

To Vice Chancellors and Pro Vice Chancellors



RESEARCH
COUNCILS UK

Research Councils UK

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Dear Colleague

**RCUK: STATEMENT OF EXPECTATIONS FOR DOCTORAL TRAINING
JOINT VISION FOR COLLABORATIVE TRAINING**

Over the past year Research Councils have been working to harmonise aspects of their doctoral training support. I am writing to share the progress to date and also outline plans for further harmonisation.

As a first step we have developed a Statement of Expectations for Doctoral Training which lays out common principles for the support of all Research Council students. We plan to use this as the basis for ongoing discussion and assurance processes with Universities around their doctoral training support. We have also developed a Joint Vision for Collaborative Training. Both statements are enclosed and will be published in June.

We are also currently finalising a common set of terms and conditions and associated guidance for our Training Grants. Considerable progress on this has been made in recent years with 5 Research Councils currently having a common set of terms and conditions. We are now taking this a step further and in September will publish a common set for all 7 Research Councils as well as expanding and having a common set of associated guidance. The intention is for these terms and conditions to come into effect for training grants starting in academic year 2014/15.

Research Councils continue to work together to share best practice and evolve their mechanisms for allocating and delivering postgraduate training. To provide clarity we are also finalising a common high level terminology for our funding routes. We will use common nomenclature for funding routes that have broadly similar approaches and plan to publish and implement this in the early summer.

I hope these actions will provide greater collective clarity on the Research Councils' expectations for the training we support as well as simplifying their administration in Institutions.

Yours sincerely

Rick Rylance
Chair, Research Councils UK

Research Councils UK

Statement of Expectations for Doctoral Training

The Research Councils' ambitions are to develop highly-skilled researchers to achieve impact across the whole economy, as well as developing the next generation of researchers to maintain national capability.

Research Councils support doctoral training through a number of mechanisms and the principles set out below apply to all our funded students.¹

Expectations of Research Organisation

- Research Organisations should implement a training strategy which is in line with the Organisation's research strategy and takes account of Research Councils' strategic objectives.
- The emphasis should be on ensuring the excellence and quality of doctoral training rather than maximising student numbers.
- A robust process should be in place to attract and recruit outstanding quality applicants.
- Collaboration with Business, Government and Civil Society Organisations is strongly encouraged.
- Research Organisations should report as required to the Research Councils, primarily through the Je-S Studentship Data Portal.²
- Students must be aware which organisations fund their doctorate, and how their Research Council funders prioritise, promote and fund research in their field. Research Council support must be acknowledged on any publications or any other form of dissemination arising from their doctoral research.
- Research Organisations should seek to maximise the impact from the outcomes of doctoral training.

Expectations of the Training Environment

- Research Organisations are required to provide excellent standards of supervision, management and mentoring. Supervisors must receive the support and training that they need to provide the highest-quality supervisory support for their students.
- Supervisors (recognising that these may also be teams of supervisors) must recognise doctoral study as a broad training opportunity for a range of careers and encourage and support students in developing their career options.

¹ It is expected that all Research Organisations supporting Research Council funded students abide by the "UK Quality Code for Higher Education" published by the QAA ([The Quality Code](#))

² Additional reporting may be required for particular schemes; any such bespoke reporting will be described in detail in correspondence between the Research Organisation and the Research Council.

- Career information should be provided prior to embarking on a doctorate to enable students to choose the most appropriate type of doctorate. Ongoing career advice should be provided during the doctorate to enable students to explore the impact they can have in a wide range of sectors and so manage their careers.
- Research Organisations must have mechanisms to assess, provide for and monitor individual student needs and offer the student appropriate development opportunities.
- Students must receive in-depth, advanced research training, as well as developing a broad understanding of their subject area. They should also develop an understanding of the potential impact of their research on society.
- Research Councils expect the provision of professional and transferable skills to form a fundamental part of doctoral training.³
- Students must receive training in the principles of good research conduct in their discipline, and understand how to comply with relevant ethical, legal and professional frameworks. ⁴
- Students should, wherever possible, benefit from the training and support possibilities offered as a result of being part of a broad peer group.
- Students should be encouraged to consider the broad context of their research area, particularly in reference to societal and ethical issues, and the importance of engaging the public with research. Learning and training opportunities should be provided to help develop their public engagement skills.⁵
- Research organisations are expected to provide an environment where students have the opportunity to widen their horizons as part of their training. Experiences outside the "home" Research Organisation, for example with other academic collaborators, in non-academic environments or overseas are encouraged where it fits with the individual's development needs and the scope of the project. These opportunities should be well planned to ensure the student gains maximum benefit.

Expectations of the Students

- Students should take responsibility for shaping, managing and directing their research project and training, taking advice from their supervisor.
- Students are expected to develop the higher-level capabilities outlined in the Researcher Development Statement.⁶
- Where students have the opportunity to work in a non-academic environment, they should maximise the opportunity by seeking to understand the role of research within the organisation and the wider context.

³ Research Organisations should use the Researcher Development Statement to underpin their professional development programmes for students.

⁴ For further information regarding the expectations on Research Organisations, see The Concordat to Support Research Integrity (<http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/Publications/Documents/TheConcordatToSupportResearchIntegrity.pdf>) and the RCUK Policy and Code of Conduct on the Governance of Good Research Conduct (<http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/Publications/researchers/Pages/grc.aspx>)

⁵ Further information, guidance and advice on public engagement with research can be found on the following websites:

- National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement
- RCUK Public Engagement with Research

⁶ Further information about the Statement and the associated Researcher Development Framework (including a self-assessment and planning tool for students) is available at the Vitae website. Information and advice on researchers' professional and career development can be found on the Vitae website.

- Students should recognise their responsibility for developing personal career goals during their doctoral training and consider their possible career options, recognising that these may be outside academe. They should ensure that they are aware of the range of advice available and reflect on their training and development needs to assist in their future employability.

Expectations for Collaborations

- The collaborating organisation and academic partner should undertake to develop a research project of the same challenge as that of a doctoral programme undertaken solely in an academic institution.
- The partners should maximise the quality of the training experience for the student by recognising the broad training and development opportunities which are available through working in academic and non-academic environments.
- Collaborators are encouraged to promote their involvement with both the Research Organisation and Research Council, both internally and externally.
- Research Councils expect the Research Organisation and collaborating organisation to have an agreement in place before the project begins, which recognises the student's contribution, and ensures that the IP arising from the research and/or training can be managed effectively.

Research Councils will

- Harmonise terms, conditions and guidance around postgraduate training, where practical, whilst recognising there may be valid subject specific reasons for different approaches in some instances.
- Discuss and evaluate postgraduate training approaches at Departmental and Institutional level on visits and through the RCUK Assurance Programme.

Joint Vision For Collaborative Training

Objectives:

Research Council Collaborative Training will provide doctoral students with a first-rate, challenging research training experience, within the context of a mutually beneficial research collaboration between academic and partner organisations in the private, public and civil society sectors.

Benefits to the student – Collaborative Training provides outstanding students with access to training, facilities and expertise not available in an academic setting alone. Students benefit from a diversity of approaches with an applied/translational dimension. Students have an opportunity to develop a range of valuable skills and significantly enhance their future employability; the expectation is that many will become research leaders of the future.

Benefits to the academic / partner organisations – Collaborative Training studentships encourage productive engagement between partners who benefit from a motivated, high-quality doctoral student undertaking cutting-edge research relevant to the organisation's priorities and objectives. Collaborative Training provide opportunities to explore novel research collaborations and strengthen current partnerships.

Defining an excellent Collaborative Training Studentship:

High-quality project – A challenging, feasible and realistically achievable doctoral project which stimulates excellent research. Through a truly collaborative approach, it provides tangible benefits to all partners.

High-quality training environment – Through access to distinctive but complementary environments, partners provide a stimulating framework for research training in the proposed field. Joint supervision gives a unique and broadening perspective on the impact of collaborative research.

High-quality student experience – An enriched integrated training experience allows the student to acquire novel skills and expertise. The student gains a wider understanding of how their research may have an impact in wider context that will enhance their future career prospects.