

Annex G

Skills training requirements for research students: joint statement by the Research Councils/AHRB

Introduction

The Research Councils and the Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB) 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 is 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, eg 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:

1. Write clearly and in a style appropriate to purpose, eg progress reports, published documents, thesis.
2. Construct coherent arguments and articulate ideas clearly to a range of audiences, formally and informally through a variety of techniques.
3. Constructively defend research outcomes at seminars and viva examination.
4. Contribute to promoting the public understanding of one's research field.
5. Effectively support the learning of others when involved in teaching, mentoring or demonstrating activities.

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

1. Develop and maintain co-operative networks and working relationships with supervisors, colleagues and peers, within the institution and the wider research community.
2. Understand one's behaviours and impact on others when working in and contributing to the success of formal and informal teams.
3. Listen, give and receive feedback and respond perceptively to others.

(G) Career management – to be able to:

1. Appreciate the need for and show commitment to continued professional development.
2. Take ownership for and manage one's career progression, set realistic and achievable career goals, and identify and develop ways to improve employability.
3. Demonstrate an insight into the transferable nature of research skills to other work environments and the range of career opportunities within and outside academia.
4. Present one's skills, personal attributes and experiences through effective CVs, applications and interviews.