

## **HR Excellence in Research Award – 4 year Review**

### **Case Study 1: Early Stage Researcher Programme**

#### *Background*

At the end of the 2012/13 academic year, the Research, Consultancy and Scholarship Committee (RCSC) agreed to fund a research skills development programme for Early Stage Researchers (ESRs), in line with the University's research strategy, and to support the research environment across the University as part of our strategy for REF2014.

Nominations were sought from Deans, and an external facilitator approached to run the programme, alongside a newly appointed Bath Spa Researcher Development Officer. It was agreed that the programme would then be offered on a two-yearly schedule.

#### *Early Stage Research Programme Outline*

The programme was designed to run over 6 half-day sessions and mentors were appointed for each of the attendees. Experienced academic staff were also invited to input into the sessions, and share their expertise.

The course aims for the staff concerned were to:

- equip them to better understand the context of research, knowledge transfer, and the funding environment
- build confidence in designing and managing research projects and funding applications

All workshops were designed to include a mixture of:

- Small group activities and discussions
- Information inputs – from the facilitator or invited speakers/specialists
- Q&A sessions
- Personal reflection and action planning, with at least three weeks between each session to allow time for reflection.

Sessions offered were:

#### **1. From Practice to Research**

- What does research look like in an academic context?
- Time management – fitting research in to your academic work schedule
- Where are you now in your research career, and where do you want to be?
- Getting established in a research environment – building contacts and networks
- How do your ideas lend themselves to research?

## **2. Developing a research proposal**

- Tuning up your research ideas – what aspects do you need to think about when planning the project?
- Designing a proposal – what might it look like?
- Thinking about resources, stakeholders, timeline
- What will funders be looking for?

## **3. Grant Writing**

- The funding landscape: What are the funding opportunities in my research field?
- The funders perspective: Their objectives and criteria
- The proposal review process
- Building your proposition
- The structure of a grant application
- Grant writing mistakes

## **4. Your Research Audience**

Based on the 'Research in Context' programme designed by the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement this session explored:

- the social context of your research and how you might respond to this
- what might be the external perspectives on your research?
- who is your audience? Using audience segmentation to target your activities
- how you might engage external stakeholders with your research

## **5. Delivering a Research Project**

- What do projects look like in an academic context?
- Thinking about your research as a project: using project management principles to manage your research
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Managing risk
- Staying motivated and keeping on track

## **6. Building your Research Profile**

Building on your existing research portfolio and reputation through:

- Networking and Social Media
- Collaborations and research partnerships
- Working effectively with others: across disciplines
- Establishing an international profile

### *Attendance*

11 staff attended the course from across the 5 academic Schools.

### *Effectiveness of course*

The evaluation of the course was positive, with ESRs who attended valuing the opportunity to form a network of peers and share experience and practice (see Appendix A attached).

A summary of activities undertaken by the ESRs since they completed the course can be seen below:

<b>Activity</b>	<b>% of participants</b>
Promotion (internal)	9%
Promotion (external)	18%
Research grant application submitted	50%
Research grant awarded	40% (67% success rate)

### *Next Steps*

A new course had been designed for 2015/16 which will commence in February 2016.

15 staff have been nominated to join the programme and have been released from teaching to enable them to participate. This was a particular concern as some of the staff nominated to the previous programme found it difficult to fit the sessions into their teaching timetables. This year, both the Dean and Head of Department have confirmed that teaching relief has been made fully available for all those attending.

Following on from 2013/14 feedback, experienced researchers and senior academics have been invited to input into all the sessions, to share good practice and to give working examples of research management in the areas covered.

## Appendix A

### General feedback from Early Stage Researcher programme – 2013-14

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• It was well structured and had a good linear progression which meant that participants could follow its logic. Teaching materials were good and communication clear. Relaxed and informal style made everyone feel at their ease.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Very useful, especially meeting successful academics and hearing their top tips, plus also being allowed to read successful and unsuccessful grant applications. Also useful to network. Only thing I can think of to improve it is to provide more concrete examples, as per the grant app session, in other sessions, e.g. could we have sight of real gantt charts/project management info and how it went wrong/right?</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The programme was well designed and included the key elements required for us as learners. The thematic approach to sessions was good, as was the recognition that not everyone had 'something' to bring to the sessions in terms of their current research or past experience.</li><li>• Good use of guests, sometimes ad hoc, speakers that had interesting things to say.</li><li>• Good to meet others in a similar position from other disciplines.</li><li>• Although this is not directly related to the programme design, attending did sometimes become a difficult thing to fit in with the workload for the learners. This sometimes left people either absent or present but stressed, which is a shame. In some ways, it is nice to be able to shut out the rest of the world and focus on the CPD but it seemed like not everyone found this easy, particularly those new to their teaching posts.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Strengths: some relevant and appropriate contexts explored. The main presenter was knowledgeable and the 'guest' speakers also added lots of insights. The programme was insightful and explored, mainly, relevant themes.</li><li>• Weaknesses: Greater detail in relation to identifying and developing bids would be welcome, as would exploring more examples of successful bids. The final few sessions were not greatly useful.</li><li>• Greater intensity would be welcomed, longer sessions, and deconstructing more specific research projects. Basing the sessions at NP would also have made the logistics of the programme easier to engage with. Further support from my School, to attend easier and without hinderance, would help enable greater attendance.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• For the most part, I enjoyed the programme.</li><li>• Strengths: an excellent facilitator, and very knowledgeable of a wide range of issues relevant to developing research programmes.</li><li>• Weaknesses: Felt that the course was a bit too broad - I would have liked to have more specifically tailored guidance.</li></ul>