

Postgraduate Training in Research Methods: Current Practice and Future Needs in English

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Postgraduate Training in Research Methods: Current Practice and Future Needs in English

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Contents

Foreword by the Director of the LTSN English Subject Centre	1
1. Introduction	3
2. Executive summary	5
3. Research design	7
4. The skill set of research methods in English	10
5. How the skill set should be delivered	14
6. Current Masters provision	22
7. Employability and the PhD	30
8. The articulation of a skills profile for postgraduate students	39
9. Conclusions	42
Appendix A: Fields of research of respondents	44
Appendix B: Skills required for different fields in English	46
Appendix C: Skills needed for postgraduate work in English	47
Appendix D: The AHRB framework of skills	50

Foreword

The English Subject Centre Report Series aims to provide contextual information about the condition of the subject, its relation to national HE policies, and the practical and academic concerns shared by English Departments at the present time. Thereby, the series intends to assist departments in their planning, and in their understanding of their own positions.

This third report takes as its subject the current provision of research methods training courses in English at postgraduate level, a subject currently high on the national agenda as the Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB), soon to become a research council, completes its Postgraduate Review following a recent consultation with HEIs and other interested bodies. At the time of this Report's completion (November 2002) the proposals and results of the AHRB's review are not yet available, our research and their review having been concurrent. However, it is anticipated that such proposals will be subject to further discussion, particularly in the manner of their implementation, and it is hoped that this report might prove a useful resource for English Departments in this regard. The report therefore needs to be considered in the national context, and alongside other relevant materials published by HEFCE, the UK Council for Graduate Education, and the British Academy.

The English Subject Centre began work in this area in the summer of 2001, when correspondence with colleagues in departments raised it as a matter of concern. Initially, the Centre gathered views of interested parties as a means of surveying the different kinds of interest in the provision of research methods training, and the different strategies being adopted in anticipation of policy change, but we realised that a larger scale, and a more methodical approach was needed to enable the composition of a representative body of thought. Our sense of this was sharpened, when having commissioned the research, we collaborated with the Council for College and University English in writing a response to the AHRB consultation informed by separate departmental responses. The responses we received showed varying concerns, many of them powerfully expressed in terms emphasising the practical needs of students, and the equally practical modes of provision adopted on their behalf. When commissioning the research from Sadie Williams, of the Centre for the Study of Education and Training (CSET) at the University of Lancaster, we agreed that the study would need to be based on a

representative sample of departments, from large, complex providers, through to small and largely local ones. Consequently, we established partnerships for the research with seven institutions, made anonymous in the report, for whose assistance and time we are deeply grateful.

The report shows that there is substantial general agreement on a core of research methods for English despite some expressed fears about the potential blandness of generic courses, and the emphasis on diverse needs. Although there are a series of views about research methods training that do not always coincide, either across departments, or across the constituencies of staff and students, some messages do come across particularly clearly. Most notable is the widespread view that an overly generic model will not adequately meet the diverse demands of research students in English, many of whom have specialised needs that require a depth of training and practice which, precisely because of this required depth, and the relevance of its application, are redundant in other contexts. No doubt this sense of relevance is felt so tautly because of the new stringencies attached to completion times: if research training methods are to be regulated partly to enhance completion rates, then students and staff will need to be certain that the time consumed is indeed being optimised to this end, lest the opposite effect is inadvertently achieved. The emphasis on research training methods is also designed to provide a framework for a postgraduate profile. The report reveals that there are some different attitudes to such a profile or description of a skill-set among staff and students but it is nevertheless largely welcomed. Perhaps most importantly, the report suggests that the opportunities for employment outside of academic work for doctoral students are considerably greater than those entertained in the popular imagination.

The report will be widely distributed. Hard copies will be delivered to departments, and an electronic version can be downloaded from the English Subject Centre website at www.english.ltsn.ac.uk.

Professor Philip Martin
Director, English Subject Centre
Royal Holloway, University of London
December 2002

1. Introduction

1.1. Background to the research

The LTSN English Subject Centre aims to promote high quality teaching and learning within its discipline and as part of its remit seeks to respond to policy issues on behalf of its community. Current discussion at the national policy level about the nature and amount of postgraduate training in research methods is ongoing and the Subject Centre has commissioned the research reported here in order to be able to make a more informed response to the consultations which are now being undertaken.

The Centre is concerned to establish a foundation of information about research methods training that is representative of the diverse ways in which departments are currently making such provision, in order to inform future developments, both within and outside departments. It anticipates that the next few years will see considerable change in the nature and scale of research methods training at postgraduate level, and that such change will have potentially large ramifications for the postgraduate qualification framework and its standing in relation to career destinations. It is hoped that the findings from this research project will play a part in the framing of these developments.

1.2 Policy issues

There has been increasing concern in recent years about the kind and amount of postgraduate training in research methods currently being undertaken and a number of recent reports have suggested that postgraduate training in this area may need to be revised. Both the educational and the employment environments have changed considerably over the last few decades and there is widespread consultation being undertaken about how best to respond to changing conditions. In particular, there has been an increase in the number of students at all levels, including Masters and PhDs, but there has been no concomitant expansion in academic employment and the unit of resource has steadily fallen in higher education. At the same time, the economy needs increasingly skilled workers, especially those able to contribute to the so-called 'knowledge economy'. Within this changing framework therefore there has been a need to review what is currently being undertaken and consider possibilities for development.

In addition, the Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB) is shortly to be replaced by a Research

Council for the Arts and Humanities. The other research councils (for social and physical sciences) have already moved towards more directed and required training in research methods. Policy makers are therefore considering how far the arts and humanities are able to adopt a similar model and how far their distinct disciplines and subjects may make other models more appropriate.

The AHRB is therefore currently reviewing overall provision for postgraduate students and undertaking widespread consultation on ways in which training in research methods could or should be extended. Some of the fields covered by the AHRB already operate with a 1+3 system, in which research students undertake a four year rather than a three year programme, and the AHRB Green Paper of January 2002 considers the benefits of extending this system to all its subject areas.

In a similar way the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) recently reviewed provision for students in the social sciences. It has now introduced a new scheme of postgraduate study with more emphasis on the development of research skills and on training in this area. Under this scheme, a 1+3 system, all ESRC research students will need to undertake a four year rather than a three year programme. The first year concentrates on research methods and only some departments are accredited by the ESRC to carry out this part of the programme. Some students therefore will need to spend a year in one department before transferring to another department for the subsequent three years, if the department of their choice is only able to offer the three year subject-based element.

The AHRB Green Paper (op cit) notes a tension between the need for scholarly outcomes of doctoral work that will contribute to knowledge, and the need for high level skill outcomes which will enable researchers trained to this level to make significant contributions to society and to the economy. Many doctoral students do not go on to academic jobs and there is a need for those who proceed to senior posts in other sectors of the economy to be able to recognise and make effective use of the high level skills, knowledge and understanding which they have gained through their doctoral studies.

The UK Council for Graduate Education (UKGCE) has similarly noted a tension between the need to produce a thesis and the need to produce a highly trained person. It proposes a model for research

training based on regular assessment of the needs of individual students. Similarly, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in its Review of Research (Report 00/37, 2000) recommends changes to the way in which research training is assessed.

The AHRB sees a potential danger for the arts and humanities in being left behind the sciences in the development and resourcing of high level provision in these areas. It therefore proposes to develop a framework of requirements which while sensitive to the needs of the arts and humanities also takes account of wider perspectives. The AHRB paper suggests that individual higher education institutions (HEIs) may lack the nature and quality of research environment required to meet these more stringent standards and that collaborative provision may be necessary in many cases. It also recognises that the new framework will mean that additional resources will be needed in order to meet the requirements laid down.

In response to these concerns, this research sought therefore to examine what provision is currently being offered, whether it meets students' needs and what the overall skill needs are in English in terms of research methods. It is hoped that these results will inform current debate and contribute to the formation of policy in this area.

1.3 Aims of the research

The aims of the research were:

- To examine current practice in English Departments in the field of research methods training
- To investigate the attitudes of both postgraduate students and staff to current provision
- To provide evidence that would enable the Centre to make an informed response to the AHRB report
- To provide data which would be of use to the subject community when planning research methods courses
- To assist this planning further by including in the research additional data and evidence about the perceived context of postgraduate study and about student motivation and ambitions

The research focused around developing an understanding of what might be understood as the skill

set of research methods in English at the postgraduate level, how that skill set is being and can be developed, and how research students perceive their needs for research methods training.

Some key issues on which the research focused were:

- Is it possible to describe training in research methods in English in a way that avoids over-reliance on generic, or non-applied, practice?
- Is it desirable to break down the field of research skills into sub-fields based on areas of practice within English?
- Is it possible to construct a taxonomy of research skills along the lines of these sub-fields?
- Are the research skills provided at taught Masters level adequate for students proceeding to research degrees?
- Are the research skills provided at taught Masters level qualitatively different to those provided at doctoral level?
- How are the needs of students working in interdisciplinary fields being met, and how should they be met?
- Should Masters and Doctoral students be able to 'profile' their research expertise and demonstrate their transferable skills, and if so how could this best be achieved?

1.4 Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the seven universities which took part in the research for their help and both staff and students for generously giving up their time. Names of the universities have not been included in this report and no individuals have been identified in order to preserve the confidentiality of respondents.

2. Executive summary

2.1 The skill set of research methods in English

- There is widespread agreement about the existence of a common skill set of research methods at the postgraduate level in English. However, its actual content varies depending on the application to different topics, particular libraries, historical periods, sources of information, databases, and theoretical approaches.
- Many staff were unhappy with the vocabulary of skills and training for doctoral work at this highly conceptual level. However, students were much less worried by the terminology.
- All universities, even small ones, are said to be capable of providing adequate research methods courses for Masters and PhD students. However, they are not all capable of providing such courses over the whole range of fields. Each university has its own specialisms and is able to teach in these areas the research skills that are particular to that period of time and topic of study.

2.2 How the skill set should be delivered

- Staff prefer students to have Masters degrees before starting doctoral work. However, this has financial implications for students, many of whom are self-funded for at least part of their period of post-graduate study.
- Institutions are finding that research methods in English are not sufficient to fill a whole year's course, or even a whole term's. There is little that can be commonly taught and most research skills are period-specific and topic-specific within that period.
- They are also finding that the small amount of research methods that can be taught in common is most effective when 'frontloaded' into the first term of the Masters year.
- Most of the research methods needed in English are best taught through working on a particular topic during the Masters (and later the PhD) dissertation rather than as stand-alone. The model is one of apprenticeship and 'learning through doing' rather than on the transmission of abstract knowledge.
- Departments, especially in smaller institutions or

less popular fields of study, would welcome some kind of shared regional provision or pooling of expertise, probably in the form of seminars, which would bring together students working in specific fields.

- However, the 'spine' or main part of the research methods training needs to be customised to the institution and its libraries and other facilities and to its range of subject specialisms.
- Mature students with work or family responsibilities would be disadvantaged by any emphasis on regional provision.

2.3 Current Masters provision

- Institutions are responding to the AHRB's plans and are introducing new courses or parts of courses to provide more research methods training during the Masters year.
- They are changing and adapting these courses as they discover what does and does not work.
- Masters courses need to serve as a stand-alone exit qualification as well as a preparation for the PhD. Many of those in the professions, particularly teachers, value the Masters degree in career terms. In addition, there will always be students who decide that they do not wish to proceed to a PhD as well as those who don't 'make the grade' and are not considered suitable. Such students continue to need a Masters qualification that has external value and is meaningful and recognisable to outside employers.
- Many universities are phasing out the two-year MPhil. However, there may be a case for the retention of some kind of two-year course for those without sufficient knowledge of the literature of the period (often overseas students) or for the specialist needs of those who require an extra year of studying a language (eg. Latin, Anglo Saxon).
- The 1+3 model does not map onto the education system in Scotland and further consultation will be needed with the Scottish sector in order to find a workable model.
- Interdisciplinary needs are currently being met adequately through the use of joint supervision and shared departmental seminars.

2.4 Employability and the PhD

- Neither staff nor students perceive a tension between the contribution to knowledge of the PhD and the need for skills for the economy. Doctoral study provides students with high level skills which are needed in a variety of professions and are particularly valuable in the 'knowledge economy'.
- Academic jobs are in very short supply. It is now often the case that a student with a PhD may spend five or six years doing part-time university teaching before getting a permanent job.
- However, students with PhDs in English have no difficulty in finding work in related fields such as the civil service, teaching, libraries, museums or the media.
- There is a significant minority of students who are not looking for academic jobs in the UK, including those from overseas, mature students who have had other careers, and those who have developed alternative ambitions during their period of study. Nevertheless, the majority do wish to work in academic life.
- For most students, the personal fulfilment and the sense of having made a contribution to knowledge still make the experience of having done a PhD worthwhile even if they do not succeed in an academic career.
- Students rated personal achievement or fulfilment as much more important than staff did.
- The articulation of a skills profile which would help students and employers become aware of what had been achieved during the PhD and would help students to 'sell' themselves better would be welcomed.

3. Research design

3.1 Sample of universities

A sample of seven universities was chosen for inclusion in the study. Five of the seven were ‘old’ (pre-1992) universities and two were ‘new’ (post-1992) universities. The sample was selected to represent both urban and rural universities, a variety of the regions and nations of the UK, and a range of university types and sizes.

It was decided in consultation with the English Subject Centre that face-to-face interviews with staff and postgraduate students would be the most appropriate methodology to use. This method would enable in-depth responses to be elicited and would also allow for exploratory questioning in the context of particular programmes of study and individual experiences. The aim was thus to seek out a broad range of views and try to arrive at an understanding of the current nature of the postgraduate experience and ways in which it could develop in future.

A total of 25 staff, ranging from Lecturers to Heads of School, and 37 PhD students was interviewed. Staff were interviewed individually and students were

interviewed in small groups ranging from one to four students. Each interview lasted for about an hour. All respondents were assured of confidentiality and neither individuals nor institutions have therefore been identified in this report.

In each university three or four members of staff were interviewed and between two (in the smallest department) and nine (in the largest department) students. Numbers interviewed from ‘old’ and ‘new’ universities are shown in the table below.

The sample was deliberately weighted more heavily towards old universities because this is where the bulk of English PhD students are concentrated. Many of the new universities have only started their programmes very recently and only have small number of PhD students. Doctoral rather than Masters students were selected because the research was particularly concerned with how the Masters degree relates to the research training needs of the PhD rather than with the Masters as a stand-alone experience.

Table 1: Number of interviews showing university type

	No. of staff	%	No. of students	%
‘Old’ university	17	68	29	78
‘New’ university	8	32	8	22
Total	25	100	37	100

3. Research design

3.2 Characteristics of interviewees

There were slightly more male than female respondents among the staff. This was not a deliberate aspect of the research design but a matter of chance and arose from external circumstances. However, the research design did ensure that there would be a balance of grades of staff and of subject areas of staff. A wide range of student fields of study was also included in the research design. Full details of the fields of research of both staff and students are given in Appendix A.

There were more female than male respondents among the students. This reflects the overall gender balance of students in English which is approximately 2:1 at the undergraduate level. The gender balance of respondents is shown in the table below.

Table 2: Gender of respondents

	No. of staff	%	No. of students	%
Male	16	64	14	38
Female	9	36	23	62
Total	25	100	37	100

Staff interviewed were from a range of grades. All were currently supervising PhD students. Grades of staff are shown in the table below.

Students were at different stages of study, some just starting the PhD after having completed a Masters degree, some in their first, second or third years of the PhD, some at the viva or completion stage, and six students in their fourth or fifth year.

Of those in their fourth or fifth year (excluding time spent doing a Masters), four were in their fourth year and these were all part-time. There were two students in their fifth year, one of whom was full-time and one part-time.

Table 3: Grade of staff interviewed

	No. of staff	%
Professor	8	32
Reader	3	12
Senior Lecturer *	5	20
Lecturer **	9	36
Total	25	100

* This group includes PL in new universities

** This group includes SL in new universities

The table below shows the number of students in the study who were full or part time.

Table 4: Mode of study

	No. of students	%
Full-time	29	78
Part-time	8	22
Total	37	100

Most of the students interviewed were from the UK but some were from overseas, as shown in the table below.

Students represented a range of age groups, from their twenties to their fifties. They also had a range of employment and educational backgrounds:

- Young entrants who had come straight from undergraduate study to Masters and/or PhDs
- Mature students who had come straight from undergraduate study to Masters and/or PhDs
- Young students who had worked for a year or two between undergraduate and postgraduate study

- Mature students who had worked for many years between undergraduate and postgraduate study
- Students currently employed in professional jobs and studying part-time
- Students employed in low-skilled jobs (taken in order to fund their studies) and studying part-time

Funding sources varied. Of those that were full time, some were receiving full or partial funding from the AHRB or from the university at which they were studying. Others were fully or partially self-funded.

Table 5: Students by country of origin

	No. of students	%
Home (UK)	29	78
Europe	3	8
USA/Canada	3	8
Asia	1	3
Australia	1	3
Total	37	100

4. The skill set of research methods in English

Staff and students were asked what they thought were the skills needed for doctoral work in English. The results are reported separately for staff and students.

The terminology of ‘skills’ is used throughout this report for clarity and consistency, in preference to phrases such as ‘professional induction’ or ‘communities of practice’ which are less well-recognised and do not perform quite the same function. However, this usage needs to be understood within the context of the sceptical views of some staff about the mechanical associations and potentially narrowing meaning of the term ‘skills’ and their consequent reservations about the terminology.

4.1 The staff perspective

4.1.1 Terminology

Some staff were unhappy with the terms ‘skills’ and ‘training’. They felt that there was a need for a more appropriate nomenclature to describe these high level activities. Academic staff are teaching at complex and advanced professional and research levels. A different terminology which reflected better the high level of understanding involved and the critical and analytic nature of doctoral work would be welcomed. Terms such as ‘professional induction’ or ‘research development’ were suggested.

The word professional is what it should be called, not skills... This is the highest exam in the system and these are professionals.

It can't be called training. Being taught the regulations is training. It's induction into a way of life, a community.

4.1.2 The skill set

Overall, there was widespread agreement about the skills which students needed. Responses are summarised in this section and further details of the skill set are given in Appendix A.

The most important skills were the ‘searching’ skills, both electronic and library based. Students also needed knowledge of their period, skills in accessing the resources appropriate to that period, and bibliographic and editorial skills. In addition, there were other specialised skills which only some students would need. Overall the main skills needed for PhD work in English were identified as involving complex higher order conceptual skills and domain knowledge, in tandem with the bibliographic, electronic and technical skills that enable materials to be identified and tracked down,

and presented and referenced consistently and accurately.

Skills needed for doctoral work fell into the following categories:

- Higher order analytic, critical and literary skills. These included how to marshal an argument, how to think critically, how to write clearly and cogently.
- Domain knowledge – an appreciation of where a topic fits into the broader canvas of literature, an appreciation of social, literary and historical contexts, an understanding of critical and cultural theory.
- Search and retrieval skills, including how to use libraries, electronic databases and the internet, and how to track down materials.
- Editing and bibliographical skills, including how to footnote, use of style sheets, how to reference, how to record data, how to build a bibliography.
- Scholarly method, including the accurate reading and transcription of old manuscripts, ability to locate and contextualise materials by the language used, attention to detail and accuracy.
- Bibliographic knowledge, including how books came to be written and circulated, knowledge of methods of literary production and transmission, understanding of editions and how to choose the most appropriate.
- Skills to do with undertaking the extended research needed for doctoral work – time management, planning, scoping the task.
- Professional skills such as CV writing, presenting at conferences, writing for publication.

Some illustrative responses were:

[They need] an ability to find sources and to have enough sense of the history and production of literature and to know the difference between them. For example, a first edition and a last corrected edition. And when it is appropriate to use one rather than another. Secondly they need to know what this field looks like in terms of the books that were published in it. How to use the National Library collection plus electronic databases. [These are] knowledge skills – what is there and how to access it. Next they need to delimit their field... And how to structure a large piece of work, how to divide it into chapters, how to use sub-headings.

Bibliography – able to search out information using current technologies, to handle the very varied sources there now are and to be able to select, to construct and use bibliographies in relation to their own topics, to use secondary materials to inform and guide their own topic, advanced material skills – both amassing and handling materials. Scholarly presentation – organisation of argument... accessing archives... Developing the skills to... question the material they are looking at.

They also need some teaching in presentational skills – bibliographic conventions, how to present articles for publication. Some understanding of publishing, copyright, intellectual property. Both historically – how it has affected their field – and what they can and can't do now.

Bibliography, footnoting, reviewing – how to read an article, extract the core argument and evaluate it. I think that's a key skill.

You need to be able to find out what has been done and form critical judgements about what has been done. And understand the boundaries of a field. And be able to understand different approaches to literary criticism and be able to use them.

Ability to marshal original arguments, able to master a whole field, coverage of literature, awareness of debates. To present material and arguments with clarity and elegance. To have a sense of confidence in their own ideas and be able to defend their work.

4.1.3 The skill set for different fields

There was widespread agreement that different skills are required in different fields in English and that very little was common to all. It was felt that the content of a common research methods course would be minimal. Although for example all students needed search skills, the actual skills required were very different, depending on whether the student needed to access medieval libraries, modern writings, rare archives, videotapes, and so on. Similarly, while those studying medieval and early modern periods needed to be able to read secretary hand, students studying later periods would need to be able to deal with first editions and later editions and understand appropriate uses of each, while students specialising in contemporary theory would need to study modern texts.

The different skills needed for different fields fell into the following categories:

- Those related to the materials of the period – medieval manuscripts, Renaissance works, Victorian periodicals, et cetera
- Skills for interpreting the texts of the period, such as palaeographic and archival skills, contemporary reading, interviewing living authors, working with visual archives, knowledge of particular theories, et cetera
- Different kinds of searching – finding medieval manuscripts, working with archives, electronic searching, familiarity with specialist libraries, finding contemporary media reviews, et cetera
- Editorial – either electronic or bibliographic editing skills or both

A fully detailed summary of responses is given in Appendix B.

Some comments were:

In the field where I work no one is going to publish a primary resource next week. Eighteenth century is a slower moving field than contemporary literature. You don't need to have your eye on the ball in the same way.

Critical theory requires an argument and the argument is paramount... However, a linguist may be doing fieldwork and be an ethnomethodologist. Phonetics is again different. And in literature itself the approach can be cultural, historical, critical, or bibliographic.

We don't teach palaeography here. Some students would require it. Some would require language skills, some archive or library-based. I supervise nineteenth century and post-modern PhDs. The former are likely to be more traditional and to use libraries, the latter to be theoretical and find new language to talk about particular texts or forms of cultural production.

In my area [18th century novel] archival skills, bibliographical skills, theoretical understanding of how books work, where the meaning of a text resides and the intention of the author, in the printed word on the page, the reader's understanding of the printed words on the page. For my students, the main thing is where to look and how to use primary and secondary resources to solve problems. How you annotate a text, how you record variants and revisions, how you would do explanatory annotations, assess which is the most reliable text to work from.

4. The skill set of research methods in English

4.2 The student perspective

4.2.1 The skill set of research methods for doctoral study in English

The skill set reported by students was similar to that reported by staff. Students felt that the variation in what the individual student would need was wide, depending on individual topics and texts. Students also felt that there were big differences between English and other subjects. In English the student is offering interpretations and meanings and these have their own validity. The outcomes and methodologies are very different from those in the sciences and social sciences.

They can't fault you on the ideas, so long as you back them up. It's [entirely] bibliographic.

In the end it's about reading, about text. Provided you know your way around a library and how to find things out, it is a case of knowing your texts. And keeping up to date with the new stuff.

One person did a study of just one book.

It's important to have the discourse so that you can communicate knowledgeably in your own subject. [You need] computer skills, research databases, Public Records Office, Manuscript Room, rare books.

A summary of responses is shown in the table below.

Table 6: The skill set (student responses)

<p>Personal skills</p> <p>Independent self motivation/ commitment</p>	<p>Contextual skills</p> <p>Basing argument within context of a field</p> <p>Knowledge of contexts in which texts are written and reviewed</p> <p>Knowledge of history</p> <p>Knowledge of literary theory</p> <p>Ability to select appropriate theory</p> <p>Industrial context (for film)</p>	<p>Library skills</p> <p>How to use the library</p> <p>How to use catalogues</p> <p>Knowledge of referencing systems</p> <p>Bibliography</p> <p>How to put together a bibliography</p> <p>How to keep a running bibliography</p> <p>How to take notes on sources</p> <p>Know the style guide backwards</p>
<p>Intellectual skills</p> <p>Effective reading/ read critically</p> <p>Able to read and summarise the whole argument</p> <p>Précis skill</p> <p>Good note taking</p> <p>Attention to detail</p> <p>Fantastic filing system</p> <p>Marshalling resources</p> <p>How to construct an argument</p> <p>Engage in coherent analysis</p> <p>Interpretation of data</p>	<p>Project management skills</p> <p>Organisation of materials</p> <p>Organisation of time</p> <p>Plan and structure adequately</p>	<p>Period-specific skills</p> <p>How to handle MSS</p> <p>How to read different hands</p> <p>How to describe MSS</p> <p>Palaeography</p> <p>Able to transcribe from the original</p> <p>Linguistic skills</p> <p>Archival skills</p> <p>Knowledge of background of book and of publishing</p>
<p>IT skills</p> <p>Computer skills</p> <p>Working with electronic documents</p> <p>Working with electronic databases</p> <p>How to get the best out of the the internet without wasting time</p>	<p>Investigative skills</p> <p>Where to go to find the material you need</p> <p>What databases there are</p>	
	<p>Specialised skills</p> <p>Languages – Latin, French</p> <p>Language history</p>	

Use of the library was a key skill but was seen as very localised.

A lot is finding out about your own university, how faculties interact, how you can tap into the resources, and understanding how specific libraries work.

One of the best sessions [on the Masters] was ten minutes with my supervisor in the library, showing me references I didn't know existed.

Archive work – [couldn't be taught] unless someone was doing the same work as me, but no one is. I've benefited more from doing it myself... It isn't something anybody can tell you. And it's unique to whichever institution the archive is in.

People studying Norman Mailer don't need the same research methods as those studying Shakespeare – [they need] either 17th century MSS or New York Times interviews.

4.2.2 The skill set for different fields

Students also reported, as staff did, that different skills were needed for different fields in English. They felt that only a small amount was held in common. Manuscripts for example were seen as needing specialised and period-specific skills, while literary criticism and editing required very different skills.

Medieval MSS need language skills – Anglo Saxon. [But] for most of us the emphasis is on criticism. Editing represents a subset of different skills.

I have to buy contemporary fiction all the time [for my topic].

[It's whether they are] theoretical or textual. Text-based or theoretical-based research are very different.

My PhD is very archivally based. Others just apply theoretical criticism to easily available text.

Although some skills appeared to be common, the actual practical techniques of doing them varied not only with the period but with the topic, so that they could only be acquired on an individual basis. Students felt not that there was a separate field-specific set of skills but that the skill set described in the previous section needed to be 'customised' for individual students and their work.

They're common but specific at the same time. We all need to know about making lists and reference sections, but they vary from period to period.

It's such a broad church. You could need post-structuralist French philosophy, or 19th century advertising – a completely different research approach.

5. How the skill set should be delivered

5.1 The staff perspective

5.1.1 Overview

The Masters degree was seen as the time to begin to develop the appropriate skills needed for doctoral study. Students' skills would then be further developed and refined during doctoral work with the help of the supervisor. The Masters degree would include some taught elements but staff felt that these needed to be combined with an in-depth dissertation and also with seminar work. At the doctoral level, there was no need for additional taught elements and individual work with the supervisor was seen as the optimum provision. However, staff felt that not enough use was made of input from trained library and information services staff at either Masters or doctoral level.

Students who had completed the Masters should be ready to embark upon the PhD, having acquired IT skills, planning skills, bibliographic skills and an understanding of the area they were intending to research.

They need to arrive at the PhD with the skills to create a research plan, to structure, to have confidence in their own ability to research the area. They also need IT literacy.

There were some professional skills which were not seen as appropriate to the Masters degree and these were best introduced during the doctoral years. These included how to publish, how to do presentations, how to lead seminars, how to write a CV. These were seen as skills needed as a preparation either for academic life or for other employment but not as skills necessary for carrying out postgraduate research. All the institutions did provide experience and/or training in at least some of these areas within the department. In addition, central units in the universities provided generic courses for postgraduate students in many of these things. Staff felt however that it was important that

effective training was also offered within the department in these areas. There was a particular need to provide opportunities for students to develop presentational skills. These were regarded as relevant and useful for employment outside academe. Departments should also offer teaching experience for those who intended to seek academic posts.

Creative Writing was seen to be an exception and to be unlike other Masters degrees. It was not seen as appropriate that it should attempt to cover the same skill set because quite different skills were needed in this field.

In Creative Writing, [the skills are] being able to workshop a piece of writing and learn from peer responses, being able to feed this back into creative projects, editing, and re-writing... The practice of production of original research means that research and analysis may be presented differently from other aspects of English.

5.1.2 Preference for Masters before PhD

All staff said that they preferred PhD students to have already completed Masters degrees and many reported that it was unofficially the policy of the university to require students to take a Masters before undertaking doctoral work. However, they were reluctant to make this a compulsory requirement because of the financial implications for UK students, many of whom are self-financing for all or part of their period of study.

Students who had done Masters degrees were overwhelmingly reported as adequately prepared for doctoral work. Those students who did not have Masters were however less well-prepared. In all the universities, students who did not have Masters degrees, as well as some of those who had Masters degrees from other institutions, were encouraged to audit courses with Masters students in the same department.

Table 7: Number of students with Masters who are found to be adequately prepared for PhD work (staff responses)

	Number	%
Adequately prepared	24	96
Not adequately prepared	1	4
Total	25	100

Although students coming with Masters from other UK universities were generally well prepared, overseas students were sometimes less well prepared. These students were sometimes recommended to undertake a second Masters degree before proceeding to the PhD.

It was particularly noted that students from the Far East did not have an adequate understanding of plagiarism. Students from North America on the other hand were well-trained in this area but often lacked the in-depth knowledge of English literature which in the UK is generally acquired at the undergraduate level.

Particularly with overseas students, teaching them to reference and not to plagiarise. UK MAs have had that beaten out of them and we don't have that trouble with North American students – I think they are stricter about plagiarism.

5.1.3 Elements of successful Masters courses

Staff were asked about the research methods content of their Masters courses and about what worked and what did not work. Many institutions were in the process of changing and reviewing their Masters courses and trying out different models.

Last year we had a circus of classes. It wasn't satisfactory. We have now constructed a proper course.

The most satisfactory model was for the Masters to contain four elements:

- Research methods (taught)
- Dissertation
- Subject content/ contextual studies (taught or seminar)
- Seminars and/or reading groups

However, the potential content of the taught research methods element was seen as small. The most effective way of teaching research methods had been found to be through dissertation work. Where the Masters dissertation served as a preparation or feed-in for the PhD work, students were able to develop their research skills through working on what were appropriate and relevant problems for their topic. However, because for many students the Masters also served as a stand-alone exit qualification, the dissertation was for these students an independent piece of work of which they could be proud.

A lot of what they need is not something you can teach them before they do it. A blanket way of teaching research methods in advance is not the best way to do it. Students feel it's better

to approach it empirically – [having learnt] a dry list doesn't help when they encounter the problem. Also different fields require different skills, so most research skills are ideally taught when a student has decided what he/she wants to do for the PhD.

There is a limit to what you can teach in a group way – basic research skills and introduction to resources. Beyond that the particular skills an individual needs are so specific... for example palaeography, twentieth century communication – they are best taught with the supervisor's response to the need.

The small amount of research methods that could be taught was most effective when front-loaded into the beginning of the year, subject content was best taught over two terms, seminars needed to run for the whole year and the dissertation to take place in the latter half of the year.

The larger universities were offering taught strands in a variety of specialisms. However, the smaller universities tended to concentrate upon offering courses only in their own specialisms. For example, if they had no staff working in the medieval or renaissance periods, they did not offer courses in these fields, nor did they accept students who wished to work in these fields. Similarly, some larger institutions with specialisms in medieval or Victorian periods did not offer film or contemporary poetry. A picture emerges then from this study of institutions 'playing to their strengths', with large institutions offering a range of specialisms and of smaller institutions offering as much depth as larger institutions but over a narrower field of study.

Research seminars were found to be an effective tool. Their content varied, covering a range of research topics, sometimes using invited speakers and providing opportunities for students to give presentations of their own work.

I structure the seminars to introduce people to references and research resources and then to focus on the students' problems – how do I get at the facts, how do I clarify it.

In addition to seminars, use was made of taught courses and dissertation work.

The courses on literature subjects are practice for research. [Students are] expected to use the web, discuss, find new areas to investigate, [do] essays on small research pieces, how to think differently about your subject. [For example, the course on the] role of symbolism in literature is really training in research topics. [How to] carve things out in a different shape.

5. How the skill set should be delivered

We try and cover as many aspects of research culture as possible. Bring them up-to-date with the ways they should be able to think conceptually. Also try to keep a balance between smaller units which they must do to cover the ground, but also emphasise the dissertation which they must do over the summer term and summer vacation.

5.1.4 Possibility of a common taught core of research methods

Staff were asked if they thought it would be possible to have a common taught core of research methods which would be the same across institutions. There were a number of difficulties with this idea. Skills which appeared to be generic needed in practice to be tailored to the individual institution, student and topic of study. An example of this would be library skills. Although all students needed library skills, these would vary for each local institution and also for specialised libraries such as the British Library and other collections. Different research libraries require entirely different techniques for students to be able to find their way around them

and gaining access to particular archives presents its own difficulties. The amount that was actually common was therefore seen as very limited in practical terms.

It would be theoretically possible but research skills that could be taught in that one-size-fits-all way would be fairly minimal – how to use electronic bibliographies, how to find things, where you can get money to attend conferences.

Only in a very limited sense – bibliography and footnoting and using criticism, yes, but not using electronic resources. You need local elements for resources.

About half the respondents felt that it was not possible to have a taught research element that was the same across institutions. The remainder thought that it was possible, but only a small number (16%) thought that it was desirable.

Staff were not only asked whether it would be possible to have a taught core of research methods which would be common across institutions but also

Table 8: Possibility of common taught element across institutions (staff responses)

	Number	%
Not possible	12	48
Possible but not desirable	6	24
Possible but only minimally	3	12
Possible and desirable	4	16
Total	25	100

Table 9: Possibility of common taught element across fields in English (staff responses)

	Number	%
Not possible	12	48
Possible but not desirable	7	28
Possible but only minimally	–	0
Possible and desirable	6	24
Total	25	100

whether it would be possible to have a common research methods element across all fields in English. A similar proportion, about half, thought that it was possible to have a taught element across all fields in English. Slightly more (24%) felt that this was desirable.

Most staff then felt that what could be taught as a common core of research methods was very limited. Most research skills needed to be integrated with the student's future PhD work, if they planned to progress, or with the topic of their Masters dissertation if they did not.

They have to be thoroughly integrated. They vary markedly from topic to topic. The number that can be taken out and taught as add-on is very limited – basic how to use a library, presentation and format.

They all require things for the PhD that are specific for the field. For example, [they need] archival knowledge for a historic PhD, but if they are studying Derrida they just need to read a lot and go to conferences.

Research skills in English could not constitute more than a term's worth of work at most. The skills required were too different for most students.

There is not a year's worth of skills acquisition in English. [What's needed] is limited skills elements plus training in the exploration of a research topic. The dissertation to stand alone, but also to be useful for the PhD. That works well here. A full-time methods course wouldn't be and wouldn't fit you for anything else. Learn those and start to apply them in a small dissertation. Those skills can be used for report writing in a company – those are transferable skills.

The skills of a medievalist, a film critic, a cultural librarian, a linguist, are not the same.

Some things were seen as fundamental. However, a lot of the research skills in English have to be learnt 'on the job' and are practitioner rather than theoretical skills.

There are some elements that could be common but a very small element. Electronic information retrieval, yes. And presentation model – MLA or MHRA – could be taught. Beyond that, even within an institution they are developing very differently because of their topic. To try to make that common would hold them up.

It is artificial to see skills as being separable from the actual research work... A lot of those skills they learn on the job, and in a more sophisticated and intense way. That makes it hard to teach in a common way.

Research skills also depended on the specialisms of the department and were not seen as 'portable' in the same way that technical skills in other subjects such as statistics might be. Departments with particular strengths attracted students who wanted to work in those fields. It would not be appropriate for them to do all or part of their research methods training elsewhere, nor would other departments be likely to have the specialised skills to teach them what they needed. Research methods needed to be embedded within the department and its strengths.

These skills have to be matched to departments and to strengths within departments. It depends on the specialisms of the department. Training in how to use electronic and bibliographic sources you could – no, when I think about it you couldn't – some places use the internet and others old libraries. You also need something about the field and what it covers. At the schematic level, yes, but how it fits to the expertise and the resources of the department is how it would be at the department level.

There are shared elements – how to deal with a bibliographic database, how to put a footnote together. But there must be different elements – for example, we have no film archive here, but we are strong on medieval and Victorian work.

I would be sceptical. We don't do anything pre-1800. You need separate skills to read earlier texts. You might have a broad set of agreements about what the aims of research methods should be in English, an agreed structure. We [the academic community] need to discuss and agree this. But a syllabus, no. People have to teach out of... where their research interests are.

Students needed to be able to 'pick and mix' what was appropriate for them. Students with different backgrounds at undergraduate level or with different kinds of prior experience would need different elements. For example, new graduates from the same institution would be familiar with the resources and electronic databases available, while those from other universities or who had been away from academia for a number of years would need updating.

Students come from very different backgrounds – new undergraduates [will be familiar with resources], but some who have been five years out of academia need resource training.

I don't think it would be appropriate to have a course ranging from fifteenth century handwriting, the handmade book – it wouldn't be appropriate to someone doing an MA in

5. How the skill set should be delivered

children's literature. Because different institutions offer different MLAs. If there was an element of pick and mix that would be different.

5.1.5 Content of a common core

Staff were asked about what might be included in a common core. Again, they reported that shared elements were fairly minimal. Most of what a student needed was seen as particular to the topic of study and the institution.

There could be a core but it would be quite basic – presentation, thinking in a scholarly way, checking sources.

Elements which might be included were:

- Resources: how to find things, where sources are
- Databases: electronic information retrieval, tools for searches, electronic bibliographies, how to deal with a bibliographic database
- Presentation: referencing, how to put together a footnote, use of style book (MLA or MHRA)
- Bibliographies: how to prepare a bibliography, how to take notes
- Nature of the book: history of the book, forgery, corruption, choice and status of editions
- Nature of text: theory of the text, literary and linguistic styles, historical overview of what constitutes literature
- Archival skills: how to use archives, how to use computer archives
- Libraries: how to use libraries, where to find journals and which are the most useful
- A language
- Interview skills (for work with living authors)

However, these things would need to be customised to individual institutions and individual students.

It would have to be adaptable to institutions. Include how to use libraries, where sources are, how to take notes – basic tools. With specialist things for medievalists. And also for those working in unpublished archives. It would need fine tuning for particular departments and particular students.

You'd quickly get into specifics – a particular introduction to the university library here or [named research library].

Different kinds of research go on at different institutions. [Some things] are appropriate for everybody – bibliography,

theory of the text, history of the book, how a book is put together, how you describe it, the difference between a text and a manuscript. But beyond that it needs to be customised according to the individual student's needs.

Staff made various suggestions for what might be contained in a common core.

[The only common elements would be] What is a scholarly footnote, what is the purpose of a footnote, what is a bibliography, what is the purpose of a bibliography, what does an adequate bibliography look like and what does an excellent bibliography look like.

In terms of formal training, certain things are fundamental. A basic set of skills should be taught and should be universal: archival skills, never know when you will need them, how to get around computer archives, bibliography – issues of forgery, corruption and editions – some background in literary and linguistic styles, the historical overview of what constitutes literature.

The use of modern technologies can be. Information retrieval, how to find things out, is all. But in most areas it's pointless to try. We used to make everybody do old-style bibliography and it's just not relevant to moderns. Scholarly presentation and writing are theoretically common but in practice can't be learned except on the job. It's not useful to do them commonly.

Original manuscript research, archival research, problems of deviant editions – a lot of things will only be relevant to some students. All you can do is teach the bare bones – citation, how you manage a project, how do you use a library, how do you use the web.

Provision needed to be flexible and allow for creative innovation.

If it was defined in a way sufficiently wide and flexible, it could be delivered by all universities. If say it said archival research was essential, there would be some problems.

I am worried that they are going to be looking for a homogeneous national training programme... I am in two minds. I don't want training to overwhelm the freedom of academic enquiry. There is a real danger that we will produce a PhD 'product', that people will not do dangerous or innovative work. If I look back to feminist or black studies, the setting up of whole new areas – that came from the power of students... Now students are professionalised. They don't write PhDs that make you angry or that you want to throw across the room. They are all very safe. Training might make this worse.

There was however support for some regional elements to be offered in addition to the ‘customised’ training offered at individual universities. The ‘spine’ of any common training would need to be specific to an institution, but there was room for regional collaboration.

I'm not sure it would be absorbed or used [by the student]. The spine has to belong to the institution. It can't be a discrete bit of training... I don't see how you could go to [Urbantown University] and do your research training, then go to [Ruralshire University] and be a researcher. You would need further support. You can teach statistics or ethnomethodology but you can't teach the attitudes to be a sensitive literary researcher... The spine needs to be in their own institution. But you could do a lot more in collaboration on top of that.

Students doing medieval studies, creative writing or critical theory have very different needs. A national curriculum would be ridiculous, but they would all benefit from some regional provision.

Students will gravitate towards departments where there are the right areas of supervision. I think pooling of resources would be a good thing. My period [18th century novel] is somewhat beleaguered. We have fewer students than Romanticism or Renaissance. It would benefit the students if there was pooling between neighbouring universities.

Concentration... in a few universities... a golden triangle training all PhDs – politically and intellectually that would be disastrous. PhD study should be accessible everywhere. Regional training is possible – universities could help each other.

People come to a postgraduate institution to work in certain ways with the strengths of that institution. But if there were to be an expansion of taught elements, it would be realistic to get together with other local universities and pool resources. We have enough students here to mount a very good course. Other universities are struggling to develop postgraduate taught courses... for the numbers they've got.

There is a very small core that can be sensibly taught that is not field specific... It might be worth a pooling of resources – could have a palaeography course run in Edinburgh or Glasgow for the whole of Scotland. Very few universities can mount the whole range of courses across the spectrum – Oxford, Cambridge, York, maybe Leeds.

Scotland with its different educational system and four year undergraduate degrees presented a challenge.

I have particular anxiety about Scotland. The AHRB does its best to be UK-wide but the structural and institutional differences in Scotland are not fully appreciated.

Staff from smaller institutions feel that their students would benefit from the experience of being in a larger group. However, some students – those with work and family commitments, often women – would be disadvantaged by any kind of common delivery or elements taught elsewhere.

The difficulty would be delivery. Some MA students have jobs or family commitments.

5.1.6 Need for ongoing training during the PhD

Staff were asked about the degree to which a Masters could fully prepare students for a PhD and how far they needed ongoing training in research methods. Respondents felt that however good a preparation the Masters was, there would always and inevitably be an ongoing need for research skills to be continually improved and finely honed during the PhD as the student researched a particular topic in increasing depth.

You must go on training... They need to be embarked on things before they are fully aware [what they need]. You can't offer a dollop of training which does the biz. The MA gives them attitudes, hunger, how do you construct the whole discipline and how do you select something within it that is not bounded by your undergraduate studies.

The Masters could provide certain things.

They will have honed writing skills, know how to write bibliographies and footnotes, how to use searches.

They know [from Masters] about acquiring information and handling it. For the PhD, they need advanced planning skills.

Some techniques are learnt by observation and specialised experience.

I don't think you ever stop learning... You learn by osmosis and observation – you watch other people in the field... Simply being around other medievalists in the library and watching them handle manuscripts.

Most research skills were best undertaken during supervisions, although the supervisor would often ‘signpost’ specialised help available from library or information science staff. Research seminars were also used to widen students’ knowledge and understanding.

5. How the skill set should be delivered

Only when they are researching in detail a particular topic do they know what they don't know. Renaissance [students] need palaeography, secretary script, looking at MSS. We don't do that in the MA. We offer theoretical issues, problems with editions, publishing backgrounds, and so on. But they will need during the PhD to be told where the resources are – it needs to be tailored to the student, where to find stuff on Virginia Woolf for example. Also, to speak to authors if they are alive. The material is not necessarily archival. They can be going out to get fresh sources. Students work best in terms of methodology when they've got a problem they need to solve. How to find sources that will answer it... you couldn't build that into an abstract methodology course.

The research training has to be done alongside the research. It is not like quantitative skills... An English PhD is a very different animal from say Psychology.

5.2 The student perspective

5.2.1 Possibility of a common taught element

Students were also asked if they thought it would be possible to have a common taught core of research methods which would be the same across institutions. A majority (56%) thought it could be, but only if it were fairly minimal in its content and could be adapted by each institution.

Table 10: Possibility of common taught element across institutions (student view)

	Number	%
Yes	13	35
Yes, if it was only a core/ only 1 term	6	16
Yes, if could be flexibly adapted for own institution	2	5
Wouldn't work for Scotland	1	3
No/ needs to be local to own institution and library	10	27
Don't know/ not sure how it could work	5	14
Total	37	100

Students like staff felt that any common element needed to be customised for particular institutions and topics.

It has to be on a really local level. Tailored to the researchers in question or it becomes uselessly centralised. It would be self-defeating and time-wasting. English is so fragmented.

It would need to be supplemented with institution-specific and period-specific.

There would have to be flexibility for the specialisms of the department.

It would need to be flexible for your own institution's library and collections.

Single sessions on particular topics would be enough.

It would have to allow for differences in individual needs... You can all go to the library together and do a keyword search

in a day or evening. It doesn't require a course or a unit.

Again, the differences between England and Scotland were a matter for concern.

It wouldn't work across England and Scotland. There are totally different run-ups in the undergraduate degree.

Students would however welcome the idea of inter-institutional seminars.

Seminars across Scotland – that would work. The idea of peers, people doing the same research. People can get quite isolated.

Some students would like more seminars and reading groups within their own departments. However, others were already active in this way.

They could do more to promote interaction among students. Reading groups.

We run a PG seminar fortnightly, mainly presentation of work in progress. But we are going to make it more skills based, with shorter presentations like those of business meetings. And we're going to invite speakers about non academic employment, and things like how to use Power Point. To get more general skills.

5.2.2 Contents of a common core

Students were asked about what should be included in a common core. The things they felt would be relevant and were common across institutions were:

- How to write a bibliography
- How to cite work
- Sources of material
- Library searching
- Internet searching
- Electronic database searching
- Consistency of style: MHRA, MLA
- Footnotes

However, they were concerned about time and wanted taught elements kept to a minimum.

The course starts too far down. You waste time in large groups. Getting to what you need.

People are doing different things and need different skills. You could waste a lot of time. It's useful to have specific skills for your method. But one size fits all would be confusing.

They also thought that some common skills could only be taught through dissertation work, either at Masters or doctoral level. These were:

- How to select appropriate theory
- Analysis skills
- Writing skills – moving from shorter pieces to longer dissertation
- The balance between primary and secondary sources
- Tracking down visual material
- Where to find relevant non-academic archives for your topic
- Ability to deal with different methodologies and theory
- How to access relevant MSS

Research skills in English are often very specific and practical and need to be learnt 'on the job'.

A lot of research methods [in English] can't be taught. You pick it up by doing it.

Part-time students had additional problems.

As a part-time student I wouldn't want to do it. I would resent the time.

The over-riding obsession as a part-time student is money. If they offer things, I often can't do them because I'm working. I work four days a week and spend two days a week on the PhD.

Students also wanted more use to be made of trained library and information staff.

There are so many highly qualified librarians here, perfectly positioned to be doing something in the research methods vein. A wasted resource.

6. Current Masters provision

6.1 The staff perspective

6.1.1 Response to AHRB proposals

Most of the universities in the study are making significant changes to their Masters programmes in the light of the AHRB's proposals. They are introducing more structured elements into their Masters courses (not all of which are styled MA but may have other Masters titles) and are including more research methods. They are also seeking a balance between the need for the Masters to prepare students for the PhD and the need for it to operate as a stand-alone qualification. Finally, they are discovering which elements of research methods can be taught in classes or seminars and which are best taught on a one-to-one basis through the medium of a Masters dissertation. Overall, they are reviewing their provision and seeking to update and change it in the light of ongoing experience. However, the smaller institutions are only just beginning to think about revising the research methods elements of their programmes and have made less progress than the larger institutions in this direction.

Some typical comments were:

The Masters has been stand-alone but we are turning it into a preparation for the PhD.

The new course will combine breadth of learning with research training... It will be a legitimate free-standing degree, not a failure [for those who don't go on], satisfying and rewarding in its own right but also providing the intense research training needed for doctoral research.

One of the universities has also introduced a new full-time one year Masters degree covering research methods which is not intended to stand alone but acts only as a preparation for the PhD. However, there have been problems with this course, particularly in terms of the fact that it does not serve as an exit qualification for those who decide not to go on to doctoral study after all. It was also found that there are difficulties in designing a research methods course in English which is sufficiently relevant and substantial to fill a year. The university is currently revising the programme. Student views on this Masters degree are discussed in section 6.2.2.

Scotland presents particular problems and respondents expressed concern about difficulties in fitting the AHRB's 1+3 proposals onto the Scottish system. Currently, students in Scotland will normally have undertaken a four year undergraduate programme

and if they then take a one year Masters degree this can be used to count towards a year of the PhD. The Masters therefore is usually combined with two rather than three further years of postgraduate study to achieve the doctoral award, making a 4 + 1 + 2 system. The introduction of a compulsory 1 + 3 programme of postgraduate study would give an overall pattern of 4 + 1 + 3 including undergraduate study and would not map onto the English pattern of 3 + 1 + 3. With current systems of student support, students would also be under increasing financial pressure with the addition of an eighth year of study.

A further change which was reported is the gradual phasing out of MPhil programmes, which most of the universities seemed to be considering. The MPhil had traditionally often been used as part of a 2+2 scheme, with students completing a doctorate in a further two years. However, staff felt that such schemes no longer map onto the funding regime of the AHRB. In addition, its usefulness as a stand-alone qualification was also in doubt. Employers did not appreciate it as being any more valuable than a one-year Masters.

On the other hand, there were some overseas students who needed additional training or background study for which a one year Masters was not enough and for whom a 2+3 programme was appropriate.

The two year course was an intensive literary training, a sort of condensed undergraduate degree, particularly useful for overseas students.

There are also small numbers of students with specialised needs (generally language needs) who may need an extra year to develop their knowledge of Latin or Old Norse or other specialism. These students may not be able to complete within the 1+3 timeframe. If therefore there is a universal move to 1+3, a move favoured by the academics in this study, there is a need to consider how the needs of those students who would benefit from an extra year are going to be met.

There was some discussion by respondents about the use of the term MA and whether other nomenclatures such as Master of Research (MRes) or MSc would be better. Some respondents felt that the term MA was confusing, particularly to employers outside academia, because both Scottish and Oxbridge universities have their own particular use of the MA qualification. On the other hand, they felt that the need for the Masters to continue to act as an exit qualification was an argument for the retention of the term MA. The MA is

a widely recognised and respected professional qualification among employers in the public sector, especially schools and further education colleges.

6.1.2 Masters as stand-alone or as preparation for the PhD

The majority of staff saw the Masters degree as serving a dual function and being both stand-alone and preparation for the PhD.

Staff were asked how many of their Masters students went on to do a PhD. This varied not only between institutions but between subjects and departments. On one course, an MA in critical theory, all the students normally proceeded to PhDs. In another (Creative Writing) none did. Other courses varied between these extremes.

Table 11: Masters as stand-alone or preparation for PhD (staff responses)

	Number	%
Stand alone	13	35
Preparation for PhD	6	16
Both	2	5
Total	37	100

Table 12: Numbers of Masters students who go on to PhDs (staff responses)

	Number of Responses	%
All*	1	4
Most (more than 60%)	4	16
About half	5	20
Less than half/very few	5	20
None**	1	4
Don't know/varies year to year	9	36
Total	25	100

* This was a critical theory MA

** This was a creative writing MA

6. Current Masters provision

The findings of the research indicate that there is a strong demand for the Masters to have a dual function, acting both as an exit qualification and as a preparation for the PhD. Masters which are stand-alone remain attractive to some groups of students. However, Masters which serve mainly as a preparation for the PhD were not so attractive. While many students saw the Masters as a way of leading into the PhD and wanted it to be integrated with PhD work, others were using the Masters year in order to decide whether they would like to progress on to doctoral work or not. If they choose not to, or their tutors decide that they are not suitable, then they need an exit qualification which can stand alone to show what they have achieved. This also needs to be something which is recognisable and valued by employers. Similarly, many students who intend the Masters as a one-year stand-alone experience change their minds during the year and decide to proceed to doctoral work. Provision also needs to be made for them. There is a very strong case therefore for all or most Masters programmes to have a dual function.

One exception however might be the Masters in Creative Writing. These students rarely seek to move on to a PhD and even if they do so such students do not require the same research methods as are needed by other doctoral students in English.

Students for whom the Masters needs to function both as a stand-alone qualification as well as potentially serving as a preparation for a PhD fall into the following groups:

- Students who may decide during the Masters that they do not wish to move on to further study
- Those who during the year are not found to be sufficiently able to progress to the PhD
- Overseas students who plan to return to their own countries and professions (very often as teachers)
- UK students who plan to remain in their current profession and for whom the Masters provides an important qualification for their career progression (mainly teachers in schools and colleges, but also includes staff in administrative posts or other parts of the public service)
- UK students planning a career change (eg. schoolteachers wanting to get into further education [FE])

Staff reported that students had a variety of motives

when undertaking a Masters degree.

Some come to do it as a Masters because they are interested. This is most pronounced in Creative Writing. But the majority see it as part of a transition to doctoral work. They come here to learn specific research skills because the thought of going straight to a doctorate is overwhelming.

Some want to become an academic. Some feel at the end of the third undergraduate year that they haven't finished studying... Some are not sure if they want to do a PhD. Some are near retirement and doing the MA for itself. Lots just want to carry on studying at a higher level. Some are teachers for whom it's an important qualification. Some are doing a career switch and using the PhD as a stepping stone.

Some come because they want to do a Masters. Some because they want to do a PhD and see the Masters as the way in. The international ones are the ones most likely to see it as stand alone.

Many students undertake the Masters because they want to continue in more depth the work they did at undergraduate level.

More and more – maybe half – are coming without any plans to do a PhD. They are doing it to finish up their undergraduate work rather than to go on.

Other students use the Masters to 'try the water'.

[For the mature students] To find out how far they can go. Give them an opportunity to think further about research... The young ones have made up their minds. "I've always wanted to do an MA". Or [it arises out of their undergraduate study] "I feel I've just started." [Others say] "I've always wanted to do a PhD."

In general, the Masters is a way of finding out if they want to do a PhD.

Most staff wanted the Masters to serve a dual function.

Our MA is also [as well as being stand-alone] designed to provide the research skills they will need to go on to a PhD. More than that – to go on to be a member of an intellectual community.

It acts as a hurdle and filter for the PhD, [but also] it is taken by many people as stand-alone.

Mature students often did not have clear intentions about the future.

They think, I'll do this course; and then they think, I'll do another. [Mostly mature part-timers]

Some applicants for PhDs I've said to them, why don't you just do the Masters, you're not ready. But some just do the taught bit. Most are part-time and they buy it by the module.

One member of staff at a new university which has only recently started offering PhDs saw the Masters as serving the community rather than as a preparation for further study.

[Our Masters is] stand-alone. Most are teachers. Many are retired. It's run to respond to the needs of the broad community.

6.1.3 Desirability of students moving on

Respondents were asked if they preferred students to stay at the institution where they did the Masters or to go elsewhere for doctoral work. Nearly all either preferred, or thought it more appropriate, for people to stay.

Table 13: Preference for Masters students to stay for doctoral work (staff responses)

	Number	%
Prefer them to stay here	12	48
Mostly mature & therefore appropriate for them to stay	4	16
Prefer them to stay unless we don't have the supervision capability	3	12
It depends on student	3	12
Prefer them to go if done Masters and UG in same place	2	8
I prefer it but institution doesn't	2	4
Total	25	100

While most staff preferred students to stay, they had different reasons for this. Some felt that when students had done their preliminary work with the department as part of their Masters, it was desirable for them to stay from an academic point of view. They had been prepared by the Masters for the PhD programme in that institution and they would have experience in the specialisms of that department. This was particularly so where this was one of the leading departments in the country in a specialism and staff felt that there was no need for students to move on.

The MA is based in our specialisms and we do those better than any other institution.

Part of the design of the MA is to lead into research work. So we prefer them not to.

We prefer them to stay here. They've done their preliminary work with us.

The existence of supervision capability was seen by many as the key factor.

The expectation is that we would have the resources to supervise them. We turn people down because we don't have the available supervision... At doctoral level it's the person rather than the place that matters. You want to work with a particular person rather than go to a particular university.

When we do not have the supervision capability we direct them to move on, for example in modern poetry, film or Shakespeare.

Others felt that it was intellectually undesirable for students to stay if this was also where they had spent their undergraduate years. However, there were financial pressures against recommending students to move on. Many staff felt themselves caught in an ethical dilemma between advising the students in their own best interests to move elsewhere and seeking to maintain the research profile of the department by retaining them as doctoral students.

Personally I would prefer them to go elsewhere, especially if they have done an undergraduate degree here. Obviously, institutionally we want them to stay, especially the good ones.

6. Current Masters provision

I think for the students it's better to go on, have three different institutions. But from the funding point of view it's best for them to stay here. It's terrible to have to say that.

From the School's point of view, we want our good students to continue with us. We encourage them to stay. [But] if you ask me if this is wise, I would say someone should not do all three degrees at one institution.

We have to [advise them to stay] because of the funding. Ideally for the student it's best not to have their entire career at one institution.

Mature students, particularly women with families, were not in a position to move on.

Mostly they are matures – I've never had a PhD student who wasn't a mature woman. It's not appropriate for them to go elsewhere.

6.1.4 The needs of students working in interdisciplinary fields

Not all respondents had experience of supervising PhD students working in inter-disciplinary fields. Those that had were confident of their ability to deal with such students. The most common approach was joint supervision, often being added during the course of the PhD as the students' interests developed towards another field. Joint supervision was supplemented by the student being invited to audit undergraduate and Masters courses in the other department and to attend postgraduate seminars there. The most common links mentioned were with history, philosophy, theology, art, and languages.

There was no support for the idea that these students needed additional courses or that their need for training in research methods was not being met. The combination of seminars and individual supervisions in the other department was reported as effective.

PhD students are allowed to audit undergraduate and Masters courses... An inter-disciplinary topic will be supervised in two departments and have access to these courses... But the particular topic determines what skills they need.

6.2 The student perspective

6.2.1 Usefulness of the Masters

Students put a very high premium on the value of their time. They were very aware of the financial costs of study; some were working part-time; many had debts

accrued during undergraduate study. These financial factors made them increasingly aware of the importance of making the very best use of the limited time available. This affected their attitudes to what was offered on the Masters. If they were going to be able to achieve a PhD in three years after the Masters, they wanted what was in the Masters to be relevant to what they would be working on in the PhD.

All the students who had done Masters had found them useful as preparation for the PhD, whether or not they had included taught research methods. Those which did not include taught research methods had given the students breadth of understanding and the experience of independent research on a topic relevant to the PhD.

The Masters allowed me to... do background reading and gather materials, so I'm in a much better position to start the PhD.

It's given me time to explore my ideas a bit. I'd be floundering if I'd gone straight to the PhD... The taught elements were things I wasn't interested in. [I got an] interesting grounding in theory and culture and post-modernism... It's a good idea to have time to think and I can use the dissertation as the basis for my PhD.

What gave me the greatest preparation was the extended dissertation I did over the summer. Research on my own with a supervisor... I found it very inspiring.

As with the staff, the model was seen to be one of apprenticeship, with research methods being only a small element of what was needed.

It wouldn't have been easy without the MA... It was like an apprenticeship. It... immerses you in the kind of things they can provide supervision for... Research methods were covered and covered adequately. We had a weekly research methods seminar.

One module [on research methods] was enough.

Those who had had very highly structured Masters courses often felt less well-prepared.

It was a taught course with regular workshops and lots of feedback. There was a communal atmosphere... [But] not a lot of research on the MA. I've had to learn how to research properly, I didn't get that on the MA.

It did try to prepare you for individual study but it's a taught course. You don't realise how much you'll be on your own in research terms [on the PhD].

I find it difficult to do a PhD in England. In England it is about thinking and being creative. In America it is more constructed. I find it difficult not to write in this structured way. [Student from Asia]

The teaching of more than a very limited core of research methods was seen as problematic. However, everybody would benefit from some elements, particularly library and electronic working.

Manuscript transcription was useless for us. And the practical stuff [we needed] was missing – how you write your bibliography, footnotes, referencing, standards on double quotes, etc... Sessions in the library were very useful, how to use the electronic databases... Also seminars on things like how to read effectively.

I would have liked more time in the library learning how to use the machines.

The research methods course was really helpful. How to put together a bibliography, library searching, on-line database searching.

6.2.2 A new kind of Masters: ‘MRN’

As was indicated above, one university had introduced a new Masters degree (called here the ‘MRN’ – not its real name) designed to teach research methods and to be a preparation for the PhD rather than stand-alone. However, this programme was not seen by students as satisfactory and they were not happy with it. They felt that there was insufficient material in research methods in English to fill a year. They also resented a wasted summer when they would have liked to be starting work on the doctorate.

The ‘MRN’ was useful but not a year’s worth. The ‘MRN’ doesn’t fill your year.

Others said:

‘the workload was not heavy’, ‘non-existent’, ‘like having a year off’.

One student described it as:

A bit of a limbo, waiting to do what you want to do.

It was seen as both too specialist and too fragmented. Those who were doing medieval studies found the medieval elements useful. Others found these irrelevant and would have liked more theoretical overview. Overall, the students felt that most of the ‘MRN’ had been a waste of time for them. Students would like something much more ‘pick and mix’ so that

they could get the best value out of the time spent. They needed something much more specific to their chosen fields and found the individual contact with supervisors far more useful than the taught elements.

Everyone in my group hated it and didn’t learn anything. The only thing you learnt was from working with my supervisor.

The most useful part was going around by myself, finding out what I needed to know... [We needed] less of the long weekly classes that weren’t useful.

Working over the summer was important. One student who had done her MA elsewhere and had also sat in on the ‘MRN’ said:

It was good working over the summer [in the MA I did]. With the ‘MRN’ you don’t know if you’ve been accepted [for the PhD] and there is nothing to do over the summer. And we did such a wide range of things for the MA which was very valuable. [In my MA] we had two seminar groups a week [and] I read texts I wouldn’t have read as an undergraduate.

The ‘MRN’ is a nine month course. You are left with a three month interlude.

These students agreed that some research methods elements during their Masters would have been useful.

How to use the bibliography in the British Library... I felt very stupid about electronic resources when I arrived here [after MA]. I had no idea how to annotate, how to edit, how to transcribe MSS... I spent ages struggling with the Short Title Catalogue... The MA is independent work and they work very well at that.

However, research methods were seen to make up less than a term’s work and could not be made to cover a whole year as a stand-alone course.

6.2.3 Need for further training while undertaking the PhD

Students did not want any formal teaching in research methods once they had completed the Masters. What they did want was seminars, both subject-based and skill-based, and induction sessions.

Induction needed to cover use of the library, other resources and information about seminar programmes within the department.

[They could have] one big meeting at the beginning. Then a series of meetings in the first few weeks for PhD students.

6. Current Masters provision

In the first year, I was unaware that there were seminars. I was left on my own. I came from [named university] and didn't know the ropes.

They should have a thorough library induction for postgraduates. If I hadn't done my undergraduate here, I wouldn't have a clue.

In seminars they wanted to cover the professional topics which they did not want covered during the Masters. These included:

- How to prepare papers for publication
- How to prepare a paper for presentation at a conference
- How to structure a thesis, what length a chapter should be et cetera
- Writing CVs
- Presenting at seminars and leading discussion
- Surviving the viva

They also wanted:

- Research seminars where people give papers (including staff and outside speakers)
- Opportunities to present their own work, including panel sessions in which students at the beginning of their PhDs can make more limited contributions

Some comments were:

Seminar skills – how to do a good seminar and get people interested. This is neglected in most universities. You need to go to conferences to be hireable in future. And public speaking is useful in any career.

My supervisor spent time with me talking about using the British Library. Also where I might find material. Because subjects differ so much, you need different tools.

Breadth of cultural awareness [from] seminars where you listen to other people's work.

Something about what's expected in a thesis. Everyone seems to assume you know. How many chapters you have to have.

Doctoral students often feel very isolated and one seminar every two weeks was not seen to be enough. Some students had experienced even less than that.

It would be useful to have more seminars for full-time students, so you could see people and see what they are doing. The seminars are every two weeks – it took me a long time to get to know people, to find out if there are people with common interests. More sharing really helps people with their writing, talking about your ideas.

[The MA] didn't prepare you for the fact that you don't see anyone else. The first year I didn't see anyone except my supervisor.

Taking courses with the Masters students was not seen to be very useful because they were operating at such different levels.

The basic problem is that Masters and PhD students are at such different places. The PhDs can talk about MSS and the Masters about essays.

One student who had not done undergraduate studies in the UK had benefited greatly from the two year MPhil, which was now being discontinued.

It provided me with an extensive background which will be useful if I become a teacher... I had to learn different subjects from different fields... Because I come from [European city] it was absolutely necessary. The department there had no Victorian and I needed the background.

6.2.4 Inter-disciplinary work

Fourteen percent of students in the sample were doing inter-disciplinary work and they were all happy with the training in research methods that they were receiving. They were able to audit undergraduate courses and to attend postgraduate seminars in the other departments. Some also had supervision arrangements across subjects.

Some typical comments were:

I do things in History but it couldn't be systematised. It's things that come up. Your supervisor has contacts and can put you in touch with people, keep an eye out for seminars and conferences.

I border History and Theology. I get the lecture lists and pick things out. Also graduate seminars... I would not have wanted... [to be] forced to do something in other faculties.

Table 14: Needs of students doing interdisciplinary work for additional research methods training (student view)

	Number	%
Needs being met	5	14
Needs not being met	0	–
Not doing interdisciplinary work	32	87
Total	37	100

7. Employability and the PhD

7.1 The staff perspective

7.1.1 Purpose of the PhD

Respondents were asked what they saw as the main purpose of the PhD. People were divided in their opinions. Some (40%) saw the traditional aim, the contribution to knowledge, as still paramount. More than half however thought that preparation for an academic career was at least as or more important (56%). A number also mentioned personal development or satisfaction as an important subsidiary aim.

Table 15: Main purpose of PhD (staff responses)

	Number	%
Contribution to knowledge	10	40
Preparation for an academic career	8	32
Both	6	24
Not sure	1	4
Total	25	100

The contribution to knowledge remained an overriding factor for many.

The primary thing I would like to think it's about is a contribution to knowledge. And on the whole PhD theses are. People undertake them out of a passion... Some are original. The best are stunning contributions to knowledge, and these are exciting to read.

The definition used to be an original and substantial contribution to knowledge. Now it's only substantial, not original – it's been reworded. For those who go on to academic careers, it's part of the academic kit. [But] the thesis outlives the person. The thesis has a significance which is independent of the individual. Two theses [in my field] which are standard references – neither of the authors went on to academic life.

The PhD often served several purposes.

To prepare for the profession and to allow individual maturation in social and personal terms. Secondly, to contribute to knowledge, to what we know about literature – knowledge is the life blood of the culture.

It's different for different people. Some see it as an apprenticeship for the academic profession. Some people want to do it as an end in itself – the interest of the subject. Or post-children – [a woman thinking of work in the] OU or adult

education, doesn't expect a full-time academic job. Some arise out of the MA – found an interesting area and wanted to do more work on it. But they don't come in with the idea of learning transferable skills – they found the skills were transferable when they had done it.

Some regretted that in their experience the PhD seemed to have become primarily a professional training.

I'd love to say the original contribution to knowledge but it's not. It's a training for the job, to be like us.

There was concern about the lack of academic jobs and the need to prepare students for other professions.

To join a profession, to become an academic, in theory. But the job market doesn't allow it. So we have to see these people as acquiring high level abilities that will enable them to manage various kinds of projects in education and other fields. To demonstrate a capacity to be original, but also to marshal material at its higher level.

There is a general crisis about encouraging students to do PhDs if they think it's an automatic path to an academic post. The difficulty is very great. I tell students, only do it if you are really fascinated by the topic, even if you don't get a job.

7.1.2 Tension between aims

Respondents were also asked whether they thought there was any tension between the contribution to knowledge of the PhD and the need for skilled persons for the economy. The vast majority (72%) saw no tension. They felt that the skills developed during the production of the contribution to knowledge which is the main output of the PhD were skills that were extremely useful and in demand in the economy, particularly in the knowledge economy.

Table 16: Tension between aims (staff responses)

	Number	%
Yes, there is tension	6	24
No, there is not tension	18	72
Not sure	1	4
Total	25	100

The PhD was seen to develop a range of useful skills which were relevant to the needs of the economy.

There is no tension. If you can do PhD research properly, you can transfer it to other matters. You are surprised by your skills. Jobs in the knowledge economy... The person who will tackle one sort of problem can tackle other problems.

The skills in terms of processing large quantities of material, making real critical sense out of an amorphous body of stuff – this often transfers well into other kinds of activity. It doesn't only make them effective teachers in higher education – some do transfer very effectively to other areas of work. However, the training of effective teachers in higher education is our primary economic purpose.

Employers were reported to value the skills acquired during doctoral work.

I deal with employers and write a lot of references. A lot of employers say they value the qualities of expression, articulacy, ability to structure a piece. They are not looking for specific vocational skills – they are looking for a potential or quality. Looking for attitudes to knowledge rather than specifics.

It equips people for other jobs – blue chip companies love PhDs, also the Civil Service fast track, local government fast track – they welcome higher level qualifications. Research skills, [knowing how to] organise, are very useful in those jobs.

[You are] lucid, able to write reports, to understand all kinds of systems and how they are underpinned by information gathering. You are equipped for a huge range of jobs.

Two of my students decided they didn't want to go into academic life because of the salaries. One became a financial consultant and one a computing consultant. They moved very successfully into those areas. So no, there is no distinction between doing a successful PhD and subsequently becoming part of the economy. [The one who went into] financial consultancy drew on the skills she'd learnt on the PhD, she said, organising information, organising time – she found she had transferable skills.

We do tell them they have transferable skills – to manage a project, analytical communication, able to communicate your results, set a deadline and hit it. These are transferable skills.

The needs of the economy are changing and English is becoming more not less relevant.

We need highly skilled articulate people who have a good understanding of cultural issues. We need people who can think creatively and originally... PhD people will be much more useful in the knowledge economy than they were in the past. We are moving towards a knowledge economy and it is much more likely that these skills will be useful. Who would have imagined the development of computer games? They are basically narrative.

7. Employability and the PhD

English also makes a direct contribution to the sale of books and to the media.

People make more of [the supposed tension] than they need to. The contribution to knowledge feeds directly into the cultural industries. The sale of books in Britain and internationally is a major contributor to our economy. The media, broadcasting, film and the contribution of PhD students to knowledge – there is no contradiction. English literature is so internationally recognised because it’s been kept alive by the academy. The structuralism row, debates about cultural studies, debates on what constitutes serious literature – it all feeds into the economy. And English PhDs are everywhere – broadcasting, publishing, schools, the academy.

In addition, doctoral students in English have developed very high order skills in information technology and retrieval.

It’s a stereotyped view to think that this person has been shut up in a library and therefore can’t make any contribution to the economy. That’s not how it works these days.

7.1.3 Students hoping for academic careers

Staff were asked if their doctoral students were hoping to enter academic life. The majority were reported to be doing so, as shown in the table below.

Table 17: Numbers of students hoping for academic careers (staff responses)

	Number	%
All/most	20	80
Half/ some	2	8
A few	2	8
Don’t know	1	4
Total	25	100

However, staff were very concerned that there were so few academic jobs available, and worried that even the best students might not be able to succeed in their career ambitions. There was considerable variation in awareness among academic staff, some of whom had little knowledge about the career destinations of their students, but those who were aware reported that students seeking academic jobs were finding that it might take five or six years after completing the doctorate before they found permanent academic posts.

It depends how persistent they are. The time between getting the doctorate and getting a permanent post is extending. It can be five or six years. They get college lectureships and teaching work. They try and get teaching experience.

Many spend years doing various kinds of part-time teaching.

It was common to offer new PhDs some part-time teaching work in the department to tide them over.

We try and give people work teaching to tide them over while looking for a job.

The most prestigious universities reported less difficulty for their students in finding academic work. In addition students who were prepared to move had a better chance of succeeding.

High employability for our students. A lot get academic posts. Some go back to what they were doing.

Almost half of those I’ve supervised or examined have found permanent posts. Some people don’t want to go on – some want to do other things. Some struggle, hang around, doing casual teaching, there isn’t enough good employment in the academic world to soak up even all the able people.

Mature students were often happy with a variety of part-time and contractual posts and did not expect to find permanent jobs in academia.

They do a lot of sessional teaching, both during and after the PhD. My mature student – I don’t think she’ll get a full-time teaching post but she’ll get lots of bits and pieces. The ones that hang on, they do eventually get something. London has so many colleges. Their careers are very fragmented. The only way they can survive is by doing lots of bits and pieces.

More are now in their early 30s and their 50s. They will struggle for permanent full-time jobs but part-time and temporary posts, yes.

7.1.4 Careers outside academia

Staff were asked how many students did in fact manage to achieve their academic career ambitions. Responses were very variable. However, those that did not get academic work were reported to have no difficulty finding other kinds of work.

Table 18: Numbers of students succeeding in finding academic work (staff responses)

	Number	%
All/most	6	24
Half/ some	4	16
A few	4	16
Don't know / it depends	11	44
Total	25	100

Table 19: Difficulty in finding non-academic (ie. outside university sector) work (staff responses)

	Number	%
No difficulty	6	24
Sometimes difficult	4	16
Don't know	4	16
Total	25	100

Teachers find it very easy. [They used to] tend to have to go to private schools because they don't have a [teaching] qualification, but it's easier now because they can do an internship while teaching.

No, it does seem to be a qualification that carries some weight.

Schools find it prestigious to have a doctor on the staff. She's 51 – it will enable her to go faster.

There are lots of academic-related fields in which a PhD is useful – museum curator, arts in general, teaching [but] not in a university, civil service. Processing and collecting facts and

turning them into ideas.

Staff reported that those students who did not enter academic life went into a wide variety of careers. The most frequently mentioned were:

- Teaching (school, FE)
- Publishing/editing
- Media work (television, radio)
- Advertising
- Marketing

7. Employability and the PhD

- Writing
- Journalism
- Research (eg. for media, police, Inland Revenue)
- Civil service
- Other public services
- University administration
- Museums/ archives/ libraries
- Computing/ website design / software design
- Management/ blue chip companies
- Accountancy/ financial services/ banking

Other careers mentioned by single individuals were:

- Actress
- Sports consultancy
- Retrained as a lawyer
- In a motor cycle firm in Italy as English speaker on their website
- Buying and selling houses
- Social work

It's really surprising. One is working for a sports consultancy. [They go into] thinking type jobs. Creative business jobs. It's difficult to categorise. They go into business jobs where they have to think, not management consultancy as such. A few become school teachers.

It's amazing. Teaching, journalism, civil service, BBC, TV, radio, advertising, marketing, bank... A lot of them have done pretty well.

One of my students is writing blockbuster biographies and has already signed a book deal.

Some go into teaching, civil service. University administration has become one of our strengths. Also, people in administration come to us for a higher degree.

I can't say it's a bad idea to have people with PhDs teaching in schools now – it can only be to the advantage of the students. Not many PhDs don't become productive members of society in some shape or form.

It was felt by some respondents that the PhD would become increasingly useful in employment terms as more and more people gain degrees at lower levels.

We are moving into a new kind of society where a degree will be the norm and there will be an expectation of a higher degree.

Most respondents thought that having a PhD was useful in the job market.

Information retrieval, argument – just what are wanted in the world.

It depends on the post. It would be a disadvantage for some jobs but an advantage for the traditional places – archives, museums. High level administrative jobs now recognise the value of that kind of work.

Employers do value it. It marks them out as a superior candidate... They always put it on their business cards so it must mean something.

7.2 The student perspective

7.2.1 Tension between the aims of the PhD

Students were asked if they thought there was a tension between the contribution to knowledge of the PhD and the need for skilled persons for the economy. They were fairly evenly divided, with nearly half saying that there was no tension and 41% of the opinion that there was.

Table 20: Tension between aims (student view)

	Number	%
Yes, there is tension	15	41
No, there is not tension	18	49
Not sure	4	11
Total	37	100

Some students felt that the PhD made you more useful to the economy and that undertaking a major piece of research as you do for a PhD in English developed qualities which were attractive to employers.

There's no tension. You are able to do independent research, organise your own time, attention to detail. You have to develop those skills.

If you do something as complex as a PhD, you are going to learn something you can use in other contexts.

The skills you learn should equip you to work in a wider world. You should be able to go out and do anything in the world.

A lot of people do PhDs with a view to going into a merchant bank. It's a high class qualification in its own right.

PhD students are viable fodder for the economy. We can go into advertising, management consultancy.

There shouldn't be any tension. The skills you get doing a PhD are very useful in a working environment. But there is a perceived tension. My colleagues wonder why I'm doing it. [Full-time career civil servant]

There was also a contribution to culture.

Getting someone to look at things in a new way. These things do contribute to the economy in the end, if people can think differently... Human beings are capable of great creativity... You bolster the cultural economy.

If you can write something provocative and new, it changes things. If you can find a niche you can be passionate about.

Others felt that many employers would be put off by the fact that you had a PhD.

Civil Service is OK. And librarians, university administration. Otherwise it's just for personal interest. But we knew this. You are committing yourself to this.

All my friends with Maths and Physics can walk into jobs in management. If I don't get an academic job and don't become a teacher, I'll just deny it I think... Also people think you're a bit weird and a bit swotty and the boss doesn't want to think you're cleverer than him.

Other students were unhappy with the idea that it should be linked to the economy and were doing the PhD simply for love of the subject.

Education shouldn't be linked to the economy. What use is an English PhD? There is a huge tension, which distresses me. It's not about marketing, it's my love for the subject, pursuing this idea.

Some students saw teaching as the only possibility.

It's hard to foresee earning money from the skills I've got. The people I know earn their money from teaching... People in creative subjects like English make their money from teaching.

7.2.2 Main purpose of PhD

Students rated personal achievement or fulfilment as much more important than staff did. Overall, 41% saw the main purpose of the PhD as being preparation for an academic career, 24% saw the contribution to knowledge as the main purpose, while for a further 27% personal fulfilment and a sense of achievement were the most important.

Table 21: Main purpose of PhD (student view)

	Number	%
Contribution to knowledge	9	24
Preparation for an academic career	15	41
Personal fulfilment or achievement	10	27
Interest in researching this topic in depth	2	5
Not sure	1	3
Total	37	100

7. Employability and the PhD

The PhD was recognised as a requirement for academic life and students who wanted to pursue an academic career were very committed to the idea of becoming teachers in higher education.

The whole package is a skills learning, a kind of apprenticeship to academia. Learning the skills to become an academic. The skills are continually being learnt in the process of the PhD. You can't separate the theory from the practice.

I wouldn't be doing the PhD if I didn't intend to teach. I see it as means to an end and necessary for an academic career.

The contribution to knowledge was also a major factor.

To explore something hugely and in detail... Your contribution to knowledge. You do make a contribution. It does make a difference. For example [because of people's research] there are more books on women writers available now. For me, it is something I loved and I wanted to do it for life.

Widening the field of human knowledge. And your own field of knowledge. Becoming an independent thinker. Developing your intellectual capacity to the highest extent you can.

I'm doing it because I want to. Even if I never become a Prof or publish, I have extended the field and I care about that even if only four people read it.

Personal achievement and satisfaction were very important.

At the end there's the hope of a job, but even if I don't get it, it's an end in itself, an academic endeavour I can be proud of.

It's about standards, about excellence. People who are interested in the subject taking time to explore their interest. For me personally it's pursuing an idea. It's about fulfilment. A piece of work that says yes, I've achieved it.

There's no guarantee of a job, and at my age no hope of one. I'm doing it to prove something – I was written out as hopeless at the age of twelve.

7.2.3 Career ambitions

Most students (78%) wanted to pursue academic careers.

Table 22: Career ambitions (student view)

	Number	%
Academic career	29	78
Academic but only part-time	2	5
Other ambition	5	14
At the end of my career now	1	3
Total	37	100

They realised it would be difficult but they were reasonably confident, with 46% expecting to succeed. (See table 23) A further 29% were seeking other careers, had jobs already, were returning to their own countries, or were only looking for part-time work. This meant that there were 9 (25%) who wanted academic careers but being realistic doubted that they would succeed.

Table 23: Expect to succeed in academic career (student view)

	Number	%
Yes	17	46
Maybe / it's a gamble	5	14
Yes, but only part-time	2	5
Not looking – other ambitions/ end of my career	6	16
Yes, but in my own country	3	8
No, not realistically	4	11
Total	37	100

They knew that competition for academic jobs was fierce.

There are so few jobs. You're waiting for dead men's shoes.

I could always get a job teaching at some level, but anything else I might find difficult.

However, many were confident.

I've as good a chance as anybody. They'll want my publications, which I've got waiting inside.

Those who were not mobile were fairly realistic about their prospects.

I've got two kids, I'm not mobile. I may have to look outside academia though I would prefer academia... I might think about... FE or adult education.

[I've got a] baby due at Christmas – the options are quite limited. In a way I'd really like to [go into academia] but I don't want to limit myself to thinking that is the only future. I really enjoy teaching. I might think about a PGCE.

Some were happy with making a career out of a variety of part-time teaching posts.

I've got a lot of part-time work – the OU, [named FE] college, here, [named neighbouring] university. I'm not hoping for a full-time job.

Those who were prepared to move, however, were fairly confident that they would be able to find academic posts.

It will be difficult but I'm prepared to move around. I expect to work part-time for quite a while.

I've no ties. I can move. Also my research is in a safe area, Shakespeare.

Some were returning to their own countries.

In Taiwan it won't be so hard.

It's the same in America. There are more colleges and types of colleges there.

I'm planning to go back [to Israel]. But I'll probably end up teaching English as a language.

Students recognised the possibility that they might need to seek other careers if they were not successful in academia and they anticipated no difficulty in finding jobs in related fields such as library or museum work or teaching in schools or FE. Most of them did not however think the PhD would be useful if going into unrelated careers such as business and management.

I could work for a charitable organisation, or a journal interested in human rights and ethics or something concerned with the environment.

It depends what kind of job. It has to be only a step away – archival work, research jobs.

It's a two-edged sword. It's a plus in the civil service but it makes no difference in libraries. Some employers might think it a drawback. It can be seen as over-specialised, over-protected, over-educated.

Some students already had jobs.

Not necessarily looking for full-time. I also run a publishing company.

Others had different ambitions.

I would like to go back to Art Colleges – an academic career, but not at this level.

Two students were disillusioned in the quality of

7. Employability and the PhD

undergraduates at their university.

I find teaching A level more satisfying in terms of personal relationships than teaching at university... you have more contact time... and you see real personal development with the students. I feel I'm more of an educator with them. Here at this university there is a mass of girls who don't know why they are here. I find it hard to inspire or get them motivated... The girls sit there and don't speak... You can't even get them to read books.

They don't speak in seminars. Vast numbers of girls are here because they want to be teachers. They are not interested in the subject.

Alternative careers which students said they might think about were:

- University administration
- Librarianship
- Museums
- School teaching
- Civil Service
- Journalism
- Publishing
- BBC
- Advertising
- Media

- Editing
- Adult education
- Law
- Sotheby's
- Research in an art gallery
- Work for charitable organisations
- Arts Council
- Writing of all kinds
- Film making

Many were confident that employers would be interested in them.

I was looking at Amnesty International and they were interested in people with PhDs because they wanted people to do research for them.

Others were more doubtful.

You are out of the loop, out of a commercial environment. I think the disjunction is large, not trivial.

They are very wary. You'd be a flight risk if an academic job came up.

You don't have the practical knowledge. I applied for this editing job and they didn't consider me. I've applied for several jobs but it's so hard.

8. The articulation of a skills profile for postgraduate students

8.1 The staff perspective

Staff were asked whether they thought that it would be useful to have a skills profile articulated for postgraduates. There was some support for the idea of a skills profile with 44% of respondents thinking that it might be helpful and a further 12% having no objection to it. However, 36% felt that it would be so bland as to be meaningless. Some staff were aware of the AHRB’s proposed skills framework and although they were not specifically asked about it for the research, it is appended at Appendix D for reference.

Table 24: Usefulness of a skills profile (staff responses)

	Number	%
Useful/ valuable	9	36
Might be helpful	2	8
No objection to it	3	12
Wouldn’t be useful/ would be so bland as to be worthless	9	36
Don’t know	2	8
Total	25	100

Many thought that employers would value it.

An employer would value anything that has clarity and an institutional seal of approval. It can’t do any harm.

It’s very reductionist, but I see no objection to it. A certain brand of employer would be impressed.

Great idea. You have subject-specific skills and general skills – group work, presentation at university level. People in English can deal in communication, interpret and understand cultural objects, articulate in media, work in groups. Employers want highly articulate people, they want these skills.

Particularly, most PhD students I’ve worked with have very good IT skills. But employers don’t know that. They think English is stuffy, elitist, ‘working for four years on WH Auden – what use is that to me?’ If employers knew they had these elements, which invariably they do have, that could only be a good thing.

It is always a good idea to articulate these skills. They can

make a presentation to the Board – speaking or writing implies an audience. Practical communication, they can publish, speak at conferences.

There were dangers in such a profile becoming too prescriptive.

I’ve no strong feelings. It’s the same as having a benchmark. It wouldn’t take more than an afternoon to thrash out what are the transferable skills of a graduate programme. Most people understand what a PhD involves – I don’t think it would add very much... I think we underestimate the intelligence of employers. Is there any evidence that they want it?... The danger is that it becomes prescriptive and it becomes harder to accommodate the unusual and eccentric.

No harm in it. It would challenge students to match, to notch up... It’s also a matter of confidence – women in particular, the whole confidence thing... Anything is attractive to employers that shows somebody is multi-skilled. PhDs can look as if they can only do one thing well. It can say to employers – there’s a whole new range of training here that

8. The articulation of a skills profile for postgraduate students

students do. But you don't want it to get heavy – light touch, reminding students of the skills they have and how you can develop the skills they have not.

The format would need to be right.

It couldn't be student specific. It would have to be very general – use a library, write to a certain standard of presentation. Employers want to know specifically what this person can do for this company – they don't want 'motherhood and apple pie'.

It wouldn't be destructive if handled properly. It could be helpful, like the benchmark for undergraduates. That turned out to be helpful in the end... It would have to be sensitively constructed.

It was seen as something that would be very useful for students and would help them know how to present themselves to employers.

It would make students think about themselves in a different way. Employers believe what they are told [when] applicants present themselves as having these skills. It's useful to point out to students that these skills are transferable.

It would give the students confidence in the knowledge of their own abilities. They may not be aware of what they can do in outsider terms. Something like a log book – good idea.

Sometimes having to write things down has the virtue of focusing the mind. An articulation of what we think we are doing would be useful. Articulating what skills you need to complete the research.

Other respondents felt that it would be worthless.

I don't think it is particularly helpful, having done it at undergraduate level. The end results... are inevitably bland and don't tell you very much. A language develops to encapsulate these skills and it becomes bland. It is also difficult to differentiate levels - how is this different from someone at a school level?

8.2 The student perspective

Students were positive about the idea of an articulated skills profile and most (62%) thought it would be useful. It would help them become more confident and to present themselves better to employers.

Table 25: Usefulness of a skills profile (student view)

	Number	%
Useful/ valuable	23	62
Not useful	11	30
Don't know	3	8
Total	37	100

Students felt that they were often insufficiently aware of how what they had achieved during the PhD was relevant in the workplace.

It would help you organise what you can do in your own mind.

There are things you do and don't realise you're doing it. It's good to sit and think about the skills you've acquired.

Even if employers weren't aware of it, it would help students to know how to 'sell' themselves.

It would help you to think about how to write your CV and letters if you decided to go outside academia. More useful to us than to them.

It would help to start thinking about how you can apply it in the outside world. Giving students essays back is not dissimilar to writing feedback on my staff. Many students [without experience of the working world] don't know this is relevant. [It would be useful] to be able to break down your PhD into what you've done to make you employable. It will enhance my career because I'll sell it like that. [Full-time civil servant]

Some students thought that it would not be useful because applications have to be carefully tailored to a particular post. The information would be more appropriate as part of a CV.

8. The articulation of a skills profile for postgraduate students

What would be the purpose? You'd put it on a CV anyway and tailor it for the job you were going for. It's no use until you know what job you're applying for.

A customised CV is better.

Other students thought that employers would like it.

To point out the skills that make you relevant in a job – a lot of people don't know what the PhD involves.

The fact that you can gather information quickly and coherently and precisely interpret it might not be fully understood by the employer. It might be helpful if when you received your PhD there was a piece of paper from the external examiner saying that this person has achieved the level of critical and analytical skills required.

Some felt that it would not affect employers' views.

I don't think it would affect basic perceptions of PhDs in English and what they can provide to the non-academic community.

There would be some difficulties with design.

How would you work it? 'Tick the box if you can organise your time' would be ridiculous.

You'd have to be careful about making a uniform set of criteria. Institutions are very different.

Some of the things students felt a skills profile should include were:

- Time management
- Resource management
- Organisational skills
- Critical and analytical skills
- Information technology
- Project management
- Attention to detail
- Meeting deadlines

Some comments were:

It shows self-discipline, working under pressure, meeting deadlines.

Project management, organisation, detail, efficiency.

9. Conclusions

The results of this research show widespread agreement about the existence of a skill set of research methods in English at the postgraduate level. However, although these skills are generic in theory their content is very different in application. While an outline schemata could be drawn up to include things like library skills, database searching, contextual studies, bibliography, footnoting and so on, these would need to be taught very differently for different students and the content would vary for each institution and each field in English. In many cases it would also vary with particular topics within a field. Teaching of the skill set therefore needs to be firmly located within the specialisms of individual departments.

Secondly, the skill set is not abstract and knowledge-based as it might be in a subject such as statistics or psychology. Most of the skills needed are highly specific to particular topics. The appropriate model is one of apprenticeship and becoming a sensitive literary researcher, rather than acquiring a body of knowledge which can be applied in a variety of different situations. The research skills are inherently located within the nature of the topic. This means that research methods in English are not sufficient to fill a whole year's course or even a whole term's, and that many of the research skills needed are best taught through dissertation and seminar work.

The skill set in English then, while common in general terms, (for example 'able to find relevant information', 'understanding of context'), in practice is highly specific to both the period and the topic. The picture that emerges from this research is of the English scholar as highly individualistic. Very little in terms of research methods is shared. Rather, each individual doctoral student needs to develop the specific skills needed for a specific piece of work and apply them in depth to a particular and unique problem. The result in economic terms is an extremely employable person, articulate, able to project-manage, marshal an argument, present ideas, work with large amounts of data, write reports, think critically and organise information, and having high level information technology skills. Academic jobs are becoming harder to find, but this research suggests that PhD students are very employable in the wider world and are likely to become more so in an increasingly 'knowledge-based economy'.

In employment terms, although most students would like academic posts, they are realistic about the

difficulties of succeeding. However, even if they do not succeed they feel that the PhD will have been worthwhile. For most of them the PhD is also an end in itself. It is something of which to be personally proud, which extends the field of knowledge, and has been worthwhile in those terms. Students rated personal achievement or fulfilment as much more important than staff did.

Students have different needs and come from differing educational and employment backgrounds and are not all looking for employment. Overseas students returning home, part-time students remaining in their professions and using the PhD as a tool for advancement, and people nearing retirement who are not seeking career change would fall into this category.

Full-time doctoral students from the more prestigious universities who seek academic posts while taking longer to find them do get there in the end. Mature students in contrast are often happy to find part-time work at a variety of HE and FE institutions in their locality. Other students choose to move out of academic life altogether. They appear to have no difficulty in making successful careers in fields such as administration, the media, and teaching and research in non-university contexts (eg. schools, museums).

When thinking about non-academic employment, students do vary a lot in their sophistication and knowledge of the job markets available. More articulation of the skills they have acquired and understanding of what they can offer to employers would be valuable to them. A skills profile would be welcomed as a way of helping them to 'sell' themselves to employers.

Institutions are themselves responding to the AHRB proposals about the provision of research methods and have introduced a variety of new courses. They are currently redesigning these courses to take account of their experiences about what works and what does not work. One of their findings is that Masters degrees serving solely as a preparation for the PhD are not satisfactory and that there remains a need for the Masters to have a dual function and also to act as an independent exit qualification.

Most staff would prefer students to have Masters degrees when they embark on a doctoral programme. However, problems do arise in Scotland with the AHRB's proposed 1 + 3 structure which does not map onto the Scottish system. In Scotland, students have

normally already undertaken four years of undergraduate study and the one year Masters counts towards the three year PhD, so that the system at postgraduate level is a 1+2. Including undergraduate study, under the new proposal the English experience would be 3+1+3 but the Scottish would be 4+1+3 rather than its current 4+1+2. There are clearly potential problems here and additional consultation will be required for Scotland.

Appendix A: Fields of research of respondents

Table 26: Field of research: Staff

Early	
Anglo-Saxon poetry + all medieval literature	1
Medieval literature + modern drama	1
Medieval & Tudor, + drama all periods	1
Renaissance	1
<i>Early Subtotal</i>	<i>4</i>
18th Century	
18thC	1
18thC novel	1
18thC Scottish and American writing	1
<i>18th Century Subtotal</i>	<i>3</i>
19th Century	
Victorian literature	2
19thC literature	1
Romanticism and 19thC	1
Victorian plus Critical & Cultural Theory	1
19thC popular print plus 20th C feminist theory	1
<i>19th Century Subtotal</i>	<i>6</i>
20th Century – Contemporary	
Edwardian writing & American literature	1
20thC theory and literature	1
20thC literature plus contemporary poetry	1
20thC literature plus some American	1
American modernism	1
American & Canadian literature	1
American literature particularly of the South	1
Post-colonial Africa, Australia & Caribbean & theory	1
Modern and contemporary poetry	1
Creative writing, theory, contemporary fiction	1
<i>20th century – Contemporary Subtotal</i>	<i>10</i>
Non period-specific	
Children's literature (all periods)	1
Poetry (all periods)	1
<i>Non period-specific Subtotal</i>	<i>2</i>
Total	25

Table 27: Field of research: Students

	Students
Early	
Old and Middle English	1
Medieval	3
Shakespeare	1
Renaissance	3
<i>Early Subtotal</i>	8
18th Century	
18thC novel	2
<i>18th Century Subtotal</i>	2
19th Century	
Victorian poetry	2
19thC literature	2
Victorian literature	1
Victorian fiction	2
Late Victorian women writers	1
19thC American	1
<i>19th Century Subtotal</i>	9
20th C – Contemporary	
20thC writers	2
20thC poetry	2
Literature and modernity	1
American literature	1
Modern American	1
American women writers	1
Post-colonial literature	2
Contemporary drama	1
20thC crime fiction	1
Crit&CultTheory	1
Film & visual media	3
<i>20th C – Contemporary Subtotal</i>	16
Non period-specific	
Creative writing	2
<i>Non period-specific Subtotal</i>	2
Total	37

Appendix B: Skills required for different fields in English

Table 28: Different skills required for different fields in English (staff responses)

Critical theory
Requires an argument – the argument is paramount
Knowledge of theory – post-modern, critical
Cultural studies/acquaintance with sociological methodologies
Skills of close reading of primary text
Problematising translation when theory written by non-English speakers
Period specific
Medieval scholarship/palaeography/how to read Elizabethan hand
Medievalist language skills (eg. Latin, Old English, Middle English)
Renaissance
Archival work
Training in Victorian periodicals
Different types of scripts
Handling MSS/dealing with MS material
History of the book
How to find out if something is a first edition
Twentieth century communication
How to access and critique visual material (for film)
Literary
Development of technique (critical, bibliographic or cultural historical)
Keeping up with new writing (for contemporary literature)
Editorial
Electronic editing
Bibliographic editing
Linguistic
Phonetics
Other language skills
Practical
How to do fieldwork
Interviewing techniques for living authors
Ethnomethodological techniques
Creative writing techniques

Appendix C: Skills needed for postgraduate work in English

The following table summarises the views of staff about the skill set needed for postgraduate work in English.

Table 29: Skills needed to undertake PhD work in English (staff responses)

	No of responses
Overall basic requirements	
Think critically and independently across the issues in their subject/ form critical judgements/how to question the material/where the meaning of a text resides	4
Writing skills/able to write clearly and cogently	3
Amassing and handling material/finding and processing information	2
Conceive an overall argument/present arguments	2
Takes notes on what you read	2
To retrieve, to present and to annotate	1
Organise information	1
Reviewing, extracting and evaluating core argument	1
Thoroughness	1
Meta-cognition	1
Knowledge of literary context/ theory	
Analytic positioned reading for critical theory/understanding that making a theoretical choice if use critical theory/knowledge of cultural and literary theory/grounding in contemporary theoretical approaches to texts	4
Understanding of relationship to field as a whole/understand the boundaries of the field/survey broad range of secondary material and locate own research within it	3
Coverage of literature, awareness of debates, able to master whole field	3
Understand and use different approaches to literary criticism/awareness of a range of methodologies/how to use critical works	3
Differentiate between primary and secondary material/select between sources/aware of what the material is and how to make use of it	3
Understanding of social, literary and historical context	2
How to act as a critic/knowing about your field	2
Knowing what the resources are, how to use them, how to note them	2

continued overleaf

Table 29: Skills needed to undertake PhD work in English (staff responses) *contd*

Searching for materials	
How to use electronic databases/electronic information sources/how to do effective bibliographic searches	10
Ability to find sources/how to locate information/how to collect material	5
Follow up leads from one publication to another	2
How to do literature searches/library searches	2
How to use online resources/be selective when using the internet	2
How to find MSS	1
How to locate and access unpublished material	1
How to use libraries	
How to use libraries/library skills	6
Working with research libraries/how to use specialised libraries	5
Accessing/using archives	2
How to access other libraries outside own institution	1
Creating bibliographies	
Construct and use bibliographies related to own topic/bibliographic skills/how to construct a working bibliography/generating a bibliography	4
How to keep a bibliography/draw up bibliographies/keep records and bibliographies as you go along/how to record data	4
Editorial skills	
How to reference sources	2
Editing/textual skills	2
Cataloguing/indexing	2
Footnoting	2
Bibliographic conventions/academic conventions	2
Use of style sheets	1
Mastery of surface correctness	1
Bibliographic skills	
History of the book/knowledge of methods of literary production	4
Mastery of bibliographic resources/knowledge of what the references are/how to use primary and secondary sources	3
Knowledge of publishing and how it's affected their field	1

Table 29: Skills needed to undertake PhD work in English (staff responses) *contd*

Dissertation skills	
Planning the argument or thesis within a dissertation/how to structure an argument/develop a focus to the argument/how to create a research plan, to structure	7
How to structure a thesis/division into chapters, use of headings	5
To be able to identify a chunk that might be done/formulation of the project, keeping it reasonable/to organise and decide what's relevant	3
To find a suitable method	1
Project management skills	
Planning skills/how to plan 3 years work/time management/able to work to deadlines/sense of timetable	5
IT skills	
IT/Word processing/high level word processing and internet skills	3
Period specific skills	
Archival skills	2
Issues about authorship, the status of works, the status of oral sources, theoretical issues	2
How to annotate a text/how to record variants	2
Accurate reading and transcription of old MSS	1
Ability to contextualise materials by the language	1
Elizabethan hand and palaeography	1
How to assess reliability of texts	1
Professional skills	
Oral presentations, writing papers for conferences, handling discussion	4
Teaching	3
How to put a research paper together/present articles for publication	2
How to write abstracts	2
Understanding of intellectual property, copyright	1
Meeting other scholars, going to conferences	1

Appendix D: The AHRB framework of skills

The AHRB has outlined a framework of skills for the humanities and details are given in this appendix. One department in the survey is in fact already using this framework and holds fortnightly seminars with the students to discuss which of these skills they lack. Opportunities are then provided for students to acquire them, either through the seminar series itself or in other ways.

Joint statement of the Research Councils'/AHRB's skills training requirements for research students

The Research Councils and the Arts and Humanities Research Board play an important role in setting standards and identifying best practice in research training. This document sets out a joint statement of the skills that doctoral research students funded by the Research Councils/AHRB would be expected to develop during their research training.

These skills may be present on commencement, explicitly taught, or developed during the course of the research. It is expected that different mechanisms will be used to support learning as appropriate, including self-direction, supervisor support and mentoring, departmental support, workshops, conferences, elective training courses, formally assessed courses and informal opportunities.

The Research Councils and the AHRB would also want to re-emphasise their belief that training in research skills and techniques is the key element in the development of a research student, and that PhD students are expected to make a substantial, original contribution to knowledge in their area, normally leading to published work. The development of wider employment-related skills should not detract from that core objective.

The purpose of this statement is to give a common view of the skills and experience of a typical research student thereby providing universities with a clear and consistent message aimed at helping them to ensure that all research training was of the highest standard, across all disciplines. It is not the intention of this document to provide assessment criteria for research training. It is expected that each Council/Board will have additional requirements specific to their field of interest and will continue to have their own measures for the evaluation of research training within institutions.

(A) Research Skills and Techniques – to be able to demonstrate:

1. the ability to recognise and validate problems
2. original, independent and critical thinking, and the ability to develop theoretical concepts
3. a knowledge of recent advances within one's field and in related areas
4. an understanding of relevant research methodologies and techniques and their appropriate application within one's research field
5. the ability to critically analyse and evaluate one's findings and those of others
6. an ability to summarise, document, report and reflect on progress

(B) Research Environment – to be able to:

1. show a broad understanding of the context, at the national and international level, in which research takes place
2. demonstrate awareness of issues relating to the rights of other researchers, of research subjects, and of others who may be affected by the research, e.g. confidentiality, ethical issues, attribution, copyright, malpractice, ownership of data and the requirements of the Data Protection Act
3. demonstrate appreciation of standards of good research practice in their institution and/or discipline
4. understand relevant health and safety issues and demonstrate responsible working practices
5. understand the processes for funding and evaluation of research
6. justify the principles and experimental techniques used in one's own research
7. understand the process of academic or commercial exploitation of research results

(C) Research Management – to be able to:

1. apply effective project management through the setting of research goals, intermediate milestones and prioritisation of activities
2. design and execute systems for the acquisition and collation of information through the effective use of appropriate resources and equipment
3. identify and access appropriate bibliographical resources, archives, and other sources of relevant information
4. use information technology appropriately for database management, recording and presenting information

(D) Personal Effectiveness – to be able to:

1. demonstrate a willingness and ability to learn and acquire knowledge
2. be creative, innovative and original in one's approach to research
3. demonstrate flexibility and open-mindedness
4. demonstrate self-awareness and the ability to identify own training needs
5. demonstrate self-discipline, motivation, and thoroughness
6. recognise boundaries and draw upon/use sources of support as appropriate
7. show initiative, work independently and be self-reliant

(E) Communication Skills – to be able to:

8. write clearly and in a style appropriate to purpose, e.g. progress reports, published documents, thesis
9. construct coherent arguments and articulate ideas clearly to a range of audiences, formally and informally through a variety of techniques
10. constructively defend research outcomes at seminars and viva examination
11. contribute to promoting the public understanding of one's research field
12. effectively support the learning of others when involved in teaching, mentoring or demonstrating activities

(F) Networking and Teamworking – to be able to:

13. develop and maintain co-operative networks and working relationships with supervisors, colleagues and peers, within the institution and the wider research community
14. understand one's behaviours and impact on others when working in and contributing to the success of formal and informal teams
15. listen, give and receive feedback and respond perceptively to others

(G) Career Management – to be able to:

16. appreciate the need for and show commitment to continued professional development
17. take ownership for and manage one's career progression, set realistic and achievable career goals, and identify and develop ways to improve employability
18. demonstrate an insight into the transferable nature of research skills to other work environments and the range of career opportunities within and outside academia
19. present one's skills, personal attributes and experiences through effective CVs, applications and interviews

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