



CASE STUDY

Implementing *Advancing your Research Career* as part of a Professional Development drive at the University of Southern Queensland

Background

The University of Southern Queensland (UniSQ) is a regional, research-intensive university. They introduced Epigeum's *Advancing your Research Career* to provide increased professional development for researchers looking to reactivate their research careers. The decision was made by the University's research executive team and key staff. Doctor Samantha (Sam) Rose and Professor Petrea Redmond have played a key role in the implementation; Sam is the Director of the Office of Research and Petrea (School of Education) is responsible for chairing the ECR (Early Career Researcher) programme.

Historically, UniSQ's professional development had been good but largely ad hoc. Sam and the executive team recognised the need for a more holistic initiative to 'upskill their researchers'. UniSQ joined the Development Group to collaborate on *Advancing your Research Career* before introducing the Epigeum course to their institution in May 2022. Sam was attracted to the course because the modules were flexible and customisable to fit the UniSQ context - and self-paced whilst holding lots of content. By participating in the Development Group, the university could fast-track a course that otherwise would have been time and cost-intensive to create internally. 'It gave me assured quality return on investment so it was an easy business case', Sam explains.



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Implementation

UniSQ makes *Advancing your Research Career* available to staff via their CMS platform Moodle, promoting it as part of their professional development. They implement the course in two ways. The first forms part of the framework for their 12-month Early Career Researcher (ECR) programme, in which up to 20 researchers take part yearly. The ECR programme has eight monthly in-person sessions throughout the academic year, with the program culminating in a two-day research retreat and workshop - facilitated by mentors - where the researchers write grant applications that determine their funding for the following year. The Epigeum course is as a mandatory accompaniment, with each of the ten modules forming homework corresponding to a session.

The course is also available as an optional online resource, promoted as part of UniSQ's researcher induction package with a link to enrol in modules once they've completed compulsory tasks. This has proved useful for supervisors as a starting point to train researchers who may arrive with knowledge of some areas in their research career - but require 'upskilling' on other topics such as funding. The flexibility of Epigeum's course is such that users can take one or several modules - and revisit content throughout the year. Sam says that one researcher's feedback described the course's delivery as 'both accessible and digestible', showcasing the benefit of this resource for busy academics.

UniSQ's People Portfolio (human resources team) have furthered the benefits of the Epigeum course by customising their staff's profiles. When an individual completes a course module, a certificated badge appears on their profile, offering a visual representation of a

researcher's continued performance. This helps supervisors to conduct a checklist of a user's professional development, offering a baseline for supervisors to build on.

Sam is impressed by the reflective element of the course's self-evaluation component and the 'intuitive and easy to use' modules - both have been crucial for course engagement. UniSQ also appreciates how *Advancing your Research Career* balances the representation of STEM and Humanities. 'I really like the opportunity the course offers for researchers to reflect on what they are doing, and to make a plan for their future career, regardless of their discipline', Sam adds.

Outcome

A year into using Epigeum's course, the baseline for course enrolment is 100 people. Going forward, UniSQ hopes to further the course's reach. The People Portfolio team is working to identify touch points to encourage more researchers to access the course post-induction, and Sam is considering opening the course up to certain student cohorts. Future customisation - uploading institution-specific links within Epigeum's course - may also help to signpost users and create further impact in the future.

Recently, UniSQ saw an incredible increase in the Times Higher Education top 350 Universities in 2023, more than doubling their previous ranking and demonstrating their commitment to research culture. 'We're really creating some waves in terms of research performances', Sam states. She appreciates how *Advancing your Research Career* has helped facilitate a well-rounded professional development programme for researchers.

Find out more about *Advancing your Research Career* and how it can support researchers at your institution.