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# The Higher Skills Agenda

*Enhancing the Research Culture*

organised by Teesside University, Thistle Hotel, Middlesbrough, 3 June 2009

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# UK GRAD

**Launched in 2003 by Research Councils**

- The role of the UK GRAD Programme is to support the academic sector to embed personal and professional skills development into research degree programmes (RDP).
- Our vision is for **all postgraduate researchers to be fully equipped and encouraged to complete their studies and to make a successful transition to their future careers.**





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## UK GRAD... to... VITAE

Original contract expired

- new one started Jan.2008 – Dec.2012
- Incorporating the Higher Education Researcher Development (UKHERD) group
  - About all HE researchers, not just postgraduate
- Continuing: National networks, resources, projects and publications & Regional Hubs





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# VITAE

- Enhanced voice for researchers in institutions
- Seeing research work as a continuous progression – a curriculum for research competence?
- New version of the *Concordat to support the career development of researchers*
- More requirement for development needs of researchers to be built into project funding proposals





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# Skills training requirements for research students: joint statement by the research councils/AHRB (2001)

- A - Research Skills and Techniques
- B - Research Environment
- C - Research Management
- D - Personal Effectiveness
- E - Communication Skills
- F - Networking and Teamworking
- G - Career Management





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# The JSS and the Higher Skills Agenda

Any issues?





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# The JSS and the Higher Skills Agenda

Any issues:

Bad eggs – because bad management of programme/staff, resources

good eggs – , the more the better, because resources, trained staff,  
reward, celebration

JSS - Where to start – how rigid vs flexible, how comprehensive

- Holistic

- but too much not about PhD







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# The JSS and the Higher Skills Agenda

## Any issues?

Completion rates

Bad eggs – non-attendance, getting interest in schools, timing of provision to be relevant, level of genericity

good eggs – engaged participant-centred, peer learning, getting them out of office, cross disciplinary

JSS - applicable to all? – level of study





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# The JSS and the Higher Skills Agenda: issues - 1

Stephen Rowland

- lowest common denominator problem

Diana Leonard – leads to infantilisation

Even if O.K. for postgrads, research and lecturing staff are beyond this?





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# The JSS and the Higher Skills Agenda: issues – 1a

## **The Competency Framework**

Extending Joint Statement, in terms both

- of showing development
- of applying to more highly developed career stages
- Can the development of postgraduate researchers and research staff be supported with the same activities?
- Learning Needs Analysis / Personal Development Profiling
- Michael Eraut (*inter alia*) – competence vs competency





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# The JSS and the Higher Skills Agenda: issues – 2

Pearson & Brew, Cargill – “add on model”, competing for attention

Rowland, Frank Furedi – and much of it amounts to external interference

- skills for other employers' interests
- top-down imposition and autonomy problem

Realist stance: C-G fundamentally different to A+B





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# The JSS and the Higher Skills

## Agenda: issues – 2a

- **Realism** (ontologically distinct entities):

X is a skill, Y is not a skill

- **Irrealism:**

{A has skill X} = {A is skilled at doing X}





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# The JSS and the Higher Skills Agenda: issues – 2b

## **Irrealism (contd):**

{A is competent at conducting lab work}  
= {A is skilled at conducting lab work}

{A is skilled at conducting lab work}  
= {A has lab work skills}





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# The JSS and the Higher Skills Agenda: issues – 2c

## **Irrealism (contd):**

{A is competent at engaging in argument}  
= {A is skilled at engaging in argument}

{A is skilled at engaging in argument}  
= {A has argumentation skills}





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# The JSS and the Higher Skills

## Agenda: issues – 3

Still a question about how to gauge competence, development and attainment, and other success arising out of development provision

Part of the question how to evaluate the impact of development programmes, focus of the Vitae Rugby Team Impact Framework:

<http://www.vitae.ac.uk/policy-practice/1418/Rugby-Team-activities.html>

- uses Kirkpatrick, D.L. & Kirkpatrick, J.D. (2006) *Evaluating Training Programmes* (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.), Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc







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# The JSS and the Higher Skills Agenda: issues – 3a

## **Impact Level 0: Foundations**

This level relates to investment that leads to development of the infrastructure for training and development activity, such as the employment of additional staff, a larger programme of training workshops and other activities being offered, or training facilities being refurbished. Metrics such as the number of training opportunities offered, the number of researchers participating, or a more specific example such as the number of researcher interactions with industry as the result of a particular training activity, are examples of Level 0 impact measures, i.e. these primarily measure inputs and throughputs.





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# The JSS and the Higher Skills

## Agenda: issues – 3b

### **Impact Level 1: Reaction**

This level indicates the reaction of participants to training and development activities. For example, at the end of a workshop participants may be asked what were their views of the experience? What was their view of the training programme as a whole?





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# The JSS and the Higher Skills Agenda: issues – 3c

## **Impact Level 2: Learning**

This level reflects ‘the extent to which participants change attitudes, improve knowledge, and/or increase skill as a result of attending the programme’. For example, does a researcher have a better understanding of how to work effectively within a team as a result of attending a training workshop?

## **Impact Level 3: Behaviour**

This level reflects ‘the extent to which change in behaviour has occurred because the participant attended the training programme’. Is the researcher now managing their project and time better as a result of the development activity? How has the researcher applied what they have learnt?





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# The JSS and the Higher Skills Agenda: issues – 3d

## **Impact Level 4: Outcomes**

This level measures the final results of the training and development activity. Have changes in behaviour resulted in different outcomes? Has the quality of researcher improved? Is there a more highly skilled research workforce?

## **Capital Analyses?**

- Economic Capital – macro-level productivity
- Human Capital
- Social Capital





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# The JSS and the Higher Skills Agenda: issues – 3e

## Questions to consider with respect to Learning & Behaviour (i):

- 1) What would enhance the learning experience on workshop events across skills and competence development programmes for you, as researcher and early career academic participants?
- 2) What would help you to understand the attainment level you are at?





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## The JSS and the Higher Skills Agenda: issues – 3f

- To what extent would the addition of assignment work linked to but outside workshop events enhance the learning “experience” for you?
- Which skill areas/attributes would be enhanceable, which not?
- Would being assessed help you to understand the attainment level you are at, or attain higher still?
- When is it important to have in assessment an indication of being “good enough”, or not, i.e. pass or fail? - is it just appropriate for courses which contribute credits towards a qualification?





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## CETL funded project

*Evaluation of researcher support programmes: assessment within development events, and the attitudes and experiences towards academic careers provision, of early career academics (ECAs)*

Proposers: Martin Gough (Kent), Emma Williams (Cambridge), Frederico Matos (Cambridge & UCL), Jon Turner (Edinburgh)

Funded by the Centre for Excellence in Preparing for Academic Practice:

<http://www.learning.ox.ac.uk/cetl.php?page=54>





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## The JSS and the Higher Skills Agenda: issues – 4

The sustainability question:

- What happens when 'Roberts' money stops in 2012?







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## The JSS and the Higher Skills Agenda: issues – 5 & 6

5) This “public understanding” thing...:

-How is it possible to communicate your state-of-the-art research to the public when you are only just getting to grips with what it means yourself?

6) And how can skills be transferable when fostered in one situation but are expected to be used in a quite different one?





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# The JSS and the Higher Skills Agenda: issues 5 & 6....

... demand analysis of the concept of practice...

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