

The University of Portsmouth Six Year Internal Evaluation Report for the Human Resources Excellence in Research Award

Introduction

The University of Portsmouth is a modern University with a growing research base and a reputation for excellence, recognised by its strong position in various league tables. We are committed to building on a successful REF 2014 entry, and growing our research output, partnerships and income. At any given time, the University employs 120-130 contract research staff as well as a variable number of hourly paid research staff (currently 86) and an academic staff base of ~1250¹. The University is one of only four universities in the south-east to achieve the highest Gold rating in the Teaching Excellence Framework.

The University was awarded the HR Excellence in Research Award in May 2013. Since then, the University has continued to document and monitor progress against the Concordat principles and successfully renewed the HR excellence award at the two-year milestone in 2015 and at the four-year stage in 2017.

We place a particular emphasis on research staff in our approach to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, at the same time recognising that such staff are part of the wider research community that includes academic staff at different career stages.

Other university level developments: the University's Research and Innovation Themes

The period covered by this report coincides with the implementation of one of the key strands of the University and Research and Innovation strategies: namely the five interdisciplinary themes. Through the themes, we seek to draw together interdisciplinary expertise to enhance our capacity and profile in response to key national and international challenges, complementing faculty led strategies and plans, and building upon existing activity.

The five interdisciplinary themes have received significant investment and were launched formally at the University's Research and Innovation Conference September 2018, although substantive activity had commenced in January that year. Theme initiatives are targeted at supporting our academic members of staff, with specific initiatives to support the professional development of early career staff e.g. through the themes fellowship scheme. Benefits also flow directly and indirectly to research staff, either through new or extended research assistant posts, new career opportunities for research staff in professional support roles, as well as research environment opportunities, such as new seminars, workshops, clinics and lunches. This theme based activity complements work already underway or established in each of the faculties to support the career development of researchers.

Internal evaluation process

Operational oversight for the HR Excellence Award falls under the aegis of the Concordat Implementation Group, a formally constituted sub-group of the University Research and Innovation Committee, which is chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation). The Concordat

¹ We use the term 'research staff' in this documentation to describe fixed term and hourly paid research staff. We use the term 'researcher' to describe all staff involved in research including research staff and academic staff.

Implementation Group (CIG) is now chaired by the Deputy Director (Research and Innovation Services; Environment and Strategy), taking over from the Senior Researcher Development Coordinator (SRDC) in July 2018. The CIG includes academic representatives from across the five faculties, a representative of the Associate Deans of Faculty responsible for Research and/or Innovation, the Deputy Director of HR, and a representative of the Graduate School. Furthermore, its Terms of Reference ensures membership of at least one member of research staff. There is representation from the Athena Swan core group, and the University's Equality and Diversity Unit, ensuring good communication between the CIG and those groups.

Progress made against the 2017-2021 action plan, and priorities for the period 2019-2021 has been discussed at CIG. The group took into account a range of data collated from central sources (see progress update column of the 2017-2019 action plan). The group also considered the changing internal and external research landscape (e.g. consultation on the Concordat) and other University level initiatives implemented in the period of the action plan (e.g. the interdisciplinary themes).

This resulted in a 2019-2021 action plan which was subsequently shared with a range of other groups, inviting feedback and input to the future plan, including: Researchers Network (which includes research staff as well as early career researchers), Associate Deans' Research, Theme Directors and Academic Staff Association. In addition, the plan and upcoming priorities were discussed at a focus group specifically with research staff (May 2019), resulting in amended and new actions. The final action plan and 6-year review report have been discussed and agreed by the University Research and Innovation Committee.

Key achievements

The key achievements of the 2017-21 action plan in the past two years include:

- Creating a specific route tailored to research staff within the University's new online PDR system (Performance and Development Review system) (Principle 2: Recognition & Value);
- Revised induction pack sent to every member of research staff (and every researcher) joining the University, outcome of this will be measured in CROS 2019 questions on induction (Principle 3, 4: support and career development);
- Achievement of University wide Athena Swan Bronze (extended principles) (Principle 6: Equality and diversity);
- Commitment to Athena Swan Silver and the Race Equality Charter (Principle 6: Equality and diversity);
- Creation of a Guide for PIs to ensure they are aware of their responsibilities in supporting the career development of researchers² (Principle 3, 4: support and career development).

Complementary to the specific actions, other achievements linked to the Concordat driven by the CIG leadership team include:

- Improved systems and processes around data identification and collation e.g. for attendance at training, reporting on researcher career progression (Principle 3, 4: support and career development);
- Bespoke professional development scheme devised under the auspices of the themes initiative to support early career researchers (aimed at academic staff) in developing their own independent, academic careers. Twelve Themes Research and Innovation Fellows were

² Final version being completed at time of writing

awarded internal fellowships in early 2019, and they are embarking on a comprehensive programme of action learning and development to be completed over the next 18 months. The plan is to expand its reach if the scheme is successful. (Principle 3, 4: support and career development).

Whilst progress in some areas has been good, in others, progress has been harder to achieve. One of the issues has been levels of engagement with the research staff community. At the outset of the current action plan period, it was agreed to put the Research Staff Forum into abeyance with the establishment of Researchers' Network to take its place as the means to represent and engage with research staff. The Researchers' Network was more fluid in its structure, working with thirteen champions self-selected and/or nominated from across the Faculties. This ensured an energised group and obviated perennial challenges of achieving consistent research staff representation where such roles were often in flux. The champions helped provide a stable forum and online community for the more transient research staff community. Nevertheless, whilst the champions have themselves been engaged, efforts to maintain the engagement of research staff more widely looks to have plateaued or decreased as indicated, for example, by the data for engagement in training. The forward-looking action plan contains actions to redress this trend and reinvigorate the wider research staff community. On another action, relating to promotion of academic staff to Reader or Professor the data indicates that there is still a gender gap; this is a feature of our [Athena Swan 2017-21 action plan](#) (see action 5.3).

Next steps and focus of the strategy for the next two years (incl. Success measures)

The University is keen to undertake a comprehensive review of professional development support available to all staff. In the meantime, the CIG are keen to maintain its focus on and progress for research staff, noting that the longer-term comprehensive University wide review will also bring benefits to all in the research community.

The priorities for implementing the Concordat over the next two-year period include:

- Monitoring uptake and impact of the PDR system for research staff, aiming to capture feedback from 80% of research staff receiving a PDR during the current cycle. The feedback will inform future cycles of PDR and the activities of CIG more broadly. The aim is for improved PDR experienced of research staff measured CROS scores from 2019 to 2021 survey – 100% PDR uptake and increase in score for 'usefulness of appraisal' (Q15 in CROS) (Principle 2: Recognition & Value);
- Conduct a review and relaunch of RISDP³ programme (including consultation with research staff and researchers more generally). The outcome will be a revised fit-for-purpose programme that addresses different career stages more fully, participation will be monitored, aiming for improving on the metrics described in the 2017-19 report and for research staff specifically measured through increases in CROS scores from 2019 to 2021 surveys (particularly Q23 & Q25) as well as attendance and evaluative feedback from events. Evaluative feedback collated routinely as part of RISDP will be used to evaluate the impact for academic staff (Principle 3, 4: support and career development).

³ Research and Innovation Support and Development Programme coordinated by the Research and Innovation Services department

- Review of Researchers' Network and relaunch the Research Staff Forum to ensure sufficient focus on research staff in the latter and recognising the evolution of the former to reflect the interests of early career researchers. We will monitor attendance at both events and for research staff use CROS scores for the specific institutional questions added to CROS 2019 (Principle 3, 4: support and career development);
- A suite of actions to improve how the University values, and is seen to value, the contribution of research staff including specific activities around web profiles of research staff, support for media activities, encouragement and support to engage in University award schemes (Measurable through relevant CROS scores and feedback from Research Staff Forum & Researchers Network) (Principle 2: Recognition & Value);
- Further embedding of support for research staff, and early career researchers within the interdisciplinary themes initiative, particularly with the successful delivery of the themes fellowship scheme with the majority of fellows having achieved their career development goals identified in their fellowship plan, and the mentoring of PIs (to include how they support their research staff) (Principle 3, 4: support and career development);
- A series of actions looking to embed support for research staff in existing processes e.g. the University's bid process, internal funding criteria/processes reflecting the increasing impact of the Concordat agenda with funders (Success measures still under discussion);
- The University intends to submit for a University Race Equality Charter award in February 2021 and for a University Athena SWAN Silver award in November 2021. Furthermore, the CIG is embedding in its practice routine consideration of equality and diversity matters, for example the data monitoring and analysis will report on protected characteristics as a matter of routine where data is available.