

# Vitae Researcher Development Framework

## Briefing for careers specialists

### Overview

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

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

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

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

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

**“ A discussion of the RDF will always form part of our Careers and Employability skills training sessions for researchers including ‘review your skills’ and for careers both inside and outside academia. As part of our career coaching for researchers we supported a session based around application and interviews asking for evidence from specific domains. We are striving to incorporate the RDF in future events.”**

**Jane Simm, Careers Adviser for Postgraduate Researchers and Research Staff,  
University of Sheffield**

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

### Using the Vitae Researcher Development Framework

For all careers specialists, the Vitae Researcher Development Framework will support individual work with researchers in providing guidance and coaching, delivery of career management workshops and engagement with a wide range of employers, including those who may not actively recruit postgraduate researchers and research staff. Using the Researcher Development Framework, careers specialists with a specific remit for the employability and career development of researchers will be able to align their institution's strategy with relevant UK policies such as the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, the UK Quality Code for Higher Education for research degree programmes, the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and the European Commission's HR Excellence in Research Award. [www.vitae.ac.uk/rds](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/rds)

The Researcher Development Framework can be used by researchers on a regular basis in career development activities to create a context for career conversations.

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

Inspiring and empowering researchers to engage with their career development is central to the work of careers specialists and using the Researcher Development Framework will support this by enabling you to:

- promote the full range of researchers' knowledge, behaviours, and attributes
- position career management and development as central activities for researchers
- raise the importance of a wide range of career path options for research staff and postgraduate researchers
- provide a language for researchers to articulate their skills, behaviours and attributes to a wider audience
- provide support to supervisors and principal investigators in the career development of their researchers
- enhance employer engagement activities to promote the value of researchers.

# Background

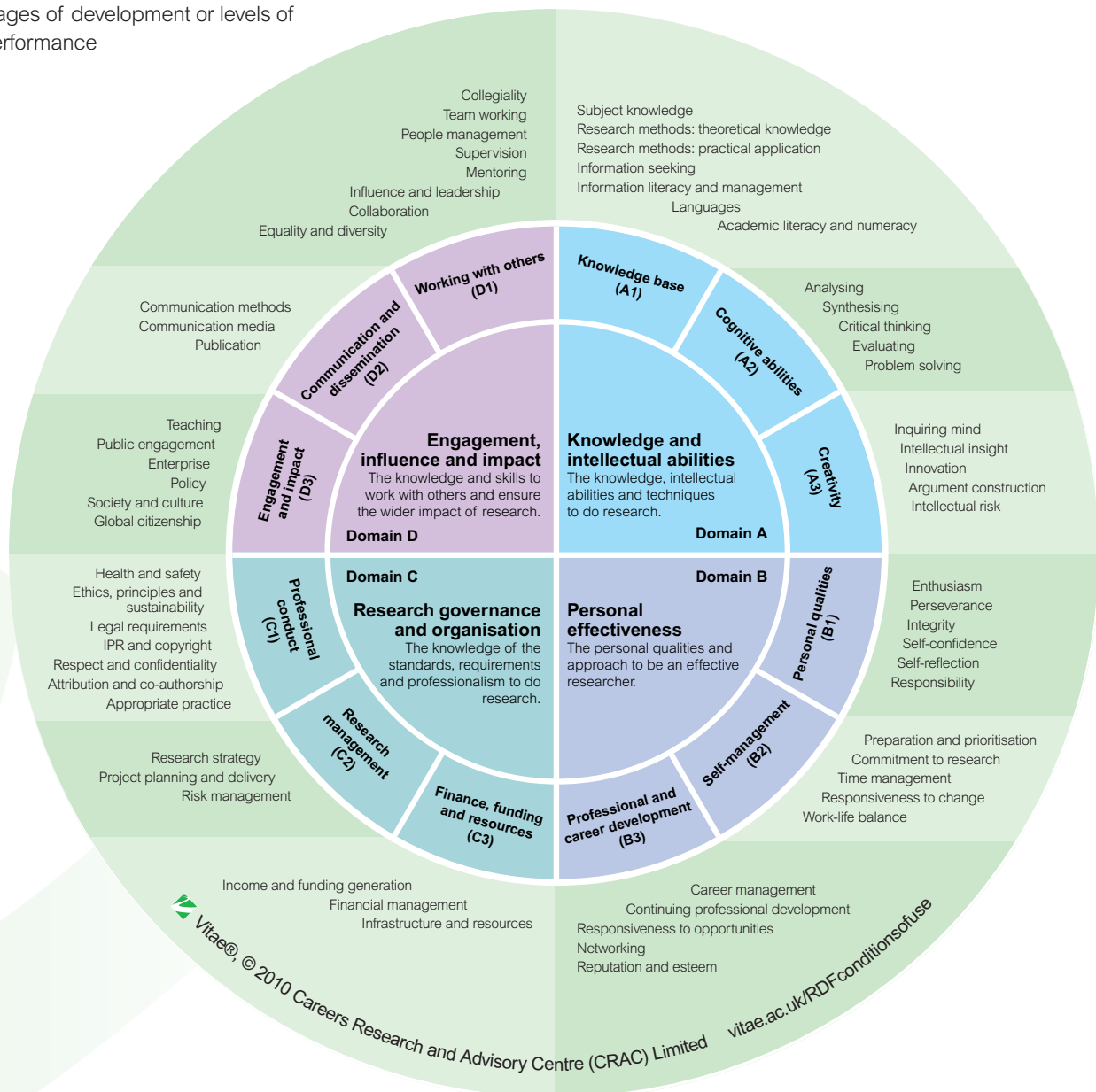
The Vitae Researcher Development Framework and Researcher Development Statement underpin policies for supporting the professional and career development of researchers. Institution-wide implementation of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, the UK Quality Code for Higher Education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

# Structure

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

# Who is the Researcher Development Framework for?

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



# Careers specialists using the Researcher Development Framework say:

“The Researcher Development Framework is a welcome addition to the range of career development tools available to careers professionals providing support to researchers in higher education, and it will help practitioners to develop their work with this client group.”

Josie Grindulis, Chair of the AGCAS Research Staff Task Group

“I find using the career management descriptors extremely valuable in careers workshops for early stage postgraduate researchers as it clearly sets out the need for them to take ownership of their own career progression but also to seek out appropriate support and guidance. The Researcher Development Framework helps me to make career theory a practical reality for researchers.”

Clare Jones, Senior Careers Advisor, University of Nottingham

“Succeeding in academia is increasingly competitive and perplexing for early career researchers. The Researcher Development Framework offers a clear and manageable breakdown of what’s required. At a recent postdoc conference on academic careers, the Researcher Development Framework was warmly received by our researchers. It encourages them in a realistic manner.”

Dr. Anne Forde, Careers Adviser for Life Science Postdocs, University of Cambridge

## The on-line Researcher Development Framework Professional Development Planner

[www.vitae.ac.uk/rdfplanner](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/rdfplanner)

“The UKRSA promotes the Researcher Development Framework Professional Development Planner as a useful tool to help focus researchers on their career development. UKRSA encourages local research staff associations in organising sessions for researchers to share their own experiences using the Professional Development Planner. It provides an excellent basis for identifying shared needs for careers and professional development whilst providing the basis for seeking additional support.”

The UK Research Staff Association (UKRSA)

## Stakeholders say:

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

Jackie Wilbraham, R&D Science Policy Director, AstraZeneca

“The Researcher Development Framework provides a fantastic way for research staff to consider their professional and career development alongside other performance criteria. Individual research staff will find using the framework to review strengths and priorities really useful as preparation for conversations about career opportunities.”

Guy Gregory, HR Director, University of Bristol, Universities Human Resources (UHR)

“The Vitae Researcher Development Framework provides a valuable mechanism to increase institutions’ capabilities to develop world-class researchers. It provides a strong basis for the delivery of the principles of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers and the QAA Code of Practice for research degree programmes.”

Professor April McMahon, Vice-Chancellor and Chair, External Advisory Group, Researcher Development Framework

Research Councils UK have fully endorsed the Researcher Development Statement.

In their Statement of Expectation, the **Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC)** refer to the Researcher Development Statement. Researchers are expected:

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

The **Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC)** acknowledges the Researcher Development Statement in their Doctoral Training Partnerships:

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

“The Researcher Development Statement offers a valuable framework of knowledge and skills that research staff will need to meet a variety of career challenges. It assists institutions in their implementation of the principles of the Concordat and will help them continue to develop their research staff at all levels.”

Professor Sir Ivor Crewe, Chair, Concordat Strategy Group

## Practical actions for career specialists:

- Promote the Researcher Development Framework as a practical framework for researchers to consider their overall career progress and development needs
- Promote the Researcher Development Framework as a means to record evidence and experience that will be useful in development discussions with a principal investigator/supervisor and in preparing recruitment or promotion applications
- Highlight the Researcher Development Framework as a transferable framework enabling wider consideration of career options within and outside academia
- Use the Researcher Development Framework to support individual guidance and coaching with researchers
- Demonstrate researchers' capabilities to employers and enhance employer engagement activities
- Identify opportunities to influence career development provision at careers service and institutional levels
- Communicate to principal investigators and supervisors the ways that the Researcher Development Framework can support their career development work with researchers
- Link with other colleagues who have a role in researcher development

## Useful links

### For the Researcher Development Framework

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

### Other Vitae resources

- Careers information: [www.vitae.ac.uk/careers](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/careers)
- 'What do researchers do?': [www.vitae.ac.uk/wdrd](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/wdrd)
- Researcher career profiles: [www.vitae.ac.uk/careerprofiles](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/careerprofiles)

## Conditions of use

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

## About Vitae

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

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

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

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