vitae

Researcher Development
Framework (RDF)

Overview

Vitae's sector-leading Researcher Development Framework (RDF) is a widely recognised and utilised approach to researcher development. The framework articulates the knowledge, skills, and behaviours of effective researchers, and is used for planning, promoting and supporting the personal, professional and career development of researchers.

The skills and competencies that researchers develop are critical for a dynamic workforce that drives societal, economic, and environmental benefits. The publication of the Vitae RDF 2025 sets out the values, knowledge, and behaviours, of today's researchers who can work across sectors and look to society's future needs.

Effective researchers are creative, innovative, flexible, and entrepreneurial. They recognise and value diverse contributions and approaches to research and can apply, translate and share research in a wide range of contexts. Vitae RDF 2025 recognises the critical importance of connections between the professional and career development of productive and motivated researchers and initiatives to further knowledge exchange, research integrity, open research, and research culture.

The framework is designed for:

- researchers to take control of their own professional and career development
- managers and supervisors of researchers in their role supporting the development of researchers
- researcher developers, human resources specialists and careers advisors in the planning and provision of support for researchers' development.

It will be of interest to employers to understand the portfolio of skills unique to researchers in 2025 and beyond, and their potential value as employees. It may also be of interest to individuals who support or enable research, such as technicians, to reflect upon their own professional development, or those that conduct or would like to conduct research as part of their role.

The RDF supports the UKRI Statement of Expectations for Doctoral Training[1] to ensure training and development is holistic and integral to the doctoral experience, and researchers are prepared to operate across interdisciplinary, collaborative, and challenge-led environments. The RDF also aids the implementation of the New Deal for Postgraduate Research;[2] Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers;[3] the UK Quality Code for Research Degrees (QAA)[4] and aligns with the European Charter for Researchers.[5] Vitae are actively working internationally with universities, research-performing organisations, funders, and sector bodies such as EURAXESS and UKCGE to support the roll out of the Vitae RDF 2025.

The framework articulates our collective responsibility as researchers, and colleagues who support researchers, to work towards a more inclusive, supportive, collaborative and open research culture.

Footnotes:

[1] ukri.org/publications/statement-of-expectations-for-doctoral-training/

[2] ukri.org/what-we-do/developing-people-and-skills/new-deal-for-postgraduate-research/

[3] researcherdevelopmentconcordat.ac.uk

[4] qaa.ac.uk/the-quality-code/2018/advice-and-guidance-18/research-degrees

[5] op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/d02f13fa-4bb8-4f33-90ee-fc20df447cfc/language-en

Structure

Steered by the RDF working group, the RDF has evolved from the 2010 framework into a new refreshed configuration that has been designed and led by researchers and practitioners. Co-developed with the sector through a series of workshops, focus groups and a survey, the revised version now reflects our shared current and future ambitions for the research environment.

The new structure has researchers and people at the heart, with the inner 'Researcher' domain as the new entry point to the framework. The outer circle of 'Research Communities' is encompassing of all domains, to recognise the nature of research as a shared endeavour.

The values, skills and behaviours of effective researchers are expressed in the RDF as 'descriptors'. The descriptors are now structured into three domains shown on the following page. Each of the descriptors contains up to four phases, representing distinct stages of development or levels of progression within that descriptor.

Researcher Development Framework (RDF)
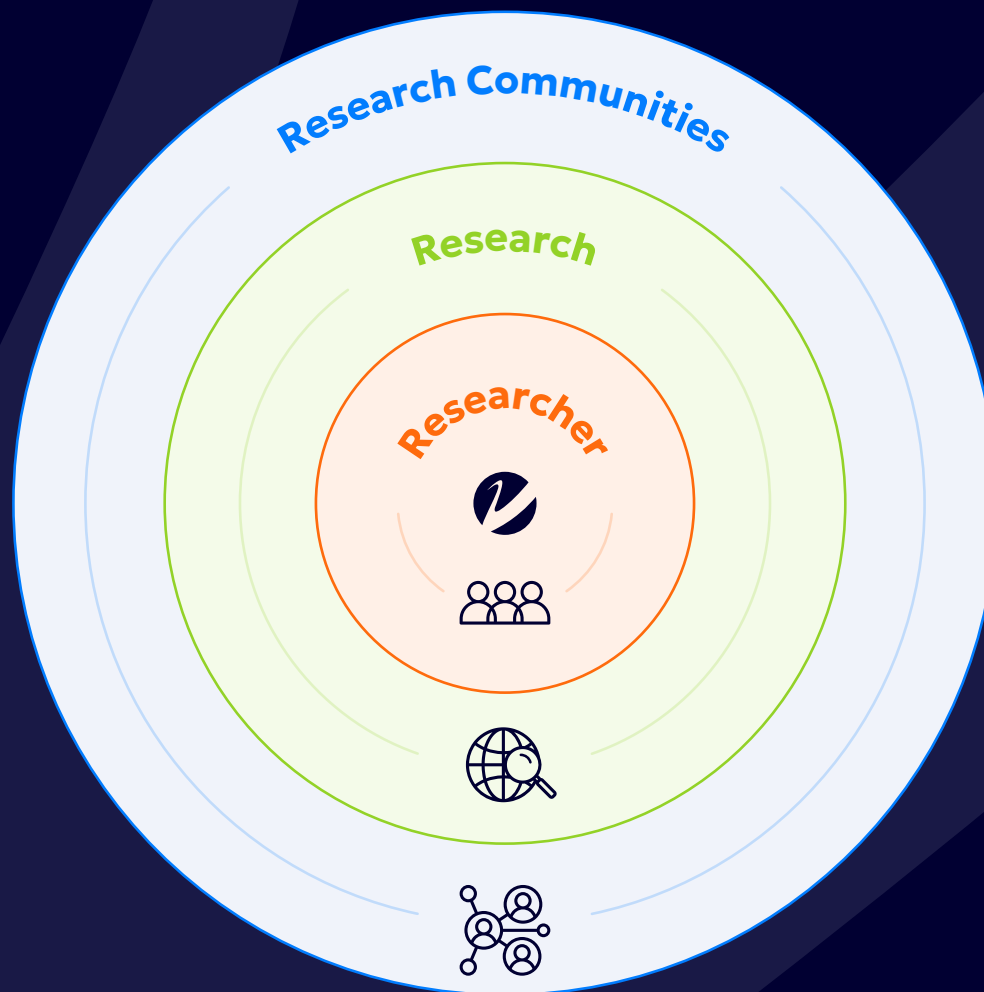
Researcher 👥

Personal and professional values and behaviours:

Development-focused • Strategic • Organised • Curious Collaborative • Adaptable • Reflexive • Motivated • Responsible

Research 🌐

Knowledge and skills to undertake research and deliver outcomes:
Knowledge and practice

Subject knowledge • Research methods • Information and data literacy • Digital and technological capabilities • Critical thinking and analysis • Creativity and innovation

Research management

Funding and finance • Project management • Risk management Open research • Research integrity and ethics

Engagement and impact

Communication • Research outputs • Knowledge exchange and public engagement • Research translation and commercialisation • Teaching and learning

Research Communities

Knowledge and skills to engage and work with others:

Research culture • Teamworking • Leadership • Supervision and people management • Coaching and mentoring • Networking

Descriptors

The framework, its descriptors and phases empower researchers to take ownership of their professional and career development, enabling them to explore, shape and pursue the developmental opportunities that will drive meaningful progress towards their individual career aspirations.

Descriptor	Summary
Researcher: personal and professional values and behaviours	
1.1 Development-focused	Takes ownership of ongoing professional development, building skills, capabilities, and experiences to support career growth, adaptability, and mobility.
1.2 Strategic	Considers the contexts and landscapes in which research operates, developing strategic direction accordingly.
1.3 Organised	Sets clear goals and objectives, plans and prioritises, conducts activities proactively and to time.
1.4 Curious	Takes an inquiring, open, and questioning approach, seeking insight, exploring new ideas, and engaging across boundaries.
1.5 Collaborative	Actively engages with others to design, create and advance research and/or outcomes that can address complex issues and maximise impact.
1.6 Adaptable	Is open, agile, and responsive to new ideas, ways of working, opportunities and solutions.
1.7 Reflexive	Continuously examines own position, assumptions, motives and biases and how these influence approach.
1.8 Motivated	Is a motivated, independent thinker, who is determined and committed to research.
1.9 Responsible	Demonstrates personal and professional responsibility, considering the potential effects of work on participants, beneficiaries, society, and the environment.

Descriptors

Research: knowledge and skills to undertake research and deliver outcomes	
Knowledge and Practice	
2.1 Subject knowledge	Develops knowledge of and contributes to research area and/or practice, the advances within it, and its relationship with other research areas and/or practice.
2.2 Research methods	Develops knowledge of and is able to integrate suitable research methods, techniques and approaches, including interdisciplinary approaches where appropriate. Is able to explain and justify the chosen design and/or approach.
2.3 Information and data literacy	Designs and implements techniques and systems to appropriately source, organise, synthesise, evaluate and manage information and data.
2.4 Digital and technological capabilities	Uses existing and emerging technologies and tools as required for research, scholarly activity, dissemination and innovation.
2.5 Critical thinking and analysis	Exhibits original, independent and critical thinking; analyses and evaluates information, research progress, data and findings.
2.6 Creativity and innovation	Identifies new trends and creates opportunities to improve ideas, build knowledge and enhance outcomes.
Research management	
3.1 Funding and finance	Identifies funding mechanisms and income-generating opportunities, understands application processes, and adheres to funding agreements.
3.2 Project management	Applies project management techniques to deliver research on time, within budget, and to agreed outcomes.
3.3 Risk management	Effectively assesses and manages all risks related to a research project or activity.
3.4 Open research	Makes research processes, results and outputs transparent and as freely accessible as possible, aiming to make research widely available and usable.
3.5 Research integrity and ethics	Upholds integrity in research by applying ethical, legal, and professional standards; addresses challenges transparently and responsibly, supporting good governance throughout the research process.

Descriptors

Engagement and impact	
4.1 Communication	Uses suitable platforms, methods, and media to communicate research, ensuring language and approaches are tailored to target audiences.
4.2 Research outputs	Develops and shares diverse outputs, practices, and activities to maximise the quality and impact of research.
4.3 Knowledge exchange and public engagement	Shares knowledge to benefit policy, society, the environment and the economy through public engagement and other activities, ensuring mutual benefit through interaction and listening.
4.4 Research translation and commercialisation	Identifies mechanisms and opportunities to transform ideas and outcomes into products, processes and services.
4.5 Teaching and learning	Engages with and shares research through teaching, training, and learning activities to develop others and enhance knowledge, capacity, and practice.
Research Communities: knowledge and skills to engage and work with others	
5.1 Research culture	Fosters inclusive, equitable, open, responsible and supportive research cultures, ensuring all contributions are valued and research excellence is enabled.
5.2 Teamworking	Leverages perspectives and skills of others, promotes shared ownership of research outcomes, fosters mutual respect and open communication.
5.3 Leadership	Leads, motivates and influences where appropriate; sets expectations, delegates responsibilities, holds self and others accountable.
5.4 Supervision and people management	Builds relationships and works with supervisees and/or line reports, interacting constructively and empathically to guide, support and empower.
5.5 Coaching and mentoring	Supports others through sharing experiences and knowledge for their benefit. Uses coaching techniques to support others to develop specific skills or reach goals.
5.6 Networking	Proactively builds and sustains networks to support professional and career development, fosters inclusive research communities and mutually beneficial connections.

The phase stage will differ for everyone, depending on current areas of focus and career goals.

Researcher

Personal and professional values and behaviours

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
1.1 Development-focused	1. Reflects on personal strengths, skills, and development needs; begins setting clear professional development goals. 2. Engages in relevant activities (e.g. training, placements, conferences) to build knowledge and experience. 3. Develops awareness of how skills and experiences may transfer across roles, sectors, or contexts. 4. Articulates personal strengths effectively through CVs, applications, or profiles. 5. Begins to build networks that support learning, career development, and opportunity awareness.	1. Critically reflects on progress, adjusting career goals and updating development plans as needed. 2. Actively seeks diverse development opportunities, including those beyond own sector. 3. Seeks coaching or mentoring to deepen skills and broaden career perspectives. 4. Offers informal support and encouragement to peers or less experienced colleagues. 5. Strengthens cross-sector networks to explore and pursue new opportunities.	1. Applies a strategic, evidence-based approach to professional development, adapting to evolving needs. 2. Demonstrates transferable skills confidently across diverse roles, settings, or sectors. 3. Builds and leverages networks and coaching relationships to support own and others' career progression. 4. Guides others in career planning, including preparing colleagues for leadership or specialised roles. 5. Contributes to shaping career pathways and development opportunities within a team, organisation, or community.	1. Maintains a visible, sustained commitment to continuous professional development, setting a standard for others. 2. Creates and enables career development opportunities across sectors, nurturing inclusive and varied career paths. 3. Acts as a recognised role model, advocating for diverse, flexible, and non-linear career pathways. 4. Leads and extends networks to amplify advancement and mobility for others. 5. Helps shape sector-wide policies, frameworks, or standards that support inclusive professional growth.
1.2 Strategic	1. Explores how own research or work aligns with organisational, sector, or societal priorities. 2. Builds awareness of broader political, economic, environmental, or cultural developments influencing research and innovation directions. 3. Develops foundational understanding of systems shaping the field or context.	1. Aligns activities intentionally with organisational or sector goals to enhance relevance and coherence. 2. Engages research participants, beneficiaries, funders, or partners to keep activities contextually informed and responsive. 3. Begins exploring cross-sector connections to broaden perspective and identify shared challenges or opportunities.	1. Applies deep understanding of strategic context, drawing on cross-sectoral, interdisciplinary, or international insights to address complex challenges. 2. Contributes to shaping organisational or programmatic priorities aligned with sector or policy trends. 3. Influences strategic direction at regional, national, or sectoral levels through engagement with key agendas, partnerships, or frameworks.	1. Leads or significantly influences strategic direction and decision-making across organisational, national, or international contexts, anticipating developments and driving effective responses. 2. Builds strategic capacity in others by fostering long-term thinking, collaborative planning, and cross-sector alignment. 3. Drives transformational change by rethinking systems, partnerships, and practices to advance inclusivity, collaboration, and innovation.

The phase stage will differ for everyone, depending on current areas of focus and career goals.

Researcher

Personal and professional values and behaviours

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
1.3 Organised	1. Prepares and plans projects to meet objectives, adjusting where needed to stay on track. 2. Develops personal systems for effective time management, following clear plans. 3. Seeks advice or guidance to strengthen organisational, time, and project management skills.	1. Prioritises tasks strategically, planning and managing expected and unexpected challenges. 2. Establishes robust, reliable systems to deliver work on time and to standard. 3. Provides practical guidance and support to less experienced colleagues on staying organised and managing workloads.	1. Responds effectively to unforeseen changes, balancing multiple priorities and constraints with confidence. 2. Identifies gaps or risks and advises on project adjustments. 3. Supports and mentors others in building strong organisational capability and resilience.	1. Influences organisational or team practices, shaping and improving planning, prioritisation, and delivery processes. 2. Acts as a role model, inspiring and motivating others to develop disciplined, effective organisational habits.
1.4 Curious	1. Demonstrates an open and questioning mindset, exploring new ideas and constructively challenging assumptions within own area. 2. Begins framing purposeful questions to deepen investigation and understanding. 3. Looks beyond immediate context for concepts or approaches that enrich thinking.	1. Identifies and asks challenging questions, maintaining curiosity and inquiry. 2. Connects ideas and perspectives from different areas, disciplines, or sectors to open new questions or deepen exploration. 3. Embraces feedback and learning, including learning from failure, to evolve research ideas and approaches.	1. Sees beyond immediate questions to identify underexplored or novel areas of inquiry; thoughtfully and confidently challenges and questions established perspectives. 2. Mentors or guides others in developing questioning, open approaches that promote fresh thinking and cross-boundary innovation.	1. Leads or significantly shapes initiatives that embed curiosity, openness, and inquiry across teams, organisations, or sectors. 2. Advocates for environments that value questioning, intellectual exploration, and thoughtful challenge to assumptions.

The phase stage will differ for everyone, depending on current areas of focus and career goals.

Researcher
Personal and professional values and behaviours

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
1.5 Collaborative	1. Understands the value of collaboration, fostering open communication, mutual respect, and shared research goals. 2. Recognises and respects the contributions of colleagues, research participants, beneficiaries, funders, or partners.	1. Builds equitable collaborations with clear roles, responsibilities, and shared outputs, engaging a wide range of contributors. 2. Co-creates questions, designs, or outputs with stakeholders to ensure shared ownership and mutual benefit. 3. Actively draws on the strengths, perspectives, and resources of all involved.	1. Sustains effective, high-functioning collaborations across disciplinary, organisational, or sectoral boundaries. 2. Fosters trust and open communication, applying conflict resolution or problem-solving when needed. 3. Builds collaborative capacity by supporting others in planning, strategy, and communication, and reflects on outcomes to improve practice.	1. Leads or drives impactful collaborations across local, national, or international contexts, enhancing disciplinary, organisational, or sectoral influence. 2. Shapes practices and frameworks that sustain equitable, long-term collaboration, reinforcing the value of collective contributions in tackling complex challenges.
1.6 Adaptable	1. Shows willingness to explore new ways of working; adjusts plans and approaches when needed. 2. Stays informed about developments in the field or context and integrates new knowledge into practice. 3. With guidance, identifies opportunities and risks linked to research directions. 4. With support, navigates unforeseen challenges and obstacles.	1. Recognises when to adapt to shifting priorities and circumstances, balancing risk and opportunity. 2. Knows when to seek advice and collaborates with others to incorporate diverse perspectives in addressing problems. 3. Encourages and supports less experienced colleagues in exploring alternative approaches, opportunities, and solutions.	1. Identifies emerging trends and opportunities in the field or sector. 2. Adapts or reshapes approaches to overcome challenges, explore new directions, or respond to evolving contexts. 3. Advises colleagues on adaptability, opportunity assessment, and risk management. 4. Influences adaptive thinking in organisational or disciplinary approaches.	1. Creates environments that promote agility and responsiveness at organisational or sectoral levels. 2. Drives adaptive improvements in delivery, practice, or innovation. 3. Anticipates and responds to shifts in the research, innovation, or societal landscape, including cross-sectoral challenges and emerging opportunities.

The phase stage will differ for everyone, depending on current areas of focus and career goals.

Researcher

Personal and professional values and behaviours

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
1.7 Reflexive	1. Recognises the value of self-reflection to understand how positionality, assumptions, and biases shape work. 2. Actively examines own influence on participants, teams, or organisational culture. 3. Begins integrating reflexive practices into project design, methods, or analysis.	1. Adapts approaches based on ongoing reflection and awareness of biases or assumptions. 2. Promotes reflexivity within teams, encouraging alternative perspectives and uncovering hidden biases. 3. Demonstrates awareness of how personal, cultural, and social contexts influence interpretation and outcomes.	1. Mentors others in applying reflexive practice to strengthen their approaches. 2. Embeds reflexivity in team or group practices through structured feedback, critical discussion, or methodological transparency. 3. Supports the development of reflexive habits within disciplinary, interdisciplinary, or cross-sector settings.	1. Models effective, discipline-informed reflexivity across all aspects of work. 2. Shapes organisational or sectoral policies and frameworks that embed and sustain reflexive practice in professional culture.
1.8 Motivated	1. With appropriate support, maintains focus and determination to achieve personal or project goals. 2. Develops strategies to stay motivated and manage routine or repetitive aspects of work. 3. Builds confidence and ability to work increasingly independently.	1. Demonstrates self-motivation, navigating distractions and difficulties while drawing on support when needed. 2. Defines and pursues a clear agenda, planning next steps with sustained commitment. 3. Encourages enthusiasm and commitment in peers or collaborators through example.	1. Leads by example, showing sustained effort and perseverance to achieve long-term goals. 2. Aligns personal ambitions with broader collaborative, organisational, or societal aims. 3. Fosters motivation and commitment within teams or groups, maintaining energy and focus over time.	1. Gains national or international recognition for sustained commitment and drive in advancing specific research areas. 2. Draws energy from challenges and is motivated by the ambition to deliver lasting value and impact.
1.9 Responsible	1. Understands how to design and conduct research responsibly, in line with good practice and ethical standards. 2. With support, ensures research activities are subject to appropriate review and oversight. 3. Considers risks and benefits at all stages, ensuring rights and dignity of all involved are respected. 4. Seeks advice and guidance where needed.	1. Critically reflects on the wider impact of decisions and actions, including social, environmental, and human implications. 2. Anticipates potential consequences of decisions and actions to minimise risk and maximise benefit. 3. Promotes ethical awareness and shared responsibility among peers and less experienced colleagues.	1. Models high standards of personal and professional responsibility in research practice. 2. Contributes to organisational or community values by supporting others to act responsibly and reflect critically. 3. Facilitates open dialogue to build a culture of ethical reflection, accountability, and mutual learning.	1. Leads or significantly shapes organisational or sector-wide initiatives that embed responsibility, partnering with affected communities, stakeholders, or groups. 2. Fosters collective reflection, learning, and coordinated action to promote positive outcomes and reduce potential harms.

The phase stage will differ for everyone, depending on current areas of focus and career goals.

Research

Knowledge and skills to undertake research and deliver outcomes

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
Knowledge and Practice				
2.1 Subject knowledge	1. Demonstrates foundational understanding of key concepts, historical development, and emerging trends in their area. 2. Begins to shape ideas that may lead to original contributions to knowledge or practice. 3. Explores theoretical and conceptual frameworks to deepen subject understanding.	1. Builds detailed, critical understanding of their subject and how it connects to related fields, sectors, or disciplines. 2. Articulates how knowledge is influenced by, and contributes to, broader societal, political, economic, or cultural contexts.	1. Integrates advanced knowledge across disciplines or domains to address complex research questions or challenges. 2. Contributes to collaborative or international efforts that extend and deepen subject understanding. 3. Encourages reflection on established knowledge, sharing insight into the evolution of the field or practice over time.	1. Makes original and influential contributions that redefine thinking or practice within the area. 2. Demonstrates deep, integrative understanding across topics or sectors. 3. Shapes international knowledge development through sustained leadership, scholarship, or innovation. 4. Fosters a reflective culture that questions assumptions and reconsiders established approaches.
2.2 Research methods	1. Understands relevant research methodologies, techniques, and their appropriate application in own research area. 2. Justifies chosen principles and methods; documents and evaluates both own and others' research processes. 3. Recognises the value of diverse methods and approaches, including interdisciplinary or practice-based ones.	1. Applies a range of appropriate research methods and techniques with increasing confidence. 2. Critically evaluates the relevance, validity, and reliability of chosen methods. 3. Develops working knowledge of interdisciplinary or cross-sector design frameworks and when they can enhance research.	1. Designs methodologically rigorous studies, combining and justifying multiple methods with clarity. 2. Integrates interdisciplinary or cross-sector approaches with critical awareness of their strengths and limitations. 3. Supports others in selecting and applying suitable research methods or techniques. 4. Contributes to developing or refining methods within own discipline or area.	1. Leads or drives the development and innovation of research methods across disciplines, sectors, or organisations. 2. Sets expectations for high-quality, adaptive research design at organisational, national, or international levels. 3. Contributes to scholarly standards, policy, or debate on advancing research methodologies.

The phase stage will differ for everyone, depending on current areas of focus and career goals.

Research

Knowledge and skills to undertake research and deliver outcomes

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
2.3 Information and data literacy	1. Develops foundational search and discovery skills using appropriate bibliographic, archival, or digital sources. 2. Assesses the reliability, relevance, and authority of information. 3. Begins engaging with data security, citation integrity, and metadata practices. 4. Seeks expert advice (e.g. from librarians, data stewards) to strengthen information handling.	1. Conducts advanced searches using a range of software, tools, or specialist resources, understanding their advantages and limitations. 2. Organises, validates, stores, and shares data or information responsibly, attending to quality, usability, and risk. 3. Applies legal, ethical, and security standards in data and information management.	1. Demonstrates expert awareness of specialist sources, tools, and repositories for research. 2. Advises and supports others in search strategies, evaluation techniques, and robust data/information practices. 3. Contributes actively to shaping good practices in data documentation, archiving, and management.	1. Develops or refines advanced techniques for data and information literacy, management, and access. 2. Anticipates and helps shape future trends in data curation, archiving, and preservation. 3. Leads or significantly shapes organisational strategies and contributes expert insights to national or international debates on data management.
2.4 Digital and technological capabilities	1. Uses available technologies responsibly to conduct research, exploring emerging tools where appropriate. 2. Develops digital and IT capabilities relevant to their work. 3. Seeks expert advice, inside or outside the organisation, to inform technological choices.	1. Identifies and integrates new technologies to improve research efficiency, collaboration, impact, or engagement. 2. Applies technological solutions responsibly and effectively to advance work. 3. Shares knowledge to help others strengthen digital confidence and capability. 4. Where appropriate, contributes to or develops new tools, platforms, or processes.	1. Provides tailored advice and strategic guidance on selecting and applying technologies for research and innovation. 2. Maintains strong, evolving knowledge of tools and approaches to support adaptation and creativity. 3. Stays current with digital trends, techniques, and systems relevant to the field or sector.	1. Shapes organisational policies and strategies for technology use and digital skills development. 2. Contributes to national or sector-wide debates on the role, opportunities, and challenges of emerging technologies. 3. Leads by example in maintaining cutting-edge expertise and anticipating future technological applications.

The phase stage will differ for everyone, depending on current areas of focus and career goals.

Research

Knowledge and skills to undertake research and deliver outcomes

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
2.5 Critical thinking and analysis	1. Understands arguments and begins to articulate own assumptions. 2. Develops independent and critical thinking, recognising and validating research problems. 3. Connects own research to prior work or experiences and identifies multiple perspectives. 4. Critically analyses and evaluates own findings and those of others.	1. Evaluates key arguments and assumptions in others' work. 2. Demonstrates original, independent thinking in developing concepts or frameworks. 3. Analyses diverse sources of information, identifies patterns and connections beyond own research, and makes sound, evidence-based judgments. 4. Supports less experienced colleagues in strengthening analytical and critical approaches.	1. Applies advanced critical thinking confidently, making evidence-based judgements across complex research questions or challenges. 2. Demonstrates strong critical analysis and problem-solving across projects, integrating diverse perspectives. 3. Leads by example, fostering an environment where rigorous analysis and constructive challenge are actively supported. 4. Helps others refine analytical and evaluative skills, strengthening the rigour of shared work.	1. Gains international or cross-sector recognition for exceptional critical thinking, shaping understanding across fields or practices. 2. Makes conceptual leaps, connecting ideas and insights across boundaries to open new research directions. 3. Champions analytical excellence, influencing agendas and strengthening critical thinking capacity system-wide.
2.6 Creativity and innovation	1. Explores information and trends to generate early-stage ideas. 2. Recognises where creativity or innovation can add value. 3. Shares emerging ideas, welcomes critique, and engages with others' creative contributions.	1. Identifies new trends and opportunities, applying creative thinking to open new research or innovation directions. 2. Proposes and develops innovative approaches, assessing potential impact. 3. Actively collaborates to generate ideas and apply creative solutions to research challenges.	1. Applies confident, lateral thinking to challenge established approaches and generate novel solutions. 2. Translates creative ideas into innovative research, applications, or outcomes. 3. Inspires and works across disciplines, sectors, or organisations to drive new initiatives or innovations.	1. Delivers breakthrough ideas, methods, or applications that advance the field and shape national or international practice. 2. Acts as a visionary, challenging norms and taking intellectual risks to drive progress. 3. Helps shape sector-wide practices that foster creativity, experimentation, and innovation.

The phase stage will differ for everyone, depending on current areas of focus and career goals.

Research

Knowledge and skills to undertake research and deliver outcomes

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
Research management				
3.1 Funding and finance	1. Works with peers or colleagues to understand organisational and funder processes for securing and managing awards, contracts, or other research funding. 2. Gains early experience in contributing to funding or income-generation applications. 3. Understands basic financial management principles relevant to research activities. 4. Builds awareness of potential income sources, including grants, fellowships, contracts, commissions, tenders, commercial partnerships, or philanthropic opportunities.	1. Recognises the importance of income generation for own research and organisational context. 2. Has broad knowledge of key funding and income sources and successfully applies for or manages small-scale opportunities. 3. Uses financial systems to track, reconcile, and manage research budgets in line with requirements. 4. Begins engaging in income-generating activities such as partnerships or consultancy. 5. Builds initial connections with funders, sponsors, or innovation partners to enable future opportunities.	1. Works with colleagues, partners, or funders to co-develop competitive collaborative funding bids. 2. Supports others in developing and refining funding applications. 3. Navigates complex funding landscapes, including large-scale or multi-partner opportunities, when appropriate. 4. Contributes to the financial sustainability of projects, teams, or programmes. 5. Provides expertise in budget management, audit, and planning; advises others on good practice. 6. Understands organisational and external financial systems that underpin research sustainability.	1. Uses leadership influence to shape funding priorities or policies within organisations or sectors. 2. Strengthens organisational funding sustainability by shaping financial management processes and building commercial awareness. 3. Establishes partnerships or networks that generate sustained income streams, supporting long-term research or innovation initiatives.

The phase stage will differ for everyone, depending on current areas of focus and career goals.

Research

Knowledge and skills to undertake research and deliver outcomes

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
3.2 Project management	1. With guidance, sets and prioritises project goals, milestones, and tasks. 2. Follows agreed decisions and plans to meet deadlines and deliver expected outcomes. 3. Develops awareness of available facilities and resources; negotiates access as appropriate. 4. Begins monitoring and evaluating project progress and outcomes.	1. Applies a range of project management tools to manage resources, team contributions, and partnerships, keeping projects on track. 2. Understands reporting, compliance, and procurement requirements from funders or organisations. 3. Evaluates progress, outcomes, and impacts, supporting less experienced colleagues to do the same.	1. Defines and manages substantial projects, applying long-term planning and diverse management strategies. 2. Oversees resource management for teams or groups, ensuring coordinated and timely delivery. 3. Procures and maintains required resources across multiple projects. 4. Monitors and evaluates progress, outcomes, and impact across a portfolio of projects.	1. Manages complex research or innovation programmes, balancing multiple projects, teams, or streams of activity. 2. Makes evidence-based decisions to keep programmes aligned with strategic goals. 3. Contributes to organisational or sector governance, influencing resource allocation and infrastructure planning. 4. Leads large-scale, multi-team initiatives, ensuring robust monitoring, evaluation, and reporting at national or international levels.
3.3 Risk management	1. Identifies risks in own research (e.g. ethical, data, funding, compliance, environmental, reputational). 2. Develops basic mitigation strategies with guidance and within institutional or sector frameworks.	1. Assesses and monitors risks across own work environment and begins supporting others in doing the same. 2. Develops and maintains risk registers or tracking tools for projects. 3. Takes responsibility for identifying, addressing, and reporting risks as they arise.	1. Leads proactive risk management for self, team, collaborators, or partners. 2. Uses structured tools and approaches to assess likelihood, impact, and mitigation strategies across projects or programmes. 3. Oversees team risk registers and provides advice to manage risks effectively and proportionately.	1. Leads or significantly shapes strategy development and implementation for research or innovation risk management at organisational or sector level. 2. Advises others and builds institutional capability in research risk management. 3. Contributes to shaping policies or cultures that embed effective, proportionate risk management in research systems.

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Research

Knowledge and skills to undertake research and deliver outcomes

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
3.4 Open research	1. Understands the basic principles and benefits of open research, including its role in enhancing collaboration, reproducibility, integrity, and innovation. 2. Applies open research practices (e.g. open access to methods, data, and outputs) where appropriate, following organisational or sector guidance. 3. Seeks guidance and support to improve research accessibility and openness.	1. Implements open research practices consistently, using appropriate platforms, repositories, and collaborative tools. 2. Develops awareness of common barriers to openness (such as data privacy, security, intellectual property, technical or cultural challenges) and learns how to navigate them. 3. Encourages peers and less experienced colleagues to adopt open research approaches. 4. Participates in open peer review or similar processes, contributing to transparency, accountability, and shared learning.	1. Advises others on embedding open research practices across project lifecycles, sharing strategies to strengthen adoption and overcome challenges. 2. Raises organisational or community awareness of open research and anticipates implications for external partners, stakeholders, or beneficiaries.	1. Leads or significantly shapes organisational policies, processes, or infrastructures that embed open research practices. 2. Demonstrates international leadership by contributing to major open research initiatives or collaborations. 3. Influences national or global systems that enable, reward, and advance openness in research.
3.5 Research integrity and ethics	1. Understands and applies relevant codes of conduct, ethical guidelines, and regulatory requirements for safe and responsible research; seeks advice where needed. 2. Demonstrates awareness of ethical responsibilities to researchers, participants, users, and others affected by the work. 3. Upholds principles of confidentiality, anonymity, and informed consent. 4. Develops understanding of safe, ethical working practices in line with protocols or standards.	1. Applies ethical, legal, and professional standards to inform research decisions and address challenges responsibly. 2. Supports less experienced colleagues in maintaining good research conduct, health and safety, and ethical practice. 3. Helps sustain a safe, ethical, and compliant environment. 4. Develops awareness of emerging issues or risks that influence research integrity.	1. Sets and upholds expectations for ethical, legal, and professional standards across projects or teams. 2. Fosters an environment where ethical conduct, regulatory compliance, and good governance are actively maintained and supported. 3. Advises on institutional or sectoral policies, helping address complex or evolving challenges in responsible.	1. Defines and promotes ethical and professional standards in complex, sensitive, or high-stakes research. 2. Leads or significantly shapes organisational or sector-wide policies and governance on integrity and ethics. 3. Acts as a recognised role model, anticipating systemic challenges to integrity and advancing legal, ethical, and professional norms.

The phase stage will differ for everyone, depending on current areas of focus and career goals.

Research

Knowledge and skills to undertake research and deliver outcomes

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
Engagement and impact				
4.1 Communication	1. Constructs clear, coherent arguments and explains ideas using inclusive language for varied audiences. 2. Actively participates in research-related discussions and debates, including across disciplines or sectors. 3. Builds initial proficiency in communication methods, including face-to-face, digital, visual, or interactive approaches. 4. Beginning to establish a professional online presence.	1. Presents work confidently, making complex research concepts accessible to diverse audiences using suitable media. 2. Communicates research vision across contexts, adapting style and content for colleagues, research participants, beneficiaries, funders, or partners. 3. Expands communication and media skills to strengthen clarity, reach, and relevance. 4. Builds a growing professional online presence and begins evidencing communication impact.	1. Applies expert communication skills to convey complex or technical ideas effectively across disciplines, sectors, and audiences. 2. Advises, educates, and guides others in improving their research communication. 3. Maintains a strong, reputable public and professional presence in the research area. 4. Embeds communication strategies into research plans and demonstrates their effectiveness in achieving intended outcomes.	1. Communicates persuasively at advanced levels, inspiring broad, international audiences and shaping research or innovation debates. 2. Maintains mastery of communication techniques and technologies, staying at the forefront of research communication practices. 3. Uses communication leadership to shape agendas, influence debates, and represent key research issues globally.
4.2 Research outputs	1. Builds awareness of how research outputs are produced, shared, and evaluated, including publications, reports, datasets, policy briefs, commissioned products, creative works, or open-access contributions. 2. Begins producing high-quality content in multiple formats (e.g. print, digital, multimedia). 3. Explores various methods and platforms for dissemination, both traditional and emerging.	1. Confidently disseminates outputs across academic, professional, public, or online spaces. 2. Encourages and supports less experienced colleagues in producing and sharing their work. 3. Participates in peer review processes (e.g. for journals, conferences, reports, or creative works) to uphold standards and improve quality.	1. Regularly produces, publishes, shares, and reviews quality research outputs, including taking on roles such as co-author, reviewer, or editor. 2. Builds collaborative or interdisciplinary partnerships to co-create outputs. 3. Provides guidance and mentorship to help others expand the reach, diversity, and quality of their outputs.	1. Holds leadership roles or expert influence in major publication, creative, or innovation platforms (e.g. editor, curator, lead innovator). 2. Builds an extensive, influential record of high-quality outputs across academic, professional, and public channels. 3. Gains international recognition for contributions that shape practice, discourse, or standards in the field or sector.

The phase stage will differ for everyone, depending on current areas of focus and career goals.

Research

Knowledge and skills to undertake research and deliver outcomes

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
4.3 Knowledge exchange and public engagement	1. Understands the value of engaging diverse public, policy, community, or sector audiences to enhance the relevance and reach of research. 2. Participates in knowledge exchange or public engagement activities (e.g. talks, workshops, exhibitions, open days), offering and inviting feedback. 3. Begins exploring how work connects to societal, ethical, or policy contexts, deepening understanding of relevant issues.	1. Designs and delivers inclusive engagement activities that communicate work clearly to non-specialist audiences. 2. Connects with users, beneficiaries, policymakers, or public audiences to co-create or adapt engagement approaches that reflect shared goals or needs. 3. Recognises the potential for research to inform policy, social change, or public understanding, and begins forming relevant connections. 4. Supports less experienced colleagues in developing engagement skills or navigating policy and public interfaces.	1. Leads substantial engagement or knowledge exchange projects that shape public understanding or inform research directions. 2. Builds and maintains sustainable partnerships with external organisations, communities, or policymakers to ensure mutual benefit. 3. Embeds engagement practices into team or organisational culture and supports others in delivering high-quality, inclusive approaches. 4. Contributes expertise to policy processes or public debates, building a record of applied influence and trusted relationships.	1. Achieves national or international impact through sustained leadership in engagement or knowledge exchange. 2. Shapes organisational or sector-wide strategies that embed engagement as an integral part of research practice and culture. 3. Acts as a recognised expert or advocate, contributing to the development of engagement theory, policy, or funding frameworks. 4. Secures investment, influence, or trust through activities that deliver social, environmental, policy, or economic value at scale.
4.4 Research translation and commercialisation	1. Generates innovative ideas and begins exploring how they might translate into applied or commercial outputs. 2. Builds awareness of commercialisation, entrepreneurship, and social enterprise pathways. 3. Recognises the importance of relationships with business, industry, and innovation partners, seeking advice or exposure to these contexts.	1. Understands key steps in research translation, including intellectual property (IP), licencing, partnerships, and commercialisation processes. 2. Critically assesses the potential for research to advance toward application or market use. 3. Pursues innovation or enterprise-focused funding, partnerships, or translation opportunities. 4. Engages with expert advisors (e.g. technology transfer offices, innovation accelerators) to navigate translation effectively.	1. Consistently applies research to create tangible products, services, tools, or innovations with reach and relevance. 2. Identifies and acts on opportunities to maximise innovation, recognising potential for new applications and partnerships. 3. Builds and sustains collaborations with business, industry, public, or non-profit innovation partners. 4. Advises and supports less experienced colleagues on translation and commercialisation pathways.	1. Leads major initiatives or partnerships to drive large-scale research translation, innovation, or commercialisation. 2. Builds a national or international reputation for innovation leadership, providing strategic guidance to others. 3. Demonstrates sustained success in bringing new products, services, or innovations to market, practice, or public use. 4. Coordinates teams and initiatives to deliver high-impact applications that extend the reach and value of research.

The phase stage will differ for everyone, depending on current areas of focus and career goals.

Research

Knowledge and skills to undertake research and deliver outcomes

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
4.5 Teaching and learning	1. Participates in or helps facilitate learning opportunities (e.g. workshops, meetings, knowledge-sharing events). 2. Begins using research insights to inform teaching, training or development activities. 3. Supports the learning of students, less experienced colleagues, or collaborators through demonstration or guided instruction. 4. Uses appropriate tools or platforms to support teaching and learning. 5. Builds foundational awareness of teaching or facilitation methods, potentially through formal or peer-based learning.	1. Develops awareness of personal teaching, training, or facilitation style and integrates appropriate tools, methods, and strategies to engage participants. 2. Applies research insights to create accessible, practical learning content. 3. Supports development of knowledge, skills, or capacity among students, peers, or collaborators. 4. May pursue professional development or accreditation in teaching or training. 5. Promotes equitable access to learning opportunities.	1. Expands and refines teaching, training, or facilitation approaches, developing a wide repertoire of methods and strategies. 2. Leads or co-leads the creation of research-informed curricula, training, or capacity-building programmes. 3. Advises and supports peers in developing and delivering research-based teaching and learning practices. 4. Builds a portfolio of contributions where research informs external learning or development activities.	1. Leads and sets vision for integrating research into teaching, training, or learning practices across organisations or sectors. 2. Fosters a culture that values research-linked learning, knowledge sharing, and capacity building. 3. Oversees evaluation and quality assurance of research-based teaching and learning. 4. Supports senior colleagues in advancing institutional or sector-wide teaching and learning initiatives.

The phase stage will differ for everyone, depending on current areas of focus and career goals.

Research Communities
Knowledge and skills to engage and work with others

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
5.1 Research culture	1. Embraces and values diversity, integrating multiple perspectives into research or practice. 2. Recognises the importance of belonging, respect, openness, and fair recognition. 3. Listens actively, exchanges constructive feedback, and contributes to an ethical, supportive environment. 4. Seeks guidance or support (e.g. HR, integrity leads, wellbeing services) to uphold positive practices.	1. Demonstrates interpersonal sensitivity, respect, and integrity, creating spaces for constructive interaction and psychological safety. 2. Actively works to build inclusive, open, and responsible environments supporting meaningful participation and high-quality research practices. 3. Promotes belonging and shared success by valuing diverse contributions, perspectives and responsible behaviours. 4. Recognises signs of stress, exclusion, or poor practice and takes or seeks appropriate action.	1. Champions inclusive, ethical, and responsible cultures at group, team, or departmental levels. 2. Establishes and upholds expectations for equitable, transparent, and fair behaviour. 3. Identifies and works to remove systemic barriers that undermine inclusion or integrity. 4. Solicits and attends to feedback to strengthen local practices which promote wellbeing, balance, and accountability.	1. Shapes organisational, sectoral, or system-wide strategies and policies to embed inclusive, open, responsible, and high-performing research cultures. 2. Contributes to national or international efforts to improve research excellence, equity, openness, and integrity. 3. Shares expertise to help improve research culture across settings. 4. Leads or drives initiatives supporting wellbeing, psychological safety, accountability, inclusion, and research excellence at scale.
5.2 Teamworking	1. Understands own behaviours and their impact on others when working in formal and informal teams. 2. Appreciates and credits the contributions of all members, including technical, professional, administrative, or external partners. 3. Communicates openly and respectfully to support shared goals and decision-making. 4. Collaborates effectively to achieve outcomes while fostering mutual respect.	1. Recognises and builds on the strengths of team members to achieve collective goals. 2. Facilitates collaboration across teams, promoting development and progression opportunities for others. 3. Navigates team tensions constructively, addressing issues such as exclusion, bullying, or harassment, and seeking appropriate support. 4. Helps shape team roles, clarify responsibilities, and promote inclusive, fair practices.	1. Builds, manages, and sustains teams, aligning diverse goals and efforts to deliver outcomes. 2. Adapts flexibly to team needs, supporting collective success while managing expectations and resolving conflict. 3. Sets and upholds standards for respectful, equitable team practices, ensuring all contributions are recognised. 4. Develops and supports leadership capacity within the team, helping others step into leadership roles.	1. Inspires, motivates, and collaborates with national or international teams, aligning wide-ranging efforts toward shared impact. 2. Informs and influences policies or structures that better recognise and reward team-based contributions. 3. Provides strategic leadership to large, cross-sector or international teams. 4. Celebrates and reinforces collective achievements, embedding a culture of shared responsibility and success.

The phase stage will differ for everyone, depending on current areas of focus and career goals.

Research Communities

Knowledge and skills to engage and work with others

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
5.3 Leadership	1. Develops awareness of personal leadership style, strengths, and areas for growth. 2. Explores opportunities to demonstrate leadership, both formally and informally, within projects or team settings. 3. Engages in activities that build leadership capability, such as training, mentoring, or cross-sector placements. 4. Begins observing and reflecting on diverse leadership models across contexts.	1. Guides less experienced colleagues, offering direction and support. 2. Communicates confidently and effectively as a leader, fostering collaboration. 3. Engages with external stakeholders (e.g. research participants, beneficiaries, partners, funders) to extend research or innovation influence. 4. Applies leadership insights drawn from diverse professional contexts. 5. Actively seeks leadership opportunities that integrate cross-sector collaboration and learning.	1. Takes responsibility for key team or organisational areas, leading both internally and externally. 2. Sets a clear, transparent leadership style, encouraging creativity, initiative, and innovation. 3. Creates structured opportunities for others to develop leadership skills, including across sectors. 4. Demonstrates cross-sector leadership by building collaborations and integrating diverse insights.	1. Gains national or international recognition for advancing research, innovation, or collaboration. 2. Leads organisational missions, ensuring competitiveness, strategic excellence, and societal relevance. 3. Shapes empowering, inclusive cultures where all contributors can thrive. 4. Drives the professional growth of others, attracting and nurturing diverse research or innovation talent. 5. Champions leadership innovation, promoting forward-looking, cross-sectoral, and transformational leadership practices.
5.4 Supervision and people management	1. Engages in peer support with less experienced colleagues or students; may assist in supervision or learning activities. 2. Works collaboratively with own supervisor or manager to agree on plans, deadlines, and balanced workloads. 3. Develops awareness of supervision or management policies and good practices.	1. Supervises less experienced colleagues or students, providing constructive, empathetic support. 2. Develops and refines personal supervision or management style, welcoming feedback to improve practice. 3. Sets clear expectations, communicates goals, and negotiates realistic workloads and timelines. 4. Contributes to co-supervision or joint management where appropriate.	1. Leads supervision or people management aligned with institutional, organisational, or professional standards. 2. Applies effective practices, including regular feedback, performance review, and structured development planning. 3. Creates supportive, enabling conditions for supervisees and line reports to thrive. 4. Supports peers in strengthening supervisory and management capabilities, sharing good practice and offering advice. 5. Recognises and rewards good performance while addressing underperformance fairly.	1. Models and promotes excellent supervision and people management practices across contexts. 2. Shapes organisational or sector-wide policies that support high-quality supervision and management. 3. Advocates for inclusive, developmental, and enabling management practices.

The phase stage will differ for everyone, depending on current areas of focus and career goals.

Research Communities

Knowledge and skills to engage and work with others

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
5.5 Coaching and mentoring	1. Provides informal support to others through demonstration, sharing experience, or offering guidance. 2. Recognises the value of mentorship and the role of receiving mentoring in career or skill development. 3. Begins to apply basic coaching techniques, such as active listening and open questioning, to support others.	1. Develops and applies mentorship skills with students, less experienced colleagues, or collaborators. 2. Participates in formal coaching or mentoring programmes, both as coach/mentor and coachee/mentee. 3. Builds capacity to support the development of others outside of formal management roles.	1. Provides structured mentoring and uses coaching methods to help others build skills, confidence, or resilience. 2. Uses reflective practice to improve coaching or mentoring impact. 3. Seeks or initiates reverse mentoring to gain fresh perspectives and challenge assumptions. 4. May pursue professional accreditation or formal recognition in coaching or mentoring.	1. Serves as a role model, sharing access to networks and creating development opportunities for others. 2. Shapes or influences organisational coaching and mentoring strategies. 3. Champions coaching and mentoring practices that promote autonomy, creativity, and diverse career pathways.
5.6 Networking	1. Develops and maintains networks and working relationships with supervisors, peers, colleagues, and wider community members. 2. Uses personal, professional, or online networks to seek feedback, advice, and opportunities. 3. Engages with diverse communities (e.g. professional associations, learned societies, public bodies, or innovation networks) to broaden perspectives.	1. Shares external connections and networks with less experienced colleagues to support their development. 2. Builds professional rapport, recognising networks as spaces for mutual learning, collaboration, and advancement. 3. Cultivates informal peer relationships that may evolve into formal collaborations.	1. Leads research or innovation networks, special interest groups, or collaborative communities. 2. Builds national or international connections with external organisations, partners, or policy groups. 3. Shares networking expertise through mentorship, opening networks and opportunities to others. 4. Integrates strategic network-building into research and career advancement.	1. Holds influential connections with key organisations, partners, or sector leaders, acting as a trusted collaborator and connector. 2. Leads or significantly shapes national and international networks, shaping agendas and amplifying collective reach. 3. Opens and shares networks to support others' access, visibility, and impact, fostering inclusive cross-sector collaboration.