

# HR Excellence in Research Award Four-Year External Review

## Introduction

Coventry University (CU) signed up to the UK Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers and was awarded the HR Excellence in Research Award in 2012. A detailed Gap Analysis was undertaken and an Action Plan agreed at this time. It is now four years since the initial award was made and a detailed review of activity has been undertaken.

The following report is a summary of this detailed review and consists of our 2017-19 Action Plan, which was agreed in January 2017. The review took the form of a data audit, a review of CROS (2015), PIRLS (2015) and PRES (2016), and structured face-to-face meetings with colleagues who were identified as having responsibility for each of the sub-sections in the Action Plan and a strategic review of progress. There are two committees with responsibility for implementation of the concordat: Research Concordat Committee (a strategic sub-committee of the University's Research Committee) and the Research Concordat Working Group (an operational group which supports data collection and audit). Researchers are represented on both the committee and working group. The membership and terms of reference of these committees are detailed in Appendix A.

## Key Achievements (2014-16)

There has been sustained investment in researchers and research at Coventry during the last two years, in terms of structures, policy and programmes, and funding. The positive effects of this strategic investment have been borne out in the 2015 national survey data (PRES, CROS and PIRLS). CROS and PIRLS (although the sample sizes were small compared to the sector as a whole) showed no areas in which the survey results were significantly more 'negative' than for the UK aggregate. Coventry's CROS 2015 results in fact highlighted that some measures of Concordat implementation appear to be more positive than is the case nationally. For example, the increased levels of participation in appraisal and review (which as of 2016 is now at 97%) is reflective of our commitment to enhancing and valuing the work of researchers (B4 in Action Plan). The percentage extent of training/CPD undertaken by staff (with 50% of staff having undertaken 5 or more days training or development, compared with a national average of 30%) is evidence of our commitment to supporting our researchers to develop both research and professional skill sets (C3).

PIRLS 2015 closely resembled the 2015 UK aggregate results, showing good levels of job satisfaction (79% positive), and higher than sector average for recognition of academic collaboration (89%, compared with 73%), of external collaborations (90%, compared with 73%) and developing research staff (58%, compared with 54%) showing our continued recognition of research activities (B1) and research careers (C7). PRES data showed a rise in satisfaction with supervisors providing support in identifying training and development for students (87% in 2016, from 79% in 2013). Although there is clearly margin for further development to meet the needs of doctoral researchers and research staff fully, there has been a distinct upwards trend in support for the development of researchers across the research community between 2013 and 2015 (and continuing into 2016 for doctoral researchers according to the in-house 2016 PRES survey).

## Investment in New Structures to Support Researchers

Coventry University restructured its administrative support for researchers into a Research Office in 2014, led by the Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor Research. The Research Office (80 FTE) offers targeted support for researchers located within a newly-formed portfolio of institutional research centres (11 in total, with an additional centre in development in Arts and Humanities). Consisting of six teams, the Research Office supports postgraduate research student recruitment and progression, research and enterprise development, research funding, post-award project management, research finance, and research excellence and impact, providing researchers with the training, skills and competencies to carry out a funded project (C2) and the ability to transfer and exploit knowledge, and facilitate its use in policy making (D2).

Working alongside the Research Office, a new team of researcher development specialists was recruited in Organisation Development with responsibility for development, training, and QR funding initiatives to support research capability development (at doctoral, early and mid-career researcher level, as well as research leaders). Doctoral training centres (DTC) that provide bespoke developmental programmes and communities of support have been established so far in four research centres. There are currently 51 doctoral researchers supported by the Centre for Trust Peace and Social Relations DTC, 33 supported by the Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience DTC, 43 by the Centre for Applied Biological and Exercise Sciences DTC, and 16 supported by the Centre for Psychology, Behaviour and Achievement DTC. There are plans to establish an additional 7 DTCs in the other research centres over the next 4 years. There has also been significant participation in a major initiative to create a national network based around the University Alliance Mission Group to support the development of doctoral and early-career researchers through creating critical mass across the network. To date, two doctoral training alliances in the fields of energy and applied biosciences for health have been established and a programme of activity for early-career researchers in the area of Healthy Ageing.

## Investment in New Policy and Programmes to Support Researchers

The new Academic Role Profile Framework (built on elements of the Vitae Researcher Development Framework and the HEA Professional Development Framework) consolidates, standardises and clarifies roles, expectations and progression criteria for all academic positions. It ensures clear progression routes for academics along pathways of research, learning and teaching, leadership and management, and enterprise and innovation. The new framework has been piloted, reviewed and published. The new progression process is in place for the 2016-17 academic year.

Two cycles of development programmes tailored to early (ECR) and mid-career researchers (MCR) took place during 2015-16. The courses were aligned to the Researcher Development Framework and the aims and ambitions of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers.

- 30 research-engaged staff participated in the 2014/15 ECR programme (16 males and 14 female).
- 26 research-engaged staff participated in the 2014/15 MCR programme (15 male and 11 female)
- 35 research-engaged staff participated in the 2015/16 ECR programme (15 male and 20 female)
- 23 research-engaged staff participated in the 2015/16 MCR programme (12 male and 11 female)

These programmes were evaluated through post-workshop online surveys and post-course focus groups with researcher-participants. In response to the feedback, a new portfolio of targeted micro-programmes has been developed to ensure greater inclusivity of all research-engaged staff and a more targeted and work-based approach. The current programme includes cohort-based micro programmes on: Research Leadership and Research Careers; Research Funding and Policy; Research Impact and Engagement; Doctoral Supervision,

and Research Communication. All programmes are constructively aligned to tangible research outputs and outcomes (including: journal articles, funding bids, personal development strategies, conferences, and impact and engagement activities). Notions of responsible research, internationalisation, and innovation and creativity are embedded across all five programmes. Each programme consists of off-campus intensive workshops, peer mentoring circles, reading groups, online learning, and individual and collaborative work-based learning projects. This series of bi-annual programmes launched in Autumn 2016 with the Research Communication Skills Programme (24 research-engaged staff participated, 12 male and 12 female). Our online developmental provision has also received significant further investment. Modules, which are available to all research students and research-engaged staff, are accessed through our VLE. Content includes modules on: career planning, managing your doctorate, research communication, research supervision, research ethics, research impact, research integrity, and research methods.

A multi-million-pound institutional commitment to offer staff with an interest in research the opportunity and support to undertake a doctorate through a Staff Doctorate Programme was also offered from June 2016. Twelve members of staff joined the first cohort. This developmental and qualification-focussed programme includes tailored training, academic writing and cohort development activity as well as a fee-waiver and ring-fenced time allocated to undertake doctoral research.

## Investment in Funding Initiatives to Support Researchers

An annual programme of research funding competitions was established in 2015 and the programme has run through three cycles: Round 1: £400K.19; Round 2: £371K; Round 3: £557K. Across the three rounds, 46% were awarded to females (where 43% were applicants) and 54% to males (where 57% were applicants). Funding has been focused on supporting staff through investment in research equipment, pump-prime funding and national and international mobility.

A Global Researchers Programme (GRP) was developed and piloted in 2015-16. This programme is designed to support PhD and MRES students from all of Coventry University's areas of research expertise to take their research abroad and to foster international collaboration. Through a combination of online experiences, intercultural learning activities and support with international mobility, the GRP aims to provide research students with the tools and capabilities to become global researchers. The 2015/16 pilot saw 73 PhD/MRES students participate in the programme and the 2016/17 pilot saw 62 PhD/MRES students participating.

## Next Steps (2017-2019)

Coventry University is committed to continuing its ambitious plans to develop research capability through large-scale investment in researchers and the quality of the research environment. To this end, 2017-18 will see the establishment of a Doctoral College and Centre for Research Capability Development (B1). This new unit will work in partnership with the People Team, Research Office, and Organisation Development on researcher recruitment and selection, recognition and value and equality and diversity and deliver a seamless development and support offer for researchers at Coventry, from PGR to professor. Specifically, the unit will enable an even higher quality training offer which will fully integrate doctoral researchers into a rapidly developing research environment at Coventry. It will also facilitate more holistic data collection and analysis, looking at equality, diversity, access, progression and retention issues across the researcher population. Critical mass will allow more training, development opportunities and events to be tailored to discipline needs and to be delivered 'vertically' and 'horizontally', meaning in groups of researchers at a variety of career stages as well as in stratified cohorts of researchers with similar levels of experience. Institution-wide events (research showcase, keynote speakers from government, research and innovation organisations, policy-makers etc.) will

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support networking across disciplines and career stages, as well as ensuring all researchers are well-equipped with an understanding of the wider research and innovation policy landscape. The Doctoral College and Centre for Research Capability Development will deliver flagship projects to include: expansion of the Staff Doctorate Programme, enhancement of international researcher mobility activities, development of a suite of professional doctorates, targeted interventions to address researcher progression and research leadership, and bespoke support as we move towards REF2021.

Given the large-scale changes in the research environment in terms of support and development, the period 2017-19 will focus on developing robust monitoring and measurement processes so that success can be more effectively and closely monitored. Key objectives of our 2017-19 action plan include:

- Develop robust mechanisms for monitoring research capability, including increasing participation in CROS and PIRLS by 25% (F2), undertaking annual reviews of developmental initiatives (B2 and C3), and monitoring the outcomes of pump-prime funding schemes (B9).
- Improve communication channels and information for researchers through the Doctoral College and Centre for Research Capability Development (A1).
- Review our approach to the recruitment of researchers, focusing specifically on increasing the diversity of researchers across our research centres (A1 and A2).
- Review post-contract opportunities for those on fixed-term contracts (B7) and review on a regular basis the number of researchers on a FT contract (A5).
- Ensure those involved in the selection and promotion of researchers have received unconscious bias training through Recruitment & Selection training and the Research Leadership and Careers development programme A7).
- Design and implement a bespoke researcher induction (C9).
- Implement a seminar series led by a researcher staff network (providing peer support and a forum to identify research-specific issues that will be fed in to agenda for the Research Concordats Working Group to discuss (B9).

Implementation will be monitored by formal governance groups. Researcher representation (at all levels) has been built in to the governance structures, with researchers at all career stages contributing to the Research Concordat Sub-Committee and the Research Concordat Working Group. Success measures are in place and will be evaluated and reviewed on a regular basis. This includes analysis of annual PRES, CROS, and PIRLS data and a bi-annual analysis against national survey data. The work of the sub-committee will also be informed by staff feedback at vice chancellor road-show events, research centre away days, and at Doctoral College Student Groups and ECR fora, as well as through online course and programme surveys.

**Appendix A:** Membership and Terms of Reference for the Research Concordat Sub-Committee and Working Group.

**Appendix B:** 2017-19 Action Plan to Support the Career Development of Researchers.

**Appendix C:** 2015 Updated Action Plan to Support the Career Development of Researchers.