

HR Excellence in Research Award

Progress Report - 4 Year Evaluation and Review, 25 September 2015

Background

This report focuses on progress made against our two Concordat Action Plans between 2011 and 2015. It also outlines next steps and future focus for actions over the next two years.

The last two years have been a period of significant change at Leicester, with some of the critical players either stepping down or being on leave, and structural, organisational and directional changes with a new Vice Chancellor and President taking office in Autumn 2014¹. One of the critical players in the implementation of the Concordat, the Director of HR, resigned in late 2013 with a new Director only taking up post in January 2015. A new senior leadership team has replaced the old one. Further, as part of the overall organisational review at Leicester, a Strategic Task and Finish Group on Developing and Enhancing Careers set up in January 2015 has been reviewing key areas of significance to the Concordat.

Following a period of hiatus through 2014, and a period of significant change in 2015, there are a number of actions from the 2013-15 Action Plan which have only been partially delivered. What has become apparent, however, is that the levels of articulation of current issues surrounding the Concordat are far greater than would have been possible four years ago, and the work over the previous four years has begun to yield results: there is a much stronger groundswell amongst the research staff at Leicester, and a commitment on the part of senior management to hear and attend to the voices of this group.

We come to this review with a sense of great optimism – we expect the next two years to see the embedding of some of the new processes and policies being discussed and adopted at the University, which will have significant positive outcomes for all staff. A new senior leadership team at Leicester are consulting, reviewing and bringing about numerous changes in staff management, reward and recognition. There is a desire to explore what good practice might look like, both from within and outside the University, and implement new practices to the benefit of all staff. And as is detailed below, research staff have been a key part of the consultations, and are a key stakeholder in the reforms being put forward.

Going forward, we hope to have a new senior strategic champion as a new Pro Vice Chancellor for Research and Enterprise takes up office early in 2016. Together with the Director of Human

¹The Academic Practice Service (APS), which is where responsibility for research staff and the implementation of this Concordat sat, was integrated into a larger body, the Leicester Learning Institute (LLI) in 2014. And whilst the priorities for 2015-17 sets out actions for LLI, this remit is set to move again to a newly configured Research and Enterprise Division in November 2015.

Resources, and the Concordat Steering Group, we hope to meet and exceed our targets to support the career development of research staff at Leicester.

How the review was undertaken

The internal review of progress against our Concordat Action Plan is now firmly embedded within core structures and practices at Leicester. The Concordat Steering Group (CSG), chaired by the Pro Vice Chancellor, Research and Enterprise, and with a membership that includes the Director of HR, Principal Investigator representatives from each of our colleges, research staff representatives from each of our colleges, the Graduate Dean, an Athena SWAN representative, and a representative from the Research Support Office. The group, supported by the Researcher Development Team (currently based in the Leicester Learning Institute, and due to move to the new Research and Enterprise Division in November 2015), has overall responsibility for evaluating progress. CSG meets once every term (thrice each academic year) but may meet more often if there is need.

The internal review process this time went through the following steps:

1. The Concordat Steering Group coordinated processes to evaluate progress against the 2013-15 Action Plan;
2. Results from CROS and PIRLS 2015 were used to inform both, the evaluation of progress thus far, and future steps that need to be taken over the next two years;
3. The annual Research Staff Forum this year, entitled 'Empowering and Investing in our Researchers through the Concordat', held on Friday, 12 June 2015, focused on the six principles underpinning the Concordat, and was organised in a world café format to elicit research staff views on what has been working well, what needed improvement, and soliciting concrete suggestions for future action. Each table was chaired by members of the University's senior management team or senior principal investigators, and the event was booked to capacity with about 80 research staff members participating.
4. As part of the overall organisational review at Leicester, a Strategic Task and Finish Group on Developing and Enhancing Careers set up in January 2015 has been reviewing key areas of significance to the Concordat. The Group includes representatives from the Concordat Steering Group, Athena SWAN, and a further research staff representative. Included in the review are:
 - Appraisals, including consultation with research staff for their views on what their appraisal should include;
 - Mentoring, including clarity on the purpose of mentoring, together with consideration of other supportive arrangements including coaching, buddying etc., and including consultation with research staff on how this might work;
 - Reward and recognition, including discussion around how research staff excellence may be recognised, representation of research staff, other routes to career development and recognition for research staff including, for instance, teaching qualifications;
 - Leadership – training for principal investigators and research leaders as well as potential leadership training for early career researchers/ research staff members.

In addition to these individual measures to look at progress against the 2013-15 Action Plan and determine next steps, there was also a continuous process of feedback from research staff groups across the four colleges of the University, either formally through the Concordat Steering Group, or informally through the Researcher Development Team, with members of this team maintaining contact and liaison with all research staff groups, and communicating to all research staff regularly via email, outlining emerging opportunities for training, career development or indeed, advertising career opportunities.

Key achievements/progress by principle

Principle 1: Recruitment, Selection and Retention

- Increase in candidates receiving panel interviews;
- All interview panels gender-balanced since January 2015;
- Organisational review of recruitment and selection processes and commitment to look at redeployment practices and compile examples of good practice.

Principle 2: Recognition of Value of Researchers

- The creation and maintenance of channels of communication between research staff and senior management and critical other stakeholders (e.g. Director of HR, PVC Research and Enterprise);
- Appointment of academic staff as champions for research staff issues at the college, and in one college, at the departmental level (CMBSP);
- Review of appraisals processes, with exploration of a career development conversation for research staff;
- Initiatives to promote clarity on promotion and reward and recognition routes;
- Pilot of new Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme that will create opportunities for research staff to train and gain qualifications in teaching.

Principles 3 and 4: Support and Career Development

- Continued work by academics at the College level to support career development and provide field-specific advice on building a strong professional portfolio;
- Recognition of need to publicise with PIs the entitlement of all researchers, as employees of the University, to professional development opportunities;
- Identification of measures to further integrate research staff and their research into institutional profile and databases;
- Review of provision of mentoring/other forms of support for research staff.

Principle 5: Researchers' Responsibilities

- Creation of databases and lists to keep research staff community updated of new appointments to facilitate communication within and between groups.
- Contribution to discussions on organisational change via the Research Staff Forum

Principle 6: Equality and Diversity

- Equal access to maternity/paternity and parental leave for all staff;
- Exploitation of synergies between Athena SWAN, the new HeForShe initiative and the Concordat for the Career Development of Research Staff.

Principle 7: Implementation and Review

- Growth in Concordat Steering Group membership to coordinate the activities around the HR Excellence in Research Award (now including Athena Swan representative, more research staff representatives, and representative from the Research Support Office);
- Engagement of research staff monitored not only through CROS and PIRLS but also staff satisfaction surveys, focus groups and other fora to be used in the University as part of the larger strategic changes.

Future strategy, success measures, next steps

The key steps for the future are identified in our 2015-17 action plan. Overall, our strategy is informed by three key drivers:

- i. Improving dissemination channels for research staff, ensuring that information captured in different fora is easily accessible: This would include, for instance:
 - a. collating a set of 'Frequently Asked Questions' to address the issues that repeatedly come up in research staff group meetings, to be set in place by March 2016;
 - b. an induction package, including central induction resources, and a template for what might be included to tailor it to departmental specificities (in time for the 2016-17 academic year);
- ii. Identifying and consulting with research staff who are not engaging: we tend to see the same research staff members driving research staff forums, or attending central events. There is a large cohort that do not appear to be engaging, and the Research Staff Development Officer, together with departmental colleagues, will consult with this cohort to investigate causes of non-participation;
- iii. Engaging principal investigators: measures to empower research staff are only effective when accompanied by support from PIs. Measures proposed include:
 - a. A leadership training programme for PIs that will showcase the Concordat and the responsibilities this entails (to be rolled out by July 2016);
 - b. A concerted strategy to visit all departments to raise awareness and seek action on the Concordat (e.g. induction for research staff, representation etc.) (to be completed by December 2016).

Our success measures will include:

- Increased traffic through the research staff webpages;
- Increasing attendance at research staff forums, workshops and events (particularly career development events);
- Evidence of engagement with non-participating groups of staff, leading to, for example, training sessions off-campus, and a broadening of existing sessions where required;
- Responses to CROS and PIRLS 2017 (including a 5% increase in response rate, and an increase in the proportion of affirmative responses to key questions in relation to the implementation of the Concordat)
- Evidence of employee satisfaction measured through staff surveys at Leicester, particularly looking, for instance, at the success of the new appraisal system, and mentoring and other support schemes.