



## U21 RESEARCH AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE STRATEGY 2010-2015

The *Universitas 21* research and knowledge exchange activities will be informed by the following guiding principles and values:

- A global focus and perspective.
- A commitment to excellence in all we do.
- A commitment to collaborative and co-operative work wherever appropriate and which has tangible outcomes.
- A commitment to build on multi- and inter-disciplinary research strengths to address global challenges
- A commitment to transferring research outcomes so as to have positive impacts on culture, society, health, economies and the environment.
- A commitment to ensure the sustainability of activity.

### BACKGROUND

At the last meeting of the U21 PVC Research (PVCR) Group (held in Brisbane in 2009) the following conclusions were agreed:

- That the U21 research strategy should utilise fully the international reputation and opportunities of this global alliance.
- That the previous focus on identified "research priorities" had been of limited success.
- That U21 was not a "funding agency" and hence should not run any competitive process to support specific projects.
- That the most productive way forward was to concentrate on "networking" and mobility which is where U21 has been most successful.
- Importantly, that the U21 research strategy should focus on Early Career Researchers (ECRs) which includes Graduate Students and Early-Career Post-docs<sup>1</sup>.

A number of these conclusions were also articulated in the paper accepted at the Annual Network Meeting held at Korea University, Seoul (May 2009, Paper 7.7). Given this background and the potential that exists within the network to support and encourage research collaborations, the network should aim to produce a research and knowledge exchange strategy that is coherent, simple and unified. It was also recognised that to date there had only been limited opportunities for those at the beginning of their academic careers. These included the Graduate Research Conference (the first of which was held in 2008) and the one-off Anniversary Fellowship scheme which had been targeted at ECRs and PhD students and administered locally by member universities. The Group supported both of these initiatives as examples of what could be done to develop opportunities for this particular target group. The following three proposals were therefore developed.

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<sup>1</sup> To be defined as up to eight years' post PhD experience

## PROPOSALS

### 1. **Workshops:**

To coordinate a series of workshops and/or symposia (say 50-60 delegates, over 2 days) targeting ECRs, but with engagement from key U21 senior researchers to give keynote presentations, but also to act as role-models, mentors and provide inspiration. This proposal would meet the criterion of international networking, which could also result in future collaborative research. These workshops/seminars would include exemplars of successful career trajectories from individuals within U21 Universities and also contain career development topics such as "grantsmanship", introduction to project management, managing IP etc. There would also be both live and recorded broadcasts to all U21 members as webinars to maximise involvement and enthuse and help train PGRs/ ECRs.

The selected areas of research activity should address significant challenges that face the communities of the U21 network. They should be applied to contemporary problems and engage students, faculty and staff from a range of relevant disciplines. They should help us to better understand the world in which we live and seek to make it better for all. It was agreed at the Brisbane PVCR meeting that there should be two U21 ECR workshops/symposia per year (~every 6 months) and have an inter-disciplinary format. These core interdisciplinary themes could include topics such as Alternative/Solar Energy, Climate Change, Food Security, Digital Media, Aging, Drug Discovery, Population Change, Sustainable Cities, the Global Financial Crisis and should be decided at the annual U21 PVCR Group meeting.

These workshops/symposia would require some degree of central coordination through the Secretariat. Limited financial support for key speakers and local organisation would be required and U21 partners would need to provide support for their own delegates to attend. The way forward would be: (i) for the annual PVCR Group meeting to identify two U21 institutions per year, who would host specific themes for the next year and provide the "champion" from each selected institution to run with each theme, identify key speakers and work out organisational details;(ii) to establish the baseline budget needed to run each workshop, which would be administered through an annual grant allocated by the PVCR Group to each Workshop after reviewing bids; (iii) to put in place a support mechanism in the U21 Secretariat to help support the local U21 organisers run each event.

### 2. **U21 Awards:**

To establish a series of U21 awards (e.g. medals and/or certificates plus travel awards to encourage international collaboration) to reward outstanding research performance (for example best published paper; research breakthrough; outstanding innovation/commercial success; outstanding impact in the non-academic community) by U21 ECRs. This proposal would be simple to manage and would address the U21 networking requirement if the presentation of these awards was carried out by the President/Vice Chancellor of the Institution hosting one of the workshops for that year.

This proposal would require little administrative support, but would require a review process (external to U21, but managed by the U21 Secretariat and PVCR Group) to identify winners from the shortlist of applicants nominated by U21 Institutions within the different categories. At the 2009 annual U21 PVCR Group meeting it was agreed that the way forward was to identify the three significant ECR awards in the three key general disciplines ((i) Biological Sciences (including Medical Sciences), (ii) Physical Sciences and (iii) Arts and Humanities and Social Sciences). It was also agreed that each U21 Institution should be allowed to nominate no more

than one ECR and Advanced Researcher per award per year. Winners of these prestigious awards would then be used as either mentors and/or advisors in future ECR Symposia and also be required to present a keynote paper as soon as possible after the award to one of the ECR workshop.

### **3. Mobility Initiatives:**

Draw on national and international funding schemes to increase staff and student mobility. For example, universities in Europe have access to EU Marie Curie Funds which can be used to fund inward and outward mobility from universities across the world. Similarly, other countries including the UK will have access to national funds which support mobility. U21 PVCRC Group should actively promote student and staff mobility by each U21 University seeking to secure external funding for at least one staff or student mobility initiative between two or more U21 institutions per year.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

This strategy should ensure the following benefits:

- Encourage staff and students across the U21 network to make links with other member institutions.
- Sharing good practice and benchmarking activity essential for the career development of ECRs.
- Increase student and staff mobility which would also help fulfil the previous and current commitments in relation to staff and student mobility.
- Increased cross-network research collaboration.
- Maximise the potential for joint graduate study and joint PhDs.

30 March 2010