

Progress Report

European HR Excellence in Research Award: University of Leeds two year review

Introduction

This report describes the internal evaluation of our Action Plan undertaken September-December 2016 by an Interim Steering Group (see separate document). It highlights progress made against the University of Leeds's (UoL) *Four Year Strategy and Action Plan 2015-18*¹ (hereafter the Plan) and outlines foci, next steps and success measures for 2017-18. We expect these advances to improve RS satisfaction with factors of recruitment, selection, recognition and value in the Careers in Research Survey (CROS) 2017 and beyond.

Researchers' views were considered via the results of CROS 2015 at UoL. Additionally, six postdoctoral researchers were also asked to review progress and next steps against the Plan and to feedback. The Steering Group was structured to enable linkages to be made across equality and inclusion work (ie Athena SWAN implementation), organisational development and professional learning, careers, learning and teaching and, at a national level, the CROS and Principal Investigators surveys Steering Group.

Importantly, it should be noted that our plan is iterative, and is constantly evolving to reflect the fact that support for our research communities constitutes a key component of how we work at Leeds.

Context

Since 2015 UoL has made significant organisational changes directed towards further strengthening its research and innovation capabilities. This includes a strong focus on creating a "vibrant research community" which recognises, values and maximises the contribution that research staff (RS) make to the quality and reach of our research and innovation.² The particular support needs of those seeking to sustain their research outside of their formal role has also been recognised, with those on 'teaching only' contracts, who are still actively researching or seeking a future academic role invited to participate in CROS 2015.

This underscores our desire to widen the reach of Concordat objectives. We will do this through a review of our employment contracts and our Guidance on the Employment of Research Staff in 2017-18 focussing on their relevance to all postdoctoral staff

Meanwhile, the development of key interdisciplinary research themes and platforms at Leeds, such as the Leeds Cultural Institute will also provide enhanced professional opportunities for RS.³

Of particular note, 146 new UoL Academic Fellowships, of which a third have been internally appointed, are providing an additional academic leadership career pathway and enhanced professional development opportunities to our most able postdoctoral researchers.⁴

¹ http://www.sddu.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Leeds_Concordat-Implementation-Strategy-and-Action-Plan-2015-18_FINAL_WEB.pdf

² University of Leeds Strategic Plan 2015-2020 http://www.sddu.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Leeds_Concordat-Implementation-Strategy-and-Action-Plan-2015-18_FINAL_WEB.pdf

³ Leeds Cultural Institute <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/info/130504/capabilities/170/culture>

⁴ <http://uafsupport.leeds.ac.uk/>

Key achievements against the strategy, indicators and actions identified in the original action plan

These are reported by Concordat Principle.

1 Recruitment and Selection and Recognition and Value

The Plan describes much systematic and methodical, yet crucial work, to ensure that the UoL has reviewed, implemented and promotes excellent human resources practice towards research staff across our institution. Our philosophy is one of continuous improvement.

This work builds upon the principles in our Guidance on the Employment of Research Staff⁵ at UoL and includes projects to review induction and promotions criteria and to strengthen the people-management requirements of and support for principle investigators through a focus on our Leadership Excellence Behaviours, which should progressively act to improve the probation, review, career development and mentoring concerns of research staff. (Themes 3c, 4a-b, 5a).

A significant breakthrough in raising the profile of research staff interests has come with the establishment of eight locally-organised Early Career Researcher (ECR) groups. These are increasingly enabling community-led peer networking, training and support and providing a vehicle for research staff to feedback views and ideas to the UoL leadership. This will be enhanced in 2017 by the establishment of a UoL-wide RS society: *Researchers@Leeds*. A priority is to see this association well-founded and sustainable with established structures and mechanisms in place to represent the research staff community. (Themes 1a – f.) Recognising that early career researchers are not limited to RS we have also been working to include also other ECR groups who do not fit the previous mould, such as research technicians and research-based IT specialists.

2 Support and Career Development

In response to the Plan a significant achievement has been the establishment of a new University-wide mentoring scheme, which has seen 45 RS and Teaching Fellows so far matched with academic mentors since September 2015 — a major advance in professional and career support. (Theme 4.) This supplements the many local schemes open to RS within their departments. In addition to a broader selection of shorter courses and workshops⁶ a dedicated research staff developer has introduced an annual RS Conference, now in its third year, focussed on careers planning and management within and beyond academia.

These initiatives address the concerns of RS outlined in Theme 6. Very popular with RS, the Conference will increasingly draw on *Researchers@Leeds* in the future, providing development opportunities for involvement in shaping and running the event as well as an annual forum for RS to meet with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research and Innovation (Theme 1c.) Active participation in the Conference and forum will be measured and for the views expressed to inform our next Four Year Strategy and Plan).

The two years of this interim plan will see major advances in capabilities to support RS development through the expansion of strategic research themes focussed on addressing major societal challenges via interdisciplinary platforms such as the Astbury and Bragg Centres.⁷ The recent appointment of a Dean for Interdisciplinary Research will contribute to the further development of interdisciplinary research and the role of RS within this. These initiatives are aimed at improving the institutions research capability and to increase the amount of research income won and provide an opportunity for research staff to develop.

The Nexus Innovation and Enterprise Centre⁸ (Theme 2a)) will also come on-stream in 2018 linking academic researchers with the City and Region and providing greatly enhanced opportunities for RS to

⁵ <http://www.sddu.leeds.ac.uk/research-innovation/research-staff/research-staff-as-employees/>

⁶ See <http://www.sddu.leeds.ac.uk/research-innovation/research-staff/>

⁷ <http://www.astbury.leeds.ac.uk/> and <http://campusdevelopments.leeds.ac.uk/portfolio-item/engineering-and-physical-sciences/>

⁸ <http://campusdevelopments.leeds.ac.uk/portfolio-item/university-innovation-and-enterprise-centre/>

collaborate with industrial and business partners as well as providing valuable additional innovation, training, placement and networking opportunities to promote their employability.

A focus will be on the people-development work packages associated with the Nexus project which actively includes RS, as will a review of our accredited learning and teaching qualifications. New web pages for RS will enhance the information currently available on Fellowships and other career paths.

3 Researchers taking responsibility for their own development

With input from a specialist research staff developer, the eight RS groups mentioned above have organised many local training events with expert careers-related sessions contributed by this and other colleagues from human resources. A further disciplinary groups in Engineering will be supported 2017.

To a great extent this depends on the interest and commitment of RS themselves. However, the enthusiasm and commitment of existing groups and the take-up of mentoring, networking opportunities and the specialist short courses provided for them suggest a viable interest in self-development and actualisation.

4 Diversity, Equality and Inclusion

The recently formed ECR sub-committee of the Women at Leeds Network (WALN)⁹ is now running regular career-stage appropriate meetings. This sub-committee includes postdoctoral members with a range of protected characteristics and does much to promote diversity, equality and inclusion in the research community.¹⁰

Members of the Steering Group for this Plan also work across the Athena SWAN and other project groups bringing synergies of understanding, shared data and related concerns to inform our foci and priorities. They have informed, for example, a new professional development programme for ECRs in Engineering and Physical Sciences, the *Women Rising* project funded by Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council is addressing those at key career transition points i.e. from PhD to first postdoctoral or fellowship position or from these to lecturer. This recognises the key attrition points where female (and other minority groups) are lost from academic research.

In 2017 twenty women will have the opportunity to take part in two linked retreats intended to support their retention and progression. The Programme will be evaluated via a survey and focus groups in order to cross-apply learning to other disciplinary groups and to address intersectional issues for ECRs. Excellent feedback from participants will be a success measure and pending this, additional funding will be sought for further iterations.

5 Implementation and Review

In reviewing the Plan so far we have come to recognise the need for a standing group to specifically address postdoctoral affairs and to provide governance and guidance in line with UoL's deliberative and committee structures. Therefore, a new permanent group to provide oversight of Concordat implementation and RS matters more widely will be formed in 2017 to take forward and broaden the work of the HR Excellence Award Steering Group. This Group will act to implement the Plan for 2017-18 to review progress and plan forward.

⁹ <http://www.equality.leeds.ac.uk/for-staff/athena-swan-and-wiset/women-in-science-engineering-and-technology-%E2%80%93-leeds-wiset-network/>

¹⁰ *ibid*