



Vitae Annual Report

2020 / 2021

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Global leader in supporting
the professional development
of researchers



Foreword

*Spotlight on:
A year in the life of
an evolving 'new
normal' - a year in
which significant
achievements have
been accomplished*

With just a few months of remote working under our belts, the delivery of **Vitae Connections Week 2020** as a fully online experience was a remarkable event. There were over 50 sessions, an exhibition and overwhelming engagement in the Three Minute Thesis® Competition.

By March 2021, the roll-out of Connections: Getting to Grips as a virtual event for the second time, had become almost second nature. In fact, all our learning, development and events conducted in the past year have been online, and whilst we look forward to face-to-face delivery, the online format has proven a genuinely valuable alternative.

With a key focus on a culture shift that prioritises engagement with professional development for researchers, it has been encouraging to see the uptake in the Culture, Employment and Development in Academic Research Survey (CEDARS), following last year's pilot. It is a testament to the dedication of our community to help make those much-needed shifts in the research environment and in upholding our Researcher Development Concordat commitments. We anticipate further engagement next year and have received interest from members globally.

Vitae has helped establish a firm evidence-base for influencing future policy decisions about the

research environment having recently conducted research on the impact of Covid-19 on researchers and research, commissioned by UKRI and the UK Department of Business Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS). Many of the findings will have relevance worldwide and will help improve the research culture, wellbeing and mental health of researchers and in relation to upholding Researcher Development Concordat commitments.

Working with the Government and others to develop an emergency career development plan, the Careers Research and Advisory Centre (CRAC), that manages the Vitae programme, has been a key stakeholder in the Career Development Policy Group (CDPG). Formed in 2020, the Career Development Policy Group brings together a range of organisations who believe that citizens should have an opportunity to access support in their careers. The group works with the Government and other stakeholders to develop policies and initiatives, including for researchers, that support career development, post Covid-19.

Navigating the effects that Covid-19 brought, has certainly accentuated areas for improvement in the research system as well as presented beneficial opportunities that are part of our new normal. The accelerated adaptation of the HE sector over the past 18 months demonstrates how momentous changes can be made in relatively short periods of time when necessary.

Reflecting on my term as Chair of the CRAC Board, the achievements accomplished collectively as a researcher development community have been significant in helping build an improved environment for researchers to thrive.

So it seems timely to seize the research culture agenda and further our progress in developing an improved researcher environment globally. An environment that, using the Government R&D Roadmap, helps meet ambitions for increased R&D investment in the UK and reinforces the need for positive change in research culture. An environment in which researchers can flourish and reach their full potential.

Drs. Astrid Wissenburg

Chair of the Board of Trustees, Careers Research and Advisory Centre (CRAC), Director of Research, University of Exeter



About us

Vitae is the global leader in supporting the professional and career development of researchers, experienced in working with institutions as they strive for research excellence, innovation and impact.

We are a non-profit programme, part of the Careers Research and Advisory Centre (CRAC) Ltd, with over 50 years' experience of enhancing the skills of researchers. We strengthen our members' institutional provision for the professional development of researchers through research and innovation, training and resources, events, consultancy and membership.

Vitae has four aims:

- *Influence the development and implementation of effective policy relating to researcher development*
- *Enhance higher education provision to train and develop researchers*
- *Empower researchers to make an impact on their careers*
- *Evidence the impact of professional and career development support for researchers*

Our partners include governments, funders of research, academies, professional bodies, trusts and foundations, universities and research institutes.

CRAC provides research intelligence and innovation for all those who support career development for people of all ages and in all sectors. We work in partnership with government agencies, education organisations and providers, and employers and professional bodies.

CRAC is a registered charity No 313164 established in 1964.



Vitae Connections Week 2020

Last year, our annual conference was reimagined as a fully online and highly interactive event in response to the unanticipated global challenges of Covid-19, and the desire for accessibility to a remote audience. Almost 300 participants came together virtually from 17 countries, spanning Europe, Asia, North America, Africa and Australia for Vitae Connections Week 2020 offering the latest around policy and practice of researcher development. There were four days of keynote presentations, 23 'live' sessions, 23 on-demand sessions as well as expert panels, roundtables, fringe activities, an exhibition and networking opportunities. It presented a timely opportunity to discuss strategic opportunities and challenges; consider key sector trends like improving research culture; and to share innovative practice.

"The formats of the different sessions were excellent in maintaining interest and concentration. The content was also fab!"

Participant, Vitae Connections Week 2020

Join the culture shift

Researcher development is at the heart of improving research culture; bringing together wellbeing, ethics and integrity, leadership, and equality, diversity and inclusion to create an environment conducive to successful research.

Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers (Researcher Development Concordat)

As part of the exciting evolution of the Researcher Development Concordat and to bring all Concordats together under one umbrella, the Concordat Strategy Group (CSG) announced a review of governance structures in which Universities UK (UUK) have taken on the role of Secretariat since 2021. Vitae will continue to play a key role in supporting UUK in future Researcher Development Concordat developments and in advocating for an improved research culture.

Vitae have been tasked by the Concordat Strategy Group (CSG) with gathering

examples of good practice from across different contexts and stakeholders, including demonstrable impact, to share these with those responsible for delivering on the Researcher Development Concordat's aims. The examples will form part of a new 'living' digital library to be launched around Vitae Connections Week 2021.

"Vitae's role in implementing the Researcher Development Concordat in partnership with the Concordat Strategy Group makes a significant contribution to embedding the Concordat across the sector and sustaining its lifecycle"

Professor Julia Buckingham CBE, Universities UK President; Vice Chancellor and President of Brunel University London; & Chair of Concordat Strategy Group

HR Excellence in Research Award

Vitae manages the HR Excellence in Research Award process for Vitae organisational members and there are currently 96 Vitae member institutions who hold the Award.

In response to interest from Vitae Members, Vitae supported institutions in preparation for submissions by running 'drop-in' sessions, which so far have been

attended by over 50 attendees and given the opportunity to engage and share practice.

A dedicated member forum about the Award was also held earlier in 2021 to explore how the process might evolve to support institutional capacity building and embedding of the Concordat Principles.



Vitae Member Working Groups

The Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for Researcher Developers Working Group; Researchers Careers Working Group; Wellbeing Working Group and Researcher Networks Working Group provide a platform and voice on behalf of the community to help influence the global research environment.

In the light of Covid-19, the Wellbeing Working Group has been particularly active in the past year and have been able to draw upon practical resources created from Catalyst Fund projects to help deliver a 'Supporting Researcher Mental Health and Wellbeing 2021' event including researchers and supervisor training, supporting websites, researcher wellbeing and models for action learning sets.

In addition, the working group submitted a video presentation for the 'UKCGE 2nd International Conference on the Mental Health and Wellbeing of Postgraduate Researchers', **highlighting themes and recommendations for stakeholder groups.**

The working group also organised an event in partnership with the University of East London (UEL) that focused on **how supervisors could support researchers and their own mental health.**

The Researcher Networks Working Group have been creating a new 'Toolbox' for developing and sustaining effective Researcher Networks. The toolbox will showcase examples of practice from the Vitae community such as inclusivity and sustainability of networks and should serve as useful digital repository for anyone involved in building effective researcher networks.

"A strong network enables better mutual learning and cooperation in responsible research and innovation. We are in the process of creating a global network named the RRING community to develop and foster open access to a global knowledge base on Responsible Research and Innovation"

Dr Gordon Dalton, RRING Project Coordinator.

Culture, Employment and Development in Academic Research Survey (CEDARS)

The pilot of the Culture, Employment and Development of Academic Researchers Survey (CEDARS) ran successfully in 22 institutions.

The question set was then reviewed and refined by the CEDARS Steering Group.

53 participants attended a practice sharing event in March 2021 with 48 institutions running CEDARS in 2021.

12,594 researchers responded to CEDARS 2021. The results, published at Vitae Connections Week, show clear evidence of implementation of the Researcher Development Concordat principles.

'CEDARS reveals valuable researcher perspectives on research culture, employment and development within the institution which informs our thinking as researcher developers. The qualitative data can help ascertain what's working and what's not within the institution and the evidence drawn from the data can be used as an effective lever for change.'

Dr Anna Seabourne, Head of Researcher Environment, University of Huddersfield

Responsible Research and Innovation Networked Globally (RRING)

Vitae have continued to play a large part in the HORIZON 2020 funded RRING consortium, which looked to establish a global community for Responsible Research and Innovation. The project also addressed the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, through the framework of the UNESCO recommendation for science and scientific researchers. This was trialled in several countries with resources developed, training workshops and a global summit.

The formal phase of the project was completed in May 2021 and the community will now look to build on the network based on the knowledge gained through the project.

Surveys and consultations

Vitae has gathered evidence on behalf of the researcher development community to inform responses to the following:

- Two extensive surveys to assess the evolving impact of Covid-19 on researchers and research, and the resulting restrictions to working, on the research base, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and UKRI

- UK Research and Development Roadmap to ensure voice of researcher development influences the Government's ambition for the UK to be a global science superpower and premier destination for those in R&D
- People and Culture Strategy, UK the report has called for a more inclusive and sustainable research sector to benefit everyone

- Bureaucracy Review, UK - consultation in progress
- CRAC is a founder member of the newly developed Career Development Policy Group helping the Government enhance careers support in response to the effect of Covid-19 by helping maintain employment, productivity and progression in the UK.



Research and Evaluation

Research and evaluation activity has been focused on a range of themes which relate to strategic interests, for a wide range of clients who support career development. Specialist areas include career transitions, career tracking, STEM and research careers. Many of our evaluation and impact studies relate to Vitae's activities with researchers and the research environment and by providing evidence help to influence policy. In the past year, projects have been undertaken in the following areas:

- Evaluations of a range of doctoral provision and early-career research support programmes, for funders including the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) and the Royal Academy of Engineering.
- Career tracking studies based on primary research with alumni or analysis of systematically collected outcomes data.
- Several projects on diversity and inclusion themes, including for the Royal Society and the Royal Academy of Engineering.
- Longer-term evaluations of thematic funding programmes (improving outcomes for local graduates and development of conversion MSc courses in data science and artificial intelligence, both for the Office for Students).

Some particularly novel work has taken place, including devising a new method to assess the quality of careers information (for Health Education England) and establishing - for the first time - the profile of early-career scientists eligible to apply for fellowship programmes (in order to assess whether the fellowship funding model is inclusive).

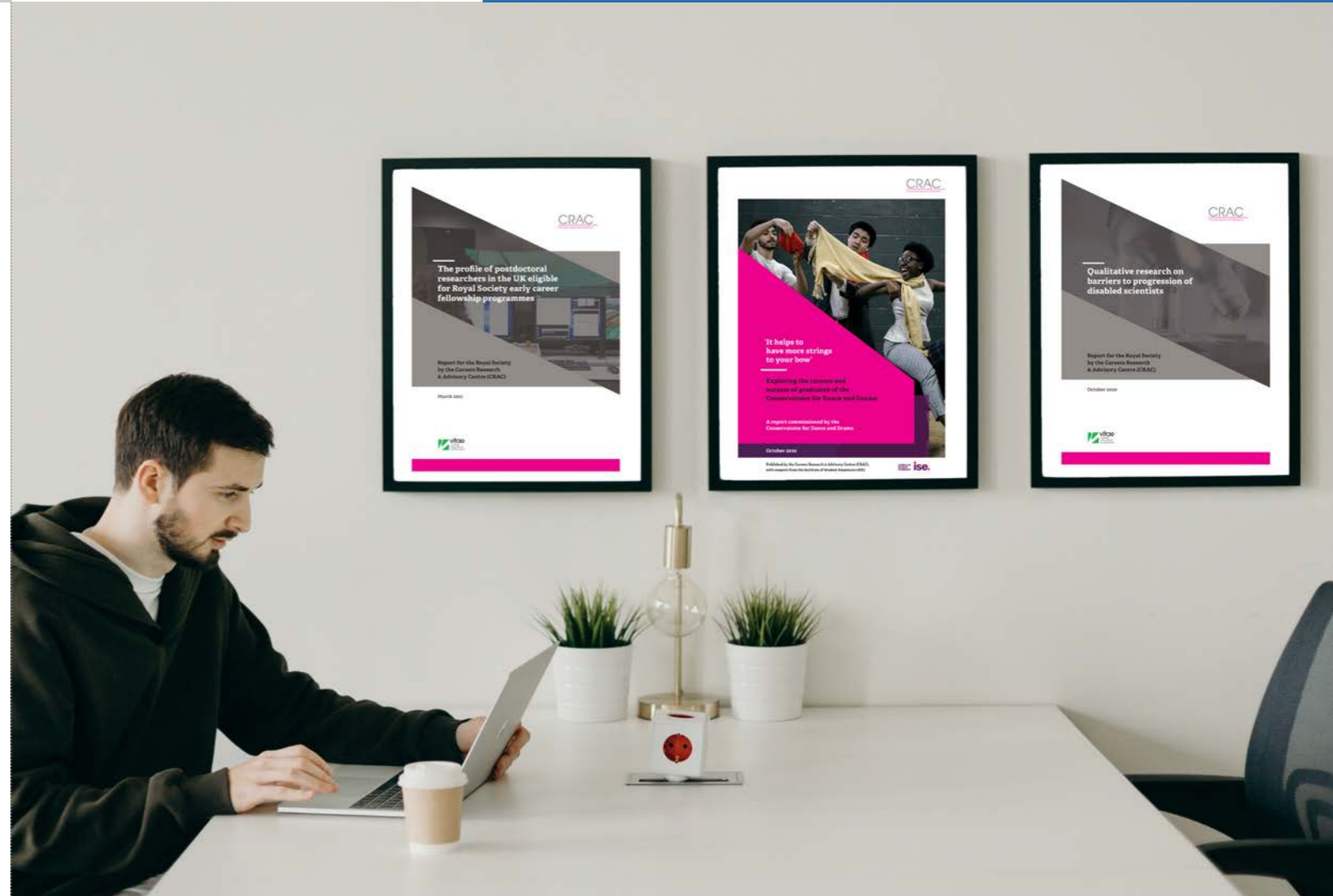
Advocacy

- Advance HE Surveys Advisory Group
- Chemistry in Cells Doctoral Training Programme Advisory Board
- Developing and Implementing hands-on training on Open Science and Open Innovation for Early Career Researchers (DIOSI) Advisory Board
- Economic and Social Research Council, North West Social Science Doctoral Training Partnership, Training, Employability and Knowledge Exchange (TEKE) Panel
- EUniWell Advisory Board
- National Institute for Career Education and Counselling (NICEC) Fellow
- People and Culture Strategy, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS)
- Prosper Advisory Board
- Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Advisory Committee on Degree Awarding Powers
- Queen Mary Academy External Advisory Board
- Responsible Research and Innovation Networked Globally (RRING) Founding Partner
- Scientific Advisory Board for GW4 BioMed Medical Research Council (MRC) Doctoral Training Partnership
- Technicians Commitment Advisory Board
- The Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) Data Insights Strategy Group
- The European Laboratory Research and Innovation Group (ELRIG) Board and Early Career Professionals (ECP) Panel
- The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) International Survey of Science Association (ISSA) Advisory Board

Vitae
sits on the boards and advisory groups, providing a voice for the professional development of researchers

Vitae in the media

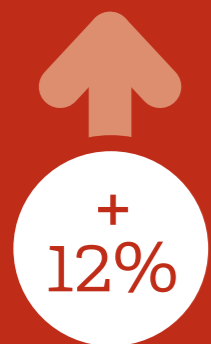
Vitae has continued to gain global media coverage over the last year through its engagement activities and influence in the sector.



Vitae stats (Per annum)

Page views
1,278,484

Visitors
427,286



Registered users

Open access and open research Vitae chat

An open access and open research #Vitaechat was held during Open Access Week and was especially welcome given a climate where access to facilities and face-to-face interaction has been limited. The chat was held for researchers and researcher developers alike, and heightened the important practice of open research and its positive impact on research culture.

Mental Health and wellbeing survey

Vitae was an amplification partner for 'Joy and Stress Triggers: A global survey on mental health among researchers' by the Cactus Foundation, which gathered 13,000 responses from 169 countries.

Enhance your development strategy and provision

Our evidence-based approach to researcher development draws on independent research, policy and frameworks; supporting you to identify goals and evaluate success in your strategy and provision.

Engaging with members

Our careers web pages have been the most referred to pages, with the CV pages maintaining around 400,000 page views each year. Vitae members have been able to benefit from the large range of off-the-shelf training manuals as well as the latest Vitae publications such as 'Understanding the experience of postgraduate researchers (PGRs) using the Vitae Researcher Development Framework (RDF) at UK Universities'

and the first Culture, Employment and Development in Academic Research Survey (CEDARS) 2020 aggregate results, which were created as a handy Powerpoint slide-set resource for Vitae member institutions.

There have been 1,278,484 page views on the site since 01/09/20. Last year: 427,286 visitors.



Vitae festive networking 2020

The event was an opportunity for Vitae members supporting the career and professional development of researchers to come together and reflect on events and learning from 2020.

Connections Getting to Grips

For those new to researcher development, and one of Vitae's flagship events, the second roll-out of this event as an online experience proved just as popular as the first the previous year.

Vitae Researcher Development Framework (RDF) and RDF Planner

In 2020, Vitae embarked on a series of projects that aimed to revisit and potentially refresh some aspects of the RDF, taking into account research environment and cultural changes over the past 10 years, and anticipating changes to come over the next 10 years.

Vitae invited Vitae Members involved with the RDF at a strategic level to learn more about these projects,

progress and to share ideas about how the RDF intersects with other frameworks and institutional tools and approaches.

There are currently 78 RDF Planner subscriptions with five new Planner subscriptions from institutions in Ireland. There are 182 registered users with individual subscriptions and 9,810 registered under institutional subscriptions, totalling 9,810 registered users.



Online career and professional development training from Vitae

Vitae has continued to deliver training and support to researchers across the UK, Europe and beyond. We have delivered two workshops for researchers in Australia, four for researchers in Japan, 14 for researchers based at European

institutions, and nearly 20 for UK institutions. All of our training for the last 18 months has been delivered online and while we look forward to returning to in-person

delivery, we have proven that online training is a real and valuable alternative. The most requested topics for training this year have been career planning, enterprise, engagement and supervisory training. We have also seen an increase in requests for individual career coaching for researchers.

Member forums

Following the success of the member roundtables of 2019-20, the following three member forums have been held in the last year in response to priority topics chosen by Vitae members:

- *Immediate priorities for researcher development*
- *People and culture strategy*
- *Evolving the HR Excellence in Research Award*



CIRCLE

Vitae were asked by the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) to develop additional resources to help grant recipient institutions in Africa to access the Researcher Development Framework (RDF) from the perspective of being at an early stage in researcher professional development and institutional strengthening programmes.

This will support high level mapping of the organisation and the activity that they then embark on as a result. In order to make these resources as accessible as possible they will be both web pages and paper booklets.

La Caixa

The third year of the La Caixa junior Leader programme has now been delivered, with all three cohorts receiving their residential training virtually as a series of half day workshops, and coaching for Cohorts 2 and 3 seeing an excellent take-up. 96% of those in the coaching programme rated their coach as excellent. We also delivered webinars to Cohort 3 and introduced discussion forums on topical issues including Managing Research in a Pandemic, and Research Integrity, using a format we had successfully pioneered with the Medical Research Council (MRC) earlier in the year.



Path to Leadership in Africa

Following the commission by Wellcome and Accelerating Excellence in Science in Africa (AES) of the report and recommendations published in 2020, we recently published three further peer-reviewed articles. Most theories of leadership focus on high-income countries but these focus on research on leadership in low-income countries.

1. **Pathways to research leadership for early career researchers in Africa: A potential role for African and Global Funders. Accepted by South African Journal of Higher Education - available online in 2022**
2. **Breaking the glass ceiling: perspectives and strategies on gender and research leadership in African higher education. International Journal of Gender, Science and Technology. In Review**
3. **Early-and Mid-Career transition to research leadership in Africa.**

Intellectual Property Office (IPO)

Now in our third year of collaborating with the IPO on the Intellectual Property (IP) for research programme, we have delivered 17 virtual events, which included four live lectures open to researchers from across the UK. The remaining 13 events were hosted by a UK research institution and included a presentation from their team managing IP.

Over 900 participants attended the sessions, and 95% of respondents felt the session had helped them understand the relevance of IP in their research.

Building on Vitae's experience, in running and developing the IP for Research workshops, Vitae and the Intellectual Property Office have created a flexible 'off-the-shelf' IP for Research training package that researcher developers and/or technology transfer offices can use to deliver in-house IP training either as a stand-alone event or as part of a wider researcher training programme. These resources are a response to the demand for greater awareness of IP for researchers and will help to upskill the research community in Intellectual Property.

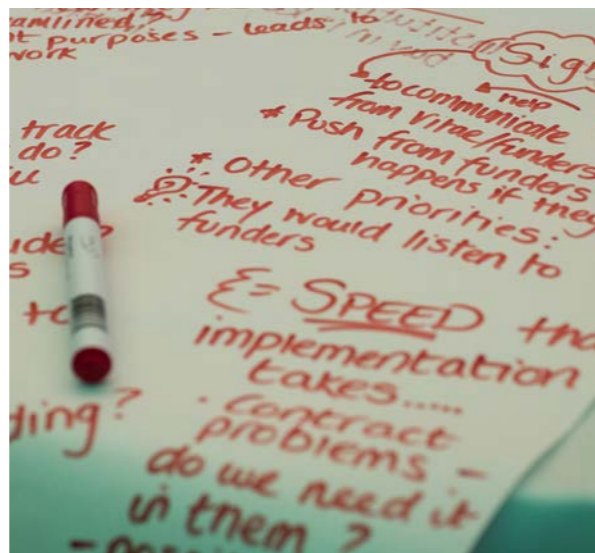
Building Research Capacity for Sustainable Water and Food Security in Africa (BRECCIA)

As the final part of our contracted support for the BRECCIA Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) funded programme, Vitae have delivered four webinars to the early career researchers, on the topics of mentoring; impact in research; integrity and conduct; developing relationships. We are currently in discussions with BRECCIA about further support Vitae can provide in the next stage of the programme.

Training for the Japan Science and Technology Agency

In the past year, Vitae has delivered three webinars and three training courses for the Japan Science and Technology Agency, aimed at young researchers, around the professional and career development of researchers.

- Training package 1
- Training package 2
- Training package 3



Innovative Training Networks (ITNs) and Doctoral Networks (DNs)

Vitae is currently involved in two funded ITNs, which achieved funding in the final year of Horizon 2020: 'Oligonucleotides for Medical Applications' (OLIGOMED) which aims to address urgent needs in healthcare, in particular cancer, Huntington's Disease and cardiovascular diseases; and 'Systems approach of URban enviRonmEnts and health' (SURREAL) where the researchers are working on an improved understanding of the urban health system's complexity, and on co-designing and applying adequate interventions in the system. Our involvement in the PAIN-Net ITN was concluded in 2020 with the final training, delayed due to the pandemic, was delivered virtually.

We are currently in active discussions with new applicants under the Horizon Europe programme for Doctoral Networks which is replacing ITNs, and expect to be a partner in a number of applications later this year.

"Vitae really understood our professional development challenge - by providing strategic expertise and bespoke training sessions, Vitae enabled us to take our capacity development to a whole new level"

Dr Julie Reeves, Researcher Developer - Senior Teaching Fellow and Co-investigator in the BRECCIA-GCRF programme



Vitae 3MT® competition

The Vitae 3MT® 2020 competition was transformed into an on-line virtual event, with global reach, through open access voting for the People's Choice winner, attracting almost 800 registering to watch.

Following the success of last year, 2021's competition is being delivered virtually again. Approximately 20% more institutions registered their interest in holding a 3MT® competition in 2021 and 61 submitted entries to the Vitae 3MT® 2021 competition, which is a healthy 15% increase.

When surveyed, institutional 3MT® organisers reported that the top two benefits of running the competition were developing and challenging postgraduate researchers and showcasing institutional research.

“Through this pandemic I've realised just how crucial science communication is and #3MT is an excellent way to build on those skills”

Shruti Mandhani, previous Judges Choice Winner

Connect with the community

Through a culture of engagement and practice sharing, researcher development professionals connect with diverse perspectives to generate new ideas and drive collective progress.

Academic Apprenticeships

The Level 7 Academic Professional Apprenticeship standard (L7 APA) develops early career academics in higher education, following either a teaching or research specialist route. Aligned to both the UK Professional Standards Framework and the Vitae Researcher Development Framework (RDF), this year the standard has been reviewed and a survey commissioned to understand why so few apprentices have undertaken the research specialist route. This will help Vitae to determine our role in supporting the community, working with the HE Trailblazer Group.

UK Research Staff Association (UKRSA)

Aside from the work being done in conjunction with the Researcher Networks Working Group, UKRSA have been focusing on recruitment and representation over the last year and have also been involved in and asked to join a number of consultations and other related committees such as the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) bureaucracy review and the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) Early Career Researcher forum discussions.

UKRSA have also had a representative on the National Postdoc Conference (NPDC) Steering Group as well as on the HR Excellence in Research UK panel.

Consortium for the Humanities and the Arts South-East England (CHASE)

This year we have concluded our third CHASE research internship with publication of the 'Understanding the experience of postgraduate researchers (PGRs) using the Vitae Researcher Development Framework (RDF) at UK Universities' methodology report and accompanying 15 case studies.

As part of a series of projects that aim to revisit and potentially refresh some aspects of the RDF, Vitae's latest RDF project has been identifying issues and questions that should be considered, to make recommendations for the future RDF over the next 10 years.

Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) review of doctoral education

EPSRC undertook a strategic review of their doctoral training programmes to align with the UK R&D Roadmap of increased investment in R&D and the People and Culture Strategy. As part of this review RAND Europe and Vitae were commissioned to conduct a literature review and deliver a series of focus groups with current doctoral researchers and alumni. These six focus groups explored their experiences of their doctoral education and how well prepared they felt for their chosen careers.

ELRIG Early Career Professional Network

Vitae has continued supporting the career and professional development strands and activity of the ELRIG Early Career Professional network - the not-for-profits organisation serving the life science and drug discovery communities. Building such global networks is imperative for Early Career Professionals (ECPs) as they navigate the variety of career options ahead of them. The ECPs are from academia, not-for profits and industry, and the collaboration helps Vitae gain and maintain understanding from an employer's perspective, given that so many early career researchers go into careers beyond academia.

Looking to the future

The Covid-19 pandemic has given many of us the opportunity to do things differently, to take different perspectives, and to respond to new challenges.

Looking back at what has been achieved across researcher development practice and policy, for research culture, and by Vitae, should give us all reason to celebrate the many individual and collective successes. Now, at the start of Vitae's programme year, we are taking stock of these successes so that we can build from them as we define our immediate and future priorities. Priorities that, as ever, will be informed by the ongoing challenges facing researcher development and our members, as well as new opportunities to position and use researcher development to achieve the wider aims of institutions, policy makers and the research system.

With this in mind, we will be consulting on future evolutions to Vitae membership to help shape our offer so that we adapt to your cultural, strategic and global perspectives. We aim to meet the differing needs of our members in pursuit of an environment conducive to successful research that is underpinned by evidence-based goals, strategy and provision for researcher development.

The consultation and broad evolution of our membership offer in partnership with our members, will complement other specific areas to be refreshed, including the UK process for the HR Excellence in Research Award and the Researcher Development Framework (RDF).

Strengthening opportunities to collaborate with both new and existing members will be a priority for Vitae in the coming year, as well as continuing to develop our relationships with wider stakeholders in researcher development. For example, with the UK Government, in particular the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), we will be feeding into the Research and Development (R&D) People and Culture Strategy and highlighting linkages to the implementation of the Researcher Development Concordat, together with the Concordat Strategy Group. Further, as a growing focal point for improving research culture in institutions, we will be supporting the researcher development profession to maximise and demonstrate our collective value, ensuring the needs of individual researchers and the wider environment are met.

Globally, we will take advantage of recent transformations, both technologically and in working practices, to ensure an open dialogue with our members, colleagues, and partners, that supports mutual learning and fosters a culture of engagement and practice-sharing amongst researcher development professionals.

Building on the success of member forums, working groups, and our learning and development offer for researchers internationally, we will look for new ways to support your research ambitions, generate new ideas, and discover what works well for you and your researchers. Having spent time looking back through the pandemic, we aspire to look forward with you as we co-create an environment in which researchers can flourish and reach their potential.





We are a non-profit programme, part of the **Careers Research and Advisory Centre (CRAC) Ltd** with over 50 years' experience of enhancing the skills & careers of researchers

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