

University of Leeds HR Excellence in Research Award Progress Report – 10-year Internal Evaluation and Review (January 2021)

Introduction: This report describes the internal evaluation of our Four Year Concordat Implementation Strategy and Action Plan 2019-2022, overseen by the Early Career Researcher Development Steering Group (ECRDSG), and outlines the next steps and success measures for 2021-22. The University reaffirmed its commitment to research staff becoming signatory to the updated Researcher Development Concordat in March 2020. As part of our Concordat governance, we have prepared a new Concordat Implementation Plan mapped against the new obligations and where appropriate, we have transferred ongoing actions. Full details can be found on our new Concordat webpages.

Effects of Covid-19: Our institutional Concordat launch was impacted by the Covid-19 lockdown. The pandemic has continued to influence how we are working and as expected, it has had an impact on the progress of some of our actions. Whilst working remotely has brought challenges, we have embraced the benefits lockdown has brought. More of our provision is being delivered in an online synchronous and asynchronous format, allowing greater numbers of attendees as we are no longer constrained by room capacity, or replaced by self-guided learning resources that give our researchers access to materials at the point of need (just in time development). We have the added benefit of LinkedIn Learning to build curated collections. These changes have been positively received. As a department we want to ensure that these positives are sustained and that we continue to learn about online delivery and the needs of our researchers, whilst also acknowledging that some of the greatest development comes from being part of a community and the experience of 'being in the room'.

Organisational environment and changes since 2018: There have been significant senior management appointments over the last two years, including a new Vice-Chancellor, Deputy-Vice Chancellor (Research and Innovation), Deputy Vice Chancellor (Digital Transformation) and Dean of the Doctoral College. Whilst this has been a period of change, the focus on the Concordat and our research staff has remained a top priority. Our new VC (Sept 2020) has a clear vision for Leeds, built on the pillars of Community, Culture and Impact. Our new DVC and Dean of the Doctoral College have already implemented changes to ensure research staff and research culture are at the heart of our plans, including monthly progress updates on Concordat actions at Research and Innovation Board. The Digital Transformation Strategy encompasses all areas of the University's mission and recognises people and culture are central to realising the anticipated benefits.

Since our last external review, Organisational Development and Professional Learning (OD&PL), has seen a change in leadership, with the appointment of two co-directors. Work focusses on Leadership and Professional Practice and Academic Practice (AP). Within AP we are grouped into three new sub-teams: Researcher Development and Culture (RDC); Student Education; Digital Practice. The new RDC team brings together researcher development at all levels from PGR through to experienced researchers, giving a much better overview, and allows development to be shared more widely across career stages and avoids duplication of resources. The RDC team has a team leader, also responsible for the Concordat and HR Excellence. In November 2021, the RDC team welcomed a new Careers with Research Consultant (see Key Achievements) to work primarily with our research staff and postgraduate researchers. OD&PL continues to work in partnership with our Faculties and Schools and Professional Services including HR, Research and Innovation Services (RIS), the Library, IT Services and the Careers Service to provide policies, guidance, resources, training and development. Our approach is built on analysis of local experience, engagement with developments in the wider sector environment and horizon scanning for future requirements and possibilities.

As we developed our new Concordat Implementation Plan we have referenced and aligned with other key initiatives being undertaken at Leeds, including our Equality and Inclusion framework, University Behaviours and Race Equality action plan. The Plan also reflects the new ways of working, including how we will deliver various activities and how we will continue to support our researchers working remotely, both from a practical and wellbeing perspective.

How the internal evaluation was undertaken?

The ECRDSG, chaired by the Dean of the Doctoral College, leads our implementation of the Concordat principles and as a result it is overseeing this ten-year review. Membership of this committee includes Pro-Deans for Research and Innovation, representatives from OD&PL, Deputy Director of HR, an ECR academic champion, Head of Interdisciplinary Research Development and ECR representatives. The steering group reports the Concordat Implementation plan and progress reports to Research and Innovation Board.

In addition to the steering group, we have formed an ECR action group, with membership open to anyone involved or interested in researcher development; the action group feeds into the steering group. This ensures we have continuous dialogue with and feedback from our researchers. Meetings provide updates on progress, outline our plans and hear about the challenges facing our research staff. Both groups are supported by a combined MS Team

(Researcher Development) where meeting minutes, documents, events and updates are available to everyone. For the last year meetings were held quarterly but during recent consultation the group requested to meet monthly. The Concordat plan actions have been shared and refined with this group. We have also held focus groups with researchers on specific topics, particularly career development, as we grow this area.

Open meetings with senior leaders helped to inform some of the key actions in our plan, including the 10 days career development time becoming an entitlement. Our researchers highlighted access to development being a barrier, so we took action to remedy this. 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.

Challenges in evidence collection: In previous years we have run the CROS survey to provide evidence of our impact and progress. This year we ran CEDARs, however the survey was running at a point when there were multiple surveys from our institution and the sector and we have seen evidence of survey fatigue, ultimately affecting our response rates for CEDARs. Our response rate was 7% well below the 26% we previously had with CROS. This has left a dilemma of how to use this data effectively and what conclusions can be confidently drawn for this review. In addition, as we move from the old Concordat principles to the new obligations, we have limited baseline data to build on. Many actions are new, so we will look to see an increasing positive trend or engagement with our initiatives over the next two years, establishing base line data ahead of our new HR Excellence action plan for 2023.

Key achievements and the progress against the strategy, indicators and actions:

- **10 days development time:** Leeds are incredibly proud that one of our most ambitious actions has been completed. After consultation with our researchers highlighted a barrier to development, we decided to put responsibility for career development in the hands of our researchers by including 10 days development time in postdoctoral contracts. The wording has been agreed with the University's legal department and included in new contracts issued since March 2020. Whilst existing contracts will not be re-issued, we are making sure researchers and their managers are aware of this change, including an action to continue promotion. During Concordat launch week we ran a session on what the 10 days are and how they can be used; this session had the highest number of attendees. We have run bespoke sessions for 4 schools and have a further 3 scheduled.
- **Concordat Launch:** To promote the institution becoming signatory to the relaunched Concordat we had planned a launch event, postponed as we went into lockdown. In November 2020 we held a week-long event with sessions to explain what the Concordat is, what it means for career development, what the 10 days are and what development looks like. Guest speakers included the deputy-VC (Research and Innovation), Dean of the Doctoral College, Co-Director of OD&PL and UKRI. Sessions were recorded and made available via our website. Session attendance varied (between 12 - 56) and the resources have been accessed 362 times.
- **Careers with Research Consultant:** Following a successful recruitment process we are delighted that Ruth Winden has joined the RDC Team in OD&PL in October 2020. Ruth has a background working with researchers at Leeds, helping them transition into roles outside academia. She co-developed our Career Architect programme and is now keen to run a pilot blended version, giving us the capacity to expand the programme to a greater number of researchers. Ruth made a significant contribution to the Concordat launch with sessions on career development and using the 10 days. She is also a member of the ECR Steering group.
- **Careers resources/guides:** Over the summer 2020 we created a series of self-guided resources which are available from the Careers section of our Researcher Development website. Additional resources will be added as they are developed. These resources provide information and support for researchers at the point of need, responding to feedback from our action group around access to timely support on topics such as CV writing and are focussed on finding and applying for positions. The guides are already being accessed as evidenced by the viewing analytics; CV - 104 times; CAR Stories - 33 times; Career Anchors - 111 times. The Careers Summer series also gave Ruth an environment to trial some of our Career Architect sessions in a blended format.
- **Open meetings and the Action Group:** Our researchers often comment that they feel removed from decision making and our senior leaders, not hearing about institutional strategies or policies. To date we have run 3 open meetings giving our researcher access to those in leadership. Meetings have been held with our previous Dean of the Doctoral College/Chair of the ECR steering group Prof Claire Honess, our previous DVC Prof Lisa Roberts, our new Dean of the Doctoral College/Chair of the ECR steering group Prof Luke Windsor. These discussions help shape and inform our plans. As we have had several changes in leadership, we are scheduling another two meetings this year. Researchers have asked if one of these can be with our DVC Student Education so they can hear more about the University's strategy and find out how they can engage with student education.

We are very keen to ensure our plans are built in partnership with our researchers. We introduced an ECR Action Group to work with the Steering Group. This group has open membership to anyone interested in research staff development. Meetings were running every three months but in response to feedback recently moved to monthly, on a trial basis. The action group reviews our plans, provide updates and share best practice.

- **Research Culture:** Leeds has an institutional commitment to building a positive, inclusive research culture. Although not an action on our original action plan, the RDC team leader and Co-Director of OD&PL have been founding members of a new institutional Research Culture Group, reporting to Research and Innovation Board. This Concordat has been central to this work and hence included here. The group brings together key people and services with a role or interest in Research Culture. Alongside the group the RDC team are running Research Culture Cafes, using the Wellcome Trust model, with the aim of sharing best practice, establishing what researchers feel our current culture is like and raising issues with solutions for change. As we move forward, we will be building on this new action with the aim of developing and sustaining a community of practice.

Next steps and the focus of the strategy for the next two years:

With a new VC in role, it is no surprise to hear we will be getting a new University strategy with new priorities and initiatives. The Concordat remains a large part of our work on culture and community so actions in our forward-looking plan will be updated or refined in support of these.

- **Career Development:** One of our largest 'areas' of action will be our support for researcher career development. The new careers role (Ruth) brings an opportunity to grow this part of our work dramatically. The ideas and initiatives she has planned could fill this section on their own. Career Architect will run as a pilot with between 12-16 people starting in February. Following the pilot, we will be aiming for 3 cohorts per year with 25 people per cohort. Resources from the programme will be made available via our careers webpages creating that on demand collection researchers have requested. To support our managers and researchers to hold effective, honest career development discussions we will create two complimentary sessions: 'How to Hold Effective Career Conversations with Researchers' and 'How to Benefit the Most from Career Conversations with your PI'. Other plans include monthly "Careers with Peers" events and "In Career Conversation with ..." recorded conversations with researchers from the University of Leeds who have moved into a wide variety of career paths, using their research background as a stepping stone. Alongside the wider career support, we will also be building on our resources and opportunities for those wanting to explore an academic career in more detail.
- **Promoting the 10 days training per year:** After securing the 10 days development time, we now turn our focus to promoting them and providing support for our researchers/managers to use them. We will turn materials developed for the Concordat launch into a guide defining what development can look like and how it can be achieved, using the 70-20-10 model.
- **Research Leadership and/or PI development:** We are currently mapping a research leadership programme to support researchers at various points in their career. Focus groups and interviews have provided some starting themes. The development is not envisaged to be a linear programme, more a range of options for people to access when required, in a similar style to our management essentials.
- **UoL research staff survey:** One of the areas we have identified as a priority is establishing baseline data ahead of our 12-year review. The next 2 years will be spent evaluating our actions and a large part of this is creating a research staff/manager survey. To do this effectively, we will be looking to bring someone into the RDC team, possibly on a project basis or secondment.
- **Refreshing the University welcome and induction:** As we develop this provision, we will ensure research staff and their needs are fully incorporated. This may include tailored sessions or provision for them, particularly around the Concordat and its obligations.
- **Work nationally as part of Researchers14 and N8PDRA groups:** Continuing to engage and share best practice with other researcher developers and institutions is a fundamental part of what we do. Through R14 we are looking to work alongside other institutions to share development opportunities, combining resources, ideas and avoiding duplication. This approach will also benefit our researchers as they engage and network with other researchers from outside Leeds.
- **Implement the role of PhD advisor:** The overall aim is to ensure our researchers have equal opportunities to teach or supervise, and that they are supported to do this, with their efforts formally recognised. Linked within this action is the production of a Code of Practice for researchers who teach, development of their student education practice and a clearly defined role description.