

Recruiting Postgraduate Research Students

This short guide is designed to offer advice and support to departments and individuals recruiting postgraduate research students.

1. We recognise that the recruitment of PGR students is not primarily a matter of marketing. PGR recruitment goes hand in hand with research strategy. But there are marketing aspects to the recruitment of PGR students which this paper explores.

2. Research by the National Postgraduate Committee indicates a hierarchy of factors influence the decision making process of PGR students:

- Can I find a suitable supervisor for my area of interest?
- How will I be supported by my supervisor and department?
- What funding is available?
- What academic facilities does the University offer PGR students?
- What are the social aspects of being a PGR student at this University?

3. Our own enquiry data suggests two key initial sources of information on PGR study:

- Web search 50%
- Word of mouth 36%
- Education UK 6%
- Print Advertising 3%
- Printed Guides 2%
- Other 3%

4. Pull communications (ie where people find us rather than our communication reaching out to them) generate the vast majority of initial interest. It follows that the most critical aspect to PGR recruitment is to ensure that websites are fit for purpose. We recommend:

- Staff research interests on the web are up to date, well presented and clear. We recommend listing research interests so that sites invite enquiries from prospective students about topics for supervision rather than prescribing narrow areas of supervision. There may be occasions when in addition to this, it is useful to suggest specific research topics. It's not always easy but try and describe research interests in the

way in which people would search for them through a search engine. This will optimise your pages from a search engine perspective. Contact Mike Simpson (mjs76) in the Division to discuss website development.

- You should ensure the online postgraduate prospectus is kept up to date with staff contact details and their research interests. It is routinely updated annually but we can make changes at any point. There is a search facility on the prospectus. Contact Mike Simpson (mjs76) in the Division to request changes.
- Ensure that your website navigates well with logically labelled links, has good content written for prospective PGR students, clearly lists staff and their research interests and includes obvious 'calls to action'.
- Calls to action may be to read about staff and their research areas, or make an enquiry to the department about research topics.
- Making an enquiry needs to be made as easy as possible. You can route general enquiries through to the on-line prospectus enquiry form which students can use to request a prospectus from us. Postgraduate prospectuses are sent out with covering letters. These letters can be customised. Contact Simon Edwards (swe4) to arrange this. Specific and detailed enquiries should of course be routed to individual academics or a PGR co-ordinator.
- A new research focussed area of the website has been launched www.le.ac.uk/research and this should help raise the profile of research at the University and act as another conduit into the website for prospective PGR students.
- Try and communicate the wider benefits of study through your website, not just research interests. Although finding an appropriate supervisor is the key factor, funding and support issues are also incredibly important to students. Describing how PGR students will be supported could give you the competitive edge in a market that is increasingly competitive as we approach the Research Excellence Framework. For advice on creating strong, benefit focussed copy contact Helen Pennack (hp63).

5. Word of mouth is clearly an important channel for recruitment. At risk of stating the obvious:

- Encouraging current masters' students or creating distinct pathways from masters' degrees through to research study may encourage existing PG students to continue their studies with you. For example offering some kind of scholarship or discount may act as an incentive.
- Ensure any opportunities and studentships are well promoted within the department.
- Where appropriate paste opportunities onto email lists and national websites.

6. Use external advertising sparingly. There are occasions when it may be helpful to advertise studentships externally. We recommend web advertising as the most cost effective approach. In particular we recommend opportunities are advertised on jobs.ac.uk, postgraduatestudentships.co.uk, and findaphd.com. Specialist print advertising may also be helpful. Before reaching decisions on external advertising please contact Imran Awan (ia70) in the Division of Marketing & Communications. We will place advertising through our advertising agency, and ensure it is professionally designed.

7. We should not underemphasise the facilities on offer at Leicester to PGR students. For example, the Graduate School reading room in the David Wilson Library contains extensive, dedicated PG facilities including PCs, study places, and two bookable group study rooms. There are extensive and successful University-wide and College-wide training programmes to help students to develop generic research skills that increase employability and effectiveness and also enhance discipline-specific research skills. Departments will also not wish to underplay the facilities and resources that they provide through their own accommodation, equipment, seminar programmes, access to visiting academics, etc.

8. Recruiting international PGR students

The principles above apply to both HEU and international students. UUK offer specific advice to universities on recruiting international students:

- Devise strategies for retaining international students already in the UK (see above recruiting existing masters' students);
- Offer fee support i.e. international student scholarships;
- Develop guidelines for minimum supervision levels (PGR student expectations have been rising and value-for-money is important, especially for self or privately funded students);
- Ensure that websites address the needs of international PGR as well as PGR more generally.

Specific, professional advice about PGR recruitment and the international arena can be obtained from the Director of the International Office, Suzanne Alexander (sa208).

9. Manage the relationship: After initial contact the lead needs to be managed. It is good practice to follow up on enquiries after an initial period of time. This will give the impression we are keen and interested in the individuals and will hopefully spark further interaction. You will also know that students don't always know what a good research project is - getting into an early email "discussion" about a suitable project area will help define this.

10. Reach a Decision swiftly. Research by the Russell Group shows postgraduates are six times more likely to accept an offer that is faster than average rather than slower than average.

11. PGR student recruitment is fundamentally about research strategy rather than marketing. Not only do the research interests have to match but recruitment is often tied to offering funding which is in turn tied to research grant activity. 22% of full-time PGR students are self-funded for the majority of their fees. 23% have had the majority of their fees funded by their department or University. 24% are funded via research councils. 20% are funded by other sponsors (such as the British Academy or overseas governments).

12. Financial Support and Incentives for Departments.

A PGR student has two incentive areas within finance.

Firstly, any fee income and HEFCE income is included in the income used within the department's income and expenditure account. Therefore more students should lead to a higher contribution.

Secondly, in the non-pay formula there is an incentive part to reward PGR students, the amounts are per student FTE, and uncapped. The values are: -

	Home	Overseas
Clinical	1,213	3,637
Lab	1,213	3,637
Intermediate	970	2,910
Classroom	458	1,455

And of course PGR students form an increasingly important element of national research assessments (such as the forthcoming REF).

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