

Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers

HR Excellence in Research Award, Six Year Review, January 2018, Progress Report

1. Introduction

Queen's University Belfast supports the principles outlined in the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers. Support for researchers is demonstrated through investment in research posts, support for researchers from Schools/Institutes and a range of centrally co-ordinated support offered to those employed to undertake research.

Queen's first achieved the HR Excellence in Research Award in 2012. An updated action plan was agreed in 2014 as part of the internal review process; this was subsequently recognised again in 2016 following an external review.

Within the [Corporate Plan](#) there are clear strategic priorities to deliver Queen's Vision. These focus on growth in research income and international and postgraduate student populations. Of particular relevance to this review is [Queen's Research Strategy](#) and the focus on the enhancement of postgraduate and postdoctoral culture.

Queen's University Belfast is a research-intensive institution (ranked 8th in the UK for Research Intensity – [REF 2014](#)) and a leading University in addressing gender equality issues - holding an institutional Silver Award and 11 SWAN departmental awards, including two Gold. The Athena SWAN Charter encourages and recognises the commitment to advancing the careers of women in science, technology, engineering, maths and medicine employed in higher education and research. It has also been expanded to recognise work in arts, humanities and social sciences, business and law and professional support roles.

2. Strategic Research Aims

Queen's [research aims](#) are aligned to our academic strengths and we are recognised globally for the social, economic and cultural benefit delivered through our research. As the results of REF 2014 demonstrate, Queen's has both breadth and depth of research quality. To underpin our commitment to internationally-leading research and collaboration we have established four interdisciplinary [Global Research Institutes](#) and six Pioneer Research Programmes. With external, international peer review, these centres will bring researchers together to tackle global challenges and will play a key role in increasing the international profile and distinctiveness of Queen's.

Research Strategy Priorities are: Developing a culture of research ambition, connecting to tackle global challenges and establishing vibrant Postgraduate and Postdoctoral communities.

3. A Successful Research Environment

A number of inter-related factors contribute to a successful environment for researchers in Queen's, these have changed significantly since the introduction of the Concordat. These include:

- Collaboration across research career paths within core disciplines, Pioneer Research Programmes and Global Research Institutes;
- Investment in infrastructure (including [capital development](#)) to deliver a world-class research environment;
- [Professional support services for researchers](#) across Faculties and professional support units. In particular, the Research and Enterprise Directorate provides direct support for researchers and academics related to research funding/finance, ethics, publications, impact, innovation and engagement activities;
- High quality learning and training environment. The newly opened state of the art [Graduate School](#), is home to Queen's postgraduate community. It aims to create a vibrant and ambitious postgraduate and postdoctoral culture via an exclusive postgraduate hub. This will enhance intellectual and social connections for researchers, encourage interdisciplinary research and provide high quality training and career development opportunities.

4. Evaluation and Review, Ownership and Key Stakeholders

This progress report and the updated Action Plan recognise the progress and good practice that exists and also gives an opportunity to acknowledge that there are still areas which will be progressed further.

The review was co-ordinated by Human Resources, Organisational Development team in consultation with the Concordat Implementation Review Group (CIRG). It consisted of a range of meetings including the Vice-Chancellor, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research, Enterprise & Postgraduate Affairs), other senior management from the Directorates of Human Resources and Research and Enterprise, Deans of Research, managers of researchers and the Postdoctoral Forum. A series of meeting were held with

research staff, primarily in areas with researcher societies/forums, e.g. Medicine Health and Life Sciences and Electrical Engineering, Electronics and Computer Science. These meetings focused on the provision of development activities, the research staff experience and CROS results. The CIRG includes academic and research staff representing all Faculties, researchers representing School-based research societies, and professional support staff who bring expertise from their individual roles to the group. This group aims to promote the Concordat action plan and act collectively to monitor, recommend, develop and implement initiatives to meet the objectives of the action plan; this includes reviewing data identified in the Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS) and PI/Research Leaders Survey (PIRLS) and engagement in training and career development activities.

The HR Excellence in Research recognition is part of a wider set of University strategies and support mechanisms which positively impact on the careers and support for researchers. It continues to be the responsibility of senior managers and support teams listed in the Action Plan in conjunction with Heads of academic Schools and others who manage and undertake research, to progress the stated actions. The actions developed for the updated implementation plan are embedded in other University strategies and plans within the overall [governance and core committee structure and reporting arrangements](#).

5. Key Achievements and Areas of Progress against the 2016 Action Plan

The detailed Action Plan has been updated to reflect and demonstrate the progress made since 2016. A number of areas of progress are highlighted below. Cross-reference to the relevant Concordat Principle is in brackets:

1. The University-wide Postdoctoral Forum, chaired by PVC (Research, Enterprise & Postgraduate Affairs), meets 4 times per year to enable best practice and concerns of researchers to be raised and discussed. This has enabled progression of a number of key initiatives, in particular researcher mentoring, a showcase event and improvements to appraisal for research staff. These are highlighted in more detail below. **(2,5)**
2. A new Postdoctoral group mentoring programme was delivered in 2017-18: 44 researchers and 12 academics participated. Additional central and local interventions have also developed for coaching/mentoring from which postdoctoral staff can benefit. **(3,4,5)** Impact example: prior to mentoring, 35% of mentees had a career development plan; this increased to 67% in the post programme evaluation.
3. A Postdoctoral Showcase Event was held in September 2017 to highlight the work and career progression opportunities for researchers at Queen's and enhance networks within the University and with other employers. 140 staff attended. **(2,3, 4, 5)**
4. Recognition and celebrating excellence: The Vice-Chancellor has instigated specific [research staff awards](#) annually since 2015. These include recognition and prizes for Early Career Research, Postdoctoral Research, Research Impact and Research Innovation. Annual [Staff Excellence Awards](#) were also introduced for all staff in a range of categories in 2016. **(2)**
5. The [Queen's University Research Fellowship Scheme](#) was launched in 2015 to recruit outstanding postdoctoral researchers and accelerate their careers at Queen's and allow this cohort to concentrate on their research alongside career development training. **(1, 2, 3, 4)**
6. Ongoing investment in training and career development: University wide resources for central Training and Development is approximately £1M annually with specific investment related to this initiative of approximately c. £160k annually via Human Resources. **(3,4)**
7. Additional strategic investment for Concordat-related activities via Research and Enterprise is c. £40k. Further investment is made at Faculty level. A proposal has been agreed to pilot a faculty Postdoctoral Development Office in Medicine Health and Life Sciences between (2017-20). **(3,4)**
8. High level of uptake and engagement with the professional and career development programme for researchers: 878 attendances in 2015/16 and 913 attendances in 2016/17. Report analysed by School to identify gaps in engagement. **(3,4).**
9. Introduction of Nature Masterclasses online resource to support scientific writing and publication. 143 users in the first year, most beneficial development areas: developing writing skills; understanding of publication process. **(3,4,5)**
10. Focus on leadership development through the online Professional Skills for Researchers package, design of the new Research Leaders programme and central Training and Development courses for managers and leaders. Over 170 research staff have attended the Management & Leadership in a Research Role 2-day workshop over the past 9 years. **(2,3,4)**
11. Ongoing focus on career development (through a dedicated Careers Consultant role) alongside personal, professional and skills development with additional events to widen employability/employer engagement opportunities. **(3,4,5)**
12. CROS/PIRLS: both surveys completed in 2017. Since 2015, CROS response rate has improved from 16% to 26% and PIRLS response rate has maintained at 25-26%. Reports produced with future actions identified. **(2, 7)**
13. Queen's conducted an all staff engagement [survey](#) in 2016, 69% of staff shared their views. This was followed by an institutional 'Listening Exercise' and the establishment of dedicated working groups and institutional/Faculty action plans. This complements the additional focus group/consultation and survey work for the researcher staff group. There was correlation in the overall feedback with actions to focus on: Academic Standards, career progression, training, reward and recognition. **(2, 7)**
14. Additional School-led post-doctoral societies coming together to lead activities for researchers. **(2, 3, 4, 5)**
15. Improved website communications dedicated for postdoctoral staff support **(2)**

16. Collating and sharing best practice examples via the Concordat Implementation Review Group **(3,5)**
 17. Ongoing Human Resources focus on recruitment, selection, progression, reward, recognition – developments have occurred in relation to revising and updating appraisal, including updated documentation and guidance for research staff. **(1,2,3)**
 18. Queen's utilises EURAXESS as a platform for recruitment of Researchers, highlighting the benefits of the HR Excellence in Research recognition for recruitment via portals across Europe. **(1)**
 19. A range of recent Human Resources accreditations were achieved during 2016 and 2017: [awards](#) for: Equality & Diversity, Health & Wellbeing, Gender Equality, Disability, Family Friendly policies. **(2, 6)**
 20. Members of Organisational Development take part in a number of national researcher development initiatives such as the Scottish regional development group and national conference events (Vitae). A postdoctoral researcher member of Queen's CIRG is a representative on the national review panel for the Concordat. **(7)**
- 6. Next Steps and Priorities to highlight for 2018 – 2020 (see Action Plan for more detail and further success measures).** Cross-reference to the relevant Concordat Principle in brackets
1. Appropriate representation and continuity of information and actions to and from the CIRG, Postdoctoral Forum and relevant committees. Measure/evidence: terms of Reference/memberships reviewed annually, file notes, meeting summaries and action lists. **(2, 5)**
 2. Review and update the Postdoctoral support website (February 2017). **(2)**
 3. Ensure resources/funding provision to support researcher activities (including central training and career development support and Research and Enterprise support) is appropriate and aligned. Measure: review annually. **(3,4)**
 4. Review current provision of career development workshops launch revised programme in September 2018. Increase participation levels to 80 per annum. **(3,4,5)**
 5. Hold a second Postdoctoral Showcase event – 200 staff to attend – theme: career progression opportunities for researchers. **(2,3,4,5)**
 6. Two researcher-focused employer networking events to be delivered per annum. **(3,4,5)**
 7. Annual Learning and Development engagement for researchers: increase by 10% (to include additional engagement in online learning resources). Measure/evidence: report by School produced and reviewed to address any gaps. **(3,4)**
 8. Learning and Development – enhance existing range of facilitated events with courses and programmes to support mentoring & coaching (measure: 40 participants in specific research mentoring). Research leadership (Enhancing Research Leaders Programme piloted and 20 participants in 2018-19). Greater use of online resources, tools for personal and professional development (new resources in place by September 2018; annual review/uptake for researchers). **(3,4,5)**
 9. Interdisciplinary research: to support future research funding bids and research career development. Measure/evidence: delivery of additional development activity which will provide teams with opportunities to enhance capability required for interdisciplinary research. **(3,4)**
 10. Delivery of a range of actions within the [People and Culture Strategy](#) which will be relevant to the range of staff groups, including researchers. Over the period 2018-20, this aims to create a values-based culture and experience for staff which empowers excellence and builds staff commitment and responsibility for organisational success. **(1,2,3,4,5,6)**. Within core themes of: *employee experience, culture and talent*, this new strategy will deliver outcomes related to:
 - a. Creating a Positive Culture: embedding Queen's [Values](#) and improving staff engagement
 - b. Talent Management: new approaches to defining 'talent', identifying and developing high potential staff
 - c. Clarifying and enhancing career paths, particularly for academic staff
 - d. Reviewing the Learning and Development provision and resources offered for staff (including a Leadership and Management Framework and a supporting suite of development programmes)
 - e. Implementing a new strategy to clarify recruitment roles and strengthen attraction and selection processes
 - f. Streamline Human Resources processes, support and education; make best use of available technologies.
 11. Implement Medicine Health and Life Science Faculty Post-Doctoral Office pilot project. **(2,3,4,5)**
 12. Develop specific Faculty-based actions during 2018 and review annually (responsibility: Deans of Research) **(2,3,4,5)**
 13. Annual consultation with Faculty research societies/groups. **(3,4,5)**
 14. Implement a peer-led, research methods training initiative by March 2018. Measure: three events to be identified and supported per annum.
 15. Ensure integration between work of University SWAN Champions, where relevant to the Concordat Implementation Review Group and initiatives. **(6)**

Additional links, not already included above:

- [Vision 2020 website and progress](#)
- [Research Staff website](#).
- [Postdoctoral support webpages](#) and [Postdoctoral Forum](#) (password protected)
- [Queen's University Researcher Career Development Guidance Booklet](#)
- [Corporate publications](#) including the DNA of Innovation Series
- [Diversity and Inclusion](#) and [Queen's Gender Initiative](#) and information on the Athena SWAN Award