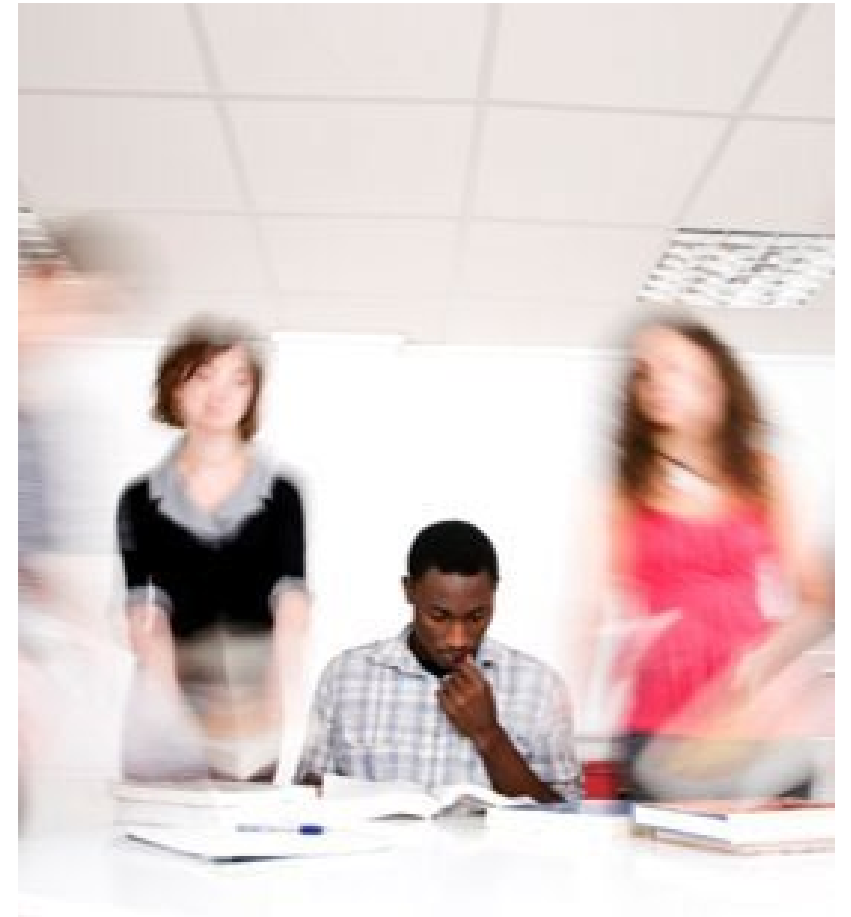


You and your development: skills for research



Welcome



This resource has been developed for postgraduate taught students to support thinking about development of your research skills

Maybe you're coming towards the end of your Masters degree and are thinking, 'What's next?' Or perhaps have you secured a new job, for which your employer will fund you to do a part-time PhD?

This resource will **guide you through a series of activities** to prompt thinking about the skills you already have that will be further enhanced through doctoral study, and some skills that you may wish to develop further. **When prompted to please pause to complete the activity in the accompanying handbook.**



There are many reasons to do a doctorate, and consider a career in research, from career-advancement reasons, other professional development reasons, financial reasons and other life circumstances.

You possibly have a lot of questions as to how, and why, you should take on a doctorate. Luckily, at Vitae, we have the resources and guides to help you.

Vitae is a non-profit programme that is a part of the Careers and Research Advisory Centre. Vitae has over 50 years of experience in enhancing the skills of researchers.

Explore [our webpages](#) to develop your understanding of **what a doctorate is, what it involves, and for more information on fees and funding.**





University of Essex Transitions and Transformations Framework



The Transitions and Transformations Framework (TandT) at the University of Essex was developed in partnership with Vitae, specifically for the University of Essex students and **aspiring researchers**.

The Framework supports you to reflect upon the skills you will develop at various career stages – from, undergraduate, postgraduate taught, through to postgraduate/doctoral research stage.

The framework helps you to identify the skills you already have, and those that you might develop further to support a potential transition to doctoral research.

Such frameworks are useful in providing a common language to describe your skills, knowledge and experience.

ACTIVITY ONE

Take a minute to find the accompanying handbook and make a quick note of:

The skills you think are important for research





UNDER-GRADUATE (Bachelor)

POST-GRADUATE TAUGHT (Masters)

POST-GRADUATE RESEARCH (PhD)

STAGE 1

- Subject knowledge
- Information seeking
- Academic literacy and numeracy
- Critical thinking
- Inquiring mind
- Enthusiasm
- Self-confidence
- Self-reflection
- Work-life balance
- Communication methods

STAGE 2

- Subject knowledge
- Information seeking
- Academic literacy and numeracy
- Critical thinking
- Problem solving
- Inquiring mind
- Enthusiasm
- Self-confidence
- Self-reflection
- Preparation and prioritisation
- Work-life balance
- Career management
- Responsiveness to opportunities
- Project planning and delivery
- Team working
- Communication methods

STAGE 3

- Subject knowledge
- Information seeking
- Academic literacy and numeracy
- Critical thinking
- Problem solving
- Inquiring mind
- Enthusiasm
- Self-confidence
- Self-reflection
- Preparation and prioritisation
- Work-life balance
- Career management
- Continuing professional development
- Responsiveness to opportunities
- Networking
- Project planning and delivery
- Financial management
- Team working
- Influence and leadership
- Communication methods
- Communication media
- Publication
- Public engagement

GROW YOUR SKILLS



University of Essex Transitions and Transformations Framework

The Transitions and Transformations Framework (TandT) highlights skills which you are beginning to develop at a postgraduate taught/masters level which are important for developing as a researcher

How many of these did you identify?

University of Essex Transitions and Transformations Framework



You may not have used the same terms, but you are likely to have identified some of these areas.

Many of the skills you are beginning to develop at masters stage, are important for higher level research, and all these skills will deepen at doctoral level.

Access the TandT framework here: [Black Researchers' Hub | University of Essex](https://blackresearchers.org.uk/)

Higher Level Research Skills



The framework identifies some new skills for doctoral level research that you may not yet have developed. For example:

- **Influence and leadership**
- **Publication**
- **Public Engagement**

Perhaps you can think of examples where you are already engaged in activities related to these areas?

For example, you may have leadership experience already in your career, or through a student leadership role; or you may also have some experience of sharing your work in different media platforms or through public events?

Building your competence in your existing skills and finding opportunities to develop some of these new ones, could help with your PhD applications and prepare you for making a good start in a doctorate.



How might professional development planning help you?



Professional Development planning is a structured process for reflecting upon your own learning and achievements, to help in planning for your personal, educational and career development, a process we are starting through this resource.

It can help you to:

- Understand your strengths, and recognise and celebrate your successes
- Identify areas for development and make informed choices about opportunities and refine your personal and professional goals.
- Help you stand out – any additional skills and development you have, the more of an advantage you have to secure and maintain the roles you want.
- Develop valuable self-reflection skills, and evidence your learning in focused and efficient ways



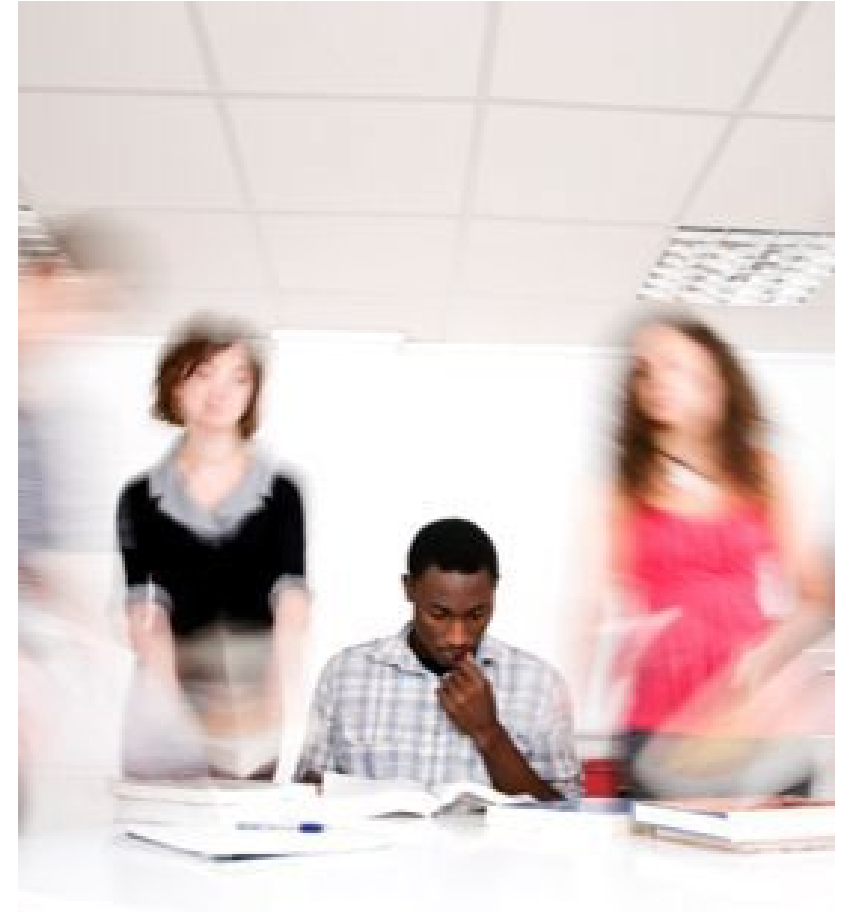
How might professional development planning help you?



Life can get so busy that we're often focused on the next piece of work, project or goal....

but in the rush forward, we might overlook the valuable experience and expertise we've already built through work, study, and life; and this is where taking some time for professional development planning can help.

Reflecting on what you already know and can do is the first step in recognising and making the most of your own strengths.



ACTIVITY TWO: Reflecting on your recent work



Find activity two in the handbook

Choose a recent study activity, like writing an essay or report, presenting some work, or perhaps planning a project or event, or something similar.



Think about the process: What did you do? Try to break it down into steps.

Reflect: are you surprised by how many skills were involved in this activity? What aspects or skills did you particularly enjoy? Are there areas for you could develop further?

ACTIVITY Three: Recognising your achievements

The next activity will provide you with some practice in thinking more deeply about the full range of skills and expertise that you are currently developing.

1. Using the first column, list the activities you have undertaken through your masters in the last 1-2 months, such as literature searching/reviews, essays/ report writing, presentations and talks, group work activities etc. These are just examples, you will have more. You can also think more broadly, to skills you have developed outside of your course, from jobs and volunteer roles.
2. Complete the second column. Start by reflecting on the activity, which broader skills and expertise were developed or practised? Then try to analyse these using the TNT - which areas did you demonstrate?

It is likely that you were able to evidence skills in both the postgraduate taught and some in the postgraduate research areas.

Leave the third column empty for the moment, it is greyed out for this purpose

Achievements so far: List all your achievements so far, big and small

Areas of the TNT covered. List areas of the TNT which are covered by your achievements

Evidence to collect

List the evidence you have generated from your achievement

ACTIVITY Three: Recognising your achievements so far

Achievements so far: List all your achievements so far, big and small

Areas of the TNT covered. List areas of the TNT which are covered by your achievements

Evidence to collect
List the evidence you have generated from your achievement

Reflect:

- Look back at your list
- Where do you have strengths?
- Are there areas you would like to develop more skills, and gain more experience?



Backing up with claims with evidence

Whether in research, academia, or daily life, we are often expected to support our statements with solid evidence. From “evidence-based policy” to the common question, “Where’s the evidence for that?” we all know how important it is to back up our claims.

Think about situations like job interviews—these often test how well you can present clear, convincing examples of your skills and experience. Yet, we’ve all struggled at times to quickly recall specific achievements that back up our expertise.

Gathering evidence can help us to have more accuracy in our skills assessment and increase self-confidence and motivation.

ACTIVITY Four: Evidence



Let's build on your skills profile from the previous activity, where you analysed your skills and experience. Let's think now about the third '**evidence to collect**' column

It's helpful to think of concrete and specific evidence that showcases your skills. This might include a variety of formats- try to think creatively.

Some ideas for evidence you may have, and could collect:

- Reports
- Presentations slides or materials
- Field work trips
- Event programmes you have attended or contributed to
- Blog posts, articles, online forums you have created
- Podcasts you have contributed to
- Social media channels you have contributed to in a student or professional role
- Certificates of courses or workshops you have attended
- A mentorship partnership – your role as either a mentor or mentee

These are just some examples, your evidence will be as unique as you are and reflect your educationally and work journey.

Have a think and jot down some initial ideas in the evidence column against your achievements so far



One helpful method for thinking about structuring and articulating evidence of your skills and experience is the STARR method: **Situation, Task, Action, Result, Reflect**. This can help you to communicate your expertise succinctly and clearly, and the TNT framework can help you with the language to describe your skills, attributes and experiences.

The STARR Method

Situation: Set the scene (Who did you work with? Why? Where?..)

Task: What specifically needed to be achieved? (Goals, outcomes, deadlines, costs?)

Action: What did you actually do? (What was your specific contribution?)

Result: What outcomes results from what you did? The actions you took?

Reflect: How would you tackle the situation next time? Would you do anything differently?

ACTIVITY Five: The STARR Method



Find activity 5 in your handbook

- Choose a specific activity or piece of evidence that you noted in the previous activity
- Use the STARR technique outlined above to write a short paragraph about the activity or evidence
- To practice for interviews, you may want to record yourself explaining this example and listen back to it to identify areas for improvement



STARR technique

Evidence example:

Collecting and organising evidence



Once you start being systematic about collecting evidence of your experience and expertise, you will need to decide **where and how to store it**.

Your university may offer specific software for helping with this. Otherwise, you might want to create your own system, either through organised folders in your documents, or by using different tools or platforms. You might organise this by date, by type of activity, or using the TNT framework.

Setting up (and using) a system for collecting and organising your evidence will make it easier for you to see your progress and for you to find examples for job applications, interviews, and future opportunities.

ACTIVITY Six: Prioritising and setting goals for development



Looking back at the TNT and the skills profile you have developed through the last activities, reflect on the following:

- Are there some skills listed in the TNT which are completely new to you?
- Are there areas in your skills profile that you would like to strengthen or expand?
- Were there some areas you found it difficult to think of evidence examples, are these priority areas for you?

Make a note of 2-3 areas you wish to prioritise to develop further

If you found it hard to prioritise it can be helpful to list out the work and study related activities, you have coming up in a timeframe that is comfortable for you (e.g. next month, next term, whatever feels most practical), and as practiced above think through the broad skills you will need to complete these.



Bringing it all together



With your development goals in mind, the next step is to explore suitable development opportunities to support your growth. Development activities generally fall into **formal** and **informal** learning opportunities.

Think back to your evidence, what types of opportunities have been most supportive in the past in supporting development of your skills? What might help again?

To help you in completing this activity, below are some development **resources and opportunities on the Black Researchers Hub**.

- [The Transitions and Transformations Framework \(T&T\)](#)
- [Academic sponsorship](#)
- [eCareersGrad – Graduate Careers Assistance](#) - [Register here!](#)
- [Scholarships and job opportunities](#)
- [Events and Workshops](#)

Register on grad intelligence [here](#) to access development activities on the Black Researchers Hub.

In addition, Informal opportunities might include gaining advice from tutors, mentors or supervisors, focused discussions with fellow students and peers, abundant online videos/virtual events/resources, observation or work shadowing, you can likely think of many more.

FINAL ACTIVITY SEVEN



This final activity helps with developing a commitment to a clear and actionable forward plan, which may guide your development journey going forward. There are many action planning tools available, a simple **GROW** framework asks you to consider:

GOAL – What exactly do you want to achieve? Where do you want to get to? What goal did you identify above?

REALITY – What is your currently reality? Where are you now?

OPTIONS – What could you do? What possible options are open to you? Think about that range of development opportunities, formal and informal? What resources do you need?

WILL – What will you do? When will you do it? What are your practical next steps? Make a commitment to your development



Congratulations!

If you have completed these activities, you now have begun to develop a portfolio of evidence of your skills and to create a development plan that reflects your current goals.

In the process of working through these activities you have generated a good deal of evidence for several of the descriptors in several areas of the TandT:

Stage 2/3: Self Reflection

Stage 2/3: Preparation and prioritisation

Stage 2/3: Career Management

Stage 2/3: Responsiveness to opportunities

Stage 3: Continuing professional development

Don't forget to add these to your portfolio when you next review your development plans.

Building in time to regularly review your plans will help to keep your development on track and make space to celebrate your achievements and acknowledge the steps you have already successfully achieved.

Finally, remember to reward yourself for your accomplishments, no matter how small!

