

# 'A survey of good practice in careers provision for doctoral researchers across national and international institutions'

Dr Sharon Milner, Ulster University  
on Behalf of 'AHECS Postgraduate Students Working Group'

Vitae Conference 12-13<sup>th</sup> Sept 2016



Association of  
Higher Education  
Careers Services

# Aim of Research Project

- explore good practice in Ireland and internationally, and apply learning to future practice
- Share good practice among AHECS members in relation to careers provision for doctoral students
- Explore the option of engaging in collaborative activities on a national and international scale

# Methodology

- Study 1: Survey of good practice in Ireland (16 institutions) (32 item survey)
- Study 2: A Global study of good practice (30 institutions) (43 item survey)
  - Scotland and England (10), Europe (2), USA (7), Canada (3), New Zealand (3), Australia (5)
  - Separate interview with ABG Intell'agence (Franco-German non-profit company supports doctoral students and companies to recruit them)

# Themes/ questions explored includes:

- Who provides careers services for doctoral students (support, funding, institutional strategies, models of completion)
- What do careers services focus on providing for doctoral students
- Resources being used
- Doctoral students internships
- Challenges working with home and international doctoral students
- Evaluation Methods

# Models of completion

No simple uniform format

- Irish approach typically 3-4 yrs
- UK generally 1+3 model
- Internationally varies e.g., Australia 3 yrs, New Zealand 4-7 yrs, USA 6-7 yrs.

*'varies by department/school. It is typically 5 years in the School of Engineering – 2 yrs of coursework, passing the PhD qualifying exam and then 3 years of research. It can be up to 7 yrs in Humanities/ Sciences' (USA)*

# Institutional Strategies

- Less than half institutions in Ireland indicated their institutions key strategies for doctoral students as they were underdevelopment
- Rich array from UK mainland and international
  - Typical objectives – recruitment, retention, first class research, completion and employability skills.

*'KPI- By 2020: To increase our postgraduate student-to-staff ratio to be within the top 5 UK institutions and to ensure that at least 90% of students complete on time' (UK mainland)*

*'providing research that makes a difference at home (in relation to the nation's knowledge economy and innovation potential, and in relation to the nations economy) – enhancing the doctoral student's career potential...(New Zealand)*

# Support for doctoral students?

- Majority services aligned with Student Support structures (56% Ireland, 74% UK mainland/International)
- Minority aligned to admin departments, Grad Schools or centres for Learning and Teaching.
- Key people involved in delivery included careers professionals (100%), alumni (44% Ireland, 67% UK/international), employers (44% Ireland, 57% UK /international) and academics (69% Ireland, 60% UK /international).
- Careers professionals who work with doctoral students also work with postdocs (31% Ireland, 43% UK / international)

*'we won funding to work on specific projects. These have been won by our department or by individual academic schools, researchers or combination of these (Australia)*

# Types of careers services delivered for doctoral research students

Open only to doctoral research students  
research students

Open to all students incl doctoral  
research students

	Ireland	UK mainland/ international	Ireland	UK mainland/ international
Individual careers consultancy/advice	13%	40%	75%	83%
Dropin sessions (CV advice, other)	6%	22%	69%	93%
Careers workshops	38%	47%	69%	87%
Careers events	6%	45%	69%	90%
Employer events	13%	31%	69%	90%
Graduate/alumni insight events	19%	38%	31%	92%
Networking sessions	13%	35%	38%	92%
Career mentoring	0%	25%	13%	85%

*'Usually it is the event that drives attendance, i.e., if we have a good speaker, or a good topic. The audience can then range from 1<sup>st</sup> year through to Alumnus and Staff' (University of South Australia)*

# What do careers services focus on providing for doctoral students?

- Similar core content across institutions in terms of:
  - Career planning, CVs, applications, interviews, networking, skills assessment etc.
- Wider range UK/internationally:
  - Innovation and creativity, consultancy and writing a grant bid (University South Australia)
  - Enterprise and entrepreneurial development (Newcastle University)
  - Negotiating my salary (ABG Intelli'agence, France)
  - 'careers lounge' series of one hour lunchtime sessions within 6-12mths of completion of doctorate (University of Wollongong)

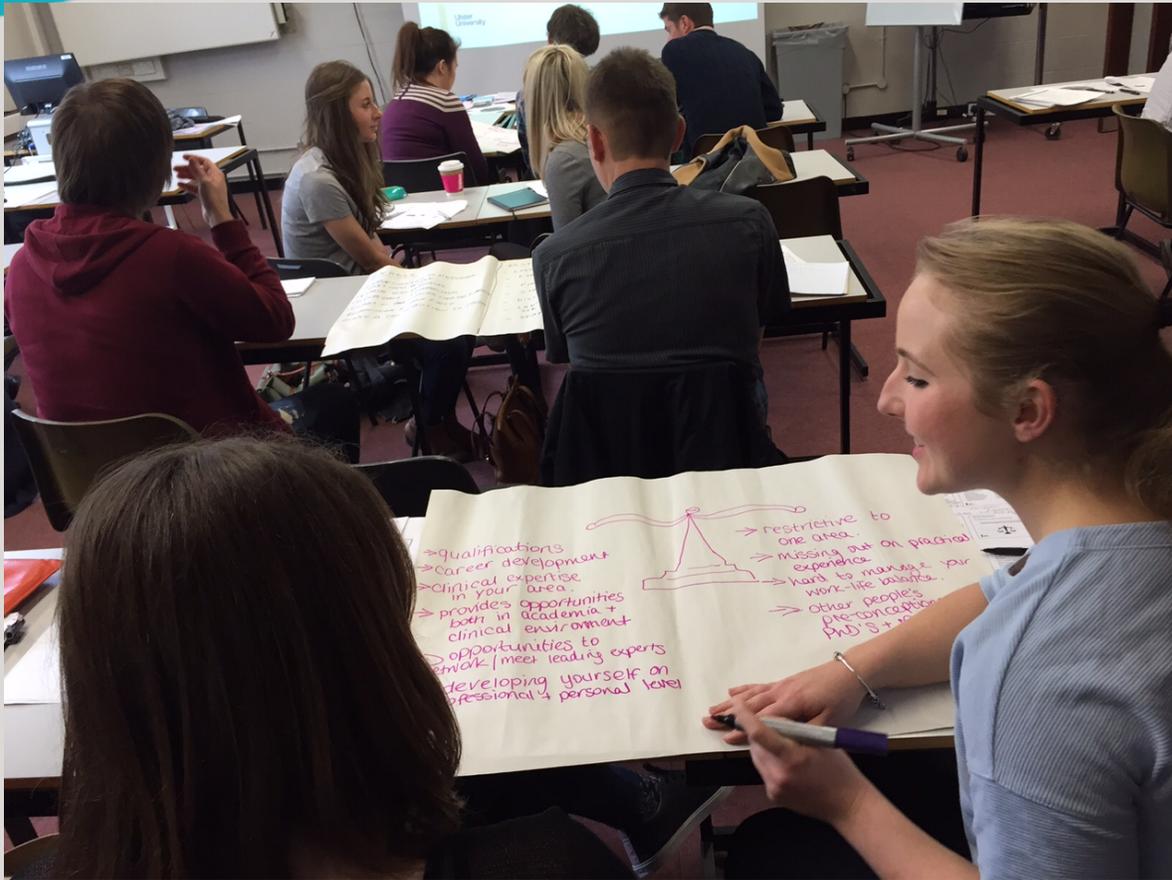
*'Retention. Successful completion. Recruitment, Employability-transferable skills'* (New Zealand)

## Sample workshop material:

## University of Washington USA.

- Mapping past experiences for future ideas
- Identifying transferable skills from PhD work
- Building a sustainable career exploration plan
- Exploring options: values as job search criteria
- Working the room – networking practice
- Career symposium for grad students and postdocs – panel of employers and networking reception
- Internships and experiential learning options for grad students
- Academic careers: salary negotiations
- Dependable strengths

## Ulster University students engaged in strategic career management workshop



# Issues and challenges faced with domestic and/or international students

- Managing student expectations and ambitions
- Challenging and competitive market
- Engagement with careers services
- Job search process
- Lack of career planning
- Networking
- Language (and use of national language)
- Visa requirements
- Work sponsorship
- Lack of knowledge/ cultural expectations
- Employer bias

*'..The international doctoral students are also faced with issues concerning language as Danish is a requirement in many jobs still. Often they discover this too late' (University of Aarhus, Denmark)*



# Internships

*'hot topic right now' (University of Helsinki)*

- Majority (86% ie 25 out of 29) UK mainland/international institutions have internship or placement opportunity
- Some are compulsory (part of funding award e.g., Newcastle University) others encouraged
- Often the case no formal strategy in place
- Practice varies from student sourcing their own internship independently to more focused/ personal provision and one-to-one help
- Students use careers service for support in identifying opportunities, making contact with organisations and application process

**'BBSRCBio DTP and ESRC funded DTP PGRs expected to complete an internship' (University of Bristol, UK)**

**'we are in the process of developing an internship program for graduate students where the focus will be on working outside of academia...' (University of Alberta, Canada)**

# Evaluation of Impact

- 89% evaluate/ monitor impact of careers provision
- Majority measure immediate impact and smaller no. conduct follow-up evaluation
- Variety of methods; student satisfaction surveys (online/hardcopy), focus groups, peer review, follow-up emails, unsolicited feedback.
- Occurred: immediately after event, during the session or after a period of time e.g.,
  - Washington use 6 monthly feedback approach
  - University of Nottingham use Career Service Evaluation Weeks

*'Graduate schools send out an e-evaluation. We sometimes use our own evaluation forms, but to avoid duplication we also use techniques like post-it feedback, or noting on a bulls-eye how helpful various activities were' (Newcastle University, UK)*

# Priority development/ collaboration areas identified

- International mobility
- Internships
- Options outside of academia
- Institutional strategy
- Career support/ funding opportunities
- Engaging/ communicating with doctoral research students
- Development of resources
- Professional development training

# Lessons learnt?

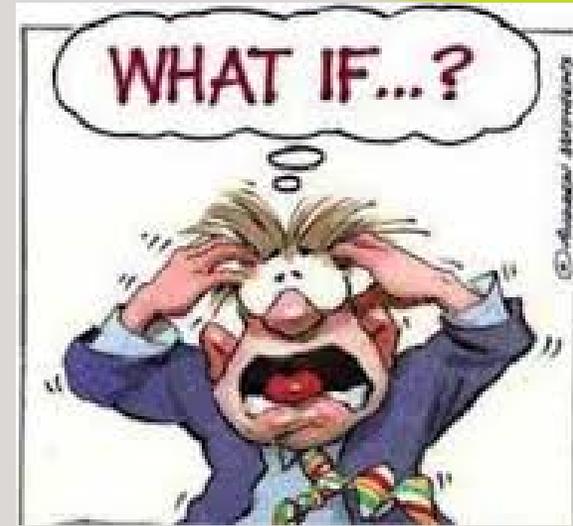
- Similar issues across institutions
- Resourcing has a major impact
- Must be supported by senior management

# Future plans

- Network / training event exploring good practice in collaboration with UK/international colleagues
  - 2 potential themes – international mobility and internships.
  - Spring/ early Summer 2017

# Exercise

- How does your practice compare?
- What are the issues of most concern re. this cohort at your institution?
- Are you reframing your practice with doctoral students?





**Any questions?**

# Reports:

- ‘Careers Provision for Doctoral Research Students: Summary of Good Practice in National and International Institutions’
- ‘Careers Provision for Doctoral Research Students: A survey of National and International Institutions:
  - Study 1: Survey of good practice in Ireland’
  - Study 2: A Global study of Good Practice’ (V.Ross)

Reports available for download:

[http://www.tcd.ie/Careers/resources/careers\\_provision\\_doctoral.php](http://www.tcd.ie/Careers/resources/careers_provision_doctoral.php)



**The AHECS Postgraduate Students Working Group** aims to share and benchmark good practice in relation to careers provision for postgraduate research students.

**Members:**

Dr Sharon Milner, Ulster University;  
Mary McNulty, University College Cork;  
Rebecca Boyd, Queens University Belfast,  
Orlaith Tunney, Trinity College Dublin;  
Elaine Kiely, University of Limerick;  
Naomh O'Connor, University College Dublin;  
Mark Cumisky, University College Dublin;  
Josephine Walsh, NUI Galway.

# 'A survey of good practice in careers provision for doctoral researchers across national and international institutions'

Dr Sharon Milner, Ulster University  
on Behalf of 'AHECS Postgraduate Students Working Group'

Vitae Conference 12-13<sup>th</sup> Sept 2016



Association of  
Higher Education  
Careers Services