

## **Review of implementation of the Researcher Development Framework by UK higher education institutions**

**March 2011**

### **1. Introduction**

The Researcher Development Framework (RDF)<sup>1</sup> is a major new approach to researcher development, to enhance our capacity to build the UK workforce, develop world-class researchers and build our research base.

The RDF is a professional development framework for planning, promoting and supporting the personal, professional and career development of researchers in higher education. It articulates the knowledge, behaviours and attributes of successful researchers and encourages them to realise their potential. Policymakers, funders of researchers and other stakeholders have endorsed the associated Researcher Development Statement (RDS)<sup>2</sup> as a useful strategic overview of the RDF.

The Researcher Development Framework and Researcher Development Statement were launched in September 2010 and a survey was sent out in February 2011 to gather feedback from HEIs on their initial responses, activities and future plans for implementing the RDF. The survey responses highlight RDF implementation at three levels, strategic, operational and directly with individual researchers. The results will also serve as a baseline measurement for uptake and use of the RDF by UK institutions.

### **2. Survey responses**

There were 50 responses to the survey, representing 42 HEIs, including ten Russell Group HEIs and seven 1994 Group institutions. Over 90% of those who responded stated that to date their HEI had already used or were planning to use either the RDS or RDF.

Of the institutions responding to the survey, 62% were using either the RDS (52%) or the RDF (60%), with a further 12 HEIs (29%) in the planning stages. Thirty-four respondents (68%) are currently using the RDF in their role while a further 11 (22%) are planning to integrate the RDF into provision. Survey respondents were typically training/development officers and staff development managers responsible for delivering and co-ordinating provision for research staff and postgraduate researchers (30 respondents), or senior managers and academics (11), including directors of research.

Thirty-three respondents (66%) provided evidence of how they are using the RDF at the institutional level and/ or in their own roles, including nine of the ten Russell Group and six of the seven 1994 Group institutions.

#### **2.1 Strategic use of the Researcher Development Statement and Researcher Development Framework**

From the examples provided of how institutions and individuals are using, or planning to use, the RDF, 49% of respondents are using the framework at the strategic level across the institution, involving senior managers, human resources, training departments and academics. Over half of the respondents who provided examples had mapped their current training and development provision to the RDF. Others were using the RDF to plan their 2011-12 professional development portfolios. Two HEIs also performed a gap analysis to

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<sup>1</sup>[www.vitae.ac.uk/rdf](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/rdf)

<sup>2</sup> [www.vitae.ac.uk/rds](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/rds)

identify areas of the RDF where provision could be expanded and additional resources could be developed. A further ten respondents were planning to map their current resources and do a gap analysis. Future plans also include matching the RDF to current institutional frameworks and using the RDF to inform development of appraisal forms.

## 2.2 Operational use of the Researcher Development Framework

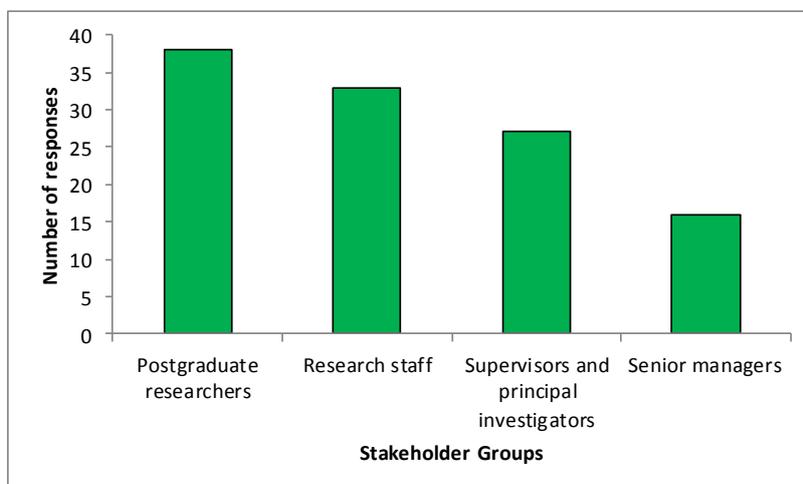
Of the 70% who provided evidence of RDF implementation, 85% of respondents were using the RDF at the operational level. This included building the RDF into researcher training programmes (including accredited courses), introducing the RDF into handbooks for research staff and/or postgraduate researchers, induction events, researcher symposia, web resources and good supervisory practice events. Future plans included, for example, a mentoring framework to support RDF implementation.

## 2.3 Informing researchers about the Researcher Development Framework

Two thirds of respondents provided examples of how they had informed researchers about the RDF. Introducing the RDF to researchers and engaging researchers with the framework were achieved via induction, using the Vitae RDF posters displayed throughout the institution, research staff fora to gain feedback on the RDF and e-newsletters.

## 2.4. Target stakeholder groups

The majority of respondents (92%) were using, or planning to use, the RDF, with postgraduate researchers (PGRs) and/or research staff. Fifty eight per cent had a more wide-ranging remit, and included principal investigators, supervisors and/or senior managers.



## 2.5. Challenges

Thirty-four respondents (68%) described some of the perceived or anticipated challenges with implementing the RDF in their institution. The main challenges identified include the perceived complexity and length of the RDF (ten responses), the time and resources needed to implement the RDF (ten responses) and successful engagement of researchers, supervisors and managers (nine responses). Other challenges included raising awareness and understanding of the RDF and linking the RDF with employability and skills for jobs outside academia.

## 2.6. Implementation resources

Respondents were asked what materials or resources their institution would find useful to implement the RDF. Of the 42 institutions represented in the survey responses, 13 HEIs (31%) requested further development of the RDF Professional Development Planner. There was a

strong call for sharing of best practice and case studies from HEIs already using the RDF, to aid other institutions in developing resources. Expert support/mentoring and training to help support staff with RDF integration were requested, as well as further resources to assist with RDF implementation and stakeholder engagement. Summaries, briefings for stakeholders and more RDF researcher profiles were also mentioned.

## **2.7 Summary**

The results from this survey indicate the considerable progress which has been made in the short time since the RDF was launched. Already there has been significant activity to introduce the RDF to postgraduate researchers and research staff. A majority of HEIs are planning to use the RDF with a wide range of stakeholders including supervisors, principal investigators and senior managers. We recognise that respondents have raised some challenges associated with RDF implementation and provided helpful suggestions for further resources. Clearly there is value in working together, sharing examples of best practice and continuing information exchange as the RDF is implemented across more institutions.

## **3. Future developments**

The Researcher Development Framework was launched in September 2010 and is a major new development in enhancing the capabilities of researchers. It will take time for institutions and related organisations to embed the strategic and operational aspects of the framework, particularly because the RDF is so much more comprehensive than the previous Joint Skills Statement. Vitae will continue to support the implementation of the RDF as a major work stream and we have used the survey responses to inform the implementation activities planned for this year.

Vitae has already developed a range of resources designed to facilitate RDF implementation. Resources available include [RDF researcher profiles](#), [a PowerPoint presentation for introducing the RDF](#), an [RDF overview leaflet](#), [background information](#) and [content overview](#), some [stakeholder-specific information](#) on using the framework, [a comparison of the RDF with the Joint Skills Statement \(JSS\)](#) as well as the [RDF colour graphics](#). There is also now a [glossary of terms](#), a [guide for mapping](#) training and development provision to the RDF, extended [FAQs](#) and an updated version of the RDF [Personal Development Planner](#).

Our future developments will focus on a suite of resources for RDF implementation which address the challenges raised by this survey including developing targeted briefings and presentations for different stakeholder groups. The Vitae regional Hubs will continue to provide expertise and facilitate practice sharing and regional activities. Vitae is working with several organisations to demonstrate how the RDF can be used to focus on specific aspects of being a researcher, e.g. public engagement, intrapreneurship and teaching, through the development of 'RDF lenses'. The RDF will be a key theme at the Vitae conference (5-6 September 2011).

Vitae would like to thank all the institutions and individuals who responded to this survey. The feedback has been useful in preparing the next phase of RDF implementation, setting a baseline of RDF use within the UK and confirming long-term development strategies.