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Bridging the gap between academia and business

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Early career researchers define their identity

The University of York Management School established the Early Career Researcher (ECR) Forum, with Dr Tina Kowlaski at its helm in early 2020. Steps were taken to identify appropriate members and a programme of activities and support functions were developed to address the needs of staff within the School.

Through discussions with Forum members, it became clear that, although the Forum was an informal community, there would be value in outlining its main objectives and highlighting these clearly. Moreover, these discussions revealed that several members were keen to engage with businesses, but they weren't confident in how best to go about this. The gap between academia and practice is commonly acknowledged and it was hoped that as a Forum the gap could be bridged.

The research

With the support of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) National Productivity Investment Fund - Accelerating Business Collaboration (NPIF-ABC) funding, Dr Kowalski reached out to Mihaela Gruia, founder and Director of Research Retold, to develop and co-ordinate a collaboration that would directly respond to the needs of the ECR Forum.

Through individual participation and use of breakout rooms, members were encouraged to think about the Forum's purpose, function and mission. The rich discussions were captured by the Research Retold team and used as a basis for creating The ECR Manifesto.

The group identified that one interest of the ECR forum was to support businesses and as a result, explored ways to make their academic work more visible and accessible, with a view to encourage external organisations to collaborate with them on research projects. By carefully considering how to best create this material, participants were able to showcase their interests and enthusiasm for greater engagement with business as well as use terminology that would make their academic work more meaningful to potential business partners.

The outcome

The NPIF-ABC funding enabled the support of Research Retold to be brought in, whose expertise lies in bridging those links between academia and practice. Through this collaboration, the ECR Manifesto has been established, as well as individualised content relating to business engagement that can be shared across various platforms. This document clearly articulates 'Who we are', 'Who we support', and 'How we support ECRs'. This visual depiction is instantly accessible and easy to digest.

After fruitful discussions with colleagues in the University's Marketing department, a brand-new webpage for the ECR Forum has been created. The content for this webpage has been inspired by the content co-created between the ECR Forum members and the Research Retold facilitators during the workshops. These will serve to raise profiles externally and highlight to local and national businesses that ECRs are keen to work with them and discuss potential collaborations.

<https://www.york.ac.uk/management/research/ecr-forum/>

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