

HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH AWARD: EIGHT YEAR REVIEW REPORT

Institutional Context

Teesside University is a post-1992 institution with a total of approximately 18,500 students and 2,300 members of staff. 581.8 FTE of academic staff were eligible to be submitted to REF 2021. 246.1FTE (42%) were submitted, with 6.4 FTE of this group on fixed-term contracts. In addition, we have 48.1FTE (8% of our academic/research base) of staff on research contracts, with 4.7FTE of this group classed as independent researchers.

As of October 2021, the ECR staff population as defined by HESA stands at 158.2 FTE and the postgraduate research student population at 357.5 FTE. At Teesside University we take a broader definition of ECRs, defining ECRs as 'staff within the first five years of their first academic or independent researcher post, contract researchers, and mid-career lecturers who are new to research'. Our ECR population is, therefore, slightly larger than that defined by HESA, though difficult to quantify exactly.

Given the nature of the institution and relative size of the researcher population, we have made the strategic decision to extend the developmental work associated with implementation of the revised Concordat across our research and academic community and our MCR, ECR and PGR populations, so that all groups can benefit from work in this area. Interventions and reporting, though, will continue to consider nuance regarding career stage and type.

The University has five academic Schools: Computing, Engineering and Digital Technologies; Health and Life Sciences; Social Sciences, Humanities and Law; Teesside University International Business School; and the MIMA School of Art and Design, based at the Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (MIMA). Research is organised under eight research centres aligned to the schools: the Centre for Applied Psychological Science; the Centre for Culture and Creativity; the Centre for Digital Innovation; the Centre for Public Health; the Centre for Rehabilitation; the Centre for Social Innovation; the Centre for Sustainable Engineering; and the National Horizons Centre.

Approach to the review process

Teesside University was originally accredited for the HR Excellence in Research Award in May 2013. Action Plans for 2013-17 and 2017-21 were previously overseen by the HR Excellence in Research Working Group. In 2021, this group was absorbed into the Research Culture & People Sub-Committee (RCPSC), a new committee that reports directly to Research & Innovation Committee (RIC). This Committee has been formally established with a ToR and Constitution and is chaired by the Deputy-Chair of RIC. Membership includes senior managers (Research & Innovation Services, HR); professorial and staff representatives from all academic schools; and ECR and PGR representatives. This report, all supporting documents, and the new Action Plan for 2021-25 received final approval from RCPSC prior to submission.

Narrative updates against the Action Plan 2017-2021 below refer in summary to those actions reported on for internal review in 2019, adding where necessary additional information where progress has been made that was pending at that review point and is organised according to the Themes in that Action Plan. Original timelines refer to a May cycle for review, but due to Covid-19 campus closure, a deferral to the following cohort was requested and so new timelines refer to a November cycle.

Evaluation

Activity and evaluative input were affected during 2020 and 2021 due to Covid-19 with events postponed or repurposed. The role of the (then) ECR Forum continued virtually and was essential for determining initial key elements for both evaluation of the previous Action Plan and establishing the parameters for the new Action Plan 2021-23. Input for evaluation and the new Action Plan development was obtained from:

- CEDARS survey (run internally only, for evaluative purposes) based on 107 responses.
- ECR Forum (now the ECR Committee) attendees and events, where operations permitted.
- ECR Forum Co-Chairs as representatives of the ECR population and members of RIC and RCPSC.

- A survey and participant interview project conducted by two recently awarded PhD candidates over three months in the summer of 2021 and supported by Research & Innovation Services staff.
- Feedback from the Researcher Development Programme.

Progress and summary of achievement against Action Plan 2017-21

The Action Plan put in place in May 2017 identified five Themes (A to E) under which actions are grouped. In the supplementary 'Progress Updates' document compiled for the internal review, actions relating to the period are set out by Theme in sequence with comments relating to progress added in detail under each.

Theme A Information, Communications, Relationships (Concordat Principles 2, 4, 5, 7): A formal internal definition of 'ECR' was agreed and is used for all HR-related support. HR Records and regular reporting on staff meeting the ECR definition and improved record monitoring ensure the ECR population is reached more effectively. Newly designed information is provided to ECRs with details of resources, training and other institutional sign-posting available on the intranet. A major review of Academic Induction took place in the second half of 2019, to improve content. ECR Induction was significantly improved by the development of an 'Essentials' strand in the RDP aimed specifically at ECRs. Induction support is provided via a mandatory standalone academic induction session and the newly developed 'Essentials' strand of the RDP which are elective attendance sessions. 253 staff attended during the period May 2017 to May 2021 (including the break in normal campus operations between March 2020 and May 2021 due to Covid). Of these, 52 staff also attended a bespoke ECR session focused entirely on career development support. Responses in CEDARS show that 62% of respondents found Induction support either 'Very Useful' or 'Useful'. Additionally, other evaluation of Induction support undertaken via an internal survey during the past two years, showed that 26.3% thought that Induction support was "Great"; 28.1% "Good, but would benefit from more focus on local (School) support"; 28.1% "Fairly Good, but I still needed more information afterwards". A web hub space has been created for ECRs which is used to provide information about the researcher development programme and the various tracks appropriate for them.

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): The structured Researcher Development Programme was designed and rolled-out in September 2018, with subsequent years seeing evaluation and adaptation of the content based on staff needs and take up. A key element was the development of an ECR-specific route and a fundamental approach has been provision of flexible options for staff. The programme in its most recent form uses both informal 'drop-in' sessions, multi-session courses over several weeks, and 'Fast Track' programmes of multiple sessions where participants can take some sessions, but not others. ECR attendance has been encouraging. Breaking down attendance statistics across the RDP offer is complex because the programme's form is now very different from its initial design and elements have been added and removed, depending on evaluation and take up. Overall RDP records show 507 individual bookings across all elements the programme, which includes 173 booking from the initial pilot programme, as reported at the six-year review. At that review, the task in the Action Plan to develop e-learning resources was marked as "deferred". However, the closure of campus operations in March 2020 and up to August 2021 meant that e-learning options became the only way of providing development support. As a result, an entire package of online development sessions has been created and, as of October 2021, remains the standard way of delivering training. As part of a qualitative project of evaluation undertaken in the summer of 2021, most interviewees strongly supported the continued use of e-learning options, especially the flexibility of archival and on-demand materials, and as a result it is planned to retain this type of provision as and when standard on-campus development sessions restart.

The implementation of a revised Professional Development Planning and Review (PDPR) Framework was a cornerstone of the Action Plan. The linking of the PDPR to new processes to ensure that research needs are addressed in line management and workload decisions has significantly improving take-up of development opportunities Staff attending the Researcher Development Programme report that the identification of training needs was a principal issue discussed during PDPR and that a recommendation or requirement for development was the main driver in their attendance at a session on the RDP programme. CEDARS data show that 79% of respondents found career development review as part of the PDPR

process either “Very Useful” or “Useful”. In the subsequent two years after the six-year review, several changes to the PDPR process have been to better embed the use of PDPR within the changes to management structure implemented during the 2017-19 period, noted in the six-year review report”. Several centrally coordinated monitoring processes have been put in place aligned with a) staff experience and seniority level (ECR, MCR, Leadership); b) better alignment between staff research objectives, their development needs to reach these objectives, and research management and structures at the local level; and c) better reporting mechanisms to address shortcomings in achievements of objectives and provision of bespoke support from researcher developers to manage shortcomings. The next stage in improvement is to bring all such processes into an online system, operated by HR, and linked to other online “self-service” systems that have already been brought into operation. CEDARS responses show that 46.7% of respondents had spent more than 3 days in the past 12 months undertaking CPD activity, with 31.7% having spent more than 5 days on CPD in the past 12 months.

All job descriptions for new and existing staff at Reader and Professor were revised to incorporate role expectations for mentoring ECRs. At the time of the development of the 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 was not fully operational at the point of the six-year review and, due to Covid, it has only just been launched as of September 2021. Of 44 currently active mentors on the scheme, 12 are researchers.

Theme D Careers innovation and resources (Concordat Principles 3, 4, 5): Resources linked to better Careers Service staff awareness of researchers’ needs were developed in the first two years of the 2017-21 Action Plan and training to careers staff was delivered. Senior Careers staff agreed a system for improving one-to-one support based on numbers of staff using the service and ensuring better communication of support available. The development of partnership opportunities based at the National Horizons Centre (NHC) via the regional THYME network (Teesside, Hull, York) led to both PGR and ECR participation in residential networking events over the period. The implementation of the ECR Forum has also enabled career-focused events to become a standard part of ECR support. Data from CEDARS show that efforts to improve communications about support have been moderately successful: 55.1% of respondents “Agreed Strongly” or “Agreed” that they were aware of the support provided for career development. 56.5% of respondents indicated that they had not, but would like to, undertake training or CPD in career management. However, that only 16.3% had pursued this in discussion with a careers’ specialist shows that research staff have not, on the whole, taken up the opportunities offered by the Careers Service and the perception seems to be that this type of support is “for students.”

Theme E HR policy review and implementation (Concordat Principles 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7): A new HR Policy, Rewards and Benefits Manager (now Head of Employee Engagement) was appointed and is a member of RCPSC. Several policy review and development projects took place and a new HR Communications Hub was launched to improve internal communications. In particular, a policy on fixed-term contracts outlines the support provided to contract research staff, including support from career advisers, a redeployment process, and a process of consultation as fixed-term contracts come to an end. Resources managed by the PVC R&I support bridging arrangements for contract researchers where appropriate. In support of equality, diversity and inclusivity, we secured an Athena Swan Bronze Institution Award in 2018; retained our Investors In People Gold status (2018 and 2021), with the institution’s commitment to equality, diversity and inclusivity specifically commended; maintained our Stonewall Top 100 position; achieved Disability Confident, Leader status in 2019; and became a signatory to the Race at Work Charter to improve the workplace outcomes for BAME employees. In the original Action Plan, we had proposed to use a ‘drop-in’ format for ECR input. This proposal was not taken up, in favour of a more formal ECR feedback and communications approach. An ‘ECR Forum’ was established in 2019 and has now morphed into an ‘ECR Committee’ increasing the formality of the feedback system. This is co-chaired by ECRs, one appointed and one elected by their peers, who also represent the ECR population on RIC and RCSPC. ECR input into all phases of Concordat-related work is now much more robust and the development of the RCSPC should enable us to improve input and evaluation over the next Action Plan period. The University ran CROS2019 in 2019 for benchmarking purposes and CEDARS in 2021 for evaluative data for this review. CEDARS ran

internally only as staffing issues during Covid campus closure meant we were unable to launch and run CEDARS during the national launch.

Action Plan 2021-23

We have identified four key areas of focus under our 2021-23 action plan. Key actions are referenced against the relevant identifier in the Action Plan. Although a two-year plan, we recognise that the research culture strand, in particular, is complex and multifaceted. A key deliverable in this period is the laying of foundations through the development of a nuanced Research Culture action plan (as detailed below) with interventions anticipated being delivered from 2023 onwards. The plan will be updated as the action is developed.

Enhancing Research Culture

Improvements in research culture will be driven forward by Research Culture & People Sub-Committee, working with the ECR Sub-Committee and PGR Forum (and MCR Sub-Committee following agreement). These formally constituted bodies will work together to:

- develop a nuanced understanding of the full range of issues within the Concordat, uplifting awareness of Concordat aims from 51% to 60% by 2023, monitored via CEDARS [ECI1].
- develop an institutional Research Culture Action Plan aligned and feeding into our HR Excellence Action Plan with progress reviewed annually via CEDARS [ECI6].
- encourage better PGR/ECR/MCR involvement with processes designed to enhance their ability to influence policy/culture/change initiatives, monitoring take-up of mentoring, participation in the formal groups, and workload time assigned for culture initiatives via annual reporting and via local culture staff leads [ECR1; ECR5; ER4].

Effective Research Leadership

Over the next two years, we will refresh our research leadership and management training to ensure it best meets the needs of our research population. This will include:

- delivering the Research Leadership Programme and Management in Practice Programme to 90% of Research Centre Directors, Research Theme Leads, Heads of Departments, and Principal Lecturers to improve enhance a range of manager responsibilities [ECI4; ECM1; EM1].
- embedding mental health and wellbeing, EDI, and integrity training within the RLP, increasing confidence levels in those managing researchers (CEDARS Q25.1-25.10) [ECI4]
- embedding appraisal and career development training within the RDP to ensure:
 - a. usefulness of appraisals remains at 79% or higher (CEDARS Q31.a) [EM4]
 - b. to increase the percentage of researchers undertaking 10 days+ CPD from 14.9% to at least 30% by 09/2023 (CEDARS Q34.8.a) [PCDI1].
 - c. increase the percentage of researchers who see PDPR as supporting broader career aspirations from 54.3% to 70% by 07/2022 [PCDI2; PCDR4].

Transparent and Equitable Research Practices

Continuing our work on equitable research practices, we are planning a suite of initiatives that will enhance our approach and ensure transparency, inclusivity, and equity. This includes:

- a review of the academic promotion process to reinforce recognition and reward of a broad range of academic, research and service work [ECM5; EI3].
- the development of a refreshed mentoring scheme and resources to support applicants with promotion [ECM5; EI3].
- a discussion paper on alternative funding models for fixed-term research contract work [EI6; EM3]
- the development of enhanced data sets to monitor academic and research promotion and recruitment [EI3; EI1].
- the implementation of equality impact assessments on a range of research-related initiatives, including strategy development, returns, audits, and internal research funding. [ECF3; PCDF2].