

Plymouth University HR Excellence in Research Award

Two-Year Internal Assessment - September 2013

Introduction

Plymouth University achieved the European Commission HR Excellence in Research Award on 5th September 2011. This Award reflected our commitment to the principles of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers. Key to achieving this Award was the formation of a working party comprising of members representing Chancellery (Pro-Vice Chancellor Research), HR, Graduate School and Research Support. Following our Award we established an HR Excellence in Research Steering Group which oversees and directs our ongoing Concordat-related work and support for our researchers. The Steering Group reports to the Research and Innovation Committee and has expanded its membership to include the Research Staff Representative from the Researcher Forum. The Steering Group meets twice a year and maintains and updates an Action Plan.

Internal evaluation

In August 2013 the Steering Group conducted a two-yearly internal review to assess progress against the implementation and action plan as well as plan our commitments for 2013 – 2015.

The Researcher Forum at Plymouth University was established in 2008 following the publication of the Concordat and became an effective mechanism for the University to communicate with its Researchers. The Researcher Forum comprises of research staff, early career academics and staff supporting researchers. The HR Excellence Steering Group works closely with the Researcher Forum on Concordat-related activities and themes, with ongoing communication and consultation between the two bodies. Meetings with the Researcher Forum have resulted in real progress for example: revision of the University Ethics Policy; the development of a tailored programme and, web page for Research Staff, and the introduction of public engagement training.

In 2013 Plymouth University participated in the CROS (Careers in Research Online Survey), the PIRLS (Principal Investigators and Research Leaders Survey) and, the PRES (Postgraduate Research Experience Survey). Additionally HR coordinated a University-wide Staff Survey. The findings and feedback from these surveys will inform our ongoing HR Excellence action plan and will be disseminated to appropriate Committees across the University.

Key achievements and progress

Achieving the HR Excellence Award has enabled us a much greater focus on our support for Researchers and recognition of their needs as a cohort. We have made effective use of this Award and have reference to it in the Research and Innovation Strategy and Action Plan 2012 – 2015. Support for Early Career Researchers is also referred to in the Plymouth University Strategy 2020 and support for Research Staff will feature in the new HR Strategy currently in preparation.

In 2012 Plymouth University restructured its professional services and the Research and Innovation Directorate re-organised to enable closer links between the teams that support research and a senior manager for Research Support was created to coordinate this. A new position of Dean of Research and Innovation was also appointed as the University's strategic lead in research and innovation.

Our first iteration of the HR Excellence action plan 2011 - 2013 was mapped against both the Concordat and the European Charter and Code for Researchers and provided an overview of our key achievements and progress highlighted against the Concordat principles is as follows:

- **Recruitment and Selection**
 - The Recruitment and Selection process at Plymouth University has been refined to streamline the procedural aspect and utilise e-recruitment.
 - CROS 2013 highlights a higher proportion of Plymouth University researchers (89%) had received detailed employment information during their recruitment for their current post than for the sector (81%).
 - The Plymouth University research web pages are being updated to allow potential researchers the opportunity to see the support available for Researchers at Plymouth.
- **Recognition and Value**
 - The Researcher Forum met on 28th February 2012 and discussed public engagement and made recommendations for development and activities. Subsequently, the Researcher Development Programme introduced public engagement training in November 2012, providing opportunities for researchers and PGRs to interact with members of the public.
 - Public Engagement features in the Plymouth University Strategy 2020 and the Research and Innovation Strategy and Action Plan 2012-2015.
 - Change to the Terms of Reference of the University's Research and Innovation committee provided inclusion of the Researcher Forum representative on the committee. This person was also invited to join the HR Excellence Steering Group.
 - An internal networking website 'Researcher Development and Information' was created in 2013 to enhance communication within the researcher community.
- **Support and Career Development**
 - The Researcher Forum met on 1st February 2013 and was consulted on an initiative for an interactive Researcher Development and Information web page. This web page will provide information, contacts, events and a blog for Researchers to communicate.
 - The Researcher Forum met on 30th April 2013 to view and discuss a new Research Staff Development Programme. Following the continued success of the Researcher Development Programme and the Organisational Development Programme, a new programme for Research Staff has been drafted and has undergone wide consultation across the University. The Researcher Forum discussed the programme, provided feedback and, gave considerable support for this provision. Consisting of over forty sessions and mapped against the VITAE Researcher Development Framework, this programme will commence in September 2013 and is expected to support the University's Performance Development Review action plan for Research Staff, Principal Investigators and Research Managers.
 - The Research Support and Development team are actively supporting Researchers to apply for a range of Marie Curie grants. Additionally Schools are continuing to provide direct support to Fellowships and beyond the period of funding.
- **Researchers Responsibilities**
 - On 7th April 2011 the Researcher Forum met to discuss authorship. The resulting discussion was fed into the revision of the University's Code of Good Practice in Research forming part of the Research Ethics Policy published in January 2013.

- A new Code of Practice for External Grant Submissions was published in 2012 and presented by the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Research) to the Researcher Forum on 30th October 2012.
- **Diversity and Equality**
 - Equality and Diversity (E&D) responsibilities are mainstreamed into all job descriptions. E&D training is a mandatory requirement via a bespoke e-learning package for all staff. Promoting a positive work environment code of practice is an underpinning part of the mandatory “Leading Fairly” session for all managers. Equal Pay Review is undertaken regularly and all posts are scrutinised via a transparent matching and grading process. E&D committees and sub committees meet termly with representation from across all parts of the University. Generic role profiles for Researchers of all grades are maintained and published.
 - CROS 2013 highlights 98% of Plymouth University respondents were positive about the University’s commitment to E&D compared to 86% for the sector.
- **Implementation and Review**
 - The establishment of the HR Excellence Steering Group ensures the action plan is reviewed and updated every six months. The Steering Group membership includes a mixture of delegated representatives of those involved in researcher support and researcher development. The aim has been a balanced membership that is small enough to act as an effective ‘working’ group.
 - The inclusion of the HR Excellence Award and support for Researchers in the University’s strategies will ensure our Concordat-related work remains a priority.

Next steps and success measures 2013 - 2015

- From September 2013 we will continue to re-map the action plan to focus on key priorities.
- The analysis and action plans of the 2013 CROS, PIRLS, PRES and Staff surveys will be reviewed and disseminated to the appropriate University Committees and cohorts by June 2014.
- 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. From 2013 – 2014 the Researcher Forum will increase the number of meetings to four per year.
- The new Research Staff Development Programme will be available from September 2013 and reviewed annually. This programme is expected to achieve a number of goals including: provide Research Staff with a programme tailored to their career development needs; improve access to develop personal effectiveness (CROS 2013 noted access to this training and development was lower at Plymouth University than nationally); link to improved participation in the performance development review process.
- CROS 2013 noted 52% of Research Staff at Plymouth University participated in a staff appraisal in the last two years with a low satisfaction in the process. PIRLS 2013 additionally noted low satisfaction with the PDR process. Human Resources will focus on increasing participation, understanding and satisfaction in the PDR process by August 2015.
- The new interactive Researcher Development and Information web page will be available from October 2013 and reviewed regularly throughout the year. This web page will include tailored

information for new Research Staff to address low satisfaction with existing induction activities as noted in CROS 2013.

- There will be ongoing University-wide opportunities during 2013-2015 for Researchers including: the Research and Innovation Conference; Festival of Research; and the Community Research Awards.
- CROS 2013 noted a low awareness of Researcher Development initiatives, particularly for HR Excellence (32%). The HR Excellence Steering Group at Plymouth will make every opportunity to publicise and raise the profile of our HR Excellence Award and Concordat-related work at Plymouth University by August 2015 and continue our support for this invaluable agenda.