

## RESEARCH CAREERS AND TRAINING ADVISORY GROUP (RCTAG)

### SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES IN 2014-15

The Research Careers and Training Advisory Group (RCTAG) and the wider consultative Research Careers and Training Network were established in 2012. During the academic year 2014-15, RCTAG met twice as a Group and held one joint meeting with the Network members. Membership of the Group is detailed in annex 1.

The Group and Network have provided a useful mechanism for the AHRC to understand and interrogate current developments in arts and humanities doctoral training and early research careers. Its activities in academic year 2014-15 have been centred around two key areas:

#### 1. Support for Early Career Researchers

In September 2014, the AHRC and the British Academy announced the results of a detailed survey into the experiences of arts and humanities early career researchers (ECRs) in the immediate post-PhD phase, published as the 'Oakleigh Report'. The Group and the Network provided input to a range of initiatives undertaken by the AHRC to address the issues raised by the report:

- The Group and Network considered the issues arising from the Oakleigh Report at the annual joint meeting in November 2014. Presentations were given by representatives of the Hortensii Project and History Lab Plus (supportive subject networks for ECRs), and break-out groups looked at the challenges for arts and humanities doctoral graduates pursuing academic careers.
- The Group discussed a proposal submitted to the Concordat Strategy Group in December 2014, to raise the possibility of revising the *Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers* to more explicitly extend its terms to cover ECRs pursuing research careers while undertaking short-term or hourly-paid teaching duties. There is ongoing discussion in this area. The Group also considered a proposal which was submitted to the Steering Group for CROS (Careers in Research Online Survey) to ask them to ensure that CROS was brought to the attention of ECRs who may not be in standard research-only posts. This was subsequently taken forward.
- With regard to those employed as postdoctoral researchers, the Group suggested that the AHRC could help by requiring project Principal Investigators (PIs) to give consideration to opportunities for the career development of their researchers (e.g. through exploring pathways to impact) when budgeting for their grant. It was felt that not all PIs were aware of the importance of the developmental dimensions of ECR posts, and that the AHRC should issue guidance on this. Following these discussions, the AHRC amended its guidance to applicants, asking them to detail the development provision they would make for any postdoctoral staff on proposed projects, as well as ensuring that Research Organisations (ROs) hosting ECR Leadership Fellows clearly outlined the support they would provide.

- The Group provided helpful feedback on the [ECR Research Training Framework](#), which sets out the AHRC's expectations of the provision to be made by ROs for ECR staff, as well as suggesting research and career development good practice for ECRs.
- Following discussions at the AHRC's Council, it was decided to launch a call to recruit ECR members for the AHRC's Peer Review College. This opportunity was open to all early career academic staff – including those employed in teaching-only positions – and it provided an excellent career development activity. RCTAG provided invaluable input into designing the call.
- The Group received presentations on equality and diversity issues from the Daphne Jackson Trust and the Equality Challenge Unit. Following this, members examined issues around networking and mentoring to provide support at the early career stage. There was a wider discussion of monitoring and the importance of identifying unmet needs.

## **2. Monitoring and Development of Studentship Schemes**

- The Group and Network received presentations from a DTP's Director and one of its non-academic partners on the value of placements and internships for PhD students, and discussed ways of embedding these activities most usefully into the doctoral experience.
- A draft of the [Doctoral Research Training Framework](#) – the student counterpart to the ECR document – was presented to the Group, who made suggestions which helped to refine and strengthen it.
- The Group also received the final report on the BGP 1 and BGP: CB studentship schemes, and noted that it provided reassurance that the grants were being managed appropriately, and that they were resulting in comprehensive training programmes, and well-designed and -supported doctoral research projects. However, concern was expressed at the lack of response from some ROs.
- The Group had provided a helpful steer on the content for the annual student survey. An analysis of the quantitative responses to the 2015 Doctoral Student Survey was subsequently presented to the Group. The main areas of concern were the continuing low numbers of students receiving formal assessment and review of their training and development needs, as well as supervisors not being engaged fully in their students' career development. In its discussions, the Group made suggestions as to how future surveys could capture the changing student research experience in coming years, as functions become increasingly shared across institutions within consortia.

The Group will continue to meet twice a year with an annual meeting with the Network. The AHRC also engages with members between meetings and will continue to do so.

## **Annex 1**

### **RCTAG Membership**

Chair: Professor Jennifer Richards (University of Newcastle)

Dr Amy Barnes (University of Leicester)  
Dr Kenneth Brophy (University of Glasgow)  
Dr Jerome de Groot (University of Manchester)  
Dr Kate Dorney (Victoria & Albert Museum)  
Professor Dee Heddon (AHRC Doctoral Programme Scotland DTP)  
Ms Carly Hegenbarth (University of Birmingham)  
Ms Alison Mitchell (Vitae)  
Professor Katie Normington (TECHNE DTP)  
Ms Caroline Starkey (University of Leeds)  
Dr Alison Wood (University of Cambridge)

AHRC staff:

Ms Laura Bones (Programme Coordinator)  
Dr Sue Carver (Head of Research Careers and Training, and Peer Review)  
Dr James Lees (Portfolio Manager, Research Careers and Training)  
Dr Ian Lyne (Associate Director of Programmes)