

University of Liverpool - Concordat Implementation Group
HR Excellence in Research Award – two year evaluation report - September 2013

This report summarises the University's internal review and progress made to the actions set out in the 2011 implementation plan.

1. Outline of internal review process

The internal review was led by the Concordat Implementation Group (CIG). The Group, comprising representation from a range of academic, research and professional services staff, coordinated the review of the initial plan (submitted in September 2011). Over the past two years, a core Team of four members met on a monthly basis to ensure progress and revision of the plan as needed. The extended CIG team met four times per year.

As part of the two year review process, the review was informed by:

- The analysis of data collected from two surveys (over two iterations)
 - CROS & PIRLS 2011; CROS & PIRLS 2013
- Direct input from each faculty Research Lead; Research and Knowledge Exchange Manager; Faculty Director of operations
- The members of the CIG Group representing central services of the University (including Research Policy, Human Resources, Researcher Development Programme, Research Staff Representatives)

In addition, the views of research staff were taken into account through three focus groups with researchers from each faculty of the University that took place in the summer of 2013; the 2012 & 2013 research staff conference and the 2011 & 2013 CROS surveys.

2. Key achievements against original action plan (period 2011 to 2013)

- A key achievement for the University since the submission of the 2011 implementation plan has been the creation and establishment of CIG at the University. The Group has been responsible for the ongoing monitoring and revision of the implementation plan that was mapped onto the 2008 Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers. The Group's Chair (senior academic) regularly reports progress made to the University's Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee.
- Previous CROS data (2011, 2013) brought up issues in relation to the quality and effectiveness of communication with research staff in relation to key institutional processes and policies that relate to their status and employment conditions. In response to this, over the past two years CIG led the development or contributed to the following initiatives:
 - a. *Development of two Guides*; one for research staff and one for Principal Investigators. The guides present the essential processes and mechanisms that are available to researchers for supporting their personal and professional development. This includes training and development mechanisms, relevant policy documentation and key contacts that are available at the institution and each faculty. In addition, national and international resources are highlighted in the guides to broaden the researchers' awareness beyond their immediate discipline specific sources. The PI guide presents the University's expectations for supporting and developing research staff.
 - b. *Website redesign*; the research staff website has been redesigned to provide up-to-date information and extend its reach beyond university of Liverpool related resources. An electronic booking system links directly to each researcher's central Portfolio of Activity and populates any development activities they undertake. Further work on the website is in progress as the Group aims to join up all web resources from PhD candidates to senior researchers into a one-stop-shop type of website (the 'Researcher Hub') that provides a complete overview of the University's research environment.
 - c. *Online training*; all staff of the University are required to complete an Obligatory Training Framework consisting of a range of online modules in induction, Diversity & Equality, Health and Safety and Information Security.
 - d. *Athena Swan*; The University has held the Institutional Bronze Award since 2010 and it has re-applied for the award in April 2013. Athena SWAN has been embedded in STEM subjects and Athena SWAN

leads and working groups have been established in 10 Schools and Institutes. A University Athena SWAN Steering group has been established, chaired by the Vice Chancellor. The Institute of Ageing and Chronic Disease, Institute of Infection and Global Health and Institute of Learning and Teaching applied for Athena SWAN Silver departmental awards in April 2013. The remaining schools and institutes are working to apply for departmental awards by 2015. A Female Early Career Research network is currently being developed, as well as Women in Engineering student society.

- CIG has led the calls for creating research staff representation forums in each faculty. A briefing paper was presented in 2012 making recommendations for designing and running the proposed forums. The paper was sent to each faculty research lead. As part of the review that was undertaken to establish the communication and representation structures of research staff in each faculty, a number of local forums have now appeared and have started to function in each faculty. The majority of forums are researcher led and each faculty has developed processes for the reporting and representation to take place and inform wider faculty specific initiatives. CIG will continue to provide support for the faculty based forums and therefore will benefit from a pool of research staff representatives in future meetings of the extended CIG that feed towards future development initiatives.
- The annual Research Staff conference continues to provide valuable information for research staff in relation to their career development, awareness of conditions of employment and wider institutional policy. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Knowledge Exchange engages with researchers in a Q&A panel discussion whilst HR managers provide employment and contracts related support on a one-to-one basis at the time of the conference. The conference is organised by a committee consisting of research staff from all faculties. A consultation questionnaire is sent out to all researchers during the planning phase of the event in order to identify the focus of the event based on feedback received by research staff. According to CROS (2011 and 2013), the researcher conference remains a valuable resource for researchers to engage with the University's senior management and discuss challenges they face.
- Since 2012, a new online version of the Professional Development Review (PDR) is available to all staff offering distinct advantages in the planning and delivery of the process. Based on CROS results over the past two iterations (2011 & 2013), the participation of University research staff in annual PDR reviews has increased steadily and the new online system has simplified the process which should improve the effectiveness and quality of the dialogue between the researcher and their reviewer. Research Staff are also expected to initiate and maintain an electronic 'Portfolio of Activity' which becomes an online CV and live repository of all relevant academic activity, which is intended to inform PDR discussions but which can also provide evidence of activity relevant to promotion and progression.
- The University recognises all staff who accrue four years service as a result of two or more fixed-term contracts as being permanent. The University is successful in identifying redeployment options for more than 60% of its researchers employed on fixed term contracts and has introduced an electronic process which allows individuals to identify suitable alternative roles and secure preferential interviews. HR Managers maintain a close awareness of the progress of redeployment cases and maintain consistent contact with individuals throughout the process. To allow all alternative opportunities to be explored, the University contact individuals whose fixed contracts are due to expire 8 months and their PIs/Head of Departments before the end date of their contract to ensure that individual consultation takes place and other options are considered in detail.
- The Implementation of the Researcher Development Framework (RDF) is ongoing and this remains a priority for CIG in relation to this review and future plans for supporting research staff (over the 2013-2015 period). Currently, training and development opportunities are fully aligned to the RDF and researchers are made aware of the framework during their induction to the institution. In addition, a bimonthly stand-alone workshop is organised to offer research staff the opportunity to explore the framework and discuss with their peers its implementation towards supporting their development. Furthermore, PIs who participate in leadership training programmes engage with the framework and apply it in the planning of development strategies for researchers they employ in their research groups.

CIG will continue to embed the RDF in the development strategy for research staff and support PIs in this endeavour. Based on the last CROS results (2013) research staff continue to value the generic development opportunities that are made available to them at the institution. A need for more specialist type of development is emerging and appropriate planning will take place in upcoming meetings between members of CIG and faculty staff.

3. Next Steps

For CIG, that operates centrally and across the faculty structure of the university, a top item in the plans over the next two years will be to enhance links with the three University faculties through the Research and Knowledge Exchange Managers. This will provide institutional alignment of central provision with faculty specific work making distribution of resources more effective and targeted. As part of this alignment, CIG will benefit from appropriate representation from research staff which will enhance the effectiveness and reach of the Group across the different areas of the institution.

CIG is committed to continue paying close attention to the improvement and enhancement of communication strategies with research staff. The two Guides will be reviewed on a frequent basis to ensure they offer the latest developments and updated policy related information. A comprehensive website structure will also support the enhancement of communication links between research staff and the Group. More development work in this area will continue over the next two years (2013-2015)

Furthermore, the implementation of the latest Concordat to support research integrity will be an essential aspect of the Group's commitment to maintain integrity in every aspect of research practice within the Institution. Research Staff had the opportunity to discuss the Concordat at the last research staff conference (May 2013) and the Group will continue to engage with existing processes that manage and coordinate research governance at the University.

As already discussed, CIG will continue to embed the Researcher Development Framework to support the development of researchers via its central and faculty based development provision. In addition, the next step will be to provide PIs with relevant support so they can also benefit and fully engage with the RDF. The implementation of the RDF for all researchers is seen as a valuable tool for supporting the review meetings between researchers and their PIs during the PDR process.

In the implementation plan, presented in a separate document, we present further proposed actions that will continue to be supported and reviewed over the next 2 years. These are of strategic importance to the university's research environment and the development of research staff.

CIG will continue to report to the University's Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee in order to keep in touch and respond to new institutional priorities and developments. Close links will also be maintained with other professional services divisions as needed.

Success measures

- CIG will continue collecting evidence from the latest (2013) and previous CROS/PIRLS surveys in order to measure progress and enhance the experience and engagement of research staff within the university's research environment
- With the development of research staff forums in all faculties, enhanced representation will be in place at future CIG meetings. This will provide clear insights towards researcher development practice across relevant areas of the University
- The effectiveness of the new PDR portal will be monitored and appropriate support will be offered to research staff and PIs in order to continue engaging productively with the annual review process
- The implementation of the RDF and PI development will feed into the new PDR as a success measure and workshops will continue to be organised to support researchers in realising and benefiting from university and national initiatives relating to researcher development
- CIG will provide support to all departments in the university that apply for the Athena Swan Awards