



Arts & Humanities  
Research Council

# Research Training Framework

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## Introduction

### What is the framework?

1. The AHRC's Research Training Framework aims to ensure that AHRC funded researchers are well supported by their Research Organisations (RO) and are receiving appropriate and relevant preparation and training, to enable them to complete a high-quality PhD and to develop a range of skills, knowledge and understanding necessary for their future employment.
2. The framework sets a minimum threshold of expected provision, founded on a needs-based approach, to providing research training for individual students in the arts and humanities. It was prepared to complement the Joint Statement of the Skills Training Requirements for Research Students (JSS) which the AHRC issued with the other Research Councils. The JSS has evolved into the Researcher Development Statement (RDS) and the RDS should now be used as the main reference document.
3. The AHRC intends that the framework should ensure that AHRC funded researchers are well supported by their RO so that they receive appropriate training, particularly in relation to transferable skills, relevant to their career development. **Unless specified otherwise, where this framework refers to 'researchers' it encompasses both students pursuing doctoral study and post-doctoral researchers at the early stages of their careers.**

### Audience for the framework

#### The student

4. This document outlines the skills and training provision that AHRC-funded doctoral students should receive. It also details what wider support for skills and training support is available to students. We expect all our doctoral students to read the framework and, in discussion with their supervisor and RO, agree an individual programme of training that meets their specific needs, which should be regularly reassessed throughout their period of study<sup>1</sup>.

#### The researcher

5. Whilst this document primarily focuses on the skills and training provision that AHRC-funded doctoral students should receive, the skills outlined in this document are also relevant to researchers in their first few years working in academia. The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers (see paragraph 31) outlines that researchers share responsibility with their ROs to engage in their own career development and lifelong learning.

#### The supervisor

6. An AHRC postgraduate studentship award is offered under specified terms and conditions which note that ROs must provide the necessary supervision and expertise to support the student in their chosen studies. We state that ROs must follow the QAA Code of Practice (see paragraph 35) which notes, "Institutions will appoint supervisors who have the appropriate skills and subject knowledge to support, encourage and monitor research students

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<sup>1</sup> QAA Code of Practice precept 19 notes "Each student's development needs will be identified and agreed jointly by the student and appropriate academic staff, initially during the student's induction period; they will be regularly reviewed during the research programme and amended as appropriate"

effectively". It is important that organisations make sure they are providing appropriate supervision both intellectually and in terms of skill development to their students. We would encourage supervisors to read the framework and consider how their students can engage with it. Supervisors should also be aware of the support available through such organisations as Vitae<sup>®</sup> (see paragraph 53).

## Support staff and the Research Organisation

7. The AHRC considers it essential that departments supporting AHRC-funded researchers meet the requirements set out in the Research Training Framework. One of AHRC's expectations in providing funding to the RO is that they have in place mechanisms for assessing and delivering the researcher's training needs.
8. Support staff and the ROs in general have a responsibility to ensure that the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers is implemented. This includes consideration of how research managers' performance in these areas is developed, assessed and rewarded, and how effectively this supports good research management.

## The framework

### Principles of the framework

9. As stated in the AHRC Delivery Plan<sup>2</sup>: 'we remain committed to the development of early career researchers, to develop their skills, benefit the wider economy, and to ensure the continuing pipeline of excellent researchers'. The framework is founded on a **needs-based approach** to the provision of research and key skills training that is sensitive to the distinctive characteristics of research in the arts and humanities, and that also reflects the state of preparation, the developmental needs and the research subject of the individual researcher.
10. Researchers should be appropriately prepared for their studies and their future careers and have opportunities to develop in areas that are relevant to the demands of their discipline. Researchers should have opportunities to develop the knowledge, understanding and skills relevant to their field of research.
11. We recognise that individuals enter research with a diverse range of skills and experience and their development needs can be met through a wide variety of mechanisms, activities and opportunities. The AHRC's framework is not intended to be prescriptive about the details of the training ROs should provide, rather it provides a structure which allow for a flexible approach to training provision. The framework thus gives examples of knowledge, skills and understanding to be developed to an appropriate level, rather than, for example, listing specific software packages or courses in which researchers should receive training.
12. The AHRC's definition of 'training' in this context is a broad one, encompassing all the opportunities, formal and informal, available to researchers to develop in their field and as a highly qualified individual in preparation for their future career.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/About/Policy/Documents/DeliveryPlan2011.pdf> (extract from paragraph 2.1.5)

## AHRC's training requirements

13. The AHRC expects ROs to undertake an analysis of training needs for each researcher. **Training programmes must be specifically tailored to the needs of individual researchers and their research topics or specific stage of career.** ROs should provide an agreed programme of training for each researcher to meet the needs identified, based on the skills and knowledge the researcher has already developed, and the further training and development they need in order to reach an appropriately high level of skills, knowledge and understanding. ROs may find the Researcher Development Framework (RDF) and Researcher Development Statement (RDS) useful tools in addressing these issues (see paragraph 30).
14. ROs are expected to provide a menu of research training provision from which the relevant elements for an individual researcher's needs could be selected. In some cases, inter-institutional collaboration may be the most appropriate way to provide this.
15. The RO is expected to adopt the principles, standards and good practice for the Management of research staff set out in the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers (see paragraph 31), and subsequent amendments. It must ensure that reliable systems and processes are in place so that the principles of the Concordat are embedded into practice within the Research Organisation.
16. In order to ensure that researchers receive the training needs identified, ROs may find it beneficial to maintain a record of research student or research staff development and assess or monitor progress against this, and provide opportunities for researchers to maintain a record of personal progress, which includes reference to the development of research and other skills.
17. The AHRC is **not** prescriptive about the details of how ROs provide and deliver training. The AHRC does not have a preference for the way in which training is delivered. There is no requirement, for instance, that training courses be accredited, nor any assumption that a formal training course is the most appropriate way to give students opportunities to develop certain skills and competencies.
18. The AHRC recognises that there are some skills that all researchers need in order to undertake research effectively, some skills that are relevant to particular topics of study, and some skills that researchers develop through the process of conducting research. Training should always be relevant and specifically tailored to the individual researcher's experience and requirements, and to their discipline and research topic.
19. The AHRC defines **subject-specific skills** as those skills that are required to undertake research in the researcher's chosen area, some of which will be generic to a range of disciplines (see examples listed in paragraph 22). ROs will be expected to ensure that researchers are appropriately prepared and have opportunities to develop in areas that are relevant to the demands of their discipline. It is unlikely that much of this training can be provided through courses for large numbers of students in the way that transferable skills training can sometimes be but, some of this training may be appropriately delivered at department (or equivalent) level. As noted above, inter-institutional collaboration may also be beneficial in delivering training to a cohort of researchers with similar requirement.
20. Development of key **transferable skills** should be a compulsory training requirement for all research students and is essential for Early Career

Researchers (ECRs). ROs will be expected to assess the training researchers have already received in these areas, and to identify further training needed. These training needs should be reviewed throughout a period of doctoral study or a research career. As well as being important in preparing researchers for their future career, whether in academia or not, the development of key transferable skills should enable researchers to work more effectively during the course of their current research.

21. Consideration should be given as to whether transferable skills may be delivered in a subject-specific context so that skills development is explicit to the research focus.

### **Examples of key subject-specific knowledge, understanding and skills**

22. This framework complements the RDS and RDF and, in updating its content, we have drawn upon these documents. The following examples of subject-specific skills for arts and humanities students should be referred to in conjunction with the RDS:
  - i. Understanding theoretical issues, the nature of evidence and argument; and the relationships between practice, theory and criticism. This includes the ability to think critically and evaluate the evidence.
  - ii. Developing research methods and skills and practical techniques appropriate to the project.
  - iii. Developing knowledge and understanding of the research context of the project, and of trends in the discipline.
  - iv. Developing knowledge, understanding and skills in analysis, referencing and synthesis of research material and information, and understanding how best to use these in the research context.
  - v. Developing knowledge and understanding of related disciplines where appropriate and understanding how to apply these.
  - vi. Developing knowledge of an additional language in order to undertake research that requires the understanding of key texts which are in a language other than English.
  - vii. Specialist knowledge, understanding and skills such as a methodology, technique, numerical and statistical techniques or specific ICT expertise.
  - viii. Understand the requirements of a professional researcher e.g. ethical requirements, codes of practice, legal requirements, social responsibility etc.

### **Examples of key transferable skills**

23. AHRC is committed to AHRC-funded researchers being equipped with the skills and experience that will strengthen the research base and enable them to proceed to a range of careers within and outside academia. RCUK's Delivery Plan<sup>3</sup> similarly makes reference to 'movement of highly skilled people between the research base and user communities at all career stages', and 'skills to be effective in knowledge exchange, public engagement, global research

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/documents/documents/RCUK\\_delivery\\_plan\\_2011\\_15.pdf](http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/documents/documents/RCUK_delivery_plan_2011_15.pdf) (section 2.4 and aims 7 and 17)

collaborations and multi-disciplinary environments'. See also, Principle 3 of the Concordat for Engaging the Public with Research<sup>4</sup>. The development of transferable skills should be a compulsory training requirement for all research students and is essential for ECRs. The list below describes broad areas that the AHRC believes are likely to be relevant to all researchers in the arts and humanities. This list is not definitive, it draws on, and complements, the skills described within the RDS, which might be referred to when considering what transferable skills may be appropriate:

- i. A full range of communication skills and awareness of communication media so that both specialist and non-specialist audiences can be appropriately addressed. Public engagement activities provide a useful context for developing the necessary skills for communicating academic knowledge to a non-specialist audience. This includes understanding the wider political, social and economic context.
- ii. Project management skills, including: designing and managing a project; team-working; delegation skills; time-management; risk management; resource management; working proactively to ensure the effective delivery of objectives; and the ability to recognise key issues and prioritise.
- iii. More general aspects of team working, including: communicating and collaborating effectively; sharing knowledge and experience; recognising the skills and expertise of team members; mentoring; and, managing work within the team in the most efficient way. Also the ability to motivate themselves and others.
- iv. Enterprising and entrepreneurial attributes, skills and behaviours such as: taking initiative; the ability to solve problems, adapt to new situations and make effective decisions; innovation and creativity; open mindedness and working to remove barriers; the ability to recognise opportunities, take them forward effectively and bring a project to fruition; social, commercial and relevant employment sector awareness; and, personal enthusiasm, self-improvement and motivation.
- v. Leadership skills, including: the ability to influence others; the potential to develop as a leader in the field and to represent their area of research positively within and outside academia.
- vi. Networking and collaborative working opportunities such as: participating in workshops and conferences; building partnerships with organisations and businesses; negotiating and listening skills.
- vii. Generic computer skills, including word processor, spreadsheet and database packages, web or office software that can be applied in a range of contexts and which keeps up to date with IT developments.
- viii. Organisational skills including managing and organising own workload effectively by prioritising tasks, anticipating future workloads and keeping and maintaining good records.
- ix. Provision of relevant support and training to enable personal and career development opportunities which are outside of a researcher's studies, for example if undertaking undergraduate teaching duties.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/documents/scisoc/ConcordatforEngagingthePublicwithResearch.pdf>

## **Specific issues**

### **Applying the framework to practice-led doctorates**

24. The needs of those pursuing a practice-led doctorate will clearly differ from those pursuing purely historical or theoretical study, for example, demonstrating the ability to contextualise practice-led research. The supervision and training provision for practice-led doctorates should therefore ensure that the menu of provision is tailored appropriately for these research students.

### **The relationship between training and development at Master's and doctoral level**

25. The AHRC believes that studying for a Master's degree, explicitly intended to prepare students for doctoral research, is the best way to approach a doctorate. We also recognise that research students approach a doctorate from various different routes, and that not all research students complete a research preparation Master's degree first. Doctoral applicants who have not completed a research preparation Master's degree are therefore eligible to apply for AHRC funding providing they can demonstrate that they have equivalent experience that has prepared them for doctoral research.

### **Assessed and accredited research training programmes**

26. While some ROs have developed successful research training programmes that use credit systems, the AHRC does not advocate any single system of delivering research training above another.

### **Research training and development beyond the first year of doctoral study**

27. The AHRC expects ROs to provide a continuing programme of research training and development throughout the period of doctoral study and research career, recognising that some skills are more appropriately developed, or need further development, as the study or career progresses.

### **The implications for part-time researchers and those not funded by the AHRC**

28. The AHRC expects that the research training provision available to full-time researchers should equally be available to part-time researchers, fees-only award holders, and students who are part funded by AHRC.
29. ROs are encouraged to ensure that any research training provided with the support of the AHRC's funding is open to all relevant doctoral students, but with priority given to those funded by the AHRC. This does not preclude the combining of funding provided from a variety of sources to maximise the quality and impact of training provision, but we expect AHRC funded researchers to benefit from our funding.

## **Putting the framework in context**

### **Researcher Development Framework (RDF) and Researcher Development Statement (RDS)**

30. Many ROs found the *Joint Statement of the Skills Training Requirements for Research Students* issued by the Research Councils a useful tool in framing their own research training provision. The JSS has now been replaced by the RDS as a resource for the personal, professional and career development for

postgraduate researchers and research staff employed in Higher Education. The Statement is derived from the Researcher Development Framework, which summarises the knowledge, behaviours and attributes of effective and highly skilled researchers. All of the skills and attributes of the JSS have been incorporated into the RDS. Further information can be found on the Vitae® website (<http://www.Vitae.ac.uk/>).

### **The Concordat to support the career development of researchers**

31. In 1996, with the aim of providing a general reference point for good practice across the UK higher education sector, a *'Concordat on Contract Research Staff Career Management'* was published. In response to a number of developments and to reflect the growing awareness of the benefits which the effective management of research careers can bring, a new Concordat was agreed by the sector which builds on the 1996 version and takes a broad approach to enhancing the attractiveness and sustainability of research careers.
32. We recognise that researchers in Higher Education and ROs constitute a diverse group. The principles set out in the Concordat apply equally to any member of staff engaged in research, and provide a framework of good practice for the management of all researchers and their careers.
33. Published in 2008, the new Concordat consists of:
  - i. A set of principles for the future support and management of research careers and, under each principle, an explanation of how it may best be embedded into institutional practice
  - ii. A clear statement of the signatories' collective expectations for the support and management of researchers
  - iii. A section emphasising the responsibility of researchers to take control of their career and to further it through informed decisions.  
<http://www.researchconcordat.ac.uk/>
34. The signatories and supporters have expressed their collective commitment to the Concordat's implementation and expect that significant emphasis will be placed on the sharing of good practice between ROs. The AHRC expects ROs and their employees to be fully aware of the framework and principles within the Concordat.

### **QAA's code of practice for postgraduate research programmes**

35. QAA is an independent body funded by subscriptions from universities and colleges and through contracts with the higher education funding bodies. It carries out external quality assurance by visiting universities and colleges to review how well they are fulfilling their responsibilities. It also offers guidance on maintaining and improving quality assurance processes and developing course delivery through the Academic Infrastructure.
36. The *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (the *Code of practice*) provides guidance on maintaining quality and standards for universities and colleges. ROs should refer to the QAA's *Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Programmes* (revised September 2004). <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/AssuringStandardsAndQuality/code-of-practice/Pages/default.aspx>

## AHRC funding and support for training

### Career development and transferable skills (Roberts) payments

37. The Roberts Review in 2002 identified a mismatch between the skills of graduates and postgraduates and the skills required by employers. The Government provided additional funding to the Research Councils to deliver additional training. The Career Development and Transferable Skills Training (Roberts) Payments were from this additional funding.
38. The AHRC allocated an annual Research Training Fund (RTF), which is also referred to as the 'Career development and transferable skills training payment', for all our doctoral award holders and AHRC supported research assistants, in order to help departments and ROs meet the requirements of the framework. This applies to all research assistants whether full-time or part-time, and doctoral award holders including part-time and fees-only students. In common with the other Research Councils, these payments are now made through student fees and indirect costs on grants, this was communicated in the RCUK Statement of Expectations:  
<http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/ResearchCareers/Pages/CareerDevelopment.aspx>
39. This page of the RCUK website also includes other useful information in relation to the Research Councils direction in respect of researcher development. For example the report from the expert Panel led by Professor Alison Hodge MBE to consider progress in implementing the Roberts recommendations.
40. Whilst the RO's allocation is the sum of payments attributed per individual researcher this does not imply that ROs should use each individual payment to exclusively support that particular researcher's training needs. Rather ROs should use the total allocation to develop, deliver and maintain systems of research training which are responsive to the needs of researchers.
41. The AHRC expects ROs to use this funding to develop and enhance their training provision for all AHRC-funded arts and humanities researchers (including part-time and fees-only), and to make this training available, as appropriate, to other researchers not receiving AHRC funding.
42. Research Council funding is primarily for the benefit of Research Council funded researchers. The AHRC wishes to foster a productive and healthy research base, thus use of the funds in a way that has broader impact is seen as constructive, but this should not be at the expense of Research Council funded researchers.
43. The AHRC does not advocate any particular system to best coordinate the payments in order to ensure the RO meets their strategy for the development of researchers. Some examples which may enable a more strategic approach to co-ordinating payments include having a central point for coordination and notification of payments and having a senior member of staff to "champion" researcher development.
44. Full details on the research training payments and how they should be used can be found on the RCUK website:  
<http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/rescareer/rcdu/training.htm>

## **Subject-specific skills – AHRC Collaborative research training scheme**

45. The AHRC expects ROs to maintain at least the minimum level of subject-specific training provision needed for doctoral award holders to complete their studies. ROs could previously apply for funding to support collaborative specialist and subject-specific training provision through the Collaborative Research Training (CRT) scheme. At this time the AHRC is currently considering whether it will run another targeted call for the CRT scheme in the area of public engagement in 2012, please see the AHRC website later in the year for updated information. In the meantime the AHRC has launched the Skills Development call, which aims to support institutions and other organisations in developing innovative, collaborative training packages, that will meet a range of capacity issues in the arts and humanities. BGP and BGP CB holding institutions will be able to bid for up to £60,000 of funding for each award to propose a mixture of activities and programmes that will respond to skills gaps or capacity issues in strategic areas of need. For more information on this call please see our website.

## **Monitoring**

### **All studentships**

46. ROs submitting applications for studentships will be required to explain what systems are in place that allow an individual student's training needs to be assessed, met and monitored through the period of their award. These are necessary not just to ensure that ROs themselves monitor the effectiveness of their training provision, but also to take account of the additional needs and opportunities to broaden experience that arise as a student's work develops over the course of the doctorate.
47. Collaborative Doctoral Award holders (CDA) are required to complete a final report at the end of their award. The form includes questions about the student's personal development, how their training needs have been identified, met and reviewed and the quality of their institutional support. We will not require reports from students supported through other schemes but we still expect the high level of provision to be maintained. This will be monitored periodically through visits and questionnaires.

### **Research Organisations (Block Grant Partnerships)**

48. Research Organisations who were awarded a Block Grants Partnership (BGP) award in 2009 will have outlined their strategy for supporting training. We expect these ROs to ensure that support is provided in line with this strategy and in line with any feedback they might have received during the assessment process. The BGP awards are partnerships between the RO and the AHRC which will include dialogue with award holders on matters relating to training and skills provision, development and strategy.
49. We may request additional information from BGP award holders if we are concerned that any revisions to their training strategy will not meet the standard offered in the BGP proposal or the standard of training required for a BGP.
50. We may also engage informally with ROs that hold a BGP through visits. Any paperwork we require in advance of these visits will be kept to a minimum but we will expect to meet with the BGP coordinator and any management team that has been put in place, supervisors, course leaders and training leaders

involved in the BGP, and students supported through the BGP. The AHRC will provide full details of what will be expected before the visit.

## **Career Development and Transferable Skills Training (Roberts) Payments**

51. The Research Councils' Funding Assurance Programme includes questions about the payments in the pre-visit questionnaire. Information about the FAP is available at:  
<http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/cmsweb/downloads/rcuk/documents/fapstrategy.pdf>.

## **Wider support for training**

### **Research Councils UK (RCUK)**

52. The RCUK Research Careers and Diversity strategy aims to build on the Research Councils' investments in training and fellowships by strengthening the skills base and by leading and influencing the skills agenda. The RCUK team works alongside the seven Councils to deliver the aims of the RCUK Research Careers Strategy and delivers the Research Councils collective activities in support of transferable and career development skills for researchers. For further information on RCUK activities, resources and guidance please visit: <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/rescareer/rcdu/default.htm>.

### **Vitae®**

53. The Research Councils fund and support the work and activities of Vitae®, a national programme supporting the personal, professional and career development of researchers. By working together with the Research Councils UK, higher education institutions and research institutes, Vitae® provides specific support for doctoral researchers, research staff and staff supporting researchers. We recommend that, whether you are a postgraduate, researcher or staff supporting researchers, you visit the Vitae® website (<http://www.Vitae.ac.uk/>) and make use of the resources and advice available to you. You might also wish to be aware of the 'hubs', which operate at a regional level:  
<http://www.vitae.ac.uk/policy-practice/1713/Regional-Hubs.html>

#### **For postgraduates**

54. There is information about the research experience, the Researcher Development Framework, resources available to you, development opportunities, news and blogs:  
<http://www.Vitae.ac.uk/researchers/1218/Postgraduate-researchers.html>

#### **For research staff**

55. There is information about the research experience, the Researcher Development Framework, resources available to you, development opportunities, news and blogs:  
<http://www.Vitae.ac.uk/researchers/1269/Research-staff.html>

#### **For staff supporting researchers**

56. For a comprehensive overview of organisations, initiatives and reports that impact on the personal and career development of researchers, and a range

of tools and resources designed to support the training and development of researchers:

<http://www.Vitae.ac.uk/policy-practice/167/Home.html>

57. Vitae® also provides tailored information for supervisors and managers of researchers:

<http://www.Vitae.ac.uk/policy-practice/1389/Supervisors--managers.html>

58. Vitae® has a range of resources available:

<http://www.Vitae.ac.uk/policy-practice/237421/Resources.html>

59. This includes the Database of Practice which contains examples of strategic and management approaches to delivering training which you can both refer and contribute to:

<http://www.Vitae.ac.uk/dop>

## **Research Councils' Graduate schools programme**

60. The AHRC strongly encourages its funded doctoral students to participate in one of the workshops organised by the Research Councils' GRADschools Programme. The AHRC funds places annually for doctoral award holders in the second and third year of their research to attend these residential workshops, which take place at a variety of locations throughout the year. They allow doctoral students time away from their research to focus on their skills and abilities and how these may relate to future career plans. These are run under the Vitae® programme. Details of the GRADschools are available on the Vitae® website at: <http://www.Vitae.ac.uk/>. In addition, some Universities or groups of Universities run local GradSchools.

## **Beacons for public engagement**

61. The beacons for public engagement initiative was a four-year project starting in 2008 consisting of a network of six beacons which are university-based collaborative centres that help support, recognise, reward and build capacity for public engagement work.

62. The six beacons are based in Newcastle and Durham, Manchester, CUE East (UEA), UCL, Wales and Edinburgh Beltane. The National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) co-ordinates, captures and shares learning between the beacons and across UK higher education institutions and research institutes.

63. The beacons are at the forefront of efforts to change the culture in universities, assisting staff and students to engage with the public. Their partners include further education colleges, museums, galleries, businesses, charities, TV and press, and public bodies. To find out more about the support that the beacons can offer you please visit the NCCPE website:

<http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/>

64. As the beacons initiative comes to an end, RCUK recognises that further support to embed public engagement in the sector is required, and has launched a new 'Public Engagement with Research: Catalysts' call, aimed at creating a culture within HEIs where excellent public engagement with research is formalised and embedded.

65. For more details on this call and the other public engagement resources that are available through RCUK please see here:

<http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/per/Pages/Home.aspx>