



Case Study: University of Westminster

The University of Westminster's busy Graduate School supports several hundred Doctoral Researchers across five faculties in central London. With a growing Doctoral Research programme, the University was keen to **improve the Doctoral Researcher experience** and likelihood of **timely successful completion**, at the same time as reducing the programme's administrative overhead.

With support from the Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research, the Graduate School began working with the team from PhD Manager in collaboration with the University's Information Services department.

The PhD Manager team began by creating an **online directory** of Doctoral Research projects as existing systems provided no effective way of sharing this information between supervisory teams, the department and faculty, and the University's Graduate School Registry.

With a directory of Doctoral Research projects, records are now easily accessible by everyone involved with a project, saving time and reducing the risk of records in different systems becoming out of sync.

'Having up-to-date information in one place saves us time in all sorts of ways, from automatically producing lists of Doctoral Researchers, to easily seeing completion rates across all departments and faculties,' explained Susanna Verdon, Graduate School Manager. 'We now have instant visibility of supervision experience for putting together supervisory teams, and automatic listings of a Doctoral Researcher's training and development saving time for both us and the Doctoral Researcher. Best of all the system is so flexible we know we'll be able to store and report on whatever information we need in the future.'

Once the records of projects were in place, the PhD Manager team and Graduate School moved on to looking at streamlining processes.

The key academic stages of Registration, Transfer, and Examination, together with an Annual Progress Review result in extensive use of file attachments being circulated by email to everyone involved. The Graduate School were keen to move from using files and email to more streamlined online forms.



PhD Manager

The PhD Manager team worked closely with the Graduate School to understand the process for each application, then **integrated custom workflow** into the directory of Doctoral Research projects. The data feeds into the workflow process, and application decisions feed into the data. The result is **streamlined, efficient, and transparent**.

'As an example, during our annual review of all Doctoral Research projects, progression recommendations from each supervisory team are now immediately visible on a dashboard together with recommendations from each faculty. We no longer need to spend time gathering and collating data as the system does this for us' explained Susanna Verdon.

PhD Manager isn't just used during the formal key academic stages. **Doctoral Researchers and their supervisors use the system for storing and recording logs of supervision meetings** throughout the year. It's helpful for the Doctoral Researcher to see notes of all their meetings in one place as an easy way to refer back to guidance and to track their progress. By automatically gathering supervision logs throughout the year, the Faculty and University's Graduate School Registry also avoid the extra work of collating all logs at the end of each year.

The PhD Manager team worked closely with the **University's Information Services** department. Dr Alex Iacconi, Head of Internet Services described the collaboration, 'PhD Manager offered the University of Westminster the opportunity to implement technologies that **greatly enhance our functionality** in support of research. The managed hosting, in conjunction with the simple web service-based data interchange, allows for an independent yet synchronised data infrastructure. PhD Manager and the University considered several options for authentication and, by choosing the dual approach of LDAP and Google OAuth, we have implemented a solution that gives us enhanced and deeper resilience.'

'What's most important to me is ensuring **each Doctoral Researcher is receiving effective support** and has the best chance of a timely and successful completion,' explained Professor Simon Joss, Director of the Graduate School. 'PhD Manager enables us to monitor progress more effectively, whilst at the same time reducing the time spent on administration for everyone involved. I'm really pleased with the progress we've made implementing PhD Manager and it's positive impact on the Graduate School.'

More information

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