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📍 UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER | MANCHESTER, UNITED
KINGDOM

Parallel panel II: *Temporal organisation of doctoral education or “when do we offer what”? Finding the right balance*

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The ethical dimension of the PhD project. How and when to check it?

What is ethics in research?

A definition (University of Stirling)

*Ethics are a personal code of conduct based on respect for one's self, others and surroundings and is governed by the principles or assumptions underpinning the way individuals or organisations ought to conduct themselves. **Research ethics** involves the application of fundamental ethical principles to research activities which include **the design and implementation of research**, respect towards society and others, the use of resources and research outputs, scientific misconduct and the regulation of research.*

Doctoral Schools in the EUA-CDE are much concerned about ethics and research integrity

The 2019 EUA-CDE survey on [Doctoral education in Europe today: approaches and institutional structures](#) revealed that

*The most important strategic priority for the respondents was the funding for doctoral education, identified by 74% of respondents (...) Second in terms of strategic priorities **was research ethics, which 70% universities considered highly important.** This indicates the increasing awareness of this issue in the institutions.*

The 2022 EUA-CDE survey on [Doctoral education in Europe: Current developments and trends](#) revealed that

***Research ethics and integrity** was rated among the highest strategic priorities **with 93% of respondents** indicating it be of high or very high importance (...) The top position of research ethics and integrity as an institutional priority coincides with the fact that research ethics and integrity is also the most widespread mandatory and voluntary training in responded universities*

The ethical dimension of the PhD project: the designing phase

HOW to ensure that a doctoral research project complies with the highest ethical standards?

1. Each PhD project should be checked for ethical issues

Ethic issues arise in many areas of research, **not only in the medical field**

2. All PhD candidates should complete an ethics self-assessment for getting their proposal “ethics-ready”

A checklist covering most of the ethics issues arising in their research project have to be completed

3. If the project raises one or more of the issues listed in the ethics issues checklist

it should be submitted to the relevant ethics committee for review

4. PhD candidates should start thinking about ethics while designing their research protocol

i.e. at the beginning of their doctoral education and as part of it

taking into account ethical aspects of its objectives, methodology and potential impact

5. PhD candidates should seek advise from their supervisors and from their institution

research ethics committees, data protection officers, and get training at Doctoral Schools

Ensuring the ethical dimension of the PhD project is a complex, collaborative task that involves
PhD candidates-supervisors-institutions

Figure 5: Mandatory transversal skills training

What type of mandatory transversal skills training is offered to doctoral candidates at your institution?

Number of respondents: 124-133/138

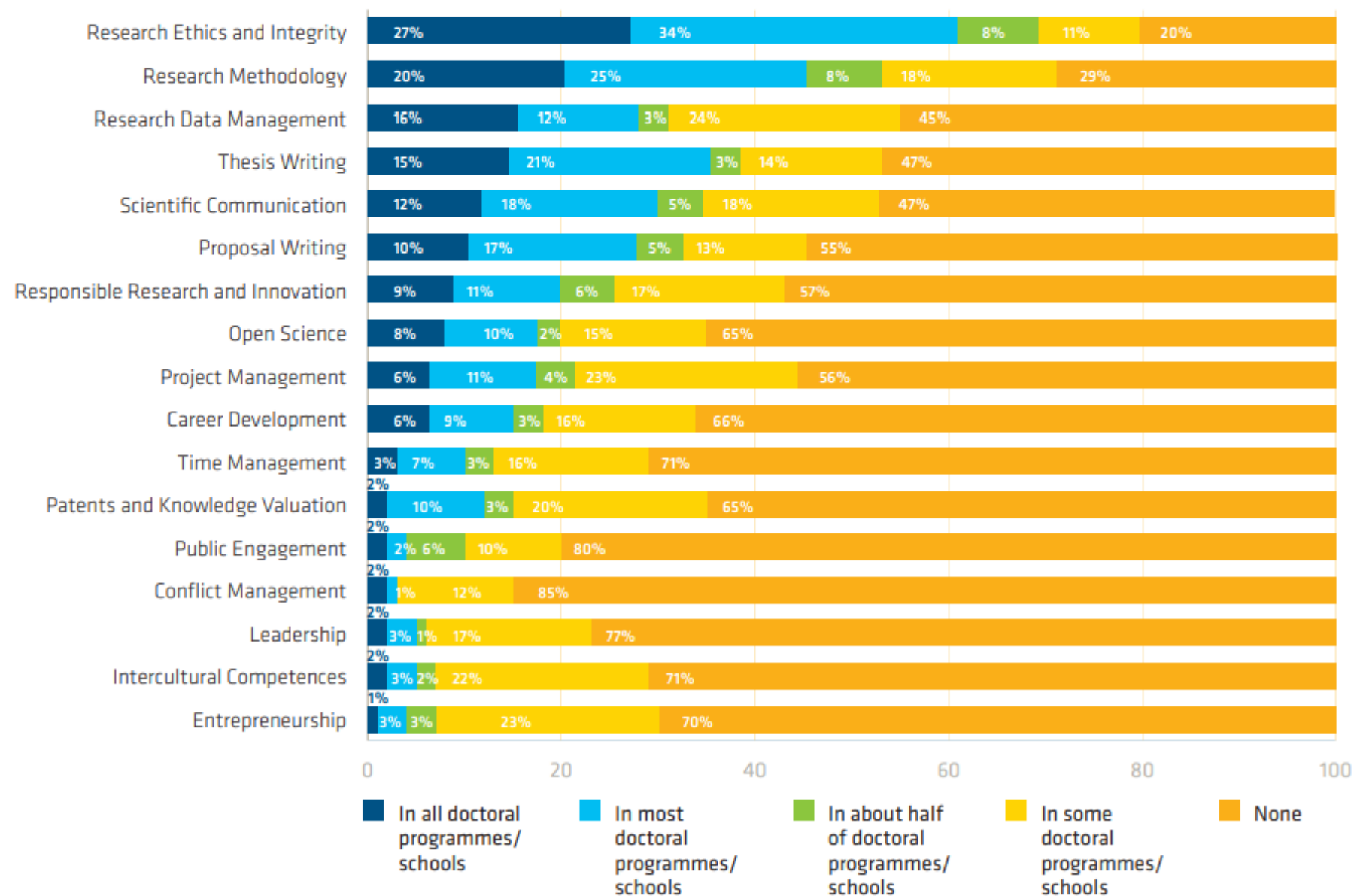
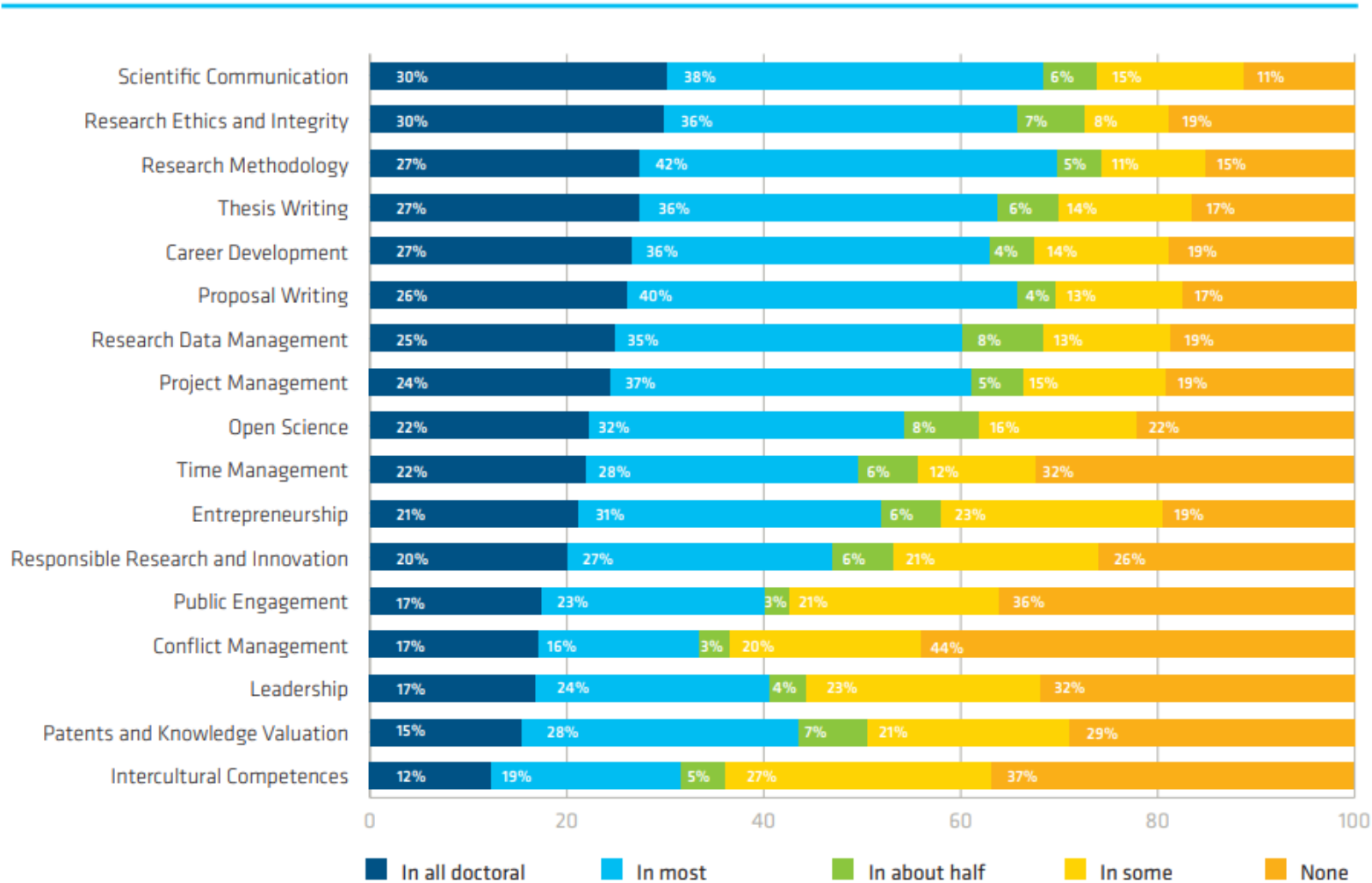


Figure 6: Optional transversal skills training

What type of optional transversal skills training is offered to doctoral candidates at your institution?

Number of respondents: 127-133/138



3.2 Optional training for doctoral candidates

The amount of optional training is significantly higher compared to the mandatory ones. Doctoral programmes and schools nowadays offer a wide range of optional trainings for doctoral candidates (Figure 6).

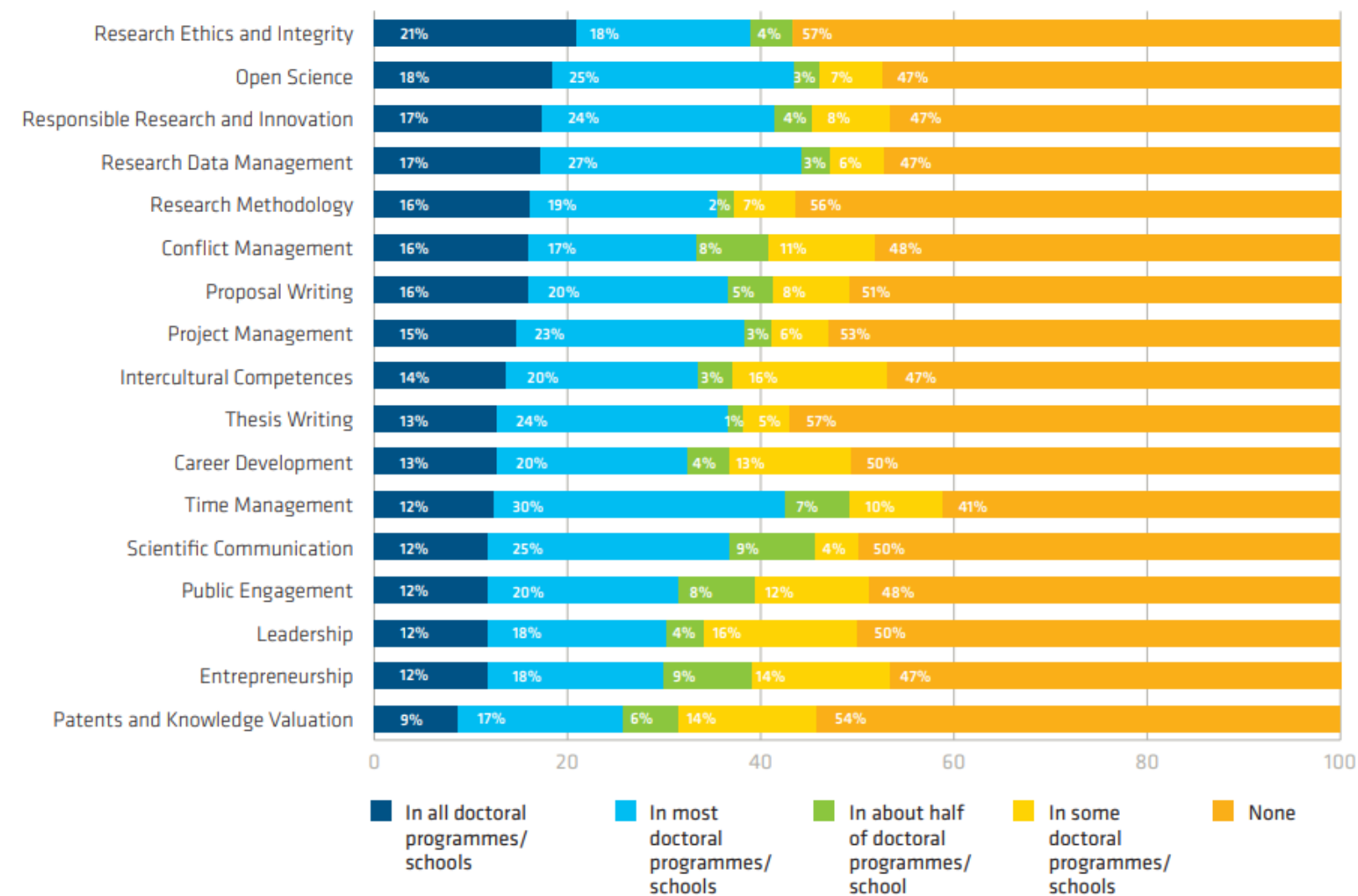
Research ethics and integrity and research methodology is also widespread when it comes to optional training, indicating that mandatory and voluntary training sometimes complement each other. From the survey responses scholarly communication is becoming increasingly crucial for doctoral candidates. For example, 68% of respondents indicated that in most or all doctoral programmes/schools, doctoral candidates can be trained in this thematic area. This confirms that doctoral schools actively encourage and prepare doctoral candidates to interact with wider society by communicating their research.

Topics such as Open Science and research data management are also included in the optional doctoral trainings of most responding institutions. These results reflect the evolution of Open Science beyond Open Access and the need for additional skills in an open science context. This includes the capability to manage, store and share data.

Figure 7: Prospective transversal skills training

If it is not available now, do you intend to offer any of the following training to doctoral candidates in the future?

Number of respondents: 62-77/138



However, these topics are offered in over 40% of institutions surveyed, indicating that doctoral candidates can choose nowadays from a wide array of different training offers.

3.3 Future training offer for doctoral candidates

The survey also asked about training that universities plan to offer in the future if it is not already available for doctoral candidates. Almost half of the respondents named research data management (44% intend to offer it in most or in all doctoral programmes) and open science (43% intend to offer it in most or in all doctoral programmes) as training to be provided in the future, but also time management and responsible research and innovation rank nearly as high (Figure 7).

However, these numbers need to be interpreted with caution. This question has a significantly lower response rate (62-77 respondents from a total of 138) compared to previous questions on doctoral training. This suggests that a significant proportion of universities do not intend to deliver previous trainings anew in case they haven't done so yet. This may also be due to the limited resources of doctoral schools and an already existing broad array of training offers (see the previous question), which

Table 1: Number of respondents per country

Country	Number of valid responses
Austria	4
Belgium	8
Croatia	1
Czech Republic	7
Denmark	2
Finland	9
France	7
Georgia	4
Germany	15
Greece	1
Iceland	1
Ireland	6
Italy	5
Latvia	1
Lithuania	3
Malta	1
Netherlands	5
Norway	5
Poland	7
Portugal	3
Romania	5
Serbia	1
Slovakia	4
Slovenia	1
Spain	17
Sweden	5
Switzerland	4
United Kingdom	6
Total	138

1.1 About this survey

The following report by the EUA Council for Doctoral Education (EUA-CDE), a special membership service of the European University Association, comprising more than 260 universities from 36 countries, provides an overview of important developments in doctoral education in Europe, particularly in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, and expanding coverage to include postgraduate education. It serves as an update of the large-scale EUA-CDE survey on “[Doctoral education in Europe today: approaches and structures](#)” conducted in 2017-2018 and it provides information on the current strategic priorities of European universities in doctoral education. The results will help shape the future activities and influence the work of the EUA-CDE, including co-producing the paper that EUA-CDE produces in 2022.

1.2 Methodology of the 2021 EUA-CDE survey on current developments in doctoral education

This report is based on the results of a survey distributed to all members of the [European University Association](#) from 15 April to 31 May 2021 and collected 138 valid responses from 28 European countries. Of the total number of respondents, 138 are members of the EUA Council for Doctoral Education.

Respondents provided information on: i) institutional data; ii) insights on doctoral training; iii) profile of postdoctoral researchers; iv) institutional priorities and v) impact of Covid-19 on doctoral education.

The geographical distribution of survey participants is shown in Figure 1 and Table 1. In two countries, we find more than ten responses. In seven countries have between six to ten responses, and 19 countries have one to five responses.

When should ethical requirements be monitored?

At an early stage of the PhD life and at any time later if ethical issues arise unexpectedly during the ongoing project

Ethical issues have to be kept in mind from the conceptual stage of the PhD proposal, **not only to respect the legal framework**, but to enhance research quality

In Spain the PhD proposal is approved within the first year (normally towards the end) of the research stage

Training in ethics must be managed by Doctoral Schools at the start of doctoral training

Questions for you

Beyond making known and subscribing to the Code of Good Practice in Research Integrity, do all PhD candidates complete an ethics issues self-checklist at your institution?

At what moment in the doctoral life?

What “non-self-evident” aspects should be measured as part of ethical integrity? For example, the Vicarius/Secondary Trauma - how the nature of researching on sensitive subjects may adversely affect the PhD candidates