Guidance for Training Needs Analysis

Faculty of Social Sciences

The purpose of the TNA
Your Training Needs Analysis (TNA) is the foundation for your training and development during your PhD, to help ensure that you graduate as an effective social science researcher.

The TNA process, and the Doctoral Development Programme (DDP) which lies behind it, is designed to help you, with your supervisors, to:

a) Reflect on existing experience and competencies  
b) Identify training needs to enable the successful completion of your PhD project; and to help you to develop as an effective social science researcher  
c) Identify opportunities for addressing those training needs

Most of your development as a researcher during your PhD will of course be achieved through doing your PhD, with all that goes in to researching, writing, submitting and defending a thesis; and through all of the other things that tend to go along with a PhD, such as participating in departmental research groups, presenting at conferences and participating in specialist workshops. The TNA process should enable you to identify how these activities contribute to your development; and at the same to identify what training needs those activities will not fully address as you develop as an effective social science researcher, and to make the best use of the opportunities available to you during your registration to be equipped for future career directions.

Completing the TNA
Completing the TNA does not happen only once. You will probably put most effort and time into working through it in the first weeks of your studies, but it is an ongoing document that should be reviewed regularly with your supervisory team. At a minimum it should be reviewed around 4 months in to your PhD (around January for a full time student starting in September) and annually – probably at the start of each academic year – thereafter.

The TNA form asks you to rate your current Competency against each skill with a number from 1-6. Remember that the point of doing this is to get you to reflect on where you are relative to where you want to get to, not to impress anyone. It is a relative scale to inform discussion. As a rule of thumb, you are unlikely to be able to rate many skills as ‘5’ (even extensive study at Masters level might not get you to a level commensurate with ‘5’ for some skills).

The Evidence/Comments column should be used for you to evidence how you have achieved the level of competence indicated for that skill.

The Training Needs column can be used both to identify general areas of development relating to that skill, and to list any relevant specific opportunities for addressing those needs.

The TNA should be completed and reviewed with your supervisor, though they may well encourage you to complete a draft of it yourself before discussing it with you.

What happens to the TNA
Your TNA is principally a process document, of use to you and your supervisory team over the course of your PhD. It does though have a secondary function, as a means of evidencing that you have been active in addressing your training needs in pursuit of becoming an effective social science researcher. Currently,
confirmation of PhD registration (via the Confirmation Review) is dependent on Faculty receiving a copy of the TNA as evidence of training and development undertaken in the lead up to the review.

The structure of the TNA
As a PhD researcher in the Faculty of Social Sciences, you are a member of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) White Rose Social Sciences Doctoral Training Centre (WRSSDTC). The WRSSDTC is committed to enabling all students within it to fulfil ESRC training requirements.\(^1\) Reflecting these training requirements, and the Vitae Researcher Development Framework,\(^2\) the TNA is divided into the following sections outlined below, with guidance on each of the headings. This guidance is indicative, not exhaustive (i.e., you are of course free to identify other means of addressing development needs).

Becoming an effective social science researcher
Listed under this heading are core research skills for social scientists, ensuring you are equipped not only for your own specialist research project, but also as a rounded social science researcher. Many of the training needs that follow under this heading can be addressed, initially at least, through participation in the WRSSDTC’s core training programme (on which you will be automatically registered), through training provided by the University Library or CICS, along with departmental and supervisor-led training.

- An understanding of research in social sciences in broad terms
  - Philosophical issues in the social sciences
    Your existing education in social sciences, probably to Masters level, could well have equipped you with a reasonable level of competence against these skills. Faculty module Foundations of Social Science Research will address these, perhaps with other formal training (such as Masters modules), and along with activities like reading, attendance at seminars and conferences, etc.

- Research ethics & integrity
  Attendance at the University module Research Ethics and Integrity is compulsory for all research students at the University of Sheffield. Completion of an ethics application is necessary as part of most students’ Confirmation Review and the experience of doing this, informed by the University module and University research ethics and integrity policy can be an excellent development process, supported by the supervisor.

- An understanding of research methods used in social science
  Faculty modules, Qualitative Methods for Social Science Research and Quantitative Methods for Social Science Research, on which you are automatically registered, are designed to address training needs around core skills in research methods. Please note that the ESRC training requirements that the WRSSDTC is committed to enabling students to fulfil, require that all social science PhD graduates have competence in both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Training opportunities such as these Faculty modules enable you to pursue this aspect of developing as an effective social science researcher, even if you know your PhD is going to follow either a strictly qualitative or strictly quantitative methodology.

- Bibliographic and literature skills
  - Understanding plagiarism and how to avoid this
    You are likely to have reasonable levels of competence in these skills if you have recently completed a first or second degree. However, these skills are fundamental to both pursuit of your research and to becoming an effective researcher more generally, so it is worth considering training in both skills and resources available (as these change rapidly thanks to digital technology). The library provides a range of training within the DDP (http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/library/services/lddp). Fellow PhD students are also often an excellent source of ideas and information on managing literature reviews, etc.

- Effective dissemination techniques
  Many PhD students’ experience covers a narrow range of dissemination techniques, and beyond formal

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1. [http://www.esrc.ac.uk/_images/Postgraduate_Training_and_Development_Guidelines_tcm8-2660.pdf](http://www.esrc.ac.uk/_images/Postgraduate_Training_and_Development_Guidelines_tcm8-2660.pdf)
written communication, often only to a limited level. A range of training opportunities can be found, including via the DDP skills seminars programme, which can help you to identify a range of dissemination techniques and strategies that may be relevant to your work, and to develop skills both through formal training and through doing dissemination.

-**Advanced understanding of methods and analysis techniques**

A range of advanced methods training is available within the DDP, delivered by the WRSSDTC. The National Centre for Research Methods runs a database ([http://www.ncrm.ac.uk/training/](http://www.ncrm.ac.uk/training/)) of advanced methods training available nationally (often at a price, which may have to be found from RTSG). Workshops, conferences and research groups can also provide excellent development opportunities.

-**Anything else identified and agreed by the supervisor and the student**

Think about and discuss with your supervisor whether there are any other core social science research skills that should be listed under this heading.

**Research and career skills for social scientists**

As well as contributing to your effectiveness as a social sciences researcher and your ability to complete successfully your thesis, the competencies listed in this section of the TNA will form an essential part of your broader professional development. Acquiring skills in these areas will support you to achieve your career aspirations, whether your ambitions lie within or outside academia.

The university offers workshops and seminars in all the areas listed within this section and there is a wide range of online information and training materials available, but it is important to remember that attending formal training is not the only way to develop these skills. Experiential learning (learning by doing) provides a valuable way to develop or consolidate skills, so in addition to identifying appropriate training and development courses - you should consider other opportunities for learning. For example, you could develop your professional skills by becoming involved with the faculty’s PGR forum or a committee within your own department, or by presenting at a conference.

It is likely that you will undertake the majority of your training and development for research and career skills during the second and third years (or part time equivalents) of your doctoral research. By this time, you are likely to have made some decisions about the career you intend to pursue after your PhD, so it is important to ensure that your training priorities reflect your ambitions. For example, if you intend to pursue an academic career, developing your grant-writing skills may be more relevant than if you plan to move out of academia.

The Faculty of Social Sciences offers a comprehensive programme of professional development activity for researchers. Please visit [http://www.shef.ac.uk/icoss/training](http://www.shef.ac.uk/icoss/training) for a full list of upcoming seminars, workshops and other professional development events.

-**Time management**

Managing your time during your PhD can be a challenge, whether you are coming to us straight from a first degree or whether you are joining us after a period of employment or raising a family. Whatever your background, you will have experience of managing your time effectively, but the PhD presents particular challenges, due to its length and complexity. In addition to attending specific training events about time management, the university has a comprehensive online guide available at: [http://www.pansophix.com/uul/downloads/sheffield/a-useful-guide-to-time-management.pdf](http://www.pansophix.com/uul/downloads/sheffield/a-useful-guide-to-time-management.pdf)

-**Effective Communication**

This includes communicating your research as well as communicating effectively with colleagues, collaborators and, depending on your project, people involved in your research.

As well as specific workshops and seminars on offer from the faculty and the doctoral development programme, which cover everything from presentation skills to managing your relationship with your
supervisor, there is a dedicated public engagement team within the University that can offer support, advice and training about public engagement work.

-Networking
There are many training and development opportunities offered by the university, however, one of the best ways of developing your networking skills is to practise them. This may involve attending conferences and other events or getting involved with groups appropriate to your field. There is an online guide to networking available from the University: http://www.pansophix.com/uul/downloads/sheffield/a-useful-guide-to-networking.pdf

-Project management
Through your previous academic or employment experience, you are likely to have developed project management skills, even if you have not undertaken any formal training. You will continue to develop these skills as you progress through your PhD; however, if you require more formal training, a workshop on project management is offered by the faculty, and the University has available two comprehensive online guides to help you manage your project effectively. These are available here:

-Team working
Whatever your background, you are likely to have had experience of working in a team, and will have developed some skill in this area. You will develop further your team working skills as you progress through your PhD and as you develop your skills in other areas, such as communicating effectively. Everybody brings with them a unique combination of experiences and skills. Recognising the value of- and of working effectively within - a diverse and team is essential.

If you feel that you would benefit from more formal training, the faculty offers bespoke development sessions for teams who wish to work more effectively together. In addition, there are several online guides that can help you:

-Interdisciplinary work
Interdisciplinarity is increasingly important in research and, as a member of the White Rose Doctoral Training Centre, you will be encouraged to engage with researchers from all three universities (Leeds, Sheffield and York), giving you both informal and formal opportunities to develop interdisciplinary collaborations. In addition to this, the faculty and the wider university offer seminars and other events to enable you to develop your understanding and skills in this area.

-Teaching
The Sheffield Teaching Assistant is a structured training programme for postgraduate and early career researchers who have, or who are likely to have, teaching responsibilities. If you wish to develop your teaching skills, you can find more details about the workshops here: http://www.shef.ac.uk/lets/cpd/sta

-Getting published
If you wish to pursue an academic career, developing a strong publication record is essential. Your main source of advice and support in this area is likely to be your supervisor, with whom you should be able to discuss your ideas and concerns. The faculty also runs a writing network for doctoral researchers, details of which can be found on the researcher development pages (http://www.shef.ac.uk/icoss/training) and offers a variety of workshops to enable you to develop your writing skills.
- **Thesis writing**
  As with getting published, your supervisor is likely to be your strongest source of support and advice about writing your thesis. Even if you have completed a dissertation as part of an undergraduate or postgraduate degree, you may find that you would benefit from further formal training and support as you write your thesis.

The faculty’s writing network for doctoral researchers may be a useful source of peer support, and through this network, workshops will be offered on various aspects of the writing process.

- **Preparing for the viva**
  As you reach the end of your doctoral studies and begin to think about your viva, you may want to access the training and development opportunities available to you through the faculty and the Doctoral Development Programme, which include workshops and one to one advice sessions. Your supervisor is likely to be able to help you greatly in preparing for your viva, as they will be able to give you advice on what to expect and how to prepare. You may also request a ‘mock viva’ to enable you to practise answering the sort of questions that you are likely to face in the viva.

- **Knowledge transfer and Impact**
  If you plan to pursue a career in academia, an understanding of and ability to demonstrate the impact of your research is essential. If you do not wish to work in academia, the strategic and practical communication skills that you will develop through your public engagement and knowledge transfer work are highly valued by employers in other sectors.

In addition to expert-led seminars and workshops organised by the faculty, the university has several central teams that offer support and training in these areas. These include,

The knowledge transfer team: [http://www.shef.ac.uk/ris/post-project/kta/home](http://www.shef.ac.uk/ris/post-project/kta/home)

The public engagement with research team: [http://www.shef.ac.uk/publicengagement/index](http://www.shef.ac.uk/publicengagement/index)

- **Applying for research grants**
  The faculty offers training to help you get to grips with the funding landscape for your discipline and to help you to develop your grant-writing skills. The University’s Research Development section also offers advice, training and information on funding schemes and applications. More information can be found here: [http://www.shef.ac.uk/ris/application](http://www.shef.ac.uk/ris/application)

- **How to keep up to date with new research**
  As you progress in your doctoral research, starting work on your literature review and becoming more expert in your subject, you will learn more about the key journals and fora for your discipline. Keeping up to date with research in your field is very important, and your supervisor is likely to be able to advise you about the most influential journals and conferences in your area.

- **Anything else identified and agreed by the supervisor and the student**
  It is important to remember that your training needs analysis is specific to you, and your supervisor is likely to be able to help you to identify and address any training needs that you may have. Seeking advice from your supervisor about a gap in your knowledge or skills demonstrates a proactive and pragmatic approach to your professional development

**Subject specific skills**
This heading represents core subject specific training and advanced training.³ Whereas the first section of the TNA addresses more or less generic skills for social science research, skills represented here are more specific to the pursuit of your research project. Training needs following from this heading may be addressed through Masters level modules or specialist formal doctoral training whether in your own department, elsewhere in

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³ Advanced training goes beyond the subject specific training that would be considered core for all research students on a given pathway
the Universities comprising the WRSSDTC, or externally, such as via the National Centre for Research Methods. Supervisor or research group-led training can also be key to development under this heading. The WRSSDTC’s fast developing programme of Advanced Training is an excellent resource: http://wrtdtc.ac.uk/training

- **Substantive subject training**
  This covers the core and compulsory elements of substantive (rather than methodological) training for research students within your pathway (but not the generic training you may do with students across all pathways). It may be addressed by relevant taught content within your pathway or department: or by less formal activities such as reading groups, research groups and departmental seminars.

- **Advanced subject specific training**
  This covers the advanced (i.e. beyond what is core to all students on your pathway) substantive training that you undertake relevant to your specific project. This may be served by formal advanced training, but is likely to be mostly pursued through reading, literature review, specialist reading groups, research groups, workshops and specialist conferences and seminars.

- **Research methods appropriate to the student’s field**
- **Working knowledge of statistical analysis techniques relevant to the discipline**
- **Application of software packages relevant to the research area**
- **Awareness of relevant journals and other outlets for dissemination**
- **Up-to-date knowledge of current debates in the relevant literature**
  These headings all represent more specific versions of generic skills listed above. On the basis of training in core skills of research methods, bibliographic and literature skills, etc, these headings encourage you to think about, and discuss with your supervisor, how to develop the specialist knowledge and skills relevant to your specific field. Formal training remains relevant here, particularly in relation to methods and software, with advanced training available through the WRSSDTC or the NCRM, or software package training via CICS or external providers. But under this section of the TNA, development against these themes is more likely to occur through being an active researcher, engaging with the literature, taking opportunities for participation in research group activities where available, in specialist reading groups, workshops, seminars and conferences; and through the fundamental development process of doing your own research.

**Useful resources**
- **Think Ahead – Researcher Professional Development (Faculty of Social Sciences)**
- **White Rose Social Sciences Doctoral Training Centre**
- **DTC@Sheffield**
- **DDP portal**
- **NCRM**
- **ESRC Training Requirements**
- **Vitae**

**Further information**
If you have any questions about your TNA, please talk to your supervisor or contact Sarah Bell, Researcher Development Manager for the Faculty of Social Sciences – sarah.j.bell@sheffield.ac.uk