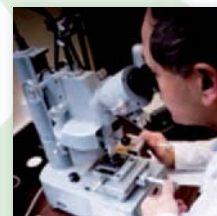


overview

for supervisors and principal investigators

welcome



So....Easter has been and gone and summer is on the horizon – how time flies when you are enjoying yourself...! June will mark the first anniversary of the launch of Vitae and it has certainly been a busy first year - on page 12 you can read about some of the new resources and events that are now available for you as academics, and your researchers.

June will also mark the first year of the revised 'Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers'. Vitae Hubs and universities have held a number of events to highlight the importance of the Concordat and as we move in to the implementation phase, we would like to encourage you to share your institution's responses (see page 3) The Careers in Research Online survey will be a useful tool in assessing the impact of the Concordat amongst research staff (see page 6.)

In fact, impact is a bit of a theme in this edition of 'overview'. Demonstrating the impact of the skills agenda through evaluation is covered by Dr Tony Bromley in his article about the Rugby Team Impact Framework on page 2. The results of the 2008 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey detailed on page 4 make interesting reading in relation to skills development and demonstrate, amongst other things, the impact that supervisors have on postgraduate researchers!

Of course, surveys, evaluation models and the like are all of interest per se, but in these times, they are vital tools in demonstrating impact – because impact often leads to funding. I said at the beginning of this piece how time flies – and I am sure I do not need to remind you that Roberts' funding is only guaranteed until 2011. We need to continue to discuss how we provide

evidence for the impact that the funding is making and what is the best way to take the agenda forward beyond 2011. We'd like to hear your opinions on this subject and you can be assured that 'overview' will continue to provide you with updates on how government, funders and HEIs respond to these matters.

Inside this issue of 'overview', you will find flyers outlining what Vitae offers to postgraduate researchers and research staff in 2009. Beside web and other resources, all activities we are organising in 2009 have been listed. We hope you find this information useful. Please feel free to pass on copies to postgraduate researchers and research staff. To request further copies, please contact your Vitae Regional Hub or email us at orders@vitae.ac.uk.

Finally, we would like to ask you to tell us what you think of 'overview' –its contents, the way it looks, how it comes to you. See page 14 for details of how to let us have your views - and how to win a free place at the Vitae conference in September.

And of course, if you are not happy with what we include in 'overview' – you know what to do...all submissions to overview@vitae.ac.uk please!

Anne Goodman, Editor

Contents

Excellence with impact	2	Retaining female talent	6	Enterprise at work	
Vitae update	3	International staff support at Bristol University	8	New features on the Vitae website	
■ Vitae Roberts Policy Forum follow-up		The balanced researcher – strategies for busy researchers	9	Events for researchers	
■ Concordat activities – What are you doing?		Top ten researcher development blogs	11	Events for staff supporting researchers	
European update	4	New Vitae resources and publications	12	Miscellany	14
Spotlight on surveys	4	■ Broadening horizons		Diary	15
■ PRES 2008 – the main findings		■ Concordat briefings		Keep in touch	16
■ The Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS)					



Excellence with impact

Dr Tony Bromley, Senior Training and Development Officer, University of Leeds, Yorkshire and North East Hub Co-ordinator and member of the of the Rugby team.

Demonstrating the impact of the training and development of researchers is high on the agenda of the UK Research Councils – after all they invest c£20m per year in funding training and development activities for researchers. Naturally they, and the sector, are keen to see what impact this investment has had. However, this is a challenging area. This article provides a brief overview of the steps taken in tackling the ‘how to evaluate impact?’ question, updates on the emergent evidence of impact and highlights what is coming up in the future.

How the impact framework works

The Rugby Team Impact Framework (RTIF) evaluation model draws together ideas from the commercial training and development sector, the social sciences and higher education evaluation methodologies to produce an evaluation model tailored for the HE researcher training and development sector.

The framework combines both the use of ‘metric’ type measures with the ‘richer’ qualitative evaluation. The framework can be used as a methodology in itself and worked through from start to finish or the results of evaluations can be mapped against it. The mapping allows the results of multiple, different evaluations to be collated and compared at a national level. Download the RTIF from the website for full details www.viae.ac.uk/rugbyteam.

Evaluation results to date

Although this is an emergent area, evaluation in the sector has already provided interesting initial results in a number of areas:

Base line work

- In one study, the most significant needs identified on entry to PhD, were in the areas of presentation, commercialisation of research, public understanding of research and research skills
- In another, the average research staff self-assessed ratings for current skills levels fell short of the levels the research staff thought were required for intended job roles including skills in project/time management, organising and communication

- There is also emerging evidence of positive correlations between engagement in needs analysis and training plans and positive overall experience of a research programme and supervision

The impact of training on learning, behaviour and eventual participant outcomes

- In one study, alumni of a GRADschool (experiential learning course) indicated benefits such as; increased focus on finishing their doctorate; a better work life balance; improved relationships with supervisors as well as success in finding employment

The impact of team learning activity

- Another study found this type of activity supportive to international students who have English as a second or other language; engaging in team work develops a range of transferable skills and researchers value the interdisciplinary interaction it provides

Further details regarding the activity reported above and other initial results were reported at the January 09 Vitae Roberts Policy Forum - see www.vitae.ac.uk/policyforum

The future

Building the evidence base for researcher training and development activity is an emergent and growing area, already revealing very interesting results. Much is planned for the future from higher education institutions across the country and also the Research Councils with their longitudinal study looking at the ‘Value and impact of doctoral study’.

A number of activities are in place to support the growth of evaluation nationally including;

- a JISCmail evaluation network. To join - go to www.jiscmail.ac.uk and join the EVALUATING-IMPACT list.
- ongoing focus on evaluation in Vitae newsletters and Vitae conference/Roberts Policy Forum reports, and Vitae Hub events
- a Society for Research in to Higher Education ‘Guide’ to evaluation (published in April 09, details soon at www.srhe.ac.uk/publications.gpi.asp)
- a new ‘International Journal for Researcher Development’ (see article on page 14).

Rigorous, effective evaluation of training and development activity will enhance provision in institutions for researchers and increasingly support development of both research performance and employability. If you would like to get involved go to www.vitae.ac.uk/rugbyteam.

The Rugby Team is a sector-led working group, drawn from a cross-section of HEIs and other relevant stakeholders, with a mission to ‘propose meaningful and workable ways of evaluating the effectiveness of skills development in early career researchers’. Vitae provides management support and resources to the Rugby Team. The team was formed following the January 2005 UK GRAD (now Vitae) Roberts Policy Forum, held in Rugby. For further information on all the material covered in this article go to the Rugby Team website www.vitae.ac.uk/rugbyteam.

Vitae update

Vitae Roberts Policy Forum follow-up



Participants at the Policy Forum in discussion in a workshop, January 2009

- **Should Roberts' funding be continued?**
- **Do we need a new Joint Skills Statement?**
- **How can we increase the evidence base?**
- **How should reporting to the Research Councils be handled?**
- **Should the Roberts' and Concordat agendas be pulled together, by requiring institutions to report on Concordat implementation in the same submission?**

These were just some of the questions arising from the 'Vitae Roberts Policy Forum- Progress in building the evidence base' which took place in Manchester on 8-9 January.

A mix of plenary and workshop sessions allowed participants (those responsible for institutional policy with regard to postgraduate researchers and research staff and for implementing the Concordat and the Roberts recommendations) explore the strategic importance of the Concordat implementation and benchmarking process, and identify the priorities of the sector in further evidencing the impact of the 'Roberts agenda'.

A summary report is now available, together with details of the workshop and plenary presentation slides at

www.vitae.ac.uk/policyforum

Following the Vitae Roberts Policy Forum an informal email consultation was undertaken with participants and members of the Hub Steering Groups on a number of the key issues arising. Results of this consultation will be published shortly.

Concordat activities – What are you doing?

Since the launch of the Concordat in June last year, there have been a number of events run by Vitae Hubs.

In December, the YNE Hub took the Concordat as the main theme of their Annual Conference. In January, the SWW Hub held a joint seminar with HEFCW for institutions in Wales. March saw the Scotland and Northern Ireland Hub inviting participants to a sector wide conference to discuss Concordat implementation. In June the Midlands Hub, London Hub and the East of England Hub will all be holding Concordat based events.

In addition many universities have held events for research staff and for academics to highlight the Concordat.

We would like to encourage you to submit outline aspects of your institution's responses to the Concordat to the Vitae Database of Practice www.vitae.ac.uk/dop.

Typical areas could include:

- launch activities that you have undertaken to raise the profile of the Concordat within your institution
- examples of gap analysis or self-audit processes that you have undertaken to identify where your institution should focus its response to the Concordat
- policy and practice relating to how your institution is managing the use of fixed-term contracts with research staff
- innovative or exemplary practices in response to one of the Concordat's seven principles.



Concordat launch event, Vitae South West and Wales Hub, January 2009

L-r: Dr Janet Metcalfe (Chair and Head of Vitae), Prof Phil Gummet (Chief Executive HEFCW), Sue Rossiter (Chief Executive, National Foundation for Educational Research), Dr Heather Graham (Associate Director, Wales, Leadership Foundation for Higher Education), Dr Iain Cameron (Head of Research Careers & Diversity Unit, RCUK), Prof Ian Diamond (Chair RCUK Executive Group)



European update

EURODOC, the European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers, has conducted a Europe-wide survey of doctoral researchers - the first survey of doctoral researchers on this scale - in cooperation with the International Centre for Higher Education Research at the University of Kassel. The survey was launched in December 2008 and closed at the end of April 2009.

This is the first survey of its kind and roughly 100,000 European doctoral researchers were asked to take part in this study.

Key questions on many points raised by the European Charter for Researchers were covered:

- What is the real situation concerning current employment conditions, social benefits and working conditions for doctoral candidates?
- Where are the real differences between countries, cultures and models of doctoral education and what can we learn from them?

Other topics included qualification requirements, career paths, funding schemes, models of training and supervision, working conditions, expected and achieved results of scientific work and mobility. <http://www.eurodoc.net/survey>

EUA-CDE Annual Meeting

The Annual Meeting of the EUA Council for Doctoral Education will take place on

4– 5 June 2009, at the University of Lausanne, Switzerland. Working groups will consider:

- supervision in structured programmes
- research careers
- internationalisation
- research assessment and doctoral education
- collecting data on doctoral programmes
- the role of networks in European doctoral education.

<http://ec.europa.eu/research/mariecurieactions/index.htm>

Spotlight on surveys

Two recently launched surveys - one aimed at postgraduate researchers and the other at research staff can yield a great deal of valuable information for institutions and provide more evidence of impact. Read on to find out more about PRES and CROS.

The Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES)

Gosia Kulej (Project Co-ordinator, The Higher Education Academy)

'Postgraduate researchers rated supervision as the most important item for successful completion.'

'They were particularly positive about their supervisors' skills and subject knowledge'

A short history

The Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) is a service provided by the Academy to all HE institutions across the UK which have postgraduate researchers. PRES is designed to help institutions enhance the quality of postgraduate research degree provision by collecting feedback from current postgraduate researchers in a systematic and user-friendly way.

PRES was originally piloted in 2006, and subsequently run in 2007 and 2008. In response to feedback from HEIs, PRES steering group and the Academy decided to run PRES every two years. The two main reasons behind this decision are survey fatigue among students and need of more time for institutions to act on survey results. Hence, the Academy in 2010 will focus on supporting institutions in sharing effective practice based on survey results instead of administering the survey itself.

PRES in numbers

- PRES was originally piloted in 2006 with 8 HEIs
- The first national administration of PRES took place in 2007 in 58 HEIs across the UK
- In 2008 73 HEIs were involved in PRES and a total of 16,524 replies were received from the 57,000 postgraduate researchers surveyed, giving an overall response rate of 28.9% (compared with 25.2% for PRES 2007)
- The demographic profile of PRES 2008 respondents is similar to the sector profile recorded by HESA, and almost identical to the profile of PRES 2007 respondents
- Currently 83 HEIs are involved in the PRES 2009 administration which is now in data collection phase
- PRES will next run in 2011

PRES 2008 – the main findings

More than four out of five postgraduate researchers rated their experience as having met or exceeded their expectations, and the main factors determining that were supervision and intellectual climate.

Supervision

Postgraduate researchers rated supervision as the most important item for successful completion:

- nearly three out of four said they were satisfied with it
- nearly three-quarters rated their experience as having met or exceeded expectations
- they were particularly positive about their supervisors' skills and subject knowledge, and were least positive about the advice they received regarding their literature searches.

Research environment

Research environment was the second most important aspect affecting the successful completion of the programme but only about half were satisfied with it. This was the lowest scoring scale in PRES. Only around half of the postgraduate researchers agreed they

- had access to a good seminar series
- had opportunities for social contact with other postgraduate researchers
- had opportunities to become involved in the broader research culture
- were stimulated by the research ambience in their department
- felt integrated into their departmental community.

Skills development

- four out of five agreed that as a result of their research degree programme, their ability to learn independently had improved and their analytical skills had improved
- more than two-thirds agreed that they had developed a range of communication skills and they felt more confident about managing a research project
- around half agreed that they had had adequate opportunities to further develop their research skills and transferable skills.

Resources

- two out of three said they were satisfied with access to appropriate resources, but most regarded it as a relatively unimportant factor in the student experience
- they were most positive about access to library and IT facilities, and equipment
- they were least positive about availability of financial support
- attitudes varied by discipline.

Completion

- two-thirds of the postgraduate researchers expected to complete their research degree programme more or less on schedule

Viva

- only a small number of PRES respondents had submitted their thesis and could answer questions relating to viva
- most of them agreed that their work had been examined in a reasonable period of time and they had received adequate support and advice in revising their thesis after the viva
- they were least positive about the support and advice they had received in preparing for their viva.

Rights and responsibilities

- around three-quarters agreed that they understood their responsibilities as researchers and the requirements and deadlines of formal progress monitoring.

Criticisms

Respondents were more critical about

- their institution valuing and responding to feedback from postgraduate researchers
- being encouraged to reflect on their professional development needs and career development needs and the range of career opportunities available to them.

Mode of study

Additional analyses were conducted of part-time versus full-time experience. PRES data shows that there is a great deal of consistency between the experience of full-time and part-time researchers. Nevertheless some issues that may benefit from further consideration or investigation have been flagged up.

- Part-time researchers tend to agree significantly less than their full-time colleagues that there was the appropriate support for research activities
- They were also less satisfied with the research environment and integration into their department community was an issue
- In general part-time postgraduate researchers were less satisfied with the statements relating to teaching opportunities. Development of transferable skills was also rated lower by part-time postgraduate researchers and they also stated they were less encouraged to think about the range of career opportunities that were available to them
- Contrary to the common belief, part-time postgraduate researchers demonstrated the same level of satisfaction with the programme as well as the same level of confidence about completing the programme more or less on schedule as did full-time postgraduate researchers

The Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS)

'The Careers in Research Online Survey' (CROS) will be invaluable to institutions in helping you understand the experiences and needs of your research staff. All institutions are encouraged to participate in CROS 2009 as part of the implementation of the 'Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers'.

The survey has been comprehensively revised to reflect the changing environment in higher education institutions (HEIs) and the aspirations of the Concordat. Questions now cover areas such as:

- recruitment and selection
- recognition and value

- support and career development
- equality and diversity
- about you
- institutional questions.

CROS 2009 opened from 2 March and will remain open until 31 May - institutions can choose when they run the survey within this timescale.

More information about how CROS operates, terms and conditions and code of practice is available at www.cros.ac.uk.

A copy of CROS 2009 is available at www.survey.bris.ac.uk/cros/2009example

A short history

CROS has been designed to capture the anonymised views and experiences of researchers working in higher education in the UK. The results will be used by institutions and research funding bodies to inform decision making and monitor developments and initiatives relating to the employment, training and career development of research staff.

Since it was introduced in 2002, CROS has led to improvement in local staff review and appraisal systems, local induction processes and communication with research staff. The feedback it has provided to government has been invaluable and led to additional funding to institutions for research staff development, as well as significantly raising the profile of research staff both within institutions and nationally.



Retaining female talent

Sarah Dickinson, Science Policy and Diversity Specialist, Royal Society of Chemistry reports.

What happens to deter women from pursuing a career in science? And does the subject studied make a difference? These were the questions posed by two recent studies examining the retention of women in science.

It is generally accepted that women are under represented in SET careers and that one contributing factor to this is that appropriately qualified women are not retained in similar proportions to similarly qualified men. A study of chemistry PhD researchers by the Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC) in 2006 revealed that although a greater proportion of women than men began their PhD with the intention of remaining in research, by the end of the PhD this proportion had halved, while the proportion of men had stayed about the same.

The RSC, Biochemical Society and the UK Resource Centre for Women in SET (UKRC) set out to follow up the RSC's research findings and conducted two studies; one, a

survey to establish whether the findings for chemistry PhD researchers are reproduced in the molecular biosciences and the other, a qualitative study which further explored what happens during the chemistry PhD to deter women from pursuing a research career.

Attitudes of molecular bioscience postgraduate researchers vs chemistry postgraduate researchers

The results of the molecular bioscience survey revealed that the majority of both male and female postgraduate researchers do not regret their decision to do a PhD, despite acknowledging the long, unsociable working hours and feelings of isolation and pressure. It did however reveal two important gender differences surrounding the PhD experience; differences which mirrored (although to a lesser extent) those found in the chemistry survey.

The nature of research work

The reality of the nature of research work affected more female molecular bioscience postgraduate researchers than males. Females revealed they found research repetitive and frustrating; a sentiment shared by both male and female chemistry PhDs. However, the qualitative study revealed that for female chemistry postgraduate researchers, these feelings actually act as a deterrent to pursuing an academic research career. Their male counterparts view the frustrations and pressure as an initiation, which will result in their acceptance into the scientific community, whilst the females see these as an ordeal and become anxious that (normal) poor success rates in their experiments reflect badly on them personally.

Supervision problems

Another gender difference within both molecular bioscience and chemistry surrounds supervision. Female chemistry and molecular bioscience respondents were more likely than male respondents to experience and be affected by supervision problems. In molecular bioscience, most men and women believe they had a good relationship with their supervisor, and a quarter said their supervision experience could not be enhanced at all, but a significant minority of female respondents (17%) reported that they had encountered profound difficulties. This was true of chemistry PhD researchers, with the qualitative chemistry study revealing a few horror stories of supervisor bullying.

Research groups

The chemistry qualitative study revealed the research group to be a factor which deterred women from pursuing a research career. They reported feeling isolated as a result of being in an inappropriate research group or because they were not a member of a research group at all – this also meant that they did not benefit from the support of postdoctoral researchers.

Female attrition at the PhD to postdoc transition

Within molecular bioscience, around two thirds of both male and female respondents were planning a research career after completing their PhD. However, the survey found female respondents were less likely to be planning an academic career than male respondents. This suggests that women qualified to doctoral level in molecular biosciences are lost to the academic community at the PhD-postdoc transition to a greater extent than men, as is also the case for chemistry. The chemistry qualitative study identified a number of issues that arose during the PhD and that only affected women, including the 'all consuming nature' of academia and its competitiveness.

However, unlike chemistry, the female attrition rate at this transition in the molecular biosciences does not seem to be due to significant numbers being deterred from

research during doctoral study. In fact the survey suggests that many female molecular bioscience PhD researchers (approximately 25%) did not intend to stay in research beyond their PhD study from the outset; the same is true of chemists but in addition chemistry loses many women during doctoral study.

Do women stay in academia?

Amongst those female PhD researchers with an intention to stay in research, molecular bioscience respondents were more likely to have an intention to remain in academia than chemistry respondents.

It seems reasonable to speculate that academia fails to retain many female molecular bioscientists and chemists later on in their career as a result of the perceived/real difficulties of balancing science with family commitments (PhD researchers are unlikely to have caring responsibilities). Indeed the perception that motherhood and academia are incompatible was found in responses to open-ended questions in both surveys and in the qualitative study.

Why the difference for chemistry?

The indication that considerably more female chemists than female molecular bioscientists are deterred from remaining in academia in the near term as well as in the long term implies there are other influential factors in chemistry in addition to the work-life balance issue. One possibility is that whilst female chemists may face similar work-life balance issues to those faced by their molecular bioscience colleagues; they also have to cope with a more single gender culture, given the lower proportion of women in chemistry, which makes it difficult to stay in the field.

Recommendations:

The RSC together with the UKRC and the Biochemical Society developed a set of recommendations based on the findings of both surveys, and on the qualitative study. For the full recommendations and pdfs of the full reports, go to www.rsc.org/diversity.

Supervision

- Academic staff should be trained before they undertake the supervision of PhD researchers, to enable them to become sensitive to the differing needs of postgraduate researchers
- A local pastoral care structure should be implemented, so that PhD researchers have someone to turn to, to take the pressure off supervisors and post-doctoral fellows
- The role that post-doctoral fellows play in supervision and support needs to be acknowledged and underpinned with appropriate training. The supervision role undertaken should be seen as positive staff skill development
- The PhD experience should not rest alone with the scientific supervisor. Mentoring schemes can prevent feelings of isolation and provide networks of support for postgraduate researchers. The mentors should receive training which includes gender awareness

PhD experience

- PhD researchers should be part of an appropriate research group wherever possible. Where PhD researchers' research areas are not directly linked to a group, then they should be part of wider networks to ensure contact and support are maintained
- A more supportive culture in respect of the development of individual PhD postgraduate researchers needs to be developed in some departments to prevent women in particular from feeling that the PhD is an ordeal. It should be normal practice that support is provided for postgraduate researchers and that individual postgraduate researchers' experiences are regularly monitored
- Measures are needed to demonstrate that women and men can pursue a successful research career in chemistry, as well as achieving work life/balance. Good practice examples should be widely disseminated.

International staff support at the University of Bristol

Considerations for PIs with international members of staff

Ri'Anna Stueber, Senior International Adviser, International Advice & Support outlines an initiative which is of particular use to research staff



- International staff support at the University of Bristol exists in a number of ways. There is an informative website addressing registering with a doctor, securing a National Insurance Number, schools and much more (www.bristol.ac.uk/international/staffsupport)
- International staff have access to three International Staff Advisers for one-to-one support
- Staff Development courses are specifically designed for the needs of international staff, such as an Introduction to the NHS and an Introduction to UK Income Tax and Pensions
- The Senior International Adviser sits on committees such as the Staff Club to ensure the needs of International Staff are considered in decision-making and event planning
- There is also a focus on current members of staff – offering cultural

awareness training to ease those first few days of arrival for new international members of staff and ensuring all members of staff are aware of the support available

- 850 of a total 5700 members of staff are classed as international (non-UK nationality), up from 651 four years earlier (an increase of over 30%)
- Just over 36% of research staff are international, an increase of 28% over a four year period
- The provision arose out of the Positive Working Environment initiative at Bristol (www.bris.ac.uk/pwe). It had the aim of making working life at Bristol productive, rewarding, enjoyable and healthy and started with a staff satisfaction survey in 2003. Over 40 action points resulted, including provision for international staff support
- The service was launched in January 2006

The primary goal of the International Support service is to ensure that when a member of international staff arrives at Bristol, they settle down as quickly as possible and concentrate on the work they have joined us to do, by providing information to enable the processes such as registering with the NHS and opening a bank account. Research staff are often only with the university for a year or so and it is therefore important that they are able to hit the ground running with their research.

Interestingly, what has been discovered at Bristol is that the best assets available for supporting international staff are current international members of staff. It is much easier for someone who has gone through the process of moving to the UK, and done all that is necessary to be able to live and work here, to recognise and understand the difficulties faced by new arrivals.

At Bristol, in addition to the information provided on our dedicated international staff website and the courses designed for them, we also have a country-representatives scheme. Staff can request prior to arrival, or at any stage of their time with us at Bristol, to be put in touch with a fellow member of staff from their home country or any country of their choice. We have over one hundred members of staff who have volunteered their e-mail addresses to be of assistance to their colleagues. It is only those from Brazil, for instance, that can advise another Brazilian about the documents necessary to obtain in the UK for their tax systems at home. We are also in the process of creating a place, such as a message board or social networking site, where the experiences and advice of current members of staff can be posted and read by incoming members of staff – what to consider before coming to the UK, what banks are friendliest to new arrivals, etc.

Other issues relate to the social aspect of joining a UK university. When international staff support was conceived at the University of Bristol, a survey was conducted to determine the main issues for international staff and a feeling of social isolation was a recurrent theme. Steps were taken, as mentioned above, to ensure that international needs and cultural considerations are addressed in event planning and decision-making in social institutions at the University, such as the Staff Club.

An issue which merits further investigation is how language intersects with these social and cultural issues. Staff may possess the English for the job, but lack the social English and cultural awareness to feel that they 'fit in'. At Bristol, we have created a website which

highlights sources of language support at our own Language Centre and on the internet, such as sites with idiom and grammar exercises. We also provide cultural help on the website, such as meeting and business etiquette information and references to British culture guides, and in courses addressing networking, adapting to academic life in the UK, and cultural awareness. Resources will dictate the support your institution can offer, but at Bristol we have found that directing international staff to sources of information and support has been well-received.

The lesson we have taken from the past few years of offering international staff support is that even if you do not have a dedicated international staff support mechanism, enabling new international members of staff

to get the basics of living in the UK out of the way as quickly as possible to permit focus on their research ensures a focused and happy staff member. Additionally, research grants usually have a time scale to work towards, so the earlier they can focus, the better for the project. You could consider buddying up new internationals with current international members of staff; naming a dedicated person in your team who is a point of contact for new internationals and can offer advice; creating a new arrivals library with information on local doctors, local banks, etc; or researching other sources of support for new internationals, such as language support. The faster your new member of staff can settle in, the faster they can get to the task at hand – the research.

The balanced researcher - strategies for busy researchers

Hugh Kearns, Consultant Staff Development and Training Unit, Flinders University shares his tips.....



In 2008 I gave a lecture and workshop series across Australia and in the United States, the UK and Ireland. I was talking with researchers and postgraduate researchers about how they might be more effective in their research roles. We also focused on the question of whether it is possible to have balance in your life and still be a successful researcher.

I discussed these topics with a large number of researchers and no matter what country I was in, the issues seemed to be the same; research seems to fall to the bottom of the priority list; it gets done after everything else and often late at night; and researchers seem to have very little idea about when enough is enough.

In December 2008, I ran a workshop with Vitae in London called 'The balanced researcher – strategies for busy researchers'. We discussed a wide range of strategies that researchers use to be effective and maintain a sense of balance in their lives. Here I'll mention five that came up regularly and resonated with researchers – you may like to pass them on!

The 80/20 rule (also known as the Pareto Principle)

The Pareto Principle is named after Vilfredo Pareto a nineteenth century Italian economist who noted that 80% of the land in Italy was owned by 20% of the population. The Pareto Principle is a rule of thumb that suggests that,

in general, 20% of your inputs gives you 80% of your outputs; in business 20% of your customers often generated about 80% of your business; or 20% of your students generate 80% of your teaching workload.

We applied this to the life of a researcher. They had long lists of things to do, projects to run and papers to write. The Pareto Principle suggests that only a few things on that list are critical and that will give the biggest payback. It might be getting that paper submitted by Friday, or making a start on a paper, or finishing off that grant application. In our discussions it was never answering the next e-mail!

Another way of describing the 80/20 rule is the phrase 'The vital few and trivial many'. Looking at your to-do list what are the vital 20%? The more successful researchers seemed to be able to put more of their energy into the projects that really matter. To do this they had to let other tasks not get done. They didn't like this but at least their time was going onto the vital few tasks.

continued on next page ...

overview

for supervisors and principal investigators

It's a marathon - not a sprint

In the hundred metres sprint Usain Bolt goes flat out from the start for the whole one hundred metres. But that strategy wouldn't work in the marathon. In the marathon you have to conserve energy so that you get to the five kilometre mark, the halfway mark and still have something left for the sprint at the end.

A research career is probably more like a marathon than a sprint. You need to pace yourself, to hold something in reserve so that you are able to, and want to, keep working in the field. This doesn't tend to be a popular view in a hard driving, publish or perish competitive culture. But as one researcher pointed out you don't write many papers when you are burnt out.

E-mail is not research

Of course e-mail is a vital tool for collaboration but how many of you can empathise with the phrase 'Well I didn't finish the paper today but at least I got through my e-mails'. From my discussions with researchers it almost seems e-mail is becoming a substitute for work. So much of researchers' time was spent answering or generating e-mail that there was little time to do the actual research. So here's one simple suggestion. Researchers who have tried this testify that it will improve your productivity immediately. Don't log onto your e-mail system first thing in the morning. Leave answering e-mails till later in the morning or the afternoon. And you might be wondering what to do instead? Make a start on the vital few.

Boundaries

A senior researcher described how she had gone about setting boundaries. She decided to work during the week but wherever possible not to work on the weekends. She didn't check her work e-mails, she switched off her work mobile phone and didn't bring paperwork home with her. She reported that her weekends were much more fun but that she was also being more effective at work. She said 'In the past I used to procrastinate about things because I knew I'd do them on the weekend. Now I focus on finishing things when I work because I know I'm not going to

work on the weekend. It helped me focus on the important things'.

One of the problems with research is that it can be with you all the time. You're having a meal with your family but your mind is wandering back to the paper you need to finish and you slip off to the computer after the meal to work on it. This leads to a phenomenon known presenteeism. That's when you're physically there but your mind is somewhere else. In my discussions with leading researchers it seems that the more effective ones have learned how to set boundaries. They know when to work and when to stop.

It is working? Are you balanced? Are you happy?

A pilot announced to the passengers 'I've got some good news and I've got some bad news. The good news is we're 500 km ahead of schedule. The bad news is that we're travelling in completely the wrong direction'.

Want more?

In this paper I've just touched on five topics that emerged in the discussions. You can find more information by downloading 'The balanced researcher' from www.vitae.ac.uk

Hugh Kearns and his colleague Maria Gardiner have published a number of books aimed at helping researchers improve their effectiveness and achieving balance in their lives. You can find more information about their work and book series at www.itthinkwell.com.au.

Hugh Kearns lectures, researches and publishes on the topic of self-management at Flinders University in Adelaide Australia. He runs highly sought after workshops across Australia and internationally. He will be returning to the UK in Autumn 2009 to run a number of workshops and lectures.

It's great to be making progress to be getting things done, to be ticking things off the to-do list. But are you making progress in the direction you want to go? Another way of putting it is before you start climbing the corporate career ladder, make sure the ladder is against the correct wall.

The question 'Are you happy?' or the alternate 'Are you unhappy?' is a good one to ask yourself regularly. And surprisingly, one we do not ask very often. Many researchers commented during our discussions that the main benefit of the discussion was time to reflect and see how things were going.



Top ten: researcher development blogs



A blog (a contraction of the term weblog) is a type of website, usually maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. Entries are commonly displayed in reverse-chronological order. 'Blog' can also be used as a verb, meaning to maintain or add content to a blog. (Source Wikipedia.....where else!)

Tristram Hooley (Vitae) provides a rough guide to the researcher development blogosphere.

Where do you get your information about researcher development issues? Obviously 'overview' is an invaluable source of information as is the Vitae website (www.vitae.ac.uk). However there are also a lot of other sources of information about researcher development. In this article I quickly run down ten of my favourite blogs which might be of interest to people who are involved in developing researchers.

1 Just Higher-ed!
www.jobs.ac.uk/blogs/just-higher-ed/

Catherine Armstrong's blog promises 'the inside story of a first lectureship job'. However, it actually delivers much more than that with articles offering practical advice about academic skills and careers as well as some thoughtful articles on the wider context.

2 Manchester Postgraduate Careers Blog
<http://manchestergcareers.wordpress.com/>

Written by the University of Manchester's Elizabeth Wilkinson (Head of Postgraduate Careers Development), this blog provides a mix of news, views, job searching opportunities and other generally useful stuff for postgraduates who are thinking about careers.

3 RIN Team Blog www.rin.ac.uk/team-blog

Produced by the team at the Research Information Network this blog is a must for anyone with an interest in research. It is particularly focused on issues around research information management, publishing and libraries but is also includes some cutting edge commentary on how Web 2.0 is impacting on the world of research.

4 Mortarboard Blog
www.guardian.co.uk/education/mortarboard

The Guardian's Mortarboard Blog is a general interest education blog. HE gets its fair share of coverage in postings to the blog, but who can resist posts like "Who needs teachers when you could have bankers? Or better still, robots?" and "A farewell to soggy semolina?"

5 PhD Blog www.prospects.ac.uk/p/articles/phd_blog_30.jsp

Graham Foster's warts and all blog on the Prospects website gives a good insight into what undertaking a PhD is like. It should be required reading for people before they kick off their doctorate, but also has a lot of useful tips and reflections for those currently struggling with the ups and downs of a research degree.

6 Careers blog for PhD researchers
www.careers.salford.ac.uk/students/phd/blog/

Fiona Christie's careers blog is another useful source of career related information for researchers. Based in the University of Salford this blog also has a range of content that is of interest to a wider audience.

7 HECSU Blog <http://hecsu.blogspot.com/>

The HECSU blog provides a research perspective on all matters around the graduate and postgraduate labour markets. While it is not updated as regularly as we might like this blog still contains invaluable information.

8 UKRC Get SET Blog
www.ukrc4setwomen.org/html/women-and-girls/getsetwomen-blog/

A series of one off posts by members of the UKRC Get SET network. All of the blog entries focus around the career stories of a particular woman who is working in a SET-related area. Many of the bloggers have doctorates or a background in research and all provide inspiration and an opportunity for discussion and interaction around their career story.

9 Real Life of a PhD Student
www.jobs.ac.uk/blogs/real-life/

Haziz Azad offers thoughts on the experience of researching and writing a PhD. Particularly essential for Maths and Computer Science researchers, but of wider interest. The blog includes discussion of skills, jobs (academic and non-academic), networking and teaching.

10 Science Careers Blog
<http://blogs.sciencemag.org/sciencecareers/>

This blog from the American Science Careers Magazine offers 'updates from the science-career trenches'. It is a pretty invaluable source of information for all researchers as long as you are aware of the US and science bias in its content.

What have I missed? I'd really like to hear from you if you write (or even read) a blog that I should have included in this list. Email me at tristram.hooley@vitae.ac.uk

New Vitae resources and publications

Broadening horizons: career management for researchers

Economic, technological, political and social changes are transforming the world of work and consequently, in order to continue to thrive and prosper individuals will need to be both adaptable and flexible and actively participate in their own career development. One of the key principles laid out in the 'Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers' highlights the importance of ensuring that researchers proactively engage in their own personal and career development. The 'Broadening horizons' programme was successfully piloted at the University of Oxford and the University of Warwick and has been developed by Vitae as a resource for staff running researcher development programmes.

'Time to think - away from work. A chance to think about and analyse my own opinions/situation and a chance to talk to others about careers issues'

'I enjoyed the course and it was good to take time out to think about my career aspirations.'

The 'Broadening horizons' programme is an intensive two day programme which provides researchers with the opportunity, skills and tools to engage proactively in their own career development. The programme enables participants to gain a clearer idea of where they are within their career and to consider what their next steps may be, whether their aspirations are to remain in research and/or academia or to move into other areas.

The programme uses a variety of group-based activities and tools to explore and encourage participants to make better sense of their own career direction and situation. Areas covered include:

- skills, motivations, values and talents: how these can be applied to career planning.
- values: what is important to them in a career, what underpins ambitions, and how these elements can be translated into potential jobs to be further investigated
- bridging the gap: between aspirations and reality
- action planning: for next steps.

The programme materials have been designed so that the programme can be run in modular form as a two-day course, two one-day sessions or four half-day sessions.

Manuals with all the information required to organise and deliver the programme are freely available to UK higher education institutions. They include:

- administration guidelines and timelines
- participant learning journal
- guidelines for facilitators to lead and de-brief the programme and individual exercises.

Vitae can also provide access to a network of experienced external trainers who are able to support the delivery of the programme on your behalf.

For further details about the programme, contact Jonathan Roberts Jonathan.Roberts@vitae.ac.uk or visit www.vitae.ac.uk/broadeninghorizons

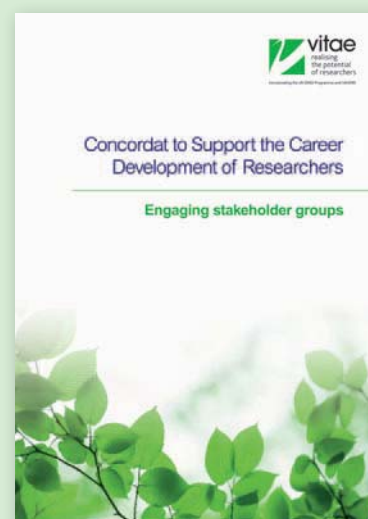
Concordat briefings

Vitae have released a new series of briefing documents focusing on the implementation of the 'Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers'.

The Concordat is an agreement between the funders and employers of researchers in the UK. It aims to ensure that researchers are nurtured and supported during their career development. By supporting researchers the Concordat aims to enhance the workforce, sustain research excellence in the UK and bring benefits to the health, economy and well being of the UK.

Inside this issue of 'overview', you will see a copy of the Managers of Researchers briefing document, which is aimed at academics. As a manager of researchers you have a role to play in implementing the principles of the Concordat. The briefing is written to help you to think through your own response and to introduce some of the ways that other academics are dealing with related issues.

You can view the full range of Concordat briefings online at www.vitae.ac.uk/concordat. For hard copies, please contact your Regional Hub (see backpage).



Enterprise at work - exploring intrapreneurship in researcher development

At a time when government is concerned with the challenges of global competitiveness, embedding innovation and sustaining our research base, it is becoming increasingly important to acknowledge and understand the skills, traits and capabilities of researchers who drive and create internal change within universities. A collaborative project between nine higher education institutions investigated how intrapreneurship fits within a changing political landscape, the links with institutional drivers, and what current and future practice might look like in terms of activities and culture that would support intrapreneurial behaviours. The outcomes of the project can be read in a report published by CRAC: The Career Development Organisation and Vitae.

The report, 'Enterprise at work - exploring intrapreneurship in researcher development', considers:

- the extent to which existing institutional provision draws out intrapreneurial awareness and learning
- some of the strategic and practical issues around developing intrapreneurial capabilities with researchers
- highlights commonality in the skills that employers typically look for in researchers, with intrapreneurial capabilities such as taking initiative, the ability to solve problems and to remove barriers, commercial awareness, personal enthusiasm and motivation.

A new project team are currently taking forward a proposed second phase of the collaborative intrapreneurship activity, focussed on developing practice through building a knowledge base of the intrapreneurial attributes that make an effective researcher and creating resources to develop intrapreneurial capabilities. If you would be interested in finding out more about this project then please contact Jonathan Roberts at Vitae Jonathan.Roberts@vitae.ac.uk.

New features on the Vitae website

As well as bringing you up to date news and events information, there are a few new features on the Vitae website you may like to take a look at and encourage your researchers to seek out too.

- **Equality and diversity section:** these pages offer advice and support, including links to specialised organisations under topics such as: disabled staff, women, parents, carers, part-time work, international researchers and returners. Vitae would like to thank Val Farrar at Premia and Rachel Tobbell at the UK Resource Centre for Women in SET for their input into these pages
- **RSS feeds:** you can receive our regular Vitae news and events updates automatically by subscribing to our web feeds on either 'researchers' portal' or 'policy and practice portal' (or both). When you subscribe to a web feed (click on the orange icon on the top right hand corner of the news or events box), you will be able to set the interval at which your browser will check the website for updates and automatically download the most up-to-date web feed list for you to view

Events for researchers

Vitae's researcher activities 2009 programme is always evolving - current opportunities for **research staff** include:

Advancing in academia 1 June 2009

An interactive one-day event that provides research staff with the opportunity to explore and develop some of the skills, knowledge, experience and attributes required to advance an academic career.

Research staff conference 5 November 2009

A one-day national conference that will bring together research staff representatives from across institutions and disciplines to discuss the researcher experience.

Opportunities for both **research staff** and **postgraduate researchers** include:

Researcher careers and recession from 13 July 2009

Vitae will launch an online space to explore the implications of the current recession for researchers and their careers.

Leadership in action (residential course) 28 July 2009

A three-day residential course exploring and developing researchers' leadership skills through experiential learning.

And opportunities for **postgraduate researchers** include:

Careers in focus 8 June, 24 September and 12 October 2009

One-day events that focus on careers for postgraduate researchers in various sectors including careers in academia and environmental sector.

Creativity in research 7 December 2009

A one-day event designed to explore the importance of creativity in a research environment and to provide researchers with tools and techniques that can help with thinking more creatively.

Please pass this information on to your researchers – further information and booking forms are available on

www.vitae.ac.uk/events

Events for staff supporting researchers

In 2009 Vitae offers a programme of five masterclasses focusing on specific areas of training and development within the higher education environment. The masterclasses are free to attend, led by an expert in the particular topic area and available for staff supporting researchers who are looking to innovate and develop their training provision. The five masterclasses will be on the following topics:

- 11 June, London - Using coaching techniques within training programmes
- 23 June, Bristol - Designing effective development programmes for researchers
- 14 July, Birmingham - Advanced facilitation skills
- 14 October, Edinburgh - Training needs analysis and PDP
- 11 November, Manchester - Evaluation and feedback

www.vitae.ac.uk/staff-supporting-researchers-masterclasses

Miscellany

HEFCE report

A new, online report by The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) describes the characteristics of starters to doctoral degree courses in UK higher education institutions between 1996-97 and 2004-05. The attributes of both the post graduate researcher and the course are examined.

Key findings include:

- Between 1996-97 and 2004-05, the number of starters to full-time PhD programmes grew by 22 per cent from 13,800 to 16,900. In the same period, the number of starters to part-time programmes fell by 6 per cent from 4,800 to 4,500. Most of the decline in numbers to part-time programmes was seen between 1996-97 and 1998-99
- When considering trends in starters to particular subject areas, there were significant differences across the subjects. For example, numbers of computer science starters to full-time courses, more than doubled between 1996-97 and 2004-05. Conversely in veterinary sciences and chemistry the number of full-time starters decreased across the same period

To read the full executive summary of the report and to download your personal copy of the study, please visit www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2009/09_04/

Work experience for social science PhDs

The Social Science Workplace Experience Programme (SSWEP), funded by the ESRC offers post graduate social science researchers the opportunity to undertake eight week placements during the summer months in Small to Medium sized Enterprises (SME), Social Enterprises, Local Authorities and Third Sector Organisations.

Placement projects focus on supporting organisations with their research, strategy or business development requirements and provide an opportunity for postgraduate researchers to develop their skills outside of an academic environment.

Previous SSWEP projects have included: compilation of marketing strategies, undertaking feasibility studies, research and analysis, business planning and evaluation, database development and website design.

For more information see www.esrc.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/KnowledgeExch/StudentSME.aspx?ts=2

New 'International Journal for Researcher Development'

The first issue of this new on-line, not for profit journal, with a focus on preparing researchers for academic practice is now available.

Led by the University of Cambridge, the 'International Journal for Researcher Development' aims to provide a forum for the sharing of information and dissemination of good practice in the world-wide higher education sector, for the professional development of researchers.

If you would like to know more about the journal or become involved in its production, please contact Dr Denise Dear at the Centre for Professional and Personal Development, Trumpington Street, University of Cambridge on dvd20@cam.ac.uk www.researcherdevelopmentjournal.org/index.

Tell us what you think ... and win a free place at the Vitae Conference

We'd like to know what you think of 'overview' –whether we are covering topics that interest you, what you would like to see more of, what features you would like, whether you like the look of it... so we would be grateful if you would complete a short online survey which can be found at <https://www.survey.crac.org.uk/overviewsurvey2009>.

All surveys completed by the end of June will be entered into a prize draw and the winner will be given a free place at the Vitae Annual Conference being held on September 8-9 at Warwick University.

Diary

Below are events which may be of interest to you and your researchers – for a comprehensive listing go to www.vitae.ac.uk/events

JUNE

- 1 Birmingham - Advancing in academia *for research staff*

- 8 Birmingham - Careers in focus - academia *for postgraduate researchers*

- 10 Midlands Hub - Concordat implementation event

- 11 London - Using coaching techniques within training programmes *for staff supporting researchers*

- 16 London Hub and EE Hub - Implementing the Concordat - one year on

- 23 Bristol - Designing effective development programmes for researchers *for staff supporting researchers*

JULY

- 13 Researcher careers and recession - online activities launched www.vitae.ac.uk *for researchers*

- 14 Birmingham - advanced facilitation skills *for staff supporting researchers*

- 28-31 Ambleside - Leadership in action course *for researchers*

SEPTEMBER

- 8-9 Warwick - Vitae annual conference

- 24 Careers in focus - environmental sector *for postgraduate researchers*

OCTOBER

- 12 Bristol - Careers in focus - academia *for postgraduate researchers*

- 14 Edinburgh - Training needs analysis and PDP *for staff supporting researchers*

NOVEMBER

- 5 London - Research staff conference

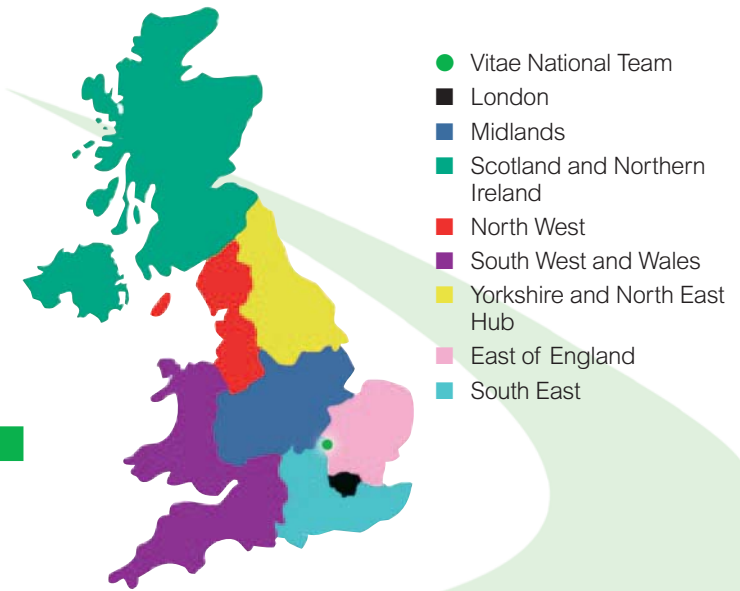
- 11 Manchester - Evaluation and feedback *for staff supporting researchers*

DECEMBER

- 7 London - Creativity in research *for postgraduate researchers*

Keep in touch

Vitae has a network of 8 Regional Hubs. Each Hub has a Hub Co-ordinator and a Hub Manager and is hosted by a university in the Region. If you would like to be on the mailing list of your local Hub, to receive Regional newsletters, email alerts and details of local events, contact:



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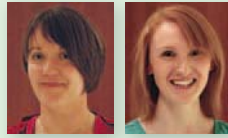
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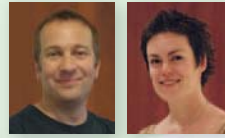
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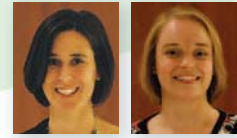
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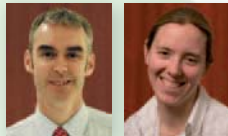
South West and Wales Hub



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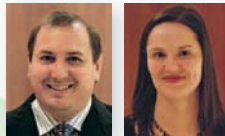
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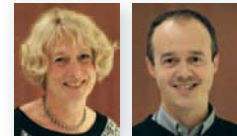
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The Advisory Board provides input to the Editor of 'overview' about the content and style of the publication. The group communicates virtually so membership does not require attendance at meetings. If you are interested in joining the Advisory Board, please contact overview@vitae.ac.uk

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

