

Plymouth University

HR Excellence in Research Award: Four Year External Assessment - September 2015

Introduction

Plymouth University achieved the European Commission HR Excellence in Research Award on 5th September 2011 which was renewed on 27th September 2013. The Award reflects our commitment to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers. Key to sustaining this Award is a working party representing the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research), HR, Graduate School, Research Support and Development and, current Research Staff members. Our HR Excellence in Research Steering Group oversees our ongoing Concordat-related work and support for our researchers. The HR Excellence in Research Steering Group reports to the Research and Innovation Committee; meets twice yearly and, maintains and updates an Action Plan.

Evaluation

This internal evaluation was conducted in August – September 2015 by the HR Excellence in Research Steering Group. The Steering Group assessed progress against the action plan as well as plan commitments for 2015 – 2017. The evaluation took into account the views of researchers including:

- **Research Staff membership of the HR Excellence in Research Steering Group.** Key to the Steering group is the membership of two current Research Staff who in turn provide representation from the Researcher Forum and Research & Innovation Committee. The input and views of the two Research Staff members of the Steering Group is essential to our work supporting our researchers. This in turn provides a pivotal link between the purpose of the Steering Group and supporting our community of researchers.
- **The Researcher Forum.** The HR Excellence in Research Steering Group works closely with the Researcher Forum on Concordat-related activities and themes. Steering Group members participate in Researcher Forum meetings (and vice-versa) and this enables ongoing communication and consultation between the two bodies. The Researcher Forum is well supported by our researchers and is a highly effective mechanism to link and enable networking between our researchers, academics and staff supporting researchers.
- **CROS and PIRLS surveys.** In 2013 and 2015 we participated in the CROS (Careers in Research Online Survey), the PIRLS (Principal Investigators and Research Leaders Survey). The findings of both surveys are incorporated in our HR Excellence in Research action plan. The findings are disseminated to the Research & Innovation Committee, all Faculties and Schools and, our HR Department. CROS findings are delivered to the Researcher Forum every two years for consultation with our researchers. The HR Excellence in Research Steering Group will continue to work closely with HR to review these findings.
- **Staff survey.** Metrics and insights from the 2013 Staff Survey were broken down into: University-wide, Faculty/Directorate, and Staff category (including research staff). The next Staff survey will be administered in early 2016.

Key achievements and progress

Sustaining the HR Excellence in Research Award enables us to continually focus and review our support for our Researchers. The Award features in the Plymouth University Research and Innovation Strategy and Action Plan 2012 – 2015 and will be included in our future University strategies. Support for Early Career Researchers is also featured in the Plymouth University Strategy 2020.

In 2015/16 a new position of Pro Vice-Chancellor Research will be appointed as the University's strategic lead in research and innovation. This post will enable closer links between the teams supporting research and senior management.

Our HR Excellence in Research action plan 2013 – 2015 was mapped against the Concordat and additionally featured elements of the European Charter and Code for Researchers. Our key achievements and progress is as follows:

- **Recruitment and Selection**

- CROS 2015 notes a decrease in the percentage of fixed-term contracts (81%) and an increase in the percentage of permanent contracts (19%) for researchers compared to 2013 (84% and 14%).
- CROS 2015 highlights the percentage of Plymouth University researchers having held two or more contracts at their current institution (61.70%) is higher than the sector (50.26%).
- CROS 2015 notes a higher proportion of Plymouth University researchers (93%) had received detailed employment information during their recruitment for their current post than for the sector (89%).
- The Plymouth University research web pages have been updated and allow potential researchers the opportunity to see the support available for Researchers at Plymouth.
<https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/research>

- **Recognition and Value**

- CROS 2015 highlights a 12% increase in the number of Research Staff at Plymouth participating in an appraisal (64% 2015, 52% 2013) with an increase in satisfaction of the process (53.34% 2015; 37.21% 2013).
- The HR Excellence in Research Steering group has increased membership of current research staff to two (Research Fellow/Research Assistant). The Researcher Forum representative remains an active member of the Research and Innovation Committee and HR Excellence in Research Steering Group.
- The Staff Survey 2013 noted that 96% of research staff agreed Plymouth University is a good place to work.

- **Support and Career Development**

- In October 2013 we introduced a tailored development programme for Research Staff. The 'Research Support Programme' saw 435 engagements from 2013-2014 with an increase to 541 engagements for 2014-2015. The programme is widely publicised throughout the year and is a highly effective mechanism to link researchers with teams supporting research.
- CROS 2015 highlights that 89% of Plymouth University researchers agreed they had access to training and development opportunities (83% for the sector). This is an improvement on CROS 2013 which noted access to this training and development was lower at Plymouth University (85%) than nationally (85.33%). Additionally the introduction of a tailored programme for researchers has coincided with an increase to the percentage of Plymouth researchers participating in appraisals and their satisfaction with the process.
- The Researcher Forum continues its success and is highly supported by researchers. Growing from just two meetings per year (2008-2009) the Researcher Forum is now meeting five times per year (2015 – 2016) and with a sixth meeting planned for 2016. The Researcher Forum continues to base its activities around the Concordat and ensures the Concordat, HR Excellence in Research, Vitae and RDF are publicised.
- In November 2014 a Research Impact and Quality Officer was appointed to develop and support research impact at Plymouth University, including public engagement. Impact and Public Engagement sessions are now featured within the two Research Support and Researcher Development Programmes.

- Since 2013 the Plymouth University Twitter for Research (@PlymUniResearch) has developed considerably. There are currently over 1500 followers and over 8500 Tweets have been made. Due to this popularity many Plymouth researchers have created their own Twitter feeds which are followed by @PlymUniResearch.
- **Researchers' Responsibilities**
 - In 2013 a Research Governance and Engagement Officer was appointed with responsibilities for ethics, governance and integrity. Ethics and integrity sessions are now featured within the two Research Support and Researcher Development Programmes.
 - CROS 2015 highlights the percentage of Plymouth University researchers that know of or have some understanding of national initiatives is considerably higher than the sector. Most notably for the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers 68.09% (38.92 sector), HR Excellence in Research Award 48.94% (37.25% sector), Vitae 78.72% (52.41 sector) and the RDF 78.72% (52.41% sector).
- **Diversity and Equality**
 - Plymouth University currently hold an institutional Bronze Athena Swan Award with additional Bronze Awards for the Faculty of Science & Engineering, School of Psychology and Schools of Medicine and Dentistry. The Plymouth University Schools of Medicine and Dentistry are working towards a Silver Athena Swan Award to be submitted in November 2015.
 - A women's network was introduced in 2015 and met on 15th June 2015. A focus of this network is career progression and mentoring. The network will meet termly during 2015-2016.
 - HR has introduced a mandatory E&D e-learning package for Chairs of recruitment panels to commence from September 2015.
- **Implementation and Review**
 - The sustainability of the HR Excellence in Research Steering Group ensures the action plan is reviewed twice yearly and the purpose of the Steering Group is maintained.
 - The HR Excellence in Research Steering Group continues to work closely with the Researcher Forum. The activities of both the Researcher Forum and the HR Excellence in Research Steering Group are pivotal to our support for our researchers.
 - Participation of Steering Group members in Researcher Forum meetings (and vice-versa) enables regular communication and consultation between the two bodies.
 - The inclusion of the HR Excellence in Research Award and support for Researchers in the University's current and future strategies will ensure our Concordat-related work remains a priority.

Next steps and success measures 2015 - 2017

- HR will implement a Fixed-Term Contract project University-wide during 2015-2016. **Success measure:** A FTC Project Start-up Meeting is scheduled for 15th October 2015 – this project will review the use of FTC contracts, with a view to reducing the number of staff on FTCs and, include communicating to researchers a better understanding of rights and responsibilities as contract researchers (**Concordat Principles 1 and 2**).
- The findings of the 2015 CROS and PIRLS surveys will be disseminated to the appropriate University Committees and cohorts by December 2015. **Success measure:** Associate Deans Research to take the results of CROS and PIRLS to their Faculty Research Committee for distribution and action planning for 2015-2016 (**Concordat Principles 1 – 7**).

- The 2016 Staff survey will provide further metrics and insights from research staff. **Success measure:** Staff survey is due in early 2016 and to have at least the same response rate, or higher than 2013 (54%) - results will be available during the autumn term 2016 (**Concordat Principles 1 – 7**).
- CROS 2015 noted an increase to 64% (52% 2013) of Research Staff at Plymouth University participating in an appraisal in the last two years with a 53% (37% 2013) satisfaction in the process. PIRLS 2015 however noted lower (46%) satisfaction with the PDR process. Human Resources will focus on increasing participation, understanding and satisfaction in the PDR process by December 2016. **Success measure:** participation by Research Staff in PDRs to become in line with other staff categories (90% participation). Review guidelines for PDR to reflect that non-completion of PDR due to staff being on FTC is not a valid reason for non-completion. And, target training for managers of research staff so that where they have staff who are FTCs they are trained on how to provide effective PDRs (**Concordat Principle 2**).
- The new Research Support Programme has run for two years. The programme is well supported with high engagement from our researchers. The next programme will be available from October 2015 and reviewed annually. The programme provides links to the Vitae Researcher Development Framework, Concordat and European initiatives. The programme will continue to support researchers' development and is intended to continue to support and promote improved participation and satisfaction in the appraisal process **Success measure:** We will work towards a minimum 5% increase in programme engagements by July 2016 (**Concordat Principles 3, 4, 5**).
- There will be ongoing opportunities for Researchers including: the Research and Innovation Conference; UKRO and funding events. **Success measure:** University-wide events to be programmed for 2015-2017 (**Concordat Principles 3, 4, 5**).
- From September 2015 we will continue our twice-yearly reviews of the action plan to focus on key priorities. **Success measure:** We will send updated HR Excellence in Research action plans to the R&I Committee twice-yearly for ADRs to disseminate to the Faculty Research Committees for appropriate actions from 2015-2017 (**Concordat Principle 7**).
- We will continue to support and consult with the Researcher Forum and we recognise that this Forum has been essential to achieving the principles of the Concordat. **Success measure:** From 2015 – 2016 the Researcher Forum will increase the number of meetings to five per year with a sixth meeting proposed for 2016 (**Concordat Principle 7**).
- CROS 2015 noted an increased awareness of Researcher Development initiatives, particularly for HR Excellence in Research at 49% (32% 2013). The HR Excellence in Research Steering Group at Plymouth will make every opportunity to publicise and raise the profile of our HR Excellence in Research Award and Concordat-related work at Plymouth University by September 2016 and continue our support for this invaluable agenda. **Success measure:** We will work towards a minimum 5% increase in staff awareness of these initiatives by June 2017 (**Concordat Principle 7**).