

CONCORDAT TO SUPPORT THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF RESEARCHERS: ACTION PLAN 2015-2017
Review of Progress and Next Steps (2017-2019)

Organisational Context

In 2015 the University of Leicester retained its HR Excellence in Research Award following the four year external review process. The review was conducted during a period of intense organisational transformation, stimulated by 'Strategic Conversations' instituted by the then new University Leadership Team.

Between 2015 and 2017, the Researcher Development Team, which oversees Concordat implementation, has been structurally moved from the Leicester Learning Institute into the Research and Enterprise Division, and will now form the core of the new Doctoral College – a move that has already seen the researcher development journey strongly underpinning the University's research environment discussions.

We have seen the implementation of organisation-wide changes, consolidation of existing achievements and identification of ongoing issues for development. We are in a position to report on attendant strategic developments which will support Concordat activities, interim progress on a range of measures identified in CROS 2017, the relationship between Concordat and other Quality Assurance mechanisms, notably Athena SWAN, and plans for knowledge brokerage across the organisation via the newly-formed Doctoral College.

The Doctoral College will be responsible for the development of researchers more broadly (from postgraduate research students through to research and academic staff), in clear and close alignment with the priorities in the University's Research Strategy (Discovery-led Research), and the talent management and succession planning envisioned in its People Strategy (Discovering People).

The University of Leicester currently employs 439 research staff (for comparison, there are 967 academic staff). Of the 439 currently employed, 154 are on fixed-term contracts, and 285 are on open-ended contracts (of which 240 are subject to a funding end date). The largest proportion (292) are situated in the College of Life Sciences, with 97 in the College of Science and Engineering and 50 in the College of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities.

Evaluation and Feedback Mechanisms

The review of progress against the University of Leicester Concordat Action Plan 2015-2017 has been undertaken via a number of consultation mechanisms and strategic interventions:

- the Task and Finish Group on Developing and Enhancing Careers (convened in early 2015 and referred to throughout the Action Plan, and also referred to in the 2015-2017 documentation)
- the Task and Finish Group on Supporting Postgraduate Research and Researchers (convened in 2015-16, and which led to a major reorganisation of PGR provision, strategically linking PGRs to early career researchers as a functional continuum, and the creation of the new Doctoral College)
- disaggregated research staff data from the inaugural Staff Survey (2016), to which 72% of research staff responded
- data from CROS and PIRLS 2017, with response rates of 18% and 35% respectively
- feedback from workshops and attendance at departmental meetings throughout 2015-2017
- qualitative data from focus groups to support Athena SWAN activities throughout 2015-2017
- qualitative data from focus group to explore 'non-engagement' with careers support (March 2017)

- the Doctoral College briefing meeting for research staff in June 2017, chaired by the Interim Graduate Dean and the Head of Researcher Development
- briefings to all academic departments on the implementation plan for the Doctoral College over Spring and Summer 2017 by the Head of Researcher Development and the Interim Graduate Dean.

Updating the action plan and supporting documentation was coordinated by the Research Staff Development Advisor in the Doctoral College; feedback was sought from research staff, academic leads in the colleges with a responsibility for early career researchers/the research environment, the Director of Research Support Services, Research Directors in the Colleges, the Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, HR - Organisational Development, Recruitment, and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. The 2017-2019 Action Plan will be monitored by the Doctoral College; progress on key performance indicators will be reported to the Research Strategy, Policy and Performance Committee, which is chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Research and Enterprise. This committee includes PGR and research staff representation.

Progress against the 2015-2017 Action Plan

The 2015-2017 Concordat Strategy was informed by three key drivers:

Improving dissemination channels:

- the evaluation and feedback mechanisms listed above are evidence of continuing engagement with the research staff community
- knowledge brokerage has continued through targeted briefings on the research staff experience via HR, Athena SWAN and the REF Environment Group
- we continue to support researcher self-organisation and identify that research staff groups are successful when embedded within departmental governance structures

Identifying and consulting with research staff who identify as not engaging:

- two focus groups on non-engagement with careers support
- supplementary questions in CROS 2017 to ascertain where researchers have sought, and are likely to seek, careers support
- the new PDD (Performance Development Discussion), designed to support careers conversations between PIs and research staff

Engaging principal investigators:

- in their briefings to academic departments on the Doctoral College, the Head of Researcher Development and the Interim Graduate Dean outlined the support for the researcher development journey from PGR to PI. They highlighted the support researchers, particularly research staff, need in their career development, both within academia and beyond
- a new suite of leadership and management development has been rolled out by Organisational Development in HR
- consultative work with academic departments to support synergies between Concordat and Athena SWAN Silver submissions is ongoing

The specific achievements against the 2015-2017 Concordat Action Plan are as follows (with corresponding actions and principles in bold):

- high levels of research staff reporting clear understanding about expected levels of performance (92%) and behaviour (96%) in the Staff Survey **(Principle 1)**
- a 13% increase in CROS respondents participating in appraisal **(Principle 2)**
- knowledge brokerage between Concordat, Athena SWAN and the REF Environment Group **(Principles 2, 3&4, 6)**
- implementation of leadership and management development for research staff, lecturers, associate professors and professors **(Principles 2, 3&4)**
- expanded data sets to explore qualitative and quantitative evidence **(Principle 7)**
- success in achieving and retaining Athena SWAN awards – seven Bronze and four Silver **(Principle 6)**

Next Steps and Focus of the Strategy for 2017-2019

Efforts thus far to link the Concordat with research leadership, career development strategies, the research environment, and equality and diversity initiatives such as Athena SWAN, were centred around events rather than strategy, and in the absence of critical enabling interventions (such as leadership and management development, and the PDD, which were implemented in 2016). While these approaches have not been without success, the Doctoral College's alignment with both the research and HR strategies means there is now robust governance and CPD in place to enhance support to the researcher experience at Leicester. However, there is an inevitable 'long tail' in evidencing the impact of these strategic changes, and we continue to be cognisant of a number of key issues which will continue to exert influence on researchers' careers, both at Leicester and across the HE sector. These include, for instance, security of employment as contracts are subject to funding; the paucity of progression routes in academia; translation of knowledge, skills and attributes into non-academic employment settings; and diversity of the staff base.

Our focus for the period 2017-2019 will be coordinated by the new Doctoral College and will:

- identify fellowships and other routes to research independence **(Principles 3 and 4)**
- support the embedding of appraisal and emphasise its role in career planning **(Principle 2)**
- diversify the availability of careers support through coaching, mentoring, peer support, PI development and web resources **(Principles 3 and 4)**
- disaggregate research-staff only data from emergent initiatives **(Principle 7)**
- maintain an evidence-based approach to researcher development **(Principle 7)**

Our success measures will be:

- the number of early career researchers starting and developing their research career at Leicester on fellowships and strategic investments (at least ten per year)
- ongoing monitoring and benchmarking through CROS, PIRLS and Staff Survey (research-only category):
 - 70% of Staff Survey respondents implement a development plan and managers assist in addressing learning and development needs
 - 90% of Staff Survey understand expected standards of behaviour and performance
 - 75% of CROS 2019 respondents agree that staff are treated fairly across the protected characteristics, and have the same opportunity to develop as other staff groups
 - 5% increase in recognition and value across a range of professional contributions
 - 60% of Staff Survey respondents are able to contribute their views at a departmental level
- evidence of the transferability of researchers' skills in academic and non-academic environments
- retention of the HR Excellence in Research Award and Athena SWAN accreditation
- a strong Environment Statement in REF 2021