HR Excellence Report 2018: Case Study University of York

This case study of good practice highlights two initiatives that have positively impacted on the researcher experience

1. <u>Mentoring Pilot</u>

The <u>University Pilot mentoring scheme for Researchers 2017</u> ran from March - October 2017. It was an objective-led cross-departmental scheme that included 4 departments: Chemistry, Environment, Physics and Health Sciences. The four departments involved represent 43% of the researcher population at York. 29 pairs from across the four departments took part. Key to the success of the pilot were departmentally based mentor coordinators who liaised and communicated with researchers (mentors and mentees) in the department. Gender balance: of the mentees: 17 Female and 12 Male,
Mentors: 18 Female and 11 Male. The majority of the mentors were senior lecturers or above mentoring researchers who identified themselves as research fellows or PDRAs and were typically (but not exclusively) within 1-5 years of completing their PhD.

The end of pilot evaluation demonstrated widespread support for the scheme:

- 100% of mentees and 97% of mentors would recommend the mentoring scheme to others.
- 87% of the mentees said their objectives had been either fully or partly met
- 84% of mentors would like to continue to be a mentor (16% said maybe). 62% of mentees would like to be a mentor in the future.
- 94% of mentees and 95% of mentors said they were very satisfied or satisfied with their mentee
- Half of all mentees were still meeting with their mentor despite the pilot having officially ended.

Mentees were asked what kind of issues and goals they wanted to address in their mentoring relationships and were given a number of options from which they could select as many as they wished. These are listed below with percentages of mentees who selected each option in brackets:

- Career Planning and Guidance (93%)
- General Support and Guidance (71%)
- Knowing what I want to do next in my career (58%)
- Understanding what is required of a first class researcher (48%)
- Increased self-confidence (45%)
- Achieving work-life balance (25%)
- Increased self-reflection (22%)

Mentors and mentees were invited to joint training sessions and were encouraged to clarify expectations about their respective roles enabling a dialogue about equality, diversity and inclusivity and to recognise the limitations and boundaries of the mentoring relationship.

Matching mentees and mentors from different disciplines had a positive impact with both parties evidencing positive benefits:

> Mentee "I found being paired with someone from outside my department and research area highly valuable. It made me more open and frank in my discussions. And more trusting of the confidentiality of our discussions. I also gained a different perspective of the wider function and structure of the university."

> *Mentor "The scheme allowed me to relate to the work of a less experienced academic in a different research field. There were many similarities, but also possibly significant differences to my own research field. I now appreciate a little more how 'cut-throat' the post-doc environment can appear to those engaged with it at the bottom."*

In addition to the 4 Science Departments involved in the pilot *12 further departments from across all three faculties* reported at the Shared Practice Event 2018 having some form of mentoring provision in place for researchers (English and Related Studies, History, Economics, Education, Social Policy and Social Work, Sociology, Politics, Management, Law, Mathematics, Electronic Engineering). This grass roots departmental activity represent 15% of the researcher population at York which, combined with those in the institutional pilot, make a total of 58% of researchers who currently have access to mentoring. This is an exponential rise since 2016 and will be further expanded to all researchers in 2019 with the launch of an institution wide objective led, cross departmental mentoring scheme open to all researchers and academic staff (in the first instance).

2. <u>Public Engagement Training and Events</u>

<u>Public Engagement training and event</u>s have become a signature of the research experience at the University of York. As a testament to this several other Universities have asked for advice on how to develop Public Engament (PE) training events such as <u>Falling Walls</u>.

A suite of public engagement training including voice projection, pitch training, media training and bespoke one to one support focussing on rhetoric, narrative and story-telling is provided for finalists in the 3MT and Falling Walls competitions. Similarly the research staff who took part in the Research Staff Conference also took part in peer and expert led presentation training. The researchers who choose to take part in the public engagement events and competitions identify as communities of researchers and communication specialists providing support and advice for each other as they hone the narrative about their research and in so doing develop greater clarity over the nature, scope and potential impact of their research. Far from distracting researchers from their science, all those who take part in PE training say they better understand their research as a result of the challenge and provocation they receive from peers and audience members. This message is being conveyed to PIs through leadership training programmes and targeted communications. The value of the ability to provide a short, concise articulation of research is also being endorsed by the University's <u>Research Champions</u> and is being used as the main form of selection in an exclusive grant writing retreat in December.

<u>Falling Walls</u> is an International Public Engagement event organised to showcase research which has the potential to break down intellectual and societal barriers or 'walls'. York's 10 finalists were selected through faculty level heats where prizes were awarded, and then finalists were given bespoke training to equip them for the 3 minute pitch to a prestigious judging panel and audience. The impact of the event was significant. At individual level the semi- finalist, Christian Shuster, dept of Physics and winner, Jet Sanders, dept of Psychology, went to Berlin to compete in the International final. Jet was told informally that she was one of the top 10. She made 20+ connections and has since been invited to take part in the Google Sci Foo Event in California, been awarded a University Learning and Teaching Award 2018, recently taken up a post in behavioural science at London School of Economics (LSE) and been invited to produce a TEDx talk. She attributes much of this success and exposure to the Falling Walls competition. At cross-institutional level, a <u>promotional video </u>was produced to inspire other researchers to get involved and has resulted in the RET Team providing consultation advice to other organisations looking to host a Falling Walls lab. The University of

Surrey is the only institution to be hosting a UK lab in 2018 at which York has a finalist. York will host a Falling Walls Event in 2019 and run this bi-annually as an opportunity to showcase the best research talent and innovation locally and nationally.

The York Falling Walls promotional video illustrates the impact of this event in showcasing to the public the potential of research to be life changing. The judging panel included representatives from media, research funders and business such as enable researchers to receive feedback on the extent to which their research has commercialisable/policy potential.

The top two 'Falling Walls' finalists (one PhD student and one Postdoc) went on to represent the University at the Falling Walls final in Berlin. Both reported having made 20+ contacts and have both since gone on to secure posts at other universities.

"Working with academic peers, particularly from different disciplines whom I was exposed to through 3MT/Falling walls, has opened my mind to a wonderful variety of viewpoint, enhanced my ability to communicate across disciplines, identify the relevance of my work across disciplines and even shape the direction of my research and scientific practice." Jet Sanders, Psychology and Falling Walls and 3MT winner (now Research Fellow in Behavioural Science at LSE)

Public Engagement training also enables researchers to raise their profile in the public domain, exposure that translates into employment and research success. Jamie Khoo, UoY 3MT 2018 winner won the People's Choice at the UK 3MT final in September 2018. She is the only non-scientist to win a prize at the UK Final since it started in 2013. She has now launched a social media campaign about her work. Vishwadeep Sarangi, Dept of Electronic Engineering took part in two competitions in 2017: 3 Minute Thesis (3MT) 2017 (people's choice winner at the 2017 York event) and the York Falling Walls event (he was 3rd prize winner). The confidence gained helped him to secure funding for two Medtech secondments which he describes in his Youtube video. Joy Ogbemudia, 2017 3MT has been made Human of York, a weekly instagram accolade recognising York citizens who contribute to society and has secured a teaching position at Leeds Beckett University Business School.

The experience, expertise and full commitment of senior staff at the University to Public Engagement makes it a unique and identifiable aspect of researcher development at York.