

UCML Executive

Friday, 26th May, 2023

Vice-Chair Research Report

UCML report Vice-Chair Research

1. The three Fellows of the AHRC Future of Languages scheme have drafted papers for the *LSP* journal outlining their findings. I have **drafted a response piece** on behalf of UCML. Thanks to Fransiska and Emma for their help and guidance.
2. The AHRC commissioned a report from CRAC on '**Doctoral Training in the Arts and Humanities: Engagement, Review and Future Options**', published February 2023. <https://www.ukri.org/publications/crac-vitae-doctoral-training-in-the-arts-and-humanities-report/>

Some key points from the report are below.

The AHRC is the largest funder of doctoral research in A+H, currently funding 1 in 6 of all PGRs in the UK.

Relatively little progress has been made on progressing EDI agendas.

There is a misalignment between the skills current PGRs believe are important for future careers and those valued by employers. The skills that need to be developed are:

- Specialised digital techniques
- Wider digital and data literacy (inc big data and dissemination)
- Enhanced creativity
- Consideration of impact

Employers recognised that key skills A+H PGRs bring include the ability to bring fresh approaches to problems and how to work with ambiguity and to switch mindsets. These are distinctive both for employers and for the contribution of A+H PGRs to interdisciplinary research teams working on grand challenges.

A current problem in the system is the widespread perception of two tiers of institutions – those with AHRC funding and those locked out of it. Concentration of funding within the DTP model has led to the dominance of some large institutions dominating partnerships. Funding and power are perceived to be concentrated in a relatively small number of institutions. There needs to be a balance between levelling up or allowing fairer access institutionally and funding 'the best' HEIs.

The DTP model is also seen to be expensive (through the cost of management and administration). If only fees and stipends were covered, without the DTP 'wrapper', 2-3 times more studentships could be funded.

Looking forward, principles to consider include:

- Incorporating collaboration into all models, including non-academic partners as much as possible
- Extending flexibility of mode of study, from FT to 'very' PT (e.g. 20%) along a continuum (rather than a binary choice)
- Personalisation of training programmes taking into account personal trajectories, including f2f and remote training
- Making training available to all PGRs in the consortium institution, not just funded ones – increase equality of opportunity
- Increased focus on EDI, which may require a rethink of the 'excellence' that candidates show to recognise the potential of applicants who have travelled less traditional routes into doctoral education.

Options for future investment:

1. Collaborative Doctoral Partnerships - expansion of provision where PGRs are hosted by non-HEIs. This seems to improve employability and intersectoral mobility.
2. DTPs – flexing the model to emphasise particular strategic priorities of the AHRC (e.g. EDI / interdisciplinary research) with a focus on widening range of institutions who participate
3. Cross-Council programmes

Cross-cutting ideas

- Provide additional individual student support (e.g. for PGRs supporting a family, for EDI reasons)
- Expand the range of external organisations able to engage with AHRC doctoral programmes
- Use some of the money currently used for doctoral programmes to fund advocacy for the A+H
- Build national centres which develop research-related skills needed by A+H researchers at all levels. The training would be available to all A+H PGRS and researchers, not just those funded by the AHRC.