EPSRC funding for Enterprise and Entrepreneurship transferable skills training for researchers

Context
In 2007, EPSRC provided £1.4M of funding to 28 organisations to support training and course development in the area of entrepreneurship with the aim of increasing awareness and encouraging innovative approaches to the exploitation of research. This was in response to ministerial speeches and the Warry Report recommendation that ‘Research Councils should … encourage universities to make enterprise training widely available for researchers in all disciplines’. In 2008, this funding was increased to £2.4M across 51 organisations, and in 2009 it totalled £2.9M across 54 organisations.

“...We need more entrepreneurs. We need more innovators. We need more scientists, engineers and designers who can turn ideas into working products. We need to be better at supporting the ecosystems that transfer new ideas from universities and which incubate new firms. We need an education system that equips young people and germinates the seeds of industrial ambition in them.”
From the Dyson report Ingenious Britain: Making the UK the leading high tech exporter in Europe, March 2010

Organisations in receipt of these funds were asked to include details of its use in their annual Roberts Skills Funding report and in the Vitae Database of Practice. This document provides a brief summary of the main messages from the 2009 reporting, based on 53 reports and with reference to the Database of Practice.

Summary
Reports from most institutions indicate that the EPSRC money has been used appropriately and to good effect, and the courses receive good feedback from students and research staff. A small number of institutions had not spent the money by the time of reporting (two mentioned a delay in course provision).

At the time of writing, the Vitae Database of Practice had 115 entries under Enterprise and Innovation related practices, up from 78 at the same time last year. Seventeen of the reports referred to the sharing of good practice or the sharing of provision between institutions, with sharing of provision being a very strong theme for many HEIs.

The range of activities enabled by the funding includes: training courses or workshops in entrepreneurial or business skills, business plan or ideas competitions, online resource provision, mentoring systems, and placement schemes with industry or business.

“The courses and events received excellent feedback and developed students’ business and consumer awareness – as well as their communication, problem solving and team working skills.”

“It was clear from delegate feedback that the opportunity to discuss commercialization with experts in the field was invaluable.”

1 Warry Report: ‘Increasing the Economic Impact of Research Councils’
2 The Vitae Database of Practice was developed to allow institutions and individuals to share details of their practices in relation to the provision of skills and career development for researchers. It can be found at http://www.vitae.ac.uk/policy-practice/34837/Data-base-of-practice.html
Main messages

Commitment to enterprise/entrepreneurship training

“Enterprise and Knowledge Transfer (EKT) is central to the [University’s] strategy.”

“[The University] adopted its current ‘Enterprise’ Mission in 2008 and has actively embedded enterprise throughout”

“Entrepreneurship and the management of innovation is central to [our] mission, which has resulted in [the University] recently appointing a new Vice-Provost for Enterprise”

“The University strategy places particular emphasis on the development of enterprise amongst all staff and students.”

“Entrepreneurship, innovation and improved business awareness are increasingly important elements in the development of researchers at [the University]”

As noted in previous years, a commitment to enterprise and entrepreneurship was already embedded in the strategic plans of many Higher Education Institutions prior to the initiation of the EPSRC funds, or has been explicitly added recently.

Some provision for training in enterprise, entrepreneurship and business skills was in place prior to the commencement of the EPSRC funding. However, the additional funding from EPSRC enabled an expansion of these activities or an opening up of opportunities to a greater number of students and research staff.

“There were no existing practices prior to the provision of these funds”

“Prior to receipt of the EPSRC funds there was a small central programme of enterprise training”

“The additional EPSRC funding … has been used to further enhance the current entrepreneurship opportunities”

“EPSRC funding has enabled the development of existing enterprise and entrepreneurship training and expansion of provision to support researchers from a wider range of discipline areas”

Range of provision

The extent and breadth of enterprise training provision varies with the size of the institution and level of enterprise funding provided. Some HEIs now have an impressive and extensive range of entrepreneurial skills training opportunities and programmes available to their researchers. Provision mentioned in reports included the following areas: commercial feasibility, consultancy, networking and collaboration, intellectual property and patents, technology transfer, how to start a business or spin-out company, creativity and innovation, business models and services, product design, market opportunities, securing finance, business planning, marketing strategies, social enterprise. A new area for this year is provision of mini-MBA courses, mentioned by two institutions as part of their enterprise provision.
Seven institutions used some of the funds to employ staff to oversee the training strategy and/or implementation.

As in previous years, the types of provision included:

1. **Workshop-based initiatives.** Workshop- or seminar-based initiatives were mentioned in 31 of the reports. Provision ranged from one or two short workshops, to whole modules on enterprise/entrepreneurship. For examples see Database of Practice numbers 42, 319, 321, 323, 402, 412, 467, 468, 477, 495, 498, 509, 536, 548, 567, 626, 728, 743, 744, 861, 862, 868, 961, 993, 1006, 1052.

2. **Intensive training courses.** Mentioned in 26 reports, these courses covered such topics as enterprise, innovation, commercialisation, business skills. Many of these courses were residential, and some culminated in a business-plan competition. The ‘Young Entrepreneurs Scheme’ model was popular. There are regional training courses provided as collaborations between institutions. Two institutions mentioned mini-MBA courses. For examples of intensive training courses, see Database of Practice numbers 9, 555, 597, 620, 683, 728, 852, 969, 975, 1009, 1069 (and also some of those under 3, below).

3. **Competitions and interactive challenges.** Fifteen reports detailed business ideas/plan competitions or Dragon’s Den style events. Some of these were the culmination of intensive training courses. For examples see Database of Practice numbers 452, 468, 652, 695, 1017, 1045, 1077.

4. **Online resources.** Eighteen reports mentioned online provision. This took various forms, from online training videos or podcasts to case studies and training materials.

5. **Mentoring and provision of support for enterprising projects.** Twelve reports mentioned this form of provision. Support was given in the form of one-to-one mentoring, input from alumni and local entrepreneurs or business mentors. Enterprise scholarships were also created to enable researchers to investigate the commercial potential of their own research, or to develop their ideas into businesses. For examples see Database of Practice numbers 779, 1051.
6. **Placements.** Five reports mentioned placements. Placements were organised at local employers and entrepreneurial technology-driven businesses. For examples see Database of Practice numbers 60, 316, 902.

7. **Other.** Other practices included a research student-led Enterprise society, putting on conferences and summits, putting together case studies on entrepreneurs, and the formation of a network of those interested in enterprise/entrepreneurship. For examples see Database of Practice numbers 930, 974

**Up-take and enthusiasm**

The level of interest in and take-up of these types of opportunity varies greatly by institution, with some institutions reporting courses as over-subscribed, and others reporting a low level of take-up.

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“Uptake of our enterprise provision has been high – our Enterprise School was over-subscribed and we could only fund about 50% of our Fellowship and Internship applicants.”

“However, the take up of all of these opportunities by researchers remains very low”

“The Masterclasses were all oversubscribed, and feedback from researchers suggests that they were inspirational and motivating.”

“Researchers’ response has been positive from those who have participated but uptake had been lower than expected.”

“Overall the response from the PGRs and ECRs has been good and very encouraging. We are over-subscribed in bookings”
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**Intrapreneurship**

In response to the first round of EPSRC enterprise funding, a collaboration of nine higher education institutions and CRAC, in association with Vitae, developed a project on ‘Enterprise at work – exploring intrapreneurship in researcher development’. The results of this project have been published as a report, which is available on the Vitae website. A group is working on a second phase of this project; details are available from [http://vitae.ac.uk/policy-practice/92293/Intrapreneurship-project.html](http://vitae.ac.uk/policy-practice/92293/Intrapreneurship-project.html).

For examples of intrapreneurial practices and practices encouraging intrapreneurship, see Database of Practice numbers 261, 414, 585, 639, 652, 681, 783.

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3 Link to download the report - [http://www.vitae.ac.uk/CMS/files/1_Intra%20Report_Final_33.pdf](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/CMS/files/1_Intra%20Report_Final_33.pdf)