KEELE DOCTORAL ACADEMY (KDA) PGR STRATEGY 2025-2028

Background and context

The KDA was established in 2020 with its mission to deliver "a distinctive and high-quality experience for PGR researchers for careers beyond Keele". It had six initial high-level aims:

- **Community**-creating and nurturing a collaborative environment for PGRs.
- **Visibility**-of PGR internally and externally.
- **Training**-ensuring high-quality training available to support PGR journey.
- **Support**-ensure effective support services in place to support PGRs.
- **Partnerships**-provide links and oversight for partnership PGR arrangements.
- **Governance**-ensure effective governance arrangements of all PGR programmes and develop new models of delivery.

We are partners within the eight Midlands Innovation group of universities which supports research partnerships and skills development.

Strategic Priorities 2025-28

Building on the initial aims above and in alignment with Keele's research strategy, the KDA has identified three key strategic priorities for 2025-28, which are as follows:

1. Growth of Keele's PGR numbers.
2. Enhancement of the Keele PGR experience.
3. Improvement of Keele's PGR outcomes and employability.

Actions planned to achieve these priorities include:

1. Growth of Keele's PGR numbers

As of June 2025, Keele's PGR community totals 591 (Figure 1), 539 of which are current PGRs (409 PhD, 34 MPhil, 96 Prof Doc), of these 71 (13%) are distance learners, reflecting the increased diversity of the PGR population. The population has grown slightly over the past five years with much of that growth centered on professional doctorates.
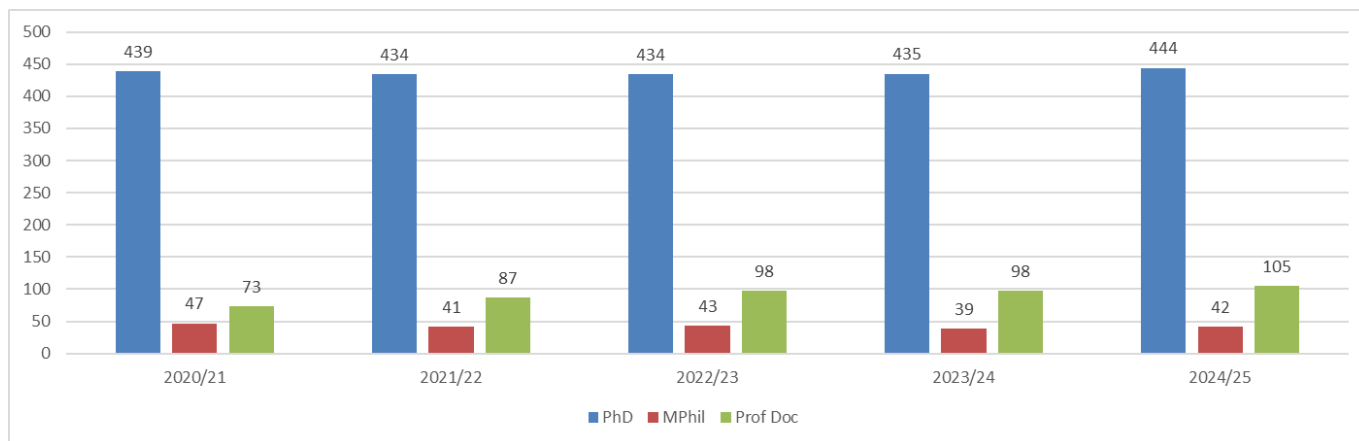
Figure 1 includes 'exit complete' PGRs.

The KDA will work with schools, faculties and directorates to improve postgraduate research recruitment. Recognising the challenges in maintaining existing internal funding for PGR there will be a particular focus on increasing international and industry partnerships, PhD by publication and external funded programmes. Specific initiatives will include:

- Maximising the refreshed PhD by publication/portfolio route and exploring whether further flexibility can be built into the eligibility criteria to broaden the pool of potential candidates.
- Working with Schools and GSRA to review Keele's Professional Doctorate offer to ensure the course structure and delivery meets the requirements of potential applicants, ensure stability and supervision of current provision and review whether any new routes or funded partnerships could be considered.
- Supporting Schools to maximise the value and reach of existing Doctoral landscape and Doctoral focal awards and external funded programmes. Ensuring adequate horizon scanning and building on developing institutional experience to maximise success of new funding opportunities.
- Exploring mechanisms to improve use of Keele Alumni for PGR recruitment activities and resources.
- Working with Schools and GSRA to identify mechanisms to improve cascade from Keele's UG/PGT programmes to PGR, promoting postgraduate research opportunities to final year students and removing barriers for application for existing Keele applicants.
- Working with Schools and Strategic Communications to encourage updating of School, Faculty and Institute webpages to ensure key research strengths with capacity for PGR recruitment are highlighted to support PGR recruitment, including new routes, supervisor profiles and enquiries management.
- Working with partnership leads to maximise the impact and reach of newly established Keystone international PGR partnerships (e.g. Morocco, Malaysia, and Pakistan) to ensure success and cohort building.
- Develop and implement a plan to maximise UK and international PGR recruitment with the support of GSRA, exploring opportunities to align to existing educational partnerships to include a PGR offer where appropriate.
- Work with DRIE to explore mechanisms for increasing industry-funded PGR provision.

2. Enhancing the PGR experience

Keele participates in the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) every two years. For the 2024 survey, a key priority was to increase response rates, which was achieved, with Keele exceeding its

targeted response rate for PRES. However, the feedback received from PRES was disappointing, with an overall satisfaction score of 73% (global average 81%) placing Keele at 49th out of 53 institutions who engaged in PRES this year. By comparison, in 2022 Keele came in 33rd out of 58 institutions with an overall satisfaction of 79%. There are significant variations in satisfaction across disciplines and schools and also a trend of poorer reported satisfaction for part-time PGRs compared to full-time.

In order to support improvements in PGR experience, the KDA will:
- Implement a PRES action plan, informed by analysis and feedback from PRES 2024, including feedback to Schools/Faculties and PGRs (using You Said, We Did) (June 2025)
- Refresh induction and onboarding information, ensuring that induction is tailored for Professional Doctorates and distance PhDs and can be delivered in a proportionate way for returning PGRs.
- Develop a PGR Supervisory Relationship Agreement to ensure expectations of supervision are clearly discussed and documented (to be rolled out in Skillsforge 2025/26).
- Develop an internal funding policy for PGRs to ensure parity across the faculties in terms of sickness and maternity support, aligning where possible with UKRI terms and conditions.
- Review PGR representation: supporting the KPA and SU to represent PGR diversity and design/deliver a PGR Representative training resource to support PGR Reps to effectively communicate with PGRs, whilst ensuring their views are reflected within relevant Committees.
- Support informal networking and community support for PGRs, working closely with the KPA to ensure a programme of activity.
- Celebrate and publicise PGR achievements within the PGR Symposium with PGR Awards.
- Complete the implementation of Skillsforge and its reporting tool Yellowfin; providing PGRs and supervisors with greater oversight of the PGR journey and improved access to PGR data.
- Review the KDA training offer, responding to feedback to design and deliver new training where needed to ensure training offer and format meets PGR needs, with feedback from PT PGRs indicating preferences for online/hybrid delivery.

For Supervisors: The KDA will ensure mechanisms are in place to evidence the supervisory training and development that is provided, both to underpin a quality PGR experience and for REF (supporting the People, Culture and Environment statements). This will include:
- Ensuring that "Introduction to Research Supervision" is recorded in mandatory training and HR records. Aim to include Research Supervision Development training being mandated (3 yearly) and being considered within appraisals.
- Increasing the development opportunities for Research Supervisors with quarterly development training (priorities include supporting different doctoral models of study (to include professional doctorates or PhD by publication) or supporting diverse student needs (e.g. neurodiversity, distance).
- Raising the profile of quality research supervision-increase the number of supervisors developing their practice (evidenced by UKCGE recognised research supervisor status).
- Recognising and celebrating good supervisory experience within university events such as the postgraduate symposium.

For Researchers: Underpinned by the activities outlined within the HR Excellence in Research award and actions, working with DRIE to support the wider culture of research opportunities and continuous improvement and training amplifying opportunities through membership of key organisations such as Advance HE and UKCGE.

3. Improve PGR outcomes and employability

To support improvements in PGR outcomes and employability, the KDA will:

- Work with Corporate Information Services and Careers to improve the quality of data on PGR outcomes and employability and contribute to development of a PGR Employability strategy, ensuring that this is shared with schools and faculties and where issues are identified, support is provided.
- Gather regular feedback from postgraduate researchers and research staff on training and development activities and resources, reviewing with the Researcher Developer the training offer available for PGRs and researchers and supporting linkage with other areas that offer training/resources for researchers (e.g. Research integrity/Open Research).
- Explore providing a doctorate plus offer (which could include teaching, leadership etc.)