

## A new deal for postgraduate research: Russell Group response to UKRI consultation

### 1. Executive summary

- The Russell Group warmly welcomes UKRI's focus on the issue of how we support postgraduate researchers (PGRs) and improve the functioning of the whole postgraduate research system. This is a vital part of the wider research culture agenda, the operation of our universities and the future of the UK's R&D sector.
- Russell Group universities are committed to taking a lead in ensuring our research culture and environment supports staff and PGRs to fulfil their potential. Our research culture [toolkit](#) sets out ideas and suggestions for how universities, funders and publishers can improve research culture. We would welcome the opportunity to work with UKRI in this area.
- We recommend UKRI consider the following principles when drafting a new deal for postgraduate research:
  - delivering sustainable growth in the research workforce via an appropriate mix of retention and recruitment
  - ensuring that universities can provide an equitable experience for students, no matter who funds them
  - competitive stipends which ensure we are supporting PGRs adequately.
- A significant increase in the research workforce will be required to deliver the Government's ambitions to cement the UK's place as a science superpower and achieve the 2.4% target. Efforts will be needed to retain current R&D workers in the field as well as recruiting more PGRs to form the pipeline of the future R&D workforce.
- Improving cost recovery rates on PGR training and providing an uplift in Quality-Related (QR) funding would enable universities to better support PGRs, improve retention with more opportunities at postdoctoral level, and (where appropriate) fund more PGRs directly.
- If fiscal constraints require prioritisation, we would support prioritising more adequate resourcing for the training of students, with a high-quality student experience and adequate stipend levels before numbers growth. To achieve a diverse workforce and stronger research culture, better funding and support per student will be needed.
- Changing PGRs' legal status to that of employees is not in their interests. It could shift the focus away from PGRs' position as students, there to learn and develop based on their individual needs and ambitions, towards a more delivery- and expectations-focused approach. Without major additional investment, it would also leave PGRs worse off financially. We recommend focusing on aligning conditions with those of staff (e.g. around parental leave rights) and investing in improving stipends and in-kind support.
- Most PGRs enter into careers outside research-active academic roles after completing their PhDs, such as research outside higher education, industry or non-academic HE roles. Clearer and more supportive UKRI guidance for PGRs could help facilitate paid industry internships and QR has an important role to play in improving careers support.
- UKRI's decision to fund international PGRs is warmly welcome, but the RDP supervision fund element of QR does not extend to international students, which should be remedied.
- Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) for PGRs is a shared responsibility for everyone in the sector. We believe UKRI has a leadership and convening role to play, encouraging different funders to work in partnership on aligning terms, conditions and funding for PGRs where feasible. BEIS' Funders' Forum provides a means by which this could take place.

### 2. Context and principles

- 2.1 The Russell Group warmly welcomes UKRI's focus on the issue of how we support postgraduate researchers (PGRs) and improve the functioning of the whole postgraduate research system. This is a vital part of the wider research culture agenda, and equally vital to

the operation of our universities and the whole R&D sector. Whether they continue in academia or move into other parts of the economy, the contribution PGRs make to our economy and society is invaluable. It is right that both UKRI and universities do all they can to contribute to PGR recruitment, support them in their research, and help them prepare for their future careers.

- 2.2 Russell Group universities are committed to taking a lead in ensuring we have a research culture and environment which supports both staff and PGRs to fulfil their potential. All stakeholders in higher education will need to work together to drive positive changes in a practical and effective way. Our 2021 report, [Realising our Potential](#), and an accompanying [toolkit](#) set out practical ideas and suggestions for how universities, funders and publishers can work to improve research culture. We are now carrying out a follow-up survey to understand how the toolkit is being used, to make sure it is delivering practical benefits.
- 2.3 The toolkit included a focus on support networks for PGRs to help build professional networks, prevent isolation and support wellbeing through a sense of community and belonging, and pointed to mentoring, second supervisors for PGRs and peer networks within and across universities as examples of ways universities could work in this area.
- 2.4 We also know supporting PGRs is not just about preparing them for a traditional academic career. PGRs who become the academics of the future are vital, but most PGRs enter into careers outside academia after completing their PhDs. These careers range from research outside higher education to work in industry or non-academic HE roles, and they also add significant value.
- 2.5 The following illustrative case studies provide examples of work being done by Russell Group universities to improve the PGR experience. We would welcome the opportunity to work with UKRI in this area.

#### **Durham University: supporting postgraduate researchers' mental health and wellbeing**

Durham University secured funding from the Office for Students to develop new online educational resources that are helping support postgraduate research students' mental health and wellbeing.

Working with three Doctoral Training Partnerships and the Durham Students' Union, the university created four training modules that identify and address mental health needs within the supervisory relationship. These aim to promote early intervention, recognise the specific role of supervisors in supporting mental health and wellbeing, identify the limits of that relationship for resolving wider mental health difficulties, and prevent the development or exacerbation of mental health symptoms by identifying the helpful and unhelpful relationship patterns that can emerge in supervision.

The training materials are designed to be accessible for students and supervisors, so that all parties have resources available to them at the point of need. They provide advice and information that helps individuals support their own wellbeing, and that of a peer or student. The contents of the modules are also being used as the basis for group training to increase awareness of the mental health support available for research students and supervisors.

Modules and course materials have been made open access, to help share best practice and enable other higher education institutions to improve the quality of the online mental health training available for research students, supervisors and university staff.

### **University of Manchester: President's Doctoral Scholar Award**

The President's Doctoral Scholar (PDS) Award scheme at the University of Manchester is a three-year programme which provides outstanding research students from across the UK and around the world with access to bespoke training in areas such as leadership, collaboration, public engagement, publication, sustainability and commercialisation.

Each year up to 100 of the university's postgraduate research students receive the PDS Award, with selection criteria based on academic excellence and leadership potential. The first cohort of PDS Award scholars commenced their studies in September 2012.

Specific training activities include leadership in action, where participants have the opportunity to consider relevant theory and practice their unique leadership styles. Award holders also play a role in managing a number of schemes funded by the university, giving doctoral students the chance to gain valuable transferable skills in planning, organisation, negotiation and collaboration.

Examples of PDS-led initiatives include Anything but Research, where students can apply for the university to fund students' non-research ideas with the aim of improving the overall doctoral experience. Successful projects include sporting activities, clubs and competitions. Additionally, the Postgraduate Summer Research Showcase is organised by PDS Award holders, when postgraduate researchers across the university are encouraged to promote their research on posters, providing opportunities to disseminate their research to a wider audience.

The PDS Awards are open to prospective candidates across all research areas. Successful applicants receive funding for their doctoral studies as well as an additional £1,000 enhancement to the annual living allowance.

- 2.6 We hope this submission will be useful in informing UKRI's considerations for a new deal for postgraduate research. While issues of sustainable funding are vital to the future of postgraduate research, we are acutely aware of the wider fiscal challenges facing UKRI and Government at large. At the time of writing, the budget available to UKRI to support PGR training has not yet been published. Given limited resources, there will clearly be tensions between the need to grow PGR capacity whilst maintaining a quality student experience and supporting other policy priorities.
- 2.7 In order to inform decision-making, we recommend UKRI consider the following principles when drafting a new deal for postgraduate research:
1. **Delivering financially sustainable growth in the research workforce** through an appropriate mix of retention and recruitment to support Government priorities and the science superpower agenda, ensuring the sector does not simply receive funds for a short period which are then removed.
  2. **Ensuring that universities can provide an equitable experience for students, no matter who funds them**, via the use of RDP QR.
  3. **Competitive stipends which ensure we are supporting PGRs adequately** in order to deliver a diverse future workforce – at present, the UKRI stipend is roughly equivalent to the minimum wage for someone aged 23.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The national living wage as set by Government is £9.50 an hour, which would amount to £17,290 a year pre-tax (35 hours, 52 weeks). Accounting for income tax and employee National Insurance, this would amount to £15,720.60, compared to UKRI's minimum stipend of £16,062.

- 2.8 If fiscal constraints require prioritisation, we would support **prioritising more adequate resourcing for the training of students**, with student experience and adequate stipend levels put before numbers growth. **To achieve a diverse workforce and stronger research culture, better funding and support per student will be needed.**

### 3. Delivering financially sustainable growth in the research workforce

- 3.1 In order to reach the Government's ambition of investing £22bn in R&D by 2024/25 and 2.4% of GDP on research and innovation by 2027/28, a significant increase in the research workforce will be required. The Government's People and Culture Strategy estimates a need for at least an additional 150,000 people in the UK R&D workforce by 2030. **In order to achieve this, efforts will be needed to retain current R&D workers in the field, attract talent from overseas and, where appropriate, recruit more PGR students to form the pipeline of the future R&D workforce.**
- 3.2 A consideration of the whole pipeline for PGRs is needed – from how many students are ready to consider PhDs, through to retention, progression and the availability of postdoctoral research positions and beyond. An overview of the size and shape of the workforce needed to support the UK's research ambitions is required in order to place PGR training into its proper context. Improving career stability and progression, especially for early career researchers, will be key to retaining talent within the R&D system, and Russell Group universities are ready to work with funders and industry to achieve this.
- 3.3 Beyond the R&D sector, an advanced knowledge economy and innovation system needs a healthy share of doctoral graduates to support it. While the UK's share of postgraduate and postdoctoral workers is respectable in developed-country terms, it is notable that the US, Australia, Israel, New Zealand and the Nordic countries all have higher shares of the over-25 population with PhDs than the UK does.<sup>2</sup> UKRI may therefore want to consider its role in supplying the wider economy with highly skilled workers, and the degree to which Government should engage in workforce planning in this area. The Government's ambition to move to a 'high-wage, high-skilled, high-productivity' economy<sup>3</sup> could for example be supported through PGR growth, especially in high-growth industries and those with skills shortages (e.g. AI, computer science).
- 3.4 However, the number of PGRs beginning new courses in UK universities has been almost flat since 2010. Low cost recovery rates on PGR training, which are discussed below, may in part explain why these numbers have remained static. However, QR funding for PGRs and its devolved equivalents will also need to be considered as a matter of priority to enable universities to deliver a significant and sustained increase in the research workforce over the long term and to support PGRs better.

#### Cost recovery on PGR training

- 3.5 The expectations of funders, employers and students with regard to the content and quality of PGR training have increased over the last decade. Since the Roberts Review, there has been a sustained increase in focus on wider training for PGRs, in order to support employment across a variety of contexts. This increase in wider skills training and preparation for employment has been welcome. Increased attention and investment in research culture in order to support PGR wellbeing has also been welcome, and Russell Group universities are committed to continuing this work.

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<sup>2</sup> World Bank data: [https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.TER.CUAT.DO.FE.ZS?most\\_recent\\_value\\_desc=true](https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.TER.CUAT.DO.FE.ZS?most_recent_value_desc=true)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-politics-58814707>

- 3.6 Such investment of course has come at a cost: **TRAC Full Economic Costs data shows that the current recovery rate for training and supervising PGR students is only 45.6%, the lowest recovery rate across all externally funded research activities.** This results in an annual deficit of £1.5bn across the sector.<sup>4</sup> Even when accounting for the use of Research Degree Programme Supervision (RDP) QR funding to cross-subsidise this activity, we estimate only around 56% of the costs of PGR training and supervision are covered on average, with a remaining deficit of £1.2bn across the sector.
- 3.7 Universities are required to find other income sources to meet this deficit. This is likely to become increasingly difficult as international competition for income streams such as international student fees continues to grow, and crucially, as the shortfall in PGR funding increases with more students entering universities. The ongoing freeze in the tuition fee rate will also continue to erode cost recovery on home undergraduate student places, further stretching other income streams which are required to cross-subsidise multiple areas of activity.
- 3.8 Without better cost recovery on PGR training, growth in PGR student numbers is likely to be limited and the ability of universities to provide appropriate support and career development opportunities to PGR students and post-doctoral researchers will be undermined.
- 3.9 Even leaving the wider financial context to one side, there are specific challenges to the sustainability of the current PGR model. Fee income is vital to funding core cost for PhDs, because core costs are excluded from other forms of UKRI PGR funding. This means that UKRI's low minimum fee rates for funded PGRs, and the resulting limits on universities' fee income, are particularly problematic. Core costs include:
- subsidised access to core facilities to enable high-quality, cutting-edge research
  - academic staff time to devote to doctoral supervision
  - post-doctoral and technician time to do 'day-to-day' training/supervision
  - HR, IT and other logistical support
  - counselling services and wellbeing support
  - physical space for PGRs
  - equipment (e.g. laptops, PPE).
- 3.10 The increased pressure on universities to secure match funding from certain Research Councils for PGR training, aside from undermining sustainability, carries with it additional administrative costs in finding match funders and complying with their processes (e.g. reporting and due diligence), as well as the costs of administering complex programme grants which have more complicated reporting requirements.
- 3.11 Alongside other measures to retain and recruit R&D talent, increasing the level of full economic costs recovered on the training and supervision of PGR students will be crucial to growing the UK's R&D workforce. We recommend:
- Delivering a substantial uplift in QR (through RDP QR and its equivalents in the devolved nations), in order to:
    - close the gap between UKRI and non-UKRI students apart from fees and maintenance
    - keep pace with the increasing scale of PGR training and supervision
  - An increase in the recovery rate on UKRI-funded PGR training and supervision.

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<sup>4</sup> TRAC 2019/20, table 5

- 3.12 **An uplift in QR and its equivalents in the devolved nations would put UKRI-funded and other PGRs on a more even footing. This would allow universities to take on more PGRs themselves than they otherwise could and support PGRs better.** It also makes it more viable for industry and charities to fund more PGRs – and, indeed, for some individuals to fund themselves. Because an uplift in QR improves available support for UKRI and non-UKRI PGRs alike and makes recruiting PGRs more sustainable however they are funded, this is much the most effective way of leveraging public money for maximum impact across the research system.
- 3.13 We are aware that QR is an England-only funding stream and that its equivalents are devolved in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. However, these issues apply across the UK. We would strongly encourage the devolved governments, and the devolved counterparts to Research England, to allocate Barnett consequentials resulting from any QR uplift to universities and specifically to the closest equivalents to QR. We would also hope that UKRI and Research England would coordinate closely with the relevant bodies in the devolved nations in ensuring this takes place.

#### 4. Focus on the individual student

##### Legal status of PGRs

- 4.1 **It is not in the interest of students to change the legal status of PGRs to that of employees.** Currently, the core purpose of a PGR course is to develop the skills and knowledge of a PGR student based on their individual needs and ambitions, equipping them with a final qualification and the training needed to support them in their future careers, either in academia or elsewhere.
- 4.2 Employment status, by contrast, is designed for a different purpose, whereby employees are under contract to deliver or perform services for their employer. Such a change would represent a fundamental shift in the relationship between a university and the student, taking the emphasis away from the student and their training towards the university's interests as an employer in need of services.
- 4.3 There is a risk that making PGRs employees could affect this relationship in other detrimental ways. Careers service provision for PGRs is often linked to their status as students. The flexibility to explore entrepreneurial experience and internships could also be impaired as an employment contract, by its nature, places more obligations upon employees as to their place and hours of work and their ability to carry out work with others.
- 4.4 **However, more can be done to mirror good practice around sick leave, parental and care leave and working conditions and to align PGR and staff rights wherever possible.** UKRI has moved a fair way towards improving the conditions of PGR stipends within the current model, notably with parental and sick leave: this is an area which could be developed further in collaboration with other funders via BEIS' Funders' Forum. Different entitlements to childcare support, while ultimately an issue for Government, could also usefully be raised by UKRI and could assist in supporting a wider range of candidates to pursue further study. We also know there are concerns about the perceived status and value of PGRs. This should be considered carefully in the research culture context, as they play a crucial role across the research system.
- 4.5 **Making PGRs employees in respect of their doctoral research would have major financial implications, which would have to be fully funded.** In particular, stipends are not presently liable to income tax or National Insurance, and students (as opposed to employees) are not liable for Council Tax. In order to ensure national minimum wage (NMW) requirements for a full-time PGR were met, and when the effect of salary sacrifice for

pension contributions is considered, a stipend would have to be set at a higher rate than the current minimum rate of £16,062.

- 4.6 A grant resulting in an NMW-compliant salary for a full-time PGR would, according to our calculations, actually result in a net loss of income for a PGR currently receiving a £16,062 minimum stipend once tax, NI contributions, pension contributions and Council Tax are considered. It would also cost UKRI significantly more per student, as well as costing universities significantly more in pension contributions and employer National Insurance.

**Estimated net financial effect of moving from a £16,062 stipend to a national minimum wage-compliant salary model for PGRs, universities and UKRI**

	Income and cost for PGRs	New costs for universities	Cost to UKRI
<i>PGR minimum salary</i> . <sup>5</sup>	£19,169.00		£19,169.00
Cost of USS pension contributions <sup>6</sup>	£1,878.56	£4,140.50	
<i>Remaining salary</i>	£17,290.44		
Costs of Income tax and NI <sup>7</sup>	£1,569.55	£1,232.66	
<i>Post-tax salary</i>	£15,720.89		
Cost of Council Tax <sup>8</sup>	£491.50		
<i>Final net income</i>	£15,229.39		
<b>Impact vs stipend model</b>	<b>-£832.61</b>	<b>-£5,373.16</b>	<b>-£3,107.00</b>

- 4.7 It should be noted that this calculation takes no account of the effects upon the tax treatment of any other income a PGR may have: while National Insurance is not cumulative between jobs, income tax is, and (depending on the income earned) the additional cost to the PGR could be up to £2,514 a year.<sup>9</sup>
- 4.8 Without significant additional investment, this change would therefore work to the financial detriment of all involved, most notably students. In the absence of that investment, it could not be delivered without either resulting in universities having fewer PGRs, a significant reduction in PGR income or both. If the financial sustainability of the PGR model is further undermined, one option which would be hard to ignore would be to increase home fees – but this would hurt funders and self-funded PGRs alike.
- 4.9 **Additional funding to support PGRs would be better invested in directly increasing support to students, rather than channelling this funding back through the tax system and pension schemes.** This is especially the case given that such funding could support

<sup>5</sup> This is the minimum figure required to ensure that the post-salary sacrifice income of the PGR will be over £17,290 (£9.50 an hour, 35 hours a week, 52 weeks a year), rounded to the nearest pound.

<sup>6</sup> We have used the current USS rates of 9.8% of employee income and 21.6% of employer income and assumed a salary sacrifice arrangement.

<sup>7</sup> Based on a personal allowance and NI secondary threshold of £12,570 for employees (as the NI threshold will go up in August) and the current NI secondary threshold of £9,100 for employees (as this will not go up). The income tax/NI rate is 33.25% for employees and 15.05% for employers. Scottish income tax rates differ.

<sup>8</sup> We have assumed, for the sake of argument, that the PGR in this example is living with three other people liable to Council Tax and is paying 25% of the household bill. The average Band D Council Tax in England is £1,966: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1064229/Council\\_Tax\\_Levels\\_Set\\_by\\_Local\\_Authorities\\_in\\_England\\_2022-23.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1064229/Council_Tax_Levels_Set_by_Local_Authorities_in_England_2022-23.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> For these purposes, we have assumed the number of PGRs likely to be pushed into paying the higher rather than basic rate of income tax is negligible and have set the maximum value of personal allowance accordingly (20% of £12,570).

higher stipends, higher loan limits or increasing the research degree programme supervision fund element of QR to support the quality of experience and support for all PGRs.

- 4.10 Many PGRs teach at their universities, whether as part-time employees or on an *ad hoc* basis. As with other earned income, converting PGR status into an employment contract would affect the tax treatment of their earnings. Teaching also offers opportunities for PGRs' career development. Given how many PGRs teach and its importance to their future careers, it also needs to be considered in terms of the wellbeing of and cumulative demands upon PGRs. We would welcome a discussion between UKRI and universities about this issue and how best to align PGR programmes with PGRs' own teaching activities.

### **Collaboration with business and industry**

- 4.11 The ability of most PhD students to do paid industry internships is very positive, especially given how many will go on to careers outside academia. **Clearer guidance from UKRI on the conditions of collaboration with businesses in a PGR context would help universities deliver these by clarifying expectations, strengthening their hand in discussions, and reducing the scope for difficult conversations with industry.** This could take the form of an updated template contract, or at least heads of terms, on issues such as data in theses and expectations of PGRs, whether from UKRI itself, an updated Lambert toolkit or modelled on the AHRC's agreed template. QR also has an important role to play in providing more support, such as career advisors.

### **International students**

- 4.12 UKRI's decision to fund international PGRs is warmly welcome – supporting the UK to recruit the best talent from around the world. However, the RDP element of QR is not extended to international students, which creates a financial imbalance between international and domestic students from a university perspective. While one option would be to simply raise fees, this would effectively eat into students' stipends, and so most universities have made the decision not to do so. **We would argue that if UKRI is funding international students, QR incentives should be aligned with that decision.** If we include international PGRs as part of the UK's planning for the research and the wider workforce and want to retain them, the case for treating them on a par with domestic PGRs for QR purposes becomes even stronger.
- 4.13 We would also welcome greater engagement between UKRI and the Home Office to ensure that immigration requirements and Research Council conditions are aligned. It is increasingly common for Research Councils to encourage – or, as with the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, require – PGRs to undertake an internship during the course of their postgraduate study. However, Home Office rules require any internship to be 'integral' to and 'assessed' as part of the course. There is a range of interpretation here, and the risk is that PGRs lose out on opportunities which are valuable to them and to industry as well. Similar issues arise with PhD students linked to consortia of universities, where they are sponsored by only one – raising issues of students having to reapply for visas, potentially out of country. We would like to see Home Office rules clarified to avoid these issues, but if that is not possible, it is important that appropriate exemptions are made for international PGRs.

## **5. Equity between PGRs funded in different ways**

### **Equality, diversity and inclusion**

- 5.1 UKRI's recognition of its role as a convener and partner, as well as a funder and leader, is vital in the EDI space. If funders align their EDI incentives for applicants wherever possible, it will both minimise duplication for universities and researchers and, even more importantly,



reinforce the impact those incentives can have. BEIS' Funders' Forum provides a means by which these discussions could take place.

- 5.2 More generally, we hope UKRI will relate its wider work on EDI to its work on a new deal for postgraduate research. High-quality data and evidence are vital to both, and UKRI's commitment to co-create processes for diversity data which reduce burden on the sector as well as enhancing its knowledge and ability to measure and evaluate will help to inform the EDI aspects of supporting PGRs.
- 5.3 The Russell Group and its members are very much aware that EDI is a responsibility for all stakeholders in higher education. In our report, [Realising our Potential](#), and the accompanying toolkit we set out ideas and suggestions for developing inclusive and respectful environments, and our follow-up survey will include information about how it is being used in terms of EDI. As we said in our submission to the consultation on UKRI's EDI strategy, we would be more than happy to work together on this and share best practice.

### Equity of treatment between funders

- 5.4 **UKRI plays an essential role in both funding PGRs and in developing approaches to PGR training in the UK. Although UKRI funds a minority of PGRs, it has a disproportionate impact by virtue of its position.** Decisions taken by UKRI can have a major knock-on effect even at short notice. For instance, the decision to fund six months' extensions for PhD students during the Covid pandemic was very welcome, but universities then had to decide what kind of support to make available for other students in order to ensure equity of treatment, which led to additional costs to institutions.
- 5.5 It is worth noting that individual Research Councils fund doctoral students in different ways. Centres for Doctoral Training (CDTs), Doctoral Training Programmes (DTPs) and in some cases (although greatly reduced) project-based funding are available. Approaches to CDTs and DTPs vary between Councils, which causes complications for universities and also sits uneasily with UKRI's intent to improve mission-orientated and interdisciplinary research. Having a more harmonised approach, particularly for CDTs, which would allow better cross-Council funding, would be sensible – notably around the funded period and levels of flexibility around extensions.
- 5.6 **More generally, greater consistency between funders as to student support and entitlements would be welcome.** At the moment, variation causes significant difficulties: universities will do all they can to treat PGRs from different funding routes equally, but differing terms and conditions between different funders inevitably create disparities. These include different entitlements to sick leave, different expectations on thesis submission deadlines, stipend rates and more besides. We are particularly aware of the challenge in respect of self-funded students, but charitable funding levels vary a great deal, as do their terms and conditions. **An uplift in QR would offer the opportunity to improve the general offer to PGRs and improve equity between PGRs from different funding routes** – which would, in its turn, enable funders apart from UKRI to do more to contribute to the Government's desired uplift in our R&D workforce.
- 5.7 **UKRI has a leadership role to play here in setting standards and expectations.** Its focus on research culture has been welcome and is closely linked to the new deal for postgraduate research. Building on a wider emphasis on cooperation and coordination, UKRI could work with other funders to encourage them to share approaches to joint priorities. BEIS' Funders' Forum has significant potential as a platform for joint working, and we would very much like to see more use made of it in this way. The Funders' Forum provides the opportunity to coordinate more effectively on PGR issues.

- 5.8 It is also important to note that funding, terms and conditions are not the only areas where experiences can vary between PGRs depending upon how they are funded. UKRI cohorts for CDTs particularly, but also for DTPs, create a greater sense of community and mutual support: other PGRs, particularly self-funded PGRs and those funded internationally, can feel more isolated. This is, of course, an issue for the sector as well as UKRI. An increase in QR would also provide more scope for universities to do more to address the sense of community for PGRs, and support more broadly.
- 5.9 CDTs allow universities to efficiently share resources and arrange bespoke training in a timely fashion to overcome specific issues. Universities found that the CDT provided an invaluable supportive structure, both academically and in terms of well-being, during the pandemic. It would be welcome if the funding for DTPs were extended to allow for the same overall level of pastoral and administrative support as CDTs.