

EU HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH: UNIVERSITY OF STRATHCLYDE EIGHT YEAR EXTERNAL REVIEW REPORT



The University of Strathclyde was awarded the HR Excellence in Research Award in September 2011 and retained the award in 2015. This report summarises progress against the 2015 - 2017 and 2017 -2019 Action Plans as well as our focus for the next four years.

A) Background and Internal Review

The University of Strathclyde is a Socially Progressive International Technological University with strong links to a number of industrial partners. The University has approximately 550 members of research staff (Research Assistants, Associates, Fellows, Senior fellows and Principal Fellows) within four faculties: Engineering, Science, Humanities & Social Sciences (HASS) and the Strathclyde Business School. Research at Strathclyde is organised into 7 [Strategic Themes](#) (Advanced Manufacturing & Materials; Energy; Health & Wellbeing; Innovation & Entrepreneurship; Measurement Science & Enabling Technologies; Ocean, Air & Space; and Society & Policy). Strathclyde's [Values](#) are: People Oriented, Bold, Ambitious, Innovative and Collaborative

Researcher Development is underpinned by Strathclyde's Values and [People Strategy](#), which has a key focus on staff development, and delivered by the [Organisational and Staff Development Unit](#) (OSDU) within the HR Directorate. Researcher Development activity is overseen by the Researcher Development Sub-Committee (RDSC), which itself reports to the University Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee (RKEC). RDSC is composed of the Faculty Vice-Deans (Research) OSDU, Researcher Development Programme (RDP, now part of the Strathclyde Doctoral School), [Researchers' Group](#) (RG; the Institutional Research Staff Association) and Postgrad Society representatives. It is chaired by the Deputy Associate Principal (Research and Knowledge Exchange).

In September 2015 responsibility for research staff development moved from the RDP in Research and Knowledge Exchange Services (RKES) to the OSDU. RDP continue to provide development support for PGRs. Following this move a consultation took place to inform the development of any new provision for research staff, as a result a number of new initiatives have been launched which are detailed within this report. OSDU provides staff development for all staff across the University, with three Researcher Development programmes: Strathclyde Programme in Academic Practice, Researcher Development and Knowledge Exchange ([SPARK](#); accredited to Masters level), Strathclyde Programme in Research and Leadership ([SPIRAL](#); CPD workshops) and, launched in 2018, the [Strathclyde Supervisor Development Programme](#).

How the internal review was undertaken

Having held the HR Excellence in Research (HR EiR) Award for eight years, internal evaluation of actions is now embedded within core practices and review processes across the university. Activities have been continuously developed over the past four years with this review providing us the opportunity to evaluate their impact and consider our strategy for the next four years. Progress against the HR EiR action plan is reviewed by RDSC. Future actions have been developed with RG and colleagues from HR, RKES and Equality & Diversity.

The six- and eight-year review documentation has been reviewed by the University Staff Committee, RKEC and RG. This eight-year progress review was led by OSDU in consultation with key stakeholders from HR, RKES, Equality & Diversity and researchers themselves through the RG and targeted focus groups.

How Researchers views were taken into account

Actions related to the 2015-2017 and 2017-2019 period were underpinned by the outcomes from the consultation undertaken when responsibility for this cohort moved to OSDU. An outcome of the consultation was the reinvigoration of the Researchers' Group which now provides key mechanism for representing the voice of our research staff and has been involved in all aspects of this review.

In preparation for this eight-year review, RG partnered with OSDU to organise two focus groups (10 members of research staff each) to consider both current areas which research staff see as being beneficial as well as identifying areas where they may need further support. The focus groups were facilitated by an independent consultant to provide a confidential environment. These focus groups provided research staff with the opportunity to explore topics in depth complementing the broader CROS 2017 and 2019 results (30% and 27% response rates). The results of both, plus ongoing collaboration with RG, have informed this report, updates to the 2017-2019 action plan and 2019-2023 action plan.

B) Key achievements and progress against the 2015 - 2017 and 2017-2019 strategy and action plan

Please note these relate to identified actions reported in the updates plans and new activities

Principles 1 & 2 (Recruitment & Selection, Recognition & Value)

1. A comprehensive benchmarking exercise relating to the use of Fixed-Term Contracts has been completed and the recommendations have been considered through the relevant University committees. The recommendations from this review will be implemented over the coming year.
2. In 2019, interest free loans for international staff (in relation to UK Visa fees and the NHS surcharge) were doubled in terms of value and repayment period in recognition of increases in these charges.
3. A range of support has been put in place in relation to Brexit, including information sessions, a webpage and sessions with an immigration lawyer for staff considering applying for settled status.
4. Strathclyde performs well against the national picture in relation to recruitment information: in CROS2019 97% (94% CROS2017) of respondents received a written job description (92% (89% CROS2017) nationally). In 2017, 95% of research staff also took part in the appraisal process, 89% in 2018 (HR data). 72% of CROS2019 respondents rated their appraisal as useful, significantly above the national average of 59%
5. The Researchers' Group (RG), an institutional-level Research Staff Association and sub-group of RKEC, launched in September 2016 to represent research staff from across all faculties. Strathclyde established and supported the growth of this group to foster research staff representation and to support development of research staff communities. The group now plays a key role in Strathclyde's approach to supporting the career development of researchers and provides a valuable mechanism for representing the voice of our research staff, with representatives on RKEC, RDSC and all Faculty Research Committees as well as strong links to institutional senior management. RG organises seminars, one-off events, social events and the annual StrathWide conference to bring research staff together as a community and to build new collaborations. In 2019, they sourced ~£25K funding from across the university and organised a funding call to support new research staff collaborations as part of the StrathWide conference.
6. A [webpage](#) containing information regarding policies and procedures relating to research staff has been launched to support managers of research staff.
7. Strathclyde reviews how well our Values are integrated into the University through a survey every three years. In 2019, 90% of research staff agreed their experience reflects the Values (88% in 2016). Of note, there was a 9% increase in agreement by research staff in Science (84% 2016, 93% 2019) and 4% increase from HaSS Research Staff (88% 2016, 92% 2019).

Principles 3, 4 & 5 (Support, Career Development and Researchers' Responsibilities)

1. Following the move of research staff development from RDP to OSDU in September 2015, a consultation took place between November 2015 and March 2016 to investigate development needs of this group. Along with CROS 2015 results, the outcomes were used to develop a proposed programme combining current provision and new additions to support research staff career development for academia and beyond. This provision is now embedded within the CPD-focused 'Strathclyde Programme in Research and Leadership' (SPIRAL) and credit-bearing 'Strathclyde Programme in Academic Practice, Researcher Development and Knowledge Exchange' (SPARK) programmes.
2. A suite of research staff [webpages](#) has been developed. The consultation had recommended any new provision for research staff should be included within the current programmes targeted at academic staff so a dedicated webpage approach has been taken to ensure research staff are able to identify relevant opportunities for their career stage. The Researchers' Group also has a web page hosted in the same area.
3. Research Staff are able to attend all staff-focused training and development activities at Strathclyde with research- and researcher-focused opportunities delivered through SPIRAL, SPARK and the recently introduced Strathclyde Supervisor Development Programme. Every year since 2015/2016, approximately 50% of the research staff population have engaged with development activities a significant increase from ~15% in 2014/2015. 91% of Strathclyde's CROS2019 respondents felt they were fairly treated in relation to access to training and development opportunities, significantly above 79% nationally.

16 research staff have been awarded a Postgraduate Certificate, Diploma or Masters through SPARK in 2019 and so far 6 (50% of completions) have completed the supervisor training. Focus group participants highlighted the SPARK class *Building a Successful Research Career* as particularly beneficial in supporting their career development.

4. Researcher development activities are monitored and reviewed at University level, through reporting processes and surveys, with clear accountability lines. New provision is implemented as a result of these processes, in line with demand and changes in the research landscape. In particular, OSDU and RKES have collaborated to develop a short workshop-programme model targeted at developing research staff and early career academics bid writing skills. The model can be adapted to different calls and has so far been used to support UKRI Future Leaders Fellowships and internal calls (EPSRC Capital Investment Award for ECRs and Strathwide). The programmes have proven popular with research staff and have supported research staff to win funding bids.
5. Strathclyde's Research Code of Practice has been published on the [web](#) and training activities have been implemented to support research staff and managers of research staff in relation to research integrity. Three events took place in 2018/2019 in relation to research integrity and the publication process: a lunchtime workshop and networking opportunity with Sir Phillip Campbell (Editor in Chief, Springer Nature); a Masterclass seminar and workshop with independent specialist, Dr Irene Hames. Further provision is planned for 2019/2020.
6. Since January 2015, OSDU have been working in collaboration with the external organisation, Vitae, to design and pilot a recognition framework (the Vitae International Researcher's award (VIRA)) for researchers' skills in relation to the RDF. The first six members of staff (four research staff) received the award in 2017 and 12 members of research staff are currently working towards the award. They are supported to complete this award through *Building a Successful Research Career*.
7. Since April 2017, 52 members of research staff have been appointed as [Impact Champions](#) through Strathclyde's [Impact Acceleration Account \(IAA\)](#). Impact Champions take a leadership role in impact implementation, planning and execution, covering a spectrum of impact activities including: commercial exploitation, public engagement, policy influencing, enhancing research capacity and understanding by public and third sector organisations. Impact Champions are also able to attend training in *Pathway to Responsible Innovation* (two-day course), *Impact Case Study Training* and *Networking*.

In total, £1.02M has been awarded to these Impact Champions for a total of 61 projects through the IAA and 66 members of research staff have attended the training (44 Impact Champions plus 22 additional research staff).
8. There are a number of opportunities to support research staff develop their teaching skills through SPARK and the Strathclyde Teaching Excellence Programme ([STEP](#)), as well as gain (Associate/) [Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy](#). Since 2016, 14 research staff have been awarded Fellowship and 1 Associate Fellow.
9. The Researchers' Group have organised networking and information events since its launch in September 2016 with the aim of connecting Strathclyde's research staff and identifying issues/supporting needs. Since 2017 they have organised an annual research staff conference and symposium, StrathWide, around the University's strategic research themes with attendance by ~50 members of research staff each year. Moreover, the RG is currently organising a 'Growing up in Academia' seminar series featuring academic staff talking honestly and openly about their career journeys.
10. An Institutional Induction specifically for research staff is delivered three times a year, with all new members of research staff being offered a place. A recent participant commented that the induction was '*genuinely useful*' in their evaluation. From October 2019, the Researchers' Group will be holding a coffee morning/afternoon immediately after research staff induction to support new staff integrate into the Strathclyde community.

Principle 6 (Diversity & Equality)

1. As a socially progressive employer, Strathclyde is the first University to be awarded 'Exemplary' status in Carer's Scotland Carer Positive Award which recognises the [support](#) the University provides to staff who are carers, through: our Carer's policy; Strathclyde Carers Group; staff counselling and employee assistance programme; and support for managers of staff who are carers.
2. All departments now hold or are in the process of applying for [Athena SWAN](#) awards, with twenty of twenty-six potential departments having achieved awards to date and Civil and Environmental Engineering holding a Silver Award.
3. Mentoring for staff returning from parental leave was introduced in 2017, this is available to research staff.
4. Staff whose first language is not English are able to attend dedicated training in writing and presentation skills. These courses remain popular with ~10 members of research staff attending each year.

Principle 7 (Implementation and Review)

1. Formal mechanisms are in place for monitoring progress on researcher development activities, the Concordat/EU HR Excellence in Research and the Athena SWAN action plans through RDSC and the Researchers' Group and the University Staff Committee.
2. CROS has run every two years since 2009 (PIRLS since 2011). The results are reported to RDSC and other stakeholders, being used to inform University strategy and action planning.
3. OSDU's Researcher Development programmes are evaluated and reviewed each year, with reports submitted to RDSC, the Researchers' Group and the University Staff Committee.
4. Members of OSDU and RDP take part and hold leadership roles in a number of national researcher development initiatives and groups, such as the Universities Scotland – Researcher Development and Training Committee (US-RDTC), the Scottish Higher Education Researcher Developer group (ScotHERD), the Scottish Higher Education Developers (SHED) and UK Council for Graduate Education (UKCGE) groups as well as contributing at national conferences and events. The Academic Development Lead (Research) is Deputy Convener of US-RDTC, contributes to Vitae Advisory group, has been Vitae Scotland Regional Representative over this period and was a member of the Concordat for the Career Development of Researchers independent review panel.

C) Next steps and the focus of the strategy for the next two years

Our strategy to support the career development of our research staff over the next two to four years will be heavily influenced by the new Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers (due to be published in September 2019) and related aspects of the Concordats for Research Integrity, Open Research Data and Public Engagement. We remain committed to the principles of the 2008 Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers over the next four years:

Principles 1 & 2 (Recruitment & Selection, Recognition & Value)

- To continue to implement, and improve where appropriate, the Policy for the Use of Fixed-Term Contracts.
- To ensure that research staff are represented consistently across the University.
- To ensure research staff have the opportunity to voice their opinion through a range of channels

Principles 3, 4 & 5 (Support, Career Development and Researchers' Responsibilities)

- To support research staff development in line with: the University's People Strategy and Strategic Aims; Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategies; the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers; and the changing research landscape.
- To implement the researcher development recognition framework for the Vitae International Research Award.
- Continue to support research staff through the SPIRAL, SPARK and Supervisor Development Programmes.

Principle 6 (Diversity & Equality)

- To pursue accreditation for Athena SWAN Charter Mark for all University departments, with departments in all faculties to achieve an Award.

Principle 7 (Implementation and Review)

- Provide enhanced support for research staff career development in light of the new Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers
- RDSC/RKEC, the Researchers' Group and Staff Committee receive regular updates on progress on staff related matters including all researcher development activities and action plans.

D) Success Measures

Our success will be measured in terms of timely achievement of the actions as set out in the Action Plan. In addition, our success measures include the following:

- Evidence of progress/improvement in CROS and PIRLS data when compared with previous years
- Retention of institutional Athena SWAN Bronze and the submission for departmental Athena Swan Awards within all departments
- Continued/increased engagement with development activities