Using Descriptors in the Portfolio of Activity

For an introduction to the PGR Portfolio of Activity see:
www.liv.ac.uk/media/livacuk/pgr-development/Short_guide_PGR_Portfolio_of_Activity.pdf

See also Using the Portfolio of Activity to prepare for your Career

Descriptors in the PGR Portfolio of Activity

The descriptors are an optional feature of the PGR Portfolio of Activity that allow you to annotate specific skills set out in the Researcher Developer Framework (RDF) to the activities recorded in the Portfolio. You can add any of the 63 RDF descriptors to any of your recorded activities, independent of the section used for the original record.

Why use descriptors? There are many reasons why you will find it useful to maintain a list of your developing skills and attributes to supplement the list of training, events and achievements:

1.   You wish to create your own skills audit to maintain record of personal development and skills developed over the period of your research degree
2.   You want to associate the recorded activities with more than one RDF domain, since the activity (or achievement) could be associated with several parts of the RDF .
3.   You want to build a case for professional qualifications that require you to provide evidence that you have experience in a number of specific skills.
4.   You are preparing for job applications and need to maintain list of skills, and evidence for these skills, that you can match to specific job descriptions

For specific advice on how to add the descriptors in the PGR Toolbox software, see the introduction to the PGR Portfolio of Activity.

Choosing suitable descriptors

Researcher Developer Statement (RDS):
www.vitae.ac.uk/CMS/files/upload/Researcher%20development%20statement.pdf

Introductory tutorial on the RDF for PGRs at Liverpool see; pcwww.liv.ac.uk/~pgro/RDF/

And also: Interactive Guide to the RDF sub-domains

You will need some familiarity with the RDF structure to choose the descriptors. If you are unfamiliar with the RDF, we recommend that you begin by printing out the Researcher Developer Statement (see links above). When you select a descriptor, you will need to record the domain and sub-domain to find the descriptor within the software menus within the Portfolio of Activity.

> For example, you may write an Ethics proposal and record that activity in Domain C, and add 'Time Management', as a descriptor from Domain/sub-domain B/B2 to record that you had to manage difficult constraints on your time whilst writing the proposal.

When you start using this part of the tool, you may find it easier to focus on a few significant descriptors/skills that are, either particularly relevant to your needs as a researcher or are clearly important for your future career.

> For example, as part of your personal development planning, have a look at the descriptors in the RDS and allocate scores out of 5 in terms of the skills that you think you should develop or improve on in the next three – six months. When you record an activity in the Portfolio that is part of this development, you can annotate the descriptor to that activity..

> Alternatively you can use one of the **Lenses** provided by **Vitae** ...

Lenses on the RDF

Full list of these lenses on the RDF, and links to the RDF files (Vitae website):
www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers/437191/Increasing-the-impact-and-engagement-of-researchers.html

If you may need to develop skills for a specific career path or are aiming to meet professional qualifications, you can gain useful advice the Vitae lens on the RDF. These are brief, 4 page documents that cover areas such as Teaching, Employability, Engineering and Leadership.

These documents match relevant descriptors in the RDF to the skills required by the appropriate professional bodies, and provide further advice about the level, and context of achievement, that you should demonstrate to meet professional requirements.

> The lenses may appear complex at first viewing. However you can begin by focussing on just three to four of the recommended areas and then develop a plan for how you can acquire, and then evidence these recommended skills.

Evidencing your Skills

Once you have annotated a descriptor to a recorded activity in the portfolio, you should edit the description part of the activity record to explain why you have added the descriptor, and the level of your achievement.

> For example, the following might be recorded as an achievement under Ethics with a descriptor of Time Management:
> "*I had two weeks to write the application, to meet deadlines for a specific board meeting, whilst maintaining research measurements. The deadline was met and I successfully defended the proposal at the June meeting of the Ethics board to begin the project in July.*"

> For many cases this information will be invaluable when you make job and research applications and are required to supply evidence for particular skills areas. The amount of evidence will depend on the type of applications, but a few pertinent notes in the Portfolio can be more easily expanded at a later date.

You might also consider the 'STAR' approach here – see our guide to 'Using the Portfolio of Activity to prepare for your Career'.

If you are assembling a portfolio to meet professional standards, you should check the specific requirements and ensure that your description matches that required in terms of key words and the level of achievement that would be expected.

> You can also refer to the RDF phases to assess your evidence for descriptors ...

The RDF phases

Full Researcher Developer Framework:
www.vitae.ac.uk/CMS/files/upload/Vitae-Researcher-Development-Framework.pdf

The full Researcher Development Framework defines up to 5 phases for each of the descriptors. Each phase describes a level of ability for that descriptor/ attribute.

> As a PhD student you are expected to aim for phase 1 on most areas, although there is no direct association between the phases and career progression.

If you want to claim a high level of ability for some descriptors, you should assess how your achievements can match the descriptions of the higher level phases. You can use these phases to build up your evidence base for future use when you need demonstrate those skills to employers or professional bodies.