

RIN/RCUK workshop on information handling skills and competencies 16 July 2009, London

Preliminary action list from discussion

In July 2008, the Research Information Network published a report, [Mind the skills gap: Information-handling training for researchers](#), which concluded that training for researchers in the UK on information-handling and management is uncoordinated and generally not based on any systematic assessment of needs. The purpose of the workshop, which brought together around 25 experts from different constituencies, was to explore what might be done to improve the situation. The workshop was tasked with identifying practical courses of action, which participating parties could commit to. This document is a synthesis of the wide range of ideas that emerged from the structured discussions. Those who took part in the event are listed at the back of this document.

1. Ideas for implementation in the short term

1.1 Advocacy/steering group

Although eventually information competence should be promoted as an integral part of a wider set of researcher competencies, in the first instance there is a need for a group of committed individuals, representing key constituencies, to kick-start the further development of information competency and act as initial champions. An early task for such a group could be to coordinate a response to Vitae's consultation on its [Researcher Development Framework](#) (RDF), from September 2009. The Group might develop a further role to oversee the sort of analysis and mapping work described below at 2.1.

Further down the line, work in this area could be progressed by a network of information competence champions – at national, regional, institutional and faculty/school/departmental levels.

RIN to coordinate the setting up of this group by end of September 2009

1.2 Consultation on Researcher Development Framework

The consultation timetable starts in September. It will be important for interested parties to publicize the consultations.

Advocacy/steering group to coordinate joint response to the consultation, working in close cooperation with Vitae, during October [?] 2009

1.3 Revision of RCUK Joint Skills Statement

Given our discussions, the forthcoming revising of the Statement is timely. It will be important to ensure that the drafting group includes appropriate representation to ensure that information-handling is properly addressed; there is also a need for consultation notably with key library groups i.e. [SCONUL Working Group on Information Literacy](#), [RLUK](#), RIN, [BAILER](#), CILIP special interest groups such as the [Information Literacy Group](#), the [University College and Research Group](#) and the [Library and Information Research Group](#)...

RLUK Research Careers & Diversity Group to ensure that the above communication takes place

1.4 High level declaration

At a high level, there is a need to draft a document that articulates what needs to happen; what are the training and development needs of researchers; what a good researcher looks like, bearing in mind all the disciplinary differences, and what part information-handling plays in this (see also under certification, 3.6 below). Input to this document should be sought from all interested communities: RCs, HE Funding Councils, Vitae, UUK and its Mission Groups, library bodies, RIN, JISC, learned societies, publishers, UKCGE and graduate school consortia... Much thought will be needed about how such a declaration might be targeted and disseminated, at local, regional and national levels.

A task for the advocacy/steering group

2. Mapping and audit work to provide initial evidence base

2.1 Three exercises, to be undertaken in the short to medium term, to provide the initial evidence base.

- *Stakeholder analysis and mapping*

Identifying key players, looking at their missions and motivators; clarify who does what currently, at local and national levels, and who speaks on behalf of information literacy; disseminate findings to build mutual understanding and help others to understand why they need to get involved.

- *Issues and opportunities analysis*

Identifying existing activities, agenda and frameworks where information competence is relevant and can make a significant difference (e.g. REF, career development) to act as hooks for embedding information skills development within broader skills/competency development strategies; clarify areas where evidence of benefits exists or needs to be gathered; compare and synthesise findings with stakeholder mapping.

- *Audit of entry-level information skills*

Light-touch evidence-gathering from students, e.g. diagnostic questionnaire; gather evidence base on trends, typologies, gaps and needs. Tie in with Researcher Development Framework. This would be an iterative process.

2.2 Disseminate and act on the findings of the three above exercises, using this to plan the next steps in advancing development of policy and strategy at national level (linking with ongoing work, e.g. the RDF); see also local advocacy, 3.8 below.

Advocacy/steering group to consider commissioning such work, starting autumn 2009, and on the basis of the findings, to build a dissemination / advocacy strategy

3. Longer-term programme of research to help frame policy and practice

Further thought is required about who would be tasked with taking forward any of these tentative activities. There could be a coordinating role for RIN here, as a follow-up to the Mind the Skills Gap work, perhaps through a sub-group of the above advocacy/steering group, with representatives of BAILER, RLUK, SCONUL and Vitae as core members, given the library/training focus here. Alternatively, if some money could be found, this work could be sub-contracted to a research organization (e.g. a suitably qualified BAILER research centre / department / consortium) to manage.

3.1 Identifying good practice

Case studies of current practice (both good and bad) in delivering training, by librarians and others. This might include:

- reflecting on the scale, nature (generic vs. role-specific, face-to-face vs. online, etc.), level and timeliness of such training;
- identifying instances of good relationships between information specialists and researchers in faculties/departments;
- drawing on the experiences of PhD students and postdocs in different realms (disciplines, mature vs. younger, part-time / distance learners, UK vs. international): what training worked for them, what didn't, how it met their perceived need;
- investigating the extent to which librarians and others make use of and contribute to the Vitae [Database of Practice](#) to share resources (conversely, Vitae might want to investigate information professionals' perceptions and use of the Database of Practice, to ensure that it meets needs).

This would be very much a bottom-up approach, trying to draw lessons out from such examples, to serve as a basis for the formulation of good practice and guidance, perhaps through the medium of some sort of toolbox.

3.2 Needs assessment

Assessment of what exists at the moment in terms of needs assessment tools, including those for self-assessment. There are some isolated examples that were highlighted at the meeting, but a more systematic assessment of what these tools do could be useful.

3.4 Research on impact of interventions

Case studies to investigate the impact and effectiveness of information literacy 'interventions' on research outputs, including timeliness and consideration of disciplinary differences; and to determine the value-for-money (quantitative, qualitative) of removing information inefficiencies within research. Reference could be made to the [Rugby Team Impact Framework](#), and data drawn from the [Careers in Research Online Survey](#) (CROS). The study could take the form of a combination of cost/benefits analysis and case study exemplars. It is important that such work should tell persuasive stories that can serve to demonstrate the value of information-handling skills.

3.5 Improving the role of trainers, and particularly supervisors

National organizations need to develop an approach for ongoing and embedded information literacy training and support for supervisors – keeping up to date and getting them to recognize the potential value – e.g. the [Postgraduate Research Experience Survey](#) (PRES) made reference to supervisors being less knowledgeable about literature searching. There is a need for:

- national coordination aimed at identifying experts, including supervisors, who can best provide the training;
- identifying staff development issues for trainers;
- encouraging the provision of environments where pedagogies (rather than techniques, tools or resources) may be compared, from different constituencies, as a means of helping trainers; and

- providing a support mechanism for supervisors; and linking existing centres of training excellence (see identifying good practice, 3.1 above), perhaps associated with the identification of champions at local or regional level.

3.6 Certification

More needs to be done to enable researchers to acquire relevant skills as part of their overall professional development. It would therefore be useful for instance to (i) enable certification, preferably mandatory, to demonstrate transferable information-handling skills in the context of and as an integral part of good research practice; and (ii) include information literacy in annual staff appraisals. Transitional diplomas might be created to demonstrate acquisition of skills during postgraduate courses. To encourage these approaches, there is therefore a case for mapping and promoting of the type of certification described above. This might help to underpin any effort to re-conceive information skills as transferable skills, looking beyond the institutional provision of information to develop digital citizens and knowledge workers – tied in with economic and social value in the context of a digital economy.

3.7 Relationship with research strategies and practices

Investigation of institutional research strategies and practices, and the extent to which they do (or not) include approaches for improving and promoting information-handling skills; and where these approaches exist, how they are being planned and implemented as part of the institutional research policy agenda. The investigation could also cover the extent to which training strategies and practices are coordinated or integrated, in a cross-cutting way, within institutions. This may be seen as the top-down complement to the above case studies to identify good practice.

3.8 Local advocacy

Develop means to encourage librarians and other related professionals to be advocates for the value of information literacy. To do this, they should:

- have clear definitions of the services offered or that could be offered;
 - take time to engage other stakeholders in researcher development and explain what they do, and make sure this is clearly identified with researcher support and research outputs;
 - argue for the development of institutional information strategies within HEIs;
 - identify institutional champions, e.g. building up networks supportive academics, talking to Research PVCs, heads of graduate schools, etc.
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Workshop participants:

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