

Appendix 3. Findings from doctoral student survey

A3.1 Aims and approach

A survey of current doctoral students (PGRs) in A&H subjects was included as one of the project activities as current PGRs were not one of the targets within the qualitative strands. The aim of the survey was to obtain views from a wide range of A&H PGRs, including those on AHRC-funded programmes and others who were not, across a wide range of UK HE institutions.

Compared with the institutional survey, the doctoral student survey was a more conventional online survey seeking principally quantitative data through closed questions, although giving respondents to the questionnaire some opportunities also to provide open-ended responses to certain questions. The practical challenge was obtaining engagement with a wide range of appropriate PGRs in the absence of any systematic central source of PGR contact details. In order to attract responses, invitations were issued using messages on social media and emails to Vitae's networks and other known contacts, all requesting that recipients forward the survey invitation to eligible PGRs. There was also a 'snowballing' element to the campaign, asking these contacts to pass the communication on to any others they thought might also be in a position to help. An incentive of an online shopping voucher was offered to PGRs who completed the survey, which was open between February and April 2022. Responses were downloaded from the online survey platform, cleaned, coded and analysed, in Excel and SPSS.

A3.2 Response sample and profile

The achieved response sample, after de-duplication and removal of partial responses, comprised 317 responses from eligible A&H PGRs. Table A3.1 summarises a range of descriptive statistics on about the study characteristics of respondents, demonstrating that the response sample contained a reasonably wide range of PGRs in terms of institutional type and location, mode of study and disciplinary area. Useable responses were obtained from eligible PGRs at 65 different UK HE institutions.

As this was essentially a convenience sample (i.e. one that could be achieved practically, rather than a sample that was designed to represent the total PGR cohort statistically), it did somewhat over-represent certain disciplinary areas and under-represented others. Nonetheless, we are confident that there is value in the results from the sample as the range of respondents did broadly reflect the ranges in many of the key characteristics of the target population.

| | | N | % |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|------------|----------|
| Institution type | | | |
| | Russell Group | 134 | 42% |
| | Post 92 | 78 | 25% |
| | Specialist | 14 | 4% |
| | Other | 92 | 29% |
| Institution location | | | |
| | England | 248 | 78% |
| | Scotland | 22 | 7% |
| | Wales | 46 | 15% |
| Disciplinary area | | | |
| | History | 79 | 25% |
| | English | 63 | 20% |
| | Cultural/media/library | 45 | 14% |
| | Art and design | 40 | 13% |
| | Performing arts | 26 | 8% |
| | Foreign languages | 25 | 8% |
| | Theology | 12 | 4% |
| | Classics | 12 | 4% |
| | Other | 16 | 5% |
| Total | | 317 | |

Table A3.1 Study characteristics of student survey respondents

Similarly, Table A3.2 illustrates the personal characteristics of respondents. We emphasise that these are provided not to demonstrate whether the sample was representative (or not) of the personal profile of all current A&H PGRs, but rather to indicate that the response sample was broadly reflective of the range of key personal characteristics within that population, and thus it is valuable even if not statistically representative. Far more robust information about the profile of the potential population is provided in Appendix 1, based on HESA data. However, the results also confirm that there were respondents with a wide range of personal characteristics in the response sample.

| | | N | % |
|--------------------------------|---------------|------------|----------|
| Gender | | | |
| | Female | 220 | 71% |
| | Male | 88 | 28% |
| | Other | 3 | 1% |
| Nationality | | | |
| | UK | 228 | 72% |
| | EU nation | 44 | 14% |
| | Rest of World | 45 | 14% |
| Ethnicity (UK only) | | | |
| | Asian | 7 | 3% |
| | Black | 5 | 2% |
| | Mixed/Other | 9 | 4% |
| | White | 202 | 91% |
| Disability/condition | | | |
| | Yes | 67 | 22% |
| | No | 236 | 78% |
| Age | | | |
| | 20-25 | 33 | 10% |
| | 26-30 | 87 | 28% |
| | 31-35 | 45 | 14% |
| | 36-40 | 27 | 9% |
| | Over 40 | 120 | 38% |
| Caring responsibilities | | | |
| | Yes | 64 | 21% |
| | No | 246 | 79% |
| Total | | 317 | |

Table A3.2 Personal characteristics of student survey respondents. Percentages are of respondents providing this information

Finally, Table A3.3 gives some insights into the types of doctoral programme and research circumstances of respondents, showing that the vast majority were studying for a PhD qualification and that around 30% were in cohort-based doctoral programmes. However, it should be noted that 11% did not know whether they were in such a programme or not. Information about how their doctorate was funded was provided on the basis of respondents identifying the type of their main funder. This indicated that nearly half of the respondents were entirely self-funded, which is close to the proportion understood from GO data for PGRs graduating in 2018/19 in Appendix 1 (46%), but there was some over-representation of AHRC-funded students at 24% of respondents (who made up 18% of GO respondents).

One third of the student survey respondents were studying on a part-time basis, which suggests that part-time students were somewhat over-represented in the survey.

| | | N | % |
|---------------------------|------------------------|------------|----------|
| Mode of study | | | |
| | Full-time | 211 | 67% |
| | Part-time | 104 | 33% |
| Year in programme | 1 | 98 | 31% |
| | 2 | 74 | 23% |
| | 3 | 61 | 19% |
| | 4 | 40 | 13% |
| | 5 or more | 44 | 14% |
| Qualification type | | | |
| | PhD/DPhil | 289 | 92% |
| | Practice-based | 22 | 7% |
| | Professional doctorate | 4 | 1% |
| Programme type | | | |
| | DTP | 37 | 12% |
| | CDT | 6 | 2% |
| | CDP | 42 | 13% |
| | Other cohort-based | 8 | 3% |
| | None of these | 188 | 59% |
| | Don't know | 36 | 11% |
| Funding | | | |
| | AHRC | 73 | 24% |
| | Other UKRI | 12 | 4% |
| | Other public source | 11 | 4% |
| | Institution | 34 | 11% |
| | Charity | 19 | 6% |
| | Industry | 6 | 2% |
| | Non-UK body | 15 | 5% |
| | Wholly self-funded | 131 | 43% |
| Total | | 317 | |

Table A3.3 Characteristics of doctoral programme studied by student survey respondents. Percentages are of respondents providing this information.

A3.3 Career contexts and motivations

In this section we present a variety of results from the student survey, some of which are best understood in the context of the respondent. From Table A3.2, it can be seen that nearly half were aged over 35, which was also reflected in the circumstances they reported prior to starting their doctorate – 48% had been in full-time employment, with only a quarter progressing directly from a prior degree (24% from a PG course and only 1% from an UG course).

Another key element of context was their career intentions; in the survey, respondents were asked to indicate their intended career sector when they had started their doctorate and also their intention at the current time. Almost exactly half had intended to pursue an academic career when they started their doctoral study, while 24% had envisaged pursuing a career in the arts/cultural/heritage sectors (and the remainder in a range of other sectors, although 6% did not know). At the point of the survey – which could be cross-referenced to their year of study, as given in Table A3.3 – 45% reported that they intended to pursue an academic career, although slightly higher proportions were interested in certain other career sectors than had been the case when they started their doctorate. The latter shift appeared partly to be due to those who had stated ‘unknown’ at the start now selecting one of the sectors.

Amongst those who were full-time respondents and in years 3 or 4 of their programme, who could be approaching the end of their programme, the proportion who were seeking a career in HE was as high or slightly higher (56%), suggesting that career intentions were not changing substantially during the course of doctoral study – and that the proportion seeking an academic career had not changed substantially from when they commenced their doctoral programme.

That said, while 23% of respondents indicated when they started their doctorate that they were not very or not at all confident they would obtain a satisfying job, that would make use of their research-related skills or knowledge, this had increased to 35% when surveyed – indicating that a substantial proportion harboured concerns about their longer term outcomes. Levels of confidence were not substantially better amongst those on AHRC-funded and/or cohort-based programmes, than others.

With these career contexts, reported rationales for undertaking a doctorate were interesting. Respondents were able to report multiple potential rationales, of which (understandably) personal interest in the research topic was always the most popular (identified by 82%). Over half expressed the desirability of continuing to study in the HE environment, while lower but substantial proportions (40% or more) identified more extrinsic motivations including the qualification being essential for their desired career, or to enable greater career progression, or that the skills or knowledge they would gain would be useful.

It was interesting to compare the rationales of those intending to pursue an academic career with others (Figure A3.1). One thing that this indicated very clearly was that far fewer of the candidates who were intending to pursue careers outside academia saw value in the doctorate in terms of their potential career direction or progression within it, than was the case for those seeking an academic career. This possibly reflects inputs in the roundtables that many PGRs do not feel the doctorate prepares them well for careers outside HE.

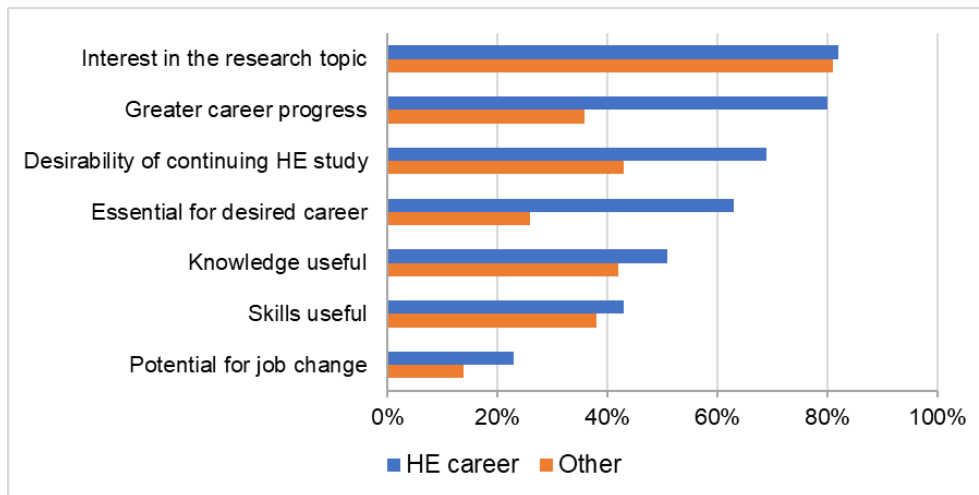


Figure A3.1 Doctoral student survey respondents' motivations for undertaking doctorate, with broad career intention when starting their programme (N=316)

Respondents were also asked more specifically about factors they had considered when they chose their doctoral programme. Very few reported that they had selected their programme primarily based on whether it was cohort-based or not, or on the basis of the package of skills training and developmental opportunities it offered, although these were significant secondary factors. The vast majority, when they had applied, had felt that the subject topic area and the specific project had been very important, followed in proportion by those citing the importance of a particular supervisor. Location was somewhat more important for those who were studying part-time, than full-time, although not dramatically so. Analysis of these results amongst AHRC-funded PGRs showed extremely similar results to those for the whole sample.

Figure A3.2 summarises these results, but for simplicity only shows the percentages of respondents who indicated a factor as having been very important or important.

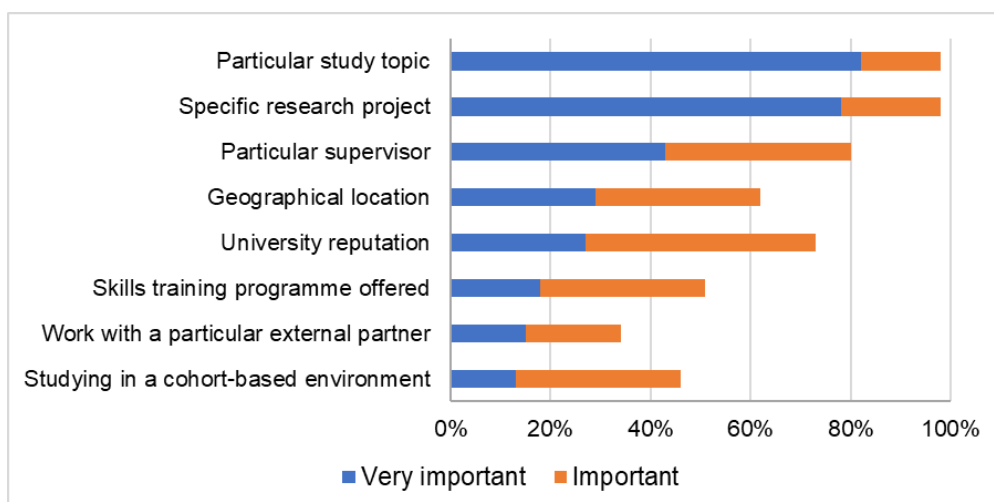


Figure A3.2 Extent of importance of various factors when selecting their doctoral programme, reported by doctoral student survey respondents (N=316)

A3.4 Experiences of programme

A number of aspects of PGRs' experiences of their doctoral study to date were investigated through questions in the survey. The vast majority of respondents (92%) reported that they had more than one supervisor, although the location of the second (or multiple) supervisors differed somewhat according to the type of doctoral programme. Amongst those identifying that they were on a cohort-based programme, 27% had a second supervisor in the same institution, a similar proportion (27%) had a second supervisor based in a different institution and for the remainder (46%) the second supervisor was in a non-HE partner organisation. By contrast, only 2% of those reporting they were not in a cohort-based or collaborative programme had a second supervisor located in a different institution (and 11% had only a single supervisor). All AHRC-funded PGR respondents had more than one supervisor and for over 80% of these respondents the second supervisor was in a different institution.

Open-ended comments about experiences of supervision revealed that most AHRC-funded students were extremely satisfied with its quality, with the only negative comments relating either to the impact of Covid-19 on reducing face-to-face meetings or from a few PGRs who had less than consistent engagement with their second (or multiple) supervisors in partner institutions. Examination of comments from respondents who were self-funded showed them to be much more varied – presumably reflecting that, overall, their experiences were much more mixed. This could be considered as evidence of higher-quality supervision for those on AHRC-funded programmes, on average, or at least supervision which PGRs found more satisfying in terms of perceived quality.

Another issue which differed considerably with programme type was the sense of belonging to a specific cohort of doctoral students (i.e. other than the informal 'cohort' that comprised all those doing a doctorate in their institution). Unsurprisingly, over 80% of AHRC-funded students, and a similar proportion of those who identified that they were in a cohort-based programme, reported that they felt that they did belong to a cohort to either a great extent (26%) or some extent (56%). By contrast, fewer than half of those who were wholly self-funded, or identified that they were not in a cohort-based programme, felt that they belonged to any kind of doctoral study cohort.

Many of those who did feel they were in a distinct cohort attested to its value in giving them an enhanced sense of belonging, in providing peer support and providing broader networking and developmental opportunities. Investigation of the responses from the minority of AHRC-funded respondents who stated that they had not positively experienced cohort benefits revealed that several had started their doctorate during the pandemic. They had studied largely remotely to this point and/or restrictions due to the pandemic had prevented some intended cohort activities from taking place.

Comments from the (more than half) of self-funded PGRs who reported that they did not feel part of a cohort were in stark contrast. Many of these expressed that they felt disconnected from other PGRs, and/or felt isolated or lonely, although it was clear that remote study due to Covid was also a factor in some of these cases. Some of these responses were from mature and part-time students, but not exclusively so; overall, the extent of feelings of not belonging to a cohort were similar for full-time and part-time students.

Analysis of these responses by ethnicity suggested that fewer of the respondents from a minority ethnic background felt they belonged to a cohort, although the very small size of this sub-sample meant that the difference was not statistically robust.

In some of the analyses that follow, results for those funded by AHRC and those who were wholly self-funded are highlighted, to illuminate differences between those on funded, cohort-based programmes and independent self-funded PGRs. Those funded by AHRC were selected as a more robust group to identify than those in a cohort-based programme because of the uncertainty of some respondents about the type of programme in which they were studying.

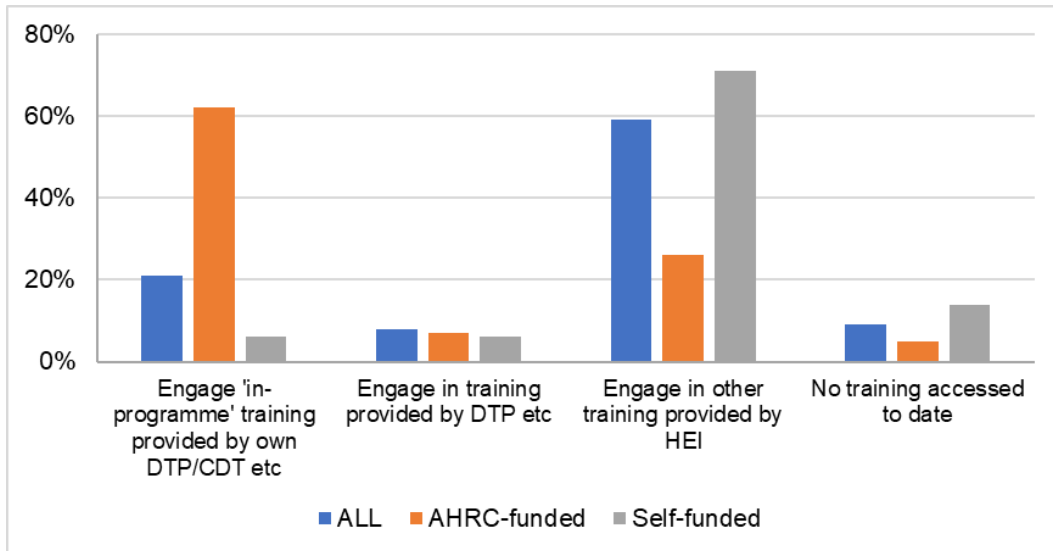


Figure A3.3 Student survey respondents' engagement in developmental opportunities and skills training, with broad type of funding (N=273)

Overall, 90% of respondents indicated they had engaged in development opportunities or training to date (referred to here as 'CPD' for brevity) and only around 1 in 10 had not engaged at all (Figure A3.3). However, how they had done so varied with their type of funding. Figure A3.3 shows that over 60% of AHRC-funded PGRs had engaged in CPD provided within their DTP or similar programme, and around another quarter of them in other institutional provision. On the other hand, two thirds of self-funded PGRs were engaging in CPD provided by their institution, and only very small proportions of self-funded PGRs reported engaging in training that was offered from a DTP or similar environment. If these results are reliable, this would suggest that the extent of 'spill-over' of opportunities provided within DTPs to other PGRs not funded by AHRC was very limited. Amongst the self-funded PGRs, 14% had not engaged in any CPD at all to date (compared with only 5% of AHRC-funded students).

The results presented in Table A3.4 show the specific areas in which PGRs reported that they had engaged, or expected to engage, through skills training, although this presentation of results does not attempt to differentiate whether that training was available specifically through a DTP programme or provided by the institution more generically. What these results do show, at high level, is the broader range of training topics that substantial proportions of AHRC-funded PGRs had accessed or could access, compared with self-funded PGRs (of whom half or more could only access training on quite a narrow range of topics). It also shows the much higher proportion of AHRC-funded PGRs who were able to engage in training in certain areas identified to be important elsewhere in this report,

including collaborative working, communications and public engagement, digital humanities, and career management.

| | All | AHRC-funded | Self-funded |
|-------------------------------------|-----|-------------|-------------|
| Research methods | 81% | 86% | 70% |
| Research ethics | 76% | 79% | 64% |
| Teaching | 63% | 71% | 45% |
| Critical thinking & reflection | 62% | 61% | 53% |
| Networking | 60% | 71% | 47% |
| Communication skills | 58% | 69% | 42% |
| Public engagement | 58% | 72% | 42% |
| Qualitative analysis | 56% | 46% | 49% |
| Career management | 54% | 63% | 34% |
| Practice-led methods | 48% | 43% | 34% |
| Project management | 46% | 50% | 33% |
| Archiving | 45% | 60% | 34% |
| Resilience | 44% | 51% | 31% |
| Digital humanities | 43% | 54% | 25% |
| Data/statistics/quantitative skills | 42% | 40% | 34% |
| Participatory research | 39% | 37% | 24% |
| Problem solving | 36% | 44% | 25% |
| Teamworking/collaboration | 33% | 50% | 17% |
| Foreign language skills | 31% | 41% | 17% |
| Creative/design skills | 30% | 40% | 17% |
| Intercultural competency | 28% | 31% | 17% |
| Leadership skills | 28% | 29% | 17% |
| Innovation | 24% | 29% | 15% |
| Digital arts | 20% | 22% | 11% |
| Commercial/business skills | 19% | 21% | 12% |

Table A3.4 Respondents' actual or expected engagement in specific skills training (N=253)

Respondents were also asked to indicate which skills they thought would be the most important to them or needed in their future workplace, after their doctorate, using open-ended responses. Coding their responses, and splitting them by broad career intention, revealed the results in Figure A3.4. For those who aspired to an academic career, the most commonly cited important skills were teaching, research and communication (noting that the latter they considered to include public speaking and outreach). Writing for publication and writing funding applications were also rated as very important skills by significant numbers of these respondents, along with resilience.

The pattern was somewhat different for those intending to pursue a career outside HE. Even higher numbers of these respondents assumed that research skills would be paramount and a high proportion recognised the high importance of communication skills. Again, resilience was relatively commonly cited but this group of respondents also identified ‘organisational’ skills such as project management and writing (albeit in these cases, this was not writing for academic publication). Problem-solving and critical thinking emerged as important skills for a few of these respondents.

Interestingly, very few respondents in either of these two broad groups mentioned digital skills, team working or creativity, which are all skills that evidence from other strands of this project suggest will be very important in future. Equally, no respondents mentioned ‘commercial’ skills at all.

We tentatively suggest that this is evidence of some potential mis-alignment between what current PGRs think will be very important in a career outside HE and the skills that other stakeholders suggest will be very important. In addition, it identifies some topics on which PGRs seeking an academic career would appreciate more support. It may also indicate that some respondents were under-estimating the potential importance to them of some of the skills in which they were currently being offered training/CPD.

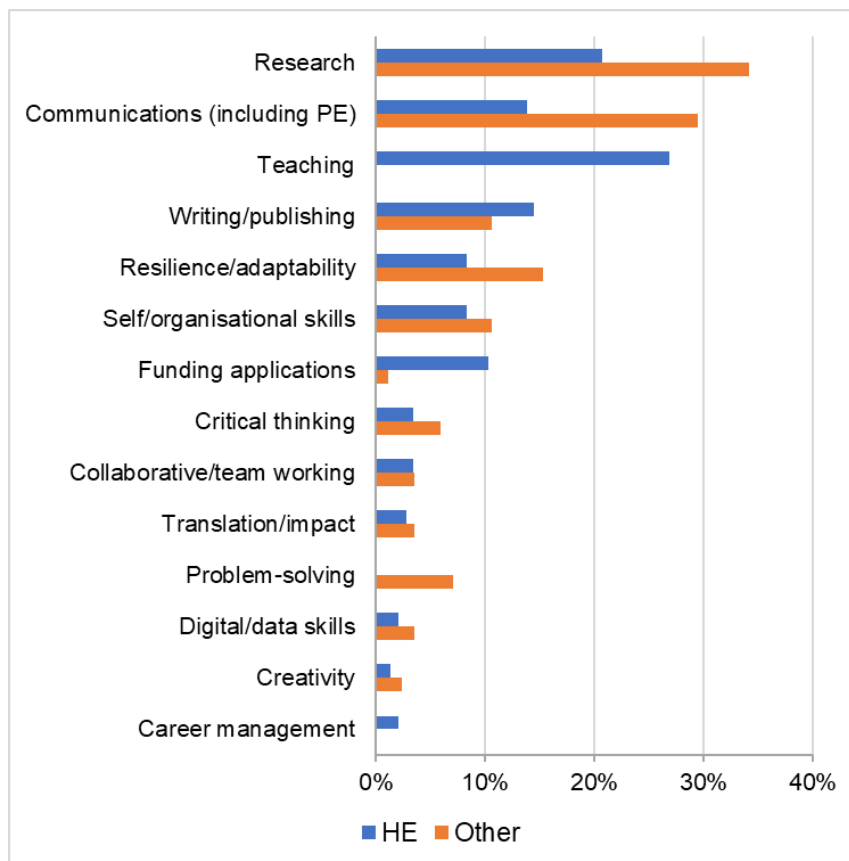


Figure A3.4 Most important skills needed in the workplace following doctorate, with broad career intention (HE career intention: N=145; Other career intention: N=105)

A3.5 Value of AHRC funding

Respondents who were AHRC-funded were asked to indicate in what ways they felt that funding was valuable to them and the difference they perceived it made to their experiences compared with their peers without such funding (through open-ended comments). The frequencies of the key themes emerging from their comments are shown in Figure A3.5, which illustrates perceived impacts both financially and experientially. More than one quarter of the AHRC-funded respondents specifically stated that without the AHRC's funding they could not have undertaken their doctorate – so this is clear evidence that such funding is providing increased access to doctoral study.

A similar number of respondents commented that having the funding meant they could focus much more on their research, i.e. they were not distracted by having to work at the same time to earn a living.

However, the largest number talked about the enhanced access to opportunities that they had as AHRC-funded students, compared with other PGRs; this was mainly expressed in terms of enhanced access to professional development activities.

A further small number of AHRC-funded respondents mentioned the chance that their programme offered them to access additional financial support (such as student development funding), which they saw could open up extra opportunities for them. In these respects, their AHRC funding was regarded as enhancing their doctoral experience – which reflects widespread perceptions recorded elsewhere in this project about there being two tiers of PGRs in terms of doctoral experiences (i.e. those with full, especially AHRC, funding, and those without).

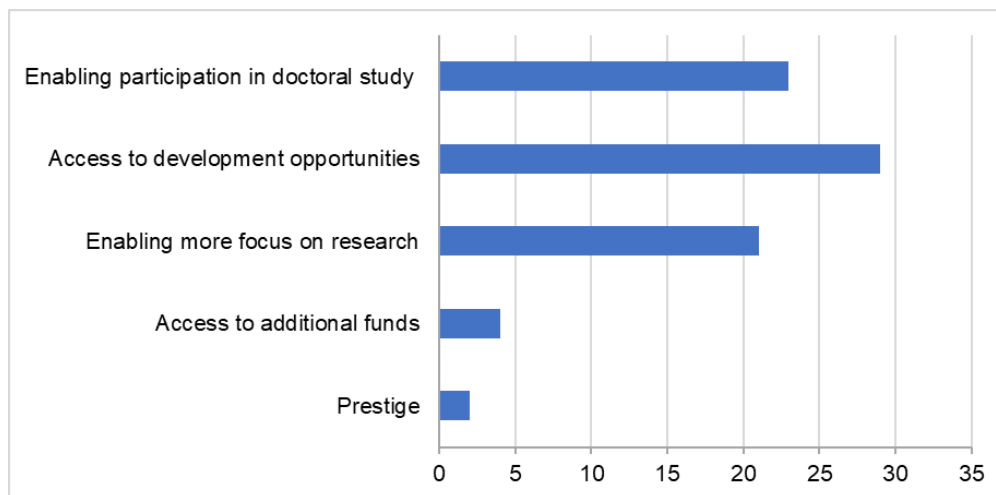


Figure A3.5 Theme of open-ended comments by AHRC-funded survey respondents asked to identify benefits of having AHRC funding. X-axis is number of respondents (N=77)

A3.6 Future provision

Student survey respondents were also asked for their suggestions, based on their overall doctoral study experiences to date, as to how they thought doctoral provision could be made better in future, for those studying A&H subjects. Their open-ended responses, some of which were very specific, were coded and then grouped into themes/topics, and are

summarised in Table A3.5. The topics are listed in the table in descending order of frequency with which they were mentioned. As some issues were raised only (or dominantly mentioned) by 'other' students, not by AHRC-funded students, an indication of the provenance and frequency of the issues is shown. It was not feasible to undertake this analysis as quantitatively as for skills as shown in Figure A3.5 due to the smaller number of comments about potential future changes. One theme we ignored in this analysis was requests for more face-to-face rather than remote activities or support, which we interpreted to be a temporary issue driven by the restricted options available during the Covid pandemic.

| | AHRC-funded | Other students |
|---|--------------------|-----------------------|
| Access to additional needs-based funding | ✓ | ✓✓✓✓✓ |
| More peer and cohort activities | ✓ | ✓✓✓ |
| More flexible access to CPD | ✓ | ✓✓ |
| Clearer expectations of student and support | ✓ | ✓✓ |
| More interdisciplinary opportunities | ✓ | ✓✓ |
| More regular/organised supervision | | ✓✓ |
| Better facilities or working space | | ✓ |
| CPD opportunities tuned to different subjects | ✓ | ✓ |
| More opportunities to teach | | ✓ |
| Greater supervisor capacity (lower workload) | ✓ | ✓ |
| More inter-university activities | | ✓ |

Table A3.5 Topics within student survey respondents' suggestions for future improvement of A&H doctoral support, based on their doctoral experiences to date (AHRC-funded respondents: N=27; Other respondents: N=82)

A number of the more common suggestions from PGRs who were not funded by AHRC were perhaps predictable in that they arose from PGRs who were less well funded or entirely unfunded, many of whom did not have access to the opportunities of PGRs in a funded, cohort-based programme. However, more flexibility in provision and support, which was more tailored to the needs of the PGR (including their age/experience and their subject) arose as a common theme across both groups of respondents. More clarity at the start of the programme, in terms of the expectations upon the PGR as a student, and about the support that they could expect, appeared to be changes that would be relatively broadly welcomed too. Equally, more opportunities to engage in interdisciplinary research or related activity would be welcome. There was also some sense from some PGRs that supervisors were being overworked and were struggling to provide the extent of support that they intended to, or for which PGRs were hoping.