

Postgraduate Research Skills Training Strategy

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Research Office Graduate Education Team

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1. INTRODUCTION

The strategic vision for the University is that it should be a national and international leader in graduate education. An integral part of this vision is to double our number of postgraduate research students by 2015, and build on our record of excellence in the provision of skills learning.

This strategy is supported by a PGR Skills Training Policy which identifies detailed University requirements, and roles and responsibilities.

The purpose of this strategy is to identify a coherent and consistent approach through which The University of Manchester will be able to achieve the following strategic goals:

- GOAL 1** To be the leading UK institution in skills training providing development opportunities that are recognised as internationally distinguished in their quality and impact;
- GOAL 2** To engage all post graduate research students and supervisors across the University in the skills training agenda;
- GOAL 3** To establish effective mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of skills training;
- GOAL 4** To improve the capacity of post graduate research students to understand what and how they are learning and to review, plan and take responsibility for their own learning, through personal development planning;
- GOAL 5** To provide training opportunities through a variety of flexible modes of delivery to meet the diverse needs of all researchers across the University.

2. GOAL ONE

To be the leading UK institution in skills training providing development opportunities that are recognised as internationally distinguished in their quality and impact.

Key Strategies are;

- 2.1** *To continue to develop a portfolio of high quality skills training programmes which equip students with a relevant and appropriate skills set through:*
- a.** Developing innovative and flexible skills training workshops / events;
 - b.** Reviewing and revising current skills training programmes regularly in light of feedback from students, supervisors and employers;
 - c.** Improving skills training programmes delivery and communication, complemented by the use of online training packages;
 - d.** Consulting with other institutions and identifying collaboration opportunities, where appropriate;
 - e.** Promoting best practice in skills training.

3. GOAL TWO

To engage all post graduate research students and supervisors across the University in the skills training agenda.

Key Strategies are:

- 3.1** *To ensure all students are informed of what is expected from them and what they can expect from the University through:*
- a.** Producing clear guidance information at the offer stage;
 - b.** Maintaining regular updates of skills training policies and activities;
 - c.** Ensuring information is accessible and effectively advertised;
 - d.** Receiving feedback from students;
 - e.** Supporting students through a range of mechanisms at discipline, school, and faculty and university level.
- 3.2** *To ensure consistently high uptake of generic skills training for PGR students across all Faculties of the University through:*
- a.** Providing clear guidelines to supervisors and students about the level and type of training required;

- b.** Raising awareness of supervisors and senior academics about the importance of and requirement for generic skills;
- c.** Creating avenues for sharing of best practice between Faculties, e.g. via regular meetings of the PGR skills co-ordinators in each Faculty;
- d.** Embedding the requirement for training needs analysis and completion of appropriate training into the PhD programme;
- e.** Identifying and developing specific and measurable key performance indicators to monitor uptake and quality of training delivered across the University.

3.3 *To introduce formal and informal mechanisms of communication with students and staff at all levels through:*

- a.** Skills Trainers meetings within each of the four faculties to enable key information to be cascaded down to the academic community;
- b.** Focus groups to enable students and supervisors the opportunity to provide feedback on the skills training provision;
- c.** Production of a PGR Skills Training newsletter reporting on the activities within each of the four faculties and at national level;
- d.** Development of a central Skills Training webpage;
- e.** Supervisors handbook, containing detailed information on key policies and national guidelines in the area of skills training;
- f.** Student handbook, containing detailed information on training opportunities available and skills training requirements;
- g.** Electronic student and supervisors surveys to help inform key policy developments.

4. GOAL THREE

To establish successful mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of skills training.

Key Strategies are;

4.1 *To successfully monitor the effectiveness of skills training through:*

- a.** Developing effective data collection i.e. from the Skills Audit;
- b.** Analysing data from the student satisfaction survey;
- c.** Ensuring good integration of the PDP into the Student System Project, thereby allowing efficient monitoring of student progress;
- d.** Reviewing record keeping by the supervisor, supervisory team, the annual review panel and administrative staff at Discipline, School and Faculty level;

- e. Ensuring greater consistency at institutional level in collecting and analysing PGR feedback;
- f. Implementing a PGR exit questionnaire;
- g. Identifying and understanding the skills needs of employers through an annual PGR Employer Satisfaction Survey, alongside the continuous involvement of employers in the development of the skills portfolio.

4.2 *To effectively evaluate whether skills training is making a difference through:*

- a. Effective use of management information systems to gather baseline data to evaluate the impact of skills training for PGR students;
- b. Analysing the outcomes of the QAA 2005/06 Special Review / Audit;
- c. Questioning alumni about the usefulness and appropriateness of this skills training to their career paths;
- d. Surveying employers and postgraduate researchers.

5. GOAL FOUR

To improve the capacity of post graduate research students to understand what and how they are learning and to review, plan and take responsibility for their own learning, through personal development planning.

Key Strategies are;

5.1 *To encourage all postgraduate students to engage in the PDP process by:*

- a. Providing high quality support and guidance opportunities for postgraduate research students in order that they may undertake the PDP process in informed and effective ways;
- b. Embedding the PDP at appropriate stages throughout the research student experience in order that students have the opportunity to undertake and be supported in the process in a meaningful way which clearly relates to the research objectives;
- c. Providing an accessible on-line PDP system;
- d. Providing high quality support and guidance opportunities for supervisors in order that they may participate in the PDP process in informed and effective ways;
- e. Continuing encouragement from all levels of the University, from the President, Graduate Education Team, PGR Associate Dean for the Faculty, Head of School, etc.;
- f. Effective mechanisms for the successful marketing and advertisement of PDPs.

6. GOAL FIVE

To provide training opportunities through a variety of flexible modes of delivery to meet the diverse needs of all researchers across the University.

Key Strategies are;

- 6.1** *To provide a progressive suite of courses that enable students to develop their skills on a needs basis by:*
- a.** Further developing the progressive nature of course opportunities available;
 - b.** Ensuring training is flexible and delivered at appropriate times, such that it takes into account the different developmental stages and variability in registration dates for students;
 - c.** Providing courses from basic through to advanced in most skills that are accessible to students throughout their programme;
 - d.** Development of training that can be delivered onsite, in the evening and online;
 - e.** Targeting courses for distinctive stages of the PhD;
 - f.** Benchmarking students' progress through monitoring techniques;
 - g.** Evaluating students' progress in order to inform the development of new skills training provision.