

Report

Title: HR Excellence in Research Award – 6 year internal review

From: Professor Mandy Fader, Chair of the Career Development of Researchers Working Group (CDR WG), and Dr Julie Reeves, Centre for Higher Education Practice (CHEP) **Date:** 24 May 2018

6 year progress report on behalf of Professor Mark Spearing, Vice President Research & Enterprise

Background

The University of Southampton achieved the HR Excellence in Research Award in January 2012. Our approach towards implementation has always been collegiate and, since December 2011, under the direction of the *Career Development of Researchers Working Group* (CDR WG). The CDR WG has collective oversight of the implementation of the Concordat and consists of representatives from all of the key University stakeholders including: research staff, the Faculties through their Concordat Champions, Human Resources (HR), researcher development through the Centre for Higher Education Practice (CHEP), the Diversity Team, the Careers Service, the University and College Union (UCU), and the International Office. The Chair of the CDR WG is a member of the University Executive Board and works closely with the President/Vice Chancellor and Vice-President Research and Enterprise.

The 2011 strategy stated we would take a four phased approach towards implementation: 1) to identify and address University level actions, 2) to address the individual level i.e. keeping research staff and Principal Investigators (PIs) and managers of researchers informed and encouraging them to engage with the Concordat principles, 3) to encourage Faculty level and Academic Unit level actions and 4) to monitor and review progress, and improve our communication mechanisms. We have made progress in all four areas and our strategic approach remains unchanged. Full details of CDR WG meetings and plans can be found at: <http://www.southampton.ac.uk/waar/concordat.page> (Also see tabs for sub-pages). *NB: Reference is made to specific action points throughout this report and contained in brackets.*

How the internal review was undertaken

The CDR WG held meetings on: 21 April 2016, 30 June 2016, 04 May 2017, 13 July 2017, 18 December 2017, and 16 April 2018. Special meetings were held on 8 February 2018, to review CROS 2017 data and on 14 May 2018, to review this submission. An open meeting on CROS 2017 was held on 21 February 2018 for all staff, and the Faculty of Medicine also held a local CROS meeting. Faculties also held regular meetings, for example: The Faculty of Humanities ECR Committee, with ECR representatives from all departments, has met once a semester since 2016 on 3 October 2016, 7 March 2017, 31 October 2017, 20 February 2018. The regularity of Faculty and University level meetings ensures continuity of progress.

Beginning in May 2017, the CDR WG began to revisit and review the major tasks and specific actions of the original plan. Three meetings (February-March), were held between the Chair of the CDR WG, Researcher Developer, the VP Research and Enterprise, and the HR Directors, to review the action plan and how to strengthen implementation processes and mechanisms. The CDR WG Chair and Researcher Developer met every 2 months to discuss the review and issues affecting research staff more widely. A [resourcing plan](#) was drawn up in January 2018 indicating which actions required information and the number of hours involved.

The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manager, Equality Charters Adviser and Researcher Developer aligned the Concordat Action Plan with the Athena SWAN Action Plan and agreed a template for gathering mutual data. The Careers Service (see 4.2), International Office (3.1), [Public Engagement with Research unit](#), PublicPolicy@Southampton unit, [ICURE](#), [LifeLab](#) (all 5.2) and Leadership and Management-HR (2.3 & 5.3) team were all consulted and contributed data/evidence of their work with research staff.

The University participated in [CROS 2017](#) and reviewed the qualitative and quantitative data. Key areas of achievement and concern that emerged from CROS were incorporated into the review of the University Action Plan. However, there were no new actions arising from CROS data as the key areas, such as around maternity leave (see 6.2), support for PIs (5.3), management of FTCs (1.2), and teaching issues (5.2) had already been identified and noted for action previously.

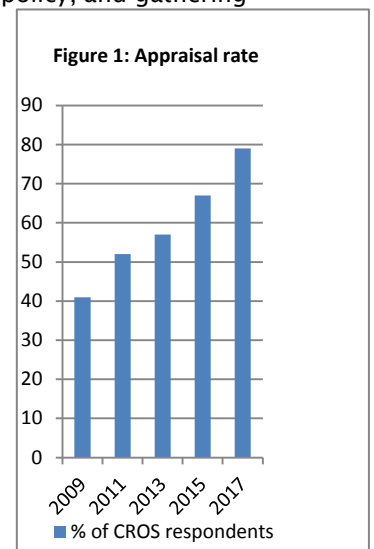
How research staff were involved in the review

- Numbers of research staff vary considerably within Faculties, from fewer than 10 staff and up to 350; therefore each Faculty has established its own method for research staff to meet, discuss and feedback their thoughts, concerns and suggestions around key issues. As each Faculty has different requirements, a variety of approaches have been used, for instance, there have been Dean's roadshows i.e. visits to researchers in each department of the Faculty of Natural & Environmental Sciences (FNES); one-to-one discussions with staff where numbers are small (Business Law & Arts-FBLA; Humanities); fixed-term staff forums (Health Sciences); discussion groups (Engineering & Environment-FEE); regular meetings with ECR representatives (FNES; Humanities) and formal committee meetings (Medicine; Humanities).
- Research Staff representatives on the CDR WG have been actively engaged in discussing the Concordat and the Action Plan, and led on discussions at Faculty level (i.e. FNES).
- Faculty Concordat Champions and representatives of key departments in the University also fed ideas gleaned from research staff into the CDR WG discussions.
- Research Staff have been invited (via email) to share their thoughts directly and independently to the Researcher Developer in CHEP.
- Research staff were involved in *all* Athena SWAN self-assessment teams.

Key achievements (2012-2018)

Structural improvements – At University level, research staff representation and support mechanisms have been vastly improved since 2011/12, particularly with the establishment of the CDR WG. The Faculty Concordat Champions have played a key role in encouraging and embedding research staff contributions; ensuring continuity of practice and activity for a transient staff population. Since 2016, it has been a real advantage to have the CDR WG Chair as a member of the University Executive Board, raising matters at the highest executive level. Closer collaborative working between the ED&I committee and the CDR WG since 2017 has also ensured combined effort on raising shared issues i.e. maternity leave policy, and gathering ED&I data/evidence.

HR processes: Changes to the HR structure and processes mean 90% of CROS 2017 respondents reported receiving a written **job description** (up from 69% in 2011). We introduced the OTM-R checklist in 2016 and revisit it on an annual basis (see 1.3). We reviewed the career pathways and introduced clearer processes for promotion and transfer across pathways. These changes make it easier to identify 'research only staff' – a major improvement since 2014. The introduction of an online appraisal system under the Academic Reward Project of 2014-16 has proven instrumental in ensuring research staff are included fully in this important process, with Deans able to chase any outstanding appraisals. CROS data confirms our participation rates have improved steadily from 41% in 2009 to 79% in 2017 – see *Figure 1*. Indeed, the impact of the changes to the appraisal process was dramatically reflected in CROS 2017 against a benchmarking group, i.e. we had fewer staff who were not invited to appraisals (10% against 33%) and a greater number of staff who knew why they were not invited (37% compared with 10% of the benchmarking group). We have seen a remarkable improvement in those reporting the appraisal leading to change: in 2017, 76% of respondents reported that the process was '**leading to changes in work practices**', whereas in 2013, only 46% stated the appraisal had led to work practice change.



Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: CROS data shows we increased the number of staff undertaking E&D training from 24% in 2013, to 59% in 2017 and placing us ahead of the Russell Group. Our internal data in 2018 records 74% of staff undertaking this training. Similar growth has been seen in the knowledge of the Athena SWAN charter, which was 21% in 2013 and 58% in 2017. Currently the majority of Faculty Champions also sit on the ED&I committee, and after 1st August 2018, they all will. The University was awarded a Silver Athena SWAN award in October 2016 (having first achieved a bronze in 2006), and we have achieved 4 departmental Silver SWAN awards, meeting goals set in 2015. We also hold 5 departmental bronze awards and in 2018 became the first University to achieve Disability Confident Leader status.

We created the **Working as a Researcher** website as a key information site for research staff, containing professional development advice and specialist information on 'career management' and for 'women in academia'. In the 2017 CROS data, 60% of respondents reported they had career plans and placing us ahead of the Russell Group, whilst in our *Faculty of Humanities 100% of respondents* reported they had a career development plan! In 2013-14, research staff attained access to the Careers Service and a specialist Career Practitioner and Professional Coach was appointed who introduced 1-2-1 coaching sessions, drop-in careers advice to research staff, and workshops. In 2017, he remodelled the approach to delivering careers support to research staff to make it more responsive to researchers' needs (see Principles 3 & 4 below).

Faculty Achievements: At Faculty level, Concordat Champions have become further embedded in their Faculty structures, with all Champions reporting to their senior management. We expect to enhance these relationships in the new structure (see below). Each [Faculty has its own action plan](#), which facilitates local change. Importantly, we have seen an increase in the formal representation of research staff (and teaching

fellows) at Academic unit/department level. We have not only improved the integration of staff but increasingly the researcher representatives are taking on greater responsibility from Faculty Champions. For example, the Faculty of Humanities, responding to concerns raised locally added a new strand of *ECR Representation* to their action plan. They established ECR reps in each department who sit on an *ECR Faculty Committee*. The Faculty then identified a list of strategic Faculty level committees where ECR representation would be appropriate and the Faculty ECR Committee has arranged for ECRs to sit on each of these committees (see Action 2.2 in the University plan). Whilst in FNES, the Champion enables research staff to run events they had decided on as a community (see 5.1).

Further key achievements and progress against each Principle, 2016 to 2018, include:

Principle 1 – Recruitment and Selection. Greater Early Career Researcher participation has been recorded in Induction. CROS 2017 data confirmed improvement in those being offered Induction, with 53% reporting they were not offered one in 2011, reduced to 26% not being offered a University induction in 2017.

Principle 2 – Recognition and Value. 7 Faculties have held 'Dean's Awards'. The Faculties of Medicine & Health, and FNES, all offer awards for best papers at their Faculty conferences, and Medicine introduced a 'most supportive PI' award in 2018. Complaints in Humanities about the lack of transparency over promotions led to a development session in May 2017, which following feedback is now an annual event.

Principles 3 & 4 – Equipped and supported & Personal and Career Development. All Faculties offer their staff access to professional development funding. Whilst reduced resourcing at University level inevitably limited central provision in terms of traditional courses; however, this is viewed as an opportunity to improve online support and move towards a blended approach i.e. we created a career roadmap template. The Faculties continued to provide support and 6 have enhanced their offer (see 5.1) i.e. Medicine have a transferable skills programme, Humanities a continuing programme of regular development sessions on topics of interest to ECRs including funding, internationalisation, careers outside academia; FBLA and FEE hold bespoke seminars. FNES held a Dean's roadshow visit to the 3 academic units to discuss research staff experience, which then informed their Action plan. FNES also held a very successful biennial careers conference organised by postdocs with the Champion. Humanities have set up a two-year cycle of flagship events to improve ECR visibility and collaboration between ECRs in the Faculty with Summer Presentations (even years) and Networking and Fostering Collaboration Event (odd years). In 2017, Careers moved away from orthodox central careers interventions also and introduced 'portable and adaptable' provision. Sessions are organised by local champions with the specialist Careers Practitioner, closely reflecting local needs (4.2).

Principle 5 – Researchers' responsibilities. In FEE, research staff organise a regular career development seminar series, inviting relevant guests/contributors. In FNES, research staff are supported to organise events they want, i.e. on grant writing, and have requested further support on specific topics, such as the REF and career progression. CROS 2017 data indicates that 60% of respondents reported they had a career plan, exceeding our target of 55% set in 2016.

Principle 6 – Diversity and Equality. The ED&I team and CDR WG have always worked closely together, and from 2017 established greater strategic synthesis, with the Concordat now part of the ED&I committee and evidencing of the 2020 action plan aligned with the Athena SWAN plan. Athena SWAN actions have also impacted on Faculty plans, for example Medicine and FEE established a returners fund/scheme.

Principle 7 – Regular Review. There are current actions to improve data gathering and reporting from all stakeholders (e.g. 1.4, 3.1 & 5.2). The CDR WG and ED&I agreed on the data required and to introduce a common template so that we are not duplicating requests. In 2017, the Vice President (Research and Enterprise) and the CDR WG Chair agreed to review progress annually with the People Plan strategic lead, and Researcher Developer.

- In conducting this 6 year review, it has become apparent that organic growth, in terms of local responses to local need facilitated by local champions, has been a notable change since 2016.

Strategic Focus (2018 – 2020)

Our review to date, indicates that the majority of our actions up to 2020 are on track and that we have completed a few (i.e. 1.3) and have exceeded our expectations in others, i.e. on improving appraisals (2.3) and our Athena SWAN awards (6.1) Our immediate strategic focus is to safeguard and build on our current progress as we prepare for a restructure of the University in August 2018. The CDR WG is consulting on how to improve the reporting mechanisms and we want to increase the number of Concordat Champions in the new structure from 1 per Faculty to at least 2 per Faculty (i.e. from 5 to 10), and the number of research staff representatives in the new Schools.

We have significantly improved our processes and procedures and have seen quantitative improvements, and we will continue to monitor our internal data. However we will begin to focus on qualitative aspects of the research staff experience i.e. by 2020 we aim to have piloted provision for PIs in at least one academic area (and in addition to existing Leadership and Management provision), have improved internal data reporting (and we have the HR structure to gather better data now), and explored the qualitative issues surrounding appraisals in 2 academic areas – this last is already a strategic focus for Health Sciences and FNES as a result of research staff feedback (5.3). We are aiming for an institutional gold submission to Athena SWAN in 2019.

On-going improvements: Two actions are outstanding i.e. 4.3, where we are looking into the new Academic Professional Apprenticeship, and 7.4, as we have yet to hold a steering group review with the Vice-President. Although we have not made as much progress as we would have liked in addressing maternity leave issues, CPD, PI training, teacher training; we do expect to have improved our advice on maternity leave, FTCs, career management (including 2 additional career roadmaps), teaching training opportunities and support for PIs, and to report greater progress in these areas in 2020. *End of report.*