



RCUK: Review of Revised Funding Arrangements for Researcher Development and their Operation May 2013

How does research development feature in strategy in your institution?

The Consortium for Research Excellence, Support and Training (CREST)¹ was set up as a shared research hub, initiated by GuildHE and 12 small and specialist Higher Education institutions in England and Wales. Supporting research development – viewed as fundamental to creating a shared research culture building on existing clusters with a developing reputations for national and international excellence – was a prime motivator for HEIs involved in setting up the Consortium. CREST member institutions have particularly strong reputations in particular for student support and engagement, so the Consortium benefits enormously from the fact that researcher development and training has been embedded in the participating institutions' strategies from the outset as they grow their research cohorts.

How is researcher development organised and delivered across the research organisation?

In 2009 HEFCE provided seed-funding for the project matched by institutional subscriptions. The Consortium is now wholly funded by participating member institutions (currently standing at 22 as of May 2013²). CREST is led by the CREST Chair (Prof Chris Gaskell, Vice Chancellor, Royal Agricultural University) with a seat on GuildHE Council, and the CREST Director (Dr Andy Dixon, Head of Research, University of Chichester). One dedicated full-time CREST Network Coordinator and a part-time Project Officer centrally support the work of the Consortium. The CREST strategy for research development is prepared and discussed by the CREST Research Group, made up by the Heads of Research (or 'Research Leads') from each of the CREST member institutions, which meets five times annually and collaborates remotely on a variety of projects throughout the year. Research Leads take on the responsibility of disseminating information and involving PGRs, researchers and relevant support staff within their institution in the CREST researcher development programme.

Researcher development is fostered by CREST using a number of mechanisms. Each CREST member institution has in place their own researcher development programmes tailored to the specific needs of PGRs and research staff working in particular disciplines; CREST is meant to provide a sustainable

¹ See www.crest.ac.uk for additional information about the Consortium.

² See www.crest.ac.uk/en/members/index.cfm for a full list of current CREST members.

means of maximising institutional investments in researcher development, and to support the development of research clusters, researcher mobility and progression at all levels.³ Examples involving PGRs and research staff include:

- CREST development and training events focusing on generic research training and policy awareness, including: supervisor / supervisee training; research funding (national and European) and bid writing; REF and impact; research ethics and integrity (in line with the Concordat); and research dissemination and publication
- CREST annual interdisciplinary symposia: bring together PGRs and research staff, affording them an opportunity to refine research communication skills and to facilitate dialogues between researchers working in different disciplines (orientated towards 'Grand Challenges')
- Researcher Mobility Scheme: bursaries supporting travel and conference fees for researchers presenting at CREST member-hosted research conference and workshops and providing seed-funding for research events co-organised by CREST member PGRs and research staff
- Support and development of joint institutional events e.g. AHRC-funded 'Design as Human Interface' series and the Creative Challenge⁴
- Joint subscription to Vitae's RDF Planner: currently being customised for CREST in partnership with Vitae; this will be included in the CREST institutional subscription and integrated into future CREST researcher development plans from August 2013 with the aim of increasing awareness of and engagement with the Concordat supporting researcher development and research skills agendas
- Joint subscription to Epigeum's online skills training programme: this is integrated into devolved institutional researcher development programmes with an eye to the demands of disciplines and specialism, and informs CREST researcher development and training
- *Critical Commentary*: an interdisciplinary journal for peer-reviewed journal for all research students and PGRS

The Consortium also runs a Virtual Research Environment (VRE) supporting a shared website used to flag research training and development opportunities organised by CREST and member institutions, as well as those organised by Vitae and the various sector bodies. This has proved particularly useful for part-time PhD students pursuing degrees remotely. It also hosts a CREST Supervisor, Examiner and Collaborator Register (currently being redeveloped and expanded as part of an expanded CREST website), which allows research staff and particularly ECRs to log their research experiences and for institutions and colleagues to identify new partners, thereby enhancing the expertise of research staff and supporting cross-institutional and disciplinary collaboration.

³ Please note that the majority of CREST-led strategies and events are designed to be as inclusive to researchers at various stages in their careers, allowing PGRs to participate fully in institutional, disciplinary and collective research cultures and to learn from more established research staff and colleagues, and vice versa. Where possible as instructed by RCUK we have separated out specific strategies and initiatives, and / or indicated participation from PGRs and staff together.

⁴ www.creativechallenge.info/

What feedback, review or other input drives changes in the researcher development support and opportunities you offer?

CREST member institutions use and discuss the national surveys (in particular PRES) to benchmark activities, and discuss best-practice and how to further support researcher development on a regular basis within the Research Group. Individual expertise – with respect to researcher development in particular disciplines (e.g. AHSS with respect to research relying on digital means of collection and dissemination, and how this relates to discourses around research ethics and integrity, and for instance supporting practice-based PhD); Agri-sciences supporting work with national and international industry partners and private-sector funders) – is also organised on a one-to-one basis across institutions as required.

Feedback as to how to better facilitate inter and cross-disciplinary dialogues is also gathered annually *vis-à-vis* the CREST Symposia, and throughout the year at CREST events, which rely on surveys and one-to-one meetings and discussions with PGRs and research-active staff, sometimes undertaken *in situ* at CREST member institutions and / or collected through thematic discussions at CREST Research Group meetings, meaning that students and staff can feedback directly to Senior Research Managers.

In addition, the following specific projects have been initiated in order to benchmark support for PGRs

- Leadership Foundation part-time PhD student project: a quantitative and qualitative study run by researchers at the University of St Mark and St John (Plymouth) in partnership with CREST looking at how to support and engage part-time PGRs
- The Researcher Self-efficacy Survey: allows institutions to collect quantitative and qualitative information about how research informs teaching and teaching informs research, and to develop (in particular) responsive research staff development strategies and programmes
- CREST PGR Survey: collects data as well as qualitative contextual information about PGRS progression and employability

How does your research organisation determine the level of resources for researcher development?

CREST strategy and development activity is reviewed annually by GuildHE Executive and Council; the GuildHE Executive also determines the annual CREST budget, derived from Member subscriptions and supplemented by project funding. The CREST Research Group develops the CREST strategy and programme to support researcher development and training, which is also approved by GuildHE Executive continuously at meetings held throughout the year (six meetings per annum); the GuildHE Executive also determines the CREST subscription.⁵ The CREST Network Coordinator and GuildHE Finance Officer administer and monitor the annual budget, and help to determine how funds are subdivided and devolved (e.g. for dedicated staffing, IT / Web / VRE, joint subscriptions, research and collaborative projects, events and workshops, etc.). Competitive funds, like the Researcher

⁵ In May 2013 they approved a 20% increase to the CREST budget.

Mobility Scheme⁶, are administered by the CREST Research Group, which regularly reviews applications from and for various events at the CREST Research Group meetings. New strands and / or researcher development events suggested by PGRs and researchers are developed and approved by the CREST Research Group where it is felt that they are of benefit to the collective cohort and / or to research clusters.

What do see as the remaining or emerging challenges and opportunities?

CREST is evidence of member institutions' commitment to supporting researcher development in a manner that is both collaborative and financially sustainable. Research concentration remains an on-going challenge for all small and specialist institutions; however, CREST provides an infrastructure and a community committed to sustaining and increasing the diversity of quality training and development opportunities available to PGRs and research staff over the course of their careers⁷.

The CREST VRE also supports a shared Open Access repository showcasing research outputs, and drawing from national and international policy discussions and developments, the CREST Research Group have made providing dissemination of OA policy and best practice to PGRs and research staff a priority for 2013-14 and looking forward into the future. While CREST is broadly supportive of the Open Access agenda, working out the details of dissemination with respect to disciplines, supporting subject journals, tracking impacts to the international reputation of UK research, and finding ways to pay for Open Access given the high APCs charged by publishers remains a challenge. Additional challenges with the potential to influence researcher development within the CREST community in terms of the make-up of the research cohort include the impact of undergraduate fees on the next generation of (in particular) domestic PGRs and Home Office policies effecting international recruitment and researcher mobility.

Finally, challenges remain with respect to devising ways to support part-time postgraduates and researchers wishing to simultaneously pursue – or return to following PGR study – careers in industry with the potential to enhance discourses around research, innovation and knowledge exchange. The HEFCE funded GuildHE Innovation Project (running from Jun 2012 to November 2013) is also considering the potential for increased support for PGRs wishing to improve their entrepreneurial skills. The national and international impact and innovation agenda poses both a challenge and an opportunity for CREST member institutions, many with long-standing links to industry which can enhance institutional and collective CREST researcher development support strategies and programmes now and in the future.

⁶ www.crest.ac.uk/en/about/crest-researcher-mobility-scheme.cfm

⁷ The recent CREST+ bid to the AHRC's BGP2 programme outlines further plans for expansion (which are being developed independently of the success or failure of the bid) currently being integrated into CREST strategic plans over the next REF cycle and looking forward into the future as member institutions continue to expand their research cohorts and support programmes.

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