

UNIVERSITY OF THE  
WEST of SCOTLAND  
**UWS**



# HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH:

Four Year Review  
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July 2020



# HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH: UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST OF SCOTLAND FOUR YEAR REVIEW REPORT

The University of the West of Scotland was awarded the HR Excellence in Research Award in July 2016. Recipients of this award are required to undertake an external evaluation every four years. This report summarises progress against the [2016-2018](#) and [2018-2020](#) HR Excellence in Research Action Plans.

## a. Background and Internal Review

In 2015, the University of the West of Scotland established a Concordat Implementation Steering Group to conduct a gap analysis and develop the 2016-2018 Action Plan against the Concordat Principles. The University received the HR Excellence Award in July 2016. In early 2018, a full review of progress has been undertaken and UWS have updated the action plan, informed by the views of research staff gathered in CROS 2015 and CROS 2017. The updated action plan and new action plan for 2018- 20 (updated June 2020) is available on the Researcher Development section of the UWS website. Our four-review is reflectively looking the last action plan and comments on our achievements, as well as highlighting areas in need of further improvement. Our Action Plan 2020-2022 has been updated accordingly and will be shared across the institution.

UWS research staff numbers rarely exceeded  $n > 30$ . Therefore, at UWS our actions are designed to include anyone who does research with a focus on early career researchers, which we considering anyone at the career stage of postdoc to the first 5 years of their first academic posts (i.e. lecturer). However, during the 4 year internal review we have found that not everyone fits this narrow definition of early career researcher, in particularly staff who have experience in practice before joining UWS. In addition, our approach to researcher engagement is open and we actively encourage participation across events for both research staff and postgraduate research students to help foster a researcher community at UWS and build bridges between staff and student communities. With this in mind we consider our research staff cohort to be ~600 academic staff (with staff on fixed term contacts  $n < 30$ ).

The support to engage and support the researcher community has benefited from two major reorganisation projects. Firstly, UWS Transformation in 2018 created a new support structure, Academic Life encompassing Research, Doctoral College, Enterprise, QuEST, UWS Academy, and Education Futures has been operational since 2018. The UWS Academy (UWSA) is a new department set up to support everyone who teaches UWS students to develop their teaching and assessment practices, their programmes and their modules with the aim of enhancing student learning. UWSA were also tasked to support the development of researchers, from postgraduates through early career to experienced practitioners and appointed the first dedicated post for researcher development in November 2018 (Dr Stephanie Zihms). UWSA delivers the PgCert in Academic Practice, which includes a optional module on Research in Academic Practice. This module is now also available as stand-alone CPD for researchers who would like to learn more about research or are new to research but not necessarily new to Higher Education. Throughout the year UWS Academy hosts a range of workshops to engage with researchers from drop-in session to webinars working closely with the Doctoral College, Research Services and Business Innovation teams who have developed a range of other flagship leadership and development programmes for researcher since 2016 when UWS first considered applying for the award.

In 2019, the University accomplished a rebalancing exercise which has resulted in an augment organisation and talent development function in the Personnel and Organisation Development Department (P&OD) and expansion of the Doctoral College, Research Services and Business Innovation support teams who today help academic staff with submitting and managing research grants, engagement with industry, commercialisation of UWS research, research policy and governance including the REF submission, impact and open access.

### **Process of Self Audit:**

The self-audit process has been led by the Concordat Implementation Steering Group led by the Vice Principal (Research, Innovation & Engagement) who is also a member of the university executive. He is supported by the Executive Director of HR, Vice Chair of the Concordat Steering Group. The views of research staff gathered in CROS 2015 and CROS 2017 have been taken into account. CROS 2019

responses were very low, attributed to rebalancing exercise ongoing at the time, so we have undertaken consultations in the style of focus groups in 2018 and again in 2020 to form our gap analysis. Focus groups to look at progress towards the principals of the Concordat were held with principal investigators, research staff and research leaders. In addition, the a sub-group of the Concordat Steering Group has consulted with the Chair of the Researcher Staff Forum (formerly Early Career Researcher Forum) and taken the Forum's annual report 2019 into consideration. There has been significant progress (some of which is detailed below and further in the Action plan 2018-2020. Concordat Steering group meeting which includes school and research staff members plus meetings to establish and Early Career Forum also provided an opportunity to consult with researchers on delivery of the 2016-2018 action plan. Continuous feedback and consultation is built into the plan through the Concordat Steering Group action tracking and Research Staff forum. A review of staff surveys and how we respond to feedback is built into the new Action Plan 2020-22.

#### b. Key achievements and progress against original action plan (2016) and two year review (2018).

Our UWS strategy for 2025 sets out how by creating new knowledge and relevant skills, our research and academic programmes, UWS will provide opportunities for business-to-university interaction, resulting in research developments, innovation, spin-out and knowledge exchange.

All academic staff will be required to develop a research or scholarly portfolio that commits them to producing excellent research, innovation or engagement opportunities that are relevant to global societal challenges. This will inform curriculum development and enhance our learning and teaching.

As outlined in our introduction above, a major achievement over the past four years at UWS has been the improved environment and support structures for all staff, impacting on the researcher community both directly and indirectly. Staff at any stage of their career can draw on materials and resources available online or call on direct support from a variety of sources within their school or from professional services teams, ranging from mentoring, career services advice, grant preparation and staff development from P&OD and UWS Academy. Propel, Grant accelerator, UWS Crucible are all programmes designed to build collaboration, impact and leadership skills established since 2016.

Together with a balanced approach to activity planning, the My Contribution process reviewed annually ensures that all academics can plan for and deliver the requirements of their role via agreed SMART objectives while progressing their career goals. The university has delivered a REF2021 (Research Excellence Framework) code of practice which sets out our approach to the REF2021 exercise and the process for identification of significant responsibility for research for the REF submission, to ensure equality and fairness for staff.

UWS has also achieved its first High Growth Spin out, Novosound, during the period of review, led by a former Post Doctoral Research Fellow Dr David Hughes it has received £3.3m investment and in 2020 as a successful technology entrepreneur, he has back to present at the UWS Crucible on the importance of researchers taking responsibility for their career development and using the resources available at UWS and in the Crucible (Principles 3&4).

#### c. Progress by Concordat principle

Based on the initial gap analysis and the two year review of HR Excellence in 2018, a range of identified gaps have been addressed and actions completed continue where applicable to be embedded within processes at UWS. Progress to date included the following achievements:

##### ***Principle 1 & 2 Recruitment and Selection, Recognition and Value***

- We have reviewed our recruitment and selection policy, procedure and practices to take account of researcher needs and good practice, including academic contracts, academic induction and access to UWS Academy programmes for research staff.
- In 2020, the business partnering approach to schools was extended to provide access and guidance to line managers on recruitment, selection, induction and My Contribution, face to face from a HR professional. Alongside this, the UWS shortlisting process has been refined and

moving forward there will be a focus on completion of the UWS unconscious bias module as this will ensure that interview panel members have received appropriate training in advance.

- Academic induction was enhanced two years ago with the launch a separate bespoke induction on research and enterprise and this is now being incorporated back into a review of the main induction programme using the lessons learned from trialling approaches and staff feedback.
- Internal studentships have been ring fenced for early career researchers recognising their value and the requirement to provide them with the capacity to help their research career development. While work is on ongoing to improve the conversion rate from application to successful promotion, there is a high conversion rate through the salary recognition and awards scheme (>90% in 2019) to successful outcome.
- It is intended that bridging support will be continued through the lifecycle of the 2020-2022 action plan, which a new fund available to recognise and protect staff, particularly those on fixed term contracts from the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. Since the lockdown of March 2020, UWS has established a MS Team called Supporting UWS Managers to promote resources and provide training and support to equip managers to support staff particularly with health and wellbeing, to communicate effectively and build teams remotely and a scaled down version of My Contribution is designed to support staff ensure that personal and career development does not fall off the agenda at a difficult time where the university is working remotely.

#### ***Principle 3 & 4: Support and Career Development***

- UWS Academy launch and the transformation and subsequent rebalancing together with a range of bespoke training and development initiatives have transformed and extended support for researcher across UWS.
- Over 90 members of staff have been on the main Grant Accelerator programme for staff identifying as early career researchers, participating in main programme sessions on funding and collaboration, group mentoring and accessing bite size sessions with a diverse range of funders.
- PROPEL in 2018/19 took a cohort of 10 staff interested in exploring options for knowledge exchange and all of the participants are now involved in delivering industry facing CPD and/or supporting knowledge transfer partnerships or leading their own research grants.
- UWS Crucible 2017 generated 12 research projects and the Researcher Staff Forum which has been sustained now for 3 years is expected to develop further with the addition of the cohort of 29 staff (including research staff) who will complete UWS Crucible 2020 in September.
- Principal 5 Individual researchers share the responsibility for and need to pro-actively engage in their own personal and career development, and lifelong learning
- My Contribution requirements are for 100% staff ensuring that researchers undertake an annual cycle of appraisal which includes a discussion on personal and career development, following feedback in 2016 and 2018 that the process was not including research staff as standard practice.
- 77% of research staff reported in CROS 2017 and 100% in focus group in 2020 that they are encouraged to engage in personal and career development and maintain a formal record of their professional development activities.
- In addition to ECR we also invited Heads of Division to participate in a focus group to better understand how they see their role in supporting and developing ECRs
- The Early Career Research Forum was established in 2018 and they have run a range of events. However, engagement is a challenge and they have suggested it might be due to the barrier identifier of researchers as early career. With our approach to open engagement this forum has been renamed to the research staff forum. We will monitor engagement with this peer-forum and the wider researcher community to better understand how to support staff and the forum leadership team.

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

UWS become a Stonewall diversity champion in 2018 committing to LGBT+ friendly practices and established a BAME network, continued to deliver training in equality and unconscious bias and host a range of campus events to promote inclusion. The university has been awarded the Athena SWAN

Bronze charter in recognition of our work to advance female representation in STEM subjects. UWS are proud to publish that females make up 50% of academic and research staff and 46% of our senior management (downloaded [here](#), 29 June 2020). The university works with the Equality Challenge Unit to promote equality and diversity in higher education.

**Principle 7 The sector and all stakeholders will undertake regular and collective review of their progress in strengthening the attractiveness and sustainability of research careers in the UK.**

CROS and PIRLS surveys have been carried out in previous years and their results have been used to inform the support and training offered to our research staff. UWS continue to engage through the Doctoral College, UWS Academy and Research Services with the VITAE network and the Scottish SCOTHerD group of researcher developers to share best practice and to inform our support in response to policy development.

**d. Strategy for the next four years (2020-2024)**

An outcome of the review carried out in 2020 have informed the 2020-2022 action plan and future direction of the next four years. The following areas have been identified as the future UWS strategy to progress and should be read in tandem with the Action Plan 2020-2022:

- Continuing to monitor and develop our training provision and support for researchers, including additional improvements to induction. Ensuring that places are reserved for research staff wherever possible on flagship training programmes
- A commitment to ensure that early career researchers are encouraged to attend sessions that are mapped to the RDF framework. This will include opportunities for research staff to get credit for example for PhD supervision duties and access to UWS Academy provision. The introduction of micro credentials for activities mapped to the Vitae RDF framework is also under consideration.
- The Concordat Steering Group consult with the Research Staff forum to reimagine how the success of early career researchers is celebrated at UWS. The Group is also keen that we look outwards and find ways to better communicate to researchers about potential for career development through engagement with the external networks available through UWS membership: Scottish Research Pools, Innovation Centres, industry groups and the Royal Society of Edinburgh Young Academy of Scotland.
- Clearer guidance for research staff and managers on contractual arrangements, including procedures for and use of fixed term versus open ended contracts – encouraging a longer term approach to contractual arrangements where possible.
- Development of additional training and resources for new Principal Investigators who are line managers of research staff and more support for Research Staff applying for fellowship opportunities.
- Support for researchers to ensure widened access and participation in existing and new mentoring and coaching schemes will be a focus for the Concordat Steering Group.
- A commitment to ensure that the research community is offered the opportunity for active participation in all equality and diversity related initiatives over the next two years, including input to consultation on the University's refreshed Equality Outcomes which will be published in April 2021
- The Research Staff Forum membership will be opened up and promoted across the organisation.
- Run CROS and PIRLS in the next round or agree alternative to elicit the same feedback.
- Conduct an assessment exercise to determine actions required and timescale for UWS to develop policies and frameworks to commit to being a signatory of the refreshed 2019 [Researcher Development Concordat](#). This will require discussion and consultation on how the recommended development time of 10 days is achieved.