



## HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH AWARD REVIEW January 2018<sup>1</sup>: 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 and an external audit in 2016.

The University is currently working to the 2016-2020 Strategic Plan, with its integral People Plan (the Human Resources strategy for this time frame). All staff at the University had the opportunity to contribute to the Strategic Plan consultation and received a copy of the key messages leaflet in 2016. Implementation of this plan began under the previous Vice-Chancellor who left the University in 2016 and has been managed in the interim by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor. A new Vice-Chancellor took up position in September 2017 and it is not currently envisaged that the University's Strategic Plan will be revised before 2020. During the past two years there has been a significant restructuring of the Faculties to align research themes plus a significant review and reorganisation of Professional Services. Within Faculties, departments have now been assimilated into Schools. Consequently, we have reviewed the action holders within the HR Excellence in Research action plan and updated some of the titles and roles in a revised plan. We have introduced an updated reporting system that has enabled us to apprise new action holders of their responsibilities and ensure that they engage with the action plan.

Within this context of change we have nonetheless made good progress against our 2016 action plan, significantly with the implementation of a new staff appraisal scheme and the very successful launch of a new Staff Excellence Awards scheme. Moving forward we will be working to the University's 2016-2020 Strategic Plan with its key aims of *Empowering our Staff* and *Investing in our Academic Portfolio*. This is 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.

### Evaluation Process

The Concordats Steering Group 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. A new quarterly monitoring programme has been introduced requesting updates from all action holders. In addition, this evaluation has drawn on feedback from the Staff Temperature Check Survey (October 2016) and Athena SWAN associated activities that generate equality and diversity data. We have engaged with our research community through an internal survey of contract research staff in November 2017 (based on CROS2017) and the resulting data will be used to identify progress and areas for further development.

### 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). CSG reports to the University Research Committee which is chaired by the Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research, Enterprise, and Marketing, a member of the University Leadership Team. The CSG membership consists of heads of directorates that 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.

### Actions and achievements by principle

#### ***Principle 1: Recruitment, Selection and Retention Practice***

During the recent transition period most job descriptions for senior academic management roles have been revised (e.g. subject group heads, heads of school, faculty academic managers etc.) to fit with the changes in the University structure. The University is introducing progression routes for academic and research staff with development of alternatives, such as a Teaching and Scholarship Career Pathway. Combined with the new Staff Performance and Development Review, these pathways should enable individuals to plan their career progression routes more effectively than in the past. Almost 75% of respondents to the Research Staff survey were on a fixed term contract, a value similar to CROS 2017 figures at 72%. We will continue to monitor the use of fixed-term contracts to ensure that they are appropriate to the work being conducted. In 2017 the University announced a major new initiative to appoint up to ten University Research Fellows. The Research Fellows, appointed into the University Interdisciplinary Institutes, will embark on a 5-year fixed term structured-research

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<sup>1</sup> Revised June 2018

development programme aimed at supporting the transition of the research staff into full academic careers. Each Fellowship will be provided with a Research Support Fund (£12k per annum) to cover essential research costs.

***Principle 2: Recognising and Valuing Researchers***

We recognise that the period of change that the University has just undergone could have had some negative impacts on key indicators of staff satisfaction. In general, however, researchers still felt integrated into their local research community (70%) and were reasonably satisfied with their work life balance (69%); compared with national figures of 77% and 67% respectively (CROS 2017). However, only 32% felt integrated into the University's research community (58% nationally). The appointment of University Research Fellows to the new Research Institutes intends to address this by integrating researchers into research groups working across disciplines. In addition, the Research Office has begun running new networking events for early career researchers within Faculties and wider Research Governance seminars.

In the recent survey, 56% of respondents reported having an appraisal in the last two years and a further 13% had been too recently appointed to have had one. This suggests that about a third of research staff had not yet been invited to an appraisal meeting, a similar figure to that obtained in 2013. However, with the introduction of the refreshed appraisal programme in 2017 we intend to improve on these figures in the near future. Training workshops for managers in the appraisal process include content on how performance can be assessed, development planning and reward of staff performance. Researcher development materials are promoted as part of workshops and included on dedicated development intranet pages.

In summer 2017 as part of our Employee Recognition Scheme the University launched its Staff Excellence Awards that are open to all staff and included nominations for research. We also have an internal PhD scholarship cluster pitching programme and a Global Challenges Research Fund pitch event, giving early career academics an opportunity to compete for internal funding. This will enable them to demonstrate funding success and research delivery, strengthening their competitiveness in the current challenging funding environment.

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

Learning and Development (L&D: formerly Staff Development) continue to play a major role in providing and coordinating a portfolio of development opportunities for research staff including applying for funding, research data management, public engagement, research impact and delivering career development opportunities. The 2017 Learning and Development Programme has increased the offer for researchers and includes expert input from other providers within the University including new research governance training from the Research and Enterprise Office and research data management from the University Library. L&D also offer bespoke workshops in response to requests from Schools or Faculties. The newly-developed Mandatory Training Map directs staff to mandatory training relevant to their job role, in addition to elective development opportunities. We are looking at increasing the range of online resources so that all researchers are supported (e.g. video recording all development sessions in R&E) and will imminently launch a Research Integrity online module to meet the requirements of the concordat on Research Integrity. We also recognise the role of Research Leaders in supporting and developing research staff and provide leadership and management training for this group. A Research Staff Association (RSA) has become inactive due to key members leaving the University. This was often poorly attended and ineffective so there are plans examine the need and, if appropriate, revamp and relaunch a new RSA supported by L&D.

The Academic and Research Development portfolio is reviewed each year to ensure it meets current needs. This review will be informed by event evaluations, the internal research staff survey and feedback gathered from the Associate Deans for Research, Faculty Research Committees and Institute Directors, in order to increase the learning and development offering for researchers. Changes in the workload model and the restructure of the administrative support in Faculties were aimed at making more time for academics to spend in writing for research. In support of this aim, Faculties have arranged writing workshops and the Research Funding Office has organised grant-writing workshops with funding bodies.

The University continues to be a member of Vitae and promote use of Vitae resources to staff, including the RDF and RDF planner. We intend to undertake a review of users in early 2018 to assess the level of use and to ensure that there are sufficient licences available for new users. Work continues to embed this as a useful tool for planning and recording development for all researchers within the L&D Programme and the new Postgraduate Training Scheme.

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

The HR 'People Plan' recognises career development needs and is linked to the wider performance management framework. To date, a Teaching and Scholarship career pathway has been developed, with plans for Teaching and Research, Research, and Professional Services Staff Career development pathways in progress. Faculties and Schools are taking the initiative with regard to encouraging staff to apply for promotion and providing support: for example, a workshop on the promotion process was recently held in the School of Environmental Sciences. Researchers are also able to consult the Careers Service to consider the full range of careers open to them, but the availability of this service could be further promoted.

The refreshed appraisal process is designed for all staff to have a robust conversation with their line Manager (or PI) regarding appropriate learning and development opportunities. As only 56% 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. Our survey indicated that only 18% of respondents had received mentoring but that 61% would like to do so. Development of a new research mentoring scheme is underway within the Faculty of Arts, Cultures and Education in 2017 and rolled out across the Faculty. The model has been shared with Associate Deans for Research through the CSG with plans in place to have this introduced into the other Faculties. A more general mentoring scheme is also available to staff through L&D.

#### ***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. Records of participation at centrally organised development events were migrated to our new HR system, I-Trent in 2017; this system is still under development and it is hoped that reporting will be available soon. Almost a third (32%) of respondents in the Research Staff Survey had undertaken less than one day of training or CPD in the past 12 months. We therefore need to explore barriers to engagement with CPD among research staff as well as ensuring that they receive information about opportunities and support for their career development.

#### ***Principle 6: Equality and Diversity***

Equality and Diversity have been reorganised as Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) with a new Head and support staff and brought within the HR Directorate. Equality and Diversity courses are included in the Mandatory Training Map, with refresher courses required every three years: this is firmly embedded and monitored. The Research Staff survey (November 2017) showed that most respondents (93%) were aware of the Athena SWAN initiative and that 80% 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 in-house PoWER programme for Women Achieving Excellence in Research and Minerva Network for Academic Women, while supporting female staff to participate in the Aurora programme (LFHE). The University will be submitting an application to maintain its Athena SWAN Bronze award in April 2018.

#### ***Principle 7: Monitoring and Evaluation***

The Concordats Steering Group (CSG) meets three times each academic year and from 2017 reports University Research Committee (URC) which has a stronger governance function, with approval authority for research governance documents. The CSG consequently has become the formal forum for ADRs and professional support directorates to discuss operational issues faced by the research community. Membership of the group has been revised to include those with responsibilities for the additional concordats and to ensure that members have the authority to commit resources to effect the actions. Administration of the HR Excellence Award has been transferred internally within L&D from retiring staff members.

Quarterly monitoring, requesting updates from all action holders, has allowed us to monitor changes in the relevant personnel and to inform new action holders of their responsibilities. In addition, the new Human Resources data management system will, when it is fully-operational, allow easier monitoring and reporting. The University routinely monitors the impact of change on its staff through staff surveys, including 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 survey scheduled for early next year as a post-restructuring monitoring event. It is the University's intention to resume participation in CROS and PIRLS in 2019.

#### **Next steps including success factors**

The Concordats Steering Group will work with key stakeholders to implement the 2016-2020 Action Plan for the remaining 2018-2020 portion, in support of the HR Excellence in Research Award. In the light of the recent, considerable change in personnel and to ensure that good practice is firmly embedded, we have taken the decision to retain actions that should be routine, or for review, to ensure that all new action holders are fully aware of their responsibilities going forward. In particular, the work of the Concordats Steering Group will be to:

- Continue to listen to the voice of researchers informed by internal surveys and focus groups. We will resume our participation in CROS and PIRLS in 2019. In addition, CSG will commission focus groups on specific topics related to the above narrative e.g. barriers to participation in learning and development activities in order to better understand and support our research staff. (by December 2018)
- Promote and support the implementation of new research mentoring programmes across Faculties and monitor their use annually (December 2018, 2019) ensuring that all staff who wish to take up the offer are matched with a mentor.

- Work with HR to implement the 2016-2020 People Plan and the staff appraisal process with particular reference to the needs of researchers and enhancing the research environment. Success factors to include greater integration into the departmental research and wider community and University research community, with target figures of 75, 65 and 50% respectively in CROS 2019. (CROS2019)
- Support HR in the development of 'Teaching and Research' and 'Research Staff' Career Development Pathways to complement the existing 'Teaching and Scholarship' Career Development Pathway. Success factors will include the completion of this project and the dissemination to staff (July 2019).
- Work with Faculties, Institutes and Learning and Development to advise on, coordinate and commission development activity for researchers (annual review of programme February 2018, 2019; new programme available September 2018, 2019). Work with Faculties to support their researchers to gain appropriate lecturing experience to enhance their career development within academia.
- 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 % take-up and satisfaction with appraisal (increase participation to 70% and overall satisfaction to 60%: monitor July 2018, 2019; CROS2019) and increased take-up of training and development opportunities (CROS2019).
- Develop an improved strategy for communicating research training and development opportunities across the University. Success factors to include feedback demonstrating greater awareness and engagement with researcher-relevant information and activities (monitor uptake of relevant training and development opportunities July 2018, 2019; CROS2019).
- Assess the level of interest in forming a Research Staff Association and establish group if appropriate.