

## **Frequently Asked Questions – Postgraduate Review**

<u>Version Tracker</u>	
<u>Date</u>	<u>Amendment/Addition</u>
27 March 2008	Clarification to question 28
18 April 2008	Amendment to questions 31, 32, 34
1 May 2008	New question 30
13 June 2008	New questions 22, 24, 42
15 August 2008	New question 28

Following recommendations made by the Postgraduate Working Group (full details of which can be found at [http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/university\\_staff/postgraduate.asp](http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/university_staff/postgraduate.asp)), the AHRC has introduced a new mechanism for funding postgraduate study. This will take the form of two schemes:

- the Block Grant Partnerships (BGP) Competition will entail Research Organisations (ROs) submitting proposals for five years' worth of award allocations and will run every fourth year of the five year cycle. The deadline for the first round is 2 September 2008. Guidance for Applicants in the BGP competition can be found at [http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/university\\_staff/postgrad/block\\_grant.asp](http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/university_staff/postgrad/block_grant.asp), along with a list of independently eligible organisations.
- the AHRC Studentship Competition, which will provide students with the opportunity to submit an individual application for an award at an RO which does not hold a BGP. This will be run in a similar way to the current Open Competition. This scheme will commence in 2009. Guidance for this Competition will be available on the website in late 2008.

Below is a summary of frequently asked questions relating to the new funding mechanisms. Please note that this will be a live document, which will be added to as further issues arise. For ease of reference, this has been divided into the following sections:

- New Schemes: General
- New Schemes: Block Grant Partnerships
- New Schemes: Studentship Competition
- Application and Assessment
- Recruitment and Post Award

## **NEW SCHEMES: GENERAL**

### **1. If the aim of the AHRC's postgraduate review was to reduce the administrative burden of the current Open Competition, wouldn't it be simpler to introduce a capping system to limit the number of applications from Research Organisations?**

The main aim of the review was not to cut the administrative burden, rather to design a competition that would facilitate long-term engagement with ROs' strategic aims and meet the goals of the new system as set out in the Postgraduate Working Group's report. Capping has been introduced in the final round of the Open Competition, and will continue under the new Studentship Competition, in order to raise success rates and reduce the administrative burden on the AHRC and ROs which submit applications from students who have little chance of gaining an award.

### **2. How will the AHRC identify and ensure its support of emergent and endangered subject areas?**

The AHRC's Postgraduate Committee decided early in the process that stability would be an important driver for the first round of BGPs, in order to minimise disruption in the sector. However, there will be a degree of flexibility in the system in order to continue to maintain the health and sustainability of all arts and humanities disciplines. Under the new subject categorisation list (Appendix C of the Guide for Applicants in the Block Grant Partnerships Scheme), those subjects where the AHRC's Postgraduate Committee had concerns as to their endangered or emergent status, have been listed separately. An example of this is modern languages. By facilitating long-term strategic planning, the BGP scheme is designed to encourage investment in capacity building for smaller departments and disciplines. Support for small subject areas, especially those that are either emergent or endangered, can still be regarded as strategic, even if the numbers are small. Organisations are asked to justify the exclusion from their proposal of any departments or disciplines that have previously attracted funding. For the future, the AHRC will continue to monitor these areas.

### **3. Won't the devolution of student selection to organisations in the BGP Competition lead to a loss of a national overview of health of disciplines currently held by AHRC panel and committee members?**

It is foreseen that the new Competitions will allow the AHRC more engagement with UK-wide organisational strategies. One of the principles for the first round of the new schemes is to maintain stability in the sector in terms of subject spread. The BGPs will be awarded by subject, year and type (either Master's or Doctoral) in order to further maintain the stability of funding. This will not, however, be the basis of future rounds and further work will be done on researching the health of disciplines before publishing the criteria and aims of future BGP rounds. A profile of awards that the AHRC intends to make, by subject, is available for reference in the Guide for Applicants in the BGP Scheme. The panels which will make the funding recommendations will ensure that funding is allocated in line with this overview of subject spread.

### **4. There is concern that high quality students will be more attracted to organisations who hold BGPs, and that this will be to the detriment of equally strong departments at organisations who do not hold a BGP.**

Whilst we cannot be completely sure of student behaviour and hence the impact on student recruitment within departments, it may be safe to assume that many postgraduates will continue to value highly a place at a specific department. Historically, top quality applications have outnumbered the available awards in the AHRC's Open Competition. In 2006, for example, of 3,080 applicants with 1<sup>st</sup> class honours undergraduate degrees, only 1,207 gained awards. The Studentship Competition will

continue to be as competitive as the Open Competition and the appeal of gaining a nationally recognised Research Council award should guarantee that organisations applying through the Studentship Competition will have a wide pool of high quality students from which to choose to submit applications.

#### **5. How many awards will be available under the new schemes?**

For new awards holders under both the BGP scheme and the Studentship Competition, i.e. those students commencing in the academic year 2009-10, and for each of the four years thereafter, there are 1325 awards available. This represents a 10% decrease in the funding level available in recent years. For a statement with further details, please refer to [http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/news/news\\_pr/2008/Success\\_rates.asp](http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/news/news_pr/2008/Success_rates.asp). Please note that whilst it is expected that organisations will want to ask for more awards, the AHRC wish to highlight the decrease in numbers available in order to manage expectations. The AHRC has undertaken that stability will be an important factor in the first round, however in light of our decreased numbers of available awards organisations are advised that the 'baseline' figure which will be made available to the panel will be their average awards minus 15%. This number takes account of the reduced number of available awards and the fact that the baseline data was already above the number of previously available awards due to the practice of over allocating awards assuming a 4% decline rate and the shift to more doctoral students over the last 5 years. Organisations are strongly advised to put in realistic bids in terms of the number of students requested.

### **NEW SCHEMES: BLOCK GRANT PARTNERSHIPS SCHEME**

#### **6. How do I know if my organisation is eligible to apply in the BGP Scheme?**

In November 2007, we wrote to all organisations to inform them of their eligibility status. The letters were sent to Vice Chancellors and copied to the Registry of each organisation. Eligibility is based on achieving the threshold requirement of an average of 8 or more offers per annum in the Open Competitions over the period 2003-2007. Those organisations which are eligible to apply independently were also sent details of the historical subject spread of offers made over the same period, as a starting point in planning their proposals under the BGP scheme. A full list of ROs and their total average offers is available on the website ([http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/university\\_staff/postgrad/block\\_grant.asp](http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/university_staff/postgrad/block_grant.asp)). It is also possible for organisations to put in a collaborative proposal, so long as their joint average awards total reaches the threshold of 8 (please refer to the Guidelines for BGP Applicants, available on our website, for full details of the requirements of a collaborative proposal).

#### **7. Will the BGP Competition encompass any of the AHRC's other studentship schemes?**

The BGP Competition only encompasses the Doctoral, Research Preparation Master's and Professional Preparation Master's schemes. The Collaborative Doctoral Awards, Collaborative Research Training, Project Students, Library of Congress and Language-Based Area Studies schemes will all continue to run independently. Award numbers for these schemes have not been included in defining an organisation's 'baseline' or its eligibility for the BGP scheme.

#### **8. How will the AHRC encourage interdisciplinarity and ensure the flexibility required of the system?**

The BGP scheme will allow flexibility for interdisciplinary proposals, as the allocation of awards will be by broad subject discipline as opposed to specific research projects. The devolution of student selection to ROs will allow 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.

**9. Why is there such an emphasis on maintaining stability through the BGP Competition? Won't this mean organisations will essentially 'flatline' for the 5 year term of the award?**

The AHRC's Postgraduate Committee decided early in the process that stability would be an important driver for the first round of BGPs, in order to minimise disruption in the sector. However, there will be a degree of flexibility in the system. In putting together their proposal, organisations can plan around areas of development and capacity-building. So, for example, if an organisation is developing a new course to come on line during the BGP term, which they wish to include in their proposal, they would need to make a case as to why it would be valuable for funding in this area to be considered.

**10. Is there a cap on the number of awards an organisation can request under the BGP scheme?**

There is no 'cap' as such for the BGP proposals. In November 2007, we wrote to all Vice Chancellors (and copied the letter to the Registry), enclosing data relating to the subject spread of the awards achieved by each individual RO over the 2003-7 period. We suggest that this information is used as a basis for the Research Organisation's proposal. It is not, however, expected that organisations will necessarily strictly adhere to their previous spread when applying for a BGP award; this information is provided as guidance only. We have not given organisations a specific upper limit for the BGPs. We do recognise that there will be some changes, and organisations have the opportunity to make a specific case for additional (or fewer) awards in certain areas. However, one of the drivers in the first round of BGPs is stability. ROs should also note that there are 1325 awards per annum to allocate over both competitions. This means that, for the first round of BGPs, not all organisations will be able to achieve their historical average, and hence it will be necessary for organisations to manage their expectations. Unfortunately, there is simply not the scope for every organisation to increase their AHRC studentship allocation over the next five years.

**11. Won't constructing a BGP proposal involve a far greater administrative burden on organisations?**

The application form is complex. This one scheme will commit approximately 30% of the AHRC budget per year, for a five-year period, hence the process and decision-making must be comprehensive and robust. However, it is not foreseen that the process of putting together a BGP proposal will involve a significantly greater administrative burden than that currently incurred in the Open Competition. The proposal will only be made every five years, and so should lead to a decrease in an organisation's annual administration commitments to gaining AHRC funding. Further, once an organisation has achieved funding within the BGP scheme, the administration involved in student recruitment, will be for guaranteed awards rather than in the context of a competition with a 25% success rate. One of the key benefits of this new system is that it will enable organisations to plan more effectively.

**12. How will the BGP system enable the innovative student-led research proposals that the Open Competition fosters?**

Organisations will not be expected to provide specific details of student projects in their proposal. They will be requesting allocations in subject disciplines, not research projects. The importance of maintaining student choice in terms of their individual projects is still a requirement in terms of the BGP nominations and remains core to the AHRC's support of

postgraduate research. The BGP offer of award will include a profile for the numbers of studentships to be made by scheme and subject area for each academic year. The studentships must be advertised according to this profile in such a way that the profile is maintained, but without restricting student choice or the principle of enabling student-driven projects.

**13. How will the AHRC monitor the allocation of awards?**

Organisations will be expected to detail their intended spread of awards in their initial proposal. We will require a strong rationale for all subject areas which are excluded from the proposal as well as those that are included. We also ask for details in the BGP proposal of how the RO will be managing the BGP and the related studentships, in terms of recruitment and monitoring, for example, and we will be monitoring against this. Essentially, the AHRC will be undertaking monitoring of the nominations to ensure that the studentships are awarded in a fair, open and transparent manner, which is in line with the initial proposal. The AHRC will not, however, intervene in any discussion between departments on award allocation: that will be for ROs to manage.

**14. If the AHRC aims to allocate awards with a 50/50 spread between Master's and Doctoral level study, should our proposal also include this split?**

The 50/50 allocation of awards is a target the AHRC has been moving towards over a number of years, and relates to the **total** spread of awards offered by the AHRC. This profile is a national, not organisational level, target. As such, it may be inappropriate for individual organisations to aim for this in their proposal. ROs should use data on their traditional spread of awards as a basis for their proposal, making cases for variation from this profile where appropriate. For example, it is recognised and expected that some organisations have strengths in Master's courses that prepare students for professional practice. The Moderating Panel will be responsible for ensuring there is stability, on a national level in their allocation of funding.

**15. What is the AHRC looking for in terms of the aspects of a Research Organisation's management procedures?**

We are looking for details about how an organisation manages its Arts and Humanities strategy and ensures that the aims are achieved. The panel will also be looking for details of how the RO plans to integrate postgraduate training with research and knowledge transfer. In the application, we ask for an indication of how the RO will ensure it is supporting the highest quality students to take up BGP funding, ensuring the selection process is fair and transparent, taking into account equal opportunities issues and ensuring appropriate national advertisement of studentship opportunities. We also ask for information relating to the monitoring processes to be implemented by an RO, for example:

- How the organisation will ensure the studentships are allocated in accordance to the BGP allocation
- How the organisation will ensure the studentships meet their organisation's strategy
- How the organisation will monitor the quality of students recruited
- How the organisation will ensure that Doctoral candidates are adequately prepared for Doctoral level study

**16. The AHRC's Delivery Plan states that 50% of its postgraduate funding will be allocated in line with AHRC strategy. Could this be clarified?**

The AHRC is asking ROs to align their strategy with the AHRC's strategy as outlined in its Strategic Plan and Delivery Plan in presenting their BGP proposal, but the 50% target is a

national one across both the studentship and BGP schemes, and not one that each organisation needs to aim for. The AHRC believes that we can achieve this 50% provision, based on the published subject spread, which in turn is based on the AHRC's historical provision therefore it is expected that the AHRC can reach this target if organisations bid to their own strengths.

The Delivery Plan includes a number of aims, from sustaining the excellence of the research base and the health of disciplines to more specific strategic areas. It is extremely important that an organisation justifies the studentship allocation it is requesting in its BGP proposal, and any alignment with the AHRC Delivery Plan is identified. The AHRC believes that, within strategic areas, there needs to be breadth to postgraduate provision. The AHRC looks at these areas in very broad terms, and will be advising assessors accordingly. If a university can make a case that it is supporting students or courses that fall within these broad areas, it should say so in their BGP proposal. Similarly, if an organisation has experience in the cross council themes, the arts and humanities focus should be clearly defined and relevant to the BGP proposal.

Organisations should highlight how they will contribute to the AHRC's strategic priorities where they can, and some may deliver more or less than 50%, but we do not expect them to make significant shifts in their position.

**17. 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.**

Whilst the AHRC can not intervene at the recruitment stage of the BGPs, students will be encouraged to act in a responsible manner with regard to their applications. Students may only allow one nomination form to be submitted on their behalf. We reserve the right to reject all of a student's nominations if they submit more than one. In the Guidance, the AHRC will state that students, in collaboration with the Research Organisation, can only submit one nomination to a BGP place.

**18. If we are successful in achieving BGP funding, will it be possible to increase our numbers of students year on year?**

It will not be possible to 'ramp up' numbers of students in this way, since the AHRC's budget is a fixed amount each year and there would not be any extra money to allocate over a BGP term. While it will not be possible to increase numbers of students year on year, it is reasonable to vary the numbers of students across subjects each year, similarly to vary them between Professional Preparation and Research Preparation Master's schemes. However, an organisation must have the same total number of doctoral and total number of Master's students each year.

## **NEW SCHEMES: STUDENTSHIP COMPETITION**

**19. Don't the new systems replicate the current sector-wide inequalities and produce a 'second class' Studentship Competition?**

The BGP and the Studentship Competitions have equal standing: one is not more important than the other. In order to be eligible to apply in the BGP Competition, an organisation must have received an average of 8 offers per annum over the 2003-07 Open Competitions, or must form a viable collaboration with other organisations which jointly achieve the threshold. This threshold is to ensure that a 'Block' grant is awarded, which can realistically facilitate an organisation's arts and humanities strategy. The purpose of retaining a Studentship Competition is to recognise that organisations with a historically

smaller award profile still provide excellent postgraduate provision, and to enable these organisations to build capacity.

**20. Will the BGP Competition encompass any of the AHRC's other studentship schemes?**

No, the BGP Competition only encompasses the Doctoral, Research Preparation Master's and Professional Preparation Master's schemes. The Collaborative Doctoral Awards, Collaborative Research Training, Project Students, Library of Congress and Language-Based Area Studies schemes will all continue to run independently. Award numbers for these schemes have not been included in defining an organisation's 'baseline' or its eligibility for the BGP scheme. All eligible organisations will continue to be able to apply in these schemes.

**21. If the Studentship Competition is capped, how will an organisation which cannot apply for a BGP in the first round be able to capacity build in order to access the second round?**

The cap relates to the number of applications an organisation can submit and will enable increasingly successful organisations to capacity build. If an organisation successfully achieves or nearly achieves its upper limit, it is likely that it would be able to access the second round of the BGP Competition in 2012. Assuming that we retain the threshold, the second round of BGPs will have different eligibility criteria from the first, since using previous Open Competition success rates will no longer be a suitable metric on which to base eligibility. The threshold will also be reviewed. Work will be done to define these criteria once the first round of BGPs have been awarded. Organisations might wish to consider the following which could potentially strengthen their position for the future:

- devise and develop their strategy for postgraduate study and training
- implement strategies to foster growth
- look at innovative ways of building capacity
- investigate new areas or develop areas of excellence
- demonstrate their own strategic investment in particular areas
- select the highest quality students for entry to the studentship competition to improve success rates
- establish or build on collaborative and partnership working across the subject sector and with external organisations.

**APPLICATION AND ASSESSMENT**

**22. My organisation is interested in submitting a collaborative bid to the BGP scheme, what issues should my organisation consider?**

Collaborative bids must have a strong academic rationale, and there should be an added value to the collaboration, compared to that in an independent bid. All organisations involved should consider whether a BGP is the most appropriate route for them, whilst a BGP award would offer stability, the studentship competition has been specifically maintained so that smaller organisations do have some opportunity to capacity build over the next 5 years.

It is vital that the bid should be based on a coherent strategy, and whilst a collaborative bid can include subjects outside the collaboration, the rationale for a coherent strategy across all the subjects at all institutions may be more challenging to articulate. We will only accept one application per organisation for a BGP either individually or as a collaboration. Please note that if your collaborative bid is successful all organisations

involved will not be able to apply for studentships from the studentship competition, so you should carefully consider which subjects you include in your application.

There will be just one application, and all partners must sign up to a common policy on training, supervision, management and monitoring and have one joint strategy on which their bid 'hangs'. Please also bear in mind that we have fewer awards to offer (see FAQ No. 5), and cannot fund at previous levels. Your award is likely to be for fewer studentships than you apply for, so it is advised that collaborating partners have a strategy in place to deal with this scenario.

**23. Certain organisations may be interested in collaborating, but may not have any other award holding organisations in their geographical area.**

The AHRC does not expect that collaborations will be driven by organisations in the same geographical area, and indeed proximity will not be viewed as a strong enough rationale for submitting a collaborative proposal. Collaborative proposals must be made at an organisational level and must have a strong academic basis for the entire collaboration, as well as the overall organisational rationale. To be eligible to submit a collaborative proposal, the participating organisations must have achieved an average of 8 or more awards per annum between them. There must also be strong evidence that the collaboration is viable. Further guidance on collaborations is available in the Guide for BGP Applicants.

**24. Is it possible to vary the number of studentships requested, across the 5 years of the BGP award?**

While you can be flexible with your subject allocations year on year, the totals must be the same in terms of the total number of Master's studentships and total number of Doctoral studentships requested each year.

E.g. 10 doctoral students per year. Year 1 = 6 History, 4 English, Year 2 = 4 History, 4 English and 2 Italian, etc. Similarly for PPM and RPM studentships.

**25. If the BGP competition is intended to allow flexibility and management of awards at organisational level, why does the application process involve such subject specific data?**

Organisations are asked to provide a broad spread of data in their application form as further performance indicators. For example, we request information on the total numbers of postgraduate students in the subject at an organisation and how they are funded, along with submission rates for all arts and humanities students. This information will give an overall picture of arts and humanities at an organisation, as opposed to being strictly reliant on the data collected in relation to AHRC award holders, which we recognise is only a small percentage of all arts and humanities postgraduates. The AHRC requires this subject specific data in order to map the spread of awards and ensure the maintenance of health of disciplines. The funding available through the BGP scheme commits 30% of the AHRC budget per year, for a five-year period, hence the process and information available for the assessors must be comprehensive. It is equally important that there is a strong justification within the proposal for the studentships requested under each of the subject areas.

**26. To what use will the AHRC put the historical data it holds on ROs and their traditional spread of awards?**

This data will be used by the Moderating Panel to ensure that any deviation from the requested number of studentships a BGP proposal contains will not undermine the bid to the extent that it becomes unviable for the RO in question. Due to the lower sums of funding available, there will inevitably be losses incurred, but the historical data will be

used to ensure that this is applied reasonably, so as not to unduly disadvantage an organisation.

**27. What will the assessment criteria and process be for the BGP competition?**

After the closing date for submission of BGP proposals of 2 September 2008, the entire application will be sent to up to five reviewers selected from the Peer Review College (for proposals requesting studentships in a small number of subject areas, for example in the case of monotecnics, there may be fewer reviewers). The reviewers will assess the proposal according to the published criteria, and will provide comments and an overall grade. There will then follow a Right to Reply stage, in the same manner as the Research Grants scheme, in which the RO will be sent, via the BGP co-ordinator, all reviewer comments on the proposal. Following the Right to Reply, the proposal, all reviewers' comments, and the RO's response will be passed to the members of the Moderating Panel. The Panel will not review the proposal again, rather it will be responsible for deciding the final allocation of funding, based on the reviews, the RO response and the subject spread map. It is possible that, while a proposal may be successful, an RO may not achieve all the studentships it has requested. Checks will be in place to ensure that any adjustments made do not undermine the proposal to the extent that it becomes unviable.

**28. What will happen to the BGP proposal between the deadline date and the organisation response stage?**

The timetable for this part of the process is as follows:

2 September 2008	BGP proposal deadline
Mid to late September 2008	problematic applications returned to the Submitter Pool, with an email sent to the contact named on the form and to the member(s) of the Submitter Pool notifying them that the form has been returned through Je-S. N.B. only proposals where there are clear errors or omissions in the form will be returned; this is not an eligibility check. You will be given a week to correct the problem and return the form.
3 Sept – 5 Dec	Proposals checked, reviewers selected, proposals sent to review, proposals reviewed by assessors, reviews returned to AHRC, reviews collated and sent to organisations
8 Dec – 7 Jan 2009	Organisation response. This will be sent by email to the contact named on the proposal (it will NOT be sent via Je-S)
7 Jan 2009	Deadline for organisation response (by email)

Please note that once the proposal is submitted through Je-S, the BGP contact will be the person named on the form, so please ensure this is the most relevant person to co-ordinate the above activities. The BGP coordinator will act as the main contact for any AHRC correspondence throughout the assessment and outcome process once a proposal had been submitted. It is expected that the BGP coordinator will also be the AHRC's main contact during any subsequent award.

**29. What will those organisations submitting proposals under the BGP scheme receive at the 'Right to Reply' stage of the assessment process?**

Once the BGP proposals have undergone peer review assessment, organisations will receive the reviewers' comments on the proposal (excluding the allocated grade and any identifying remarks made by the assessors). From this, organisations will be able to see in which areas the assessors felt the strengths and possible weaknesses of a proposal lay. In a similar manner to the AHRC's Research Grants Scheme, the organisation will then have the opportunity to correct any factual errors, or misconceptions. It will not be possible to make alterations to the proposal. A collation of the assessors' comments, along with the organisation's response, will then be sent to the Moderating Panel.

**30. What will the assessors be looking for in respect of research training?**

The assessors will be seeking information in line with the AHRC's Research Training Framework (see the Guide for Applicants for details). The proposal will need to demonstrate that the RO is providing high quality training in subject-specific and transferable skills for all of their arts and humanities doctoral award holders, not just those who are/will be funded by the AHRC. At a subject level, the proposal will need to show that there is appropriate training provision in place for each subject area, in terms of subject specific skills, both for research-based and professional modes of study at both Master's and doctoral level. At an organisational level, organisations should detail their generic skills provision.

**31. How should ROs consider the term 'awarded qualification' in the context of the information requested on doctoral completion rates the BGP Application form, as this is different for different organisations?**

We recognise that different organisations award doctoral degrees at different points of the closing processes of a doctoral student's study. Therefore, ROs should use the definition of 'awarded qualification' as it is considered at their organisation. Whilst complete information is helpful to the reviewer, we will be advising the reviewers to give more weight to the information given on 'submission'. If appropriate, the organisation should also provide an explanatory note in the relevant section of the application form.

**32. How should Research Organisations approach the spread of studentships across the five year period of the BGP award?**

Organisations are asked to enter the number of doctoral, Research Preparation and Professional Preparation Master's studentships that are being requested in each subject area for each year of the award. Organisations need to ensure an even spread overall of doctoral and Master's students requested each year. For example, if an organisation wishes to request an average of 5 doctoral awards a year, it should request 5 doctoral awards each year of the BGP bid, i.e. they should not ask for 1 in year 1, 3 in year 2, and 11 in year 3 etc. Variation can occur in the subject areas requested from year to year, however. For smaller subjects, you may wish to ask for an award every other year if an award each year cannot be justified on the basis of historical spread.

**33. The way our departments are organised doesn't map clearly onto the 33 subject areas in Appendix C of the Guide for Applicants: Block Grant Partnerships. How should we approach the structuring of our bid?**

The AHRC's Postgraduate Committee took the decision to conflate the previously extensive subject listing into the new, shorter list to allow greater flexibility for organisations. The only subjects which remain listed at a detailed level are the languages, as Committee felt that there were particular concerns about the continued health of these disciplines. Within that context, it is for individual organisations to decide, and express in the relevant narrative sections of their bid, where they view the specific subjects they support as sitting under the 33 subject areas. For a detailed description of what the AHRC defines

under each area, please refer to Appendix A of the Guide for Applicants: Block Grant Partnerships.

While bids must be made under the 33 subject areas, it is for the individual organisation to decide which department the studentships will sit within. The BGP scheme will allow flexibility for interdisciplinary proposals, as the allocation of awards will be by broad subject discipline as opposed to specific research projects. The devolution of student selection to ROs will allow 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 and Film, based in whichever department is appropriate. There is also the possibility for a student to be supervised by a number of supervisors across departments and subjects, as appropriate.

The subjects are not designed to map directly onto departments. As far as the logistical paperwork of the JeS form is concerned, while each subject must be tackled individually, it is perfectly acceptable to cross-reference the areas, and to explain the position of your organisation under the Case for Support and the organisation-level information.

## **RECRUITMENT AND POST AWARD PROCESSES**

### **34. 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 issued a comprehensive Guide to Student Recruitment and Nomination in February 2008 (available to download from the website). All organisations will be expected to advertise their available studentships nationally to ensure transparency and fairness in the recruitment process. The AHRC will be monitoring the nominations process and reserves the right to turn down a student nomination if the candidate does not meet the eligibility criteria or if the recruitment process appears to be unfair.

### **35. Will there be mechanisms in place to prevent one student being nominated to more than one BGP studentship place?**

In the Guidance, the AHRC will state that students, in collaboration with the Research Organisation, can only submit to the AHRC one nomination to a BGP place. Students will be encouraged to act in a responsible manner with regard to their applications and will have to make the choice of where they want to study before the Studentship Competition deadline (see timetable under question 32). The AHRC will not receive any nominations in advance of the Studentship Competition, and will only accept nominations for students who have **not** submitted an application to the Studentship Competition. In addition, students will not be able to be nominated to a BGP or CDA place by withdrawing their application to the Studentship Competition. Therefore all eligible Studentship Competition applications will proceed to assessment. This mechanism will mean that the potential for a large number for students withdrawing will be dramatically reduced. If a student is unsuccessful in the Studentship Competition, they will subsequently be able to be nominated to a BGP place. If the AHRC receives more than one nomination for a student, we reserve the right to reject all that student's nominations.

### **36. Why has the timetable for student nominations been changed?**

Following issues with the nomination deadline as raised by the community at the BGP Workshop events and the AHRC Regional events, we consulted with a group of organisations about the timetable for the new competitions. The current timetable gives

30 April 2009 as the deadline for receipt by the AHRC of Student Nomination forms for the BGP Studentship Competition. This timetable was developed in response to concerns of ensuring that the application or nomination process does not undermine the integrity of either scheme. However, due to the timing of the announcement of the BGP awards (Feb 2009), those organisations that will be submitting proposals under the BGP scheme felt that it may not be possible to recruit students to the studentship places within the timeframe allowed, particularly in the first year of the BGPs. Taking these concerns into consideration, and following wider consultation with a group of organisations, we have made some changes to the timetable as below:

<b>New Timetable</b>	<b>Activity</b>
2 Sept 2008	BGP Proposal deadline
w/c 23 Feb 2009	BGP awards announced
* 7 May 2009	Studentship Competition deadline
* 28 May 2009	BGP nominations 'open'
* 30 July 2009	BGP nominations 'close'

\*exact date TBC

The AHRC has provided guidance on best practice for recruiting student to the BGP studentships in the Guide to Student Recruitment and Nomination in February 2008 (available to download from the website), which emphasises flexibility within the subject areas. Since ROs know in which subject areas they are requesting studentships, it will be acceptable for organisations to anticipate and advertise for students prior to the announcement of the BGP outcomes, with the proviso that the funding for the place is yet to be confirmed. The AHRC recognises that this timetable is not ideal, however, it will only apply in year 1 of the BGP.

**37. How is it envisaged that organisations should advertise for students to fill the BGP places? Will the AHRC be placing advertisements on their website?**

The AHRC will not have any role in advertising for the studentship places. The organisation is free to advertise the studentships as they wish, provided they are advertised nationally, and that subjects map onto the subject allocation of awards given under the BGP award. This is because of the necessity to maintain a subject spread across arts and humanities subjects. One of the key drivers of the BGP scheme is to maintain student choice with regard to their area of study. It is envisaged that organisations are likely to advertise the studentships using existing processes. While the AHRC has provided best practice guidance for the recruitment process, we will not, for example, be issuing template application forms.

**38. What role will the AHRC play in the nomination process once the nomination forms are submitted by the organisation?**

We aim to process the nomination forms as they come in, so an RO submitting their nominations early would hear back before the 30 July deadline for submitting nominations. For those nominations submitted for the 30 July deadline, we aim to respond by the end of August. It is for each RO to decide how they manage this process, either sending the nominations in piecemeal or in one complete batch for instance. The AHRC will be operating a light-touch approval process. The Research Organisation is responsible for ensuring that the nominated students are eligible for the award, for example that they fulfil the published residency criteria. The AHRC may, however, query a nomination if the eligibility is unclear. The eligibility criteria will be the same as for the

current Open Competition. The AHRC will also be checking that the subject spread of the nominations matches that awarded, at the broad level. Otherwise, the AHRC will trust the decisions made by the organisation in terms of allocation to subject categories, and will only query should an allocation seem out of line with the BGP award. Details of the process will be published on the AHRC website in February 2008.

**39. Will there be a facility for re-nominating to places if students do not take up their award?**

It will be possible to re-nominate to places within a certain period of the start date. This timeframe is currently being discussed and will be confirmed in the Guide to Student Recruitment and Nomination when it is published on the AHRC's website in February 2008.

**40. 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)?**

There will be limited capacity for the vireing of awards, and any requests to do so must be discussed with, and approved by, the AHRC. It is envisaged that this may be particularly appropriate within the smaller subject areas where there may prove to be a dearth of suitable applicants for the studentships in one year. The AHRC will allow flexibility, within reason, however, it is expected that the vireing will take place at a subject level within that year. For example, if there was not a candidate of suitable standard available to fill the Italian Language and Culture in Year 1, that studentship place may be moved to Film Studies instead; if a suitable Italian student appeared in Year 2, then that studentship place would have to be moved back from Film Studies. It will not be possible to vire awards between years.

**41. Is the AHRC envisaging a greater post-award administrative burden on those organisations that hold BGPs?**

While the AHRC is devolving the responsibility of the management of the BGP studentships to organisations, the only additional post-award administration will be the recruitment of students. The opportunity for ROs to select the students for awards is perceived as one of the main benefits of the new system. Many organisations already have their own recruitment systems in place, which they can utilise. In addition, the substantial administrative burden of the current Open Competition will no longer be a factor. The AHRC will continue to process all other post-award functions, such as DSA (Disabled Student Allowance) and study visit claims.

**42. How are BGPs funded?**

BGPs will be allocated a number of studentships and the number will not change according to the type of student recruited. BGP funding will be allocated on the basis of studentships requested; it will not be a lump sum of money for the organisation to allocate as it sees fit. We will be issuing Guide to Student Recruitment and Nomination in February 2008, and will be monitoring the spread of awards given to fees only and part time students to ensure a fair balance is maintained.

**43. 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, students will continue to be eligible to apply for study visits and conferences, according to the type of their award. Such requests will continue to be made directly to the AHRC.

**44. What reporting mechanisms will be in place for the new schemes?**

The AHRC will be streamlining its current reporting processes, and the new mechanisms will be implemented for students funded under all of our schemes. Decisions relating to these issues are currently being finalised.

For studentships held under a BGP award, we plan to retain the End of Award Report, which will be completed by both the university and the student, as a mechanism for feeding back to the AHRC, and also as a tool for evaluation purposes. In addition, it is likely that the current Annual Reports will be replaced by an organisational level 'tick-box' mechanism at the end of each year of the BGP period. We will also be operating a programme of visits to Research Organisations in order to broaden our contact with the community.

Organisations will have to report on the BGP as a whole probably mid-term and at the end of the award.

**45. Will the AHRC continue to operate a system of sanctioning in relation to doctoral submission rates?**

Sanctioning will continue under the new funding mechanisms, however, this will be applied at an organisational level. We will no longer sanction at department level. The submission threshold will be raised over two years, along with the number of AHRC-funded students an RO holds before sanctions are applied.