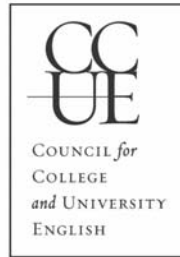


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I have pleasure in forwarding to you CCUE's response to the recent consultation by the AHRC working group on Doctoral Research in the Arts and Humanities.

from: The Council for College and University English (CCUE)

Response to AHRB (AHRC) working group on doctoral research in the arts and humanities

Summary

CCUE

- Strongly supports the AHRC's case for seeking increases in funding
- Strongly supports the AHRC's policy of consulting the sector about any proposed changes
- Urges more transparency in the allocation of awards
- Urges further development of the postgraduate career model
- Questions the expanding use of the PhD title
- Questions the success of the master's allocation process
- Questions the direction in which AHRC is leading research

Recommendations (CCUE's comments follow each recommendation)

Government funding

1. There is a strong case to be made on grounds of equity for an increase in funding for doctoral research in the arts and humanities; the group recommends that AHRC press the OST for an increase specifically in funding for doctoral research in the next Spending Review (para 7).

COMMENT

CCUE supports this and urges AHRC to provide full information on the proportion of UK research students in the arts and humanities (raw numbers; percentage figures as against all other disciplines; the proportion of AHRC-funded PhDs within the overall cohort of PhD students), their roles and functions in the university and HE sector, and specifically undergraduate teaching, and their contribution to the intellectual life and high standard of British universities.

In addition, CCUE urges AHRC to seek for an active improvement in the status of research students, including professional recognition of their teaching and training, their career guidance, and their pensionable status.

2. OST should increase the number of ORS studentships in order to increase the competitiveness of the UK in the market for doctoral research students (para 11)

COMMENT:

CCUE supports this and urges the AHRC to set up a dynamic working –party to drive this forward

3. AHRC should actively seek additional funding from OST to increase the national provision for postdoctoral fellowships in the arts and humanities in order to enhance the opportunities for career development (para 23).

COMMENT

CCUE supports this move most strongly. It will provide much-needed career opportunities for your researchers. It should be linked to stronger career services for postgraduates and professional recognition of the grade.

Information deficit

4. There is evidence that at present small numbers of ethnic minority students undertake postgraduate research. The Research Councils should commission research on the reasons for this low rate of progression to doctoral study and the possible means to increase it (para 8).

COMMENT

This is a matter of grave concern in a multicultural society and should be addressed with urgency by all funding bodies.

5. The Research Councils should commission research into the destinations, academic and other, of non-UK domiciled holders of UK doctorates.

COMMENT

The importance of the international dimension of British research and research training as part of the nation's investment in the knowledge economy requires much fuller investigation and will aid British universities in their recruitment and planning.

AHRC funding

6. The group recommends that the current AHRC model of separate funding for Master's level and doctoral study should stand (para 18).

COMMENT

CCUE is deeply worried by the statistic reported that 'only 50% of students who succeed in obtaining AHRC funding for a Master's level programme are subsequently successful for funding for doctoral research.' CCUE urges that clearer information be obtained and disseminated about this figure, and fuller information be provided about the success rate of different applicants to different schemes (MRes, MA with research training embedded, MAs undertaken as vocational training). There appears to be something of a hit-or-miss quality about the current model which appears wasteful of the one-year awards.

7. The AHRC should explore the possibility of funding longer Research Preparation Master's programmes where a case can be made for subject need (para 19).

COMMENT

CCUE would not wish to see further resources expended on RPM.

8. The current policy of adjusting the balance between Master's and doctoral awards in favour of the latter should continue (para 20).

COMMENT

It is not at all clear what this means in real terms or at what point a balance will be struck. What is clear is the statement that the AHRC will not fund Master's not leading to doctoral research. The correlative of this policy, however, must be that students who have not followed an RPM must not be disqualified from applying for doctoral research, particularly if they are then able to follow a doctoral programme incorporating appropriate research training. By the AHRC's own admission, 50% of its RPM students fail to be funded for PhD, and there are therefore no grounds for excluding applicants who have not followed an RPM.

9. Three years should remain the standard doctoral award duration. (para 21)

COMMENT

The report recognises that many students do not complete their research within three years. The result is often considerable hardship as they seek to eke out a living and try to finish their research. This is not an acceptable model. CCUE urges the AHRC to consult with the other research councils and university authorities about ways of overcoming this problem while maintaining the high quality of the PhD award, including a funded writing-up period. Such funds should not, however, be taken from the basic provision but new monies.

The report also recognises (#15) that a key purpose of doctoral research is to 'develop the next generation of researchers and teachers in higher education'. If this is to be done in three years, it must be properly funded so that postgraduates can achieve the aims set them. CCUE supports most strongly the points made under #16 and urges the AHRC to take a lead role in developing the postgraduate career model.

10. However, the AHRC should fund an additional period (up to a year) in specific cases on the basis of proven research need (para 22).

COMMENT

CCUE would not wish additional resources committed out of the primary research fund allocation.

11. The current funding policy for EU applicants should remain unchanged (para 24).

COMMENT

Agreed.

12. The current award allocation system based on competition at national level evaluated by subject specialist panels should be retained (para 32).

COMMENT

Paragraphs 25-32 are the core of the report and contain a defence of the current allocation system. What they do not contain is transparency. The percentage figures given in #25 must be opened up for the sector to view and discuss; there must be much more information given to candidates about their chances of success; institutions must be given much more feedback as to why their applications are not successful. Some, indeed, appear to receive no feedback whatsoever, thus bringing the process and the AHRC into disrepute.

Much of the report at this point is given over to the costs to the AHRC of any change. Little consideration is given to the possibility of the need for change if additional funding is to be won.

CCUE urges the AHRC to use the evidence it has accumulated not to preserve the status quo but to press for proper resourcing so that areas of research are not starved of funding and transparency and fairness can be seen to be done.

13. The AHRC should review the operation of its project studentships in order to integrate more fully activity funded by the postgraduate and research divisions (para 33).

COMMENT

There is considerable concern in the English community that the AHRC now favours large collaborative projects above the single researcher as a preferred mode of research. In principle CCUE is not against such projects; it sees advantages in the AHRC making links with the research grant arm if this will advantage students and institutions. However, the lack of a clearly articulated AHRC policy for such a review is likely to fuel suspicions that the AHRC is in the process of a transformation that is counter-intuitive to, and destructive of, the very rationale of the arts and humanities. CCUE would therefore urge the AHRC to make clear its position on the balance between project research and the single researcher in its thinking.

14. The AHRC should explore with the sector opportunities for more diverse, and perhaps more extensive, student attachments to projects (para 34).

COMMENT

See 13 above.

15. The AHRC should review its policy for discipline-targeted awards in consultation with the sector with a view to achieving a more flexible and needs-based outcome in this area (para 37).

COMMENT

CCUE strongly supports the whole of #37 in the report and urges AHRC to use the evidence it gathers to press for proper research funding for the sector. It is also advises caution in repeating the penultimate sentence out of context or of taking a simple view of the link between research and career.

16. Elements of the AHRC's Collaborative Doctoral Awards scheme should be extended to the responsive mode competition to support individual collaborative arrangements on the basis of fitness for purpose (para 46).

COMMENT

While CCUE is not against the extension of collaborative research awards, particularly where these may lead to an enhancement of research opportunities for young scholars and researchers, it is concerned about the implications of such schemes for the understanding of what constitutes doctoral research.

Enabling

17. The AHRC should make funding available for a series of inter- and cross-disciplinary seminars in which to stimulate further debate, to share good practice and to help evolve models for practice-led research at doctoral level in the creative and performing arts. (para 42).

COMMENT

No area is currently of more pressing concern to the whole sector than that of

practice-led research in the creative and performing arts. CCUE welcomes this initiative which is both timely and necessary. It is not separate from the larger debate in the document about what the AHRC and the sector now see as research, how that is to be funded and how its value is to be conveyed to government and the public.

18 The AHRC should organize and/or fund a series of pan-disciplinary seminars to explore current and emerging options in delivery and assessment of doctoral research and supervision and the development of best practice (para. 46).

COMMENT

See 17 above.

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

COMMENT

CCUE recommends that the AHRC should investigate as fully as possible the implications of any Bologna agreement for future models of doctoral research and seek to ensure that the sector's interests are properly and fully represented. It is not convinced that the bland reassurances offered in the document constitute sufficient grounds for forward planning of the kind contained in this recommendation.