

Two-Year Internal Evaluation Report for HR Excellence in Research Award – May 2018**1. Introduction**

The University of Worcester received the HR Excellence in Research award in June 2016 based on a gap analysis of its policy, practice and culture against the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers and an associated 2-year action plan to address “gaps” and areas for development. In line with the requirements of the award, we have undertaken an evaluation of our progress against the original action plan. This report summarises our findings and goes on to discuss the focus of our strategy to support the career development of researchers for the next two years.

2. Internal Evaluation Process

The evaluation process has been driven by our Concordat Implementation Group (CIG) chaired by the Deputy Pro-Vice Chancellor Research (who is also chair of the University’s Research Committee) with representation from the following groups/areas:

- Career Research Staff
- Postgraduate Research Students
- Research Leaders
- Researcher Development team
- Human Resources

CIG reports to and acts on behalf of the Research Committee which in turn updates the University’s Academic Board on progress against the action plan.

CIG has met 3 times a year over the last 2 years, overseeing and reviewing progress against the original action plan. Following each meeting, the action plan has been updated and action points fed to appropriate stakeholders. Because of this systematic approach, there have been no additional measures taken for this two-year internal review. The internal evaluation report presented here was reviewed and approved by CIG in April 2018, and by the Research Committee in May 2018.

Additional input for this evaluation has come from:

- Surveys – CROS 2017, PRILS 2017
- Feedback from stakeholder forums such as our Research Staff Forum, Research Café for Emerging Researchers
- Feedback from training and development workshops for researchers and research leaders

3. Key Achievements Against the Original Action Plan

Over 70% of actions identified in the action plan have been completed. Just 8 (12%) have not been completed and for 6 of these new deadlines have been identified in the new action plan. The remaining actions have been partially completed and have also fed through into the new action plan.

Principle 1: Recruitment, selection and retention

- Completed review of selection and recruitment processes in light of the University’s Research Strategy

- New policies and processes for probation, appraisal and promotion have been drafted and are due to be implemented in the remainder of 2018.
- New research role descriptors have been developed and are used routinely by PIs and HR
- New recruitment processes for externally-funded research posts have been developed seeking to ensure clearer continuity of employment for existing research staff.

Principle 2: Recognition and Value

- New policies and procedures on fixed term contracts developed with associated training; these are currently awaiting approval by our legal team.
- New Research Leaders programme delivered for first time in 2017/18 (attended by 14 members of research staff representing all Institutes) alongside specific training for PIs (attended by 15 PIs).
- Participated in PIRLS for the first time in 2017 with 35% response rate; outcomes fed into research leaders programmes.

Principles 3 & 4: Support and Careers Development

- Participated in CROS for the first time in 2017 with an excellent 47% response rate; results have fed into updating of our Researcher Development Programme for 18/19.
- Tools for researchers to engage in effective training needs analysis developed and made available through our VLE.
- Rolled out of a dedicated scheme for researchers in 2017/18 to support their development in learning and teaching and to enable successful application for associate and full fellow of the HEA.
- Roll out of a cross-University research mentoring scheme in January 2018.
- Established a Research Staff Forum in 2017 to enable networking and sharing of challenges and opportunities as a researcher, however to date attendance has been disappointing.

Principle 5: Researchers' Responsibilities

- Appointed a Research & KE Facilitator to support researchers to explore opportunities for Knowledge Exchange, impact development and commercialisation of research.
- Developed dedicated ethics training and support for researchers through our VLE.
- Updated policies on research integrity to ensure they reflect best practice in the sector.

Principle 6: Equality and Diversity

- Reviewed flexible working policy; evidence shows that 96% of flexible working requests were successful over the last 3 years.
- Gained an Athena SWAN institutional Bronze Award in May 2018.

Principle 7: Implementation and Review

- Concordat Implementation Group established and meeting regularly.
- Researcher Development team active in Vitae networks and local researcher development hubs.

4. Progress Issues

There have been some challenges in delivering the action plan. Most of these are a consequence of internal restructuring of key professional departments or of committees:

- Over the last two-years we have undergone a significant re-structuring of our HR Department. This period of change has created some inevitable delay in the review and development of HR policies and processes and this is reflected in the partial completion of some actions.
- The University decided to remove the specific Diversity and Equality Committee (which features heavily in the original plan) with its E&D data review functions being taken on primarily by HR

Committee but also Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Committee. E&D strategy now falls under the remit of a senior strategic group. This did not impact significantly on delivery of actions under Principle 6.

It is worth noting that the impact of some of our initiatives has been limited by research staff engagement; a good example of this is attendance and buy-in to the Research Staff Forum. Feedback from this staff group suggests they do not really identify as a specific group of “career researchers” and rather identify with a wider group of early career or emerging researchers on standard academic contracts. This may need us to rethink our approach to this group and how we support them. There may be value in focusing our Concordat action plan on a wider group of researchers (from PGRs through to early career and second career academics or “pracademics”) rather than purely on Research Staff/Career Researchers.

Some actions have proved less tenable in reality than on paper, e.g. we proposed that research staff feedback in leavers surveys/interviews would be fed into review and development of our researcher development offer but in reality, we had few such leavers in the period, none of whom provided relevant feedback.

5. Future Direction

Our new action plan builds squarely on the original plan:

- It seeks to meet outstanding or partially completed actions, e.g. develop new policy and procedures for appraisal.
- It recognises that a number of actions are ongoing and need to be kept under review, e.g. researcher engagement with staff development.
- It sets out plans to review and evaluate some of the actions from the original plan, e.g. implementing the new policy and processes on fixed term working.

A cornerstone of the new plan is the roll out of a proposed new academic and research career pathways scheme which will seek to ensure there is a clear path for progression for researchers on standard academic (teaching and research) or research only contracts. We have set ambitious targets for the launch of this new scheme.

We have placed more emphasis on developing careers support for researchers in the new plan and on widening the development opportunities we offer to researchers in the area of Knowledge Exchange (KE), not least because of the growing importance of the KE agenda in the HE sector and its relevance for researchers in particular.

It is worth noting that the University is in the process of developing its new Research and KE Strategy, significant elements of which have not been finalised at the time of updating the Concordat Action Plan. It is likely that new actions may emerge over the coming 6 months as the strategy is finalised. Our CIG will play a key role in ensuring that these feed into and out of the Concordat Action Plan.