

What is an RDF and who is it for?

A **researcher development framework (RDF)** is a framework for identifying the knowledge and skills that we use and develop as researchers.

In the UK, the most well-known RDF is the [Vitae](#) one. Most universities use this the Vitae RDF to organize Development (or Training) Needs Analysis with their postgraduate researchers (PGRs).

Development Needs Analysis (DNA), also known as Training Needs Analysis (TNA) is a process for identifying the skills, knowledge and networks that will help you complete your doctorate and pursue a career in research.

An RDF is useful as...

- A framework for organizing professional and research development opportunities
- A career planning tool to reflect on and strategise researcher development
- A map or guide for overviewing available training and development opportunities
- A diagnostic tool to identify existing skills, knowledge and networks, and set objectives to develop new ones
- A tool to kickstart conversations with supervisors and others about research and career plans

The SWDTP RDF

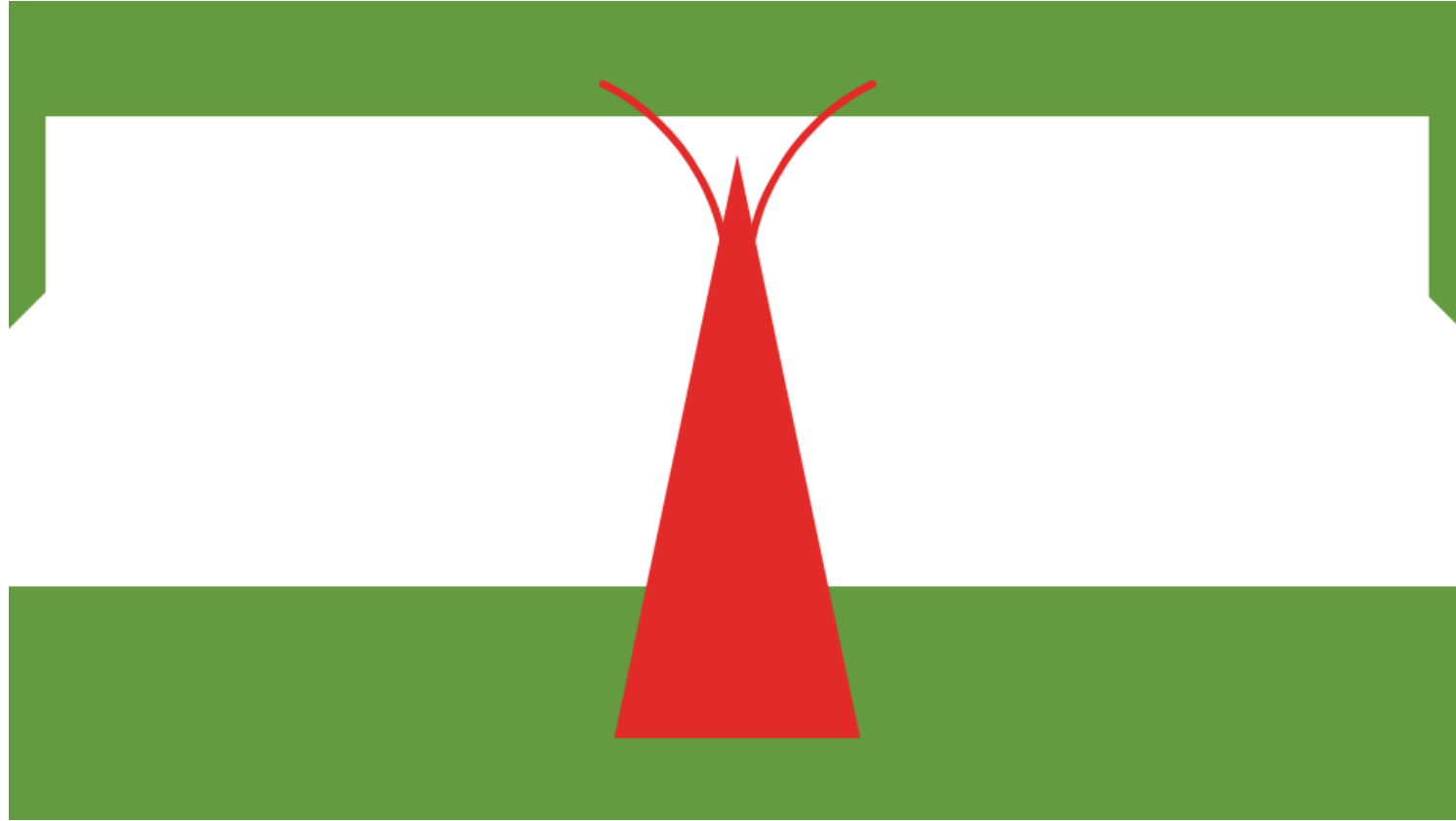
The SWDTP RDF has been designed for doctoral researchers in the social sciences (including economics, psychology and law).

It further frames the PhD research project within a researcher's wider development journey, which is complimented by other activities to support doctoral students in strategically developing the skills, experiences and networks that would best enable them to reach their goals and aspirations.

SWDTP-funded students must engage with the RDF and report on their development needs analysis, activities and achievements as a condition of their studentship. Their engagement with the SWDTP RDF is separate and additional to the development activities required by their home institution.



$\Delta+T$ (Delta-Tau): The Shape of a PhD



The SWDTP envisages the shape of a doctoral researcher's journey as a Δ superimposed on a T. We call it the $\Delta+T$ (Delta-Tau).

Why $\Delta+T$ (Delta-Tau)?

PhD training is often conceived of as being Δ -shaped, that is a process of increasing specialization. The ESRC PGR training guidelines, for example, do require a broad grounding in methods and concepts relevant to the discipline.

But research has found that PhD graduates are valued by employers for their T-shaped profile – a broad range of transferable skills together with in-depth specialist expertise. (Paul Wakeling, co-authors of the ESRC commissioned PhD report, presentation, 8 Dec 2021)

In the process of designing and conducting a research study of one bounded problem, students develop a broader range of skills. They are also expected to engage in development activities throughout their studies, building skills, knowledge and connections to help them reach their aspirations beyond their PhD journeys.

The PhD research project makes up the core 80%

This includes activities that:

- Develop knowledge and skills useful for the dissertation research (the Δ)
- Applies skills and knowledge developed through the PhD to build the academic community
- Broadens transferable skills and career opportunities

Placement

The **placement** supports PGRs to have the confidence to transfer their skills and articulate how they transfer, whilst making them aware of a wide horizon of opportunities

Specialised knowledge and advanced specialized research skills are mainly developed through the process of doing a PhD

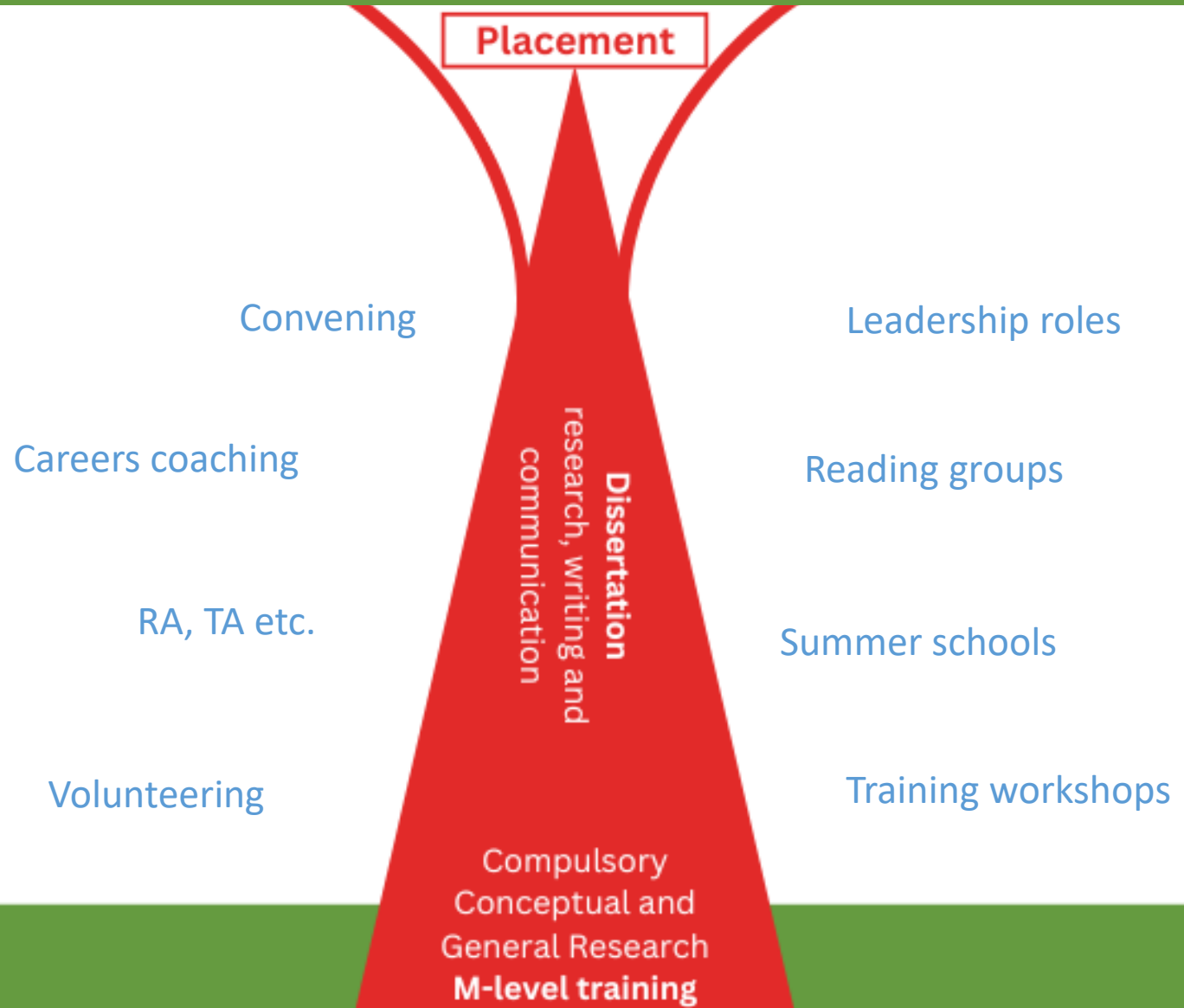
Grounding in awareness of breadth of conceptual and general research knowledge and skills relevant to the discipline

Dissertation
research, writing and
communication

Compulsory
Conceptual and
General Research
M-level training

Other training and development activities make up the 20%

The aim is not to do everything, but to select activities according to individual development plans and goals.



Activities can be loosely associated with different stages of the PhD

Grounding

Have secure grounding in conceptual knowledge and general research skills of expected within their discipline together with skills and knowledge for managing and conducting ethically sound research

Specialising

Have a depth of specialist expertise in academic debates relevant to their dissertation research, the research methods used in their dissertation research, and communication skills for practitioner, policy or public engagement pertinent to their research

Producing and Leading

Communicate effectively with academic and non-academic audiences through written outputs, verbal presentations and other appropriate means and contribute towards building research communities

Onwards and outwards

Communicate effectively with academic and non-academic audiences through written outputs, verbal presentations and other appropriate means and contribute towards building research communities

Activities can be associated with four Researcher Development Domains

Research Skills and knowledge

- Conceptual
- General
- Specialised

Corresponds to Vitae A1, A2, C1, C2

Academic literacy

- Written and verbal communication skills needed for PhD
- Written and verbal practices for academic leadership: editing, peer-reviewing, convening

Corresponds to Vitae A, relevant to D2

Professional Development

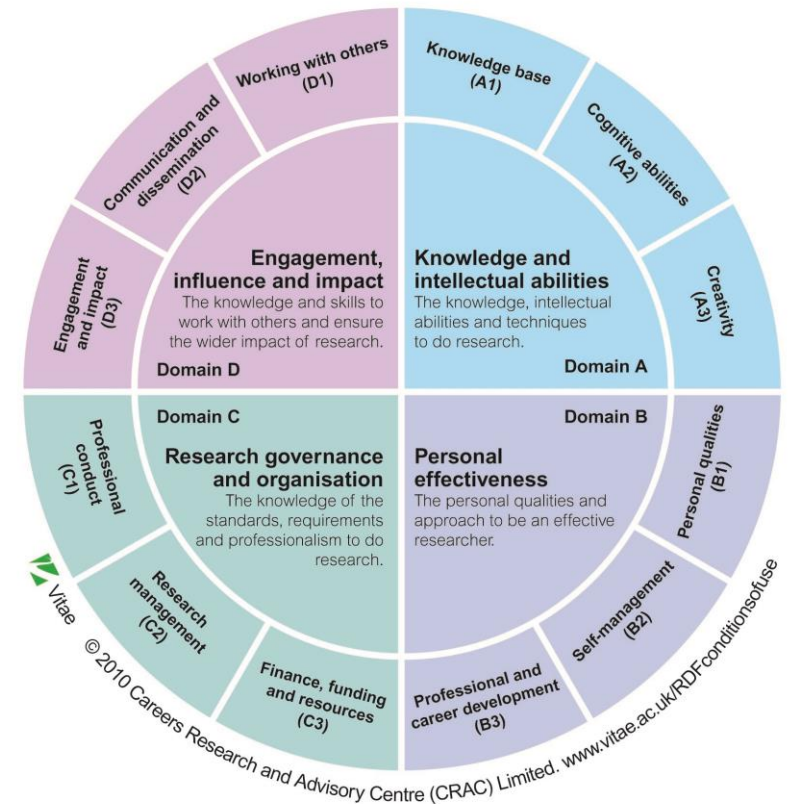
- Career exploring and building
- Enterprise and entrepreneurship
- Communication and engagement
- Collaboration

Corresponds to Vitae D1,2,3 & B3

Wellbeing and Community

- EDI
- Wellbeing
- Community building

Corresponds to Vitae B1, B2 & D1



These can be mapped onto the Vitae RDF to help students fulfil institutional expectations where Vitae is used.