THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH
Edinburgh Research Office

Researcher Development

Leadership Stories

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RESEARCH AREA: Genetics and Genomics
ROLE NAME: Member of the Research Cultures Working Group (University level) and Co-Chair of the Roslin Institute Career Development Committee (Institute level)



What does leadership mean to you in this role?
To me, leadership for researchers is not just the capacity to achieve professional goals. Leadership is also how you interact with people, how you help them to evolve in both the personal and the professional aspects. As such, I am part of multiple groups and committees, both at a Campus level (Easter Bush) and at University level. In these committees, I tend to represent the interest of postdocs and early career researchers. As such, I work as a conduit for feedback and I facilitate communication between these researchers and the governing bodies at the different levels.

The aim of this communication is to help early career researchers to integrate in the University and to make them feel as part of this "big family". For many early career researchers, particularly if coming from other countries, starting a new post can be overwhelming. Thus, having people caring and helping to improve your experience is extremely important.

In the end, this is all the Concordat is about: providing early career researchers with the best environment and tools we can to help them to progress in their careers and enjoy their time in research.

What supported your move into this role?
I would say everyone I have met during my different career stages has always been extremely supportive of my views in leadership. All the PIs I have worked with have always encouraged me to help others and they have been always available in case I needed a chat or some advice. Furthermore, the University provides several opportunities to improve your leadership skills, from individual courses to serving in different committees or task groups. One wonderful example of this type of training courses, specifically aimed to new PIs is the course "Research Leader – New and Aspiring PIs", which will provide you with insights from external consultants and senior researchers at the University.

"You need to enjoy your working environment, you need to help others to achieve their goals and create future networks and collaborations"

What type of skills do you use in this role?
I do not like to talk about my skills. It always sounds a bit pretentious to me to say that I have very good or rare skills, and in my opinion, it should be others saying what I have or I lack.

However, one thing I can say about me is that I do not mind to hear what people want to say and I also do not mind to say things clearly (particularly if I am representing others). I believe communication is extremely important to be clear and to the point, particularly when you are reporting on things that are important (ie: bullying, etc). I know many people who prefer to keep things in secret or even not to talk about these things and pretend that they never exist. However, the more you try to avoid discussing these issues, the more difficult it becomes to solve them and the higher the costs (in terms of emotional and personal costs for those affected). Thus, I think it is always important to be clear and honest, no matter to whom you are talking.

Has this role created any new opportunities for you that you wouldn't otherwise have come across?

Rather than creating new opportunities, I would say that my current role as member of the Research Cultures Working Group (RCWG) has widened them.

Before becoming a member of this group, I was a member of the Concordat Implementation Group and, even before that, I was a member of the Easter Bush Postdoctoral Committee and the Roslin Institute Career Development Committee. As part of all these committees, my goals have been essentially the same, but it is the "area of effect" is what has changed. The RCWG has allowed me to re-frame all the previous experiences I got in the other groups and committees into the context of the "wider" University and to try to help people across the entire University, rather than only a part of it.

It is extremely interesting to see how researchers in many different areas share, almost always, very similar problems. And it is always good to see and hear other new perspectives that may help to solve issues that before I thought were very particular to my Campus.

What is the main piece of advice that you would give anyone looking to move into a leadership role?

My main recommendation would be not to think that research success can just be measured in terms of number of papers and projects. A degraded working environment will always lead to degraded productivity. No matter how many papers you produce and how many projects you get, if you do not enjoy your life and you do not have a good work-life balance, then you are not (and you will not be) successful.

Research can never be done in isolation, and success needs to come from balance. You need to enjoy your working environment, you need to help others to achieve their goals and create future networks and collaborations. In essence, the more pleasant the working environment is and the nicer you are when working with others, the more success you will achieve.

Enrique is also a member of many different groups, in his current role:

- Roslin Career Development Committee (Co-chair)
- UoE Research Cultures Working Group
- UoE Concordat Implementation Group
- Easter Bush Postdoctoral Committee
- Easter Bush Campus Improving Culture Group
- Peer Support Volunteer Group at Easter Bush