

## **University of Essex – Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers: HR Excellence in Research Award – 2 Year Review**

### **Background**

The University of Essex received the HR Excellence in Research Award in May 2014. To attain the award, a gap analysis against The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers was carried out between October 2013 and March 2014 and following this an action plan for implementing the Concordat was produced.

A 2-year review of the action plan was carried out in 2016. This review was part of a process of constant evaluation of the expectations of research staff, the support offered to these groups and career progression. The workshop programme offered to research staff with teaching in their role is also reviewed annually in line with strategic needs. Consistent evaluation and monitoring of the quality of professional development offers to research staff has been enabled by the introduction of the online *HR organiser* system. Similarly, for postgraduate research students, the continued development of the Proficio scheme has also enabled automatic monitoring of uptake of skills development opportunities and individual evaluation of these. Furthermore, many of the actions identified in the gap analysis and action plan involved reviewing and monitoring current practice in line with the University's commitment to excellence in research and supporting professional development. The 2-year review took these existing processes as a starting point and also evaluated progress against individual action points in the action plan.

The review outlined in this document was led by Learning and Development with strategic level oversight from Assistant Director of HR (Organisational Development). Individual action points were reviewed in consultation with the Equality and Diversity Manager, the Dean of Postgraduate Research and Education and academic departments. Feedback from researchers on professional development opportunities and support services, for example the university coaching service, is constantly monitored and feeds into review processes. Additionally researchers continue to have representation on the university's research committee, helping to set the direction of the university's research strategy, which encompasses the themes of the Action Plan.

### **Key achievements and progress against the action plan**

*Principle 1: Recognition of the importance of recruiting, selecting and retaining researchers with the highest potential to achieve excellence in research.*

- The final version of the University Research Strategy was published in May 2014, following open consultation on its draft form with the university's research community.
- The School of Biological Sciences achieved the Athena SWAN Bronze Award in November 2014.
- The School of Health and Human Sciences achieved the Athena SWAN Bronze Award in October 2015.
- In 2016 the University committed to engaging with Athena SWAN across all departments.

*Principle 2: Researchers are recognised and valued by their employing organisation as an essential part of their organisation's human resources and a key component of their overall strategy to develop and deliver world-class research.*

- A new mandatory induction policy has been approved for introduction in the academic year 2016-17. All employees, regardless of role or responsibility, are required to complete Equality and Diversity Essentials training. In addition, managers with responsibility for others and for resources are required to complete Managing Diversity training. Employees will not be able to pass their probation period without having completed all mandatory training.

*Principle 3: Researchers are equipped and supported to be adaptable and flexible in an increasingly diverse, mobile, global research environment.*

*Principle 4: The importance of researchers' personal and career development, and lifelong learning, is clearly recognised and promoted at all stages of their career.*

- Uptake of postgraduate research student training is monitored through the Proficio system. Additional training can be offered automatically where demand is high, and Proficio also offers students a focal point to request new training opportunities, or access funding to obtain external training.
- A university-wide coaching service, available to all research staff, was rolled out in 2014 and was accessed by 45 staff in the last year.
- The Introduction of the online *HR organiser* system for staff has enabled automatic monitoring of uptake of skills development opportunities.
- Additional career development training is now offered to postgraduate research students through the Proficio scheme, including preparation for careers outside academia.
- A review of staff induction procedures was carried out in 2015, resulting in the design of an online induction portal to complement existing face-to-face sessions. This will be rolled out to new staff in 2016.
- The Research Strategy states expectations about research output with expected timelines and also makes a commitment to supporting staff to achieve this.
- The University invested in a suite of Epigeum doctoral supervisor training resources. Online supervisor training is now being piloted with staff who have attended our face-to-face "Supervising to completion" training.
- The "Ask a Postgraduate Student" scheme was established in April 2015 to allow new postgraduates to access mentoring from existing students.

*Principle 5: Individual researchers share the responsibility for and need to pro-actively engage in their own personal and career development and lifelong learning*

- Research Impact training is now offered to postgraduate research students via Proficio. Proficio empowers students in their training decisions by allowing them to decide how to spend the funds that the University gives them for training.

- An online training needs analysis for PGR has been developed; all new students are required to complete this before accessing the Proficio scheme. This analysis suggests relevant training opportunities for each individual.
- All professional development events are now managed through HR organiser allowing researchers and research managers to record and track activities and assess appropriate training and support needs.

*Principle 6: Diversity and equality must be promoted in all aspects of the recruitment and career management of researchers.*

- In September 2014 the University achieved an Institutional Gender Equality Charter Mark for its progress in advancing gender equality in arts, humanities and social science careers in higher education. In May 2015 the charter was expanded to recognise work undertaken in arts, humanities, social sciences, business and law (AHSSBL), and in professional and support roles, and for trans staff and students.
- An Equal Pay review was carried out for Professorial staff in 2016 and a gender pay gap was identified and closed.
- The University was in 53<sup>rd</sup> place in the Stonewall top employers list in 2016, climbing 144 places from 2015 and reflecting the strong commitment to equality and diversity across the University experience.
- A workshop for staff has been developed to explore the impact unconscious bias could be having on both individuals and the University and what steps can be taken to mitigate against it. The workshop has been run five times in the academic year 2015/16.
- The University supports equality and diversity through networks including: the Global Forum which promotes, celebrates and emphasises the rich cultural diversity among Essex staff; the Essex Women's Network which provides a forum for women to share ideas and provide mutual support; and a Parents' Support Network. The University is also part of the Essex LGTB alliance.

#### **Next steps and focus of strategy for the next 2 years**

- From 2016, additional investment will be made in support for researchers through a dedicated research coaching offer and additional research leave.
- The School of Biological Sciences will apply for the Athena SWAN Silver Award in the autumn term 2016.
- The School of Health and Human Sciences will apply for the Athena SWAN Silver Award in spring term 2017.
- From 2016, all departments will commence application processes for Athena SWAN.
- From 2017, postgraduate research students will be offered a one-day workshop on research careers in the UK with the aim of giving students access to the expertise of senior academics and university senior managers.

- Launch of online induction portal for all new staff, complementing existing face-to-face sessions and facilitating a longer term programme of induction. Aim for all staff joining the university from autumn 2016 to complete the online course.
- An e-mentoring platform will be launched in autumn 2016 to ensure a consistent mentoring offer to all research staff. Aim for all early career research staff to be paired with a mentor via this scheme.
- Online doctoral research supervision training will be rolled out to all academic staff in summer 2016. Aim for all new Supervisors to complete either face-to-face or online training within their first year of supervising.
- Processes for supporting the appraisal and personal development scheme, including annual monitoring, will be reviewed in the academic year 2016-17
- Job descriptions for Heads of Department and departmental research directors will be reviewed in 2016-17.
- An Equal Pay Review will be carried out for all staff in 2016, aiming to close any pay gaps identified.