Principles and Guidance from Manchester Doctoral Strategy Group on Supporting the Postgraduate Research Experience 2020

As some postgraduate researchers return to campus whilst some continue to research remotely, the principles and guidance established by MDCSG, should be followed for all activities including induction, researcher development training and PGR supervision.

The principles and guidance follow those set by Faculty Teaching and Learning teams, however, they do not replace detailed programme or guidance for taught elements. All colleagues are advised to contact their Faculty Teaching and Learning teams for further guidance on blended learning.

Principles

The following principles should underpin all activities.

Safety: The safety of our campus community is the University's main priority. All staff and PGRs must follow relevant guidance in relation to their conduct both on and offline and in their place of term-time residence.

Inclusivity: All PGR events and activities including welcome, induction and training should be accessible to all PGRs whether they are on or off-campus and should take account of the differential experiences and needs of different groups.

Communication: Maintaining clear and effective communication channels with PGRs is key to building a PGR community and supporting and maintaining wellbeing.

PGR community: Building a community and ensuring PGRs have opportunities for communication, interaction, sharing and support with their peers is vital.

PGR wellbeing and support: Online environments may result in increased feelings of isolation and may prevent PGRs accessing support when they need it most.

PGR engagement: With limited face-to-face interaction and an increased risk of isolation it is essential for PGRs to maintain engagement with their research programme. Monitoring engagement is still essential as a means of supporting PGRs and anticipating support needs.

Guidance

Safety	The safety of all staff and students is paramount. All colleagues must follow the relevant safety measures in place for 2020/21 and demonstrate good practice. Detailed guidance on staying safe on campus is available along with guidance for PGRs.
Inclusivity	It is important to recognise that there will be PGRs both on and off-campus, with some shielding, working in challenging environments, and international PGRs working across time zones. All activities should be inclusive and available to all PGRs, where feasible. The following steps should therefore be taken: • Developing asynchronous activities to allow all PGRs to engage (eg, discussion boards, guest lectures etc.) • Staff should continue to follow guidance from DASS on inclusive teaching and disability referrals. • Staff should also refer to their Faculties guidance on inclusivity and accessibility in the context of academic learning.
Communication	All PGRs should be made aware of the contact arrangements for three key colleagues – supervisor, advisor and PGR support. *Supervisors:* The guidance on remote supervision recommends establishing regular, and in some cases more frequent, online meetings.

	Advisors: All supervisory teams include an advisor to provide pastoral support. In the absence of face to face interaction, Schools, Faculties and Departments are encouraged to find ways for advisors to check in with those that they are supporting. *PGR Support*: All PGRs should be signposted to a single point of contact at either Department, School or Faculty level for all general queries, this can be either a generic email address or a named PGR professional services colleague. *Faculties, Schools and Departments are encouraged to explore other methods of contacting PGRs, for example, online chat tools and good practice should be shared with and disseminated via MDCSG.*
Community	It is important to offer opportunities for PGRs to engage with each other, separate from supervisors and advisors. Developing a PGR community is important for engagement and can help prevent PGRs from feeling isolated. Ideas include: • Events and activities that normally would have taken place face-to-face should be replaced with online versions. For example, lunchtime concerts, guest seminars and speakers (academic, alumni or business), discussion sessions should all take place online. • Societies play a key role in building communities, ensure these are signposted and promoted as part of regular communications. Where feasible support PGRs to develop societies by providing physical space to meet on campus. • Blackboard community can be used for interactive spaces and community building as well as other social media channels. Be aware that not all PGRs will have access to certain social media platforms, particularly those based outside the UK. Guidance on the use of social media in the University is available. • Signpost to the online training delivered by My Research Essentials, the bookable study space in the Alan Gilbert Learning Commons and the online sessions from the Careers Service. • Maintain and support the PGR Reps at the Department, School and Faculty level.
Wellbeing	Limited face-to-face interactions and ongoing social distancing measures means it will be more challenging to identify when PGRs require additional support and PGRs themselves may be less likely to identify and seek out support when they need it most. Ensure details of support provisions are clearly signposted. PGR Life - Wellbeing and mental health resources for PGRs. Student Support - Additional information and support on issues such as housing, finances, visas and a A-Z of all University Services. The Counselling Service – For individual appointments and guidance and workshops. Togetherall– All members of the University can access free online mental health and wellbeing support with Togetherall (formerly Big White Wall), any time, any day.
Engagement	The University's progression and monitoring system should continue to be used to monitor engagement and progress and ensure any additional support needs are identified, see additional guidance on progress reviews.