

UKHERD Members' Survey

Summary findings



Incorporating the UK GRAD Programme and UKHERD



About UKHERD

UKHERD (UK Higher Education Researcher Development Group) was established in order to enhance research capacity and performance by enabling better management, professional development and career structures for research staff in the UK. Comprising a national network of development practitioners and stakeholders with interests in these areas, UKHERD's stated aims are to

- **share good practice;**
- **build effective policy; and**
- **influence key decision makers.**

Its network includes staff development, HR and career professionals and staff working in university research offices, as well as other stakeholder groups such as Research Councils UK, the Wellcome Trust, and UK GRAD Programme staff.

From September 2008 the work and remit of UKHERD will be taken forward by Vitae which is supported by the UK Research Councils (RCUK), managed by CRAC: The Career Development Organisation and delivered in partnership with regional Hub host institutions. It will incorporate the work of the UK GRAD Programme and UKHERD. Vitae is the first national organisation to champion the professional and career development of both doctoral researchers and research staff in higher education institutions.

The findings of the UKHERD Members' Survey provides benchmarking data for Vitae and has also been used to inform the planning of Vitae's early activities.

About the Survey

In January/February 2008 a survey was conducted to find out more about UKHERD members and their needs, and specifically to identify the kinds of support, advice, and resources that would help members in their roles in the future. The survey was conducted by online questionnaire, using the Bristol Online Survey (BOS) web-based software from the Institute for Learning and Research Technology (ILRT) at the University of Bristol. There were 65 responses from a possible population of 312, the total number of people signed up to the UKHERD JISC discussion list at the time of the survey.

Summary findings

The survey elicited rich data regarding the principal issues facing research staff in the UK higher education sector, reflected the varied backgrounds and positions of respondents within their organisations, and contributed many useful suggestions. Some of the main themes that emerged were:

- recognition of the systemic and structural factors that influence the way that research staff are employed and the way that research careers are subsequently structured;
- a call for more defined career and continuing professional development structures for research staff within HEIs, and parity of esteem for careers outside academia;
- recognition of the importance of empowering, and engaging with, research staff so that they take responsibility for planning their own careers;
- a request for greater support in engaging with other groups within the sector, most specifically principal investigators and senior management within institutions, but also the funders of research;
- a need to take seriously issues of sustainability – the sustainability of the research base, of research careers, and of the researcher development agenda;
- that there is still a clearly defined need for structures to enable those with an interest in the development of research staff to share good practice, build effective policy and influence key decision makers.

Sharing good practice

Sharing resources and networking were regarded as important by the majority of respondents, with regional and national events being seen as one of the most effective means of achieving this. Internal and other networks were also valued highly by respondents. A significant proportion of respondents had experienced barriers to sharing practice, the most common of which were the time and costs required to attend events.

Many respondents recommended useful resources or sources of information, which will be fed into the future development of the Vitae website, and many respondents expressed a willingness to help develop resources in the future.

There was a call for collaborative projects working towards creating a library of training materials of direct value and use to research staff, PIs and others, created with input from a range of stakeholders to ensure relevance.

Building effective policy

As summarised above, there was consensus regarding what were the most important issues that must be addressed to advance the researcher development agenda within the UK. There was also a wide and varied selection of proposals about how to address them, the most common of which was the need for national levers, both 'carrots and

sticks'. Furthermore, that this policy should be built upon a sound evidence base was another common theme and there was a clear call for co-ordinated activity in this area. The revision of the 1996 Concordat was seen as providing an opportunity to ensure that the sector works together to effect change.

Influencing key decision makers

Survey respondents were clear that effecting change would require influencing key players at all levels, both within their organisations and also at a UK level. These key players were identified as being government, research funders, senior managers within HEIs and principal

investigators, as well as research staff themselves. As outlined above, many respondents stated that the most effective way of influencing the key players within their organisations would be by ensuring that policy recommendations were supported by clear and strong evidence.



Incorporating the UK GRAD Programme and UKHERD

Vitae – looking forward

Vitae's vision is for the UK to be world class in supporting the professional development of researchers and researcher careers.

Vitae, both conceptually and operationally, has been developed by CRAC in partnership with the UKHERD Taskforce and the UK GRAD Programme Hub host institutions.

The new programme, extending progressively throughout 2008, will deliver a range of activities around four key aims:

- **championing the development and implementation of effective policy**
- **enhancing higher education provision through sharing practice and resources**
- **providing access to development opportunities and resources**
- **building an evidence base to support the researcher development agenda**

Further information at
www.vitae.ac.uk

The themes emerging from the UKHERD Members' Survey will be addressed through Vitae activities.

On a strategic level, the programme will play a key role in the development of policy and initiatives for a sustainable approach to development of researcher careers.

Vitae will work collectively with all stakeholders towards developing a more comprehensive evidence base to gauge the impact of research training, researchers and their wide contributions to society and the economy.

For staff in institutions working with research staff, there are a range of opportunities to share practice and resources, input to collaborative, pilot and innovative projects and policy development. These include regional and national events, online databases of practice and resources, briefings and newsletters.

Vitae will play a major role in the implementation of the Concordat, including working with the HE sector and other stakeholders to review implementation progress and advising on the definition of the benchmarking study under Principle Seven.

Vitae is working with an extended steering group to revise the Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS) and a joint Vitae/Rugby Team project is to develop a framework of competencies and attributes of researchers.

Expertise from the UKHERD Taskforce and others will be harnessed to ensure that issues relating to research staff are at the centre of Vitae's mission and activities. A Vitae Research Staff Development Advisory Group will be set up to inform the strategy and practice of the Vitae programme.