HR Excellence in Research: 6 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 of Stirling was first awarded the HR Excellence in Research (HREiR) Award in 2011. This was renewed in 2013 and again in 2015. The relevant documents are available here.

The University’s vision is to build on its existing strength in providing an internationally renowned research environment in order to create an engaging and sustainable research environment that is conducive to producing world-leading research across all of its Faculties.

To this end the University has revised and expanded the ‘HR Excellence in Research Working Group’ to create a formal Research Environment Working Group (REWG) that will report directly to the University’s Research Committee. This new group will maintain its focus on delivering the HREiR action plan, but will also broaden its remit to improve the research environment more generally. This renewed focus on the research environment is likely to lead to significant improvements for post-graduate researchers, early career researchers and established academics, and will support the institution’s vision to build a cohesive research environment. The REWG’s Action Plan (incorporating the HREiR action plan) will be delivered with the support of the Research & Innovation Office, Human Resources, Stirling Graduate School, the Careers & Employability Service and within each Academic Faculty.

The work of the REWG will be relevant to achieving the stated aims of the University’s Strategy, Research Strategy and People Strategy (the latter two supporting the main University Strategy). The People Strategy (2017-21) relates to the organisation and performance of Human Resources, and has three main priorities: Communication & Engagement, Resource Structure & Skills, and Performance & Effectiveness.

In 2013, the University achieved a Bronze institutional Athena SWAN award. This award recognises our work towards achieving gender equality. We have successfully retained our Bronze institutional award, and have also achieved departmental Bronze awards in Health & Sports Science and Biological & Environmental Sciences. We submitted additional departmental applications in the most recent (April 2017) round.

**How was the internal evaluation undertaken?** The existing HREiR Working Group (HREiRWG) was expanded in remit and renamed the REWG. This revised focus resulted in an increased membership, and a renewed focus on all activities relating to the HREiR award.

The REWG membership consists of: academic representation, Human Resources & Organisational Development, Human Resources & Academic Development, Human Resource Services, Stirling Graduate School, Careers & Employability Service, Research & Innovation Services, and Policy & Planning. The REWG is chaired by Dr Edward Duncan (Associate Professor, Faculty of Health & Sports Science) who is a member of the University’s Research Committee. The role of Chair of REWG is appointed by the University’s Research Committee.

The membership currently includes research staff from two Faculties, and this will be extended to ensure that all Faculties are adequately represented. It is envisaged that members of the REWG will facilitate the information flow between Faculties and REWG in both directions, as well as acting as representatives of the research community more generally.

The internal evaluation process was managed by the Chair of the REWG together with the Researcher Development Policy Officer, with contributions from the Senior Deputy Principal and the Director of Research & Innovation. In order to update and refresh our action plan, REWG has met to evaluate progress to date, consulted across academic and support services, and then created a new strategy and action plan. In addition, the HREiR Award action plans and progress reports were considered at the University’s Research Committee (URC).
The REWG is likely to extend its research environment activities beyond those outlined in the award principles, but this increased focus on the overall research environment should result in an increased awareness and engagement in all HREiR activities.

One of the first activities of the REWG was a renewed focus on staff completion of the CROS and PIRLS surveys. This year (2017) we achieved our highest completion rates to date (30% and 34% respectively). Staff feedback from the surveys directly influenced the planning of our new HREiR actions. We aim to continue to work to increase response rates to CROS and PIRLS surveys to support further engagement and development.

**Key achievements by Concordat Principle**

**Principle 1: Recruitment and Selection:**

**Key achievements:**
With have used institutional funding to support 145 post graduate research students and 27 Fellows (recruited over three rounds) since 2013.

**Next steps:**
We will invest in the development of our research community by the continued funding of our Fellowship programme across the institution. In 2017-2018 it is anticipated that we will recruit 4-6 Anniversary Fellows.

**Principle 2: Recognition & Value**

**Key achievements:**
The creation of a specific promotions programme has been a positive development. As well as sessions for all staff considering applying for promotion, we have sessions which are female-focussed. This has been complemented by the ‘Taking Control of your Career’ session. This provision is now part of our standard calendar of events, and has resulted in an improvement in the gender parity of applications received.

**Next steps:**
To ensure closer working with the Institutional Athena Swan Group in order that we progress more effectively towards meeting our shared aims, many of which relate to this principle.

**Principle 3 & 4: Support & Career Development**

**Key achievements:**
The introduction of a supervisory support course (online with face-to-face sessions) has been well received, and feedback has been positive. To date, 61 individuals have participated in the face-to-face training, and 45 people have completed the online provision. The face-to-face sessions will be planned in light of feedback received, and additional sessions offered. Stirling Crucible continues to be a successful and popular part of the development provision at Stirling, over the 2 cohorts, there have been 36 participants. We aim to involve previous ‘Cruciblists’ in the management and planning of the next (2018) Stirling Crucible. The Stirling Framework for Evidencing Learning and Teaching Enhancement programme has proved very popular, with 70 individuals currently enrolled. We have already had 12 successful applications for fellowship of the HEA.

**Next steps:**
We will invest in a range of focused development opportunities for specific groups of staff (e.g. Principal Investigators). We will produce or disseminate a variety of online development resources that have greater reach to staff to better support career development.

We will investigate the impact of holding multiple concurrent research contracts on career progress and development.
Principle 5: Researchers’ Responsibilities

Key achievements:
The creation of new and improved web resources regarding research funding support for researchers (including: governance, ethics, and the full funding lifecycle) has provided a wealth of information and resources for researchers to reinforce the personal support provided by Research and Innovation Services. To date, there have been 114 unique views for the new Research webpages.

Next steps:
We will hold two World Café events, within the highly publicised University Research Week, to engage in open conversations with the research community. A key output of these events will be the development of a plan to further enhance our wider research environment.

Principle 6 Diversity & Equality

Key achievements:
We successfully retained our Bronze institutional award, and have also achieved departmental Bronze awards in Health & Sports Science and Biological & Environmental Sciences. We submitted additional departmental applications in the most recent (April 2017) round.

Next steps:
To ensure closer working with the Institutional Athena Swan Group in order that we progress more effectively towards meeting our shared aims, many of which relate to this principle.

Principle 7 Implementation and Review

Key achievements:
The expansion of the group to become the REWG, with a wider remit, and expansion of membership to include more research active members plus active coordination with the institutional Athena SWAN Group, will all help to raise the profile of research environment more generally, and of the HR Excellence in Research Award more specifically.

Next steps:
We will ensure that the REWG will have active membership of researchers from all Faculties. We will develop and implement an effective communication strategy between REWG, the Research Committee and all Faculties.

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

Development of a research environment action plan that is co-constructed with University researchers.

Improvement in CROS and PIRLS response rates, to at least 50%.

Increased awareness of relevant UK initiatives/bodies (as evidenced by continually improving scores in CROS/PIRLS).

Increased attendance figures at the Researcher Forum events (to increase by 50% during 2017-18).

Increased skills and training events for PGRs, increase in participation, increased number of peer-led events, and the establishment of a post-graduate society.