



# SETU Human Resource Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R)

## Progress Report: September 2023– August 2024

September, 2024



HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH



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Ollscoil  
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an Oirdheiscirt

South East  
Technological  
University

## Executive Summary

The current report highlights both new and continuing activities that were delivered through the Human Resource Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R) at SETU during the academic year 2023-2024.

1. Events | We hosted a number of events throughout the year including the All-Island Research Culture conference. We participated in SETU's Postgraduate Research conference, International Women's Day, International Men's Day and National Employee Wellbeing Day, as well as various welcome inductions, orientations and the Research Excellence Award Celebrations.

2. Courses and Workshops | Through the Broaden Your Horizons Researcher Development Programme we delivered over 25 bespoke courses and workshops specifically dedicated to research careers and researcher professional development.

3. Working Collaboratively | We continue to work collaboratively with members of our research community, and stakeholders across the University, the sector and Europe. Throughout the year we hosted a number of colleagues from the Research Management profession from various Universities across Ireland, the United Kingdom and Europe.

4. Funding | Through the Connexions internal seed fund we supported the academic community with collaborative research projects and career development activities to enhance their research activity and to increase the quality of research at the university.

5. External Activity | We provided training, talks, and courses for external organisations, including Maynooth University, University Hospital Waterford, University College Dublin, Queens University Belfast, University College Cork, La Rochelle Université; Universidad de Católica de Valencí (UCV), Universitatea Tehnică de Construcții București (UTCB) and the Institute of Physics of the Czech Academy (FZU). This type of exchange helps us to achieve our HRS4R vision of being a more outward-facing community whilst developing new collaborations, benefiting from different perspectives and staying connected to a diverse range of communities across Ireland and wider Europe.





## Introduction

We are delighted to introduce this Annual Report, which highlights SETU's Human Resource Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R) key activities delivered in the 2023-2024 academic year. Championing a healthy research culture and environment remains a key strand of HRS4R at SETU, for an inclusive research culture to flourish, strong support mechanisms for researchers are needed.

Over the past year, we have continued to strive to support members of our research community in furthering their professional development and long-term career ambitions through practice sharing forums, professional development training sessions, conference participation, seed funding support and recognition awards. SETU's HRS4R action plan primarily aims to deliver an enriched environment where researchers feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued. Key actions include providing improved access to support and guidance for researchers and their managers on induction, professional development, research careers, mentoring, wellbeing and ample networking opportunities.

Throughout the year, we have covered significant ground, thanks in no small part to the dedicated contribution and support of our research community. Together, we have made substantial progress with our HRS4R Action Plan. We would like to take the opportunity to highlight key progress this past year and share additional noteworthy achievements, which were not envisaged when the Action Plan was prepared initially.



## Highlights from 2023-2024

### **All-Island Research Culture Conference**

At the forefront of our achievements to develop a research culture where all researchers can thrive, was the first All Island Research Culture Conference which we hosted in May 2024. This brought together a worldwide community that is committed to building more transparent, equitable, and inclusive research cultures across the ecosystem. Themes focussed on Research Assessment, Engaged Research, and Equality Diversity and Inclusion. A conference reflections piece was subsequently produced to enhance engagement, gather evidence, share perspectives, experiences and good practice. SETU joined the All-Island Research Culture Network, supported by the Wellcome Institutional Funding for Research Culture. Regular network meetings, alternating between in-person and hybrid will facilitate sharing best practice and current developments in areas that impact Research Culture (open research, research assessment, research integrity, RURM, EDI, recognition of team contributions and wellbeing). We very much look forward to being involved in this dynamic new network.



### **Research Careers**

The topic of research careers is a key action within our HRS4R Action Plan to improve our research culture. SETU continued to support the European Research Area on a European Framework for Research Careers which was adopted by EU Ministers in 2023. It promises many important advances to make research careers in Europe more attractive and sustainable.

More broadly, we continued to focus on the concepts of 'the research profession' and 'careers in research', including recognition of the vital role that non-researcher roles such as Research Managers (RMA's) play in our research systems, alongside recognition for researchers at all career stages.

In early 2024, we participated in a workshop to Explore the Establishment of an Irish Research Managers and Administrators Association held in TU Dublin. These issues will be explored in more detail in workshops planned for 2024-2025. We ensured that those roles supporting research are captured within SETU's forthcoming Research Strategy by contributing to several of the Research Strategy working groups throughout the year.

### **Cinnte Review**

We contributed to the Institutional 'Cinnte Self Evaluation Report' as part of the TUS review by participating in several local working groups and sharing many of the Universities HRS4R achievements delivered through our Action plan, putting forward elements of good practice borne out of the HR in Excellence award.



## ***Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in our research***

Gender equality and diversity are essential components of a system that produces research excellence. During the last academic, we focused our efforts on two levels: firstly, through our involvement with SETU's Athena Swan SAT team, by supporting and contributing to the forthcoming Institutional Bronze Award application, outlining our commitment to the attainment of gender balance and equality of opportunity among the students and staff of the University including our researchers. Secondly, through our involvement with external agencies, by volunteering as an Athena Swan Ireland Panellist assessing external Athena Swan applications for Advance HE Athena Swan Ireland, and as a member of Science Foundation Ireland's (SFI's) EDI working group, with whom we periodically engage regarding SFI's EDI initiatives and progress. We will continue to engage with the newly formed Taighde Éireann in this regard.

Embedding EDI in our Research is also paramount in delivering upon our HRS4R EDI ambitions. As part of the Research Culture Conference, we ran a dedicated thematic session on 'EDI in our Research' to help participants to further embed EDI principles into institutional policy and practice. Aimed at tackling well-known challenges, participants gained a clearer understanding of: Reflections on gender equality and experiences of the Athena Swan Charter; EDI in Research Action Plan at Queen's University Belfast; Equity and inclusivity in Research Funding at University of Oxford: Tackling Barriers to Change; Reflection on Gender Equality and Challenges for Academic Careers at University of Manchester.

## ***Vitae International Researcher Development Conference 2023***

In early Autumn, we partook in the **Vitae International Researcher Development Conference**, geared towards those with an interest and a stake in the policy and practice of global researcher development. Themes focussed on cultures, environments, and impacts of researcher development, horizon scanning post-Covid-19, supporting researchers through PhD, Researcher Development and policy for researcher development. We also contributed to the post conference reflections piece.

## ***Recruitment & Selection***

We ensured to implement SETU's robust recruitment and selection policy which has the OTM-R practices embedded in it. This includes our 'Recruitment Licence' training for all selection board members which incorporates sessions on unconscious bias and awareness of discrimination grounds listed under national legislation. Gender balance is further ensured by the requirements in the University's Selection Procedures for the composition of Selection Boards. Our talent search is underpinned by a robust planning process conducted prior to advertisement to ensure transparency and a merit-based recruitment. We have an extensive online e-recruit system for our talent search, all of which was adhered to throughout recruitment cycles this past year. We continue to value researcher mobility by facilitating the Hosting Agreement work permit scheme.

## **Pension**

We continued to advocate for change to the national-level decision that prevents Technological University staff members employed on researcher contracts from being admitted to the university pension scheme. Our efforts are ongoing to advance this dialogue with National government so that our researchers can avail of pension arrangements consistent with those provided to research staff in universities and public bodies outside the technological university sector.

## **Work/Life Balance**

We offer blended working arrangements through our 'Work From Home' initiative available to all research staff. This work/life balance aims to help reduce stress, improve employee motivation, performance and productivity, as well as enhance the attractiveness of the University as a place to work. Within our wellbeing courses we continued to promote work life balance supports and provide training on how to achieve and maintain it.

## **Horizon Europe 'WIDERA Enables'**

In March, we participated in the Horizon 2020 "WIDERA ENABLES" kick off meeting in Budapest bringing together all members of the project consortium for the first time. The Enables project is aimed at expanding participation and strengthening the European Research Area Horizon Europe. As project partner we presented the activities around Research Careers and Researcher Development we will lead on during the next five years. Participating in the two-day event highlighted the importance of this initiative for widening partner countries in particular, whilst renewing our commitment and enthusiasm for the project.

## **Promote**

The Promote gender project is funded by the [Higher Education Authority](#) (HEA) and supported by the Insight Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) Research Centre for Data Analytics. Project partners include Maynooth University (MU) Lead Partner, Munster Technological University (MTU), University of Limerick (UL), Dublin City University (DCU), University College Cork (UCC) the University of Galway and SETU, collectively leading the call to promote women in research and build the network online.

In May, we participated in the "PROMOTE" Early Career Researchers workshop led by Maynooth University, which provided meaningful insights from senior researchers and researcher developers into navigating some of the key elements of early career research. Roundtables led by leading experts across the HEI sector including SETU worked collaboratively to build an academic cv, promotion application and grant proposals. The PROMOTE project will run a series of training sessions at four of the partner universities including SETU to provide advice on career progression for early-stage female researchers.

## **HR Excellence in Research Lead Assessors**

Two members of SETU's HRS4R Operational Group act as Lead Assessors for the European Commission in HR Excellence in Research. Over the past academic year, both members have extensively participated in the Interim Assessment; Internal Review, External Assessment; Progress and Quality of Actions; Accompanying measures e.g. embedding OTMR; OTM-R and HRS4R related initiatives. This allows SETU to keep abreast with new developments within the HR Excellence arena, share knowledge and benchmark against best practice.

## ***The European Competence Framework for Researchers (ResearchComp)***

We have fully aligned our Broaden Your Horizons (BYH) Researcher Development programme with the European Competence Framework for Researchers (ResearchComp), the first competence framework for researchers at EU level. The framework is based on the most recent analysis of the transversal skills that researchers need for successful and interoperable careers in all sectors of the society (academia, industry, business, public administration, NGOs etc.). ResearchComp provides a strategic overview of the knowledge, behaviours, and attributes of researchers who can work across sectors and look to society's future needs. It incorporates equality, diversity and inclusion; wellbeing and mental health; open research; digital skills; diverse careers; interdisciplinarity and internationalisation.

SETU's BYH programme includes a broad spectrum of activities and events designed to enrich researcher's skills and working relationships, foster their talents, and accelerate their professional prospects. Our provision is as inclusive, accessible and welcoming as possible. We empower researchers to take ownership of their own development; we collaborate with others across the University and the sector. We regularly evaluate, review, and enhance our practice to ensure we are delivering on our HR4R commitments outlined in our HRS4R Action Plan. Throughout the last academic year, a wide variety of training was provided through the BYH programme including:

### ***Workshops***

Our workshops are brief, informal and interactive sessions designed to deliver timely, targeted information on a range of themes that will be helpful for personal and professional development. They range from focusing on skills and goals development, to hosting guest speakers from across the University and beyond and exploring relevant external initiatives, such as industry and funders. They are open to all members of the research community. 90% of the BYH workshops were online in the 2023-24 academic year to ensure accessibility for all SETU researchers.

### ***Researcher Orientation***

Researcher Orientation provided a welcome to researchers who are new to SETU. This mandatory session set the foundation of expectations, informed researchers of relevant resources, benefits, and services. Topics included professional development opportunities, applying for research funding, advice on engagement, impact, information services and finance, SETU's HR Excellence in Research award and SETU's research information system PURE, and attendees had the opportunity to network with other new colleagues and form new connections.

### ***Postgraduate Researcher Induction***

This induction was held twice last year to give new Postgraduate Researchers (PGR's) an introduction to SETU's research regulations, research finance opportunities, and information/library resources. The induction also provided an overview of the processes relevant to PGRs with regards to ethics.

## ***'The Fundamentals of Postgraduate (PGR) Supervision'***

This new series aimed to introduce ideas and concepts relevant to Postgraduate (PGR) supervision, whilst creating a space for open discussion with other supervisors. It focused on the practicalities of supervising PGRs in the SETU context. The first workshop in the series focused on good practice in recruiting PGRs including Advertising a scholarship, Shortlisting, Interview Techniques and Unconscious Bias Awareness.

## ***9PLUS Podcast***

In Season 3, lecturer Robert O'Connor, from the Department of Computing & Mathematics explored latest research and research related topics that affect all of us! Each episode featured a different topic of interest to researchers including 'Why Podcast Your Research; Mis, Dis and Mal-Information; Physics and Photography; N-TUTORR, GenAI and Gasta; Autonomous Systems & A; Roses From The Heart; The Machine; The Nerve How to Talk about Race; Open Access Publishing; How AI is changing the ICT work environment; Sustainability & Land Sciences; PhD at Any Age: Two Perspectives on Returning to Education; Science Week and the SURE (Science Undergraduate Research Experience) Network and the Portalis Project.

## ***HRS4R in brief***

During professional development weeks, two HRS4R briefing workshops were held in person on both the Waterford and Carlow campuses. Aimed at those new to HRS4R and those looking to know more about our HRS4R journey at SETU. An overview of HRS4R, the HRS4R Action Plan, previous annual reports and future plans were shared with attendees. A call for new members to join the Operational Group was made, encouraging new faces and fresh ideas to support our HRS4R ambitions.

## ***Leading research teams***

We explored the additional responsibilities and challenges that come with leading a research team. Supporting the careers and well-being of each individual in the team, whilst at the same time ensuring team members co-ordinate effectively delivering outstanding research. Discussing what makes an effective team, what sorts of leadership work best, and how to ensure to maximise the success of the team.

## ***'Research Pathways Work Café'***

This new careers series Research Pathways: Work Café gave Researchers the chance to hear and ask questions about a range of career paths both in and out of academia, directly from Researchers who have taken these paths. Speakers spoke about their current roles, and shared their experiences of applying, interviewing and transitioning to these roles. Their stories were inspiring and their career choices compelling.

## ***Research Impact***

Our Researcher Development offering is constantly evolving and last year marked the launch of a new online programme "Research Impact: Creating Meaning and Value". An innovative web-based course developed by EPIGEUM, part of Sage Publishing, the internationally recognised experts in the development of higher education materials. This new online programme teaches the fundamentals of research impact. Topics include Defining Research Impact; Planning your Impact; Engagement and Communication Strategies; Evaluating and Monitoring Impact and Evidencing Impact. Modules include plentiful real-world case studies, inspiring stories and video interviews representing a range of researchers from across disciplines and at different career stages. Available on V.L.E.



## **Ethical Research**

The Ethical Research programme aimed to train researchers in the core skills needed to become an ethical researcher, a fundamental step in the research journey. This course examined the fundamental principles of research ethics, covering ethical values, decision-making, and challenges, helping researchers to reflect on their own ethical approach in a research context through contemporary case studies and multidisciplinary scenarios. Available on VLE.

## **Writing a powerful 'Lay Summary'**

Lay summary constitutes a crucial part of many funding applications. It's meant to help funders understand the essence of the proposed research, coherently showing the rationale behind the proposed study, its aims and future impact. In this practical session, we provided an overview on the dos and the don'ts of writing a good lay summary.



## **'Time for Research'**

As a busy researcher there is never enough time to get to writing! This workshop covered prioritising, goal setting and managing competing demands in a university context. Taking control of ones' time and think more realistically about research productivity.

## **'Presenting with Confidence'**

Presenting research at a conference or seminar is a fundamental activity in any research career, and it is also a task that can make a large portion of the research community feel anxious. This workshop explored techniques for presenting effectively and best engaging the audience. Helping Researchers work through any fears before a presentation and feel more confident in such situations. Building a foundation of presentation techniques for both in-person and online presentations.

## **Researcher wellbeing**

Research can be enormously fulfilling and a rewarding intellectual challenge, but we also know that it can be difficult, stressful and isolating and quite often for some, it can be all these things at the same time. As part of the BYH programme we ran a year-round researcher wellbeing programme, MyWellbeing which included workshops, seminars and social activities, to promote and support the wellbeing of our researchers.

## **'The Mindful Researcher'**

This workshop provided Researchers with tools to increase their resilience to stress, anxiety and burnout, and to enhance overall well-being. We explored the self-critical inner voices that sabotage motivation and enjoyment; How mindset can help or hinder day-to-day life and future career prospects; How certain maladaptive coping strategies (e.g. procrastination and avoidance) maintain these self-sabotaging thought and behaviour cycles. We focused on how to reshape thinking and behaviour patterns.

## **Social connectedness and wellbeing**

Once again, we continued to host a series of social events via our "Coming Together" series. Events included Wellbeing Walks on the Waterford greenway and Coffee Catch Up's amongst others. Designed to bring our research community together, meet new and old friends, hear others' views and experiences of research life across the university in a relaxed, chilled out social setting.

SETU also has a provision of dedicated mental health support services through the Employee Assistance Programme and the Department of Student Life and Learning available to all members of our research community. The Broaden Your Horizons Researcher Development Programme actively promotes awareness of these services amongst the community, as well as fostering an atmosphere that encourages those who need these services to use them through continuous promotion.

## **Value and recognition**

In September, we celebrated SETU's **Research Excellence Awards** recognising the outstanding achievement, impact and successes of our researchers. Awards were granted under the following categories: Early Career Researcher; Established Researcher; Research Impact, Research Impact Policy & Practice and Research Supervisor Award. Separate to the Excellence awards, the President's Award for the Advancement of Research and Supervision at SETU was awarded. This award recognises excellence in contribution to the development of research and supervision at the University.

## Research newsletter

Member of SETU's research community have been receiving the Research, Innovation & Impact monthly newsletter with a round-up of relevant news and events including all relevant HRS4R activities

## Looking ahead...

In June 2024, we welcomed **Professor Marie Claire Van Hout** as our new Vice President of Research, Innovation and Impact. Under Marie Claire's leadership, we will explore innovative approaches to support our HRS4R mission and foster deeper connections with our research community. As we begin this new chapter, we thank Dr Tom O' Toole for his stewardship as VP for Research, Innovation and Impact over the past year.

Research Culture is one of the top-level priorities in the emerging new research strategy, which extends to 2028. HRS4R sits at the heart of the 'People, Research Culture and Environment' strand of the strategy which sets out a clear trajectory to achieving a supportive research culture and environment in which researchers are enabled to achieve their potential. The Strategy commits to developing and maintaining an open, diverse, supportive, and inclusive research culture.

The progress of our Human Resource strategy for Researchers will be assessed against our commitments and action plans relating to the development of research culture and environment. Feedback from researchers who participate in HRS4R surveys, focus groups, strategy development workshops and consultation events will give us a greater understanding of the research staff experience across all stages of the research career path.

Our 2025-27 Action Plan will ensure that the research culture and environment at SETU is reflective of our commitment to the Charter and Code principles and University values. We will do this through:

- A Research Culture Survey: Our survey will be administered in Autumn 2024 to establish priorities and inform the institutional HRS4R Action Plan.
- Strategic Data Gathering: Research culture development work, by its nature, also generates a continuous wealth of engagement data, opinions, evaluation data, feedback, input, demographics data, dialogue, meta-analyses, common threads, complex stories, anecdotes, complaints, reflections, and personal and organisational insights.
- Regular Reporting: Reporting regularly to the University's Executive Management Team, the HRS4R Monitoring Group and the HRS4R Operational Group.
- Open Sharing: Sharing project rationale, design, delivery, outcomes and impact through our open forums, website, e-newsletters and within the wider research annual report. Communicating successes and failures, as well as plans for future enhancement.



## Conclusion

This report has provided a snapshot of the wide range of activities working to enhance the research culture at SETU, operating at a variety of levels, within different types of settings and covering a wide range of topics. Our next HRS4R Action Plan will solidify our commitment to meeting our obligations as signatories to the EU Charter and Code and we will ensure they are aligned with the European Framework for Research careers and the new Charter for Researchers adopted by the EU European Council, December 2023. The main principles we will focus on going forward for developing a healthy, thriving research culture revolve around diversity, connectivity, resilience, and engagement. We will engage diverse stakeholders through accessibility and meaningful involvement in shaping our new HRS4R Action Plan to drive real change.

Finally, we would like to express our thanks to the members of our HRS4R Operational and Monitoring Groups for their strategic input and continuing support, as well as to the members of our Subgroups, on whose expertise and engagement we rely. Their diverse perspectives and specialised knowledge enrich our discussions and enhance the relevance and quality of our work.

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