Rethinking the UK System of Doctoral Training in Marketing

There have been considerable changes in the system of doctoral education and training in the UK over the last decade. Despite the introduction of a range of ESRC initiatives, the UK marketing academy has been slow to actively debate this aspect of marketing education. This approach is different from that in the US where doctoral training practices in marketing have been widely debated by the AMA. The paper aims to fill this gap by critically assessing the UK system of doctoral training in marketing. The article begins with a brief overview of the historical development of postgraduate education and training in the UK in order to contextualise the subsequent discussion. Some of the most influential reports and policy documents over the last 40 years will be assessed, specifically in relation to how they have shaped, and continue to shape, ESRC policy and postgraduate education more generally in the UK. A critical evaluation of the existing research guidelines in marketing is undertaken and the need for more specific guidelines and a more wide-ranging and inclusive approach to the syllabus than is currently offered in many UK universities is proposed. The paper also explores the importance of staff expertise and critical mass in the context of delivering cost-effective, specialised provision. The article concludes by proposing new structures that marketing departments may wish to consider in delivering research training through the use of coalitions and the use of up-to-date developments in information technology.

Keywords: marketing education, doctoral training, critical theory, research training, postgraduate research, marketing theory

Introduction

Over the last decade significant changes have occurred in policies governing the training of doctoral students in the United Kingdom. Despite the
considerable reforms the training of research students has not attracted significant attention among UK marketing academics if measured by the number of conference papers and published articles on this issue. To some extent this situation is not surprising, and reflects a bias towards a higher status awarded to the writing and publishing of papers that focus on basic and applied research, rather than marketing education (Straughan and Albers-Miller, 2000). This said, it needs to be acknowledged that the system of research training in the US has attracted a significant amount of attention from prominent marketing academics. Indeed in the late 1980s, the American Marketing Association (AMA) commissioned a thorough review of research training practices, which resulted in a significant number of recommendations being made (Tybout, 1987). US academics have also explored the socialisation of doctoral students in marketing and varying orientations towards research training in different institutional contexts (Trocchia and Berkowitz, 1999).

The purpose of this paper is to argue that research training should be given a higher profile among marketing academics in the UK. It is particularly timely that marketing academics take the opportunity to rethink research training provision, since some of the more recent initiatives in the configuration of the PhD developed by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), will result in the UK directly competing with the well established system in the US, of a formalised period of training in the first year of doctoral program and a further three years focusing on the substantive content of the thesis. In a highly competitive, global marketplace for doctoral students, the quality of research training provision could become a source of competitive advantage for market-led marketing departments. US research has demonstrated that doctoral students can be pretty savvy about choosing the best institution to meet their needs (Webb et al., 1997). There is no reason to presume that the HE sector in the UK will be exempt from students shopping around for the best deal. The converse position is that departments that fail to provide high quality, relevant training programmes could lose potential students. The ability to compete effectively in a global marketplace for doctoral students is important in the UK, where more than 60 per cent of doctoral students in business and management are from overseas (Burgess et al., 1998).

The paper begins with a brief overview of the historical development of postgraduate education and training in the UK in order to contextualise the subsequent discussion. Some of the most influential reports and policy documents over the last 40 years will be assessed, specifically in relation to how they have shaped, and continue to shape, ESRC policy and postgraduate education more generally in the UK. The second section of the paper will include a critical evaluation of the suitability of the existing
research guidelines in marketing. The need for more specific guidelines and a more wide-ranging and inclusive approach to the syllabus than is currently offered in many UK universities will be discussed. A third theme of the paper relates to the two issues of academic expertise and critical mass. Increasingly specialised guidelines will require staff with specialist expertise to teach advanced marketing modules. It is not clear that the required expertise is available in sufficient numbers within institutions that supervise research students. A related factor is the existence of a critical mass of students in the context of delivering cost-effective, specialised provision. The final section of the paper proposes new structures that marketing departments may wish to consider in delivering research training through the use of coalitions and the use of up-to-date developments in information technology.

Historical Development of Postgraduate Education and Training in the UK

The development of postgraduate education and training in the UK has been the subject of considerable change over the last forty years. In 1963, the Robbins Report identified the expansion of postgraduate work as a necessary development to supply teachers for a rapidly expanding system of higher education and to provide skills that were in short supply in the economy. Despite acknowledging the importance of the PhD, and PhD students in advanced societies, Robbins was critical of the relatively narrow focus of most doctoral theses and recommended the inclusion of ‘training by formal instruction and seminars’. A further suggestion was that students should not be dependant on one supervisor for intellectual stimulation and training.

Twenty years later the Association of British Research Council’s Report of the Working Party on Postgraduate Education (Swinnerton-Dyer Report, 1982) argued that labour market information and employment trends should be taken into account when granting ESRC awards and studentships. A related consideration was the knowledge and skills that doctoral students would possess on completion of their studies and the contribution these skills would make to industry and commerce. A much stronger link between industry and commerce was proposed in addition to the suggestion that potential ‘users’ of academic research should be included on research council committees.

The concerns of the Robbins and Swinnerton-Dyer Report were subsequently reflected in the Government White Paper, ‘Realising Our Potential: A Strategy for Science and Technology’ published in 1993. The Report revealed a concern that the content of PhDs did not always match the needs of careers beyond academic and academic-related research. It too
recommended closer ties between industry and academia through giving a higher profile to research training. Among other things, the Report proposed the launch of a new degree comprising a one year research masters (M.Res) followed by a three year doctorate. The aim of the proposed initiative was to provide a more substantial structure for research training, and to promote a greater degree of relevance in postgraduate work with respect to the user community.

Economic and Social Research Council policy that shapes research training and operates a system of accreditation for institutions in the UK, has established and revised a series of Guidelines since 1991 that have reflected the national debate on postgraduate education and training. These Guidelines superseded the first guides to best practice in research training issued in the late 1980s which were taken from the practices adopted by the Science and Engineering Research Council. Successive revisions of the Economic and Social Research Council's guidelines have acted as a framework which institutions with ESRC research students have adopted via a process of accreditation. Many other institutions without ESRC recognition or studentships have viewed the Guidelines as a kite-mark of quality and have also brought their own research training within the ESRC's remit (Burton, 2000).

The 1991 ESRC 'Guidelines on the Provision of Research Training for Postgraduate Research Students in the Social Sciences' required students to spend 60 per cent of their first year research training activities, comprising core/generic training that all social scientists were required to complete, and subject specific training. The generic element was a cost effective way of delivering a common programme of training that met the needs of all new research students in the social sciences since staff could be pooled from across the social sciences to deliver the most advanced training available within institutions. In 1991 the generic programme of research training included: basic tools of the researcher, research design and strategy, ethical and legal issues, writing, presentation and publication skills. Students often benefited from this cross-faculty/disciplinary approach since they were exposed to a wide range of methodological approaches and staff expertise. An additional benefit was that students had the opportunity to meet other social scientists at the same stage in their research careers, and could interact and exchange experiences thus reducing feelings of isolation. Indeed generic research methods training of this nature contributed towards the development of Graduate Schools in some universities.

Subject specific training was developed out of a recognition that broadly based research training suitable for all social scientists needed to be complemented by more in-depth provision that focused on the methodological traditions and practices of the student's chosen discipline. In
1991, the ESRC's subject specific research training guidelines for marketing students were delivered under the broad heading of management and business studies. Two areas of training were identified: philosophy of the social sciences, and theory and method comprising management principles (a broad course on the fundamentals of management knowledge using case studies of research in functional areas such as finance, marketing and accounting), and a range of methods based provision including experimental methods, quantitative methods, qualitative methods, action research, measurement, data generation, and analysis.

By 2000 the ESRC's Guidelines (3rd Edition) underwent further revision which resulted in more detailed guidelines being produced. One important difference was that the recognition process and the method of allocating awards placed an emphasis on student learning outcomes, rather than the process of research training provision. A further change was the incorporation of a more vocational element in the form of personal development and employment-related skills within the generic research method guidelines. The M.Res concept was adopted in a small number of universities and was run alongside the longstanding format of the traditional three year PhD. Of a more substantive nature was the inclusion of specialist guidelines in disciplinary categories within business and management studies. Specialist training guidelines currently exist in eleven areas including accounting and finance, organisational behaviour, corporate strategy, economics, management science, operations management, public sector management, information management, international business, marketing, and human resource management. The current guidelines for research training in marketing state (2000: 19):

Students of marketing are likely to require training in the way organisations understand and respond to external and internal customers. Students should have a critical awareness of relevant aspects of social theory, economics, individual and organisational psychology, statistics and sociology. Specialist areas might include: understanding of markets, consumer behaviour, market research, approaches to customer service, market structures, competition, business strategy, advertising and promotion. Issues related to human resource management in services marketing and relationship marketing may also feature.

Clearly, the existing system of research training is more resource intensive than some of the earlier approaches since additional elements of generic training need to be included and business schools are required to provide specialist training for individual business specialisms rather than for business and management students as a whole. Of particular concern for some marketing academics and institutions is how feasible it is to provide the required specialist research training in marketing given issues of critical
mass, staff expertise, and financial constraints. Few marketing departments have the resources to provide in-depth specialist training in research methodology in the spirit of the ESRC Guidelines. Yet doctoral students should have access to marketing academics that are leaders in the field. Although generic research training is valuable since social science students have similar research training needs, alone it is not sufficient. At doctoral level marketing students should be able to legitimate why they have used one methodological approach rather than another. They can only construct good quality accounts by having an in-depth knowledge of the appropriate marketing literature and referring to it to make their case.

On academic grounds, specialist guidelines in marketing should be welcomed and widely debated among the marketing community in recognition of the important role they play in developing successive generations of the marketing academy. Furthermore, in-depth, specialist research training in marketing is a small step towards further establishing marketing's identity as a discipline in its own right. Those within the marketing academy that support the ESRC's directive for more specialist provision would argue that the content of research training should reflect the most advanced standard possible and that the UK marketing academy should collaborate across institutions (if required) to make this a reality. Without a collaborative approach it is likely that specialist research training in marketing will be highly variable across institutions, indeed it might be non-existent in some places. This situation is not desirable, nor is it in the long-term interests of the UK marketing academy.

Since it is likely that ESRC Guidelines will become more, rather than less specific, if past trends are anything to go by, a failure to deliver specialist training is not an option. The ESRC have made no secret of the fact that they are concerned about the quality and level of training that is currently being delivered in some institutional contexts (ESRC, 2000, Burgess, 2000). A failure to meet the required standard could, in extreme cases, result in having ESRC recognition withdrawn. The focus of the rest of the paper is to critically evaluate the specialist guidelines in marketing.

A Critical Evaluation of ESRC Training Guidelines in Marketing

While the revised subject specific Guidelines are a positive initiative, whether they are a sufficient basis for institutions to develop good quality training that actively competes with leading institutions on a global basis is another issue. One might argue that the current marketing Guidelines are indicative of an approach (multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, critical), and a list of acceptable specialisms (consumer behaviour, market research etc), rather than a structured syllabus, or even guidelines on what a syllabus might
consist of. There is nothing wrong with a lack of detail and a loosely structured approach but as a result there can be substantial scope for different interpretation. One might argue that there is nothing wrong with different interpretations rather than a definitive research training syllabus in marketing. However, some marketing academics may wish to question the range and quality of the provision that is delivered on the basis of the current Guidelines. It is within this context that aspects of the current Guidelines are worthy of more debate. Three aspects of the existing Guidelines need to be given more consideration, these include a closer examination of relationship between generic and subject specific training, further clarification about elements of the existing training guidelines in marketing, and elements that are currently omitted but should perhaps be included.

A Closer Relationship between Generic and Subject Specific Training

One suggestion is that there needs to be a much closer relationship between generic and subject specific guidelines and the interaction between the two. Without making this relationship clear, generic training could be delivered without it being contextualised within the specific discipline or disciplines in which students doctoral work is embedded. To illustrate this point, we can take two elements of the generic training; writing and publishing, and research methodology. The writing and publishing aspects of generic research training would include material that would be suitable for all research students in the social sciences whether that be in relation to writing a thesis (Burton, 2000), getting published (Watts and White, 2000), and presenting (Watts and White, 2000). Given the high proportion of overseas doctoral students in marketing, approaching writing from a cross-cultural perspective is important (Okorocha, 1997; Nightingale, 1991). However, subject specific guidelines in marketing should also include guidelines on writing. The publication environment facing marketing researchers is relevant in terms of the Research Assessment Exercise in Britain (Velody, 1999, Piercy, 1999) and tenure in the US. Material on publication careers in marketing (Bakir et al., 2000), the international ranking of marketing journals (Hult et al., 1997), guidelines for publishing in marketing (Summers, 2001), and interdisciplinarity in marketing publications (Bettencourt and Houston, 2001) should all be regarded as core topics for discussion within subject specific training. The interdisciplinary approach to marketing research advocated by the ESRC will also need to be integrated into writing programmes within the subject specific training. Experiences in the US advocate that doctoral programs may provide the training ground for developing the necessary writing skills for integrating new disciplinary
perspectives with established theories. In this respect rhetorical writing workshops and cross-discipline theory seminars would provide useful starting point (Bettencourt and Houston, 2001: 322).

A similar debate could be had about the teaching of methodology. It is entirely possible that research students in marketing could be taught methodological approaches within a generic programme for all social science students, without this material being grounded within the marketing discipline. Methodological approaches to marketing research reflect a number of divergent intellectual traditions, or as Oakley (2000: 23) would have it 'paradigm wars'. At the core of the debate is the long running and at times bitter debate about the issue of marketing as science, the dominance of positivism and the use of a variety of quantitative techniques (Hunt, 1994, 1995). By stark contrast, over the last twenty years there has been much more interest in hermeneutics and the use of a variety of qualitative methods in marketing research (Brown, 1995; Arnold and Fischer, 1994; Buttle, 1994). Postmodernists also rejected philosophy of science arguments in favour of interpretive methods of enquiry such as personal introspection, textual analysis and literary criticism (Brown and Turley, 1997, Hirschman and Holbrook, 1992, Stern, 1995, Wallendorf and Brucks, 1993). Critical theorists in marketing also questioned the use of positivism in marketing research in favour of grounded, interpretive and emancipatory approaches to research (Murray and Ozanne, 1991, 1995, Burton, 2001). Against the background of a move in favour of interpretive approaches was the tradition of borrowing ethnomethodology from cultural studies (Venkatesh, 1995).

These two examples indicate how generic research training provision should be extended and become embedded in the specialised research training guidelines. A failure to do so could result in research students in marketing acquiring a very general view of research and research related practices without this material being located within the context of the marketing discipline and the academic culture in which it is embedded.

A More Detailed Approach to the Existing Guidelines

A second critique is that the existing specialised Guidelines need to be more detailed. Positive attributes of the current guidelines include a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach to marketing drawing on relevant aspects of other social sciences. Marketing researchers have supported this perspective (Wells, 1993, Zaltman, 1999, Mick, 1999, Burton, 2001) and its importance was identified following the UK's 1996 Research Assessment Exercise in business and management (Cooper and Otley, 1998). In recent years the extent of interdisciplinarity in marketing has been measured by analysing the reference diversity of articles in top US journals.
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While the interdisciplinary approach advocated by the ESRC’s Guidelines should be commended, it is debatable whether interdisciplinary perspectives should be limited to the social sciences as the current Guidelines advocate. Marketing researchers might argue that focal areas within the humanities should also be included. Literary analysis (Stern, 1989), historical analysis (Brown, 2001, Holden and Holden, 1998), and the interface between marketing and religion (Iccubucci, 2001), are all examples of different ways in which marketing and the humanities can be fruitfully integrated.

It is important to encourage an inclusive approach to inter and multidisciplinary research since it can facilitate the migration of academics from other disciplines to marketing in the UK just as it has done in the US (Tybout, 1987). A flexible approach would be a positive initiative in helping to fill the shortage of marketing academics in some areas of higher education in the UK. Taking this issue further, is a consideration of whether conversion programmes should be specifically designed for doctoral students from disciplines outside marketing, in much the same way that conversion courses operate at masters degree level.

An emphasis on ‘critical awareness’ in the research training guidelines is also to be greatly welcomed. Academics from outside marketing have been extremely critical of what they perceive to be marketing’s uncritical approach and have argued that marketing is little more than hype at the hands of capitalist enterprise (Alvesson and Wilmott, 1996, Wilmott, 1999, Alvesson, 1994, Morgan, 1992). There is a small but expanding number of marketing academics (inside and outside the US) who are writing and researching from a more explicitly critical approach and conference streams, special issues of journals, texts and journal launches have supported and are supporting this work (Burton, 2001). Arguably, one of the strengths of the UK and European approaches to marketing discourse is the acceptability of critical approaches much more than is evident in the US, where the administrative science approach predominates (Wensley, 1995, Brown, 1996). However, what is lacking in the existing guidelines is an assessment of the ways in which ‘critical awareness’ might be operationalised. Burton (2001) for example, distinguishes between critical in the context of negative evaluations, critical discourse, and critical theory. Indeed there is some debate about the concept of critical theory and what this might mean in a marketing context. More debate is needed in this area to clarify what the term ‘critical awareness’ actually means, or should mean in a research training context. There is also a need to recognise that some specialisms in marketing have a longer tradition of critical discourse than others. For example, consumer researchers have long been receptive to integrating critical perspectives from the social sciences and humanities. The depth of ‘critical awareness’ therefore needs to
be contextualised within individual marketing specialisms. It is also noteworthy that not all marketing academics are advocates of critical approaches to marketing discourse of any persuasion. Unless, this area of the Guidelines is spelt out in more detail, doctoral students could be 'short changed' in departments that are unsympathetic to critical theories and approaches.

**Areas of Subject Specific Training that Should be Included in Current Guidelines**

What should be included in any syllabus can be a contentious issue. In this section it will be argued that two areas of should be added to subject specific training, those of marketing theory and marketing ethics.

**Marketing Theory**

There are numerous references to the theoretical deficiency of the marketing discipline in conference papers and special issues of journals. At the turn of the millennium journal editors took the opportunity to evaluate marketing discourse and many of the special issues that resulted identified the development of theory as an important issue for the future (for example see Day and Montgomery, 1999). The history and development of marketing theory is more widely taught in doctoral programs in the US that at any other level, however, even in the US there is considerable debate about the appropriate content of marketing theory courses (Capella et al., 1986). There is also concern that the emphasis in marketing theory courses focuses on assessing existing marketing theory and theory in marketing, rather than on theory building. Arguably, an appropriate marketing theory course in the spirit of ESRC Guidelines might contain five inter-related themes: the theoretical development of the discipline including the contributions from the social sciences and humanities; the development of marketing theory in well established and emerging specialisms or focal areas; critical approaches to marketing theory; the marketing theory and practitioner debate; and theory building.

The first of these areas, the theoretical development of the discipline, requires an exploration of marketing history. Marketing historians have not had a high profile in marketing discourse yet it is particularly important for doctoral students to have an awareness of this aspect of marketing knowledge. A failure to acknowledge marketing history in all its guises (see for example, Brown, 2001 on retro-marketing) could result in marketing academics merely 're-inventing the wheel'. This is a particularly precarious position for doctoral students because a failure to acknowledge previous research could result in their thesis not making a unique contribution to
knowledge. Given the ESRC’s interdisciplinary approach to research training, it is also important to recognise the contributions to marketing theory from outside of marketing (Burton, 2001). Some thought might be given to why some disciplines have been more widely integrated in marketing discourse than others, and which areas look promising for future development. This approach is especially important in the case of doctoral research since some of the most interesting developments and approaches in marketing research are to be found at the borders with other disciplines rather than at the centre of already well-colonised disciplinary territory (Zaltman, 1999).

A second theme of a theory course for doctoral students should include an opportunity for students to focus on their chosen specialism. In some specialisms and focal areas the history of the development of the specialism is well documented. The emergence of services marketing theory is a very good example of this (see articles by Fisk, Brown and Bitner, 1993, Berry and Parasuraman, 1993). The theoretical evolution of other specialisms and emerging focal areas will require more effort from staff and students to construct.

A third overarching element of a theory course would include critical approaches to marketing theory. Postmodernism has been the predominant critical approach in marketing over the last twenty years, as it has been in other disciplines (Brown, 1995, Firat, Dholakia and Venkatesh, 1995, Holbrook, 2001). Many marketing academics may not agree with some of the issues advanced by postmodernists, however, they should be brought to the attention of doctoral students in order to fulfil the ESRC criteria of critical awareness and the integration of multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives in research training. Critical theory has been another particularly influential critique within the social sciences and humanities, although less so in marketing (Burton, 2001). Nevertheless, papers by Ozanne and Murray (1991, 1995) are classics in the area and need to be acknowledged for the same reasons as postmodernism cited above. Within various marketing specialisms and focal areas critical approaches to marketing theory may come from a range of different directions. These critical approaches need to be identified and integrated into the syllabus.

Another strand would include an acknowledgement of the longstanding debate about the relationship between marketing theory and marketing practice. This dialogue is particularly timely because of the high profile that current ESRC policy gives to end users of research. Themes may include the value of synchronicity in theory and practice (O’Driscoll and Murray, 1998), professional judgement and the predicaments of practice (Dunne, 1999), the concept of the reflective practitioner, and practitioners’ use of marketing theories (Cornellison, 2002).
A final element would include theory building. US marketing academics have long been critical of the lack of tuition in theory building in doctoral programmes and some of the negative consequences this can have on the development of theorists and theories in the discipline. Venkatesh (1985: 63) argues, ‘theory development requires a kind of training which is not available to most academic marketers who come out of traditional marketing departments, where the emphasis is on empirical research, data analysis, and quantitative modeling. These areas offer limited potential for theory generation’. A similar point is made by Zaltman et al. (1982: 5) who argue that ‘... creating theory is not the same as understanding, modeling, and testing theory. Little guidance is available to the marketing student about creating theories’. Doctoral programme directors in the UK should take onboard these comments or at the very least have a debate about them.

Marketing Ethics

Unlike the ongoing the debate about marketing theory, the parameters of which are reasonably well established, the role of ethics in marketing discourse is still in its infancy and is also a point of some controversy. Yet the inclusion of ethics in subject specific guidelines is entirely consistent with ESRC policy that gives a high profile to ethics in research practice, and the increased emphasis on transferable skills and knowledge. While doctoral work devoted entirely to marketing ethics may be the prerogative of the few, discussions of ethics have a much wider function. The development of the field is reflected in a number of texts that specifically focus on marketing ethics (Smith and Quelch, 1993; Laczniai and Murphy, 1993) and the appearance of special issues in the area (Vitell, 2001, Sirgy, 1999). Four discrete areas of training in marketing ethics are worth mentioning, ethical issues in marketing research, practitioner perceptions of marketing ethics, ethical issues in marketing practice, and ethics and marketing educators.

Two of these areas are worthy of discussion in more detail. Ethical issues faced by marketing managers are set out in Chonko and Hunt’s (1985) classic paper ‘Ethics and Marketing Management: An Empirical Examination’. Based on a survey of 1,076 marketing professionals drawn from the membership of the AMA, the paper explores ethical problems encountered by marketing practitioners, ethical conflicts, opportunities for unethical behaviour, the relationship between unethical behaviour and success, and the impact of corporate/industry Codes of Ethics. A further paper (Chonko and Hunt, 2001) provides a retrospective and prospective commentary which is a valuable resource to enable doctoral students get to grips with some of the key debates.

A more discursive approach to the ethics in marketing practice literature is exemplified by the dialogue between Smith (2001) and Gaski (1999, 2001).
Central to the debate is the scope and usefulness of the existing marketing ethics literature. Gaski (1999: abstract) argues that 'in terms of pragmatic behavioural guidance as well as conceptual content, marketing ethics has nothing new or distinctive to offer'. In his view ethical issues in marketing can be resolved by the law or acting in the long-term commercial self-interest of the organisation. Smith's (2001) critique of Gaski's position is that his formulation and conceptualisation of the ethics debate is far too narrow in scope along a whole range of criteria.

While ethical issues in marketing practice is a rapidly expanding area of research, far less attention has been given developing guidelines for marketing educators. Sirgy (1999: 194) argues that the AMA has a Code of Ethics for Marketing Practitioners, but not for marketing academics. He proposes a Code of Ethics for University Educators the function of which is to:

- 'To promote awareness, discussion and debate of ethical issues in marketing academe;
- To provide a helpful guide for marketing educators to enhance social responsibility in teaching, research and administration; and
- To sensitize potential marketing educators (e.g. Doctoral students in marketing) about ethical issues related to the academic marketing profession'

By contrast, Kurtz (1999) questions whether a code of ethics for marketing educators is necessary, and raises the issue of conflicting guidelines at the institutional and professional association level. Whereas Malhotra and Miller (1999) suggest that Marketing Codes of Ethics should emerge out of an extension of ethical theories rather than as the construction of a practical set of objectives.

From the brief discussion above, it would appear that marketing academics have taken a somewhat reactive, rather than a proactive stance towards the development and implementation of research training guidelines. To some extent this stance is understandable given the considerable power that the ESRC wields through the accreditation of departments, awarding studentships, instigating quality assurance visits, withholding awards, and imposing sanctions upon institutions where students do not complete their thesis in the required period. However, it is in the interests of marketing academics to actively debate research training issues at the highest level since doctoral students will be the next generation of marketing academics and will therefore become our colleagues. Some doctoral students will also move into marketing and marketing related positions in the private and public sector. It is important that as academics we are training enlightened marketers.
Academic Expertise and Critical Mass

More detailed research guidelines will require individuals and groups of academics to have a range of expertise in order to deliver appropriate provision at the requisite level. It is not entirely clear that there is significant expertise within the marketing academy in the sufficient numbers required to enabled these highly specialised, advanced courses to be delivered in all institutional contexts. For example, areas such as marketing theory and marketing ethics, both of which should be central to doctoral programs, are not popular specialisms at undergraduate or masters level (Baker and Zafer, 2000). The availability of appropriately skilled staff is further exacerbated by the limited range of specialised teaching texts and articles that are aimed at the doctoral training market. While there are a considerable number of texts that provide what might be termed 'generic' research training guidance for use across all the social sciences (Burton, 2000), specialist marketing texts for this purpose are virtually non-existent. While the more detailed research training guidelines are to be welcomed, there are many issues that need to be resolved at the departmental level before they can be delivered in a way that many marketing academics would wish.

A related issue to that of availability of academic expertise is that of critical mass, specifically, the availability of research students in sufficient numbers to merit the use of a senior academic to deliver specialised courses in a manner that is cost effective and feasible within institutional contexts. The concept of critical mass in doctoral research first emerged as a significant issue in the Harris Report when it stated 'There is a strong argument that postgraduate research education is likely to be delivered most effectively in the context of a critical mass of research activity' (Harris, 1996, 56, para. 5.36). Although the Harris Report does not explicitly define critical mass, Delamont et al. (1997) argue that it has both quantitative and qualitative connotations. Quantitatively, critical mass would appear to imply a significant number of research students working on externally and self-funded projects. There is an assumption that good quality doctoral students emerge out of a volume of active researchers and projects on one research site. This view has fuelled an increase in research centres and groups within institutional settings. Qualitatively, critical mass refers to the importance of groups of doctoral students and others working on shared problems, that have a degree of intellectual cohesion, and fosters the sharing of material and other resources.

Despite considerable support for the desirability of critical mass that is reflected in ESRC and much institutional research policy, Delamont et al., (1997) question the uncritical endorsement of the general view of critical mass as being appropriate in all academic sub-cultures. They argue that
critical mass is at its most evident in research groups in laboratory sciences, a particular kind of research experience that is not always positive. There are fundamental differences between science laboratories and social sciences departments that makes the critical mass argument less appealing in a social sciences context. The critical mass scenario in a science lab context relies on the constant flow of big science money and the social role of the post doctoral researcher who provide not only direct help to PhD students, but are also visible role models who provide continuity of vision.

By contrast, PhD students in the social sciences do not operate in the same or even similar environment as postdoctoral students in the sciences. The social sciences do not have a tradition of attracting big money, although large ESRC and business funded research centres do exist, they are not the norm. Another difference is that postdoctoral work has not had a long tradition within the social sciences. Although the ESRC has recently begun to fund postdoctoral fellowships they are nowhere near the level in the sciences. Doctoral students in the social sciences are used to working closely with one or two supervisors who give continuity with much work undertaken in isolation. Critical mass does have different connotations in the social sciences, it is not necessarily about groups and volumes at any one time. Very often it is about sequential continuity rather than critical mass.

The issue of critical mass, research productivity and the recruitment and training of doctoral students has also been addressed among marketing academics in the US. Department size is a critical factor in determining research productivity. The top 25 largest departments when combined with the top five small departments account for 44 per cent of articles in major marketing journals. It is difficult for smaller departments to compete with larger departments as a result, smaller departments do not have the critical mass necessary to produce sufficient numbers of articles in major journals and therefore develop a research reputation that will attract research students. When recruiting new doctoral students Bakir et al. (2000: 102) suggest that ‘smaller departments may need to emphasize the more individualized attention and more collegial environment that they can provide or emphasize research in a particular area that is a ‘niche’ strategy may be best for smaller schools’.

In many small, but nevertheless good quality, marketing departments in the UK, specialised marketing training courses that assume a critical mass model will not be a cost-effective or feasible option. In this respect, the gulf between large, well-funded marketing departments, with a critical mass of students and smaller departments with few research students and staff could widen. ESRC policy to formalise a more specialised approach to research training is at odds with its policy to broaden the base of management research in the United Kingdom, especially with respect to developing a
wider research base within new universities.

Rethinking the Delivery of Research Training in Marketing

The scenario which arises as a logical conclusion from the previous discussion of academic expertise and critical mass, is a consideration of institutional collaboration through joint provision and the delivery of research training via distance learning. One barrier to institutional collaboration is that ESRC accreditation is granted on an institutional basis. However, joint research studentships between institutions in the same locality are successfully organised. Regional and national collaboration in respect of research student training is also a real possibility. The problem as far as individual marketing departments are concerned is that there is no organising body that could act as a clearing house for matching supply and expertise with demand. A national clearing house for research training under the auspices of the British Marketing Academy is one way to facilitate this process. However, this initiative would require considerable organisation, co-ordination and funding. Within the existing research training framework it is not clear where the necessary funding could be sourced.

Collaboration in research training at a European level is also becoming a more realistic possibility, whereas ten years ago the structure of doctoral training was so fundamentally different within EU countries that collaboration would have been virtually impossible. The most recent research suggests that there is a degree of convergence in the importance and form of research training practices among some European countries. European collaboration with respect to research training is certainly consistent with European Union policy that favours the development of cross-border educational initiatives. Although it needs to be recognised that initiatives including SOCRATES, ERASMUS, LEONARDO da VINCI and TEMPUS are mostly aimed at undergraduate level and below (Teichler and Gordon, 2001). The Human Capital and Mobility Programme did fund doctoral fellowships, but recipients were mostly students for relatively poorer EU countries who wished to study in more advanced EU societies (Maiworm and Teichler, 1997). There are still some differences in the structure and organisation of research training in Europe. For example, in the UK there has been a shift from graduate education being 'bolted on' to a situation where graduate schools have been developed along the lines of the US model. In Italy, consortia have been developed to deliver education and training on a collective basis. Whereas in the Netherlands, 'research schools' have been developed (Burgess, 1998). There are also variations in the delivery of research training in the life-cycle of the PhD. In Portugal, training occurs at the mid-point of the PhD (Seixas, 1998), while in Britain training occurs at the
beginning of the programme. In Belgian business schools, training programmes are only partly formalised (Beuselinck and Verhoeven, 1998).

The possibility of collaboration in doctoral training at the European level does exist, and marketing faculty in the UK would do well to explore these possibilities. Indeed the development of a ‘virtual’ European Graduate School, comprising national clearinghouses for training would facilitate this development in much the same way that national data archives have facilitated the exchange of data at the European level. The link to a European based training provision in addition to national and institutional research training could prove to be a point of competitive advantage for UK institutions in the face of competition from the US.

Collaboration in research training at national, European, or even international level, will require the use of distance learning initiatives of one type or another, since few doctoral students would be able to fund themselves, or receive funding for overseas visits. A positive move in the right direction is the ESRC recognition of open and distance learning based research training in 2000 (ESRC, 2000). Distance leaning initiatives have been in existence for number of years in innovative universities and they have performed a valuable and flexible function in fulfilling the training needs of part-time research students. Some of the more advanced and exciting distance learning developments are in on-line educational provision which will facilitate further institutional collaboration, although this mode of provision is not without controversy. Supporters claim that on-line learning provides students with a flexible and pedagogically rich mode of learning. While sceptics regard on-line education as a poor substitute being poorly resourced and a mechanistic alternative to the face-to-face delivery (Curran, 2001). The interest in on-line education in the US, has been underpinned by the belief in the existence of a global market providing immense profits for entrepreneurial institutions, not necessarily in the quest for quality (MacKeogh, 2001). The use of distance learning in the case of research training is not driven by profits, but in the pursuit of quality. This dimension adds another strand to the on-line learning debate in marketing. It is certainly a challenge, since some of the existing feedback suggests that distance learning programmes in marketing, score high on convenience and low on a quality learning experience (Ponzurick et al., 2000). ESRC recognition of open and distance learning based training is a move in the right direction but it opens up another range of complex debates about collaboration, delivery and accreditation that need to be acknowledged and dealt with in a more detailed and systematic way than at present.
Conclusion

Research training in marketing has not attracted as much attention as it deserves in the UK. Although the ESRC has been proactive in establishing more detailed Guidelines in the areas of business, and more recently marketing, the British marketing academy has been slow to critically evaluate ESRC policy and draw out the implications for research training practice. This paper has been a first attempt to stimulate more discussion within the UK on this issue and to suggest ways in which the debate might be extended. It is important that the quality and relevance of research training is addressed more directly. This issue is particularly timely given that the more recent 1+3 initiative adopted by the ESRC will directly compete with the US system of doctoral training. These changes in the organisation of doctoral provision will have a disproportionately large effect on marketing, and business disciplines more generally, since well over half of all doctoral candidates are classified as overseas students.

References

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About the Author

Dawn Burton teaches marketing at Leeds University Business School. Research interests include consumer financial behaviour, multicultural marketing, and marketing theory. Her research has been published in a wide variety of social science and business journals. She is author of Financial Services and the Consumer (Routledge), editor of Research Training for Social Scientists (Sage) and founding editor of Marketing Theory.