

## Summary of responses to question 7

<b>Question 7:</b> In your view, do the attributes of doctoral graduates described in <i>The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland</i> (FHEQ) doctoral qualification descriptor still apply?			
	<b>Numbers and percentages</b>		<b>Additional comments</b>
	Number	% of total	The next two rows provide an overview of responses to question 7. The rest of this table summarises the comments and suggestions received, sub-divided into broad groups.
Total number of responses to the consultation	72	100%	The overwhelming majority of respondents think the doctoral attributes outlined in the existing qualification descriptor remain appropriate. Only six (8 per cent) of the respondents to the discussion paper made no comment about this question. No one said that the attributes no longer apply.
Number answering this question	66	92%	
<b>Comments on the doctoral qualification descriptor attributes</b> Please note that some respondents are counted more than once in the sub-categories below, because they made several comments.			
a Yes, the attributes still apply.	64	89%	This number/percentage shows those who said that the attributes still apply. Details of some of the positive comments made are provided in the annex. There was one negative comment in this group from a respondent who said that, although the attributes still apply, few take any notice of them.
Some of the respondents who agreed that the attributes were still widely applicable also had suggestions for minor amendments which have been included in the sub-categories shown below. Suggestions for revisions to the descriptor are summarised in the comments.			
b The attributes, although general enough to remain broadly applicable, do not recognise sufficiently the abilities of graduates of professional doctorates and some of the more recently established PhDs. Some	7	10%	These responses are linked with those for question 10 (about the extent of employer involvement in shaping the doctoral qualification descriptor).

<p>making these points also acknowledge that section c of the descriptor has enough breadth to cover a range of doctorates.</p>			
<p>Respondents in group b suggest that it might be useful to re-visit the attributes, for example, to add a reference to original approaches to the <i>application</i> of knowledge and other characteristics common to graduates of professional doctorates.</p> <p>One respondent suggested that currently the attributes were geared towards the traditional PhD with little acknowledgement of practice-based doctorates. Another referred to the growing tension in expectations of outcome between a 'traditional' PhD and a professional doctorate. One institution said there was a need to move away from the view of the doctorate as training only for a career in academia and to take a more diverse view of future employment. Another respondent suggested that the sector needs to establish a clear understanding of what constitutes doctoral level which works for both 'pure' research and other forms of doctorate (for example, professional and practice/performance based). Originality and significance of contribution to an area of research, professional practice and performance may be a way forward (note: this theme is taken up in responses to question 8).</p> <p>Another view is that the breadth of doctoral programmes means it may be time to re-visit the attributes to ensure they fully cover the wide nature of PhDs in the creative and performing arts and professional doctorates. Any changes would only be appropriate if they helped to clarify the broader expectations of newer doctoral programmes and did not dilute the standard expectation of a UK doctorate. Such changes should take account of global considerations of the doctorate, for example the Forces and Forms for Change project supported by the US National Science Foundation, <a href="http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2008/nsf08012/nsf08012.pdf">www.nsf.gov/pubs/2008/nsf08012/nsf08012.pdf</a></p>			
<p>c Greater alignment with Dublin descriptors/other doctoral frameworks, especially in the European Union (EU), would be helpful, as would reference to the detailed attributes referred to in the Research Councils' Joint Skills Statement (JSS). See Appendix 3 to the <i>Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education: Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes</i>.</p>	4	6%	Comments in this group are summarised in the next row.
<p>The attributes in the doctoral qualification descriptor and JSS are broad and high-level enough to encompass the employability of PhD researchers. However, since publication of the JSS (2001) and the <i>SET for Success</i> report (2002), there has been increased focus on the</p>			

employability of doctoral graduates and it may be timely to review the current applicability of both the JSS and the qualification descriptor.

To enhance the employability of UK-trained researchers both within the UK and overseas, QAA may wish to consider whether the attributes in the descriptor can be aligned more closely with doctoral frameworks in place elsewhere, particularly within the EU. The attributes are compatible with the Dublin descriptors, but greater alignment might be helpful. The more detailed learning outcomes in the Research Councils' JSS are a useful adjunct. The attributes should be revised to bring them more into line with the European Qualifications Framework and Bologna descriptors, to improve the opportunity for mobility for UK graduates and those from continental Europe seeking to undertake doctoral programmes in the UK. All the comments included in this section were from respondents in higher education sector-related organisations, rather than from higher education institutions.

d The requirement for doctoral candidates to demonstrate that their work merits publication (section i of the doctoral qualification descriptor) is imprecise.	1	1%	The further information below provides some relevant background on this point, including some extra detail from the respondent.
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As can be seen from the responses to question 8, institutions' assessment criteria often include references to the need for a candidate's work to be capable of publication. Institutions who consider this an integral part of assessment criteria use phrases such as: '[the candidate] should produce work of publishable quality'; 'matter worthy of publication, though it need not be submitted in a form suitable for publication'; and 'worthy of publication or dissemination in whole or in part in a form appropriate to the discipline'.

Others focus less on publication. The institutional respondent in category d said that reference to doctoral candidates having to demonstrate that their work 'merits publication' has been omitted from their recently revised criteria for the award of a PhD because it is too imprecise a term. The institution had concerns about what would be understood by this term. Does it mean: that the thesis is ready to be published in its current form; published where; and how precisely would different disciplines interpret it? Also, the criteria used by publishers change and some types of work are more difficult to publish than others.

Further information around 'publishability' as an assessment criterion is in the summary of responses to question 8, about institutional definitions of originality.

e Need to take account of PhDs in some arts and humanities subjects.	1	1%	This respondent suggested that, although the attributes broadly apply, for some arts and humanities PhDs the written presentation of the research and the development of argument are more strongly emphasised than in the existing qualification descriptor.
f Attributes should be expanded to enable skills to be included in assessment of the thesis.	1	1%	The attributes could be expanded and unified to say something like: 'graduates should develop the expectation of contributing at the forefront of the relevant profession or discipline.'  The descriptor could also state that 'acquisition

			of the necessary D-level skills should be evidenced by production of a thesis that meets certain criteria [as already set out in the descriptor] and defence of the thesis at a viva voce examination.' This would then make it a function of the viva to explore formally the acquisition of D level skills, as well as assessing the research quality of the thesis.
g Attributes should be qualified to take account of the number of older candidates.	1	1%	This respondent (an institution with significant numbers of older doctoral candidates), pointed out that for many older candidates, employment is not the key issue when graduating from a doctoral degree and that perhaps this should be acknowledged in the descriptor.
h Suggestion for an additional attribute.	1	1%	One respondent suggested that 'the ability to defend their ideas' should be added to the existing attributes.
i Comment about the MPhil.	1	1%	One institution said it would welcome separate attributes/a descriptor for the MPhil, that is, a research master's degree which normally takes a minimum of two years to complete.

## Summary of additional comments

Below is a summary of additional comments made by respondents who said that the existing D level qualification descriptor remains appropriate.

Response number	Summary of comments made by respondent
5	The attributes are sufficiently general to remain broadly applicable. For example, they recognise advanced scholarship as well as new knowledge.
31	The attributes...apply across the PhD and professional doctorates.
48	These are extremely helpful. We use them in training supervisors, informing students and also send them to internal and external examiners. We specifically ask examiners to reflect on the descriptor when their judgements are borderline.
55	The attributes are open to interpretation (perhaps a good thing as it allows flexibility).
56	As a set of generic criteria for study and attainment the FHEQ descriptor provides an excellent set of concise benchmarks for doctoral study. The initial four capacities cover innovation, rigour, real-world ability to actualise a research project, and research skills. The three latter capacities encourage broader contextual abilities including communication, transferable skills and developing a research agenda. In this respect they are exhaustive as well as providing a necessarily artificial, but consequently clear, delineation between areas of attainment. Implications that these attributes do not meet industry's requirements are unfounded: lack of commercial awareness cannot be remedied by the inclusion of a 'commercial' criterion in the descriptors, and commercial awareness is not appropriate for all disciplines; commercial awareness is implied by 'making informed judgement on complex issues in specialist fields, often in the absence of complete data'. Similarly, over-specialisation should be addressed by criteria iv and b in the descriptor. There is a need to avoid an excessively academic interpretation of the descriptors, which should be read as guidelines for training specialists adaptable to a variety of work environments, academic and non-academic. If the quality of doctoral study is to be retained, the descriptor needs to be explained in more detail for institutions and supervisory teams, rather than rewritten, and skills development seen in its wider context.
59	The institution is generally comfortable with the descriptor, with some degree of flexibility of interpretation for specific programmes.
65	The doctoral descriptor in the FHEQ is satisfactory and should be left alone.
68	The FHEQ provides an appropriate description of the attributes of both PhD and professional doctorate programmes.

69	The organisation is not aware of significant concerns amongst its members relating to the current qualification descriptor. It supports the current emphasis in the descriptor that doctorates should be research-based and focus on excellence and that original research should be a key element of the doctorate.
72	The FHEQ descriptor remains valid and has formed the basis of the learning outcomes for the institution's doctoral programmes.