

Report of proceedings UK GRAD Programme Roberts Policy Forum January 2007, Manchester

Contents	Page
Executive summary	2
Outcomes and recommendations	2
Introduction	5
Contextualising Roberts	5
Progress and strategic direction for Roberts	7
Report back from the Rugby Team	9
Tracking Researcher Careers	10
Panel questions and discussion	13
Work group feedback: developing mechanisms for measuring impact	19
Key themes emerging from the QAA Special Review	20
Outcomes from the review of the Database of Practice	22
Workshop feedback: showcasing and sharing institutional practice	25
Plenary feedback and way forward	30
Appendix 1: Table of recommendations	34

Executive summary

2006/2007 is the fourth academic year of research council funding for implementing Sir Gareth Roberts's recommendations on skills and career development for researchers.

The aims of the 2007 annual Roberts Policy Forum, hosted by the UK GRAD Programme on behalf of RCUK and the Research Councils, were to:

- review progress of implementing Roberts and contextualise skills development within the wider UK challenges of developing a knowledge economy
- review progress and contribute to the 'Rugby Team' projects exploring how the skills agenda is impacting on research degree programmes, research staff support and employability
- hear key outcomes of the QAA Special Review of (England and Wales) research degree programmes in advance of publication
- exchange knowledge and experiences of developing effective Roberts provision through practice-based workshops.

Much progress has been made by the sector over the last three years. There is evidence from the QAA Special Review¹ that provision is being embedded in research degree programmes. Increasingly more attention is being paid to provision for research staff. However, in the broader context there is general concern over the rate of progress in increasing the UK skill base. The interim Leitch Report² highlights that while the skills profile of the UK has improved, the UK doesn't yet have a world-class skills base, and this could seriously damage our future global economic position. The forum explored the challenges of achieving a knowledge-based economy by capitalising on skills development to achieve better employability, knowledge transfer, innovation and enterprise.

The forum combined plenary presentations, panel discussion and workshops. Plenary speakers were: Dr Iain Cameron, Head of the RCUK Research Careers and Diversity Unit; Professor Chris Park, Head of the Graduate School, Lancaster University and Chair of the Rugby Team; Lisa Hill, Head of Evaluation, AHRC and Gill Clarke, Assistant Director, QAA and University of Bristol. Dr Janet Metcalfe, Director of the UK GRAD Programme, chaired the event.

The key themes to emerge from the forum focussed on evidencing, evaluating and demonstrating impact and its relationship to developing practice:

- the need to demonstrate impact: for all stakeholders, at all levels, to more actively influence and promote the researcher development agenda and evidence impact to HEI audiences, as well as externally to government to safeguard future funding and activities
- measuring economic impact: the need to recognise broader definitions of impact beyond economic impact, together with developing effective mechanisms to evaluate impact in ways meaningful to the sector
- the need to develop momentum on addressing diversity issues: making use of all opportunities, including the use of evaluation/impact studies, to inform our understanding and reduce inequalities
- the importance of recognising individual researcher needs and institutional context when developing local provision in response to the national policy focus on the economic impact of research
- the potential for case studies of researchers' careers, if well-structured, to be a prime source of qualitative evidence of the impact of researchers as well as an important career development tool for individual researchers
- bringing coherence to complementary initiatives: the need to find ways of achieving better 'joined up thinking' within institutions between the Roberts and agendas such as knowledge transfer, enterprise and preparing for academic practice
- the benefits of embedding skills development within research degree programmes and research staff training: convergence between research skills and transferable skills
- engaging and empowering researchers through higher level experiential learning on 'real' projects, with employers or through other researcher-led activities (e.g. outreach, knowledge transfer, developing academic seminars/conferences)
- the value of effectively sharing a wider range of practice, including evaluation mechanisms, enterprise and knowledge transfer, through the UK GRAD Database of Practice³ and institutional collaborations.

Outcomes and recommendations

The forum highlighted how significant progress has been made in implementing the Roberts agenda. There was clear evidence from institutional Roberts reports, the quality of the entries in the Database of Practice and in the workshop sessions, and, most reassuringly, in the outcomes of the QAA Special Review.

¹ www.grad.ac.uk/qaa

² www.grad.ac.uk/nationalpolicy/gov

³ grad.ac.uk/practice

However, all stakeholders recognised how much more is still to be done, particularly in supporting non-research council funded researchers and research staff in general. There are still significant numbers of hearts and minds to be won across the academic community. Perhaps the most important task still to do is ensuring the continuation of funding in the longer term, by being able to demonstrate that skills development is having an impact on the contribution of researchers to the economic and social good.

Iain Cameron confirmed that support for skills training was top priority within RCUK, and it was written into the Unit's new strategy that ring-fencing of institutions' allocations for skills and career development would remain for the forthcoming Government Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR)⁴ period (2007–11). Although this was a challenging CSR, Iain hoped that the funding achieved would be similar to current levels.

The Rugby Team⁵ was given a mandate by the Policy Forum to continue its role in supporting the skills agenda and moving it forward during 2007. The first activity for RT07 will be to confirm its mission, refresh its membership and review its work plan. It will prioritise the remaining recommendations from 2005, 2006 and this forum, agree the scope for projects and the way forward. Then it will seek funding for projects, through RCUK and other potential funders for projects, as appropriate. Participants acknowledged, as a last resort, the option of top-slicing a small proportion of the Roberts money to cover the cost of a few projects to evaluate the impact of skills development at the sector level.

Work group discussions and plenary dialogue resulted in a number of recommendations, variously addressed to institutions and national stakeholders. These are grouped thematically below.

Funding

The forum highlighted that the progress of Rugby Team evaluation projects in 2006 had been hampered by a lack of resources: both time and funding. Mindful of the importance of the 'impact agenda' and its prominence in national policy formulation, the following recommendations were made:

- that RCUK and other appropriate funders should make available urgently resources to enable the Rugby Team to deliver on critical projects
- for the **Rugby Team**
 - to prioritise funding for projects that seek to gather baseline data against which to measure impact
 - to seek funding, firstly from RCUK and thereafter from a range of relevant sources
- for **institutions** to consider the value of top-slicing a small percentage of the Roberts money to evaluate the impact of the skills development agenda at sector level.

Evaluating and demonstrating impact

Recommendations pinpointed ways for stakeholders to maximise the value of impact studies. A number of participants stressed that current evaluation is too often focused on a relatively narrow cohort. The evaluation base should be broadened to encompass the diversity of researchers and their contribution, both economic and social. Recommendations were as follows:

That RCUK, institutions and the Rugby Team should:

- include within their evaluation projects the diversity of types of doctoral degree, including professional doctorates, and of doctoral researchers, such as those working part-time, funded by employers and international researchers.

That the Rugby Team should:

- prioritise its efforts to influence the development of various national evaluation initiatives to promote coherence and meeting the needs of the sector
- devise a recommended skeleton template for researcher career case study development, which all agencies and institutions could use for both qualitative evaluation and in developing tools for supporting individual researchers' career development
- focus on academic staff (supervisors and principal investigators) in the initial stage of the RT06 survey to gather institutional views on the cultural impact of the skills agenda within HEIs.

That institutions should:

- articulate their views through the Rugby Team to determine the data that the sector wishes tracking and national cohort studies to provide
- use feedback from surveys and other sources as marketing tools to raise awareness of the Roberts agenda internally, and make particular efforts to gain senior management buy-in.

⁴ www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/spending_review/spend_csr07/spend_csr07_index.cfm

⁵ www.grad.ac.uk/rugbyteam

Recommendations to other national **stakeholders** were:

- that the **Higher Education Academy** consider making the BOS licence⁶ to use PRES⁷ available free of charge to institutions to encourage take-up
- that the CROS survey incorporates additional questions to enable further collection of (retrospective) baseline data of research staff's views of their research degree programme.

Working with employers

In order to continue to improve researcher employability, a close understanding of employer needs is crucial. There is still work to do at both national and local level to ensure a better fit between the supply of researcher talent and the requirements of potential employers. But there is also a major opportunity to expand employer demand for postgraduate researchers: many employers outside academia do not yet recognise the added value that a skilled researcher can offer.

Recommendations for the **Rugby Team**:

- to further investigate the nature of the 'gap' between employer needs and researcher skills in order to enable institutions to know where to focus their researcher development programmes
- to broaden its meta-analysis of the literature on employers' views of the value of postgraduate researchers to include international studies on the impact of PhD graduates
- to work more closely with employer organisations and professional bodies at national level, in order to help communicate the value of employing skilled researchers to more employers in relevant sectors
- to maximise potential from 'ready-made' employer contacts – for example, employers of researchers doing doctorates and sponsors of KTP and collaborative PhD programmes.

Recommendations to other **stakeholders**:

- that **institutions** should seek to strengthen internal links and, in particular, make more creative use of alumni databases. They could make better use of 'ready-made' employer contacts, for example by seeking case studies of PhD employees (both early and mid career professionals)
- **RCUK** should also work more closely with employer organisations and professional bodies at national level to promote the expansion of employment opportunities for researchers.

Research staff

The forum highlighted that the progress made in provision and take-up of personal and career development for research staff was still slower, across the sector as a whole, than for postgraduate researchers. UKHERD⁸ activities will drive this agenda forward more positively during the coming year and the Rugby Team will 'work harder to integrate the sets of interests of postgraduate researchers and research staff'.

The recommendations were put forward that:

- the **Research Councils and other funders** should, at the point of application, require the prospective principal investigator to state the training programme to be provided for the research associate
- **institutions** could influence this agenda from the 'bottom-up' by submitting training programmes in grant applications as examples of good practice.

Sharing and developing practice

Recommendations to national **stakeholders**:

- for the **Rugby Team**: to look at how the UK GRAD Database of Practice should be developed and consider the recommendations put forward for broadening its reach (including dedicating separate sections to themes such as enterprise, evaluation and knowledge transfer)
- for **UK GRAD**: to take forward the outcomes from the above
- for the **QAA**: to consider how the good practice examples identified in the Special Review might be integrated with the Database of Practice.

Recommendations to **institutions**:

- to explore the potential for developing researcher-led initiatives and opportunities for experiential learning through 'real' activities including enterprise learning and involvement in academic activities
- to share practice by regular use of the Database of Practice, including posting good practice identified in the QAA Special Review institutional reports.

⁶ www.survey.bris.ac.uk/ (BOS have subsequently confirmed the offer of a licence at half price for single use.

⁷ www.grad.ac.uk/hea

⁸ www.grad.ac.uk/rci

Introduction

The UK GRAD Programme Roberts Policy Forum in January 2007 at Chancellors Hotel and Conference Centre, Manchester, engaged participants in a strategic review of the Roberts' recommendations on training requirements for postgraduate researchers and research staff.

This was the fourth annual policy forum hosted by the UK GRAD Programme on behalf of RCUK and the Research Councils. The aims of the 2007 forum were to:

- review progress of the first three years of Roberts and contextualise skills development within the wider UK challenges of developing a knowledge economy
- review progress and contribute to the Rugby Team projects exploring how the skills agenda is impacting on research degree programmes, research staff support and employability
- hear key outcomes of the QAA Special Review of (England and Wales) research degree programmes in advance of publication
- exchange knowledge and experiences of developing effective Roberts provision through practice-based workshops.

The forum was aimed at individuals responsible for:

- institutional policy on postgraduate researchers and research staff, i.e. Pro Vice-Chancellor or equivalent position, and
- implementing the Roberts' recommendations for researchers.

The forum programme was designed to respond to issues of foremost concern to the sector. As in previous years participants were invited to submit their key questions in advance and UK GRAD apportioned plenary and group time to cover the most-mentioned themes. The largest number of questions concerned evaluation, followed by future funding of the Roberts agenda, strategy and supporting research staff. Other concerns and questions included: strategies for winning hearts and minds and staff engagement, inclusiveness, parity, sharing practice and key performance indicators.

The forum gave equal attention to policy and practice issues. It began with a strategic view of implementing the Roberts' recommendations. There was an update on the progress so far and future challenges, and reports from the QAA on the outcomes of the Special Review and from the Rugby Team.

The second half of the forum focused on practice, exploring the issues facing institutions in developing provision for researchers. Workshops presented examples of practice from the Database of Practice and the THES Award for Outstanding Support for Early Career Researchers shortlist. Participants were invited to discuss their own experiences and challenges to maximise benefit from the sessions.

Contextualising Roberts

Janet Metcalfe, Director, UK GRAD Programme

Janet reminded participants of the outcomes of the 2006 policy forum a year ago. Key themes had been the importance of:

- maintaining momentum and gathering evidence of impact for the Government's CSR
- the quality imperative – the need to be seen to be excellent in order to win hearts and minds
- ownership by researchers
- embedding the Roberts agenda in structures and leadership
- developing 'institutional citizenship'.

These themes remained very relevant. Gathering evidence of impact was even more critical now to ensure continued funding for the Roberts agenda. The Rugby Team's presentation of its 2005 work at the 2006 forum had resulted in strong sector support for Key Performance Indicators to remain qualitative ones, expressed through annual reporting to RCUK. RCUK's task was to translate these indicators into quantitative evidence as required by government.

2006 participant concerns had centred on the:

- diversity challenge – the relative lack of progress on reducing funding inequalities
- paucity of the research base for postgraduate researchers and research staff
- importance of tracking researcher careers in order to evaluate impact.

While these problems have not been overcome, they are 'coming higher up the agenda' and the outlook is more positive than last year.

The 2005 forum gave a mandate for the Rugby Team 06 to take forward a number of RT05 recommendations: Chris Park's presentation summarised RT06 progress.

Janet then turned to the wider context and issues that are likely to impact in the coming year. The first of these broader developments were at the European level⁹: the Lisbon Agenda and the Bologna Process.

The Lisbon Agenda aims to create the European Research Area (ERA), to become 'the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based society in the world...' (Lisbon Summit 2000). As part of this, the European Charter for Researchers and Code of Practice for the Recruitment of Researchers have been developed and adopted by the European Commission in 2005. In the UK, the European Charter and Code for Researchers Working Group, led by Universities UK, is co-ordinating the sector's response. Part of its work has been a mapping exercise looking at how the European Charter and Code relate to existing policy and practice in the UK. It has produced a useful mapping document, available on both the UUK and RCUK websites, to help HEIs assess their current provision.

The launch of the new Framework Programme, FP7, in December, lends urgency to this exercise. FP7's 'people' strand focuses strongly on skills and career development and many institutions will want to consider making bids for project funding. While adherence to the Charter and Code will 'remain voluntary', institutional practice will be a factor taken into account in the assessment of FP7 funding proposals.

The Bologna Process will reach its decision stage at the May 2007 ministerial summit, when the 'third cycle' – doctoral programmes – will assume its final shape. The signs from the European University Association (EUA) Bologna Seminar on doctoral programmes at the University of Nice, in December 2006 are that the UK has been successful in persuading other countries of the merits of many features of the UK doctorate. These include structured doctoral programmes, overarching graduate schools or administrative structures and transferable/research skills development. However, the diversity of doctoral qualifications in the UK, particularly the professional doctorate, is a cause of general concern and the UK has much to do in convincing the rest of Europe of the value of these qualifications. Is the time perhaps now ripe for the sector to have a debate in an open forum on 'What is a doctorate?'¹⁰ Providing the sector with a forum to discuss this question is on the Rugby Team agenda for 2007.

Janet also mentioned that the House of Commons Education Select Committee has recently launched a consultation¹¹ on the future of higher education and the impact of the Bologna Process, but specifically mentioned only the first two cycles. Responses from RCUK, UK GRAD and the Europe Unit drew attention to the importance of addressing the third cycle. Professor Ella Ritchie, Pro Vice-Chancellor at Newcastle University and a UK representative on the EUA's doctoral project, championed doctoral education when she gave evidence to the Committee.

Turning to the policy developments in the UK, Janet first stressed the importance of the 'skills/knowledge-based economy' agenda. The Lambert and Leitch reports¹² and the Funders' Forum all stress how critical researchers are to the sustainability of UK plc as a leading economy. Janet concluded: 'if we make Roberts work then we will achieve everything that the reports are saying we need to achieve in terms of researcher careers'.

The other critical theme on the UK agenda is evidence-based policy, and hence the importance of evaluating impact. Although finding meaningful evaluation mechanisms is difficult, the sector must take the initiative 'or someone else will...'. Institutions' Roberts reporting evidence will feed into RCUK's CSR submission.

Finally, the Research Council Economic Impact Group's report on *Increasing the economic impact of Research Councils* (July 2006)¹² is a powerful report that will have far-reaching implications for institutions – beyond postgraduate researchers and research staff. The main recommendations of the 'Worry Report' are in the areas of leadership, influencing, engagement and metrics. Introducing the latter, the report states that 'Research Councils should make strenuous efforts to demonstrate the economic impact of their funding'. Clearly, this emphasis on economic impact would underpin this forum's discussions and influence its conclusions.

⁹ www.grad.ac.uk/europolicy

¹⁰ www.grad.ac.uk/hea

¹¹ www.grad.ac.uk/reviewofresearch

¹² www.grad.ac.uk/nationalpolicy/gov

Progress and strategic direction for Roberts

An update on the CSR, RCUK strategy for Roberts, themes and experiences emerging from institutional reports and the Database of Practice

Iain Cameron, Head, Research Careers and Diversity Unit, RCUK

Iain introduced RCUK's Research Careers Diversity Unit, which reports to the Research Careers Development Group (RCDG) chaired by Ian Lyne of BBSRC. This advisory group represents all the Research Councils, who work together on the common agenda and harmonise activity as necessary.

The first Roberts Policy Forum, in 2004, had taken place here in Manchester. That event had been characterised by questions and uncertainty: what are we going to use the Roberts money to do? How are we going to make it work? It was clear that 'we have come a long way in three years'. Institutions have presented a lot of evidence of achievement, which RCUK has fed into the Government Corporate Spending Review. Equally, there remains much to do: the government is constantly 'seeking evidence of impact'.

At the 2006 Roberts Policy Forum Iain had suggested some target areas for both institutions and other stakeholders for the coming year:

- embed transferable skills in all doctoral programmes
- make significant progress on the Roberts postdoctoral career agenda
- demonstrate improved employability of doctoral graduates compared to pre-Roberts.

Certainly progress had been made in the first two areas. Institutions' 2006 Roberts reports clearly showed increased coverage. Demonstrating improved employability had proved more difficult to measure: the workshops would look at what had been done and possible next steps.

Iain gave a foretaste of the report that RCUK was preparing for the sector summarising themes and financial information from institutional reporting. The report will be available in April. Key points included:

- all institutions report ongoing development of programmes and practices
- for research staff, there is an emerging theme of career services assisting with development of programmes
- sharing of practices is a strengthening theme.

However, practice continues to vary considerable between institutions. Analysis of institutions' reported spend indicates that whereas in 2004–05 co-ordination costs accounted for 40%, in 2005–06 these costs were less than a third and over 70% was spent on training delivery. RCUK expect this positive trend to continue. Iain also noted that institutional reports showed a shift in balance of resource towards the career development of research staff.

Turning to RCUK's future monitoring requirements, Iain stressed the following purposes: to inform the sector, encourage improvement and report payback from investment. Reporting would remain 'light touch and proportionate'. Few changes were envisaged. However, in view of the wide variation in funding received by institutions it may not be appropriate for all to provide the same level of information. Larger organisations (30 institutions receive 80% of Roberts funding) may, in future, be asked supplementary questions, requiring detail of how minimum standards are ensured across the institution. Iain praised the Rugby Team's role in advising on the use of Key Performance Indicators and confirmed that RCUK would continue to take sector advice on evaluation mechanisms. 2007 reporting requirements would be confirmed by RCUK in April¹³.

Returning to the theme of government's expectations of research, Iain pointed to a host of influential reports from the last few years, all linked by a common thread: the need to develop high level skills to strengthen the economy. These included:

- Roberts SET for success¹³ – May 2002, and the government response Investing in Innovation – July 2002
- Greenfield SET FAIR¹² – Nov 2002 and the government response – April 2003
- Lambert Review of Business-University Co-operation¹² – December 2003
- Science and Innovation Investment Framework¹² 2004–2014 – July 2004
- Next Steps¹² – March 2006
- Worry Report¹² on Increasing the Economic Impact of the Research Councils – July 2006
- Leitch Review of Skills¹² – December 2006.

¹³ www.grad.ac.uk/roberts

There is no doubt that the government drive comes from the top and is set to continue. Gordon Brown's Pre-Budget Report¹⁴, December 2006, provided ample evidence, for example:

'economies like ours have no choice but to out-innovate and out-perform competitors by

- *the excellence of our science and education*
- *the quality of infrastructure and environment*
- *our flexibility and our levels of creativity and entrepreneurship.'*

The Leitch Review of Skills demonstrates that interventions focusing on low level skills have a high impact on employment but a relatively small effect on productivity. In contrast, focusing on high level skills brings relatively little improvement in employment levels, but large productivity benefits. As one of the 'most powerful levers for improving productivity... higher level skills are key drivers of innovation, entrepreneurship, management, leadership and research and development.' They are critical to a high skills, high performance economy, increasingly in demand from high performance, global employers and an important feature of greater employer collaboration with HE.

The Warry Report 'Increasing the Economic Impact of the Research Councils' recommends that, as part of their influencing role, Research Councils 'encourage the universities to make enterprise training widely available for researchers in all disciplines'. In 2007 EPSRC has allocated money to support enterprise training to institutions with large numbers of Research Council funded researchers¹³. These institutions will be expected to report on this as part of their Roberts reporting requirements.

National policy developments therefore bring about a 'need to think about how skills we are developing in people...can impact in the longer term on their performance in work and how that impacts upon the economy'. The sector has considerably raised the baseline of researchers' transferable skills: the question now is whether there is more that we can do in certain niches to strengthen particular skills to increase the economic impact of trained researchers.

Areas where we can strengthen researchers' impact on the economy include:

- skills for employability – e.g. entrepreneurship, knowledge transfer, broader technical skills (e.g. quantitative methods), science into policy
- skills for interdisciplinary working
- influencing career flows and public perceptions – outreach to schools and public engagement activities.

Also vital are longitudinal studies of careers and inter-sectoral mobility. Iain's Team is discussing the form that these will take with the Office of Science and Innovation's Research Unit.

In his closing remarks, Iain drew attention to the Research Careers and Diversity Unit's new strategy publication: 'Research Careers: A strategy for success'¹⁵. This gives detail about the five key aims of its remit:

- attract the most creative minds into research
- encourage researchers to get the training they need
- help research organisations manage their staff and develop their careers
- encourage people from all groups of society to take up research careers
- enhance the international reputation of UK research training.

RCUK's thinking and progress on current initiatives such as the Research Careers Mapping Tool¹⁶ and refreshing the Concordat¹⁷ were included in the strategy summary. It also included a number of case studies of individuals showing how developing their skills had helped them.

¹⁴ http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/pre_budget_report/prebud_pbr06/prebud_pbr06_speech.cfm

¹⁵ www.grad.ac.uk/rctraining

¹⁶ www.grad.ac.uk/rci

¹⁷ www.grad.ac.uk/researcherscareers

Report back from the Rugby Team (RT05 and RT06)

An update on the status of the RT05 recommendations and activities of RT06

Chris Park, Director of Graduate School, Lancaster University and Chair of the Rugby Team

Chris explained that his presentation would summarise the past, present and future emphasis of the Rugby Team: what had been achieved, what still needed doing, and where the work might focus next. Further detail is contained in the Team's 2006 report – *Moving the skills development agenda forward for early career researchers*¹⁸.

The Rugby Team was formed in January 2005 at Roberts Policy Forum (in Rugby – hence the name) in response to participant views that there was a need for a cross-sector working group on the evaluation of skills development of early career researchers. RT05, as it became known, presented a strategy paper to the January 2006 Roberts Policy Forum, comprising recommendations for stakeholders and recommendations for further work. The 2006 policy forum took the view that the team should continue its work and further develop the agenda.

The mission of the 2006 group (RT06) has been 'moving the skills development agenda forward for early career researchers'. Mainstreaming and embedding the skills development agenda is now the target. It was tasked with progressing recommendations from RT05 and further promoting and informing the early career researcher skills agenda.

As a cross-sector group bringing together different perspectives, membership of RT05 comprised HEIs, HEFCE, NPC, QAA, RCUK, SHEFC, UK GRAD, UKCGE, and UUK. RT06 recognised the need for representation by more, different, voices, including researcher and employer perspectives. New 2006 members are UKHERD, NRSA, AGCAS, HEA, and a wider range of HEIs.

Whereas a slogan for RT05's work on evaluation was coined as 'Great Expectations meets Mission Impossible', RT06 could perhaps be called 'Catch-22 meets Don't Look Back in Anger'. Due to the time and resources available within the team of volunteers, it was frustrating at times that progress was relatively slow in some areas.

RT06's main activities have centred on three projects:

- 'Developing a survey of how the sector has engaged with the Roberts skills agenda' (RT05 recommendation 1)
- 'Collecting feedback from employers and employees about the skills agenda' (RT05 recommendation 3b)
- 'Developing institutional frameworks for evaluating research training' (RT05 recommendation 8).

All these projects will report later this year. They are work in progress, deliberately so, in order to build in feedback from participants at the forum's workshops:

- 'Developing a survey of how the sector has engaged with the Roberts skills agenda', led by Pam Denicolo of the University of Reading.
Conscious of the lack of a baseline against which to measure progress, this project has arisen as a 'best attempt' to try to reconstruct how the Roberts agenda has impacted within HEIs over time. The workshop: 'Gathering HEI views: assessing the impact of the skills agenda within HEIs' will ask participants for feedback in the proposed survey approach.
- 'Collecting feedback from employers and employees about the skills agenda', led by Julie Blant (AGCAS), Mary McCarthy (University of Exeter) and Janet Metcalfe (UK GRAD).
This project is a meta-analysis of the existing data on employers' views about what they want from a PhD graduate.
- 'Developing institutional frameworks for evaluating research training', led by Jon Turner (of University of Edinburgh and UK GRAD Scotland and Northern Ireland Hub).
The work group 'Enhancing HEI evaluation of researchers' skills development' will show that some very effective evaluation is emerging. The Rugby Team is seeking to identify the range of effective practices to enable institutions to make sound internal decisions about what makes for effective practice within their particular institutional make-up.

¹⁸ www.grad.ac.uk/rugbyteam

Much of the other work of the Team is 'below the waterline', bringing benefits through its work in influencing other stakeholders as well as its more public outputs. RT06 has continued to influence the national skills agenda in various ways:

- Roberts funding and reporting: the team informed the development of monitoring and reporting arrangements for HEIs, as mentioned by Iain Cameron in his presentation
- UK GRAD Database of Practice: RT06 encouraged UK GRAD to further develop the Database, and HEIs to use it.
- lessons from the QAA Special Review: RT06 urged QAA to continue to explore ways of sharing effective practice, and institutional approaches to enhancement, across the sector
- HEA survey of the research student experience: there has been strong input via RT06 members on the PRES Steering Group. This project is led by Chris Park who chairs both groups
- surveying career destinations of research students: the Team has encouraged RCUK and HESA to include non-RC funded research students. There is, however, still a need to ensure that the sample is fully representative of the cohort (part/full time; gender; discipline)
- skills and career development of research staff: the Rugby Team has encouraged and supported the development of UKHERD and Rob Daley (University of Leicester) now represents UKHERD on RT06.

RT06 has also helped shape the direction of other national discussions, in particular, debating the purpose of postgraduate researchers and research staff. Chris Park is leading the 'back to basics' project 'What is a doctorate?' designed to encourage and inform a national debate on the changing nature of the doctorate in the UK. He has authored an HEA Discussion Paper '[Re]defining the doctorate' to kick-start the debate in 2007.

Also asking fundamental questions in order to help shape future policy and practice is the project led by Rob Daley, 'What are research staff for?' Participants will have the chance to contribute to RT06 Thematic Report 4, authored by Rob, by attending the workshop 'Gathering research staff views'.

Members of the Rugby Team have also contributed to other major initiatives, for example, engaging with discussions about the Bologna Process, the European Charter and Code for Researchers and the revision of the Concordat.

Perhaps the most complex issue on the skills agenda is evaluating the economic impact of investment in the skills development funded by Roberts money. RT06 has recommended that RCUK scope and fund a project during 2007 to benchmark 'pre-Roberts' outcomes from research degrees. The workshop 'Delivering economic impact through researcher development' is designed to help focus the type of project RCUK might commission to produce meaningful results.

Following input from the forum workshops to the Thematic Reports mentioned above, these would be finalised and posted on the UK GRAD website. There remained, however, RT06 recommendations that it had not been possible to follow through to completion in 2006. Chris ended by asking the question 'where next?' Did the sector wish to mandate the work of the Rugby Team to continue during 2007? If so, what would be the working group mission, composition and work programme?

Tracking researcher careers

AHRC study on the impact of skills development, the career progression, and economic and social contribution of A&H PhD graduates

Lisa Hill, Head of Evaluation, AHRC

The aim of the survey, commissioned in 2006, was to improve AHRC's understanding of the career pathways of its postgraduate students. Lisa explained that, following an overview of AHRC's postgraduate funding, she would introduce the aims of the career tracking project, describe the methodology and main findings, and finish with some comments about future work on longitudinal studies and assessing the impact made by doctoral finishers in the arts and humanities.

The budget for AHRC postgraduate awards – £33.5m in 2005/06 – represents around 40% of the Research Council's total budget. In 2005 this funded 632 new PhDs, as well as 858 masters awards. This is a significant level of investment and it is important to understand the impact of both in terms of the training provided and the career paths subsequently followed both within and outside academia: asking the questions, what is the utility of skills and training to employment? What is their wider impact?

AHRC has long-held reservations about the reliability of 'first destinations' data and also wanted to investigate longer-term career progression. It therefore put its Career Tracking Survey out to tender and appointed DTZ Consulting and Research (with Swift Research) to survey and report on two areas: AHRC-funded PhD and Professional Preparation Masters (PPM) degrees.

The aims of the survey were to:

- focus on career progression of arts and humanities doctoral and PPM graduates, rather than just first destinations
- provide an accurate representation of their employment patterns
- find out where they gain, and how far their study prepares them for, employment
- find out what skills they take into their chosen career or profession
- discern any influences on the wider public realm, looking beyond simple economic impact to map broader influences on public life, policy and culture
- ascertain whether there is any influence on local or regional economies through their location and spread.

The sample comprised 2,500 students from 28 HEIs, selected to cover a representative mix of institutions with a high percentage of AHRC-funded students and a range of monotechs. The cohorts selected were 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000 starters. The response rate was higher than the 10% target: replies were received from 413 PhD and 267 PPM graduates. Alumni offices were the main, but not only, method of contacting former students. Both postal and web based questionnaires were used. The survey consisted of 50 questions. Respondents were also invited to provide a case study profile giving further details of their career history, including career intentions and motivations. There was nothing particularly specialised or innovative about the methodological approach. It would be easily replicable across the research base.

54% of the same were female. 85% were UK nationals. The biggest group, 61%, were aged between 30 and 34 years. 13% were aged 35-39 years and the groups aged less than 30 years and 40-49 years each comprised 11%. Only 4% of the sample was aged over 50 years.

As for subject area, this was dominated by historical studies (43%) and language/literature (35%). 13% had studied law, theology or philosophy and 9% art or music.

The main factor in the decision to do PhD research was 'interest in subject' for 46%, while for 43% it was the desire to pursue an academic research career.

Main findings included the following:

- 94% of PhD respondents were employed: (78% in full time employment; 10% part time; 6% self-employed)
- 1.5% were unemployed (seeking employment)
- 74% worked in an HEI
- 11% in a public organisation
- 8% in independent organisations
- 7% in private business.

Most of those employed outside academia reported that they had made a positive career choice that enabled them to use skills developed in a PhD in an interesting and challenging environment.

Of those employed in HEIs, 59% held permanent academic positions, 33% were on fixed term academic contracts and 7% occupied non-academic positions.

Within the public/independent sector the breakdown was: 31% independent organisation (e.g. BBC, The National Trust), 21% school (mostly English/History/Modern Language teachers), 19% government, 11% museum or cultural body and 7% local authority. Within the private sector the majority were employed in professional jobs. The biggest groupings were in the creative industries (37%) – mainly editors within large publishing houses – and business and financial services (33%), largely consultants, lawyers and accountants. The 6% who were self-employed were mostly artists, barristers, journalists and consultants.

87% of respondents were based in the UK, with 13% overseas. 28% of the sample are based in London and 18% in the wider South-East. 40% remain in the region they studied – this rises to 55% of those who studied in London.

The majority earn between £25 000 - £39 000 p.a., although there were wide variations, with a few earning over £100 000 a year. Interestingly, 25% of respondents had a career before commencing their PhD (and almost 75% of respondents undertook paid work during their PhD).

Analysis of a sub-sample showed that all those now employed in permanent or open-ended academic positions began their career in academia and had worked in the sector continuously. In contrast, those in fixed-term positions showed no typical career path. However, many were at an early stage of their careers and are likely to progress to permanent contracts.

In response to questions about the quality of the research degree training they had received, over half (53%) of this (entirely pre-Roberts) cohort responded as 'very satisfied'. 39% were 'quite satisfied'; 7% 'not satisfied'. The main issues affecting the quality of the PhD experience were deemed to be: the pivotal role of supervisor; lack of formal training and a need for better career guidance and opportunities to develop skills. Some respondents recommended that there should always be more than one supervisor, because of the risks involved in depending on one person to fulfil this highly important role. Another important theme was the lack of support from career planning, both within and outside academia.

Asked to identify the skills they had acquired via their PhD, the following were mentioned by over 50%:

- subject specific knowledge
- archival research skills
- critical analysis skills
- research method skills
- personal skills
- presentation skills
- time management
- project management.

There was general satisfaction with the skills gained as preparation for current employment and there was a close match between these skill areas and those identified as required for the current job, with the exception of team working skills, which were required in the present role, but rarely addressed during the PhD. Very few respondents highlighted a lack in provision of other skills: those mentioned were people management, building self-confidence, IT skills and advanced presentation skills.

The survey also asked about the value of the qualification. Overall, 66% felt that a PhD was 'essential' for their job and 23% replied that a PhD was 'of some importance'. Unsurprisingly, among those who worked in an HEI, 90% said a PhD was 'essential'. Among those working in public/independent organisations only 12% felt that a PhD was 'essential' and in the private sector only 7%.

Questioned whether they would study for a PhD again, 90% responded that they would. However, the figure varies by sector, from 93% of those working in HEIs to 70% of those in private sector employment. Interestingly, the highest positive response of 96% was from those in self-employment.

Lisa then considered how far the survey had met AHRC's expectations. The first two aims had been met in full ('to focus on career progression of arts and humanities doctoral and PPM graduates, rather than just first destinations' and 'to provide an accurate representation of their employment patterns'). The following two aims 'to find out where they gain, and how far their study prepares them for, employment' and 'to find out what skills they take into their chosen career or profession' had been partially met. However, further work was needed to address the most difficult questions – discerning 'any influences on the wider public realm, looking beyond simple economic impact to map broader influences on public life, policy and culture' and ascertaining 'whether there is any influence on local or regional economies through their location and spread'.

The survey reports are very recent (the findings are now available at http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/about/ke/evaluation/pg_career_tracking.asp) and returning to the raw data for further analysis should enable AHRC to address some of its unanswered questions. Another next step is to draw comparisons with other studies, including first destination surveys. It is too early to say how AHRC plans to pursue the question of impact of training (the reports have not been fully considered as yet): one possible approach is employer surveys, another (more likely) is to collect in-depth case studies to support the contextual data. AHRC is also seeking to establish a longer-term longitudinal survey of career progression from within the collaborative doctoral awards cohort.

Finally, Lisa explained, the Research Council's approach to the 'impact' question will be informed by the work it is doing with PwC to develop an impact strategy. AHRC will be seeking eventually to implement this strategy in both its postgraduate research and knowledge transfer areas of activity.

Panel: questions and discussion

The question and answer session with the plenary speakers raised a range of issues, reflecting the diversity of themes addressed in their presentations. A recurring theme of the session was 'how to get all the pieces to fit together' in the light of rapid change to the PhD degree and national policy developments. There was also much interest in exploring different approaches to evaluating impact.

Using qualitative Key Performance Indicators

The first question concerned the Rugby Team's work on evaluating impact. Chris Park was asked why the Rugby Team had responded to opposition in some parts of the sector to metrics-based evaluation by moving away from seeking quantitative measures of the effectiveness of Roberts' provision and moving in favour of qualitative data instead. What were the arguments on both sides?

Chris replied that the Rugby Team had started by seeking sector agreement on 'hard' measures such as participation rates and completion rates. However, it became apparent that these measures need to be considered in context because of the wide variation in institutions' missions, profiles and other characteristics. Bald statistics do not tell the whole story. The same figure might be a good achievement for institution X but a poor one for institution Y. What really matters is: how does an institution know that it is doing work that is effective? To answer this question a range of measures, both hard and soft, will be taken into account by individual institutions. The Rugby Team therefore believes that its role is to support institutional quality enhancement: working on behalf of the sector rather than seeking to recommend, on behalf the research councils, measures that the sector does not perceive to be valid ones.

Interpreting the AHRC tracking survey

The next cluster of questions and comments explored the conclusions that might be drawn from the AHRC career tracking survey and where further work might be needed. AHRC was to be commended for its *"work of enormous value in opening up this agenda"*.

The first questioner was struck by the high proportion of respondents who had attained permanent academic posts, when other research into career patterns of research staff had indicated that, generally only 10% could currently expect to attain permanent positions. Was it the case that students in the arts and humanities could look forward to better academic career prospects than their counterparts in other disciplines? He also commented on the age profile of the AHRC sample – a significantly higher average age than for science students: was it likely, in the arts and humanities that more people used a PhD to upgrade their career?

Lisa Hill replied that the AHRC research had indeed shown that a large proportion of respondents was achieving academic career paths. She was asked how confident the AHRC could be in the representative nature of the research sample, given that it was easier to track those who had remained in academia than those who had left the sector. Lisa replied that 'we can only go so far with the conclusions that we have drawn' as AHRC has no way of assessing whether the response was representative. It should also be remembered that the response rate was 30%.

Lisa was then asked whether it was fair to conclude that the 10% of researchers who had benefited from AHRC award were much more likely to secure a permanent post than those arts and humanities PhD students funded by some other means. Lisa agreed that this was a possible finding that required further investigation. It had not been possible to survey non AHRC-funded graduates in the recent survey, but AHRC was keen to extend survey research to explore the experiences of non AHRC-funded students in future. This could well show significant differences in career expectation and also of experiences in the research environment. One participant commented that the percentage of respondents who were dissatisfied with the quality of their PhD supervision was much lower, at 7%, than the sector average, and might well reflect the fact that the sample represented the 'crème de la crème' of arts and humanities students.

A further commentator pointed out that a similar survey had been conducted for PPARC a few years ago, with not dissimilar findings, though for different reasons. Diversity was the theme to focus on. Given the scale of the research, it was very important for AHRC to be cautious in its conclusions and beware of generalising findings. In particular, in the light of the current drive on economic impact data collection, it would be unwise to overemphasise the high percentage of respondents outside academia who responded that doing a PhD was not essential for their job. He looked forward to the further work that AHRC was planning, including an aggregate study, which could profit from the large American literature on this subject.

Policy implications for practice: the form of the PhD

Iain Cameron was then questioned on the subject of the implications of widening the economic impact and footprint of researchers for the length of the PhD and funding conditions. Iain had talked about encouraging researchers to engage in

entrepreneurship activities and going out to schools. Internships are a related theme that had also been discussed recently at the UK GRAD conference in September. These broader activities could all have significant implications for completion rates. Might the research councils tolerate suspension of registration, for example, or allow for longer PhD degrees?

Iain replied that as a result of the Roberts review the average length of the PhD funding period had already increased from three to three and a half years. It was envisaged that such broadening activities could generally be contained within current funding periods. There was a debate to be had about whether taking 'time out' interrupts productivity or enhances it, and if the latter, how soon the benefits start impacting. Some Research Councils were indeed looking at making arrangements for facilitating a break in the PhD. In making these opportunities available, it was vital that the value to the individual of the broader activities should be institutions' prime concern. The increase in personal development planning and ownership by PhD researchers was a most encouraging trend in this regard.

Chris Park added that there is general awareness of how the traditional PhD is being pulled in different directions by the different demands of stakeholders. His paper, 'Redefining the Doctorate' aims to draw together all the issues for consideration. For example, some university regulations, and expectations on completion rates, do not allow for any other model than the traditional PhD. There is a need for a sector debate on how to 'get all the pieces to fit together'.

Disconnect between researcher activities

A follow up comment was made that Roberts delivery in institutions was often quite divorced from the parts of institution responsible for enterprise, placements and other externally-focused activity. A vision of how those elements could be brought together, of how partnerships could be built within institutions, was urgently needed.

Janet Metcalfe commented that the disconnect between Roberts provision and activities such as enterprise also applied to the area of preparation for academic practice. There was an opportunity for universities to be much more holistic in how they approached different issues that impacted on the researcher experience.

Iain Cameron commented on different initiatives that were already taking place across the sector. There is a need to look at what is being done, what the scope for extending this is, and, crucially, who is going to benefit from what sort of training?

Chris Park added that we need to avoid a 'national curriculum mentality', as some in the sector feel that the Joint Skills Statement implies the development of a fixed template.

The danger of this is the development of a 'tick-box' approach to researcher development. It is important to remember that institutions are not only autonomous, their cultures also vary tremendously. 'We need to find ways of embedding in ways that are meaningful within our individual institutions' and to our individual researchers.

Future funding

The next questioner asked Iain Cameron, at what point in the coming year he would be able to confirm whether the Roberts tranche of funding would continue, and whether allocations would remain ring-fenced? Iain replied that there was no doubt that this was a challenging CSR and that departments who maintained similar levels of funding would be 'doing well'. However, within RCUK, support for skills training was top priority, and it was written into the forthcoming RCUK strategy that ring-fencing allocations would remain for the forthcoming CSR period 2007-11. He could therefore cautiously predict similar levels of funding being made available.

Researcher employability outside academia

The following questioner turned to issues of employability and employer attitudes. How can we convince employers who do not see the value of PhD graduates to look at the potential creativity and analytical skills (for example) that they can contribute? Janet Metcalfe replied that the studies looked at by the Rugby Team had shown that where employers recruited PhD graduates, they were indeed valued. It was a communication gap with employers that did not recruit PhD graduates that needed to be addressed, a finding that was highlighted in the recent UK GRAD project 'Recruiting PhDs – what works?'¹⁹.

Diversity of the researcher population

The final questioner wondered whether much of the discussion so far had centred on the traditional early-career researcher in their 20s, embarking on a career, and whether the diversity of the PhD population had been forgotten. Iain Cameron replied that perhaps sometimes there was an implicit assumption that only certain groups were being addressed. Lisa Hill pointed out that 25% of the AHRC survey respondents had had careers before embarking on a PhD.

¹⁹ www.grad.ac.uk/publications

Developing mechanisms for measuring impact

Workshops on day one were designed to explore specific Rugby Team projects relating to the gathering of views of researchers, academics and employers and embedding institutional evaluation processes. Workshop participants were tasked with identifying and agreeing next steps for these projects: recommendations to the sector, the Research Councils and other national stakeholders and the Rugby Team, including any specific actions for the coming year.

Workshop 1: Gathering HEI views: assessing the impact of the skills agenda within HEIs (RT05 Recommendation 1)

Pam Denicolo, Director, Graduate School for the Social Sciences, University of Reading and **Sandie Tjok-a-Tam**, Project Researcher

This workshop reviewed progress on the development of survey tools to assess awareness, engagement and impact of the skills agenda among researchers and academics. Participants had the opportunity to input into the development of audience-focussed questionnaires to be trialled in 2007. The aim is to create national tools that are available to HEIs and establish the basis for longitudinal tracking of progress on the skills agenda, on a similar basis to the CROS and PRES surveys.

Outcomes:

The purpose of the survey was wholeheartedly supported, but it was noted that in documents, especially for those targeted at individuals and groups outside RT06, there needs to be clarity about what 'impact' we are seeking to measure. This is to measure the cultural impact within HEIs, not changes (yet) in research proficiency or employability. This will enable the sector as a whole, and HEIs individually, to ascertain changes in knowledge/beliefs about the agenda and emotional and practical engagement with it.

Participants provided feedback on:

- the time needed to complete survey questions
- suggestions for improvement of question structure
- suggestions for further questions; though participants were alert to the need to keep focussed on purpose
- evidence that there is a huge and growing 'need to know' by those supporting the skills agenda about staff and researcher knowledge/understanding/engagement so that they can refine their efforts (and also to maintain motivation!).

It was reinforced that such a survey would not only provide information to HEIs and to RCUK, but would promote the agenda within institutions, encouraging people to engage, and could usefully include information as part of the questions to raise awareness/dispel myths/correct misunderstandings.

Recommendations:

The main recommendation was that funding should be sought/provided urgently to ensure that a pilot survey is conducted within three to four months and that a full survey is conducted before the start of the next academic year. Many participants volunteered services to:

- help refine the questionnaire
- become champions of the survey in their institutions
- take part in the pilot study.

A majority of participants recommended that the first part of the survey should focus on academic staff (supervisors and principal Investigators) since they are critical in the process. There was a concern that early career researchers could be 'over-surveyed' in the current academic year through the national PRES and CROS surveys (although it was recognised that these surveys have a different focus). A minority were in favour of surveying researchers as well as staff in the near future, and these participants requested a copy of the draft researcher' questionnaire, in the event that only academic staff were to be initially targeted by the survey as a whole.

Workshop 2: Gathering employers' and employees' views (RT05 Recommendation 3b)

Mary McCarthy, University of Exeter and **Claudia Morgavi**, Project Researcher, University of Sheffield

The opening presentation summarised the results of a meta-analysis of existing 'pre-Roberts' studies on the views of employers of the value of postgraduate researchers. It identified the common themes relating to employers' needs in terms of skills and competencies, and employers' perceptions. The study also identified the gaps - what is not covered and what we still don't know. The discussion included elements from the AHRC presentation, especially its wider applicability to researcher career tracking and the impact of the skills agenda.

The following recommendations were identified:

- collect feedback using a case study approach from employer representatives in KTPs and collaborative PhDs
- use alumni databases to access relevant participants for longitudinal surveys. Such surveys could include line management perspectives on skills needed in the particular roles, thus linking researchers and employers
- involve professional bodies. They have a vested interest in PhDs on professional programmes
- the template structure and content of the case studies in the Research Career Mapping Tool will be critically important for future research and to be effective for use by multiple stakeholders, particularly for researchers
- focus on the gap between the employer and HEIs in general - the lack of communication
- develop relationships with employer bodies (CBI, AGR, etc.) to help reinforce messages
- where effective skills analysis exists (e.g. Manchester, Liverpool) this could be used to demonstrate one aspect of the richness of a PhD researcher post-Roberts
- give better support for employers who would like to employ PhDs, especially small and medium employers (picking up on the UK GRAD project 'Recruiting PhDs researchers – what works?')
- acknowledging it is difficult, look at ways to investigate social as well as economic capital. Don't forget the intrinsic value of the PhD
- develop strategic ways forward to encompass the needs of major stakeholders (government, RDAs, HEIs, academics, researchers):
 - use good practice e.g. case studies of both employers and employees
 - look at what is happening overseas, e.g. USA, Australasia and mainland Europe
 - assess economic impact by region, include the socio-economic.

Workshop 3: Gathering research staff views

Rob Daley, Post-Doctoral Staff Development Officer, University of Leicester and **Janet De Wilde**, Research Development Co-ordinator, Heriot-Watt University

This workshop reviewed the national findings of CROS 2006 and progress since the initial 2002 survey in terms of research staff perspectives of how they are supported in their skills and career development. It demonstrated how one institution is validating and building on their CROS results to improve their provision for research staff. Participants then had the opportunity to input their approaches to understanding research staff skills and career development needs.

The CROS survey clearly shows that research staff posts are not just stepping stones to other positions: one-fifth of the UK's 35,000 research staff have more than ten years' experience and 35% have been in the role between five and ten years. More than half (58%) are aiming for a research career. Of these, just over 50% want to work in academia and only 8% are set upon a private sector career.

One in five respondents believe that their employment in their current institution has not improved their career prospects. Overall, only 13% were aware of the Roberts Agenda and of these only 38% (5% of total respondents) feel that Roberts has led to improved career development support within their institution. As for performance review, 43% of total respondents participated in any form of appraisal. These were almost equally divided between those who found review useful and those who found the process unhelpful. Training opportunities were available to less than 50% in most areas of generic skills. The exceptions were presentation and writing skills training, which were both available to two-thirds of respondents. However, those who did attend training reported high satisfaction levels.

Taking CROS a step further: researcher perspective in a local context (Janet De Wilde, Research Development Co-ordinator, University of Heriot-Watt) used focus groups to illuminate and inform her institutional CROS results. Her conclusions were: lack of communication, knowledge, promotion and information materials were major issues. The results recognised a need to implement change by addressing:

- institutional strategy
- training needs
- reflecting on CROS results
- engaging different stakeholders
- crafting communication needs based on the above.

Participants agreed the following recommendations:

- the Roberts agenda should engage more effectively with professional bodies and their CPD programmes
- the funding councils should, at the point of application, require the prospective principal investigator to state the training programme to be provided for the research associate – and this should be audited!

Workshop 4: Enhancing HEI evaluation of researchers' skills development

(RT05 Recommendation 8)

Jon Turner, Director, Postgraduate Transferable Skills Unit, University of Edinburgh, Co-ordinator, UK GRAD Scotland and Northern Ireland Hub

This workshop explored approaches to the evaluation of researcher skills development programmes that are being used by HEIs. These range from specific short course evaluation sheets, to more in-depth evaluation of impact over a longer time period, audits, researcher experience surveys, personal development tools and links into broader institutional approaches to quality assurance and enhancement for postgraduate degree programmes and researcher staff support.

Participants shared examples of approaches from their own institutions. These will be included in a report of current practice that is being prepared by members of the RT06 that will focus on measures being taken by institutions internally to evaluate and enhance their provision.

Outcomes

Participants discussed the practicalities of:

- evaluating inputs and throughputs (e.g. mapping provision against the Joint Skills Statement, end course evaluations, follow-up evaluations and assessment of distance travelled)
- evaluating outputs and impact (e.g. surveys of PhD alumni, supervisors and employers, Personal Development Planning and specific metrics like submission rates and employment destinations)
- and more holistic approaches to evaluation (e.g. researcher experience surveys, appraisal and review, and general institutional quality assurance arrangements).

General points included:

- the importance of combining qualitative and quantitative approaches
- taking advantage of informal opportunities for evaluation (e.g. taking stock of what is learnt during a workshop)
- using control questions
- and the added benefit of using evaluation to help build a greater awareness of the skills development agenda in institutions (e.g. by asking supervisors and departments to self-assess/comment).

Recommendations

- That when planning major researcher experience surveys institutions bear in mind how much work is needed to get good response rates and are ready to follow-up the results (e.g. reporting on findings to respondents, using focus groups to gather further detail on specific areas needing attention and engaging senior managers in the need to take action as a result of the findings).
- For the sector to use the experience of current research staff as PhD students to provide a baseline picture of PhD skills development pre-Roberts. One way of doing this would be to build appropriate questions into CROS.
- To include examples of evaluation methods in a separate section of the UK GRAD Database of Practice.
- For the sector to engage with PRES but to look for ways of ensuring that there are no financial barriers to this (e.g. cost of BOS licenses), especially for smaller institutions.

Workshop 5: Delivering economic impact through researcher development

Iain Cameron, Head, RCUK Research Careers and Diversity Unit, **Ian Lyne**, BBSRC and Chair, RCDG and **Chris Park**, Head of Graduate School, Lancaster University and Chair of the Rugby Team

The recent Leitch and Warray reports both stress the importance of delivering economic impact to ensure our future prosperity. This workshop considered how the sector can provide opportunities and activities for developing researchers' skills relevant to improving economic impact and raising the awareness of researchers of the value of engaging in activities such as knowledge transfer, secondments/work placements and enterprise training.

The presentations began with a look at how different stakeholders have different perspectives on economic impact. For the sector, focusing on the supply-side of PhD training, measuring economic impact is often about evaluating individual career progression, in other words the 'private benefit'.

Given this policy climate, it is essential that the sector demonstrate strong evidence of the impact that PhD students make to the UK economy. However, there remain profound tensions between the national, governmental view, and the local, HEI interest.

The sector remains suspicious of using quantitative data, such as qualification/completion rates, as the variety and complexity of factors that need to be taken into account (different doctoral PhDs, students, HEIs). The problems of identifying cause and effect, mean that a meaningful basis for analysing data is elusive. HEIs acknowledge that they are all at different positions and would prefer to measure distance travelled.

The Warry and Leitch reports, however, focus much more on the 'demand side', and seek to measure economic impact in terms of the 'public benefit' to business development and 'the bottom-line'. Leitch, for example, strongly supports the extension of demand-led approaches to skills provision, believing that the government should intervene only in areas of market failure. The report advocates a balance of responsibility for skills development between the sectors, with government intervention much more prevalent in supporting lower level skills and a growth in employer investment in higher level ones. This puts, at the very least, a question mark over the levels of government funding for higher skills that the sector can expect over the long term.

Although the workshop was focused on researcher skills development and economic impact, the wider context was also borne in mind. Research Councils, for example, when looking at questions of economic impact, are seeking ways to measure the impact of the research they fund as well as the contribution of the trained researcher. This also presents its challenges as it may not be easy to measure the direct contribution to wealth, but research has had indirect impact through major advances, such as improvements in communications through mobile phone technology

The workshop started with a general question of what evidence do we have to quantify the impact our PhD graduates make to the economy? It was concluded that we still need to agree the evaluation questions to ask. It is likely that we will need a range of qualitative and quantitative measures, metrics and case studies.

Participants put forward varying responses and suggestions for ways to evaluate impact, often drawing on previous studies. It was felt that we needed to have a better understanding of cases study trajectories over time. It is important also to consider how we are going to measure the impact of research staff.

Does the sector needs to consider shifting the emphasis of the skills development opportunities it provides in order to link skills delivery more clearly to employability and to exploit, for example, synergies with outreach and public engagement activities. What range of skills will need to be developed for the future?

Outcomes:

Participants believed that qualitative studies were likely to be a better approach than trying to get a quantitative picture. Case studies about PhD graduates, showing their individual impact in their employment were considered a valuable approach – could HEIs do more to support the collection of these by using their alumni? Case studies provide valuable marketing tools to HEIs for promoting their research degree programmes.

Case studies should feature the diversity of types of doctoral degree and doctoral students, including professional doctorates and other students working part-time and funded by employers. It is vital to look also at the economic impact of mid-career professionals, not just those embarking on their careers.

RCUK and other national stakeholders were urged not to reinvent the wheel. Past studies have examined some of these the issues, e.g. 'Improving standards in research degree programmes'²⁰ on benchmarking, there is opportunity to build on the AHRC project, the forthcoming PRES results and the evidence from the QAA Special Review should be fully exploited. Other models of evaluation that may be useful to look at include the interim evaluation²¹ of the HEFCE KTP programmes.

It was agreed that employers should be further encouraged to have an input into research degree provision to ensure that PhD programmes are providing the skills that employers are looking for.

²⁰ www.grad.ac.uk/nationalpolicy

²¹ www.sqw.co.uk/pdf/evaluation_final.pdf

Developing mechanisms for measuring impact: Plenary feedback and conclusions

Janet Metcalfe summarised the workshop outcomes and then commented upon the useful and creative recommendations that had been made. She noted that there was much commonality of theme. Recommendations were directed at institutions and at a range of national stakeholders. The majority of the recommendations put forward by the workshops were directed at institutions:

- identifying what HEIs can do in terms of engaging more with employers
- in looking at their internal evaluation
- in seeking feedback from postgraduate researchers, research staff (following up the data from national surveys) and alumni.

The workgroups had conveyed an important message that there is no merit in doing a survey unless the data is going to be used. Janet urged HEIs to submit examples of their evaluation approaches to the Database of Practice so that others can see how a variety of approaches have been used effectively.

Janet then commented on the recommendations that addressed **national stakeholders**:

The research councils and other funders should, at the point of application, require the prospective principal investigator to state the training programme to be provided for the research associate

This echoes one of the recommendations of the recent CORP (Co-ordination of Researcher Provision) project. It is useful to reinforce to the Research Councils the importance of this in every way we can. The planned review of the Concordat presents an additional important opportunity to strengthen mechanisms for promoting research staff entitlement to training and career development.

Gathering institutional views on the cultural impact of the skills agenda within HEIs: that the first part of the survey should focus on academic staff (supervisors and principal investigators)

Janet wondered whether the scope of this project should be reviewed. Should RT07 perhaps add broad questions about general researcher development in line with the scope of the CROS, PRES and PI surveys, not just engagement with the Roberts agenda?

Funding urgently needs to be available to ensure that the pilot survey is conducted and a full survey launched before the start of the next academic year

This recommendation was made in connection with the institutional impact survey, but all the current and proposed evaluation projects require money and time over and above the commitment of the Rugby Team. This recommendation is addressed, therefore, to RCUK and other funding stakeholders.

The Roberts agenda should engage more effectively with professional bodies and their CPD programmes and develop relationships with employer bodies (CBI, AGR etc.)...

This recommendation was directed at RCUK and/or the Rugby Team. Did these recommendations imply a need still to identify a national project on identifying the needs of employers?

Collect positive feedback, using a case study approach, from employer representatives engaged in Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs)²² and Collaborative Training Accounts (CTAs)²³

The AHRC career tracking survey had indicated that case studies present perhaps the most effective way of demonstrating career development and impact. An important initiative in this context was the Research Career Mapping Tool, a project initiated by the Funders' Forum. This envisions a national site to support career development for researchers that will be very heavily based on case studies to illustrate individual routes/career paths. The HESA longitudinal study, too, will use case studies.

This recommendation could suggest a RT07 project to define a framework or template for case studies that provide evidence for career development. This framework could provide a tool to achieve multiple agendas – demonstrating economic impact while also showing individuals a range of possible career paths.

²² <http://www.ktponline.org.uk/>

²³ <http://www.epsrc.ac.uk/PostgraduateTraining/CollaborativeTrainingAccounts/default.htm>

Case studies should feature the diversity of types of doctoral degree including professional doctorates, and diversity of doctoral researchers, such as those working part-time, funded by employers and international researchers

It may well be appropriate to research the professional doctorate cohort as a national project on researcher career progression/economic impact. This cohort provides a ready-made sample of individuals and their employers who believe in the value of investing in a PhD.

It was proposed that the economic impact of international students also be addressed: this is an overlooked category that should certainly be represented in case study evidence. Britain's global interests were positively served by offering postgraduate study to future potential leaders in other countries. Also emphasised was the importance of selling the benefits of researcher development 'not just nationally, but internationally too'.

Incorporate examples of institutional evaluation on to the Database of Practice – probably as a discrete section

A recommendation that the Rugby Team and UK GRAD will consider in the development programme for the Database.

Janet then asked the forum to confirm whether the Rugby Team should continue in 2007.

Iain Cameron spoke first, in support. The Rugby Team had driven the agenda in this CSR. It had proved an effective mechanism for focusing the sector on ways to convince the external world of the effectiveness of this agenda. If the evidence of impact is not compelling for the next CSR, funding would be seriously under threat. Iain added that he fully recognised that the Rugby Team needed further resources to progress its work, and that RCUK would be addressing this.

Simon Inger, University of Bath and UKHERD, proposed that the Rugby Team be given a mandate to continue. 'There is...a definite job list... and it needs a group such as the Rugby Team to get the work done.'

The recommendation was carried that the Rugby Team continue working towards its mission and convene to review and develop its 2007 work plan.

Key themes emerging from the QAA Special Review

Gill Clarke, QAA and University of Bristol

Gill explained that in giving a preview of main outcomes from the Special Review, she would focus on those relating to skills development. The overview report itself would be launched at the UKCGE Winter Conference in February. Touching briefly on the report's conclusions, Gill highlighted that:

- good practice was evident in each of nine areas
- HEIs' preparation for review identified strengths and areas for more work
- areas for further consideration were common to a large proportion
- outcomes show that section 1 of the Code can be used effectively by different institutions.

The overall picture was very positive: examples of good practice were explicitly identified in 105 (85%) of the reports (123 institutions were involved in Special Review, of which 10 were in Wales, and 113 in England and Northern Ireland.).

Most incidences of good practice were in:

- the clear and comprehensive information provided for students
- progress monitoring and review arrangements
- skills development.

Indeed, 50% of the examples of good practice were wholly or partly concerned with skills development.

All report information was at summary level and anonymous. HEIs had access to their own reports but the overview and full reports did not identify specific institutions. The many examples of good practice, however, deserved wider dissemination.

Preparing for Special Review was clearly developmental for institutions, helping them identify where their real strengths lay and where the gaps were. The process also raised awareness across institutions of both national imperatives and external and internal support.

Reviewers most frequently commented on the following areas for further attention:

- the need for consistency and fairness in applying policies
- the importance of making information accessible to everyone who needs it
- good staff support needed in implementing policy
- the need for a regular review of practice.

Gill picked out three particular challenges:

- HEIs' ability to provide development for established supervisors
- how to ensure fairness in oral examinations
- developing detailed assessment criteria for research degrees.

Good practice was identified in these areas at some institutions, but it was not widespread. This is not surprising: these are all difficult areas, often requiring regulatory change within institutions, which takes time to achieve.

Gill then showed some early analysis of the distribution of examples of good practice, taken from the summary sections of reviewers' reports. It showed considerable overlap between different categories, and highlighted, once again, the difficulty of the task of trying to pinpoint cause and effect in skills development. For example, good practice in induction could take place in a skills development context, or skills development can be an element of supervisory practice, and so on.

The skills section of the Special Review overview report finds that:

- there are wide variations in practice between institutions; most arrangements are appropriate
- there is evidence of Roberts funding being used to support formal institutional provision
- some institutions are choosing to accredit taught modules
- there are differences between institutions in monitoring participation
- training often covers both research and transferable skills; boundaries are blurred
- high quality materials are generally provided to support skills development
- multiple sources of advice and guidance are available to students
- there are multiple examples of opportunities for researcher-led skills development
- research skills development opportunities are more advanced than for generic skills.

Gill commented on the positive nature of much of the variation in practice. This is not only between institutions, sometimes there is variation within an organisation, which shows sensitivity to the differing needs of different subject areas. Sometimes the amount of development expected is defined, sometimes not, and again there can be subject differences. Good practice includes making a wide range of opportunities available and supporting individuals to make appropriate choices.

Many HEIs have formal researcher development programmes, informed by the Joint Skills Statement. Sometimes these bear credit weighting and, in a very small minority, completion is a pre-requisite for progression to the final award. A few institutions have also made arrangements to accredit prior learning.

Whereas some institutions monitor take up by all researchers, regardless of funding body, others only monitor participation by those funded by the research councils. One particular area where perhaps a lack of monitoring should be addressed is training for teaching undergraduates. While provision was widely available, in some institutions training prior to teaching was not mandatory.

The quality of much training and support material (paper and electronic) was much in evidence. Many institutions had developed virtual learning environments (VLEs), often linked to Personal Development Planning (PDP). It was found that more institutions were using PDP specially developed or adapted for postgraduate researchers. It was also noticeable that the supervisory team model was becoming more widely used.

Researcher-led activities are a positive development found at many institutions, often involving support for external conference and seminar attendance. Reviewers also noted the growth in flexible opportunities for part-time, external and overseas researchers. Another trend is that recruitment to targeted skills development positions is levelling off, and academic staff are getting more involved in skills development delivery.

The skills development section of the overview report will highlight some general issues for consideration. Institutions are showing an acceptable variation in approaches, but in some HEIs there is inconsistent use of PDP and general record keeping regarding skills development and a need for:

- a range of development opportunities
- enhancement of some existing formal research training programmes
- better alignment with the Joint Skills Statement.

Gill then summarised how special review reports lead on to institutional audit:

- review of postgraduate research programmes will be integrated with institutional audit from 2006–07
- the audit team receive a copy of the institution's special review report
- a section of the institution's audit report is dedicated to management of PGR programmes, researchers and academic standards of research degrees
- relevant pages of Eng/NI Audit Handbook are: 5-6, 11-12, Annex B section 6.

In conclusion, it was evident that much work was being done by institutions to improve development opportunities. Gill gained a sense from the reports that the Roberts funding 'is really making a difference, even in institutions that do not receive large amounts'. Diverse approaches are appropriate, and furnish a large number of examples of good practice. Gill stressed the importance of communicating and sharing across the sector, using for example, the UK GRAD Database of Practice and regional development opportunities.

Before taking questions and comments, Gill posed a question, prompted by the many examples of good practice where skills were delivered in subject settings: do we need to continue distinguishing between research and generic skills? Is there still a case for separating the elements of the Joint Skills Statement that are eligible for Roberts skills funding – currently A and B are excluded – when there is so much synergy between all parts of the Joint Skills Statement?

In response to Gill's closing remarks, participants offered the following views:

- do not separate research and generic skills: teach the latter by applying them to the subject grouping
- winning hearts and minds of supervisors is easier if they see a synergy between research and transferable skills
- it is important not to get too 'hung up' about the boundaries between research knowledge, research skills and transferable skills, as it decreases the flexibility that is vital for being able to meet student needs. Such an attitude also contradicts the spirit of the Roberts recommendations
- while in theory the convergence of research and generic skills was to be applauded, it did result in differences in interpretation in practice i.e. HEIs' views on what activities were eligible for Roberts funding (a prime example being research conference attendance.).

Kate Reading, for RCUK, responded to the last point by stressing the principle of additionality. Activities were eligible for Roberts funding if they are aimed at outcomes additional to those the student needs to achieve to their research. Taking the example of attendance at a research conference, Roberts funding was appropriate for preparation and debriefing activities to maximise skills development from the experience. But other sources of funding should be used for fees and expenses; the Research Councils have funding streams to support conference attendance²⁴.

Other responses to Special Review findings were the:

- importance of promoting and sharing examples of good practice: the Database of Practice is the ideal vehicle for this, its scope is already wider than the skills agenda
- view that the high degree of overlap of good practice in skills development and other areas is a very positive sign that skills development increasingly is being embedded in research degree programmes.

Outcomes from the review of the Database of Practice

Janet Metcalfe, Director, UK GRAD Programme

Janet picked up a thread from Gill Clarke's previous presentation by urging participants to post examples of good practice identified by Special Review on the Database of Practice to share with others – if they had not done so already!

Starting with a brief history of the Database, Janet explained that the sector had expressed a strong desire to share practice and experience, not just at networking events, but also by other means. The specification for the Database had been developed by the Rugby Team 05 and the Database was launched in October 2005 and promoted through the Roberts reporting for that year. In its first three months 66 institutions posted a total of 272 entries.

Review terms were set in 2006 to:

- analyse content and usage
- investigate functionality and maintenance issues
- recommend ways to encourage uptake and effective use for quality enhancement
- offer ways to enhance value in supporting Roberts reporting.

The review took place over spring and summer 2006 and an overview report was produced for the UK GRAD annual conference Profiting from Postgraduate Talent in September 2006. Some functionality improvements to the Database were made in early autumn 2006 to coincide with the 2006 Roberts reporting.

At 1 December 2006 the Database had 426 entries, posted by 82 institutions, an average of five postings per HEI, and an increase of 50% in the number of entries since 2005. 310 of these entries were available for viewing and 116 in draft form. 88% of the practices posted were Roberts-related. Encouragingly, in the autumn HEIs reviewed and subsequently updated one quarter of the postings they made in 2005–06. The Database enters 2007, therefore, in a healthy and dynamic state.

The review of the Database had revealed:

- strong sector support for the resource as a tool for enhancing practice
- the majority of users were in favour of retaining the facility to submit practices as part of annual Roberts reporting, with some provisos
- users valued and made use of the Database in a variety of ways: one unexpected finding was the support for descriptions of institutional strategy/overall programmes, not just individual pieces of practice
- a range of creative suggestions for enhancing functionality and encouraging usage.

An analysis of 2005 and 2006 practices posted shows that:

- doctoral researchers are the prime participant group in significantly more postings than research staff, but the gap is narrowing and more practice is working across the continuum, targeting joint audience training courses, followed by researcher support activity, remain the most popular foci of practice, but 2006 saw percentage increases in postings about self-directed learning and coaching/mentoring. This indicates a shift towards more needs-based provision and researcher 'ownership' method of delivery is still dominated by examples of experiential learning and/or group work, but there is an increase in the category of reflective practice
- the majority of postings describe practice delivered at institutional level (unsurprisingly, given the Database's 'Roberts' context). There were significant increases in the rate of postings about departmental, inter-institutional and national/regional initiatives. These are healthy signs, in the first instance, of practice becoming more related to the particular research environment and, in the second, of a possible increase in collaborative activity.

An online user survey, conducted as part of the review, showed that practitioners who browsed the Database to search for practice elsewhere significantly outnumbered those who posted details of their own practice:

- 28% used the Database 'to see what other institutions are doing'
- 22% 'to look for examples of specific practice'
- 20% 'to generally gather ideas for future development of our practice'
- 11% 'to benchmark our practice against others'.

The same survey showed that 8% of respondents had submitted practice in connection with Roberts reporting and 6% 'to share our practice with the sector'.

On issues of purpose and range the review highlighted:

- the primary purpose of the Database should be to share practice
- the diversity of types of practice is one of its strengths
- more practice specific to individual needs would be valued by users
- some practitioners favoured value judgements on what is 'good' practice (for example *Amazon*-style peer reviews).

UK GRAD's view is that it is right to retain the Database as one of 'Practice' rather than of 'Good Practice'. It is inadvisable to exclude practice that some practitioners do not find useful and/or innovative, because it could be new and/or relevant to others. In this context Janet reminded participants of the value of submitting established practice that had proved successful, not just institutions' latest initiatives. Many practices that have been submitted set a model for others. The Database is, in effect, Wiki-based: it will eventually find its own level of practice.

24 DTA awarding councils, DTG 3 www.bbsrc.ac.uk/funding/training/dtgdocs/dtg_tc_%20march_2006.pdf?IMAGE3.X=10&IMAGE3.Y=8

NERC FAQ 6 www.nerc.ac.uk/funding/available/postgrad/studentinfo/faqs/faqphd.asp

PPARC www.pparc.ac.uk/Pg/Stu/Studentships.asp#ConfUKField

AHRC Guide for Award Holders (para 57) www.ahrc.ac.uk/holders/postgrad/postgraduate_doctoral_scheme.asp

ESRC Postgraduate Funding Guide:

www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/Support/postgraduate_students/Studentship_Handbook/index.aspx?ComponentId=370&SourcePageId=1358

The sector's opinion was divided on its value as a Roberts reporting tool. On one hand it discouraged HEIs from sharing challenges and the facility to keep entries private (viewable by RCUK only) was not consistent with the purpose of sharing practice. However, the link with Roberts also encouraged use of the Database and added value to reporting.

On balance, the advantages outweighed the disadvantages. The Database will retain its dual purpose of sharing practice and facilitating Roberts reporting. However, the facility to keep entries 'private' is now time-limited. Institutions are still able to post practice in draft form, but have a period of six months in which to refine the draft and release for public viewing.

Some enhancements to the Database can be addressed quickly, whereas others require further exploration.

In the short-term UK has changed the interface in response to user needs. Practitioners now submit shorter summaries for the front page, focussing on what is distinctive about the practice. This makes browsing for relevant practice easier. UK GRAD has made the input template more user-friendly, with additional guidance. It has also introduced the ability for those posting practice to provide a URL link to their individual practices (www.grad.ac.uk/practice/xxx). The search mechanism is being upgraded in stages: the form that a future key word search facility will take is being investigated. This is not just a technical issue: further ways also need to be found to address some problems of ensuring data quality (e.g. miscategorising, use of non-standard descriptive terms).

For the longer-term, UK GRAD is committed to find ways to publicise the Database in order to get people using it in still greater numbers and more regularly. Further work is planned in the following areas:

- profiling: issues of 'marketing', highlighting new postings, featuring themes/practices, e.g. a 'top ten' listing of most viewed practices
- structuring: how far is it useful to 'group' practice by type or audience?
- interactivity: exploring support and scope for peer review, discussion and feedback, including the scope to track how practice has developed over time
- interface: upgrading this to enhance posting and searching.

On the issue of the scope for expanding and sectionalising the Database, the forum had already produced some recommendations for further consideration, in the areas of evaluation, enterprise and knowledge transfer.

The Database was developing in the right direction towards its ambitious mission:

'To provide a tool where:

- staff involved in researcher support add and update practice on a regular basis as an ongoing commitment to sharing practice with the sector
- users regularly search the Database of Practice as a first and continuing steps in developing their own practice
- a virtuous circle is created through practice being posted, used and adapted by others and re-posted.'

In her closing remarks, Janet pointed out that the most viewed practice on the Database was currently that submitted by Imperial College, which had won the THES Award for Outstanding Support for Early Career Researchers. She had been 'astonished by the number and quality of entries' for the Award. Janet recommended that when participants were back at their desks, rather than spend an hour clearing in-boxes, the time could be better spent in 'positive procrastination' by browsing the Database.

Day 2 Workshops: Showcasing and sharing institutional practice

Workshop topics were selected from distinctive and innovative practice posted on the UK GRAD Database of Practice, institutional Roberts reports and the shortlist from the THES Award for Outstanding Support for Early Career Researchers. Each workshop was asked to summarise key success criteria, tips or learning points that could help others developing similar provision.

Workshop 1: Providing funding for training activities developed by postgraduate researchers for researchers

Nuala McCabe, Senior Postgraduate Officer, Queen's University Belfast
www.grad.ac.uk/practice/453

Queen's University Belfast provides funding for 'Researcher-Led Initiatives', allocated from Roberts' money, for training initiatives developed and delivered by postgraduate researchers. This can involve organising a conference, research seminar or some other appropriate training activity and the content of the training event must relate to one or more of the skills areas set out in the Joint Skills Statement. These initiatives encourage researchers to show initiative and work independently in developing training that will not only enhance their own skill-set, but also benefit fellow researchers. To date these initiatives have proved to be extremely effective in encouraging researchers to identify skills requirements and develop relevant training activities. Postgraduate researchers organising and attending these events are able to receive training credit, which is also a motivating factor.

Following a presentation which included a description of one initiative 'New Work in Forensic Science', a researcher-led mini-conference, participants compared their institutional experiences, drawing on related initiatives at, for example, LSE, and the universities of Nottingham, York and Newcastle. They discussed the importance of:

- well-specified guidelines (taking care not to over-formalise as this can deter applicants)
- evaluation and feedback: at Nottingham consultants have been used to evaluate projects
- finding ways to attract different departments. At some (but not all) universities, applications from humanities researchers exceed those from scientists. Virtual and e-learning development may be a way of attracting more science researchers to apply.

Key success criteria in getting these initiatives 'off the ground' included:

- clear focus, achieved by good administration, to publicise, assess and control these researcher-led activities
- identifying a successful project early on to 'organically publicise' the initiative. This may be an existing project that is not widely known.

Institutions that have already made a start might consider:

- organising bid proposal workshops to encourage researchers to generate bids
- rolling assessment of bid proposals, rather than a single, or series of deadlines
- inter-institutional collaboration via their Hub to increase regional networking.

Workshop 2: Blue Skies Business Plan Competition

Dominic Houlihan, Vice-Principal, University of Aberdeen
www.grad.ac.uk/practice/452

- How to make your doctoral researchers into business people, professors and/or company directors?
- Getting the commercial/business agenda onto doctoral researchers' to do list
- Who are the role models within and out with the university?
- What knowledge, skills and mindsets are required for commercial exploitation of research?

Faced with the challenge of enhancing generic skills of doctoral researchers, areas that seemed to be particularly difficult were routes to employment in business and/or the commercial exploitation of blue skies research. Over a period of years Aberdeen has been successful in changing the culture of the academic staff to commercialisation by obviously valuing it, incentivising where possible and in providing seed funding for commercial ideas. The latter approach has proved to be the most successful and in essence consists of a committee that judges a ten minute 'pitch' worthy of funding or not. The amounts awarded can be up to £50k and we see around 40 'pitches' per year. The latest success story in the committee's progress has been the rise in applications from the arts and social science departments.

We have also worked on tracing success stories of PhD researchers and research staff who have taken the commercial route and we regularly show off our growing numbers of professors with companies.

Perhaps the most innovative idea has been 'The Blue Skies Thinking – Business Ideas Competition' in 2006. The cash prizes were large and over 50 applications were received, mostly from PhD researchers. The applications, their range and their quality indicated that there is untapped talent in the PhD population. The applicants had to receive some training before the first stage of judging – hence more PhD researchers received generic skills training in business planning. A surprising range of offers was received from other government/private organisations to assist in training. We hope that this year's competition will bring in over 100 applications.

The learning points emphasised were:

- a business plan competition with real incentives can be a powerful way of motivating PhD researchers and research staff to think entrepreneurially
- Aberdeen's experience is that entries do not conflict with the research topic: the business ideas were 'nothing to do with the PhD project'
- making training a pre-requisite for entering the competition brought researchers into training sessions that they would not otherwise have attended, getting them thinking about financial and business planning
- using professors as role models can be very effective. The culture of the institution needs to be one where business and entrepreneurship are valued, recognised and rewarded.

The key points of the discussion that followed were:

- encouraging culture is the key – success stories come hard, use supervisors as role models
- follow-up, how to address this? Decision whether to use a hands on/off approach
- the interesting trend picked up from Aberdeen example: PhD researchers – ideas unrelated to research topic; research staff – ideas related
- tap into local entrepreneurship networks, where these exist.

Workshop 3: 'Speed PhD' – An Innovative approach to an Introductory Workshop for new PhD Researchers

Tony Bromley, Senior Training and Development Officer, University of Leeds and Co-ordinator,
UK GRAD Yorkshire and North East Hub
www.grad.ac.uk/practice/76

This workshop described the practice of the 'Speed PhD' as a vehicle for general discussion and exchange of ideas on research student induction. 'Speed PhD' is a two-day interactive induction workshop for PhD researchers currently running at the Universities of Manchester and Leeds. It provides a framework to combine presentations relating to the research degree with a group research exercise and is undertaken within six weeks of arrival. Participants gain practical experience of doing research within the context of the stages of the PhD process. They also produce a 'Speed PhD' thesis in two days, attend a conference, write a journal paper and even have a viva!

The format is also used as a vehicle to highlight and demonstrate the importance of the associated training and development needs analysis. Sessions in the 'Speed PhD' are targeted at aspects of the T/DNA such that an environment for self-assessment is encouraged, and completion of the course is the starting point for introducing the online development tools. 'Speed PhD' also helps to build community with staff, trainers and most importantly researchers being able to meet each other in a fun, interactive setting!

Workshop participants:

- viewed the 'Speed PhD' as a clever way of replicating the PhD process
- considered a 'Speed PhD' a practical method of getting PhD researchers to 'own' their project
- emphasised that experiential learning done as an induction activity is high risk and has to be done well to ensure a positive experience and so researchers become engaged in their own development
- saw that institution-specific information could be delivered separately allowing the model to be adapted to mixed subject groups or possibly even run regionally
- recognised that the 'Speed PhD' is resource intensive
- felt that using peers (later-stage PhD researchers) to deliver courses along with a lead tutor could be both cost-effective and useful for all
- saw this programme as something that academic staff could also engage with.

Workshop 4: Charity Stretch: fund raising and training rolled into one

Karen Clegg, Director, Graduate Training Unit, University of York
www.grad.ac.uk/practice/339

How can we use Roberts funding to develop and enhance the skills of our researchers who each have such different needs, previous experiences and come from a variety of cultural backgrounds? That is the question that continues to focus our minds most. This session described one of the ways that the Graduate Training Unit at the University of York has tried to respond to this challenge. 'Charity Stretch' involves researchers planning and staging an event to raise money for a charity of their choice. The aim is to raise the maximum amount of money possible for a registered charity by means of a single fundraising event.

The rationale behind Charity Stretch is that people learn better through experience: we learn by doing. Classic team development 'bridge-building' activities are fun and useful for some but others are left cold by what is, in effect, an artificial or simulated experience. By contrast 'Charity Stretch' is driven entirely by the participants, they set the goals, they determine the shape, style and magnitude of the event and collectively and individually they reflect on what they have learnt. Support is on hand but ultimately it is the collective responsibility of the individuals within the group to ensure that the event is a success. Since all the activities are cross-referenced against the Joint Skills Statement this is an opportunity for students to fulfil their training requirements while doing something they perceive as real and worthwhile.

Students are required to attend an introductory session, a briefing by the University Communications Office and create a business plan and marketing strategy. Event management guidance is also provided. As anyone who has organised an event will know there are a myriad of things to arrange and individuals must work together to do a risk assessment and ensure that all aspects of the event have been thought through.

Workshop participants identified advantages of this activity over more traditional skills training as:

- researchers defining their own goals, the scope and range of their activities, and developing skills as part of a process that is 'for real, in real time'
- supporting employability by giving researchers real examples of skill areas such as team work and communication to evidence on CVs and at interviews
- increasing the university's interactions and contacts with the wider community and voluntary sector.

Tip: target a big group of researchers who are ready to commit and to take responsibility.

Workshop 5: Accredited training for postgraduate research supervisors

Colin Chandler, Director of Postgraduate Programmes, HCES, University of Northumbria
www.grad.ac.uk/practice/293

How do we support our colleagues in the range of roles required for PGR supervision? Supervision of individual researchers involves staff in multiple and changing roles over an extended period of time (guide, counsellor, advocate, and assessor, to name a few). This workshop explored ways in which different institutions provide supervisor training and support, the issues we face with a diverse researcher group (i.e. part time/full time, home/overseas, university based/employer based and overseas fieldwork), and in engaging staff in training.

The workshop introduced Northumbria's response to these issues: its supervisor training programme. Staff are required to be accredited as supervisors with the Graduate School and maintain this accreditation through attendance at an update session every three years. The programme draws upon contemporary sources to explore and illustrate the multiple roles and responsibilities of research supervisors. Research-based publications on doctorateness, the operations of vivas, university documents, reports and institutional statistics are all used to illustrate both good and unsatisfactory practice.

Workshop participants agreed on the importance of:

- embedding this form of training into 'New Lecturer' Academic Practice programmes, which should also be open to research staff in order to enhance their academic CVs
- senior managers' participation: 'leading by example'. This may help to address the problem of 'prima donna' supervisor attitudes towards training. Participants strongly supported the policy of regular update sessions every three years
- drawing in external/industrial supervisors for training: this has been very positive in some institutions, encouraging more university staff to engage
- an approach to training that reflects supervisors' interests. The discursive approach at Northumbria has been valuable. An approximate 50:50 split of presentation and discussion time has worked well.

Workshop 6: How to be an effective researcher: academic practice, research and career skills

Jon Turner, Director, Postgraduate Transferable Skills Unit, University of Edinburgh and Co-ordinator, UK GRAD Scotland and Northern Ireland Hub

www.grad.ac.uk/practice/486

Planning and managing research projects, teaching, applying for funding, presenting and publishing research results all help researchers to develop a range of high level transferable and career skills. Appropriate training and support focussed on these skills helps build confidence and capability in academic practice and emphasises the importance of these skills for all PhD graduate careers – not least in academia.

This workshop described several new initiatives in researcher skills training and support at the University of Edinburgh that have focussed on the opportunity for positive feedback between academic practice and transferable or career skills.

For PhD researchers this includes:

- Working with discipline-based Graduate Schools to develop a range of workshops that map directly onto major milestones within the PhD (e.g. Academic Paper Production, PhD Thesis Workshop, Poster Production and Presentation).
- Interactive induction sessions in Graduate Schools that bring together first, second and third year researchers and supervisors to identify the training needs of researchers, share advice and experience.
- 'How to be an Effective Researcher', a two-day developmental style training course that focuses on some of the key transferable skills most important to researchers 6-18 months into their PhD.

Developments for research staff include workshops that focus on specific key areas like project management and grant applications as well as 'Career Progression in Academia' seminars and a new induction event ('Introduction to Professional Development and Career Planning') that encourages researchers to begin career planning at an early stage.

Issues that emerged during discussion included:

- Embedding skills training, personal and professional development, e.g. by linking workshops to PhD milestones and through approaches like codes of practice for the management of research staff, is a key success factor.
- Involving academics in this agenda is important and seems to be growing. To successfully involve academics in designing or running workshops it is important that they can see clear benefits to justify their involvement. Some institutions have arranged staff development events to facilitate this. For example linked to the 'How to be an Effective Researcher' course at Glasgow Caledonian University.

A significant culture change has taken place in the last few years. The environment is much more receptive to the skills agenda and the time is right to look for new ways to reach all researchers and specific cohorts (e.g. part-time and international postgraduate researchers).

Workshop 7: Research skills development

Elaine Walsh, Senior Lecturer, Graduate Schools, Imperial College London and **Esat Alpay**, Senior Lecturer in Transferable Skills, Imperial College London

www.grad.ac.uk/practice/271

The three-day residential Research Skills Development (RSD) course has been specifically designed for first year PhD researchers, in which transferable skills relating to research and personal effectiveness are addressed. Integral to the success of the course is the in situ training of research staff and academics as tutors, who gain a wide range of skills relating to communication, teamwork, small group teaching and personal effectiveness. Trained research staff tutors then have the opportunity to use their RSD teaching as part of a more formal teaching qualification. The course is run for mixed groups of researchers from across the college, and effort is given on experiencing cross-subject communication and collaboration. The course often attracts postgraduate researchers from the Royal College of Art.

Development of the college's transferable skills programme is strongly research-led. As this provision is a big investment, there has been careful evaluation to ascertain its impact. Evaluation of the residential course provides quantitative feedback on specific areas of benefit. It is based on pre and post course questionnaires and a follow up study five weeks after the course. Measuring the differences pre and post course show that the courses have an impact in the four skill areas defined and also increase positive attitudes towards skills training. Evaluation has also highlighted some gender differences and those between home and international researchers, some of which are subject to further research.

Tips:

- Involve research staff as trainers as much as possible, with the approval of the appropriate principal investigators.
- Explore the use of mature/experienced PhD researchers as tutors, including part-time researchers.
- Feed back all evaluation results to researchers and academics as thoroughly as possible.

Workshop 8: Knowledge transfer in the arts and humanities

Joan Beal, University of Sheffield
www.grad.ac.uk/practice/94

This workshop covered the experience of teaching a research training module on knowledge transfer (KT) to final year PhD researchers in arts and humanities disciplines. Knowledge transfer, previously referred to as 'third arm/leg/strand/ mission', has increasingly become central to the missions of universities. It is also recognised by all the research councils, including the AHRC, as an important element in research proposals. PhD researchers, especially in arts and humanities, have hitherto not been made explicitly aware of this aspect of the university's mission, or of the ways in which they might 'transfer' the knowledge presented in their theses.

Taking the broad definition of knowledge transfer agreed upon by the Russell Group universities: 'activities (that) are concerned with the generation, use, application and exploitation of knowledge and other university capabilities outside academic environments', the Sheffield module begins with a presentation of examples of knowledge transfer activities in Arts and Humanities departments. Discussion is then focussed on activities that the students are already engaged in, which might constitute 'knowledge transfer'. Practitioners are brought in to present case studies of a range of activities including commercial publishing and consultancy. The researchers complete a personal knowledge transfer plan at the end of the module.

The workshop presented several advantages of teaching knowledge transfer to PhD researchers in the arts and humanities. Such provision helps to:

- include PhD researchers in the academic community and its mission
- prepare researchers for academic careers, as KT is part of research grant applications, and showing knowledge of KT issues can help candidates stand out in job applications
- raise awareness of non-academic careers. Hearing these promoted by academic speakers can reinforce the work of the careers service very powerfully
- identify new outlets for disseminating their research, and sometimes generate income as well
- encourage researchers to 'get out more'. Research in the arts and humanities can still be an isolating experience
- increase researchers' motivation at low points in their PhD through the experience of communicating their research.

Participants identified:

- the need for joined-up thinking between the skills and KT agendas
- practical ways they could progress joined-up provision in their institutions
- examples of approaches such as 'Science Communication in Action' at the University of Edinburgh that achieve KT aims through experiential learning and the workshop 'How to do good research and keep it' at the University of Leeds, which introduces key KT concepts in year one of the PhD.

Tips:

- Target second year researchers, while offering it also to third years. Attending a module in year two allows time for researchers to put learning into practice.
- Use as many role models from among alumni and colleagues as you can to show that research and consultancy activities can complement each other.

Workshop 9: Online resources for research staff within and beyond the university

Hilary Jones, Skills Development Co-ordinator, University of York
www.grad.ac.uk/practice/421

In using online resources to support our researchers we have a fabulous opportunity to improve our offerings without starting from scratch – simply by linking to one another's websites. This workshop provided an opportunity to start such a process.

The session began with a short tour of the online resources Hilary has developed for researchers in the Department of Biology, University of York. These resources include a research staff website, a Family-Friendly page and an open-to-edit CareersWiki website.

After the tour, workshop members discussed the initiatives currently taking place in their own institutions, and put together an action plan/set of ideas enabling them to better support their researchers.

Participants identified some key advantages of making online resources more widely available, which included enabling researchers:

- to access training where line manager attitudes (releasing other staff for training but not those on short term contracts) remain a barrier
- to access training materials where they have missed the face-to-face session.

Major challenges are:

- identifying who the researchers are, their start date and the email address that they use
- the bureaucracy relating to setting up a site.

For some institutions, a major challenge is whether/how to integrate provision where there is a strong culture of postgraduate researchers and research staff wishing to be considered as separate groups.

Tip: Do your research and find out what researchers want before designing your provision. Your institution's CROS results provide a good starting point.

Workshop 10: Learning by doing

John Gibbins, Director, Postgraduate Skills Development, University of Newcastle
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How can we best develop researcher skills? What novel learning experiences can we deploy in researcher development? How can we develop higher level skills with the more advanced researchers on the third and fourth years of their degree? How can Roberts providers work with and learn from employers on how best to improve researcher skills?

One answer is to provide researchers with opportunities to learn skills while doing and managing a research project with an actual employer. Based loosely upon the pedagogies of apprenticeship and sandwich vocational learning, the Learning by Doing scheme at Newcastle University allows researchers to develop skills while engaged in paid employment with a local or regional small or medium size research employer.

This presentation explored the pedagogy behind this scheme, explaining how the Small Enterprises Research Unit (SERU) recruits and trains employers and researchers, twins them via an online database, and manages and monitors quality service provisions. Some examples of feedback from participants completed the presentation element of the session, which then opened up into a discussion of how researchers can develop skills while working with employers and while doing a variety of activities not focused primarily upon their thesis.

Tips:

- Build on what you've got! Find out who in your institution links to SMEs in your region (the equivalent of Newcastle's SERU). Build upon their databases, communication systems, etc.
- Get the match between the employer's needs and the researcher's needs right early on to ensure the project gets completed on time and benefits all stakeholders.
- Support, train and monitor the researcher throughout.
- Focus on quality control and evaluation. Make sure to get deep feedback from researcher, employer and supervisor about what went well, what went badly, and what changes could be made to improve future projects.

Plenary feedback and way forward

Janet Metcalfe, Director, UK GRAD Programme and **Iain Cameron**, Head, Research Careers and Diversity Unit, RCUK

Janet first drew together the threads from the forum's ten workshops on showcasing and sharing institutional practice. Workshop leaders had summarised the key success factors that would help develop practice in the areas covered by their sessions.

These key success factors had grouped into three themes:

- Developing enterprise skills (workshops 2, 8 and 10)
- Embedding development within researcher skills programmes and research staff training (workshops 3, 5, 6 and 7).
- Empowerment (workshops 1, 4 and 9).

Developing enterprise skills

There was a strong message across the workshops about the importance of developing a culture within institutions where enterprise is valued, so that researchers feel comfortable engaging in that. Institutions need to think how to develop hooks to motivate researchers – an interest in enterprise will not happen spontaneously. There are clear advantages in linking enterprise skills development to other skills areas e.g. project planning, grant applications, which many researchers perceive as more immediately relevant.

Embedding development within researcher skills programmes and research staff training

Participants had again stressed the importance of linking skills to the research environment – a theme introduced earlier in the event. Janet commented that a convergence of research skills and transferable skills is becoming the way forward for the skills agenda. The sector's thinking has moved a long way from the original concept of a block of two weeks additional training for generic skills. The 'Speed PhD' model at Manchester and Leeds is an example of getting researchers to appreciate the importance of skills development within the PhD process as a whole.

Workshops had also highlighted the quality imperative, as noted at last year's Policy Forum: 'if you are going to do it, do it well'. First impressions count hugely, e.g. induction must be excellent.

Other themes included:

- scalability – how do you provide for everyone, across the institution?
- the importance of senior management buy-in, leading by example
- the benefits of involving academic staff and research staff as mentors and tutors – embedding is truly happening when a whole department is involved in developing skills.

Empowerment

Janet picked out several key success factors identified by the groups:

- the importance of face-to-face contact with supervisors to persuade them to get involved
- getting researchers to generate their own ideas, e.g. by providing funding for them to bid for and deliver their project proposals for skills development. Get researchers interested with bite-sized workable ways to get them started
- offer real not simulated experiences – 'Charity Stretch' at York is an example where teams of students devise, plan and deliver a fundraising event
- the importance of using role models – alumni and others who have done PhDs and have engaged in knowledge transfer or a range of careers.

The way forward

Janet returned to the forum themes outlined in her introduction and drew together recommendations that had emerged during the event around those areas: sharing practice, the diversity challenge, working with employers and 'evidencing impact' in all its forms (individual impact, institutional impact, national impact).

Sharing practice

The forum had given everyone an opportunity to see the richness of practice across the sector. Excellent practices have emerged as a result of huge effort by practitioners. There is a lot of commonality between what the QAA has found in Special Review and has reported, the practices posted on the Database of Practice and what we have heard about at the forum. How do we capitalise on that? How do we share practice more effectively? There is a need for the Rugby Team to look at how the Database of Practice should be developed and consider the recommendations put forward for broadening its reach. One possible route is to dedicate separate sections to themes such as enterprise, evaluation and knowledge transfer.

The Diversity Challenge

The forum had shown that there is still a long way to go on this agenda. But, encouragingly, work groups had come up with some ideas for ways forward. For example, the suggestion to use the professional doctorate cohort for some of the impact studies and evaluation that are needed could help us engage more closely with this group. Another group that we need to know more about are international researchers. We know little about the impact of the development of international students in the UK and how that affects the attractiveness of UK degrees for international students. The recommendation to conduct an international review of literature on impact of research degrees will also provide relevant information.

Unfortunately, the QAA Special Review had confirmed that many non-RC funded students still lack, or fail to take up, opportunities that RC-funded students are benefiting from. Janet commented that it was clear that institutions represented at the forum supported the fundamental principle that we should be treating all researchers equally.

The forum had also highlighted that the progress made in provision and take-up of personal and career development for research staff was still slower, across the sector as a whole, than for research students. Janet was confident, however, that UKHERD activities would drive this agenda forward more positively during the coming year.

Working with employers

The work groups had made some very constructive recommendations in this area. Particularly:

The Rugby Team and RCUK should work more closely with employer organisations and professional bodies at national level.

- Institutions and the Rugby Team should make more of their 'ready made' employer contacts – for example, professional doctorate employers and PhD sponsors. Institutions need to make better internal links and, in particular, make more creative use of alumni databases. The example of the University of Newcastle's 'Learning by Doing' programme, where co-ordinators talk to employers about how their PhD programmes are meeting their needs, shows how there are opportunities to engage with employers on even quite a modest scale within institutions.
- The RT06 project 'Gathering Employers' and Employees' views' needs to investigate more closely the nature of the 'gap' between employer needs and researcher skills. Is it really a skills gap or rather, a communication gap? Is the key problem that PhD researchers are not good at articulating their skills? We need to find out more so that universities know where to focus their researcher development programmes.

Evidencing impact

Janet first stressed the importance of evidencing impact to internal audiences as well as externally to government.

The forum had heard about a number of planned or actual tracking/cohort studies. A myriad of initiatives is underway in the UK. One of the Rugby Team's priorities is to try to pull these various threads together so that what we do has some coherence and meets the needs of the sector. Janet felt that the sector has not really articulated yet what it wants in terms of tracking information. Through the Rugby Team the sector is able to make its voice heard. For example, what data you want the HESA tracking survey to provide? What would you want to see from the proposed Research Council and Wellcome Trust cohort studies?

Several presenters and participants had agreed on the value of using case studies. This had led to the recommendation that information should be collected that can be used both for evaluation purposes at national (and institutional) level to evidence impact, but also at individual level to help people make career decisions. There is a role for the Rugby Team in devising a recommended skeleton template for multi-function case studies, which all agencies and institutions could use.

Demonstrating impact

The theme of influencing and promoting what we are doing had only come to the fore this year. It is now a critical one: the government agenda is heavily focused on measuring impact and so it is vital to keep researcher development high on the national agenda. 'We need continually to put ourselves higher on the agenda than other issues and to constantly demonstrate need - within institutions as well as at national level.' Everyone can contribute at institutional and individual level. Several participants had commented on how feedback tools and surveys are also a marketing tool because they raise awareness. Janet urged participants to make the most of publicity from initiatives such as the THES Award for Outstanding Support for Early Career Researchers – within institutions as well as externally. A similar opportunity existed to promote the positive feedback from Special Review within HEIs.

It was pointed out that the 2008 RAE presented an opportunity to promote the skills development agenda more proactively to the academic community. The RAE requires institutions to submit evidence of the quality of the research environment and how they support their researchers. Demonstrating progress on the Roberts agenda in the various subject areas could be a useful input for the RAE and a powerful way to engage academics.

Economic impact and beyond

The forum had looked beyond questions of economic impact to external and internal cultural impact, societal, regional and global impact. On economic impact, KTP programmes have been suggested as a starting point for further work on the difficult issue of quantitative indicators.

Iain Cameron then made some closing remarks on behalf of RCUK. He stressed how the researcher skills agenda was the most important priority in his remit. Revisiting the 'sector targets on a postcard' that he had put forward in his earlier presentation:

- embed transferable skills in all doctoral programmes
- make significant progress on the Roberts postdoctoral career agenda
- demonstrate improved employability of doctoral graduates compared to pre-Roberts.

Iain said that they all remained most apposite for 2007, and that the only alteration he would make would be to change the word 'employability' in the final target to 'impact'.

He was extremely encouraged that Special Review had been so positive, thereby providing external validation of the evidence that RCUK has been providing to government of sector impact. Iain then described to participants how RCUK gradually gathered and used its evidence base. It was not a case of channelling large amounts of information onwards to the Treasury. Rather, reporting and other research enabled RCUK to develop increasing confidence that the sector was achieving outcomes that benefited the sector and, generally, in the strength of the foundations for the CSR and future bids.

On the outcome of the CSR, Iain shared his view that it was highly unlikely that the budget for the Roberts agenda would increase: it was more likely to remain stable. The Rugby Team's potential work plan would therefore need to be prioritised, as RCUK would not be able to fund all projects.

Finally, Iain reiterated what a positive event the forum had been. He commented on the valuable role of the Rugby Team – how it had generated an agenda, which had fed directly into the meeting. Participants in turn had offered clear recommendations for the way ahead. Thanks to the commitment of the sector there was 'a real momentum going'.

Next steps

Janet outlined the sequence of events. First, a report of the policy forum would be produced and circulated to all participants. This would include sets of recommendations to national organisations, the Rugby Team and institutions. (*Recommendations are given in full at appendix 1 and listed in the Executive Summary on page 2*).

The Rugby Team had been given a mandate to continue. It clearly still had a role to do in holding the skills agenda together and moving it forward. The Team needed to confirm its mission and its membership. It recognised a need to refresh the latter. Several offers had been received during the forum and more were most welcome. Janet pointed out that there were opportunities to get involved with the work of the Rugby Team at all different levels, through its virtual correspondence group, or via the UK GRAD bulletin board for example. She urged everyone to take the opportunity to share their views with RT07.

Next, the Rugby Team needed to review its work plan. It would prioritise the remaining recommendations from 2005, 2006 and this forum, agree scope for projects and the way forward. Then it would seek funding for projects – RCUK would be approached first, then other potential funders for projects as appropriate.

Janet then invited audience response. There was strong support for the Rugby Team, but a feeling that the work of the Team would stall unless some 'serious money' could be found for its projects. It was vital to move forward 'in the next three to four months' on impact studies. If RCUK did not have additional funding that can be used for this purpose, is the option of last resort to consider top-slicing a small percentage from HEI Roberts allocations? It was pointed out that a reduction in Roberts funding would hit organisations with smaller amounts disproportionately hard. In that eventuality, was there perhaps an argument for top slicing only from larger institutional budgets?

Janet responded that first efforts must be aimed at attracting additional funding. The role of the Rugby Team would include investigating a range of appropriate funding sources. RCUK might not be the appropriate first 'port of call' for all project funding. For example, extending the HESA longitudinal study to cover all research students, not just those with Research Council awards was more relevant to the Funding Councils than the Research Councils.

Chris Park, Chair of the Rugby Team, then commented on the different rates of progress on the postgraduate researcher and research staff agendas. He believed that the Rugby Team 'must work harder to integrate the two sets of interests'. He had been forced to conclude that the one major reason why development for PhD researchers is more embedded than it is for research staff is the QAA Code of Practice – i.e. audit and enforcement. There was nothing comparable covering research staff. It is vital to find ways of raising the profile of research staff skills development, perhaps through the revised Concordat.

Janet drew proceedings to a close by thanking participants for their energy and contributions to the policy forum. It is clear that significant progress has been made in implementing the Roberts agenda. There is compelling evidence from institutional Roberts reports, the quality of the entries in the Database of Practice and in the workshop sessions, and, most reassuringly, in the outcomes of the QAA Special Review.

However, everyone recognises how much more is still to be done, particularly in supporting non-research council funded researchers and research staff in general. There are still significant numbers of hearts and minds to be won across the academic community. Perhaps the most important task still to do is guaranteeing future funding by being able to demonstrate that skills development is having an impact on the contribution of researchers. The forum has once again given a challenging remit to the Rugby Team to report back on in 2008.

Appendix 1

Table 1: Recommendations

Funding	
Recommendation to RCUK and other appropriate funders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To make available urgently resources to enable the Rugby Team to deliver on critical projects.
Recommendations to the Rugby Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To prioritise funding for projects that seek to gather baseline data against which to measure impact. To seek funding, firstly from RCUK and thereafter from a range of relevant sources.
Recommendation to institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To consider the value of top-slicing a small percentage of the Roberts money to evaluate the impact of the skills development agenda at sector level.
Evaluating and demonstrating impact	
Recommendation to RCUK, institutions and the Rugby Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include within their evaluation projects the diversity of types of doctoral degree, including professional doctorates, and of doctoral researchers, such as those working part-time, funded by employers and international researchers.
Recommendations to the Rugby Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To prioritise its efforts to influence the development of various national evaluation initiatives to promote coherence and meeting the needs of the sector. To devise a recommended skeleton template for researcher career case study development, which all agencies and institutions could use for both qualitative evaluation and in developing tools for supporting individual researchers' career development. To focus on academic staff (supervisors and principal investigators) in the initial stage of the RTO6 survey to gather institutional views on the cultural impact of the skills agenda within HEIs.
Recommendations to institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Articulate their views through the Rugby Team to determine the data that the sector wishes tracking and national cohort studies to provide To use feedback from surveys and other sources as marketing tools to raise awareness of the Roberts agenda internally, and make particular efforts to gain senior management buy-in.
Recommendations to other national stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> That the Higher Education Academy consider making the BOS licence¹ to use PRES² available free of charge to institutions to encourage take-up. That the CROS survey incorporates additional questions to enable further collection of (retrospective) baseline data of research staff's views of their research degree programme.

¹ www.survey.bris.ac.uk/ (BOS have subsequently confirmed the offer of a licence at half price for single use.)

² www.grad.ac.uk/hea

Working with employers	
Recommendations to the Rugby Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To further investigate the nature of the 'gap' between employer needs and researcher skills in order to enable institutions to know where to focus their researcher development programmes. • To broaden its meta-analysis of the literature on employers' views of the value of postgraduate researchers to include international studies on the impact of PhD graduates. • To work more closely with employer organisations and professional bodies at national level, in order to help communicate the value of employing skilled researchers to more employers in relevant sectors. • To maximise potential from 'ready-made' employer contacts – for example, employers of researchers doing professional doctorates and sponsors of KTP and collaborative PhD programmes.
Recommendations to other stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That institutions should seek to strengthen internal links and, in particular, make more creative use of alumni databases. They could make better use of 'ready-made' employer contacts, for example by seeking case studies of PhD employees (both early and mid career professionals). • That RCUK should also work more closely with employer organisations and professional bodies at national level to promote the expansion of employment opportunities for researchers.
Research Staff	
Recommendation to the Research Councils and other funders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the point of application, require the prospective principal investigator to state the training programme to be provided for the research associate.
Recommendation to institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To influence this agenda from the 'bottom-up' by submitting training programmes in grant applications as examples of good practice.
Sharing and developing practice	
Recommendations to national stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For the Rugby Team to look at how the UK GRAD Database of Practice should be developed and consider the recommendations put forward for broadening its reach (including dedicating separate sections to themes such as enterprise, evaluation and knowledge transfer). • For UK GRAD to take forward the outcomes from the above • For the QAA to consider how the good practice examples, identified in the Special Review might be integrated with the Database of Practice.
Recommendations to institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To explore the potential for developing researcher-led initiatives and opportunities for experiential learning through 'real' activities including enterprise learning and involvement in academic activities. • To share practice by regular use of the Database of Practice, including posting good practice identified in the QAA Special Review institutional reports.

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