



Understanding the experience of postgraduate researchers using the Vitae Researcher Development Framework at UK Universities

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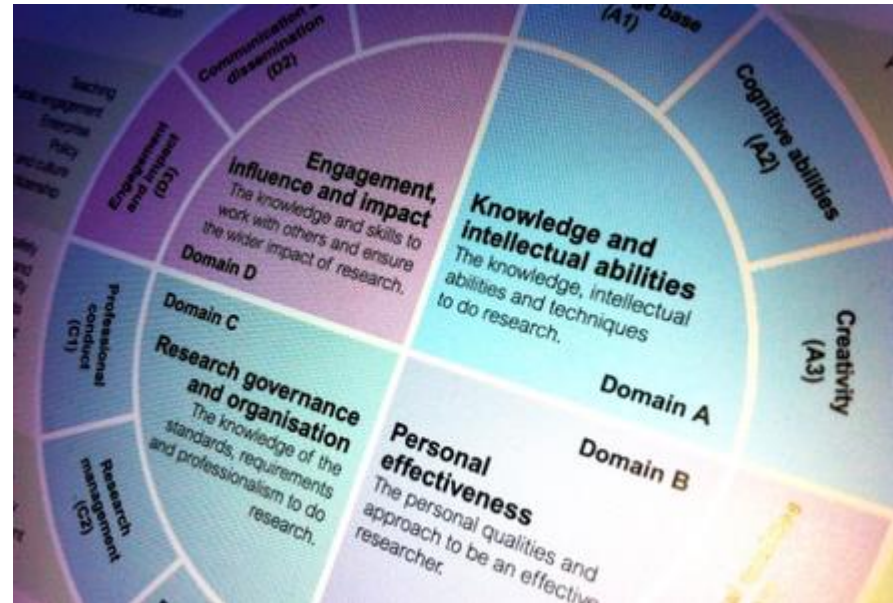
Introduction



- Project undertaken by Saumya Ranjan Nath during a 9-month placement as a Research Assistant at Vitae as part of the CHASE Placement Scheme.
- [CHASE Doctoral Training Partnership](#) (DTP) is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)
- Saumya's doctoral research focuses on the Environmental History of an indigenous community in eastern India.
- The Vitae placement provided the opportunity to broaden and apply research skills and aptitude in a wider policy-making context in the UK.
- The placement facilitated the building of networks and connections for long term research career development.
- The following slides provide a preview summary of the project so far. A full report and case studies will be published later this year.

Aims and Objectives

- To understand the adoption and use of the Vitae RDF by postgraduate researchers (PGRs) as a career and professional development tool.
- To understand the experiences and perceptions of RDF users



[Vitae Research Development Framework \(RDF\)](#)

Research questions:

How are PGRs introduced to the RDF at the beginning of their PhD?

What is PGRs' experience of using the RDF?

What is the nature and scope of institutional support received by PGRs in using the RDF?

Context



- Researchers make an important contribution to the UK economy and Post Graduate Researchers (PGR) are the future contributors to that vision.
- Vitae has been one of the global leaders in supporting the professional development of researchers including PGRs, working with institutions as they strive for research excellence, innovation and impact.
- The Researcher Development Framework (RDF), a self-assessment and career development tool for researchers, was developed by Vitae in 2009
- The RDF has been adopted by universities in UK with the aim to positively transform the landscape of professional development for researchers
- The framework is aligned with UK's commitment to the development of world-class researchers who are critical to economic success, addressing major global challenges, and building a leading knowledge economy
- There was a lack of evidence about how PGRs make use of the RDF and its impact on them within an institutional context.

Research methodology

- **Systematic literature review** to analyse and understand institutional protocols or policies around using the RDF. This contributed to the contextualisation or background understanding of the project and was helpful in limiting the scope of the research.
- **Call for participation of PGRs**
- **Screening Survey** ensured different institutional, disciplinary and national PGR backgrounds and levels of experience of using the RDF
- **Semi-structured online F2F interviews** provided flexibility and adjustment and allowed the PGR respondent to share information openly.
- **Thematic analysis** helped to identify and analyse patterns or themes from the qualitative interview data.
- **Case Studies and methodology** to be published later this year

Key Messages

- PGRs were introduced to the RDF during the PhD induction process
- There was limited discussion about why the RDF should be used by PGRs and how it would make their experience more meaningful
- Learning about the RDF on institutional websites could be challenging

Most PGRs:

- found the RDF self-explanatory, concise and easy to understand
- prefer using the RDF Planner to the RDF Manual
- used the RDF at the beginning of their PhD and not so much in later stages
- mentioned that their peers are unaware of the RDF
- experienced limited institutional and supervisory support, guidance and mentoring
- Felt that explaining the purpose of RDF and its relation to the PhD and career development during induction is a positive step in the right direction along with long term support and mentoring

Recommendations

For institutions

- Introduce the RDF during PhD induction and follow up with PGRs throughout the doctorate
- Provide information and training on the RDF to PGRs and their supervisors to encourage its use among PGRs
- Consider facilitating online and offline spaces for PGRs to engage in peer support in relation to career and professional development

For Vitae and the Vitae Member community

- Expand online RDF resources that signpost its relevance for PGR career development
- Further develop PGR awareness and recognition of the RDF in collaboration with institutions

For the wider sector

- Encourage academic staff to engage with researcher career development frameworks and tools to develop and support greater PGR engagement

For doctoral researchers

- PGRs can form and be part of peer groups (both online and offline) to discuss and support each other on career and professional development.