Research Training:
How specific does it need to be?

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The British weekly magazine *Times Higher Education* recently published an article entitled 'Doctor, doctor, quick, quick' (Reisz 2008). The author reflected about the challenges which are faced by doctoral students who are expected to complete a doctoral programme with a high-quality thesis in a short period of time. Several scholars were cited who had expressed concern that the focus on the speed is not compatible with the demand of quality. It is not only in the United Kingdom that the process of studying for a PhD has become more streamlined. Although in this paper I will focus on the UK context, the comments should be more widely applicable.

In the UK, it is normally expected to complete a doctoral programme and submit a thesis within three years. Doctoral students have to pay a fee, and Research Councils to which applications for funding can be made usually provide funding for three years only. For the allocation of funding to universities, Research Councils pay increasing attention to the completion rates. That is, if a specific university does not have a good track record of doctoral completion within at least 4 years, then funding will not be made available. Another aspect of streamlining PhD programmes is that research training provision is now a responsibility of the institution. That is, when applying for funding to Research Councils, universities have to submit detailed evidence of the training they provide for their doctoral students.

For developing Research training programmes, institutions need to decide by whom training is provided, on which topics, when, and where. In taking such decisions they can be guided by the framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area (often refered to as 'Bologna process'). In a report from a Joint Quality Initiative informal group (2004), the descriptors (often refered to as 'Dublin Descriptors') for doctoral awards as the third cycle qualifications were specified as follows:
"Qualifications that signify completion of the third cycle are awarded to students who:
 – have demonstrated a systematic understanding of a field of study and mastery of the skills and methods of research associated with that field;
 – have demonstrated the ability to conceive, design, implement and adapt a substantial process of research with scholarly integrity;

    – have made a contribution through original research that extends the frontier of knowledge by developing a substantial body of work, some of which merits national or international refereed publication;

    – are capable of critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas;

    – can communicate with their peers, the larger scholarly community and with society in general about their areas of expertise;

    – can be expected to be able to promote, within academic and professional contexts, technological, social or cultural advancement in a knowledge based society."

(Dublin Descriptors, 2004, http://www.jointquality.nl)

These descriptors apply to the outcome of doctoral research. The knowledge and skills which are to be demonstrated in a PhD thesis and examination need to have been acquired in the course of doing doctoral research. Universities are expected to provide training programmes and other forms of support to help doctoral students to acquire the relevant knowledge and skills. That is, although for each doctoral student a supervisor is appointed (or a supervisory team), and one-to-one interaction with the supervisor is still very important, the provision of research training is becoming more and more the collective responsibility of universities. Training is seen in a rather wide sense. It covers training not only in discipline-specific knowledge and research methods, but also in the development of transferable skills and career management.

      This wider understanding of training is clearly reflected in a joint statement on skills training requirements for research students which the UK Research Councils produced in 2001. The skills are arranged in seven groups: (A) Research skills and techniques, (B) Research environment, (C) Research management, (D) Personal effectiveness, (E) Communication skills, (F) Networking and teamworking, (G) Career management. This list reflects the changed nature of what is expected of a PhD today. The focus is not exclusively or predominantly on producing a thesis, PhD candidates today are also expected to be trained researchers. The skills presented in the document are the outcome of the training process. It is acknowledged that students may already possess some of them at the beginning of their doctoral studies (for example as a result of research conducted for a Master's dissertation), while others are expected to be taught or developed during the course of the research. Elsewhere I have commented on all of these seven groups (Schäffner 2009), but for this paper I will focus on (A) Research skills and techniques, (B) Research environment, and (G) Career management.

      For each of these seven groups, the Joint Statement gives a further specification. Concerning Research skills and techniques, students are expected to be able to demonstrate:

1. The ability to recognise and validate problems and to formulate and test hypotheses.
2. Original, independent and critical thinking, and the ability to develop theoretical concepts.
3. A knowledge of recent advances within one's field and in related areas.
4. An understanding of relevant research methodologies and techniques and their appropriate application within one's research field.
5. The ability to analyse critically and evaluate one's findings and those of others.
6. An ability to summarise, document, report and reflect on progress.

(Joint Statement 2001).

These aspects are most immediately relevant to the specific topic doctoral students are working on. Students may need guidance in refining their topic, in refining the research questions to be addressed and/or hypotheses to be formulated, and in selecting the most appropriate research method(s) for the topic. Supervisors will have a decisive role to play in these respects, since they were appointed precisely because of their own expertise in the subject area the doctoral student is working in. Since the research is meant to make a contribution to the advancement of knowledge in the discipline, knowledge of recent advances within one's field (see point A3 above) is essential for doctoral students in order to contextualise their own research topic. At the level of doctoral study, it cannot be expected that lectures and seminars are offered which provide an overview of the discipline, in our case the discipline of Translation Studies. Students would normally have gained such knowledge of their discipline within their previous studies at Bachelor's and/or Master's level. There are, however, some doctoral programmes in which some formal teaching is provided and assessed by coursework which students have to pass before they are allowed to submit their thesis. Opinions differ as to the value of such formal training, but there is no denying that doctoral students need to enhance their knowledge. Individual meetings with the supervisor are helpful, but discussions can be more fruitful if more people are involved. If several doctoral students are enrolled in a doctoral programme at the same institution, special seminars or workshops can be organised. Training programmes jointly developed and delivered by several universities, as well as national or international doctoral training pro- grammes or summer schools (e.g. the CETRA programme for Translation Studies) have the additional advantage that different theories and approaches in Translation Studies can be addressed and training in different research methods be provided. Encouraging doctoral students to attend such summer schools and give presentations about their own research at conferences is part of the role of the supervisor. The more exposed doctoral students are to the wider field of Translation Studies the more benefitial for their advance-

ment of knowledge in their field of research, or for the "systematic under-standing of a field of study" as stated in the Dublin descriptors.

The section on *Research environment* in the Joint Statement includes the following skills to be developed:

1. Show a broad understanding of the context, at the national and international level, in which research takes place.
2. Demonstrate awareness of issues relating to the rights of other researchers, of research subjects, and of others who may be affected by the research, […]
5. Understand the processes for funding and evaluation of research.

[…]

7. Understand the process of academic or commercial exploitation of research results.

These aspects concern the social, professional and ethical responsibili-ties of a researcher more generally and thus go beyond the requirements of conducting research on a specified topic for the completion of a PhD. They focus on the preparation of doctoral students for their future career as teachers and researchers in higher education. The question then arises as to how the development of such skills can be incorporated in doctoral training programmes and by whom such training will be provided. Some of these skills can probably best be dealt with at the institutional level in specific seminars for all doctoral students across disciplines. Most UK universities have recently introduced such institution-wide doctoral training pro-grammes. Bringing together doctoral students across the institution also allows to develop an awareness of issues that apply to other disciplines, thus contributing to a wider understanding of the social role of research and of potential differences between the natural sciences and the humanities.

Research environment in the Joint Statement refers to the wider institu-tional and national framework in which research is being conducted. While focusing on their thesis, doctoral students may not be aware of this wider context, and they perceive the immediate research environment in their own department as much more important. In November 2007, the UK Higher Education Academy published the results of its first national survey of postgraduate research students' experiences (PRES 2007). Students were asked to rate (from 1-5, with 5 being the highest score) several aspects in terms of importance and satisfaction. Supervision had the highest mean agreement of 3.93, followed by skills development (3.86), goals and standards (3.80), infrastructure (3.62), intellectual climate (3.40), and teaching opportunities (3.11). Concerning the intellectual climate, 25.9% of the respondents indicated that it had failed to meet their expectations. When presented with the statement 'My department provides a good seminar programme for research degree students', 57.2% agreed and 19.5% disagreed. 49.3% agreed to the statement 'The research ambience in my

department or faculty stimulates my work', and 49.0% agreed to the statement 'I feel integrated into my departments' community' whereas 26.7% disagreed. These rather poor ratings can be interpreted as a clear signal to universities to offer doctoral students more opportunities for intellectual exchange. The more opportunities there are for students to give presentations on their own research, to listen to lectures, to meet fellow researchers, to engage in discussions, the better their knowledge will be, not only of the discipline but also of the requirements and constraints of the research environment in the wider sense. In short, doctoral students need to be fully integrated in research groups and/or research projects and be seen as partners in the research community, rather than as paying customers to whom services have to be provided.

The final section in the Joint Statement is devoted to career management and lists the following skills. Students should be able to:

1. Appreciate the need for and show commitment to continued professional development.
2. Take ownership for and manage one's career progression, set realistic and achievable career goals, and identify and develop ways to improve employability.
3. Demonstrate an insight into the transferable nature of research skills to other work environments and the range of career opportunities within and outside academia.
4. Present one's skills, personal attributes and experiences through effective CVs, applications and interviews.

These skills go definitely beyond the immediate aims of doctoral research which is the production and successful defence of a high-quality PhD thesis. In view of the relatively short time available for completing the thesis, it may seem impossible to include the development of the skills above as part of a structured doctoral programme. However, writing a CV, writing a job application and practising job interviews (e.g. as mock interviews) can be incorporated very efficiently into a general training programme delivered to all doctoral students at a university.

The article in *Times Higher* mentioned at the beginning quotes the 2006 Bologna doctoral conference which stressed "the uniqueness of the doctoral cycle that provides training by and for research and is focused on the advancement of knowledge" (Reisz 2008: 32). This makes the author ask: "If PhDs are about both 'training for research' and carrying out a particular important research project, one might still ask how the balance should be struck." (ibid). In an environment which values quick completion of a PhD and at the same time requires institutions to provide systematic training in all the aspects reflected in the six areas as listed in the Joint Statement, the pressures on both the doctoral student and the institution may seem overwhelming. It is understandable that doctoral students themselves think of skills training primarily in terms of topics which are immediately relevant

to their short-term aim of completing the PhD. The expectation of the Research Councils, however, is that universities take on their responsibility to prepare their young doctoral students for a long-term professional career, which includes raising awareness for and providing training in what the profession requires. Admittedly, not all candidates who complete a PhD in Translation Studies will stay at universities and embark on an academic career as lecturers and researchers. Some will wish to work as professional translators, or as managers in the translation industry, or in other related fields. Career management training will thus mean learning to market the acquired knowledge and skills to employers both within and outside academia.

Finally, the question in the title invites an answer. However, a definite (or a prescriptive) answer cannot be provided. If we agree that the Translation Studies community (in the widest sense of the term community) has a responsibility for preparing the future generation of translators, translator trainers, and translation researchers, we have to accept our responsibility for providing training. In respect of doctoral research, the quantity and quality of skills training depends on the individual circumstances of the doctoral student (e.g. previous training, previous experience) and on the institutional and national frameworks (e.g. regulations, time allowed, supervisory arrangements). Training provision should allow for a certain degree of flexibility in view of students' individual needs. What is essential is to create the conditions in which doctoral students can contribute to stimulating discussions about a variety of topics in Translation Studies in particular, but also about issues of a more general nature in respect of research (e.g. ethics, funding). That is, the quality of the research environment is more important than designing a specific course with a specified number of hours.

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