

Vitae Midlands Hub Training Exchange (MHTE) – End of pilot report (Jan 2012)

1. Background:

The Vitae Midlands Hub extended its suite of training and course offerings for 2011 by establishing a Vitae Midlands Hub Training Exchange (MHTE). This pilot project was initially signed up to by nine Midlands HEIs, who had been in discussions since October 2010 to develop a collaborative model of reciprocal training for post graduate researchers, research staff and / or staff supporting researchers in the Midlands. The pilot will run until early Spring 2012.

Please find detailed below background information, impact and evaluation data and future proposals to maintain collaboration.

2. Timeline of activity:

June 2010	Rachel Davis, Midlands Hub Co-ordinator, submits an Innovate bid for £10,000 to develop a collaborative model of reciprocal training for PGR students (with potential to be extended to research staff and staff supporting researchers) at HEIs in the Midlands Hub.
July 2010	The Innovate panel decide not to fund the bid, but provide the following feedback. <i>'this regional approach to developing and sharing expertise makes good sense. Not only will it help to further embed the training skills within the HE culture, it also makes good, sustainable economic sense given the current climate of cutbacks and diminishing resources. However it wasn't innovative enough in comparison to other projects proposed for the Innovate fund'.</i>
September 2010	Representatives from the Midlands Hub attending the Vitae annual conference echo support for the principles of the failed Innovate bid. In response to this need, spare resource is identified in the Vitae Midlands Hub 2010 budget to potentially fund the development of a collaborative pilot training exchange.
October 2010	A 'Managing Transition' workshop is held at Aston University to allow interested HEIs in the Midlands to discuss how such a training exchange could work. Support is given for pursuing the pilot.
November 2010	Rachel Davis and Vicky Crawford (Project Officer) write a briefing paper to senior management at each Midlands institution to approve involvement in the pilot. Interested institutions submit a wishlist of course offerings and desired training to the Midlands hub.
January 2011	Nine confirmed pilot institutions are announced and the first meeting of the Midlands Hub Training Exchange takes place in Warwick. The members decide how the pilot will be operationalised and a membership agreement is circulated, re-drafted and ratified.
March 2011	Confirmed institutions start to submit listings of course and trainer offerings to Vicky Crawford at the Midlands Hub HQ at Warwick.
April 2011	Wednesday 20 th April - Progress meeting of the Midlands Hub Training Exchange held at Loughborough University from 1:00pm – 3:30pm.

	<p>Vicky Crawford streamlines administrative processes by consolidating all course offerings and bookings within www.vitae.ac.uk/midlandshub</p>
May 2011	<p>65 course offerings are uploaded to the website between May and July 2011 – with 90 bookings</p> <p>32 postgraduate researchers attend training between May and July 2011 as a result of individual trainers being exchanged between member institutions</p>
July 2011	<p>Wednesday 6th July - Progress meeting of the Midlands Hub Training Exchange held at Coventry University.</p> <p>Members discuss the possibility of collaborating and sharing internal expertise, by organising a continuing professional development (CPD) conference for staff supporting researchers in Autumn 2011.</p> <p>Credit balances from the course places pool are determined and shared for information between members.</p>
August 2011	<p>48 course offerings are uploaded to the website between August and October 2011 – with 10 bookings</p> <p>0 postgraduate researchers attend training between August and October 2011 as a result of individual trainers being exchanged between member institutions</p>
September 2011	<p>The Vitae Conference includes a workshop detailing how the MHTE to date has strengthened collaboration</p>
November 2011	<p>A CPD Conference for MHTE members is held at the Herbert Art Gallery in Coventry on 7th November. 19 members attend a variety of workshops sharing approaches to training for research staff and postgraduate researchers in a 'train the trainer' style. Members are also used as a focus group to input into the design of a new national CPD framework for staff supporting researchers.</p>
December 2011	<p>Impact and evaluation data is collated and analysed by the MHTE Project Officer, Vicky Crawford. This includes mid-point feedback (July 2011), tutor evaluations, course participant evaluations, MHTE Conference evaluations and end-point feedback (Dec 2011).</p> <p>Course places on offer continue into the New Year 2012. It is agreed that no new courses will be added beyond 31st Jan 2012.</p>

3. Principles of the pilot:

Between March and 31st Dec 2011, member institutions were asked to engage in at least one training exchange from the following options.

Course Places Pool – Institutions offered a number of places on a selection/all of their training courses. The institutional contact at participating HEIs offered places on a select number of these courses (courses where there is a current deficit in their own internal provision) to their research students/research staff. Research students/staff then booked a place on one of these courses via

www.vitae.ac.uk/midlandshub. The number of places and courses on offer were regularly up-dated on Basecamp via the Project Officer, who also monitored use of credits.

The Course Places Pool used the following credit system to ensure equity and fairness in provision:

- 1 credit per student per course (up to 2 hours in length)
- 2 credits per student per course (2-4 hours / half a day in length)
- 3 credits per student per course (4+ hours / full day in length)

Trainer Exchange – a Trainer at one MHTE member institution may have had their time released to attend a nearby Midlands institution to offer an additional training session. In exchange, a Trainer from the same institution would come to the original MHTE member institution to offer training in an area where they have a training strength / spare capacity. The trainer exchanges were agreed between contacts at member institutions and were not subjected to credit accounting.

4. Member institutions (as at 31st Dec 2011):

- University of Birmingham – Catherine Mills representing the Graduate School and Gurpreet Jagpal from the Enterprise Innovation Centre – catering for research staff and students
- Coventry University - Lisa Burman – catering for research staff
- The University of Leicester – Mehdi Barghchi and Duncan Stanley – catering for research staff and students
- The University of Nottingham – Jane Wellens and Pauline Harris – catering for research staff and students
- The University of Warwick – Rachel Davis – catering for research students

The following institutions withdrew from the pilot during 2011 due to internal restructuring/staffing issues:

- De Montfort University - David Ross – catering for early career research staff and students
- Loughborough University – Heather Dalglish – catering for research students
- The University of Northampton – David Watson – catering for research staff and students
- Nottingham Trent University – Lindsay Davies – catering for research staff

5. Meeting the original aims of the MHTE pilot:

To avoid commitment of additional financial resource from MHTE members – <i>achieved. Only additional expenses involved travel to attend meetings.</i>
To receive regular up-dates of MHTE activity from the Project Officer – <i>achieved, though the use of web-based 'basecamp' system for up-dates did not prove popular.</i>
To ensure the pilot adheres to the principles of equity and fairness – <i>mixed response. The credit system for maintaining a balance of debits and credits did not prove effective as strong participants in the pilot ended up being penalised for their involvement. Student no shows also penalised the strong MHTE participant HEIs. Thus it was agreed in August 2011, that future credits would be monitored but not subject to strict regulations.</i>
To design exchanges in a sustainable manner (covering current & future topics of need in the HEI sector) – <i>mixed response. The MHTE represented a variety of cutting edge researcher topics; relevant in the short-medium term researcher future. e.g. 20 % = academic writing, 6% = business & enterprise, 9% = collaborative working and leadership, 3% = career development, 16% = personal development, 22% = public engagement, 19% = research and information skills and 3% = teaching & learning)</i> <i>-By addressing topics of training need in a train the trainer style, versus buying in external, one off training.</i> <i>-By developing centralised booking systems that can be absorbed into Midlands Hub regular activity</i>
To foster a culture of openness and reciprocity, and break down barriers of perceived competition between institutions – <i>achieved.</i>
To offer access to training where your own institution has a current training deficit – <i>achieved.</i>

6. National sector objectives: Achievement:

The following strategic priorities; relevant to Vitae and RCUK were met by the pilot:

Lead sector responses to changes in the Roberts funding, including support for HEIs to deliver the RCUK statement of expectation, informed by RDS/RDF and Concordat
Support cost effective delivery of training and development, informed by RDS/RDF and Concordat
Drive excellence in provision through the development distribution of high quality learning resources and practice sharing, informed by RDS/RDF and Concordat
Researcher professional development, career management and employability
Facilitate regional sharing of practice on policy implementation including highlighting examples of institutional approaches as inspiration
Encourage input from the regional network on policy development and feedback regional views to the national programme
Provide opportunities for regional HEIs to share practice at the level of provision

7. Impact and Evaluation data: Course participant feedback

Presenting Academic Writing (UoB PGR feedback - University of Warwick training exchange)

*"I really liked the open surgery at the end, where Dr ***** asked who had a talk coming up, how we can make it better, etc."*

"I wish I had had this course earlier in my university life."

Effective academic writing (UoB PGR feedback - University of Warwick training exchange)

"I think it should be compulsory for 1st year students."

"The presentation and handouts are excellent. Many thanks."

Speed Reading (emails received from Loughborough PGRs – training exchange)

"I attended your speed reading course today. I mentioned to you when I left how I found it useful. I have dyslexia and just in that course I improved for 103 words per min with the first read through at the start of the day to about 200 words per min with the last read through. Which is double and I felt that I still took in the same amount of information and could recall it. So I'm very impressed."

"I have nothing but positive feedback and have shared all my top tips with my PhD colleagues 😊 They can't believe that I went from 205 WPM to 1,435 WPM in a 5 hour course! I still can't quite believe it either! 😊"

8. Impact on the audience (MHTE members):

Use the impact framework as a reference - levels 2-4 learning, behaviour, outcomes

	<p>2 Learning (from University of Birmingham):</p> <p><i>"I think the MHTE has reinforced the importance of drawing on and building our working relationships with colleagues at local institutions and the ideas and best practice in PGR development which we can continue to learn from one another.</i></p> <p><i>This pilot has also highlighted the need for the full commitment of all participating HEIs. I think this is where the scheme has run into difficulties as staff at participating HEIs have struggled to find the time to devote to the implementation and promotion of the scheme."</i></p>
	<p>3 Changed Behaviour</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Course booking/submission procedures at individual member institutions were streamlined and centralised by making greater use of the Vitae website, thus easing the administrative workload at each member institution. This allowed the booking process to potentially be sustainably taken forward beyond the end of the pilot. - A culture of increasing reciprocity, openness and willingness to share resources between large and small institutions in times of austerity.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased networking between PGRs at different institutions in the midlands who would come together at MHTE courses. - The large quantity of PGRs benefiting from training when trainers from other MHTE institutions delivered training at a host institution (versus numbers travelling elsewhere as part of the course places pool) e.g. <i>“Around 75 UoB PGRs have also benefitted from workshops run by external MHTE trainers at Birmingham (Academic Writing - Warwick and Creative Thinking - Loughborough), versus 35 who have booked on training elsewhere”</i>
	<p>4 Unexpected outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A conference for the members of the MHTE was designed as a result of training needs/weaknesses expressed in discussions throughout the pilot. The workshop/plenary content was designed by and for staff supporting researchers and included a Vitae-led focus group discussing the emerging field of accreditation and CPD for this distinct group of researcher developers. - The ability to attend free training courses at other midlands institutions at flexible times during the term appealed in particular to part time students, who also developed greater awareness of the Vitae part time researcher programme and the effective researcher programme. - There was a significant decrease in commitment to the pilot in the autumn term vs the summer term, and this reflected the substantial increase in workload and reduced ability to commit time to the pilot internally within each institution at this time of the year

9. Lessons learnt from the pilot:

- Basecamp seemed to be an unpopular format for communication. It appears many MHTE members did not have automatic email up-dates and thus would only see new uploads/messages when they logged in.
- Despite centralised booking systems being developed, institutions still felt the time commitment involved in processing bookings for course places was too complex/involved.
- From MHTE meetings, it was felt that there was a reluctance for students to travel, at their own expense, to neighbouring institutions to receive free training as part of the course places pool.

10. Regarding future commitment to the pilot from members:

In your opinion, should the MHTE continue into the next academic year? If so, would you be willing to continue as an MHTE member?

“Yes, definitely. I need to make this a priority to set up our offering and find support at Coventry in helping me to maintain this.”

“UoB is willing to continue to be a MHTE member, however, I am not sure the scheme will work at the current levels of HEI participation.”

“Nottingham would be happy to continue as a member if the MHTE exchange continues”.

“Yes, the University of Warwick would be prepared to continue as an MHTE member”

11. Future proposals:

The MHTE could be sustainably taken forward by embedding the positive networks now created between remaining institutions in a trainer exchange format – whereby subtle collaborations between trainers at different institutions are encouraged. The most positive course participant quotes were from those who had attended trainer exchanges. The course places pool, despite being stream lined and simplified, has had poor take up by students and staff supporting researchers throughout the autumn term 2011. HEIs have requested a centralised booking system that they can log into and self-manage, but this is beyond the capabilities of any existing vitae system.

“I’m not certain exactly what other members would like in terms of research staff development. Coventry has a small research staff community and therefore does offer proportionally less courses than a more research-intensive institution. I would be interested in a discussion about how Coventry can add more value to the training exchange in terms of research staff development”

“In future, the MHTE could be a way to collaborate on new cross-institutional provision, but this isn’t a new idea and probably takes place in other ways, where it does happen”

Issues to consider when discussing the continued format of an MHTE Trainer exchange in 2012:

- Does commitment of only Five HEIs warrant future time resource being allocated? The trainer exchange could be opened up to all Midlands hub members to improve marketing and knowledge exchange.
- Would all 5 HEIs have the internal trainer expertise and willingness to share trainers for free? Could these trainers benefit postgraduate researchers and research staff? (noting the continued need to meet the latter)
- Is this type of collaboration between institutions already happening effectively in other guises e.g. part time researcher, effective researcher?
- Could trainer exchanges really address training weaknesses in the sector?
- Would members take forward developing exchanges themselves if a bank of suggestions was provided by the Midlands Hub, or would the Midlands Hub need to commit extra time to foster and promote trainer exchanges? – noting that one institution felt the time commitment of the MHTE Project Officer to the pilot was not sufficient to manage and meet the aims of the pilot as effectively as possible. In 2012 there will no longer be a dedicated MHTE Project Officer – all support will be absorbed in the existing Midlands Hub, thus making dedicated Trainer Exchange support difficult to sustain.

The above issues have been discussed by members of the Midlands Hub and it has been agreed that trainer exchanges, using established MHTE collaborative networks and relationships, will be promoted by the central Midlands Hub throughout 2012. Trainer exchanges will only prove successful if MHTE members (and fellow Midlands Hub HEIs) continue to submit trainer offerings/trainer needs via the trainer exchange forms on: <http://www.vitae.ac.uk/policy-practice/372501/Midlands-Hub-Training-Exchange---Trainer-exchange-offerings.html>

In addition, a new trainer request form and administrative booking processes for the trainer exchange have been added to the vitae website:

<http://www.vitae.ac.uk/policy-practice/1746/Midlands-Hub.html> (scroll down page to the MHTE box)

<http://www.vitae.ac.uk/policy-practice/503641/Midlands-Hub-Training-Exchange---Trainer-requests.html>

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