

**Careers Provision for Doctoral Students:
A Survey of National and International institutions
Study 1: Survey of Good Practice in Ireland**

AHECS Postgraduate Working Group

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Executive Summary

The survey of careers services for doctoral/postgraduate research students (PGRs) in Ireland aimed to identify and collate current practice to help promote and share best practice career provision for postgraduate research students. 16 respondents completed the survey, reporting a wide range of career provision.

Key Findings:

Careers provision:

- All institutions reported that careers support for PGR students is primarily delivered by careers professionals, who are most often aligned with student support.
- In 63% of organisations funding for PGR careers services is drawn from the careers service budget and in the majority of organisations, careers training and support is open to all students and is not specifically for PGR students.
- Provision is supported by a range of others with 69% of institutions indicating that academic staff are involved in the delivery of PGR careers services. 44% of institutions involve employers or alumni.
- Responsibility for PGR student career provision is often part of a role, alongside working with other groups of students or postdoctoral researchers

Delivery:

- 39% delivered mandatory modules and 62% delivered to the whole cohort as part of orientation/induction. 64% reported delivery for specific subject areas.
- Most institutions focused on face-to-face delivery, with individual careers consultancy being the most likely area for virtual delivery (56%).
- 93% reported communication about PGR careers services via email. The use of graduate school and student mailing lists were also popular communication methods.

Content and resources:

- Almost 90% of organisations delivered workshops in career planning, CV and applications (academic and general) and interviews. A wide range of other individual workshops were also reported.
- Respondents listed a wide range of careers resources used, with Vitae being the most common.

Priorities:

- Respondents identified that the most useful areas for AHECS to provide PGR Careers support would be in relation to options outside of academia and international mobility.

1. Background

A survey of careers services for doctoral/postgraduate research students (PGRs) in Ireland was conducted by the AHECS PG Students Working Group in Summer 2015. The aim of the survey was to identify and collate current practice to help promote and share best practice career provision for postgraduate research students across Ireland. The survey forms the first part of a series of work by the working group whose overall aims are:

- To informally and formally share good practice amongst members
- To benchmark good practice of careers service provision for doctoral research students in Ireland and internationally using quantitative and qualitative data
- To recommend further research, activities, training or strategies for AHECS working with doctoral research students based on the findings

2. Method

A survey was designed and distributed via SurveyMonkey. The survey was piloted with members of the PG Working Group and following minor revisions circulated to relevant careers contacts in universities and institutes across Ireland. Based on the academic year 2014/15, respondents were asked to provide details of career provision for PGR students. 16 respondents completed the questionnaire, representing 10 universities, 5 institutes of technology and 1 college of education.

Participating institutions included:

- Dublin City University
- Dublin Institute of Technology
- Institute of Technology, Carlow
- Institute of Technology, Tralee
- Limerick Institute of Technology
- Maynooth University
- NUI Galway
- The Open University
- Queen's University Belfast
- St Patrick's College, Drumcondra
- Trinity College Dublin
- Ulster University
- University College Cork
- University College Dublin
- University of Limerick
- Waterford Institute of Technology

3. Findings

3.1 Context

Respondents indicated the total number of postgraduate students at their institution:

Table 1: Number of Postgraduate Students per institution

Institution	PGT Students	PGR Students	Full-time (%)	Part-time (%)	AHSS (%)	STEM (%)	Health Sciences (%)
1	3647	1446	81	19	28	37	36
2	13574	651	47	53	61	34	4
3	100	-	-	-	-	-	-
4	4521	893	72	28	41	43	16
5	2000	400	-	-	-	-	-
6	2666	1668	84	16	42	38	20
7	3000	1800	90	10	-	-	-
8	987	2362	83	17	-	-	-
9	1400	850	85	15	27	49	24
10	28000	1100	-	-	-	-	-

Total responses: 10. Figures in *blue* are approximate

The reported number of postgraduate students varied widely across institutions, but in most cases identified, the vast majority of students were full-time.

3.2 Postgraduate Strategy

Respondents were asked what the institution's key strategic objectives were in relation to PGRs. Not all had specific objectives for PGRs, with 2 indicating the strategy was under review.

6 institutions identified strategic objectives:

Develop a more vibrant postgraduate research community and increase the number of registered PGRs and doctoral degrees awarded (including establishment of a new Graduate School)

- *The Open University*

*Exceed the national benchmark for PhD successful completions within 5 years
Increased number of PhD degrees awarded annually
Increase the quality and diversity of provision*

- *Ulster University*

Increase the numbers of PGR students and increase all associated funding in tandem.

- *Maynooth University*

*By 2020, 80% in structured PhD programmes (40% increase);
10% increase in the number of academic staff involved in research student supervision;
€60m direct research funding annually, increased from 52m;
Ensure all PhD students enjoy a high quality research experience and have opportunities to build successful careers in a range of sectors*

- *University of Galway*

To increase throughput of postgraduate students

- *University of Limerick*

Increase research under five thematic areas: Biological and Medical Sciences, Earth and Ocean Sciences, Physical Sciences, Engineering and Maths and ICT, Humanities and Social Sciences, Business and Law.

- *University College Cork*

Few identified PGR recruitment targets. No targets relating to particular disciplinary areas were identified.

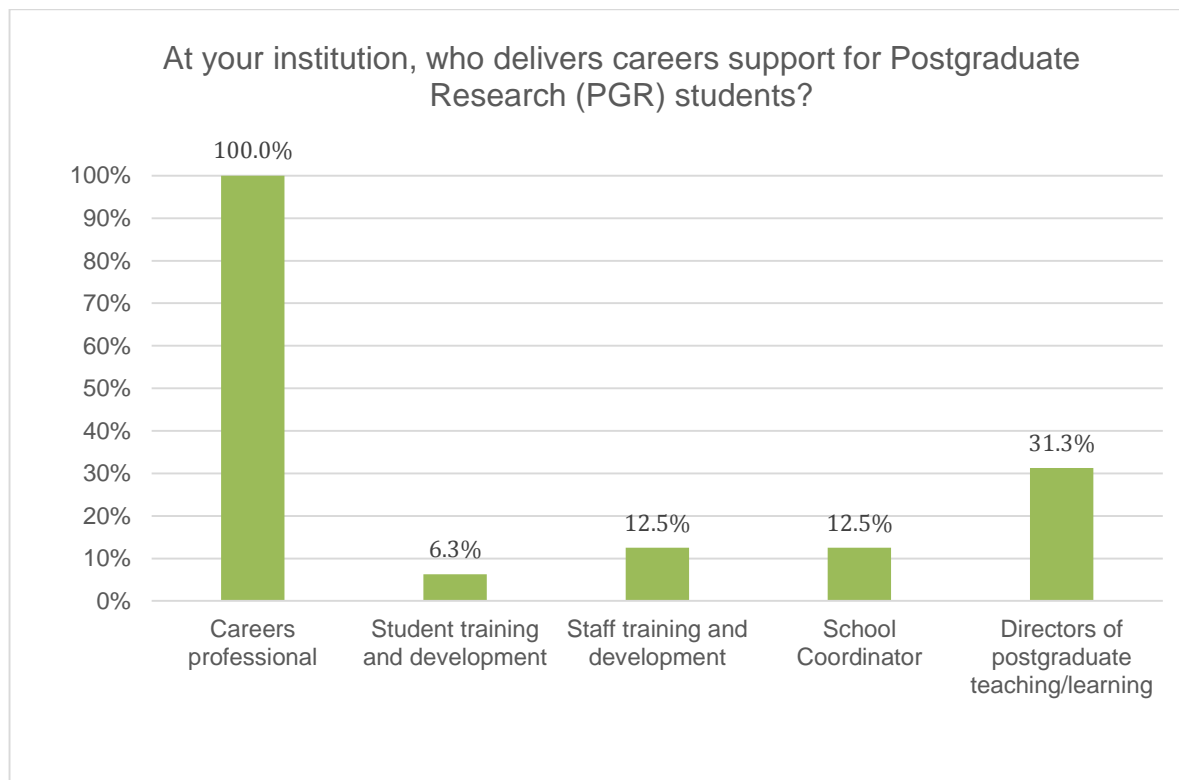
Table 2: Recruitment targets

Institutional targets	Targets relating to particular geographic regions
This is based on available funding - no specific target is set	20% non EU nationals
By 2020 in excess of 200 doctoral graduates per year	-
Approx. intake of 200 for AY2015	-
Increase by 1-2% over the next 2-3 years.	-

3.3 Provision of Career Support for PGR Students

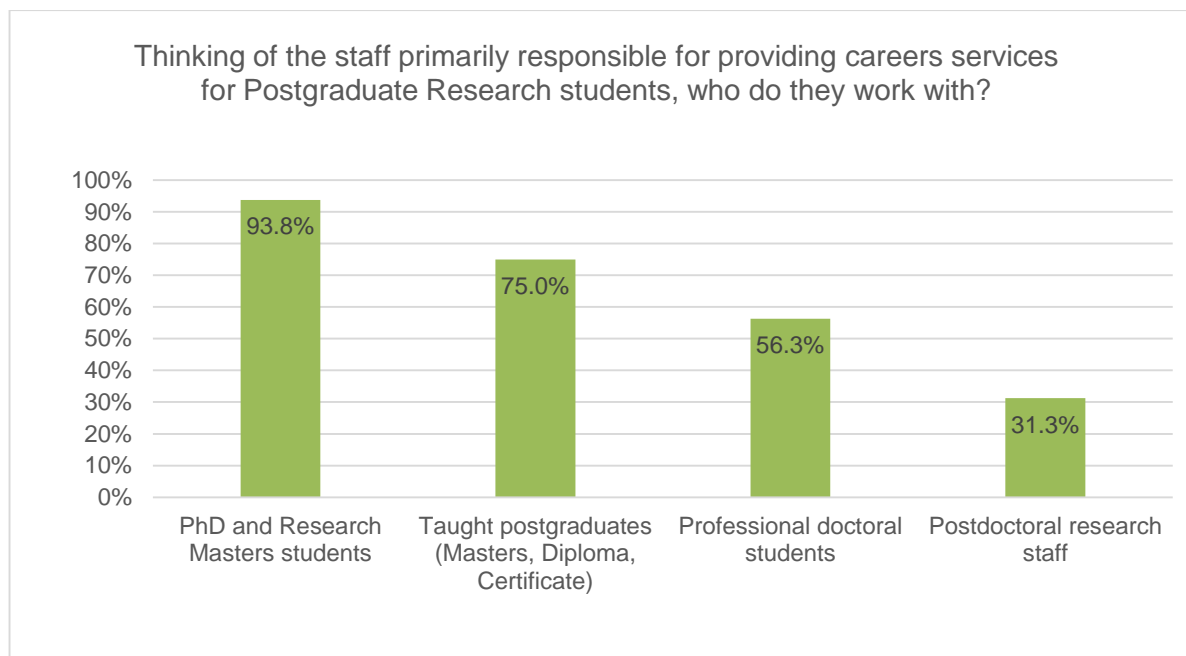
When asked who provides careers support for postgraduate students, 100% of institutions indicated that this was provided by a careers professional. As detailed below, a range of other providers were also identified. In addition, one institution commented that supervisors also provide career support.

Figure 1: Delivery of careers support



Nine institutions reported that their careers provision for PGR students was primarily aligned within student support, two reported it was aligned to a Graduate School and two reported it was aligned with Academia/Teaching and Learning. A further three participants identified alignment with a combination of departments.

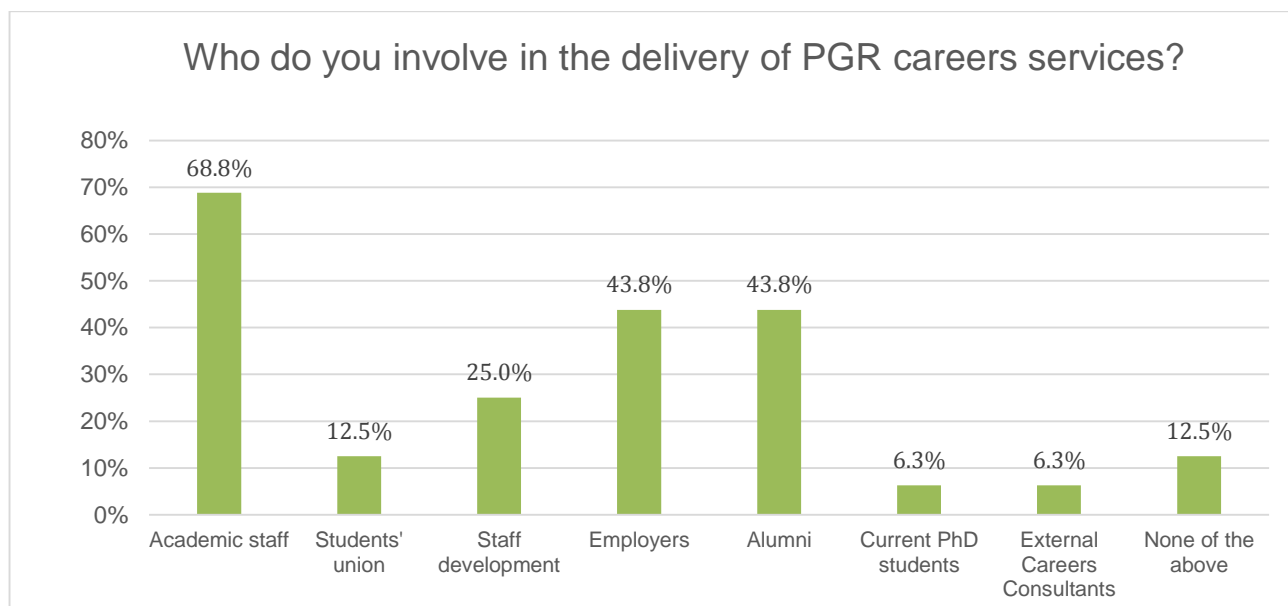
Figure 2: Primary responsibility for PGR careers service provision



In 75% of cases, staff who worked with PGR students also worked with postgraduate taught students, and in 56% of cases they also worked with professional doctoral students. 33% of institutions provide joint careers events specifically for postgraduate research and postgraduate taught students. 20% provide joint careers events for postgraduate research students and postdoctoral researchers.

Respondents were also asked who they involved in the delivery of PGR careers services. Nearly 70% involved academic staff and over 40% involved employers and alumni.

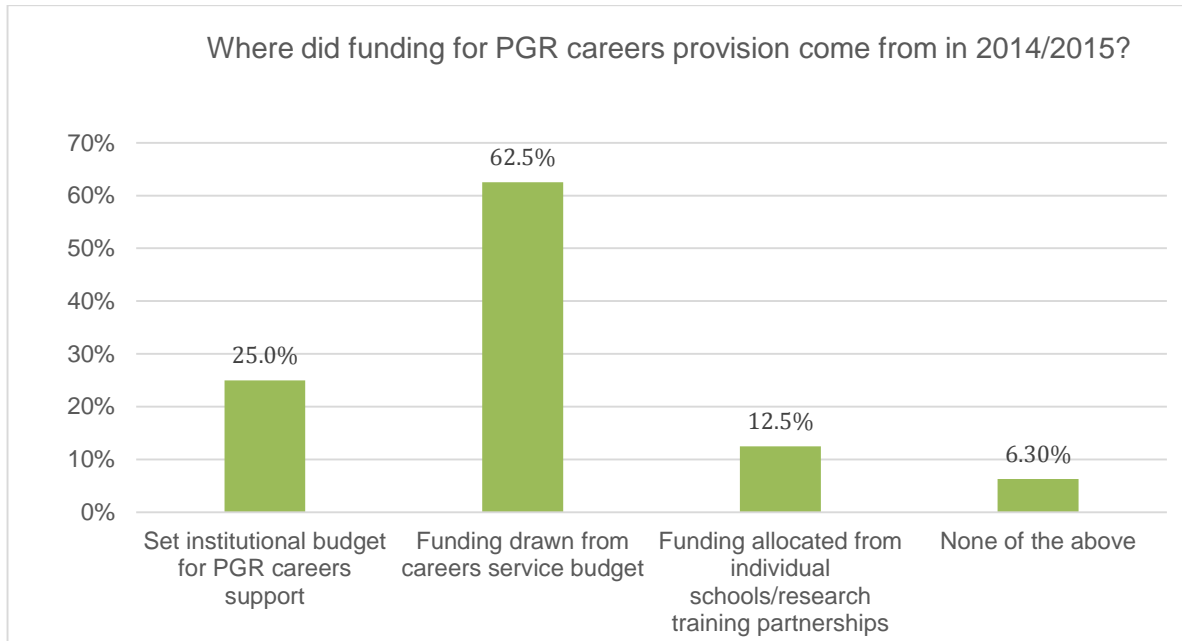
Figure 3: Involvement in delivery of PGR careers services



When asked how PGR careers services are allocated, 56% reported that resources were allocated ad hoc across the service. Two institutions (12.5%) had a dedicated member of staff to work with PGR students, two worked with freelance consultants, one had staff time allocated to work with PGR students, two had a combination of the above and one reported none of the above.

In most cases funding for PGR careers provision was drawn from the careers service budget.

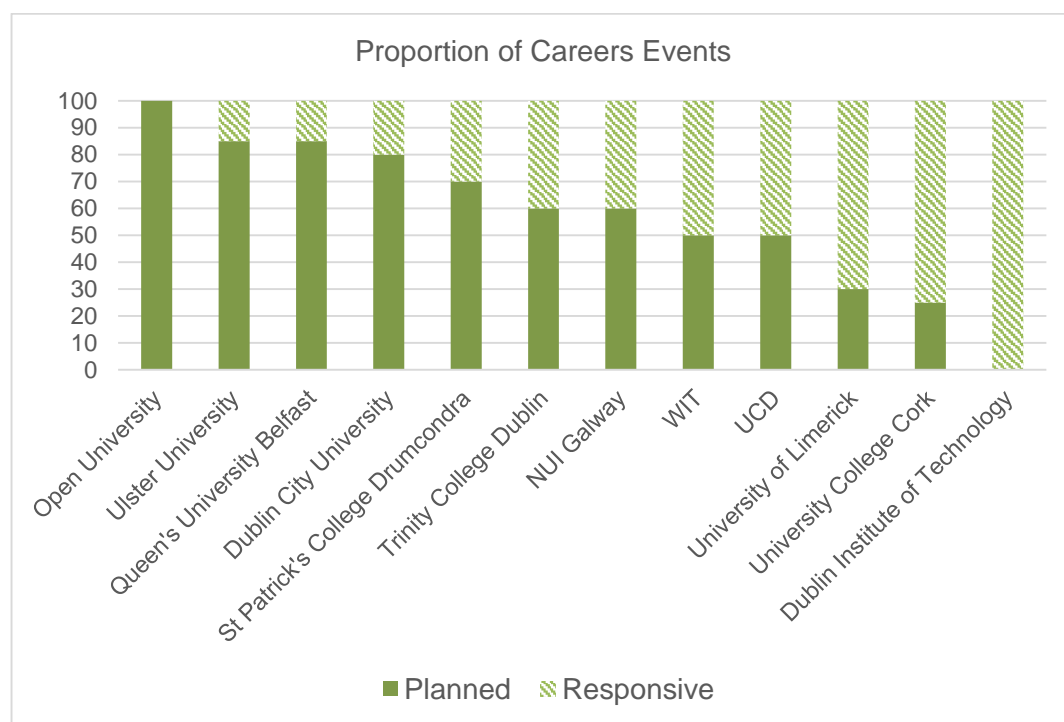
Figure 4: Source of funding for PGR careers provision



3.4 Careers event delivery

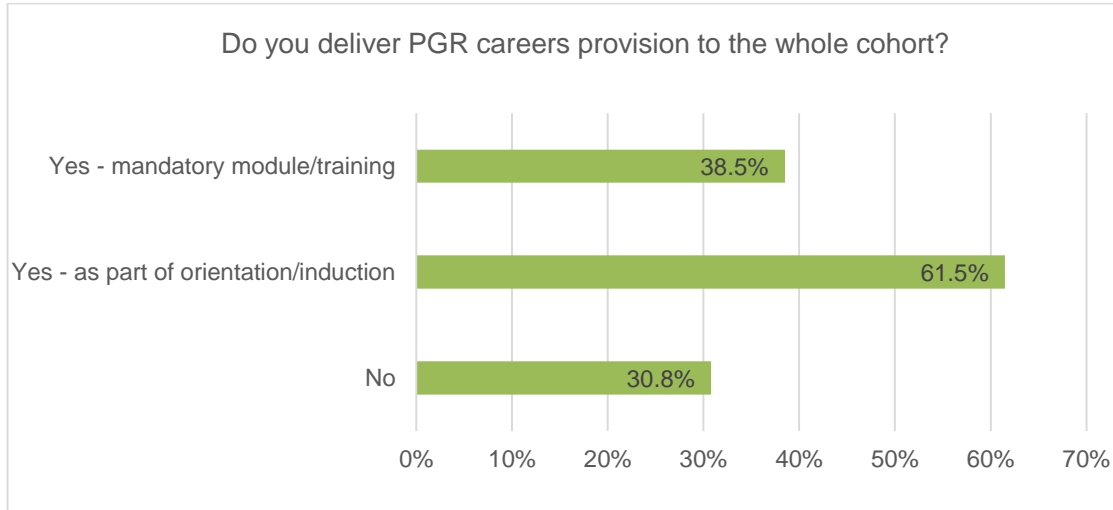
Respondents were asked to estimate the proportion of careers events that were planned and the proportion that were responsive to demand. This varied considerably, as detailed below:

Figure 5: Estimated proportion of careers events planned/ responsive to demand



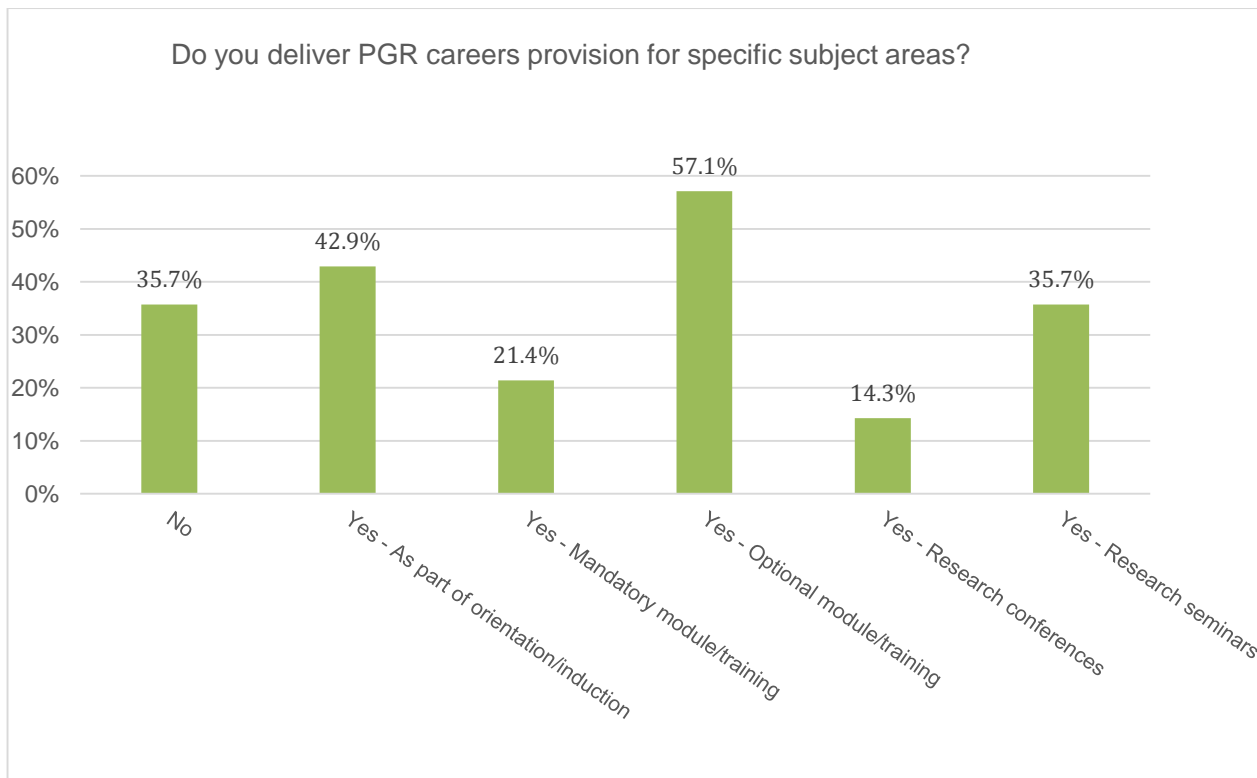
Over 60% of institutions delivered PGR careers provision to the whole cohort as part of induction, and 39% delivered mandatory training to the whole cohort.

Figure 6: Delivery of PGR Careers provision to cohort



A number of respondents added comments identifying that they offer optional training. 43% delivered PGR careers provision for specific subject areas as part of induction, and 57% delivered optional training for specific subject areas.

Figure 7: Delivery of subject-specific PGR Careers provision



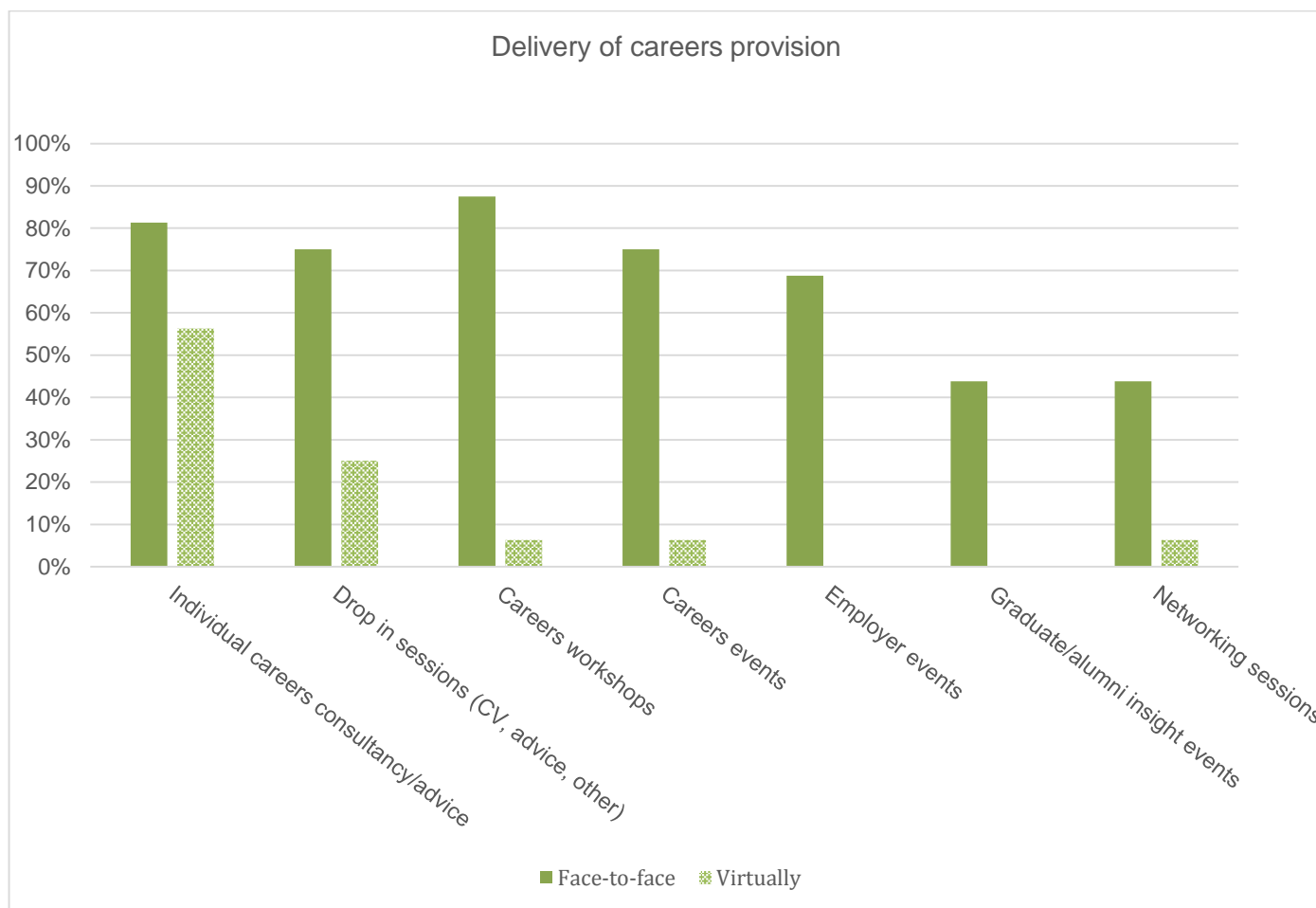
37.5% of respondents reported that they deliver specific careers workshops for PGR students, and the majority provide a wide range of services open to all students, including PGRs. Three institutions provided some type of discipline-specific provision.

Table 3: Type of careers services delivered for PGR students

	Open only to PGRs	Open to all students including PGRs	Discipline-specific
Individual careers consultancy/advice	12.5%	75.0%	6.3%
Drop in sessions (CV, advice, other)	6.3%	68.8%	6.3%
Careers workshops	37.5%	68.8%	6.3%
Careers events	6.3%	75.0%	6.3%
Employer events	12.5%	68.8%	12.5%
Graduate/alumni insight events	18.8%	31.3%	12.5%
Networking sessions	12.5%	37.5%	6.3%
Careers mentoring	0	12.5%	0

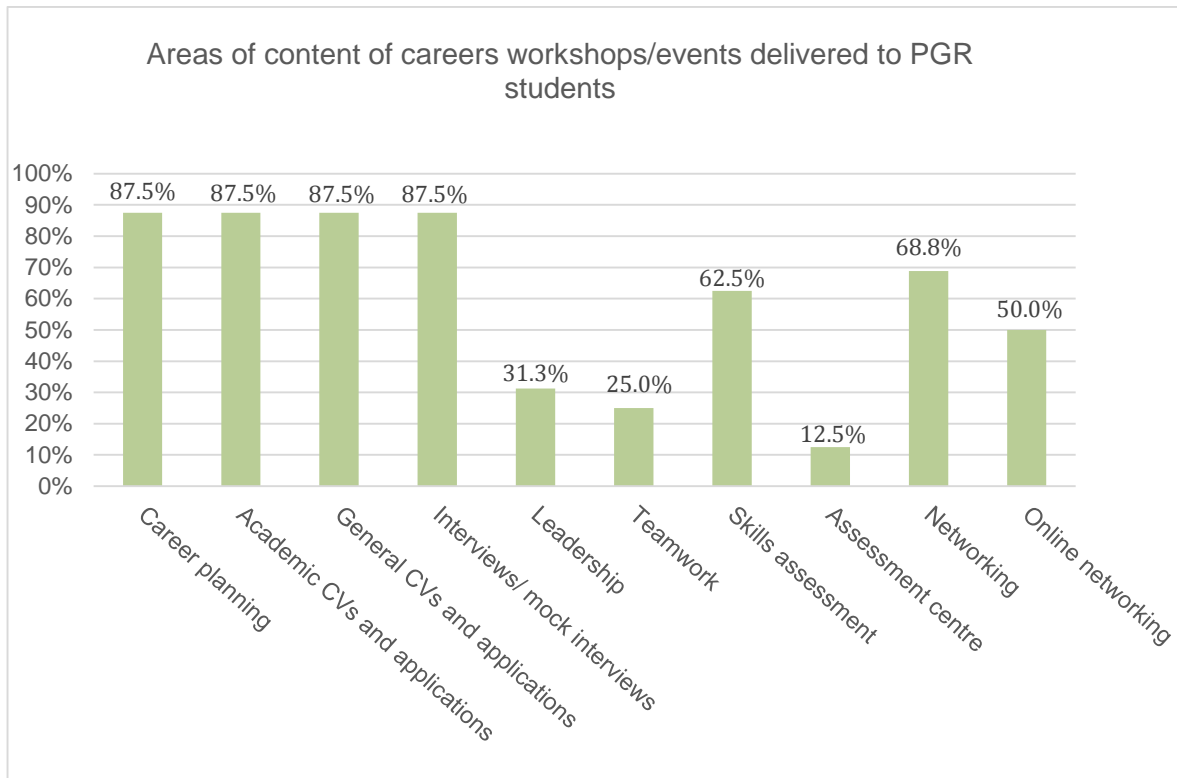
Most organisations deliver the provision face-to-face, with over 50% also delivering individual careers consultancy virtually.

Figure 8: PGR Career Provision delivery methods



Participants were asked which software they used to deliver provision virtually. Skype was most commonly cited, with others including Blackboard, virtual research environment linked to website, careers service CRM system, Moodle (Loop), Careers Connect, SULIS based on Sakai (rSmart CLE research), email and online videos of events.

Figure 9: Content of careers workshops and events



Almost 90% of organisations delivered workshops in career planning, CVs and applications (academic and general) and interviews. Additional courses added in the comments included career options, transferable skills, role of mentoring, presentation skills, alumni experience, public engagement and commercial awareness.

Ten respondents provided titles of the courses they deliver for PGR students and these are listed in Table 4 below according to the main topics covered.

Table 4: Titles of courses delivered for PGR Students

Institution	Topic				
	Career Planning and Development	Career Options Outside Academia	Job Search Skills	Academic Job Search Skills	Interview Preparation
1	Developing and Consolidating Your Research Career (as part of professional skills for research leaders online courses)				
2		Careers in Other Areas Outside Academia – VITAE course			
3	Future Ready Development Programme	After my PhD	Communicating Skills to Employers (all years)	Effective Academic Applications (all years)	Preparing for Academic Interviews (2 nd year +)
		Employment in Research			Preparing for Interviews Outside Academia (2 nd year +)
		Career Options			

4	Planning and Managing your Research Career (credit bearing module offered to total PGR population)	Academic and Alternative Employment (seminar and networking for specific schools)		Academic and Non - Academic CVs and Online Profile Support (to PRTL-funded PhD students, cross-institution)	
5	Introduction to Strategic Career Management (Yr 1 PhD induction)			Developing Professional CVs (3 rd yr)	Interview Skills (3 rd year)
	Strategically Planning Your Career (year 1 6 months after induction)				Mock Interviews (3 rd year)
	Building your Career: Adding value to our career (Yr 2)				
6	Life Span/Life Changes and Choices for the Young Researcher	Career Choices and Future Trends	SMART Job Search Strategies for Researchers	CVs for Researchers	
	Finding Support – the Role of the Mentor		Transferable Competencies		
	Help – I don't know what I want to be when I grow up (generic but all attendees were PGRs)				

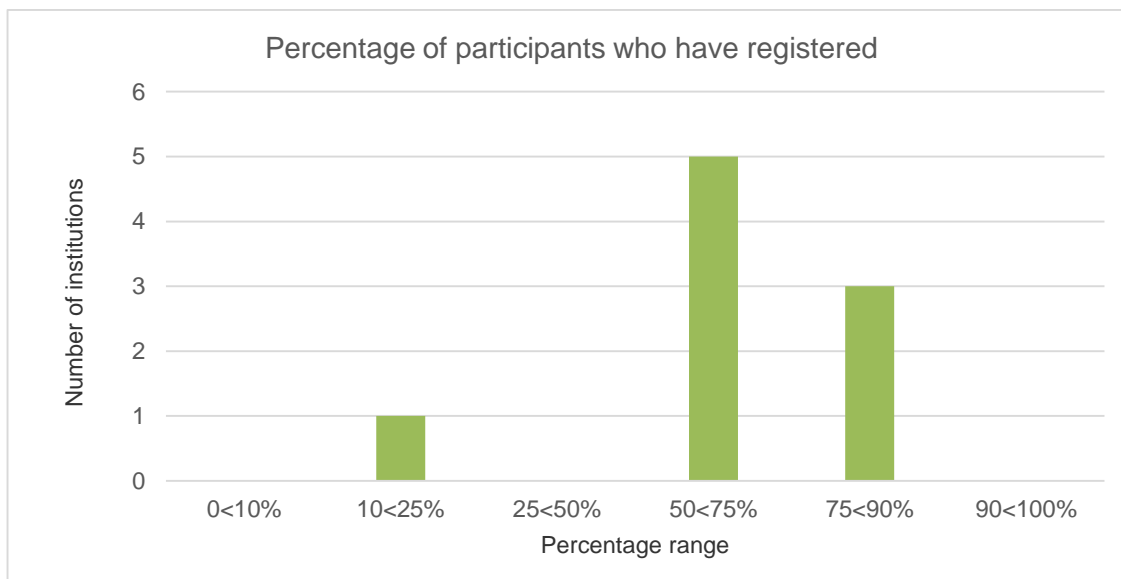
7	Career Planning		Job Hunting	CV Workshop	Interview Skills
8	Career Planning for PG		Networking	CV and Applications for PG	Interviews for PG
			Your Online Presence		
9	Careers Service – What the Careers Service Can Do For You	Careers Inside and Outside Academia	Exploring Networking and the Hidden Job Market	CVs and Cover Letters (Academic and Non Academic)/	Presenting Yourself to Employers
		Planning a Career in Research or Academia	Career Networking – Making the Most Out of LinkedIn	Creating a Tailored CV	Preparing for Interviews
	Career Planning for Research Postgraduates	Research Postgraduate Briefing – First Destination Research Findings			Practice Makes Perfect – Mock interviews
10	PhD Internship	Broadening Horizons – Humanities – Alumni Sharing their Experiences			

3.5 Student Engagement

Although many respondents found it difficult to say at which stage PGR students are most likely to engage with careers services, overall it was thought that it was more likely for PGR students to engage during the later stages of their research with 36% indicating that they were most likely to engage in 3rd year and in 4th year, and 25% indicating they were most likely to engage in 1st year and 2nd year.

Where institutions have pre-registration for careers events or workshops, most institutions estimated that 50 < 75% of those who register attend the event.

Figure 10: Attendance levels



When asked the total number of students who attended PGR/PGT careers events, the institutions identified the above numbers. Participants were also asked to indicate the average number of students who attended per event (where respondents had indicated a range, the mean was calculated).



Table 5: Reported number of students attending PGR/PGT careers events

PGR			PGT		
Total number attending	Proportion of PGR population	Average number attending per event	PGT	Proportion of PGT population	Average number attending per event
10	-	-	150	-	-
20	-	20	100	100%	100
40	-	-	400	-	-
>40	2%	12	>300	11%	32
60	3%	-	200	7%	-
-	-	75	-	-	-
122	14%	10	283	20%	8
150	14%	90	150	1%	-
160	19%	11	190	14%	28
295	20%	15	-	-	-
312	13%	30	218	24%	40
400	100%	-	400	20%	-

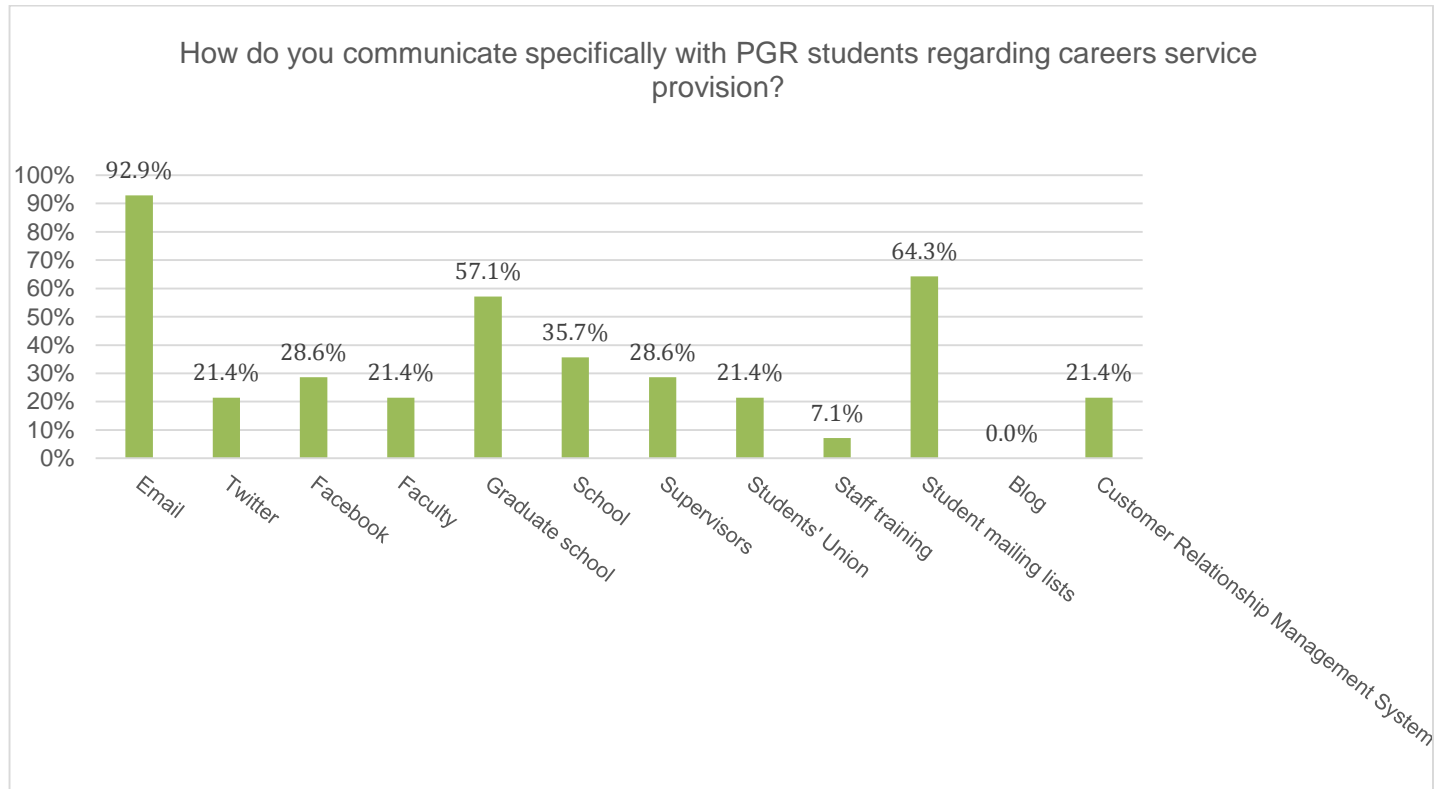
Total number attending figures in *blue* are estimates.

It is clear from Table 5 that the number of students attending careers events varied widely.

3.6 Communication

Most institutions reported that they communicated via email. Use of graduate school and student mailing lists was also common. Other communication methods referred to in additional comments included a virtual research environment and plans to introduce a Customer Relationship Management System.

Figure 11: Communication methods



3.7 Resources

The most commonly used resource was Vitae (www.vitae.ac.uk), which was reported as being used by 69% of the institutions.

Other reported resources used include:

- Epigeum software for research students (paid licence) - <https://www.epigeum.com/>
- Windmills
- Prospects.ac.uk (free)- www.prospects.ac.uk
- Findaphd.com / postdoc.com (free) – www.findaphd.com www.findapostoc.com
- Euraxess - <http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/>
- Fulbright - <http://www.fulbright.org.uk/>
- Profiling for Success (subscription) - <http://profilingforsuccess.com/>
- Academicjobseu.com - <http://academicjobseu.com/>
- Careeredu.eu - <http://www.careeredu.eu/>
- Timeshighereducation.co.uk – www.timeshighereducation.co.uk



- CareerLeader (fee) - <https://www.careerleader.com/colleges.html>
- Going Global (fee) - <http://www.goinglobal.com/>
- rcuk.ac.uk – www.rcuk.ac.uk
- Gradcracker - <http://www.gradcracker.com/>
- Science Careers <http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/>
- Eurograduate - <http://eurograduate.com/>
- Psychoneuroxy - <http://www.psychoneuroxy.com/>
- SHL – www.shldirect.com/en-us/practice-tests
- Aptitude Online – www.aptitudeonline.co.uk
- Beyond the PhD – www.beyondthephd.com
- OPQ Psychometric testing (pay fee) - <https://online.shl.com/gb/en-gb>

Respondents were asked to identify any resources that they had created for PGR students.

Resources are listed below:

- Contributed to Research School website
- Adapted workshop materials
- Information resources with links to academic and non-academic resources from jobs to career change book references – adapted from AGCAS Contract Researchers: List of resources
- Workshops and resources for PMRC module
- Majority of resources adapted from other sources to suit PhD students e.g. PhD skills audit, mock interview sessions, skills card sort (adapted for research postgraduate skills)
- Developed skills assessment and professional development plan
- Handouts for workshops
- CV guidance adapted from Vitae
- Development planner

3.8 Employer Engagement

Respondents were asked to identify employers they engaged with specifically for PGR careers events. While a number of respondents indicated that they didn't engage employers specifically, four institutions provided details of employers they engaged with. These included:

- McKinsey (Associate career track for PhD, MBA graduates)
- Technologies Inc (alumni link- which employs many Arts and Humanities postgraduate students)
- Dropbox
- Tramp Press
- NISRA
- NI Civil Service
- Radox
- SAP Software
- Solutions Musgrave Group
- Citi (alumni links)
- Almac
- Norbrook
- PwC
- Actavis (alumni link)
- POST
- Andor (alumni link)
- DOW (alumni link)
- Fichtner Consulting (alumni link)
- Santander Universities Ltd (internship scheme)

3.9 Areas for AHECS support

Participants were asked to identify up to three areas that would be most useful if AHECS were to provide support for PGR careers.

Table 7: Preferred areas of support from AHECS

Area of support	Response Percent
Options outside of academia	68.8%
International mobility	50.0%
Career planning	43.8%
Skills assessment	37.5%
LinkedIn/online networking	25.0%
Networking	18.8%
Leadership skills	12.5%
CVs	0.0%
Interviews/ mock interviews/	0.0%
Teamwork skills	0.0%

Respondents identified that the most useful areas for AHECS to provide PGR Careers support would be in relation to options outside of academia and international mobility.

4. Summary and areas for further exploration

The range of careers provision for PGR students varies. Although the amount of provision specifically for PGR students is limited, examples of best practice in workshops, communication resources and delivery can be identified across institutions. In order to benchmark provision in Ireland against the broader field of postgraduate careers provision, it is intended that a survey will be conducted to explore careers provision for PGR students in the UK and internationally. In addition to the areas considered above, areas of interest for further exploration include employer engagement, internships, provision for international students and evaluation of impact.