

## HR Excellence in Research Award: Six Year Internal Review Report

### Working Group, meeting schedule and working methods

Teesside University was awarded the HR Excellence in Research Award in May 2013 which was retained after 4-year external review in May 2017. The Working Group held quarterly meetings throughout the period of the current action plan. In the period directly prior to six year internal review, monthly meetings were held to May 2019. The Working Group membership now comprises: Director of Research & Innovation Services; Deputy Director (Learning Development); Head of Research Governance; HR Business Partner; Senior HR Officer (Employee Engagement); Senior Careers Advisor; Principal Lecturer (Academic Registry); and ECRs. The Working Group membership crosses over with staff involved in setting up a new ECR Forum (linked formally to the senior Research & Innovation Committee); the working group for Athena-Swan; and to the University's Investors in People Action Planning Group. The Working Group provides a Standing Report on activities to each meeting of the senior University Research & Innovation Committee (RIC), chaired by the PVC for Research & Innovation, with a membership comprised of senior managers for research, including all School Associate Deans (Research & Innovation.)

### Evaluation of the Action Plan

Input for evaluation was obtained from:

- 1) Careers in Research Online Survey 2019
- 2) Survey feedback from Researcher Development Programme events taking place in 2018-19
- 3) Survey of Induction activities for ECRs in the period 2017-2019
- 4) Institutional staff surveys within the period
- 5) Feedback from mentors and mentees at academic unit level
- 6) Input from researchers as part of the Investors in People Gold review in 2018

The Working Group met on 6-December-18 to agree the process of internal review and running of CROS 2019; on 7-March-19 the form of the review and data gathering was agreed. A meeting on 11-April-19 agreed the format of the present report and updates to the action plan; and on 16-May-19 the final review submission was agreed. Accompanying this report is a supplementary 'Progress Updates' document providing detailed commentary on progress on the Action Plan 2017-2021 originally submitted in May 2017 and revised following external review in November 2017. The Action Plan 2017-2021 has also been amended for 2019-2021 to reflect decisions taken during the review process.

### Key stages of progress against Action Plan and summary of achievements in last two years

The Action Plan put in place in May 2017 identified **five Themes (A to E)** under which actions would be grouped. In the supplementary 'Progress Updates' document compiled for the internal review, actions relating to the period up to May 2019 are set out by Theme in sequence with comments relating to progress added in detail under each. The use of the supplementary document is designed to be easy to follow, showing all relevant actions and sub-actions ('tasks') by date, relevant Concordat Principle(s) and success measure. Each Action is labelled by Theme letter and a number within that Theme. Task success is coded by Completion and by Colour. Where an Action is incomplete or has been revised or deferred, grey colouring is used.

**Theme A Information, Communications, Relationships (Concordat Principles 2, 4, 5, 7) :** A formal internal definition of 'ECR' was proposed and agreed and is now use for all HR-related support, by Research & Innovation Services, and in all elements of the Researcher Development Programme. HR Records and regular reporting on staff meeting the ECR definition are being developed and staff with responsibility for ECR support are using improved record monitoring to ensure the ECR population is reached more effectively. Newly designed information is now provided to ECRs by HR with details of resources, training and other institutional sign-posting available on the intranet. For Induction, 116 staff attended during the period May 2017 to March 2019. Of these, 38 staff also attended the new bespoke ECR Induction, a proportion of just under 33% of new staff reached with ECR-specific information, resources and support. The Action Plan for 2019-2021 puts in place specific measures to improve this. Entire (not just new staff) ECR population at time of internal review is 144 staff in total. A web hub space has been created on the intranet for ECRs. This hub has been mostly used so far to provide information about the researcher development programme. The web hub had an average of 125 unique user views per month over the period May

2017 to December 2018. Usage of the research staff development webpage in the period May 2017 to March 2019 is 542 page views, 438 of which are unique,

**Theme B Research development support (diversity) (Concordat Principles 2, 3, 4, 5, 6) and Theme C Research development support (availability, accessibility) (Concordat Principles 2, 3, 4):** A new structured Researcher Development Programme was designed and the initial programme was rolled-out in September 2018. Initial evaluation of ECR participation in the programme is in progress. ECR attendance has been good, with the elements of the programme targeted at ECRs being popular and feedback positive. ECR bookings consisted of 40 for each of the two ECR-specific Induction sessions which ran three times so far in year; and 38, 31, and 24 attendees for other ECR sessions within the programme in the first six months. The key element of the new RDP programme was the ECR route. The development of support types and level indicators explicitly linked with the RDF ensure ECRs are targeted specifically for development, with a large proportion of provision aimed at the ECR group. During the design phase and initial roll-out of the development programme, the proposal to develop e-learning resources to complement the traditional delivery was explored but the consensus was that it would likely be more effective to wait until evaluation of the initial form of the researcher development programme had been conducted to decide whether e-learning options would be valued by ECRs. For this reason, the implementation of ECR-specific e-learning options has been postponed. The implementation of a revised Personal Development Review system and the introduction of the Professional Development Planning and Review (PDPR) Framework was a cornerstone of the Action Plan in terms of ensuring proper research staff support and development. The linking of the support types and level indicators used for the researcher development programme to the new PDPR process, clearly linked to the RDF, and new processes linked to PDPR to ensure that research needs are addressed in line management and workload decisions, is improving take-up of development opportunities. The new PDPR process was implemented as expected. A series of 20 briefing and training sessions offered opportunity for staff to receive information and guidance on the revised PDPR framework. A total of 220 staff participated. PDPR co-ordination in Schools is led by a named member of staff providing records updates to central HR. Uptake and completion records are properly detailed under the new system. Staff attending the Researcher Development Programme report that identification of training needs was discussed during their PDPR and that a recommendation or requirement for development was the main driver in their attendance at a session on the programme. The previous TURN events were re-designed and re-launched as a monthly research lunch. A new member of support staff has taken the lead on these events, with attendance consistently good and, importantly, a majority of attendees are ECRs, many attending regularly each month. There have been six monthly lunches in the period so far with a total ECR attendance of 38 (unique headcount). All job descriptions for new and existing staff at Reader and Professor Deans (Research & Innovation) were asked to review mentoring in their areas as part of this change to senior staff expectations. A number of individual ECR staff were contacted to provide input into their experience of mentoring. At the time of the development of the current Action Plan in May 2017, it was anticipated that the improvement of mentoring would be linked to the roll-out of a new central institutional mentoring scheme. This scheme is still not fully operational but is planned for roll-out in 2019-20 as part of a revamped HR Organisational Development plan.

**Theme D Careers innovation and resources (Concordat Principles 3, 4, 5):** Resources linked to better Careers Service staff awareness of researcher journey have been developed. Training has been held with the careers staff at two bespoke sessions during the period. Senior Careers staff have agreed a system for improving one-to-one support based on numbers of staff using the service which involves ensuring better communication of support and information with ECRs and that the one-to-one support offered is shared effectively. Initial plans for development of partnership opportunities focused on the launch of the new National Horizons Centre (NHC). Opportunities for ECR involvement in this partnership have been focused initially at inviting ECRs to participate in the residential events as part of the regional THYME (Teesside, Hull, York) network. Two events have been held in the past six months at which ECRs participated.

**Theme E HR policy review and implementation (Concordat Principles 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7):** A new HR Policy, Rewards and Benefits Manager has been appointed and is progressing a number of policy review and development projects. A new Central Communications Hub has also been launched to improve internal communications. The University was awarded Athena-Bronze Award status in October 2018. One ECR has become a long-standing permanent member of the Working Group but efforts to appoint a second ECR have been less successful, due to staff moving on from the University. The Director of Research & Innovation Services was appointed to the Working Group and reporting to the Research & Innovation Committee, chaired by the PVC Research & Innovation, with a membership of senior staff including all School Associate Deans (Research & Innovation), established using regular Standing Reports. A new ECR Forum is being put in place reporting formally to the Committee and a number of informal and self-organised ECR group meetings have been taking place, with feedback reported to the Working Group. The University ran CROS2019 for benchmarking purposes.

## Activity and progress monitoring over next two years: Key areas of focus

As part of the review process, the Working Group has agreed that some previously defined actions/tasks under the Themes should be revised for the period 2019-2021. Some of these revisions are based on changes in priority given feedback received and some revisions are based on adjustment of aims that are achievable given changes to institutional structure or resources. No actions have been removed entirely. However, the Group agreed that, given that the original Action Plan for the four year period was already ambitious, it was important to focus on ensuring that the fundamental areas under each Theme were embedded properly. Where substantially new ways of working had been proposed, it was essential to ensure that these had been achieved, rather than adding new actions or changing direction significantly. Therefore, with the exception of the key areas highlighted below, the major activity for the 2019-2021 period will be to ensure that enhancements of ECR support through achievements in the past two years are carefully monitored to ensure that their benefits are realised fully; and to take advantage of successful implementation of more efficient staff management systems and opportunities provided by new communication portals and digital projects that have been introduced in the early part of 2019 within the University. Additionally, specific areas of focus 2019-2021 will be to address those actions/tasks left only partially complete at the end of the first two year period and to tackle those actions/tasks to be changed, as follows:

**Theme A** (across all actions): A major review of Academic Induction proposed by the Academic Registrar, led by the Academic Registry and with the participation of Research & Innovation Services in relation to research staff, will take place in the second half of 2019. The opportunity to substantially improve ECR Induction, increase the reach of the support available for ECRs and to better embed the opportunities available to ECRs (see Theme D2 below) is significant. It is anticipated that this will permit for better enhancement of all actions related to Communication under Theme A. **(Concordat Principles 2, 4, 5, 7)**

**Theme C2:** Feedback received so far on whether E-learning elements will provide a useful supplement to more traditional RDP training and be valued by the ECR population has been mixed and currently it is insufficiently positive to warrant the investment of staff resource into a full-blown e-learning approach as proposed in 2017. However, it has been agreed by the Group that an evaluation of options currently available with the intention of the piloting of *some form* of e-learning is still desirable. The initial proposal is that this will be based on the use of Panopto Guides, currently being used in other aspects of the University's work, as an initial step in determining the value of online provision for the ECR population. **(Concordat Principles 2, 3, 4)**

**Theme C3:** Evaluation of the use of indicators and types at the point of this review is difficult because the use of indicators and types has only recently been implemented in alignment with the new RDP. A major focus over the next two year period will be to obtain evidence of whether the indicators and types are understood by staff; their usefulness in enabling staff to assess their needs; and what element of support would be most appropriate to them. Additionally, a review of the use of indicators and types by staff responsible for conducting performance reviews and allocating time and resource will be undertaken. This will be linked with further evaluation of the PDPR process and the use of online Research, Innovation, Enterprise and Business Engagement Planning (RIEBE) forms used to determine workload allocations and plan research objectives and professional development for individual staff. **(Concordat Principles 2, 3, 4)**

**Theme C4:** At the end of the review period, a substantial change to the management structure for research at local level was implemented. This will provide major benefits for improving the opportunities for mentoring of research staff and ensuring that more staff are acting as mentors. In tandem with the inclusion of a newly launched central institutional mentoring scheme in 2019-20 as part of the Strategic Plan proposed by Human Resources, it is hoped that the objectives of increasing research-specific mentoring during the period of the Action Plan will be achieved. This is a major focus of the next two years now that structures have been put in place to make real progress with this objective. **(Concordat Principles 2, 3, 4)**

**Theme D2:** Data from CROS and other surveys related to the RDP show that staff would welcome more focus on career support in a one-to-one form with Careers professionals. A key piece of work will be to get the message out that *this support is already available* and to continue to support the Careers staff in building their own knowledge and expertise in the support provided to research staff. **(Concordat Principles 3, 4, 5)**

**Theme E6:** The objective of improving ECR engagement will hinge on establishing the ECR Forum, reporting to Research & Innovation Committee. This is a change to the previously proposed 'drop in' approach in favour of a more stable and formal body representing ECR interests. It is also proposed – as reflected in the amended Action Plan – that the ECR Forum will provide the Working Group with better and consistent ECR representation and that the Forum will be asked to design and co-ordinate the major ECR input phase of the next review cycle in 2021. **(Concordat Principles 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7)**

The planning of the RDP programme for 2019-2020 is currently in process. Expansion of key areas of the programme are anticipated, with a widening of scope of topics for the monthly networking lunches for ECRs and an increase in participation in intensive, targeted development events.