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1. Welcome back

Dear Supervisors,

I hope that you all had some time to enjoy the summer and are refreshed and ready for the new year! We will soon be welcoming a large number of new PGRs to Royal Holloway, including our first cohorts for ESRC SEDarc and EPSRC AI and Digital Inclusion CDT.

Further we have just put out a funding call for 10 RHUL Studentships that will be aligned with our planning for a new Social Purpose Research Innovation Hub for a January 2025 start (see more below!), supporting our strategic aims for the RH2030s strategy.

Please also look out for the new supervisor training. Laura Christie has led the development of a new Moodle module that provides training on RHUL PGR processes and support (see more below!). Further in Jan 2025 we have spaces for 16 staff to take part in Supervisor training, with a 'train the trainer' approach so that we can role out a programme of supervisor training here at RHUL. We will also be sending out dates for this years Supervisor Forum!

We all recognise that it is important to invest in our PGRs, developing and supporting our future research leaders. Over the upcoming year we will be looking to make processes clearer for applying for external PhD funding opportunities. We are focusing on simplifying our processes and regulations where to improve clarity and accessibility for our PGRs and supervisors to better support our researchers throughout their journey.

As always, please get in touch with your School Director of PGR Education (DPE), the Doctoral School or myself if you have any suggestions for how to improve the support that we offer or the PGR programmes.

Lastly, a date for your diary, we will be holding the Doctoral School PGR Annual Conference on 7th November. Please do encourage your PGRs to attend and present, and do come along yourselves to see the amazing work that our PGRs are doing.

Professor Dawn Watling

2. Highlights of Doctoral School activities - 2023/24

We often get asked about the operations of the Doctoral School. We want to celebrate here some of the highlights from the Doctoral School operational activities for the last academic year.

Email queries responded to	36,494		
Studentships processed	109 (£1,752,000.00)		
Expense claims processed	73 (£19,280.00)		
Adverts placed	47		
Annual reviews and upgrades processed	466		
Exam entry forms processed	211		
Submissions received	169		
Vivas supported & outcomes processed	158		
Awards Processed	264		
Manual documents produced	122		
Meetings held with academics and PGRs	44		
Guest Researcher/Transfer in records processed	20		
Changes to student records processed	Interruptions (inc. Authorised Absence & Mat/Pat leave)	Change to Mode of studies	Withdrawals
	54	5	36
	Funded Sick Leave	Funded Placements	Change to Start Date
	38	7	20
	Returners from interruption (inc. Authorised Absence & Mat/Pat leave)		
123			
Suspension of Regulations processed (inc. Covid related)	177		

3. Professor Felix Driver wins Outstanding Doctoral Supervision Award 2024

Professor Felix Driver, an historical geographer specialising in collections-based research and public engagement in the arts and humanities, was praised by the judges for his very high level of supervisory expertise from application to thesis submission and beyond, his capacity to source collaborative funding, his empathetic engagement with students, particularly during Covid-19, and his strong commitment to community building.

One judge commented that Felix *"is able to adjust his behaviour and supervision method according to the student's situation, which is a rare and truly remarkable quality for a supervisor"*.

The high quality of his research and mentoring skills makes him a superb role model for both doctoral researchers and supervisors. He is a champion for collaborative working, whether with co-

supervision, or external partnerships, and has supported the development and transition of his researchers through to post study careers.

Another judge commented: *"His work on brokering placements for PhD students and in centring them to advance their careers is exemplary"*.

He encourages his doctoral researchers to engage, to collaborate, give presentations and publish their work, and attends all their conference presentations. His commitment to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion are commendable, as is his commitment to the mental health and wellbeing of his researchers, and the level of pastoral care provided.

Felix has been shortlisted for the annual Times Higher Education's Outstanding Research Supervisor of the Year Award. [Find out more.](#)

4. Above and Beyond Community (ABC) Recognition Awards

The Doctoral School was delighted to be able to run an ABC award in recognition of MPhil/PhD researchers contributions to the local PGR community, either at departmental or School level, outside of that expected within the normal realm of the programme. One PGR was nominated from each School, and the winners below will be formally awarded at the [Doctoral School Conference](#) on 07 November 2024.

- Samantha Watts (School of Business and Management)
- Sam Weller (School of Engineering, Physical and Mathematical Sciences)
- Kate Pozgay (School of Humanities)
- Tatiana Glazkova (School of Life Sciences and the Environment)
- Kat Osborne (School of Law and Social Sciences)
- Shanika Ranasinghe (School of Performing and Digital Arts)
- The Other Kind of Doctor podcast team (Doctoral School)
(Gemma Rides, Gaia Giampietro, Ryan Jefferies, Courtney Hooton, Teale Failla, Lewis Gibson and Polly Hember)

5. PRES 2024 Highlights

The [Postgraduate Research Experience Survey \(PRES\)](#) is a national survey of postgraduate researchers conducted by institutions across the UK and globally which allows the university to compare how we are doing with other institutions, to make changes that will improve what we do in future, and to keep doing the things that our postgraduate researchers value. This year's survey closed on 16 May 2024.

Thank you and well done to everyone who has supported the PGR community through the last year, this has been reflected in the PRES highlights as below:

- Royal Holloway ranked 20th for overall satisfaction (out of 53)
- Overall satisfaction is 83%, which is above the sector average of 81% and also above the Royal Holloway 2023 PRES score of 77%
- Royal Holloway ranked 1st for overall satisfaction for students with a declared disability (out of 30)
- The section scores have improved for all sections in 2024 from the 2023 PRES survey

6. Empowered & Independent PGRs – a message from Dr Laura Christie (Researcher Development Programme)

I wanted to highlight the sorts of training that are part of the Researcher Development Programme. The aim is to support PGRs to become independent researchers and the workshops on offer encourage them to become empowered to manage their project and progression and associated activities (e.g., publication, applying for funding, public speaking, volunteering and work experience etc.). We have received feedback from researchers on certain courses that they have been life saving and life changing (their words) as well as highly useful and practical in preparing them for the next four years.

Specific courses that can support new starters are:

- Making the Best Start you Can – includes defining and clarifying, planning the project and upgrade, reviewing and implementing.
- From Surviving to Thriving – Focuses on wellbeing, resilience, productivity, emotional intelligence.
- Research Project Management – includes Supervisory team communication, time management and procrastination and restarting after a break.

This year we continue to have 1:1 support for academic writing, so if you have any researchers who could use support with improving their English Language and academic writing please refer them to [Vicky Penn](#).

As this is a professional development programme we would like to encourage professionalism specifically regarding the high level of no-shows we receive on our courses which prevents others from joining when a course is fully booked. When you are meeting with your researcher and discussing their [professional development](#) we would be grateful if you could encourage attendance to those courses they have booked upon – or that they delete their place or notify us in advance. We administer these courses well and are always wanting to help researchers get the most from these opportunities.

Please email me if you have any queries Laura.Christie@rhul.ac.uk

7. The Doctoral School Research Conference

We are delighted to invite doctoral researchers and supervisors from all disciplines and all stages of research to take part in our annual Doctoral Research Conference on **07 November 2024**. This interdisciplinary conference aims to provide a platform for emerging scholars to present their cutting-edge research, engage in meaningful academic discussions, network with peers and experienced academics, and build lasting connections within the academic community.

Please do encourage your PGRs to take part in this event, and come along yourselves to support and see the wonderful research that is taking place across the university.

Further information can be found [here](#).

8. RHUL Social Purpose CDT

The Doctoral School is excited to announce funding for 10 studentships that will form a cohort of PGR future leaders, who will start January 2025, as part of our launch of a University of Social Purpose.

Successful applicants will join as a cohort of students working on projects that are focused on Social Purpose and be a part of the team linked to the Social Purpose Research Innovation Hub, once established (planned within the RH2030s strategy). Whilst students will primarily work within their primary supervisors' department/school, we are looking to develop the **cohort in the style of a CDT of Social Purpose**.

We recognise that recruiting for a January 2025 start is a tight timeline that we are working towards.

Do you have an idea for PhD projects around the theme of social purpose and are looking to recruit a new PhD student? [Yes, I want to hear more!](#)

9. Supervisory team role reminders

At the start of the new academic year, all new PGR students at Royal Holloway are asked to complete a New Starters form in liaison with their supervisory team so that the Doctoral School can record their supervisory team information accurately - which can then be viewed on the Student Dashboard.

a) How many members should there be on an MPhil/PhD supervisory team?

Each MPhil/PhD supervisory team should consist of at least two members i.e., a principal supervisor plus at least either a second supervisor or an advisor. It is possible to have multiple second supervisors / advisors, as appropriate.

b) What is the difference between a second supervisor and a PGR advisor?

- In brief, if an academic is providing support with the student's research, they should be recorded as a second supervisor.
- If their support is purely pastoral, they should be recorded as a PGR advisor.
- Please note that academics in either of these roles are not eligible to be nominated as the student's examiner when it comes to the viva.

c) Which roles require a percentage weighting?

- Principal supervisor and second supervisor roles require a percentage weighting to reflect the relative amount of time and responsibility each supervisor is allocating to the student.
- These percentage splits are used to help calculate the Student Load (i.e. the sharing out of tuition fee income between departments based on the amount of supervision they are doing), indicates to the PGR the distribution of supervisor expectations, and for HESA return purposes.
- Where a student has an external supervisor, a percentage weighting needs to be recorded if you wish the collaboration to be recognised by HESA. A zero weighting may be used where you wish to note an external supervisor's role in supervision, but there is no formal recognition.

d) Where can I find more information about supervisory teams?

The following guides can be found on the [Quick Links webpage](#):

- [Supervisory team overview](#)
- [Guidance on recording percentage weighting within a supervisory team](#)

- [Roles and responsibilities within a supervisory team](#)
- [Amendments to the supervisory team](#)
- [Appointing an external supervisor or advisor](#)

e) How do I update the supervisory role details for continuing students?

Please email the [Doctoral School](#) with the new details (including percentage splits), copying in all academics affected by the update.

10. PGR Space

The Doctoral School is aware that PGR space, both within departments and Schools, as well as general PGR specific space on campus is highly sought, and we have put together details of on campus facilities that PGRs can utilise in one place. This information has been disseminated to PGRs via the Researcher Newsletter, but do encourage and remind your students to make use of these spaces as needed. Further details can be found [here](#).

To help PGRs make the most of the PGR space currently available for use within departments and Schools, the Doctoral School created the PGR Space Improvement Initiative supporting minor improvements to these spaces over the summer.

Keep an eye out in future updates to see what our PGRs achieved!

11. Accessibility and Inclusion Hub

As part of the extension to the Royal Holloway EDI strategy to see equity and inclusion throughout the university community, an Accessibility and Inclusion Hub has been created as a central point of reference for EDI guidance for all academic and professional staff colleagues. You can access this suite of information via the following link: [Accessibility and Inclusion Hub](#).

12. Access to wellbeing information for PGRs

You can find information on Wellbeing services available to PGR students:

- [Wellbeing for PGRs](#) – you can find support services you can signpost students to as well as wellbeing and self-care tips
- [Support for PGR students registered with Disability and Neurodiversity Services \(D&N\)](#) – this includes information on how to register with D&N, applying for Disabled Student's Allowance (DSA) or Library Support for disabled students. You can also find a range of annual review, upgrade and viva access arrangements that can be considered for your students.
 - [Annual review and upgrade access arrangements – student guide](#)
 - [Annual review and upgrade access arrangements – staff guide](#)
 - [Viva access arrangements – student guide](#)
 - [Viva access arrangements – staff guide](#)

13. The Other Kind of Doctor

Interested in hearing more from PGRs about their experiences and understanding what they are keen to talk about?

Check out the [Other Kind of Doctor](#) podcast and blog.

14. Quick links

- [Quick link to PGR forms and guides](#)
- [A to Z of the Doctoral School microsite](#)
- [Turnaround times for Doctoral School processes](#)