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Digital literacy support for researchers: the personalised approach

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CHAPTER 6

DIGITAL LITERACY SUPPORT FOR RESEARCHERS: THE PERSONALISED APPROACH

JANE SECKER

INTRODUCTION

The illiterate of the 21st Century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn. (Alvin Toffler 1971: 414)

Supporting researchers in the digital age is a challenging, rewarding and expanding area of work for academic libraries and related support services in higher education. Over the past ten years there has been a huge growth in research support services offered in higher education. The range and types of activities that these services now include has expanded considerably since the Roberts Review of 2002 and the consequent funding that was made available to higher education institutions. Research Councils UK (RCUK) committed £20 million annually for the period 2008–2011 to the development of transferable skills for researchers. The growth in support services led to a number of recent publications in the librarianship field documenting these initiatives and highlighting good practice (for example, Webb, Gannon-Leary and Bent 2007, Allan 2009). In addition there have been a number of important studies commissioned and undertaken by organisations such as the Research Information Network (RIN). While current government priorities are for research funding in Science Technology Education and Medicine (STEM), all universities recognise the value of providing professional development opportunities for their researchers.

One thing is clear, however: researchers are not a homogenous group; they are made up of distinct groups who fall under this umbrella term. Given the diversity of researchers both in terms of the disciplines in which they work and the levels at which they work, the nature of the support that can be offered fits better with the boutique approach. Support for researchers can be approached quite differently to other categories of users in a university, such as undergraduate students. While undergraduates are also not homogenous, they are generally greater in number and so if only for practical reasons the ability to tailor and customise services for students is more difficult. Researchers, however, even in research-intensive

universities, almost always exist in smaller numbers than undergraduates. In addition their needs are more specialist and consequently the support and services that libraries provide are far more suited to the boutique approach. If undergraduates are the 'bread and butter' work of the librarian, researchers are the speciality pastries!

This chapter will outline some of the key issues to consider when planning or improving the support that an academic institution provides for its researchers. It will start by considering the work of researchers, to examine the different groups that exist within universities and understand the 'researcher lifecycle'. This lifecycle starts with research that might be undertaken at undergraduate and masters level, moving on to PhD level, to postdoctoral level, and finally to the later-stage researcher who might be a senior professor or a research fellow. At each of the different stages, not only the needs of the researcher, but also their attitude towards those who are offering support to them, will change. At each stage it is essential to understand the prior knowledge and experience of the individual researcher, but also to ascertain something of their specific area of research interest, not just the academic department they are based within. In addition to the level of the researcher, the process of undertaking research is a lifecycle and one where needs will vary. At the initial stage in any research process researchers will often be looking to identify previous studies in their field, whereas later on they will be generating theories and finally looking for ways to check the quality of their data and then publish their work. One size does certainly not fit all when providing support to researchers, and the need to personalise, adapt and tailor services is essential in order to be successful. Even within the same institution, the interests and expertise of researchers, whether they are a physicist, a historian or a lawyer, will vary enormously. It is important to know which particular aspect, for example, of a law a researcher is interested in, or the theoretical background or philosophy that underpins their work.

The chapter is largely based on the author's experience of supporting researchers in the social sciences; however, there is no reason to suggest that researchers in the humanities or in the sciences are any different, even if the funding models will vary. Therefore, much of what is written should hopefully be of relevance to those supporting all types of researchers at higher education level. Most importantly this chapter suggests that getting to know researchers personally will help you understand their needs, so building networks and contacts within academic departments is extremely important. In addition, if you can, actually spend some time being a researcher as it will also help you to understand the research process and empathise with this group. For example, attending training courses alongside researchers can be a helpful way of learning what researchers really do and what their needs might be. One of the biggest challenges to librarians and other support staff seems to be their reluctance to interact with researchers in their own environment. Librarians must leave the library, IT trainers move away

from the computer training room. Sometimes a researcher will only tell you what they really want or need over a coffee, or during the lunch break of a training course, not when you are sitting at the enquiry desk or gathering feedback from an online survey. It is important to find out what help and support researchers really need, rather than making assumptions about what you think they need, or what services your library has traditionally offered. It is also important for groups of support staff to work together collaboratively, to run training sessions and ensure the support provided in their institution is as joined up and seamless as possible.

RESEARCH INFORMATION NETWORK (RIN) AND VITAE RESEARCH AND THE BOUTIQUE APPROACH

The chapter will start by drawing on some of the literature in this area, including recent research commissioned and undertaken by RIN and Vitae. Both these organisations are valuable sources of training and advice for researchers and for the research support community. However, this section will specifically concentrate on themes from their recent research that support the personalised model of research support. RIN was set up back in 2004 and is a policy unit funded by the UK higher education funding councils, the seven research councils and the three national libraries.

Its aims are to

- ‘Enhance and broaden understanding of how researchers in the UK create and use information resources and services of all kinds’.
- ‘Support the development of effective policies and practices for researchers, institutions, funders, information professionals and everyone who is involved in the information landscape’ (RIN 2011a).

Since its establishment, RIN has commissioned a range of valuable studies aimed at the broad range of individuals and organisations that provide services and support for the research community. However, RIN has been particularly successful at engaging with the library community. It has established a number of working groups that have developed policy and guidance for the research support community, but librarians in particular have participated in and welcomed its work.

Another important organisation is Vitae, which is primarily tasked with championing the personal, professional and career development of doctoral researchers and research staff in higher education institutions and research institutes. It is funded through the Research Careers and Diversity Unit of the Research Councils and CRAC: The Career Development Organisation. Vitae runs national events such as conferences, providing support at the policy level for institutions and engaging with stakeholders, including researchers, employers and research supervisors

and managers. It also has eight regional hubs that offer training and support to postgraduate researchers, encouraging collaboration between institutions and the sharing of good practice. With this in mind it maintains a database of good practice, which includes examples of high-quality courses and initiatives run in higher education institutions to support researchers (Vitae 2011a). A quick browse through this database reveals a wealth of examples that echo boutique principles. One example is the University of York's Engagement, Impact and Influence Programme, which in addition to the four workshops for PhD students includes coaching and one-to-one support (Vitae 2011b). Other courses and initiatives are clearly aimed at researchers either in specific disciplines or at key stages in their career.

Both RIN and Vitae commission and undertake research themselves. For example, the joint RIN and OCLC Research Study undertaken in 2010 on research support services (RIN 2010) had a number of significant findings for higher education. The work also supports the boutique approach, for instance in suggesting:

- Institutions should review their training provision and the configuration of support services to develop shared services but also look to provide customised support.
- Researchers need specialist training and guidance on copyright, IPR and licensing issues.

The study suggested that, despite the significant growth of services in this area, researcher's needs were still not fully being met. RIN have published a number of other relevant studies, for example on the use of social media by researchers (RIN 2011b) and the value of libraries (RIN 2011c). In both reports it is clear that the needs of researchers are highly specific and that a generic approach to support services is only going to be of limited success. For example, the Value of Libraries Study found that researchers highly rated the personal contact and expertise of subject liaison libraries (RIN 2011c: 43). PhD students, in particular, valued having a named contact in the library to help prevent feelings of isolation. In one institution desktop visits were very popular with research staff and the report described the importance of 'proactive' librarians.

It is common in academic libraries to have subject librarians, sometimes called liaison librarians or academic support librarians, who act as a first port of call for academic staff in a department. Many will also provide training for students, staff and researchers, and they may be available for one-to-one consultations. Learning support staff similarly may have dedicated responsibility for specific departments across a university. However, support staff can soon become stretched for time if large numbers of researchers call on them for one-to-one help and advice. This can also compete with their other responsibilities to provide classes for students, which has led some institutions to appoint a dedicated research support post in

the library to focus on the needs of this group. However, the problem remains that providing large numbers of individual consultations may seem less effective and less scalable than offering a more generic programme of support. It also becomes extremely important to capture the value of the one-to-one interactions, which may be statistically less significant than large numbers of students attending a training class, but overall far more rewarding for the individuals concerned.

THE RESEARCH AND RESEARCHER LIFECYCLE

When discussing researchers it is clear that the term can be used to describe a wide range of different types of individuals undertaking research at different stages of their career. While undergraduate and masters students often do not perceive themselves as ‘researchers’, almost all degree programmes include an element of independent work that a student is required to undertake, such as an extended essay or dissertation. When we think of researchers we might traditionally associate this with doctoral students or postdoctoral research staff, but in almost all higher education institutions research is carried out at many different levels, by students, research students, lecturers and senior research fellows.

The ‘research lifecycle’ has been categorised into seven ages by Bent, Webb and Gannon-Leary (2007: 81–99), which includes:

- masters students
- doctoral students
- contract researchers
- early career researchers
- established academic staff
- senior researchers
- experts.

When considering the seven groups listed above, what is clear is that the needs of early career researchers such as doctoral students will be very different to senior research fellows. The knowledge, experience and skills of the different groups will also vary enormously, with senior researchers often being highly specialised in their interests but also fairly confident about their abilities and less likely to see the need to attend a training session. It is important to consider the help and support available to all these groups of researchers in your institution. It is also vital that any services and support are marketed effectively to the different groups. For example, new researchers are often very keen to find out about electronic resources and tools that can help them, such as when they are first undertaking a detailed literature search. Meanwhile senior researchers often have well-established networks and methods for keeping up to date in their field. They may not, however, have kept up with changes to services they use, or be using the most appropriate tools to

support their work. Offering training courses across the board to researchers in your institution may not take into account the different needs within the group. However, the flexibility and personalised nature of the components of the boutique approach mean that services can be adapted and targeted at a specialist audience.

In addition to the researcher lifecycle, the research process itself is often described as an iterative cyclical process. The RIN study on the value of social media for researchers (RIN 2011b: 15) encapsulates the research cycle succinctly, describing it as having four stages:

1. identification of knowledge (literature review, and so on).
2. creation of knowledge (the actual research process).
3. quality assurance of knowledge (for example, peer review).
4. dissemination of knowledge (publication, presentation at conferences, and so on).

All four are underpinned by social interaction and collaboration, and the RIN study considers the role of social media at each of these different stages. However, understanding this cycle can also be helpful when framing services and support for the research community. There are specific points in this cycle when input from library and learning support staff might be more helpful (for example at stages 1 and 4) and times when researchers may prefer to work alone or with their colleagues. The next section will examine in more detail how boutique principles work in one higher education institution to provide support for varying groups of researchers at different points in their careers, but also at different stages of the research process.

INTRODUCTION TO DIGITAL LITERACY PROGRAMME IN CLT AT LSE

There are many different ways that institutions provide support to researchers; however, drawing on my own experiences at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) provides a useful example of a method that echoes many of the characteristics of the boutique approach. There are a wide range of research support services offered across LSE, from several different departments including the library, Centre for Learning Technology (CLT), Teaching and Learning Centre, and Research Office. This chapter will focus on the support offered by CLT. Elsewhere in this book a case study is provided by colleagues in the library to illustrate other services they provide to researchers. However, in CLT the move towards providing boutique services has evolved over the last five years and seems to offer a useful way of defining the specialist support on offer. Throughout this section of the chapter references will be made to the key characteristics of the boutique library component model.

Background and Context

At LSE, CLT was established in 2001 to support teaching and administrative staff in the effective use of technology in their teaching. LSE uses the virtual learning environment Moodle to provide blended learning support for campus-based students, including some online activities and access to resources. The small team of eight staff primarily offers training and support to staff at LSE to enable them to use technology effectively in teaching. However, at LSE PhD students increasingly act as 'Moodle editors' working alongside an academic colleague to edit the online course and so training and support is also offered to this group. CLT has responsibility for providing wider support for staff and researchers in what are termed 'digital literacy' skills. A programme of digital literacy classes was launched to stimulate an interest in e-learning and partly in response to the growing recognition that staff and researchers had limited knowledge of the potential that new technologies could offer them. The team was also aware that, if staff did not have the required skills or understanding about technologies to support their research, they would be less likely to use these tools in teaching. So part of the reason for offering this programme was a desire to be trend setting and reactive to a perceived need.

LSE use the following definition of digital literacy: 'the skills, knowledge and understanding that enables critical, creative, discerning and safe practices when engaging with digital technologies in all areas of life' (FutureLab 2010: 19). As LSE is a research-intensive university, staff in CLT are also aware that research activities are hugely important to the academic staff and the institution as a whole. In the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise, LSE had the highest percentage of world-leading research of any university in the UK and topped or came close to the top of a number of other rankings of research excellence. Ninety per cent of staff were returned as research active and there are around 20 research centres, many of which are world renowned. Therefore, while the role of CLT is primarily to support staff in their use of technology for teaching, providing staff with support for their research is crucial. Research and teaching are closely intertwined and the skills, technologies and tools that help staff become better teachers often help support their research activities. Consequently, CLT felt it was uniquely placed to offer research support in the area of digital literacy.

Digital Literacy and Boutique Services

Support for staff is offered in a variety of ways in CLT, including providing advice and guidance on the department website, and dealing with high numbers of queries via email but also over the telephone and in person. A mixture of one-to-one appointments and more formal dedicated training sessions is offered to staff throughout the year. Training in how to use Moodle is by far the most popular course on offer; however, the team has always offered a range of specialist workshops for

staff as part of the academic staff development programme. Attendance at formal workshop sessions has been variable and individual consultations have remained popular with staff who favour the personalised nature of such an appointment and the ability to schedule a meeting to suit their busy lives. Appointments are usually in the CLT office, but visits to staff in their department are not uncommon. The work of CLT has many of the characteristics of the boutique approach at its heart, including:

- offering highly tailored support and a personalised approach to services.
- being trendsetting and reactive to requests for new services.
- being customer focused and offering support at a convenient time and location for staff.
- additionally, a high degree of autonomy among the team, who can focus on areas of interest to them, respond to enquiries from staff, and provide support for staff with a specific discipline focus.

The Digital Literacy Programme originated in 2005/2006 with the launch of several classes for new staff on how to find and use electronic resources, how to find and use images and digital media in teaching, and how to use reference management software. A key aspect of these classes is they are all held in computer classrooms so require attendees to participate in a series of hands-on activities. They are also typically offered at a time convenient for staff, such as lunchtime or on Wednesday afternoons when teaching is kept to a minimum. As technology has evolved, in particular with the growth of social media, new classes have been developed to cover many of the Web 2.0 tools and services such as blogs and social media. In fact each year new classes have been developed and existing classes have been updated. Some of the classes on offer in 2010/11 included:

- **Keeping Up To Date:** this features using alerting services from key bibliographic databases, identifying RSS feeds, and using a reader to keep up to date with blogs and other websites using this technology.
- **Managing Your Internet Resources:** this shows staff how to use social bookmarking tools such as Delicious and Diigo – these are useful for teaching, but particularly useful for researchers.
- **Blogging For Beginners:** this covers how to set up a blog using WordPress software, in addition to tips for getting started with customising your blog and writing your first post.
- **Collaborative Writing Tools:** this includes using wikis and Google docs and is particularly aimed at researchers who might need to share documents with staff based at other institutions.
- **Introduction to Twitter:** this covers using Twitter for professional purposes and academic networking and to keep up to date with research interests.

One of the new classes launched in 2010 was a course on managing your web presence. This had proved popular as a half-day workshop, but numbers were low due to the time commitment required. Therefore the class was adapted to create an hour-and-a-half-long digital literacy class and has proved popular over the past year. The team obtains feedback on the programme in its annual staff survey and has responded to requests for new areas of support, for example launching a class in 2011/12 on managing information using tools such as Zotero and Mendeley. However, the programme arguably has another valuable role in highlighting the broader remit of the Centre for Learning Technology. The team is aware that some staff at LSE perceive CLT as the department that supports Moodle. By offering the Digital Literacy Programme, it highlights a broader range of expertise in the team; and there is some evidence that this leads to a greater range of enquiries from staff and PhD students.

Trendsetting and Reacting to Change

An important part of the boutique approach is the flexibility of service provision and the ability to react to new developments and trends. Research support services offered in CLT arguably fit this model well as the department deals with the ever-changing nature of technology-enhanced learning. This means the team has adapted its services and has developed a range of initiatives in collaboration with other departments at LSE. So, for example, the six-week information literacy programme offered to PhD students (Secker and Macrae-Gibson 2011) was developed by CLT and LSE Library. It partly drew on the experiences of the Digital Literacy Programme, incorporating aspects of some of the classes. Additionally, the provision of personalised support for PhD students lies at the heart of this programme. So, for example, students are asked to complete a pre-course questionnaire and are provided with specialist help and advice based on the nature of their thesis or research area. They are also put in contact with their academic support librarian to allow the support to continue once they have completed the course.

Other courses that have been developed echoing boutique principles include a course on the effective use of PowerPoint that was developed by CLT and the IT training team. This course is a half-day workshop that includes aspects of pedagogy, IT training and effective presentation skills. Some courses have developed in response to requests for training and support in a specific area. For example, a popular course on preparing poster presentations now runs several times per year and usually is attended by early career researchers such as doctoral students. The course was first developed to support an internal one-day conference for PhD students, where it was decided to include a poster exhibition. Students were invited to submit posters for a competition to showcase their research and to give them the experience of presenting in this format. Increasingly poster presentations feature at academic conferences and PhD students often find this a

relatively easy way of getting recognition and feedback on their research findings. It can also be a less intimidating way of presenting at a conference for a novice. The Centre for Learning Technology itself had some experience of preparing posters from attending and presenting in this format at academic conferences. Therefore several members of staff agreed to prepare some materials to support the poster exhibition. A set of resources is available on the CLT website (LSE 2011); however, in addition, the staff now run a short workshop on poster presentations, which has proved consistently popular. Finally, the most recent initiative has been the scheduling of joint 'software surgeries' offered to staff at a set lunchtime each week in Autumn Term 2011. Representatives from a range of support services are on hand to answer queries. They can also usefully cross-refer issues that straddle service areas, for example both an IT and library query. To date, the feedback has been extremely popular as staff can visit the surgery without booking to get personalised support and training.

Personalised, Subject-specific and Customer-focused Services

The range of workshops offered by CLT leads to a steady number of enquiries from researchers who are seeking specialist advice or support. In some instances staff are referred to another department that may already offer a training course or be better suited to dealing with their request. However, where the enquiry falls into the remit of CLT, these enquiries are usually followed up through one-to-one consultations, which can really focus on the specific needs of the individual or the group of researchers. Some of the recent one-to-one sessions that have been arranged include:

- Consultation with a project team over the best social citation or social bookmarking tool to use in their project, which involved staff from universities in several different countries. This led to several meetings and providing written advice about a comparison of three social citation tools: Mendeley, Zotero and CiteULike.
- Consultation with a project director about which tools to employ to best support their team in communicating with each other, sharing resources, and managing their project effectively using appropriate technologies. This involved an investigation of various academic networking and project management tools. The team eventually decided to subscribe to a project management tool.
- Following on from attendance at a Facebook workshop, several *one-to-one* consultations with administrative staff have taken place over the setup of Facebook pages to support incoming students on specific courses at LSE.

The Centre for Learning Technology web pages on digital and information literacy now include information about the one-to-one consultation service. It is also important that the team has a clear understanding both of its own remit and of the

expertise available elsewhere at LSE, and refers enquiries outside its remit to the appropriate department. A cross-department forum set up at LSE several years ago, known as the Training and Development Group, helps to ensure there is good communication between all training and support departments. This group meets once per month and membership is open to all those offering training (whether to staff or students) across LSE. The existence of a shared Training and Development System to advertise courses on offer across LSE has also helped communication and collaboration between the different departments. This system allows students and staff to browse all the courses available to them and to manage their bookings for training sessions.

Other Support for Researchers

The programme run at LSE in the Centre for Learning Technology is primarily delivered by learning technologists who focus on using a range of new technologies to support research activity. However, as in most institutions the support that is offered to researchers is far broader than the Digital Literacy Programme. In some institutions a graduate school or research office may coordinate a wider programme of training that is offered by a number of different units. Roberts funding has been used in many institutions since 2002 to fund the support of PhD students specifically. More recently, a number of institutions have bid for and been awarded funding from the funding councils, such as ESRC to set up doctoral training centres. LSE has been fortunate enough to be recently appointed as an ESRC doctoral training centre. This will lead to a greater level of collaboration between training providers and may lead to further development in research support provision. However, in summary, other types of support offered to researchers at higher education level include:

- High-level information literacy/information skills support for PhD students and researchers. Sessions usually focus on finding, using and managing specialist sources such as archival materials and data sources. At LSE a six-week course is offered to PhD students; however, researchers can attend any classes in the information skills programme, some of which are more suitable for researchers. They also have support provided online through Moodle in a course called 'Researcher's Companion to Moodle'. Finally they are encouraged to book a *one-to-one* consultation with their liaison librarian, who can run specialist training for individuals or groups of researchers on request.
- Bibliographic/bibliometric support, which can help researchers demonstrate their research impact. This has proved useful in preparing for the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE)/Research Excellence Framework (REF). Institutional repositories to manage research output are an important way that academic libraries provide support for researchers. Increasingly librarians are running sessions on citation analysis and other bibliometric

techniques that can all help demonstrate the impact of research.

- Research skills and methods training in both qualitative and quantitative techniques. In many institutions this may be offered within academic departments as research methods are often discipline specific. LSE has a methodology institute that offers a range of workshops in both qualitative and quantitative research methods. In other institutions these courses may be coordinated by a graduate school or at a faculty or departmental level. In many instances this will also include IT training in specialist software including qualitative and quantitative packages such as SPSS, NVivo and Stata.
- Careers advice and personal development sessions. Careers services often cater for PhD students and researchers. Increasingly PhD students are keen to demonstrate the transferability of research skills outside academia and many may be looking to find work in other sectors. LSE employs a specific careers adviser to support PhD students.

As mentioned earlier, the Training and Development Group has helped to improve communication between the different training providers at LSE. In addition to this group, a research support group has also been established, which looks in particular at the needs of PhD students across LSE. As well as being a group for staff who support researchers, it is supported by a number of PhD students acting as representatives for their peers.

Research Support and the Boutique Approach

When the Digital Literacy Programme was launched in 2005, one of its underlying motivations was the need to cope with growing demands on staff time for one-to-one consultations. In the early years of the CLT all training was offered on a one-to-one basis, including support for using the VLE. This meant that staff received a highly personalised training session to set up their e-learning course, which focused on their specific needs. However, the decision to use the VLE was entirely optional and the numbers of courses using technology was relatively small. When the team were planning the move to a new VLE in 2007 it became clear this transition could not be supported through one-to-one training. Group training had the advantage of reaching larger numbers of staff and was also a more time-efficient way of using learning technologists' time. However, it has always been recognised that training in a group does not always meet the specific needs of a teacher or a researcher.

The combination of providing group training sessions with the ability of staff to book individual consultations as a follow-up has been working effectively for four years now at LSE. The training programmes act as a showcase for the range of support that is offered by the team, beyond simply training for Moodle or other learning technologies. However, the model does rely on only a relatively small number of staff taking up the offer of a follow-on one-to-one session. Clearly

with over 2,000 staff at LSE, it would not be feasible for the eight members of staff in CLT to offer everyone this intensive style of session. The team also needs to be clear about which areas are within its remit and when to refer staff to other colleagues, for example in IT training, the library, or the Teaching and Learning Centre. However, the library also offers research consultations to staff, and IT training has a similar model of allowing staff to request up to three personalised sessions per year. The close working relationship between the departments hopefully minimises the possibility of duplication as far as possible.

Higher education institutions would rarely contemplate charging their own staff for the range of research support services that they offer. However, in the future as funding models in higher education are changing this might be something institutions will consider. It is also important to cost the time spent by research support staff in external project proposals. For example, when external project funding is being sought, it is important that the expertise and any additional resources are factored into the research proposal. As many research projects now increasingly work on full economic costings, with associated charges for estates (covering heating, lighting, office space), so the associated costs of research support services should also be included. In some instances a research project may require the purchase of additional bibliographic databases or software, but if staff expertise in support departments is also used, then this should surely be costed as well. It is therefore essential that a good working relationship with the Research Office is established, to ensure that the proper contribution of support staff to externally funded projects is taken into consideration.

INTRODUCTION TO THE RDF AS A FRAMEWORK TO PROVIDING TARGETED SUPPORT

Research support provision in higher education has been guided by RCUK and bodies such as Vitae. The launch of new guidance in 2011 in the form of the Researcher Development Framework (RDF) and Researcher Development Statement (RDS) comprises a helpful document for institutions seeking to target the support they provide for researchers. The RDF and RDS replaced the 2001 Joint Skills Statement (JSS) that had been developed collaboratively by the research councils to describe the skills a doctoral student would be expected to have by the time they had completed their degree. The RDF, however, covers a longer period of a researcher's career, is broader, and has been described as

a tool for planning, promoting and supporting the personal, professional and career development of researchers in higher education. It describes the knowledge, skills, behaviours and personal qualities of researchers and encourages them to aspire to excellence through achieving higher levels of development. (Vitae 2011c)

The framework is designed for two audiences: researchers themselves, and managers, supervisors, research support staff and institutions as a whole for planning their support for researchers more strategically. There is a range of resources for researchers on the RDF website, for example they can download a professional development planner (Vitae 2011d) to help plan the support and training they might need. However, in the context of this chapter, the RDF is a valuable way of auditing current research support services within an institution and could be a way to identify areas for more personalised services.

The RDF describes four areas of knowledge, skills, behaviours and personal qualities of researchers across their career. The framework is divided into four domains and three sub-domains, as follows:

- Domain A: Knowledge and intellectual abilities
 - a. A1 Knowledge base
 - b. A2 Cognitive abilities
 - c. A3 Creativity
- Domain B: Personal effectiveness
 - a. B1 Personal qualities
 - b. B2 Self-management
 - c. B3 Professional and career development
- Domain C: Research governance and organisation
 - a. C1 Professional conduct
 - b. C2 Research management
 - c. C3 Finance, Funding and Resources
- Domain D: Engagement, influence and impact
 - a. D1 Working with others
 - b. D2 Communication and dissemination
 - c. D3 Engagement and impact.

A visual representation of the framework is reproduced in Figure 6.1.

Within each domain each of the three sub-domains is further broken down into 63 'descriptors'. The framework was produced empirically using interviews with researchers who described the characteristics of excellent researchers. For example, section A1 (Knowledge base) includes descriptors in the following areas:

- subject knowledge
- research methods: theoretical knowledge
- research methods: practical application
- information seeking
- information literacy and management
- languages
- academic literacy and numeracy.

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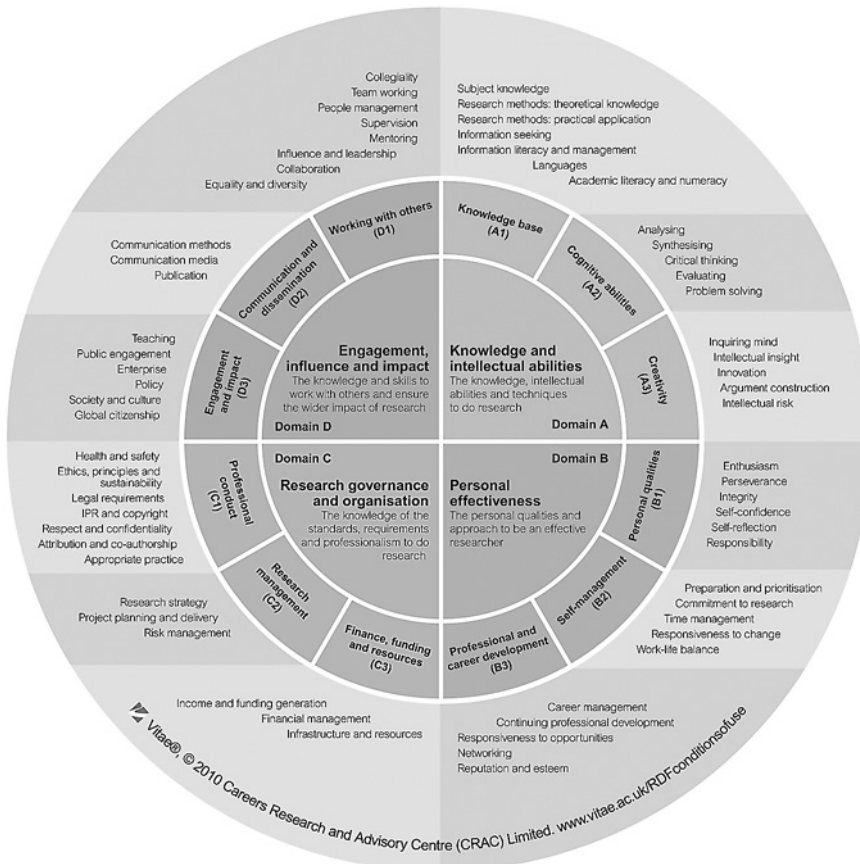


Figure 6.1 Vitae Researcher Development Framework (Vitae 2011)

The RDF is a comprehensive framework of researcher development, and within an institution different departments will provide specific research support services. Libraries and librarians will naturally tend to focus on specific activities around developing researchers' information literacy skills. Meanwhile, a graduate school or academic development unit will focus on other aspects of the framework, such as knowledge about different research methods or developing academic literacy. Ideally, all research support staff should use the RDF to audit provision across their institution. However, Vitae is aware that specific parts of the RDF are more relevant to certain groups of staff. It is therefore in the process of developing lenses that focus on aspects of the framework to demonstrate how they apply in different contexts. Helpfully for the library profession, one of these lenses focuses on information literacy, and it was due for release in 2012.

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USING THE RDF WITH THE BOUTIQUE APPROACH

The RDF can be used in a variety of ways by those delivering research support services in libraries and related departments. The framework can be used as a way of auditing research support provision within a specific department to identify related support services and opportunities for collaboration. It can also be used to highlight any opportunities to build on existing training or to identify gaps in provision. The Researcher Development Statement can support and inform future training and development strategy within research degrees. Following the audit process the RDF could highlight areas where specialised or boutique research support services could be developed.

It would be helpful for a group of researchers and those supporting them to undertake an audit of support jointly to map out the provision that is available across the institution. This will be a practical way to avoid any assumptions and misunderstandings about what each department is offering. For example, librarians are typically seen as being able to offer help around finding resources and literature searching. However, other training providers do not always recognise their ability to help researchers evaluate and manage information. In some areas it may be helpful for research support staff to team up to offer joint training or guidance. For example, at LSE at undergraduate and masters level it has proved useful for library staff to work with educational developers to run a session on avoiding plagiarism. The grouping of descriptions under the four domains may offer other opportunities to see synergies between different areas of skills development, which may traditionally be offered by separate units. For example, the descriptor D2 (Communication and dissemination) includes activities around communication methods, communication media and publication. Courses and guidance in this area might be developed by a combination of librarians, supervisors, IT staff and learning technologists to cover not only traditional publishing in journals but also the use of new media such as blogs and issues such as open access.

Once the audit has been undertaken, how to provide support and guidance can be reviewed. Generic training courses could be one way of providing researchers with the knowledge and behaviour outlined above, but researchers need support appropriate to their level and discipline, which means a course might not always be cost effective or feasible. For example, descriptor C1 (Professional conduct) says researchers should have knowledge of health and safety, ethics, legal requirements, IPR, copyright, and confidentiality issues, among others. Many of these areas are ones in which all researchers will need specific guidance, and so a training or information session would be appropriate. However, descriptor B3 (Professional and career development) covers career management, continuing professional development, responsiveness to opportunities, networking, and reputation and esteem. It is much more difficult to envisage generic courses that would work in this area and it may be more appropriate to provide one-to-one guidance.

The RDF also encourages researchers to evaluate and plan their own career development, which suggests a high level of personalised services. If researchers are encouraged to use the professional development planner, it could provide a way of flagging up both generic training on offer and more specialised support.

CONCLUSION

Researchers like students will not always know who can help them in their own institution. Therefore it is vital that research services are targeted appropriately and that research support staff work together collaboratively to promote their services effectively. The ideal scenario is one where a researcher will use a framework such as the RDF to identify their development needs. At the same time the institution will have audited their research support provision to address each of the descriptors in this framework and ensure there is a suitable programme of support in place. This approach suggests that institutions will offer a personalised model of research support that takes into account a researcher's disciplinary needs, their current skills level and their future requirements. The boutique approach can certainly help to meet the diverse needs of researchers. However, research support does need to be realistic and cost effective, so services will need to be planned appropriately taking into account the staff available to provide the support and the numbers of researchers within the institution.

While attempts are being made at LSE to encourage collaboration and shared knowledge and understanding, through groups such as the Training and Development Group, and the establishment of a shared training database, the situation is still not perfect. Silos of support can still exist in all institutions and it is often necessary to offer centralised research support. It is clear that service providers including libraries, IT departments, educational technology specialists, careers advisors and others need to adopt a collaborative approach to researcher development. They also need to make attempts to break down the barriers between academic staff, researchers and support staff. If they succeed in doing this, tailored and personalised services offer a way forward for developments in this field.

TOP TIPS FOR ENGAGING RESEARCHERS

While the boutique model offers much to research support services it is clearly not feasible or cost effective to provide a highly personalised model of support to meet the needs of each researcher in your institution. No institution will have the resources to provide one-to-one support for everyone. In addition there are huge benefits to bringing researchers together, even in just small groups for development activities. Research is often an inherently lonely process, and so interaction and networking is an important aspect of research support services that you offer.

However, the following list provides ten top tips for maximising the services you can provide to researchers, while not overstretching yourself or your staff:

- ‘Soft’ launch or pilot new boutique services perhaps with just one academic department initially to enable you to test the level of demand that there might be before committing to provide a fully functioning service.
- Do not be afraid to try out new ideas; aim to offer at least one new course or initiative each year to keep your services fresh.
- Build up a network of ‘tame’ researchers at different levels and in different departments who can provide you with valuable feedback for any new ideas you wish to launch.
- Spend some time carrying out research yourself to really understand the process; even if it is just a short literature review to inform your work, it will help you understand the challenges that researchers face.
- Keep records of the time spent on *one-to-one* activities and group training sessions to enable cost–benefit analysis to be carried out.
- Sometimes you need to persevere with offering services, as it may take time for word to get out about the service you are offering; this is particularly true when knowledge of your services is spread by word of mouth.
- Ask for feedback from users of boutique services to demonstrate the value you are providing, and use positive and negative feedback to inform your services.
- Collect qualitative feedback for researchers as this will tell you a lot more about what they really need than a simple survey.
- Team up with other service providers to join up the support you offer and to develop strategies for promoting your services collectively; researchers actually rarely mind who is offering the training, just that it is appropriate.
- Constantly review your marketing and promotion – are you using the appropriate channels to reach researchers and are you using the right language?

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