EPSRC funding for Enterprise and Entrepreneurship  
transferable skills training for researchers

Context

In 2007, EPSRC provided £1.4M of funding to 28 organisations to support training and course development in the area of entrepreneurship with the aim of increasing awareness and encouraging innovative approaches to the exploitation of research. This was in response to ministerial speeches and the Warry Report\(^1\) recommendation that ‘Research Councils should … encourage universities to make enterprise training widely available for researchers in all disciplines’. In 2008, this funding was increased to £2.4M across 51 organisations.

> “The world is evolving very quickly and we must be able to unlock British talent and support economic growth through innovation as never before.”
> John Denham, HE Speech at the Wellcome Collection, London, Feb 29th 2008

Organisations in receipt of these funds were asked to include details of its use in their annual Roberts Skills Funding report and in the Vitae Database of Practice\(^2\). This document provides a brief summary of the main messages from the 2008 reporting, based on 47 reports and with reference to the Database of Practice.

Summary

Reports from most institutions indicate that the EPSRC money has been used appropriately and to good effect, and that the increased provision of enterprise and entrepreneurship training has led to a concomitant increase in interest and demand for training on the part of researchers. A very small number of institutions had not spent the money by the time of reporting (five mentioned a delay in course provision); this was stated to be because of a desire to plan carefully how to put it to best strategic use.

The funding was used to initiate or build on: training courses or workshops in entrepreneurial or business skills, business plan or ideas competitions, online resource provision, placement schemes with industry or business, and mentoring systems. At the time of writing, the Vitae Database of Practice had 78 entries under Enterprise and Innovation related practices, up from 55 at the same time last year. Eighteen of the reports referred to the sharing of good practice or the sharing of provision between institutions, with sharing of provision being a very strong theme for many HEIs. Social enterprise is an emerging theme, being mentioned in seven of the reports.

Roberts payments are for transferable skills training, applicable to a range of environments including the business environment. We note that one institution, not in

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\(^1\) Warry Report: ‘Increasing the Economic Impact of Research Councils’  

\(^2\) The Vitae Database of Practice was developed to allow institutions and individuals to share details of their practices in relation to the provision of skills and career development for researchers. It can be found at http://www.vitae.ac.uk/policy-practice/34837/Database-of-practice.html
receipt of additional EPSRC funds, nevertheless included a paragraph in their report on the use of Robert payments entitled ‘Entrepreneurship Innovation and Business’.

Main messages

**Enterprise/entrepreneurship**

A commitment to enterprise and entrepreneurship was already embedded in the strategic plans of many Higher Education Institutions, or has been explicitly added recently. This being the case, 14 HEIs reported that they had some provision for training in enterprise in place prior to the commencement of the EPSRC funding. However, the additional funding from EPSRC enabled an expansion of these activities. One HEI noted that the EPSRC funding stimulated new training provision in this area.

Provision of enterprise training varies with the size of the institutions and level of funding provided. Some HEIs have introduced an impressive and extensive range of entrepreneurial skills training opportunities and programmes. These cover such areas as intellectual property and patents, recognising opportunities, networking, how to start a business or spin-out company, creativity, case studies of successful entrepreneurs, entrepreneurial strategy, market opportunities and cycles, entrepreneurial finance, business planning and marketing. The training took various forms, from websites, podcasts, business games, seminars and workshops, to special events, intensive residential courses, mentoring schemes and placements. Two institutions used some of the funds to employ new staff to oversee the training strategy and implementation.
Range of provision:

1. **Workshop-based initiatives.** Workshop- or seminar-based initiatives were a particularly popular approach, being mentioned in 29 of the reports. Provision ranged from one or two short workshops, to whole new enterprise/entrepreneurship modules. See Database of Practice numbers 42, 319, 321, 323, 402, 412, 467, 468, 477, 495, 498, 509, 536, 548, 567, 626, 728, 743, 744.

   “I thought it would be valuable to let you know how incredibly useful I found this course. Even though I’ve had previous industrial experience, I nevertheless learnt a great deal about enterprise and innovation in an academic context, and the course content has immediate relevance to the research projects I’m involved in.”

2. **Intensive training courses.** Mentioned in 18 reports, these courses covered such topics as enterprise, commercial awareness, business skills, and building relationships with industry. The majority were residential, and some culminated in a business-plan competition. Universities are collaborating to provide regional training courses. See Database of Practice numbers 9, 555, 597, 620, 683, 728.

3. **Competitions and interactive challenges.** Seven reports detailed business ideas/plan competitions, and five institutions encouraged intrapreneurship by running open competitions for the best ideas for use of the funding. See Database of Practice numbers 452, 468, 652, 695.

   “The regional university business plan competition Blueprint is pivotal to the enterprise activity of all 5 North East universities.” (DOP 468)

4. **Online resources.** Online videos, podcasts, case studies and training materials were provided by individual HEIs. A consortium of HEIs has commissioned Epigeum to produce a series of 3 e-module enterprise resources in response to the EPSRC funding, with more HEIs having signed up for these modules. 14 reports mentioned online provision.

5. **Placements.** Placements were organised at a Small Enterprise Research Unit. Short visits to business and industrial institutions and start-up or spin-out companies were also arranged. Three reports mentioned placements. See Database of Practice numbers 60, 316.

6. **Mentoring and provision of support for enterprising projects.** Support was given in the form of enterprise scholarships to enable researchers to investigate the commercial potential of their own research, or to develop their ideas into businesses. Support from business mentors was also reported, along with input from local entrepreneurs and previous graduates of HEIs that have successfully started a business or spin-out company. 11 reports mentioned this form of provision.

7. **Other.** Other practices included a research student-led Enterprise society, the hosting of a conference on wealth generation from research and innovation, the purchase of magazine subscriptions and books for libraries, and the use of ‘Xing!’ or ‘Yomp’ Business development games.
Intrapreneurship

In April 2007, in response to the first round of EPSRC enterprise funding, a workshop took place to explore current and future provision of enterprise skills development. As a result of this workshop, a collaboration of nine higher education institutions and CRAC, in association with Vitae, developed a project on ‘Enterprise at work – exploring intrapreneurship in researcher development’. The results of this project have been published as a report, which is available on the Vitae website. The report contains suggestions and case studies, and some of the recommendations are listed below.

‘Universities should consider allocating a proportion of funding for enterprise activities to specifically support the development of intrapreneurial capabilities.’

‘Incorporating an institutional strategic vision to embed intrapreneurial activities would help to raise the profile, awareness and understanding of this set of capabilities, acknowledging and enhancing both the effectiveness of researchers themselves in their current roles and supporting the development of ‘the next generation of world-class researchers’.’

‘Culture and practice within institutions could provide more opportunities for researchers to suggest improvements that could be made to the workplace, and universities could provide more processes and mechanisms to support the implementation of these ideas.’

Within the Roberts reporting for 2007-2008, a number of institutions made reference to practices that develop intrapreneurial culture: four institutions reported that they ran competitions for Roberts funding “to develop innovative initiatives for the development of researchers under sections C-G of the Joint Skills Statement,” thus encouraging intrapreneurship in the use of Roberts funding. Another HEI runs a similar scheme whereby researchers can bid for EPSRC money for enterprise skills development.

See Database of Practice numbers 261, 414, 547, 585, 639, 652, 681, 783.

“Early indications from researchers’ web-based feedback on the entrepreneurship programmes have described them as valuable, well-planned and productive.”

“The feedback from participants was extremely positive and we will seek to integrate entrepreneurial and intrapreneurial elements into our future programmes”

Link to download the report - http://www.vitae.ac.uk/CMS/files/1.Intra%20Report_Final_33.pdf
Next steps

Following on from the first collaborative project on intrapreneurship, a consortium of eight HEIs and CRAC, in association with Vitae, met in January to initiate a second phase of the project, focussing on developing practice. The project is exploring how a focus on intrapreneurial capabilities will enable researchers to be more effective in a range of activities, and building a knowledge base of intrapreneurial attributes.

It has been proposed that the dissemination of the results of the project will be through a practice-sharing workshop at the Vitae conference in Sept 2009, the production of a summary publication to be launched at the Roberts Forum in Jan 2010, and regional or national events in the spring of next year.

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12th March 2009