

PGR Training and Development opportunities – an overview with Dr Cathy Coombs

- Welcome to your PGR community

Hello, and a warm welcome to Manchester Metropolitan University.

My name is Cathy Coombs and I work in the [Graduate School](#), supporting a wide range of training and development activities for you, our postgraduate researchers.

I am very much looking forward to working with you throughout your degree.

Starting a research degree is an exciting time, and hopefully you're feeling really fired-up about your research topic and the findings you hope to make.

It can also be a nervous time, though, and feel like a step 'up' or into the unknown, so I want to start by saying that it's ok if you're feeling unsure or if you doubt yourself along the way: there will be up's and down's but the University has plenty of support in place for you.

One of those areas in which you might feel unsure is around your skills and preparation to undertake the research, as well as how your skills will prepare you for life after the PhD.

That's where I and the PGR Experience team can help.

- Training needs analysis and the Researcher Development Framework

When you first meet with your supervisor, you'll be prompted to complete a Training Needs Analysis.

This process will ask you to rate your current skills and knowledge using Vitae's Researcher Development Framework.

This is a highly-regarded tool for researcher professional development, which we hope will become familiar through your time at Manchester Met and prove useful in helping you decide where to focus your training and development efforts.

The Framework is split into four sections: Domain A is all about Knowledge and intellectual abilities; Domain B relates to various aspects of Personal Effectiveness; Domain C covers Research governance and organisation; and Domain D focuses on Engagement, influence and impact.

You'll likely have all sorts of background experience, from your studies and professional life, that already give you competence and confidence in some of these areas; others will need more development.

- Development opportunities

Once you've completed your training needs analysis, you can make the most of the workshops and seminars offered across the University.

This might mean attending research events in your department, faculty or University Centre for Research and Knowledge Exchange.

You'll also have access to the [Graduate School](#)'s annual programme of workshops, currently delivered as webinars and covering different aspects of the Researcher Development Framework.

You can search and book these seminars and others, for instance those run by the Postgraduate Arts & Humanities Centre, through Skillsforge.

Overall, we expect you to engage with ten days' worth of personal and professional development activities each year – or five days if you are studying part-time.

- Your University Centre for Research & Knowledge Exchange

Beyond attending workshops and seminars, we hope you'll also want to get involved in the research culture of your Faculty and research centre, and the events run by the [Graduate School](#).

As one of our community of researchers at Manchester Met, you will be allocated membership of one of our fourteen University Centres for Research and Knowledge Exchange.

Your research centre will likely be the same as your Principal Supervisor's - but if you're not sure, please check with us in the [Graduate School](#) or your supervisory team.

The research centres offer a variety of events, from workshops and mentoring, to seminar series and annual conferences – we encourage you to make the most of your membership and get involved.

- Resources and services available to you

As a registered student at Manchester Met, you have access to all the facilities and student services in place to support you and enrich your studies.

Our [University Library](#) will provide access to resources, databases and special collections, and they can also provide advice in planning your research, whether you're thinking about how best to access the materials you need, you need advice on referencing software or tools for data management.

[The Library](#) provide a workshop series, drop-ins, 1-2-1's with subject librarians and a range of guidance via their webpages. You'll meet them through your induction and be able to work with them throughout your time with us.

The Academic & Study Skills team offer a range of skills-focused workshop series, including sessions focused on PG study, criticality and writing skills.

Access their webpages for lots of short videos as well as booking for those longer webinars.

If English is not your first language, you may wish to seek support from [the Language Centre](#). They offer pre-sessional English for offer holders and coaching for registered students in academic English.

If you experience challenging times during your studies at Manchester Met, remember that you have access to a wide range of [wellbeing support services](#), from wellbeing workshops and [MMU Sport](#) to [disability support](#), [chaplaincy](#) and [counselling](#).

We are here to help and if you're not sure where to start, your supervisory team or we in the [Graduate School](#) will be able to signpost you to the most appropriate support.

- Rise at Manchester Met

At Manchester Met, all students can get involved in our [Rise Programme](#), a flexible opportunity to add value on top of your degree.

On our PGR welcome pages, you'll find links to two of the online courses so far created by postgraduate researchers, 'So you're thinking of a PhD?' and 'Rise, Inspire and Empower'.

These are designed by PGRs and for PGRs, and once registered on the Rise platform, you'll have access to many more online short courses to help you up-skill and get an insight into new areas.

There are other opportunities to get involved too, for instance working with undergraduate research interns as a mentor – a valuable experience if you are considering trying teaching in the future.

- Support for your writing

We're aware in the [Graduate School](#) that getting into good writing habits can be one of the most challenging aspects of research study – as well as one of the most rewarding!

There are PGR-led writing groups, shut-up-and-write sessions and short retreats available across the University, so it's worth checking what's happening in your department or research centre.

I run a monthly writing retreat, usually hosted over Zoom, to create a structured space for focused writing.

The retreats vary in length and timing – it's all about supporting you and your writing practice – so please do book in on Skillsforge or get in touch if you have questions or ideas.

In 2021/22, we will be setting up a new writing buddy scheme alongside the regular retreats and continuing to host our regular coffee chats, a chance to share your tips and hear from others about their experience of writing up research.

- Opportunities to talk and ask questions

Our coffee chats and drop-ins are a regular source of support and community for all PGRs.

We run themed coffee chats, for instance introducing your Library team, sharing ideas on keeping well during PGR study and giving you a chance to speak to your PGR reps.

These are informal sessions which give you a space to speak to members of our [Graduate School](#) team and guests, even if you are working from a distance and don't regularly come onto campus.

We also offer drop-in sessions with members of the Research Degrees management team, in case you need to ask questions about your progress, milestones or anything else related to the administration of your degree.

These are in addition to regular information sessions introducing you to your research degree milestones, with plenty of opportunity to ask questions and make sure you're ready for your next milestone.

You can search and book all our milestone information events, coffee chats and drop-ins on Skillsforge, or get in touch with us.

- Developing transferable skills: communicating your research

If you'd like to develop your research communication skills, look out for [the University's Three Minute Thesis competition](#) which runs each spring and [the Images of Research competition](#) that launches each autumn.

Attending and presenting at conferences is also an important development experience, and we in the [Graduate School](#) can offer financial support through the Research Support Award for all kinds of research-related activities.

You can find out full details, including the upcoming deadlines and the application form for the Research Support Award in our PGR Development Moodle area.

There will be conferences and symposia running in your Faculty and Research Centre: please do get involved!

At University level, the [Graduate School](#) supports PGRs to run an annual conference in March each year. Look out for opportunities to join the organising committee, submit an abstract and attend the sessions.

- Opportunities to teach

Another key skill many PGRs look to develop during their time with us is teaching.

You might get the opportunity to teach within your department, or if you're interested in school teaching, look out for information about [the Brilliant Club](#), a fantastic supported opportunity to share your research and develop your teaching skills in local schools.

If you're successful in getting an opportunity to teach either at University or school level, you will need to undertake some initial training: [the Brilliant Club](#) provides training to all its tutors, and for teaching within Manchester Met, you can sign up for the University Teaching Academy's [New To Teaching course](#).

This is not only chance to be introduced to the core teaching skills you'll need, but to meet others just starting out with teaching and to work towards accreditation from Advance HE.

- PGR voice

We in the PGR Experience team work closely with your Students Union and PGR representatives.

Your reps hold regular meetings to hear the student voice, attend University and Faculty committees and drive change where needed.

We are always delighted to welcome new PGR reps and to hear from a diverse range of voices, so look out for opportunities via your department, faculty and the Students Union.

In 2021/22, we will be offering leadership mentoring to support all PGR reps and those PGRs who volunteer to organise our annual conference.

This will be a brilliant opportunity to be mentored by a researcher in their early academic career stage, to learn from their experience and work together on key leadership skills and employability.

Get involved in either the annual conference or volunteer as a PGR rep to find out more.

- Keep in touch!

However you choose to communicate with us and whatever you get involved in during your time here, your voice matters: we in the PGR Experience team want your time at Manchester Met to be the best it possibly can be, and everything we do, from workshops to competitions, bringing in guest speakers to supporting our PGR reps, is about getting your voice heard and your development needs met.

Get in touch, now or at any time during your research degree. We are always delighted to hear from PGRs and to have new ideas for the kind of events you would find useful.

Above all, make the most of your time with us: I hope it is rich, rewarding and fun – and look forward to working with you along the way.