

HR Excellence in Research Case Study

Northumbria University: Research Development Programmes for academic staff

Background

Within Research and Innovation Services (RIS), the Research Development and Research Policy Teams run a successful researcher development provision to academic staff. This mainly comprises instructor-led, in-house individual sessions on topics such as grant proposal development, finding funding, PhD supervision and developing resilience. Feedback from these events is positive, but we always aim to improve and redevelop our training provision to ensure currency and relevance.

In recent years the strategic direction and focus of the University has changed: the publication of the [University Strategy 2018-2023](#) and its ambitious targets for increasing research income has increased requests for training sessions on areas such as the changing research landscape, writing successful grant applications, creating impact in funding bids and project management.

In response to this, since Spring 2019 we have focussed our training provision on the ‘funder journey’; that is, the steps that are taken in finding funding, writing a proposal, receiving funding and project management. RIS Senior Management and the Research Development Team agreed that three separate programmes, each aimed at different career stages, would be developed, advertised and recruited to in academic year 2019/20. The aim of these cohort programmes would be to create a community of academics who could then support each other and share ideas, promoting a positive, collegiate research culture at the University. The three cohort programmes are:

- Early Career Researcher (ECR) Development Programme – our ECR community at Northumbria is growing, and we realise the need to invest in this staff group as much as possible to give them the tools and support they need at the beginning of their research journey.
- Next Generation of Large Award Holders (NGLAH) Programme – we have run this programme at Northumbria for a number of years. It is extremely popular with staff who are looking to win their first large research grant, and equipping them with the tools, knowledge and support to achieve this.
- Fellowship Ready Programme – winning a Fellowship grant is very different to other research funding. Schemes are very competitive, take months to develop and concentrate on the individual, rather than a team. We want to give staff who are ready to develop themselves at this level all the advice and support that they need to craft a winning proposal.

Although a lot of resources go into running these programmes concurrently with the rest of our training provision, we are committed to their continuation, for the benefits they offer to our researchers.

Development

Throughout the summer of 2019, the Research Development and Research Policy teams developed the three cohort programmes.

Scoping sessions determined the content: all materials accumulated from past funding development events were scrutinised to see if exercises could be re-used, and new materials were developed where required.

We decided that the use of guest speakers in all three programmes (academics and professional services staff) would be beneficial. Academics would present case study examples of their successful bids and provide inspiration to attendees, and professional services staff would demonstrate the practical steps involved, such as which templates to use, how to navigate the processes involved in bid development and accessing support available online.

All programmes were designed to take place over a four-week period, to minimise disruption to teaching schedules. Dates were arranged for ECR and NGLAH programmes in both semesters as demand was expected to be high for these programmes. Dates and venues were sourced in advance to ensure the best spaces in the University could be used.

We considered how to target academics and whether a selective application process would be beneficial. It was agreed by the Research Development Team that an application process would allow us to screen potential participants, to ensure they were at the right stage of their research career for the programmes, and so that we would have advance knowledge of their funding experience to date to inform the design process. As a result of this, application forms were developed along with deadlines for submission and dates for selection.

Delivery, feedback and next steps

To date (November 2019), all programmes have been successfully recruited to. We have 30 staff currently completing the ECR programme, we have 16 staff due to start NGLAH at the end of November, and 10 staff who are studying with us on our Fellowship Ready programme. There has been a great deal of interest in both the ECR and NGLAH programmes and so we are looking to deliver these again in semester 2. Feedback so far has been very positive, and we are looking at evaluation tools to capture feedback which will help us grow and develop these programmes for the future.