

Heriot-Watt University "HR Excellence in Research" award two-year Internal Review

Initial Publication Date September 28th 2012

In September 2010 Heriot-Watt University received the "HR Excellence in Research" award from the European Commission. A condition of this award is that a two-year internal assessment of progress against the original 2010 Concordat Implementation Plan is carried out. The following report contains the findings of this review and the revised action plan covering the next two years.

Summary

Researcher development, through a portfolio of innovative development opportunities, is a key part of Heriot-Watt's activity. The success of the whole programme is highlighted in the national and international interest in the programmes, and the nomination for awards.

How the internal evaluation was undertaken

The evaluation was carried out by the Researcher Development Coordinator in conjunction with the Deputy Principal (Research and Knowledge Transfer) and the Director of Human Resources.

The evaluation included careful analysis of a number of existing data sets as well as in-depth consideration of University policies and practices that impact on research staff, and discussions with Research staff directly. These included the engagement data for researcher development workshop programmes, the institutional CROS 2011 data and the institutional PIRLS 2011 data. This was supplemented by the minutes of discussions at meetings of the Research Staff Representative Group and the Research and Knowledge Exchange Board. Other data was utilised as appropriate.

How Researcher's views were taken into account

The views of researchers were collected through a number of different mechanisms. These include discussions with the research staff representatives, in-depth analysis of the Heriot-Watt 2011 CROS results. Research staff views were also gained from a number of projects which evaluated different elements of the researcher development programme.

How the review links with existing QA and other monitoring mechanisms?

The information gathered in this review will be presented to the University Research and Knowledge Exchange Board and will be used to inform future policy and practice developments in within the Human Resources and Development directorate.

1. Key achievements against original action plan

The following section outlines the progress made against the main aims of the action plan published in April 2010.

Policy for the management of fixed-term contracts

This policy was adopted in the summer of 2010 and has been working well for the last 2 years. During this period, 24 research staff have been moved from fixed-term contract to open ended contracts, and continues to support and implement changes to contracts as and when possible.

Promotions procedure for research staff

The new promotions procedures for research staff have been in operation since late 2010. Over this period, 28 members of research staff have been successful in gaining promotion through this process. A review of the promotions processes has been completed, focussing on simplification, standardisation and increased transparency of process.

New activities to improve the Knowledge Transfer and Knowledge Exchange support for academics and research staff

Over the last two years, Heriot-Watt University has seen a step change increase in the support and development provided to researchers and academics around knowledge exchange and public engagement. This has included a range of training and development opportunities for researchers at all levels.

The Heriot-Watt "Enterprising Researcher Summer School" provides early career researchers with a good introduction to the skills and knowledge needed to by researchers to start planning their own business or to improve their interactions with commercial partners. This has run every summer since 2009 and an evaluation of this programme has identified evidence of impact at all levels of IEG's Impact Framework. Some examples of the evaluation survey results are presented here:

- 100% of the respondents indicated that attendance at the summer school had improved their: 1) knowledge of research commercialisation, 2) understanding of entrepreneurship, 3) knowledge of knowledge transfer
- 71.4% of respondents indicated that the summer school experience stimulated them to enter enterprise, knowledge exchange based competitions (e.g. RCUK business plan competitions)
- 28.6% of respondents indicated that they were involved in enterprise or commercialisation projects since attending the summer school.

Researchers who wish to develop their commercial awareness and associated skills to a higher level than that provided by the summer school are encouraged to engage with the Heriot-Watt Converge Challenge Business Plan competition and associated training opportunities. The University initiated the "Converge Challenge" in 2010, and all feedback suggests that it has been a major success. This annual competition is open to all Heriot-Watt researchers as well as researchers in those Scottish Research Pools of which Heriot-Watt is a member. The Converge Challenge includes a 2-day commercialisation training course which is open to all participants. In addition, a wide programme of business and commercialisation training seminars are provided throughout the year. These workshops are open to all Heriot-Watt researchers. Recently, some of these seminars have been videoed and made available on-line.

The innovative Crucible approach to researcher development has been successfully expanded to Scotland, and now even across Europe. Through the Heriot-Watt Crucible (and through the Scottish Crucible) more experienced research staff have been able to "enhance their innovative research capacity and impact through interdisciplinary collaborations and knowledge transfer". This programme has been highly successful and was one of three finalists in the 2011 Leadership Foundation for Higher Education's "Good Practice Impact Award 2011" and has been shortlisted for the 2012 THE awards in the "Outstanding Contribution to Leadership Development" category.

Heriot-Watt is also host to the KE Scotland conference and has initiated a researcher KE training day that precedes the conference, which again has been well attended nationally. This training is open to researchers across Scotland and provides further opportunities for Heriot-Watt (and other) researchers to undertake high quality development while also providing networking opportunities with researchers from other disciplines and institutions.

All researchers are encouraged to develop their understanding of public engagement and to develop their skills in this area. Most of this development is provided through the Edinburgh Beltane partnership of which Heriot-Watt is a key member. This provides a wide range of public engagement training and support including dialogue techniques, storytelling development, engaging policy makers and even stand-up comedy through the Edinburgh Bright Club. The Beltane Public Engagement Fellowship scheme has provided successful researchers dedicated time and support to develop their public engagement activities. This scheme has been shortlisted for the 2012 THE awards in the "Outstanding Support for Early Career Researchers" category. Three of the 15 funded PE fellows were HWU researchers. In order to increase the recognition for researchers who are active in public engagement activities and to encourage more researchers to develop this area of activity, the University Principal has introduced a set of annual awards to highlight the outstanding public engagement work done by members of the University. The Principal's Public Engagement awards include a specific category for early career researchers.

Research staff symposia

Over the last two years we have held three research staff symposia on specific topics of importance to researchers, and based on their needs. These events provided focussed development for research staff as well as an excellent opportunity for research staff across the university to meet. The topics have been selected through consultation with the research staff representative group, and all of the topics chosen have focussed on career opportunities for research staff. The topics have included:

- *"Developing your Research Career at Heriot-Watt University"* (February 2010)
- *"Working in Industry and Entrepreneurship"* (November 2010)
- *"Applying for a Research Fellowship"* (September 2011)
- The next symposium is being planned for Dec 2012

New web provision for research staff

While we have improved the quality of information provided through our web sites, this is still very much a work in progress. While the web sites for various projects provide good content and information for research staff (e.g. Scottish Crucible, Converge Challenge, Public Engagement Prize) we still wish to provide a richer web provision for research staff, especially around aspects of induction and career development. We have recently introduced a new electronic booking database system, which has improved the flexibility offered to researchers in managing and recording their development activities and has added much needed opportunities to analyse the engagement data to provide a clearer picture of researcher development across the University. It is expected

that this will improve our present reporting mechanisms and will lead to a better understanding of the development needs of researchers and lead to an improved service to researchers.

Other initiatives and developments

Over the last two years a number of other initiatives and developments, not included in the 2010 action plan, were undertaken to improve the support for research staff across the whole University.

In June 2012, the Researcher Development Coordinator, delivered a 3-day bespoke development programme for researchers at the Orkney campus. This was the first researcher development activity run at this campus since 2007. The programme was a mix of workshop activity on specific topics and individual career focussed surgeries. This provided these researchers an opportunity to reflect on their career aspirations, to develop individual development plans as well as undertake training and development in key areas that they had identified. It is expected that similar visits will occur no less than every 2 years going forward.

We have also made changes to our induction provision for new research staff. Instead of a specific induction event for research staff we adapted the induction for academic and other staff to also include research staff. We feel that this will help them to better integrate into the Heriot-Watt community and means that new research staff can attend an induction event more frequently than before. These events normally take place every six weeks. The CROS 2011 results indicate that induction experiences of research staff have improved significantly at both institutional and departmental level since 2009 and that research staff feel more integrated into the institutional research culture and their research community than they did in 2009.

The range of leadership development continues to expand with both specific offerings for research staff through the research staff workshop programme, Heriot-Watt Crucible and through the wider University Leadership Development programme. Research Leadership is also covered in the institutional PGCAP for new academics. This includes an introduction to the Vitae Researcher Development Framework (RDF) as well as consideration of how this can be used to support their own development and the development of the researchers they manage.

2. Next steps: Action Plan for 2012-2014

As part of the on-going University strategy to continue to grow and strengthen our research activities, it is expected that the total number of research staff will grow over the next two years. (The last 2 years have seen a growth in research staff numbers of ca. 11%). An important aspect of this strategy is to continue to embed the principles of the Concordat within Heriot-Watt normal practice.

As well as the above programmes continuing, additional plans to improve the support for research staff include:

1. The University has recently expanded the researcher development team by appointing a Research Events Coordinator to help with the organisation and administration associated with the growth in researcher development activity. This post will help to improve the support for research staff and to improve the access researchers have to development activities.
2. The University aims to appoint a Public Engagement Officer by January 2013. This post, which will be part of the researcher development team, will provide improved training and development opportunities in public engagement for researchers across the university and will facilitate researchers in gaining further opportunities to undertake public engagement activities. This post is part of the Universities on-going commitment to ensure that the work of Edinburgh Beltane continues beyond its core funding period. **Delivery date January 2013, Lead: Head of Academic Enhancement**
3. In response to the CROS 2011 results, the University aims to improve the provision of information to new research staff. While Heriot-Watt scores higher than the national average in this area, there is much room for improvement. The approach planned is to develop different ways of delivering this information and ensuring that the information is presented in a more focussed manner to ensure ease of use by researchers. **Delivery Date June 2013, Lead: Human Resources and the Researcher Development Coordinator.**
4. We aim to further expand and develop the present web resources to support research staff induction and career development. **Delivery date on-going to 2014, Lead: Head of Academic Enhancement and the Researcher Development Coordinator.**
5. Increase the visibility and awareness of the Research Staff Representative Group through dedicated web pages outlining the purpose, remit and membership of the group and minutes of meetings. **Delivery date March 2013. Lead: Researcher Development Coordinator.**
6. Over the next two years we aim to increase awareness and use of the RDF by both researchers and their managers. This will be achieved through mapping our present workshop provision to the RDF and through further embedding the RDF into different researcher development activities. Further works will be done to use the various RDF Lenses being developed by Vitae to support the researchers' use of the RDF. The university will also explore the purchase of a subscription to the Vitae RDF planner. **Delivery date on-going to 2014, Lead: Researcher Development Coordinator.**

7. The Research Staff Symposia will continue to be run at regular intervals: **Delivery date on-going to 2014, Lead: Head of Academic Enhancement.**
8. On-going monitoring: The University intends to participate in both CROS and PIRLS in 2013 and will use internal surveys and evaluations to continually monitor the implementation of the Concordat across the University. **Delivery date, Completion of survey August 2013, completion of reporting by January 2014. Lead: Researcher Development Coordinator.**

The initial University Concordat Action Plan 2010 can be viewed [here](#).