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## Section B Purpose and Context of the ESRC *Postgraduate Training Guidelines*

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### Purposes of the *Guidelines*

- 1 The ESRC *Guidelines* are intended to fulfil three main purposes:
  - i) to indicate the skills and competencies that postgraduate research students should have acquired by the time they have completed a research degree, if they are to be accepted as professionally trained researchers in their subject;
  - ii) to outline broadly the overall context, objectives and content of the training that students must have received by the time they have completed a research degree;
  - iii) to provide criteria for ESRC's assessment of master's courses and doctoral provision. Fulfilment of these criteria allows successful applicants for ESRC recognition to receive ESRC studentships.
- 2 The word 'training' in the *Guidelines* means 'education, training, *and* development.' This refers to the process by which a social scientist acquires and improves the knowledge, skills and understanding needed to work as a professional researcher in his or her area of the social sciences.
- 3 It is intended that the training requirements detailed in the *Guidelines* should be completed over a period of three to four years. The ESRC remains flexible on how training is organised although basic generic and subject training should be normally delivered through a one or two year research training master's programme with more advanced training taking place throughout the subsequent doctoral training programme.

In particular subject areas or for particular specialist requirements one year's initial training prior to moving on to the PhD programme may not be adequate. Either a high degree of specialist training (such as language learning), or conversion training from other disciplines may be needed, with knock-on effects for the timing of other training, whether basic or advanced. Some of these issues are further explained in this section of these *Guidelines*, but the ESRC is open to a range of alternative models for delivery of training, provided that outlets explain the rationale for their chosen model, and provided that any required outcomes are achieved in the course of the full period of the doctorate.
- 4 The provision of training, supervision and support identified here are all requirements for the receipt of ESRC recognition and must be provided for **every** ESRC-funded student. In addition, we would expect that all other social science postgraduate students would have access to this, or similar, training.

### Key Features of ESRC Support

- 5 **4 or 5 year studentship awards**

These are ESRC funded studentships providing a training programme for students who have not previously completed any substantive research training. They comprise a research training master's followed by a PhD programme, the aim being to provide continuity of support, allowing progress and training to be planned with more certainty and to allow more time within the PhD for work on the doctoral research itself. In the majority of cases students will be funded for a one-year research-training master's and then for three years for a PhD, subject to satisfactory progress. However, alternative models of support, such as a 2+2 model, (or 2+3 model), that deliver the same outcomes are equally acceptable to the ESRC (see B3).

**The term '1+3' is a generic term used to denote a programme consisting of a research training master's and a PhD programme delivered over a four-year period.**

#### 6 **3 year research studentship awards**

These are ESRC-funded studentships providing a training programme for those students who have already completed an appropriate research training programme, either through an ESRC-recognised master's course or an equivalent programme of research training. Students are funded for up to 3 years for a PhD and will be required to undertake only necessary advanced training and any remaining core training within an appropriate research environment.

**The term '+3' is a generic term used to denote a PhD training programme delivered over a period up to three years duration.**

#### 7 **Training in methodologies and research methods**

The *Guidelines* have always placed a clear emphasis on the importance of generic training in research methods to enable all social science researchers to understand and use essential qualitative and quantitative techniques appropriately. Responding to concerns about a perceived lack of such skills within the social science community, the 2001 version of the *Guidelines* strengthened this requirement and spelt out more clearly the kinds of skills in research design, data collection and analysis that postgraduate students should have acquired by the end of their training. The importance of high quality training in methodologies and research methods is continued in the 2005 version with an expectation that training programmes will have evolved to reflect new developments and techniques over the intervening period.

#### 8 **Training outcomes**

The *Guidelines* focus more on the outcomes to be achieved from research training programmes, in terms of knowledge, skills and competencies, than on the structure of programmes or on the way in which they are delivered. Outlets seeking recognition will therefore have to demonstrate that the organisation of their training programmes will deliver the required training, in terms of breadth and depth of coverage, and provide the necessary assessed outcomes in terms of the skills and competencies achieved.

#### 9 **Part-time students**

ESRC is also committed to the support of part-time students at postgraduate level and provides recognition and funding for such students. The ESRC's provision and expectations, which recognise the special needs and circumstances of part-time students, are set out in detail in Appendix 1 of this document.

#### 10 **Distance learning training programmes**

The ESRC will recognise training programmes that are delivered either wholly or substantially by distance learning and will provide funding for students undertaking PhD training in this way. The ESRC's requirements in this regard are also described in Appendix 1 of this document.

#### 11 **Recognition of professional doctorates**

The ESRC will recognise professional doctorates, in order to assure the quality and level of training provided, but has decided not to fund students on such programmes at this stage. This is covered in more detail in Appendix 2 of this document.

#### 12 **Recognition of outlets and programmes**

ESRC recognition for research training may be conferred on academic departments, centres or other units and programmes where students may register for a research degree and which can meet and sustain provision that meets ESRC expectations. A research training 'outlet' refers to collections of people and facilities brought together to deliver the research training specified in the *Guidelines*.

The ESRC will encourage and support outlets seeking to collaborate on the delivery of training wherever this is feasible, economical and of mutual advantage. This collaboration may be at Faculty or Graduate School level, or between individual departments or consortia arrangements between institutions.

The ESRC is especially concerned to encourage the use of flexible co-operation across institutional boundaries to deliver the best advanced training at the most appropriate point in the development of students' research skills. Co-operation may involve a range of activities, from a single training programme, with a shared degree structure, delivered by a consortium of partner institutions, to the provision of discrete advanced workshops and courses which are made available to students from a number of institutions.

Where part of a training programme is conducted in collaboration with an institution overseas, details of the specific contributions made by that institution should be provided in applications for recognition. The outlet awarded ESRC recognition is responsible for monitoring the acceptability of the level and standards of training contributions in institutions to which ESRC recognition cannot apply.

### **The criteria for ESRC recognition of research training outlets**

- 13 The ESRC uses five general criteria in its recognition of research training outlets. These are as follows:

- i) the adequacy of provision of formal, broadly-based and subject-specific training for students in research methodologies and transferable employment-related skills, and the arrangements for the provision of advanced training;
- ii) the adequacy of the arrangements for the supervision of students;
- iii) the presence of an active research environment, where students may benefit from interaction with experienced researchers and current research projects;
- iv) an adequate critical mass of students so that they can benefit from interaction with their peers;
- v) satisfactory PhD thesis submission rates which demonstrate that the majority of students complete their doctorates within a reasonable time.

Sections C to F of the *Guidelines* provide further details on these criteria. Issues related to the recognition of part-time and distance learning provision are addressed in appendix 1.

## **Training outcomes**

- 14 The *Guidelines* focus on what training is delivered rather than on the way in which it is delivered. Outlets supporting students on a four-year programme, however, must provide a full research training programme to satisfy each of the general criteria set out above; whilst those supporting students on a three-year programme must satisfy criteria (ii–v) and criteria (i) in respect of advanced training provision during the period of doctoral training. In either case all students must be trained and supported throughout their award in full accordance with the requirements of the *Guidelines*.

The key formal indicators for the ESRC are the submission of the thesis and award of the doctorate. However, the overall goal of training will be the development of fully trained and competent social science researchers, able to understand and use research techniques appropriate to their subject area and conversant with approaches used by other social scientists.

## **Applications for ESRC recognition**

- 15 ***Timescale***

Outlets will be invited to apply for recognition on a cycle which is normally between four and six years. Only when an outlet is recognised will ESRC accept an application for a studentship, provided the application is appropriate to the recognition status the outlet holds.

- 16 ***Application form***

Application forms and further information about ESRC recognition are made available on the ESRC Website usually three or four months before applications are due.

- 17 ***Types of applications***

Applications can only be made for four types of recognition:

- 4 year full-time programmes; plus part-time and CASE recognition
- 3 year full-time programmes; plus part-time and CASE recognition
- distance learning training programmes
- professional doctorate provision

N.B. In certain circumstances, for example, programmes involving interdisciplinary research, or for which specialist language training is required, submissions may be made for programmes of five years duration.

#### 18 *Assessment of applications*

Assessment of applications is undertaken by Subject Area Panels (SAPs) and final decisions on recognition are made by the Training and Development Board following a review of recommendations from the SAPs to ensure consistency across all subject areas.

#### 19 *Conditional acceptance*

The Training Board on occasion may decide to award conditional recognition to an outlet. This means that the outlet may receive studentships in the next academic year. However, for continued recognition beyond this, a report explaining how the conditions applied to their recognition have been met must be submitted to the ESRC by the end of the first year. Only when the ESRC is satisfied that the conditions have been met in full will continued recognition be confirmed.

#### 20 *Changes to provision*

The ESRC encourages outlets to continually improve and evolve their provision. In particular it would not wish outlets to hold back from implementing plans for innovative developments in their provision once recognition has been obtained. It is important, however, that planned changes are discussed with the ESRC in advance so that any possible implications for recognition status can be identified and discussed.

There is also a general requirement for recognised outlets to notify the ESRC Research and Training Directorate, in writing, when any aspects of provision described in the original application are modified, particularly where substantive changes to content and staff are involved. Details of the changes should be provided in full. **Failure to do so may affect an outlet's recognition status.**

### **Training and Development Board institutional visits**

21 Since 1993, the ESRC's Training and Development Board has supplemented its research training recognition by undertaking visits to a number of institutions each year. The main purposes of such visits are:

- to understand more about the ways in which ESRC outlets are delivering research training and supervision in response to the *Postgraduate Training Guidelines*
- to identify aspects of good practice and to disseminate these to other institutions

The institutional visits are conducted by members of the Training and Development Board and senior members of the ESRC Office, and conclude with confidential reports to the institutions involved. Regular ESRC papers report on general areas of good practice in the delivery of research training and supervision which emerge from the visits and are available on the ESRC website at:

<http://www.esrc.ac.uk/esrccontent/postgradfunding/outcomes.asp>

## **Information about ESRC studentships**

- 22 Further details on ESRC Studentship awards and how applications can be made are available in the *Guidance Notes for Applicants*, which are published and available only on the ESRC website in early January each year, although individual HEIs may also make copies available locally. These materials contain information about ESRC's support for full-time and part-time students and how they can apply, including: application forms, lists of ESRC recognised outlets, courses and programmes.

Students receiving awards are issued with a copy of the *Studentship Handbook* providing details of ESRC requirements for award holders; the obligations, terms and conditions of the award; and other relevant information. The Handbook is also available on the ESRC website at:

[http://www.esrc.ac.uk/esrccontent/postgradfunding/handbook\\_2004.asp](http://www.esrc.ac.uk/esrccontent/postgradfunding/handbook_2004.asp)