How to use the Wellbeing and mental health lens

Researchers may wish to use this lens to:

- identify how wellbeing and mental health literacy can support their career and professional development as a researcher
- identify how the skills and attributes they have developed through research can contribute to or underpin their development in relation to wellbeing and mental health
- select areas that they want to develop to build good wellbeing and mental health, which can be used to inform their development reviews
- provide a language to evidence the transferability of their skills and attributes in relation to wellbeing and mental health, which can be used for example, in applications or job interviews

Researcher developers may wish to use this lens to:

- demonstrate to researchers and other stakeholders how good wellbeing and mental health can contribute towards the overall professional development of researchers
- enable researchers to recognise the learning they have acquired through wellbeing and mental health activities and highlight the transferability of these abilities
- highlight personal development needs, inform personal development review discussions and create action plans
- strategically align wellbeing and mental health learning and development provision around the lens
- demonstrate to researchers and other stakeholders how good wellbeing and mental health can contribute towards the overall happiness and satisfaction of researchers

Institutions may wish to use this lens to:

- improve research culture
- build institutional capacity
- develop supportive researcher communities
- enable researchers to establish positive wellbeing practices
- scrutinise institutional practice and the implications of policy decisions on wellbeing and mental health
- provide a framework for induction, to include signposting to wellbeing and mental health support, for all research staff including postgraduate researchers

Development of the Wellbeing and mental health lens

This lens has been developed as part of the Office for Students Catalyst funded project led by University of Portsmouth to support the wellbeing and mental health of postgraduate researchers. It has been co-created with the researcher development community through iterative engagement and consultation of sector experts to reflect the breadth and depth of different institutional contexts across the research landscape.

A note on language

In the context of wellbeing and mental health it is particularly important to be mindful of the language used to communicate support and advice. In the development of this lens, much consideration has been given to the use of terminology in relation to the individual and systemic challenges. Perseverance and resilience are terms often used when considering how an individual might build their own skillset in relation to mental health. This type of language can be problematic, putting the onus on the individual rather than focussing on more collaborative terms, for example, around how the culture of an organisation can help to develop a supportive environment for positive wellbeing and mental health.

Support and resources

Further information around wellbeing and mental health can be found on the following Vitae webpages:

Main wellbeing and mental health page: **www.vitae.ac.uk/wellbeing-and-mental-health**
Mental Health Awareness Week page: **www.vitae.ac.uk/mental-health-awareness-week**
Catalyst Fund project resources: **www.vitae.ac.uk/catalyst-fund-project-resources**

Exploring wellbeing and mental health and associated support services for postgraduate researchers report, May 2018
www.vitae.ac.uk/HEFCE-PGR-mental-health-Report

Vitae Researcher Wellbeing and Mental Health leaflet: **www.vitae.ac.uk/wellbeing-and-mental-health-leaflet**

To protect and maintain the integrity of the Vitae Researcher Development Framework (RDF) and the Researcher Development Statement (RDS)[6] and to ensure a consistent approach to the development of lenses on the RDF, anyone wishing to create a lens on the RDF should seek permission from Vitae, and must adhere to the RDF conditions of use[7]. Enquiries regarding the development of a lens on the RDF should be directed to **rdf@vitae.ac.uk**

For further information about the range of Vitae activities go to **www.vitae.ac.uk** or contact **website@vitae.ac.uk**

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6. www.vitae.ac.uk/rds
7. www.vitae.ac.uk/rdfconditionsofuse

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Wellbeing and mental health lens on the Vitae Researcher Development Framework (RDF)

Overview

The Vitae Researcher Development Framework (RDF) underpins an innovative and globally recognised approach to developing world-class researchers. The framework has been developed by and for researchers working in higher education as an aid to planning, promoting and enhancing professional and career development. It articulates the knowledge, behaviours and attributes of successful researchers and encourages all researchers to realise their potential. This is one of a series of lenses on the Vitae Researcher Development Framework.

For further information visit **www.vitae.ac.uk/rdf**

Supporting materials relating to this lens are available at **www.vitae.ac.uk/rdflenses**

Purpose of a lens

Using the Vitae Researcher Development Framework, the Wellbeing and mental health lens provides an overview of the key attitudes and behaviours recommended for researchers to positive wellbeing and mental health. This lens outlines those descriptors which are most central to creating a healthy environment and culture in order to protect both the mental health of others and the individual researchers own wellbeing.

Context

To produce world-class research, we must provide a healthy and supportive research environment that allows researchers to flourish. Yet, postgraduate researchers are more at risk of having or developing a common psychiatric disorder, such as anxiety, than the general population.[1]

In the 2019 PRES survey[2] a revised set of questions enabled direct comparison of levels of wellbeing among postgraduate researchers with those of undergraduate students and the general population in the UK. Analysis of the results found that the wellbeing levels of postgraduate researchers are "fairly low", below those of the general population. They also reported feelings of anxiety at a significantly higher level than undergraduates.

There appears to be an unhealthy expectation that the PhD experience should be difficult and stressful, and this alongside a sense of isolation and imposter syndrome can lead to an unhealthy working culture that impacts on mental health.

Many of these issues appear to be embedded in wider research culture. A report commissioned by Wellcome[3] indicated that poor research culture is leading to stress, anxiety and mental health problems. In their online survey of over 4000 researchers, just over half had sought, or have wanted to seek, professional help for depression or anxiety. The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers[4] places a responsibility on institutions to promote good wellbeing and mental health and on managers of researchers to promote a healthy working environment that supports researchers' wellbeing and mental health.

Describing wellbeing and mental health

As defined by the World Health Organisation (2018):[5]

"Mental health is a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community."

1. Full link to report is: www.vitae.ac.uk/HEFCE-PGR-mental-health-Report
2. www.advance-he.ac.uk/reports-publications-and-resources/postgraduate-research-experience-survey-pres
3. www.wellcome.ac.uk/reports/what-researchers-think-about-research-culture
4. www.vitae.ac.uk/concordat
5. www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response

Vitae Researcher Development Framework (RDF)

Wellbeing and mental health lens

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Attitude:
Respects the inclusive and collegial manner in which researchers conduct relationships within and beyond academia

Respects individual difference and diversity

Behaviour:
Actively works in an inclusive, respectful and constructive way with colleagues, stakeholders and research users

Is approachable, patient and diplomatic

Recognises and acknowledges the contribution of others and and their own part in team success

Supervises, mentors and develops the potential of less experienced researchers and colleagues through support and advice

Empathises, respects others' needs and standpoints

Leads, motivates and influences where appropriate

Listens to other points of view and needs of colleagues

Attitude:
Understands the implications that high levels of rejection in terms of academic publishing and other research dissemination methods may have on wellbeing and mental health

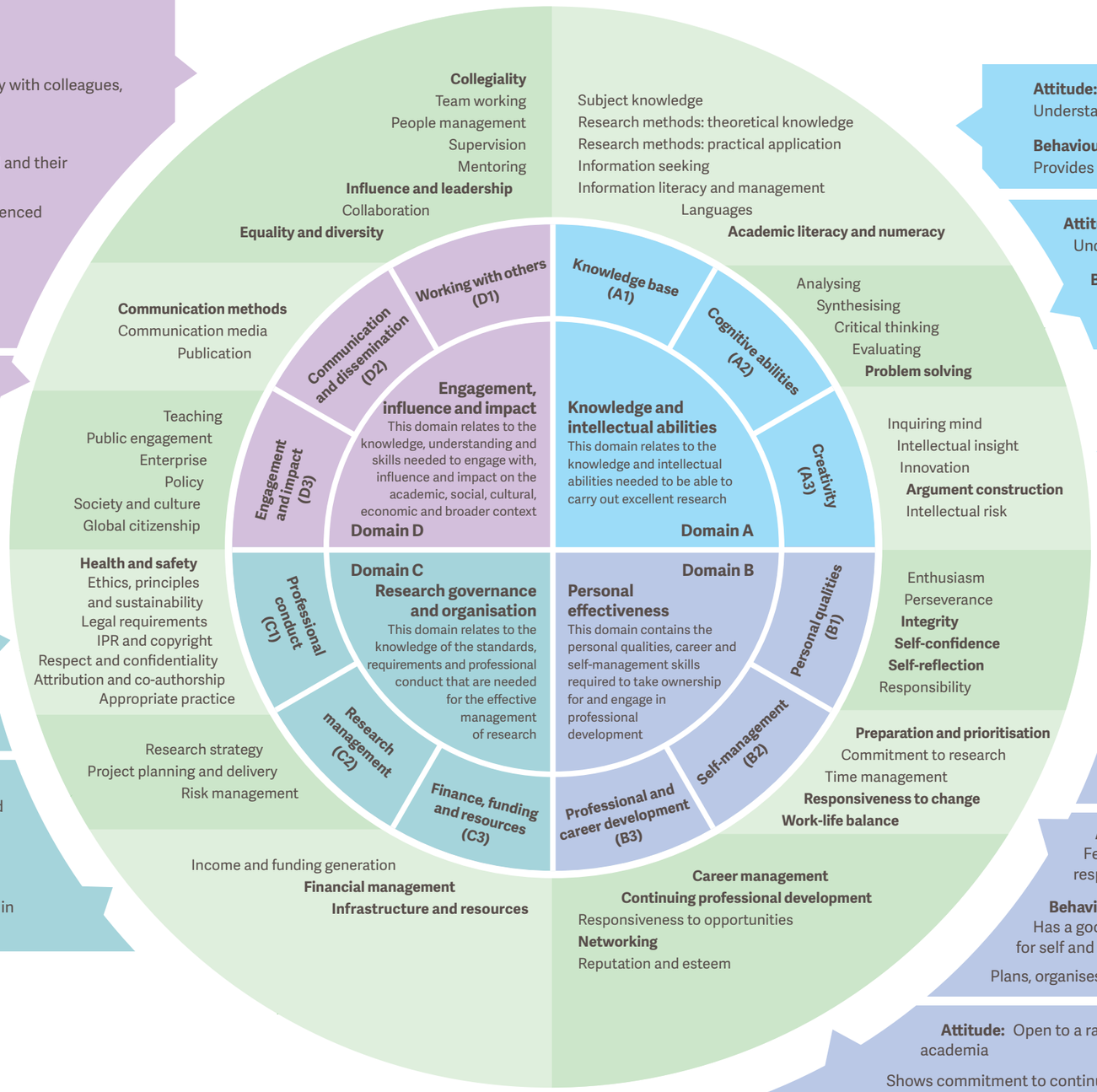
Behaviour:
Recognises pressures associated with communication/ dissemination and seeks and offers support

Attitude:
Understands the importance of maintaining good mental health

Behaviour:
Demonstrates good practice around mental health and encourages this in others

Attitude:
Understands the personal and financial commitment involved in undertaking postgraduate research, and and the potential impact of personal finances on wellbeing and mental health

Behaviour:
Actively considers the personal and financial cost of projects in decision making



Attitude:
Understands and accepts own and others' strengths and weaknesses

Behaviour:
Provides and seeks support as appropriate

Attitude:
Understands the personal and practical costs of research projects

Behaviour:
Can critically evaluate own workload, schedule and goals, and balance work alongside personal needs

Attitude:
Has confidence in being able to defend research outcomes constructively

Behaviour:
Recognises that, whether defending own work or criticising others', criticism of research should not be personal criticism

Attitude:
Has a clear view of personal integrity

Is self-reflective, seeks ways to improve performance without being too harsh on themselves

Feels confident in themselves and their abilities

Behaviour:
Takes responsibility for self and others

Creates a culture which allows others to become more confident

Attitude:
Feels comfortable with change and able to be flexible and responsive

Behaviour:
Has a good awareness of and is able to achieve work-life balance both for self and colleagues.

Plans, organises, prioritises and conducts research in proactive and realistic way

Attitude: Open to a range of future career options and sees value in work beyond academia

Shows commitment to continuing professional development and enhancing employability

Behaviour: Takes ownership of and manages career and professional development

Maintains and develops relevant skill set and experience in preparation for a wide range of opportunities within and beyond academia

Actively networks for professional and career purposes and seeks to enhance research reputation and esteem

Boxed text:
Summary statements have been adapted from the Vitae Researcher Development Statement **www.vitae.ac.uk/rds** in consultation with expert sector groups

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