

Report of the  
**Vitae Policy Forum**  
12-13 January 2011

Vitae is supported by Research Councils UK (RCUK),  
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# Report of the Vitae Policy Forum

12-13 January 2011

The Vitae Policy Forum is an annual event focusing on policy developments and the implications relating to skills and career development for researchers. It is an invitation-only event aimed at PVCs or equivalent staff.

The 2011 Forum was an important opportunity for institutions to influence the policies and strategies for researcher development and the Concordat over the next spending review period.

In light of the Comprehensive Spending Review announcements, the Browne Review, the Research Excellence Framework and institutional responses, the Policy Forum aimed to:

- explore strategies, structures, practice and reporting mechanisms for sustaining researcher development beyond Roberts ring-fenced funding
- respond to the outcomes and recommendations from the Independent Review of the Roberts skills agenda and implications for future strategy and practice
- compare how universities are profiling researcher development and the Concordat to differentiate their strategic missions
- review the role of the Concordat and researcher development as part of strategies to develop the UK HE research workforce and improve the research environment.

The event combined plenary presentation, panel discussion, and choice of workshops. This report provides an overview of inputs and outcomes. Further details, such as presentation slides and full workshop outcomes, can be found on the [Vitae website](#).

## Wednesday 12 January 2011

### Introduction

#### Dr Janet Metcalfe, Chair and Head, Vitae

Janet summarised factors shaping the very different environment for researcher development from that of the previous year; several developments in the wider HE environment impacted upon its sustainability. The implications of the funding settlements for higher education, changes to undergraduate fees following the Browne review (with as yet unknown consequences for the environment for research and researchers) brought about a state of flux which would be prolonged by the forthcoming HE White Paper. The end of ring-fenced funding for researcher development in April 2011 formed part of a more general climate of resetting of priorities, restructuring and retrenchment in many areas.

This was also an intensive period for policy affecting researcher development. The Forum gave participants a timely opportunity to influence decisions regarding the development of the research environment template within the REF; review of Concordat implementation, future RCUK reporting mechanisms and sector response to the independent review of Roberts recommendations.

As part of the preparation for the Forum, HEIs had responded to Vitae questions aimed at forming a picture of sustainability of the researcher development agenda. Many of the forty or so responses emphasised the importance of researcher development and the Concordat:

- Commitment to the agenda at senate or board level had made some progress: 47% in respect of postgraduate researchers (PGR), 34% of research staff (RS)
- Around half of institutions were still reviewing their strategies (45% for PGR, 56% for RS)
- The changing funding regime and funding gaps over the transition period were major issues for many in fully embedding researcher development
- Much refocusing of priorities and rationalisation of provision was taking place. Larger institutions were looking at how to implement and embed researcher development within disciplines, while reducing central provision
- For the 13% of respondents with low amounts of Roberts funding, the funding changes had little impact

Asked about specific challenges, over half of institutions foregrounded loss of the funding stream, with almost as many responses mentioning the general financial climate for HEIs or competing internal agendas. A third focused on the challenge of engaging principal investigators and academics, with its concomitant implications for embedding the agenda in departments. Other challenges included researcher recruitment, engaging researchers in researcher development, maintaining quality of provision, engaging employers, and the contraction in opportunities for academic careers.

The Policy Forum would enable collective reflection on what was achievable by 2014 and communicate that to funders and other stakeholders (such as the Concordat Strategy Group) responsible for setting policy agendas and measuring progress and impact.

### New government priorities for research and researchers

#### Dr Stephen Axford, Head of Science and Society, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills

Stephen illuminated the government's vision of UK science and research, showing how BIS was taking this forward. This vision and BIS priorities for the science and research budget were set out in the publication 'Allocation of science and research funding 2011–2015'.<sup>1</sup>

The government had protected science and research budgets because the UK's world-class research base was a key driver in promoting economic growth: "Despite enormous pressure on public spending, funding for science and research programmes has been protected in cash terms demonstrating the Government's commitment to rebalancing the economy and promoting economic growth."<sup>2</sup> Funding research led to improved business performance, new business creation, better public policy and services, new inward investment, and highly skilled people contributing across the economy.

Translated into BIS priorities, this meant:

- concentrating funding where research is of proven excellence
- providing relative protection to funding in areas attracting leveraged funding from collaboration with charities and private sector funders of research
- maintaining a substantial flow of new researchers (from the UK and abroad)
- maintaining national capability in critical areas
- providing researchers with access to key large scale research infrastructure, both here and abroad
- supporting cross-Council research into strategic national challenges identified by government, such as energy and climate change
- pursuing a research cluster strategy to support economic growth
- maintaining stability of funding over the medium-to-long term through continuation of a ring-fenced budget
- promoting financial sustainability in the UK research base through maintenance of the full economic cost policy of research funded by Research Councils.

Internal restructuring at BIS would better support these priorities by consolidating higher education, innovation and research policy. Professor Sir Adrian Smith was now the Director General for knowledge and innovation, leading across these previously separate areas.

The recent work on measuring impact had shown that huge benefits had been achieved by the HE research community over many years. The links between HE research and economic growth were powerful: in the period 2003-2011, 38 university spin-outs were floated on the stock exchange with an IPO value of £1.77 billion. During the same period, 25 spin-out companies were acquired by other firms for more than £3billion.

<sup>1,2</sup> [www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/science/docs/a/10-1356-allocation-of-science-and-research-funding-2011-2015.pdf](http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/science/docs/a/10-1356-allocation-of-science-and-research-funding-2011-2015.pdf), BIS, 20 December 2010

Focusing on what impact meant to individual researchers, Stephen then drew attention to researcher responsibility and visibility. How should the research community participate in current government themes: the 'big society' and 'nudging' towards behaviour change? How do researchers raise their profile to gain a recognisable 'voice'? Such work was challenging, but public engagement was of paramount importance.

## Research Councils' delivery plans, funding and implications for researcher development

**Dr Steven Hill, Head of Strategy Unit, Research Councils UK**

Steven began with an overview of the research funding landscape. It was well known that government favoured greater concentration of research excellence. He reminded participants that in the dual support system, while the Funding Councils were responsible for strategic funding, Research Council funds were already concentrated in a relatively small number of institutions, the result of highly competitive grant allocation.

Allocations for individual Research Councils for the spending review period 2011-15 saw resource budgets largely receiving 'flat cash', with small adjustments across the period. MRC spend was protected, and STFC protected against exchange rate effects for subscriptions to international facilities, while some other research councils received a small decrease in cash terms. In contrast, the capital budget for research had seen a 44% cut, which would lead to significant constraints for those areas with high capital commitments. Overall, the contraction across all councils amounted to about 3% in cash terms, 12% in real terms (allowing for inflation) over the period.

The Research Councils had published their individual spending plans, while RCUK took the new step of publishing a strategic vision that brought together key collective policies.<sup>3</sup> In this document, RCUK set out its aims for leading in:

- shaping the research landscape (more proactively than before)
- incentivising collaboration and knowledge exchange
- ensuring that the UK gets maximum benefit
- promoting high level skills (in research and for the general workforce)
- developing and running the national research infrastructure.

To achieve these RCUK would:

- work more closely with HEIs – particularly those that receive the greatest research funding, other research organisations and the Funding Councils in strategic partnership
- steer collaboration to deliver enhanced outcomes and impact
- locate and encourage centres of excellence and capability, leading to greater research concentration where appropriate
- develop collaborative approaches to managing demand for research funding.

There was much commonality between the individual Research Council delivery plans. The existing emphasis on grand challenge (cross council) programmes remained. The overall aim was to maintain a balanced portfolio, ensuring funding was directed at strategic needs, while also protecting curiosity-led research. Critical mass featured more prominently: in most councils the doctoral training model would spread. Multidisciplinarity and collaboration would be encouraged so that the next generation was even better at working collaboratively than the current one. Vulnerable disciplines would be protected where national capability was threatened.

Economic, societal and cultural impact was given much attention. Given the national imperative for economic growth, such impact needed to become faster, broader and deeper. The research councils would embed impact still further in their processes. There would be greater focus on developing people's ability to transfer their skills and knowledge, for example, through a growth in people exchange schemes.

Support for doctoral researchers was aimed at preparing them for both research and non-research careers. There would be a further concentration of training in the best centres.

The cohort approach to grant allocation would grow. Training would be focused to deliver strategic skills needs for business, policy and research and to increase employability. This would include more CASE awards and demanded the development of skills in collaboration and engagement.

Policy on support for future leaders would include a new approach. RCUK would balance the identification of excellent individuals against strategic considerations, both broad UK capability requirements and specific emerging research opportunities for the future. It would change some fellowship schemes to focus on developing the research leaders of tomorrow in the areas needed by the nation.

RCUK remained "committed to the development of early career researchers, both to develop the skills to benefit the wider economy and to ensure the continuing pipeline of excellent researchers for the nation. As a result we would continue to invest in the RCUK Research Careers programme, continuing to support the implementation of the Concordat for Researcher Development and managing the transition of the Vitae programme towards a self-sustaining position".

The Research Council delivery plans focus on the highly capable people required to sustain the UK research base, enable closer work with industry and to work in many sectors of the economy. The current contract for Vitae is from January 2008 to December 2012. From the outset, the Research Councils agreed a level of funding to underwrite the contract, but had a strategic aim to move towards a broader funding base. No decisions have yet been made about future funding for the Vitae contract, however the Research Councils are keen to ensure that the impact of past investments through the Roberts funding continue to be realised. Over the coming months, the Research Councils will consider the medium to longer-term requirements for researcher development and their role(s) in supporting this.

<sup>3</sup> [www.rcuk.ac.uk/documents/RCUKStrategicVision.pdf](http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/documents/RCUKStrategicVision.pdf)

## New era for researcher development, funding, review and priorities

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

Iain summarised the significant progress on the researcher development agenda, before outlining RCUK thinking on future funding and monitoring requirements. The context was one of evolving drivers: from central direction with limited support (pre-2002), via the cash-driven Roberts agenda, to devolved funding from 2011, whereby institutions set the agenda.

The Independent Review of Roberts Recommendations had made nine recommendations across five themes, covering: future funding and progress monitoring; maintaining expertise, sharing provision and best practice; focusing on employment to drive skills development; HR rewards for good researcher development; promoting the UK doctorate and researcher development.

RCUK welcomed the report from the panel and the overview it provided of researcher development in the UK. RCUK agreed with the challenges identified in the report and supported the recommendations. Participants were invited to give feedback on [RCUK's draft response to the Panel](#). The panel had confirmed that Roberts funding had stimulated much valuable provision and innovation. However, more needed to be done to achieve Sir Gareth Roberts' vision of a sector responding to the needs of industry and developing clear career paths. Effective and systematic interaction between HE and non-HE employers was essential. The panel recognised the significant contribution of Vitae in assisting progress. The panel had noted the considerable distance travelled in provision across the sector. Part of the evidence to the panel was an [analysis of institutions' 2009 annual reports to RCUK alongside 2004 strategies](#). This indicated that by 2009 around three-quarters of research organisations were making extensive, dedicated provision for personal, professional and career development for postgraduate researchers. Around one-third had extensive bespoke provision for research staff. The lower figure for research staff reflected a relative lack of provision and models on which to build at the outset.

There was much commonality between institutions' 2009 and 2010 reporting on sustainability issues. RCUK's analysis of 2010 reports showed that:

- nearly two-thirds of institutions had a strategy and policy for managing and supporting research staff (with the implementation of the Concordat coming through strongly in reports, particularly from larger universities)
- most mentioned carry-forward of funds. Current plans would take researcher development through to 2013-14, but institutions expressed some concerns about funding for staff and programmes in the interim
- institutions were using reviews and evaluation to re-focus activity and avoid duplication, increasing collaboration to ensure cost-effectiveness or breadth of provision.

Alignment of researcher development with other institutional agendas (such as employability and enterprise) began to be identified in 2009. It was vital to build researcher development into (and learn from) the expanding Doctoral Training Centre model. Sharing of practice across institutions remained a strong theme in reports and was essential in future strategy.

## Question and answer session

### Supply and demand for early career researchers

The number of Research Council funded doctorates would remain 'reasonably stable': the DTC model changed the mechanism not the funding level. Research Councils would continue to fund largely full-time studentships, but acknowledged that more flexible models might be a future consideration, depending upon the impact on demand for further degrees of the increase in undergraduate fees and hence graduate debt. There was no indication that the Government would revisit policy on postgraduate fees.<sup>4</sup> A concern was also expressed that the abolition of the compulsory retirement age, coupled with funding reductions, would make it difficult for some HEIs to find posts for talented doctoral graduates.

### People exchange and collaboration

There was much to be gained by strengthening the 'people aspects' of knowledge exchange. It was likely that the Research Councils would strongly recommend some form of 'work' experience within Doctoral Training Centre programmes and there would be more encouragement of short, focused periods of experience, such as the ESRC Policy Fellow scheme. Policy-makers were urged to look beyond the model of young full-time researchers with little prior experience. Strategic thinking was needed about exploiting the contribution of those coming into academia from other sectors to undertake professional or part-time doctorates. A concern was also expressed that interdisciplinarity could suffer in the current economic climate. However, cross-Council and intra-Council collaboration featured strongly in Research Council delivery plans.

### Funding researcher development

Participants expressed concerns that the Wakeham review recommendation to drive down indirect costs might pose difficulties for recovering researcher development costs and also queried the best way to seek contributions from other funders of research. RCUK was confident that indirect costs were the most appropriate location for researcher development budgeting, also confirming that funder contributions would be discussed by Concordat signatory funders at the Concordat Strategy Group meeting in March.

### RCUK reporting

RCUK confirmed that HEI reporting on sustainability strategies in 2011 and progress in 2012 or 2013 was voluntary. Evidencing commitment to researcher development by reference to such reports might strengthen HEI bids for competitive funding (for example for DTCs).

<sup>4</sup> Following the Policy Forum, David Willetts, Minister for Universities and Science, announced in February that Professor Sir Adrian Smith would reconvene his review panel which produced 'One Step Beyond: Making the most of postgraduate education' in March 2009. The panel is asked to reconsider UK postgraduate education in light of the new HE funded environment.

## Day 1 workshops

Each workshop examined a Concordat principle and how it applied to both research staff and doctoral researchers; first visioning success, then considering what progress was possible by 2014 and how it should be measured. Plenary feedback (below) highlighted changes in policy and practice needed to support progress and its evaluation. Links to further details of workshop discussion and outcomes are given below.

### Recruitment and retention of researchers

**Prof David Gani**, Deputy Principal for External Affairs and Advancement, University of Strathclyde and

**Prof Ella Ritchie**, Pro Vice-Chancellor Teaching and Learning, Newcastle University

**Themes:** visibility and targeting of information, developing funding policy and REF drivers.

The workshop called for:

- HEIs to improve the transparency and clarity of information (e.g. websites and job descriptions)
- marketing (by all parties) to communicate the value of the PhD, researcher development, and diversity of opportunities through better stakeholder targeting
- new funding models, such as funding for third year self-funders to encourage completion
- sector input into the REF to ensure researcher development advantages are a key driver.

### Value and recognition

**Dr Odette Dewhurst**, Senior Research Training and Development Officer, Chair of ReSDAG, University of Leeds and

**Su Bryant**, Head of Organisational and Staff Development, University College London

**Themes:** challenge of assessing progress in highly subjective area, researcher perception of policies/communication.

Participants:

- identified examples of how researchers might wish to feel valued and recognised, while cautioning that different researcher expectations made for highly variable interpretations of value and recognition (e.g. from leading on grant applications to a car parking space)
- suggested that a combination of formal and informal mechanisms for identifying value and recognition was appropriate
- called for careful communication of the purpose and value of monitoring as this can be dismissed by researchers as 'box ticking'
- recommended that HEIs make use of national surveys and local wellbeing surveys.

### Career development

**Dr Jon Turner**, Director, Institute for Academic Development, University of Edinburgh and

**Prof Brian Ford-Lloyd**, Director of the University Graduate School, University of Birmingham

**Themes:** making the most of existing evaluation tools, probing implementation of institutional strategies, location of research/analysis, priority data gaps, globalisation.

The workshop called for:

- reviews of all evaluation instruments to check they were capable of eliciting all the required information (e.g. CROS, PRES, PIRLS, HEIs' local surveys)
- smarter analysis by comparing stakeholder perspectives as revealed by different surveys
- assessment of employer awareness and needs to be conducted at national level
- urgent attention to lack of knowledge about research staff destinations
- Vitae to co-ordinate a national template for exit surveys
- RCUK to explore possibilities of changes to national datasets, e.g. HESA to clearly identify research staff
- a significant project (possibly collaborative, inter-HEI, RDF-linked) to research and assess implications for research training/support to enable researchers 'to be adaptable and flexible in an increasingly diverse, mobile, global research environment'

### Researcher responsibilities and empowerment

**Terri Delahunty**, South West Wales Hub Co-ordinator, Cardiff University and

**Prof Jacqueline Labbe**, Chair of the Graduate School, University of Warwick

**Themes:** change management, culture, strategic goals, evaluation and reporting methods.

Participants stressed the importance of having realistic expectations about the extent of culture change achievable by 2014, however, the recession may help researchers to focus on their careers. They suggested:

- a focus on strategic goals, with the overall goal that researchers should be more self-aware and reflective (this was more important than upskilling in particular areas). Measuring should focus on the extent researchers can articulate their skills and attributes
- that reporting by 2014 should be more qualitative and case-study based and less concerned with documenting provision and throughputs of researchers
- Vitae follow up Roberts alumni to assess progress in ownership of careers
- HEIs upload more case studies and career profiles (to accompany public information about research degrees, so that career pathway planning is embedded from the start)
- participation rates in researcher development were investigated.

## Equality and diversity

**Alison Mitchell**, Deputy Director, Vitae and  
**Ellen Pugh**, Senior Policy Adviser, Equality Challenge Unit

**Themes:** culture and environment, internal and external drivers (e.g. REF), challenges in assessing progress.

Participants:

- supported a vision of the future within a supportive culture and environment where equality and diversity are valued such that 'there is no such thing as a traditional career path', and where PIs felt supported by community of practices and institutional strategy for equality and diversity enabling them to work with the best researchers no matter what their personal circumstances
- agreed that measuring progress in equality and diversity cannot be determined by collection of quantitative data alone and therefore qualitative instruments are important
- recommended that by 2014 some progress was possible in refining staff surveys and taking account of them to good effect in research strategy, making some changes to staff policy and practice, and institutional data collection and dissemination processes. Full scale cultural change was necessarily a longer term aim
- suggested HEIs could be encouraged to enhance staff surveys' coverage of E&D issues, especially for research staff.

## Review and evaluation

**Thomas Papworth**, Concordat Implementation Coordinator, Universities UK and  
**Sheila Thompson**, Director of Researcher Development Programme, University of Edinburgh

**Themes:** making the most of existing evaluation tools, priority data gaps, employer perspectives and engagement, tools for researchers.

The workshop felt that multiple measures of success had been developed and therefore much was measurable by 2014. It called for:

- increased take up of nationally-produced surveys (CROS, PRES, PIRLS)
- HEIs to work on improving survey response rates
- improved engagement with industrial and business employers so that their requirements were better articulated
- investigation into the possibility of extending the HE Achievement Record to researchers
- a solution to the lack of destination data on research staff.

## Thursday 13 January 2011

### Responding to a changing funding environment and the REF: implications for researchers

**David Sweeney**, Director, Research, Innovation and Skills, HEFCE

David began by emphasising the importance of developing researchers. Investment in the UK research base enabled innovation and commercialisation and was essential to the UK's economic success. The current funding scenario brought some challenges, but the UK could continue to produce excellent research and researchers. Evidence of impact presented by RCUK and HEFCE (via the REF impact pilots), combined with arguing the need to protect the next generation of researchers, had helped achieve a relatively good CSR settlement. Plurality of funding for university-based research was a major strength of the UK. However, efficiency savings could be made by all stakeholders.

The content and relative weighting of the different components of the REF would be finalised later in 2011. Current thinking pointed to research outputs 60%, impact 25% and environment 15%. The initial sector consultations had shown widespread acceptance of the principle of incorporating impact in the REF. There had been considerable agreement that impact assessment should be based on expert review of historical impacts, focus on the research of submitted units not individuals, be underpinned by high quality research and take a broad view of impact (inclusive of all disciplines). The pilots to test impact assessment methodology had operated successfully. Panels, with membership drawn from academia and research users, worked well together. The pilots showed that:

- the process made explicit the benefits that research in each discipline brings to society
- it was possible to assess the impact of research through expert review of case studies
- a number of refinements were needed for full implementation
- a generic approach was workable, with scope for REF panels to tailor the criteria as appropriate to their disciplines
- the weighting should be significant to be taken seriously by all stakeholders.

All input was welcome into forthcoming decisions on the 'research environment' component of the REF. A key concern was to achieve fairness for smaller research organisations that lack the inbuilt advantages of well-funded and equipped larger institutions. A major lesson from the impact pilots was 'that we are still learning', so it was likely that the arrangements for the first REF would change subsequently. Another was that 'we need to build on our work with impact so we all have a clear view of why we're doing what we are doing'.

Finally, David gave an overview of equality and diversity developments. The REF E&D Advisory Group had addressed the implications of the REF and will produce guidance to panels and HEIs on all aspects of E&D in the REF, particularly the selection of staff to submit to REF. More broadly, promoting equality and diversity in research careers was essential to HEFCE's Concordat implementation strategy. One element

of this strategy was the HEFCE-funded equality and diversity project, which Vitae would carry out in 2011. Vitae would work with the [Equality Challenge Unit](#) (ECU) to ensure that the project complemented the ECU's wider remit.

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## Question and answer session

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In a wide-ranging session, David Sweeney made the following observations in response to participant questions:

- The environment component of the REF was not likely to involve 'major overhaul', although it would take account of sector feedback requesting greater clarity and structure
- It was important to counteract the perception outside the UK that funding cuts were making the UK a less attractive destination for researchers: 'We all have to take responsibility for our international persona'
- Scotland and Wales were working with HEFCE and Vitae to find ways to be involved in the HEFCE-funded equality and diversity project
- Researchers needed to gain a personal understanding of the importance of impact to their purpose as researchers. Ways for researchers to have face-to-face contact with stakeholders must be explored
- 'Top slice' funding streams for initiatives such as teaching enhancement had been much reduced in a funding system where the money primarily flows through the student. The government was thereby placing more responsibility on universities to decide what they want to achieve. This would require universities to invest by working together and taking a long-term view

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## Update on key UK initiatives

**Dr Vivien Hodges, Research Manager, Vitae**

**Ellen Pearce, Director, Vitae**

**Alison Mitchell, Deputy Director, Vitae**

**Dr Tony Bromley, Senior Training and Development Officer, Vitae Yorkshire and North East Hub Co-ordinator, University of Leeds**

**Dr Andrew Wilson, Director of Capability Enhancement, Loughborough University**

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This session gave participants short briefings on each of the topics explored in the workshops that followed.

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## Researcher Development Framework (RDF) project update

**Dr Vivien Hodges**

Analysis of sector consultation had shown broad support for the RDF. The Researcher Development Statement (RDS) had been launched as a replacement for the Joint Skills Statement, with cross sector endorsement by 26 organisations (including QAA and the Research Councils). The Vitae website now included FAQs on how the RDF linked to other initiatives (such as the Concordat) and included a CPD tool for researchers. Next steps were: validating framework content; enhancing the professional development tool; producing more guidance, resources and practice-sharing events for different stakeholders; communication activities; evaluating implementation.

[www.vitae.ac.uk/rdf](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/rdf)

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## Achieving and retaining the HR Excellence in Research badge

**Ellen Pearce**

A UK-wide process, incorporating alignment with the QAA Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes and the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, enables institutions to gain the European Commission's HR Excellence in Research badge, thereby acknowledging alignment with the principles of the European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for their Recruitment. Twenty three UK HEIs achieved the badge in 2010, out of a Europe-wide total of 38, thus gaining considerable profile internationally and in the UK. The UK approach is to streamline national and European initiatives for maximum efficiency. The workshop would examine the process and consider the Concordat Strategy Group proposal for full alignment of timescales and processes between monitoring the Concordat implementation and the 'HR Excellence in Research' process.

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## Equality and Diversity (E&D) in Research Careers

**Alison Mitchell**

Alison outlined the HEFCE-funded project to promote equality and diversity in research careers. Vitae would work with HEIs and the ECU over the following nine months to facilitate sharing of good practice and develop high quality resources for the sector. Project objectives were to:

- ensure that E&D in relation to research staff is understood, visible and prioritised within HEIs
- build a network of HEI experienced 'champions' and/or enthusiasts in E&D for research staff
- increase the E&D knowledge, expertise and capacity of trainers and developers working with research staff
- provide high quality, targeted resources for principal investigators supporting research staff.

Next steps included inviting 'champions' through Vitae Hub networks and gathering good practice case studies of E&D initiatives for research staff (researcher, principal investigator, institutional).

## Impact and Evaluation Group (IEG)

**Dr Tony Bromley**

2010 had seen considerable progress in evidencing the impact of researcher development. The IEG report ['The impact of researcher training and development: two years on'](#) (September 2010) had been a major group effort, achieving 120 sector wide contributions from 37 UK universities (plus two overseas), Vitae, RCUK, QAA and HEA. Use of the framework was broadening: for example for the forthcoming RDF evaluation and Vitae programme review. Potential activities were: themed 'subject' reports based on the established evidence base (such as 'employability'); stakeholder-specific briefings of the impact of researcher development; updating the impact framework documentation to reflect the RDF; [profiling the 'two years on' report case studies more prominently on the website](#); undertaking a review of the structure and nature of researcher development programmes. The group would also input to evaluation of progress in implementing the Concordat and respond to the RCUK independent panel review, whose findings it broadly welcomed.

## Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS) and Principal Investigators and Research Leaders Survey (PIRLS)

**Dr Andrew Wilson**

Institutions had seen an increasing pressure to deliver development for research staff over the last few years and to measure its impact. Equally, the Independent Review had called for 'quantified starting points'. CROS was a powerful tool for institutions to use in benchmarking and exploring researcher perceptions. The new Principal Investigators and Research Leaders Survey (PIRLS) responded to the critical role of research leaders in project and people management. The survey will ask research leaders what had helped them become effective, what they needed in order to develop further, and what they thought researchers needed to become research

leaders. The surveys were running in spring 2011 and again in 2013. Institutions were urged to take up both, as CROS and PIRLS complemented each other to enhance institutional evaluation.

## Engaging with employers

**Alison Mitchell**

Vitae's recent employer seminar had restated the fundamental premise that success in engaging employers requires value for employers, proactive researchers and support from academics and HEI professional services. 'Cost, time, value' were important for everyone. As follow up to the event, Vitae was collecting good practice case studies of researcher recruitment and retention by companies, HEI programmes linking researchers and employers and 'working partnerships' (employer-researcher-academic). A larger study would map the landscape of engagement including CASE-type studentships, KTP, internships and placements.

Vitae was also setting up special interest groups (by employment context) and sectors (employer-academic communities) as well as 'Careers in focus' partnerships with the Research Councils. A strong emerging message was the value in empowering researchers as 'intermediaries' between academia and external employers. Resources must communicate how researchers are messengers of their value and be matched to employers' researcher skills 'gaps'. Forthcoming work would also feature online networking opportunities, briefings for employers and researchers, a Vitae Employer Advisory Board and employer input to the RDS/RDF. Participants were urged to recommend case studies and participate in the project through the Vitae Hub network.

## Day 2 workshops

**Workshops examined the six topics above with particular focus on HEI implications for sustainability, strategies and practice and feedback to shape and enhance future project activity.**

## Implementing and evaluating the Researcher Development Framework

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

**Prof Pam Denicolo**, Director of Graduate School, University of Reading

The workshop explored institutions' initial responses to implementing the RDS/RDF, how the RDF has been validated during the reflection period, and how to evaluate success. Participants prioritised the need for more resources, particularly to help researcher developers communicate the benefits and uses of the RDF to all researcher groups and to map HEI provision. The workshop also called for more clarity from Vitae regarding the status of the RDF and desirable timescales for implementation.

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## Achieving and retaining the EU HR Excellence in Research badging

**Ellen Pearce**, Director, Vitae and  
**Dr Karen Clegg**, Director, Graduate Training Unit, University of York

This session outlined the [HR Excellence in Research badging process](#), explored the next steps for institutions that have already gained the badge and made recommendations about the approach to the external review planned for 2014. Participants gave broad support to Vitae's proposals for full co-ordination of the Concordat and HR Excellence in Research monitoring processes and recommended that the RCUK monitoring process was also combined to minimise reporting burdens.

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## Equality and diversity in research careers

**Alison Mitchell**, Deputy Director, Vitae and  
**Janet Wilkinson**, Three Times Three Consulting

Building on the outcomes of the previous E&D workshop, this session focused on materials development needs. Participants proposed that resources should fit with other initiatives as far as possible, target areas less well served by existing initiatives and provide material for researcher developers that helps them integrate equality and diversity themes into their existing provision and resources. Participants suggested that resources for research leaders should focus on negotiation and managing flexible working.

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## Demonstrating the impact: Impact and Evaluation Group (IEG) priorities 2011–2014

**Dr Tony Bromley**, Senior Training and Development Officer, Vitae Yorkshire and North East Hub Co-ordinator, University of Leeds and  
**Dr Donna Murray**, Head of Networks and Stakeholders, Institute for Academic Development, University of Edinburgh

In exploring the measures of success and priorities for the IEG over the next three years this workshop examined how the IEG could: help the sector to gain maximum value from the existing body of evidence; add value by complementing and contributing to existing and proposed mechanisms; continue to encourage the sector to build a robust evidence base relating to the impact and value of researcher development. Participants felt that huge progress had been made in a short space of time. A key priority should be to communicate existing impact information more strongly, using case study examples as well as data, the better to target and influence different stakeholders.

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## Engaging and understanding the views of principal investigators through PIRLS

**Dr Rob Daley**, Researcher Development Co-ordinator, Heriot-Watt University and  
**Thomas Papworth**, Concordat Implementation Coordinator, Universities UK

PIRLS was the key plank of the Concordat benchmarking project to explore the views and perceptions of principal investigators and identify a baseline against which to measure cultural change. This workshop explored what further activities were needed to engage principal investigators and how PIRLS would contribute to our knowledge and understanding of the views of PIs. It recommended a communiqué from the CROS and PIRLS steering group to explain and promote uptake by institutions and potential respondents. The draft PIRLS question set was generally well-received. Participants made helpful suggestions for further improvements.

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## Engaging Employers

**Dr Judy Williams**, Research Training Manager, University of Manchester,  
**Dr David Sargan**, Director of Graduate Education, Graduate School of Life Sciences, University of Cambridge and  
**Richard Carruthers**, Work Based Development Co-ordinator, University of Southampton

Using case studies from the universities of Cambridge and Southampton, this workshop explored how institutions were working with employers outside the higher education sector to better understand their requirements and to develop programmes and activities that enable researchers to understand the range of employment opportunities available to them and the transferability of their knowledge, skills and attributes as researchers. Participants concluded that individual institutions were doing good work in engaging with employers, but that there was some co-ordination work to be done to support the sector in raising the visibility of this work, highlight its impact and share practice.

## Plenary feedback and way forward

**Janet Metcalfe invited participants to reflect on themes emerging from the event and, following discussion, to feed back reactions, implications for HEIs, RCUK, HEFCE, the Concordat Strategy Group and the Impact and Evaluation Group.**

### Visibility and marketing

On the theme of visibility and marketing, Vitae had surveyed HEI websites to gauge the visibility of commitment to researchers. This revealed that:

- 73% explicitly valued staff in their HEI strategies: 15% mentioned research staff specifically
- researcher development provision was publicly visible on 93% of websites in respect of PGR; 78% for RS compared with 90% for staff development
- 88% of websites cited the Concordat
- 43% of websites profiled (some) CROS data; only 25% PRES data
- 50% profiled PGR associations; 35% research staff associations.

Participant feedback highlighted the need for simple, clear messages on websites, including the Vitae website, and publications. Additionally, making the current provision and evidence of its impact work much harder to promote researcher development, for example, many HEIs failed to report publicly on how they followed up survey (CROS, PRES) findings.

### Achieving cultural change

Feedback from participants noted:

- the potential of professional communities and particularly institutional leadership to drive culture change
- that widening participation was a major equality and diversity issue at research degree level
- using the RDF to support researchers to articulate their skills
- the potential value of RCUK rewarding and incentivising PIs for engaging with researcher development through grant extensions and award schemes
- public engagement required more visible incentives and rewards
- the REF could be a positive influence; asking for specific information at Unit of Assessment level would help ensure PIs considered researcher development issues.

### Researcher careers

Comments on better understanding researchers' careers included:

- Vitae national and Hub level employer engagement might be more powerful than by individual institutions, and that more use could be made of HEI alumni offices
- support for further research into the destinations of research staff and development of a national exit survey template

- the importance of participants responding to the forthcoming HESA staff record consultation and engaging with HR colleagues to work towards improved systems and datasets
- a reminder that careers services were a potentially rich source of qualitative and quantitative information on researcher careers.

### Monitoring and impact evaluation

There was significant feedback for RCUK and the Concordat Strategy Group regarding monitoring and impact evaluation:

- Continued, proportional monitoring by RCUK could be helpful in keeping researcher development on the agenda of university senior management to secure fee and grant monies. RCUK should address vice-chancellors in all monitoring communication and include questions on universities' other sources of researcher development funding.
- The rationale for the reporting schedule was clear. Nonetheless, it was a heavy schedule and it is important not to overburden institutions with evaluation
- All UK stakeholders should make careful, joined-up decisions on the data to be collected, not only because evaluation can be expensive, but equally because over-evaluating could alienate the staff whose attitudes researcher developers were trying to change
- Measuring 'distance travelled' would be more helpful to HEIs if it was from an HEI's self-assessed starting point, rather than to defined national criteria. If the latter approach were chosen, RCUK would need to recast its statement of expectations
- 'Distance travelled' expectations for 2011–13 should be modest: more engagement with, and delivery by, academic staff would take time
- The HR Excellence in Research badge is an important 'carrot'; it should not be used as a 'stick'

Participants questioned RCUK support for future co-ordination of the researcher development agenda, and expressed support for a continuing role for Vitae. Janet Metcalfe suggested that participants feed in views on what the sector needed in terms of central coordination for the remaining two years of the Vitae contract and beyond via their Hub advisory group.

Janet Metcalfe confirmed ongoing efforts join up the Concordat, IEG activities, RCUK and the RDF to demonstrate how they formed a single, coherent picture. Feedback to the Concordat Strategy Group would stress the need to formulate measures of success that were realistic in the timescales. Iain Cameron affirmed that the tools and frameworks now in place facilitated communication at policy level.

Janet pointed to the 'extraordinary amount of resources and evidence that we can make work harder for us with all stakeholder groups'. Collectively the sector had achieved a tremendous amount in a short time; commitment levels were high and there was much cause for optimism about future sustainability.

## Vitae

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

Vitae works 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 for researchers.

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

Our 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](http://www.vitae.ac.uk) or contact [website@vitae.ac.uk](mailto:website@vitae.ac.uk)

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