



HR Excellence in Research Four-Year Report 2014

December 2014



HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH

European HR Excellence in Research: University of Leeds Four-Year Report

1 Introduction

The University of Leeds (UoL) has been a signatory to the *Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers* since 2008, receiving the *European HR Excellence in Research Award* in 2010 and working to embed Concordat principles through its *Guidance on the Employment of Researchers* (hereafter: the *Guidance*). Following on from our two-year internal review and revised strategy (2012) a step change in policies and training provision has taken place to close those 'gaps' identified following CROS and PIRLS surveys 2013 and to facilitate University-wide progress. See *Research Staff* for all relevant documents.

Since September 2013 University strategy has been reviewed and a new strategic plan implemented from October 2014. The plan recognises the importance of a vibrant PhD and postdoctoral community to future success in research, including significant growth in the quantity and excellence of our research.

In planning for growth, we will continue with a 'One University' approach which brings together researchers, their managers, professional training, careers, equality and human resources expertise to produce, wherever possible, improvements to the way UoL develops and supports research staff (RS). This report will demonstrate the key steps taken by these partners to produce positive change since UoL gained its Award.

2 Internal Evaluation Process

Central to our continuous review and development towards Concordat aims, the UoL has undertaken the CROS four times from 2005 and PIRLS three times. Analyses of the findings are used to consult RS about their working experiences, career aspirations and development opportunities and to elicit the views of principal investigators (PIs) in relation to their role as managers of researchers.

This process is led by the Staff and Departmental Development Unit (SDDU), which has a representative on the national CROS and PIRLS Steering Group. In partnership with the colleagues listed above, this Service coordinates Concordat strategy, implementation and review activities on behalf of the UoL, reporting to the Researcher Development Steering Group (RDSG), which provides academic leadership for the career development and skills training of researchers. In turn, RDSG reports to the UoL Research and Innovation Board, which has executive power to enact organisation-wide changes.

Foundational to internal review, survey data is disseminated by subject area via Faculty Research and Innovation Committees for school and faculty level discussion, responses and actions. Additionally, in spring 2014 two follow-up Open Meetings, chaired by the Director of SDDU, were organised for RS and PIs to meet with the Pro-Vice Chancellor, Research and Innovation (PVC R&I) and the Director of HR to discuss issues and themes emerging from the 2013 surveys. Remarks and recommendations were captured and a synopsis made available on the *Research Staff* web pages alongside the survey findings.

An Award Steering Group (ASG) was convened to consider this feedback in the light of both the survey findings and our general progress against implementation of Concordat principles. Members of the Group were drawn from a representative cross-section of UoL services and academic roles including RS, the Acting Director of HR, the PVC R&I, a Faculty Dean, a School Director of R&I, a PI and a Faculty Pro-Dean for R&I, together with representatives of SDDU, HR and Careers Centre.

The ASG also considered our internal Award review process, quality assurance mechanisms and measures of progress and advised on the Award re-submission planning and drafting process. Their recommendations form the basis of the *2015-18 Concordat Strategy and Implementation Plan*.

An early draft of the Strategy and Plan went forward to R&I Board, which endorsed ASG recommendations and subsequently invited responses from service and academic leaders on the suggested actions (July-September 2014). An important recommendation during development was to seek a broader cross-section of postdoctoral views while drafting the *2015-18 Concordat Strategy and Implementation Plan*. A subgroup of RS was therefore invited to comment alongside ASG and R&I Board.

The terms of reference for this Group allow ongoing responsibility for implementation and review of the *2015-18 Concordat Strategy and Implementation Plan* to lie with the Researcher Development Steering Group. In addition to RDSG, faculties have Advisory Groups of academics and researchers which inform researcher training issues, quality and progress. All services which contribute to researcher development report annually to RDSG. Meeting notes are forwarded for consideration to R&I Board, which, in turn, reports to Senate. At an operational level, the Researcher Development Operational Group provides a forum for researcher developers to share practice and plans in coordinating and guiding the implementation of policy developed at RDSG and acting on the feedback from the faculty groups. Additionally, all services have wider advisory and networking mechanisms in place to ensure quality and to support progress in a 'joined up' manner.

3 Key Achievements and Progress against the Implementation Strategy 2010, Interim Review 2012 and Revised Implementation Strategy 2012-14

The Revised Implementation Strategy 2012-14 has been updated with progress against goals. Additional advances are reported below.

Principle 1: Recruitment and Selection

UoL continues to promote awareness of the Concordat and the European HR Excellence in Research Award among RS. New RS are directed to the UoL Guidance (which is fully aligned to Concordat Principles) in their letters of appointment and during local and UoL level induction processes. Joiners are also signposted to pages for RS within staff intranets and to newly enhanced SDDU Research Staff web pages.

Since the Interim Review 2012 the Guidance has been updated and good induction practice furthered across faculties with the introduction of an induction checklist and personal letters of welcome, including key links to resources. The introduction of the UoL Leadership and Management Standard in 2008 has reinforced the recognition and value placed on RS and the role of PIs in developing them, starting with recruitment and selection.

Steps have been made to address gender and other diversity gaps through recruitment and selection processes. The UoL holds the Athena SWAN Bronze Award, four departmental Bronze and one Silver Award. All STEM departments have action plans to address the recruitment and selection of women and minorities where needed, in order to provide measurable improvements on gender balance. Action plans, including goals to address the recruitment, management and support of RS, are publicly available.

In autumn 2014 UoL announced that it will award up to 250 funded University Academic Fellowships over three years to broaden opportunities by offering flexible development for exceptional candidates, including RS, to receive five-year tenure track equivalent development leading to Associate Professor roles.

The UoL continues to plan for researcher succession, investing in and gaining funding for nine Research Council funded Centres for Doctoral Training in 2013-14 which will provide an excellent pipeline of research and industry-ready researchers over four or five years. Current RS will also benefit from the industrial partnerships, collaborations, visits and placements being developed by these Centres.

Principle 2: Recognition and Value

The UoL's Strategy 2015-20 underscores the contribution a vibrant research community makes to the organisation. This is made explicit in the Guidance. These principles entitle all RS to probation and staff review processes, with attention given to the importance of managers supporting professional development in the UoL Leadership and Management Standard. HR guidance on probation and performance management has been reviewed since 2012 for currency and robustness.

People management training is available through SDDU and Faculty HR Managers, supporting PIs in the effective management of their RS. A School-based PI Academic Development Programme took place in the School of Medicine in 2014, including people management skills. This context-focussed pilot is being evaluated, with a view to rolling out further localised PI people management training in the Faculty of Medicine and Health and beyond.

In 2011-12 security of employment for those on fixed term and fixed funding contracts was introduced. For RS whose contracts are extended beyond three years, open-ended contracts are provided allowing RS to obtain mortgages, for example, and to have the right to enhanced redundancy payments. This provision is better than legal requirement, with most employers requiring four years' service.

Alongside this, an upgraded institution-wide redeployment scheme and process has allowed 190 self-registering RS to be redeployed in a range of roles over the last four years (27 per cent of the total number reaching the end of a fixed-term contract during that period.) Since 2012 several informal early career research groups have been set up and meet regularly, supported by the specialist staff developer for RS.

The UoL's Communications Team has identified coverage of RS achievements as a matter of editorial equity. Thus the UoL magazine *The Reporter* now includes RS in its editorial plan and seeks external media profile for them wherever possible. Many schools and institutes have regular newsletters which feature RS achievements.

As noted in the revised Implementation Strategy 2013-14, a high priority is given to gender parity and representation, with particular attention given to the portrayal of female researchers within UoL publications.

As a result, faculties have progressively reviewed their research websites and promotional materials, with priority given to the dissemination of positive female images, reflections and career stories - see [Faculty of Mathematics and Physical Sciences](#), for example. The UoL also badges recruitment advertising with the AS Award logo in order to promote its diversity and inclusion ethos.

Principles 3 & 4: Support and Career Development

Since the Interim Implementation Plan began major advances in the provision of RS-specific training have been made: a reappointment to the SDDU specialist RS training role was given an enhanced brief to strengthen training opportunities, and a course programme offering [pathways](#) to both academic and non-academic careers was developed in 2013-14, together with dedicated web guidance.

Each pathway, such as the Getting Published and Getting Funding routes, is made up of a series of short workshops offering expert advice and guidance to support career development, Where appropriate, pathways include links to other providers in SDDU, for example [Research Ethics](#) and [Research Impact](#).

All sessions are designed around the [Researcher Development Framework](#) (RDF) and [SDDU's training and development principles](#).

An inaugural high-quality [Career Development Conference](#) for all RS (2014) demonstrated the value the institution places on these employees. SDDU has also developed a resource-rich [Professionalisation Matrix](#) to offer guidance on potential development activities by grade/career stage.

As a result of the enhanced RS workshop programme and conference there were 1700 attendances by RS at SDDU programmed training events in 2013-14, an advance of c25 per cent from 1341 in 2012-13. Internal networking that includes RS is also essential to research strategies across our faculties, which recognise the need to capitalise on their talent in generating research income and impact. Consequently, RS are frequently offered opportunities to present their work at cross-group, school or faculty events, thus strengthening their presentation and networking skills. Training in advanced presentation and research impact skills has been developed to support these opportunities.

Since 2010 32 RS have taken part in the [UoL Teaching Award 1 \(ULTA 1\)](#) a credit-bearing and career-portable course leading to eligibility for Associate Fellow status of the HE Academy. This works to strengthen the teaching skills and practice of those hoping to pursue an academic career. RS are often invited to give guest lectures, also improving their teaching expertise and experience.

[The preparation and writing of Fellowship applications](#) is supported through training, with enhanced discipline-specific support for application processes developed in 2013. [See case study](#).

For those considering non-academic routes, a unique career-planning programme *The University of Leeds Career Architect Programme (CA)* has been developed. Bringing together careers resources, skills training, peer mentoring and individual coaching, the three pilots (2013-14) saw more than 50 per cent of the 24 RS involved achieve higher-level professional, industrial research or academic jobs while on the Programme or shortly after, with others making informed choices to pursue fellowships or other opportunities pre-contract end.

Few participants had definite career plans at the beginning of their CA. The Programme enabled them to make planned rather than default choices. The Programme has been extended for 2014-15. In addition, funded industrial placements and internships are being introduced, in Medical Technologies for example, allowing RS to explore external career paths while on contract and to become industry-ready. [See participant's blog post](#).

Principle 5: Researchers' Responsibilities

The UoL's probation process and staff review and development scheme (SRDS) recognise that individual researchers share the responsibility and need to pro-actively engage in their professional and career development. RS have annual meetings with their line manager to plan and evaluate progress against workplace and development goals. Those beyond probation are required to take part in SRDS, which was externally audited in 2014 for its robustness in supporting professional and career development. Refresher training for all reviewers is encouraged to guarantee its continuing usefulness. Mentoring is also seen as essential to continuing professional development, and online [resources](#) that enable RS to find and work with a personal mentor were developed in 2011, with more than 4000 page visits so far. Using the expertise gained in building this resource staff developers have worked with individual faculties, such as Biological Sciences, to build localised mentoring schemes.

Principle 6: Diversity and Equality

Diversity and inclusion is promoted in the recruitment and career management of researchers. UoL conducted a strategic review of equality (2012), following this with the publication of its *Equality and Inclusion Framework 2014-2019*. A priority is: "... to undertake initiatives in recruitment and progression, to investigate and address any barriers to staff from protected characteristics..." and to "... commit to undertaking activity to encourage applications for promotion or development for staff from identified under-represented groups." (P9)

All interview panels are required to undertake equality and inclusion training, which is monitored, including that for unconscious bias. Appointment, leaving and promotion statistics are routinely monitored both at central and local levels. The University's HR policies have been updated since 2010 to ensure that recruitment advertising, job descriptions and interview processes adhere to inclusion policies.

HR policies have also been extended to include career breaks, flexible working, job-sharing and working from home - opportunities that particularly support the work-life balance of early career RS, many of whom have child and other caring responsibilities. See case study.

The UoL has also signalled its support for the Equality Challenge Unit's Charter Mark, which, in coming together with the Athena SWAN award scheme in 2015, will address diversity and inclusion in Arts, Humanities and Social Science disciplines.

Principle 7: Regular and Collective Review

The PVC R&I has oversight of Concordat implementation. In line with our review process 2014 (see section 2) UoL will continue to conduct CROS and PIRLS surveys regularly, using the findings to check progress against Concordat aims, to invite responses and adjust action planning where necessary. We will also seek to support the development of the surveys at a national level through continuing membership of the CROS and PIRLS Steering Group.

UoL will continue to take part in future HR Excellence review processes. Annual opportunities for RS and PIs to meet senior managers to discuss findings and issues have now been implemented, providing an important source of feedback to HR, SDDU and the RDSG, which will regularly consider our *Concordat Implementation Strategy and Action Plan 2015-18* at its six-monthly meetings.

This Group will also invite the views of RS drawn from the planned RS Association, other ECR Groups and the Faculty Advisory Groups. SDDU and HR managers will continue to bring together all the professional and service staff involved in supporting researchers to review and progress services for RS within existing governance.

4 Outline the strategy for the next four years, including metrics and success measures

A vibrant community of researchers is essential for achieving the ambitions of the University's strategic plan 2014-20. Our strategy for the next four years, arising from the internal evaluation process outlined above, is framed around seven key objectives designed to improve and enhance:

- Communication, consultation and engagement with research staff to strengthen their involvement and representation in University management and decision-making processes and their recognition and status
- Opportunities for research staff to develop their profiles and careers
- Opportunities for research staff to advance professionally through undertaking teaching
- Mentoring to support research staff career development
- Processes for, and training principal investigators in, the induction, probation, review and development of research staff
- Our provision of training and development to support career planning
- Opportunities for research staff to become independent researchers.

Success on all these objectives will be measured through a progressive improvement in our CROS scores and our award-winning People Management Framework surveys. Trend data from the last such surveys will be used as a baseline for measuring progress. Additional measures will include data on research staff careers, numbers of research staff undertaking training for teaching and career development and reporting having a mentor, numbers of PIs trained and briefed, as detailed in our 2015-18 strategy and implementation plan.

University of Leeds, December 2014