

The Professional & Higher Partnership Ltd

# **Analysis of university reports on career development and transferable skills training (Roberts) payments**

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## **Executive summary**

This report aims to inform the panel about progress by universities in implementing skills-related recommendations of the 2002 Report of Sir Gareth Roberts' Review *SET for Success*. It draws on information from the most recent annual reports from research organisations on the use of career development and transferable skills training (Roberts) payments (from November 2009) and on initial outline strategies for use of these funds (November 2004).

The panel requested that the report examine a sample of 2009 annual reports and compare them with outline strategies from the same organisations in order to comment (separately on postgraduate researchers and research staff where appropriate) on:

- distance travelled 2004–09;
- performance across the sector;
- any patterns in implementation;
- activators and barriers;
- views of research organisations in 2009 regarding sustainability.

The **sample** consists of 95 research organisations across the spectrum of Roberts payment levels (57% research-led universities, 24% teaching-led universities, 11% research institutes and 8% specialist HEIs). Annual reporting formats do not permit direct mapping of 2009 information against 2004 data and interpretation has been duly cautious.

**2004 reports** reflected a range of institutional **starting points** and **priorities** across all types of research organisations (RO). For example, some organisations reported a close alignment between the aims of the Roberts agenda and their institutional priorities. A greater number (mostly research-led universities) evidenced a culture of researcher development in parts of the RO. Strategic consideration of the Roberts agenda was at an early stage for many ROs, particularly with regard to research staff (RS), where internal and external drivers were weaker. Outline strategies revealed aims and motivations including compliance, enhancement, impact, and strategic integration. The majority of ROs planned largely separate provision for PGR and RS.

Reports indicated a range of **existing provision for PGR** where:

- around one in ten described extensive, structured provision for transferable skills training that presaged the Roberts recommendations;
- over four-fifths evidenced varying degrees of transferable skills provision, available to certain groups;<sup>1</sup>
- fewer than 10% lacked detail on, or reported no prior provision of, transferable skills.

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<sup>1</sup> In larger ROs these had grown in an unplanned and generally unco-ordinated way in different departments. Modes of training were somewhat limited.

In contrast, reports suggested **existing provision for RS** where:

- around one in fifteen evidenced broad foundations of provision and processes;
- a quarter reported some existing provision tailored to research staff needs, but access to appropriate training opportunities was usually limited and uptake low;
- a further one-third solely offered RS access to general staff training opportunities;
- one-third gave no details of provision for research staff.

Most ROs' response to Roberts funding prioritised rapid expansion of training opportunities to PGR. Organisations with small Roberts allocations showed the greatest variety in their aspirations for researcher development. The majority of reports offer little detail with regard to RS strategy and some suggest a less secure understanding of requirements in respect of RS. **2009 reports** showed a high degree of consistency between outline plans and direction travelled. Progress was more advanced with regard to postgraduate researchers, consistent with the lower base for research staff in 2004. Researcher development provision in 2009 showed a strong correlation with the extent of an RO's existing provision and degree of co-ordinated planning in 2004. Reports indicated widespread availability of transferable skills opportunities (and processes supporting integration with RDPs) available to postgraduate researchers both research-council and non-research council funded. They also reported substantial growth in provision aimed at research staff.

2009 reporting suggested that, for **PGR**:

- extensive, structured provision was indicated by three-quarters of ROs;
- partial provision<sup>2</sup> was indicated in almost all the remaining quarter.

While for **RS**:

- extensive, structured provision was indicated by more than one in three ROs;
- one in five evidenced some structured, tailored support for research staff;
- fewer than one-fifth only reported access to general staff training;
- around one-fifth of reports lacked detail about RS provision.

Many 2009 reports evidenced high **quality opportunities** for PGR and RS; growing expertise and openness to sharing practice leading to the spread of more effective practice across considerable parts of the sector. Innovation was increasingly linked to cost-effectiveness. **Uptake** of opportunities made better progress among PGR than RS.

A number of possible activators and barriers to progress are identified, relating to strategic positioning, research or learning environment/culture, and processes followed. Other reported barriers include cost, and diversity of researcher needs. Embedding of the agenda in research organisations was reported as a concern by some organisations.

In late 2009, ROs' views on the sustainability of the researcher development agenda had a number of themes: widespread belief that institutions recognised the importance

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<sup>2</sup> which lacked evidence of provision of, and/or access to, a comprehensive menu of transferable skills opportunities.

of researcher development in contributing to overall strategy; widespread uncertainty and some pessimism, however, about the extent institutions might compensate for reductions in Roberts payments; much evidence of sustainable delivery methods and other cost-efficiencies being implemented; relatively few references to future alternative sources of funding. In the illustrations given by institutions of how they were adapting for a sustainable future, there were indications that: i) some institutions' commitment to research staff development appears less secure; ii) as synergies are sought with other partners within (and occasionally beyond) institutions, the agenda is evolving such that the gap between the broad Roberts vision of transferable and career development skills for all early career researchers and actual practice may widen.

## **Key issues**

### **Distance travelled 2004—2009**

In most ROs, there was a 'step change' in provision over the period, in terms of quantity, range and quality of provision.

As regards **provision of opportunities**, reports indicated:

- a considerable growth in development opportunities for researchers and flexibility in how these are delivered;
- a wider range of transferable skills being covered (as measured against the *Joint Skills Statement* (JSS));
- greater use of planning self-development and tracking progress/achievements (e.g. through training logs and appraisals);
- much improved opportunities for skills development for careers in academia;
- significant growth in specialist careers provision for researchers.

As regards **quality enhancement**, reports indicated:

- better **embedding** of broader skills in research degree programme processes;
- a large growth in central **co-ordination** of researcher development provision;
- increased **researcher 'ownership'**, e.g. through involvement in planning programmes, researcher-led activity;
- increased **collaboration and practice-sharing** facilitated via UK GRAD (PGR) then Vitae (both) resulting in widespread dissemination of good practice and innovation;
- greater **capacity** and expertise within ROs for development and delivery of RD programmes and substantial commitment and enthusiasm from those involved;
- a general **culture of enhancement**: fewer than 10% of ROs reporting in 2009 show provision little changed in quantity/quality from 2004.

Overall, the JSS appeared to be an important driver still, but more ROs were seeking to integrate institutional strategies/frameworks with 'next generation' frameworks.

### **2009 reports – observations and challenges**

#### ***Embedding the Roberts agenda***

- Efficiency and cost-effectiveness is now a prominent driver;
- More institutions are aiming to embed provision in faculties rather than to centralise;
- Embedding researcher development in HR practices (research staff) is improved but somewhat patchy;
- Cultural differences between and across HEIs make for wide range of responses by academic staff to researcher development;
- It remains more challenging to engage researchers and their managers in skills provision perceived to have less immediate relevance to academic endeavour (particularly research staff and their managers).



### ***Nature of provision***

- Reports suggest a strong focus on development for short-term/medium-term objectives: successful completion of doctorate (PGR) and more effective contribution in current role (RS);
- Developing transferable skills for a range of careers is a subsidiary focus for many ROs and those ROs that systematically seek employer input are in the minority;
- Researcher-led activity is an increasingly popular and important plank of provision across all types of RO;
- Opportunities related to knowledge exchange, public engagement and enterprise are growing in most ROs;
- Innovative approaches to researcher development generally originate at HEIs with substantial Roberts allocations and 'mature' training programmes. Most ROs with lower Roberts funding provide a less varied menu of development opportunities.

### ***Impact***

- The majority of universities and colleges are conducting evaluation in greater depth, using the Rugby Team Impact Framework;
- Evaluations conducted by some institutions with larger Roberts allocations are starting to report results showing positive evidence of impacts on researcher development.

### ***Role of Roberts funding***

This comparison of ROs' 2004 and 2009 reports suggests that Roberts funding:

- focused institutions on resource management for researcher development;
- stimulated ROs to increase provision for all types of researchers regardless of sponsor;
- enabled the co-ordination of devolved provision across larger ROs and thus accelerated the spread of effective programmes and intra-university collaborations;
- enabled investment in efficient and cost-effective systems for managing training provision;
- enabled timely introduction of PGR training needs identification and PDP;
- stimulated innovation and effective practice in researcher development;
- enabled effective practice- and provision-sharing across the sector;
- supported ROs to become more outward-facing (introduced a broader mix of training providers and perspectives; broadened employer engagement);
- encouraged some smaller ROs to engage more fully with the Roberts agenda;
- supported the introduction of the revised Concordat.

## **Sustainability**

ROs' 2009 reports indicated that:

- few are optimistic about their organisation's level of financial commitment to researcher development post 2011;
- enabling factors are embedded processes and practices (PGR), training capacity building, growing researcher-to-researcher support, investment in sustainable online provision, processes and resources;
- alignment of researcher development with other institutional agendas (employability, enterprise, learning and teaching, etc) and DTCs is likely to lead researcher development down diverging, and possibly narrower, paths across and within institutions;
- career development support, and other provision less clearly linked to research priorities, may be vulnerable in some ROs, and may disproportionately affect research staff progress.

## **Overview of process and data**

This report informs the independent panel of progress by universities in implementing skills-related recommendations of the 2002 Report of Sir Gareth Roberts' Review *SET for Success*. It draws on information from the most recent annual reports from research organisations on the use of career development and transferable skills training (Roberts) payments (November 2009) and on initial outline strategies for use of these funds (November 2004). Its objective is to examine a sample of 2009 annual reports and compare them with outline strategies from the same organisations in order to comment on: distance travelled 2004–09; performance across the sector; any patterns in implementation; activators and barriers; views of research organisations in 2009 regarding sustainability, commenting separately on postgraduate researchers and research staff where appropriate.

The sample consists of research organisations across a wide band of Roberts payment levels. Those selected are organisations who both i) provided sufficiently detailed returns to RCUK in 2004 and 2009 and ii) received allocations of over £2K in 2009. Composition of the sample of 95 organisations (from a possible total of 170) is shown in the table below.

<b>Payment level</b>	<b>No. ROs in sample</b>	<b>% of ROs at payment level</b>
Over £1M	5	100%
£500K–£1M	9	100%
£100K–£500K	29	100%
£50K–£100K	14	88%
£10K–£50K	26	62%
£1K–£10K	12	33%
Less than £1K	nil	0%
Total	95	n/a

The sample is somewhat weighted towards organisations with higher numbers of RC-funded researchers and higher Roberts payments. However, it includes 23 teaching-led universities (24% of the sample), 10 research institutes (11%) and 8 specialist HEIs (8%).

Annual reporting formats do not permit direct mapping of 2009 information against 2004 data and interpretation has been duly cautious. As RCUK points out, 'Research organisations were not asked to answer specific questions and omissions cannot therefore be taken to mean that a practice is missing, rather that it is not reported'<sup>3</sup>.

A similar approach of general areas of questioning is taken in the 2009 monitoring requirements. ROs were also encouraged to report highlights, keep reports short (2-3 pages), and log further detail on the Vitae database of practice. Furthermore, the areas

<sup>3</sup> Annual summary of reporting: <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/cmsweb/downloads/rcuk/researchcareers/05repsum.pdf>

that organisations were asked to address in 2009 do not permit direct comparison with outline strategies. Interpretations of the likely incidence and spread of processes and practices therefore take into account a number of factors: such as the main emphases across reports and the sum content of organisations' reports from both years.<sup>4</sup> The report draws quantitative conclusions sparingly for these reasons, and offers them only as broad indication.

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<sup>4</sup> In 2009, the reporting format emphasised highlights of provision, processes for review, and sustainability. In response, some organisations include contextual information in 2009 which provides an overview of the basic building blocks of their provision, thus enabling some points of comparison with 2004 strategies, but others do not.

## **2004: Overview of strategies**

### **Responses to Roberts funding**

The different strategic and operational approaches among research organisations in receipt of the first Roberts payments in 2003–04 reflected a range of institutional priorities. These did not group into neat categories according to type of research organisation. For example, instances of substantial investment in researcher development before the advent of Roberts funding can be found across research-intensive universities large and small, teaching-led universities and research institutes.

*In 2001 the University created the post of University Research Training Coordinator (URTC; 0.5 fte) to enhance and coordinate training provision across the University. The post was funded initially for a 3 year period under HEFCE human resources strategy funding and is line-managed by the Pro-Vice Chancellor Research and Graduate Studies.... Dedicated web sites were available to all PGRS and CRS outlining training events and opportunities ...<sup>5</sup>*

2004 reports can be grouped as follows:

1. *Strong institutional alignment with Roberts recommendations*: around one in ten reports described considerable prior activity, and investment in, researcher development (found across all types of organisation);
2. *Distinctive institutional agenda*: partial fit with Robert recommendations, relevant provision where agendas overlapped (research institutes and specialist institutions dominate this group, comprises around one in ten reports);
3. *Partial alignment*: by parts of the organisation/on parts of the agenda (mostly universities, just over half the sample);
4. *Unclear strategic fit*: reports with few clues to organisational priorities (found in all categories, around a quarter of reports).

With organisations' prior strategic consideration of researcher development variable, it was unsurprising that the degree of specificity in 2004 reports varied considerably.

*... this outline strategy indicates current thinking but ... emergent strategy will develop dynamically as we address the needs of our doctoral students, post-doctoral researchers and the institution as a whole.*

### **Aims**

The explicit and implicit aims in organisations' 2004 reports can be grouped around the themes of i) compliance with external requirements; ii) effectiveness and enhancement of provision; and iii) integration with the strategy and practice of research organisation ((ii) and iii) being concerned with impact). Comparatively few reports set out their aims at the level of the individual researcher.

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<sup>5</sup> Post-1992 university

*We provide activities to enable researchers to: perform better now during their research project (for research students and research staff); make informed decisions about pursuing an academic career and to help them consider alternatives; pursue an academic career via workshops on such things as publishing, grant writing, managing research projects, training for teaching activities ...; pursue a career outside of academia by providing workshops on alternatives, on professional skills development (with an industry perspective) and on CV writing, interview skills and psychometric testing.*

### **Compliance**

At the simplest level, organisations were concerned to meet external requirements. These were clear on the research student agenda: the QAA had published its revised *Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes* in September 2004 and endorsed the *Skills Training Requirements for Research Students: Joint statement by the research councils/AHRB* (the JSS) as the sector's template for research and transferable skills. The Roberts transferable skills recommendations related to sections C–G of the JSS, while sections A and B related to research skills. Precepts 18, 19 and 20 of the *Code* covered the provision of 'appropriate opportunities for personal and professional development'; student development needs jointly identified by student and supervisor at induction and thereafter regularly reviewed; and provision for 'postgraduate researchers to maintain a record of personal progress, which includes reference to the development of research and other skills'.

### **Providing a full range of opportunities**

To meet QAA requirements, organisations had to analyse gaps in any current training provision, ensure they provided opportunities covering all JSS areas and introduce associated opportunities for training needs identification, joint review, and logging of progress by students themselves. A small minority of strategies were confined to such aims.

For research staff, there was no equivalent template. Institutions took their cues partly from recommendation 5.3 of Roberts Review, partly from RCUK advice to use the JSS as a general guide.

### **Access to opportunities**

Concern was expressed in many strategies to combine Roberts funds and institutional budgets to develop provision that was more flexible and accessible to both RC- and non-RC funded researchers, and to those who found participating in predominant model of short courses difficult (e.g. part-time researchers, distance learners).

### **Effectiveness and enhancement**

#### ***Uptake of opportunities***

Some strategies referred explicitly to anticipated challenges of engaging postgraduate researchers, research staff, supervisors and research leaders in activities perceived irrelevant to the job in hand. Many outlined plans to brief, consult and involve

stakeholders in various ways to achieve 'buy-in'. Strategies were also concerned with making participation convenient and straightforward to access.

### ***Integration of opportunities***

Compliance with the QAA Precepts regarding training needs identification, recording and review was not the only issue here. Many strategies discussed how the effectiveness of training depended on appropriate selection of timely interventions. Support of supervisors (in the case of postgraduate researchers) was seen to play a key role in achieving this, through joint discussion of training needs at progress meetings. Provision for discussing research staff's development needs was, variously, through appraisal, development review or careers consultation (where these opportunities existed).

### ***Quality of opportunities***

This driver, also found in many strategies, relates to quality of both inputs and outputs of training, provision and careers support. In the strategies of those with greater experience of delivering transferable skills training and career developments, organisations often outlined imaginative ways in which they planned to use funds to enhance effectiveness of provision. Strategies gave varying attention to evaluating learning outcomes.

### ***Feedback***

*Regular communication with a range of stakeholders provides longer-term feedback on the impact, relevance and quality of skills training. Skills training is also included in quinquennial reviews of postgraduate degree programmes. In September 2004 we held a "Listening Lunch" with PhD graduate employers to discuss researcher skills training, career and professional development. Feedback from this session has been incorporated into our induction programme for PhD students and we will continue to seek feedback from employer, PhD graduate and student focus groups.*

The feedback/enhancement loop was also discussed in a number of strategies. It was more common for strategies to highlight researcher feedback than that of other stakeholders such as external and internal employers.

### ***Impact***

Organisations were asked to give their performance indicators and responses varied considerably, from what would now be categorised as RTIF<sup>6</sup> Levels 0 and 1 (e.g. greater availability of opportunity, increase in participation, participant satisfaction ratings) to ambitious 'Level 4' responses (e.g. greater employability as evidenced by employers).

A small number of institutions with high levels of Roberts funding planned to invest in advancing research in researcher development. This enabled, inter alia, a focus on the development of effective practice in evaluation.

<sup>6</sup> Rugby Team (now Impact and Evaluation Group) Impact Framework.

### **Strategic integration**

This driver had two, contrasting expressions (both relatively rarely expressed):

- strategies' concerns to embed researcher development in the 'normal business' of organisations where it was not;
- strategies' concerns to emphasise how researcher development was already 'normal business' in strategic alignment with organisational mission and goals, and how, consequently, Roberts funds would further support these.

### **Realising aims**

Common themes of reports were:

- capacity building (in-house trainers, developing resources);
- achieving effective direction of funds and strategy;
- achieving greater co-ordination for efficient use of funds;
- online support systems (e.g. for marketing, management, monitoring);
- mechanisms to promote researcher involvement (e.g. through representation, structured feedback, and in some cases, design and delivery of programmes);
- using bought-in training/resources;
- sharing processes and practices, sometimes leading to collaborative provision.<sup>7</sup>

### **Reports' treatment of postgraduate researchers and research staff**

The question of whether to consider the two categories of researchers together or separately was a key issue for strategies. In principle, the concept of the 'early career researcher', promoted widely at European level, was gaining ground. In practice, the provision planned and organised by a majority of organisations tended to treat postgraduate researchers and research staff as distinct groups with often different needs (or at least differently perceived needs, and this was considered a crucial factor in engaging researchers), although there were exceptions, particularly among ROs with fewer researchers, as illustrated below.

**Doctoral Students & Post-doctoral Researchers** *The University does not distinguish between the two groups for the purposes of staff and skills development. Indeed, at [...] the relatively small numbers involved necessitate a response that emphasises the common pressures that both face in building careers, whether in research, academia or elsewhere ... Evaluation of these developments has been positive, with no differences in responses between research students and post-doctoral researchers. The opportunity to discuss skills development and meet with others facing similar issues has been particularly welcomed. In this sense, a particular outcome of the skills development agenda has been the additional impetus it has given to the research community.*

The organisation of this report follows the dominant practice in reports of considering postgraduate researchers and research-only staff separately for the most part. This is

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<sup>7</sup> Pooling provision or developing joint provision was seen to have multiple benefits: extending capacity, offering greater choice to researchers; achieving cost efficiencies from economies of scale; enabling researchers to network more widely.



also appropriate, given the different starting points for most organisations' strategy and practice in respect of the two groups in 2004. For example, in some research institutes, research staff fit with existing HR policies and practices was strong, but the organisation was less certain of its aims and responsibilities towards transferable training for postgraduate researchers. It should also be noted that the RCUK-funded UK GRAD Programme with its nascent regional Hub structure<sup>8</sup> was largely confined to supporting the postgraduate researcher aspect of the Roberts agenda.

In most cases, research organisations' 'state of readiness' for making effective use of Roberts funding was more favourable with regards to postgraduate researchers than research staff.

Research staff strategy formulation and implementation was hampered by:

- weaker internal drivers; a wider gap between current practice/cultures and the Roberts recommendations;
- less bespoke provision already in existence, so fewer pockets of good practice to build on;
- external drivers (such as the original Concordat<sup>9</sup>) lacked a compliance element and offered no agreed template to guide provision.

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<sup>8</sup> The UK GRAD Programme launched in 2003 with a remit to support the development of postgraduate researchers. Initially it had three regional Hubs, with three more Hubs added during 2004. The formation of Hubs was driven by the ROs within the region.

<sup>9</sup> Few 2004 reports mention the Concordat, or other external drivers such as the Research Careers Initiative.

## **2004 Strategy and practice: postgraduate researchers**

Most 2004 reports give useful description of the RO's starting point – the 'pre-Roberts' provision for postgraduate researchers – before outlining strategies or plans and changes already made in 2003–04.

### **Existing provision for postgraduate researchers**

#### ***Opportunities***

In 2004 over 90% of ROs reported that *some* provision for formal training in transferable skills covering C–G of the JSS was in place for postgraduate researchers before Roberts funding commenced in 2003–04. However, descriptions of a wide range of opportunities in a structured programme of provision were found in just 12% of reports.

*The aim of our Graduate Programme is to train talented individuals for future roles in science and technology or in the communication and utilisation of these disciplines. We therefore aim to promote acquisition of a profound knowledge base in one of our research areas, to hone critical faculties by exposure to the discipline of hypothesis-led research, and to encourage excellence in the communication of scientific results and ideas. The strategy by which we deliver our aims is our comprehensive Graduate Programme. Whilst the emphasis is on qualifying the students for a career in research at international level, careful attention is also paid to transferable skills and career advice so that those few students electing not to stay at the bench can instead use their skills productively.*<sup>10</sup>

Overall, reports paint a picture whereby the cohort most likely to benefit from these opportunities were full-time 'UK-domiciled' students in a STEM discipline, probably during their first year of study, who would usually access them in their home faculty or department. Planned programmes in science departments were often on a mandatory basis. Opportunities, where they had spread within a large organisation, had grown organically. Coverage of JSS areas was generally not comprehensive and normally weighted to areas most obviously related to successful completion of doctorate. There were fewer opportunities for developing 'soft skills' and career management provision.

#### ***Integration of skills training opportunities***

In 2004, over half ROs reported the existence of some form of training needs analysis (TNA).<sup>11</sup> Mature systems that provided for initial TNA covering transferable as well as research skills, ongoing mechanisms for review of skills needs, and 'ownership' by the postgraduate researchers (e.g. logs) were comparatively rare.

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<sup>10</sup> Research institute, 2004.

<sup>11</sup> 53% of all reports submitted. *Summary of Research Organisation Reporting on Career Development and Skills (Roberts) Payments 2005*. (RCUK, 2006).

### ***Organisation and models***

Prior to 2004 relatively few research organisations provided transferable training from a single unit. Mixed models were frequently reported, especially by larger research organisations: transferable skills being available from a central service unit or units (e.g. staff development, careers service) while research-related skills were the province of the School or department. In research-intensive research organisations with large numbers of postgraduate researchers spread across several schools/faculties, provision might be wholly or largely faculty based, with little central co-ordination. In some organisations, transferable skills training was delivered primarily by academic staff. Training provision prior to Roberts usually comprised of stand-alone short courses, seminars and workshops or block training. Few reports illustrated online provision or other forms of support such as mentoring. Examples of organised experiential learning were, almost exclusively, variations on the residential workshop model familiar to many through the national Research Council Graduate Schools. Informal learning opportunities such as conference presentations were frequently described, but often without associated training or feedback. Evaluation of provision by participants (beyond end of course feedback sheets) and stakeholder involvement (e.g. in design and delivery) was very patchy.

### **Approaches to strategy – postgraduate researchers**

#### ***Expanding opportunities***

The great majority of outline strategies focused on demonstrating how gaps in coverage of JSS areas would be addressed. In much of the university sector, the emphasis was on expanding existing and introducing new courses, increasing internal training capacity and (where scale of Roberts or institutional funding permitted) using external trainers to fill in-house skills gaps. Improving timeliness of provision was frequently mentioned too. ‘Front loading’ of provision early on in the doctorate was a problem which the Roberts funding would help overcome.

In most universities, rapid expansion of opportunities appeared to be high priority.<sup>12</sup> Descriptions of extensive consultation and pilot phases were infrequent in relation to provision for postgraduate researchers.

#### ***Uptake***

Hand in hand with expanding opportunities went achieving uptake: raising postgraduate researcher and supervisor awareness of the new opportunities and initiatives to promote buy-in; prioritising the development of TNA/PDP to integrate training provision into programmes; facilitating participation using online information and booking systems.

#### ***Mandatory vs recommended provision***

9% of research organisations reported pre-Roberts training requirements that were mandatory across the organisation. It should be noted that the extent of compulsory provision over the course of the doctorate reported by ROs ranged from two days to

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<sup>12</sup> This response was possibly associated with the short planning timescales experienced at the time, which some ROs refer to in their reports.

several weeks. In 2004, 22%<sup>13</sup> planned a strategy on the basis of compulsory training programmes. Post-1992 universities were the most likely type of RO to opt for compulsory training programmes, making up half this group. Most of the group who introduced mandatory provision drew on in-house experience of pre-Roberts compulsory programmes in certain disciplines. In their 2004 reports a few organisations mention experiences of student and supervisor dissatisfaction with 'one-size-fits-all' mandatory training programmes. Some reports also anticipated that it would be challenging for their organisation to engage students and supervisors in new transferable skills provision. The majority of strategies opted for a 'carrot' rather than 'stick' approach and planned to make completion of transferable skills training recommended rather than compulsory. Some planned to incentivise participation by introducing credit-bearing provision (fewer than 10%) or award/certification schemes.

*The [...] programme is now fully embedded within the regulations and codes of practice for postgraduate researchers. The programme is now compulsory for all registered PGRs and the high participation rate by new students indicates that both students and supervisors are now engaged in the skills training as a key part of doctoral career development. The programme is a fully validated part of the College teaching portfolio and cannot be modified without approval from cross-faculty scrutiny panels.*

Aims concerning the introduction of mandatory TNA or PDP (linked to progression) were more common across the sector. Where compulsory provision was planned, arrangements for giving exemption for areas of prior learning/skills were normally discussed.

In a small minority of organisations – mostly research institutes – the organisational learning culture was such that attendance at training programmes was accepted as being part and parcel of the experience of working there, so the issue of 'compulsory status' was less important.

### **Location of provision**

In larger organisations with differentiated faculty-based provision, co-ordination of activity featured as a major priority. Strategic responses varied according to institutional strategy, structure and culture. At one end of the spectrum were universities who planned to centralise all transferable skills training, at the other, universities where all provision would be the responsibility of faculties. In the latter case, central co-ordination consisted of mechanisms to ensure progress towards full provision and to encourage practice sharing and, where appropriate, joint activities between faculties. The majority of larger organisations planned a 'mixed economy' of provision, somewhere between these two approaches, aiming to supplement existing provision with planned provision at either a central or faculty/department level as appropriate. Factors determining the level of appropriate training delivery included economies of scale, subject-specific content, and perceived importance of interaction with researchers from other disciplines.

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<sup>13</sup> The group of 21 comprised 7 research-led ROs, 11 post-1992 ROs and 3 bioscience research institutes. RCUK conducted an analysis of all 2004 reports received and found references to mandatory provision in 29% (*Summary of Research Organisation Reporting on Career Development and Skills (Roberts) Payments 2005*, RCUK, 2006).

### **Further aims**

Organisations with more experience of implementing provision 'before Roberts' were more likely to mention as priorities:

- increasing access to opportunities (for example by repeating provision more frequently, developing online resources);
- enhancement of learning opportunities, for example by piloting and evaluating new forms of provision and processes;
- involving stakeholders in ways ranging from consultation on design and delivery of new courses to inviting competitive bids for Roberts funds;
- exploring or furthering shared provision with other organisations.

### **Small Roberts allocations**

Organisations with small Roberts allocations, particularly where they had relatively few postgraduate researchers as an institution, might plan to allocate the new funding to enable individuals to attend external courses, either locally (e.g. a specialist IT course) or further afield (e.g. national GRADSchool). A fairly common response among small specialist institutions and research institutes was to invite applications from researchers for funding to attend a course they had identified (as a short-term measure) while a more considered approach was formulated.

The strategies of teaching-led institutions with small numbers of RC-funded researchers showed wide variation according to whether substantial strategic investment was combined with Roberts funding. Some had modest compliance-driven aims, a few demonstrated the full range of aims described above.

### **Use of capacity-building support**

Reports cite:

- internal sources (e.g. learning and teaching development unit, web-learning development teams);
- role of national UK GRAD in helping provision develop locally<sup>14</sup> and of the regional Hubs (see below);
- other higher education institutions providing delivery and training the trainer (small number of references).

### **Sharing of processes and practices**

15% of reports describe established or nascent inter-organisation partnerships for shared development and delivery of some provision for postgraduate researchers. Some institutions describe actual or planned arrangements for their students to benefit from provision at neighbouring research organisations. Largest of these arrangements was the Bloomsbury Network within London where, in 2004, institutions were collaborating on a single 'shop window' website enabling students to access provision at different institutions.

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<sup>14</sup> 38% of the sample mention UK GRAD as a provider of local training/training support/materials/accreditation of local courses as 'UK GRAD Equivalent'.

*We will continue to provide and revise our Training Courses on site but in the long term it is likely that we will need to look for external partnerships to extend the range of skills training opportunities for our Research Students and Post-doctoral researchers. The institution is currently exploring partnerships with [...] and [...] which may give us an opportunity to expand our skills training opportunities further by pooling resources ... In addition, we will explore ways of utilising some of the on-line training opportunities developed by [...]. This will be of particular help in providing training for part-time workers.*

The majority of organisations, however, did not have a history of collaborative practice. 2004 reports were more likely to demonstrate commitment to exploring information-sharing and possible joint provision through membership of the new UK GRAD Hubs.

## **2004 Strategy and practice: Research staff**

### **Existing provision for research staff**

One-third of reports indicated that little or no provision for research staff existed before 2003–04. These reports split fairly evenly between those that are explicit about a lack of provision, and those that did not address the question. In a further third, research staff had access to general staff training provision. In a further quarter, there was some partial provision tailored for research staff. Fewer than 10% of reports described extensive developmental provision for research staff.

### **Identification of training and development needs**

Implementing Roberts recommendation 5.3 implies infrastructures for both performance and career development review. In the majority of organisations, research staff did not appear to be covered by staff review/appraisal policies:

- Around 30% cited arrangements to support research staff career development (50% of research institutes and 10% of teaching-led universities);
- Around 40% of the 2004 reports discussed using the mechanism of annual appraisal or personal development review to identify training needs (50% of research institutes);
- 7% of reports indicated that both appraisal and career review mechanisms were in place for research staff.

*The Personnel Department has revised its fixed term policy in response to the Fixed Term Workers (prevention of less favourable treatment) Act and this will have a significant impact on the employment of post-doctoral researchers ... With effect from 1 January 2004 all new post-doctoral research staff are subject to a one year probationary period during which time targets are set and training needs identified. Staff are reviewed after 4 months and 10 months in post to monitor performance and to address and training needs which arise.*

### **Opportunities, organisation and models**

In a large majority of universities, existing provision for research staff was wholly or mostly centralised, consisting of courses run by central support units. Sometimes this included bespoke provision, but more frequently did not. Induction arrangements (where formal ones were reported) were usually not bespoke to researchers and research staff were not especially targeted to attend. Some courses for postgraduate researchers in those universities with some scale of existing provision were open to research staff. Attendance records did not normally identify research staff and it was thought that uptake of such opportunities was low. A small number of reports refer to other learning methods (such as mentoring). Reports also point to the informal learning opportunities inherent in daily project work and experiences such as conference presentations.

*In general, training provision available to research students and that available to staff through the University's staff development programme and the Centre for Learning and Teaching is open to postdoctoral researchers. In [... graduate school] separate training is envisaged in project management and career progression, and in [... graduate school] training is generally managed through research groups according to needs analysis with Research Group Leaders. However, it is recognised that skills development for postdoctoral researchers requires further attention, particularly to consider how best to meet diverse needs at an appropriate level, and this will be addressed by each graduate school and monitored by the University in the coming year.*

While research staff in research institutes were more likely to experience formal training in transferable skills, the majority of RIs did not make specific arrangements for career development support. RS might also be found taking part in internal group training identified as an organisational or research group need.

### **Approaches to strategy – research staff**

*The 2003/4 Roberts Training Funds will enable [...] to put in place its development plans for postdoctoral researchers by January 2005, which is much earlier than would otherwise have been possible ... their skills training needs in 2003/4 have been identified and addressed both at the School level, and by the ... Staff Development Department. Evaluation has been by means of questionnaires at each training event, and also by a general survey of contract research staff conducted in the summer of 2004. The recommendations from this survey have contributed to the formation of a Staff Development plan including the enhancement of career development support and advice, development of flexible and blended learning programmes to supplement current provision, and the enhancement of [...] communications with and skills development support for this group of staff.*

The above report belongs to a minority that describes plans in detail. The great majority of reports devoted disproportionately less space to research staff than to postgraduate researchers, whether outlining existing or planned strategy and practice. Taken as a group, only research institutes gave prominence to research staff issues.<sup>15</sup> Quite a few organisations reported that this was because strategy formulation was at an early stage (e.g. a working group had convened but not reported). Moreover, planned rapid expansion of provision was far less common than plans to consult and pilot on a small scale during the forthcoming academic year.

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<sup>15</sup> In many university reports (which typically run to 4–6 pages) only one or two paragraphs focus specifically on research staff. It is common for report authors to 'lose sight of' research staff; including them alongside postgraduate researchers in overall terms, but not mentioning research staff in the accompanying detail (for example, giving planned evaluation practice or performance indicators that relate exclusively to postgraduate researchers).



In a few organisations, planning needed to start with simply identifying eligible research staff. Some universities' administrative systems did not yet identify RC-funded research staff.

Broad aims were usually consistent with those for postgraduate researchers: expansion of opportunities; enhancement of provision; measures to promote uptake. In a small minority of reports, development of research staff was explicitly linked to a strong organisational drive to build research capacity/excellence. Few reports discussed desired impacts, as was consistent with a picture where many strategies were still being formulated.

As mentioned above, 30% of institutions reported that they could build on existing career development support provision. A further 10% described plans to use Roberts funding to introduce career development support (usually by funding dedicated Careers Adviser time). While some other reports made general references to reviewing and extending career development provision, others did not focus on career development at all, leaving an impression that the institution might conceive the Roberts requirements for research staff in the same vein as for postgraduate researchers.

In formulating strategies, some research organisations drew on research staff feedback, e.g. from focus groups, and surveys. Around 20% mentioned drawing on data from the Careers in Research Online Survey<sup>16</sup> (CROS).

### **Engagement**

Most reports from universities gave few examples of research staff demand for existing 'generic' training opportunities. Several reports discuss concerns that engaging research staff and their research leaders in the broader 'transferable skills' agenda would be very challenging. In contrast, where provision for academic staff (e.g. grant-writing, supervision) was available to research-only staff, opportunities were taken up in greater numbers.

In a handful of organisations with established best practice, there was evidence of a culture of expectation among research staff.

*1:1 careers guidance one-hour sessions have been available since February 2003 ... The new funding has allowed us to increase employment of the CRS Careers Advisor ... enabling us to increase the number of individual guidance sessions (total of 182 hours since April 2003, approximately 120 individuals).*

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<sup>16</sup> Altogether, 22 ROs participated in CROS in 2004. [www.cros.ac.uk](http://www.cros.ac.uk)

## **Progress 2009 – Overview**

### **Context**

Some developments over the period 2005–09 which impacted on organisations' progress in refining and implementing strategic plans were:

- the launch of the revised Concordat in June 2008, which strengthened organisations' focus on research staff issues and began to provide a 'route map' to focus strategy as the JSS had done for the research student agenda in 2004;
- the evolution and re-launch with the Concordat of the UK GRAD Programme and UKHERD as Vitae, with an extended remit to support the entire early career researcher agenda;
- the transferable skills agenda broadened somewhat, as a result of increasing government emphasis on entrepreneurship and knowledge exchange including influencing policy development.

In parallel, a more focused emphasis on impact (both within the Roberts agenda and broader research environment) developed. The Rugby Team Impact Framework (RTIF) became widely used by ROs to guide and map evaluation of researcher development<sup>17</sup>. The JSS was also increasingly viewed as an incomplete model for postgraduate researchers and there was no equivalent statement of the skills and attributes of research staff. In 2008 Vitae started a project with the sector to develop a new researcher development framework, covering all stages of researcher careers.

### **Direction and distance travelled**

There was a high degree of consistency between plans outlined in 2004 reports and direction travelled. In a few cases, 2009 reports referred to programme reviews that led to major changes of approach. There are examples both of devolved provision being taken back into a centralised model and, more frequently, of moves away from centralised provision towards greater control by faculties. In the latter case, a concern to embed the Roberts agenda in departmental cultures was a key driver (see Sustainability, p. 38).

Progress was more advanced with regard to postgraduate researchers, consistent with the lower base for research staff in 2004. Availability of extensive, structured opportunities for postgraduate researchers was indicated by 74% of reports and for research staff by 36%. Reports indicated widespread availability of processes supporting integration with RDPs available to both RC- and non RC-funded postgraduate researchers, and substantial growth in provision aimed at research staff. Reports also indicated a high degree of commitment to continual enhancement by those responsible for, and working in, researcher development. The section 2009 Progress against Strategic Aims (p. 30) gives further detail.

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<sup>17</sup> The Rugby Team (now renamed as the Impact and Evaluation Group) is a sector-led group supported by Vitae to propose meaningful and workable ways of evaluating the effectiveness of skills development in early career researchers. [www.vitae.ac.uk/rugby team](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/rugby%20team)

### **Growth of collaborative activity**

One indicator of this sector-wide drive towards providing researchers with the widest possible choice of quality opportunities to meet their individual learning needs is the growth in collaborative provision. In 2004, existing and planned collaborations were reported by 14 research organisations in the sample. Shared provision in 2009 involved 51 such organisations (54%)<sup>18</sup>.

Collaborative activity was catalysed by membership of the Vitae Hub networks, as well as by existing links. The proportion of ROs who reported being active in local Hubs grew from 35% of the sample in 2004 to 61% in 2009.

### **Sharing practice**

Many reports refer to making use of Vitae's national resources for finding out about practice elsewhere and sharing one's own (in addition to frequent mention of local Hub initiatives). Reports' most frequently mentioned sources were the Vitae annual conference and using the well-populated Database of Practice.

Reports showed an association between being active in Vitae networks and enhancing provision and processes. The 2009 reports that described training and development provision little changed from that provided in 2004 did not report being active in the Vitae Hubs, did not generally mention using other available Vitae support, and usually were not part of other relevant networks. A similar link can be made between those who did not report on the introduction of reflective processes; training needs analysis, personal development planning and career development planning.

*Engaging in the national agenda for researcher development has been a priority over the last academic year. Delegates were sent to the annual Vitae conference and other networking events in order to build stronger links with other practitioners.*

### **Activators**

Among the 2009 reports are examples of organisations where the degree of reported distance travelled between 2004 and 2009 is particularly striking. Such cases, and other reports that indicate satisfaction with progress made, reveal a number of themes.

### ***Researcher development championed at senior level***

This appears highly important in accelerating progress within organisations with little, or fragmented provision prior to 2004, as well as enabling organisations with substantial prior experience to lead on innovation and develop to higher levels.

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<sup>18</sup> This ranged from joint development of innovative course models to simple arrangements to allow remote researchers to access provision at a more local institution.

*... during 2004 the University has been actively addressing the question of how to improve skills provision for research postgraduate students, particularly PhD, and postdoctoral researchers. A strategy has been developed to take this forward. The [office of the VC] has assumed direct responsibility for the strategic planning and direction of a new skills training initiative during 2003/4. The [...] (Research) and [...] (Teaching and Learning) have chaired a number of working groups ...*

### **Strategic drivers**

Creation of new Graduate Schools provided notable embodiments:

*The establishment of a Graduate School from 1 September 2006 has had and continues to have a profound effect on the level of support available. The rationale at the heart of this initiative was strategic: a review and reorganisation of the skills development programme for postgraduates, a major enhancement of the opportunities available for contract researchers and a redeployment of existing resources to better support the researcher cohort.*

Several organisations reported a positive effect in the creation of researcher spaces in new Graduate Schools and other physical ‘homes’ for researcher communities.

### **Presence of organisational ‘learning culture’**

This was evident in some smaller organisations where a new Director (or sometimes an HR/training professional) influenced a general cultural change within the organisation.

*In setting up Postgraduate Studies and committing staff time to the same, [...] recognised the need for training and support for early stage researchers, and the role these play in ensuring timely completion and future success for the researcher ... The use of staff within the postgraduate training programme will facilitate the continuation of this programme in the future. Increased focus on staff development within the organisation will also support continuation of the programme.*

**Style of provision ‘fit’ with organisational culture.** Some research organisations’ distinctive provision appeared to be particularly well suited to achieving ‘buy in’ in the way it chimed with ‘the way things are done here’.

### **‘Preparing the ground’**

Sustained participant and staff involvement in design and delivery of provision, involving consultation, testing and piloting, was also associated with success. Persistence and maintaining a high profile for researcher development also played a part.

*... time was invested in mapping existing provision against the skills and abilities listed in the Research Council's joint statement and collating information on them in a consistent way. Briefing/ training sessions have been provided for course/workshop providers. As a result, more focused aims and outcomes were produced for each course aligned to the Research Councils' agreed list of skills/attributes. The mapping process also enabled gaps in provision to be identified or revealed where additional courses might be useful or necessary. Students and staff were consulted (through focus groups) on ways in which delivery of the training might best be handled and on what additional provision was required in order to meet their needs...*

*During 2008/9, the Researcher Development team visited each academic department's staff meeting. This gave us access to the majority of academic staff and RS to raise their awareness of: the skills programmes, requirements for training and the Concordat. Anecdotally, we have seen an increase in communication from individual academics asking for advice and information. Academics have also been invited to various activities throughout the year ...*

### **Barriers**

Few 2009 reports dwelled on these, but mentions were made of: lack of funding (research organisations with low Roberts allocations); diverse researcher cohort (challenges in meeting a variety of needs cost effectively); difficulties in engaging various stakeholders (including resistance to the language of researcher development, and sometimes to style of provision).

## **2009 progress against strategic aims**

ROs' strategic aims did not remain static between 2004 and 2009. However, to facilitate comparison of 2004 and 2009, we confine ourselves to generic aims that underpin institutional variations.

These are grouped around: provision of opportunities – coverage, access, quality; integration of opportunities; uptake; impact; and mission integration. Differences between postgraduate researchers and research staff are noted.

### **Coverage**

It is possible to draw broad conclusions about the extent and range of opportunities, but not about coverage of particular transferable skills. For example, course titles could disguise the range of skills practiced.

*Several of the new courses were designed to provide development in a number of skills that may not have been as attractive, or viable, if they were offered as stand alone courses. In the case of Preparing for Supervisory Boards for example, the skills covered included report writing, active listening and responding to feedback.*

### **Postgraduate researchers**

2009 reports indicate that skills learning opportunities covering all areas of the JSS were available to a large majority of Roberts-funded postgraduate researchers<sup>19</sup>. Furthermore, the principle of enabling access to opportunities by non RC-funded students seems almost universally adopted from 2004 or earlier. Research organisations commonly reported committing substantial institutional funding to researcher development.

Occasionally, reports gave signals that compliance with expanding external requirements could conflict with the needs and motivations of students.

*The [evaluation] study has provided a wealth of evidence that late stage PhD students have positive views about taking part in a programme of transferable skills ... Changes in the curriculum to match current government priorities towards entrepreneurial applications should be implemented with caution, to ensure student needs continue to be met.*

Among organisations with low numbers of RC-funded researchers (allocations less than £50k):

- some had broad provision due to institutional investment (research institutes, some teaching-led universities);

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<sup>19</sup> 2009 reports are structured in such a way that ROs do not normally provide an overview of provision that enables direct comparison with 2004.

*Currently, over 50 ½ day interactive, experiential workshops, 10 multi-day courses and a ... local Grad School are offered by over 150 staff from across the University's Academic Schools and Support Depts. in a wide range of research, personal, professional and research leadership skills. Research students and staff take up over 900 places in the programme per annum. Feedback is very positive with consistent 4 out of 5 ratings and the numbers are regularly 15 to 30 participants per workshop with the numbers engaging in the programmes steadily improving. Over 90% of all new FT research students have attended ... even though they are not mandatory.*

- some were 'meeting minimum standards' (some teaching-led universities, small specialist colleges) by offering courses across all areas of the JSS, but in some areas breadth or depth was lacking. Typically, course programmes remained weighted towards research skills and written communication skills;
- a small number did not demonstrate coverage of all JSS areas.

### **Research staff**

Although expansion of opportunities took place more slowly in most organisations than that for postgraduate researchers, reports paint a generally positive picture of the provision of research staff opportunities. Around 20% of 2009 reports lack detail about research staff, but of the remainder, the great majority showed progress since 2004. 15% of ROs still only offered general staff training to research staff, but (varying degrees of) bespoke provision was now available at nearly 60%. Concordat-related activity in organisations gave added impetus. In 2009 reports, around 60% of organisations referred the influence of the Concordat on their policy and practice (75% of organisations with Roberts allocations over £50, 000) and this is likely to underestimate actual numbers.

*Vitae-backed workshops, notably the Effective Researcher, have featured strongly this year. We have offered both versions of the Effective Researcher (for research students and research staff) ... The research staff version is emerging as a cornerstone of a more structured programme of provision for that group.*

*Expansion of bespoke provision and activities to support ECRs ... has included the launch of a Fellowship Programme in [...] School, and the development of a university-wide peer mentoring scheme for research staff.*

### **Access to opportunities**

Access to appropriate opportunities was considerably improved by 2009. Face-to-face courses remained the dominant model, but inflexible block training was far less commonly reported than in 2004.

A growth in online provision in parallel to face-to-face provision between 2004 and 2009 benefitted all kinds of researchers, not only part-time and distance learners. By 2009 web 2.0 had given organisations a more extensive toolkit, including video, wikis and blogs.

*We have provided more one-to-one and small group support and provision of courses at different times, including some shorter courses in the early evenings (“twilight sessions”) and this is leading onto a new programme of half hour lunchtime “taster” courses we will be launching in 2010; these will also be recorded and put onto our VLE<sup>20</sup> ...*

### **Postgraduate researchers**

Courses for postgraduate researchers were much more likely to be spread across the doctorate, rather than front loaded. Different arrangements were offered– for example, scheduling two half-day courses on the same day to assist part-timers travelling from a distance or taking leave from work to attend. In their 2004 strategies many organisations planned portals offering a single access point to course information and bookings and these were proving successful. In 2004, fewer organisations were envisioning the development of major online training provision. However, by 2009 the majority offered some form of online training. Some developed online content in-house, in place of, or along side bespoke commercial products. These were seen as particularly useful for enabling distance and part-time students to access training provision. In most organisations online learning was supplementary to face-to-face provision, but in a small number of teaching-led institutions it formed an important part of core provision.

### **Research staff**

Several universities described the launch of research staff portals in 2008–09, usually to provide ‘one-stop-shop course information’, but sometimes with other applications. Several reports refer to purchasing online training materials aimed at research staff as well as postgraduate researchers.

***Careers Advisory Service developing a dedicated web-site for Research Staff. Resource will identify stages in career planning from exploring options to job applications, linking to further sources of information and a vacancy database in order to support these staff in their career planning and job hunting.***

### **Enhancement**

In larger research organisations with higher Roberts allocations there is much reporting of:

- attention to evaluation of content;
- extensive range of learning modes;
- experimentation and innovation in efforts to continually improve the attractiveness and effectiveness of provision.

Reports describe a wealth of advanced practice. This was most often (but not exclusively) generated by the research-intensive universities who had some firmly

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<sup>20</sup> Virtual Learning Environment



established provision in 2004<sup>21</sup>. More examples relate to postgraduate researchers than research staff, but there are a substantial number of the latter too.

By 2009 the group training model was less often the sole mode of training. A number of organisations across the sector mentioned the introduction of one-to-one and small-group coaching, for example surgeries for writing skills or statistics, to meet individuals' very specific needs, as well as mentoring schemes, placements and other experiential projects.

*The University has encouraged training providers (internal and external) to embed and support participant self assessment and reflection within training delivery. This has been particularly important for informal training opportunities (e.g. job shadowing, project-placements for doctoral students).*

Across all types of universities, researcher-led activity (researcher conferences being particularly popular) was often showcased as a way of combining creative experiential learning with cost-effectiveness. One of their reported advantages was the potential for integrating learning across a number of areas. Research student conferences were the most common supplementary form of provision to workshops in universities with lower levels of Roberts funding.

*One of the most exciting modes of addressing a wide range of JSS impact areas (research environment, personal effectiveness, communication, team-working, career management) developed within the 2008/9 session has been support given by [...] to Schools and Departments in order to enable the maintenance of researcher-led web- and e-journals. Support for a series of rotating 'internships' represents a strategy of 'learning by doing' and has enabled researchers to engage with all areas of journal establishment and management. Engagement extends far beyond areas of academic management and networking (calls for papers, reviewing etc.) to include technical areas, such as interaction with network and artistic designers. Significantly, the journals now established are also targeted at non-academic audiences (literary, artistic, policy-oriented etc.), such that researchers must engage with non-academics within the cultural industries and policy-making community. As a result, researchers have not only developed their academic skills, but have also accumulated skills and developed contacts applicable beyond the academic arena.*

## **Integration**

### ***Postgraduate researchers***

Good practice in online personal development planning and review was widely available by 2009.

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<sup>21</sup> Piloting innovative models could be relatively expensive, which is assumed to partly account for the relative lack of innovation in organisations with lower levels of Roberts funding

*Our e-profile and e-PDP tools are now well established; over 450 of our research students are actively using them. This helps students to showcase their research ideas, CV, wider academic interests and skills to prospective employers, both within and outside of academia.*

References to TNA/PDP issues are rare by 2009 and it is not possible to compare implementation with 2004 outline plans.

### **Research staff**

46% of ROs referred to appraisal or personal development review arrangements in 2009, (compared with 40% in 2004). Examples of processes to embed research staff development into organisational fabric continued to be supplied mostly by those who shown most attention to research staff in 2004.

*Broad range of direct and indirect professional skills development opportunities that managers are also helped to promote and engage in ... workshops and reflective advisory sessions ... opportunities for direct engagement in outreach and public understanding, or experiential roles on working groups and committees ... underpinning these, ... formal structured processes of probation and performance reviews that both prompt and encourage career and personal review.*

### **Uptake**

Where reports offered information on course attendance, the average for research staff was lower than that for postgraduate researchers, sometimes considerably so. Beyond this observation, trends are difficult to discern. Participation rates for researchers were sometimes reported (usually to illustrate year-on-year increases), but the information given is insufficient to discern sector patterns. Some ROs were clearly concerned to find ways to encourage uptake, for example by offering taster courses or shorter courses, timetabled with care (for example, putting on training lunches to attract research staff or Saturday courses for part-time researchers).

### **Postgraduate researchers**

A few organisations indicated investigations of lower participation rates by final-year postgraduate researchers, but one or two others noticed that, recently, such participation had risen. The example below from a large university with varying levels of uptake across different faculties neatly illustrates, in a single institution, a range of uptake levels as reported across the sector<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> This example should not be taken as indicative of general uptake rates by discipline area, about which the reports do not give much data.

***The approximate proportion of postgraduate researchers participating in career development and training opportunities for the academic year 2008/2009***

***[Engineering and Physical Sciences]***

*90% of new postgraduate researchers participated in the “required” elements of training during 2008/09*

*67% of all postgraduate researchers registered during 2008/09 participated in elements of the faculty training programme*

***[Humanities]***

*67% of new postgraduate researchers participated in the “required” elements of training during 2008/09*

*41% of all postgraduate researchers registered during 2008/09 participated in elements of the faculty training programme*

***[Life Sciences]***

*100% of new postgraduate researchers attended the “required” training elements of the faculty programme during 2008/09*

*100% of all postgraduate researchers registered during 2008/09 participated in elements of the faculty training programme*

Reports offered clues to areas of researcher demand in the reporting of changes to provision, for example offering more courses in subjects most visibly linked to successful completion of the doctorate. Some organisations describe refocusing and rebranding provision in order to tie it in more clearly and visibly to the ‘business of research’.

*Our “top ten” courses, designated by student feedback were ... 1. Research Module for Early-Stage PhD researchers, 2. Research Module for Mid-Stage PhD researchers, 3. Research Module for Final-Stage PhD researchers, 4. Saturday School for Part-Time Researchers, 5. Working with your supervisor, 6. Preparing for your viva, 7. Surviving Conferences, 8. Preparing Poster Presentations, 9. Thesis Writing, 10. Entrepreneurship Masterclass.*

***Mandatory provision***

Reports from some ROs with mandatory training provision indicated that degree of positive student feedback was associated with degree of choice and control over the make-up of the programme. Where such ROs had conducted programme reviews (typically in 2008–09) these had led to reconfiguring mandatory provision to reduce (sometimes substantially) the amount of ‘required’ elements and to increase options in the programme.

The degree to which mandatory provision was enforced also varied. A small number of institutions made evidence of skills development a requirement for doctoral completion. This was by way of a satisfactory log/portfolio of evidence, or in one case, completion of online modules with a satisfactory pass mark.

### **Research staff**

On the one hand, successful awareness-raising activities appeared to be gathering pace.

*The first research staff conference ... took place in March 2009. This provided opportunities for discussing key topics which impact on the career development of research staff, including RAE, REF, the new Concordat and the University's Strategic Plan, and for sharing practice. ... Feedback was extremely positive and the event will be run again in 2010.*

On the other hand, some universities reported continuing difficulties in take up of places. More than one university commented that recent CROS results showed very high levels of awareness of development opportunities: lack of information was not a barrier to participation, but rather, factors such as research leader support.

*CROS data revealed general satisfaction with the range of support and skills training being offered but highlighted lack of support for participation as a reason for lack of engagement; as a result training for PIs is now a university staff development priority.*

### **Feedback**

Of the various stakeholders, researchers were most likely to be consulted in 2009 about the quality and content of provision, followed by supervisors. Most ROs had focused less on seeking employer input. Most HEIs' involvement with employers focused on their role in delivery – of careers, business and enterprise sessions (sometimes by alumni). Ad hoc employer input to programmes was most frequently gathered via the HEI careers service. Other sources mentioned in 2009 included: industrial sponsors, supervisors and advisory boards, research pools (in Scotland), knowledge transfer offices, employers offering work placements/internships, and external trainers. A small number of ROs employed more structured arrangements.

*The University has a long-standing relationship with several local employers. Staff and students are supported by and often located in and co-supervised by industry (e.g. [... engineering company]) or the public sector (e.g. the NHS or local government) and this results in continual discussion regarding the quality of overall provision. A representative from industry ... attends the University's annual monitoring event of research student provision.*

### **Impact**

Reports generally described their processes to evaluate impact at different levels of the Rugby Team Impact Framework. For a large majority, investment in evaluation beyond Level 2 was very much 'work in progress'. However, some reports from research-led ROs with large Roberts allocations outlined results of impact evaluation. A greater awareness of the key role of evaluation was shown by 2009 reports. Several commented that new projects had to have evaluation built in from the start. Others described how they were demonstrating evidence of impact within the university to key stakeholders.

*A detailed evaluation of our transferable skills programme has been undertaken. This has focused on the views of late stage PhD students in the...disciplines ... Participants report an enduring positive impact on their behaviour and consider that the training meets their perceived needs as they progress as researchers ... The transferable skills programme is considered to be particularly strategically important by women and overseas students from the STEM subjects.*

### **Mission integration**

Reports in 2009 showed greater awareness of the importance of alignment with the RO's strategic priorities. This was a recurring factor in ROs' comments on sustainability.

*The postgraduate skills agenda is becoming increasingly linked to other employability initiatives within the University, for example, PGRs are being used to train undergraduates in personal development planning. As in the previous academic year, communication of the Roberts agenda and our researcher development strategy remains a key priority. We are actively engaging with other relevant steering groups and committees across the University, including those in HR, the careers service and research planning and strategy to ensure that the Roberts agenda is embedded in institutional culture.*

## **Sustainability**

Reporting in November 2009, RO views on the sustainability of the Roberts agenda had a number of themes:

- widespread belief that the institution recognised the importance of researcher development in contributing to its overall strategy;
- equally, widespread uncertainty and some pessimism about the extent institutions might compensate for reductions in Roberts payments;
- sustainable delivery methods and other cost-efficiencies had been, and were continuing to be implemented;
- relatively few references to future alternative sources of funding.

In the illustrations given by institutions of how they were adapting for a sustainable future, there is evidence that:

- some institutions' commitment to research staff development appears less secure;
- as synergies are sought with other partners within (and occasionally beyond) institutions, the agenda is evolving such that the gap between actual practice and the broad Roberts vision of transferable and career development skills for all early career researchers may widen.

### **Institutional commitment**

Around three in five reports made mention of institutional commitment to researcher development. Two in five of reports showed their commitment by emphasising the financial contribution made by their institution, while one-third of reports illustrated how researcher development was embedded in university strategy, structures or practice.

*In the refreshed University strategy map, one of the key themes is to 'deliver a postgraduate student experience that attracts the world's best students.' This includes, 'we ensure that students are well-equipped for a range of careers upon graduation, with excellent research and generic skills'. 'Valuing and developing all our staff' is one of the strategic enablers underpinning the strategy map.*

*We receive modest levels of 'Roberts' funding; the majority of skills training is already supported by other funding streams ... These activities do not rely on 'Roberts' funding and are embedded in the University's organisation.*

### **Future prospects for institutional funding**

The majority of reports were circumspect in how they discussed institutions' likely contribution to researcher development in the future, in the light of uncertain economic conditions and ongoing institutional reviews of provision. Indeed, around one quarter of reports either did not address sustainability or explained that reviews (usually high level) were in progress<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> For further detail see *Vitae policy forum 2010: Exploring funding options for researcher development*  
[http://www.vitae.ac.uk/CMS/files/upload/Vitae\\_policy\\_forum\\_10\\_funding\\_options.pdf](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/CMS/files/upload/Vitae_policy_forum_10_funding_options.pdf)

Around one in ten reports were optimistic in tone. These reported positive indications of institutional commitment to researcher development – visible signs such as recently formed Graduate Schools, other new infrastructure, and recent reformulation of strategy or practice. These ROs had funding levels ranging from £50K– £325K.

Another one in ten were more pessimistic. These indicated that it would be very difficult to increase the contribution they already made in order to replace any reduction or cessation of Roberts funding.<sup>24</sup> These ROs were mostly in the groups that received over £100K Roberts funding.

*Over the past few years, the University has invested a considerable amount of its own resource, in addition to Roberts Funding, in developing its skills training provision. Although the University would be committed to offering provision of this kind in the future, sustaining this at the same level, in the event that external funding (via Roberts or an alternative) ceased to be made available, would present a very significant challenge. In such circumstances, the scale and nature of the training and development programme may need to be revisited.*

Another one in ten ROs pointed out Roberts funding was not a major factor in determining provision. These institutions all received Roberts payments between £2K and £50K. Although some in this group expressed confidence in their institution's continued investment in researcher development at similar levels, others were more cautious.

*The [...] is keen to ensure that the progress made as a result of the Roberts funding is incorporated into the mainstream of the organisation. Therefore Academic Services led a review of current research student training provision. This was supported by the Learning and Development team and a steering group including representation from supervisors and students, and reported to Academic Board. Information was also gathered via an online survey of supervisors and students to assess the demand and quality of current provision, as well as identifying any new needs. This found that the programmes currently supported by Roberts funding were seen as key to [...] and had the support of all parties going forward. It also identified very few areas of un-met need. Around 40% of reports (adopting a more neutral tone) focused in their responses on efficiency measures and cost savings.*

### **Cutting the cost of researcher development**

Organisations at all levels of funding reported that they were seeking to reduce costs by increasing:

- use/development of online (sometimes blended) learning;
- delivery by specialist staff within the organisation (trainers, central services) and the concomitant reduction in the use of external trainers;

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<sup>24</sup> The few that gave figures suggest approximately 50:50 matched funding.

- training of academic staff to deliver at faculty/departmental level (see below);
- delivery by RS (training or supporting PGR);
- researcher-led informal learning activities, mentoring and networking;
- explorations of collaborative provision – internal (e.g. with Knowledge Transfer offices);
- explorations of collaborative provision – external (e.g. within Vitae Hubs or institutional networks).

Sometimes more than one approach was being pursued. For example, 10% of reports mentioned both online learning and capacity-building of in-house training.

A small number of reports referred to exploring synergies with other agendas, such as employability, for economies of scale or mutual developmental benefit (e.g. PGR mentoring undergraduates). In one case, internal restructuring had brought all skills development into one unit. Closer collaborations with KT/business development offices were also reported.

In-house training capacity building and use of a variety of accessible methods of training, including researcher led/involved, were already strongly apparent prior to 2009. They were all seen as vital to the process of embedding the Roberts agenda. However, the urgency of finding sustainable ways forward has perhaps accelerated these trends. Several reports also mentioned that intra-institutional applications for Roberts funding now had to demonstrate evidence of sustainability.

Several programmes had completed reviews over 2008–09 and a number of these had confirmed a preference for wholly or predominantly faculty-based provision in order to embed researcher development in a sustainable fashion.

There is some evidence that cost factors were leading to reviews of accredited/mandatory PGR programmes, although other (developmental) factors are cited too.

*The scale of the [programme] has grown substantially and there is now considerable pressure on being able to secure its delivery in the current format. With this in mind the University will engage in ... review process which focuses on a number of elements of the University's current provision. The review will consider:*

- *the central programme provision;*
- *the Research Training Credit (RTC) claim and AP(E)L systems;*
- *the Faculty provision of training opportunities, and;*
- *the revalidation of the award bearing ... programme.*



### **Other funding**

Around one in ten reports referred to specific alternative sources of future income (achieved or being explored). These nearly all consisted of Doctoral Training Centres or regional funding streams<sup>25</sup>.

One interesting example of how researcher development could contribute to its own sustainability was given by an HEI which had plans to build on a successful pilot that gave intensive, high quality support to researchers seeking project funding.

*In collaboration with the Business Development Office a new member of staff is to be dedicated to supporting research students and early career researchers gain funding and experience via knowledge transfer schemes, case studentships and placement fellowships. The post will specifically aim to provide researchers with support in making applications through these funding streams and aim to provide them with the opportunity to utilise their skills outside of academia and explore the potential to develop research careers in the public and private sector. This post will also contribute to the sustainability of the various initiatives.*

Income from commercialisation was mentioned just once (international sales of skills training videos).

### **Issues**

#### **Research staff**

Some reports clearly indicated how institutional commitment to both postgraduate researchers and research staff was embedded in strategy or practice.

*The [steering] Group also ensures that the Roberts agenda is developed in line with the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy (which refers explicitly to the Joint Skills Statement) and the University's Research and Human Resource strategies which articulate the University's commitment to the training and career development of research staff.*

However, other reports made more general statements, or the detail was wholly or largely confined to PGR<sup>26</sup>. Elsewhere, there were voices expressing concern that progress on the research staff agenda was too recent to have changed institutional cultures, which could make provision particularly vulnerable to cuts in a post-Roberts era.

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<sup>25</sup> ESF (KESS in Wales.), ERDF (SME/work experience schemes in the East Midlands), DEL, SFC.

<sup>26</sup> Particularly on the lower bands of Roberts funding.

*The challenge to develop sustainable interventions that have a life beyond current Roberts' funding is significant. Indications are that interventions designed specifically for researchers and targeted at that grouping are better received and have more positive outcomes than generic interventions.*

### **Implications of decentralisation**

As illustrated above, funding appeared a considerable driver in the way universities were seeking to further embed in faculties and departments and in seeking partnerships within and beyond the institution. This has implications for the future form of transferable skills training and career development, as different partners bring different aims and perspectives on purpose and desired outcomes.

In their 2009 reports, many institutions commented that very popular courses were those that developed research methods/management and those related to developing academic careers. But equally, most researchers had access to a wide range of learning opportunities that enabled them to be better prepared for a range of career paths. There could be considerable challenges in maintaining this breadth of vision as funding and practice become increasingly linked to more disparate agendas.

*The theme of Preparation for Academic Practice will form the core of training and career development within the [school of Humanities]... in the future.*

*Having also built up an impressive programme for staff under the Roberts' Agenda, we are now seeking to expand and embed skills training, by re-locating provision within Schools, Faculties and Departments. Consultation is underway to explore aligning research staff development more closely within academic areas, through an organisation development model, engaging with senior staff. We are considering options to bring these activities into the main budget to ensure training and development for researchers is aligned with [...] research strategy, as well as individual aspirations, and to ensure that the objectives of the Concordat are fully achieved.*

Two of the three reports that explicitly called for continued ring fencing of Roberts funding were particularly concerned about 'narrowing' of provision.

*We believe that the Roberts money should continue to be ringfenced since this would send a clear message to the UK research community of the importance of breadth in the training of researchers as championed in the original Roberts report. While major strides have been made, pressures on PIs and supervisors could mean that the message is diluted otherwise.*

*We believe that it would be preferable to retain the current ring-fence on Roberts support because this is the best way to ensure that the substantial improvements in researcher skills development will be maintained in the future and to avoid a drift away from the core values of the training.*

However, if a balance between central and devolved control and provision could still be achieved in the future, there were important benefits to be gained.

*The devolution of funding to Schools has resulted in a step change in the awareness and engagement with Roberts in many Schools. Whilst there are variations in the levels of engagement and activity between Schools the general trend is positive. Increased provision within Schools has also resulted in an increase in the take up of central training programmes and support.*