

Trinity Research Staff Association

Cumann na dTaighdeoirí Coláiste na Tríonóide



TRSA

Alison Donnelly,
The Printing House, Trinity College, 14 December 2006

The reality of research careers in a knowledge economy

Presentation outline

- Brief introduction to TRSA
- Issues of most concern to contract researchers in TCD
- Reality of research careers in a knowledge economy
- Transferable skills
- What are the solutions?

TRSA history

- Established June 2005
- Represent & promote interests of Contract Researcher (CRs)
- First association of its kind in Ireland

Achievements

- First time CR elected to the governing Board & management committees of Trinity
 - Research committee, WiSER committee, Statutes Review Working Party, Working group on academic titles

Achievements

- Ran workshops and attended conferences– to increase awareness
 - Irish Universities Quality Board
 - University of London
 - Irish Research Council for Science Engineering and Technology – workshops & NCRA
- Surveyed CRs to determine their terms and conditions of employment
- Position paper – Contract Researchers in Trinity: a frontline perspective

Contract Researchers in Trinity: A Frontline Perspective

- Completed questionnaires from 162 (50%)
- 93% “satisfied or very satisfied” with the research they were conducting
- 81% “dissatisfied or very dissatisfied” with job security
- 69% were dissatisfied with their career prospects
- 46% were dissatisfied with their current salary

Issues from survey....

- Lack of career structure - short-term contracts, titles
- Salary not in line with experience
- Pensions
- Career-development advice
- Opportunities for gaining transferable skills
- Recognition - not seen as professional!
- FTWA – redundancy, benefits etc

Transferable skills

- Project management
- IP
- Entrepreneurship
- Science communication
- Leadership and team work
- Business administration
- IT
- Technology commercialisation
- Self-promotion and marketing
- Negotiation and networking

Broad skills base facilitates high quality research and research training

The reality of research careers in a knowledge economy?

- Evolving the Irish Research Infrastructure / Populating the Knowledge Economy
- The Institutional, Financial and Other Factors influencing Research Career Formation in Ireland
- Career Paths in Industry – feast or famine!

What is a knowledge-based economy

- Use of knowledge to produce economic benefit
- Means through which high-technology business, educational & research institutes can contribute to a country's economy

Evolving the Irish Research Infrastructure / Populating the Knowledge Economy

- Lack of continuity in funding
- HEIs are employers but CRs salaries are largely paid by a third party
- Industry needs to be a partner in design & delivery but should not set the research agenda
- While research plays an important role in university rankings, it is more likely to be the PIs rather than the researchers that receive credit for the research output
- Problems with turnover and loss of knowledge/expertise

Institutional, financial & other factors influencing research-career formation in Ireland

- 'Bizarre how we think we can build a knowledge-based economy on short-term contracts'
- No alignment between:
 - **National policy**: assembly line production of PhDs with the focus on economic output
 - **Reality**: very few R&D jobs in industry
- 'Status and inclusion within the University' is considered very important to CRs.
 - Are we staff or not?
 - Are we academics or not?
 - Is a Postdoc a period of training/study *i.e.* 5th level or an academic position?

Career Paths in Industry – Feast or famine

- Limiting factors
 - Work experience
 - Knowledge of IP
 - GLP and QC
 - Lack of recognition of skills
 - Mobility – movement between sectors
 - Presentation /communication skills
- Solutions
 - Placements/partnership
 - IP training
 - Training
 - Accreditation, entrepreneurial skills
 - Practical experience
 - Provide courses

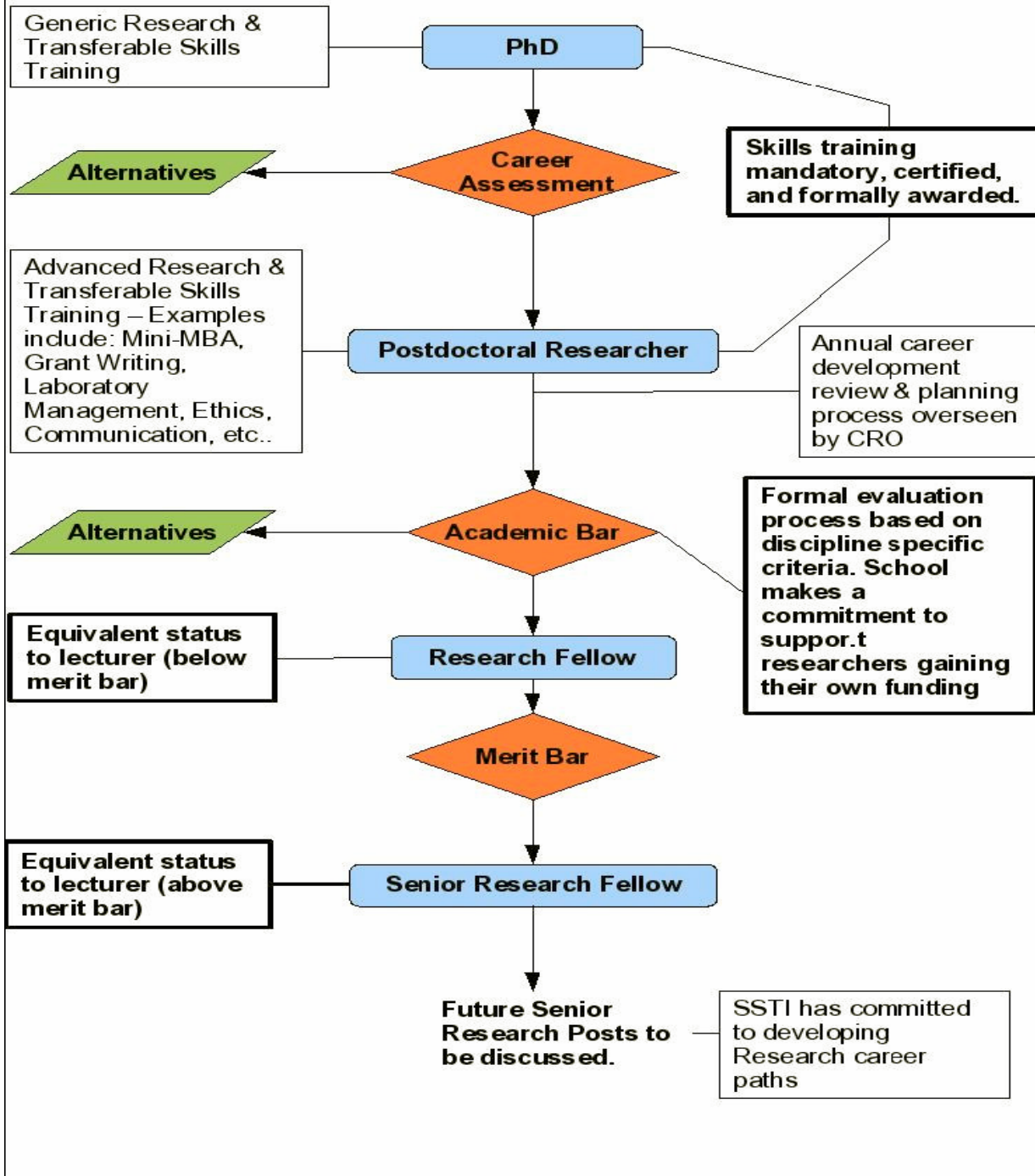
Strategy for Science, Technology & Innovation (SSTI)

- “People are at the heart of the knowledge society”
- “In addition, the development of career paths which will make science more attractive”.
- “Emphasis placed on sustainable career development rather than only focusing at early stage careers”

Strategy for Science, Technology Innovation (SSTI)

- “To double the output of PhDs by 2013 – a total output of 6,546 PhD graduates over the period 2006 - 2013”
- “Growing the number of Postdoctoral researchers by 1,050”
- “Growing the numbers of PIs by 350 over the period to 2013”

Emerging research career path



So what are the solutions?

- Cannot build a sustainable career on short-term contracts
- Serious commitment to research careers is required
 - Stability of funding for individual researchers over the longer term
 - Clear research career path with salaries in line with experience
 - Acknowledgement by universities of researchers as professional academics

