

**University of Leicester**  
**CONCORDAT TO SUPPORT THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF RESEARCHERS ACTION PLAN 2011-2013**  
**Review of Progress and Next Steps (2013-2015)**

### **Background and Context**

In 2011 the University of Leicester gained the HR Excellence in Research Award in recognition of its commitment to promoting the principles of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers. As part of this commitment, the University undertook a review of existing support for research staff, along with a gap analysis against the requirements of the 2008 Concordat. The results of the benchmarking and gap analysis then formed the basis of the 2011-2013 Concordat Action Plan. This report outlines the progress made during the award period, the means of evaluating this progress, the key achievements, as well as the challenges encountered in implementing parts of the Action Plan, and the ways in which the Action Plan 2013-2015 seeks to address these challenges.

### **Evaluation Mechanism**

The internal evaluation was conducted by members of the Concordat Steering Group (CSG), and was coordinated by the Academic Practice Service (APS). The Concordat Steering Group reports to the Research Policy Committee and is chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Enterprise. Its membership comprises a member of academic and research staff from each of the four Colleges – Arts, Humanities and Law; Medicine, Biological Sciences and Psychology; Science and Engineering; and Social Science; the Graduate Dean; the Director of Human Resources; the Equalities Adviser; the Research Development Coordinator; and the Research Staff Development Officer. The review was informed by the 2011 CROS results and subsequent focus groups, the 2011 PIRLS results as well as an internal PI survey conducted over April-June 2013, feedback from research staff networks and the 2013 Research Staff Forum. In addition, draft progress reports were sent to all research staff inviting feedback on success measures to date and areas for development. The updated action plan maintains the same structure as the 2011-2013 plan, and the action points are updated to reflect the inclusion of new stakeholders to maintain existing provision and to collaborate on areas for development.

### **Key Achievements**

The implementation of the Concordat raises questions about the extent to which existing organisational policies and procedures are operating effectively for the benefit of all staff, whether engaged in research duties or otherwise. It also sheds light on the kinds of environments in which research staff are able to develop professionally. The preparation of the 2011-2013 Action Plan sought simultaneously to capture organisational practice, diagnose problems and propose solutions. The intervening period has consolidated achievements, revealed structural barriers to career development, both at the local and national levels, and deepened understanding of the systemic and cultural factors which might inhibit full participation by research staff in the University.

There are distinctions to be made between (i) existing provision which benefits all staff, for example robust recruitment and selection practice; (ii) provision which is perceived as inaccessible or irrelevant, for example promotion and appraisal and (iii) areas where researchers are affected most keenly, for example, in understanding the nature of contracts, creating a voice and presence for themselves in University structures, and developing professional experience and transferable skills in

an uncertain employment climate. It is the third where we have focused most of our attention, while pushing forward to discuss and evolve strategy in (i) and (ii) above.

The Concordat Steering Group notes consolidation of good practice in the following areas:

1. *Recruitment, Retention and Selection Practice*: The CROS 2011 results demonstrate an increase in the incidence of panel interviews, and PIs report high confidence levels in their recruitment and selection responsibilities. There is mandatory recruitment and selection training for panels, and HR maintain records of attendance at the training (Action Plan 1.1). PIs and HR work together to go through the ending of contracts (1.2). There is a high-level commitment to ensure that as this requirement for the redundancy interviews ends with the new legislation on fixed-term contracts, managers are supported to a level of maturity where they can continue to have a conversation with their research staff on their careers and their future.
2. *Recognising and Valuing Researchers*: The Division of Human Resources and APS hosted the first Research Staff Forum in June 2013, attended by 100 of the University's 450 research staff, representing 20 academic departments and three of Leicester's hospitals. The event was opened by the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Sir Robert Burgess, and was chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Enterprise, Professor Kevin Schürer. The Forum included contributions from University senior management, senior and junior academic staff, and Professional Services, and was developed in response to research staff surveys on aspects of the employee experience. That senior University figures facilitated the planning and delivery of the event, and that research staff contributed to the agenda, attests to the recognition and value accorded to research staff, and sets a valuable precedent for employee engagement (see <http://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/press/media-centre/online-features/leicester-motors-ahead-with-plan-to-support-researchers2019-career-development>).
3. *Equipping and Supporting Researchers in a Changing and Fluid Environment*: APS, in collaboration with other Professional Services and academic colleagues, provides training on all aspects of academic practice, including research methods, research supervision, teaching and learning, public engagement and enterprise, finding funding, and career development (5.2).
4. *Recognising Researchers' Personal and Career Development Needs*: Academic departments have demonstrated commitment to researchers' acquisition of broader professional experience (2.2). New research staff attend an induction session where the role of the Concordat is highlighted, and a presentation made on the kinds and nature of contracts (1.7).
5. *Having Researchers Share Responsibility for their Careers*: There has been a groundswell of activity amongst research staff, with an increase in research staff networks and research collaborations, as well as greater interaction with Professional Services on issues critical to them (e.g. promotions, mentoring, open-ended contracts, etc.) (3.4 and 5.2).
6. *Diversity and Equality Processes*: Progress has been made in identifying major funders' provision for maternity leave and making these documents publicly accessible.

7. *Review of Progress*: This is on-going. The Concordat Steering Group meets thrice each academic year to review progress and raise issues that might be emerging in relation to the Concordat.

### **Areas for Further Development**

The above achievements demonstrate that there are structures in place to engage research staff and enable them to contribute. However, the findings from the 2011 CROS results and more recent focus groups, consultation with research staff networks, and perspectives shared at the Research Staff Forum reveal:

- beliefs among some research staff that full participation in the University – in areas such as promotion, appraisal, attendance at departmental committees, teaching, grant applications – is not available to them, due to perceptions of their role as atypical and transitional;
- research staff at all levels are daunted by the prospect of an unstable employment climate, the ways in which their academic experiences are transferable to non-academic roles, and how to develop a research career in higher education;
- research staff who have between three and seven years of service see themselves as being at the greatest disadvantage in terms of access to decision-making, information and key university policies;
- principal investigators are confident in their academic managerial responsibilities, but are less confident in their human resource obligations.

### **Next Steps**

In order to combat perceived disenfranchisement and address the developmental needs of research staff and PIs alike, the new action plan addresses the following:

- Engendering greater research staff engagement – the Director of HR, the PVC Research and Enterprise, and the Research Staff Development Officer will host monthly brown bag sessions with research staff to identify matters of importance, and report the intelligence to the appropriate university committee (1.10);
- CSG is tasked with examining current arrangements within departments and schools, in order to assess where explicit provision for research staff contribution to decision-making structures as well as the acquisition of professional experience could be made (2.2, 3.1);
- A session on fixed-term and open-ended contracts will be added to the suite of existing HR Advisory Workshops, in a direct attempt to address gaps in knowledge of staff with three to seven years of service (1.7);
- Human Resources and APS will collaborate to deliver a modular programme to develop PI confidence in their leadership and human resource obligations (2.4 and 5.3);
- APS will work with PIs and research staff to develop awareness of the variety of employment routes open to research staff, and the transferability of their skills (5.3).