

University Research Update (3rd edition)

Welcome to the university's research newsletter which has been developed to inform you about research in the university, relevant information, news and support. You have received this newsletter as you are on the university's mailing list as being research active / interested. If you would like to unsubscribe please reply to this mailing.

We are clearly living in completely unprecedented and uncertain times and the economic impact of COVID19 will be felt for many years to come. There will be short term and longer term impacts, but one thing is certain. Research and knowledge exchange will be critically important as an underpinning factor to economic revival, a point which was recognised by Richard Lochhead, Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science as he announced a £75M of additional support for research in Scottish Universities.

Looking at the longer term our research communities will need to regroup and reposition. In my view there are four significant considerations which may underpin a 'new normal' in research across the University of the Highlands and Islands: In the first instance, the university already has widespread engagement with business across the region, both in terms of employer engagement and in regard to knowledge exchange and research activities. Our knowledge exchange activities are organised around key sectors in the economy, including tourism, the creative economy, energy and aquaculture. Prior to COVID19 momentum was building for the University to play a significant role in enhancing the economic performance of these sectors and in the longer term this must continue. Secondly we should be mindful of a place-based research environment, stemming from United Kingdom Research and Innovation (UKRI) policy. The Highlands and Islands is unique in the economic geography of the UK and as such is uniquely placed for its economy to benefit from place-based policy. The university's major strengths in environmental science (land-based, marine and aqua), health and humanities align very well with the rolling out of a place-based strategy that is progressed from 'inside' the Highlands and Islands. Thirdly, whilst our work in research and knowledge exchange should be repurposed to focus primarily on the benefit the university's work can bring to the Highlands and Islands region, it should continue to be outward looking. In terms of some of the major challenges of our time which will impact on the economy and society of the region, such as climate change, the solutions are international and we need to continue to be involved in world leading, international, research which will provide the solutions to the region's challenges, and our work in environmental science is an important component here. We also have a responsibility to 'export' our research to other regions in the world, using our existing networks, for example in regard to islands. Finally we will need to work closely with key stakeholders to influence policy and to ensure that the Highlands and Islands region continues to attract investment to support research and knowledge exchange activities. Key stakeholders include, for example Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Scottish Enterprise, UKRI, and Scottish and UK Governments. The risk is that perceived peripherality, a region removed from the centre of power will make it more challenging for the scale of investment required to be realised.

I look forward to working with colleagues to progress these really important agendas.

Professor Neil Simco

An t-Àrd-Ollamh Niall Simco

Vice-Principal Research and Impact

Iar-Phrionnsapal Rannsachaidh agus Buaidh

Academic recognised for contribution to research community

Michael Rayner, Dean of Research (pictured) was awarded Professorial status in March 2020. I would like to personally congratulate Michael, noting that this accolade reflects both his long standing passion, enthusiasm and advocacy for the role of research in universities and society, and the esteem in which his work is held across the partnership and across the sector.



[Read more here.](#)

Oban scientist recognised for ground-breaking research

A marine scientist who has played a key role in exploring the issue of micro-plastics in our oceans has been recognised for her work. Bhavani Narayanaswamy, pictured, has been awarded a Professorship from the University of the Highlands and Islands. [Read more here.](#)



Scientists uncover 'hidden' water of the Arctic Ocean



Pictured left - Dr Marie Porter of SAMS with slocum gliders, one of which helped her uncover a hidden Arctic eddy. [Full story here.](#)

Photo by Dr Emily Venables, SAMS

REF 2021

Preparations for the University's REF 2021 submission continue apace. Whilst we know that COVID19 has led to the formal submission date for REF 2021 of 27th November 2020 being postponed, it is not yet known when the revised date will be and as such we have decided to continue our preparations to the timescale we have already set out, but the additional time will provide an opportunity for further preparation, especially for impact case studies where evidence of impact is of key importance. Key internal events are as follows: In March a 2 day scrutiny event was held to consider each of the University's impact case studies and to provide formal feedback to authors on points for enhancement, and later in April a similar event was held to consider the environment statements which each Unit lead prepared, together with the Institutional Environment Statement. We have also completed the staff scoping exercise and the cohort of staff deemed to be in scope against the national criteria have been identified and informed

AMBER – Adaptive Management of Barriers In European Rivers (AMBER)

Within a Horizon 2020 project called AMBER, and in collaboration with SSE, the Ness District Salmon Fishery Board and SEPA, Lucio Marcello with colleagues and students at the Rivers and Lochs Institute UHI are in the final stages of submitting an EU report outlining their findings for a multi-disciplinary case study on the ecological and social impact of hydropower barriers in the Ness catchment. After contributing to a paper on global estimates of river fragmentation in UK rivers, they are currently integrating data from environmental DNA (eDNA), drone and freshwater habitat assessment surveys with a view to identifying any significant habitat disturbance that might be contributing to the long-term decline in the resident salmon population.



Photo - Sunny Bradbury helping out on habitat assessment fieldwork

COVID-19 impact on EU programmes and projects

As you'll be aware, the situation on EU grants was already complex, due to the impact of Brexit. COVID-19 has added a further – and even more immediate – level of complexity. So many of our research projects across the University receive EU funding, so we are working with funders and other organisations to spell out the challenges and find solutions where possible.

Our most immediate concerns relate to students who are not able to complete required outputs within the original timescale. Reasons might include:

- They take ill themselves
- They have unexpected care duties, eg childcare, reducing their capacity to study

- They are not able to carry out lab- or field-work due to restrictions
- They are working in a health related area and are required to support NHS provision
- Combinations of the above!

One of our main EU structural funds projects is Developing Scotland's Workforce, a major skills project lead by the Scottish Funding Council, which includes funding for additional PGT and PGR places (49 PhD-ships). This funding was due to continue into 2022-23, irrespective of Brexit, but along strict compliance regulations.

Another major EU programme providing funds for our research activities is INTERREG. We have a number of projects in the Northern Periphery & Arctic and VA (Cross Border, with partners in N Ireland and Ireland) programmes in particular, funding 15 PhD places, working with Queens University and Ulster University in Belfast.

We also have a small number of projects in the EU Horizon 2020 research programme.

For all of these, we are working closely with funders and our sectoral contacts to raise awareness of the issues and seek guidance. To date, there are encouraging signs that these concerns are recognised and there is a willingness to work with organisations to find ways forward, whether it be extension of project end dates or agreeing new project objectives.



There's not a huge amount of detail yet, but we expect further information shortly. I will circulate details when available, but if you have any specific concerns in the meantime, please let me know.

Linda Stewart
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Academics invited to join the university's find an expert service



The university's communications team manages a find an expert service for the media.

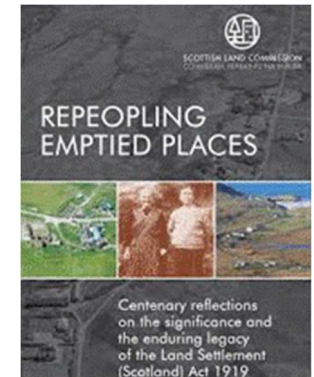
This online resource helps journalists to find academics from around the university partnership who are willing and able to provide expert comment. The service also helps to raise the profile of the university partnership, our areas of expertise and our academics.

Located in the news and events / media section of the university website, the find an expert service provides a database which can be searched by topic or by academics' names.

If you would like to apply to be listed in the university's find an expert service, please complete our online form or contact the university's communications team.

Land and people

Historians at the university's Centre for History are developing a reputation for how their historic research is impacting upon land reform in Scotland. Professor Jim Hunter, Dr Iain Robertson and Dr Elizabeth Ritchie have all been central in creating insights and new ways of thinking about the historic relationship between land and people, both within the Highlands and Islands, and elsewhere. Professor Jim Hunter's 'Repeopling Emptied Places: Centenary reflections on the significance and the enduring legacy of the Land Settlement (Scotland) Act 1919', was commissioned by the Scottish Land Commission to mark the anniversary of the 1919 Act. It's available online and as a pamphlet – you can read it at <http://bit.ly/Repeople>



Argyll College UHI student creates a Scottish Covid-19 tracker



John Frace, pictured, has developed a popular COVID-19 website which he updates daily. Full story [here](#).

The Marine, Environmental Science and Engineering (MESE) cluster



Are you a researcher that's not involved with one or more of the university's clusters? If so, you are in the minority.

There are four clusters (MESE, HARC, Health & SILK) that together encompass the university's research portfolio.

The Marine, Environmental Science and Engineering cluster is also known as MESE. This grouping approximates REF's Unit of Assessment 7 environmental science as well as computing and engineering. Together there are around 130 university researchers from support scientists to PhD students to lecturers and professors within in this cluster and its activities have focussed to date on building the university's environmental science up to critical-mass by:

- Funding workshops that bring people together from across the partnership to build policy-relevant teams, collaborative proposals and new research collaborations.
- Running a swap-a-scientist-between-campus scheme.
- Archiving filmed research seminars from the university's researchers and visitors.
- Running a mailing list for grant and other emerging opportunities.
- Mapping out researcher interests across the membership.
- Building up a list of key research equipment.
- Representing researcher needs on the university and partner committees

The clusters are still taking shape and are open to bright ideas for serving researcher needs. HARC, for example, has been running a vibrant seminar series on "Ruination and Decay". As well as covering social science, members of SILK and HARC are planning to work with MESE to explore ways of melding the creative arts with science to improve public understanding and impact.

To join MESE, please contact their administrator Rachel Culver or their Chair Ben Wilson.

Find out more about the four clusters [here](#).

Essential tips every researcher should follow to really understand a research field (in English)



Web of Science (WoS) have released the above web recording with tips on finding key papers, journals and researchers within WoS. Access details and more information on WoS in general, including the pdf version of the above web recording, is available on the researcher resources area of the university website.

New project aims to support mental health of NHS workers

Researchers at the University of the Highlands and Islands have been awarded £44,581 of Scottish Government funding to lead the initiative, which aims to use digital technologies to help NHS Highland health and social care staff cope with the impacts of COVID-19. Dr Johannes De Kock (pictured), a digital health research fellow and clinical psychologist from the university's division of rural health and wellbeing, will lead the initiative. [Read more here.](#)



Covid-19: Suspension of recruitment to hosted clinical trials/ research studies in NHS Highland

In order to address the current and potential implications of the COVID-19 outbreak on the patient population, clinical and research teams, NHS Highland's Research Development & Innovation Division have taken the decision to *suspend recruitment* into all* clinical research studies within NHS Highland.



*A small number of exceptions to the above decision may apply as follows:

Patients who have already signed informed consent may continue to screen and register for a trial BUT ONLY where the investigator considers it safe in light of the prevailing situation, and it is in the patient's best interests to do so. The decision to continue as described, in light of this guidance, must be recorded in the Investigator Site File and patient notes, and notified to the R&D Office as an exception (see below).

- All activities related to current or upcoming Covid-19 research studies should continue where safe to do so
- Patients may, at the PI's discretion, still be approached about observational studies, pre-screening studies, etc., where this participation requires no additional hospital attendance by the patient
- Patients may be enrolled in a study that the patient's treating physician considers to be providing "essential clinical care"

This is an urgent safety measure being taken to ensure that patients, carers and staff, particularly those with *(or who are in routine, close contact with others who have)* underlying health conditions are not put at any unnecessary risk. The decision has been taken in close consultation with National Research Scotland and Chief Scientist Office colleagues, and mirrors actions being taken in all Scottish NHS Boards.

Please contact NHS Highland's Research, Innovation and Development Department for further information.

MHRA advice is available at <https://mhrainspectorate.blog.gov.uk/2020/03/12/advice-for-management-of-clinical-trials-in-relation-to-coronavirus/>

HRA advice is available at <https://www.hra.nhs.uk/planning-and-improving-research/policies-standards-legislation/covid-19-guidance-sponsors-sites-and-researchers/>

Government's Chancellor looks for a research-driven future beyond Covid-19

* **Research** Professional News

Research and 'levelling up' are the way out of looming economic crisis, says Rishi Sunak. [Read more here.](#)

Graduate School resources

The [Graduate School's SharePoint](#) site is available for all staff and supervisors looking for more information about the postgraduate research provision.

The Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Degrees and the Brightspace Postgraduate Research area remain the go-to places for student procedural guidance and forms - the aim of this new site is to provide staff with complementary information, templates and checklists to assist with, e.g. candidate interviews and new student local inductions. The Postgraduate Research page on [Brightspace](#) has been updated to include a new page entitled 'Covid-19 (coronavirus): Information for students and supervisors' which contains Covid-related info and FAQs

Funding opportunities

Funding opportunities can be accessed [here](#).

Staff and student testers needed for the new online application for ethical approval

The development of a new online application for ethical approval, which will be provided by [Haplo](#) through their ethics monitor system, is now underway with a view it launching in August. Please contact [Fiona Leiper](#), Research Ethics Officer, if you are available to assist with testing during the period 15/06/20 – 28/06/20, thank-you.



Research publications

You can browse all research outputs published during 2020 on the [university's research database](#)

Below are a (fairly) random selection of recent publications to demonstrate the breadth of research happening across the university:

[A-B-Tree: Using tree lore and literature to support creative writing learners](#)

University author; Mandy Haggith

[Adaptation to climate change–related ocean acidification: An adaptive governance approach](#)

University author; Lucy Greenhill

[Entrapment in plastic debris endangers hermit crabs](#)

University author; Alex Bond

[Evaluating emotional distress and health related quality of life in patients with heart failure and their family caregivers](#)

University author; Neil Angus

[A physical activity intervention to improve the quality of life of patients with a stoma](#)

University authors; Gill Hubbard, Julie Munro

Congratulations to all researchers who have had their work published.

The university's research web pages

Access the university's support pages for research staff [here](#) to access a host of researcher resources, policy information and news.



If you want to your research colleagues across the university to learn about your project, a recent publication, your work in general or have information about research news, a funding collaboration you are building, events or training opportunities then please click the button below!

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