

HR Excellence in Research Award: Two Year Internal Review Report **University of Westminster**

1. Introduction

The University of Westminster is committed to the principles of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers and was awarded the HR Excellence in Research Award in February 2016. As a recipient of this award the university is required to undertake a two-year internal review of progression against its original action plan. This report summarises where we are in relation to these actions.

2. Internal review process

Progress against the Action Plan is monitored by the HR Excellence in Research Award (HRERA) Steering Group chaired by the Provost using a monitoring and evaluation spreadsheet with Red, Amber and Green (RAG) ratings to highlight specific areas for attention. The HRERA Steering Group was created in May 2015 and includes a representative range of career researchers including faculty research directors, professors, readers, various lecturer and researcher ranks and professional services staff. Staff from Staff, Learning and Development (SLD) support the group by organising meetings and maintaining the action plan. Membership is reviewed on an annual basis to ensure diversity in research experience. The group consists of circa 20 individuals and meets a minimum of three times a year to discuss and advise on the action plan. The action plan is updated after each Steering Group meeting and action points are fed to appropriate stakeholders throughout the university via the group's chair and professional services.

The approach of HRERA Steering Group is to continuously track and review the original action plan and therefore no additional process measures were taken for this two year internal review. The internal review presented here was created and approved by the HRERA Steering Group on the 17th January 2018.

Additional input for this evaluation has been obtained from:

- CROS & PIRLS surveys - results from these surveys have been compared to the Action Plan
- Staff Engagement Surveys (SES) - questions which relate to research support have been included in the general staff satisfaction survey
- Feedback from focus and stakeholder engagement groups - this has been fed back to the HRERA Steering Group and has resulted in changes to or additionality to training provision
- Professional development reports, recruitment data and evaluation of training provision

3. Key achievements and Progress against original action plan

The University of Westminster uses a 'living' HRERA action plan that currently has 36 different action points set against it. Action points are evaluated and updated at every Steering Group meeting; currently there are 26 actions that are rated as 'green' (denoting complete actions) whilst 8 actions are rated as 'amber' (denoting actions in progress). No actions are rated as 'red' (inability to complete action) whilst 2 actions are rated as 'grey' (actions were cancelled). A copy of this action plan is attached with the submission.

The action plan operationalises the [original submission](#) to Vitae and relates key achievements and progress to the 7 Concordat principles. A summary table of our *primary* achievements is presented below. Not all action points and achievements are presented.

Table 1. University of Westminster Achievement Highlights

Principle(s)	Action Taken	Achievement
Principle 1 - <i>Recruitment and Selection</i>	Identified clear progression pathways for researchers and continue to support status changes to permanent contracts	Two researchers were made permanent in 16/17 whilst an additional two were made permanent in 17/18.
Principle 2 - <i>Recognising and valuing researchers</i>	The PPDR system was reviewed and is being revised to ensure that our researchers are appropriately supported and recognised in their activities.	CROS data shows a significant improvement to 'recognition and value' questions with all scoring above the national average. PIRLS data shows that 'recognition and value' questions are in line with national averages.
Principle 3 - <i>Researchers are equipped and supported</i>	A dedicated research staff website for researcher development & researcher career opportunities has been designed and developed. Induction policies reviewed to ensure complete coverage of new staff.	A researcher website has been created with support from researchers following stakeholder group meetings on suggested outline & content. This webpage collates all internal sources and points researchers to external resources & opportunities. 100% of staff recruited in last two years were offered & participated in induction.
Principle 4 - <i>Researchers personal and career development</i>	Focus & stakeholder groups were run to ascertain researchers' views on their career progression & development at the university. Renewed emphasis on ethics training occurred and a Mentoring Working Group was formed to implement a university wide research mentoring strategy.	The first annual Westminster research conference was held in June 2017 with excellent feedback. Ethics training sessions have increased attendance and all faculties have bespoke research mentoring policies. CROS results show that 70% of researchers have a clear career plan, which is significantly above the national average.
Principle 5 - <i>Researchers' Responsibilities</i>	We have increased awareness of the UoW Research Governance Framework (RGF) and Code of Practice for Research through various activities. The university is changing its PPDR platform to increase user friendliness and engagement.	CROS and PIRLS 2017 both show an increased awareness of the UoW RGF compared to 2016. The online-based PPDR system is being revamped to create a new system that is more user-friendly.
Principle 6 - <i>Diversity and equality</i>	The university launched the Women's Network and BME Network in October 2016. We have raised awareness of diversity and equality policies and programmes. We continue to work towards Athena SWAN silver award.	Our diversity networks hold multiple events per year and have active attendance. Awareness of various diversity and equality policies have increased in the 2017 CROS and PIRLS surveys. 97% of CROS respondents believe the university is committed to equality and diversity. In July 2016 the university was named as the most diverse university in the UK.
Principle 7 - <i>Regular and collective review</i>	The HRERA Steering Group was established to provide continuous monitoring of Concordat principles & objectives. Staff Engagement Survey (SES), CROS and PIRLS were extensively advertised to staff. Guidance criteria were changed to ensure that research-only & research-teaching staff were made better aware of which survey to answer.	Researcher engagement for CROS & PIRLS increased by 90% compared to 2015 (90 to 172 responses). The overall response rate for both surveys increased significantly. The CROS survey did particularly well in capturing research-only staff with a response rate of 78%.

4. Progress Issues and Future Direction (2018-2020)

Not all actions that were set out in the original action plan have been achieved to date. The following is a short summary of actions that were not pursued, or are delayed, and the reasons why.

In relation to **principle 1**, the possibility of a general bridging fund for researchers between projects was explored but a lack of funding did not permit this initiative to be taken forward. Faculties within the university continue to make decisions on a case-by-case basis using local research finances. In addition, the university decided not to become a local contact point for Euraxes but researchers are signposted to specialised sites on the researcher development webpages. In relation to **principle 4**, the university considered including Epigeum blended learning modules in its researcher development, however a review by the Research Integrity & Misconduct Working Group suggested that this should not be pursued as it was felt that the programme on offer did not meet our needs. Also related to **principle 4**, the university established a Mentoring Working Group to draft a university wide research-mentoring framework which was to be launched in academic year 2017/18. This action has been delayed and is set to be completed for academic year 2019/20. However, all faculties within the university have individual bespoke research mentoring schemes.

Going forward we have updated our action plan with a series of continuing actions (denoted by the suffix *b*) that either need further work, or a different approach, due to their status as amber on our current action plan. In addition, we have outlined a series new actions that aim to build on our progress to further enhance the institution's research environment. The actions proposed are carefully aligned with our 2020 Strategy that seeks to foster a research engaged environment that produces research with impact across subjects that are both practice and research orientated.

Of the continuing actions we will focus specific attention to the introduction of an institutional research mentoring policy and associated guidelines (**principle 4**). This is a significant undertaking requiring further development of the work already carried out and additional support being made available to encourage and support the significant number of expected mentors/mentees. We aim to have completed this process by the beginning of academic year 2019/20 and then move towards a monitoring and evaluation state.

We will seek to streamline administrative research processes and improve interdisciplinary collaborations across the institution (**principle 3**). We will do this by establishing a virtual 'Research Hub' that comprises interdisciplinary Research Institutes, the Graduate School and the Research Office by 2020. In conjunction with such organizational improvements we also aim to provide a programme of training (**principle 4**) that will help the institution maximize the impact of its research. We will do so by developing opportunities around the concept of 'the digital researcher' that seeks to address issues of data management planning, General Data Protection Regulation, training for social media, twitter and other connectivity products and ways to create impact in the digital space.

Finally, to ensure that our staff are valued and recognized in an ever shifting educational and research environment we aim revise and implement a new career progression framework that documents and implements clearer processes for researcher advancement and progression (**principle 1**) by 2020.

We consider the above objectives key in defining our evolving HRERA strategy. Each of our objectives puts staff at their core and we remain committed to embedding the Concordat across the gamut of research culture present within our institution. This review provided an excellent opportunity for reflection on our progress achieved, and unachieved, and we look forward to continuing our significant forward momentum.