

Case Study A:

Contract Researcher Engagement with Development Opportunities at Bath Spa University

As our Contract Researcher (research-only) community at Bath Spa University is relatively small, we have designed a bespoke package of training and developed opportunities for them alongside what is already offered to all academic staff and PhD researchers through the Researcher Development Programme and annual cross-university events such as the Research Festival.

Within the Researcher Development Programme, which contains between 30-50 events each year, our Contract Researchers can engage with training on REF, Impact, Public Engagement, Ethics, Interdisciplinary Collaboration, Creative Practice Methods, Academic Writing, Publishing, Wellbeing and an array of other research-related areas.

As part of this programme we run specific sessions and opportunities for Early Stage Researchers (within which group the majority of our Contract Researchers are positioned). These include: ESR Inductions with Career Planning Workshops, Professional External Coaching provided for ESRs, Internal ESR Mentoring Scheme offered by our research leadership community, and workshops designed for ESRs (for example, 'Creating Your Niche in Academia and Research', 7/11/19).

Alongside these opportunities Contract Researchers are invited to apply for funding (up to £500) to design and lead workshops as part of our Journeys in Research Series, which has been running since 2016. This series is designed by researchers for researchers and provides an opportunity to develop event management, training design and leadership skills and to share their expertise and knowledge with the broader community.

Likewise, Contract Researchers are encouraged to sign up for modules within the MA in Professional Practice in Higher Education (some of which are co-led with the Researcher Development Manager) to achieve HEA Fellowships and to develop their broader skills across teaching, learning and research. In particular, a new Supervising Research module was launched in 2019 which supports Contract Researchers to gain experience of supervising PhD researchers. This module provides an accredited route to recognition for their supervisory practice without the necessity of them taking on formal supervisory roles during their time at the university.

As Contract Researchers also have specific needs and requirements beyond the ESR community, from 2018 onwards we have also offered them one-to-one meetings with the Research Support Office team, the opportunity to promote their research across the university in our Research Newsletter and by other avenues, and we have run surveys to discover what training and development they would specifically select. In response to these surveys we have provided sessions tailored to their requirements (for example, 'Public Engagement and Impact', 24/04/18), but also invited them to speak at various workshops so as to share their expertise and become more clearly embedded in the wider community. Contract Researchers are also represented on our central committees, including REC (Research, Ethics and Consultancy Committee), and have the opportunity to shape policy and developments in the research culture at Bath Spa.

Over the past three years, we have maintained a strong relationship with our Contract Researchers and they have been actively engaged with the training and development opportunities available each year. Many of these researchers have not only attended a variety of sessions, but have also run their own sessions as part of our Journeys in Research Series (inc. 'Small Press and Bookmaking', 6/3/18 and 'Creating a New Identity', 25/2/20) or spoken at established workshops (ex. 'Ethics of Representation', 28/5/19). Likewise, we have Contract Researchers signed up to complete our Supervising Research module 2019-20 and 20% of those researchers being mentored on our ongoing ESR Mentoring Scheme are Contract Researchers.