You can use the RDF in whatever way works for you. The graphic with the division into domains and sub-domains gives a big picture overview, which will help you appreciate all the different facets that make up a successful researcher. On closer study, the RDF provides a comprehensive framework to describe your attributes and skills. The detail in the phases of the descriptors give you the language to articulate the skills you are developing and ideas on how to develop them even further. Working with the RDF will be an enjoyable journey of discovery that will guide you through your doctorate and beyond.

The RDF can be used not only to help you plan for your long term career ambitions but also to make a feasible short term plan.

You will find the RDF on the inside of this leaflet. For the purpose of this publication we have focused on those areas of the RDF which are useful to explore in the first few months of your doctoral research. We call it ‘a lens’ on the RDF. This particular lens highlights the knowledge, behaviours and attributes required to start out in research and to begin developing as a researcher.

How to use the ‘Getting started in research lens’

You may wish to use this lens to:
- consider the knowledge, behaviours and attributes essential to a successful start in doctoral research
- select areas where you may need to develop in order to become an effective researcher
- develop self-awareness by considering which areas you’re most interested in
- inform progress and professional development reviews with your supervisory team
- start collecting evidence of the transferability of your knowledge, behaviours and attributes for your CV and job applications
- prepare an action plan for developing your research and your career.

“I wish now that as a doctoral researcher I had given more thought to what I was doing to build my career. I would encourage anyone undertaking a doctorate now to be proactive: think about what is really important to you.”

Participant in the Vitae Effective Researcher programme

Focus through a lens

Now look overleaf and choose one ‘Getting started’ descriptor that you will devote special attention to every week or month for the first year of your doctorate. You could do this at random or you can answer the suggested ‘starter questions’ on the RDF graphic overleaf. Your answers will depend on your academic and professional experience and the requirements of your research project.

Once you have chosen your descriptor, create an action plan for how you are going to develop in that area. Remember that your objectives need to be SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound). Regularly review and record your progress. You can subscribe to the Vitae RDF Planner to record your achievements.

Register on our website using your institutional email address and visit www.vitae.ac.uk/rdfconditions-use for more professional development tips for new researchers.

Getting started

“The PhD is MY project and I am the driving force”

Participant in the Vitae Effective Researcher programme

Congratulations on starting your doctorate and embarking on the journey towards the highest level of degree that can be achieved! Starting a PhD can seem daunting, but taking a professional approach to your development from the start can help make the path smoother, and enable you to be a more successful researcher in the long run. It will also enable you to use the experience effectively as a stepping stone to a range of careers.

The right mindset

As a researcher you are already committed to enquiry through your research. Professional development extends this process to your own capabilities, understanding, aptitudes and ambitions.

For further information about the RDF visit www.vitae.ac.uk/rdf

Intro course to professional development www.vitae.ac.uk/pdproc

To find out about the Vitae RDF Planner visit www.vitae.ac.uk/rdfplanner

Browse our changing themes, find links to #vitaehangoutrecordings at www.vitae.ac.uk/focus-on

Know yourself

In order to engage effectively with your career planning, it’s important to expand your self-awareness. Knowing what you are good at and how to enhance your strengths to improve further will enable you to make more informed choices about opportunities that come your way and allow you to truly maximise your potential. You can improve your self-awareness by:
- taking stock of your capabilities and expertise now, at the start of your doctorate.
- being aware and keeping track of the skills and competencies you are gaining as you progress through your doctorate.
- identifying skills you would like to develop and taking opportunities to develop them.
- understanding what you enjoy and don’t enjoy to help you choose the most satisfying career path after you finish your doctorate.

Developing as a researcher

During your research you will push the boundary of current knowledge, gradually becoming an expert in your field. It’s important to recognise that through doing your research you will begin to develop a unique set of high-level capabilities including:
- the knowledge, abilities and techniques to do your research
- the personal qualities and approach to be effective in your career
- the standards, requirements and professionalism of the research community
- the skills you need to work with others and to contribute to the wider impact of research.

Development as a professional researcher involves more than building your research skills and profile. Successful researchers engage in continuous professional development to ensure they are always learning and improving.

The product that the PhD researcher creates is not the thesis — vital though that is to their subject area through the creation of original knowledge — no, the product of their study is the development of themselves.”

Sir Gareth Roberts

How do I start planning my professional development?

Vitae asked leading academics what makes a successful researcher. Their answers informed the Vitae Researcher Development Framework (RDF) and Statement (RDS), which has been endorsed by all UK universities, Research Councils and other research funders. You can use the RDF to guide you in your professional development as a researcher and set aspirational goals to excel in your career. Depicted as a circle (see figure opposite), the RDF is divided into four domains, 12 subdomains and 63 descriptors, each of which is described by up to five phases of development, which you can explore using our online Vitae RDF Planner…(continued on back page)

To protect and maintain the integrity of the Vitae Researcher Development Framework and the Researcher Development Statement (RDS)1 and to ensure a consistent approach to the development of lenses on the RDF, anyone wishing to request a press version of the RDF must adhere to the RDF conditions of use2. Enquiries regarding the development of a lens on the RDF can be directed to rdf@vitae.ac.uk.

For further information about the RDF go to www.vitae.ac.uk or contact website@vitae.ac.uk.

If you are employed in a staff support capacity and your institution is a Vitae member organisation, you may also request a press version3 of this file.

1 www.vitae.ac.uk/ds
2 www.vitae.ac.uk/rdfconditions-use
3 www.vitae.ac.uk/get-press-files