Appendix 2. Findings from the institutional survey

A2.1 Aims and approach

The aim of the 'institutional survey' was to obtain strategic views regarding doctoral education in the arts and humanities from senior staff in a range of UK universities, to complement the more personal views obtained from individuals in the roundtables and interviews. It was recognised that senior staff might not be able to engage in the roundtable activities as fully as others, so a survey approach was adopted which could reach a wider range of senior people to bring in their strategic perspectives.

The approach taken was to develop an online survey tool and to invite a senior member of staff in each university to develop a single 'institutional' response on behalf of their institution. CRAC has adopted this approach in a number of previous projects, in order to obtain more representative views on strategic issues than might be provided by other individuals within such institutions (and to avoid the possibility of obtaining several responses from different individuals within a single institution that could conflict).

Survey invitations were sent to individuals in 136 UK institutions, comprising senior staff at PVC level where we had existing contacts or could find them, senior faculty leads, and/or other senior staff already known to CRAC-Vitae where we believed they could facilitate a response.

Given the nature of the questions posed, such a survey was expected to require collation of certain information which would be provided by different people or teams within an institution. Response to the survey would therefore require significant effort on the part of relevant institution staff. For this reason, in addition to the primary invitation to a senior staff member, we also notified existing contacts in A&H departments – including those who had recently taken part in one of our roundtables – as well as other Vitae contacts that the request had been made, in the hope that they might encourage development of a response in their institution.

The survey was open from late February to mid-April 2022, obtaining 40 complete responses, a response rate of almost 30%, utilising one reminder email and enquiries to known contacts to encourage a response where one had not been received. A range of descriptive statistics for the response sample is given in Table A2.1.

	Russell Group	**Specialist**	**Post-92**	**Other**
Type of institution	8	3	18	8
	England	**Scotland**	**Wales**	**N Ireland**
Location of institution	37	2	1	0
	Yes	**None**		
AHRC-funded provision	31	9		

Table A2.1 Characteristics of respondents to HE institution survey (N=40)

The summary of key characteristics shows that the 40 respondents represented institutions of a range of types, large and small, general and specialist, and of varying degrees of research intensiveness. The vast majority of institutions were located in England, with institutions in the other UK nations somewhat under-represented. We were aware that two other institutions in Wales had intended to submit responses, but were unable to do so in practice within the timescale.

The sample included 31 institutions currently obtaining AHRC funds for doctoral provision and 9 that did not (of which all but one were post-92 institutions). It had been considered very desirable from the outset that some institutions without such funding should be within the response sample. The following is a summary of responses to key questions in the survey, many focused on strategic issues relating to doctoral provision in A&H subjects.

A2.2 Extent of provision and expected future trends

Of the 40 responding institutions, 28 reported that they had an explicit strategy in relation to research, and/or provision of doctoral programmes, in A&H subjects. Descriptions of these strategies revealed that a few were institution-wide strategies, rather than disciplinary, but most were specifically focused on building or consolidating A&H research capacity and/or its reputation. Several referred specifically to aspirations for more interdisciplinary research involving A&H, for example:

> *"The strategy is to build research power and outstanding interdisciplinary research in [A&H and related] disciplines that tackles UN Sustainable Development Goals, and offers a thriving research environment for doctoral training within the Arts and Humanities."*

A small number of the strategies quoted had distinct aspirations to widening the diversity of participation in doctoral study. While most of the specialist institutions were seeking to consolidate their existing reputation and/or strength, some of the post-92 institutions were strategically stating aspirations for growth in the extent and depth of their A&H research (in some cases from a low base). None referred to any future diminution of their focus on A&H subjects, but perhaps this was inevitable given the request for A&H-focused strategies. The importance of doctoral provision within such a strategy, and of DTP partnerships where they were already participating, was mentioned by several respondents.

A wide range of scales of doctoral provision were reported, from 0 to 260 full-time doctoral researchers (PGRs) commencing programmes in a typical recent year (mean = 35) and 0 to 170 part-time (mean = 10). One institution reported they had none at all. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the extent of provision at institutions not funded by AHRC was in all but one case below the average (means for non-funded institutions: full-time 14; part-time 8).

Amongst the institutions reporting AHRC-funded doctoral provision, this funding accounted for on average 15% of their PGRs, although this proportion ranged from 2% in two post-92 institutions to 45% in one Russell Group institution. Six institutions reported that the proportion was under 5%, which was a combination of both post-92 and 'other' institutions. While the range was broad, the average of 15% aligns well with the "about 1 in 6" proportion of all doctorates funded by AHRC stated by stakeholders and observed in our analysis of HESA data (Appendix 1).

Asked about the proportion of their A&H doctoral students they expected to be AHRC-funded in the next 5 years, 17 of the 29 respondents anticipated that the proportion would remain about the same, but 8 thought it would decrease. None thought it would increase.

Over half of the respondents reported that their institution provided at least some scholarships itself or other funding for doctoral provision (24 out of 40 institutions), ranging in extent from 3 to 50 students annually. Only 7 institutions offered more than 10 such scholarships per year. Considering these proportions together, this seems to suggest that overall the role of AHRC funding remains greater than institutions' own funding of doctoral study through scholarships (which would include those provided as part of 'matched funding' arrangements within DTP programmes). A number of respondents indicated that the extent of their own funding would partly relate to how successful they were in obtaining DTP studentships that year, presumably reflecting the role of matched funding requirements for scholarships within DTP arrangements.

The institutional survey responses provided very interesting information in relation to future plans and aspirations. Figure A2.1 summarises responses in relation to how institutions' total numbers of doctoral researchers had changed in the last five years and how they were expected to change in the next five.

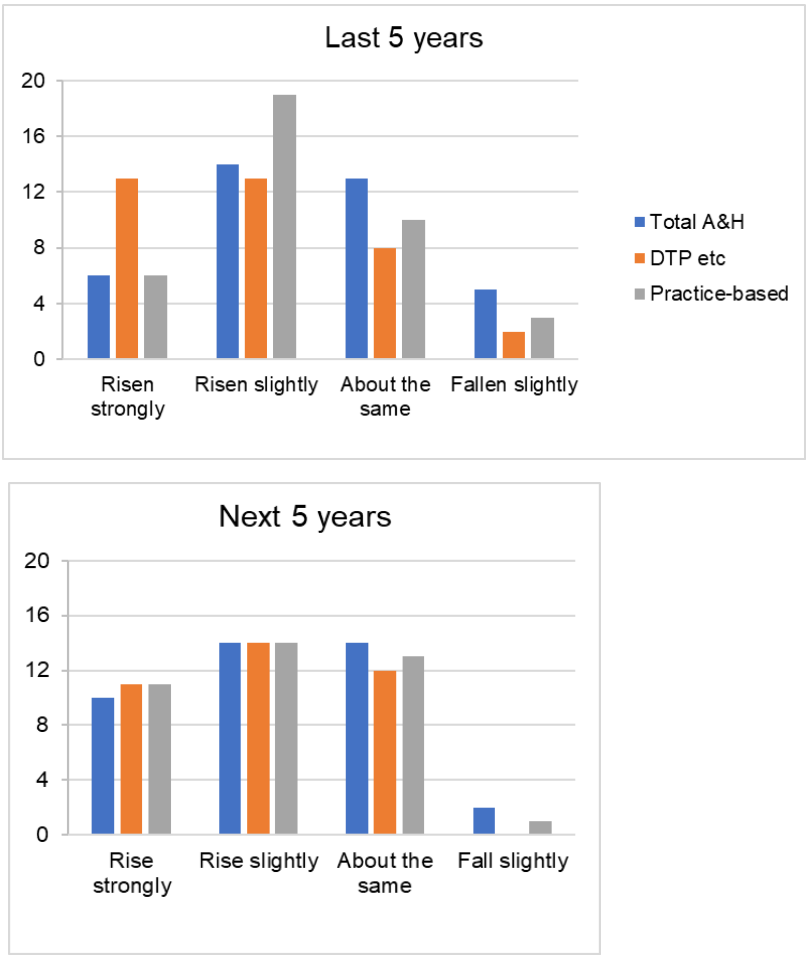

Figure A2.1 Perceptions about recent (upper chart) and future (lower chart) trends in extent of A&H doctoral provision, from institutional survey responses (N=36)

In the last five years, 6 institutions reported a strong rise in the extent of A&H doctoral provision (driven by rises in DTP provision) and 13 some rise in provision, while for the other half of respondents the extent had remained roughly the same (in most cases) or in a few cases fallen slightly. None reported more than a slight fall in extent.

More of the institutions (22) expected growth in total A&H doctoral study in the next five years, including 9 expecting strong growth. They expected this to be largely through DTP provision and other types of provision such as practice-based. The remainder of institutions (14) expected little change in extent, with only two expecting any fall (and none a substantial fall). Thus, in total, they were anticipating a greater extent of doctoral study in the next five years than in the last five.

Examination of the data in detail revealed that the strong growth was mostly anticipated by post-92 institutions, but also two Russell Group institutions and one specialist. The strongest growth was expected in practice-based provision but also, for some, through new or more DTP provision. The two institutions anticipating a fall in extent of provision were medium-sized institutions with well-established research and doctoral provision.

When considered together with their expectations about the proportion of their provision that would be funded by AHRC (which, broadly, most felt would remain much the same or decrease), we infer that expectations of growth in provision were for expansion of provision that was not funded by AHRC.

Respondents were invited to comment on their expectations for the future and also on the main external factors they thought were driving them. The most common trend expected was greater demand from international students (stated by over half of those anticipating growth, including some who cited recent increases in applications now that DTP programmes were open to international students). Around one third expected more demand for part-time doctoral study, which they believed would result in growth (although a few respondents also expected some decrease in full-time study). In a few cases, an institution's recent engagement in a DTP was expected to be significant in increasing its numbers.

When asked to identify and comment on the external factors, many respondents cited issues which they viewed as somewhat negative, which we found surprising when juxtaposed with their stated expectations of growth. The most common positive issue mentioned was UKRI opening up Research Council studentships to international applicants, which was expected to increase the number of applicants from overseas. This appeared to be interpreted as supporting a growth in numbers, rather than any shift from UK to international participation. At the same time, many respondents mentioned the negative influence of Brexit on the number of applicants from European nations and many also mentioned concerns about the availability of funding in future. A number of responses mentioned potential effects of the pandemic, which was perhaps unsurprising given the timing of the survey in early 2022, with suggestions that it could lead to a weaker graduate labour market – potentially making doctoral research an attractive haven instead for recent graduates. A few respondents felt the possibility of overseas PGRs working entirely remotely (for example, in their home country), which could be feasible in some A&H disciplinary areas, could increase opportunities for international student participation. Arguably, this could comprise a form of transnational education (TNE), which has hitherto been rare at doctoral level.

Within the UK, several respondents expected more interest in future in practice-based models of doctoral research, in the context of the changing labour market, anticipating more

people being employed part-time and seeking to combine this with doctoral study. A handful of respondents thought that availability of the UK student loan for doctoral study could somewhat increase numbers. Overall, however, although this is a subjective view, we did not find the articulation of these external factors convincing as grounds for the widespread expectations of expansion in A&H doctoral study. Some of the considerations cited in relation to external trends and changes in future are included in the later section here on future priorities.

A2.3 Benefits of AHRC funding

The institutional survey asked a range of questions in relation to the perceived effects and benefits of having doctoral funding from AHRC. Specific benefits to (doctoral) students were reported to include the following, listed broadly in order of how many respondents cited them:

- An enhanced doctoral experience through the range of training and other opportunities offered to funded students and through cross-institutional supervision, including notably some access to additional funding for specific opportunities;
- Enabling additional or wider access to doctoral study (i.e. funding enables some students to study who could not do so without it);
- Improvements to student wellbeing and also other benefits of peer support through study within a cohort (within the university, mostly, rather than more widely);
- Prestige of being (or having been) an AHRC-funded student;
- Spill-over to some unfunded students in terms of access to certain developmental and training opportunities.

Benefits to the institution were seen as both direct and indirect:

- Attracting higher quality students;
- Increasing the number of PGRs, which enhanced institutional research capacity and enabled critical mass in some subject areas;
- Enhanced collaboration with other institutions, including better networks of academic staff built on the back of co-supervision arrangements;
- Being able to offer an enhanced doctoral training experience to PGRs;
- Spill-over effects – i.e. having the prestige (or ‘kitemark’) of being a DTP partner can attract students not eligible for an AHRC studentship;
- Increased attractiveness to potential high-quality staff and ability to retain them through the greater total A&H research endeavour;
- Enhanced institutional reputation associated with DTP leadership;
- Being able to offer full funding could widen the range of students able to undertake doctoral study in the institution.

Overall, these responses suggested that being able to offer AHRC-funded programmes was seen as positive and generally worked well in practice, and in some cases extremely well, delivering many of the benefits outlined above. The greater extent of provision possible and enhanced training they could provide came across as the most important benefits. A number of areas of challenge were identified by a few respondents, however:

- A negative effect on the number of doctoral studentships that their institution could directly support (due to requirements for match funding);
- Some narrowing of coverage in doctoral research (as they perceived DTP programmes tended to favour more 'traditional' disciplines);
- Increasing the challenge of getting students to complete within the funded period, given AHRC-funded students' greater opportunities to access wider developmental activities;
- A relatively high administrative load;
- Some duplication of effort due to local application and selection processes, as DTPs compete for some of the same prospective students.

When asked specifically about requirements for matched funding, the broad picture reported was that these requirements were just about sustainable, albeit in most cases with some detriment to the extent to which institutions could themselves fund other PGRs. These responses need to be seen in the context that the level of 'matched' funding varied between institutions (between 1/3 and 2/3, broadly) and there was some call for more consistency in this, including between the policies of different Research Councils. It was felt by some that this was a more challenging issue for A&H departments because they had relatively little opportunity to access funding from external sources such as industry, in comparison with STEM departments for example.

The most common responses to a question about what institutions would like also to do in future, that they could not do now, were (1) to enable a greater range of diversity of students to participate, and (2) to extend a similar 'enhanced' doctoral experience to all their PGRs rather than only to those in AHRC-funded cohorts (i.e. to remove the current 'tiers').

3.3.4 Candidate selection priorities

A section of the survey was dedicated to selection processes for candidates for doctoral programmes, which we introduced to try to shed some light on potential tensions that some interviewees had expressed between institutions' aspirations for academic excellence (being the over-riding concern during selection) whilst also trying to enhance the diversity of PGRs.

Institutional survey respondents were asked to rank the importance of 15 potential factors in their selection process (from 1 which was most important to 15 as least). The results are summarised in Table A2.2, using a mean ranking score for each factor and also the standard deviation for each factor (SD, to give an idea of how tightly clustered individual results were – with the smaller the SD indicating tighter clustering of results).

These results show that the most important factors were a candidate's idea or proposal for their research, excellent prior subject knowledge, interest or engagement in that subject and their potential as a doctoral researcher. Attainment in the form of a prior Master's was ranked nearly as highly as many of these factors, whereas experiences outside university and career intentions were rated less important. It is also noticeable that the standard deviations were in many cases relatively high – suggesting that institutions were not ranking factors consistently, although the two uppermost factors were also the most tightly clustered. Deeper analysis of results from the 30 AHRC-funded institutions which providing this ranking information produced very similar results to results overall, albeit with somewhat more emphasis on having a prior Master's degree. However, on the basis of these relatively small

samples and rather basic analytical approach, overall this suggests that the factors considered during selection by AHRC-funded and other institutions were similar.

	All respondents		**AHRC-funded**
Factor	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**
Research ideas/proposal	2.9	2.75	2.5
Excellent subject knowledge	4.2	2.53	4.1
PG Researcher potential	4.9	3.22	5.2
Interest/engagement in subject	4.9	3.62	4.9
Research skills	5.3	3.14	4.9
Masters attainment	5.7	3.98	5.2
First degree attainment	6.8	3.88	6.5
Research experience	7.2	3.21	7.1
Personal characteristics (e.g. ethnicity, WP status)	7.7	3.73	8.0
Enthusiasm for HEI/faculty	9.0	3.85	8.7
Other skills	9.4	3.56	9.6
Masters course/HEI	10.3	3.66	10.3
Experiences outside HE	10.3	3.61	10.0
Career intentions/ambitions	11.0	3.24	11.1
First degree course/HEI	11.5	3.09	11.5
N	*37*	*37*	*30*

Table A2.2 Ranking of importance of factors in selection of candidates for doctoral programmes (1 = most important; 15 = least). SD is standard deviation.

Respondents were also asked to comment on how they combined the two drivers of academic excellence and enhancing diversity and inclusion. With the exception of a few institutions which suggested that academic excellence did over-ride all other considerations, many respondents indicated that they were currently grappling with this issue and trying to assess candidates more holistically. Some commented that they were experimenting with different selection methods, although few had a formalised contextual admissions process (unlike the situation for undergraduate admissions, which is more standardised and thereby has greater potential for systematic adjustment to take account of student context, for example). Some respondents further commented that the distributed nature of the selection process within the institution (rather than it being centralised) meant that operationally it could differ in practice locally from institutional policy or aspirations. The evidence here seemed to suggest that institutions have travelled different distances in terms of a shift to more contextualised selection procedures, although almost all had recognised that it was necessary in order to achieve greater diversity of participation. Only one respondent mentioned that they had implemented an element of ‘ring fencing’ in order to promote candidates from under-represented groups.

3.3.5 Priorities for the future

In parallel with the roundtables, institutional survey respondents were asked to consider potential priorities for AHRC in supporting doctoral research in future. Again, a ranking exercise was used, the results of which are shown in Table A2.3.

Priority	**All respondents**	
	Mean	**SD**
Enhancing diversity of participation	1.9	1.29
Maintaining health of disciplines	3.9	2.57
Contributing to solution of 'grand challenges'	4.0	2.06
Providing more value to society	4.4	2.14
More interdisciplinary research	4.5	1.90
More collaborative research with external organisations	4.8	2.01
More fundamental 'academic' research	5.4	2.44
Maintaining UK sovereign capability in A&H research	5.5	2.44
N	*38*	*38*

Table A2.3 Ranking of potential priorities for AHRC in supporting future doctoral research (1 = most important, 8 = least)

While this again is a very simplistic analysis, the results show the prominence of diversity and inclusion issues in institutions' minds currently, while many of the other potential factors they might consider were seen as of lower but relatively similar importance. That said, ensuring the continuation of fundamental/'pure' research, and that the UK retains research capability, were the least strongly ranked as important. Again, in most cases the standard deviations were relatively large (given 8 options to rank), suggesting that different respondents had ranked factors with varying importance. The results for AHRC-funded institutions were extremely similar to those for all institutions together.

Asked about the role they sought from AHRC in relation to doctoral support over the next 10 years, the most popular comment was that it should continue to fund provision (mentioned by over a third of all respondents). The next most common suggestions were to ensure greater diversity of students and to enable a more inclusive pattern of funding in terms of institutions, including for example:

> *"AHRC should recognise research excellence where it exists, and broaden the DTP provision to allow for other universities to benefit."*
>
> *"A reconsideration of DTPs as the primary site for AHRC funding to widen participation."*
>
> *"Spreading funding beyond DTPs is essential, to mitigate the sector divide, and affirmative action around diversification, to effect a sea-change."*
>
> *"Quota awards or making more studentships directly available to black and minority ethic students from disadvantaged backgrounds should be more effective for diversifying participation."*

Advocating for the value and importance of A&H research, and especially how it should encourage interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary research, was also a common response:

> *"AHRC should continue to play a role in leading the conversation not just about need to demonstrate and create social value but of the necessity of A&H in conversations about what social impact and values mean and entail."*
>
> *"Look for opportunities to work alongside and capture funding for and lead projects that at first glance appear as if they were primarily designed for STEM, Social Sciences, etc. The key is about insisting that A&H are not adjuncts to but appropriate intellectual leaders for much broader range of projects"*
>
> *"The AHRC is the only organisation speaking for these disciplines, and it should lobby for them not just in terms of research but in terms too of those things that feed and nurture research and research careers -- a lively and diverse offering at UG level."*

These topics were the most commonly mentioned but other suggestions included that AHRC should provide more specific strategic direction including ensuring quality of provision. However, our interpretation is that the relative rarity of these latter suggestions somewhat conflicts with the popularity of suggestions for more leadership from AHRC made during the roundtables.

Further open questions were asked about changes to the external environment and research and how doctoral provision might change in future. In each case the responses were coded and grouped to identify the three most common response topics, below; themes raised by only two or three respondents are not identified here. In terms of expectations for changes in A&H research as a whole, the topics raised were (in descending order of frequency):

- It will become more interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary;
- It will need to be more impact-focused and more will relate to grand global challenges;
- More focus will be needed on digital and transferable skills.

There were very common expectations that A&H PGRs would enter careers in a widening range of sectors in future, many of which would relate to or be driven by digital technologies, and that fewer A&H PGRs would have a career in academia. At least for early careers, such a shift is <u>not</u> supported by recent trends in PGR outcomes, shared in Appendix 1, which indicate consistently that around half of A&H PGRs enter an occupation in HE.

The three most common suggestions as to what the achanges they were expecting should mean for future provision of doctoral training, reflecting the preoccupation with widening career paths, were that it would need to include:

- More professional/transferable skill development;
- More 'external' experiences such as placements or collaborations with non-HE partners;
- More integration of career support within programmes.

In turn, many respondents suggested that A&H doctoral provision should change in the following ways:

- More equitable access for a more diverse range of students;
- More flexible models of provision;
- Tht research and collaborations should be more impact-focused.

AHRC's role in bringing about these changes was most commonly recommended to be:

- Ensuring that career considerations and support are embedded in funded programmes;
- Ensuring that doctoral programmes develop transferable skills but in addition provide more intensive skill development options such as through summer schools or other national training offers;
- Advocating for the value of A&H research and researchers within global challenge-based research activities and strategies.

One respondent neatly encapsulated a number of these aspirations:

> *"The AHRC's roles should continue to be funder, advocate, facilitator, and critical friend of the Arts and Humanities. It should foster change, innovation, and diversity among practitioners and students, but not impose preconceived models upon them. It should encourage fruitful exchange with other academic and scientific disciplines and research cultures, but not pursue 'one size fits all' uniformity. Within a funding landscape under pressure from short-term and narrow conceptions of 'impact' as economic utility, the AHRC can help ensure that the 'arts' are not reduced to the fine arts, that the 'humanities' are not transformed into the 'human (or social) sciences', and thus that research in the Arts and Humanities can continue to contribute to the flourishing of the society and culture of the twenty-first century."*