

University of Chester
HR Excellence in Research Award Four Year Review
(covering the period December 2014 - December 2016)

Introduction

In November 2009, the Research and Knowledge Transfer Office (RKTO) and Human Resources (HR) completed the first self-audit against the principles of the Concordat and identified an action plan which was approved by Senate in June 2010.

The University of Chester achieved its first HR Excellence in Research award in 2012 and renewed the award in 2014. During the years since the publication of the Concordat, the University has made considerable progress on the research agenda, and progress towards the aim of sustaining and enhancing the research culture across the University at all levels. This is reflected in the Corporate Plan, which affirms the importance of fostering a culture of personal and professional development, attracting and retaining a skilled workforce and to the creation and propagation of knowledge with recognised impact and excellence. Our community of researchers (used in the broadest sense - to include research and academic staff) is therefore vital to the achievement of our research ambitions.

Evaluation process

For the renewal of the HR Excellence in Research award, the evaluation process began by a working group of three key members of staff in RKTO and HR updating the original action plan with our achievements. The University's Research and Knowledge Transfer Committee established a steering group to oversee and advise on the review process. This group consisted of: the working group, two researchers from different faculties, a research assistant from a third faculty, a line manager of researchers, an early-career academic and a Head of Department - the aim being to capture a wide range of perspectives.

The steering group meet in order to:

- Review the updated (draft) action plan, formulate new actions and identify key priorities for the future;
- Advise on consultation with a wider researcher group, including the themes to be developed;
- Identify the strategically important areas for further investigation and discussion; and
- Finalise the action plan on behalf of Research, Postgraduate & Knowledge Transfer Committee.

Consultation with researchers (Research Assistants through to Senior Research Fellows) was organised by Research & Knowledge Transfer Office staff with input from HR via circulation of the draft document to all 25 research staff, three feedback/networking meetings and telephone conversations. Seven researchers responded to the consultation, which reinforces the need identified in our action plan to find more ways to engage with and get feedback from this group. It is important to recognise that the number of researchers remains quite small but spans a wide range of subjects/qualifications/experience and grades.

The final stage of institutional approval of the strategy and action plan occurred via the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Academic) and Senior Pro-Vice Chancellor who have responsibilities for research and HR matters respectively.

Ongoing monitoring

Since the last review in 2015 the University has monitored the achievement of the action plan via a joint HR Excellence/Athena SWAN steering group. The merging of the two steering groups was to help the University to join up enhancement activities, and whilst this has had some benefits (e.g. ensuring researchers needs and issues are explicitly considered in relation to gender equality), there have also been challenges through the dilution of focus. In recognition of this challenge, a better balance is planned to be achieved by:

1. key members of HR and RKTO to meet bimonthly to review the action plan;

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2. expanding the remit of the HR Excellence in Research Steering group to cover the ongoing monitoring, meeting 2-3 times per year;
3. annual reporting to Research & Knowledge Transfer Committee to coincide with faculty annual reviews of research; and
4. overlapping membership with the Athena SWAN steering group to ensure effective liaison between the groups.

Key achievements and progress against strategy

At the last review in 2015, the University clearly articulated the main priority for 2015-16 as being to sustain and enhance the research culture across the University at all levels in order to increase research income, impact and PGR student numbers. By these measures the University has achieved considerable success:

- the income level has risen by 20% over the last 2 years, average grant/contract value has increased by more than 250%, and the success rate remains around 50%;
- PGR student numbers have increased from 451 in 2013-14 to 555 in 2015-16;
- REF2014 – 10 subject submissions increased to 16, staff submitted increased from 70 (17.3%) to 151 (28.7%); average rating increased from 1.81 to 2.00; and impact scores of 2* or better for 13 submissions (the other 3 were first time submissions and scored at least some 1*).

The increase in research grant/contract income, with increased HEFCE QR and HEIF allocations, are particularly important for researchers in the University as these are the principal sources of income supporting research-only positions. However our success against the other success measures has been mixed:

- Target - increased participation in development and training (currently little baseline data for researchers)
 - participation in the PDP review process has fallen amongst researchers and the University as a whole (from 80%/60% participation in 2013/14 down to 25%/37% in 2015/16 for researchers / all staff respectively);
 - online booking for training events listed in the Learning Directory has been introduced, so participation can now be monitored more effectively for all staff groups, including researchers. For example in 2015/16, of the 478 staff attending training, 3 were researchers, who attended 3 of the possible 46 courses available. Since then, some training events have been restructured to make them shorter or are now available online (e.g. via webinar) to improve accessibility.
- Target - increased satisfaction amongst researchers over the long term (currently no baseline data)
 - the questions added to the staff satisfaction survey which were intended to provide baseline data, were both limited in number and format, and the low response rate from researchers meant that in the results of the survey their responses were combined with all staff engaged in research (i.e. the academic staff). However those respondents were positive: 'The University supports me in achieving my research goals' (59%) and 'I have been able to take responsibility for my own development as a researcher' (76%) (see the explanatory text against action number 12 in the action plan). Alternative measures of satisfaction need to be considered for the future.

Progress against the Concordat Principles

With a priority to enhance the research culture across the University, our strategy is necessarily long-term and evolving over a number of years. However there has been progress against each of the Concordat principles:

Principle 1 - Recognition of the importance of recruiting, selecting and retaining researchers with the highest potential to achieve excellence in research.

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Over the last two year period we have undertaken some rebranding of the corporate website to enhance visibility of the University's research culture – which we believe will make a positive contribution to the recruitment of excellent researchers. Updating and enhancement of the website and information packs remains on ongoing task.

Principle 2 - Researchers are recognised and valued by their employing organisation as an essential part of their organisation's human resources and a key component of their overall strategy to develop and deliver world-class research.

Gaining a fuller understanding of the critical success factors for our researchers is essential if the University is to meet its aspirations for research. We have made a significant investment in a research project to understand these success factors and barriers, and additional data collected via the staff satisfaction survey and new HR online booking system for development events add further richness to the picture. We continue to consider how the wealth of data collected can be best used to further the research strategy.

Principle 3 - Researchers are equipped and supported to be adaptable and flexible in an increasingly diverse, mobile, global research environment.

The Learning Directory (i.e. training provision) is being constantly updated and linking training needs analysis via the RDF/PDP will be strengthened via the online PDP and training for research supervisors and Heads of Department. The recent consultation with Researchers has also identified interest for some additional researcher training events (e.g. grant writing, writing for publication, use of research tools), which will be incorporated into the programme.

Principle 4 - The importance of researchers' personal and career development, and lifelong learning, is clearly recognised and promoted at all stages of their career.

Analysis of our data on the uptake of the PDP has shown that a formal annual review approach has not been taken up by many researchers. As a consequence, planning is in progress to develop training for Heads of Departments (and other line managers) - planned launch through 2017 - to increase the profile of the Concordat amongst managers, and look at alternative mechanisms to promote career development of research staff.

Principle 5 - Individual researchers share the responsibility for and need to pro-actively engage in their own personal and career development, and lifelong learning.

Work by colleagues in HR to hold focus groups with researchers has allowed us to identify some key themes and priorities for introducing additional development opportunities. A case study to highlight personal responsibility for engagement in development has also been identified.

Principle 6 - Diversity and equality must be promoted in all aspects of the recruitment and career management of researchers

The University's annual Diversity Festival continues to grow in the range of events offered and to attract a wide audience. A festival event in March 2017 has been designed specifically for developing research careers, which we hope will be seen to have immediate relevance to our researchers.

Principle 7 - The sector and all stakeholders will undertake regular and collective review of their progress in strengthening the attractiveness and sustainability of research careers in the UK

Consolidating the quality assurance and review mechanisms of the increasing number of people-focused award schemes in which the University participates (HR Excellence in Research, Investors in People, Gender Equality Mark, Athena SWAN etc.) has been trialed over the last two years with the intention of ensuring that they work to mutual advantage without diluting efforts or disenfranchising any group. Review mechanisms for research in the University have recently been changed, with faculty research strategies now receiving closer scrutiny by the Research & Knowledge Transfer Committee, and it is proposed to incorporate into those reviews for 2016/17 local activities contributing to the HR Excellence in Research actions.

Priorities and implementation strategy for the next 2 years

Our aim in relation to HR Excellence in Research continues to be to sustain and enhance the research culture across the University at all levels – as we believe this is the most effective way to support our research staff – and to increase grant income which will have a direct impact upon the research staff employed in terms of role security and opportunities for progression.

Our priorities:

- Enhancing the research culture and status of researchers (career pathways project) [Principle 1]
- Enhanced resources for researchers:
 - Funding to extend contracts beyond the grant period – and possibly create permanent posts [Principle 2]
 - Courses designed for researchers (e.g. grant writing, writing for publication) [Principle 3]
 - Funding for conferences as staff development (not just for research dissemination) [Principle 4]
- Establish research mentorship within the mentoring scheme [Principles 3 & 4]
- Establish a Research network/ forum [Principle 5]
- Improve participation/engagement (e.g. in PDP, surveys, training) and getting better data [Principle 5]
- Embedding effective review mechanisms for this award [Principle 7]

Our success measures:

Develop an improved information package for applicants to give a fuller picture of working as a researcher at the University (e.g. support mechanisms, case studies, role descriptions)

Collect data to evidence individuals returning to the University and progressing to higher grades; hit rates for the internal & external information webpages will be monitored

The average fixed-term contract duration (currently 1.5 years) to increase by up to 20%

At least 2 new training events developed and each delivered twice during 2017/18.

Aim for at least 4 researcher participants to attend. Positive feedback received.

A £3000 annual fund established from 2017/18 offering awards up to £500.

Applicants to identify the specific benefits of attendance in their applications. Applications to exceed awards by 50% to encourage strong, well thought out applications

Deliver a workshop on research mentoring

Establish a pool of 10 research mentors and establish at least 2 research mentoring relationships

Establish terms of reference, hold termly meetings and establish an active online discussion board. Monitor feedback to ensure the network proves useful to researcher and their development

Participation in a revised probationary review process suitable for very short contracts to reach 60% and participation in online PDP for longer contracts to reach 40%.

Attendance at training events to reach 25% by end of 2019.

Completion of the action plan and reporting on and updating the plan (as necessary) with effective feedback to researchers via the network and webpages

• **RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION**

PRINCIPLE 1 – Recognition of the importance of recruiting, selecting and retaining researchers with the highest potential to achieve excellence in research

The University recognises the importance of recruiting, selecting and retaining the right staff in all roles and follows a standardised set of policies and procedures for [Recruitment and Selection](#) training for members of interview panels (which is mandatory for panel Chairs), use of Fixed-Term Contracts (requiring clear justification for their use), role evaluations (using HERA) and template job descriptions. The University has:

- seven [template job descriptions for researcher](#) grades, from Research Assistant to Leading Research Fellow
- mechanisms to offer feedback to unsuccessful candidates.
- [web recruitment pages](#) which refer to 3 job categories - Academic/Support/Research. A link on the Research jobs webpage takes individuals through to the [Research pages](#) in order to find out more about Research at the University of Chester.

Furthermore, recognising that many researchers are on fixed-term contracts, the University naturally includes within end of contract discussions any other employment opportunities within the University in order to enhance retention. Recently a working group was established to implement new processes and practices relating to orientation plans to improve integration from pre-arrival through induction to the first probationary review with the line manager.

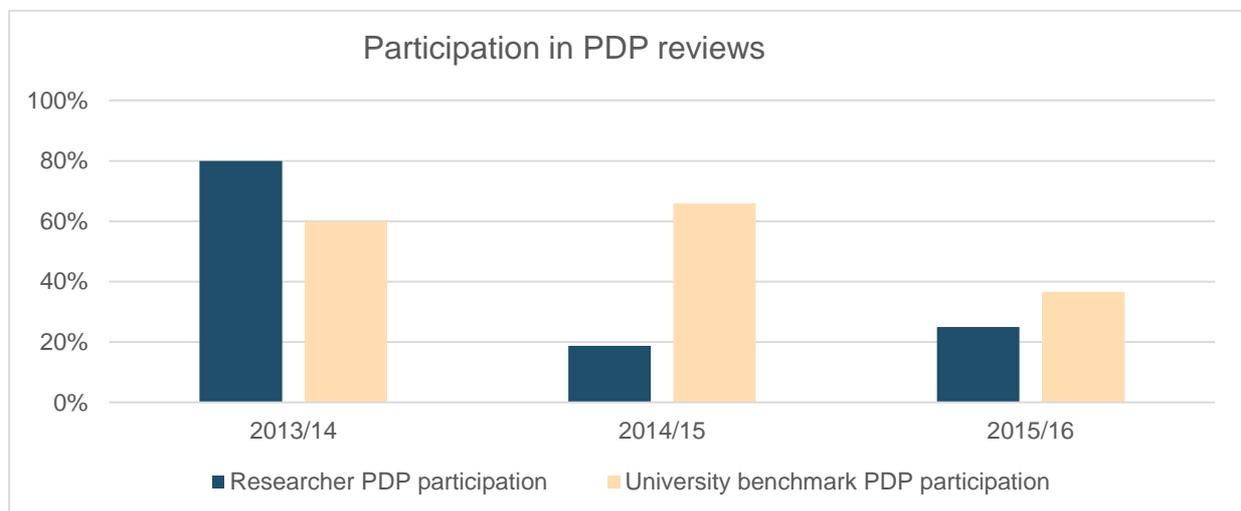
2014 Actions
<p>1. HR to evaluate appointment and promotion procedures for research grade staff <u>Completed:</u> The appointment and induction of newly recruited research staff has been reviewed and resulted in a number of changes which will be implemented from January 2017, as described in a. below <u>Ongoing:</u> Evaluation of the promotions procedures is yet to be actioned alongside practices within other HEIs – as such this action will be carried forward into the 2017/18 action plan (see action i)</p>
<p>2. HR to work with Marketing, Recruitment & Admissions on revision of the corporate website in relation to staff recruitment to increase the profile of research and researchers contribution to the University <u>Completed:</u> Recruitment pages have been updated and make reference to 3 job categories including Academics/Support/Research. A link on the Research jobs webpage takes individuals through to the Research pages</p>
2017 and 2018 Actions (see action plan summary for further details of the actions)
<p>a. Develop and implement orientation plans, to enhance existing integration process for newly appointed/promoted employees by January 2018</p>
<p>b. Develop a Research Staff Hub on Portal to provide a range of resources tailored to research staff. Relevant information for job applicants - to give a fuller picture of working as a researcher at the University (e.g. support mechanisms, case studies, role descriptions) - to be available from the website. Development phased over 6, 18 and 36 months.</p>
<p>c. Produce a proposal to Senior Management Team to develop mechanisms to enhance researcher retention and job security for research staff on fixed-term contracts by January 2018</p>
<p>d. Enhance the HR exit process to include a reflection on research/generic skills and support for future employment with guide available from September 2017</p>

• **RECOGNITION AND VALUE**

PRINCIPLE 2 – Researchers are recognised and valued by their employing organisation as an essential part of their organisation’s human resources and a key component of their overall strategy to develop and deliver world-class research

The University’s [Corporate Plan](#) recognises the importance of appropriately trained and equitably rewarded staff in a culture where everyone is encouraged to fulfil their potential and career ambitions. This includes our researchers, who are key to the achievement of the Research and Innovation objective of hosting ‘an expanding and innovative University research environment that supports world class research’. Although some researchers are engaged on relatively short contracts, the University does not aim to treat them any differently - e.g. all new staff participate in induction programmes, have the opportunity to participate in staff surveys and development activities, attend open staff meetings to put questions or concerns to SMT and contribute to the staff suggestion scheme – the challenge is frequently one of timing as not all opportunities are available all the time, though the expansion of online resources is helping to overcome this barrier.

Since the introduction of the HR Excellence in Research scheme, the University has introduced additional researcher grades (OS4, Research Assistant to OS10 Leading Research Fellow)] providing a transparent grade structure for researchers, and expanded relevant training/development provision. We have sought to strengthen the link for researchers between Performance and Development Planning ([PDP](#)) and the [Learning Directory](#) which now expressly aligns learning interventions/workshops to the Vitae Researcher Development Framework ([RDF](#)) and other professional standards (e.g. the Higher Education Academy’s ‘[UK Professional Standards Framework](#)’) in order to support personal and professional development over the long term. However, despite these efforts participation rates in the University’s PDP review processes have been disappointingly low for the last two years. In addition, participation in the University’s probationary review process has also been very variable (0 – 50%) but this is influenced by the prevalence of short, fixed-term contracts.



Whilst the University carefully manages the use of fixed-term contracts across the University, their use is more common amongst researchers – consequently the safeguards in place are particularly relevant. These safeguards include: consultation between managers and researcher to explore alternatives to contract expiry and to discuss what assistance might be provided; policies on redundancy and redeployment which apply to all staff employed for a period of at least 12 months; and circulation of vacancy details.

A key element of the University’s research management is through the [Research & Knowledge Transfer Committee](#), to whose membership we have added researchers and early-career academics, who attend on a rotational basis. We believe this helps researchers to understand

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the wider University context, provide feedback and additional perspectives to our deliberations whilst not being unduly burdensome in terms of the time commitment from staff who may be on short-term or low-fractional contracts.

In June 2015, the Research and Knowledge Transfer Office (RKTO) commissioned and funded a one year research project to investigate gender disparity in research productivity at the University, as evidenced by the REF2014 submission. The project was completed by Professor Chantal Davies, Dr Ruth Healey and Anthony Cliffe and produced a report entitled '[Gendered experiences of academic staff in relation to research activity and the REF2014](#)'. The research generated rich qualitative and quantitative data from male and female participants about the barriers to research activity and explored possible support mechanisms for early-career academics and researchers in intermediate grades through to established academics and senior researchers. The recommendations of this report are being taken forward via events (such as the 'Developing Your Research Career' event during the [Diversity Festival 2017](#)), policy change and general awareness raising.

2014 Actions
<p>3. HR to establish if researcher participation rates in the 2014 PDP and staff development opportunities are significantly different to other groups of staff and follow up with actions as appropriate</p> <p><u>Completed:</u> Researcher participation in the 2014 PDP process was higher (at 80%) than the benchmark figure for all staff (60%), however participation has since fallen, and more so amongst researchers (see figure above). The introduction of an online process is intended to improve participation.</p> <p>In relation to the uptake of staff development opportunities, in 2015/16, of the 478 staff attending training, 3 were researchers, who attended 3 of the possible 46 courses available. This appears to show under-representation by researchers – however short-term contracts are likely to be a factor. Further actions to increase participation are described in section C</p>
<p>4. HR to consider how the development of an online PDP might be used to highlight the RDF and relevant sections of the Learning Directory to research staff</p> <p><u>Ongoing:</u> The online PDP is being implemented across the University and is planned to be implemented by April 2018 (see action f). Approximately 25% of staff have transferred to this new online PDP system. Reference is made to the RDF in the PDP Guidelines</p>
<p>5. HR to extend the career pathways project to consider how a promotions scheme might be created for researchers</p> <p><u>Ongoing:</u> Development of Career Pathways at the University of Chester is at the early stages of development, this is one element of the implementation of a Workforce Planning Strategy which is to be piloted in a couple of departments in 2017 (see action i)</p>
<p>6. HR to create researcher case studies as resources and to facilitate mentoring for researchers</p> <p><u>Ongoing:</u> A one-stop-shop is to be developed specifically for Researchers on Portal, the University's intranet; this easy to access resource will incorporate case studies which relate to best practices/hints/tips in support of Researchers CPD/progression and engagement (see action b)</p>
2017 and 2018 Actions
<p>e. Complete implement the online PDP across the University by June 2018</p>
<p>f. Review the probationary review process to ensure suitability for short contract durations and tailored (as necessary) for use by researchers; review to be concluded by December 2017</p>

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| g. Promote the mentoring scheme to researchers via direct emails. Upon successful establishment of the mentoring relationship, create a case study document to further promote the scheme by April 2018 |
| h. Draft a Manager's Recognition Guide and seek approval from SMT to implement by September 2017 |
| i. Conduct by April 2018 a review of options to support researcher career progression including an initial exploration into career pathways for researchers which may exist at other HEIs and incorporate a review of researcher job descriptions |
| j. Keep researchers informed of relevant developments and implications of the TEF & REF (via Research Staff Hub by December 2017) |

- **SUPPORT AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT**

PRINCIPLE 3 – Researchers are equipped and supported to be adaptable and flexible in an increasingly diverse, mobile, global research environment

PRINCIPLE 4 – The importance of researchers' personal and career development, and lifelong learning, is clearly recognised and promoted at all stages of their career

The University's commitment to staff development is evidenced by being awarded Investors in People Bronze status in 2012, Silver status in 2013 and Gold status in June 2014 - and our career development opportunities for researchers are offered on the same basis as for all University staff. Responsibility for staff development lies with HR and the Research & Knowledge Transfer Committee.

The University's [Staff Development Policy](#) recognises the importance of CPD for all staff and provides opportunities for staff to participate in an annual PDP with trained reviewers, to undertake the relevant professional development (within the University or elsewhere) and to apply for financial support from their department. HR also manage the University-wide staff development and training programme (the '[Learning Directory](#)') which delivers sessions such as Presentation and Communication Skills, Supervisor Good Practice, Negotiating, Team working, People and Project Management. In order to encourage participation from researchers, the programme has been mapped to the [RDF](#), which is also used in the [PDP](#) process and from 2016/17 some workshops have been divided into shorter sessions and delivered virtually using Lync/Moodle thus reducing travel time and preventing staff from having to take a full day out of the office – providing enhanced flexibility for research staff.

[Learning Directory](#)

The directory lists over 50 development opportunities and nearly 80 events during the 2016-17 year themed around: Induction for New Staff ; Delivering Academic & Service Excellence; Managing Self and Inspiring Others; Organizational and Stakeholder Awareness; Working Together; Leadership Academy; Postgraduate Researcher Training. Qualifications are also available in Leadership and Management in HE (PGDip) and Supervisory Leadership and Management in HE (Cert).

The University's [Research & Knowledge Transfer Committee](#), which reports directly to [Senate](#), has a duty to arrange appropriate training and support for researchers and its membership includes senior academic managers from across all Faculties and representation of researchers and PGR students. Under the direction of the committee, the [Research & Knowledge Transfer Office](#) and [Academic Quality & Enhancement](#) provide a range of research and professional skills training/resources (e.g. grant writing, writing for publication) – which are open to research staff, research students and supervisors. The committee also liaises closely with the [Postgraduate sub-Committee](#) in relation to training for PGR students who complete a Researcher Development Plan (based upon the RDF) at induction, which is reviewed annually thereafter.

The University also recognises that mentoring can offer unique benefits to participants and has been a new element of the [People and Organisational Development Strategy](#) since 2016. A mentoring programme is being rolled out across the University for a wide range of role types, but is yet to be taken up by researchers. In addition, independent advice is available to all staff from the University [Careers & Employability](#) service.

As might be expected of any HEI, a wide range of research specific modules are offered as part of degree programmes across the University – and these may be accessed by researchers. Whilst not relevant to all researchers, we are conscious that some will be engaged to a limited extent in teaching activities or wish to move into academic careers, so their development needs are also catered for.

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Training for teaching

Training to support staff in preparing to undertake teaching or other academic duties is provided through the University's [Learning and Teaching Institute](#) (LTI). They offer:

- '[New to Teaching](#)' workshops (a two day certificated programme);
 - a '[Learning and Teaching in HE](#)' programme accredited by the HEA, which can be used for CPD or for academic credit leading to a PG certificate, diploma or MA. This programme is appropriate for those researchers with more established positions and teaching/learning support responsibilities. The programme includes modules which focus upon research supervision (identified in our 2012 action plan).
5. support for Researchers whose role includes teaching, leadership and development of other researchers, and who have already attained [Fellowship](#) of the Higher Education Academy, to apply for recognition under the UK Professional Standards Framework for teaching and supporting learning in higher education at Senior Fellowship level.

2014 Actions

7. HR to gain approval from SMT for the revised People Management Strategy and underpinning People and Organisational Development Strategy during 2015, following wider consultation, prior to university wide implementation

Completed: This strategy was approved following wider consultation with stakeholders to ensure it underpinned and supported Faculty and Service Department's aims. This strategy will be integrated into the new People Strategy being re-written for 2016 to 2020

8. HR to annually collect and analyse data on participation by researchers in the University-wide staff development and training programme to establish whether there are any apparent barriers to participation

Completed: In 2015/16 academic year, 3 research staff participated in developmental workshops compared to 475 non-research staff – non-research staff include Academics and Professional Support Staff

9. The Graduate School promote supervisor training to appropriate (i.e. senior) research staff and to continue to monitor and respond to the effectiveness of research supervisor training provision

Completed: the supervisor training has been incorporated into the University's 'Learning Directory' in order to increase its visibility to all staff. The content of the training sessions is constantly under review in the light of the feedback received

10. The RKTO to propose additional questions on researcher support and development for the staff satisfaction survey

Completed: Only a limited number of questions could be added, but responses were analysed and showed that 77% of staff who conducted research within their role, felt able to take responsibility for their development as researchers

11. HR with RKTO to develop and deliver targeted training sessions for PIs, Heads of Subject etc. to promote awareness of the Concordat, University support for researchers and clarify entitlements and responsibilities

Ongoing: Various ad hoc training activities have taken place, typically by invitation from academic departments. Additional developmental sessions will include Grant Application writing & Presenting at Conferences (see actions b and h)

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2017 and 2018 Actions	
k.	The People and Organisational Development Strategy to be absorbed into the People Strategy during the next review by the HR Director to align with the University's Corporate Plan; this revised People Strategy to be made available to staff by September 2017
l.	Monitor participation rates of researchers in all Learning and Development events for 2016/17 and undertake appropriate marketing of the opportunities for this specific audience
m.	Develop & deliver by April 2018 training for academic staff who have come from a professional (i.e. non-research) background to help them maintain & build research activities post-PhD; and develop resources & training for managers to address unconscious bias in workload allocation
n.	Revise content of the Supervisor Good Practice training sessions to explicitly include supervision of researchers (in addition to doctoral students) by September 2017
o.	HR to work with Careers and Employability to develop an action plan to improve the employability of research students to increase the possibility of them gaining research positions after completing their studies; any subsequent actions to be reviewed and approved by SMT by April 2018
p.	Seek feedback from researchers via the Researcher Network, taking a lead from the themes within the CROS survey. Consider participation in CROS 2019 if number of researchers (or interest from researchers) increases
q.	Secure funds in 2017/18 RKTO business plan to support conference attendance for career development purposes (rather than for research dissemination) and inform researchers of opportunity to apply

• **RESEARCHERS' RESPONSIBILITIES**

PRINCIPLE 5 – Individual researchers share the responsibility for and need to pro-actively engage in their own personal and career development, and lifelong learning

The University puts many support mechanisms in place for its researchers, but ultimate responsibility to take up development opportunities must be shared between the researcher and their line manager. The key to engagement is often access to information, which the University facilitates via our intranet (e.g. news/announcements, the Learning Directory), email (e.g. vacancies) and the [Research & Knowledge Transfer Office](#). Since November 2012, RKTO have issued a [newsletter](#) which aims to facilitate communication with colleagues across the University, to promote the services of the RKT department and to ensure that developments within the department, University or externally relating to research and knowledge transfer are publicized. Regular updates relating to successful funding applications and projects are also included. The newsletter is produced in a printed format, circulated electronically to all staff and is available to download from the R&KT pages on the intranet. The RKTO intranet site provides access to [policies, procedures and guidance](#) relevant to researchers. All researchers are required to abide by the University's [Research Governance Handbook](#) and to participate in the annual PDP process.

However, just as researchers must take responsibility for their development, it is recognised that their line managers should understand the implications of the [Concordat](#), and the University's policies and procedures as they apply to researchers. Therefore the University is working to develop targeted training for this group for delivery in the 2016/17 year.

As noted below, the University has encouraging data from the staff satisfaction survey (2015) on the extent to which individuals felt able to take responsibility for their own development. However, to preserve anonymity it was not possible to separate the views of researchers from those of academic staff in the survey. Unfortunately this is a recurring problem - the relatively small number of researcher employed by the University at any one time (typically around 25) can make surveys and data analysis unreliable or simply not informative. Therefore the University acknowledges the need for a new strategy to target feedback from researchers in order to help the University understand the relatively low participation rates by researchers in the survey and falling participation in the [PDP](#) process.

2014 Actions

12. The RKTO to propose additional questions on researcher responsibilities in career development for the staff satisfaction survey

Completed: In 2015, 58% of employees (n =1,153) participated in the Staff Survey, 3 out of the 1,153 were research staff. Responses to 'The University supports me in achieving my research goals' were 23% = Agree; 36% = Tend to Agree; 24% = Tend to Disagree; and 17% = Disagree. These responses were from 29 respondents and included academic staff who fall out with the scope of the HR Excellence in Research criteria. Likewise responses to 'I have been able to take responsibility for my own development as a researcher' were 36% = Agree; 41% = Tend to Agree; 14% = Tend to Disagree; and 9% = Disagree

13. HR with the RKTO to undertake a training needs analysis with small groups of researchers to develop targeted training sessions for researchers and line managers

Completed: the focus groups identified the following 3 priorities for targeted training - a researcher mentoring scheme, specific information for researchers (e.g. travel expenses and facilities/resources available whilst off-site), and skills acquisition for CV enhancement

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<p>14. RKTO to establish a Researcher Network to create opportunities for networking, discussion and feedback <u>Ongoing:</u> The logistics of facilitating a Researcher Network provided challenges in terms of individual's availability/travel and time to participate in such events. This action to be carried forward into the 2017/18 action plan and thereafter evaluated (see action s)</p>
<p>15. RKT Committee to consider whether and how information on Faculty/Department research events might be disseminated <u>Ongoing:</u> The Committee has discussed mechanisms to share information on research events from across the University, yet the difficulty remains finding the resources to collect and update the information so that staff are confident it is up-to-date, which is essential if it is to be useful. This remains an action for the next period (see action b)</p>
<p>2017 and 2018 Actions</p>
<p>r. Develop case studies and other resources which promote examples of how researchers have taken responsibility for their own career development; this will be an element of the 'Managing Your Career' guide referred to as an action in b. Principle 1</p>
<p>s. Establish a new Research Network, meeting termly from January 2018</p>
<p>t. HR to facilitate via Portal, the opportunity for research staff to connect with other researchers within and outside of their own department, whether professionally or socially. This informal facility to 'Connect with other Researchers' to be available from January 2018</p>

• **DIVERSITY AND EQUALITY**

PRINCIPLE 6 – Diversity and equality must be promoted in all aspects of the recruitment and career management of researchers

The University's [Diversity and Equality Policy](#) relates to all staff and all aspects of the University's operation including, for example, advertisement, recruitment and selection; pay; terms and conditions of service; training and staff development; probation and promotion; and grievance and disciplinary procedures. Our [Single Equality Scheme](#) addressing age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex, and sexual orientation also applies to all staff and students. In addition, the University has a comprehensive portfolio of policies relating to [Freedom of Speech, Dignity and Respect](#) (addressing discrimination, bullying and harassment), [Equal Pay, Maternity Leave, Paternity Leave, Adoption Leave, Time Off for Dependents, Flexible Working](#), Retirement, and Time Off for Religious Observance. A dedicated section of the University intranet provides access to all equality and diversity policies and guidance, and in common with many universities, from 1st September 2016, all staff have been required to complete mandatory Diversity and Equality online training.

All new University policy and procedural documents are subject to an [Equality Analysis](#) process as part of the development and implementation process and key employment and other university policies have been Equality Impact Assessed. Indeed, it was a consequence of the [Equality Impact Assessment of REF2014](#) that the RKTO commissioned research to understand the under-representation of women amongst the University's research active academic staff/REF-eligible researchers – mentioned in section B.

The [Equality Challenge Unit](#) is a key reference point for the University in ensuring equality and diversity across all our activities. We commenced work on the [Athena SWAN charter](#) in May 2012 and was awarded [Institutional Bronze](#) in November 2014 – and continue to work on our [action plan](#). We will be submitting an application to renew the Institutional Bronze Athena SWAN award in April 2018. Furthermore, in April 2014 the University made a successful institutional submission to pilot of the Gender Equality Mark (GEM) scheme. In order to further the gender equality agenda, a [Women's Networking group](#) is now well established and open to all female staff, and we have seen an increase in the University's professorial profile which now stands at 32% female. A wide range of [support networks](#) now exist across the University for staff with LGBT, disability, parents and carers interests.

2014 Actions
<p>16. HR to liaise with the RKTO to ensure that the needs of researchers are considered in the implementation of the actions detailed in the Athena SWAN and GEM action plans Completed: the University's Athena SWAN steering group includes the Director of Research & Knowledge Transfer in addition to researchers and academic staff, in order to ensure that researchers' needs are taken into account</p>
<p>17. Athena SWAN Champion & Director of Research Policy to create a joint Self-Assessment/Review Team for Athena SWAN and HR Excellence in Research to meet 4 times per annum to review progress against actions – and consider how GEM and liP schemes might also be incorporated where appropriate Completed: The joint steering group has been operating since September 2015 (though at a reduced frequency). However, the review mechanisms are being revised for the next period (see actions v and x)</p>
<p>18. HR to investigate the proportion of newly appointed female staff on fixed term contracts (FTCs) Ongoing: Of the University's 25 research staff, 14 have been appointed since 1st January 2014, 6 female and 8 male. All were FTCs, the reasons being:</p>

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- due to funding, including QR, HEIF and KT funding
- due to time limited project
- due to temporary/ casual positions

The data will be consider by the Athena Swan Self-Assessment Team along with comparable data for other staff groups, and needs to be seen in the context of the reasons for issuing FTCs

2017 and 2018 Actions

u. Direct email and telephone marketing of relevant events at the Diversity Festival to researchers & managers in January/February 2018 in order to improve participation, followed by attendance monitoring and feedback

v. To ensure relevant HR Excellence in Research actions are incorporated into the Athena SWAN April 2018 action plan

w. Develop research staff equality data in line with the data requirements of the Athena SWAN (AS) charter and set specific targets with the AS action plan to address any inequalities (December 2017)

See also action m relating to gendered training

• **IMPLEMENTATION AND REVIEW**

PRINCIPLE 7 – The sector and all stakeholders will undertake regular and collective review of their progress in strengthening the attractiveness and sustainability of research careers in the UK

All University policies and procedures are monitored by the relevant department and are subject to either on-going or a formal triennial review by the University's governing [Council](#). For example, the profile of staff is monitored by HR through the annual reports of the [Single Equality Scheme](#).

The [Research & Knowledge Transfer Committee](#) have recently revised membership to include representation from research staff (i.e. those whose main function is research) and from Early Career Researchers to ensure that their needs and experiences are fully considered. The Committees discussions have recently included issues such as: how to identify early career researchers who have been employed by the University in other roles for a number of years; internal delays over approval of short-term appointments; and promoting research activities/events across the University. The monitoring of progress against the HR Excellence action plan has formally rested with the joint Athena SWAN/HR Excellence Steering group, but it is proposed revise this: to expand the role of the HR excellence steering group to include monitoring, and to have an additional review mechanism via the Research and Knowledge Transfer Committee, by receiving an annual update report to co-inside with the Faculty Annual Reviews of Research. This will enable the Committee to review researcher development within the wider context of Faculty research strategies and achievements – whilst also placing a firmer focus for action at the level of faculties, who are often best placed to provide specific and targeted support to their researchers.

2014 Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• RKTO to investigate the under-representation of women amongst the University's research active academic staff and REF-eligible researchers, and make recommendations to Research and Knowledge Transfer Committee to address any issues that may be identified Completed: the research was commissioned and reported in summer 2016. It identified a wide range of barriers to research (for women and men) and possible action points. The report was discussed at Research and Knowledge Transfer Committee in November 2016 and the Athena SWAN/HR Excellence joint steering group (see also action m)
2017 and 2018 Actions
x. Termly meetings of steering group with expanded the terms of reference to monitor completion of actions, and report annually to R&KT Committee to coincide with annual reviews of research. PVC (Research) to be involved in biannual sign off of action plan and annually through report to R&KT Committee
y. R&KT committee to expand the scope of Faculty annual reviews of research to explicitly report on researcher development from 2016/17

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS IDENTIFIED

Principle	Action	Responsibility	Outcomes and success measures
1	a. Develop and implement orientation plans, to enhance existing integration process for newly appointed/promoted employees by January 2018	Assistant HR Director Learning & Development	Orientation Plans to be made available online by end of January 2018 100% of People Managers to be trained to use the new Orientation Plan process by end June 2018 A minimum of 60% of new employees/promotions to have up-to-date orientation plans
1,5	b. Develop a Research Staff Hub on Portal to provide a range of resources tailored to research staff and PIs. Relevant information for job applicants - to give a fuller picture of working as a researcher at the University (e.g. support mechanisms, case studies, role descriptions) - to be available from the website	Assistant HR Director Learning & Development with Grants Officer (RKTO)	Information to include within 6 months (December 2017): <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Getting started in your Role –e.g. structures/car parking/catering/HR/Estates/GreenChester/Health4All/IT Services 2. Orientation Plans, Online Probationary Process & PDP 3. Development Opportunities, links to Vitae and RDF & support for future employment 4. Researchers Network, Research Staff Discussion Board, Connecting with Researchers & Staff Forum (newsletter) 5. Vision and Strategy 6. Research Committees 7. Research related policies and procedures 8. Principal Investigators 9. Equality and Diversity 10. REF & TEF information 11. Current Vacancies & salary scales Within 18 months (December 2018): <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 12. Resources e.g. Funding; Running a project; Research Impact; Ethics 13. Apprenticeships 14. Early Career Researchers 15. Research events calendar 16. Health and Wellbeing 17. Supporting our staff, including case studies Within 36 months (December 2019): <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 18. Career Pathways & Managing Your Career

			19. Engaging with our community (including impact) 20. Staff Survey
1	c. Produce a proposal to Senior Management Team to develop mechanisms to enhance researcher retention and job security for research staff on fixed-term contracts by January 2018	Director of Research & Knowledge Transfer	If proposal is approved, establish funding level and criteria by April 2018 to influence funding from 2018/19 academic year, so that contracts can be longer than grants to facilitate dissemination and impact
1	d. Enhance the HR exit process to include a reflection on research/generic skills and support for future employment	Assistant HR Director Learning & Development	'Managing Your Career' online guide to be made available from September 2017 and monitoring of hit rates thereafter. A link to the document to be emailed to all researchers prior to end of contract
2	e. Complete implement the online PDP across the University by June 2018	Assistant HR Director Learning & Development	The aim is for all employees to have access and have been trained to use this tool. This will make it easier for remote researchers to complete this virtually where necessary (to increase participation), improve the visibility of the RDF and make a clearer link for researchers between the RDF and PDP process 100% of employees/departments to be trained and given access to the new online PDP process by July 2018 Increased completion rates for PDP amongst researchers to 40% (Review Year runs from August 1 st to July 31 st each year)
2	f. Review the probationary review process to ensure suitability for short contract durations and tailored (as necessary) for use by researchers; review to be concluded by December 2017	Assistant HR Director Learning & Development	Review to be concluded by December 2017. Increased completion rates for probationary review process amongst researchers to 60%
2	g. Promote the mentoring scheme to researchers via direct emails. Upon successful establishment of	Assistant HR Director Learning & Development &	RKTO to identify key researchers to encourage and prompt identification of individuals as potential research mentors by September 2017

	the mentoring relationship, create a case study document to further promote the scheme by April 2018	Director of Research & Knowledge Transfer	Aim to recruit at least 10 mentors and establish 2 research mentor relationships Case study document developed by April 2018
2	h. Draft a Manager's Recognition Guide and seek approval from SMT to implement by September 2017	Assistant HR Director Learning & Development	Guide completed and approved by September 2017, and published on portal. Monitor hit-rate and seek feedback after 12 months
2	i. Conduct by April 2018 a review of options to support researcher career progression including an initial exploration into career pathways for researchers which may exist at other HEIs and incorporate a review of researcher job descriptions	Assistant HR Director Learning & Development	Comprehensive review to be concluded by April 2018 for implementation of approved actions through 2018/19 academic year
2	j. Keep researchers informed of relevant developments and implications of the TEF & REF (via Research Staff Hub by December 2017)	Director of Research & Knowledge Transfer	Information on Portal by December 2017 and discussed at the Researcher Network during 2018
4	k. The People and Organisational Development Strategy to be absorbed into the People Strategy during the next review by the HR Director to align with the University's Corporate Plan; this revised People Strategy to be made available to staff by September 2017	Assistant HR Director Learning & Development	People Strategy Completed by September 2017

3,4	l. Monitor participation rates of researchers in all Learning and Development events for 2016/17 and undertake appropriate marketing of the opportunities for this specific audience	Assistant HR Director Learning & Development	Establish the 2016/17 participation rate by September 2017 and identify appropriate target for increased participation rates in 2017/18 Dates of training events to be highlighted via researcher portal pages, discussion board and bimonthly messages
3,4	m. Develop & deliver by April 2018 training for academic staff who have come from a professional (i.e. non-research) background to help them maintain & build research activities post-PhD; and develop resources & training for managers to address unconscious bias in workload allocation	HR Manager – Development and Diversity with Director of Research & Knowledge Transfer	A ‘Developing your research career’ event was delivered March 2017 - feedback obtained and to be analyzed to inform planning of future events by October 2017. Development & delivery of new training by April 2018. Attendance levels and feedback to be monitored for enhancement opportunities Success measure will be in inclusion of a higher proportion of female staff in REF2021 (i.e. more representative of the staff profile)
3,4	n. Revise content of the Supervisor Good Practice training sessions to explicitly include supervision of researchers (in addition to doctoral students) by September 2017	Director of Research & Knowledge Transfer & Project officer (AQSS)	Planning to be completed by September 2017 for introduction of amended content during 2017/18 academic year - anticipate delivery twice pa. Feedback from participants to be monitored to inform future delivery
3,4	o. HR to work with Careers and Employability to develop an action plan to improve the employability of research students to increase the possibility of them gaining research positions after completing their studies; any subsequent actions to be reviewed and approved by SMT by April 2018	Assistant HR Director Learning & Development & C&E	HR Team to inform Careers of Researcher vacancies. Process to be in place by December 2017

4	p. Seek feedback from researchers via the Researcher Network, taking a lead from the themes within the CROS survey. Consider participation in CROS 2019 if number of researchers (or interest from researchers) increases	Director of Research & Knowledge Transfer & HR Manager – Development and Diversity	Establishment of Research Network by January 2018 Thereafter mechanisms, key themes and timeline for feedback agreed with researcher community. Subsequent actions to make improvements evidenced by follow up feedback
3,4	q. Secure funds in 2017/18 RKTO business plan to support conference attendance for career development purposes (rather than for research dissemination) and inform researchers of opportunity to apply	Director of Research & Knowledge Transfer	A £3000 annual fund established from 2017/18 offering awards up to £500. Applicants to identify the specific benefits of attendance in their applications. Applications to exceed awards by 50% to encourage strong, well thought out applications
5	r. Develop case studies and other resources which promote examples of how researchers have taken responsibility for their own career development; this will be an element of the 'Managing Your Career' guide referred to as an action in e. Principle 1	Assistant HR Director Learning & Development & Director of Research & Knowledge Transfer	At least 2 case studies developed and included on portal as researcher resource by September 2017
5	s. Establish a new Research Network, meeting termly from January 2018	Director of Research & Knowledge Transfer with Grants Officer (RKTO)	Some meetings to address issues raised by research staff. Target engagement by 30% of researchers
5	t. HR to facilitate via Portal, the opportunity for research staff to connect with other researchers	Assistant HR Director Learning & Development	Directory of Connections to be available by January 2018

	within and outside of their own department, whether professionally or socially. This informal facility to 'Connect with other Researchers' to be available from January 2018		
6	u. Direct email and telephone marketing of relevant events at the Diversity Festival to researchers & managers in January/February 2018 in order to improve participation, followed by attendance monitoring and feedback	HR Manager – Development and Diversity	Increase participation rates of Researchers in Diversity Festival Events from 0% of researchers attending events in 2016 to 5% for 2017 and 10% in 2018 Specific email to researchers requesting suggestions for events for 2018 that they would like to attend, to be linked with network meeting
6	v. To ensure relevant HR Excellence in Research actions are incorporated into the Athena SWAN April 2018 action plan	HR Manager – Development and Diversity	Athena SWAN action plan to include relevant actions from HR Excellence in Research Action Plan (from September 2017)
6	w. Develop research staff equality data in line with the data requirements of the Athena SWAN (AS) charter and set specific targets with the AS action plan to address any inequalities (December 2017)	HR Manager – Development and Diversity	Data to be reported to Athena SWAN Self-Assessment Team (SAT) and reviewed in line with Athena SWAN requirements. Actions will be developed as a result and updated in this action plan
7	x. Hold termly meetings of steering group with expanded the terms of reference to monitor completion of actions, and report annually to R&KT Committee to coincide with annual reviews of research. PVC	Director of Research & Knowledge Transfer & R&KT Committee	Ensure timely completion of actions and feedback to R&KT Committee. Annual report to R&KT Committee in November each year

	(Research) to be involved in biannual sign off of action plan and annually through report to R&KT Committee		
7	y. Expand the scope of Faculty annual reviews of research to explicitly report on researcher development from 2016/17	Director of Research & Knowledge Transfer	Researcher development explicitly addressed in annual reviews, with Departments and Faculties reporting local measures to enhance environment and support