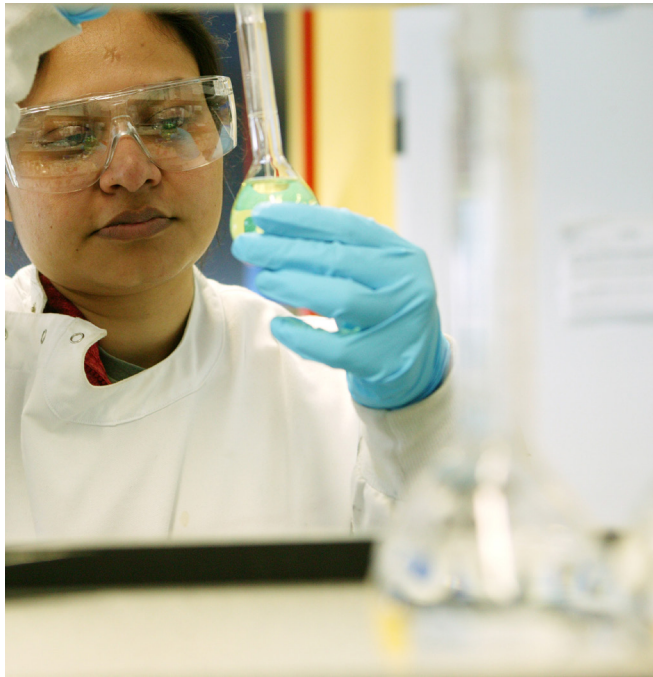



**DUNDALK INSTITUTE
OF TECHNOLOGY**

**Human Resources Strategy
for Researchers (HRS4R)**

Action Plan



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1. Introduction

In 2012, Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT) was accepted to join the fourth and final cohort in the HR Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R) group by the European Commission. The HR Excellence in Research Logo will give recognition of the Institute's commitment in implementing the principles of the Charter & Code for Researchers. The Charter and Code aims to contribute to the development of an attractive, open and sustainable labour market for researchers. It provides a framework for the career management of researchers, addressing all researchers, employers and funders, who would like to benefit from, develop and maintain a supportive research environment and working culture.

The HR Strategy for Researchers, HRS4R, was developed by the European Commission as a tool for institutions to assist in the adoption and implementation of the Charter and Code. Institutions can earn the right to use the 'HR Excellence in Research' logo by participating in and successfully completing the HRS4R process which involves the following steps:

- An internal Gap Analysis by the participating research institution involving all key players, to compare policies and practices against the Charter and Code principles
- Based on the results of the Gap Analysis, the institution develops its own HR strategy for researchers which should include a concrete public action plan
- The Gap Analysis and Action Plan are reviewed and acknowledged by the European Commission. The acknowledgement implies the right to use the 'HR Excellence in Research' logo
- Progress in the implementation of the strategy and action plan is subjected to a self-assessment after 2 years
- An external evaluation is carried out at least every 4 years

2. Rationale

In 2000 the European Commission established the European Research Area. The ERA aims to improve Europe's research performance to promote growth and job creation and in 2005 the European Commission introduced the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers. The Charter & Code comprises 40 principles for researchers at all levels of the career and encompasses all fields of research across all sectors, both public and private. The 40 principles of the Charter & Code specify the roles, responsibilities and entitlements of researchers as well as of employers and/or funders with respect to the recruitment and retention of high quality researchers.

The European Charter for Researchers (Charter) spells out a set of general principles and requirements which specify the roles, responsibilities and entitlements of researchers as well as those of employers and funders of researchers. The Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers (Code) consists of a set of general principles and requirements that should be followed by employers and funders when appointing or recruiting researchers. These principles and requirements ensure transparency of the recruitment and selection process with equal treatment of all applicants, and the development of an attractive, open and sustainable European labour market for researchers.

DkIT recognise that it is the quality and expertise of its researchers which underpins its research

success to date. The Institute must strive to actively support its research community in their endeavours, both established and early career researchers. It is only through this that the Institute can attain its research vision to be a leader in its research themes. For this reason, DkIT is committed to improving policies, procedures and research environment to ensure researchers welfare support and career development. DkIT fully endorsed the Charter and Code in October 2012.

By formally endorsing the Charter and the Code, DkIT confirms the importance of partnership in their effective implementation. We believe that researchers, employers and funders must work together to ensure that the Charter and Code are fully and properly implemented and promoted.

3. About Dundalk Institute of Technology

Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT) is situated on the North East Coast of Ireland. The DkIT campus is a 90 acre (360,000 m²) site, situated in Dundalk, County Louth and is positioned halfway between the two largest cities on the island of Ireland, Belfast and Dublin (each approximately 80 kilometres away).

Since its establishment in 1971 DkIT has earned a reputation as the leading higher education provider in the North East of Ireland and has significantly contributed to the transformation of the region. Our reputation has been solidly built by providing quality educational opportunities in a broad range of disciplines from undergraduate degree to PhD level.

The Institute has four Schools and these are:

- School of Business & Humanities
- School of Engineering
- School of Informatics & Creative Arts
- School of Health & Science

At present, in excess of 5,000 students are registered in DkIT (both full and part-time). There are in excess of 450 mature students registered in DkIT and approximately 10% of students registered in DkIT are international, coming mainly from China.

DkIT has shown through its development and growth over the past 40 years that it is committed to bringing diversity and excellence to all of its academic pursuits. This has been achieved through significant capital investment in a state of the art campus and the development of a culture amongst its staff of the highest possible levels of attainment in teaching and research.

To date, the Institute has put particular emphasis on:

- enhancing access to educational opportunity;
- learning and teaching;
- growing research capacity that impacts directly on learning, teaching, knowledge transfer and regional economic development;
- working with regional and national partners on social, economic and cultural sustainability.

DkIT is committed to supporting the wider economic, cultural and social objectives of the region with a particular focus on its border location. In doing this, it actively cultivates alliances and

partnerships with community, public and private sector agencies, throughout the region and on a cross-border basis, around a common agenda of local and regional development.

The Institute is committed to ensuring that students and staff are afforded the opportunity to develop their full potential in a professional and supportive environment.

3.1 Research in DkIT

Over the past decade the Institute has positioned itself as one of the leading Institutes of Technology with an international reputation in terms of its research performance. DkIT's Research Strategy 2014-2016 outlines a vision for the Institute that "by end 2016, DkIT will be the leading Irish institute of Technology in key research areas".

As research activity has grown and developed across the Institute our approach has always been to invest in strategic and growing areas of research, which are aligned with our strengths in specific areas and which are informed by the external environment. Research in DkIT is founded upon excellence led by global needs which possesses real societal and economic impact.

DkIT's research and innovation agenda within both its established and emerging areas is driven by various research teams which are embedded across the Institute's four academic schools. DkIT has always recognised the need to have a diversity of research centres and groups, including academic, industry facing and mission orientated centres. All of our established research centres are where the Institute possess the critical mass of world class researchers:

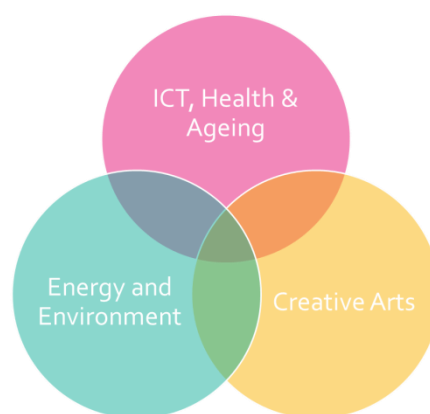
- with established international track records
- whose research outputs are internationally benchmarked
- whose work is interdisciplinary in nature cutting across traditional academic schools
- who possess state of the art infrastructure and facilities.

Prioritised Established Research Themes

- ICT, Health and Ageing
- Energy and the Environment
- Creative Arts

Emerging Research Themes

- Entrepreneurship
- Humanities and Social Sciences
- Teaching and Learning



The Institute's current Strategic Research Plan (2014-2016) places the growth and development of research and its impact on teaching at the centre of the strategy and DkIT sees its academic research base as a fundamental resource to be supported and grown in the coming years. In 2012, DkIT entered into a strategic partnership with Dublin City University. Both DCU and DkIT are committed to research agendas which deliver tangible societal and economic benefit and that addresses current global challenges. The establishment of the DCU DkIT Graduate School will support this ambitious research agenda and ensure greater progression opportunities for all learners. DkIT students can now benefit from the breadth of expertise and research activities undertaken by DCU and students

who wish to pursue a Masters' Degree or a PhD by research can do so in DkIT and receive a DCU accredited award through the DCU-DkIT Graduate School framework. This alliance will ensure greater access and progression opportunities for all learners, from all backgrounds, with more flexibility and will strengthen Ireland's Eastern Economic Corridor.

DkIT has secured funding from all of the major funding sources including: The European Commission's Interreg Programme, Science Foundation Ireland's Research Frontiers, Strategic Research Cluster and Technological Sector programmes; The Higher Education Authority's Programme for research in Third Level Institutions (PRTL) cycles 3 and 4; government agencies including the Environmental Protection agency; the Irish Research Councils.

3.2 DkIT's Research Strategy (2014-2016)

Research Priority 3 "Engage and support Researchers" of the Institute's Research Strategy for 2014-2016 emphasises the support and development of research careers in the Institute, key objectives include;

- The further development of a suite of support and training opportunities for researchers (i.e. postgraduate students, research supervisors, early career and established researchers)
- To put in place career structures and supports for research focused staff including early stage and postdoctoral researchers through a Research Career Framework
- Specific supports will be provided to early stage researchers
- Ensure Early Stage researchers are involved in research governance structures

4. Definition of a Researcher

For the purposes of Dundalk Institute of Technology HRS4R Gap Analysis and Action Plan, postgraduate students are referred to as Early Stage Researchers and postdoctoral and other researchers are termed Experienced Researchers. This is in line with the European Commission documentation which defines Early Stage Researchers as researchers in the first 4 years (full time equivalent) of their research activity, including the period of research training. Experienced Researchers are defined as researchers having at least four years of research experience (full time equivalent) since gaining a university degree/diploma giving them access to doctoral studies, in the country in which the degree/diploma was obtained or researchers already in possession of a doctoral degree, regardless of the time taken to acquire it¹.

It must be noted that in the Irish higher education system researchers at postgraduate level (Early-Stage Researchers) are not, in most cases, employees but are registered as full time students. The Charter and Code outlines principles targeted at employers of researchers and this does not therefore include postgraduate researchers in the Irish context. However, for the purposes of the Gap Analysis and creation of the Action Plan all researchers are considered professionals regardless of their employment status. This does not, however, constitute a transfer of employee rights or the

¹ <http://ec.europa.eu.euraxess/index.cfm/rights/definitions>

creation of a relationship of employment for these early stage researchers. In consideration of the application of the Charter and Code principles to the policies and practices in DkIT, researchers at all stages of the career trajectory were considered.

5. Methodology

Following a successful expression of interest DkIT was accepted to participate in the fourth cohort of the EU HR Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R) Group. A representative of DkIT attended the second and third Mutual Learning Seminars for this group in Tarragona on 2nd and 3rd October, 2014 and in Brussels on the 20th November 2014 respectively. These meetings provided the background knowledge and case studies from staff in other Research Performing Organisations who had already achieved the Excellence in research Logo.

Following on from these meetings the 40 principles of the Charter and Code were reviewed initially by staff from the Research Office in DkIT and the following methodology for the Gap Analysis and creation of the Action Plan was determined. DkIT has undertaken a three-step process of review to develop the Gap Analysis and Action Plan.

- Gap Analysis of Principles of the Charter & Code
- Review of Gap Analysis and Prioritisation of Principles
- Creation of the Action Plan and Strategy

5.1 Gap Analysis

The Research Office took primary responsibility for the Gap Analysis phase. The Gap Analysis was conducted by the Head of Research and the EU Research Projects Officer. This involved a desk based internal analysis to compare DkIT policies and practices against the principles of the Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers.

On the basis of the results of the Gap Analysis a number of actions were proposed for DkIT to undertake to address the gaps identified. The Gap Analysis was uploaded to the DkIT website and feedback requested.

5.2 Review of the Gap Analysis and Prioritisation exercise

DkIT recognises the major contribution played by researchers in delivering high quality research and while everyone with a responsibility to support researchers has a role to play in implementing the principles of an institutional strategy to meet the Charter & Code the Research Office decided that it was the researchers who should define the framework for any Institutional strategy. The Research Office was very conscious that responses to surveys have varying results in terms of participation and so instead it was decided to provide information sessions to stakeholders to explain the background to the HR Excellence in research project and to use focus groups of researchers to gather feedback and support. The Gap Analysis was sent to 60 Early Stage (Post-Graduate) Researchers and 50 Established Researchers. A doodle poll identifying dates and times for focus group meetings was also circulated at the same time.

The purpose of the HRS4Rs consultation process was to inform the development of the HR strategy for Researchers and to assist the Institute gain a better understanding of the development and ongoing needs of research careers and to inform actions within the Institute.

The consultation was targeted at individuals within the institute who are involved in conducting research; this cohort included Academic Staff; career researchers, Postdoctoral researchers and Postgraduate students. The Research Office created a doodle poll to identify a number of suitable dates where researchers were invited to meet with representatives in the Research Office to;

- Review the Gap Analysis,
- Prioritise Principles they considered most relevant
- Propose Action Points
- Discuss the limitations associated with the implementation of actions

A total of seven focus groups were convened with between two and four Researchers represented at each meeting. Researchers who were unable to attend the focus groups were invited to give feedback on the Gap Analysis via e-mail.

5.3 Creation of DkITs Action Plan

It was acknowledged that researchers at different stages of their careers would have different priorities and as such the consultation was conducted in such a way to distinguish between the two research levels. The priorities of both Early Stage Researchers (post-graduate) and more Experienced Researchers were recorded.

Following the consultation and prioritisation exercise by DkITs research community, a prioritised list of Principles and Actions was prepared by the EU Research Projects Officer for presentation to the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee Comprised a wide range of staff from across the Institute and included:

- Human Resource Office Representatives
- Representative from the Registrar's Office
- Representatives from the Communications Office
- Ethics Committee Representative
- International Office Representative
- Finance Office Representative
- Technology Transfer Manager
- School Representatives
- Research Office Representative
- Communications Office Representative

Chaired by the EU Research Projects Officer the primary aim of the Steering Committee was to analyse in detail the priorities identified by the researchers, to review actions proposed and to decide on the most efficient means of meeting the principles of the Charter and Code as relevant to DkIT Researchers. The Steering Committee also identified the key actor responsible for the action implementation.

The combined outcomes from the Researcher prioritisation exercise and the Steering Committee informed the development of the Action Plan.

6. Summary findings

The Consultation phase of the Gap Analysis proved very beneficial to staff working in both research and research support areas within the Institution. Key strengths were identified in the areas of structured PhD programmes, recruitment, and working conditions while a number of priorities were identified which comprise the main points of the Action Plan.

Table 1: Principles from the Charter and Code as prioritised by DkIT researchers (Early-Stage, Experienced and Overall)

Overall Priority	Principle
1	39 Access to Research Training
2	23 Research Environment
	24 Working Conditions
	38 Continuing Professional Development
	9 Public engagement
Early Stage Researchers Priority	Principle
1	23 Research Environment
	36 Relationship with Supervisors
	39 Access to Research Training
2	8 Dissemination
	9 Public engagement
	38 Continuing Professional Development
Established Researchers Priority	Principle
1	1 Research Freedom
	6 Accountability
	11 Evaluation
2	2 Ethical Principles
	9 Public Engagement
	24 Working conditions
	33 Teaching
	36 Relation with Supervisors
	39 Access to research Training

As can be seen from Table 1 there were considerable overlaps in the priority Principles identified by both the Early-Stage and Established researchers and certain actions can be grouped. Concerns of DkIT researchers included:

- Access to Training and Continual Professional Development (Principles 38 and 39) – though as can be expected requirements differed between ESR and Established Researchers. ESR requested more details of the training available to them while Established Researchers

wanted increased access – as research and teaching commitments affect training uptake by this cohort.

- Teaching hours, Relation with Supervisor and Evaluation (Principles 33, 36 and 11) were of concern to both ESRs and Established researchers. These concerns are associated with the establishment of a formal Research Career Framework.
- Communication, Dissemination and Public engagement (Principles 8 and 9) – all participants in the consultation process were of the opinion that Communication of research activities across the Institution was poor and by extension so too was engagement with the wider community/stakeholders outside of DkIT.
- Working conditions, resources and working environment (Principles 23 and 24) were of concern to all participants however, the nature of these working conditions varied with ESR more concerned with Principle 23 citing Journal selection and out of hours access to labs as issues. Experienced Researchers were concerned more with Principle 24 and requested documentation and clarity on certain working conditions and contract details such as maternity leave and entitlements and access of flexible working hours.

7. DkIT Key Recommendations and Action Plan

Deriving from the work conducted to date, significant progress has been made by the Institute to identify gaps and address the issues affecting researchers, resulting from contract management, research and teaching balance, employment entitlements, and training and development. A total of 14 actions (outlined below in the Action Plan Schedule) were identified as key areas requiring improvement. Some actions identified require immediate short term action while others will be addressed over a longer period of time.

The inherent overlap across the 40 principles of the Charter and Code means that actions can potentially address multiple principles. The Gap Analysis and prioritisation by DkITs researchers outlined the five main actions needed to meet the main concerns of Researchers and these include:

- Development of a Research Career Framework - which will apply to all Early Stage and Experienced Researchers and it is hoped that it will help to streamline existing practices and provide researchers with an increased variety of training/skills to facilitate their employment in industry and innovation in addition to academia.
- Institutionalising a Performance Development Management System will ensure that researchers are meeting their career milestones and will help to identify specific areas of career development.
- Developing a Researchers Induction Manual – ESRs stated that they were unaware of many of the supports, services and policies in place in DkIT.
- Providing Researchers with a centralised area on the website for all relevant policies and procedures - the growth of multiple internal websites and webpages over the past few years, in addition to other forms of media has led to multiple sources of information which can be confusing when trying to access information quickly. This Gap Analysis exercise has demonstrated not only the need to update, review and revise some practices and policies but to also use one centralised repository, for all policies and procedures.
- Improving Communication of research activities internally and externally.

8. Action Plan and Schedule of Implementation

This document reflects Dundalk Institute of Technology's institutional HR Strategy and Action Plan based on the Gap analysis of the Institute's practices compared with the European Charter for researchers and the Code of Conduct for Recruitment of Researchers.

Action No.	Action	Responsible	Support	2015		2016				2017				2018				
Ethical & Professional Aspects				Q 3	Q 4	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	
1	Review current Induction procedures and develop a DkIT Researchers Induction Manual to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Academic Research Freedom○ Ethical Principles and Practices○ Responsibility and accountability○ Intellectual Property○ Good Laboratory Practices○ Dissemination and Communication○ Data Protection and Management○ Misconduct and Complaints○ Supervision○ Research Management including personal safety○ Probationary period and Performance review○ Publications	Head of Research	Research Office HR Manager Registrar			Ø					R							
2	Introduce a Performance Management Development System for each Researcher and formalise the probationary period review	Head of Research	HR Manager Head of School Research Centre Manager		Ø					R				R				
3	Enhance the accessibility of Institutional policies and procedures by updating DkITs website with one central repository for all researcher relevant documents, policies and procedures	Research Officer	IT Department Communications Office	Ø														
4	Encourage and promote Dissemination, Communication and Public Engagement by researchers through; <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Provision of an Institute wide event calendar outlining all research events, presentation, performances etc. on DkITs website○ Provide Media Training for researchers on	Communications Manager	Research Office Heads of School IT Manager		Ø					R				R				

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a regular basis Establish a Researchers day –across the Institute not Schools based Develop a Communications Policy 																	
Recruitment																		
5	Introduce policy and training for use of audio-visual tools used for interview purposes	HR manager	Research Office Graduate Studies Office International Office				◊			R								
6	Promote and Strengthen the value of mobility experience including inter-sectoral mobility	Head of Research	HR Manager Head of School		◊						R						R	
Working conditions & Social Security																		
7	Develop a Research careers and Development Framework for researchers	Head of Research	HR Manager Academic Council		◊					R					R			
8	Provide clarity on and document <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maternity pay and leave entitlements for Researchers Flexible working arrangements for Researchers Research Employment Contracts 	HR Manager	Academic Council Financial Controller Head of Research	◊					R									
9	Improve the current IT infrastructure – Wi-Fi and network speeds to be improved	IT Manager	Head of Schools	◊						R								
10	Agree an acceptable number of teaching hours for ESRs and Post-docs for purposes of career development	Head of Research HR Manager	HR Office Academic Council Head of School		◊					R					R			
11	Encourage Postdoctoral Researchers and Postgraduate Researchers in establishing a Researchers Forum	Head of Research	Research Office Graduate Studies Office International Office	◊						R							R	
Training																		
12	Provide induction training for all new Researchers and repeat it every semester	Head of Research	Registrar Head of School Research Office Graduate Studies Office	◊						R					R			
13	Provide Researcher Skills Training in webinar format and host on the DKIT website	Head of Research	Graduate Studies Office			◊			R					R				

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