

## CONCORDAT IMPLEMENTATION

### UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH AWARD TWO YEAR INTERNAL REVIEW PROGRESS REPORT.

The University of Aberdeen received the HR Excellence Award for Excellence in December 2010. As a condition of the award we are required to undertake a two-year internal review of progress against the actions set out in our Concordat Implementation Plan.

#### IMPETUS FOR CHANGE

Since 2010, the University of Aberdeen has reviewed researcher development provision and activities and secured ongoing funding for the dedicated Researcher Development Unit (RDU), with a remit to support personal, professional and career development of researchers (postgraduate, research staff, Principal Investigators and supervisors). The RDU aligns its provision with internal strategic objectives, research council expectations and the national researcher development agenda, championed by Vitae. In supporting the RDU within a centrally administered unit, the University has embedded researcher development activities at the highest level and has ensured a sustainable future.

From November 2012 the RDU became part of a newly established Centre for Academic Development (CAD). The remit of CAD recognises the activities which are necessary and essential to academic activities including professional development, teaching, learning and supporting the career development of students, researchers and academic staff.

A major achievement in 2012, was the University's successful bid to Research Councils UK for a prestigious Catalysts Award for Researcher Engagement and Development. Awarded in March 2012 this embeds a strategy for progressive researcher empowerment whereby the provision of skills and personal development are closely coupled with tangible and real-life opportunities to put skills into practice through public engagement and other channels. The Catalysts grant is only one of eight awarded in the UK and the only one to be awarded in Scotland. Our strategy begins at the very first point where research staff arrive in the institution. Our approach develops a relationship with our research community from their induction, through a comprehensive generic skills programme and follows through to practical experiences. The success of the progressive strategy for researcher development, as described in the RCUK catalysts application has helped to anchor researcher development and engagement into the research process.

#### HOW THE INTERNAL REVIEW WAS UNDERTAKEN

The internal review comprised a multi-step process coordinated by the RDU in conjunction with the Vice Principal for Research and Knowledge Exchange and the Director of Human Resources.

1. The Researcher Development Advisory Group (RDAG) was established with the monitoring of Concordat Implementation as part of its core remit. The implementation and action plan was reviewed and updated on a 6-monthly basis, reporting progress against the actions. The RDAG, chaired by the Vice Principal for Research and Knowledge Exchange, includes representation from each of the Academic Colleges (Directors of Research), Human Resources, Policy, Planning & Governance, Researcher Development and from session 12/13 will include research staff representation and representation from the Centre for Academic Development.
2. A short-life working group was established to co-ordinate the internal review and shape the actions going forward. The group consisted of research staff from each of the Academic Colleges, Human Resources, Researcher Development, College Directors of Research and Policy, Planning and Governance. The evaluation included consideration of existing data sets, including CROS<sup>1</sup> and PIRLS<sup>2</sup> 2011, which informed the review. Specific data regarding researchers' perceptions about the Concordat and institutional expectations were collated using CROS data and through focus groups with research staff across each of the Colleges during the review period. The group also liaised with central administrative colleagues where appropriate.
3. The University Management Group endorsed the review and report in December.

#### HOW THE REVIEW LINKS WITH EXISTING MONITORING MECHANISMS

The communications strategy of the RDAG includes reporting to the Staffing and Development Committee and the Committee for Research, Income Generation and Commercialisation and the updated action plan will be used to inform policy and practice developments as appropriate.

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<sup>1</sup> CROS: Careers in research Online Survey

<sup>2</sup> PIRLS: Principal Investigators and Research Leaders Survey

## KEY ACHIEVEMENTS AND PROGRESS AGAINST ORIGINAL ACTION PLAN

This section outlines the progress made against the action plan published in December 2010, full details can be found in the action plan.

### PRINCIPLES 1 & 2

The overarching vision of the University's new Strategic Plan (2011-2015) is the pursuit of excellence, through supporting and developing all students and staff within our institution. This demonstrates a clear commitment to "to support our researchers and help them develop at all stages of their career" (Strategic Objective 2).

Since 2010 research staff have been employed on open-ended contracts (unless the term of appointment is shorter than 9 months). This offers a feeling of added security to research staff on funding limited contracts with additional security offered through the redeployment process. Research staff identified at risk of redundancy are invited to register for daily redeployment updates and to attend career support workshops. Figures for redeployment continue to improve and since May 2011 only 31% of research staff on open-ended contracts with funding limitations have been made redundant with 59% of staff at risk of redundancy successfully redeployed or continued in their current role. Guidelines to support the recruitment, selection and development of researchers have been developed and are available online. This also was highlighted in the focus groups with researchers who identified that a bitesize guide to the Concordat and how the institution supports them would be useful. Staff in the redeployment process are supported with specific career support workshops, including CVs, self marketing and interview techniques. Feedback from these workshops is very positive and they are incredibly valuable and useful. In addition tailored programmes of training are offered to enhance the training and development opportunities for research staff facing redundancy.

CROS 2011 data suggests that overall, research staff feel integrated into the local and institutional research community and that their contributions are recognised.

The number of research staff and research leaders taking part in appraisal at the University of Aberdeen is well above national averages in 2011 (CROS national 55%, UoA 70%; PIRLS national 82%, UoA 94%). A University wide review of appraisal, to improve the impact is currently being undertaken. CROS and PIRLS data were available to inform this process.

We continue to raise awareness of the promotion procedure to all staff, and the promotion process is currently under review to make it more accessible to research staff. We have also improved the induction information on the RDU website and have developed a Researcher Development Handbook which includes information on induction and appraisal. The online recruitment system, launched in 2010 continues to be updated and developed to enhance the experience of applicants external and internal to the institution.

### PRINCIPLES 3&4

The University Management Group endorsed the Researcher Development Framework<sup>3</sup> in 2010 and the RDU continues to align materials and provision with the RDF and highlight it on the RDU website ([www.abdn.ac.uk/dev-rsd](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/dev-rsd)). More recently we have used the RDF lenses to highlight development pathways across different themes. The website has also been updated to include information for supervisors, PIs and research leaders to bring the information for developing researchers and research careers together in one place.

The University's provision for PIs is well established with a sector leading PI Leadership Development Programme in place since 2007.

*"An excellent 2 days, extremely valuable opportunity to network with colleagues and hear from senior management".*

Together with the Academic Colleges and Human Resources, Researcher Development uses data from event evaluations, appraisal objectives and PIRLS data used to progress these events and ensure they continue to meet the needs of the target audience. During 2012, we conducted a dialogue between research staff and research managers to discuss the challenges of balancing research commitments with career development for each group. One of the outcomes of this event was the need for practical leadership and management skills for both research managers and for research staff, when focusing on career development. In September 2012 the RDU launched a 4-day leadership programme for research staff and has activities planned for 'moving into management' for 2013. A range of online resources for 'strategic' career planning for research staff are also available on the RDU web pages. An online

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<sup>3</sup> The University Vice Chancellor has also signed the Manifesto for Researcher-led Public Engagement which in turn endorses the Concordat for Engaging with Public with Research 2010 which sets out guidelines for empowering researchers to embrace engagement-led career development

handbook to support research leaders and PIs who have management responsibilities has also been developed and will be available on the researcher development website.

Within the College of Life Sciences and Medicine a new Fellowship scheme, launched in February 2012 supports the career progression of research staff through mentoring and CV building towards fellowship funding applications.

The Framework of [Academic Expectations](#) was developed in 2011 to give clear guidance about role profiles and workload to form the basis of honest discussions about workload for academic staff during appraisals.

A review of mentoring across the university has also led to identification of new College champions and targeted training session for mentors and mentees.

To embed training of researchers in the remit of a research career, we have taken steps to recognise such activities as part of workload models and provide train the trainer sessions to empower academic and research staff to actively participate.

#### **PRINCIPLE 5**

Half of our research staff indicate having a clear career path in mind, while the others are still indecisive about their future direction, hence the importance of a robust and forward looking researcher development strategy. As detailed above the reinvigoration of the mentoring scheme undoubtedly helps researchers feel better equipped to take responsibility for their own development.

#### **PRINCIPLE 6**

In 2011, the University launched an Equality and Diversity [e-training](#) facility for all staff, together with training workshops to support the recruitment process. There are two modules focusing on 'Diversity in the Workplace' providing basic training on the legislative framework and its practical implications and 'Diversity in Teaching and Learning', focuses on the specific issues for teaching staff. Demonstrating our commitment to equality and diversity, we achieved an institutional Bronze Award through the Athena Swan Charter and are working towards Silver accrediting schools within the College of Life Sciences and Medicine. CROS and PIRLS data will be available to inform the development and evaluation of the action plans.

ABZwise, a pilot programme between the University of Aberdeen (Scottish Programme for Entrepreneurship SPE) and staff from the Centre for Entrepreneurial Learning (CfEL) from the University of Cambridge was designed specifically to inspire and inform enterprising women in science, engineering and technology. The outcomes of the event have provided the foundation for a new, organic, network for STEM women in the institution.

*"ABZWISE weekends are refreshingly different - they increase your ability to think about your expertise and personal strengths in new ways by learning from other successful enterprising women from both academia and industry. They also help you to see yourself as part of a bigger picture rather than just within the confines of your academic life".*

#### **EVALUATION AND MONITORING**

Progress against the Implementation plan has been monitored on an on-going basis through the RDAG and through reports to the committees detailed above. The views of researchers and research leaders are sought through CROS and PIRLS, the annual research staff satisfaction survey and through the biannual research staff forum. We have been active participants in major events and Researcher Development forums to share best practice, including ESOF 2012, Vitae International Conference (and associated meetings) and Engage 2012.

#### **NEXT STEPS: ACTIONS GOING FORWARD**

We have achieved the majority of our actions on our implementation plan, however we are not complacent about the work required to further strengthen our impact in this vital area over the next two years, not least in the awareness of the concordat amongst research staff and a thorough review of institutional and local induction programmes and processes. Our progress and updated actions are detailed in the action plan.

Briefly, our actions going forward include embedding the responsibilities under the Concordat to PIs through the PI development programmes and the support available to them, including the use of Vitae Every Research Counts resources. We will also raise awareness of the institutional policy to support career development of research staff ([http://www.abdn.ac.uk/hr/uploads/files/3day\\_development\\_time\\_research\\_staff.pdf](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/hr/uploads/files/3day_development_time_research_staff.pdf)) to support researchers taking responsibility for their own development through honest conversations with their line managers. We will also develop a framework and development portfolio to support career development for research staff which reflects the RDF and

our institutional objectives supporting research staff in reflecting on and planning their development to manage their own career progression.

The Staff Development Unit will launch a coaching module, accredited by the Institute for Leadership and Management, in collaboration with the University of St Andrews. The intention is to develop coaching skills amongst University staff, including researchers and academics, to build internal capacity to support individuals to take control of their own career development and to support the development of their teams. The project will also build a coaching network across the collaboration in Scotland.

We will seek to establish working groups within the RDAG to focus specifically on PI and research staff issues. The groups will extend their reach beyond the RDAG to engage directly with key target audiences and report regularly. These groups will also act as a conduit for identifying emerging development needs of researchers and would provide a forum through which issues identified by research staff can be raised. Together these key actions will help shape a more robust communication and consultation strategy for both researchers and PIs to ensure improved awareness of the considerable opportunities available to them and to co-create development opportunities, specifically through a researcher-led initiatives fund launched in 2012.

The University also intend to progress plans to embed equality and diversity through making the e-training modules mandatory in the near future.

In addition to the communication strategy detailed above, we will continue to take part in CROS and PIRLS surveys to benchmark and evaluate our progress in implementing the concordat and improve the researcher experience.

**DR LUCY LEIPER**

**RESEARCHER DEVELOPMENT ADVISER**

#### **ACTIONS 2012-2014**

The 2010 action plan has been updated with details of progress against identified actions here; actions for 2012-14 are detailed below.

PRINCIPLE	2012-2014 ACTIONS
<p><b>PRINCIPLES 1&amp;2</b></p>	<p>CROS and PIRLS 2011 highlighted that induction, although very useful, is frequently not offered. <b>ACTION:</b> Researcher development will review institutional, local and research staff specific inductions to identify why researchers are not engaging with inductions. The RDU will identify new ways to communicate and engage with the researchers and managers of researcher and develop new induction processes where necessary. Lead: RDU, COLLEGES and HR</p> <p>A review of appraisal is currently in progress.</p> <p><b>ACTION:</b> Following the review of appraisal, the Researcher Development unit will meet with colleagues in each of the Academic Colleges (Registrars, Business Development Officers, HR advisers) to highlight upcoming opportunities and to ensure these reflect development needs identified through appraisals. HR, Colleges, RDU (from 2013)</p> <p>HR Excellence Award awareness, locally and nationally.</p> <p><b>ACTION:</b> Undertake a review of how the HR Excellence in Research Award can be highlighted internally and how it can be used to promote the University of Aberdeen, for example in external advertising of posts. The review should also investigate how the University can maximise impact through the Euraxess resource. RDU, Research &amp; Innovation and HR (by end 2013).</p> <p>Recruitment and Selection &amp; Recognition and value.</p> <p><b>ACTION:</b> Undertake an investigation into the benefits of developing of a Code of Practice for the Career Development of Research Staff. Such a resource would to support both research staff and line managers who may be recruiting researchers. Such a code of practice <b>could be a way to integrate expectations relating to career development in appraisals. RDU and HR (by end 2014).</b></p> <p><b>ACTION:</b> Review of Investor in People status in 2013 – review how the principles of the Concordat can be harnessed in the action plan. Lead: Organisational Development (Human Resources)(end 2013).</p>
<p><b>PRINCIPLES 3&amp;4</b></p>	<p>Embedding development and the Researcher Development Framework in research careers remains a priority.</p> <p><b>ACTION:</b> Using the RDF, we will develop a framework and portfolio for development which aligns with University of Aberdeen role profiles across researcher positions and which reflects institutional strategic objectives.</p> <p>Lead: RDU</p> <p>Moving forward, the key element is that skills development and training are linked to experience and follow-through activity - what we call a progressive strategy and one which was endorsed by our Catalysts award. In order to truly embed development activities in research careers requires that we are explicit in what and</p>

	<p>how we expect researchers to demonstrate how they are developing and to provide opportunities for them to do so.</p> <p><b>ACTION:</b> Development and delivery of a progressive development programme coupled to tangible outputs.</p> <p><b>ACTION:</b> Identify (or define) core areas within which researchers should be able to demonstrate development which are also related to institutional objectives.</p> <p>Lead: RDU and PERU</p> <p>Our researcher development programme is progressing through a combination of researcher-led and co-development models complementing the more traditional centrally organised programme, influenced and steered by Vitae's RDF.</p> <p><b>ACTION:</b> We will launch a Researcher Development Initiatives Fund - an enabling fund allowing groups of researchers with good ideas to be able to apply for financial support to run development modules relevant to them.</p> <p>Lead: RDU (end 2012)</p> <p><b>ACTION:</b> We will seek to establish working groups within the RDAG to focus specifically on PI and research staff issues. The groups will extend their reach beyond the RDAG to engage directly with key target audiences and report regularly. These groups will also act as a conduit for identifying emerging development needs of researchers and would provide a forum through which issues identified by research staff can be raised. Together these key actions will help shape a more robust communication and consultation strategy for both researchers and PIs to ensure improved awareness of the considerable opportunities available to them and to co-create development opportunities, specifically through a researcher-led initiatives fund launched in 2012.</p> <p>Lead: RDAG</p> <p><b>ACTION:</b> The RDU will also collaborate with Learning and Teaching colleagues to develop a Certificate in Academic Practice to raise awareness in researchers of the responsibility to take ownership of their own career development and to support the careers of their research staff.</p> <p>Lead: Centre for Academic Development</p>
<p><b>PRINCIPLE 5</b></p>	<p>Our researcher development programme is progressing through a combination of researcher-led and co-development models complementing the more traditional centrally organised programme, influenced and steered by Vitae's RDF.</p> <p><b>ACTION:</b> We will launch a Researcher Development Initiatives Fund - an enabling fund allowing groups of researchers with good ideas to be able to apply for financial support to run development modules relevant to them.</p> <p>Lead: RDU (end 2012)</p> <p><b>ACTION:</b> We will raise awareness of the institutional policy to support the career development of researchers (3-day development policy, <a href="http://www.abdn.ac.uk/hr/uploads/files/3day%20development%20time%20research%20staff.pdf">http://www.abdn.ac.uk/hr/uploads/files/3day development time research staff.pdf</a>) through the researcher development programme, research staff inductions and investigate how reporting on activities can be into the appraisal process for research staff or through another identified mechanism.</p> <p>Lead: RDU and HR (early 2014)</p> <p><b>ACTION:</b> Develop an online personal development portfolio for researchers to support the framework detailed above.</p> <p>Lead: RDU, (in consultation with Staff Development, HR and College Directors of Research and Admin Teams, mid 2013)</p> <p><b>ACTION:</b> New communication strategies to engage with researchers, including social media and e-zines.</p>

	Lead: RDU (end 2012)
<b>PRINCIPLE 6</b>	<p>We seek to embed the responsibilities under the Concordat to PIs through the PI development programmes and the support available to them.</p> <p><b>ACTION:</b> Include the use of Vitae Every Research Counts resources in development programmes.</p> <p>Lead: RDU, College Directors of Research and Admin Teams, HR (during 2013)</p> <p>Continue to review mentoring schemes within each of the Colleges and monitor uptake offering support activities as required, in particular in relation to the CLSM Fellowship scheme.</p> <p>Lead: HR (Staff development) and College Teams (ongoing)</p> <p><b>ACTION:</b> The Staff Development Unit will launch a coaching module, accredited by the Institute for Leadership and Management, in collaboration with the University of St Andrews. The intention is to develop internal coaching capacity to support coaching for University staff, including researchers and academics, to support individuals to take control of their own career development and to support the development of their teams. The project will also build a coaching network across the collaboration in Scotland.</p> <p>Lead: HR (Staff development) (2013)</p>
<b>PRINCIPLE 7</b>	<p><b>ACTION:</b> We will seek to establish working groups within the RDAG to focus specifically on PI and research staff issues. The groups will extend their reach beyond the RDAG to engage directly with key target audiences and report regularly. These groups will also act as a conduit for identifying emerging development needs of researchers and would provide a forum through which issues identified by research staff can be raised. Together these key actions will help shape a more robust communication and consultation strategy for both researchers and PIs to ensure improved awareness of the considerable opportunities available to them and to co-create development opportunities.</p> <p>Lead: RDAG (end 2012 and ongoing).</p> <p><b>ACTION:</b> We will continue to review the Concordat implementation plan at 6-monthly intervals and to consult with research staff to identify actions going forward.</p> <p>Lead: RDAG</p> <p><b>ACTION:</b> Take part in CROS and PIRLS in 2013</p> <p>Lead: RDU (2013)</p> <p><b>ACTION:</b> We will use relevant information from the institutional staff satisfaction survey to inform (and enhance) benchmarking data collected through CROS and PIRLS.</p> <p>Lead: RDU and HR (from 2013)</p>