University of Reading

Report of the Research Staff Working Party

Members of the Working Party were:
Professor Cedric Brown, Dean Faculty of Arts and Humanities (Chair)
Professor Ian James, Head of School, Mathematics, Meteorology and Physics
Dr Parveen Yaqoob, Research Group Leader, School of Chemistry, Food Biosciences and Pharmacy.
Ms Janet Pryse, Director Centre for Staff Training and Development
Dr Justin Hutchence, Centre for Staff Training and Development (Secretary)

The Working Party met twice on 13th September and 3rd October 2006 and conducted further discussions via email.

Introduction

The Working Party was established jointly by the University Board for Research and the Staffing Committee. It was asked to consider improvements *in practice in* areas of the national Careers in Research On-line Survey where the University appears to be performing below the standard of a comparator group of research intensive universities. Specifically these issues are: the numbers of Research Staff (RS) attending induction, the induction to their role locally within Schools, the regularity and perceived quality of the supervision of RS, the percentage of RS who found training difficult to attend due to a lack of time.

Methodology and Results

The Working Party investigated good practice at other UK universities. The UK Grad Database was a useful resource which outlines the training and development provision for RS in a large number of universities. Comparatively the University of Reading already offers a good range of development activities for RS. The University is one of only three that offer an accredited Certificate in Research Career Management. Only one other university offers a specific mentoring scheme for Research Staff as introduced at Reading in 2005-06. The University of Nottingham offers more training from potential future employers in industry. Generally it would appear that the central provision for RS development at Reading is as good, if not better, than most other UK universities.

Some universities provide more general opportunities such as internal conferences for communicating and promoting the results of RS research, often in association with Graduate Schools. Some universities support and encourage a self-sustaining Research Staff Society. *The* smaller Research Staff population at Reading compared to these universities makes *these things* less of a priority for allocation of limited resource.

One current area of weakness is the lack of detailed information on the HR system to identify new Research Staff. This should improve with the move to the Trent system

Conclusions

The Working Party concluded that the problems arose not in the University's central provision for Research Staff, but with some of the local line management practices experienced by RS in Schools. The Working Party makes some straightforward recommendations, and seeks to embed these in the relevant parts of management policy as quickly as possible in order to ensure the support of this group of staff in the long term.

Recommendations

1   The Working Party proposes that a *long-term* structure should be put in place to consider policy relating to the support and development of RS *and that it be a matter of discussion in the relevant University committee. It therefore* **recommends that Research Staff matters should become a standing item on the agenda of Staffing Committee**, and that Justin Hutchence should report as required.

2   The Working Party *also seeks to make clear and consistent where the responsibility lies at School level. It* recommends that School Directors of Research should be given an overview of Staff Development Reviews for RS with the responsibility of responding to any common themes arising from them. A School Director of Research may involve the local SDR coordinator in gathering this information.

3   As a reinforcement of 2, the Working Party recommends that an item on the development and management of RS should be included in Annual School Research Strategies.

4   The Working Party is clear that early identification of the issues is key to success. It compiled a list of topics for RS to discuss with their Principal Investigator/Applicant within the first month of their arrival at the University. [1] The Working Party recommends that this list be sent to Principal Investigators/Applicants and be distributed automatically to RS via an email generated from the Trent workflow system.

5   *As a reinforcement of 4., t*he Working party reviewed a draft of the booklet on *Good Practice in the Management of Research Staff.* This will be published and distributed to Principal Investigators/Applicants once policy revisions that are dependent on the ratification of the Framework Agreement have been agreed.

6   *Furthermore, the* Working Party **recommends that this publication is supported by a re-launch of the university's** *Local Concordat* which provides a short summary of key aspects of Research Staff management. The Working Party proposes some amendments to the *Local Concordat*, however it **recommends that the document is reviewed after the publication of the new** *National Concordat* due in Autumn 2007.[2]

Professor C C Brown

October 2006

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[1] *Topics for discussion with your Principal Investigator* are in Appendix 2
[2] Amended *Local Concordat* is in Appendix 1.

Appendix 1

Local Concordat for Contract Research Staff (CRS) at the University of Reading

1. At the outset of each project the Principal Investigator/Applicant (PI/A) will establish a clear statement of objectives and responsibilities. The PI/A and Contract-researcher will discuss these and establish a mutually agreed demarcation of responsibilities. The agreed timescale should be commensurate with the duration of the project (for example 3 or 6 monthly for a 3 year project).

2. For each project there will be, as appropriate, half yearly meetings between the PI/A(s) and Contract-researcher, for which records will be kept. Progress towards the target tasks will be reviewed and changes in the targets or dates of achievements agreed and noted.

3. The provision of a mentor within a School, particularly for new members of contract research staff, is strongly recommended and should be facilitated if a research member of staff requests a mentor. Reference to the principles in the 'Guidelines for Mentoring of Academic Staff' should assist in establishing this relationship. Any research staff who opt to study for the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice must have a mentor within their School. All identified mentors are encouraged to attend a briefing session on the role of mentors.

4. Clearly stated targets for publication of results and presentations at Conferences should be discussed and agreed in broad terms at the outset of the project, and revised annually as the project progresses.

5. It must be clearly established at the outset of the project (subject to revision as the project progresses) the extent to which the Contract-researcher is able to present papers as principal (or sole) author.

6. The School expectations of CRS must be clearly stated at the outset of the project. This is of particular importance with respect to post -graduate supervision. The Contract-researcher is encouraged to be involved in supervising post-graduate students, this should be undertaken jointly with an established member of the academic staff, and training and guidance should be provided. CRS are also encouraged to undertake some teaching at undergraduate and postgraduate level. The amount of this additional activity should be in proportion to the priorities of the project on which they are employed. In the light of quality considerations the uncoordinated use of CRS to support teaching is not encouraged and teaching activities by research staff should be supported by compulsory attendance at appropriate training and development events.

7. All CRS will participate in the University's Staff Development Review scheme. Normally the Review should not be undertaken by the PI/A unless at the specific request of the research member of staff.

8. CRS will be encouraged to actively participate in the induction and training programmes provided by the Centre for Staff Training and Development, which includes support in career management and development. Full records of CRS participation in these courses will be kept by CSTD. PI/A's should expect that research staff will spend a specific amount of time each year on professional and personal development.

9. If any continuation of the research is proposed then CRS should be expected to be involved through the submission of a second grant application. In such an application they would be clearly identified as a co- author.

10. In terms of their career development research staff are urged to view a fixed term contract post as an opportunity to develop experience and skills as a precursor for ongoing employment within academia or elsewhere. CRS are asked to consider carefully if fixed term contracts beyond two consecutive 3-year projects are appropriate for their career progression.

11. CRS should be invited to attend School staff meetings for general matters including a recurring agenda item on CRS issues.

Approved by Council 11 July 2003

For new members of Research Staff

Topics for discussion with your Principal Investigator/Applicant

The University suggests that you discuss the following topics with your Principal Investigator/Applicant during the first month of your contract. Experience has shown that some investment in your induction helps to establish a successful research contract. The University also recommends that you have a mentor from within your School with whom you can discuss your role, your development as a researcher and your future career.

1 The objectives of the project.

2 Your responsibilities within the project.

3 Reviewing the progress of the research.

4 The option of having a mentor.

5 Targets for publication.

6 The procedure for establishing the order of names in the authorship of papers and other publications.

7 Supervision and teaching roles.

8 The time available for personal and professional development on a yearly basis.

9 The duration and assessment of probation.

If you have any questions, or would like any additional information, please contact
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