

Career Development and Transferable Skills Training Payments: Summary of 2008 Reporting

1. Summary and main points arising

1.1. Summary

The 2008 reports offer evidence of continuing development and innovation in provisions for both research students and research staff. They continue to provide evidence of substantial activity in supporting the personal and professional development of researchers and greater embedding of this activity within research organisations.

“The investment in dedicated skills development has resulted in a step change in the levels of communication of skills provision and the skills agenda to academic staff, administrators, senior managers and students.”

The management structures have continued to evolve. Graduate Schools remain a “home” for Roberts-related activities within many universities (42%).

References to management (particularly of provisions for research staff) by staff development units or similar continues to grow. However, in 2008, many organisations (32%) have management which is not clearly within one unit such as a graduate school.

“a University-wide strategic steering committee which...contains a wide representation from academic faculties, central units and the student / staff body.”

Several references to such management groups indicate they take a strategic view of researcher development at the university and typically include representation from faculties, staff development units, research and innovation offices and career advice services as well as graduate schools.

Whilst the increase in the average proportion of funding being devolved is slight (38% in 2008 and 31% in 2007) there are many references to devolved funding being used for departments or faculties to “bid” for activities. Several reports indicate this has provided a route for more involvement in programme design and delivery by supervisors and research group leaders.

“Since August 2007 one third of the University’s Roberts income has been devolved directly to Schools. This change was designed to accelerate the implementation of Roberts locally and further embed Roberts training and development opportunities within the PhD and research staff experience.”

The allocation of Roberts Money separately identifies the funds for research students and staff. Despite some notable exceptions, particularly amongst research centres and institutes, nearly half (45%) indicated an under-spend of 20% or more on research staff. Nevertheless, support for research staff continues to be an area of growth, with 28% of organisations indicating that training and support for research staff increased in 2007/08 and a similar proportion expecting an increase next year.

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Whilst sustainability has been raised at various meetings, such as the Vitae Conference in September 2008, it has not been a theme in reporting. There were two references to studentships funded through the host organisation where “Roberts” amounts are incorporated in the costs.

Generally, universities have reported on overall programmes (including research training) and some care may be needed to ensure payments are used to add value and not to replace funding for research training, knowledge acquisition (e.g. learning to use particular software applications) conference attendance or health and safety training all of which are inappropriate use of Roberts payments. Clarification of the use of the payments will be sought from a number of the organisations again this year.

“This year it was proposed, and accepted that students [with organisational funded studentships] should receive the same level of funding for training and development as those receiving the Roberts skills training money.”

1.2. Sharing Practices

Many organisations are sharing practices and 24% of reports referred to entry of at least one practice on the Database of Practice. A majority (62%) mentioned working with one or more other research organisations on courses or programmes. Working with the local hub or national Vitae programme was also mentioned by many (51%). The numbers of practices on the Vitae database of practice (www.vitae.ac.uk/dop) continues to grow, from 181 in its first year (2005) to 310, 459 and now, in 2008, 593 practices. There are around 80 organisations contributing, with an average of 7 practices each, although the 14 organisations with the most practices (from 14 to 39 entries viewable) account for over half the 593.

“A strategic decision was made to add value to what we have traditionally offered for research staff by collaborating with other institutions to: enable networking; increase critical mass and; expose researchers to industry and commerce.”

There were also many references to universities developing their own materials, particularly for on-line identification of development needs, logging of personal development or recording post-event assessment of courses.

1.3. Developing Processes

Around half the reports indicated a senior member of staff (such as PVC research) has responsibility for the overall programme. Greater involvement of researchers in programme development was a significant theme, whether directly through structures such as management committees, focus groups and surveys or indirectly through feedback from career discussions and courses.

“For the Roberts agenda and other policy initiatives (e.g. research staff concordat) to have the desired impact, it is vital that researchers are empowered and supported to take control of their own professional and career”

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Several reports mentioned attainment of broader skills being incorporated in transfer process from MPhil to PhD or that postgraduate certificates are offered en route to a PhD. Others mention development of opportunities to apply skills through practice and experience rather than a wholly “class-room” approach.

“more on-going opportunities were created for students to integrate skills into daily practice.”

This year, 55% of the reports said PDPs were available for students (compared with 51% in 2007) and 28% said they were available for research staff (compared to 30% in 2007).

1.4. Feedback and Information

There has been a dip in the reports mentioning using information drawn from the Contract Researcher Online Survey (CROS), 13% compared with 19% in 2007 and 14% in 2006. This may be reflecting that the survey did not run in 2008. Several reports also mention the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES).

“Employer feedback from visits and placements is reviewed and has shaped important adjustments to the schemes.”

Most reports (72%) specifically mention using feedback from course attendance (c.f. 72% in 2007 and 66% in 2006). Several also mention using an annual review of course feedback to inform programme development and for many this is the main route for gathering research student or research staff input.

1.5. Emergent issues

Embedding within staff management – widespread use of appraisal for personal development planning and monitoring

Appraisal was identified by several organisations as the key route for identifying research staff development goals and progress towards these. In some instances appraisal is integrated in staff management, in others it does not seem to be obligatory or “normal business”.

“Post-docs are treated in the same way as all other university staff and undertake the annual staff review process which requires all staff to review their performance and to plan for their future development.”

Review, evaluation and impact – at different levels and with varying breadth

Several reports refer to review of all or part of provisions in 07/08, with some using this to inform consolidation of provisions and embedding practices. There was also reference to two projects to consider impact across a numbers of institutions.

“This year we have begun a review of the whole scheme to reflect our experience of running the scheme now for two years.”

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Careers advisors – a continued theme of increasing involvement

Appointment (or partial funding of posts for) careers advisors was mentioned by several under “innovations in 2007/08”. Most were mentioned in the context of support for research staff.

Feedback from careers discussions is not only used to inform personal development plans, but in aggregate, to inform programme development.

More on enterprise and business awareness

45% of reports include reference to development of skills relevant to enterprise and business.

A summary of use the additional payments provided by EPSRC for the development of skills relating to enterprise and maximising the impact of research outcomes will be provided separately.

Seeking employer views

Seeking or incorporating employer views is variable with 31% of reports making no mention of routes for incorporating employer views or participation in the development of programmes for research students or staff a further 25% mentioned employer engagement but gave little or no details. This compares with 23% of reports outlining current activity and how this works.

“suggestions... through one-to-one careers discussions are vital in providing ideas for future training courses and careers events that really cater for researchers' needs.”

“Research-only staff nearing the end of their contract are strongly encouraged to attend employability skills unit sessions and are offered 1-1 support and self-study materials if they are unable to participate.”

“A key focus has been helping researchers to understand why enterprise or commercial awareness is relevant to them... this has resulted in a real culture change among our researchers.”

This may be an area for future attention in the light of the contributions to the Debate on the Future of Higher Education and emphasis on user-led skills development.

<http://www.dius.gov.uk/policy/he-debate.html>

Alumni helping to highlight a range of career options.

There were several references to university-wide events for current research staff and students where past students and/or research staff were invited back to talk about their current role and the steps they took to reach it.

1.6. Financial Reporting

In 2007/08, payments totalling £22,161,807 were made to 170 organisations. By 18th December, reporting had been received from organisations in receipt of £21,874. These reports gave a total of £21,162 being spent in 08. The following section reflects the information provided in these reports with some exceptions.

When considering the figures given in the following section, it is important to note that these are indicative and incomplete. Not only were 36 reports outstanding at the time of compilation (out

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of 170), but figures were also omitted from totals where the basis was obviously different from the majority of reports. For example:

- o Staff figures which did not correlate with payments or spend (e.g. 6 training staff where spend on training staff given as less than £1K)
- o Several reports did not split out figures for spend or staff according to research student or research staff.
- o Several reports split out figures for central vs devolved spend for research student and research staff. This may highlight that different structures and approaches are used for developing programmes for particular groups within the research community.

This does not preclude inclusion of figures where differences are less apparent.

Year	Total Paid (all orgs)		Spend (reported by Dec)		Balance		
	Students	Staff	Students	Staff	Students	Staff	Overall
2005/06	11,002	8,873	5,360	3,315	5,642	5,557	11,199
2006/07	12,014	8,061	9,928	4,749	2,086	3,312	5,398
2007/08	12,013	8,039	11,965	5,668	-70	2,280	2,210
2008/09	13,388	8,774	13,850	7,312	-462	1,462	1,000

The above table gives figures from the annual reporting exercise, as received by December each year (i.e. incomplete, but with improving compliance from 2005 onwards).

The spend on staff continued to increase in both absolute terms and compared with the previous years (2008 increase of £1,644K over 2007 and which means 83% of amounts paid, compared with 71% in 2007, 59% in 2006 and 37% in 2005). Spend on student development has also increased (by £1,885K, which means 103% of paid, compared with fractionally over 100%).

Table 2: Financial summary 2007/08²

	Students		research staff	
	Costs	number	Costs	number
Employment of co-ordination staff	3,500	133	1,914	75
Co-ordination costs (infrastructure)	840		529	
Training, Development and Delivery Costs	6,254		3,019	
Employment of training staff	3,256	216	1,851	108
Totals	13,850	350	7,313	183
Payment levels	13,388		8,774	

¹ Total paid does not include EPSRC additional sums for development of skills related to enterprise and business

² Figures are rounded to £K and whole numbers. Reporting of staff numbers generally in terms of FTEs, so included fractions. Reporting of staff numbers may include those not funded from Roberts payments – funding and numbers do not correspond in all reports, particularly for delivery of training.

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	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Total on co-ordination (staff and other costs including infrastructure)	3,347	4,329	5,221	6,782
Total on training preparation and delivery	5,329	10,328	12,412	14,380
% of spend on co-ordination	38%	29%	30%	32%
Spend given under staff headings (both co-ord and delivery)	4,688	6,082	8,298	10,520
% of total spend on staff	54%	41%	46%	50%

Approximate proportion of spend (%)	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Central	(n/a)	70	71	74
Devolved	(n/a)	36	31	38

The numbers of staff posts varies from year to year and this may be due in some part to how posts are reported. The intention was for an indication of the FTE on Roberts-related activities (eg a person working 0.8 of full time and spending around half their work-time on Roberts-related development would have been 0.4). Some reports obviously included a wide range of training staff, some variations may have been less obvious. Others omitted staff figures altogether. Of 134 reports, 64 gave figures that were included in the totals below.

	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
To support				
Research Students	145	361	253	350
Research Staff	78	203	107	183
Totals	223	564	360	533
% of total numbers shown under research staff	35%	36%	30%	34%

2. Database of Practice

The UK GRAD (now Vitae) database of practice was been developed as a tool to allow institutions and individuals to describe their practice in all areas related to skills and career development for researchers. On 10 December 2008, it held 583 practices, entered by 80 organisations. 30% of practices are entered or updated during the 'Roberts reporting season'. Around 39% of the organisations in receipt of payments in 2006/07 had entered practices and 30% had more than one entry.

Table 6 presents the entries in the database of practice by focus of practice. There has been growth across all areas, but particularly in career management / developing employability (67%), knowledge transfer and outreach activities (58%), internships, placements and consultancy projects (55%) and enterprise and innovation related practices (50%), albeit from a low base for some.

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For 2009 three additional categories have been added map it more closely with the Concordat principles. These are practices relating to recruitment and selection, equality and diversity and researcher-led activities.

Focus of Practice	Practices 2008	Practices 2007
Interpersonal skills development	265	204
Induction, review and reflective processes	130	96
Generic research skills development	249	194
Wider preparation for academic practice	166	113
Enterprise and innovation related practices	75	50
Internships, placements and consultancy projects	17	11
Knowledge transfer and outreach activities	60	38
Career management / developing employability	216	129
Evaluation, feedback mechanisms and research relating to skills and career development	72	53
Strategic and management approach to practice	112	81

[The database of practice is now hosted on the Vitae website (www.vitae.ac.uk/dop). Individual practices can be accessed using the short url www.vitae.ac.uk/dop/xx.html.]

3. Background

In 2007/08, payments of £22M were issued by the Research Councils to 170 organisations (£13M in respect of research students, nearly £9M in respect of posts on grants). The basis for the calculation is a per capita payment of approximately £800 for each research student or staff post funded by the councils.

The Research Councils collectively fund around a quarter of the full time home domiciled research students in the UK and perhaps a third of the research posts on projects. The research councils are, however, the largest single funder of researchers in the UK.

3.1. Reporting Requirements 2008

This consisted of a summary financial table, entry of innovative or exemplary practices in the Database of Practice at www.grad.ac.uk (now available via www.vitae.ac.uk/dop) and a narrative report. The narrative report of up to two pages outlined the processes followed and their impact on the training of researchers. The following headings were used:

1. Process for reviewing strategy and building the skills development programme. This should include reference to:
 - i. the management framework
 - ii. the involvement of employers and other stakeholders

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- iii. how researcher feedback is used
2. Commentary on the range of career development and training opportunities and approximate proportion of research students and research-only employees participating.
3. How researchers are encouraged to consider their career development and training needs and reflect on their skills.
4. Innovations in the last year and any areas for future development.
5. Any examples of sharing processes or practices with other organisations.

There were up to two additions:

- organisations with payments over £1M were asked how they ensured minimum levels of provision across the organisation
- organisations in receipt of payments for entrepreneurial skills development were asked to include a paragraph on this