

Analysis of institutional responses on funding arrangements for researcher development

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Analysis of institutional responses on funding arrangements for researcher development

Executive summary

This report analyses the responses to the Research Councils UK (RCUK) 2013 survey of institutions regarding the strategy, funding and delivery arrangements for researcher development since ring-fenced funding. It serves as a follow-up to RCUK's review in 2011¹ where institutions were asked to outline the extent to which funding for researcher development would be embedded within budgets.

75 institutions responded to the 2013 survey representing a 44% return and 91% of the £120 million Roberts funding issued by the research councils between 2003 and 2011. The four-page reports were varied in their level of detail making it difficult to compare data directly with the 2011 RCUK review. That something did not appear in a response was not taken as indicating its absence or lack of significance in the institution. The overall themes and conclusions are drawn from the more general messages in the responses.

The responses strongly suggest that researcher development is fully embedded in institutional strategies but demonstrate an element of difficulty with translating this strategic approach into the delivery of researcher development provision.

There was much reference to provision for postgraduate researchers, but less detail was available around the support for research staff, for whom training and development provision was generally covered in broader staff development training programmes.

The majority of respondents were looking to maintain previous levels of provision. Many institutions who had previously received high levels of Roberts funding reported having to find efficiencies and ways to provide the same or greater levels of researcher development interactions, than those who originally received smaller level of funding who were operating on a 'business as usual' basis. Many institutions reported restructuring and devolving researcher development delivery to meet cost efficiencies. Some were taking a more 'life-span' approach.

Perceived challenges for institutions covered the perennial issues of engendering a culture of professional development amongst researchers and their managers and supervisors, future funding of development programmes for researchers, and engagement with employers. New challenges included the logistical complexities of delivering often collaborative provision, including placements, and providing equality of access within a complex environment of multiple doctoral training centre and partnerships.

Researcher development fully embedded in institutional strategy

The findings overwhelmingly demonstrated that researcher development has been fully embedded in institutional strategies, with almost two-thirds citing that researcher development was a senior level responsibility. Strategies are being reviewed every three to five years as an integral part of institutional strategic review. Generally, there were more references to specific postgraduate researcher strategies (35%) than for research staff (20%). The European HR Excellence in Research Award² was seen by institutions as an

¹ Monitoring of Researcher Development 2011-2013

www.rcuk.ac.uk/documents/researchcareers/ResearcherDevelopment2011-2013.pdf

² European Commission HR Excellence in Research Award www.vitae.ac.uk/hrexcellenceaward

important strategic driver for researcher development and the implementation of the Concordat principles.

Sustainability of funding

Specific information about funding arrangements varied substantially. Where details were provided, it was usually for central provision: generally institutions reported being unable to identify the cost of any distributed provision. Predominantly institutional core funding was being accessed (and competed) for researcher development. Generally institutions who had received greater amounts of Roberts funding, reported having to find efficiencies and ways to provide more researcher development interactions with less funding, particularly for postgraduate researchers. Institutions that received less Roberts funding generally reported little change in levels of funding or provision for researcher development.

Although almost a third specifically mentioned they had raised postgraduate fees, very few reported having earmarked funding of £200 per postgraduate researcher. It was much more difficult to identify a trend in funding levels for research staff development, whose budgets often had been absorbed into general human resource or staff development budgets.

Restructuring and devolving of researcher development delivery

Half of responses, the majority from research-intensive institutions, described moving to a model of central delivery of predominantly generic skills with discipline-specific and bespoke provision devolved to faculty or school level, particularly for postgraduate researchers. A few described a planned or current restructure of teams to enable more efficient coordination and delivery of provision, more use of academics for delivery, less use of external experts. Ten institutions mentioned taking a 'life-span' approach, considering the professional development from postgraduate researchers through, in some cases, to senior academics.

Over a quarter outlined collaborations with other institutions mainly driven by the search for cost-efficiencies, breadth and sustainability of provision. Some noted the complexity of managing successful collaborations. More than a half noted the benefit of working with Vitae, including its regional Hub networks, national events, regional training events, access to resources and sharing practice.

Breadth and availability of opportunity

The Vitae Researcher Development Framework was highlighted by two thirds of respondents as a key driver when reviewing and planning provision for postgraduate researchers and research staff; mapping workshops, courses and bespoke provision. Some noted the challenge of providing a comprehensive programme and a step-change in research staff provision.

There was insufficient detail in the reports to judge the breadth and depth of researcher development provision or any disciplinary differences. However, the widely varying responses highlighted specific priority areas grouped around impact, knowledge exchange, employability, public engagement and research integrity. Almost a half of responses reported increasing their provision of e-learning and use of virtual learning environments as an efficient way to make development opportunities more widely available, especially to part-time researchers and those who worked remotely.

Culture change and engagement

Since the start of the Roberts initiative increasing the levels of participation of postgraduate researchers and research staff, and engaging supervisors and principal investigators with

professional development has been recognised as the major challenge. Institutions see the manager role as key to the future engagement of research staff and reported involving principal investigators more directly in identifying specific training needs and using annual review procedures to formalise involvement. There was little evidence of recognition and reward of good supervision and management practice within human resources policies and practice¹.

There was evidence of growth in institutional researcher networks, particularly research staff associations and the use of social media to engender a sense of community and engagement in professional development. A fifth of institutions highlighted increased provision and use of mentoring as a way of engaging research staff in professional development. There was considerable evidence of the involvement of postgraduate researcher and research staff representation on board and committees.

Doctoral training centres and partnerships

The structure and organisation of provision relating to doctoral training centre models was a strong theme, particularly from research-intensive institutions. There was a strong call for consistency across research councils' expectations for researcher development, with some institutions accommodating the requirements of up to seven different research councils with potentially conflicting priorities. Many mentioned the challenge of developing provision for collaborative models. Overall, around a third of responses highlighted a desire to provide equality of opportunity to all postgraduate researchers and the difficulty of avoiding a 'two tier' system that disadvantaged those researchers who did not receive research council funding.

Collaboration with employers

Responses indicate that collaborations with employers continue to be a challenge. Employer engagement was more often mentioned in relation to postgraduate researchers and their employability: there was very little mention in relation to research staff. Institutions recognise the importance of raising awareness of careers outside of academia, while acknowledging having to balance the sometimes tension between academics and the employability agenda.

Many doctoral training centres and partnerships have facilitated engagement with employers through collaborative research projects and work placements schemes. Respondents welcomed the opportunity to extend links with employers, collaborate and be more innovative in researcher development delivery. However, providing placements were highlighted as a challenge by institutions.

Evaluation and enhancement

Even though institutions recognise the need to demonstrate return on investment in researcher development to maintain future core funding, measuring the impact of researcher development provision does not yet appear to be well embedded in the majority of institutions. The majority of responses reported collecting post-course feedback while few mentioned assessing the higher impact levels of changing behaviour and outcomes. 11 institutions (15%) mentioned using the Vitae Impact Framework³, of these eight were from the Russell Group.

There was consistently high use of Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS), the Principal Investigator and Research Leader Survey (PIRLS) and the Postgraduate

³ Vitae Impact Framework, 2009 www.vitae.ac.uk/ieg

Researcher Experience Survey (PRES), which were all highlighted as important tools to explore researchers' views and experiences and to benchmark institutional practice.

Conclusion

The institutional reports reveal a useful insight into the progress in embedding professional development of researchers across the higher education sector. Overwhelmingly, institutions have incorporated researcher development into institutional strategies, but there is still some way to go in terms of implementation. Most institutions have invested significant time and resource to achieve a successful transition from ring-fenced funding to assuring a continued programme of provision for researchers, often through developing devolved and blended models of delivery. Some have used the process to explore opportunities to take a broader view of researcher development, across the Vitae Researcher Development Framework domains and all stages of the researcher career. Nonetheless there is concern about the security of the agenda: institutions identified the continued challenge of providing the evidence to ensure on-going core funding to sustain the quality and breadth of provision, particularly in the expectation of increasing demand from researchers.

Institutions also recognise that the engagement of postgraduate researchers and research staff is a significant challenge. Most agree that key is convincing principal investigators and supervisors of the value of professional and career development. Building researcher communities and 'voice' were also seen as future opportunities to build researcher engagement in development opportunities.

The growth and diversity of doctoral training centre models is providing additional challenges and opportunities for researcher development provision and equality of access, including improving employer engagement and providing placements. Many institutions identified the advantage of Vitae in sustaining networks and providing opportunities for collaborations.

Recommendations

As a response to the findings of this research the following recommendations for further actions have been made:

1. RCUK should continue to review progress with the transition since ring-fenced funding particularly in the strategy, funding and delivery arrangements for researcher development and the measurement of its impact, potentially incorporating this within the Research Councils' normal monitoring and assurance processes.
2. Institutions should explore how best to achieve effective collaborations and share resources that genuinely achieve cost efficiencies and capacity in researcher development provision.
3. Institutions should continue to work with principal investigators and supervisors to gain their greater engagement in the broader researcher development agenda.
4. Institutions should encourage the growth of local research staff associations and their involvement with strategy, delivery and research staff engagement with researcher development programmes.
5. RCUK should work with institutions to gain a clearer understanding of the challenges facing institutions in delivering effective researcher development programmes within a landscape of multiple doctoral training centres and partnerships.
6. Institutions should explore ways to deliver effective provision and management of placements, particularly within doctoral training centres and partnerships.
7. Institutions should embed more systematic use of the Vitae Impact Framework and UK survey instruments to achieve more robust and extended evaluation to provide an evidence base, not only to shape training and development interventions, but also to support continued institutional funding for researcher development.

1. Introduction

This report summarises the responses to the Research Councils UK (RCUK) 2013 survey of institutions regarding the strategy, funding and delivery arrangements for researcher development since ring-fenced funding. It reviews the impact of the revised funding arrangements for researcher development and whether researcher development is strategically embedded in institutional support and provision for postgraduate researchers and research staff.

Context

Sir Gareth Roberts' Review of the supply of people with science, technology, engineering and mathematics skills⁴ highlighted the need for improvement in the development of researchers' transferable skills and career development. In response, between 2003 and 2011 RCUK invested around £120 million to implement the relevant recommendations across all disciplines.

During the 'Roberts' period of funding the landscape of research degree programmes has changed, predominately through the introduction of various models of doctoral training centres and partnerships, including collaborative ventures across groups of institutions and focused centres within an institutional faculty or department. Institutions are exploring how equality of access and the wider benefits of researcher development can be achieved through different funding streams for doctoral programmes. Since the Wilson report on university and business interactions⁵ there has been more emphasis on expanding employer engagement with respect to researchers, for example, through placement or internship schemes and knowledge exchange and enterprise activities.

With regard to research staff, the three year review of progress of the implementation of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers is an important reference point in researcher development. It highlights remaining challenges relating to researcher development, particularly in breadth of provision for research staff and their engagement in professional development.

The RCUK annual summaries of institutional Roberts' reports and particularly the RCUK-commissioned analysis of the 2011 institutional responses⁶ demonstrates how far the sector has travelled since the beginning of Roberts and institutions' proposed approach to researcher development following the end of ring-fenced funding. Overall, the 2011 summary report highlighted that there was more certainty relating to continued resources and funding for postgraduate research provision compared to research staff provision.

Institutional strategies for provision covered two main themes, which are explored in this report. The first being more emphasis on cost and resource effective researcher development provision, including:

- restructuring of training and development units
- distributed delivery models, up-skilling academic and other staff to deliver provision at faculty/department level

⁴ SET for success: supply of people with science, technology, engineering and mathematics skills, 2002

⁵ A Review of Business–University Collaboration, Wilson, 2012

www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/32383/12-610-wilson-review-business-university-collaboration.pdf

⁶ Analysis of university responses on career development and transferable skills training and changes in 2010/11, RCUK, 2011 www.rcuk.ac.uk/documents/researchcareers/2011analysis.pdf

- more e-learning/blended learning delivery
- more researcher-led activity
- maintaining or increasing collaborative approaches between and within organisations.

Additionally, institutions were planning on “strengthening the support researchers receive from their supervisors and managers, so that development needs are identified more accurately, formal provision is tailored more closely to needs, and the potential for informal on-the-job learning is maximised” with the expectation that researcher development will rely less heavily on traditional forms of provision. Institutions recognised that for this to be effective, more academics must engage in continuing professional development and this was reflected in expectations of:

- expanding researcher development remits to cover researchers at all career stages
- using the Vitae Researcher Development Framework with researchers at all career stages
- raising awareness and developmental activity through the Concordat and the HR Excellence in Research Award activities
- broader organisational and staff development approaches, such as performance management strategies and increasing leadership development provision.

Survey method and processes

The purpose of RCUK’s 2013 review⁷ was to assess the impact of the funding change and establish whether researcher development has become embedded in research training and staff support since ring-fenced funding.

To avoid an overly burdensome task for institutions RCUK specified a relatively brief response to five open-ended questions, including some guidance about the level of detail and the specific information required for each question:

“Please address the questions given below, using existing information where relevant. We suggest a maximum of four sides of A4 for responses. Please include separate paragraphs under each question regarding postgraduate researchers and research staff.

1. How does researcher development feature in strategy in your institution?
Evidence should include reference to the frequency and level at which strategy is reviewed.
2. How is researcher development organised and delivered across the research organisation?
Evidence should include indicators of the breadth of opportunities and availability at institutional and/or departmental level; collaboration with other research organisations; employer engagement; employability; engagement of researchers and their managers with researcher development.
3. What feedback, review or other input drives changes in the researcher development support and opportunities you offer?
Evidence could include assessment; evaluation; national surveys (e.g. PRES, CROS, PIRLs); input from researchers, PIs and supervisors; sharing of practice. Please outline any major changes since the end of the ring-fencing.
4. How does your research organisation determine the level of resources for researcher development?
Evidence should include who decides the level, funding models and routes for funding within your organisation and an indication of the level of funding.

⁷ 2013 letter to institutions

<http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/documents/researchcareers/ResearcherDevelopmentLetter2013.pdf>

5. What do you see as the remaining or emerging challenges and opportunities?"

Responses were analysed using a combination of two different methods. A matrix approach was adopted allowing the data to be analysed by areas that were of particular interest to RCUK. Additionally the data was analysed using a grounded theory approach where all themes were coded as they arose ensuring that any themes outside the initial sphere of interest were captured.

As part of the evaluation and actions needed arising from the findings, the Vitae Working Group on Impact and Evaluation provided confidential advice on emergent issues, based on an analysis of responses. The preliminary findings were presented to a group of delegates at the Vitae Researcher Development International Conference in September 2013 to gauge how the findings resonate with the sector. A summary of discussions in the workshop can be found in Appendix I.

Sample shape, compared with 2011 review

In March 2013 RCUK invited 172 institutions which had received Roberts funding to respond to the survey by 30 May 2013. The 75 responses (44%) represented 23 of the 24 members of the Russell Group, 8 of the 11 members of the 1994 Group, 6 members of Million+, 12 members of the University Alliance and other research organisations of varying size and specialism. The responses represent 91% of the total Roberts funding issued by the research councils.

This review serves as a follow-up to the similar review in 2011⁸ where institutions were asked to outline the impact of Roberts funding in their institutions up until that point and to gauge the delivery and funding plans being put into place in advance of the end of ring-fenced funding for researcher development. 57 of the 75 responses were from institutions who also responded in 2011. Where possible, comparison is made with the results from 2011⁹, along with other data of comparable interest.

The response rate in 2013 was 6% lower than in 2011 when 83 responses (50%) were received. The responses in 2011 displayed a similar representation of recipients of Roberts funding that year, totalling 92.5% compared with 91% in 2013.

Limitations

Even though the response rate from institutions was good, several limitations must be considered when analysing the responses:

- the respondents were self-selecting, i.e. there was no mandate to respond
- although there was some guidance provided, the questions were open-ended
- with length limit institutions have prioritised inclusion of certain details over others. That something may not appear in a response does not necessarily indicate its absence or lack of significance.

Where most institutions kept to the requested report length (four sides of A4 paper) some gave more information than this and others gave less. Some provided an in-depth illustration of researcher development provision, for example, and others gave a brief summary. Some

⁸ Monitoring of Researcher Development 2011-2013

www.rcuk.ac.uk/documents/researchcareers/ResearcherDevelopment2011-2013.pdf

⁹ Analysis of university responses on career development and transferable skills training and changes in 2010/11, RCUK, 2011 www.rcuk.ac.uk/documents/researchcareers/2011analysis.pdf

gave detailed information about institutional funding mechanisms while others gave an overview. Some may have been inclined to report what they thought RCUK wanted to hear or reinforce an institutional standpoint on certain topics.

This report lays out the findings from responses question by question eliciting the key themes as they arise.

2. Institutional researcher development strategy

Researcher development strategy

Institutions' responses were approached in a variety of ways and in varying levels of detail, however there is no doubt that researcher development features very strongly in institutions' strategic plans. All but two reports had researcher development integrated into their institution strategy and processes; both of these were very small research organisations.

It is clear that institutions have a strong desire to provide optimum facilities, research training and development experience for researchers in order to attract the best quality researchers from the UK and around the world to their institution. Many stated that increasing research activity and creating a more entrepreneurial environment is critical for progress.

Not all responded with detail at this level, but where it occurred other key drivers include:

- building research capacity. This came through particularly strongly in institutions with little Roberts funding, especially research capabilities in existing staff
- increasing the quality of research
- increasing knowledge exchange, enterprise and innovation
- improving interdisciplinary or multi-disciplinary capabilities
- increasing postgraduate researcher numbers.

Some responses highlighted specific strategies relating to research staff (20%) and postgraduate researchers (35%) while others demonstrated the overarching strategies to researcher development in general. These differing approaches owe mainly to the organisational structures within different institutions.

Responses provided details of how these institutional priorities cascaded down to faculty department and school level, with some devolving responsibility to faculty and school levels, while others retained responsibility for overarching KPIs at central level.

Half of the responses described a combination of central team providing overall responsibility of researcher development delivery and leading the generic transferable skills provision, with discipline specific, bespoke or researcher-led aspects of training being devolved to faculty or school level.

Some institutions illustrated in detail how their researcher development strategy linked to broader institutional strategies while others gave a more general response. 25% made direct reference to how the researcher development strategy linked to other strategies within their institution, keen to make the point that researchers are a key enabler of many strategies in the organisation. Examples of links to such strategies include:

- HR strategies
- Employability strategies
- Enterprise strategies
- Learning and teaching strategies
- International strategies
- Knowledge exchange
- Public engagement
- Equality and diversity.

Institutional ownership of researcher development

There was also a clear message that responsibility for the researcher development agenda was at a high level organisationally, predominantly at pro-vice-chancellor (PVC) level. Some responses implied the institutional ownership by stating the committee responsible for researcher development, but from the 46 (61%) who made direct references, 29 cited PVC-level ownership. Responses often described dual responsibility for postgraduate researcher and research staff but this was dependant on organisational structure.

Frequency of review of strategy

Differing level of responses made a trend difficult to identify and not all who provided strategic information gave the frequency of review at senior level. This does not mean to say that this does not occur, but that in the limited space for reporting, other elements may have been prioritised for inclusion.

In general, researcher development is widely embedded within the institutional cycle of strategic review. A trend for reviewing institutional strategies every three to five years is evident and additional annual or biannual reviews are commonplace at research board level. Implementation groups usually meet on a regular basis throughout the academic year to monitor progress and adjust provision and funds as deemed necessary. Institutions were keen to emphasise the involvement of research staff and postgraduate researcher representatives in such review groups and that their views are key in driving the quality and direction of provision.

Institutional postgraduate researcher strategies focus on providing high quality professional development and ensuring that doctoral graduates are employable and have developed a career plan. Research staff strategies were less clearly defined and many reported incorporating these into broader HR strategies for all university staff, or within graduate school structures.

There was considerable overlap of themes in response to the strategy (question 1) and the delivery (question 2) of researcher development. These themes included:

- close alignment with the Concordat and the requirements necessary to retain the HR Excellence in Research Award
- mapping of provision against the Vitae Researcher Development Framework
- incorporating the Vitae Researcher Development Framework within performance reviews
- linking with the impact and public engagement agendas
- strategic responses to reductions in funding
- enhancing the research environment.

Only three responses mentioned the Research Excellence Framework. One described how external drivers such as the REF and Athena SWAN have had a positive effect on engagement:

“...engaging research staff in training and career development has been less easily achieved than working with research students. External factors like the REF (research environment section) and pressures to achieve Athena SWAN accreditation have usefully created opportunities for greater engagement with researcher development [...] Experience is that increased engagement fosters the steady culture change that is essential to furthering researcher development. The last year has seen increased requests for advice on the introduction of mentoring and personal development review.”

High range Roberts-funded institution

One example outlined both the positives and negatives of such a process:

“The Research Excellence Framework has had both negative and positive effects. It has revealed a number of areas for research support development. However training around ‘impact’ and ‘engagement’ has made some staff feel this is merely ‘ticking the box’ exercise, rather than an opportunity to develop new skills.”

Low range Roberts-funded institution

25% of responses were keen to acknowledge their work done with Athena SWAN, particularly how gender equality goals fed in to researcher development.

“The University’s equality and diversity policy intersects with researcher development policy: in particular, the University’s strategy for women’s development and for promoting career development for women involves a number of programmes open to research students and staff.”

High range Roberts-funded institution

3. Funding and resourcing

Funding and resourcing levels

The open question format resulted in substantial variation in the level of detail supplied in responses on the topic of resourcing, with some institutions providing information about funding processes but not level of funding and vice versa. This made it difficult to compare approaches across the responses. It also limited the quantitative data that could be extracted from the responses.

Predominantly institutions were accessing core funding and competing with other institutional priorities for researcher development. That researcher development features so strongly in institutional and other strategies gives it an advantageous standpoint for achieving resource in this way, albeit generally at a lower level from previous ring-fenced funding.

Postgraduate researcher funding

Institutions were most positive about the funding arrangements relating to postgraduate researchers presumably because of the more straightforward nature of the funding mechanism. Of those who were specific, 30% reported responding to the RCUK recommendation to raise fees by £200. A further 5% stated they used a combination of fee income and core funding. Some faculties and departments were being cross-charged for central provision based on their total number of postgraduate researchers.

Research staff

Funding for research staff was reported to be harder to identify and was often part of broader staff development budgets. Levels of funding ranged from £200 (to match postgraduate researcher funds) to one example where £600 was allocated per FTE. We only found a few examples where there was a defined researcher development budget within HR.

There are examples of 'pay as you go' models of delivery from principal investigators grants. Only seven institutions reported they extracted funds for research staff development directly from grants and three institutions reported they would not take the route of extracting funds from grants.

"The terms and conditions of [extracting funds from] grants make this very difficult on a practical level (funds are associated with the individual grant holder not the institution)"

High range Roberts-funded institution

Other challenges raised around the grants mechanism include the difficulty in budgeting and planning a sustainable programme for research staff when the funding stream is unpredictable and unstable.

"During the Roberts funding period, researcher development activities increased and demand has continued to grow. A key challenge, therefore, is in identifying creative solutions to meet the increased demand whilst maintaining quality of provision and within existing resource levels."

High range Roberts-funded institution

Most institutions reported working with an annual cycle of funding for researcher development, although two institutions reported a five year financial plan and two reported three year rolling budgets with annual reviewing process. Those with longer budgetary cycles cited the benefit of having freedom to plan more strategically for the longer term.

4. Delivery of researcher development

The responses varied considerably, with some institutions providing a general overview while others gave a detailed illustration of provision including specific examples of practice.

Common drivers reflected those that were identified in 2011 and include the following:

- Concordat implementation plans are mentioned in 69% of responses (23 Russell Group and five 1994 Group), monitored and assessed by a Concordat Implementation Group.
- HR Excellence in Research Award: 55% reported having the Award and are now working to maintain it
- Vitae Researcher Development Framework: with 66% mentioning the RDF in shaping their researcher development provision; of which the vast majority mapping their resources to the framework
- 65% describe the importance of collaborative partnerships for the sustainability of provision in a time of uncertain funding arrangements
- doctoral training centres and partnerships, and other similar models, were mentioned in 33% of responses, predominately from research-intensive institutions
- e-learning or blended learning and VLEs were mentioned by 44%.

A third of responses raised concerns about the ability to sustain current levels of provision after ring-fenced funding. For some, though, it has been an opportunity to thoughtfully consider how they will respond to funding changes.

“Continuing to do more with less, particularly when the criteria in the DTC differ such that some RCs allow RD to be included and others make it very difficult.”

High range Roberts-funded institution

Structures and delivery models

13% mentioned recent, current or imminent restructuring to accommodate new strategies, usually to achieve resource efficiencies. Restructures included:

- combining postgraduate researcher and research staff teams
- moving postgraduate researcher or research staff teams into another function
- graduate schools taking on a broader remit of responsibility.

Generally in larger institutions, graduate schools retained responsibility for the delivery of provision for postgraduate researchers, while research staff development is the responsibility of the HR function and usually embedded within staff development.

Ten responses across a range of different types of institutions outlined their aspirations to take a whole ‘life-span’ approach and create a seamless route of progression from postgraduate researcher to senior academic, maintaining a continuum of professional development. The same number report that postgraduate researchers have access to all staff development opportunities at the institution. Some within this group reported delivering workshops etc. where postgraduate researchers and research staff attended alongside each other citing the benefits of doing so were evident to both groups.

“The training and development unit formed under the Roberts’ agenda merged with the previous staff development unit in August 2011 to form a new unit [...] which provides a programme of training and development opportunities for all staff and postgraduate researchers. This new unit has enabled the streamlining of resources and the ability to continue and expand provision built up in the previous researcher development training unit.

Prior to the launch of [...] in August 2011 an audit involving key members of staff (Senior Management Team, Research Deans, Directors, Vice Principals, postgraduate course coordinators) was carried out to determine the current needs of postgraduate researchers and early career researchers at a local level in order to provide training and development at an institutional level.”

Mid-range Roberts-funded institution

Central and local delivery

A common model for delivery of postgraduate researcher provision came through from larger institutions, where there are many more numbers and diversity of needs to cater for, was for a central team (comprising a team of staff and usually based within a graduate school and careers service) to manage the content and logistics of the overall researcher development programme and delivering the generic research and transferable skills, while discipline specific and bespoke elements of delivery were devolved to a local level. Half of all responses mentioned a combination of central and devolved provision for postgraduate researchers. Where delivered locally, the provision was agreed by the central team to ensure alignment with the postgraduate researcher development strategy. Several institutions raised the difficulty of being dependent on academics with already high workloads to deliver provision locally.

In the 2011 report, one sixth of respondents anticipated the greater need to involve faculties and other departments in the delivery of researcher development, predominately larger institutions. While it is not possible to directly link these data, the 2013 results show a definite trend for working more broadly with colleagues in other organisational departments.

In 2012 [senior management] approved a new post-Roberts model for researcher professional development by approving the creation of a new *Researcher Professional Development* (RPD) team. The RPD team comprises 9 full-time staff based in different parts of the university who are united as a University-wide team drawing upon Faculty-specific and institution-wide experience:

- 4 *Researcher Development Managers* based in the Faculties supporting PGRs and research staff in the Arts and Humanities and Social Sciences; in Life Sciences; and in Engineering and Physical Sciences;
- 3 based in Research & Innovation Services: *Team Leader, Mentoring Manager, Support Officer*;
- 2 designated *Careers Advisers* based in the Careers Service.

High range Roberts-funded institution

20 institutions refer to specialist researcher careers advisers usually based within the university's careers service, funded or part-funded by the researcher development budget. Careers services are cited by 22 respondents as being responsible for delivering the employability skills agenda and for owning links with employers. Some responses highlighted the involvement of library and information services, research support offices, and teaching and learning centres.

Responses show that research staff professional development is usually owned by HR or staff development functions and fits as part of the broader staff development programme of provision. It was acknowledged that research staff engagement is a continuing challenge and 25% cite plans to remedy this by making changes to the annual review process, some making aspects of the review mandatory. Within this group the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers and the HR Excellence in Research Award are the key drivers for this change. While some report specific research staff development programmes in place, it is more common that research staff have access to a wealth of training offerings

for all staff from which they can pick and choose. Ten responses reported that postgraduate researchers also have access to all staff development courses.

“[Our] staff development policy states that Heads of Division and line managers are expected to engage proactively with researchers’ skills and career development and to encourage and support all staff (regardless of job role, grade and working patterns) to take advantage of internal and external staff development and training opportunities. This includes holding regular probation, review and performance management meetings, and allowing opportunities for training and development. This requirement has been incorporated into the performance standards for academic staff. This is monitored through staff survey and also the CROS and PIRLS surveys.

A personal review takes place annually for all members of staff, regardless of length of time in post or whether fixed term or permanent. The annual review for research staff involved reflecting on their achievement of the previous year’s objectives, reflection on CPD activities undertaken, setting future objectives and identifying any specific learning and development needs.”

Typical holistic approach to research staff development

Mentoring

Increased use of mentoring, particularly for research staff, is mentioned by 16 institutions. This is seen as a way of extending the continued professional development offering by providing individual personalised support for research staff, encouraging self-reflection and engagement, and improving the usefulness of appraisal systems.

“The University’s Careers Service and most Faculty Researcher Development Teams have extensive experience of managing successful mentoring schemes... Examples of Faculty provision include: a pre-arrival scheme linking students holding offers with current students; peer mentoring schemes to support students whilst at the University writing buddies scheme to support students whilst writing their thesis.

A very successful University-wide programme, developed initially for undergraduates, is the [our] mentoring scheme which matches students on a one-to-one basis with a mentor who, over a six month period, will support the student through face to face meetings, telephone/Skype conversations and email. This scheme has now been developed for PGRs, matching current PGRs who successfully applied to the scheme with University PGR alumni.”

High range Roberts-funded institution

Post-Roberts restructuring

Whilst the institutions which provided information on funding generally reported funding for postgraduate researchers as remaining the same or reduced, most institutions are planning to maintain current levels of support or anticipate supporting more provision going forward as institutions aim to take on more researchers.

Institutions were not asked to report staffing levels, yet many detailed a much more distributed model than in previous years and described an expectation that academic staff will do more delivery. This was raised as a challenge by three smaller institutions citing heavy academic workloads as an impeding factor.

The end of ring-fenced funding has provided an opportunity for institutions to assess the most efficient way of delivering researcher development across the board and many have taken the decision to restructure and streamline funding and delivery team structures. Most

responses detailed the creation of new steering groups, boards and committees to oversee the delivery of the key institutional strategies.

12% of responses state that they have restructured teams or are waiting for ratification of proposal of restructuring delivery.

“Following the revision of funding arrangements, the Researcher Development Co-ordination Group (RDCG) was revised to merge the previously separate groups that considered the strategic vision for research staff and student development and the operational co-ordination of researcher development. The RDCG comprises all three faculty Deans of Postgraduate Studies, a Dean of Research and representatives of the Staff Development Unit. This group contains all researcher development co-ordinators, a member of the Careers Service and representatives of research students and staff. The make-up of group ensures efficient sharing of resources and expertise to the benefit of our research community.”

High range Roberts-funded institution

Several institutions mentioned a reduction in use of external experts in favour of using existing staff.

“The number of external expert contributors to [...] has decreased since the end of the ring-fenced funding for development of postgraduate researchers. There are now just [3%] of contact hours which are delivered by external contributors. While internal contributors constitute an opportunity cost (in terms of staff time), external contributors represent an absolute, real cost to the institution which is difficult to meet at the present time.”

Mid-range Roberts-funded institution

Breadth of opportunity and availability

Institutions provided a variety of different forms of response to the question of breadth of provision making it impossible to gain a comprehensive view in this area. Clear priority areas were grouped around impact, knowledge exchange, employability and research integrity, some referencing the Concordats for Public Engagement and Research Integrity.

The Vitae Researcher Development Framework was highlighted as a key driver for reviewing and planning the breadth of courses available for postgraduate researchers and research staff. Two thirds of institutional responses describe their use of the Vitae Researcher Development Framework when planning provision and the mapping of workshops, courses and bespoke provision to the four domains.

“The Researcher Development Framework has provided a unique opportunity to develop skills training for both staff and students upon one continuum. For the first time it enables research development to be organised and delivered holistically to both staff and students. This has helped in developing a research culture at the University, where there has been enhanced dialogue between our more experienced and less experienced researchers.

It has been recognised that the Researcher Development Framework and its embedding has led to a greater collegiality of staff across the university in delivering research skills and training. This cross subject disciplinary dialogue has led to enhanced understanding of research for all involved and to the potential for interdisciplinary collaborative research bids.”

Low range Roberts-funded institution

Themes around efficiency of delivery are evident and focus around reaching and engaging more researchers with less direct involvement from central delivery teams, more distributed delivery and incorporating various e-learning and online approaches.

A general trend was noted across institutions (44%) for e-learning and virtual learning environments (VLE), consistent with the emergence of this trend in the 2011 survey. E-learning and its variants was cited as an efficient way to make all training opportunities available to everyone, especially to part-time researchers and those who work remotely.

In 2011 institutions wrote of plans to provide an “e-supported infrastructure...to strengthen such provision”. Two years on shows that many institutions have indeed set up such a support system which typically enables users to view all opportunities available to them, book onto courses, access e-learning, videos, VLE and also to record learning points from workshops to feed into their e-portfolio used for annual performance review. Three reports profile their e-supported infrastructure specifically, but the remainder report hosting their resources on webpages which performs a similar task. Five reports mention using or trialling the Vitae Researcher Development Framework Planner as a career development tool for researchers.

Collaboration with other research organisations

Collaboration with other institutions and organisations features as a strong theme through the responses. Partnerships with other local institutions and the pooling of resources are proving a popular way to achieve breadth of provision and innovative approaches in a cost effective way.

26% of institutional responses describe an externally collaborative approach to generic and transferable skills training enabling efficiencies by sharing resources, premises and expertise with other local institutions. Postgraduate researchers and in some cases research staff were able to attend courses being held in other partner institutions thereby benefitting from networking with peers outside their own institution. In 2011, 30% of institutions highlighted the importance of collaborations with other institutions going forward.

“Early in the development of our current researcher development programme it became clear that there were benefits both in terms of the economy and of the sharing experience in forging closer links with [local] institutions and organisations [...] who were facing similar challenges. As a result [the consortium] have developed a single postgraduate development programme. [We] have also forged closer ties with [another institution in the region] supporting the development of the Science Graduate School PPD programme.”

Low range Roberts-funded institution

53% reported collaborations within Vitae Hubs, attendance at regional and UK Vitae events and the use of Vitae courses and resources.

Institutions were also collaborating more broadly to achieve efficiencies. Some of the most frequently cited were:

- international links, such as Universitas 21, EUA and LERU
- employers, through careers services engaging alumni and local businesses to deliver the employability agenda.

Collaboration with employers

Collaborations with employers continue to be a challenge for researcher development teams and are more often mentioned in relation to postgraduate researchers, careers and their employability. There is only one mention of employers involved in developing researcher development strategy.

“External evaluation and increased employer and alumni involvement is an opportunity to get greater stakeholder involvement and enhance the programme.”

High range Roberts-funded institution

One institution highlights the challenge of engaging employers in developing researcher development strategy:

“The University has strong and diverse links with commerce and industry, especially through our new innovation centre. Incorporating the needs and perspectives of these and other research users into training and development programmes requires a dynamic and pro-active approach. The complexities of these relationships require the long-term attention and dedication of senior staff. This creates challenges with regard to resourcing and succession planning as the level of expertise required is significant as is the amount of staff time”

Mid-range Roberts-funded institution

Some doctoral training centre and partnership models require a collaborative approach with other institutions and with employers through collaborative research projects and work placements schemes. While respondents welcome the opportunity to collaborate, extend links and be more innovative in researcher development delivery, a notable theme through the responses is that institutions involved in doctoral training centre provision anticipate the requirement to provide placements will be a major challenge going forward.

As mentioned above, 22 reports outline the work of the careers service and their range of careers fairs and events drawing in alumni and business leaders to inspire researchers during sessions focusing on what careers look like outside of academia.

The need to raise employability and awareness of careers outside of academia are acknowledged by all responses and are included in strategic plans. Some cite the tension between academics and the employability agenda.

“Supporting Research Staff to take a proactive approach to managing and planning their careers remains a key challenge. This cannot be achieved in isolation and requires the commitment and support of PIs. Whilst there is often a willingness on the part of the PI to support the development of their Research Staff there is sometimes a conflict of interest when this development leads the member of research staff to explore alternative careers. In order to genuinely afford this step change which recognises the many ways researchers can make a positive contribution there needs to be greater flexibility within research grants to allow Research Staff to explore alternatives such as links with industry or enterprise.”

High range Roberts-funded institution

Engagement of postgraduate researchers, research staff and researcher-led activities

The aim to increase engagement of research staff and postgraduate researchers was a strong theme throughout the responses. Making it easier to access information about available researcher development programmes was seen as key. The investment in the web-based directories and booking systems was seen as central to this aim.

In most universities participation for postgraduate researchers is voluntary, whereas 15 institutions have some form of mandatory requirements or have strong expectation of engagement. Some institutions described introducing accredited courses, particularly leadership qualifications, to add gravitas to the schemes being provided, while others use credit-based systems to encourage participation. In some cases a minimum credit threshold

was required to be completed over a certain timescale and/or as a pre-condition of thesis submission.

“In relation to leadership, an award - the Level 5 Certificate in Leadership and Management - accredited by the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM), the UK's largest awarding body for leadership and management qualifications, has recently been launched. The Certificate recognises that learners have undergone personal and professional development which has been accredited both internally and externally. The Level 5 qualification is primarily designed for project managers, department heads, and other practising middle managers, however the ILM has agreed to provide this level of accreditation to postgraduate research students due to the commitment to training and development that exists within PhD programmes and environments. It is believed that [we are] the first university in the UK to provide such an award to postgraduate research students.”

Mid-range Roberts-funded institution

There is general agreement that engagement rates are much higher for postgraduate researchers than for research staff. This is commonly attributed to principal investigators' attitudes towards training for research staff that does not directly benefit the work immediately at hand. However, there is some feeling that attitudes are changing and initiatives such as research staff associations and the building of research staff communities are helping the sense of momentum required for building more engagement with development offerings. This theme appeared in the 2011 survey results but seems to come through with more strength in the 2013 responses.

“One area for improvement that has been identified by the [...] is the historical lack of a postdoc community. In order to address this and to foster a vibrant postdoc community, the [...] established and continues to facilitate a postdoc reps network. This network has grown since its introduction in 2008, and now covers every campus, Department and Division across College with some 74 members.”

High range Roberts-funded institution

One example demonstrated the importance placed on providing a central space or 'café' where both postgraduate researcher and research staff can congregate and network. Another example uses postgraduate researcher ambassadors to help engender a sense of community in the area of researcher development:

“The [...] have recently recruited a number of postgraduate researchers who teach as Researcher Development Ambassadors. These students help develop and deliver training sessions on Personal Development Planning and help promote researcher development within their peer communities. “

High range Roberts-funded institution

The presence of research staff and postgraduate researcher representatives on strategic boards and impact assessment groups is a theme across all of the reports. This shows a commitment from the institutions to making the researcher development provision appropriate for the target audience and to achieve buy-in resulting in increased participation.

There was a general message that the renewed institutional strategies around researcher development will help drive through change at supervisor and principal investigator level.

“There is a University-wide online Personal Development Record system which all research students are required to complete and maintain. The system is used, for example, to record the mandatory training plan agreed between researcher and supervisor within one month of commencement of their degree programme, notes of the required minimum ten progress

meetings with supervisors and for the transfer process at the end of year one (where progress against the training plan is reviewed). The PDR also contains an RDF-based training needs analysis self-assessment tool and personal development planning functionality. Training for new supervisors is mandatory.”

High range Roberts-funded institution

25% of reports proposed a change in annual review systems for research staff. Some institutions are planning to use the Vitae Researcher Development Framework as part of the appraisal process to help research staff and principal investigators to engage with professional development and career planning.

“Principal Investigators to use the RDF as a tool for supporting and enhancing the development opportunities for research staff. Progress is made towards integrating the framework to the annual review process at the University; this is seen as an opportunity to encourage further discussions between PIs and research staff on career planning.”

High range Roberts-funded institution

Researcher-led activities

Researcher-led activities usually happen at local/school level and are very popular by all accounts, usually addressing specific needs such as writing skills. There were 18 references describing the success of researcher-led activities at their institutions, although future funding for these initiatives was less certain. Some provide discrete funding from a central budget for such activities and some make accessing such funding a competitive process, and others are more light-touch in approach.

“£30k of remaining Roberts funding was made available in 2011-2012 to research students and early-career researchers to develop and deliver researcher-led projects producing **either** research with impact **or** resources to support employability. Up to £10k was available for projects in each of the academic disciplines (arts and humanities, social sciences and sciences). Collaborative interdisciplinary projects that cut across these boundaries were also welcome. It has not been possible to offer the fund in 2012-2013 due to financial restrictions.”

High range Roberts-funded institution

5. Assessment and development of provision

Assessing progress, enhancement and impact

Institutions outlined a range of assessment mechanisms and approaches to monitoring progress against strategies and practice. More broadly, evaluation of researcher development provision was widely reported to be assessed by committees of varying levels, but annually at PVC level as a minimum. This usually included a collation of the feedback from the delivery of individual training and development activities. Institutions also described postgraduate researchers and research staff being represented on steering groups allowing their contribution to the development of provision.

Generally, the evaluation of researcher development provision was predominately at Level 1-2 (reaction and learning) of the Vitae Impact Framework. Most often used to collect feedback were:

- post-event feedback forms
- online surveys
- focus groups for postgraduate researchers, research staff, supervisors and principal investigators
- institutional engagement surveys
- UK surveys, e.g. PRES, CROS and PIRLS
- HR-related monitoring, such as the proportion of research staff receiving appraisals/development reviews

Some institutions link feedback through their e-portfolio system and online appraisal systems to coordinate the whole process.

11 institutions (15%) mentioned using the Vitae Impact Framework¹⁰, of these eight were from the Russell Group. A few institutions report a systematic approach to evaluating the impact of researcher development activities.

“All researcher development events are evaluated at level 1 of the Impact Framework/Kirkpatrick model, using a standard end-of-event feedback form. Trainers/presenters are also required to complete a post-course feedback form with comments on any aspect of course design/delivery that requires action or improvement.

On a sample basis, individual course delegates are followed up around 12 weeks after attendance to provide Level 3 evidence of behavioural change. This evidence is published on the CAPOD ‘impact’ blog. [We] are also in the process of developing and implementing a comprehensive evaluation strategy which will systematically plan data collection and analysis at each level of the Impact Framework for every development activity. Other evaluation projects are carried out on a one-off basis, such as the longitudinal evaluation of mentoring (during summer 2013).”

High range Roberts-funded institution

UK surveys: CROS, PIRLS and PRES

83% cited involvement with one or more of the UK surveys. 71% said they had taken part in CROS, the results of which were usually used as a core assessment of performance and reported to a variety of committees including Concordat implementations groups, HR and Research Strategy Boards. 83% reported having taken part in PRES which was broadly

¹⁰ Vitae Impact Framework, 2009 www.vitae.ac.uk/ieg

used as a key indicator of postgraduate researcher satisfaction with programmes. 50% said they had taken part in PIRLS. Many state that in the non-CROS/PRES/PIRLS years they undertake annual assessment of a similar nature to ensure continuity of data. Some institutions mentioned use of the International Student Barometer¹¹.

"Results from the CROS have led to the expectation that all research staff should receive a departmental induction, a managed probation period with adequate support to enable the researcher to fulfil the duties of their role and thereafter an annual Performance and Development Review, in line with the process for all staff."

High range Roberts-funded institution

"Input from academic staff is gathered through a number of world café events. Here a range of academic and support staff are invited, from research leaders to early career researchers, to consider any necessary developments for the programme."

Mid-range Roberts-funded institution

¹¹ International Student Barometer www.i-graduate.org/services/international-student-barometer-and-student-barometer/

6. Challenges and opportunities

Institutions highlighted a wide range of challenges and opportunities arising from the change in funding for researcher development. Below we have illustrated the most common themes.

Challenges

Cultural change and engagement

The engagement of research staff, postgraduate researchers, and particularly principal investigators and supervisors, is well-recognised by the sector as an on-going challenge and is well represented in institutional responses. 35% of responses highlight engagement of principal investigators and supervisors as a major challenge. Raising the status and acceptability of researcher development continues to pose a significant challenge going forward.

“Supervisor and PI engagement in researcher development is patchy across the institution. There is a necessity to continuing the development and building relationships within and between all levels of the University as tools and training alone will not shape a culture that endorses researcher development.”

High range Roberts-funded institution

“It is difficult to secure supervisor engagement with training of a more generic and career development kind (as opposed to assessment of research training needs at the discipline specific level).”

High range Roberts-funded institution

25% cite engagement of research staff and postgraduate researchers and empowering researchers as a challenge.

“Continuing to raise expectations among doctoral students and their supervisors to ensure researcher development agenda remains a priority”

High range Roberts-funded institution

“A key challenge remains the on-going engagement of research staff and their “leaders” in development as a useful investment beyond the immediate needs of the task at hand. Linked to this is the sharing of good practice and stories that exist in some parts of the organisation who are more engaged currently.”

High range Roberts-funded institution

Doctoral training centres and partnerships

The relationship of researcher development provision to the planning, development and implementation of doctoral training centres and partnerships and other models of collaborative training emerged as a key theme, with institutions highlighting several challenges.

“The increase in the number and complexity of Research Council funded Doctoral Training Centres in recent years has presented [us] and the wider HE sector with a number of challenges and opportunities. Questions have arisen about how to effectively integrate DTC and non-DTC PGR development provision, share best practice emanating from different DTCs and ensure efficiency in terms of DTC processes across the range of DTCs at [...]. The Research Councils often have differing regulations or requirements for their funded PGRs which can make supporting these cohorts particularly resource intensive. There is also the wider question of how to ensure that non-Research Council funded PGRs have equal access to researcher development opportunities at [...].”

High-range Roberts-funded institution

“The increase in collaborative doctoral training centres and partnerships has increased the complexity of the programme logistics for the University. We are committed to retaining a university-wide structure in order that students benefit from the cross-disciplinary approaches, however some Research Councils place a very high value on cohort based activity to the extent that activities are offered for a small sub-group of funded researchers when there is no pedagogical reason for doing so. This tension can be difficult to address.”

High-range Roberts-funded institution

29% of responses, predominantly Russell Group universities, expressed concerns over how to avoid a ‘two-tier’ system and ensure equality of opportunity for researcher development within their institution regardless of how they were funded.

“There are also fears that moves of all Research Councils to fund students [through DTCs] could create a two-tier system, whereby Research Council-funded students have a greater level of training and development available to them. As a research-intensive institution, we oppose any policy that would create a two-tier system and we believe that access to training and development must be equal for all PGR students.”

High range Roberts-funded institution

13% of responses, predominantly Russell Group universities, also registered their concern over the prospect of delivering efficiently the requirements of the seven different research councils with their perceived potentially conflicting needs.

“It can be difficult to ensure an efficient and cost effective approach to provision in the context of the seven Research Councils, each of which has a different approach. If the Researcher Development Framework has indeed been adopted as the common framework, the individual Research Councils should endorse this”

High range Roberts-funded institution

“Additionally, the different approaches taken by the different Research Councils to doctoral training centres (including the different names used!) are unnecessarily confusing. In our view, the Research Councils need to co-ordinate much better and more effectively on policies and practices for PGR student development in order to reduce this confusion.”

High range Roberts-funded institution

Funding and provision

33% reported that the sustainability of funding following the end of ring-fenced funding and difficult climate along with institutional spending reviews was seen as both a remaining and emerging challenge. A few noted that the increase in postgraduate fees was not all flowing through into researcher development budgets.

“We have welcomed the decision by RCUK to embed funding for training provision within the tuition fees of all postgraduate students. However following the termination of Roberts funding our overall training budget has fallen and hence providing a comprehensive training programme for researchers on a significantly lower budget has provided on going challenges and constraints.”

Mid-range Roberts-funded institution

8% of responses raised the challenge of sustaining the quantity, quality and demand for professional development, particularly moving beyond the provision of development opportunities to a more comprehensive approach.

“During the Roberts funding period, researcher development activities increased and demand has continued to grow. A key challenge, therefore, is in identifying creative solutions to meet the increased demand whilst maintaining quality of provision and within existing resource levels.”

Mid-range Roberts-funded institution

“The challenge then, is to provide appropriate and relevant development that secures value for money and meets 21st century researcher needs. This is to move from training to development; from evaluating reactions to courses to demonstrating the impact on individuals and in their work environment; and from providing a single or simple range of courses to offering bespoke and varied development so that each researcher can access what they need, when they need it and in the way that suits them best. Although very exciting for those who support researcher development, it is a demanding task.”

High range Roberts-funded institution

Responses noted the challenges of providing a range of development opportunities across the Vitae Researcher Development Framework, highlighting impact, research integrity, leadership, multi-disciplinarity, open access, social responsibility and global citizenship.

“How to integrate research training provision across RDF domains and particularly how best practice can be shared across domains.”

High range Roberts-funded institution

“Continuing to ensure that there is appropriate synergy between research development, academic practice (including supervision training) and leadership training for all staff”

High range Roberts-funded institution

A few institutions highlighted the challenge of achieving a ‘step-change’ in research staff development.

“[We] echo the challenges highlighted at the Vitae Policy Forum 2013, specifically how to ensure research staff provision remains fit for purpose to provide a pipeline of researchers with the relevant knowledge, skills and attributes to succeed in today’s global employment market. Empowering researchers to take responsibility for their own professional development, whilst ensuring provision meets the needs of such a diverse population, will factor into [our] ambitions to maintain excellence in researcher development. Embedding equality and diversity, measuring impact – specifically in relation to progress made since attaining the HR Excellence in Research Award – and the internationalisation and external engagement agendas will remain as critical areas of work for [us] in this transitional period of step-change.”

Mid-range Roberts-funded institution

Employer engagement and internships

10% of responses described employer engagement and knowledge exchange as an on-going challenge.

“There is also a challenge in employer engagement regarding the RD agenda. It can be difficult to forge meaningful links with business that can have a tangible benefit to researchers. We have been ambitious in our progressive approach to RD that has necessitated the inclusion of a range of stakeholders to provide opportunities for practical experience. Our focus moving forward is to work more closely with our partners to inform and shape our RD activities. A recently appointed Employer Engagement Co-ordinator within the Careers Service will also provide crucial support for researcher activities.”

Mid-range Roberts-funded institution

“The University has strong and diverse links with commerce and industry, especially through our new innovation centre. Incorporating the needs and perspectives of these and other

research users into training and development programmes requires a dynamic and pro-active approach. The complexities of these relationships require the long-term attention and dedication of senior staff. This creates challenges with regard to resourcing and succession planning as the level of expertise required is significant as is the amount of staff time.”

Mid-range Roberts-funded institution

12% of responses recognised the value of providing placements and internships for postgraduate researchers; however, they also acknowledged the challenge of doing so. Two responses specifically mentioned the challenge of implementing the BBSRC Professional Internships for PhDs (PIPS) programme, which requires a 12 week placement unrelated to the researcher’s principal research project.

“It is a challenge to improve the career support to meet all the strategic requirements and find suitable internship opportunities that meet all PGR needs.”

High range Roberts-funded institution

The challenge of encouraging more timely career planning through regular use of the Vitae Researcher Development Framework by research staff was highlighted by one institution.

“Implementation of the RDF for research staff remains a challenge so it is used as a career planning tool and not as an emergency resource at the end of their contracts”

High range Roberts-funded institution

Other challenges

Several other themes were also highlighted as challenges by a few institutions.

Measuring and evaluating the impact of researcher development programmes was a notable challenge expressed by a few respondents, particularly in relation to building an evidence base to ensure future funding.

“The difficulty of establishing meaningful measures, quantitative and qualitative, of the effectiveness of researcher development is a challenge to promoting training and expenditure on training.”

High range Roberts-funded institution

“Measuring the long term impact of researcher development training and how this impacts the career development and employability of early career researchers is an on-going challenge and focus.”

Mid-range Roberts-funded institution

Equality and diversity was cited as a challenge by some. A few responses highlighted the challenge of supporting the diversity of researchers, including female researchers, part-time researchers, distributed campuses, overseas campuses and international researchers.

“Equality and diversity continues to be a challenge. Increasing the use of Every Researcher Counts materials within researcher development activities and the [institutional] commitment to support submissions for Athena Swan silver/gold awards beyond the current Bronze re-submission will require staff time and focus.”

Mid-range Roberts-funded institution

A few institutions took the opportunity to raise general challenges relating to researchers, for example concerns about the impact of increased undergraduate fees and restrictions on visas on the supply into doctoral degrees.

Opportunities

Institutions were asked to identify future opportunities relating to researcher development.

Doctoral training centres and partnerships

While doctoral training centres and partnerships present institutions with some significant challenges relating to their organisation and delivery, 21% of respondents described how they also provide the opportunity for institutions to think differently about researcher development.

“The increasing expectation to work in partnership with other organisations is both an opportunity in terms of change and innovation, and a challenge in terms of managing the complexity and potential extra cost. This is the most significant emerging issue”

High range Roberts-funded institution

“New models of doctoral funding provide opportunities for greater support integration and embedding of researcher development activities within the doctoral programme.”

High range Roberts-funded institution

Opportunities for collaboration

12% have seen collaborations between institutions and building on existing collaborations as a positive outcome.

“Working increasingly in partnership with other universities, research organisations, business, industry etc - the potential for building collaborative networks for researchers and sharing resources, skills and good practice is very exciting.”

High range Roberts-funded institution

“Developing regional and other collaborative events with research partners is both challenge and opportunity – made easier through the excellent Vitae Hub.”

High range Roberts-funded institution

Vitae was recognised by several institutions as a valuable partner for collaboration, sharing practice and providing access to resources.

“Vitae have been instrumental in enabling cross-institutional events and programmes enabling sharing of resources and best practice and opportunities for all postgraduate researchers.”

Mid-range Roberts funded institution

The UK HR Excellence in Research Award process and other UK initiatives

The processes relating to the HR Excellence in Research Award were highlighted by several institutions as opportunities to drive forward researcher development.

“HR Excellence in Research Award has provided an opportunity to review and improve further the opportunities for researcher development.”

Mid-range Roberts-funded institution

“A major project that the Concordat Steering Group is undertaking is a full review of the workload allocation model for research staff. HR will be involved in this process. The review will be carried out over a six month period and will pose many challenges to existing processes.”

Mid-range Roberts-funded institution

Similarly, Athena SWAN, the Concordat to Support Researcher Integrity and the Vitae Researcher Development Framework were all also mentioned as external initiatives that

provide institutions with opportunity to review policies, procedures and practices to benefit the institution.

Online provision

9% saw an opportunity of using online provision and structures (VLE, Moodles) to provide more comprehensive and cost-effective provision capable of reaching a greater audience. Several highlighted that efficiencies can be made by providing such resources online as opposed to through face-to-face workshops.

“[Our] Moodle-based VLE could also be used more widely for research staff training and development. The opportunity is for blended-model training, delivered by different service departments, to be supported by a range of resource types, from formative assessments through to screencasts and lecture capture”

Mid-range Roberts-funded institution

Researcher ‘whole life-span’ approach to researcher development

10 institutions saw an opportunity, and challenge, following the revised funding arrangements to establish a researcher continuum or ‘whole life-span’ approach to researcher development.

“Closer alignment of postgraduate and early career staff provision to ensure a whole life-cycle approach to researcher development and to provide training efficiently and cost-effectively”

High range Roberts-funded institution

“Integration of researchers more fully in to University life and developing seamless transitions from PGR to research staff to new Academics to Senior or established academics remain challenges.”

High range Roberts-funded institution

“We also need to consider how to achieve better integration of training with career planning and employability. This will entail a closer alignment of postgraduate and early career researcher provision to ensure a whole life-cycle approach. We must enable PGRs and ECRs to transition into a range of roles and equip them to positively manage what is likely to be a portfolio career; for instance, we need to understand and support the transition from PGR to ECR, from PGR to non-academic work, from ECR to an academic post, from ECR to a range of non-academic posts, and all while considering the diverse needs of researchers.”

High range Roberts-funded institution

The overarching opportunity, and challenge, is to establish:

‘Researcher development as a distinct and highly valued component of a UK research training and development experience which singles out the UK as a ‘gold standard’ in comparison to international competitors for the training of researchers.’

High range Roberts-funded institution

7. Conclusions and recommendations

The primary motivation for this review was to examine how researcher development had been embedded in institutions since the end of ring-fenced funding in 2011. The responses were varied in their level of detail making it difficult to compare data directly with the 2011 RCUK review where institutions outlined their strategies, plans and funding solutions for post-Roberts phase of researcher development. However, based on the 2013 responses, there were consistent and strong themes that generally echoed those from 2011. There was also a resonance with key themes from the Hodge review, Wilson review and other reports relating to the sector.

Researcher development embedded in institutional strategy

Although the theme of embedding researcher development within institutional strategies came through in 2011, there was much stronger evidence from the 2013 responses that researcher development is strategically important to institutions although many are still in a phase of transition and adjustment to the new funding arrangements.

References to external drivers such as the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers and the Vitae Researcher Development Framework still prove to be important factors in shaping strategy and delivery. The strategic value of involvement in the HR Excellence in Research Award process comes through more strongly than in 2011. That 55% of responses stated they held the HR Excellence in Research award (indeed 78 UK institutions hold the award currently) was a strong indicator that institutions are committed to researcher development and that provision for postgraduate researcher and research staff is a key driver for institutions. Additionally, as highlighted in the three year review of the implementation of the Concordat principles¹², it will be an increasingly important driver, particularly if the European Commission develops an associated certification mechanism for good HR management¹³. It was notable that links to Athena SWAN were emerging, although more references could have been expected given the recent increase in institutions registering for the award. Similarly there were few references to the REF research environment as a strategic driver. This may be due to different responsibilities for these initiatives within the institution.

The findings demonstrated that researcher development has been fully embedded in institutional strategy. While embedded at a strategic level, findings demonstrate an element of difficulty with translating the strategy relating to researcher development to delivery of provision. Almost two-thirds specifically cited that researcher development was owned at a senior level, predominately a pro-vice-chancellor responsibility. Strategies are being reviewed as an integral part of institutional strategic review, with regular monitoring at operational levels. However, there were generally more references to specific postgraduate researcher strategies (35%) than for research staff (20%), possibly due to the tendency for research staff provision to be less well established or to have been included within general staff development.

Recommendation 1

RCUK should continue to review progress with transition since ring-fenced funding particularly in the strategy, funding and delivery arrangements for researcher

¹² Three-year review of the implementation of the principles of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, Vitae, 2012 www.vitae.ac.uk/CMS/files/upload/Vitae-Concordat-three-year-review-report-April-2012.pdf

¹³ www.vitae.ac.uk/policy-practice/353501/European-Commission-HR-Excellence-in-Research-Award-.html

development and the measurement of its impact, potentially incorporating this within the Research Councils' normal monitoring and assurance processes.

Funding of continued high quality provision in an increasingly complex landscape

Many of the messages relating to funding identified in the 2011 review were repeated in the 2013 responses. The theme of sustainability was highlighted throughout the responses and can be summarised in two areas. The first shows concern, particularly for research-intensive institutions, about the on-going sustainability of funding streams where funding is now being drawn from core funds. The second area describes concern over sustaining the quality and quantity of researcher development provision with the same or reduced funding, particularly responding to any increase in uptake in researcher engagement with research provision. The 2011 review highlighted a dichotomy where institutions were 'indicating ways of 'maintain and enhancing' researcher development at the same time as budgets for doing so are likely to be smaller and more unpredictable'. In 2013 institutions' responses reflect the same challenge.

Specific information about funding arrangements varied substantially in institutional responses. Where details were provided, it was usually in the context of central provision: generally institutions reported being unable to identify the cost of distributed provision. Predominantly institutional core funding was being accessed (and competed) for researcher development, reflecting the recognition of its strategic importance. Generally, institutions who had received greater amounts of Roberts funding reported having to find efficiencies and providing more researcher development provision with less funding, particularly for postgraduate researchers. Institutions that received less Roberts funding generally reported little change in funding levels for researcher development. This reflects the 2011 report where institutions with less Roberts funding generally reported a 'business as usual' attitude to planning future provision.

Although almost a third specifically mentioned they had raised postgraduate fees, very few reported having earmarked funding of £200 per postgraduate researcher. There was little detail on research staff funding levels. Institutions reported that it was much more difficult to identify a trend in funding levels for research staff development, whose budgets often had been absorbed into general human resource or staff development budgets.

There is a clear need displayed by institutions to drive through efficiencies prompting a move by many towards devolved and online delivery of provision. The majority of responses, particularly from research-intensive institutions, described moving to a model of central delivery of predominately generic skills with discipline-specific and bespoke provision devolved to faculty or school level delivered by academics, particularly for postgraduate researchers. Some institutions have mandatory or credit-rated provision for postgraduate researchers.

Although there was little information on staffing levels, a few described a planned or on-going restructure of teams to enable more efficient coordination and delivery of provision, more use of academics for delivery, less use of external experts, involving other support services, embedding researcher development staff within faculties and schools, and broader responsibilities for graduate schools. Ten institutions mentioned taking a 'whole life-span' approach, considering the professional development from postgraduate researchers through, in some cases, to senior academics.

The Vitae Researcher Development Framework was highlighted by two thirds of respondents as a key driver when reviewing and planning provision for researchers; mapping workshops, courses and bespoke provision to the four domains. There was insufficient detail in the reports to judge the breadth and depth of provision, however some noted the challenge of providing a comprehensive programme and a step-change in research staff provision. The widely varying responses highlighted specific priority areas grouped around impact, knowledge exchange, employability, public engagement and research integrity.

Almost a half of responses reported increasing their provision of e-learning and use of virtual learning environments as an efficient way to make development opportunities more widely available, especially to part-time researchers and remote researchers. The Hodge review of progress in implementing the Roberts initiative¹⁴ highlighted concerns about such strategies and the need to make sure that expertise of delivery and quality of provision is not compromised. It recommended that institutions ‘must ensure that expertise is maintained in specialist roles dedicated to maintaining the skills development and support for career development of researchers, even following changes in funding mechanisms’.

Over a quarter of responses outlined collaborative partnerships with other institutions on researcher development provision, mainly driven by the search for cost-efficiencies, breadth and sustainability of provision through pooling resources and expertise. However, some responses also noted the complexity of managing successful collaborations. More than half noted the benefit of working with Vitae, including its regional Hub networks, national events, regional training events, access to resources and sharing practice.

This more collaborative approach is in line with the Hodge review, which noted that ‘collaborations with external partners are key to achieving efficiencies with examples from many describing benefits from pooling resources with, usually, local institutions and with other external partners such as Vitae’ and recommended that institutions should ‘continue to find ways of sharing provision and best practice to minimise duplicated effort and support researchers effectively’.

Recommendation 2

Institutions should explore how best to achieve effective collaborations and share resources that genuinely achieve cost efficiencies and capacity in researcher development provision.

Culture change and engagement

Since the start of the Roberts initiative researcher development teams have been working to raise the levels of participation of postgraduate researchers and research staff and to engage supervisors and principal investigators with professional development. In 2011 many institutions outlined their strategies for improving the levels of engagement, particularly seeing the manager role as key to the future engagement of research staff. In 2013 engagement strategies appear to respond to the Hodge review of ‘achieving greater stability of the transferable skills and career development of researchers’ by involving managers

¹⁴ Review of progress in implementing the recommendations of Sir Gareth Roberts, regarding employability and career development of PhD students and research staff, RCUK, 2010
www.rcuk.ac.uk/documents/researchcareers/IndependentReviewHodge.pdf

more directly in identifying specific training needs and using annual review procedures to formalise involvement. A fifth of responses highlighted increased demand for and the use of mentoring as a way of engaging research staff in professional development

However, there was little evidence of progress on the Hodge review recommendation of ‘...recognising and rewarding appropriate behaviours such as good supervision of PhD student and career development of all research staff through their human resources policies and practice’.

The recommendations to institutions in the three year review of the implementation of the Concordat principles¹⁵ also emphasised principal investigators as key to improving engagement and changing practice by supporting them (and supervisors) ‘in undertaking their leadership and management responsibilities’ and ‘how to use the Vitae Researcher Development Framework to effectively engage research staff, and their principal investigators, in professional development’. Institutions were also encouraged to share best practice on research staff and principal investigator engagement, a need echoed by participants at the Vitae 2013 Policy Forum¹⁶.

Many responses reported that Vitae has been influential in sharing practice through events, Hub networks, resources, and providing a central repository for sharing practice¹⁷. In the three year review of the Concordat, Vitae was encouraged to build on this to ‘actively share institutional successes and good practice in relation to the CROS and PIRLS recommendations, specifically increasing the engagement and development of principal investigators and research staff’.

Recommendation 3

Institutions should continue to work with principal investigators and supervisors to gain their greater engagement in the broader researcher development agenda.

An emerging theme, which also came through to a small extent in 2011 and highlighted in the recommendations of the three-year review of the Concordat, was support for and interactions with a growing number of institutional research staff associations and the use of social media to disseminate information about provision, to engender a sense of a ‘researcher community’, gain familiarity with the Vitae Researcher Development Framework and, eventually, the expectation of engagement in professional development. There was considerable evidence of the involvement of postgraduate researcher and research staff representation on board and committees.

Recommendation 4

Institutions should encourage the growth of local research staff associations and their involvement with strategy, delivery and research staff engagement with researcher development programmes.

¹⁵ Three-year review of the implementation of the principles of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, Vitae, 2012 www.vitae.ac.uk/CMS/files/upload/Vitae-Concordat-three-year-review-report-April-2012

¹⁶ Vitae Policy Forum, Vitae, 2013 www.vitae.ac.uk/CMS/files/upload/Vitae-Policy-Forum-2013-report.pdf

¹⁷ Vitae Database of Practice www.vitae.ac.uk/dop

Doctoral training centres and partnerships

The structure and organisation of provision relating to doctoral training centre models was a strong theme within responses, particularly from research-intensive institutions which identified both challenges and opportunities for researcher development provision.

Even though all the research councils have endorsed the Vitae Researcher Development Statement¹⁸ and reference it within their funding calls, there was a strong call for consistency across the research councils' expectations for researcher development provision. Some institutions highlighted the logistical complexity of accommodating the requirements of up to seven different research councils with potentially conflicting priorities. While the training requirements promote collaboration and innovation in researcher development, many mentioned the challenge of developing provision for collaborative doctoral training models. Overall, around a third of responses highlighted a desire to provide equality of opportunity to all postgraduate researchers and the difficulty of avoiding a 'two tier' system that disadvantaged those researchers who did not receive research council funding.

While there was clearly concern around the provision of researcher development programmes within an increasingly complex landscape of doctoral training centres and partnerships, there was insufficient detail in responses to identify the causes and significance of this concern. The Hodge review emphasised that RCUK should fund initiatives that reinforce the development of skills, recommending 'using mechanisms that are efficient for the whole higher education sector and other stakeholders'.

Recommendation 5

RCUK to work with institutions to gain a clearer understanding of the challenges facing institutions in delivering effective researcher development programmes within a landscape of multiple doctoral training centres and partnerships.

Collaboration with employers

The importance of engagement with employers was highlighted in the Hodge review, which recommended that "research organisations, employers and other relevant stakeholders such as Vitae, should develop systematic and frequent interactions such that the focus on employment needs is the driver for future developments of transferable skills training. Mechanisms for this and the blocks that prevent it happening must be understood and improved."

2013 responses indicate that collaborations with employers continue to be a challenge. Employer engagement was more often mentioned in relation to postgraduate researchers and their employability: there was very little mention of employer engagement in relation to research staff. Institutions recognise the value of employer engagement and raising awareness of careers outside of academia, while acknowledging having to balance the tension between academics and the employability agenda. Most often employer engagement is reported as the responsibility of the careers service, usually through specialist researcher careers advisers, and the organisation of careers fairs and events with alumni. Very few institutions reported employer engagement in the development of strategy and provision.

¹⁸ Vitae Researcher Development Statement, Vitae, 2010 www.vitae.ac.uk/rds
RCUK Statement of Expectations for Doctoral Training, RCUK, 2013
www.rcuk.ac.uk/documents/researchcareers/statementofexpectation.pdf

Many doctoral training centres and partnerships facilitate more engagement with employers through collaborative research projects and work placements schemes. Respondents welcomed the opportunity to extend links with employers, collaborate and be more innovative in researcher development delivery. However, the increasing interest in, and in some cases the requirement for placements was highlighted as a major challenge by institutions.

Recommendation 6

Institutions should explore ways to deliver effective provision and management of placements, particularly within doctoral training centres and partnerships.

Assessment and evaluation of impact

Measuring the impact of researcher development provision does not yet appear to be well embedded in the majority of institutions. The majority of responses reported using post-course feedback forms to evaluate training and development opportunities. However, few mentioned longer-term feedback mechanisms or assessing the higher impact levels of changing behaviour and outcomes. 15% of responses mentioned using the Vitae Impact Framework to measure the effectiveness of their development programme for researchers. The Impact Evaluation Group 2010 report¹⁹ stressed the importance of research into and evaluation of researcher development activities 'to underpin the enhancement of pedagogy and practice to take the sector forward in realising the full potential of researcher development and researchers'.

However, there was consistently high use of the UK surveys, the Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS), the Principal Investigator and Research Leader Survey (PIRLS) and the Postgraduate Researcher Experience Survey (PRES), which were all highlighted as important tools to explore researchers' views and experiences and to benchmark institutional practice. The results of these surveys increasingly are being used to demonstrate institutional progress relating to the HR Excellence in Research Award, Athena SWAN and the REF research environment.

There was a general sense that in order to achieve current levels of funding from institutional core budgets demonstrating return on investment will be a greater challenge than previously. The three year review of the implementation of the Concordat principles recommended that the Concordat Strategy Group 'agree a programme of evaluation and review to 2015/16, with an interim report in 2013/14, based on the measures of progress²⁰ [...] other sources of sector data, and linked to the HR Excellence in Research Award process and evaluation of the REF outcomes'.

Recommendation 7

Institutions should embed more systematic use of the Vitae Impact Framework and UK survey instruments to achieve more robust and extended evaluation to provide an evidence base, not only to shape training and development interventions, but also to support continued institutional funding for researcher development.

¹⁹ The impact of researcher training and development: two years on, Vitae, 2010

www.vitae.ac.uk/CMS/files/upload/IEG_Development%20Report2010_soft%20copy.pdf

²⁰ Appendix 4, Three-year review of the implementation of the principles of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, Vitae, 2012 www.vitae.ac.uk/CMS/files/upload/Vitae-Concordat-three-year-review-report-April-2012

Appendix I: Workshop outcomes from Vitae Researcher Development Conference

The initial findings and predominant themes from the responses were presented at the Vitae Researcher Development Conference 2013.

Around 20 conference delegates attended the workshop who were encouraged to share how well the themes resonated with experiences in their own institutions. The main outcomes are detailed below.

1. Roberts funds carried forward may cause a delayed reaction

Some of the workshop attendees indicated that they had carried forward funding ahead of the ending of ring-fenced payments meaning that the sustainability of funding for these activities is unclear going forward. It was acknowledged that it would be useful for RCUK to be aware that this may cause a delayed-reaction to the impact of the end of ring-fenced funding.

2. Good news stories or honest picture?

There was much discussion around the extent to which institutions were presenting a good news story to RCUK and showcasing what institutions are doing well. It was acknowledged that while there is mostly likely to be an element of this in the responses, arguably the section of most interest was the section on challenges and opportunities going forward which was mostly likely to be written by those delivering the researcher development programmes.

3. Keeping expertise in house

There was a resonance with the workshop attendees that many are keeping training in house and reducing the use of external trainers. There was also recognition of the trend of central and devolved style delivery. One concern arising from this discussion was around how much in house train-the-trainer activities were occurring to make sure the expertise is cascaded within institutions and appropriately sourced.

4. Online provision – is it really more effective?

There was discussion around how to make sure that, where there is a growing trend in making larger amounts of training available online, the quality of the overall programme of interactions is not compromised by relying too much on online and e-learning. It was agreed that a blend of delivery methods is what is important.