



Vitae Research Staff Conference: empowering researchers through staff associations

4 November 2010, London

www.vitae.ac.uk/rsconference2010

Conference report

Vitae is supported by Research Councils UK (RCUK),
managed by CRAC: The Career Development Organisation
and delivered in partnership with regional Hub host universities



CRAC



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. Vitae has published a series of specific briefings for the range of higher education professionals involved in implementing the principles of the Concordat.

One of Vitae's aims is building an evidence base to support the researcher development agenda. As part of this aim, Vitae is working with the Concordat Implementation Coordinator, the HE sector and other stakeholders to review progress in implementing the Concordat and taking forward the benchmarking projects.

www.researchconcordat.ac.uk

Conference report

4 November 2010, Wellcome Collection Conference Centre

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Overview

The Vitae Research Staff Conference in 2010 was for members of research staff who are active in research staff associations (RSAs) or who wish to become so. People who have an interest in setting up RSAs were also invited to attend. The event aimed to empower individuals through a greater understanding of policy and practice to make an impact on the experiences and careers of research staff within their own institutions and influence national agendas. Last year's inaugural conference resulted in the establishment of the UK Research Staff Association (UKRSA) and launched Vitae's successful Research Staff [Blog](#). This year, even more than last, the emphasis was on the exchange of views by members of research staff alongside input on local, national and international developments.

Participants:

- discussed how research staff can get their voices heard more effectively in policy discussions
- explored how to encourage involvement with research staff associations to enable research staff to make an impact in their own institutions and nationally
- considered the research environment and examined issues that impact on research staff across institutional and disciplinary barriers
- examined issues around researcher's career paths and discussed how RSAs can develop and influence professional development.

Vitae organised the conference with significant input from the UKRSA. Participants recognised the leadership role Vitae played in setting up the UKRSA and nurturing local RSAs. Key outcomes from the event were the identification of more volunteers for the UKRSA, thereby aiding its sustainability; sharing of practice on running and setting up research staff associations; establishing networks of people interested in RSAs; and ideas of priorities for UKRSA activities.

The conference combined keynote presentations, questions and answer sessions, networking and interactive workshops. The workshops enabled deeper exploration of how researchers could benefit from initiatives ranging from research staff associations, frameworks such as the [Concordat](#) and the [Researcher Development Framework](#) to surveys such as the survey of RSAs and [Careers in Research Online Survey](#) (CROS). The networking session at the end of the day was lively and well attended.

People who didn't attend the conference could follow proceedings thanks to the very active Twitter feeds with the hashtag #rsconf

This report provides summaries of the plenary sessions and workshops. Presenters' slides and photographs of the event can also be accessed at www.vitae.ac.uk/rsconference2010.

Plenary presentations

4 November 2010, Wellcome Collection Conference Centre

Plenary presentations

Chaired by David Proctor, Postdoctoral Research Scientist, Dundee University and Co-chair, UKRSA

Introduction and welcome

Dr Tennie Videler, Programme Manager: Researcher Networks, Vitae

Tennie Videler welcomed participants and urged them to make the most of its opportunities to contribute and network. The participants were the most valuable resource at the conference. The day particularly focused on:

- how to encourage people to become active in research staff associations
- ways of influencing policy in higher education
- opportunities to share practice.

There had been significant progress since the first Vitae Research Staff Conference one year ago, with [UKRSA](#) now up and running. Research staff face a different, but equally uncertain, higher education future with a new government and spending cuts in higher education. The conference programme would combine insights from plenary speakers into the current situation with practical workshops sharing practice and seeking input into initiatives to improve career development for researchers.

Update on Research Councils' strategy: Research Council expectations in relation to the Roberts agenda

Dr Iain Cameron, Head of Research Careers and Diversity, Research Councils UK (RCUK)

Iain Cameron explained how Research Councils' attention to research staff careers had developed over the years, the changes and constraints accompanying the economic downturn and new government, and Research Council expectations for researcher development in the coming years. Although government spending is under pressure, the Government remains as strongly committed to research excellence as ever.

Context

Together the Research Councils will spend £3.4bn of the £8.6bn UK R&D budget for 2010-11. This includes funding some 14,000 research staff in universities and research institutes (about one-third of the UK total). The science budget is 'relatively safe', but on a 'flat cash' basis. This means that each year Research Councils will need to find efficiency savings to the value of inflation in order to maintain the same investment in research.

RCUK is the name for the Research Councils working together. RCUK exists to increase the collective visibility, leadership and policy influence of the Research Councils, provide focus for collective dialogue with stakeholders and ensure greater harmonisation of operational and administrative functions across the Councils. One of the operational areas that cross-cuts all Research Councils is researcher skills and career development.

Early Research Council support for researcher careers

The first phase of Research Council funding for researcher skills and career development (1968-2003) consisted of a programme of residential courses for postgraduate researchers, the 'Research Councils' Graduate Schools Programme'. Attention was first paid to research staff (then known as contract research staff) in the mid 1990s, with the Research Careers Initiative (RCI) from 1997-2002, designed to implement the 1996 [Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers](#). The original Concordat – the first national policy intervention regarding research staff – aimed to change employment cultures, provide a viable career structure and adjust funding systems to enable change. The policy had limited levers, however; there was little funding attached. Nevertheless, the initiative did result in some useful structures such as CROS (Contract Researchers Online Survey – now Careers in Research Online Survey).

2002-2010: 'The Roberts agenda'

A huge boost came with Sir Gareth Roberts' government review and report 'SET for Success' (2002) which led to a major injection of funding for doctoral researchers – principally in transferable skills – and for career development and training for research staff. From 2003-07 RCUK funded UK GRAD to support developments in HEIs, particularly for postgraduate researchers. In 2008 RCUK specifically included research staff in the remit for national support to HEIs and with an expanded brief UK GRAD became Vitae. In the same year the new [Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers](#) was launched. A major achievement of this period was the structures that were put in place: universities built capacity with the support of Vitae, who especially helped university staff to share and develop their practice.

The future: researcher development

We are now at the stage of embedding skills into doctoral training and staff development, paying increasing attention to the impact of skilled researchers and seeking sustainable models for funding. A separate funding stream will no longer be in place, so this development will no longer be cash-driven. Instead, RCUK is working towards a mechanism whereby money for research staff development is embedded into research grants. The process for accessing this money will be driven by universities. It is vital that institutions ask 'what do we want from our researchers, what impact do we want them to have?' in formulating grant proposals.

“ I want to congratulate the organisers for a vibrant and stimulating conference. ”

Participant feedback

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The Concordat – a comprehensive framework

The Concordat sets out principles for the future support and management of research careers and an explanation of how it may best be embedded into institutional practice. It provides a clear statement of the signatories' collective expectations for the support and management of researchers. The Concordat is strongly linked to the [European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for their Recruitment](#) but applied to the UK context, thus enabling a level of detail beyond that in the 'Charter and Code'. The Concordat provides many pointers to expected practice, in areas such as: appraisal, responsibility of researchers to take control of their career, mentoring, and representation on committees. It is organised around seven principles: recruitment and selection; recognition and value; support and career development; researchers' responsibilities; diversity and equality; implementation and review.

Implementing the Concordat

The report [Higher education institutions' strategic responses to the Concordat](#) summarises findings from a survey conducted early in 2010. Around a quarter of HEIs had a strategy already in place, while most were drawing one up at the time of survey. Strategies for career development of research staff might be separately identified, or they might be included in HR or research policy strategies. Encouragingly, staff development figured highly in the way Concordat principles were shaping university policy and practice. There remains much to be done, particularly to engage PIs and research staff.



RCUK priorities

Implementing recommendations from the 2010 [Independent Review of the Roberts agenda](#) will make ensuring engagement with stakeholders (including research staff, employers, both HE and non-HE, and users of research outputs a priority. The Research Councils are very clear about the importance of, and challenges involved in, maintaining the momentum of career development in a downturn. Making the transition from ring-fenced funds to embedding activity into 'normal' practice will not be straightforward. RCUK will monitor progress to sustainability and impact, demonstrating value to employers and the economy.

Looking beyond your current post: the wider context

Prof Dianne Berry, Director of Postgraduate Research Studies and Researcher Development, Reading University

Diane Berry summarised the national picture for researchers: the place and value of early career researchers in the ever changing context within and beyond their institutions. She urged participants to 'take responsibility for your future and sell your accomplishments', giving practical advice on how to improve career chances.

Research staff – vital but often overlooked

The UK's global position depends on it having thriving universities that are enriched by a continuing supply of highly skilled and entrepreneurial people – research staff are key to achieving this. Indeed a recent [report by the Council for Science and Technology](#) argued that investing in people and stimulating and supporting their creativity was more important than trying to predict promising areas for research. But institutional structures, usually geared to permanent academic staff or to students, often overlook research staff. RSAs therefore have a major role in making sure the research staff voice is heard and heeded. In attending to research staff issues, institutions also need to address the inequalities in research careers that remain, despite progress on equality and diversity.

The changing research landscape in HE

Massive changes characterise the last 20 years or so, in particular greater emphasis on research assessment and accountability (more internal research management within HEIs, with targets and research plans). Research funding is increasingly concentrated; 92% of HEFCE funding goes to 50 institutions, less than half the number of eligible universities. We are seeing more collaboration and larger, multidisciplinary groupings, with both inter- and intra- institutional mergers. Emphasis on impact has grown significantly. Funders now expect research to demonstrate value to wider society and the economy.

Economic pressures

HEIs were already experiencing considerable uncertainty as government policy changed rapidly. With the pressure on public spending even greater, future planning is particularly difficult. For example, what might be the implications of the [Browne review of student funding](#) for postgraduate degrees? Many institutions are 'reshaping' or 'restructuring', resulting in reduced capacity for replacement staff and new posts. Many are narrowing their focus towards their areas of excellence. With reduced public spending across all sectors, fewer career positions are available in government departments and research organisations. Many parts of the private sector are also affected by the economic downturn.

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Implications for your career

It remains true, nevertheless, that times of challenge are also times of opportunity. There are, and will still be, jobs to be had. So, you need to do what you can to make yourself more likely to get one. By attending this conference participants were already giving themselves an advantage. Being part of a RSA gives members a much wider insight into academic life.

Take responsibility for your own future

This may mean you need to change the way you think. It means acknowledging that there is a world beyond academia and that many researchers end up working outside higher education. From an early stage you need to perceive your future in terms beyond your current position. You also need to realise that doing your day-to-day job well is no longer sufficient to secure you a good job in the future.

Prepare for the future

You need to plan and work on a number of activities that complement your basic academic achievements, so that your CV stands out. Take advantage of training and career development opportunities, broaden your skills base, and sell your accomplishments. Remember that the skills and achievements required to move on from your current position are not the same as those you displayed to get there. Having a good set of outputs, publications is not enough. You now need to demonstrate the benefits of your research not just to academics and funders but to new audiences: other potential beneficiaries and the wider public. Vitae's booklet [The Engaging Researcher](#) is a valuable resource. Experience of applying for funding is invaluable, whatever your next role. Look for opportunities, such as conference attendance.

Be proactive and flexible

To take control of your future you need to make choices based on informed decisions. Make a plan, but be prepared to adjust it: don't close off paths too early. Keep an open mindset – the future is unpredictable. Build a network that goes beyond academia. The most successful people will adapt and seize new opportunities as the world changes around them.

An international response

Dr Gordon Dalton, President, Irish Research Staff Association

Gordon Dalton gave an insight into the Irish Research Staff Association, which gives a collective voice to researchers across all seven Irish universities. Its future aims include helping to develop the researcher voice at European level. Gordon highlighted the importance of RSAs working together to achieve solid representation of researcher interests on the national and international stage.

Strategic goals

Established in 2007, IRSA is an umbrella organisation of Ireland's university research staff associations. Its strategic goals in representing Irish researcher interests span: career development, working conditions and enhancing the public image of researchers in Ireland, so that a researcher career becomes an attractive career choice. Part of its remit is also to represent Irish researchers internationally.

IRSA goals are focused on:

- lobbying for improved employment conditions
- developing a career structure
- engaging with national funding bodies
- growing skills for developing researcher careers, via fora and workshops
- developing a national researcher network
- representing Irish researchers at national and international events.

Influencing Irish policy

IRSA has made successful inputs to the Department of Education Working Group on Researcher Careers, particularly its work in defining a career path structure from postdoctoral fellow to senior research fellow. IRSA's most successful influence has been on the issue of allowing research staff to be named on grant proposals.

As yet, there is no dedicated funding to support research staff careers. But the IRSA has begun collaborating with Ireland's main funding bodies, the Irish Research Council for Science, Engineering and Technology (IRCSET), Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) and the Health Executive Authority. Collaborations include contributions to, and attendance at, events such as [Globe Forum](#). The IRSA is working with the IRCSET foundation to develop a networking web platform, which will include a CV database of all researchers in Ireland and funding opportunity alerts.

International influence

IRSA has attended and contributed to a number of events in mainland Europe and the USA. It is perhaps the most active national association for research staff at European level, having attended the European Science Open Forum (2010), the European Science Foundation forum on career structures (2009) and spoken by invitation to the Council of Europe's Scientific and Technical Research Committee. IRSA will be a full member of [Eurodoc](#) from 2011 and aims to build direct contact with mainland European research staff associations.

Challenges

Despite this promising start, there is a long way to go. The IRSA committee is voluntary and subject to high turnover as members on short research contracts move on. RSAs need to seek out people on longer contracts to help provide continuity. IRSA has no direct government funding as yet and is not automatically consulted on researcher issues.

Working towards a European research staff association

Developing a collective voice is important: research staff from different parts of Europe are not generally consulted on research issues at EU level. IRSA's goal is to set up a European research staff association (ERSA), that is consulted on European researcher issues and equals the influence of the American research staff association. The target is for the ERSA to launch at the 2012 European Science Open Forum in Dublin. Currently the IRSA is working to secure European funding for the ERSA, to enable recruitment of permanent administrative staff, and is contacting other national RSAs with a view to organising preliminary meetings in the run up to 2012.

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A national response: developments and activities

Dr Chris Thomson, Researcher and UKRSA Co-chair, University of Hull

Chris Thomson encouraged all participants to own the [UKRSA](#). He described the ways UKRSA was building contact with local RSAs to truly represent UK researcher issues. To be sustainable UKRSA needs local RSA members to get involved at national level too. UKRSA's recent survey of local RSAs had much persuasive evidence to help RSAs influence the implementation of the Concordat in institutions.

UKRSA's vision

UKRSA, with the support of Vitae, is seeking to support diverse groupings of research staff, particularly through local RSAs across the sector in developing their careers, both within and outside the academic sector. The overall vision for UKRSA is to create a sustainable research staff association with support across the UK and international reach; informing institutions, funders, and governments, and providing a national voice for research staff about the most effective ways to support them in achieving their career aspirations.

Impact of local RSAs



The first UKRSA survey of local RSAs showed that RSAs are already making a significant difference representing research staff. The results are published in the report '[Understanding Research Staff Associations and their impact](#)'. 83% of respondents had achieved an increased profile for research staff issues within their institution. Some 50% of RSAs reported that they had secured improvements to research staff working conditions.

At the personal level, 50% reported acting more confidently as a researcher as result of their RSA involvement. 28% enjoyed research more as a result. These are great selling points for RSAs when working to get researchers actively involved in RSAs. There was also some evidence of improved research outputs and career prospects as result of taking part in RSA activities.

On institutional policy and practice:

- 76% said that the Concordat was central to their activities
- 95% had been consulted on training and development (the majority felt they had improved the range of professional development activities available to research staff)
- 50% had been consulted on Concordat and fixed-term employment policies (even though there is no obligation for institutions to consult with RSAs).

UKRSA policy influence

UKRSA works to respond, at national level, to the issues identified by local RSAs. Representing research staff to influence policy is key: UKRSA is already a member of five national committees; four national organisations have a presence in the UKRSA advisory group (UCU, IRSA, RIN and Vitae) and UKRSA has been invited to speak and provide the research staff voice at national events.

The next stage is to increase communication between local RSAs and UKRSA (eg using online surveys and consultations). This is so that UKRSA can be sure of representing the local voice more fully on the national scene and local RSAs can make full use of the support UKRSA provides. The reports that UKRSA has published – the '[Guide to Research Staff Associations](#)' and '[Understanding research staff associations and their impact](#)' – will only realise their potential influence if local RSAs take them forward with research staff and university management.

UKRSA role in supporting research

The central message of the survey response was that being a researcher means undertaking great research. RSAs exist to help researchers do so more successfully: we must always remember this when selling the benefits of RSA involvement. Local RSAs report that they are successful in celebrating and focusing on research issues. The online communities established by UKRSA can have a key role in supporting research, by helping researchers make links across institutions and departments.

Future support to local RSAs

UKRSA will follow up the '[Guide to Research Staff Associations](#)' with a series of resources. UKRSA is undertaking research to better understand what support would help most. A likely priority will be resources to help you communicate to research staff within your institutions.

Supporting UKRSA

UKRSA is made up of everyone involved in local RSAs, not just the committee. UKRSA would like as much help as possible, on a rising scale of involvement:

- as personal members of RSAs, by publicising consultations via online communities
- by putting your RSA details in our national directory of societies, forums, groups, committees, and associations
- by joining the UKRSA Basecamp forum if you are willing to get a bit more involved
- by volunteering for our advisory group (expenses reimbursed)
- by becoming a co-chair of UKRSA.

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Question and answer session

Chaired by **Dr David Proctor**, Postdoctoral Research Scientist and Co-chair, UKRSA

What is RCUK's position on naming research staff on fixed term contracts as the grant holder on grant proposals, given that Ireland is moving towards a change of policy on this?

Iain Cameron responded that research staff can be named as a 'researcher co-investigator' on a grant proposal, which acknowledges a contribution to the development of the proposal, or as a named researcher working on the grant. Research staff also have the opportunity to apply for prestigious fellowships in their own right; often these have grants attached.

There are a number of broader factors influencing Research Council policy, which made the extension of grant holder eligibility difficult. For example, the grant holder has a lot of responsibilities placed on them by the university. He said that in recent years the research grant success rate had dropped and it was important to avoid another large increase in applications. Funding works differently according to discipline and it is important to understand and work with those conventions.

Are career paths possible while the great majority of researchers remain on fixed-term contracts?

Dianne Berry agreed that creating more permanent positions for researchers was a challenge for all institutions, particularly at the present time. The University of Reading creates permanent posts for career researchers when sources of funding are clear. However, if too many posts are created there is a high risk of redundancy. Gordon Dalton explained the tenure position of academic staff in Ireland meant that barriers to permanent research posts were even greater in Ireland.

Do RSAs support research staff careers both within and outside academia?

Chris Thomson replied that this was certainly the case for UKRSA and he hoped that all local RSAs would have the same aim. Some respondents to the survey of local RSAs had replied that being involved as an RSA committee member had led on to interesting jobs outside academia. Gordon Dalton suggested that the majority of Irish research staff would eventually move into industry, therefore it was important that IRSA continued to be involved with industry fora and made further links with employers.

The complementary roles of UKRSA and UCU

Vitae was congratulated from the audience on organising an inspiring event, showing the importance and power of the organised, collective voice of research staff. Participants were urged to work with UCU as well as UKRSA, to give a stronger voice to researchers when raising issues with management, particularly regarding working conditions: 'Let's make the collective voice even stronger.'

“ The conference was very interactive, combining presentations from invited speakers with open and honest discussion fora on various different topics involving all conference attendees. The success of the group workshops and the conference as a whole was facilitated, in no small part, by a sense of camaraderie and common purpose among the participants. ”

[RS Blog](#), McCrudden, 11 November



Workshop outcomes

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Participants could choose to participate in two of eight workshops. Further material from the workshops is available on the [conference website](#).

A1 How to engage research staff

Ms Lilian Menu, Director, Postdoc Career Development Initiative (PCDI)

Dr Joanne Tippett, Lecturer, School of Environment and Development, University of Manchester

Dr Blanka Sengerova, Postdoctoral Researcher, University of Oxford

Dr Deborah Holliday, Postdoctoral Researcher, University of Leeds

How do we engage researchers in research staff associations or communities? How do we engage individual research staff with their professional, personal and career development? What are the barriers that prevent researchers from engaging, is there anything particular about research staff?

In this practical and well attended workshop, participants heard:

- how in the Netherlands PCDI is dealing with career, professional and personal development for researchers using a bottom-up strategy, working together with early career researchers to plan activities, and as ambassadors and bloggers to spread the word
- about the UK's [Research Staff Blog](#), now over one year old and a place where researchers can discuss their shared experiences, issues and concerns
- how UKRSA engages researchers, through its presence on several social networking media, including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Nature Networks.

Participants shared and collected ideas on how to overcome barriers and engage researchers in their own development and in research staff associations. Discussion was facilitated using the Ketso hands-on kit for creative group work.

Blanka Sengerova wrote a [post on this workshop](#) on the Research staff blog.

Outcomes

Participants compared a variety of approaches to fostering research communities. The Research Staff Blog on the Vitae website has been developing well and has also become a useful resource for research staff as a library of information contained within older blog posts. UK researchers were invited to join PCDI's online community and to attend the PCDI [Postdoc Retreat](#), a highly popular annual event in the Netherlands.

Using Ketso participants developed over 150 ideas on themes including: linking to research, bottom up approaches, blogging and social media, website and digital resources, hands on tools, face to face community; skills training, institutional and external support and away from it all, social. The idea that was seen as the most important in terms of 'what works' was: 'for researchers to know they can affect change'. The themes that generated the most discussion were: 'Face to face community' (with the highest proportion of ideas around 'what works well') and 'Linking to research' (with the highest proportion of both barriers and creative new ideas).



“ Thanks to everyone that contributed to the Twitter feed and #rsconf throughout the day. The extent of interaction that took place online was a good reflection of what took place within the Wellcome Collection Conference Centre; I think the conference was a smashing success! ”

Participant feedback

Workshop outcomes

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A2 Who or what is the Concordat? – implementing the Concordat: the researcher's perspective

Dr Dan Weekes, Research Associate and UKRSA committee member, Kings College, University of London

The [Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers](#) has a variety of principles covering topics ranging from the recruitment, selection and retention of researchers to recognising the importance of researcher personal and career development. Institutions across the UK are starting to implement the Concordat to a varying degree and positively influence the experience of researchers. This workshop briefly introduced the Concordat, what it means for researchers and what institutions are already doing to implement it. Participants then discussed how and why researchers can individually and collectively influence Concordat implementation.

Outcomes

Participants explored the importance and benefits of engaging with the Concordat and developed their knowledge of how to engage other researchers. Discussion highlighted the following:

- Institutions' Concordat policy and practice needs to be better explained among researchers and principal investigators. At present, few on either side are aware of Concordat plans or implementation procedures
- Policy and practice can vary dramatically across institutions and researchers are best placed to highlight areas of good and bad practice
- Who will make the final decision on research staff training – Heads of Department or PIs?
- Researchers should be encouraged to appraise their PIs. Is this feasible?
- Salary grading systems help to maintain the motivation of researchers.



A3 How to use the Researcher Development Framework

Dr Vivien Hodges, Research Manager, Vitae

Dr Julie Reeves, ECR Skills Training Co-ordinator, University of Southampton

This well-attended workshop introduced the [Researcher Development Framework](#) (RDF), the [Researcher Development Statement](#) (RDS) and gave a brief overview of the developments that followed consultation with a wide range of stakeholders (including input from last year's Research Staff Conference). The workshop also introduced the new [RDF Continuing Professional Development \(CPD\)](#) tool and participants were invited to input into its future development.

The RDF is a tool, designed via analysis of the extensive survey responses from researchers, that gives structure to career development and planning. Primarily, the framework is designed for:

- researchers to evaluate and plan their own personal, professional and career development
- managers/supervisors of researchers in their role supporting the development of researchers within higher education
- trainers, developers, human resources specialists and careers advisors in the planning and provision of support for researchers' development
- higher education institutions in making decisions about their strategic approach to development of researchers.

The RDF has four 'domains': knowledge and intellectual abilities; personal effectiveness; research governance and organisation; engagement, influence and impact. The Researcher Development Statement (RDS) is derived from the RDF and is designed for policy makers and research organisations that provide personal, professional and career development for researchers in higher education. The RDF has been incorporated into a downloadable CPD tool to allow researchers to identify the areas in the framework they want to develop further, create an action plan and record evidence of their progress.

Outcomes

The workshop helped Vitae to develop a resource on 'Introducing the RDF' and improved presenters' understanding of 'what works' and how much time was needed.

The workshop raised awareness and developed understanding of the RDF and the CPD tool. Participants agreed that the RDF highlighted, (i) things we can do for ourselves; (ii) things we can train in; (iii) things we need our line manager to facilitate, in order to become more fully rounded researchers.

Different contexts for using the RDF and CPD tool were discussed.

For example, the RDF is something to work through when preparing a CV as it will highlight the strengths of the individual.

Participants gave Vitae useful feedback, including ideas for new uses of the RDF and CPD tool, such as in meetings between mentors and mentees so that researchers could better prepare for performance appraisal. With their mentor they could identify both the skills sets they already have (to build on these) and those they needed to develop.

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A4 Sources of support for equality and diversity

Rukhsana Rahim Din, Organisations and Network Coordinator, Services for Women, Women for the UK Resource Centre for Women in SET

Jennifer Woolley, Chief Executive, Daphne Jackson Trust

The workshop focused on support mechanisms that help women to return and/or pursue a career in STEM (science, technology, engineering and medicine) professions. It raised awareness of important and successful initiatives of the [UKRC](#) and [Daphne Jackson Trust](#) which variously support career entry, retention and re-entry. The UKRC provides a range of support for women in STEM, including career development training, local networks, mentoring and coaching. The Daphne Jackson Trust provides a returner's scheme for those who have had a career break of at least two years. It mainly, but not exclusively, supports female STEM professionals and has a success rate of helping 96% return to either academia or industry through its fellowship scheme. The fellowship is normally part time for two years and the fellow is paid a salary, with a small additional allowance for expenses such as conference attendance. Fellowships include a tailored training programme designed to update the skills and knowledge of the Fellow (accompanied by other support such as mentoring) thus allowing them to return at the appropriate level to their career.

Marouan Zarrouk wrote a [post on this workshop](#) on the Research Staff Blog.

Outcomes

The presenters led a discussion about the generally low representation of females in STEM professions. Participants identified a lack of confidence among women to apply for STEM posts. There are cultural differences across Europe in women's representation in STEM professions, (with Eastern European countries placed in the top range and the UK midfield). Training and education plays a key role in attitude formation and the need to change in the UK to better support women in pursuing STEM careers.



B1 Case study examples from local RSAs and launch of RSA guide

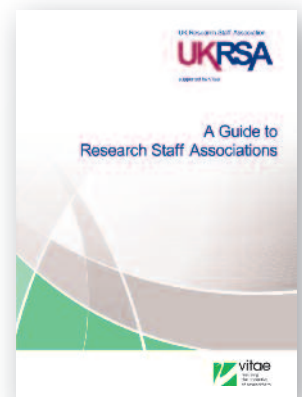
Dr Robert Hardwick, Postdoctoral Researcher, University of Leicester

Dr David Proctor, Postdoctoral Research Scientist, University of Dundee

Sheila Thompson, Director of Researcher Development Programmes, University of Edinburgh

Dr Jo Rees, Senior Postdoc, University of Cambridge

The '[Guide to Research Staff Associations](#)' is a practical guide for anyone with an interest in establishing and sustaining a successful RSA. Based on the opinions and experiences of survey respondents who are currently involved in running RSAs the guide includes: reasons to set up an RSA; practical considerations such as different models and sources of additional support; tips for growth and maintenance; case studies of existing RSAs.



Rob Hardwick introduced the UKRSA and the new guide. Sheila Thompson, who has been a champion for local research staff associations in the University of Edinburgh gave an overview of how the 11 RSAs have developed there and her perspective on the importance of RSAs. Jo Rees spoke on the activities and success factors of the expansion of [Postdocs of Cambridge](#) (PdOC) and David Proctor on the set-up of the CLSPA in Dundee. The workshop enabled participants to share practical tips and to map RSA models being used or considered to identify the suitability of particular models for different circumstances.

Stuart Gifillan wrote a [post on this workshop](#) on the Research Staff Blog.

Outcomes

Key tips for new and established RSAs were:

- Use all available sources of support
 - approach your Head of School/College. They often see the advantages of RSAs more clearly than principal investigators
 - make contact with your institution's researcher development staff
- Document what you do and how you did it, typically via a website. This is invaluable for helping your successors take over when you move on. It also helps make more effective applications for funding
- Continually ask your members what they want from your RSA. Poorly supported activities result when RSAs forget they need to keep in touch with members **all the time**.

The workshop also identified that RSAs had benefited from 'Roberts funding' that would no longer be available from 2011. It recommended that measures should be in place for sustainable researcher development funding.

Workshop outcomes

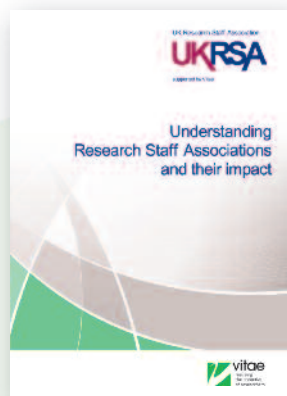
4 November 2010, Wellcome Collection Conference Centre

B2 Understanding research staff associations and their impact

Dr Chris Thomson, Researcher, University of Hull and UKRSA Co-chair

Philippa Storer, Senior Programme Manager: Researchers and Employers, Vitae

The joint report '[Understanding research staff associations and their impact](#)' by UKRSA and Vitae is an initial investigation into Research Staff Associations (RSAs), to understand where they exist, how they are structured and types of impact that they are having within their host institutions and on the researchers that run them. This report uses the survey data to explore how RSAs are having impact, framed within the Concordat principles. The evidence clearly demonstrates the level of impact and influence existing RSAs are already achieving within their institutions, and how being actively involved in an RSA can influence an individual's personal and career development. The report indicates how:



- RSAs have the capacity to contribute significantly to sustaining the research work force and building the UK research base
- RSAs demonstrate the value behind principle 5 'Individual researchers share the responsibility for and need to proactively engage in their own career development'
- engaging with RSAs can help HEIs ensure the resources that are available are targeted, cost-effective and sustainable
- RSAs are working well with HEIs to influence the environment of research staff impacting on research and employment outcomes.

The workshop was an opportunity for participants to:

- consider the outcomes of the UKRSA/Vitae research
- reflect on the potential benefits of being involved in running an RSA
- input into future research of the UKRSA and Vitae
- explore the recommendations made in the report.

Outcomes

Participants discussed the report's recommendations in small groups, looking variously at recommendations to research staff, RSAs, universities and UKRSA. They considered the following areas of recommendation particularly important:

- RSAs should survey their constituencies to understand what types of activities will interest and engage them. Work with HEIs to ensure the range of development activities reflects the interests and needs of research staff
- RSAs should involve key HEI staff, such as HR and staff development and senior managers, to help ensure the continuity and sustainability of the RSA
- HEIs should encourage and support RSAs as an effective means of understanding the needs of research staff and a way of engaging with them
- HEIs should ensure RSAs are represented on relevant institutional committees and working groups and engage research staff with institutional policy decisions
- Research staff should take responsibility for their own career development, including taking advantage of events and activities provided by their HEI or RSA
- UKRSA should provide mechanisms for practice-sharing to engage researchers successfully, by communicating creative ideas and the benefits of involvement

A summary of how the recommendations were ranked can be found in Appendix 5 of 'Understanding Research Staff Associations and their impact'.

In addition, participants shared the following thoughts and tips:

- The Concordat advises researchers to take responsibility for their own career development. RSAs are a good way to demonstrate to HEIs that researchers are 'holding up their end of the bargain'
- HEIs should make new research staff aware of RSAs at induction. RSAs should include literature about their activities in induction packs
- Broadening constituencies and succession planning is critical. RSAs should consider engaging other groups such as postgraduate researchers
- Creating pathways for physical face to face meetings with senior managers, HR, staff developers etc are helpful in instigating and developing effective working relationships
- When setting up an RSA consider the geography and where research staff are placed across departments. Sometimes there are geographic barriers against people meeting if it means travelling across town
- RSAs should feedback and update their constituency about the outcomes and actions of their activities. Understanding the impact an RSA is having will help instigate and prolong engagement
- Make communications concise (both events, emails and updates)
- Raise the profile of the UKRSA to all research staff. Promote engagement with the UKRSA as a way research staff can effect change at a national level. This in part, may help overcome the reluctance of research staff to get involved at local level if they feel they will move on before change is made in their institution and they won't benefit. Helping to make change on a national level will have relevance wherever their research career will take them within academia

Workshop outcomes

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B3 Fixed term contracts

Mr Ronnie Kershaw, National Organiser, [UCU](#)

This session explored the results of a Vitae funded project published as '[Researchers, fixed term contracts and universities: understanding law in context](#)' and the UCU's stand on current practice.

The project looked at how research-intensive universities have responded to the legislation on fixed-term employment, in the management and employment of researchers. Over the last decade the higher education sector has begun to re-imagine the role of research staff. This has been both driven and supported by a range of policy initiatives which have emphasised the need to empower researchers to respond to changes in the research labour market. Concurrent with this policy agenda has been the development of new legislation and policy on fixed-term employment driven by the European Directive on Fixed-Term Work. The project was commissioned to look at how these two policy initiatives were inter-acting and what the implications were for higher education, the research infrastructure and researcher careers.

Within this session some of the results of this study were presented and discussed. Participants were invited to reflect on and discuss their own views on and experiences of fixed-term employment and their institution's policy.

Outcomes

Participants explored a diversity of responses and perspectives identified in the study. One suggestion to emerge was to form 'research agencies' where researchers could be matched with institutions' skills requirements.

Participants identified several areas of action for research staff and HEIs:

- HEIs need to re-think their strategies so that research-only careers become viable. At present, being a postdoctoral researcher 'doesn't count' as a career choice; there is a perception that research staff should either become a lecturer or leave the HEI
- Institutions would gain by creating more permanent positions aimed at senior researchers (eg staff scientist). By allowing experienced researchers to remain with the institution, the HEI would not have to continually retrain new people in how to do the research
- Research staff should encourage HEIs to allow them to be principal investigator on grant applications as it is often not the Research Councils who prevent this
- It was generally felt that it was up to research staff to 'keep pushing for what we want'
- An active redeployment policy that is aimed at keeping researchers in employment by offering them the first opportunity if posts become vacant to see if they are suitable before advertising it externally is ideal
- Far greater forward-planning is needed to create greater job security. Research groups with common research themes should form 'clusters' or networks around these themes. Research groups can fit into multiple overlapping themes. Clusters may be 'virtual' rather than co-located in the same department or faculty, but will organise regular seminars in work time to permit staff to share research results. The aim of research clusters is to: i) give opportunity for joint grant applications ii) develop research programme themes, and iii) manage multiple successful project bids, with staff, facilities and estate following the research
- Bridging funds need to be made more widely available

B4 What surveys of research staff tell us

Dr Vivien Hodges, Research Manager, Vitae

Dr Sean McWhinnie, Director, Oxford Research and Policy

Vivien Hodges shared outcomes from the analysis of the Careers in Research Online Survey ([CROS](#)) by broad disciplinary group and the [What do researchers do? Doctoral graduate destinations and impact three years on](#) longitudinal study, 2010. Sean then discussed his report for the Institute of Physics and the Royal Society of Chemistry on [Chemistry and Physics Postdoctoral Researchers' Experiences and Career Intentions](#) with some reference to his earlier work on [Chemistry](#) and [Molecular Bioscience](#) PhDs and women's retention.

This was followed by the opportunity to discuss survey outcomes in relation to RSAs; how RSAs can make the best use of these outcomes and ideas for new surveys in the future.

Tony McElligott wrote a [post on this workshop](#) on the Research Staff Blog.

Outcomes

- Participants were more informed on the kind of information available as a result of research conducted on the experiences of research staff
- Such surveys were useful to RSAs in confirming universal research staff concerns and issues irrespective of demographic differences
- The workshop showed how RSAs could use CROS survey information to influence policy at their institutions
- Survey results also enabled RSAs to influence policy at national level
- Vitae was urged to produce summaries of survey results for RSAs

“ I think the event is a really important and unique one which caters for the much needed networking 'out of the box' for researchers of all ilks. ”

Participant feedback

Closing Plenary

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The positive aspects of portfolio careers

Dr Barrie Hopson, Consultant

Barrie Hopson gave a thought-provoking insight into portfolio careers: what they were; the satisfactions they can bring and who might be suited to them. Given the change away from traditional career paths, it made sense for everyone – employed or self employed – to consider themselves a freelancer. Whatever the career and work pattern, 'Make sure on your journey you use your passions to define your directions and your skills to get you there.'

A brief definition

How many people can find a single job that uses all their skills and strengths, corresponds to their values, chimes with their passions and enables them to lead the lifestyle they want? Given the rarity of such an occurrence, it is not surprising that more and more people are looking at portfolio careers as a possible route to fulfillment. Put simply, a portfolio career is having two or more jobs, with two or more sources of income. In the UK, 1.2 million people are employed in more than one job and many of the four million self employed also combine different roles. Two thirds of portfolio workers do so out of choice, not necessity.

Changing workplace

Workplaces are changing rapidly. Organisations are increasingly employing a shrinking group of core people and using temporary personnel for everything else. The CBI has reported that flexible work and freelancing are an economic 'must'. Portfolio working was first examined by Charles Handy two decades ago in 'The Age of Unreason' but it is only now that the web has transformed our working lives (one in eight of us work from home and six out of ten new businesses start from home) that portfolio working has taken off.

Changing career models

The traditional model of the single track career ladder looks increasingly precarious in a world where every job is temporary. As management theorist Peter Drucker said 'Corporations once built to last like pyramids are now more like tents...You can't design your life around a temporary organisation'. If you think of yourself as a freelancer instead, you free yourself to plan for the future rather than react to circumstance.

The serial career option

One alternative to the single track career is the serial career – typically a new career every five to seven years. Just as psychology posits that we have multiple selves, and are capable of constantly reinventing ourselves, so too with our careers. People with serial careers typically get bored when they have achieved one set of challenges and so look for new ones. Whereas in the past a CV with many career moves did not find favour with employers, today's employers value adaptability, initiative and lifelong learning.

Flexicurity

People with portfolio careers are often constantly changing what is in their portfolio. Their security comes from within. They are usually less vulnerable in a downturn than those who lose their sole source of income. Portfolio careers are for people who love variety. 'Why have one boring job for life when you can have several cool jobs for the time being?' (Tanya de Grunwald).

Skills and mindsets

Not everyone thrives on multiple roles. You need to be most of the following: excellent at time management and organising yourself; able to work well under pressure; able to cope with little separation between your work and the rest of your life; a risk taker; energetic; assertive; comfortable being your own boss; not hung up on financial security; a networker and marketer; a self-starter; and preferably not a perfectionist.

Funding options

There are various ways to finance a portfolio's set-up phase, for example: get someone else to pay you while you develop it (perhaps gain experience working for a start up company or a large one); save several months' money to see you through the period; work in a part-time job to 'pay the mortgage' while using the remaining time to create your portfolio.

Your brand

Other people's perception of you is your brand, whether you consciously create it or not. Your brand covers your appearance, work, attitude, and the ways you market yourself (business card, voice mail etc). Remember your digital presence (eg LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook). Take care not to leave a digital footprint you'll regret!

Networking

Networking is vital for a successful portfolio career but face-to-face networking can be daunting, so information, training and experience in how to do it are really valuable. You can start overcoming networking fears in simple steps, for example: groups form early, so arrive first so people come over to you; volunteer for a role; when you connect people say something about them as well as their name; find out what you can do for them; make sure you have their contact details and follow up afterwards.

Finding your motivated skills

Your 'motivated skills' (Bernard Haldane) are the skills you love to do, and therefore those you should be using in your portfolio career. To identify these, think about achievements that you are proud of from different phases of your life, starting with your childhood. What exactly did you do well and enjoy?

The [portfolio careers website](#) has lots of information to explore portfolio careers further, including video interviews with people with a vast range of portfolio careers. Remember, whatever your chosen career pattern, you can **always** reinvent yourself.

Closing Plenary

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Wrap-up

Dr Tennie Videler, Programme Manager:
Researcher Networks, Vitae

Tennie Videler asked participants to give specific feedback on the conference, including via the Research Staff Blog, to help plan the next event in autumn 2011. She also invited participants to reflect on and record action points, both those to do with local RSAs and personal career-related ones. These were much more likely to be achieved if they were relatively small and able to be done in the near future. Tennie then asked participants to share key messages from the workshops:

How to engage research staff

This workshop identified common problems and brainstormed a wealth of possible solutions.

Implementing the Concordat

This workshop identified the urgent need to find ways to make the Concordat better known among research staff and principal investigators. It was also seen as a model of great potential interest to Ireland.

Using the Researcher Development Framework

Participants considered new ways of making the framework valuable, and emphasised its use for identifying and building on the user's existing skills and strengths, not just as a model for identifying skills gaps. Participants were considering running RDF workshops at research staff associations at their institutions.

Sources of support for equality and diversity

Participants increased their knowledge of important and successful initiatives. There was much interest in disseminating information within institutions. Some participants would have valued input on provision for research staff in the humanities and social sciences.

Case study examples from local RSAs and launch of guide to RSAs

This workshop drew on contrasting models for successful RSAs. It highlighted the value of contacting those responsible for researcher development in your institution, who would see value in giving RSAs logistical and administrative support (mirroring the Vitae/UKRSA relationship at national level).

Understanding research staff associations and their impact

This workshop highlighted the importance of closely tailoring RSA and researcher development activities to the needs of research staff. Workshop groups prioritised some of the draft report's recommendations by stakeholder, which will greatly help UKRSA to identify key activities for 2011 and finalise the report.

Fixed term contracts

Participants discussed how the impetus for research to become an acceptable career path/direction 'has to come from us – we have to keep pushing'. Researchers must act together in a sustained way to influence governments, funding agencies and institutions.

What surveys of research staff tell us

The value of surveys for RSAs was revealed. They allow RSAs to highlight issues to HEIs with robust data to back it up. To make the most of these potential 'levers' it is important for Vitae and UKRSA to present data for RSAs so that it is easily accessible.

“ The event was great– thank you for inviting me!
It was a very useful conference; it's a shame it had to end ”

Participant feedback

After the event

4 November 2010, Wellcome Collection Conference Centre

Vitae Research Staff Blog

Individual participants shared their impressions and kept conversations going on the [Research Staff Blog](#). There are links to posts about individual workshops in their sections of this report.

UKRSA committee meeting

Members of the UKRSA committee met in London in December. Please contact ukrsa@gmail.com or tennie.videler@vitae.ac.uk to express an interest in joining the UKRSA committee. The following may be of interest:

Endorsement of the RDF

It was decided that the UKRSA would make its first endorsement. The UKRSA now endorses the Researcher Development Framework (www.vitae.ac.uk/RDF). We will be shortly adding a page to our website to advertise this endorsement and encourage UKRSA members and other research staff to comment on it.

Regional RS associations

We will set up regional organisations of local RSAs (and members of research staff who do not have access to local RSAs). In Scotland this has worked exceptionally well. Vitae's Hub Managers are very eager to help out.

Vitae Research Staff Conference 2011

Discussions were started on the next Vitae Research Staff Conference, to be held in November 2011. If you have any ideas for the programme, workshops or speakers, again please get in touch with Tennie at tennie.videler@vitae.ac.uk.



Society for Research into Higher Education's annual conference

UKRSA's first academic publication was a conference paper presented at the Society for Research into Higher Education's annual conference in December. The short paper was based on the impact and guide studies. Academic involvement of the UKRSA will help to grow the quantity of academic research in this area. Please be sure to cite this paper along with the reports!

Towards a European Research Staff Association

In December Dan Weekes represented the UKRSA and Gordon Dalton the IRSA at the '15th Symposium on European Network on Research Careers'. This was an event hosted by the various research funders from across Europe. A key outcome of this meeting was that we and the IRSA were asked to table a proposal for how a European research staff association (ERSA) should be run.

Action Day, 23 February London

Members of the UKRSA will be meeting on 23 February at the British Library to finalise plans for research and resources, the UKRSA will produce this year. If you are interested in attending, please contact Tennie at tennie.videler@vitae.ac.uk.

“Meanwhile, I think the conference went really well. Congrats to all for excellent organisation, great venue, good food, and from what I heard happy delegates!”

Participant feedback



Vitae is supported by Research Councils UK,(RCUK), 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.

To achieve our vision we have four aims:

- building human capital by influencing the development and implementation of effective policy relating to researcher development
- enhancing higher education provision to train and develop researchers
- empowering researchers to make an impact in their careers
- evidencing the impact of professional and career development support for researchers.

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

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