Discovering the professional identities of researcher developers: roles, responsibilities and representations

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Session overview

- Survey background

- Theoretical background

- Results:
  - Who is the typical researcher developer?
  - What do they do?
  - What do they want to do?

Survey: Background

- Vitae London Hub Steering Group

- PTES, PRES, CROS & PIRLS – but what about researcher developers?

- Decided to create survey specifically for researcher developers augmented with a selection of targeted interviews

- Survey would need to have more open-ended questions than usual to attempt to capture the variety of experiences (but not perfect!)

- Used some CROS questions to allow comparison

Survey: Relevant Theory

Whitchurch, C. (2008), Shifting Identities and Blurring Boundaries: the Emergence of *Third Space* Professionals in UK Higher Education. Higher Education Quarterly, 62: 377–396.

From the abstract:

This paper ... builds on a categorisation of professional staff identities as having *bounded, cross-boundary* and *unbounded* characteristics.

[I]t describes a further category of *blended professionals,* who have mixed backgrounds and portfolios, comprising elements of both professional and academic activity.

The paper goes on to introduce the concept of *third space* as an emergent territory between academic and professional domains, which is colonised primarily by less *bounded* forms of professional. ...

Finally, it is suggested that *third space* working may be indicative of future trends in professional identities, which may increasingly coalesce with those of academic colleagues who undertake project- and management-oriented roles, so that new forms of *third space* professional are likely to continue to emerge.

Survey: practical matters

- Used similar window to PTES/PRES/CROS/PIRLS
- Used BOS
- Total of 102 respondents from across the sector
- Twelve respondents explicitly thanked us for creating the survey
- *"Thanks for creating this survey. I look forward to finding out the results"*
- We focused on researcher developers based within institutions

Survey: Results – who is the typical RD?

Category	Typical	Data
Gender	**Woman**	77% female
Nationality	**British**	90% UK
Age	**30s**	53% 30s
Ethnicity	**White**	8% BAME
Qualification	**PhD**	68% have doctorate
Background	**Science background**	46% Science; 29% SocSci; 25% A&H

Survey: Results – who is the typical RD?

Category	Typical	Data
Salary	**Earn £40,000**	52% £35k-£45k
Contract	**Open-ended contract**	90%
Time in post	**5 years at current institution**	Average 4.7 years
RD Posts	**One institution as RD**	77%
How categorized	**Role categorized as "Professional services"**	58%
Line manager	**No formal line management responsibilities**	63%
Budget	**Budget responsibilities**	58%

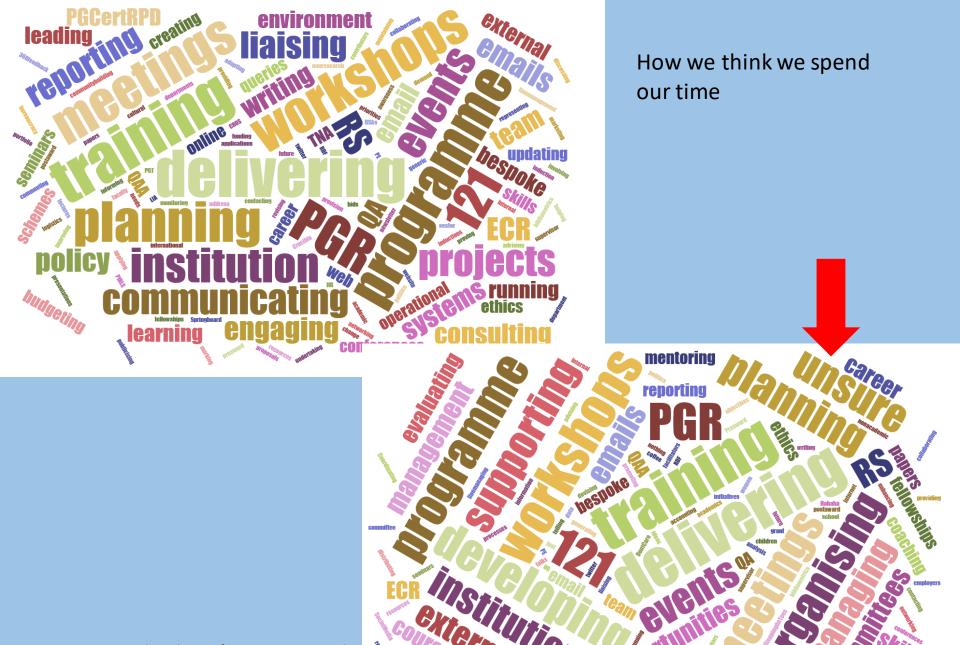# Please indicate the groups for which you are responsible (please select all that apply). N stated

Group	Primary	Also support
Postgraduate research students	**64**	**28**
Research staff	**67**	**22**
Postgraduate research supervisors	**29**	**49**
Academic staff with responsibility for research staff	**29**	**40**
Masters students	5	29
Undergraduate students	3	9
Other staff	12	33
Other students	0	10

How we think we spend our time

How we think we're perceived as spending our time

How we think we spend our time

How we think we're perceived as spending our time

Actual and perceived use of time

- Types of courses listed varied between actual and perceived (more basic for the 'perceived' responses)

- Frequently respondents listed more than three activities in actual, and fewer than three in perceived. Narrower range of activities

- The need to tell others in the institution was stressed for the 'perceived' responses

- Several derogatory comments from academics given under perceived – "peddling soft skills", "knitting yoghurt"

- Comments indicating underappreciation
  - Education level is higher than they believe is recognised
  - Time spent on admin activities

Compared to CROS & PIRLS
well-being

	ResDev	CROS	PIRLS
Satisfied with work-life balance	**74**	**69**	**46**
Institution promotes better health and well-being	78	51	
Institution committed to E&D	94	86	86
Opportunities to participate in decision-making processes (e.g. committees)?	83	46	
Opportunities for promotion and progression?	**32**	**34**	
Requests for flexible working?	78	67	
Terms and conditions of employment (excluding any fixed-term nature of contract)?	81	54	

Compared to CROS & PIRLS
training and development

	ResDev	CROS
Access to training and development opportunities?	90	83
Opportunities to attend conferences and external meetings?	94	77
Appraised in last two years	87	67
You are encouraged to engage in personal and career development?	90	75
You take ownership of your career development?	93	88
You have a clear career development plan?	**46**	**52**
You maintain a formal record of your continuing professional development activities?	70	56
You use the Vitae Careers Framework for Researcher Developers (CFReD) {CROS RDF} to support your continuing professional development activity?	15	10

Career aspirations

	Next step	Long term
Not sure	**16**	**17**
None/ no response	**6**	**20**
Increase seniority	27	19
Continue to develop	15	6
Freelance	5	10
Retire	7	4
Academic	3	8
Personal fulfilment	0	7
Sideways move	5	2
Leave HE	6	0
Study	3	0
Travel	2	0
Create new role	1	1

Qualifications

Highest level of education	
Undergraduate degree	7
Other PG degree	4
Masters degree	20
Doctoral degree	69
(Postdoc/academic	53)

Professional distinctions	Have	Working towards
Coaching	21	6
HEA/ PGCAP	20	9
Teaching/ education	16	4
CIPD	10	2
Psychometrics	5	0

Other professional distinctions:
HR qualifications, Chartered status, NLP practitioner, careers qualifications, communication qualifications, MBA, counseling qualifications, project management qualifications, FRSA, ARMA, languages

Challenges

- Waiting for jobs to be advertised/ opportunities to become available

- Scarcity of promotion opportunities

- Lack of clarity on career progression options and what is needed to pursue them

- Need to move between institutions to advance

- Wish to research/ publish

Good news! ☺

- Enthusiastic, emerging profession
- Keen to develop themselves and others
- Freedom within the role

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Not so good news! ☹

- Freedom within the role... ignored/misunderstood
- Unclear progression/promotion paths