



MEMORANDUM

To: Richard Bartholomew, Chair of the DTC Network Review Panel

Subject: BSA and HaPS response on the Review of the ESRC Doctoral Training Centres Network

Date: 02 April 2014

Dear Richard Bartholomew,

We write on behalf of the British Sociological Association and the Heads and Professors of Sociology to send you and the DTC Network Review Panel our joint response to the review of the ESRC Doctoral Training Centres Network.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this issue as it is something of importance for our discipline. We hope the re-commissioning will be an opportunity to modify DTCs in ways that strengthen rather than weaken the discipline of Sociology and the capacities of individuals who teach it.

Please contact us if we can provide any additional information.

Yours sincerely,

Judith Mudd, Chief Executive
On behalf of the British Sociological Association

Lynn Jamieson, Chair
Heads and Professors of Sociology

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BSA-HaPS response to the Review of the ESRC Doctoral Training Centres Network

The British Sociological Association (BSA) and the Heads and Professors of Sociology (HAPS) believe that Sociology, along with other social sciences, requires a model of postgraduate training that involves collaboration and inclusiveness across institutions if the strengths and capacity of the discipline are to be nurtured. The experiences of Sociology colleagues across current Doctoral Training Centre (DTC) arrangements suggest that the DTC model both has the potential to achieve this and falls short. We are aware that the number of DTCs may be reduced in the commissioning process but we believe this could be balanced by increasing the number of institutions involved in collaborations. Furthermore, we believe that studentship competitions operating through the DTCs may be adding to the disadvantages already faced by high achieving students from less advantaged backgrounds, since they tend to be found outside the institutions favoured with DTCs. Consequently, we suggest that the re-commissioning process broadens the criteria for inclusion in DTCs beyond simple metrics of REF scores and critical mass; we also argue that four-year awards are sustained.

DTCs need to become more collaborative and inclusive if capacity in Sociology is to be strengthened not weakened.

Sociology is taught in a wide range of Higher Education (HE) institutions. In some institutions it is hard to separate the teaching of Sociology and Social Policy. Prior to the DTCs many institutions teaching Sociology had the capacity to offer core postgraduate training in social and sociological research and advanced training in some aspect of Sociology and sometimes also Social Policy. The DTCs had the potential to strengthen support for students completing postgraduate courses in institutions where specialisms were limited and postgraduate numbers were small by connecting them to more comprehensive portfolios of advanced postgraduate training in Sociology and the peer support of a larger body of students that would be created when DTCs collaborated across a range of institutions and institutions of different types. In this sense, we do not think inclusion is in conflict with concentration. The vision of DTCs with cross-institutional collaboration that fits Sociology's contribution to social science is one which nurtures a wide range of specialisms maintaining a distinction between core and advanced training in the crafts of social research as practiced at the leading edge of Sociology, expanding rather than harming existing capacity.

The current DTC arrangements are far from this vision and arbitrarily exclude excellent former outlets for training and many excellent sociologists rather than engaging them to work collaboratively to strengthen the capacity of the discipline. Exclusions had the effect of snuffing out training provision commended by the ESRC under the old system that accredited Doctoral Training Units, with subsequent damage to Sociology in excluded institutions and more general damage across the multi-disciplinarily excluded post-1992 sector. Outcomes often seemed capricious. For example, Professor John Scott at Plymouth could not supervise an ESRC-funded student because Plymouth is outside of the DTC network. He is the chair of the Sociology REF sub-panel and one of the top British sociologists. There are similarly excluded world famous sociologists at The University of Leicester, The Open University, The University of Loughborough, London South Bank University, Manchester Metropolitan

University, Aston University, Oxford Brookes University, Keele University and other institutions. The Scottish DTC is the most collaborative and inclusive across institutions but it too falls short of the vision described here. The ESRC's reliance on 2008 RAE scores of individual subject Units of Assessment and critical mass to determine inclusion in DTCs was highly problematic. Given that post-1992 universities have tended to have lower critical mass, using this to determine inclusion inevitably reproduces inequalities in status and resources between universities and denies recognition to individuals and teams delivering an excellent research environment for supervision that could be supplemented by training provided by collaboration with other institutions. Indeed, where subjects collaborate across institutions, we believe the 'pathway' should be considered in the aggregate for purposes of determining 'critical mass.'

Also we note that the number of returns by Units of Assessment to the Sociology Sub-Panel has been declining across RAE/REF exercises because sociologists are often being used tactically by institutions to boost the numbers and profile of other Units of Assessment, especially Social Work and Social Policy. For example, 29 Units of Assessment in Sociology have been submitted in REF 2014 compared to the 39 submitted in RAE 2008 and correspondingly more at the Social Work and Social Policy Sub-Panel. The distribution of Sociology staff across RAE/REF sub-panels is in contrast to the HESA staff data. For example, at RAE 2008 there were 1243 'Social Policy/Social Work' staff and 927 'Sociology' staff. Recent HESA data indicates approximately 3,500 Sociology staff and 2000 staff in Social Policy/Social Work.

Using REF scores in Sociology as criterion for inclusion in Sociology pathways and as a gateway to entitlement to Sociology ESRC studentships will further disadvantage the discipline. Thus we recommend the rethinking of inclusion criteria in the re-commissioning of the DTCs. We suggest use of more than one inclusion criterion, with at least one criterion focusing directly on the quality of disciplinary training and supervision that can be offered and ensuring a combination of criteria that would recognise areas of excellence in an institution below a particular REF score.

Lessons can be drawn from the perspective of colleagues in a post-1992 university which was excluded from formal inclusion into the Scottish DTC. This institution was very supportive of the move to the Scottish DTC and took part in drafting the proposal for the Sociology pathway. However, it was disappointed by the gap between the subsequent reality and the claims of inclusion and capacity-building made during this process. The institution is excluded from the DTC but some individuals were able to find their way onto supervision teams thanks to their membership of networks which have active links with the Scottish DTC. However, for the heads of department and colleagues, these informal individual arrangements are a transfer of staff resource with no guarantee of return or promise of future return to the department or institution.

Adding to the disadvantages faced by students from less advantaged backgrounds

The disproportionate exclusion of post-1992 universities from the DTC arrangements contributes to making it less likely that high-achieving students from such universities will be attracted to postgraduate study or that the few who are so attracted will get advice and support in making applications.

The allocation of studentships by DTCs increasingly favours students who already have a master's degree. The absence of funding for master's degrees means that this advantages those who can afford to self-fund. Over



50% of studentships are now allocated to +3 students and the proportion is approaching 70% in Scotland where collaborative awards form a higher proportion of the total. Collaborative awards are almost without exception +3 awards. If self-funding of a master's typically becomes a prerequisite for a PhD, this obviously discriminates against students from less advantaged backgrounds and is contrary to goals of widening participation. It also impacts on Sociology more than some other disciplines. Sociology has typically been at the leading edge of widening participation in higher education and has a history of disproportionately recruiting students from less advantaged backgrounds. We recommend that collaborative funding arrangements are modified to remove any expectation that the collaborating body contributes towards funding the 1 of the 1+3 award. Moreover, we suggest consideration be given to further reducing the risk of a 1+3 award for the collaborating funder by modification of formal procedures at the end of the 1, for example, allowing for the re-advertising of the award as +3 should the student fail to achieve the master's degree at an acceptable standard or wish to exit at this point.

Concluding Remarks

We are supportive of the DTCs but advocate a more collaborative and inclusive model. We accept that devolution of responsibilities to DTCs may be a better option than any of the alternatives. We hope the re-commissioning will be an opportunity to modify DTCs in ways that strengthen rather than weaken the discipline of Sociology and the capacities of individuals who teach it.