

Getting a Better Deal for PGRs

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Foreword

This report presents the findings of UCU's research into the experiences and needs of postgraduate researchers in UK higher education. It has been produced in response to the consultation run by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) on behalf of the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), on creating a 'new deal' for PGRs.

Our research shows that the current PhD system is not fit for purpose. While some PGRs can complete their PhD and obtain subsequent goals without difficulty, too many have to deal with financial hardship, personal crisis and harmful work environments, without any kind of safety net or support. This is why we need a better deal for all PGRs. We believe that 'success' in the PhD must not be a matter of inherent privilege, including but not limited to independent wealth, secure visa status, lack of disability, or pre-existing understandings of university cultures and systems, which enables those with the right resources to navigate systems, and leaves others behind. Currently, however, this is built into the design of the PhD. Getting through the PhD can often be as much in spite of the way postgraduate research is structured as it is because of it.

'Successfully completing a PhD' must be about more than just 'surviving' broken systems and a lack of support. PGRs must be enabled to thrive through the provision of adequate support and resources to **do research** they care about, to be able to **build meaningful careers** in relevant fields, and to **live well**. Currently, systems and processes do not provide this support efficiently or fairly.

Too often, in fact, these three goals of doing research, building careers and living well are put in competition with one another. Very few activities allow PGRs to meet multiple needs simultaneously and there is very little flexibility in the system. Unfairness is further compounded because efforts by PGRs to meet their needs in relation to building their careers are too often co-opted by universities in need of a supply of cheap (or free) casual labour. PGRs undertaking this labour are too often left without employment protections, adequate or timely pay, appropriate

assessment of workloads, sufficient support or meaningful development opportunities.

The likelihood of PGRs thriving or just surviving is currently dependent on to the degree to which their needs are met by the system in the first place, the degree to which their own privilege helps them to successfully navigate the system, and the degree to which privilege enables them to overcome any barriers to their needs being met.

Through our survey, focus groups and interview we identified three general operational problems with the current PhD:

1. Insufficient income and/or funding and the associated workload and time costs
2. Insufficient specificity in training and the formal requirements of the PhD for career development
3. Insufficient interpersonal support and integration of PGRs within universities.

These are issues that affect all PGRs, and they are explored in Sections 3 and 4. However, some PGRs face greater additional challenges than others. This includes migrant PGRs, disabled, chronically ill and/or neurodivergent PGRs, PGR parents and those with caring responsibilities, working class and/or 'first generation' PGRs, women and non-binary PGRs, Black and other underrepresented minority ethnic PGRs, and self-funded or unfunded PGRs. The views of PGRs who fall into these different groups are explored and discussed in Section 5. So too are issues of taking leave, and making complaints: these are issues that can affect all PGRs, but have a disproportionate impact on marginalised PGRs.

Any 'new deal' for PGRs must represent a better deal for all of these groups. It must address the three goals of doing research, building careers and living well for PGRs with privilege *and* for those without. It must recognise and remove the additional barriers faced by those that don't currently fit the 'normative' model of a PhD researcher, and work to dismantle that model.

We have proposed some ways for doing this, some of which need urgent action, and some which need longer term exploration. Our list of 'urgent needs' for PGRs is extensive, which reflects the extent and range of issues PGRs currently face. Our possible new models include extending staff status to PGRs, and an alternative model that would allow PGRs to balance staff and student status. These need more discussion, but we hope they will provide the basis for further work.

Recommendations

We recognise that restructuring the PhD to create a better deal for PGRs will take a long time, and require more in-depth work to understand all of the implications for different groups of PGRs.

However, we also know that PGRs need change now. The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic and of the cost of living crisis have brought issues of inequality, wellbeing, pay and workload and respect to the fore for many PGRs. We know what some of these problems are, and that they need to be addressed urgently.

A range of different stakeholders need to take action to improve the PhD: some of these urgent needs can be addressed by UKRI, but others need action by government, universities, and other funders. We intend to continue our conversations with these stakeholders to ensure the needs of PGRs are met.

Urgent needs for PGRs

Fair remuneration and workload allocation

- Increase pay for all PGR stipends and ensure future pay rises keep up with the rising cost of living
- Ensure equal access to teaching and other work opportunities for all PGRs, and ensure universities monitor key demographics relating to who is and is not able to take up these opportunities
- Ensure all additional work outside of PhD research is properly workloaded for PGRs, and that extra commitments come along with compensatory funding and time extensions for the PhD
- Ensure workload assessments and pay both cover the full extent of work undertaken by PGRs, including adequate preparation and marking time, and reform graduate teaching assistant roles in line with Appendix 2 of UCU's **PGRs as Staff manifesto**
- Ensure all PGRs undertaking university 'improvement' work outside of the PhD, including but not limited to strategy meetings and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) initiatives, are paid for that work, and compensated through time and funding extensions to their PhDs.

Supervision

- Ensure that a clear set of expectations is created for supervision, which details the specific forms and quantities of support that supervisors should be responsible for providing to PGRs

- Ensure that supervisors have engaged in training and have the support that they need to provide expected supervisory duties. This should include Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) training
- Provide role-specific line management for supervisors in order to provide them with support and accountability
- Ensure that the workload allocation provided for supervisory duties is increased to a level that enables supervisors to adequately provide expected support
- Provide all PGRs with structured personal development mentoring as a means of ensuring an additional channel of interpersonal support outside of all supervisory relationships
- Provide transparent and accessible processes for changing supervisor alongside funding and time extensions for PGRs who change supervisors to cover any time lost
- Ensure that PGRs have adequate autonomy over their own research projects
- Ensure that supervisors do not use PGRs as unpaid research assistants in the absence of departmental (or other) funds made available to this end

Training

- Ensure all PGRs, regardless of funding or visa status, are able to access the same PGR training
- Ensure personal financial cost is never a barrier to accessing training for PGRs
- Ensure all universities have protected and sufficient funds to allow all PGRs, including self-funded/unfunded PGRs and migrant PGRs, to access training
- Conduct an accessibility audit on all online and in-person PGR training, to ensure it meets all access requirements for disabled, chronically ill and neurodivergent PGRs
- Ensure training provision includes sessions at times of day that are accessible to those with caring responsibilities, who are part time or who are distance learners
- Ensure training for PGRs includes a mix of basic and specialist skills training, as well as training for transferable skills, EDI and other relevant topics
- Ensure career support services have targeted provision for postgraduates, which includes support for both those who wish to pursue academic careers, and non-academic careers
- Ensure all PGRs have clear information about the training available to them, and how to access it.

Facilities

- Ensure all PGRs have access to dedicated office space that is appropriate, safe and accessible
- Conduct an assessment of all spaces for PGRs to ensure they are accessible for disabled, chronically ill and/or neurodivergent people, and act to improve spaces where necessary

- Ensure all PGRs know who to contact about health and safety concerns regarding their work spaces
- Ensure all PGRs, supervisors and other relevant staff have clear information about what funding is available for facilities and equipment, from which source, and through which processes
- Extend existing research support grants from both funders and universities so they can be used to cover equipment costs.

Taking leave

- Ensure all funded students, regardless of funding source, have the same access to paid periods of leave, and that funding extensions are accompanied by extensions to maximum registration periods
- Ensure all students have access to adequate time extensions in order to account for periods of disruption *and* leave
- Introduce bereavement leave for all PGRs
- Introduce carers leave for all PGRs
- Extend entitlement to Shared Parental Leave to all PGRs
- Extend equal rights to periods of leave, including but not limited to sick leave, parental leave, bereavement leave and other leaves of absence, to all migrant PGRs. Ensure periods of disruption and leave are permissible reasons for visa extensions.
- Reduce the burden of evidence for eligibility for periods of leave
- Join up leave systems with those of disability support, such as DSA, in order to reduce needless duplication of evidence requirements
- Reform existing periods of leave to allow for greater flexibility and a 'phased return' system
- Reform entitlement to sick leave to allow for greater flexibility for people with chronic, fluctuating conditions, who may not qualify through illness over one calendar month (as commonly required by university regulations), but accumulate considerable 'lost' days as a result of their condition(s).
- Ensure universities have clear systems of support for PGRs during their periods of leave, including regular check-ins where appropriate
- Ensure all PGRs, supervisors and other staff have accurate and up-to-date information about PGRs' rights to different types of leave, and the processes for accessing them
- Ensure clear communication about rights to periods of leave, both to PGRs and their supervisors. This must include the importance of taking leave when necessary, in order to reduce stigma around absence and pressure from staff to avoid periods of leave
- Ensure all PGRs have equal entitlement to holiday leave, are aware of their entitlement, and are encouraged and supported to take it
- End the practice of suspending access to university services, including but not limited to library and wellbeing services, during periods of leave.

Making complaints

- Extend access to university HR complaints procedures to all PGRs, in recognition of their distinct role compared to other students
- Overhaul all complaints procedures to ensure they deal with complaints in a robust and timely manner, taking into account the existence of multiple cases by single perpetrators, ensuring investigations are independent, transparent and thorough, and that the onus is on the university to take action, *not* the PGR
- Ensure the anonymity of PGRs raising complaints is upheld in all cases, and that they are protected from any form of retribution, included but not limited to threats to visa status, withdrawal or denial of funding, or further instances of abuse
- Ensure supervisors who have had complaints raised and upheld against them are not in a position to supervise new PGRs
- Ensure that, where a supervisor is responsible for accountability or complaints about supervision in their department, that relevant alternative provision is identified for those that they supervise.
- Ensure all PGRs and others have clear information about points of contact, processes, progress and time limits relating to complaints throughout their PhD, and for the duration of any complaints made
- Ensure all supervisors and other relevant staff have clear information about complaints processes, understand their importance and are equipped to support PGRs where necessary
- Ensure all university complaints procedures have strict time limits that are adhered to, so that migrant PGRs can have their complaints heard within the time limit of their visa, and so that for all PGRs complaints can be heard in a timely manner and within the period of maximum registration
- Introduce clear mechanisms for all PGRs, including migrant PGRs, to be able to change supervisors and/or universities without loss of funding or visa status.

Urgent needs for migrant or international PGRs

- Abolish fees for all PGRs and, in the interim, ensure that no migrant PGR is charged more than a domestic PGR for their period of study
- Abolish the NHS surcharge
- Ensure time conducting PhD research is counted as years towards securing indefinite leave to remain
- Extend equal rights to Disabled Students Allowance and other forms of disability support to all migrant PGRs
- Extend equal access to university hardship funds for all migrant PGRs
- Extend equal access to UK welfare benefits to all migrant PGRs
- Introduce greater flexibility and longer time limits to the current Tier 4 visa
- Ensure every university has a dedicated point of contact to support and advocate for migrant PGRs with regards to visa issues

- Ensure all university complaints procedures have strict time limits that are adhered to, so that migrant PGRs can have their complaints heard in a timely manner, and within the time limit of their visa
- End the intrusive surveillance and monitoring of migrant PGRs
- Ensure all migrant PGRs have appropriate and comprehensive induction and ongoing pastoral care support throughout their PhD.
- Provide access to adequately resourced networks for migrant staff within universities.

Urgent needs for disabled, chronically ill and neurodivergent PGRs

- Ensure all universities can demonstrate they are meeting their current anticipatory duties under the Equality Act 2010 with regards to reasonable adjustments for disabled PGRs
- Ensure all supervisors and other relevant staff are trained on models of disability, how to combat ableism and how to support disabled PGRs
- Ensure every university has a clear strategy for ensuring its digital systems, physical facilities, training programmes, events, inductions, progress assessments, vivas and other systems for PGRs are suitable and accessible for all disabled, chronically ill and neurodivergent PGRs
- Ensure all PGRs have access to Occupational Health assessments, and subsequent support
- Extend access to DSA to all PGRs, including migrant or international PGRs
- Ensure support through DSA is available for the full duration of the PhD for all PGRs
- Overhaul the DSA system to make the application process fit for purpose
- Remove evidence requirements for DSA applications, or ensure that universities provide external or internal professional assessment in a timely manner that sufficiently meets requirements for evidence
- Ensure support available through DSA and other university systems is tailored to the needs of PGRs, rather than relying on support for undergraduate students
- Review what can be funded through DSA to ensure it meets the needs of disabled PGRs
- Ensure any changes to the PhD system do not negatively affect provision for disabled, chronically ill and neurodivergent PGRs, including protecting existing entitlement to DSA
- Ensure disabled, chronically ill and neurodivergent PGRs have flexible deadlines and more time for completion of their PhDs, both as a reasonable adjustment and in recognition of the extra time necessary to undertake additional disability- and support-related activities
- Increase funding for and access to individual mental health support, and ensure university mental health services employ specialist and diverse counsellors to ensure appropriate provision for Black and minority ethnic PGRs, LGBTQ+ PGRs,

disabled, chronically ill and neurodivergent PGRs and other multiply marginalised groups

- Provide comprehensive information for both PGRs and staff about what reasonable adjustments could be made for disabled, chronically ill and neurodivergent PGRs, including for those who receive a diagnosis during the course of their PhD
- Provide access to adequately resourced networks for disabled, chronically ill and neurodivergent staff within universities
- Ensure disabled, chronically ill and neurodivergent PGRs who wish to pursue a career in higher education have access to mentoring, career support and staff support networks, that links them with disabled academics and leaders in higher education
- Improve routes for accessing PhD funding across all academic disciplines for disabled, chronically ill and neurodivergent PGRs.

Urgent needs for PGR parents and those with caring responsibilities

- Extend entitlement to tax-free childcare for all PGRs
- Extend entitlement to 30 hours free childcare to all PGRs
- Introduce paid carers leave for all PGRs who are funded, and carers leave time extensions for all PGRs
- Ensure all universities have a policy and strategy in place for supporting PGRs with caring responsibilities, for instance through a carer's support plan, and a commitment to flexible and accessible work and events
- Where available, extend access to university childcare subsidies or provision at a discounted rate to all PGRs
- Ensure all universities have training in place for managers and supervisors around the needs and experiences of staff and students with caring responsibilities (including childcare and caring for other friends or family members)
- Provide access to adequately resourced networks for staff within universities who have caring responsibilities.

Urgent needs for women and non-binary PGRs

- Provide workplace training, support and adjustments in relation to menopause in universities such as those recommended by the **Fawcett Society** and the **TUC**
- Provide workplace training, support and adjustments in relation to endometriosis in universities such as those recommended by **Endometriosis UK**
- Provide access to free sanitary products for all who need them across universities
- Address gender disparities among senior staff, including closing the gender pay gap and combating lack of representation in leadership roles
- Provide a comprehensive programme of mentoring for women and for non-binary PGRs, especially in disciplines where they are underrepresented

- Ensure access to adequately resourced gender-based staff networks within universities
- Require universities to adopt adequate policies and practice on gender equality and healthy workplace environments as they pertain to supervision and training for PGRs.

Urgent needs for LGBTQ+ PGRs

- Review all systems for PGRs across funders and universities to ensure they are inclusive of diverse sexualities and gender identities
- Ensure all LGBTQ+ have access to well-supported and promoted staff and PGR-specific LGBTQ+ networks
- Ensure all PGR training, including but not limited to field work, ethics, and social media and other communications, include elements relating to safety and appropriate support for LGBTQ+ PGRs
- Ensure all supervisors and other relevant staff have appropriate training on issues facing LGBTQ+ PGRs, how to combat prejudice and discrimination, and how to support and champion LGBTQ+ PGRs
- Ensure all LGBTQ+ PGRs have access to a comprehensive and relevant mentoring programme that links them with LGBTQ+ academics and leaders in higher education.

Urgent needs for working class and 'first generation' PGRs

- Create ringfenced departmental and/or institutional funding to enable all PGRs to meet up-front costs in relation to training, development and other research-related activities
- Provide access to adequately resourced networks for working-class staff within universities
- Provide a comprehensive programme of mentoring for working class and/or 'first generation' PGRs
- Provide clearer information and support on the informal, cultural requirements of developing a personal network and CV building when attempting to access, navigate, and move on from doctoral research
- Provide adequate training to all PGRs on how to effectively develop personal networks and engage in CV building

Urgent needs for Black and other underrepresented minority ethnic PGRs

- Address the recommendations in **previous research for UCU** and **Leading Routes** on better support for Black and other underrepresented minority ethnic PGRs, including but not limited to:

- Providing a more equitable route into postgraduate study that values talent over previous attainment
 - A robust and structured mentoring programme for Black and other minority ethnic PGRs that links them with Black academics and leaders, and other academics and leaders of colour, in higher education
 - Better information for Black applicants and potential PGRs on scholarships and other funding
 - Targeted recruitment for underrepresented ethnic minority PGRs
 - Training for university staff and recruiters on combating racism in their practice
 - Ensuring all universities have well-supported BME networks, which include Black and other minority ethnic PGRs
- Ensure all universities report on and address their race pay gap, and underrepresentation of Black academics and other academics of colour in senior leadership roles
 - Expand provision of ringfenced funding and scholarships for Black PGRs and other underrepresented ethnic minority groups (for example, people from a Gypsy, Roma and Traveller background, and others identified through disaggregated ethnicity data).

Urgent needs for self-funded or unfunded PGRs

- Remove or reduce the burden of paying tuition fees
- Provide financial assistance to support self-funders with costs of living
- Provide ringfenced departmental and/or institutional funding to enable all PGRs to meet up-front costs in relation to training, development and other research-related activities
- Ensure fair provision and remuneration of additional paid work such that hiring processes are transparent and formalised and pay is fully reflective of the labour requirements
- Provide paid time-on for all research and teaching activities that are included within staff members workload allocation models
- Ensure there are clear mechanisms for providing flexibility in relation to time limits for completing the PhD without incurring additional fees
- Introduce regulations to ensure that universities cannot take on additional PGRs with demonstrating the resources and capacity to adequately support them in line with agreed expectations
- Introduce mechanisms to ensure that PGRs can effectively challenge inadequacies in relation to the above.

New models for the PhD

We have explored PGRs and others' views regarding extending staff status to PhD researchers in this report. We have also explored other potential models. Our final, longer term recommendation is to continue to develop a new PhD system, in partnership with relevant stakeholders including PGRs, that makes sure it provides a better deal for all PGRs.

Postgraduate research, as currently exists in the UK, may well be improved by creating two separate tracks for doctoral research. These may provide more direct routes towards two different sets of aims or motivations for engaging in a PhD: for the purposes of pursuing a research, or research-related, career in or outside of Higher Education, and for the purposes of engaging in research or developing one's knowledge for its own end. Creating two respective tracks may enable far greater accessibility for people wishing to pursue each aim, with these tracks being:

1. The early career portfolio doctorate, where funding is intended to provide people, as members of staff, (a) pathways to research or research-related careers in and outside of higher education and (b) research and/or research-related outputs that are intended to benefit one or more sector
2. A flexible and accessible PhD by thesis in which people, as students would engage in self-directed research for the purposes of subject interest knowledge development.

There is more detail on this model, and its potential for improving the PhD process, in Appendix 4.

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1. Introduction

The University and College Union (UCU) is the representative body for employees in post-16 education. It represents over 130,000 members, including lecturers, researchers, professional services staff and postgraduate researchers (PGRs) in universities, colleges, prisons, adult education and training organisations across the UK. Membership includes PGRs either as 'student' members or in their teaching, research and other staff roles.

The **PGRs As Staff** campaign was launched in November 2020, following a motion put to the membership at the UCU Special Higher Education Sector Conference earlier that year. The campaign manifesto was developed by PGR members and includes recommendations for improving the rights and conditions of PGRs in both their PhD and teaching roles.

This report was written in response to **UKRI's consultation** on developing a 'New Deal' for postgraduate researchers. The consultation was developed in partnership with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), in response to the Conservative Government's **Research and Development People and Culture Strategy 2021**. This stated:

Through cross-sectoral consultation we will consider how these students are supported and developed both practically and financially. This work will address the issues that contribute to precarity in early careers, and prepare students for rewarding careers across the whole economy. The support provided through the New Deal should also enable a more diverse range of potential students to consider careers in research.

UKRI's consultation asks about priorities for focus across four areas:

- Models and access
- Routes in, through and out
- Rights and conditions
- Funding and financial support.

The final of these areas in UKRI's consultation - funding and financial support - focuses on finance issues for universities, doctoral training partnerships and similar bodies. As such, we have focused our report on the first three questions - Models and access, Routes in, through and out, and rights and conditions - as these areas have the most direct relevance to PGRs.

We have structured the report to reflect UKRI's own 'New Deal' consultation. In addition, we begin with a section on the biggest issues for PGRs, based on what they told us through our survey and focus groups.

We expect UKRI to conduct further research and engagement exercises as part of developing its New Deal. We are using this consultation to emphasise areas where we *know* change is needed now, and where PGRs need government, UKRI, universities and others to act now. We have also highlighted areas for longer term discussion and change. A full list of our recommendations can be found on page 3.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Overview

The views in this report are those of PGRs, academic staff and others. We gathered these through an online survey of PGRs and others, and two focus groups for PGRs: one in Scotland and one in Wales. The survey was open from 14 March - 06 April 2022, and was promoted through social media and UCU mailing lists. It was also emailed to the directors of all Doctoral Training Partnerships and Centres in the UK, who were asked to complete and circulate it to their PGR cohorts. We offered people the option to contribute in a different way to the survey if they wanted to, including via email or interview.

2.2 Survey

The survey had three main sections:

- Making the PhD work better for you
- Our proposals for a better deal
- A better deal for different groups of PGRs

We invited participants to consider some general questions, and to answer a series of questions relating to different demographic areas which we know might affect people's PhD experience.

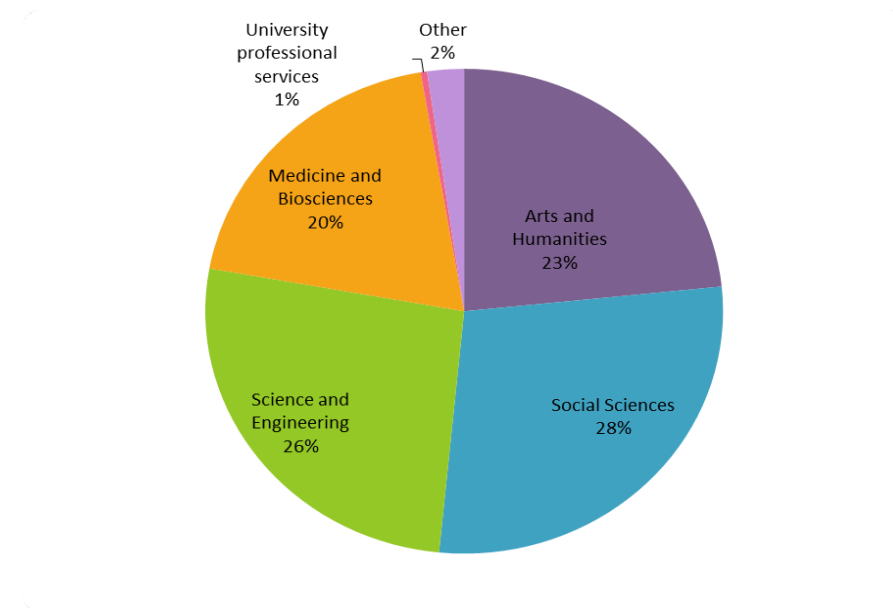
A copy of the survey questions is included in Appendix 1.

2.2.1 Respondent Demographics

Our survey had 536 full responses and a further 429 partial responses. 76% of respondents were current postgraduate researchers, 9% were PhD supervisors, and 8% were post-doctoral researchers or lecturers. 23% told us they were classed as an international or migrant PGR. There was a relatively even distribution of respondents from different subject areas, as the chart below shows, with most

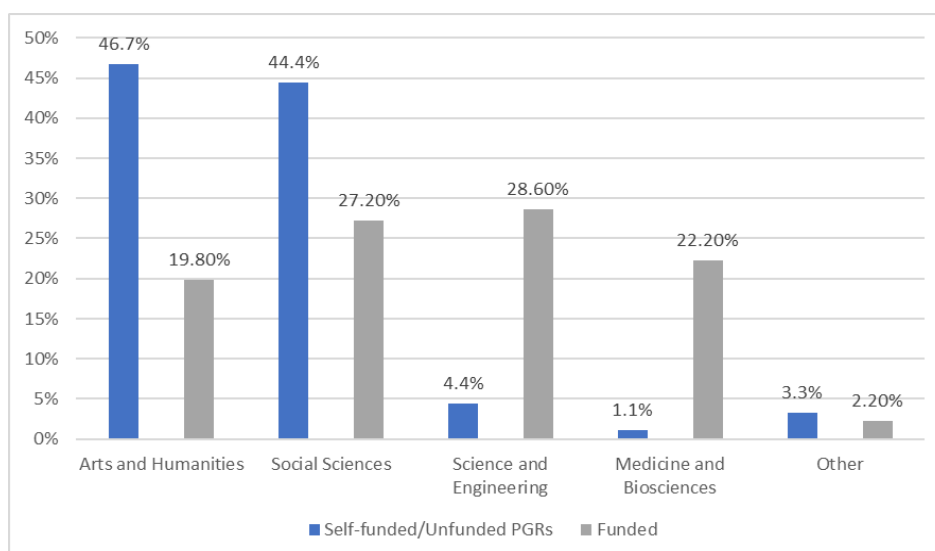
respondents coming from the social sciences, and fewest from medicine and biosciences.

Chart 1: Subject area of respondents (%)



However, Chart 2 shows an important variation in subject area. Self-funded or unfunded PGRs were much more likely to be studying in arts and humanities or social sciences subject areas, and very unlikely to be studying in material sciences or other areas. As discussed in Section 5.4, this is also true for respondents who told us they were disabled, chronically ill and/or neurodivergent.

Chart 2: Subject area comparison for self-funded/unfunded PGRs and funded PGRs (all sources) (%)



23% of respondents identified as disabled, chronically ill or neurodivergent. Just under a quarter of respondents were Gay, Lesbian or Bisexual, with others identifying as Queer or other non-heterosexual identities. 4.5% of respondents told us their gender identity does not match sex registered at birth.

There were some notable gaps in representation. The geographic distribution skewed towards England (78% of respondents), with good representation from Scotland (19%) but neglecting Northern Ireland (7 respondents) and Wales (11 respondents). Women were overrepresented compared to men, with 62% compared to 32% (and 4% non-binary people). This is contrary to the funding trend for UKRI, where 54% of scholarships went to people who identify as male in 2019/20. Less than 1% of respondents were aged 65 - 74 years, with the majority (62%) aged 25 - 34 years.

Only 9% of respondents who were doing or had recently completed their PhD were part-time PhD researchers, whereas figures from the [Higher Education Statistics Authority](#) (HESA) suggests that 24% of all PGRs are part time. Only 13% told us they were self-funded or unfunded, which we suspect is lower than the general rate of self-funded PGRs, although we do not have reliable data to assess this against. Table 1 shows the funding source for all respondents. A small number of people were in receipt of a doctoral student loan.

Table 1: Source of funding for current or former PGRs

	Percent	Count
UKRI research council - e.g. AHRC, ESRC, EPSRC etc.	63.1%	429
University	22.9%	156
A government outside of the UK	1.5%	10
Industry, charity or other professional body	6.0%	41
Wellcome Trust	0.7%	5
Leverhulme Trust	0.6%	4
Other research funding body	4.0%	27
Unfunded/self-funded	12.5%	85
Other - please specify	5.3%	36

The majority of respondents were White British (58%), and a further 22% identified as 'White - any other White background'. Only 16% of respondents, in aggregate, identified as any other ethnicity. However, UKRI's own aggregate data shows that

only 10% of its awardees identified as any ethnicity other than white. Some areas of particularly stark underrepresentation in our data, such as people from a 'mixed - White and Asian', 'mixed - White and Black African' and 'mixed - White and Black Caribbean' background, as well as Black Caribbean people, are also mirrored by an underrepresentation in the number of UKRI awards given to people in those groups in 2019/20. A full breakdown of the ethnicity of respondents is available in Appendix 3, along with details of other demographic results.

2.3 Focus Groups

We ran two focus groups, one in Wales and one in Scotland. This was to ensure we had good representation across devolved nations, and to get in-depth data about the experiences of different groups of PGRs. It was sadly not possible to arrange a focus group in Northern Ireland. Given the differences in administration of higher education and postgraduate research in this nation, it is important that UKRI captures this experience at some point during its own research project.

We recruited focus group attendees through UCU regional offices. We invited PGRs in each nation to register for the events, and specifically stated we were interested in hearing from PGRs who:

- were self-funded
- were on a student/tier 4 visa
- identified as Black or from another minority ethnic background
- identified as disabled, chronically ill or neurodivergent
- had parental or other caring responsibilities
- Or were part-time.

We were unable to recruit any participants who were part time, but had good representation across these other groups. A breakdown of demographics for focus groups can be found in Appendix 2.

The focus groups themselves focused on three main questions:

- Think back to your initial expectations of being a PGR within your university. How would each of you compare this to your experiences so far?
- What has made the biggest difference to you – good and bad – as a PGR?
- What changes would make the biggest difference to you – good and bad – as a PGR?

We also asked PGRs whether they were aware of any differences for PGRs in their nation compared to the rest of the UK. A full list of questions is available in Appendix 2.

3. Models and Access

The current model for postgraduate research does not meet the needs of different stakeholders in a way that is either fair or efficient. In this section we present the need for an alternative model for postgraduate education, and some possible options for redesigning the PhD. We also present the views of PGRs and other respondents to our survey regarding 'staff status' for PGRs.

3.1 Problems with the existing model

The **stated aims** of government department BEIS in developing a 'new deal' for postgraduate researchers include addressing early career precarity, facilitating social mobility, and ensuring the supply of skilled workers that are needed across society. These aims clearly overlap with those of people who engage in postgraduate research, whose motivations include in varying and overlapping degrees: (1) accessing research and teaching careers in higher education, (2) accessing specialist career opportunities in a range of different industries, and (3) pursuing education and knowledge production.

The saturation of the post-PhD academic job market coupled with the perception of PGRs that the PhD itself is highly limited in its ability to provide a pathway to academic or non-academic careers - also noted in the **2021 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey** - suggests that the current system is, at best, a highly inefficient means of meeting many of the goals of relevant stakeholders.

This carries significant costs for PGRs. Only 1.1% of survey respondents thought that opportunities and support for PGRs to continue careers in higher education were very good, and only 8.6% answered 'good'. Not everyone, of course, would like to continue in higher education after their PhD. However, many of our respondents told us they were looking outside of higher education precisely because of the inaccessibility of navigating precarious contracts with poor working conditions. As will be discussed in Section 4 - *Routes in, through and out* - many of those wishing to pursue careers in other sectors also felt unsupported in doing so, if not actively blocked from doing so.

Although we stress in this report that there is a clear set of urgent changes that need to be made to PhD systems, minor adjustments to the provision of doctoral education are unlikely to significantly improve the ability for all postgraduate researchers to pursue careers further in UK higher education and elsewhere, unless accompanied by much more extensive systems change. Problems with the system are in part caused by both the chronic underfunding of research, and the underinvestment in and casualisation of academic staff. There are also additional structural problems within the current model of postgraduate research that we note

from our research which should be addressed to allow significant improvements for all PGRs.

General operational problems with the PhD system can be grouped into three categories:

1. Insufficient income and/or funding and the associated workload and time costs
2. Insufficient specificity in training and the formal requirements of the PhD for career development
3. Insufficient interpersonal support and integration of PGRs within universities.

3.1.1 Set up to Fail?

Structural problems are experienced in the forms of barriers to funding, career opportunities, wellbeing support and inclusion in university networks, among others. While none of these barriers are necessarily insurmountable, overcoming them will often require significant degrees of privilege with regards to most if not all elements of the PhD.

As such, some PGRs told us they view themselves very much as being set up to fail:

Our training session for getting a job in academia boiled down to being told the following: 'Don't bother, unless you're an independently wealthy, [non-disabled], white man with no family ties or dependents.' The sad thing is, the person delivering the session was right. I see no real future in UK academe, but equally, I want to continue researching and teaching.

Don't want to be in academia? Well, sorry can't help you.

*I mean, the academic system is just ruinous for early career researchers, including PGRs. Most support just consists of being told that if we want a job we *must* do GTA work, that we *must* publish as many papers as possible, and we *must* be presenting our work at conferences. But we're also told we should be treating the PhD as a full time job?*

I am coming to the end of my PhD and although I have great support from my supervisor - I feel I am about to have my legs cut off as I leave the university system. I am the first person in my family to ever to [go to] university and at PGR level it has been a fight to afford to be here and I don't see many people like me when I am here. There is no easy route into an academic job and I feel connections and luck have far too great [a] part of [the] outcome. I love both teaching and research with such a passion and it really is my dream job - but having spent years looking for funding for a PhD I am faced with potentially years at building an academic career.

All employment events I have been to actively encourage us not to try and enter academia, that it is not worth it and to consider how instead our skills could be used in ways which are more feasible and profitable, to focus on the 'employability' aspects of our studies. It's very disheartening.

Most PhD students (including myself) were too stressed most of the time to think about anything other than surviving their PhD - doubtless the opportunities are there but few will seek them out.

It's by no means a "failure" to leave academia after the PhD, but it's not what they want when they start, and it's not fair that people are putting in years of work with little realistic chance of it paying off in the way they plan.

Basically, you're on your own. You've spent the last 4 years working at this institution, while probably only being paid for the first 3 of those years. But you're not needed. Next.

Continued devaluation of and reductions of funding for the arts and humanities, plus the pandemic, plus Brexit, means the job market for arts & humanities PGRs has utterly collapsed in the 3 years since I started my PhD. My decade-long dream of being a lecturer is over before it has even begun. I cannot begin to describe the emotional pain this is causing me; I often wonder what the point is in finishing this degree.

Every avenue I have explored (not just in higher education) comes with warnings about their competitiveness. I feel very stressed about the matter, as I am very behind on my research due in part to COVID and overwhelmed about needing to be published etc to be a competitive candidate. The opportunities also make it even more difficult for PGRs such as me, who have a spouse/family and cannot uproot to get a job on the other side of the country or risk a temporary contract as much as more advantaged students.

Activities and specific skills that will enable PGRs to obtain suitable post-PhD work is something that should be identified and made integral to the formal requirements of postgraduate research. Indeed, the content of PGR career training run by departments and doctoral training partnerships (DTPs) does little to assuage this view. While additional training or career mentoring is needed, this will not be sufficient to address structural issues that are made worse, if not caused by, the current model of PhD completion and assessment.

3.1.2 What are the biggest issues for PGRs?

We asked respondents to our survey what they felt were the biggest issues for PGRs at their university. We asked them to rank the following issues from most important to least important:

- Career progression
- Bullying, harassment and discrimination
- Training
- Workload
- Supervision
- Personal health and wellbeing
- Low pay
- Lack of funding for research support (e.g. conferences, equipment, travel, etc.)
- Visa issues
- Workplace health and safety.

Of these, respondents (n=504 - 633) ranked **low pay**, followed by **personal health and wellbeing, workload, career progression and lack of funding for research support** the highest. Many respondents told us in comments, however, that they found it difficult to rank them as they were all important and related. Others said while they may have ranked some lower than others because they had not personally experienced them, they still felt they were likely to be important.

One response summed up the range of problems faced by PGRs, and the ways in which those problems were interlinked. Many of these issues were raised in other comments separately. This demonstrates the extent to which universities and PhD systems are failing PGRs.

Systems don't suit PhDs in paid work. Practice based PhDs aren't properly supported sector wide. Time limits don't reflect the real world of research. There is no easy way to change research topic or often even adjust it. There isn't enough support for PhDs who need to take time out. Checkpointing systems are unsuitable. PhD students are treated as naughty kids by faceless bureaucracies. Systems are uncompassionate and unsuitable for research. There is insufficient workload allowance for supervisors. PhDs processes in the UK are a time driven box ticking sausage machine which takes no proper account of the nuances, different paths and ways of doing a PhD. All universities treat the arrival of a new PhD as if it's the first time this has happened, and it's a major achievement even.

Other comments raised serious concerns about the processes and systems involved in doing a PhD, including their impact on individuals' health and wellbeing.

It's pressure. Pressure is the biggest thing. When you get given funding and you're supposed to do a research project, but you don't know what a research project is and you don't know anyone who has ever done a research project, the pressure is intense. And no one tells you what the consequences are if you miss a deadline. Everything is so vague.

I do not regret doing the PhD. However, the process has broken me in many ways and left me in a permanently depleted position with increasing work precarity. For someone like myself who doesn't fit the mold of the traditional academic and has travelled a different path, inequality and who holds privilege in HE is very clear.

As someone who contended with anxiety, the biggest thing standing in my way was the lack of confidence. I do my best to help others dealing with this in their PhD now but this is not in my role, nor as a part time staff member do I have any responsibility over this. There is a middle ground between hands off and overbearing. Universities building more support groups and incorporating them into the PhD would have helped me.

A key issue is that PGRs are adults - they often do not have the safety net of just going home for a while until they are 'better' - Adults without any social safety net. Improved conditions for PGRs would reduce the stress and lack of wellbeing that PGRs often experience. How this happens is open for discussion but it is not an acceptable situation.

[A] culture that sees PGRs as students and therefore benefits from our academic contributions while deferring us to a crumbling student support system. Mental health across the sector is deteriorating. We don't want more wellness workshops, we want to be able to afford to live and research.

Many responses also suggested that many of these issues were inextricably linked to issues of work precarity, low pay and a lack of rights for people in roles such as graduate teaching assistants (GTAs). This also linked to issues of career progression.

The lack of funding and money-making practices off of international students is harsh. If we are doing original research as PhD students we should be receiving compensation for it. Especially since our research and deliverables will be to the University's benefit. But universities here love to see us as students when it's convenient for them, and staff when it benefits them the most.

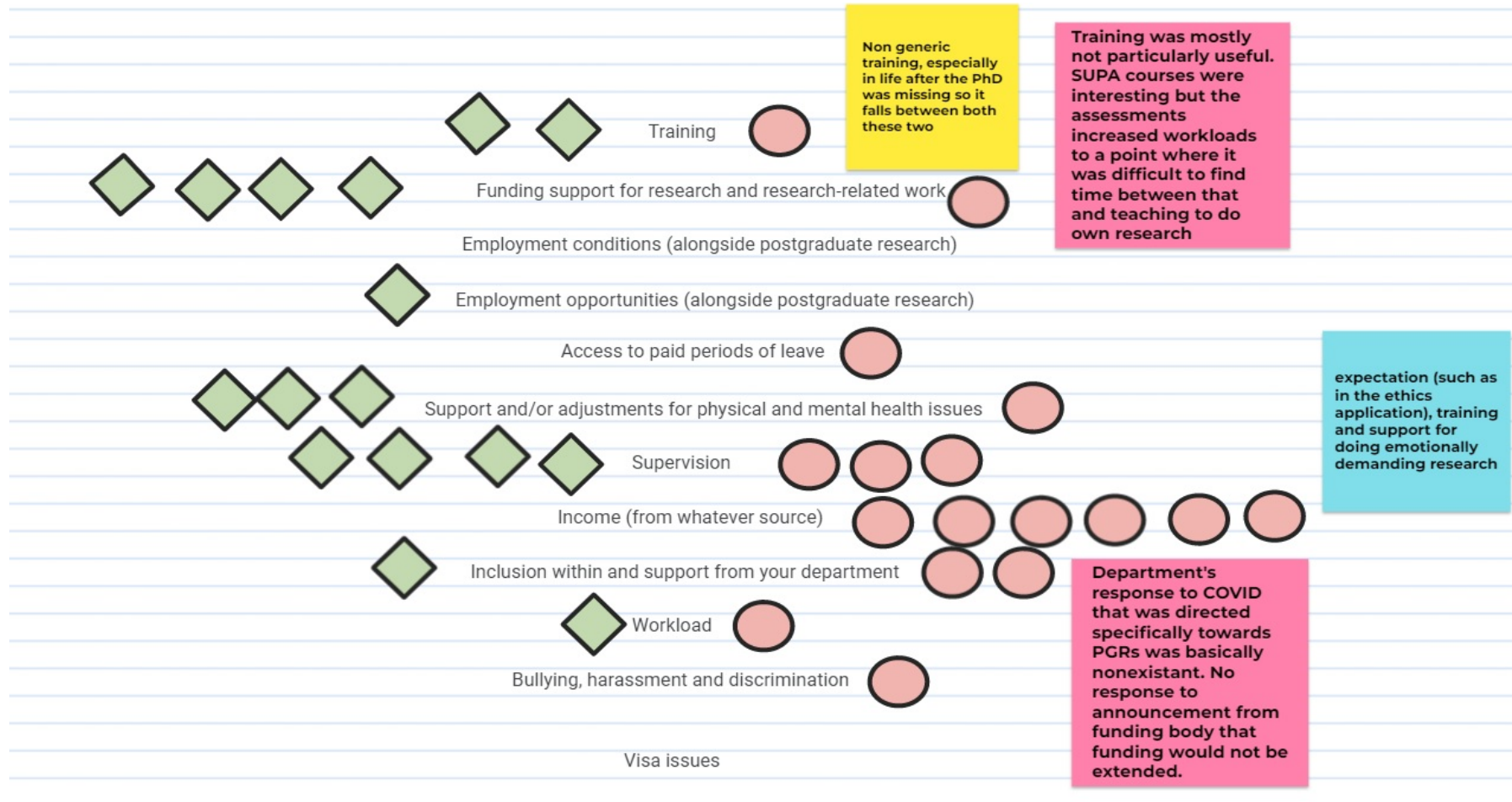
The work situation (precarious contracts and workload for my supervisors) makes it very difficult to maintain a good dialogue with my supervisory team or build up a CV for future work. Currently I'm struggling to see a role for myself in traditional academia going forward.

Clearly the current system is highly exploitative and damaging to individuals carrying out PhDs, which in turn hinders the quality of scientific outputs.

I feel that my University is utterly uninterested in the work done by PGRs and fails to recognise the fact that we are vital parts of departments, bringing in new research and ideas, and propping up the running of modules and marking. I began teaching this year and whilst I have loved doing it, the amount of work for the amount we are paid as 'doctoral tutors' (as if the teaching we do is somehow less than or separate to the work done in seminars just down the hall from employed staff) is diabolical. I have never been as drained by a job as I have been this year. Despite logically knowing that as a young, female member of staff students would be more inclined to disclose wellbeing and personal issues to me, I truly was not prepared for the reality of this.

During focus groups, we similarly asked participants to tell us which of these issues had made the biggest difference to their experience as a PGR, both positively and negatively. They marked these on an online Jamboard, which is shown below. These show, again, that lack of sufficient income and other funding is a significant concern. They also show a mix of experiences regarding training, support and adjustments for disability and health conditions, and, in particular, supervision. Where people had had good experiences with supervision, they described themselves as "lucky" in comparison to other colleagues. These issues are explored in more detail in Section 4.3.

Chart 3: responses to the question 'what has made the biggest difference to you – good and bad – as a PGR?' (Scotland Focus Group)



*SUPA = Scottish Universities Physics Alliance

Chart 4: responses to the question 'what has made the biggest difference to you – good and bad – as a PGR'? (Wales Focus Group)



3.2 Alternative Models: The Early Career Portfolio Doctorate

An alternative model for postgraduate research that may overcome many of the operational challenges that PGRs have identified and are detailed throughout this report, would be one that mainstreams the early career portfolio doctorate. This means of engaging in doctoral research would build on existing practices of a PhD *by publication* or clinical doctorate. It would also reflect common early career employment practices in many other sectors where graduate schemes provide a range of professional skills and experience that will be more directly useful to both the employer and employee.

The early career portfolio doctorate could provide one half of a two-track model for the PhD. These two systems may provide more direct routes towards two different sets of aims or motivations for engaging in a PhD: for the purposes of pursuing a research, or research-related, career in or outside of Higher Education, and for the purposes of engaging in research or developing one's knowledge for its own end. Creating two respective tracks may enable far greater accessibility for people wishing to pursue each aim. The two tracks would be:

1. The early career portfolio doctorate, where funding is intended to provide people, as members of staff, with (a) pathways to research or research-related careers in and outside of higher education and (b) research and/or research-related outputs that are intended to benefit one or more sector.
2. A flexible and accessible PhD by thesis in which people, as students would engage in self-directed research for the purposes of subject interest knowledge development.

It is worth noting that this portfolio model would also reduce the perceived costs of leaving the PhD for whatever reason insofar as it would likely allow PGRs to accrue useful career experiences and achievements much earlier and more easily, which could be recognised and taken elsewhere. This may improve issues of post-PhD job market saturation, and would certainly help remove the barriers for PGRs who wish to leave a situation they find detrimental to their wellbeing.

We believe that this model, coupled with the provision of a new, accessible, affordable and flexible option for self-funded PhD study for those *not* wishing to develop a research or research-related career but still wishing to contribute to knowledge and understanding, will enable the postgraduate research system to overcome inbuilt tensions that have developed as the practices and positions of universities within society have changed, and be more reflective of this. We believe that this two track model - detailed more fully in Appendix 4 - provides a better balance of relevant stakeholder interests and that it is worth exploring in more detail by all, including UCU, to understand its implications.

3.3 Alternative models: PGRs as Staff

Debates around whether postgraduate researchers should be classed as employees, as opposed to students are not new, and the argument that they should has previously been expressed by both PGRs and **university employers**. The COVID-19 pandemic, however, and PGRs' deteriorating **experiences** of those operational challenges of postgraduate research, identified in the previous sub-section and elsewhere in this report, in the face of wider economic conditions have resulted in far stronger demands for major structural change. This is reflected by the creation of the *PGRs as Staff* campaign by the PGR members of UCU. The campaign's **manifesto** sets out some of the initial ways in which universities and funders should provide PGRs with stronger rights, better respect, and the protections and benefits of staff members within UK universities.

UCU's ultimate primary campaign objective here, however, has to be balanced with its other objective: that any change must be of no detriment for any already marginalised groups of PGRs. Put similarly, in relation to BEIS policy objectives, any 'new deal' must be a 'better deal'. There are a number of different ways in which 'staff' or '*de facto* staff' status could be obtained and it has been noted from the start that there must be serious consideration of how any change may positively and/or negatively impact access to postgraduate research in terms of both overall numbers of postgraduate researchers and for particular groups of marginalised people.

We therefore wanted to better understand what PGRs and others thought about the potential benefits and drawbacks of gaining staff status, and what related elements they thought were the most important.

Our findings suggest that many PGRs believe they would benefit from staff or de-facto staff status insofar as it would go some way to addressing the structural problems that they have identified within the current postgraduate research system in relation to:

1. pay, workload and living conditions, and
2. capacity for developing interpersonal support and integration within the university.

There were, however, concerns raised in relation to potentially losing perceived benefits if PGRs were no longer being classed as students. Of most importance here was:

1. access to disability support allowance and other disability-related state benefits
2. the ability to access postgraduate research in a self-funded capacity
3. the impact on those studying on Tier 4 or Student Visas, and
4. having access to student networks and associations.

Views around these potential losses were mixed, however, and these are discussed in more detail below.

Taken together, implementing the recommendations throughout this report would likely amount to near *de facto* staff status. It is also worth noting that 'Early Career Portfolio Doctorate' model suggested previously, described in more detail in Appendix 4, may provide an option that allows individuals to make an informed decision about which set of benefits are more appropriate with respect to their aims and needs for postgraduate study.

3.3.1 The Importance of Staff Status

When asking about possible proposals for a better deal, 69% of survey respondents told us they thought extending staff status to all PGRs was 'very important', and a further 17.2% said 'quite important' (n=529). 67.5% said extending access to staff grievance policies and trade union case work was very important, and a further 25% said it was quite important. 67.2% told us it was very important to extend access to tax-free child care to all PGRs, and 60% or more rated extending access to pensions, shared parental leave, bereavement leave, caring leave and a better visa as very important. 83.6% (n=528) told us they thought extending trade union representation and entitlement to facilities time to PGRs who wanted to engage in trade union duties was either very important (54.2%) or quite important (29.4%).

Respondents were comparatively less favourable towards extending access to staff networks (49.4% 'very important') and to university strategy meetings (48.1% 'very important') to PGRs, or including them in staff emails (48.1% 'very important') although many of the comments suggested this was because of concerns about workload.

We invited respondents to answer the following two questions to gain more information regarding their views of securing staff status:

- What do you think would be the main benefits of PGRs gaining staff status?
- What would be the main student status benefits that you would be concerned about losing?

3.3.2 Benefits of Staff Status

Benefits commonly highlighted by respondents included:

- securing stronger rights as employees
- gaining more respect for their work and role, and a better understanding for themselves and for others of the PGR role itself from the outset.
- being involved in university decision-making
- better access to housing through mortgages or better rental arrangements
- better pay, access to pensions and entitlement to leave

It's about feeling like I belong and am wanted within this space. Some of the benefits exist outside of the PhD though - it is also about keep in pace with my peers who are employed and not having to field comments about 'when am I going to get a real job',

it is about not automatically needing a guarantor for a lease because of your student status or being able to get a mortgage, it's about making national insurance payments so that you are building up your contribution years to your pension.

Recognition of our contribution to the university (teaching and research); extension of material staff benefits - more financial security; getting a more constant seat at the table in important conversations rather than being seen as transitory members; recognition as colleagues rather than 'assistants' in teaching roles

Not being treated as second class citizens. Not being treated as personal serfs by some supervisors. This is exacerbated by the nature of undertaking a PhD: if you leave any other job after 2-3 years for a different one, it's typically considered valuable work experience; if you leave a PhD programme after 2-3 years without a PhD, it's considered a failure, even by employers with no clue about how a PhD programme works.

1. It would acknowledge the role of PGRs in the research activity of the university: in my department most of the research in the department is performed by PGRs, so we should be seen as research staff. 2. It would remove the dual-status of PGRs who teach. Currently I am a student most of my time but a member of staff when I teach, which also involves two different accounts for IT and HR purposes that creates totally unnecessary stress and confusion.

In one sentence: a recognition that we are established, independent adults with all the rights, responsibilities and life "complications" inherent therein. Easier to complete referencing checks for tenancies, credit cards etc. - especially funding would be more clearly understood. People would take you more seriously in a variety of situations - a lot of times people hear "student" and treat you like a teenager with no experience. Having the same rights as our employed colleagues with similar levels of responsibility. Clearly defined annual leave, sick leave, working hours etc. If there was a repeat of covid we might not get so screwed over - it was like we were a forgotten category because "student" only ever seemed applicable to UG and PGTs, but yet we weren't eligible for furlough/support like employed colleagues.

Greater recognition of what they do to contribute to their departments. Impostor syndrome is so common in PGRs. I help some at the moment who struggle with not knowing if they are "worthy" of attending things. Accepting that they do have a role would be very helpful in sorting out with them what that is.

Choosing to do a PhD in its current state is choosing to put your life on hold for 4 years. The poor pay from the stipend also means that I cannot save for the future. Being counted as staff would give the assurance that the university is contributing towards my pension (however poor that may be...) which would help reduce the feeling I'm wasting these years of my life when I could be fully employed elsewhere.

The issue is the safety net for when things go wrong in particular, and the only way I can see to solve that is employee protections, employment rights. [Interview]

3.3.3 Concerns Regarding Staff Status

Concerns about the drawbacks of staff status included:

- Loss of council tax discount
- Having to pay other taxes, and having to pay back student loans
- Other discounts, including shops, travel, gym membership, academic society membership and conference fees
- Losing access to student networks, including clubs, student unions and NUS membership

*Loss of ability to be represented by Students Unions (including NUS) and loss of access to the SU community, activities, etc - *especially* for those who have gone directly from undergrad education into PGR roles. Risk that, when not seen as students, the nature of our journey as people *still learning how to do research* may be overlooked and hence the expectations for our research output maladjusted. Would REF principles start being used to screen PGR students? Loss of central wellbeing services that, while often insufficient, are afforded to students. We need to be recognised as both staff AND students.*

- Losing access to student support, and additional pressure from managers

My only concern is that this status might put more pressure on PGRs to be "perfect". At the moment, as a student, they feel that there's room for error and there's an understanding that they are still learning/getting trained on becoming "professional researchers". Once they lose that status, it might make them feel that they need to already know the answers to everything and might be even more hesitant in asking help from their supervisors.

My biggest concern is that if they were to become staff, they would be treated as cheap labour and lumbered with all the work that staff don't feel like doing. Their time should be protected, to allow them to dedicate this to their research. They are also there to learn and develop, explore and have fun- this may be more difficult when subjected to management metrics, formal annual appraisal processes, etc.

No more student support, which includes Graduate Schools holding your hand step by step throughout, PGRs would need to navigate HR regulations on their own. No more student counselling, no more student discounts, no more tax exemptions. Medical leave only commensurate with actual sick notes. No more interruption of study for 'personal reasons'. PGRs who stop engaging could be fired instead once mechanisms to try and help them as students no longer apply. No more student training (staff training is really poor). I also expect that if PGRs were given staff status the teaching they do would no

longer be paid extra. No longer possible for students from abroad to come in with external funding... As a staff member I find that the support we provide to students is much superior than the support any staff member receives. The grievance policies and procedures in place for staff are not superior than the ones in place for students. Staff burn out and leave and no one extends a hand to them to ask what happened.

- Reduced flexibility and freedom over people's own time and research

Flexibility with time, constructive supervisor-student relationship, freedom from university bureaucracy, membership of the broader student community.

Autonomy over my own working hours, autonomy to decide on my annual leave dates and working patterns, autonomy to remain independent of the hugely problematic bureaucracy of working for such a large institution. Autonomy to focus on research rather than trying to navigate the mountain of emails and forms that staff have to fill in. Also, as it stands as a student my first priority is to my research - if I became a member of staff then that loyalty would have to shift towards my employer and I think that is an appalling situation to put a PhD student in. As a student I can put both my wellbeing and my research first. That is so important given the stresses of the PhD - as a member of staff that would add a layer of complexity and competing demands that I think is unacceptable and unmanageable.

Many of my PGR colleagues have completed internships in industry. It might become more difficult to interrupt studies for internships if there is a contract of employment with the university; an interruption could also impact negatively on important employment rights that depend on continuous service, such as redundancy payments and parental leave entitlements. Some people combine PGR study with existing employment. An employer who is currently happy to allow flexibility for study purposes might be less willing to allow a competing contract of employment to exist.

- Negative impact on equality and diversity, if fewer places were available

In a big picture sense, there is a risk that PGRs as staff would further exclude already-marginalised students, e.g. if recruitment to Phd programmes has to be through the same inequitable HR systems that already exclude already-marginalised staff.

- Losing access to the Graduate visa, or exclusion from study entirely as an international PGR

For international students, visas would probably become even more complex and prohibitively expensive than they are now, if people are officially workers instead of students. It would simply rule out studying in the UK for many people. Also, they might subject students to even more draconian monitoring--like Tier 2 work visas, where my employer was supposed to know where I was pretty much every minute of the day, and

threatened me with revoking my visa when I took on extra duties at my department's urgent request.

I'm also unclear on how it would work for international PGRs - would they be granted Skilled Worker visas? Currently the new Graduate Immigration Route is a great option for PGRs post-PhD (I'm applying for it now), and it would be a shame to lose access to that unless there was a different route available (for example, if PGRs were granted a 5-year Skilled Worker visa, they could apply for ILR immediately after).

However, many respondents pointed out they didn't benefit from some of these elements, or would be willing for them to change in return for better working conditions. For instance, several respondents pointed out they weren't entitled to council tax discount because they were part-time, or because of their living situation, and others said they would have no problem with paying taxes and losing student discounts if they were paid a decent, livable wage. Some respondents also said they could not see any downsides to losing student status, because of additional costs and lack of support as a result of being classed as students.

Literally none at all. It does not serve me in any way. The money I save on council tax is completely overshadowed by my incredibly high childcare costs, my higher interest mortgage, everything really.

Some, however, highlighted an important complexity with regards to state disability benefits and other support and protections for disabled people. This included losing the protection of the anticipatory duty of the Equality Act 2010, which applies to students (as 'customers') but not employees.

Additional protection under the Equality Act re the anticipatory duty, access to Disabled Students' Allowance

DWP disability benefits eligibility, being found 'fit to work' even though I'm not really, beyond possibly a fractional contract. Low income support schemes (e.g. Warm Home Discount), depending on income level and, possibly, if losing recognition as disabled. Lack of availability of roles that fit the 'permitted work' criteria (for ESA) i.e. up to 16 hours and paid no more than equivalent to 16 x 'national living wage' per week... Being pressured to take on extra work, under a typical 'any additional duties' clause typical of employment contracts. That fewer disabled people would be given the opportunity to become PGRs, due to disability discrimination in accessing work.

Others also pointed out that many staff at UK universities are subject to unfair conditions and a lack of support. Finally, some respondents raised questions about whether PGRs would lose copyright or ownership over their own research work. However, we know anecdotally that there is already a mixed picture across UK universities regarding ownership, for both students and staff.

Again, these are important issues that any new system for PhDs will need to resolve, to ensure everyone is in the position to secure a better deal. In particular, there must be further work done to understand the practical, legal implications for migrant or international PGRs and disabled PGRs. We will discuss more issues for these groups in Sections 5.3 and 5.4 of this report.

3.3.4 Self-Funded PGRs and Staff Status

In the section of the survey asking about the needs of particular groups, we specifically asked self-funded PGRs to express their views on the implications for self-funding researchers of securing staff status. As the quotes below show, many stated that they saw self-funding as inherently exploitative, but there were a range of views as to what the implications of extending staff status policy would be.

There were concerns that if staff status wasn't applied to self-funded PGRs then this could increase the costs of self-funding, which would further limit access, both in relation to postgraduate research overall and to training and opportunities within it. There were also concerns that if people could only engage in postgraduate research as a funded member of staff then this would limit access to underfunded areas of scholarship, particularly in relation to arts and humanities. As Chart 2, shared earlier in the methodology section, shows, respondents to our survey who told us they were self-funded/unfunded were much more likely to be within these disciplines.

Staff status was seen as potentially positive, however, if it could be used to extend funding to people who are currently self-funded. Somewhat in contrast, it was also viewed as a positive if it meant limiting access to postgraduate research to those who could be funded, insofar as it would stop people from being exploited.

This is very tricky. The number of PGR positions will contract if PGRs cost institutions more. [People] who pursue doctoral study for professional development or simply the love and interest in their discipline will be reduced. It has the potential to hollow out the PGR community and turn it only into the first job in a research career. Much is lost in doing this. The future careers of PGRs are clearly very important and I'd not argue against this - however, PGRs as staff risks reducing the PGR experience simply to career development.

I worry that there will be barely any positions in the Arts and Humanities and that this could potentially have the effect of making the field even less diverse than it already is as STEM [science, technology, engineering and mathematics] subjects will be the financial priority.

It means that doctorates will be attractive to a larger group of people who wouldn't be able to fund their own studies normally and who perhaps wouldn't be "competitive" enough for a scholarship (eg because they had a 2:1 degree rather than a first).

If this would come with an income, this would be very welcome.

I suppose the two biggest [implications] are that self-funders become even more 'second class' PGRs than they already are, and the potential for them to be exploited as a cash cow.

Losing student-status benefits could hit finances, and obviously this would be felt much more keenly by self-funded PGRs. But I hope achieving staff status would help universities realise how ridiculous it is for PGRs to be self-funded, and that research staff should be properly paid for the work they do.

I think that everybody who wants to do a PhD should be able to do one, whatever the reason. But the reality is also that there aren't enough jobs for all the wonderful PhDs we have across the UK (and beyond). This would rob a lot of people from the opportunity to do a PhD, but maybe it will also ensure universities no longer take advantage of self funded PhDs paying tuition fees and giving them nothing in return.

Some self-funded or unfunded respondents told us they felt let down by their experience, compared to their expectations when starting their programme. As explored in more detail in Section 5.10, self-funded PGRs were more dissatisfied with the extent to which their needs had been met than any other group of PGRs.

I should not have been allowed to enrol. The entire premise of entirely self-funded shouldn't be allowed and it felt so unethical and exploitive once I started the program. I felt like a cash cow.

I find it particularly galling that I have to fork out thousands of pounds per year for crap supervision and minimal access to office space. Meanwhile, I've written two journal articles without any payment for my time. Instead, all of my research activities should be paid - then I would not have to take on more teaching work than I can manage because I wouldn't have to worry about those competing demands.

It would have helped if the supervision I had paid for, and as laid out in the university's policy, as well as by the QAA [Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education] and OfS [Office for Students], had actually been provided. It would also have helped if, the supervision not having been provided, there had been a proper route to redress.

I became a self-funded PGR because at the time I wasn't able to apply for any scholarships in my chosen institution where I did my masters. I decided that I was going to provide for myself by working. Little did I know how poorly paid I was going to be or how severe the cost of living crisis was going to become in 2022. Self-funded

PGRs take a lot of paid work to support themselves. Very often that is at the expense of the PhD progression, which in turn makes the whole process longer and harder and results in poor mental and physical health. Currently there is limited help for students who are struggling with finance but that does not cover help with tuition fees. There should be more help with tuition fees!

While ultimately the implications of the change from student status to staff status for self-funded PGRs would be unclear, given that it would not occur in isolation, it is worth noting that in our survey question on the importance of specific proposals for improving the postgraduate research system 79.4% of respondents identified "Remov[ing] fees for all postgraduate researchers" as either "really important" (55.9%) or "quite important" (23.5%). Evidently, however, the conditions, affordability, and accessibility of self-funded postgraduate research must all be significantly improved in a manner that enables more people to successfully engage in research and education.

Universities, however, must also not be allowed to (unintentionally or otherwise) mis-sell career development to people as a means of (1) acquiring revenue via inaccessibly high tuition fees from UK and international students, (2) attracting comparably cheap (if not free) and disposable research and teaching labour, and (3) further saturating the job market in a way that facilitates casualisation. The model for postgraduate research described in Appendix 4, may provide one means of exploring how different logics and competition over access to resources and careers may be balanced in a more equitable manner, which limits these forms of exploitation while also improving rights and conditions.

4. Routes in, through and out

4.1 Overview

The last section identified operational problems that may inhibit the aims of different stakeholders, including government and PGRs, being effectively met. It also identified two possible structural solutions to these issues - (1) the early career portfolio model and (2) staff or de facto staff status - and presented areas of our research that engaged with people's views on the latter. This section explores people's lived experiences of the structural problems highlighted above.

As previously stated, the overall implications of these problems is not that they necessarily make it impossible for PGRs to have a good and valued set of experiences - although in some instances they definitely do. Rather, it is that these problems can raise significant barriers for PGRs to effectively meet their aims without requiring equally significant amounts of privilege or proximity to privilege. This may often entail that success as a PGR, or even the completion of the PhD, is achieved as much in spite of the system, as it is because of it.

Funding for universities and others to train and benefit from the work of PGRs should be contingent on them being able to demonstrate that they can provide and maintain conditions, staffing levels, facilities and resources without requiring additional under/unpaid labour or cost from PGRs and other staff. Our discussion here suggests that any claim from universities that postgraduate research is 'loss leading' should be interrogated further, given the reliance of some universities on this pool of low-paid labour, and the high material and other costs paid by many PGRs.

Comments in response to our survey highlighted two key themes: lack of money and time, and access to different forms of support. These are discussed below.

4.2 Lack of Money and Time

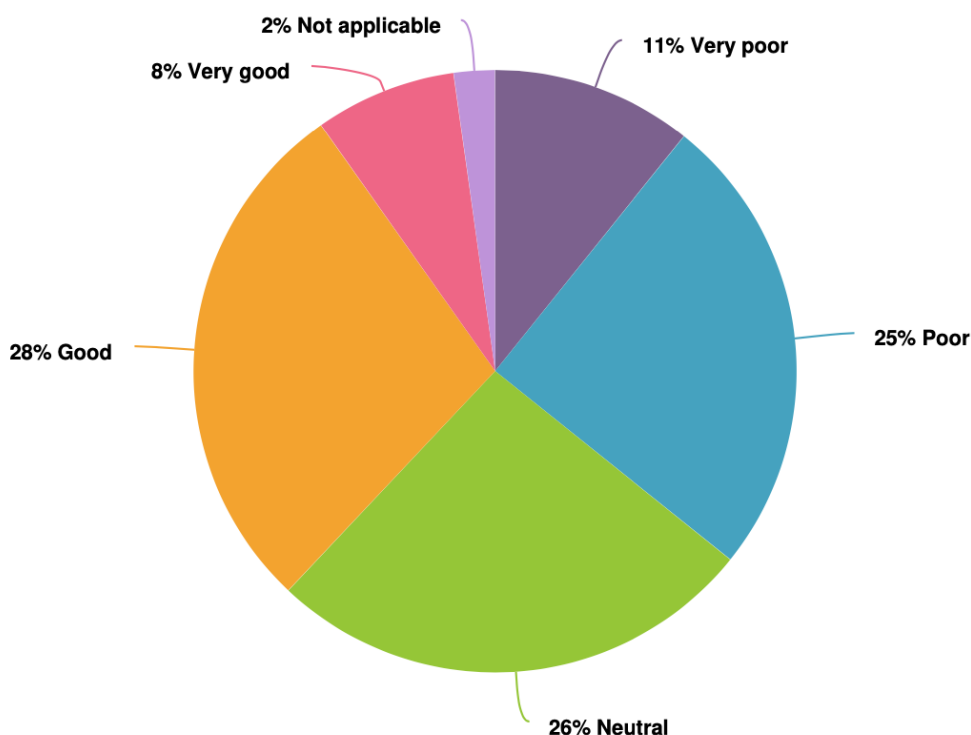
As noted, low pay was the biggest single concern for respondents to our survey. PGRs have often complained about low pay in relation to stipends and salaries, and the difficulties of having to pay tuition fees. Low pay for PGRs has become even more of an urgent issue in light of the current cost of living crisis.

However, the options for PGRs to supplement their income often produce further barriers to gaining the full benefits of postgraduate study.

4.2.1 Lack of Money

As Chart 5 demonstrates, when asking about the quality of opportunities available for PGRs to take on paid work, participants' answers were relatively evenly split.

Chart 5: Percentage responses to the survey question "What do you think about the opportunities available for PGRs to take on additional paid work (e.g. teaching, research and lab assistance, etc.)?"



This split, when taken with the comments, suggests that opportunities for paid work are highly dependent on institution and department. As demonstrated in the below quotes, respondents that tended towards the negative highlighted a range of issues in relation to competition, access, lack of jobs and informality in recruitment processes, that collectively amount to opportunities being dependent on privilege.

Too dependent on informal methods of recruitment and therefore proximity to privilege.

Personally, I have been unable to take on a GTA role which I had intended to do, because I am a parent and was told by my department that no consideration could be made for my limited childcare - i.e. they could not guarantee my teaching would be on the days I had childcare and they could not give me the 4 weeks notice I require to change my childcare days.

It was and probably still is down to favoritism. I was also blocked by my supervisor at the time from taking on work I had been offered.

In the School of English at my university there is only the opportunity to gain a semester of teaching experience before finishing whereas in other departments GTA experience is obtainable the whole way through. Some people play favourites and get their students to stay on for multiple semesters barring other students from those opportunities

Very variable across institutions. The Uni where I did my PhD had lots of opportunities and the process to get involved was straightforward and well signposted. At the Uni where I am a lecturer it is very hard to get money to hire PhD students to teach, there is little training or support for them, and it's hard to advertise posts

Practices of offering paid work are entirely nepotistic and informal. I taught as a GTA on an entire module last year, and this seemed to be entirely down to the fact that my supervisor also taught on this module. There was no advertisement of the post and no job description or contract. Those PhD researchers who spend most time at the pub drinking with faculty members are the most likely to be offered paid work as GTAs.

In four years not ONE opportunity came up for me to take on any paid work in my department, despite asking supervisors about it multiple times.

The restrictions on visa holders is very prohibitive.

That the availability of these opportunities is dependent on privilege is particularly concerning because the vast majority of people did not view available paid work as something that was particularly valuable as a career development experience. Indeed, elsewhere in the survey, one respondent even expressed the opinion that teaching work is widely 'viewed as a career killer which is why it is so heavily pushed on PGRs'. Although this is a minority view, and the comments in the next section show that other PGRs see this and other kinds of work as important to career building, it is concerning that some PGRs feel they have to undertake the work that more senior, paid colleagues do not want to, with little benefit to themselves.

Indeed, once this experience had been initially gained, many described teaching work as something that was done out of necessity, in order to maintain a sufficient income level. The need to supplement low income was frequently described as detracting from both the ability to pursue more valuable forms of developmental experience, and the ability to engage in one's postgraduate research.

There are some great opportunities which provide a lot of experience, but people are usually underpaid and poorly managed. There is usually also no serious workload allocation management for the roles and how they impact upon PhD work. This both requires and normalises the practice of people routinely working 45-50+ hours a week in order to feel that they might be able to progress in their career (and that is often

compounded by concerns over income). Failing that, they don't make enough progress with the PhDs and need to move further out of funded/tuition fee paying periods.

It can be very useful for PGRs to have the opportunity to gain teaching experience, however these opportunities are not guaranteed and often very competitive. Unfortunately, due to PGRs having low stipends or self-funding, many have to take on additional paid work as a necessity rather than as a voluntary career development choice.

My department does its best to give us good opportunities. However, the pay doesn't match what work we have to do. I am constantly having to take on additional work to supplement my funding and afford the increasing cost of living. I can't afford to live where I'm doing my PhD next year on my stipend and the uni work doesn't make up for it. Working full time on [a] PhD and having to have 3 additional jobs makes the whole process very stressful and impossible.

These opportunities are useful to gain teaching experience, however many PhD students have to spend lots more time working in these positions than they want to, in order to supplement their stipend, which means they have less time for their research. A PhD is a full time job so stipends should pay a living wage, so any extra paid work to gain experience is optional, not essential to survive. This once again puts poorer students at a disadvantage as they have to spend more time working other jobs and so have less time to spend on their research.

We have strict terms in our contracts that do not allow us to take on many additional hours of work so we are very restricted in terms of what work we can take on/the hours of this. Additionally, many of the research assistant jobs have been offered at below the real living wage, and so we can't afford to do these for the experience when we can earn more money in hospitality.

I have loved teaching and I am grateful for the opportunities I have had to teach. Being unfunded, teaching is my sole source of income (most of which gets recycled back into the university as tuition fees). However, the conditions of casualised teaching routinely mean that I am expected to work many hours overtime unpaid, directly impacting my research.

Are there opportunities for paid work? There are always opportunities for teaching, exam marking, etc, in fact they're in such high demand that at some unis they are on a "first come first served" basis because so many PGRs apply for them. Is the work paid fairly? Absolutely not. The work is precarious, contracts are delivered late or not at all, pay is also delivered late or not at all, training is extremely poor, working conditions are unmanageable, the hours are long, I could go on. Almost all of the PGRs I know who do additional paid work, myself included, do it mostly because they need the money,

because their stipend is not enough to cover the cost of living. This should not be the case at all.

There are plenty of opportunities. However, this is often taken to add on to the piddly salary we get from our funding bodies. We end up having to work so many more hours on tutoring jobs to make up for the lack of good salaries. Also, since I am not funded for the full length of my PhD, I need to do these extra jobs to make sure I save enough money for the months I am not funded for, which is very stressful.

There have been plenty of opportunities to undertake additional paid work, especially in the form of seminar/module assistance, and these have been useful opportunities for professional development. However, the remuneration for these positions is simply inadequate for the level and amount of work performed, which only [increases] the financial difficulties of PGRs stemming from the low rate of a normal stipend. The major limitation is that the contracts of these roles grossly underestimate the amount of work necessary to properly prepare for teaching, so PGRs are consistently underpaid for the considerable work we undertake over and above these specified amounts.

Comments such as these are indicative of the ways in which low pay and/or ability to meet the costs of the PhD is the biggest issue for the majority of PGRs. The comments suggest that insufficient money likely has a role to play in next three issues that respondents ranked highest for PGRs: personal health and wellbeing, workload, and career progression. Without this issue being adequately addressed, it will continue to have far reaching negative consequences. Extra work outside of the PhD is not, these comments suggest, a solution. Nevertheless, universities addressing the issues of low pay and unrealistic workload allocation in relation to casualised work undertaken by PGRs (and others) would likely go some way to improving a number of related pressures on PGRs.

Our survey suggests that many PGRs view PhD stipends as insufficient to maintain a good quality of life.. It should not be the case that additional paid work is required to complete a PhD, without this requirement being formally recognised and taken into account in workload allocation models and the period of funding that is provided. A better solution, however, would be to provide PGRs with remuneration that is both reflective of their value and the work they do, and which does not require supplementing through additional work.

4.2.2 Lack of Time

The issue of lack of time is one of lacking time both within the working week as a result of requirements to take on unmanageable or unsustainable workloads, and lacking overall time for PhD completion.

Insufficient overall time could be experienced in relation to funding period length, maximum permitted completion period, or both. Excessive required workloads are seen as one contributing factor, but there are other conditions that can reduce capacity, described

later in this section. In order to address the variable experiences and requirements of different PGRs, and provide mechanisms that support people in navigating barriers, there needs to be greater minimum provisions in relation to overall time. More importantly, there needs to be greater capacity for flexibility in relation to overall time.

We note that the recent review of PhD scholarships conducted for the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) recommended a longer PhD funding period. Subsequently, ESRC scholarships have been extended from 3 to 3.5 years. Our research also supports a move towards a longer funding period. Extending funding to 4 years was most frequently identified as "really important" in our list of proposals for creating a better deal for PGRs, with 76.7% of respondents selecting this option, and a further 17.5% selecting 'quite important'.

Additionally, when respondents were asked how long they felt PhD scholarships should last, only 5% answered that funding should be for 3 years. As Chart 6 shows, the most common view was that funding should last for 4 years (53% of respondents). A further 14% stated '5 years' and another 25% answered 'however long it takes to complete'. These answers are a further indication of the need for there to not only be greater minimum funded time periods, but also that the need for recognition of different needs and therefore flexibility. This is discussed in more detail in section 5.4, particularly in relation to the needs of disabled, chronically ill and neurodivergent PGRs.

We also asked respondents how long they felt PGRs should have to complete their PhD, regardless of funding. Chart 7 shows that there was a greater split of opinion in relation to this question, with the percentage of those answering "4 years" being equal to those answering "5 years" or "there should be no limit". These results show that the expectation that PGRs should complete their PhDs within 3 or 3.5 years is unrealistic for many, and harmful for those with greater needs for flexibility.

Chart 6: Percentage responses to the question: 'How long do you think funding scholarships should typically last?'

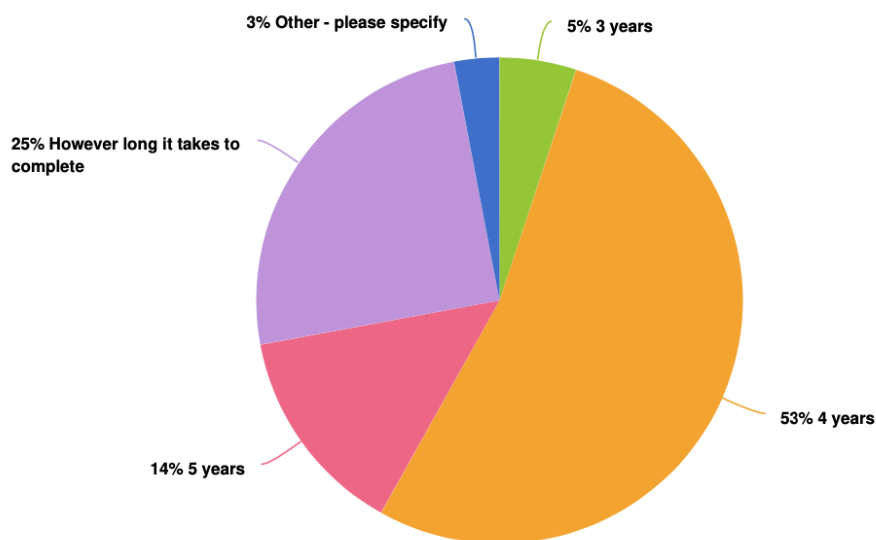
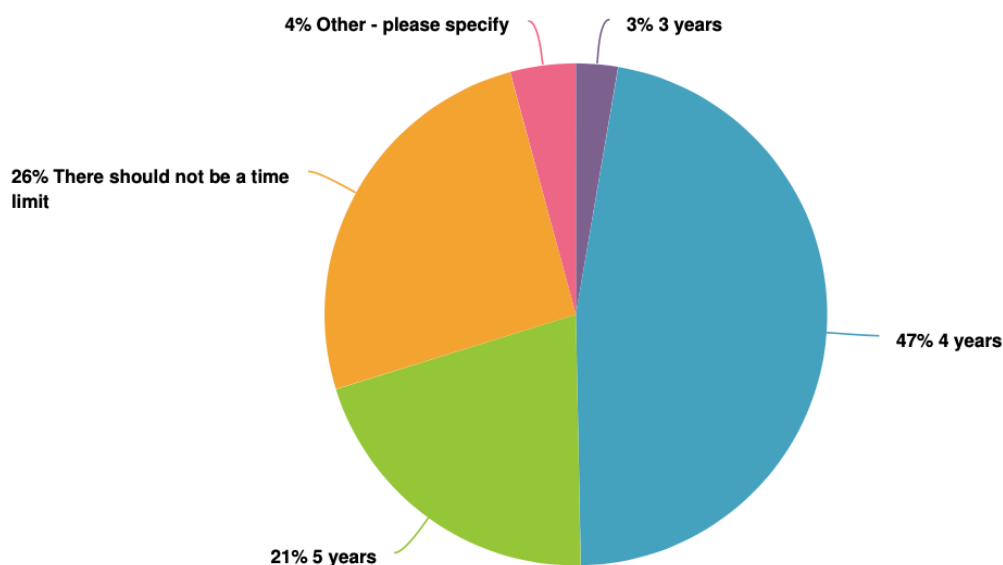


Chart 7: Percentage of responses to the survey question 'How long do you think people should be allowed to complete their PhDs?'



4.2.3 Fair Remuneration and Workload Allocation

Additional income is not the only reason PGRs take on extra work. As discussed throughout this section, PGRs often describe themselves as being required to engage in additional paid or unpaid research and teaching work or experiences outside the formal requirements of

the PhD in order to gain relevant experiences for career development. They also often feel obligated to engage in work to improve conditions within universities, with this particularly being the case for those from marginalised groups. These are all duties that other members of staff would often have incorporated within their agreed workload allocation, with the latter set coming under the category of 'citizenship' or similar. PGRs are often *not* paid for this work, although there are some examples of university and funding bodies doing this:

At AHRC [Arts and Humanities Research Council]/Midlands4Cities [Doctoral Training Partnership], we are the first year of Student Advisory Forum (SAF) representatives to receive backpay/remuneration of some form for our time working as SAF. There is one SAF at each of M4Cs partner universities (so, eight total). We began the role in Summer of 2021 and it finishes in Spring 2022 (so, it's roughly 9-12 months). The remuneration takes the form of a one month paid extension to our PhD funding dates. [Interview]

In exploring the issue of pay levels, we asked survey respondents to read a document that contained descriptions of the level 1 and level 2 **nationally agreed role profiles** for research staff, which respectively resemble institutional job profiles for research assistants and research associates. These profiles are indicative only, as we know practice varies around the country.

We then asked respondents two questions about which of these two profiles better reflected

1. the duties and responsibilities that they have, have had, or would expect to have as a postgraduate researcher, and
2. the duties and responsibilities that they believe postgraduate researchers *should* have.

As Charts 8 and 9 demonstrate, in both cases, a clear majority of respondents selected the profile that most closely resembled that of a research associate (level 2), with only a relatively small number in each instance selecting 'other - please specify'.

Chart 8: Percentage of responses to the question 'According to the above grade profiles, which profile do you think is the best fit in terms of describing your current duties and responsibilities as a postgraduate researcher? (If you are not a current postgraduate researcher, please indicate which profile is the best fit in terms of your previous experiences or those that you are expecting to have).'

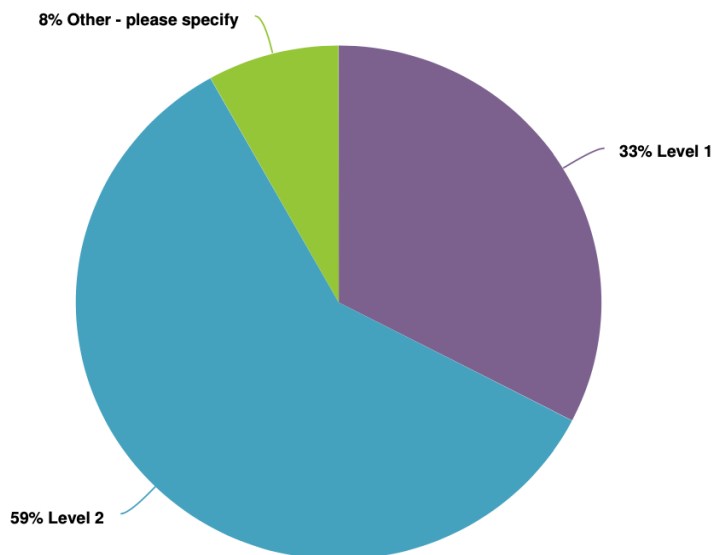
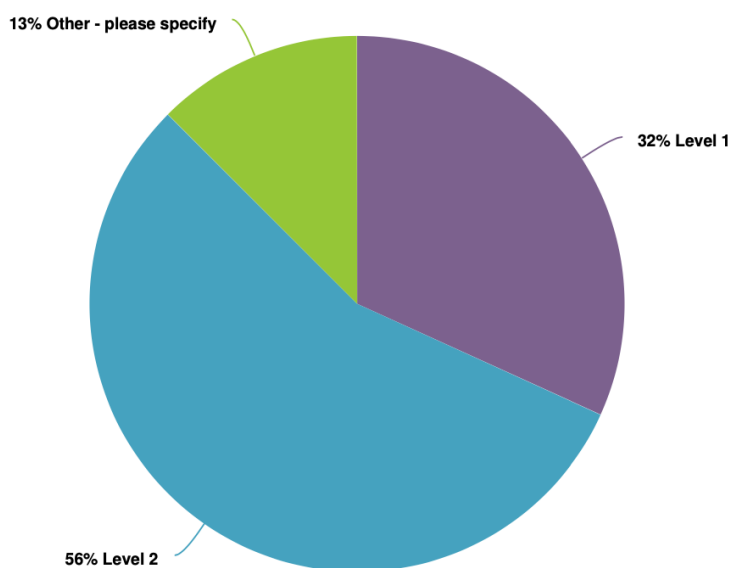


Chart 9: Percentage of responses to the question 'According to the above grade profiles, which profile do you think best reflects the set of duties and responsibilities that postgraduate researchers should have?'



This suggests that most respondents believe PGRs currently have most of the duties and responsibilities that they should have. Accordingly, there are no significant differences to the comments that people gave in explaining their answers to both questions. There is some variation suggested between disciplines, however.

As a lab-based PGR I'm absolutely at Level 2, because all of my project students (summer students, Master's students) have been almost entirely under my supervision, in terms of day to day work, supervision of their projects, risk assessment, experiment planning etc, with only some involvement from our supervisor. This is standard in most labs.

I am currently the primary module tutor on a 12-week module, and have taught for approximately 100 hours this academic year, and provided student support and guidance on a one-to-one basis. This is in addition to completing my own PhD research, preparing articles for publication, giving conference papers and chairing conference panels, and gaining funding for cohort development projects that I am involved in.

My supervisor broadly had an expectation of Level 1 but was happy for me to lean into Level 2 as I showed proficiency and willingness to be more independent.

Comments do present the general view that the expectations placed upon PGRs often go far beyond the duties that are formally required of them, especially in later years of the PhD. Many said these duties should not be added to any further.

I manage my entire research group's meetings, represent PGRs at university level, collaborate internationally, and have basically run my entire research institute's induction programme for the last two years. I teach classes of between 15 and 40 students, some with no supervision or guidance, so I prepare lesson plans, give feedback, and deliver material. I also mark coursework that contributes to students' degrees (fairly certain I shouldn't be allowed to have this authority and Yet). I'm a mentor to many younger PhD and Masters students. I think this mostly goes beyond Level 2 in almost every area that isn't research - because my research skills are suffering as a result of the rest of my responsibilities.

I think that, currently, academia expects too much from PhD researchers and their duties and responsibilities are far too many and too difficult for their level of experience. There is a huge emphasis on innovation and the advancement of knowledge as an outcome of the PhD. In terms of teaching, a lot of the responsibility is outsourced to PhD students and they have no choice but to work themselves as hard as possible, despite poor conditions and pay because their future career prospects depend on it. This creates unrealistic expectations, especially for people from marginalised backgrounds.

Really depends on the project and the PGR, personally I think that the burden of student supervision should not be put on PGRs unless they are paid separately for it at a fair rate and with associated contract of employment, and there is a clear understanding of how many hours they should be doing supervision during their workday as a PGR.

They're a mix really... But if you're going to REQUIRE doctoral researchers to teach and have other responsibilities, we will need longer to complete the research asked of us. 3 years would definitely not be enough.

Some respondents stressed the need for flexibility and tailored approaches, rather than a 'one size fits all' model of the PhD.

Duties/responsibilities should vary over the course of a PhD - what is appropriate for a first year with no experience is not appropriate for a fourth year. Have to bear in mind that this is supposed to be a form of training. I guess maybe starting at level 1 with the expectation of reaching level 2 at some point e.g. at one of the progression milestone assessments. Teaching should not be mandatory (or should be allowed to be informal e.g. training new researchers within the group).

PGRs are not all the same, do not bring the same things with them into their programmes from their previous experience and come into doctoral or research programmes at different stages of life. I'm extremely wary of what looks like 'one size fits all' for something that is a highly individual journey.

I think first year and non-teaching PhD students are more likely to fit in with Level 1. But once past progression - and if directly involved in undergraduate student teaching - PGR candidates are likely to be working at or towards Level 2. Progression reviews could move through these grades, with the aim being to take on more responsibility as you progress through the PhD.

The above quotes suggest that the labour of postgraduate researchers is of far greater value than they are typically paid (or in some cases pay) to do. Postgraduate researchers will do the duties that they need to in order to get by, and, where they are able, they will likely also do those duties that they believe they need to in order to achieve their subsequent goals. Clearly, this issues needs addressing. Indeed, as noted, 84.6% of respondents identified 'developing a comprehensive workload allocation model' for PGRs as either 'really important' (50.5%) or 'quite important' (33.1%).

Having the capacity for valued duties to be formally recognised and flexibility integrated into PGRs' requirements with respect to pay, workload, and agreed funding period extensions will help to address some issues of required privilege in the UK PhD system. This could be achieved through universities being required to buy out PGRs' time, which

would then, where applicable, entail a funded extension equal to the time required for the work.

Urgent needs for PGRs

- Increase pay and ensure future pay rises keep up with the rising cost of living
- Ensure equal access to teaching and other work opportunities for all PGRs, and ensure universities monitor key demographics relating to who is and is not able to take up these opportunities
- Ensure all additional work outside of PhD research is properly workloaded for PGRs, and that extra commitments come along with compensatory funding and time extensions for the PhD
- Ensure workload assessments and pay both cover the full extent of work undertaken by PGRs, including adequate preparation and marking time, and reform graduate teaching assistant roles in line with Appendix 2 of UCU's **PGRs as Staff manifesto**
- Ensure all PGRs undertaking university 'improvement' work outside of the PhD, including but not limited to strategy meetings and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) initiatives, are paid for that work, and compensated through time and funding extensions to their PhDs.

4.3 Support

We wanted to know more about people's views in relation to the different forms of support that were provided for PGRs to successfully engage in their work and meet their aims and expectations for postgraduate research. We therefore looked at support in relation to three general areas:

1. supervision
2. training, and
3. facilities.

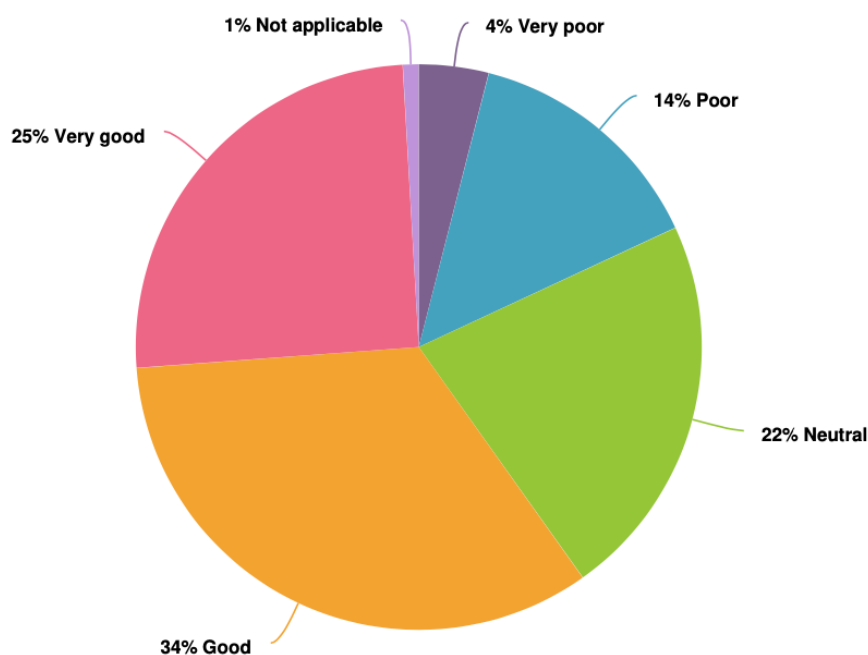
The discussions below adds further weight to our conclusion that PGRs are often required to have significant privilege in order to successfully navigate many aspects of the PhD, and that mechanisms to ensure greater equity within the system need to be explored and established.

For instance, according to our survey respondents, the supervisory relationship would benefit from greater formalisation, accountability and allocation of resources, while facilities and training need to be made more accessible and provided in a manner that better meets the needs of PGRs.

4.3.1 Supervision

As Chart 10 demonstrates, overall satisfaction with the supervisory role and relationship was relatively positive. Indeed, as we shall see, views here were somewhat more favourable than those relating to the other two areas - training and facilities.

Chart 10: Percentage of responses in relation to the question 'What do you think about how the supervisor role and relationship currently works?'



Comments from respondents stress the importance of the supervisory relationship, and the dependence of many PGRs upon their supervisors. It was striking, however, how frequently people commented that while their own supervision was excellent or reasonable, they considered themselves 'lucky' to have such levels of support from their supervisor. Others, they felt, had not been so lucky. Having a supervisor with both the capacity and desire to adequately support a PGR, through effective mentoring and investing time in their personal development, was described as a 'privilege', which PGRs were acutely aware of others not having.

One of the more charitable explanations that people suggested for why they perceived a high degree variance in the quantity and quality of supervision was the lack of clear expectations and training regarding what supervision should entail.

This is incredibly varied. I have seen examples of fantastic supervision and many example of horrific supervision, and every shade in between. There is no rule book or training for supervisors (if there is it it certainly not apparent).

I have great supervisors. However, I do think so much of the PhD is reliant on that one relationship meaning that if something goes wrong or say your supervisor leaves then the whole structure around your PhD is in jeopardy.

the problem I see is... with the role of mentor that our supervisors should have in building and suggesting about our future career. Very often the supervision is strictly related with helping the student to finish the PhD, without any long-term prospects or further trainings. It seems that after your thesis you are abandoned again, having built nothing in 3-4 years... This is not the way a doctorate should work.

It's completely luck of the draw. You could get excellent supervisors, or you could have a nightmare situation and be faced with dropping out or dealing with years of abuse. The ability to know in advance of starting a PhD is extremely limited, as consulting past supervisees is not always an option or representative of future experience. This feels wholly unfair.

I had a fantastic relationship with my supervisors and I know this is why I both enjoyed my PhD so much and was so successful in it. However, not everyone is this lucky. A good PhD experience shouldn't come down to luck of the supervisor found. It should be a given at all PhD researchers have the same opportunities and support

I had a life-changingly good relationship with my PhD supervisor and second supervisor. They took their responsibilities very seriously, and went out of their way to mentor me and model how to engage as a member of the academic community. I know I am comparably lucky, and that even others with generally positive and supportive supervisor relationships didn't get the level of time and active cultivation that I did.

When it works well it's fantastic, when it doesn't it's appalling and there is no safety net.

I have great supervisors and it works really well for me but I know others have different experiences.

Currently PhD success/failure can be caused by the supervisor alone. If you have a supportive supervisor who builds up confidence and supports you during write up (adequate feedback, answering questions during writing, timely feedback) the student can learn and grow. If the opposite it can cause a lot of mental harm and will ultimately lead to those students leaving Academia (or their field altogether). My PI was fantastic until close to the end of my PhD where it went sour very quickly (at the point where most support is need arguably?) meaning that my write up took longer, I was unpaid for a very long time trying to balance thesis writing and finding some kind of income. There needs to be more clarity and transparency in what is expected to successfully get a PhD as all a student can do is what a PI expects.

I had a fantastic relationship with my supervisor but this relationship is essentially undefined, and for some people it works out well, and for others it very much doesn't.

Supervisors were described as having too much power in determining outcomes for PGRs. Other respondents provided more detail as to why this is the case and why it is so important to be 'lucky' with your supervisor. Their answers describe a perceived lack of oversight and accountability into supervision, such that it is made very difficult for postgraduate researchers to do anything where their supervision is poor. 'Poor', in this instance, extends to bullying, exploitation, and neglect, although one commenter also noted that there is a lack of process for raising poor supervision performance that falls short of outright abuse. As described in Section 5.2, channels for complaint for addressing these issues were often described as ineffective, whether by design or just in effect.

Supervisors need to be vetted by universities, research institutions better - our PGR community has had some terrible experiences with supervisors - including work/ideas being plagiarised, bullying and harassment - and this is not acceptable.

Supervisors are not [being] held accountable for bad supervision or even for abusive behaviour. The current system is set up in a way that the burden of "fixing" the relationship falls on the PGR - even if they take an issue further to a Director, the responsibility still falls on the PGR to make a case to explain why the relationship isn't functioning. The power imbalance also means that a PGR very rarely takes a step to complain. This is because PGRs know that they have to rely on their supervisors for reference letters to get their next job.

One of my supervisors shares details of their personal lives that are inappropriate and, despite this happening in front of other staff (who have separately commented to me that they felt this was inappropriate), nobody has raised this and I don't feel comfortable enough to ask them to stop.

They're nice and smart people, but they didn't provide enough technical support. I'm paying 18,500 pounds per year but I don't find much difference between doing it in uni vs. doing it alone in my room.

My supervision has consistently been very poor. I have 2 supervisors who should be 50:50 split. The first has a high workload and does not have the time to dedicate to offer me regular feedback or meetings. I can wait months for chapter comments or a supervision meeting. The second has never opened a draft I've sent and rarely turns up. I've raised supervisor issues through the appropriate channels over the years, but nothing. I was even told that supervision doesn't matter so long as I submit something at the end of my registration. I have also had issues of being belittled and treated poorly by my supervisors. E.g., I have been told I do not deserve to be there and that I should quit (this was in response to when I asked if we could have a meeting after me waiting 4 months for a draft chapter to be read).

Many supervisors - particularly more senior members of staff - are key factors in creating or exacerbating anxiety for PGRs, in my experience... Some supervisors pressure PGRs into carrying out unpaid or underpaid (workload higher than hours allocated) research assistant work. Some supervisors bully or discriminate against their supervisees. Some supervisors do not allow PGRs to have autonomy over their own projects. Access to career progression opportunities is often too dependent on power/prestige of supervisor.

There is very little consequence for poor supervision that amounts to less than harassment, total dereliction, or academic misconduct. Complaints about quality of supervision can only be channelled directly to the supervisor (which deters most PGRs from making complaints), or to welfare services who can only advise us to hang in there. At my university supervisors also fill the role of personal tutor for their PGRs, and are supposed to be the first point of contact for pastoral support, which seems to me wholly inappropriate given that they are also our line managers. Supervisors have such a dominant role over PGR projects and day-to-day life that they essentially create the PGR environment, so there needs to be actual concrete systems to oversee, them with actual consequences for bad supervision and rewards for good supervision.

There is a clear need to have mechanisms to ensure accountability in supervision and for mitigating negative impacts on PGRs in terms of time costs, wellbeing, wider personal relationships, and access to opportunities. Without these, issues of dependency and inappropriate power imbalances will remain. Section 5.2 outlines some further recommendations in relation to making complaints.

As our research suggests, however, supervision is more likely to be very good than very poor or poor. Most respondents described it as 'good' or 'neutral', which provides a good baseline to build upon. Survey respondents had a number of views as to how very good supervision could be encouraged. One common suggestion was to address the issue of lack of clarity or agreement as to what PGRs should expect from the supervisor.

In many ways, I think the supervision process could be made more uniform without being too prescriptive, as each relationship needs to be organic. There should be a clear statement at the outset spelling out what responsibilities both parties have at a university level. There should be a framework for an initial meeting laid out, and suggestions for meeting structure given (highlighting e.g. that unspoken 'changing' role of the supervisor as the student becomes increasingly knowledgeable and independent). New PGRs should be aware of the limitations of their supervisor's role but clearly signposted to other places where support can be accessed. Likewise, supervisors should be clear with new students from the outset - what expectations (implicit though they may be) do they have of the student? I think there is often an assumption that students will be able to advocate for themselves.

Roles of supervisors and co-supervisors also needs clearly defining prior to projects starting. Many proposals for PhD projects list co-supervisors as a 'box ticking exercise' if a certain number of co-supervisors is required, or if adding a certain name boosts the success rate of the proposal (e.g. high profile academics) without any intention of that person actually working on the project once it begins. This is misleading to the PGR, and often leaves them lacking in essential support.

[The supervision role is] very lax, a couple of meetings per year is not enough, not nearly enough supervision coming up to review periods and supervisors unfamiliar with what is required to actually pass these reviews - the PhD role is extremely lonely.

Others suggested requirements for relevant training in relation to those needs and expectations, as well as other forms of support for supervisors to ensure that they can be effective in delivering this.

Better training and more expectation for standard and quality of supervisory role. For first time supervisors providing mentorship

More training is needed for supervisors, with guidance on how to set up this relationship to be most productive for both parties, but also to make clear university expectations around preventing some issues I've heard about anecdotally from others

Supervisors need to be trained in how to be an effective supervisor (covering both academic and pastoral support), and there needs to be more checks in place that a prospective supervisor has the skills and time to be a good supervisor BEFORE taking on students.

Respondents also suggest that gaps in support could be filled through the provision of other forms of mentoring. The value and need for mentoring is noted further throughout section 5.

I have had great academic and personal support from my supervisor, however not all PhD researchers have this experience. It can be a difficult position to rely so entirely on one's supervisor as the primary (if not sole) point of contact for the PhD. I think it would be beneficial for PhD researchers to also have an independent mentor or personal tutor figure they could go to with problems, especially if their relationship with their supervisor is not good.

Another clear limitation was the time that supervisors are allocated for this role. 91.1% of respondents identified 'improving recognition of supervisory duties in staff workload allocation models' as either 'very important' (67%) or 'quite important' (24.1%). Comments in relation to supervision further described the need for improvement and/or regulation. Respondents suggested that universities do not sufficiently value the supervisory relationship, the time of supervisors, or the support that PGRs need.

Supervisors have too many PhD students and cannot give them enough time. They are also overworked by the university with different roles and meetings

Good in my experience but as a supervisor I can safely say my performance as a supervisor is determined by my own workload and circumstances which means at times students lose out, although I do take supervisor responsibility seriously and tend to have to use my own spare time to ensure I'm doing an adequate job. PGR supervision, and the extent of academic and pastoral support some students require is not accounted for in workload models.

Supervisors often see supervision as a burden. I feel I would be no better or worse off if I had no supervision - there needs to be a clearly defined value-add from supervisors' input, otherwise they might as well get on with the rest of their unmanageable workload.

I wish there was more of a specific framework for this that people had to stick to. My supervisors are often unavailable when I need them and incredibly difficult to reach by email. I then always feel like I am bothering them when really I am just asking them to do their job - this should be a given but feels like a favour.

I've had bad experiences with my supervisors. It feels very much like they are going through the motions because they are put under pressure to supervise by their line managers etc. Personally I think they don't get given enough time to supervise in their "workload model" and undergraduate/postgraduate taught students always come first because their "student experience" is seen as more important than the experience of a PGR.

I have had students that I have never been workloaded, and have few hours to supervise the students I have despite being the most experienced supervisor in my department. I have never had workload for examination. When I was a PGR student I had a rotating arrangement of supervisors for the schools agenda which didn't help me

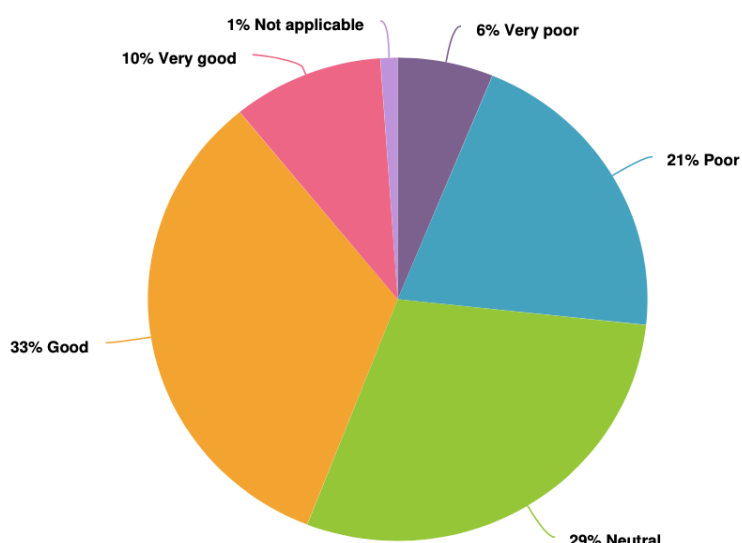
It is far too variable and dependent on both who is supervising and what (workload/reputational) pressures are on the supervisor... Most supervisors are not given the time to provide adequate amounts of support or facilitate closer relationships between the PGR and the department.

We have asked for further supervisor training in our university, and were met with the response that 'supervisors are too busy to take on further training' despite this being part of what contributes to the overall issue.

4.3.2 Training

As Chart 11 demonstrates, survey respondents reported a more negative view towards training than they did towards supervision, with a quarter describing provision as poor or very poor.

Chart 11: Percentage of responses in relation to the question 'What do you think about the training opportunities currently available to PGRs?'



As with supervision, and, indeed, facilities, respondents' comments suggest there is considerable variation across different universities. In this case, variation exists in relation to PGR training in terms of both value and access. Some respondents described how they felt the most valuable training was often the least accessible, and the most accessible was, conversely, the least valuable. This suggests that those without access to resources - primarily, the means of institutional and/or personal funding - may often be unable to engage in training that they perceive as useful.

*Why is so much bulls***hit mandatory, and such useful stuff is prohibitively expensive?*

Many of the better courses are expensive and competitive. Some are even based on prior experience - how are we supposed to get new skills if getting a place requires certain skills already?!

From a supervisory point of view I think the opportunities are largely there; the main issue I face is that the opportunities usually need to be paid for and I am not willing to stretch my students' funding pots to this. This is not to say that I don't think training is

valuable (I do!) but if funding is limited then conducting the primary research needs to come first, otherwise the student will not be able to achieve their PhD in the first place.

Needing to travel to/pay for expensive training could be a real problem, depending on the funding people had. The quality of training can also be hit and miss, but that's probably just a fact of life.

Any training that has been useful for us we have had to fight for - often having to find external funding for it. I am also grateful to national conferences that have sessions dedicated to PGRs as this is where I have been able to get good training.

Training opportunities at my institution are poor. Training opportunities that are external are often VERY expensive, even for those with research grants, meaning people have to very carefully pick and choose what may or may not be best for them at that time, with potential deprivation for learning and training in other areas of their research/general training

In general, respondents seemed to equate good training to that which was more specialised or advanced.

Social science training at my institution is at the level I'd expect GCSE students to learn... There needs to be genuine rigour in any training offer, and this needs to be held up to very high and externally accountable standards. Supervisors need to know what this training involves - in my institution faculty members have no idea whatsoever what is in the training programme, let alone the quality thereof.

Training often tries too hard to be interdisciplinary when many PhDs aren't. I think much of that time and money would be better spent allowing PhD students to attend specific training that they find themselves rather than universities and DTPs creating broad schemes aimed at everyone that don't work for anyone.

To be honest, I think there is a problem with over-training. My experience has been my funder requires a certain amount of training and 90% of the training they have enforced/provided has been a waste of time. The training I have benefitted from has all been stuff I have gone and found myself.

It's too basic and generalised, and doesn't suit needs.

There aren't any particular benefits or opportunities associated with being a NERC student. Students create their own training opportunities. The only training opportunities I have are those that are provided by the university and are available to any PGR student. Anything beyond this I have to pay for personally.

Training (given by CDTs and DTPs) is often not delivered effectively, aimed at a lower level than PhD students can achieve (e.g. there are hundreds of R/stats training

courses, but 99% are beginner level that many students have covered as undergraduates), and transferable skills are not made clear.

I think it varies from university to university and what the definition of "training" is. Our PGRs are generally happy with the transferable skills programme available through Researcher Development, but complain that they lack core research methods training that they absolutely need for their programme (eg stats, NVivo, R). This is because departments don't offer this type of training (which they are meant to) or because there is no funding for them to attend specialist training offered externally to the university. If Researcher Development teams were appropriately resourced, then they would be able to bring in external trainers who could offer the necessary research methods training.

My university had a great, free academic development department and I took full advantage of that. My department also bought in some additional training around stuff like presentation skills and leadership. However, access to more specialised training (eg technical skills) is really hit-and-miss.

My university offers external training, and a fund, and internal training, including across departments - and I've been able to access all the info I need.

Some respondents also told us they felt it was unfair that some PGRs could access training via individual or institutional funding, while others could not.

Unless the PGR is working on a project where the grant funding their position includes training (this is very rare in medicine/health research) we have pretty much no facility to support training in PGRs (at least any training that has a cost).

My funding allowed me to access lots of training and conferences. Again, this should be universal, not relying on a generous consumables amount. I had PhD colleagues funded by the same research council with drastically less consumable allowances

As someone not enrolled in a DTP, I was just funded for 4 years of research and received almost no training. Institutions should make more of an effort to make training available to ALL students, not just those on a DTP

Transferable skills training is available, but could be made more accessible to students not located on central campus. General training is massively DTP dependant and this suffers for students without a DTP with no assistance from the department.

Some respondents answered that the most useful training they experienced was external to their university, DTP or CDT. The above comments suggest that significant investment in basic training at the local level or in insufficiently-specialist networks may be an inefficient use of resources. Strategies for PGR training would likely benefit from greater

attempts at expanding provision of, and access to, more advanced training, which can more effectively build on skills that, often, have already been acquired.

Much greater consideration should also be given to accessibility issues, which can also occur in relation to the mode of delivery or scheduling of training, bureaucratic requirements and restrictions, gatekeeping, or workload. This is important for disabled, chronically ill and/or neurodivergent PGRs, and also for migrant or international PGRs who face additional barriers to accessing training.

There is no shortage of good training opportunities. What is lacking is the PGR students' ability to access funding and find the time needed to take advantage of these training opportunities. Between training, teaching and marking, conducting research and writing - our time is stretched so thin that taking unpaid training is often the first to be sacrificed.

I've attended a few helpful workshops, but there is no provision at all for disabled or neurodivergent researchers. Most of the trainings stem from a place of privileged ableism.

More needs to be done about access. Many PGRs have family and work commitments so training would be better in the evenings/weekends rather than during the day

I have moderate hearing loss. The pandemic has basically denied me the opportunity to engage with training. There are far too many barriers and these are still in place. No one is widening access to people with hearing difficulties

I think British students are able to have good opportunities available as PGRs. For the rest of students, the number of available opportunities are reduced and are associated with a lot of paperwork, not only with the university but also for the visa and to find an accommodation.

Our booking system for PGR training is chaotic - the portal opens once every 4 months and everything is booked up in a day. Courses often don't account for part time students who may work, or disabled students who may not be able to attend at the last minute (you can't book any other courses if you miss one). Covid19 improved online provision but it is still woeful - excluding part-time and disabled students.

[Training is] largely available through supervisors' referrals and guidance and they act as gatekeepers

[Very] few overseas opportunities are advertised as being available part time or for under 4 weeks (the maximum time allowed to be outside the UK when claiming DWP disability related benefits). Also, the turnaround time for applying for these opportunities makes it quite tricky, especially if I then need to enquire about part time etc

Another area of training and support that is clearly viewed as needing greater consideration is career development. Training in this area by universities and DTPs was most commonly described as either poor or absent.

People complained about a lack of support in developing particular skills and experience that could be used with academic and also non-academic jobs. Without proactive support for acquiring these, opportunities for career development were described as being dependent on supervisors and other personal networks. However, as described in both sections on supervision and facilities, people often viewed there being clear barriers for accessing these informal forms of support. It should therefore be the case that mechanisms and resourcing for providing or facilitating both formal and informal support are improved.

As a mature student there is very little that helps me progress beyond what I was doing in my last 10 years of work. I am realistic that I likely won't end up with a job in academia and would really like to speak to careers advisors and do training directed at people who have had careers and want to try something new. The careers advisors simply don't know what to do with someone in their mid thirties, and I imagine this is even worse if you are older. My biggest fear is unemployment post graduation, and for all the talk of our employability there is very little guidance on how to actually pursue a new career.

There needs to be more training for jobs in industry. For example, Project Management is offered as a potential job for PGRs after their PhD but these jobs often ask for Project Management qualifications, so more training that would actually increase our chances of getting jobs outside of academia (seeing as academia is an incredibly unattractive career path), would be good.

Would like more opportunities for training in skills and other lab experiments that are not directly used in my research project but would be useful in future jobs.

None of them are particularly useful or reflective of the disgraceful job market we go into. There's nothing on website building, Photoshop or design work, very little on social media or marketing, and there's almost none on how to start businesses outside of academia.

One notable omission is the training opportunities for things that would be useful in academia - say for example an introduction to publishing in a journal, or working on editorial boards, or similar. This seems to largely be left to individual supervisors, which is both inefficient and inconsistent, and also often relies on the student asking the right questions in the first place, assuming they know what those questions are.

Nothing on careers external to academia, very little on careers in academia. No idea what I'm doing, hard to find specific training.

The only training opportunities I see advertised feel more suited to a lower level of study, such as how to write academically. These are useful to offer, but I would presume most PGRs have this skillset already. There aren't enough vocational training sessions covering things like academic publication, job applications, career options etc.

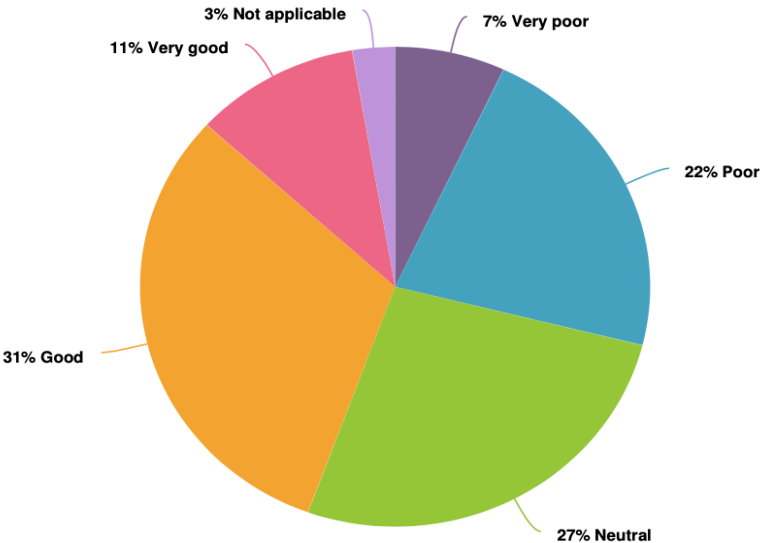
A lot of the training events provided are a bit pointless, and I feel there is not enough concentration on post-PhD life, e.g. careers in academia (without just telling us it's hopeless) and how to apply your skills to roles outside of academia (without just saying you can manage a lengthy project). It would be good for training to actually equip you with practical skills (cv, etc.), as well as methods for helping with your thesis.

My University is currently not offering any of my phd students any teaching. I consider this a core part of their training (for which they should of course be paid). Universities should not be allowed to take on students without guarantee of the availability of comprehensive training opportunities. This gap has been left to me and colleagues to fill with a voluntary scheme of our own devising. It in no way replicates the benefits of proper paid teaching roles.

4.3.3 Facilities

Chart 12 indicates that overall views on the facilities that are made available to PGRs to complete their work were very similar to those relating to training: over a quarter of respondents rated them either 'poor' or 'very poor'.

Chart 12: Percentage of responses in relation to the question of: "What do you think about the facilities (labs, offices, equipment, software etc.) available to PGRs?"



The comments in relation to facilities also detail a very similar picture regarding the variability of provision of facilities, as that for training. In the case of PGR facilities, these were described by respondents as being highly dependent on the resources that institutions afforded departments. A general trend here, however, was that many viewed the facilities provided for PGRs as often being worse than facilities for staff or taught students.

Variable according to institution and department I think. In general I would say they aren't suitable for contemporary (often hybrid) work practices and the move to hot-desking in some offices is detrimental to PGRs in terms of feeling valued

PGRs are given a communal, unheated office in the basement. Here, the chairs are broken, the computers are dated and often [d]o not connect to the internet, and the damp causes risk of illness over extended periods. It is for this reason our school's PGR office is empty and unused.

This is also incredibly variable but I can answer for myself. I have had access to high quality equipment and facilities, however, these facilities have been incredibly oversubscribed since they don't have the capacity to fit the needs of the institute. Offices have been very poor, with no natural light and very cramped conditions.

Really varies from building to building even within the same school - sometimes good other times really not good

At my institution they kicked some 30 PGRs out of their shared office and work space to turn it into "teaching space" over the pandemic - it instead became a giant storage room.... Says all it needs to really

The labs, equipment, and software are really good, but my office isn't suitable - 15 people in a really small room and part of a huge variety of disciplines. I would appreciate a bigger space, or fewer people in the office, and would love to share an office with someone from a similar area so we could talk about our projects

This is extremely variable depending on the department PGRs are based in. As a general rule though the [university] where I am based, does not have ANY requirements to provide any dedicated study space to PGRs, it's up to individual schools to deal with their (often limited and low quality) estate. Same re IT equipment; my school provides all PGRs with their own IT kit to use during their studies but that is not the case everywhere.

My subject has good access to an office, bookshelves etc but this is inconsistent across the uni.

One time we ran out of desk space in our office and they moved three of us into a storage cupboard inside the Ladies' toilets in the basement of the building, and no I am

not making this up. Some university facilities are excellent, like yes great we have machines that cost millions in our labs and we get to use them daily! But office space in particular seems to be at a premium and the facilities available in every PGR office I've ever worked in have been quite poor; often PGRs aren't able to get their own PCs, frequently office equipment is outdated or broken, covid safety is a real problem in poorly ventilated offices, and labs often have to make compromises on some equipment and essentials based on funding.

Again, it's so variable it's not possible to rate. I was lucky--a rich department in a newish building, with lots of equipment. The printers had paper, and if an overhead light burned out, someone would fix it. Not needing to constantly hassle over those things really made a difference to my daily PhD experience. However, visiting friends in other departments and unis could be a huge shock. Things can be very shabby.

The only offices worse than mine are pgr students

For my situation, we have been put in a large basement office away from everyone else in our school which physically disabled people cannot access. The lights and heating/air con don't even work properly. We have constantly complained but they might as well say 'we literally don't care, that's your problem'

While plenty of people described the facilities available to PGRs as poor, many survey respondents stated they didn't have access to facilities in the first place. Inadequate facilities can create serious barriers for postgraduate researchers which they often have to overcome themselves.

Available but old, old pcs, poor desk set up. My personal laptop, which I have to use to work at home, is full and I can't afford a new one, no support with this

I've struggled with no dedicated and quiet, desk space, library facilities for pgrs are terrible, very little quiet desk space & there is no chance to have a desk of our own to leave heavy books etc. I have had to pay more in rent for a larger room to fit a desk in. I've used cafes more than university workspaces.

We'll move to a new building soon with much nicer offices but the plan is for us to hot desk because the building is over capacity even now before it has opened! I can't even begin to explain how disrespectful this, its a very strong sign to me that university does not value its researchers. Having one's own desk is incredibly useful for a researcher who is often bouncing between the lab, the office and various research facilities.

I had access to lab equipment but not field equipment which I had to buy myself but my fieldwork budget wasn't anywhere near enough

The NIHR budget allocated money for a computer, but I was not allowed to buy a computer that cost more than 450 pounds. My PhD was highly computational which

meant I had to buy my own laptop, saving most of my income for 3 months from the stipend.

We have not been offered a dedicated study space, let alone desk/office, and yet do not have the funds to be living in accommodation that supports working from home well. If they expect us to be completing a PhD in three years alongside teaching then we need dedicated study spaces on campus.

Home working especially is a problem; we are paid so little, and then expected to write an entire thesis at our kitchen table with no concern for e.g. proper display screen equipment, furniture etc (which the uni should be providing us!)

Comparably to sciences, the offering for arts and humanities PGRs is incredibly poor - we work in hot-desking office spaces, with no space to hold office hours for the students we teach nor guarantee that we will get a seat in the office. As a result I have spent time in the communal undergraduate library, marking students' essays as they might be walking past, and hold my office hours on Zoom so as not to hold office hours unprofessionally in a cafe or corridor somewhere.

My funding body says the tuition they've paid includes department funding to cover my equipment expenses, but my department says my funding body needs to cover equipment expenses. In the end I've just had to use my stipend to buy equipment when needed, but this is not sustainable. I can't afford a new computer and the one I'm working with is outdated and doesn't have the processing power to do some of the necessary tasks for my PhD, so I have to borrow computers from others when they aren't using them.

These issues can all have negative implications for wellbeing, feelings of self-worth, and accessibility for PGRs.

There are two other key barriers that survey respondents described as being created for PGRs as a result of inadequate facilities. The first of these was more likely to exist in relation to lab or specialist equipment, where limited budgets force PGRs to use outdated or substandard equipment. This can be an impossible barrier to overcome without sufficient funding support.. This was sometimes described as a factor that reduced people's capacity to conduct their work in a timely manner.

Laboratory resources, such as instruments necessary for research, have been under-maintained, are too old, or are the only available option within a department, meaning that if they break, research is suspended for long periods of time.

A lack of mid-range equipment funding opportunities hampers the ability of supervisors to offer better/up-to-date equipment

PhD offices are under-equipped for the amount of PGRs at our university, so incoming students usually have to wait for a computer to be found and allocated to them. Labs are in poor condition, lacking working machines and lab technicians in most cases. It seems that most money at a university is allocated to undergraduate facilities so facilities that are exclusively used by PGRs (labs, offices, machines etc.) are poorly maintained and lacking.

Our equipment is constantly breaking. I spend a lot of time trying to fix things rather than focusing on my project. Which in turn causes me more stress.

The other barrier was more commonly associated with inadequate or non-existent office space. These were described as things which limited PGRs from integrating with the rest of their departments, whether their PGR communities or, as was more commonly referenced, more senior staff. This can hinder the ability of postgraduate researchers to access information, opportunities or interpersonal networks - all of which could be used to successfully navigate the challenges that they may face, if they had access to them.

We are separated from staff so have little to no interaction with members of the school/faculty. It's so frustrating, I think the thing that would make the biggest positive difference to my PGR experience would be having a workspace alongside academics within my department, even if it is just to benefit from the tea room conversations or to get to know who everyone is.

We used to have a PhD common room for our department where all students could meet and work together. Now we hot desk computers in a hallway across from the stairwell and dispersed across floors. I no longer know the other students in the program as a result and gave up trying as there is no central gathering place anymore.

There is a complete lack of desk space for PGRs, and equipment needs are not met or there is a great difficulty in them being granted. Having no space to work for the past few years has been really difficult for our PGR community.

I have no office space, my CDT has no common room which results in a dispersive learning experience as we all work separately in various libraries / nooks. I feel we are missing out on opportunities to network not only with other academics but with each other.

The labs, equipment, and software are really good, but my office isn't suitable - 15 people in a really small room and part of a huge variety of disciplines. I would appreciate a bigger space, or fewer people in the office, and would love to share an office with someone from a similar area so we could talk about our projects

I raised the issue of my PGR office being inaccessible for students with disabilities when we moved to the office in 2018 (there is no way to access it without using a flight of stairs). It took until 2021, when a student who is a wheelchair user started studying in

the department, for anyone to take notice. Their solution was to isolate that person in a different office on another floor, away from their peers.

In our department I value being given an office space, but this is not accessible for people with mobility issues meaning that some of the PGRs cannot enter the office. In addition, our office space is separated from other academic staff, meaning we do not feel like part of the wider faculty.

There is a clear list of urgent needs that need addressing to help PGRs get a better deal during their PhD for each of the areas covered in this section - supervision, training and facilities. These are listed below.

Urgent needs for PGRs

- Ensure all PGRs have access to dedicated office space that is appropriate, safe and accessible
- Conduct an assessment of all spaces for PGRs to ensure they are accessible for disabled, chronically ill and/or neurodivergent people, and act to improve spaces where necessary
- Ensure all PGRs know who to contact about health and safety concerns regarding their work spaces
- Ensure all PGRs, supervisors and other relevant staff have clear information about what funding is available for facilities and equipment, from which source, and through which processes
- Extend existing research support grants from both funders and universities so they can be used to cover equipment costs

5. Rights and conditions

This section provides a discussion of the experiences of PGRs from marginalised groups. We have already noted the ways in which PGRs require a certain level of privilege to be able to navigate UK higher education and PhD systems. The issues raised here go above and beyond those described in the previous ones.

This section addresses three areas from the section of UKRI's consultation on rights and conditions:

- How rights and conditions support postgraduate researchers with different needs
- How postgraduate research students are enabled to continue with their research when their personal situation changes
- Whether postgraduate research students are informed about their rights and conditions; and that there is support in place if things go wrong.

We invited respondents to our survey to answer a series of questions relating to specific needs of different groups of PGRs. This included:

- Migrant or international PGRs
- Disabled, chronically ill and/or neurodivergent PGRs
- PGRs with parental or other caring responsibilities
- Women (including trans women) and non-binary PGRs
- LGBTQ+ PGRs
- Working class or "first generation" PGRs
- Black PGRs and other underrepresented minority ethnic PGRs
- Self-funded or unfunded PGRs.

Some respondents told us they felt we should have asked questions relating to the needs of older PGRs, who are also in a minority within the wider PGR population. This was an unfortunate omission, and we agree the needs of this group require further research and attention.

As noted, we also encouraged PGRs from a range of different backgrounds to attend our focus groups. Issues relating to migrant or international status, race, self funding, disability and gender were all mentioned during focus groups, and are featured below.

Table 2 below shows the number of people who opted to look at survey questions for the groups above, although not all of these people answered every question in each section.

Table 2: number and percentage of respondents opting to view and comment on questions relating to specific groups of PGRs

Value	Percent	Count
Disabled, chronically ill and neurodivergent PGRs	23.8%	115
Black PGRs and other underrepresented minority ethnic PGRs	8.9%	43
International/migrant PGRs	19.2%	93
Self-funded or unfunded PGRs	19.6%	95
Working class or "first generation" PGRs	32.2%	156
LGBTQ+ PGRs	17.1%	83
PGRs with parental or other caring responsibilities	13.0%	63
Women (including trans women) and non-binary PGRs	34.7%	168
I want to skip this section	33.7%	163

In many cases, the needs described in this section are extensions of those faced by the entire PGR community. This strengthens the view that it can be the case that greater privilege allows for the needs of PGRs to be more effectively met, while comparative lack of privilege can present greater barriers to success. This point is initially demonstrated in the discussion of people's views around the provision of paid and unpaid leave and complaint systems. As previously stated, while these are issues for all PGRs, they have a greater bearing on those from more marginalised groups. As such, these mechanisms for support and accountability are more frequently described as being required for people from marginalised groups, while shortcomings in these systems are frequently mentioned as having disproportionately large consequences for them.

5.1 Taking Leave

We asked survey respondents four questions about different types of leave that a PGR might need to take during their PhD:

- If you have had to take periods of paid sick leave, what did you think about the processes involved in arranging this?
- If you have had to take periods of paid parental leave, what did you think about the processes involved in arranging this?
- If you have had to take periods of unpaid leave, such as a leave of absence or suspension of studies, what did you think about the processes involved in arranging this?
- In what ways do you think support for taking periods of leave could be improved?

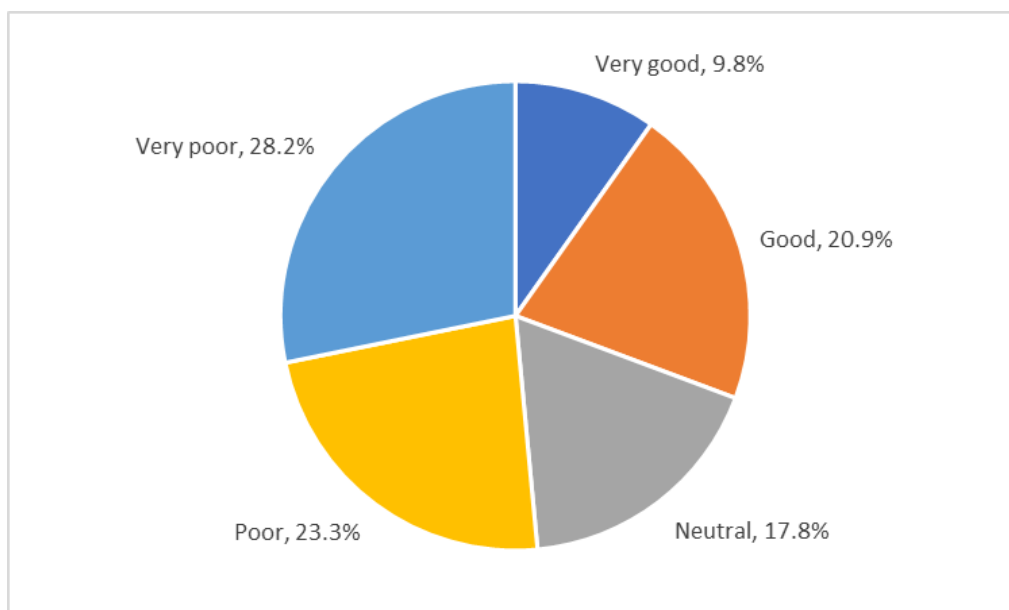
18.9% of respondents (n=702) told us they were not entitled to paid sick leave. 14.1% of respondents (n=693) told us they were not entitled to paid parental leave. 5.9% also told us they were not entitled to unpaid leave (n=693).

In all cases this is unacceptably high. While some people excluded from paid forms of leave will be self-funded/unfunded PGRs, we know that others are funded by their university, but still excluded from support. Some will also be migrant or international PGRs, who are not entitled to funded support, and are restricted in the amount of leave they are allowed to take before jeopardising their visa status. In the case of parents, PGRs have no entitlement to shared parental leave, because they are not classed as employees. This means male parents will only be entitled to a very low level of parental leave, if any at all.

This system is highly unfair, and highly discriminatory. It entrenches gendered parenting roles. It means that migrant disabled PGRs and migrant parents will face substantial extra barriers to PhD study in the UK, solely on the basis that they are not from the UK, and regardless of ability and talent. It leaves many PGRs at risk of serious financial hardship, which will be a considerable barrier for those without independent wealth and family support.

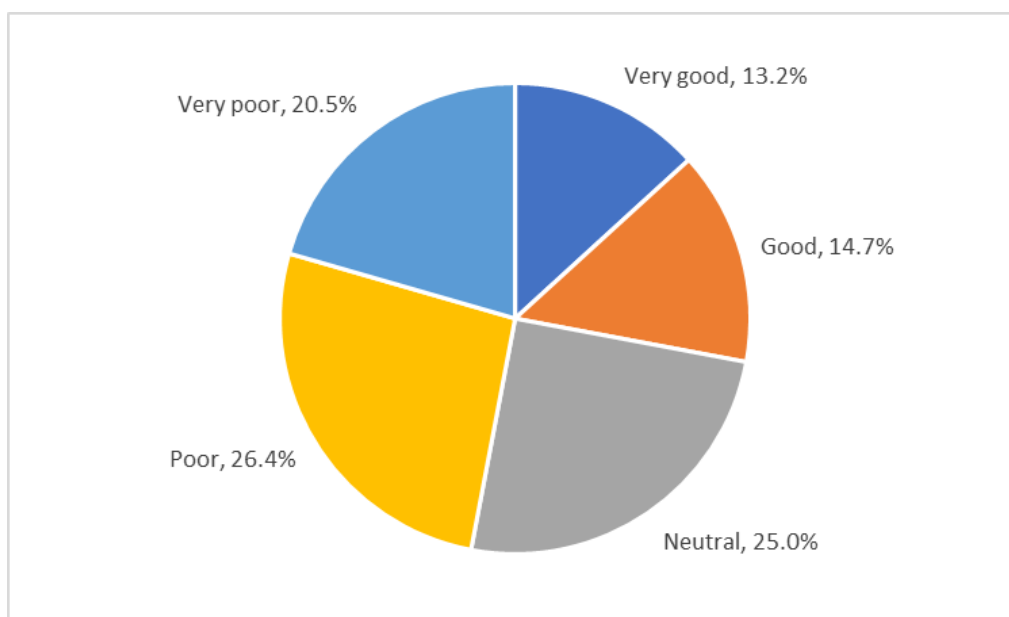
163 people had taken a period of sick leave during their PhD. Chart 13 below shows how these respondents rated the process of taking paid sick leave. As this shows, just over half of respondents (51.5%) rated their experience as poor or very poor.

Chart 13: percentage responses to the question "If you have had to take periods of paid sick leave, what did you think about the processes involved in arranging this?"



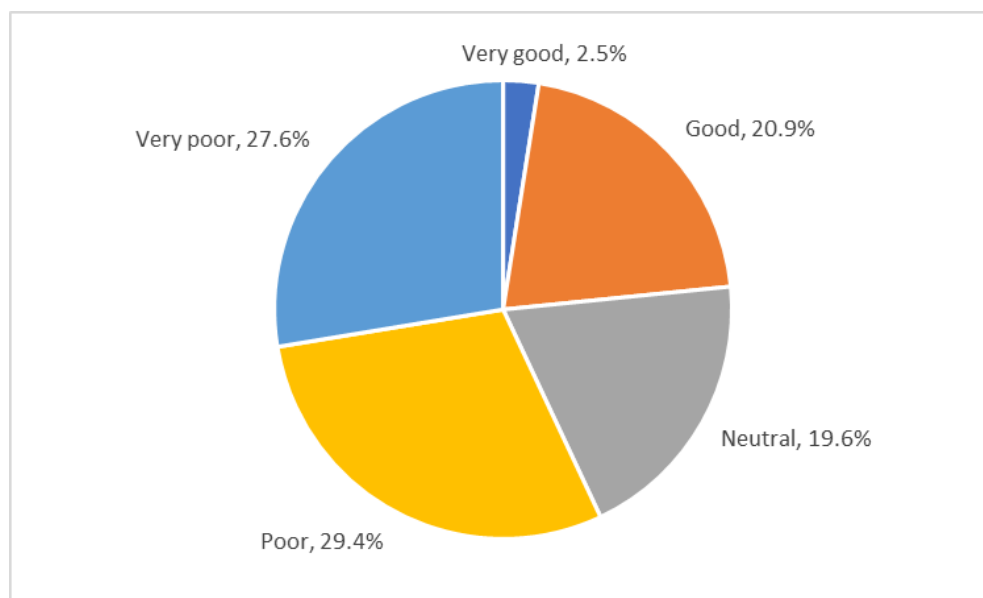
68 people had taken a period of paid parental leave during their PhD. Chart 14 below shows how they rated this experience. In this case, slightly under half of respondents (46.9%) rated their experience as poor or very poor. Only 27.9% rated their experience as very good or good.

Chart 14: percentage respondents to the question 'If you have had to take periods of paid parental leave, what did you think about the processes involved in arranging this?'



Finally, 163 people had taken a period of unpaid leave during their PhD. As Chart 15 below shows, 57% of respondents said they found the process either poor or very poor. Only four people said they had found the process very good.

Chart 15 percentage respondents to the question 'If you have had to take periods of unpaid leave, such as a leave of absence or suspension of studies, what did you think about the processes involved in arranging this?'



Respondents told us what they felt would make the experience of taking periods of leave better. Key themes included:

- Having entitlement to leave in the first place, and improving equity and fairness of access

International PhDs are not entitled to take leaves of absence in the same way that domestic researchers are. While we are granted a certain number of days per year of general leave, if someone were to need extended sick leave, or to take a break in their studies for any reason, this is not permitted and you would lose your visa and right to stay in the UK. Taking extended leaves of absence or transferring to part time was suggested at my uni if you were impacted due to the covid pandemic (which everyone was), but neither of these options are available to international PhDs, putting them in a position of having to muddle a pandemic with far fewer resources than their UK/EU peers.

There is an inequality between the processes for home and international students. UCU should lobby the Home Office for illness and parental leave to be included as reasons for visa extensions.

International student visa holders are only allowed a 2 month unpaid medical intermission if needed. Their visa is revoked if they need longer... This has been extremely difficult to navigate as an international PGR who has developed a chronic illness during my PhD. I am an adult with a family here who's visas and jobs are

dependent on my visa. We uprooted our lives to come here and don't have a home to go back to in our home country, but the UK just assumes PGR's can go "home" if they are sick for more than 2 months... In an ideal world, PGR's, including international PGR's, would have the same legal rights as employees to take paid sick leave and get extended deadlines for the time missed while sick. In the meantime, even just having the rights for longer unpaid sick leave/intermission and deadline extensions would help immensely.

Personally, I have not taken leave during my PhD. I would have liked to take a couple of months of leave to look after my mother whilst she was undergoing cancer treatment, she lives alone and I live 5 hours away from her. However, I could not do this as it would have been unpaid leave and I couldn't afford it.

Most PhD students I know are self funded. The idea of unpaid leave is ridiculous. Most students have massive loads and very little reward. There's no such thing as "time off" from a phd in the UK system. Pay us, and maybe we can talk about wellbeing.

- Having greater clarity and information about entitlement and processes, both for PGRs and supporting staff

My university simply did not know what to do, as if it was a complete surprise to them that a PhD student was having a baby. It would have been much easier and less stressful if there was a clear consistent policy in place across institutions and funders.

Clearer guidance around how periods of leave affect submission deadlines and funding, and a more joined up approach from the doctoral college/department and funding bodies.

It's all still very much on a need to know basis and supervisors themselves don't seem to consider they themselves need to know - in the case of my parental leave, I had to manage it all by myself directly with HR, which was a stressful and byzantine process.

Nobody told me that I was entitled to take paid sick leave (I now realise I was). Or how to get benefits when I wasn't well enough to work. The assumption is you come from a comfortable background and don't need to.

I know I was not impacted negatively by disruption but know colleagues who almost got deported as they received incorrect information regarding the possible allowable length of their leave.

- Better, or any, support alongside periods of absence

Enough support to even create a space where I could have considered taking any kind of paid leave during or since my PhD (unable to during and currently due to lack of

financial assistance; lack of supervision or support and workload too high to even consider it)

Pregnant PGRs are not factored into the planning - no one thinks about planning maternity, there are no keeping in touch days, no support in returning to work, nothing at all.

- Not being 'punished' for taking leaves of absence, for instance through removal of access to library services and university counselling and wellbeing support

As PGR students, we are expected to treat our PhDs like a job. But the universities' that we 'work' for fail to treat PGRs as employees. Sick leave isn't an option for most PGRs - I certainly don't get any paid sick leave and, if I an LOA to recover from illness or manage a family issue, I'm instantly cut off not only from my only means of financial support but from all the support networks and facilities of my university. Essentially, this system leaves already vulnerable student-staff cast adrift and without any means of support at a time when they may most require it. I haven't taken a period of unpaid leave - but that is only because of financial necessity and not because I haven't needed it.

- Reducing pressure from supervisors and other staff to not take a necessary leave of absence

At the moment, it's haphazard and often left to the whims of the supervisors. I have colleagues who, when they applied for parental leave, were told "they shouldn't have got pregnant" and before sick leave was introduced, I know many who were in a vicious cycle. They were made unwell by their PhD but were then worried about their sick leave running out. I also know of disabled PGRs who were forced to apply for UC when they ran out of sick leave.

Two members of staff attempted to intimidate me upon return, sign strange paperwork of dubious origin, and one of them stated that my absence had made the institution (department) look bad: such behaviour should never happen; HR said they weren't responsible because I was a PhD student.

Supervisors should not be able to deny PhD students the opportunity to take reasonable annual leave.

- Removing stigma around taking leave

Less stigma about taking leave, whether for medical reasons, parental or mental health etc. ensure support on their return to work also.

- Improving systems for documenting holiday leave in order to ensure PGRs take their entitlement, where applicable

Paid holiday leave would also encourage a healthier work life balance for PGRs.

- Improving systems for accessing entitlement to leave, including reducing evidence requirements for periods of leave, including reducing evidence requirements for periods of leave

It should be easier to arrange this, particularly for ill health, you should not have to jump through so many hoops to prove you're ill when you're ill.

Make the process simpler and more streamlined. Make the process appropriate for the type of leave - e.g. paid parental leave was treated the same in terms of administration as an unpaid LOA or sick leave, so the forms were confusing to fill in and many sections were not technically correct/applicable

In my experience individual people, supervisors and funder representatives are extremely supportive. But that individual support is countered by the bureaucratic processes put in place which default to a position of low trust between PhD candidate and institution. The bureaucracy roots the relationship in risk management rather than support and engagement - it starts to feel extremely transactional rather than individual.

Personally, my supervisory team were extremely helpful and empathetic, however the institutional bureaucracy has been absolutely ridiculous, from having to wait for a quarterly progression board meeting to approve (or not) requests for taking leave, to them officially refusing a period of leave but informally advising I could take the time off regardless, to them even continuing to pay my stipend while I was taking leave - meaning I have less funding left on my return. All because they apparently don't understand their own processes and paperwork. So as ever in HE it's the systems and processes that set us up to fail.

- Increasing flexibility of leave processes

There are times when you need to reduce your study intensity but the system only allows you to be active or paused. It also demands that any pause in studied is for whole calendar months which are planned in advance. We need a system that recognises complex lives and supports us to study when we can to the level we can.

Support mechanisms must be adequate such that at any time, for any reason, any PGR can take leave of any length and readily return when they so choose, without this being seen as a source of friction.

- Introducing better support to return to research

I have found that having a few months with no contact and doing no work then being expected to return 'as usual' to full work is quite damaging. Continued contact with

supervisors, wider research group and other PGRs remaining possible. Flexibility around engagement with work, procedures for phasing back into work, working reduced amounts, being allocated limited work to do while unwell etc.

Others who took bereavement leave were not allowed to come back in their own time, they were pressured to return before they were ready. Should be more support in place to phase people back into work - as would happen in most workplaces outside academia

■ Changing the minimum period for sick leave entitlement.

There should not be a minimum period- i.e. if you need a week or two off with paused funding then you should be able to have it. Having time limits means that most people who could do with a short period off will not take it as they cannot afford to lose the time or funding, particularly when in their third year. It also pressures people to not have as long off as they need and can lead to snowballing of worsening health.

Provision for menstrual leave. To apply for sick leave monthly seems trivial and is too big an admin task, but over the course of 4 years time lost to menstrual illness may amount (for me) to around 13 weeks, or nearly a full quarter

Concerningly, some PGRs also told us that funding extensions do not include extensions to their period of maximum registration, meaning pressure to complete their PhD remains regardless of disruption to research.

Our DTP offers up to 13 weeks of sickness benefit if a doctor's note is presented, but without any extension to the submission deadline. On the other hand, if we are aware of an imminent medical absence (e.g. operation), we are encouraged to suspend our student status instead; this extends the submission deadline, but - of course - is unfunded. Cram your PhD or lose your income source: some choice!

We have also seen above that survey respondents strongly supported the introduction of bereavement leave, carers leave and entitlement to shared parental leave for all PGRs. These are essential reforms for improving the experience of PGRs when life events happen and they need more support.

I understand that it is now not possible for PhD students to take shared parental leave. I strongly recommend that this is reinstated as taking shared parental leave made a huge difference to my partner's, my child's and my wellbeing, as well as making it easier to return to study.

Classing PGRs as employees rather than students, and ensuring they are paid a livable wage, will mean that they begin paying National Insurance contributions. This will also mean they are able to access statutory support for periods of leave, such as statutory sick

pay and statutory maternity and paternity pay and leave. As stated, we know staff status carries a number of complications, but this is one clear benefit.

The pandemic has highlighted the absolute necessity of guaranteed sick pay for every kind of employee and if funders do not take account of this going forward, they ignore the dignity and humanity of the students they claim to support.

Urgent needs for PGRs

- Ensure all funded students, regardless of funding source, have the same access to paid periods of leave, and that funding extensions are accompanied by extensions to maximum registration periods
- Ensure all students have access to adequate time extensions in order to account for periods of disruption
- Introduce bereavement leave for all PGRs
- Introduce carers leave for all PGRs
- Extend entitlement to Shared Parental Leave to all PGRs
- Extend equal rights to periods of leave, including but not limited to sick leave, parental leave, bereavement leave and other leaves of absence, to all migrant PGRs. Ensure periods of leave are permissible reasons for visa extensions.
- Reduce the burden of evidence for eligibility for periods of leave
- Join up leave systems with those of disability support, in order to reduce needless duplication of evidence requirements
- Reform existing periods of leave to allow for greater flexibility and a 'phased return' system
- Reform entitlement to sick leave to allow for greater flexibility for people with chronic, fluctuating conditions, who may not qualify through illness over one calendar month (as commonly required by university regulations), but accumulate considerable 'lost' days as a result of their condition(s).
- Ensure universities have clear systems of support for PGRs during their periods of leave, including regular check-ins where appropriate
- Ensure all PGRs, supervisors and other staff have accurate and up-to-date information about PGRs' rights to different types of leave, and the processes for accessing them
- Ensure clear communication about rights to periods of leave, both to PGRs and their supervisors. This must include the importance of taking leave when necessary, in order to reduce stigma around absence and pressure from staff to avoid periods of leave
- Ensure all PGRs have equal entitlement to holiday leave, are aware of their entitlement, and are encouraged and supported to take it
- End the practice of suspending access to university services, including but not limited to library and wellbeing services, during periods of leave.

5.2 Making Complaints

PGRs and others told us about the serious issues they faced when things went wrong during their PhD. Some made formal complaints about malpractice, bullying and harassment, while others were expected to carry on and find 'solutions' for themselves.

Systems for making complaints do not work for PGRs, and too many are unable to even raise concerns safely. This is an area that needs serious and urgent reform. As mentioned earlier, a significant majority of those surveyed viewed extending access for PGRs to staff grievance policies and trade union case work as being either important or very important. One former PGR told us they felt processes associated with making complaints were designed to dissuade and prevent students from escalating any complaint, such that the reputation of the university was protected. A survey respondent stated:

The university's complaints procedure was adversarial and tried to be threatening; the OIA [Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education] is not a proper body, in my opinion, based on experience, to assess student situations. For example, in my experience, it rejects legitimate complaints multiple times until they are given legal backing (putting a student complainant to unreasonable and unnecessary expense); it treats opinions delivered by a university as if they were facts, ignoring actual facts that contradict these opinions.

We know from **previous research by the National Union of Students (NUS) and the 1752 Group** that PGRs are more likely to have experienced sexual misconduct than undergraduate students. For instance, more than twice the proportion of postgraduates than undergraduates reported a staff member attempting to draw them into a discussion about sex (14.9% of postgraduates vs 6.4% of undergraduates). Fewer than one in ten respondents to their survey overall said they had reported their experience of staff sexual misconduct to their institution.

Previous research by UCU also reported on the structural vulnerability of postgraduate researchers. PGRs, along with precariously-employed staff, disabled staff, trans and non-binary staff and non-heterosexual staff, were significantly more likely to have experienced sexual violence in the past five years. As the report states, PGRs are more dependent upon an institution and a single academic or small team, who can affect their access to funding or paid work, or even threaten their visa status. As such, they are in a uniquely vulnerable position, with very few options and little autonomy.

In our survey and interview, people highlighted significant problems with the complaints process. This included a lack of time limits that meant universities could 'run out the clock' on complaints, either because of visa expiry or the end of the maximum registration period. Universities insisted on seeing individual complaints made by PGRs in isolation, rather than together with other complaints made by staff and students. This echoes one finding from the recent Al Jazeera **Degrees of Abuse** podcast on bullying and harassment

in UK universities. PGRs told us they felt the onus was on themselves to pursue lengthy complaints processes, or alternatively to change their project and find their own new supervisors.

I was unfortunate enough to be in a group where the PI was a notorious bully, and had been subject to upheld staff complaints in the recent past, and I helped lead a complaint against them. The university's response to that complaint was completely inadequate, taking more than a year to 'resolve' unsatisfactorily and imposing enormous emotional and material costs on the PGRs who complained (above and beyond those caused by the PI). I had not been in this group, I would have had a relatively good PhD experience. But the way the university responded to the complaint suggests that when things go wrong, they go very seriously wrong: the university itself becomes complicit in covering up illegal harassment and victimising the victims.

I now know this happens a lot. These issues happen far more than people realise, but they are swaddled by either formal NDAs or just a general conspiracy of silence and the need for people to try and finish their work. [Interview]

The lack of a good HR system. I don't know whether that's better if your staff because it's universities, but actually not having a clear track of who I go to - the ranking is different, we work with postdocs who are more senior to us but they're not our managers. I had some inappropriate behaviour towards me in the first few months of my PhD and that person is the postdoc that I work with entirely on my project, and I've complained about him several times but it still manages to - I think because I'm a student and this is my project, if I want to remove myself from the situation I have to change my project and actually that penalises me massively. My supervisor has been quite supportive of it, but I'm in my final year and this is a real obstacle. I just wonder whether having been considered - it seems like we're staff when it's convenient and we're students when it's considered, and when it comes to issues like this we tend to be students and it's really hard to find a formal way of dealing with situations like this when you don't have those corporate structures of... here's an independent person who you make these complaints to and they will make sure that you have - I worked in industry before and that's how we dealt with it all. [Focus group]

People also highlighted the ways in which complaints systems for students were ineffective. They described how they were designed for undergraduates rather than postgraduates (acknowledging that they also do not work well for undergraduates) and how they were not fit-for-purpose for PGRs working closely with their supervisors during a full working week. PGRs told us they felt complaints were not taken seriously by universities, and that too often no action was taken.

The system is completely broken and is extremely vulnerable to exploitation and putting PGRs in situations where they cannot escape bullying and harassment. Worst case scenario, a PGR joins a research group and one or all of their supervisors is

actively abusive (bullying, sexual harassment, intimidation) and the supervisor's behaviour goes largely unchecked, with a devastating impact on the PGR. I know of PGRs who have, after a few months of PhD research, reached out to e.g. CDT directors complaining about abusive behaviour from their supervisors, and been told to "stick it out" and that changing supervisors would "cause offence to your supervisor" and be "an administrative nightmare".

I honestly think that the only way to to avoid these abuses, or to reduce the chance of these abuses happening is to be staff, to be regarded as staff and to have employment protections. That can only happen via a complete rejig of how PGRs work. Even without that, universities could say "we are going to use the same processes. We can't pay you extra so that you can pay tax, we can't pay you NI, but we are going to apply all of the same staff processes about bullying et cetera." But I don't think they will. I think that basically to avoid many of these issues is to be staff, and I've only come to that conclusion reluctantly. The majority of PGRs go through PGR without these issues. The problem is when it breaks down, whether that's the supervisor relationship or something like this, there is zero safety net, zero protection. [Interview]

I've known a couple of students and heard plenty of second-hand accounts of bullying from supervisors and expectations of excessive workloads with the university doing nothing and the only choice has been for the student to drop out which then means they are very unlikely to get onto another DTP. I think it's really important the PGRs are able to access the same grievance policies and trade union case workers as staff.

I applied for multiple PhD programs, and the person who became my supervisor had to warn me that one of the others I had applied to was with a problematic individual (he has since been disciplined for bullying, including having a grant stripped, but has not been sacked). The reliance of women on whisper networks is simply unacceptable, because by definition they don't reach everyone. Universities need to take allegations of abuse, of any form, much more seriously.

Also, the longstanding issue of sexual harassment and bullying. We are in a vulnerable position and I don't feel confident that if I make a complaint about either of these topics anything is gonna come off it. Instead, I would be marginalised or discriminated against because I spoke up and also, I don't know the consequences for the accused individual so what's the point on raising a complaint then.

For migrant or international PGRs in particular, there was seen to be no recourse in these situations, as visa restrictions meant they could not quit or change schools, and could potentially face retributions that would affect their visa status if they did make a complaint.

You can't just move to another university and finish your research, it's not like a job, particularly for people with visas. [Interview]

Ultimately I think the biggest problem with my expectations versus what happened is that I had no recourse, as a migrant. I can't transfer schools, I've no right to do that, I would have to go home to the U.S. in the middle of a pandemic. It's not like I really have somewhere to go back to. [Focus group]

Urgent needs for PGRs

- Extend access to university HR complaints procedures to all PGRs, in recognition of their distinct role compared to other students
- Overhaul all complaints procedures to ensure they deal with complaints in a robust and timely manner, taking into account the existence of multiple cases by single perpetrators, ensuring investigations are independent, transparent and thorough, and that the onus is on the university to take action, *not* the PGR
- Ensure the anonymity of PGRs raising complaints is upheld in all cases, and that they are protected from any form of retribution, included but not limited to threats to visa status, withdrawal or denial of funding, or further instances of abuse
- Ensure supervisors who have had complaints raised and upheld against them are not in a position to supervise new PGRs
- Ensure all PGRs and others have clear information about points of contact, processes, progress and time limits relating to complaints throughout their PhD, and for the duration of any complaints made
- Ensure all supervisors and other relevant staff have clear information about complaints processes, understand their importance and are equipped to support PGRs where necessary
- Ensure all university complaints procedures have strict time limits that are adhered to, so that migrant PGRs can have their complaints heard within the time limit of their visa, and so that for all PGRs complaints can be heard in a timely manner and within the period of maximum registration
- Introduce clear mechanisms for all PGRs, including migrant PGRs, to be able to change supervisors and/or universities without loss of funding or visa status.

5.3 Migrant and International PGRs

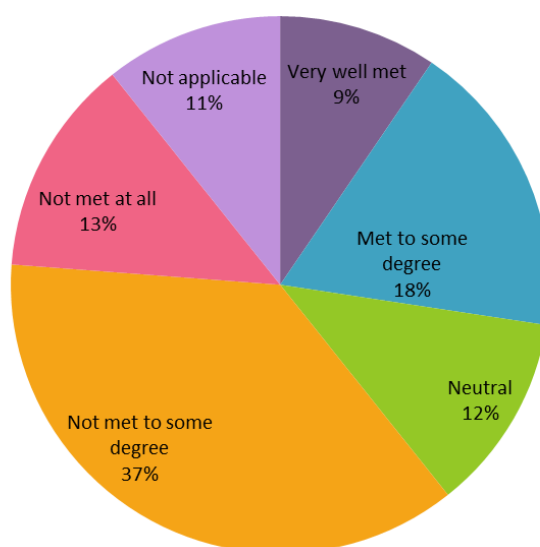
23% of survey respondents (156 out of 675) told us they were or recently had been classed as a migrant or international student. A small number of others told us they were EU PhD students within the EU settlement scheme. We segmented the data to show answers for this group, which we were able to compare against answers for those not in this group.

Migrant PGRs were generally younger than non-migrant respondents, with a greater proportion aged between 25 and 34 years (80% compared to 66.2%), and only 1.8% aged over 45 compared to 6% for non-migrant students. However, a lower proportion of migrant PGRs were aged 24 years or younger (7.9% compared to 14.4%). A lower

proportion of migrant PGRs said they identified as disabled, chronically ill or neurodivergent than non-migrant PGRs (15.8% compared to 26.5%).

We asked respondents who were or had been migrant or international PGRs to tell us how well they felt their related needs had been met. Chart 16 below shows their responses. 36.9% said their needs were not met to some degree, and a further 13.1% said their needs were not met at all. Only 9.5% said their needs were very well met.

Chart 16: % respondents to the question 'If you are a current or former PGR and have international or migrant status, how well do you feel your related needs were met during your PhD?' (n=84)



Answers to other questions and comments throughout the survey also indicate areas where migrant and international PGRs struggle, including funding and pay; fees and other costs; and areas of culture and support.

Funding and pay

Migrant PGRs were more likely to be funded by their university than non-migrant PGRs (32.9% compared to 19.8%). This is likely to be because they were excluded from many other sources of funding. Migrant PGRs were also more likely to be unfunded/self-funded than non-migrant PGRs (20.1% compared to 10.7%), which, again, is likely to be a result of exclusion from sources of funding.

I ended up in financial hardship and I felt like there is no support whatsoever for self-funded students who somehow end up in a situation where they cannot continue to be self-funded, there is no hardship funds - even though university does have hardship funds I realised they are quite limited to the international students, and because we

have a visa, we cannot access the public funds, so it leaves you in a very precarious situation and also in a place where you can either just walk away from the programme or really - like I am doing so many menial jobs but then that takes away from the time and energy I could be putting into my PhD and it's not seen as a structural issue, it's seen, that that is on me, and my personal choices. [Focus group]

As a US student there is little to no UK funding geared toward covering the £14000 yearly tuition fees. This means a good portion of time is spent looking at obscure funding websites in the United States that may fund scholarship in the UK.

My main issue is the lack of funding opportunities for overseas PhD students. I've been in the country for 7 years but am not yet eligible for indefinite leave to remain and for British tuition fees because I was a student for part of this time. So, my main issue is that it's difficult and expensive to fund myself as an overseas student.

I was really hoping that by being here I would be able to access possibilities of funding - at least applying, I couldn't even apply to anything because there was absolutely nothing for international students. Especially since we pay three times more than [home students]. They don't want us here. Or they only want people that are filthy rich. Once we get here we have no chance to compete for funding or support. [Focus Group]

lack of continuous funding and also losing student status at the end of funding. It affects all aspects of our lives, exemptions on taxes, and lack of family in the country makes it significantly more difficult for international/migrant students. We don't even have our parents' home to benefit from while finishing our studies. Why make people go through such harsh conditions if the expertise, knowledge and skills of these candidates will be valuable on the job market once finished?

Migrant or international PGRs were more likely to rate opportunities to take on additional paid work as poor. 33.8% of migrant PGRs said opportunities were poor, compared to 24.4% of non-migrant respondents. This is likely to be because opportunities to take on paid work are limited by Tier 4 visa restrictions, but could also relate to lack of awareness among other staff of what work migrant PGRs can and can't do, lack of placement opportunities or other issues.

I had a very good opportunity - I got an interview, it was to work at Oxford for three months... I was like, "it's Oxford!" It's an opportunity of a life time if I get it! Well [the supervisors] said it's fine you can get the 60 days leave to do it - then I contacted the international group, they said I couldn't. It was annoying to know I wouldn't be supported even if I got the greatest opportunity I could imagine.

Being limited in the number of hours I can work (or even volunteer) places a lot of stress on my taking on further responsibilities and opportunities during my PhD. I also have additional costs in visa fees and worry about my visa status after graduation.

International PGRs are more likely to self-fund, as UK domestic funding isn't available to them. However, they are also prohibited from taking certain types of employment on their student visas - for example consulting work. I know several PGRs who are living from savings even though they have skills which would allow them to work their way through their PhD.

Costs

The issue of lack of funding and restricted access to paid work is exacerbated by the high fees international PGRs are charged by universities. This comes out strongly in survey comments.

As a supervisor, the current situation for international PhDs is untenable. I have had exceedingly bright and capable students approach me, but who simply cannot access the funding to cover international fees, and who are restricted in their ability to work during the PhD in the absence of funding. The system needs to change.

It is entirely unreasonable to charge international fees for PGRs. This excludes most people from applying to UK universities as most funds will not pay these fees, and means that only wealthy students can conduct research degrees. There should be no selection of research students based on the fees they can pay.

The disparity in tuition fees between domestic PGRs and international PGRs seems exploitative. While some difference may be expected to help universities cover the fees of visa administration, international student support, and the like, it should also be taken into account that international PGRs are more likely to have difficulty securing housing and may have to pay more for housing as a result, in addition to the fees imposed by visa applications etc.

As well as university fees, migrant or international PGRs also have to pay other additional or higher costs, including the NHS surcharge and visa charges:

Eliminate health surcharge fees (we are workers contributing to NI already) for application, allow access to public funds,

To exempt from IHS [Immigration Health Surcharge] fees for their dependents. These IHS fees are very high such as £2500 per person. For instance, one of my friend[s] will apply for a visa now, he has to pay £10.000 which is almost impossible for some students from some countries.

Fees covered for PGRs transitioning into longer-term visas after completion. Right now, I'm looking at finding 2500 GBP to cover the fees for my graduate extension visa. I'm not sure if I have access to benefits after my PGR and worry I may be in precarious housing situation should I fail to cover these funds.

Graduate extension visa fees mean international PGRs who are already financially constrained by hostile migrant policies and work restrictions, are pushed out of the country. If we want to stay, we must pay thousands of GBP on top of securing funds for housing! This is not experienced by UK PGRs and is further reason why there should be some ring-fenced pool of money for POC and international PGRs.

Allow working full-time during the PhD, allow for applying to public funds in case of necessity, allow to apply for training and jobs opportunities only closed for UK and/or EU nationals. Reduce visa and NHS costs and charge them annually instead of upfront (e.g., 4 year PhD needs to pay 4 year NHS surcharge visa cost upfront). If you are allowed to work, you are also covering NHS through taxes, therefore migrants are paying more for NHS than nationals.

Others highlighted higher housing costs, and more precarious, poor quality housing:

International/migrant PGRs must pay 6-12 months of rent upfront to access private housing. Don't get me started on the fees for university-accommodation, much less the fact there is so little accommodation available to PGRs with families.

[A]rriving in London and trying to find accommodation as a migrant is a terrible experience and I got no support from university. The university halls price is 60% of my monthly salary.

Visa issues

We asked respondents to tell us what they would change about the current visa system for PGRs. They told us they struggle to get accurate advice and support, face considerable hostility, and, as above, struggle with costs, work restrictions and time limits.

Universities should have at least one immigration specialist who represents students and/or PGRs, NOT the university/Home Office. I've been given so much incorrect information, had my motives questioned, and been generally treated poorly by visa 'support' teams, who made it clear to me their job was to ensure visa compliance and not to help students. Specifically, there is currently no provision for helping students/PGRs plan for longer-term settlement in the UK.

First and foremost, the people working at the visa office at my university really, really need to start treating internationals with just a tiny bit of respect. We are human beings who happen to be from another country - don't assume we are trying to bend the rules, stop all the suspicion and control and hostility.... From the day I started my programme, I have considered giving up and going home at least once a week solely due to the visa regime and the unwelcoming attitude I am experiencing. If I had known before coming here, I would have gone to another country, and I will recommend to all other international students to avoid the UK. I cannot take a leave of absence or even visit home while working remotely full-time without losing my visa. It is unbearable.

I was treated as if I was trying to commit visa fraud despite being appointed to monitor undergrad students' visa status through teaching. My entire experience with my university has been hostile from day one as and because of being a visa student

*The current system of Tier 4 / Student route is far too broad, leading to great confusion for both PGRs and institutions about what the different requirements are, generates significant inequality between the rights and opportunities of international and domestic researchers, is incredibly expensive to access (due to the requirement to pay the health surcharge up front for the entirety of the length of the visa), and generally creates so much f***ing stress - I simply cannot underestimate the amount of stress.*

It is entirely offensive and discriminative for PGR students to be treated bureaucratically different. Having chosen the road of research and then getting a different more difficult treatment (with requests like how many times a week we need to be in the labs, tap our cards in and out, accessing wifi in school) is definitely a breach of privacy and offensive. If we can not be trusted as a PGR student/researcher how can my research be trusted?

A longer visa should be granted, PGR students who have chosen to conduct their research in the UK, should be able to carry on doing research and have sometime to look for such opportunities. This visa should not be conditional to a health insurance payment (or should be covered by the research bodies). Let us keep in mind that PGRs are not doing a PhD for money, most of us went into it right after finishing our master/undergrad degrees and did not have any savings. Put into perspective, we are at an age where all our peers have stable jobs, good income, and families. We are dedicating 4 years of our life to no savings, no stable life, no opportunity to have a family (because we can not provide), it is not logical to think that we need to pay 3000 pounds before starting this journey, and moving to other places (and we know how expensive that is in the UK). Just for the visa application (with health insurance and money I needed to move to London) I still owe 6000 pounds.

The PhD years should be counted into work experience calculation and considered as years worked when applying for permanent residency. The UK is one of the very few countries in Europe that do not recognise PhD years as valid years worked for permanent residency applications, and that is not fair.

Anecdotally, we also know that migrant PGRs can face serious challenges when university systems don't take account of inflexible time limits on visas. This can leave international PGRs having to pay substantial fees because visas aren't organised in a timely manner. Some PGRs have to leave complaints about bullying, abuse and misconduct unresolved because of expiring visas and a lack of time limits on complaints systems, leading to the perception that universities are just 'waiting out the clock'.

Culture and support

Migrants were more likely than non-migrant respondents to say that their university values the work of PGRs to a great extent (12.1% compared to 6.7%). However, the rates for both groups was similar, and greater, for those who felt their university did not value the work of PGRs very much, or at all: 46.1% of migrant PGRs and 46.7% of non-migrant respondents said they did not feel the work of PGRs was valued either very much or at all.

Migrant PGRs were also much more likely than non-migrant respondents to rate the supervisor role and relationship as 'good' - 43.5% compared to 28.9%. This suggests many migrant PGRs are getting good support, which is encouraging. However, 14.9% of migrant or international PGRs told us they rated the supervisor role and relationship as poor or very poor. As focus group respondents told us, when it goes wrong for migrant PGRs they can be left with very little support:

I've had to switch supervisory teams because my experience was so bad. [The supervisor] I had chosen was doing a lot of outreach, was doing the interdisciplinary type of work that I wanted to do. Because they were so responsive at first, I thought that was a great sign. That fell apart almost immediately. It was great the first semester, the second semester obviously COVID happened, and I am disabled and severely immuno-compromised. They almost immediately stopped responding to me. I made multiple complaints to the department, no one would answer me. [Then] they forwarded an email with mental health information, when all I was asking for was to push a meeting back a week, and they forwarded it to a bunch of people, which caused a complete breakdown in the relationship. And then my department sat me without an advisor for a year despite the fact that I handed them a list of names... Most British academics absolutely do not understand the migrant system in the UK, they have no concept of it. [Focus Group]

20 people classed as a migrant or international PGR answered specific questions relating to disability, chronic illness and neurodivergence. This group was much more likely than non-migrant respondents to say that their disability-related needs were not met to some degree or were not met at all. 35% said they were not met to some degree (compared to 25%), and 30% said they were not met at all (compared to 15.3%). They were also much less likely to have received DSA than non-migrant respondents. Only two people told us they had been in receipt of DSA, and both rated their experience as poor or very poor. 18 people, or 90% of migrant respondents answered 'not applicable'. This compares to 48.6% of non-migrant respondents who answered 'not applicable'.

Because of the pandemic I developed anxiety which I didn't have before. I tried asking for some mental health help in the university. They postponed a deadline that I had, but the contact they put me with in the mental health group - I told them I had been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder and I thought this could be influencing everything and I needed some help just to organise my head because that could maybe

help me with my anxiety, and they were like - you don't have a UK certificate that you have ADD. No I have a [diagnosis from my home country]. They said they need your GP to tell us you have it... I asked the GP, they didn't give me a report, they didn't even test me for ADHD, so I haven't been given any support for ADHD. The guy sent me a couple of texts, support texts, just "take a look, read about it, see if it helps" and that was it. [Focus group]

I feel like there's no mechanism or support to bring this up [mental health condition] without sabotaging my own progress. [Focus group]

Migrant PGRs are likely to be disqualified from entitlement to DSA, other benefits, paid sick leave or even unpaid periods of leave over a certain length, due to Tier 4 visa restrictions. This likely accounts for the high levels of dissatisfaction with support for needs relating to disability, chronic illness and neurodivergence. This is highly discriminatory; it essentially excludes disabled migrants from doing a PhD in the UK, regardless of their talent, skills and suitability for academic study.

I am in poor health and have wanted to take an intermission to focus on my recovery for over a year. However, I am only allowed two months of intermission before I am at risk of having my visa rescinded. My doctors do not think two months would be long enough for the treatments I need, and are not sure I could pass the medical requirements to come back from intermission, putting me at risk of losing my (and my spouses) visa. This would cost us our housing, jobs, and healthcare, and we do not have a home to go back to in our home country. However, UK PGR's are allowed to take multiple consecutive terms of sick leave without fear of losing healthcare or their right to remain in the country. It would be so helpful to have the ability to take a longer intermission and focus on my treatment and recovery so that I can actually be a more effective researcher when I return. It would also be nice to not have the pressure that my spouses visa depends on me keeping up with my workload despite me being chronically ill.

The same problem exists for migrants with caring responsibilities, migrants who become parents, or those who have to take leave for any other reason (bereavement, crisis, etc.) but are prevented from doing so because of their visa conditions. If a PGR loses their visa status and has to return to their country of origin, simply because they have to take a longer period of leave than is permitted, this can mean losing networks of support and established health and care relationships, which can have a devastating impact on their health and wellbeing.

Being able to take an interruption of studies without being forced out of the country. Both if I need a break (my PhD is very intense) and if I want to go work for a company for a couple of months and earn a decent salary, as some of my colleagues that are not under a Visa do.

The numbers of respondents who told us they both held migrant status and were parents or carers was low, with only nine people answering the question about how well needs relating to being a parent or carer were met. However five of these people said their needs were not met at all (55.6%), with the remainder spread equally across the other four responses.

I'm a mum of two young children and have a migrant background, so no family in the country who could provide support. Legal implications for my immigration status due to Brexit have been stressful and expensive to deal with. The Covid19 crisis over the past 2 years also has been extremely hard on my mental health, also affecting my kids. We (still) find it really hard to manage the levels of stress that have built up over the past years. I'm now no longer registered as a student officially, while I'm being still allowed to submit my PhD thesis as a 'late submission' if I manage to put it together over the next few months, which means I'm currently trying to complete my thesis with no supervision, no other support and of course funding has long ended. While my supervisors have been supportive in spirit, I feel the university has made it rather difficult to get support and extensions and work adaptations while I was registered as their student. I hope future students with similar circumstances will have more rights and access to support and adaptations to their PhD programme.

Finally, migrant or international PGRs and other respondents highlighted a lack of targeted support for them around careers, understanding higher education and navigating life in the UK.

Job support for PGRs is also oriented around UK citizens and is often not helpful for migrant PGRs who have more work restrictions.

More mentoring and networking opportunities for international PGRs. Special trainings to help explain the UK HE system - there are so many things that pose a huge learning curve, including - in a big way - ACRONYMS. So much knowledge is taken for granted: RQF levels, standardised course curriculums, REF, school-level qualifications, the general structure of HE at various degree levels, what field-specific research networks exist, what inter-institutional collaborations exist, how UK funding bodies work (and who they are / what they do), as well as where and how to access basic stuff, like homegoods, groceries, quality rental properties, transportation, bank accounts, mobile phones, etc.

Urgent needs for PGRs

These urgent needs for migrant or international PGRs are in addition to those already raised in the sections on taking leave, and making complaints.

- Abolish fees for all PGRs, and in the interim ensure no migrant PGR is charged more than a domestic PGR for their period of study

- Abolish the NHS surcharge
- Ensure time conducting PhD research is counted as years towards securing indefinite leave to remain
- Extend equal rights to Disabled Students Allowance and other forms of disability support to all migrant PGRs
- Extend equal access to university hardship funds for all migrant PGRs
- Extend equal access to UK welfare benefits to all migrant PGRs
- Introduce greater flexibility and longer time limits to the current Tier 4 visa
- Ensure every university has a dedicated point of contact to support and advocate for migrant PGRs with regards to visa issues
- End the intrusive surveillance and monitoring of migrant PGRs
- Ensure all migrant PGRs have appropriate and comprehensive induction and ongoing pastoral care support throughout their PhD
- Provide access to adequately resourced networks for migrant staff within universities.

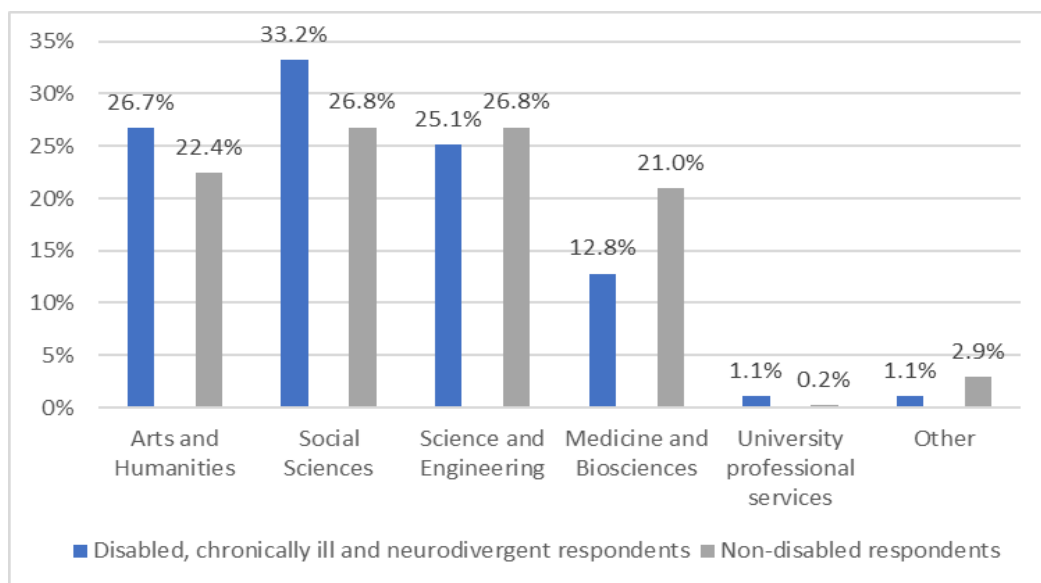
5.4 Disabled, Chronically Ill and Neurodivergent PGRs

181 survey respondents told us they identified as disabled, chronically ill or neurodivergent, representing 22.9% of all respondents (n=790).

PGRs who identified as disabled, chronically ill and/or neurodivergent were more likely to be part time than non-disabled PGRs (16.3% compared to 6.4%). They were also more likely to be self-funded/unfunded than non-disabled PGRs (17.3% compared to 11.7%).

Disabled, chronically ill and/or neurodivergent respondents were more likely to be in arts and humanities or social sciences disciplines than non-disabled respondents, and much less likely to be in medicine and biosciences, as Chart 17 below shows. These results do include respondents who were not or had not recently been PGRs, so is not an exact representation of our PGR respondents. Nevertheless, it suggests more work must be done to extend access to this discipline to disabled people who wish to study it.

Chart 17: percentage respondents to the question 'Please select your subject area', disabled, chronically ill and neurodivergent respondents compared to non-disabled respondents



Respondents who identified as disabled were much more likely than non-disabled respondents to answer 'not very much' to the question 'To what extent do you feel your university values the work of PGRs?' (46.3% compared to 32.5%). They were also almost half as likely to answer 'to a great extent' (6.3% compared to 11%). This is highly concerning, as it reveals a noticeable disparity in experience between disabled and non-disabled PGRs.

Disabled respondents were more likely to say there should not be a time limit for completing a PhD (34.5% compared to 22.6%). This likely reflects the additional challenges disabled, chronically ill and neurodivergent PGRs face in completing within existing time limits, and the difficulty in arranging leaves of absence. The current system poses significant challenges for people who need to take breaks, and it is notable that disabled PGRs were more likely than non-disabled respondents to rate the experience of taking paid sick leave as 'very poor' (36% of disabled respondents who had taken paid sick leave, compared to 22.5% of non-disabled respondents who had taken paid sick leave). Similarly, disabled respondents were more likely than non-disabled respondents to rate the experience of taking periods of unpaid leave as 'very poor' (39.6% compared to 19.1%).

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, a much higher percentage of disabled respondents than non-disabled respondents rated removing evidence requirements for all paid and unpaid periods of leave as 'very important' (41.2% compared to 24.2%). Specific challenges exist for those with fluctuating chronic conditions who might experience flares over a short period, for whom paid sick leave or a leave of absence would not be appropriate, but who nevertheless lose considerable time as a result of their condition. This has been highlighted in the section on taking leave, and we have recommended much greater flexibility and recognition of fluctuating conditions as a result.

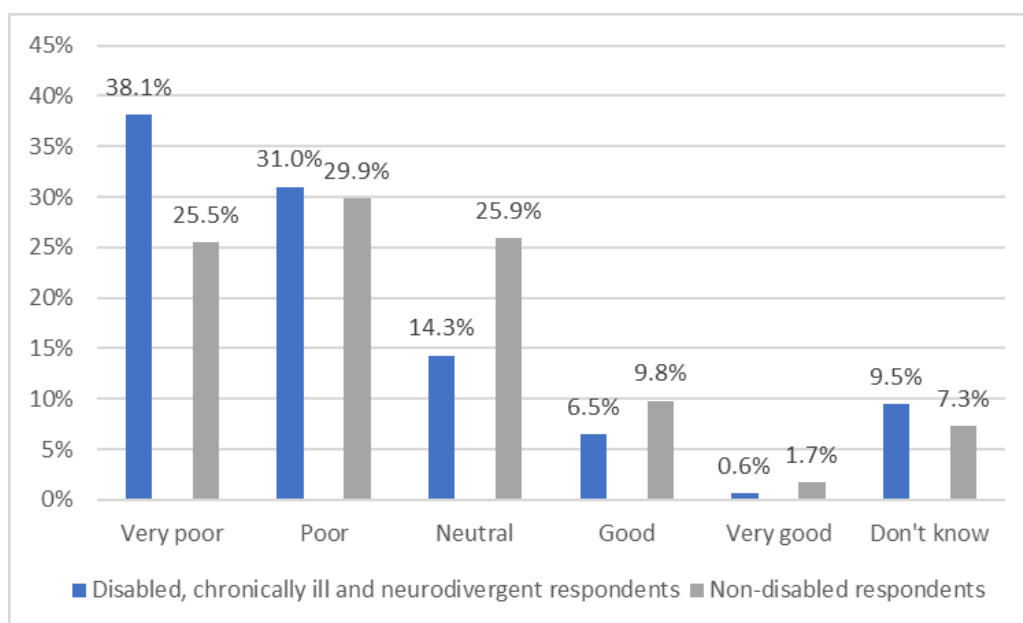
Disabled, chronically ill and neurodivergent respondents were more likely to rate facilities as very poor (9%) or poor (28.1%) than non-disabled respondents (6.9% and 20.3% respectively). This suggests they face greater challenges in having their basic access needs met, and that systems are not helping them to do this.

Most of the doors around my building are heavy manual ones. Physically impaired people might find it very hard to keep pushing and pulling them. There are no quiet spaces for neurodivergent people to decompress.

They could provide a desk and chair which are very necessary for my chronic orthopedical chronic ill, hence I had to change my desk all the time due to hot desk issues. After 2 years I have been given but I wasted my time for 2 years, can you imagine?

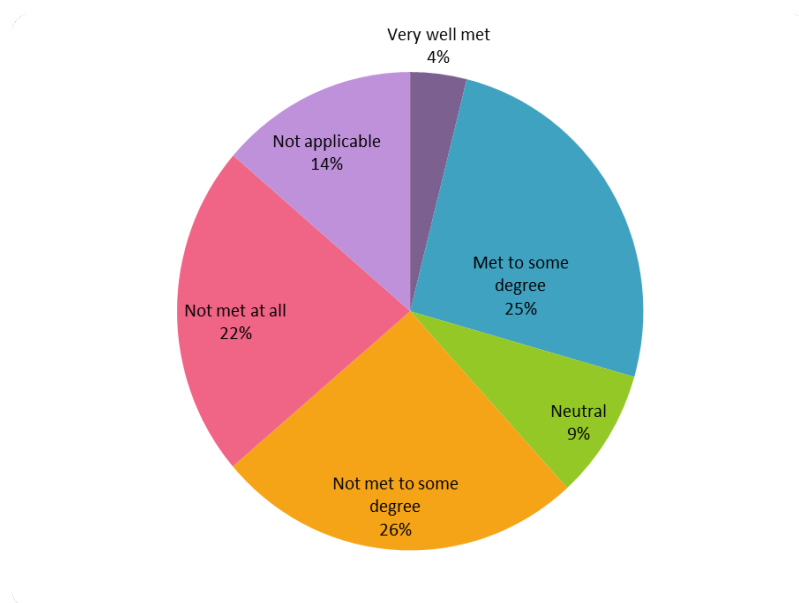
They were also more likely to answer 'very poor' to the question 'What do you think about the opportunities and support for PGRs to continue careers in higher education post-PhD?'. Chart 18 below shows these results. This is particularly concerning because, as with other marginalised groups, research shows that disabled role models and mentors in leadership positions in higher education help aspiring and future disabled academic leaders to pursue careers in the sector. If disabled, chronically ill and neurodivergent PGRs do not see a role for themselves in the sector, and are not supported to progress, then they will not reach these leadership positions, and the cycle will be perpetuated.

Chart 18: percentage respondents to the question 'What do you think about the opportunities and support for PGRs to continue careers in higher education post-PhD?', disabled, chronically ill and neurodivergent respondents compared to non-disabled respondents



We asked respondents who identified as disabled, chronically ill or neurodivergent whether they felt their related needs were met during their PhD. As Chart 19 below shows, only 3.9% of 102 respondents felt their needs were very well met. 48% felt their needs were either not met to some degree, or not met at all.

Chart 19: percentage responses to the question 'If you are a current or former PGR and identify as disabled, chronically ill or neurodivergent, how well do you feel your related needs were met during your PhD?'



We also asked respondents how they felt the experience of disabled, chronically ill and neurodivergent PGRs could be improved. Common answers included:

- Training, combating ableism and improving understanding of disability, chronic illness and neurodivergence

[A]dditional trainings for disabled/neurodivergent PhDs - our uni has zero recognition of the significant portion of PhDs who identify this way, has no support or policies in place for them, and the vast majority of the trainings (e.g. on writing tips, productivity, communication, etc.) are all organized first and foremost from an ableist perspective. When I've asked about the possibility of additional provision for these PGRs, I only receive shrugged shoulders at best (disdain and defensiveness at worst).

[I]t would have helped if my supervisors had some training in supervising disabled, neurodivergent and chronically ill PGRs so that they didn't constantly say and do ableist things that made my life extremely difficult.

Supervisors should be more aware of mental health issues in PGR students and how to deal with them in a sensitive/appropriate manner - maybe some sort of training could be provided for that.

I did not feel comfortable advising my supervisor that I was diagnosed with ADHD in the middle of my PhD as I was afraid this would impact their perception of my abilities and potentially limit my opportunities. I can't say for certain whether it would have, but given the poor response I got during my first meeting when I suggested I would need to be mindful of my mental health when researching a sensitive topic (which was essentially "well if you don't think you're capable of reading about this topic, then you shouldn't be here") didn't encourage me to be forthcoming with any further concerns or difficulties.

I am a PGR supervisor and feel ill-equipped to support neurodivergent PGRs who may receive diagnoses as adults, sometimes late in the PhD process

- Tailoring disability support to PGRs, rather than relying on provision for undergraduate students, which was not applicable to PhDs

A better offering from the university on what accommodations can be made for PhDs with learning disabilities. Most of the proposed accommodations are for exams & assignments (such as extra time), which do not apply to someone doing a PhD.

A designated contact within the department and/or doctoral college for disabled PGRs

I have ADHD and my university doesn't seem to have many provisions that are applicable for PGRs. I'm able to access software which may help me via DSA, but what I (and a lot of other students with ADHD) need is more time. If I had been diagnosed with ADHD while I was a taught student, I could have got extra time for exams and assignments, but that option doesn't exist even though ADHD makes it so hard for me to focus on my PhD some times.

- Extending access to Occupational Health assessments, and providing recommended support

Full access to occupational health services. I was able to be assessed by occupational health as lab work was exacerbating my chronic pain, however my assessor said she would like to refer me for physio, but the university only pays for this for staff, so I would have to pay privately, which was not possible on my stipend. Funds to apply for ergonomic and specialist equipment. An occupational health assessment has confirmed that I need an ergonomic chair and alternative microscope eyepieces however this equipment will cost thousands of pounds and I am struggling to find any funds I can apply for to buy these, as most university funds are for undergrads and the DSA doesn't pay for all equipment like this.

- Improving understanding and information about what reasonable adjustments could be made for disabled, chronically ill and neurodivergent PGRs

Knowing what kind of accommodations and support other autistic students had found helpful. It was difficult for me to predict what kind of issues I might have and what support I would need, and at the start of my PhD I didn't know what to ask for. I found the transfer interview extremely stressful, and would have appreciated more time to respond to the questions, as I can sometimes be slow to process spoken language.

I'm not chronically ill but I had a year of long covid and I asked the institution for the following things to help me: to give me a phased return to work (they refused); postpone an APR that was happening immediately after returning from sick leave (they refused); a funded extension based on a period of illness and therefore lower productivity (they refused)

- Allowing more time for completion, both as a reasonable adjustment and in recognition of the extra time necessary to undertake additional disability- and support-related activities

Flexibility in funding length in recognition that some required tasks (reading and writing anything of length) are harder and take longer for many neurodivergent people, in addition to those who are disabled or chronically ill. I often need to develop shortcuts to keep up or burn myself out, neither of which are good in terms of wellbeing.

- Extending access to paid sick leave for all PGRs including migrant or international PGRs, making sick leave more accessible and flexible, and removing the bureaucratic burdens for medical evidence

Paid sick leave. Also the acknowledgement that being ill takes time.

I can manage my illness generally very well on the day to day. It is hard when the sick leave you can apply for is only given in monthly blocks of time.

After I completed my cancer treatment it took another 2.5 years before I felt well enough to commit to full time study. I had been capable of around 80% of full time for a long time before that but was restricted to 50% (part time) or 100% (full time). This was not flexible enough and there would not have been this rigidity if I was an employee rather than a student.

As a chronically ill student, it would help to have an extended period of funding from the start, as an illness, in addition to taking a toll on one's daily energy and ability to perform well, requires time-consuming management in terms of medication and doctor's appointments. Despite indicating that I am chronically ill at the time of application and registration, my University has never contacted me with any supportive measures such as DSA or paid sick leave.

[If PGRs had staff status they] would be able to interact with other aspects of the adult world without being a "special case" or worse: not actually able to receive help... These

systems also place the burden of evidence/effort on the phd student as it is their case that is "special".

- Increasing funding for and access to individual mental health support

Greater access to mental health support and research support: this exists at my institution but is extremely overstretched - Better training for supervisors on mental health difficulties and how these impact research: I had to take time out for mental health reasons and my supervisors asked intrusive questions about my medication, and dismissed my need for reasonable adjustments which had been requested by the university's disability support team eg: recording supervisions because brain fog and short term memory problems make it hard to remember all the discussion. There was also an assumption when I returned to study that I would be back to full speed immediately: I had experienced a mental health crisis and there was absolutely no phased return to work, just immediate pressure

- Removing additional barriers for visa holders

A lot of PGRs would fall into more than one of these specific groups, so care needs to be taken to ensure that messaging accounts for intersectional experiences. For example, sometimes advice / messaging given to international PGRs ignores the fact that some of them are also disabled, and vice versa.

- Improving accessibility of on-site and online facilities

If the uni was accessible! The barriers to PGR room, library etc as someone with mobility difficulties are astounding.

The disability service at my uni (and at most unis) is very suited to the needs and adjustments for undergrads, and less so for PGRs; for example it was hard to access office space that wasn't a sensory overload nightmare (our office was open plan and connected to our lab, which is full of noisy machines, it's impossible to work there) and when I requested to be moved somewhere quieter I was told that wasn't a "reasonable" adjustment.

I don't know if it is possible, but I would really appreciate some kind of autistic-friendly working space in a library on campus - perhaps somewhere a bit quieter, with dividers between work spaces.

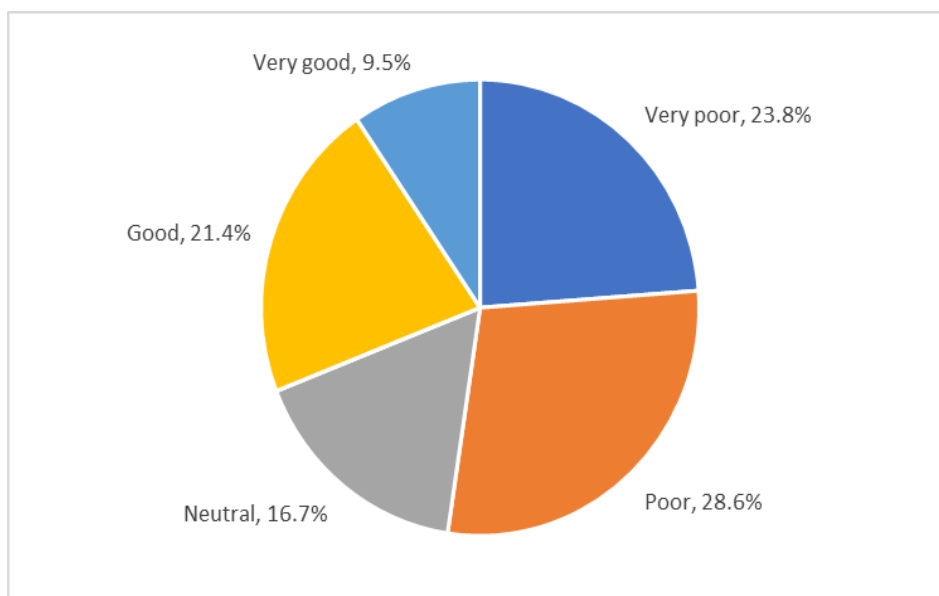
Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) is one way in which disabled, chronically ill and neurodivergent PGRs can get the support they need. We asked respondents to tell us their views on DSA, through three questions:

- If you are, or have been, in receipt of Disabled Students Allowance (DSA), what did you think about the process for accessing support?

- If you are, or have been, in receipt of DSA, what did you think about the support you got?
- How could DSA be improved?

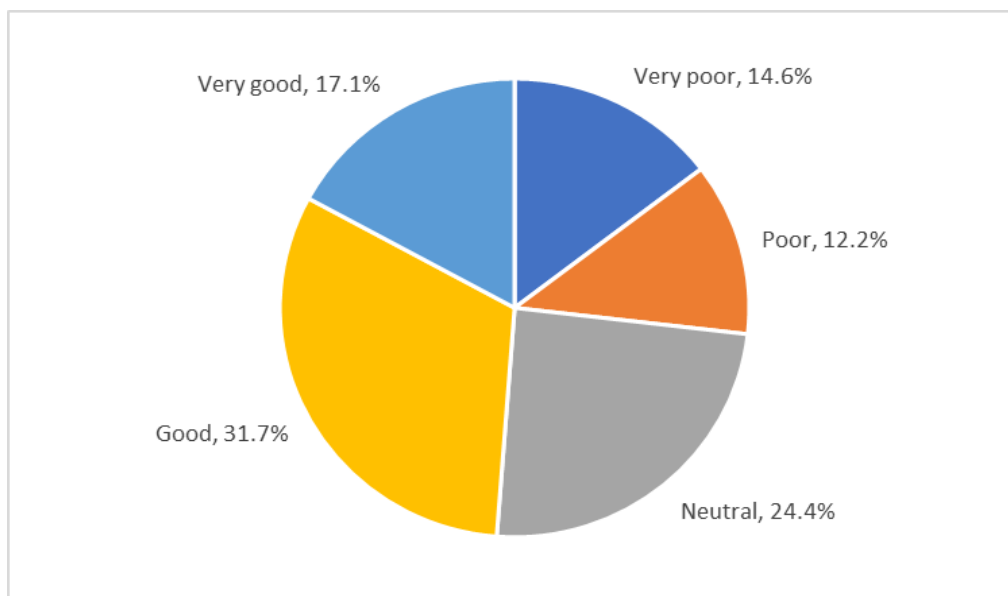
42 people responded to the question 'If you are, or have been, in receipt of Disabled Students Allowance (DSA), what did you think about the process for accessing support?' Of these, as Chart 20 below shows, over half of these people rated their experience as poor or very poor.

Chart 20: percentage responses to the question 'If you are, or have been, in receipt of Disabled Students Allowance (DSA), what did you think about the process for accessing support?'



41 people told us about their experience of receiving support through DSA. As Chart 21 shows, unlike the experience of applying for support in the first place, people's experience of the support they received was generally more positive: almost half of respondents rated it as good or very good.

Chart 21: percentage responses to the question 'If you are, or have been, in receipt of DSA, what did you think about the support you got?'



It is encouraging that, once support is granted, disabled PGRs generally rate it as good. However, clearly the processes involved in accessing that support need to be improved. Responses to the final question in this section, regarding ways that DSA could be improved, highlight a range of issues, including:

- Inaccessible and extended bureaucratic processes, with a lack of information about entitlement or what is available, and unfair evidence or diagnosis requirements

Really long-winded inaccessible process. Universities take far too long to implement recommendations/order equipment. Not easy to get new needs assessment/new equipment if needs change, or if nature of course changes (i.e online vs in person). Needs clear specification of who to contact about what.

The paperwork associated with DSA is outrageous, especially the annual rigmarole of getting it all signed off again. It could be made far simpler for those in receipt of DSA (many of who find admin and paperwork difficult to manage) if the user is able to ask for equipment and/or support as a reasonable adjustment like any other member of staff, with support provided directly at the point of need and the institution claims any extra costs incurred from a national fund for that purpose (similar to funds available for small private sector businesses).

Overhaul the whole system, it's beyond broken. My applications have been delayed, lost, delayed again, it's a nightmare. I wrote my thesis on a broken laptop for over a year before DSA came through and replaced it, with the excuse that they lost my paperwork. Disabled PGRs are treated as an afterthought in general, and DSA makes

this even clearer. My assessor, while a brilliant and supportive person who assessed my needs really well, also didn't understand my funding situation and kept asking me to contact my student loans company when actually I needed to contact my research council. DSA systems needs to have a separate "track" for PGRs as our needs and funding situations are so different to those of undergrads. Waiting periods need to be reduced and communications need to be clearer and more frequent.

Include access to assessment and diagnostic services.

The eligibility assessment took far longer than it should have and this was my main issue with DSA.

- Lack of access for migrant or international PGRs

As an international researcher I do not have access to this program, so therefore I can't comment on its effectiveness for those who are eligible.

- The value of tailored interpersonal support, and the problems that arise when this is not available

The support I got (specialist mentoring) has been invaluable for me in terms of productivity, organisation and wellbeing. I think everyone should have access to a mentor that they see regularly.

I've been offered mentoring support via my university but it was outsourced to Randstad and, to be honest, is quite poor in terms of quality. You can tell that the support is tailored to undergraduates - my support worker, although very nice, clearly didn't understand what was involved in a PhD project and was surprised to find that I was a mature student who didn't attend classes and submit assignments as an undergraduate would. In the end, I stopped utilising this support as it was more of a chore to engage with it than a benefit to my mental health and wellbeing. We did have dedicated PGR support worker for mental health but that was a short-term funded project and, after making a big noise about it when it first started, the funding ran out and the project was quietly discontinued by the university.

- A need to extend support to include provisions such as a greater range of software and other work equipment, with additional needs for enabling office working

Provide furniture to improve the office environment e.g. sound dampening desk dividers and visual distraction reduction (partitions around desk, small or individual office space).

We are aware that one possible impact of granting PGRs staff status for disabled PGRs would be the loss of DSA. This loss could be ameliorated by gaining access to the state benefit Access to Work. There are both benefits and downsides to this, however. We asked

respondents what they thought about this potential loss of DSA, versus gaining Access to Work. The importance of this question is underlined by the responses detailed above, highlighting the generally positive attitude of disabled PGRs towards DSA provision.

There were mixed views regarding whether DSA might be more or less accessible and supportive than Access to Work. Some respondents understandably told us they would need more information about the latter, having not claimed it previously, while others said their experience with Access to Work had also been poor.

The DSA process is extremely poor but AtW is even worse - I am both staff and a student and as a student managed to get adjustments I was unable to get as a staff member for two years.

I've not heard good things about [AtW and OH], and have serious concerns about being regarded as staff for this exact reason. I am concerned that motions to give us staff status would further marginalise disabled researchers.

DSA does offer specific support and is easier to access than Access To Work (I had DSA during my masters but am not eligible for any disability related benefits as a non student). Universities would need to be willing to support PGRs who would have previously been eligible for DSA but cannot access any other support.

Some felt that access to Occupational Health Assessments, and the support they could provide, would be better than DSA, and that if this was granted through staff status then this would theoretically extend access to migrant or international PGRs. Additional perceived benefits included better access to office equipment, better administrative support, the legal protection afforded to employees regarding reasonable adjustments, and gaining more flexible forms of sick leave in tandem, through staff status.

For me, DSA was helpful but access to paid sick leave and occupational health would have been more suitable to my needs.

Having recently undergone an occupational health assessment for a contracted university job the process was far easier. It requires less work from the individual and does not require the high levels of written evidence that PhD students often have to spend time or money sourcing.

The DSA support at my university is definitely tailored more to undergraduates and taught students and unsuited to the PGR experience.

These staff services are not limited only to UK/EU citizens, so in my opinion it would be a vast improvement, as I could actually request an occupational health assessment as an international researcher.

Occupational health assessments might be better for changing the work environment for all, not just giving the PGR an additional allowance.

As a tier-4 visa holder, I'm not entitled to this anyway. I would rather have access to occupational health and some sort of subsidy or fair wage to support me either way.

As an international student, I don't think my visa allows access to DSA, but having staff access to these would probably help mitigate the issue.

Others argued that staff should have the same support that students have access to - especially in terms of disability mentoring and mental health services. Those who already had access to DSA stressed that any change in the PhD system must afford them the same or better support than they currently have.

I would add that all disabled staff should have access to the same level of support as students. It doesn't make sense that when a university start paying you, they remove the support that allows you to function more effectively!!

My main concern would be the potential loss of my weekly mentoring support appointments. However, I believe that an occupational health assessment would mean my disability was taken more seriously and I may actually get more support overall.

I would expect the university to make a separate support team to allow PGRs to access occupational health and Access To Work, and to accommodate assessors coming into PGR workplaces to make adjustments to e.g. offices and labs. If such a scheme were put in place there would need to be an efficient handover process between DSA and Access To Work to make sure that noone was left without support.

I think the mental health mentors on DSA would be a real loss. Ensuring access to ongoing mental health support (not limited to a few weeks) would be critical. Also ATW travel to work can be a lot of admin. But potential admin support from ATW could be a real win. Both have terrible waiting times for support and would need the uni to be much more organised in providing necessary support to get through the application process

This is a key issue that will need to be resolved before any changes to the PhD system are made. Disabled PGRs must not be disadvantaged by any changes. Indeed, systems change must explicitly look to improve support, provision and access for disabled, chronically ill and neurodivergent PGRs.

Urgent needs for PGRs

These urgent needs for disabled, chronically ill and neurodivergent PGRs are in addition to those already raised in the sections on taking leave, and making complaints.

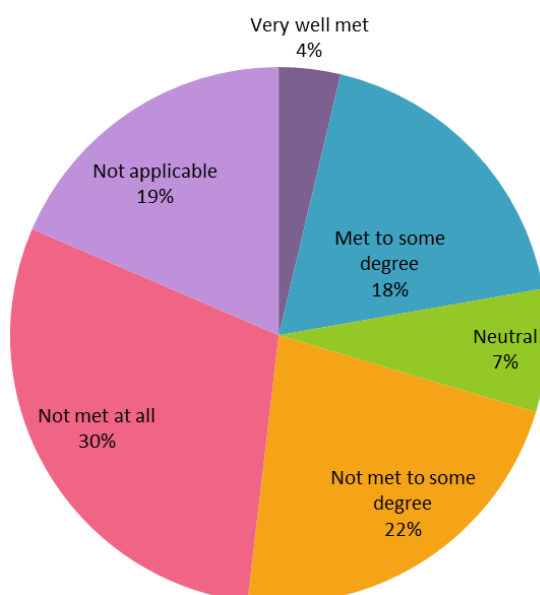
- Ensure all universities can demonstrate they are meeting their current anticipatory duties under the Equality Act 2010 with regards to reasonable adjustments for disabled PGRs
- Ensure all supervisors and other relevant staff are trained on models of disability, how to combat ableism and how to support disabled PGRs
- Ensure every university has a clear strategy for ensuring its digital systems, physical facilities, training programmes, events, inductions, progress assessments, vivas and other systems for PGRs are suitable and accessible for all disabled, chronically ill and neurodivergent PGRs
- Ensure all PGRs have access to Occupational Health assessments, and subsequent support
- Extend access to DSA to all PGRs, including migrant or international PGRs
- Ensure support through DSA is available for the full duration of the PhD for all PGRs
- Overhaul the DSA system to make the application process fit for purpose
- Remove evidence requirements for DSA applications, or ensure that universities provide external or internal professional assessment in a timely manner that sufficiently meets requirements for evidence
- Ensure support available through DSA and other university systems is tailored to the needs of PGRs, rather than relying on support for undergraduate students
- Review what can be funded through DSA to ensure it meets the needs of disabled PGRs
- Ensure any changes to the PhD system do not negatively affect provision for disabled, chronically ill and neurodivergent PGRs, including protecting existing entitlement to DSA
- Ensure disabled, chronically ill and neurodivergent PGRs have flexible deadlines and more time for completion of their PhDs, both as a reasonable adjustment and in recognition of the extra time necessary to undertake additional disability- and support-related activities
- Increase funding for and access to individual mental health support, and ensure university mental health services employ specialist and diverse counsellors to ensure appropriate provision for Black and minority ethnic PGRs, LGBTQ+ PGRs, disabled, chronically ill and neurodivergent PGRs and other multiply marginalised groups
- Provide comprehensive information for both PGRs and staff about what reasonable adjustments could be made for disabled, chronically ill and neurodivergent PGRs, including for those who receive a diagnosis during the course of their PhD
- Ensure disabled, chronically ill and neurodivergent PGRs who wish to pursue a career in higher education have access to mentoring, career support and staff support networks, that links them with disabled academics and leaders in higher education
- Improve routes for accessing PhD funding across all academic disciplines for disabled, chronically ill and neurodivergent PGRs.

5.5 PGR Parents and Others with Caring Responsibilities

54 people answered questions relating to how well their needs were met as parents or carers during their PhD.

30% said their related needs were not met at all, and 22% said they were not met to some degree. This is one of the lowest ratings among the different groups we asked about, with only self-funded or unfunded PGRs returning a worse result (38% of 82 self-funded or unfunded PGR respondents said their related needs were not met at all). Only two people said their needs relating to their care role were very well met.

Chart 22: percentage responses to the question 'If you are a current or former PGR and have parental and/or other caring responsibilities, how well do you feel your related needs were met during your PhD?' (n=54)



PGR parents and those with other caring responsibilities told us they often had little support or recognition from their university of funder during their PhD.

From my interaction with other student carers, aspects of child care entitlement are difficult. As is getting universities to act as though phd students may well have children and other responsibilities, often this is assumed to be the "odd ones out" and makes those phd students feel unwelcome and out of place

As a single mum, I really struggle with this. I am teaching three days a week just so I can afford to put my daughter in nursery full time in order to have the other two days to work on my PhD. I rely on universal credit to make up the difference.

There is no recognition at my institution that some PGRs have partners and family members they need to care for. I care for my partner who has multiple chronic health conditions but there is no mechanism for recognising the time this takes away from studies or wellbeing support. I also had to care for a family member with cancer full time for several months, necessitating suspension of my study. This was unpaid, which has left me in debt.

I wish someone had told me before attempting the PhD that if you have a small child there is simply no way for you to progress academically beyond the doctorate. Spending several years chasing the short-term contracts / fellowships all around the country / world which are apparently necessary before you can even begin to think of applying for an entry-level permanent job is simply not possible when you have a small child in school. It is also very difficult to do the networking deemed necessary if you have little spare time. I see it as effectively a form of structural ageism: to progress into an academic career beyond the PhD you basically have to be a footloose 20-something. If someone had been honest with me up front, I probably would not have done the PhD.

This lack of support has been particularly stark during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, where childcare and other caring needs have increased.

I was lucky enough to get a funding extension on my PhD because it was interrupted when I had to assume full-time childcare responsibilities during COVID. I cannot imagine what it has been like for those that have not been so lucky.

[O]ften the amount of paperwork and 'evidence' required to support such applications were too unrealistic, not least during the Covid19 crisis, e.g. frequent children's illnesses etc put a lot of strain on my ability to work on my PhD project but were hard to evidence with little access to GPs. Also, the prolonged lockdowns with nurseries and schools shut across the country made it really hard to work and built up further stress which, again, was hard to have documentary evidence for.

Paid caring leave is incredibly important and also gendered. I had a 2 year old during lockdown and was still expected to be doing my PhD full time even though all childcare facilities were closed. Impossible

Ideas for improving support for PGR parents and carers included better communication, more flexibility, more funding and access to state benefits, and the integration of a 'carer's plan' into university support for individuals who are carers. As noted in Section 5.1, extending the right to shared parental leave is also an urgent need for PGR parents.

Routine communications and easy to use systems for logging a 'carer's plan', and indicative examples of measures that might be agreed, without restricting the

possibility of other options. Recognition of caring for a partner with chronic health conditions as readily as parental care was recognised (e.g. during the pandemic).

Child care grant or access to some funding for child care. For university to realise that their practices are dissuading working class mothers from completing PhD

More flexibility regarding submission deadlines, paid/unpaid leave, change from full-time to part-time status; longer PhD time schedule (4-5 years rather than 3 funded years). Better networking among PGRs with caring responsibilities. More affordable childcare arrangements - my children went to the university nursery with a discounted rate but it was still incredibly expensive and we had to live very, very frugally to survive these years.

It would be better for PGRs to have a clear, legal, entitlement to parental leave in line with the rights of employees, not simply at the discretion of supervisors/administrators.

Current studentship levels are inadequate if you have dependants. I had to work for pay throughout my PhD to make ends meet. Always balancing the time the paid work took away from research vs the amount of childcare it would buy me to focus on research (&paid work). I've never before or since had such an extended period of unmanageable work-life imbalance and it was all because UKRI does not provide additional support for childcare cost/dependants.

Tax-free childcare would change my life.

I wasn't able to claim 30 hours childcare despite my stipend being of sufficient size if it had been 'earned'.

The recognition of caring responsibilities other than children should be a core focus too eg: partners and family members with disabilities/long term health conditions.

A small number of respondents, however, did point out that the flexibility of a PhD could allow parents and other carers to work around their caring responsibilities, although even this had its limits.

Being a PGR is very flexible and has allowed me to work around child care. I get frustrated when dates for deadlines and meetings are left to the last minute and then changed last minute after I have planned my time and childcare.

Consolidating training into full days rather than one or two hour sessions over multiple days / weeks. Covid brought a significant benefit with online provision as it meant I could access much more without having to plan multiple childcare sessions, being home for school pick up etc.

We asked PGR parents and carers if they thought the introduction of a new form of Carers Leave would be a good idea. 95% of 56 people said it was, and the remaining three said they did not know. The comments highlighted how this would help alleviate financial stress for carers, and end the need to choose between your PhD and your loved ones.

It would help students' mental health by taking away the PhD stress and allowing focus on caring responsibilities, without adding extra financial worries

If your child is ill you need time off to be with them. Not being paid causes significant financial hardship and disproportionately affects those who are already struggling financially who don't have family support or financial support i.e lone parents.

It would make my life as a parent and PGR much less stressful and better. It would also improve the life of my partner and my son.

PGRs should not be penalised for having caring needs. No-one should have to choose between their work/studies and caring for a loved one.

It would allow me the chance to support my family without worrying about having to quit.

Urgent needs for PGRs:

These urgent needs for PGR parents and those with caring responsibilities are in addition to those already raised in the sections on taking leave, and making complaints.

- Extend entitlement to tax-free childcare for all PGRs
- Extend entitlement to 30 hours free childcare to all PGRs
- Introduce paid carers leave for all PGRs who are funded, and carers leave time extensions for all PGRs
- Ensure all universities have a policy and strategy in place for supporting PGRs with caring responsibilities, for instance through a carer's support plan, and a commitment to flexible and accessible work and events
- Where available, extend access to university childcare provision at a discounted rate to all PGRs
- Ensure all universities have training in place for managers and supervisors around the needs and experiences of staff and students with caring responsibilities (including childcare and caring for other friends or family members)

5.6 Women and Non-binary People

69.1% (549) of people who completed our survey identified as women or non-binary. We recognise that these two groups face different challenges, but given the small number of non-binary respondents, we have grouped them together to represent marginalised or minoritised genders. This is not ideal, but we have also made sure to represent both

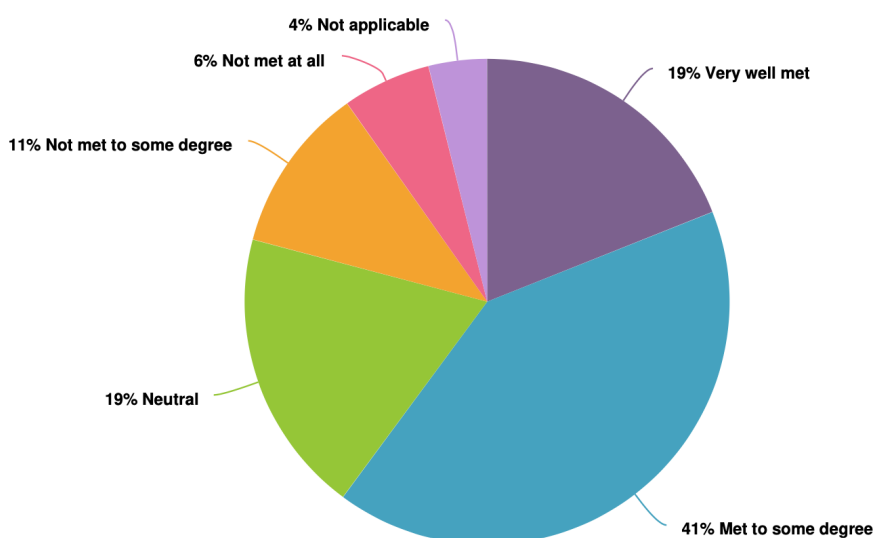
women and non-binary people in the comments featured below, so that both experiences are discussed.

This group were more likely to report being disabled, chronically ill, and neurodivergent than those who weren't in this group (25.6% vs 14.6%). Those who identified as women or non-binary were also more likely than men to be based in arts and humanities (25.5% vs 18.8%) or social sciences (30.8% vs 25.1%) subject areas, but less likely to be in sciences and engineering (22% vs 33.3%).

Women and non-binary people were more likely than men to rate introduction of paid caring leave as very important (64.3% vs 51.4%), and more likely to rate inclusion of PGRs in departmental and university strategy meetings on teaching and research as very important (53.6% vs 36.9%).

We asked respondents who identified as women (explicitly including trans women) or non-binary to tell us how well they felt their related needs had been met. 154 people answered this question. Chart 23 shows their responses. This group was the only one across our questions about specific groups of PGRs that gave a positive answer, with 21.4% and 40.9% stating that their needs were either very well met or met to some degree.

Chart 23: percentage responses to the question 'If you are a current or former PGR and have parental and/or other caring responsibilities, how well do you feel your related needs were met during your PhD?' (n=154)



A number of respondents noted that issues and considerations relating to caring responsibilities more commonly affected women. In addition to those suggestions,

respondents also highlighted a range of ways that their experiences could be improved, including:

- Accessibility and funding in relation into health issues that commonly affect women (in addition to those in relation to paid sick leave)

Account for menstruation. Install free sanitary product dispensers and painkillers. Create quiet areas/rooms where the person can catch a breath.

for people with uteruses it'd be nice to have some recognition of things like endometriosis

Some organisations have explicit policies relating to periods and menopause, something like this would be useful for the university to adopt (if it has not already).

- Representation among more senior members of staff

More women in senior roles ie as PIs. My department has mostly male supervisors and it doesn't feel very inspiring.

To have more representation in leadership roles.

Seeing more women in leadership roles. For example, most CDTs funded by UKRI at my institution are exclusively led by white male academics, and their PGR cohorts reflect that demographic, too.

Careers sessions / advice from female PIs who have families. Previously at careers sessions when asking about balancing a family with academia, there has only been replies from male professors, who said they were okay because their wife took years off to look after the child...

More representation of women in higher positions within the university

- Access to supportive spaces and relationships with women, particularly in the form of networks and mentoring.

If there was a forum/regular meeting for female PGRs, run by female staff members where we could access support and guidance

As a female PGR I was strongly involved in feminist research networks which were very supportive

The creation of women-only spaces to discuss the issues we face and the implementation of more inclusive measures in the university .

For some of the uni orgs for women to not be limited only to staff, or only to those in STEM fields.

More female supervisors/mentors

I am very lucky to have a lot of other female PhD students within my office and department but this is very subject dependent.

Access to a network of female role models or mentors,

- **Hostile work environments and the barriers that are created in relation to access to opportunities, personal relationships, wellbeing and work**

Having more support for casual sexism (other than from other women). Many friends and colleagues in the department experienced sexism from other students and staff which was not effectively dealt with and caused excessive distress for some. As a whole, the department was not inclusive with social events taking part in evenings (so those with caring responsibilities couldn't attend).

Less sexism and misogyny would provide a more relaxed environment for studying

This is more something that needs to be done at the structural level of institutions, but there is a gender imbalance in who does and is expected to do EDI and wellbeing work within academic departments. As a woman, I feel like there's an expectation for me to take on this kind of work, whilst men get to be solitary geniuses in their ivory towers working on their masterpieces with no criticism. I have noticed that the only men around me who do take on this EDI and wellbeing work are either queer scholars or scholars of colour.

Work environments can still be conservative

The male/female balance in the department was an imbalance; more men were employed and mostly men were in positions of authority; the atmosphere and ethos revealed itself gradually, in my experience, as one favouring men over women

When I first started, I had one child and had several people 'jokingly' tell me to wait until after my PhD to have any more. When I returned from maternity leave, once again, I was spoken to as if that was it now - I've had my two babies so I'm done - which is not necessarily accurate I also get a lot of jokes from people putting excess pressure on me here because it 'must be easier than being at home and being a mother of two'

A lack of sexual harassment and/or mockery for being girly

I am nonbinary and people seem to not be able to read my email signature, t-shirt, pronoun pins, and insist on using "she/her" pronouns for me constantly still. I work in an area of science that is very dominated by men, my group is primarily physics, and the representation of women remains terrible in this field (my group of 35 had 3 women when I started and isn't much better now) Sexist attitudes and comments remained unchallenged and my supervisor, who has a history of inappropriate behaviour with women under his supervision, has several times behaved in ways that made me very uncomfortable (the few times it happened it was while I worked in the lab, and I shut it down immediately, he has a tendency to be very "touchy feely" which is CREEPY and WEIRD and I cannot BELIEVE this still happens in 2022) There is a culture of "lads" and normalised heavy drinking followed by inappropriate behaviour perpetuated by senior members of staff at conferences, postdocs and other PGRs in the group and department, that makes the environment very uncomfortable as a woman. To improve this experience I would suggest compulsory, frequent seminars about such behaviours for all staff, PGRs etc, and additionally better and more accessible support for PGRs who identify as women.

I feel some of my colleagues still don't take me seriously because of my gender. Also, there could be more events directed a women in X area of research or research networks to promote women getting involved in academia.

I think the hardest thing has been experiencing sexism at a conference and being unsure about how to resolve it

Urgent needs for PGRs

These urgent needs for PGRs are in addition to those already raised in the sections on taking leave, and making complaints.

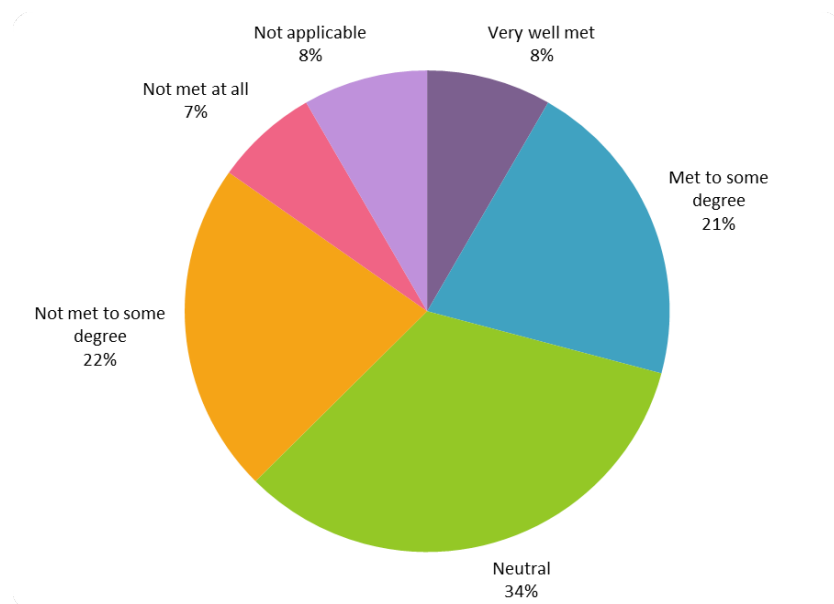
- Provide workplace training, support and adjustments in relation to menopause in universities such as those recommended by the [Fawcett Society](#) and the [TUC](#)
- Provide workplace training, support and adjustments in relation to endometriosis in universities such as those recommended by [Endometriosis UK](#)
- Provide access to free sanitary products for all who need them across universities
- Address gender disparities among senior staff, including closing the gender pay gap and combating lack of representation in leadership roles
- Provide a comprehensive programme of mentoring for women and for non-binary PGRs, especially in disciplines where they are underrepresented
- Ensure access to adequately resourced gender-based staff networks within universities
- Require universities to adopt adequate policies and practice on gender equality and healthy workplace environments as they pertain to supervision and training for PGRs

5.7 LGBTQ+ PGRs

72 people told us how well they felt their needs relating to their identity as LGBTQ+ were met. As Chart 24 below shows, people most commonly told us they felt neutral about this. Some people told us they did not feel they had specific needs relating to their LGBTQ+ identity.

However, there was in fact a relatively even split between those who responded 'neutral' and those who selected either a positive or negative option, suggesting a more mixed experience. An equal percentage (29%) said their needs were not met to some degree or at all, as said they were met to some degree or very well.

Chart 24: percentage respondents to the question 'If you are a current or former PGR and identify as LGBTQ+, how well do you feel your related needs were met during your PhD?'



People told us about a range of actions and initiatives that universities, funders and others could take to make their experience better. The high representation of discrimination against trans and genderqueer people in this section is likely reflective of the particularly hostile situation in which they currently find themselves, in UK higher education and beyond. Clearly there needs to be more work to fight prejudice and discrimination in this area.

Issues raised included:

- Creating more inclusive systems

More flexibility in terms of who counts as family/partner etc. in administrative regulations. Training specific for queer folks prior to data collection (when e.g. connected to traveling).

If the UK was less hostile to trans people

Inclusive language and facilities. Actions of visibility.

There is nothing related to LGBTQ in my department. Moreover, user studies carried out during research use discriminatory scales for sex/gender all the time.

- Access to LGBTQ+ communities, social spaces and facilities, including integration within staff LGBTQ+ networks

Even though my university is a member of the Stonewall Diversity Champions Scheme, at my School there are no visible efforts to create safe spaces for people who identify as LGBTQ, and in particular for trans people. We are lacking simple things like gender neutral toilets (even though our building was just recently refurbished), or spaces to include our preferred pronouns in our website profile.

I am at a mid-size uni with a very small cohort of PGRs. There are other queer PGRs and I know many of them first-hand but there is no kind of LGBTQ PGR network - frankly even the LGBTQ staff network (which PGRs are eligible to join here) seems to be very seldom active.

No dedicated support or network currently available that deals with LGBTQ issues

As a PGR student there are no formal Queer networks for me to join. I am much older than the average member of the SU lgbtq society, and have never been informed of a staff network. Again, this then becomes the kind of work that we have to do informally and in our own time.

- Specific training for LGBTQ+ PGRs (e.g. while on fieldwork, social media usage, etc)

Given the frequently heightened debates around trans issues, I did not always feel that there was sufficient knowledge or support of that context available within my institution. E.g. lots of the generic advice on social media use as a PhD student was emphasising the benefits of sharing knowledge, getting it out there etc. There wasn't really much sign of understanding or appreciating that actually, entirely neutral, appropriate tweeting about trans people and health services, by me as a trans person, could be a risky thing to do. Nor was I at all sure that the university would have my back if (say) the right wing press leapt on something I'd researched and frothed it up into a media controversy. I felt that I was navigating this kind of situation as a PhD student largely alone.

Support for lgbtq people doing fieldwork needs to be improved drastically

- Specific training for staff in understanding LGBTQ+ perspectives, issues and making spaces accessible for these people

I was a trans PhD student, studying LGBTQ topics. My supervisory team were very supportive. However there were various points when I felt that others in my department or institutions did not really understand the salience or significance of studying LGBTQ issues, including occasional examples of crass comments that I felt unable to challenge (e.g. a very senior staff member responding to me explaining my research at a PhD induction event by telling me that there was a trans woman at his ballroom dancing class, and providing his views on her attire).

Compulsory training for all staff and PGRs on LGBTQ inclusion in the workplace, especially including respecting pronouns

Any kind of recognition from my dept, feeling safe to be myself, people using my pronouns.

- Greater representation within the curriculum, workplace, and academic culture.

Year round recognition of LGBTQ contributions to science (not just in the designated month)

More visibility and more modules/workshops exploring LGBT work and topics within the curriculum

Seeing members of my community represented - e.g. a seminar series in my department.

I organised a teach-out 'beyond the binary' to link colonialism to gender binary. This helped folks see that queer and transphobia is rooted/part of institutional racism. Once folks saw understood this, they understood my gender identity better because at least they were vaguely familiar with anti-racism as a concept.

Funding for specific teaching, research, and social responsibility on gender, sexuality, and sexual characteristics.

Urgent needs for PGRs

These urgent needs for LGBTQ+ PGRs are in addition to those already raised in the sections on taking leave, and making complaints.

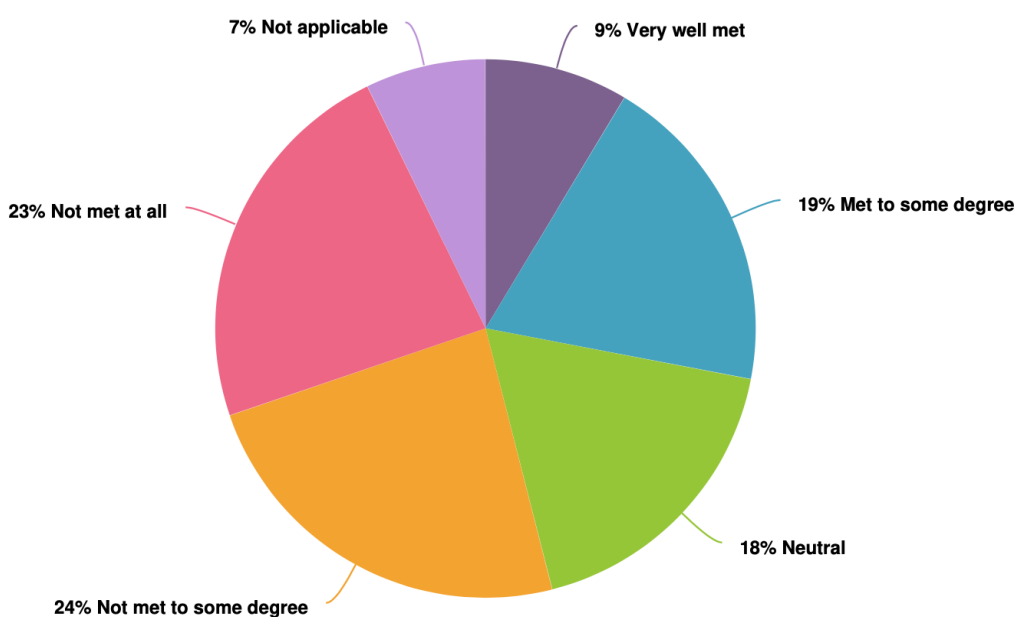
- Review all systems for PGRs across funders and universities to ensure they are inclusive of diverse sexualities and gender identities

- Ensure all LGBTQ+ have access to well-supported and promoted staff and PGR-specific LGBTQ+ networks
- Ensure all PGR training, including but not limited to field work, ethics, and social media and other communications, include elements relating to safety and appropriate support for LGBTQ+ PGRs
- Ensure all supervisors and other relevant staff have appropriate training on issues facing LGBTQ+ PGRs, how to combat prejudice and discrimination, and how to support and champion LGBTQ+ PGRs
- Ensure all LGBTQ+ PGRs have access to a comprehensive and relevant mentoring programme that links them with LGBTQ+ academics and leaders in higher education.

5.8 Working Class and 'First Generation' PGRs

139 respondents answered our question on the degree to which their needs were met through the PhD as a working class person or someone who was the first in their family to go to university ('first generation'). As Chart 25 indicates, the responses here were generally more negative, with 23% answering 'not met at all' and 24% answering 'not met to some degree', compared to 9% and 19% who answered 'very well met' and 'met to some degree', respectively.

Chart 25: percentage respondents to the question 'If you are a current or former PGR and identify as working class or "first generation" (e.g. if you are the first in your family to go to university), how well do you feel your related needs were met during your PhD?'



Respondent's subsequent comments on what would have improved this experience, highlighted the barriers to access that they face. In particular, they commented on having difficulties understanding and navigating the informal relationships and requirements that exist in relation to higher education. They also described not having access to other forms of financial support that they believed others may have. As detailed in the previous section, these can be significant barriers to success. Access to informal channels and having sufficient income are likely important factors for accessing support in the form of training and opportunities for personal development, or for overcoming any inadequacies here that are experienced in these areas. This view is supported by respondents' comments, which included the following themes:

- Lack of income and other available sources of financial support

Recognition that I cannot receive financial or other support from my family because they are not in a position to provide this. I know other PGRs who had their parents fund conference trips etc. and although there are some funds available there is no recognition from universities that poorer students will face more difficulties given the low pay of stipends.

Higher stipend so I do not have to worry so much about money and what I might eat next month, especially with the energy and housing costs through the roof

Recognition of the extremely precarious financial position working class PGRs are in - I have had to work part time throughout my entire PhD to get by financially, but my supervisors have treated this like a lack of commitment rather than a financial necessity

Money! Most people I know have family support with their studies- the stipend is inadequate and I struggle to support myself. I would like to help my mum out with her rent (as I did when I lived with her last year) but that is completely unfeasible.

Proper pay. We don't all have the luxury of familial wealth to get by on what is, quite frankly, abhorrent pay grades. I earned more money than my stipend from working full time in retail and hospitality. I earned more than this working in the arts.

- Lack of clear information about requirements to successfully navigate higher education

Better support in some way. Impostor syndrome is even worse when your family did not go to university and have no value or understanding of what you are doing. Consideration of this from my supervisor and a tiny bit more emotional support, understanding and encouragement would have gone a long way.

Recognition of the social and cultural capital that working class and first generation PGRs do not have access to - I had no idea what to expect at a conference, no familiarity with the way PGR study and academic departments are organised, no network of pre-existing contacts etc

A proper induction, with points laid out clearly what you can expect, what is expected of you, how things work at a university, the simple university 101. There are so many things that can slow you down when you don't know who to talk to, where to find resources, how things are done etc.

Talking to other first-gen academics before starting - I felt so much impostor syndrome, guilt for feeling burnt out despite being more privileged than my family, felt in the dark about 'unwritten' rules. I think knowing the extent to which people in academia are first-gen, along with meeting others who went/are going through similar circumstances, would have helped.

- Dependence on interpersonal support to navigate HE

Peer support groups, clear and signposted opportunities for mentorship outside of normal supervision.

Lots of things that we are just expected to know. I.e. funding sources, cultural norms in academia, how to access conferences or write and publish papers. I'm so grateful that one of my supervisors is also first gen as he's been able to give me so much guidance but there's literally nothing from the university.

But - those non-first gen PGRs really helped me get to grips with academia and managing a PhD. Community with other PGRs and ECRs and possibly even lecturers is especially important. Before meeting them, I did not have anyone to ask what it's like or for general advice.

I am often left to find things out on my own....administrative processes, what it is like to be a PGR, the process of going through milestone reviews, etc. It is a lot to put on a person, especially if they are also international students who do not have a support network to fall back on in the UK.

Informal informational interviews with other first gen PGRs and/or members of staff before starting the PhD.

- Lack of privilege in relation to ability to develop crucial interpersonal support and personal networks

Maybe a flashing red warning sign telling me there's no job security and I'll have to work thrice as hard as many of my peers! Ha! I'm only half-joking. I haven't found the PGR community, or indeed academia at large, to be welcoming, understanding of, or often even remotely cognisant of, the socioeconomic barriers that come with being a working-class PGR.

There was often an assumption that I would know academic procedures, especially the unspoken ways of interacting with colleagues and how to build a network. So being

explicit for PGRs who are first generation on how the job market works and how academia works would have been really helpful.

I don't have any industry contacts or networks or family connections, and those put me at a disadvantage, so networking should be facilitated by the uni.

Advice about "how to network", or indeed on what networking really is. I've found that my peers from more well off backgrounds had a particular set of social skills that enabled them to network both within the department and externally, e.g. at conferences.

I would personally benefit from group meetings with other first gen. or international students who are also UKRI-funded, at least so that I don't feel alone. Many of us are "fighting the same battle" individually, when a more established network could alleviate some of these through information-sharing and experience-sharing.

Urgent needs for PGRs

These urgent needs for working class or 'first generation' PGRs are in addition to those already raised in the sections on lack of pay, taking leave, and making complaints.

- Create ringfenced departmental and/or institutional funding to enable all PGRs to meet up-front costs in relation to training, development and other research-related activities
- Provide access to adequately resourced networks for working-class staff within universities
- Provide a comprehensive programme of mentoring for working class and/or 'first generation' PGRs
- Provided clearer information on the informal requirements of developing a personal network and CV building when attempting to access, navigate, and move on from doctoral research
- Provide adequate training to all PGRs on how to effectively develop personal networks and engage in CV building

5.9 Black PGRs and Others from Underrepresented Ethnic Minority Groups

We know that some minority ethnic groups are far more underrepresented in UKRI scholarship awards than others. For instance, **UKRI detailed ethnicity data** shows that a total of only 70 studentship awards were made to researchers from a Black and Black British Caribbean background across the six years from 2014/2015 and 2019/2020 - between 10 and 15 each year.

However, because of low response numbers to our survey from people who fall into disaggregated categories of ethnicity, we cannot give meaningful insights into any

statistical differences between groups from different ethnic backgrounds in answers to our survey questions. The comments provide more and better insight into some of the issues for minoritised groups, but it is important to do further, targeted research into experience across different ethnicities, in partnership with expert, Black-led organisations.

Some further research has already been done:

- Dr Jason Arday produced a report for UCU in 2017 on **Exploring black and minority ethnic (BME) doctoral students' perceptions of an academic career**
- Paulette Williams, Sukhi Bath, Dr Jason Arday and Chantelle Lewis produced a report in 2019 for Leading Routes, an organisation supporting the next generation of Black academics, called **The Broken Pipeline: Barriers to Black PhD Students Accessing Research Council Funding**.

The findings and recommendations in these reports are important, and UKRI must take note of their recommendations. Black and other minority ethnic PGRs in Dr Arday's report said they had a strong appetite for an academic career, but lacked support, felt isolated and, in some cases, struggled to access teaching opportunities. The Leading Routes report noted that almost half of all Black doctoral students were enrolled part time in 2019, according to HESA, and that they are, anecdotally, more likely to be self-funded. It highlighted how an emphasis on prior attainment, fixed notions of 'academic excellence', a lack of information and a preference for graduates from research-intensive institutions all acted as barriers to recruitment of Black PGRs. Leading Routes recommended adopting a more open approach to assessing academic eligibility, ensuring PGR interview panels are diverse, improve PGR admissions processes and guidance for applicants, and adopt a team supervisory model for PGRs. Dr Arday recommended establishing a charter for what good PhD supervision and mentoring looks like, developing a system of mentoring for PhD researchers, ensuring staff have training on forms of bias and how to recognise and address isolation, and ensuring universities have and support BME networks.

Both reports recommended exploring and establishing ring-fenced funding for Black and other underrepresented minority ethnic PGRs. It is encouraging to see ring-fenced research funding schemes for **understanding and dismantling barriers to postgraduate research for people from minority ethnic backgrounds** through UKRI, and ringfenced scholarships for Black PGRs, those from low-income households and international and EU PGRs **from the Leverhulme Trust**. One survey respondent also highlighted further UKRI-funded schemes:

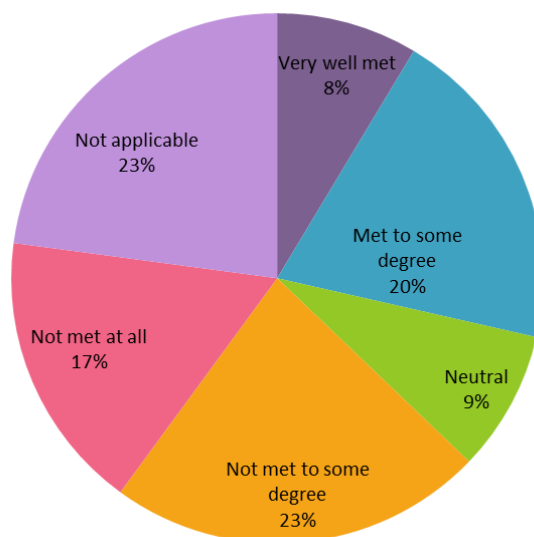
I am on the working party of the ESRC WRDTP [White Rose Doctoral Training Partnership] ring fenced doctoral scholarships for Black British students in association with the Stuart Hall Foundation - a very good initiative. More needed.

It will be important to understand and share the findings from UKRI-funded research projects, to ensure universities meaningfully commit to helping extend access, and also to

expand UKRI's own work in this area. This must include working with and funding Black academics at all levels of higher education.

In our own survey, 35 people answered the question 'If you are a current or former PGR and identify as Black or from another minority ethnic background, how well do you feel your related needs were met during your PhD?'. As Chart 26 below shows, results were fairly mixed, although more people answered 'not met to some degree' or 'not met at all' (40% in total) than the more positive answers.

Chart 26: percentage responses to the question 'If you are a current or former PGR and identify as Black or from another minority ethnic background, how well do you feel your related needs were met during your PhD?'



We also asked respondents what they felt would make the situation better. Mentoring and role models came out strongly, along with career support and networks of other Black and underrepresented minority ethnic PGRs. Comments also recognised the extra workload burden on the small number of Black academics in leadership roles in UK Higher education, however.

Career insight support, mentoring, and sponsorship (ideally from Black academics, but the problem is that there are so few of them and the burden is already so great. This contributes to why Black PGS/Rs leave academia, and so the unfortunate cycle continues).

Actually having role models (from the same ethnic background as myself) who have truly prospered under academia and are not burnt out by it all.

To have more representation in leadership roles.

A more visible network to join of other minoritised students.

Extra help writing grants/proposals, PGR black and brown network

BAME mentoring network at the University of Sussex is a model network that warrants further research and adaptation.

Others highlighted the need for a more inclusive environment.

Awareness of issues that affect me and my community. An active effort to recruit other Black PGRs.

More cultural awareness to be taught so a more inclusive environment can be established.

Past issues of discrimination/racism being reported as to not being hidden to new PGRs

It would be helpful if supervisors and departments understood the EDI-related barriers I will face with my PhD research and career development in HE.

My supervisory team... are quite oblivious in terms of diversity and what that entails. I have two white male professors working in the STEM field and it's very obvious to me that, even though they know how to supervise I guess they don't really understand the background that I come from. That's something that comes across very obviously to me, there's a lot of microaggressions like, people don't pronounce my name properly or just tiny things they could learn to do but haven't ever been exposed to before. [Focus group]

I did not expect academia to be so racialised. I do, as a woman of colour I do feel this come up a lot, more than I expected it to. And I feel like there's not even enough information about how to proceed with it, where is it that you take this up? [Focus group]

Maybe just because Wales is a smaller nation, there's a lot more direct contact at the government level to what's actually happening with PGRs [with regards to equality, diversity and inclusion in STEM], which I think is quite great. [Focus group]

We also asked survey respondents whether they supported the idea of ringfenced funding for Black and other underrepresented minority ethnic PGRs. Of 37 respondents, 33 said 'yes' and the remaining four that they did not know. Comments highlighted how this would recognise the extra labour done by Black PGRs during their career, and would show a meaningful commitment to improving access. It shouldn't stand alone, however.

Because Black and other underrepresented ethnic individuals end up doing a lot of academic caretaking and barely get the recognition for it. Payment is the only form of recognition that works.

It shows a commitment to actually providing the funds to enable inclusion rather than just gesturing about it. It does also need to come hand in hand with active reckoning of the barriers (both real and imposed by behaviour of others) to postgraduate research for people from minority backgrounds. Year round recognition of contributions of Black and minority ethnic groups to science, active effort to be more inclusive in hiring

Black and other POC groups are less likely to gain full-time lectureship, the wage gap is more severe for us. Universities are increasingly hostile to us - whether born here or a migrant - and the fees we pay to afford travel and housing means we are balancing multiple jobs with less access to support. Yes 100%

We often are left behind from the beginning before we start our undergrads so it's important to establish funding for people who did not have the same opportunities as other students.

Elsewhere in the survey, respondents also pointed out that ringfenced funding could also help working class and/or first generation PGRs to access postgraduate study. It is encouraging to see the Leverhulme Trust supporting both groups, along with migrant or international PGRs.

Urgent needs for PGRs

These urgent needs for Black and other underrepresented minority ethnic PGRs are in addition to those already raised in the sections on taking leave, and making complaints.

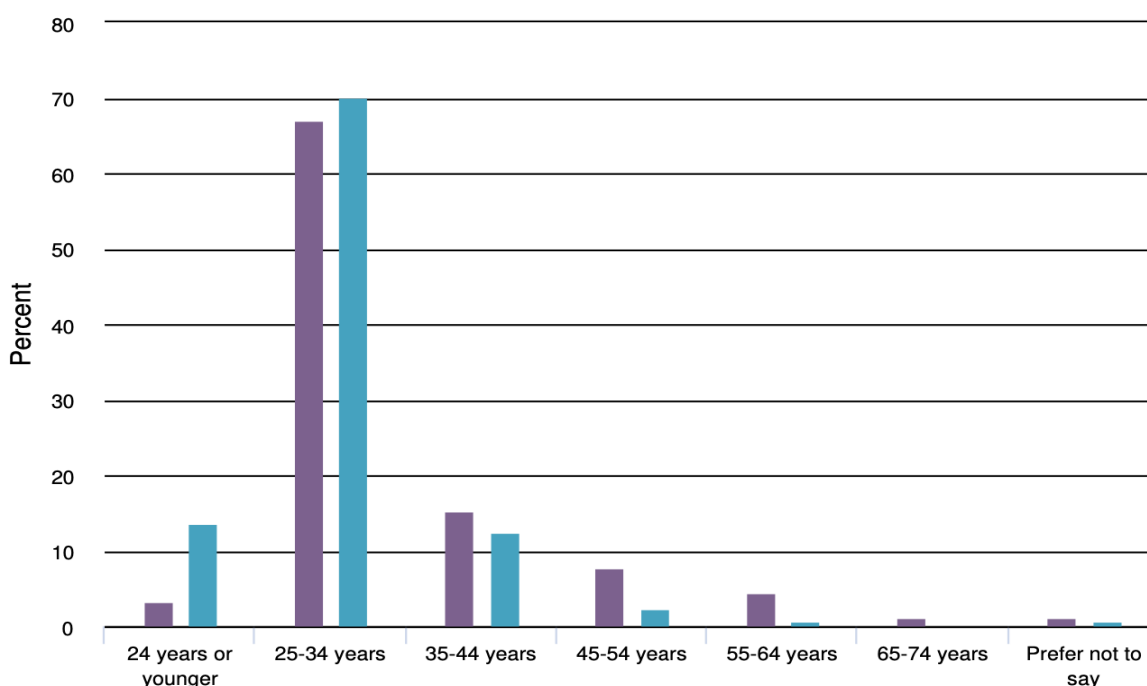
- Address the recommendations in previous research for UCU and Leading Routes on better support for Black and other underrepresented minority ethnic PGRs, including but not limited to:
 - Providing a more equitable route into postgraduate study that values talent over previous attainment
 - A robust and structured mentoring programme for Black and other minority ethnic PGRs
 - Better information for Black applicants and potential PGRs on scholarships and other funding
 - Targeted recruitment for underrepresented ethnic minority PGRs
 - Training for university staff and recruiters on combating racism in their practice
 - Ensuring all universities have well-supported BME networks, which include Black and other minority ethnic PGRs

- Ensure all universities report on and address their race pay gap, and underrepresentation of Black academics and other academics of colour in senior leadership roles
- Expand provision of ringfenced funding and scholarships for Black PGRs and other underrepresented ethnic minority groups (for example, people from a Gypsy, Roma and Traveller background, and others identified through disaggregated ethnicity data).

5.10 Self-Funded or Unfunded PGRs

11.7% (91) of survey respondents stated that they were either 'unfunded' or 'self-funded' to complete their PhD. Overwhelmingly these people were in arts and humanities (46.7%) and social sciences (44.4%) subject areas. This was a clear overrepresentation compared to respondents who had PhD funding from any source, 19.8% of whom were in arts and humanities, and 27.2% of whom were in social sciences. Only 4.4% and 1.1% of self-funded respondents belonged, respectively, to science and engineering, or medicine and biosciences subject areas. While not clear due to the limited sample size and lack of alternative public data, our survey data suggests that self-funders are more likely to be older than those with external sources of funding. As Chart 27 shows, self-funders were overrepresented in every age bracket above the 25-35 group. Self-funded PGRs were also more likely than others to identify as disabled, chronically ill and/or neurodivergent (32.2% vs 22.9%). As suggested in our earlier discussion of this group and, as detailed in the Leading Routes report highlighted in the previous section, Black PGRs are also more likely to be self-funded/unfunded.

Chart 27: Segment comparison between self-funders and those with funding in relation to stated respondent age (purple = self-funded, blue = funded)

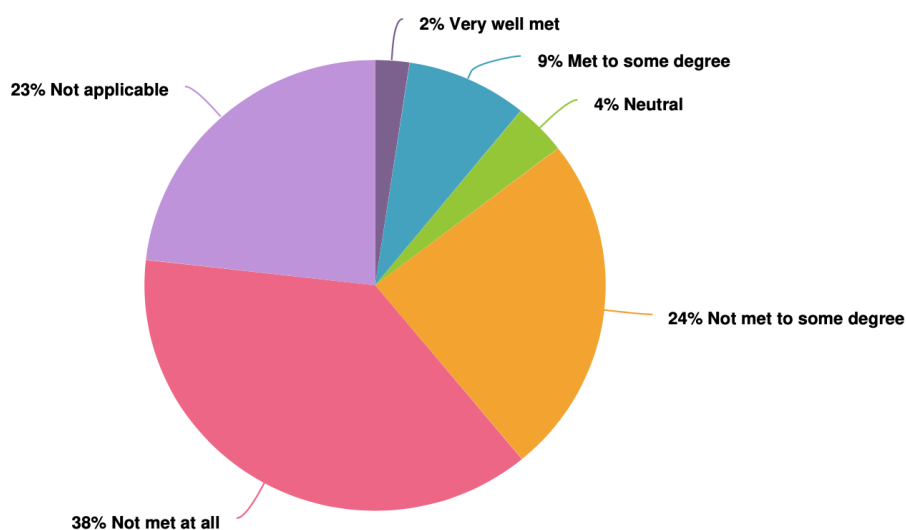


In relation to respondents' experiences of the PhD, self-funded PGRs were much more likely to believe that there should be no time limit for completing the PhD (46.3% vs 25.7%) and, to a lesser extent, that funding should also have no time limit (35.4% vs 25%). Training was much more likely to be viewed negatively when compared to funded PGRs (43.9% vs 25.8% 'poor' or 'very poor') and facilities were far less likely to be viewed positively (19.6% vs 43.4% 'good' or 'very good'). Opportunities for additional paid work were also viewed more negatively (54.8% vs 34.5% 'poor' or 'very poor'). Supervision and the supervisory relationship, however, was slightly more positively viewed by self-funded PGRs, which may reflect their increased dependence on this form of support where the above options may be lacking. Unsurprisingly, in relation to the above, self-funded PGRs were even more likely to rate opportunities and support for career development negatively, with 39% stating that these were 'very poor' compared to 27.3% of funded respondents.

Without more time to explore the data it is hard to understand the extent to which the above difficulties can be explained by lack of resources as a result of being self-funded. It is quite possible that some differences can be explained by the comparative underfunding of arts and humanities, which respondents have commented on throughout our survey. It is clear either way, however, that lack of resources is a significant issue for self-funders that needs addressing. It is worth noting, for instance, that self-funded PGRs ranked 'lack of funding for research support' as the 2nd largest issue for PGRs, where this was 5th for their funded counterparts.

The results here and elsewhere suggest that self-funders are more likely to come from more marginalised groups. This runs contrary to the assumption by some respondents to our survey that self-funded PGRs have significant degrees of privilege. They are further marginalised by their lack of PhD funding and being positioned within comparatively underfunded subject areas. It should not, therefore, be surprising that self-funded PGRs are the least likely group least likely to report that their needs were well met, as demonstrated in Chart 28.

Chart 28: percentage responses to the question 'If you are a current or former PGR and you are self-funded or unfunded, how well do you feel your related needs were met during your PhD?'



The additional barriers that PGRs can face in their capacity as being self-funded are described below. These can all ultimately be attributed to a lack of resources and the implications that this has on access to training, development opportunities, and other useful forms of formal and informal support that were detailed in the previous section.

Fees are scaled up yearly based on cost of living. The PhD loan I receive does not, nor does it come close to covering yearly costs. Fees are also very expensive when you factor in cost of living and the fact that PGRs don't pay fees in a vacuum, but also need to be able to afford food and rent.

Providing equal access to opportunities regardless of funding status. Anyone funded has more access to training opportunities, attending conferences, etc, which helps them progress with their careers.

As a US student there is little to no UK funding geared toward covering the £14000 yearly tuition fees. This means a good portion of time is spent looking at obscure funding websites in the United States that may fund scholarship in the UK

Available monetary support ring fenced for self funded. Such as guaranteed teaching or grants for travel/ subsistence.

Very limited opportunity for funding and the whole process to get support was demeaning and embarrassing. Had to constantly prove how poor I was in order to get support. Applying for an extension was embarrassing because I needed to work

concurrently to my PhD just to Survive but it doesn't seem the university cares at all about self funded students.

I took on as much work as possible alongside my studies -- there should be some acknowledgment of the need for extra time to finish up given this imbalance.

What about the current housing crisis? There should be funds to support this. International PGRs who must pay 6-12 months of rent upfront to access private housing. Dont get me started on the fees for university-accommodation, much less the fact there is so little accommodation available to PGRs with families.

I would like to raise that the lack of funding in the arts and humanities is not just causing the obvious and most important issues surrounding workload and economic hardship for my friends who are self-funded. It also creates inequality within cohorts which damages personal and professional relationships. Very simply put, it unfortunately creates bad blood. It creates situations where a funded student can suggest a pub meet-up, and self-funded students won't turn up because they can't afford to spend money on a few pints that week. This isn't an exaggeration, it's a genuine issue in my department. Friends have said to me 'sorry I can't come, but I really can't afford to meet people for drinks/coffee/lunch at the moment'. It's very hard to navigate those kinds of dynamics, and it's a dynamic that's being created structurally by the lack of funding for arts and humanities.

We need more financial aid readily available in advance. Currently, students are expected to pay upfront and apply to get their expenses covered retrospectively. This automatically excludes many from being able to travel and attend conferences. Also, we need help with the cost of computers and home office equipment!

I feel there is very little recognition of the difference in experience between funded and unfunded PGRs. I recognise that being funded is far from a golden ticket, however, it does afford opportunities that as someone who is unfunded I simply do not have access to. When am I meant to attend and speak at conferences when I have to work three days a week or more to cover my living costs? If I attend a conference I have to potentially lose a day of work, so whilst I may be able to claim back the cost of the ticket I can't claim back the money I have lost by not working. When am I meant to have the time to attend networking events? I miss out on so many internal opportunities to make contacts and to promote my research because they take place during the working day. Often by not attending these kinds of things, or having to turn down speaking at events, I get the impression I am being perceived as difficult or inflexible but I really cannot fit these things into my day.

I have to work 2-3 part time jobs alongside my PhD just to be able to make up my living costs. This is not factored in to how long the PhD takes to get or to my progress

reviews. The pressure of having to find sources of funding for travel and for research, which more often than not do not cover the full costs, also take up time.

My partner is an unfunded PhD student and struggles massively, spending most of his time filling out scholarship and funding applications rather than doing actual research. This seems to be a pervasive problem in non-STEM subjects.

Urgent needs for PGRs

These urgent needs for self-funded PGRs are in addition to those already raised in the sections on taking leave, and making complaints.

- Remove or reduce the burden of paying tuition fees
- Provide financial assistance to support self-funders with costs of living
- Provide ringfenced departmental and/or institutional funding to enable all PGRs to meet up-front costs in relation to training, development and other research-related activities
- Ensure fair provision and remuneration of additional paid work such that hiring processes are transparent and formalised and pay is fully reflective of the labour requirements
- Provide paid time-on for all research and teaching activities that are included within staff members workload allocation models
- Ensure there are clear mechanisms for providing flexibility in relation to time limits for completing the PhD without incurring additional fees
- Introduce regulations to ensure that universities cannot take on additional PGRs with demonstrating the resources and capacity to adequately support them in line with agreed expectations
- Introduce mechanisms to ensure that PGRs can effectively challenge inadequacies in relation to the above.

6. Conclusion

This report has set out the wide range of challenges faced by PGRs at UK universities. It has highlighted the ways in which all PGRs can potentially face difficulties with low pay, high workloads, lack of support and inadequate training, and how these difficulties are compounded for those who do not fit into a traditional, normative understanding of a PhD researcher. It has set out the need to break away from this normative understanding, and some of the steps that need to be taken in order to do so.

Our list of urgent needs for PGRs is extensive, and reflects the fact that current problems with the PhD system are wide ranging. These problems can stop all but the most privileged, independently wealthy, non-disabled, white person, with permanent residence in the UK and no caring responsibilities, from succeeding in their PhD. By 'succeeding' we mean being able to do good research, build a career, and live well. All of these goals must be met for a PhD experience to be successful. At the moment, for too many people, they are not.

Our new models for the PhD propose some potential, longer term solutions to reformulating the PhD programme. These proposals seek to 'draw the line', as one focus group respondent put it, between extending to PGRs the important rights, respect and protections afforded to staff, and maintaining the flexibility and freedom that many PGRs benefit from. These and other models will need much more discussion, in particular to ensure that no PGR from any already marginalised group finds their situation made worse. We need to make sure any new deal is a better deal for all, including migrant or international PGRs, disabled, chronically ill and/or neurodivergent PGRs, Black and other underrepresented minority ethnic PGRs, PGR parents and carers, women and non-binary PGRs, LGBTQ+ PGRs, working class and/or 'first generation' PGRs, and others.

We want to keep working on and discussing this reform, and its implications, both with UCU's PGR members and with UKRI. We know urgent change is needed now, but we also recognise there is a longer term programme to engage with. We would like to extend our thanks again to all PGRs and others who have helped us form the report presented here, and hope they feel represented in its content.

Appendix 1: A Better Deal for PGRs survey questions

1. About you

Page description:

These questions are to help us understand who is answering this survey, and what gaps there might be in the data.

If you are a current postgraduate researcher, or you have finished your PhD and you're now working as a post-doctoral researcher or outside of higher education, we will ask you some additional questions about your PhD studies.

1. What is your current role?

- Current postgraduate researcher
- Other postgraduate student
- Undergraduate student
- Former postgraduate researcher, not working in higher education
- Post-doctoral researcher or lecturer
- PhD supervisor
- Other academic without a supervisory role
- Working in a role supporting postgraduate researchers and students
- Other - please specify

2. In which nation is the university that you are currently, or were most recently, based at?

- England
- Northern Ireland
- Scotland
- Wales
- Other - Write In

3. If you are a current or former postgraduate researcher, are/were you full time or part time?

- Full time
- Part time
- Other - please specify

4. Are you classed as an international or migrant postgraduate researcher (e.g. from a country other than the UK)?

- Yes
- No
- Other - please specify

5. If you are a current or former postgraduate researcher, how are/were you funded?

If you are/were funded from multiple sources, please tick all that apply.

- UKRI research council - e.g. AHRC, ESRC, EPSRC etc.
- University
- A government outside of the UK
- Industry, charity or other professional body
- Wellcome Trust
- Leverhulme Trust
- Other research funding body
- Unfunded/self-funded
- Other - please specify

6. If you are or were funded to complete your PhD, how many years of funding does/did your scholarship provide?

This question assumes the person is working full-time in a PGR role. If you are part time, please tell us the full-time equivalent if possible.

- 1 year
- 2 years
- 3 years
- 4 years
- Other - please specify

7. Please select your subject area:

- Arts and Humanities
- Social Sciences
- Science and Engineering
- Medicine and Biosciences
- University professional services
- Other
- Not applicable

8. Please select your gender

- Female
- Male
- Non-binary
- Other - please specify
- Prefer not to say

9. Does your gender identity match the sex registered at your birth?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

10. Which of these best describes your sexual orientation?

- Bi-sexual
- Gay or Lesbian
- Heterosexual or straight
- Other - please specify
- Prefer not to say

11. Ethnicity

- Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi
- Asian or Asian British - Chinese
- Asian or Asian British - Indian
- Asian or Asian British - Pakistani
- Asian or Asian British - Any other Asian background
- Black, Black British, Caribbean or African - African
- Black, Black British, Caribbean or African - Caribbean
- Black, Black British, Caribbean or African - Any other Black, Black British, or Caribbean background
- Mixed or multiple ethnic groups - White and Asian
- Mixed or multiple ethnic groups - White and Black African
- Mixed or multiple ethnic groups - White and Black Caribbean
- Mixed or multiple ethnic groups - Any other Mixed or multiple ethnic background
- White - English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British
- White - Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- White - Irish
- White - Roma
- White - any other White background

- Other ethnic group - Arab
- Other ethnic group - any other ethnic group
- Prefer not to say
- Other - write in

12. Age

- 24 years or younger
- 25-34 years
- 35-44 years
- 45-54 years
- 55-64 years
- 65-74 years
- 75 years or older
- Prefer not to say

13. Do you identify as disabled, chronically ill and/or neurodivergent?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

2. Making the PhD work better for you

Page description:

These questions are about how the PhD system works currently, and how we might want to change it.

If you are a current or former postgraduate researcher, please answer on the basis of your own experience. If you are in another role, please think about the questions from the perspective of your own role.

14. To what extent do you feel your university values the work of PGRs?

- Not at all
- Not very much
- Neutral
- To some extent
- To a great extent
- Don't know
- Not applicable

Comments

15. What are the biggest issues, in your opinion, for PGRs at your university?

Please rank the following according to importance, by dragging and dropping each one into the position you think it should go, with the most important at the top and the least important at the bottom.

Drag items from the left-hand list into the right-hand list to order them.

- Personal health and wellbeing
- Bullying, harassment and discrimination
- Low pay
- Supervision
- Training
- Career progression
- Visa issues
- Lack of funding for research support (e.g. conferences, equipment, travel etc.)
- Workplace health and safety
- Workload

16. How long do you think people should be allowed to complete their PhDs?

This question assumes the person is working full-time in a PGR role.

- 3 years
- 4 years
- 5 years
- There should not be a time limit
- Other - please specify

17. How long do you think funding scholarships should typically last?

- 1 year
- 2 years
- 3 years
- 4 years
- 5 years
- However long it takes to complete
- Other - please specify

18. If you have had to take periods of **paid sick leave**, what did you think about the processes involved in arranging this?

- Very poor
- Poor
- Neutral
- Good
- Very good
- I have not taken any paid sick leave
- I am not entitled to paid sick leave

19. If you have had to take periods of **paid parental leave**, what did you think about the processes involved in arranging this?

- Very poor
- Poor
- Neutral
- Good
- Very good
- I have not taken any paid parental leave
- I am not entitled to paid parental leave

20. If you have had to take periods of **unpaid leave**, such as a leave of absence or suspension of studies, what did you think about the processes involved in arranging this?

- Very poor
- Poor
- Neutral
- Good
- Very good
- I have not taken any unpaid leave
- I am not entitled to unpaid leave

21. In what ways do you think support for taking periods of leave could be improved?

22. What do you think about how the supervisor role and relationship currently works?

- Very poor
- Poor
- Neutral
- Good
- Very good

- Not applicable
- Comments

23. What do you think about the training opportunities currently available to PGRs?

- Very poor
- Poor
- Neutral
- Good
- Very good
- Not applicable
- Comments

24. What do you think about the facilities (labs, offices, equipment, software etc.) available to PGRs?

- Very poor
- Poor
- Neutral
- Good
- Very good
- Not applicable
- Comments

3. Our proposals for a better deal

Page description:

These questions are about some specific proposals we and others have suggested for improving the PhD. Please do tell us about any other ideas here.

There will be an opportunity to think about some of these proposals in more detail, in relation to specific groups of PGRs, in the next section.

25. What do you think about the opportunities available for PGRs to take on additional paid work (e.g. teaching, research and lab assistance, etc.)?

- Very poor
- Poor
- Neutral
- Good
- Very good
- Don't know

Comments

26. What do you think about the opportunities and support for PGRs to continue careers in higher education post-PhD?

- Very poor
- Poor
- Neutral
- Good
- Very good
- Not applicable

Comments

27. Below are some proposals we are considering for improving the PhD. Please tell us how important you think they are.

Rating scale:

- Really important
- Quite important
- Not important at all
- Don't know/no view

Proposals:

- Introduce a fund for self-funded PGRs to help meet research costs
- Introduce paid caring leave
- Extend trade union representation and entitlement to facilities time to all PGRs who wish to engage in trade union duties
- Introduce paid bereavement leave
- Include all PGRs in university staff communications
- Extend entitlement to Tax-Free Childcare for all PGRs
- Improve recognition of supervisory duties in staff workload allocation models
- Extend pension provisions to all PGRs
- Extend entitlement to shared parental leave for all PGRs
- Extend access to occupational health assessments to all PGRs
- Remove evidence requirements for all paid and unpaid periods of leaves
- Allow and encourage PGRs to access university staff networks
- Extend staff status to all PGRs
- Extend access to university staff grievance policies and trade union case work (e.g. on issues of excessive workload, bullying, etc.)
- Create a new PGR Visa to extend fair and equal conditions to international PGRs

- Provide access to library, IT and similar facilities for a minimum of 1 year after completion of the PhD
- Include PGRs in departmental and university strategy meetings on teaching and research
- Remove fees for all postgraduate researchers
- Extend funding for all funded PhDs to 4 years
- Develop a comprehensive workload allocation model for PGRs, including the research process and other requirements or engagements
- Extend and protect ringfenced funding for Black PGRs and those from other underrepresented minority ethnic backgrounds

Comments

PGRs are currently classed as registered students during their period of study. One of our proposals is that they should be treated as members of university staff instead. You can read more about what we mean by this in our PGRs as Staff Manifesto.

[PLEASE OPEN THE FOLLOWING LINK IN A NEW TAB OR YOU RISK LOSING YOUR PROGRESS]

28. What do you think would be the main benefits of PGRs gaining staff status?

29. What would be the main student status benefits that you would be concerned about losing?

Academic roles at universities are placed within pay scales that vary by institution. These scales are often bracketed into grades, which provide a minimum salary according to roles and responsibilities and enable incremental pay progression. Grades for research jobs are based on the degree of autonomy and responsibility that a person in a role is expected to have over research, including funding bids and outputs, in addition to how great a contribution that should be making to the research community within their department and institution.

For the next two questions, please **refer to this link**, which contains two grade profiles for researchers that have been nationally negotiated and agreed by UCU.

30. According to the above grade profiles, which profile do you think is the best fit in terms of describing your **current duties and responsibilities** as a postgraduate researcher?

(If you are not a current postgraduate researcher, please indicate which profile is the best fit in terms of your previous experiences or those that you are expecting to have).

- Level 1

- Level 2
- Other - please specify
- Comments

31. According to the above grade profiles, which profile do you think best reflects the set of duties and responsibilities that postgraduate researchers **should have**?

- Level 1
- Level 2
- Other - please specify

32. What else do you think we should propose?

4. A better deal for different groups of PGRs

Page description:

These questions are about the different types of support that different groups of PGRs need - including disabled, chronically ill and/or neurodivergent PGRs, international PGRs, self funders, parents and carers, Black PGRs and other underrepresented minority ethnic PGRs and others.

You do not have to answer every question - only answer those you feel comfortable and able to do so.

33. Which of the following areas would you like to comment on?

Please tick as many as you like. This will affect which follow-up questions you see, to help you move through the survey.

- Working class or "first generation" PGRs
- I want to skip this section
- Black PGRs and other underrepresented minority ethnic PGRs
- Women (including trans and non-binary) PGRs
- Self-funded or unfunded PGRs
- PGRs with parental or other caring responsibilities
- Disabled, chronically ill and neurodivergent PGRs
- LGBTQ+ PGRs
- International/migrant PGRs

34. If you are a current or former PGR and identify as disabled, chronically ill or neurodivergent, how well do you feel your related needs were met during your PhD?

- Very well met
- Met to some degree
- Neutral
- Not met to some degree
- Not met at all
- Not applicable

35. What would help/have helped to improve your experience as a disabled, chronically ill and/or neurodivergent PGR?

36. If you are, or have been, in receipt of Disabled Students Allowance (DSA), what did you think about the **process for accessing support**?

- Very poor
- Poor
- Neutral
- Good
- Very good
- Not applicable

37. If you are, or have been, in receipt of DSA, what did you think about the **support you got**?

- Very poor
- Poor
- Neutral
- Good
- Very good
- Not applicable

38. How could DSA be improved?

39. If PGRs were given staff status, rather than student status, this would prevent them accessing DSA. However, it would allow them to access other systems of support such as occupational health assessments and the benefit Access To Work. What do you think about this?

40. If you are a current or former PGR and identify as Black or from another minority ethnic background, how well do you feel your related needs were met during your PhD?

- Very well met
- Met to some degree
- Neutral
- Not met to some degree
- Not met at all
- Not applicable

41. What would help/have helped to improve your experience as a PGR who is Black or from another underrepresented minority ethnic background?

42. We are thinking of proposing specific ring-fenced funds to support Black and other underrepresented minority ethnic individuals who wish to undertake a PhD. Do you think this is a good idea?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

43. Please tell us why.

44. If you are a current or former PGR and have international or migrant status, how well do you feel your related needs were met during your PhD?

- Very well met
- Met to some degree
- Neutral
- Not met to some degree
- Not met at all
- Not applicable

45. What would help/have helped to improve your experience as an international or migrant PGR?

46. We are exploring the idea of creating a new visa for international/migrant PGRs, in order to allow international PGRs to have the same status as domestic PGRs. Do you think this is a good idea?

- Yes

- No
- Don't know

47. Please tell us why.

48. If yes, what do you think are the most important things that should be covered by the visa?

49. If you are a current or former PGR and have parental and/or other caring responsibilities, how well do you feel your related needs were met during your PhD?

- Very well met
- Met to some degree
- Neutral
- Not met to some degree
- Not met at all
- Not applicable

50. What would help/have helped to improve your experience as a PGR with parental and/or other caring responsibilities?

51. We are thinking of proposing the introduction of (paid) caring leave for PGRs with parental and other caring needs, for periods of substantial disruption. Do you think this is a good idea?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

52. Please tell us why.

53. If you are a current or former PGR and identify as a woman (including if you are trans or non-binary), how well do you feel your related needs were met during your PhD?

- Very well met
- Met to some degree
- Neutral
- Not met to some degree
- Not met at all
- Not applicable

54. What would help/have helped to improve your experience as a PGR who identifies as a woman?

55. If you are a current or former PGR and identify as LGBTQ+, how well do you feel your related needs were met during your PhD?

- Very well met
- Met to some degree
- Neutral
- Not met to some degree
- Not met at all
- Not applicable

56. What would help/have helped to improve your experience as a PGR who identifies as LGBTQ+?

- Very well met
- Met to some degree
- Neutral
- Not met to some degree
- Not met at all
- Not applicable

57. If you are a current or former PGR and identify as working class or "first generation" (e.g. if you are the first in your family to go to university), how well do you feel your related needs were met during your PhD?

- Very well met
- Met to some degree
- Neutral
- Not met to some degree
- Not met at all
- Not applicable

58. What would help/have helped to improve your experience as a PGR who identifies as working class or "first generation"?

59. If you are a current or former PGR and you are self-funded or unfunded, how well do you feel your related needs were met during your PhD?

- Very well met
- Met to some degree

- Neutral
- Not met to some degree
- Not met at all
- Not applicable

60. What would help/have helped to improve your experience as a self-funded or unfunded PGR?

61. We are considering proposing the creation of a specific fund for self-funded PGRs to support them with research costs, such as travel, conferences, books and equipment. Do you think this is a good idea?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

62. Please tell us why.

63. What are your views on the implications for self-funding researchers of securing staff status for PGRs?

64. Is there anything else you would like to tell us in relation to the needs of specific groups of PGRs?

Thank you. Please click 'submit' to go to the final page.

Thank You!

Thank you for taking our survey. Your response will make a real difference to our work, and will directly feed into our report to UKRI.

You can submit a response to UKRI's consultation directly if you wish to. You can find the UKRI consultation [here](#).

For more information about the PGRs as Staff campaign, take a look at our pages on the UCU website.

Appendix 2: Workshop plan for focus groups in Scotland and Wales

Section	Description
Welcome and housekeeping	
Expectations versus reality	Think back to your initial expectations of being a PGR within your university. How would each of you compare this to your experiences so far?
What matters? Pt.1	<p>We want you to think about what has made the biggest difference to you – good and bad – as a PGR. We want to know about this in terms of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. your health and wellbeing, 2. your ability to effectively conduct your work, and 3. your ability to develop a career. <p>On the Jamboard there is a list of things that we think might make a difference. Have a look and leave a diamond next to the ones that have made the most positive difference, and a circle for the most negative difference (on the left hand bar). You can also leave comments on the post-its (and please do!)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Training ■ funding support for research and research-related work ■ Employment conditions (alongside postgraduate research) ■ Employment opportunities (alongside postgraduate research) ■ Access to paid periods of leave ■ Support and/or adjustments for physical and mental health issues ■ Supervision ■ Income (from whatever source) ■ Inclusion within and support from your department ■ Workload ■ Bullying, harassment and discrimination ■ Visa issues
What matters? Pt.2	<p>We want you to think about what changes would make the biggest difference to you – good and bad – as a PGR? We want to know about this in terms of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. your health and wellbeing,

2. your ability to effectively conduct your work, and
3. your ability to develop a career.

On the Jamboard there is a list of things that we think might make a difference. Have a look and leave a **diamond** next to the ones that you think would make a positive difference, and a **circle** next to any you disagree with (on the left hand bar). You can also leave comments on the post-its (and please do!)

- Automatic inclusion within staff meetings, activities, networks and emails
- Legal 'employee' status for you as a PGR
- Fair remuneration for additional departmental/institutional activities that staff are work loaded to do
- A workload allocation model for PGRs that includes both research and other paid work conducted alongside
- Improved recognition of supervisory duties in staff workload allocation models
- Access to pensions provisions
- Extended entitlement and access to different kinds of paid leave (parental, sick, caring, bereavement, etc.)
- Extended and realistic funding period length
- Increased income
- A new PGR Visa which extends equal conditions and access to international PGRs
- Access to university grievance policies and trade union support with issues like excessive workload, bullying, and inadequate line management from supervisor
- Removal of all tuition, writing up, and other fees
- Access to occupational health
- Provision of open funding for PGRs to help meet additional research costs
- Extended ringfenced funding for Black PGRs and those of other underrepresented minority ethnic backgrounds
- IT and facilities access for 1 year or more after completing PhD

PGRs in [Nation]	Do you think there are any advantages or disadvantages with how postgraduate research is currently funded, managed and supported in [given nation] in comparison to other nations in the UK?
Next steps and close.	

Appendix 3: Demographics of respondents

Survey respondent demographics

1. Current role

Value	Percent	Count
Current postgraduate researcher	75.7%	603
Other postgraduate student	1.8%	14
Undergraduate student	0.4%	3
Former postgraduate researcher, not working in higher education	1.3%	10
Post-doctoral researcher or lecturer	7.7%	61
PhD supervisor	8.5%	68
Other academic without a supervisory role	1.4%	11
Working in a role supporting postgraduate researchers and students	2.0%	16
Other - please specify	1.4%	11
	Totals	797

2. Nation

Value	Percent	Count
England	78.4%	556
Northern Ireland	1.0%	7
Scotland	18.8%	133
Wales	1.6%	11
Other - Write In	0.3%	2
	Totals	709

3. PhD status

Value	Percent	Count
Full time	88.9%	599
Part time	8.9%	60
Other - please specify	2.2%	15
	Totals	674

4. Are you classed as an international or migrant postgraduate researcher (e.g. from a country other than the UK)?

Value	Percent	Count
Yes	23.1%	156
No	74.7%	504
Other - please specify	2.2%	15
	Totals	675

5. PhD funding source

Value	Percent	Count
UKRI research council - e.g. AHRC, ESRC, EPSRC etc.	63.1%	429
University	22.9%	156
A government outside of the UK	1.5%	10
Industry, charity or other professional body	6.0%	41
Wellcome Trust	0.7%	5
Leverhulme Trust	0.6%	4
Other research funding body	4.0%	27
Unfunded/self-funded	12.5%	85
Other - please specify	5.3%	36

6. Years of funding available

Value	Percent	Count
1 year	0.2%	1
2 years	1.1%	7
3 years	35.1%	223
4 years	38.7%	246
Other - please specify	25.0%	159
	Totals	636

7. Subject area

Value	Percent	Count
Arts and Humanities	23.4%	185
Social Sciences	28.2%	223
Science and Engineering	26.3%	208
Medicine and Biosciences	19.5%	154
University professional services	0.4%	3
Other	2.3%	18
	Totals	791

8. Gender

Value	Percent	Count
Female	62.3%	495
Male	31.6%	251
Non-binary	4.2%	33
Other - please specify	0.1%	1
Prefer not to say	1.8%	14
	Totals	794

9. Does your gender identity match the sex registered at your birth?

Value	Percent	Count
Yes	92.8%	727
No	4.5%	35
Prefer not to say	2.7%	21
	Totals	783

10. Sexuality

Value	Percent	Count
Heterosexual or straight	59.5%	470
Gay or Lesbian	8.2%	65
Bi-sexual	15.3%	121
Other - please specify	3.5%	28
Prefer not to say	13.4%	106
	Totals	790

11. Ethnicity

Value	Percent	Count
Asian or Asian British - Chinese	1.8%	14
Asian or Asian British - Indian	1.9%	15
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	0.6%	5
Asian or Asian British - Any other Asian background	1.3%	10
Black, Black British, Caribbean or African - African	1.3%	10
Black, Black British, Caribbean or African - Caribbean	0.4%	3
Black, Black British, Caribbean or African - Any other Black, Black British, or Caribbean background	0.1%	1
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups - White and Asian	1.8%	14

Mixed or multiple ethnic groups - White and Black African	0.3%	2
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups - White and Black Caribbean	0.3%	2
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups - Any other Mixed or multiple ethnic background	1.5%	12
White - English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British	58.3%	461
White - Gypsy or Irish Traveller	0.1%	1
White - Irish	2.1%	17
White - Roma	0.1%	1
White - any other White background	22.0%	174
Other ethnic group - Arab	0.3%	2
Other ethnic group - any other ethnic group	0.5%	4
Prefer not to say	3.4%	27
Other - write in	2.0%	16
	Totals	791

12. Age

Value	Percent	Count
24 years or younger	11.5%	91
25-34 years	61.8%	490
35-44 years	15.9%	126
45-54 years	7.1%	56
55-64 years	2.4%	19
65-74 years	0.4%	3
Prefer not to say	1.0%	8
	Totals	793

13. Do you identify as disabled, chronically ill and/or neurodivergent?

Value	Percent	Count
Yes	22.9%	181
No	72.5%	573
Prefer not to say	4.6%	36
	Totals	790

Focus group demographics

Table 3: Focus group demographics

Nation	Total number	Female/ woman	Male/ man	Nonbinary/ other	I identify as Black or as from another minority ethnic background	I am on a Student or Tier 4 visa	I identify as disabled, chronically ill or neurodivergent
Wales	3	3	0	0	2	2	2
Scotland	6	2	2	2	2	3	3
Total	9	5	2	2	4	5	5

Appendix 4: New Models for the PhD

Postgraduate research, as currently exists in the UK, may well be improved by creating two separate tracks for doctoral research. These may provide more direct routes towards two different sets of aims or motivations for engaging in a PhD: for the purposes of pursuing a research, or research-related, career in or outside of Higher Education, and for the purposes of engaging in research or developing one's knowledge for its own end. Creating two respective tracks may enable far greater accessibility for people wishing to pursue each aim, with these tracks being:

- The early career portfolio doctorate, where funding is intended to provide people, as members of staff, (a) pathways to research or research-related careers in and outside of higher education and (b) research and/or research-related outputs that are intended to benefit one or more sector.
- A flexible and accessible PhD by thesis in which people, as students would engage in self-directed research for the purposes of subject interest knowledge development.

Early Career Portfolio Doctorate

Assessment and award protocol

The Early Career Portfolio Doctorate would require the completion of a research project, along with an associated portfolio. This portfolio would provide PGRs with a means of flexibility such that they are assessed on forms of communication or practice that would be more specific to a number of different career options than the traditional thesis. Portfolios may include activities such as: engaging in research-led teaching, speaking at conferences, writing policy reports and recommendations, public research communication, academic publications, community events or partnerships, artistic performance or practice, or product or concept development.

Working towards a portfolio would remove much of the disincentive for leaving a PhD when it is not working out for them, insofar as it would allow people's accumulated experiences and achievements to be more easily recognised in other relevant job roles. It would also provide a more flexible and efficient means of designing the PhD, such that it was more reflective of career requirements both in and outside of higher education. This would also enable doctoral research to be more reflective of the contemporary position and function of universities within the UK.

Contracts and Length

Contracts for those engaging in the Early Career Portfolio Doctorate should be funded as staff positions and have both a minimum length and mechanisms for agreed extensions. These would occur in relation to:

- Taking on agreed additional work duties for the purposes of experience, training, departmental support, placements or secondments, which would entail additional duties being included with workload allocation models.
- Delays in research as a result of limited facilities or equipment, necessary changes of supervisor, or other no-fault issues.

Pay and Conditions

Pay would be in line with existing university pay structures and there should be scope for incremental progression in line with increased experiences and responsibilities over time. Universities would be required to buy out the time of PGRs in the form of providing funding extensions to cover agreed increases in time.

Supervision, training and interpersonal support

Those engaging in the Early Career Portfolio Doctorate should have a detailed set of formal individualised expectations regarding the support roles and requirements of supervisors and staff in departments and faculty in relation to the PGRs' research project, training, portfolio development, and career support. This could be agreed in the form of an individual study plan from which workload allocation and portfolio requirements are agreed upon. This would also provide transparency around the obligations of each party in the PhD.

PhD by Thesis

The PhD by thesis should be a form of accessible and advanced adult education, which provides people with resources and support to pursue their own educational interests. Substantially lower cost and more options flexibility would ensure that it was accessible to more people, including those in work or retirement. PGRs in this track may have taught student status and be provided with associated services and facilities. There would be no specific expectation for career development here, although some employers may see the benefit in the development or funding of advanced knowledge.

The PhD by Thesis should:

- Include initial teaching on research, reading and writing skills before moving to structured support with individual research projects
- Have similar entry requirements to taught masters

- Enable high degrees of flexibility in the mode of study, in relation to distance learning and more options for %FTE
- Have its fees scaled according to the mode of study
- Enable greater provision to research underfunded areas (especially in arts and humanities)
- Have public funding support

For more information about this report, or about the UCU **PGRs as Staff** campaign, please contact:

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