UK Council for Graduate Education

RESEARCH TRAINING FOR HUMANITIES POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

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FOREWARD

The UK Council for Graduate Education was established in 1994 to promote the interests of graduate education in all disciplines in higher education institutions in the UK. The Council promotes a series of activities, workshops, conferences, and seminars to this end. The Council also commissions reports on specific topics. Research Training for Humanities Postgraduate Students is the eighth in this series of reports.

The current report is the result of work undertaken by a group convened by Professor Geoffrey Crossick, Pro-Vice-Chancellor at the University of Essex. The group has had the opportunity of discussing its ideas as they evolved with the Council of Deans of Arts and Humanities. Its staff and student focus was informed by a survey to which 68 Institutions responded. The Council is very grateful to all of those involved for giving their time to the project and to the group in preparing this report for publication.

The report raises important challenges for those involved in research training, not least in its use of the terminology *preparation* for research and *development* in and during research. The views expressed in the report are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the UK Council. We can though be confident that the group's approach and the issues raised will contribute positively to the discussions about research training and will greatly assist institutions as they grapple with the problems of running training programmes in the humanities.

Professor H Green

December 1999 Chair,

UK Council for Graduate Education

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We could not have carried out this work without the active support of all those who responded to the survey - and the very considerable rate of replies and the care with which they had been completed reassured us that the subject was indeed one which was of concern to institutions. We are particularly grateful to the staff and students at the three anonymous institutions at which case studies were carried out. Our thanks go to Wendy Patterson of Nottingham Trent University for her committed and valuable work as researcher on both the survey and the follow-up case studies. Professor Michael Worton, at that time Chair of the Council of Deans of Arts and Humanities, gave us the opportunity to present the Working Group's plans and early thoughts to meetings of CUDAH. Finally, our thanks to Rosemary Cox of the University of Essex, for the very efficient secretarial support which she provided for the Working Group.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. This Report contains the findings and recommendations of the Working Group established in 1998 by the UK Council for Graduate Education to explore the issue of research training for postgraduate students in the humanities. The Working Group was convened by Professor Geoffrey Crossick, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Development) at the University of Essex. The other members of the Working Group were Dr Isis Brook, University of Lancaster; Professor Jill Forbes, University of Bristol and now Queen Mary & Westfield College; Professor Christopher Green, Courtauld Institute of Art; Professor Sandra Harris, Nottingham Trent University; Professor Richard Johnson, Nottingham Trent University; Dr Michael Jubb, Director of Programmes, Arts and Humanities Research Board; Professor Jo Labanyi, Birkbeck College; Professor Kate McLuskie, University of Southampton; and Dr Paul Slack, Principal of Linacre College, Oxford. The Working Group met for a series of half-day meetings over the course of a year, carried out a survey of current practice and opinion with respect to the training of humanities postgraduate students, carried out closer case studies of a small number of institutions, and held group discussions with research students.

1.2. The Working Group decided at an early stage to work with a fairly inclusive sense of the humanities rather than struggling to establish a rigorous definition. We therefore began pragmatically with those disciplines and subject areas that lie within the responsibilities of the Arts & Humanities Research Board (AHRB). These include English Language and Literature, Cultural and Media Studies, Modern Languages and Literatures, Linguistics, History of Art and Architecture, History, Classics, Philosophy, Religious Studies, and Law. Although there will be aspects of Archaeology which are very similar to other humanities disciplines, we recognised that the highly specialist and often scientific needs of many research students in the discipline could not be addressed by the Working Group. We also decided to exclude from our consideration the performing and creative arts, on the grounds of the very different nature of research in those subjects, the fact that doctoral study in these areas remains relatively limited, and because the UK Council for Graduate Education had partially addressed the issue in a report (practice-based doctorates in these subjects which was published in 1997[1]. However, the non-performing aspects of research in areas such as drama and music and film fit closely with other humanities disciplines and are therefore encompassed by our report. We realise that humanities subjects that were not represented on the Working Group, such as Theology and Law, might well have partially different approaches. There was, however a good deal of awareness on the Working Group of the difference amongst the disciplines that were represented. The humanities are not an undifferentiated block, but a set of disciplines which share many characteristics yet which also diverge. We are nonetheless confident that the broad conclusions which we have drawn can shape the preparation and development of research students in all these disciplines, though fully appreciate that there will be points of difference and specialist needs that we have not covered.

1.3. The question of research training for postgraduate students in the humanities has moved onto the agenda of national and institutional academic discussion over the last year or so.[2] There are a number reasons for this. The newly-established Arts and Humanities Research Board, which has assumed responsibility for distributing government funding for postgraduate studentships in the areas which it covers, will need to address the issue of training in the near future. The political imperatives of being seen to deliver 'value for money', including the need to improve PhD[3] completion rates, are one

[1] UK Council for Graduate Education, *Practice-Based Doctorates in the Creative and Performing Arts and Design* (1997). The Working Group which produced this report was convened by Professor Christopher Frayling, Rector of the Royal College of Art.

[2] The UK Council for Graduate Education's report *Graduate Schools* in 1995 noted the considerable growth of training for research students in the preceding years, but it is instructive that none of the examples were drawn from the Humanities.

[3] The term PhD should be understood to embrace the DPhil degree and also, with appropriate adjustments to

reason for that, but so too is the concern of the AHRB to ensure that the research students which it funds are well prepared for the research which they undertake, that they are supported to produce high-quality theses, and that they are ready for future employment, academic or non-academic, when their theses are complete.[4]

The Quality Assurance Agency has published the section of its Code of Practice dealing with postgraduate research programmes,[5] and although this is cast in fairly general terms, institutions will need to address the issue of research training and support, and these will in the future be examined as part of QAA institutional audit and perhaps also academic review. If developments within national academic politics have placed research training firmly on the agenda for the humanities, institutions have themselves begun to address the issue in recognition of the needs of their postgraduate students. Irrespective of the outside pressure to improve thesis completion rates, institutions and departments have acknowledged the role of training and support in helping students to produce good theses, to do so efficiently, and to emerge ready for employment. We were encouraged by the range of activities to prepare and support research students which we found in institutions, and we were also encouraged by the very positive response from within institutions to the establishment of our Working Group. The question of research training in the humanities is very much on the agenda, and we hope that our analysis and recommendations will contribute to the development of policy in the area at both the institutional and national levels.

1.4. This report has been produced in the belief that it is the humanities community which best knows the demands of its disciplines, and that it is the humanities which must therefore take the lead in shaping these policies. We were aware that models of training had developed in other disciplines - closest at hand were those in the social sciences - which might not be suitable for the humanities, and which could nonetheless be used to shape the model required of our disciplines. Indeed, as our discussions proceeded, we came to realise that there were distinctive features of the humanities which rendered models imported from elsewhere inappropriate. Those distinctive features will be a continuing aspect of this report, but we would highlight at the outset the way in which a research project in the humanities undergoes a continuous process of redefinition, through the processes of reading and investigation, thinking and writing. This is of course not exclusive to the humanities, but it is one of their strongest and most distinctive features. The consequence over the years has been that in preparing students for research an approach has been used whose implicit and informal nature has contrasted with the more detailed consideration of research methodology that characterises social science training. Although we found much to agree with in the Postgraduate Training Guidelines issued by the Economic and Social Research Council, we were not persuaded that their main features were appropriate for the humanities: in particular the high level of prescription, the clear sequence in which training followed by research, and the expectation that common theoretical training courses would benefit all research students in a discipline.[6] Indeed, the ESRC's recent consultation on the future of its training guidelines raises the question of whether it might itself change the character of its expectations.

1.5. The Working Group sought to move beyond existing model of research training rather than to build its proposals in reaction to them. Although we found in our survey some excellent and imaginative practice in humanities departments and faculties, the humanities have no reason be complacent. A humanities model of research training

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take account of the different expectations, to MPhil degrees.

[4] The current AHRB guidelines (inherited from the Humanities Research Board) are limited with respect to research training programmes. See Humanities Research Board, *Guidelines on Support for Research Students in the Humanities*.

[5] Quality Assurance Agency, *Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality in Higher Education: Postgraduate Research Programmes* (1999). See Appendix A of this report for the sections most relevant to the area of our inquiry.

[6] See the section on 'Postgraduate Training Guidelines' in the Economic and Social Research Council document *ESRC Recognition of Research Training Courses and Programmes*.

exists, but it is implicit as the training itself, and relies heavily on the transfer knowledge and skills from supervisor to student through the supervision process. We would not wish to undermine the continuing importance of that relationship, which will always lie at the heart of most humanities postgraduate research, but the humanities disciplines have for too long assumed that research training was for others rather than for themselves. The Working Group also found itself less and less attracted to the term 'research training', although we recognise that its wider currency makes its use inevitable, and we shall for that reason continue to use it on occasions in this report. Practice and skills on the one hand, intellectual and critical reflection on the other, are components of integrative research process, with a successful thesis as one integrative outcome. The danger inherent in the language of 'training' and 'skills' is that it can lose sight of this integrative research process, by prioritising those things which can be easily specified, and by marginalizing those which are difficult and interesting.

1.6. The Working Group was set up by the UK Council for Graduate Education with a view to preparing a report for its members. Its recommendations are directed both at the institutions of higher education in which students study for research degrees, and at the Arts and Humanities Research Board. The Working Group's aim is to identify the major issues involved in research training for postgraduate students in the humanities, and to recommend an appropriate way for institutions and for the AHRB to approach the question. Our intention in the model which we outline, and in the recommendations which flow from it, is to provide institutions with an approach to research training that will shape their detailed policies. We suggest that the AHRB should make the adoption of this approach, and the principles which underlie it, a requirement for institutions which support research students funded by the Board. Detailed implementation in institutions will need to take into account the context set by their own distinct missions, academic structures, composition and size of research student body, and so on. However, even if we do not recommend a prescriptive model, it is in our view essential that institutions address a series of issues that begin with the admission of students, and continue through the preparation and support provided for research students, through to thesis completion, preparation for employment, and the enrichment of the lives of the researcher and of others.

1.7. The Working Group prepared this report conscious of the serious constraints on university resources as well as of the pressures on research students themselves. The issue of resources is considered in Paragraph 5.6 below. We are confident that our analysis and proposals are realistic.

2. CURRENT PROVISION AND OPINION

2.1. An essential part of our work was to survey the extent to which institutions are currently providing training for research students in the humanities, and to seek out the views of both staff and students. We did this in three ways.

2.2. First, we circulated a questionnaire to all the institutions represented on the Council of University Deans of Arts and Humanities (which despite its title includes among its members many representatives of non-university HEIs); and we received 82 responses, from 68 HEIs. The completed questionnaires provided information on the following issues: the nature, scope and relative emphasis placed on research training in the institution and its location (university-wide, faculty and/or department based, subject based, etc.); how institutions regarded Masters programmes as a preparation for doctoral research; the perceived strengths and limitations of current institutional training; views on the most and least essential components of research training; finance and the resourcing of research training; the identification of any features uniquely associated with humanities research. A full report of the results of the survey is available on the UK Council for Graduate Education's website.[7]

2.3. Secondly, individual members of the Working Group consulted groups of staff and students in their own institutions. Finally, we undertook detailed case studies at three further institutions, where a researcher spent a day in meetings with senior staff, postgraduate administrators, other research staff, supervisors, and research students in the humanities.

Group-Based Training Provision

2.4. Our survey and our consultations revealed a great deal of activity, but also a very wide diversity in the kinds of provision made for doctoral students in the humanities, and little consistency in modes of delivery. Collective provision for large groups and categories of students at department, faculty or institutional level has become increasingly common in recent years, to set alongside the support and training that is delivered one-to-one by supervisors and others. Such provision has added new dimensions to doctoral training programmes. But we found that it was rarely shaped to take account of individual needs, nor of the ways in which students develop during the course of their research. Crucially, we found little evidence that it was based on any assessment of the needs of individual students.

2.5. Our survey showed that training is organised in a wide range of ways, with the majority being delivered at faculty or department level, or by a combination of the two. Approximately one-fifth of HEIs organise their group-based training by subject or discipline. The survey indicated that only a small minority currently organise postgraduate research training centrally at institutional level; but there are indications that a number of HEIs that do not organise their provision in this way at present are planning to do so in the future.

2.6. The responses to the survey indicate the seriousness with which institutional managers in particular are now treating the provision of research training, although the responses are not easy to interpret in all cases since it appears that a number of institutions did not clearly distinguish between research training elements in Masters programmes and specific provision for doctoral students. As we indicate later in our Report, we believe there is a critical distinction to make between the needs of Masters and doctoral students.

2.7. Nevertheless, our survey suggests that in most HEIs group-based training provision is compulsory for all doctoral students, with only just over one-fifth of the survey returns

[7] www.ukcge.ac.uk

describing training courses as optional. This suggests that the great majority of research students are now required to attend formal research training courses, especially during their first year. We recognise, of course, that the responses to our survey may overstate the position, since we were most likely to receive responses from institutions where provision is highly organised. Some provision takes the form of short induction courses that may last for no more than a few days in the first term. In other cases it consists of courses which meet at least once a week for up to a year. Typically, such courses take 2-3 hours per week, with fewer than 10 per cent taking more than 3 hours. Overall, there is great diversity among institutions in what is offered to - and expected of - students, ranging from attendance at a one-day induction course to a demand on 80 per cent of their time in the first year.

2.8. In terms of content, almost all the formal courses cover practical research and study skills, such as project definition and planning; work scheduling and time management; IT skills; and bibliography. The large majority of courses also provide training that is specific to individual subjects and disciplines, including conceptual and methodological issues; and training related to epistemological issues such as the nature of evidence and of argument, and theoretical issues related to them. Just over half the courses cover ethical and political issues relating to how evidence is obtained, the relationship between researcher and subjects, and political and social contexts including matters such as gender, class and ethnicity. Just over a third of the courses explicitly cover employment-related and transferable skills, including teaching skills. Overall, the survey shows a pattern of provision that attempts, in various ways, to cover abroad range of topics and issues. But again, the returns do not make clear how or why certain topics and issues were covered through formal research training courses in some cases but not in others.

The Role of the Supervisor

2.9. The survey showed that group-based provision is seen as complementary to the role of the supervisor, and this was strongly backed up by the other evidence that we gained. Most respondents to the survey, along with the other staff whom we consulted, indicated that, particularly with regard to training in subject-specific matters, and epistemological, ethical and political issues, the supervisor shared responsibility with those who provided group-based courses. There is thus a widespread consensus that supervisors must take responsibility for all aspects of the training of their students, but not sole responsibility for providing it: co-operation between supervisors and other colleagues is the preferred arrangement. Both students and their supervisors tend to be sceptical, however, of the value of institution-wide courses and the extent to which they can meet the needs of individual students working on specific humanities projects.

Assessment and Accreditation

2.10. No clear pattern emerged from the survey or from our other evidence with regard to assessment or accreditation. Responses the to survey showed that half the group-based courses were formally assessed, although other comments suggested that in the majority of cases, the assessment related to the research training components of Masters courses, and that very few training courses delivered specifically to doctoral students are formally assessed. Similarly, very few courses or programmes are accredited by an external body; and it appears that accreditation at institutional level applies mainly to the training components of Masters courses. There are some indications, however, that this may be about to change in some institutions that are planning the introduction of institution-wide generic skills-development courses, in some cases involving the assessment of prior learning.

Masters Courses

2.11. There have been moves in recent years to develop a much clearer relationship between study at Masters and doctoral levels, especially since the former Humanities Research Board (HRB) introduced its "1+3" structure of awards in 1994. The HRB specified that its normal expectation would be that students should not embark on a three-year programme of doctoral research without first undertaking an initial year of

formal postgraduate study at Masters level. Both staff and students are very much aware that it is now very rare for a student to succeed in gaining an award from the AHRB for doctoral study without having such formal postgraduate experience; and there is widespread acceptance of the 1+3 model, with Masters courses being regarded as necessary for the provision of basic research training.

2.12. The change initiated by the HRB has thus had a profound impact on recruitment to doctoral programmes. A third of survey respondents indicated that over 75 per cent of students admitted as doctoral students already had a Masters degree, and a cumulative total of three-quarters of survey respondents indicated that over 50 per cent of their doctoral entrants were so qualified. This evidence was backed up in our consultations with individual institutions, where we found in some cases that all the doctoral students in the humanities had already gained a Masters qualification.

2.13. Our survey displayed, however, a variety of views about the relationship between Masters Courses and doctoral research. We were on occasions told that the development of the 1+3 system had in some unspecified way resolved the question of research training, and there may be some assumption to this effect amongst humanities departments. Yet, most respondents regarded the training provided through Masters courses as satisfactory only where there was a close relationship between the subject matter of the Masters course and that of the doctoral research project. Moreover, while no-one indicated that the training provided through the Masters courses in their departments was inadequate as a preparation for doctoral research, *less* than a third regarded it as wholly satisfactory for that purpose. This is a matter to which we return later in this report.

Funding

2.14. The funding of the provision of research training is complex. Most respondents to our survey indicated that their group-based Courses are funded by the department, faculty or centrally by the HEI; but in many cases it seems that a combination of budgets is employed. The resource allocation models used in some universities did not make it easy for respondents to identify the income streams that were being used to support their provision for doctoral students. A small minority of respondents stated that their provision was unfunded and run on goodwill. Our consultations with staff in individual institutions revealed much uncertainty about how provision for postgraduate research students is funded. There is clearly a need for staff at all levels to be much better informed about how funding is provided to universities, for the humanities in particular; and about the ways in which that funding can be identified and used for the support of research and training provision. We consider this issue further in Paragraph 5.6.

The Purposes of Research Training in the Humanities

2.15. The responses to the survey showed a strong sense of the distinctiveness of research in the humanities, with nearly two-thirds of respondents referring to the predominance of projects conceptualised and undertaken by individuals. Many referred to the great demands for originality, independence of thought and organisation that such work imposed, and to the social and intellectual isolation it can bring. Other distinctive features of humanities research that were mentioned both in the survey returns and in our consultations included the extent to which it is library-based; the critical importance of methodological and epistemological debates; and the sheer variety and diversity of the subjects and disciplines within the humanities, and of their methodologies. Given the strong sense of distinctiveness, it is not surprising that respondents had clear views about the desirable features of research training in the humanities.

2.16. There was a strong degree of consensus about the primary purposes of research training. The overwhelming majority of our survey respondents saw it as essential to teach students about methodologies and current debates in their subject or discipline, with the aim of improving the quality of the thesis that the students would ultimately

produce. Among senior staff in particular, there was also a concern about submission and completion rates, and the need to improve them. The provision of research training was seen as one means to that end. Our consultations with students showed that they too were very conscious of the need to get on with their work as quickly and effectively as possible.

2.17. Our survey also indicated that nearly all respondents regarded it as either essential or highly-desirable to heighten students' awareness of the broader epistemological, methodological and ethical issues involved in doing research in the humanities. Perhaps more notable was the fact that nearly 90 per cent of respondents indicated that it was either essential or highly desirable to teach students to develop transferable skills, both conceptual and practical; and that 75 per cent of them saw it as at least highly desirable to enhance students' employability, either for an academic or for some other career.

2.18. There was a similarly strong consensus about the desirable content of provision and about what students should have covered and achieved by the end of their doctoral research. Almost all our survey respondents regarded as essential the teaching of practical research and study skills, such as project definition and planning; work scheduling and time management; IT skills; and bibliography. The same went for teaching that is specific to individual subjects and disciplines, including conceptual and methodological issues. Training related to epistemological issues such as the nature of evidence and of argument, and theoretical issues related to them, was regarded as essential or highly desirable by over 90 per cent of our survey respondents; and more than three-quarters gave the same level of importance to coverage of ethical and political issues relating to how evidence is obtained, the relationship between researcher and subjects, and political and social contexts including matters such as gender, class and ethnicity. The teaching of employment-related and transferable skills, including teaching skills was given slightly less priority, although even here over 60 per cent of respondents regarded such provision as either essential or highly desirable; and only 10 per cent regarded it as of little or no importance.

The Strengths and Weaknesses of Current Provision

2.19. In the light of the consensus about both the purposes and the desirable content of research training provision, it is not surprising that respondents to our survey identified the strengths of provision within their own institutions largely in terms of the balance between core practical skills and subject-specific issues. Flexibility and the ability to respond to the needs of individual students were also seen as important strengths. But alongside the stress on the individual went an awareness of how many students gained from, and needed, the mutual support, encouragement and stimulation that they receive from their colleagues on group-based courses, and also in other more informal meetings and forums. This was strongly backed up in our consultations with both staff and students.

2.20. The survey also revealed a telling level of agreement about the range of problems involved in organising research training provision in the humanities. Resistance from students or staff was mentioned by two-fifths of respondents, and this was clearly linked to other problems such and as the diversity of student needs, as well as the wide variety of disciplines and topics within the humanities. These in turn could lead to unhelpful tension between the need to provide generic training and the demands for training that is specific to the needs of individual students, subjects and to topics. Our consultations with individual institutions, and our case studies, in particular, showed that senior staff and administrators were strongly committed to the provision of high-quality courses organised at institutional level, but that both students and their supervisors were highly sceptical of the value of such provision, particularly when it was made compulsory. There is a mismatch here which institutions need to address.

2.21. Interestingly, only a quarter of our survey respondents mentioned problems relating to the finance, resources or staff time needed to develop and maintain research training provision. We have noted above (Paragraph 2.14) staff members' uncertainty about how these activities are funded, and the suggestion that provision is in some cases dependent on goodwill. We return to these points in Paragraph 5.6.

Student Opinion

2.22. The central message that came across from our discussions within students was that they were sceptical as to the value of over-formal core structures for the delivery of research training. Above all, they wanted support and training that they saw as relevant to their needs, and to their research project in particular, and they tended to define their needs in terms of enabling them to produce a high-quality thesis in due time. Any time that was spent on training had to be demonstrably worthwhile, and students were highly critical of provision that they saw as wasting time and that could be better spent on their central goal of completing their project and producing a high-quality thesis. Thus there was strong support for short, sharply-focused induction courses, and for early training in project-planning and management; in note-taking and note-management; and in the bibliographic knowledge and skills. They were much more sceptical about the value of courses in time-management, or formal IT courses; rather, students sought information and guidance on what specific tools were available that might be of use to them, and support to enable them to develop specific new skills.

2.23. Students - particularly those who had already completed a Masters course - were also sceptical about the provision of training in epistemological and conceptual issues that was not related to or informed by work that they themselves were undertaking in their doctoral project. Such training was most valuable, students thought, if it took place at a stage - perhaps in their second year - when they were actively engaged with the conceptual and evidential problems of their own research. At any earlier stage, the debates could appear too abstract. Moreover, students were strongly in favour of conducting at least some of the debates themselves: they stressed the importance of student-centred and student-run workshops where they could share ideas, present their own work, and experience other work and other disciplines by talking to other research students. They looked to departments and faculties to create and maintain the structures to enable them to do this, as much as to make the provision themselves.

2.24. Generally, students stressed and valued their own resourcefulness and independence. They wanted to take responsibility for their own learning, and they made a clear distinction between studying and being taught. They were proud of their own powers of intellectual enquiry, and emphasised the importance of having the freedom to find out for themselves what lines of enquiry to pursue and how. They were confident in their own ability - with the help of supervisors and of discussions with other students - to know at what point to abandon a particular line that was failing to produce results.

3. A MODEL FOR RESEARCH TRAINING IN THE HUMANITIES

3.1. Our thinking developed from a number of different considerations which we refined during the course of our discussions and in our consultations with others:

- First, our view of the distinctive nature of research and scholarship in the humanities;

- Second, our dissatisfaction with the commonly-used terminology of training, and our preference for the language of **preparation** for doctoral research and of **development** in and during research;

- Third, our view of the two principal outcomes aimed at through successful doctoral research: a high-quality thesis that advances knowledge and

understanding of a specific topic or area of study; and a highly-talented person who is able to put the knowledge, understanding and skills that they have acquired through doctoral research to use in a wide variety of contexts;

- Fourth, a belief that effective research training provision must be focused on and directed towards the needs of individual students and the doctoral research on which they are engaged.

3.2. While we have been encouraged by much of what we learned about the ways in which students are being trained and supported in various institutions across the country, we believe that the importance and implications of these four basic considerations have been inadequately recognised and articulated; and that much of what is currently being provided to students has not been thought through with sufficient clarity and rigour. The result is that while there is widespread agreement - particularly among institutional managers - about the need for, and the generic purposes of, doctoral research training, there is also widespread unease and scepticism - particularly among students and their supervisors - about the value of what is being provided.

The Distinctive Characteristics of Research in the Humanities

3.3. The humanities cover a very wide range of subjects and disciplines, and there is no single feature which sets research in the humanities as a whole apart from research in other areas of study. Nevertheless, we believe that there are a number of features which taken together tend to make the demands imposed on research students rather different from those that are typical in many other subjects and disciplines.

First, there is the sheer range and diversity of the subjects and disciplines which comprise the humanities, and the different demands that they impose. This wide range goes along with a positive value that is put on interdisciplinary.

Second, there is consequently a wide range of applicable methodologies and epistemologies (from the largely empirical to the largely theoretical) and, more important, a characteristic interplay between them.

Third, the predominant mode for research projects at both doctoral and more advanced levels is for researchers to take responsibility for the specification and the conduct of their own research, and to lay great stress in their research on the development of their own intuitions, insights and understanding.

Fourth, the processes of data collection and analysis typically feed into each other in a cyclical way, and are often conducted concurrently with interpretation and evaluation. The research process typically involves a continuous questioning and redefinition of the research questions that are being addressed, as insights, knowledge and understanding are developed and enhanced. Research projects are thus essentially developmental: every project has to find and develop its own questions, concepts and methods.

Fifth, the extent to which the process of writing is a fundamental part of the process of research itself, as well as forming one of the principal outcomes. Writing is critical to the development of the advances in f knowledge and understanding which researchers aim to achieve.

3.4. None of these features is in itself necessarily unique to the humanities, but together they provide a set of distinctive characteristics. doctoral projects from very different starting points, with uneven and divergent ranges of competencies and characteristics. Students will benefit from a wide range of provision fitted to their needs; and they will also have to acquire further knowledge, understanding and skills as they progress, in order to tackle specific aspects of their work. Some of these needs can be met by training courses, which may take place in the second or even the third year of the research project.

This means that what is appropriate for research training in the humanities is itself distinctive, and that what works in other subjects and disciplines may not work in the humanities.

Preparation and Development

3.5. We became increasingly aware during our discussions and consultations of the importance of avoiding some of the dangers inherent in the current emphasis on "training". For example, it may set inappropriate and improper boundaries to the process of doctoral research in the humanities; the outcomes of training that can be readily specified (typically in terms of specific transferable skills) may come to be regarded as a key criterion for the award of doctoral degrees; research training of this kind may take priority over the difficult and interesting questions that research in the humanities aims to address; and such training may even come to stand for the research itself. We are already aware of instances where research students are being put through "research training" regardless of its relevance to the particular enquiry on which they are engaged. Such provision is wasteful and serves no-one's interests.

3.6. In our discussions we thus came increasingly to question the usefulness and validity of the term "training" as applied to the requirements of research in the humanities. Rather, we came to focus on two different kinds of requirements and characteristics of the support for research students: first, the need to ensure that they are properly prepared for the research that they plan to pursue; and second, the need to ensure that they are enabled to develop their knowledge, understanding and skills through the processes of research and its associated writing.

3.7. A distinction of this kind does not imply a sequential model. Students do, of course, need to be appropriately and well taught and prepared before they begin a research project. Otherwise there is the danger that they will find it difficult even to get their project off the ground. The ways in which they are taught and prepared at this initial stage need to take account of the extent to which students begin their doctoral projects from very different starting points, with uneven and divergent ranges of competencies and characteristics. Students will benefit from a wide range of provision fitted to their needs; and they will also have to acquire further knowledge, understanding and skills as they progress, in order to tackle specific aspects of their work. Some of these needs can be met by training courses, which may take place in the second or even third year of the research project.

3.8. It must also be recognised, however, that students develop high levels of knowledge, understanding and skills - much higher than can readily be delivered by any training course - through the process of research itself. They become highly-qualified and talented people not by doing training courses, but by doing research. Where further preparation or teaching is appropriate or necessary during the course of the research project, it needs to be set in the context of, and take full account of the sophisticated attributes that research students will have developed. We set out our ideas on preparation and development more fully in Paragraphs 4.2 to 4.11.

Talented People and Successful Theses

3.9. Our work led us to a clear understanding that research training provision in the humanities needs to be generated by and focused on the twin goals of doctoral research: a highly-developed and highly-talented person and the production of a high-quality thesis. Because these goals are complementary, we believe that student-centred and thesis-centred approaches to research training are not alternatives but mutually reinforcing elements of the same process.

3.10. In this context, we see doing research, developing and learning, new skills, thinking about research and its processes, and critical reflection as components of an integrative process. Specific training courses therefore need to be built into the student's programme

of, doctoral research as a whole, rather than being regarded as separate from or ancillary to it. In our survey and in our consultations we found that too often both supervisors and students regarded research training courses as a distraction from what they saw as their main task of producing a thesis. Training provision must not become a distraction from the student's thesis work, but rather be seen as essentially relevant to it. Effective training aims at facilitating the completion of high-quality theses; but it is also grounded in a recognition that the work of thinking and doing that is involved in producing a successful thesis also involves the development of a range of talents that can be closely related to the requirements of employability. We suggest that one of the purposes of research training provision should be to enable students to develop and recognise those talents, along with the realisation that they constitute the key skills for employment that we consider in Paragraphs 4.24 to 4.26.

A Needs-Based Approach

3.11. It is fundamental to our approach that the needs of doctoral students in the humanities are not precisely the same as those of students in other disciplines and subjects. Moreover, since the humanities themselves cover a wide range of disciplines and a wide range of topics within each discipline, it is not to be expected that the needs of all humanities students will be the same. Effective training provision has to be related as closely as possible to the needs and goals of the student and of the project that he or she is undertaking. Thus it must start from an assessment of the needs of individual students; and that assessment must be regularly reviewed and updated.

3.12. Doctoral students in the humanities no longer - if they ever did - constitute a homogeneous category. The nature of both undergraduate and Masters courses has changed in ways which have increased the diversity of the attributes that students have when they start doctoral research. On the one hand, it cannot be assumed that students will start with a command of an agreed body of knowledge or a map of the subject on which to build more specialised work. On the other hand, students are introduced at undergraduate as well as Masters level to methodological debates and to research resources and techniques that may form one of the foundations for doctoral research.

3.13. It must also be recognised that for increasing numbers of students, a doctoral project undertaken part-time is the culmination of a programme of life-long learning. It is pursued alongside, as an alternative to, or following a period of, paid employment, and it is valued as a focus for self-directed and unalienated work. These students often see their training needs in quite different terms from those who see a doctoral degree as an essential preliminary to an academic or other career. Research training provision therefore needs to take full account of these different goals and needs.

A Four-Part Needs-Based Model

3.14. These considerations led us to identify four categories of factors that need to be taken into account in developing and implementing the provision for research students in the humanities, which are set out schematically in the table 'Research Training in the Humanities: A Four Part Model' :

- The desired outcomes of doctoral research;
- The ways in which students can be prepared, and in which they can be enabled to develop, in order to achieve those outcomes; and how their achievements are evaluated and recorded;
- A hierarchy of different levels of requirements for doctoral research in any subject; in the humanities; in a broad subject area; down to a specific research project;

- A specification of the types and levels of knowledge, understanding and skills that a doctoral student may need to acquire or develop.

RESEARCH TRAINING IN THE HUMANITIES: A FOUR-PART MODEL

This model identifies four categories of factors that should be taken into account in developing and implementing the provision for research students in the humanities. The four categories and the complex relationships between them are explained at length in the report of which this table is an integral part. Provision must be based on an assessment of students' needs and a clear understanding of the different kinds of desired outcomes of doctoral research; of what can be achieved through preparation and development; of the different requirements, working from the generic to the specific, of students working in different subject areas; and of the kinds of knowledge, understanding and skills that research students need to acquire and develop. The extent to which the different kinds of knowledge, understanding and skills that are listed in Box D will be covered in the provision to different students can and should vary considerably in individual cases. They provide a useful checklist, however, of different elements that should be included in defining the needs of both individual students and groups of students.

A. Desired Outcomes of Doctoral Research

1. Theses which represent a significant and original contribution to knowledge

2. Trained researchers

3. Prospective teachers in HE

4. Generally highly-qualified and talented people, who will use a wide range of knowledge, understanding and skills that they have gained through doctoral research in a wide variety of contexts, in employment and beyond, enriching their own lives and the lives of others.

B. Preparation and Development: Achievement and Evaluation

1. Preparation and training are necessary in order *to do* many of the things that are required in doctoral research: support and training needed at different stages *before* and *during* the programme of doctoral study in order to achieve the desired outcomes.

2. Knowledge, understanding and skills are also developed and achieved *in doing* doctoral research: reflection needed at each stage to recognise what has been achieved towards the desired outcomes; and what still needs to be done.

3. Evaluation/assessment and recording of what has been achieved necessary at key stages during the programme.

C. Levels of Requirements: Knowledge, Understanding and Skills

A hierarchy of requirements for doctoral research

1. In any subject area
2. In any subject /disciplinary area in the humanities
3. In a generic subject area or discipline (e.g. History, Music); or in more than one subject area/discipline where necessary (e.g. French and Anthropology)

4. In a specific subject/disciplinary area (e.g. Medieval History, French Literature)

5. In a specific project area (e.g. the prosopography of the 18th century Spanish Court)

D. Types and Levels of Knowledge, Understanding and Skills

Project-Related

1. Project planning and management
-definition and redefinition
-scheduling and time management

2. Written and oral communication

3. IT skills, knowledge and understanding -generic
-humanities/subject/project specific

4. Numeracy and statistical knowledge and skills

5. Record keeping and records management

6. Bibliographic knowledge and skills

Research, Subject and Practice-Related

1. Understanding of epistemological issues, including nature of evidence, argument and theoretical issues

2. Understanding of social and political issues and contexts of research: relationships between researcher, subjects, and audiences

3. Analytical, synthetical and theoretical knowledge, understanding and skills

4. Knowledge and understanding of the context of the project within the discipline, and of wider trends within the discipline

5. Appreciation and where appropriate, knowledge and understanding, of other related disciplines.

6. Foreign language skills

Personal Development

1. Problem-solving

2. Interpersonal relationships and skills

3. Working with others and team-working

3.15. The model thus starts (Box A) by recognising that there are two different kinds of outcomes from a successful programme of doctoral research: a thesis that represents an original contribution to knowledge; and a highly-qualified and talented person. Moreover, the talents that successful doctoral graduates will have acquired should provide the high-level knowledge, understanding and skills that constitute a basis for their further development as researchers, as prospective teachers in higher education, and as people who will utilise their talents in a wide variety of employment and other contexts, enriching their own lives and the lives of others. It is clearly essential that provision for doctoral students should take account of - and is indeed aimed at - all these desired outcomes.

3.16. The model then sets out (Box B) what we see as the critical distinction between the teaching that students may need in order to achieve these desired outcomes; and the ways in which they will develop their knowledge, understanding and skills in and through the process of doing doctoral research. The critical point here is that all kinds of

achievements towards the desired outcomes should be recognised, evaluated and recorded, not least so that gaps can be identified and filled.

3.17. The model goes on to identify (Box C) different levels of knowledge, understanding and skills that will be required by, and expected of, successful doctoral students, starting at the most generic level required for a research student in any subject, and moving to the most specific level of requirements for a student pursuing research in a particular topic. The critical point here is that neither generic nor specific levels of provision will meet all the needs of students, or even groups of students. Provision must be tailored to the requirements that are set by the areas of work on which they are engaged.

3.18. Finally, the model identifies (Box D) some of the kinds of knowledge, understanding and skills that research students are likely to require, including those that are project-related (such as project-planning and management; communications; IT; numeracy; records management; and bibliography); those that are more related to the theory and practice of research in different subject areas (such as epistemological issues; knowledge of the social and political contexts of research; analytical, synthetical, and theoretical knowledge; understanding of the context of the specific research project within the discipline or subject area, and of other related disciplines and subjects); and those that are more related to personal development (such as problem-solving; interpersonal relationships and working with others). The list is not exhaustive, and the categories in particular are not intended to be prescriptive: some items, such as numeracy and statistical knowledge, might be placed under a different heading, or under more than one. We are clear, however, that research students in the humanities, as in other subject areas, need to acquire and develop these talents and attributes, at different levels according to their needs.

3.19. The essential point of the model is its identification of four groups of factors that we believe must be taken into account in planning the provision for research students in the humanities. Thus, provision must be based on a clear understanding of the different kinds of desired outcomes of doctoral research; of what can be - and what is - achieved through preparation and development; of the different requirements - working from the generic to the specific - of students working in different subject areas; and of the kinds of knowledge, understanding and skills that research students need to acquire and develop.

3.20. We recognise, of course, that there is a series of complex relationships between the different elements listed in the four parts of the model. Thus, for example, bibliographic knowledge and skills (listed as item I.f in Box D) could be readily related in different ways and at different levels to anyone of the elements listed in Boxes A-C; what is needed in order to complete a thesis may be different from what is required for someone who intends to develop a research career; what can be achieved through preparatory training courses in bibliography, even at an advanced and fairly specific level, will be different from what students can and will learn and develop themselves in the course of their research; and the generic knowledge and understanding of bibliography that is required by - and of - any research student in the humanities is only a part of what will be required by a student working on a specific project.

Similar points could be made about IT skills, numeracy, foreign languages, or indeed any of the other elements listed in Box D.

3.21. The extent to which the different kinds of knowledge, understanding and skills that are listed in Box D will be covered in the provision to different students, therefore, can and should vary considerably in individual cases. We believe that they provide a useful checklist, however, of different elements that should be included in defining the needs of both individual students and groups of students.

3.22. This model thus provides the framework within which our recommendations are located, and the basis of what we have called a needs-based approach to research training, with an assessment of individual student needs as its essential starting point.

The assessment should take full account of what the student has already learned; and it should be regularly reviewed and updated. We believe that this model and this approach avoids the dangers that we see in the application of other models to the humanities; and we believe, indeed, that it could be of wider utility. Above all, it avoids the dangers inherent in the application of a rigid framework of provision for all research students, regardless of their needs; and of inappropriate models of the relationships between Masters courses, research training courses, and doctoral research itself.

3.23. It is important to stress that the model is compatible with, and indeed envisages, many different modes of delivery. Some support and training can be provided appropriately through extensive general courses which all students are required to attend, at institutional, faculty or departmental level; other provision will have to be delivered to much smaller groups, or to individuals. It is critical, however, that both students and all who are involved in the planning and delivery of provision should be clear about their roles and expectations: and students must be enabled to develop a full understanding of how those roles and expectations impinge on the ways in which their own work develops.

4. UNPACKING THE MODEL: DETAILED ISSUES

Responsible Recruitment

4.1. Institutions must approach the recruitment and admissions of students to research degrees in a responsible manner. It is therefore essential that before an offer is made institutions identify an applicant's broad capacities and needs. Institutions must not admit students in areas of study in which they cannot provide supervisors with scholarly expertise at an appropriate level. In offering a place to a prospective research student, an institution is entering into a contract to support that student adequately. Institutions must have procedures to ensure that these responsibilities are effectively discharged. Furthermore, the provision of training and support must not be seen as a substitute for the requirement that institutions recruit only those students who are appropriately qualified.

Preparation

4.2. Students need training and support to prepare them for the rigours of doctoral research, and to acquire new knowledge and skills. Preparation is clearly critical during the early stages of research, not least in enabling students more clearly to define - and refine - their proposed projects, with clear aims and objectives, research questions to be addressed, appropriate methodologies, and a clearly-specified plan of campaign. Much can be achieved through generic provision which aims to enhance students' abilities to plan and manage their projects; to enable them more effectively to manage and control the notes and records that they will generate on a scale to which they have not in general been accustomed; and to make them more fully aware of the research resources - including IT resources - that are available to them in their institution and elsewhere. In almost all cases in the humanities, students will benefit from provision that aims to enhance their bibliographical knowledge and skills.

4.3. While short, sharply-focused induction courses that aim to develop such knowledge and skills are immensely useful, further training and support must be based on the needs of individual students and projects. That does not mean, of course, that training can only be provided one-to-one, to individual students. Supervisors will continue to provide instruction and advice in this way, but much of what students need will be provided most effectively by selecting from a menu of courses and provision offered by the institution. This menu will comprise courses provided by departments (including those other than the student's own), faculties and the institution as a whole. We address this further in Paragraphs 4.18 to 4.22. In selecting from that menu, the essential requirement derived from the principle of the needs assessment is that the training must be appropriate and relevant to the student and his or her project, and seen as such by all concerned. It is important, therefore, that students, their supervisors, and others at the departmental or faculty level, should be actively involved in an assessment at an early stage of the

knowledge and skills that have already been learned, what needs must be met, and what skills need to be acquired or developed. The end product of the assessment should be a plan for meeting the needs, filling the gaps, and ensuring that the necessary skills are developed.[8] We refer to this plan as the student's individual programme, and discuss the process further in Paragraph 4.19. Students should not, however, be compelled to attend courses to meet needs that they do not have, or to fill gaps that do not exist. And it must be recognised, for instance, that where students have already completed a Masters course, their needs are likely to be different from those who have not.

4.4. Two further points should be stressed. First, while students require training and support to prepare them for doctoral research, they will, and should, themselves take responsibility for much of their own preparation, both individually and in discussion with other students. Doctoral students are highly-conscious of their own abilities, and of the difference between learning and being taught. Support for their own learning is often more appropriate than training.

4.5. Secondly, preparation is not a once-and-for-all activity that is completed in the early stages of doctoral research. New needs for training and support will arise at various stages during doctoral students' work, as they and their research develop. Needs assessments must therefore be regularly reviewed, and the plan for meeting the needs amended to cover newly-identified gaps, or a requirement for the acquisition of new skills.

Development

4.6. It is our fundamental contention that students develop through the processes of research and writing themselves, and that this development is essentially connected with their ability to produce a thesis that makes a significant and original contribution to the advancement of his or her knowledge. It is in the process of doing research that students develop the high levels of knowledge and understanding, as well as the skills, that are the essential attributes of a successful doctoral student. This is of particular importance in the humanities, where, as we have noted above must be in Paragraph 3.3, research students typically take responsibility themselves for the specification and conduct of their research; where the research process typically involves a continuous questioning and redefinition of the research questions that are being addressed as insights, in knowledge and understanding are developed and enhanced; and where the process of writing is an integral part of the process of developing the advances in knowledge and understanding that researchers aim to achieve. It is thus in addressing and redefining their research questions, and in finding, developing and applying the most appropriate concepts and methods, that research students acquire and develop not only the knowledge and understanding, but also many of the skills that are relevant not only to their particular project but also more widely.

4.7. Teaching and training are important, but it is students' own learning through the process of research that constitutes the key feature of doctoral work. Thus, to take an obvious example, students' knowledge and understanding of epistemological issues including the nature of evidence and the development and application of theory can be enhanced through the provision of courses and seminars. It will, however, be developed much further in the course of their research. It will also have training to be displayed as a critical part of their thesis; and they can expect it to be tested in the course of their viva examination. Similarly, students can be taught about useful techniques for keeping and

[8] The principle is similar to that which lies behind the systems that have emerged in most HEIs for granting exemptions from courses on the basis of Accredited Prior Learning (APL) and Accredited Prior Experience and Learning (APEL).

managing notes and records; but they will need to develop and apply their own practices and procedures that are relevant and appropriate to their own project and working methods.

4.8. It is for these reasons that the research culture and environment are so important. Students cannot do it all themselves, of course, and they need support and help from their supervisors, from other research students, and from other members of staff within their own institution and beyond. The most effective and successful doctoral research typically results from students being able to find and develop their own place in an active research community which comprises both staff and students, a community in which each member provides support for others. We comment on the ways in which such active research communities can be developed and sustained, and the ways of building a critical mass of research students to sustain such communities, in Paragraphs 4.18 to 4.22 below.

4.9. It is essential, therefore, that students are enabled to locate their research within a wider research culture and environment. Research seminars in which there is active discussion of conceptual, theoretical and methodological issues, both in their own disciplines and subject areas and beyond, are critical to the development of both students and their projects. An effective research environment often refers to the culture amongst the academic staff, and it is too often assumed that it will also constitute a good research environment for doctoral students. Doctoral students need their own research milieu, one which will overlap with that constructed amongst academic staff but not coincide with it. Effective provision provides forums for students to discuss issues and the methods of research, enabling them to learn from each other as well as from a range of more experienced researchers, and providing them with opportunities to gain experience in oral presentation, both formal and informal. At their best, such forums may not only enhance students' knowledge and understanding of conceptual, theoretical and methodological issues, but become integrated into the research process itself.

4.10. In all our consultations, students stressed the importance of such forums which were directed at their interests and needs, throughout their periods of doctoral research. We endorse their preference for forums of this kind for the discussion of conceptual, theoretical and methodological issues, rather than the formal teaching of such issues in courses which can seem too abstract and remote from the interests and concerns of many students. We also strongly support students' enthusiasm for activities that they themselves organise, where they can present their own work and discuss their own concerns. This does not, however, absolve institutions from their responsibilities; and they will often need to support students' own activities, at least to the extent of making sure that they happen.

4.11. In enabling students to locate their own research in this way, we believe that they will be enabled also not only to develop and complete a successful thesis, but also to enhance their own abilities and talents. It is essential also, however, that students and those who are responsible for supporting them should at regular intervals take stock in articulating and evaluating the abilities, knowledge and understanding they have developed, and record their evaluations. Such work can then feed into an amended needs assessment, and a revised plan. It will also provide students with the language to articulate the ways in which doctoral research has enabled them to develop abilities and talents that they can put to use in a wide range of employment and other contexts.[9]

Role of the Supervisor

4.12. The relationship between research student and supervisor has long been the principal framework for postgraduate research in the humanities, and the Working Group's recommendations are not intended to weaken that relationship. The apprentice model which the relationship resembles is indeed appropriate in disciplines where

[9] The current discussions about HE Progress Files that have followed a recommendation in the Dearing Report might result in a system for recording such abilities. But it is possible that at the doctoral level the abilities developed are best presented in a less schematic fashion.

closely-knit research groups and collective projects are not the norm. One consequence of this model is that there has been a tendency for supervisors in the humanities to see supervision as part of the teaching process, in contrast to the natural and physical sciences where it is part of the research process, and this has sometimes encouraged the feeling that outside involvement is an unwelcome intrusion. We noted, however, that institutions have in recent years begun to set that relationship within a context of wider institutional support, including new monitoring and reporting mechanisms for quality assurance reasons. However, it also includes important activities which are intended to provide wider support for students and their supervisors, including generic skills courses and research supervisory boards and committees designed to broaden the departmental help available to the student. A recognition of the unevenness of supervision, depending as it does on the competencies of individual supervisors and on their relations with their individual research students, has been one reason for these innovations. Additional elements have thus already complicated the relationship between supervisor and student, and where the training elements have not seemed relevant this has sometimes been resented by supervisors as an unwelcome intrusion or a distraction from the writing of a thesis. Research training provision of the kind which this report proposes, however, will offer support to individual supervisors by supplementing the process of supervision in a variety of practical, intellectual and social ways.[10] If it is to succeed, it is essential that the programme for each individual student be constructed in close co-operation with their supervisor, who must be involved in the initial needs assessment, and who must be kept informed of the student's activities and progress. Our conclusion that assignments completed as part of preparatory training programmes, whether formally assessed or not, should be papers and reports that are closely related to the student's research project means that this written work will be able to feed directly into the supervision process.

Role of the Masters Course

4.13. A Masters programme constitutes an important stage in the intellectual and research development of a research student, and will remain so.[11] The Working Group concluded that Masters programmes have an important role as a preparation for a research degree, one that has been substantially reinforced by the AHRB's 1+3 funding model, and we consider that all students intending to pursue doctoral research should be expected to study for a Masters degree of its equivalent. Although there may be students for whom a direct transition from undergraduate degree to research degree is appropriate, especially mature students seeking to study part-time for a research degree, the Working Group was convinced of the general importance of Masters programmes as a transition to research. Students told us of its importance in developing the intellectual confidence essential for embarking on doctoral work. It must be emphasised, however, that the mere fact of having studied for and obtained a Masters degree must not be seen as a substitute for preparation for research.

We did not, however, conclude that this required Masters programmes to be reconstituted as training programmes for future research students. An increasing number of Masters programmes do contain research training elements, and we welcome this trend. A Masters programme will necessarily require significant reflection on a discipline, its concepts and approaches. Where the programme contains a research dissertation, then appropriate preparation should be provided to ensure that students are adequately equipped to undertake the research. These are elements that derive from the character of

[10] The majority of respondents to the survey believed that research supervisors had responsibility for three of the areas of preparation about which they were asked (subject-specific training, epistemological issues, ethical and political issues) while only a minority thought that they had a role in the other two (practical ; research and study skills, employment related skills). Although most respondents thought that supervisors had some responsibility for some or all of the components, the replies also suggested that respondents believed that they do not, or should not, have sole responsibility for any.

[11] We use Masters to refer to postgraduate programmes that follow the award of a Bachelor degree or its equivalent, and not to those Masters degrees which are currently awarded at the end of a four year undergraduate programme.

a Masters programme itself, and we do not go beyond that to recommend that all Masters programmes should contain research training components, or that having taken such components should be a pre-requisite for doctoral research. The Masters course should therefore be seen in general terms as a stage in a student's intellectual development rather than as a precise training for doctoral research. The question to be asked of a prospective or actual research student should not be whether they have followed a Masters course of a particular character, but whether he or she is prepared for the proposed research. The fact that a student has studied for a Masters degree will therefore fit within the needs assessment model which we are proposing. The essential issue is a comprehensive assessment of the student's preparedness - his or her qualifications, skills, knowledge, motivation and experience - for the project in question. A good deal of this preparedness may have been provided by a Masters programme, but viewing the relevance of the Masters course through our needs-based approach means that we recommend that the AHRB should not seek to recognise specific Masters programmes as a preparation for research.[12]

Accreditation of Research Training

4.15. The Working Group considered the issue of whether the research training provided for postgraduate research students should be accredited by the institution and receive some form of certificate or award. We noted a variety of practice in this respect, with most institutions offering no certification for successful completion of training courses. There were exceptions, however, of which the most elaborate is at Oxford, where the majority of Probationer Research Students in humanities disciplines follow a nine-month course for the award of a Master of Studies degree. The course usually incorporates a research methods and techniques module, several subject-specific foundation courses on topics such as historiography and bibliography, and a dissertation of 10,000 or 15,000 words which constitutes initial work for the doctoral thesis. Courses such as this were often devised to constitute the first year of the AHRB ' s I+3 model, for students who had not already studied for a Masters degree.[13] The Oxford case merely highlights a much wider issue. 'Students who acquire the necessary preparation for their project through a Masters programme qualify for a degree for their work, while other students - undertaking some of the same preparation in the first year of doctoral research but exempted from the requirement to undertake the whole programme - do not. However, a Masters programme rarely comprises only training and preparation modules, and the award records a different range of achievement from that of a first-year doctoral student.

4.16. In any case, the Working Group noted the general trend in skills development away from certification and in favour of evidence-based presentation of the skills and abilities acquired, and it welcomed that trend. A successful thesis and successful publications, together with evidence of the other skills acquired during doctoral research, are in our view the most valuable outcome of the training and preparation followed by a student, and we were anxious to avoid the danger of diversion into the teaching of skills and the distribution of certificates, rather than focusing on research development and

[12] For example as the ESRC has done for some years.

[13] The Certificate of Postgraduate Study at Cambridge is another programme of this kind.

achievement.[14] The Working Group appreciated that there may well be attractions in accrediting or certificating discrete parts of the preparation programme, above all training in precise skills within areas such as ICT or languages. It would be particularly advantageous in terms of future employment if induction and training courses for postgraduates new to teaching were to receive certification.[15] There can be a case for such awards, especially for students who satisfactorily complete a structured first-year programme of work but do not then continue with their doctoral research, However, the Working Group does not recommend that institutions should establish formal accreditation for their preparatory courses as a whole. Where institutions decide to put in place accreditation, it is important that the courses and their modes of assessment fit with the needs-based model outlined in this report.

Upgrading, Progression and Assessment

4.17. The part that satisfactory completion of research training plays in decisions on upgrading to PhD from a lower award (typically an MPhil) varies from institution to institution. Institutions handle the fasters process of upgrading in different ways, and have different criteria for direct PhD registration. The Working Group decided that the criteria for the upgrading and progression of research students did not fall within its whole terms of reference, though it concluded that upgrading requirements that were specified and transparent constituted a valuable target for students and an opportunity for institutions to ensure that the student was progressing satisfactorily and was suited to doctoral research. Our concern was the place of research training within the process of upgrading. It is essential that students receive feedback on their progress - based on research training courses, but assessment should be formative rather than summative, and directed at providing students with an understanding of their strengths and of gaps to be filled. Any assessment of skills in our acquisition, or other progress in the programme of preparation, must be firmly set within the student's research activity rather than through separate assessment. Feedback is often more helpful and important than formal assessment to students following such courses. In this context it makes little sense to set the achievement of specific pass marks on constituent elements of the training programme as a condition of upgrading, However, progress and achievement on the preparatory programme should be part of the package of information and evidence that will be taken into account by those making upgrading decisions.

Institutional Organisation of Provision

4.18. As we noted in Section 2, the survey of institutions revealed just how varied were the ways in which research training provision was organised and delivered, though in the great majority of cases these were the responsibility of faculty or department.[16] The Working Group saw no evidence that institution-wide generic skills courses, sometimes seen by institutional senior managers as an easy way to discharge obligations to students, were either liked or successful. This was a point made forcefully in the case

[14] 1n this context we noted with interest the proposals to transform the French Diplome d'Etudes Approfondies (D.E.A.) from its current status as a stand-alone qualification that is a preliminary to doctoral research into an intermediary qualification within a programme of doctoral study. See letter from Maurice Garden. Adjoint au Directeur de la Recherche, to the Presidents and Directors of French higher education institutions, November 1998, entitled 'Formations doctorales-Ecoles doctorales-DEA,' (http://dr.education.fr/ED_9-11-98.html).

[15] See the UK Council for Graduate Education's recent report, *Preparing Postgraduates to Teach in Higher Education* (1999).

[16] In 40 per cent of responses group-based research training was organised by the faculty, and in 51 per cent by the department or subject discipline.

studies by both students and supervisors. It is unlikely that institution-wide delivery of research training provision would be suitable, other than in small and specialist institutions, because the range of students' needs is too great for such provision to be satisfactory.[17] The question of whether the provision should be organised at the level of faculty or department (or discipline where that is different)[18] is a more difficult one. All the evidence which we received, as well as the implications of the needs-based model which we have elaborated above, points towards the most useful provision being that which is closest to the student. This suggests that provision should be organised at the level of department or discipline wherever possible, and in general terms we believe that that is the ideal situation. However, there are some significant qualifications to that recommendation. Although we do not believe that separate institution-wide units devoted to research training skills are a suitable alternative to departmental (or faculty) provision, there are clearly specialist technical skills which may be best provided by institution-wide services. Computing and languages are obvious examples, though even here it is important that the learning process is one which links as closely as possible to the subject matter of the students' research. We were also mindful of the dangers that research training which is entirely internal to a department might, even in what we have described as preparation activities, restrict the awareness of other disciplines and their possible contribution to a research student's own project.

4.19. The model which we propose in this report requires that an individual student's programme be selected from a menu offered within an institutional framework of provision. In order for an extensive and cost-effective menu of opportunities to be offered, we are conscious of the need for a critical mass of research students in the humanities although, as we argue in Paragraph 4.22, this critical mass need not exist within a single institution. We are not proposing that each student should have a tailor-made programme delivered individually for them, neither for preparation nor, of course, for development. That would be enormously demanding of resources and entirely impractical. Our proposals require that each student's needs be assessed, and that these are then met by provision at the level of the department or faculty, occasionally even by courses at the institution level. The needs assessment should be carried out at the departmental level, although it is the responsibility of institutions and/or faculties to ensure that the procedures are in place to carry out the needs assessment and to ensure that an appropriate programme can be constructed for each student. (In this connection, see also the discussion of responsible recruitment in Paragraph 4.1.) Individual students should be involved in their own needs assessment, and they will require a list of the components offered within the menu as a starting point for articulating their own needs. Although the list offered in Box D of the table setting out the four-part model should not be regarded as definitive, it does in our view represent a good starting point for the assessment of students' needs. The knowledge, understanding and skills set out in Box D - or a significant sub-set of them - identify those which a student should have acquired by the end of a period of doctoral research. Each might be derived from prior study or experience, from preparatory provision and training in the early or subsequent stages of doctoral work, or by development through the process of researching and writing a thesis within a wider research environment.

4.20. The individual student's programme will draw upon a wide menu of courses and opportunities offered at the level of department, faculty and institution. The menu will contain a range of elements, the great majority of them continuing from year to year, and of varying intensity and modes of delivery. While some elements might need courses which last for a term or more, others might be delivered through day or weekend schools or workshops. Interactive web-based courses might be provided, where appropriate, which could be accessed at the point in their research relevant to individual students. The menu will comprise components provided by students' own department, other departments, their faculty or other faculties, and on occasions the institution as a whole. Where institution-wide courses are provided, it is important that those delivering the

[17] This would apply equally where the Graduate School covers the entire institution.

[18] We have employed in this report the most commonly used terms to describe institutional structures, but we appreciate that there are variations. We use *Department* to refer to the disciplinary unit, and *Faculty* to refer to the multi-disciplinary unit, typically drawing together cognate disciplines.

course consult humanities departments to ensure that they are adjusted to the needs of their research students.

4.21. The courses will thus vary: a student's individual programme may draw its components from subject-specific skills courses, practical and research skills courses that are not subject-specific, substantive subject modules often drawn from Masters programmes, inter-disciplinary seminars, web-based tutorials, and so on. Institutions are providing a good deal of this already. Although new elements may need to be delivered, especially by those institutions which have so far done little to develop research training for their, humanities research students, our primary concern is to provide a way of articulating provision out of current practice, and to provide institutions with a framework within which to reflect upon and develop their own provision. Whereas the need to fashion students' work on their individual programmes as closely as possible to their research would suggest that departmental provision was the best, the small numbers of students involved might make that unjustifiable, although unavoidable where very subject-specific skills are involved. Departments and institutions will have to assess what is possible within the staffing and other resources available, and construct provision at a level which reflects those resources. With respect to development activities it is likely that the wider community beyond the discipline will be a valuable asset for research students. Although preparation, and to a lesser extent development, are best rooted at the departmental or discipline level, wider interdisciplinary experience and discussion can be of considerable value to a student's research and intellectual growth.

Regional Collaboration

4.22. The question of 'critical mass' arises in relation to the resources involved in offering specific courses for preparation, but the Working Group concluded that it was even more relevant to development which required the existence of a research culture within which the student would work. We agreed that excellent PhD theses could be produced by students working in subjects or departments with small numbers. It was nevertheless recognised that the uniquely decentralised provisional of doctoral opportunities in the UK in comparison with some other countries meant that it was important to address these questions of the wider research environment. We have already proposed that inter-departmental and faculty collaboration should be used as appropriate to produce the critical mass needed. An alternative approach would be to bring together students from the same discipline (or related disciplines) in adjacent institutions. This might be needed for training in specialist skills that are found in only a small number of institutions (e.g. Latin, palaeography). As far as some institutions are concerned - and the same might apply to very small subject areas in any institution - the critical mass needed to sustain some of the development activities might be constructed only by bringing together students from several institutions. Institutional competitiveness and the financial complexity of joint courses might serve to inhibit regional collaboration, but we believe strongly that it should be sought where appropriate by institutions that are close together geographically. Regional seminars, conferences, and intensive weekend workshops at which students read and discuss papers arising out of their research, could all play a valuable role in providing the research culture which could be absent where the number of research students in a field is very small. The Working Group believes that the AHRB might have a role to play in supporting such activities, especially by making funds available for such research-student centred activities, and inviting collaborative bids from institutions to organise regional events. The AHRB should see this as part of its responsibilities for developing the humanities disciplines, rather than as following its studentship funding programmes, and such events should not be restricted to holders of AHRB studentships

Interdisciplinarity

4.23. Scholars in the humanities are increasingly conscious of work in related disciplines, and the wider intellectual context of debate in the humanities will prove one of the sources of stimulation and guidance for doctoral research projects. Although some of the

most relevant guidance of a theoretical and methodological kind will come from within the student's discipline, it must be recognised that many approaches and methods are already interdisciplinary, in that they conform more to paradigmatic than strictly disciplinary differences (for example tensions between structuralist/poststructuralist approaches on the one hand and social-historical/materialist approaches on the other). There are intellectual debates within the humanities, fields of discussion in which new ideas and new work are being generated, and any doctoral student needs to be aware of these trends. The implication is that students in terms of both preparation and development would benefit from encountering other relevant disciplines and the main debates within them. We are all too aware of what we heard from many research students - that they do not wish to be forced into interdisciplinarity, but wish to be made aware of the existence of work in other disciplines which might be useful to them. If a student's project or proposed approach suggests that access to another discipline might be valuable, then this should be identified at the needs assessment stage, or by the supervisor as the work progresses. Beyond that we would recommend that research students in their preparation be made aware of conceptual approaches and intellectual developments in other disciplines, be given the opportunity to attend seminars in other humanities departments and to pursue questions with specialists in other disciplines where that seems appropriate.

Interdisciplinary contact often flourishes best where students have themselves chosen to come together for that purpose, and faculties should consider facilitating and supporting student-led interdisciplinary seminar programmes.

Key Skills and Employment

4.24. As we have noted at various points in this report, there are two principal outcomes to doctoral research: a thesis which represents a contribution to scholarship in its field on the one hand, and a developed and skilled person on the other. While an individual research student might acquire valuable incidental skills, for example as a teacher, the skills and attributes that are needed to carry out research successfully and to write a good thesis are precisely those which develop the research student as an employable individual. These should not be seen as distinct, and the Working Group concluded that at this level of education it made little sense to treat skills for employment as additional to those acquired through the programme of study. There are the skills which research students brings to their research, those which are acquired through specific training courses, and above all those outcome skills which are the result of the whole process of researching and writing a thesis.

4.25. It is the responsibility of institutions to ensure that their doctoral students have the opportunity to develop the attributes needed for an academic career. Although the availability of undergraduate teaching for research students will depend on resources and on the appropriateness of the research student for teaching duties, institutions must provide induction and training for all research students engaged in teaching, as well as mentoring and support in the teaching process. Where appropriate, research student teachers should be provided with the opportunity to work towards accreditation by the Institute for Learning and Teaching. Research students in the humanities hoping for academic careers will also need advice on matters related to career development, especially on the publication of their research.

4.26. However, a good proportion of humanities research students do not intend to seek academic careers, and an even larger proportion do not obtain them. The role of institutions is to help students develop the language with which to articulate the skills they have, those which they develop through doing research, and their applicability in different employment situations. Researching and writing a humanities doctoral thesis produces a skilled and employable individual, and HESA statistics show that those who emerge with a PhD have little difficulty in finding employment. We considered examples of the

attributes developed through research for a doctoral thesis. We found particularly helpful a short document produced by the Careers Service at King's College, London on 'Skills of Research Students[19], and endorse its comment that 'Students tend to underestimate the value of these skills and, as a result, may not do themselves justice when it comes to considering their choice of career or when applying for jobs. ' Amongst the general, as opposed to subject specific, skills which students develop at a high level when working for a doctoral thesis are communication skills (written and oral); analytical skills; an ability to work under supervision in a co-operative way; a capacity for organising their own time and work, including the directing of a substantially long-term project; an ability to work with others; an ability to handle and organise large quantities of information; specific skills such as foreign languages or computer software packages; and of course the motivation and ability to work hard and deal with difficulties and set-backs. These and other attributes are associated with the successful completion of a doctoral thesis. It is a good story, and institutions should make it explicit and provide students with the language with which to tell it.[20]

Part-Time Students

4.27. The limited public funding that is available for Postgraduate research in the humanities, together with the extent of debt with which students will increasingly emerge from their first degree and Masters degree, means that the trend for numbers of part-time research students to increase is one that is likely to continue. Since the programme for the preparation dimension of research training will rest on an assessment of what each student needs to carry out their planned doctoral research, the Working Group concluded that part-time students should be subject to the same training expectations as full-time students. We recognised that part-time students were often, though by no means always, undertaking their research for personal satisfaction more than out of any expectations of an academic career, and although this might justify some modification of the programme of preparation, the basic principles on which such a programme would be drawn up should be the same as for a full-time student. We disagreed with the suggestion that the motivation behind much part-time research would reduce the significance of development activities. It is not so much the needs of part-time research students that differ from those of their full-time counterparts - certainly insofar as the needs arising from the research project are concerned - but their availability for the delivery of the courses and other provision established to respond to those needs. It is important that in organising their provision institutions bear in mind the problems faced by part-time students in full-time employment and unable to attend during the day in the working week. We recognise the difficulties that this might entail, especially the where the number of part-time students in a department is small. Although web-based materials will help part-time students to engage with provision that they can attend less regularly, we concluded that it was more important to bring part-time students together (with full-time students where possible) in intensive day workshops or weekend schools.

International Students

4.28. International students are as varied a category as are UK students, and the Working Group did not believe that the approach to provision that we have elaborated for research students as a whole would need to be significantly modified for students from outside the

[19] Available on their website: www.kcl.ac.uk/kis/college/careers

[20] See the useful article on this by Pat Cryer, 'How to get abead with a PhD', *Times Higher Education Supplement,* 16 May 1997. Also Pat Cryer (ed.), *Developing Postgraduates' Key Skills* (Society for Research into Higher Education, London, 1998).

UK. Those who had not studied previously in this country would be moving into a different academic culture with different style and expectations, and both the preparation and development provision would help their process of adaptation. English language is the one area where specific additional provision might be needed. However, responsible recruitment will ensure that students admitted to higher degrees have requisite scores in IELTS, TOEFL or other appropriate tests. The literary base of much humanities research means that the level of proficiency in English required for research should be higher than that in some other disciplines. Institutions might need (themselves or in collaboration with other institutions) to provide language support - especially in thesis writing skills - for non-native speaker international students. In other respects the Working Party did not believe that special research training was needed for international students.[21]

5. RECOMMENDATIONS TO INSTITUTIONS

5.1. Institutions will already be aware of their various obligations to provide support and training for their research students, and the recommendations in this report are shaped with those obligations in mind. There are their responsibilities to the students themselves, whom they have admitted to a programme of doctoral research which includes the support needed to bring the research to a successful conclusion. This requires staff with the expertise to supervise the work, a support structure to provide the training, and a research environment to enable the student to develop as a researcher. There are also the responsibilities set out by the Quality Assurance Agency in its *Code of Practice: Postgraduate Research Programmes.* Finally, there are the requirements set out by the Arts and Humanities Research Board for the support of students whom it funds, requirements which we recommend below should be strengthened in line with the recommendations of this report. In response to these and other expectations, institutions have developed their provision of training and support for research students in the humanities, and we were impressed by the variety of initiatives that were revealed by our survey. However, progress has been uneven, and some of the provision appears to be modelled on the examples of disciplines outside the humanities in ways which are insufficiently attentive to the character and needs of doctoral research in the humanities.

5.2. Our conclusion is that provision must be founded on an understanding of the distinctive characteristics of postgraduate research in the humanities. (Paragraphs 3.3 to 3.4) It also needs to recognise the important distinction between preparation and development. (Paragraphs 4.2 to 4.11) Further, it needs to acknowledge the twin outcomes of doctoral research - the thesis and the person. All of this leads us to a needs-based model. The essential point of the model is its identification of four groups of factors that we believe must be taken into account in planning the provision for research students in the humanities. Thus, provision must be based on a clear understanding of the different kinds of desired outcomes of doctoral research; of what can be - and what is - achieved through preparation and development; of the different requirements - working from the generic to the specific - of students working in different subject areas; and of the kinds of knowledge, understanding and skills that research students need to acquire and develop.

5.3. We **recommend** that all institutions recruiting students to undertake postgraduate research in the humanities establish provision for training and supporting those students

[21] See the UK Council for Graduate Education report, *The International Postgraduate Student: Challenges for British Higher Education* (1999) for a wider discussion of international students.

based on the principles outlined in this report. The basic contents of our recommended approach are clearly set out above, and are summarised as 'a needs-based approach.' (Paragraphs 3.14 to 3.23.) *First,* the general assessment of a student's needs as part of a policy of responsible recruitment. *Second,* a specific assessment on his or her admission to the institution of a student's needs in the context of the research project. This should establish what gaps in knowledge and understanding must be filled, and what skills need to be acquired or developed. This assessment should be informed by the four- part model which we have set out above and which we commend to institutions as a starting point for their own procedures (though we see it as no more than a starting point). *Third,* the establishment of an individual student's programme for meeting the needs, filling the gaps, and ensuring that the necessary skills are developed. This programme will be drawn from an annual menu of courses and other components provided within the department, faculty and institution.[22] (Paragraphs 4.2 to 4.5, 4.18 to 4.21.) *Fourth,* the establishment of activities to enable students to continue to develop as researchers from admission through to the submission of their thesis. (Paragraphs 4.6 to 4.11.) The needs-based model, and the distinction between 'preparation' and 'development', are fundamental to our recommendations.

5.4. We **recommend** that institutions establish the procedures necessary to implement the above requirements for the training and support of research students in the humanities. In recognition of the diversity of institutions - a diversity of mission, disciplinary organisation, numbers of research students recruited, academic and management structures, and resources available for research training - we are not prescribing anyone particular model for implementing our recommendations. We discuss above (Paragraphs 4.18 to 4.21) our views on the appropriate levels within the institutional structure at which the provision might be delivered, but we acknowledge that the diversity within the sector makes it inappropriate for us to recommend precise requirements in this area. It is for institutions to ensure that they have the procedures in place to implement the model outlined in this report, and it is for them to decide the actual content and mode of delivery of the various components, taking into account the needs of their students and their own institutional arrangements. It is the application of the principles outlined in this report to provide preparation and development for humanities research students which is our concern, not the precise manner in which that is achieved. In the current terminology we are concerned with outcomes, and with the principles on which those outcomes should be met, rather than with the procedures and processes that ensure those outcomes.

5.5. We **recommend** that institutions establish a mechanism for carrying out the needs assessment that lies at the heart of our proposals. Once a student has been admitted to work for a research degree, procedures must ensure that the needs assessment is carried out, that the recommendations of the assessment are implemented, and that the student's progress is monitored. (Paragraphs 4.3 & 4.19.) We **recommend** that the needs assessment be carried out by a small group that must include the supervisor, at least one other member of academic staff in the department or subject area, and the student himself or herself. The outcome of the needs assessment should be recorded, and a report on that outcome made to an appropriate person with authority for graduate research students in the department (or, where appropriate, faculty). There should be an annual review of the needs assessment and of the programme agreed, and amendments made as necessary. The student must be involved in this process of review. While none of this should be excessively bureaucratic, it is essential for both student and institution that decisions are formally recorded.

5.6. We are very aware that resources in higher education are scarce, that their distribution is competitive within institutions, and that each institution has its own methods of resource distribution. It is important that resource distribution models which make inter-departmental collaboration difficult should not inhibit the developments that we have

[22] This might on occasion require local and regional collaboration.

recommended. We are also aware that changes in the HEFCE Funding Models for both Teaching and Research have not advantaged humanities departments, especially the low Standard Resource for taught postgraduate students in the humanities and alterations to the subject quanta in the QR formula. Similar changes have been introduced by SHEFC and HEFCW. In spite of these factors, the financial arguments for resources to be made available for the training and support of research students in the humanities are clear and must be made explicit. Institutions derive income not just from fees paid for research students and from HEFCE T-Grant allocations for full-time students in their first year[23] of research, but also through HEFCE QR funding for full-time students in their second and third years.[24] This QR funding can substantially exceed the other sources of income in departments with high RAE grades. Institutions must recognise that money flows in for humanities research students, and that the cost of the kind of provision recommended in this report (mostly staff time) are relatively small. Departments and faculties need to ensure that this is recognised when arguing for the allocation of resources for research training, support and development.

5.7. The principal resource needed for the provision and activities recommended in this report is the time of academic staff in humanities departments. It is essential that contributions to research training be recognised in staff teaching allocations and workload models.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE ARTS AND HUMANITIES RESEARCH BOARD

6.1. The Arts and Humanities Research Board is the major single source of funds for doctoral research in the humanities, and it has an obvious interest in ensuring that the funds it provides are used effectively: that they result in the production of successful theses which lead to significant advances in knowledge; and that doctoral graduates emerge as highly-talented people who go on to use those talents in academic and a wide variety of other employment. To that end, it monitors submission and completion rates as well as the employment of its former award-holders. It also sets out some basic requirements for the provision of research training in the departments and institutions where its award-holders study. The requirements are of a generic kind, and the AHRB has so far followed its predecessor, the Humanities Research Board (HRB) of the British Academy, in not laying down prescriptive guidelines and requirements such as those set by the Research Councils, and especially the ESRC.

6.2. We **recommend** that the AHRB should not establish a system to recognise specific Masters programmes as a preparation for research. We **recommend** that the AHRB should not specify precise requirements that must be met before an award can be made to a student in a particular department or institution, as to the subject matter and the nature of the training that must be provided. Such requirements would be inimical to our whole approach. But we do **recommend** that the AHRB should put in place procedures to assure itself that provision of the kind that we have set out in Sections 3 and 4 is in place; and, that the provision for its individual award-holders is based on the kind of assessment of needs that we have described. The strengthening of AHRB expectations would have the additional benefit of raising the profile of research training in the humanities, and thus make it easier for departments and faculties to make the case for institutional resources to be made available.

[23] Years 1 and 2 for part-time students.

[24] Years 3, 4, 5 and 6 for part-time students.

6.3. We note that neither the HRB nor the AHRB has played an active role in promoting the development of research training provision, other than through the implementation of their 1+3 scheme of awards. We believe, however, that the new Board could play a useful role in facilitating the development of institutional collaboration at local or regional level, and we **recommend** that it should initiate discussions with institutional authorities and with learned societies and professional associations to that end. We further **recommend** that the Board should consider setting aside a modest level of funding to support the development of regional Workshops and conferences to enable students to present and discuss their work. (Paragraph 4.22.)

6.4. We also note that the AHRB does not provide any financial support for the Research Councils' Graduate Schools Programme, consisting of short residential courses which seek to develop students' transferable employment skills and to provide careers advice. While we do not believe that it should be a requirement for students to attend such courses, we **recommend** that the AHRB should consider the establishment of a pilot scheme to provide funding for a small number of its award-holders who might wish to benefit from such courses, in order to ascertain how popular and effective they might be for the specific needs of students in the humanities.

6.5. Finally, we note that the AHRB is unlike the Research Councils in not providing funds in the form of a research training support grant (RTSG) that is specifically directed to making a contribution to the training needs of each holder of a doctoral award. We understand and support the priority that the HRB and now the AHRB have given, in the context of the limited funds available to them, to making as many awards as possible, rather than adding to the cost of each award. We are also conscious that an RTSG could make only a small contribution towards the costs of supporting the preparation and development of research students; and that the major responsibility rests with institutions which are already provided with funds for these purposes in the form of block grant.

Nevertheless, we **recommend** that the AHRB should consider whether it should provide some modest contribution towards the costs of supporting and training its doctoral award-holders, as a means both of improving current provision, and of enhancing its ability to hold institutions to account for the ways in which they put the recommendations of this role in Report into effect.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1. The UK Council for Graduate Education established a Working Group to explore the question of research training for humanities postgraduate students because although the subject was moving onto the agendas of higher education institutions, government, and national bodies, it had received little systematic attention. The Working Group's discussions and investigations enabled it to develop a clearer sense of the characteristics of doctoral research in the humanities and the requirements for 'research training' that flowed from those characteristics. It is important that the character of the humanities should play a central role in shaping the debate over research training. It may well be that some of the principles and ideas elaborated in our report, and the model which we have proposed within it, are applicable outside the humanities, but that is for others to judge. We have outlined in this report the reasons why the issue needs to be addressed - reasons derived not primarily from wider political considerations, but from the needs of the humanities and their research students. It is in our view essential that the developments in this area command widespread support from within the humanities, above all the support of research students and their supervisors, without whose commitment no provision of training can succeed. We believe that our concern to embed research training in the character of humanities research, our insistence that the needs of individual students should be the guiding principle, and our stress on the need to ensure that the work done in research training provision is close to the student's own research, should all help its acceptance. We believe that our proposals are right for students and manageable for institutions.

Appendix A

Report on the Case Studies

by Wendy Patterson and Sandra Harris

Introduction

Case studies were undertaken at three UK institutions with the aim of obtaining detailed information about the provision of research training for humanities postgraduate students and ascertaining the views and concerns of a range of staff and postgraduate students. Different types of institutions were selected: a provincial old university (Institution 1), a large new university (Institution 2) and a large established old university (Institution 3). All three institutions have a significant level of research activity and are committed to developing their research training provision for humanities postgraduate students.

Prior to the case study visits, pre-meeting notes were distributed to all those who were to participate in the research; these provided details of the terms of reference of the Working Group and a list of issues for discussion during the visit. In each case, the researcher spent one day at each institution and had meetings with senior managerial staff, postgraduate administrators, other research staff, supervisors and postgraduate research students in the humanities.

A detailed, 4,000 word report was compiled on each case study. The present document provides a very brief summary of these full reports and is designed to highlight some significant and interesting issues which emerged during meetings with staff and students and from the documentation provided by the institutions. All three institutions had interesting and innovative research training provision. Unfortunately, it will not be possible within this summary report to present these in detail. Consequently, the main body of the report includes five brief sections:

1. Generic research training provision which is provided centrally.

2. Faculty level postgraduate research training provision and related activities.

3. Departmentally organised postgraduate research training activities.

4. Significant issues relating to research training provision.

5. Conclusions.

Generic research training which is provided centrally

All three institutions run university-wide generic skills development courses for all postgraduate research students. At Institutions 1 and 2 these are, or will shortly become, compulsory for full-time research students. At Institution 3 they are optional.

At **Institution 1** the generic provision is delivered by the Centre for Careers and Academic Practice and consists of a minimum of ten days training over a three year period. The majority of sessions are run on separate days for each Graduate School's specified postgraduate student population. From 1999/2000 the course will be compulsory for all full-time research students. As part of the training, students will be required to compile a portfolio which will be assessed and authorised by their supervisors and monitored by the training providers.

At **Institution 2** the generic provision is delivered by the university-wide Graduate School and is comprised of nine units, five of which are compulsory and are delivered during a two-day residential component of the course. The remaining four units are negotiable and students may apply for accredited prior learning if they can provide evidence that they

already have the requisite skills. During the next academic year, Institution 2 intends to purchase the services of an outside agency to provide an additional generic skills course. This will run in tandem with the current provision and students will be able to choose which course to attend.

At Institution 3 the University Graduate School provides a 'Skills Development Programme' which runs throughout the year and offers a wide range of skills-based courses. The courses are optional, and the Graduate School brochure advises research students to discuss with their supervisors which courses they need to attend and to select a range of such courses to be taken over the full period of the PhD.

Faculty level postgraduate research training and related activities

At Institution 1, the Humanities Graduate School runs an on-line information resources training course. The course is open to all 1st year research and taught masters postgraduate students and is designed to enable students to access, use, evaluate and store a wide range of Arts and Humanities information resources. It runs for twelve weeks and is divided into six units of six hours each. Each on-line unit is supported by email tutorials and face-to-face surgeries. The Graduate School intends to make this a compulsory course for all humanities postgraduate research students by September 1999. A system for monitoring and assessing students on-line is being developed.

At **Institution 2**, the faculty-level provision of research training is under development. A comprehensive plan has been designed by a senior research fellow in consultation with colleagues. This is based on certain agreed principles which include the following:

- Acceptance that the 1+3 model is becoming a reality, with the MA regarded as providing 'basic' research training;

- Acceptance that the number and variety of disciplines in this particular Humanities faculty make a generic faculty course untenable, and, consequently, that research training should be delivered by individual departments or groups of departments.

An aims and outcomes model has been devised for the faculty which includes what students should be able to do (i.e. write a literature review, search effectively for relevant sources, evaluate their own progress, etc.) and will know how to present (i.e. an abstract for an article, a thesis, a conference paper, an academic CV, etc.).

At **Institution 3** an Arts and Humanities faculty-wide research seminar series was set up last year which ran for twelve weeks. This seminar series is currently under review, and there are no other faculty-wide research training courses.

Departmentally organised postgraduate research training activities

The majority of departments within the humanities faculties in all three institutions run research seminars for postgraduate students. In all institutions the numbers of Postgraduate research students within an individual department vary to a considerable extent; as a consequence, the number and frequency of seminars also varies. Typically, in the larger departments, a weekly or fortnightly seminar series is held to which staff, postgraduate students and outside speakers may all contribute. Some departments run student-led seminars, and students take an active part in all departmental research training.

Significant issues relating to research training

1. University-wide generic skills-based courses

In all three institutions, there were tensions and conflicting viewpoints with regard to these courses. Despite substantial differences in the size and nature of the research communities, senior managers in all three institutions were genuinely committed to the value and benefits of centralised provision, as were postgraduate administrators and some other research staff. Supervisors were much more doubtful as to the extent that such provision can meet the needs of humanities students who are mainly working on individual projects. Students were most doubtful of all, questioning the relevance to their research of many components of generic courses. They also resented courses being made compulsory. At a time of rapid development when many, if not most, institutions are etc.) , moving in the direction of generic courses, there is a real problem here which needs to be addressed, at least with regard to the humanities.

2. Concern with completion rates

Completion rates, not surprisingly, are a major cause of concern for all three institutions. Generic courses are, in part, an attempt to address that concern in a particular way. Academic staff as well as Deans and Pro-Vice-Chancellors were anxious to improve completion rates, if uncertain as to the most effective way forward. A dichotomy between 'being supportive' to students (financial, emotional, intellectual support and improved facilities) and 'being strict' with them (close monitoring, imposition of firm deadlines, implementation of contractual relationships) was often invoked during discussions with supervisors and other staff. Students too were affected by the pressure to complete their research within three years and were, consequently, not willing to 'waste time' on generic courses which were not perceived as directly relevant to their work.

3. Faculty and departmentally-based research training

It was here that there was most variance between the three institutions, both in terms of the types of research training provided and in the attitudes of both staff and students. Most research students felt the need for some type of organised seminar programme, which would act as a forum for the exchange of ideas and enhance the research culture. The online training course at Institution 1 provides an example of faculty organised provision which students regard as relevant and useful and allows them to decide for themselves how much time and effort they need to spend on it. A postgraduate conference organised by the faculty at Institution 2 was also highly regarded by students and well-attended. Institution 3 was the one most committed to departmental autonomy and, possibly as a consequence, the least successful in organising faculty-based research training. Departmentally organised seminars were felt to be beneficial by both students and staff, though even these are not always well-attended. There is clearly a problem between students' own perception of their needs and how those needs are perceived by institutions; there may also be a discrepancy between student needs and institutional needs, especially in responding to current pressures.

Conclusions

The findings of the case study research suggest that:

1. There is a perception by the majority of postgraduate students and their supervisors that generic, university-wide research training mostly fails to meet the needs of postgraduate students in the humanities. Moreover, making these courses compulsory generates resentment in both students and supervisors and this may work against perceived intellectual or social networking benefits.

2. Humanities-specific skills-based courses delivered at faculty level can be successful and positive, especially if they are flexible in terms of the time and effort students must spend on them. ,

3. At institutions where faculty-level courses are thought to be untenable, a faculty-wide aims and outcomes model may be a useful way of encouraging and monitoring good practice across departments while still enabling departments to retain control of the specifics of their particular provision.

4. Postgraduate research students generally favour departmentally organised research seminars and the opportunity to have one-to-one tutorials with staff over other types of formal training.

A needs-based model of research training would be positively viewed by our sample of postgraduate research students in the humanities in all three institutions. Such a model would also be regarded as ideal by the majority of staff. However, there is also a clear perception that such a model may be difficult to implement and, possibly, prohibitively expensive in terms of time and resources.

Appendix B

Extract from the Quality Assurance Agency, *Academic Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality in Higher Education: Postgraduate Research Programmes* (1999), pp.10-11

Skills training

8A

Research students should have access to training sufficient to gain the skills they need to design and complete their programmes effectively and to help prepare themselves for their subsequent career.

In considering the provision of skills training, institutions will wish to consider the development of:

- a broad understanding of the context in which the research takes place;
- analytical and research skills, including the understanding of project design and research methodologies, appropriate to the subject and programme of study;
- general and employment-related skills including, for example, interpersonal and team working skills; project management, ~information retrieval and database management, written and oral presentational skills, career planning and advice and intellectual property rights management;
- language support and academic writing skills;
- training and support for those researchers who may be involved in teaching and demonstrating activities.

Supervision

9A

Supervisors should possess recognised subject expertise.

In ensuring that appropriate staff undertake supervisory duties, institutions will wish to ensure that supervisory staff are qualified and recognised by peers in their own subject field.

9B

Supervisors should have the necessary skills and experience to monitor, support and direct research students' work.

Institutions should consider:

- the provision of training for supervisors and continuing staff development;
- whether, if a supervisory team is appointed, one member should be designated as the first point of contact;
- what alternative arrangements are necessary and appropriate where the supervisor(s) is unavailable to act for a temporary or extended period.

9C

Research students should receive support and direction sufficient to enable them to succeed in their studies.

Institutions will wish to consider how to ensure that:

- individual supervisors are not overloaded;
- there is a framework for regular supervisor/research student interaction, with a minimum frequency of (and responsibility for initiating) scheduled review meetings between the student, supervisor(s) and, if appropriate, other individuals;
- students are introduced to other researchers (and appropriate academic bodies and societies) in their field;
- participation in institutional and external discussion forums is encouraged, with the presentation of research outcomes where relevant;
- advice is provided on health and safety, ethical and other issues;
- there are routes for the research student and supervisor(s) to seek independent advice should communication links within the i relationship break down;
- support is provided to the supervisor(s) where serious concerns of student ability or application to the study programme have been identified.

9D

Thee progress made by research students should be consistently monitored and regularly communicated to the students.

Institutions will wish to consider:

- the nature and frequency of contact between the supervisor(s) and research student;
- the nature and adequacy of monitoring reports (including their production and agreement, institutional review mechanisms and feedback arrangements);
- the mechanisms for advising research students if desired academic standards have not yet been, or are unlikely to be, achieved;
- the provision of counselling and advisory services;

- the transfer arrangements between registration categories;

- the mechanisms by which decisions to suspend or terminate a research student's registration may be taken.