

HR Excellence in Research Two Year Self-Assessment Northumbria University – January 2015



Further information on Northumbria University's implementation of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers can be found here:

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

Introduction

Northumbria University has continued its strong commitment to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers over the last two years. This is despite a period of change at Northumbria, with a significant restructuring programme during the middle two years of the University's 2009-2014 Corporate Strategy period. The process was undertaken to better align the structure of the institution with the aims of Vision 2025, an ambitious plan for Northumbria to be known as a research-rich, business-focused, professional university with a global reputation for academic excellence. The plan included significant investment in research staff with the intention of attracting and retaining talent.

The University produced its first Concordat Action Plan in 2012 which dovetailed into the Strategic Plan for Research. Both identified a number of commitments relating to the development of research careers that needed to be taken forward: the enhancement of support for current staff (Principles 2 and 4); support and mentoring for new academic appointees to develop their research activities (Principle 5); providing a range of research training for early career staff (Principles 4 and 5) and a requirement that teaching loads are reduced where possible in the first two years of an academic appointment to allow time for the development of research activity.

These strategic documents underpin the growth in the research profile of the University and the investment committed to support this. The growth of our research capacity is evident in a doubling of the number of academic staff submitted to the REF 2014 compared to the RAE 2008, including the submission of 118 early career researchers. This is echoed by increased research bidding activity and the development of a more strategic approach to external funding applications. There is now greater focus and support available for producing high quality research outputs and a requirement to make them available via our institutional repository, [Northumbria Research Link](#). In addition there has been a more than 400% increase in investment in research sabbatical leave.

The CROS and PIRLS surveys in 2013 showed that Northumbria has improved its standing since the previous survey and is above the sector average in several areas. For example, a significantly higher proportion of NU respondents attend training in equality and diversity (46.2% NU, 26.6% sector), ethical research conduct (61.5% NU, 24.8% sector), public engagement (38.5% NU, 18.6% sector) and research impact (39.2% NU, 17.5% sector). However, there was a perceived lack of institutional recognition for certain activities, in particular academic collaborations and securing research funding. A number of issues were also highlighted around decision-making and opportunities for progression and promotion. The former is being addressed by a new Research and Enterprise Reward Scheme (RERS) designed to strengthen the bidding culture of the University and reward academic staff who have won external income, enabling these staff to access funds to support and develop further research and enterprise activity. The other areas for development are included in the 2014-2016 Concordat Action Plan.

How was the internal review undertaken?

Since Northumbria University's first Concordat Action Plan was agreed in 2012, there has been a Working Group convened to review the work done to date, monitor progress and develop further actions where necessary. The Concordat Working Group meets four times per year and is chaired by an Associate Dean (Research and Innovation). Its membership includes Principal Investigators, Early Career Researchers and Contract Research Staff from across the University's four faculties. Membership also includes staff from Research and Business Services (RBS) and Human Resources (HR). Membership of the group is considered annually to ensure broad representation is maintained. The ECR member is selected by the Northumbria Early Career Researchers Forum.

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The process of reviewing the Action Plan began in March 2013 at the beginning of academic year 2013-14. This ensured that it was updated to reflect current issues affecting researchers at Northumbria and to take account of new institutional processes and policies. Input was gathered from across the University, including the Northumbria Early Career Researchers Forum. The Action Plan and the work of the Concordat Working Group is fed into the University Research and Innovation Committee (RIC) which is chaired by the Pro Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation and reports directly to Academic Board. The Concordat is a standing point on the agenda of the RIC which meets 4 times per year.

Key achievements and progress over the last two years

Recruitment, Induction and Retention (Principles 1, 2, 4, 5, 6)

- The University has undertaken a robust and detailed review of HR policies and procedures to ensure a transparent and consistent recruitment and selection process across the institution.
- A new Performance and Development Appraisal scheme has been introduced this academic year for all staff (including research staff), the development of which addressed feedback from CROS 2013. Feedback will be sought and success monitored closely at six months and one year after the introduction of the scheme.

Research Training and Development (Principles 2, 3, 4, 5)

- A review of researcher training has been undertaken which informs ongoing work in creating a researcher development portal for Northumbria researchers with links to all relevant documentation, processes and training in one place.
- Since 2013-14, there has been an official Staff Researcher Development Handbook which presents all researcher training opportunities by career stage (e.g. new to research, ECR/post-doctorate, experienced researcher etc.) and theme (e.g. communication and social media, funding, getting published, impact etc.). These courses are delivered by HR, RBS, the Library Research Support team, academics and consultants. This is supplemented by specific Faculty programmes. For example, the Faculty of Business and Law run an innovative Research Development Programme which this year includes 36 different sessions. There is also a growing range of research training and learning materials available online through the Library's Skills Plus collection.
- An Early Career Researcher development group has been set up to ensure the content, duration and structure of training is appropriate for ECRs. In addition, a consultation has been established with HR, Research and Business Services, the University Library and the ECR Forum to identify training gaps to be covered next academic year.
- It is now University policy and practice to include at least one ECR representative on the University Research and Innovation Committee and the Faculty Research and Innovation Committees. This is included in the Terms of Reference for these groups and membership will be revised annually.

Developing Good Research Practice (Principles 2, 3, 5, 6)

- University Ethics web pages have been developed to ensure there is a University-wide repository of information about Northumbria's policies, practices and guidance as a guide to staff and students and to promote best practice for the ethical conduct of research. The Research Ethics and Governance Handbook is updated annually and includes Faculty-specific ethics pages. The University Research Ethics Committee has approved standard Faculty training sessions led by Faculty Research Ethics Directors. Attendance is monitored to ensure that staff undertake an ethics update briefing every three years.

Growing Research, Innovation and Impact (Principles 1-7)

- Individual academic records of all research outputs, external funding applications and awards, research students, enterprise and impact activities are now captured through the on-line Personal Research and

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Innovation Plan (PRIP) system. It is expected that the PRIP will be shared with line managers as part of the new Personal Development Appraisal scheme.

- A research mentoring programme, developed in response to a request from the Early Career Researchers Forum, has been adopted to ensure all research staff have a trained mentor. Training is in place to ensure mentors and mentees understand the scheme and their responsibilities/expectations.
- A more comprehensive approach to ECR support and career development has been developed in Faculties, including targeted support, training sessions and ECR retreats/networks.
- As part of Vision 2025, the University has developed a number of Leadership Development Programmes aimed at supporting academic and professional support staff at different levels.

Monitoring and Improving Our Performance (Principles 2, 4, 5, 7)

- The University-wide ECR Forum was launched in 2012/13 and runs 3 Forum meetings per year with a range of other training, information and social activities. Forum activities are steered by an ECR working group which consists of 2 ECRs per faculty supported by Research and Business Services.
- A detailed analysis of the 2013 CROS and PIRLS survey results was undertaken, which informed a number of initiatives, including an update of the Concordat Action Plan. The University also undertook a Staff Survey with feedback and results released in June 2014. As a result a Staff Engagement Forum has been established.

Next steps and strategy for the next two years

The 2014-16 Action Plan includes continuing actions from the original plan and new activities building on progress achieved to date. It can be viewed here: <https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/research/researcher-development/>

Success measures will be included where appropriate, e.g. the number of staff accessing research mentors, the numbers of PIs engaging with Supervisory Briefing Sessions, and the numbers of research staff undertaking a P&DR with effective outcomes.

Key actions for 2014-15 include:

- Review and develop research-specific induction framework for new academic staff (Principles 1, 2)
- Carry out ongoing review of research training provision across the University, including consultation with ECR Forum (Principles 2, 3, 4, 5)
- Finalise the career development framework which identifies competencies required for progression to subsequent grade and training available at each career stage (Principles 1, 2, 4)
- Revise University policy on Research Data Management and provide appropriate staff training to ensure robust process and compliance with EPSRC requirements by May 2015 (Principles 2, 3)
- Ensure that the first year review of the new Research Mentoring Policy is carried out and with feedback data from HR and consultation with the ECR Forum, that any identified shortcomings are addressed (Principles 1, 2, 3, 4)
- Encourage a strong response to the CROS and PIRLS 2015 survey in order to ensure useful feedback and data for the Concordat Working Group to consider and address, where appropriate (Principles 1, 2, 7)
- Work with the Athena Swan Self-Assessment team to contribute to the institutional bronze award submission and ensure best practice is shared across Departments and Faculties (All Principles)
- Ensure work to address issues raised in the 2014 Staff Survey are addressed accordingly, including running a “pulse” survey in February 2015 to assess impact of ongoing actions (Principles 2, 3, 4, 5)