



HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH AWARD REVIEW January 2020: Progress and Next Steps (2018-2020)

Background and Context

The University of Hull was awarded the HR Excellence in Research Award in 2012 in recognition of its commitment to promoting the principles of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers. Since then, the award has been renewed following an internal review in 2014, an external audit in 2016 and a further internal review in 2018.

Over the past four years, the University has been working to the 2016-2020 Strategic Plan, with its integral People Plan (the Human Resources strategy for this time-frame). The key aims of the Strategic Plan have been *Empowering our Staff* and *Investing in our Academic Portfolio*. These were underpinned by four priorities of the *People Plan*: (1) to attract and invest in talent, (2) to encourage staff to engage, learn and develop, (3) to enable change and innovation and (4) to develop leadership and performance. During this time, two significant restructurings have taken place, most recently with a return to a faculty/department structure, although two schools remain. Currently the University is undergoing a transformation programme working to shape a strong and financially sustainable future for our students and colleagues, which will result in a smaller, higher quality institution. As a result, professional services have been reviewed and EDI responsibilities are now distributed jointly between HR and the Pro-Vice Chancellor for Education. In addition, the Graduate School is now known as the Doctoral College. Regular monitoring of the action plan has continued throughout this period of change, with new action holders identified and informed of their role. Work has now begun on the University's next Strategic Plan for publication in 2020.

We have made good progress against our 2016-2020 action plan; key highlights have been implementing a new staff appraisal scheme, launching the very successful Staff Excellence Awards scheme in 2016-18, and the development of faculty-led mentoring schemes in 2018-20. We have previously reported on the 2016-18 period and complete this here focussing on the 2018-20 timeframe. The University's new research strategy was approved by Council in December 2018, following wide consultation with stakeholders from across the University community. The strategy aims to 'attract, support, develop and empower a diverse community of talented researchers and research students, enabling them to deliver world-leading research and innovation'.

Governance

The HR Excellence Action Plan is led and sponsored by the HR Directorate and the work within it is overseen by the Concordats Steering Group (CSG). A new chair of this group was appointed in 2019. CSG reports to the University Research Committee, which is chaired by the Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research, Enterprise, and Marketing who is a member of the University Leadership Team. The CSG membership consists of faculty deans, associate deans for research and appropriate staff from professional and support service who hold the authority to commit resource and prioritise activities; this allows actions to progress quickly. Members of research staff also sit on this steering group.

Evaluation Process

CSG was responsible for the internal evaluation of progress against the Action Plan with a lead from HR, Learning and Development and the Research and Enterprise Office. We have continued with the regular monitoring programme and engaged with our research community through a number of surveys including an internal survey of contract research staff (November 2017; based on CROS2017)), a Staff Survey 2018 and CROS 2019, plus Athena SWAN associated activities that generate equality and diversity data.

Actions and achievements by principle

Principle 1: Recruitment, Selection and Retention Practice

Human Resources (HR) have revised job descriptions to ensure that they are clear, the language is modified to be gender neutral and that person specifications are included with the job description. Job adverts are also checked for appropriate language to ensure we attract a diverse range of applicants. All recruiting managers are reminded of their duties to hold a fair, transparent and quality focused process and all new recruiting managers are required to undertake the online learning Recruitment and Selection and Unconscious Bias modules (with a 3 yearly refresh cycle). HR checks the suitability and diversity of each panel.

The proportion of staff on fixed-term contracts (FTC) is still around 75% (HR data). While this is higher than that reported nationally in CROS 2019 (64%), some of these researchers have been appointed recently through investment in University Research Fellows in the Research Institutes. We will continue to monitor to ensure appropriate use of FTCs. A new vacancy

management process, implemented in autumn 2019, ensures that vacancies are managed at a senior level to ensure appropriate use of contract type in line with our transformation agenda.

The HR system, iTrent, can now be used for monitoring training and development, appraisals for both staff and line managers.

Principle 2: Recognising and Valuing Researchers

The level at which researchers felt integrated into their local research community had been maintained at 70% over the past two years, while more now also felt integrated into the wider university community (46% compared to 32% in 2017; CROS 2019).

In CROS 2019, 50% of respondents had had an appraisal in the last two years, which is still low compared to national results (72%; CROS 2019) but may have been related to the high proportion of recent appointees among the respondents. Half of those who had an appraisal thought it was useful overall, which is similar to national results. Appraisal was considered most effective in identifying strengths and achievements, leading to training or other professional development opportunities, or in reviewing personal progress. It is University policy that all employees take part in the annual appraisal and development review process and we are raising awareness among research staff of their entitlement to appraisal further through the induction process and the Learning and Development programme.

Research reward mechanisms within the University have been reviewed and reported to the CSG. The University of Hull currently rewards research through two schemes. The first is through the University Employee Excellence Awards, an annual scheme which recognise outstanding contributions across a range of areas (research, rising star, enterprise and innovation). The second is an ad hoc merits payments scheme for excellent performance, as recommended by a line manager: this scheme is not exclusive to research. In addition, there are research reward schemes within faculties. Going forwards from the current transformation project, HR are developing the concept of 'Everyday Excellence' which is intended to facilitate smaller more frequent rewards, based on clear principles of transparency and fairness of application (launch date 2021).

Principle 3: Equipping and Supporting Researchers to be adaptable and flexible

Learning and Development (L&D) continue to play a major role in providing and coordinating a portfolio of development opportunities for research staff with expert input from other providers within the University, including the Research and Enterprise Office and the University Library. The programme is reviewed annually to ensure it meets current needs based on event evaluations, CROS and other surveys and feedback gathered from the Associate Deans for Research, Faculty Research Committees and Institute Directors. We have refreshed the portfolio on writing and publishing and included new workshops on communicating research to different audiences. The new programme is launched at the beginning of each new academic year, including both mandatory and elective development opportunities. The Mandatory Training Map directs staff to mandatory training relevant to their job role, and is also reviewed annually. In addition to the programme, L&D offer bespoke workshops in response to requests from Schools or Faculties, and workshops and resources may be added in responsive mode to requests and suggestions outside of the annual planning round. Support for research and academic development is also offered within faculties, for example, through mentoring workshops, writing retreats etc. We recognise the role of Research Leaders in supporting and developing research staff and provide leadership and management training for this group.

We have increased the range of online resources so that all researchers are supported, including the Research Integrity online module launched in February 2018 and the 'Think Further' resources for early-career researchers produced as part of a nationwide collaboration between higher education institutions. The next step will be to develop a researcher development programme (non-accredited), as part of a new Academic Development Centre to be developed in 2020. This tailored approach aims to improve awareness and access to relevant developmental opportunities and to encourage a sense of progression. The online toolkit of induction materials for managers of researchers has also been reviewed and relaunched. The University continues to be a member of Vitae and promote use of Vitae resources to staff, including the Vitae Researcher Development Framework as a useful tool for planning and recording development for all researchers.

Principle 4: Recognising Career Development Needs and Lifelong Learning at all career stages

Building on previous career pathways, the Academic Careers Framework (ACF) was introduced in 2019 to support academics (Lecturers, Senior Lecturers, Readers and Professors) within the University by recognising the breadth and value of all types of academic contribution. It aims to create parity between the different domains (education, research and knowledge exchange) and make University expectations of those roles more transparent. While this does not directly cover research-only staff, it makes academic career development opportunities clearer by providing criteria, descriptions and examples of indicative evidence for each role and level: the resulting developmental opportunities are available to all. We followed this up by establishing a working group to look at career pathways for research-only staff and as a result aim to develop an advisory careers framework for researchers.

The University's Research Strategy 2018 recognises the value of mentoring. Over one quarter of respondents in CROS 2019 had received mentoring and a further 48% would like to. Current mentoring schemes offered by Faculties have been reviewed and a draft of policy and guidance on requirements for mentoring of researchers is being prepared. A more general mentoring scheme is also available to staff through L&D.

As only 50% of research-only staff reported having had an appraisal in the last two years this indicates that further work is required to ensure that both researchers and their managers are aware of their rights and responsibilities in this regard. New workshops on preparing for academic promotion and on appraisals have been introduced for staff to get the most out of the process, and the new forms place greater emphasis on career development. Going forwards the appraisal process will form an important part of identifying development opportunities for researchers as part of the minimum 10 days per year prescribed by the new Concordat.

Principle 5: Researchers' Responsibilities

Communication with researchers about training and development opportunities has continued using the normal L&D promotional channels as well as via a bespoke email list for research only staff. There had been an improvement in take-up of training or CPD: in the past 12 months only 4% of CROS respondents reported had spent no time on training or CPD (compared to 20% in 2017), 78% had spent between one and five days and 17% had spent more than five days.

There has been initial interest in setting up a Research Staff Association from the post-doctoral research community. We aim next to investigate whether this is viable with support from Learning and Development in 2020.

Principle 6: Equality and Diversity

Responsibility for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) lies jointly with the Head of the HR Directorate and the PVC (Education).

Equality and Diversity courses are included in the Mandatory Training Map, with refresher courses required every three years: this is firmly embedded and monitored. Most respondents in CROS 2019 (86%) in 2019 were aware of the Athena SWAN initiative and 87% of the sample believed that the University is committed to equality and diversity. The University addresses the underrepresentation of women in research through bespoke initiatives such as the Minerva Network for Academic Women, and supporting female staff to participate in the Aurora programme (AdvanceHE). The University retained its Athena SWAN Bronze in October 2018 and this is valid through to April 2022.

Three-quarters of CROS respondents in 2019 were satisfied with their work-life balance. However, CROS 2019 results suggested that further work could be done to promote better mental health and well-being at work. To support staff health and well-being needs, an internal 'Healthy Hull' SharePoint site was launched in 2019, bringing together resources, advice, training, support and guidance.

Principle 7: Monitoring and Evaluation

The Concordats Steering Group (CSG) meets three times each academic year and reports to the University Research Committee (URC), which has approval authority for research governance documents. The CSG is the formal forum for Associate Deans for Research and professional support directorates to discuss operational issues faced by the research community. Membership of the group includes those with responsibilities for the additional concordats. Members are selected to ensure that they have the authority to commit resources to effect the actions. A new chair of CSG was appointed, commencing September 2019. Administration of the HR Excellence Award continues with L&D and HR.

We have continued to monitor the action plan three to four times per year, requesting updates from all action holders. In addition, the new Human Resources data management system is live and allows for easier monitoring and reporting. The University routinely monitors the impact of change on its staff through staff surveys, which have included a 'Staff temperature check' survey (October 2016), from which data on research staff could be extracted, and a Research Staff survey (November 2017). The University usually participates in both CROS and PIRLS, but in 2017 abstained from national surveys to reduce the risk of survey fatigue for our employees ahead of a large institutional Staff Survey in 2018, scheduled as a post-restructuring monitoring event. The 2018 Survey included some questions relevant to PIs and research leaders. The University resumed participation in CROS in 2019, and will participate in both CROS and PIRLS going forwards.

Next steps including success factors

The publication of the revised Concordat for the Career Development of Researchers in September 2019 was timely as we refresh the HR Excellence in Research Action Plan for the next four years. The new University of Hull HR Excellence in Research Action Plan for 2020-2024 has been developed with a view to transition to the revised Concordat once processes have been agreed with the European Commission. Hence, it will focus on the first two years and will be revised in 2022. This time-frame also allows for the revision to incorporate priorities from the new University Strategic Plan being developed in 2020. The Concordats Steering Group will continue to work with key stakeholders to implement the 2020-22 Action Plan,

in support of the HR Excellence in Research Award. Based on recent surveys and focus groups we have identified the following priorities for the Concordats Steering Group going forwards:

- Building on the partnership established between HR and L&D in administering the HR Excellence in Research Action Plan, we will establish a wider steering group for this process including Faculty Research Managers. This will build faculty links and share good practice in researcher development across the University, leading to greater equity of treatment and opportunity between researchers. We will develop more efficient faculty reporting processes through Directors of Research within departments/schools.
- Establish a new researcher development programme, through a collaboration between Learning and Development, HR, Faculties and Institutes, taking into consideration the requirement for a minimum of ten days professional development for researchers in the new Concordat. In particular, this will include specific guidance on induction and appraisal:
 - Induction – CROS 2019 results indicated that not all researchers were aware of induction opportunities at institution or local level. We will work with Faculty Directors of Research and Faculty Research Managers to improve the on-boarding experience. This will increase productivity and add to a researcher’s sense of integration into the departmental research and wider community and University research community, (with target figures of 75, 65 and 55% in the subsequent CROS survey). As part of this process we will create and trial a charter for PIs and their researchers.
 - Appraisal - We will continue to work with HR and Faculties to develop greater awareness by both researchers and their managers of their rights and responsibilities with regard to appraisal/review and their own professional development. Success factors will include greater percentage take-up and satisfaction with appraisal (increase participation to 70% and overall satisfaction to 60%: monitor through CROS) and increased take-up of training and development opportunities.
- There has been recent increased interest in the mental health and wellbeing of researchers nationally. CROS 2019 revealed that many researchers felt that the University could do more to promote better health and well-being at work. We will monitor researcher wellbeing through CROS and Staff Surveys and integrate wellbeing and mental health support into researcher development. Target: 55% for ‘The University promotes better mental health and well-being at work’ in CROS.
- We will continue to promote and support the implementation of research mentoring programmes provided centrally and within faculties and monitor take-up and satisfaction with the scheme annually, to ensure that all researchers who wish to, have experience of mentoring. Target: 60% satisfaction with process and outcomes of mentoring, in the first year, rising to 80% in subsequent years.
- Research integrity – Uptake of the research integrity training has been good but we will continue to make everyone aware of their responsibilities. This will be included within the proposed research charter. Completion will continue to be monitored regularly with a target of 90% compliance.
- We note that the proportion of researchers on FTCs had increased. While this may have been impacted by the University’s success in bringing in new research funding, robust vacancy management procedures are in place and HR will monitor to make sure that FTCs are only used where there is a recorded and justifiable reason.
- The CSG Working Group on career development for research-only staff, which involved early-career researchers as well as an Associate Dean for Research and representatives of HR and Learning and Development, recommended that the University:
 - Develop a career pathway resource for this group of staff
 - Review and standardise job titles for researchers in line with appropriately evaluated job roles to ensure University has competitive recruitment and retention practices
- The majority of CROS 2019 respondents (87%) felt that the University is committed to equality and diversity and 76% were satisfied with their work-life balance. However, we will continue to work to improve the research environment for all researchers through implementing our vision, values and behaviours. The University will continue its ongoing inclusivity agenda, with a recently launched Inclusivity Network and further promotion of the DARA (Dignity and Respect Advisors) Network providing informal support to staff. Moreover, improved induction and appraisal procedures combined with embedding of the proposed researcher charter should improve perceptions of fair and equitable treatment.
- We will continue to listen to the voice of researchers informed by internal surveys and focus groups and CROS. /PIRLS. Following an exploratory meeting, there have been expressions of interest in forming a Research Staff Association and in 2020 we will work to establish a group if appropriate.