How do we best ensure the engagement of early career researchers with our provision?

How do we ensure we offer what they want / need?

As an example….

- Designing provision for late-stage PhD students
- Formerly, at our institution, there had been an emphasis on early stage PhD students

Know your audience

- Busy
- Anxious
- Sceptical
- Not well informed about career options
- Not aware of their transferable skills and their value to employers
- “Communication gap” with the world outside academia

FUMO – Finish Up Move On

- A 2-day non-residential course
- Up to 24 students
- Pack in as much content and activity as possible
- 3 themes
  - Finish your PhD
  - Prepare for the career transition
  - Leadership

1: Finish your PhD

- Gets them through the door
- One session on thesis and one session on the viva
- The need they can admit to themselves!

2: Career transition

- The stuff that’s less available elsewhere
  - Self awareness
  - Networking / Interview skills
  - Consideration of options through meeting alumni
  - Addressing the communication gap head-on

3: Leadership

- “the mother of all transferable skills”
- Highly sought after by employers
- Not well understood by students

The “bundling strategy”

- Sweetening the bitter pill…
- Some protests
- By combining topics you get the crucial messages out to the widest possible audience

What we learnt

- Get alumni involved
- Look for other internal resources e.g. Business Development Unit
- Explain why you are covering specific content and doing certain activities
  - E.g. leadership
    - Developing a vocabulary and an awareness of issues
    - Link to the model with which they are familiar, i.e. supervision
- Maintain good pace and use your best facilitators
- Never forget the infinite diversity of your participants in terms of background, aspirations and quirks!

Over to you…

- What are your best ways of securing engagement?
- How can we be confident that we are addressing real needs?
- How might the situation change?
  - Loss of ring fenced £
  - Changing recruitment market
  - Maturing Roberts agenda