

Response of the British Academy of Management to the ESRC:
Review of the PhD in the Social Sciences: [Open Consultation](#)

The British Academy of Management (BAM), welcomes the ESRC's review of the PhD in the social sciences. This initiative resonates with our ongoing work to support the development, delivery, and sharing of management knowledge and education, and we welcome the opportunity to support and assist the ESRC as this process moves forward. As the leading authority in the academic field of business and management (B&M) in the UK, our submission reflects the broad perspective of our diverse community and is based on contributions from our Fellows and members.

Our submission focuses on doctoral programmes (DPs) offered by UK universities & business schools in the diverse social science field of business and administrative studies (B&A) that includes: Business, Management, Finance, Accounting, Marketing, Human resource management, Office skills, and Hospitality, leisure, sport, tourism & transport.¹ We discuss a range of DPs from traditional PhDs (by thesis) and PhDs by publication, to our field's professional doctoral degree the Doctorate of Business Administration (DBA). DBAs account for 15% of the 4,120 graduates of UK B&A doctoral programmes from 2015/16 to 2017/18 and are specifically discussed in this Review's Rapid Evidence Assessment – and we believe it important to consider and support this growing area of doctoral studies as part of this review. PhDs by publication have become more popular in Europe in recent years, but their take up has been mixed and limited in UK business schools because, though appealing to some students seeking an academic career, they have distinct disadvantages in terms of skill development. Clearly, each of these routes face different challenges and require different remedies to make them fit for the future of UK research.

1. **In your view, how well do UK social science doctoral programmes equip students with the skills needed for their future careers? How competitive are they internationally?**
 - a. *In responding to this question, please consider how well UK social science doctoral programmes equip students with core research skills as well as the generic transferable skills needed for careers within and outside academia. What do current doctoral programmes do well and what is missing?*
 - b. *To what extent is global competitiveness a concern in relation to UK social science doctoral graduates? Please tell us about your experiences of how well UK doctoral graduates compare with those from other countries. For example, is your institution recruiting doctoral graduates from the UK or overseas? How well do UK doctoral programmes prepare social science graduates to compete with overseas graduates?*

¹ <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/support/documentation/jacs/jacs3-principal>.

- c. *We are particularly interested in the skills and experiences that, in your view, are not adequately covered by doctoral programmes at present, and why you perceive this to be a gap. How important are digital and data skills for social science students and how effectively are these being developed at present?*

Our submission focuses on doctoral programmes (DPs) offered by UK universities & business schools in the diverse field of Business & Management (B&M) studies.² We discuss a range of DPs from traditional PhDs (by thesis) and PhDs by publication³, to our field's professional doctoral degree the Doctorate of Business Administration (DBA).⁴ Each route faces different challenges and requires different remedies to make them fit for the future.

UK B&M doctorates are generally highly competitive and prestigious compared to similar programmes offered globally, due to a deeply embedded culture of scrutiny, quality supervision, and the independent examination process. This reputation for quality is reflected in the high proportion and quality of international applicants,⁵ though the pandemic & low relative stipends for UK PhDs versus the cost of living have raised recent unrelated challenges to recruitment. UK and international-origin graduates of UK programmes are generally well placed to compete for careers abroad and, in turn, the UK B&M community recruits a high proportion (35%) of intl. academic staff.⁶ Their skills, compared to those trained in the UK, depend more on the institution, than the country, in which they completed their doctoral training.

There is, of course, also institutional and regional variation in the quality of PhD supervision and training in the UK.⁷ Many leading universities, for example, provide access to 1st-class PhD training on a regional basis through initiatives like NATCOR, the NARTI network, and the NWSSDTP – often with ESRC support.⁸

² https://www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/student/datafutures/a/modulecostcentre_costcn.

³ PhDs by publication have become more popular in Europe in recent years, but their take up has been mixed and limited in UK business schools because, though appealing to some students seeking an academic career, they have distinct disadvantages in terms of skill development.

⁴ DBAs account for 15% of the 4,120 graduates of UK B&A doctoral programmes from 2015/16 to 2017/18 and are specifically discussed in this Review's Rapid Evidence Assessment – and we believe it important to consider and support this growing area of doctoral studies as part of this review. See: <https://chartereddabs.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Postgraduate-Qualifications-in-Business-Chartered-ABS.pdf>.

⁵ 64% of postgraduate students in the social sciences (including B&A studies) at Russell Group Universities in 2014/15 were international. See: <https://campaignforsocialscience.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Navigating-Brexit-Supporting-and-Safeguarding-UK-Higher-Education-November-2016.pdf>.

⁶ The Total Percentage of International Academic Staff at All UK Universities on Regular Contracts in the Business & Management Studies cost centre in 2016/2017 was 35%, including 18% from the EEA and 17% from the rest of the world. For more details, see: <https://campaignforsocialscience.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/World-of-Talent-II-20.02.19-ATL-FINAL.pdf>.

⁷ We see clear evidence of this every year in the Doctoral Colloquia that we hold, and it is one of the reasons that BAM invests heavily in training and development for early career and doctoral researchers in the business and management community. We would be happy to talk further with the ESRC about this work.

⁸ The EPSRC-approved National Taught Course Centre in Operational Research (NATCOR) initiative provides Operational Research training to roughly 100 PhD researchers annually, and is closely associated with STOR-i

Traditional UK B&A PhDs are short (3 years) by international standards, and thus focus on teaching skills geared towards academic job attainment. Core skills training in areas like Research Methods are sound, compare well with those taught abroad, and are based on the considerable methodological expertise & dedication of delivering staff. Though focused on methods used in academic (rather than business) settings, such skills are transferable to other sectors in that they impart critical thinking and research rigour useful in many settings.

Training and development in digital & data skills are important for opening up research opportunities (especially in a pandemic), increasing knowledge transfer options, and providing easily transferable skills to enhance career options. How effectively they are developed often depends on individual research topics, as they are not necessarily covered as part of general doctoral training due to the intense time and resources required of both providers & students. Challenges are also raised by a limited number of skilled trainers and lack of access to important quantitative datasets/databases. Remedies to these gaps will help UK DPs and graduates be even more globally competitive in future.

The 3-year PhD registration period also does not provide enough time to develop other wider academic skills, softer skills, and capacities that students are often expected to pick up on their own. Students are often not well-trained in how to write for 4* academic journals (vs. thesis writing), and aren't afforded the time to produce such high-quality publications before graduation, which would improve their academic career prospects. Language training is often missing: a transferable skill that would increase graduates' global competitiveness. Much more could be done to develop skills on engagement and impact given their importance to the REF, ESRC funding, and knowledge exchange for public benefit.

Academic rigour is often favoured over relevance. Part-time PhDs and DBAs are often the exception, as many researchers are embedded in an organisation to bring about change with their research. Despite their utility to industry and policy, and to those who wish an industry career, DBAs can be viewed as a 'lower form' of doctorate (rarely leading to 4* publications) – something we believe could be changed with greater systemic investment & support within the UK research system.

Thus, while globally competitive, the exact skills offered by B&M doctorates vary by institution, region, and the type of DP under discussion. We support offering PhDs of longer duration which, along with greater investment, would support wider academic & transferable skills

and Management Science doctoral programmes. This is a Lancaster University hosted collaboration involving 12 universities, which develops and delivers taught courses in operational research to PhD students. For more information, see: <http://www.natcor.ac.uk/>.

The Northern Advanced Research Training Initiative (NARTI) network connects leading business and management schools in the North of England. For more information, see: <https://narti.org.uk/>.

The North West Social Science Doctoral Training Partnership (NWSSDTP) is a partnership between Keele University, the University of Manchester, University of Liverpool and Lancaster University, with funding from the ESRC, that provides a common forum for training and development of research methods, knowledge exchange, and capacity building. See: <https://nwssdtp.ac.uk/>.

training in areas like (but not limited to) digital & data analysis. Yet, we caution that the same set of skills & outcomes should not be expected of very different DPs like the PhD & DBA.

2. How can UK doctoral programmes best prepare graduates for non-academic career pathways?

- a. Roughly half of all UK doctoral graduates do not pursue academic careers. When answering this question please draw on learning from your institution and where relevant more widely. We are particularly interested to hear about the role of internships / placements and the impact of involving of non-academic partners in doctoral programmes.
- b. To what extent does careers information, advice and guidance prepare doctoral candidates for non-academic careers?
- c. How can higher education institutions and doctoral students be incentivised to develop the skills and attributes needed for non-academic careers?
- d. What are the barriers to more effective support?

A. How to best prepare graduates for non-academic career pathways varies by subject and programme type.

PhD candidates in Management tend to aspire to an academic career, and the programmes they are in – given their short duration – thus are strongly academically orientated to ensure their competitiveness on the academic job market. Research-oriented funded projects would be more useful for these PhD candidates than practical internships, whereas both would be useful for DBA candidates.

A strong theme among those we surveyed was the need for greater collaboration with industry organisations/public bodies to offer joint research projects to all doctoral candidates. Several noted that UKRI PhD funding schemes involving non-academic partners are complicated to set up and apply for – they suggested streamlining such processes and encouraging long-term collaborations with industry partners, especially where they could contribute to skills training. Greater government and systemic support are needed to align objectives, expectations, and time scales, and foster understanding across businesses and academia of the mutual benefits of this.

There are other remedies that could make B&M doctorates more competitive outside academia. ‘Access to ‘real’ research projects, exposure to current practical issues, and access to important practical datasets will better equip social science candidates with the mindset and skills they need for any future career.’⁹

⁹ Professor Qile He (Horace), Professor of Strategy and Performance Management, College of Business, Law and Social Sciences, University of Derby. Some also noted that adjustments may be needed to doctoral contracts to

- B. It is also clear that better careers information, advice, and guidance is needed to prepare doctoral candidates for both academic *and* non-academic careers, and there is a clear appetite for this. Specific information on careers for doctoral graduates is often missing or insufficient. Few DPs offer doctoral-specific career advice, or only generic guidance on CV writing and interview skills. Much more information could be offered to students on the types of careers available to social sciences doctorates. HEIs would need to have and allocate specific funding for this.
- C. The issue is less about incentivisation (as individual student preferences should matter), and more about providing more time, funding, and opportunities for students to obtain training in transferable and softer skills, and to connect with real-world contexts beyond academia. After all, most serious careers require the same fundamental skills and attributes – such as dedication, attention to detail, the desire for knowledge & understanding, and the ability to apply the latter in a thoughtful and relevant way across particular contexts.
- D. Barriers to more effective support include:
- continued adherence to academic prejudices against those seeking non-academic careers;
 - the focus on 4* publications as the only acceptable outcome of doctoral studies, rather than research focused on long-term real-world impact;
 - and the lack of information provided to students on post-doctoral career options & paths.

- 3. How can social science doctoral programmes best prepare graduates to work collaboratively?** (Maximum 3,000 characters or roughly 500 words)
- When answering this question please consider all types of collaboration, including interdisciplinary, international, cross-organisation and cross-sector.*
 - What skills are needed to work on collaborative projects, such as grand challenges?*
 - Please tell us about any practices that you believe to be innovative and/or particularly effective in supporting social science doctoral graduates to develop these skills and work collaboratively.*

Collaborative work – across disciplines, borders, organizations, and sectors – is crucial to the future of research if we are to ever truly tackle the biggest challenges faced by society. Social science knowledge is a lynchpin to unlocking many of the grand challenges, and thus it is vital

allow for participation in supervisor-led research, or to address some IP associated with joint-research projects with non-academic partners.

that we better prepare social science doctoral graduates to work collaboratively across these lines in future.

To do so, it is important to understand the barriers to collaborative working. The short registration period for PhD students necessitates a focus on their theses research which, by nature, is an individual project that must demonstrably be their own work, making co-authorship (with the exception of some PhDs by publication) difficult early on. The most prestigious B&M journals are international (fostering intl. collaboration) but not interdisciplinary, making it harder for PhDs to prioritise interdisciplinary research early on if they want an academic career. There can also be intellectual property issues associated with collaborative research between doctoral candidates and their supervisor's projects or with business data from industry/public bodies.

Yet, there are clear steps that can be taken to increase the emphasis on collaborative working at the doctoral level. Longer PhD programs, allowing space & time for collaborative work at earlier career stages would help with this & other issues. Changes to IP structures in doctoral contracts may be useful, as would more studentships linked to collaborative research projects. Encouraging students to consider joining research Centres/Clusters at their university that promote collaboration across disciplines, borders, institutions, & sectors can be also be useful, though more needs to be done to help PhD students integrate into these groups. There are also clear examples that could be followed of successful provisions for supporting interdisciplinary research in doctoral centres, such as STOR-i¹⁰, which integrates statistics and operations management research.

'As working with others is always a challenge (especially across disciplines), changing attitudes at an early stage can result in a more sustained approach to changing long-term behaviours.'¹¹ In B&M, exposing graduate students to opportunities to work on real-world issues & important business data may help foster greater research collaboration with businesses and across sectors/disciplines. 'Interdisciplinarity can also be fostered by encouraging interdisciplinary topics for theses and through cross-departmental supervision. But a common barrier to interdisciplinary and collaborative PhDs is that many supervisors themselves work within the confines of one discipline and do not have networks/collaborators outside their core discipline.'¹² So it would also help to encourage more senior faculty to conduct interdisciplinary

¹⁰ The STOR-i Centre for Doctoral Training has distinctive international visibility and reach with globally leading institutions. Its ground-breaking approach to statistics and operations management research is developing a new generation of researchers capable of contributing to academia and industry. Its strategic multinational research cooperation objective enables students in each institution to spend extended visits with one another. All students have substantial industrial engagement, with 80% of PGRs co-funded and co-supervised by partners such as BT, Shell, Unilever, Rolls Royce and the Met Office. In 2019, STOR-i was awarded third generation funding (the only centre of its kind to be funded for a third time) and will benefit from more than £10m of investment from EPSRC, Lancaster University, and industrial partners. This will fund 70 PhD researchers across five cohorts.

¹¹ Professor Savvas Papagiannidis, Professor of Innovation & Enterprise, Newcastle University Business School.

¹² Professor Martyna Sliwa, Professor of Management & Marketing, Essex Business School, University of Essex.

projects, to help create the networks & supportive environment needed to initiate and foster collaboration by their doctoral students.

4. How can doctoral student health and wellbeing be safeguarded?

- a. *Are there particular aspects of doctoral level study that have a negative impact on student wellbeing? Please highlight successful activity being undertaken at your institution and where relevant more widely to support the mental health and wellbeing of social science doctoral students. This could include general support for students at your institution and support specific to doctoral students. We are interested in hearing about how these initiatives are funded and the results of any evaluation studies.*

UK B&M doctoral students are under a lot of pressure today, particularly due to the short duration of their programmes and relatively low amount of funding available compared to similar programmes in other countries. But there are many other concerns as well. The doctoral research process can be potentially very lonely, and students can feel isolated from the academic communities in their own school. Doctoral students of course worry about their future careers and options, something that this review is clearly aimed at addressing. Part of the challenge is the tendency to keep adding new tasks and training to programmes without providing more time in which to complete them – which increases transferable skills and helps with job prospects, but also increases the pressure on students. At the same time, PhD and other doctoral students feel pressure to produce 4* research outputs, especially those aiming to find success on the academic job market. And unfortunately, what has been called ‘a looming mental wellbeing crisis in social science PhD student communities ... is [only] likely to be amplified as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic,’ which ‘has caused significant disruption to data collection, wellbeing, care responsibilities and study arrangements through the closure of the campus.’¹³

Many institutions offer a range of services that aim to support students and staff generally, but these are rarely aimed specifically at supporting the mental health and wellbeing of doctoral students. These can range (increasingly) from digital health solutions to mental health first aiders, though the latter are often focused on staff. It would seem ‘vital that each institution had access to a dedicated professionally qualified team of support,’ and that supervisors are encouraged to take some degree of responsibility for the wellbeing of their students.

There are cultural shifts in the research community that could help improve doctoral student wellbeing as well. The academic job market in the UK could ‘lessen the focus on 4* outputs as the only currency of the job market and place more emphasis on the research skills actually developed’ by candidates over the course of their studies. In the US academic job market, for example, publications are considered in balance with the quality of doctoral theses and the

¹³ Professor Emma Bell, Professor of Organisation Studies & Director Research Degrees, The Open University. Quote is from her submission to this same review. For evidence of the looming health crisis, see: <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2020/06/25/phd-life-the-uk-student-experience/>.

demonstrable methodological and teaching skills and experience of candidates. Better careers guidance/advice, and other supporting mechanisms (targeted mentoring) should be put in place to help with the transition from doctoral student to job attainment.

Finally, more will need to be done to respond to the impact of Covid-19 on doctoral student wellbeing. The UKRI response, extending grants for UKRI grant-funded research and fellowships is deeply welcomed. More support will be likely be needed, however, to fill the gaps where doctoral candidates are not UKRI funded, and their Universities do not have the funds to offer internal grant-extension programmes.

5. How can we ensure a diverse and inclusive population of social science doctoral students?

- a. *What are the key barriers to accessing and successfully completing doctoral level study for under-represented groups and how can these be overcome? Please consider under-representation in relation to socio-economic group, gender, ethnicity, disability/long-term conditions and other protected characteristics. Please refer to work being undertaken at your institution and where relevant more widely that is effectively enhancing equality, diversity and inclusion. This may include general initiatives at your institution (e.g. Athena Swan) and those specific to doctoral students. We are interested in how initiatives are funded and the results of any evaluation studies.*

Inclusion, equality, diversity and respect (EDIR) are at the heart of the BAM's values. Yet, we know there are many challenges in realising the kind of diverse and inclusive community we want – at both the student and staff level. Towards this end, we are working on a research project to build knowledge and understanding on this issue, and to propose best practice and policy recommendations for effectively addressing issues related to EDIR in HE B&M schools. The project will build upon detailed evidence (a state of the art literature review, HESA data analysis, and ethnographic data collection/analysis) to reach its conclusions, and we look forward to sharing these with the ESRC as soon as possible.¹⁴

Ahead of this, we wanted to note some key points raised by those involved in doctoral programme delivery in our community. The first being the impact limited funding has on EDIR. The Director of the Ph.D. in Management at Cass Business School, for example, notes that 'the limited funding available implies that the choice to pursue doctoral studies tends to be taken by those who have access to other financial resources, which in turn tends to exclude some socio-economic groups.'¹⁵ The Assoc. Dean Postgraduate at Liverpool's Management School points out that this is compounded by the fact that 'the prospect of taking on further debt

¹⁴ This work is being led by Professor Martyna Sliwa, Professor of Management & Marketing, Essex Business School, University of Essex. Please look out for more information to follow, at <https://www.bam.ac.uk/bam-strategic-projects>.

¹⁵ Professor Elena Novelli, Professor of Strategy and Director of the Ph.D. in Management, Cass Business School.

often deters excellent undergraduates of all backgrounds from progressing to masters and doctoral studies, and more funded places would help address this issue.¹⁶ A Professor at Newcastle Univ. Business School points out that at his university this has meant that the majority of PhD applications he receives ‘tend to come from governments in the Middle-East sponsoring degrees or from Chinese students.’ He notes that ‘unless funding is available to entice students from more varied backgrounds to apply the supervisors’ choices will be limited from the outset. HEIs could set aside funding for their best undergraduates and actively encourage those who demonstrate an excellent potential to apply for PhDs.’¹⁷ A Professor at Essex Business School points out that one clear remedy ‘would be to have a number of scholarships ‘ring-fenced’ each year for candidates from under-represented groups.’¹⁸

Funding is far from the only issue, just as ethnicity and socio-economic status is not the only dimension of EDI. There are ‘significant threats to [widening participation] caused by the Covid-19 crisis’ including ‘disadvantages for women students related to disproportionate caring responsibilities, and for Tier 4 students who are more likely to be BAME and are unable to travel to the UK for study.’¹⁹ Athena Swan is helping make headway on gender issues, but far more needs to be done. And greater efforts are needed to improve inclusion of those with disabilities into the research community, including ‘more training for supervisors & students on supporting/working with students from different backgrounds, especially those with disabilities.’²⁰

6. What aspects of current UK social science doctoral programmes could be developed to ensure they remain world leading?

- a. *How could UK doctoral programmes be organised, structured and funded to more effectively support a diverse and globally competitive population of social science graduates? Please consider alternative funding models, the length of the full time programme and any other changes that would be required to improve future provision.*
- b. *What can the social sciences learn from other disciplines and organisations?*

Doctoral programmes in business and management are globally competitive. Yet, there is scope for development to ensure they better serve students and the UK research system. Towards this end:

We support offering PhD programmes of longer duration, of at least 4 years and up to the min. intl. standard of 5. This would support training in wider academic and transferable skills,

¹⁶ Professor Lisa Anderson, Fellow of the British Academy of Management and Associate Dean Postgraduate, Management School, University of Liverpool.

¹⁷ Professor Savvas Papagiannidis, Professor of Innovation & Enterprise, Newcastle University Business School.

¹⁸ Professor Martyna Sliwa, Professor of Management & Marketing, Essex Business School, University of Essex

¹⁹ Professor Emma Bell, Professor of Organisation Studies & Director Research Degrees, The Open University. Quote is from her submission to this same review.

²⁰ Professor Qile He (Horace), Professor of Strategy and Performance Management, College of Business, Law and Social Sciences, University of Derby.

making graduates more competitive on the global academic job market and (when they wish) more mobile to other sectors. It would also offer space for students to engage in more collaborative work on issues like the grand challenges. Because increasing the expectations for skills training and collaboration, without increasing the time in which to do so, would be ineffective, lower the quality of completed work, and negatively impact student wellbeing and mental health.

We also support higher levels of funding for PhD candidates and DPs. Matching global standards vis-à-vis the high cost of living in the UK would do much to improve student wellbeing and enhance the likelihood of success for university programmes aimed at increasing EDIR. Providing more funding for a higher number of ESRC studentships linked to collaborative research projects with industry/public sector bodies and to challenge-themed research projects, would also foster a wider culture of collaborative working on issues of relevance over time. Given the challenges highlighted by Covid-19, and the desire to improve EDIR, it may also be worth considering if distance-learning PhDs could be eligible for ESRC studentships.²¹

To increase collaborative and engaged work, it will also be important to support longer-term collaborations with non-academic partners, access to real world (in our case business) data, and a variety of fieldwork. Developing an interdisciplinary DTC across business & management could be a critical ESRC investment and would make a significant difference in how we prepare the next generation of scholars to tackle the grand challenges.

To better prepare doctoral students for academic and non-academic careers, it will be important to ensure better careers information, advice, and guidance specifically designed for doctoral students, explaining the different pathways open to social science graduates.

To support student wellbeing, wider funding to provide grant-extensions through the pandemic for those who don't currently qualify under the UKRI scheme, increased support and mental health services specifically aimed at doctoral students, wider recognition of the pressures placed on them, and the cultural shifts discussed above, are all needed. To enhance EDIR – in addition to increasing grant levels – greater opportunity, awareness training, and reassessment of best practices is needed. The ESRC may also wish to consider ring-fencing some grants for under-represented categories of students.

We also believe it important to recognize that the same set of skills and outcomes should not be expected of very different DPs like the PhD and DBA. 'If you want a top-class PhD programme that competes globally, you need to be clear about its aims. It cannot prepare PhDs for both industry and academia equally, and attempts to shoe-horn everything into one degree with multiple aims and audiences just does not work. The resulting pressure and confusion can also have a detrimental effect on students' mental health.'²²

²¹ Professor Emma Bell, Professor of Organisation Studies & Director Research Degrees, The Open University. Quote is from her submission to this same review.

²² Professor Stephanie Decker, Professor of History and Strategy, Department of Management, University of Bristol.

We would like to see B&M PhDs increase the range of academic and transferable skills offered and to be more engaged and collaborative in nature – but this will be difficult without the structural changes in duration and investment discussed above. The primary goal of these programmes will still need to be to help graduates achieve a (albeit more engaged, flexible, collaborative) career in academia.

UK DBAs, and DBA candidates, are quite different from PhDs.²³ They are normally already employed in senior positions and carry out their research in an organisational setting. But the potential for DBA research to create impact has not been fully recognised and the degree is still often seen as second-class PhD, even though it is a distinct offering that clearly fulfils the ‘double hurdle’ qualification (being both academically sound and of high practical value). We believe DBAs and their significant contribution to the UK research ecosystem should thus also see greater investment, recognition, and support from government.

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²³ For more information on the DBA see, e.g.: Anderson, L., Gold, J., Stewart, J. and Thorpe, R. (2015) Professional Doctorates in Business and Management, London: Sage.