**University of Reading HRER Submission 2016 – Review Report**

**Background and Context – What has been happening since 2014?**

We are delighted to be submitting this progress report on our HR Excellence in Research Award (HRER). We have made progress on all seven of the principles of the concordat and framework – in some cases more than we had expected and in some cases a little less. One of our challenges has been a major organisational and personnel change within the University during the last year.

These changes will ultimately significantly enhance the manner in which the University will support its researchers at all levels, from undergraduates pursuing research projects to our most distinguished research professors. Providing improved support to PhD, post-doctoral and Early Career Researchers has been one of the key aims of the changes in our research organisation, management and leadership. These have, however, taken some time to implement and consequently slowed down some areas of planned activity.

The major change of relevance to HRER has been the introduction of 36 Research Divisions in the University as the units that plan and undertake research and to which all researchers belong. These replace previously existing research groups and Schools as the units that organise research.

The 36 Research Divisions are placed into five themes, each led by a newly appointed Research Dean: Environment, Food, Health, Heritage & Creativity, and Prosperity & Resilience. The Research Divisions provide the structure for supporting researchers in all areas of their activities, such as personal research planning, mentoring and leadership development. As such, the university now has a structure within which the seven principles can be more effectively implemented and progress monitored.  Moreover, the composition of research committees and their terms of reference have been revised enabling greater participation by researchers. For example, research staff are now represented on the University Board for Research and Innovation (UBRI). As from 2016 our Research and Enterprise Services came under the direct management of the PVC for Research and Innovation. This improves our ability to ensure that researchers are fully supported as a key element of the research community at the University.

This change in the University's research organisation has coincided with other developments of relevance to the HRER activity. We have appointed a Dean for Diversity and Inclusion and have run a major project throughout the whole university to ensure we are providing an appropriate environment for the equitable treatment of all of our staff. This will provide significant enhancements to our activity under Principle 6 and 7.

There has also been significant changes in the People Development Team. Our Research Staff Development Manager left the University in March 2016, caused some delays in implementing our HRER activity. However, along with another departure, it enabled a restructure to embed the principles of HRER across the team, so that researchers receive the highest quality development from those with the most appropriate skill set.

**Governance for HRER**

Our HRER accreditation is sponsored by the PVC for Research and Innovation, ensuring quality assurance at the highest level. The actions from our submission are co-ordinated by Lynn Moore, Learning and Development Officer (Leadership and Research Staff Development) and is supported by Alison Hackett, HR Assistant Director for People and Talent. UBRI, chaired by the PVC for Research and Innovation, has responsibility for ensuring the Implementation Plan is progressing appropriately and receives a report from Alison three times a year. UBRI requires all actions to be implemented.

**Approach to Evaluation and Engagement with Research Staff**

In People Development we have been reviewing how we work with our key customers and stakeholders. As a result we have had a number of discussions with senior leaders of research on both the academic and support side. We have also engaged with Early Career Researchers in the form of individual discussions and focus groups and undertaken focus groups with PhD students.

These conversations have covered the following topics, based in the main on data from CROS and PIRLS surveys and Athena Swan surveys:

- Induction
- Performance Management
- Development
- Career Progression
- Wellbeing and support

By way of example, some of the wider work we have been doing as a result of these conversations has led to:
- An away day for research support teams, facilitated by People Development and HR and also attended by the PVC for Research and Innovation and two Research Deans. This focused on identifying the stages of the research journey and outlining the ways in which support services will work with academics at each stage, the aim being to develop working relationships and put in place practical actions for moving forward. A number of work streams emerged from this which are now in delivery stage.
- People Development facilitated 2 sessions for Research Division Leads on strategic thinking, aimed at enabling RDL's to develop research plans aligned to the research strategy
- A meeting with Research Deans and the PVC for Research and Innovation to agree priorities for researchers' development. This was driven by a need to be clear on the expectations for early career researchers and an increasing demand for leadership development for the RDL's
- A discussion with University Research Committee to identify the priority development needs for the 16/17 academic year

**Key Achievements**

A great deal has been achieved and we have moved a number of our actions forward (in addition to the wider work detailed above). Nevertheless we have been unable to make as much progress as would have been ideal in relation to some issues. This is largely due to resource gaps as a result of the PD team restructure. Addressing this will be one of our key priorities over the next 2 years. Below is a summary of the key achievements since 2014:

| Achievement | Principle | Measure |
|---|---|---|
| Production of 46 career profiles from recent University of Reading research staff to enable the wider action of profiling research staff careers. This will also link into a wider action from our People Strategy called 'Faces at Reading' which aims to provide information to current and future staff on the range of careers available at Reading | Principle 1, 4 and 5 | The original indicator of success from the 2014 plan was a written report based on a longitudinal study.<br><br>We have since changed the scope of this project and the next steps are detailed in our new action plan.<br><br>We do have 46 detailed career profiles currently ready. Broader success will be linked to the success of the Faces at Reading project which is currently being scoped, we will also link into staff survey results, CROS & PIRLS survey results and retention figures |
| Delivery of a range of developmental programmes for research staff with 100% of those that attended rating the sessions as either 'excellent' or 'very good'<br><br>This includes D&I related development such as springboard and promotion workshops | Principle 4 and 6 | We have delivered 106 courses for research staff over the last 2 years on the People Development open programme, this is in addition to courses that schools run for their staff but that People Development aren't necessarily aware of as they are not currently recorded on our systems. |
| Via consultation and engagement with the University Research Committee, Research Division Leads (RDL's) and Early Career Researchers (ECR's), identification of priority development needs for ECRs and RDLs | Principle 4 and 5 | This was not part of the 2014 action plan but was necessary to undertake due to organisational changes and shifting priorities.<br><br>The priorities identified were to balance out the development offer to also include those mid-career as well as early career and to undertake a full review of the whole development offer, including ensuring enhanced engagement directly with ECR's as the offer develops.<br><br>The success of making the changes will be evidenced throughout the next 2 years in relation to numbers on |

| | | courses, feedback provided and results from the staff survey and CROS and PIRLS surveys |
|---|---|---|
| Positive increases in scores from CROS and PIRLS surveys in the priority areas identified in 2014 of induction and performance management | Principle 5 | Data from CROS shows an increase in satisfaction with departmental and local induction by 6% and 7% respectively

CROS data shows that satisfaction with appraisal has improved across all measures ranging from a 15% to a 31% improvement. Overall satisfaction increased by 27%. |
| Alignment of people and resources as outlined in the background and context section (both in People Development and on the academic side in relation to research themes and divisions and the line management of research support staff) | Principle 2, 3 and 7 | This was not part of the 2014 action plan but was necessary to undertake due to organisational changes and shifting priorities.

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## Areas of Focus for 2016 to 2018

We have a number of priority areas for the next 2 years, some of which are linked to ensuring we undertake the actions from 2014 which we have not yet been able to complete, while others are new actions based on feedback from research staff in CROS and PIRLS surveys, focus groups and various working groups and committees.

In particular we need to do more around principles 1, 2, 3 and 7 (based on CROS survey and focus group feedback and acknowledging that previous action plans have been light in these areas)

- We will review our induction offer for research staff, ensuring alignment with the wider review of induction practices across the university. This is a carry forward action from 2014.
- We will build on the work we have done so far (outlined in the section above) to deliver the 2014 action around profiling the careers of research staff.
- We will work with our careers service to enhance the range of career development activities for research staff. This is a carry forward from 2014.
- We will ensure that there is appropriate leadership and management development opportunities for research staff, in line with the wider offer for all staff at the university. This is a carry forward from 2014 but will be enhanced as a result of wider changes to leadership and management development within the University.
- We will ensure that there are opportunities for ECRs to network with each other and share experience and best practice.
- We will ensure enhanced engagement with ECRs via a number of focus groups in autumn 2016 and beyond.
- We will produce and implement a researcher development strategy which will cover staff at all stages of their career.

The new action plan to 2018 details the specific success measures for each action. These broadly fall into the following categories:

- A positive increase in scores on CROS and PIRLS surveys in the areas identified. In particular in relation to induction (75% stating that induction is useful), feeling valued (10% on average increase across all questions) and development (75% to have a development plan in place (scores across all elements to increase to an average of 75%)
- Obtaining benchmark scores in our whole university staff engagement survey and then identifying targets for improvement. It is not possible to state an expected benchmark as we have not had a staff survey since 2011
- Scores and comments on staff development feedback forms to 100% rating courses as either 'excellent' or 'very good'
- Uptake of courses for research staff to increase so that all are at full capacity.