

Building Your Network: Staff Development Toolkit

Networking is often a difficult topic to discuss with those at an early stage in their career – there is a tendency to view it as something suspicious, slightly amoral (it has the image of "using other people") and uncomfortable. Coupled with the importance of networking as highlighted by our interviewees, these are very good reasons for networking to be incorporated into good researcher development programmes. Whilst you certainly can run standalone workshops on networking, there are plenty of good resources available for free online which can be incorporated into workshops on other topics to encourage and support networking. For example, networking ice-breakers at the start of a workshop can be used to emphasise the importance of networking and also how to do it through natural conversation and to encourage researchers to remember facts about the people they are talking to. Not just what they do but what their broader sets of interests might be, which might be useful in opening up further opportunities.

Early career researchers and academics need to be encouraged to develop an "elevator pitch"-type description of their research so that they can easily communicate the core concepts to any intelligent person within a few seconds. They would also benefit from being encouraged to develop good listening and questioning skills in order to be able to build rapport and engage in constructive discussion with anyone.

Finally, the key point that aspiring leaders would really benefit from learning is that networking is not amoral – it is largely about showing interest in other people's research for the purpose of wider and mutual benefits – and is certainly essential to career progression in modern academia.

Building Your Research Profile: Staff Development Toolkit

If you are already running a programme of researcher training and development, then undoubtedly this will already incorporate sessions on writing and publishing. Other topics that you might wish to consider would be around supporting aspiring leaders in horizon scanning and helping them to identify potential funding sources. Obviously the main funders such as the EU (Horizon 2020), the Research Councils and large trusts such as the Wellcome and Leverhulme are key sources of information about the topics that they are currently inviting bids for.

Future horizon scanning can be more difficult; however, most funders will have published strategic plans indicating their broad priority themes for the future. You may also wish to invite successful academics in your organization to come and discuss topics with aspiring leaders, such as

1. How they do horizon scanning and keep up to date with their field
2. Where they think the research in their field is heading
3. How they adjust their approach, position their research or build their team according to their predictions
4. The importance of building interdisciplinary teams for future impact and potentially significant breakthroughs

Achieving a Work / Life Balance: Staff Development Toolkit

Clearly our interviewees felt that effective time management and work-life balance were critical elements of effective leadership. We would encourage any university interested in developing research leaders of the future to include a workshop and resources to help early career researchers and academics to start to develop strategies and boundaries before they get to the point of being overloaded. We suggest that you include the following:

1. Identify and make explicit your university's policies on work-life balance and support for the well-being of staff. Encourage discussion around these – should they be revised? If so, how? What would make their implementation effective?

2. Are all staff made aware of the demands of jobs or new tasks and roles before they take them? Have a discussion around hidden pressures and the prevailing culture in academia that may not be overt in job descriptions but sometimes makes it hard for academics to cope.
3. Do you know if there is any additional support available for staff when they move to more senior roles? Perhaps workshop participants could make some suggestions of what leaders would find useful. They could base this on the information provided in the section 'Guidance from the top' or their own experiences. Examples might include job shadowing, having an effective handover from predecessors, and accessing supporting documentation such as reports.

In all of this, effective boundary setting and assertiveness skills are key. We suggest that you include an overview of these in any time management / work-life balance workshops you run. This would also be a good opportunity to promote any mentoring schemes or coaching services you provide in order to help future leaders learn how to say “no” and how to identify the “strategic yes”.

Finding Mentors and Role Models: Staff Development Toolkit

Our research and academic leaders felt that having a variety of mentoring relationships was extremely valuable for enabling researchers to realise their potential.

The following discussion questions might form the basis of a workshop on mentoring for aspiring leaders, or be used to induct new mentors and mentees:

1. What is the role of a mentor?
2. How do the roles of a mentor and line manager compare?
3. What does a successful research leader look like?
4. What can you learn from the strengths and weaknesses in the approaches of people who have led or managed you in the past?
5. Who has strengths in an area that you would like to develop in?
6. What do you do to create an environment where people can come to each other for advice and discussion?
7. What schemes are you aware of across your organisation (or elsewhere)?
8. How would you approach someone to ask if they would mentor you?

It may also be useful to develop a formal mentoring scheme for aspiring research and academic leaders, either within your institution, or across a consortium of institutions, should resources permit. At the minimum, staff should be offered guidance on how to identify, select and approach their own mentor.

Management and Leadership: Staff Development Toolkit

Our research leaders felt that management skills and experience were an important aspect of progressing and succeeding in research and academic leadership.

We would encourage you to provide management and leadership programmes and workshops for aspiring leaders. In particular, you may wish to consider the following:

1. Do your staff benefit from the learning and experience of senior managers and leaders within your institution and outside? How can you encourage discussions around management roles and responsibilities between early career academics and those in leadership positions?

2. Do principal investigators and line managers receive training in managing effectively? Perhaps workshop participants could identify best practice in management and think about where additional training might be useful. They could base this on the information provided in the section 'Guidance from the top' or their own experiences.
3. What opportunities are there for early career researchers to get involved in the governance of your institution? Do ECR reps sit on committees and steering groups? Are ECRs made aware of the potential benefits of taking part in these groups and do they know how to find out about them? Are line managers encouraged to make these opportunities available and to delegate effectively to the benefit of the professional development of the people they lead?

Particular skills workshop topics that might be useful include people management (e.g., effective recruitment, delegating, motivating, and communicating) and self-management (e.g., reflecting, decision making, confidence, and strategic thinking).

The interviewees often expressed areas of leadership and management that they find difficult and need to focus on. They were aware of the need to develop themselves continually and often did this by watching and learning from the behaviour of leaders around them, by reflecting on particular challenges in their daily role, and by putting in strategies to try to address those challenges. Particular leadership and management goals for the interviewees included being more reflective, letting people make their own mistakes, and saying 'no'. We would suggest that any training and development activities for future research leaders should support the art of reflective practice.

Academic leadership often starts off with no formal line management authority and we consider that it is important that those people are supported in being a "leader from any chair". We recommend that Vitae's resources in this area are used in the provision of leadership training, for example Preparing for Leadership for Research Staff (www.vitae.ac.uk/pfl) and the Leading Researcher booklet (www.vitae.ac.uk/leadership).

Culture and Environment: Staff Development Toolkit

Our research and academic leaders felt that in order to progress in an academic career, the culture and environment needed to be considered in terms of

1. creating a favourable culture for teams and individuals to flourish
2. understanding and interacting with the macro-environment
3. supporting diversity in the community within which they work.

We therefore suggest that programmes for aspiring leaders should encompass these aspects. In particular, you may wish to consider including the following:

1. An overview of the learning and teaching, and research landscapes across the higher education sector, within the UK, EU and globally
2. The importance of building and maintaining effective teams. This could include topics from how to recruit the best staff, through to using theories and strategies to develop effective teams.
3. Using the Vitae Every Researcher Counts materials (www.vitae.ac.uk/everyresearchercounts) and reflective tools (e.g. 360° feedback, coaching, psychometric and occupational personality questionnaires, Myers-Briggs Type Indicator) to discuss diversity in teams in a constructive way
4. Supporting the use of mentoring in order to enable early career researchers to be paired with more experienced academics or those from another university, such as through linking to existing, well-established schemes

Views on provision for leadership development

Our research and academic leaders were specifically asked to identify their top five topics to be included in training courses for aspiring research and academic leaders. We have collated and summarised their views below by mapping them onto the relevant descriptor from the Vitae Researcher Development Framework (RDF).

Topics recommended for training mapped to the Vitae Researcher Development Framework (RDF)

Domain A

A1 Subject knowledge*

A2 Evaluating*

Domain B

B1 Ethusiasm*

B1 Self-reflection*

B1 Responsibility*

B2 Preparation and prioritisation*

B2 Time management

B2 Responsiveness to change*

B3 Continuing professional development*

B3 Networking*

B3 Reputation and esteem*

Domain C

C2 Research strategy*

C2 Project planning and delivery*

C2 Risk management*

C3 Income and funding generation*

C3 Financial management

C3 Infrastructure and resources*

Domain D

D1 Team working*

D1 People management*

D1 Mentoring

D1 Influence and leadership*

D1 Collaboration*

D2 Communication methods*

D2 Publication*

D3 Public engagement*

D3 Policy*

www.vitae.ac.uk/rdf

Most of the descriptors identified during the interviews also belong to the Leadership Lens on the RDF (see Appendix 2) as indicated with an asterisk (*). Not all of the descriptors from the Leadership Lens were identified by the interviewees, however, this is to be expected given that the interviewees were specifically asked to describe topics that could be trained, rather than the qualities needed for successful leadership more broadly. Potential additions to the Leadership Lens are time management, financial management, and mentoring.

As well as important topics listed above, our interviewees also identified a number of recommendations for the format of training for the next generation of research leaders, including activity, role-play and case-study based training; the opportunity to interact with colleagues from other departments and subject areas; the importance of learning to find the information you need and apply to it a new context; and being prepared for the inevitable challenges of future leadership.

“I think it’s true as a researcher as well as a leader, is you can’t necessarily learn all the skills first that you might apply at some point in the next 40 years of your career; I think you have to learn to learn or something.”

Additional supporting quotes can be found in Appendix 3.

Leadership climate analysis toolkit

As revealed during the interviews, successful leadership is about more than developing the necessary skills and experience. The following questions, based on the reflections of research leaders in UK institutions, are intended to prompt you to consider aspects of the organisational climate that will empower researchers and academics to achieve their leadership potential.

This toolkit could be used by staff across the institution, such as HR, senior management, academics and staff developers to give a snapshot of the current organisational climate and highlight areas for discussion and development.

Career planning for leadership

The organisation enables early career researchers and academics to

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| ■ Learn about the roles they are interested in and know the criteria for progression _____ | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| ■ Take the time to plan ahead _____ | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| ■ Use appraisals as a tool to discuss and plan their career development _____ | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| ■ Factor their personal values into their career planning _____ | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| ■ Develop the skills they will need at their next career level before they get there _____ | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| ■ Be resilient and learn from failures _____ | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| ■ Take time to reflect and consolidate _____ | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Working with others

The organisation enables early career researchers and academics to

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| ■ Communicate, collaborate, connect and work collegiately _____ | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| ■ Learn to manage upwards and to ask for help _____ | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| ■ Be prepared to listen to others _____ | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| ■ Invest in developing working relationships over time _____ | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| ■ Have difficult conversations in an honest and supportive way _____ | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| ■ Understand how to get what they need from other people _____ | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Building networks

The organisation enables early career researchers and academics to

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ■ Make effective use of conferences _____ | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| ■ Use networking as a development opportunity _____ | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Building a research profile

The organisation enables early career researchers and academics to

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ■ Grow their publishing track record _____ | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| ■ Engage in the process of getting funding _____ | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| ■ Perform horizon scanning and forward planning to build impact _____ | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Achieving a work / life balance

The organisation enables early career researchers and academics to

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

- Learn to delegate to other people, ask for help and say “no” _____ 1 2 3 4 5
- Take time out of work on a regular basis _____ 1 2 3 4 5
- Put family first and acknowledge that having a family will impact on career decisions _____ 1 2 3 4 5
- Create a boundary between work and home _____ 1 2 3 4 5
- Develop a strategy for dealing with emails and competing demands _____ 1 2 3 4 5
- Selectively engage with opportunities and use the “strategic yes” _____ 1 2 3 4 5

Finding mentors and role models

The organisation enables early career researchers and academics to

- Recognise the value of informal mentoring _____ 1 2 3 4 5
- Look for mentors in all places _____ 1 2 3 4 5
- Use mentors to boost their confidence _____ 1 2 3 4 5
- Not always take their mentor’s advice _____ 1 2 3 4 5
- Continue to seek mentoring relationships throughout their career _____ 1 2 3 4 5

Management and leadership

The organisation enables early career researchers and academics to

- Understand what leadership is _____ 1 2 3 4 5
- Develop longer-term strategies verses short-term actions _____ 1 2 3 4 5
- Build a talented team _____ 1 2 3 4 5
- Understand how the institution and academia works _____ 1 2 3 4 5
- Be confident _____ 1 2 3 4 5

Culture and Environment

The organisation enables aspiring and current research and academic leaders to

- Create a welcoming and invigorating environment within which academics and researchers can excel _____ 1 2 3 4 5
- Develop an appreciation of the landscape of HE and the context within which both teaching and research sit _____ 1 2 3 4 5
- Enhance and enable performance _____ 1 2 3 4 5
- Recognise the increasing importance of interdisciplinary (or multidisciplinary) working _____ 1 2 3 4 5
- Appreciate the benefit that the variety of individual behaviours, experiences, attitudes, outlook and skills have to offer _____ 1 2 3 4 5

Guidance from the top

Introduction

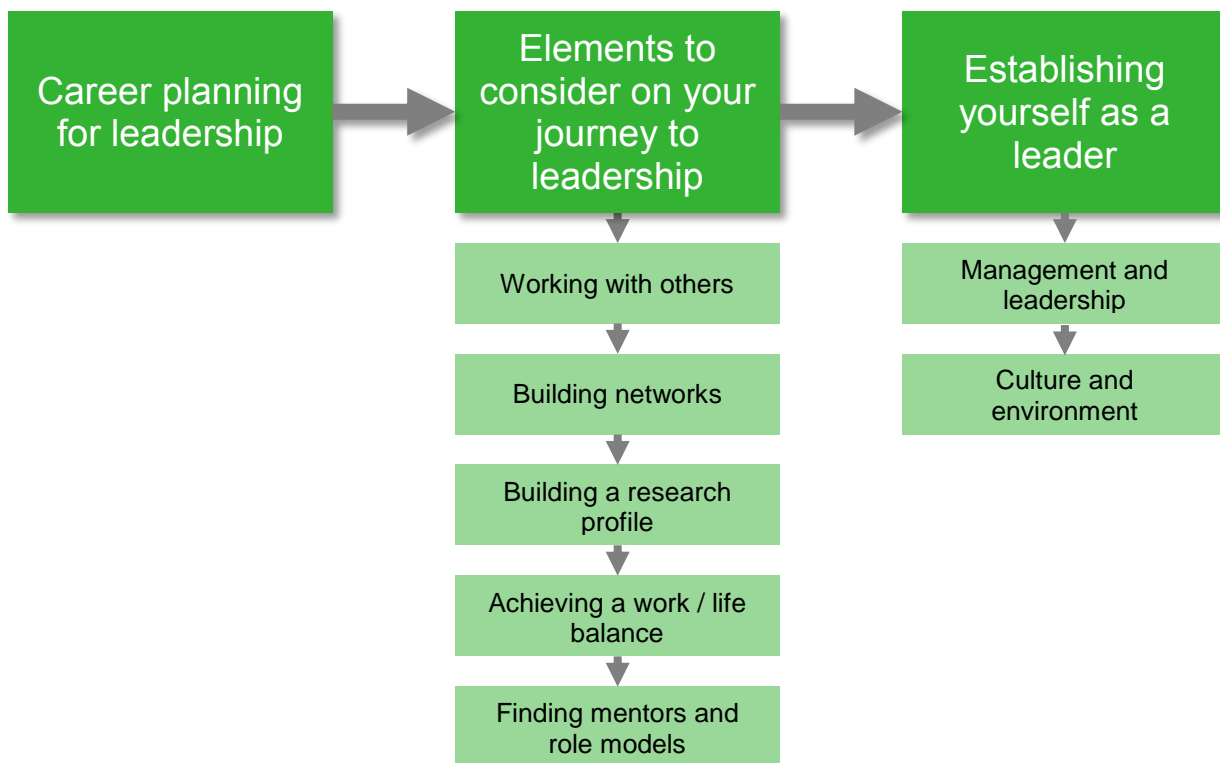
Guidance and reflection sheets on preparing for academic and research leadership; for use with, and by, aspiring leaders

This section provides advice and insights from experienced, established and successful academic and research leaders to research staff, early career academics, and others about how to plan and develop a career towards becoming a successful leader in higher education. This section is provided as a series of eight separate guidance and reflection sheets that can be incorporated into workshops with early career academics and researchers, used as source material for mentoring conversations, or used by aspiring leaders for themselves. The preparing for research leadership guidance and reflection sheets can also be downloaded from the Vitae web site.

The eight guidance and reflection sheets are:

- 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

We suggest that the sections are considered in the following structure:



Career planning for leadership

Advice from academic and research leaders

- Learn about the roles you are interested in and know the criteria for progression
- Take the time to plan ahead
- Use appraisals as a tool to discuss and plan your career development
- Factor your personal values into your career planning
- Develop the skills you will need at your next career level before you get there
- Be resilient and learn from failures
- Take time to reflect and consolidate

Mapping to the Vitae Researcher Development Framework (RDF)

B2 Self-management

B3 Professional and career development

Developing and planning your career were highlighted as important aspects of becoming a leader in academia. All 18 people interviewed have taken different routes to their academic and research leadership positions and here we capture what they found useful as they progressed their career, what they think would have been useful, and how they support the career progression of the people they lead.

It is evident from their experiences that there are steps that every aspiring leader should take in planning their career. Think about how they might apply to your own situation, now and in the future.

Learn about the roles you're interested in and know the criteria for progression

One thing that came out of many of the interviews was the importance of understanding what an academic role was and how this can differ in different institutions. The balance between teaching and research came up as something that differs not only between institutions but also between disciplines. Sitting on evaluation panels was described as being particularly useful for gaining an insight into research evaluation criteria and processes, potentially improving your own chances of getting grants.

"The honest reflection is that at some point I should really have looked a little bit more closely at what leadership at my University means...if anything I think I would have preferred to have stayed and carried on leading research within a defined group, not at an institute level"

Take the time to plan ahead

The career journeys of the leaders we interviewed were often not linear, for example, moving between higher education and other sectors. One piece of advice that came up often, as a result of this, is to spend time reflecting on career plans and directions, for example through a career road map or a five year plan. Although plans may change and adapt, our interviewees expressed how important it is to have specific and measurable targets to be able to monitor progress and recognise achievements. Other top tips included being open to unexpected opportunities, not pinning everything on staying in academia, and not restricting oneself to just one specific area of expertise.

“Thinking ‘I’m going to be an academic and I don’t need to have any other plans’ is probably not an effective way of getting the most out of your postdoc position. You’re going to ignore opportunities that that position’s giving you because you don’t think they’re important. Even if you just want to squeeze the most out of it, you’ve got to have a plan B”

Use appraisals as a tool to discuss and plan your career development

Many of the interviewees reflected on the importance of having honest career conversations with their boss and other academics. Although they may not have realised the importance of this early in their career, it is something they now try to do with the people they lead. You may be entitled to a regular appraisal or review, and you should be proactive about using this opportunity to benefit your career progression.

“Obviously doing the reviews regularly and from the word go really, I think it’s quite good to try and start having these conversations almost as soon as somebody’s appointed. I would say to people, ‘You need to think a bit about your career as you go along’”

Factor your personal values into your career planning

The sense of being a good fit was often described as an important factor in deciding between institutions, research groups, and career directions, leading to the conclusion that the ‘best institution’ might not always be the best institution for you. When considering their next career move, our leaders thought about the value they could bring to a group or institution (and vice versa), the opportunities for career progression, the goals and motivations of the head of department, and the support available from the people around them, for example. Home life and commitments outside of work were also prominent in the decision making process for some, leading them to choose one particular country or career sector over another.

“I’m not defined by my institution, I’m defined by my work. And I think a lot of people cling on to their institutional status in ways that actually prevent them from fulfilling what they really could do if they were a little bit more free to do that.”

“Once you have your career and two children you’re kind of driving an oil tanker and there’s quite a big turning circle.”

Develop the skills you will need at your next career level before you get there

A key message coming out of the interviews was around practicing the skills that you will need in the future, both to secure the position, and to succeed once you are in it. Our interviewees were keen to help the people they lead to avoid a steep learning curve in the future by helping them to build the relevant knowledge now, for example through practicing grant writing, being involved in teaching and supervision, and acting as a peer-reviewer. Our leaders reflected on how difficult it is to sustain a research career without taking on the broader academic responsibilities, which can require quite different skill sets that take time and effort to develop.

“Seize the opportunities that are offered to you, and I think possibly I’m saying that because I didn’t quite realise half the time that I was being offered fantastic opportunities and usually I did take them but it wasn’t that I realised well that will be fantastic for my career”

Be resilient and learn from failures

Taking risks and seizing opportunities will inevitably lead to some failures. Our interviewees have not been successful in everything and recognised that academic leaders will need resilience to cope with many rejections along the way. However, they also expressed how important it is to learn from those rejections and to be able to move on from them positively.

“I wish I’d known that you will fail at some things and I think that would have been useful for me to have known that beforehand, that everybody fails and things can go wrong and that’s not a bad thing necessarily.”

Take time to reflect and consolidate

A common feeling among our leaders was that challenges lie ahead and that they are still facing challenges in their career. However, they are not a group to shy away from those challenges. They encouraged aspiring academic and research leaders to question their motives, keep looking at those around them for inspiration and motivation, and celebrate even the small achievements along the way.

“Why do you want to do it? What’s it for? Because if what you’re doing it for is it’s the next step on the ladder that’s fine if that’s what you want to do, you want to climb the ladder, but well... So I would always try and do things that made me happy and climbing ladders doesn’t make me happy”

Your reflections on career planning for leadership