



AGCAS

Researchers Matter

An update from the Research Students and Research Staff Task Group

The aim of this short quarterly publication is to provide an update on any news, resources, or practice that will be helpful for careers practitioners involved in supporting research students or research staff. Each edition will include a 'Focus on' section where we outline suggestions and examples of practice for a specific area of work with researchers.

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1. Academic job vacancies: a new resource

At the request of the task group, Jobs.ac.uk updated the analysis they did previously on academic job vacancies advertised on their website. This research represents an analysis of nearly 20000 jobs advertised in 2016 and 2017. Clearly, not all academic jobs are advertised through jobs.ac.uk and many roles will be made available through institutions' internal systems but it is a useful snapshot of the academic job market.

Of particular note:

- Fixed term contracts represent by far the majority of 'Research' and 'Teaching Fellow' roles
- Nearly 20% of 'Lecturer' roles are advertised at part-time: great flexibility for workers but perhaps indicative of instability in the market
- Jobs in 'Northern' institutions accounted for nearly 20% of all roles, though the 'Golden Triangle' of London, Oxford and Cambridge accounted for 37% (London/SE)
- 'Senior Teaching Fellow' roles are more likely to be permanent compared to the entry level 'Teaching Fellow' so there is some possibility of progression from the entry-level teaching fellow role.
- Reflecting funding priorities, it is unsurprising that 20% of all roles are in the 'Health and Medical' category.
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View the full report on our Task Group Resource section on the AGCAS website.

[Academic job vacancies: an analysis](#)

2. Review of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers

An independent review of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers has just reported. AGCAS contributed to the consultation during the review, and will do again as the recommendations are consulted on in the next few months. There are some interesting

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recommendations that may affect careers professionals if they are implemented, a few of which are highlighted below.

- There should be increased support for researcher independence – 20% of a researcher's time should be allowed for developing independent research and skills.
- Concordat signatories should prioritise a more comprehensive collection of researcher and research careers information.
- PIs have an obligation to encourage researchers to explore all career options, to manage expectations of an academic career, and to support researchers in whichever career path they choose.
- Employers will ensure their research staff have access to professional, independent and fair advice on career management, which considers career paths both inside and outside academia.

So collecting destination data, providing careers support for researchers, and equipping PIs to support the career development of their researchers are all areas where the expertise lies with HEI careers professionals. It is important therefore that we have a voice in this consultation and that we are prepared for the impact a revised Concordat could have on the expectations of our HEIs on what support we provide for researchers.

You can read the report of the review, and the response from the Concordat Strategy Group, at the link below.

[Review of the Concordat](#)

3. Task group workshop at national conference

The task group ran a workshop at this year's AGCAS Conference. The workshop - "Future-proofing PhDs: Supporting postgraduate researchers to find their fit" - considered how careers professionals can support postgraduate researchers in the context of the fourth industrial revolution. Participants were asked to discuss this using a SWOT analysis of postgraduate researchers. Strengths and opportunities identified related to their ability to work with large quantities of data, be comfortable with complexity and problem solving, their grit and resilience. However, some of the challenges/threats included possible naivety of the non-academic job market, potential hostility of supervisors of leaving academia or a risk they undersell their skills. The workshop then discussed examples of best practice to suggest how careers support for PGRs can help them to exploit these strengths and navigate these challenges. Slides from the workshop are available on the AGCAS website.

[Workshop A3 - AGCAS Conference](#)

4. AHECS Developing Future Ready Researchers

AHECS, the Irish equivalent of AGCAS, held an event in May on 'Developing Future Ready Researchers'. If you are looking for inspiration and new approaches on supporting the career development of researchers then you may get some ideas by looking through the presentations from this event. You can learn how one Australian university is supporting their researchers to develop their employability through placements and consultancy projects; get the Irish take on opportunities and challenges for mobility beyond academia; and hear from an industry/university partnership on how they incorporate employability development for their STEM PhD students.

The slides from the presentations and notes from some of the discussions are available on their wordpress site

5. Focus on: Working with PhD Supervisors

One of the biggest differences between working with Postgraduate Researchers as opposed to undergraduate students is that there is often no curriculum in which to embed careers education, advice and guidance activities. For PhD students, the structure of their programme is often determined by their meetings with their supervisor(s), making supervisors key stakeholders in supporting Postgraduate Researchers' career development.

As a result, PhD students often expect support for their career and professional development from their supervisors. So, how can we, as careers professional, influence, inform and support PhD supervisors to provide the relevant support? We share some ideas and examples below.

1. Produce resources to help PhD supervisors have career conversations with their students

PhD supervisors may not feel they are equipped to provide support and advice on the range of career options open to PhD students. It can be helpful to provide resources that PhD supervisors can use to have career conversations with their students. This could be in the form of a leaflet, web pages, or booklets. Importantly, these need to be widely shared or publicised to PhD supervisors. There are examples below.

2. Use data to inform PhD supervisors about current environment for PhD students

PhD supervisors are usually very busy academic staff so they will not always be aware of the factors that are influencing the career development or options of their PhD students. Providing an overview of relevant data can help them to understand some of the challenges and expectations of their students, as well as to stimulate them to act on the data by supporting their students more effectively. Data it can be useful to share includes:

Destinations of Leavers of Higher Education (DLHE): Share DLHE (6 months after graduation) and where possible longitudinal DLHE data (3.5 years after graduation) on PhD graduates with relevant academic staff, e.g. Head of Graduate Schools, PGR Administrators, doctoral training centre managers. The data can help academic staff to see that the academic career route is not the typical career destination of PhD graduates and emphasise the growing importance of supporting students to explore career options. *(Note: Obviously DLHE is now changing to the Graduate Outcomes Survey so we will have a lag period before we get new data but if you've not done it already, share your latest DLHE data).*

Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES): Although many academic staff will be aware of this data, they may not have focused on the professional development or career aspects of the survey. The survey asks PGRs to indicate their career intentions chosen from a range of options. Showing this data to PhD supervisors can be really useful as it emphasises 1) the need to manage PGRs' expectations where intention towards academic careers are high, and 2) that not all PhD students want an academic job, showing the importance of interventions to help them explore other options.
[PRES 2018 national results](#)

Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS) and Principal Investigator and Research Leaders Survey (PIRLS): The results of these surveys can give an insight into career expectations or researchers (and mismatch with actual career outcomes data); engagement with and interest in career development; and research leaders' confidence in supporting researchers with their career development. If your institution takes part in these surveys the data will

probably sit with your Researcher Development Department, or you can use the national results compiled by Vitae.

[CROS and PIRLS national results](#)

Career outcomes and employer views research: When appropriate, you could share highlights or an overview of surveys or reports on long-term researcher destinations or employer views of researchers, e.g. Vitae 'What do research staff do?' and UKRI 'Impact of doctoral careers'. As for the first destination information, this will give supervisors a broader overview of PhD graduates longer term career outcomes, and may increase their confidence in discussing career options beyond an academic career with their PhD students.

[What do research staff do?](#)

[Impact of doctoral careers](#)

3. Initiate or take opportunities to meet with PhD supervisors

We all know that building good relationships is often key to influencing. Looking for opportunities to network with and talk to PhD supervisors is a great way of building your profile so you can start to have more influence.

- Training for new or established PhD supervisors will happen in some form at all institutions. Investigate who provides supervisor training in your institution so that you can feed into it, i.e. is the Graduate School, Doctoral College or someone else?
- Invite selected PhD supervisors to attend some of your PhD workshops or events to help increase their understanding of what you do.
- Look for opportunities to contribute to, or attend, relevant university committees, such as research training committees.

4. Arrange for formal career development planning to be part of the PhD student review process, or written into code of practice for PhD students

Aim to understand the formal review and recording process for PhD students in your institution. This can vary by discipline. There may already be a process where students have to reflect on and record their professional development activities. Look for opportunities to influence this and encourage inclusion of formal conversations about career. Consider developing a short resource which PhD supervisors could use to have formal career conversations.

Find out what your university policies are for PhD students. If there is a code of practice, does it cover career and professional development and if so, what does it say? Who is responsible for producing this? Consider offering to write something on career and professional development for any relevant policies / documents.

Examples of Practice

Web pages on Careers Service website aimed at PhD supervisors (University of Edinburgh).

This covers the support the Careers Service can provide for PhD students, as well as suggestions of how the PhD supervisor can support their students. There is advice on helping a PhD student to develop an academic career; to explore non-academic career options; and on applications and interviews.

[Advice for PhD Supervisors](#)

A 'Careers Guide for Doctoral Supervisors' (University of Bath). This outlines the support the Careers Service can provide for PhD students

[Careers Guide](#)

Careers Service contributed to revised Code of Practice for Supervisors and Research Students (University of Edinburgh). They wrote a short paragraph on professional development and career support (see section 6.3.2). In addition, the section on annual progression reviews was adapted to include an expectation that these will also include discussion of professional and career development.

*Annual progression reviews provide a formal record of how the research project and thesis are going and recognition of student achievements. They also **offer a structured opportunity to discuss students' professional development and career aims**, and identify any training needs.*

[Code of Practice](#)

If you would like to share any examples of good practice in working with PhD supervisors then please contact the Chair of the Research Students and Research Staff Task Group.

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