HR Excellence in Research Award

A report summary of our two year self assessment

1. BACKGROUND

In 2010 Newcastle University gained the HR Excellence in Research Award in recognition of our on-going commitment to promoting the principles of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers. As part of this commitment, we had undertaken a review of our existing support for research staff, along with a gap analysis against the requirements of the new Concordat, following which a Concordat Implementation Plan was developed in 2009. The Implementation Plan outlined the steps Newcastle University committed to undertake to further embed this important agenda. This report outlines the significant progress we have made during the award period towards achieving the objectives set out in our original Implementation Plan; our means of evaluating this progress; and our plans to build on our successes to date.

2. KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

During the 2010-2012 reporting period significant progress has been made against our original Implementation Plan. We have now mapped this progress against the original objectives and summarised our key achievements.

The Concordat and our Implementation Plan were launched in a high profile event chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and addressed by Iain Cameron, RCUK to which all researchers and Principal Investigators were invited. Responsibility documents and post card summaries were disseminated along with copies of the Concordat and our implementation plan, research staff were reminded of the career development opportunities available to them during their employment in Newcastle, and feedback and ideas were invited. The event helped develop a high level of engagement with researcher development issues at all levels. According to CROS 2011 for which we achieved a 44% response rate, 84% of our research staff report having heard of the Concordat. At the strategic level, the implementation of the plan has been monitored by Staff Committee and University Research Committee (URC) with regular reporting to Faculty Research Deans. Staff Committee and URC recently agreed the centralisation within the Staff Development Unit of the Research Staff Support Team, in order to provide a more integrated synergistic response to the researcher development agenda and to share good practice across the Faculties. The Concordat has also prompted the University to pursue the Athena Swan bronze award and individual academic units are now pursuing the Silver award, the Institute of Health and Society being the first to be successful in this endeavour. 90% of our research staff felt the University was committed to equality and diversity (CROS 2011). Role profiles have been developed for all research staff and these have underpinned our recruitment and selection and promotion procedures, and now inform our training and development and career management activities. We have made significant improvements to our recruitment, selection and induction guidance and processes for research staff. We have completely reviewed our researcher promotions procedures which are now based around the role profiles, integrated with all other academic promotions and advertised to all research staff. 74% research staff now report having received a PDR, a research staff careers adviser has been appointed, and a number of specific initiatives have been developed and disseminated across the University to support researcher career development, including the Career Pathways Framework, the Research staff mentoring scheme, Faculty fellowships, the Transitions Programme, and the PI Development Programme.
We are also particularly proud of a number of significant successes, which we can link directly to the impetus provided by the Concordat and the added value gained from the HR Excellence in Research Award:

**Contribution to strategic goals**
The senior management team of the University (the University Executive Board) is committed to the implementation of the Concordat, and researcher development is integrated into both the HR and research strategies of the University. The improvements to our recruitment guidance have now led to comprehensive web based recruitment and selection guidance and documentation for all posts within the University containing detailed job descriptions and person specifications. And building on the success of the role profiles and promotion routes for research staff, we have now developed academic staff career pathways, which contain detailed role profiles for both teaching and scholarship, and research-based roles in addition to our standard research and teaching roles, affording parity of esteem and recognised promotion routes to all academic roles within the University.

**Impetus for change**
The importance of researcher development is now recognised at the highest level within the University, and implementation of the Concordat is monitored very closely by a number of groups chaired by members of the University’s Executive Board. The Concordat Implementation Steering Group is chaired by the Executive Director of Human Resources and oversees progress against the actions identified in the Implementation Plan. The University Research Committee, chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Innovation, considers six monthly reports on researcher development strategy and activity and sets the overall strategic direction of researcher development; and quarterly individual consultation and feedback meetings take place with internal stakeholders such as Faculty Research Deans and the chair of University Research Committee. The Researcher Development Coordination Group monitors synergy and ensures consistency in the implementation of development opportunities for Postgraduate Students and Research Staff and has representation from Faculty Research and Postgraduate Deans, Researcher Developers, Careers Advisor and Research Staff and Postgraduate Students.

**Supporting internal processes to embed and enhance researcher development**
The Concordat and the requirements for the HR Excellence in Research Award have prompted us to develop a more concentrated and focused approach to researcher development and support across the University. In response to this need, we have brought together the previously faculty-based research staff development provision into the central Staff Development Unit. The integration of our research support staff within the Staff Development Unit has enabled us to share the good practice which had been developed within the different Faculties, to create synergies to support development activities across all staff categories, and to maximise our use of development resources and specialisms whilst still recognising and being responsive to the needs of the individual faculty.

**Meeting researchers’ needs**
The Implementation Plan contained a number of actions to improve the support available to research staff to enable them to develop their own careers. The role profile and responsibilities documents and ‘postcards’ remind PIs and Heads of Academic Unit of the need to support career development activities, and the web based PI Manual supports Principal Investigators in fulfilling their responsibilities under the Concordat. The
development and roll out of our career development initiatives all underpin these development activities. 84% of researchers report having engaged in CPD activities and 72% have participated in internal training activities (CROS 2011).

3. EVALUATION AND MONITORING

Progress against the Implementation Plan has been monitored on an on-going basis. The Implementation Steering Group has met bimonthly to review progress and set project milestones and priorities, where appropriate. Quarterly reports have also been made to the Deans of Research and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research, and six monthly reports have been made to University Research Committee (URC). Research staff opinion has been sought via the CROS and PIRLS surveys, and through the Employee Opinion Survey, and reports and recommendations have been made to Staff Committee and URC. Research staff have also been consulted directly through the mailing list and through their representatives on the Research Staff Working Party, updates on the Implementation Plan have been posted on the website, and feedback on provision is made directly through the evaluation questionnaires following specific development activities. As part of this self-evaluation exercise the results of CROS and PIRLS have been mapped against the actions identified in our Implementation Plan. The results of this mapping exercise have fed through into our new Implementation Plan for 2012-2014.

4. NEXT STEPS

While we have achieved the vast majority of the objectives set out in the original Implementation Plan and have made significant progress in embedding the principles of the Concordat into our policies and activities, there are still areas on which we need to focus over the next two years. These are outlined in our new Concordat Implementation Plan for 2012-14. It should be noted that the new Implementation Plan is still in draft, subject to consultation with major stakeholders and ratification by University Research Committee and Staff Committee. Significant cornerstones of this new plan include the training of Principal Investigators with responsibility for managing research staff to ensure they are fully aware of their responsibilities under the Concordat and of the support available to them in fulfilling these responsibilities; and the development of a more robust communication and consultation strategy to ensure more research staff are aware of the considerable career development opportunities which exist and are available to them during their employment with Newcastle University, and to enable staff to input their ideas and feedback to ensure that the opportunities available remain relevant to their needs.

Progress will continue to be monitored and evaluated by the strategic groups referred to earlier in this document, informed by results of the CROS, PIRLS and Employee Opinion Surveys and by direct feedback from research staff.

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