The Researcher Professional Development team (RPD)

Impact Review

Complied by Bryony Portsmouth

Researcher Professional
Development

Think

Ahead

2014
THE AWARDS
AWARD WINNER
OUTSTANDING SUPPORT FOR
EARLY CAREER RESEARCHERS

Impact review purpose

This review is designed to give you an insight into the activities, reach and impact of the **Researcher Professional Development team's Think Ahead framework.**

Think Ahead, is a research-led framework, encompassing of a wide variety of learning and development initiatives,

> "*for the continuous professional development of researchers at the University of Sheffield, supporting individual career ambitions in and beyond academia.*"

Strategic contribution
Alongside the Think Ahead framework, the team drive institutional change in line with the University's HR Excellence in Research Award action plan, underpinned by the 'Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers' (the Concordat). This involves working with colleagues from around the University to enable sustainable changes in practice, structures and cultures that support researchers to deliver world class research. For details of the impact of this activity, please visit: **www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/ecr/strategy**

Who the team is
The team is made up of nine individuals that work across the university and are placed within a variety of structures in order to have the broadest reach to support researcher development and institutional change.

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Why the Think Ahead framework is important

Continued investment in resource to deliver the **Think Ahead framework** remains a strategic priority for a number of reasons.

1. The University of Sheffield (TUoS) is externally recognised as being committed to the Concordat through holding the HR Excellence in Research Award. Engaged HEIs like TUoS live the value that, "the importance of researchers' personal and career development, and lifelong learning, is clearly recognised and promoted at all stages of their career."

2. Councils who fund research are signatories to the Concordat and are increasingly aware of the importance of developing researchers both as a tool to maximising research outputs as well as to ensure a skilled and vibrant country.

   "The development of talented researchers with transferrable and professional skills is essential for UK competitiveness." (EPSRC, 2012)

   "Highly-trained, skilled, and professional researchers are fundamental to supporting the UK research-base in the arts and humanities and contributing to the UK's economic and social wellbeing and cultural wealth." (AHRC, 2012)

   "BBSRC supports nearly 2000 postdoctoral researchers in UK labs, seeking to enhance not only their scientific output but their career progression. Research staff help drive scientific advancement and innovation, forming a vital component of the UK bioeconomy." (BBSRC, 2016)

3. Investment in learning and development has been noted to have benefits both to employers and employees.

   "Learning and development can comprise of a lot of different activities but overall it's really about developing employees, so they can contribute to organisational performance." (Ruth Stuart, Research Adviser at CIPD, June 2015)

Meaningful development activity can lead to increased job satisfaction and employee motivation as well as the potential for improved processes and innovative strategies. The attractiveness of the organisation can also be increased through reduced turnover and enhanced reputation.

Engaging in continuing professional development enables individuals to enhance their capacity, confidence, reputation and therefore their career potential.

Impact Review, 2015-2016   www.shef.ac.uk/ris/ecr

Events

Throughout the 2015-2016 academic year, the RPD team facilitated, organised, delivered, coordinated and signposted a breadth of workshops, seminars, conferences, courses, job preparation sessions and meetings.

The below numbers are a snapshot drawn from our two key events managements systems only.
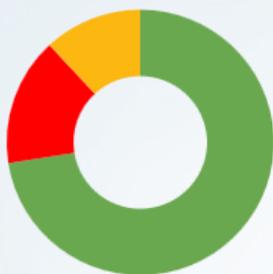
Reach across the University

3392 attendances
1445 individual attendees

#1 932 PGRs

#2 503 Researchers

#3 10 other
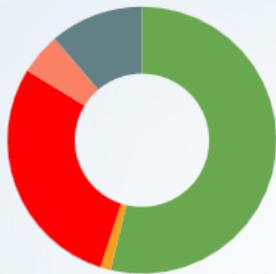
Where attendees are based:

- Academic Depts./schools (53.75%)
- Other (1.25%)
- Academic Units/Groups (28.75%)
- Faculty (5%)
- Professional Services Depts. (11.25%)

Session places

731 places were wasted in the last year

#1 common excuse

"Something else came up at short notice."

Prioritising development activity is a key attribute of success.

- Attended (72.49%)
- No show (15.62%)
- Cancelled (11.88%)

✘ 'No show' non-attendance represents a waste of resource both in terms of staff time, resources and most importantly other researchers' opportunity to access learning events.

A selection of impact feedback

- "Totally useful, really enjoyed the networking game, made me feel part of the university community." (Engineering Faculty PGR induction)

- "Sometimes you're not sure how to put training into practice, but I can go straight back and write my poster with these tips."

- "I just wanted to pass some praise on to you and the rest of the Think Ahead team with regards to the three minute thesis competition. As you know I took part last year (and thoroughly enjoyed it!) and I recently had to give a 5 minute presentation at a job interview I went for on a topic relating to the charity the job was for. I put all the skills I learnt through the three minute thesis competition into practice and was successful in getting the job :) I firmly believe taking part in the three minute thesis competition played a huge part in helping me get the job, so I wanted to say thanks!"

- "I really did not want to do SUGS but my supervisor thought it would help with my networking skills. I have enjoyed it so much and want to do more of this type of activity."

- "First draft almost complete with a bit of micro-editing left to do. I am on cloud nine! I'm sending it for publication by the end of this month!" (writing a journal article and getting it published)

- "Thanks for your effort to arrange such a wonderful program. Sure it was very useful for me to hone my writing skills. Again thanks for the laptop too." (4 day intensive, 'writing for publication' course)

- "I'm so sorry to mess you about but I won't be able to attend this writing course. My P.I. doesn't want me away from the lab for that length of time. Are there any shorter courses available that are only for 1 or 2 days?" (4 day intensive, 'writing for publication' course)

- Most useful parts - "Skills in presenting myself both on video and also in other contexts, e.g. presentations, job interviews." (Success on Screen)

- Most useful parts - "The idea that it is very convenient to put some experiences on a paper so we can learn from them. The idea of having a journal was great. We concluded that it is interesting to reflect when things go bad and when go right as well. Identify the causes and try to repeat them if you succeed or to avoid them if you didn't." (How to write reflectively to improve self-development, for PGRs)

- Most useful parts – "An overall idea of what a fellowships are, how to apply and more awareness about the main aspects that need to be highlighted and explained properly." What you gained – "More awareness about how to apply for fellowships and all the possible opportunities." (Fellowship Support Programme, Faculty of Engineering)

- "I will use the activity log to see how I really use my time and then think about how better to optimise my day." (Managing Yourself, for PGRs)

- "Mentoring should involve empowering the student to think and progress on their own rather than feeding them solutions and directions." (The Supervisor as Mentor)

Personalised support

Ongoing 1-1 careers guidance, coaching sessions and job preparation meetings took place throughout the year, providing **303** personalised sessions for PGRs and **147** for research staff.
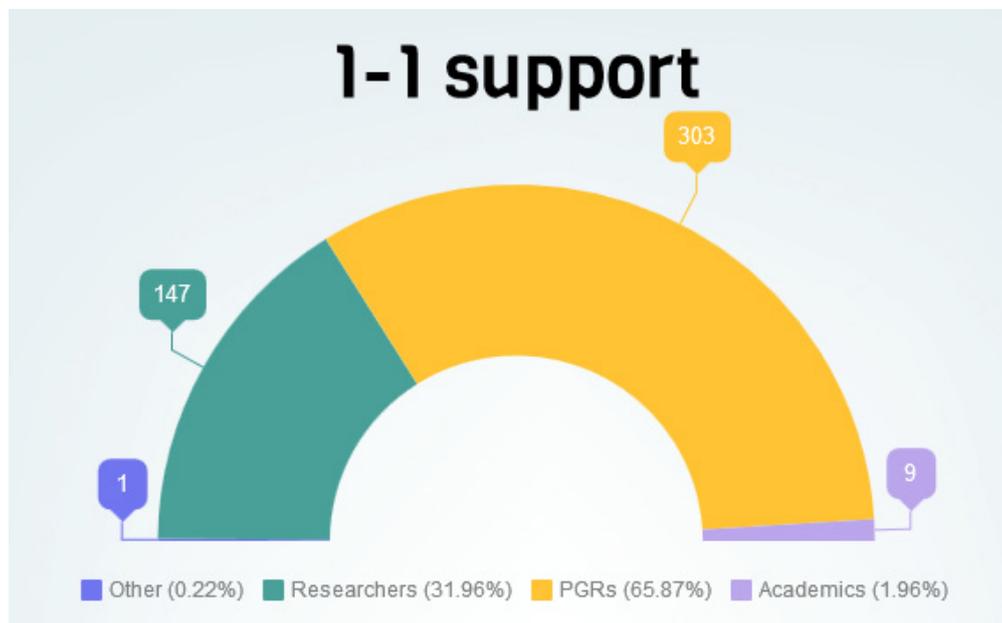
Impact

- "Since I met you last year, I know what I have to do, and moreover you have given me hope for the future. I thank you from the depth of my heart."

- "Lucy has been amazing. She has been chatty and friendly from the start but full of great ideas to boost my confidence and get me back on track. She never tells me what I have to do but makes lots of suggestions of how I might do things. She has got me writing, when I was not putting pen to appear at all and has boosted my confidence in my ability to write." (Dedicated Outstanding Thesis Mentor nomination)

- "Many thanks for your assistance and time helping me out with the interview prep and arranging mock interview. I got the job! And yesterday I have officially accepted the offer. Couldn't have done it with your thoughtful tips and advice, so can't express how grateful I am."

- "Thanks so much for your input into this [ITN bid], and for asking difficult questions. I didn't realise you could design programmes like this – it's definitely made the bid stronger." (Academic in Social Sciences)

- A post-doc from Engineering reported that he had obtained a lectureship after receiving help with his application and interview.

- Following several months of coaching, a contract researcher from the Faculty of Engineering who had had a lot of difficulty finding employment outside academia was able to make a speculative application which has resulted in a job offer with a local company.

Focus on key initiatives

WRITE*fest*2015

Supporting the University of Sheffield's (TUoS) Academic Writers

November is Academic Writing Month, an academic write-a-thon that happens every year. It is hosted by PhD2Published, as an online space where the global academic community can pledge their writing projects, record progress, and share thousands of writing tips via the #AcWriMo hashtag on Twitter.

The University of Sheffield 'WriteFest' was launched to bring together people from across the university to recognise and celebrate writing. Drawing on the format of the very popular academic writing retreats, WriteFest had some added bitesize workshops, a guide to crafting your own ideal writing soundtrack, and a creative writing element. All academic staff, research staff, and research students were encouraged to join in the write-a-thon and the festival provided protected time and space for writing that helped people to:

- Create new good habits and strategies for managing academic writing
- Take a proactive approach to overcoming writing blocks with the support of the writing community
- Make and protect short blocks of time for writing as a normal part of the working day
- Write socially, leaving offices and departments to meet and write with others

To deliver this fantastic festival, RPD team members utilised the talents of other TUoS colleagues - Andy Tattersall (writing technologies), Matt Cheeseman (creative writing) and Vicky Williamson (choosing music to write to).

Impact

#146 PEOPLE ATTENDED

#86,490 WORDS WRITTEN

{#AcWriFest15}
NOVEMBER

WRITE*fest*2015

WriteFest is a University-wide festival of academic writing, that will bring people together to write, and enhance writing productivity

CELEBRATING ACADEMIC WRITING MONTH

Think Ahead SURE

Think Ahead: SURE is a scheme which offers Early Career Researchers within the Faculties of Medicine, Dentistry & Health and Science the opportunity to develop many of the skills considered necessary for a career in research by managing their own 6 to 8 week research project. Undergraduate students are encouraged to apply for a summer placement working on one of the Think Ahead SURE projects. This develops valuable research skills and offers time in a laboratory.

The Think Ahead: SURE Supervisor recruitment process is highly competitive and applications are reviewed by a cross-faculty panel.
Those successfully recruited to the scheme receive training and support a number of areas:
- Recruiting students: from short listing applications through to interviewing the candidates.
- Grant writing: skills training plus support in applying to external funders, enhancing your funding profile.
- Training workshops in becoming a more effective researcher, research manager and better supervisor for your student.
- Assistance on managing your research budget and navigating the systems.

Impact
33 projects were delivered in Summer 2016, 22 of them attracting external student stipends. 66 individuals participated in an applied learning experience supporting the development of current and future researchers.

■ "From start to finish I have found every aspect of the Think Ahead SURE scheme to be extremely valuable. Not only has it provided me with experience in short-listing and interviewing candidates, applying for my own grants and supervising my own student but also some useful pilot data to contribute to my PhD thesis! It has been an exceptionally rewarding experience and I could not recommend the scheme more highly"

■ "I have fully enjoyed my experience with the Think Ahead SURE scheme. Getting the opportunity to design my own research project and manage it from start to end has been invaluable. Not only have I gained experience in applying for external funding, selecting candidates to interview and managing a project and student, but I have also been able to learn more about methods and a topic area that I would have not been able to explore in my own research. I highly recommend this scheme to anyone interested in building their academic and research skills."

Researcher Education & Development Conference (REDs)

This inaugural conference, envisioned, designed and organised for the sector by the RPD was timely, and in-line with recent sector calls for the professionalisation of the researcher developer role. Those who develop research staff and students were invited to strengthen their links to evidence-based practice and the impact agenda by coming together to share and discover the scholarly work that underpins robust and innovative education of research staff and students.

11 paper presentations, 2 keynote talks and 55 delegates.

Impact for delegates

- "There is a lot of innovative work going on out there and I need to engage with it more fully (I was so unaware of a lot of what was happening). There is scope to do research in this area that will be well received."

- "I found the day a really useful assurance that the work our team does is in the right direction. We are striving to investigate the impact of what we do, to enable people to 'develop' and make changes based on their engagement with us. It was good to hear that this is not only good practice but lends itself towards schorlary activity. My biggest light-bulb moment was the realisation that we need to enable PIs to realise they too are researcher developers."

- "There are a lot of different pieces of research going on, but at the moment there isn't much coherence between them. I don't see this as a bad thing, I suspect it's just indicative of a new field."

- "I was delighted to see the large number of people at the conference indicating there is a building momentum for a research approach to the development of researchers that may not have been there previously."

- Support/development for the environment around researchers is as important as the training and development we deliver to the researchers. Development needs to have an element of challenge in it."

Mentoring for research staff (RMP)

The RMP has been in place for five years, with 75 mentees taking part in 2015-2016. The RMP is open to postdocs, research associates, assistants, and fellows, university teachers, teaching fellows, and new lecturers at the University of Sheffield! New this year was the sharing of full case studies to help people really understand the impact that being in a mentoring partnership has made to researchers' lives.

Male, Arts & Humanities

MY OBJECTIVES

The main reason I initially wanted to join the mentoring programme was to get advice on how to develop my academic career from someone who was well-established in their own. I was looking for guidance about the key steps to take and the goals to set in order to become an independent and successful researcher. However, as I entered the process and upon my first discussion with my mentor my main objectives changed. I was thinking of submitting a fellowship application and the timings of the funding stream I was targeting fit in well with the scheduled meetings with my mentor. I therefore agreed with my mentor to use the programme to help develop and refine my fellowship application.

THE MEETINGS

We spent subsequent meetings working through important aspects of the application such as the Case for Support and the Pathways to Impact. My mentor was able to provide excellent advice, and the meetings provided some structure and timescales to build the development of the fellowship application around. We used the meetings to discuss general issues to do with the application, as well as working through specific text and ideas to be included in the application.

THE OUTCOMES

Although the mentoring process has officially come to an end, my mentor is still providing support with the development of my fellowship. Her advice and observations about the fellowship have given me a fresh outlook on how to approach the application. The whole mentoring process has helped ensure the application has developed in a timely and well-structured way, and has provided me with added motivation to keep the application on track and to schedule. My mentor's experience in successfully applying to and being a reviewer for the funder has also been extremely helpful.

RECOMMENDED

I have found the mentoring process extremely beneficial. Its flexibility, allowing the mentor and mentee to shape the programme to fit with their needs, has allowed me to get maximum benefit from it. It is also great that the mentor is providing this support voluntarily, her desire to help is illustrated by the fact we have continued our partnership. A further benefit of the programme is a result of the mentor being from a different department to me providing an alternative perspective on my application, and making me consider issues that I would likely not have thought of without the inter-disciplinary discussions we have had. This is especially useful given that the funding application is likely to be reviewed by people outside my own discipline.

#researchwell

In June 2016, the RPD team worked with colleagues across the University to lead a week of activities focused on promoting wellbeing in research. A legacy website was created as a result of the events and is now a hub of information and resources about the importance of researching well.

Why is this important to us (and other colleagues)?
"We're very privileged to be able to work with researchers as they progress through their PhD, start a new research contract or take the next step in their career. We see their successes and their achievements – and it's brilliant! Inevitably, though, we also see the other side: researchers who are struggling or stressed-out. Because – spoiler alert – academia is hard! It's enough of a challenge when everything's plain-sailing in the rest of your life but, when a perfect storm of work and other life stresses come at once, it can feel overwhelming." (Sarah Bell in a post on the Think Ahead blog).

Impact
Discussions held during the week have led to changes in the way Leave of Absence is managed, to ensure a more connected and less distancing experience for PGRs.

- "I am very grateful to you for organising the event as it can often seem like you become 'invisible' during a leave of absence, so it was very good to know that someone cared! It was also refreshing to meet supervisors who obviously took their role towards their students seriously and wanted to help them as much as possible through their LOA."

- "Hallelujah is all I can say to this - absolutely spot on to organise these sessions! And glad it's getting out there." (Interim PGR lead in Arts & Humanities).

- "This session [recognising and supporting a researcher who is struggling] was so helpful and needed. I feel I've failed one of my researchers in the past, but I just didn't know what to do. I feel a lot more confident now."

- "It was a fun and informative session that allowed me time to think about something very different from normal duties and allowed me to go back to them refreshed and reinvigorated. I gained a much needed break from my research that has allowed me the opportunity to clear my head" (Knitting for Premature Babies)

Kroto Research Inspiration

Kroto Research Inspiration celebrates researchers' creative communication of research through an annual cycle of competitions and events which culminate in a researcher showcase. In 2016, the programme included:

- *An introduction from Professor Tony Ryan, Professor of Physical Chemistry & champion of public engagement in science and technology*
- *Presentation from Dr Jenna Stevens-Smith, Outreach and Public Engagement Manager, Imperial College London, University of Sheffield Alumna and previous winner of the Kroto Family Prize for 'Excellence in the Science Education of Young People'*
- *Two Ignite Academy talks from Sheffield PGRs*
- *The researcher showcase and prize giving*
- *Laughter and buckyball building*

Impact
KRI has inspired researchers to set up their own communication channels such as pressure-ink.com and has joined together activity across the University through a collaborative partnership between teams in Research & Innovation Services, Outreach and Public Engagement & Impact.

Success on screen project

The project offered an applied developmental experience for researchers through training delivered by 'Vox Coaching' combined with the opportunity to produce a personalised research video.

The project aimed to enable those who took part to:
- Be confident on screen
- Know how to create a narrative for video recording
- Experience the production of a short film in collaboration with a film maker
- Gain a resource to enhance their visibility.

Outcomes

Videos were published on YouTube by individuals to share their research and raise their profile - Emiliano's video has had 2069 views on YouTube since December 2015.
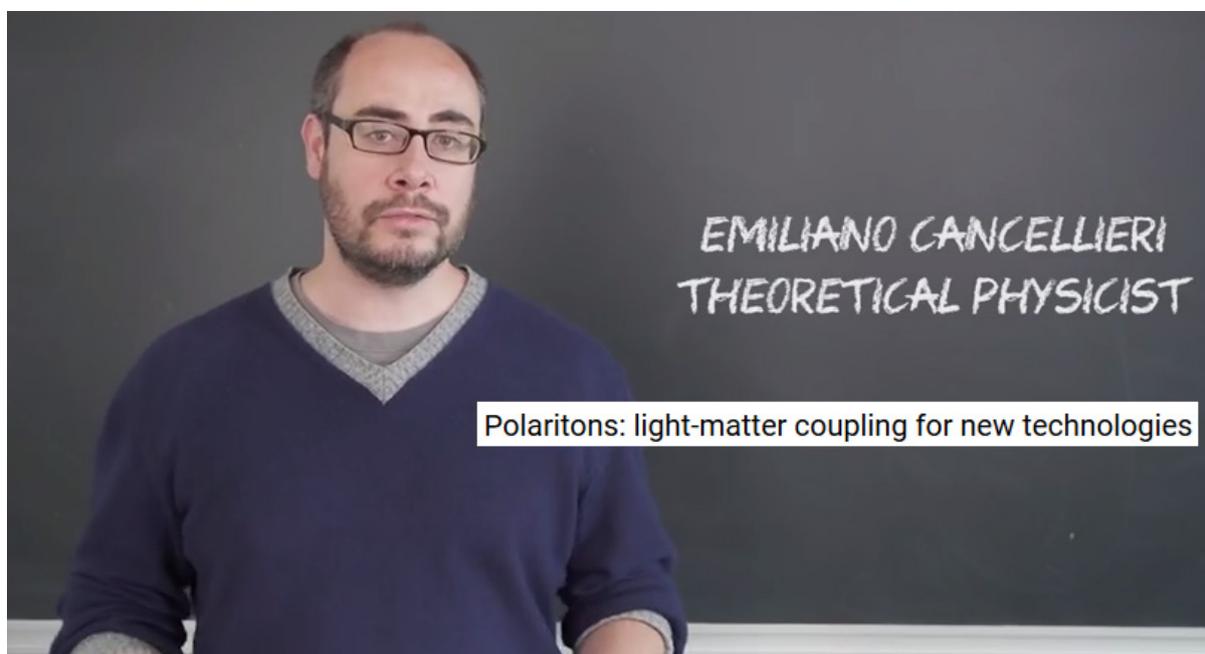
An ItunesU channel was set up in May 2016 to showcase all of the 12 videos produced by researchers: https://itunes.apple.com/gb/itunes-u/researchers-sheffield/id1117320301?mt=10

Impact for researchers

- "The video is extremely useful to explain my research to people inside and outside the academia. I've used the video with undergraduates, PhDs and researchers in the University of Sheffield and in other universities."
- "The video has been very useful for funding applications for outreach activities. Both to explain the outreach project and to show that I already have experience in outreach projects."
- "Developing the video gave me the chance to establish new contacts and collaborations both with other academics and with artists."
- "It absolutely amazing experience! Also it was really challenging."

Daniel Kelly, went on to win the Kroto Research Inspiration 'my research story' video competition in 2016 with his creation (www.sheffield.ac.uk/egs/myresearchstory).

Partnership with Brilliant Club

"The simple, scalable and sustainable way The Brilliant Club works to achieve our mission is by recruiting, training and placing PhD researchers to work in state schools. The Scholars Programme employs doctoral and post-doctoral researchers on a part-time basis to deliver programmes of academic enrichment to small groups of pupils." (Brilliant Club, 2016).

The RPD works in collaboration with TUoS widening participation team to help the Brilliant Club achieve its mission. The partnership helps the RPD to:

- Broker teaching opportunities for researchers
- Assessing quality recruitment mechanisms and training provision provided by Brilliant Club
- Contribute to the Brilliant Club steering group
- Coordinate the learning and development offer through arranging the information sessions and recruitment of tutors

Outcomes and impact

- 250 researchers expressed interest (188 PhD students, 57 research staff and 5 others)
- Assessment Centre interviews: winter (18), spring (15)
- Accepted as tutors: winter (9), spring (6)
- 10 Brilliant club placements since January 2016
- 140 pupils from 14 schools visited the University of Sheffield.
- Pupils with a PhD tutor in Spring programme (56)
- Schools where tutors delivered sessions: Spring (5)
- Confidence in high-level subject knowledge of the Scholars Programme topic increased from 29% to 85%, and confidence in written work at the same standard as a pupil one key stage above increased from 65% to 96%.

"I was pleasantly surprised by the speed at which the pupils understood the new concepts I was teaching them, as well as their ability to generate new and independent ideas about the material. However, what impressed me the most was their enthusiasm and commitment to the course. Many of them achieved a very, very impressive standard of work."

<u>Scholars Programme Graduation event September 2016</u>

TUoS Outreach
@SheffOutreach

Follow

Black Death, Climate Change, Antibiotic Apocolypse- a few super projects produced by pupils with PhD tutors
@BrilliantClub #SheffOutreach

11:14 AM - 30 Sep 2016

2   2

Technology

Increased reach of the Think Ahead Twitter handle @ThinkAheadSheff

Continuation of the Think Ahead blog

Words used to describe our facilitators

This '**Fabula-Cloud**' presents the words used by researchers in feedback forms to describe our researcher development facilitators – these are both RPD team members as well as internal and external specialists.

Thank you

The RPD could not achieve such success with the Think Ahead framework without the contribution of so many other champions of researcher development.

Thank you to all our alumni & friends who speak at events such as v i s t a, our mentors for researchers and for thesis writers, professional services colleagues across the institution, external facilitators, developers at other HEIs, supervisors and PIs who champion CPD and our researchers themselves.

Here's to another successful year!