



EVALUATION OF THE POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWSHIP SCHEME

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The ESRC's Postdoctoral Fellowship Scheme was introduced in 2001 to address concerns as to the numbers and preparedness of the "next generation" of social science researchers entering into academic careers. In particular, the Scheme was intended to allow Fellows (guided by Mentors) to: "develop their postdoctoral work and research skills; produce publications that will increase their chances of securing university appointments; and disseminate their work to non-academic audiences". Some 293 fellowship awards have been granted across priority areas and the social sciences generally, for a total investment to date of £8M.

The central recommendation of this Evaluation is that ESRC continue its Postdoctoral Fellowship Scheme. There is no reason to discontinue it. Fellows, Mentors and Heads of Departments regard it as a productive, beneficial scheme. The scheme is likely to retain some individuals who would otherwise have left academics. Perhaps its greatest contribution in the short term, however, is the empowering of excellent early-stage researchers with top-level professionalisation skills and the ability to produce top quality publications, thus enhancing their chances of securing desirable posts. The scheme does indeed shorten strategically the early career development stage of the Fellows. By helping in this way to embed Fellows in their academic fields and networks, the scheme nurtures the next generation of leaders and strengthens the foundation for economics and social sciences in the longer-term. The scheme, in other words, contributes to strategic capacity building.

This independent Evaluation has been undertaken to provide ESRC with insight and advice in order to assist its decision-making as to continuing, ceasing or modifying the Scheme. Review processes included: analysis of materials; discussions with key individuals; semi-structured interviews with 45 Fellows, Mentors and Heads of Departments; questionnaires returned by 49 Mentors; a focus group of Fellows and integration of information and insights.

Capacity The majority of Fellows have found academic jobs, perhaps half of these are permanent positions. The scheme's intervention may have "saved" 15-20% of the Fellows and kept them from leaving academia, but for most Fellows already committed to academia, the Fellowship appeared to enhance success or accelerate trajectories into good posts, often, it would seem, higher quality posts than would otherwise have been obtained. The Fellowship was seen as adding value to Fellows' employability by providing a) the badge of ESRC's competitive selection process and b) the opportunity for Fellows to write and publish good quality work based upon their PhD research. Some good researchers from outwith the UK, particularly in Priority Areas, have entered into the UK system; others still participate in networks.

Publications A central aim of the scheme has clearly been met. In the vast majority of cases, the Fellowships allowed individuals to increase the quantity of publications and improve the quality of publications, compared to their likely output had they not had the Fellowship. Furthermore, many Fellows were able to place their articles strategically in a higher level of journal than they would otherwise have attained.

Skills New skills, methods and approaches were developed by Fellows, with a consequent influence on research capacity and employability for many. Messages were sent to ESRC not to think in terms of required technical skills across an increasingly diversifying professional base, but rather to recognise the importance of the professionalisation process at this stage. Informal training and indeed sessions at ESRC conferences could contribute to such abilities as writing for publication; generating competitive research proposals, plans and strategies; presenting work to colleagues and non-academics; networking and so on. Teaching experience, teaching training, was for many a useful c.v. component gained during the Fellowship, but in some cases the protection of an ESRC cap on teaching loads is needed. ESRC conferences are commended as mechanisms not only for sharing understanding of professionalisation abilities but also for community-building among Fellows.

Development The scheme is held in very high regard. Fellows, Mentors and Heads of Departments recommend strongly that it be continued, viewing it as contributing significantly to the long-term health of British academia (although it cannot of course resolve all challenges). Recommendations for relatively minor modifications to the scheme, such as issuing a handbook to Mentors, were provided. The role of the Mentor is seen as critical, though relationships will vary, as does host institution support. Opinion is divided on the subject of one year versus two year duration of the Fellowship. If a choice were necessary, weight would probably be given to a greater number of one year Fellowships than to fewer Fellowships of longer duration. ESRC may want to consider this and other possible mechanisms for facilitation of *new* research. Interviewees offered warnings as to obstacles and lessons learned about good practice to future Fellows, Mentors and ESRC. The central message to ESRC was that the scheme should be continued and if possible expanded.

Conclusions and Recommendations Issues arising from the evaluation were identified and discussed, including, for example: the nature of the scheme's impact; duration of Fellowships and the need of junior academics to develop new lines of research inquiry; the evident lack of mobility in numbers of Fellows who do not move to new change institutions; opportunities for ESRC to further the process of professionalisation of Fellows; and relationships with Mentors and host institutions.

The core recommendation of this Evaluation is that ESRC continue its Postdoctoral Fellowship scheme. Not only is it highly regarded, it contributes strategically to research capacity building in the short-term and appears likely to do so in the long-term. In the short-term, the scheme leads to high quality research dissemination and strategically shortens the early career development stage of many Fellows; in the long-term this embedding of future leaders should strengthen the foundation of social sciences and economics in the future. To complement this work, ESRC may wish to facilitate the next step for Fellows (and other junior academics): the development of new lines of research inquiry.

ESRC has demonstrated vision and follow-through in tackling a critical stage in the development of the next generation of Britain's academic social scientists and economists. The reservoir of lessons learned by the Council, its staff, academics and Fellows themselves can be drawn upon as in the future ESRC tackles other challenging inflection points in academic career paths.

I. Introduction

Background and Objectives of Evaluation

The ESRC's Postdoctoral Fellowship Scheme was introduced in 2001 to address concerns as to the numbers and preparedness of the "next generation" of social science researchers entering into academic careers. In particular, the Scheme was intended to allow Fellows (guided by Mentors) to: "develop their postdoctoral work and research skills; produce publications that will increase their chances of securing university appointments; and disseminate their work to non-academic audiences". Some 293 fellowship awards have been granted across priority areas and the social sciences generally, for a total investment to date of £8M. ESRC determined a need for an external evaluation in order to assist decision-making as to continuing, ceasing or modifying the Scheme.

Core Questions

As defined by ESRC, the evaluation addresses four main areas:

- (i) *Capacity:* (e.g., how many fellows have secured academic employment; do the fellowships make a significant difference to job prospects; has capacity in priority areas been boosted; has the scheme helped to keep good non-UK researchers in this country?)
- (ii) *Publications:* (e.g., have the fellows produced significantly more (or better quality) published outputs than for the normal PhD?)
- (iii) *Skills:* (e.g., have the fellows been able to develop new approaches and methods through advanced training; is there substantial evidence of engagement with non-academics?)
- (iv) *Development:* (e.g., should the Scheme be continued and, if so, how might it be developed and improved?)

It was also hoped that the evaluation of this particular innovative scheme might shed light on broader issues, such as the nature of postdoctoral education, its function as a developmental stage in the professionalisation of academics, and the effectiveness of prioritising target fields as recipients of postdoctoral fellows to help accelerate the maturation of those fields. Insights into such issues have been captured as well.

Structure of Report

This evaluation has assessed the Scheme relative to its objectives and seeks to advise ESRC accordingly. The overarching goal of the various review processes has been the delivery of a product that will be *useful* to ESRC as it considers the future of a Postdoctoral Fellowship (PDF) Scheme. Thus the results generated have been integrated and distilled into this Consultant's Report, including an Executive Summary, an Introduction framing the issues of the Report, a Summary of the review processes utilised, Analysis of the issues for which ESRC requests illumination, and Conclusions and Recommendations on future support. Seven Annexes provide additional information.

II. Summary of Review Processes

Overview

Methods employed have been both qualitative and quantitative. Since comprehensive coverage of nearly 300 fellowships is not feasible, emphasis was placed upon eliciting insights helpful to ESRC as it moves into the future.

Review processes utilised were:

- *analysis of materials* (ESRC documentation, 70 Reports by Fellows, and other relevant materials);
- *discussions* with key individuals having views of “the big picture” of the scheme (e.g., ESRC Officers);
- *semi-structured telephone interviews* (21 Fellows; 25 Mentors and Heads of Department)
- *Mentor questionnaires* (targeted at Mentors, as readily located individuals likely to have desired knowledge, 49 responses at nearly a 75% response rate); and
- a *focus group* allowing several previous Fellows to come together to discuss issues and send messages to ESRC.

Review of Scheme and Related Documents

The Evaluator visited ESRC at the end of March and met with key individuals associated with both the Evaluation Office and the Scheme itself. This set the scheme and its evaluation into a useful context and highlighted priority questions and themes.

Over eighty end-of-award Reports were reviewed and key issues and concerns were noted.

Drawing upon these strands, a framework of “core questions” was developed and shared with the ESRC Evaluation team. This framework was used subsequently in the development of the questionnaire, the semi-structured interview format and the focus group agenda.

Identification and Location of Individuals

A base group of 44 individuals was selected for more detailed review, split approximately evenly between Cohorts 1 & 2. These were chosen to a large extent on the basis of a degree of reflection apparent in the Reports (as boding well for future interviews). Furthermore, this group represented a reasonable spread across various categories of interest, not only Cohorts, but also “priority” and non-priority, disciplines, institutions, non-UK students and early indication of types of positions secured. Fellows selected for interviews from this group represented a reasonable distribution across categories.

In conjunction with ESRC staff, the Evaluator prepared a detailed chart updating when possible the whereabouts of 66 Fellows, their Mentors and, when identifiable,

their Heads of Departments (during their postdoctoral fellowship). This chart now finalised is provided as Annex A, with an accompanying chart (Annex B) summarising professional placement of the base group, for ESRC staff use, as was its earlier version. In many cases tracking down the individuals has been a bit challenging!

Interviews of former Fellows, Mentors and Heads of Departments

Semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with 45 individuals (core questions outlined in Annex F). These consisted of: 10 Postdoctoral Fellows of the 2001 cohort; 10 Postdoctoral Fellows of the 2002 cohort; 12 Mentors (6 related to each of the two cohorts); 8 Mentors (split evenly between cohorts) who were also Heads of Departments -- one was a Research Director; and 5 Heads of Departments.

Notes from each interview were dictated and transcribed. Coded responses were aggregated by question and analysed across interviewees in the two categories of Fellows and Mentors/Heads of Departments. Interviewees appeared to become quite engaged in the process and were generous with their insights and reflections. An extensive analysis is captured in Annex G.

Questionnaire, Mentors

The Evaluator prepared a questionnaire which, after review by the ESRC Evaluation team, was sent to 66 Mentors. With some reminding, completed questionnaire forms were received from 49 individuals, nearly a 75% response rate. Responses were entered into a database and analysed (Questionnaire form and Figures attached as Annexes C and D, respectively).

Focus Group, Fellows

A focus group was held for Postdoctoral Fellows in relative proximity (Scotland). Although unfortunately the timing coincided with marking at the end of the academic year, so that several individuals could not attend, the small group of individuals who participated did so energetically. The facilitated discussion provided a rich vein of insights, captured in a seven-page document in Annex F.

Integration

Summaries of analyses from each methodology have been integrated, so that the core questions of the evaluation can be addressed. A brief summary of the approaches emphasised for each of ESRC's four main areas is provided below.

(i) Capacity

(a,b) Securing of academic employment, difference made in job prospects:
A combination of ESRC office efforts and "sleuthwork" during the evaluation has generated a detailed chart on 66 Fellows, for most of whom current academic employment has been identified. Mentors, through email correspondence, questionnaires and interviews have been helpful in providing information as to

employment and also interpretation of the difference made by the award in prospects. (Mentors are useful sources of information since they are likely to keep track of employment of “their” Fellows.) Interviews with Fellows also enriched understanding of the PDF’s impact.

(c) Boosting of capacity in priority areas ESRC materials have identified the Priority Area Fellows within the base group; for most of these current affiliations are known and captured in the detailed chart. Qualitative insights have been gained through interviews.

(d) Retention of good non-UK researchers in UK ESRC records did not allow ready identification of non-UK researchers. Information was gathered as possible regarding non-UK members of the base group, particularly through interviews and to some extent questionnaires.

(ii) Publications

More or better quality? The emphasis here was not on counting publications which would in any event be a tenuous figure so heavily laden with caveats as to be useless, given differential levels of reporting, constantly changing figures, and heterogeneity in typical numbers of publications across different disciplines. Instead, semi-structured interviews were utilised to zero in on the important, inherently qualitative core question: the difference made by the PDF. Thus views were analysed regarding both quantity and quality of publication output relative to an informed, albeit subjective, judgement as to the output of a “normal” PhD. Interviews elicited this expert judgement from Fellows, Mentors and Heads of Department.

(iii) Skills

Development of new approaches and methods Semi-structured interviews drew out Fellows, Mentors and Heads of Departments in particular as to the role of advanced training in developing new approaches, methods, skills and impacts of such developments. Information was gathered from Mentors through questionnaires as well.

Engagement with non-academics As a relatively new sort of behaviour for academics, which may well turn out to be characterised by tentative “first toes in the water” rather than systematically organised ventures, this topic was explored via semi-structured interviews, particularly with Fellows themselves.

(iv) Development

Continue, develop, improve the Scheme? In order to elicit quite subtle assessments, semi-structured interviews of Fellows, Mentors and Heads of Departments, as well as a focus group of Fellows, were used to gather insights and recommendations. Individuals were thus able to step back and make recommendations to ESRC concerning the big picture of issues targeted by the scheme. Some insights were also captured via questionnaires. Indeed, the number and quality of insights shared has been impressive, such that ESRC will have a rich vein to mine as it considers the future.

III. Analysis of Issues: CAPACITY

Securing of academic employment, difference made in job prospects and career path

Summary¹

Roughly 90% of Fellows interviewed and of Fellows described in Mentor questionnaires appear to have found academic positions in the UK, with close to half of these permanent. (However, a smaller percentage of the base group of 44, 66%, is known to have found academic employment - with over 40% of the total number having permanent positions - but location is unknown for some. Four have challenging non-academic positions and six are in universities in other countries.) The likelihood that nearly all Fellows interviewed or reported upon will remain in academia is almost uniformly regarded as high, although some in temporary posts will of course consider non-academic positions. There are several individuals who have chosen (challenging) non-academic posts and perhaps a small number have not found professional posts. While apparently most Fellows would have pursued academic posts even without the PDF (Postdoctoral Fellowship), qualitative judgements offered would suggest that at least 15-20% were retained in academia by the timely intervention of the PDF.

In any event, the PDF is usually regarded as enhancing success or accelerating trajectories. Certainly the PDF was regarded as making some contribution to Fellows' securing of academic posts, whether or not it made the critical difference is perhaps impossible to tell. A nearly unanimous view was that the PDF adds value to employability of Fellows. Two principal advantages in securing posts are: 1) the badge of ESRC competitive vetting and 2) the opportunity to write and publish good quality work and demonstrate their capabilities. Fellows emphasised the impact of the confidence gained upon their professional behaviour. Quite often, the PDF was seen as leading to higher quality posts than Fellows might otherwise have obtained so early in their career. This in itself may help to retain bright people in academia.

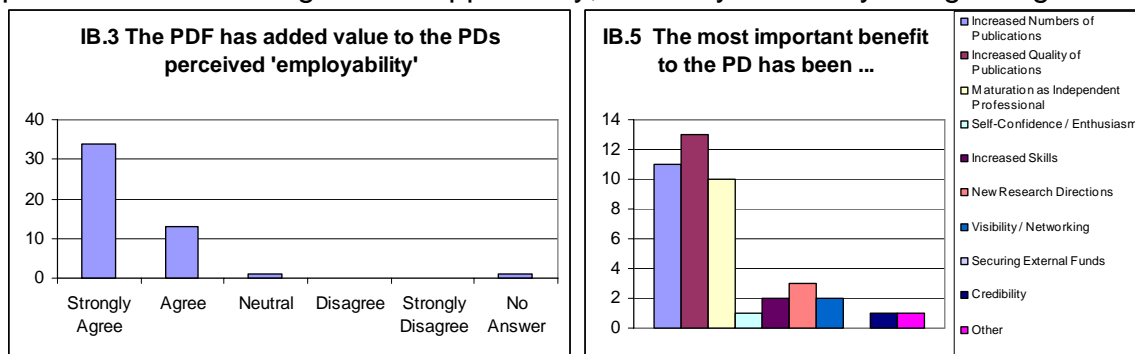
Mentor Questionnaires

Regarding positions and career paths, based on 49 Mentor's reports, 22 Fellows had achieved a permanent academic position with about that same number, 21, having secured temporary academic positions -- teaching, research or teaching and research posts. At least 40 Mentors expected their Fellows to stay in academics. While more than half thought that their Fellows would have pursued an academic career even without the PDF, eight disagreed and another 13 were neutral or did not answer. So, minimally, the PDF itself might have retained one-sixth of the Fellows in academics. Even for those Fellows who would have stayed in academia anyway,

¹ This and subsequent Summary sections integrate information and insights from interviews (for which the distillation is provided as Annex G due to its length), as well as the more concise information from Questionnaires and Focus Groups captured in the body of this Report. Summary comments derive from information gathered as outlined above. While of course such summary comments do not purport to be comprehensive across all 293 Fellowships awarded, nonetheless emerging trends and patterns may serve to illuminate the larger picture.

many Mentors (22) saw the PDF as helping them to secure their particular current posts, with only 9 thinking the posts likely to have been secured without the PDF.

Regarding benefits, a striking 47 Mentors felt that the PDF added value to the Fellows' employability. The benefits most frequently cited as "most important" to the Fellow were: increased quality of publications (13); increased numbers of publications (11) and maturation as an independent member of a professional community (10). Nearly all the Mentors (44) felt that their Fellows took full professional advantage of the opportunity, with only 2 actually disagreeing.



Focus Group Highlights

ESRC and its evaluation process lend added value to employability in terms of credibility (prospective employers respect the competitive "pre-selection" as useful in choosing among applicants). Furthermore, Fellowships provide an additional year of professional experience and an enhanced portfolio. Intangibly but importantly, professional goals and behaviour were enhanced by ESRC's explicit treatment of Fellows (e.g. at its conference) as "the future of academia", which boosted confidence significantly.

One way in which the Fellowship scheme enhances career paths is that, because Fellows can afford to wait for a satisfying job, they are more likely to do well and to stay in academia therefore.

Boosting of capacity in priority areas

Summary

When considering employment destinations of the base group of 44 Fellows (Annex B), a noticeably greater percentage --89%-- of the 18 Priority Area Fellows are in UK academic posts compared to the percentage of Other Fellows in UK academic posts -- 50%. Indeed, more than half (56%) of Priority Area Fellows have secured Permanent Academic Posts, compared to just under one third (31%) of Other Fellows. Given that Priority Areas were defined by ESRC due to concerns over low numbers going on in academic career tracks, it would appear that the scheme helped to prepare individuals to take on good quality academic jobs, in this way perhaps accelerating a boost in capacity within UK academia. (Factors contributing to this picture may include: a backlog of demand for individuals in these areas; perhaps some sort of selection process targeting of Priority Area postgraduates who were already more committed to pursuing academic careers than their "other"

counterparts and/or the provision of an attractive career pathway in Priority Areas.) It may be that Priority Area Fellows who wanted to stay in academics were given the vehicle with which to do so, perhaps in some cases allowing them to resist other careers. The high level of permanent posts secured by Priority Area Fellows may reflect a previously unmet backlog of demand within universities; if so, the proportion of permanent to temporary academic posts may over time come to resemble that for Other Fellows.

In considering this base group, it is perhaps of interest that 7 of the 16 Priority Area Fellows now in the UK academic system (44%) are originally from outwith the UK, whereas only 2/13 Other Fellows now in the UK academic system (15%) are from outwith the UK. Clearly highly qualified individuals from other countries are helping to meet the demand in the UK system.

Priority Area Fellows interviewed expect to stay basically in their area, within academics. Some Fellows in Area Studies, however, appear to be diversifying somewhat into related areas. Interestingly, of 18 Priority Area Fellows in the base group, it would appear that all but one appear to have remained in their original areas.

Mentor Questionnaires

More than half the Mentors did not know if their Fellows were labelled as ESRC “priority areas”.

Retention of good non-UK researchers in UK

Summary

It appears that roughly half (42% according to Mentors’ questionnaires; 56% of base group) of researchers from outwith the UK are staying in the UK academic system. Of six non-UK Fellows interviewed (five of whom are staying or hope to stay), five received their PhDs in UK institutions. One of these Fellows would have left for an academic job in the US were it not for the PDF.

Generally, Fellows from outwith the UK who leave the UK remain involved in British academic networks. At least five of the six Fellows in the 44 Fellow base group who have gone to an academic/research post in another country are originally from outwith the UK. As examples, one is a researcher in education in France; one specialises in marketing, in Greece; one specialises in business and innovation in Italy (but explicitly regards this as temporary); one is in management in Germany and another in Germany (the only designated “Priority Area” Fellow) is a tenure track assistant professor doing quantitative research.

Mentor Questionnaires

Just under a third of those responding (14) had Fellows from outwith the UK; of these only 6 (just under half) have found an academic position in the UK. However, seven of the eight remaining were cited as involved in ongoing networks with UK colleagues.

Mobility

Summary

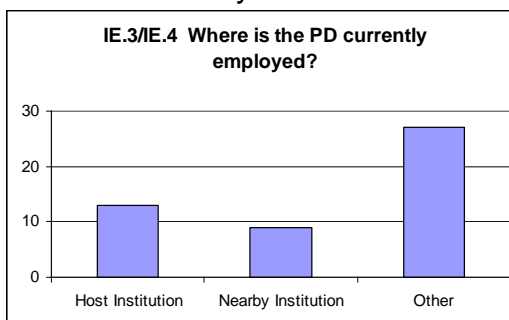
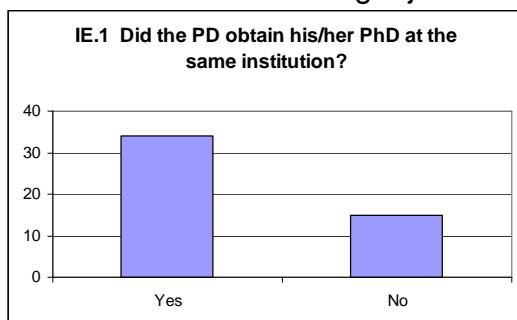
Mobility (changing institution between PhD and postdoctoral work) was investigated as its relative absence was one of the “surprises” of the scheme. Despite ESRC’s encouragement, perhaps 70% of Fellows remained at their PhD institution. Indeed, according to Mentors’ questionnaire responses, nearly half of the posts secured following the PDF were either at the host institution or one nearby. Over a third of the Fellows reported on received their PhD, conducted their PDF and took a post at the same or neighbouring institution. Clearly, this is not a picture of dynamic mobility among junior academics in the social sciences.

Interviews and focus group discussion illuminated the factors “painting” this picture. The advantages of moving (e.g., new perspectives, new sense of professional identity, new networks) often do not outweigh disruption of a Fellow’s personal life (and perhaps that of a partner or family) when the PDF will only last a year. Furthermore, given the PDF rationale of allowing Fellows to write up their PhD research, professional discontinuity does not seem attractive. Sometimes, a Fellow is already positioned in a world-class centre of excellence, such that a move would be contrived. Institutions’ self-interest enters into the picture as well; fostering a Fellow is often most attractive when that Fellow is one of the institution’s own brightest PhDs, and, perhaps, a potential staff member.

An urgent plea to ESRC was often sounded: do not force Fellows to move, leave that decision up to the individual. Changing Mentors or even departments within the same institution will sometimes provide new perspectives, but some would object even to that being a hard and fast rule.

Mentor Questionnaires

Mobility appears to have been quite limited, with 34 (nearly 70%) of the Fellows being reported on having attained their PhD degree at the same institution as the PDF host institution. In 8 cases, the Mentor had also been the PhD supervisor (16%). Furthermore, nearly half (45%) of the posts secured following the PDF were either at the host institution (13) or at a nearby institution (9). Of the 13, 11 had received their PhDs from the same institution. Of the 9, 6 had received their PhDs from the same institution. Just over a third of the Fellows reported on by these Mentors, in other words, continued their postdoctoral work at the same institution as their PhD work and then got jobs either there or nearby.



Focus Group Highlights

Regarding mobility, there is a strong sense that this is a decision that must be left to the individual as a range of factors, from disrupting embedded lives to leaving an internationally leading centre of excellence, could mitigate against switching institutions between the PhD and the Postdoctoral Fellowship. However, for those who do remain in the same institution, ESRC could help by providing Heads of Departments and to Mentors with annual guidance reminding them of the rationale behind Postdoctoral Fellowships as a new sort of position and thus the need to treat the Fellows in accordance with their new status, even if they are familiar figures in the department or centre.

IV. Analysis of Issues: PUBLICATIONS

Quantity

Summary

ESRC can feel confident that in the vast majority of cases the Fellowship increased the quantity of publications Fellows produced, compared to the quantity they would have produced without the Fellowship as a “normal” post-PhD. Three quarters of Fellows interviewed, and more than 85% of Mentors and Heads of Departments interviewed saw the PDF as having increased the quantity of publications produced by Fellows. (Eighty-four per cent of Mentors surveyed agreed.) The “gift of time” allowed Fellows to focus on writing and see manuscripts through to completion. ESRC and/or Mentors could provide Fellows with guidance in developing publication strategies.

Mentor Questionnaires

Most Mentors (41 or 84%) strongly agreed (17) or agreed (24) that because of the PDF, the quantity of work prepared for publishing or published by their Fellows is significantly greater than that of a “normal” PhD.

Focus Group Highlights

The time is invaluable for producing publications. ESRC could provide guidance to beginning Fellows as to how to strategically prioritise prospective publications.

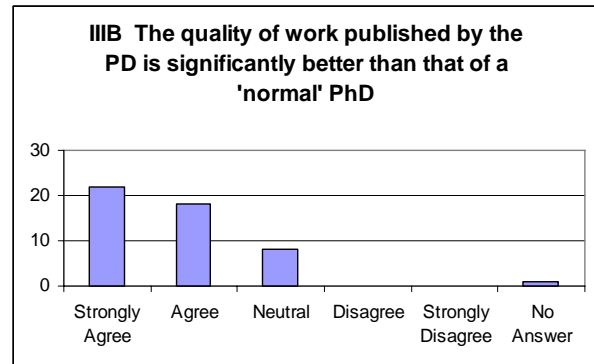
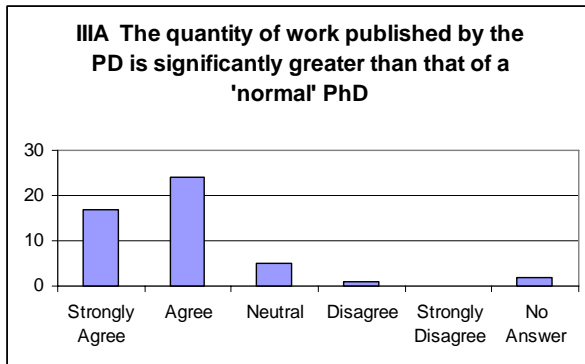
Quality

Summary

Similarly, the PDF scheme has clearly made possible the enhancement of the quality of much of the Fellows’ output. For example, all but one of the twenty Fellows interviewed felt the PDF had allowed them to improve the quality of their publications. Between 70% (Mentors and Heads of Departments) and 82% (Mentors surveyed) of established academics judging their work agreed. Mentors and Heads of Departments interviewed saw a different level of maturity and quality in the articles produced by Fellows, who thanks to the scheme had the time to refine them; a key indicator by which they judged enhancement of quality was the level of journal achieved. For many of the Fellows, a key learning experience lay in refining and strategically targeting articles for higher quality journals than they would otherwise have aspired to, let alone reached.

Mentor Questionnaires

Most Mentors (40 or 82%) agreed (18) or strongly agreed (22) that because of the PDF, the quality of the work prepared for publishing or published by the PD is significantly greater than that of a “normal” PhD.



Focus Group Highlights

ESRC could use a beginning of the year conference to discuss the process of transitioning from PhD to new research – a balance which will be different for each Fellow.

V. Analysis of Issues: SKILLS

Development of new approaches and methods: changes and influences on research capacity and/or employability

Summary

New skills, methods and approaches have been attained and have influenced research capacity (and direction) as well as employability for many if not most Fellows. The picture is not one, however, of Fellows earnestly adding the greatest number possible of technical skill notches to their respective belts. While many Fellows did indeed develop new skills, methods and approaches, very often the change was regarded as incremental, based on a solid foundation of skills prepared during postgraduate work. Indeed, many reacted somewhat negatively to the idea that PDFs should include “skills training”, since a) this takes place at the undergraduate level; b) needs of individuals for particular technical skills are strikingly divergent at this stage; and c) this may not be seen to embrace what many view as most critical at this stage – development of changed behaviours in the process of professionalisation.

Important abilities are acquired throughout the process of professionalisation, such as writing, learning how to get published, developing research plans and strategies, public speaking, networking, and dealing with non-academics (and with academics!). Such capabilities are often the result of “informal” training, such as participation in draft-critiquing groups within a host department. Indeed, informal training may well be more frequent than formal training during a PDF. When interviewed Mentors and Heads of Departments singled out new capabilities having an impact on employability, they most often cited abilities likely to be fostered by informal training or individual exploration: writing, presenting work, broadening interests or connecting research interests to application.

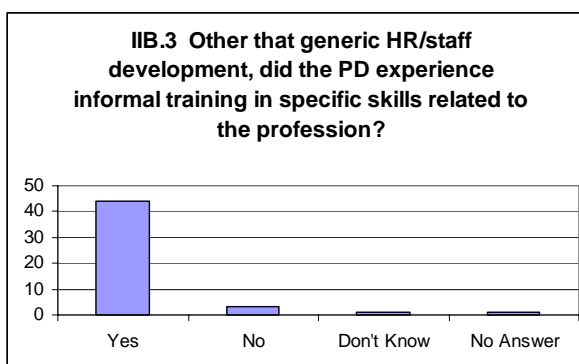
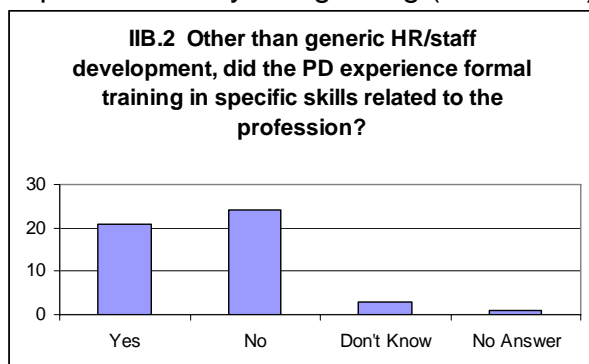
Perhaps not surprisingly, therefore, focus group members and others recommend that ESRC should not expect or require skills training across the board, but should support individual Fellows who identify specific needs for training.

Mentor Questionnaires

Mentors did view the PDF as providing skills useful to the Fellows. Forty-two (86%) agreed (26) or strongly agreed (16) that their Fellows acquired new methods or skills through the PDF that will strongly influence their future research capacity; only 5 agreed with the statement that these methods or skills would make no difference in attaining academic employment. The PDF was seen by most (40) as making it possible for the Fellows to explore new approaches as well.

Although skills were acquired, formal training was not the principal route. Whereas informal training such as critiquing of draft publications took place in nearly all cases (45), formal training in specific professional skills was cited by only 21 Mentors, with 24 answering no. Perhaps not surprisingly, there was no mandate from all Mentors for a networked or centralised mechanism for Fellows to learn certain new skills.

Fewer than half (21 or 43%) agreed that this would benefit future Fellows, with nearly a quarter actively disagreeing (11 or 22%).



Focus Group Highlights

At this stage, skills training can feel too forced or fragmented for professionals whose needs are beginning to diverge widely. ESRC should facilitate (with flexibility and perhaps funding) individual Fellows as they identify their own specific needs for training, allowing an individual for instance to take a particular skills course or work for a month elsewhere with an appropriately skilled individual.

Teaching experience and training

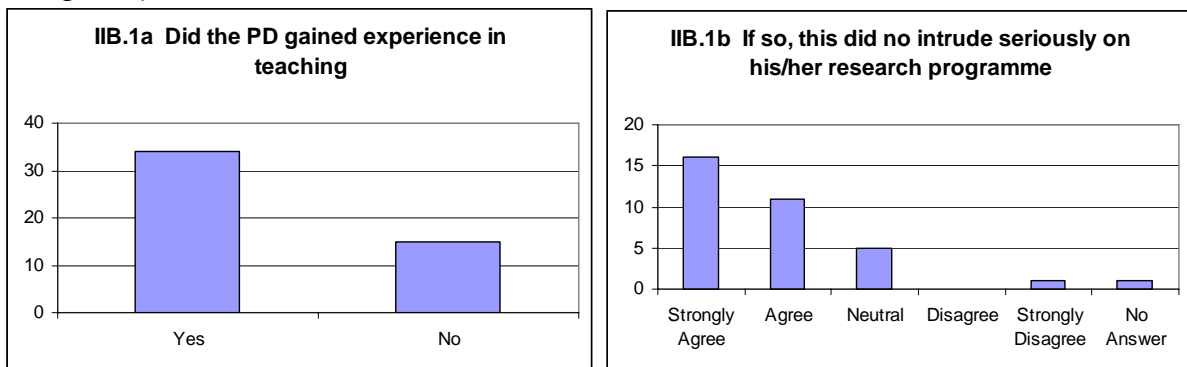
Summary

The inclusion in a Fellowship of one particular type of training, or experience, is somewhat controversial. Teaching, certainly a fundamental component of an academic's life, can detract from the research focus of the PDF, yet, without it, Fellows' job prospects may suffer. Fellows report a range of experiences, from being forced by departments to take on basically a full teaching load to being supported by their Mentors in refusing to do any teaching. The central "gift" of the PDF is that of time to focus on publication, yet the greater goal is to afford bright people an opportunity to secure good academic positions and thus keep them in British academia. Heads of Departments, in particular, recognise that any appearance of being "teaching shy" can work against even a high-flying research fellow when hiring decisions are made. Resolution of this conundrum, it is recognised, will vary by individual. (For example, some Fellows will be able to document extensive teaching experience prior to the PDF. Some will choose to take teaching accreditation courses.) Most, however, would recommend that Fellows take on no more than a light load of teaching responsibilities. A strong recommendation to ESRC is that it provide guidance to Fellows, Mentors and Heads of host departments as to a capped limit on teaching loads, with a reminder that this and other components of the Fellow's year are meant to contribute to the individual's career development.

Mentor Questionnaires

Teaching experience was not uniformly a part of the PDF; more than twice as many noted that their Fellows gained experience in teaching (34) than did not (15). Most (27 or 80%) of those whose Fellows taught felt that this did not intrude seriously on

their research programmes (5 were neutral, one did not answer and one strongly disagreed).



Focus Group Highlights

While teaching experience can augment cvs, this must be the Fellow’s choice. ESRC could provide guidance for Fellows, Heads of Departments and Mentors as to in what ways taking on a **capped** level of teaching could be a career opportunity.

Role in training for ESRC

Summary

Rather than putting on collective skills training as such, ESRC was encouraged to continue with and perhaps expand its conferences for Fellows. Fellows are enthusiastic about these conferences, not least because they value being treated as a cohort especially important to the future of their fields. Carefully selected and framed content, which could for example include “academic personality skills” involved in professionalisation, could benefit people at postdoctoral levels across disciplines. (Not unlike some past conferences, sessions might for instance include writing for publication, writing successful proposals for small grants, developing research and publication strategies, presenting work, interacting with media, policymakers and other non-academics.) If more than one conference were held per year, topics could be added, for example research ethics or new directions in the Research Councils. (Perhaps in addition, ESRC could host workshops on particular themes or problems that would bring together even Fellows from different fields and perhaps non-academics.)

Many Fellows feel a bit isolated; fostering a sense of community and peer support among them could be accomplished relatively easily. ESRC could contribute even more to networking at its conferences by, for example, setting up a Fellows website with descriptions of interests, photographs, location, opportunities to chat and so on. The fact that the former Fellows now at Scottish institutions did not know about each other underscores the opportunity for connecting current Fellows and alumni in the same geographic (or professional) area.

In relation to more traditional skills training, two suggestions for ESRC were that it develop a database of short courses on various skills to facilitate Fellows identifying what is right for them and, in a perhaps related effort, that it conduct a gap analysis as to advanced methods for which training is desired but not yet available.

Mentor Questionnaires

Fewer than half of the Mentors agree (17) or strongly agree (3) that ESRC should play a more pro-active role (e.g. in hosting conferences for PDs); while 15 were neutral and 2 did not answer, 10 disagreed and 2 strongly disagreed (41% positive; 24% negative).

Focus Group Highlights

The ESRC Conference is well regarded; the motivating feel-good factor should continue. Sessions should not be pitched at the PhD level but could include, for example, referees talking about their criteria for manuscripts, how to get published, how to get funding (including EU funds), and so on. Another day with a social element could allow Fellows to share experiences and network with others in the same geographic or intellectual area. A Fellows website would allow continuing communication.

Engagement with non-academics

Summary

Engagement with non-academics did not seem to be a driving motivation for participants in the scheme. Nonetheless, three quarters of the Fellows interviewed had some professional interaction with non-academics. Although for some this simply entailed work with journalists or participation in a workshop, for others the interaction was substantive enough to open up access to data or indeed new lines of inquiry. Fellows gained a heightened understanding of how to communicate with non-academics. ESRC could encourage further interaction with non-academics by providing funding for seminars or workshops involving them and by including them in its conferences.

Focus Group Highlights

Interaction with non-academics should not be forced, as it is highly dependent on an individual's work. However, it can be facilitated, either by a Mentor's networking or by ESRC inviting Fellows to its own conferences when they feature non-academics. ESRC could provide even more media awareness and training.

VI. Analysis of Issues: DEVELOPMENT

View of the scheme and recommendations received

Summary

The ESRC Postdoctoral Fellowship scheme is highly regarded. When posed the question of whether or not the scheme should continue, all Fellows, Mentors and Heads of Departments responding answered firmly in the affirmative.

In fact, when interviewees were offered a wide open question as to what *they* would do to increase the number of high quality people entering and staying in academic economic and social sciences, many reaffirmed that this scheme directly hit that target. At least two thirds of the interviewees felt that the scheme has the potential to bring about the desired increase. Some raised the question of whether or not absolute numbers would actually be increased, since most Fellows would try to stay in academia anyway (as evidence gathered here would suggest). Others, however, observed that the PDF scheme does provide important opportunities for *good quality positions* to these very bright individuals. It would be difficult to be certain that such people would not eventually leave academics if instead of progressing with a good quality position, they were struggling with less inspiring positions and an apparent lack of career path.

Of course, this scheme cannot single-handedly restore the attractiveness of an academic career. Many looking at the bigger picture wondered if this was “tinkering at the margins” and discussed the importance of higher salaries, more jobs, longer-term research contracts and greater supplies of research funding if the best young people are to be brought into academia. Additional ways of addressing career inflection points include support for PhD work and also, perhaps, ring-fencing research funding for starter grants for junior academics in the transition period of their first five years in post.

Mentor Questionnaires

Mentors recommend nearly unanimously (48 of 49, with one not answering) that the ESRC continue the scheme, with 39 recommending continuing it basically as it is and 9 recommending continuing it in a modified form. Nearly all agree (11) or strongly agree (35) that the scheme’s objectives are worthwhile. Most (40 or 82%) view the scheme as having “the potential to increase significantly the number and quality of entrants to academia” (26 agree, 14 strongly agree, with 8 neutral and only one disagreeing).

While still primarily positive, agreement is not so emphatic regarding clarity and appropriateness of selection criteria (26 agree and 11 strongly agree (76% positive), with 8 neutral, one disagreeing and 3 not answering). The level of agreement is similar, though slightly lower, regarding the effectiveness of ESRC’s management of the implementation of the grant (24 agree and 10 strongly agree (69% positive), with 9 neutral, 3 disagreeing and 3 not answering).

Focus Group Highlights

“Continue!” “It is fantastic and has made a real difference.” The scheme is clearly regarded positively.

The time to do research benefits the Fellows but it also benefits the Universities, which get people with more experience. This all helps lead to more quality people getting and staying in the right job, which will have a positive knock-on effect on the next generation of academics.

Suggested modifications

Summary

The objectives and orientation of the scheme seem to meet with widespread approval, but the selection criteria are sometimes regarded as a bit opaque. ESRC may wish to consider not only the criteria but the language in which it describes them and the difficulty of its application form if it does not want to de-motivate various groups of potential candidates (such as mature students). Regarding implementation, interviewees suggested various points along the theme of flexibility. In addition, a frequent suggestion was that ESRC could increase the chances of Fellows having productive Fellowship years by: issuing a guidance (a handbook but not heavy-handed) on How to be a Mentor, placing limits on teaching and clarifying roles for all concerned, including host institutions. Because the PDF is focused on publishing *past* work, the ESRC might consider instituting a similar fellowship to help individuals three or four years into their career move into *new* areas of research. As mentioned earlier, Fellows would appreciate more contact with each other, through conferences, networking, peer mentoring, perhaps even joint proposals.

In terms of follow-up, ESRC might want to hold a meeting to help former Fellows with small grant applications and indeed it might wish to look at the quality of research grants submitted by Fellows in five years time. For shorter-term follow-up, Mentors would be willing to be contacted when ESRC tries to locate Fellows. ESRC could compile a set of vignettes of successful Fellows to encourage current and future Fellows.

Focus Group Highlights

ESRC could perhaps consider providing some pension investment with the stipend. ESRC should identify the appropriate institutional contact person so correspondence (e.g. to “Finance Director”) does not go astray. The application process seemed long and repetitive, compared to British Academy’s 2-3 pages. However, the overall administration was smooth and light touch. ESRC might develop a “stable of distance mentors” who could provide constructive, career-oriented feedback to end-of-award reports.

Contributing Factors

Summary

The role of the **Mentor** is regarded by nearly all as a critical one, although different Fellow/Mentor relationships will require different levels and nature of interaction. This is after all a time of transition to independence for the Fellow, even though the Mentor still has important functions such as encouraging the Fellow to develop and follow a strategic plan for the Fellowship year, involving the Fellow in networks, ensuring him or her a place in the local research culture and providing informal training in professionalisation abilities. ESRC guidance as to the Mentor's role(s) could benefit Mentors as well as Fellows, not least in validating explanations of workload to Heads of Departments. Fellows encourage future Fellows to choose their Mentors wisely. Mentors when interviewed spoke often of relatively altruistic incentives such as helping younger people, contributing to the field and sharing intellectual interests. Yet in questionnaires slightly more Mentors disagreed than agreed with the statement that ESRC is providing sufficient incentives for Mentors.

On the other hand, more Mentors agreed than disagreed with the statement that ESRC is providing sufficient incentives to **host institutions!** The badge of the ESRC PDF is one such incentive as is the contribution that bright Fellows make to the local research environment. (For host institutions that keep their Fellows there may be RAE advantages, though there are issues regarding what does or does not count where for the PDF and Fellows' publications.) Yet Heads of Departments in particular point out the lack of overheads to cover costs associated with the PDF. In turn, a minority of Fellows have not been treated well, perhaps in terms of space or computers, perhaps in terms of being left in a limbo or excessively junior status, perhaps by being exploited with a heavy teaching load. ESRC may want to include guidance for host institutions in its guidance for Mentors. ESRC will doubtless need to monitor changing cost recovery policies for possible impact on the scheme.

In considering **other factors** playing a role in the professionalisation of Fellows, participation in conferences and networks was seen as extremely valuable. More money from ESRC is recommended for networking conferences. Experience gained through light teaching loads can also be a valuable part of a professional portfolio, as discussed earlier, but it must remain a Fellow's *choice*. Quite a few Fellows helped to organise workshops and found this sort of networking useful; care needs to be taken that this is not overly time-consuming.

Mentor Questionnaires

More Mentors disagreed (41% -15 disagree, 5 strongly disagree) with the statement that "ESRC is providing sufficient incentives for Mentors" than agreed (33% -13 agreed, 3 strongly agreed).

A few more Mentors agreed (43% -17 agree, 4 strongly agree) rather than disagreed (31% - 9 disagree, 6 strongly disagree) with the statement that ESRC is providing sufficient incentive for host institutions to play an active role in the professionalisation of Fellows.

Focus Group Highlights

ESRC could provide guidance as to the Mentor's role to Fellows, Mentors, Heads of Departments.

Duration of Fellowship

Summary

The question of the duration of the PDF, whether it should be one or two years long, is undoubtedly the most controversial issue regarding the scheme. Although one might expect an automatic reaction of wishing for more time, it is interesting that just about half of interviewed Mentors and Heads of Departments would prioritise one year (particularly if two years duration meant fewer Fellowships), as would about 55-70% of Mentors surveyed (with the latter figure arising from dislike of lowering numbers to achieve longer duration). Perhaps surprisingly, about 60% of Fellows interviewed would also view one year as sufficient, two thirds of those making that point even without considering a balance of numbers versus duration. Reasons for favouring one year duration include: the real possibility of just putting one's head down and getting on with it; one year is long enough to accomplish the scheme's objectives and two years could lead to loss of focus (whereas a three year fellowship could make possible substantive *new* research.)

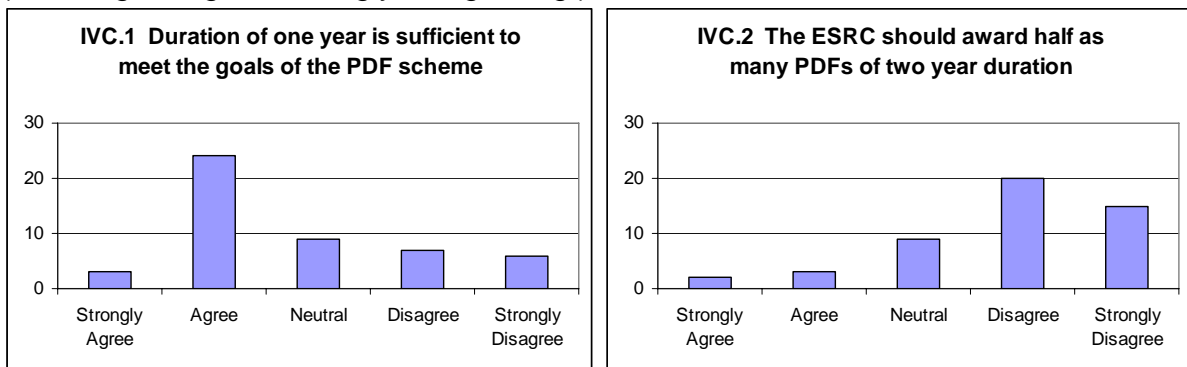
However, some (e.g., perhaps a third of interviewed Mentors and Heads of Departments) felt strongly about the value of two years. Certainly, the constraints of one year can loom large, with job hunting alone taking a great deal of time and attention away from the core of the Fellowship. Often, the role of the second year was seen as allowing Fellows to begin *new* lines of research as a transition to the next stage of their careers. If ESRC were to award two year fellowships, it might wish to establish different criteria emphasising such a research role of the second year. Some suggested a diversified portfolio of Fellowship types, that ESRC show flexibility in willingness to offer some 18 or even 24 month fellowships if a good case is made, either in the application or at a defined midpoint. (ESRC might, alternatively, choose to keep the one year duration for this Fellowship scheme, but offer a greater number of small research grants to assist early career individuals in developing new research.)

If the Fellowship funding pie is finite, the value of affording higher numbers of individuals the Fellowship opportunity weighs far more heavily with most than giving fewer individuals a more comfortable two years.

Mentor Questionnaires

More than half of the Mentors (27 or 55%, with 24 agreeing and 3 strongly agreeing) felt that one year's duration is sufficient to meet the goals of the scheme. Just over a quarter of the Mentors (13 or 27%) disagreed (7) or strongly disagreed (6), with 9 Neutral. If considerations of a possibly finite pie are raised, however, commitment to two year's duration decreases strikingly. Regarding the statement, "the ESRC should award half the number of PDF awards but make each award two years long", only 10

percent of Mentors agreed (2 strongly agreeing, 3 agreeing) while 71% disagreed (20 disagreeing, 15 strongly disagreeing.)



Focus Group Highlights

Although a two-year fellowship would be helpful, opinion was divided as to whether this would outweigh the value of providing opportunities to a greater number of individuals since picking winners is not an exact science and with fewer numbers more good people could be missed. If two-year fellowships were to be awarded, it would be reasonable to use different criteria and indeed to require development of strategies for new research.

Lessons learned: Issues and Good Practice

Summary

During interviews, early warnings were offered to future Fellows about possible obstacles, issues, problems or distractions. Among these are dangers of taking on too much teaching, being distracted from writing by pursuing positions and not taking full use of the opportunity in a year that disappears surprisingly quickly. Interviewees offered a variety of lessons learned and good practice tips, captured in Annex G. Planning, balancing responsibilities, managing time and self-protection are advised. Selecting Mentors and host institutions wisely, along with making use of Mentors to develop and follow a strategic year plan, are also recommended. Networking and participation in conferences are emphasised as key steps in professionalisation. And of course, writing, and writing well, for good quality publications, will be at the core of successful Fellowships.

Focus Group Highlights

Balances are key: contributing to one's own career and to the host institution without being taken advantage of; research with teaching, even administration and supervising, according to the needs of one's career; gaining experience while also taking time to read, reflect and learn.

If teaching is done, it should be quality teaching (e.g. seminars) not a mass quantity experience such as a whole course.

Be clear about the expectations and relationship of Fellow and Mentor.

Get out and about; use the budget for conferences to: a) get yourself visible/known; b) learn about new ideas; and c) network. Recognise that all three of these activities interlink and help you move toward getting a good job. Try to get a clear (strategic) picture of the whole. "The threads do come together!"

Messages to ESRC

Messages sent to ESRC are primarily extremely positive (given the caveat that one scheme alone cannot change the entire face of British academia). The scheme is viewed as intervening at the right career stage with the right people, giving people a chance of getting good positions and thus being likely to stay more committed to academics. Fellows also have a greater chance of planning and pursuing strong research strategies which will in turn contribute to social science in the UK. Fellows themselves are extremely appreciative of the opportunities offered. Specific recommendations are captured in Annex G. The overall message is that ESRC should continue the scheme and, if possible, expand it.

VII. CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS

Accomplishments, impacts of scheme

The Scheme has without doubt provided significant numbers of bright early career individuals with an unusual opportunity that has had positive impacts on:

- quality of publications,
- quantity of publications;
- research capacity;
- professionalisation of individuals; and
- in many cases successful securing of good academic posts.

Fellows are deeply grateful for this opportunity and for most it contributed greatly to a sense of self-confidence as a valued member of the academic community. Mentors and Heads of Departments perceive the scheme as contributing to the quality of research dissemination in their fields as well as to the career development of selected individuals.

Key issues and challenges

One issue of course is based on the **What If conjecture**: what if these selected Fellows had not received Fellowships? Has the scheme actually increased the numbers of PhDs retained in British academics, or would these bright, highly motivated individuals have stayed anyway? This is by nature impossible to answer conclusively. Interviews with a small sample of 20 Fellows would suggest that the scheme did perhaps “save” 15-20% who might otherwise have left academics. Beyond this, however, as one interviewee reflected, the scheme may not only help to keep individuals in academia at the time of transition from a PhD. By helping the individual Fellows to establish their research programs, undergo professionalisation and obtain better quality jobs more quickly than they would otherwise have done, the scheme’s impact may also be felt at a critical point several more years down the career path, when individuals might otherwise be struggling with a dispiriting load and see no future in their academic career. (This suggestion might argue for longitudinal studies of Fellows and indeed other PhDs; another longitudinal study suggestion was that ESRC assess the quality of research proposals submitted in later years by former Fellows).

It may be that, for most of the Fellows, the scheme may contribute to but does not necessarily make the critical difference in their decision to remain in academia at the time of finishing a PhD. Its importance might lie, however, in the quality of career opportunities opened up to many of the Fellows as or soon after they finish the Fellowship. **Jump-starting successful career trajectories** is likely to ensure that these individuals are productive and feel validated as members of the academic community. They are set on a course of becoming leaders. This may be the critical long-term feature in the scheme that one interviewee saw as the best hope of UK social sciences twenty or thirty years down the road.

The thorny question of **Fellowship duration** is a key issue. Certainly more people would be happy with a greater number of one year fellowships than a smaller

number of two year fellowships. ESRC might, however wish to consider the issue of how best to assist Fellows (and others) to take the next critical professional step --- planning and conducting *new* lines of research. If the Fellowship is selected as the best mechanism, then ESRC might want to put some flexibility into the scheme such that individuals could propose such activity for the second part of 18 or 24 month Fellowships. Alternatively, ESRC might want to consider the oft-repeated suggestion that it ring fence funding for small research grants for early researchers to use in developing new research directions.

In fact, the “ability to establish independent research careers” lies at the heart of many other postdoctoral schemes, often in the natural sciences (e.g., the Royal Academy of Engineering/EPSRC Postdoctoral Research Fellowships). The Royal Society’s University Research Fellowships “aims to provide outstanding scientists, who should have the potential to become leaders in their chosen field, with the opportunity to build an independent research career.” The US National Science Foundation Minority Postdoctoral Research Fellowships and Supporting Activities programme seeks to increase the participation of underrepresented groups in Social, Behavioural and Economic Sciences as well as Biological Sciences. These fellowships support training and research, travel to prospective sponsors, national conferences of Fellows and mentors, and *starter research grants*. The British Academy, often cited by social scientists as making possible the initiation of new, post-PhD research, does so by offering three-year Postdoctoral Fellowships. Targeting the development of new research, the Nuffield Foundation New Careers Development Fellowship scheme “offers high-flying post-doctoral Fellows, with independent ideas and questioning minds, the opportunity to take a ‘change of direction.’” Since this last appears to provide perhaps four Fellowships per year and the British Academy provides approximately thirty awards per year, there would seem to be room for ESRC to in some fashion facilitate junior academics in developing **new lines of research**.

A more specific issue lies in the degree to which ESRC wishes to encourage “**mobility**”. Practical and professional arguments advanced were quite convincing as to the disproportionality of disruption to benefit that moving institutions would entail for many if not most Fellows. In fact most of the Fellows considered here have voted with their feet (so to speak) by *not* changing institutions. Institutions’ self-interest often enters into the picture as well such that an individual may do postgraduate work, conduct the Fellowship and take on an academic post all at the same institution. If, as seems to be the case, people are very often unwilling to change institutions to gain fresh perspectives, this constitutes a challenge for ESRC as to how it might alternatively promote that intellectual vitality or “intellectual mobility”. Changing Mentors or switching departments are possible mechanisms, but perhaps something even more innovative could be developed.

There may also be scope for ESRC to contribute (gently) to what is becoming recognised as a critical process in the postdoctoral stage: the **professionalisation** of Fellows. Sharing of good practice as to informal training, facilitation of networking across Fellows and lively, useful ESRC Fellows conferences focused on relevant abilities may accelerate and improve the professionalisation of individuals. This shift away from technical skills could allow the individuality of each Fellow to emerge even as common professional challenges are explored. To assist individual Fellows in

locating any technical training they might need, ESRC could put together a database of short courses, perhaps conducting a gap analysis as it does so to make sure that front-edge emerging methods are available to Fellows (and others).

A not unrelated issue is that of **interaction with non-academics**. While many Fellows had their own interactions (perhaps at a modest level), assistance from ESRC would not come amiss. So, for example, as ESRC “models” interaction at its various conferences and workshops, Fellows with relevant interests could be invited to participate. Very small grants to encourage joint seminar series or other endeavours could encourage Fellows to explore issues with non-academics in a mutually respecting, collegial way. Advice could be provided in conference sessions and follow-up guidance devoted to challenges such as communication with the media or with policymakers.

There was no particular indication that labels of **Priority Areas** had special impacts on the likelihood of Fellows remaining in an area, in any way other than the general Fellowships influenced other Fellows. The possible exceptions are in business and management (now handled in other ways e.g. through AIM) and perhaps economics, where the lure of the private sector is compelling. (In such areas, RAE notwithstanding, creative mechanisms to allow individuals to travel back and forth between sectors might be helpful.) There may be fewer applications in such areas (and some Fellowships are turned down for interesting and lucrative private sector jobs), nonetheless Fellows who do accept Fellowships in these areas generally appear likely to stay in academics. (Of those considered in this study, non-academic positions were taken by individuals in other areas.) Dropping the identification of priority areas, as long as review panels are mindful of distribution across disciplines, should not pose problems.

Although most Fellows had very good experiences, there was naturally some variability in the effectiveness of the **Mentor** relationship and the support offered by **host institutions**. ESRC could make a contribution by developing a short, “friendly” guidance handbook for Mentors that could also be useful to host institutions (at the department level). ESRC could encourage prospective applicants to consider carefully the relationship they and the prospective Mentor would expect, to make sure the fit is a good one. The quality of the research environment offered by the host institution will make it either more or less easy for a Fellow to mature through a professionalisation process. ESRC could think creatively about the Mentor role, perhaps developing supplemental peer mentoring through its PDF community.

Incorporated within this handbook and indeed within ESRC’s condition of grant for institutions accepting Fellows, ESRC will doubtless want to make very clear what would be considered a reasonable cap or **limit on teaching**. Individual Fellows may choose to take on teaching to make their c.v. more compelling, but they should not be exploited. Excessive teaching burdens (or other burdens) detract from the core function of the Fellowship.

Recommendations

The central recommendation of this Evaluation is that ESRC continue its Postdoctoral Fellowship Scheme. There is no reason to discontinue it. Fellows,

Mentors and Heads of Departments regard it as a productive, beneficial scheme. The scheme is likely to retain some individuals who would otherwise have left academics. Perhaps its greatest contribution in the short term, however, is the empowering of excellent early-stage researchers with top-level professionalisation skills and the ability to produce top quality publications, thus enhancing their chances of securing desirable posts. The scheme does indeed shorten strategically the early career development stage of the Fellows. By helping in this way to embed Fellows in their academic fields and networks, the scheme nurtures the next generation of leaders and strengthens the foundation for economics and social sciences in the longer-term. The scheme, in other words, contributes to strategic capacity building.

Certainly the scheme, like any other, could be improved. Examples of suggested changes, none of which contradicts the central success of the scheme, include: increased flexibility; transparency of selection criteria and simplification of application requirements; compensating for lack of mobility; encouragement of non-traditional applicants; guidance for Mentors and protection of Fellows from excessive teaching burdens.

If anything, ESRC should be more pro-active about celebrating Fellows and the scheme. For example, ESRC could expand or provide additional conferences, thus 1) underscoring the special roles of the Fellows as future leaders, 2) facilitating the professionalisation process and 3) encouraging development of networks and a sense of community among Fellows. Additional regional conferences and inclusion of Fellows during ESRC institutional site visits could reinforce messages as to the importance of this growing community of academics.

Indeed, the scheme is sufficiently effective that ESRC could consider expanding it by providing more Fellowships. Certainly the growing demand far outstrips the supply.

Now that it has gotten this intervention “right”, ESRC could proceed to tackling the *next* challenging stage for junior academics --- the development of new lines of research inquiry beyond the PhD work. Toward this end, ESRC might perhaps add flexibility to the system by providing some 18-24 month Fellowships oriented toward development of new research directions (in addition to the normal one year Fellowships). Alternatively it might consider ways in which to improve access of junior academics to research funds, perhaps by advising them on writing small grant proposals or perhaps even by ring-fencing a pool of small grant research funds especially for competition among junior academics.

ESRC has demonstrated vision and follow-through in tackling a critical stage in the development of the next generation of Britain’s academic social scientists and economists. The reservoir of lessons learned by the Council, its staff, academics and Fellows themselves can be drawn upon as in the future ESRC tackles other challenging inflection points in academic career paths.

ANNEXES

Postdoctoral Fellows Information Chart	A
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ANNEX A

POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWS INFORMATION CHART

(Personal Details not provided in this public version)

Employment Destination of Base Group of 44 Fellows

ANNEX B

EMPLOYMENT DESTINATION OF BASE GROUP OF 44 FELLOWS

Employment Destination of Base Group of 44 Fellows

	PERM AC	TEMP AC	NON-AC	INTERNAT	?	Totals
UK	7	4	3	1	3	18
UK-Priority Area	7	2		1	1	11
Non-UK-Priority Area	3	4				7
Non-UK	1	1	1	4	1	8
TOTAL	18	11	4	6	5	44

Priority Area Fellows

10/18 Priority Area Fellows are in Permanent Academic Posts (56% of Priority Area Fellows)
 An Additional 6/18 Priority Area Fellows are in Temporary Academic Posts (33% of Priority Area Fellows).

16/18 Priority Area Fellows are in UK academic posts of some sort (89% of Priority Area Fellows).

1/18 Priority Area Fellows are in international posts (5.5% of Priority Area Fellows).

1/18 Priority Area Fellows are in unknown destinations (5.5% of Priority Area Fellows).

Other Fellows

8/26 Other Fellows are in Permanent Academic Posts (31% of Other Fellows).

5/26 Other Fellows are in Temporary Academic Posts (19% of Other Fellows).

13/26 Other Fellows are in UK academic posts of some sort (50% of Other Fellows).

4/26 Other Fellows are in non-academic posts (15% of Other Fellows).

5/26 Other Fellows are in International posts (19% of Other Fellows).

4/26 Other Fellows are in unknown destinations (15% of Other Fellows).

Non-UK Fellows

At least 16 members of the 44 base group are understood to come originally from outwith the UK.
 (Since records do not provide this information, this figure may actually be somewhat higher.)

More than half (56%) of these are in academic posts in the UK.

Questionnaire

ANNEX C

QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire

SURVEY: MENTORS

(Note: throughout, "PD" refers to the individual and "PDF" refers to the Fellowship awarded.)

I. CAPACITY

IA. Employment (Please mark the entry below which most closely describes the employment status of the PD)

- Academic Permanent?
- Temporary Teaching?
- Temporary Research?
- Other Academic?
- Non-academic Professional Position?
- No Professional Position?
- Unknown

Is the PD *likely to stay in academics*? Yes No Don't know

IB. Career Path Implications

IB.1 It is likely that the PD would have pursued an academic career *even without the PDF*.
 Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

IB.2 It is likely that the current post would have been secured *even without the PDF*.
 Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

IB.3 The PDF has *added value* to the PD's perceived "employability".
 Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

IB.4 The PD took full professional advantage of the opportunity presented.
 Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

IB.5 The most important benefit to the PD has been (please tick **one**):

- a. Increased *numbers of publications*
- b. Increased *quality of publications*
- c. *Maturation* as an independent member of professional community
- d. *Self-confidence/enthusiasm*
- e. *Increased skills*
- f. Addition of *new research directions* to portfolio
- g. *Visibility/networking* (e.g. through presentations or running workshops)
- h. Securing *external funds*
- i. *Credibility*
- j. Other (Please specify)

IC. Priority Areas

IC.1 Was the PDF in a **priority area**? Yes No Don't know

Questionnaire

I.D. Non-UK PDs

ID.1 Is the PD from **outwith the UK**? ___Yes ___No

ID.2 If so, has the PD found an academic position *within the UK*?
___Yes ___No ___Don't know

ID.3. If the PD is from outwith the UK and is not currently in post in the UK, is the PD involved in *ongoing networks* with UK colleagues?
___Yes ___No ___Don't know

IE. Mobility

IE.1 Did the PD attain his/her PhD at the *same institution*? ___Yes ___No

IE.2 Were you the supervisor for the PD's PhD work as well? ___Yes ___No

IE.3 Is the PD currently employed within your institution? ___Yes ___No

IE.4 Is the PD currently employed in a nearby institution? ___Yes ___No

II. SKILLS

IIA. Changes and career implications

IIA.1 The PD has acquired new methods or skills through the PDF that will *strongly influence the PD's research capacity* in the future.
___Strongly Agree ___Agree ___Neutral ___Disagree ___Strongly Disagree

IIA.2 Any methods or skills newly acquired during the PDF, while enhancing the work of the PD, will *make no difference* to the PD's success in *attaining academic employment*.
___Strongly Agree ___Agree ___Neutral ___Disagree ___Strongly Disagree

IIA.3 The PDF allowed the PD to explore **new** approaches/lines of inquiry that s/he *would not have been able to explore* in the absence of a PDF.
___Strongly Agree ___Agree ___Neutral ___Disagree ___Strongly Disagree

IIB. Training

IIB.1 The PD gained *experience in teaching*. ___Yes ___No
If so, this did not intrude seriously on his/her research programme.
___Strongly Agree ___Agree ___Neutral ___Disagree ___Strongly Disagree

IIB.2 *Other than* generic human resources/staff development training, did the PD experience *formal training in specific skills related to the profession* (e.g., short course on statistical analyses)?
___Yes ___No ___Don't know

IIB.3 *Other than* generic human resources/staff development training, did the PD experience *informal training in specific skills related to the profession* (e.g. critical discussions of draft-stage publications)?
___Yes ___No ___Don't know

Questionnaire

IIB.4 Future PDs would benefit from learning certain new methods or skills in a *networked or somehow centralised way* (rather than only on an individual basis within the host institution).

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

IIC. Engagement with non-academics

IIC.1 Did the PD interact with non-academics as a part of the PDF?

Yes No Don't know

III. PUBLICATIONS

IIIA Because of the PDF, the **quantity** of the work prepared for publishing or published by the PD is significantly greater than that of a "normal" PhD.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

IIIB Because of the PDF, the **quality** of the work prepared for publishing or published by the PD is significantly better than that of a "normal" PhD.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS TO ESRC

IVA. Recommendations

IVA.1 Would you recommend that the ESRC:

cease supporting the Scheme

continue it basically as it is

continue it in a modified form?

IVA.2 The *objectives* of the scheme are worthwhile.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

IVA.3 The *selection* criteria are clear and appropriate.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

IVA.4 ESRC's management of the *implementation* of the grant is effective.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

IVA.5 ESRC should play a more *pro-active role* (e.g. in hosting conferences for PDs).

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

IVB. Contributing Factors

IVB.1 ESRC is providing sufficient incentive for Mentors.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

IVB.2 ESRC is providing sufficient incentive for host institutions to play an active role in the professionalisation of the PDs.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Questionnaire

IVC. Issues

IVC.1 Duration of *one year is sufficient* to meet the goals of the PDF scheme.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

IVC.2 The ESRC should award *half the number* of PDF awards but make each award *two years long*.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

IVC.3 The ESRC Postdoctoral Fellowship Scheme *has the potential to increase significantly the number and quality of entrants to academia*.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

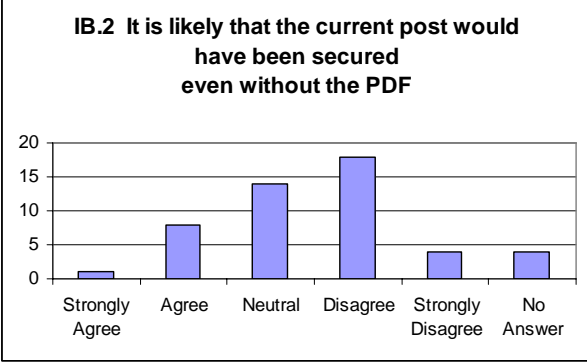
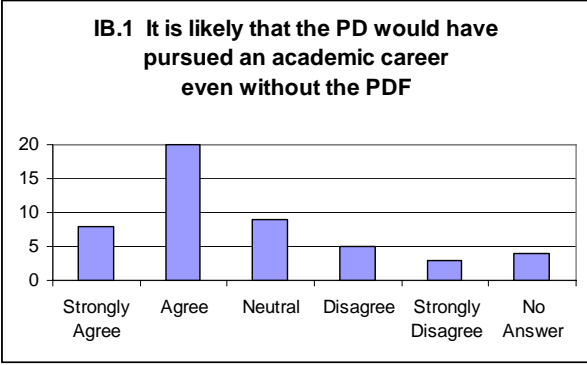
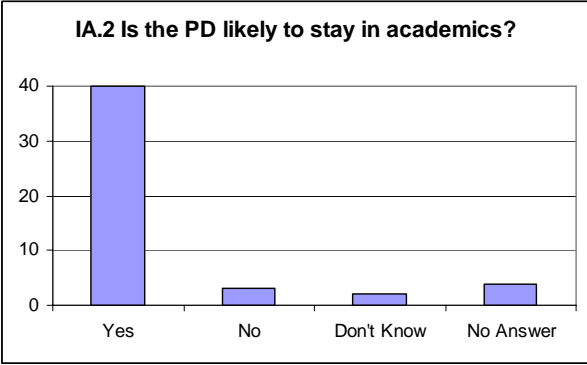
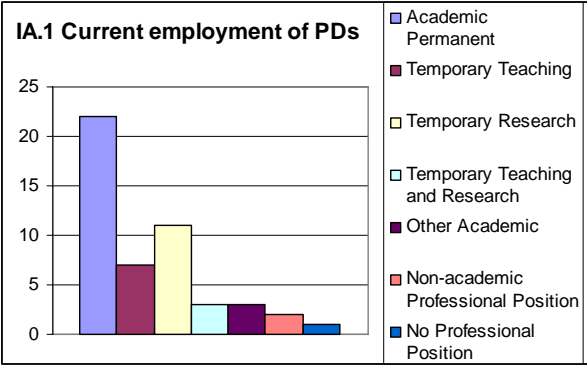
IVC.4 Other Comments?

Questionnaire Results

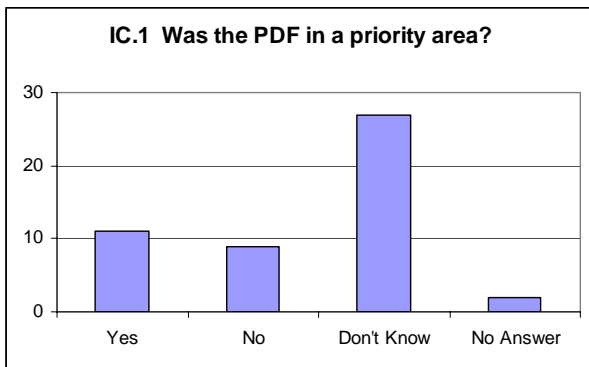
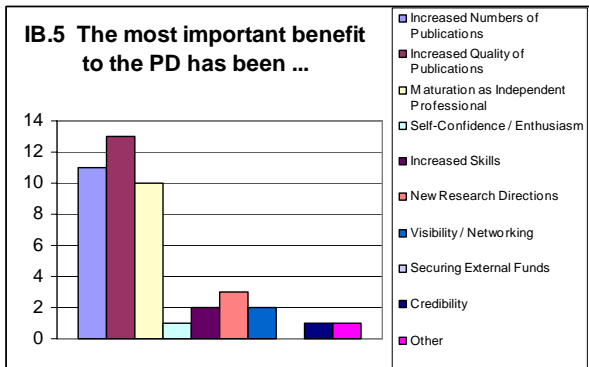
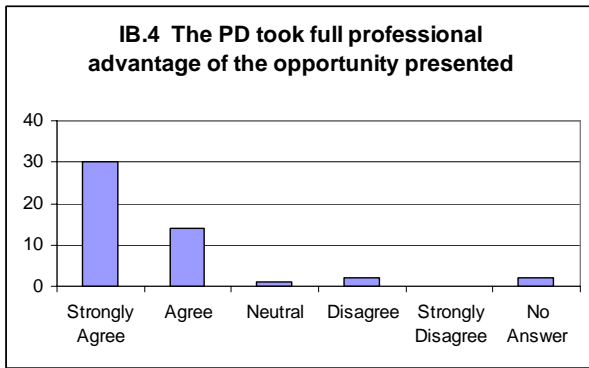
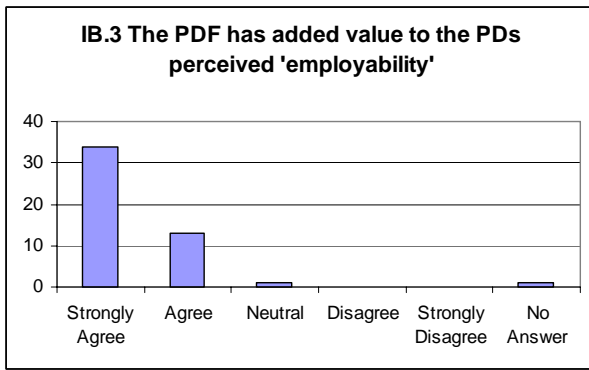
ANNEX D

QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS (CHARTS)

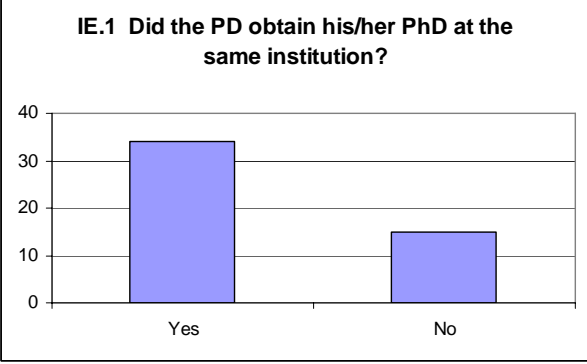
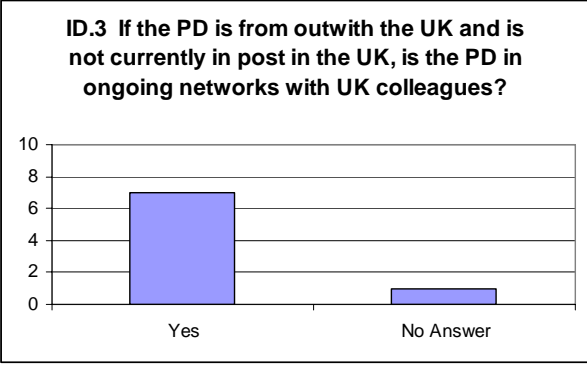
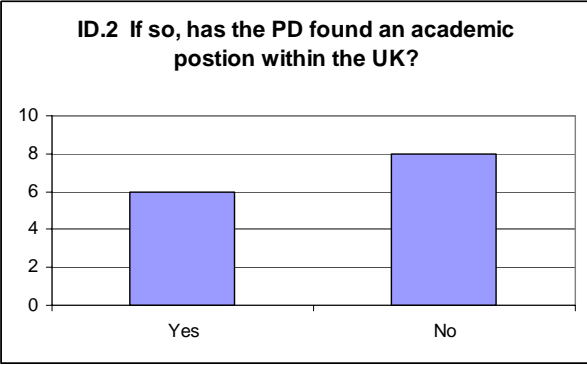
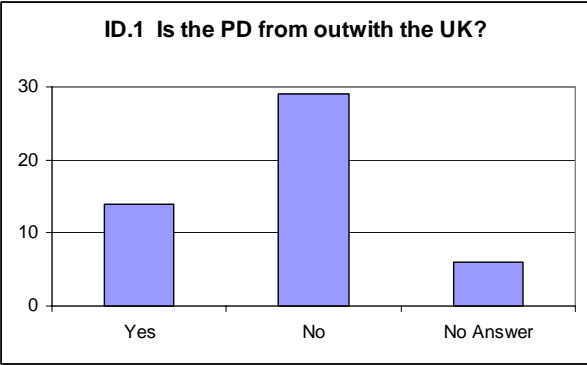
Questionnaire Results



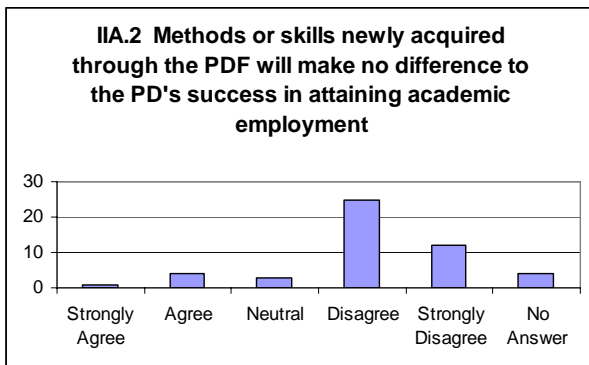
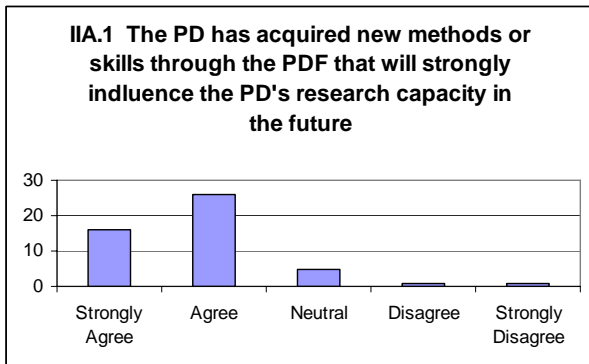
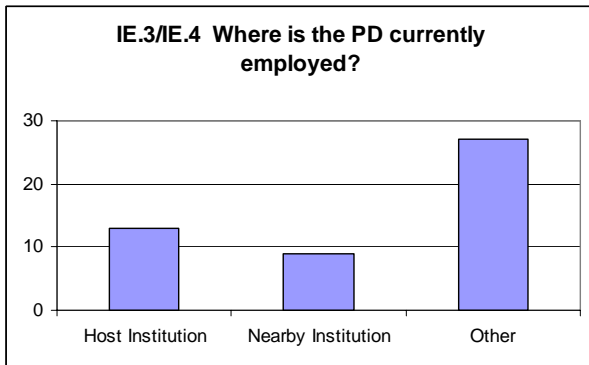
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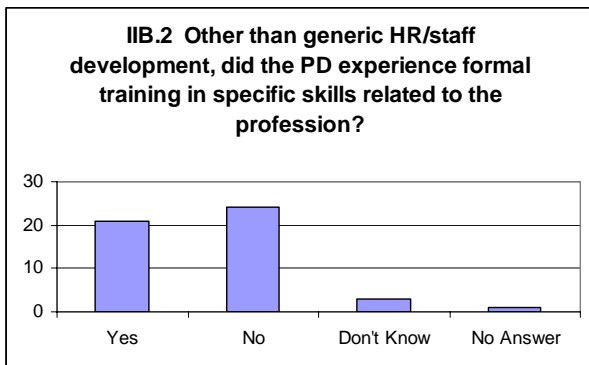
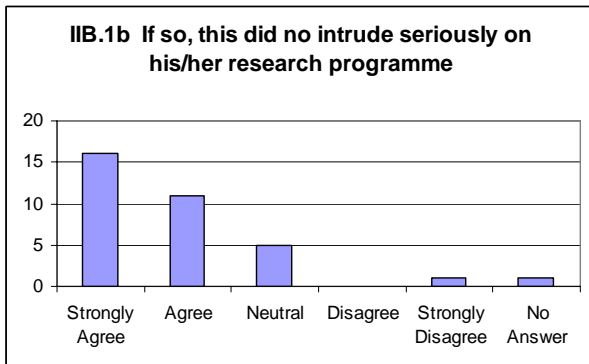
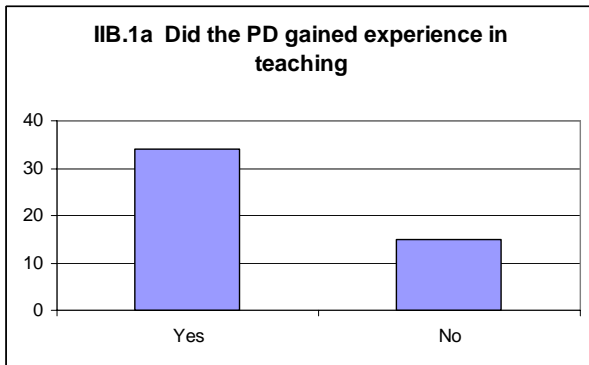
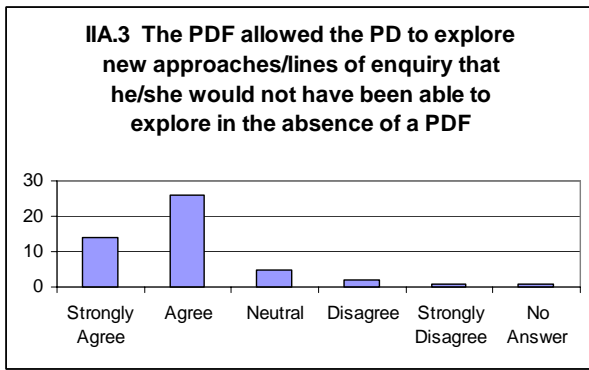
Questionnaire Results



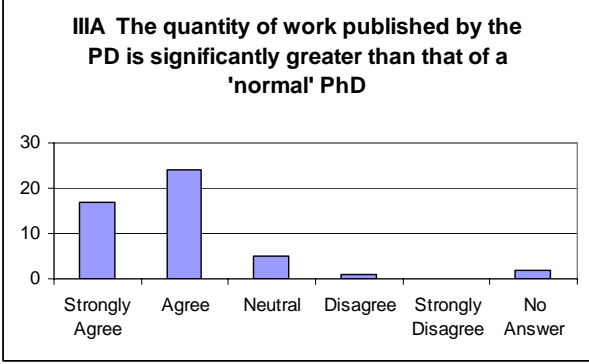
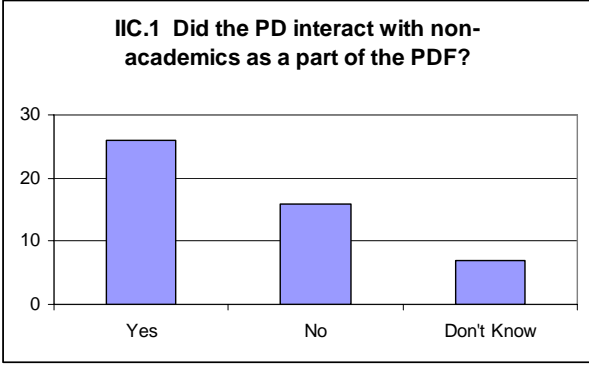
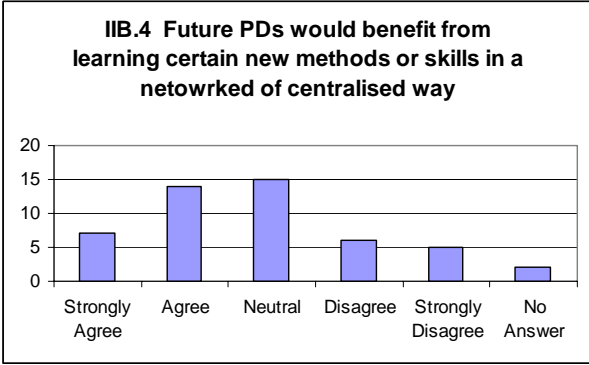
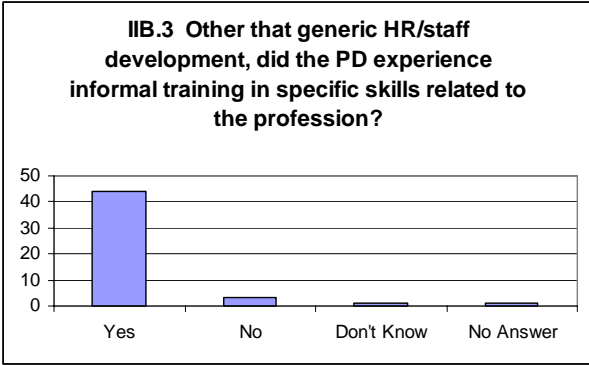
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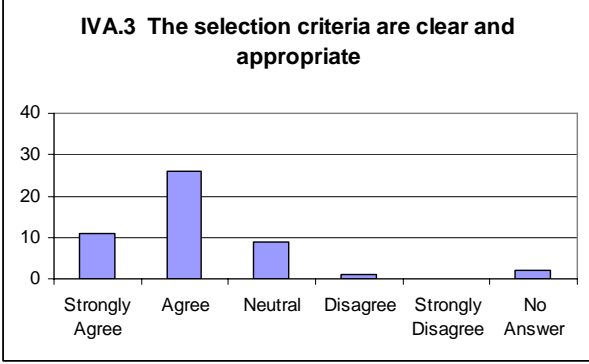
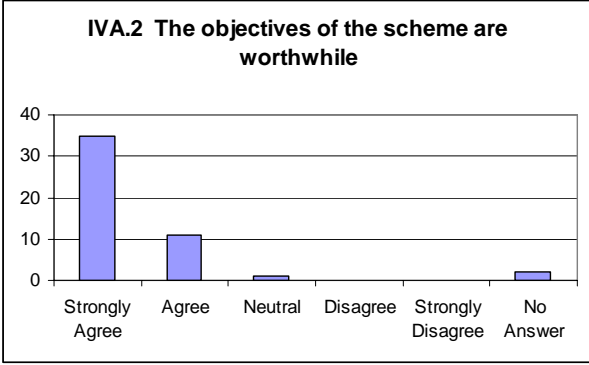
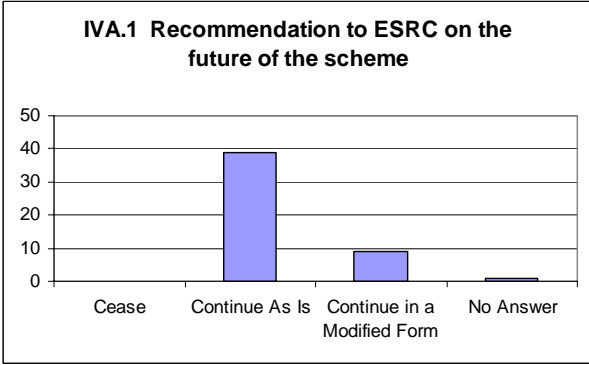
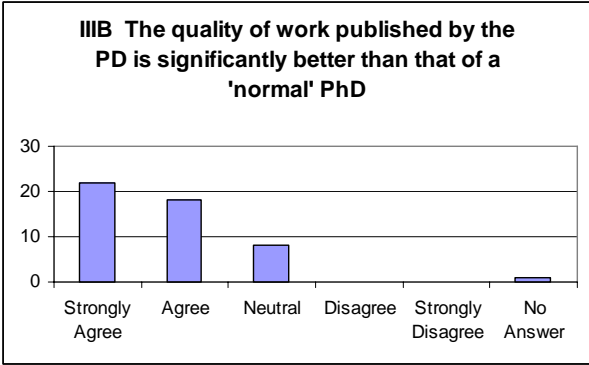
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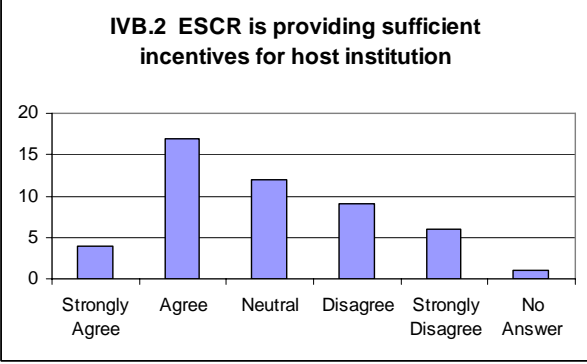
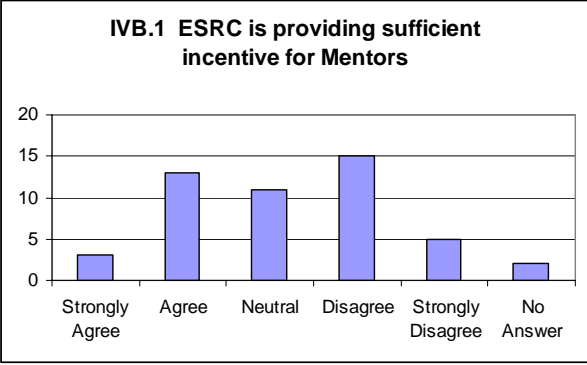
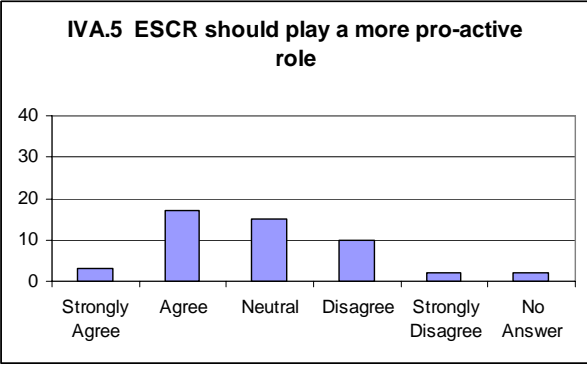
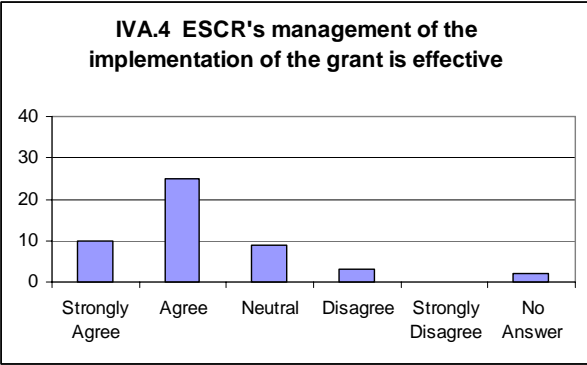
Questionnaire Results



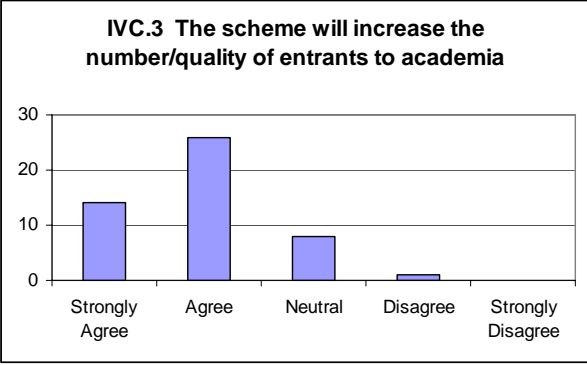
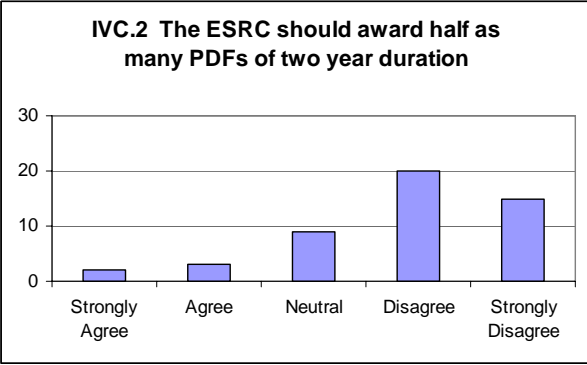
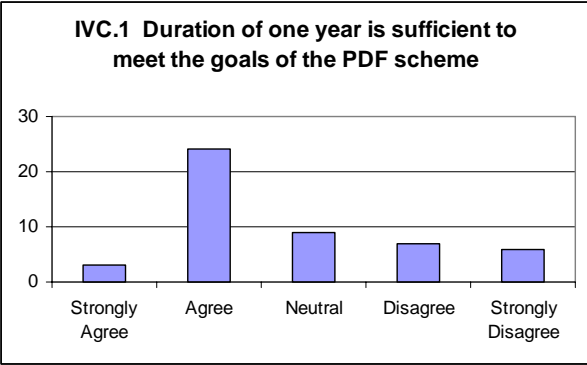
Questionnaire Results



Questionnaire Results



Questionnaire Results



Focus Group Agenda & Input

ANNEX E

FOCUS GROUP AGENDA AND INPUT

Focus Group Agenda & Input

Focus Group Former ESRC Postdoctoral Fellows 15 June 2004 Edinburgh

AGENDA

Introductions

Overview, Objectives and Format

Discussion: Career Paths

Discussion: Skills

Discussion: Publications

Discussion: Recommendations to ESRC

Visionary Strategies & General Messages to ESRC

Fine-tuning of Fellowship Scheme

Roles of Mentors & Host Institutions

Significant Experiences

Lessons learned: Good practice

Insights into duration of Fellowship

Warnings

Focus Group Agenda & Input

Input to CORE QUESTIONS

I. CAPACITY

Did the PDF make a difference in the post secured, job prospects or career path generally? If so, how?

Has the PDF **added any value** to perceived “employability”? If so, what?

Added Value to Employability

- There exists a high regard for ESRC and its rigorous evaluation process
- Fellowships are known by employers to be competitive; hence Fellows are “pre-selected” for employment; this selection process helps in applications for posts
- Fellowship provides time for reflection, thinking about where one is going and helping a Fellow to develop a portfolio
- Fellowship provides an additional year of professional experience

Did the PDF make any difference to a) **career choice** and/or b) **sense of self** as a competent member of a professional community? If so, what?

Career choice

- The Fellowship time probably makes choice of careers more clear-cut. It provides a wider perspective of what the job of being an academic is really going to be like (e.g., it will include teaching, refereeing).
- Fellows seem to really want to be an academic.

Sense of self

- ESRC’s treatment of Fellows at conference as “the future of academia” really boosted confidence and a sense of oneself as an important member of the academic community of social sciences.

Are PDs **likely to stay in academics** in this area? Why or why not?

Career path in academics

- A key role of the Fellowship is giving people the sense that they did not have to take the first job that came along. If people grab at any job and end up with the wrong position, they are more likely to leave academia. If, however, they can wait for the right opportunities, until they get a job that is satisfying, and right for them --- then they are more likely not only to stay in academia but to do well.
- If someone knows he or she has a Fellowship, they can focus on finishing a quality PhD in a timely manner, rather than being distracted by a job hunt.
- Keeping the programme primarily for people within a few years of finishing PhDs is positive regarding careers.

Focus Group Agenda & Input

What do you see as the perceived *advantages/disadvantages of mobility*, PhDs moving to a different location from PhD study?

Mobility

- This depends very much on individuals' circumstances.
- In academic careers, people are starting their professional life some 10 years later than others, so they may be embedded in their lives.
- Changing institutions between the PhD and the PD does not always make sense. Much depends on the nature of the individual's relationship with the Supervisor/Mentor and also on the level of expertise available. If someone gets their PhD from the top centre in their field, there is little point in moving away for the sake of doing so.
- Moving is very disruptive, especially for a one year fellowship.
- Even people who do not move institutions for a PDF could well move later.
- Moving can benefit the recipient lab/group with new skills; but this scheme should not force moves.
- Part of the benefit of the PDF is that it is a cushion between the PhD and a job. The choice should be left to the individual.

- To address the potential problem of an unchanging perception of a PD who stays on at the institution that awarded the PhD, ESRC could provide annual guidance to Heads of Department and to Mentors regarding the new status of the individual as "staff" and yet as research-funded staff who should not be exploited for heavy teaching duties. (An ESRC-imposed cap on teaching time is a good idea.) This would generally be helpful as postdoctoral fellows are a relatively new concept in the social sciences. The ESRC could explain the reasoning behind creating this "mezzanine" level of position and behind the way it expects Fellows to be treated.

II. SKILLS

Did the PDF make a difference in PhDs' development of new approaches, methods and skills? What has been the role of advanced training? Engagement with non-academics?

Skills

- There can be too much emphasis on little bits of skills rather than helping prospective academics look at the whole job.
- How can people learn what the job will actually be like? Partly, people need time to do things. Gaining experience of a wide range of things that an academic does can be more important than specific skills.
- People can feel "forced" to do things related to skill-building all at the beginning.
- ESRC could perhaps build in support for ongoing training so that when and as an individual realises what s/he needs, ESRC can provide funding for the learning experience identified to meet that person's specific needs (e.g. Essex quantitative course, at whatever time during the Fellowship makes sense).
- It is particularly important that Fellows be able to request more training as different University settings will or will not provide what is needed.

Focus Group Agenda & Input

- Perhaps ESRC could facilitate a willingness of Fellows to go to other institutions to take an identified skills course or work for a month or so with an individual possessing key skills.
- A problem with generic courses is that Fellows are so varied.

Balance of Teaching responsibilities

- There is a trade-off between teaching and research.
- Fellows should not be forced to do teaching or administration. However, on a voluntary basis, some could augment their cvs by doing so.
- ESRC could provide guidance for Fellows, Heads of Departments and Mentors as to in what ways taking on a (capped) level of teaching could be an opportunity but that there is NO obligation to do teaching. If it is done, it should be done completely for the benefit of the Fellow's career/cv.

Is there a **central role in training** for ESRC (or some other body)?

ESRC Conference, etc.

- Sessions on "how to get published" could be helpful.
- Assistance with the learning process involved in the development of the craft of writing good articles.
- Perhaps have some speakers talk about what they as referees would look for in manuscripts.
- Sessions on getting funding (including EU) as this is critical to career advancement.
- The conference is best held at the beginning of a Fellowship year.
- Another day could be added to promote a social element, in which Fellows can share experiences, and be put in touch with others in the same geographic region or intellectual area.
- It's important not to pitch content at PhD level.
- The conference added to confidence and a sense of oneself – by reinforcing the message that the Fellows are the future of academia.

Does/would interaction with non-academics during a PDF have an impact on either a) **career choices** or b) the **way research and knowledge transfer** will be conducted in the future?

Interaction with non-academics

- One reason for interacting with non-academics is that this can be tactical with regard to future grant applications where this can be a competitive advantage.
- This can be done independently, but it is helpful if the Mentor facilitates the Fellow's networking with non-academics.
- Interaction with non-academics should not be forced; it depends on work, topic, who might be interested, etc.
- ESRC could help increase interest in interacting with non-academics by inviting Fellows to its own events/conferences/symposia in relevant fields, at which Fellows could hear/meet individuals from outside academia.
- At the annual conference, the ESRC-sponsored media session and then the subsequent training session were very helpful. ESRC could encourage more media awareness/training.

Focus Group Agenda & Input

III. PUBLICATIONS

To what extent (if any) has the PDF affected publication records? Do PDFs have significantly more or better quality publications than “normal” PhDs?

- The PDG was invaluable; it provided time to get the PhD work published. It made a big difference. Fellows might otherwise be able to do writing in a spread-out fashion, but the PDF allows a real momentum to build.
- ESRC could provide strategic guidance at the beginning of the PDF as to how to strategically choose/prioritise publications to come from the work.
- The application form should not prohibit PDs from doing new research. Some only have the tail end of a PhD to finish off and need to go on to something new. The transition to designing/formulating new, post-PhD research is important. Everyone will have a different balance of publishing “old” work and formulating new.
- The ESRC could discuss the process of transitioning to new work, at a beginning of the year conference.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS TO ESRC

How should ESRC proceed?

What would YOU do to increase the number of high quality people entering and staying in academic economic and social sciences?

- This scheme is definitely going in the right direction.
- Although it is getting a bit better, the PhD stipends are low. Also the PDF funding, while beginning to be a “normal” salary, still does not provide benefits such as the pension that others are accruing. Could ESRC provide some pension investment with the stipend?

Would you recommend that the ESRC _____ **cease** supporting the Scheme **or** _____ **continue** it in some form?

- Continue!
- It is fantastic and has made a real difference.
- Generally, reactions are very positive. This is a good step.

Do you think that, over time, the ESRC Postdoctoral Fellowship Scheme *has the potential to increase significantly the number and quality of entrants to academia?*

- There are a finite number of lectureships. The PDF gives people time to work out where they are going. The time to do research benefits the Fellows but it also benefits the Universities, which get people with more experience. This all helps lead to more quality people getting and staying in the right job, which will have a positive knock-on effect on the next generation of academics.

Focus Group Agenda & Input

If the scheme should be continued, would you recommend any specific **modifications** of the scheme (to achieve better results in influencing career choice toward an academic career, facilitating/accelerating travel along an academic career path, enhancing base of useful/attractive skills, capabilities, attributes) in:

- a) *orientation/objectives* of the scheme
- b) *selection* criteria
 - The emphasis should be on what the prospective Fellows would do with the year, not on judging their PhD.
- c) *implementation*
 - The application process was long and repetitive, encouraging waffle-y answers. (The British Academy form is only 2-3 pages long!)
 - Generally, the actual specific administration of this scheme was efficient and appropriately light touch. Things went smoothly.
 - ESRC should identify the right contact person --- probably the Head of Department—so that letters do not go astray as they tend to do if addressed “randomly” to some official (or title) like a Finance Director.
- d) *follow-up?*
 - ESRC could give feedback to the end-of-award Report, constructive feedback as to how to take it forward. This job could be farmed out to professors with instructions that comments are to be directed toward career development of the PDs. ESRC might develop a “stable” of wise, helpful individuals to do this sort of “distance mentoring” task.

Lessons Learned: Good practice and issues

Could a **2-year PDF** make a significant difference? How? What if this meant a smaller number of PDFs? Could/should a second year be different in some way? (e.g. interdisciplinarity?)

- The job hunt can seriously intervene within the first year; needing to find a job makes this an unsettling time. Two years could allow a PD to settle in to their work in the first year.
- Even if, as one would expect, people dropped out for good jobs in the second year, this would be a positive thing!
- If the award were for two years, it would be reasonable to differentiate the second year, e.g. encourage Fellows to develop a design/plan for their next phase of research – or to expect, over the two years, that Fellows would both develop publications from their PhD and develop strategies for new research. If the award were for two years, different criteria might be developed.
- Ideally, the scheme would provide two year awards AND provide just as many! Some would see the two-year span as so helpful to individuals that it should be introduced, but others would put more weight on the provision of opportunities to a greater number of individuals, given that “picking winners” is

Focus Group Agenda & Input

not by any means an exact science. With a small number of awards, good people could be missed.

What would you alert future PDs about, in terms of obstacles, **issues**, problems or distractions?

How can PDs **take the best advantage of the PDF opportunity** (e.g., to do something that would not otherwise have been done)?

Would you like to share any elements of **good practice**?

In conducting PDF?

- Balance helping your own career with contributing to the institution, while not getting taken advantage of.
- Find the right balance of Research with a Teaching commitment depending on the needs of your own cv. If a Fellow has no teaching in their PhD experience portfolio, he/she should do some during the Fellowship. Even that should be a quality teaching experience (e.g. seminars) not at mass quantity teaching experience. Don't offer a whole course!
- Build up experience in all four areas of an academic's job: teaching, research, administration and supervising.
- Take the time to learn your craft, going even beyond teaching and research to get experience in seminars, refereeing, etc. (However, don't be over ambitious with the "extra things" such as organising seminars.)
- Do get involved in refereeing (although not too much) as it not only puts you in touch with work long before it is published, but also teaches you about constructing good articles.
- Think strategically about where to publish.
- Take the time to read --- reflect and learn.
- Remember that you can negotiate with ESRC to change somewhat from your original plan if you have a good reason; you can probably arrange for a small transfer of money across line items. (Of course, your home institution's own finance office may be the real barrier!)
- Take guidance regarding institutional bureaucracy so as not to divert your (valuable) time.
- Get out and about; use the budget for conferences to: a) get yourself visible/known; b) learn about new ideas; and c) network. Recognise that all three of these activities interlink and help you move toward getting a good job. Try to get a clear (strategic) picture of the whole. "The threads do come together!"

In Mentoring?

- Be clear about what your relationship with your Mentor will be like, what is expected from you and from your Mentor.
- ESRC could provide general guidance to Fellows, Mentors and Heads of Departments as to the Mentor's role.

In host institution role?

- Can there be something in this for host departments?

In Generating enthusiasm and willingness to explore new ideas (take risks)?

Focus Group Agenda & Input

- ESRC should encourage (or at least not discourage) development of designs for new research, new phases, during the Fellowship year (or two years if the scheme were lengthened).

In ESRC functions?

- The annual conference should include facilitation of networking and communication among Fellows. This approach could be expanded by creating a website, where Fellows could post notes through the year.
- At the conference, the emphasis on Fellows as “special” was a motivating feel-good factor – that should be continued.

Core Questions – Interview Template

ANNEX F

CORE QUESTIONS – INTERVIEW TEMPLATE

Core Questions – Interview Template

Core Questions (ALL)

I. CAPACITY

Did the PDF make a difference in the post secured, job prospects or career path generally? If so, how?

IA. Setting the Scene: Employment

Has employment been secured?

Academic Permanent? Academic Temporary?
Temporary Teaching? Temporary research? Other?
Prestigious award?
Research funding? (In-hand? Application pending?)
Were other options offered and turned down? (at point of PDF uptake and/or at point of finishing PDF?)
Non-academic? (If so, what motivations for accepting it? Would it have been accepted in competition with an academic offer?)
None?

Is the PD likely to stay in academics?

IB. Career Path Implications

Did the PDF make a difference in the PD's career path?

IB1. Would the PD have pursued an academic career even **without the PDF**?

IB.2 Is it likely that the current post (if any) would have been secured even **without the PDF**?

IB.3 Has the PDF **added any value** to the PD's perceived "employability"? If so, what?

IB.4 Did PDF make any difference to a) PD's **career choice** and/or b) **sense of self** as a competent member of a professional community? If so, what?

IC. Priority Areas

Has capacity in priority areas been boosted?

IC.1 Was the PDF in a **priority area**?

IC.2 If so, **what?** (business & management, economics, area studies, quantitative skills, interdisciplinarity....)

IC.3 Would the PD have explored further academic involvement in this area **without the PDF**?

IC.4 Is the PD **likely to stay in academics** in this area? Why or why not?

I.D. Non-UK PDs

Has the PD found that the PDF has increased or decreased inclination or ability to stay in an academic research career path in the UK?

Core Questions – Interview Template

ID.1 Is the PD from ***outwith the UK***?

ID.2 Has the PDF made any discernable difference in ***career options/path***? If so, how?

ID.3 If not currently in post in the UK, is there an ***intent to try to return*** to the UK? Perceived chances?

ID.4 If not currently in post in the UK, is the PD involved in ***ongoing networks*** with UK colleagues?

IE. Mobility

Is mobility an important parameter?

IE.1 Did the PD attain a PhD at the ***same institution***? Same mentor?

IE.2 What do you see as the perceived ***advantages/disadvantages of mobility***, PDs moving to a different location from PhD study?

IE.3 Do you have ***“distance” criteria*** as to posts that you would take either now or in future?

II. SKILLS

Did the PDF make a difference in PDs’ development of new approaches, methods and skills? What has been the role of advanced training? Engagement with non-academics?

IIA. Changes and career implications

IIA.1 ***What has changed*** from the PhD work in the way the PD conducts research? (Can you identify any specific methods or skills that you have added to your repertoire as a result of the postdoctoral fellowship? Have you explored any new approaches?)

IIA.2 Do you think that any newly acquired approaches, methods or skills will a) influence your ***research capacity***, direction or quality in the future and/or b) influence your ***employability*** in the future? How?

IIB. Training

IIB.1 Would you recommend any particular training experiences as a ***model*** for PDs or indeed lifelong academic development? Any formal/informal training specific to profession? (Non-HR/staff development) Teaching expertise?

IIB.2 Is there a ***central role in training*** for ESRC (or some other body)?

IIC. Engagement with non-academics

IIC.1 Have you interacted with any non-academics? If so, has this had an impact on either a) your ***career choices*** or b) the ***way you will conduct your research and knowledge transfer*** in the future?

Core Questions – Interview Template

IIC.2 Would you have liked *more interaction* with non-academics? What would have helped to make this possible within a PDF?

III. PUBLICATIONS

To what extent (if any) has the PDF affected publication record? Do PDFs have significantly more or better quality publications than “normal” PhDs?

IIIA. Details

Have there been any *publications* from the PDF that have been prepared, submitted or published since the end-of-award report? (Detail, journal etc. to be emailed)

IIIB. Quantity

Has the *quantity* of the work conducted/prepared for publishing/published been affected by the PDF? If so, how?

IIIC. Quality

Has the *quality* of the work been affected by the PDF? If so, how?

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS TO ESRC

How should ESRC proceed?

IVA. Future of scheme

IVA.1 *What would YOU do* to increase the number of high quality people entering and staying in academic economic and social sciences?

IVA.2 Would you recommend that the ESRC *cease* supporting the Scheme *or continue* it in some form?

IVA.3 If the scheme should be continued, would you recommend any specific *modifications* of the scheme (to achieve better results in influencing career choice toward an academic career, facilitating/accelerating travel along an academic career path, enhancing base of useful/attractive skills, capabilities, attributes) in:

- a) *orientation/objectives* of the scheme
- b) *selection criteria*
- c) *implementation* (e.g., duration of grant?)
- d) *follow-up?*
- e) *other?*

IVA.4 Do you think that, over time, the ESRC Postdoctoral Fellowship Scheme *has the potential to increase significantly the number and quality of entrants to academia?*

IVB. Contributing Factors

IVB.1 In terms of the role(s) played by the **Mentor** in the professional development of the PD, were there any positive/negative surprises? What incentives are there/could

Core Questions – Interview Template

there be for a Mentor? Would you recommend a system other than the Mentor-centred one?

IVB.2 In terms of the role(s) played by the **Host Institution** in the professional development of the PD, were there any positive/negative surprises? What incentives are there/could there be for an institution to host a PDF?

IVB.3 To what extent were any of the following expedited by the PDF in a way that would make a significant difference to professionalisation and/or career options?
networks of colleagues? (At the host institution? In the UK? Internationally?)
teaching, running a workshop or other experiences beyond research?
Other factors?

IVC. Lessons Learned: Good practice and issues

IVC.1 What is the most important thing the PDF allowed the PD to do **that would not otherwise have been done?** (How can the best advantage be taken of the PDF opportunity?)

IVC.2 Could a **2-year PDF** make a significant difference? How? What if this meant a smaller number of PDFs? Could/should a second year be different in some way? (e.g. interdisciplinarity?)

IVC.3 What would you alert future PDs about, in terms of obstacles, **issues**, problems or distractions?

IVC.4 Would you like to share any elements of **good practice?**

In conducting PDF?

In Mentoring?

In host institution role?

In training and skills development?

In Generating enthusiasm and willingness to explore new ideas (take risks)? In

ESRC functions?

Other?

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ANNEX G

INTERGRATED RESULTS OF INTERVIEWS

Integrated Results of Interviews

ESRC Postdoctoral Fellowship Scheme Evaluation Information and Insights from Interviews

The following paper is the result of integrated analysis across 45 interviews, each of which covered all or most of the points listed in the Interview Template. Fellows, Mentors and Heads of Departments were generous with their time and insights, generating a rich reservoir of understanding and points for ESRC and others to consider. Within the limits of inevitable subjectivity, the attempt was made not to intrude the Evaluator's views, but rather to treat comments as "data". Notes taken during telephone interviews were transcribed, compiled by question and analysed for clusters or patterns as well as notable points. (Comments in italics, while not exact quotes, reflect particularly closely language used by an interviewee.)

CAPACITY

Employment and Likelihood of staying in academics

Summary of inputs from Mentors & Department Heads

Mentors were indeed extremely useful sources of information as to Fellows' location and positions attained. Most of those responding thought the likelihood of the Fellows remaining in academics was very high. A few left academia for quite challenging positions in government or national/international organisations; this appears to have been more of positive interest than the result of disappointment in academic pathways.

Summary of Inputs from Fellows

Of the 21 Fellows interviewed, 90% had secured academic positions. Just over half had secured permanent posts and two individuals had chosen quite senior non-academic positions. All seventeen answering the likelihood question expect or hope to continue in academics, although one is finding contract research wearing and may apply for teaching posts and another is applying for a civil service post as well as academic posts.

Career Path Implications

Summary of inputs from Mentors & Department Heads

Most mentors and department heads responding (80%) felt that their Fellows would have probably (or definitely) pursued, or tried to pursue, an academic career even without the Fellowship. However, the Fellowship might well have made a difference in accelerating a trajectory or enhancing success. About a fifth of the responses were less confident that their Fellows would have remained in academia without the PDF. When asked if the current post would have been secured even without the PDF, only three answered no, but nearly all those who did not regard this as an

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unanswerably speculative question believed it likely that, while the post might well have been secured anyway, the PDF had made some contribution.

In fact when asked if the PDF had added any value to the Fellow's employability, all 24 mentors and department heads who responded agreed. Views of Department Heads were particularly useful in this regard, as they are in the position of weighing candidates for positions. Fellows have two main advantages: 1) they have been through ESRC vetting and are known therefore to be competitive and 2) with the year of the fellowship, they are able to write, to publish, to demonstrate what they are capable of so that prospective employers view them as attractive and less risky than other candidates who have accomplished less. The point was made that the PDF enhanced employability for good quality positions that were more likely to retain bright people in academics than would positions in which they were too bogged down to do research.

Summary of Inputs from Fellows

At least three Fellows would quite probably have left academia without the PDF. One noted that the PDF was *crucial* in keeping him *on the career path*, keeping him *from slipping through the net*. Another had been a consultant and had offers to continue; she felt the Fellowship *did help to keep her on an academic career path to see if it would fit* with her and she found it did fit. At least five other Fellows were actively considering non-academic careers. For instance, one was offered a researcher post with the Home Office, but the Fellowship helped him decide to stay in academia. Several interviewees found that it was hard to answer this question, or that they would have tried to stay in academia but might not have been able to. Eight were quite confident that even without the PDF, they would have stayed in academia. So, it is probably safe to say that the PDF kept at least 15% of these individuals in academia and may have actively contributed at some level to the retention of up to 60%.

Regarding the likelihood of their current post having been secured even without the PDF, nearly half of those responding were sure that the PDF helped to some extent, but might not have been the absolutely critical factor. Two academics and perhaps one interviewee in a senior non-academic post, however, did view the PDF as likely to have made a critical difference for their current posts. Several thought they would have secured some post, but not necessarily one of the same quality. Only one expressed certainty that the post would have been obtained without the PDF; several others either just did not know.

All agreed that the PDF had added value to their perceived "employability". Half of the Fellows explicitly agreed that the PDF had enhanced their employability *per se*. The rest spoke more in terms of value conferred by specific career-enhancing steps they had been able to take (such as writing quality publications) or of the "badge" conferred by winning a competitive ESRC fellowship.

When asked if the PDF made a difference to their career choice or sense of self as a competent member of a professional community, at least half the Fellows mentioned specifically the increased sense of self-confidence they had gained, such that they presented themselves more positively and believed in their own self-worth within the

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professional community. This was a particularly important gain for some, as in the case of someone who, because she had worked outside of academia, had been treated as “less pure” than other PhDs by her supervisor, so the fact that ESRC regarded her as of good quality gave her confidence a real boost. In another case, a Fellow had had children during longer-than-usual postgraduate work combined with contract research work; so the PDF not only provided much needed time to work on publications, it also developed her confidence to apply for a permanent position (which she has obtained). Unfortunately, two Fellows observed that they were not treated in any special way or as full members of staff, so their professional self-confidence was *not* enhanced.

Somewhat more than a quarter of the Fellows made the point that their career choice had not been affected, although three Fellows said that their career choice had been affected (one, to stay in academic; another, to broaden into interdisciplinary work, and another to turn down a job in US academics). Several others observed that their career choice had been reinforced by the PDF.

Priority areas

By and large, Mentors and Department Heads were not particularly aware of priority area labelling of Fellows.

Fellows were a bit more aware of their status, though some guessed incorrectly as their fields related to priority areas but they may or may not have been labelled Priority Area by ESRC. Ten of the Fellows interviewed were labelled Priority Area by ESRC: 4 Area Studies; 2 Economics; 3 Management and Business Studies; 1 Quantitative Research and 1 who crossed over Priority Areas. All expect to stay in academics and remain basically within their area, although it was noted that there may be a trend away from Area Studies as such.

Non-UK Fellows

Of the ten non-UK fellows discussed by mentors and department heads interviewed, four are within the UK system and two are trying to be. Three have left the UK but are active in UK networks, while one who has left is not. Some had also received British PhDs.

Six of the Fellows interviewed are originally from outside the UK, but all have been in the UK for a long time, with five having gained their PhDs in the UK. Four of the five who are in the UK system would have remained in the UK even without the PDF, but the fifth rejected an academic job offer from the US due to the Fellowship. One is working outside the UK, but stays in touch with a UK network.

Mobility

Summary of inputs from Mentors & Department Heads

Of the Fellows discussed by mentors and department heads in response to this question, about 60% continued at the same institution, but with a Mentor who had not been their supervisor, the others were about evenly split between those who

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continued at the same institution with their former supervisor as Mentor and those who changed institutions for their fellowship.

Advantages of mobility (changing institutions between postgraduate and postdoctoral work) were seen by mentors and department heads as including: getting exposure to fresh perspectives, making new contacts and networks, picking up diverse “tacit knowledge”, leaving a place where the PhD student might have “sucked the staff dry” to find new colleagues who will have a different way of viewing or evaluating one’s work.

Disadvantages of mobility seem to fall into two clusters: issues pertaining primarily to the Fellow and to the PhD granting institution. In the first case, many acknowledge the impracticality of expecting someone, quite probably with a family, to move for a one year stint as a career staging point only (unlike a three year fellowship, when a move would make sense). This can be disruptive not only personally but intellectually, particularly given that the objective of the scheme is for Fellows to make the most of continuity in the sense of writing up PhD research. One interviewee suggests that keeping the individual at the same institution *strategically shortens* the time they take to develop professionally.

It was recognised by many that the advantage/disadvantage equation will fall out differently for different individuals in different disciplines. As just one example of this variability, it may be more beneficial for someone to change institutions if there are many good departments in their field; if on the other hand they are already located in one of only two or three specialised centres of excellence in the UK, they might be smart to stay put. It may be easier for people to change institutions in some geographic areas more than others.

A frequently made point was that, particularly in areas of high demand, universities find they can benefit from honing the skills of one of their own PhDs through the PDF until, perhaps, employing them as a staff member. This allows the university to keep its most able students, especially if they work in areas targeted by the university. This may also have implications for capturing the value of an individual for the RAE.

Several suggestions were made to reap advantages of mobility in the face of these issues. Switching away from a supervisor to a new Mentor, while not always appropriate, can provide fresh perspectives and perhaps new networks, for example. The Mentor might even be in another department (as happens with Nuffield fellowships). One Fellow working with the former supervisor as Mentor actually developed a co-advisor in another country, along with attending international conferences, this opened up both perspectives and networks. Another Fellow approached the person who would become her Mentor long before the PDF and became involved in networks at that institution, so could progress readily once the PDF began.

Summary of Inputs from Fellows

Mobility was not high; only three of the twenty-one Fellows interviewed changed institution for their postdoctoral work. Fellows frequently cited ESRC’s requirement as the reason they had changed to a new person as Mentor rather than staying with

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their PhD supervisor. Only three did not have a different Mentor, and two of these had reverted back to their Supervisor only after the new Mentor became ill or left the institution.

Given their predominant collective experience of not moving, Fellows were able (hypothetically) to cite potential advantages of changing institutions between the PhD and the PDF. These included: exposure to a different cohort of academics, ideas, directions of research, challenges and different ways in which departments operate. Furthermore, it can be an opportunity to make new contacts and extend one's research network. One Fellow who did move had been very happy at the PhD institution but felt it had nothing new to offer, so moved in order to *build new contacts and partnerships and do things a bit differently*, being exposed to new approaches by the Mentor. Another type of advantage lies in the opportunity for a Fellow to create a new identity in his or her new status, not to remain as a student in the eyes of the staff, *embedded in the same relationships (when) it is hard for people to see you in your own right*. As another observed, *some time you have to leave home for people to recognise who or what you are*. In a similar vein, another recommended that a Fellow *at least change departments to at least start something fresh, so you are coming in on your own terms, with a sense of yourself as a confident academic in your own right*. It was noted that, if a Fellow stays at the same institution, the institution could extract too much non-research work from them by playing upon their hopes of staying and obtaining a permanent job.

However, not surprisingly, most Fellows by far saw more advantage in staying at the PhD granting institution. One of the largest disadvantages to moving that they identified lies in the disruption to personal life. Many Fellows will be caught up with partners, houses or other "complicating factors" that make moving an option fraught with problems. One Fellow sent a message to ESRC: *at the ESRC conference, a big deal was made about how moving was healthy and how people should move. They seemed to ignore the living circumstances of a lot of people. This seemed to be based upon an old-fashioned patriarchal household model where people just moved from job to job.*" Similarly, another Fellow noted that expecting people to move between the PhD and the postdoc *may be going back to a "young male under 30" view of who postdocs are*.

Another disadvantage to moving that was identified frequently lies in the disruption to continuity of research and publication. A time period of at least two to three months was often cited for settling in, which would seriously eat into a twelve month fellowship. Furthermore, the relationship with the Mentor would be risky. Particularly since the Fellows are expected to disseminate what they have done in their postgraduate work, many felt that staying at the same institution was only sensible. *You can stay put and get on with writing papers with the people you know*. Several pointed out that a Fellow would be foolish to leave a centre of excellence in their field simply to fulfil a moving requirement.

A strong message was that individuals need to be able to decide for themselves if a move will be more advantageous than disadvantageous. Several suggestions were put forward for gaining some of the advantages of moving without having to change institutions. One Fellow, for instance, put real effort into developing her own contacts and individual reputation internationally. For some,

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changing Mentors or even departments was healthy, but this will be different for different individuals.

I. PUBLICATIONS

Quantity

Summary of inputs from Mentors & Department Heads

More than 85% of those responding saw the PDF as having affected the quantity of work prepared for publishing or published. Many commented on the availability of time without other responsibilities such as teaching having made this possible. The rate at which an individual Fellow could produce publications was often increased during the Fellowship period. In some instances, the Fellow was able to explore a new area or facet sufficiently to produce a paper that might not otherwise have been completed, or indeed to transform a thesis into a book with a broader base. Of course, publication lag times can occur, whether due to field (e.g. the several year lag time for economics articles) or content. One Fellow, for example, worked with the Mentor to develop a new measurement tool, now that that has been published, other papers using it will be accepted to high quality journals.

Summary of Inputs from Fellows

Three quarters of the Fellows felt that the the PDF increased the quantity of the work prepared for publishing or published. The only four who did not feel the quantity had increased all felt that the quality of their work had benefited from the PDF. Fellows recognised the importance of the time provided, one noting that he *would never be at the stage he is without having had the Fellowship*. Either by observing others or through their own experiences since the PDF, they appreciate that their Fellowship was allowed them to avoid the *monstrous* challenge of trying to produce a number of publications while doing other things. Still, several expressed the wish that they had had even more time to accomplish more.

Quality

Summary of inputs from Mentors & Department Heads

With only one interviewee actively denying that the quality improved, and several others making different sorts of comments, 70% of responses were in the affirmative, that the PDF enhanced the quality of publications. Many noted that their Fellows were already producing quite good quality, but that the extra time and opportunity for review, feedback and redrafting helped improve the work. Indeed, one Mentor deliberately decreased the number of papers that the Fellow would normally have produced and worked with him to focus on a few good articles for top quality journals. As another said, an important aspect of the fellowship is to give the Fellows *time to realise how important the type and quality of publications they generate will be to their future*. . As an example, one described the impact: *the quality of the work is definitely affected; it is more mature, and it shows, and the breadth of the perspective shows. If the Fellow had not had the fellowship he would have struggled*

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to get the work out at the right quality. The indicator of quality that many use is that of the level of quality of the journals in which publications appeared; this was often seen to be higher as a result of the PDF

Summary of Inputs from Fellows

All but one of the Fellows felt the PDF had allowed them to improve the quality of their publications. The gift of time was invaluable, allowing individuals to think, read, write and rewrite, draw out broader implications of their work, perhaps even develop skills or augment data. A strikingly recurrent theme was that of strategically targeting better quality, top journals for publications. At least two Fellows were deliberately held back by their Mentors in terms of quantity, so that they could focus on quality. One appreciated the *help being given with strategy (as) it was really important to aim higher (and do fewer papers) at really top line journals ... to get a top level job.* In very much the same spirit, another noted that the PDF provided *the luxury to develop an article, refine it...Rather than sending it out quickly to any journal you can take a few more weeks and send it to a top journal. (The Fellowship) lets you aim at a higher standard of journal.* The opportunity to discuss work at conferences and get feedback was also seen as contributing to the quality of publications.

II. SKILLS

Changes and implications

Summary of inputs from Mentors & Department Heads

When asked about changes in the way the Fellow conducted research, especially in terms of new approaches, methods or skills, many Mentors and Department Heads viewed change as only incremental, given the PhD skills base already possessed by the Fellows. Certainly, some individuals sought out courses or learning experiences in particular quantitative or qualitative research methods. However, many improved key abilities such as writing articles, preparing proposals or presenting at conferences. Change in approach was important for quite a few Fellows, in particular a broadening and deepening of their understanding, with some deliberately incorporating perspectives from another discipline or from practitioners. Informal “training” often occurred through mechanisms such as presentation of work leading to feedback at seminars and participation in sub-discipline workshop groups or reading and draft critiquing groups.

When asked if any newly acquired approaches, methods or skills influenced either the Fellow’s research capacity or employability, Mentors and Department Heads were quite positive. Interestingly, while some were just generally positive, nearly half specifically noted an impact on employability. For most of these, the enhancement singled out had to do with writing, presenting work, broadening interests or connecting research interests to application.

Summary of Inputs from Fellows

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Fellows' responses fell into three categories of approximately equal numbers. One category emphasised that skills already possessed may have been extended incrementally during the PDF, but were not actually "new." Another category of responses cited particular technical skills (such as quantitative methodologies) or new approaches, such as coming up with *methodologically innovative ways* of interpreting materials. The remaining set of responses articulated changes occurring in Fellows' "professionalisation" such as: writing; confidence in public speaking; networking; dealing with the media; working with policymakers and other non-academics; drawing out and communicating implications of research; learning how to get published; communicating with publishers; understanding the nature of an academic position; and learning about project management. (Teaching certification was mentioned by Fellows in different categories.)

Of those Fellows responding, nearly three-quarters felt that their research capacity, direction or quality has been affected by approaches, methods or skills acquired or enhanced during the PDF. Several of these (a quarter of all those responding) also saw a connection between the newly acquired capabilities and enhanced employability.

Training

Summary of inputs from Mentors & Department Heads

The individuality of Fellows, underscoring the necessity for case by case pathways through the PDF, was frequently emphasised. In fact, a recurring theme was that Fellows had already had extensive skills training during their postgraduate years. Training in this sense was not seen as necessarily a part of the Fellowship. One interviewee observed for example that *when you are a real researcher, you have to find out what questions you want to ask and then you may have to learn new things but you do it in that context*. Another noted that *the more formal requirements you impose, the less of this precious luxury of time the Fellow will actually have*.

Nonetheless, institutional teacher training courses were mentioned often, given the importance of teaching ability to academic careers. As one interviewee pointed out, universities will look for a mix of capabilities in hiring lecturers: *experience in conducting a research project and starting another one; publications; and evidence that a person can manage teaching, research and administration, balancing them as needed in an academia*. Even so, most agree that teaching experience should be only a light load.

Much of the other "training" mentioned was informal. *We know what it takes for someone to become a researcher, the infrastructure is there at the university, we don't see it as training but as part of a complete experience*. Elements of a dynamic research environment, such as participation in seminars or having one's writing reviewed, sharing ideas about a draft with a team, working within a research team or participating in internal conferences for postgraduates as a more senior colleague are therefore important. It was suggested that ESRC might think about this sort of professionalisation training (not just methods training). One institution holds informal workshops where people get academic feedback on their writing, sometimes from people in other disciplines. Presentation, communication, project management skills

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are seen as important in this light. NERC offers postgraduates a course on writing research proposals but perhaps such courses should be aimed at the postdoctoral level.

Mentors and Heads of Departments were asked if there is a central role in training for ESRC or some other body. More replied in the negative than the positive, responding to what is often seen as a very heavy emphasis on required skills training at the postgraduate level. Worries over bureaucracy and hoops were evident. A handful made positive suggestions –if the training were optional – for *academic personality skills* such as how to present oneself, advance one's career, speak, choose topics or perhaps writing articles or proposals. Fellows' need for some sort of collective training might vary depending upon the research culture in their host institutions. ESRC might allow Fellows to apply for bursaries to seek out whatever specific training they need. Key skills courses, such as Essex quantitative skills courses, could be supported.

Much more positive was the response to the ESRC networking conference, as mentors and department heads had seen their Fellows' enthusiasm. Content such as the academic personality skills involved in professionalisation could be helpful, as could networking. Such activities were seen as contributing to the Fellows' sense of themselves as part of a community. One suggestion was that the ESRC hold an end-of-year workshop at which all the Fellows presented their work. Other conferences might focus on research ethics or new directions in the Research Councils. PDF alumni could speak and reinforce the sense of community. Two other roles were suggested for ESRC: 1) developing a database of skills short courses so that individual Fellows could dip into that as a resource when identifying their own training needs and 2) a gap analysis leading toward making quite advanced methods available as necessary.

Summary of Inputs from Fellows

Fellows emphasise the heterogeneity and individuality of needs for training – *horses for courses* summarises a frequent message. Freedom from requirements may be particularly appropriate given the skills base of postgraduate education. However, some recommended types of experiences, such as a one week residential course offered by a society that keeps people connected and up to date with research; or specific workshops attached to conferences; the Essex summer school; going somewhere internationally for a period of time to try something different; or short courses on topics such as research ethics, supervising doctoral students, small group learning experiences. Certainly, informal training with Mentors, supervisors and institutional contacts can be very important.

Nearly two-thirds of the Fellows responding recommended that (at the individual's discretion) Fellows gain either or both teaching experience and training. Several felt that being able to “prove” they could teach as well as do research made a real difference in obtaining a position. Institutions apparently vary in the degree to which they help Fellows get teaching experience or have access to teacher training.

While disliking the idea of any requirements for training during a postdoctoral fellowship, Fellows still saw useful roles that ESRC could play, primarily through

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conferences at which attendance would be voluntary. Fellows who had attended the ESRC conference for the scheme were for the most part very appreciative. A variety of “professionalisation” topics were recommended that could cross fields and interests, such as: how to apply for and get a job; how to do interviews; writing for publication; development of long-term research strategies; preparing research plans; meeting the funders; how to write research proposals; career skills; research ethics; media strategies; interaction with policymakers; and interacting with public interest or public sector groups.

Certainly there was real interest in the idea of encouraging networking and even peer support/motivation among usually isolated Fellows. ESRC could even put more effort into members of a PDF cohort finding others with similar interests, perhaps putting up web pages with sketches of work interests and photographs prior to a conference. ESRC could draw PDF alumni onto the website and into the PDF community. A mailing list or website could be constructed to allow informal conversation and exchange of information among Fellows, especially those in the same field or interested in the same topic (perhaps from different perspectives). ESRC could helpfully let Fellows know if other Fellows are in the same institution or nearby, to give them a sense of company in their in-between status. An ESRC PDF event that was week-long and residential was suggested. Or, alternatively, the once-a-year conference might be spread out through the year, perhaps involving Mentors.

Occasional mention was made of the idea that ESRC could hold events targeted by discipline, or by stage reached by the Fellows (starting, mid-course, finished). One way to encourage interesting interdisciplinary connections while still being focused enough to attract participants would be for ESRC to hold meetings on different topics or issues.

The point was made that since many PhDs today go on into areas other than academics, that, perhaps via conferences, ESRC could help people learn about possible careers and career skills beyond academics. Perhaps ESRC could even help to educate potential non-academic employers who may not be comfortable hiring PhD level individuals. While not increasing the academic cohort, this could help to increase impact by trained social scientists.

It was also suggested that ESRC either lay on short courses directly or put together a database as to where short courses are available.

Engagement with non-academics

Summary of inputs from Mentors & Department Heads

Mentors and Heads of Departments cited 9 Fellows who had interacted in some way with non-academics. While the Mentor for one of these regarded the interaction as detracting from a good publishing strategy, several other Mentors noted benefits to the Fellows. Contact in some cases opened up new lines of inquiry or access to data, with a positive effect on research. Some interactions were via conferences or seminars; in fact one Fellow along with colleagues elsewhere received funding for an ESRC seminar series designed to bring together academics with policymakers and

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practitioners. One recommendation to ESRC is that it provide monies for seminars or other activities disseminating to non-academics.

Summary of Inputs from Fellows

Three quarters of the Fellows interviewed had had some professional interaction with non-academics, ranging from a fairly low level such as participation in a workshop or seminar, through working with the media, interacting with stakeholders during research, all the way through to contributing to policymaking. Attitudes are positive toward continuing interactions. Many observed that their interactions, and the understanding of potential application that arose, helped to open new lines of inquiry in their research. Awareness of how to communicate research findings to non-academics has definitely increased.

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DEVELOPMENT

How should ESRC proceed?

Summary of inputs from Mentors & Department Heads

Primarily positive comments were made regarding the role of this scheme; you have to have some sort of a transition year so this is a brain wave. The Fellowship can make a real difference to outlooks and career paths. It is perceived that the scheme can help people stay in academia, even in a time when it must be quite daunting at the end of a PhD, to realise that no department will employ you unless they think you will help with the next RAE. One person stated emphatically, for instance, that having a PDF not only helps people get through the post-PhD point by providing breathing space and maturation time, but also makes a difference down the line when, after 3-4 years, individuals might otherwise fall out of academics. Expanding the scheme was occasionally suggested, including non-traditional people and perhaps tackling mid-career points. Given competitiveness of the US, Canada and other countries where people have broader training, the scheme can help Fellows be more competitive by reading more widely and broadening their understanding of their field. The attractiveness of the money itself was noted.

A number of issues were raised. Along with funding, *morale and motivation*, in the absence of confidence about job opportunities, are real challenges. For example, one interviewee had attended a doctoral student conference at which the students noted *how over-burdened and over-stretched and perhaps demoralised or at least unenthusiastic and under-paid academics were*. Another person noted that ESRC does a good job of trying to balance the greater weight of perceived problems with the Higher Education system. Without the PDF, someone might go into a post in which they are buried in course work and administrative work so that *all the capabilities they have been building up in research go out the window* – making jobs in the US more attractive. Others do not see a long-term benefit in academia so leave for consulting or other posts outside of academia and in so doing make better salaries. Issues differ across disciplines. For some, an issue is created by the current emphasis on publications for the RAE which curtails a flow back and forth between the private sector and academia; this can be a problem for business or *any discipline where there is a craft skill, where it is important to have a knowledge base regarding things going on outside of academics*. For other fields there can be dangers of a “negative spiral” which require commitment external to individual universities; if undergraduate numbers are low, universities won’t support so many staff members so fewer undergraduates become motivated to go on through the ranks into academia.

In the face of diverse issues, various suggestions were made as to what could be done. Certainly, increases in salaries and in research funding (levels *and* duration) were most often seen as having potential to make a difference. For example, one action suggested was for ESRC to ring-fence a pool of research funding for people in the transition period of their first 5 years. Another suggestion was to make the PDF flexible enough to be turned into an early career fellowship if an individual were to secure a post and wanted to buy out research time. Consistent with a broader

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recommendation to put money into social science research to ensure long-term careers, a more specific recommendation was for ESRC to take a longer-term strategic view of contract research staff's careers by giving them longer-term research contracts. Perhaps the ESRC could build fellowships into retained positions, with one person suggesting the model RCUK is looking at of a sliding scale of funding until the university takes on the position fully.

Some view funding for more PhD students as addressing the real bottleneck, when people at the end of undergraduate years do not want to go on into academics. It is of course important that, not only are undergraduates encouraged to go on, but that they also actually like the fields of study. One person cited US-style research and teaching assistantships as a possible way of supporting more postgraduates and a point was made that ESRC could give universities more money to allow more staff time for dealing with PhD students.

One suggestion was that the ESRC encourage people to do research into research and what helps people do research well!

Summary of Inputs from Fellows

Fellows, perhaps not surprisingly, think highly of the Postdoctoral Scheme as a mechanism to achieve this goal. Phrases like *brilliant innovation*, *pivotal moment*, and *bridge to employment in research* were used. As one interviewee commented, *no other scheme allows you to deliberately work on what you have already done and build yourself up on your PhD*. Many recommended extending the scheme in either duration or numbers, or both. This recommendation tied in with larger concerns of perceived lack of opportunity (for posts, salaries, research funding) among those considering academic careers, including prospective PhD students. For example, increase in salaries for academics generally was recommended by a third of the interviewees. Increase in number and quality/duration of posts available was also recommended to make academic careers more inviting. ESRC somehow “ring fencing” research funds as starter grants for junior academics (perhaps former Fellows) could contribute to career development *after* the postdoctoral fellowship stage. The message was often repeated that worries over practical considerations, such as the ability to support a family, can be a powerful deterrent to pursuit of an academic career.

Continue the scheme?

Summary of inputs from Mentors & Department Heads

Of the 21 responding to this overarching question, all recommended continuing the scheme. Three of these suggested modifications and/or slight preference for PhD funding while at least five explicitly recommended expansion. One interviewee commented: *It should be continued and expanded, it is very good value for money... There could be two to three times as many to really make an impact upon people seeing the world as full of possibilities.*

Summary of Inputs from Fellows

The Fellows were unanimous --- continue it!

Any modifications?

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Summary of inputs from Mentors & Department Heads

Orientation and objectives seemed to interviewees to be just about right. Selection criteria were often regarded as *a bit opaque*. Suggestions for criteria to consider included: the research quality of the individual and the research culture and institutional support available at prospective host institutions. ESRC was warned against creeping age-ism or discrimination against overseas students.

Most suggestions regarding implementation centred primarily on flexibility of various sorts or on clarification of roles. So for example, ESRC could be more flexible regarding salaries for people who have worked before, so that universities (which do not get any overhead) feel constrained to make up some or all of the difference. ESRC could also be flexible regarding part-time work. Flexibility could also take the form of strengthened links into the ESRC small training bursaries so that Fellows could travel to pick up specific skills. Interviewees who had had trouble with ESRC's original lack of flexibility regarding start dates were pleased that ESRC has tried to address what can be a real problem of a lag time between the Viva and the start date. Flexibility might arise in the timing of applications, perhaps staggering them, allowing fit with skills summer schools, perhaps even mid-academic year starts. Another example would be to achieve an improved match with the economics job market cycle – or to allow Fellows who have taken a job to *weave the money flexibly into their job* and buy out research time.

ESRC could issue guidance clarifying Mentors' roles, perhaps even producing a helpful, not overbearing, handbook: What it is to be a Mentor. ESRC might usefully communicate with departments as to ways in which mentoring Postdoctoral Fellows could be accounted for in work loads, as supervision of postgraduates has been. Because departments will be tempted to use Fellows in teaching, ESRC may well want to make clear what its maximum limit on teaching hours would be. Another suggestion would be to provide overhead on PDFs in order to make the Fellows more attractive to host departments.

Another possible modification raised was the possibility of offering (in addition) a similar fellowship three or four years into a person's career, to, in this second stage, help individuals to move into new research areas.

In terms of follow-up, the end of award reports appeared to be quite acceptable. Given that Fellows may/will move on after the Fellowship, it was suggested that Mentors be copied on letters in which the ESRC is trying to track down either the individual or end of award reports. As has proved to be the case with this evaluation, Mentors can be useful sources of information as to subsequent location of Fellows. One or two suggested that the Mentors might write a very short end of award report themselves, but certainly a light touch and streamlining would be favoured over bureaucracy. ESRC might want to look five years after PDFs are awarded to see if recipients are by then submitting better quality research grants than others in their cohort.

Summary of Inputs from Fellows

The objectives seemed appropriate to the Fellows, but selection criteria were sometimes somewhat *imponderable*. So, for example, one Fellow suggested that ESRC make as clear as possible how criteria would reflect the balance struck

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between predictable and adventurous work. Views on the application form itself were mixed, with one interviewee actually praising its taxing length because *it makes you think* but others noting that advice was needed to fill it out, as it was a good month's work, so that this might discriminate against people who were not applying from within a university. ESRC may want to make it very clear that there is not an age limit, that geographic mobility is not a prerequisite, and that people who have stepped out of the academic career path are welcome to return.

Regarding implementation, one suggestion for ESRC directly was that it might develop a more explicit point of contact for Fellows. Otherwise, most comments fell into two areas. One cluster of comments sent a strong recommendation to ESRC to provide guidance to Mentors and indeed to host institutions (e.g., what is expected of a Mentor, what should/should not be expected of Fellows regarding tasks such as teaching, who is in charge of financial decisions). The other cluster of comments encouraged ESRC to be more pro-active in encouraging networking and a sense of community among Fellows and PDF alumni, along with conference(s) providing media and policy training and other such generic skills. It might be useful, for example, to set up peer mentoring, perhaps even facilitate the writing of joint proposals. To encourage current and future Fellows, ESRC could put together a set of vignettes of Fellows who have done interesting things or achieved successes. As follow-up, it was suggested that ESRC hold some sort of meeting to help former Fellows with small grant applications, perhaps bringing in more established alumni to meet with them as well as provide help with forms.

Several suggestions encouraged ESRC to help Fellows link with non-academics, in part to attract prospective researchers interested in "real-world" problems. A CASE-like award might be a good model or perhaps developing programmes with government departments, Whitehall or other organisations (one interviewee referred to joint postdoctoral fellowships with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister).

Potential to increase significantly the number and quality of entrants to academia?

Summary of inputs from Mentors & Department Heads

Just over 70% of those answering (17 of 24) felt that the scheme has the potential to generate this increase; of these replies 6 were qualified in some way such as pointing out that the scheme alone could not create all the change. Some of the reasons for this belief include: *it stops people from getting sucked into part-time teaching which can keep them away from a real career*; *it will get more research knowledge out into the public domain*; *it will help recipients get better jobs – making it a more efficient market if the best students get the best jobs*; *it could help fill the gap at a key transition point that is a testing ground which is good for the employer to see how someone does in this and also a transition for people to be more entrepreneurial after their PhD*. The scheme can be viewed as *an intervention at the right time*, which, although it may or may not make a significant impact on numbers, *by easing the transition between the PhD and the first job it does help to improve quality*.

Qualifications or disagreement certainly include recognition that this one scheme alone cannot make all the difference, either conceptually or by virtue of its limited

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numbers. While accepting that it would be surprising if the scheme did not have a positive effect, one interviewee challenged, *is this tinkering at the margins rather than addressing the big problems of trying to attract and retain British academics in some of these fields?* Pay and conditions were cited as key to change. In addition to raising salaries, yet another suggested, ESRC should help provide stability to develop career paths for people, even letting them know that when there are not enough academic jobs available, a PhD can increase employability in interesting non-academic jobs (although this last might be more true in the US than the UK). Another interviewee suggests that we have a lot to learn: *we don't really know the dynamics of what happens, we don't really know why people become academics.*

Summary of Inputs from Fellows

About the same proportion of Fellows, two-thirds of those responding, thought the PDF scheme has the potential to make a real impact, even if the impact will take some years to manifest itself. *This could be the single most important factor in the UK's competitiveness in Social Sciences twenty years down the road.* Several interviewees made the point that of course the scheme alone can only be one helpful factor among many. Others raised the point that the scheme may not be maximising numbers by capturing people who would otherwise leave academia, but it may provide important opportunities to individuals who are committed to academics.

Contributing Factors: Role of and Incentives for Mentors

Summary of inputs from Mentors & Department Heads

Very few surprises were noted by Mentors regarding their mentoring experiences. However, the suggestion was made that ESRC (which had no relationship with the Mentors) could consider developing guidance as to effort and time expected. This would help the Mentor directly in planning a work load and would help the Mentor explain to the head of department that this component of a work load should "count". Guidance would also help Fellows realise that they will probably have less of a Mentor's time than they had of their supervisor's time.

Intellectual incentives were cited most often by Mentors and Department Heads, as it can be satisfying to share ideas and explore topics with lively colleagues. Others spoke more in terms of altruism, how positive it is to see a highly motivated individual grow professionally and to see a field moving forward in the UK. Several noted the lack of incentives, except perhaps in publications or a bit of positive perception. The Nuffield New Career Fellowship was mentioned, which provides the Mentor with some money perhaps to buy release time for research with the Fellow. One interviewee suggested as a possible incentive the provision of funding for the Mentor to attend a conference with the Fellow, assisting in their networking. Perhaps a fairly typical sentiment was that voiced as *it is not particularly time consuming or onerous - -- a pleasure, really.*

When asked if they would recommend a system other than a Mentor-centred one, Mentors and Department Heads, very few offered alternatives. Mentors provide experience, guidance, point of contact and so on, but they do not play the same role as a PhD supervisor. Fellows will vary as to the extent to which they need a Mentor. Some interviewees did emphasise the importance of the associated research group or research environment, as being supplemental to, at least as or even more

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relevant than the individual Mentor. One did suggest that ESRC weight the robustness of the research culture more heavily than the Mentor, even if a Mentor was still needed as a point of contact. Another discussed the need for Fellows to move along the path toward independence, thus prioritising a Mentor who can be challenging rather than a Mentor who seems to be a perfect fit.

Summary of Inputs from Fellows

For the most part, Fellows found no negative surprises in working with their Mentor, although some received less feedback than they had hoped and had to work quite independently. Many Fellows enjoyed working independently, yet some found that regular communication, even progress reports, were helpful.

Lessons learned regarding Mentors included the value of changing to a different person from the PhD supervisor as this allows the Fellow to redefine academic status and to integrate the best of skills from both into something that suits him/herself. One bit of advice was to choose a senior, wise person as a Mentor even if not in the exact same field. Yet another bit of advice was to look for someone who will be committed to the Fellow, so not to aim for the highest professor all the time.

While many Fellows did not see real incentives for Mentors, others suggested: altruism, intellectual excitement, the possibility of joint publications, or prestige. Many noted, however, that Mentors often do not need additional prestige. One spoke of adding Fellows to the Mentor's *dynasty, in effect spreading their genes down the line*.

Only two recommended other systems, though some recommended combining the Mentor system with peer-mentoring among Fellows. At one institution, the department has a job market research officer (an academic) who helps each person develop an excellent "job market paper", assists them with strategies and refers them to others in the department. Such functions might be good practice information even for conventional Mentors. An ESRC Bank of Mentors selected for wisdom and nurturing orientation, could provide virtual mentoring for Fellows wherever they might be located, giving them a fresh perspective and advice.

Contributing Factors: Role of and incentives for Host Institutions

Summary of inputs from Mentors & Department Heads

No surprises were cited as to the role played by the host institution. Some concerns were expressed, by department heads in particular, regarding the fact that ESRC does not pay overheads to cover costs such as space or computer facilities, or sometimes other hidden costs associated with the Fellowships (such as differentials in salaries for those who have worked or extra conference travel, journal subscriptions). One noted, *everything about the scheme is financially disadvantageous to the institution*. To counteract these negatives, however, many pointed out the contributions that lively, bright Fellows make to the research environment. Additional incentives lie in the "badge" of having such Fellows and their likelihood of publishing good quality work, generally putting the department in a favourable light. Departments may be more willing to forego overheads for their own PhD products, progressing them toward successful careers. There may well be a difference in perceived incentive between the local department and the University.

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The extent to which the PDF itself or Fellows' publications "count" toward the RAE is another issue.

Summary of Inputs from Fellows

Fellows' experience with host institutions varied widely, from one whose institution put in an extra £10K to another at which the Fellow had to chase up office and computer resources without help or welcome. While most institutions were either positive or presented no surprises, at least two imposed very heavy pressure for teaching and/or administration. There can be a tension between Mentors' awareness of prestige and high calibre research and the host department or institution wishing for overhead costs.

ESRC will need to monitor changing policies regarding recovery of costs by institutions. If the PDF is not to provide overhead, it will need to be a prestige mark and contribute to research culture at host institutions. Many Fellows suggested that the role of postdoctoral researchers involves contributing to seminars, visitors' experiences and thus enhancing a vibrant research culture, as well as perhaps publishing works that contribute to the RAE.

Other Contributing Factors in professionalisation

Summary of inputs from Mentors & Department Heads

Networks Mentors and Department Heads were extremely positive about the value of networks and conferences during the Fellowship year. These help Fellows develop confidence, expand knowledge and interests, develop ideas for new research grants, write up publications, get to know relevant players, and boost their careers. The recommendation was made that ESRC put more support into networking conferences.

Teaching Mentors and Department Heads generally see teaching experience as important to employability, if only to prove that the individual is not teaching shy. Individuals will vary as to the extent to which they need to add teaching to the portfolio during the actual fellowship. Most would agree that the teaching load should be kept light, as indicated by ESRC's limit. Some offer voluntary, light paid teaching; others think in terms of a seminar or two to Master's students.

Running workshops/conferences Opinions vary as to the usefulness of experience in coordinating such events; it may be most appropriate when Fellows can fit their efforts into solid workshop infrastructure, so that the load is not too great.

Summary of Inputs from Fellows

Networks Fellows regarded the PDF as contributing directly to their (important) networking. Ability to travel to conferences, especially international conferences, was mentioned frequently. In emphasising the usefulness of attending conferences, one Fellow observed that *during four days one gets a real education in how things work and who is doing what*. Not only were talks given and contacts made within and outside of academia, but joint bids were prepared and at least one Fellow received an offer to be an international visiting scholar. Interactions with excellent visitors to the host institution were also helpful.

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Teaching Fellows had different experiences with and views on teaching. At one end of the spectrum a Fellow made the deliberate choice not to teach; at the other a Fellow did a great deal of teaching. At least one Fellow talked with great feeling of the pressure exerted by the host institution to force him to take up a heavy teaching load; the Mentor's intervention was necessary to allow him to protect the core of the PDF – the research. Those who taught one module or gave seminar lectures on their own subject or indeed gained ILT accreditation seemed quite happy with the experience gained from a moderate load. Fellows are aware that if they have done no teaching, it can be an issue at a job interview. The strong message is that teaching, which has the potential to be a *bone of contention*, should be a Fellow's *choice* depending on needs of the individual's career (and that ESRC may need to protect this element of choice.)

Running workshops/conferences Some helped to organise conferences or workshops and felt that this was useful in networking.

Lessons Learned, Good practice and Issues: Most important thing the PDF allowed the PD to do that would not otherwise have been done?

Summary of inputs from Mentors & Department Heads

The opportunity to write and publish was cited most often, but close behind were the opportunities to a) plan and move on to new research from a consolidated base and b) think. The PDF is seen as providing a rare quiet space within a career which offers time to reflect and develop new ideas.

Summary of Inputs from Fellows

The activity most often cited (by more than half of the Fellows) was *writing, publishing quality and quantity* in a way that would not be possible when plunged into the first year of a lecturing position. Several particularly valued the *thinking space*, the opportunity to either begin or plan strategically for new lines of research for the next stage in their careers. At least a quarter of the Fellows emphasised the *variability* of PDFs and the importance of each Fellow thinking carefully about what she or he would most like to get out of the invaluable *time* the PDF affords.

Duration of PDF

Summary of inputs from Mentors & Department Heads

Just about half of the mentors and department heads would prioritise one year; about a third feel equally strongly about a two year duration. Several were unsure or suggested flexible alternatives such as 18 month fellowships. Many were emphatic that one year is enough time to accomplish objectives of the scheme and of the Fellows, and that two years can lead to loss of focus, without giving the room for substantive research that three years would. Perhaps a bit of elasticity could be appropriate, but greater numbers of one year fellowships were preferred by many to fewer numbers of two year fellowships. However, on the other hand, others felt that two years was vital to substantive accomplishment and in particular to providing the opportunity for Fellows to begin new research inquiries.

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Summary of Inputs from Fellows

Perhaps surprisingly, quite a few Fellows (9) came out strongly for one year's duration as sufficient. When added to these are the (4) who would like to see two year duration but would vote for one year to gain greater numbers of PDFs, the percentage rises to over 60%. The remainder were about evenly divided between those who simply favour two years and those who recommend flexibility on the part of ESRC, so that 18 or even 24 months could be offered to those who showed a persuasive plan. The activity cited most often for the second year was the initiation of new research (perhaps funding for the second year could come from a research "pot" and not constrain numbers). Concerns over a one year duration included a perceived need to start new research and conflict with the job market cycle so that much of the 12 months is spent job hunting. Those favouring duration of one year, however, feel that this is a reasonable block of time to which a Fellow can commit and that *if you put your head down you can get a lot out of it*. One interviewee recommended that ESRC ring fence early career research grant monies rather than spend the money on a second postdoctoral year.

Messages to Future Fellows: Obstacles, issues, problems or distractions?

Summary of inputs from Mentors & Department Heads

When asked what they would alert future Fellows about in terms of obstacles, issues, problems or distractions, Mentors and Department Heads made various points, including: the danger of getting sucked into too much teaching; the importance of having some light teaching experience; the risks of interdisciplinary work when positions are granted by discipline-based units; the danger of being distracted from writing by pursuing positions; and the danger of getting bogged down and not taking full use of the opportunity. Many urged Fellows to *hit the ground running*, as the year goes by quickly, and to make use of Mentors' guidance in focussing and sticking to a strategic plan for the year. In some sense, the Fellows should enjoy more protection against distractions than do most academics.

Advice to Fellows

Select the Mentor (and the host institution) wisely.

Get busy quickly, make your contacts, line up conferences, decide when you are going to do papers and where and so on as the year passes very quickly. ... You should plan for the full 12 months within the first 3 weeks of starting, of course this plan will change but when you start to plan you realise how busy you may have to be and what things have to be timed for when.

The Mentor should work with the Fellow to develop a work programme for the year, setting the agenda, making sure it is feasible in the year and making sure that it moves along and also that it moves along to incorporate the future.

Be quite focussed, work out targets early on with the Mentor and (yet) also be a bit opportunistic.

Nurture your networks.

Summary of Inputs from Fellows

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When asked what they would alert future Fellows about, in terms of obstacles, issues, problems or distractions, Fellows often noted a recurring theme --- the speed with which time passes and therefore the importance of planning, balancing responsibilities and self-protection. Future Fellows are also advised about the importance of getting the right mentor (perhaps talking first to potential Mentors or their PhD students past or present) and being specific about what they want to get from working with the Mentor.

Advice to Fellows

Don't let the year disappear!

Manage your time well, know your objectives and what you want to have done.

Be wary about doing this and part-time teaching and doing too much.

Don't teach.... Generally say no to anything people ask you to do.

Be sure that others accept that you have control over your schedule because to them you look like a free resource. You might need the help of a mentor with big shoes to stand up for you on this.

Think about exactly what the host institution will offer and hold the institution to that (perhaps with the help of ESRC)

It is important to balance research with getting sufficient teaching on your cv; it is important therefore to go to a host institution which supports and respects the scheme's research orientation.

*Elements of **good practice**?*

Summary of inputs from Mentors & Department Heads

Advice to Mentors and Host Institutions supporting Fellows Many of the good practice examples and words of advice offered to Mentors and Host Institutions (or departments) have to do with ensuring that the Fellow is a full participant in a rich research environment. In part, this entails ensuring their activity, such as giving presentations in seminars, participating in peer review of draft articles, engaging in informal activities, and so on. The way in which the Fellow is treated is also important; they should be explicitly regarded as a junior member of staff, not a PhD student, if the professionalisation process is to be successful. (One institution mentioned as good practice in this regard, its own formal Mentoring Programme which is extended even to those early in academic positions). The language with which they are described, the facilities to which they have access, the location of their offices all can underscore a shift in status.

Other points on good practice relate more specifically to Mentor responsibilities, such as: make clear at the beginning what is and is not to be expected from the Mentor relationship; develop a plan with reasonable expectations and timing; and protect Fellows from being involved in low grade activities such as committees;

Host institutions should, it is suggested: allow Fellows to take any research courses such as computing that they want to; allow Fellows to apply for small travel grants, take staff development courses and otherwise participate as full members of staff.

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Summary of Inputs from Fellows

Distilling the lessons they had learned, Fellows passed along advice on good practice to future Fellows, focusing in particular on mentors, strategic planning, management of time, and building networks and a professional identity.

Be very careful about where you go and be sure you can work with your mentor. Have strong coordination with your mentor since they can contribute a lot to conceptualising the work.

Ask for more help from the Mentor regarding publications strategy and what to do next.

You have to think carefully about what you want your mentor to be, it may not be someone who knows your exact field but someone who is good at direction and help in developing people's careers.

Think strategically, what will the PDF help you do that you could not do otherwise. Plan to get something very specific out of it.

Think ahead about what you are going to do next; make the Fellowship more than a stopgap. ...Spend some time getting relevant work experience. (The ESRC could help guide people.)

Prioritise.

Get different experiences in the year that will contribute to your well-rounded ability as a lecturer in a permanent post if that is what you are seeking....focus on research.

Make the most of the time; make the time work for you.

Be realistic about the time things will take, a year goes a lot faster than you think it will.

Have someone to talk to, to make sure you are sticking to your schedule.

Concentrate on publications; the year goes by very quickly.

Write the papers!

Be sure you are aware what others are doing; do networking; learn about your discipline and the bigger picture.

Networks are very important, along with conference participation. You present ideas and get a critical analysis which is good personally and intellectually. You stay honest, focused and learn about what others are doing.

Take advantage of any junior faculty workshops offered at conferences.

Get out in your own field, especially build international networks because that affects journals....go to the conferences of your professional association.

It is important to make sure, especially if you stay at the same institution, that you work hard to expose yourself internationally and to different people outside of the institution to develop your own areas beyond your PhD. Go to different conferences and different countries and develop your own network and your own identity.

Force yourself to go out and present your work. Submit to highly regarded journals to put yourself to the test. Seek to build your confidence as a researcher. Think strategically about how to get a job and how to get subsequent funding.

Really enjoy it. It (the Fellowship) is a fantastic opportunity. ...I've met a lot of people with anxieties about having only one year but it really is a huge privilege, I really enjoyed every minute of it.

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Messages to ESRC

Summary of inputs from Mentors & Department Heads

Messages to ESRC from Mentors and Department Heads are primarily positive ones about the scheme, with a variety of quite specific suggestions as to actions ESRC could undertake. For example, the ESRC conferences and networking appear to be empowering and worth continuing or expanding, providing not only networking but also assistance to Fellows such as a professional trainer helping with verbal presentations. Giving Fellows autonomy and flexibility regarding their budgets is suggested. Being somewhat flexible on salaries may help to attract diverse Fellows. Providing guidelines for Mentors could be helpful. By specifying a maximum teaching load, ESRC would make it easier for Mentors to protect the Fellows. The evaluation of this programme was noted as a positive feature, and Mentors and Department Heads might be interested in the results. In a couple of years, it would be interesting to see what Fellows' destinations are; certainly in the short-term Mentors could be contacted regarding Fellows' location. It would be helpful if ESRC made sure that selection criteria are transparent or explicit. ESRC should recognise that there is a lot of institutional as well as individual investment in making PDF applications; so *don't lightly change the system*. RAE inclusion rules will be important; regarding the scheme, ESRC may need to become involved as to what "counts".

Positive messages on the scheme overall include (but are not limited to) the following. For many fields, this is the right time for the scheme. In terms of individuals, the scheme gives Fellows time to think, to generate new problems and think about how to formulate and solve them, and lead to genuinely substantive research output. The scheme helps people become able to do independent research, in other words, maturing after their PhDs.

ESRC is encouraged to keep the scheme and extend it if possible. It gives people a chance of getting good positions and thus they are more likely to be committed to academics. Furthermore, they can go ahead with planning and implementing a research strategy, which contributes to social science in the UK.

Keep giving out the Postdoctoral Fellowships. They are successful and the departments and Fellows are happy!

Stick to the system, make the application form shorter and give more money. Otherwise, love and best regards to ESRC!

Summary of Inputs from Fellows

Fellows sent a variety of messages to ESRC, in addition to those arising during discussions of specific topics. Many sent messages of praise and gratitude. Others suggested ways in which ESRC could: improve relationships of Fellows with Mentors and host institutions; help Fellows move ahead on career path; and share intervention strategies.

The scheme was brilliant --- don't change it!... It has shaped me as a young scholar. The scheme should be encouraged; the ESRC should keep doing it.

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The ESRC needs to realise that the product could come about several years down the line from the Postdoctoral Fellowship. The message to the ESRC is to keep up the good work.

The positive approach of ESRC (telling Fellows they were a cadre of high flyers) was very welcome.... There was a sense that this Fellowship was one step in a process of development.

It is a fantastic scheme, continue and expand it but rethink who you are appealing to and what it means to push the idea of mobility. Make sure you open up the field fully to returners and mature students who may feel the programme is not for them, given the orientation of the application form and the material.

ESRC needs to make sure they have sorted out the end of PhD timing problem.

The ESRC could publish something providing guidance for Mentors.

The ESRC could tighten up on host institution behaviour.

The ESRC could provide guidelines as to what extent other work, such as teaching and policy engagement, should be done.

The ESRC might give more guidance on getting things out the door in publishing.

The ESRC could help guide people in what they want to do after the postdoc, especially if they have a wealth of information regarding previous postdocs and what they did.

The ESRC could give advice on the Small Grant scheme at a later stage.

The ESRC should help make academics more enticing. It is hard for junior and contract researchers, they can get quite disheartened. They should be able to do interesting things.

It might be possible to do a 6 month version of the scheme and maybe have some bridging grants, different approaches to helping people get articles out. You might be able to widen the numbers.

As different countries are looking at intervention schemes, Norway and Holland at the postdoctoral level, it would be good for the ESRC to share findings.

The Postdoctoral Fellowship was much appreciated. Thank you.

Additional Information Provided for the Training and Development Board

ANNEX H

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL PROVIDED FOR THE TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT BOARD

Additional Information Provided for the Training and Development Board

Addendum to Evaluation, ESRC Postdoctoral Fellowship Scheme

Consultant was asked to consider evaluation data and address, to the extent possible, the following questions.

Were there differences across disciplines between those who:
Wanted a 2-year duration for the Scheme
Wanted a 1-year duration for the scheme?

(For example, economics journals have very long lead times before articles are actually published; might this be a discipline for which two years would be particularly useful?)

Were there differences across disciplines between those who:
carried on in academics
left academics?

(It is more difficult to attract Fellows in some disciplines than others.)

Were there differences in the degree to which a Fellow's treatment as possessing a new, respected status, integrated into the host department, between those who:
Conducted their Fellowship in the same institution as the PhD AND had the same Mentor;
Conducted their Fellowship in the same institution as the PhD but had a DIFFERENT Mentor;
Conducted their Fellowship in a DIFFERENT institution.

(Perhaps there are implications for ESRC's guidance to institutions.)

IV. How many of those who stayed at the same institution kept the PhD supervisor as Mentor?

Additional Information Provided for the Training and Development Board

- I. **Were there differences across disciplines between those who:**
- a. **Wanted a 2-year duration for the Scheme**
 - b. **Wanted a 1-year duration for the scheme?**

Favours 2 Years (2)	
South Asian Studies	SOY
Economics	ECN
Offer some 2-year (4)	
Lang/Linguistics	LIN
German Studies	LIN
Economics	ECN
Russian/E Europ Studi	PIR
Favours 1 year (7)	
Politics	PIR
Mgmt/Business	MBS
Internat Politics	PIR
Psychology	PSY
Geography	SOY
Russian/E Europ Studi	PIR
Gender Studies	SOY
Leans to 2, but favours 1 if 2 years=fewer (5)	
Politics	PIR
Russian/E Europ Studies	AST
Mgmt/Business	MBS
Social Psychology	PSY
Geography	HUG

Of 18 Fellows of the base group interviewed, responses are split roughly into three groups. Those totally favouring 2 years represent 11%; adding in those recommending a mix of 1 year and 18-24 month Fellowships would add up to 33.3%. Those leaning toward 2 years, but recommending 1-year duration if 2-year Fellowships would mean fewer Fellowships, represent 28%. Those definitively recommending 1-year duration represent 39%.

Favouring 2 year or Mix (2+4=6)

Economics (2) + LIN (2) + SOY (international) + PIR (international)

Leaning to 2 years, but recommending 1 if 2 Years means fewer PDFs (5)

1 each: PIR (Politics), AST (internat), HUG (Geog), PSY (Social Psy), MBS

Favours 1 year (7)

3 PIR (Internat Politics, Politics, Internat); 2 SOC (Geog, Gender Studies); 1 PSY; 1MBS

It is perhaps noteworthy that the only 2 Economics Fellows voted one each for 2 Years and a Mix including 2 Years. Similarly, the only two LIN Fellows both suggested a Mix including 2 years. Those favouring 2 year or a Mix appeared to be either in Economics or in an "international" area of some sort. Perhaps these areas require more time before a new professional level is "visibly" attained, sufficiently to impact on career path.

Additional Information Provided for the Training and Development Board

II. Were there differences across disciplines between those who: carried on in academics left academics?

Distribution of Disciplines across Job Destination Categories

	PERM AC	TEMP AC	NON-AC	INTERNAT	?	Total
AST	1					1
EDU				1		1
ECN		4		1		5
HUG	1	1	1		1	4
LIN	2					2
MBS	1	1				2
PIR	6	1	2	1	1	11
PSY	4	2	1	1	1	9
SAP		1			1	2
SOY	3	1		1	1	6
STI				1		1
Total	18	11	4	6	5	44

Four out of five in Economics are in *Temporary Academic Posts* (80%); none are permanent (0%); one is in an international post. Perhaps the temporary nature of posts in Economics reflects a time lag to publication or other visible indicators of professional maturation.

7/11 PIR Fellows are in Academic posts (64%), 6 of these are permanent (55%). Two took non-academic jobs (18%).

6/9 PSY Fellows are in Academic posts (66%), 4 of these are permanent (44%).

4/6 SOY Fellows are in Academic posts (66%), 3 of these are permanent (50%).

2/4 HUG Fellows are in Academic posts (50%); 1 of these is permanent (25%).

Both of the 2 MBS Fellows are in Academic posts (100%), 1 is permanent (50%).

Both of the 2 LIN Fellows are in Academic posts (100%), both of these are permanent (100%).

Other than the interesting case of Economics (in which all academic positions secured seem to be temporary), the job destination categories including more than 4 Fellows seem to show a general pattern of two-thirds having achieved academic posts, approximately half of which are permanent.

Additional Information Provided for the Training and Development Board

III. Were there differences in the degree to which a Fellow's treatment as possessing a new, respected status, integrated into the host department, between those who:

Conducted their Fellowship in the same institution as the PhD AND had the same Mentor;

Conducted their Fellowship in the same institution as the PhD but had a DIFFERENT Mentor;

Conducted their Fellowship in a DIFFERENT institution?

Fellows' and Mentors' responses pertaining to change in status/treatment were gathered from Interview Template questions relating to:

IE.2 (advantages/disadvantages of mobility)

IVB.1 re Mentors

IVB.2 re Host Institutions

IVB.3 re professional activities

IVC3 Issues

IVC4 Good practice.

These comments were grouped according to Fellows' background: (Same Institution/Same Mentor; Same Institution/Different Mentor; Same Institution/returned to Supervisor when Different Mentor became ill or left; or Different Institution.

Nearly half of the Fellows interviewed volunteered positive indicators about their treatment as a professional of a different status than a postgraduate. In addition, several more Mentors made comments indicating a changed treatment. No significant difference was apparent across categories of background, with positive indicators spread throughout categories. The only two negative points came from Same institution/Different mentor, but these were outnumbered by positive points made in this category.

Additional Information Provided for the Training and Development Board

How many of those who stayed at the same institution kept the PhD supervisor as Mentor?

	#	% (of 44)
Same Institution, Same Mentor	4	9
Same Institution, Different Mentor	23	52
Same Institution, Supervisor after Mentor ill/left	2	5
Same institution, Mentor Status?	6	14
Different Institution	9	20
Total	44	100%

Twenty per cent (20%) of the Fellows in the base group moved to a Different Institution for the Fellowship.

In contrast, only 9% are known to have stayed at the Same Institution and kept the Same Mentor (previous Supervisor).

Some 14% stayed at the Same Institution, but it is not known whether or not they kept their Supervisor as Mentor.

About half (52%) of the Fellows stayed at the Same Institution but changed to a Different Mentor. An additional 5% tried to shift Mentors, but reverted to their Supervisors when the new Mentor became ill or left the institution.