

# Report of proceedings UK GRAD Programme Roberts Policy Forum January 2006, Birmingham

<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>3</b>
Outcomes from the event	3
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Plenary presentations and discussions</b>	<b>6</b>
Introduction to the event	6
Researcher Careers: how the Roberts agenda supports the UK's wider agenda to develop research careers	7
Review of year two of Roberts: themes and experiences emerging from institutional reports and database of practice	9
Report back from the Rugby Team	12
<b>Panel discussion</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Day 1 work group feedback: validating the Rugby Team recommendations</b>	<b>17</b>
Rugby Team recommendations for further studies (work groups A, F, G)	17
Recommendation 2B: defining KPIs for Roberts reporting (work groups B, C, D, E)	20
<b>Day 2 emerging themes and sharing practice: work group feedback</b>	<b>23</b>
Theme A: meeting the needs of researchers	23
What are the key requirements of the target groups?	23
Theme B: strategies for winning hearts and minds	24
Theme C: embedding provision within usual practice	26
What is the long-term vision of the skills development requirements?	26
<b>Forum conclusions and outcomes</b>	<b>28</b>
Progressing the Rugby Team agenda	28
<b>Table 1: Responses to the Rugby Team strategy paper recommendations</b>	<b>29</b>



## Executive summary

In January 2006, UK GRAD hosted the third Roberts Policy Forum. Its aims were to:

- review the progress of the sector in the first two years of Roberts: share experiences, ideas and good practice
- hear the report from the Rugby Team on evaluating the effectiveness of developing skills
- validate the key performance indicators for future reporting to the research councils
- explore the differences and synergies of developing Roberts provision for postgraduate researchers and research staff<sup>1</sup>.

The forum combined input from plenary speakers, panel discussion, and workshop sessions where participants worked, and reported on, a number of thematic topics. Speakers were: Professor Ian Diamond, Chief Executive at ESRC, Dr Iain Cameron, head of the RCUK Research Careers and Diversity Unit, and Professor Chris Park, Director of the Graduate School at Lancaster University and chair of the Rugby Team, a sector-led working party examining issues of evaluating research skills development of early stage researchers. The forum was chaired by Dr Janet Metcalfe, Director of the UK GRAD Programme.

2005/06 is the third academic year of research council funding for implementing Sir Gareth Roberts's recommendations on skills and career development for researchers<sup>2</sup>. Much progress has been made on designing and delivering skills development programmes for postgraduate researchers; however, provision for research staff is much less developed. This forum looked at the challenges of developing provision for both postgraduate researchers and research staff and explored the issues relative to each group, identified synergies and shared experiences.

Important themes that emerged included:

- the urgency of maintaining momentum on progress in order to secure future funding: the forthcoming government's Comprehensive Spending Review means that 2006 is a critical year for gathering evidence of the value of the skills agenda
- the quality imperative: provision must not only be of high and consistent quality, it must also be seen to be excellent to win hearts and minds
- ownership by research students and research staff: how far do they really have a voice?
- the importance of developing a sense of institutional citizenship among all researchers
- embedding the Roberts agenda in institutional structures and leadership.

The 2006 forum also received a report from Professor Chris Park on behalf of the Rugby Team, the working group formed following the January 2005 UK GRAD Roberts Policy Forum. One of the aims of the group was to contribute to a strategic debate with national stakeholders on how to evaluate the effectiveness of skills development amongst postgraduate researchers (PGR) and research staff.

For institutions, a key part of the work of the Rugby Team has been on developing a framework of indicators that could be used by HEIs and research institutes to review their provision. Participants at the 2006 forum had an opportunity to:

- comment on the framework
- explore and validate the recommendations of the Rugby Team to all stakeholders in the evaluation of researcher training and development
- contribute to the development of the key performance indicators (KPIs) that will form part of institutions' future reporting mechanism to RCUK.

## Outcomes from the event

### Rugby Team strategy paper recommendations

The following outcomes relate to interactions between funding bodies and institutions. Full outcomes, relating to all stakeholders, are described in the section 'Forum Conclusions and Outcomes' on page 28 and summarised in Table 1 (p29 – 31).

- RCUK, in conjunction with HEFCE, agreed to proceed with an urgent study within this academic year into *the impact of recent changes to national funding and policy on PGRs and research staff* (Recommendation 1).

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this report we use the term 'research staff' to cover anyone employed principally to do research, but who does not have an established academic post

<sup>2</sup> Sir Gareth Roberts' review 'SET for Success: the supply of people with science, technology, engineering and mathematics skills' [http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/documents/enterprise\\_and\\_productivity/research\\_and\\_enterprise/ent\\_res\\_roberts.cfm](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/documents/enterprise_and_productivity/research_and_enterprise/ent_res_roberts.cfm)

- RCUK confirmed that:
  - institutions would continue to be required to produce short annual reports on the use of Roberts funding (i.e. if continued beyond the current funding period)
  - it will publish the 2006 reporting requirements due in November by Easter 2006
  - it will support development of the database of practice hosted by UK GRAD and encourage its use by institutions, thereby promoting an enhancement-led approach to reporting, as well as the sharing of good practice
  - it will also continue to produce an annual summary of institutional reports (Recommendations 2a, 2c and 2d).
- The Rugby Team received, and accepted, feedback from the work groups that the four proposed key performance indicators (KPIs) it recommended be used in institutional reporting to RCUK needed some minor development. In the case of three KPIs, (a) (b) and (d), changes to wording should be made to clarify and better define the data required, ensuring that language was appropriate to both PGR and research staff audiences. More fundamental objections were raised to KPI (c) *Extent of the use of PDP processes (e.g. % engaged)* and the Rugby Team was asked to consider how this could be rephrased so that engagement with PDP remains, and is seen to remain, a voluntary process for individuals (Recommendation 2b). The revised KPIs are contained in the revised Rugby Team strategy paper available at [www.grad.ac.uk/nationalpolicy](http://www.grad.ac.uk/nationalpolicy).

In light of the comments from the forum and the stakeholders, the Rugby Team agreed to revise the strategy paper and publish the final document for circulation widely within the sector during spring 2006.

- The Rugby Team strategy paper also identified a number of areas where further work was needed, for example, collecting feedback from stakeholders, in particular employers. Participants were asked to consider whether a new sector-led group should convene to carry on the work of the Rugby Team, particularly to drive the agenda forward. Subsequent responses to the survey of participants have all supported the continuation of a 'Rugby Team' group and several offered their services to this reformed group.

### Other key outcomes

Several other issues were also raised during the course of the event and were addressed as follows:

- **Funding of skills development for non-RC funded students**  
Ian invited UK GRAD to write to him urging consideration of this issue by the Research Funders' Forum of which he is a member
- **Lack of UK research agenda for postgraduate studies**  
Ian said that the ESRC were aware of and concerned about the general health of the research activity into HE in the UK and was interested to see the results of a HEA-funded literature review of the research into postgraduate research degree programmes
- **Current lack of funding of support structures for research staff skills development**  
A proposal to toplice a small percentage of the Roberts money allocated for research staff to fund infrastructure and projects was supported by participants. Dr. Iain Cameron from RCUK agreed that if the principle was generally endorsed by the sector, then this money could be available to fund bids, from organisations such as UK HERD, for specific projects that encouraged national/cross-institutional activities
- **The importance of tracking researcher careers to demonstrate/investigate the value of the skills agenda**  
RCUK and UK GRAD will progress discussions with HESA to extend the proposed 3.5 year follow-up survey, and HEIs were urged to make further efforts to survey alumni.

Despite the amount of work still to do, speakers from RCUK stressed that government was very encouraged by the progress that had been made by the partnership between institutions and the research councils. RCUK was confident of continued funding for the Roberts agenda as long as evidence is presented of its added value – and of the sector continuing to move forward in developing researchers' skills.

## Introduction

The UK GRAD Programme Roberts Policy Forum in January 2006 at Aston Business School's Management and Development Centre in Birmingham was the third annual national event dedicated to supporting the implementation of the Roberts agenda.

The forum was an opportunity to:

- review the progress of the sector in the first two years of Roberts: share experiences, ideas and good practice
- examine the conclusions of the Rugby Team on evaluating the effectiveness of developing researcher skills
- validate the recommendations of the Rugby Team's strategy paper *Evaluation of skills development of early career researchers*, including key performance indicators for future reporting to the research councils
- explore the differences and synergies of developing Roberts provision for postgraduate researchers and research staff

The event 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 on training for postgraduate researchers and research staff.

As in previous years the forum programme responded to issues of foremost concern to the sector. Participants were invited to submit their key questions in advance and UK GRAD ensured that plenary and group time was apportioned to cover the major themes that emerged:

- future funding of the Roberts agenda
- evaluation of institutional performance
- ways of sharing practice, particularly on the themes of
  - identifying and meeting the needs of researchers
  - strategies for winning hearts and minds
  - embedding provision within usual practice.

The first afternoon took a strategic view of the first two years of implementing the Roberts' recommendations. Dr Janet Metcalfe chaired the forum and reported on progress during 2005. Professor Ian Diamond, Chief Executive of ESRC and member of the Funders' Forum, spoke on how the Roberts agenda supports the UK's wider agenda to develop researcher careers. Dr Iain Cameron, Head of Research Careers and Diversity Group, RCUK then commented on the themes and experiences emerging from institutional annual reports and examples of practice posted on the UK GRAD Database of Practice.

Professor Chris Park, Director of the Graduate School at Lancaster University and chair of the Rugby Team reported on its activities during the year and presented the recommendations contained in its strategy report. Subsequent discussions in work groups provided participants the opportunity to contribute to both the development of the KPIs the research councils will use for future reporting and to explore other recommendations in the Rugby Team strategy paper.

The following morning explored the issues facing institutions in developing provision for postgraduate researchers and research staff. There was opportunity to share practice and compare experiences between institutions and across the two researcher groups through workshops and plenary feedback.

## Plenary presentations and discussions

### Introduction to the event

**Dr. Janet Metcalfe**, Director, UK GRAD Programme

Janet emphasised the sector's huge progress on the Roberts skills agenda over the past two years, particularly during 2005. For example, issues of foremost concern to participants at the previous year's forum in January 2005 were:

- research staff: how do we meet their needs?
- funding of the skills agenda: how secure is it?
- evaluation: how do we know we are making a difference?
- sharing of good practice: how do we do more, better?

Over the course of 2005 important developments took place in each of these areas.

### Research staff

2005 saw the creation of UK HERD (Higher Education Researcher Development) whose mission is:

*to enhance research capacity and performance by fostering better management, better professional development and better career structures for researchers.*

From an original network of twelve individuals a year ago it has now over 150 members. UK HERD is supporting the policy forum by providing the facilitators to support the workshops relating research staff.

Although there was still considerable work to do in supporting the **whole continuum of researchers**, the birth and development of the UK HERD network over the course of 2005 has given considerable impetus to the research staff careers agenda. During 2006 UK GRAD and UK HERD are developing a memorandum of understanding to ensure that synergies are exploited and opportunities for collaboration maximised so that early career researchers are supported, and seen to be supported, as a continuum.

### Evaluation

Participants at the 2005 forum (held in Rugby, hence the subsequent working party's name) recognised the need to build an evidence base of the value and impact of skills development for researchers and believed that this initiative should be driven by the sector with the emphasis on enhancement rather than measurement. Supported by RCUK and the UK GRAD Programme, working party members from all stakeholders were recruited, and tasked with reporting their conclusions to the 2006 Forum.

In exploring the rationale for finding a coherent and transparent way of evaluating skills development, the Rugby Team highlighted a number of issues, including the need:

- to assess the impact of recent initiatives (particularly the Roberts funding, the RCUK skills competencies requirements, and the revised QAA Code of Practice) on the employability of PGRs and research staff
- to provide feedback to funding bodies (such as the UK funding councils and RCUK) and to the government, which needs to evaluate the effectiveness of its investment and see what benefits it has brought
- to inform the enhancement of the quality of the experience of PGRs and research staff both within individual HEIs and across the sector
- to monitor the engagement of individual HEIs and the sector as a whole in skills development of researchers
- to support HEIs and their staff in identifying the most effective ways of evaluating and enhancing the support and training offered in their own institutions
- to demonstrate the appropriateness of the emphasis on skills development within the UK PhD experience.

**Extract from 'Evaluation of skills development of early career researchers – a strategy paper from the Rugby Team'**

The Rugby Team's resulting strategy paper, *Evaluation of skills development of early career researchers*, sent in draft form to participants in preparation for the 2006 forum, summarises the activities of the Team. It outlines the current situation with regard to skills development for researchers, explains why evaluation of skills development is important and identifies some of the challenges in doing so. The recommendations it makes to key stakeholders are the culmination of extended debate, consultation and discussion, both within the Rugby Team itself and with the sector.

## Sharing of good practice

Notable progress has been made on *sharing information and good practice*. The UK GRAD network continued to develop over 2005 and now stands at over 2500 contacts. A major new resource was the UK GRAD Database of Practice, designed to collect examples of practice relating to skills development for researchers and to share this good practice through a searchable database. The Database of Practice was designed in conjunction with the Rugby Team and was an optional element of institutions' Roberts reporting. It has so far attracted over 270 entries. Janet urged institutions to make even better use of this tool in 2006.

However, there are still areas that remain highly relevant over the course of 2006.

## Maintaining and improving quality

The quality imperative remains critical. Consistency of quality of practice within and across institutions is important for ensuring the quality of experience for researchers and the UK's standing in the global research environment. The QAA Special Review later this year addresses this imperative for postgraduate research degrees in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

## Funding

The government announced that instead of the expected Spending Review there would be a 'zero baseline' Comprehensive Spending Review in 2007. This gives particular urgency to the need to evidence the successes and progress of the Roberts agenda during 2006.

## Diversity

Another important theme of last year's forum – has fared less well. Little progress has been made on inequalities of funding between RC funded and non-RC funded researchers. Diversity of researcher population brings complex challenges: this year's forum aimed to help participants explore some of the issues and compare approaches.

## Researcher Careers: how the Roberts agenda supports the UK's wider agenda to develop research careers

**Professor Ian Diamond**, Chief Executive, ESRC and member of the Research Funders' Forum

### The national context

Ian began by stressing the importance of the partnership between RCUK and institutions on developing researcher careers. This is '*an agenda that the nation cannot afford to fail on*'

Starting with the government agenda, he outlined some high-level interactions, including how the Funders' Forum is working, then described the Research Councils' role, both with regard to future funding and the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE).

Ian reminded participants of the repeated commitments that government – and Gordon Brown in particular – had made to development of researchers, for example:

*'Higher level skills will increase the UK's ability to benefit from technological advances and become more productive.'*  
(Chancellor's pre-budget report 2004.)

HM Treasury's *Science and innovation investment framework 2004–2014*<sup>3</sup> commits the UK to increasing the ratio of R&D to GDP (Research Intensity) from 1.9% to 2.5% by 2014. This is to be achieved by an increase in government spending over time, combined with industry increasing its spend in partnership with the public sector.

Investment in higher level skills is essential, if the UK is to remain competitive globally. Economic rewards from innovation are growing, as the pace of technological change increases and developing economies, such as China and India, move into higher-value activities. Improving the UK's capacity for science and innovation depends upon:

- investment in the science base (science in its broadest definition, i.e. including the arts and humanities)
- improving links with business
- attracting foreign direct investment
- building high value-added firms that will raise private investment.

<sup>3</sup> [www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/spending\\_review/spend\\_sr04/associated\\_documents/spending\\_sr04\\_science.cfm](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/spending_review/spend_sr04/associated_documents/spending_sr04_science.cfm)

Conscious that this list stresses the importance of industrial partnership, Ian added that '*basic research is absolutely fundamental.*' The research councils will work hard to maintain their dual funding role, while ensuring that basic research has impact and that the skills base exists to do both basic and applied research.

### **The Funders' Forum and Research Careers Committee**

The Research Funders' Forum is where the entire research base meets; its membership includes governmental and non-governmental funders of research. At the Funders' Forum, members can consider the collective impact of their strategies on the sustainability, health and outputs of the Research Base. It examines issues such as:

- research careers
- health of disciplines – identifying where investment might be required to meet industry needs or to combat academic staff shortages
- supply/demand in SET
- financial sustainability of institutions – a set of indicators has been developed to ensure sustainability
- knowledge transfer – a better term would be 'people transfer', to reflect the iterative process of researchers and others spending time in each others' sectors, communicating and developing knowledge.

The Research Careers Committee (RCC) is a sub-group of the Funders' Forum and is chaired by Sir Gareth Roberts. Its remit is to advise and inform the Funders' Forum and other interested parties on issues relating to research careers, including research staff, postgraduate researchers and new lecturing staff within higher education. The RCC has divided into two working groups: 'management and good practice' and 'career paths'.

### **Future funding**

The 2005 pre-budget report maintained the government commitment to funding the science base and was welcomed by RCUK. The level of commitment will depend upon the outcomes of the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) 2007. The CSR represents a long-term and fundamental review of expenditure across all government departments. It will start with an assessment of government spending since 1997, in order to develop a rigorous analytical framework for 2008–11 allocations. Therefore the Research Councils have to account, collectively, for their Roberts allocations so far, and justify spending plans for 2008–11, from a zero baseline.

The evidence base for CSR 2007 comprises:

- institutions' 2004 and 2005 reporting to RCUK on career development and skills training
- academic Fellowships reports
- survey of the impact of enhanced stipends and salaries
- monitoring length of research degree programmes.

Mechanisms are in place to collect evidence in all of these areas, but impact is not measurable as yet in many. Clearly, it is imperative to demonstrate that the Roberts reforms are working well.

### **The RAE**

The 2008 exercise is the sixth RAE, and the first to publish guidance relating specifically to how research staff are supported. At the initial consultation stage, it was clear that reference to research staff was variable both in extent and strength across the panels. RCUK made representations to HEFCE about consistency of approach. The current feedback from panels is much improved, although there is perhaps an issue now that this positive development is not being conveyed within institutions. RCUK can help reinforce this message, but it is primarily the role of institutions to ensure they are communicating with their staff.

### **RCUK and research careers**

The Research Councils have shown their strong commitment to the research careers and diversity agenda by setting up RCUK's Research Careers and Diversity Unit in April 2005. It is an evolutionary development of the previous Postgraduate Training Group and has an advisory group with representatives from all the research councils, whose chair for 2006 is Ian Lyne, Head of Postgraduate Training and Fellowships, BBSRC.

The purpose of the Unit is to address as government priorities:

- the supply of scientists and engineers
- diversity within the scientific research workforce, particularly increasing the involvement of women and minority ethnic groups in science and its governance.

It does this through activities which:

- promote and support cross-council collaboration on research careers
- foster relationships with OST, HEFCs, Wellcome and other funders
- build understanding of diversity issues in postgraduate research
- co-ordinate with the UK Resource Centre for Women in SET.

Specifically:

- supporting development of a UK code for researchers (Concordat mk II) – links to European Charter for Researchers
- encouraging universities to share good practice in research careers and skills provision
- collaborating with Wellcome Trust on depiction of Careers Paths for Researchers (RCC working group) and potentially developing a Career Path Map, a web-based tool, in the first instance for early career researchers
- developing common data requirements to underpin analyses of the impact of funding schemes on research careers.

The report from the Rugby Team offers performance indicators that will inform RCUK's plans over the medium to long-term.

A major element of the Unit's current work plan includes reporting on the implementation of the recommendations of the SET for Success. The unit will be reporting to government on the basis of institutions' latest reports. It is clear that research organisations are responding positively to the challenge to advance skills training for early careers researchers in the UK. It is also the case that academic fellowships have been well-received, and are seen as an effective tool for improving and managing the career development of contract researchers.

Iain concluded by emphasising once again the importance of achieving '*proper research careers*':

*'Our agenda as RCUK is to have a science base in 2014 that enables us to hold our heads up globally. Across large areas of the science base ... in terms of quality we equal the best or indeed lead the world... across other areas we need to make some improvements and are intending to do so.... We have to get ourselves in a position where we continue [to maintain and enhance quality]...and we will only do that if we have proper research careers, proper monitoring and development of the skills...and we can only do that in partnership with HEIs. We do not see ourselves in RCUK as becoming...regulators of practice in the HE sector. We are in the business of working with the HE sector to ensure that...research careers are exciting and that they are appropriate to the 21st century country we want the UK to be.'*

## Review of year two of Roberts: themes and experiences emerging from institutional reports and database of practice

Dr. Iain Cameron, Head of Research Careers and Diversity Unit, RCUK

Iain began by introducing the staff of the Research Careers and Diversity Unit, emphasising the continuity with the previous Postgraduate Training Group, and showing how staffing had expanded to work with institutions to meet the Roberts agenda.

2005 saw many developments in the researcher careers agenda: too many to list. But a key development was the creation of UK HERD whose mission is: to enhance research capacity and performance by fostering better management, better professional development and better career structures for researchers. From an original network of twelve individuals a year ago it has now over 150 members and is chaired by Wendy Stainton Rogers, The Open University. RCUK sees the growth of UK HERD as a timely development, given the urgent need to develop the research staff side of the skills agenda.

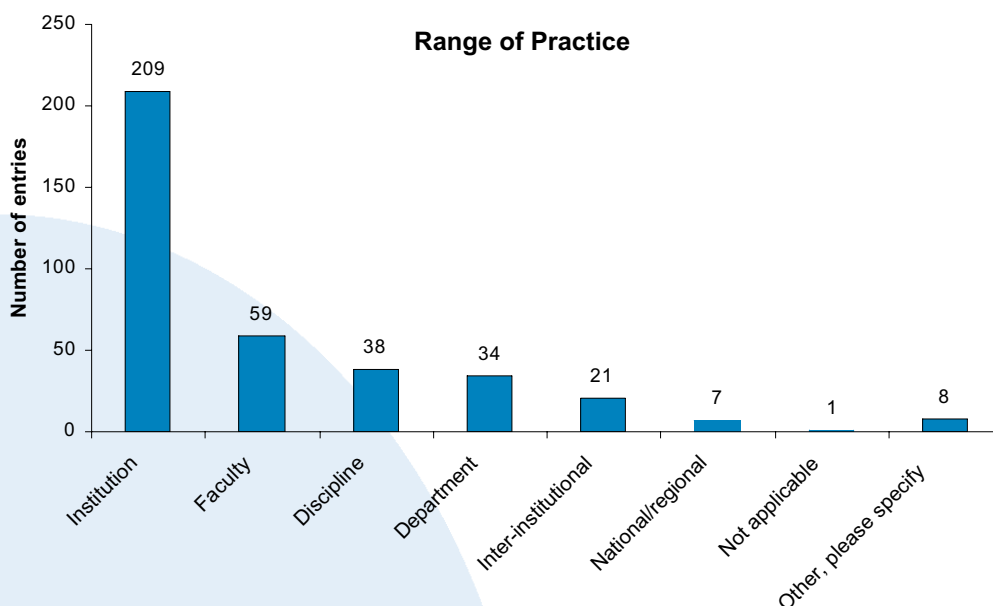
### Database of practice

The Database of Practice, hosted by UK GRAD, was another key development of 2005. The database is designed to be a central resource for information on institutions' skills development activity, in order to share practice and aid future development. Iain urged participants to continue to share and compare practice by using the database fully. Practice does not need to be especially innovative: innovation can come with the transfer of that practice into a different context.

Analysis of the database's 277 entries in 2005 suggests that focus is well-established on doctoral researchers but that developments are needed for research staff:

- 220 entries related to PGR, compared with 137 to research staff
- 73% of the entries concerning PGR are Roberts-related, compared with 40% of those involving research staff.

A large majority of entries relate to practice within an institution, principally at institutional level. Inter-institutional examples are small but growing.



Individuals posting to the database were asked to map their practice against the seven sections of the Joint Skills Statement (JSS) and identify whether it was Roberts-related provision. Roberts funding is designed to achieve added value by extension of existing provision and/or new activity to take place within sections (D – G) of the JSS. There is some evidence that a minority of institutions are using Roberts money for activity which does not meet the criteria. Within normal audit visits, the research councils may begin to look more closely at this.

### Roberts reporting 2005

Iain reminded participants that a year ago RCUK had promised 'light touch and proportionate' reporting requirements, aimed at the support of good practice. Reports should focus on what the additional funding enabled institutions to achieve.

In 2004, institutions' outline strategies enabled RCUK to undertake a broad analysis of the response, and state, of the sector. Subsequently in 2005 institutions were required to offer evidence of innovation and account for the use of funds across the broad areas of co-ordination, training development and delivery.

This table indicates the balance of resources employed by institutions on co-ordination costs and delivery respectively. At this stage, a 40:60 split looks reasonable. Over time RCUK might expect the proportion of spending on delivery to increase.

RCUK will aim to maintain current levels of financial monitoring and not require institutions to report in greater detail.

### Overview of Roberts Financial reporting (to Sept 2005)

	PGR	Postdoctoral Researchers	
Employment of co-ordination staff	21%	13%	} <b>39%</b>
Co-ordination costs	4%	1%	
Training delivery costs	26%	15%	} <b>61%</b>
Employment of training staff	12%	9%	
Annual funding from 2005/6 (approx)	£20M		

## Reporting to government

Government feedback on the partnership between RCUK and institutions to implement the Roberts agenda has been very positive. Iain summarised this as:

*'So far, so good – but we need to preserve the funding streams and maintain momentum.'*

The coming year is critical to the future success of the skills agenda across the sector. Against a background of the forthcoming CSR, serious reporting will begin on the impact of the Roberts reforms. The reports that institutions submitted in November 2005 will feed into a review of Roberts and ultimately the CSR 2007 as will evidence from the Database of Practice hosted by UK GRAD. Evaluation, based on the outputs of the Rugby Team, will step up a gear. Particular focus is needed on making the research staff agenda work.

In this context, developments in RCUK's reporting requirements of institutions can be seen to mirror progress on the Roberts agenda and the need to capture that data to secure future funding:

- November 2004 – outline skills strategies
- November 2005 – examples of innovation and financial overview
- November 2006 – benchmarking progress and reporting against Key Performance Indicators.

The central issue is demonstrating improved employability of PGR and research staff.

RCUK is required to report in the coming year across the entire Roberts agenda:

- **Recruiting the best researchers** will report against the government 10-year science framework this summer
- reporting progress **so far** on all postgraduate and postdoctoral Roberts recommendations has just been completed
- evidencing the CSR 2007 for continuation of the Roberts funding streams has a deadline of January 2007.

The overall picture RCUK expects to report to government will focus on:

- skills training as a success story, with evidence of real culture change, particularly within postgraduate research degrees, and research staff issues receiving progressively more attention
- increased participation by high-quality researchers remaining a problem area. Universities remain very reluctant, on the whole, to use higher salaries to solve recruitment problems
- RCUK Academic Fellowships showing evidence of becoming a future highlight.

It is vital to be ready with evidence of **impact** of the Roberts recommendations, to ensure that the Roberts funding streams are carried through, ideally into the baseline funding of the RCs. There is a possibility of growth in spending in some areas, for example Academic Fellowships.

## From aspirations to delivery plan

Iain reminded listeners that it was important not to equate Roberts solely with the skills agenda. The Roberts recommendations cover a wide range of measures concerning research careers. How the measures work together is critical, in order to sustain improvement to the whole. Iain explained that, at the 2005 Roberts Forum in Rugby, he had framed some aspirations for consideration by the sector. These have been developed into the key aims of RCUK's Careers and Diversity activities:

RCUK Delivery Plan, May 2005 (Chapter 5)

- 'High quality, highly motivated students being attracted to PhDs and retained through attractive training and stipends;
- Demonstrable up-skilling and better skills targeting as a result of Roberts investments through endorsement by employers (including universities);
- Research Council-funded PhDs being seen as 'setting the standard' in fitness for purpose, particularly in areas of skills training, with a central role for the UK GRAD programme;
- UK being seen as a premier choice for researcher training, with high demand from the best prospective students from overseas to study in the UK;
- Continuing professional development (CPD) being encouraged for researchers at all levels;
- Promoting better inclusion of women, people from minority ethnic groups and people with disabilities.'

Finally, Iain proposed three action points for RCUK and the sector – for implementation in 2006 and review at the Roberts Forum 2007. How far have we come to date, and how much progress do we expect to make in the next year, on:

- *embedding* transferable skills in all doctoral programmes
- making significant progress on the Roberts research staff **career development** agenda
- demonstrating improved *employability* of doctoral graduates compared with before **SET for Success?**

## Report back from the Rugby Team

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

Chris began with a reminder of the mission and structure of the Rugby Team, stressing that it had been an independent, **sector-led** working group on the evaluation of skills development of early career researchers. Conceived and set up at the January 2005 Policy Forum in Rugby; its members represented: HEIs, HEFCE, SHEFC, RCUK, QAA, NPC, UK GRAD, UK HERD and UKCGE. Over the course of 2005 the Team had consulted widely with stakeholders across the sector to fulfil its mission, which was: *'to propose a meaningful and workable way of evaluating skills development in early career researchers'*.

It soon became apparent to the Team that an attempt to reconcile three tensions was required:

- the Roberts agenda embraces PGR and research staff but the Rugby Team was set up under the umbrella of the UK GRAD programme, to look specifically at postgraduate researcher issues. Broadening its remit to include research staff has posed challenges
- the Team's remit is Research Council-funded PGR and research staff. However, to exclude consideration of non-RC researchers would have meant accepting a two-tier service for students
- the skills agenda is not just about institutions' use of Roberts funding – it is about embedding skills development across the sector.

### Outputs

The targets asked of the Team are to:

- produce a strategy paper giving recommendations for the future direction of the Roberts agenda
- identify and promote mechanisms for sharing good practice
- identify ways to establish baselines of current practice against which to measure future progress
- outline a framework of potential measures of success in skills development in early career researchers, which (amongst other things) will inform what RCUK requests of individual HEIs in their annual Roberts reports
- make recommendations for further work as needed.

Given the difficulty in accommodating different stakeholder wishes on this ambitious agenda, the Team's motto could well be *'Great Expectations meets Mission Impossible!'*

### Drivers of change

Multiple drivers can be summarised as:

- the skills agenda for early career researchers, as framed by the QAA Code of Practice for RDPs (2004), RCUK Joint Skills Statement (2002) and Roberts Review SET for Success (2002)
- reporting and accountability: financial reporting and engagement with the skills agenda
- enhancement and good practice.

Chris commented that multiple drivers had led to multiple agendas at times, bearing in mind the various expectations of different agencies. There has been a common false perception in the sector that the core agenda for the Rugby Team has been how to report – on the use of Roberts money and to RCUK. Chris emphasised that financial reporting was only part of the picture: *'the formal front end, visible aspect of the skills agenda...what is really important is trying to get HEIs to engage with the agenda – the actual embedding. (Are we doing it? Do our students see it? Are observers of our system seeing that significant change is going on?) It's also about enhancement, not just accountability. Are we producing happier, more successful, better skilled researchers? – that is what the agenda is all about.'*

### Challenges

No-one underestimates the difficulty of finding ways to measure effectively the value of developing skills.

The Team was extremely conscious of 'fitness for purpose' issues. It recognised HEIs' existing reporting burdens and was very reluctant to add to these. Where possible, data that is already being collected should be used. Everything possible should be done to try and get institutions involved in the process, to put the emphasis on enhancement, not merely on compliance with the demands of external agencies.

*'We need to find measures that are reliable and appropriate, not just easy to collect...there is a real danger of over-emphasising the measurable, with attendant risks of league tables, incorrect interpretations and collateral damage.'*

Rugby Team strategy paper

Inherent difficulties include: the long lead-time before results are apparent; the lack of pre-Roberts baseline data; the problems of establishing cause-effect and how to assess the development of 'soft skills'. The Rugby Team has attempted a difficult balancing act: how to weigh institutional interest and daily practice against the national interest. Trying to reconcile the tensions has informed the Team's recommendations.

### Strategy paper recommendations

Chris noted that also there has been an unfortunate perception in the sector that the Rugby Team's recommendations would be concerned with imposing new demands on HEIs alone, whereas in fact its recommendations are made to all stakeholders. This insistence on recommendations 'across the piece' is crucial to achieve buy-in.

The recommendations that have emerged have been driven by a commitment to: trying to achieve joined-up thinking and a pulling-together of stakeholders, increasing engagement within institutions and across the sector – and expectations that are realistic. The Team's strong belief in 'evolution, not revolution' has informed all its outputs.

#### Recommendation 1: to the UK HE funding bodies and research councils

*... that they commission a study into the impact of recent changes to national funding and policy on PGRs and research staff. This study should build on existing evidence...and examine how the supervision and training of PGRs and the management of research staff is developing in response to revisions to the QAA Code of Practice, the Roberts investment in transferable skills training and other related initiatives.*

There is an urgent need for much more information – 'better late than never'. *'We further recommend that the study should be conducted within the current academic year, if possible, to allow as far as possible a comparison to be drawn between the experiences of PGRs and research staff before and after the most recent changes in policy and funding.'*

The study should also establish the basis for longitudinal work, allowing stakeholders to repeat the study, and thereby build up an impression of development over time.

#### Recommendation 2a – to RCUK

*'RCUK should continue to require HEIs to report annually against their declared skills development strategies for PGRs and research staff with respect to spending of Roberts monies. They should encourage the continued use of the UK GRAD Database of Practice as a mechanism for sharing examples of practice relating directly to Roberts, but also the wider skills development agenda.'*

This recommendation is a request to RCUK to continue to head in the direction that the partners have already chosen, and not to set new targets. The Database of Practice is a tool that has already been developed. It has great potential: we should enhance and develop it so that institutions can better use it to inform their own improvements.

#### Recommendation 2b – to RCUK

*'That RCUK should consider using the following four indicators:*

- a. number of opportunities for researchers to engage in skills and career development*
- b. uptake of opportunities for skills development by researchers*
- c. extent of the use of PDP process (e.g. % engaged)*
- d. demonstrate how the institution embeds the use of researcher feedback as part of their evaluation mechanisms.'*

These indicators would be a reporting requirement on institutions in receipt of Roberts money, and would be included in institutions' annual reports to RCUK. Chris pointed out that the Rugby Team had consulted widely, in order to find indicators that would be useful over time, not add to the bureaucratic burden on HEIs and avoid developing a league-table mentality. The view within the working group was that it should not be too difficult to set up mechanisms to collect this information.

#### Recommendation 2c – to RCUK

*'RCUK should analyse the individual Roberts Reports produced by HEIs across the sector and produce an annual summary of progress against the Roberts agenda, which is generally available to the sector. The Rugby Team does not support the publication of any data that may lead to the production of 'league tables' rather than encourage continued enhancement.'*

Underlying this recommendation is the recognition that institutions are all starting from different points, and to invite comparison between them is meaningless and dangerous.

#### Recommendation 2d – to RCUK

*'RCUK should define and publish by Easter 2006 their ongoing Roberts Report requirements for 2005–6 and beyond, to allow HEIs to develop future strategy and set up appropriate data collection mechanisms.'*

The Team recognised by this recommendation the importance of giving institutions adequate time to prepare and collect information.

#### **Recommendation 3a – to UK GRAD**

*'UK GRAD should continue to support and further develop the online database of practice, and find effective ways of encouraging all HEIs to contribute to it and use it to inform enhancement of their own provision for the skills and career development of postgraduate researchers and research staff.'*

Chris reinforced the message that the more institutions contributed to the Database, the more useful it would be for users.

#### **Recommendation 3b – to UK GRAD**

*'UK GRAD should consider the development of a meaningful and viable way of collecting feedback particularly from academic and non academic employers, employees and researchers as an extension to the publication 'What Do PhDs Do?', perhaps based on the CROS principle.'*

Most HEIs do not have systematic ways of collecting feedback from employers. The Team believed that there was a role for UK GRAD in supporting the sector to do so.

#### **Recommendation 4 – to QAA**

*'The QAA should give careful consideration to how best to use HEIs' submissions to the Special Review and future audit methodologies as a means of identifying, sharing and promoting good practice in PGR provision and support across the sector. For example the outputs of the Special Review could be used to create a sector-wide view of current research degree programme (RDP) provision in England.'*

This recommendation points out that the sector already has national mechanisms and the importance of using them to understand better how the skills agenda is developing.

#### **Recommendation 5 – to the Higher Education Academy**

*'The HEA should consult with the other national stakeholders, particularly the funding councils, research councils and QAA to inform the development of their proposed survey on the impact on the research environment on the PGR learning experience.'*

This is another recommendation aimed at keeping the burden on HEIs to a minimum: if stakeholders work together, survey overload can be avoided.

#### **Recommendation 6 – to HESA**

*'RCUK has expressed interest in surveying career destinations of research council funded PGRs three and five years after graduation. The Rugby Team recommends to HESA (and the sector) that any such survey should be extended to include all PhD graduates, including non-UK domiciled graduates as far as possible.'*

Part of the tension noted earlier between national and institutional drivers is that while national agencies are focussed on UK students, and the research councils primarily on their funded students, HEIs want to see and utilise information on career destinations of the whole PGR population within the sector.

#### **Recommendation 7 - to UK HERD**

*'UK HERD group should take the lead in identifying mechanisms to evaluate across the sector the provision of skills and career development for research staff, and in proposing appropriate means of enhancing skills development amongst this group.'*

The Rugby Team recognises the research staff expertise within UK HERD: it is also important to bring together the expertise of the two cohorts, PGR and research staff, to ensure continuity of support for early career researchers.

#### **Recommendation 8A - to HEIs**

- *'Each HEI should consider how best to develop their own framework for evaluating research training of early career researchers:*
- *that will inform performance management and enhancement*
- *does not impose too great an administrative burden*
- *is compatible with external reporting requirements (particularly for Roberts funding).*

*The framework outlined in Appendix 5 (of the Rugby Team Strategy report) presents a range of measures that HEIs may wish to consider when developing their own evaluation processes.'*

In other words, this is not a prescriptive list – but an offer to institutions, to adopt these or other measures as they see fit.

### **Recommendation 8B – to HEIs**

*'Each HEI should consider how best to make use of the QAA Code of Practice, the QAA Special Review, and ongoing academic audit activities, to inform the development of a holistic institutional approach to evaluating research training of early career researchers.'*

Consistent with earlier recommendations, this one puts the onus of responsibility back on HEIs to engage with mechanisms that already exist.

### **Recommendation 8C – to HEIs**

*'HEIs should consider adopting the following performance indicators for research staff:*

- a. Presence and regular review of institution policy for their personal and career development*
- b. Provision of a professional development/review system implemented within three months of commencement of contract and at least annually thereafter*
- c. Provision of professional and career development opportunities and mechanisms for the review of their effectiveness*
- d. Opportunities for mentor support.'*

As previously noted, UK HERD is taking forward the research staff agenda. This is the Rugby Team's suggestion as to how a level playing field within institutions might be achieved.

### **PhD examination – implications**

*'Although it is beyond the remit of the Rugby Team, the implications of the research and generic skills agenda on how the PhD is examined has surfaced repeatedly in our consultations. The sector should consider whether the time is appropriate to instigate a debate on the assessment of the PhD.'*

This is clearly beyond the remit of the Rugby Team, but members wished to publicly recognise that there is a growing need for this debate to happen.

## Panel discussion

Questions to the three plenary speakers addressed the following themes:

### Drivers for change

Professor Ian Diamond was asked whether the RCs would see it as useful to integrate skills into PhD assessment. Ian replied that as HEIs are autonomous institutions, it was not for RCs to insist. Janet suggested that, as this issue was beyond the remit of the Forum, it was one the sector might like to take up in a different context. [This topic has been posted as a theme on the UK GRAD bulletin board.]

Two participants questioned the lack of mention of further drivers:

- Where do developments in Europe fit in? Dr. Iain Cameron replied that the development of transferable skills was one of the ten Salzburg Conclusions<sup>4</sup> and that the UK was recognised across Europe as the lead player in this area of researcher career reform. However, it was vital to keep our momentum going to stay at the forefront of Europe.
- Why do students not feature as a driver for change in the Rugby Team paper? The suggestion was made that students could still be involved in testing and developing the KPIs (indicators) by means of a consultancy case-study used on UK GRAD courses. [The NPC are fully participating members of the Rugby Team.]

There was also a question about employers not benefiting yet from the Roberts agenda and the difficulties in collecting feedback from them. An entry from the University of Leeds on the Database of Practice highlights the EMPRESS project by the Careers Service on employers' needs and perceptions of what researchers added (or not) to their organisation. The Rugby Team, by making Recommendation 3B, recognised the importance of gathering feedback from all stakeholders.

### Framing and developing the Rugby Team recommendations

#### Longitudinal studies

There was a concern that the proposed longer term study of career destinations, as currently proposed, might not go far enough: careers often do not get established until seven to ten years after a PhD. Iain replied that RCUK was encouraging HESA to do longitudinal studies and to take part in an OECD world-wide project on tracking doctoral holders careers. Professor Ian Diamond added that HEIs were getting much better at tracking alumni for fundraising purposes: this was an opportunity for HEIs to aid career tracking.

#### Non-RC students

Panel members of the Rugby Team were asked why, given the Team's desire to avoid recommendations that would promote a two-tier system, there was no recommendation on equality of funding for skills development for all PGR? Ian Diamond replied, suggesting that UK GRAD might wish to write to him after the Forum asking that he raise this issue at the next Funders' Forum meeting.

#### Gaps in knowledge

The problem of insufficient baseline information on the skills agenda was related to the underlying problem of a lack of a national research agenda for postgraduate study at both academic and policy level. Research that has already been done is often hard to identify. Developing such an agenda, which ESRC should then begin to fund, was overdue, especially when one looked at work done by international competitors such as the USA, Canada and Australia. Ian Diamond answered that this issue would be explored with the Rugby Team. Janet pointed out that UK GRAD and the Institute of Education are undertaking a HEA funded literature review of the research into research degree programmes<sup>5</sup>, which will be available as a searchable database later this year.

#### Influencing institutional practice

At the end of the forum John Gibbins suggested a new recommendation for RCUK: that institutions should be recommended to ring-fence Roberts funding and put Roberts statements into university mission statements.

#### RAE

Two participants sought to explore the role of the RCs in relation to equality of treatment for early career researchers within the RAE. Ian Diamond reiterated that the RCs have no regulatory authority on the RAE, but a privilege to observe on panels. Ensuring uniformity is the work of the super-panels. In response to the concern that in arts and humanities, researchers' contributions are seen as secondary to their supervisors', Ian added that he did not expect the RCs to take a formal view on issues such as joint publication.

<sup>4</sup> [www.eua.be/eua/jsp/en/upload/Salzburg\\_Conclusions.1108990538850.pdf](http://www.eua.be/eua/jsp/en/upload/Salzburg_Conclusions.1108990538850.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> [www.grad.ac.uk/pgrexperience](http://www.grad.ac.uk/pgrexperience)

## Day 1 work group feedback: validating the Rugby Team recommendations

Participants were divided into seven facilitated work groups. These were an opportunity to validate and further explore recommendations made in the Rugby Team's strategy paper. Each group reported their outputs in the plenary session that followed. In view of the substantial similarities between the views of the four groups tasked with examining Recommendation 2b, concerning key performance indicators, the work group feedback below is organised thematically rather than on a group-by-group basis.

Responses by the stakeholders to whom the recommendations are addressed are shown after each set of feedback. A summary of the responses to all the recommendations is given in Table 1 at the end of the report.

### Rugby Team recommendations for further studies (work groups A, F, G)

#### Work group A: Recommendation 1

Given the level of recent activity relating to RDPs and research staff, we make a general recommendation to the UK HE funding bodies and research councils that they commission a study into the impact of recent changes to national funding and policy on PGRs and research staff. This study should build on existing evidence from, among others, the SET for Success review and the Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS) and examine how the supervision and training of PGRs and the management of research staff is developing in response to revisions to the QAA Code of Practice, the Roberts investment in transferable skills training and other related initiatives.

#### Key outcomes

The study should also establish the basis for longitudinal work – allowing funders or other stakeholders to repeat the study and thus build up an impression of development over time. We further recommend that the study should be conducted within the current academic year, if possible, to allow as far as possible a comparison to be drawn between the experiences of PGRs and research staff before and after the most recent changes in policy and funding.

The facilitators structured discussion around the following questions:

1. Do you agree that such a study is needed?
2. Do you think there is some urgency in collecting data this year to provide a baseline?
3. What outcomes should we be looking for?
4. Do you have views/suggestions about how the study should be conducted?
5. Any other comments or suggestions?

Participants agreed unanimously that such a study was needed. They urged that data should be collected this academic year, highlighting the need:

- for the best baseline data possible (must not miss the 05/06 year)
- to consider this first year of data collection as a 'foundation year'. We should accept that we will not get it right first time and that it will be incomplete, but use lessons learnt to develop future, more effective format/processes.
- to ensure cohesion and efficiency (if we delay, we increase the risk of HEIs going down their own, different, paths).

When defining desired outcomes (question 3) the following factors should be considered:

- collecting baseline data that will allow us to come to preliminary conclusions and also inform data collection (what and how) in future years
- the need to look ahead 10–15 years if we are going to get a true evaluation
- the impact of Roberts funding being only one of several potential factors affecting the extent to which PGRs acquire skills
- using the QAA definition of a research student (there were concerns that professional doctorates and research masters might otherwise be excluded)
- using QAA Special Review information provided by institutions anonymously to produce broad overview of practice and opinion
- building on mechanisms currently used by institutions, including student surveys and Roberts reporting.

Suggestions as to how the survey should be conducted (question 4) stressed that:

- it should take into account diversity across the sector: FT versus PT mode; subject area; type of institution
- longitudinal study is optimal, but this requires baseline and sequential annual data. Use should also be made of a comparative approach in initial studies to exploit the current available data, e.g. sample different cohorts of current new starters, established and final year PhD students to enable comparisons between years. (This would be a less effective approach with research staff since Roberts money for research staff has been allocated to all years simultaneously from the start of the programme.)

- it might combine evidence of process with evidence from individuals, e.g. supervisors, to overcome the difficulty of targeting/sampling individuals in some institutions.
- the following mechanisms for conducting the study should be considered:
  - focus groups
  - evidence based/metrics: courses offered, attendance, employment etc.
  - feedback: interviews, exit surveys, telephone survey
  - sample new research staff to obtain views of pre-Roberts PhDs.

Other comments included:

- does the difficulty in establishing cause versus effect matter at this stage?
- a joined-up approach from now on is essential. There is a danger of duplication and questionnaire/survey 'fatigue' if different institutions/organisations 'do their own thing'.

*Recommendation 1* was formally accepted at the forum by Dr. Iain Cameron on behalf of RCUK. Iain promised to talk urgently with Will Naylor at HEFCE on how to proceed to undertake the study within the desired timescales. Janet, on behalf of UK GRAD, committed to examining the outcomes from the work group devoted to this recommendation to extract feedback to help develop outline terms of reference and desired outcomes from such a study. These have been circulated to RCUK and HEFCE.

### Work group F: recommendation 3B

The Rugby Team recognises the importance of collecting feedback on the research and generic skills agenda from all stakeholders. It is recommended that UK GRAD should consider the development of a meaningful and viable way of collecting feedback particularly from academic and non-academic employers, employees and researchers as an extension to the publication 'What Do PhDs Do?', perhaps based on the CROS principle.

#### Key outcomes

The group started by re-examining the proposed stakeholder groups and concentrated its efforts around the following four:

- academic employers
- non-academic employers
- researchers, including postgraduate researchers
- supervisors/principal investigators (PIs).

The group posed the following questions in relation to each stakeholder group:

- how to access it?
- who is the output for/what is the purpose of collecting the feedback?
- what do you want to know?
- how do you gather the evidence?

#### Academic employers

The suggestion was made that a sample of PIs at a range of institutions be surveyed. Those taking part would be asked to identify an outstanding 'first-position' research staff and consider what made that person exceptional. From this a set of competencies could be identified. This tool should be used by universities to assess their staff against these competencies. The information gained would then help universities identify whether the researcher development programmes currently in place were fit for purpose. A research project to investigate this suggestion could be commissioned via RCUK/HEFCE/HEA/UK GRAD.

#### Non-academic employers

These should be accessed via sectoral or common interest bodies rather than individual employers. At institutional level, more use could be made of existing industrial or external advisory groups. Employers should be asked:

- why do you employ a PhD?
- what is the ideal employee?
- how does what you've got compare to the ideal?
- are PhDs worth higher salaries?

It was stressed that non-academic employers would be approached for general feedback, not for comments on individual employees. It was noted that University of Leeds, for example, has undertaken an employer survey (EMPRESS), details of which are posted on the Database of Practice.

### Researchers

These should be surveyed via institutions, regional Hubs and the NPC. The design of the questionnaire should be fit for purpose over the long term, enabling annual comparisons. Questions should aim to identify what training has been useful and how it has been used. Questionnaires should be supplemented by focus groups of those who have undergone training. This information will be useful for individual institutions, funding bodies and the researchers themselves.

### Supervisors/PIs

These should be accessed via staff development activity and postgraduate research deans. They should be asked whether skills training has made a difference to the performance of their postgraduate researchers during their PhD, and if so, in what ways? This should be done via a sector-wide, online survey organised by UK GRAD. UK GRAD Hubs could facilitate focus groups within institutions.

*Recommendation 3b:* Dr. Janet Metcalfe responded that it was the view of UK GRAD that it would be most appropriate for the sector to drive this agenda of feedback from key stakeholders. There might be a vehicle for this if the sector decides a new working party should be recruited to take over the baton from the Rugby Team.

### Work group G: recommendation 7

*UK HERD group should take the lead in identifying mechanisms to evaluate across the sector the provision of skills and career development for research staff, and in proposing appropriate means of enhancing skills development amongst this group.*

#### Key outcomes

Simon Inger, a member of the UK HERD task force, began the workshop by explaining UK HERD as a self-organising network which aims to maximise the benefit of initiatives supporting research staff development. 'Research staff' is defined as anyone employed principally to do research, regardless of qualifications or contract length. These form a constituency separate to postgraduate researchers, and their development and issues are usually supported by people with distinctly staff-facing roles. There is therefore a clear need for some kind of sector-wide body to address and support research staff development and developers through:

1. practical measures to ensure dissemination, sharing and improvement of good practice, effectively share information, and help development professionals to maximise their effectiveness
2. co-ordinating, collating and lobbying for funding for the evidence base by which research staff development can be designed and evaluated
3. representing the interests of the research staff community to policy-makers, and lobbying for high-level support of career development practices.

Simon added that UK HERD clearly needs funding for infrastructure and projects in order to be effective. Acceptable options include:

- a. top-slicing a small fraction of Roberts funding (e.g. 0.5%) to be available for research staff development-related UK HERD projects such as conferences and training events. This should not abrogate funders from providing support in proportion to the importance they claim to place on research staff skills and career development. It would, however, be an immediate and painless way to enhance the effectiveness of the Roberts agenda for research staff
- b. ad-hoc applications to other stakeholders and funders.

The key impacts of UK HERD's proposed work plan would be on development professionals, but the increased range and quality of its efforts should be discernible by individual research staff and research managers.

Although distinctive approaches may be needed for many aspects of research staff development compared to postgraduate researchers, UK HERD will work closely with UK GRAD to ensure all possible synergies and collaborations are exploited.

*Recommendation 7:* Simon Inger confirmed that UK HERD has a UK-wide network now in place to take forward this role. The principle of top-slicing a small percentage of Roberts money at source by RCUK to support specific projects concerning research staff development was generally supported by forum participants.

## Recommendation 2B: defining KPIs for Roberts reporting (work groups B, C, D, E)

*It is recognised that in order to secure ongoing funding for skills development, RCUK also will require HEIs in receipt of Roberts funding to also report annually against a minimum number of performance indicators alongside existing reporting requirements. We agreed with the research councils' view during the Rugby Team discussions that qualification rates are not an acceptable proxy for skills development. We recommend that RCUK consider using the following four indicators:*

- a. number of opportunities for researchers to engage in skills and career development*
- b. uptake of opportunities for skills development by researchers*
- c. extent of the use of PDP process (e.g. % engaged)*
- d. demonstrate how the institution embeds the use of researcher feedback as part of their evaluation mechanisms.*

Groups B and C were asked to consider the applicability of the KPIs to PGR, while groups D and E considered the KPIs from a research staff perspective.

There was considerable overlap between the views of the four groups. For reasons of economy therefore, the following is a summary of the consolidated views. The view of a particular group is identified only where this is not shared or mentioned by the others.

### Key outcomes

Those reporting back stressed that participants had given support to the concept of KPIs, and were much in favour of the Database of Practice. Discussion had focused on three potential uses for KPI data:

- within institutions, it could be used to monitor progress year on year, at departmental/faculty/institutional levels
- aggregated by RCUK, it would be used to show national progress on the skills agenda
- it was also possible that data would be used to make comparisons between the performance of different institutions

Of these three uses, work groups supported the first, confirming that this could support an enhancement-led approach in their HEI. Several groups mentioned that the KPIs listed in Appendix 5 of the Strategy Paper, which form part of Recommendation 8 (that institutions consider basing their institutional evaluation practice on this framework) was, though onerous, likely to be very useful.

The majority acceded with some reluctance to the second use for KPI data – unconvinced that collated data at national level would be meaningful, but accepting that it was required in order for RCUK to make the case to government for continued funding. Group E went further than the other groups in questioning the appropriateness of collating national data from a common set of KPIs, suggesting that each HEI be responsible for defining its own targets, based on the needs of its researcher constituency, and report to RCUK progress against those targets

All work groups shared a concern, however, that institutional data might be used at some point to make comparisons and draw conclusions about relative performance. Participants in all groups voiced the view that to make cross-institutional comparisons was erroneous, because institutions would:

- not necessarily be applying the same unit of measurement
- have different starting points
- be of very different sizes, which impacted considerably upon scale and type of provision
- have very different constituencies (e.g. whether full-time or part-time students dominate), which has a major influence on both the provision and uptake of skills development opportunities.

Speakers warned that institutional comparison was fraught with danger, as it paved the way for a league table mentality taking over the skills development sector, which would make enhancement-led approaches in HEIs impossible to maintain. Groups insisted:

*'Metrics are only relative to time and institution.'*

## The proposed KPIs

It was felt that there needed to be a balance between quantitative and qualitative measures and that the proposed KPIs perhaps gave too much weight to quantitative information. Three KPIs called for numerical information, with only KPI d lending itself to a descriptive response.

Groups varied in the level of support they gave KPIs a, b and d. Not all were as positive as Group C, who stated:

*'the group were broadly content with the KPIs a, b and d and confident that they would be able to use to gauge the health of the skills development agenda in the UK.'*

However, all groups had serious concerns about KPI c, described below.

Group D's feedback emphasised the desirability of developing the proposed KPIs so that they better supported HEIs' enhancement-led approaches to skills and career development. For example, Group D suggested inserting the words 'development and' before 'evaluation' in KPI d would enable the KPIs to be described as a cycle of continuous review, with development and evaluation of programmes leading back to setting of provision.

### KPIs (a) and (b)

Groups had reservations about the framing of KPIs a and b in terms of 'number, and uptake of opportunities.' They posed a number of questions. What constituted an opportunity? How would comparisons be made between face-to-face courses and other types of opportunity? Was uptake measured by course booking or attendance? How do you measure opportunities/uptake of non-course based learning such as online learning, mentoring, and shadowing? Group D pointed out that research staff were more likely to take up a range of less quantifiable, more informal opportunities than were postgraduate researchers.

Group E identified a possible unit of measurement: a credit, or ten student hours, but did not believe it was the right unit. In common with other groups, E believed that the scope, range, breadth and depth of opportunity was more important than the number. Groups also repeated the wish to be able to measure the quality of opportunity; to find out from PGRs and research staff what aspects of the opportunities taken up have been useful.

Relating to research staff, Group D felt there was value in looking at CROS for what it revealed about the needs staff say they have, what provision is there, and how the two match up.

### KPI (c)

There was much opposition to the use of PDP processes being measured. Groups pointed out that the Dearing Report had tasked the sector with making PDP available to all students as an opportunity, but that uptake was a matter of individual student choice. This principle should be maintained. Measuring engagement would encourage HEIs to put pressure on students, which would work against the effective use of PDP. In short: 'HEIs should be asked if they've got a PDP process in place. They shouldn't be asked about uptake.' Group B identified a number of ways of probing PDP opportunity within an institution, such as availability in different departments and whether PDP is introduced at induction.

The groups looking at research staff also pointed out that the term PDP did not have relevance for this cohort. Different terms would need to be used to indicate the range of activities that research staff undergo, that fit within a PDP framework but are not so called.

### KPI (d)

Groups supported the general thrust of this KPI. Again, it was thought that the wording of the KPI needed attention. It should be made clear that the KPI refers to identifying the processes by which an institution gathers feedback, rather than what feedback it collects. The term demonstrate might also need explanation. Does it mean offer proof or give a description? Group B felt that researcher feedback should be broadened to stakeholder feedback, although it recognised that there was an issue about what can usefully be collected and reported upon.

Group E took up the theme of making use of tools that already existed, in order to reduce the burden on HEIs and add value to successful mechanisms. The group recommended that institutions be required to log relevant information on the Database of Practice, enabling national data on this KPI to be collated by interrogating the database.

## Implications for the Rugby Team

The combined feedback from the work groups thereby invited the Rugby Team to re-visit the Recommendation 2b KPIs and:

- consider how it might frame the Recommendation to encourage institutions to recognise and use the KPIs within an enhancement-led approach (for example, using a development cycle description), helping them to set targets and track year-on-year progress within their institution
- develop the definitions of the units of measurement (such as opportunity)
- change the wording where current expressions were not relevant or meaningful to research staff (such as PDP)
- redefine KPI c so that opportunity and not engagement was measured
- consider whether qualitative indicators (such as breadth and width of opportunity) might supplement or replace 'number of opportunities'
- examine whether the database of practice should be used for reporting on KPI d.

*Recommendation 2b:* Chris Park confirmed that the Rugby Team will fine-tune the KPIs (and wording of any other recommendations where feedback has been received). This is for purposes of clarity, not substantive change.

Dr. Iain Cameron agreed with the importance of an enhancement led approach and acknowledged the sector's concern of inappropriate inter-institutional comparisons, but stressed that RCUK needed the data from the KPIs to be able to be collated at national level

There is also work still to be done on producing guidance on how to measure the KPIs taking into account the intent of the process.

## Day 2 emerging themes and sharing practice: work group feedback

Day 2 activities consisted of work groups arranged around the three themes that clearly emerged from the issues raised:

- how to meet the needs of researchers
- strategies for winning hearts and minds
- embedding provision within usual practice.

Participants attended two sessions, designed to address the key questions submitted in advance. The first session was an opportunity to explore the issues, share practice and identify practical approaches for a particular cohort; the second session was a chance to look at the synergies and differences across the cohorts and possible recommendations at how to respond to them as an institution.

Work groups were asked to report key outcomes focussed around the specific similarities and differences in provision for the PGR and research staff agendas, followed by any practical ideas or suggestions for moving forward, along with any examples of good practice.

Across each of the three themes, there was substantial overlap between the points made by the group focusing on postgraduate researchers and that concerned with research staff. (In Theme B, there was a third group, concerned with academic staff.) To avoid repetition, therefore, group feedback has been combined except where stated.

### Theme A: meeting the needs of researchers

#### What are the key requirements of the target groups?

##### Similarities between postgraduate researcher and research staff provision

- Both groups need to upskill, even if they have different starting points. **Training needs analysis (TNA)** is needed for all
- Both groups are subject to **formal assessment processes** designed to identify training needs
- As 'researchers in training', both groups need **mentors** as well as 'managers'
- It is the responsibility of the **supervisor/PI to support** their researchers' development: the attitude of the supervisor/PI heavily influences take up of opportunities
- Both groups have fixed end points (PhD, contract) and uncertainty about the future. Both need **career information** that is timely, honest, realistic and independent
- It was observed that similarities between PGR and research staff within disciplines are greater than the similarities between PGR or research staff across disciplines; e.g. the experience of a chemistry PhD researcher has more in common with chemistry research staff than with a social science PhD researcher. Institutions can address this by some of the work being **discipline-based**
- There is much **diversity in both groups**, e.g. there are increasing numbers of overseas early career researchers. Provision exists for overseas PGR but rarely for overseas research staff
- Both groups have **social needs** to alleviate isolation, and need fora to meet other PGR or research staff
- Both groups depend on good **communication structures** within their institutions
- Opportunities to **practise new skills** (not just learn them) are needed by both groups

##### Differences between postgraduate researcher and research staff provision

- **Status** and therefore relationship with the HEI: research staff are staff of the institution; PGRs are 'customers'
- Routes of **accountability** differ: responsibility for the two groups usually lies in different parts of the institution
- **Information systems** (human resources) relating to PGR provision are generally good; for research staff they are generally poor and as a result there are many communication difficulties
- There is a national **Code of Practice** for postgraduate researchers but not one for research staff
- The HEI has different **expectations of output** from the two groups. Research staff are expected by their PI to achieve the project as priority; with personal development very much secondary
- Research staff want to be acknowledged as having moved **beyond 'student' status** and may be reluctant to take up learning opportunities. As a group, they are also more likely to have family and other responsibilities, which impact upon their attitude towards provision
- The level of **skills requirement** is likely to be higher for research staff
- There are **subject differences**, e.g. research staff are concentrated in science research and within arts and humanities postgraduate researchers are very distributed. This has implications for provision locally
- **Diversity** issues may be different, with many more part-time and distance learning PGRs than research staff

## Actions for institutions

Offered by both Groups (A1 & A2):

- develop communication and collaboration between central support for the two groups: graduate offices, staff development, careers services
- develop information systems to identify overlaps and gaps in provision
- offer induction to all overseas researchers – staff as well as students
- make separate social opportunities available for both groups
- use e-learning to support face-to-face training, e.g. through preparation and follow up activities. With increased diversity of researcher population, e-learning becomes an even more important tool. Careful thought has to go into its design as a result of the multiplicity of groups using it.

Suggested by Group A1 (PGR):

- work on the level of discipline where appropriate
- ensure career information gets to PGR/research staff and their supervisor/PI.

Suggested by Group A2 (research staff):

- develop a Code of Practice for research staff providing formal recognition of their status and activities
- following from this, provide mechanisms for reviewing training needs and a framework for this to be carried out
- recognise the value of mentoring
- encourage engagement with supervisors and PIs by developing incentives
- respond to the need for evidence-based research
- recognise that all the above needs additional funding for it to take place.

## Examples of practice

- Cross-HEI women's mentoring scheme (St Andrews and Dundee)
- Dedicated careers advisers for research staff (e.g. Warwick, and a number of others)
- Careers events including alumni e.g. 'Working on a fixed-term contract'
- E-learning support provision for PGRs (e.g. University of Melbourne's 'PhD essentials' covers ethics, project design and includes video clips)
- The Open University's 'Lyceum' includes a virtual meeting room and virtual tutorial
- Building a training element into job descriptions/expectations e.g. MRC Career Development Fellows

## Theme B: strategies for winning hearts and minds

### How should we develop strategies for engaging postgraduate researchers (Group B1), research staff (Group B2), supervisors and principle investigators (Group B3) in the skills development agenda?

#### Similarities between the target groups

##### Need for commitment by, and to, the institution

All these groups belong to the same institution! Much discussion focused on the key issue of ownership. Commitment from the very top was vital. The example was given of the Vice-Chancellor of one of the HEIs represented, who takes part in PGR induction, and stresses; *'if you just stay within your department and do research you have missed the point of doing a PhD.'* Personal commitment from the top needs to be reflected by institutions' mission statements, reworded to include the Roberts mission.

##### Bottom-up and top-down approaches

While top-level buy-in is necessary, it was not thought as sufficient for success. All groups need to be able to develop a sense of belonging; working to strengthen *institutional citizenship* will immeasurably help win hearts and minds to personal and professional development. Institutional citizenship can only flourish if institutions listen, respond and ensure needs are identified 'bottom-up'. Researchers need not only to be able to contribute their views, they also need to be given feedback on them: to know that their voice counts. All groups of researchers must be included in formal representation (committees, advisory groups and so on).

### Common misconceptions

Individuals in all these groups lack awareness of their needs and of the benefits of engaging with the agenda. In many cases, the problem is ignorance of what is available – it is not always a matter of ideological opposition to the skills agenda. We need to work harder to communicate throughout our institutions. The importance of senior-level champions was stressed. Extremely effective ambassadors were alumni and successful supervisors/PIs committed to the skills agenda. It was vitally important to show alternative role models and successful case studies, to counteract negative influences. Emphasis must always be on showing how time is being invested, not wasted, that the gain is a higher level of skills, adding value to the research.

Group B2 discussed how ignorance of researcher roles and needs by non-research staff also obstructs progress. We need to do more to educate support services, human resources departments, library staff etc.

### Response to quality

Groups repeatedly warned that everything offered under the Roberts umbrella needed to be of the highest quality. Effective provision, that was seen by participants to be useful for their research role, marketed itself by word of mouth. Conversely, ineffective provision could do much to set back winning over hearts and minds.

### Need for management skills

Group B2 also suggested that all the target groups need to be supported to acquire management skills, so that they understand better the views of their managers and those they have to manage. Both people and project management should be covered.

### Differences between the target groups

#### Special needs of research staff

All groups believed that research staff are the most disenfranchised and fragmented as a group. (For example, they were the group least likely to be included in formal representation channels.) Considerable work needs to be done to help reduce social isolation and to engage them in management processes. The need for 'catch up' time and attention in their own groups, not mixed ones, was much emphasised. Group B3 observed that often the efforts that are made for them are not properly communicated and that this reinforces the sense of disenfranchisement. One group pointed out that the Fixed Term directive should, over the longer term, considerably help in improving the status of research staff.

In the longer term it may sometimes be appropriate to bring postgraduate researchers and research staff together for training. The choice of whether to offer joint or separately tailored provision for PGR and research staff should be determined by topic and institutional culture.

#### Diversity

Group B1 noted that reaching distance and part-time postgraduate researchers was a major challenge; research staff are mainly full-time and on-site. Group B2 noted that mature/long stay research staff need support provision differently packaged, if they are to feel it is something they might benefit from. Learning needs analysis of all staff should be derived from proper annual appraisal.

#### Single versus multiple focus

Full time postgraduate researchers (when based at an institution) are easier to cater for and communicate with, because they are focussed wholly on their research, whereas supervisors, managers and part time researchers have a host of priorities.

### Actions for institutions

- Place importance of research skills training in teaching portfolios and department/school/faculty strategic plans as well as in mission statements and speeches by senior management. Fostering a training culture means developing your training for academic staff
- Build in representation of all students and staff groups. As well as permanent structures such as committee representation, there is a very important role for open fora, focus groups and task forces to ensure needs are identified bottom-up and institutional citizenship promoted. Institutions should ask themselves: 'do we listen properly to the researcher voice when we develop our researcher training?'
- Constantly recruit and use champions, ambassadors, infiltrators... Find alumni prepared to discuss how they have retrospectively valued their training and development

- Ensure that you get induction right, both content and image. First impressions count! Attend to semantics and ensure you are sensitive to the recipients' context e.g. PGR at induction are not interested in hearing about employability skills. Induction should involve past students, academic staff in post
- Meet researchers' needs by offering a range of training structure options and different levels of skills development
- Be pragmatic. Work with departments/faculties who express interest. Then publicise those successes
- Work to build the skills agenda into high-level committee structures, where supportive senior staff monitor provision and spend: this will make progress harder to dismantle if Roberts money is no longer ring-fenced within institutions
- Use 'carrots' such as awards/inducements/prizes balanced with 'sticks' such as mandatory performance review. Be careful how you use 'sticks'. *'Support and encouragement, not enforcement, wins hearts and minds.'*
- Practise what we preach, e.g. frame job descriptions at all levels using the Joint Skills Statement.
- Other areas that institutions might want to look at are: workload planning for staff, and 'approved supervisor' schemes

### Examples of practice

- Responsibility for Roberts money and this agenda at Pro-Rector level at Imperial College, London and others
- Annual award at Durham for best supervisors. Awardees then give master classes
- HEA award based on essays written by PhD students on good/best supervisory practice
- Showing personal commitment to provision: Director inviting junior colleagues and signing using first name.
- Getting PGRs to set up their own conferences, seminar programmes to develop and practise a range of skills (Glasgow)

## Theme C: embedding provision within usual practice

### What is the long-term vision of the skills development requirements?

#### Groups C1 and C2

Both groups noted that much of their discussion echoed points made by work groups looking at Themes A and B. Issues such as quality of provision, endorsement, communication, ownership and infrastructural change were mentioned repeatedly: *'to a great extent, embedding means...we need to do a lot more of all that over a long period of time.'*

However, by taking the longer-term view, the discussions of Groups C1 and C2 also drew out the following factors and issues:

#### Culture shift timescales

Change takes a long time to embed: 10–15 years. In some cases natural wastage is the only solution to opposition to the skills agenda!

Equally, we must not forget how far we have come: *'Roberts funding has made an enormous difference.'*

Development staff are in place to make the agenda happen, institutional structures have developed, for example committees and advisory groups, often bringing together senior staff with representatives of PGR/research staff.

Culture shift is also accelerated by national coverage of the Roberts agenda. Institutions who have received less Roberts money need to collaborate with larger institutions. Recognising that everyone is operating this agenda helps culture shift everywhere.

#### From add-on to expected provision

Embedding the Roberts agenda into institutional committee structures/advisory groups was seen as vital. If institutions no longer have to ring-fence Roberts money, it will be more difficult for that money to be used for other purposes if there is scrutiny and oversight of skills provision at senior levels.

If we are successful, in 15 years time there will not be a separate skills agenda – it will be seamlessly integrated into normal expectations of PGR supervision and research staff work.

#### Winning hearts and minds

'Bottom-up' and 'top-down' pressure need to work together. Other groups have described the need for senior-level endorsement. It must be stressed too, that researchers are not necessarily easily won over. There is still resistance, widespread in some disciplines. Won over, researchers are vitally important for leveraging pressure (peer pressure and upwards).

*Research staff* often resist initiatives which they see as being aimed primarily at 'students'. As a result, institutions should review how they measure up against the following:

- top quality, differentiated provision is essential, and it must be tailored to individual needs
- there must be a clear link between training needs analysis, skills training inputs and outputs that are useful to the recipient's research

- how institutions conduct induction for PGRs, research staff **and** supervisors/PIs, is critical
- there is a need to develop marketing and communication strategies to ensure PGRs and research staff know that you are offering tailor-made provision.

#### **Developing and retaining commitment**

- PDP is more successful if it is seen as a career continuum and not as stopping after the PhD. It may be necessary to change the name PDP to encourage research staff to engage. Keep it simple and pragmatic
- TNA must happen at annual review, not just at the start. Opportunities for career review must similarly be offered at defined intervals.
- Actively challenge the preoccupation with academic careers and promote recognition that other careers are valid options.

#### **Funding bodies' role**

- Funding mechanisms must make researcher staff development a key criterion. PIs would have to take the skills agenda seriously if the RCs built more explicit references to statements on skills development for PGR/research staff into grant applications and end of award reports
- RCs should continue to require institutions to report on the use of skills budgets
- RCs should make it easier for institutions to embed the Roberts agenda by agreeing and implementing a common approach on the recommendations. (It is not helpful that the individual research councils have different interpretations of the move to an average 3.5 years for a PhD.)

#### **Actions for institutions**

##### **Which approach – carrot or stick, or a combination?**

- Making access to Roberts money contingent on departments demonstrating that they are providing appropriate opportunities
- Buy-in at supervisor/PI level may be more successful if incentives are offered rather than penalties. Continually selling the benefits to supervisors is vital
- Build in third party assistance/guidance for researchers. Make it a specific responsibility of co-supervisors
- Consider giving the individual PGR/research staff a training account/budget (possibly contingent on evidence of engagement with RDP and skill development opportunities)
- Invite bids for money for innovative training/development opportunities. Make this open to everyone, so that the agenda can be owned by anyone in the institution: it should not be seen just as the preserve of the staff development unit/graduate school or equivalent
- A minority of HEIs already give credit for skills development: explore this option
- Consider how developing collaborative provision (for example the institutions in the North East) can help change expectations in your different target groups

## Forum conclusions and outcomes

On behalf of the Rugby Team, Professor Chris Park thanked all the working groups for carefully examining some of the proposed recommendations and giving very valuable feedback.

The themes he had drawn out from the group reports were the:

- recurring fear of league tables: the worry that this would become just a bean-counting exercise
- importance of measuring distance travelled on an individual institution basis
- difficulties of longitudinal analysis
- scale of the challenges: reconciling different interests all the way up from departmental to national level
- importance of diversity issues
- tension between postgraduate researchers and research staff. Is it possible to develop a single set of tools?

Chris was encouraged that participants had urged the Rugby Team to fine-tune the KPIs but had not made fundamental objections to the recommendations. On the basis of this mandate, i.e. the final consultation within the sector, the Team would revise the strategy paper ready for publication.

Chris ended with a reminder that a perfect solution to evaluation difficulties was unattainable, but that did not make it any less important for the sector to take a collective lead, because:

*'if we, the sector, don't do this, someone else will do it to us!'*

## Progressing the Rugby Team agenda

Opening the forum's final session, Dr. Janet Metcalfe invited the representatives of all the stakeholders present to give their response to Rugby Team recommendations directed at their organisation, taking into account the feedback received from participants during the forum.

The responses by the stakeholders to their recommendations were generally very positive. They are summarised in table 1 below. In light of the comments from the forum and the stakeholders the Rugby Team will revise the strategy paper and publish the final document for circulation widely within the sector during spring 2006.

The Rugby Team, having discharged its original terms of reference, had three final questions for participants:

1. Should a successor body to the Rugby Team be formed to take up some of the recommendations that still need national action/pressure behind them?
2. If so, what should be the terms of reference for the group?
3. What should be the profile of the group? - nominations for volunteers are welcome. [Members of the current Rugby Team are welcome to re-volunteer - or not!]

There was a strong indication from participants that there was still a need for a sector-led group, such as the Rugby Team, to ensure that the key recommendations in the strategy paper are driven forward. This has subsequently been confirmed through email correspondence with participants, with several individuals volunteering to become members.

The majority view was that the current Rugby Team should review its membership and identify where specific stakeholder representation was missing; suggestions included the Scottish and Welsh funding councils and more regional representation. To keep the size of the group workable, the virtual correspondence group would also be retained.

The feedback also suggested that one of the first tasks of the revised Rugby Team should be to agree its terms of reference in light of the feedback from the Forum.

Janet drew proceedings to a close by thanking participants for their contributions to the forum and valuable feedback on the Rugby Team recommendations. She also thanked all members of the Rugby Team for their hard and productive work over 2005, and in particular Chris Park, for steering the group so effectively throughout its challenging remit.

**Table 1: Responses to the Rugby Team strategy paper recommendations**

Recommendation	Actions agreed at the Policy Forum
<p><b>Recommendation 1 to RCUK &amp; funding councils</b> Given the level of recent activity relating to RDPs and research staff, we make a general recommendation to the UK HE funding bodies and research councils that they commission a study into the impact of recent changes to national funding and policy on PGRs and research staff.</p> <p>This study should build on existing evidence from, among others, the SET for Success review and the Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS) and examine how the supervision and training of PGRs and the management of research staff is developing in response to revisions to the QAA Code of Practice, the Roberts investment in transferable skills training and other related initiatives.</p>	<p>This was formally accepted by Iain Cameron on behalf of RCUK. Iain promised to talk urgently with Will Naylor at HEFCE on how to proceed to undertake the study within the desired timescales. Janet, on behalf of UK GRAD, committed to examining the outcomes from the work group devoted to this recommendation to extract feedback to help develop outline terms of reference and desired outcomes from such a study. These have been circulated to RCUK and HEFCE.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 2a to RCUK</b> RCUK should continue to require HEIs to report annually against their declared skills development strategies for PGRs and research staff with respect to spending of Roberts monies. They should encourage the continued use of the UK GRAD database of practice as a mechanism for sharing examples of practice relating directly to Roberts, but also the wider skills development agenda.</p>	<p>Iain confirmed that RCUK will continue to ask institutions for short annual reports on their use of Roberts funding, and will support development of the Database of Practice through the UK GRAD Programme.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 2b to RCUK</b> That RCUK should consider using the following four indicators:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>number of opportunities for researchers to engage in skills and career development</li> <li>uptake of opportunities for skills development by researchers</li> <li>extent of the use of PDP process (e.g. % engaged)</li> <li>demonstrate how the institution embeds the use of researcher feedback as part of their evaluation mechanisms.</li> </ol>	<p>Chris Park, chair of the Rugby Team, confirmed that the Rugby team will fine-tune the KPIs (and wording of any other recommendations where feedback has been received). This is for purposes of clarity, not substantive change.</p> <p>Iain Cameron agreed with the importance of an enhancement-led approach and acknowledged the sector's concern of inappropriate inter-institutional comparisons, but stressed that RCUK needed the data from the KPIs to be able to be collated at national level.</p> <p>There is also work still to be done on producing guidance on how to measure the KPIs taking into account the intent of the process.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 2c to RCUK</b> RCUK should analyse the individual Roberts Reports produced by HEIs across the sector and produce an annual summary of progress against the Roberts agenda, which is generally available to the sector. The Rugby Team does not support the publication of any data that may lead to the production of 'league tables' rather than encourage continued enhancement.</p>	<p>Iain confirmed that RCUK will produce an annual summary of progress in the sector, based on institutional reports, and will seek feedback from the sector on whether RCUK's format is useful and whether/how it should be developed.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 2d to RCUK</b> RCUK should define and publish by Easter 2006 their ongoing Roberts Report requirements for 2005–6 and beyond, to allow HEIs to develop future strategy and set up appropriate data collection mechanisms.</p>	<p>Iain agreed to publish ongoing Roberts Report requirements by Easter to allow HEIs sufficient development time.</p>

**Table 1: Responses to the Rugby Team strategy paper recommendations** *(continued)*

Recommendation	Actions agreed at the Policy Forum
<p><b>Recommendation 3a to UK GRAD</b> UK GRAD should continue to support and further develop the online Database of Practice, and find effective ways of encouraging all HEIs to contribute to it and use it to inform enhancement of their own provision for the skills and career development of postgraduate researchers and research staff.</p>	<p>UK GRAD will continue to host and develop the Database of Practice. In summer/autumn 2006 UK GRAD will fully analyse database contents to highlight the richness of reports contained there. UK GRAD invites feedback on how the database could be improved and will devise a feedback survey using the Bristol Online Survey (BOS).</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 3b to UK GRAD</b> UK GRAD should consider the development of a meaningful and viable way of collecting feedback particularly from academic and non academic employers, employees and researchers as an extension to the publication, 'What Do PhDs Do?', perhaps based on the CROS principle.</p>	<p>Janet Metcalfe responded that it was the view of UK GRAD that it would be most appropriate for the sector to drive this agenda of feedback from key stakeholders. There might be a vehicle for this if the sector decides a new working party should be recruited to take over the baton from the Rugby Team.</p> <p>To progress this recommendation will be one of the requirements of the new 'Rugby Team'.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 4 to QAA</b> The QAA should give careful consideration to how best to use HEIs' submissions to the Special Review and future audit methodologies as a means of identifying, sharing and promoting good practice in PGR provision and support across the sector. For example the outputs of the Special Review could be used to create a sector-wide view of current RDP provision in England.</p>	<p>Gill Clarke, QAA's representative on the Rugby Team, confirmed that QAA has already started working on this recommendation. She also stated that all information used from the Special Review will be anonymous (and with permission only) and that the analysis will be based on trends not specifics. The recommendation will be re-worded slightly to make this absolutely clear.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 5 to the Higher Education Academy</b> The HEA should consult with the other national stakeholders, particularly the funding councils, research councils and QAA to inform the development of their proposed survey on the impact on the research environment of the PGR learning experience.</p>	<p>HEA is involved in discussions with a sub group of the Rugby Team and other interested parties to develop a more joined-up approach in forthcoming survey work.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 6 to HESA</b> RCUK has expressed interest in surveying career destinations of research council-funded PGRs three and five years after graduation. The Rugby Team recommends to HESA (and the sector) that any such survey should be extended to include all PhD graduates, including non-UK domiciled graduates as far as possible.</p>	<p>Iain Cameron confirmed that RCUK will explore this with HESA.</p> <p>Janet Metcalfe added a note of caution, suggesting that the cost of extra data collection had not yet been apportioned, and that the sector should be consulted over the additional burden entailed.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 7 to UK HERD</b> UK HERD group should take the lead in identifying mechanisms to evaluate across the sector the provision of skills and career development for research staff, and in proposing appropriate means of enhancing skills development amongst this group.</p>	<p>Simon Inger confirmed that UK HERD has a UK-wide network now in place to take forward this role. The principle of top-slicing a small percentage of Roberts money at source by RCUK to support specific projects concerning research staff development that organisations such as UK HERD can bid for was generally supported by forum participants.</p>

**Table 1: Responses to the Rugby Team strategy paper recommendations** *(continued)*

Recommendation	Actions agreed at the Policy Forum
<b>The forum did not discuss the following Rugby Team recommendations relating directly to institutions.</b>	
<p><b>Recommendation 8A to HEIs</b> Each HEI should consider how best to develop their own framework for evaluating research training of early career researchers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• that will inform performance management and enhancement</li> <li>• that does not impose too great an administrative burden</li> <li>• that is compatible with external reporting requirements (particularly for Roberts funding).</li> </ul> <p>The framework outlined in Appendix 5 of the Rugby Team strategy paper presents a range of measures that HEIs may wish to consider when developing their own evaluation processes.</p>	Participants were formally invited to note the recommendations to directed at institutions and develop and implement their own institutional plans.
<p><b>Recommendation 8B to HEIs</b> Each HEI should consider how best to make use of the QAA Code of Practice, the QAA Special Review, and ongoing academic audit activities, to inform the development of a holistic institutional approach to evaluating research training of early career researchers.</p>	
<p><b>Recommendation 8C to HEIs</b> HEIs should consider adopting the following performance indicators for research staff:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. presence and regular review of institution policy for their personal and career development</li> <li>b. provision of a professional development/review system implemented within three months of commencement of contract and at least annually thereafter</li> <li>c. provision of professional and career development opportunities and mechanisms for the review of their effectiveness</li> <li>d. opportunities for mentor support.</li> </ol>	

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