

Introduction

Northumbria University (NU) received the HR Excellence in Research Award in 2013 and retained it after the two year review in early 2015. This report and accompanying action plan provides an update on activities carried out to progress both the original action plan and the revised version from two years ago. Full details of Northumbria University's Concordat to support the Career Development of Researchers action plan and HR Excellence in Research reviews can be found at: <https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/research/researcher-development/researcher-development-for-staff/>

The University's Corporate Strategy since 2008 has focused on building NU's research capability and growing the number of research-active staff. As a result, the University has made a significant investment in both research staff and new facilities. Despite a challenging external context, the "Brexit" vote and the uncertainties about the future recruitment and retention of EU and international staff and students, NU remains committed to this Strategy, continuing to nurture its vibrant research culture and to support and develop research staff and students.

How the internal evaluation was undertaken

Internal evaluation is now embedded and continues to be led by the Concordat Working Group (CWG) whose membership includes a mix of academic staff at all levels from all faculties, alongside representatives from Research and Business Services and HR. The Group is chaired by a Faculty Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor, and is a formal sub-group of Research and Innovation Committee (RIC). RIC is chaired by the PVC (Research and Innovation), who is responsible to University Executive on researcher development issues, including the Concordat.

The CWG meets four times per year and membership of the group is considered annually to ensure a broad representation is maintained. The ECR representative is selected by the Northumbria Early Career Researchers Forum and ensures that NU's community of early career researchers is represented in discussions.

NU is committed to seeking the views of researchers at all levels. This evaluation has drawn on information from a range of sources, including CROS and PIRLS, RIC, Faculty Research and Innovation Committees and the ECR Forum. This has been used to measure progress and inform the future Concordat action plan. In addition, in order to seek feedback on ongoing activities and to inform future Concordat actions, three focus groups for different career stages were convened by HR in 2016-17 to discuss and get feedback on areas such as mentoring arrangements, inductions and training needs. This information has been collated and where appropriate, responded to or built into future planning. Another mechanism for seeking feedback is the biannual Staff Survey. The 2016 Survey showed progress in areas included work life balance¹, pay and conditions², and equality and diversity³.

Key achievements and Progress against the original action plan and two year review

More detailed information can be found in the updated Action Plan 2016-18. In brief, key achievements include:

¹ 2016 survey results show that 63% of staff feel they have a good work-life balance, up from 61% in 2014

² 72% of staff feel fairly paid for the work they do, up from 63% in 2014

³ 86% of staff of staff believe that the University is committed to equality of opportunity for all staff, compared to 84% in 2014

- The development and annual review of a new research mentoring framework for the whole university
- A new Academic Development and Researcher Training Programme for research staff and a Professional Development and Research Training Programme for the postgraduate research community
- The creation of a new grant-writing and professional development training programme for future research leaders, the “Next Generation of Large Award Holders” programme
- The development of a new Academic Career Promotion Framework
- The development of a new online ethics approvals system for academic staff and postgraduate research students
- New Researcher Development web and intranet resources

Progress by Concordat principle

Principle 1: Recruitment, Selection & Retention of researchers

- Recruitment and Selection policies have been reviewed and are now available on the new HR intranet pages with the aim of promoting best practice in recruitment and supporting staff in managing recruitment processes throughout the University. In addition, all staff participating in recruitment panels now undertake unconscious bias training as part of the broader mandatory recruitment training.
- The University has made a significant (£8M) investment in research through the creation of eight new “multi-disciplinary research themes” where a diverse range of new research talent has been recruited. This includes the creation of 40 new academic posts, including 15 new Vice Chancellor’s Research Fellow posts which are dedicated research posts attracting new talent to work in the multidisciplinary themes. Whilst the VC’s Research Fellows are on fixed term contracts, they are also supported to develop as researchers with a view to becoming permanent members of staff at the end of the 3 year fixed term period.

Principle 2: Recognition and Value

- A new University sabbatical policy has been adopted, enabling all staff to apply for a semester long sabbatical every three years to undertake research and innovation, teaching and learning or business engagement activities related to their academic or professional field. This ensures sabbaticals can be taken for a range of activities, allowing staff to define their own career development pathways and focus.
- As part of NU’s commitment to continuing professional development and to supporting staff in their current roles and with their future career aspirations, a significant review of the appraisal system took place in 2015 and led to the introduction of the new Performance and Development Appraisal (PDA) system. In 2015-16, more than 93% of staff had an appraisal. There are no figures from previous years but feedback suggested that there was some inconsistency in the frequency and style of appraisals previously. Figures will be monitored going forward. In addition, after the first year, HR sought feedback on the system and made changes based on the feedback received. For 2016-17 more explicit links will be made between the appraisal and the existing Personal Research and Innovation Plan in both the forms and the guidance and a move to an online PDA system is also being piloted.

Principles 3 & 4: Support and Career Development

- A new Academic Career Development Framework has been created to provide clarity and guidance on academic career development pathways and opportunities for promotion. There have also been regular sessions in advance of each promotion round where academics share their experience of the promotion process and offer guidance on applications to those seeking future promotion.
- The University has invested extensively in Leadership and Management Development in recent years offering a range of internally designed programmes. Between 2012-2016, these programmes were accessed by 322 members of staff. They have been delivered across three levels: Senior Academic Leaders /Professors; Academic Leaders; and Future Leaders. They aim to develop the skills, knowledge and behaviours participants need to support their career development and to make an enhanced contribution

to the work of their Faculty. In parallel, the University has also had an increase in the numbers of applications and successes to Research Council's future leaders' programmes, e.g. ESRC Future Research Leaders, demonstrating increased external recognition of our growing research talent.

- There has been an extensive review of research training provision, resulting in a new Academic Development and Researcher Training Programme (AD RTP), linked to the Vitae Researcher Development Framework⁴. This has its own intranet page and online booking system and is advertised to all staff through the intranet, weekly posts on the Northumbria Research blog and through different mailing lists e.g. the ECR Forum list. Based on feedback from the ECR Forum, it groups sessions according to the targeted career stage, making it easier for early stage researchers and others to see the training most appropriate for them. There is also an equivalent programme for postgraduate research students, the Professional Development and Research Training programme⁵. So far in 2016-17, these new programmes have had a significant increase in attendance numbers compared to sessions run in previous years. Recent sessions have had more than 50 attendees compared to 10-15 previously.
- A new training course has been developed for our future research leaders. The "Next Generation of Large Award Holders" (NGLAH) programme supports nominated academics in their development as researchers, with a particular focus on grant-writing. The course has been a well-received addition to the existing range of courses and shows further investment in existing talent and a commitment to their development. By the end of 2016-17, 36 academics will have completed the course. In addition, through the University's membership of the Leadership Foundation for HE, other courses are available for aspiring and senior research leaders.
- In order to make researcher training and development opportunities and resources easier to find, website and intranet researcher development pages have been updated for staff⁶ and for the growing body of postgraduate research students⁷.
- Research mentoring has become an established University mechanism with web resources and training enabling all research-active staff to have access to a mentor or to be trained as a mentor.

Principle 5: Researchers share responsibility for their own personal and career development

- The new AD RTP mentioned above includes sub-programmes for different career stages, e.g. new Principal Investigators or ECRs. This offers a more effective "self-service" training programme whereby researchers can quickly identify and book the development opportunities most relevant to them.
- The Early Career Researchers Forum has continued to run since the 2 year review. This is led by and for ECRs, enabling members to decide upon the key issues to be addressed. The Forum initiated the formal inclusion of ECRs in the memberships of RIC, faculty research and innovations committees and other strategic university committees and working groups. The ECR Forum also meets regularly with senior academics and the PVC (Research and Innovation).
- Acting on a suggestion from the ECR Forum, a Staff Doctorates Forum has been established to support the significant number of staff undertaking PhDs and Professional Doctorates (171 in 2016-17). It is an informal, monthly drop-in providing space for staff to share and discuss the particular issues involved in undertaking a part-time doctoral qualification whilst working in an academic post.
- Over the last two years, the NU has introduced a formal coaching programme. Any interested staff are able to access a coach and over the last two years 50 members of staff have been trained as qualified coaches and are now part of the University's Internal Coaching Network.

⁴ https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/media/27044159/academic-development-researcher-training-programme-2016-17_n16.pdf

⁵ https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/media/27044197/professional-development-researcher-training-programme-2016-17_n16.pdf

⁶ <https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/research/researcher-development/researcher-development-for-staff/>

⁷ <https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/research/researcher-development/researcher-development-for-postgraduate-research-students/>

Principle 6: Equality and Diversity

- NU is committed to providing an environment in which equality and diversity is valued and encouraged, where there is equal access to opportunities. All staff are required to undertake mandatory equality and diversity training every 3 years. Online resources have been developed since the two year review and the launch of a new e-Learning platform and improved modules is anticipated early 2017. The 2016 Staff Survey results show that 86% of staff believe that the University is committed to equality of opportunity for all staff, compared to 84% in 2014.
- Since the two year review, NU has been awarded an institutional Athena SWAN Bronze Award (in October 2015) and a number of departments are now seeking Silver awards. Current activities supporting Athena SWAN include NUWise, the network established to support and develop the careers of female staff and PhD students, as well as Think Physics, a collaborative project using physics to inspire young people, particularly women to work and study in these disciplines.

Principle 7: Implementation and Review

- The CWG, chaired by a Faculty Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research and Innovation, has oversight of the University's action plan. Researcher membership of this group is an important element in reviewing progress. In addition, initiatives such as the biannual Staff Survey, CROS and PIRLS surveys and University and Faculty Research and Innovation Committees all ensure researcher representation and involvement in Northumbria's decision making and provide important feedback mechanisms on the needs of researchers.

Strategy and success measures for the next four years

As a result of REF 2014, NU was included in the UK top 50 for research power for the first time and was recognised by the Times Higher Education as having the biggest rise in research power of any university in a national assessment of research quality in UK universities. This indicated a major step forward and the University is keen to improve its position in REF 2021, fully realising that research excellence is wholly dependent on providing an environment for researcher development. The updated action plan sets out the focus for the next two years and identifies actions to be implemented during this time. This includes:

- Identifying further mechanisms to encourage researchers to develop their academic career, building on the success of the ECR Forum, the Staff Doctorates Forum and other activities.
- Reviewing mechanisms for communicating with research staff to ensure training and development practices and opportunities continue to be informed by staff feedback, including developing a suite of online training resources in 2017 to complement the existing training offer.
- Monitoring the introduction of the University's new Current Research Information System (Pure) to ensure that researchers are able to optimise opportunities for viewing and showcasing their research activity.
- Continuing to invest in delivering applied research to drive forward the multi-disciplinary research themes
- Continued monitoring of research mentoring across NU to ensure equitable access to the programme and increased participation rates, e.g. aiming for 75% of CROS 2017 respondents have a mentor compared to 58.8% in CROS 2015. NU will also consider how to develop opportunities for group mentoring and cross-disciplinary mentoring arrangements, piloting "mentoring circles" in the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences in early 2017 before rolling this out across the University.

Success will be measured by timely achievement of the actions set out in the Action Plan and the specific deliverables agreed. In addition, our success indicators include the following: evidence of progress and improvement in 2017 CROS and PIRLS response data/response rate compared with previous years; continued increases in numbers of staff undertaking PDAs and participating in mentoring programmes; positive feedback from participants undertaking training, including in new programmes such as the NGLAH programme.