

# University College Cork two year self-assessment for the HR Excellence in Research Award

## 1. Introduction

In 2013, University College Cork ('UCC') gained the *HR Excellence in Research Award* in recognition of the University's on-going commitment to adopting the principles of The European Charter for Researchers and a Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers. This commitment is echoed in the University's Research Strategy.

The HR Excellence award to the University was made on the basis of the University's Action Plan for Researchers, which consists of 35 actions that, when complete, will go a very long way towards the University's ambition to adopt in full the Principles of the EC Charter and Code for the benefit of its research staff.

This report outlines the key achievements made against the actions listed in the University's original Action Plan.

## 2. Process of self-audit

The overall responsibility for the monitoring and implementation of the University's Action Plan lies with the HR Research Working Group (for composition see Appendix A). The two year self-assessment has involved wider consultation with the University's research staff, the Research Staff Association, The Research Staff Association HR Working Group (See Appendix E) and the working group established to lead the adoption of the HR Strategy for Research ('HRS4R') in UCC (See Appendix B).

## 3. Key Achievements and Progress against the Original Action Plan

### A. Ethical and Professional Aspects

UCC has incorporated the Irish national protocols for research integrity into its [policy](#) and culture. In June 2014 the "National Policy Statement on Ensuring Research Integrity in Ireland" was launched. The policy statement aims to commit the main organisations in Irish research to the highest standards of integrity in carrying out their research. The working group that produced the policy document included three members of UCC staff: Professor Anita Maguire, Mr. Michael Farrell and Professor Alan Kelly. UCC is also represented on the Ethics Committee of the Royal Irish Academy by Dr. Julia Jansen (Philosophy) Vice Chair of the Committee. Professor Anita Maguire, Vice President for Research and Innovation is also Chair of the newly formed National Forum on Research Integrity. These undertakings have enabled UCC to participate at national level discussions on research integrity. The University's Ethics Committee is tasked with establishing procedures that will continue to embed good research practice into the culture of the University.

International leadership practices are becoming more inclusive for women e.g. Horizon 2020 is making inroads in addressing the gender imbalance in research. Since 2012, gender equality is one of the key priorities of a "Reinforced European Research Area Partnership for Excellence and Growth" (ERA) (<http://www.gender-net.eu/>).

The thrust of equality and wellbeing is now part of the ethos of competitive advantage in the global academic and research environments. In light of this and to better support gender diversity and equal opportunities in research for women, UCC partnered in:

- *Through the Glass Ceiling* program of positive action aimed at career progression for female academics and researchers. The project was funded under the Equality for Women Measure 2010-2013, with funding from the European Social Fund (ESF) through the Human Capital Investment Operational Programme 2007-2013 and the Irish Department of Justice and Equality.
- UCC is also included in a four-year collaborative European project GENOVATE involving partners in seven European universities. GENOVATE is an action-research project based on the promotion of a Gender Equality Action Plan (GEAP) in each partner university.

- UCC is currently participating in the AURORA program. Aurora is a leadership development initiative for women enabling UCC to further encourage the development of its female research, academic and support staff. 6 academic staff joined the Aurora programme in the UK in 2014 and 20 female staff (representative of academic, research, professional services and technical staff) are participating in the Dublin-based programme in 2015.
- UCC has just committed to the implementation of Athena SWAN Charter throughout the organisation and is currently recruiting an Athena SWAN co-ordinator to work on its implementation University wide

Through these initiatives UCC is actively supporting gender diversity and equal opportunities in research for women.

## **B. Recruitment**

The UCC [Employment and Career Management Structure](#) (Appendix C) was introduced for research staff in November 2011. Prior to then research staff were recruited without clearly defined procedures or contract management. The new employment and career management structure includes clearly defined levels within the researcher career path with a requirement for continuous professional training and development throughout the post-doctoral and senior post-doctoral stages and on-going training recommended at all levels. The structure also provides for a researcher's personal and professional development, a consistent recruitment process, and a clear contract management and salary administration policy. Currently all research recruitment adverts and procedures comply with the University's recruitment policy for researchers, the requirements of the role and the University's salary policy. HR provides training for all research staff (who wish to avail of it) in recruitment selection processes and the appointment process here in UCC.

During its implementation all researchers in the University were made aware of the UCC Employment and Career Management Structure (through e-mail circulars, workshops and presentations) and in line with the Universities strategy 99% of research staff have been aligned to the new career structure. The policy is displayed on the [HR Research website](#). All new research staff are informed about the structure at their induction which is mandatory for all new staff. On-going improvements to the policy have also been made by the HR working group which include uniform salary bands for the Senior Research coordinator role and modification of the Research Support Officer bands.

## **C. Working Conditions & Social Security**

A key priority of the University in the past two years has been to create conditions where research staff feel more valued and integrated into the local and wider research communities at College/School and University levels. The University's Research Staff Association, formed in 2006, has been extremely prolific in its achievements to date (e.g. organised researchers social events and relevant seminars, and worked with the VP Research Professor Anita Maguire and Human Resources to enable researcher contributions to be recognised in funding applications) and has already made a significant impact on institutional practice by driving forward its agenda of inclusion in the decision making processes of the University. It has also been instrumental in pushing forward a researcher survey on researcher teaching practices throughout the University.

To this end and to ensure that the research staff voice is heard, UCC Academic Council (10-10-14) endorsed the nomination of two representatives of the research community. Complementing this, research representatives meet with members of the University's senior management team including the VP Research and Innovation and the Director of Human Resources three times per year. Researchers are also represented on the University's Staff Development and Enhancement Committee which is a sub-committee of UCC's Academic Council. Through these channels researchers may input into the relevant decision-making processes of the University. Efforts will continue to be made to coordinate and strengthen representation of research staff both locally and centrally promoting participation of researchers on College and School committees and the University's Governing Body. The Human

Resources Research Advisor meets with the UCCRSA regularly for informal meetings which is a new and welcome initiative.

Currently UCC is bound by the terms of an Emergency Measure in the Public Interest Act, 2013 and the Haddington Road Agreement. Bearing this in mind (and if permitted under the emergency legislation) UCC has begun a review of its research salary administration policy focussing on Research Fellows and Senior Research Fellows with the intention of attracting high calibre researchers to UCC. In light of the economic emergency and as part of its desire to manage expectations UCC has updated its researcher induction to ensure that researchers have clear guidelines regarding their contracts of employment from the outset of their appointment. Following the results of the gap analysis publicisation of the role of the Staff Ombudsman to research staff also occurs at induction. Research Staff like all UCC Staff have access to the Employee Assistance Programme which entitles them to 8 paid counselling sessions per year for more information <http://www.ucc.ie/en/hr/eap>

As stated in the action plan the University recognises that currently a two tiered system exists in the application of policies and procedures in recruitment, contract management and salary administration and in the Tyndall National Institute. This has caused tension and frustration. The University has met with Tyndall research staff and Tyndall management and has fully committed to reviewing the existing structures as appropriate. The University has completed a job evaluation exercise involving all research administrative and technical support staff in Tyndall, with a view to establishing pay parity with their counterparts doing similar or equivalent work in UCC. The University has engaged Price Waterhouse Coopers to carry out this exercise and a report has been delivered. The next step in the process is the Appeals Procedure and the arrangements for hearing appeals will be the subject of a Labour Court hearing in the near future.

#### **D. Training and Development**

UCC is taking a proactive approach to career development for researchers. There are many resources around career development already in place in UCC (see appendix D). In addition to its other training, the University also delivers University wide programmes, including a flagship researcher professional development programme covering the theory and practice of management and leadership called Professional Skills for Research Leaders. The programme is designed for research staff who are interested in developing these key skill areas, both to support their current roles and their career development – whether in academia, industry, business or other contexts. Participants are equipped to work more effectively in their current roles, and to take on future challenges. Coupled with this the **UCC Research Support Services and the UCC Careers Office** has introduced career sessions with industry. These lunchtime sessions provide information about recruiting, networking and exploration of research opportunities with industry.

Within the University mentoring schemes for research staff have developed organically and in response to funding calls. These are organized and delivered locally in Colleges and Schools. Other mentoring schemes are delivered centrally by the HR Staff Training & Development Unit. Mentoring is regarded as an important opportunity to supplement other training offerings to enable research staff to develop their careers of choice. HR is currently working with the **UCC Research Support Services** to implement formal structures in the university to mentor researchers in writing grants and securing funding.

As part of its commitment to researchers UCC has introduced a robust training and development schedule which combines programs from **UCC Research Support Services, The Careers Office, Human Resources, Technology Transfer** and external trainers. We hope that this training and development will complement and enhance the informal structures that are already available (and those currently in development) within the University. Research staff also have access to the [Staff Fee Concession Scheme](#) which provides financial support for programmes at degree level. Research staff also have access to paid examination leave and study leave to pursue approved

programmes of study. UCC also hosts a Staff Recognition Awards Scheme and The Research Awards Scheme which have been introduced in recent years and have profiled many of the University's Researchers and their work.

#### **4. Evaluation and Monitoring**

Progress against the University's Action Plan has been monitored on an on-going basis by the HR Research working group and the UCC Research Staff Association. Research staff have been consulted directly about the progress of the Action Plan through various meetings of the UCCRSA HR Working group.

#### **5. Next Steps and Focus Going Forward**

Whilst UCC has achieved many of the objectives set out in the original Implementation Plan (Action Plan) and has made significant progress in embedding the Principles of The Charter and Code into policy and procedure, there remain areas in which the institution needs to focus efforts in the next two years.

These areas include:

- We will work with the University Ethics committee to develop a workshop on research integrity and research ethics including best practice in data/records management and storage and raise general awareness of research integrity and research ethics across campus.
- The development of an agreement between employers and funding bodies which supports career development for researchers is happening at the National Level. It is expected that this agreement will come into effect in 2016. This will provide a uniform policy for all Universities in Ireland surrounding career advancement and salary scales for research staff in Irish Universities.
- We will focus on raising awareness of the University's commitment to researcher development amongst Principal Investigators and Senior Academics in the next two years through workshops and meetings starting at College level. We are currently feeding into the follow-on document for Ireland' Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation particularly in the area of the Charter and Code for Researchers.
- The University will continue to support the development of UCC's research staff. We will do this by providing encouragement and support from senior management and champion the incorporation of researchers in key committees across the University, at School and College level, and at Academic Council.
- The original concept of a Postgraduate Certificate in Research Management has been delivered in the guise of the ILM endorsed Professional Skills for Research Leaders Programme which will be introduced to Senior Post Docs and Research Fellows to enhance their research management skills at this critical time in their careers.
- Although a lot of progress has been made in the area of Researcher Performance Development and Review and the monitoring and recording of Probation for research staff, UCC recognises that a lot more still needs to be done. For PI's who have engaged in this process there has been very positive feedback and UCC intends to embed this process in the broader university community. We intend to continue the work of the HR Research working group to address and improve these very important issues. Amendments to the scheme are currently the subject of consultation with the Unions. <http://www.ucc.ie/en/hr/pdrs/training>
- Human Resources will work with the UCC Research Staff Association (UCCRSA) regarding review of the Career Framework, and engage with the University community regarding the Career Framework via regular briefing sessions.

## **Appendix A**

HR Research Working Group:

Mr Barry O'Brien, Director of Human Resources (Chair)

Professor Anita Maguire, Vice President for Research and Innovation

Mary O'Regan, HR Research Advisor

Dr Maeve Lankford, HR Manager

Helen O'Donoghue, HR Manager

Susan O'Callaghan, HR Manager

Dr Siobhan Cusack, Senior Research Officer, UCC Research Support Services

Tracy Eagles, Research Contract Management

Laura McSweeney, Research Contract Management

## **Appendix B:**

A working group was established to lead the adoption of the HRS4R in University College Cork. It included representation across academic disciplines and research areas in the university and consisted of the following members;

Mr Barry O'Brien, Director of Human Resources (Chair)

Ms Mary O'Regan, Department of Human Resources

Dr Paul Bolger, Environmental Research Institute

Professor Geraldine Boylan, College of Medicine & Health

Dr Colman Casey, College of Medicine & Health

Dr Gordon Dalton, Hydraulics and Maritime Research Centre and Association of Research Contract Staff

Professor Alan Kelly, School of Food & Nutritional Sciences

Dr Liam Marnane, Dean of Graduate Studies

Dr Tanya Mulcahy, Health Innovation Hub

Ms Kate O'Brien, Science, Engineering and Food Science

Dr Caitríona Ní Laoire, College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences

Dr David O'Connell, UCC Research Support Services, Office of Vice President Research and Innovation

Dr Seamus O'Tuama, Adult Continuing Education

Ms Colette Ormonde, Department of Human Resources, Tyndall National Institute

Dr Domenico Zito, College of Science, Engineering and Food Science and Tyndall National Institute

**Appendix C:**

UCC [Employment and Career Management Structure](#)

## **Appendix D:**

Effective Presentation Skills for Researchers

Teaching and Learning (5 x 2 hour sessions)

The Research Process and Effective Communication-from Grant Proposal to Research Publication

Career Management Skills for Research Staff

Creative Job Hunting and Online & Offline Networking for Researchers

Introduction to Project Management for Research Staff

Organising a Conference Online

Mentoring Scheme

More info at: <http://www.ucc.ie/en/hr/training/plan/research/>

The **Careers office** also offers courses and information for Research staff on CV's, applications and interview planning plus a lot more at <http://www.ucc.ie/en/careers/informationforresearchstaff/> including links to [vitae](#) which is an organisation dedicated to realising the potential of researchers.

**IT Training** also provide a lot of courses at <http://www.ucc.ie/en/tcentre/> and <http://www.ucc.ie/en/it/>

ILM accredited Professional Skills for Research Leaders: Information at <http://www.ucc.ie/en/hrresearch/psrl/>

## **Appendix E**

Research Staff Association HR Working Group

Dr Mark Jessopp, Chair of the UCCRSA Committee

Dr Ehsan Sooudi, Vice Chair of the UCCRSA Committee

Dr Gordon Dalton, Secretary of the UCCRSA Committee

Ms Mary O'Regan, Research Advisor, HR UCC

## **Appendix F**

## **Appendix G (See Below)**

EURAXXES Skills study Template

## **Appendix H**

Researcher Conference Endurance in Research April 2015

See information and programme at: <http://www.ucc.ie/en/hrresearch/researcherconference2015/>

**APPENDIX G**

<b>Euraxess Skills Study Template</b>				
University College Cork Ireland	<b>R2 Recognised Researcher</b>	<b>R2 Recognised Researcher</b>	<b>R3 Established Researcher</b>	<b>R4 Leading Researcher</b>
<b>Status</b>	Employee – Post Doctoral Researcher	Employee – Senior Post Doctoral Researcher	Employee – Research Fellow	Employee – Senior Research Fellow
<b>Overview</b>	This title applies to newly qualified Post-Doctoral Researchers and will be considered as a period of training as the researcher will have dual goals in terms of the research project and their own career development. The researcher will be mentored by a Principal Investigator (PI). It is expected that a researcher would spend no more than 3 years at the Post-Doctoral level, subject to the term of the project and would then be eligible to compete for a Senior Post Doctoral post advertised by the University.	This is an advanced research training role, building on prior experience as a Post-Doctoral Researcher in UCC or elsewhere, where the researcher will conduct a specified programme of research and research training under the guidance of a Principal Investigator. The primary purpose of the role is to deliver research results and objectives, develop new or advanced research skills and competencies, the successful development of funding proposals and to interact in the supervision and mentorship of graduate students, in conjunction with an academic supervisor.	The Research Fellow title is awarded to individuals who have personally secured their own independent external research funding inclusive of their salary following an open, transparent and competitive selection process by the research funding body or who have been appointed by the Higher Education Institution following an open competition. The Research Fellow would still be associated with a Principal Investigator who would act as their mentor and facilitate access to research infrastructure.	The highly prestigious and competitive Senior Research Fellow title is awarded to individuals who have personally secured their own substantial, independent, external research funding, inclusive of salary, following an open, transparent and competitive selection process by the research funding body, or who have been appointed by the University following an open competition. The Senior Research Fellow would be completely independent with access to their own research infrastructure.

<b>A. Research knowledge and skills</b>	Grant Writing / Scientific Writing  Epigeum Module on Ethics in Research	The Research Process and Effective Communication- from Grant Proposal to Research Publication  Working with Postgraduate Research Students Funder Review Panels Securing Funding	Grantmanship training	Certificate in Teaching and Learning
<b>B. Personal effectiveness</b>	Career Planning  CV, Job Application and Interview Techniques  IT Training	CV, Job Application and Interview Techniques	Leadership training	Negotiating Skills
<b>C. Research Management</b>	Not at this stage in their career	Teaching and Learning Skills  Supervising PhD Students	Managing a research team	Mentoring Training
<b>D. Engagement, influence and impact</b>	Communication Skills Training  Presentation Skills	Industry led workshops (e.g. leadership)  Commercial awareness  Knowledge Transfer	Professional skills for Research leaders online Epigeum course to be rolled out Jan 2015	Commercialisation and IP  Professional skills for Research leaders online Epigeum course to be rolled out Jan 2015

\* See list at <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/vitae-publications/rdf-related/introducing-the-vitae-researcher-development-framework-rdf-to-employers-2011.pdf>

UCC provides a comprehensive skills and career development framework for research staff. The framework supports the Principal Investigator and the Post-Doctoral/Senior Post-Doctoral researcher in identifying development objectives during the period of employment, to support obtaining the skills required to progress through the research career path. The framework enables Post-Doctoral researchers to plan their careers and to access training and development activities that support their research role and longer term career goals. Furthermore, establishes a process that enables post-doctoral researchers to engage with their Principal Investigator (PI) for feedback and input on their progress.

The framework identifies four key categories of development for a post-doctoral researcher as they progress through their career. The four key skills development categories have been identified as follows;

1. Professional Research Skills
2. Personal Effectiveness and Professional Development
3. Teaching, Learning and Mentoring
4. Innovation, Commercial and Industrial Skills

Each category is made up of several development sub-categories to facilitate prioritising and personalising the researcher's training and skills development plan and which will be used as a guide by the Post-Doctoral researcher and the PI when reviewing progress and identifying areas for development during the period of employment.

**Please see links to UCC Researcher Training**

<http://www.ucc.ie/en/hr/training/plan/research/>

<http://www.ucc.ie/en/careers/informationforresearchstaff/>

<http://www.ucc.ie/en/tcentre/> and <http://www.ucc.ie/en/it/>