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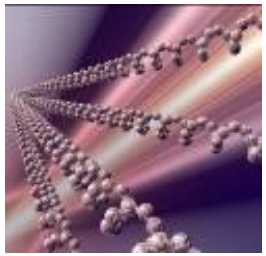
RESEARCH CAREERS

A strategy for success

vitae
realising researchers' potential



Ensuring the sustainability of the Roberts Skills agenda

Iain Cameron, Research Councils UK

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25th February 2010

8th Annual Postgraduate Conference - NSA

2002: Roberts' Recommendation 4.2

'two weeks training a year principally in transferable skills'

Recommendation 4.2: PhD training elements

Despite the welcome current moves by the Funding Councils to improve the quality of PhD training, institutions are not adapting quickly enough to the needs of industry or the expectations of potential students. The Review therefore believes that the training elements of a PhD – particularly training in transferable skills – need to be strengthened considerably. In particular, the Review recommends that HEFCE and the Research Councils, as major funders of PhD students, should make all funding related to PhD students conditional on students' training meeting stringent minimum standards. These minimum standards should include the provision of at least two weeks' dedicated training a year, principally in transferable skills, for which additional funding should be provided and over which the student should be given some control. There should be no requirement on the student to choose training at their host institution. The minimum standards should also include the requirement that HEIs – and other organisations in which PhD students work – reward good supervision of PhD students, and ensure that these principles are reflected in their human resources strategies and staff appraisal processes.

Furthermore, in order to assure employers of the quality of PhD students, as part of these standards the Review recommends that institutions should introduce or tighten their procedures for the transfer of students to the PhD. In particular, the Review believes that HEIs must encourage PhD projects that test or develop the creativity prized by employers.

Government Response: To encourage universities to address the skills acquired by PhD students and to ensure they are relevant to business…

…institutions are not adapting quickly enough to the needs of industry or the expectations of potential students.

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2008 HE Debate: Strong support from Thrift and Wellings

- **THRIFT:** The Roberts funding for universities should be sustained over the long-term to ensure high-quality researcher development programmes become embedded across the sector. (Thrift - p28)

- **WELLINGS:** The "Roberts Funding" should be continued and expanded.
  - Additional resources to build on "employability" agenda
  - Broader set of courses specifically to assist commercialisation
  - eligibility criteria should be expanded to cover all post-graduates and post-doctoral fellows, including international students…

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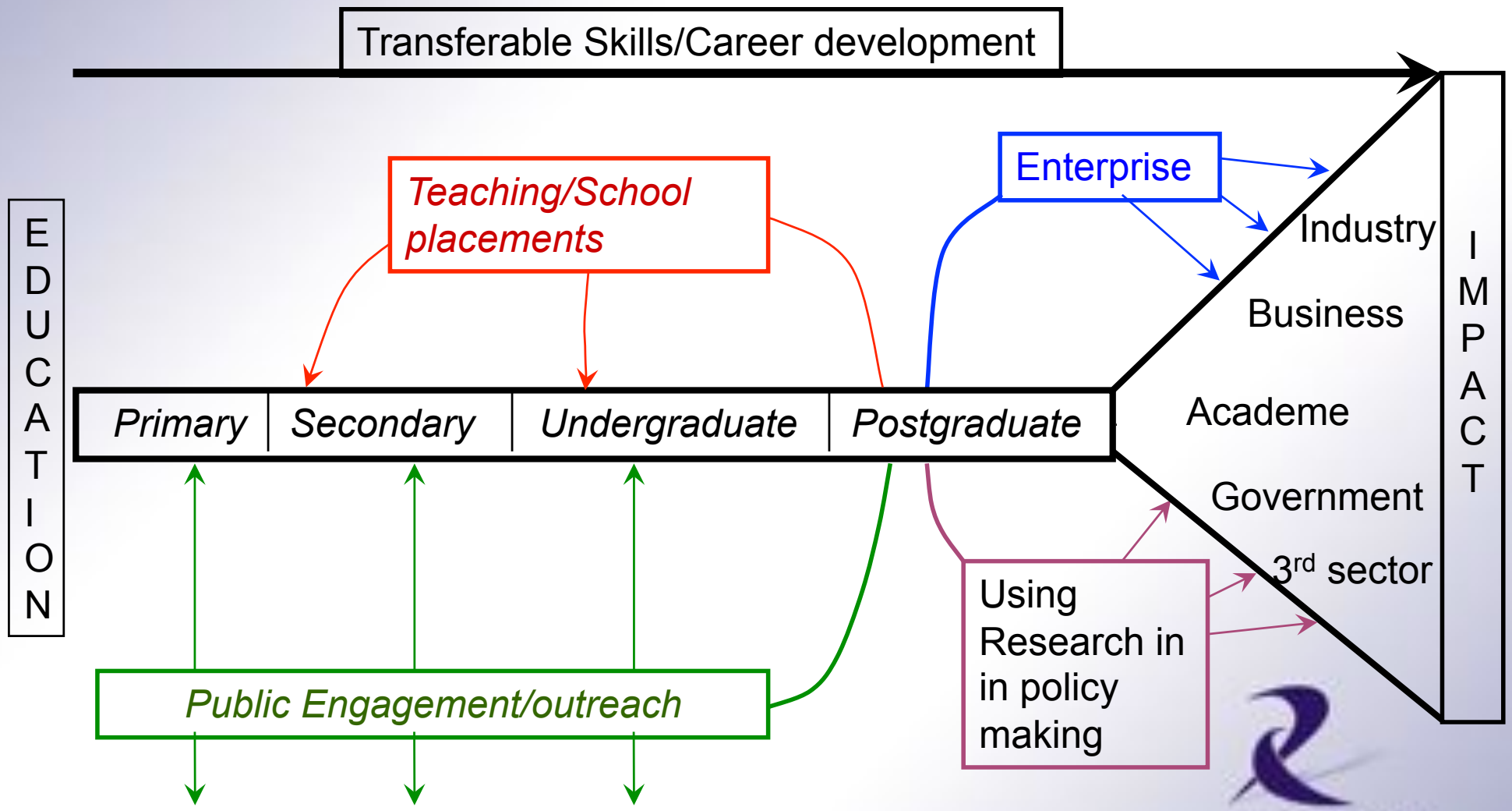
Researcher skills: acquisition and impact



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The Importance of Researchers (from the Concordat)

"[A vision that that will]…ensure the continued provision of well-trained, talented and motivated researchers that is essential to the continuation of our research excellence. We are committed to the realisation of this vision in the UK."

The Concordat signatories

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The Importance of Researchers to Research Councils UK

Excellent, trained researchers will:

- Maintain a world class research base
- Ensure effective knowledge exchange to the economy through people
- Act as effective users of research outputs (people and knowledge)

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Research Councils UK expectations 2004:

- HEIs already provided significant training and development opportunities
- Councils were keen to see innovative approaches and institutional collaboration
- New ‘Roberts’ funds were for:
  - Pump-priming of new activities
  - Extending existing provision
  - Improving quality and impact
- HEIs encouraged to seek analogous funds from other sponsors
- **Backed by ~£60M in each 3-year CSR period**

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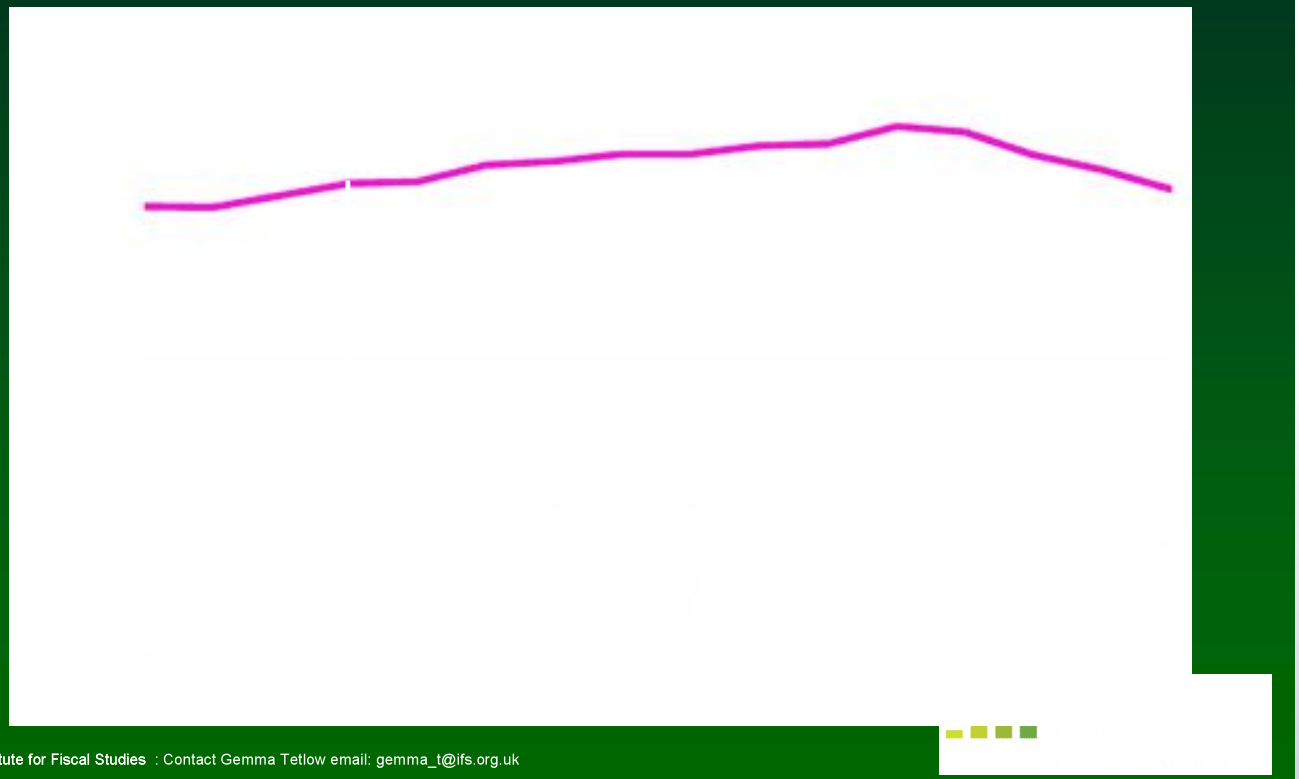
*Letters to VCs/Principals in 2003 and 2004

Much was done then the world changed!

Public service spending increase in Labour's second and third terms reversed



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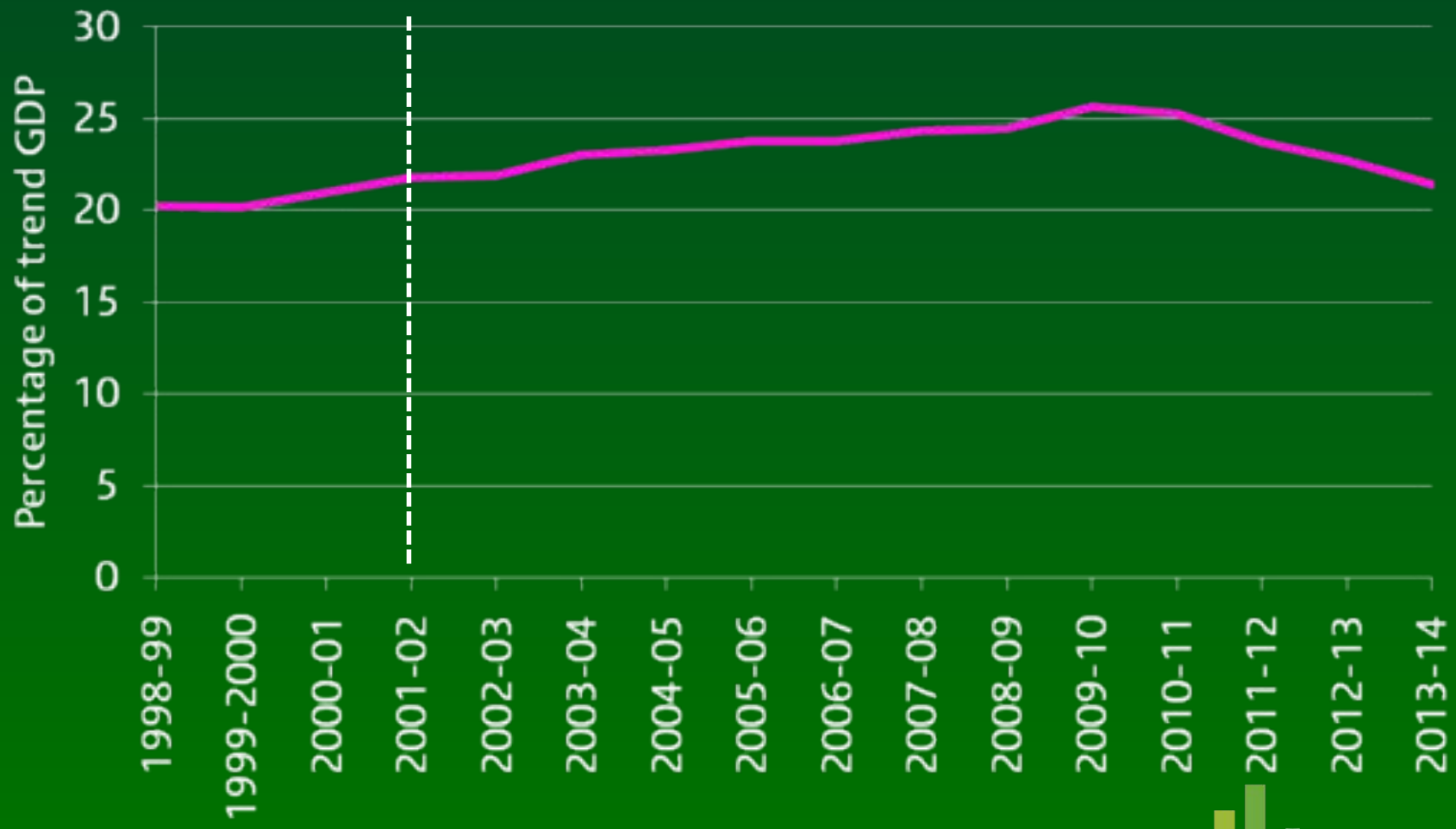
Public service spending increase in Labour's second and third terms reversed



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Recent context – from Government

"In a more challenging climate for research … we will need to carefully protect the excellence of our research base"

(Higher Ambitions Nov 2009)

"Promote increased flexibility in career paths for researchers moving between commercial businesses and universities"
(Ministerial letter to HEFCE 22-12-09)

"All universities should also be expected to demonstrate how their institution prepares its students for employment"
(Ministerial letter to HEFCE 22-12-09)

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The role of Vitae and the Concordat

25th February 2010

8th Annual Postgraduate Conference - NSA

What might RCUK expect in future

- A broad range of quality career planning, training and development opportunities continue to be available for researchers.
- Transferable skills training and career planning are fully embedded in HEI programmes to support researchers.
- Funding for RCUK researchers likely to be part of normal funding mechanisms*
- Other funders contribute their share of the costs of researcher development.
- HEIs continue to enhance the effectiveness and v.f.m. of researcher development programmes.

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* normal funding mechanisms include doctoral training and research grants.

Review of the Roberts Investment

- Assess impact of implementing 4.3 and 5.2 of 'SET for Success' – primarily using/validating existing information.
  - Comment on approaches and mechanisms
  - Assess progress towards embedding and sustainability.
- Identify additionality of funding and RCUK/HEI approaches including:
  - leverage from other sources of funds;
  - how other stakeholders have engaged with the agenda.
- Comment on the international standing of the UK regarding researcher development.
- Report* to provide recommendations for medium and long-term.

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In summary

- Research Councils UK can reasonably expect that HEIs will train and manage their researchers properly:
- Pump priming funding has established the agenda – has it changed the culture?
- How will we take the agenda forward sustainably?

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