

Measuring the impact of the Roberts agenda & funding in Scotland : Event report

27 July 2009, University of Dundee

The *Measuring the impact of the Roberts agenda & funding in Scotland* event was aimed at supporting those responsible for the implementation of the researcher development agenda in Scotland, and gave institutions an opportunity to share practice, identify effective approaches to evaluation, and explore potential for future collaboration within the evaluation process.

This report is relevant to all stakeholders in researcher development in and beyond Scotland. It contains:

- summaries of national and local developments in evaluating the impact of the researcher development agenda;
- insights into evaluation practice in a range of institutions;
- discussion of ways in which collaborative activity across HEIs can facilitate the vital work of understanding and capturing the impact of investment in researcher development;
- suggestions of possible areas for further exploration by HEIs and funders.

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A workshop organised by the University of Dundee and the University of Edinburgh, supported by Universities Scotland Research & Commercialisation Committee, Research Training Sub-Committee and Vitae Scotland and Northern Ireland Hub

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Workshop context

In response to funding and policy initiatives such as the *Roberts Review*,¹ the *QAA Code of Practice: Postgraduate research programmes*,² and *The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers*,³ Scottish institutions have made significant progress in enhancing the provision of personal and career development opportunities for researchers. Discussions at the January 2009 Vitae Roberts Policy Forum⁴ surrounding the continuation and evolution of the Roberts agenda highlighted the importance to institutions and funding bodies alike of building an evidence base for the impact of Roberts funding. This will be of particular importance in the lead up to the next Comprehensive Spending Review and in helping inform decisions on the future of Roberts payments and the need for ring-fencing of funding.

Collaboration between Scottish institutions has always played an important role in supporting the researcher development agenda. This culture of collaboration, and other distinctive elements of Scottish higher education such as research pooling, provide an incentive for Scottish institutions to work together on the key issues of impact and evaluation to ensure that there is strategic alignment within the agenda within and across Scotland.

Programme and process

Before the workshop, a *Basecamp*⁵ workspace was created to enable participants and organisers to share event-related information. 27 participants attended the workshop, representing the universities of Aberdeen, Abertay Dundee, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Heriot-Watt, Queen Margaret, St Andrews, Stirling, Strathclyde, and the West of Scotland (UWS), with further participation from other institutions via *Basecamp*.

Speakers from across the UK mapped policy frameworks, discussed current developments in evaluating the impact of the researcher development agenda and illustrated different approaches by means of institutional case studies. Participants then divided into two discussion groups to share their institution's current practice and considered the potential for future collaboration.

The workshop was organised and facilitated by **Dr Christine Milburn**, Head of Generic Skills Dundee, University of Dundee and **Dr Jon Turner**, Director of the Postgraduate Transferable Skills Unit, University of Edinburgh and Coordinator, Vitae Scotland and Northern Ireland Hub, with support from Dr Amy Cartwright, Hub Manager, Vitae Scotland and Northern Ireland Hub, and Dr Lisa Anderson, Generic Skills Training Coordinator, University of Dundee.

Speakers

Professor Alan Miller

Deputy Principal (Research and Knowledge Transfer),
Heriot-Watt University (Chair)

Professor Pete Downes

Principal,
University of Dundee

Mrs Pam Milne

Director, HR,
University of Dundee

Dr Janet Metcalfe

Head of Vitae, a Research Council funded organisation supporting the personal, professional and career management of UK researchers

Mrs Kate Reading

Research Careers and Diversity, RCUK

Dr Tony Bromley

'Rugby Team', Vitae Hub and University of Leeds

Dr Lucy Lee

Postdoctoral Research Training and Development Advisor,
University of Sheffield

Dr Ruth Neiland

GRADskills Director,
University of St Andrews

Welcome and introduction

In welcoming participants, **Mrs Pam Milne** highlighted the importance of sustaining the momentum of the researcher development agenda and stressed that this workshop was seen as an important opportunity to work together across Scotland to help achieve this. **Professor Pete Downes** then placed particular emphasis on how researchers, particularly PhD students and postdoctoral researchers, were 'the engine room' of a successful university. He detailed that a central concern in evaluating impact should be the self-awareness of researchers – better enabling individual researchers to evaluate their learning, skills and preferences, so that their potential could be realised in their career choices. This should be accompanied by culture change within universities so that career success was no longer narrowly defined in terms of academic careers. The audience and speakers further echoed Professor Downes' opinion that we must train and develop the careers of research staff so that they see all alternatives as positive choices.

¹ <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/rescareer/rcdu/rrimp.htm>

² <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/codeofpractice/section1/postgrad2004.pdf>

³ www.researchconcordat.ac.uk/

⁴ www.vitae.ac.uk/policy-practice/.../Vitae-Policy-Forum-2009.html

⁵ <http://basecampHQ.com/>

Evaluation and impact: setting the scene

Understanding the evaluation landscape – Dr Janet Metcalfe

In her presentation **Dr Janet Metcalfe** demonstrated how the major UK-wide and European initiatives relating to evaluation of researcher development were interlinked. This highlighted to participants how well-designed evaluation procedures would advance several evaluation requirements. Her presentation focused on the nature of the evaluation requirements, in particular:

- results of the sector consultation following the 2009 Roberts Policy Forum;
- institutions' annual Roberts reporting to RCUK;⁶
- external evaluation of the Roberts agenda (providing independent evidence for decisions on future funding);
- evaluation of Vitae itself;⁷
- the Rugby Team⁸ and the Rugby Team Impact Framework;⁹
- *Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers* (the 'Concordat') benchmarking and reporting;¹⁰
- *European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers* (the 'European Charter and Code') '*HR Strategy for Researchers*'.¹¹

Dr Metcalfe highlighted how the 2009 Policy Forum consultation¹² had revealed overwhelming support for the continuation of ring-fenced Roberts funding at institutional level in order to ensure continued focus on fully embedding the researcher development agenda, and how 95% of respondents agreed on the importance of providing skills development to *all* researchers, regardless of their source of funding. The consultation had also revealed support for an external evaluation of the Roberts agenda, confirming the potential importance of such an evaluation to the sustainability of the Roberts agenda. External evaluation would also be very valuable for informing future HEI strategy, sharing and enhancing HEI practice, and informing Vitae strategy and activities.

Dr Metcalfe described how the Rugby Team, a sector-led group supported by Vitae, had a remit to 'inform national and agency policies and practices relating to the evaluation of skills development of researchers' and 'provide sector input into shaping a programme to build an evidence base on the effectiveness of developing researchers' skills'. As such the Rugby Team Impact Framework (see page 4) was one of a number of evaluation projects that had a potentially key role in assembling evaluation and impact evidence.

Dr Metcalfe discussed the 2008 launch of the Concordat in terms of the six accompanying benchmarking projects, four of which were evaluation-related, and tied into the measuring impact agenda: how HEIs are implementing the Concordat principles; results of the Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS);¹³ use of fixed-term employment contracts; engagement of supervisors and principal investigators with researcher development.

Furthermore, implementation of the Concordat by HEIs including monitoring and evaluation processes related well to the 'HR Strategy for Researchers' proposals (a form of 'kitemark' for employers of researchers) developed by the European Commission. These proposals allow for equivalent national processes. It was less clear how UK HR policy on postgraduate researchers, through the QAA Code of Practice (Postgraduate Researchers), mapped onto the Commission's proposals. The UK was considering its response to the proposals. Dr Metcalfe ended by appealing to participants to be aware that the inherent challenges of evaluation must include the varied foci of initiatives of which researcher development may only be a part.

RCUK perspective: monitoring and sustainability – Mrs Kate Reading

Mrs Kate Reading attended the event as the RCUK representative, and confirmed that severe pressure on the science budget was likely after the next general election. RCUK wished to ensure that researcher developers saw that it was vital to engage senior, influential figures in their own HEIs as well as external bodies in considering: 'Do they see the difference researcher development makes?' Convincing senior figures with evidence of impact would not only increase the likelihood of HEI spend on researcher development, but where such senior figures sit on research council advisory panels, could also help sustain the Roberts agenda at national level.

Looking at the evaluation landscape previously outlined, Kate stressed how important it was for HEIs to focus their annual reports to RCUK on demonstrating impact and value for money more explicitly than hitherto. She confirmed that future forms of monitoring were under consideration. RCUK agreed that the Concordat was linked to, but broader than, the Roberts agenda, so combining the two reporting mechanisms might be inappropriate. Kate also confirmed that RCUK welcomed the idea of conducting an external evaluation and was examining the Rugby Team's proposal.

Kate explored for participants the current position with regards to Roberts funding, and likely scenarios from the RCUK

⁶ <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/rescareer/rcdu/training.htm>

⁷ www.vitae.ac.uk

⁸ <http://www.vitae.ac.uk/policy-practice/1418/Rugby-Team-activities.html>

⁹ [ibid](#)

¹⁰ www.researchconcordat.ac.uk/documents/Implementationplan.pdf

¹¹ <http://www.vitae.ac.uk/policy-practice/2667/European-Charter-and-Code.html>

¹² www.vitae.ac.uk/CMS/files/.../VRPF_consultation_results_Jul09.pdf

¹³ www.cros.ac.uk

Evaluation and impact: setting the scene

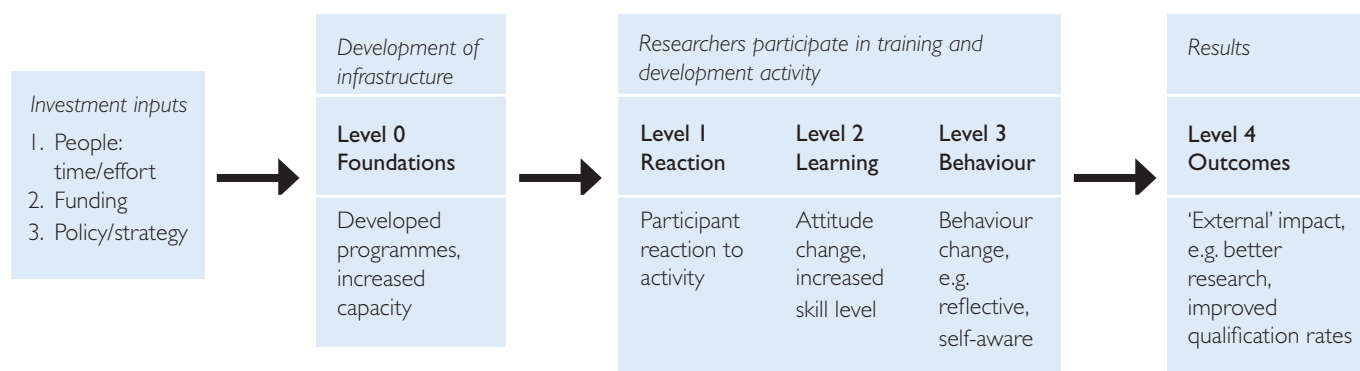
perspective. She stated that the current position is a commitment to ring-fenced funding to the end of CSR period 2010–11 (i.e. March 2011), and that the decision regarding the continuation of ring-fencing would take into account ‘how embedded are the letter and spirit of Roberts’ recommendations 4.2 and 5.3?’ and ‘is it similar for both postgraduate researchers and research staff?’. It was stressed that it was important to find out what universities themselves were contributing already, and that there are a number of possible funding scenarios ranging from no change to considering postgraduate researchers (PGR) and research staff (RS) in quite different ways. With the Roberts budget considered a small part of PGR annual cost, Kate questioned whether a funding formula based on all researchers was necessarily beneficial: ‘at what level of dilution does £ per head cease to make a difference?’

The 2011 watershed would not mark an end to the researcher development agenda but a point in its evolution. In summary, it was vital to: build on progress to date; maximise benefits and impact; influence and effect culture change; and demonstrate value for money.

The Rugby Team Impact Framework (RTIF) – Dr Tony Bromley

Dr Tony Bromley described how the RTIF aimed to foster, support and guide existing and new ways of effectively evaluating researcher training and development across the sector, thus encouraging further engagement in the evaluation agenda by HEIs and aiding the sector in building a more comprehensive evidence base. It provided both a method to guide an evaluation of activity at a range of levels (from individual workshop to whole programmes) and a language such that evaluations of differing methods can be understood in the context of a single framework. The logic diagram at the centre of the methodology behind the RTIF (Figure 1) characterises the progression from initial investment through to outcomes and defines five levels at which to measure impact.

Figure 1: A logic diagram representing the effect of investment in training and development activity from initial investment to final outcomes.



Source: *A Guide to the Evaluation of Training and Development Programmes for Postgraduate and Other New Researchers*, SRHE, 2009.

So, for example, when evaluating an activity such as a speed reading course:

- Level 0 Foundation evaluation would address the needs and expectations of participants;
- Level 1 Reaction might seek participant views at the end of the course and again one month later;
- Level 2 Learning could be assessed by periodic speed reading tests at points during the course;
- Level 3 Behaviour change could take into account a final speed reading test and post session feedback;
- Level 4 Outcomes might seek evidence of impact through supervisor feedback and focus groups.

When planning a training activity and its evaluation, the key questions were: What is the identified training need? Do the aims of the training activity correspond with that need? How will the activity contribute to the needs of stakeholders (e.g. overall university strategy)? What is the participant starting point (i.e. a baseline assessment)?

Dr Bromley accepted that evaluation had inherent challenges, such as the problem of attribution, the subjective nature of participant views, and the limitations of metrics, but advocated that these were not reasons not to attempt it, and that using a range of techniques together would help overcome such problems. To date over 20 HEIs had shared information about evaluation projects mapped against the RTIF. Participants were invited to join the JISC email network ‘Evaluating Impact’¹⁴ to keep up to date about evolving practice and to share their own.

¹⁴ www.jiscmail.ac.uk/evaluating-impact. To join, email a request to t.p.bromley@adm.leeds.ac.uk

Evidencing the impact of postdoctoral researcher training at the University of Sheffield – Dr Lucy Lee

Dr Lucy Lee described an evaluation project whose origins pre-date the Impact Framework, yet illustrates how different kinds of evaluation may be easily mapped onto the RTIF. This University of Sheffield project also exemplified the importance of a baseline to benchmark impact and of matching the level and degree of evaluation to stakeholders' expectations. Evaluation could be 'mind-boggling': keeping stakeholders in view was vital for focus.

In 2007 the School of Medicine implemented a baseline assessment consisting of a questionnaire across the school (addressed to over 300 research staff, mostly on fixed-term contracts) which asked about participants' career to date, skill perception/need analysis, academic achievements, opinion on the environment and career aspirations. Analysis of the results led to the development of a training programme – combining workshops with work-based opportunities – designed to apply learning in a new environment.

Mapped against the RTIF, the baseline enabled a programme evaluation featuring:

- Level 0: Baseline/induction questionnaire
- Levels 1–3: Reaction questionnaire (on day), learning and behaviour questionnaire (3–6 months linked to personal learning statements)
- Level 4: Measuring change. Biennial/exit questionnaires to map back onto the baseline questionnaire (improvement in perceived skills base?). Outcome indicators were also developed, such as monitoring publications, grant income, fellowships and other successful employment/leadership positions.

Programme-specific success indicators were also used. For example, to improve skills in communicating with the public, research staff could attend a workshop and participate in science week shadowing. The percentage going on to volunteer as science ambassadors was Level 4 evidence of impact. In another example the programme manager was able to map an increased grant funding success against attendance at grant writing workshops.

Survey on the impact of Roberts funding at the 1994 Group institutions¹⁵ – Dr Ruth Neiland

Dr Ruth Neiland detailed an important evaluation project from 2008, when the University of St Andrews was commissioned by the Research and Enterprise Policy Group of the 1994 Group to conduct a survey, that aimed to: ascertain how Roberts funding had been used and the impacts it had effected on support for PhD students and postdoc research staff across 1994 Group institutions; produce an internal report to share practice across the Group; use the results to inform the Group's policy decisions and lobbying position in the future.

In focusing on impact in member institutions, the survey identified (in RTIF terms) largely, but not exclusively, Level 0 Foundation stage impact. Responses illustrated the variety and reach of key institutional 'impact points'. Roberts funding had: widened the scope and extent of training programmes; motivated engagement of researchers with skills development; enhanced support for supervisors and PIs; assisted provision of researchers' induction; improved personal development planning (PDP) and record keeping practices; facilitated better inter- and intra-university collaborations; stimulated researcher-led innovations; extended networking and mentoring within research communities; raised awareness of and skills in knowledge transfer; broadened employer engagement and researcher-specific careers advice.

As a result of the report, the 1994 Group confirmed a strategy of fostering a supportive environment for its researcher community and promoting engagement with the Research Councils' 'excellence with impact'¹⁶ agenda. The report had also been widely used for lobbying for the continuation of Roberts funding.

Professor Pete Downes – Principal, University of Dundee

In summing up the presentations, Professor Downes gave an institutional reflection suggesting that the focus be on presenting a convincing body of evidence of the benefits of the training to HEIs as well as RCUK and research councils. He expressed support for the skills training agenda for researchers and for the need for institutions to manage their resources in a coherent way. Prof Downes explored approaches to achieving acceptance that there would be a continuing need for the agenda, giving support for the types of impact mapping described in the RTIF. In particular, he stressed the need for coherent case studies and planned, convincing evaluation. He highlighted that, compared with research income, the Roberts budget is relatively small, and that bringing the funding issue into focus for universities would potentially be a beneficial exercise for the agenda: 'sometimes, we [universities] have to wean ourselves off ring-fencing and admit that researcher development is central to our purpose.'

¹⁵ www.1994group.ac.uk/documents/.../090115_RobertsFundReport.pdf

¹⁶ www.rcuk.ac.uk/cmsweb/.../rcuk/economicimpact/excellenceimpact.pdf

Summary of discussions and sharing of practice

Panel discussion with plenary speakers

In a wide-ranging 'ask the panel' session, speakers stressed:

- the importance of showing HEI senior management evidence of impact;
- that evaluation for external stakeholders can be dovetailed with the need to influence HEI senior management;
- that 'we need to be better at telling a range of funders how they can help us';
- engagement in universities is uneven, with more culture change evident on the PGR than the RS agenda;
- institutional differences make it appropriate for the researcher development agenda to be 'owned' in different ways, within a variety of structures.

Participants discussed how to convince senior management to give priority to researcher development over competing budget pressures. Building the reputation of the university was a top concern of senior management; what steps were being taken to respond to this? Was Roberts provision used to help recruit PGR (e.g. alumni endorsement)? Did institutions seek tailored evidence of impact? (One HEI had found 70% of RAE submissions contained the names of PGR.)

It was highlighted how sustaining progress in culture change was vital. Without a supportive environment, researchers were unable to take advantage of learning opportunities or apply the results. It was felt that an end of ring-fenced funding would make it more difficult to continue progress in achieving culture change, indeed in some institutions gains might be lost entirely. As such, systematically evaluating culture change was also an important part of the evidence base.

Discussion groups

Common ground: methods and challenges

There was open sharing and discussion of researcher development infrastructure in participants' HEIs, and the challenges of the evaluation agenda in light of this. In summary:

- Researcher development delivery mechanisms (infrastructure) were well established (RTIF Level 0).
- Training needs analysis was routine and HEIs employed a variety of approaches to personal development planning.
- Workshop participants worked to influence the researcher environment (e.g. engaging supervisors and PIs).
- All institutions monitored spend on, uptake of and reaction to their researcher development programme.
- Overall performance was investigated through periodic surveys of researchers (annual or biennial), and annual reporting was generally done for internal stakeholders as well as for RCUK.
- End of course feedback was routinely analysed (Level 1).
- Typically, institutions convened review groups, with researcher participation, to identify need, explore reaction to training opportunities and plan adjustments. Increasingly, institutions were introducing follow up questionnaires or focus groups to explore learning and application of learning, usually after three or six months (Levels 2 and 3). This was resource intensive and was therefore done selectively.
- Gathering evidence of Level 4 impact was yet more resource intensive and was rarely attempted in a systematic way. Evaluation at this level was a concern for many participants.
- In general, institutions where control of Roberts funding was centralised, or largely centralised, found evaluation easier to plan, implement and synthesise than those with a substantial degree of devolved expenditure. However, devolved expenditure also had potential advantages, such as accelerating culture change.
- Some participants were concerned that overemphasis on evaluation could divert resources from the prime aim of helping develop better researchers for those individuals' benefit. New evaluation initiatives should be time-effective and well-planned (e.g. not collect large amounts of hard-to-analyse data).

Participants then discussed how it would be possible to leverage impact evaluation opportunities presented by programmes common to a number of HEIs, for example, the *How to be an effective researcher* programme. Universities including Glasgow and Heriot-Watt were already undertaking follow up of participants to investigate learning and behaviour change. Glasgow held a reunion event, with the additional option of email feedback. At Heriot-Watt a Masters project was focussed on Level 3 impact of the programme, using interviews and a questionnaire based on Imperial College's SKIPI¹⁷ evaluation process. Participants felt that a powerful body of impact evidence could be collected by combining such evaluations.

Environment and culture

The workshop explored the interaction of institutional factors (such as size and number of researchers) and strategies for embedding researcher development. For example institutions with small Roberts budgets might have very distinctive approaches. At Queen Margaret University, a largely teaching-led institution, there was an expectation that professors would contribute to researcher development programmes. The Roberts agenda complemented the institution's core curriculum

¹⁷ 'A skills perception inventory for evaluating postgraduate transferable skills development', *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, Volume 33, Issue 6 December 2008, pp. 581-598.

Summary of discussions and sharing of practice

employability programme. The University of Abertay Dundee had chosen to provide a skills environment for all its 150 PhD students by means of compulsory PDP. Students maintained their PDP throughout their period of registration and it was used to assess their training needs with supervisors and research advisors. Students were required to present their PDP log before submission of the PhD thesis as evidence of engagement with skills development. Any gaps had to be justified before graduation was permitted. Unlike the majority of PDP evidence, the records of Abertay PhD graduates were therefore public documents.

Larger institutions had various strategies to overcome lack of engagement. For example the University of Edinburgh detailed a significant element of devolved funding to encourage departmental and individual ownership (see next section). St Andrews and Dundee raised academic awareness by inviting participation in training programmes and conferences, typically pairing internal contributors with external experts. This was proving a successful formula. Several universities were also broadening the range of opportunities offered, particularly to research staff (where it was more difficult to get engagement with training workshops) for example, organising visits (e.g. to the Scottish government) and conferences (*KT Scotland, Research Futures*).

Participants also discussed the influence of organisational structures. Some HEIs – for example, the University of Stirling – had a central researcher development programme based in Research and Enterprise, while other development programmes were managed from within Staff Development areas, Graduate Schools, independent units and Office of the Principal/Vice-Principal. A location within Research and Enterprise was discussed as having the potential advantage of helping to position researcher development as a continuum – relevant to all researchers throughout their career. However, other locations offered other advantages.

Strategic realignment

Roberts funding has been distributed to institutions since 2003. Initial researcher development strategies have been adapted and refined in the light of evaluation evidence and/or changing university strategies. In some institutions researcher development strategies have changed course very visibly. Several interesting examples were shared.

At the University of Edinburgh a major review of Roberts progress 2003–06 led to two key changes in the internal allocation of Roberts funding: greater devolved Roberts funding for Schools and a new funding stream for researcher-led training and development. The former change was designed to accelerate and further embed Roberts training and development opportunities within the PhD and research staff experience. It generated a great deal of new activity tailored to local requirements. Funding researcher-led training and development initiatives provided a way of encouraging researchers to take ownership of their own training and development and gave researchers the opportunity to develop the skills that they need in a way most appropriate for their circumstances and background.

The University of Strathclyde's evaluation approach was now one of strategic alignment with the University strategy of 'community engagement'. An audit of provision across faculties (Roberts funding being both centralised and distributed) established baselines and pockets of excellence. It was looking at how to implement quality assurance, using value for money and sustainability criteria. An overall aim was cultural step change and therefore investigating institutional impact, by developing impact and metrics frameworks, was a priority.

Evaluation tools

The workshop participants discussed how some institutions used locally devised surveys, while others combined these with nationally developed survey instruments, variously CROS, PRES,¹⁸ Research Leader Survey,¹⁹ and the Skills Training and Research Supervision Survey (STaRSS).²⁰ Discussions ensued as to how national tools might not match local requirements perfectly, but could be tailored:

- The University of Edinburgh found CROS excellent for comparing year-on-year researcher experience, providing valuable information to inform institutional strategy. At Heriot-Watt, student reps contributed to PRES follow-up focus groups.
- Pre-course questionnaires were widely used to assess researcher expectations. Institutions understood the limitations of course reaction questionnaires ('happy sheets'). However, there were discussions as to how the RTIF could be used to review these and gain better information by asking simple questions e.g 'will you do anything differently after today?'
- Local surveys were also developed by adapting proven software. The University of Edinburgh's end-of-year research staff participant survey ran on the Bristol Online Surveys²¹ platform (BOS), which the University found easy to operate. The survey had recently been reviewed with the aim of gaining RTIF Level 3 evidence and rich data was being achieved.

Participants discussed how institutional investment in online course booking and monitoring systems had facilitated fine-grained data mining. Similar systems at Dundee and St Andrews enabled a variety of reports to be run in a time-effective way. At Dundee, annual reporting drew upon both attendance and feedback data. Transcripts of course attendance records could be produced for individual researchers and PhD programme coordinators.

¹⁸ <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/supportingresearch/postgraduatework>

¹⁹ <https://connect.le.ac.uk/p37637449/>

²⁰ www.survey.bris.ac.uk/support/news/survey-starss

²¹ www.survey.bris.ac.uk/

Conclusions: what next?

Summary

Dr Jon Turner summarised how the event had highlighted the importance of focussing evaluation on what is important for our key stakeholders. There was widespread concern with regards to the continuation of the Roberts funding, and the potential impact of any change in funding on progress made with the agenda. There was also concern over the lack of information as to the form, extent and timing of evaluation that could be called for, though the morning's presentations had given useful pointers to help participants deal with the current uncertainty. The event had clearly highlighted that we must prioritise the need to demonstrate these impacts to: our senior managers – they have joint importance as budget holders/decision makers in the HEI, and as opinion formers with our external stakeholders; the research councils; other funders and government. There was widespread agreement that a collaborative approach to evaluation and demonstrating impact could increase our effectiveness if HEIs could balance the need to evaluate for a unique institutional context with the need to demonstrate impact at scale to external stakeholders. In addition, participants were urged to contribute fully to practice sharing and building the evidence base at UK level via existing mechanisms (the Vitae Database of Practice,²² RCUK annual reporting, and JISC email network). At the Scottish level, a number of possible projects and approaches (shown below) had been suggested for further discussion.

Resulting recommended actions

1. Use Basecamp to support collaboration

Both discussion groups reported keen interest in sharing information and using *Basecamp* to support this:

- as a tool to share local evaluation practice;
- as a place to develop understanding of national evaluation initiatives, such as the RTIF;
- to get feedback on ideas in development;
- as a marketplace of ideas and, potentially, people;
- to manage ongoing discussion of possible projects.

2. Possible collaborations

Several suggestions had emerged from the groups.

Comparative surveys

The 'Academic Research Careers in Scotland' survey²³ (a report published by SHEFC/IER in 2001) had value as a baseline. Running that survey again could help to evaluate progress in research career development. Participants considered if it were appropriate and timely to ask SFC to fund a re-run.

Another option was to adapt the 1994 Group's survey described above. This idea drew a mixed response and would need continued discussion. One advantage would be the opportunity to explore questions tailored to the Scottish context, e.g. financial models and how institutions were performing against key SFC priorities, such as knowledge exchange and research pooling. Any survey would need careful planning to ensure real benefit.

Better use of national survey tools

PRES was a prime opportunity to mine existing data. Participating institutions now had three years of survey results. PRES officers could be approached with the aim of creating a Scottish benchmarking club.

The event had highlighted the importance of focusing PIs and supervisors on the Roberts agenda. Should HEIs make better collaborative use of STaRSS?

Pooling information, experience and expertise

In any researcher development collaboration involving

several HEIs, it was important to maximise evaluation opportunities. The new Scottish 'Crucible'²⁴ programme offered good opportunities for year-on-year impact evaluation. There was also scope to share or collate evaluation data from common programmes such as *How to be an effective researcher*²⁵ or local GRAD schools.

Institutions could also share staff to apply external but supportive perspectives on programme evaluation by, for example, acting as external evaluators, leading focus groups.

Reporting evidence of impact

Participants agreed that RTIF Level 4 'Outcome' was the most challenging to evaluate by a single institution, although institutions could be more proactive in capturing Level 4 impact through existing activities such as focus groups, employer engagement and first destination surveys.

One way of sharing the work of demonstrating impact would be to produce one case study or exemplar of impact per HEI. This could be published as a Scottish report and/or could link to the RCUK cohort study 'Doctoral Career Pathways'.²⁶

3. Support from RCUK and funding councils²⁷

One of the afternoon discussion groups strongly felt that visible support from RCUK and direct communications from funding councils to researchers with regards to the importance of the Roberts agenda would help to underline the value of the researcher development agenda, giving it stability and supporting the necessary culture changes.

It was widely, and strongly, felt in the group that the agenda was not yet sufficiently embedded across institutions and that removal of the Roberts funding or of ring-fencing of funding would set the agenda back.

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²² www.vitae.ac.uk/policy-practice/.../Database-of-practice.html -

²³ <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/publications/2001/researchcareersinscot.pdf>

²⁴ <http://www.rdfunding.org.uk/Queries/ListGrantDetails.asp?GrantID=15186>

²⁵ <http://www.vitae.ac.uk/policy-practice/1404/Effective-researcher-PGR.html> Vitae is currently undertaking an external evaluation of the *Effective researcher* programme (ER). All HEIs who have delivered the ER programme are invited to participate.

²⁶ <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/rescareer/rcdu/impact.htm>

²⁷ The future of Roberts funding was further discussed at the Vitae Policy Forum (January 2010), <http://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers/56271-126801/Vitae-policy-forum-2010.html>