



Vitae Researcher Development Conference 2008

8-9 September 2008, Novotel London West

www.vitae.ac.uk/vitaeconference2008

Conference report

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NESTA is the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts - a unique and independent body with a mission to make the UK more innovative.

NESTA runs a series of programs on collaborative innovation. This range of programmes encourages people to connect across organisations, places and disciplines.

NESTA believes the problems faced by society, such as global warming, ageing populations or sustainable growth, will need input from across a number of disciplines. Traditional boundaries between disciplines or knowledge communities create specialised and insular research agendas. NESTA looks to create opportunities for such communities to interact to create new knowledge, produce real innovations and solve society's grand challenges.

NESTA seeks to promote innovative models for cross-disciplinary research in the UK and to understand the cultural and institutional barriers that need to be overcome for such research to flourish.

As part of this programme NESTA runs Crucible, a residential scheme which offers 30 early-stage career researchers an opportunity to develop new collaborations across disciplines. This programme is now being run by several universities and institutions.



The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers sets out the expectations and responsibilities of researchers, their managers, employers and funders. It aims to increase the attractiveness and sustainability of research careers in the UK and to improve the quantity, quality and impact of research for the benefit of UK society and the economy.

The single largest contribution to the implementation of the Concordat will be through the Vitae programme. Vitae champions the personal, professional and career development of researchers in the UK and its activities will support universities and research institutions to achieve the principles of the Concordat. One of the aims of Vitae is building an evidence base to support the researcher development agenda. As part of this aim, Vitae will work with the HE sector and other stakeholders to review progress in implementing the Concordat and advising on the definition of the benchmarking study under Principle Seven.

www.researchconcordat.ac.uk

Conference report contents

8-9 September 2008, Novotel London West

■ Introduction

Page 4

■ Welcome

Page 5

Dr Janet Metcalfe, Chair and Head, Vitae

■ Day 1 plenary presentations and Q&A

Page 6

Professor Jean Chambaz, Université Pierre et Marie Curie

Professor Sir Richard Brook, Director, The Leverhulme Trust

Professor Ella Ritchie, Pro-Vice-Chancellor Teaching and Learning, University of Newcastle

Q&A panel session

■ Day 2 plenary presentations and panel discussion

Page 10

Ellen Pearce, Director, Vitae and CRAC: The Career Development Organisation

Panel chaired by Jeffrey Defries, Chief Executive, CRAC: The Career Development Organisation

■ Professor Philip Esler, Chief Executive, Arts and Humanities Research Council

■ Dr Andrew Dearing, Secretary General, European Industrial Research Management Association

■ Martin Owen, Director, Medrus Learning

■ Professor Margaret Attack, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research, University of Leeds

■ Dr Patrick Hadoke, Research Fellow, Queens Medical Research Institute, University of Edinburgh

Participant questions

■ Richard Reeves, Director, DEMOS

■ Workshop outcomes

Page 15

■ The postgraduate researcher agenda

■ The research staff agenda

■ The overarching researcher agenda

■ Issues emerging from the day

Page 19

Introduction

8-9 September 2008, Novotel London West

The first Vitae Researcher Development Conference: Realising the potential of researchers focused on a new era of professional and development support for researchers in the UK. Significant and rapid changes in the global environment create both opportunities and challenges for building the skills base of UK researchers during the next five years.

The conference addressed five overarching themes:

- strategies for sustaining personal and career support for researchers
- new models and approaches for understanding researchers as professionals
- supporting innovation in skills development
- understanding, developing and promoting researcher careers
- research, evidence and evaluation relating to the skills and careers of researchers.

Over 400 participants attended the conference, which builds on, and incorporates the work of the UK GRAD Programme and the UK Higher Education Researcher Development Group (UKHERD).

Background

The government and national stakeholders have stressed the need to increase the value of the UK research base, ensuring international visibility and respect. The importance of sustainable and attractive research careers is critical in a world where 'the UK cannot compete on cost, [but] must raise our game on skills, training and knowledge' (Lambert review, 2003¹). There have been repeated calls for a new national framework for research careers. The focus on 'driving up higher level skills that contribute to innovation in business' was outlined in the recent 'Innovation Nation' white paper².

The revised 'Concordat to support the career development of researchers'³, launched in June 2008, aims to demonstrate internationally the high standards of management and support that can be expected by researchers in the UK. It creates a single framework for institutions seeking to meet the expectations of a number of different funders within the UK as well as the European Commission. It provides a new imperative to review and improve professional development support, particularly for research staff.

In July 2008, the Research Councils UK 'Mission for Social and Economic Impact'⁴ was published providing, for the first time, a clear statement of the research councils' role in enhancing economic and social wellbeing. It covers the activities and disciplines of all seven research councils and is accompanied by a 'Statement of Expectation on Economic and Social Impact'⁵, which describes the behaviour and attitudes that RCUK wishes to foster.

The conference addressed the strategic and practical implications of a changing framework of support for researchers in the UK.

This report summarises the keynote presentations, panel debate and issues and outcomes from workshop discussions, identifying the key issues emerging from the day. Presentation slides for the keynotes and further details of the 31 workshops are available at:

www.vitae.ac.uk/vitaeconference2008

The conference was chaired by Professor Mary Ritter, Pro Rector, Postgraduate and International Affairs, Imperial College London and chair of the Vitae Education Advisory Board.

¹ www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/lambert_review_business_university_collab.htm

² www.dius.gov.uk/publications/SciencInnovation.pdf

³ www.researchconcordat.ac.uk/

⁴ www.rcuk.ac.uk/innovation/rolerc/missionsei.htm

⁵ www.rcuk.ac.uk/innovation/rolerc/missionsei.htm

8-9 September 2008, Novotel London West

Welcome

Dr Janet Metcalfe, Chair and Head, Vitae

Dr Janet Metcalfe, introduced the themes and aim of the first Vitae conference.

In welcoming participants to the conference, Janet highlighted that this year's conference brings together, for the first time, the issues relating to professional and career development for both doctoral researchers and research staff. Vitae acknowledges the distinctness of these two cohorts, but also the commonality in many issues that researchers face.

The conference was designed to enable participants to explore key issues in developing researchers over the next five years and to discuss strategic and practical approaches to supporting the skills and career development of postgraduate researchers and research staff in a changing global and national context. Janet identified the conference as a prime opportunity to share ideas and practice with a network of all those who have a stake in developing UK researchers. This year's event included the following features designed to broaden the range of interaction and discussion opportunities available to participants:

- timetabled networking sessions
- participants seated at networked conference tables, enabling questions for speakers to be relayed to the platform
- 'fringe sessions' for presentation and discussion of work in progress, recently completed work, new ideas, best practice and for building networks.

Initiatives and projects launched or explored at the conference include:

- the Higher Education Academy '**Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES): 2008**'⁶
- the **Quality Assurance Agency** web-based discussion paper on doctoral programmes (July 2007)⁷
- the revised '**Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS)**'⁸ which is set to launch early 2009. Through a related workshop participants input thoughts and ideas about what the revised survey tool for research staff should contain
- the new '**Concordat to Support the Career Management of Researchers**'⁹, launched in June. The conference addressed practical ways in which to support its implementation
- outcomes from the '**UKHERD Members' Survey**'¹⁰, which took place early this year
- a report from a collaborative project '**Enterprise at work: exploring intrapreneurship in researcher development**'¹¹
- the '**Impact Framework**'¹², developed by the Rugby Team. Revised terms of reference for the team, a sector-based group set up to 'propose meaningful and workable ways of evaluating skills development in early career researchers' have also been developed.

⁶ www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/research/surveys/pres

⁷ www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/doctoralProg/consultationPaper.asp

⁸ www.cros.ac.uk/

⁹ www.researchconcordat.ac.uk/

¹⁰ www.vitae.ac.uk/CMS/files/1.UKHERD%20Survey%20Briefing_4pp_33.pdf

¹¹ www.vitae.ac.uk/CMS/files/1.Intra%20Report_Final_33.pdf

¹² www.vitae.ac.uk/CMS/files/1.Rugby%20Impact%20Framework_33.pdf

Day 1 plenary presentations and Q&A

8-9 September 2008, Novotel London West

Drivers for research in a changing global context

Professor Jean Chambaz, Université Pierre et Marie Curie and Chair of the Steering Committee for the Council for Doctoral Education, European University Association.

Professor Chambaz identified drivers for EU research in a global context and described how Europe is failing to maximise its doctoral knowledge base; UK higher education is in the lead for good practice in the development of researchers, but all European partners need to improve the quality of doctorates and raise stakeholder awareness.

The impact of globalisation

Globalisation, 'a market-led organisation of the world', has both winners and losers; the Lisbon strategy¹³ is the EU's response to maintaining European competitiveness. Lack of investment means that Lisbon targets for R&D investment and researcher employment are unlikely to be met: European investment rates are falling further behind the US, and China is catching up fast.

Europe needs to change the way it addresses both its economic and social problems, better promoting the development of a knowledge-based society. Globalisation changes spatial and temporal norms, bringing a greater complexity and interdependence to the problems societies face. There is a tremendous need to apply creative thinking more effectively.

The role of universities

The challenges of globalisation provide the context in which reports (eg World Bank, OECD, EU, national) have called for an increased strategic role for HE institutions in: extending the frontiers of knowledge; transferring knowledge into new products and services; training highly qualified and educated professional workers; educating citizens; giving students key competences, skills and vocational guidance to

develop their professional career in a changing environment and prepare for life-long training through the development of creative thinking by training through research.

An increased responsibility for HEIs in an innovation-driven economy does not, however, equate to market-driven research: 'research, knowledge and innovation are not identical'.

Priorities for HE institutions should be: mastering research policy, responsible partnering with industry for effective knowledge transfer and developing networking in Europe to achieve a more open and attractive European Research Area¹⁴. It is encouraging that both France and Germany now add greater impact to UK co-authored papers than does the US¹⁵.

Engaging with employers

A Rugby Team report, 'Employers' Views of Researchers Skills'¹⁶ 2007 concluded that UK graduate employers outside higher education often fail to recognise the impact that those with a research degree could bring to their organisations. To bridge this communication gap we must implement the new European vision of the doctorate, partnering with enterprises in doctoral education where appropriate and developing stakeholder awareness of the added value of training through research. Doctoral programmes should consistently offer:

- a dedicated 'professional experience'
- the elaboration of one's own career development plan
- an original research project at the edge of knowledge
- the supervision of senior academics.

Doctoral candidates, as early stage researchers, should be recognised as professionals – with commensurate rights and duties, as identified by the 'The European Charter for Researchers, 2005'¹⁷ and the Salzburg Principles, 2005¹⁸. Employers need to be made aware that postgraduate researchers are graduates with three to four years of professional experience. During their research they develop creative thinking, learn to extract and synthesise, solve complex problems and manage quality, time and resources.

¹³ ec.europa.eu/growthandjobs/index_en.htm

¹⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/index_en.html

¹⁵ www.dius.gov.uk/publications/IntComparativePerformanceUKResearch.pdf Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills 'International comparative performance of the UK research base' July 2008

¹⁶ www.vitae.ac.uk/cms/files/Rugby-Team-Employers'-views-of-researchers'-skills-September-2007.pdf

¹⁷ http://europa.eu/eracareers/pdf/am509774CEE_EN_E4.pdf

¹⁸ www.eua.be/fileadmin/user_upload/files/Council_for_Doctoral_Education/Chambaz_Lausanne_Final_Compatibility_Mode_.pdf

Day 1 plenary presentations and Q&A

8-9 September 2008, Novotel London West

Developing the awareness of all stakeholders

The European Universities Association (EUA) Doc-careers project, 2006–7¹⁹ identified that doctoral structures should offer (not impose) a positive environment to develop transferable skills for both academic and non-academic careers.

Throughout Europe there is an urgent need for professional skills development for supervisors and also to lobby employers (outside HE and within) for the better career development of research staff. Research staff need fair career prospects, attractive employment and working conditions (including mobility opportunities) and life-long training on the same basis as any professionals. Underpinning all awareness raising must be continuous quality improvement of doctoral education and career development for doctoral candidates. To these ends, the Council for Doctoral Education (EUA-CDE)²⁰ was formed in 2008 (the first Europe-wide platform to develop and advance doctoral education and to enhance its visibility at international level). EUA-CDE works to:

- promote cooperation and exchange of good practices
- encourage and support the development of institutional policies
- identify and monitor the trends in doctoral education inside and outside Europe
- improve the availability of data and information
- act as a representative voice for doctoral education in European universities in dialogue with stakeholders.

Research careers in an era of professionalism

Professor Sir Richard Brook, Director,
The Leverhulme Trust

Sir Richard discussed the divergent cultures of the different players in the research enterprise and how these could work together successfully. He cautioned against 'the professionalism that seeks to measure itself in quantitative terms, because it may be counter-productive to the whole reason why the profession exists – the passion for the research objective'.

Publicly funded support of research has a wide range of benefits – new useful information, instrumentation and methodologies; skills; access to networks of experts and information; problem-solving capacity; spin-off companies – it is difficult to measure what flows from university research to the community and it is not just about cash. Nevertheless, government 'likes things that can be measured'. We now live in a world of hyper-evaluation.

Evaluation is necessary but problematic. It is a negative force when, through competitiveness, universities embrace every quantitative measure offered (eg the Shanghai Jiao Tong List, the H-index, the journal impact factor) and can put metrics before research itself. When a university mission statement consists of a target position on an index, this is a prime example of an evaluation mentality that has 'poisoned the very culture we are trying to stimulate'.

Evaluation can illuminate, but faith in it as an infallible measure of quality is misplaced. Different evaluation studies measuring the same object (eg ranking of primary schools) have no consistency.

There are at least six research cultures: government, industry, public laboratories, universities, private agencies and public agencies. There is room to bring their aspirations together. For example, industry is fired by the passion for enterprise, traditional university research by the passion for the puzzle. Industry 'homes in' on customer need, a specific objective, while the university 'sets out' on an unknown path, following the 'wish to know' motive. The path between the two involves compromise and developing, in universities, a

¹⁹ www.eua.be/fileadmin/user_upload/files/EUA1_documents/Jean_Chambaz_-_2nd_WS_DOC-CAREERS_doc-career2.pdf

²⁰ www.eua.be/events/eua-council-for-doctoral-education/

Day 1 plenary presentations and Q&A

8-9 September 2008, Novotel London West

culture of respect for applications. Notably, although much important work is done by huge teams of committed professionals, often the link that enables the research network to function is still the work of an individual researcher.

In today's complex landscape, agencies might therefore consider following the approach of the Leverhulme Trust, which aims to help:

- permit the highest competence in individual research
- engineer idea and competence flow
- support a culture of respect for applications
- value research over metrics.

Responding to a changing environment: a UK HEI perspective

Professor Ella Ritchie, Pro-Vice-Chancellor Teaching and Learning, University of Newcastle

As both Pro-Vice-Chancellor Teaching and Learning, University of Newcastle and the new chair of the Rugby Team, Professor Ella Ritchie offered a dual perspective on the place of researcher training and development in the changing HE environment.

Researcher training and development has achieved an enormous amount in five years, but not yet proved itself central to universities' most pressing agendas. Developing academia's future staff to better compete internationally is essential to university sustainability. As a community we should do more to engage the senior management teams in research development, who are often focused on other priorities.

The HE environment is more complex than ever, with:

- increasing international competition for both students and staff
- European-wide developments ('doctoral cycle') strengthening European competition

- stresses on the public purse, little likelihood of an end to fees capping before 2012/13
- huge government focus on output measurement (including the successor to the RAE, the Research Excellence Framework²¹) accelerating 'league table mentality'
- Government pressure for a highly skilled workforce (Leitch report²²) and innovation (Sainsbury review²³) to maintain the UK's international competitiveness
- an imperative to demonstrate value in social and civic engagement
- new regional research funding focus (eg some research councils' doctoral training centres)
- increasing differentiation of HE institution missions, and diverging regional agendas.

With financial stringency likely and the possible end of ring-fenced funding from 2011, the Roberts' agenda's important contributions to key university missions (university performance, quality of staff, skills and employability agenda, working with industry and civic engagement) are under threat from lack of recognition. At institutional level, researcher developers must recognise the varied landscape and work for integration with those key agendas. In particular, there must be an end to the frequent 'bifurcation' of the skills and employability agenda (the contribution of researchers to UK competitiveness is under-recognised at all levels; there is little mention of doctoral high level skills in government reports). Research training and development must also engage researchers and their managers more successfully – especially by respecting and building on the disciplinary loyalty of most staff and students. There is also a need to tread a fine line in developing 'joined up' practice for research students and staff: enabling researchers to perceive a developmental continuum without creating a climate of expectation that all students are trainee research staff and future academics.

At national level, Vitae and the Rugby Team can greatly support the sector in responding to the government's evaluation and high level skills agendas. As well as work in progress (eg impact frameworks) we must look to better align our language and messages, for example, revising the 'Joint Skills Statement'. We must 'continually refresh what we are doing in the light of competing demands'.

²¹ www.lse.ac.uk/collections/researchAndProjectDevelopmentDivision/temp/RAE2008.htm

²² www.dcsf.gov.uk/furthereducation/index.cfm?fuseaction=content.view&CategoryID=21&ContentID=37

²³ www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/sainsbury_review_index.htm

Day 1 plenary presentations and Q&A

8-9 September 2008, Novotel London West

Q&A panel session

What are the panel's thoughts on the role and place of metrics and measures within the HE and research environment?

The panel thought that the sector bears some responsibility for the damaging effects of an 'obsession with metrics':

- senior management should 'manage the boundaries' and not overburden staff with a concern about metrics (Ella Ritchie)
- we need some indicators but the sector should select them (Jean Chambaz)
- the government does recognise the importance of curiosity-driven research: the fault lies with over-competitive universities accepting every measure offered (Sir Richard Brook)
- collaboration rather than competition is the way forward, eg the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) boards coming out in favour of peer review as part of the Research Excellence Framework (REF) (Mary Ritter).

How do we educate employers and professional bodies to understand the value of doing research and the additional skills that researchers require?

The panel felt that successful engagement is not a 'one way' activity (as implied by the question) but required a partnership approach:

- universities should work hard on the many different opportunities for partnerships and knowledge transfer, from representation on governing bodies and short projects to CASE studentships and professional doctorates (Ella Ritchie)
- HE institutions must first ensure that doctoral programmes are high quality and that means developing supervisors and principal investigators (Jean Chambaz).

How as a sector do we work towards fairer career prospects and incentives for research staff in view of the funding mechanisms and academic career structures?

Jean Chambaz focused on the need for more investment in researchers by European governments. Sir Richard Brook pointed out the paradox that research is unpredictable, yet a predictable career structure appears to be the goal. Researchers need self awareness to accept uncertainty and make appropriate choices. For Ella Ritchie, a key issue is culture: ensuring researchers are valued as highly as other staff in the institution.

The agenda will succeed or fail by engagement of supervisors and principal investigators (PIs). How do we persuade them to embed the skills agenda?

Ella Ritchie stressed that skills should be integrated into subject-specific research training, not added on. Jean Chambaz and Mary Ritter suggested that supervisors should be given every opportunity of undergoing and supporting training, but the sanction of 'no more doctoral students' might need to be used as a last resort.

How joined up do our training programmes need to be to address the needs of postgraduate researchers and research staff?

Ella Ritchie described how at Newcastle there is often separate delivery but a good deal of co-ordination and co-operation between delivery units. Some overlap could be a good opportunity to learn from different approaches. Mary Ritter suggested that it is important to maintain a distinction between doctoral and early career researcher stages as doctoral graduates move into a range of careers, not just academic research.

What more can we do to raise the public awareness of research and researchers?

Sir Richard Brook considered public awareness as greater and more positive than a few years ago. Ella Ritchie suggested that universities make more effort to engage the (influential) local press. Mary Ritter urged raising awareness of young people, eg through initiatives in schools that also develop researchers' skills.

Day 2 plenary presentations and panel discussion

8-9 September 2008, Novotel London West

Vitae – future developments

Ellen Pearce, Director, Vitae

Ellen explained the genesis of Vitae and the action plan underpinning its vision 'for the UK to be world class in supporting the professional development of researchers and researcher careers'.

Vitae, launched in June 2008, is a culmination of all the previous work of the UK GRAD Programme and UKHERD. It is supported by Research Councils UK (RCUK), managed by CRAC: The Career Development Organisation, delivered in partnership with regional Hub host universities and advised by an external advisory board.²⁴

Underpinning Vitae's work are values familiar from its history:

- a respect for institutional autonomy
- a belief that all researchers should make their own career choices, all of which are all equally valid
- a commitment to working with all researchers, irrespective of how they are funded.

There is much familiarity in how Vitae operates, but also a change in emphasis. Vitae will move away from delivering a large programme of face-to-face activities for researchers, but with focus instead on supporting communities of practice, for example by developing resources for use by HEIs. The two 'Effective Researcher'²⁵ programmes recently launched for postgraduate researchers and research staff are prime examples. The development of website functionality by the end of 2008 is also designed to enable communities to share ideas and communicate more easily.

Research, evaluation and evidence building will assume a greater role – with projects such as the Rugby Team's work on competencies and researcher attributes²⁶ and the revision of the 'Careers in Research Online Survey' (CROS). There will also be more linkages with the overlapping agendas, such as enterprise and outreach, for example, the developing work on intrapreneurship in energising researcher skills²⁷.

On the horizon Vitae also sees a broadening of strategic partnerships (eg with major funding bodies). As the last five years have shown, change in the research environment is likely to be extensive. Vitae will build on its strengths – successful operational structures and practices – to both proactively influence and respond to the broad set of changes in that environment.

Strategies for sustaining personal and career support for researchers

Panel discussion with: **Professor Philip Esler**, Chief Executive, Arts and Humanities Research Council; **Dr Andrew Dearing**, Secretary General, European Industrial Research Management Association; **Martin Owen**, Director, Medrus Learning; **Professor Margaret Attack**, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research, University of Leeds; **Dr Patrick Hadoke**, Research Fellow, Queens Medical Research Institute, University of Edinburgh.

Jeffrey Defries, CRAC Chief Executive chaired the discussion. His introductory remarks suggested two necessary conditions for the development of the status of the researcher and a recognised career path:

- aspiration to be a researcher should begin in school
- researchers need both status and 'sustenance' – early career researchers need better financial reward and fairer employment conditions. This is also vital to enable research to be a fully inclusive profession.

Andrew Dearing opened the panel session with an invitation to focus not on UK academic research but on the wider European research environment.

Future demand for researchers is dependent on the rate of economic growth: Europe's problem is not so much that there will be insufficient researchers as that companies for employing those researchers fail to incubate or grow.

Among large corporates, the trend of outsourcing research and development is a disturbing one. It often implies an undervaluing of the researcher profile. There is a

²⁴ www.vitae.ac.uk/policy-practice/1420/Our-structure.html

²⁵ www.vitae.ac.uk/effectiveresearcher

²⁶ www.vitae.ac.uk/CMS/files/vitaeconference2008-C2_D2%20daley,%20Rob.pdf

²⁷ www.vitae.ac.uk/CMS/files/1.Intra%20Report_Final_33.pdf

Day 2 plenary presentations and panel discussion

8-9 September 2008, Novotel London West

diminishing of the pool of research graduates recruited into large corporate R&D departments, who traditionally often moved departments further into their career, taking their researcher skills into management roles in other areas of the organisation.

The nature of research environments is changing in other ways.

The characteristics of an excellent research environment are similar for industry and academia, for example: nurturing initiative and creative ideas; working across the boundaries of disciplines; ensuring balance between structure and 'anarchy'; providing a good infrastructure; cooperating with the best research players.

In all sectors, expertise is no longer broad based within an individual organisation. In much of industry, 'open innovation in global networks' is seen as the way ahead. In academia too, success comes from specialisation, together with being able to link with other centres of expertise. The need for depth of knowledge has not changed: the new imperative is the added ability to network. This applies as much on the individual as the organisational level. Researchers need a 'T-shaped' profile, combining depth with breadth. Support for researcher personal and career development should therefore focus on helping researchers 'stay deep' but also combine and connect, with an international perspective and in a multi-disciplinary fashion.

Networks often concentrate in geographical areas (Silicon Valley being the leading example). Universities have a key role in developing such local environments. University leaders should focus resources (people and space) to become the nucleus of their local communities. This is both an economic and social imperative. In terms of wealth creation, government, academia and business need to address the problem of the 'missing mezzanine' – the often long and fraught development period between the research idea and the marketable product.

Martin Owen developed the argument that 'the network is the thing': universities need to encourage the free flow of research information across networks.

'When you can dramatically lower the costs of connecting supply and demand, it changes not just the numbers but the entire nature of the market.'²⁸

²⁸ Chris Anderson 'The Long Tail: Why the future of business is selling less of more'

The effects of the internet age are significant:

- the ability to connect people with 'minority interests' into sizeable groupings (the 'long tail')
- a new expectation of getting high quality information for free.

The business model of research publication is thus untenable. The old 'attention economy' of journals publishing will be replaced by a new attention economy, based on 'the quality of your networks and your visibility in those networks'.

Support for researchers should focus on developing these new ways to behave: helping researchers get into networks, succeed in networks and enabling networking to transform the way research communication takes place. The skills that researchers need have a lot in common with the skills developed by online computer games: the potential synergy is ripe for further research. Supporting researchers to engage better with researcher colleagues and wider audiences helps sustain the passion for research that is key to researcher motivation.

Universities too often operate policies and practices that inhibit research networking and forget that the internet was a tool invented by researchers for research purposes:

- 'the internet is not a brochure – seize it back from your marketing department'. University websites are often overly focused on student recruitment: it is frequently difficult, if not impossible, to access information about research staff and projects from their websites
- 'beware of IT purists – don't let their big schemes overrule'. University IT departments frequently do not allow researchers to communicate in ways that 'people outside universities find enormously liberating and useful'.

So, in addition to supporting researchers, researcher developers need to look at the wider institutional environment and 'audit' the university's practices and policies. What innovation is stifled? What can you do to help change that?

Patrick Hadoke showed how traditional face-to-face networks are having a transforming effect on research staff at the University of Edinburgh. This case study 'Helping research staff take control' shows a clear link between researcher representation and taking responsibility for one's own career development.

Day 2 plenary presentations and panel discussion

8-9 September 2008, Novotel London West

Until 2004 research staff at the University of Edinburgh experienced problems of isolation: lack of interaction; few feedback opportunities; no representation on university committees. The negative effect on job satisfaction and self-esteem extended to career development, with generally poor understanding of career options and low take-up of careers resources.

A postdoctoral forum, set up in 2004 in one research group, attracted nine out of a possible 17 research staff to its first meeting. Its aim was to encourage integration and improve the flow of information. From these small beginnings the idea spread to other units and departments within the School of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine and from there to the Schools of Humanities and Social Sciences, and Science and Engineering. Four years later, 690 of Edinburgh's 1,500 research staff belong to a postdoctoral forum. Research staff are now represented fully, including the university's Roberts Steering Committee. In this period the university has also developed a 'Code of Practice for the Management of Research Staff'. Bringing research staff to the centre of the picture and the creation of a climate of support has brought a noticeable improvement in research staff morale and improved motivation to take control of their own career development.

How can research staff empowerment be encouraged elsewhere?

Any initiative of this kind has to be 'bottom up'. Researchers at Edinburgh were resistant to previous suggestions from senior management. The first group began on the suggestion of a line manager with a very loose remit. Different groups focus on what is important to them, resulting in a great variety of approaches and structures, remits. But groups are also forging links – wanting to know the concerns of other disciplines. Networks of peer support are developing and also institutional support. The groups now receive Roberts funding, for example to set up seminar series (including career seminars).

Margaret Atack gave a senior management perspective on one institution's strategies for sustaining personal and career support for researchers. *The University of Leeds works to embed personal and professional development in university culture and ensure it contributes clearly to university strategy and the needs of stakeholders. Good evaluation plays a key part in sustainability.*

²⁹ www.vitae.ac.uk/CMS/files/1.Rugby%20Impact%20Framework_33.pdf

³⁰ www.researchconcordat.ac.uk/

Embed personal and professional development in university culture

The university aims to provide a co-ordinated continuum of provision for researchers from research students to research staff, academics and PIs. This is informed by a 'Foundation level 0' type assessment of its provision, as described in the 'Rugby Team Impact Framework'²⁹.

Embedding in the university culture requires:

- not dividing provision as 'generic'/'non-generic'
- ensuring the senior level committee structure is right with a senior level champion
- engaging Deans and Heads of Departments
- implementing the Concordat³⁰ – through the new 'Policy on the Employment of Researchers' launched at Leeds

Contribute clearly to university strategy and the needs of stakeholders

This is achieved through the 'Growing Research Income and Performance' (GRIP) Strategic initiative. The aim of provision is 'to enable researchers to develop their research performance, employability, professionalism and engagement with society'. Specific activity includes 'Grant Writing Action Learning Sets' and 'Project Managing Your Research Degree'.

Research and evaluate provision

It is vital to:

- understand what you are achieving and how
- introduce strategic measures
- implement evaluation methodologies eg the 'Rugby Team Impact Framework'
- develop research capability to support provision.

If all these elements are in place, there should be only one possible answer to the question:

'Can a world class university stop providing a high level of provision in personal and professional development activity for researchers?'

Universities should also explore a range of funding options for the 'post-Roberts' era that may come after 2011. These include: research student fees; faculty/school financial plans; FEC (full economic costing) research grants; other funding bodies.

Day 2 plenary presentations and panel discussion

8-9 September 2008, Novotel London West

Philip Esler spoke in his role as champion for knowledge transfer and economic impact for Research Councils UK; researchers at all stages of their 'life course' are enriched if they engage with the impact agenda.

All the research councils have an 'evangelical commitment to excellence with impact'. The 2006 Worry report³¹ put a strong emphasis on this remit, but it is not new: all the research councils' royal charters contain the impact remit.

'Impact' means making a demonstrable difference, generally in partnership with a non-academic organisation. 'Economic impact' is a broad term, encompassing not only monetary impact but, equally importantly, public policy and quality of life. Partnering therefore spans the private, public and voluntary sectors. In this broad context, the 'innovation agenda' is a subset of the impact one.

Excellence with impact requires cultural change in the academic community; more and more researchers need to engage with it. So, from next year research grant applications across all research councils will require applicants to describe partnering arrangements they have put in place to ensure impact. The impact agenda can only become more significant as the research councils move into preparations for the next government spending round.

The greatest impact is that made by people: the graduates and researchers going into the full range of careers. The skills agenda is therefore vital to this project. In support of this, RCUK has developed a new 'Statement of Expectation on Economic and Social Impact'³², which includes the expectation that 'research staff and students develop research, vocational and entrepreneurial skills that are matched to the demands of their future career paths'. Proving demonstrable impact is vital, albeit a challenge. RCUK is starting with a case study approach. The recently commissioned longitudinal cohort study³³ investigating researchers' careers will be extremely important.

Q&A panel session

Are researchers being consulted properly about personal and career development? Why do some feel that it's an imposition, a box ticking exercise?

Margaret Atack responded that it is vital that individual development needs are discussed collaboratively in review meetings: universities should have effective training needs analysis and personal development planning for all researchers.

Is there a place for short-term contracts in researcher career development?

The panel recognised that a common view in academia is that a series of short-term contracts, preferably in different institutions, is an effective way of building early experience on the academic career path. In practice, however, mobility was a huge problem for many researchers (owing to personal commitments, financial disincentives etc). Although some PIs supported the current funding arrangements, others felt trapped in a continuous cycle of writing research proposals to sustain their staff.

Andrew Dearing switched the focus to what he considered a bigger problem for researcher career development in the UK: the erosion of research career opportunities outside universities, particularly in public research organisations.

How do we empower researchers to look outside academia?

The panel felt that changing the attitudes of PIs and academics is key. These staff have great influence on researchers; many perpetuate the belief that a job move outside academia is a failure. Margaret Atack emphasised the need to work with PIs to help them understand that they have staff development responsibilities. At the University of Leeds it is embedded in formal staff processes that research staff have an individual meeting at the beginning of their contract to encourage reflection and career planning from the outset and to avoid 'crisis management' near the end of the research project.

³¹ www.vitae.ac.uk/policy-practice/375-2866/The-Worry-Report.html 'Increasing the Economic impact of the Research Councils' (the Worry report) is the report of the Research Council Economic Impact Group, chaired by Peter Worry, to the Director General of Science and innovation at the DTI.

³² www.rcuk.ac.uk/innovation/rolerc/missionsei.htm

³³ www.rcuk.ac.uk/news/080730.htm

Day 2 plenary presentations and panel discussion

8-9 September 2008, Novotel London West

Andrew Dearing suggested that it is human nature to only focus on what is close by, so it was necessary to make external opportunities more visible. This would happen if universities developed the role previously described as a catalyst for the local economy: the local environment would provide more examples and role models.

Is there an optimum time for researchers to leave universities; ie when does their research employability have the most impact?

The panel felt that there was no single model, as there is a huge number of variables. As a result a focus on career planning is needed from the outset of the research project.

Philip Esler pointed out that research councils were also looking at how to improve career development support to increase impact within academic careers. For example, the Arts and Humanities Research Council had identified a need to support people in their first teaching post/postdoctorate to prevent them losing impetus in developing and publishing doctoral work.

Making an impact – creating the future

Richard Reeves, Director, Demos

From a career that has spanned research and journalism, universities and think-tanks Richard Reeves offered thought-provoking views on the fundamental purposes of research, how to nurture good research, and how the development community can support the empowerment of researchers.

Ideas themselves are a force in the world: this core belief of nineteenth century thinker John Stuart Mill is at the heart of the research enterprise. Research should be about developing new ideas, putting them into the public domain, encouraging the collision of ideas that is vital for progress. Curiosity-driven research is essential, as is valuing of error, blind alleys and other research 'failures'. There is a lot of necessary 'waste' in research that needs to be better recognised in the way researchers are managed and research is evaluated.

In our internet-driven age where information comes cheap, expertise is ever more needed. The researcher's thinking skills – of probing analysis, of synthesis, and so on, are sorely needed not just in academia, but also in all other worlds: corporate; political; social. The careers of alumni are an important measure of success.

Researchers need autonomy and energy to do good research. Autonomy means intellectual freedom and giving researchers more responsibility earlier in their careers. University research cultures are often stuck in disempowering hierarchical practices. Energy is equally important. Good research work is extremely hard (mental and sometimes physical) work: are researcher's energy levels supported or sapped?

Researcher developers should therefore look at what they can and are doing to support the autonomy and energy of researchers in their care. At the organisational and individual level, what is energising activity and what is de-energising? 'Are you a 'radiator' or a 'drain?' Consider how to be a more effective 'radiator' and deal better with the 'drains' (eg how to minimise the draining effects of meetings?).

Researcher developers can only be effective at empowering and energising others if they attend to their own needs for energy and autonomy. This should be a priority.

8-9 September 2008, Novotel London West

The postgraduate researcher agenda

Workshops in this strand were offered on the following topics:

- So you're new to developing postgraduate researchers?
- The impact of European developments on doctoral programmes
- The changing doctorate; outputs from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) discussion responses
- Understanding the changing needs of doctoral researchers
- New approaches to doctoral supervision
- Changes in the supply of doctoral researchers

These workshops explored some of the complexities of the UK's postgraduate research environment, with its diversity of students and doctoral programmes. The sessions looked at the challenges posed by national and European drivers (particularly the 'knowledge-focused' economy, where innovation leads to new products and services) and an increasingly competitive international market for doctoral researchers. Key outcomes are summarised below, and full details of each workshop can be found at www.vitae.ac.uk/vitaeconference2008

The needs of doctoral researchers

Good supervision was found to be the key factor in a successful experience. The 'Postgraduate Research Experience Survey' (PRES)³⁴, now in its second year was considered a useful tool to help institutions monitor and enhance the doctoral experience.

There is a continuing need to improve postgraduate integration in departments. This applies to all doctoral researchers, but there are particular challenges associated with international students and part-time students.

The UK doctorate and its assessment

The diversity, capacity and dynamism of the UK research base with its range of doctoral models is valued, but the nature and sufficiency of 'final

assessment' of a doctorate (the thesis or published work) was called into question by the advent of doctoral programmes explicitly developing research and transferable skills. In general, participants felt that current assessment arrangements could be flexible enough if more attention was given to progress assessment, (eg incorporating skills assessment in the 'credit' system).

Clarity is needed in terms of whether there is any threat to the quality of the UK doctorate given the UK's flexible and diverse arrangements for entry and for the length of doctorates. Participants felt that we need to better understand the progress made by HEIs in embedding Bologna actions.

Improving supervision

The value of the concept of 'learning leaps' (transformational moments) for informing training programmes and supervisor development/programmes was identified.

Dialogue and a neutral language between students and supervisors to explore expectations is valued.

Participants also identified how different approaches to supervision can be usefully applied to student problems, and the importance of explicating these different supervisory approaches within supervisory teams.

Demand for UK doctorates

Participants urged further investigation of the factors that have led to the relative decline of UK students among the postgraduate researcher population.

How is it that competitor countries are funding doctoral researchers to a much higher level than the UK? They also agreed on the importance of improving how the UK doctorate is being promoted (nationally and by institutions), particularly on the web.

Participants placed high importance on the continued development of national and institutional strategies for attracting international researchers. Key areas which are common to all postgraduate researchers in the UK include: being clear about what is a doctorate and what is its 'offer', improving the student experience, more flexible approaches to delivery, central investment and linking national and institutional strategic priorities.

³⁴ www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/research/surveys/pres

Workshop outcomes

8-9 September 2008, Novotel London West

The research staff agenda

Workshops in this strand ran on the following topics:

- So you are new to developing research staff?
- What will the Concordat mean in practice?
- Recruiting, developing and retaining researchers – developing an HR strategy
- Working with PIs to develop research staff
- Redefining the CROS survey in light of the Concordat and other developments
- The impact of the fixed term directive on supporting the careers of research staff

The thread running through all these workshops was the 'Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers'³⁵, launched in June 2008. Building on the 1996 Concordat³⁶ and the 'European Charter and Code for Researchers'³⁷, the new Concordat provides a set of principles for the future support and management of research careers and a clear statement of the signatories' collective expectations for the support and management of researchers.

A second important driver was the European directive³⁸, which has been adopted into UK law, which sets conditions to protect fixed-term employees from being treated less favourably than non-fixed term employees undertaking comparable roles.

Key outcomes from these workshops are described below. Full details of each workshop are at: www.vitae.ac.uk/vitaeconference2008

Expectations of institutions and researchers

Participants agreed that Concordat principles should be integral to the training and personal development of researchers. Research staff need equal status and equal treatment by HR departments as other staff, and incentives. A major cultural shift is needed by institutions.

The new Concordat (unlike its predecessor) places emphasis on the responsibility of researchers themselves. The cultural shift required of research staff to engage with personal, professional and career

development should be facilitated by embedded training and targeted approaches.

Implementing the Concordat

Participants stressed the need for targeted engagement at institutional level, finding out what motivates different stakeholders and balancing carrot and stick measures which work alongside individual stakeholders existing interests and motivations.

The vice-chancellor and heads of departments are important groups to get buy-in from. There is also an opportunity to bring different stakeholders together in order to improve common understanding. Individual 'Concordat champions' could be appointed who could act on behalf of, and report back to their groups.

Participants also identified an urgent need for improved information to support effective benchmarking, and made detailed recommendations to the Concordat Implementation Steering Group.

The Concordat identifies a specific role for the 'Contract Researchers' Online Survey' (CROS)³⁹ in monitoring the achievement of the Concordat's seven principles. This has implications both for the design of questions and also report mechanisms – a top-level report of national data. Participants put forward a number of detailed views on how CROS should be enhanced to encourage institutional participation, high-quality response and data analysis.

Supporting research leaders and managers

In light of the introduction of the fixed term directive, the role of the principal investigator (PI) is crucial. PIs needed sufficient support from HR, policy and management to make the system work for the PI, the researcher, and the institution.

The Concordat gives a central role to appraisal in providing effective support for researchers. PIs need to be encouraged and supported to develop their people management skills, in particular, using management tools such as appraisal. Participants acknowledged the diversity of practice and terminology used by institutions, particularly in relation to principal investigator/research staff appraisal and the need for HE institutions to identify and share examples of good practice by PIs and institutions in leading and managing research staff.

³⁵ www.researchconcordat.ac.uk/

³⁶ www.vitae.ac.uk/1270-2827/www.vitaeacuk.html#1

³⁷ www.vitae.ac.uk/policy-practice/2667/European-Charter-and-Code.html

³⁸ www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2002/20022034.htm

³⁹ www.cros.ac.uk/

Workshop outcomes

8-9 September 2008, Novotel London West

Impact of the fixed term directive

Participants confirmed that the use of indefinite contracts for research staff, with the associated redundancy procedures, was growing. This is being supported by the use of hybrid funding models. Much research is required into the real influence the various institutional responses to the directive have on research staff turnover, length of contract, career progression, numbers of redundancies within universities, and the costs to institutions of their response.

The overarching researcher agenda

Workshops in this strand were offered on the following topics:

Strategies for sustaining personal and career support for researchers

- Institutional strategies for sustaining personal development and careers support
- Exploring the professional development of research training professionals

New models and approaches for understanding researchers as professionals

- Developing an underpinning competency framework for researchers in the UK
- Working with PhD graduates and former research staff to support career development for current researchers

Supporting innovation in skills development

- Creating leaders and managers for the future
- Engaging researchers in social enterprise
- Researcher-led professional development
- Exploring intrapreneurship in researcher development
- Engaging researchers in the development of themselves and their peers
- Effective mentoring schemes for researchers

Understanding, developing and promoting researcher careers

- Supporting researchers' careers and career choices
- Developing researchers to work in a global context

- Responding to part-time study and flexible modes of working
- Personal and career development with overseas researchers
- Engaging with employers

Research, evidence and evaluation relating to the skills and careers of researchers

- Measuring the impact of skills development
- Reviewing and evaluating skills training
- Investigating researcher careers: the implications of a new cohort study
- Roberts Reporting made easy: A guide for anyone new to reporting to RCUK on the implementation of the Roberts Review

Full details of these workshops are www.vitae.ac.uk/vitaeconference2008
Key themes are shown below.

Engaging and empowering researchers

The potential benefits and rewards of researcher-led activities were demonstrated in a number of workshops.

Benefits for researchers include peer support, mentoring and skills development. For universities, participants identified the potential of engaging researchers as champions or 'skills ambassadors' to promote and help enhance provision.

Ways to focus on developing researcher's intrapreneurial skills within institutional culture and structure were explored.

Participants identified new approaches and extensions to existing activities, showing how it is possible to apply an intrapreneurial approach to skills provision.

There was wide recognition of the benefits of offering flexible study and work opportunities. The workshop on this topic suggested a number of roles for Vitae: helping HE institutions support part-time researchers by supporting services such as dedicated courses/seminars; facilitating collaboration between universities in the area of flexible provision and facilitating an online community for part-time researchers.

Practitioners discussed the merits of different approaches to supporting researchers to take responsibility for their career development. 'Planned happenstance' is a relatively new approach concerned

Workshop outcomes

8-9 September 2008, Novotel London West

with helping the client with behavioural strategies to deal successfully with 'the neglected realities of career decision making' (eg limits of information, non-linearity of change). Employing a planned happenstance approach was judged useful by participants.

Enhancing employability

Participants endorsed the recommendation from The Roberts Policy Forum in January 2008 to develop an overarching competency framework/model of professional learning for researchers. Such a framework could be generic but would need flexibility for users to adapt it for local use, eg within disciplines.

Preparing researchers to work in a global context was seen as a particularly important challenge. Inter-cultural training alone was likely to prove inadequate. It was suggested that institutions should make more use of the skills and experience of incoming international researchers.

Several workshops linked the themes of enhancing employability and evidencing success. Evaluation both informs enhancement and provides evidence for sustaining the skills agenda.

The importance of continuing to develop the talent pool of researchers was recognised through giving them the opportunity to engage with employers. Programmes and activities which brought employers and researchers together encouraged researchers to think more broadly about research career options, enabled them to develop new skills and provided valuable experience which can enhance their CV.

Cross-university mentoring schemes were shown to have the potential of enhancing academic careers for aspiring academics. A pilot scheme linking university alumni (mentors) with current researchers (mentees) enabled the mentees to explore different research environments and skill sets that might be expected by other institutions.

Sustaining the development of researchers: evidence and enhancement

Understanding external strategies and drivers, winning hearts and minds within institutions and measuring the impact and effectiveness of Roberts and the skills agenda were all identified as factors in planning for the future and sustaining change. Participants were encouraged to consider a number of planning scenarios

beyond 2011 including: no change in funding mechanism, end of ring fencing, decrease in the level of funding and the potential of new requirements from stakeholders.

Improving research management is essential to create more widespread openness towards, and successful support for, researcher development. Several workshops heard from universities and projects that had developed effective models for research leader development.

When addressing evaluation the need to 'be careful what you evaluate' and to be 'patient for impact' was identified. Discussion identified a number of problems with assessment and the challenges of understanding the context in which learning is being applied. It was suggested that Vitae should have a role in helping aggregate and feed evaluation work being undertaken in HE institutions through to the research councils to be fed into policy decisions.

At both national and local level it was deemed important to make use of qualitative information (eg case studies of career destinations) as well as metrics. The new cohort study⁴⁰ commissioned by RCUK in partnership with the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) will help the research councils, government and others to understand the economic impact of postgraduate research training. The study will establish a 'panel' of all UK- and EU-domiciled doctoral graduates for a longer-term study to track their careers over a number of years.

Better researcher development practitioners: enhancement and professional development

Inter-university collaboration was recognised to have an important role in strategic approaches to researcher development. Examples included supporting part-time researchers and encouraging employers to engage with research staff.

Effective monitoring and evaluation was explored by several workshops.

Six years after the introduction of Roberts payments there is a growing community of professionals employed by HEIs in 'Roberts posts'. The workshop exploring the professional development of research training professionals asked participants to share their experiences, highlight their development needs, and examine the potential to develop a national Continuing Professional Development programme for the sector.

⁴⁰ www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=112&Itemid=154

Issues emerging from the day

8-9 September 2008, Novotel London West

Emerging themes

Dr Janet Metcalfe discussed the major themes that had developed over the conference: engaging in the wider environment; sustaining the development of researchers; building further evidence; enhancing employability; empowering researchers. Emerging from discussions and interactions during the conference, these overarching themes would inform practice and developments in the coming years.

Engaging in the wider environment

In a global and competitive area, universities have an increasingly strategic role to play in the knowledge economy; with responsibility for, and as custodians of, knowledge for the public good. Universities need to remain focused on the changing external drivers and avoid the risk of too much introspection. This involves reflecting on where there is a mismatch of approach with business and other research agencies and finding ways ahead in partnership. Universities need to support all researchers to make the most of their potential, bringing about major benefits for the individual, university and the wider environment.

Sustaining the development of researchers

With potential changes in Roberts funding in the next government spending period, institutions need to be focusing on strategies for sustaining researcher development activities. This means demonstrating the centrality of researcher development to HE missions at all levels and embedding activities within normal practice. Principal investigators and supervisors are key to successful embedding. Institutional policy-making brings all relevant departments together and implementing the new Concordat provides an important opportunity for such dialogue to take place.

Building further evidence

We have been cautioned against the dangers of hyper-evaluation. The challenge is to build on positive uses of evaluation: those which offer insights into demonstrable differences made by researcher development. At the individual level, the importance of formative as well as summative assessment has been explored. It has also been acknowledged that real impact will only be seen in the longer term.

The Concordat benchmarking process will be an opportunity to review activities relating to research staff on

both an operational and strategic level. Universities' Roberts reporting is an important source of evidence, with Database of Practice submissions providing qualitative information. Vitae has recently refocused the Database of Practice following Concordat principles (eg sections on recruitment/selection, diversity and equality, researcher led activities, evaluation mechanisms) to support institutional and RCUK benchmarking. Likewise, the 'Careers in Research Online Survey' (CROS) is being revised to strengthen its operational and strategic potential.

Enhancing employability

The conference has suggested a new vision of postgraduate researchers. Seeing postgraduate researchers as graduates with three or four years' professional experience gives us a helpful way of presenting researchers to recruiters. Employers (both within and beyond academia) need 'T-shaped' researchers, who bring both real expertise (depth) and the ability to build quality networks in a global environment (breadth), and our efforts must be focused on supporting this.

Further work needs to be done around exploring career pathways and collaborations with non-HE employers – the RCUK cohort study will be very useful in illuminating this.

Empowering researchers

As researcher development professionals we should be constantly seeking more effective ways to support researcher empowerment. The conference has highlighted that key conditions for an empowering environment include autonomy, intellectual freedom, responsibility and energy. Participants have explored effective ways of encouraging researchers to be proactive and take opportunities. Researcher-led developmental activities were seen as having wide-ranging benefits: including a sense of 'inclusion' and increasing ownership of career development. Areas for further exploration include researcher social enterprise and intrapreneurial skills development, and the 'planned happenstance' approach to careers support.

Our thanks to Karen Haynes of the Professional and Higher Partnership Ltd for the writing of this report.

Our thanks also to all speakers, workshop leaders and participants for taking part so fully in the first Vitae Researcher Development Conference. Your contributions, feedback and comments not only have informed the outcomes of this event but contribute to the ongoing national debate and Vitae's own activities in realising the potential of researchers. We look forward to welcoming you to next year's conference **8-9 September 2009** in Warwick and to working with you in the forthcoming year.



Incorporating the UK GRAD Programme and UKHERD

Vitae builds on previous work by the UK GRAD Programme and UKHERD. Vitae is supported by Research Councils UK (RCUK) and managed by CRAC: The Career Development Organisation and delivered in partnership with regional Hub host universities.

The role of Vitae is to work with UK higher education institutions (HEIs) to embed professional and career development in the research environment. Vitae plays a major role in innovating, sharing practice and enhancing the capability of the higher education sector to provide professional development and training of researchers.

Our vision is for the UK to be world-class in supporting the personal, professional and career development of researchers. Our key aims include:

- championing the development and implementation of effective policy
- enhancing higher education provision through sharing practice and resources
- providing access to development opportunities and resources
- building an evidence base to support the researcher development agenda

For further information about the range of Vitae activities go to www.vitae.ac.uk or contact enquiries@vitae.ac.uk

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