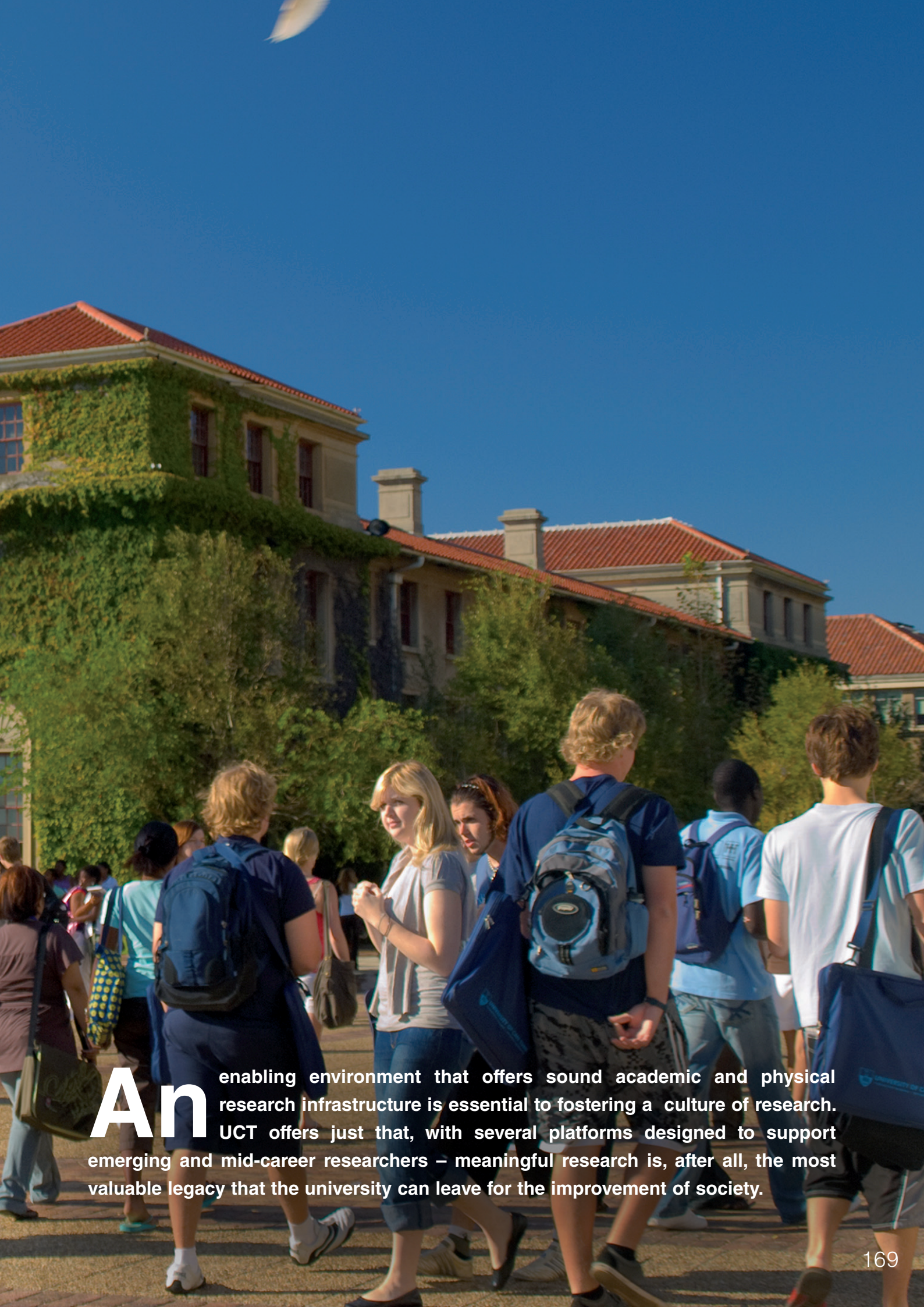# Research support

An enabling environment that offers sound academic and physical research infrastructure is essential to fostering a culture of research. UCT offers just that, with several platforms designed to support emerging and mid-career researchers – meaningful research is, after all, the most valuable legacy that the university can leave for the improvement of society.

Looking after a new generation of researchers at UCT

To support emerging researchers and academics, and prevent a gap in research capacity as established cohorts move on, the UCT Research Office has launched several programmes, namely the Emerging Researcher Programme (ERP) in 2003, Supervision Training in 2005, and the Programme for the Enhancement of Research Capacity (PERC) in 2009. These initiatives were launched through the generosity of the university's donors, and are complemented by the Mellon Visiting and Retired Scholars Mentorship Project, aimed at offering further individualised support to young academics.

Passing the baton: the Emerging Researcher Programme

Designed to ensure the transfer of skills from senior academics with excellent research and supervision track records to those not yet established, the ERP offers two streams of support: one for the social sciences, including law, humanities, commerce, and social science-related fields within the health sciences (SSLHC); and another for the natural and health sciences, and engineering (SET).

The success of this programme is evidenced by its growth: in its founding year, the programme had 45 participants; by the end of 2011, this number had increased more than tenfold, with a total of 492 academics having received some form of support from the ERP since its inception (304 or 62 percent in the SSLHC stream and the balance in SET). Sixty academics joined in 2011 alone. Participation is entirely voluntary and many members who have "emerged" opt to retain links with the ERP and to receive an evolving form of support.

On joining the programme, researchers meet with one of the Research Development (RD) co-ordinators for an extensive interview, in which they receive information about the programme, and are encouraged to speak about their research ambitions, opportunities, and constraints. Funding, mentoring, and other research needs are identified, and where further mentoring is required, the co-ordinators offer to match the researcher with a senior academic in a mentorship capacity. Initially, mentors and senior academics were mostly retired scholars but
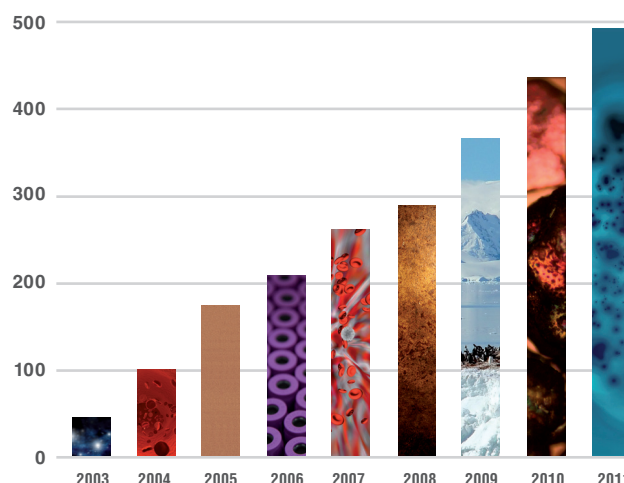

Figure 10 Number of staff registered with the ERP, 2003 to 2011

recently, due to the growth in the programme and changing demands, the ERP increasingly makes use of academics in current employment.

During 2011, the ERP offered 36 seminars across both streams, attended by 278 discrete participants, with many attending several events. Topics included: Research Planning; Optimising Conference Attendance; Networking at a Scientific Conference; The PhD Process; *Ad hominem* Promotion; Sabbatical Planning; Writing a Book; Publishing in a Scholarly Journal; Constructing an Article; Plagiarism; RefWorks; Search Engines; Budget Management; UCT Library Resources; Opening Scholarship (ways to distribute research using open access resources); and How to publish in *Nature*.

"During 2011, the ERP offered 36 seminars across both streams, attended by 278 discrete participants, with many attending several events."

In addition to the seminars, the ERP also held 14 workshops with 194 participants across both streams. Workshops are held over a longer period of time than seminars and involve active participation by those who attend. Topics in 2011 included: PhD Proposal Writing; Research Strategising; Constructing a Social Responsiveness Portfolio; and Presenting at a Conference. Eight were writers' workshops, usually two- or three-day retreats, designed to help researchers produce accredited research outputs. Progress towards publication is monitored after the workshop by RD co-ordinators.

In 2011 the Research Office also provided support for initiatives in the creative disciplines, including the Department of Drama's initiatives to produce PhDs, and the establishment of the *South African Journal of Dance* in the School of Dance.

Since shortly after its inception the ERP has been awarding modest grants for research development purposes. Recipients are primarily researchers participating in the ERP, although under certain conditions mid-career staff who have been through the ERP are considered as well. The entire grants process is used as a capacity-building exercise, from assistance in developing the proposal and submitting the application through to the production of appropriate outputs that correspond to goals identified in the proposal itself. Monitoring of grants and individual mentoring support throughout the process is offered by one of the RD co-ordinators. In this way, the ERP aims to equip researchers with the skills required to compete successfully for external grants.

In 2011 grants in excess of R4 million were awarded. These included 77 research development grants with an average value of R40,000 each. A further 16 grants were awarded for PhD completions. Nearly 80 percent of the funding for these grants came from the Carnegie Corporation, with university funds supporting the remainder.

Supervisors in training

Supervision training is open to all academic staff. Supervision training workshops are offered twice a year in both the SET and SSLHC streams, and are led by senior, experienced UCT academics or retirees and RD co-ordinators. The interactive nature of the programme is an important feature, as participants continue to be drawn from a wide range of academic areas and levels of experience, in addition to young staff who are still completing their higher degrees. In 2011, supervision training workshops were attended by a total of 73 staff across both streams.

Granting opportunities: the Programme for the Enhancement of Research Capacity

While also supporting the development of research capacity, PERC specifically assists academics to achieve National Research Foundation rating and promotes research that is consistent with UCT's strategic goal to be a model research-led university that is mindful of its location in Africa.

Since its inception in 2009, 15 PERC grants have been awarded, ranging in value from R150,000 to R165,000. The grants are designed to promote collaborative, inter-disciplinary, Africa-oriented research. One of the major

PERC funds
key bird study

The African continent is host to the great majority of weaver species in the world – 112 of 117. Mapping the breeding distribution and analysing variations in colony sizes of these species is the goal of PHOWN (Photos of Weaver Nests, http://weavers.adu.org.za/phown.php), a project of the Animal Demography Unit and the creation of Dr Dieter Oschadleus. The mapping project helps to address issues of food security (certain weaver species are voracious consumers of grain), as well as to measure the impact of climate change.

PHOWN has an electronic database of more than 2 500 records and invites 'citizen scientists' to take photographs of weaver bird nests (with date, GPS coordinates, and preferably a nest count) wherever they see them and to record these in PHOWN, where they can be archived and accessed.

Professor Les Underhill and Dr Oschadleus received a grant from PERC to extend the activities of PHOWN into Africa. Dr Oschadleus recently presented papers on results from PHOWN, and participated in a roundtable discussion at the National Museum of Kenya in Nairobi (Kenya is the country with the highest diversity of weaver species – over 60 – of any country in the world). The overall aim is to increase the photographic record for West, Central, and East Africa.

ways of generating new knowledge is through the creation of forums for debate and discussion.

Three grants were awarded in 2011, for research on mineral law for Africa, mapping of weaver bird distribution in Africa (see previous page), and exploring the practice of child-carrying in Africa.

A distinguishing characteristic of PERC is that it is responsive to initiatives that emerge from academics, departments, and faculties; and is also proactive in stimulating new transformative research. The PERC co-ordinator helps applicants to develop proposals and supports them in the research process, through individual or small group discussions, seminars, and workshops.

The Mellon Visiting and Retired Scholars Mentorship Project

The Research Office also provides a sound framework of support for the donor-funded Mellon Visiting and Retired Scholars Mentorship Project. This project dovetails with the ERP and PERC to build and strengthen a new generation of researchers.

In contrast to the other programmes, a one-on-one, discipline-specific mentorship relationship is brokered

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between developing researchers and a visiting or retired scholar who commits up to one year of their time. Initially launched in 2006 as a three-year project, the AW Mellon Foundation has extended its support until the end of 2013.

Since its inception, 34 mentors have participated in the project, the majority of whom were from outside South Africa: the United States of America, United Kingdom, The Netherlands, Israel, Germany, Canada, Nigeria, and Australia. Approximately 240 researchers have benefitted from mentoring interventions, which have resulted in a wide range of outputs, for example, peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, conference papers, grant applications, and doctoral graduates.