HR Excellence in Research: 4 year review

Context: The University of Stirling is a research-intensive institution, and, following REF 2014 was ranked 5th in Scotland with regard to research intensity.

The University supports the career development of researchers via the Research & Enterprise Office, Human Resources & Organisational Development, Stirling Graduate School, the Career Development Centre and within each Academic School.

The University of Stirling was awarded the HR Excellence in Research (HREiR) Award in 2011. This was renewed in 2013. The relevant documents are available here.

In 2013, the University achieved a bronze institutional Athena SWAN award. This award recognises our work towards achieving gender equality. During 2015, the University submitted a number of departmental applications (results pending) and intends to pursue an Athena SWAN silver institutional award in 2016.

How was the internal evaluation undertaken? A HREiR Working Group (HREiRWG) was formed to evaluate our progress to date, and create a new strategy and action plan for the next four years. The HREiRWG was made up of colleagues from Human Resources & Organisational Development, Stirling Graduate School, Careers Development Centre, Research & Enterprise Office, and Policy & Planning. The internal evaluation process was managed by the Researcher Development Policy Officer, with contributions from the Senior Deputy Principal and the Director of Research & Enterprise. In addition, the HREiR Award action plans and progress reports were considered at the University’s Research Committee (URC) and the Researchers’ Forum (RF). Views from researchers were gathered via the CROS and PIRLS surveys, and the University of Stirling Staff Survey. Research staff were invited to participate in the internal evaluation via the RF and URC.

Key achievements and progress against original action plan (by Concordat Principle)

Recruitment & Selection

- there are now role profiles for all academic, research and support roles
- A further recruitment round of University of Stirling Impact Fellows was held in 2015. Funding is confirmed to continue this scheme beyond 2015-16 with a stated aim in the 2015-21 Research Strategy to recruit five Impact Fellows annually.
- The University has committed to support PhD studentships as part of the 2015-21 Research Strategy, with a stated aim of doubling the number of University-funded research postgraduates.

Recognition & Value

- As of August 2014, a proportion of any overheads earned on all new research income will be allocated to Divisional Discretionary Funds. Budgets allocated will be identified to individual PIs and must be made available for those who earn them.
- The 2014/2015 University Staff Survey identified a number of areas of strengths: equality & diversity (3rd place); pay & benefits (2nd place), and role/responsibility (1st). A significant improvement relates to learning and development (L&D) with staff reporting that they are able to access L&D opportunities that enhance both career (66%) and personal development (71%). A majority of staff (57%) reported having taken up internal L&D opportunities over the previous 12 months.
- In CROS 2015, which has a 16% response rate, 92% of respondents were aware of the Researcher Development Programme (RDP), and of those 79.6% had participated in training, this is an increase from CROS 2013 were 77% were aware of the RDP. 84.3% stated that they were encouraged to engage in personal and career development, which is an increase since CROS 2013 (74.3%). In PIRLS 2015, which had a 20% response rate, the RDP was rated as good/very good by 63.3% of respondents, which is an increase since the PIRLS 2013 (53.1%).
HR have run university-wide, School specific and women-only promotions session, growing from this, there will be a new Promotions Programme set up. This will be a rolling programme of events, and will link with Achieving Success (review process for all staff).

- In 2014/5, the University undertook a significant investment in systems development to support research students. The new tailored web-based support system, Research Compass, provides online mechanisms for progress monitoring, but also for skills and training needs analysis and links through to the skills development programme for research students.

Support & Career Development

- The RDP for staff involved in research and the Stirling Graduate Skills Programme for research postgraduates are both ongoing. In terms of attendance, there was a 25.4% increase in the number of research staff participating in the RDP between 2013-14 and 2014-15, and a 23% increase in the number of postgraduate research students participating in the SGS development programme between 2013-14 and 2014-15.

- Evaluation of mentoring programmes is currently taking place. There are approx. 50 formal mentoring partnerships across the University via a range of different schemes: Women Leadership Mentoring Partnership; New Academic Staff mentoring Partnerships (local schools); maternity mentoring (currently being piloted in one School), also the University Mentoring Partnerships which is open to all staff. Participating in this last programme is our Principal, who is mentoring a senior academic. We actively support mentoring via regular centrally-funded training and, in one school are piloting a Mentoring Partner (a senior academic who is taking on direct ownership of supporting mentoring across her school).

- **Management Essentials training** (training support for managers). This has been developed from Management Development programme, and has been significantly refreshed and enhanced.

- The University has developed and successfully delivered a Gender Equality Initiative (GEI). This comprises a bespoke women’s career development programme (Stepping Stones) and the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education’s Aurora women’s leadership programme. Over two years, the University has supported a total of 44 women to complete the Aurora programme - one of the highest in the UK. As part of the GEI, frequent networking opportunities are held for women across the University. The University received the award of ‘highly commended’ at the Times Higher Education (THE) Awards 2014 in the Outstanding Contribution to Leadership Development category for this initiative.

- The University has continued to promote Scottish Crucible (national leadership programme for research staff across all disciplines) (12 participants over the past 3 Scottish Crucible events which represents 12.25% of overall numbers) and in 2014 set-up a Stirling Crucible event. It is a stated aim of the University’s Research Strategy 2015-21 to repeat the Stirling Crucible.

- The Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (PGCLTHE) has been revised and updated, accredited with the University, and external accreditation has been sought with the Higher Education Academy (HEA). The PGCLTHE will form the credit-bearing pathway for recognition with the HEA, within the Stirling Framework Evidencing Learning and Teaching Enhancement (SFELTE). An application to the HEA for accreditation of this Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Framework has been made (May 2015). In addition to a planned increase in the availability of CPD in learning and teaching within the CPD framework, there will also be an Experience Pathway, for seeking recognition with the HEA.

- Attendance at the Learning and Teaching Conference 2015 organised by HR Academic Development was 50% higher than in the previous year (EduFair).
Support & Career Development

- An induction event for new members of research staff was held in 2013-14 (22 attendees) and 2014-15 (15 attendees), and will be repeated annually. This is a half-day event including a networking lunch. The event aims to give headline information to new staff and to showcase the support available for staff. The programme’s content has been amended in response to feedback and is organised jointly by HROD and REO. Achieving Success (AS), the process whereby every member of staff will meet with their manager to agree objectives, how these match their Departmental Plan, and what ongoing support or development they might need, was revised during 2013-14 and a range of recommendations made and implemented:
  - a ‘refresher’ Development programme for both reviewers and reviewees. For Reviewers the aim is to develop reviewer skills in the process and also core to this in interpersonal skills development (i.e. effective feedback conversations, coaching conversations, performance management conversations).
  - review of the AS forms. One of the strengths of the form is the ability to flex the content and tailor it to the school/dept. The Development Plan part of the form has been updated to become more comprehensive. The Objective setting part of the form has been refined to make explicit the ‘reflections’ and the forward looking toward the objectives for the forthcoming year.

- New leadership and development programmes launched: accredited by the Institute of Leadership and Management Programme. There are 3 core programmes: team leaders/supervisors; first line managers, and middle managers. These are complemented by additional group-specific programmes for women and senior leaders. We also provide a personal leadership programme (PLP) for all staff – targeted to develop individual sense of themselves as leaders of their own remit and self. The three accredited programmes and the PLP were piloted in 2014-15. We are currently mid-way though the final pilot of the middle management programme. To date all have had very positive feedback and we aim to re-run all programmes in the 2015/2016 academic year and then annually thereafter.

- Making the Most of Masters (MMM), supports taught postgraduate students to collaborate with external organisations i.e. prospective employers, to undertake work based/related projects in lieu of the traditional university-based dissertation. Originally funded by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) from 2011 to 2014, MMM is now embedded within the University. In the last two academic years almost 100 students participated from three academic Schools, covering 20 masters programmes (MSc, LLM and M Res) with new programmes coming on board each year. MMM at Stirling has hosted an annual Employer Engagement event for our students since its inception. The University of Stirling will host the “MMM Legacy” project supported by the SFC (April 2015 to August 2017), that will extend and expand the reach of the MMM partnership to trial and pilot the MMM approach at three other Scottish universities and Highland & Islands Enterprise.

Diversity & Equality

- The position of Dean for Equality and Diversity was established in Summer 2014 to provide senior leadership to take forward the University’s ambitious equality and diversity agenda.

- OneStirling: a joined up approach was developed with the Student Union to effectively promote and embed the University’s commitment to equality and diversity in all its activities. The following activities were promoted under the OneStirling banner: international Women’s Day celebration, International Festival, Japanese Week, Challenging Everyday Sexism event, ScienceGrrls (University of Stirling Science Fair); Generation W – Celebrating Women in Business, and the first Women in Sport Conference.

- An Equality Action Forum (EAF) was formed in October 2013 to drive forward the University’s equality activities. This group is composed of the University’s Equality Champions, within each School and service area. The aim of the EAF is to raise awareness of best practice and support in equality matters and drive forwards the University’s equality activities. EAF meetings each focus on a particular topic. In 2014/15, these have included myth-busting and best practice sessions on bullying and harassment, disclosing a disability, family friendly leave, e.g. maternity, paternity, parental & adoption leave and flexible working. Planned sessions for 2015/16 include Hate Crime, Promoting E & D, Embedding E & D in the Curriculum, and Religion on Campus.
Diversity & Equality

• Since June 2014, all employees with 26 weeks continuous service have the right to request flexible working. The Flexible Working Policy has been revised accordingly with relevant training available.

• Regular reporting and monitoring procedures have been put in place with regard to equality and diversity. The University publically shares its progress through the Equality Mainstreaming Progress Report and Annual Employee Equality Report published on the Equality area of the University website (updated April 2015). The University was shortlisted for the Times Higher Education Leadership and Management (THELMA) Awards 2015 under the category ‘Outstanding Strategic Planning Team of the Year’ in respect of delivering our strategic objectives for equality and diversity.

Future strategy: The University of Stirling is a research-led institution, delivering research which makes a difference. Our HREiR action plan and strategy aim to work in synergy with both our University Strategic Plan and Research Strategy to ensure that our researchers can make a significant contribution to conducting research which addresses key economic, societal and cultural needs. We have developed a new HREiR action plan for the next two years and we will review this regularly, as stated in the plan. We will continue to engage with our research community via the URC, RF and the CROS, PIRLS and PRES surveys, and the University Staff Survey. The HREiRWG will be chaired by a member of URC from 2015-16 onwards. HREiRWG will report on progress against the published action plan at each URC meeting, and ensure that we are directly aligned with both the new University Strategy (to be published 2016) and the University’s Research Strategy (2015-21).

Strategies to support Principles1 & 2: the University is committed to recruiting and retaining outstanding researchers, in order to enhance our research profile. Specific activities will include: increasing the number of university-funded PGRs; continuation of the Impact Fellowship scheme; increasing engagement by researchers, including PGR in the RF; and continuing to provide support regarding the promotion process.

Strategies to support Principle 3, 4 & 5: the University is committed to supporting and building research skills and capability across all levels and to encourage outstanding research leadership and engagement with development opportunities. Specific activities will include: running the Stirling Crucible in 2016; provision of supervisor training, review of peer review strategies across the institution.

Strategies to support Principle 6: equality and diversity is highly important to the University. This is illustrated by the creation of OneStirling, the work of the Equality Steering Group and our commitment to the Athena SWAN charter. Specific activities will include: application for an institutional Athena SWAN Silver Award and Departmental Athena SWAN awards.

Strategies to support Principle 7: review and implementation of the Concordat is of continuing importance to the University. Regular reporting on activities is carried out via the RF, URC and HREiRWG. Specific activities will include: increasing response rate to CROS and PIRLS, and increasing awareness of the HREiR award across the institution.

Key Success Indicators: Success will be measured by the achievement of the actions set out in our action plan, including:

• Provision of PDP system suitable for research staff – to be in place by August 2017.

• Continued increase in numbers of staff and students engaging with development opportunities – in particular, to improve attendance at the Research Induction event with a target of 20 attendees. For the RDP, 152 individuals participated in 2014-15 (cf 121 in 2013-14) and we would wish to see an increase in this number, with a target of 200 individuals participating by 2016-17 (approx. 45% of total research staff)

• Successful Athena SWAN awards at departmental and institutional level
• Report produced regarding probation for research-only staff
• Increased awareness of relevant UK initiatives/bodies (as evidenced by higher scores in CROS/PIRLS)
  Improvement in CROS and PIRLS response rates, to reach 25%.
• Launch of revised CoGRP