Enabling Researchers to be Change Agents

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Outline

• Research Staff Liaison Officers
  ○ What does an RSLO do?
  ○ What’s involved?

• Background: Why create the role?

• Recruitment

• RSLO perspective
  ○ Experience and achievements
  ○ Benefits

• Impact and activities
Research Staff Liaison Officers

What does an RSLO do?
• Provide a link between research staff and central support teams
• Represent the research staff community
• Champion issues affecting research staff

What’s involved?
• Facilitating communication between research staff within and across Departments
• Facilitating shared practice opportunities for researchers to get together and discuss key issues facing them
• Contribution to sector wide discussions about the Concordat
• Provide input and support the implementation of the University’s Concordat Action Plan
Background: Why create the role?

- To effectively liaise with a growing number of ECR/Postdoc Forums
  - Recognition that researchers talk to each other
  - Extending the time/resource of the RET Team
- To incorporate current ‘lived experience’ of researchers within the Concordat Implementation Group
  - Acknowledging chalk-face reality of being a researcher and giving them a ‘voice’
- To gain better understanding (and data) of what researchers really need
  - What would make a difference and increase engagement?
- To increase number of researchers engaging with training and development opportunities
- To provide researchers with opportunity to give recognition and professional development experience (practise what we preach!)
Recruitment

- Importance of getting PI support
  - Identified engaged PIs through the ‘Research Leaders’ programme and used them as champions for the role
- Invited expressions of interest to the role descriptor
- Conducted interviews to ascertain interest, motivation, skill set and previous experience in training
- Appointed one RSLO in 2017-2018 and three in 2018-2019 (one immediately got a job!)
Francina Clayton, RSLO Sciences Faculty
Experience and achievements

- Championing issues affecting research staff
  - Member of Concordat Implementation Group Committee
  - Panelist for #Vitaechat ‘Raising the profile of researcher career development’

- Facilitating responses to Concordat Consultation
  - Raising awareness of the Concordat
  - Bringing researchers together via ECR/Department Forums

- Contributing to researcher development activities
  - Planning, promoting and presenting at Research Staff Conference
  - Panelist for ‘Preparing for your viva’ PhD training event
  - Internal judge for University of York 3MT auditions
  - Video interview for new Online PGR Supervisor Training

- Attending and presenting at Vitae Researcher Developer Conference 2019!
Benefits

- Networking - exponential growth in contacts
  - Leading to increased sense of belonging within University
- Enhanced skill-set
  - Confidence to take on a new role and balance demands of post-doc
  - Communicating with diverse researchers from different disciplines
  - Relevant skills within and beyond academia
- Awareness of the Concordat and HE landscape
  - Increased engagement in CPD
- Support and encouragement from PI
- Honorarium
  - Enabling conference attendance, 1-to-1 careers coaching and other resources
Exceptional engagement with recent Concordat Consultation

- 76 different universities and research institutes responded (22 Russell Group, 23 pre- and 31 post-1992)
- Additionally there were 7 international organisations and 51 ‘other groups and organisations’
- York had the **highest number** of Concordat Consultation group responses (7) of ALL institutions and the **sixth highest** number of individual responses (15), behind Oxford, Bath, Nottingham, Stirling and Birmingham
Impact and Activities

91%

increase in the number of researchers attending training

(almost doubled from 184 in 2017/18 to 352 in 2018/19)
Impact and Activities

97% satisfaction rating

99% would recommend

(some attribution to RSLO’s for raising awareness and championing researcher development)
50% increase in the number of researchers attending Research Staff Conference between 2018 and 2019
Transferable skills beyond academia...

“As a Research Staff Liaison Officer, I was involved in implementing the Concordat agreement and discussing the Concordat strategies with the fellow researchers and senior management staff at the University. I have gained confidence in my communication and networking skills which helped me to secure a job as a Project and Communication Manager at the Bio-renewables Development Centre”.

Dr Anna Alessi, Project and Communications Manager at Biorenewables Development Centre

“Anna’s role of Project and Communication Manager at the Bio-renewables Development Centre is unusual and requires a wide skill set including managing a multi-partner, international research project and being central in the communications output of our Centre to both academia and industry. The experience and skills gained during Anna’s time as RSLO were highly relevant to this role and contributed to the decision to award Anna the post.”

Dr Tom North, Business Development Unit Manager Biorenewables Development Centre
Good Practice Recognition by the HR Excellence in Research Review Panel

“The peer review team were impressed by both the breadth of Concordat-related activities being undertaken and the opportunities being supported which allow their researchers to develop leadership and other professional skills such as the RSLO roles and a significant number of research staff associations. We would strongly recommend the evidence presented by University of York meets the requirements of the 8 year review process.”
The researcher liaison officers have opened up a space and helped to create an environment where questions about the future and support of researchers can be discussed.

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Thank you for listening.