



Yorkshire Consortium for Equity in Doctoral Education

Guide to Positive Action in Doctoral Recruitment

Guidance and support from The University of Leeds about the legal and practical things to consider when proposing or implementing positive action within doctoral recruitment.

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Date: 1st April 2025

YCEDE cannot guarantee that all information contained in this resource is accurate at the time of reading, particularly with regard to dates, deadlines, and funding availability.

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Suggested Audience: Staff

Suggested Sub-Audience: Recruitment & Selection, Project Management

This resource is intended for use in improving equity and outcomes for ethnically minoritised individuals interested in doctoral study or careers in research.

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TO CITE THIS

Carson, L. & Gisborne, G. (2025) *Yorkshire Consortium for Equity in Doctoral Education*
[online] available at:

<https://ycede.ac.uk/toolkit/pgr-recruitment-selection-and-admissions/recruitment-selection/guide-to-positive-action-in-doctoral-recruitment/>

Positive action in doctoral recruitment

Some groups of people who share a particular characteristic may suffer disadvantage connected to that characteristic, have different needs compared to others without that characteristic, or be underrepresented in certain activities.

In these cases, organisations are permitted to take positive action under the provisions of the Equality Act 2010. The positive action provisions are exceptions to the usual requirements of discrimination law that prevent those with a particular characteristic being treated differently, either better or worse, from those without that same characteristic. Without the positive action exceptions, taking action that deliberately and overtly advantages those with a particular protected characteristic over those without it would normally be unlawful under the Act.

Positive action can be applied in a range of ways to support recruitment of a more diverse postgraduate research cohort. This usually involves 'ring-fencing' opportunities or support so that only those who share an identified protected characteristic (or characteristics) are eligible to access them. This may involve ring-fencing:

- scholarships, studentships, or other financial awards
- research internships
- interview places
- application support (e.g., spaces on mentoring schemes)

Organisations wishing to take positive action must ensure they comply with the requirements of the Equality Act to avoid unlawful discrimination. The template below is based on guidance available through the Equality and Human Rights Commission's (EHRC) Statutory Code of Practice on Employment and can be used to establish a lawful basis for the application of positive action in doctoral recruitment as well as plans to review interventions introduced in this way. This template is intended as a guide that can be adapted to the specific context of your institution and any policies or guidelines related to the application of positive action in recruitment.

Nature of the intervention to be introduced

e.g. Ring-fenced doctoral scholarship covering the full cost of academic fees and annual maintenance stipend (at the current UKRI rate)

Target demographic

e.g. Home (UK) fee-rated PGR applicants from Black, Asian or other minoritised ethnic groups

Which protected characteristic(s) apply?

Age	Religion or belief	
Disability	Sex	
Gender reassignment	Sexual orientation	
Marriage / civil partnership	Race (including colour, nationality and ethnic or national origin)	
Pregnancy / maternity		

What is the aim of the intervention?

Overcome or minimise a disadvantage	
Meet different needs	
Address underrepresentation in a particular activity	

What evidence do you have to demonstrate a need for the intervention?

e.g. the average number of PGR entrants from minoritised ethnic groups over a 3-year period for your institution compared to the general population or other non-minoritised groups

What change do you hope to see as a result of introducing the intervention?

e.g. a 3-5% increase in the representation of minoritised ethnic groups among PGR entrants for your cohort

What evidence do you have to demonstrate that the intervention is 'proportionate'?

e.g. feedback from prospective PGR applicants suggests that funding is the most significant barrier to access and therefore more likely to effectively address underrepresentation than other possible interventions

What feedback do you have from stakeholders to support the intervention's introduction?

e.g. consultation with current students through surveys and focus groups demonstrates support for the introduction of a ring-fenced scholarship as a means of widening access to postgraduate research

For how long will you introduce the intervention in the first instance?

e.g. 3 years, pending review

How and when will you review the impact of the intervention?

e.g. annual review of PGR entrant data to identify increases in representation of minoritised ethnic groups in cohort

How and when will you review the intervention to ensure it remains proportionate?

e.g. 3 years after the intervention's introduction, measuring underrepresentation using the same criteria as those used to support the initial application of positive action

Who will be responsible for reviewing the impact and proportionality of the intervention?

e.g. postgraduate scholarships team