

## HR Excellence in Research: 4 year evaluation and review of progress

The University of Southampton achieved the HR Excellence in Research Award from the European Commission in 2012; subsequently our progress was reviewed internally and the award retained in 2014. This report and associated documents provide information for the four year external review of progress in implementing the principles of the *Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers*.

### How the review was undertaken

The 4 year review has afforded the University the opportunity to take a longer view of progress against our 2010/11 Action Plan and to reflect on the changes that have been achieved in supporting and developing our research staff to date. The review has been extensive and we actively sought to include the voices of research staff as much as possible. The four year review process has consisted of several elements and builds on the 2 year review.

- Evaluation of progress overall has been continuous and carried out by the Career Development of Researchers Working Group (CDR WG), which met three times per annum and comprised representatives from across the University, including researchers. The views of researchers have also been captured via participation in CROS (2009, 2011, 2013 and 2015) and the survey findings were considered at both the CDR WG and Faculty levels.
- Beginning in January 2015, the CDR WG, Human Resources (HR) and Professional Development-ILlAD staff began to review progress against the 2011 action plan. Designated staff included the Chair of the CDR WG, the Assistant Director HR, the Head of Diversity, and the HR Business Partner who met regularly with the Researcher Development Coordinator to review each section in detail. The HR Business Partner and Researcher Development Coordinator met in October 2015 to consider the OTM-R template.
- Faculty Concordat Champions have been consulting with the research staff in their Faculties since the 2 year review and continue to identify areas where progress has been made, or is still required, locally. Faculty activity was reported at the CDR WG meetings and Faculties have reviewed their own action plans.
- The Provost held an open meeting with Postdocs in May 2015 and issues emerging from the discussion fed into the review.
- Research Staff were invited, via emailed Newsletters in October and December 2015, to participate in the review process, and two members of research staff made major contributions to sections of the Action Plan.
- Research Staff Faculty representatives contributed to this report and new 2020 Action Plan via the CDR WG and the Faculty Concordat Champions.
- In January 2016, all Research Staff were emailed the 2020 Action Plan for comment.
- The Associate Deans of Research, and the Directors of HR, Research and Innovation Services, Strategy and Planning, and the Doctoral College, have been consulted for their views on the progress report and the new Action Plan. The new VC will also be invited to contribute his views, vision and ambition for research staff.
- Finally, data from the CROS, internal evaluation data and staff profiles have been analysed (from 2011 to 2015) to inform the review.

Key documents including: 1) this Review document 2) the 2011 action plan with progress status, 3) the 2016-2020 Action Plan, 4) Notes from Provost Open meeting, 5) web-link to the Equality Plan; are all located on, or are linked to, our website

<http://www.southampton.ac.uk/waar/concordat.page>

## Key achievements and progress against 2011 plan

Undoubtedly, key achievements since the original plan of 2011, and where we have seen continued improvement since the internal review of 2014, have been: the increased inclusion of research staff in all aspects of University life; and the growth in research staff led activity at Faculty level; all of which has been actively supported and facilitated by the Faculty Concordat Champions. We implemented a 4 phased approach that included: the University, individuals (research staff and PIs), Faculties via the Concordat Champions, and regular reviews by the CDR WG. The formalisation of the CDR WG as a body with links to the PVC Research and Enterprise and Advisory Group (REAG), along with the creation of Faculty Concordat Champions and the development of Faculty Action Plans have all served to connect research staff issues to the organisational structure and improve the central implementation process. Moreover, the Faculty Concordat Champions and Research Staff Representatives have identified issues, introduced activities and events, embedded change, and drilled down into the local level in ways that have enhanced central activity.

Another area of dramatic change has been the improved careers offer to research staff: from no access to careers information at all in 2011, to the appointment of a Specialist Advisor for researchers (both PGRs and ECRs) in 2013, along with open access to all researchers to the Careers Service drop-in sessions and information centre, specialist workshops and the creation of a career coaching referral system. We have established a core programme of centrally funded training and development for researchers and have seen significant improvements in the areas of induction, appraisal and in equality and diversity matters; where we were once behind the UK sector (according to CROS data) we are now in line and even ahead in some areas. CROS data confirms continued progress in terms of staff feeling recognised for a wide range of contributions and we are proud that our researchers feel valued and recognised for their contributions to publishing, public engagement, knowledge transfer/commercialisation and funding applications. All of our Faculties now offer Dean's awards or promote similar schemes, in recognition of the contributions research staff make to the University and local research environment.

Much of the progress since 2011 was achieved against a background of major and on-going structural change in the University; this inevitably impacted on some of our goals, for instance we have not been able to implement as much support for PIs as we would have liked, or improved teaching training for research staff to the extent we anticipated, however these areas will be addressed in our 2020 plan.

## Progress by Concordat Principles – highlights

**Principle 1** – All HR information was reviewed in 2011 and the HR website redesigned in 2012 to improve access to recruitment and selection and other HR policies, with information more clearly signposted for managers and staff. We reviewed our induction processes and improved the University level induction and central information (establishing an Induction Portal); as a result we have seen yearly increases in participation from 47% in 2011 to 73% in 2015 (CROS data). Departmental/Faculty induction has correspondingly increased, from 63% in 2013 to 74% in 2015. We also introduced an induction module for research staff that new research staff are invited to personally, and a website, Working as a Researcher, was created in 2012 for researchers and PIs, containing useful links, advice, videos, and a 'pow-toon' for new staff.

The Concordat Champions in the Faculty of Humanities and Faculty of Business, Law and Art (FBLA), have been able to meet with their researchers individually to identify any problems and resolve locally.

**Principle 2** – As part of the larger HR 'Reward project', we reviewed and revised our academic appraisal process and created an online system. The online appraisal system enables more rigorous monitoring of the process overall. Greater numbers of research staff now receive an appraisal, from 52% in 2011 to 67% in 2015, which brought us into line with the UK sector average (as per CROS data), and all appraising staff, PIs, have received training in the new process.

In 2012, the Faculty of Physical Sciences and Engineering (FPSE) introduced the Dean's award for researchers, in recognition of the variety of contributions they made. Now, 5 out of 8 Faculties offer a Dean's award where there were none in 2011, and all Faculties encourage nominations to the VC's annual award, resulting in 1 team and 3 individual awards made to research staff since 2012. In 2015, the Dean of the Faculty of Natural and Environmental Sciences (FNES) conducted a 'roadshow' where he visited researchers in the academic units to discuss their concerns, so that he could improve their experience in the Faculty.

**Principle 3** – A core programme of training and development has been created for researchers, that is regularly reviewed and revised based on research staff evaluations and feedback, and a permanent researcher development position was established in 2012. Participation in the core programme has increased from 480 attendees in 2011, to 586 in 2015. Research staff have access to online training resources including videos, Management Pocketbooks and Lynda.com, where none existed in 2011.

The research staff development programme includes contributions from: the International Office (on international mobility schemes and opportunities), the Research Innovation Services (providing advice on external engagement), the Library (on digital management and scholarship skills), the Public Engagement with Research unit (on how to get involved in public engagement activities), and PublicPolicy@Southampton (on how research can influence policy). Since 2012, several 'International Staff' and 'Researcher' cafes have been held per annum; providing researchers with the opportunity to network and obtain advice in an informal setting.

The Faculty of Medicine has a local transferable skills programme that also includes 'research clubs' and bespoke workshops e.g. How to Become a Lecturer, and Supervisory Skills.

**Principle 4** – All researchers have access to the Careers Service resources and drop-in advice sessions, where there was no access in 2011. A specialist advisor was appointed in 2013 and provides three different kinds of dedicated workshops to researchers (e.g. Exploring a career outside of academia) and one-to-one career coaching; individuals can also be referred for general coaching (30 research staff have received coaching to date). Researchers in the Faculty of Engineering and the Environment (FEE) organise a series of discussion sessions on "how to further your career for researchers in FEE" directly addressing research career issues; in 2014/15 they held 8 sessions with an average attendance of 29 people, and have 7 sessions planned for 2015/16. FNES also hold careers events in their Faculty.

We have encouraged mentoring for researchers and have seen mentoring programmes extend year-on-year across the University, from a single formal scheme in the Faculty of Medicine in 2011, to the creation of a University wide scheme open to all, as well as, by 2015, local programmes in FNES, FEE, the Faculty of Health Sciences, and within the Humanities. CROS 2015 data showed that 1 in 4 had received mentoring training, which was higher than the norm for the UK sector.

**Principle 5** – It was a key aspect of our strategy in 2010-11 to encourage researchers to take greater ownership and control of their career, which the majority (85% in CROS 2015) feel they now do. Since 2011, researchers in FEE and the Faculty of Social, Human and Mathematical Sciences (FSHMS) have designed their own training programmes, whilst in FNES they have also designed and organised an annual conference.

We have significantly decreased the number of researchers undertaking no training at all, from 27% in 2011 to 14% in 2015. Although we have seen a sharp increase since 2013 in the number of researchers undertaking 2 to 5 days' training (we are now slightly ahead of UK norms), we have not seen a similar trend in those keeping CPD records or maintaining a clear career plan; rather we have seen a decline in this area which we will examine further.

**Principle 6** – This is the area where the University wide equality and diversity initiatives, driven by the Athena SWAN award, have had an impact, with 91% stating that they believe the institution is committed to equality and diversity in 2015 as opposed to 81% in 2011 (CROS data). We have established a number of support networks including a 'Parent and Carers network', and the Faculty of Medicine has a 'Parental Leave Champion'. Chemistry and the Faculty of Medicine each achieved

a 'silver' Athena SWAN award in 2015, and several other units will be submitting for silver awards in the near future. We aligned the 2011 action plan with Athena SWAN and the Equality Plan in 2013, and will continue to do so in the University's 2016 application for Silver.

**Principle 7** – The CDR WG has met three times a year to monitor the implementation process and to address research staff issues. The appointment of Faculty Concordat Champions in 2011/12 greatly improved progress, whilst the appointment of a new Chair of the CDR WG in 2014 ensured direct reporting into REAG and the PVC Research and Enterprise. All 8 Faculties have produced local action plans reflecting their researchers' needs; these have been reviewed, also, on a regular basis. Annual performance reporting on the training and development programmes has been carried out by Professional Development-ILlAD and the Careers Service.

### Next Steps and Success Indicators by 2020

Many of the actions in our 2011 plan addressed specific problems that, although pressing at the time, were not as ambitious or strategic as we now would like our 2020 plan to be. Under the higher level ambition of empowering and enabling our researchers to participate fully in institutional life and to move onto fulfilling careers, our 2020 plan builds on our continued improvement to date in a systematic way. We are focusing on better sign-posting of information for researchers, improved compliance, and evidence and data collection that will enable us to 'target' any weak areas and issues in a timely manner. We will continue to nurture and support our researchers and to emphasise Faculty-driven initiatives. We now wish to examine the research career pathway more closely and develop guidance/advice that responds to researcher needs. We aim to make our researchers feel valued, engaged and connected in the University, and we want to empower and encourage them to take ownership of their careers.

In broad terms, we would expect to see the following by 2020:

**Principle 1** - Improved information to new research staff and the management of fixed term contracts. Introduced the OTM-R checklist and produced a policy response to RESAVER<sup>1</sup> Annual HR data reporting on: retention, permanency, promotion, pay, flexible working, contract type, gender and BAME.

**Principle 2** – Continued expansion of reward and recognition for research staff, with greater researcher participation in Dean's and VC's awards, and promotion rounds, and an improved appraisal experience. Empowered research staff and increased involvement in University life, including relevant committees, wider opportunities and Faculty level activity.

**Principle 3** – Achieved greater transparency of policy and practice; with clearer guidance on permanency, funding, parental leave, and CPD.

**Principle 4** – Improved our CPD and Careers offer, to encourage sustainable career planning and proactive CV building. We anticipate an increase in career coaching and an increased proportion of staff with Career Plans (as per CROS data). We will have developed and evaluated an 'employability module', informed by employers, researchers, and alumni.

**Principle 5** - Continued encouragement of research staff to be pro-active in their professional development and career management. We will have developed training and support for PIs.

**Principle 6** – Continued achievement of advanced Athena SWAN awards. Our vision is to provide better support and guidance to research staff, especially in the area of parental leave.

**Principle 7** – Continued regular meetings of CDR WG but with increased researcher ownership and direction and with a greater role for Faculty plans. Increased our understanding of the research career pathway, including the international dimension, and produced career pathway roadmaps. Gathered data for an annual report to help inform future planning. We will align our plans with the new University Strategic Plan 'key performance indicators' (KPIs). We anticipate continual improvements evidenced via CROS, internal data, the University Staff Engagement Survey, and through feedback from Researchers, PIs and employers.

<sup>1</sup> OTM-R the *Open, Transparent and Merit-based Recruitment of Researchers* checklist (July 2015). RESAVER is a European pension scheme for researchers