

HR Excellence in Research Award: 2016-2018 evaluation, Loughborough University

Evaluation of our support for research staff and progress against our implementation strategy has been reviewed using information from the Careers in Research Online Surveys (CROS) the University's Staff Survey, and via our expanded Athena SWAN activity, which aims for all of the University's Schools to be awarded Athena SWAN by 2022. The Athena SWAN applications have been useful for identifying good practice and activities supporting research staff, and for finding areas for improvement. The Athena SWAN self-assessment teams (SATs) include research staff representatives, which has been helpful in identifying any issues which may affect this group of staff. The Research Staff Working Group has contributed to the Concordat Implementation Review and includes members of Loughborough University Research Staff Association (LURSA) as well as researcher-support staff from Professional Services. The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research) has overall oversight and responsibility for research staff support and career development, and is also the Athena SWAN Champion. The internal review, including recommendations and forward action plan was reported to the University's Research Committee in November and December 2018. Our research staff association, LURSA, have been and will continue to be consulted on progressing elements of the Concordat Implementation Plan as representatives of the research staff population (c. 335 members of staff).

Key progress by principle:

Principle 1: Recruitment and Selection

The University is committed to reducing the use of fixed-term contracts for research staff. Since 2015, there has been a decrease of the number employed on fixed-term contracts from 89.1% in 2015 to 83.2% in 2017, as measured by data from the CROS2015 and CROS2017 surveys. In October 2018, 278 of 336 Research Staff were on fixed-term contracts (82.7%). This represents a 7.2% decrease in staff employed on fixed-term contracts since May 2015; this reduction is a very positive endorsement of the University's commitment to reducing the use of fixed term contracts and we hope to continue to reduce this to exceed the target of 10% as set in 2016.

Principle 2: Recognition and Value

Research Staff were invited to provide feedback regarding the Research Staff Employment Code of Practice in May of 2018, however this approach had to be revised as the feedback received was minimal. Therefore, since this meeting, the Code has been reviewed by the Research Staff and Student Development Advisor in conjunction with Human Resources. The reviewed document was considered by the Research Staff Working Group in December 2018; further consultation with the relevant Unions and University committees will follow in early 2019.

Research Staff are routinely involved in School Quadrennial Review meetings. This provides a forum for research staff within each school to meet with the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research and other senior members of the review panel to discuss such issues as employment, career development and research culture with the school. The findings of the research staff panel are then fed into the overall review outcome and recommendations for the School. In addition to this, three schools (Design; Science; Sports, Exercise and Health Science) have created and/or supported specific research staff meetings within the School, which are often attended by the school's Associate Dean for Research; the discussion points of these meetings are fed into the LURSA committee meetings via the school's reps.

The University has created a series of events to celebrate the achievements of Research Fellowship holders. The "Fellowship Inaugural Lectures" now run throughout the year and are publicised across the university; new fellowship holders are invited to give a lecture that is chaired by the PVC, and which showcases their research and describes their career development, to inform more junior researchers about development opportunities and strategies. The idea for this series originated from LURSA and the series is run in conjunction with them.

Principle 3: Support and Career Development

The introduction of a new Performance and Development Review (PDR) process, which has been mandated for all non-probationary staff at the University, was initiated in January 2017. This has had a positive and significant effect upon the numbers of Research Staff undertaking PDR, with all eligible staff participating in the process. The first round of PDRs were undertaken from January to March 2017, and therefore the effect of the new process was visible in the results of CROS2017. Across the University, the level of overall satisfaction with the PDR was relatively unchanged, however in one school satisfaction was significantly lower – it emerged that in this school PDRs had been conducted by academics who were not the principal investigators in charge of the research staff, which led to concerns about the usefulness and benefit of the PDR to Research Staff. The School management team made changes to the PDR process in the school based upon the results from CROS, and in 2018 principal investigators carried out PDRs on their own staff wherever possible. This led to a reduction in concerns from both research staff and their reviewers, and overall satisfaction will again be measured in CROS2019 to quantify any change. The PDR process across the University continues to be refined and has become a positive and valuable part of the management of Research Staff.

The Centre for Academic Practice (CAP) has created two new schemes by which Research Staff can undertake CPD in learning and teaching, which leads to recognition from the HEA. Recognition of Teaching for Researchers (ROTOR) has been designed to be flexible to fit around researchers' other work commitments, whilst the Associate Teaching Pathway (ATP) is a more intensive course designed for researchers with less teaching experience. Collectively, the courses have enabled 25 research staff to gain Associate Fellow of the HEA status and 2 gain Fellow of the HEA status in the last 2 years. This is compared to a total of seven research staff achieving HEA status in 2016. This 2018-19 academic year there are over 20 research staff enrolled on the two courses.

Principle 4: Support and Career Development

We have monitored the number of hours of training undertaken by research staff via the staff central booking system "My.HR", with some other development opportunities offered via different routes (e.g. via the Doctoral College and Institute of Advanced Studies) that we cannot yet quantify. The total number of hours of training have increased significantly in the past four years from 1391 hours for all research staff in 2015, to 3011 hours in 2018, a 117% increase. Since 2016 the increase has been 69%, well above the target of 5%; the Research Staff population has remained relatively stable in that period (342 in January 2015 c.f. 332 in December 2018). Most of the increase in training hours is likely to be attributable to the increased uptake of PDR, coupled with strategic advertising of CPD opportunities to Research Staff in the PDR period and the increased number and variety of opportunities.

The University has created a number of additional development opportunities for Research Staff at the university. They have been offered the opportunity to undertake "Using the media to publicise your research", a day-long course run by professional media trainers who are ex-BBC journalists. We have also held instances of "Getting Hold of your Career", again provided by an experienced external trainer, to encourage research staff to reflect upon their career to date and plan their future steps. This has been complemented by the creation of a mini Careers Fair for Researchers, which takes place on an annual basis and involves companies that are specifically looking to recruit people with Doctoral-level qualifications and research experience. We have also added Research-Staff specific sessions at our annual Research Conference, including sessions on finding Research Fellowships and on career adaptability. The Careers Network's Career Consultant dedicated to supporting Researchers' career development ran two workshops specifically designed for Research Staff in the School of Science and School of Sport Exercise and Health Science. These enabled attendees to consider their current career situation, their ability to adapt to meet fast changing labour market landscapes and prompted them to consider their future career direction.

We have also created new development opportunities open to research staff and academic staff; the Research Office is now running an extensive training and development programme that covers topics such as finding funding, putting together a funding applications and ethical processes in research. There are also greater opportunities to join less formal training, for example the Supervisor Forum series that is aimed at people supervising doctoral students, either formally or informally.

There has also been an enhanced emphasis on research staff applying for external Research Fellowships, including the appointment of a member of staff in the Research Office dedicated to supporting applicants throughout the application process. This has led to a greater success rates and an increase in the number of researchers achieving fellowships, which also leads to increased retention of high-calibre researchers. In 2016/17 academic year support was given to 13 UK fellowship applicants and 14 international applicants; in 2017/18 the equivalent figures were 21 UK fellowship applicants and 11 international applicants. Out of the total 59 applications, 10 applicants (17%) were successful in being awarded a research fellowship. The support provided is also likely to help with the future career of those unsuccessful in fellowship bids, and a proportion of these staff are successfully moving on to lectureship positions both at Loughborough and elsewhere. The School of Architecture, Building and Civil Engineering runs a Proposal Apprenticeship Scheme, which allows research staff to be involved in the process of crafting a grant application, which gives them valuable insight into the application process and helps to prepare them for future applications of their own.

In late 2016 the University recruited five researchers to the new post of Vice-Chancellor's Research Fellow. These new positions were created to give added prestige to the pursuit of external Research Fellowship funding, and to acknowledge this the posts were recruited as open-ended contracts (in line with the commitment to reduce fixed-term contracts), with the specific remit to pursue further external research funding and establish independent research career.

Principle 5: Researchers' Responsibilities

The University is continuing to support the Loughborough University Research Staff Association (LURSA) in their activities. LURSA has continued to run social events for research staff including a quiz night at a local cafe, a networking lunch for research staff and plans for upcoming board-games evenings; these activities, along with creation of new publicity materials, has been funded via a dedicated budget from the University. In addition, the LURSA-led project "Design and Digital World", which ran in 2014/15, has been analysed and written into an academic paper, which was published earlier this year by former members of LURSA (<https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2018.1505538>).

Research Staff have been encouraged to apply for Santander Mobility Awards, which is a specific pot of funding, administered by the Research Staff and Student Development Adviser, to encourage collaboration and network building with other institutions within the Worldwide Santander Universities network. In 2017-18 there were 6 successful applications from research staff, improved from just 2 in 2016-17 and 4 in 2015-16.

Principle 6: Diversity and Equality

The University has become a member of the Equality Challenge Unit's Race Equality Charter, committed to follow its principles in how it approaches race equality and addresses its institutional culture. The university is also committed to addressing issues around gender equality and career progression through extensive engagement with the Athena SWAN charter. In addition to this all new staff attend mandatory equality and diversity training to ensure that all University Staff are aware of the values which Loughborough University promotes; attendance is required for staff to pass their probation.

Principle 7: Implementation and Review

There have been regular meetings of the University's Research Staff Working Group over the past few years, which has examined and discussed the issues pertinent to Research Staff. The group

is chaired by Dr Kathryn North, Head of Researcher Development, representing the Research Office, who attends the University's Research Committee and acts as the conduit between the two groups. The Working Group contains Research Staff representatives from across the schools of the University, plus a member of academic staff who has progressed from a Research Staff position, it is also supported by the Research Staff and Student Development Advisor and a HR partner.

Finally, a coordinated and concentrated effort resulted in a response rate of 39% of all research staff to CROS 2017, a 50% increase over the previous level of 26% recorded for CROS 2015.

Next Steps, Focus and Success Measures

In order to continue to progress a culture that improves and maintains our alignment with the Concordat, the University will continue to embed research staff support and development across a number of strategic initiatives. The principles of the Concordat continue to be adopted into the strategic plans of the University and in the University Athena SWAN action plan and School-level action plans. The Research Staff Working Group will continue to monitor progress and to identify further areas for improvement, reporting to the University's Research Committee. Key to this next phase of our strategy will be to continue to build upon progress, and many of the actions from previous plans are being carried forward into the next phase to allow consolidation to take place. The Centre for Academic Practice has recently been integrated into Human Resources and Organisational Development. This connects several parts of the University integral to the implementation of the Concordat, creating joined up services that will enable continued progress in the implementation of the Concordat.

Some of the key areas of focus for the next two years are:

Continuation of the review of the Research Staff Employment Code of Practice; having been reviewed by the Centre for Academic Practice, Human Resources and the Research Staff Working Group, it is now awaiting further progression through the University's committee structures. It is anticipated that this can be completed by March 2019 and shared with all relevant parties, including principal investigators and research staff.

Work is continuing to improve induction practices for new Research Staff across the University; the induction of new staff is an integral part of the People Strategy being devised by the new Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development (HROD) and will be reviewed in early 2019. We expect a 20% increase in participation in school inductions as measured by CROS2019 compared to CROS2017. Research Staff induction practices in Schools are currently being reviewed by Head of Researcher Development through meetings with Associate Deans for Research.

We will continue to encourage Research Staff to apply for external funding – whether directly via a Research Fellowship or through being a Researcher Co-investigator or named researcher on a grant. We will continue to develop events, including the Fellowship Inaugural Lectures and Annual Research Conference, that will help to drive awareness and participation in funding applications; with the aim of a 10% increase in applications from our research staff for Fellowship calls by July 2020. We will also create new opportunities for researchers to build their employability, including the creation of at least three Post-Doctoral Development Fellowships to support freshly graduated EPSRC-funded PhD students in their transition to independent researchers.

We will continue to develop further opportunities for CPD of Research Staff, identifying potential opportunities through questions in CROS2019 and via LURSA and the Research Staff Working Group. We will deliver at least one new CPD opportunity specifically for Research Staff each calendar year. We will implement a new mentoring scheme, aligned with the University's People Strategy, to meet the expectations of Research Staff in relation to mentoring; this will be piloted starting October 2019.