

Doctoral Skills Training

Guidance for Doctoral Researchers and Supervisors - 2019-20

Context

All doctoral researchers at Sheffield Hallam University will have the opportunity to develop a range of research, personal and professional skills during the course of their programme. Transferable skills training as a key component of undertaking a PhD or professional doctorate is required by the university regulator, expected by research funders, and promoted by the University as part of its commitment to 'education for employment'.

Sheffield Hallam's Approach

Sheffield Hallam recognises that all doctoral researchers arrive at the start of their programme with different experiences and career plans. Therefore, doctoral skills training is, as far as possible, needs-based and individually-tailored. Rather than being required to complete a set training programme, each doctoral researcher's development needs are identified and jointly agreed with their supervisory team at the start of the degree; and these are regularly reviewed and updated as appropriate.

The University's Requirements

There are three compulsory elements of doctoral skills training at Sheffield Hallam. These are for the doctoral researcher to complete:

1. A development needs analysis, and agree this with their supervisory team;
2. The required research ethics training (Epigeum online Research Ethics 1 all doctoral researchers, Epigeum Research Ethics 2 for those whose research is likely to involve human participants, personal data and/or human tissue) – further information via <https://blogs.shu.ac.uk/shard/resources/epigeum-online-training/>;
3. Any discipline-specific research methods courses requisite for the programme

Beyond these minimum requirements, doctoral researchers must also 'satisfactorily engage' in addressing the other needs identified in their development needs analysis. This may be virtually nothing, or a comprehensive development programme, depending on the previous experience and career plans of the doctoral researcher. Essentially, this involves addressing any significant gaps that were determined to exist between current skills level and the level required, to enable successful completion of the research project and equip the doctoral researcher for their intended career pathway.

Development Needs Analysis

Development needs analysis (DNA) should be undertaken alongside a professional standards framework of the knowledge, behaviours and attributes of excellent practitioners. UK universities use Vitae's Researcher Development Framework (RDF) <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers-professional-development/about-the-vitae-researcher-development-framework> to help researchers articulate their skills and provide a common language for understanding and communicating their capabilities.

To help make the RDF more practical and usable, the University has acquired licences for all doctoral researchers for an online system called the RDF Planner (<http://vimeo.com/53575801>). The RDF Planner helps doctoral researchers undertake a skills audit against 63 criteria, which capture the characteristics of excellent researchers. This enables identification of areas of strength and those in need of development.

In the RDF, each criterion (descriptor) has five levels (phases) of competence. As an approximate guide, phase 1 is the level new doctoral researchers should be looking to ensure they are at in all the key descriptors relevant to their research, phases 2-3 are where they should be progressing toward the end of their study and into postdocs, and phases 4-5 are more aspirational, describing senior academics.

For each descriptor, doctoral researchers should self-assess whether they have achieved a phase using the guidance provided; recording this using the 'No'/'Yes' button. If they have not, they can add the action(s) they think they need to undertake in order to feel they have achieved it. This will automatically transfer into their development plan. Once they have achieved it, they can add evidence. This area of the Planner is also where relevant training can be accessed (see the black boxes in the image below).

The screenshot displays the 'Academic literacy and numeracy' descriptor in a light green header. Below it, the 'Phase 1' section is highlighted in light blue. The phase 1 criteria include: understanding and communicating in an academic context, preparing presentations, writing for specialist and non-specialist audiences, mathematical competence in one's discipline, applying statistics, and using computer packages for data analysis. Below the criteria, a 'Phase achieved?' dropdown is set to 'No', and there are buttons for 'Evidence: Added(0)' and 'Actions: Added(0)'. A black button labeled 'Access training and support in this area' is also visible. Below the phase 1 section are two light blue boxes for 'Actions' and 'Evidence', each with an 'Add new' button. The 'Phase 2' section is partially visible at the bottom in a grey background.

It is appreciated that, due to its size, the RDF Planner can initially appear overwhelming. It is therefore suggested that doctoral researchers attempt their DNA in bite-sized portions - focusing on a few areas at a time. As there are 63 in total, eight descriptors per week over an eight week period is recommended.

The following areas are suggested to attempt first (from the 'Getting Started in Research' lens):

- A1 - Subject knowledge; Information seeking
- A2 - Critical thinking; Problem solving
- A3 - Inquiring mind
- B1 - Perseverance; Self-reflection
- B2 - Preparation and prioritisation; Time management
- B3 - Career management
- C2 - Project planning and delivery
- D2 - Communication methods

Further information on each of the 63 descriptors can be found on the Vitae website (please register with your shu.ac.uk email address to access full member content).

<https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers-professional-development/professional-development-advice-sheets>

Please access the Planner using Google Chrome, Edge or Firefox browsers to ensure full compatibility. The reports will not run correctly if accessed using Internet Explorer.

Reports can be run on the skills audit to provide summaries, both for users and to inform discussions with supervisors (see example below).

My action plan

Back to reports

1 of 2 Find | Next

Researcher Development Framework Planner

myRDF - Action plan - Elizabeth Scanlon

Your action plan provides an overview of the descriptors you have identified for development, and the current status of the phases you wish to progress within these descriptors. You may wish to share this report with your supervisor or another colleague to inform discussion about your professional development.

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5
Knowledge and intellectual abilities (A)					
Knowledge base (A1)					
Subject knowledge	Achieved	-	-	-	-
Research methods - theoretical knowledge	Achieved	-	-	-	-
Research methods - practical application	Achieved	-	-	-	-
Information seeking	Achieved	Achieved	-	-	-
Information literacy and management	Achieved	-	-	-	-
Languages	-	-	-	-	-
Academic literacy and numeracy	Achieved	-	-	-	-
Cognitive abilities (A2)					
Analysing	Achieved	-	-	-	-

Personal Development Planning

A DNA should be used to produce a bespoke personal development plan, and this happens automatically in the RDF Planner. In the DNA, the level doctoral researchers assess themselves to be at is not necessarily important. What is important are the gaps between where they are and where they need to be. An example of part of a development plan is shown below.

My actions

1 of 1 100% Find | Next

This report provides an overview of the actions you have input by descriptor and phase and gives the status of each action. It includes the dates the actions were created, the target for completion and actual completion. It highlights actions that are overdue.

Completed actions are in green
 Open actions are in Blue
 Overdue actions are in Red


	Date created	What are your objectives?	How will you measure progress and achievement?	Target date	Completed	Completion date
Knowledge and intellectual abilities (A)						
Knowledge base (A1)						
Subject knowledge						
Phase 1						
	05/11/13	Read John Watts' 'Henry VI' and Helen Castor's 'The King, the Crown, and the Duchy of Lancaster' books to get to grips with the Political Culture paradigm	Books read and able to frame my work within this paradigm	31/10/13	Completed	29/10/13
Research methods - theoretical knowledge						
Phase 1						
	05/11/13	Complete D&S Qualitative Research methods course	Course assignment	22/01/14	In progress	
Research governance and organisation (C)						
Professional conduct (C1)						
Ethics, principles and sustainability						
Phase 1						
	05/11/13	Complete Epigeum Ethics 1 online course	Successfully achieve pass rate	03/12/13	In progress	

Further action and evidence examples can be found on the Vitae website (please register with your shu.ac.uk email address to access full member content).

<https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers-professional-development/action-and-evidence-examples>

Accessing Development

There are two main ways to access development. The first is through the Planner. Under each of the 63 descriptors there is a button to 'access training and support in this area'. The development provided by different parts of the University has been mapped into this, so examples of training related to the descriptor will be listed here to give researchers some ideas (see example below).



Organisation resources	Vitae resources
Epigeum Research methods in the literature review Academic CPD Online Courses https://blogs.shu.ac.uk/shard/resources/#skills Author: Research and Innovation Office Published: 02 Feb 2017	Subject knowledge Supporting information for this descriptor provided by Vitae in downloadable and printable PDF format https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers-professional-d.. Author: Vitae Published: 27 Jun 2013
	Subject knowledge - examples of action and evidence phases 1 and 2 Supporting information for this descriptor provided by Vitae https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers-professional-d.. Author: Vitae Published: 01 Oct 2014
	Subject knowledge - examples of action and evidence phases 4 and 5 Supporting information for this descriptor provided by Vitae https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers-professional-d.. Author: Vitae Published: 01 Oct 2014
	PDP ROC Professional Development Planning for Researchers Online Course. The modules in Vitae's online course will help you identify skills to develop, set goals, action plan and articulate your evidence. www.vitae.ac.uk/pdproc Author: Vitae Published: 18 Feb 2016

Close

While the Planner presents development in a needs-based way, an overview can also be found on the University's Doctoral School site: <https://blogs.shu.ac.uk/doctorschool/training-and-development-2/>

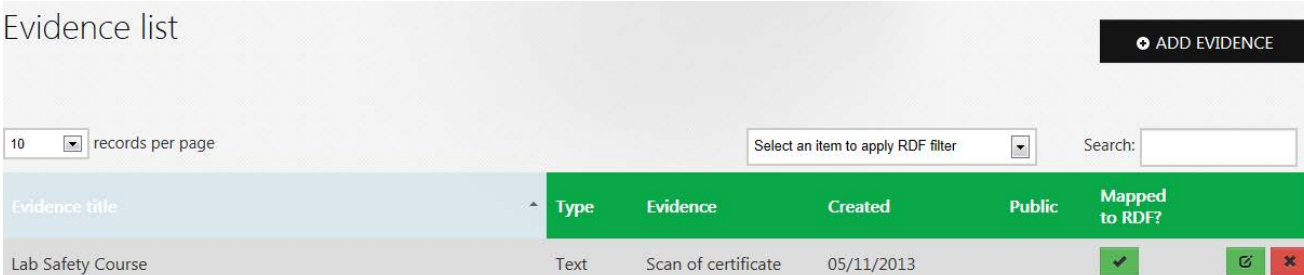
Development available for doctoral researchers includes:

- Doctoral Skills Training relating to Communication Skills, Research Data Management, Academic Writing Skills and Doctoral Viva
- MRes modules <https://blogs.shu.ac.uk/doctorschool/training-and-development-2/research-methods/>
- Faculty-based / discipline-focussed training
- Teaching and learning courses (including Teaching Skills for Doctoral Students)
- The SHaRD programme (research staff sessions, some open to doctoral researchers)
- Library research support sessions
- English for your Doctorate (<https://students.shu.ac.uk/shuspacecontent/languages/university-english-scheme-ues>)
- Career Service's career management workshops
- Online courses and resources covering: research skills, research integrity, research leadership, statistical methods and personal effectiveness

Where possible, details of these sessions and contacts have been provided on the Doctoral School Blog and Research Degrees Blackboard site (under the 'Doctoral Skills Training' and 'Online training and CPD' tabs).

Recording Development

The RDF Planner also has ePortfolio functionality. Evidence collected of development undertaken can be stored and shared on the system. Doctoral researchers already using PebblePad or another ePortfolio are welcome to continue to use their preferred system.



Evidence list

10 records per page

Select an item to apply RDF filter

Search:

Evidence title	Type	Evidence	Created	Public	Mapped to RDF?
Lab Safety Course	Text	Scan of certificate	05/11/2013		✓

Sharing Content

No one can see what researchers input on their account - they own it and can choose what to share and with whom. Reports, action plans and evidence can all be downloaded as PDFs and sent to supervisors in advance of meetings.

Supervisor Role

Doctoral skills training should be a collaborative process between doctoral researchers and their supervisory team, so supervisors are expected to actively support doctoral researchers in this area, and integrate it into the supervisory relationship alongside the core research output (thesis) element. Supervisors are also expected to check 'satisfactory engagement' with skills training, particularly with reference to the 12-month (24-month part-time) confirmation process (RF2).

End of Programme

At end of the programme, so content is not lost, researchers can either download everything off the system, or make a 'transfer request' to take on a personal subscription (£24 pa). If they become SHU research staff, they can continue with their accounts unbroken, if they plan to actively use the system for ongoing personal development. If they move to become staff at another UK university that subscribes to the RDF planner, they can request to transfer their account there. If an account is no longer required, please contact the Doctoral School on doctoralschool@shu.ac.uk and the account can be reallocated to a new user.

Contacts

Queries relating to the doctoral skills training and the RDF Planner should be directed to the Doctoral School Team (doctoralschool@shu.ac.uk / 0114 225 4464).

A full list of doctoral contacts can be found at: <https://blogs.shu.ac.uk/doctoralschool/contact-us/>

Summary of Actions Required by Doctoral Researchers

1. Register an RDF Planner account with your SHU email address (you should receive an email prompting you to do this). Do not pay for an account - SHU has an institutional subscription which you will be set up under.
2. Attend RDF Planner training if you want more support (organised by the Doctoral School).
3. Undertake a development needs analysis (work through the myRDF section of the RDF Planner; access the system by logging in at: <http://rdfplanner.vitae.ac.uk/>).
4. Set actions to address skills gaps that are identified (still within the myRDF section of the RDF Planner).
5. Submit completed 'My action plan' and 'My actions' reports, generated by the RDF Planner, to your supervisor (download reports as PDFs and email them) and jointly agree your development plan. Submit the agreed reports as attachments to your RF1 application.
6. Undertake the relevant training and development (overview provided at: <https://blogs.shu.ac.uk/doctoralschool/training-and-development-2/>).
7. Record your progress (as evidence in the RDF Planner).