Developing the next generation

Guidance and good practice in the leadership development of early career researchers and academics

Dr Fiona Denney, Brunel University London
Alison Mitchell, Vitae
Dr Katie Wheat, Vitae

Acknowledgements

The project team

- Dr Fiona Denney, Brunel University London
- Alison Mitchell, Vitae
- Dr Katie Wheat, Vitae
- Dr Judith Williams, University of Manchester
- Dr Rodney Day, University of Hertfordshire
- Dr Anna Price, Queen Mary University of London (formerly of King's College London)
- Louisa Lawes, formerly of University of Edinburgh

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Executive summary

Improved efficiency and effectiveness in the development of the next generation of early career researchers and academics is crucial for the sustained growth of excellent research, innovation and knowledge leadership. The strength of growth in this area affects the UK's competitive positioning worldwide and poses a strategic challenge for universities. Academic and research leaders have multiple roles and responsibilities including effective development of future talent within efficient and effective working relationships. Many research and academic leaders are ill-prepared for the challenges of leadership, and 'learning on the job' does not equip them to develop the next generation in the broad range of skills required for leadership in a variety of careers. The Vitae Researcher Development Framework (RDF) maps out the competencies of successful researchers and highlights the competencies of successful research leaders in the Leadership Lens; the development of these competencies is key to the journey to academic and research leadership.

There are many contributors in the efficient and effective development of academic and research leaders and this project aims to assist current academic and research leaders, future leaders, and the wider academic community by uncovering academic and research leaders' reflections on their personal journeys to a leadership position, along with their insights into managing and developing talent. The project uncovered what academic and research leaders wish they had known about managing and developing talent when they started.

This project transforms the understanding of how to develop readiness for academic and research leadership by harnessing the reflections and experiences of those who have made the journey. Research leaders from different universities and disciplines were invited through interview to look into their everyday experiences within research communities.

The project outcomes include a series of toolkits for use by staff developers and academic and research leaders, and a series of guidance and reflection sheets for use with and by early career researchers and academics themselves. The guidance throughout this resource provides recommendations about good practice in effective performance management by academic and research leaders in the development of early career academics and research staff, taking account of the steps to becoming a successful leader encapsulated in the RDF.

Developing the next generation of research leaders resources include
- Research leaders views on the provision of leadership development
- Recommendations for the development of research leadership
- Leadership climate analysis tool kit
- Research leadership guidance and reflection sheets for early career academics and research staff
    - Career planning for leadership
    - Working with others
    - Building networks
    - Building a research profile
    - Achieving a work-life balance
    - Finding mentors and role models
    - Management and leadership
    - Culture and environment

All resources can be downloaded from the vitae website (www.vitae.ac.uk).

How to use this resource

What is it?

- A practical resource intended for use by staff developers in higher education institutions
- A series of toolkits and guidance documents around themes relating to the development of future academic and research leaders
- A source of guidance and advice on preparing for academic and research leadership careers
- Based on a research project conducting and analysing interviews of current academic and research leaders in UK institutions

Who is it for?

- **Staff developers and HR** can use the resources to, e.g.,
    - assess institutional provision and climate
    - develop new training and resources for early career researchers and academics
    - stimulate conversations with academic and professional colleagues
    - give out as worksheets during training.

- **Current academic and research leaders** can use the resources to, e.g.,
    - inform effective career development and mentoring conversations
    - provide your researchers with self-directed reflection and guidance sheets
    - reflect on your own journey to leadership.

- **Early career researchers and academics** can use the section 'Guidance from the top' to, e.g.,
    - inform career planning for research and academic leadership
    - have more effective development conversations with academics and research leaders
    - reflect on what it means to be a leader in a higher education institution.

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vitae realising the potential of researchers

Project background

The sustained growth of excellent research, innovation and knowledge leadership is crucial for maintaining the UK's competitive positioning worldwide. Improved efficiency and effectiveness in the development of the next generation of early career researchers and academics poses a strategic challenge for universities in achieving this growth. Academic and research leaders have multiple roles and responsibilities including effective development of future talent within efficient and effective working relationships. Principal investigators and research leaders, however are "less confident in staff performance management" than in their other responsibilities such as supervision. Whilst they recognise the benefit of more professional development for themselves and others, they are "less likely to feel valued for motivating individuals, providing careers advice, and managing and developing research staff"[1]. Many research and academic leaders were themselves ill-prepared for the challenges of leadership, and 'learning on the job' does not equip them to develop the next generation in the broad range of skills required for leadership in a variety of careers. The Vitae Researcher Development Framework[2] (RDF) maps out the competencies of successful researchers and highlights the competencies of successful research leaders in the Leadership Lens; the development and application of these competencies is key to the journey to research leadership. This project transforms the understanding of how to develop these competencies in readiness for research leadership by harnessing the reflections and experiences of those who have made the journey and placing them in a practical, experiential context.

There is a triangle of responsibility enshrined in the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers[3], uniting institutions, academic and research leaders and researchers in their responsibilities for the development of research staff for career pathways, including research leadership. Institutional actions can also be reflected in the acquisition of the HR Excellence in Research Award[4]. By focusing all stakeholders on the key priorities of developing the next generation of leaders, efficiencies can be found through targeting scarce resources and in shared purposefulness and effectiveness achieved through concentrating on what makes a successful research leader. This project aims to transform the practice of all these stakeholders by identifying priorities, mapped to the RDF and the Leadership Lens on the RDF, making recommendations and providing guidance as a result of analysis of the interviews with successful research leaders.

There are many contributors in the efficient and effective development of future leaders and this project aims to assist current academic and research leaders, future leaders, and the wider academic community by uncovering academic and research leaders' reflections on their personal journeys to a leadership position, along with their insights into managing and developing talent. A key part of this process was to invite academic and research leaders to look into their everyday experiences within research communities. To this end, the project captured leaders' reflections on their career and development journeys. Common themes emerged through semi-structured interviews with leaders in different HEIs and disciplines. These are reported here to enable greater clarity on the priorities for developing the next generation of academic and research leaders and to enable innovative and transformational practices across the sector.

[1] Principal Investigators and Research Leaders Survey (PIRLS), Vitae 2013 https://www.vitae.ac.uk/impact-and-evaluation/pirls
[2] Vitae Researcher Development Framework (RDF), Vitae 2010 https://www.vitae.ac.uk/rdf
[3] Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, Vitae 2009 https://www.vitae.ac.uk/concordat
[4] HR Excellence in Research Award https://www.vitae.ac.uk/hrexcellence

Aims and objectives

The project aimed to uncover what academic and research leaders wish they had known about managing and developing talent when they started.

The project aims to provide:

- common themes and examples of what academic and research leaders would have found useful when they got their first grant or first lectureship by asking them to reflect on their own journey and the professional support that could have been better provided to enhance their own career development and transition to a leadership role
- guidance for senior academics and research leaders on how to manage the development of their research staff, particularly in relation to guiding, mentoring and supporting the next generation of research and academic leaders
- better understanding of the effective development of early career researchers and future leaders by all stakeholders within the HEI, including line managers, HR, staff developers and senior management, in order to enhance talent management and development, and help researchers (as future leaders across all sectors) transition into careers that are right for them
- the next generation of leaders with insights into formal and informal professional development of current academic and research leaders in order to empower them to take responsibility for their own formal and informal professional development.

Reflective approach

In summary, semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with 18 academic and research leaders in 5 different HEIs and representative of a range of disciplines. The interviews were transcribed and analysed thematically using NVivo[5] in order to draw out the key points, from which this report, containing guidance and training documents, is developed.

The interviews captured the perspectives of academic and research leaders on their leadership context, history, and reflections on:

- what they wish they had known and what would have helped them during their journeys, providing critical insights to inform efficient and effective mentoring, training, and development for early career researchers and academics
- current requirements as research leaders, including the rewards for developing talent
- positive management strategies to enhance their research staff performance and how they get the best out of research talent whilst recognising and enabling a diversity of future careers
- important attributes in managing research staff and building teams to maximise efficiency and research impact.

The full methodology is set out in Appendix 1

Outcomes, guides and resources

The project outcomes are presented as a series of guides in the forthcoming sections, to inform all stakeholders, including academic and research leaders, staff developers and aspiring leaders themselves, about priorities in developing research leadership talent more efficiently and effectively. These guides can be used to enable:

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[5] NVivo http://www.qsrinternational.com

- academics and research leaders to increase the impact of researchers and their contribution to the UK knowledge economy by helping to minimise the inefficiencies created by poor working relationships and under-prepared research and academic leadership
- institutions to assess the leadership climate in order to support academic and research staff to be better prepared for senior positions
- academic and research staff who wish to progress in leadership positions in academia to plan their professional development.

The resources are also available to download from the Vitae web site (www.vitae.ac.uk).

The guides provide recommendations about good practice in effective performance management by academics and research leaders in the development of research staff, taking account of the steps to becoming a successful research leader encapsulated in the Vitae Researcher Development Framework (RDF) and can be used for a variety of purposes:

- By academics and research leaders, describing the support that they can provide efficiently for the advancement of research staff towards research leadership and career pathways out of academia
- By institutions and research staff developers, looking to provide more efficient and effective support of early career research staff and how to engage academics and research leaders in preparing research staff for future leadership positions
- With and by early career researchers and academics, providing insights on how to have effective conversations with colleagues in leadership positions and for their own career development

Discussion and next steps

This report provides a suite of resources to assist institutions, academics and researchers in transforming the development of the next generation of academic and research leaders, mapped to the Vitae Researcher Development Framework (RDF). The leaders who contributed to the project came from different HEIs and disciplines and yet there were several common themes that emerged. When taken together, these common themes point to practical and experiential priorities identified by leaders themselves as important in the preparation of future academic and research leaders. These themes can be practically applied by institutions, for example, by using the Leadership Climate Analysis Toolkit to analyse current provision to identify any gaps, by considering the views and recommendations of the leaders who were interviewed, and by using the Staff Development Toolkits (developed from the combined reflections of the project team) as a starting point for creating new training and resources. However, whilst institutions have responsibilities to provide training and development (including mentoring) for research staff, research staff themselves have responsibilities for their own career development, as highlighted by Principle 5 of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers[6], and the section 'Guidance from the top' provides resources that can be used by aspiring academic and research leaders themselves.

All the participating institutions in the project are adopting the resources and we invite others to make use of them in developing leadership programmes, perhaps developing their own case studies. The methodology could also be used to better understand the leadership development priorities of groups of research staff to enable equality and diversity in the research environment.

We hope you find the resources useful and welcome your feedback (https://www.vitae.ac.uk/about-us/contact-us).

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[6] Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, Vitae 2009 https://www.vitae.ac.uk/concordat

Institutional strengthening for leadership

Introduction

For staff developers, HR, senior management, and current research and academic leaders

This section provides a series of toolkits from an institutional perspective and for current leaders of research staff. The guidance contained in this section enables a review of current provision and institutional climate to ensure that the needs of future leaders are met, effectively and efficiently. These recommendations are based on the real-life experiences of successful academic and research leaders.

This section provides
- Views on provision for leadership development from the leaders we interviewed
- Recommendations for the development of leadership
- Leadership climate analysis tool kit

The Leadership Climate Analysis Toolkit can be used to analyse current provision against the common themes emerging from the interviews with academic and research leaders to identify any gaps. You may also wish to consider the recommendations from both the research leaders who were interviewed and the Staff Development Toolkits (based on the combined reflections of the project team) in creating new resources to address any gaps. This would assist with pursuing an innovative approach to transform the development of academic and research leadership talent across the institution, grounded in the reflections of experienced leaders.

Recommendations for the development of research leaders

We have reflected on the outcomes from the interviews to create toolkits for use by staff developers to address each of the key themes identified in this document. These examples can be used as a starting point for creating new workshops and resources for use with aspiring and current research and academic leaders.

Career Planning for Leadership: Staff Development Toolkit

The following topics and discussion questions might form the basis of a workshop on career development for aspiring leaders, or be used to support effective career conversations during appraisals:

1. What guidance and structures are in place to ensure that all staff at your institution have useful appraisals?
2. How will you ensure your next appraisal conversation is worthwhile? Are there any additional tools or training that you need to help with this?
3. What are the things that are important to you for your future career, both professionally and personally?
4. How do you help the people you lead to understand the responsibilities of their next career stage?
5. What does your career road map or five year plan look like? What are the features of a useful career plan? How can a career plan form the basis of a career conversation with your line manager or with the people you lead?

Working with Others: Staff Development Toolkit

Our leaders felt that developing and maintaining a variety of working relationships is essential for becoming an effective leader in UK academia. We strongly recommend that this is reflected in any training and development that you include for early career academics and research staff and we suggest that the following topics and discussion points might form the basis of a workshop for aspiring leaders to work more effectively with others and within the structures of your institution:

1. What support and training do you need in the areas of communication skills, effective listening and team building? Are you making the most of these skills to grow strong and wide-reaching networks?
2. What methods do you have for managing upwards? Who do you need to manage and for what purpose?
3. How do you show that you value your team members and colleagues? Do you feel appreciated and valued by your line manager and colleagues / team-mates? If not, what could you do to appreciate and value them more as a first step to encouraging them to value you?
4. What do you know about how to get things done within your institution and across the sector? How are you reaching out and building working relationships across other departments? How can you remove the barriers between academics and professional services in your institution?
5. What support and training is there to assist having difficult conversations. Have you had experience of having difficult conversations with colleagues? What scenarios might you come across in the future and how do you think you would deal with them?