THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH
Edinburgh Research Office

Researcher Development

Leadership Stories



NAME: Christine Merrick
COLLEGE: College of Science and Engineering
RESEARCH AREA: Biotechnology
ROLE NAME: Chair of the BioDocSoc

What does leadership mean to you in this role?
In this role, I have recruited, relaunched, and steered the strategic direction of the BioDocSoc, which is a postdoctoral society that acts as an interface between school executives and researchers in the School of Biological Sciences (SBS). I have established an accessible and sustainable online community with over 100 members through which researchers can share resources and have their voices heard. I now lead a team of ten postdoctoral researcher representatives who act as advocates for postdoctoral interests ranging from public engagement and teaching to innovation and researcher development. We listen to the needs of researchers in the school and provide information and organise events to support this diverse community.

What supported your move into this role?
I have been a SULSA Early Career Researcher Representative since 2018. I have used this role to broaden my understanding of the research landscape and develop my professional network. As a result, I was invited to represent postdoctoral researchers within SBS. I found that to truly represent the community we needed a team of representatives covering a range of postdoctoral interests. With the support of SBS Postdoc Advisors, the Graduate School and Staffing Services Manager, and Leadership Training from the Institute of Academic Development, I embarked on re-establishing the BioDocSoc.

What type of skills do you use in this role?
Strong communication skills have been essential for understanding the needs of stakeholders and keeping them informed. Negotiation and influencing skills have been key in recruiting a strong team of postdoctoral representatives and securing funding to deliver events. Networking skills have been vital for keeping abreast of training opportunities and initiatives to champion postdoctoral researchers.

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Has this role created any new opportunities for you that you wouldn't otherwise have come across?
In accordance with our manifesto, members of the BioDocSoc now provide postdoctoral representation at several senior committee meetings within SBS including Principal Investigator meetings within each institute, the SBS Learning and Teaching Committee, and the SBS Industry Advisory Board.

What is the main piece of advice that you would give anyone looking to move into a leadership role?
My main piece of advice would be to talk to people and use any support available. Talking to people helped me identify the most important aspects of my role and lead me to undertake Leadership Training with the Institute for Academic Development. This has enhanced my skills to deliver leadership effectively.