distinctive mission and priorities. They work closely with industries and professions and include major providers in technical and professional subject areas such as art, design and media, music and the performing arts; agriculture, food and the natural environment; the built environment; education; law; health and sports. Many are global organisations engaged in significant partnerships and producing locally relevant and world-leading research.

Introduction

The [New Deal for Postgraduate Research](#) is a long-term piece of work that aims to improve the experience and quality of postgraduate research training in the UK. The objectives of this call for input and for the new deal are to:

- 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.

Our response to the call has been shared in full below. This has been put together after gathering views from our members. We appreciate the support from our members and UKRI for engaging with us to articulate this response.

All responses will be viewed and published by UKRI in due course.

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Our Response

Section one: goals of postgraduate research training

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?

GuildHE Response: The motivation to undertake postgraduate research studies can vary for individuals. For some, it can be an opportunity to pursue further knowledge in topics they are passionate about. For others, it can be a route into certain careers, both academic and non-academic, as discussed above. The goals of contemporary postgraduate research training should be to equip individuals with the tools to develop in their discipline, creating new knowledge both in practice and in theory. It should be structured in a way that it allows successful training of students to develop their skills to carry out quality research and to enter different types of employment post PhD. Any contemporary models should acknowledge the opportunities of practice research and professional doctorates and how these approaches contribute more meaningfully to certain careers. It should also develop skills in management, leadership and organisation as transferable skills, valued not just in academia but outside of it too.

A broader question that can be expanded upon is the collective understanding in the UK Higher Education sector of the purpose behind a contemporary postgraduate research study. Is it an end point to a high quality research produced at the end of the three years, or is it to develop a well rounded researcher, enabled to carry out ethical, reproducible, impactful research in the future. A PhD has the potential to bring in valuable lived experiences of students, allowing them to reconcile those experiences with their positionality in that research, producing results that are more genuine and authentic. Supporting a structure that encourages that process is going to serve well for both diversity of researchers and outputs, with better and wider impact. Preparing for life after a viva should not just take place in the last year, but these conversations should take place early on. Any contemporary postgraduate study should consider how the goals of a PhD student can and often do change over time. In order to support this, supervisory relationships should be encouraged to be seen as a collaborative co-learning process.

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.

GuildHE Response: Currently, the routes into PhDs and funding models are aimed at rewarding those with high attainment in their undergraduate degree, and there is [evidence](#) that students from high tariff institutions are more likely to enter PGR studies. Furthermore, students from research intensive Institutions, such as those in the Russell Group, are more likely to get a funded PhD through the Research Councils; this is where funding for PGR study is concentrated. Current models systematically give preference to individuals from certain backgrounds, this will be unpacked further in the next section. Any future models and access should evaluate the pipeline into postgraduate study, considering it against the criteria of entry and the avenues of funding available.

Existing funding models put small and specialist institutions at a disadvantage. For example, these institutions do not have large amounts of QR funding to develop research environments that can realistically compete to secure block training grants from the Research Councils. QR funding provides the stability institutions need to keep developing excellent research, to build a track record of performance, and implement long-term research strategies ([see report by Wellcome](#)). Small and specialist institutions are closely aligned to the professions they serve and carry out research in specialisms such as creative arts, sports sciences, agriculture, and allied health; the research is often practical, translation, or applied, and aimed at stimulating growth in those economic sectors.

At specialist and smaller research active universities, such as those represented in the membership of GuildHE Research, the profile of a PhD candidate does not reflect the rest of the UK HE sector. They are more likely to be undertaking their doctoral research part time, they are more likely to be female, and they are more likely to be mature ([see GuildHE report](#)). Many students are also staff at the institution, or at similar organisations in the field. Many are pursuing research after a career in industry or in public services to consolidate these experiences. Postgraduate research at these institutions operates differently. Their motivation to carry out PhD is not always for the sake of career enhancement, but also to advance their skill or to pursue knowledge in subjects of personal interest to them. There are students that follow a typical route but there are many more students who come in from teaching or from industry and leave into careers beyond the academy.

The current structures and models limit the scope of opportunities delivered by small and specialist institutions and hence the potential benefit these PGRs can provide to their specialisms, local economy and the industries they are linked to. Alternative structures have benefitted institutions of this type in the past. One model could be embedding PhD students in local communities and creative practice communities, with funding working in a similar way to Collaborative Doctoral Awards (CDAs), with support ring-fenced for local community/practice partners. Developing a more diverse range of CDAs and opening them up to a wider network of external stakeholders could help to engage with students from more disadvantaged backgrounds, where this more collaborative approach could help them have a better sense of belonging. These could also support institutions based in rural and coastal areas and in small towns, linking to the aims of the levelling up agenda.

The current structure of Doctoral Training Partnerships (DTPs) puts small and specialist institutions at a disadvantage. Few have access to extensive resources to secure students through match funding, they are rarely included in partnerships, and where they are it is often not at the inception of the partnership, putting them in a position of diminished power in terms of DTP culture and organisation. It is inequitable for smaller institutions to be left out of DTPs purely due to their

operational constraints. The recent REF results demonstrate their ability to produce world-leading research and maintain outstanding research environments, and to do so in every region of the UK. Yet, it is difficult to see how these institutions can insert themselves into partnerships without funders pulling policy levers, especially as no institution could reasonably want to leave those that currently exist. Better consideration should be taken in DTP design to make these opportunities more proportionate to the size of institutions and therefore more accessible, encouraging the smaller ones to take part in and grow their PGR offer, and incentivising larger institutions to create partnerships with smaller and developing institutions. Alternatively, a collaboration between smaller and specialist institutions could be developed, offering DTP provision that is cognisant of and sympathetic to the characteristics of typical students and research methodologies at such institutions. Where these have been attempted in the past, the number of institutions needed to make the DTP viable has been the primary downfall. Here again, funders have the ability to overcome biases in the sector that stymie such proposals due to perceived risks and complexities, and an unfair comparison with very dissimilar institutions.

Just as important is considering the importance of continuation of participation in DTPs for smaller institutions. There have been instances in the past where a member has been discontinued from being a part of a DTP, adversely affecting the pipeline of students and the quality of the research environment. As we have seen in other instances where funding is removed, such as HEIF, it takes institutions a long time and a lot of work to catch up. It seems unfair to make those least well resourced work hardest to sustain themselves.

Structures under the New Deal could perhaps provide alternatives for institutions small and specialist who take on a lower number of PGRs. Furthermore, PGR funding should be incorporated in the levelling up agenda, allowing students to take support from their local providers.

Furthermore, any future structures should also engage in participatory research and its lack of acknowledgement currently. There is a growing body of work relating to how researchers can engage better in participatory research practices, particularly where this might be community based and result in meaningful impact (e.g. [the work of NCACE](#)).

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.

GuildHE Response: One of the challenges with regards to access to postgraduate study, finance, and support has been linked strongly to ethnic minorities. They are more likely to progress to higher education institutes in comparison to their white counterparts and make up for 23.9% of the undergraduate population and 22.0% of the PGTs in the UK. This representation falls to only 16.8% at PGR level (see [GuildHE Briefing on PGR Access and Participation](#)). Work has been undertaken by Research England and the OfS to address some of these issues. However, this work is only supporting a small part of the sector. It will be interesting to see what outcomes arise from the competition to improve access and participation for ethnic minorities and how those translate to an improvement in the rest of the sector. It will be vital for UKRI to consider how current and future interventions in this regard are promoting inclusivity in all parts of the sector, including small and specialist institutions.

There still are significant challenges with regards to access and participation in the context of equality, diversity and inclusion for postgraduate research study. It might be difficult to balance increased access, inclusivity and equal opportunities with the high level of academic and creative

expectations of a PhD. Where possible, mentorship can be offered to under represented groups to encourage participation in Council supported PhDs. A model similar to that run by [Royal Academy of Engineering for their fellowship programme](#). Mentorship programmes can also be run and supported by UKRI to encourage a diversification of individuals applying for and receiving support via DTPs and training networks.

Support should also be prioritised for institutional initiatives linked to local industries, in a way that institutions are able to serve their civic agendas alongside promoting economic, cultural and social development in their communities. Small and specialists are in close and reciprocal relationships to their communities and the industry sectors to which they are aligned. Therefore they offer PGRS a broad spectrum of research opportunities, including professional doctorates, applied research, and practice research, which may be attractive to students looking for alternatives to the traditional PhD pathway. These alternative pathways are currently not as recognised as the traditional models and routes with a perception of relatively lower prestige/ value attached to them. For example, in Osteopathy, the Prof Doc awarded in the UK would not be recognised as a research degree in Europe. Despite the format of a Prof Doc being advantageous for potential osteopathy research students, enabling individuals to research alongside their (typically) self-employed practice, and to incorporate materials that they develop from the mandatory professional development required by their regulated status into a portfolio of research-level enquiry, institutions offering pathways in research in osteopathy have started to return to more traditional PhD programmes to overcome these issues of parity of esteem.

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.

GuildHE Response: A central hub for finding funded PGR opportunities would be helpful to bridge gaps and motivate more students to pursue PGR study. Currently it is a patchwork approach, with opportunities advertised on jobs.ac.uk / findaphd / individual websites. For those not provided relevant support at institutions or for those who may want to pursue PGR study at a later stage, a streamlined central guide in writing applications might also be helpful.

The New Deal should consider the opportunities and learning that lie in collaborative PGRs. There are examples of interdisciplinary doctoral partnerships and networks that have driven quality

research and innovation. However, these models are mostly STEM focused. Expanding the collaborative doctoral programmes into different types of organisations and communities can be identified and supported. These are especially important for small and specialists where the PGR population is much smaller. More structured PhDs along the lines of the EdD could be considered by Doctoral Training Partnerships, with research methods training built into the first year of study.

As discussed before, GuildHE Institutions have a high number of mature students. They also have a higher number of practice researchers. These students do not necessarily take up PhDs for career development. Instead they can be considered as career breaks to deep dive into a subject of interest to them, and to develop themselves intellectually. While the routes out are streamlined for typical PhDs, it is harder for students who carry out their doctoral studies out of personal motivation to determine a suitable pathway after completion. This brings into discussion the wider understanding of the value of PhD education, as understood by researchers themselves and by the funding bodies. Research into how these kinds of candidates contribute to the wider society would be useful in determining the support they can be provided.

The considerations of routes in, through, and out should also consider the structural barriers in place at the moment. The process of obtaining Research Degree Awarding Powers can be long and unpredictable, and is untested in its new format and guidelines. Being awarded a doctorate under the name of the Institution they are studying at would certainly supplement the sense of belonging for the students. For some small specialists the possibility of RDAPs remains out of reach for a significant number of years due to the minimum threshold of 30 completions; clearly an institution taking 5-10 students per year on a part time basis will be waiting some time to reach that. And for all, there is an understandable level of scrutiny in this process, but not one that is replicated for those that have RDAPs already. Perhaps the funders should consider what lessons might be taken from the process to monitor the environments across the sector in new ways, in order to bring about better outcomes for PGR students (for more on this [see our response to the consultation on the future design of research assessment](#)).

Finally, to support transition to jobs for PGRs completing their studies, a funding pot can be considered, a short programme to help postdocs develop their publication profiles and bridging them into their first role. This could also take the shape of paid secondments. There is precedence set from the funding councils of supporting this transition.

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

GuildHE Response: In evaluating routes in, through, and out, considerations should be made of what impact different models could have for marginalised groups. If these considerations are not prioritised at this stage, then any subsequent competitions or attempts to bridge gaps for different groups will not be as effective.

Last year, GuildHE commissioned research to capture the lived experiences of ethnic minority PGRs in the UK. The report ([available here](#)), released in January 2022, highlights the current systemic challenges that prevent ethnic minority candidates from not just accessing PGR study, but their difference in experience during the study period and out of it. The results reiterate findings from other studies around a lack of sense of belonging for ethnic minority postgraduate research students. Students highlighted the lack of representation in the student body, academic staff and

curricula. They shared a lack of openness and fairness in formal and informal opportunities available to them. Students also felt that more could be done to facilitate their ability to establish connections with academia and industry who understand their specific experience.

The report also sets out a number of recommendations. UKRI can consider ways in which some of those can be incorporated into the New Deal. One such way could be to have smaller pots of funding available to support smaller networks, outside of DTPs and DTCs that institutions could apply for. For example, the report suggests putting together a GuildHE Research ethnic minority PGRs network. Even modest financial support to set up the network and support its pilot could go a long way for small and specialist institutions.

GuildHE Research also provides development and networking opportunities for PGRs from its member institutions. These include running doctoral schools, writing workshops, supporting a peer group and more. These opportunities for PhDs from small and specialist universities provide invaluable support to them, who can sometimes be one of the only few PGR students at their provider. These initiatives, if supplemented through flexible funding opportunities could scale up to support challenges faced by PGRs at institutions small and specialist in nature.

As highlighted in a [blog by GuildHE](#) “As a representative body for smaller and specialist institutions we are continually advocating for a higher education sector in which the full diversity of institutions are valued, included, and supported. Diversity is a real strength of the UK higher education and research ecosystem and promotes equality of opportunity, regardless of individuals’ background, social capital, location, preferred mode of study, or stage of life.” However, the current funding models lockout institutions of this type, by asking them to compete against universities with more traditional and established research environments.

Support should be provided for all higher education institutions, independent of how well they performed in an exercise 7 years ago. Small and specialists grow significantly between REF cycles, at a pace not comparable to research established universities ([see paragraph 85 and Recommendation 92 in this select committee report](#)). However, this growth can be significant in its own right. Studentships can be offered for candidates from local communities, linked not to REF based outcomes, but to how well that institution is connected to its local area.

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

GuildHE Response: The pandemic and cost of living crisis have reinforced that long term commitments like a PhD can be precarious, bound to change due to a variety of influences not in one's control. In some ways, these unforeseen challenges have normalised conversations around human capacity, both physical and mental. A consideration that can be made is for universities to provide pre admission information opportunities, akin to open days, to inform potential candidates of the requirements expected of them. To inform them of the potential hardships and difficulties that they may face, with exchange of experiences from those who have been through the process. There can be more opportunities for prospective PGRs centrally offered by funding bodies to access resources that can paint a realistic picture of a PGR study and how to prepare for it.

GuildHE Postgraduate researchers have a much higher proportion of part time students, almost 6:4. Some of these part time students are also staff members at the institution they are carrying out their studies in. Guidance can be provided centrally for institutions as to how to balance rights and support in these different responsibilities. Furthermore, different industries have different rights and conditions, and differing levels of comprehension of research and where it might sit within those structures. Centralised guidance in minimum standards accepted as a sector could standardise rights and support for all postgraduate researchers.

It is also imperative to have an element of flexibility in registration periods for postgraduate students, who are often working, have family and other caring commitments alongside their studies. The pandemic and the UKRI response to Covid-19 funding for students was a good example of how mitigating measures can be put in place. The cost of living crisis will affect many students and a rolling hardship fund helps them to remain studying when they have specific needs.

The GuildHE [report on lived experiences of ethnic minority PGRs](#), discussed before, brings to light a number of challenges faced by international students. The report highlights that certain groups such as ethnic minority students, mature students, and international students have a higher likelihood of having a lack of sense of belonging and an increased sense of isolation. There is a lack of awareness for international students of how the British system works in their academic and social lives. Furthermore, the immigration process that some internationals go through to get to the UK, and legitimise their presence here can be dehumanising. Some of these are regulations imposed not by institutions or funders, but by the home office. The report highlights that if this process is carried out with respect, further alienation of international students can be minimised. From applying for housing, and bank accounts, to navigating an education process quite rigid and partial in the way it rewards thoughts and ideas, international students could certainly use more support in integrating with both the social and education system in the UK.

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.

GuildHE Response: It would be useful to have sector understanding of how different models of funding, support during the study period and flexibility in that support affects the outcomes of PGR

students. It is acknowledged that with only a set amount of resources, there can be a trade off between providing unconditional support for a smaller number of students, or providing smaller pots of support to a wider range of candidates. However, the focus should first be on the system that already limits participation for certain groups, like those from a weaker socio-economic background, or those from an ethnic minorities. Any changes introduced that perpetuates these inequalities instead of mitigating them should be re-considered.

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.

GuildHE response: As highlighted, most students in GuildHE member institutions are not in receipt of UKRI funding. Some are self-funded, supplementing their income through other jobs (including work at their institution). Some are funded by the university. And there are other ways students are funding their PhD studies, many of which have been highlighted in the context above. Due to their limited funding and resources, GuildHE institutions are often creative in how that money is spent,

stretching their resources to deliver the maximum they can.

More PhD projects that offer collaboration can be encouraged. University of Worcester is increasingly encouraging colleagues to locate financial support from external partners for new PhD projects, by making sure that any university PhD scholarships they support are co-funded wherever possible. This can reduce the financial burden on the university (allowing them to support more students) but also encourage some increasingly innovative and useful research. It can also allow institutions to develop more lasting relationships with external partners.

Bath Spa University also shares support for three year Knowledge Transfer Partnerships. Such models are useful for attracting business and industry investment into PhDs, but the time pressures on students to complete are stressful. Perhaps a longer scheme, targeting post-doc study could be considered. With a fourth and final year funded 100% through the KTP, to enable students to reach viva stage more easily, once the priorities of the research for the business involved have been addressed.

Consideration can also be given to providing a travel allowance for students, a cost that can be exponentially expensive, so that students don't have to move to take up opportunities. Furthermore, universities can be awarded funding fee waivers, not just studentships, opening up opportunities for people to study locally on a part-time basis. Furthermore, institutions can also be supported to offer evening PhDs so that students who are working full time or during the week can still access these classes. Similar to the model provided through Executive MBA's.

Doctoral training partnerships often involve a range of partners, and there are internal politics involved in the consortia which may benefit partners with greater research intensity, as they are likely to have more students, greater investments and so on. Perhaps an independent assessor appointment could be considered, to aid transparency and to ensure equity of decision making processes, regardless of perceived risks or sense of importance.

Another element highlighted through our discussions is whether those students associated with DTPs or in receipt of Research Council fundings have an undue advantage over self funded candidates, or those supported through other means. Association with DTPs could mean that those students have access to better opportunities to promote their work, to network better, and to have access to additional funding. Between 2016-2019, of the total 19,868 PhD-funded studentships awarded by UKRI research councils collectively, only 245 (1.2%) were awarded to Black or Black Mixed students (See [report by Leading Routes](#)). One has to question in this case if privilege can be redeemed between different groups of students, if the system puts them at a disadvantage from the start.

On the flip side, it is worth considering reasons behind self funding of PhD students, and the profile of candidates who pursue that route. Are there any freedoms or advantages associated with self funding? In a discussion with a peer researcher of the lived experiences report by GuildHE, it was highlighted that sometimes the ethnic minority PGRs do not pursue a funded PhD, by DTPs or by Councils, purely because they do not offer research in the kinds of topics ethnic minority students could be interested in. This, combined with the fact that some studies highlight supervisors dismissing research topics of interest to some ethnic minority students, one can wonder if self funding is a way for some groups of students to gain some agency.

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.

GuildHE response: The pool of funding across higher education institutions should be diversified to support and strengthen pockets of research excellence, wherever they are found. Particularly for institutions who remain locked out of doctoral training partnerships. Positive action should also be prioritised, as seen in the Research England and the Office for Students competition for access and experience of ethnic minority PGRs. Such positive actions should be made accessible to all kinds of institutions, outside of models of competition, and be extended to support students who fulfil the widening participation criteria. Furthermore, continuing with a UKRI led scheme across councils for individual students to apply for places at HEIs not part of consortia would help with this issue

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

GuildHE Research: Many aspects of the New Deal aim to address fundamental issues in UK society and in the Higher Education Sector. While a New Deal is to be welcomed, it will have to operate within our current social, cultural and political contexts. It begs the question of how significant changes can be made to postgraduate experience within these contexts?

If the models of funding, especially around DTPs and DTCs are not reviewed, small and specialist institutions, and the kind of diverse PGRs and important research they support will remain to be left out. There is competition in all aspects of funding, in QR through REF, in other smaller pots of funding, in HEIF, and more. However, such a model of competition is not sustainable for training of PGRs. We have to be geographically diverse, culturally diverse, subject diverse, and support the full pipeline of doctoral awards. If models of funding continue to remain competitive, and aren't diversified to include alternatives such as targeted funds, incentives to collaborate across scales of institution, or co-creation, we are failing before we have started. UKRI can consider more proportionate means of funding, linked perhaps to some sort of a formula allocation, or to postgraduate outcomes and other desirable attributes. Otherwise, smaller providers will not get a chance to build a track record they need to progress.

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 underrepresented 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?

GuildHE Response: The GuildHE research consortium currently represents 30 higher education institutions, spread geographically, present in rural and coastal areas. They provide research opportunities in a variety of specialisms, such as arts, drama, agriculture, veterinary sciences, hospitality, osteopathy, sports sciences and more. We are open to engaging with the UKRI in establishing connections to this unique group of PGRS. Furthermore, we also have a higher proportion of professional doctorate students and practice researchers. Engagement with such students can develop more effectiveness and bespoke measures of rigour, originality and significance for these kinds of alternative routes.

Furthermore, for those who have recently transitioned out of a PhD study or for those in their final year, engagement can gather input on how they can be better supported through their research study, and better prepared for their careers ahead, both in and beyond academia. Engagement can also be considered with communities and third sector organisations to seek their views on how funded participatory PhDs could be developed. UKRI can also consider widening the studentship funding pool to those HEIs that demonstrate 3* and 4* research in REF - this is in addition to the PGR element of HEQR, which is predominantly used to support postdoc research environment and culture in small HEIs.

Finally, in gathering evidence of challenges faced by different groups of PGRs in access and participation, UKRI must consider that the operational context for smalls and specialists is different from research intensive institutions. For such institutions, the culture is not driven by competition. Many times, improvement is guided under the assumption that all institutions have a certain level of research maturity. Such generalisations can also be made for certain communities. We have found that using an external moderator in our discussions with a diverse group, minimises the chance of that happening. We have sought moderation from Lou Chiu in order to guide some of the difficult discussions we have had on anti-racism and allyship.