Section A: Executive Summary
In 2019 the Students’ Union reviewed its approach to how we develop proposals that lobby for improvements to the student experience. Part of this introduced the concept of a Policy Inquiry – which is an in-depth, research-informed process that generates a high quality Student Voice Report on a particular topic. The end goal is a range of recommendations that we plan to present the College that will have a substantial and long-lasting positive impact on the student experience.

The Students' Union is very much aware of our own lack of understanding about the postgraduate research experience at Royal Holloway. Our engagement with the postgraduate community is low, and this Policy Inquiry (launched by the President – Jack O’Neill) is the beginning of what we hope is an ongoing discussion with our postgraduate research students about how we can improve the doctoral experience for current and prospective students at the College. We want to better understand the PhD experience on campus so we can engage with you in a much deeper level than we have in previous years.

The purpose of this briefing document is to examine the general issues negatively impacting doctoral students in the UK. It was created with the aim to frame our research and to improve our understanding of the postgraduate research student experience on a national level. We hope it will initiate discussion with the doctoral student body at Royal Holloway University of London about their own experiences in our very first Policy Inquiry on the RHUL Postgraduate Research Student Experience.

This report is broken up into three substantive sections, as well as a list of useful references.

Section B: The History of the Postgraduate Research Experience
The first details the relationship between the Government and the doctoral student community in the last twenty years. It examines two major publications which have shaped the way education policy makers engage with postgraduate research students: The Roberts Review (2002) and the Browne Review (2010). These two papers are important beginnings to our Policy Inquiry because of the very different ways they approached the doctoral student experience.

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Section C: The Postgraduate Research Student Experience: National Issues
The second section identifies the key themes surrounding the doctoral student experience at a national level. The discussion of these issues is framed within the national narrative, but we hope the next stage of our Policy Inquiry will help us better understand how they apply to Royal Holloway doctoral students specifically.
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**Section D**

The third section outlines the next steps of our Policy Inquiry. The Students’ Union will be running two focus groups made up of current doctoral students, and we will launch a postgraduate research student survey in October. We will then combine the results of this, and the most recent Postgraduate Research Experience Survey data, to produce a formal ‘Student Voice Report’ in the Spring Term.
Section B: The History of the Postgraduate Research Experience

B.1. Background Information
The declaration that there is a lack of knowledge surrounding the postgraduate research student experience has been a recurring statement in a number of published reports and articles on the subject in the last twenty years. This confession may seem absurd at first when considering the breadth of time and amount of publications acknowledging this problem, but Jenny Shaw, the Student Experience Director at Unite Students, reaffirms, ‘the almost total lack of coherent and understandable narrative about postgraduate study in the UK is staggering’.1 The UK doctorate is diverse and encompasses a variety of student experiences, however, it cannot be emphasised enough how this community of researchers are often neglected and left to fend for themselves while funding bodies, higher education institutes and the Government focus almost the entirety of their attention on the needs of the undergraduate population. As a result, there is a ‘persistent uncertainty and enduring lack of consensus over the purpose of the doctorate’ in the UK among education policy makers.2 This stance furthers the Higher Education Academy’s argument that ‘[t]he Government’s commitment to postgraduate study is vague and unclear’.3 This pervasive lack of engagement with, and inability to understand, the doctoral student experience is undeserved, especially as their numbers have increased by 20.3 per cent in the last decade.4 Rather than supporting a rising group in academia who, correctly identified by The Russell Group ‘are the lifeblood of the next generation of university researchers’, we repeatedly let them down and risk the future of UK research and development with our inability to change this narrative of disinterest.5

The Higher Education Commission maintains in their independent inquiry, Postgraduate Education (2012) that ‘[a] healthy postgraduate system is vital to Britain’s continued development and economic success’.6 The current environment, however, is a far cry from this and is often described as one that is extremely toxic at times. Besides the lack of attention being given to doctoral students, a variety of factors further deepen their growing disillusion with research life, for example, the ongoing UCU strikes, high tuition fees, lack of funding, the competitive publish or perish culture in academia, and the over-supply of researchers seeking academic positions. The disposable nature and short-supply of fixed-term positions for early-career researchers in not sustainable. Many burn out and leave academia and research behind altogether to take up a permanent position often in another industry they are unprepared for. These negative feelings of dissatisfaction, exploitation and underappreciation are further exacerbated by education policy makers’ inability to resolve the relentless plague of problems doctoral students face at the start of their research journey during the PhD.

Of course, there will be critics who maintain that, after having undertaken an undergraduate degree and most likely a postgraduate taught degree, doctoral students have a solid

understanding of the higher education system, and therefore do not need the same level of attention and care as undergraduates. Others will also suggest postgraduate research students remain trapped within the divided wasteland that separates university student and staff, and it is this inability to label them as one or the other which makes their experience truly unknowable. Some might even argue the narrow focus of each individual PhD project makes it difficult to cater to the general population of doctoral students as a whole. Undeniably, postgraduate researchers in STEM disciplines can have very different needs and experiences to those in the humanities, social sciences and those students undertaking professional doctorates. But we cannot forget that they also share many similarities, and the national problems affecting doctoral students are often cross-departmental. While all of these points do raise valid concerns about the nuances and challenging nature of the PhD itself, they reaffirm the voices of doctoral students are being abandoned in the void of higher education policy. The UK cannot continue down this path any longer, and we need to further examine the way supervisors, departments, schools, university professional services and employers engage with the postgraduate research community.

This review will examine reports and articles on the doctoral experience produced in the wake of two major publications in the early 2000s: The Roberts Review or SET for success: The supply of people with science, technology, engineering and mathematic skills (2002) and the Browne Review or Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education: An Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance (2010). These two papers are important beginnings to our Policy Inquiry because of the very different ways they approached the doctoral student experience. The Roberts Review, written by Sir Gareth Roberts, called attention to the low intake of PhDs in STEM departments at universities, and his discussion brought the plight of doctoral students to the forefront of the Government’s attention. His list of recommendations for postgraduate researchers was specifically focused on improved funding and employability training, two key issues which are still very much a problem in today’s PhD environment. The thoroughness of his findings and his clear understanding of the deep-rooted faults present in doctoral programmes led the Government to agree to all of his recommendations, and ‘set in motion a policy initiative’ which ‘provided £120 million of new government funding to support the skills and development of research students and postdoctoral research staff’,7 In contrast, the Browne Review, lead and written by Lord John Browne Madingley, took a completely different stance and overlooked doctoral students entirely in his discussion about the future of higher education funding. His disinterest—really his negligence—shaped the Government’s current lack of understanding and engagement with this community of researchers since.

B.2. The Roberts Review
Sir Gareth Roberts (1940-2007) was a Welsh physicist and president of Wolfson College, Oxford who was deeply involved with the ‘UK science scene’ throughout his academic and professional life.6 He was a member and chairman of multiple academic bodies like the now-defunct Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, and he wrote two reports which specifically examined the future of research and development in the UK.9 The first, earlier referred to as the Roberts Review, examined the decreased intake of scientists and engineers in PhD programmes, and their

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9 The Higher Education Funding Council for England has been replaced by The Office for Students and Research England.
unequal distribution across the research and development sector after graduation. The second, a Review of research assessment (2003), discussed the Research Assessment Examination (RAE), and his list of recommendations demanded a ‘radical overhaul’ of assessment practices in universities across the UK. Both publications altered the academic landscape for doctoral students, postdoctoral researchers and early-career researchers, and improved the way universities, funding bodies and policy makers engaged with them. For the purposes of this review, though, this paper will only discuss the Roberts Review and the impact it had on the doctoral student experience in the ensuing years.

In his Executive Summary, Roberts states the ‘Review was commissioned at the time of Budget 2001 as part of the Government’s strategy for improving the UK’s productivity and innovation performance’. He articulates in the report the importance research and innovation plays in establishing a country’s place in the competitive global marketplace, and he argues the decline in the supply of science and engineering skills in the UK will negatively affect the UK’s ranking as a leader. The scope of the Roberts Review explores all possible avenues of improvement for STEM subjects, and he suggests recommendations for every level of education from primary school to the PhD as well as for permanent academic research staff. Crucially, though, Roberts maintains it is not solely the responsibility of educational institutions to implement these changes. The Government and employers must also take responsibility for reversing this ‘downward trend’ and find ways to attract researchers to these roles both within and outside academia.

Roberts maintains undertaking a PhD ‘is fundamental to the development of the highest level of science and engineering skills’ in that it cultivates ‘specialist knowledge’ and instructs postgraduate researchers ‘in the techniques and methods of scientific research’. He blames a variety of factors for the decreased numbers of students taking up PhDs in STEM departments in the early 2000s: three-year funding for what can be a four-year degree, low Research Council stipends and insufficient career training—specifically in transferable skills—which leaves doctoral students unprepared for employment outside of academia upon completion of the degree. It is important to note that, while Roberts only discusses the precarious situation of STEM subjects in his report, many of the concerns he draws attention to were cross-departmental, and humanities and social science research students experienced similar setbacks as their science and engineering colleagues.

Roberts directly addresses these problems in his report, and his first recommendation for postgraduate education is that the Government and Research Councils increase PhD stipends to reflect current graduate earnings. He maintains this will not only elevate the appeal of doctoral study, but it will mirror the ‘market demand’ for researchers and hopefully promote enrolment in currently at-risk STEM subjects. He further argues three years of funding does not correctly reflect the length of time it takes most doctoral students to complete their degree. This restriction results in an added ‘time pressure’ to what is an already high-stress situation, and forces many doctoral students to submit “safe”, rather than innovative, projects’ so that they finish within the funded period to avoid financial hardship. An obvious consequence of

12 For the sake of brevity, this literature review will only examine his discussion on doctoral and postdoctoral researchers.
14 Roberts, SET for success, p. 10.
15 Roberts, SET for success, p. 10.
16 Roberts, SET for success, p. 10, 11.
17 Roberts, SET for success, p. 11.
this choice is the UK’s eventual failure to compete in the global marketplace due to missed opportunities and lack of engagement with cutting-edge research. Therefore, Roberts recommended funding bodies and the Government should increase doctoral funding for a minimum of three and a half years in order to avoid this potentially disastrous fate.

While funding is a major point of concern for PhD students, it is not the sole one, and Roberts rightly asserts the lack of employability training for postgraduate researchers is pervasive across higher education institutes in the UK. He concedes there is a movement to fix this issue, but universities are not changing their policies fast enough to match industry trends and fulfil student-expectations of what the PhD degree should be.\textsuperscript{18} Most worrying, in Roberts’ opinion, is the lack of training in transferable skills, and he recommended the Government and Research Councils require all doctoral funding be conditional upon ‘training meeting stringent minimum standards’\textsuperscript{19}. His suggestions includes students attending at least ‘two weeks of dedicated training a year principally in transferable skills’ with the provision that additional funding be granted to cover the cost.\textsuperscript{20} Importantly, though, this extra training is viewed by Roberts as an enhancement of the PhD. It should not replace the traditional exchange of knowledge between supervisors and their research students, although he did suggest supervisors take on a more involved role in shaping their doctoral students’ personal and career development.\textsuperscript{21}

One of the reasons Roberts stresses the importance of improving transferable skills in particular is because only a third of research students take up a postdoctoral role after the PhD. A postdoctoral position is often considered an extension of the PhD and is an essential step towards achieving a permanent staff position at a higher education institute. Undertaking a postdoc allows early-career researchers the chance to participate in cutting-edge research while further developing the required skillset to propose and run their own projects. While there is a higher level of independence with the postdoc, many researchers still work under senior academic staff in a similar fashion to the doctorate. Most postdoctoral roles last two years and there is no guarantee of earning a permanent place with the institution after its completion. Of the 30 per cent of recent graduates who land postdocs, less than twenty per cent actually achieve this goal. With such low odds of gaining employment in academia, we cannot ignore the glaring fact that a high percentage of doctoral students will ultimately find employment in non-academic roles for which they are ill-prepared.\textsuperscript{22} Most doctoral students go into the PhD knowing how competitive the job market is but, at the time of the Roberts Review, there was a clear lack of communication about employment options outside the university. Roberts’ recommendations in the rest of the report try to make stronger links between employability training so early-career researchers leave the PhD feeling supported and confident in their abilities to continue working in research and development outside the confines of the university.

B.3. Response to the Roberts Review
As mentioned earlier, the Roberts Review launched one of the most effective policy initiatives for doctoral students in the last twenty years, one which sorely needs to be replicated in today’s higher education environment. The Government’s response to the Roberts Review, \textit{Investing in Innovation: A Strategy for Science, Engineering and Technology} (2003), was published ten months later, and laid out a detailed plan to implement all of Roberts’ recommendations. The Government acknowledge in the paper that, in the past, the UK missed research opportunities and had not been ‘successful in capitalising on earlier waves of scientific and technological breakthroughs’ and, ‘[i]n previous decades, weak links throughout the innovation process have

\textsuperscript{18} Roberts, \textit{SET for success}, p.11.
\textsuperscript{19} Roberts, \textit{SET for success}, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{20} Roberts, \textit{SET for success}, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{21} Roberts, \textit{SET for success}, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{22} Roberts, \textit{SET for success}, p. 12.
held back delivery of economic benefits’. Unwilling to continue in this way, the Government agreed with Roberts ‘that there needs to be a new impetus to improve standards of PhD training’, and promised a ‘dedicated capital stream and enhanced research funding to enable the science and engineering base to restore, maintain and grow the infrastructure for research’. What resulted was an extraordinary flow of cash into a budget of around £20 million per annum specifically for further postgraduate research ‘career development and transferable skills training’ for all research disciplines—not just STEM departments—between 2003 and 2011.

This funding was subsequently labelled ‘Roberts Money’ or Roberts funding in homage to his ‘championing of the value of investment in the development of people’ and his dedication to improving education and innovation in the UK. Unlike the process of applying for grant money, wherein institutions must bid for funding, Roberts funding was allocated on the basis of Research Councils UK (RCUK) sponsored doctoral students per institution. The amount awarded was £800 per annum per student and, depending on the number of RCUK students at a university, the allocated funds ranged anywhere from just under £400 per annum for a single, part-time student to over £1 million for more than a thousand full-time students. By the end of 2010, 178 institutions received Roberts Money and were granted the authority to use it however they saw fit. Most institutions made funding available to all researchers regardless of their fee status and, while Roberts emphasised the importance of transferable skills development, the money was often also spread out into additional areas of early-career development towards research training. Some Roberts Money was also used to create Doctoral Training Centres which provided four years of PhD funding to students and often worked in collaboration with universities. An example of such partnerships was The White Rose Doctoral Training Centre which offered joint projects with The University of Leeds and The University of Sheffield and the EPSRC Doctoral Training Centre Regenerative Medicine which worked with The University of Nottingham, Keele University and Loughborough University. RCUK published a progress report on the impact of the Roberts Money in 2010 and found the majority of institutions in receipt of the funding made research development and transferable skills training more accessible to students. The positive reaction to the Roberts Money training resulted in it being considered a required element of the PhD.

Of course there were criticisms of some of the ways employability and transferable skills training was presented to doctoral students, but the outcomes of Roberts Money were seen as a ‘major stimulus’ for improvement in skills development and considered an overall success. Still, the funding was never expected to last forever, and in July 2009 Vitae published a report on behalf of Universities UK and recommended

Research Councils UK should continue to provide “Roberts” funding to universities beyond 2010/11 for the professional and career development of all researchers and to support the

28 Research Councils UK, Review of progress, p. 15.
increasing emphasis on skills relating to knowledge transfer, public engagement and working in an international context.\textsuperscript{31}

Despite multiple calls like this to extend funding, the RCUK ceased granting institutions Roberts Money in 2011. Universities promised to continue providing employability and training support for postgraduate researchers by raising tuition fees £200 per annum per student—a quarter of the cost they were receiving from RCUK.\textsuperscript{32} Understandably, expectations were low as to how universities would continue the same level of support on a much smaller budget. The blow to doctoral students was, perhaps, made even worse because the decision to cease funding their research and career development occurred one year after the publication of the Browne Review which examined in detail the future of higher education funding in England and completely ignored doctoral students in the report.

\textbf{B.4. The Browne Review}

The Browne Review began in November 2009 following Parliament’s passing of the Higher Education Act of 2004. Despite reservations by some Labour MPs, the bill passed—but only on the promise that the Government would initiate an independent review into the future of higher education funding.\textsuperscript{33} The law primarily altered the way in which universities were funded in England and Wales by raising undergraduate tuition fees with variable rates up to £3,000 in 2006. The legislation also increased government financial aid for undergraduates and introduced an income-based payment plan which could be deferred or varied depending on a graduate’s salary. Arguments opposing the changes were centred on increased graduate debt and the fear of creating a tier system within higher education institutions. Postgraduate taught and research students have always paid variable fees and were not directly affected by the change in legislation, but that did not mean PhD programmes would not be impacted by changes being implemented at the undergraduate level. The 1994 Group, an association of smaller research-focused universities founded in response to the Russell Group, argued in their own inquiry, \textit{The Postgraduate Crisis: Policy Report} (2012), that ‘the new funding environment’ would adversely affect home student continuation to postgraduate study.\textsuperscript{34} They further argued: ‘UK graduates will be deterred or unable to progress onto postgraduate study due to accrual of student debt and the prospect of [self-funded] postgraduate course costs which need to be met up-front’.\textsuperscript{35} Valid concerns were continuously being raised about the impact the new legislation would have on postgraduate study, but were ultimately ignored by Lord Browne and the rest of the panel members during their investigation.

In the third chapter of the review, Lord Browne lists in extensive detail the large pile of evidence the panel members collected:

\begin{quote}
We have held four days of public hearings, questioning 36 witnesses. We have received over 150 submissions from academics, universities, colleges, student groups, parents and businesses, totalling over 2000 pages of evidence. We have visited 13 higher education institutions where we have held discussions with students and staff. We have held five meetings of our Advisory Forum, made up of over 20 organisations that represent the full range of the higher education system.\textsuperscript{36}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{31} Faye Emery and Janet Metcalfe, \textit{Promoting the UK doctorate}, p. 4.
The thoroughness of their research is commendable, but what Lord Browne fails to disclose is that the collected evidence they eventually discuss only pertains to undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes. One has to question, however, how much of their data actually concerns postgraduate taught sector as the review devotes only a single page of text in the sixty page report to this community of students at the very end of the document. Moreover, Lord Browne acknowledges the panel was asked ‘to consider funding and student finance issues for postgraduate students, as well as undergraduates’, but they lacked ‘the scope to look at research funding’ and decided to exclude postgraduate researchers from the review entirely. The panel’s decision to overlook a population of higher education students in an inquiry about the future of university funding, despite being told explicitly to do so, is a bold move. The title of their section discussing postgraduate education sums up the panel’s overarching argument for this decision: ‘Postgraduate education is a successful part of the higher education system and there is no evidence that changes to funding or student finance are needed to support student demand or access’. The majority of doctoral students, however, would disagree.

The panel’s lack of engagement with postgraduate research students reveals a complete reversal of interest from the Government’s response to the Roberts Review less than a decade earlier. Despite admitting the panel invested zero time researching the funding situation for PhD programmes, Lord Browne alludes to Roberts Money in this section and insinuates this funding is spread out across postgraduate taught and research degrees: ‘[t]here is significant investment in postgraduate study through HEFCE in the current system’. What Lord Browne fails to clarify, though, is that this funding is for postgraduate researchers only and will be discontinued imminently. He acknowledges the panel received submissions which argued for doctoral students to ‘receive the same support as undergraduates’, however, they did not make this recommendation in their report. Unwilling to discuss the possibility of finding alternate sources of funding, Browne reiterates there is a lack of public resources available and the only way to source such support would require ‘removing investment from undergraduate students’. He considers this an unnecessary action because postgraduate taught students have always managed to privately fund their postgraduate education through Research Council stipends, savings, family and employer support, or private loans. He concludes his discussion with the assertion that there is ‘no evidence that the absence of student support in the taught postgraduate market has had a detrimental impact on access to the PhD’. In short, Lord Browne believes there is no need to provide financial support so long as students are willing to privately pay for MA and PhD degrees.

The Russell Group state in their 2012 submission to the Higher Education Commission’s Postgraduate Education inquiry that they recognise public resources are currently under strain, although they disclose they had submitted ‘an overview of private options in its second submission to the Browne Review’ that detailed alternate sources of funding which could be directed towards current and prospective doctoral students. These suggestions were ultimately ignored and omitted from the publication. Browne does acknowledge near the end of the review that higher undergraduate fees might become a barrier to the postgraduate sector and could perhaps negatively affect enrolment numbers. He consequently suggested

38 Lord John Browne Madingley et al, Securing a Sustainable Future, p. 55.
postgraduate trends should be ‘monitored carefully’, but he makes no official recommendation to the Government regarding the future of funding for postgraduate study at any point in the Review. 44

B.5. Response to the Browne Review

The Browne Review’s oversight of postgraduate research funding did not go unnoticed, and many academics, higher education institutes and educational organisations like Universities UK, Vitae, the National Union of Students (NUS), The Russell Group and the Higher Education Commission challenged Browne’s decision to exclude doctoral study from his discussion. There is a recurrent feeling of general concern about the future of doctoral students in higher education policy in the literature published in the wake of the Browne Review, although it is almost always framed within a much larger narrative about how their position as neglected students impacts the country’s research and development output. The Higher Education Commission argued in their own inquiry that ‘[p]ostgraduates are major drivers of innovation and growth’ and it cannot be understated enough the important role their research plays in establishing the UK’s position as a leader in the global marketplace. 45 The 1994 Group reiterates these sentiments in The Postgraduate Crisis that any deterrent or ‘damage to progression to postgraduate study will have severe and long term’ repercussions for the country. 46 One could argue it is this fear of losing our place as a leader in innovation and knowledge which still remains the vehicle that drives the research being done on doctoral students. These fears are not new ones, though, for Roberts highlighted such concerns in his report nearly twenty years ago. It is time to change our perceptions on the worth of postgraduate students if we are to truly better understand their experience and write successful policy to improve it.

Doctoral students have so much more to offer beyond their market value to research and development. Around the same time as he published his review, Roberts spoke about the personal growth of postgraduate researchers during the degree: ‘The product that the PhD researcher create is not the thesis – vital though that is to their subject area through the creation of original knowledge – no, the product of their study is the development of themselves.’ 47 This is an important element of the PhD that is often overlooked—the degree goes far beyond the completion of a research project. We must remember that doctoral students are not only undertaking the PhD to become experts in their chosen discipline, but their pursuit of knowledge additionally refines their critical thinking, problem-solving and languages skills, and ultimately shapes how they engage with individuals and society. Moreover, we need critical thinkers who are aren’t afraid ‘to question established knowledge’ and are willing to engage in debate beyond their research specialities. 48 Having a ‘community of scholars’ engaged in this level of thought creates ‘cultural capital’ and brings a multitude of benefits to society, including ‘enhanced creativity and innovation’, which should be as equally valued as their research output. 49 Therefore, by undercutting the worth of postgraduate researchers like Browne does in his review, we risk further alienating them and losing all they have to offer.

It is this very reason why we need to examine all of the national issues negatively impacting doctoral students and the ways we can improve their overall postgraduate experience. Funding and access to postgraduate study are still very much issues, and more needs to be

45 Lord John Browne Madingley et al, Securing a Sustainable Future, p. 17.
47 Sir Gareth Roberts, unpublished quotation c. 2002 quoted in, Faye Emery and Janet Metcalfe, Promoting the UK doctorate: opportunities and challenges, 8 and 29.
48 Professor Adrian Smith et al, One Step Beyond: Making the most of postgraduate education (March 2010) <www.ukcge.ac.uk/media/Download.aspx?MediaId=1300> [accessed 17 June 2019] (p. 5).
49 Chris Park, Redefining the Doctorate, p. 8.
done to improve PhD widening participation programmes at universities. There are also imperative questions being raised concerning the doctorate degree and internationalisation. UK PhD programmes are continuously being compared with USA and European degrees, which have led to ongoing dialogues on the competitiveness and success of the UK doctorate and whether changes should be made to the structure of the degree. Another strand of discussion related to this topic is the important, albeit complicated, relationship the UK has with its international doctorate population. A significant majority of PhD students hail from outside the UK and, while their higher tuition fees help fund universities and boost international relations, strict immigration policies and extremely high visa fees mean the country is training a large proportion of researchers to ultimately use their knowledge and experience elsewhere in direct competition with the UK. Moreover, we’re losing out on the cultural capital this international community of scholars brings to the country. Employability is another recurring theme in many of these papers and it seems there has been a lack of momentum in improving early-career development and skills training since the discontinuation of the Roberts Money in 2011.

One national issue which has gained traction in recent years is the improvement of students’ mental health and wellbeing across all level of studies in higher education. In the past university professional services and academic staff would often use specific language which ‘normalise[d]’ the high demand of work and stress associated with the PhD. Examples of the type of language used are phrases like “surviving” the doctoral degree and “staying sane” as well as declaring specific years, or the writing up process, to be “the worst” and that it was common to get “the postgrad blues.” Consequently, doctoral students often resign themselves to this fate and expect to experience these overwhelming feelings of stress throughout the degree which, as research shows, can be a trigger for poor mental health and wellbeing. Stress and anxiety are often further exacerbated by a common feeling among PhD students identified as Imposter Syndrome. Imposter Syndrome is brought about by their own perception of not being ‘intelligent, capable or creative despite evidence of high achievement.’ In recent years, though, there has been a major shift in tone on the discussion concerning the nature of the degree and doctoral students’ poor mental health. The increase of articles and reports which examine the ways universities can better help students is a welcome change, but there is more which still needs to be done.

The subsequent sections of this literature review will discuss these national issues which negatively affect UK doctoral students on a national level with the aim to better understand how these concerns affect postgraduate researchers at Royal Holloway University of London more specifically. In the autumn term the Students’ Union will undertake a Policy Inquiry which will explore the postgraduate research experience at the university. This literature review was created to frame our own research and work as a platform to initiate discussion with our doctoral student body. We may find many of these issues are pervasive on campus or, perhaps, students will highlight there are other problems which might not be considered on a national level but very much are issues here in Egham. This Policy Inquiry simply is the beginning of what we hope is an ongoing discussion about how we can improve the doctoral student experience for current and prospective students at Royal Holloway University of London.

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51 Dr Janet Metcalfe, Dr Sally Wilson and Professor Katia Levecque, Exploring wellbeing and mental health, p. 18.
52 Dr Janet Metcalfe, Dr Sally Wilson and Professor Katia Levecque, Exploring wellbeing, p. 19.
C.1. Funding the UK Doctorate

Lord Browne claimed in his review that UK postgraduate degrees are well-funded, but the reality of postgraduate taught and research funding was, and still is, very different to the scenario he presented. With the loss of Roberts Money and the lack of recommendations for the Government, public funding for the postgraduate sector was dramatically reduced to finance only specific taught courses like teacher training, social work, and certain medical and healthcare courses, or was financed ‘indirectly’ via the Research Councils for doctoral study. The loss of Government subsidy towards postgraduate research programmes resulted in universities raising their tuition fees to recoup the loss of cuts in public funding. In many ways postgraduate tuition fees have always functioned in this manner, but the added pressure of mounting student debts with undergraduate fees now raised to £9,250 per annum and uncapped postgraduate taught fees has dramatically increased the financial burden placed on doctoral students at the start of their degree.

About 30 per cent of full-time PhD students receive funding from one of the seven UK Research Councils. Research Council funding has always been considered ‘the largest single source of funding after self-funding’. Research Council funding for UK students can include both tuition fee and maintenance costs which reflect the tax-free equivalent of current graduate starting salaries. EU students, in contrast, only receive Research Council funding for their tuition fees. Universities, funding bodies and other organisations do offer competitive scholarships for students without stipends, although they usually cover only a share of the cost of tuition fees or living expenses. Consequently, most UK and EU doctoral students are expected to source private finance at some point, and 30 per cent of postgraduate researchers receive absolutely no support at all. These financial barriers negatively impact widening participation and enrolment numbers for doctoral studies, and such concerns were echoed in multiple reports published in the wake of the Higher Education Act of 2004 and the Browne Review. The Higher Education Commission maintain [a]cademia offers a platform for thought leadership—It is vital that it is a profession which is accessible to all with the talent, not just those able to pay their own way. Chris Park, Professor Emeritus at Lancaster University, explained in his own paper, Redefining the Doctorate (2007), how students from lower socio-economic backgrounds ‘are much less likely to consider postgraduate study, including PhDs’ if they have to self-fund their degree. The NUS highlighted the risks students take to finance their degree in their paper, Steps towards a fairer system of postgraduate taught funding (2012): ‘many graduates are currently funding their study through potentially disastrous measures such as credit cards, overdrafts and personal loans’. These observations are still relevant in today’s postgraduate research environment, and many doctoral students place themselves in a financially uncertain position. This adds another pressure to the already-stressful degree, and it’s quite common for doctoral students to only complete the MPhil

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54 Professor Adrian Smith et all, *One Step Beyond*, p. 11.
55 This section only examines the costs for UK and EU students because one of the requirements for international students to undertake a UK PhD is that they must provide evidence of their finances and proof they can pay for the degree and maintenance costs. In later sections this paper will examine the international doctorate experience in more detail.
57 Professor Adrian Smith et all, *One Step Beyond*, p. 7.
59 Chris Park, *Redefining the Doctorate*, p. 15.
portion of the degree, take a break in their studies or completely drop out when they become financially stretched to the limit.

For years, Higher Education Institutes, funding bodies and the Research Councils have demanded 'a mixed economy funding system' which includes more public support for current and prospective doctoral students and better represents 'the heterogeneous landscape of postgraduate provision'. Many, however, were unable to provide successful models of this should be done, and the debate around improving access to doctoral funding stagnated over the years. The NUS acknowledged these difficulties in their own proposal to improve funding for postgraduate taught degrees:

> It is almost impossible to create a national eligibility scheme based on socio-economic status at postgraduate level. At the age of 21, graduates become independent from their parents and so parental income is not a useful indicator of need; still less when the prospective postgraduate in her thirties and has a career and a family to support. As such, trying to create a national targeted, means-tested scheme is not going to work.

NUS further discussed the risks of 'any large-scale injection of money into the system' without checks on tuition fees, and how it would increase 'fee-inflation', the rising costs on student debt and an increased pressure on already-constrained public finances. In a similar vein to The Russell Group’s proposals, NUS suggested alternative routes of private funding via professional access schemes for specific courses like law as well as employer co-funding for part-time students. They also presented an option for the more ‘traditional’ route for students who continue to postgraduate study immediately after their undergraduate degree. The plan for this route is one which involves a single graduate loan with strict eligibility requirements and repayment plans. While all of these proposals were specifically laid out in the NUS paper for postgraduate taught courses, many of their suggestions could also work for the PhD.

Nearly a decade after the conclusion of Roberts funding and the publication of the Browne Review, the Government finally responded to the repeated ‘concerns’ voiced by academics, universities, funding bodies and educational organisations about potential research students choosing not to continue to doctoral study ‘because of difficulties with funding’. The Government initiated a consultation in 2016 and found that the average cost of a PhD for home and EU students ‘ranges from £45,000 (for a three year degree in a lower cost location) to £73,000 (for a four year degree in a higher cost location)’. They subsequently decided in in their Budget 2017 report they would launch a Doctoral Loan in the 2018-19 academic year which would cover anywhere from a third to a half of the costs for eligible students. The consultation believed this amount ‘had “the potential to reach a wider range of students with doctoral potential, and support new research areas and activities”’.

The Doctoral Loan scheme is open to all UK, EU and settled status postgraduate research students under the age of 60 who are not in receipt of Research Council funding. Students who apply can receive up to £25,700 if they apply before the start of the first year of their degree, and the amount awarded is divided equally across each year of proposed study up to three years for full-time PhD students and eight years for part-time students. Applicants are eligible to apply at any point in their degree but, for all applications submitted after the first year, the amount awarded is reduced to a maximum of £10,609 per year. The eligibility restrictions are not entirely unreasonable, and the loan’s repayment plan begins only when a

63 The National Union of Students, *Steps toward a fairer system*, p. 7.
64 The National Union of Students, *Steps toward a fairer system*, p. 10.
graduate earns a threshold amount of £1,750 a month before tax and other deductions.\(^6\) The Government released early statistics about the Doctoral Loan from its 2018-19 launch year and, up until October, a total of 1,800 students had been approved for a loan. Further data found the average amount requested per year was £6,500 with just over £24,000 asked for the full period of the PhD.\(^6\)

The introduction of the Doctoral Loan is a step in the right direction towards improved funding options for the PhD, but the amount granted to postgraduate research students is relatively minimal when you look at the overall cost of the degree. At Royal Holloway, for example, the average annual Doctoral Loan awarded to full-time Home and EU students would cover the £4,327 tuition fee for most research degrees, but leaves little left over to go towards maintenance costs and other research expenses they will incur. The Doctoral Loan also does not cover the writing-up year, and any student who takes longer than three years to submit is required to self-fund the cost of that year. In regards to maintenance expenses, postgraduate hall fees at Royal Holloway can cost anywhere from £5,281.45 for a 38-week rental up to £8,442.31 for 50 weeks. The 38 week accommodation option is unsuitable for most doctoral students as they study for the duration of the year. Therefore, a doctoral student looking to rent accommodation through the university is looking at paying a minimum of £6,620 per annum. Postgraduates who prefer private accommodation to halls will pay less. The average rent for private accommodation in Egham is about £110 per week which is a yearly cost of £5,720 excluding deposits and utilities.\(^7\)

On top of tuition fees and living costs, there are additional research expenses to consider. The competitive publish or perish culture of academia is instilled at the onset of the PhD, and doctoral students know from the start that they are expected to share their research output in various forms of public discourse at national and international conferences, bespoke speaking events, as well as in peer-reviewed journals. Conferences are considered one of the larger expenses as they are often held around the country or abroad, and postgraduate students and early-career researchers are expected to personally finance their trips if they wish to participate as a speaker or simply attend the event. Besides the travel and accommodation costs, there are additional conference registration fees along with secondary expenses if they wish to participate in special talks or trips. Travel scholarships are sometimes offered, although these are competitive and usually low-paying. Many students increase their debt and pay out thousands of pounds annually to attend these events in order to remain up-to-date on current research happening on the national and international level. One can see how this has implications for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and essentially adds an additional financial barrier to the degree.

Furthermore, unless a student is undertaking the degree on a part-time basis, the doctorate is often compared to a full-time job. Many students participating in focus groups often contrasted postgraduate life with ‘normal’ life, which signifies it’s also somehow very different to a full-time job.\(^7\) Because the financial demands of the degree are steep, many postgraduate researchers take up work at the university as a graduate teaching assistant or a research assistant. The salaries for these roles are often non-contractual, paid as a casual wage and only covers the time spent in the classroom or lab, which discounts preparation time, grading, and office hours. Even with these brief reprieves, financial hardship forces many doctoral students to take casual or evening work to stave off their growing debt in the hope it does not negatively impact the quality of their research.

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\(^6\) See https://www.gov.uk/doctoral-loan for further details.


\(^7\) Figure provided by the Royal Holloway Students’ Union Advice Centre.

For now, the introduction of the Doctoral Loan has eased some of the financial burden placed on postgraduate research students, but more needs to be done—and not just from the Government. The many calls for improved funding options need to be embraced at an institutional level as well. Royal Holloway does offer College scholarships, and the Students’ Union is looking forward to learning in more detail how the university does—or doesn’t—financially support its home, EU and overseas doctoral students.

C.2. Widening Participation: An Ignored Frontier

Many of the issues raised in the previous section have direct implications on widening participation to doctoral study. NUS correctly maintains, '[p]ostgraduate study is not an absolute right', however, it is 'an opportunity that talented people should be able to take advantage of, no matter what their social background'.72 Most reports published in the wake of the Higher Education Act of 2004 echo similar sentiments, but fail to provide recommendations on how to lift these financial barriers and improve access to doctoral study for prospective students from underrepresented backgrounds.

The Higher Education Academy (HEA) was one of the first major educational organisations to run a project on widening participation to postgraduate study in 2006. The project was launched because of the limited research about the backgrounds of postgraduate students and was based around three questions: ‘if there is any under-representation of particular groups in postgraduate study, why students decide to continue to study at postgraduate level and what their experience is once they take on a postgraduate qualification’.73 The HEA highlights some of the obstacles which block access to the doctoral degree: financial hardship and lack of support, timetable clashes, commuting difficulties, childcare needs, job pressure ‘and the perception that postgraduate study is for a particular type of person’.74 The project managers admit in the report that some of these themes have already been identified in the work done on widening participation to the undergraduate sector, but there needs to be further investigation on doctoral study. For the project, the HEA examined issues related to student finances and debt, first-generation students, gender, socioeconomic background, ethnicity, course choice and employment opportunities.

During the 2006-07 academic year, HEA collected surveys from 1073 students in their final year of undergraduate study at two universities. The first was located in south London and the second was on the south coast of England. Additional telephone interviews were held with 20 participants who agreed to speak after graduation, and the interviewees included students who had continued on to postgraduate study as well as those who chose not to.75 At the time of the project, undergraduate tuition fees had only just been raised to £3,000 and the research found ‘[a]ctual debt was accepted as a part of studying, but students’ attitudes to debt did vary. Most did not regard the cost of postgraduate fees as prohibitively high. Far more significant for many of the interviews was the concern of not having any money’.76 The surveys and interviews also revealed that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds implied they had solid ‘support networks’ during their undergraduate degree, which signified that ‘any disadvantage that [was] evident at the start of their degree was ‘alleviated’ by graduation.77 There were outliers to the research, though, and the project managers found that first-

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72 The National Union of Students, Steps towards a fairer system, p. 6.
73 The Higher Education Academy, Widening participation to postgraduate study, p. 3.
74 The Higher Education Academy, Widening participation to postgraduate study, p. 15.
75 The Higher Education Academy, Widening participation to postgraduate study, p. 3.
76 The Higher Education Academy, Widening participation to postgraduate study, p. 6.
77 The Higher Education Academy, Widening participation to postgraduate study, p. 6.
generation university students ‘were less likely to go on to postgraduate study’.

Consequently, they recommended that widening participation teams at universities ‘could do further work to raise aspirations and provide additional support’ for this community of students who lack ‘family knowledge’ of postgraduate taught and research programmes.

In regards to ethnicity, the HEA report found that students from minority ethnic groups from the two sample universities, especially those who identify as Black Afro-Caribbean, had ‘higher intentions’ to undertake a MA or PhD whilst still undergraduates, however, they are the least likely ethnic group to actually go on to postgraduate study after graduation. The HEA report found Black Afro-Caribbean students ‘are disadvantaged in the two key areas of debt worry’ and ‘family experience of higher education’, and they had ‘varying expectations’ about the postgraduate degrees and its subsequent value in improving their employability. Despite these barriers, HEA discovered the most ‘at risk’ category to progress to the PhD was white-working class males, and this is a statistic which has remained unchanged since the report.

The study further highlighted the growth in the postgraduate taught and research degrees is a consequence of a large influx of international students, and the HEA suggests more should be done to increase home student numbers at the postgraduate level. As will be discussed in the next section, this is an issue which is still very much at the forefront of discussion surrounding the doctoral degree.

While the HEA project on widening participation was a tremendous first step in looking at ways to improve access to postgraduate study, the sample size is too small and fails to address these issues on a national level. Moreover, since its publication, there has been little research done on the underrepresentation of students at the doctoral level beside the continued work in this area by Professor Paul Wakeling, a sociologist of education at the University of York. Wakeling’s article, ‘Are Ethnic Minorities Underrepresented in UK Postgraduate Study?’ (2009) was published after the HEA report and examines in further detail many of the same issues. Wakeling expands the HEA project in his paper and analyses the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data on a national level from the 2001-02 to 2004-05 academic years. He found White students to have a much higher proportion of representation on research degrees than taught degrees, where Black, Chinese and ‘Other’ students have higher representation. He further found that students from Pakistani, Indian and Bangladeshi backgrounds had the lowest representation across all levels of postgraduate study.

In his research, Wakeling discovered representation was highly skewed based on the chosen discipline, and ethnic minority students are most likely to apply for ‘professional and technical’ degrees like law, medicine, dentistry, and mathematical and computing sciences whereas White students dominate ‘the more “academic” disciplines’ in the humanities. He specifically examined underrepresentation at the doctoral level and found ‘the reduction in ethnic minority

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78 The Higher Education Academy, *Widening participation to postgraduate study*, p. 5.
80 The Higher Education Academy, *Widening participation to postgraduate study*, p. 45.
81 The Higher Education Academy, *Widening participation to postgraduate study*, p. 45.
82 The Higher Education Academy, *Widening participation to postgraduate study*, p. 47.
85 Paul Wakeling, ‘Are Ethnic Minorities Underrepresented in UK Postgraduate Study?’, p. 98
representation between first-degree and research degree is related to subject of study.’

Economic backgrounds was another indicator of underrepresentation, and Wakeling learned students from lower socio-economic backgrounds have lower progression rates to the PhD. Besides areas of study, there is also a correlation between representation and location. White postgraduate students make up the majority of the student body in postgraduate study across UK institutions, although some universities based in London or located in cities with a more diverse population retain a large proportion of ethnic minority students.

Two years after the publication of the HEA’s project report, the Higher Education Policy Institute and the British Library highlighted in their own review, Postgraduate Education in the UK (2010), that the backgrounds of doctoral students is still ‘heavily skewed towards those from higher socio-economic backgrounds’. They suggest this issue is difficult to tackle because there is a lack of data about underrepresented student participation at the doctoral level, especially when compared to the work being done in the undergraduate sector. This sort of comment, in light of the HEA and Wakeling reports, is frustrating because initial steps were taken to better understand these students, but there remains no follow-through from higher education institutes and the Government to improve the research in this area. Once again, doctoral students are being ignored while attention is focused on the undergraduate sector which is considered a huge success story for widening participation. This is something former Labour MP, Alan Milburn, discussed in a 2012 interview with The Higher Education Careers Services Unit (HECSU):

Post-graduate education is a real time-bomb in terms of social mobility. Everyone agrees that nobody should be barred from undergraduate education because they can’t afford fees, and yet we completely accept this barrier when it comes to post-graduate education. The fact is, post-graduate education is not a luxury for the individual, it is a necessity for our economy and wider society.

Milburn is not demanding we divert attention away from undergraduates, but that we instead give postgraduate researchers the same amount of attention. Milburn’s argument mirrors Wakeling’s conclusion in his paper: ‘If we value equality of opportunity and diversity in our professions, university system and society then the impediments to greater postgraduate participation for some groups must be better understood and acted upon.’

The Higher Education Commission reaffirmed Milburn’s argument in the ‘Key Messages’ section of their 2012 report: ‘Postgraduate education is “the new frontier of widening participation”—with prospective students currently barred from study if they cannot afford fees or access sufficient credit’. One of their major concerns is the possibility of undoing all the hard work widening participation teams have done at the undergraduate level by failing to promote postgraduate study to underrepresented communities at the university. The Higher Education Commission’s recommendations for this area of policy argues ‘[u]niversities should systematically investigate “cold spots” in postgraduate participation in order to inform and
target their access and widening participation activities” like more flexible provision, including ‘part-time, distance and online learning’. While these recommendations are important, especially as over fifty per cent of postgraduates study part-time, their discussion of widening participation, like so many other published reports, was vaguely superficial.

Once again, the only publication to thoroughly discuss widening participation to postgraduate study came from the same sources as earlier studies in this area: Paul Wakeling and the Higher Education Academy. Wakeling co-authored Transition to higher degrees across the UK: an analysis of national institutional and individual differences (2013) with Gillian Hampden-Thompson on behalf of the HEA, and many of the observations highlighted in Wakeling’s earlier paper remain unchanged in this later publication. Wakeling and Hampden-Thompson once again examined HESA data for the 2009-10 and 2010-11 academic years and found that Chinese students had the highest rate of progression to research degrees, followed by White and other Asian backgrounds. Black African, other Black background, Indian and Pakistani groups had lower rates of progression in the 2010-11 academic year but suffered a severe drop in 2010-11. Finally, Bangladeshi and Black Caribbean graduates were still ‘exceptionally low’ in their progression to doctoral study. In their conclusion, Wakeling and Hampden-Thompson, argue widening participation to postgraduate study goes beyond questions of student funding, and he maintains further work needs to be done to examine other elements impacting widening participation. Some of their recommendations ask for a close analysis of institutional differences with progression rates, for subject comparisons to be carried out as well as ‘[a] more complex statistical analysis of rates of progression by gender, ethnicity and social class’. They additionally recommend that their analysis on transition trends and widening participation should be re-examined and updated in two years in order to closely monitor any change that might have occurred. Unfortunately, their recommendations were ignored and there has been little advancement on widening participation at the postgraduate level since.

Currently, Royal Holloway has a plan to implement a widening participation team for the undergraduate sector, but the College has no plan to promote it at the postgraduate level. The Students’ Union is keen to hear from current students who have come from disadvantaged or ethnic minority backgrounds, and learn what we can do to improve access to the PhD for future students currently underrepresented on campus.

C.3. Internationalisation and the UK Doctorate

Over the last twenty years the UK has been a key destination point for international students to undertake their PhD, however, Chris Park identified two major challenges which have the potential to impact international recruitment: ‘increasing global competition’ and ‘increasing pressure to harmonise with proposed European models of the doctorate’ in line with the proposals laid out in the Bologna Process. The Bologna Process began in 1999 with the aim to bring more cohesion and cooperation to higher education systems across Europe, and was launched with the signing of the Bologna Declaration by 29 European ministers responsible for higher education. The main objectives of the Bologna Declaration ‘were to establish a

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96 Paul Wakeling and Gillian Hampden-Thompson, Transition to higher degrees across the UK, p. 55.
97 Paul Wakeling and Gillian Hampden-Thompson, Transition to higher degrees across the UK, p. 59.
98 Chris Park, Redefining the doctorate, p. 20.
European Area of Higher Education by 2010, and to promote the European system of higher education world-wide.\textsuperscript{99} This is done in a variety of ways—through biennial meetings to review the standards and quality of higher education, the creation of ‘a system of easily comparable degrees’ as well as ‘transferable credits for degree programmes’ and, finally, through the promotion of student movement between participating European countries.\textsuperscript{100}

Before the implementation of the Bologna Process, international students used to come to the UK to improve their English language skills while simultaneously working towards their PhD. These days, many European countries now offer postgraduate degrees in English, and their lower tuition fees are more ‘attractive’ and considered a ‘cheaper alternative’ to UK study.\textsuperscript{101} Moreover, the doctorate degree in the majority of European countries includes four years of full-time study—and funding—which aligns with what Sir Gareth Roberts originally argued for the UK to adopt in \textit{SET for success} nearly twenty years ago. Consequently, there is now a real consensus in Europe that the three-year UK doctorate is ‘too short and is considered ‘inadequate’ in comparison to European PhDs.\textsuperscript{102} There are differences between the degrees, however, in that the UK doctorate involves less classroom and lecture hours and is more researched based. UK doctoral students spend more time in the lab or library working on their research alone. The Higher Education Policy Institute commends the UK doctorate’s structure and ‘ability to teach students to think for themselves’.\textsuperscript{103} Still, the real lack of financial support, on top of inflated fees, can be the ultimate deciding factor for international students when choosing where to begin their postgraduate research careers.

Despite these challenges, the 1994 Group maintains international recruitment to the PhD remains ‘a major success story and should continue. However, the UK cannot rely upon international students to supply the workforce of the future.’\textsuperscript{104} This statement encapsulates the complex relationship between the UK doctorate and international students. 55 per cent of international students choose to undertake their postgraduate studies in the UK, and we are second only to the USA in terms of international intake.\textsuperscript{105} This, of course, results in huge economic benefits to the UK, and, for example, the total fee income for the 2008-09 academic year was £2.2 billion.\textsuperscript{106} Alternatively, the UK’s reliance on ‘international recruitment is not an efficient or sustainable strategy’ because most graduates eventually return home and use their research skills to ‘help build the economic competitiveness advantage of their home country’, resulting in an economic loss for the UK.\textsuperscript{107} These, of course, are somewhat broad generalisations and there are many different nuances to the issue.

The above arguments about international doctorate students tend to focus more on the market-value of the researcher rather than the cultural capital they bring to the UK during their studies. One reason why academics and educational policy makers are so fixated on the economic value of international students is specifically a result of universities recouping the cost of provision through inflated international tuition fees. At Royal Holloway, for example, a PhD in the humanities will cost a Home or EU student £4,327 per annum for the 2019-20 academic year whereas an international student will have to pay £13,500. This is a difference

\textsuperscript{99} Chris Park, \textit{Redefining the doctorate}, p. 21.
\textsuperscript{100} Chris Park, \textit{Redefining the doctorate}, p. 21.
\textsuperscript{101} The Russell Group, \textit{The Higher Education Commission’s Postgraduate Inquiry}, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{102} Chris Park, \textit{Redefining the doctorate}, p. 24.
\textsuperscript{103} The Higher Education Policy Group and The British Library, \textit{Postgraduate Education}, p. 61.
\textsuperscript{105} The 1994 Group, \textit{The Postgraduate Crisis}, p. 7
\textsuperscript{106} Professor Adrian Smith et all, \textit{One Step Beyond}, p. 66.
\textsuperscript{107} The Higher Education Commission, \textit{Postgraduate Education}, p. 37.
of just over £9,000 and, the more international students an institution has, the more income it generates for the university. The Higher Education Policy Institute and the British Library raised the issue of rising international fees in their report, and commented on how students are ‘likely to question whether they are receiving “value for money”’ if they choose to undertake a UK PhD.\(^{108}\) They recommended ‘providing students with more quantitative data on what their courses deliver’ in order to better inform international students about the UK interpretation of the degree.\(^{109}\)

But international doctoral students should be valued beyond their fee status, especially as they are actively contributing to UK innovation and development throughout the duration of their research degree. Professor Adrian Smith acknowledges in his review, *One Step Beyond: making the most of postgraduate education* (2010), that appealing to ‘the best students from around the world plays a significant role’ in the research output produced.\(^{110}\) Smith further articulates in his review the important cultural capital international students bring with them to their research and why we should value it more: ‘The international diversity of postgraduate education in the UK generates a vibrant and stimulating environment that brings together a variety of cultural knowledge, experience and insights’.\(^{111}\) The country should wish to retain these traits in the workplace both within and outside academia, but stringent and expensive immigration requirements are the main reasons international students eventually return home.

The high departure of international researchers is a consequence of the 2010 the Coalition Government between the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats and their commitment to ‘introducing “an annual limit on the number of non-EU economic migrants admitted into the UK to live and work”’.\(^{112}\) This pledge included students and many institutions at the time were concerned about how this immigration reform would impact ‘genuine students from studying in the UK’.\(^{113}\) The Higher Education Commission highlighted how the ‘immigration cap’ has unfortunately ‘led to a damaging perception that the UK does not welcome international students’.\(^{114}\) Arguments could be made by international students against investing their time and money in the UK PhD if there is little hope of continuing their research in the country after the degree. The eventual closure of the Highly Skilled Migrants programme, which was at one point a hugely successful post-study visa route for international students, further emphasises this point. Doctoral students now have to decide whether they want to apply to a Tier 2 visa which can cost anywhere from £464 for shortage occupations up to three years of work to £1,408 for other employment over three years and requires sponsorship from their employer. There are also additional expenses to consider, like the NHS surcharge which costs international workers £400 per annum. Moreover, these fees don’t include dependents, and many applicants are forced to pay similar fees for family members. There are also extremely stringent requirements, including a £30,000 minimum salary that many graduates are unable to meet. It’s not surprising that many international students ultimately decide to forego this lengthy and expensive process to return home.

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\(^{110}\) Professor Adrian Smith et al. *One Step Beyond*, p. 66.

\(^{111}\) Professor Adrian Smith et al. *One Step Beyond*, p. 5.


\(^{113}\) The 1994 Group, *The Postgraduate Crisis*, p. 16.

The 1994 Group argue those students who leave do so ‘with a connection [to the UK] that will bring lasting social and diplomatic benefits’.\(^{115}\) This may be true, but the UK still suffers both an economic and cultural loss when those researchers leave and take their knowledge and experience with them. To further complicate matters, the loss of international researchers further highlights the fact that there is a shortage of home-domiciled workers in areas of research and development due to low national recruitment numbers to the doctorate. Therefore, the UK is actually reliant on their international students, and need them to undergo the expensive, and often emotionally draining, immigration process, to stay and to ‘plug skills gaps in the indigenous population’.\(^{116}\)

In recent months the Government has been working on the introduction of a post-study work visa for international students who have completed their degree at UK universities at all levels. It was announced on 10 September 2019, the Government announced the reintroduction of a post-work study visa. Since the 2012 removal of the post-study visa, postgraduate students have only been allowed to stay in the UK up to six months after graduation without a Tier 2 visa, and many higher education institutes and education policy makers have blamed low international enrolment numbers in recent years on the removal of the post-study visa. The new visa will extend the time international students can stay in the UK before requiring a Tier 2 visa to two years.\(^{117}\)

The Students’ Union would like to further investigate the international student experience at Royal Holloway and learn more about students’ plans after graduation.

**C.4. Postgraduate Researcher Mental Health and Wellbeing**

In the last few years, higher education institutes have taken active steps to improve mental health awareness and access to services at the undergraduate level, however, there is less knowledge about the wellbeing of doctoral students. The Higher Education Academy highlighted in their 2008 report on widening participation that there needs to be more work done to better understand student stress and anxiety about postgraduate study, especially the PhD, but it took ten years for an in-depth review of these issues to actually occur when Vitae published *Exploring wellbeing and mental health and associated support services for postgraduate researchers* (2018). Vitae is a non-profit organisation which supports the professional development of researchers and works closely with Research England. The report examines institutional policies on mental health services, the factors affecting postgraduate researchers’ wellbeing; it identifies students who are more likely to develop poor mental health and lists recommendations with the aim for higher education institutes to ‘provide a safe working environment’ that supports doctoral students in this capacity.\(^{118}\)

The former Higher Education Funding Council for England invited all UK higher education institutes to participate in the study and 87 universities replied with strong interest, which highlights how important this issue is in today’s PhD environment. The sample was eventually narrowed down to ten higher education institutes—seven Russell Group universities and three other institutions—and the project was conducted through interviews with permanent staff and doctoral student focus groups. The permanent staff interviews involved a range of positions from vice-chancellors, department heads, student union officers, professional student services officers and advisors from welfare and counselling services. The focus groups were composed


\(^{116}\) The Higher Education Commission, *Postgraduate Education*, p. 37


\(^{118}\) Dr Janet Metcalfe, Dr Sally Wilson and Professor Katia Leveque, *Exploring wellbeing*, p. 30.
of between five and eight doctoral students from a variety of departments, year of study, national status and modes of study. Following these discussions, the project managers ran a pilot survey at six higher education institutes in order to ‘establish a method to measure the extent of mental health problems’ affecting doctoral students and their overall experience of the research degree.\textsuperscript{119}

All of the institutions involved in the project acknowledged the PhD experience ‘is significantly different’ from taught undergraduate and postgraduate courses, and this ‘create[s] specific challenges in ensuring their wellbeing and mental health’ needs are successfully met with the professional services they provide.\textsuperscript{120} As mentioned earlier, there is a longstanding correlation between the PhD and stress. The project managers of the Vitae report acknowledged previous research on ‘work-related stress’ and its links to ‘depression and anxiety’, and stress ‘is reported to be higher amongst academic staff than across the general population’.\textsuperscript{121} The report does discuss how stress is not always considered a negative and, at times, ‘is an important quality for successful researchers’.\textsuperscript{122} There is a problem, however, when stress levels become unmanageable and higher education institutes, professional staff and academic staff need to understand that doctoral students are at risk of developing a mental health condition because the nature of the degree fosters this unhealthy environment.

Many professional staff who work in support roles at higher education institutions disclosed to Vitae how many doctoral students ‘could be approaching crisis point’ before finally deciding to seek help, and this is simply not good enough.\textsuperscript{123} A lack of doctoral student engagement with wellbeing and mental health services was reaffirmed in the focus group discussions. Many doctoral students repeatedly articulated ‘that they did not associate themselves with the general student body’, and felt the university’s signposting of mental health services were ‘primarily targeted at the undergraduate population’.\textsuperscript{124} These students additionally admitted their lack of understanding about mental health and wellbeing services was a consequence of their own view ‘of “falling between student and staff”’ and not knowing whether to use staff or student services when a problem arose.\textsuperscript{125} There were other issues flagged about accessing early information about wellbeing services at induction talks at the start of the academic year. Unlike undergraduate and taught postgraduate students, doctoral students commence their degree at different points throughout the year, resulting in many students being excluded from these talks and missing out on the information provided.

Furthermore, it is a known fact that university counselling services are under immense strain throughout the year with the undergraduate population, and many doctoral students admitted in the focus groups that they waited until the vacation period to access these services because the high demand of undergraduate cases is much lower. Vitae noted there are other forms of pastoral support available at higher education institutes, specifically the Students’ Union, but the officers interviewed for the project admitted they had low engagement with doctoral students. This was reaffirmed with the pilot survey, and only 11 per cent of doctoral students agreed they would be ‘comfortable’ speaking to a students’ union advisor for a mental health issue while 64 per cent of respondents disagreed with this statement.\textsuperscript{126} This is clearly an area

\textsuperscript{119} Dr Janet Metcalfe, Dr Sally Wilson and Professor Katia Levecque, Exploring wellbeing, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{120} Dr Janet Metcalfe, Dr Sally Wilson and Professor Katia Levecque, Exploring wellbeing, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{121} Dr Janet Metcalfe, Dr Sally Wilson and Professor Katia Levecque, Exploring wellbeing, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{122} Dr Janet Metcalfe, Dr Sally Wilson and Professor Katia Levecque, Exploring wellbeing, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{123} Dr Janet Metcalfe, Dr Sally Wilson and Professor Katia Levecque, Exploring wellbeing, p. 18.
\textsuperscript{124} Dr Janet Metcalfe, Dr Sally Wilson and Professor Katia Levecque, Exploring wellbeing, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{125} Dr Janet Metcalfe, Dr Sally Wilson and Professor Katia Levecque, Exploring wellbeing, p. 13.
\textsuperscript{126} Dr Janet Metcalfe, Dr Sally Wilson and Professor Katia Levecque, Exploring wellbeing, p. 14.
that has room for improvement, and the Royal Holloway Students’ Union is keen to improve our own engagement with postgraduate research students so that they feel comfortable accessing our resources like the Advice Centre.

Besides university professional staff, chaplaincy services and the students’ union, the other point of contact for mental health support is often a doctoral student’s primary supervisor. In addition to overseeing the research project, PhD supervisors are also expected to ‘provide basic pastoral support,’ but Vitae found there is ‘widespread recognition among senior staff and support services that there was variability in the quality’ of supervision.\(^\text{127}\) Some professional support staff relayed reports of academic staff ‘declaring, “we don’t do mental health,” arising from disinterest’ or a lack of training and confidence to offer this level of support.\(^\text{128}\) This is further complicated because the relationship between a doctoral student and their supervisor is quite complex, and in the doctoral student focus groups there was a ‘consensus’ among participants that ‘difficulty in the supervisory relationship was one of the most common reasons for wellbeing issues.’\(^\text{129}\) Vitae found this ‘fear of complaining about or to supervisors’ was common among the participants, and some postgraduate research students viewed themselves as trapped ‘in a powerless position: they didn’t want to change their research and didn’t believe they could change how they are treated.’\(^\text{130}\) Others highlighted the issue of “macho cultures” in academia and the perception that talking about mental health ‘would be seen as a weakness’ and negatively impact their career prospects after graduation.\(^\text{131}\) Not all students in the focus groups and survey shared negative experiences with their supervisors, and 76 per cent of the pilot survey respondents ‘agreed they had “regular contact” with my supervisor/s, appropriate for my needs’ compared to the 89 per cent of respondents in the PRES 2017 survey which included the same question.\(^\text{132}\) The data from the Vitae survey discovered that 42 per cent of respondents agreed to feeling ‘comfortable talking to their supervisor if they were experiencing a mental health issue, such as anxiety or depression’ and 45 per cent disagreed with this statement.\(^\text{133}\)

Besides access to mental health and wellbeing support, the Vitae report examined some of the potential triggers of stress and anxiety, and many of the issues are ones which have been previously discussed in this review—financial hardship, workload, mode of study, harassment and international status. Funding and financial hardships have been discussed in previous sections of this review and will not be covered in this section. The doctoral workload has been already been compared to a full-time job, one which is made even more difficult with added roles of teaching or other part-time commitments to finance their tuition fees and maintenance costs. The extensive hours of the doctorate degree and competitive nature of publish or perish culture in academia further ‘encourages a blurring between work and personal time’ and leads to an extremely unhealthy work-life balance.\(^\text{134}\) Some doctoral students in the focus group associated their workload and long research hours ‘to the point of “exploitation”,’ and this is reiterated in Dr Catherine Oakly’s essay, ‘How I left academia’ (2019). She explains how her experience in academia ‘was of a two-tier system in which the labour of casual staff’, like PhD students and postdoctoral researchers, ‘is disposable and made invisible in ways that benefit

\(^{127}\) Dr Janet Metcalfe, Dr Sally Wilson and Professor Katia Levecque, Exploring wellbeing, p. 15.

\(^{128}\) Dr Janet Metcalfe, Dr Sally Wilson and Professor Katia Levecque, Exploring wellbeing, p. 15.

\(^{129}\) Dr Janet Metcalfe, Dr Sally Wilson and Professor Katia Levecque, Exploring wellbeing, p. 19.

\(^{130}\) Dr Janet Metcalfe, Dr Sally Wilson and Professor Katia Levecque, Exploring wellbeing, p. 19.

\(^{131}\) Dr Janet Metcalfe, Dr Sally Wilson and Professor Katia Levecque, Exploring wellbeing, p. 19.

\(^{132}\) Dr Janet Metcalfe, Dr Sally Wilson and Professor Katia Levecque, Exploring wellbeing, p. 19.

\(^{133}\) Dr Janet Metcalfe, Dr Sally Wilson and Professor Katia Levecque, Exploring wellbeing, p. 20.

\(^{134}\) Dr Janet Metcalfe, Dr Sally Wilson and Professor Katia Levecque, Exploring wellbeing, p. 21.
senior staff and managers.’

Harassment is another major problem, and the project found ‘isolated examples’ of female doctoral students who had experienced sexual harassment from male supervisors. NUS published their own report with the 1752 Group, *Power in the academy: staff sexual misconduct in UK higher education* (2018), around the same time as Vitae, and it explores why ‘higher education is not a safe place for women’, especially female postgraduate research students. The NUS report examined the repercussions for sexual misconduct and found that ‘[w]omen were up to three times as likely as men to have changed their behaviour or academic trajectory’ because of sexual harassment, and ‘a very high proportion of non-binary students also reported negative consequences’. The Vitae report additionally found incidents of racial discrimination within the department, and doctoral students in the focus group felt professional university services lacked the training to deal with sensitive issues like racism. Another problem raised in the focus groups was the blurred boundaries of a supervisory relationship, and how this leads to other forms of harassment besides sexual misconduct. The NUS report also discusses the close relationship supervisors have with their research students, and how ‘these students generally spend more time with academic staff, work more closely together, and be part of a smaller cohort than their undergraduate counterparts. This can often lead to a closer relationship between staff and students – with even less clear boundaries’. Vitae highlights how postgraduate research students always remain ‘the weaker party’ in the relationship when this happens, and they often find it difficult ‘to know when they can say no to supervisors’ about their workload and attending social or personal events with their supervisors. The students in the focus groups and surveys suggested ‘bullying and harassment’ are consequences of these blurred boundaries and needs to be addressed. Other risk factors identified by the project were loneliness, a lack of career confidence, family responsibilities, and the feelings of isolation some doctoral students experience while undertaking the degree part-time, through distance learning or as international students.

The conclusions drawn from the interviews, focus groups and pilot survey revolved around higher education institutes creating an accessible and supportive environment for their students across all levels of study—not just for undergraduates. Vitae further argues ‘systematic culture change’ is necessary in the research sector, especially in regards to managing workloads, expectations of high-achievement, and reversing machismo attitudes about mental health and its association with weakness. Vitae subsequently listed ten recommendations to impact change in mental health services at universities, and they addressed these recommendations to universities, major funding bodies and organisations like Universities UK and Research England, academic supervisors and professional university.

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136 Dr Catherine Oakley, ‘How I left academia’, para 4 of 17.
138 NUS and the 1752 Group, *Power in the academy*, p. 27.
139 Dr Janet Metcalfe, Dr Sally Wilson and Professor Katia Levecque, *Exploring wellbeing*, p. 22.
140 Dr Janet Metcalfe, Dr Sally Wilson and Professor Katia Levecque, *Exploring wellbeing*, p. 22.
141 Dr Janet Metcalfe, Dr Sally Wilson and Professor Katia Levecque, *Exploring wellbeing*, p. 22.
142 Dr Janet Metcalfe, Dr Sally Wilson and Professor Katia Levecque, *Exploring wellbeing*, p. 30.
staff members. The project managers additionally appealed for higher educational institutes to use open access websites and participate in shared practice when implementing new mental health and wellbeing strategies. This recommendation was made with the aim that ‘learning is shared as widely and as early as possible’ so that postgraduate research students begin accessing the help they need long before they reach crisis-point.\textsuperscript{144} The Students’ Union is invested in examining the mental health support services at Royal Holloway and whether doctoral students have found them helpful. In the coming focus groups and postgraduate research student survey we appreciate your willingness to respond and share your own experiences of wellbeing throughout your research degree.

C.5. Postgraduate Researcher Employability

Since the publication of the Roberts Review, doctoral student employability has remained a key issue when discussing the nature of the PhD and how well it prepares research students for a career both inside and outside academia. For many research students, the ultimate goal still remains a permanent position at a higher education institute. However, as Roberts pointed out as early as 2002, there is an oversupply of early-career researchers looking for work at a time when there is an unrelenting undersupply of academic positions. Nearly twenty years later nothing has changed and, if anything, career prospects for a permanent place at a university has only worsened. As discussed earlier, Roberts’ recommendation for improved skills training for careers outside of academia was embraced by education policy makers and brought the, sometimes-hard, reality that the majority of doctoral students will not land an academic position they have spent the last three to four years training for to the forefront of discussion.

These days it’s more common for early-career researchers seeking employment in academia to hold temporary, fixed term positions with multiple employers. In the United States these lecturers and researchers are typically referred to as adjuncts, but there appears to be no UK equivalent to the term. These temporary roles include both lecturer and postdoctoral researcher positions, and usually last for one to three years. While many early-career researchers consider these jobs a necessary step towards a permanent academic position, many find the lack of stability and constant cycle of job applications too emotionally draining and ultimately burn out during their quest for a permanent place. Financial hardship is another factor which impacts how long early-career researchers are willing to work for lower pay on short term contracts. Dr Oakley, for example, reveals in her essay how living for years on a low research stipend during her PhD and having to self-fund her writing up year left her with almost no savings at the end of her degree. Moreover, her inability to land another temporary contract before her current one ran out was another deciding factor in her decision to leave academia.\textsuperscript{145} This situation is all-too common for early-career researchers, and the repetitive cycle of temporary contracts further exploits their positions, resulting in many researchers eventually transitioning out of the sector emotionally and financially depleted.

The transition from academia to a career in another sector can be psychologically difficult, and this statement is reaffirmed in Dr Oakley’s essay. She maintains in the piece that the hardest part of transitioning into a new sector was the psychological implications and she compares it to an ‘identity crisis’.\textsuperscript{146} She explains her ‘entire sense of self has been wrapped up in academic study and achievement’, and no longer having that connection caused her to

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{144} Dr Janet Metcalfe, Dr Sally Wilson and Professor Katia Levecque, \textit{Exploring wellbeing}, p. 34.
  \item \textsuperscript{145} Dr Catherine Oakley, ‘How I left academia’, para. 7 of 17.
  \item \textsuperscript{146} Dr Catherine Oakley, ‘How I left academia’, para 8 of 17.
\end{itemize}
question who she was. She also ‘struggled’ with the concept of ‘sunk costs’ associated with her PhD. She had spent years of her time, finances and emotional investment working towards a career that is well known for operating ‘through a model of delayed gratification’, but ultimately ‘implies acceptance into the academic fold, esteem, and a lecturer’s salary’ if you work hard enough for it. To have failed at that was devastating to her, as it is to many early-career researchers who travel a similar career route.

L. Maren Wood, the co-founder of Beyond the Professoriate, further examines the psychological challenges of transitioning outside of academia in her article, ‘Odds Are, Your Doctorate Will Not Prepare You for a Profession Outside Academe’ (2019). Woods describes the painful realisation many early-career researchers experience when they discover the PhD actually does not prepare doctoral students for non-academic careers. Wood holds a PhD in History, but left the sector in 2012. She details the experience of her own exit along with other early-career researchers in her article. She concedes there are exceptions, in that some STEM disciplines like engineering can find successful work outside the confines of the university, but the majority of humanities and social science doctoral students will find the transition difficult. Wood acknowledges this ‘is often a heavy psychological blow’, especially as doctoral students have been taught their PhD ‘will make them attractive to all sorts of employers’. The blow Wood is referring to is the realisation that the transferable skills promoted in the Roberts Review ‘are transferable because they are the same skills that other professionals, who are equally smart and capable, are developing on the job’. Wood goes on to list the skills valued in the doctorate degree—analytical and critical thinking, qualitative and quantitative research, project management and language skills—and argues these skills are considered transferable because they ‘are already valued and cultivated’ in a variety of employment sectors.

Therefore, when early-career researchers finally depart the academic career path, they find themselves in competition with people who not only have these same skills, but also have a strong background of work experience in the sector. Many early-career researchers struggle to land entry-level positions, which only exacerbates such feelings as ‘depression, anxiety, and doubt’.

The sort of misinformation about transferable skills Wood alludes to is found in such comments like the 1994 Group’s statement that ‘[t]he knowledge and skills developed’ during the PhD are extremely valuable ‘in the public and not-for-profit sectors’. While their belief that society benefits from having ‘[a] better educated and highly skilled workforce in these areas’ is true, Wood’s article reveals the deep faults in this argument and that there are extremely capable people already in these positions who do not have a PhD. Moreover, arguments which imply non-academic sectors don’t understand the value of the doctorate degree and the ‘advantages’ the PhD could bring to improve the sector are also unhelpful. What many of these professions value most is experience, and many early-career researchers lack this essential asset.

147 Dr Catherine Oakley, ‘How I left academia’, para 8 of 17.
148 Dr Catherine Oakley, ‘How I left academia’, para 10 of 17.
149 Dr Catherine Oakley, ‘How I left academia’, para 10 of 17.
156 Faye Emery and Janet Metcalfe, Promoting the UK doctorate, p. 24.
Importantly, Wood is not arguing against people from pursuing a doctorate for the sake of gaining work experience. There are many personal benefits to continuing on to doctoral study such as a passion for the subject and engaging in a high level of discourse with other scholars. Many PhD alumni do not regret undertaking their degree once they’ve left academia behind, but they do wish they had better understood the reality of their career options available to them. What needs to change is the way professional and academic staff support the career development of their doctoral students. The League of European Research Universities (LERU) explores in their recent position paper, Delivering talent: Careers of researchers inside and outside academia (2019), how university professional and academic staff still primarily encourage their doctoral students’ career development for eventual employment at a university.\(^\text{157}\) This continued perception that ‘non-higher education careers as “second-best”’ is extremely damaging, and ultimately hinders doctoral students as research reveals ‘doctoral graduates have a far wider impact through their employment in a range of sectors’ and not just the university.\(^\text{158}\)

The LERU paper rightly argues that ‘timely and good quality career support is essential for doctoral and postdoctoral researchers to find their way in society’, but professional and academic staff need to stop focusing on the generalised arguments about transferable skills and have honest conversations with their doctoral students about the reality of their employability.\(^\text{159}\) They need to also discuss the difficult transition into the public and private sectors as well as the importance of work experience. Academia is known for its ‘ivory tower’ mentality, and Wood suggests informing doctoral students that their research and teaching experience at higher education institutes is considered ‘a very narrow type of work experience.’\(^\text{160}\) Wood argues for more professional training courses like interview workshops, job searches, CV and cover letter writing because this sort of training will help doctoral students feel more ‘empowered to make informed career decisions’.\(^\text{161}\) Wood and LERU also suggest universities create internships with organisations in the non-academic sector, and to provide funding for doctoral students to gain actual work experience while undertaking the PhD. LERU argues the work should not fall solely on the university, and that doctoral students needs to actively engage with other sectors and attend professional development training.\(^\text{162}\)

Crucially, there needs to be better information relayed to doctoral students about their career development, especially in terms of the difficult transition from academia to non-faculty roles in the public and private sector. One way to do this is to acknowledge that the current system of short-term positions does not work. The Royal Holloway Students’ Union is aware that there needs to be changes in the level of support at the University Careers Service. In addition to the Postgraduate Research Student Experience Policy Inquiry we will also be undertaking an Employability Policy Inquiry in the spring. We are hoping the knowledge we gain about the doctoral student experience, especially in regards to their career development, will help us better understand larger issues surrounding the university’s Career’s Services so we can make recommendations to improve it.

\(^{158}\) Faye Emery and Janet Metcalfe, Promoting the UK doctorate, p. 25, 23.
\(^{159}\) Jan van der Boon, Delivering talent, p. 18.
\(^{161}\) L. Maren Wood, ‘Odds Are’, para. 20 of 29.
\(^{162}\) Jan van der Boon, Delivering talent, p. 24.
Section D: Next Steps
Importantly, all of the above themes have been chosen because they have had a strong, reoccurring presence in the literature produced on the doctoral student experience at a national level in the last fifteen years.

The Students' Union is very much aware that some of these issues might not pertain to the Royal Holloway postgraduate research student body, and that we might have missed other pressing matters which are very specific to the College. We want to better understand the PhD experience on campus so we can engage with you in a much deeper level than we have in previous years, and make recommendations that will help you get the most from the degree her at Royal Holloway.

The SU is very much aware of our own lack of understanding about the postgraduate research experience at Royal Holloway. Our engagement with the postgraduate community is low, and this is why President, Jack O’Neill, placed it as a focus on one of his manifesto commitments during the officer elections.

The next steps of the Policy Inquiry will focus on the specific issues impacting Royal Holloway postgraduate research students. The Students’ Union will be running two focus groups made up of current doctoral student, and will launch a postgraduate research student survey in October. Following these two events, the Students’ Union will produce a paper which analyses this research and will be submitted to the Postgraduate Collective at the end of term. We are very much interested in all you have to tell us, and we look forward to hearing from you in the coming months.
Section E: References


Smith, Professor Adrian et all, One Step Beyond: Making the most of postgraduate education (March 2010) <www.ukcge.ac.uk/media/Download.aspx?MediaId=1300> [accessed 17 June 2019].


