

Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers

HR Excellence in Research Two Year Review, January 2014

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). 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.

Through these processes, a proposal to continuously review and enhance existing processes in relation to the management, training and career development of researchers was approved. This resulted in an action plan, which highlighted a number of key actions and responsibilities for the 2011-13. This was aligned to Concordat principles, and the UK –wide process to gain the European Commission's "HR Excellence in Research Award".

Process

This is the two year review in accordance with the HR Excellence in Research recommendations. The review recognises the progress and good practice that exists and also gives an opportunity to acknowledge that there is still room for improvement and areas which require attention and need to progress further; these are addressed 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 Acting Vice-Chancellor, other Senior Management, Directors of Research Forum and Chairs of School-based research societies in 2013 and early 2014. These meetings raised awareness of the action plan and secured the input of Directors of Research, senior management and research staff representatives into the review and content of the documentation. These meetings were particularly beneficial in updating progress, redefining actions and responsibilities, discussing how actions could be implemented and securing support for further engagement.

CIRG (see [link](#) below for membership and terms of reference) includes academic staff, researchers and professional support staff who bring expertise from their individual roles to the group. It is expected that the group will be able to influence issues in relation to the Concordat action plan and act collectively to monitor, recommend, develop and implement initiatives in the Institutional action plan.

A number of CIRG members are also SWAN champions in Schools. Queen's has been named as the lead university in the United Kingdom for tackling the unequal representation of women in science and engineering. It is the only UK University to be awarded a Silver institutional honor at the Athena SWAN Charter awards, which recognise the commitment of institutions, and science, engineering and technology (SET) departments, to addressing gender inequalities and improving career progression for female academics. These SWAN champions have highlighted the links between SWAN initiatives and the actions of the CIRG to support the career development of all research staff.

Queen's continues to engage 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:

- Concordat Implementation Review Group
- Senior management boards and committees receive reports and recommendations;
- Careers in Research Online Survey;

- 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.

Ownership and Key Stakeholders

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

- Vice-Chancellor
- Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Postgraduates
- 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.

Key Achievements and Areas of Progress against the Original Plan

The attached Implementation Plan has been updated to reflect and detail the progress made and actions to be taken over the next two years. A number of these are worth noting:

1. One important output of the original working group was to publish a guidance booklet which sets out how the Concordat principles are being implemented in the University and provides guidance on how researchers might expect to develop their careers in the short and longer term. The guide was produced by reviewing policies and procedures and actual working practice over many years in relation to employment and development of research colleagues. The CIRG and Directors of Research have noted the value of this resource and the need to ensure it is up to date and circulated as widely as possible.
2. Active HR Excellence in Research working group to update the action plan and review priorities – the group meets bi-annually and has liaised with senior management and Directors of Research forum;
3. Best practice initiatives throughout Queen's in relation to employment, training and support for research staff have been gathered and recorded. The CIRG is now reviewing best practice and establishing how this could be promoted as a reference and guide for others.
4. Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS) 2011 completed;
5. Alignment of researcher training and development (T&D) provision with the Researcher Development Framework (RDF);
6. In order to support researcher development at local level, the Research Training and Development Fund was launched in 2012/13 in conjunction with the International Student and Postgraduate Centre to enable groups of researchers to initiate development activity to meet their own needs and receive some financial assistance.
7. Emergence of researcher societies in 7 schools covering the majority of contract research staff. These societies drive their own programmes of activities to share knowledge in research activities and encourage locally based development and career progression seminars;
8. Ongoing programme of centrally delivered T&D for research staff – this comprehensive, bespoke programme includes:
 - a. new courses annually e.g. an ILM accredited programme for research leadership, The Engaging Researcher and Collaborative Researcher programmes have all been introduced;
 - b. courses and interventions refined and updated to reflect best practice;
 - c. collaborations across the University;
 - d. involvement of dedicated internal facilitators, researchers, academic staff and external expertise where necessary;
 - e. Research Staff attendance at central training programme workshops has continued to increase since the Researcher Development Programme was launched in 2005-06, when 297 course attendances were recorded, to 562 recorded attendances in 2012-13
9. Increase on uptake of career development T&D programmes, 20% between 2012-13 and 2010-11, including group seminars, 1:1 support and opportunities to focus on employer engagement;
10. The continued monitoring of the completion of appraisal by research staff, has found that in 2011-12 97% completed appraisal, with 99% completing appraisal in 2013-13.
11. Development of improved researcher development web-pages;
12. EURAXESS – Queen's research posts now advertised via the Euraxess Researchers in Motion website which is linked to the HR Excellence in Research initiative to provide a comprehensive portal of information and

support services to researchers seeking employment throughout Europe. Queen's is a UK local access point for Euraxess in this region.

Alignment of Resources and Services

Human Resources also offer a "territorial" approach with HR staff working in partnership with individual Schools. This has provided significant benefits to supporting the effective recruitment of research staff (along with other staff categories) and to address issues in relation to probation, induction, appraisal and redeployment. Training and Development also remains a dedicated central resource for staff. This approach has been well received and highly rated in annual Service Quality surveys undertaken with academic departments.

In addition, during 2011-2013, Queen's has undertaken a process to reshape one of the most important services supporting research in the University. The Research and Enterprise Directorate supports talented researchers, helping them to take their innovative work from original idea, through concept and development, to economic and societal impact.

The re-shaping of this support service has been driven by a research and enterprise landscape that is rapidly changing and increasingly complex – this has required Queen's to think about a radically different approach to helping those researchers, students and businesses served. The aim is to provide holistic support to researchers and a 'one stop shop' for external partners. The Directorate has formed 8 teams, each specialising in a different area of support, much of which is structured on a Faculty-facing basis. This has resulted in a more collaborative approach to supporting researchers and will have an impact on delivering the aims of the HR Excellence in Research Action Plan in future years.

Next Steps and Priorities for 2014-16

1. Development for those who manage researchers – this will include face-to-face training or workshops for those new to researcher management roles and additional online resources. This is likely to include common issues such as induction, appraisal and career development. This was clearly identified as a gap by the CIRG and it will ensure that staff with responsibility for managing researchers understand what is required and are better equipped to undertake this role. This development programme will be designed and piloted with a group of staff by July 2015.
2. Communication Plan – to include further distribution of Queen's guide booklet, the HR Excellence in Research Action Plan, CROS and PIRLS survey work and key points from Concordat Implementation Review Group meetings. Again a clear gap was identified in the ongoing awareness of the Concordat principles, Queen's response and related resources, policies and procedures available to staff. The CROS includes a question about respondent's awareness of the Concordat. In 2009 41% of Queen's respondents to CROS stated that they were aware of the Concordat by CROS 2011 this had increased to 61% of respondents. Through the development of a communications plan Queen's would wish to have 80% of Queen's respondents to CROS 2015 state that they were aware of the Concordat.
3. Further survey and engagement work by undertaking CROS survey 2015 and PIRLS survey 2015 – this will give an opportunity to benchmark engagement with Queen's staff against comparable survey results nationwide, track progress with previous Queen's CROS reports and a first opportunity to conduct the Principle Investigators and Research Leaders Survey in 2015.
4. Seek opportunities to secure sufficient resource to support work in the HR Excellence in Research Action Plan through emerging University strategy (in particular the 2014 Institutional Research Strategy) and resource allocation mechanisms;
5. Capture a range of research staff related data, to include training, staff numbers, recruitment, progression and exit information;
6. Improve attendance at central and local induction events for research staff. During 2012-13 only 25% of staff with a new contract attended the central induction event. Through the actions contained in updated implementation plan, Queen's ambition is to have 80% of new research staff attending the central induction events.
7. Annual refinement of centrally delivered T&D programme for researchers based on best practice, identified needs and staff evaluation/feedback;
8. In CROS 2011 58% of Queen's respondents stated that they had not undertaken any of the specific career development activities provided by the University, e.g. courses and one-one support, but would wish to do so in the future. The numbers doing so increased by 20% in 2012-13 and Queen's would wish to see a similar increase in 2013-14 and 2014-15.

9. Provide targeted support for local (School – based) researcher societies to provide opportunities for them to establish and engage with each other;
10. Improved support for coaching and mentoring of research staff;
11. As well as highlighting best practice, there is also a need to identify and address areas of inconsistency in management, support and development of researchers.

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)
- Corporate Plan 2011-16 <http://www.qub.ac.uk/home/TheUniversity/AboutQueens/CorporatePlan2011-16/>
- Queen's Human Resources Strategy available to all staff via Queen's Online intranet
- Vice Chancellor's Annual Report/corporate copy
<http://www.qub.ac.uk/home/ceao/CorporateCommunications/CorporateCopy/>
- 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](#)
- [Athena SWAN Silver Award](#) - [Equal Opportunities Office](#) - [Queen's Gender Initiative](#)