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Research Report

January 2009

Survey on the Impact of the Roberts' Fund at 1994 Group institutions

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**A summary of findings from a research project commissioned by
the 1994 Group's Research & Enterprise Policy Group**

Summary of Institutional 'Impact Points' identified in the 1994 Group Roberts' Survey (Neiland, Reddy & Winn 2008)¹

In the 1994 Group Institutions, Roberts' funding has.....

- increased financial resources available for skills training of all postgraduate research students and postdoctoral researchers
- promoted more effective resource management and planning
- improved coordination of training provision
- widened scope and extent of training programmes
- motivated engagement of researchers with skills development
- enhanced support for Supervisors and Principal Investigators
- assisted provision of Researchers' Induction
- improved personal development planning and record keeping practices
- encouraged researchers' feedback and representation
- facilitated better inter- and intra-university collaborations
- stimulated researcher-led innovations
- extended networking and mentoring within the research community
- raised awareness of and skills in knowledge transfer
- broadened employer engagement and researcher-specific careers' advice

¹ GRADskills & Research Policy Office, University of St Andrews,
<http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/rpo/>

1. Introduction

This report summarises a study carried out for the 1994 Group institutions¹ in summer 2008, examining the impact of the provision of Roberts' Funding on the skills training and career development opportunities for postgraduate research students and postdoctoral researchers. Overall, the study shows that, as a result of this funding, skills training and related support for early career researchers are now firmly embedded within institutions, and that the amount, range, and quality of training and other support has improved considerably. However, it is also clear that although institutions have invested a significant amount of their own resources to supplement Roberts' funding, they are nevertheless reliant on the continued provision of the ring-fenced Roberts' income so that they are able to build on many of the innovative forms of training and support that are currently at an early stage of development.

2. Brief history of Roberts' funding

Sir Gareth Roberts' highly influential review, *SET for Success*², was commissioned by the UK government as part of its strategy for improving the UK's productivity and innovative performance and was published in April 2002. The Review made a number of recommendations as to the type and range of financial, training and career support that should be provided within universities for early stage researchers (PhD Students and Postdoctoral Staff). The UK Government responded positively to the Roberts' Review and allocated almost £150 million in the 2002 Comprehensive Spending Review to the UK Research Councils (RCUK) to increase stipends and length of PhD programmes, create 1000 academic fellowships

¹ The 1994 Group brings together eighteen internationally renowned, research-intensive universities. Members of the 1994 Group are: University of Bath, Durham University, University of East Anglia, University of Essex, University of Exeter, Birkbeck University of London, Goldsmiths University of London, Royal Holloway University of London, Lancaster University, University of Leicester, Loughborough University, Queen Mary University of London, University of Reading, University of St Andrews, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of Surrey, University of Sussex and University of York.

² SET for Success, Final Report of Sir Gareth Roberts' Review, April 2002.
<http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/roberts>

positions, and deliver additional training for RCUK-funded researchers. It included approximately £20 million specifically allocated per year for "Career Development and Transferable Skills Training", a sum which has become known as "Roberts' Funding".

Roberts' funding has been distributed, as a 'ring-fenced' payment, to the UK universities by the Research Councils on an annual basis since 2004. The level of funding varies between institutions, depending on the number of Research Council-funded doctoral studentships and postdoctoral awards currently held. Roberts' money is intended to be used by universities to improve the provision of generic development opportunities for early career researchers. The goal is to enhance their personal, professional, and career management skills and thereby increase their overall employability in multiple sectors inside and outside of academia.

3. Purpose of study

In April 2008, the Research & Enterprise Policy Group of the 1994 Group commissioned a survey to ascertain the use and impact of Roberts' funding for Postgraduate research students' (PGRs) and Postdoctoral researchers' (Postdocs) skills development across the 1994 Group Institutions. The purpose of this study was to assess the impact of the Roberts' money within the 1994 Group Institutions and investigate how it is being used to enhance their delivery and provision in various areas affecting the support and development of early career researchers.

4. Methodology

The survey was undertaken by a research team at the University of St Andrews.³ A questionnaire on the use and impact of Roberts' funding was distributed to a representative of each 1994 Group university during the summer of 2008 with the invitation to provide additional information in the form of the annual Summary Report submitted to

³ Dr MRM Neiland, Dr MH Reddy & Mrs JE Winn, GRADskills & Research Policy Office, University of St Andrews

RCUK in 2007. Completed questionnaires were received from all 18 1994 Group institutions; and seven also provided their institution's Roberts' Summary Report.

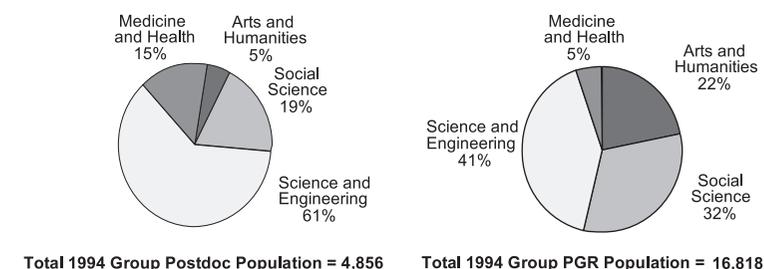
5. The early career researcher population within 1994 Group universities

The 18 universities of the 1994 Group have a combined research community of around 21,500 postgraduate research students and postdoctoral researchers. More than 75% are students (PGRs). A comparison with HESA data suggests that about 14% of all early stage researchers at UK HEIs are carrying out research as part of the 1994 Group.

PGRs and Postdocs are present at all 1994 Group institutions, frequently numbering more than 1000 researchers per university. Almost half are scientists & engineers and one third are social scientists, both of which are found in almost all 1994 Group institutions. Arts & Humanities and Medicine & Health researchers make up a smaller proportion of the research community (less than 20% in each case), and are more unevenly distributed.

As Figure 1 demonstrates, Science and Engineering dominate at the Postdoc level, accounting for over 60% of all research staff at the 1994 Group. Postdocs normally comprise 20-30% of an institution's research community.

Fig. 1: Comparison of the discipline composition of the Postdoctoral researcher (left) and PGR student (right) populations in the 1994 Group research community.



6. Amount of Roberts' funding received by 1994 Group members

The 1994 Group receives a total income of nearly £4 million annually from the Roberts' Fund. All seven UK Research Councils contribute substantial sums to the 1994 Group, but almost half comes from EPSRC. As each Research Council allocates £850 per student or postdoc they fund, the total Roberts' Fund being received by the 1994 Group is for almost 4,500 individual researchers, or around 20% of its early stage community. The remaining 80% of early career researchers receive no Roberts' funding from the UK Research Councils.

Although only a relatively small proportion of the 1994 Group's PGRs and postdocs are RCUK-funded, and therefore attract Roberts' allocations, this funding generates a substantial income stream which is normally used to support all members of the early stage research community irrespective of their funding source. This contributes to the richness of the overall research environment which, in turn, benefits the RCUK-funded researchers.

In order to fully support all PGRs and postdocs at their institutions, 1994 Group universities are required to leverage, sometimes considerable, financial resources from other streams of funding. Quality Related (QR) research funding, for example, is proving to be a vital avenue through which institutions can fully support the breadth of their early stage research communities. A number of universities attributed investment of their own resources in expansion of training provision, employment of new support staff, and development of Graduate Schools to the existence of Roberts' funding.

7. Management of Roberts' Funding and the engagement of Senior Managers

A centralised approach to the management of the Roberts' Fund is typical of most 1994 Group universities, especially for income relating to postdoctoral researchers. The majority of income is being spent on staff salaries, external trainers/consultants, course/event provision, and other related costs, with a small proportion being utilised for infrastructure enhancements.

Table 1: Numbers of Institutions holding and distributing Roberts' funding from 'centre' as opposed to 'devolved' distribution

| % Funds Centrally Held | PGRs | Post Docs |
|------------------------|------|-----------|
| 0 - 25% | 4 | 2 |
| 26% - 50% | 4 | 3 |
| 51% - 70% | 3 | 3 |
| 71% - 100% | 7 | 10 |
| Total No. Institutions | 18 | 18 |

All 1994 Group universities have devoted senior managerial staff time to the organisation and discussion of how best to utilise the Roberts' fund for maximum impact. New committees have been set up to plan and review internal strategies and practice. Overall leadership on the Roberts' agenda usually lies with the Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research, indicating that it is regarded as a significant means for enhancing and supporting the research community at 1994 Group universities.

8. How funding is spent – staff and training

8.1 Roberts' Staff

Roberts' funding has enabled the 1994 Group universities to create new posts, reassign existing staff and bring in external training expertise. The salaries of 79 university staff across the Group are now being paid for from the Roberts' Fund, including those of 59 new trainers, managers and administrators. External trainers contribute up to a third of the generic skills' provision at most 1994 Group universities.

Table 2: University staff employed with Roberts' funding across the 1994 Group*

| Category of staff | % of total Roberts' staff | Total Number | New Posts | PGR or Postdoc only focus | PGR and Postdoc focus |
|---|---------------------------|--------------|-----------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| Trainer | 38% | 30 | 22 | 9 | 21 |
| Manager/ Coordinator | 23% | 18 | 15 | 6 | 12 |
| Administrator | 22% | 17 | 12 | 0 | 17 |
| Careers Adviser | 13% | 10 | 6 | 4 | 6 |
| Entrepreneurship or Enterprise specialist | 2.5% | 2 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Other | 2.5% | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| TOTAL | 100% | 79 | 59 | 20 | 59 |

* At least 20 of all University staff employed with Roberts' funding are working "Full-time".

8.2 Roberts' training

Major new skills development programmes and coordinated training activities have been introduced at all 1994 Group institutions as a result of Roberts' funding. Most are organised centrally or via a coordinated centralised-devolved system, and cover all areas of the RCUK Joint Skills Statement, especially categories C-G.⁴ Typically they comprise a large number of new courses and development activities (50-200 annually) which are usually relatively short (2 hours - 2 days) and encompass both interactive, experiential workshops and seminars/information sessions on topics relevant to research and career skills. The largest proportion of Roberts' funded training targets PGRs.

⁴ The Joint Skills Statement sets out the skills that doctoral research students funded by the research councils would be expected to develop during their research training. The categories included are: (A) Research Skills and Techniques, (B) Research Environment, (C) Research Management, (D) Personal Effectiveness, (E) Communication Skills, (F) Networking and Teamworking, and (G) Career Management. For more information, see: <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/cmsweb/downloads/rcuk/researchcareers/jsstrainingrequirements.pdf>

Further innovations are rapidly expanding the scope and extent of skills training provision across the 1994 Group institutions to engage particular cohorts (e.g. postdoc, international, part-time or mature researchers) via different modes of training and development. In particular, postdoctoral provision appears to be developing in a distinctly different way at some universities compared to the skills training provided for PGR students. As well as typically including skills courses and workshops, it may also encompass i) career coaching and planning sessions, ii) mentoring by senior research and academic colleagues, and iii) participation in accredited professional development programmes.

9. Engagement by early career researchers

At least 9,000 early stage researchers in the 1994 Group have benefited from Roberts' training in the past year, representing 42% of the total research community. They include many international researchers and students/staff who are not funded by RCUK, but have chosen to participate in the Roberts' funded training and development opportunities now available to them at the 1994 Group Institutions.

Engagement levels are consistently higher for PGRs than for Postdocs, and for first year students than students in subsequent years. Intra-institutional variability in engagement is reported, perhaps partially attributed to different discipline/academic attitudes to generic skills, and variability in the scope of provision at different universities.

Participation in specific Roberts' activities remains optional at most 1994 universities which maintains flexibility in the development of personal development programmes for individual researchers. Uptake of training and development opportunities by all early stage researchers is promoted through various means as institutions try to ensure that they both fulfil their obligations to RCUK in relation to skills training and career development opportunities and encourage more of their researchers to benefit from the new training opportunities now available to them. Engagement levels with Roberts' funded activities are reported to be improving at most institutions on a yearly basis.

10. Support for Supervisors / Principal Investigators

Roberts' funding is being used to support Supervisors/Principal Investigators' (PIs') understanding of, and engagement with, the skills agenda in half of the 1994 Group institutions. New Roberts' initiatives targeting supervisors include update sessions, discussion groups, supervisory manuals, surveys and web resources, all aimed at equipping Supervisors/PIs to better support the skills development of their PGR students and Postdoctoral research staff.

11. Other enhancements as a result of Roberts' Funding

Ten additional enhancements to the quality of the support environment within which early stage researchers are working were identified (over and above training). These include improved intra-institutional collaborative working between academic and/or support departments, and increased induction and networking events, including interdisciplinary workshops and conferences. New systems for improving personal development planning, soliciting feedback from early career researchers, and for enhanced record keeping, mentoring and researcher representation were also reported. Finally support was being provided for inter-institutional collaborations in the delivery of generic skills training.

12. Effects on Knowledge Transfer

Importantly, Roberts' funding is being used to enhance skills development of researchers in different aspects of Knowledge Transfer (KT) at many of the 1994 Group institutions, with the focus of most activity to date being on commercialisation, entrepreneurship and business skills training (70% of institutions).

Facilitating knowledge of and skills in outreach and public policy engagement/development is a less common use of Roberts' funding so far, although some good examples exist within the Group. Engagement with different types of KT is beginning to be seen as a valuable means for researchers to develop skills and knowledge to enhance their future employability and enable their research to have an impact on Society.

13. Employers and career development

Opportunities for researchers to engage with external employers and access researcher-specific career advice and support have been greatly enhanced by the allocation of Roberts' funding at most 1994 Group universities. Anecdotal evidence suggests that researchers perceive that they are better equipped to move on in their career having undertaken Roberts' funded training. Objective data for this finding is beginning to be sought at a few 1994 Group institutions through the establishment of projects to track career pathways of former researchers.

14. Conclusions

The receipt of Roberts' funding has considerably increased the amount of financial resources available for skills training and development of PGR students and Postdoctoral researchers at the 1994 Group institutions. Such training and development opportunities are now firmly embedded within institutions' structures and practices. Clearly, there is good evidence from this survey that Roberts' funding is achieving what it set out to do. It is helping universities to improve the provision of generic development opportunities for early career researchers and to enhance their personal, professional, and career management skills. Allocation of Roberts' funding is also having wider beneficial effects by encouraging universities to develop innovative approaches, collaborations and projects to i) enhance the generic development of early career researchers, ii) improve their awareness of and skills in knowledge transfer, and iii) facilitate better employer engagement and researcher-specific careers' advice.

As a result of the provision of Roberts' funding, institutions have also invested, sometimes considerable amounts of, their own financial and other resources to support the skills training and development of their early career populations. Given the progress demonstrated in the 1994 Group institutions documented in this study, and also evident elsewhere in the sector, there is clearly a need for this funding to continue. This would enable the excellent innovations that are being put in place, many still at early or conceptual stages, to be fully developed and implemented for both the benefit of our early career researchers and of the wider UK research community.

Dianne Berry, Paul Marshall & Tom Norton, on behalf of the 1994 Group Research & Enterprise Policy Group

Our thanks go to Dr Ruth Neiland and the *University of St Andrews GRADskills & Research Policy Office* for undertaking this survey on behalf of the Group, and to the contributors from each of the 1994 Group universities who willingly provided data on the use and impact of their Roberts' funding for the wider benefit of the sector and its early stage researchers.

1994 group >

Telephone: +44 (0)20 7872 5598

Email: enquiry@1994group.co.uk

1994 Group

1 Northumberland Avenue

Trafalgar Square

London WC2N 5BW

Visit us online at www.1994group.co.uk