

# Vitae Researcher Development Framework

## Briefing for postgraduate researchers

### Overview

**Researchers make an important contribution to the UK economy, both in sustaining our research base and as leaders in the workforce. The Vitae Researcher Development Framework (RDF) underpins a major new approach to developing world-class researchers.**

**The framework has been developed by and for researchers working in higher education as an aid to planning, promoting and enhancing professional and career development. It articulates the knowledge, behaviours and attributes of successful researchers and encourages all researchers to realise their potential.**

**The associated Researcher Development Statement, endorsed by the UK HE Funding Bodies, Research Councils UK, Universities UK and other national organisations, provides a policy reference for researcher development strategies. Together with the full, operational framework it supports the implementation of policy related to researchers' professional development in the UK.**

**This is one of a series of briefings developed by Vitae for a range of stakeholders involved in the professional and career development of researchers.**

**For further information about the Researcher Development Framework and other briefings in this series visit: [www.vitae.ac.uk/rdf](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/rdf)**

**“going through the Researcher Development Framework allows you to highlight what you're good at and think about how you could bring that into employment...”**

**Michael Walker, Postgraduate Researcher,  
University of Sheffield**

The Researcher Development Statement and the more detailed Researcher Development Framework, enable researchers to articulate their skills and take a proactive approach to their professional development. The Researcher Development Statement replaces the Research Councils' Joint Skills Statement (2001) as the UK framework underpinning professional development for researchers.

### Using the Researcher Development Framework

The Vitae Researcher Development Framework is a guide to your development as a professional researcher, enabling you to identify the strengths you already have and prioritise for personal and career development in the context of future career opportunities.

Being a successful researcher involves many skills including communicating your work to others, being aware of its impact and being innovative and enterprising. The Researcher Development Framework can help you decide on priorities for your professional development, informing discussions with your supervisor. Towards the end of your doctorate the Researcher Development Framework enables you to consider the skills and experiences that will enhance your career prospects and articulate your capabilities to future employers.

The Researcher Development Framework has been incorporated into a downloadable Professional Development Planner to enable you to identify the areas in the framework you want to develop further and to create an action plan. [www.vitae.ac.uk/rdfplanner](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/rdfplanner)

On a regular basis, you can use the Researcher Development Framework and Professional Development Planner to:

- aid self-reflection and set yourself aspirational goals
- choose the most appropriate formal and informal development opportunities provided by your institution and look for development opportunities outside of your research
- prepare for one to one reviews with your supervisor or mentor to help you complete your doctorate
- consider how your skills and experiences will enhance your prospects of success in various career areas
- highlight, articulate and evidence the transferability of your skills in your CV, in job applications and at interviews.

# Background

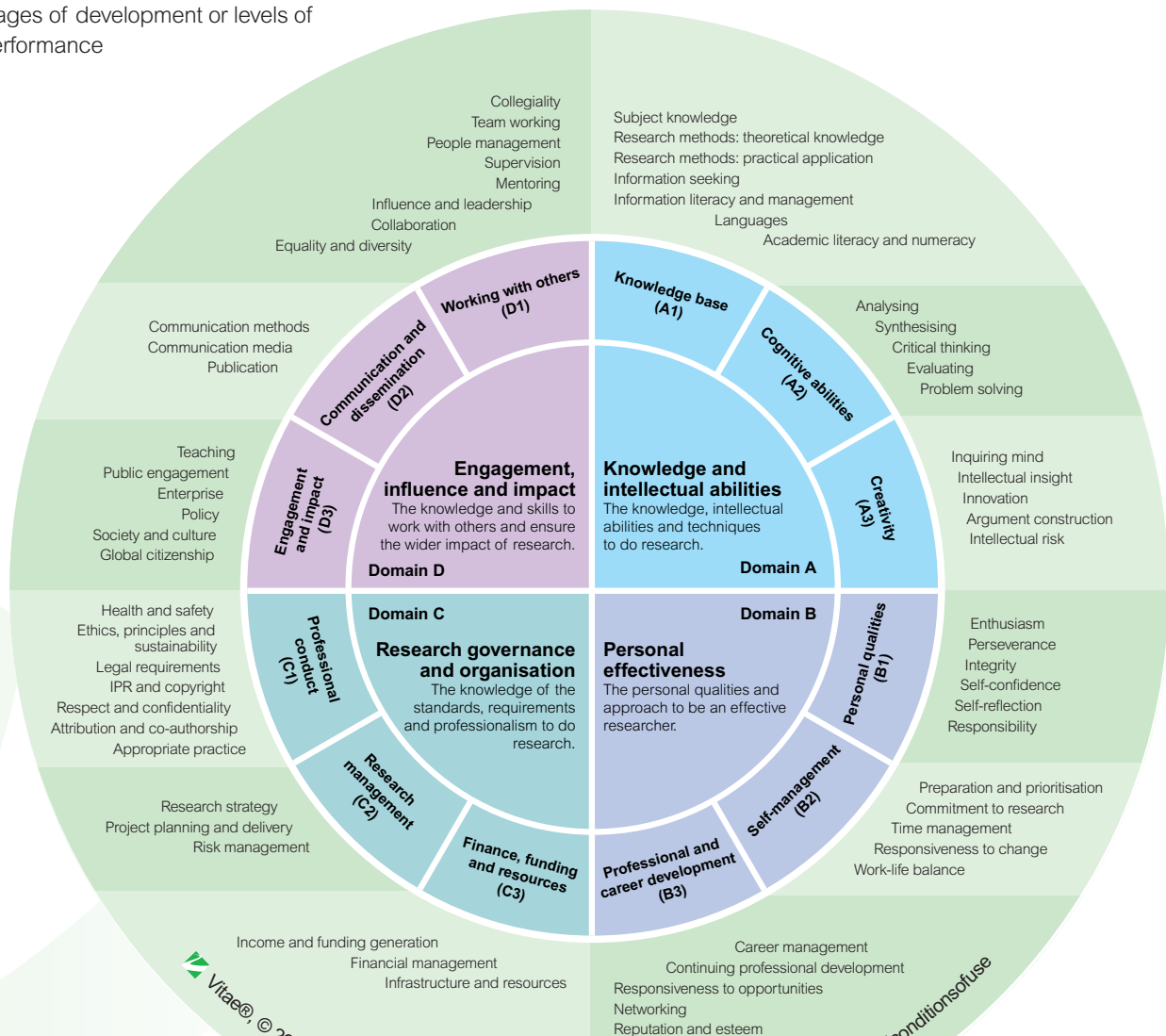
The Researcher Development Framework and Researcher Development Statement underpin policies for supporting the professional and career development of researchers. Institution-wide implementation of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, the QAA Code of Practice for research degree programmes and the Roberts recommendations for postgraduate researchers and research staff are enhanced and strengthened by use of the Researcher Development Framework and Statement.

# Structure

- The Researcher Development Framework and Statement were created through interviews with researchers and empirical data leading to the identification of the characteristics of excellent researchers
- Characteristics, expressed in the framework as 'descriptors', are structured into four domains and twelve sub-domains, encompassing the knowledge, intellectual abilities, techniques and professional standards to do research, as well as the personal qualities, knowledge and skills to work with others and ensure the wider impact of research
- Three to five phases for each descriptor present stages of development or levels of performance

# Who is the Researcher Development Framework for?

- Researchers – to evaluate and plan their professional development
- Principal investigators and supervisors of researchers – in their role supporting the development of researchers
- Researcher developers, trainers, human resources specialists, careers advisors, senior managers and others – in planning and providing support to researchers
- Policy makers, funders and other organisations – to inform and reinforce policy and strategy relating to researchers
- Employers – to provide insight into the unique blend of researchers' skills and to enable exploration of researchers' potential benefits to the company as employees



# Researchers using the Researcher Development Framework say:

“It put career development back into the forefront of my mind as it can often slip back when you’re engaged in what you’re doing day to day. If you’re prepared to put the effort in to think about the statements that are in (the Researcher Development Framework) then I think it can really help.”

Samantha Cartwright, Postgraduate Researcher,  
Centre for Agri-Environment Research, University of Reading

“I would see this (the Researcher Development Framework) as a barometer...to give me a bit more clarity about what areas I could develop and what might be most important. It’s something I could keep returning to.”

Anja Dalton, Postgraduate Researcher, Centre for Transport & Society,  
University of the West of England

“If the Researcher Development Framework had been available when I was a postgraduate researcher, I’d have had a much better idea of what I needed to do, what skills I needed to accumulate, logging the evidence and how to set priorities.”

Patrick Hadoke, Tenure-tracked Senior Academic Fellow in  
Pharmacology, University of Edinburgh

“I would like to achieve a readership within two years. My attitude towards target setting and using a ‘five year plan’ to guide my progress and create opportunities consistent with my career development goals has helped me reach my current phase.”

Sandra Hiatt, Senior Lecturer and Programme Leader in Art and  
Design, Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure,  
Liverpool John Moores University

## The Researcher Development Framework Professional Development Planner

“We don’t have much time to think about [career development] and when it’s already written down you can keep coming back to it and see if you are complying with your own recommendations.”

Maria Sharmina, Postgraduate Researcher,  
Sustainable Consumption Institute (SCI), University of Manchester

“The Researcher Development Framework will encourage me to be more proactive about my career development as it provides me with a framework (list of milestones) that I can judge my current progress in relation to what I want to achieve with my career.”

Joe Viana, Postgraduate Researcher in the  
School of Management, University of Southampton

## Relevant organisations say:

“As researchers move on in their careers, whether they remain in academia or move into other employment areas, they need to be able to analyse the experience they have gained in order to consider their career direction and to work towards achieving their goals. This self knowledge can help them in a number of different ways: it can provide a focus for guidance discussions with a careers adviser, provide material for effective written applications and assist in interview preparation.”

The Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services  
Research Staff task Group

“NUS is pleased to support the Researcher Development Framework, which we believe will help institutions to improve the quality of their support for postgraduate researchers.

Doctoral candidates are the lifeblood of research. By taking a focused approach to their development and with the right institutional support in place, postgraduate researchers in the UK can continue to make an enormous contribution both within the academy and to wider society.”

National Union of Students (NUS)

Research Councils UK have fully endorsed the Researcher Development Statement

In their Statement of Expectation, the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) have referred to the Researcher Development Statement: Researchers will be expected

“to develop the higher-level capabilities as outlined in the Researcher Development Statement”

The Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) acknowledge the Researcher Development Statement in their Doctoral Training Partnerships call for proposals:

“BBSRC also supports the development by Vitae of the ‘Researcher Development Statement’, which outlines the areas of professional development that research organisations should be addressing in their training programmes.”

“The Researcher Development Framework provides researchers with a tool to use to help identify their transferable skills, strengths and capabilities and how to develop them. All of which are relevant to a range of careers and extremely valued by employers.”

Jackie Wilbraham, R&D Science Policy Director, AstraZeneca

# Using the Researcher Development Framework Professional Development Planner:

## Top ten tips from other researchers:

- Use the Researcher Development Framework Professional Development Planner to select individual areas for development
- You can choose to use the Researcher Development Framework for short term as well as long term development
- Prioritise development on those areas which are most relevant to you
- Draw on experiences outside of your daily research to evidence, reflect on and develop your capabilities
- Progression to the highest phase in a descriptor may not always be relevant to your career plans
- Talk to others to get their views about your strengths and capabilities
- To move from one phase to the next why not explore attending courses
- Some phases may only be reached through experience and practice
- Create a realistic action plan with measurable goals in specific time frames
- Review your progress against your action plan and go through the cycle again regularly

**“the Researcher Development Framework screencast is really useful to give you an idea of how to use the Researcher Development Framework Professional Development Planner.”**

**Emma Coonan, Information Librarian,  
University of Cambridge**

For more information about the Researcher Development Framework tailored to postgraduate researchers, and to download the Professional Development Planner see [www.vitae.ac.uk/rdfresearchers](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/rdfresearchers)

## Useful links

Your institution will provide a range of support and development opportunities. This can include training and development opportunities and careers advice.

To complement institutional provision, Vitae has many resources for postgraduate researchers.

### For the Researcher Development Framework:

- Researcher Development Framework: [www.vitae.ac.uk/rdf](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/rdf)
- Researcher Development Framework researcher profiles: [www.vitae.ac.uk/rdfprofiles](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/rdfprofiles)
- Researcher Development Framework Professional Development Planner: [www.vitae.ac.uk/rdfplanner](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/rdfplanner)
- Contact: [rdf@vitae.ac.uk](mailto:rdf@vitae.ac.uk)

### Other Vitae resources

- General advice and information for Postgraduate Researchers: [www.vitae.ac.uk/pgrs](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/pgrs)
- Schedule for Success: [www.vitae.ac.uk/schedule](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/schedule)
- ‘PGR Tips’: [www.vitae.ac.uk/pgrtips](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/pgrtips)
- Premia resources for disabled researchers: [www.vitae.ac.uk/premia-pgr](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/premia-pgr)
- ‘What’s up doc?’ blog: [www.vitae.ac.uk/whatsupdoc](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/whatsupdoc)
- The researcher booklets: [www.vitae.ac.uk/researcherbooklets](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/researcherbooklets)
- Careers information: [www.vitae.ac.uk/careers](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/careers)
- ‘What do researchers do?’: [www.vitae.ac.uk/wdrd](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/wdrd)
- Researcher career profiles: [www.vitae.ac.uk/careerprofiles](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/careerprofiles)

## Conditions of use

The Researcher Development Framework was produced by Vitae in conjunction with colleagues from the UK higher education sector. Conditions of use, including requirements for acknowledgement, can be found at [www.vitae.ac.uk/rdfconditionsofuse](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/rdfconditionsofuse)

## About Vitae

Vitae is the UK organisation championing the professional and career development of postgraduate researchers and research staff in UK higher education institutions and research institutes. We play a major role in the drive for high-level skills and innovation and in meeting the UK’s goal to produce world class researchers.

Vitae works with institutions to embed professional and career development for researchers into the research environment. It plays a leading role in innovating, sharing practice and enhancing the capability of the higher education sector to provide support for researchers in this area.

For further information about Vitae visit [www.vitae.ac.uk](http://www.vitae.ac.uk)

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