

Mind the skills gap

Information-handling training for researchers

July 2008

Research Information Network briefing

www.rin.ac.uk



‘...research information skills and competencies have not kept pace with rapid change.’

The Research Information Network’s (RIN) report, *Mind the Skills Gap: Information-handling training for researchers* (July 2008) finds that training for researchers on information seeking and management is uncoordinated and generally not based on any systematic assessment of needs.

The report focuses on the nature, extent and organisation of the information-related training for researchers that is provided by universities and other higher education institutions. It looks at the roles that librarians and other information specialists play and how the training they provide fits with the wider provision of generic training for researchers.

Developing the personal, professional and career management skills of researchers is currently high on the agenda in the UK’s higher education sector. Over the last few years, researchers have enthusiastically embraced new technologies and services that allow them to discover, locate, gain access to and create information resources on their desktops.

In embracing the new opportunities presented by online resources, many researchers have acquired a range of new skills. But librarians and information

professionals say that many researchers display alarming deficits in their skills and in their understanding of the new online information environment.

This raises important questions about how researchers acquire the appropriate skills in discovering and handling research information resources and services, the training opportunities provided for them, and the take-up of those opportunities.

You can download the executive summary and the full report at www.rin.ac.uk/training-research-info

The key findings and recommendations are listed overleaf.

Key findings and the RIN's recommendations



1. Better coordinated information-handling training and development for researchers

- The RIN will work with the Research Councils UK (RCUK), Vitae (formerly UKGrad), SCONUL and Research Libraries UK (RLUK) to ensure appropriate and well coordinated information skills training and professional development programmes are provided for researchers.

2. Clarification on eligible funding for information-related skills training

- Libraries are expanding training provision but few get 'Robert's money'. Funders need to provide clear guidance on the kinds of training that can be supported and especially what types of funding can be used to support the training in specific information skills and tools that libraries and other information specialists are in a unique position to provide.

3. Ensuring libraries and central training units are well equipped to train researchers in information handling

Libraries and central training units:

- should engage with their Vitae regional hub and make use of the Vitae Database of Practice to share good practice examples.
- need to engage with Vitae, to explore innovative approaches to monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the training they provide.
- should join in developing and delivering training programmes with the academic community, ensuring that they recognise the strengths of different training approaches.
- need to offer training for researchers that relates to information management and help develop training that takes account of researchers' different subject domains and experience and balance this with training offering generic skills where needed.

4. Ensuring higher education institutions have a strategic and integrated vision for training provision

- Integrated approaches and strategies need to be developed and aligned with research strategies to avoid gaps and duplication. Communications between all those concerned in the planning, organisation and delivery of training needs to be improved.
- All training providers should exploit the potential of e-learning and blended approaches to training, but ensure this new technology is used according to good practice examples.
- The delivery of coherent training programmes that meet the real needs of researchers needs to be addressed. More innovative approaches to identifying and assessing the information-related training needs of researchers needs to be adopted.
- Training programmes need to be formulated in partnership with relevant members of academic staff, to take account of, and exploit, the experience and expertise already acquired by researchers and their disciplinary differences.

More information

The Research Information Network aims to facilitate the implementation of these recommendations and welcomes the support of interested organisations. Please contact Branwen Hide, Liaison and Partnerships Officer, email branwen.hide@rin.ac.uk or telephone **020 7412 7759** for more information.

Useful links

Access and use of information services – Research Information Network www.rin.ac.uk/access-menu

Database of Practice – Vitae

www.grad.ac.uk/cms/ShowPage/Home_page/Online_resources/Database_of_practice/p!efbcXXc

Information literacy – SCONUL

www.sconul.ac.uk/topics_issues/info_literacy/

Research Libraries UK Resource Discovery Strategy Group

www.rluk.ac.uk/resourcediscovery

Training & Roberts money – Research Council UK

www.rcuk.ac.uk/aboutrcs/activities/training

'Roberts money'

In March 2001, Sir Gareth Roberts was asked by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretaries of State at the then Departments of Trade and Industry and Education and Skills to undertake a review into the supply of science and engineering skills in the UK. The review was commissioned as part of the Government's productivity and innovation strategy. One of the major conclusions of this review was that postdoctoral researchers should have proper access to appropriate training to help develop their career paths. The review highlighted IT training (but not specifically research information training) as one of the key areas that could benefit from further training provision.

See www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/documents/enterprise_and_productivity/research_and_enterprise/ent_res_roberts.cfm