

Lancaster University

HR Excellence in Research Two Year Progress Report

1. Introduction

Lancaster University has made good progress towards achieving the objectives outlined in our 2011 Action Plan. HR and other policies and processes have been improved to help ensure that research staff are treated equally with others in terms of their recruitment, management and access to professional and career development. What has been harder to achieve is a positive change in culture and attitudes at ground level, as experienced by researchers themselves, and for us this aspect is very much a work in progress. Nevertheless, we can point to very solid achievements on which we can build to embed fully the principles of the Concordat into the life of the University.

2. How the review was conducted

In 2011 a Concordat Monitoring Group was established as a sub-committee of the University Research Committee with a remit to champion the Concordat, monitor progress against the Action Plan, provide guidance on the implementation of the Concordat, and report annually to the Research Committee. The Group, chaired by the Dean of Graduate Studies, comprises the Associate Deans of Research from each of the four Faculties, an HR professional with a specific researcher development responsibility, and two researcher representatives. The Group meets three times a year and receives reports on progress of the Action Plan. The composition of the Group provides direct links to the Faculties and the researcher community and enables the collection of first-hand information on progress.

The review was informed by reports from officers in HR and from the Faculties on progress on the actions outlined in the Action Plan. Feedback from researchers was extensive and collected via:

- The CROS surveys of 2011 and 2013
- Lancaster Researchers' Survey 2012, carried out in partnership with Lancaster UCU
- A Researchers' Feedback Forum 2012, an open meeting for all researchers, hosted by the PVC for Research
- Staff Feedback on PDR Experiences 2013, an online confidential survey of all staff about their experiences of the PDR (Performance and Development Review) process.
- Reports from researcher representatives on the Concordat Monitoring Group.

The CROS results were particularly valuable in that they enabled comparisons between the two surveys of researchers' perceptions of how they are managed. They also enabled us to compare Lancaster's progress with that of other HEIs in the Russell and 1994 Groups.

Other institutional QA mechanisms informing the review included the reports to the Equality and Diversity Committee and the institutional KPIs relating to the uptake of PDR (appraisal) and the use of fixed-term contracts.

3. Key achievements and progress against the Action Plan 2011-2013

A: Recruitment and Selection

- A1 'Recruiting the Best' approach to researcher recruitment is a key element in the University Strategic Plan and embedded in faculty plans
- A2 'Stonefish' e-recruitment system used for all research posts, stating job requirements and person specifications. Use of a points system to score and rank applications. Annual 'named appointments' reports for each Faculty on posts that have not been advertised.
- A3 Permission of Faculty Deans is required to designate posts as fixed-term. Departments are required to justify why the post should not be indeterminate.
- A4 E&D training is a requirement for all panel members. Specialist 'Recruiting the Best' training required for all panel chairs. Feedback is offered to all unsuccessful candidates.

- A5 All posts are evaluated through the HERA process. Written contracts are required for all posts, however short in duration.

B: Recognition and value

- B1 A Model Researchers' Charter for Faculties setting out mutual responsibilities and expectations has been agreed and disseminated. The university has supported Lancaster UCU in establishing a Lancaster Researchers' Network, a discussion and lobbying group open to all research staff.
- B2 Researchers who have left employment are enabled to keep their University email accounts for 3 months.
- B3 The take up of PDR (annual appraisal) by researchers increased from 55% in 2010 to 96% in 2012. An 'Initial PDR' for new researchers provides for agreement of a personalised development programme. Effective management of staff is included in promotions criteria for research managers. A development programme for Principal Investigators and research leaders has been provided.
- B4 A common approach on the use of bridging funding to support continuity of employment agreed by the four faculties.
- B5 Pay progression and promotion routes for researchers is open and published on University website

C: Support and Career Development

- C3 The aims and content of training programmes for researchers are now aligned with the Researcher Development Framework. Access to 10 days personal development annually agreed as a norm for all researchers (Model Charter).
- C4 Access to 1:1 professional careers guidance is provided for research staff.
- C5 Role and significance of RDF has been incorporated into PI development programme.
- C6 Agreement of an individual induction programme is part of Initial PDR. 41% of new researchers took part in the central induction programme in 2012/13.
- C11 Access to opportunities to teach and mentor others is included in Model Charter.
- C13 There is researcher representation on University Research Committee and Concordat Monitoring Group.

D: Researchers' responsibilities

- D1 Promotion of the Researcher Development Framework as a planning tool for individual development and lifelong learning, with RDF workshops provided.
- D3 Pilot development course in ethical research practice run and evaluated.
- D5 Model Charter stresses the researcher's responsibility for his/her own development.

E: Equality and Diversity

- D1 A new institutional Equality and Diversity Plan 2013-2016 launched (Sept 2013).
- D2 Annual Reports to include detailed E&D staff breakdown, including researchers as a separate category, for each Faculty.
- D3 An Equality Analysis process for HR and other policies and procedures has been instituted.
- D10 Athena Swan Bronze Award achieved for the institution. Physics Dept. achieved Juno Champions status.

F: Implementation and Review

- F1 Annual reports to University Research Committee on progress in meeting Concordat requirements from Concordat Monitoring Group.
- F2 Participation in CROS 2011 and 2013, PIRLS 2013.
- D3 Active engagement with Vitae NW Hub and Vitae national initiatives.

4. Next steps and future focus

In July 2013 Lancaster University Council approved a new strategic plan to take the University through to 2020. A key priority of that plan is the production of 'world class research that changes practice and thinking'. Departments are required to develop operational plans to deliver this priority and others, and it was agreed in Senate that these plans would incorporate the implementation of the Concordat principles at local level. A key role of the Concordat Monitoring Group, as champions of the Concordat, will be to support the development of that aspect of a department's operational plan. We feel that this will go a long way towards achieving that change in culture and attitudes which is so necessary if the spirit of Concordat is to be fully embedded in the university.

In addition, researcher feedback, this two-year evaluation and institutional development plans have identified a number of areas for further action is required. Lancaster University will:

A: Recruitment and Selection

- Implement a new integrated HR and Payroll system which will greatly improve HR and people management processes and enable greater employee and manager self-service access to data. Evaluate how this system will incorporate the e-recruitment function currently provided via the Stonefish system.

B: Recognition and value

- Embed the provisions of the researchers' Model Charter in individual departments, implementation to be monitored by Faculty Associate Deans for Research.
- Ensure that Concordat principles are incorporated within departments' operational plans.
- Review the operation of the current PDR system with the aim of improving the quality of individual experiences.

C: Support and Career Development

- Implement the new researchers' development programme with the aims of providing a wider variety of learning experiences and greater levels of researcher participation.
- Develop a personal development qualification for researchers based on the SEDA-accredited model.
- Provide an annual Researcher Development Day of keynote presentations and taster workshops, aimed at the broad researcher community.
- Review and improve induction processes to ensure that relevant and timely induction is delivered at local levels.

D: Researchers' responsibilities

- Establish and resource a Research Staff Association to provide a range of social and other events and explore how it can be developed as an independent voice for researchers.

E: Equality and Diversity

- The CROS surveys and our own internal surveys have indicated a perception that researchers are not always treated equally with other staff in a number of areas. We will explore further these equality issues through the HR policy equality analysis process, utilising the data from the surveys.

F: Implementation and Review

- Host Vitae development events for the NW Region and work with the Vitae NW Hub to share practice and develop new provision to support researchers' professional and career development.