

DOCTORAL RESEARCH IN RUSSIAN AND EAST EUROPEAN STUDIES: TRENDS AND REALITIES FROM THE UTREES DATABASE

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Fifty years ago the late John Simmons, then Librarian-Lecturer in Charge of Slavonic Books at the Taylor Institution in Oxford, wrote that ‘... British theses in Slavonic studies have not so far attracted the attention of the bibliographer’. Later to become Librarian of All Souls College, John was the doyen of Slavonic bibliographers, and it was typical of him to meet this perceived need himself by publishing the first listing of British theses in Russian and East European studies in *Oxford Slavonic Papers*. The timeline below shows how the bibliography grew over the next half-century from 300-odd entries on 21 pages to over 5000 entries on an online database. The paper then goes on to suggest ways in which the data in UTREES can offer insights into the development and content of postgraduate research in Russian and East European studies in the British Isles.

UTREES: Origins and Development

1967. John Simmons publishes the first list of theses in REES awarded higher degrees by British universities in *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, vol. 13. It contains 313 entries dated from 1907 to 1966, and includes all degrees above BA level, as do the next six quinquennial supplements. The final quinquennial supplement omits all MAs.

1973. 1st supplement, by JS, 1967-71 (161 entries), *OSP*, n.s. vol.6.

1977. 2nd supplement, by JS, 1972-76 (238 entries), *OSP*, n.s. vol. 10.

1982. 3rd supplement, by JS, 1977-81 (223 entries), *OSP*, n.s. vol. 15.

1987. 4th supplement, by Gregory Walker, 1981-86 (267 entries), *OSP*, n.s. vol. 20.

1994. 5th supplement, by GW, 1986-91 (330 entries), *OSP*, n.s. vol. 27.

1998. 6th supplement, by GW, 1992-96 (614 entries), *OSP*, n.s. vol. 31.

2004. 7th supplement, by GW, 1997-2001 (668 entries), *SEER*, vol. 82(1).

2008. The Modern Humanities Research Association (MHRA) publishes in book form *University Theses in Russian, Soviet and East European Studies 1907-2006*, listing 3317 theses. It cumulates and updates the eight preceding lists (omitting all 1-year masters’ and bachelors’ dissertations) and adds full subject and author indexes.

2009. The MHRA launches UTREES (University Theses in Russian and East European Studies) as an online database, based on the published bibliography, with multiple search options and an annual updating cycle.

2011. Annual updates take the total number of entries beyond 4000.

2012. From this year additions are limited to doctoral theses only.

2016. By the end of this year UTREES lists 5166 theses, 4459 of them doctoral.

How Complete? How Representative?

These are the principal factors which have affected the level of coverage achieved by UTREES, and which in turn have determined how representative it can be as a record of postgraduate research in REES carried out in the UK and the Irish Republic.

Positive

- Compilation uses a set of over 100 search terms (countries, areas, subjects) to trace relevant theses in institutions' online catalogues, the BL's EThOS database and the ProQuest *Dissertations and Theses UK and Ireland*.
- Searching the abstracts contained in the EThOS database (from 2007, some earlier) and the ProQuest database (from 1986, some earlier) regularly shows up theses which are relevant to REES but have uninformative titles which would escape a simple title search.
- By continuing its geographical coverage of all areas of the former USSR, UTREES is de facto a record of research on Central Asia and the Caucasus as well as of the Russian Federation, the former European Soviet republics and the rest of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe.

Negative

- Until the update of 2012, UTREES attempted to list two-year masters' theses and their earlier equivalents (mostly BLitts). There are 707 of these on the database (just under 14% of the total), but coverage was always patchy: institutions' library catalogues don't always include masters' theses; it's often difficult to distinguish two-year from one-year theses; and masters' dissertations have never been recorded by EThOS.
- Some institutions have in the past been slow and/or unsystematic in the recording of their theses, and a few still are. Long-term retrospective searching to trace possibly relevant theses can only be selective.
- The lack of searchable abstracts for older theses (see above) will certainly have resulted in some relevant theses with uninformative or misleading titles being missed over the years.

Overall, I would say that we've achieved the inclusion of doctoral theses, certainly over the last twenty years, to within ten or fewer percentage points of completeness, but have never able to trace two-year masters' theses to the same extent, for the reasons given above. In 2012 we restricted additions to doctoral theses only. Even so, UTREES is, as far as I know, the longest current thesis bibliography in any field of area studies, and that in two respects: firstly in its 5000-plus entries, and secondly in the period of 110 years over which it now extends from 1907, when Mr T.P. Themelis gained a BLitt at Oxford for his thesis entitled 'The relation of the Eastern Church to the Western Churches from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century'.

The crucial point here is that UTREES shows only *research that has actually been done*, whatever university policies and government initiatives may have been in play at the time. The decision to write a thesis, rather than spend several years of one's life doing something else, depends on a combination of attractions and deterrents. These include the interests of departments; any government-inspired incentives; the availability of funding; the topicality of particular themes; and – not least – the motivations and the cultural and linguistic equipment to be found in the pool of potential applicants for postgraduate research. The database documents the total net result of those decisions.

So UTREES does offer us a substantial fund of data as the basis for some reasonably reliable statements about research in REES in the British Isles. It can help to trace the development of scholarship over time, and identify topics and modes of treatment which have gained and lost attention. It can show the institutional framework within which postgraduate research in REES has been carried on, and tell us something about the scale, the geography and the preoccupations of that research. And it can even offer a few clues about the researchers themselves.

Numbers, Dates and Institutions

Research degrees as we recognise them today were introduced into British universities later than we tend to assume. The BLitt was adopted from around 1895, but the PhD/DPhil only made its appearance from 1917 onwards. Once available in Britain, the number of doctoral awards went up rapidly, rising from a total of two (in all subjects) in 1919/20 to more than 1800 in 1960/61. The expansion has continued: this year (2017) the Quality Assurance Agency estimated that about 100,000 students in the UK were working for doctoral degrees. Judging from the numbers of doctoral theses registered by UTREES in recent years, something like a thousand of those students are probably writing on REES-related topics.

Table 1. REES postgraduate research: theses listed in UTREES 1907-2016

Year	No.	Docs	Year	No.	Docs	Year	No.	Docs	Year	No.	Docs
1907	1	-	1942	2	2	1967	22	17	1992	68	52
1914	1	-	1943	5	5	1968	25	19	1993	72	49
1919	2	-	1944	1	1	1969	32	23	1994	76	56
1920	1	1	1945	3	2	1970	30	20	1995	82	65
1921	1	-	1946	-	-	1971	30	23	1996	100	79
1922	2	1	1947	3	1	1972	39	30	1997	111	94
1923	2	1	1948	3	2	1973	38	31	1998	128	105
1924	2	-	1949	9	8	1974	40	34	1999	171	142
1925	3	2	1950	7	6	1975	43	32	2000	171	147
1926	5	3	1951	7	5	1976	53	45	2001	161	133
1927	5	3	1952	4	4	1977	35	27	2002	199	165
1928	4	2	1953	12	11	1978	55	42	2003	169	138
1929	2	2	1954	16	15	1979	39	35	2004	149	130
1930	2	2	1955	12	9	1980	47	34	2005	172	164
1931	4	3	1956	8	6	1981	55	40	2006	196	183
1932	2	1	1957	7	6	1982	49	40	2007	169	151
1933	1	1	1958	13	10	1983	48	37	2008	167	154
1934	3	2	1959	11	10	1984	50	37	2009	203	194
1935	2	2	1960	10	5	1985	40	30	2010	177	162
1936	2	2	1961	10	8	1986	60	40	2011	205	204
1937	1	-	1962	5	4	1987	65	47	2012	185	185
1938	4	3	1963	6	6	1988	47	33	2013	168	168
1939	-	-	1964	8	8	1989	50	37	2014	192	192
1940	4	3	1965	14	13	1990	45	30	2015	206	206
1941	1	1	1966	14	13	1991	68	45	2016	105*	105*

**incomplete*

Table 1 gives an overview of the extent to which this growth has been reflected in REES. As mentioned above, the first research degree in a REES-related subject was a BLitt awarded by Oxford in 1907. The first doctorate was for a Cambridge DLitt thesis in 1920, before we begin to see PhDs from London (Royal Holloway in 1923, SSEES in 1925), followed by Birmingham in 1928. Oxford didn't award its first DPhil in the field until 1943. The number of theses per year (doctors' and masters' together) recorded by UTREES remained in single figures until 1953, when it reached 12. After that the annual count didn't pass 20 until 1967.

Then, in the decade from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, there's a marked increase in the count of doctoral theses. This probably stemmed from a combination of university expansion (21 institutions appeared in UTREES for the first time between 1965 and 1975); a heightened vogue for REES; and targeted government funding. Doctoral thesis numbers soon reached a level which would remain fairly constant until the end of the 1980s. They passed 50 in 1992, then the number of PhDs in REES shot up at breakneck speed, almost *tripling* between 1993 and 2000. The rate of increase has since been slower and somewhat irregular, passing 180 in 2006, but then fluctuating before hitting 204 in 2011 and a record 206 in 2015. As a result, over half the theses in the UTREES database are now dated 2002 or later.

Table 2 shows that the number of contributing institutions also remained very low well into the 1960s, with many producing a relevant thesis only occasionally. Three universities contributed the seven theses listed in 1950, and five produced ten theses in 1960. By 1970 there were 12, then 18 in 1980, and still only 15 as late as 1990. After that the yearly count of institutions represented accelerated rapidly from 36 in 1995 to 55 in 2000. Since then it has remained in the 50s and 60s (with no masters' theses added after 2011), and reached a high point of 67 institutions listed for 2015.

Table 2. Number of institutions awarding degrees listed in UTREES

1907-1945	12	1995	36
1950	3	2000	55
1960	5	2005	52
1970	12	2010	63
1980	18	2015	67
1990	15		

But as **Table 3** indicates, many of these will have been contributing for the first time. Of the 67 institutions appearing for 2015, just eight (UCL, Oxford, Manchester, Birmingham, Cambridge, Sheffield, Kent and LSE) accounted for 80 theses out of 206 (nearly 40%). On the other hand, 39 institutions in 2015 provided either two entries or only one, with an average of 1.4 each.

Table 3. Institutions contributing a first thesis to UTREES, 1965-2016

1965-1975	21	1976-1989	26	1990-1999	27	2000-2016	52
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In 2006 two institutional partnerships (CEELBAS and CRCEES) were set up to promote and sustain postgraduate work in REES, with funding from the AHRC, the British Academy and other sources. **Table 4** suggests that the institutions with the longest history of postgraduate research, combined with the highest output of doctoral theses, are nearly all partners in one or other of the groups, and remain active as research centres.

Table 4. Institutions with 50 or more doctoral theses listed in UTREES (to 2016)

Showing affiliation to the two language-based area studies partnerships for REES

Oxford (1943-) <i>CEELBAS</i>	576	Sheffield (1976-) <i>CEELBAS</i>	86
SSEES + UCL (1925-) <i>CEELBAS</i>	429	Essex (1969-) <i>neither</i>	76
Cambridge (1920-) <i>CEELBAS</i>	362	Nottingham (1955-) <i>CRCEES</i>	72
LSE (1929-) <i>neither</i>	345	KCL (1928-) <i>neither</i>	66
Birmingham (1928-) <i>CEELBAS</i>	207	St Andrews (1972-) <i>CRCEES</i>	64
Glasgow (1954-) <i>CRCEES</i>	169	Kent (1973-) <i>CEELBAS</i>	59
Manchester (1959-) <i>CEELBAS</i>	135	Exeter (1974-) <i>neither</i>	57
Sussex (1969-) <i>neither</i>	104	Bristol (1959-) <i>neither</i>	53
Edinburgh (1940-) <i>CRCEES</i>	93	Warwick (1984-) <i>CEELBAS</i>	52
Leeds (1961-) <i>neither</i>	89	Staffordshire (1997-) <i>neither</i>	50

Other partners in CEELBAS: Bath (28) and SOAS (31).

Other partners in CRCEES: Aberdeen (37), Durham (42), Newcastle (27) and Strathclyde (28).

Countries, Areas and Nations

Every entry in UTREES is indexed by up to three out of 93 country/area/nation codings, which make it possible to determine which parts of our catchment area were attracting the attention of thesis writers over time. Until the early 1960s, the small number of theses appearing each year (rarely more than ten) dealt roughly equally with Russia and the USSR on the one hand and with the rest of Eastern Europe on the other. **Table 5** shows how, over the next few years, the proportion treating Russia, and the Soviet Union specifically, grew very markedly as academic attention began to focus more heavily on multiple aspects of the contemporary USSR. In 1970, 26 out of 30 theses dealt exclusively or in part with the Soviet Union or Russia, and only six with countries outside.

The table shows how this preponderance persisted as the total thesis output gradually grew larger up to the beginning of the 1990s. Then, as the sharp rise in overall numbers becomes apparent in the next few years, we can also see a major shift in the proportions. By 1995, countries outside Russia and the RSFSR were in the majority – although not by much – and by 2000 the proportion had risen to nearly 2:1. Since then the trend has continued, albeit quite gradually, with the proportion reaching 3:1 in 2015.

Table 5. Theses dealing with Russia/USSR and with other countries/areas, 1970-2015

PhDs and Masters – in 2015 PhDs only. Some theses have 2 or 3 country/area index entries.

‘Other’ includes non-Russian republics of the USSR during and outside the Soviet period.

Year	Russia/SU	Other	Year	Russia/SU	Other
1970	26	6	2000	85	160
1980	38	20	2005	87	152
1985	33	16	2010	71	200
1990	43	20	2015	71	227
1995	61	67			

Several factors have brought about these changes in emphasis towards countries that had previously attracted little or no attention from thesis writers. One of the most prominent has been the work devoted from the late 1990s onwards to areas of conflict within the UTREES catchment area, very notably in Bosnia and Kosovo. Here the numbers have been swelled by treatments not only of military and security topics, but also by theses looking at the legal, criminal, medical, social and other consequences in those countries. From about the same time the non-Russian republics of the former Soviet Union begin to attract more

attention after figuring only rarely in theses produced during the Soviet period, with the Baltic states and Ukraine being the most prominent.

Then, beginning around 2000, we find an upsurge in theses treating aspects of former communist countries' adherence to the European Union and NATO and their transition to market economies (though the latter admittedly includes Russia as well). A little later still, as the effects of free movement within the EU became apparent, there's a striking rise in theses dealing with migration to the UK and Ireland – especially from Poland and Romania – from virtually nil throughout the period of communist rule to form a substantial element within the total output. As a final example, Albania – a country which was formerly a great rarity in thesis lists – has appeared regularly in every year since 2001, primarily due to a postgraduate research programme on emerging economies at the University of Staffordshire, concentrating on South-East Europe and supported by the Open Society Foundation.

Subjects

The UTREES database also carries up to three subject codings for each thesis, using a list of 34 subject terms. REES are deeply Interdisciplinary, so it isn't surprising that over 80% of the entries have either two or three subject codings, making it possible to trace over time (as it does for countries and areas) how subjects rose and fell in their attraction for researchers. Until well after the Second World War the only subjects appearing with any regularity as thesis topics were History, International Relations, Literature and Language, and Politics and Government. From **Table 6** we can trace the standing of these subjects over the decades that followed. History has maintained a strong showing up to the present, roughly proportionate to the overall growth in thesis numbers – though the variety of historical themes and treatments has broadened out enormously from the concentration on diplomatic and political history of earlier years. Many theses have had to be indexed under International Relations and/or Politics as well as under History, and you'll see from the table that the growth in the numbers of all three subjects has moved broadly in parallel. In all three cases, too, the proportion of theses with an application to countries other than the USSR and Russia has risen markedly since the 1990s.

Table 6. Number of UTREES thesis entries indexed in selected subjects, 1970-2015*PhDs and Masters – in 2015 PhDs only. Most theses have 2 or 3 subject index entries.*

Year	1970	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015
(Total thesis number)	(30)	(47)	(40)	(45)	(82)	(171)	(172)	(177)	(206)
History	6	20	21	16	34	67	39	29	52
International Relations	2	9	11	11	24	42	38	41	34
Literature & Language	12	11	8	14	6	20	22	19	26
Politics & Government	3	9	2	14	33	47	40	57	48
Econ/Finance/Manag't	8	7	5	5	21	36	38	43	38
Society	1	9	3	4	14	43	37	29	35
Law & Crime	-	5	1	4	6	13	14	16	14
Health & Psychology	-	1	1	-	2	9	7	8	18
Migration & Minorities	1	1	-	2	4	18	17	32	61

Literature and Language, on the other hand, while they have kept up a presence in the listings since the 1920s, have registered a steady decline in their proportion of the total output. The table shows that that proportion fell from 40% in 1970 to 20% in 1985, and then to a mere 7% in 1995. It remains to be seen whether the more recent slight rise in their presence will be maintained.

However, by far the most conspicuous recent change in the subject makeup of theses in UTREES has been the surfacing of topics in so many *other* disciplines which had attracted little attention until the events of 1989/90. First, as we might expect from the appearance of the 'transition economies', Economics, Finance and Management have shown a significant growth in both proportion and absolute numbers. The study of Society in its various manifestations was only an occasional presence until the 1980s, but rapidly became a major component of the output from the 1990s onwards. At a somewhat lower level we can trace an increase in theses on Law and Crime, probably due – among other factors – to the work of the International Criminal Tribunals and the growing importance of commercial law and corruption in the transition economies. A feature since the early 2000s has been the study of the psychological effects of conflict and displacement, as well as the investigation of a wide variety of health issues in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

Finally on the matter of subject coverage in UTREES, the most evident growth point emerged as a result of our decision to include ‘Migration and Minorities’ as an index term. As you can see from the table, no theses at all from 1985 were indexed under that term, but over the last 20 years the upswing has been remarkable. Very noticeable within this body of theses has been a strong and growing subgroup looking at the situation of migrants to the UK and Ireland coming from countries in Eastern Europe and the former USSR.

Authors

In one final drilling-down into the UTREES data, I suggest that it allows us to track (with some reservations) the extent to which participation by foreign postgraduates in doctoral research in REES has risen from the 1990s onwards. The figures in **Table 7** rely on the appearance (and only the appearance) of what seem to be indigenous surnames as thesis authors. Of course, the possession of a name that looks Russian or Hungarian doesn’t mean that the author hasn’t been born in the UK or taken the name of a foreign spouse; but the steep increase in the number and proportion of such names over the last 20-odd years does seem much too substantial to be dismissed as sheer chance.

Table 7. Thesis authors with apparently indigenous surnames 1970-2015

PhDs and Masters – in 2015 PhDs only.

Year	Total	Indig.	Year	Total	Indig.
1970	30	3 (10%)	2000	171	41 (24%)
1980	47	3 (6%)	2005	172	54 (31%)
1985	40	3 (7.5%)	2010	177	80 (45%)
1990	45	6 (13%)	2015	206	90 (44%)
1995	82	19 (23%)			

Provisional Interpretations

Since 1991, completed doctoral research in Britain and Ireland relating to Russia, Eastern Europe and the area of the former Soviet Union has more than quadrupled in volume. Over the same period, the number of institutions awarding doctorates in the field has nearly tripled. Research is now taking place in many institutions beyond the established centres for REES. These are typically institutions which don’t reckon themselves to be REES ‘centres’,

but which are home to departments, small groups or individual academics who take on doctoral students – in whatever discipline – to write theses that have a geographical focus on Russia, Eastern Europe or the FSU. One powerful element in this trend has been the rapid increase in the number of students from our catchment area who are able to relate their research – whatever its subject – to their own country. This allows them to benefit from intimate local knowledge, mastery of one or more local languages, and often from local contacts and data sources which are less easily accessible to UK-based researchers.

The events of 1989-90 and subsequently had a huge effect on REES research in many ways. Academic interest in the area percolated into quite unlikely disciplines; opportunities arose for more exciting fieldwork; access to formerly closed archives was granted; new funding sources appeared; and student mobility improved. I've listed a sample of recent titles below to illustrate a few of these outcomes. The benefits of all these developments are in some measure still with us, even though they're being encroached on – for example – by the reimposition of restrictions on access to Russian archives, and the likely negative effects of Brexit on the movement of researchers. We also need to be aware that interests in countries and subjects can shift across area studies as a whole as well as within REES. UTREES alone can't supply the data to establish whether, for example, postgraduate research in Middle Eastern or Chinese studies has recently been developing at comparable or greater rates and if so under what influences. In whatever direction the trends move, UTREES will – I hope – be there to document the written record of future research.

Specimens of recent theses listed in UTREES

A. Theodosiou, *Authentic performances and ambiguous identities: gypsy musicians on the Greek-Albanian border*. Manchester, PhD, 2003.

N. Hayes, *Bosnian women's experience of war, loss and resettlement*. Leicester, DCLinPsy, 2005.

K. Lang, *Cancer in Estonia*. London (London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine), PhD, 2005.

M.J. Kempny, *Crossing boundaries of cultures and identities: Polish migrants in Belfast*. Queen's University Belfast, PhD, 2010.

A. Kupatadze, *'Transitions after transition': coloured revolutions and organized crime in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan*. St Andrews, PhD, 2010.

M. Cerović, *Questions and questioning in Montenegrin police interviews*. York, PhD, 2010.

T. Disney, *Between care and control? Orphan geographies in the Russian Federation*. Birmingham, PhD, 2015.

I. Tsocheva, *An explanation of anxiety and depression among adults and adolescents in Bulgaria*. Roehampton, PhD, 2015.

G. Botoeva, *The local drug economy: the case of hashish production in a post-Soviet Kyrgyz village*. Essex, PhD, 2015.

G. Howley, *The acquisition of Manchester dialect variants by adolescent Roma migrants*. Salford, PhD, 2016.