AHRC and British Academy Report ‘Support for Arts and Humanities Researchers Post-PhD’, Oakleigh Consulting Ltd

Vitae Conference Workshop 9 September 2014

The AHRC and British Academy report on ‘Support for Arts and Humanities Researchers Post-PhD’ was published on 3 September 2014.


http://www.britac.ac.uk/news/news.cfm/newsid/1140

Sue Carver (AHRC) and Nigel Vincent (British Academy) gave a presentation on the report at a workshop at the Vitae Conference on 9 September 2014. Participants in the workshop included academics, researcher developers and administrative staff with responsibility for graduate matters. For information about the conference: https://www.vitae.ac.uk/

A discussion followed the presentation and the main points arising were as follows:

• The wide range of job titles can be an issue in terms of Early Career Researchers (ECRs) being identified within an institution – over 70 different titles were used by respondents surveyed in the report. The question was therefore raised as to whether there would be any value in the title ‘ECR’ being identified as a specific role.

• Within the humanities in particular there can be a question of identity, since ECRs on the one hand are not postgraduates but on the other often do not have a clear role in the same way as RAs do within STEM disciplines.

• If ECRs were able to self-identify this might help them to gain access to relevant support within their institutions.

• The fact that ECRs may hold more contracts both inside and outside the university at the same time inevitably blurs the boundaries of academia.

• It is important for institutions and senior colleagues to support ECRs in developing their academic career aspirations rather than simply offering ‘just another contract’.

• At the same time there cannot be academic roles for all ECRs and it is important to be realistic, to manage expectations and ensure that ECRs are supported in developing transferable skills from an early stage.

• Exit interviews are an effective means of enabling institutions to understand how the careers of ECRs develop both within and beyond academia, and thus to help them plan more effective support activities.

• We need to change how we refer to ‘non-academic’ or ‘alternative’ careers to emphasise that this can be a positive choice and must not be seen as failure.
• There are lessons that might be learned from the EU Co-Fund in terms of cohort support.
• It needs to be recognised that ECRs enter academia from different backgrounds and therefore have different development and support needs.
• It is important to ensure ECRs are involved at a number of levels, for example by being invited to take up institutional roles.
• It is also necessary to support academics and PIs, given that the report shows they are the main source of advice. Other sources of advice should be clearly signposted and guidance provided in respect of careers outside academia.
• At the same time there is a responsibility on the ECR to get engaged in those activities that are available.
• It is possible that the individual nature of research in much of the arts and humanities means that ECRs get used to managing themselves and therefore prove more reluctant to seek advice.

We wish to thank all those who attended the workshop and for their engagement with the discussion.

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