

● Response to Economic and Social Research Council consultation on the 1+3 Model for Postgraduate Funding

The Royal Geographical Society (with The Institute of British Geographers) welcomes this opportunity to respond to this consultation on the ESRC's 1+3 model for postgraduate funding. The Society is the learned society and professional body representing geography and geographers. It was founded in 1830 for the advancement of geographical science and has around 14,000 members. We requested comments from Heads of Departments of Geography and all the Chairs of the Society's Research and Working Groups.

(1) Does 1+3 as it currently operates create specific problems in your discipline or field?

There is a range of opinion, with a broad view that 1+3 has implications that are more structural and institutional than discipline-based. These implications include:

- There are problems with judging students at undergraduate level in terms of their capabilities 4 years ahead as prospective PhD candidates; and of anchoring them into a PhD project the subject and content of which may change radically after their Masters experience. This may be a particular issue for students working in an interdisciplinary context or where the Masters is used to move between disciplines.
- The lack of funding for stand alone Masters may encourage students to apply for 1+3 funding before it is clear that they have research potential or a real commitment to undertake a PhD.
- The existence of the ESRC 1+3 model distorts the recruitment picture in terms of studentships not supported by ESRC, where it restricts acceptance of applicants to those who have already completed a Masters degree (in a context in which provision of 1+3 funding is not possible).

However, there are certain discipline-based issues that have been highlighted by our consultation, as follows:

- There is a difficulty in those areas requiring advanced quantitative techniques, as the requirements for generic training gives little opportunity to provide more intensive quantitative training in a Masters programme. This is compounded by a recruitment difficulty in these areas, when students are not attracted by the 1+3 option, but wish to undertake a stand-alone Masters course and then decide on the PhD.
- The diversity of geography is not well-served by a quota system that limits research studentship availability to certain Departments, and by implication therefore, to particular research areas. There is opposition to ESRC further restricting the areas it supports through the quota scheme, and effectively limiting future development in certain fields.

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(2) Are there significant areas of postgraduate research activity in your field which are not currently compatible with ESRC 1+3 funding?

- There is a view, especially relating to policy or applied research, that one area which ESRC has neglected is research training intended as a preparation for employment, as opposed to specific doctoral training. There is a rationale for keeping a distinct Masters-level funding stream for students intending to pursue research but not within Higher Education.
- There is a clear tension in the responses to this question. Some argue that areas requiring advanced quantitative techniques are poorly served by the 1+3 model, as discussed above. Others, however, are highly critical of the requirement for sophisticated statistics courses in the Masters training year even for students whose research methods are essentially qualitative (e.g. focus groups, in-depth interviews).
- There are some issues with projects based on overseas fieldwork and/or foreign-language acquisition. While some account is taken of these requirements in the +3 years, there is little to no space in the 1+ year for integrating language training with the generic and subject-specific research training. This simply adds pressure to such students in their +3 years. One option would be to create the flexibility to add language to the 1+3 model without moving to a 2+3 model which is perhaps too much, and demands an additional commitment from potential students.
- There is increasing evidence of some lack of clarity about whether some students should apply to AHRC or ESRC (for example, in areas such as cultural geography, and some branches of historical geography that lean towards economic history).

(3) What, if any, changes would researchers in your discipline like ESRC to make to the current 1+3 structure?

There are several negative views of the quota procedures:

- The basis for the 1+3 quota allocations is considered to remain obscure.
- The algorithm is not transparent (as it has been, for example, in NERC), and as a result it is impossible for a Department to estimate the number of quota awards it might expect, and plan for allocations to supervisors in order to sustain research areas.
- There is a weak strategic rationale for limiting the applications an institution can submit to the 1+3 competition.
- The 1+3 model involves a high risk, in funding 4 years of research being proposed by students who have yet to finish their first degree.
- The ESRC recognition exercise is thought to rely too heavily on historical data, and does not take sufficient account of recent staff changes that might affect the research environment and supervisory expertise available in a given department.
- Students interested in pursuing a PhD are forced to apply to an institution which has quota awards based on its past record even though it may not be the most appropriate place them to go based on their research interest.



- The 1+3 structure might usefully be introduced to the CASE type awards. Students on CASE awards also have to spend some of their time working for their non-academic partners, which effectively means that they do not have the full 3 years to concentrate on their PhD.
- Given the problem in recruiting in some fields (i.e. advanced quantitative techniques) the opening up of awards to EU students (i.e. fees and stipend) would be welcomed.

A real difficulty in geography at present is the lack of clear criteria on which the Masters courses are recognised. In the last exercise some institutions only submitted MRes courses while others included other MAs with a training element. This means that in effect the 1+3s are effectively of a different character and since not all students wish to follow the MRes path those working on the basis that the Masters had to be an MRes were effectively penalised. The lack of clarity was recognised in the feedback from the Geography Panel.

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