

RDF 2025 PLANNER USER GUIDE

Introduction

Vitae's sector-leading [Researcher Development Framework](#) articulates the knowledge, skills, and behaviours of effective researchers, and is used for planning, promoting and supporting the personal, professional and career development of researchers across sectors. Originally developed with researchers in 2010, and embedded across the UK and international institutions, the RDF is a recognised tool for planning and supporting your development. It does so by providing a structured map of the broad skills and behaviours of effective researchers, and by empowering you to take ownership of your professional and career development, whatever your current career aspirations. The framework provides a recognised language and scaffolding to articulate your developing competencies and skills.

The RDF Planner tool enables you to work within the framework and take a structured reflective approach to planning your development, helping you to:

- Identify strengths and build a portfolio of your developing skills and expertise
- Support you to identify, articulate and communicate your competencies
- Set goals to develop skills in areas in which you feel less confident
- Download your portfolio to support CVs, applications, appraisals and annual reviews; and to facilitate meaningful conversations and informed decision making about your career and professional development.

Getting Started

Spending some time initially to familiarise yourself with the planner and reflect on your current skills can be valuable. An ongoing strategy is to then revisit the planner little and often, adding new skill examples and setting fresh goals as your professional journey unfolds. The planner serves as your personal portfolio, what you put in stays private, offering a reflective space just for you. Your organisation can only see whether you've logged in and how many entries you've made, but not the content itself.

If you use the planner with an organisational subscription and find it useful, you can switch to another subscribing institution or get a low-cost individual subscription when you leave.

To access the RDF Planner under an organisation subscription, you must:

- be added to the application by your organisation through the creation of a user account,

- receive an email invitation from your organisation to register,
- follow the link provided in the invitation email, then complete and submit the registration form. Please note that agreeing to the Terms and Conditions is a mandatory part of this process.

When you access the planner for the first time, you'll need to register your information. This is a single-step process; after registering, you can log into the RDF Planner at <http://www.rdfplanner.net>.

Navigation and accessibility

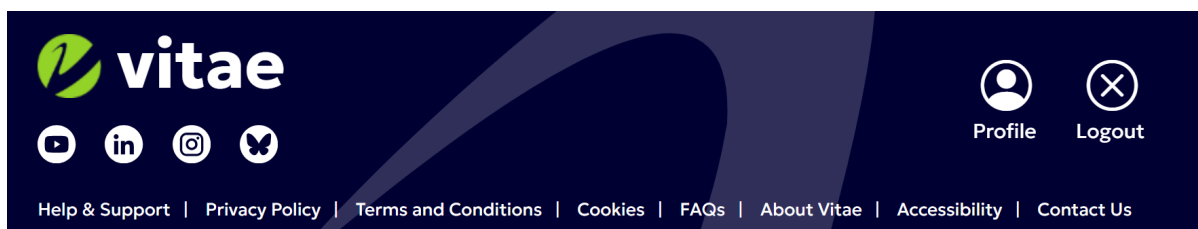


The planner is designed to be intuitive and easy to use, featuring tiles and visuals to enhance your user experience. You can use the 'Home' icon in the header to return to the RDF Planner from anywhere in the application, likewise you can click onto to the 'Researcher Development Framework Planner' banner to return home.

You can also quickly move to the top of pages within the planner by clicking on the '↑' icon that appears in the bottom right corner of the screen as you scroll down.

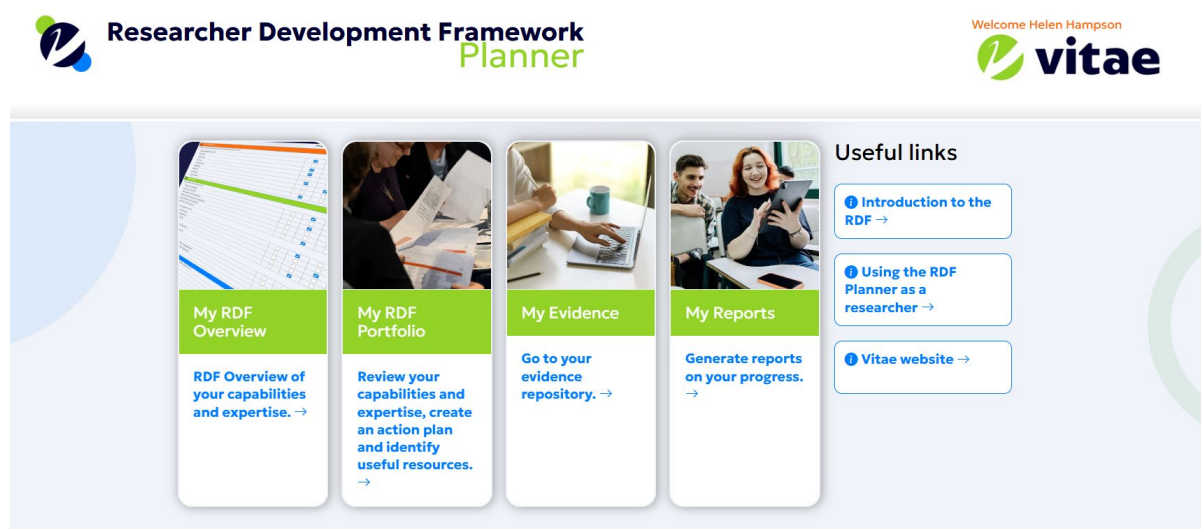
At the bottom of the homepage you will also see a series of links, directing you to further information to help you gain help and support; to our privacy policy; our terms and conditions; information about Vitae; and frequently asked questions.

It is possible to change to site contract colours and increase the text size to meet accessibility requirements.



The RDF Planner Homepage

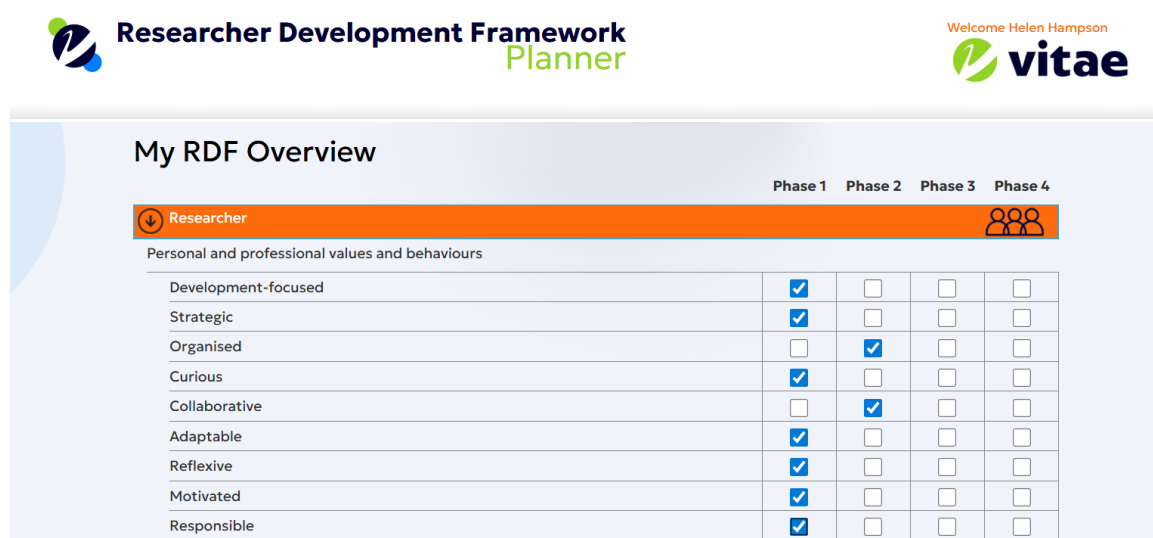
The Planner Homepage includes four main areas: My RDF Overview, My RDF Portfolio, My Evidence, and My Reports; and a series of useful links.



My RDF Overview

My RDF Overview presents an at-a-glance summary of the Researcher Development Framework, the domains (Researcher, Research, Research Communities) and descriptors/skills (Development-focused, strategic). Click on the drop-down menus to explore the domains.

To find out more about the descriptor you are exploring, hover over the box to read further details. You can read across the four phases of suggested development, suggesting how the skills area/descriptor looks at different stages from phase 1 through to phase 4.



The phases nominally map to stages of development from doctoral researcher (1), to early career researcher (2), to mid-career (3), to leading researcher (4). But they are not labelled as such to recognise the different experience individuals bring to research. A doctoral researcher may have significant project management experience from professional life for example, whilst a leading researcher will have areas in which they are less experienced and may wish to focus. The phase stage will differ for everyone depending on current areas of focus and career goals.

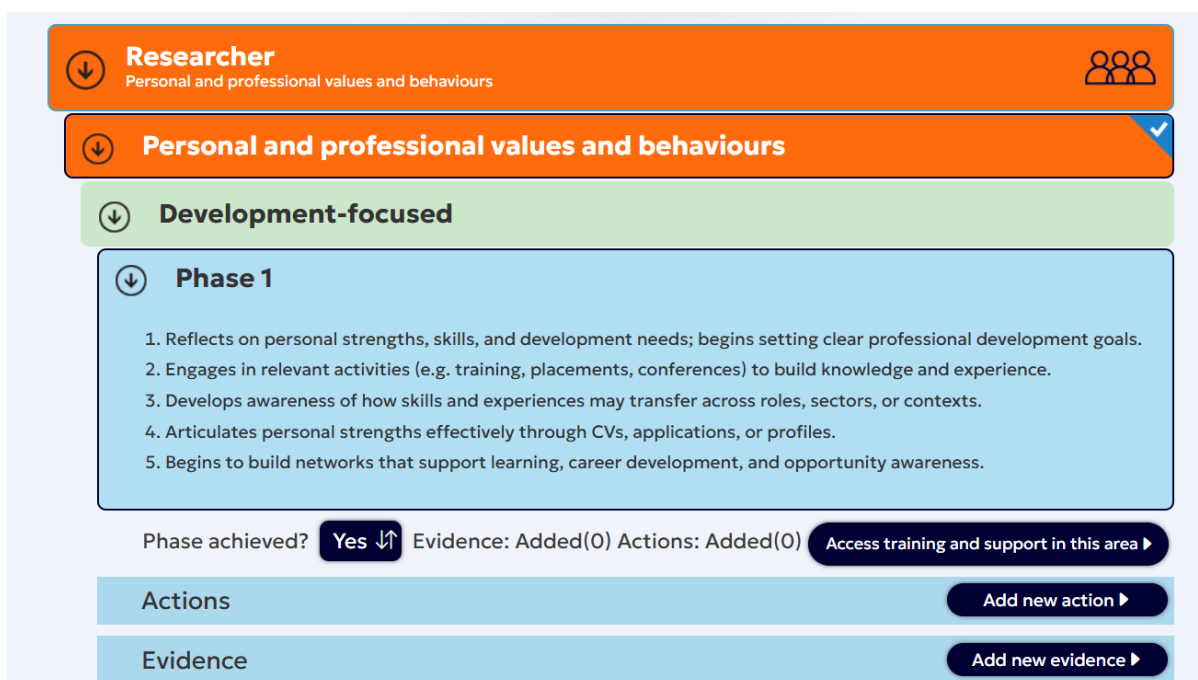
In this part of the planner you can begin an initial self-assessment of your current skills, ticking any boxes that you feel you have accomplished. The phases give you the language to help you describe your current experience, as this initial self-assessment gives you a good sense of where you are now. Changes made here will impact elsewhere in the Planner, it's worth investing a bit of time on your first visit to the planner in this area.

My RDF Portfolio

Building a portfolio of your experience

In this area of the planner you can begin to record examples of your achievements and learning and build a portfolio of your growing expertise. Scanning through the RDF tree, choose an area that you would like to populate with an example of recent progress or achievement.

For instance, if you wanted to record some recent achievements or development related to planning your development, you could navigate to the 'Researcher' area and select the 'Develop-focused' descriptor. Here you will see the phases and you can select where you currently are. To identify where your strengths are, start by thinking about what evidence you can provide of your skills and competencies.



Researcher
Personal and professional values and behaviours

Personal and professional values and behaviours

Development-focused

Phase 1

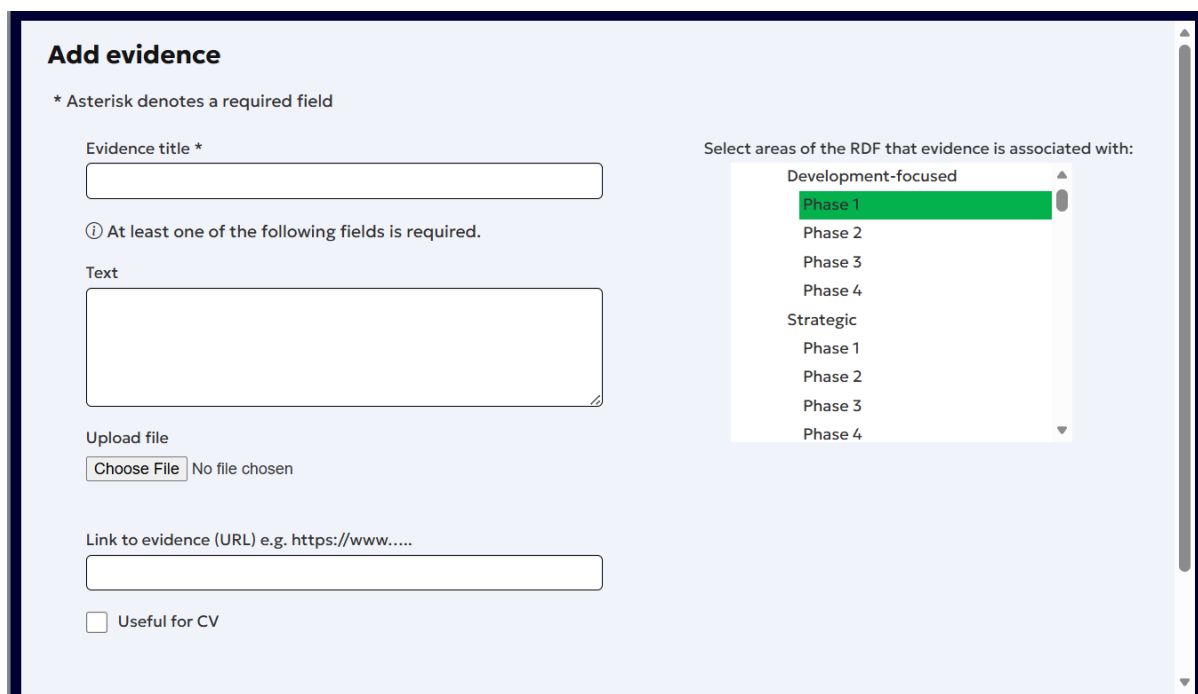
1. Reflects on personal strengths, skills, and development needs; begins setting clear professional development goals.
2. Engages in relevant activities (e.g. training, placements, conferences) to build knowledge and experience.
3. Develops awareness of how skills and experiences may transfer across roles, sectors, or contexts.
4. Articulates personal strengths effectively through CVs, applications, or profiles.
5. Begins to build networks that support learning, career development, and opportunity awareness.

Phase achieved? **Yes** Evidence: Added(0) Actions: Added(0) [Access training and support in this area](#)

Actions [Add new action](#)

Evidence [Add new evidence](#)

Select 'Add new evidence' and choose your evidence type. You can select 'add new' or 'add from repository' to select evidence of examples you have previously uploaded. You can upload different types of evidence in the form of links, files, or written reflections. You can edit your evidence at any time by selecting the 'Edit/View' button.



Add evidence

* Asterisk denotes a required field

Evidence title *

Text

Upload file
[Choose File](#) No file chosen

Link to evidence (URL) e.g. https://www.....

☐ Useful for CV

Select areas of the RDF that evidence is associated with:

- Development-focused
 - Phase 1**
 - Phase 2
 - Phase 3
 - Phase 4
- Strategic
 - Phase 1
 - Phase 2
 - Phase 3
 - Phase 4

You may find it helpful to use the STARR framework when you add your evidence, and to communicate your growing experience succinctly and clearly. The STARR acronym breaks down as:

Situation: Set the scene (who did you work with? Why? Where?)

Task: What specifically needed to be achieved? (Goals, outcomes)

Action: What did you actually do? (What was your specific contribution?)

Results: What outcomes result from what you did?

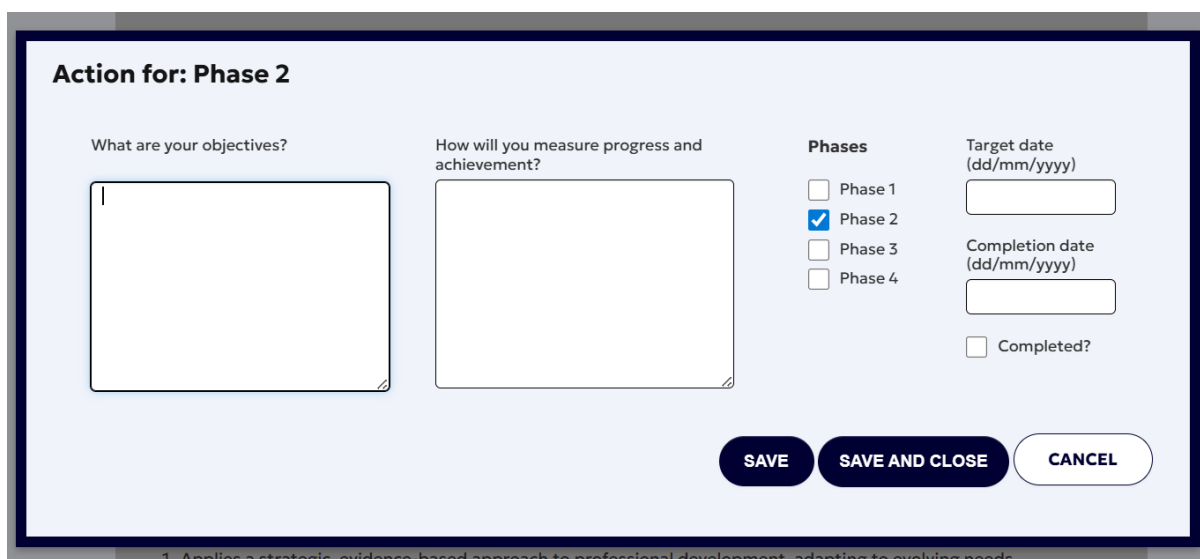
Reflect: How would you tackle the situation next time? What might you do differently?

Developing your action plan

Once you have spent time using the planner to assess and evidence your existing skill set, you can also then develop some target actions for growth and for your development. Your self assessment should have helped to identify areas you feel less confident in, and may wish to prioritise. It's a good idea to focus on a few areas at a time, and return to the planner little and often, to add evidence as skills develop, and set new actions as different growth areas become important. Choose the areas of development that are important to you at this current time.

To begin developing your actions, choose a domain and descriptor area, and then choose your target phase. For instance, as a doctoral researcher or early career researcher using the RDF planner, you might have selected 1.1 Development-focused phase 1 as achieved, and be planning to set some actions for phase 2 within this descriptor.

Use the 'Add New Action' feature to set a specific, achievable goal.



Here you can describe what you will do, in practice, to achieve this phase of

development. When you write your action, aim to make it a SMART goal, you will see this area is set up to support this. A SMART goal is:

Specific: Defines your goal in detail

Measurable: Describes how you will track progress and measure outcomes

Achievable: Challenging but achievable

Relevant: A reasonable and motivating goal, which is aligned with your current priorities. Does it make sense given where you are now?

Timely: Has a clear timeline or end point.

For example, with the communication descriptor (of the engagement and impact domain) you might set a SMART action as follows: 'By the end of this semester, I'll submit an abstract and deliver a presentation at a departmental seminar, using feedback from my supervisor and peers to improve the design and delivery of my presentation.' After you've recorded your goal, set a target and completion date to keep you on track and save your work.

Accessing training and support


Phase 2

1. Critically reflects on progress, adjusting career goals and updating development plans as needed.
2. Actively seeks diverse development opportunities, including those beyond own sector.
3. Seeks coaching or mentoring to deepen skills and broaden career perspectives.
4. Offers informal support and encouragement to peers or less experienced colleagues.
5. Strengthens cross-sector networks to explore and pursue new opportunities.

Phase achieved? **No**  Evidence: Added(0) Actions: Added(0) [Access training and support in this area ▶](#)

Actions [Add new action ▶](#)

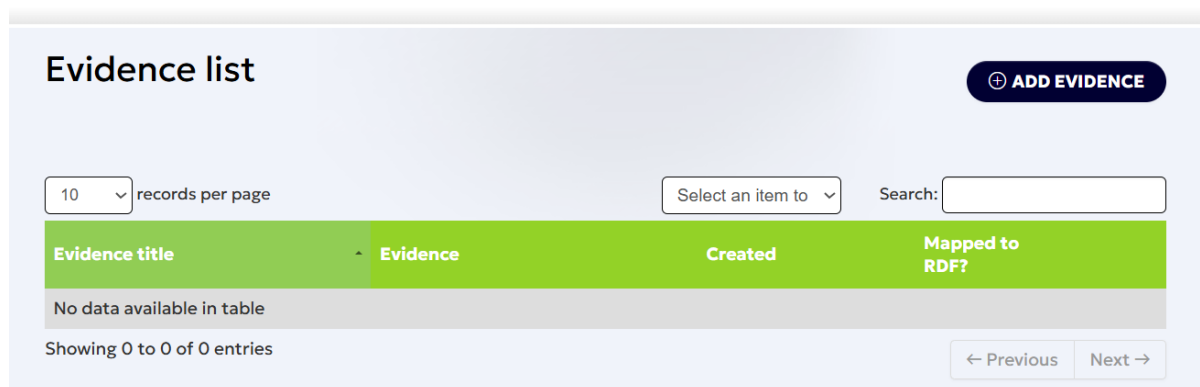
Evidence [Add new evidence ▶](#)

You can view training and support resources and opportunities for each phase by selecting the black button labelled 'Access training and support in this area' in the phase detail area of the RDF tree. A window will open showing resources and opportunities provided by Vitae, and, if added, resources and opportunities provided by your organisation.

My Evidence

The 'My Evidence' area of the planner shows you all the items of evidence that

you have added to date. You can add evidence and example of skills development directly within this space, rather than via My RDF Portfolio as a shortcut. As before you will be prompted to upload a file/text or link and add a title. You will also be prompted to map your upload to the relevant RDF area.



Evidence list ⊕ ADD EVIDENCE

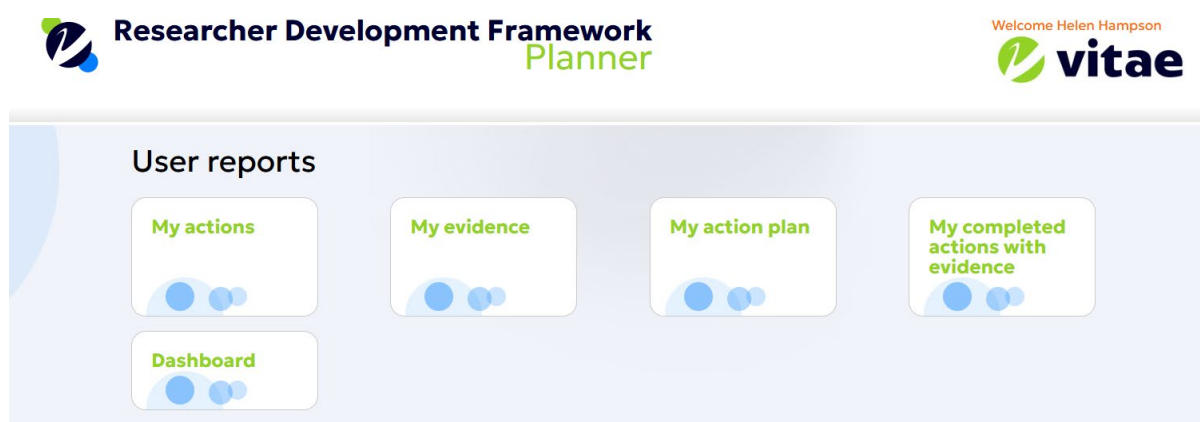
10 records per page Select an item to Search:

Evidence title	Evidence	Created	Mapped to RDF?
No data available in table			

Showing 0 to 0 of 0 entries ← Previous Next →

My Reports

There are several reports that you can run and that will give you an overview of your action plan. All reports are accessed by selecting the 'My Reports' tile from the home page.



Researcher Development Framework Planner Welcome Helen Hampson 

User reports

- My actions**
- My evidence**
- My action plan**
- My completed actions with evidence**
- Dashboard**

My actions: report shows all actions that you have entered onto the RDF Planner and a colour coded associated status, so you can see at quick glance which actions are completed, in progress, or overdue according to timeline you have set under My RDF Portfolio.

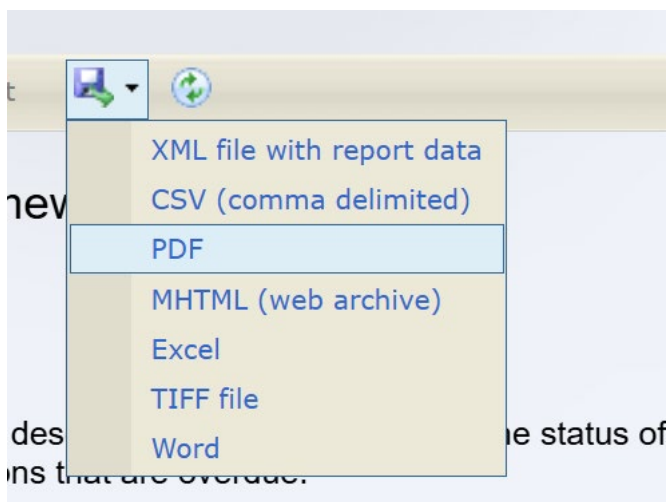
My evidence: report shows all evidence and examples of skills that you have entered onto the RDF Planner mapped against the Vitae Researcher Development Framework.

My action plan: provides a different view of your progress against the phases.

My completed actions with evidence: shows a complete list of your actions in the RDF Planner along with any evidence or examples you have uploaded to demonstrate skills gains and growing experience.

Working with reports

To export and work with your data, click the disk icon in the report header and select the file format you want to export to from the drop down menu.



These reports allow you to gain a quick insight into your progress, which in turn can be used to inform meetings and appraisals, or to communicate your skills and experiences in future competency-based CVs, applications or interviews.

Useful links



The useful links area of the planner allows you to learn more about the framework; to access short videos on using the RDF and to link through to the Vitae website.

Managing your account and subscription

Changing your password

You can change your password within your profile page by clicking on the 'Profile' button in the RDF Planner footer. Click the 'Change password' link at the top of the profile page and follow the directions.

Requesting transfer of subscription

If you are moving to a different organisation, you can request to transfer your subscription, if the organisation has a valid subscription and is accepting new users. To do so,

- Open your 'Profile' page by clicking on the 'Profile' button in the RDF Planner footer.
- Click the 'My Subscription' link at the top of the profile page.
- Complete and submit the 'Request transfer' form. Please provide as much relevant information as possible to support your request.

If your request is approved by the target organisation administrator, your subscription will be automatically transferred to the new organisation. You will be sent a notification email informing you if your request has been approved or denied.

Getting help

If you are having problems getting started or logging on to the system, you can get help from your organisation administrator. Your organisation administrator's email address is included in the email you were sent inviting you to logon to the RDF Planner. If you cannot find the answers you need in the above, or the useful links resources, you can email the RDF Planner support team at rdfplannerhelpdesk@vitae.ac.uk.

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