

MDCSG
25th March 2026
NOTES

In attendance: Elizabeth Cartwright, David Bechtold, AnneMarie Walsh, Monique James, Jon Pittman, Tanya Luff, Tasleem Hanif, Helen Baker, Amy Smith, Alex Hinchliffe.

For Item 2i: Karabo Sibasa, Teri Gosling.

Apologies: Richard Cotton, Ruth Whelan and Georgina Dalton.

1. MDCSG

i. Notes from the previous meetings

Received: notes from the February MDCSG meeting.

Noted: that the words 'some discussion' should be removed from the action noted for item 6i (**ACTION – AH to update the notes**).

2. Researcher development, experience and wellbeing

i. Researcher Development Programme Evaluation Project

Received: a presentation detailing the findings and recommendations of the Researcher Development Evaluation Project (full report available by request).

Noted:

- a. That the project was based on the feedback of 6 PGRs who were high attenders of Researcher Development offerings but that it would be useful to understand more about why some PGRs choose not to engage, and to explore ways of better capturing this insight.
- b. That resilience training had come out as a priority.
- c. That there is a need to understand why individuals sign up for sessions but do not attend, including identifying points of friction (work-load and time management) leading to no-shows.
- d. Consideration should be given to sessions that include a mix of PGR-only and sessions joint with supervisors to support shared understanding and accountability.
- e. Reflection on the six participants who did attend suggested they felt a clear need for support and were personally motivated to engage.
- f. Supervisor awareness was identified as a key factor in supporting PGR engagement.

Agreed:

- a. That AS would look into the cost / feasibility of using VOX coaching to deliver some future sessions (**ACTION – AS**).

iii. eProg Prioritisation of Developments

Received: paper detailing the prioritisation of eProg development

Noted:

- a. RDRD has been working with Faculty Doctoral Academies (DAs) and the IT team to prioritise high-value enhancements.
- b. A defined prioritisation process has been established, whereby high-value requirements identified through the eProg replacement work were extracted and have been prioritised
- c. RDRD and the DAs assigned a business value score, based on assessment against eight criteria:
 - Volume of PGR complaints
 - Volume of academic complaints
 - Volume of administrative complaints and administrative workarounds
 - Ability to improve reporting capability
 - Need for process streamlining to increase efficiency and standardisation

- Compliance risks requiring mitigation
 - Alignment with Manchester 2035
 - Extent to which the change would support improved data migration in the event of eProg replacement
- d. Consultation activity undertaken to inform prioritisation included:
- A workshop with DAs, during which scores were reviewed and adjusted.
 - An email consultation with PGR Directors.
 - A review of qualitative comments from the PGR Voice Survey.
- e. Next steps were outlined, including working with the new Product Manager to develop a roadmap and timeline and the progression of high-priority, complex items, including:
- Improved save functionality
 - Data retention enhancements
 - Workflowed progression forms
 - Workflowed attendance forms
 - Workflowed change of circumstances forms and a new task page

Agreed:

- a. That any standardised forms / updated workflows would need to come back to MDCSG for approval prior to implementation.

3. Recruitment and Admissions

No items

4. Funding

i. Bid Updates

Noted:

- a. In FBMH the Professional Doctorate in Higher Healthcare and Higher Science (DClinSci) is due for renewal, with re-tendering planned for the summer.
- b. In HUMS the AHRC announced two DFA calls: - 'Art history, visual arts and creative practice' (deadline 17 March) - 'Multilingual futures for UK growth and connectivity' (deadline 21 April)

5. Progression and Assessment

i. Posthumous and Aegrotat Award Policy

Received: the updated Posthumous and Aegrotat Award Policy.

Noted: that the policy had been reviewed in line with the schedule and following a 6 week consultation period.

Agreed: MDCSG approved the policy (**ACTION – AH to include in the papers for the next AQSCR meeting**).

6. Planning and Quality Assurance

i. Melbourne Review

Received: the Manchester Melbourne Dual Award Review

Noted:

- a. The five-year review had been completed in line with the requirements of the agreement, drawing on survey feedback from supervisors and PGRs, alongside workshops with Professional Services staff.
- b. The review highlighted a number of benefits, including:
- The overall success of the programme, characterised by high-quality supervision, deep research collaborations, access to a wide range of facilities, and significant academic and broader impact.
 - High levels of satisfaction reported by both candidates and supervisors.
 - The programme's importance as a major strategic relationship for the

University of Manchester.

- c. Areas for further work and improvement were identified, particularly in relation to Professional Services processes, where duplicated activity and a lack of clarity across the programme were noted.
- d. It was noted that RDRD, Faculty Doctoral Academies and Melbourne colleagues would need to work together to streamline and clarify processes.
- e. It was noted that more detailed information, including access to the full underlying data set, would be helpful.
- f. It was also noted that additional information on publications arising from the programme would be valuable.

Agreed: MDCSG agreed to the recommended renewal of the programme.

ii. UKRI Submission Within the Funded Period

Received: paper detailing the implications of the update to UKRI TGC 2.9 regarding submission within the funded period.

Noted:

- a. In October 2025, the UKRI terms and conditions were updated (TGC 2.9) to clarify that:
 - PGRs are expected to submit within their funded period.
 - Research Organisations must design projects that are realistically achievable within this timeframe.
- b. These requirements apply to PGRs registered from October 2024 onwards, with the earliest expected submissions falling on or after 30 September 2027.
- c. UKRI may apply sanctions where expectations are not met (below 70% submission within this period).
- d. A number of questions were raised for MDCSG consideration, including:
 - Whether access to submission-pending status should be restricted for UKRI-funded PGRs.
 - Whether current mechanisms are sufficient to assess project feasibility for submission within the funded period.
 - Whether there is scope and budget to extend funded periods for three-year programmes (including HUMS AHRC and ESRC awards, and 3.5-year programmes across faculties funded by EPSRC, ESRC and AHRC).
 - Given that internal funding terms and conditions already align with UKRI, whether programme durations should be reviewed and aligned more closely with funding structures.
 - Whether submission-pending should be removed entirely, either for UKRI-funded PGRs only or also for University-funded students.
 - Whether a standardised four-year doctoral programme should be adopted.

Agreed: Members will review the paper for detailed discussion at the April MDC Executive Committee meeting.

iii. MDCSG Annual Monitoring and Faculty PGR Voice Actions Update

Noted:

- a. **Workforce Planning:**
 - Ongoing review of activities and resources, especially related to new appeals and complaints procedures.
 - Appeals and Complaints Communities of Practice session scheduled for April.
 - Job Descriptions are being adapted via PGR OMG.
- b. **eProg Development:**
 - Continued development and enhancement of eProg. Prioritisation was discussed under Item 2ii.
- c. **Researcher Development:**

- The review and evaluation project has concluded, and results were previously shared in the meeting.
- d. **Poor Supervision Escalation:**
 - Routes for escalation and resolution of poor supervision are under way e.g. in HUMS Completion Data has been used to identify supervisors who are repeatedly failing to get their PGRs to completion. In FBMH an escalation document is currently being developed.
- e. **Supervision CPD:** Plan to embed supervisor CPD into BAU and RSVP.
- f. **PGR Voice Survey:** Survey has concluded; action planning received and progress against actions will be reviewed at this meeting. FBMH is developing comms to PGRs over the summer regarding the actions taken as a result of the survey. There have been discussions in FBMH on how to increase survey response rates e.g. introducing an eProg milestone.
- g. **PGR Communications Framework:** Development and implementation are ongoing. Georgina Dalton to pick this work back up.
- h. **Employability & REF 2029 Data:** Work is underway with REF colleagues regarding data requirements and production methods.
- i. **DASS Support & Viva Adjustments:** Progress made at the last meeting, with an agreed set of adjustments for viva. A Communities of Practice session with DASS and operational colleagues is planned for April.
- j. **Outcome Measures:** KPIs and outcome measures are being defined. The latest updates are in the activity report.
- k. **Progression & Assessment:** Review of progression assessments, standardisation of assessor training and forms, linked to ongoing eProg work.
- l. **Programme Review:** Regular review of dual awards and international partnerships proposed, referencing the Melbourne review. Potential to expand to other partnerships.
- m. **Recruitment, Admissions & Diversity:** Targeted outreach for underrepresented groups, piloting and evaluating blinded applications, ensuring robust interview processes, and incorporating EDI on forms. FSE's blind application trial proved too resource-intensive for admissions.
- n. **Financial Barriers for International PGRs:** Exploring support mechanisms for upfront costs (e.g., health surcharge). Progress includes preloaded credit card payment options. AMW is in discussions with Global Mobility. Potential government lobbying considered.

iv. Supporting PGRs as People

Noted: that RM was unable to attend so the item would be deferred until May (**ACTION – AH to add to May agenda**).

7. Careers and employability

No items

8. Activity Reports

i. RDRD Activity Report / Library Update

No comments

9. Any Other Business

i. Bicentenary Update Paper

Noted:

- a. HB has begun drafting a paper, on similar lines to the update previously submitted to University Executive in May 2025, focusing on Cohort 2.
- b. Faculty Doctoral Academies are collating project information by 2 April.

- c. The EDI team is on standby to undertake project-level EDI analysis.
 - d. Fiona Eccles to complete applicant-level analysis.
 - e. A draft paper will be shared when ready, anticipated in late April and will be brought to the May MDSCG meeting for consideration.
- ii. DASS Reasonable Adjustments**
- Noted:**
- a. That typical questions are covered in the mandatory viva preparation training.
 - b. That there is no clear template for a viva as it is an evolving academic conversation so we need to carefully manage PGR expectations.
- iii. PGR Festival**
- Noted:**
- a. That the start date of the week-long festival had been set for 24th November with a summer PGR BBQ being planned to soft launch the event and raise awareness.

10. Date of Next Meeting

Wed 27 May 2026, 11:00 – 13:00, Roscoe 4.9