HR Excellence in Research Report 2016

THE UNIVERSITY OF YORK

All Key Documents and information about the University’s implementation of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers can be found at:
https://www.york.ac.uk/staff/research/training-forums/research-excellence-training-team/research-staff/concordat-to-support-the-career-dev-of-researchers/

Introduction

The period 2016-2018 covered by this report and revised action represents a period of significant and strategic change in the provision of support for researchers at the University of York. ‘Research Excellence’ is one of the six foundations of the Research Strategy 2015-2020 and is defined at York as the creation and execution of research that has the potential to be ‘world leading and world changing’. The people who undertake and support research are vital to the achievement of this ambition. In recognition of this, the PVC Research (PVCR) commissioned a comprehensive internal Learning Needs Analysis (LNA) of all the support and training available to researchers. The University Research Committee endorsed the recommendations in April 2016 and this has led to a strategic re-configuration of support for researchers and a new model of provision (Appendix 1). The implementation of the model will be led by the newly formed Research Excellence Training Team (RETT) in partnership internally with academic staff and research related professional teams and externally with research funders, Russell Group fora and collaborators. Strategic direction for the work will be given by a new ‘Research Excellence Training Steering Group’ chaired by the PVCR. This group will receive papers from the Concordat Implementation Group and have strategic oversight of the Concordat and HR Excellence in Research process.

This report details the headline achievements against the actions outlined in the published action plan 2014-2018 to date. Appendix 2 provides further detail against each action.

1. How did we undertake our internal review? (Including how researchers’ views were taken into account during the review and, where relevant, how the review linked with existing QA and other implementation/monitoring mechanisms)

The University of York received confirmation of EU recognition through the ‘HR Excellence in Research’ process in September 2010 and this was re-confirmed in 2014. The processes supporting the achievement of the Concordat principles are now embedded in the university infrastructure. The Concordat Implementation Group (CIG), chaired by the PVCR will continue to progress the operational activity associated with the achievement of the action plan and will provide alignment of activity with Athena Swan.

The University of York introduced three faculties in 2015 (Science, Social Science and Arts & Humanities). These are each led by a Dean and an Associate Dean of Research. Representatives from a range of departments are bought together at the CIG and membership of this group is reviewed regularly to enable new researchers and PIs to join. The group commit to ensuring that progress is made against the University action plan and take key messages back to their departments. A key part of the meetings (three per year) is for academic staff, researchers and support staff to share practice and to identify ways of encouraging greater engagement with the Concordat.

The annual Concordat Shared Practice event is now an embedded part of the research culture at York. The 2016 event included sessions on career development and research funding for researchers and for the first time those staff with a departmental responsibility for the Concordat (usually Chairs of Departmental Research Committees) were invited to give a verbal 5 minute update on the progress made against their action plans. The staff reporting represented 90% of the research staff community at York. The notes taken at the event have been collated and verified by the departmental contacts. This information and the progress reports received from Professional Support functions including HR and Research and Enterprise form the basis of this report and updated action plan. This report has been considered and approved by the CIG in August 2016.

Consultation with researchers about the progress made and future priorities has taken place through a number of mechanisms. Firstly through the growing number of research staff associations, secondly through discussions with departments and finally through the CIG. In addition a special edition CROS newsletter was distributed to all researchers and PIs and departments were supplied with detailed results and asked to incorporate actions into their planning processes. The institutional response rate to CROS 2015 was 40% (compared with the national response rate of 28%).

The latest versions of the action plan, reflective document and minutes of meetings of Concordat meetings are held on the Concordat VLE/intranet. All staff have access to this area providing transparency and an opportunity for all York employees to view progress. In addition, all key documents including CROS15 results are held on the University’s Concordat Webpages. Copies of the departmental and support function action plans are available to all university staff and students through the intranet.

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2. Key Achievements and Progress against the Strategy, indicators and actions identified in the action plans 2014-2016

Detailed progress against the 2014-2018 action plan is available in Appendix 2.

Progress against Key Performance Indicators and actions 2014-2016:

1. Continue to use the Leadership programmes including ‘Research Leaders’ to influence change amongst PIs in support of their researchers. To measure this we will conduct a longitudinal evaluation to monitor the impact of the programme on behaviour. (Principle 2)

Longitudinal evaluation of all participants in the ‘Research Leaders’ programme since 2011 confirms that the programme continues to be an influential mechanism for changing the culture around PI engagement. The evaluation produced a 31% response rate. Of that 88% of respondents said they were ‘more confident in their ability to support the careers of researchers’. One said “I am more aware of early career research issues” another that it “helped carry out the performance review process with postdocs”. 88% said they felt ‘able to put into effect changes to leadership behaviour that has had a positive impact on the researchers I manage’. 79% reported they were more aware of sources of support for researchers.

2. Introduce mentoring guidance notes and training for academic staff and assess the impact of this such that university wide mentoring provision can be considered. (Principle 3 & 5)

Mentoring Guidance Notes with specific recommendations for researchers have been added to the web and circulated to researchers and departments. To ascertain the appetite for mentoring amongst researchers York added institutional questions to CROS15:

71% of the 209 respondents said that they felt having a mentor within their department would be beneficial. 63% responded positively to have a mentor within their faculty; 48% to having a mentor outside of the faculty and 54% becoming a mentor.

The responses indicate there is a keen appetite and that further support for mentoring would be welcomed. A proposal to introduce a mentoring scheme for all academic and research staff was presented and warmly received by the CIG. This report informed the Learning Needs Analysis and agreement was made in April 2016 to prioritise the provision of a mentoring scheme for contract researchers. This work has begun by the creation of a mentoring working group which will meet in Autumn 2016. Further work is being undertaken to make the York Profiles and Mentors Platform useful for researchers. This platform makes available details of alumni who are willing to answer questions and/or mentor individuals. Further work is being done to enhance the accessibility of profiles of PhD alumni. In addition, significant work has been to create a set of University ‘Career Pathways’ resources. This includes case studies of what is required of different roles and complements the range of careers training available to researchers via the RETT.

One respondent said:

“The university is taking responsibility to do this by having training, careers advice and following the Vitae advice and Concordat advice. So much is happening that wasn’t there before”

The University is working closely with the Universities of Sheffield, Cambridge and Bristol to share best practice around mentoring for researchers and have advanced discussions, through the 1Researchers14 Group, with the Research Councils about the development of mentoring resources.

3. Increase participation of researchers taking advantage of careers guidance and coaching. (Principle 3&5)

CROS15 data indicates that the majority of respondents (81%) agree that they are encouraged to engage in personal and career development. 91% report taking advantage of their career development. CROS15 data suggested that ‘Career management and support’ continues to be an area that researchers want to take advantage of. Departmental reports (June 2016) indicate that a range of careers interventions are being offered to researchers. This includes: workshop provision with alumni & industry based guest speakers (Physics, Environment, Biology and Chemistry); guidance notes on career progression made available (Language and Linguistics); one to one career advice and CV sharing for researchers nearing the end of their contract (History); Support for promotion applications and career stories (Centre for Health Economics). We will continue to explore further how careers support can be given to researchers.

There has been an increase of researchers taking advantage of the university coaching scheme. 17 people have taken advantage, 2 of which have taken part in the ‘Research Leaders’ programme and several who were encouraged by their PI. More females appear to be taking advantage and this gender difference will be monitored.

4. One of the KPIs in the previous (2012-2014) action plan was to cascade the good practice taking place in departments with regard to the development of Early Career Research Associations (RSAs). In 2014 there were 3, in 2016 there are 9 RSAs (a 200% increase in 2 years). Many of these are formally constituted with a Terms of Reference and membership with the power to influence departmental decision making and practice. The latest of these, the department of Health Sciences peer-led Contract Researchers Forum has been designed to provide space to discuss the Concordat and will coordinate training, development and networking activities and directs researchers to careers and mentoring support. Principles 4&5

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1 ‘Researchers14’ are a grass roots group of professional support staff who are actively engaged in working with and supporting researchers in 13 Russel Group institutions. All members are the operational lead for the Concordat and ‘HR Excellence in Research’ at their institutions.
Further evidence of increased engagement and commitment to the support of researchers:

A new monthly online research staff newsletter was introduced in January 2016 and this has contributed to a 25% increase in participation in training and support. The newsletter is sent directly to all research staff and to research administrators in departments who are able to further cascade the information. (Principle 5)

The ‘Research Champions’, all senior academic staff who champion the work of the work of the Universities Research Themes are actively seeking ways to engage researchers with their initiatives. (Principle 2)

The Departmental reports received at the 2016 shared practice event indicate that a positive step-change in activity related to research support has taken place. Across the departments there is evidence of:

- Widespread consultation with ECRs about their needs, researcher representation on departmental committees and increased efforts to include researchers in departmental activities (Principle 2)
- Revised dept. induction processes for researchers. The department of Archaeology has created a ‘PI Responsibilities’ document which outlines the process and content for induction and the career and research support available. The content was developed through consultation with the researchers and led by the Postdoc Rep (Principle 3)
- Expanded opportunities for researchers to run projects and gain teaching experience (Principle 2, 4)
- New opportunities for researchers to ‘buy out’ time to develop fellowship and grant applications
- Sufficient numbers of departments have expressed an interest in developing (or further developing) their buddy and mentoring schemes. These people are being bought together as a Researcher Working Group. (Principles 1, 2, 3, 4)

The Equality and Diversity provision has been reconfigured and the E&D Committee is chaired by the Vice Chancellor. The Athena Swan Committee reports to the E&D Committee and is now chaired by the PVC Research. Recognising the new broader remit of Athena Swan the Committee includes representation from all faculties and has an institution wide remit. To support this work an Athena Swan Forum has been created to enable sharing of good practice between departments and across faculties. This forum is chaired by a member of the Concordat Implementation Group enabling a synergistic and beneficial relationship between the two areas and for areas of gender and diversity to be reflected in all areas of activity. (Principle 6).

CROS15 results indicate that 62% of respondents at York feel they are given an opportunity to participate in decision making process (compared to 46% Russel Group) and 87% feel they are able to participate in training and development (compared to 84% Russel Group). Principles 1 & 2

3. Next steps and focus of future strategy for the next two years, including success measures

The 2014-2018 action plan continues to evolve with new areas taking prominence in line with institutional strategic objectives.

Challenges and opportunities 2016-2018:

The LNA has led to revised and expanded portfolio of work around researcher support. The Research Excellence Support and Training brief includes all those involved in research and all who support it. A new governance structure for this work is being worked through which will provide greater integration of the work into the Faculty structure and align the support and training with the University’s research themes. This new structure will also provide closer alignment of Athena Swan and Concordat activity

Recognising that progress has been made against many of the areas of the Concordat the University will continue to put effort into developing the areas of the Concordat which require cultural shift. In particular, building partnerships with PIs and engage them in professional development activities which are often seen as ‘additional’ rather than intrinsic to their research.

Over the next two year period we will continue to work towards the actions and KPIs articulated in the plan. In addition we will:

- Build on the success of the Concordat Shared Practice event and run a separate event for Chairs of Research Committees and those responsible for the Concordat in departments to come together and share their experiences
- Create a ‘Celebrating our work with Researchers’ document to recognise the significant efforts being made at departmental, faculty and central level to support researchers. This will recognise and celebrate the success of the work achieved to date in relation to the Concordat and Athena Swan awards.
- Run a conference for research staff focussing on career development as well as ‘Research Excellence’. PGRs looking to transition to postdoc will be encouraged to attend
- Identify ‘champions’ for the Concordat and research development activity which will be part of the wider ‘Research Excellence’ portfolio
- Work in partnership internally with the growing number RSAs and externally with other Russel Group universities and the research funders to provide benchmarking intelligence upon which future support can be built
- Use institutional data from the 2017 institutional staff survey to inform future support for researchers
- Develop mentoring practice for researcher’s
- Contribute to the work of ‘Researchers14’ and specifically the work around revisions of the Concordat. We would welcome an opportunity to contribute to the national revision of the Concordat and to represent an institutional perspective on the Concordat Steering Group
Appendix 1: The Research Excellence Training & Support Model

Topics:
- Grant/fellowship writing
- EU funding
- Finance training
- Where to find funding

Topics:
- Ethics & Integrity
- Data management
- Open Access
- Project Management

Topics:
- Public engagement
- Commercialisation
- Collaboration and Impact
- Use of social media

Topics:
- Role Induction
- Leadership & Management
- Career guidance
- Teaching