



Arts & Humanities
Research Council

AHRB working group on doctoral research in the arts and humanities

Executive Summary

The last decade has been a period of dramatic change in the scale, nature and environment of research in the arts and humanities in the UK. There has been a steep rise in the number of UK doctoral researchers in the arts and humanities. Demand for UK-based doctoral research from outside the UK has kept pace with the steep rise in domestic demand. This dramatic growth places increased emphasis on the wider roles of arts and humanities research; it is widely acknowledged that doctoral study in the arts and humanities has twin aims, producing both high-quality research and highly qualified researchers, and that a doctorate in the arts and humanities is a valuable preparation not only for a career in higher education but also for a wide range of research-related and management jobs in the public and private sectors.

There has been much new and innovative thinking about the nature of doctoral study, principally in the area of practice-led research in the creative and performing arts but also more generally in the development of collaborative doctorates, doctorates by distance learning, 'new route' and professional doctorates and the exploration of doctorates by portfolio. This dynamic process has taken place against a background of underfunding; the working group offers recommendations on this score below.

AHRC has been an important force in stimulating and supporting change. The group recommends no major change in AHRC policy but does recommend a number of initiatives and adjustments with a view to increasing flexibility and enhancing the council's ability to midwife new developments.

The group was concerned that in some areas planning and policy are impeded by an information deficit nationally and recommends further work on this front.

Recommendations

Government funding

1. There is a strong case to be made on grounds of equity for an increase in funding for doctoral research in the arts and humanities; the group recommends that AHRC press the OST for an increase specifically in funding for doctoral research in the next Spending Review (para 7).
2. OST should increase the number of ORS studentships in order to increase the competitiveness of the UK in the market for doctoral research students (para 11)
3. AHRC should actively seek additional funding from OST to increase the national provision for postdoctoral fellowships in the arts and humanities in order to enhance the opportunities for career development (para 23).

Information deficit

4. There is evidence that at present small numbers of ethnic minority students undertake postgraduate research. The Research Councils should commission research on the reasons for this low rate of progression to doctoral study and the possible means to increase it (para 8).
5. The Research Councils should commission research into the destinations, academic and other, of non-UK domiciled holders of UK doctorates.

AHRC funding

6. The group recommends that the current AHRC model of separate funding for Master's level and doctoral study should stand (para 18).
7. The AHRC should explore the possibility of funding longer Research Preparation Master's programmes where a case can be made for subject need (para 19).
8. The current policy of adjusting the balance between Master's and doctoral awards in favour of the latter should continue (para 20).
9. Three years should remain the standard doctoral award duration. (para 21)
10. However, the AHRC should fund an additional period (up to a year) in specific cases on the basis of proven research need (para 22).
11. The current funding policy for EU applicants should remain unchanged (para 24).
12. The current award allocation system based on competition at national level evaluated by subject specialist panels should be retained (para 32).
13. The AHRC should review the operation of its project studentships in order to integrate more fully activity funded by the postgraduate and research divisions (para 33).
14. The AHRC should explore with the sector opportunities for more diverse, and perhaps more extensive, student attachments to projects (para 34).
15. The AHRC should review its policy for discipline-targeted awards in consultation with the sector with a view to achieving a more flexible and needs-based outcome in this area (para 37).
16. Elements of the AHRC's Collaborative Doctoral Awards scheme should be extended to the responsive mode competition to support individual collaborative arrangements on the basis of fitness for purpose (para 46).

Enabling

17. The AHRC should make funding available for a series of inter- and cross-disciplinary seminars in which to stimulate further debate, to share good practice and to help evolve models for practice-led research at doctoral level in the creative and performing arts. (para 42).
18. The AHRC should organize and/or fund a series of pan-disciplinary seminars to explore current and emerging options in delivery and assessment of doctoral research and supervision and the development of best practice (para. 46).

19. The group supports the development of programmes involving collaborations between UK and international HEIs and recommends that the AHRC should clarify guidance to ensure that such collaborations are not impeded by the way in which funding is administered (para 52).

AHRC working group on doctoral research in the arts and humanities

1. Background

1. The last decade has been a period of dramatic change in the scale, nature and environment of research in the arts and humanities in the UK. The 2002 AHRB review of its postgraduate programme included a recommendation that AHRB conduct a review of the UK arts and humanities doctorate more generally. Change has if anything accelerated in the period since the report, in part driven by new initiatives from AHRC (project based studentships, collaborative doctoral research based partly in non-HEI bodies, ring-fenced doctorates). The moment is now right for a general review of the current situation and exploration of possible future directions both for doctoral research in the subject domain and for the role of AHRC as supporter and enabler.
2. In 2004 the AHRB established a working group consisting of academics covering its subject domain, an academic representative from the science community and AHRB officers. A table showing the final membership of the group is attached at Annex A. The terms of reference are given as Annex B. The working group held a series of meetings in May and December 2004, March and April 2005.
3. The review process was underpinned by extensive consultation with the sector, involving a series of workshops held in the autumn of 2004 and a survey of HEIs and subject associations conducted on its behalf by the Institute of Education. The AHRC and the working group are grateful to all who took the time to attend the seminars and respond to the survey, and the comments gathered inform this report and its conclusions. In reaching its conclusions, the group considered a wide range of information, details of which are attached at Annex C.

2.1 Growth I: UK

4. There has been a steep rise in the number of UK doctoral researchers in the arts and humanities in the last ten years. HESA statistics indicate an aggregate increase of 118% in completed doctorates in the broad subject domain between 1994 and 2004, with individual subject increases ranging from 62% to 242%.
5. The increase in demand has been strongest in the area of the creative and performing arts. But even languages and other long established humanities disciplines have more than doubled the number of doctorates produced over that period. This compares with an increase of 88% in the total number of completed doctorates in the UK for all disciplines.
6. This increase in the volume of activity in the arts and humanities is a distinctive UK phenomenon. Comparative figures for the rest of the world are available for only part of the last decade. Between 1998 and 2001 most countries experienced only a modest rise (Germany, Austria,), no change (USA) or even a fall (France, Italy, Netherlands) while for the same period growth in the UK was 31 per cent. Countries with rates of change comparable with that of the UK are in most cases starting from a very low base in absolute figures, with the exception of Australia, Canada and Japan; of these only Japan equals the steep rise visible in the UK.

7. The increase is all the more striking for the fact that doctoral research in this area is seriously underfunded in comparison with other disciplines; a much larger proportion of arts and humanities doctoral students (47.3%) receive no award or financial backing than in other subject areas (32.11%). The quality of applicants for AHRC funding, which has remained steady over the period of rapid expansion, reflects the generally high quality of doctoral researchers in the arts and humanities and anecdotal evidence from institutions suggests that arts and humanities researchers compete successfully against those in other disciplines in competition for internal studentships. There is a strong case (not only for reasons of equity but also for the economic importance of the arts and humanities) for an increase in funding to adjust the serious imbalance between different disciplines and **the group recommends that AHRC press the OST for an increase specifically in funding for doctoral research in the next spending review.**

8. There is one exception to this picture of buoyant demand. Within the cohort of UK-domiciled students HESA figures on ethnicity indicate that only small numbers of minority students undertake postgraduate research. It is likely that the root of this problem can be traced to undergraduate level. But the relatively low rate at which students from ethnic minorities progress from Master's to doctoral level study (around one out of six compared with one out of three among white students) is a matter of concern. It is difficult at present to get beyond the limited data which is available. **Further research is needed on the reasons for this low rate of progression to doctoral study and the possible means to increase it.**

2.2 Growth II: EU and Overseas

9. Over the last ten years, demand for UK based doctoral research from outside the UK kept pace with the steep rise in domestic demand. It is difficult to obtain discipline-specific data; here as elsewhere the volume and granulation of information available makes both evaluation and planning difficult. But across the higher education sector as a whole between 1994 and 2002 the proportion of doctorates in the UK completed by non-UK students remained static at roughly one-third. Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data for 2002-3 indicates that in arts and humanities subjects, a relatively low proportion of doctoral population and completions are accounted for by UK domiciled students (58% and 56%, compared with 63% and 62% when all subjects are included). Of the remaining doctoral students, roughly one third are from EU countries and two thirds from other overseas destinations.

10. The sustained attractiveness of doctoral research in the UK for non-UK researchers probably reflects a variety of factors, one of which is almost certainly the global dominance of the English language. Another likely (though on present information unprovable) cause within the arts and humanities is demand from the EU and the rest of the world which cannot be satisfied locally. But such considerations do not explain the significant personal investment made by incoming researchers. Half of the EU students in arts and humanities research in the UK received no financial backing, with only one per cent receiving support from their Government. The buoyancy of non-UK demand across the sector suggests that in general the UK doctorate maintains its international competitiveness on grounds of quality. The 2002 report noted a concern in some quarters about the international standing of the UK and humanities doctorate. Despite some differentiation between different

disciplines, the vast majority of respondents to the survey expressed a firm belief that the UK doctorate in the arts and humanities was both internationally respected and attractive to non-UK researchers and their confidence seems to be borne out by such figures as are available. Some respondents to the survey expressed a concern that the effective shortening of the PhD (that is, to an assumed four years in a culture where research periods have traditionally been much longer) threatened to undermine its quality. This is not however the majority view according to the survey.

11. The success of the disciplines in inward recruitment represents (together with overseas student recruitment) an important source of income for UK higher education. Globally this is part of the large contribution which the HE sector makes to the national economy. There are also significant collateral benefits in terms of service jobs for local economies, for many of which the university is the most significant employer and client. It was however observed by respondents to the survey that the poor levels of funding available for overseas doctoral students reduced the competitiveness of the UK in relation to the USA in particular. The ORS studentships currently available are a welcome means of attracting overseas students. Experience in HEIs suggests that individual studentships generate student intake beyond the number of successful candidates, **there is therefore reason to believe that an increase in the number of ORS studentships available would further increase the numbers of high fee-paying students applying to research in UK universities.**

12. Despite the buoyant demand from outside the UK, it remains difficult to obtain any reliable information about the destinations of non-UK researchers both within and outside the UK. Respondents to the survey were broadly confident that UK researchers were in demand elsewhere in the world. Work is already being and has been done by the Council of University Deans of Arts and Humanities (CUDAH) on destinations of doctoral researchers. But in an increasingly globalized academic market specific research is needed into the destinations - academic and other - of holders of UK doctorates, not just in the arts and humanities but more generally. This has a bearing on the question of long-term demand. Particularly important is the question of the number of non-UK doctoral students entering academic posts in the UK. The openness of the British academic labour market is both culturally important and a major source of intellectual strength; the British system has benefited from the non-dynamic nature of other HE cultures. There may however be questions of long-term sustainability in some subject areas especially dependent on non-UK recruitment.

3. The purpose of doctoral study

13. There is broad agreement in the sector that the key qualities of the completed arts/humanities doctoral researcher should be a capacity for original and autonomous thinking, an ability to command a field of knowledge, research skills (the ability to frame and explore research questions, the ability to frame and test a hypothesis and to manage a project), an understanding of the appropriate research methods, the ability to produce a cogent argument and conversely to engage in critical thinking, and an ability to communicate at a high level.

14. During the last three decades the doctorate has emerged as a crucial entrance qualification to the Academy to a degree which was not true a generation ago. A key purpose of doctoral research is and must be to develop the next generation of researchers and teachers in higher education. However, this has never been its sole purpose. There have always been researchers who elected to use their research skills in a wide range of public and private sector roles. And there has always been a significant demand for places from individuals primarily interested in the intellectual challenge of doctoral research. The dramatic increase in the number of doctoral completions, though it does not change the essential picture, places increased emphasis on the wider roles of arts and humanities research, since the sector could never absorb more than a small proportion of completed doctorates.
15. The view of the disciplines nationally, reflected both in the consultative seminars and in the online survey, indicates a wide acceptance across the arts and humanities disciplines of the principle that doctoral study has not one but two aims: the production of high-quality research and the training of a highly qualified researcher. Colleagues nationally are equally firm in the view that a doctorate in the arts and humanities is a valuable preparation not only for a career in the Academy but also for a wide range of research-related and management jobs in the public and private sectors. Researchers from the subject domain enter a broad range of professions outside the academy, including public administration, corporate management, library and museum work, publishing and marketing. The increased focus on research training in HEIs, strongly supported by AHRC initiatives, is an important underpinning for this larger role.
16. Several conclusions follow from the recognition of the wider importance of research in the arts and humanities:
- transferable skills developed by doctoral research must be made explicit both to researchers and to potential employers. At present it seems that both researchers and disciplines undersell themselves.
 - opportunity must be offered within doctoral research to develop skills which will further enhance the career prospects of the arts and humanities doctoral researcher. The current flexible and needs-based approach by AHRC and the institutions offers the best way of achieving this.
 - institutions need to have developed careers guidance structures for those undertaking doctoral research. It seems reasonable that AHRC should require reassurance on these issues in return for funding for doctoral research training.

4. The funding of doctoral research

4.1 Structure

17. Both in the seminars and in the online survey, representatives of the arts and humanities disciplines were firmly of the view that doctoral research must be preceded by a period of prior training, generally through a taught postgraduate programme. This represents a major sea change in public opinion in the arts and humanities. Only a decade ago it was the norm for students to proceed straight from a BA to research, and the currently dominant 1 + 3(+) structure of postgraduate study is ultimately the result of the imposition of this model by

AHRB specifically for students in receipt of its funds. Its now general acceptance by the sector is a validation of the policy.

18. There is also a general agreement across the arts and humanities that it would not be appropriate to roll up the funds for postgraduate training and postgraduate research into a single period of funding based on the model of the ESRC 1 + 3 awards. This view receives support from AHRC statistics, which show that only 50% of students who succeed in obtaining AHRC funding for a Master's level programme are subsequently successful in the competition for funding for doctoral research. This strongly suggests that it would not be beneficial either to the Research Council or to applicants to restrict postgraduate funding to an inflexible unitary model. Students may wish to leave their funded studies after Master's level for a range of valid intellectual and career reasons. **Therefore the group recommends that the current model of separate funding for Master's level and doctoral study should stand.**
19. Responses from the sector are more mixed on the ideal time balance between the Research Preparation Master's (RPM) and the doctorate. Currently AHRC operates with a maximum of one year for full-time RPM programmes with a handful of exceptions for specific skills-based practical programmes. The online survey indicates that there is a broad preference (assuming the current maximum duration of funding) for 1 + 3, that is, for a one year RPM. There is however some support within the creative and performing arts, and also philosophy for (again assuming the current maximum duration of funding) a 2 + 2 structure, that is for a two-year RPM. This view emerged still more firmly in the consultation seminars. If AHRC is to serve the sector as well in the future as it has in the past, flexibility with efficiency has to be the guiding principle. **AHRC should explore the possibility of funding longer RPM programmes where a case can be made for subject need.** The risk that this will generate a proliferation of two-year programmes where one year would suffice is negligible, since AHRC is a minority funder at postgraduate level and most arts and humanities doctoral researchers are either self- or institutionally-funded.
20. Both the consultative seminars and the survey suggest that there is widespread concern that (apart from the targeted Professional Preparation Master's Scheme) the AHRC no longer funds Master's level study not leading to doctoral research. Though it can be argued that there is a funding gap for students undertaking such programmes, **the working group does not see it as the AHRC's function to provide such support and believes that the current policy of adjusting the balance between Master's and doctoral awards and of using its Master's awards to support preparation for doctoral research should continue.** The AHRC position on Master's funding does not constitute a comment on the quality of or need for other sorts of Master's degrees offered by institutions. It reflects its role as a research council.

4.2 Duration

21. The current approach to funding assumes a four-year cycle from completion of BA to doctorate, including one year of PGT. There is however widespread recognition that a doctorate can only rarely be completed within three years. For example, the 2002 Roberts' Review, *Set for Success* recommends that "...the Government and the Research Councils should fund their present

numbers of PhD students on the basis that full-time students need funding for an average of three and a half years". To comply fully with this element of the Roberts report would lead to a reduction of 14% in the number of awards (if research is funded for 3.5 years) or 25% (if research is funded for 4 years) at current budget levels. A very large number of high quality fundable doctoral projects are already unsupported. If AHRC were currently funding projects and candidates of questionable quality, the case for a smaller number of awards would be unanswerable. There is no evidence that funding a smaller number of awards would improve the quality of doctoral research in the arts and humanities, while it would certainly increase individual hardship across the domain. The significant improvement in completion rates in the arts and humanities in the recent past indicates that the quality of research project management is high and that staff, students and HEIs in general function effectively within the present regime. The tenor of discussion in the consultative seminars suggested that the sector would be against a universal increase in funding at the cost of making fewer awards; comments made by respondents to the online survey are consistent with the view which emerged from the seminars. **The working group considers that three years should therefore remain the standard doctoral award duration.**

22. There is, however, scope for a targeted increase in funding. It has also been suggested that extended funding may be appropriate for specific projects which require additional skills acquisition beyond those generic to postgraduate research or to the relevant discipline. The working group agrees that there is strategic value in funding an additional period for the development of specialist skills (for instance, to counter the decline in the research in non-anglophone history). Skills which might be covered include specialist language acquisition directly necessary for the field in question, extensive field work for historical and other research in non-anglophone regions, technical skills (such as training in new technologies in areas of the creative and performing arts or scientific expertise such as cognitive psychology). It would be necessary to establish criteria for the allocation of the additional funding and a reporting process to establish that the relevant skills had been acquired. There would also be a cost relating to the actual provision of the research training. Both skills and costs would have to be identified by the institution at the application stage. **The group recommends that AHRC fund an additional period (up to a year) on the basis of proven research need and develop appropriate mechanisms.**

23. One key function of doctoral research is to renew the academic profession. Doctoral researchers are the source from which the next generation of scholars is developed. Postdoctoral fellowships have an important role to play in the career development of researchers and future academics. In an ideal world all researchers would have the opportunity to mature their ideas further by intermitting a research fellowship between PhD and first teaching job. That will not happen. But there is at present a significant gap in the funding for higher research after the doctorate, filled to a small extent by Oxbridge Junior Research Fellowships, institutional research fellowships and British Academy postdoctoral research fellowships. To fill this gap adequately would require enormous resource. **But the AHRC should actively seek additional funding from OST in order to enhance the national provision for postdoctoral fellowships in the arts and humanities in order to enhance the opportunities for career development.** These posts might be fully funded by

AHRC. Alternatively a partnership model with institutions would permit more of the next generation to benefit from such a scheme.

24. The working group also considered the question of the level of funding for EU applicants. At present these qualify for fees only awards where criteria for residency are not met. There is no European perspective on this issue. Government and (where appropriate) institutional policy across Europe varies widely in the readiness to fund research students from other member states. Within the UK, Research Councils differ in their views on the appropriate level of support for EU students, largely on the relationship between supply and demand for research places in the relevant disciplines. The case for retaining the current approach by the AHRC is at present unanswerable. To fund EU nationals at the same level as UK applicants would be to reduce the resource available to fund UK applicants. On current application figures, it would lead to 15-20% fewer awards to UK domiciled researchers in a context in which only 20% of UK applicants (in turn a minority of UK domiciled researchers) succeed in obtaining funding. The reduction would be greater still if (as can reasonably be anticipated) the availability of full studentships increased the volume of EU applications. The figures for EU demand for the UK arts and humanities doctorate do not suggest that there is any need to increase the level of opportunity and there is no evidence that EU students feel unfairly treated. **The group considers that the current funding policy for EU applicants should remain unchanged.**

4.3 Allocation of Awards

25. The current AHRC approach to doctoral funding (except for studentships attached to research grant projects and collaborative doctorates) is based on competition at national level evaluated by subject specialist panels. Over 70 per cent of the awards made over the last three years were shared between 20 institutions, with Cambridge and Oxford accounting for over 25 per cent and London-based institutions for over 20 per cent. Only 31 of the 139 institutions which submitted doctoral applications received over one per cent of the number of awards made.
26. Where so many of the awards are concentrated in a few institutions, unsurprisingly the desire is sometimes expressed (especially by potential beneficiaries) for the introduction of a quota system as practised by other research councils. Possible advantages of this would be increased efficiency at AHRC level (by reducing administrative and academic costs) and in institutions with large numbers of applications (though it should also be noted that though institutional administrative costs are high, so too are the rewards at over £30,000 per student).
27. The group was not however convinced that quotas would bring significant efficiency gains for AHRC and the sector more generally. Though the majority of awards go to few institutions, even within Oxbridge and London success rates are very uneven across the disciplines. Quota allocations are therefore likely to be subject specific and administratively complex at AHRC level. They are also far easier to quantify at the top end than lower down, where the numbers of awards are smaller. The problem is made worse by the diversity of the AHRC subject domain. ESRC quota awards are currently spread over 129 departments in 45 institutions. In contrast AHRC awards are spread over 470 departments in 94 institutions. The need to demonstrate transparency and fairness would also

impose administrative burdens on institutions receiving quota allocations which counteract the efficiency gains. There would also be a loss in flexibility.

28. These are not the only arguments for the current system. Additional points to note are:

- Open competition maintains dynamism and flexibility by preventing a largely historical allocation from becoming self-perpetuating. This is an important consideration in the light of AHRC statistics, which show that institutional and departmental success rates, even for departments with a successful track record in the competition, vary dramatically - by a factor of up to 50 per cent year on year. Quotas reduce the capacity to respond flexibly to year on year variation according to the quality of the field.
- The nationally constituted panels operate as a quality control mechanism. Where institutions allocate independently, the advantage will lie with candidates already known to the institution. This is already visible in institutional rankings of postgraduate students.

29. Though other Research Councils operate quota allocations, this is not in itself an argument for the AHRC to do the same, since postgraduate support occupies a unique role within its funding portfolio. Feedback from the sector indicates widespread support for the current system and general hostility to the introduction of quotas. Change to a system which commends widespread approval for uncertain returns at risk of reduced credibility with the sector would be unwise.

30. A compromise structure is possible which avoids the ossification of a straight quota system: a combination of quota with open competition along the lines of the ESRC system. This would allow the allocation process to take account of the fluctuations in current success rates. The problem is that the operation of a partially open competition is likely to prove in itself administratively complex in the context of the distribution of AHRC applications and awards by departments (see above). There is also the danger of encouraging game-playing by making it advantageous for departments to allocate their quota and hold back their best students for the open competition.

31. Another possibility identified by the group was the introduction of limits on the number of postgraduate applications which an institution might make to the AHRC. This would be simpler to operate than quotas, though it might create pressures within institutions. Again, however, quantification would be much easier with the small group of institutions which account for the majority of awards than for institutions with smaller numbers of studentships.

32. **On balance, the working group concludes that the case for change to the allocation system is not made and the current competitive system should be retained.**

4.4 Project studentships

33. Currently there is a cohort of postgraduate students funded from the research grant arm of the AHRC operation through projects. The number of students attached to identified projects will grow, since some of the activity funded through strategic initiatives must for good academic and strategic reasons be at

doctoral level. At present there is little dialogue within the AHRC between the postgraduate and research arms on issues such as selection, monitoring and completion rates. The first cohort of project based students will complete in the near future, which provides an opportunity for AHRC to review the operation of the project studentships in order to integrate more fully the two areas of activity.

34. At present project based research students are assigned to the project for the duration of their doctoral research. For many students and PIs this will remain the most appropriate structure. But there is also scope for a more flexible relationship between students and projects, for instance where a student can amass and share data or develop necessary skills through a short secondment or where the research project itself lasts for a shorter period than the studentship. **The AHRC should explore with the sector opportunities for more diverse, and perhaps more extensive, student attachments to projects.**

4.5 Strategic allocation

35. Until recently the allocation of awards to subject areas by the AHRC was wholly responsive and despite recent strategic initiatives this remains the dominant pattern. AHRC has gone some way toward aligning its doctoral awards with the strategic needs of higher education by moving from a purely demand-led mechanism for allocating awards to its postgraduate panels to one which reflects in part the potential of the academic community to absorb the researchers. In addition, until recently a separate competition existed for doctorates in the creative and performing arts. For the 2004 competition the AHRC for the first time also introduced a limited scheme of ring-fenced doctorates intended to support newly emerging disciplines and disciplines perceived to be at risk.
36. Respondents to the online survey were strongly of the view that the AHRC should not tie its awards too narrowly to anticipated future demand from HE. **The working group supports this view.** Even with much better management information than is currently available, attempts to micro-manage the future population of the sector are likely to create distortions and waste and to militate against the level of quality guaranteed by open competition. However, respondents were generally supportive of the idea of proactive intervention by AHRC. In its new role as a Research Council AHRC has a responsibility to keep under review the needs, direction and viability of individual subjects within its domain, a responsibility acknowledged by AHRC in its newly created cycle of subject reviews. This relates both to new fields of research and to areas perceived to be at risk.
37. However, policy in this area needs considerable refinement. Participants in the seminars were critical of the recent ring-fencing initiative, especially on the issue of definition of research area. The problem is larger, however. Disciplines evolve and boundaries between disciplines in the arts and humanities are more fluid and porous than in the past. Fields seeming to disappear may simply be changing focus. Attempts to retain historical levels of activity in and balance between disciplines will be at best ineffectual and at worst detrimental, if intervention is not based on a clear understanding of the current nature and needs and recent evolution of specific fields. Policy refinement must be based on a close and continuing dialogue with the sector on principles for allocation,

definition, mechanisms for identification, nature and scale of intervention. Initiatives need not be large scale. Here as elsewhere flexibility is the key. An important caveat must be the sustainability of the selected area. There is little point in generating doctorates if there is no career trajectory. **The group recommends that, in consultation with the sector, AHRC reviews its policy for discipline-targeted awards with a view to achieving a more flexible and needs-based outcome in this area.**

5. Developments in doctoral study

5.1 Practice-led doctorates in the creative and performing arts

38. The development of practice-led doctorates¹ in the creative and performing arts over recent years has generated much new and innovative thinking about the nature of doctoral study. Responses to the survey reflect statistics demonstrating the scale and pace of growth in this area, indicating that there are now a large number of such doctoral programmes on offer in a broad range of subject areas, including fine art, design, the performing arts, creative writing and music. Many of these explore the potential for interdisciplinary and collaborative work. Many researchers in these fields of study are increasingly incorporating the use of cutting-edge technologies into their work and testing new artistic approaches within culturally based partnerships, while in the performing arts there are examples of doctoral students producing collaborative creative practice as the basis for distinct individual doctoral research.
39. Though some of the features of research in these fields are shared by other arts and humanities disciplines, broadly speaking the distinguishing feature of doctorates in these areas are the central roles played by practice as research methodology and by creative work within research outcomes. There have been strides made towards generating consensus on core matters of principle relating to process and outcomes. Practice led approaches to research remain an area of active debate in which progress is at different stages across different disciplines, in particular in subject areas, such as creative writing, where there is currently perhaps less consensus than in other practice-led areas. It is also important to stress that there is a wide spectrum of activity and a range of diverse approaches to practice-led research across different subject areas. Though there is much to be gained from interdisciplinary discussion and the sharing of good practice, each of the disciplines engaged with practice-led research has distinct requirements and viewpoints.
40. The assessment of practice-led PhDs and the role of a written element alongside the submission of creative practice (including performances, creative writing, visual art works and projects, music) is one area which would benefit from further discussion and investigation. Most participants in the seminars and respondents to the survey, including those from the creative and performing arts, agreed that a written component providing an articulation of the research process and demonstrating critical reflection should be a key element of the doctorate. Requirements relating to the length of the written element and provision for the assessment of practical research do however vary across different institutions. Concerns remain that the balance between the written

¹ We acknowledge that there is still debate surrounding the terminology with which to describe doctorates that include artistic output as an essential part of the research. For the purposes of this report the term “practice-led” will be used in accordance with current AHRC policy.

component and the practice-led research is not always appropriate or fit for purpose.

41. Research training is also an area in which there may still be a bigger gap in at least some areas of the creative and performing arts than elsewhere. The AHRC's new collaborative training awards scheme is an important step towards encouraging the development of good research training practice in this area. Eleven of the twenty-five subject-based awards made in 2004 went to the establishment of collaborations in practice-led areas, including programmes providing research training in art and design, creative writing and music. A national-scale bid to establish an interdisciplinary research training initiative for doctoral students in the field of performance theory and practice, led by the Performance and Live Art Research Unit at Nottingham Trent University, also gained an award. **The group considers that there is the scope for further work to be done in developing models and sharing good practice, across both institutions and different disciplines.**
42. The role of the AHRC in any future discussion about the nature of research at doctoral level in the creative and performing arts should not be prescriptive or regulatory. There is useful work which could be done by the AHRC in enabling the process and creating a forum for firmer agreement, by generating and assisting debate. Debate is also an essential part of the process by which the arts and humanities ensures that its research culture is relevant to its time. Survey responses indicate that the sector is strongly in favour of the AHRC taking on such a role. While the AHRC should not dictate what is required in a practice-led doctorate, it is in a unique position to look into current provision and to facilitate discussion.

The group recommends that the AHRC should make funding available for a series of interdisciplinary workshops in order to stimulate further debate, to share good practice and to help evolve models for research at doctoral level in the creative and performing arts.

5.2. Other initiatives

43. Research studentships must be seen in the context of larger changes in arts and humanities research. Arts and humanities researchers have always functioned within a national and international environment founded on collaborations of different sorts. The availability of funding for large research project grants from the AHRC and other bodies has expanded the opportunities for structured collaboration in which autonomous research also contributes toward a larger collective project. Project-based research studentships, in which individual student projects are devised specifically to contribute toward the larger project (long familiar in the natural and social sciences) are part of that larger picture. These developments in turn must be seen as part of the dynamic and changing landscape of arts and humanities doctoral research. The responses to the survey demonstrate that the sector is experimenting with different PhD structures, with a diverse range of awards already in existence and a keen interest in changing and expanding 'traditional' doctoral pathways underpinning the comments of a majority of respondents.
44. Some models of doctoral study currently in development within the sector include:

- *Collaborative doctorates*, some involving more than one HEI and others involving a HEI and another partner. The latter form of collaboration has been encouraged by the recent introduction of the AHRC's Collaborative Doctoral Awards scheme, which aims to develop collaboration between HEI departments and non-academic organisations.

Applications submitted in the first round of the scheme suggested that there are already many imaginative and exciting projects taking place within the sector. Awards were made to HEIs collaborating with a diverse range of partners, including: museums and galleries; libraries and archives; heritage organisations; archaeological trusts; theatres and other performance-based companies; commercial businesses; and public sector organisations (such as an NHS trust). Such doctoral programmes are likely to play an increasing role as the potential for collaboration of this sort across all areas of the subject domain is explored further.

- *Doctorates with distance learning elements*. Developments in communications technology have already had a major impact on the way in which research student supervision is conducted. But some institutions have in place regulations and mechanisms for distance supervision, for example, the Modular PhD in Applied Linguistics at the University of Birmingham. Distance learning has much to offer, especially for overseas-based students for whom a move to the UK is impossible, but it brings its own demands; since this area of activity is likely to grow, there is a need for the sharing of experience and good practice.
- *The four-year New Route PhD*. First introduced in September 2003 in 34 universities across the UK, across a range of subject areas, the New Route PhD includes a significant taught element and a range of professional skills, such as media related skills, business methods and enterprise skills, intellectual property rights, and technology transfer.

Responses to the online survey illustrated a wide range of attitudes to, and experiences of, the New Route PhD. Some institutions indicated that they had already been introduced successfully, with the examples cited suggesting that these are predominantly in the area of languages and linguistics. Others were investigating the possibility of introducing the New Route PhD in the near future. Some responses were less favourable, with a number of institutions indicating that they had introduced New Route PhD programmes but that these had not attracted much interest from students.

Other respondents noted that current funding structures made it difficult to introduce the four-year New Route PhD. As discussed above (para. 18) there is general acceptance in the sector, underpinned by compelling statistical evidence, that it is not appropriate to provide funding in four year blocks with no output until the end of this period. To fund the New Route PhD from start to finish would conflict with this principle. It is important to have separate exit points after one or two years in order to evaluate whether the student is adequately prepared to undertake doctoral work as an independent researcher. Acceptance of this principle would involve some restructuring of New Route PhDs. Provided that this requirement is met, the disaggregated components of the New Route PhD should be eligible for funding through the existing AHRC postgraduate programmes

- *Professional doctorates* are defined in the 2002 report published by the UK Council for Graduate Education as, “a programme of advanced study and research which, while satisfying the University criteria for the award of a doctorate, is designed to meet the specific needs of a professional group external to the university, and which develops the capability of individuals to work within a professional context.”

Responses to the survey indicated that although professional doctorates are offered in other subject areas within their institutions, the majority had no immediate plans to introduce them within the arts and humanities. One notable exception was in the area of theology, with one institution planning to introduce a professional doctorate in Practical Theology, aimed at a constituency including ministers of religion, managers and chaplains in health care, with an emphasis on reflective practice and the development of research-led expertise in the field. Other areas in which there may be potential for the introduction of such doctorates include librarianship and information sciences, museum studies, conservation and the creative and performing arts.

45. In addition to different models of study, there is scope for the further development of alternative modes of assessment. At present, except for PhD by publication, the mode of assessment for doctoral research in the arts and humanities is the dissertation of 75,000 to 100,000 words. Exceptions are mainly confined to the practice-led doctorates. Provided that the core requirements of the doctorate are met (i.e. that the research is an independent and original contribution to knowledge in the field, that it is properly grounded in a knowledge of prior research, that it articulates clear research questions and identifies and utilizes appropriate research methods), there is room for a range of assessment modes in humanities as well as arts disciplines, such as accreditation or the PhD by portfolio.
46. It is important that new developments potentially beneficial to students and HEIs are encouraged. The group sees two roles for the AHRC in nurturing new initiatives and responding to the dynamism and increasing diversity of doctoral research in the arts and humanities:
 - the first is in the investigation of current options in delivery and assessment and the development of best practice. **The group recommends that the AHRC supports this process of debate and exchange through a series of cross-disciplinary seminars. In particular the group recommends that the AHRC should facilitate discussion within the sector on the scope for a more diverse range of assessment models designed to reward more effectively the complex range of skills which the production of a PhD thesis entails.**
 - the second role is in the area of funding. It is important that funding mechanisms are as made as flexible as possible in order to accommodate new models of doctoral study. **For instance, there is a case for extending to doctoral study the provision recently introduced at Master’s level for qualification by distance learning; this might be done initially through a limited pilot scheme.** The current funding of postgraduate students within the responsive mode competition rests on the assumption of a single institutional base. Though this is likely to remain the dominant mode of

postgraduate research in the arts and humanities, the introduction of the AHRC's Collaborative Doctoral Awards scheme is likely to stimulate further developments in collaborative provision. **Elements of the AHRC's Collaborative Doctoral Awards scheme (which has established the essential structures, procedures and principles needed as the basis for shared provision) could reasonably be extended to the responsive mode competition to support individual arrangements on the basis of fitness for purpose.** This would largely be a matter of clarifying the guidance given to applicants and institutions.

6. Bologna and beyond

47. The higher education market is now globalized at all levels. The issue of internationalization is however more than a matter of competition for students, important as that is in intellectual and economic terms. It also relates to regulatory issues and more positively to new opportunities.
48. The Bologna process, which seeks to establish a European Higher Education Area by 2010 in which staff and students can move with ease and have fair recognition of their qualifications, incorporates not only undergraduate but also postgraduate taught and research programmes.
49. Bologna has attracted considerable anxiety in UK higher education, reflected in both the seminars and the online survey. There was particular concern that the comparison with Master's level qualifications across Europe, where a two year period of study is more prevalent, would result in the loss of the UK one year Master's qualification. The survey results indicated a general opposition within the sector to re-structuring specifically intended to meet Bologna requirements, which in addition to the obvious funding implications, would have a detrimental impact on the attractiveness of postgraduate study in the UK to overseas students. However, outcomes so far suggest that there is nothing emerging from the process which would necessitate a re-structuring of postgraduate study in the UK. This is especially the case given the official UK position that any European debate regarding duration and structure both at Master's level and doctoral level should be based around academic concerns and be driven by questions of quality and outcomes rather than quantity.
50. The group supports the UK position. It is however unfortunate that the process has been seen as a threat rather than an opportunity. Properly implemented the Bologna process has the potential to act as a genuine tool for mobility between countries rather than merely a benchmarking exercise. Any measures which improve the opportunities for mobility are to be welcomed, provided that these do not come at the expense of flexibility within any frameworks which are developed.
51. Feedback gathered at the seminars and through the online survey suggests broad agreement that increased international collaboration in the delivery of doctoral programmes is to be welcomed, but also that it presents many challenges. Particular areas of concern were: the administrative difficulty of setting up such programmes; the potential problems created by split supervision; mechanisms for quality assurance; and the question of ownership of outcomes. Despite these reservations, greater internationalism was identified as one of the key issues for the UK doctorate in the arts and humanities over

the next five or ten years, and there was general recognition of the cultural benefits of increased collaboration.

52. The group supports the development of programmes involving collaborations between HEIs in the UK and those in other countries and recommends that the AHRC should clarify its guidance to ensure that such collaborations are not impeded by the way in which funding is administered.

Appendix A

Membership of AHRC working group on doctoral group in the arts and humanities

Professor Christopher Carey (Chair)	University College London / Member of AHRC Postgraduate Committee	Professor of Greek
Dr Anne Douglas	The Robert Gordon University	Senior Research Fellow in Fine Art
Professor Eric Evans	Lancaster University / Member of AHRC Postgraduate Committee	Professor of Social History, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities
Professor Susan Hunston	The University of Birmingham	Professor of English Language and Deputy Head of Department, Chair of School of Humanities Postgraduate Programmes Group
Professor Mary Jacobus	University of Cambridge	Professor of English
Dr Michael Jubb (replaced for 2005 meetings by Yvonne Hawkins)	AHRC	Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Policy and Programmes
Professor Jo Labanyi	University of Southampton	Associate Dean (Research) for the Faculty of Law, Arts and Social Sciences
Professor Malcolm McCrae	The University of Warwick	Department of Biological Sciences and Dean of Graduate School
Dr Emma Wakelin (replaced for 2005 meetings by Alison Henry)	AHRC	Head of Postgraduate Programmes
Professor Martin White	University of Bristol	Provost of Institute for Advanced Studies and Professor of Theatre, Department of Drama: Theatre, Film, Television

Appendix B

Terms of Reference

A: Background

1. The AHRB's current policy regarding the funding allocated to doctoral study is that it, in common with the Research Councils, endorses the one year Master's plus three years doctorate model of postgraduate training, the benefits of which have been widely recognised. On this basis, the majority of the awards allocated through the AHRB's Doctoral Scheme go to applicants intending to follow a programme of study which follows this structure.
2. In 2002, the Board published a review of its Postgraduate programme and in this noted that there, "remained concerns about the nature and quality of the UK PhD" and that there had been a number of significant developments which the Board needed to consider and address. With this in mind, the recommendation of the review was that the Board should establish a working group to consider a range of issues, including the nature, scope and structure of doctoral study in the arts and humanities in the UK, taking into account models and developments both in other subject communities and in other countries, and noting the developments of the Bologna process.
3. The working group's review will be carried out in the context of the Board's strategic objectives for the postgraduate programme for the period 2004 to 2009:
 - To provide awards to enable students of the highest quality to pursue and to bring to completion programmes of doctoral research that will make significant contributions to the advancement of knowledge and understanding
 - To provide awards to enable students to pursue high-quality Master's courses that will prepare them either for doctoral research across the key areas of the arts and humanities, or for professional work and practice
 - To sustain and promote the provision to students of high-quality scholarly support for their studies, and appropriate training in research methods and key skills; and thereby to enable them both to complete their doctoral projects and also to develop as highly-knowledgeable and skilled researchers ready to progress into careers in higher education and other employment and vocations
 - To promote and support measures to enhance the standing of postgraduate study in the arts and humanities, and the reputation of UK postgraduate degrees
 - To develop better understandings of the relationships between postgraduate study and subsequent employment in the higher education sector and beyond; to liaise with employers so that we are better-informed about their views and requirements; and to develop with employers new kinds of provision to enhance the flow of knowledge, ideas and people between sectors, to their mutual benefit

B: Terms of Reference

4. Against this backdrop, it is proposed that the AHRB should undertake and publish a study reflecting on the UK doctorate in the arts and humanities, considering what the goals are of a doctorate in the arts and humanities, what the objectives and standing of the UK arts and humanities doctorate should be, and how the aims, demands and nature of the UK doctorate are changing.
5. Alongside this, the group is asked to develop a set of recommendations for the Board/Council on how the AHRC should respond to the findings detailed in the report.
6. Amongst other issues, the group is asked to give particular consideration to:
 - a. The balance between the two aims of doctoral study, to produce a high-quality thesis and a highly-qualified individual; and the place of broader key skills development
 - b. The appropriateness of the currently standard one year master's followed by a three year doctorate research route in the arts and humanities
 - c. The appropriateness of other structures (including the 2 + 2 route, and the structures of the doctorate in other countries)
 - d. Practice-led doctorates in the creative and performing arts (with particular reference to the route to PhD, the appropriateness of existing structures and the nature of output)
 - e. The establishment of New Route PhD programmes lasting four years
 - f. The implications of the Roberts Review and its implementation
 - g. The growth of professional doctorates
 - h. The implications of the Bologna process
 - i. The issue of the European doctorate
 - j. The number of doctoral students it is appropriate for the AHRB to support in order to meet the UK's current and future needs

Appendix C

Information considered alongside results of consultation

Reports

- Improving Standards in Postgraduate Research Degree Programmes (HEFCE 2003)
- SET for Success: The supply of people with science, technology, engineering and mathematics skills (Sir Gareth Roberts, 2002)
- What do PhDs Do? (UK Grad 2004)
- Doctoral Futures – Career Destinations of Arts and Humanities Students (CUDAH 2002)
- Academic Staff: Trends and Projections (HEFCE 2002)
- Practice Based Doctorates in the Creative and Performing Arts and Design (UKCGE 2001)
- Research Training in the Creative and Performing Arts and Design (UKCGE 1997)
- Professional Doctorates (UKCGE 2002)
- Doctor! Doctor! Doctoral Studies in twenty-first century Britain (English Association 2001)
- Postgraduate Education in the United Kingdom (HEPI 2004)
- PhD Research Degrees: Entry and Completion (HEFCE 2005)
- The International Postgraduate: Challenges to British Higher Education (UKCGE 1999)

Other Information

- HESA statistics on doctoral and Master's level population and completions 1994-2003
- OECD statistics on international doctoral completions 1998-2001
- Information on the Bologna process provided by the Europe Unit of Universities UK
- AHRC statistics on applications, awards and submission rates