

Vitae response to the REF consultation

Vitae is the UK organisation championing the professional and career development of postgraduate researchers and research staff in UK higher education institutions and research institutes. We play a major role in the drive for high-level skills and innovation and in meeting the UK's goal to produce world-class researchers.

Vitae works with institutions to embed professional and career development for researchers in the research environment. It plays a leading role in innovating, sharing practice and enhancing the capability of the higher education sector to provide support for researchers in this area.

Vitae's response is based on eight years of operating in this arena and on the evidence collected as part of the work¹ of the cross-sector Impact and Evaluation Group which highlights that researcher training and development activities have had positive impacts which include:

- clear demonstration that researcher development is capable of maximising the investment in research and providing an outstanding return on investment for researcher development
- significant impact on employability, demonstrating direct links between training and development activity and employment of researchers
- significant impact on research practice and outcomes, eg direct links with improved doctoral submission rates, increases in grant income, the writing of academic publications, management of research projects and enhancement of research practice
- improvement in the researcher experience
- evidence of cultural change in HE through supervisors' awareness of the need for and value of skills training and development activity
- improvement in employer awareness of the skills offered by researchers, researchers' awareness of skills required by business
- life changing impact in terms of the personal and professional development of individual researchers.

This response has been developed with input from the Vitae Research Staff Development Advisory Group (ReSDAG) and Regional Hubs. Vitae is intending to produce a series of resources to support institutions to meet the 'People' aspects of the REF.

¹ http://www.vitae.ac.uk/CMS/files/upload/IEG_Development%20Report2010_soft%20copy.pdf

1. Vitae believes it is imperative that support for researchers (research students and research staff) is included as an explicit criteria for the panels to consider as part of the contribution to the vitality and sustainability of the wider discipline and research base. We welcome the focus in the research environment section on the people issues, including staffing strategy, staff development and support for research students. This is aligned to the vision of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers which aims, through the implementation of its principles, to enhance the researcher workforce and thereby sustain research excellence bringing benefits to the health, economy and well-being of the UK. Within this vision we believe that equality of opportunity is key to ensuring that we can capitalise on researcher potential
2. We would welcome a more uniform approach amongst the panels in terms of the weight given to the 'People' element of the REF
3. We recognise that there is likely to be a need for panel specific criteria in relation to the 'People' aspects of the Research Environment. However Vitae would recommend more consistency in the panel criteria for the 'People' element of the Research Environment section and recommend that the following examples of evidence are appropriate across the four panels:
 - i. Staffing strategy and staff development
 - a. Evidence of the staffing strategy and its effectiveness, how it relates to the unit's research strategy. Examples could include:
 - i. succession planning and sustainability
 - ii. pattern of recruitment and impact of demographic profile of the unit
 - iii. the balance and role of fixed term contracts
 - iv. clear procedures for career progression of staff at all stages of their careers
 - v. redeployment processes and the ability/support for staff moving between projects
 - b. Evidence of the implementation of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers and the impact of this. Examples could include:
 - i. use and effectiveness of appraisal and induction
 - ii. researcher career development for all staff and students including the opportunity for researchers to discuss and produce a career development plan, the role of principal investigators and research leaders in this process, and information on career tracking and employment destinations of researchers
 - iii. evidence of how early career researchers are integrated into the research culture
 - iv. use of mentoring
 - v. leadership development activities
 - vi. evidence from the Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS) and the Principal Investigator and Research Leader Survey (PIRLS) as a way of understanding the views of research staff and research leaders, and benchmarking with other institutions

- vii. evidence of progress and engagement in gaining the European Commission's HR Excellence in Research award
 - c. Evidence of how the unit supports equality and diversity. Examples could include:
 - i. Study leave, extended leave and maternity/paternity/carers' leave
 - ii. opportunities for part-time staff
 - iii. arrangements for staff who are returning to a research career after a career break
 - iv. arrangements for those seconded from outside higher education
 - v. how staff from a wide cross-section of society can engage in research
 - d. Mechanisms by which standards of research quality and integrity are maintained (including ethics procedures and authorship policies)
 - e. Examples of collaboration/exchange with industry, public bodies or third sector which could include examples of work shadowing or placements
- ii. Research students, examples could include:
- a. Evidence of effective doctoral training which includes training and development opportunities in all four domains of the Researcher Development Framework (Domain A: knowledge and intellectual abilities including research methods, Domain B: Personal effectiveness and career development, Domain C: Research governance and organisation including ethics, Domain D: Engagement, impact and influence)
 - b. Evidence of how research students are integrated into the research culture
 - c. Contribution of submitted staff to doctoral programmes
 - d. Evidence of engagement of doctoral researchers in personal, professional and career development including employability skills and preparation for future careers
 - e. Evidence that feedback is sought to improve the research experience for example from the Postgraduate Research Environment Survey (PRES)
 - f. Examples of opportunities for doctoral students to be involved in collaboration/exchange with industry, public bodies or third sector
 - g. Evidence of support for equal opportunities in the recruitment and support of research students
4. We recommend that the impact template should include 'how the unit specifically supported and enabled staff to achieve impact from their research and recognised this activity' in the guidance for all four panels

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