

Frequently Asked Questions

This document will be regularly updated to reflect those questions most frequently raised with ESRC. Potential applicants, and their research organisations (RO), should review this document before contacting us for advice.

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Strategy	1
Content of postgraduate training.....	5
Eligibility	8
Metrics	9
Costings	11
Activities	12
Process.....	13
Future plans.....	15

Strategy

Why have you changed from Doctoral Training Centres (DTCs) to Doctoral Training Partnerships (DTPs)?

DTPs are the same as DTCs, the name change is due to research council harmonisation of terminology.

What do you mean by ‘partnership’?

The partnerships are twofold: firstly the partnership between the Research Councils and research organisations in the funding and delivery of research training; secondly, there are partnerships between the organisations involved with consortia.

What’s the difference between a DTP and CDT?

DTPs must be multidisciplinary and offer a broad range of training across the social sciences. CDTs are thematic and will pump prime the development and delivery of specialist training in new and emerging interdisciplinary research areas where there is demand to build capacity which is difficult to do through traditional methods.

Why do you expect CDTs to be developed in collaboration with non-academic partners?

CDTs are to be developed in collaboration with non-academic partners to maximise the wider impact of ESRC's training investment in these new and emerging areas.

Will ESRC scrutinise the type of non-academic partners involved in the bid and will some be more welcome than others (ie private sector)?

The DTC Network Evaluation highlighted the lack of collaborations with private sector partners so we'd welcome bids that include them but they will not be privileged above other partners. Fundamentally we're looking for purposeful partnerships and it's down to applicants to justify their inclusion and the strengths and value they bring to the bid.

Why is 20 per cent co-funding required for the Biosocial CDT to come from the RO as well as non-academic partners but not in the case of the New Forms of Data CDT?

We expect both CDTs to be developed in collaboration with non-academic partner(s) from the outset. As the New Forms of Data CDT is in an area that is of considerable interest to business, public and civil society sectors we expect at least 20 per cent of the funding to be supported by non-academic partner(s). We recognise that in-kind contributions may also be provided in addition to the cash contribution. However, as biosocial research is an emerging area where there are fewer links with business and more with the public and civil society sectors, we recognise that the contribution from the non-academic partner may be a mix of cash and in-kind contributions and as such, RO funding can be utilised to meet the requirement of 20 per cent co-funding.

Can my organisation apply for both a DTP and CDT?

Yes, ROs can be part of one DTP proposal, and can be part of one CDT proposal in each thematic area.

Can you provide additional information on the expected size and scale of the bids? For example, what is the maximum number of partners you would expect to see in any bid? Should we focus on a couple of key partners or seek to engage with a larger number of institutions?

We are not putting figures on the expected size of a consortium. Proposals must clearly justify the choice of partners and articulate the added value of the partnership. If your bid is likely to include a number of partners, you must carefully consider how you will deliver a consistent student experience and how you are going to develop a sense of cohort amongst students across all partner institutions..

We also don't have a specific number in mind for non-academic partners. For all partners you will need to make sure that you have effective mechanisms for engaging with them

Would you prefer single or multiple institution proposals?

Applications are eligible from single ROs and consortia. We do though encourage applications which include pockets and excellence and additional studentships are available to them.

Can my organisation be part of two different bids within the same thematic area?

No, you can be part of one CDT bid in new forms of data and one in biosocial research.

Can we include a pathway in new forms of data or biosocial research in our DTP if we are also applying for a CDT?

Whilst we don't want to stifle innovation, as a general rule you should not apply for funding for the same activity in multiple applications and as the aim of the CDTs is to pump prime developments that would not happen without the additional investment we do not expect to see much in the way of overlap. You can be involved in a bid for a DTP and a CDT so you could set out your plans for what you would do if successful in bidding for one or both. Also, you can apply to add new pathways to DTPs annually so if your CDT was not successful you could consider that as a route to incorporate it in to a DTP.

DTP accreditation is usually for five years, why is it now six?

Although the first studentships will not start until October 2017, we need to plan how we monitor and evaluate our investment in postgraduate training to inform the next round of commissioning. We need to allow sufficient time for the DTPs to establish themselves and to learn from their development. The next round of commissioning will also need to be informed by the next Research Excellence Framework (REF) exercise and likely cycles for comprehensive spending reviews. When taking all of these factors in to account, a six-year period of accreditation is more appropriate.

Can we apply for a DTP in a specific disciplinary area?

No, DTPs must be multidisciplinary. Those who might be termed a 'pocket of excellence' in a specific area will need to be part of a consortium bid, they cannot apply to be a DTP on their own.

How will institutions be encouraged to include a 'pocket of excellence' in their bids?

We want to support excellence in postgraduate training wherever it is found, so additional studentships will be made available for those who include what might be discipline-specific, local pockets of excellence in their proposals.

How are you defining 'pockets of excellence'?

It's a term that arose during the last round of commissioning and reflected that there were a number of institutions who didn't have sufficient strength across the social sciences to host a DTP but were clearly strong in specific areas. We hope that they will be included in some partnerships and will allocate additional studentships to encourage this to happen. A 'pocket of excellence' might be included at the level of a single pathway or it could be on a broader scale. Ultimately applicants must justify the configuration of their proposal and the clear value that each partner adds to the arrangement. Practically we hope the REF metrics thresholds will help identify pockets of excellence.

Do all bids need to include a pocket of excellence?

It is not a requirement that all bids include pockets of excellence, though we are encouraging collaborations which include them as we want to support excellent postgraduate training wherever it is found.

How many studentships will be allocated to bids including pockets of excellence?

We can't be specific about that at this time. Twenty five per cent of our budget will be reserved for strategic steers, how they're allocated will depend on how many have included pockets of excellence or demonstrable strength in the our areas highlighted for steered awards namely interdisciplinarity, advanced quantitative methods and the use of ESRC datasets.

How can we find potential partners?

ESRC are unable to broker collaborations. Institutions will need to identify partners through their own networks.

You funded 21 Doctoral Training Centres, why are you only anticipating 15 DTPs?

In order to deliver the best experience for our students, we are keen to increase the size of our student cohorts. Being part of a cohort has been shown to be hugely beneficial to our students, in terms of the support they receive from one another and also the training opportunities which are afforded to them. Therefore we intend to consolidate the DTP network to approximately 15 centres. Although the network will be consolidated, it will also be diversified through the introduction of Centres for Doctoral Training and enhancing the capacity-building dimension of Centres and Large Grants in strategic areas.

As you are funding fewer DTPs, does that mean you're expecting them all to be large consortias?

No, proposals will be welcome from both single institutions and consortia. Applicants will be required to justify their structure particularly the added value to the delivery of training and to the student experience.

How many CDTs do you intend to fund?

We are planning to introduce five CDTs over the next six years. The first two are in the areas of biosocial research and new forms of data and they are being commissioned alongside the DTPs.

How did you decide on the focus areas for the two CDTs?

Drawing upon a range of evidence sources, including external reports and ESRC's strategic priorities, the areas of biosocial research and new forms of data were chosen to be the areas of focus for the first two CDTs.

How should we focus our CDTs? Should it relate to one particular area or should we pick three to four areas which have common training needs?

This is a matter of choice and your capacity to deliver. We don't expect everyone to cover all areas.

Can you provide information on what you would expect to see in the bids in terms of the relationship between existing DTCs and DTP? ie how much integration are you expecting to see?

We won't be able to finalise plans for transition arrangements between DTC and DTPs or CDTs until we know how the new bids have been configured. We would like to minimise duplication where possible so if a DTC is proposing to reapply in a similar format then it would

not be unreasonable to try and accommodate this within a single approach to monitoring but it would not be appropriate if there are new consortia arrangements going forward. Applicants may choose to address this when describing their management structure within their proposals.

It is important to remember that the DTC training grants will need to be reconciled when they reach their end dates, we are not expecting to see significant underspend and any underspend will not automatically be transferred.

The specification for the CDTs suggests that the Director must be a research leader in the field, but the same isn't required for a DTP – why is that?

DTPs must provide a range of training across a broad range of the social sciences as such it would not be practical for the DTP Director to be a research leader in all areas. As the CDTs are thematically focused they are able to be led by an expert in the area.

Can you clarify what you mean by 'science policy' in relation to the institutional /consortia strategy and vision section of the DTP Je-S guidance notes?

We are expecting DTPs to set out how the overall strategy (including but not limited to research) for the research organisations comprising the DTP is developed and how high quality training provision is linked/integrated to that strategy. As we want to ensure that training provision isn't developed in isolation.

Content of postgraduate training

Can we apply for five-year training programmes?

Yes, but you would need to demonstrate a strong case and we would not provide additional funding to supplement this.

Why do these calls place an increased emphasis on cohort-building?

Studying as part of a cohort has been shown to be hugely beneficial to students in terms of the support they receive from one another and also the training opportunities available to them. We appreciate that students have a range of pre-existing affiliations such as their discipline, department, and, at collaborative DTCs, institution. Whilst we don't want to supplant these, we do want to ensure that there's a clear sense of being part of an ESRC-funded cohort too.

Why has ESRC returned to specifying the core methods requirements?

We remain committed to funding high-quality training to support social science researchers, and as funding will now be through a range of mechanisms it is important to ensure that there is an established platform that can be consistently applied across them. We also hope that re-establishing the minimum requirement for core research training will support ROs in making the sometimes difficult decision on whether a student should be funded on a 1+3 or +3 basis. Subject specific training is still for organisations to determine.

Are you expecting all students to be trained in quantitative and qualitative research methods?

Yes, though the level and intensity will vary from subject to subject.

What is a pathway?

We define 'pathway' as the training a student will receive in a particular disciplinary or thematic area of social science during the course of their PhD.

Should we use the ESRC discipline list to define our pathways?

It is down to the organisations involved to determine how they configure their pathways. This might be around disciplines, interdisciplinary challenges or other strategic themes.

To what extent do you want pathways to be thematic or disciplinary?

We have not specified a requirement; applicants can determine how to configure their pathways.

How many pathways can we include in our DTP proposal?

We're not setting a formal limit on the number of pathways included within a DTP, however applicants must justify the inclusion of each pathway and indicate the level of demand they expect so they can demonstrate that a viable cohort of students will be sustained on each pathway. CDT proposals have, by definition, only one pathway.

The call specification asks for evidence of demand for each pathway. Why is that?

We want to ensure that organisations aren't including redundant pathways where there is little or no demand which could result in students being isolated. When considering whether a pathway is viable, institutions need to consider the numbers of students which will be supported on the pathway, and this can include non-ESRC funded students.

Why does the call emphasise the need for training needs analysis when organisations already have their own processes in place?

We want to ensure that all ESRC-funded students receive a rigorous training needs assessment throughout their studies and that this is implemented across all pathways and partner organisations. In addition, we want organisations to engage supervisors, identify areas for development for each student and think carefully about the content and most appropriate delivery of the required training courses. We expect the Director, and the management team, to play a central role in reviewing students' training needs at an aggregate level to identify and seek to address any gaps in provision.

Can you share some examples of the type of TNAs you are looking for?

Whilst we can pull together some examples of best practice we can't share institutional documentation. We would, however, stress that we recognise that institutions will already have a process in place and as such don't want to force institutions to complete a new form specifically for ESRC funded students. However, we do need to be assured that there is a robust process in place and that a student's progression in terms of the depth and breadth of their training is being documented. Moreover that there is a consistent TNA process for all students in a DTP/CDT.

Why are DTPs being set a target for the balance of three and four year awards?

Since the introduction of the DTCs we have seen a national drift to awarding more +3 award, and we are concerned that this might limit the opportunities to those without a prior masters

qualification. We want to ensure that we support the most talented students whatever their background, and that those unable to self-fund a Masters do not find this a barrier to entering into postgraduate training

Doesn't this contradict the need to have an open competition?

Whilst we reserve the right to reduce allocations where the majority of awards are consistently allocated on a three year basis we won't do this without prior discussion with organisations. Where it can be clearly demonstrated the allocation of +3 awards is an accurate reflection of the whole pool of applicants, and that the students have been correctly assessed as being eligible for +3 awards, then the allocation may not be reduced.

You've said what you expect with regards to widening participation but not what you want us to do, can you please clarify?

In the call documents we have set out some specific requirements in terms of the process for recruiting and allocating studentships. Beyond this we want applicants to set out how they will contribute to the widening participation agenda and promote postgraduate research to a diverse base of graduates. We don't want to be prescriptive because we recognise that many institutions already have pro-active recruitment strategies at the undergraduate level and we want to encourage institutions to think innovatively about how these can be applied to/extended to the postgraduate level. As part of our monitoring of DTPs and CDTs we will be looking at the demographic information we collect on students allocated funding and when concerned will expect ROs to provide evidence on how their allocation relates to the overall applicant pool. Therefore applicants will need to consider they collect and analyse data on students.

How should DTPs allocate studentships?

The allocation of studentships will be devolved to the DTPs, apart from steered additional studentships awarded by the ESRC. To ensure excellence is the primary criteria, we expect the majority of studentships to be allocated through a fair and transparent open competition across all pathways and partner institutions. Allocations must not be based on internal quotas

Can DTPs allocate studentships in our priority areas outside of the open competition?

DTPs can allocate a small number of studentships in priority areas, as long as the reasons for this are fully articulated in the proposal. However, the vast majority of studentships should be awarded through an open competition.

The DTP call specification seems to prescribe the management structure and resources required; Can't ROs determine that for themselves?

Yes. Ultimately it is down to organisations to determine how to resource the governance structure, but our suggestions are based on experience from the DTCs and to ensure that organisations (particularly those who haven't been part of the DTC network) have realistic expectations of the time commitment required to effectively manage an DTP.

Do all pathways need to accommodate part-time provision?

Yes, all pathways need to be available on both a full- and part-time basis. Applicants must

indicate within the bid if it is not possible to offer part-time across all pathways and the reasoning for this will be assessed through peer review.

What about distance learning?

Applicants can determine whether training is made available on a distance learning basis. We anticipate that most students will not be registered on a distance learning programme and, as such, will be required to live within a reasonable travelling distance of their institution. Where students can be registered on a distance learning programme, applicants will need to articulate their approach to cohort-building that includes all students.

Eligibility

How many ROs can be involved in each proposal?

We're not setting a limit on the number of ROs which can be involved in consortia applications. However, applicants will need to clearly justify the configuration and demonstrate the value added of the proposed partnership, particularly to the delivery of training and to the student experience.

Can my organisation participate in more than one DTP bid?

No, individual ROs are only allowed to be part one DTP proposal.

If we aren't successful in our bid for a DTP or CDT, can we still apply for associated studentships?

Only as part of an enhanced Centres and Large Grants proposal in a strategic area where it has been signposted in the call documentation. Please note that applicants will still need to meet metrics threshold.

Can an overseas institution be a partner organisation in a bid?

Whilst we appreciate that ROs have, and continue to develop, links and partnerships with institutions overseas or have overseas campuses themselves, ESRC's remit only permits us to fund postgraduate training at eligible institutions in the UK. As such, overseas institutions can't be part of a consortium, but we expect bids to articulate how their training provision will enable students to develop the cultural and methodological skills required to work with international partners.

You've previously allowed DTCs to recruit international students in economics and advanced quantitative methods (AQM), why is that changing?

RCUK have recognised the desirability of opening recruitment to attract the best international taken in areas of skills shortage. For ESRC, we previously defined these areas as being economics and advanced quantitative methods. When DTPs can demonstrate that despite having a proactive recruitment strategy they are struggling to recruit high quality students in a particular area we will consider their request to relax eligibility criteria.

The costings suggest that you will no longer be including enhanced stipends in economics and AQM as part of the training grant calculation, is that correct?

Yes, but research organisations will have the flexibility to pay an enhanced stipend in those areas that are strategically important to them.

Why have you limited international eligibility in economics?

We have seen a significant rise in the number of international student recruited in economics to the extent that some DTCs are wholly, or mostly, reliant on international students to fill their awards. This, together with the number of studentships allocated in economics being above our national benchmark targets, had led to us revisiting the policy. We will, however, consider requests from organisations to relax eligibility in areas where they can demonstrate, that despite working proactively, they are struggling to recruit.

Does this change also apply to EU students in economics?

Yes, they must satisfy the standard eligibility criteria unless the DTP or CDT has made a case for relaxing those requirements.

Is it a requirement that all students commencing a +3 must have an MRes?

All students commencing a +3 must be able to demonstrate they meet the majority of the core research methods training requirements set out in the Postgraduate Training and development Guidelines 2015. This is likely to have been through completion of an MRes, however, it is recognised that they may also be met through completion of other Masters and exceptionally through work experience. We would not expect students to have gained these core skills through completion of an undergraduate degree. The minority of the core requirements not met prior to commencing a +3 must be identified and addressed through the students training needs analysis.

Metrics

Why are ESRC using REF-based metrics as part of the assessment criteria for proposals to the DTP and CDT calls?

We are using REF-based metrics as part of the assessment criteria to ensure that we support consistently high-quality pathways, and that each delivery mechanism meets the same quality threshold.

Why have some of the metrics thresholds increased from the 2010 DTC commissioning exercise?

The REF found significant improvement in the quality of research since the last RAE exercise. On average across all submissions, 22 per cent of outputs were judged world-leading (4*), up from 14 per cent in the previous exercise in 2008. A further 50 per cent were judged internationally excellent (3*), up from 37 per cent. These increases are consistent with independent evidence about the improved performance of UK research and the views of the international members of the REF panels.

What is the relationship between a REF UoA and a proposed training pathway?

Pathways can be made up of multiple UoAs, but each UoA must meet the thresholds in order to be eligible for ESRC accreditation. This ensures that the breadth of research conducted across a pathway is equally strong.

Can we include non-social science UoAs in the bids?

Yes, particularly as we are encouraging interdisciplinarity. However, all ESRC-funded studentships must be at least 50 per cent social science.

We made multiple submissions to the same UoA, can the results be aggregated?

Yes, you can aggregate information within a single UoA.

If each studentship has to be 50 per cent social sciences, would each studentship have to be registered in a social science department or in a biosocial CDT, for example, could they be in a biology department?

We would expect that it would be appropriate for students to be based for some of their time, and some of their training, in biology departments. Ultimately we'd encourage applications to be pragmatic about where the student is based in relation to what makes most sense for their programme of study.

Why has impact been used as a metric?

The decision to include impact alongside output and environment scores reflects the importance we place on our students being in an environment, and supervised by academics, with a strong understanding of the importance of and track record in achieving impact through their research. This will also be reflected in revisions we are making to the Postgraduate Training and Development Guidelines to strengthen our requirements for impact-related skills training.

Is the 5 FTE social science staff only?

No, it's 5 FTE and not confined to social science staff.

Do we need 5 FTE at each institution in each UoA on each pathway?

Yes, this needs to be at an institutional level to ensure supervisory capacity within institutions at which the student is based.

Does the minimum of 5 FTE staff with an output at 3*or 4* refer to the pathway as a whole (ie the collection of staff in that pathway across a consortium), or does each institution within the consortium needs to have a research volume equivalent 5 FTE staff with an output at 3*or 4* to be part of that pathway?

The thresholds are at the level of an individual UoA and cannot be aggregated to the level of the pathway. This is so that we can ensure the training will be sustainable over the course of the accreditation and there will be the capacity to provide supervision for students at the institutions within which they are registered.

How do these criteria apply to new staff which may have joined the institution since the submission to REF2014, or to existing staff who were not included in the REF submission?

Any pathway must be made up of UoA(s) which meet the REF metrics threshold and we cannot account for new members of staff when looking at this data. However, new members of staff and those existing staff not included in REF submissions can all still supervise students and they can be actively involved in the proposal, as long as the training they are involved in relates to UoAs which meet the threshold.

Is the 50 per cent threshold based on rounding to the nearest whole number?

The UoA percentage is able to be rounded up to the nearest whole number. Therefore a UoA of 49.1 per cent would meet the threshold.

Do we need to include information regarding supervisory capacity of the CDT, if so how should this be provided?

Both of the CDT call specifications state that in order to ensure there will be sufficient expert supervisory capacity within the CDT, applicants will need to list the supervisors who will be involved with the CDT, and indicate whether they have previously supervised or are currently supervising students, and to state which disciplinary area the students worked/ are working in. This information should be provided as part of the metrics attachment and should not exceed two sides of A4. In addition applicants are asked to reference this information under the Governance, organisation and management heading with the case for support.

Costings

Why are we being asked to provide costs envisioning a potential 25 per cent cut in costs?

The current financial climate is quite challenging and we may face significant cuts. We plan to provide funding beyond fees and stipends to reflect the value that additional activities, such as overseas visits and collaboration, can have on a student's skill development. However, if budgets are reduced we want organisations to think creatively about how they can still deliver a high-quality student experience on a reduced budget.

If we've been asked to do this on the assumption of 30 studentships per year, can we take it that that's the indicative number of studentships each DTP will receive?

No, the DTPs will vary in size but in order for us to undertake a like for like comparison we would like everyone to work on the same basis.

If CDTs are expected to leverage 20 per cent of their funding, how much does that equate to?

Although we are unable to provide an exact figure at the moment, the expectation is that the 20 per cent would equate to two studentships. Obviously a CDT may be able to leverage more.

Why is the notional cost of a DTP student for 3.5 years, but four years for a CDT?

The notional cost of a DTP studentship reflects our expectation that there should be an equitable split between three and four year awards. CDTs are in new and emerging areas

where the interdisciplinary nature of the topic may require a broader range of research training.

The specification suggests that £4000 will be included in the funding provided for student and cohort development is that per student?

It is per studentship.

Is the cohort development budget specifically for that activity?

Yes, fees and stipends will be paid separately. As we have increased our expectations around cohort development we are providing funding to facilitate it.

Should funding leveraged by the CDTs include costs to cover the student cohort and development fund?

Our expectation is that funding leveraged by the CDT should match the full cost of the studentship including the student cohort and development costs. We recognise that in some instances this may be challenging, for example, where potential partners are based in voluntary or public sector, and in these instances the RO(s) would need to meet the shortfall to ensure students aren't disadvantaged.

Can CDTs leverage funding from external partners that are based outside of the UK?

Yes. In the case of overseas academic research organisations it is important to note that students must be registered at and receive their training within the UK research organisation(s) comprising the CDT. We cannot accredit overseas academic research organisations. This does not prevent bids including overseas placements and participation in international training events/workshops overseas, indeed this is encouraged.

Will additional funding be available for the additional costs associated with consumables for bioscience associated with the biosocial CDT?

Yes, the BBSRC will provide a top-up to the RTSG for biosocial research studentships requiring additional support (eg for laboratory consumables) this will be aligned with the RTSG allowance provided to BBSRC DTP students.

Activities

How many overseas institutional visits (OIVs) do you expect us to fund?

We can't be exact at this stage as funding will be proportional to the studentship allocation, but we would anticipate at least three visits per year for a DTP in receipt of 30 students.

The collaborative target for DTPs has increased from 20 to 30 per cent – why is this?

Overall the existing network is exceeding the current target, so we are increasing the target to 30 per cent due to the wide range of transferable skills which students gain. We expect institutions in their proposals to set out a clear strategy for how they will achieve this target and how they will link in with their wider institutional resources.

What activities count towards this target?

We're not prescriptive about the specific activity - it could be CASE type studentship, an internship or another mechanisms. However it does have to involve substantive knowledge exchange with a non-academic partner.

Will ESRC be running its own internship scheme?

No, but we will be participating in the RCUK internship scheme.

Process**Why are you asking for Expressions of Interest?**

We are trying to gauge the likely volume of proposals, both for DTPs and CDTs, to inform our planning for the peer review process.

I didn't submit an Expression of Interest. Am I still eligible to apply?

Yes but we strongly encourage all applicants to submit an Eol.

Will we get feedback on the EOI?

We are using EOIs for peer review planning purposes only.

Why is the deadline for CDT proposals earlier than the DTP deadline?

We thought it would be helpful to stagger the closing dates, both to spread the workload within ROs and to allow us to effectively manage the peer review process.

How will the proposals be assessed?

Proposals will be initially assessed by members of an assessor college comprised of members drawn from institutional or Learned Society nominations. They will then be considered by specially constituted commissioning panels.

Why are you interviewing directors when you haven't before?

The role of the DTC Director has evolved considerably since the DTCs were first commissioned. That, and the importance of a clear and active governance structure, has emerged as a key feature of the DTC network. We therefore want to take the opportunity to explore the bids further through an interview process, as we would with our research centres.

What if we aren't available on the date of the interview?

The interview dates are fixed and published well in advance. If the DTP director is not available then alternative representation would need to be agreed.

How many people can attend the interview?

The director and up to three other members of the team.

Will all DTP applicants be invited to interview if only the highest ranked CDTs are being invited?

Yes, because unlike DTPs, we are only funding on CDT in each of the thematic areas.

Will we be disadvantaged by the peer review process by not previously being part of the DTC network?

No, we are keen to support fair competition between those who have previously held DTCs and those who have not. All proposals will need to be evidence-based and applicants will have to demonstrate track record. Reviewers will be made aware of the resources made available by the ESRC to the DTCs to support their training activities.

So if we're accredited as a DTP, are we guaranteed studentships for the next six years?

Not necessarily. DTPs will be allocated a number of students for the first three years. We will review the DTP's performance after three years to ensure that they are broadly in line with expectations and targets, both in terms of those set by ESRC and those articulated by the applicants in their proposals. If not, we reserve the right to reduce or remove the allocation.

Will the ESRC be steering studentships to particular disciplines within DTPs?

DTPs will be allocated an annual quota of studentships set for the six year accreditation period (subject to satisfactory progress against metrics). The final calculation will be based on an allocation mechanism where 75 per cent of studentships will be allocated by algorithm (used in the previous DTC commissioning exercise) and 25 per cent strategically by the ESRC. We will provide additional studentships in advanced quantitative methods, use of ESRC data sets and interdisciplinary research which straddles other research council remits. Proposals will need to evidence their strength in these priority areas and demonstrate that it is an area of focus and importance to be considered for additional studentships.

The allocation of these additional studentships will initially be for three years. The priority areas will then be reviewed and we reserve the right to change steers and allocations at this point.

Can you please provide further information on the algorithm?

The algorithm will be an updated version of the one used in 2010 (see below). Key changes are that we will be incorporating REF impact scores and will be using FTE staff numbers rather than social science staff numbers.

The variables for the 2010 algorithm were:

- the product of FTE social science staff numbers
- % 3*/4* RAE output
- % 3*/4* RAE environment
- ESRC research income and
- % excellent (5/6 or 6/6) peer review grades.

Allocation = FTE Category A Staff x RAE output x RAE environment x [ESRC income] 0.5 x peer review assessment variable

Why has the ESRC decided to move away from setting national benchmarks?

We feel that disciplinary benchmarks go against our desire to encourage interdisciplinary working, and as we no longer have robust data on which to base these benchmarks. We will instead more regularly review demographic data to monitor the health of UK social sciences.

Future plans

When will there be another accreditation exercise?

It is likely that there will be another accreditation exercise in 2020.

Will there be an interim exercise for new DTPs to be funded?

No, we won't fund any new DTPs but we will consider requests from existing DTPs to add new pathways or partners. This will be limited to once a year and there would need to be a convincing case demonstrating how the proposed changes will add value to the existing structure.

Can we add new pathways? If so, how?

Yes, new pathways can be added once a year. They must still meet the metrics threshold and will be subject to a light- touch peer review process.

What will be the thematic areas for the remaining CDTs and what are the timescales for commissioning them?

We will commission them within the next couple of years. We will be looking at our priorities and whether there are any capacity issues in those areas.