

1. We are writing on behalf of the Association of Business Schools (ABS) to give our views and voice our concerns over the ESRC's proposals to change the regulations governing the recognition of doctoral degree training and quota awards.
2. ABS is a membership organisation which represents the views and interests of staff in 120 member business schools based in the UK ([www.the-abs.org.uk](http://www.the-abs.org.uk)). All of these institutions have degree awarding powers as recognised by the Quality Assurance Agency and almost all engage in research activity as recognised in the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise.
3. Business and management studies represent the largest area of research and teaching provision in the UK. There are currently over 10,000 university academic staff employed in UK business schools and over 200,000 students enrolled in undergraduate, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research programmes. The rapid expansion of business and management research and teaching is one of the major success stories within UK higher education social sciences in the last 40 years. Unfortunately, this success may be jeopardised by the chronic shortage of doctoral students in UK universities and the number of doctorally qualified people wishing to take up academic positions in UK business schools. This shortfall has been recognised by the ESRC and the Advanced Institute of Management. Initiatives such as the ESRC/FME Teaching Fellowships, where experienced practitioners are guided through a doctorate and into an academic position, are helping.
4. In 2006/07, the last year for which HESA figures are available, there were 3,833 full-time equivalent students enrolled on doctoral programmes in business and management in the UK. Of this number, 1,439 were UK domiciled, 594 were from other EU countries and 1,800 were from outside the EU.
5. In reading the proposals we are assuming that ESRC is using the word 'doctoral' in broad terms. The Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) is successfully delivered by over 30 UK business schools, and has been a very successful bridge between the academic and practitioner worlds. ESRC has recognised this through accrediting some DBA programmes (e.g. University of Bradford School of Management). We assume that any count of the number of active social science doctoral students will include DBA registrations.
6. We welcome the emphasis on increased commitment to excellence and greater flexibility in provision. Current procedures are in some areas somewhat inflexible and overly prescriptive. This inhibits the development of specific processes that would be in the students own interests and experience. However, we would have also welcomed changes in the framework which would also enable an increase in the number of students in business and management, as well as completion rates across the sector more broadly. Unfortunately, it is our view that the proposals will reduce the opportunities for business and management doctorate students engaging in ESRC recognised programmes. If the proposals are implemented, the

loss of recognition by many business schools will subsequently reduce the attractiveness of business and management studies to potential students.

7. In terms of counting the number of social science subjects within a University, we would argue that business management can not be counted as a single subject. Typically, a business school would include organisational behaviour, strategy, marketing, accounting and finance (all possibly subjects areas that draw on and contribute to social science), plus applied areas that are fundamental to ESRC's interdisciplinary challenges (e.g. human resource management, health care management and environmental management). A more realistic approach to identifying the location of social science related activity is required; a simple count of the existence of traditional social science departments, for example, will not do.
8. At present the students enrolled on PhD and DBA programmes in business and management are based at institutions spread across the country. The pattern of these registrations does not map neatly or easily against centres of broad research strength in other social sciences. This represents our biggest concern.
9. The proposals from the ESRC to limit the recognition of doctoral programmes and quota awards to institutions with broad-based research excellence in 5 or 10 social science areas assumes that excellence in research training correlates with institutional research profiles in a range of social sciences. However, in reality many very research active business schools exist in Universities that are largely science and engineering orientated. Examples include Imperial, Aston, Cranfield, Cass and Surrey, which collectively had over 350 doctoral student registrations in 2006/07. Thus the proposals may exclude such business schools from ESRC doctoral funding, with the ultimate effect of reducing the number of doctorate students at a time when the sector is crying out for more.
10. Further, the link between excellence and scale implicit in many passages of the Consultation is not evidenced. No evidence is provided regarding the critical mass argument. Indeed, evidence suggests the opposite; RAE 2008 has identified pockets of excellence, distinct from overall institutional profiles, as well as finding international excellent research training and above-median completion rates in many institutions submitting business and management Units of Assessment. Examples include Kingston and Manchester Metropolitan University. These would not fall within the ambit of the ESRC proposals, and we are concerned that such pockets could be all together removed.
11. ESRC recognition also brings with it the opportunity for strong applications for CASE awards which are in keeping with the development of applied research projects and knowledge transfer. The continuing Knowledge Transfer agenda in business and management will be compromised if Business and Management Schools are prevented by the new recognition structure from applying for CASE awards and therefore will not supported by ESRC to continue to develop research expertise in collaboration with the user community.
12. The Consultation document suggests that, where insufficient capacity exists in an institution, collaborative arrangements may be pursued and examples are

provided. Whilst some larger institutions may welcome smaller groups, in practice, institutional collaborations are often difficult to manage and bring with them additional costs. For some institutions also, geographical isolation means that long distances would have to be covered in order to develop meaningful units adding further costs. Even where higher education institutions are in close proximity, local rivalry or different specialisms may inhibit collaboration. There is no guarantee that such investment will raise the quality of training or indeed completion rates as attention becomes focused on cross-institutional arrangements.

13. The ESRC's proposals, as they currently stand, undermine the current potential for growth and deepening of research capacity in business and management in the UK. An unduly elitist approach might harm UK business schools competing in a global market for doctoral students. We would encourage the ESRC to have a broad view of what constitutes doctoral education, including the DBA, and of where social science research exists. For the above reasons, we recommend that the next recognition exercise should be taken at the level of the department rather than at the institution. Moreover, this will allow greater diversity and flexibility of provision: notions at the heart of the ESRC's own policy statements and in the Consultation.

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