

HR Excellence in Research Report 2018

All Key Documents and information about the University's implementation of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers can be found [here](#) and on the links provided:

Introduction

The period 2014-2018 covered by this report represents a period of consolidation and enhancement of support for researchers at the University of York. The [Governance structures](#) put in place in 2016 have provided a robust framework for the prioritisation of Concordat related activity and enabled efficiency and transparency. The [Research Excellence Training Steering Group](#) oversee the support and training for Researchers and receive papers from the [Concordat Implementation Group](#) (CIG). The PVC-Research chairs both groups in addition to the [Athena Swan Steering Group](#) signalling institutional commitment to researcher support at the highest level and enabling alignment and synergy between activities.

The [Research Excellence Training Team \(RETT\)](#) serve all those engaged in research through the delivery of training and development activities. The RET Team continue to work in partnership internally with both academic and research related professional teams and externally with research funders, Russell Group fora ([Researchers14](#)), the [N8 partnership](#) European collaborators and business and third sector organisations.

This report details the headline achievements against the actions outlined in the published action plan 2014-2018. Appendix 1 (HR Excellence Plan 2014-2018) provides further detail against each action. Appendix 2 provides a case study of areas of good practice (mentoring and public engagement). Data informing this review includes: Institutional Staff Survey Data 2017 (73% response rate), Evaluation Data from the Research Staff Conferences 2017 and 2018, Consultation with researchers about the priority areas for the Concordat Action Plan 2018-2020, Departmental Concordat Action Plan reviews, Minutes from CIG meetings, researcher input to the [UoY response to the Concordat Review](#) and the UoY [Equality Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2017-2019](#). York has approximately 580 early career researchers.

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 mechanisms for ensuring researcher engagement with the Concordat Principles and with the creation of the new action plan 2018-2020 have been expanded and enhanced over the last four years since the last major external review.

Faculty and dept. level consultation: Progress against agreed dept Concordat actions is reviewed at Faculty Research Group meetings and at the Institution wide Annual Concordat Shared Practice Event at which new and innovative practice and policy development in support of researchers is discussed. See section 2 on key achievements.

Consultation with individual researchers has been achieved in the following ways: A [Research Staff Liaison Officer](#) (RSLO) post was created and appointed in summer 2017. The postholder liaises with dept [research staff associations](#) to ensure that the researcher voice is represented at institutional level. The RSLO is co-opted onto the Concordat Implementation Group and undertakes a range of duties including convening project working groups such as the Concordat Review Consultation group who helped to shape the [University's Concordat response](#). The RSLO also writes a regular piece for the monthly [Research Staff Newsletter](#).

The 2018 [Research Staff Conference](#) included a dedicated consultation workshop on the Concordat at which delegates were asked to provide responses to three questions (below). They were assured that their responses would directly feed into the drafting of the UoY Concordat action plan and the HR Excellence in Research reporting process.

1. *Suggest one thing you would like your PI/Line manager to do to support your career development* (responses included: 'allow time for career development/professional development,' 'be supportive of training', 'provide support and time for grant writing', 'continue to support secondments', 'help develop research independence')
2. *What do you feel is your biggest obstacle/challenge to your career development?* (responses included: 'lack of time and space', 'lack of specific support for Fellows who are neither Postdocs nor academics', 'lack of mentors and protected time', 'job instability', 'short term contracts', 'dept careers support', 'help understanding the promotion process'. Additionally some researchers reflected on aspects about themselves that they could improve on e.g. "I need to develop my confidence and step outside my comfort zone".
3. *Suggest one thing you would like the University to do to support your career development?* (responses included: more output led training, publications and grant writing, individual help, bridging funds, secondments. Others said 'train the PIs on the Concordat', 'recognition for good PI support'). Many of these issues are echoed in the Athena Swan consultations with researchers.

To calibrate these responses delegates were asked in the post event evaluation to answer the question 'What do you think the University should be committing to in terms of researchers over the next two years?' the answers confirmed the following as most important: a) careers, professional development and mentoring for researchers b) employment security (longer/open contracts) and permanent positions and c) in-house funding. Delegates reported an interest in promoting themselves better, developing public engagement skills and networking and want more support on publishing, grant writing and careers. These areas are reflected in the 2018-2020 action plan.

2. Key Achievements and Progress against the Strategy, indicators and actions identified in the action plans 2016-2018

The progress and achievements against the full range of Principles can be seen in the action plan 2014-2018 (Appendix 1). Selected highlights are below against relevant Principles and specific action points:

- P1 (A.1.2.1) Fellowships at York have increased by 9% in the last 12 months. These include 9 Wellcome/UoY [Centre for Future Health Fellowships](#), 2 [Daphne Jackson Fellowships](#) and 2 [Enterprise Fellowships](#). Competition for these Fellowships is highly competitive and is supported by a dedicated programme of training and mentorship. To support this a [University Fellowship webpage](#) has been created with links to departmental pages (see [Chemistry](#) and [History](#)), contacts and funder information. There have been 1348 hits and evidence of sustained reading of material in the 10 months since the launch. The further development of the Fellowship training offer is reflected in the action plan 2018-2020.
- (P1) SS2017 data indicates that 82% of researchers felt able to work flexibly (compared to 80% academic staff)
- (P2) Staff survey data 2017 indicates that 81% of researchers reported they valued the opportunity to have a performance review compared with 71% of academic staff. 52% said they regularly reviewed their development needs compared to 42% of academic staff.
- P2 (B.2.3.1.) A comprehensive suite of [research staff guidance notes](#) has been created to guide new and existing researchers through their initial stages at the UoY, how to create research impact, professional career development, research funding links to resources. There have been 555 webhits since the launch in late 2017. The Research Staff Liaison Officer(s) will explore through research associations how well this is being used and PIs will be introduced to them through the Research Leaders programme.
- P3&4 (C.3.4.1) Review mentoring provision. The pilot scheme ran in 2017 and involved 4 departments. 100% of participants said they would recommend it. Following a full evaluation a roll out of an objective led, cross departmental mentoring scheme for researcher and academic staff will take place in 2019. The scheme will run twice a year with 60 places on each iteration. The coaching scheme will be promoted alongside the new mentoring programme through the weekly staff digest, training forum, via the RSLs and to PIs through the Research Leaders programme will be put in place in 2018/19. It will also feature in the new PI termly update.
- P4 (3.1.1) Additional careers support has been realised through the introduction of bespoke one to one careers consultations, [revised career webpages](#) and [video case studies](#). To date there have been 196 website hits. This will be monitored with a view to doubling in 2020.
- P5 (5.2.1) A new suite of training on Knowledge Exchange and Enterprise has been made available to all researchers with bespoke elements for the new [Enterprise Fellows](#). The 20 places available have been filled. By 2020 we look to engage at least 10% of researchers in some form of KE training or activity.
- P6 (6.1.1.1) A new [Equality and Diversity and Inclusivity \(EDI\) Strategy](#) has been launched and an accompanying action plan developed. Actions will be reviewed and reported on annually to the University's EDI Committee with cross-university input and responsibility for delivery.
- P7 (F.7.2.1). As a member of the [Researchers14](#) group the UoY is able to benchmark practice around the selection, support and training and policies surrounding researchers. All R14 members are experienced researcher developers and share good practice to inform partners and influence policy & practice. The group had a voice on the Concordat Review Expert Panel and have submitted recommendations about researcher support at the invitation of UKRI. Each member contributes to the [Blog](#). The group will continue to influence the funders and UKRI through meetings and invitation to engage.

The 2016 report also outlined a number of additional challenges to be tackled in the period 2016-2018:

i. 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

The annual shared practice event is now a signature of the University of York's Concordat implementation providing a collaborative space in which innovation and progress can be shared with a focus on continual improvement. In 2018 all departments with more than 3 researchers were asked to report on progress against the Concordat Principles and to identify 3-5 key challenging actions for the period 2018-2020. The staff reporting represented approximately 96% of the research community at York providing a solid review of the work being done to support researchers. The highlights include:

- Dedicated Postdoc web pages (See [Archaeology](#))
- Mentoring for researchers - see case study.
- Increased opportunities for postdocs to teach (English & Related Literature, Theatre Film & Television)
- Researcher representation on Ethics and Athena Swan committees (Languages & Linguistics)
- Enhanced researcher induction processes (Psychology, Archeology, Politics)
- Research expectations for grants and publications mapped to career stages (Education)
- Postdocs making key contributions to departmental strategy and sharing of good practice and training experience (Biology - Athena Swan Gold award holder)
- LGBT+ STEMinar 2018 on career development featured 2 inspiring Keynotes who talked about their career path as LGBT+ scientists, 1 academic, 1 PDRA who have successfully moved into open roles. The Joliet-Curie Conference in 2017 also provided career support for PDRAs (Athena Swan Gold award holder)

ii. Create a 'Celebrating our work with Researchers' document to recognise the significant efforts being made at departmental, faculty and central level to support researchers and run a conference for research staff focussing on career development as well as 'Research Excellence'.

Rather than produce a document that would have limited longevity, the celebration and showcasing of research talent and career development has taken place through a number of annual events and initiatives:

The [2017 Research Staff Conference](#) included keynote speeches, motivational talks on how to be a brilliant researcher and a funders panel session titled ‘How can we best support the Career and Professional Development of Researchers?’ This highly engaging event was followed by the York’s first ever [Falling Walls lab](#). See case study for further details about the impact of this event on individuals and the institution.

The [2018 Research Staff Conference](#) programme (see video footage) was designed by researchers to celebrate research talent and to shine a spotlight on the support available. All researchers presenting received bespoke communication training and are now enrolled in bespoke Fellowship pitch training. Online pre and post-conference evaluation indicates that 90% of those who responded (45%) would recommend the conference to other staff. 91% reported a) a better understanding of the Concordat and b) said that being asked to contribute to the University’s Concordat Action Plan was helpful. This level of engagement is reassuring and represents a cultural step change.

iii. Work in partnership internally with the growing number of RSAs and externally with other Russell Group universities and the research funders to provide benchmarking intelligence upon which future support can be built

In the last two years the number of departmental [research staff associations](#) has increased from 9 to 11 (Departments of Archaeology and Sociology have recently formed research staff associations). The research staff liaison officer has enabled closer working across departments and helped to bring together a growing community of researchers who are now keen to engage with training. The Dept of Health Sciences have also created a Postdoc Researcher Liaison Officer the remit for which includes raising and promoting researcher issues and managing the implementation of the Concordat. The Dept of Theatre, Film and Television have created a new citizenship role of Director of Postdoctoral and PG Research who will oversee the interests and support for both sets of colleagues and will be a member of the Dept management group.

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

After 8 years of extensive activity to support researchers, a number of significant achievements have been made and a growing proportion of researchers have begun to engage, yet there is still relatively little traction in the areas of career and employment security (Principle 1). This is not unique to the University of York and is acknowledged across the sector ([Researchers14 Concordat Review Response](#)). Recognising this the focus of the next two years will be to work with other research intensive institutions and lobby groups (N8, Researchers14 in particular) to tackle these issues. Recognising also that engagement in professional and career development is an individual choice the University will continue to provide the best possible support for all researchers and develop new cohort based, output led programmes for those researchers who want to differentiate themselves as committed to their own professional development (Principle 4). Additionally, we will deploy the 100+ PI ‘Research Leaders’ alumni to increase PI support for training and expand the number of Research Staff liaison Officer (RSLO) posts (this idea was shared with the Researchers14 group and has subsequently been used by University of Oxford who have created ‘Sir Gareth Roberts Fellowships’). The UoY action plan 2018-2020 details a range of interventions to further support researchers. Below are a selection of the more ambitious, strategic and/or collaborative projects which we believe will positively impact on the experience of researchers and PIs and which resonate with the recommendations made in the 2018 [Concordat Review](#).

Focus/target group	Strategic Objectives (by Principle)	Success Measure(s)	Achieved by
Institutional policy change in relation to the use of fixed time contracts	Work with N8 institutions to explore the blocks around the use of Fixed Term Contracts (Principle 2)	An agreed approach to the use of FTCs	August 2020
Researcher Recognition & Representation	Increase the number of Research Staff Liaison Roles by Faculty to further support the creation of Research Student Associations (Principle 3)	Recruit two Research Staff Liaison Officers to Increase the volume of researcher driven activity and who will represent researcher views on the Concordat Implementation Group to given them a voice.	December 2019
Researcher Careers	Enhance the career support available to those researchers looking to move outside of HE (Principle 4)	Increase the attendance at careers events from 10% to 25%. Deliver two Faculty facing careers event with alumni and business input.	August 2019
Researcher Training	Deliver the following new programmes for Researchers: Advanced Grant Writing - 3 part programme commencing with a Grant Writing Retreat (application by public engagement pitch) followed by mentoring and peer review panels -Fellowship Training including Networking	Roll out this new programme and evaluate the impact on grant applications Deliver and evaluate the events in terms of increased contacts and confidence	July 2019 July 2019

	Events -Knowledge Exchange and Enterprise Training (Principles 3&4)	Engage 10% of researchers in some form of KE training	August 2020
PI Training	Deliver a new comprehensive suite of PGR Supervisor Training interventions -	Engage 20% of all PGR supervisors in training and review and evaluate the new programme	July 2019
PI and Researcher Mentoring	Roll out an institution wide objective led, cross departmental mentoring scheme for academic and research staff - including PDRAs and Postdocs. (Principles 3,4 & 5)	The scheme will run twice yearly and be fully evaluated. Each intake will accommodate up to 60 mentees	Review July 2019
PI Engagement	Increase PI engagement	-The Research Leaders programme 2018/2019 will include a research staff/postdoc session and be informed by RSLO intelligence -Membership of the CIG will include more PIs to ensure their voice is heard -HR partners and the REF manager will raise awareness of the Concordat	Review July 2019

The University of York is the smallest of the Russell Group Universities yet the scale of ambition in support of researchers is not tempered by this. Recognising the value of collaboration to deploy the limited resources available in a way that capitalises on the track record of success in the area of researcher development there is every confidence that progress can be made in these areas.