

University of Exeter - HR Excellence in Research: 6 Year Review 2016

An internal evaluation of the University's HR Excellence Award was undertaken in 2016 to assess the performance of the University in meeting its obligations under the Concordat and to gauge progress against actions arising from an interim self-assessment review in 2014. The original 4-year strategy called the *Concordat Implementation Plan* (CIP) was produced in 2009.

Primary sources of data for this evaluation are the Staff Engagement Survey (SES), the University of Exeter PGR Wellbeing Survey together with internal monitoring reports produced for the Researcher Development (RD) team and the Doctoral College Management Group. The evaluation was undertaken by the Head of Academic Development together with the Director of Research Services (replaces RKT), Head of Researcher Development, Doctoral College Manager and University of Exeter Gender Equality Working Group (replaces the Athena Swan Steering Group). The evaluation process engaged the six College Directors of Postgraduate Research and PGR and ECR Leads and was supported by email consultation of various staff groups including research staff. The final report was discussed and approved by the Research and Impact Strategy Management Group (RISMG) chaired by the DVC Research and Impact, which includes academic representation of all Colleges. RISMG members include the six College Associate Deans of Research, the Dean of the Doctoral College (replaces the Faculty of Postgraduate Research) and Directors of aligned professional services.

Key achievements and progress against the strategy

Staff Engagement Survey (SES)

In 2015 the University ran a full Staff Engagement Survey to assess a range of issues affecting both academic and professional services staff. In order to avoid 'survey fatigue' with ECRs and risk a poor response rate as a result of running three surveys in quick succession, the University decided not to undertake the 2015 CROS and PIRLS surveys. Priorities were instead informed by the outcomes of a series of meetings with ADRs and PIs in 2013/14 to identify and agree areas requiring action within each College.

Athena Swan

The Athena SWAN Working Group is the University strategic lead for gender equality issues, chaired by Professor Mark Goodwin, DVC (External Affairs) and meets monthly with the Head of RD and academic representation from all STEM/M Colleges. All STEM/M Colleges have their own Athena SWAN Working Groups to drive forward and monitor progress at a local level. The University was successful in renewing our Athena SWAN Institutional Bronze Award (April 2015); all 9 STEM/M disciplines in CEMPS and CLES achieved an Athena SWAN award, 4 at Silver and 5 at Bronze (Nov 2015). Physics also secured 'Practitioner' status under the Institute of Physics' JUNO accreditation.

ePDR

Engagement in centrally delivered L&D participation is monitored through TRENT and My Career Zone. Further focus on the importance of researcher development within career progression is evident through the development in 2016/17 of an ePDR which will highlight professional development needs.

RD Position Document and Plan

An extensive review of research development provision in 2015-16 has provided significant insight into training and development priorities for PGRs and ECRs across the University. A new Training Vision and Plan has been approved by the DC Strategy Group and sets out the guiding principles and priorities that are already being used to improve the RD programmes for both PGRs and ECRS and will continue to inform more substantial changes in 2016/17.

PGR Researcher Development Provision

The PGR RD Programme provides formal training and development opportunities on the Exeter and Penryn campuses. Feedback from participants continues to be highly positive: over 95% agreed or strongly agreed that sessions in the core programmes met their learning outcomes in 2015-16; over 97% agreed or strongly agreed that they would recommend the session to their peers. The quality of provision is reflected in the continued growth in participation of Exeter PGRs rising to 61% in 2015/16 in a population of c.1500 with c.3000 individual attendances; and in of Cornwall PGRs to 98% in 2015 with the population of 187 undertaking 682 individual sessions.

PRES Data

The PRES Professional Development Section Positive Satisfaction Scores have increased significantly over time from 40% in 2009 to 79% in 2015. 91.7% in 2015. Research Skills was also high with 91.7% although Research Culture was lower at 79.3% and this is an area of focus for the Doctoral College.

An interim survey was undertaken in July 2016 with questions around equality and diversity, well-being, research culture, the postgraduate community and the Doctoral College and this is informing current action planning.

Webinars for PGRs

With the specific aim of improving provision for part-time and distance learners, the webinars programme offered through the GW4 partnership has increased significantly from 9 events covering 9 topics in 2012/13 to 25

covering 23 topics in 2015/16. Exeter is the key delivery partner in this area of activity with 21 of these webinars covering 19 topics were delivered by Exeter. All webinars have been well-received by the GW4 PGR community.

Peer-to-Peer Mentoring

The pilot of the PGR peer-to-peer mentoring training was extended in Geography in Penryn and this has been a successful programme. There are plans to develop this provision further in 2016/ 17, following a successful bid for additional funding.

ECR Core Programme

The ECR Core Programme continues to be revised and enhanced informed by engagement and evaluation data. Again, the quality of the provision in this area is very positive with 98% of respondents in 2015/16, agreeing or strongly agreeing that sessions met their learning outcomes and 97% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that they would recommend the session to their peers. There has been year on year growth in participation with 378 ECR attendances in 2015/ 16 up from 356 in 2013/ 14. In addition to central provision, Colleges have developed a range of specific development opportunities.

Well being

PGR and ECR well-being has been highlighted as an issue at both institutional and national level. The Doctoral College has provided a clear focus on both direct provision and improving information sources. In 2015-16 access was secured for PGRs to work station assessments and the staff well-being support through Care First and Silvercloud while retaining their access to the Guild Advice Service. The University is committed to improving and supporting all staff and students, articulated in the University Values, and HR has increased the range of wellbeing resources and support services including the following:

- Care first - provides free confidential, impartial advice and support 24 hours a day, 365 days a year for all staff and PGRs.
- Wellbeing training: 'Mental Health Awareness Training' and 'Managing wellbeing training'
- Holistic therapies including Yoga and Mindfulness
- Inclusivity tool kit
- 'Above and Beyond' recognition and reward scheme
- Information and sources of support on the staff wellbeing website - <http://www.exeter.ac.uk/staff/wellbeing/>
- Staff Wellbeing Strategy Group

There is also a strong focus on developing vibrant research communities and supporting student-led initiatives that directly address PGRs' own priorities. This work continues in 2016-17.

Management of Provision – Working with Colleges and external partners

The creation of the Doctoral College Strategic Board and Management Group have improved the interface between the Colleges and centralised training provision by providing strategic and operational leadership for PGRs and ECSs across the University. A larger group of stakeholders is engaged through the termly Doctoral College Forums through which colleagues share good practice and disseminate information. Work was started in 2015/16 to support the ECR Networks and PGR Liaison Forums at discipline level and this work continues across all campuses.

GW4

We have continued to work actively within the GW4 partnership to develop shared and joint training programmes and resources. The relationships with partners are strengthened through the work of the Building Capacity and Developing People Workstream and the Developing People and the PGR Working Groups. For example, a Medieval Studies Network Event at Exeter led to an AHRC submission. All four GW4 institutions' provision is open to PGRs and ECRs across the partnership, and Exeter RDT managed the GW4 RD Webinar Programme for PGRs in 2015/16.

Doctoral College

The Doctoral College was formally established in autumn 2015 and works closely with DPGRs and other ECR/ PGR-facing staff through the governance groups, DC Forums and other groups. Key researcher development themes are identified in the DC Strategic Objectives including PGR mental health and wellbeing, and defining and enhancing research cultures and communities. Priority has been given to building capacity for attracting and delivering externally funded DTEs and Exeter now has at least one doctoral training programme with each of the research councils.

Researcher Development Website

The RD website is being restructured following the creation of the Doctoral College and in light of feedback received during the 2015/16 researcher development review. The priority is to articulate a clear narrative around effective professional development and possible career options and to provide access to appropriate online tools and resources. The Doctoral College is working collaboratively with Academic Development to ensure that the Exeter Academic project and accompanying website effectively describe career journeys and provide information advice and guidance about career development and the support available for all researchers and other academic job families.

LTHE Programme

LTHE Programme funding is secure and is an outstanding programme for PGRs and ECRs, preparing for teaching and assessment, accredited by the Higher Education Academy. We continue to receive high quality feedback, rating all programme streams 4.2 out of 5 or above in terms of content, quality, relevance and practical application.

2016 – 18 HR Excellence in Research action plan

Whilst a substantial amount of development has been achieved to support researchers to be the best that they can and to ensure consistent high quality training and development throughout their careers at the University of Exeter on all four campuses, there is further development and enhancement work to be done. This is set out in the 2016 – 16 HR Excellence in Research Action Plan and described here. The top priorities are to:

Early Career Researchers

1. Continue to review and evaluate researcher development provision with ECRs
2. Ensure access to learning and development, career pathways advice and support, and effective PDR processes
3. Focus on the health and wellbeing of all of our researchers, and to explore the role and activities of the Academic Mentor for ECRs

Postgraduate Researchers

4. Further increase access to and participation in L&D opportunities, and career pathway advice and guidance
5. Develop the role of the new PGR Pastoral Tutor

University Researcher Community

6. Continue to enhance the research community and cultures for all our academic staff to ensure a sense of belonging and to build connected communities across campuses and with external partners.
7. Work with the wider academic community at all grades and in all disciplines, to continue to create a united vision for Research Practice at Exeter and to increase engagement in working towards that vision

Action Plan Overview

The following activities will be undertaken to achieve these priorities: It is proposed that the following be included in the new HR Excellence in Research Award action plan (2016 – 18):

Early Career Researchers

- Active participation in the new GW4 Crucible (2017) for ECRs
- Increase and enhance academic support and development for the REF
- Run the CROS and PIRLS surveys in 2017
- Introduce a new Academic Induction programme for all job families and grades
- Introduce of a new Research at Exeter Induction Workshop Series
- Develop ePDR to include ECR PDR process improvements supported by performance analytics drawn from existing sources
- Industry training – to ensure that ECRs have joint studentships with industry and business. External engagement and collaborative activity
- New ePDR changes for ECRs, who will be reviewed by their PI and another

Postgraduate Researchers

- Build online resources for PGR-facing staff to support and extend professional development
- Develop the role of the PGR Pastoral Tutor (to replace the PGR Mentor role)
- Develop and extend development opportunities for PGR Supervisor Development
- Run the PRES survey in 2017

University Researcher Community

- The Academic Development Steering Group to be established, chaired by the DVC Education with membership from across the University Professional Services and Colleges involved in development provision for academics
- Develop and extend positive research community and working environment
- 2016/17 University Athena SWAN Working Group will be subsumed within the new University Gender Equality Group, but with a broader remit for all gender issues;
- Athena SWAN Working Groups within STEM/M Colleges will be broadening their remits to include all protected characteristics;
- Continue to develop and extend the remit and contribution of the Doctoral College
- Continue developments within our Exeter Academic project
- Continue developments on the HR Inclusivity Programme
- Current schemes on STEMM training