



## AHRC Submission Rate Survey Guidance

### 2011 Submission Rate Survey

#### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The AHRC is accountable for the public funds it manages and distributes. The Submission Rate Survey is one method that the Council employs to monitor the progress of and outcome of studentships.
- 1.2 The Submission Rate Survey is an annual survey that calculates the rate of submission of doctoral students who have held AHRC postgraduate studentships. The census date of the survey is **30 September** each year. The Student Details Portal (SDP) is used to collect information from institutions about actual and expected submission dates of doctoral students due to submit by the survey census date. For 2011, the SDP must be updated by **28 November 2011**, Institutions who do not meet this deadline will be recorded as a nil return.
- 1.3 The Council's monitoring of submission rates is intended to encourage the timely completion of a thesis; this policy incorporates a sanctions policy. Submission rates within 4 years have improved significantly among departments with funded students since the introduction of this policy.
- 1.4 As of the 2010 submission rate survey exercise, the AHRC will also be generating 5 year submission rate statistics, as required by all Research Councils. The AHRC will therefore be requesting updated information on submission and completion for students that were first included in the 2008 submission rate survey. The 5 year rate will be published in the AHRC Annual Report as an overarching figure for all AHRC doctoral studentships and will not be broken down by Research Organisation.

#### 2. Changes to AHRC Submission Rate Policy

- 2.1 The AHRC has been seeking to work with institutions to improve the submission rates of doctoral students in the arts and humanities. To this end, it has implemented a policy of penalising institutions where the submission rate of students supported by the Council falls below certain thresholds. Institutions identified in the survey with submission rates below the target thresholds are then rendered ineligible to hold doctoral studentships for two years.

2.2 The implementation of the Block Grants Partnerships (BGP) scheme, the Studentship Competition and the Block Grant Partnership: Capacity Building route (BGP-CB), which replaced the Studentship Competition in 2011, has led to the AHRC changing the way it applies sanctions to institutions and their individual departments as a result of the submission rate survey.

2.3 As studentships held within a Block Grant are allocated to institutions by subject area rather than by department, the AHRC **no longer applies sanctions at a departmental level**. As of the 2008 submission rate survey exercise, sanctions have been applied at an **institutional level only**.

### 3. Changes to Thresholds

3.1 As a direct result of this change, the AHRC has **increased the percentage threshold for submissions at an institutional level from 60% to 70%** to ensure that high submission rates are maintained within each institution. This will also bring our submission rate threshold in line with the other Research Councils.

3.2 The minimum number of students required for an institution to be subject to sanctions has been **raised from 4 to 8**, to ensure that institutions with a smaller number of studentships, where a small number of nil submissions can have a significant effect on submission rates, are not penalised by the increase in the percentage threshold.

3.3 Please note that these changes apply to all institutions with AHRC doctoral studentships regardless of whether studentships were allocated through a Block Grant, through the Studentship Competition or through any of the other routes available for doctoral funding from the AHRC.

3.4 The AHRC has implemented these increases over a two year period with annual increases in thresholds as indicated on the next page.

Survey year	Minimum number of students	Institutional threshold
2008	4	60%
2009	6	65%
<b>2010 onwards</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>70%</b>

#### **4. Action to be taken as a result of the 2011 Submission Rate Survey**

- 4.1 The Council will aggregate the results for departments in a single institution. Where an institution's 4-year institutional submission rate falls below 70 per cent, **both** for those students surveyed in the current survey **and** also the aggregate 4-year rate for the last three years of the survey **and** there are 8 or more studentships included over that 4 year period, sanctions will be applied.
- 4.2 Institutions facing sanctions as a result of the 2011 submission rate survey will have their AHRC funding for support of new doctoral studentships withdrawn for a period of two years, both for awards through the BGP and through the other routes available for doctoral funding. Funding for current students will be unaffected. The doctoral studentships allocated to that institution through a BGP will be withdrawn entirely for that two year period and institutions will not be able to re-allocate those studentships to support Master's students or to add them to their allocation in the latter years of the BGP.
- 4.3 Institutions facing sanctions as a result of the 2011 submission rate survey will be ineligible to hold AHRC doctoral studentships for a period of two years.

#### **5. Institutional Warnings**

- 5.1 The AHRC will continue its policy of warning institutions should their submission rate fall up to **10%** below the institutional threshold for that year.
- 5.2 In the 2011 survey, a warning will be issued to institutions whose submission rate falls below the 70% threshold but above 60%, and penalties will be incurred only if they fail to meet the 70% threshold in the 2012 Submission Rate Survey.
- 5.3 Institutions cannot change submission or completion dates for individual students once they have been included in published survey results in the AHRC Annual Report.

## **6. Cohort for Inclusion in the 2011 Submission Rate Survey**

- 6.1 Full-time students are expected to submit a doctoral thesis within four years of taking up an award. Part-time students are required to submit within seven years. The submission date is calculated from the start date of an award not from the start of any unfunded doctoral study. Thus, for full-time students who took up awards on 1 October 2007, the Council would expect submission by 30 September 2011 but part-time students would not be expected to submit until 30 September 2014.
- 6.2 In 2011 we will also survey part-time students who took up their awards on 1 October 2004 and who are therefore expected to submit by 30 September 2011. These will be included in the institutional submission rate calculations alongside full-time students. Submission dates will also take into account any period of suspension during an award previously approved by the AHRC.
- 6.3 The AHRC also collects information on completion rates as part of the annual submission rate survey. For these purposes, completion is defined as the award of a doctoral or other degree. This is normally counted as the date of the successful viva examination and is the earliest date on which it is known that the doctoral degree can be recommended. If that information is not readily available, an alternative is the date the Degree Committee or equivalent recommended the award.
- 6.4 Where the award of a doctoral degree has not been recommended, institutions are asked to amend the SDP to reflect the actual degree awarded. If a student submits a doctoral level thesis and is subsequently awarded a lower degree e.g. MPhil, the institution will need to record this within the SDP as 'No Degree Awarded'. Please note, this will still be shown as a submission for the purposes of the submission rate survey as a doctoral thesis will have been submitted. However, if the decision is taken in advance of submission that a student should submit a thesis at a lower degree level, then this will be shown as a nil-submission for the purposes of the submission rate survey exercise as no doctoral thesis will have been submitted.

## **7. Changes Affecting Submission Rate Calculations**

- 7.1 The AHRC will take the following changes of circumstance/registration into consideration when calculating expected submission dates under the conditions outlined below:

### **7.2 Transfers between departments**

If a student has transferred from one departmental unit to another within the same institution, s/he will appear on the survey for the new unit.

### 7.3 Transfers between institutions

If a student has transferred from one institution to another, s/he will appear on the survey of the receiving institution, and will count in the calculation of the submission rate of that institution.

### 7.4 Transfer between institutions after the award has ended

If the AHRC exceptionally agrees that a student may transfer between institutions or departments after the end of their AHRC award but before their expected AHRC submission date, then that student will **still be surveyed under the original institution** or department that they were registered with prior to the transfer.

7.5 The date at which the student first took up the award will remain the same for the purposes of submission rate calculations.

### 7.6 Suspension of studies during the period of an Award

During the period of an award, the AHRC will allow suspensions of the award for up to 12 months for reasons such as maternity, illness or other exceptional personal circumstances. Prior to September 2010, the AHRC's approval for such suspensions had to be sought in accordance with the terms and conditions of awards as set out in the [Studentship Grants](#) guide. Periods of suspension approved by the Council will be taken into account when calculating the expected submission dates.

### 7.7 Periods of certified illness during the period of an Award

The AHRC will consider requests to extend a submission date if a student has recorded one or more periods of certified illness with their Research Organisation during their studentship. As periods of certified illness are included within the tenure of a studentship, submission dates will only be extended if a formal request is made during the writing up period and before the student's submission date has passed. Extensions will not be agreed during the tenure of a studentship. The AHRC can only extend the submission date by the periods specifically covered by medical certificates and reserves the right to view the medical evidence held by the Research Organisation before agreeing to any extension. Please refer to the [Studentship Grants](#) guide or further information on periods of certified illness.

### 7.8 Death

Students who die are omitted from calculations of submission rates and institutions should update the Portal record where appropriate.

## 7.9 Terminations

Full-time students whose awards are terminated during the first year of the award will be excluded from all submission rate calculations. Similarly, part-time students whose awards are terminated during the first 2 years of the award are excluded from calculations. Students whose award is terminated after the periods indicated above will still be included in the calculations.

## 8. **Applications to Extend an AHRC Expected Submission Date**

8.1 Once an award has finished, requests to extend the final year of study, which we term as the writing-up year will need to be approved by the AHRC as this will affect the thesis submission date. Requests must be made formally, in advance through the completion a *Submission extension request form* which is available for download from the AHRC website. Normally, the AHRC will only consider requests to extend the submission date by up to one year. The Council cannot approve extensions retrospectively therefore it is important that such cases are brought to the Council's attention in advance of the student's expected AHRC submission date. If the Council has approved an extension, it will be taken into account in the calculation of submission rates.

8.2 The exceptional circumstances where an extension to a student's expected AHRC submission date will be considered are:

- **Illness or accident** – this refers to any period during the writing-up period where the student was unable to work on their thesis for medical reasons.
- **Maternity, paternity or adoption** – a maximum of 12 months for each individual period of maternity or adoption leave during the writing-up period and 2 weeks for each individual period of paternity leave occurring during either the writing-up period **or** during the period of the studentship. Paternity is granted as an additional period of unpaid leave and so any requests for paternity leave during a studentship will not automatically be taken into consideration when submission dates are calculated and extensions must be requested separately.
- **Exceptional personal circumstances** – this includes bereavement and any other difficult personal circumstance that has rendered the student unable to work on their thesis during the writing-up period.
- **Scholarships** – the AHRC will consider requests to extend submission dates if a scholarship is awarded after a studentship has finished and before submission. The scholarship must provide additional value to the original thesis or offer the student a rare opportunity to research a related topic. Extensions will not be granted if a scholarship is awarded to fund an additional year of research on the student's current thesis topic.

8.3 The Council will **not** consider the following cases as grounds for an extension:

8.4 Taking up full-time employment after the award has ended

The Council will **not** grant an extension to the submission deadline if the submission has been delayed because the student has taken up full-time employment after an award has ended. It may be possible for students to take up a short-term teaching appointment, but only during the period of a studentship and subject to the Council's approval. Taking up employment at the end of a studentship is considered a normal outcome of doctoral study and therefore not a reason for extending a submission date. Students who take up full time employment before completing their thesis may find themselves unable to meet their submission date, we therefore encourage students to consider such a situation carefully.

8.5 Transfers from full-time to part-time study after a studentship has ended

The Council cannot approve extensions to submission dates because the student has changed their mode of registration after their studentship has ended and expects the student and institution to respect the terms under which the studentship was awarded.

8.6 Requests submitted after a student's submission date has passed

The Council cannot grant extension requests retrospectively. If a student does not submit their thesis or a legitimate extension request on or before their submission date, they will count as a nil submitter.

## 9. Timetable

9.1 All institutions must ensure that they update the submission rate data for the 2011 survey through the Student Data Portal (SDP) by **Monday 28 November 2011**. Institutions failing to meet this deadline will be considered as having a nil return. Once this deadline has been reached, the submission and completion rates for individual institutions will be calculated. Institutions will then be asked to check the preliminary results before they are published in the AHRC annual report.