

Towards HR Excellence in Research:

Update on Research Concordat actions at University of Wolverhampton

CONTEXT & REVIEW METHODOLOGY

Since its 2012 launch, progress with the University's Research Concordat Action Plan (RCAP) has been driven and periodically reviewed by the cross-university Concordat Workgroup. Over the same timeframe the University has substantially restructured from eight schools to four large autonomous faculties; a change that affected the majority of University staff, including researchers. While this had some impact on our progress, it also presented additional opportunities to address specific RCAP priorities.

To review progress we gathered input from across the researcher community but also targeted individual stakeholder groups for specific feedback in areas such as our pilot of the Vitae Researcher Development Framework. The workgroup compiled these various perspectives into this single summary and updated the action plan accordingly. The updated RCAP is available on the University's Research website.

PROGRESS TO DATE

Employment practices

We have completed RCAP Aims 2 to 4 but a further update of the Organisational Change Policy is underway and will be finalised shortly. Exploratory analysis has been undertaken into the methods by which we determine future research business plans/actions and staffing needs (succession, development and talent management plans) to ensure that they are best aligned (RCAP Aim 1). It is anticipated this work may help reduce the use of temporary researcher contracts in the future.

Research/researcher recognition and profile

The University has publically launched a £6million investment into research over three years. This enabled the establishment of a new centralised research management facility: "*The Research Hub*". Here we have co-located the Dean of Research, Research Policy Unit (RPU), Doctoral College, Project Support Office (PSO), Centre for Academic Practice (CAP), and Centre for Technology Enhanced Learning (CTEL). It has raised the profile of our research and researchers, providing better focus for the co-ordination, development and support for our researcher community (RCAP Aim 5).

The University has recruited a significant number of additional professors (on permanent rather than fixed-term contracts). To support this, the professorial and reader conferment processes have been overhauled, along with updates to professorial appraisals. This work will be used as the basis for similar developments for all other researchers over the next two years. (RCAP Aims 6, 8, 9, 11 & 14)

To support the launch of the new Research Hub, a range of web-pages have been established and will be further developed over the coming year (RCAP Aim 5). The larger Professoriate is in the process of establishing on-line researcher biographies/profiles for themselves and their research teams. In addition, all University Research Centres and Research Institutes have webpages, as does the new Doctoral College. Next academic year these will be enhanced, linked to additional web-based facilities as they come on-line.

RCAP priorities have now been reflected within the University's Research Strategy and in the Research Committee/Strategy Group terms of reference in order to mainstream our Concordat commitments into routine business. This has been strengthened by the establishment of two key elements within the new

Research Concordat Action Plan

As at May 2016 (*was 2-year Review Update (July 2014)*)

faculty structures; each faculty has a new Associate Dean (Research & Enterprise) post and its own Faculty Research Committee with dedicated admin support. The effectiveness of these new arrangements will be monitored as part of standard operational review practices and considered by the Concordat Workgroup.

Researcher development: Mentoring

The University has reviewed and is enhancing its researcher mentoring scheme. The enhanced scheme will have three branches: “*Senior Researchers*” for staff who are making applications to become Readers and Professors; “*Intermediate Researchers*” for staff with potential to make an application but require further development in order to fully meet the criteria; and “*New/Early Researchers*” staff who have not researched previously or have limited research experience. [Note: The N/ER branch will run alongside the existing Early Researcher Award Scheme (ERAS) which is only available to staff who attain a PhD; the N/ER will not require a PhD.] (RCAP Aim 8)

Researcher development: the Vitae Framework

In December 2012, the School of Sport, Performing Arts and Leisure worked collaboratively with Vitae to pilot the Researcher Development Framework (RDF) with doctoral students. Two research staff were trained and facilitated the process (RCAP Aim 11). Evaluation of the pilot led to the RDF being adopted by the Research Policy Unit, as outlined in the Research Supervisors’ Handbook (2014), Appendix B, <http://www.wlv.ac.uk/pdf/Supervisor%20Finished.pdf>. It is being used specifically within the Pre-research Degree Programme which aims to support potential PhD students who require further development in order to undertake their research degree (PhD, MPhil). Faculty-based RDF Champions are being identified and training is planned for Supervisors.

Career structures and support for researchers

The Careers Centre launched additional webpages (RCAP Aim 13) and revised the career support sessions for research staff to now include: *Induction/introduction to careers, Career planning, Career planning and transferable skills, Personal branding, Marketing yourself, and Marketing your skills in applications*. Courses have been marketed and take-up rates are better monitored. Further course updates will occur shortly to incorporate the learning gained from our other RCAP developments such as the Vitae RDF pilot.

The University has continued to develop a more clearly defined researcher career path; *Research Assistant to Professorship*. Roles at each tier have been reviewed and reshaped in order that they better enable a transition to the next level, if/where appropriate. This work continues, in tandem with RCAP Aim 5 work (mentioned earlier), incorporating aspects of the new researcher mentoring scheme in due-course.

Monitoring is underway to check the extent to which our flexible working policy provisions are used by the researcher community compared to the wider University population. This information will be a routinely reported HR metric for researchers in due-course.

The Athena Swan Charter

Last year the University achieved the bronze-level Athena Swan Charter status (RCAP Aim 15). The priority will now be to continue these developments, for which we will fund an Associate Dean level project lead and dedicated admin support. They will monitor our progress and submit for bronze renewal in due-course. They will also help develop a number of Silver departmental submissions within The Faculty of Science and Engineering and the Faculty of Education, Health and Wellbeing where STEM teaching and research is undertaken.

Research Concordat Action Plan

As at May 2016 (*was 2-year Review Update (July 2014)*)

In addition, the University has planned activity underway to use the '*Managing your Academic Career for Women in SET*' approach to provide opportunities for women in SET areas to examine existing skills, networks and references and to consider what next steps might be appropriate (RCAP Aim 17). Appropriate staff have been trained to deliver this programme, which is now being scheduled for delivery.

Communication/consultation with the researcher community

Having run Concordat-focused consultation and information events with researchers in recent years, plans are underway to repeat similar exercises in future. Communication has also been enhanced by elements of the University restructure and the new Research Hub. We also have plans which commence in the autumn to prepare for, and market, our participation in the Spring 2015 CROS survey. The resulting data and information gathered from our Corporate Staff Survey will be used in the next RCAP iteration in 2016.

NEXT STEPS (PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT TWO YEARS)

The research business model (RCAP Aim 1 & 13)

Further explore the alignment of Research business planning & development with Research people planning & development. This involves re-examination of our research income streams, growth areas, growth potential & patterns and relevant workforce planning & development (succession/talent management), informed by data projections and analysis. It is intended to support use of our enhanced career paths for researchers and should help reduce our fixed-term contracts usage in research.

Researcher recognition, community communications and cohesion (RCAP Aim 5)

We will consolidate the researcher 'community identity' with further developments of researcher on-line profiles, blogs, bulletin boards and 'virtual' community facilities. We will also run further Concordat meetings and/or a communications exercise for researchers and research managers linked to CROS 2015.

Enhanced appraisals, PDPs and the Vitae RDF (RCAP Aims 6, 8, 9, 11, 12 & 14)

We are establishing a new stakeholder workgroup to work on developing the researcher appraisal process in line with the Professorial appraisal developments. This will link with PDP, RDF and mentoring practices to ensure a comprehensive approach. At the same time, the development needs of research managers will be assessed and addressed via the University's new corporate management development provisions, the "Management Toolkit".

Mentoring (RCAP Aim 8)

The new 3-tier researcher mentoring will be fully implemented and its effectiveness evaluated.

Career support for researchers (RCAP Aims 10, 11 & 13)

Careers Centre will further consult and enhance its career support events for researchers, ensuring that they best meet current and future predicted researcher community needs.

Equality and Diversity (RCAP Aims 15, 16 & 17)

Our work on maintaining and developing performance in line the Athena Swan Charter will continue in earnest (via the specialist workgroup). Researcher community usage of E&D-related policy provisions will be explored and enhanced if/where necessary.

Concordat Review (RCAP Aim 20)

Participate in the 2015 CROS survey and use that data along with the University's Staff Survey findings & researcher consultation feedback to update the next RCAP iteration in 2016.

	Aims/Objectives	Actions	Responsibility	Target Timeframe	Update as at May 2016
Recruitment & Selection; Recognition and Value (Principles 1 & 2)	1. Review use of fixed-term contracts in research within the University.	a. Analyse the numbers of research staff on each contract type b. Review relevant funding streams, life-cycles & timescales c. Reconsider the 'business model' by which the University determines its researcher staffing needs and employs/deploys its staff, ensuring that the approach is appropriate to Concordat standards	Research Strategy Group, HR	Spring 2016	A 12% reduction was achieved in research Fixed Term Contracts. With the introduction of the new Fixed Term contract policy; it is recommend that this action continues to the new Action Plan.
	2. Improve University procedures for recruiting, employing, retaining and ending FTCs (if/where they are necessary).	Establish and implement a Fixed Term Contract Policy (links to action below). Monitor/review its operation	HR Dept. & Cross-Uni. HR workgroup	Completed. Dec 2016	A Fixed Term Contract Policy has been approved by the University and is due for review in Spring 2019.
	3. Further enhance redeployment process for those employees presently on FTC and facing contract review or closure in the future.	Development of a specific University Redeployment Policy, building on the strengths established by the Organisational Change Policy (under revision) Intermittently monitor/review its operation and act on findings	HR Dept. & Cross-University strategic HR workgroup	Amended by Oct 2014 Dec 2016	Complete – due for revision under UoW processes in May 2016.
	4. Reinforce that research posts should only be advertised as fixed-term where there is a clearly recorded and justifiable reason.	Review of the University's Recruitment and Selection policy/practices, with specific audit/monitoring of the usage levels of fixed-term contracts.	HR Dept. & Cross-University strategic HR workgroup	Completed but checks are on-going	No change to July 2014 update

	Aims/Objectives	Actions	Responsibility	Target Timeframe	Update as at May 2016
Principles 1 & 2 cont...	5. Strengthening of the identity/organisational culture of the University-wide research community.	<p>Introduction of an enhanced research-focussed website which provides information and advice for supporting the career development of Research staff and is in line with the corporate marketing and communications strategy, research strategy and related improvements.</p> <p>Explore and establish a virtual (on-line) University-wide researcher community in which all researchers can participate, communicate, share ideas & good practices and be part of a supportive, professional internal network.</p>	<p>Marketing and Comms (MaC), HR, Doctoral College, RPU, Careers, Research Managers</p> <p>Project Group, Research managers, Researchers and MaC.</p>	<p>Partially complete,</p> <p>Review April 2016</p> <p>Partially complete, Review April 2015</p>	<p>Research Hub on line: http://www.wlv.ac.uk/research/the-research-hub/</p> <p>It is recommended that monitoring of the effectiveness of the new Hub is included in the new Action Plan.</p>
	6. Increase effectiveness of, and participation in, staff appraisal for both research staff and managers (P.I.s).	<p>New project to review and enhance the University's staff appraisal scheme (process and usage levels) as a key strategic priority. This will enhance the linkage between staff and organisational priorities.</p> <p>(From project group - Autumn 2014)</p>	HR & stakeholder representatives (Project Group)	<p>Work underway.</p> <p>Review 1: June 2015</p> <p>Review 2: June 2016</p>	The HR online personnel record system (Agresso) has as part of a new update – the facility to record that appraisal conversations have occurred. It is recommended that this is included in the new Action Plan so that the take up of appraisals can be monitored.
	7. Raise the profile of research and researcher-related priorities within the University's new People (HR) strategy.	Review and renewal of University's People (HR) Strategy in line with introduction of new Corporate Strategy. (Drawing specific linkage to development and deployment of research staff.)	HR, HR Strategic workgroups and stakeholder representatives	Partially complete, Review at refresh (2016/7)	Fully complete – was included in new Organisational Development website under the 'Investing in You' section. Further updates and enhancements are ongoing as part of the Workforce (HR) Strategy

	Aims/Objectives	Actions	Responsibility	Target Timeframe	Update as at May 2016
Support/Career dev.(P. 3 & 4)	8. University Staff Mentoring Scheme which provides mentors to support all staff in career progression to be made more widely available to research staff.	Revised three-level approach for researchers to be piloted, implemented and evaluated Review the University-wide Scheme	Doctoral College Staff Dev. Unit	1: May 2015 2: May 2016 As above	New cross University scheme was launched early January 2016 replacing a more local scheme. The monitoring of mentor/mentee take up is part of the Workforce Strategy and metrics can be reported to the CWG.
	9. Encourage researchers to engage pro-actively with career planning and raise their awareness of careers services available to them.	Develop careers webpages for researchers. Produce a more effective CEWS marketing approach for engaging with researchers. (Paper-based & electronic) Inform research managers of the availability and nature of careers support for researchers.	Careers, Enterprise and Workplace Services, Researcher managers	Partially completed, Review Jan 2015 Review April 2015	Careers signposting pages fully complete and included in new Organisational Development website.
	10. Increase participation in 'Personal and Career Development' programme run jointly by Careers & Counselling Units.	Undertake further monitoring of event attendance & provide data to research management Further review the programme design to ensure that researcher development needs in this area are best met. Launch/Market updated programme.	Careers, Enterprise and Workplace Services	April 2015 June 2015	Fully complete – but CWG noted this is work in progress alongside the promotion of appraisals and recommended this be included in the new Action Plan.

	Aims/Objectives	Actions	Responsibility	Target Timeframe	Update as at May 2016
Support and career development; (Principles 3 &	11. Establish greater infrastructure & tools to support researcher development.	Further exploration of the benefits of the National Researcher Development Framework and the pending Enterprise Development Framework.	Research-Strategy Group, University's Research Committee, Dean of Research, HR, SDU, Doctoral College	Pilot completed	Recommended that this be monitored under the new University Strategic Plan (due mid 2016)
		Establish a research-focussed workgroup to scope and implement appropriate usage for all researchers. (Faculty focus)		Summer 2015	
	Explore how we can best link the Development Framework and our staff appraisal process so as to further optimise the benefits of its use.	New RS Group, URC, Dean of Research, HR, SDU, Doctoral College	Summer 2015	See point 6 above for further action development	
	12. Further improvements in Researcher, Research Manager and P.I. learning and development opportunities.	Review the national learning and development opportunities, identifying how best to engage our research community in these. (E.g. the "Broadening Horizons" programme, etc..). Introduce an appropriate range of these for research staff and monitor usage, providing relevant data to research management.	Research Strategy Group, University's Research Committee, Dean of Research, HR, SDU, Doctoral College	Completed but monitor national devs. On-going to March 2016	Although sections of this are complete; CWG noted this is work in progress alongside the promotion of appraisals and recommended this be included in the new Action Plan.

	Aims/Objectives	Actions	Responsibility	Target Timeframe	Update as at May 2016
	13. Greater awareness and use of the newly established career grade structure and opportunities within the University.	<p>Further marketing, provide structure/process info and deliver careers coaching sessions for research staff. (Monitor progress of % staff through structure)</p> <p>Include a researcher staff development priority within the next revision of the University's Research Strategy. Introduction of support and monitoring processes to better enable research managers to target and prioritise the development of research staff.</p>	Research Strategy Group, University's Research Committee, Dean of Research, HR, SDU, Doctoral College	<p>Review monitoring June 2015</p> <p>Completed</p> <p>November 2014</p>	<p>Careers signposting pages fully complete – and included in the new Organisational Development website.</p> <p>Second Research Investment Fund launched end of 2015 - a further £6M over 3 years to recruit additional staff and PhD students. Monitoring of this to be included in the new Action Plan</p>
Researcher responsibilities (P5)	14. Enhance the support for, and planning of, the development of Researchers, Principal Investigators and Research Managers	<p>Explore the introduction of compulsory Personal Development Portfolios (PDP) and/or CPD records for all research staff.</p> <p>Link PDP and/CPD to appraisal activity. (Review this with appraisal review June 2016)</p> <p>For Research Managers, review the extent to which they have personal appraisal objectives relating to their activity in developing their research staff.</p>	Research Strategy Group, University's Research Committee, Dean of Research, HR, SDU, Doctoral College	<p>May 2015</p> <p>May 2015</p> <p>On-going, review April 2015 & 16</p>	<p>New ERAS scheme - open for applications as of May 2016.</p> <p>New development for early career staff (those finishing or about to finish their PhDs): a residential week organised for September 2016. Draft programme includes elements of how to get published, importance of online profiles for researchers, PowerPoints for conference presentations (etc).</p>

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	15. Achievement of Athena Swan Charter status	To prepare a Bronze Institutional Application for submission in 2012/13. Renewal appl. in 3 years* Three year re-assessment and work toward Silver	Athena Swan Workgroup	Completed. *2016 Nov 2016	Bronze status achieved and due for reaccreditation in 2016
Diversity and Equality (Principle 6)	16. Ensure that the working conditions for researchers provide the flexibility necessary for successful performance in line with legal requirements. Working conditions should allow all balance work and personal commitments.	Appropriate diversity, work life balance, family friendly policies in place at the University. Publicise again to researcher community. Review the extent to which these provisions are used by research staff and raise awareness/use of them.	Research Strategy Group, HR, Equality and Diversity Unit, New HR Strategy workgroup	Complete & Dec 2014 April 2015	Now being monitored for all staff as part of the new Workforce (HR) Strategy
	17. To offer the 'Managing your Academic Career for Women in SET' across the University in order to provide an opportunity for women to examine existing skills, networks and preferences and to consider what next steps might be appropriate.	The Athena Swan Champion to attend UKRC and Vitae-related 'trainer training' in order to be able to offer the programme across the University. Launch the training, by way of in-house provision, across the University. Monitor and enhance operation	Athena Swan Workgroup	Completed 2014/15 acad. year On-going to 2016 review	Athena SWAN initiatives continue to be deployed across the University

	Aims/Objectives	Actions	Responsibility	Target Timeframe	Update as at May 2016
Review (Principle 7)	18. Run consultation event with researchers and research managers to explore the grass-root perspectives of the impact of our Concordat development work.	Undertake CROS survey, analyse results and review developmental priorities accordingly. Benchmark results against previous studies and the sector results. Design and implement further awareness raising/testing Concordat events	Concordat Working Group	Completed but on-going - Apr 2015 Periodically to 2016 Review	Completed. New CROS survey to be rolled out nationally
	19. Publish the Concordat Action Plan and encourage feedback from all parties within the University.	Publish Action plan on the University's new Research website (launching March 2012) Refreshed/republished Summer 2014	DVC Prof Ian Oakes (or VC), Concordat Working Group, MaC,	Completed Sept 2014	Complete
		Publish announcement article in WLV Insider staff magazine. Announce review results 2014	DVC Prof Ian Oakes (or VC), Concordat Working Group, MaC,	Completed Sept 2014	Complete

	Aims/Objectives	Actions	Responsibility	Target Timeframe	Update as at May 2016
	20. University to review and evaluate implementation of Action Plan as an on-going process: Where relevant, mainstreaming this workload into other standard University development & review processes in order to establish it as a self-driving priority.	Publish Action plan and establish a timetable of quarterly review meetings.	DVC, Dean of Research, Concordat Working Group	Completed and On-going	
		Launch new Research-focused workgroup involving a larger volume of researchers and research managers. (N.B. This links to, and supports, actions stated earlier in this document.)	DVC, Dean of Research, University's Research Committee	Review Jan 2015	
		Establish a clear link between this work and the current 'Uni-wide' work to review/evolve the new HR Strategy. Update various HR workgroups on the priorities & progress of our Research Concordat Action Plan (RCAP) to ensure workloads are co-ordinated and mutually supportive	HR, HR Strategy Work Groups, Concordat Work Group	Completed Dec 2014	
		Establish consideration of RCAP priorities within standard University strategic/planning processes. (EG: Must be factored into the 2012/13 redevelopment of the University's Research Strategy and work towards the R.E.F.).	DVC, Dean of Research, Research PIs, Concordat Working Group	Completed Reconsider at refresh (2016/17)	
		In next planning round, ensure that all relevant Schools and Research Institutes have objectives regarding how they support and drive forward the RCAP agenda.	DVC, Dean of Research, University's Research Committee, Schools & Depts.	Completed Re-review Summer 2015	

		Explore adding a review of RCAP progress to the University's Research Committee agenda (as a standing item).	DVC, Dean of Research, University's Research Committee	Completed	
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