

## **Vitae response to the evaluation of the ‘How to be an Effective Researcher’ programme for postgraduate researchers.**

To assess the effectiveness, value for money and impact of the ‘How to be an Effective Researcher’ programme (also known as Effective Researcher) for institutions and participants, Vitae commissioned an independent evaluation of the programme, as part of our commitment to regular evaluation of researcher development activities. The independent review provides evidence that the programme has had long term impact for a large number of higher education institutions (HEIs) and participants and provides recommendations for future sustainable researcher development programmes.

Vitae’s ‘How to be an Effective Researcher’ programme is a comprehensive two-day non residential programme to support the development of new researchers in skills such as communication, planning, time management, problem solving, leadership and assertiveness. The programme was funded by Vitae and first piloted at the University of Edinburgh in 2005. Vitae commissioned Dr Sara Shinton, Dr Jon Turner and Janet Wilkinson to write the materials and it was developed into a format that it could be delivered through Vitae collaborative networks. This included the provision of organiser and facilitator manuals to run the programme, a kit of resources available through the Vitae regional Hubs, taster sessions to promote the programme and a ‘train the trainer’ model of delivery, which included access to a network of leading professionals who were able to deliver the programme on behalf of institutions. At the point of the evaluation the programme had been delivered at over 30 HEIs, reaching over 3000 postgraduate researchers. It has now been delivered at over 40 HEIs. In terms of quality, scale and scope, the programme has become a landmark in researcher development and was recognised as a finalist in the National Training Awards 2010.

Vitae commissioned MY Consultants to conduct an independent UK wide evaluation of the programme in January 2010.

The aims of the evaluation project were to:

1. identify and analyse the impact that the programme has had on UK HEIs, using impact measures in line with the Rugby Team Impact Framework<sup>1</sup> (RTIF)
2. identify and analyse the impact of the programme on a sample of researchers from a selection of institutions who had attended the training programme
3. gather case study examples to illustrate the impact of the programme
4. discover any additional benefits that institutions have identified as a result of running the programme
5. consider recommendations for next steps and future developments for the programme.

The full evaluation report is available at: [www.vitae.ac.uk/effectiveresearcher](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/effectiveresearcher)

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<sup>1</sup> [www.vitae.ac.uk/impact](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/impact)

The evaluation shows that the programme has had a long-term impact on participants and institutions, highlighting the following positive results from an institutional perspective:

- 95% positive impact in delivering against the Roberts agenda
- 82% developed their relationship with Vitae
- 73% enhanced the connection between training delivery and research at the HEI
- 64% supported the development of the institutions' internal facilitators

'It was good in providing a cost effective, off the shelf product which helped promote and support the development of a wider generic skills programme'.<sup>2</sup>

Dr Tracey Stead - Postgraduate Skills Training Coordinator, University of Bath

From a participant perspective the evaluation was equally positive with respondents reporting:

- 84% more confident as researchers
- 84% better understanding of their transferable skills
- 79% improved their research
- 73% enjoyed their PhD more
- 71% improved relationship with supervisor

'I feel more confident in communicating with others in my field, managing my supervisor and getting the support I need'.<sup>3</sup>

Rachel Bolton King – Postgraduate researcher, Nottingham Trent University

'There has been a noticeable difference to students' performance as a result of these courses'.<sup>4</sup>

PhD supervisor

Vitae welcomes the report, which contains a series of recommendations that will usefully inform the future development of the 'How to be an Effective Researcher' programme and similar Vitae training programmes to meet the changing needs of researchers and institutions.

## Recommendation

**1. The cessation of Roberts funding has implications for the future take up of externally delivered courses and this needs to be taken in account when considering further investment in the development of new programmes or updating existing ones. In particular, programmes should be designed so that HEIs have the option to deliver the programme without recourse to external facilitators to ensure sustainable cost effectiveness.**

The programme package that Vitae developed around the 'How to be an Effective Researcher' programme was designed so that HEIs could access a network of experienced external trainers to deliver the programme and develop internal facilitators so that it could be delivered without recourse to external trainers.

The report shows this model has proved successful, enabling both the proliferation of the programme across the sector and sustained delivery by the HEIs themselves. The report highlighted that over half the institutions using the programme had changed their facilitation

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<sup>2</sup> 'Evaluation of the "how to be an effective researcher"' programme for postgraduate researchers, MY Consultants, June 2010

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*

approach since first running the programme to achieve an internally sustainable model. Combined with the provision of taster sessions, this cascading model of dissemination of quality materials has been extremely successful and is being applied to other materials.

Vitae will continue to build on this successful model to ensure that more quality materials are made available for use by HEIs throughout the UK.

### **Recommendation**

**2. Vitae should explore how it supports HEIs during a transition to reduced funding to ensure that the benefits which have resulted from programmes such as the 'How to be an Effective Researcher' are not lost as a result of a changed funding environment.**

One of Vitae's key themes for 2010/11 is to ensure the sustainability of researcher development through collaborative development and delivery models and sharing practice. To this end, a Vitae Connections event on 10 November 2010 will share best practice around the collaborative use of resources to help institutions to deliver economies of scale and resource provision, tailored to local needs. Of particular interest will be applying this model and developing the 'How to be an Effective Researcher' programme for researcher development in Doctoral Training Centres, partnerships between institutions, and through multi-disciplinary approaches. Vitae will continue to develop training resources that have the flexibility to be adapted by HEIs across the UK so that they are easily and cost effectively integrated into institution programmes.

### **Recommendation**

**3. The impact and value for money of the programme would suggest that Vitae should continue to develop and disseminate researcher training programmes using a model similar to that utilised by the 'How to be an Effective Researcher' programme.**

Vitae recognises that in the current economic climate there is a need for the cost effective development and delivery of training resources. Vitae will continue to use cost effective processes to develop resources and make them available to HEIs in a similar way to the 'How to be an Effective Researcher' programme.

Building on the 'How to be an Effective Researcher' development and dissemination model, Vitae will continue to organise 'taster sessions' to enable more institutions to adopt these programmes.

'How to be an Effective Researcher' is only one of a suite of high-quality packaged programmes. Others include: the 'Broadening horizons: career management for researchers', which supports research staff career development; the 'Part-time researcher' programme; the 'Careers in academia' programme and a 'Career development programme for women', developed in partnership with UKRC, which have all followed this model of cost effectiveness in quality programme development and delivery.

Future developments include a 'Leadership in action' programme; 'Advancing in academia' programme; a collaborative project with nine HEIs to develop resources around the topic of intrapreneurship; and a collaborative project with the University of the West of England to develop training resources on social enterprise. Vitae welcomes any suggestions for specific themes we should address in the future. Please contact [jonathan.roberts@vitae.ac.uk](mailto:jonathan.roberts@vitae.ac.uk)

#### **Recommendation**

**4. Institutional training programmes have developed substantially at many institutions since the introduction of the 'How to be an Effective Researcher' programme. Work is therefore required to update the 'How to be an Effective Researcher' programme to reflect the increased level of training researchers will have undertaken prior to attendance.**

Vitae is committed to ensuring that the 'How to be Effective Researcher' programme continues to meet the needs of institutions and participants. In autumn 2010 we will begin updating the programme materials, as well as developing additional materials to complement the existing programme. These will be piloted in early 2011 and made available in the summer of 2011. The materials will also be reviewed to align with the new Researcher Development Framework to continue to support institutions in their provision.

#### **Recommendation**

**5. HEIs should consider how they engage supervisors more fully in the training and development process.**

Vitae recognises the importance and value of engaging supervisors in the professional and career development of their researchers. Vitae is currently working with the University of Nottingham to update and develop further the HEFCE-funded website, 'meeting the leadership and development needs of principal investigators'. This is expected to be launched in January 2011 and will provide a wide range of resources and advice that will encourage supervisor support for researcher development. Supervisors can also sign up to receive 'overview', a bulletin designed for supervisors and principal investigators. Vitae will gather examples of how other institutions have engaged supervisors in the training of postgraduate researchers and would welcome examples being entered onto our Database of Practice. [www.vitae.ac.uk/dop](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/dop)

Vitae would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who was involved in this evaluation project, particularly the institutions, trainers and participants who responded to the surveys. If you would like any further information about the 'How to be an Effective Researcher' programmes or other programmes offered by Vitae, or if you have other comments or suggestions that you would like to share with us, please email [jonathan.roberts@vitae.ac.uk](mailto:jonathan.roberts@vitae.ac.uk).

Further information about Vitae resources is also available at: [www.vitae.ac.uk/resources](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/resources)