

The University of Leeds “HR Excellence in Research Award” Two-Year Internal Review

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A. Introduction

In December 2010 Leeds was part of the second tranche of UK HEIs to receive the "HR Excellence in Research" Award from the European Commission in recognition of its commitment to ensuring good working conditions and career development for researchers. A condition of this award is that a two-year internal assessment of progress against its original Concordat implementation strategy is undertaken. This report contains the findings of the University's internal review and revised implementation strategy for 2012-14.

B. Review Process

The proposed plan for the University's review was approved by Research & Innovation Board¹ and the review undertaken by the University's contact for the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers and HR Excellence in Research Award² in conjunction with the Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation, Director of Human Resources and Director of the Staff and Departmental Development Unit (SDDU).

Researchers' views have been taken into consideration through institutional CROS 2011 and PIRLS 2011 data, in addition to post-course evaluation, several focus groups with research staff, discussions with research groups/early career networks and a series of meetings with the Pro-Deans for Research & Innovation of each of the nine faculties, plus the Dean of Postgraduate Studies.³

Other data were utilised as appropriate.

Additionally, the University updated its Implementation Strategy in October 2011⁴, following analysis of data from CROS and PIRLS.

C. Key achievements and the progress against the strategy

The 2010 gap analysis and subsequent Implementation Strategy highlighted that, whilst the University has a range of excellent support and provision for its research staff, communication and awareness of this was a key issue. This, therefore formed the main focus of the Implementation Strategy for 2010-12.

Action 1: Continue to promote Concordat and distribute to all newly appointed research staff via central or faculty HR. The University has identified the awareness of the Concordat amongst its research community as an ongoing priority and has therefore increased the prominence of references to the Concordat and HR Excellence in Research Award through: promotion of the new Guidance on the Employment of Researchers⁵ (launched October 2012) which is fully and explicitly aligned to the principles of the Concordat; increased presence on institutional web pages; improved distribution to newly appointed research staff; inclusion in guidance distributed to Units of Assessment to assist in preparation of submissions for the Research Environment section of REF2014.

Action 2: (i) Updating of Policy on the Employment of Researchers to include information on all University policies relevant to the Concordat and to research staff. (ii) Distribute to all newly appointed research staff, together with Concordat (action 1) via central or faculty HR. (i) The existing Policy document has been superseded by the new Guidance on the Employment of Researchers. This was promoted across the University⁶ and a formal launch event is due to take place in Spring 2013. The launch will be a lunchtime event aimed primarily at research staff and Principal Investigators and will be a mix of presentations highlighting support across the University and discussion.

(ii) All newly appointed research staff receive information about and a link to, the Guidance on the Employment of Researchers and the Concordat. Discussions are underway with Faculty HR Managers to improve local communication.

¹ http://www.leeds.ac.uk/secretariat/other_committees.html#res%20board

² Dr Odette Dewhurst, Senior Research Staff Development Officer in the Staff & Departmental Development Unit (SDDU)

³ Chair, Researcher Skills Training and Development Academic Steering Group

⁴ <http://www.sddu.leeds.ac.uk/uploaded/research-docs/Concordat/University%20of%20Leeds%20Implementation%20Strategy%20Oct2011update.pdf>

⁵ http://www.sddu.leeds.ac.uk/uploaded/research-docs/Employment_of_Researchers_Guidance_Oct2012_Final_1.pdf

⁶ http://www.leeds.ac.uk/forstaff/news/article/3549/guidance_on_the_employment_of_researchers

Action 3: (i) Align training and development provision for researchers with the Researcher Development and Next Generation frameworks. (ii) Promote the Researcher Development and Next Generation frameworks to researchers and research leaders through the refreshed Employment Policy for Researchers (action 2) and other means. In 2012 an exercise was undertaken to map existing provision across the University against the RDF. This was used to identify any gaps in provision and provide a basis for strategic development of new, and streamlining of existing, provision. The RDF is promoted to researchers during training sessions and through publicity advertised across campus, as well as through the Guidance document.

Action 4: Faculty and central service training providers will continue to work together to review, refresh and develop their approach to supporting the career development of research staff. CROS 2011 results showed that research staff awareness of the provision and support available for them remained high. One method by which the University aims to maintain research staff awareness of opportunities is through the gap analysis and “packages” outlined under progress against Action 3 and in Section E (b). In 2011 the University undertook a strategic review of Roberts-funded provision. As part of this, the Researcher Training and Development Steering Group (RTCDSG), which had responsibility for Concordat implementation, was superseded by the Research Skills Training and Development Academic Steering Group (RSTDASG). As part of this review, the structure for development and delivery of researcher training and development (both PGR and research staff) was altered and, from September 2012, staff who had previously been based within the faculties were integrated into the Staff and Departmental Development Unit to enable more effective and ‘joined up’ provision. This will aid communication and strategic provision of researcher development.

Action 5: Reinforce the importance of providing the opportunity for research staff to have a mentor. Provide additional support/information about mentoring. Encourage sharing of good practice, led by faculties in which mentoring has proved successful. The University recognises that this remains a key issue and formal mentoring opportunities have been increased through the expansion of the Personal Advancement for Career and Employability (PACE) mentoring scheme⁷ which currently includes research staff based in the Maths & Physical Sciences and Environment faculties, in addition to the Faculty of Engineering in which it was launched. Research staff applying for fellowships and first grants are also required to have support from a mentor during the application process. A new University website on mentoring⁸, with extensive resources, was launched in summer 2012. It is also intended that the importance of mentoring will be further communicated through the launch and dissemination of the new Guidance on the Employment of Researchers which specifically states the expectations for mentoring of research staff.

D. Progress in areas not included in the original Implementation Strategy.

Equality & diversity: In addition to the existing Athena Swan award (Bronze) held by the University since 2009, the Faculty of Maths & Physical Sciences was awarded a Silver award in March 2012. The School of Healthcare has received a Bronze award and plans to apply for a Silver award in 2013. The University also now has a Women in Science, Engineering and Technology (WiSET) network⁹ which was established in September 2010. In May 2012, the University held a “Celebrating SET Women at Leeds” event and photographic exhibition. Marked with the launch of a specially commissioned exhibition of photographic portraits, this event recognised women who have achieved an external prize or award in their field for outstanding research, teaching, scholarship or technical work since January 2009. This event and exhibition supported the University’s Athena SWAN objectives towards the recruitment, retention and advancement of women in STEM areas at the University of Leeds.

New provision and support for research staff:

The University constantly evaluates its training and development provision for research staff, introducing new opportunities as/when appropriate. Highlights of new provision include:

- **Careers sessions** for research staff in the faculties of Medicine & Health and Biological Sciences on: From postdoc to academic; Becoming an independent researcher; Make yourself visible and increase your profile; Working in research in the USA.
- **Leadership in Action**¹⁰: a three-day, interactive course for research staff, based on the model developed by Vitae.

⁷ <http://www.emeskillstraining.leeds.ac.uk/mentoring/>

⁸ <http://www.sddu.leeds.ac.uk/sddu-mentoring.html>

⁹ <http://www.equality.leeds.ac.uk/for-staff/athena-swan-and-wiset/>

¹⁰ <http://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers/104253/Leadership-in-Action.html>

- **Extended, University-wide selection and support programmes for fellowship applicants:** the University has provided bespoke support for those applying for fellowships and first grants since 2006. However, since 2010, in response to a strategic need to identify and support the strongest candidates, provision has been expanded to cover seven funding bodies, with plans to cover a minimum of two further ones during the 2012-13 academic year.
- **Fixed-term contracts & redeployment:** in April 2012, the University introduced a new Procedure to Support the Employment Security of Staff on Fixed Funding or Fixed Term Contract.¹¹ As part of this, research staff who are 6 months from the end of a fixed-term contract are supported by the Redeployment Framework¹².

E. Next steps and the focus of the strategy for the next two years

Key objectives relating to Actions 1-5 are highlighted in the revised Implementation Strategy. In addition to these, the focus of the University's forward strategy will include:

a. Equality & diversity.

In addition to those areas of the University which already hold an Athena Swan award, the Faculty of Engineering is planning to apply for Silver in 2013 and the School of Medicine plans to apply for Bronze in April 2013. Preliminary discussions are also underway between the University's Equality Service and the Faculties of Biological Sciences and Environment and the Leeds Dental Institute and Institute of Psychological Sciences.

b. Communicating with the University's research community.

Feedback from research staff and Faculty Pro-Deans for Research & Innovation has identified the need to have a single web-based point of entry for research staff (to support current staff and promote support to those considering joining the University) which will act as a portal to direct staff to available resources. Also, following the alignment of provision against the RDF, the University is developing 'packages' of development opportunities for research staff. The aim of these packages is to assist research staff (and their line managers) identify and access the most appropriate development opportunities available to them at different stages of their career. These will be launched for the 2013-14 academic year.

c. Support for research staff undertaking non-academic career paths.

Plans are underway to pilot a programme of support for researchers within a large research group, to support research staff reaching the end of their contract and/or considering a research career in industry. This will involve a mix of coaching, support from alumni currently based in industry and incorporate the Transitions Programme¹³ developed by Newcastle University. The intention is to run this programme in early 2013 and if suitable, expand it to include other, relevant areas of the University.

d. Specifically include research staff on the new strategy map.

The University is currently undertaking a refresh of its strategy.¹⁴ It has been proposed that the strategy should specifically highlight the aim of "providing an experience that develops internationally excellent research staff."

e. Seeking feedback from the research community.

The University will undertake to seek feedback from its research community through participation in CROS and PIRLS in 2013. Focus groups with research staff and Principal Investigators will be held following analysis of the survey results in order to further discuss the results and to shape recommendations arising from the surveys.

¹¹ http://hr.leeds.ac.uk/info/27/employment_security_for_staff_on_fixed_funding_or_fixed_term_contracts

¹² http://hr.leeds.ac.uk/info/33/recruitment_and_redeployment/184/redeployment_framework

¹³ <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/staffdev/devactivities/research/career/transitions.htm>

¹⁴ <http://strategy.leeds.ac.uk/our-strategy/>