

HR Excellence in Research Award

Anglia Ruskin University – Four Year External Review

Introduction

Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) is committed the principles of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, and was awarded the HR Excellence in Research Award in May 2013. As part of our initial application, we prepared a Gap Analysis and Action Plan against the principles of the Concordat, outlining steps we intended to take to improve our support for researchers. We reviewed this as part of our two-year internal review, and produced a new Action Plan, subsequent to which our award was renewed. Further renewal is subject to a successful external review at four years, including updates to previously submitted documents, and the development of a new Action Plan. This report provides a summary of our position as part of the submission requirements.

Preparations for External Review

Our Researcher Development Working Group (RDWG) is responsible, reporting to our Research Committee, for overseeing our researcher development activities including monitoring our HR Excellence in Research Award Action Plan.

Our preparations for this external review were undertaken by a sub-group of, and overseen by, RDWG. Both the sub-group and RDWG itself consist of members of our Research & Innovation Development Office (RIDO), HR Services (HRS), and Faculty-based academic staff, including a number qualifying as research-only staff and colleagues who are responsible for the management of researchers. These colleagues have sought input and feedback from researchers in their Faculties more widely.

Evidence to inform the evaluation was sought from our researcher community through participation in the 2015 Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS) and the 2015 Principal Investigators and Research Leaders Survey (PIRLS). Due to concerns about the robustness and reliability of the data due to the small number of participants involved, we have decided not to participate in the 2017 round of either survey. Our biennial Staff Survey provides an alternative source of data, in addition to feedback collected from other events involving researchers, for example our annual Research Conference. Finally, we have reviewed appraisal data, training records, ARRO usage, recruitment data, sabbatical outcomes and other sources of evidence to support our claims.

Reorganisation and Restructuring

There have been changes to the institutional focus in this area since the last review, as well as the underlying university support structures, largely as a result of Anglia Ruskin recruiting a new Vice-Chancellor, a new Deputy Vice Chancellor with responsibility for Research and Innovation and a new Director of the Research and Innovation Development Office (the latter following a restructure). We have refocused our efforts away from research-only staff specifically (of whom we have only a relatively low number) to support researchers more generally. We have also reallocated the responsibility for researcher development and increased the resource available in that area.

As will be seen in the updates to our 2015 Action Plan, this led to some practical consequences for our earlier plans. This period of reorganization and restructuring also delayed some activities until the structure in which they would operate was clear.

Nonetheless, every effort was made to maintain staff researcher development as 'business as usual', monitored through Research Committee, and a number of planned developments were carried through – for example, the introduction of the Research Funding Observatory programme in January 2016, specifically intended to support colleagues' capability and capacity to successfully apply for research grants.

Key Achievements and Progress

• Recruitment & Selection

We have continued to ensure that we strongly meet the expectations of the Concordat in this area. We reviewed our Recruitment and Selection Policy, producing a revised and amended version in late 2015. Colleagues across the institution involved in recruitment and selection are appropriately trained. Our dedicated Recruitment Team in HRS achieves a high level of compliance (91.25% or better) against their KPIs in supporting them.

We have wrestled in particular with the Concordat's expectations around the use of fixed-term contracts. While we fully support the Concordat's intentions in this respect, and our policies are clear in allowing fixed-term contracts to be used only when justifiable, the proportion of fixed-term contract holders among our research staff has increased over the review period (from 65% to 85%). While this is a reflection of increased success in winning time-limited research grants, it reinforces the need to enable continuity of employment where possible.

• Recognition & Value

Research remains a key institutional ambition and we remain committed to effectively recognising and valuing the efforts of our staff in furthering research. The move in 2015 towards online appraisal has been evaluated and deemed successful, and our researchers' views of, and satisfaction with, appraisal processes continues to be high. CROS 2015, for example, showed that 85.7% of respondents found appraisal useful or very useful. Managers of researchers are confident in terms of managing and motivating staff.

Our research-only staff are generally satisfied with their equality of treatment in terms of pay and reward; we reviewed and substantially amended our Grading Review Procedure in February 2016. All researcher regrading applications made in 2015 and 2016 were successful. We have developed and introduced an ECR Charter, published in August 2016, guaranteeing a minimum level of financial support available to all ECRs, amongst other commitments.

Our exit survey was discontinued shortly after our HR Excellence submission was made in May 2015 because it had become apparent that response rates were low and the resulting data lacked value. We are in the process of reintroducing it in an online version, which was trialled in March 2017, to remedy these concerns. This will help us to better understand the reasons behind decisions to leave, and whether we can do more to ensure staff feel recognised and valued in their roles.

• Support & Career Development

As described above, over the review period we have taken the decision to realign the focus of our support for the professional and career development of researchers, in tandem with

restructuring and reorganising the services delivering such support, a process which continues. This impacted especially on proposed actions in this Concordat area.

Nonetheless, we have taken important steps. We have published an ECR Charter, replacing the post-doctoral charter originally proposed, setting out a number of commitments for support of ECRs, including research-only staff. The proportion of sabbaticals awarded to ECRs increased from 10% in 2015 to 14% in 2016; following a revision of the scheme designed in part to better enable ECRs to participate, this leapt to 40% in 2017. We will create a specific development programme for ECRs.

We have continued to provide a range of opportunities for our researchers, including the new Research Funding Observatory programme, though the intended 'hub' mechanism to centralise advertising of these opportunities has not yet come to fruition. We will revisit this in the near future, to ensure an effective cross-institutional approach to all aspects of professional and career development for researchers. We will benefit from our efforts ensuring improved attendance recording, and our involvement in developing the recently-launched Epigeum 'impact tools' module, to better understand take-up of the resources we already have.

While our efforts to increase take-up of work-shadowing as a career-development mechanism have not yet borne fruit, our use of mentoring schemes in a variety of arenas has increased significantly. We are beginning to investigate a more formal approach to coaching. Similarly, we have retained our emphasis on research planning and ensure all staff (other than those on probation) are appraised. We have also developed the Individual Research Report (IRR) mechanism to enable better research reporting.

- **Researchers' Responsibilities**

We support researchers in meeting their responsibilities in their daily conduct. For example, we revised our guidance around research integrity in late 2015, and have taken steps to support our researchers to make the outcomes of their research available on an open access basis. Colleagues are encouraged to use the Researcher Development Framework and to take responsibility for their career development.

We also have mechanisms in place to enable researchers' voices to be heard, to ensure that we are effectively supporting them to deliver on their responsibilities. Researchers are formally represented at a variety of institutional forums, from our Research Committee to Faculty Boards, including the RDWG and its sub-group. We also run a variety of conference-type opportunities, for example our institutional Research Conference, the Innovation and Knowledge Exchange conference which was introduced during the review period, and more specific events, such as for research supervisors and our annual REF Awayday. All of these enable researchers to share their views, helping us to understand and act upon their concerns.

- **Equality & Diversity**

We are absolutely committed to equality and diversity. We have ensured that various recognitions of our commitment have been updated as standards changed (for example, accreditation as a 'double-tick Positive about Disabled People' employer has been replaced with approval as a Disability Confident Employer). We are working on applications for Athena SWAN departmental-level recognition, as well as the renewal of our institutional award. We review all relevant policies at least once every three years, or where legislative changes require. As a result, our staff strongly recognise our commitment to equality and diversity.

Next Steps

We have taken this opportunity to prepare a new Gap Analysis and Action Plan covering 2017-2021. We have been careful to ensure that the evidence we present is relevant to the particular clause, and especially, as had been a previous tendency, to avoid attaching actions, or multiple actions, to all clauses regardless of the weight of evidence demonstrating our compliance with the Concordat or where the emphasis of the clause is less relevant to us as an employer of researchers. That is, we have sought to be very clear about where actions are actually needed to develop the quality of our support and the extent of our compliance with the Concordat, while ensuring we do not dilute our efforts by including action for action's sake.

Our main focus for activity over the next four years is planned to be around our use of fixed-term contracts, and ensuring equality of treatment of colleagues employed on a fixed-term basis; drawing together researcher training and development activity, including better advertising of development opportunities across the institution; and in particular creating a specific development programme for ECRs. We will ensure that the RDF is used to articulate such opportunities. We will revisit induction arrangements to ensure that necessary information is shared, and we will review our Commercialisation Policy to better facilitate knowledge exchange activities. We will collect and review feedback, especially around work-life balance, discrimination, bullying and harassment; and monitor initiatives like the Returners Fund and Flexible Working Policy such that these are used to best advantage, ensuring that equality and diversity objectives continue to be met. Finally, we will maintain support for researchers' integrity practice, taking action where concerns are raised. Measures of success have been identified in the Action Plan for each of these actions, which cut across, and collectively address, the Concordat's principles on Recognition and Value, Support and Career Development, Researchers' Responsibilities, and Diversity and Equality.

Conclusion

We have made significant progress against our Action Plan, and see this reflected in the growing research culture at ARU. While the nature of the next REF remains unknown, we expect to see this progress leading to improved outcomes in REF 2021. We continue to strive to ensure that the principles of the Concordat are embedded as part of our culture and natural behaviour, benefiting research-only staff and other researchers alike, and showing no distinction in the level of support offered. For research-only staff, we continue to recognise the importance of ensuring continuity of employment, and parity of opportunity, regardless of contract type. We welcome the opportunity this review has given us to take stock of our activities in supporting researcher development over the past two years, despite the challenging circumstances outlined, to recognise those areas in which continuing focus is required and to celebrate our areas of strength.