

HR Excellence in Research Award Anglia Ruskin University – Two Year Internal Review

Introduction

Anglia Ruskin University is committed to 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 the application process we prepared an action plan outlining the developments we planned to make to improve support for researchers. Progress against our action plan is monitored by our Researcher Development Working Group. Institutions that receive the HR Excellence in Research Award are asked to undertake a two year internal review. This report summarises the findings of this review.

Internal Review Process

This internal review has been undertaken by a subgroup of the Researcher Development Working Group involving members from Research, Development & Commercial Services (RDCS), HR Services (HRS) and faculty research staff.

We have sought feedback from our researcher community through participation in the 2013 Careers in Research On-line Survey (CROS) and more recently by holding focus groups with staff from this group during 2015 to seek their views. Additionally, we reviewed appraisal data, training records, ARRO usage, recruitment data and our staff survey outcomes.

Key Achievements & Progress

- **Recruitment & Selection**

We have made a number of improvements in this area including the fundamental review of our Fixed Term Employment Policy to ensure that fixed term contracts are only used where there is no reasonable prospect of further funding not simply because funding is externally sourced.

Last year we extended our Teaching, Scholarship & Research Job Family to incorporate Research Assistant jobs making career progression routes clearer for research staff.

All staff continue to complete online diversity training and recruitment panel chairs complete further recruitment and selection training.

- **Recognition & Value**

Research remains at the heart of our new Corporate Plan covering 2015 - 2017. We actively encourage and support all staff to engage in research, particularly where this will contribute to the classroom experience of our students.

We offer an enhanced range of opportunities to our researchers including a highly successful series of researcher development seminars in collaboration with Imperial College, London (e.g. Managing your First Research Group and How to Peer Review Research Papers). Attendance is funded from our corporate staff development budget and approximately 20% of our researchers attended. Recently we have revised our sabbatical scheme to encourage applications from Early Career Researchers (ECRs) and 10% of sabbaticals awarded in 2015 related to this group. Before this change was implemented we ran a very well received separate sabbatical scheme for the Lord Ashcroft International Business School in 2013/14 to help ECRs establish their research profiles.

- **Support**

Following a successful pilot last year we have moved to an online format for staff appraisal this year. We have revised our appraisal process to ensure that research activity is fully embedded and are pleased to have very high participation rates with 98% of staff appraised in 2014. Our previous process required staff to submit a plan which was separate to their main appraisal documentation. The new process incorporates the Research Plan within the main appraisal form and makes this a key component of the appraisal discussion for all academic staff. Objectives are also very clearly linked to our Corporate Plan. Training is available to Primary Investigators and line managers to increase their understanding of career development for research staff and opportunities available for these staff specifically.

Our probation process also has increased emphasis on ensuring researchers are supported. Staff are allocated a mentor alongside their line manager, with the key aim of identifying any requirements for support, training or development. Research staff on Grade 4 have a shorter probation period (6 months) than other academic staff, and our probation process clearly identifies the expectations we have of these staff.

Our training and development activities include courses aimed directly at researchers. In addition, research staff can access training via our Epigeum suite of on-line courses, which are available to staff and students. Dedicated web pages provide further training support in research skills and techniques, ethics and integrity.

- **Career Development**

CROS 2013 results showed that 100% of research staff agreed or strongly agreed that they are encouraged to focus on personal and career development. This takes place at all stages of employment including induction, probation, annual appraisal and regular feedback. The Vitae Researcher Development Framework tool was introduced to enable research staff to maintain focus on their skills and make informed choices about career development. Introduced initially to assess the developmental needs of research students and to broaden their skills, it has now been extended to all staff. By 2013 43.7% of staff used this tool, above the national average and we hope to see a further improvement in the CROS 2015 results.

CROS 2013 results showed that although 56% of research staff were engaged in the mentoring and supervision of other researchers at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, other research staff would welcome the opportunity to do this. We continue to include access to the PG Certificate in Higher Education as part of the probationary process, and are promoting the opportunity to be involved in teaching to research staff as a whole.

Building on the excellent 2013 results showing that research staff felt integrated in the departmental (93.75%), institutional (81.3%) and wider (87.5%) research communities, a range of university-based conferences widen the opportunities for developing personal and career enhancing skills including public speaking, networking and integration. Our open access repository ARRO ('Anglia Ruskin

Research Online') encourages researchers to make their publications freely available and therefore enhance their visibility and career development. To date, over 350 staff have used this repository.

A key area for improvement identified in CROS 2013 was increasing awareness among research staff of the Concordats that Anglia Ruskin adheres to and of Vitae. This information is now communicated via the mandatory Online Induction Module supported by a Welcome Event attended by RDCS colleagues.

However, the focus groups we ran with our researchers in preparation for this review identified that not all colleagues were aware of the career development opportunities available to them. We have incorporated actions to address this in our new action plan.

- **Researcher Responsibilities**

44% of the respondents to CROS 2013 agreed, or strongly agreed, that they used the Researcher Development Framework to structure their development activity and we will continue to stress its importance. From September 2015 we will introduce a new research data management policy which will be supported through training, a website and publicity.

- **Equality & Diversity**

We were awarded an institutional Athena SWAN Bronze Award in April 2015. Having received this award we have plans to progress departmental applications over the coming years.

Our Dignity at Work and Study Policy provides a route for staff to raise any concerns in relation to the way they are treated in the workplace. Our Flexible Working Guidance was revised in February 2015 to make it more user-friendly and all HR policies and procedures, including provision for maternity, paternity and shared parental leave, are reviewed to keep pace with changes in legislation.

- **Implementation & Review**

Our Researcher Development Working Group are responsible for monitoring progress against our action plan and have been involved in the development of our new action plan. In addition our Research Committee has been kept up to date on our progress and this review process.

Next Steps

We have taken this opportunity to prepare a revised action plan covering 2015 - 17. We have focused our efforts around better communicating the range of opportunities that are available to research staff, continuing to build our research community to enhance staff engagement and broadening the conference and development opportunities available to staff.

Conclusion

We have made significant progress against our action plan and see this reflected in the growing research culture at Anglia Ruskin as evidenced by our improved REF2014 outcomes. We aim to embed the Concordat seamlessly as part of our culture and natural behaviour that shows no distinction between supporting the careers of our researchers and academics. We endeavour to ensure permanency of employment, continuity of care and parity in the range of opportunities available, whether on a permanent or fixed-term contract. Wherever possible, we look to offer permanent as opposed to fixed term contracts and provide training to allow researchers to grow their careers. This review has given us the opportunity to reflect on our areas of strength and develop these whilst identifying areas for greater focus in our revised action plan.