

AHRC Postgraduate Funding Opportunities 2011 FAQs

GENERAL

1. Does the AHRC provide funding for Postgraduate study?

The AHRC's main provision of postgraduate funding is via **Block Grant Partnership (BGP)** and **Block Grant Partnership Capacity Building Route (BGP:CB)** Studentships, where a Research Organisation (i.e. university) is awarded a number of studentships under one or other of these mechanisms, and will recruit students to those funded places. The ROs in receipt of these awards are listed on our website. The AHRC provides funding, through the Research Organisation (RO) for Doctoral and Masters level qualifications via three schemes:

- Doctoral Award Scheme,
- Research Preparation Master's Scheme
- Professional Preparation Master's Scheme

For each scheme we have academic, residency and scheme requirements that students must fulfil in order to be eligible to receive AHRC funding through the RO. The details of these are available in the **Guide to Student Funding 2011**, available on our website. <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/FundingOpportunities/Documents/GuidetoStudentFunding.pdf>

Additional Doctoral opportunities include the **Collaborative Doctoral Award** Scheme and Project Students on **Research Grants**, where successful ROs will advertise specific projects.

ROs undertake their own recruitment processes. Therefore, students must contact the RO at which they wish to study as soon as possible to clarify their position and to find out about their processes and timetables.

2. My Research Organisation holds a BGP or BGP:CB – how do I access funding?

Students must contact the RO directly, as they are responsible for advertising and recruiting students to the studentships places they have been awarded under the BGP or BGP:CB. Organisations have to undertake open and fair recruitment to these places.

Each RO will have its own internal processes, deadlines and application forms, so students must contact them in order to apply for a possible BGP or BGP:CB Studentship.

Please note that the AHRC is not able to directly advertise studentships or act as a broker between students and ROs. Students must contact and apply directly to the RO in which they are interested with regards to the availability and selection process for studentships.

3. Where can I get the application forms?

ROs have their own recruitment process, so students must contact the RO direct to find out about their application process.

4. What is the deadline for applications?

Students must contact the RO at which they wish to study to find out about their application processes and deadlines.

5. My proposal is interdisciplinary in nature. How does this fit with the BGPs?

The BGP and BGP:CBs allow flexibility for interdisciplinary proposals, as the allocation of awards was by broad subject discipline as opposed to specific research projects. The devolution of student selection to ROs allows awards to be made with an organisational overview. For example, an RO which has been awarded a studentship in English may then be able to recruit a student with a project that covers English, History and Film, and who is studying in a History department.

6. How does the BGP system enable innovative student-led research proposals?

Studentships awarded within the BGP and BGP:CBs were by subject disciplines, not by research projects. The importance of maintaining student choice in terms of their individual projects is a requirement in terms of the BGP and BGP:CBs, and remains core to the AHRC's support of postgraduate research. The BGP Studentships must be advertised in such a way that does not restrict student choice or the principle of enabling student-driven projects.

7. How will the AHRC monitor the allocation of awards?

The AHRC will undertake monitoring of the BGPs to ensure that the studentships are awarded in a fair, open and transparent manner, which is in line with the initial BGP proposal. The AHRC will not, however, intervene in any discussion between departments on award allocation: that is for ROs to manage.

8. There is some concern that organisations may be left with no candidate to take up an award if students make multiple applications to organisations which hold a BGP.

The RO will need to manage this through its recruitment process and taking into account the flexibility provided by the AHRC in respect of the allocation of awards.

9. Recruitment of students by organisations could result in a decrease in quality of award holders and may encourage organisations to favour applicants from within their own departments.

It is unlikely that organisations will want to recruit anyone other than the highest quality students. The AHRC issues a comprehensive **Guide to Student Funding** (available to download from the website), which includes guidance on recruitment. All organisations are expected to advertise their available studentships nationally to ensure transparency and fairness in the recruitment process. Recruitment is one of the areas that the AHRC will monitor.

10. What are the monitoring and reporting mechanisms for BGPs and Studentships?

The AHRC will undertake mid-term and end of award monitoring for the over-arching BGP awards.

For studentships held under BGP awards, the AHRC no longer asks the RO to confirm the progress of students at the end of each academic year. However, we encourage ROs to ensure that student progress is satisfactory and that students have met the relevant terms and conditions. ROs will also be required to update the Student Details Portal when changes to the student's circumstances occur, and on an annual basis.

All AHRC-funded students are required to submit, by the end of their studentship, a report on the work they have undertaken together with an assessment from their

supervisor or course leader.

The AHRC also monitors whether or not students succeed in gaining the qualification for which they were aiming when they took up their studentship for a Master's or Diploma course. ROs are required to respond to an annual survey that is conducted on the AHRC's behalf by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and which monitors completion rates in ROs.

11. Will the AHRC continue to operate a system of sanctioning in relation to Doctoral submission rates?

Each year, the AHRC collects information from ROs on the submission and completion rates of students who took up studentships four, five and six years previously. This data is used to measure the performance of ROs in meeting the targets set for the successful submission and completion of theses by the students who the AHRC funds. Sanctions are applied at an organisational level only. Full details of the AHRC's submission rate policy can be found on the website at <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/About/Policy/Pages/SubmissionRate.aspx>.

12. Why are the BGP funds being allocated differently from 2011?

We will be awarding the BGP funds slightly differently this year compared to previous years. Since we will not be taking nominations for the places in advance of making the awards we have to assume that all the places will be taken by full award, full-time students. As a result, the actual numbers of full students that can be supported have been reduced slightly to allow for the fact that each assumed student will cost the maximum amount. We have also adjusted the allocation in line with the Delivery Plan (<http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/About/Policy/Documents/DeliveryPlan2011.pdf>).

All ROs in receipt of a BGP have received letters detailing exact figures for their institution, including the slight reduction in numbers for this year.

In order to make the most of their funding allocation, ROs are now permitted to use their funding more flexibly and strategically and have the option to use the AHRC awards to part-fund studentships. If they do part-fund, the remaining portion of the award must be sourced from other funds, thus creating more awards. The RO must not ask the student to find the remaining funds from his/her own resources.

13. Will the Roberts Funding stop in 2010/11

In line with the other Research Councils, the AHRC has incorporated an additional £200 into the fees allocation to enable ROs to support skills development. In addition, in 2011/12, we will provide a small sum under the 'Research Training Grant' element of the award, to assist ROs in meeting the requirements of the Research Training Framework. Further details on this can be found here: <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/FundingOpportunities/Pages/ResearchTrainingFramework.aspx>

ADMINISTRATION OF THE AWARD

- 1. Can you confirm the extent of flexibility we have in using the funding. For example if we originally had 3 PPM and 2 RPM, and have been offered 2 PPM and 1 RPM, can we offer students a 50% AHRC funded RPM or 50% AHRC funded PPM with no matched funding? Alternatively, could we use one of the PPM to fund 3 fees only AHRC studentships?**

You are able to part-fund students in order to recruit an increased number. The RO or its research partners **must** provide the other 50% of the costs to the student through a grant, bursary, etc. The student must not be expected to fund the remainder of the studentship cost themselves. You should advertise all the studentships as fully funded regardless of whether the full amount is coming from the AHRC. Studentships should not be advertised or offered as being part funded.

There must be a fair and transparent recruitment process, which should not favour fees-only students over those eligible for a full award for financial reasons. You should bear in mind that if a student drops out, the award may be offered to the next person on the rank list. If the person dropping out was eligible for a fees-only award, and the next a full award, then the RO must either top up the cost of the replacement studentship from elsewhere, or lose that studentship altogether.

e.g.

Rank List:

- 1. full award*
- 2. full award*
- 3. fees-only award*
- 4. fees-only award*
- 5. full award*

If 1. drops out, the award should be offered to 2., but if 2 also drops out, then the money would enable 3. and 4. to be funded because they are fees-only students.

- 2. If a student applies to us with part-funding already arranged (say from a charitable trust), can we part-fund them from the grant?**

Yes. This would be fine. The key thing is that the student must not be expected to cover any of the costs. The RO or its research partners **must** provide the other 50% of the costs to the student through a grant, bursary, etc. The student must not be expected to fund the remainder of the studentship cost themselves.

- 3. Can money be vired from one heading to another? i.e. could we fund two fees-only students with the aggregate fees and stipend money that would have covered one full studentship?**

Please see Question 1.

- 4. What do we do if we wish to fund a Doctoral student for 2 years, and then wish to use that proportion of the grant that would have funded a third year of the studentship to fund another Doctoral student for their final year?**

This would be fine. The key thing to remember is that each student must receive their qualification at the end of the period of funding. Also, the new student must be selected through a fair and transparent recruitment process.

5. We may find that we have residual funds in a heading. Can we use them for other purposes, i.e. the RTSG or the skills training grant?

All monies must be kept within their fund heading. The only exception is between fees and maintenance. Also, monies must never be moved between grants, since reconciliation is at the grant and fund heading level.

6. Will unspent funds in Year 1 be allowed to roll over in Years 2 or 3? If this is allowed, by Year 3 enough may have been accrued to pay fees for a one-year Master's, or if vireing is allowed, to top up the skills training or RTSG.

ROs may roll money over into subsequent years, but may not vire into the Research Training Support Grant or skills training. Any funds left unspent at the end of the grant period will be lost, and cannot be moved onto another grant.

7. Can residual funds left in any of the grant headings be used for PE activities if they specifically relate to AHRC-funded student research?

No. This would not be permissible. The AHRC runs separate schemes, such as the Collaborative Research Training scheme for these purposes. The only exception would be if there is a skills training aspect to the PE activity, however all of this money is intended for student research training, and this must take priority.

8. Will there be an opportunity to vire studentships within the BGP award (i.e. to temporarily remove a studentship from one subject area and allocate it within another)?

You do have the option to vire awards between subject areas, and in most cases are not required to get approval from the AHRC. This may be particularly appropriate within smaller subject areas where there may prove to be more high quality applicants than places available in that year. Flexibility in allocating the awards within subjects is allowed here, however it is expected that, where possible, the vireing will take place at a subject level within that year. For example, if there was not a suitable candidate to fill the Italian language place in year 1, that studentship place may be transferred to Film Studies. It would be expected that in year 2, a Film Studies studentship would be allocated back to Italian language, however, only if a suitable student can be found; otherwise the place may stay within Film Studies.

It is also possible to adjust studentship numbers between academic years, for example, if a studentship cannot be filled in year 1, it may be "saved" to be used in a subsequent year when the quality of applicants may be higher. However, the AHRC award will not be adjusted to allow for this; the institution must manage the financial implications themselves.

For virements of student places to subjects that were not in the original award allocation, AHRC approval must be sought.

9. Is it permissible to allocate an RPM award to a student undertaking an MA by Research, i.e. an MA with no taught component?

Yes. An RPM award may be allocated to students undertaking an MA with or without a taught component, so long as the course meets the aims of the RPM scheme.

10. Does the new flexibility extend to converting an RPM to a PPM?

We wouldn't normally expect this to happen, but if such a case did arise, and could be justified by the RO, then the case should be put to the AHRC for approval.

11. Can we award the studentships in any subject area, even if this wasn't originally the subject area awarded?

We would expect you to remain within the disciplines in the original BGP allocation and not award to new subjects. However, if you felt that there was an emerging subject that it was not possible to include in the original bid, for which you feel you can make the case, you should contact us and we can consider the possibility of allowing this.

12. What degree of flexibility is allowed in terms of the number of awards per discipline, e.g. is it possible to distribute the original funding allocation of one RPM award to each of Archaeology, History and Performing Arts differently, by giving 2 to Archaeology and one to Performing Arts?

You can distribute the awards differently, provided you feel you can make a good case for doing this. We would expect the proportions of the subject allocations to remain roughly the same but are willing to allow more flexibility on this.

13. What is the full period of the grant when the grant covers both one-year Master's and three-year Doctoral studentships?

The period of the grant is 3 years as this allows the Doctoral students to be funded from the grant. Funding for Master's students will only be provided in Year 1, though the RO may use the funds over a longer period if circumstances dictate.

14. Institutions are being encouraged to shift the balance of funding from standalone Masters into more integrated Masters + Doctoral programmes. How does this reconcile with the requirement that students should not be offered a 1+3 degree at the outset?

The AHRC does not support the 1+3 model, i.e. funding the same student for 1 year of Master's level study, immediately followed by 3 years of Doctoral study, without the student needing to reapply in a competitive process for the Doctoral funding. This is because the AHRC believes this locks students either into or out of funding, meaning that the best quality students may not be supported as a result. It may also be appropriate for a student to transfer to a different institution to complete their doctoral studies, which should be encouraged if in the best interests of the student.

However, in order to provide more integrated training, and since the AHRC will no longer be supporting standalone Master's degrees, any student taking a Master's degree should be doing so with the intention to continue to a Doctoral degree. Any Master's course supported by the AHRC should be formulated to naturally lead on to Doctoral study. A student may be recruited with the intention of them completing a 1+3 programme of study, but both parties should be able to discontinue this programme at the end of the Master's year.

15. Could you clarify that, from October 2011, the AHRC funding does not guarantee two years for a PPM award, i.e. we could fund a PPM award for two years, but we would need to use the money for Year 1 from the 2011/12 pot, and the money for Year 2 from the 2012/13 pot?

That's correct: you can still fund students for two-year Master's courses, but you need to manage the funding from within the award or take the second year from the 2012/13 award. Alternatively, the money for one of the two years, or 50% of both years, could be sourced from elsewhere. However you manage this, the cost must not be passed on to the student. For example, you may not fund the first year from the AHRC award, then ask the student to self-fund the second year, or ask him/her to reapply for funding.

16. Is the extended funding detailed in the Guide to Student Funding only for students who are enhancing specific skills? Does this mean we cannot apply for a third year of Doctoral funding for students who have already completed a 2-year Master's award?

This is correct. Since its introduction, the extra year of Doctoral funding students may apply for should only be approved in specific cases for students who need to acquire additional skills (as detailed in the Guide to Student Funding). It is right that it is not intended for students who have already completed a 2-year Master's award.

N.B. the AHRC will not provide additional funding. If the RO wishes to allow a student an extra year for skills training purposes, the RO will need to find the money within the grant.

17. In the Guide to Student Funding, it states that: "If a student has undertaken a 2 year Master's at the same institution, a full-time Doctoral studentship would normally last 2 years." This suggests that a student who has undertaken a 2 year Master's at another institution is not subject to this restriction, and that a full-time Doctoral studentship award could potentially last 3 years in these circumstances. Is this correct, or does this restriction in fact apply to all students regardless of the institution where the 2 year Master's was studied?

This only applies if the student remains with the same RO from Master's study through to Doctoral study.

18. In the Guide to Student Funding, it states that: "If the Grant includes Doctoral students, it will be for a duration of 3 years; if it only includes Master's funding, its duration will be one year only." Our understanding, based on previous communications, was that a grant including Doctoral students would have a duration of 4 years, rather than 3, to allow some flexibility should a student suspend. Can you clarify?

The extra year was only permitted in 2010. From now on, the AHRC only funds Doctoral students for 3 years. If a student suspends, he/she needs to be moved onto another grant to complete their funding.

19. Why do students need to start their course on 1 Oct (or exceptionally 1 Jan)? This reduces our flexibility, particularly in replacing Doctoral students who withdraw as we will have to wait until the following year, rather than identifying someone more quickly and starting within the BGP period. Other Councils allow any start date.

It is our expectation that most students will commence at the start of the academic year and the funding is provided on this basis. ROs now have the flexibility to accommodate late start dates and replacement students, but the funding must be managed within the term of the award.

20. In the Guide to Student Funding, it states that we can recruit a new student to fill a studentship if the original student fails to enrol. Is there any deadline/restriction on doing this?

Students should be replaced within a reasonable time period, given the need to support the student within the period of the award. The AHRC does not dictate what this timeframe should be, but leaves it to the RO's discretion.

21. The Guide to Student Funding states that a student is expected to remain resident in the UK, and close to the RO at which they are registered throughout the period of their studentship. How close does this need to be?

The AHRC does not define this in terms of miles, but any student not registered as a distance-learning student must live within a reasonable distance from their RO to ensure that they are able to maintain regular contact with their department and supervisor. This is to ensure that they get the full support, mentoring, training and access to facilities they need to complete their research successfully and to a high standard.

22. Will students holding a BGP studentship continue to be entitled to apply for funding to support study visits?

Yes. In addition to fees and maintenance as appropriate to their residency and registered status, doctoral students will be eligible to apply for study visits and conferences. The AHRC has provided Research Training Support Grant funding within the BGP award for this purpose. Requests should therefore be made to the RO according to their published process.

Further guidance is provided here:

<http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/FundingOpportunities/Documents/RTSGguidelines.pdf>

23. In these times of rising travel costs and concomitant environmental impact, would it be reasonable to consider requests for using digital images of source materials from foreign libraries/archives rather than travel?

This is permissible if the RO deems the request to be reasonable.

24. If any change is made to the award, for example a change from full- to part-time, or maternity leave, will the cost still be covered?

The policy on changes to part-time or maternity leave remains the same. Please refer to the **Guide to Student Funding** for full information on the policy for these various situations. Maternity costs are covered at the reconciliation stage, while changes from full to part-time, or vice versa, need to be managed within the award.

25. In the Guide to Student Funding, it states that periods of student absence should be recorded on the Student Details Portal within one month of the suspension being approved. Presumably the information you require is the revised funding end date? It may not be possible to enter this within a month of a student suspending, as we sometimes don't know the length of the suspension until the student re-registers.

While there is no specific functionality on the SDP to record suspensions, it is possible to amend the end date and submission date (where appropriate), and to enter the stipend and fees paid to the student in that academic year, which may need to be reduced accordingly. If you know the return date, then this should be entered. If you do not know the return date, you should enter an indicative date and revise this when the student returns. When you amend the end date, you need to enter a reason why the change has been made. This is important for the Submission Rate Survey.

26. Please could you explain the process for extending a submission date in more detail, i.e. what are the practical requirements for doing this?

If a student suspends during the period of funding, the RO must amend the end date of the award, and the submission date on the Student Details Portal and add a reason.

If a student suspends after the funding has ended, i.e. during their writing up year, the RO must approach the AHRC with a reason to extend the end date.

27. Within what timescale does the AHRC expect Doctoral students to complete?

By the end of the period of funding, the AHRC expects that at Doctoral student will have completed all primary research, and may have been able to write their thesis. A student needs to have submitted within one year of the end date of their funding.

An RO can fund a Doctoral student from any point during their course, provided the qualification is achieved at the end of the funding period.

28. When a student terminates, how should we go about replacing them? What options are available to us in terms of how the remaining period of funding for that studentship should be managed?

ROs need to use funding remaining in the pot from the terminated student. If there is any shortfall in the funds required for this, the RO must find the extra funding elsewhere within the university or its partners. The student must not be expected to cover the shortfall themselves. If this is not possible, then the studentship will be lost.

It is permissible to move the student to a later grant, but it is not possible to appoint a new Master's student instead of a Doctoral student. (N.B. please refer to Question 5 in this section re. converting RPM to PPM and vice versa). If the student is moved to a new grant, this needs to be reflected in the Student Details Portal update.

29. In the Guide to Student Funding, it states that, if a student transfers to another institution, the grant is not transferred with them. Will the student be included in the original RO's submission rate survey, rather than the new RO's? Will the receiving RO need to liaise with the original RO about suspensions, changes to expected submission date, RTGS payments etc?

We require the student to be included in the new RO's submission survey. To ensure that the student appears on the new RO's survey, it is important that when a student transfers, the Student Data Portal is updated. This will require both ROs involved to liaise about dates and finances. In the SDP, the original RO should no longer be marked as the 'Degree awarding organisation' or the 'Submitting RO' and the new RO should be added and marked as the 'Degree awarding organisation' and the 'Submitting RO'. Dates should also be updated where necessary.

30. What happens about reconciling studentships that go beyond the 3-year term?

For all Doctoral grants offered in 2010/11, i.e. those starting in October 2010, we have provided a year's grace to allow time to reconcile. Beyond this, for grants commencing in 2011 onwards, all grants offered are for a 3-year duration, and cease at the end of the 3 years. At the end of these 3 years, ROs will be send a final expenditure statement, and will need to account for all monies spent. Any studentships, e.g. those which suspended during the course of the 3 years, which continue beyond this period, will need to be moved onto the next grant, or the necessary costs found from elsewhere.

31. In the Guide to Student Funding, it states that DSA funding will be reconciled at the end of the grant period. Does this mean we have to wait 3 years to claim this funding?

DSA requests should be submitted in the normal way, and cover the full period of the student's study. Once the DSA request has been approved, the costs are added to the grant the student is linked to, and paid in quarterly instalments over the period of funding. At the end of the grant, all of the DSA monies paid to the RO must be reconciled. Receipts should be retained as these may be requested.

32. Do the Health and Safety requirement outlined in the Guide to Student Funding also cover RTSG-funded visits?

The RO has the same duty of care to the student when they are on a study visit as when they are at their home institution.

33. Does the need to report to the AHRC in cases of misconduct also apply to students who appeal against, say, a lower award, or who subsequently make a complaint to the OIA?

If a student appeals or complains against their RO, the AHRC does not need to be informed, unless it materially affects the progress or outcome of the degree for which the AHRC is funding them.