Towards HR Excellence in Research: Six Year Review
June 2022
HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH: UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST OF SCOTLAND SIX YEAR REVIEW REPORT

The University of the West of Scotland has held the HR Excellence in Research Award since 2016 and our previous actions plans are reports are available on our website (https://www.uws.ac.uk/research/research-environment/researcher-development-concordat/)

Introduction

To support the HR Excellence process and alignment of our work with the Researcher Development Concordat UWS established a Concordat Implementation Steering Group, which has since been renamed Concordat Steering group to show the progress from establishing this group to retaining our HREiR award. Due to the Covid-19 interruptions we amended our 2020-2022 Action plan and have adjusted how we consulted researchers for our 2022-2025 Action plan. A full review of progress has been undertaken and UWS have updated the action plan, informed by the views of research staff gathered in informal feedback sessions, through our online forums on Teams and via focus groups. The updated action plan and new action plan for 2022-2025 is available on the Researcher Development section of the UWS website. Our four-year review is reflectively looking at the last action plan and comments on our achievements, as well as highlighting areas in need of further improvement. Our forward-looking three-year Action Plan (2022-2025) has been updated accordingly and will be shared across the institution.

Context

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 previous reviews 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 and academic staff, as well as postgraduate research students to help foster a researcher community at UWS and build bridges between staff and student communities. 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 reorganisation in 2021 with the move of Researcher Development into Research Services. Through bespoke researcher development activities and with assistance from the wider Research Services team UWS are seeing a post pandemic return of research focused activities which are being built upon in the ambitions of the new three-year plan.

Process of Self Audit:

The self-audit process has been led by the Concordat 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 through informal feedback (e.g., feedback and evaluation questionnaires, conversations) and targeted focus groups to look at progress towards the principals of the Concordat were held. Due to survey fatigue in 2020 and 2021 we opted for more informal approach using evaluation questionnaires and our
online Teams spaces to gather feedback. We have incorporated relevant CEDARS questions in our 2022 institution wide Colleagues’ Survey which we will take into consideration when we conduct an interim action plan review in 2023/24, around 18 months into the next three-year action plan cycle.

There has been significant progress since UWS reported on our four-year review (some of which is detailed below and further in the Action plan 2020-2022). Concordat Steering group meetings which includes school and research staff members plus meetings organised by the Staff Forum for Research also provided an opportunity to consult with researchers on delivery of the 2020-2022 action plan. Continuous feedback and consultation are built into the plan through the Concordat Steering Group action tracking and Staff Forum for Research1. A review of staff surveys and how we respond to feedback is built into the new Action Plan 2022-25.

Progress Highlights

Environment and Culture
- UWS Crucible leadership programme delivered for 27 early career researchers during the first lock down.
- Vice Principal Research, Innovation and Engagement adopts the Café Culture discussion format designed by Wellcome Trust to listen to colleagues and talk about the challenges in research culture and reflect on what a better culture looks like.
- Pivot to on-line and hybrid engagement for the staff forum for research and researcher development has increased engagement
- Research Festival week in May 2022 saw a return to in-person research seminars, events and showcases including the PGR student competition.

Employment
- From the start of the Covid-19 pandemic and up to December 2021 bridging funding was available and arrangements were made to ensure that 15 staff on fixed term contracts were not adversely affected by the pandemic
- May 2022 heralded the launch of two new awards, Public Engagement in Research and Researcher Development.
- A new Staffing Authorisation Process provides clarity on the procedures for and use of fixed term versus open ended contracts.

Professional and Career Development
- New Academic Research in Practice module launched as part of PG Certificate in Academic Practice.
- November established as Academic Writing month, writing support expanded and Power Hour of Writing, the new weekly writing group is established and growing.
- A dual pathway Grant accelerator programme delivered to x staff
- Shadow scheme for early career doctoral supervisors launched and two competitions launched to award 28 Vice Chancellor Studentships to early career supervisor lead teams.