

# **HR Excellence in Research Award July 2020**

## **Durham University Progress Report - 8 Year Evaluation and Review**

### **Overview**

Durham University was awarded its “HR Excellence in Research” status in 2011 in recognition of the University’s alignment of its recruitment and management of early-career researchers with the principles of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers. This was retained through a 2-year internal review in 2013, external review in 2015 and internal review in 2017. This report and the associated action plan outline our process and progress to date in supporting and implementing the principles in the UK Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers.

### **How was the 8-year external review undertaken?**

Overall responsibility for reviewing and evaluating progress against our action plan sits with the Concordat Implementation Group (CIG), chaired by the Deputy Vice-Provost for Research (Professor Louise Bracken). The group includes the Head of HR Business Partnering, the Head of Researcher Development of the Durham Centre for Academic Development (DCAD), and representatives of the Equality and Diversity Team, the Colleges, Research and Innovation Services (RIS) and the UCU. Research staff membership of CIG is provided via the Research Staff Association (RSA) leadership team, who are elected by the research staff community and serve to represent the voice of contracted researchers within the University structure. The CIG is a subgroup of Research Management Committee, a formal committee of Senate. The RSA meets regularly with its members to feedback issues to the CIG. A representative from RSA sits on Research Committee to be able to contribute to institutional decision making. The HR Excellence in Research Award forms part of a larger package of University strategies and implementation mechanisms that positively impact our researchers’ career and professional development support and opportunities. As such, the award is considered alongside the University Strategic Plan 2017–2027 and within this, the University People Strategy. The 8-year Evaluation and Review is part of a continuous process of review rather than a ‘one-off’ event that includes the following activities:

- An internal evaluation of progress against the 2018 action plan is undertaken by CIG three times each year. This involves consultation with colleagues from Colleges, DCAD, CEEC, HR, RSA and UCU.
- The views of researchers are taken into account through engagement with the Career Researcher Online Survey (CROS) 2019 survey, through regular face to face networking events with the RSA, and the CIG itself. The results of CROS 2019 were considered by the CIG in June 2019 and a report submitted to the University Research Committee. The Culture Employment and Development in Academic Research Survey (CEDARS) 2020 has been undertaken and revised targets adopted for CEDARS 2022.
- A draft of this external evaluation and action plan based on the 2019 Researcher Development Concordat was reviewed by the CIG in June 2020 before submission to Vitae.
  - The final documentation was reviewed by Provost Board prior to submission.

### **Key Developments and progress against the 2018 action plan**

During 2019, there was significant reorganisation with the formation of the new Durham Centre for Academic Development, the appointment of a new Head of Researcher Development and a new CIG Chair. This coincided with the opening of a new £40 million pound Teaching and Learning Centre with dedicated postgraduate and staff development facilities.

Full details of progress against the six-year review actions are provided in the updated action plan document (Durham HR EiR Action Plan 8 Year Review2018-20.docx). Key developments from the last two years are provided here with reference to the original Researcher Development Concordat. Gap analysis (Durham HR EiR gap analysis 2018to20.docx) has been undertaken to inform the new action plan (Durham HR EiR action plan 2020to22.docx):

#### **Progress against Principles 1&2: Recruitment, Selection, Recognition and Value**

- New Progression and Promotion procedures were introduced in 2017. From 2018 research staff were able to apply for progression and promotion annually. In 2019, 75 Research Staff submitted their CVs and 9 were promoted.
- In addition, research staff receive annual feedback on their submission to the progression process and their development.
- New university policy was introduced in 2019 to enable research staff to be promoted within a grant with the university covering any additional cost that could not be covered from the grant funding. There was an 240% increase in research staff seeking promotion under the new process from 2018 (22 staff) to 2019 (75 staff).

#### **Progress against Principles 3&4: Support and Career Development**

- A new Research Staff Association (RSA) committee was elected in 2019 with 4 new members. The committee is facilitating a range of events and providing a voice for research staff on university committees.
- A dedicated Research Staff Team has been set up on Microsoft Teams to share information and facilitate online meetings. A regular research staff newsletter has been introduced that provides an effective means of communication.
- There are regular Research Staff coffee breaks (moved online following the Covid-19 response) that provide the opportunity for research staff to network informally and raise any issues. These are regularly attended by the Deputy Vice Provost for Research and the Dean of Science.
- A redesigned Research Project Leadership scheme was launched in 2019 and promoted to Research Staff.
- Specific training and development opportunities have been delivered focusing on areas such as non-academic careers and Fellowship writing.
- The Fellowship training was jointly organised by RIS, the RSA and DCAD with over 60 staff attending two online training sessions.
- 76% of research staff (CROS2019) agreed or strongly agreed that they were encouraged to engage in personal and career development and 85% take ownership of it.
- The RSA are helping to organise Research Staff Awards for 2020.
- A Staff and Student Health Needs Analysis was carried out during 2019 that provided a baseline to determine appropriate actions moving forward.

#### **Progress against Principle 5: Researchers Responsibilities**

- Mentoring processes are embedded within the institution and best practice shared.

### **Progress against Principle 6: Diversity and Equality**

- Our annual academic recruitment campaigns focus on enhancing diversity at all stages of the recruitment process. Departments are encouraged to go outside of their usual networks with a focus on increasing diversity in the applicant pools, particularly in areas where we see under representation of minority groups.
- Appointment procedures have been updated to include gender balance on appointment panels and, where possible, academic positions to be advertised on a job share basis.
- Unconscious bias training is compulsory for all interview panels.
- There has been an increase in minority groups applying for positions from 54% (2017/18) to 61% (2018/19).
- 18 out of 24 departments successfully applied for Athena Swan Award.

### **Progress against Principle 7: Implementation and Review**

- CIG updates have been presented at Faculty boards by the CIG Chair and the Head of Researcher Development in terms of raising awareness of the Concordat, its obligations and sharing best practice.
- Regular themed meetings are organised for research staff with presentations from relevant bodies such as UCU, HR, DCAD and the Careers Service.

### **Support for research staff during Covid-19**

We have adapted our support for research staff in light of Covid-19 and the resulting lockdown. Key initiatives delivered are as follows:

- 1) Durham University released funding to extend the contracts of researchers ending during the early stages of the pandemic to the end of June.
- 2) Departments encouraged PIs to have regular virtual meetings to support the wellbeing of researchers as well as manage projects. This was important given that research staff had the potential to feel isolated under these circumstances.
- 3) Support for researchers moved online by establishing a Teams channel to share resources and exchange messages.
- 4) Coffee mornings continued virtually.
- 5) All training, such as fellowship and careers workshops, was delivered online.
- 6) We extended IT accounts of research staff whose contracts were ending to enable them to continue to access support.

### **Strategic focus for 2020-22**

We feel we have made excellent progress on embedding the principles of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers in everyday business at Durham University. Over the eight-year period we have established and embedded governance of the principles in our formal management structures, evolved the ways in which we deliver training for research staff and delivered a step change in HR practices for progression of research staff.

In line with the new Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers (published September 2019) our strategy will be to deliver a step change in research culture at Durham University. This will be founded on the three pillars of the Concordat, around Environment and

Culture, Employment and Career Development. To deliver the step change we will work undertake the following objectives:

- 1) Review and evolve our governance and management of research culture and seek to form a new Research Culture Group that reports to Research Committee. This will enable us to integrate the full range of elements of research culture into a core governance structure which can then cascade change across the institution accordingly. The Research Culture Group will include representatives from academics, research staff and professional support services.
- 2) Establish new ways of monitoring, learning and evaluating our culture and employment of researchers (academic staff and research staff). We will develop a new methodology that will extend data from the CEDARS survey to support the review and evolution of our policies and practices.
- 3) Sustain and extend training and support for career development and progression of researchers. This will enable us to increase the uptake of training by research staff and ensure PIs are supporting their research staff appropriately, especially around encouraging training and career development.

The Action Plan outlines a detailed programme of work to support these overarching objectives and they will be evidenced through responses to questions in the CEDARS survey in 2022 (see, for example, ECI1, EC12, ECI4, ECI5, EM1, PCD1, PCD2, PCD12) and annual Research Staff focus groups (see, for example, ECI2, ECI3, ECM1, ECM3, ECR1 and ECF1)