**University of Stirling**

**HR Excellence in Research Award Review Report, September 2013**

# Introduction

Excellent research relies upon expert, highly-skilled and innovative researchers. Our aim is to support researchers attain their full potential by providing an outstanding programme of training, skills development opportunities and a supportive research community which provides professional networks for the future. The Athena SWAN Bronze award achieved by the University in September 2013 recognises this.

The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers drives our support for research staff and students. In 2011, following a comprehensive gap analysis against the Concordat, we set out our actions to grow support for researchers. In 2012 we monitored and continued our progress against these actions. This year we have re-reviewed our original action-set, examined the progress made and created a series of new objectives for 2013/14 to 2014/15. The 2013 review has been founded on feedback from researchers collected via the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES), Careers of Research Online Survey (CROS), Principal Investigators and Research Leaders Survey (PIRLS) and direct feedback from researchers via our Researcher’s Forum and consultation on the draft action plan. The University’s Research Committee has championed and led the review. It has been informed by the full range of professional expertise in researcher development which is embedded across the University. The resultant action plan for 2013/14 – 2014/15 provides an update on our original position and sets our new objectives to progress our vision for researcher development at Stirling. Our original action plan (updated in 2012) is retained on our webpages to act as a marker for our progress and provide accountability.

The evaluation and revised action plan are connected to and embedded within the University’s quality assurance mechanisms. The Research Committee has overall responsibility for researcher development and monitors progress against the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers. The University Court has overall responsibility for matters relating to equality and diversity which are actively monitored through the Equality Steering Group. In addition, the commitments set out are also embedded within all academic school and relevant service delivery plans.

# Key achievements

## Recruitment and Selection

We strive to attract excellence and respect diversity through our recruitment processes. In recognition of the importance of recruiting and retaining researchers with the highest potential to achieve excellence in research, Stirling created the Impact Fellowship and Studentship programme. The programme objective is to act as a career launch-pad for researchers. Fellows are provided with a senior mentor, research grant and support to help them make the transition from postdoctoral to independent researcher. Impact Studentships are collaborative arrangements, generally with an industry partner, which provide a crosssector experience and real-world problem solving. Both programmes have been successful in attracting international cohorts of researchers in 2012 and 2013.

## Recognition and Value

Since 2011, Stirling has:

* Established a Researcher’s Forum with a remit of amplifying the voice of researchers in University decision making, informing policy making and promoting networking and integration.
* Adapted membership of the University Research Committee to increase researcher representation on the body charged with the strategic development of research.
* Rolled out its development and objective setting process, Achieving Success to contract researchers.
* Improved its online presence for researchers including the interactive learning platform Succeed.

## Support and Career Development

In 2012 Stirling Graduate School (SGS) was created in order to provide a hub for Stirling’s postgraduate community. In its first year of activity SGS has taken definitive action to review support for doctoral researchers as part of a major student engagement project. The review has encompassed the Skills Development Programme (SDP) for doctoral students, progression and monitoring systems, peer to peer support and the academic regulations which underpin doctoral provision at the University. Throughout the period Stirling has enhanced and introduced new mechanisms to support researchers make the transition to a career in research. The University has:

Piloted a mentoring scheme in 2012 which provides support for staff to develop skills and experience in areas such as research grant and contract application, networking and applications for promotion.

* Developed a postgraduate certificate in academic practice. The course includes a module on researcher career development. A module for postgraduate research students who teach has already been completed by over 50 students.
* Grown its programme of training for researchers through the SDP for doctoral students and Researcher Development Programme (RDP) for research staff in response to feedback. Survey results have shown that awareness of, and participation in, the RDP has grown over the last two years.

## Researcher’s Responsibilities

We encourage researchers to take responsibility for, and pro-actively engage in, their professional development. By strengthening the voice of researchers in strategic decision making via representation at the Research Committee and the Researcher’s Forum we encourage researchers to shape their own future. Researchers are invited to take control of their own development through the range of training and opportunities offered. Promoting greater responsibility for personal development is the theme of a current project to create a portfolio management system. The system, initially for research students, will enable individuals to record the outcomes of their development activities against key objectives, analyse their training needs and take action to address these. Developing this type of support for research staff is a key theme of work to 2014/15.

## Diversity and Equality

The University has made significant advances in promoting equality. We were awarded the Athena SWAN Bronze award in September 2013. The award follows rigorous examination of equality and diversity information relating to our academic activities by a special task group throughout 2012 and 2013. Our Athena SWAN action plan contains robust actions with clear accountability to promote equality and diversity. New equality outcomes have been introduced which replace and build upon our Single Equality Scheme (2009-2012). The outcomes are priorities for action which are evidence-based and follow extensive consultation with staff and students. Future progress will be monitored against these outcomes. Consideration of equality and diversity are embedded within all of the University’s activities. In preparation for the Research Excellence Framework (REF) the University has been guided by the equality outcomes which are incorporated into Stirling’s REF Code of Practice. Equality considerations run throughout all of our REF activities, for example all REF-related committees and decision makers received REF specific equality training. An Equality and Diversity Panel is the decision making body on all individual and complex circumstances and an appeals process has been put in place. At key milestones data is analysed by equality characteristics. There will be a review of the REF decision making once the process has concluded.

## Implementation and Review

The University continually gathers feedback from researchers in multiple ways, i.e. CROS, PIRLS and PRES surveys, the University’s all-staff survey, the Researcher’s Forum and focus groups. These mechanisms have been used to continually develop and refine the support in place for Stirling researchers. A review of progress against the original action plan was carried out in 2012 to monitor progress.

# Future priorities

We continue to progress our researcher development activities. However, we are aware that further action is needed to ensure that Stirling is a leader in this regard. The priorities set out in our 2013/14 to 2014/15 action plan can be summarised as follows:

* Providing a stimulating programme of development opportunities – the SDP and RDP will continue to be reviewed and revised in response to feedback alongside other development initiatives such as the mentoring programme. External accreditation will be sought for internal courses. Increased opportunities for researchers to gain experience of student supervision will be investigated to give researchers the experience they need to progress in their careers.
* Valuing and supporting researchers:
  + Managers of researchers need to be properly equipped to support researchers. Over the period HR and REO will ensure enhanced training and support is provided to research managers.
  + We shall conduct an investigation into researcher satisfaction (particularly focusing on fixed term contracts). The study will include sector-wide comparisons and best practice, exploring potential initiatives to support career progression. In this context, the Code of Practice for the Management of Contract Research Staff will be revised.
  + New initiatives will be developed in-line with the Athena SWAN action plan and equality outcomes to support career progression in research for women. For example, mechanisms to support the re-integration of women into research activity following maternity leave will be explored.
* Facilitating long-term career planning – over the next two years we are committed to putting in place a portfolio management system which will empower research staff and students to plan their personal development. A review of the appraisal system will ensure that it facilitates the personal development of researchers appropriately.
* Excellence in recruitment will be maintained through a further recruitment round of Impact Fellowships and Studentships thus supporting researchers in their transition to independent research careers.
* Developing a vibrant researcher community – We will continue the progress made through the Researcher’s Forum to generate a vibrant, well-informed researcher community which actively contributes to the University’s development. We will do this by facilitating networking and information exchange. The induction process will be investigated and revised to ensure researchers are empowered with the information they need from the beginning of their journey at the University.

We will monitor our progress against the action plan through the Research Committee, Researcher’s Forum and Equality Steering Group. We will be accountable to our researcher community on delivering our action plan. We have strengthened our direct accountability to researchers through establishing the Researcher’s Forum and revising membership of the Research Committee to achieve this.

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