HR Excellence in Research Award September 2016

Progress Report - 6 Year Evaluation and Review

Overview

Durham University was awarded its "HR Excellence in Research" status in 2011 in recognition of the University's alignment of its recruitment and management of early-career researchers with the principles of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers. This was retained through a 2-year internal review in 2013 and through external review in 2015. This short report and the associated action plan outline our process and progress to date in supporting and implementing the principles in the UK Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers.

How was the 6-year internal review undertaken?

Overall responsibility in reviewing and evaluating progress against our action plan sits with the Concordat Implementation Group (CIG), chaired by the Dean for Research (Professor Colin Bain). The group includes from the Deputy Director of Human Resources, the Associate Director of the Centre for Academic, Researcher and Organisation Development (CAROD), and representatives of the Equality and Diversity Team, the Colleges, Research and Innovation Services (RIS) and the UCU. Research staff membership of CIG is provided via the Research Staff Association (RSA) leadership team, who are elected by the research staff community and serve to represent the voice of contracted researchers within the University structure. The RSA meets regularly with its members to feedback issues to the CIG. The HR Excellence in Research Award forms part of a larger package of University strategies and implementation mechanisms which positively impact the career and professional development support and opportunities for our researchers. As such the award is considered alongside the University Strategic Plan 2017–2027[1] and within this the University People Strategy. The 6-year Evaluation and Review is part of a continuous process of review rather than a 'one-off' event:

- An internal evaluation of progress against the 2015 action plan is undertaken by CIG three times each year. This involves consultation with colleagues from Colleges, CAROD, CEEC, HR, RSA and UCU.
- The views of researchers were taken into account through engagement with the 2017 CROS survey, through regular networking events with the RSA, and the Concordat Implementation Group itself. The results of CROS2017 were considered by the CIG in June 2017 and a report submitted to the University Research Committee. Revised targets were adopted for CROS2019.
- A draft of this internal evaluation and action plan was reviewed by CIG in October 2017 before submission to Vitae.

Key achievements and progress against the 2015 action plan

Full details of progress against the four-year review actions are provided in the updated action plan document. A summary of highlights from the last two years is provided here:

Progress against Principles 1&2: Recruitment, Selection, Recognition and Value

- In 2016/17 we introduced a new Appointments Policy that ensures all appointments, including internal leadership and development opportunities, are openly advertised. As measured by CROS 2017, satisfaction levels with the recruitment process were over 90%.

---

1. https://www.dur.ac.uk/strategy2027/

- In consultation with staff, we developed a new Annual Development Review process, with a new form designed specifically for contracted research staff. We then saw in CROS 2017 an overall increase in staff finding the ADR beneficial from the 50% return in 2015 to 70% in 2017.

Progress against Principles 3&4

- The Research Staff Association (RSA) has been formed following an election, with chairs for each faculty and an overall chair elected in 2016. The RSA has gone on to lead a number of events across the institution and holds a seat on Research Committee to represent the research staff community.
- A LinkedIn platform has been developed, along with a website for the Research Staff Association, to allow contact between postdocs whilst with us and in their subsequent careers.
- A new training website for research staff has been developed as part of the CAROD pages with links to further details of online and face to face training opportunities. This has led to an increase from 35% (CROS 2015) to over 50% (CROS 2017) engagement with training opportunities. In addition, over 70% of research staff actively engage in University induction, up from 40% in 2015. Over 200 research staff members have attended development events in 2016/7 and feedback on these events has on average score of 4.8/5 for event appreciation.
- A new training portal has been developed with links to pages with further details and the online training booking system. In addition, all research staff now have access to the Careers Service Portal.
- A range of new workshops have been developed including 'Alumni Stories' (series of sessions featuring Durham alumni who will share their professional journey outside of academia) and 'Meet the Employer' (series of sessions featuring employers that value, and can utilise, the skills, knowledge and expertise developed by researchers).
- Places on the award-nominated Leading Research programme are actively promoted to research staff, as are places on the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice programme.
- 84% of CROS17 participants indicated that they are actively encouraged to engage with personal and career development, with over 90% taking active ownership of it.

Progress against Principle 5

- A new Research Integrity e-Learning tool has been developed and promoted to early-career researchers, along with a suite of e-learning and face-to-face learning opportunities.
- We have developed and implemented a mentoring programme specifically targeting research staff. Each academic department now has a research staff coordinator, who has developed a network of mentors, each of whom has received training to support them in their role. Every member of research staff now has the option of mentoring for an individual who is not their PI.

Progress against Principle 6

- We have extended our approach to all areas of E&D using the model used to develop the gender action plan; consultation on this has taken place with staff via an online questionnaire, with follow-up focus groups exploring emerging issues.
- We have fresh Equality Objectives and supporting Action Plans to 2020 and have sponsored a recurrent Daphne Jackson Fellowship.

- Our Gender Equality Action Plan aims to improve our policies and practices to take better account of work/life balance.
- We have concluded a review of our Nursery Open Hours.
- Equality and Diversity training for all staff can now take place through a University created e-learning package.
- We continue to engage in the Women in Academia Coaching & Mentoring programme. All science departments have gained at least Athena Swann Bronze level awards, and an institutional submission for Athena Swann will occur in early 2018.

Progress against Principle 7

- The Dean for Research has presented on research staff development to all Faculty Boards, jump-starting the Research Staff Mentoring Programme.
- A research staff conference takes places annually, with presentations from the Dean for Research, HR, CAROD, the RSA and UCU.

Strategy and Success Measures beyond 2017

Having reviewed our progress against targets set in 2015, we've identified key areas for work over the next two years, namely:

Strategies to support Principles 1&2: Recruitment, Selection, Recognition and Value

- We will review the effectiveness of our new promotion procedures in 2017/8 for contracted research staff and will review progression onto non-fixed term contracts and associated funding issues.
- We will target a higher fraction (>50%) of those undertaking research skills and techniques development as measured by CROS2019.
- Explore mechanisms for assisting research staff with relocation costs and, for non-EU staff, visas & NHS fees. Ensure comparability of treatment with those on non-fixed term contracts

Strategies to support Principles 3&4: Career Development

- We will reclassify our training provision against Vitae's Researcher Development Framework, through the introduction of a new Durham Development Needs Analysis process (D-DNA).
- We will ensure that training programmes are aligned with expressed needs of research staff. Target for CROS2019 on all training and development questions is to have (undertaken)/(undertaken + would like to take) to be > 1/3

Strategies to support Principle 5: Researcher Responsibilities

- Through the introduction of our new Research Integrity training package, we will seek to increase by 50% the fraction of research staff engaging with this training, as measured by CROS2019.

Strategies to support Principle 6: Equality and Diversity

- To understand retention issues, we will undertake a quarterly analysis of exit interview questionnaires.

Strategies to support Principle 7: Implementation and Review

We will implement a new HR IT system to facilitate the collection and review of data relating to research staff.