



Gradline aims to inform and entertain members in the early stages of their career in microbiology. If you have any news or stories, or would like to see any topics featured, contact **Jane Westwell** (e j.westwell@sgm.ac.uk).



Tristram Hooley and Tennie Videler
from Vitae, look at the new Concordat and ask what it will mean in practice for research staff and PIs.

What is Vitae?

Vitae (www.vitae.ac.uk) is a national organization championing the professional and career development of researchers. Funded by Research Councils UK (RCUK) and managed by CRAC: The Career Development Organization, Vitae builds on previous work by the UK GRAD Programme and UKHERD to involve all stakeholders in supporting the professional development of researchers. Through national activities, and the work of eight regional Hubs, Vitae works with higher education institutions, researchers and employers for real and positive change.

Vitae's vision is for the UK to be world-class in supporting the professional development of researchers and researcher careers.

The programme has four key aims:

- Championing the development and implementation of effective policy
- Enhancing higher education provision through sharing practice and resources
- Providing access to development opportunities and resources
- Building an evidence base to support the researcher development agenda

As a researcher or manager of researchers, Vitae offers you access to a range of information and services that

A Concordat to support the career development of researchers

can support your work; visit the Vitae website to find out more. The website includes dedicated sections dealing with professional development and careers for research staff. We also offer a regular newsletter for supervisors and managers of research and regular events and courses to help you get to grips with issues and access a network of colleagues with whom you can share ideas and practice.

The Concordat

The 2008 Concordat to support the career development of researchers was launched in June. It is a statement of key principles for the support and management of researchers and their careers, agreed by Universities UK and major funders of research in the UK. It recognizes that permanent research or academic positions are limited. The Concordat could deliver real progress but its success depends on researchers and their managers re-examining the ways they work.

The Concordat's key principles are:

- 1 Recognition of the importance of recruiting, selecting and retaining researchers with the highest potential to achieve excellence in research.
- 2 Researchers are recognized and valued by their employing organization as an essential part of their organization's human resources and a key component of their overall strategy to develop and deliver world-class research.

- 3 Researchers are equipped and supported to be adaptable and flexible in an increasingly diverse, mobile, global research environment.
- 4 The importance of researchers' personal and career development, and lifelong learning, is clearly recognized and promoted at all stages of their career.
- 5 Individual researchers share the responsibility for and need to proactively engage in their own personal and career development, and lifelong learning.
- 6 Diversity and equality must be promoted in all aspects of the recruitment and career management of researchers.
- 7 The sector and all stakeholders will undertake regular and collective reviews of their progress in strengthening the attractiveness and sustainability of research careers in the UK.

What will the Concordat achieve?

The Concordat encourages institutions to embed support for researchers and maximize their potential both within research roles and beyond. Managers of researchers (such as PIs) are encouraged to look for opportunities to develop their staff by mentoring them and giving them more responsibilities. Typically this might be done through appraisals, professional development courses and access to tailored advice.

Personal developmental activity often impacts the success of projects; it can increase the effectiveness of researchers and help keep motivation and vision within a longer term career context.

Commitment to professional development also has to be personal. Researchers should take control of their development and make the most of appropriate opportunities offered by their employers.

Practical ideas for implementation of the Concordat for research staff:

See if you can join a mentoring scheme, either as a mentor or a mentee

Be proactive about networking

Are you represented? Could you join a committee in your institution or a postdoctoral or similar society?

Discuss your career and development in an appraisal with your line manager

Explore your career options with a careers advisor. Many institutions now have one specializing in research staff

Attend appropriate transferable skills training courses

Consider how your current skills could be translated to other careers

You can find out more about the Concordat and related developments by visiting the Vitae website at www.vitae.ac.uk/policy-practice/

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SGM Meeting at Harrogate, Spring 2009

Workshop for early career microbiologists – Personality at work

1915, Monday 30 March 2009

Delivered by Sarah Blackford (*Society for Experimental Biology*)

Have you ever wondered why there are some people you get on with and others you don't? Why it is that some people just don't seem to be thinking along the same wavelength as you or seem disorganized or dispassionate?

In this session, you will learn about a well-known personality inventory, the MBTI (Myers Briggs Type Indicator), and how it can help to decipher between different personality types. The session will give you the opportunity to recognize some of the

personality elements which describe you or that you recognize in your friends or colleagues and will attempt to demonstrate the importance of considering personality in your day-to-day working life and for your career development and planning. As well as being informative, the session will take a light-hearted and interactive approach giving you the insights as well as the practical uses for this fascinating instrument.

Sarah Blackford is the Education & Public Affairs Officer for the Society

for Experimental Biology, SEB (www.sebiology.org). With an early background in biological sciences research and publishing, she is now a qualified careers coach and has worked as a careers consultant within university careers services and, more recently, with the SEB for over 10 years. Sarah is a qualified MBTI (Myers Briggs Type Indicator) practitioner and uses it as a basis for self-awareness in the career development programmes she runs which are specifically designed for postgraduates and postdoctorals.

The session will be followed by buffet and drinks.

This event is restricted to postgraduate students and first postdocs attending the conference and pre-registration is essential.

Enhancing the undergraduate experience

Each year, the SGM Vacation Studentship scheme funds more than 40 undergraduate research projects lasting 6–8 weeks during the summer before the students enter their final year. Summer students gain valuable practical experience and an insight to microbiology research. **Jane Westwell** caught up with three students from the 2007 cohort.



Li Yen Mah – University of Manchester
(supervised by Dr Christian Heintzen)

Li Yen's project looked at VVD – a photoreceptor and repressor of light-signalling in the model eukaryotic microbe *Neurospora crassa* that also plays a role in modulating light-resetting of the organism's circadian clock. The aim of her project was to identify domains within VVD that are important for resetting of the circadian clockwork. After the project Li Yen commented, 'I am very inspired by Dr Heintzen's and his team's hard work, and this experience has instilled in me the passion to pursue a career in scientific research.'

Li Yen has been accepted by the Beatson Institute of Cancer Research in Glasgow to pursue a PhD studying how autophagy is regulated, and how this might integrate with apoptosis to cause tumour cell death. Her long-term aim is to be a principal investigator in a university.



Leanne Allum – Cardiff University
(supervised by Professor Lynn Boddy)

Leanne's project focused on investigating isolates of the endangered oak polypore *Piptoporus quercinus* for evidence of inbreeding. Samples came from different areas of Windsor Great Park, Germany and Wales and early results from Leanne's project indicated that the species may be highly inbred. Before the project started Leanne hadn't been sure that a career in science was for her but afterwards she observed, 'The placement definitely made me want to continue working in labs as I loved the hands on experience.' Leanne was pleased to graduate with an upper second class honours degree and aims to find a lab-based role near her home in Wiltshire.



Anna Janowicz –
University of Glasgow
(supervised by Dr Robert Davies)

Anna studied two different ethanol-producing micro-organisms – *Zymomonas mobilis* and *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*, determining which one would be most suitable for large-scale bioethanol production. Anna enjoyed the opportunity to learn much more about real-life research work than during routine laboratory classes. She found the studentship good preparation for her industrial placement at the University of South Bohemia in the Czech Republic which started a month after she completed the studentship. Anna commented, 'I think that all students of biological sciences should have an opportunity like this to find out what real research is like and whether it is a good choice for them or not. It reassured me that this is something I want to do in future. It also provided a good insight into what to do if things go awry, which is a helpful experience regardless of what field you go into!'

Anna returned to Glasgow recently to complete her MSc. She plans to apply for a position as a trainee clinical microbiologist and continue research in this field with a view to one day leading her own research team.