

HR Excellence in Research Award

September 2014

Progress Report - 4 Year Evaluation and Review



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The University of Edinburgh received the HR Excellence in Research Award from the European Commission in September 2010 and retained it in 2012. This document and the associated action plan outline our internal evaluation and provide information for the external four year review to consider progress in supporting the principles detailed in the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers. This should be read in conjunction with the new University People Strategy.

How was the internal evaluation undertaken?

Internal evaluation of progress against our HR Excellence action plan is now embedded within core practices. The Institute for Academic Development (IAD) has overall responsibility for evaluating progress working closely with University HR Services (UHRS). Updates on progress are made to the University Senatus Researcher Experience Committee (REC). The award is considered alongside a number of other implementing mechanisms including plans for Athena SWAN (at School and University level), compliance with the Quality Assurance Agency's Code of Practice (Chapter B11) and the newly developed University People Strategy. In addition over the last 12 months we have reviewed the entire plan as follows:

- An internal evaluation of progress against the original action plan was completed by the IAD. This involved consultation with colleagues from Colleges and Schools, UHRS, Edinburgh Research and Innovation, and the University Careers Service.
- Views from researchers were taken into account in 3 ways; through engagement with the CROS and PIRLS surveys and in particular the 2013 data; through regular networking events for Research Staff Society organisers and committee members, held by IAD; and through the REC membership which includes research staff as well as PhD students, College Deans of Research Training, the Director of HR, senior academics and PIs.
- A draft of the internal evaluation and action plan was submitted to REC for comment and approval. REC have strategic overview of the researcher experience and support at Edinburgh, covering the full career range of doctoral candidate to PI.

Key achievements and progress against original action plan

Full details of progress against the original action plan are provided in the updated document available to view online. A summary of highlights from the last four years is provided here.

Progress against Principles 1 & 2

- The development of redeployment guidance for recruiters, a Talent Register, career transition workshops, a modernised Redundancy Avoidance Policy developed in partnership with trade unions, and a successfully implemented eRecruitment system are supporting staff at risk of redundancy and enhancing our capacity to attract and retain new talent. To ensure that recruiting staff are effectively trained, new e-learning modules on Recruitment, Selection and the Law, and Annual Review were made available in 2012 and to supplement this in 2014 we launched a new online training package on "unconscious bias", now available to all staff. The University has improving numbers of staff going through annual review (6% increase for research staff according to CROS 2013) and in 2013/14 we reported an institutional return rate of 92% of staff having an Annual Review (72% in 2012/13). The University continues to strive for our Strategic Plan KPI to ensure 100% of staff are reviewed.

Progress against Principles 3 & 4

- Information on the support offered by the IAD and HR continues to be updated online, linked to the RDF, and is advertised via twitter, monthly newsletters and through Research Staff Societies. This has been recently expanded to include information for PIs and fellows.
- The successful recruitment of 100 Chancellor's Fellowships led to improved orientation and professional development activities which are now available to all staff with research roles.

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- Increased support for PIs takes the form of a 4 day leadership course for those who are new or aspiring to the role, a management programme for experienced PIs and new modules in our Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice.
- For enhanced induction, the IAD has been working with support groups across the university to improve and tailor University inductions for all staff, ensuring they are timely, relevant and cover a broad range of useful information. This has resulted in a reported 8% increase in induction for research staff (CROS 2013).
- The 1:1 support continues to grow with over 100 people taking the opportunity to have confidential careers conversations in the last 2 years; 30 partnerships on our pilot mentoring scheme for research and a pilot programme offering coaching to participants on the Research Leaders programme.

Progress against Principle 5

- The IAD has continued to grow support for Research Staff Societies, promoting and inputting to their events, organising networking activities and supporting collaborations. At the request of the convenors network the IAD now manages and maintains an up to date mailing list for all research staff societies.
- The University's Researcher-Led Fund Initiative continues to encourage and support researchers in devising, organising and providing local training and development activities with a career development focus. Many successful projects have been supported with a number developing into self-sustaining enterprises. An extension of this is the new Academic Researcher-Led Networking fund which supports staff in the formation of academic and interdisciplinary networks.
- In 2012 REC expanded membership to include a representative from the research staff societies. This was further expanded in 2014 to ensure representation from all three Colleges allowing research staff to influence enhancements in provision and policy.

Progress against Principle 6

- Equality and diversity continues to be of strategic importance to the University. This is highlighted through initiatives such as the development and agreement of a University Equality & Diversity Strategy, online training, advice and support materials including e-learning modules on E & D, mentoring pilots, and a significant and ongoing commitment to the Athena SWAN charter. The University is active in the Gender Charter Mark pilot scheme and has also signed up to the new Race Equality Charter Mark with the aim of making a submission in April 2015.
- Vitae "Every Researcher Counts" materials are now used in several training programmes, including the PI course on good management practices.

Progress against Principle 7

Concordat implementation, evaluation and review, benchmarking and reporting is all now covered by the HR Excellence Award process and supporting initiatives like Athena SWAN. Regular formal mechanisms for reporting on activities is achieved by the work of the IAD, HR and REC as described above and enhanced by the following:

- A key achievement for the University underpinning all its work in supporting researcher development was the establishment of the IAD. The IAD supports strategic priorities in teaching, learning and researcher development and has provided a sustainable environment for researcher development including capacity to take ownership of the HR Excellence Award implementation process, embedding it in core business.
- More recently, the publication of the new People Strategy has built in recognition of the importance of researchers and is supporting the embedding of the Concordat, as well as a number of other QA and monitoring processes, into regular business. This will influence our HR Excellence strategy until 2016.
- The University is showing its ongoing commitment to enhancement in the researcher development agenda through continued participation in the CROS and PIRLS surveys.

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Strategy and Success Measures beyond 2014

We have developed an updated action plan that sets out the focus of our strategy for the next two years. Identifying specific actions beyond 2016 will be considered as the New Strategic Plan is developed. The updated action plan incorporates continuing actions from the original plans and actions that build on our progress and align with the University's current Strategic Plan (2012-16) and the People Strategy. Progress will be monitored by the IAD and UHRS, reporting to REC, and through the reviews of the People Strategy implementation, monitored by Staff Committee. Full details of our updated action plan are provided in the document available to view online at: <http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/institute-academic-development/research-roles/research-only-staff/advice/concordat/hr-award>

A brief summary of the strategy and actions is provided here.

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

The University has an ongoing commitment to clear and transparent routes to recruitment and progression. Progress in these areas will focus around improving procedures to enhance the employer branding of The University to ensure we attract and retain the best researchers from a diverse range of backgrounds. Specific activities will include:

- Establish a dedicated Relocation Support Service to provide assistance to new members of staff, including research staff and their families when relocating to Edinburgh to make the transition and settlement easier. This will include information on UKBA regulations.
- Develop exemplars of practice in teaching, research, interdisciplinary research and public engagement to highlight differing routes to reward, recognition and promotion.
- Roll out training to established PIs to enhance their understanding of recruitment, appraisal and equality and diversity best practice.
- In the longer term (beyond 2016) undertake a review of our advertising strategy including harnessing Euraxess advertising routes effectively; utilising social media and promoting the HR Excellence in Research Award when recruiting researchers.

Strategies to support Principles 3 & 4: Career Development

The University has established mechanisms to ensure the personal, professional and career development needs of researcher are met. Our commitment to this is highlighted in the People Strategy which includes supporting the leadership capabilities and enhancing development as two of the five themes. Specific activities will include:

- Continue to develop our overarching CPD framework for learning and teaching such that there are suitable opportunities available for all staff to enhance preparedness for academic practice. This includes enhanced support for those who take on Tutoring and Demonstrating roles.
- Enhance 1:1 support for researchers through an expansion of the mentoring pilot to make it available to all staff, and by offering 5 coaching sessions to all participants on the Research Leaders course for new and aspiring PIs.
- Continue to monitor the uptake of annual review in order to meet the Strategic Plan target whilst simultaneously ensuring line managers are appropriately trained in the skills needed to perform effective career development appraisals for research staff.
- Take membership of Vitae from 2015 until review point in 2017.
- In the longer term, Staff Committee will consider the best way to promote and recognise the value of international mobility and cross-cultural understanding for all our staff by promoting flexible, interdisciplinary job exchanges and secondments.

Strategies to support Principle 5: Researchers Responsibilities

Encouraging researchers to proactively engage in their own development continues to be a challenge however this area has seen much improvement in the past four years. Enhancement in

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this area will focus on improving the support offered to Research Staff Societies and considering new ways to disseminate knowledge of the opportunities available. Specific activities will include:

- Review the findings of a 2014 REC Task Group exploring research staff needs in order to find implementable solutions to gaps in provision.
- Streamline and simplify the support on offer to research staff through the IAD and UHRS and look for innovative mechanisms to promote courses, funding streams and online resources.
- Implement strategies to improve the uptake of CROS and PIRLS surveys.
- The IAD is a founding member of a new network of researcher developers working together to consider best practice in research staff support and review strategies to overcome challenges.
- Previous work with Research Staff Societies has helped the researchers themselves to identify key problems with engagement in society activity. The IAD will continue to work with societies to explore solutions to these issues. This will include expanding on web resources, advice and information; considering the feasibility and role of Academic Champions and identifying sustainable funding and support structures for societies at a departmental level.

Strategies to support Principle 6: Equality and Diversity

Equality and Diversity is at the core of both the University Strategic Plan and the People Strategy and exploring policy and practice improvements is an ongoing activity. Future enhancements include:

- Consider mechanisms to support equality in reward, recognition, promotion and support for researchers who are working across or between disciplines.
- Continue to support departmental submissions for Athena SWAN awards, and look to achieve institutional silver in by the end of 2015.
- Update flexible working guidelines (which are currently under review) to reflect forthcoming changes with regards to the sharing of parental leave.
- Design and implement an Equality Impact Assessment Framework which will enable the University to embed good practice across all areas and meet its legal obligations.
- Implement and embed the University's Equality Outcomes and Action Plan to ensure that the University is regarded as an exemplar of good practice.

Strategies to support Principle 7: Implementation and Review

Implementation, evaluation and review is embedded and linked to other initiatives such as the People Strategy implementation plans and Athena SWAN charter. This will continue for the next 4 years. Regular review will be managed by both the IAD and UHRS every two years a complete review will be endorsed by REC and Staff Committee and published online. This work will occur in close collaboration with the researchers through Research Staff Societies and the Unions. In addition we will continue to benchmark against best practice using CROS, PIRLS, Athena SWAN and publications such as "HR Strategies for Researchers" produced by Vitae.

Broad Success Indicators

Our success will be measured in terms of timely achievement of the actions set out in the Action Plan many of which include specific deliverables. In addition, our success indicators include the following:

- Evidence of progress/improvement in CROS and PIRLS data when compared with previous years. In 2015 this will include a significant improvement in uptake.
- Increases take-up of appraisal/annual review
- The extent of the roll-out of our PI development programme
- Applications to the Researcher-led Fund and Academic Researcher-Led Networking fund.
- Achievement of Athena Swan Awards
- Achievement of Race Equality Charter Mark status
- People Strategy Action Plan implementation
- Achievement of relevant University Strategic Plan KPIs (reviewed in summer 2016)