

Poster Purpose

This is a snapshot of good practice careers provision across Irish and international institutions as reported by 46 institutions who participated in an online survey carried out by the AHECS Postgraduate Students Working Group.

Background

In the past decade, in line with the OECD (2004)¹ recommendation, there has been a significant rise in doctoral graduates. This increased output is reflected in the growing number of doctoral researchers employed in industry which, according to the HEA (2011)², has trebled between 2001 and 2007. As the growth of doctoral education accelerates it is likely there will be a continued increase in doctoral students engaging with Careers Services to ensure they optimise their career options across sectors (e.g. academia, industry, non-profit/ NGOs, policy organisations).

Methodology

In September 2015, the AHECS Postgraduate Students Working Group developed a 32 item survey to explore the nature and extent of careers provision for doctoral students across 16 Irish higher education institutions. Then, in order to consider our findings in a wider context we carried out a separate 43 item survey in which an additional 30 institutions across England and Scotland (10), mainland Europe (2), the US (6), Canada (3), Australia (5) and New Zealand (3) participated. A separate interview was completed by ABG Intelligence - a FrancoGerman non-profit organisation set up specifically to help doctorate students/ graduates to develop their careers and companies to recruit PhDs (see their PhD career tool, DocPro). An executive summary report is available that provides a summary of the quantitative and qualitative responses from both surveys for all participating institutions, grouped according to theme/ question³.

Who provides careers services for doctoral students?

The careers provision for PhDs in the majority of these institutions (all in Ireland, 21 out of the 30 in other countries) were aligned within the University structure to Student Support, though a minority of Careers Services reported alignment to administrative departments, Graduate Schools and Academic Teaching and Learning Units. Perhaps because of this, student enrolment figures could only be reported tentatively. All institutions reported that the key people involved in delivery of careers supports included careers professionals, alumni, employers and academics.

'Employers participate in events where their perspective is very useful (e.g.) how do they use LinkedIn for recruitment purposes...'
(Aarhus University, Denmark)

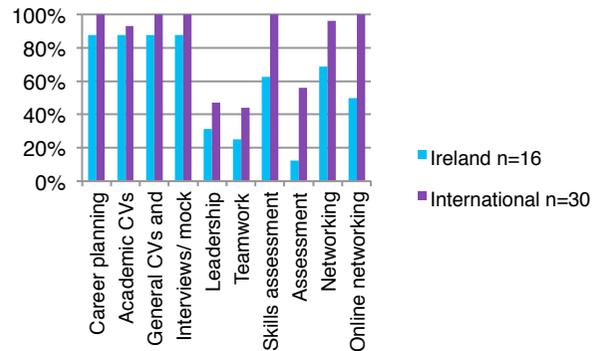
In Ireland, 2 (out of 16) institutions have a dedicated member of staff to work with PhD students, 2 employ freelance consultants and 1 has time allocated to working with PhDs. Out of the other 26 institutions who responded to this question, almost all indicated a dedicated resource for working with PhDs whether through staff time or the use of freelance consultants.

What do careers services focus on providing for doctoral students?

'Retention. Successful completion. Recruitment. Employability-transferable skills' (New Zealand)

Similar core careers content is being delivered to doctoral students in Ireland and overseas, mostly as non-credit bearing activities. Doctoral career-planning workshop material focuses on things like: CV/ interview preparation, identifying transferable skills, networking practice and salary negotiation. A full list of workshops and sample alumni and employer engagement activity is listed in each of the reports³.

Fig 1 Careers content delivered to doctoral students



Resources being used

The majority of institutions in Ireland, England and Scotland report using Vitae, a recently privatised organization that provides training and development supports for Early Stage Researchers (www.vitae.ac.uk). US and Canadian institutions reported sharing an extensive library of resources (i.e. one Canadian university reported 2500 items including books, DVDs, online subscriptions to databases, magazines and journals). In New Zealand, graduate destination data is used. One Australian university reported they are developing an online mentoring platform using alumni.

Other resources being used across all institutions include:

Epigeum, Vault, jobs.ac.uk, Profiling for Success, Graduate First, Prospects Planner, Adult Directions, MBTI.

Doctoral Student Internships

A large proportion (25/ 30) of institutions outside of Ireland reported that PhDs in their institution have internship/ placement opportunities available to them, and in some places they are even compulsory as part of the funding award (e.g. Newcastle). The management of these schemes varies across institutions. For example, the University of Nottingham offers doctoral students opportunities for placements in local SMEs through a scheme managed by the Graduate School.



FIG. 3

ULSTER
DOCTORAL
STUDENTS
ENGAGED
IN A
STRATEGIC
CAREER
MANAGEMENT
WORKSHOP

Challenges of working with doctoral students

The following challenges/ issues were highlighted repeatedly: managing expectations, competitive academic job market, general lack of engagement (by PGRs), lack of engagement in particular by international students (i.e. including language issues and visa regulations).

'Doctoral students '...are trained to question and debate, and therefore can be challenging. Embrace this as they can be great fun to work with!'
(University of Bristol)

Practice-sharing/ Innovation for the future

Among events listed, one Australian institution reported that they have won funding to work on specific projects (e.g. with other institutions). The University of Wollongong, NSW, Australia, organises a biennial **'Graduate Researcher Careers Conference'** and Edinburgh organises **'The PhD Horizons Careers Conference'**.

Pending feedback from you, the AHECS community we would like to organise a **practice-sharing training event** in collaboration with some of the participants of this survey. So far, feedback from the Irish cohort in this survey indicates priority interest-areas as: careers outside of academia and international mobility. **Let us know what you think!**

References

1. Organisation for Economic Cooperation & Development (2004) Review of National Policies for Education: Review of Higher Education in Ireland, Examiner's Report. Paris: OECD
2. HEA (2011) National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030. Dept Education & Skills, Dublin: Stationary Office
3. Careers Provision for Doctoral Students: A Survey of National and International Institutions:
Study 1: Survey of Good Practice in Ireland
Study 2: A Global Study of Good Practice

Download from: <http://www.ahecs.ie>

The AHECS Postgraduate Students Working Group aims to share and benchmark good practice in relation to careers provision for postgraduate research students. Members: Mary McNulty, UCC; Rebecca Boyd, QUB, Orlaith Tunney, TCD; Sharon Milner, UU; Elaine Kieley, UL; Naoimh O'Connor, UCD; Mark Cumisky, UCD; Josephine Walsh, NUIG