

Report

Title: HR Excellence in Research Award – 2 year internal review

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Date: 23rd January 2014

Progress report on behalf of Professor Judith Petts, PVC Research

Background

The University of Southampton achieved the HR Excellence in Research Award in January 2012. This was at a time when the University had undertaken a major reorganisation of its structure and administrative staff. Much of the Action Plan drawn up in 2011 reflected that situation and the expectations made of the new organisation. Subsequently, many of the anticipated actions in the 2011 plan were subject to change as the Human Resources (HR) department continued to be reorganised during 2012-13. Despite the challenges of changing staff and operational structures, extensive progress has been achieved under the direction of the *Career Development of Researchers Working Group* (CDR WG). The CDR WG has oversight of the implementation of the Concordat and consists of representatives from the key University stakeholders including: research staff, the Faculties through their Concordat Champions, Human Resources (HR), the Professional Development Unit (PDU), the Diversity Team, the University and College Union (UCU), and the International Office.

The strategy stated in 2011 was to take a four phased approach towards implementation: 1) to identify and address University level actions, 2) to address the individual level i.e. keeping research staff and Principal Investigators (PIs) and managers of researchers informed and encouraging them to engage with the Concordat principles, 3) to encourage Faculty level and Academic Unit level actions and 4) to monitor and review progress, and improve our communication mechanisms. Our strategic approach as well as our stated overall aim, 'target end state' and method, remain unchanged. Full details of CDR WG meetings, the 2011 Implementation Plan, the 2014 Revised Action Plan and Implementation Schedule can be found at: <http://www.southampton.ac.uk/waar/concordat.page>

How the internal review was undertaken

The CDR WG met on: 19th March 2012, 24th October 2012, 15th May 2013, 1st November 2013 and 23rd January 2014. Beginning in May 2013, the CDR WG began to revisit and review the major tasks and specific actions of the original plan and to take into consideration, and where appropriate incorporate, three developments: 1) the changes that had taken place within HR, 2) the Athena SWAN award process, and 3) the outcomes of a University level 'academic reward project' (also see Principle 2 below) that examined career titles and pathways, and the appraisal and promotion processes. The CDR WG Chair and Skills Training Coordinator from the PDU considered progress made at the University level and the Faculty Champions did the same within their Faculties.

The University participated in CROS 2013 and reviewed the qualitative and quantitative data. Key actions emerging from CROS were incorporated into the University Action Plan, with four new actions on teaching opportunities and career development added to the plan. Data from CROS relating to each Faculty has been incorporated into the Faculty Actions Plans where appropriate.

The Assistant Director HR for Specialist Services and Assistant Director HR for Operations were consulted and reviewed the 2011 document and made appropriate amendments. The Diversity Project Officer was consulted and the implementation plan was aligned with the Athena SWAN Action Plan.

How research staff were involved in the review

- Each Faculty established a forum for research staff to meet, discuss and feedback their thoughts, concerns and suggestions around key issues. As each Faculty has different issues, so each forum reflects the needs of the staff in that Faculty. Research Staff views have, then, informed the Faculty Action Plans and the overall review process in diverse ways.
- Research Staff representatives on the CDR WG have been actively engaged in discussing the Concordat and the Action Plan.

- At the University level, Research Staff have been invited (via email) to share their thoughts directly and independently to the Professional Development Unit in a number of ways: 1) research staff were invited (in March 2013) to say 'what a step-change in support for research staff would look like' from their perspective; 2) researchers were asked for comments and feedback on the outcome of the CROS 2011 and 2013; 3) during 2011-13, research staff were invited to send in their views via a monthly newsletter (this mechanism ceased in September 2013); 4) In December 2013, research staff were emailed the latest version of the Action Plan and asked for feedback.

The final report, pulling all of the above elements together, was agreed by the CDR WG on 23rd January 2014.

Key achievements (2012-2014)

Structural change: In October 2011, we were about to embark on a step-change in our implementation process by focusing on Faculty and Academic Unit levels. The establishment of the CDR WG and Faculty Concordat Champions and research staff representatives (formally established 19th March 2012) have been major achievements and key instruments in terms of implementing the Concordat.

Progress has been made in all four phases of our strategic approach, and particularly in Phase 3 – i.e. Faculty level actions. The Faculty Champions have been instrumental in driving change through the institution by establishing research staff forums and representation at Faculty level. Each Faculty has established regular meetings for their research staff, some have included teaching fellows as well, and although the representative forums vary in their level of formality, the significant point is that each Faculty has used these as the means for engaging research staff in the implementation process and to find out what is needed in their area.

Further key achievements and progress against each Principle include:

Principle 1 – Recruitment and Selection

The Induction process was reviewed and a new Organisational Induction and Research Staff 'module' introduced. Greater Early Career Researcher participation has been recorded and CROS 2013 confirmed improvement in take-up from 2011 (from 45% being offered Induction in 2011 to 62% in 2013). CROS 2013 indicated that the number of researchers participating in an appraisal over the past 2 years was 75%.

The internal promotions rounds were publicised better within the University; a 'briefing' session by the Provost and on-line information were introduced in 2012. A revised training workshop and up-dated information were introduced on 'recruitment and selection'. The UCU organised an 'Anti-Casualisation Event' that discussed fixed term contracts, on 6th March 2013. The HR held data on research staff has been improved; a significant change is that the Faculty HR Managers now reconcile staff numbers with the Faculty Finance Officers on a monthly basis.

Principle 2 – Recognition and Value

Three Faculties introduced 'Dean's Awards' schemes recognising and celebrating the contributions of research staff in a range of areas including, for example, 'exceptional contributions in research, education, enterprise, public engagement and citizenship', and other Faculties plan to introduce similar schemes – please see <http://www.ecs.soton.ac.uk/news/4271> & http://www.southampton.ac.uk/biosci/news/2013/12/18_achievements_recognised_at_deans_award_ceremony.page

Action learning sets and/or group mentoring have been introduced for women seeking promotion as part of a specialist programme of activity i.e. *Women into Leadership and Management* for early career researchers and academic staff, *Springboard* for more established women.

The University embarked on a major project in 2013, *The Academic Reward Project*, which consisted of five work streams. The work stream groups, comprised of over 70 volunteer staff including researchers and PIs, were tasked to examine the key areas of: the Enterprise career pathway; the Professorial level; Titles and Pathways for staff levels 4-6; Appraisal best practice for staff levels 4-6; Promotions and Probation. The work was completed and reported in September 2013. Changes to the appraisal process and titles will be introduced 1st October 2014.

Principle 3 – Equipped and supported

A [specialist programme of training and development](#) has been established for research staff and co-exists with a general training programme for all University staff. The specialist research staff programme was aligned with the *Vitae Researcher Development Framework*. A leadership programme, *The Future Academic Leader* programme, has been developed for high potential research staff, and aligns with the University's Senior Leadership Development Programme. A specialist website, *Working as a Researcher*, was created and launched in 2012. This site contains useful information and links for researchers, but is still a 'work in progress'. <http://www.southampton.ac.uk/waar>

Principle 4 – Personal and Career Development

Research staff have been given access to the University careers' services (Career Destinations) resources. We held our first Career Development day event for research staff on 26th March 2013. A focus group of Principal Investigators (PIs) was held in July 2012, which identified PI development needs and captured their views on managing research staff and the Principal Investigators and Research Leaders Survey (PIRLS).

Principle 5 – Researchers’ responsibilities

We continue to emphasise the importance for research staff of managing their development needs and we encourage staff to be pro-active in their roles. The number of research staff groups has grown across the University and Faculties have encouraged research staff to organise meetings and events. Postdoctoral researchers have been actively self-organising, for example, staff in the Faculty of Health Sciences established a ‘Fixed Term Contract forum’, and researchers in the Faculty of Natural and Environmental Sciences organised ‘peer to peer’ mentoring groups preceded with training workshops, and they also arranged a ‘Q & A session’ with a Head of Academic Unit, while researchers in the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences designed their own annual programme of development events.

Principle 6 – Diversity and Equality

The University equality plan was reviewed in 2013. The University Athena SWAN bronze award was renewed and six Academic Units were awarded bronze for the first time also in 2013. As a result of the equality plan and Athena SWAN, we are monitoring issues related to gender, pay, age, and disability more closely and have a more accurate picture of our staff profile. Cultural awareness/diversity training has been introduced. An International Staff Café was established, which offers international staff the opportunity to meet and network informally on a monthly basis. A programme of support has been designed and implemented for women, from early career (*Women into Leadership and Management* programme) to those seeking promotion to Professor. Support networks have been established for: Parents and Carers, and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Trans (LGBT) staff. Dr Kalwant Bhopal conducted research into our black and minority ethnic academic staff’s issues.

Principle 7 – Regular Review

The CDR WG reviewed and reported progress at the University level and took Faculty reports and up-dates from the key stakeholder representatives (including research staff representatives) at its meetings. HR produces quarterly reports on key staff data. The Professional Development Unit reported annually on its activity, which included research staff provision, attendance and evaluations.

On-going improvements

A number of actions are still on-going/outstanding due to the Academic Reward Project i.e. the reviews of Probationary procedures, promotions process, career pathways, and appraisal process. Specialist training and support for PIs and managers of researchers was dependent on some of the new processes, so has yet to be introduced as planned although general support in key areas is available. The outcomes of the Academic Reward Project are expected to be implemented in October 2014. Tracking the impact of changes has not progressed as far as we would have liked, so we remained dependent on information from CROS and individual feedback. We did not have a campaign using the Vitae ‘Every Researcher Counts’ resource as two interactive e-learning modules were made available to all members of staff, i.e. *Equality and Diversity Essentials* and *Managing Diversity*, that covered similar material. We did not produce a ‘statement of expectations’ for research staff as this was overtaken by the Academic Reward Project work and the outcome of that project is needed to clarify the nature of any ‘expectations’. The ‘Advisory Group Recommendations’ in the 2011 plan have now been consolidated into either University or Faculty level actions for clarity. A revised Action Plan is available at: <http://www.southampton.ac.uk/waar/concordat.page>

Strategic Focus (2014 – 2016)

1. Faculty Concordat Champions will work with researchers, their managers and their Faculty management teams to continue to implement their action plans. All Faculty Action Plans will be published online by 28th February 2014 as working documents that will be updated accordingly.
2. The CDR WG will continue to monitor and progress on the ‘outstanding and on-going’ actions from the 2011 plan and the four new actions arising from CROS 2013 feedback, on provision of a range of teaching opportunities and better career development support.
3. Faculties will continue to formally recognise and reward excellence by a variety of methods *e.g.* the Dean’s awards schemes.
4. Full implementation of the Academic Reward Project across the University will ensure improvement in Induction, Probationary reviews, and Annual Appraisals. The new processes will dramatically improve our internal tracking mechanisms for all staff.
5. We will use CROS data (2011, 2013, 2015) to monitor continued improvement on a biennial basis.
6. We aim to achieve three departmental Athena SWAN silver awards by 2016; many of the objectives of the Athena Swan charter are aligned with those of the CDR WG.
7. The Professional Development Unit will continue to improve the [Working as a Researcher](#) website and add specialist information on ‘*career management*’ and for ‘*women in academia*’.
8. By 2016, the CDR WG will have completed the implementation action plan and on going development and monitoring will be fully embedded in Faculty and University policy and processes.

End of report.