UCL

UCL Research Staff Development Strategy 2017-2022

UCL Research Staff Development Strategy

Overview

This document proposes a UCL Research Staff Development Strategy capable
of supporting the development of UCL's research staff to fully meet the multi-faceted
roles which they perform within the university and in the broader society. Mindful also
of the challenges faced by those commencing a research role, a particular focus
of the strategy is the development required by Early Career Researchers, both
to develop in their research career and to prepare them to transit to their next role.

Mission

This strategy supports the following mission:

"To further the principal themes of UCL 2034 and UCL's (forthcoming) Research
Strategy by providing our research staff with a comprehensive, world-leading
development programme capable of providing them with the specialist knowledge
and skills required to succeed in their research roles, to provide them with the generic
career knowledge, skills to do so and to encourage the independence and agency
required to transit to a future role, whether within Higher Education or another sector."

Vision

This strategy has the following vision:

"UCL's research staff will feel listened to, valued and invested in by the university.
They will have easy access to a world-leading suite of development options and
career advice and which will help prepare them to excel in future academic and non-
academic roles. Early Career Researchers in particular will feel supported, developed
and enabled to explore and achieve their aspirations and to develop the knowledge,
skills, leadership behaviours and networks to do so, whilst also maintaining their
desired work-balance. UCL's researchers will voice satisfaction with the available
development opportunities and will act as ambassadors amongst the wider research
community for UCL and its Strategic Researcher Development Framework."

Values

The strategy supports the following values:

"A desire to challenge the status quo openly, freely and rigorously; an openness to pushing the frontiers of disciplinary knowledge within and beyond conventional disciplines; a desire to make impact with the fruits of research; a commitment to excellence, fairness and equality; a sensitivity to diversity; a commitment to work with integrity and to adhere to ethically acceptable standards of conduct; to work in a sustainable manner; to develop collaborative relationships and partnerships; to show leadership and to engage with society beyond academia."

Differentiating Research Staff Development

Research staff, especially post-doctoral staff, require a distinctive and additional knowledge and skills set from that needed to obtain their PhD. This is required both to pursue a research career and to successfully transit beyond the academy, if desired. Examples of this distinctive knowledge and skill requirement include financial management and grant getting, their legal obligations, how to deliver on multiple projects, teaching and facilitation skills, how to pitch ideas, influence others and negotiate their stance, advanced public impact and engagement skills, (team) leadership and management skills – including the adoption of a coaching style, how to mentor others and career support.

The strategy aims to satisfy this distinctive and additional requirement in addition to meeting research staff's technical and research-specific knowledge and skill development needs.

Goals

In pursuing the strategy, we will be guided by the following goals:

1. Developing UCL's researchers to achieve their potential as researchers and as contributors to the wider society, both within the UK and internationally;
2. Encouraging all researchers to embrace their career in its fullest sense, to take ownership of this, explore the range of career options available to them and to consider the development needed to be successful;
3. Providing all researchers with the specialist skills to excel and lead in their research area;
4. Providing all researchers with access to the generic and transferable knowledge, behavioural and leadership skills to succeed in their current and future career, whether in higher education or another sector;
5. Drawing on researcher development expertise from across UCL, including Faculties, Departments and Research Networks, to create a comprehensive programme suitable for the multi-faceted roles researchers perform and to prepare them for a range of potential careers.
6. Seeking a Research Staff Development Centre, to provide a central location for researcher development and UCL and to facilitate the overall development of UCL's research staff.

Objectives

We will achieve our goals through delivery of the following objectives:

1. Expand, co-ordinate and deliver the Research Staff Development Programme (RSDP) to include development in both the generic and specialist knowledge and skills required for a successful research career. Include within this the researcher-related development provided by all UCL providers, including Faculties and Departments, research-led teaching (UCL Arena), career development (UCL Careers), innovation and enterprise (UCL Innovation and Enterprise), public engagement (Public Engagement Unit), leadership, management and behavioural skills development (UCL HR Organisational Development), Research/Library skills and Open Science (UCL Library Services) and the Research Facilitators (OVPR).

2. Work with Principal Investigators and other senior research staff, to engage them in developing their Early Career Researchers and to raise their awareness of the available researcher development opportunities;

3. Provide personal development and career planning and development support for Early Career Researchers, including academic, discipline-related and other, non-traditional career routes;

4. Provide a framework of leadership and management development events, focusing on the generic skills and behaviours which research staff require to lead and manage their research and research teams (with a focus on Principal Investigators) and which can be transferred to other academic and non-academic roles (all researchers);

5. Develop relationships with industry and other sectors including funding bodies, to provide internships and secondments for Early Career Researchers in discipline-related areas such as research and development, to provide experience in alternative career routes for research staff and to encourage an expectation of this amongst the funding bodies;

6. Develop coaching, facilitation and teaching skills amongst research staff with line management responsibilities and increasing the number of qualified coaches available to coach Early Career Researchers;

7. Extend UCL's mentoring provision, so that every Early Career Researcher seeking a mentor receives local support to acquire one and guidelines about how to gain the most from this experience;

8. Publish a Code of Practice stating expectations of research staff and their managers.

Actions and Required Investment

The actions, timescales and investment required to operationalise the above objectives will be agreed and overseen by the Pro-Vice-Provost of the Doctoral School, advised by the Research Staff Consultative Group (RSCG).

Risks

The following risks to the delivery of the strategy are identified:

1. The potential demand from researchers may exceed the available development resources, both centrally and locally provided;
2. Research leaders, the local culture and the time constraints to which researchers work may not always support the development of broader, transferable, or teaching skills. This could be especially true for Early Career Researchers;
3. Research staff may prove sceptical about the genuineness of the strategy and its ability to deliver, such that not all engage with the available opportunities for them and their team members.
4. The RSDP risk over-reliance on a small number of providers should the pool of potential suppliers not increase;
5. The current UCL provision for staff career planning and development may be insufficient to meet the potential demand;
6. Developing supportive external relationships capable of providing internships and secondments may take time and may not be available in the desired number, such that an alternative approach may be required;
7. Meeting the potential demand for coaches and mentors may prove challenging and an alternative approach, such as peer coaching, may be required;
8. Over-reliance on face-to-face delivery/an under-developed electronic media capability;
9. Operational constraints such as the availability of rooms on campus.

Mitigating Actions

Actions to mitigate the above risks will be included when planning the implementation of the Strategy.

Ownership and Revision

Responsibility for this Strategy rests with the Pro-Vice-Provost of the Doctoral School, who will review it in Term 2 annually with members of the Research Staff Consultative Group (RSCG). This is to ensure its continued evolution in-line with the changing development needs of research staff.