

Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers: HR Excellence Award - Two year evaluation process – Bath Spa University

Introduction

Bath Spa University was awarded the HR Excellence in Research award in January 2012 and this award reflects the University's current and on-going commitments to maintaining an active research portfolio - concentrating on our areas of strength while also fostering new research areas.

In order to align ourselves with the European charter and code, the University undertook in 2011/12 an audit of existing practice in relation to the support and career development of research staff across the University. An Action Plan was agreed through the University Research, Consultancy and Scholarship Committee (RCSC) on how we can align ourselves more closely with the principles of the Concordat, and this was approved and acknowledged by the European Commission.

The Action Plan is a working document, and is updated regularly in line with annual school research plans and with University strategy. The last annual review was in July 2013, and the action plan has been updated again as part of this process. It can be found at: <http://www.bathspa.ac.uk/research/hr-excellence-in-research>

Process

The annual internal evaluation of the current action plan was undertaken by the Research Support Office (RSO), in consultation with HR, and discussed at RCSC at its January 2014 meeting, drawing on discussions from the annual review process to evidence continuous improvement in this area. As set out in our published consultation process for the Concordat, RCSC members canvass the views of academic and research staff across their constituencies, and feed their views back into Committee discussions. RCSC at its meeting on 23 January 2014 also discussed the revision of RCSC formal membership to include representatives from all categories of research staff, including ECRs, PGR students and contract research staff, to make the Committee more representative, and to give those staff a platform to raise issues formally and inform decision making processes. These changes will be taken forward through the appropriate procedures during 2013/14.

The July 2013 review of the action plan also took into account the requirements of the new QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education, and in particular, Chapter B11 on Assuring and enhancing academic quality of research degrees.

Key achievements and the progress against the original action plan

A: Recruitment and Selection

The University has agreed a new University vision and strategy up to 2015 which can be found at: <http://thehub.bathspa.ac.uk/services/vice-chancellor/vision-and-strategy> and this includes an implementation plan for research highlighting the commitment to support high quality research and research staff across the University.

As part of the new strategy, a suite of new research professors have been appointed who are acting as mentors to research staff, and the Research Office has been engaged in a round of strategy meeting with each School, to agree on how their research staff can be supported across a range of activities.

The University has subscribed to a pilot of the Vitae Researcher Development Framework (RDF) planner, and all new academic/research staff undertaking the CLTD programme, and new PGR students should now attend an introductory session on how to use the RDF and the RDF planner to manage their research career development.

B: Recognition and Value

As stated in our Action Plan, all staff are treated equally at BSU. Both staff and student researchers have the same rights of membership to research centres, and all staff have access to staff development programmes and other benefits. Guidelines for the determination of duties of research staff are now published on the web alongside grade profiles for all academic and research grades, and the University runs an internal recruitment and promotion campaign for readers and professors.

The University is currently developing a research career management strategy for its staff, and has mapped the role profiles for all research staff, academic staff, readers and professors against the phases of the Vitae Researcher Development Framework (RDF), so that staff can use the RDF as a developmental tool, and to inform Staff Development Review (SDR) discussions about research career development (<http://thehub.bathspa.ac.uk/services/research-and-graduate-affairs/researcher-development-programme/managing-your-research-career> .) We have also invested in a pilot of the Vitae RDF planner, and will be evaluating this across both academic/research staff and PGR students in the 2013/14 academic year – a proposal on whether we should investing in this on a longer term basis will be taken to RCSC in March 2014.

An annual leadership programme was launched in 2012/13, and attendance is mandatory for all managers, including those identified as managing contract research staff as PIs or Research Centre Directors. Central funding has also been provided to support staff on Research Leadership Development courses offered elsewhere (e.g. University of Bristol and Vitae programmes).

Schools are now asked to report annually to RCSC on activities related to research staff development and environment. Minutes of RCSC are discussed at School Research Committees, which include representation from contract researchers and PGR students.

C. Support and Career Development

The University has appointed a new Researcher Development Officer who is taking forward a number of initiatives and developing a research staff development strategy in line with the University's Vision and Strategy as outlined in the implementation plan for research. Key elements for 2013/14 can be found at <https://thehub.bathspa.ac.uk/services/research-and-graduate-affairs/researcher-development-programme> and include:

- Early Career Researcher programme
- Research career management programme (in line with the 4 domains of the Vitae RDF) to include training for established researchers and mid-career staff
- Piloting the Vitae RDF planner, including one-to-one support for academic/research staff and PGR students
- A programme of workshops and training sessions that address the four skill sets identified in the Researcher Development Framework.

The University has also appointed a Knowledge Exchange Officer, who will be working with academic/research staff and PGR students to identify opportunities for knowledge exchange, including industrial/business work placements and skills development. A new Knowledge Exchange mentoring scheme was also approved at RCSC in January 2014 for immediate implementation.

D. Researcher's Responsibilities

A more systematic system for developing and managing research staff career development is being discussed across the University. The staff development programme is being enhanced to match the domains of the Vitae RDF and researchers have access to the RDF to help identify development needs. The development programme consists of workshops for all staff as well as targeted training sessions for early and mid-career staff.

E. Diversity and Equality

As part of its submission to REF2014, the University's Code of Practice for the selection of research staff was developed through a consultative process under the direction of the RCSC. The principles, policies and procedures set out in the Code framed our decision making processes in relation to REF2014 in the context of the principles of equality and diversity, and all relevant legislation, and aimed to demonstrate fairness to our staff by addressing the principles of transparency, consistency, accountability and inclusivity in line with the Concordat. A series of roadshows were undertaken on the Code of Practice for all staff across the University in the run up to REF2014, and all Directors of Research, Deans of School and other staff involved (67 in total) in the selection process were required to undertake equality and diversity training. The result of this has been to raise awareness of equality and diversity issues with respect to research across the academic management of the University.

Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) on REF2014 have been undertaken, and actions arising from this are being taken forward by the University Equality & Diversity Steering Group. These EIAs are available on the University's webpages (link to follow)

All staff are required to complete an on-line Equality and Diversity module when they commence employment at the University.

F. Implementation and Review

The Concordat Action Plan is a live document and a formal evaluation is undertaken annually by RCSC. The Vice-Provost (Research & Graduate Affairs) has responsibility for implementing and reviewing action across the year, in consultation with HR and members of the Research Support Office.

Next steps and the focus of the strategy for the next two years, including success measures.

<i>University Strategy and Vision Implementation Plan</i>	<i>Next Steps</i>	<i>Success Measure and Date</i>
Develop mechanisms to support strategic planning for research at School level and to communicate research priorities, themes and opportunities between Schools.	Facilitate research development across Schools, and ensure that all staff designated as research active are supported and have opportunities to engage with the University research environment.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agreement of strategic actions with Schools for supporting their research activities, with associated benchmarking and success criteria <i>(by April 2014)</i> 2. No. of cross-university research sandpits and interdisciplinary research seminars facilitated and supported <i>(ongoing)</i> 3. Quarterly RSO strategic newsletters <i>(immediate)</i>.
Enhance capacity and staff development opportunities to support preparation of high-quality research grant applications and develop internal peer review and share good practice within and between schools to enhance the quality of external research funding applications.	Develop a range of research development courses to enhance the bidding culture, and facilitate theme/call specific workshops and seminars alongside one-to-one RSO support for grant applications, as well as mentor support and peer review mechanisms.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. No. of new Research Staff Development courses offered <i>(ongoing)</i>. 5. Staff uptake on courses <i>(ongoing)</i> 6. No. of Research grant applications developed and submitted <i>(review annually)</i> 7. Increase in success rates and no. of grants awarded <i>(review annually)</i> 8. Increased roll-out of Vitae RDF planner across academic/research staff and PGR students <i>(Feb/March 2014 for pilot and 2014/15 if invest long-term)</i>
Explore mechanisms to promote research productivity.	Discussions with Schools and HR over the support for research staff, and the development of IPR/Consultancy models and an ethical and research integrity framework.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Development of an IPR/Consultancy policy for consideration by RCSC <i>(March 2014)</i>. 10. Development of an Action Plan for the implementation of the Concordat on Research Integrity <i>(March 2014)</i> 11. Consultation on a career development pathway for research within the HEA accredited PG Cert in HE <i>(Spring 2014)</i>

In addition to the above, the University is keen to ensure that all research contract staff are actively consulted and included in discussions relating to research environment and development. Whilst the critical mass is not yet large enough to implement the CROS survey at Bath Spa, members of the Research Support Office will be actively engaged in discussions over research support with all research designated staff in Schools, and mentor relationships and training will be put in place to ensure that such staff are not isolated and that their views are valued as part of the wider research community across the University.