HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH AWARD: 4-YEAR EXTERNAL REVIEW REPORT 2017

Context of this review and institutional position since 2-year review 2015

Teesside University was awarded the HR Excellence in Research Award in May 2013. After conducting an internal evaluation and review, the University retained the Award at the 2-year review point. The original action plan 2013 was updated in 2015 and the 2-year review report provides detail on the rationale for those revisions and an update on previous actions relating to the 2013 Plan. Further specification of the actions for the period 2015-2017 was also included in the 2-year review report and the status of each is updated in detail in the last version of the original action plan. Both reports are available at: http://www.tees.ac.uk/sections/research/training_staff.cfm. This report provides a summary of each of these further specifications which provided the focus of the past two years.

In May 2015, just after the completion of the 2-year review, Professor Paul Croney was appointed as the new Vice-Chancellor. Subsequently, the strategic direction of the University has changed substantially from the period prior to 2015, with new senior staff appointed to all areas of the institution, a new research strategy in place, and new support departments as well as different structures within the Academic Schools in which researchers work. These new structures put consistent management and reporting lines in place within the Schools in the form of an Associate Dean and Principal Lecturer for Research & Innovation and Departments within Schools have been created, each with a Head of Department. The Working Group acknowledges that it has been challenging to progress actions originally proposed at the 2-year review point as far as it was anticipated because structures that were assumed for the implementation of certain actions have been changed, in particular those actions linked in any way with the Research Institutes which no longer exist in their previous form. However, the Working Group also recognises many potential benefits for Concordat implementation, goals which are now specified in the Corporate Research Strategy. New structures at local level now have a consistency which offers opportunities to put Concordat-related support in place that would not previously have been possible.

Evaluation for the 4-year review

For the purposes of the 4-year review evaluation, the University held two Concordat consultation events (November 2016 and March 2017) using a focus group format. An invitation was extended to all Schools via the Associate Deans (Research & Innovation) in each School who were asked to nominate research staff to participate in the focus groups. A total of 17 staff participated across the two focus groups, representing a cross-section of experience and disciplines from different Schools. In addition to obtaining significant feedback on the previous action plan, the Working Group received a number of strong recommendations for the new action plan. As a result, one major outcome of the focus groups was the decision to organise the new Action Plan on the basis of specific themes connecting the various actions coherently. Staff who were consulted about how best to improve research staff support were clear that the actions needed are fundamentally interlinked. As a result, much of the new plan is based directly on the ideas of focus group participants who provided feedback on existing actions as well as examples of how those actions could be extended and improved. The area where this is seen most keenly is in the area of 'mentoring' as set-out in the previous Action Plan, which is "re-framed" in the new Action Plan on the basis of the ideas of staff about how mentoring might work better *within our institutional context*. Further detail on this aspect of the evaluation and the effect on the new Action Plan are given in the progress update below.

Additional input for the evaluation was obtained from staff surveys, in which questions relating to research support are included; engagement with and feedback from individual researchers, via central research support relationships; and feedback obtained from formal staff development activity, researcher development events, and the Leadership & Management programme (LMRE) evaluations. Senior management were also consulted with respect to links with research strategy and resourcing as well as the longer-term staff development goals within the research and corporate strategy.

The Working Group met quarterly during the period since the two-year review, adapting to changes of personnel related to the re-structure noted earlier. Three original members of the group from 2013 continue on the group whilst the posts and functions previously undertaken continue under the responsibility of new members appointed to the group. In addition to hosting the two Concordat consultation events, the group also met specifically to agree the content of this report, provide specific updates on the existing Action Plan, and to agree the content of the new Action Plan.

Key progress against 2013 original Action Plan and 2015 updated Action Plan

The original action plan put in place in May 2013 identified four 'headline' areas for action. At the two-year review in May 2015, the plan was updated with a new area of focus (leadership and management development for researchers) and further specification of the original actions was proposed. Progress on each of these areas and further specifications of the actions is as follows:

1) *Working Group membership to be expanded to include a member of research staff & to include a member of the University's Athena-Swan development group;* a member of research staff was appointed to the Working Group in 2015; an existing member of the Working Group was appointed to the Athena-Swan development group, fulfilling the second action.

2) *Engage more directly with research staff to see whether specific mentoring opportunities would be beneficial in meeting their career & development goals; [Concordat Principles 2, 3, 5] – original plan areas;*

   2a)   Increase participation in the institutional mentoring programme making benefits more available to researchers & evaluating effectiveness; [Concordat Principles 2, 3, 5] – specification 2015. This was the area that generated the most interest and ideas in the focus groups. Three major insights obtained from the focus groups were that: i) research staff recognised mentoring, in whatever form, as a major key to their development; ii) the institution-wide formal mentoring programme, although seen as positive, did not have a strong uptake by research staff; and, iii) most research staff believed that the aim of further work in this area should be *to diversify support as much as possible*, aiming for *accessibility and availability of bespoke and tailored support activity* as a priority, even if that activity was not recognised formally as "mentoring". Focus group participants were clear that currently existing practices of strong individual support provided in day-to-day activity by peers and more experienced researchers –which elicited strong expressions of confidence from focus group participants -- should not be compromised by an attempt to make that kind of personal support outwardly more "formal" or by trying to capture that practice in formal processes. It was strongly felt that such attempts could put staff off from engaging in mentoring as either mentor or mentee altogether. A key insight was that many focus group participants thought that the institution needed to "re-frame" its mentoring activity in ways that were *more suited to the research culture of the University* and that *diversity* should be just as important as formality. A number of important ideas were put forward, including that a major challenge in increasing participation in the formal institutional programme was a perceived lack of availability of suitably qualified researchers to be mentors; the uncertainty of some potential mentees about how to get the kind of mentoring that they wanted, which was often less formal than that available through the programme; and finding time to focus on their development needs. The new Action Plan is thus closely based on the views of the focus group participants. Previously the Research Institutes were proposed as the principal loci of mentoring, but these have now been re-structured. Instead, a new approach for targeting support as part of a revised staff review process (PDPR) will take place as part of standard staff review which should enable formal consistency without prescribing *in what form* development needs are provided, but encouraging determination on an individual basis. The institutional formal mentoring system has 32 staff members participating as mentors. Incorporating formal mentoring more explicitly into senior staff roles and thereby increasing the pool of available mentors in the institutional mentoring programme whilst also encouraging "looser" more flexible forms of mentoring where this is appropriate and where it works for the individual, should permit the provision diverse routes of support that each member of staff will find most beneficial based on their experience, their needs, and the time they have available.

   3) To ensure that research staff have the opportunity to be briefed specifically on matters related to researcher support when being inducted into the University; [Concordat Principles 2, 3, 4, 5];

   3a) Monitor & evaluate the effectiveness and relevance of the dissemination & use of Induction support & information for new staff [Concordat Principles 2, 3, 4, 5]. Over the past two years, GRS (now RIS) staff have been providing research-specific support to new staff at the central academic induction events, held monthly for new academic staff, and co-ordinated by the Academic Registry (functions previously performed by the Department for Learning & Development). Reports about new starters are provided by Human Resources and all new academic staff attend. Research induction information consists of signposting to key support mechanisms and staff members who support

research staff, ensuring that new staff are aware of the availability of training and development opportunities. This is in addition to the previously completed action from 2013 of ensuring that initial information documentation was provided to new staff in the form of a welcome e-mail, mailing list membership, and a Learning & Development Handbook for Researchers. There has been an increase in the number of staff reached at the induction point: 66 staff distributed over 20 induction sessions in the period May-15 to May-17. Of the 66 staff reached, 15% booked development activity directly after the induction session. The initial staff development opportunities signposted at induction are now running more frequently due to demand, with an average attendance of 12. The offering of these opportunities will increase further over the period of the new action plan with the aim of improving accessibility (Theme C). The central TURN events signposted at induction and elsewhere in information distributed to new staff now have an average attendance of 50 staff per month.

4) *Development of a Career Development for Researchers portal & module to extend the support on careers currently provided via individual support; [Concordat Principles 3, 4, 5];*

   4a) Develop more targeted Careers Service resources, information & awareness of this support & obtain better data on researcher career outcomes [Concordat Principles 3, 4, 5]. Careers Service staff have offered initial induction information continually throughout the period 2013-17 but, as anticipated in the 2-year review report, obtaining accurate data on researcher career outcomes from staff moving on from the institution has been difficult [although see (5) below on staff gaining promotion]. The Working Group discussed the challenge of outcome data repeatedly, reaching the conclusion that this data would not be sufficiently useful in improving support provided to staff to warrant pursuing it further. Therefore, a decision was taken to focus on developing bespoke support specifically for researchers using improved needs analysis and to ensure that research staff are better aware of the support that is available to them. In order to measure outcomes, a new needs assessment tool currently being piloted will be used to establish benchmarks. This received strong support during the focus groups from staff who emphasised the benefits of bespoke support provided *at the right stage* and aimed *at the right level,* rather than generically. Bespoke web resources have been available since the 2013-15 period of the action plan and continue to be developed, but it is also proposed to ensure that all Careers Service staff themselves are adequately trained and supported to deliver such bespoke support for researchers. This will be achieved using the new Theme B indicators as a framework and by developing a "researcher journey map". The Careers Service has also been involved in re-structuring activity and is now embedded within the Department of Academic Enterprise and, as such, is in a position to focus on innovative support solutions for the future, an important change which informs the new action plan for the next 4-year period, including the Theme of Career *Innovation* & Resources, with new partnership opportunities for staff development.

5) *Widen the reach of the Leadership & Management programme (LMRE) & ensuring that staff needs & attendance are a priority [Concordat Principles 3, 4, 5]* The decision by the Working Group to add this area of focus at the 2-year review has proved to be a good one by the strong continuing success of this programme. In 2015, the key action was to ensure that staff who could benefit from attending the programme were invited to do so and that when they had accepted the invitation were encouraged and enabled to attend all days in the programme. There have been 42 participants from Teesside across four cohorts, distributed across the Academic Schools as follows: SDCA 6; SCM 9; SHSC 11; SSE 6; SSBL 10. Participant evaluation remains positive with participants also providing input into improving the programme and delivery; and outcomes of the programme are encouraging, with some participants winning promotion or being given new responsibilities with a strategic focus: of the 42 Teesside participants so far, just over 20% have been confirmed as having secured permanent more senior positions subsequently (7 internal promotions; 2 at other institutions). In the new action plan, this area of activity will be embedded into an expanded and more structured development programme, working with management in Schools to ensure that potential participants are offered the opportunity and time to take part via the PDPR process. Leadership & Management forms the upper tier of the level indicators to be used in Theme B of the new action plan.

6) *Review & revision of each area of HR policy relevant to researchers. [Concordat Principles 1, 2, 3, 6]* Review and, where required, revision of HR policies has been undertaken throughout the period of the 2013-2017 action plan. Specific policy review and revision details are given in the updated action plan for the period. Under the new action plan, the process of review and revision is compressed into a single action with relevant policies listed under the action with timescales where appropriate. An outcome of the Working Group evaluation with respect to HR policy review in the previous action plan was that the regular cycle of review and revision is undertaken for all HR policy as standard practice and so a separate Theme in this area has been retained with a specific action related to how such review practice impacts on the researcher group and facilitating further actions if appropriate.

7) *Re-apply for Bronze Athena-Swan accreditation [Concordat Principle 6]* Previous applications for Bronze accreditation were not successful. A new application will be made under the leadership of PVC Prof Jane Turner, with staff briefing events taking place in April 2017.

Headlines of the new action plan 2017-2021 and measures of success

As a result of the evaluation for the 4-year review, it was clear that an explicitly thematic action plan would be welcomed by our researchers, prioritising *diversity and accessibility* of support and development activity, and so the new action plan has been redesigned using thematic organisation. The focus area of mentoring has been integrated into two separate but linked themes (B and C) which prioritise diversity and accessibility. Leadership & Management is incorporated into Theme B as a level indicator. The information & dissemination focus remains as Theme A but aimed towards communications and relationship-building. The re-structured Researcher Development function within Research & Innovation Services has a remit specifically linked to the new action plan which thus forms a central pillar in RIS(RD) activities for the next four years, aligned with the institution's Research Strategy to 2020-21. Success measures for each theme are summarised here. In the Action Plan itself, the goal of each theme's actions are stated initially, followed by specific tasks related to achieving that goal. Action success measures are varied, with some linked to production of materials, others to confirming that briefing or training has been undertaken. A few success measures are quantitative, such as volume of attendees, but the Working Group believes that qualitative evaluation is likely to provide more insight into the actions proposed. Our staff needs are clearly about successfully delivering diversity of targeted and tailored support, the effectiveness of which can only really be measured by progress in addressing and meeting those diverse needs. Participant evaluation will thus be an important aspect of our success measures, with some "dip-stick" evaluation with individuals as well as some more systematic evaluation at the 2 and 4-year period review points.

Theme A: **Information, communication, relationships** *[Concordat Principles 2, 4, 5, 7]*. The aim is further enhancement of the information focus of the previous action plan whilst improving communications and building of relationships with researchers to enable them to plan for development via a revised PDPR HR process. Actions here link to Theme B via needs analysis; further development of research support activity via academic induction; a complete overhaul of web resources; and repurposing the well-established monthly TURN events to be an exclusively staff development forum. Success will be measured by tracking uptake of opportunities by staff and by evaluation of the re-purposed TURN events in both quantitative and qualitative terms.

Theme B: **Research development support: diversity** *[Concordat Principles 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6]*. This theme aims to provide targeted support tailored specifically to the differing needs of staff by focussing on identifying the right support for the experience level of individual staff members. The use of level indicators and type indicators will enable a structured approach to needs analysis linked to levels of the RDF. The identification of mentoring needs and provision is integrated into this needs analysis. Development of staff with responsibilities for conducting needs analysis is a key action under this theme. The goal is to ensure that the diverse needs of staff are adequately identified and success will be measured by evaluating PDPR use and establishing better records of required support.

Theme C: **Research development support: accessibility, availability** [*Concordat Principles 2, 3, 4, 5, 6].* This theme is primarily related to the delivery of development activity linked to the indicators in theme B. To facilitate accessibility for all staff, the long-term development of new in-house e-learning resources is a key action of this theme, supplementing existing and newly-developed training activity in a blended-learning format. Involvement of departmental-level staff in provision is also important to the success of these actions. It is anticipated that the full development of actions under this theme will take the entire 4-year period to 2021 which is, as elsewhere in the Plan, indicated by timescales in square brackets. The goal of this theme is to ensure that staff have access to those support needs identified in Theme B, and the Working Group propose that this will best be ensured by a *more structured* development programme that has hitherto been available. Success will be measured by having a fully-developed structured programme in place by the end of the period, staff uptake of e-learning resources, and evaluation of effectiveness in addressing their development needs. The e-learning element is a key part of Theme C in ensuring better access and thus will also be evaluated separately, in terms of uptake volume as well as content quality.

Theme D: **Career innovation and resources** *[Concordat Principles 3, 4, 5].* The aim is to take advantage of the new positioning of the Careers Service within the Department of Academic Enterprise and open up careers support for researchers to wider opportunities of partnership working. New structures within Academic Schools offer links between advisors and Schools and a number of new external partnerships present potential areas for researcher career development. The renewed focus of the department also provides an opportunity to up-skill careers advice staff themselves for provision of bespoke researcher support and the development of better tools for providing that support. Success will be measured by implementation and uptake of new tools, training and partnership opportunities by research staff and to the number of staff receiving bespoke support in any of the forms provided.

Theme E: **HR Policy review and implementation** *[Concordat Principles 1, 2, 5, 6]*. Implementation of the revised PDPR process is fundamental to other actions across the themes and a key success measure in itself: implementation will be measured by uptake and use volume and the effectiveness of enabling Theme B goals will be determined by qualitative evaluation with individual staff. Rolling review of HR policies linked to evaluation of the effect of changes on staff will be measured by tracking review more closely against Concordat implementation, improving dissemination and then evaluating staff awareness at the end of the period.