**University of Hertfordshire 10-Year HR Excellence in Research Report**

**Constituency and Structure**

At the University of Hertfordshire, our target audience for the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers is our researcher community, which is all staff and students who do research. This includes staff with research as part of their role: 137 on research contracts, 1112 academics with research and scholarship contracts (only a proportion of these staff are research-active), and ‘hidden researchers’, combining research with other roles.

The structure for delivering on the Concordat, in terms of institutional responsibilities and committees at the University, centres on our Researcher Development Group (RDG). Its Terms of Reference are to promote researcher development issues at the University and to coordinate the University’s reviews for the HR Excellence in Research award and for compliance with the Vitae Concordat. The RDG has access to and support from high level committees, with the RDG Chair reporting termly to the University’s Research Committee chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research & Enterprise); and sitting on the People Board, chaired by the Secretary and Registrar, which delivers the People strand of the University’s Strategic Plan.

The RDG represents and informs researchers across the University through its structure, membership, termly meetings and activities. It is chaired by a senior academic working with an HREiR Project Manager from Learning and Organisational Development (L&OD). We have an ECR School Representative from each of our 8 academic Schools to provide two-way communication across the University. Additional RDG members represent central departments: the Research Office (RO); Careers & Employment; the Researcher Development Programme (RDP); HR; the Equality Office; the Athena SWAN Project Officer; the Learning & Teaching Innovation Centre; Health, Safety and Wellbeing (HSW); Associate Deans Research (ADRs) and the University and College Union. RDG agendas and minutes are circulated to the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research & Enterprise); Director of the Doctoral College, Director of HSW, Head of Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI), the ADRs in the 8 Schools, the Head of HR and the Head of L&OD. Hertfordshire has 6 Research Themes addressing global challenges which span the University’s research areas and the Theme Champions are part of the RDG circulation group.

**Review Process**

Our HREiR Action Plan is kept live with continuous review at the RDG meetings and reporting to the Research Committee (both termly). RDG School representatives communicate to and from the Schools on actions and input is provided by the other RDG members. For this HREiR 10-year review, as previously, we have consulted our RDG School representatives, and used the feedback they have gathered from researchers in their Schools, audited progress against the current action plan and identified new actions. We have done a gap analysis using the new Concordat action plan. We have integrated researchers’ views from other sources including the CROS, PIRLS, and the University’s work from home survey. We have aligned our action planning with those for Athena Swan and the Race Equality Charter Mark. The updated 8-year action plan, review report and 10-year action plan were prepared by the RDG Chair, who is herself a researcher, and the HREiR Project Manager, and presented to members of the Pro-Vice Chancellor Research & Enterprise’s Management Group. Thus, the 10-year review has involved researchers’ views at every stage.

**Key Achievements**

* Establishment of high-profile cross-university staff networking groups e.g. Network of Women+ Professors (NWP), Academic Women Advancement Group (AWAG) and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME); which include support for research staff and demonstrate commitment to diversity. All have a champion in the senior leadership team and funding for activities.
* Successful and well-attended UH ResDev19 Conference.
* 2 rounds of Skill Up! Researcher-Led Researcher Development scheme in 2018-19, allocating funds to each School to support researcher development.
* Continuing high level of engagement and commitment of RDG, production and dissemination of Guidance, ADR representation on RDG, closer collaboration with Equality Office and representation at Vitae events.

**Progress by Concordat Principle**

**1: Recruitment, Selection, Retention**

Through a feasibility study we determined that the employment experience for research staff is relatively secure at the university as we only have a fraction of research staff on fixed term contracts and most researchers are redeployed at the end of their contracts. The HR department has reviewed and enhanced paternity leave and will continue to review policies on a rolling cycle. (ECI2; EI6).

We have encouraged appraisal training for both researchers and research line managers, however the CROS results show a small decrease in researchers agreeing appraisals are useful while PIRLS results show an increase in managers finding appraisals important and useful in relation to CPD. Not all researchers are appraised by research active managers which may contribute to their CROS result. Completion of CROS and PIRLS increased in 2019 but is still low compared the number of research staff and may not be wholly representative of their views. The introduction of a single survey in 2021 for all research staff, CEDARS, will help reduce confusion over which survey to complete and through effective timing and marketing of the survey we intend to increase participation so it is a more reliable guide to the effectiveness of measures taken. (ECI6).

The HR system upgrade provides the opportunity to explore moving appraisals online and allowing L&OD access to development needs in action plans in order to provide a more tailored provision. Expanding understanding of the breadth of opportunities and how to use the 10 days CPD will be informed by HR guidance and through RDP & RDG

To increase opportunity and diversity in career progression to Reader, Associate Professor and Professor (Research) the 2020 application process has changed with promotion panels now being more representative of the diversity of staffing across the university and feedback provided against the criteria. Two new workshops are offered to those interested in promotion; one for female and one for BAME colleagues. We will monitor the impact of these changes on the diversity (gender/BAME) in annual promotions to Readers, Associate Professors and Professors (Research) (EI3).

Finally, we aimed to increase mentoring for researchers and there are now 5 out of 8 academic Schools who have mentoring schemes with 2 more Schools planning to establish a mentoring scheme. Reviewing current mentoring has revealed opportunities for cross-school mentoring schemes open to BAME researchers and women researchers through the networking groups mentioned above. The information on mentoring schemes is being collated on the internal website to ensure transparency, so staff can identify the mentoring scheme that will best suit their needs. We plan to offer mentor training centrally, to monitor the development of the mentoring schemes and to encourage coordinators to share best practice (PCDI4).

**2: Recognition and Value**

Though heavily promoted among the research community the Vice-Chancellor’s Awards (VCA) nominations have fallen each year, which is disappointing. Researchers from each School were named in at least one RO News each 6 months over the last two years. We will encourage managers to nominate researchers for recognition though the VCA for research success (PCDM4).

In 2019 there were two rounds of Skill Up! with 49 applications in total. In 2020 there were no rounds of Skill Up! due to lack of funding and COVID 19. Reports from recipients indicated that the Skill Up! awards developed their confidence as researchers, the quality of their academic writing, and their access to relevant research networks, contributing to improving their research profile internally and externally. We intend to reinstate Skill Up! in 2021, dependent on internal funding (PCDI1).

To increase awareness of the importance of researchers’ wellbeing this was the focus of the well-attended PGR Conference 2020. The Director of Health, Safety and Sustainability is now the representative on the RDG, each school has a well-being champion and monthly emails are sent to promote the EAP. During the Covid-19 lockdown whilst many staff have been isolated, there has been increased communication about what provision there is available to staff on-line, internally and externally, through daily emails, there has been increased positive feedback to staff about their work and value from senior leaders of the University and Schools which has been well received by researchers. The #UHResDev21 online conference will focus on how researchers can be proactive in looking after themselves, and support those they work with and supervise, with respect to mental health and wellbeing, raising awareness of signs to look out for. The EAP will be signposted at #UHResDev21 (ECI3; ECM3; ECR3).

**3: Adaptability and Flexibility**

To better equip our researchers for intersectoral mobility our biennial research conference ResDev19 included a panel of researchers with very different research career journeys. We plan to raise awareness of mentoring and resources available through UH Careers and Employment and Vitae, at #UHResDev21 and through RO News (PCDI5; PCDR2).

We were not able to run all our planned workshops due to staff shortages and Covid, however some ECRs engaged with an alternative online course. Currently all development has been moved on-line and interestingly attendance has increased. Careers support for researchers is clearly signposted on our websites. L&OD are currently reviewing the Learning and Development programmes and will be consulting with RDG. We plan to identify and disseminate opportunities to develop research leadership skills internally and externally and to raise awareness of mentoring opportunities available to researchers (PCDI4).

The RO ran two well attended funding workshops and offers bespoke development sessions and bid support to Schools. One session has run and was well received by researchers, but other planned sessions have been postponed due to Covid. Many of the bimonthly RO newsletter introductions were focused on specific schemes of funders last year. We plan to continue a bespoke offer to support Schools (EM2).

**4: Personal and Career Development, and Lifelong Learning.**

How to use the 10 days CPD now forms part of the appraisal guidance notes, making it clear that development is more than training workshops and includes on the job training, shadowing, mentoring, conferences, journal articles etc, and how the 10 days will be used should be included on the appraisal action plan. There are links to all training courses from one well organised and easily located internal webpage, including the RDP which is open to research staff as well as students. The RDF is included in the RDP Handbook and the Research Staff Induction Checklist for line managers. Although there is no change in awareness of the RDF, there is increased positive feedback from researchers about the usefulness of appraisal in relation to identifying development opportunities. Developing the usefulness of appraisals is one of the key areas we will be working on in the next two years (EM4; PCDI1; PCDI6; PCDM1; PCDR4).

Leadership Development programmes are being reviewed and research leadership will form part of this process. The RDP includes sessions relevant for experienced researchers in specific aspects of research leadership, and individuals have been signposted towards leadership mentoring through internal and external schemes. We plan to raise awareness of leadership training opportunities through the internal website and communications (PCDI4).

**5: Researchers’ Shared Responsibility and Engagement**

There was no demand for a Research Staff Association RSA, as there are a number of effective cross-disciplinary researcher communities including the RDG itself; the EdRes Network, NWP and interdisciplinary research theme events organised by theme champions. These networks are recognised by the University with funding and the engagement of the PVC Research & Enterprise. Regular news updates on researcher development are included in the RO News and disseminated by School Representatives helping to raise their profile within their Schools. We are pleased that more than 60% of researchers completing CROS feel integrated into their institutional department research community, and into their department generally.

Development pathways for researchers at different stages of career are on our research pages on the university’s website. Researchers are guided at appraisal to consider appropriate professional development opportunities, providing a personalised needs-led approach, with researchers taking ownership of their own career development in line with the principles in the new Concordat. We plan to raise awareness for research leaders and managers of resources signposted through website (PCDR1; PCDR5).

**6: Diversity and Equality**

Our bronze Race Equality Charter Mark has been retained for 2020, with the condition that work is undertaken to improve the progress against the action plan and it is resubmitted in 2021. The University has launched our BAME Action plan, which outlines the responsibilities for Schools and individuals in improving racial equality across all aspects of work at UH. We have introduced an EDI board to provide an institutional and strategic body to review EDI priorities and reporting, identifying issues that need addressing. We are conducting a project to increase completion of mandatory and refresher training for all staff, including researchers, in order to develop the culture of diversity and inclusion further. We have introduced an EDI for managers workshop to clarify management responsibility. (ECI3; ECM1; ECM3; ECR1; ECR2).

The Equality Office supports eight staff networks, which have a high profile in UH, benefiting research staff and others. Research active staff are specifically engaged with the network of Women+ Professors (NWP); Academic Women Advancement Group (AWAG), and with our largest network Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) and our newest Men's Mental Health (MMH) Network (ECI3; ECM3).

We aimed for two Schools to submit for Bronze Athena Swan status and for an institutional Silver by 2022. All Schools now hold Bronze or and two hold Silver Athena SWAN awards. The University will apply for an extension, with the target to apply for a Silver award in 2023.

The new Head of EDI is on the circulation list for RDG papers and has attended an RDG meeting. The Senior Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer actively participates in all RDG meetings with updates and actions to enhance equality and inclusion for researchers, enhancing two-way communication with the E&D Office.

**7. Progress Review**

School representative’s attendance at RDG meetings is 60-80% and there is always an update from each school during the meeting. All representatives provided responses from researchers within their Schools regarding the Concordat review, enabling the Chair to represent their views for decision making.

The new RDG Guidance book has been developed, consulted upon, disseminated and is available on our webpages. The Chair works closely with ADRs to ensure all Schools are represented and that the role of School Representative is understood.

The comments on CROS were reviewed for ideas that were actionable. Our analysis of CROS and PIRLS aligned with the feedback from ECRs in the RDG indicating a strong belief in the institution’s commitment to equality and diversity. We found very little change in CROS results regarding understanding and knowledge of Vitae and the RDF, and in many of the areas of questioning. There were many negative comments, indicating further work is needed with respect to valuing and developing researchers.

We engaged with the Vitae Conference and Connections through presentation and representation by two members of RDG, increasing our awareness of sector initiatives. Vitae is one of the foci at #UHResDev21 and events and resources from Vitae available to support researcher development will be featured in RO news (ECI1). Development of a cross-university system for workload management will help researchers to know they are valued by the University(ECI3).