

Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers

HR Excellence in Research Award, Four Year Review, January 2016, Progress Report

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 and the range of training, development and support offered to those employed to undertake research.

In 2010, a review of researcher-related training and employment issues was initiated to consider the implementation of the revised Concordat (launched in 2008). At that time a working group chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Postgraduates considered these issues including a gap-analysis of existing practice against Concordat principles. An action plan was created in 2011 which highlighted a number of key actions and responsibilities for 2011-13. This was aligned to Concordat principles, and the process to gain the European Commission's HR Excellence in Research Award. An updated action plan was agreed in 2014 as part of the internal review process.

More recently, initiatives in relation to the management, training and career development of researchers have been reviewed and enhanced. This work involves Human Resources and staff development initiatives; it is also encompassed by wider issues within the Human Resources Strategy and the Institutional Research Strategy. The University appointed a new Vice-Chancellor in March 2014 and agreed a new strategic plan referred to as "Vision 2020" in October 2014. This confirmed the University's mission as: "A world class international university that supports outstanding students and staff, working in world class facilities, conducting leading-edge education and research, focused on the needs of society". Of particular relevance to this review is the focus in 'Vision 2020' towards the enhancement of postgraduate and postdoctoral culture in the University, this is discussed further below.

Process of Evaluation and Review

This progress report and the updated Action Plan summarise the process undertaken for the four year review, in accordance with the HR Excellence in Research requirements. The review recognises the progress and good practice that exists and also gives an opportunity to acknowledge that there are still areas which will be progressed further; these are detailed in the updated Action Plan.

The review was co-ordinated by the Staff Training and Development Unit in consultation with the Concordat Implementation Review Group (CIRG) and a range of meetings including the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research, Enterprise & Postgraduate Affairs), other senior management from Directorates of Human Resources and Research and Enterprise, consultation with researchers, managers of researchers and representatives of School-based research societies. 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, e.g. Staff Development, Personnel and School management, 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.

The above meetings and consultations raised awareness of the action plan and secured the input of senior management and research staff representatives into the review and content of the documentation, updating progress, redefining actions and securing support for further engagement.

Initiatives relevant for this award are embedded in other University strategies and implementation plans – these include the new University Vision towards 2020 and specific Human Resources and Research strategies. In implementing the action plan there has been collaboration with the University's SWAN initiative and individual School-based SWAN groups. All of these aspects have undergone significant review over the last two years (see below for more detail).

Queen's engages and consults with research staff, senior managers, those who manage and supervise researchers and other stakeholders in supporting research. The main mechanisms for this during the last two years have included:

- A series of meetings were held in 2014 with research staff as part of the consultation for the ‘Vision 2020’ strategy planning, which lead to a number of recommendations, including the establishment of the Postdoctoral Forum;
- Concordat Implementation Review Group;
- Senior management boards and committees receive meeting minutes, reports and recommendations;
- Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS) and Principle Investigators and Research Leaders Survey (PIRLS) to gain more detailed feedback from staff, benchmark response to the rest of the sector and identify areas for improvement;
- The central researcher development programme, which provides staff with opportunities to review and plan their career development;
- Formal and informal consultation with research, academic and professional support staff – a new example of this is the recently established Post-Doctoral Forum which has been put in place to enhance two-way communication with post-doctoral research staff.

Ownership and Key Stakeholders

This initiative has been endorsed by the senior management listed below:

- Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research, Enterprise and Postgraduate Affairs
- Director of Human Resources
- Director of Research and Enterprise

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.

Current Context and Background during this Review Period: 2014-16

As there has been much change and a significant process of strategic consultation and development during the period of this HR Excellence in Research review, it is necessary to set out this strategic context, important references, approved recommendations and actions taken.

Vision 2020

In October 2014, Senate approved a paper on ‘Towards Vision 2020’ which set out the journey that Queen’s has been on to date, our ambitions going forward, the case for change and the recommendations for achieving strategic aims: “Vision 2020”.

Three priority areas for growth have been identified as part of Vision 2020. They are: Reshaping Research; Reshaping Undergraduate and Postgraduate Provision; and Reshaping Internationalisation.

Targets have been set to realise opportunities for growth along the following lines:

- Increase in Post Graduate community from 23% (3250 students in 2013-14) to 30% (5000 students in 2020-21) of the total student population
- Increase International student cohort from 8% to 20%;
- Growth in Research Income from £55m to £110m per annum
- Enhancing the research environment and culture for the increasing numbers of research students and staff.

Relevant for this HR Excellence in Research Review, one of the important topics raised during the development and consultation phase of Vision 2020 was: Postgraduate and Postdoctoral Culture. The development of a vibrant and ambitious postgraduate and postdoctoral culture and activity across the University, with significant increases in postgraduate taught, postgraduate research and postdoctoral numbers a significant part of the strategy. A new Graduate School opened in 2015, a new exciting vibrant hub allowing postgraduates to make key connections with peers and academics.

In the Vision, great importance has been placed on the postdoctoral community within Queen’s, both in terms of increasing the number of Research Staff through increased research income and improving the engagement with, and support for, this group of staff. Improving the postdoctoral culture to ensure that there is a consistency in the quality of

management, mentoring and support given to this group of staff will be a priority. For example, all Research Staff line managers should be encouraging and supporting researchers to build their skill sets, through applying for grants, leading research projects, gaining some teaching experience (as appropriate) and building up essential employability skills.

It was recommended that a further piece of work around developing the postdoctoral culture would be undertaken to crystalize some of the important issues arising from the discussions with PDRA staff ahead of developing the Vision 2020 strategy, including the establishment of a Postdoctoral Forum and improving the wider involvement of the postdoctoral community within the University.

Key Achievements and Areas of Progress against the 2014 Action Plan

The detailed Implementation Plan has been updated to reflect and demonstrate the progress made and actions to be taken over the next two years. A number of these are highlighted below with cross-reference to the relevant Concordat Principle in brackets:

1. Ongoing Human Resources focus on sector-leading recruitment, selection, promotion and appraisal policies and processes – significant developments have occurred in relation to revising and updating the appraisal (performance, development and review) scheme with updated documentation, guidance and training and a completion rate of 95% for appraisals. **(1,2,3)**
2. Communication improvements: circulation of researcher career development literature to all researchers, website improvements and promotion of HR Excellence Action Plan at Post-Doctoral Forum. **(4,5,7)**
3. Delivery of two cohorts of the Enhancing Research Practice programme with ILM accreditation during 2013-2015 – 29 researchers in total have participated to date. **(3,4,5)**
4. Ongoing investment in training and career development: University wide resources for central T&D is £1.1M annually with specific investment related to this initiative of approximately £160k annually. **(3,4)**
5. Increasing year-on-year uptake and engagement with the training and career development programme for researchers: an increase of 33% in 2013/14 (749 attendances) and 24% in 2014/15 (933 attendances). **(3,4)**
6. Focus on leadership development through the central T&D programme for managers and leaders, the online Professional Skills for Researchers package and a recently approved proposal to deliver a Research Leaders programme for staff new to leadership in a research role. **(2,3,4)**
7. Ongoing focus on dedicated career development provision alongside personal, professional and skills development with additional events to widen employability/employer engagement opportunities. **(3,4,5)**
8. Enhancing dual approach (central and school-based) to new staff induction with improvements to guidance on local induction. **(1,3,5)**
9. CROS/PIRLS: both surveys completed in 2015 (CROS response rate: 16% and PIRLS response rate: 26%) with reports to generate future actions in 2016. A proposal has been approved to carry out an all staff engagement survey in 2016. This will compliment additional focus group/survey work for specific training programmes such as the Emerging Research Leaders Programme. **(7)**
10. Additional School-led work on post-doctoral societies/groups and a University wide Post-Doctoral Forum, chaired by PVC (Research, Enterprise & Postgraduate affairs), to enable issues and concerns of researchers to be raised and discussed. **(2,5)**
11. Collating and sharing best practice examples via the Concordat implementation Review Group **(3,5)**
12. Developing a new mentoring scheme for research staff, alongside further interventions available on coaching/mentoring. **(3,4,5)**
13. Project agreed in HR systems development plan to improve availability and use of data relating to researchers. The data will largely pertain to employment and training factors. **(1,7)**
14. Overlap between work of University SWAN Champions and their representation and input to Concordat Implementation Review Group and initiatives. **(6)**
15. University achievement of Northern Ireland Public Sector Organisation of the Year at the Family Friendly Employer Awards 2015 and CIPD winner for Health and Wellbeing Initiatives in 2015. **(2)**

Next Steps and Priorities to highlight for 2016 – 2018 (see Action Plan for more detail and success measures)

1. Utilise the Post-Doctoral Forum to increase awareness of HR Excellence in Research Action Plan and gain feedback on these matters from research staff: 3 Forum meetings per year, Chaired by the PVC for Research,

- Enterprise and Postgraduate Affairs. (2,5) Specific actions arising from previous Forum meetings include a review of the research staff appraisal form and proposed new mentoring initiative for research staff.
2. Further survey and engagement work by undertaking CROS and PIRLS survey 2017 with an aim to increase the response rate of each to 30%. This will give an opportunity to benchmark engagement with Queen's staff against nationwide comparators and track progress with previous Queen's CROS and PIRLS reports. (7)
 3. Utilise the enhanced data available through the HR Systems data project to inform and target training, communication and support to researchers – annual review of data beginning 2016 and review of data available via the HESA return on research staff. (1,3,7)
 4. Maintain high levels of uptake and engagement with training (including induction), career development, and appraisal. Annual review of participation in training and refinement of centrally delivered T&D programme for researchers based on researcher development framework, identified needs, staff evaluation/feedback and best practice including Vitae resources. Broad success would be to maintain existing high levels with pro-rata engagement across all faculties representing research staff distribution. (3,4,5)
 5. Provide targeted support for School – based researcher societies to provide opportunities for them to address specific needs, engage with each other and take the lead on issues identified at local level. (1,3,4,5)
 6. Improved support for coaching and mentoring of research staff – deliver open Effective Mentoring Skills workshops, support Schools establishing mentoring schemes with T&D support for mentors and deliver a new post-doctoral staff mentoring scheme (pilot delivered and reviewed by Sept 2016 with 15 pairs). Investigate research staff mentoring of PGRs via a scheme to be based in the new Queen's Graduate School. (2,4,5)
 7. Deliver a pilot programme: Emerging Research Leaders Programme by July 2016 (20 participants). (2,3,4)
 8. Deliver a further Enhancing Research Practice (ILM accredited) programme in 2016-17 academic year. (2,3,4)
 9. Hold an annual employability/employer engagement event for researchers. (4,5)
 10. Review central induction programme for researchers (July 2016) and collate additional resources used for local (School-based) induction (Feb 2017). (1)
 11. Regular engagement with SWAN Champions via CIRG representation and annual meeting with Queen's Gender Initiative Director to align these initiatives (next monitoring point January 2017). (6)

Connection to Research Strategy 2015 – 2020: Background and Relevant initiatives to be delivered:

The University's new Research Strategy aims to foster a vibrant postgraduate and postdoctoral community, growing both cohorts, drawing them into our wider research culture, and providing the highest-quality learning and training environment. A number of initiatives have been agreed to encourage this process, which will compliment and support the implementation of the Concordat Action Plan:

- The first round of a new Queen's University Fellowship Scheme attracted 15 excellent early-career researchers, and we aim to issue a further call for applications during this strategy period by 2020. This Scheme includes access to an enabling fund (approx. £50k annually) for professional and career development, alongside support from a dedicated mentor.
- We will continue to provide excellent career development support for our existing researchers via the annual programme of training and other support, including access to conference funds specially targeted at early-career researchers to support their development and networking;
- Queen's commitment to the Concordat/EC Charter and Code for Researcher Development has been recognised through the European Commission HR Excellence in Research Award – the Research Strategy commits Queen's to maintaining this recognition;
- Queen's has already taken additional steps to raise the profile of Postdoctoral Research Associates:
 - A Post-Doc Forum was established, alongside the current Postgraduate Forum, to bring the views and experiences of these researchers to wider attention, and to support networking amongst researchers at this stage of career (commenced in 2015 with 3 meetings to be scheduled annually)
 - A PDRA research prize was established as part of a suite of Vice-Chancellor's awards (first award presented in 2015)
 - The first annual early career researchers research showcase 'New Voices: New Impact' was held on 18 November 2015 to publicise the work performed by this group of staff, and to provide a platform for researchers at this career stage to engage the public and research users.

Appendix 1: Associated documents and links

- Further information on the development support provided to Queen's Research Staff is available from the Research Staff [website](#).
- [Queen's University Researcher Career Development Guidance Booklet: \(PDF Download\)](#)
- Vision 2020 website <http://www.qub.ac.uk/home/Vision2020/>
- Current Corporate Plan 2011 – 2016 (to be revised in 2016 up to 2020)
<http://www.qub.ac.uk/home/TheUniversity/AboutQueens/CorporatePlan2011-16/>
- Queen's Human Resources Strategy available to all staff via Queen's Online intranet
- <http://www.qub.ac.uk/directorates/HumanResources/PersonnelDepartment/A-ZInformation/#d.en.368699>
- Vice Chancellor's Annual Report/corporate copy including the DNA of Innovation Series
<http://www.qub.ac.uk/home/TheUniversity/AboutQueens/CoreUniversityPublications/>
- Human Resources website: <http://www.qub.ac.uk/directorates/HumanResources/>
- Research and Enterprise website: <http://www.qub.ac.uk/directorates/ResearchEnterprise/>
- [Information on the Concordat Implementation Review Group](#)
- [Equal Opportunities Office - Queen's Gender Initiative](#) and information on the Institutional Silver Athena SWAN Award
- 'New Voices: New Impact' showcase
<http://www.qub.ac.uk/directorates/ResearchEnterprise/News/NewsArticles/Name,538780,en.html>
- Vice-Chancellor's Research Prizes:
<http://www.qub.ac.uk/directorates/ResearchEnterprise/Impact/SupportforImpact/VCPrizes/>