
British Academy response to UKRI's call for input on a New Deal for Postgraduate Research

17 May 2022

Background

This call for input formed an engagement exercise, focused on doctoral training in particular, as part of UKRI's long-term aims to improve the experience of and quality of postgraduate research training in the UK. The New Deal was a commitment of the government's Research & Development (R&D) Roadmap and formed part the R&D People and Culture Strategy published in July 2021.

The Academy has previously responded to two related consultations on the R&D Roadmap. The first was a contribution to discussion on how to achieve the ambitions set out in the Roadmap (August 2020).¹ Earlier this year, the Academy also responded to a review of the research, development and innovation (RDI) landscape (February 2022).²

This response to UKRI's call for input was informed by the points made in these responses, as well as highlighting relevant outputs from the Academy's Higher Education and Skills policy programmes. This includes the report setting out *Good Practice for Providing Careers Guidance for Postgraduate Research Students* and the case studies on the pathways of former doctoral graduates from SHAPE subjects which accompanied the report.³ This was also supported by evidence taken from external sources, including outcomes of Advance HE's Postgraduate Research Experience Survey.⁴

¹ The British Academy (2020), *UK Research and Development Roadmap: A response from the British Academy*.

² The British Academy (2022), *Research, Development and Innovation (RDI) Landscape Review: A response from the British Academy*.

³ The British Academy (2020), *Good Practice in Providing Careers Guidance for Postgraduate Research Students*; The British Academy (2020), *Case studies: the career pathways of doctoral graduates*.

⁴ Neves, J. (2018), *2018 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey*, Advance HE; Pitkin, M. (2021), *2021 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey*, Advance HE.

Response

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

As the national academy for the humanities and social sciences, the British Academy believes that contemporary postgraduate research training should be relevant and accessible to the full breadth of the UK's postgraduate research community: across a diversity of researchers, disciplines, and modes of study. This is essential to not only the successful completion of the doctorate, but also to enabling postgraduate researchers to appreciate and maximise their choices and opportunities through making the most of the skills and attributes that studying at this high level develops, leading to rewarding and successful careers in academia or beyond.

The Academy supports endeavours to embed research training opportunities that encompass experience and training in non-academic settings alongside traditional research training. A goal for contemporary postgraduate research training should be to provide for a diversity of postdoctoral careers. For a variety of reasons, including different career ambitions, personal circumstances, and issues such as academic job precarity, as many as 70% of doctoral graduates across all subject areas leave academia within three and a half years of graduating.⁵ Additionally, in the most recent iteration of the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES), postgraduate researchers clearly expressed a desire for a wider range of training and professional development with a focus on what comes after the PhD, aside from a purely academic career.⁶ As shown in Academy research, best practice in training and career guidance for postgraduate researchers centres this community's voice, and encourages co-creation of training opportunities.⁷ The report – *Good Practice in Providing Careers Guidance for Postgraduate Research Students* – sets out key features of good practice in training and careers guidance for postgraduate researchers and offers specific examples of good practice that already exist across the sector and higher education institutions.⁸

As the UK Government continues to uplift investment in Research & Development (R&D) to reach 2.4% of GDP, it will be vital to support research and innovation across the whole pipeline. The Academy believes that postgraduate researchers must have opportunities to develop skills as co-creators of knowledge and positive research cultures. It will be essential for the entire R&D ecosystem that research training embeds such opportunities for postgraduate students across all disciplines. Placements or internships with industry and employers are much less common for postgraduate research students in SHAPE disciplines. Not only are such opportunities important for their training, development, and employment prospects but, as our range of case studies further demonstrates, postgraduate researchers from SHAPE disciplines bring high level skills and insights that will be essential to meeting Research & Development targets.⁹

However, barriers to access and a potential “brain drain” from higher education are concerning, especially with regards to EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion). Contemporary postgraduate research training should contribute to current endeavours to improve research culture in the UK. The Academy has been pleased to see and support such endeavours, including through the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers and the Concordat on Research Integrity, as well as more recent discussions on attracting and retaining skilled and talented researchers in the UK. It will be vital that a New Deal for postgraduate research aligns with and promotes existing researcher development initiatives and frameworks, which themselves seek to enhance and support a positive research culture in the UK, including for postgraduate researchers.

⁵ Hancock, S (17 February 2020), [“The employment of PhD graduates in the UK: what do we know?”](#)

⁶ Pitkin, M. (2021), *2021 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey*, Advance HE, see pp. 16-19.

⁷ The British Academy (2020), [Good Practice in Providing Careers Guidance for Postgraduate Research Students](#).

⁸ [Ibid.](#)

⁹ The British Academy (2020), *Good Practice in Providing Careers Guidance for Postgraduate Research Students*, The British Academy (2020), [Case studies: the career pathways of doctoral graduates](#).

Section 2 – Areas of focus

Models and access

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.

The Academy agrees with the current areas listed under models and access, including funding, supervision, and award. The inclusion of supervision as one of the areas being considered is critical as, despite being an important and central relationship in the postgraduate research experience, the role of and support for supervisors can be overlooked.

It would also be useful to explore models of best practice in training and career development for postgraduate students. Satisfaction with professional development has seen a decline in the past 3 years and was the area with the largest decrease in satisfaction between 2020 and 2021 in the PRES survey.¹⁰ The qualitative findings from the PRES corroborate the Academy's own findings that postgraduates require career development that is adjusted to their different needs and career stages (in comparison with undergraduate students).¹¹ As most postgraduate researchers will go on to have careers outside of academia,¹² it will be vital for a postgraduate New Deal to consider tailored, diverse career development models and best practice to support postgraduate professional development alongside funding, supervision and award.

Issues and concerns around “access” should also include the ability of researchers to move in and out of academia. The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) response to their review of the PhD in social sciences aims to address this issue, alongside employability and career development, by introducing Research in Practice, a scheme which includes the opportunity for a 3-month placement in academia, policy, business or third sector organisations.¹³ The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, which includes postgraduate researchers in its definition of “researchers”, also has mobility as a leading principle, where “researchers must be equipped and supported to be adaptable and flexible in an increasingly diverse global research environment and employment market”.¹⁴ The Academy would encourage a focus on “access” in take into account these changes to access models, and emphasis on mobility, in the sector.

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.

The Academy believes that an important challenge for the New Deal will be to ensure that training and guidance is accessible to all postgraduate researchers, regardless of discipline, source of funding, mode of study or type of doctoral award, so as not to unfairly disadvantage any groups. As has already been identified by UKRI in setting out this consultation, there is a need for members of the postgraduate research community to have flexibility within their doctoral programme model to access training and career development opportunities that embed knowledge exchange beyond academia.

Many postgraduate researchers, particularly in the humanities and social sciences, have cited time constraints as a major barrier to engagement with training and development and it is important to

¹⁰ Pitkin, M. (2021), *2021 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey*, Advance HE, see pp. 18-19.

¹¹ The British Academy (2020), *Good Practice in Providing Careers Guidance for Postgraduate Research Students*.

¹² Hancock, S (17 February 2020), “The employment of PhD graduates in the UK: what do we know?”

¹³ Economic and Social Research Council, (2021), *Review of the PhD in the Social Sciences: ESRC Response*.

¹⁴ <https://researcherdevelopmentconcordat.ac.uk/>.

acknowledge that the doctoral cycle includes “pinch points” throughout which require greater reserves of mental and emotional energy – something which can be compounded for those with additional caring, work, or other responsibilities in addition to their studies.¹⁵ As noted in our response to question 2, the most recent iteration of the PRES survey also shows a drop in satisfaction for both the research skills and professional development aspects of the research degree experience.¹⁶ Embedding training and guidance that account for different disciplines and phases in doctoral programmes is also one of the key elements of good practice, which the Academy set out in its document on good practice in careers guidance for postgraduate researchers.¹⁷

Not all higher education institutions are signed up to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, and not all postgraduate researchers will have access to training and other provision from doctoral training partnerships and comparable initiatives. As noted in the consultation, many postgraduate researchers are self-funded, so particular consideration should be given to how self-funded postgraduates can best be supported and afforded access to training and development opportunities already offered to their funded peers. Initiatives such as the British Academy's Early Career Researcher Network may provide useful models for inclusivity.¹⁸

As mentioned in our response to question 2, supervision plays a central role in the doctoral experience for postgraduate researchers and can have an impact well beyond graduation. As noted in the most recent PRES survey, in addition to more tailored support, postgraduate researchers emphasise a need for greater support from their supervisors when it comes to training, careers, and development.¹⁹ It is important that supervisors acknowledge the importance of training and career development for their students, alongside their subject of research, but supervisors themselves have significant demands and increasing pressures on their time and the roles they are expected to play. It will, therefore, be important to consider the requirements of appropriate support and training for supervisors, alongside those for postgraduate researchers, as part of the New Deal. The UK Council for Graduate Education's “Researcher Supervision Recognition Programme” and “Good Supervisory Practice Framework” may offer examples which could be adopted across the sector.²⁰

Finally, assessment and evidence related to the impact of award models should recognise this across the breadth of disciplinary study, including SHAPE disciplines. The Academy would highlight the Arts and Humanities Research Council's (AHRC) studentships awarded through the Collaborative Doctoral Partnerships, which are similar to the industry-based models common in STEM disciplines. These collaborative award models include partnership between universities and major heritage and cultural organisations, such as the British Library and National Museum of Scotland, to support students to undertake collaborative research projects. This partnership is rewarded by the impact across exhibitions, conservations projects and other areas knowledge exchange, and the postgraduate researchers themselves benefit from embedded training and real-world experience of a non-higher education industry environment, alongside their research training.²¹

¹⁵ The British Academy (2020), *Good Practice in Providing Careers Guidance for Postgraduate Research Students*, especially 1.2; Vitae and Thouaille, M-A. (2017), “One size does not fit all. Arts and Humanities doctoral and early career researchers' professional development survey”, The Careers Research and Advisory Centre (CRAC) Limited. <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/news/vitae-news-2017/new-report-onesizedoesnotfitall/>

¹⁶ Pitkin, M. (2021), *2021 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey*, Advance HE, p. 17.

¹⁷ The British Academy (2020), *Good Practice in Providing Careers Guidance for Postgraduate Research Students*.

¹⁸ For more information, see: <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/early-career-researcher-network/>

¹⁹ Pitkin, M. (2021), *2021 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey*, Advance HE, pp. 17-19.

²⁰ For more information, see: <https://ukcge.ac.uk/resources/research-supervision-recognition-programme>

²¹ The British Academy (2020), *Good Practice in Providing Careers Guidance for Postgraduate Research Students*, see: p. 30.

Routes in, through and out

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

The Academy welcomes further investigation into postgraduate pathways through doctoral education, including the reasons why people decide to undertake postgraduate research.

In addition to areas outlined in the consultation document, the Academy would welcome further exploration of the importance of supervisory support through the different pathways of postgraduate research training. As supervisory support is vital to facilitating a good research culture, positive career outcomes, and job satisfaction, a New Deal for postgraduate research should consider the need to support supervisors in this role.²² As noted in our response to questions 2 and 3, supervision is essential in encouraging and supporting students to engage in career development throughout their doctoral study. However, more can be done to support supervisors through the myriad of functions they provide for students, including career development, as well as the many other competing demands on their time. The UK Research Supervision Survey 2021 found that supervisors felt support was lacking for providing advice on non-academic careers, as well as skills to support diversity and provide pastoral care for candidates.²³ The important role of supervisory support for postgraduate development and access to opportunities – and how supervisors can be best supported – should be considered as part of “routes in, through and out”.

A New Deal should encompass a broad range of training which recognises the high-level skills that postgraduate researchers develop. The Academy's case study report on the career pathways of SHAPE doctoral graduates demonstrates the breadth and depth of skills fostered by postgraduate research training, which are utilised across different sectors and career paths.²⁴ In addition to the evidence gathered as part of these case studies, support for opportunities to develop experience beyond academia, such as the AHRC's Collaborative Doctoral Partnerships,²⁵ demonstrate that pathways through doctoral degrees are rarely linear. A postgraduate New Deal should be aware of the non-linearity of postgraduate research training – as is already encouraged by UKRI and other funding streams – as an additional area to explore under “routes in, through and out”.

In considering the amount of time required to complete a research qualification, attention should be paid to the range of doctoral pathways that exist, as well as the different circumstances and modes of study of doctoral students themselves. Any attempt at a “one-size-fits-all” approach to doctoral timelines will inevitably disadvantage certain groups and individuals, and may also disadvantage certain disciplines and areas of study.

The role of higher education institutions within the system is both as research-performing organisations and as providers of a steady supply of skilled researchers, including postgraduates, with essential skills needed for business and innovation in all sectors of the economy.²⁶ The post-submission period, where postgraduate researchers move from one sphere of activity into the other, is often a point at which there is less access to support. The Academy would, therefore, also encourage a New Deal to provide greater support for postgraduate researchers, including those from SHAPE disciplines, in this crucial transitional period. We have already cited the range of

²² The British Academy (2020), *Good Practice in Providing Careers Guidance for Postgraduate Research Students*, especially 1.3.2

²³ UK Council for Graduate Education (2021), *UK Research Supervision Survey 2021 Report*, especially pp. 36-37.

²⁴ The British Academy (2020), *Case studies: the career pathways of doctoral graduates*.

²⁵ This scheme offers students the opportunity to work outside of the university environment in collaboration with a non-higher education partner. See: <https://www.ukri.org/councils/ahrc/career-and-skills-development/supporting-universities-and-consortia-to-develop-careers/collaborative-doctoral-partnerships-cdp-scheme/>

²⁶ The British Academy (2022), “British Academy Response to the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee Inquiry on Delivering a UK Science and Technology Strategy”, see especially question 5.

pathways that postgraduate researchers can take, and not all of those will follow the same timescales. Greater support offered to postgraduate research students from the full range of disciplines as they transition into becoming early career researchers (ECRs) will also help to raise the quality and diversity of the ECR community and thus the excellence of SHAPE research – which will in turn benefit both academia and other employment sectors more broadly.

Question 5: What challenges should we prioritise under routes in, through and out? If you have any specific evidence to support your input, please provide a brief summary and – where available – any relevant links.

The New Deal should consider the challenge of providing adequate support and opportunities to postgraduate researchers across different disciplines and modes of doctoral study, as well as how this range of students might be best supported by tailored training. The most recent HESA data suggests that part-time postgraduate study is increasing slightly after a lull in the early 2010s – it will be vital to be inclusive of this postgraduate student demographic, who will experience a different route “through” the doctoral process compared to other students.²⁷ The Academy believes that this student group’s needs should be recognised and considered under UKRI’s “routes in, through and out” focus area.

The 2021 PRES found that satisfaction with professional development is declining among respondents – only 67 per cent of postgraduate researchers reported receiving the support they needed during the Covid-19 pandemic, and only 60 per cent report that their institution values and responds to feedback from research students.²⁸ These issues go to the core of many of the areas suggested for consideration as part of the New Deal, and for which UKRI is requesting evidence. The Academy’s 2020 report *Good Practice in Providing Careers Guidance for Postgraduate Research Students* – which has been cited elsewhere in this response – notes that co-production with postgraduate researchers can help to produce training which is most appropriate and accessible to a broad spectrum of the cohort, in terms of modes of study, discipline, and accessibility considerations.²⁹ Research conducted at the University of Oxford also found that the most popular and best received careers events and resources (both those developed centrally by the institution or more subject-specific events organised by departments) were those which had been co-created with the postgraduate research student community.³⁰

Co-production can also bring benefits in terms of greater representation for those groups who are often less visible in provision or in academia more generally, particularly those who are from Black, Asian or minority ethnic backgrounds – a considerable proportion of whom enrol on doctoral programmes on a part-time basis.³¹ Some examples of best practice are set out in the Academy’s report, cited above.

The Academy believes that a New Deal should also consider and support current postgraduate researchers themselves, in offering ready-made networks for discussion of matters such as career options, aspirations, and concerns. Given the diversity of pathways, disciplines, and even ages which can exist within a cohort, this is a valuable source of experience and insight.³² A continuing theme in surveys of and engagement with PGRs is a dissatisfaction with the opportunities PGRs have for discussion and interaction with their peers, as well as opportunities for involvement with the wider research community, so making better use of existing peer-support networks would help to address this.³³ Support networks are a key feature of the Academy’s Early Career Researcher

²⁷ HESA (2022), “Who’s Studying in HE?”, see: “HE student enrolments at HE and FE providers by level of study and HE provider type”.

²⁸ Pitkin, M (2021), *2021 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey*, Advance HE, see p. 23.

²⁹ The British Academy (2020), *Good Practice in Providing Careers Guidance for Postgraduate Research Students*.

³⁰ Bray, R. and Shaw, R. (2017), “Supporting PhD students to stop postponing and start exploring career options”, *Phoenix*, Issue 151, *Supporting Postgraduate Students*, p. 11.

³¹ The British Academy (2020), *Good Practice in Providing Careers Guidance for Postgraduate Research Students*, p. 22.

³² The British Academy (2020), *Good Practice in Providing Careers Guidance for Postgraduate Research Students*, p. 17.

³³ British Academy Early Career Researcher Network; Neves, J. (2018), *2018 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey*, Advance HE; Pitkin, M. (2021), *2021 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey*, Advance HE.

Network and researchers have embraced the opportunities for discussion and interaction with more experienced researchers.

This offers a model for collaborative engagement that would benefit PGRs as they move through their studies and onto different career paths. The Academy has produced a series of case studies of former SHAPE doctoral graduates who have pursued a diverse range of career pathways as a resource to accompany the report on good practice for careers guidance. Not only do such resources show current postgraduate researchers, or those thinking about doctoral study, the range of pathways that this can open up, but they also can also address challenges in very relatable ways and give visual representation to a range of experiences.³⁴

Rights and Conditions

Question 6: Are there any additional areas that we should consider in our work on rights and conditions? Please state why. If you have any specific evidence to support your input, please provide a brief summary and – where available – any relevant links.

A significant and ongoing issue for postgraduate researchers is their location in something of a “grey area” between students and academic staff. This often means that their voice is not heard in either capacity, leading to dissatisfaction with their status and associated rights and conditions. Many postgraduate research students are employed in teaching capacities by higher education institutions, and this experience is a key aspect of skills development at this point in their careers.³⁵ However, there is little formal (as opposed to anecdotal) evidence related to their experience of this employment; for example, the PRES survey does not include teaching opportunities and experiences providing teaching provision in its survey questions for students, rather discussion of teaching tends to relate to students’ experiences with their supervisors.³⁶

Yet research has shown that university teaching staff are at high risk of burnout and there have been calls to better understand how postdoctoral students’ mental health may be impacted.³⁷ There are also concerns in the sector that precarity and poor working conditions are forcing researchers to leave academia, which will impact the long-term health of UK research excellence and research culture.³⁸ The Academy would therefore encourage a UKRI New Deal for Postgraduate Research to explore and evidence the impact of postgraduate teaching experiences as part of its exploration of routes “through and out” of postdoctoral research training, alongside considerations of rights and conditions.

There are already frameworks and initiatives in place to support researchers (including postgraduate researchers) and enhance research culture more broadly, and in doing so they aim to address many of the challenges which we have highlighted in our responses as part this call for input. One such is the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers.³⁹ This includes principles for institutions, funders, managers of researchers and researchers themselves, covering matters such as research environment and culture, employment, and professional and career development. Not all higher education institutions are currently signatories to this Concordat, however, and work on a New Deal for postgraduate researchers should consider encouraging wider sector adoption and commitment to such frameworks.

³⁴ The British Academy (2020), *Case studies: the career pathways of doctoral graduates*.

³⁵ Teaching appears under D1, D3 of the Vitae Researcher Development Framework: <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/vitae-publications/rdf-related/researcher-development-framework-rdf-vitae.pdf/view>, see pp. 17 and 20.

³⁶ Pitkin, M. (2021), *2021 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey*, Advance HE, see pp. 29 and 34-35.

³⁷ Guthrie, S. et al (2017), *Understanding mental health in the research environment*, RAND Corporation, see: p.xv-xc.

³⁸ Research Professional (May 2022), “UKRI fellows push for culture change in academia”.

³⁹ <https://researcherdevelopmentconcordat.ac.uk/>

Question 7: What challenges should we prioritise in our work on rights and conditions? If you have any specific evidence to support your input, please provide a brief summary and – where available – any relevant links.

A postgraduate New Deal should consider the important role of higher education institutions in expanding the available data on postgraduate researchers and their pathways after graduation. As we have already addressed in previous responses as part of this call for input, a key area to prioritise will be evidencing and understanding postgraduates' experience of employment within higher education institutions; how this employment impacts their rights and conditions; and if these rights and conditions include support, adequate remuneration and professional development. While postgraduate researchers are not classified as "staff" in the UK, they are across much of European higher education and these international examples may prove useful in developing the New Deal. Our report on best practice in career guidance for doctoral researchers highlighted the professional development programme PHACE (PhD Activating Career Event) at Utrecht University, in the Netherlands.⁴⁰ The university considers postgraduate researchers as employees, and the compulsory WORK2WORK programme aims to prevent unemployment – if candidates have not found a job, this programme offers re-employment coaching approximately 4 months before the end of their contract.⁴¹

Greater understanding of the employment experiences of postgraduate researchers and their pathways after graduation will be of benefit to institutions and the sector more broadly in designing and offering appropriate guidance and training.⁴² Ideally, an institution will provide tailored advice for each of their separate student cohorts, including postgraduate taught and postgraduate research.⁴³ These groups are at very different stages of their academic, personal, and professional development, and their motivations for study and ambitions for careers will also vary significantly. Co-production with these cohorts can help to ensure that the advice provided is appropriate and relevant, as well as giving a sense of ownership to the postgraduate researchers themselves.

Many postgraduate researchers will also experience precarious employment as teaching assistants and postgraduate teachers. As noted in our response to the previous question, while this is symptomatic of a wider sector issue with precarious contracts, this has particularly negative impacts for certain groups within the research community – particularly self-funded postgraduate researchers, people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, women, and those from Black, Asian or minority ethnic backgrounds.⁴⁴ There are important equality, diversity and inclusion issues that accompany precarity, which impact the mental and financial health of individuals, as well as broader issues around research culture and feeling valued.

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

The Academy is pleased to note the focus on financial support and funding for postgraduate researchers. Seeking funding for postgraduate research can be complex and, due to limited availability, present a barrier to many talented researchers. Poor access to funding and financial support is a particular challenge for SHAPE postgraduate researchers due to the relatively low levels of domestic funding given to SHAPE disciplines; in 2020-2021, the two main research

⁴⁰ The British Academy (2020), *Case studies: the career pathways of doctoral graduates*, especially p. 15.

⁴¹ For further information, please see: <https://www.uu.nl/en/organisation/phd-candidates/phace/career-programmes-before-the-end-of-your-phd>

⁴² The British Academy (2020), *Case studies: the career pathways of doctoral graduates*.

⁴³ The British Academy (2020), *Good Practice in Providing Careers Guidance for Postgraduate Research Students*.

⁴⁴ The British Academy (2019), *Consultation Response on the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers*

councils for SHAPE disciplines received just 5.1 per cent of the UKRI budget combined.⁴⁵ The Academy would encourage the New Deal to deliver increased transparency in how doctoral training partnership funding is allocated across the seven disciplinary research councils, and to protect funding for SHAPE disciplines. In addition, reducing barriers by clearly signposting where there are opportunities and funding that is flexible to individual circumstances is essential if a talented and diverse research community is to be supported.

In addition, the individual circumstances of postgraduate researchers are variable and so a “one-size-fits-all” model of funding can be problematic. It is encouraging that there is a move towards extending UKRI postgraduate research funding to cover longer periods and the use of discretion on an individual basis.⁴⁶ As pathways into, through and out of postgraduate research training are variable, alongside the importance of supporting collaborative experiences with sectors beyond academia, restrictive funding models can create barriers to such opportunity. The Academy would therefore support further exploration with postgraduate research and higher education institutional models of funding, while promoting wider financial support for postgraduate researchers from all backgrounds and disciplines.

In considering the funding available for postgraduate researchers, and the diversity of funding sources which support the research system, it is critical to consider how this interacts with the funding available for training and resources. As noted in response to previous questions and in the consultation document, UKRI does not fund the majority of postgraduate researchers, meaning that the development of a New Deal should prioritise – regardless of financial support for the course – funding for training and resources which are accessible to all postgraduate researchers. Linked to these considerations is the accessibility of training opportunities, and the need for increased awareness over the time required to undertake wider training and development. As noted elsewhere in our response, it is common for many postgraduate researchers to undertake employment alongside their research, either through posts within their institution or external employment, impacting the amount of time some researchers can invest in additional training, which has equality, diversity and inclusion implications.

Question 9: What challenges should we prioritise in our work on funding and financial support? If you have any specific evidence to support your input, please provide a brief summary and – where available – any relevant links.

As highlighted in previous responses, the tension between time to complete research verses time to invest in development remains a challenge. In order to invest in a sustainable and talented research workforce, priority must be given to providing sufficient flexibility in models of funding to support postgraduate researchers in all their development needs. Such consideration should be built into the funding and financial support models for postgraduate support to foster agility and flexibility. This would allow for ongoing support within the duration of doctoral study, as personal and work circumstances can change.

Furthermore, there needs to be greater attention and focus applied to the differences in the opportunity available across higher education institutions and different funding statuses. The current, uneven landscape of postgraduate research risks creating a broad and unfair range in opportunities for development for researchers, undermining efforts to increase research excellence capacity in the system. Varied levels and types of development may also undermine any efforts to improve the mobility of researchers, both between institutions and out of academia.

⁴⁵ UKRI (2021), *Annual Report and Accounts 2020-2021*.

⁴⁶ Economic and Social Research Council (2022), *Review of the PhD in the Social Sciences: ESRC Response*, see p.6.

The Academy would therefore encourage UKRI to use this opportunity and focus on a New Deal, which offers a moment in time for the sector, to explore how funding and wider financial (and non-financial) support can create greater equality of opportunity for all postgraduate researchers.

Overall approach

Question 10: Are there any areas that we could usefully focus on, or other questions that we could usefully explore, not covered within our four focus areas? Please state why and provide links to evidence where possible.

The Academy is pleased that the focus on a New Deal for postgraduate researchers is putting a spotlight on this cohort. We would welcome further consideration of postgraduate researchers and the doctorate (of whatever discipline, type, and mode) within the wider context of the research and higher education landscape. Many problems of access and participation for certain demographics begin long before postgraduate-level study and so must be looked at in their wider context.⁴⁷ Similarly, issues of insecure employment conditions will impact many postgraduate researchers' experiences as early career researchers after their doctorates.⁴⁸ While not all will continue in academia after their doctorate, such considerations may impact upon decisions to pursue doctoral study. More joined up working and thinking across research and in the sector more broadly should, therefore, also consider postgraduate researchers as important contributors to the entire research ecosystem.

The pandemic has had a significant impact upon university research activities,⁴⁹ including for postgraduate researchers with varying levels of support allowances provided, whether by institutions or funders.⁵⁰ These experiences will not only have impacted current postgraduate researchers, but may also impact upon the decisions of current postgraduate taught or undergraduate students to continue to doctoral-level study. The PRES 2021 found a strong correlation between the level of satisfaction with quality of academic and other support during the COVID-19 pandemic and lower scores with overall satisfaction in 2021.⁵¹ While postgraduate researchers' satisfaction with supervision increased in 2021, with satisfaction with supervisory contact and feedback remaining consistent across the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns, qualitative excerpts suggest that this improvement was not consistently experienced.⁵² A New Deal for postgraduate research should therefore also consider what lessons can be learned from the experience of the pandemic and its impacts.

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

This initial consultation has contained very broad "areas of focus", which have clear and considerable overlaps and complex relationships with one another, which may be made invisible by siphoning focus. As these areas of focus are particularly relevant to equality, diversity and inclusivity issues, the Academy would welcome the opportunity to engage with the development of a New Deal as its remit becomes more focussed. In particular, we look forward to facilitating conversations with postgraduate researchers and early career researchers in SHAPE disciplines, and the wider SHAPE sector.

⁴⁷ ESRC (2021), *Review of the PhD in the Social Sciences*, see p. 48.

⁴⁸ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (May 2021), 'Reducing the Precarity of Academic Research Careers', *OECD Science, Technology and Industry Policy Papers*, No. 113, pp. 8-9.

⁴⁹ The British Academy (2021), *Shaping the COVID Decade: Addressing the long term societal impacts of COVID-19*, see pp. 31-34.

⁵⁰ The 2021 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey found that only two thirds of PGRs were satisfied that they had received the support they needed in relation to the pandemic or that their institution had worked to ensure the quality of their academic experience. See Pitkin, M. (2021), *2021 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey*, Advance HE, pp. 23-25.

⁵¹ Pitkin, M. (2021), *2021 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey*, Advance HE, see p. 25.

⁵² Pitkin, M. (2021), *2021 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey*, Advance HE, pp. 35-36.