

# Vitae policy forum 2010:

## **Exploring funding options for researcher development**

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## Introduction

Developing world-class researchers is an important priority for government, Research Councils UK and higher education institutions (HEIs). The researcher development agenda and associated ring-fenced funding from RCUK, has been critical in moving this aim forward. However this funding has not been confirmed beyond April 2011. This report examines a range of possible future funding strategies for researcher development. Its aim is to provide clear and concise summaries of the advantages and disadvantages of different funding options and associated challenges for the development of postgraduate researchers and for research staff. It draws primarily on the presentations, discussions and outcomes from the Vitae policy forum<sup>1</sup>, January 2010 and pre-2010 policy forum information supplied as part of the registration process. It also draws on information gathered during 2009, primarily the references to sustainability in the 2009 institutional reports to RCUK.

The Vitae policy forum 2010<sup>2</sup> brought together people from the higher education sector who have a strategic role in researcher development, as well as staff from the Research Councils, for open and constructive discussion on the extent to which the skills agenda is embedded in institutional strategies, structures and practice, and the implications of possible changes in funding options in the short and long term. Participants were acutely aware of the significance of decisions about future funding mechanisms at a time of recession, cuts in HE funding, and university concerns about the full costs of postgraduate researcher training<sup>3</sup>.

The intention is that RCUK will find this report, alongside the outcomes of the postgraduate review and the independent assessment of the impact of the Roberts investment, helpful in informing their decisions on their strategy, policies and processes for researcher development beyond April 2011<sup>4</sup>.

It is also anticipated that HEIs will find this report useful in informing senior management decisions on immediate and long term strategies for sustaining and embedding researcher development within their institutions.

The report highlights key issues and suggests recommendations to RCUK and HEIs to increase the potential of a successful and sustainable transition from ring-fenced funding in its current form to any future funding options.

<sup>1</sup> The Vitae policy forum is an annual event focusing on policy developments and the implications relating to skills and career development for researchers who can speak on behalf of the institution in relation to institutional strategies and implications of possible future funding mechanisms for researcher development. It is an invitation-only event aimed at PVCs or equivalent staff.

<sup>2</sup> This report only covers aspects of the Vitae policy forum relating to future funding. Full details of the event can be found on the Vitae website at [www.vitae.ac.uk/policyforum2010](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/policyforum2010). Video recordings, presentation summaries and slides are available for the plenary presentations, panel discussion and workshops.

<sup>3</sup> See 'Costs of training and supervising postgraduate research students', February 2005, HEFCE [www.hefce.ac.uk/Pubs/rdreports/2005/rd01\\_05/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/Pubs/rdreports/2005/rd01_05/)

<sup>4</sup> Subsequent to the policy forum the Research Council's have issued a statement of expectation regarding researcher development, [www.vitae.ac.uk/policy-practice/375-229641/Statement-by-Research-Councils-UK-RCUK-regarding-researcher-development.html](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/policy-practice/375-229641/Statement-by-Research-Councils-UK-RCUK-regarding-researcher-development.html)

## Background

The publication of Sir Gareth Roberts' review SET for Success in 2002 catalysed a change in how the career development of postgraduate researchers and research staff is supported in HEIs. The review, commissioned by the Treasury to investigate the supply of people with science, technology, engineering and mathematics skills, made a number of recommendations relating to the personal and professional development of researchers. Since 2003/04, RCUK have issued over £100m for researcher development and institutions have made significant progress in enhancing the provision of personal and career development opportunities for researchers.

The funding from RCUK for implementing the Roberts' recommendations regarding researcher development (particularly recommendations 4.2 and 5.3) has been identified by most institutions as critical to what has been achieved so far. To date, it has been allocated on the basis of the numbers of research council funded researchers and delivered through co-ordinated payments, separate from research or training grants, directly to research organisations. RCUK's commitment to such 'ring-fenced' payments extends to March 2011 and decisions for the period thereafter have not been made.

The consultation following the 2009 policy forum<sup>5</sup> found that 'overall there was overwhelming support for the continuation of ring-fenced Roberts funding and the importance of having a clearly identified payment to institutions so as to ensure continued focus on fully embedding the Roberts agenda'. This followed from a widespread belief that 'skills development is not yet permanently embedded in most institutions and the loss of funding will seriously threaten the progress made and could have a wider impact on the research base'. Of particular concern was the potential negative impact on the implementation of the Concordat.

The consultation also identified critical issues for the sector on possible changes to the funding options:

- the timing of integration of funding and resources – how to achieve the transition from ring-fenced funding to a sustainable funding basis without jeopardising progress to date
- uneven progress in embedding researcher development in HE culture – between HEIs and particularly in relation to the personal and career development of research staff
- the breadth of funding – how to achieve a broader funding base<sup>6</sup>
- the ability to plan post 2010/11 – a need for RCUK decisions on future funding options and processes to be made as soon as possible, even though funding levels will not be known until after the next comprehensive spending review.

However, there is recognition by RCUK and HEIs that the professional development of researchers, including transferable skills, should be an integral part of the normal business of research with resources drawn from all funders of research and in a way that is sustainable in the longer term. Continued dependence on ring-fenced funding makes this agenda vulnerable, particularly in this time of potential political and funding changes.

In the context of increasing financial constraint on HEIs, institutions have been considering the strategic implications of a potentially substantial reduction in RCUK financial support for researcher development. HEIs' 2009 annual reports to RCUK on the use of Roberts funds show institutions starting to undertake reviews of Roberts strategies.

A review of the reports from the 30 institutions in receipt of the greatest amount of Roberts funding (80% of total funding) showed that 23 institutions were undertaking high-level strategic reviews. Of the 19 reports that highlighted the membership of the reviews, 16 were chaired by, or reported to a pro-vice-chancellor. Post 2010/11 strategies that were being explored included:

- securing core funding for graduate schools, moving staff to core funding
- bringing together provision for PGR, RS, academics and sometimes undergraduates too
- exploring collaborations with other HEIs
- looking at the role of doctoral training centres in sustaining the agenda
- devolving provision to faculties and departments
- using fewer external trainers
- increasing online provision
- building capacity for delivering researcher development amongst academic staff (including recognising and rewarding training activities).

## Vitae policy forum 2010 discussions

Speakers, workshops and a panel debate at the 2010 Vitae policy forum explored the advantages, disadvantages and consequences of potential strategies for the future of 'Roberts funding', the implications for researcher development and the evidence required to support preferred funding options.

Three possible future funding options were considered in relation to postgraduate researchers and research staff:

- funding is an identifiable strand in research council funding options, ie there is a specific budget line relating to researcher development
- funding is embedded in research council funding options, ie overheads are increased to cover the costs of researcher development
- funding for researcher development through the Research Councils ceases completely from 2010/11.

Although participants were asked specifically not to consider the continuation of the current ring-fenced funding as an option in the workshops, the role of ring-fencing was raised at the Vitae policy forum 2009 and in the previous consultation. Participants' perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages are also presented here.

<sup>5</sup> Vitae policy forum 2009 consultation results, <http://vitae.ac.uk/policy-practice/1393-117771/Vitae-Roberts-Policy-Forum-consultation-results-2009.html>

<sup>6</sup> RCUK funding is linked to the number of research council funded researchers, who in most institutions represent only a small proportion of postgraduate researchers and research staff. Numbers are skewed towards the research-intensive institutions (the 30 largest research council funded HEIs receive 80% of the funding). Institutions have a degree of flexibility in how the funding is used and most HEIs contribute additional resource and offer equal access to development opportunities for all researchers.

## Views on ring-fencing

It is widely acknowledged that ring-fencing has been enormously important in transforming researcher development in UK HEIs. It has not only benefited those universities in receipt of significant funding, but has had, in the eyes of many institutions who receive little funding, a 'trickle down effect' which has helped build capacity across the sector. At the same time, most participants at the 2010 policy forum agreed with the view that ring-fencing does not promote the long-term aim of embedding researcher development in the normal business of HEIs.

In the short term, the dependency of HEIs on ring-fenced funding was related to the amount of funding received. In HEIs with large numbers of research council funded researchers and therefore high levels of Roberts payments researcher development provision is particularly vulnerable to a sudden loss of Roberts funding. The 30 largest recipients of Roberts funding identified 240 full-time equivalent staff employed on Roberts funding in their 2009 reports.

Opinions differed on the routes that should now be taken to achieve the long-term aim of embedding researcher development, with appropriate funding, into the normal business of doing research.

There were some that believed that continued ring-fencing was the best way forward in the long term. They highlighted that ring-fencing raised the profile of the researcher development agenda and carried a strong message of the commitment of government and RCUK to the Concordat and the importance of the researcher development agenda to the UK.

At the other end of the spectrum of opinion, some acknowledged that ring-fenced funding might no longer be essential for maintaining the Roberts agenda, particularly in HEIs receiving low levels of funding. They noted potential advantages, such as institutions having more flexibility to define and tailor provision to meet local strategies/needs, and agreed that 'less visible' funding streams could afford protection from possible further cuts.

Other participants supported an end to any form of ring-fencing in the longer term, agreeing that researcher development needs to be integrated and accepted by senior managers, supervisors and principal investigators as a normal part of the offer to researchers. For the short to medium term, however, these participants felt that researcher development monies required continued protection and that in the current economic climate, it was risky to withdraw from a policy of earmarked funding. This might be continued ring-fencing in its current form, or an identifiable strand in research council funding:

*'An identifiable strand in the Research Council funding would allow those of us committed to PGR training to point to a sum of money that RCs expect to be spent on PGR training as part of a university's contract with the Research Councils. [It would also] allow me to point to the explicit training expected by RCs and extract (hopefully) a similar amount of funding from the fees of every other (non-RC) PGR student.'*

Participant quote

As shown in the recommendations, groups discussing funding mechanisms for research staff particularly were agreed in their concerns about the risks of a direct transition to embedded funding post 2011, with no intermediary step(s).

In an 'ideal world', many participants would like to have a longer period of ring-fenced funding in order to build a strong base of engagement and excellence of provision throughout the sector. However, some of the views expressed at the forum were tempered by a sense of political realism: ring-fencing had achieved its aim of catalysing the agenda and therefore arguments for a further period of 'pump-priming' would be seen as untimely.

### The Research Councils UK perspective, Dr Iain Cameron

At the Vitae policy forum 2010 the Research Council perspective was presented by Dr Iain Cameron – Head of Research Careers and Diversity, RCUK. Iain focused on the need to take the agenda forward sustainably. Roberts funding was a pump-priming measure with an expectation from the outset that a broader funding base would develop: *'Pump-priming funding has established the agenda – has it changed the culture?'* With further cuts in public sector funding imminent, protecting excellence is vital.

Although Roberts funding is lodged with RCUK, all the Concordat signatories have committed to the realisation of a vision designed *'to ensure the continued provision of well-trained, talented and motivated researchers that is essential to the continuation of our research excellence.'* A key achievement since 2004 has been the development of the Roberts agenda to achieve a wide base of commitment.

In 2004 many HEIs already provided significant training and development opportunities. New 'Roberts' funds (around £60m in each three-year CSR period) were for pump priming of new activities, extending existing provision, improving quality and impact, eg through innovative approaches, and institutional collaboration.

RCUK's commitment to the importance of excellent, trained researchers, to: *'maintain a world class research base; ensure effective knowledge exchange to the economy through people; act as effective users of research outputs (people and knowledge)'* is undiminished.

[www.rcuk.ac.uk/rescareer/rcdu/default.htm](http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/rescareer/rcdu/default.htm)

There are encouraging signs of the value attached to the research base at national policy level, such as: *'in a more challenging climate for research ... we will need to carefully protect the excellence of our research base'* (HE Framework 'Higher Ambitions', November 2009). Employability and flexible career paths for researchers remain important drivers.

## Future funding options

### 1. Funding for researcher development is an identifiable strand in research council funding options

#### Postgraduate researcher funding

Currently the Research Councils fund doctoral programmes through a variety of options ranging from individual awards, including those attached to project grants, to the increasing use of variants of block funding of doctoral training centres or equivalent. Including researcher development as an identifiable strand requires a specific budget line to be clearly identifiable within all research council options for doctoral programmes.

#### Research staff funding

Research staff are primarily funded through research grants and fellowships. Including researcher development as an identifiable strand for research staff would require this cost to be identified according to research council guidance for Full Economic Costing (fEC).

### 2. Funding for researcher development is embedded in research council funding options

#### Postgraduate researcher funding

This implies that funding for personal and professional development of postgraduate researchers is included in funding proposals to RCUK, but is not identified as a specific budget line within the Research Council award.

#### Research staff funding

This implies that funding for personal and professional development of research staff is included in funding proposals as '**Indirect Costs – (estimated) Non-specific costs charged across all projects**'<sup>7</sup> a part of the fEC overhead.

### 3. Funding for researcher development through the Research Councils ceases completely from 2010/11

#### Postgraduate researcher funding

In this scenario no funding is distributed through research council options. Funding for postgraduate researchers comes from a variety of sources. Alternative sources of funding would be sought. Sources could be an increase in tuition fees, top slicing funding in HEIs, charities, government and industry. HEIs also receive funding for research degree programmes through the funding councils' quality-related (QR) block grant: currently one of the purposes of this flexible funding is to provide universities with resources to...'**develop people and skills**'.

#### Research staff funding

In this scenario no funding is distributed through research council options. Research in the HE sector is funded primarily by the government, with additional support from international sources, the private sector and charities. Public funding for research is administered under a dual support system: the funding bodies provide recurring annual 'block grant' funding, while grants for specific projects and programmes are provided by the Research Councils on the basis of 80% of fEC, the EU and government departments.

## Outcomes

Individual workshops at the forum were tasked with identifying long-term advantages and disadvantages, risks inherent in the transition to the longer term funding model(s)<sup>8</sup> and how these may best be overcome.

**Table 1 (page 9)** summarises both institutional and the Research Councils' perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of the different funding options, including ring-fenced payments, based on the workshop outcomes, presentations and panel discussions. To facilitate comparison these have been grouped into five broad categories:

- considerations for UK policy
- strategic issues for HEIs
- finance and administrative issues
- issues for researcher development provision
- implications for researcher engagement.

Participants identified both positive and negative impacts for all of the options, including ring-fencing and no funding. Some of the perceived impacts have the potential to be either a positive or negative impact, depending on how the proposed option is adopted or communicated. Where there were fairly consistently predicted negative impacts Table 1 identifies these in **bold green** type.

<sup>7</sup> BBSRC Grants guide, <http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk/funding/apply/grants-guide.aspx>

<sup>8</sup> Different models might apply to postgraduate researchers and research staff

## Key workshop conclusions

The main conclusions for each of the funding options were:

### 1. Funding researcher development is an identifiable strand in existing research council funding options

#### Postgraduate researchers

- There was a strong sense that whilst adding a specific sum to PGR fees for researcher development enabled separate identification, it had disadvantages regarding full integration of researcher development into research degree programmes
- Identifying researcher development as a separate strand within fees would be most beneficial in HEIs that still have some way to travel in fully embracing the agenda. Being able to identify what the Research Councils expect to be spent on PGR training would help extract funding from other (non-RC) PGR fees to provide equity of opportunity and provision

#### Research staff

- The funding for research staff preferably should be included within the indirect costs of grants. This would allow HEIs to combine with the costs of academic and other staff and would provide more flexibility of funding. It would also be another step towards embedding the agenda throughout the sector
- Currently, principal investigators 'own' the money on the grant and may have different priorities for the money. Not all PIs recognise the value of researcher development and the evidence of its benefits. PIs may decide to use the funds for local research-related training rather than enable the funds to contribute to institutional researcher development provision and the resulting economies of scale. It could be administratively complex and resource intensive to identify and co-ordinate the money

### 2. Funding researcher development is embedded in existing research council funding options

#### Postgraduate researchers

- Increasing the PGR fee would bring in additional funding from other PhD sponsors, as typically these do not provide separate Roberts funding. However, any increase in the Research Councils' fee level should make clear that this now covers the provision of training previously covered by the ring-fenced funding
- Universities should consider introducing stronger requirements in to the doctoral degree regulations regarding researcher development, to make clear that this is now an integral part of doctoral study

#### Research staff

- Although there are advantages in this approach in embedding researcher development as an integral component of research and it may encourage other funders to do likewise, it was felt that it was too early to adopt this mechanism for research staff
- If adopted, it is critical to produce clear guidelines linking it with the Concordat and reporting mechanisms linking to other national drivers, such as the REF and end of grant reporting

### 3. Funding for researcher development through the Research Councils ceases completely from 2010/11

- In this 'worst case' scenario, the Research Councils should avoid a sudden cut-off and provide tapering funding
- HEIs should recognise that researcher development provision has real value to HEIs and remember that the Roberts funding was designed as pump-priming
- HEIs and funders should consider top-slicing an agreed amount from every postgraduate researcher fee, irrespective of sponsor, to replace lost Roberts income<sup>9</sup>
- The funding councils should emphasise the importance of researcher development in the 'research environment' within the REF<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> This was estimated by one workshop at £150 per award

<sup>10</sup> At HEFCE's request Vitae and ReSDAG have subsequently sent a range of suggestions on how to include researcher development in the REF <http://vitae.ac.uk/researchers/1271-194501/Vitae-response-to-the-Research-Excellence-Framework.html>

## Considerations relating to the transition period

The importance of a timely, measured and effective transition period was consistently a strong theme from institutional and the Research Council participants. There is real concern that the researcher development agenda may stall while RCUK decides on and communicates to the sector the chosen option for future funding of researcher development. Already expertise and capacity for researcher development is being lost from the sector as the uncertainty encourages experienced staff to look for more stable employment.

A loss of funding without a transition period/tapering relief may impact on the implementation of the Concordat and standards in PGR provision across the sector as a whole. Even with a change to funding researcher development through grants and fees, the management of the transition process will be critical to sustaining the agenda. There will be a period, estimated as three to five years based on the average length of grant and application period, before all awarded RCUK grants fully incorporate researcher development funding.

There was general acknowledgement that funding decisions are dependent on the outcomes of the next Comprehensive Spending Review. However, an early decision on long-term funding mechanisms for researcher development would enable HEIs to develop internal mechanisms for costing, identifying and retrieving funding for researcher development.

### Transition actions

Participants identified a list of recommended actions for RCUK and HEIs to enable a smooth transition to an alternative long term funding mechanism.<sup>11</sup>

#### RCUK/HEIs

- RCUK/sector to have discussions on appropriate funding levels to sustain the researcher development agenda
- Review of RCUK PGR fee level and implications of 'deregulating' fees. Assess the potential impact on international PGR recruitment

#### RCUK

- Urgent decision on the most appropriate long term funding mechanism for sustaining the researcher development agenda
- Develop and communicate a clear plan and timetable, with reporting requirements linked to national drivers
- Consider a plan for transitional relief/tapering costs and the implication for existing or submitted grants/awards. Consider whether release of funds should be contingent on HEI sustainability plans
- Consider what, if any, reporting processes will be appropriate in the future. How would these link to end of grant, QAA and Concordat reporting?

- Consider revision of RCUK terms and conditions of grant and guidance to applicants and reviewers to reference more strongly the importance of researcher development
- Work with other funders to incorporate researcher development funding into fees and grants

#### HEI strategies

- Map the researcher development agenda against HEI's strategic missions
- Ensure researcher development is consistent with and embedded in HEI strategic missions and institutional codes of practice
- Collate supporting evidence on the value of researcher development
- Provide compelling arguments to senior management to link researcher development to strategic missions
- Prioritise planning for sustainability during the transition to alternative funding mechanisms

#### HEI funding and administration

- Develop a strategy for identifying and recovering funding from fees and grants
- Set up internal processes to recover funding
- Develop a strategy for accessing alternative internal and external funding sources

## Conclusion

The Vitae policy forum 2010 gave considered thought to how to sustain progress in implementing the researcher development agenda. In a climate of increasing financial constraint on institutions it is essential that researcher development is contributing to the strategic missions of HEIs and is acknowledged by all stakeholders as an integral part of the normal business of doing research.

Sustaining existing provision for researchers and ensuring future progress needs to work at all levels from the individual researcher level to the international stage:

#### At international level:

- the UK is well recognised as a world leader in researcher development and it is essential that we maintain and improve our position.

#### At national level:

- there are strong opportunities to use drivers such as the QAA code, the Concordat and REF to ensure that researcher development makes a significant contribution to the research experience in the UK. Compliance is understandably a key driver for HEIs, and possible ways to highlight or strengthen requirements could be explored with the QAA and the funding councils

<sup>11</sup> Participants were also invited to comment on this report in its draft form and comments were incorporated accordingly. The response of the National Union of Students is shown at [www.vitae.ac.uk/policyforum2010](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/policyforum2010)

- the importance of maintaining progress in support for the research staff agenda and the Concordat. There is widespread concern at the vulnerability of the research staff agenda, where progress has been more recent
- it is time for the Roberts agenda to come of age. Part of the embedding process should be seeing researcher development as a holistic process and maybe it is time to drop the use of 'Roberts' and its association with developing 'transferable skills'.

### At HEI level:

- the importance of aligning researcher development with individual HEI strategies and mission statements. Whatever the funding route ahead, it is critical that senior management support and thus allocate funding to continue the agenda
- the importance of maintaining the broader employability focus for researcher development within the environment of undertaking research. For example, there is a danger that embedding funding in research grants and fees could lead to more focus on research-related training.

### At researcher level:

- there is still a need to raise the value of researcher development with researchers, supervisors and principal investigators
- The Concordat and QAA Code of Practice both highlight the importance of researchers taking ownership for their own professional and career development.

There are advantages and disadvantages of all future funding mechanisms. However, if funding mechanisms are changed, an appropriate managed and funded transition period is of critical importance. Research staff provision and 'Roberts rich' HEIs are particularly vulnerable to a sudden cessation of funding. It is a complex decision-making context, but one where early decisions by RCUK on funding mechanisms are important to enable HEIs to plan and minimise further attrition of experienced and effective researcher development staff and to successfully sustain and embed researcher development in normal business. This report has aimed to assist this decision making process.

## Vitae policy forum 2010: Stakeholder voices

**Professor Mary Bownes**, Vice Principal, University of Edinburgh, illustrated the crucial role that Roberts funding had played in enabling the university to dramatically and quickly increase the breadth and depth of its skills provision, be innovative, and offer flexible options, all the while trying to embed researcher development by giving all stakeholders a voice in the nature of provision and how it is developed. *'It is vital to think through the implications of different funding scenarios very carefully: it is hugely important for our researchers, research base and international standing.'*

**Professor Broniek Wedzicha**, Pro-Dean for Research, Enterprise, and Knowledge Transfer, University of Leeds, described the 'transformational effect' of Roberts funding at the University of Leeds. The nature and form of future provision would clearly be funding dependent and the sector needs to be more imaginative in working towards a broader funding base. *'How we view the success (or otherwise) of the Roberts agenda depends on how we view the doctorate. If the primary outcome of running a doctoral programme is the flow of trained people resulting from that programme, the Roberts agenda has fundamentally changed the landscape for the better. If the primary outcome of running a doctoral programme is the research output those students generate, the impact is far more modest. In terms of the people we produce the Roberts agenda is now firmly embedded and we must not go back to the pre-Roberts mode of PhD education.'*

**Mr Simon Kerridge**, ARMA and University of Sunderland, emphasised the importance to research managers of being able to plan: 'it is critical to know what money is coming in, for what purpose. All alternative funding mechanisms discussed would need carefully worked out transitional arrangements. We should work towards postgraduate researchers being included in fEC.'

**Mr David Sweeney**, Director – Research, Innovation and Skills, HEFCE, argued that *'volume is the biggest challenge we face and we should be aiming for excellence, not growth'*. It is questionable how the strategies of universities who are pursuing volume will be sustained – government funding is not growing. On funding mechanisms, the sector should be clear about its principles. It has long expressed a wish for hypothecated funding to be the exception to the rule (usually for setting up new initiatives such as Roberts), preferring the freedom to manage block funding from funding councils to meet local needs.

**Dr Ian Lyne**, Head of Skills and Careers, BBSRC, expressed his concern that a desire for ring-fencing sends negative messages to government about how committed universities are to pursuing the agenda on their own. Furthermore, the very visibility of ring-fenced funding could make it more vulnerable to being cut, if Research Council budgets come under pressure in the current economic climate. *'The Research Councils have undiminished commitment to the researcher development agenda but the agenda is changing. It is now part of the broader impact agenda. A core government aim is that researchers take their expertise out of academia into other sectors in various ways.'*

**Dr Patrick Hadoke**, Research Fellow, University of Edinburgh, described how support from Roberts funding had been instrumental in setting up research staff societies, leading to a range of benefits. 'Ring-fenced Roberts funding has been a visible sign of commitment to researcher development by the Research Councils and the university and the symbolic importance of this should not be underestimated. It is a significant factor in encouraging participation among often isolated and marginalised groups such as research staff and should be retained.'

## Vitae policy forum 2010 participants' perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of different funding options for researcher development

Where there was general consensus among participants of a disadvantage, this is shown in **bold green** type

**Table 1**

Consideration for UK policy	Ring-fenced Roberts funding continues	Identifiable budget line in studentships/research grants	Embedded within studentships/research grants as overheads	Research Councils cease funding researcher development
<b>UK global reputation for developing and producing excellent researchers</b>	UK well placed to promote and sustain an international lead in researcher development	<b>Potential for losing momentum and therefore international status in researcher development</b> Increasing cost of PGR training could impact on international recruitment	<b>Potential for losing momentum</b> Sustaining and promoting a leading role internationally may be more challenging Increasing international doctoral fees to fund researcher development could reduce recruitment	<b>Likely UK-wide decline in researcher development provision could impact on international competitiveness</b> <b>Increasing international doctoral fees to fund researcher development could reduce recruitment</b>
<b>Research Council support for UK commitment to researcher development as embedded in the QAA, UK Concordat and European Charter and Code</b>	Carries strong message of commitment by the Research Councils to researcher development, the Concordat, QAA and importance of this work to the UK	Visible sign of commitment by the Research Councils to researcher development, although careful messaging important to avoid being seen as withdrawing from the researcher development agenda	Harder to demonstrate overt Research Council commitment Will require careful messaging to avoid being seen as withdrawal from the researcher development agenda	<b>Potentially sends negative messages about UK commitment to researcher development agenda if the Research Councils withdraw from financial leading role</b>
<b>Role of the Research Councils in steering the development of researchers to meet identified priorities</b>	RCUK able to direct researcher development agenda, rather than owned by the sector Collaboration, enhancement, evaluation and innovative practice supported and resourced Increasing capacity to respond to changing needs of researchers	The Research Councils retain some ability to influence policy areas Collaboration, enhancement, evaluation and innovation culture likely to continue in some form Potential capacity to respond to changing needs of researchers	Research Councils less able to influence priority areas (less leverage) Collaboration, enhancement and innovation culture likely to continue in some form <b>Risk of less focus on evaluation</b> Capacity to respond to changing needs of researchers dependent on HEI senior management engagement	<b>Difficult for HEIs to respond to changing policy directions</b> <b>Likely fragmentation of collaborative researcher development network increasing competition between HEIs</b> May stimulate more creativity in provision/partnerships
<b>Role of HEIs to respond to emerging government or Research Council priorities for researcher skills/workforce</b>	HEIs able to be responsive to changes in UK policy directions	HEIs able to continue to respond to policy changes	HEIs could be less willing to respond to policy changes	<b>Potential for significantly reduced contribution to priority areas such as enterprise, knowledge exchange and public engagement</b>
<b>Role of Research Councils in 'monitoring' provision for UK researchers</b>	Established financial monitoring and reporting processes ensures funding used appropriately	RCUK has limited ability to judge commitment of HEIs to researcher development	<b>No visible funding yardstick to judge commitment of HEIs to researcher development</b>	Little leverage to encourage HEIs to engage in researcher development agenda

<b>Strategic issues for HEIs</b>	<b>Ring-fenced Roberts funding continues</b>	<b>Identifiable budget line in studentships/research grants</b>	<b>Embedded within studentships/research grants as overheads</b>	<b>Research Councils cease funding researcher development</b>
<b>Culturally embedding researcher development within HEIs' core activities</b>	Allows HEIs time to complete the process of embedding researcher development as 'normal business', particularly for research staff	Provided transition is handled well, increases likelihood of embedding as 'normal business'	Provided transition is handled well, increases opportunity to embed as 'normal business'	<b>Agenda stalls as effort focused on persuading senior management to use core funds and embed as normal business</b>
<b>Autonomy of HEIs in defining strategic and local needs</b>	<b>Conditionality of funding reduces HEI capacity to respond to institutional/local priorities</b>	HEIs have some flexibility to implement their strategies and respond to local priorities	HEIs have flexibility to implement their strategies and respond to local priorities	HEIs have full autonomy to implement their strategies, but reduced funding
<b>Timing of changes in funding mechanism</b>	Ring-fenced status could reduce incentive and progress of embedding	<b>Timing of transition period inherently risky with HEIs already under pressure to cut costs</b>	<b>Timing of transition period inherently risky with HEIs already under pressure to cut costs</b>	<b>Timing inherently risky Disproportionate impact on large research intensive HEIs (Russell Group and 1994 group)</b>
<b>Opportunities and challenges associated with funding changes</b>	<b>Need for ring-fencing has the potential to send a negative message that HEIs are not committed to researcher development agenda</b>	Flexibility for HEIs to develop strategic approaches to researcher development	More flexibility for HEIs to develop strategic approaches to researcher development	Potential competitive advantage for HEIs that continue to invest/seek other funding. Likely to be better funded HEIs able to provide more researcher development opportunities

<b>Researcher engagement</b>	<b>Ring-fenced Roberts funding continues</b>	<b>Identifiable budget line in studentships/research grants</b>	<b>Embedded within studentships/research grants as overheads</b>	<b>Research Councils cease funding researcher development</b>
<b>Communicating to researchers the importance of professional and career development</b>	Visibility of Research Council support aids engagement by research staff (isolated group to whom dedicated funding has especial value)	If communicated well, sends message to researchers that researcher development is integral to the doctorate/research project Identifying on studentships and grants may help embed locally as 'expectation' for researchers to engage	If communicated well, sends message to researchers that researcher development is integral to the doctorate/research project RS: importance is less visible to PIs if included in overheads	<b>Potentially sends messages to researchers and academics that researcher development is not important</b>
<b>Engagement and take-up by researchers</b>	Enables continued growth	Potential for continued growth	Potential for continued growth	<b>Disruption to and reduction of provision may discourage engagement</b>

<b>Finance and administration</b>	<b>Ring-fenced Roberts funding continues</b>	<b>Identifiable budget line in studentships/ research grants</b>	<b>Embedded within studentships/ research grants as overheads</b>	<b>Research Councils cease funding researcher development</b>
<b>Security of future funding</b>	<b>Risk that visibility of the Roberts funding as a lump sum in Research Council budgets increases vulnerability to cuts</b>	Less visibility in Research Council budgets may help protect against future UK public spending cuts	Lack of visibility may help protect budgets against future UK public spending cuts	
<b>Opportunities to diversify funding base</b>	Possible disincentive to broaden funding base and improve value for money for 'Roberts-rich' institutions	Could help leverage funding commitment from other funders/HEIs	Increasing indirect costs of fEC recovered on Research Council grants and potentially from other funders  PGR: If the Research Council fee level increased, could impact on all PGR fee levels	More focus/creativity in seeking broader funding base, including industry Institutions more likely to raise PGR fees?  Move to 'unregulated' PGR fees
<b>Financial management within HEIs</b>	For HEIs, the block payment from the Research Councils is simple to manage, and enables a strategic approach and longer term planning	<b>Less predictable funding stream, particularly for less research-intensive HEIs</b>  <b>Potential extra costs in identifying and consolidating funding</b> <b>PI ownership of grant funds tensions between local and central budgets</b>  RS: success dependent on which budget line and HEI financial processes	<b>Less predictable funding stream, particularly for less research-intensive HEIs</b>  <b>Some extra costs in identifying and consolidating funding from overhead budget (difficulty varies between HEIs) needs senior management commitment to extract</b>	RS: opportunity to rationalise different funding streams for staff development
<b>Budgeting researcher development costs</b>		Challenge of budgeting accurate costs	Difficulty budgeting accurate indirect costs, particularly for research staff on grants  Unclear where and how money could be 'embedded in grants'	<b>Research Councils only pay 80% of 'fEC' costs</b>
<b>Reporting requirements</b>	<b>Cost to HEIs of coordinating and reporting on funding to RCUK</b>	Potential for reduced central coordination and reporting costs  Need to achieve balance between local (grant) and central HEI reporting	Reduces central coordination and reporting costs	No reporting requirements or costs

Researcher development provision	Ring-fenced Roberts funding continues	Identifiable budget line in studentships/research grants	Embedded within studentships/research grants as overheads	Research Councils cease funding researcher development
<b>Strategic approach to researcher development provision</b>	Programmes can be planned and developed to long term strategies with predictable funding Researcher development agenda focused on broad professional development	Planning programmes is more difficult with unpredictable budgets, especially for smaller HEIs Unless strong research council messages, risk of training/development becoming more research related broad employability/careers provision lost	<b>Planning programmes is more difficult with unpredictable budgets, especially for smaller HEIs</b> <b>Unless strong research council messages, risk of training/development becoming more research related broad employability/careers provision lost</b>	<b>Negative impact on overall quality of provision and broad development of researchers</b> <b>Bespoke provision for research staff is likely to be particularly vulnerable</b>
<b>Ability of HEIs to meet minimum standards of provision in QAA CoP</b>	QAA minimum standards of provision generally exceeded	QAA minimum standards of provision likely to be exceeded, though risk to non-RC funded more tightly associated with Research Council awards	Standards of provision dependent on senior management support for researcher development, Research Council visits, institutional audit requirements	<b>Reduction in level of researcher support: difficulty achieving minimum standards</b>
<b>Ability of HEIs to implement the principles of the Concordat</b>	Continued progress in implementing relevant Concordat principles	Potential for continued progress in implementing relevant Concordat principles	Progress on Concordat implementation dependent on senior management support	<b>Concordat implementation likely to stall</b>
<b>Access to researcher development provision</b>	Flexibility to use the funding strategically/structurally to benefit all researchers Provision for non-RC funded researchers more variable	Potential for broadening funding base for researcher development and thus access for all researchers Risk of focusing on provision for research council funded researchers if funding base not extended	Potential for broadening the funding base for researcher development and thus access Potential to benefit all researchers dependent on senior management support	<b>Reduced availability and access to researcher development. May contribute to research concentration</b> <b>Scope of offer likely to be much reduced concentration on most 'effective' provision</b>
<b>Capacity building</b>	Continues to build capacity and expertise in researcher development provision in the UK	Risk of losing experienced staff, particularly with lack of certainty during transition	<b>Risk of losing experienced staff, particularly with lack of certainty during transition</b>	<b>Loss of experienced staff and capacity within the UK to train and develop researchers</b>

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

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. For further information about the range of Vitae activities go to [www.vitae.ac.uk](http://www.vitae.ac.uk) or contact [enquiries@vitae.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@vitae.ac.uk)

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