

## HR Excellence in Research Award September 2019

### Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers Progress Report 8 Year Evaluation and Review

#### 1 Introduction and Background

The University of Leicester has held its HR Excellence in Research Award since 2011. During these eight years there have been significant changes at Leicester, including a number as a direct result of the ongoing work to implement the principles of the Concordat for the Career Development of Researchers such as the launch of a new Doctoral College.

The University established four thematic research institutes to increase collaborations across departments, schools and colleges, And a fifth institute, the Leicester Institute of Advanced Studies (LIAS), was created to foster a collaborative and inspiring environment that cuts across all disciplines and thematic areas. LIAS regularly hosts international researchers as Innovation Fellows to promote global working and encourage collaborations for researchers of all levels.

As a living memorial to the First World War, the University's overarching strategy underpins its motto *Ut Vitam Habeant* – so that they may have life. There are five key values within the strategy, represented by the VITAL acronym, **V**aluing people, **I**nnovators, **T**ogether, **A**ccountable, and **L**eaders, and these contribute to creating a positive environment for researchers of all levels.

The research population at Leicester fluctuates, but for the past 8 years has had a population between 400 and 500 colleagues on research-only contracts. At the college level, approximately 60-70% are in the College of Life Sciences, 20-30% are in the College of Science and Engineering, and 5-15% are in the College of Social Sciences, Arts, and Humanities. In addition, we have approximately 800 academics covering teaching or teaching and research contracts.

This report is a summary of the detailed review of the activity we have undertaken in the previous years as well as our 2019-2021 Action Plan. The review was conducted through analysis of the University staff survey in 2017 as well as the biannual Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS) and Principal Investigators and Research Leaders Survey (PIRLS), with a particular focus on the responses to the 2017 and 2019 surveys. Further detail and input was gathered from the ECR and Research Staff Career Enhancement Group which, as a result of the formation of the Doctoral College, is due to become a sub-committee within the official University committee structure this autumn. The current membership and terms of reference for this group are detailed in Appendix A.

#### 2 Investments in new structures to support researchers and programmes to support researchers

The Doctoral College was formed in September 2017 and became a focal point for researchers of all levels, but with particular remit to support researchers on fixed-term contracts and non-established early career researchers. The driving force behind the formation was feedback received through CROS and other surveys, which identified a lack of dedicated and focused support. The Doctoral College provides a suite of support for these groups, including career development and a range of dedicated training courses encompassing: grant writing series, a comprehensive wellbeing provision and career support for researchers looking beyond their current contracts. To further support the development of future leaders and enable progression, the Doctoral College has piloted and continued a dedicated Researcher Leadership Programme (RLP), targeted towards researchers mainly on fixed-term contracts to provide them with toolkits and knowledge to progress further. Examples of courses delivered through this programme are: Leadership and Leadership Styles, Grant Management and more focused career development support. Established researchers are supported through the University's VITAL Leadership Programme (VLP), which members of RLP can access. VLP provides a wide range of courses, including courses focused on: Line Management, Change Management and the Art of Delegation. Research staff also have access to career advice and guidance consultations provided by the Doctoral College, and nearly 15% have used this resource over the last two years.

The Doctoral College has further championed support for researchers on fixed term contracts through the Doctoral College Research Staff Fund. This fund allows researchers to undertake collaborate research trips

and also provides seed funding for fixed-term researchers to assist with their transition to independence. Additionally, part of this fund has been used as bridge funding for researchers who may otherwise have been made redundant due to the gaps in externally funded projects and follow-on funds. This fund enables Leicester to retain and continue to develop future research leaders.

Another major development since 2011, is the re-format and evolution of the Career Enhancement Group with formal reporting lines to the Research and Enterprise Committee within the University committee structure. This continual evolution has led to the creation of ECR leads for each college and formal reporting opportunities for researchers. This forum has enabled sharing of best practise and co-design of a mentoring programme for researchers originally established in one of the colleges to be rolled out to the other two colleges.

### 3 Key Achievements and Progress against the Strategy

The previous actions plans are available for the periods [2011-13](#), [2013-15](#), [2015-17](#), and [2017-19](#) along with the summary and review documents for each period ([2 year](#), [4 year](#), and [6 year](#)).

3.1 Key achievements since the last review in 2017 are highlighted below:

**Principle 1 - Recognition of the importance of recruiting, selecting and retaining researchers with the highest potential to achieve excellence in research**

In 2019, there was a significant increase in the number of CROS respondents taking ownership of their career development (8% increase) as well as those with a career development plan (21% increase).

Whilst recruitment and selection training exists for hiring panels, unconscious bias training has been established as a mandatory course for all staff within the University.

Career development workshops for 'moving beyond your current contract', 'transferring to a non-academic career' and 'how to succeed at employment interviews' have attracted 99 attendees within the 2017-19 period and career events with potential employers have attracted a total of 326 attendees in the same period.

**Principle 2 - Researchers are recognised and valued by their employing organisation as an essential part of their organisation's human resources and a key component of their overall strategy to develop and deliver world-class research**

In CROS 2019, there was a significant increase in the number of respondents both participating in appraisals (6% increase) and finding them more useful overall (15% increase), and particularly within appraisals for discussions on career development (21% increase) and career aspirations (22% increase).

The Doctoral College piloted and delivered 2 cohorts of the Researcher Leadership Programme (RLP), with 17 participants since January 2018.

There have been a greater number of researchers recognised for their contribution to teaching (4% increase), knowledge transfer (6% increase), public engagement (12% increase), and supervision (14% increase).

A task and finish group has been set-up to create a researcher career path for grades 7 – 9 (primarily for those on fixed-term contracts or externally funded positions), mirroring those already available for academic pathways. The task and finish group is chaired by the Director of HR and will report to the University Executive Board by December 2019.

**Principle 3 - Researchers are equipped and supported to be adaptable and flexible in an increasingly diverse, mobile, global research environment**

**Principle 4 - The importance of researchers' personal and career development, and lifelong learning, is clearly recognised and promoted at all stages of their career**

The appraisal process and associated documents within the University have been updated to allow and record career planning and development for researchers. As a consequence, there have been greater career development discussions through appraisals (21% increase). There are at least three evening career events each year along with half-day events, focusing on different elements of non-University employers, such as journalism, the NHS, and biosciences.

The provision of increased courses for researchers across multiple thematic areas and increased opportunities to embed the skills has seen an increased uptake, particularly for public engagement (17% increase), supervision (5% increase), research skills (4%), and leadership (2%). To facilitate opportunities such as public engagement, the Doctoral College facilitates a lunchtime lectures series through the Adult Education Centre, enabling researchers to interact and present their research to the public.

**Principle 5 - Individual researchers share the responsibility for and need to pro-actively engage in their own personal and career development, and lifelong learning**

As mentioned above, there has been an increase of over 20% in CROS respondents taking ownership of their career development and having useful conversations with line managers and mentors to develop clear career plans.

As part of the increased responsibility and pro-active engagement in their own development, this has also resulted in an increased integration into departmental and cross-discipline communities (15% and 5% increases respectively).

**Principle 6 - Diversity and equality must be promoted in all aspects of the recruitment and career management of researchers**

The University was awarded an Institutional Silver Athena SWAN award in November 2018. Currently 15 departmental awards are held as of 19th September 2019 (9 Bronze, 6 Silver), with a further two awaiting results. The College of Life Sciences are now embarking on a College level silver award (which will replace 7 of the existing awards). These central policies are discussed and embedded at all levels with on the ground activity via the Career Enhancement Group and its members.

As previously mentioned, unconscious bias training has become mandatory for all staff within the University and is required to be undertaken every 12 months. Additionally, hiring panels are provided with reminders and guidance within the interview panel pack.

**Principle 7 - The sector and all stakeholders will undertake regular and collective review of their progress in strengthening the attractiveness and sustainability of research careers in the UK**

In CROS 2019, Leicester obtained the highest level of responses to date, with over double the responses for the previous survey. Equally, PIRLS 2019 had over double the response compared to the 2017 survey; an effect of the new Doctoral College.

Another measure of the increased awareness and need to support researchers is the transformation of the Career Enhancement Group into formal sub-committee within University committee structure.

#### 4 Next Steps and focus of future strategy for the next two years, including success measures (2019-2021)

The immediate next step is the transition of the ECR and Research Staff Career Enhancement Group to a formal sub-committee of the University structure, thus demonstrating a clear understanding of the importance of supporting this population within the University.

**Principle 1 - Recognition of the importance of recruiting, selecting and retaining researchers with the highest potential to achieve excellence in research**

The exit interview format is being revised and it is expected that the new format will enable feedback from researchers on fixed-term contracts to be utilised.

Whilst the responses to CROS 2019 showed a high level of information being provided to prospective candidates, Leicester had a slight drop in the last two year period. The review of job descriptions through the task and finish group mentioned previously may address this but other actions are required to maintain a high level of clarity in recruitment information.

**Principle 2** - *Researchers are recognised and valued by their employing organisation as an essential part of their organisation's human resources and a key component of their overall strategy to develop and deliver world-class research*

Recognition for researchers' contributions has increased for all measures and is in line with the benchmark group used with the exception of teaching. However, further opportunities to develop and practice these core skills are required. A review of the core training delivered through the Doctoral College and Organisational Development, coupled with ongoing discussions at the Career Development Group to identify further opportunities will enable the provision to be more relevant and more visible.

**Principle 3** - *Researchers are equipped and supported to be adaptable and flexible in an increasingly diverse, mobile, global research environment*

**Principle 4** - *The importance of researchers' personal and career development, and lifelong learning, is clearly recognised and promoted at all stages of their career*

Mentoring for research staff and early career researchers has been rolled out across the University, but further support of the programme is required to ensure increased uptake and effectiveness of the provision. This will need to include expanding the existing training and development opportunities for both mentors and mentees across all colleges.

Respondents in CROS 2019 identified a need for further provision around personal effectiveness, research impact, and leadership and management. Accordingly, the Doctoral College will need to ensure continuation of its RLP as well as extending the availability of some of the components to the wider community.

**Principle 5** - *Individual researchers share the responsibility for and need to pro-actively engage in their own personal and career development, and lifelong learning*

Whilst targets in the current and previous action plans for ownership of career development plans and integration have been vastly exceeded (above or in line with benchmark group), we aspire to continue to integrate researchers of all levels into local and wider research communities as well as continuing to ensure relevant career development discussions occur for all researchers. This will be facilitated through the Career Development Group and college based champions.

**Principle 6** - *Diversity and equality must be promoted in all aspects of the recruitment and career management of researchers*

The University has an institutional silver award and 14 individual departmental awards, but there are large areas of the research base that are not encompassed by these. There is a need and strategy for more areas of the University to invest in Athena Swan at local levels. Linked to this, the University is also developing a new Race Equality Charter strategy.

**Principle 7** - *The sector and all stakeholders will undertake regular and collective review of their progress in strengthening the attractiveness and sustainability of research careers in the UK*

Awareness of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers was lower than expected, with only 56% of CROS 2019 respondents being aware that it existed and only half of that understood it. A key part of the ongoing strategy is to increase the awareness of the Concordat to all who are supported or encompassed by its remit but more importantly for researchers to see benefits of its implementation. The institutional driver will be the Career Enhancement Group.

This review and report is based on the action plans developed with regards to the previous Concordat. With the publication of the revised concordat in September 2019, it is our intention to review our latest action plans and ensure our future plans continue to align with this revised concordat. Any adjustments or additional actions will be agreed through our Career Development Group, with implementation prior to the formal 2 year review.