

Senate Presentation and Discussion 10th February 2021 – a brief update

In 2020/21 we aim to provide a brief update following the Senate presentation and discussion ‘open sessions’.

The presentation topic on 10th February 2020 was Adaptation and Renewal: Research and Innovation, and the presenters were Professor Jonathan Seckl, Senior VP and Dr Sara Shinton, Head of Researcher Development, IAD. They drew on the support of Dr Lorna Thomson, ERO; Professor Malcolm Macleod, Academic lead for Research Improvement and Research Integrity; Jarmo Eskelinen, DDI; Dr George Baxter, Edinburgh Innovations; David Brown, Deputy Vice-Principal; Bridget Mellifont, Policy Officer and Nicola Cuthbert, Research Development Manager.

Challenges

After summarising many of the impressive achievements staff have made in research during and related to COVID, and support for PhD students in terms of funded extensions, we focused discussion on the impacts felt by many staff, particularly those from under-represented groups. In recent years we’ve looked with more care at the inequalities experienced by some researchers, so were fortunate in being able to draw on this work to make rapid, evidence-based decisions during the lifetime of the ART: Research and Innovation to mitigate these.

This report summarises the response to comments and suggestions received during the presentation and discussion. Four key challenges were highlighted in our presentation and in the comments received.

- Communication and access to information
- Support for managers of researchers
- Insecurity in employment
- Understanding researcher experiences

Many of these were echoed in the results of the Research Culture survey conducted in July 2020, which identified issues in

- support in navigating grant processes;
- knowing how to report research misconduct;
- confidence, skills and training in managing a research team;
- perceptions of institutional commitment to diversity and inclusion

Progress

To improve communications and awareness of support, the new **Research Staff Hub** has been designed and is now being reviewed by key stakeholders. The structure includes a section on “Rights and Responsibilities” of research staff in direct response to comments at Senate. It

will also provide researchers with clear links to support from services for issues such as misconduct or bullying. The new Hub will be launched before the summer.

To **support managers**, a broad resource is under development. Based on the successful CMVM “Managing Your Research Team” training, this will include clear links to all policies and practices relevant to research staff managers. There will be self-directed training materials including case studies and facilitator guides so the materials can be incorporated into local training events. The materials will be available in late Summer 2021.

To help researchers navigate support and services more effectively, every school will have a named “**Research Staff/Postdoc Champion**”. CSE and CMVM have these largely in place and IAD is working with CAHSS to develop a model which is best suited to the researcher population across the College.

To help researchers understand the requirements of research funders and plan their career development, Edinburgh Research Office has developed an **Academic Talent Strategy** which clearly sets out the developing expectations of funders and projects as research ambitions grow. This strategy aims to reduce opacity and improve fairness by making it clearer to all researchers what is expected of them so they can use these insights in development discussions. ERO are also building their online support to complement 1:1 advice.

We hope that the diversity of the new Chancellor’s Fellows cohort demonstrates our commitment to **EDI** but we know we can do more. We’re currently interviewing a range of stakeholders connected with their recruitment to ensure best practice is understood and shortcomings are scrutinised and addressed. These interviews will continue over the next few months and will be summarised in a public report to support other institutions with ambitions to recruit diverse researcher cohorts. We will also start to talk to those who weren’t successful to see what strategies we can apply to help them succeed in securing similar opportunities.

Another **EDI** initiative has been the start of two new programmes in Spring 2021. One is aimed at researchers who have had their research time disrupted by caring responsibilities or other roles in the University. A second is a leadership programme for minority ethnic women, a particularly under-represented group. The impact of these programmes and learning from the experiences of participants will be reviewed in AY 21/22 when the first cohorts complete the training.

Insecurity and precarity remain a concern of our researchers and those who support them. The funding model for research is a major factor, but we are exploring what we can do to minimise insecurity by reviewing the University’s Talent Register (analysis complete and now being considered by HR as part of their wider work on precarity) and interviewing long-term researchers to better understand their experiences. This is a sector-wide challenge so we are also talking to funders and other institutions about potential cross-sector approaches. We’ll report on our findings and any identified actions in Summer 2021.

Regarding **PhD extensions**, three rounds of funded extensions have allocated over £2.1 million to 184 students. Additionally, a hardship fund has supported 84 students and

distributed almost £56,000.

New developments

The interest and engagement from the research community in the University's commitment to support has also driven a significant development in governance. A new high-level committee focused on **Research Culture** will be instituted later this academic year, with representation from all stakeholders, including early career researchers. This new committee will scrutinise the developments outlined above and identify how best to improve our research culture.

We've also been successful in securing funding from the **Technician Commitment Collaboration** fund, (one of three successful applications) to highlight the breadth of support available to technicians at Edinburgh's Higher Education Institutions. The project, led by IAD and HR, will improve knowledge on the different career options available and develop awareness of the opportunities for development across the University of Edinburgh, Heriot-Watt University and Queen Margaret University.

Supporting links

Concordat Action Plan: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/institute-academic-development/research-roles/research-only-staff/advice/concordat/concordat>

Edinburgh Research Office competency framework: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/research-office/research-talent-and-culture/researcher-development/competency-framework-research-funding>

Edinburgh Research Office - Winning Research Funding online resource: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/research-office/winning-research-funding>

Edinburgh Research Office – COVID themed support for researchers (EASE login required) <https://ue.sharepoint.com/sites/EdinburghResearchOffice/SitePages/COVID-19-and-research.aspx>

SERCH (Support for Research during Covid Hub) - <https://www.ed.ac.uk/arts-humanities-soc-sci/research-ke/serch-research-hub>

Research Staff Hub **test site** (EASE login required) <https://www.edweb.ed.ac.uk/unpublished/researchers>

Technician Commitment Collaboration project: <https://www.technicians.org.uk/successful-technician-commitment-collaboration-fund-bids-announced>