

University of Reading HRER Submission 2018 – Review Report

Background and Context – What has been happening since 2016?

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. The major organisational and personnel changes within the University highlighted in the last report have now become embedded and have worked to achieve the aims of enhancing the support provided to researchers at all levels, from undergraduates pursuing research projects to our most distinguished research professors. Providing improved support to post-doctoral and Early Career Researchers was one of the key aims of the changes in our research organisation, management and leadership.

The major organisational structural change was the introduction of 36 Research Divisions in the University as the units that plan and undertake research and to which all researchers belong. These replaced previously existing research groups and Schools as the units that organise research.

The 36 Research Divisions were 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 was revised enabling greater participation by researchers. For example, in addition to research staff being represented on the University Board for Research and Innovation (UBRI), they are also represented at the monthly formal meeting of the University Research Committee (URC), chaired by the PVC for Research and Innovation and attended by all senior research leaders.

In the University competitions for research pump priming calls have emphasised that applications from ECRs will be particularly welcome and have then given additional weight to submitted proposals in the evaluation process. Hence a number of ECR projects have been funded over the last two years or so helping to kick-start ECRs' research careers.

The appointment of two Deans for Diversity and Inclusion has brought coordination to the various activities across the whole University to ensure we are providing an appropriate environment for the equitable treatment of all of our staff. Their appointment and activities have greatly increased the visibility and appreciation of diversity and inclusion issues across the University and embedded the principles into University business including all that affecting University researchers. This is demonstrated by the number of Schools who have attained or retained their Athena SWAN awards since 2016, as shown below. The University retained its Bronze award in 2017.

	School	Athena SWAN Award
1	School of Psychology and Clinical Language Sciences (SPLS)	Bronze
2	School of Biological Science (SBS)	Bronze
3	School of Chemistry, Food and Pharmacy (SCFP)	Bronze
4	School of Mathematical, Physical & Computational Sciences (SMPCS)	Silver
5	School of the Built Environment (SBE formerly SCME)	Silver
6	School of Archaeology, Geography & Environmental Sciences (SAGES)	Silver

There were some significant changes in the People Development Team during the summer of 2016. A new Learning and Development Officer (Leadership and Research Staff Development) joined the University in August 2016 and, being new to the HE sector, needed time to become familiar with the role and the research environment. However, having become more familiar with the role, she revisited and improved the development programme, and better promoted it, leading to higher uptake of the workshops. As a result of other structural changes within the team, the principles of HRER have been more widely embedded across the team, so that researchers have access to a far

greater range of development opportunities and receive the highest quality development from those with the most appropriate skill set.

As part of the University's strategy for staff engagement, the latest all-staff satisfaction survey was due during May 2017. It was realised during the implementation planning stage that this would be launched at the same time as the CROS and PIRLS surveys in 2017. This potential duplication was managed by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research and Innovation sending an email to all research staff explaining the reasons for the surveys being carried out at the same time and emphasising that CROS and PIRLS are focussed specifically for research staff. Despite this, there was a lower response rate to CROS and PIRLS than in previous years, although research staff did respond to the all-staff survey. Where applicable, their responses to the all-staff survey have been included in our submission.

Governance for HRER and Internal Review Process

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) who is supported by Susan Thornton, Acting HR Assistant Director for People and Talent. The governance for HRER has significantly been enhanced since 2016 by two new arrangements. Firstly, the importance that the University places on the HRER Award is indicated by the fact that the HRER action plan has become a standing item on the formal monthly URC meeting. This demonstrates that the URC recognise that the HRER Award not only requires actions from HR but ownership of the action plans needs to be shared amongst the senior research community. In support of this, one of the Research Deans has been appointed as project sponsor, having monthly meetings with the L&D Officer to ensure the plan is progressing smoothly and discussing areas that require senior research leadership input to ensure that progress is being made.

Progress against the HRER Implementation Strategy 2016 - 2018 has also been regularly discussed at the Research Staff Committee to assess the extent to which progress against the actions is visible to ECRs and to highlight areas where communication needs to be enhanced.

Approach to Evaluation of Progress with HRER Action Plan and Engagement with Research Staff

In People Development we are keen to ensure that we constantly review the way that we work, the development opportunities that we offer and progress towards our HRER action plan. As an example, we held a number of discussions with senior leaders of research on both the academic and support side and with those who deliver development sessions specifically for Early Career Researchers.

The L&D Officer (Leadership and Research Staff Development) met with each of the Research Deans to understand the challenges and development needs within their theme. She also attended a Community of Practice for each Research Dean, attended by Research Division Leads to understand the challenges and development needs within their Divisions and for them as research leaders. These discussions have informed the approach to management and leadership development and provided feedback on progress against the HRER action plan.

As detailed as an action on the HRER Implementation Strategy 2016 - 2018, there were focus groups carried out with Early Career Researchers, PIs and the Research Staff Committee to understand in more detail the feedback from the CROS and PIRLS surveys and Athena SWAN surveys, covering the following areas:

- treatment of protected characteristics in relation to recruitment and selection
- commitment to flexible working
- extent to which researchers feel valued and recognised.

The actions and suggestions arising from these focus groups were taken to URC to endorse and have been added to the HRER action plan or School Athena SWAN action plans to ensure they are acted upon.

By way of examples, some of the results of these conversations include:

- Enhanced and improved development opportunities available for ECRs. The duration of the sessions are limited to two to three hours to ensure they are far more convenient to attend. The content is more specific and tailored to research staff.
- The feedback from the revised programme has been very good.

- There has been a greater promotion of the other development opportunities open to ECRs for example from Vitae and from the 'open programme' (courses available to all staff).
- The PVC for Research and Innovation met with the Research Staff Committee to ensure a new Chair was found following the departure of the previous one.
- The PVC for Research and Innovation met with the new Research Staff Committee Chair individually to demonstrate the support for the Committee from senior research leadership.
- The Research Dean championing HRER on behalf of URC has sought financial and administrative support for the Research Staff Committee to enable it to raise its profile and further represent the ECR community.

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). Where 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. This is being addressed by agreeing a more realistic action plan for the next two years to ensure the actions identified can be fully resourced and implemented. This should result in those actions achieving a more noticeable and sustainable impact. Below is a summary of the key achievements since 2016:

Achievement	Principle	Measure
Production of PDRA handbook	3.3, 3.9, 7.1	The content of the handbook has been developed by the Leadership & Research Staff Development Officer with input from URC, a Research Dean, PIs, ECRs and the Research Staff Committee, gaining credibility for the content. The handbook highlights what PDRAs can expect from their PI and from the University.
Production of PI handbook	3.3, 3.9, 7.1	A handbook for PIs has been developed to explain what is expected of a PI in managing ECRs and supporting them in their career development. The content of the handbook has been developed by the Leadership & Research Staff Development Officer with input from URC, a Research Dean, PIs, ECRs and the Research Staff Committee, gaining credibility for the content.
Design of Career Planning form and Research Staff Development Prompter	5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6	Career Development pro formas have been designed and approved by URC, with input from the Research Staff Committee.
Review of development programme and the greater uptake that's resulted from it	3.3, 3.4, 3.6, 3.7, 3.9, 5.4, 5.6	Full review took place in 2016, with the revised programme offering more specific courses of a shorter duration to make it a lot more convenient to attend. The way the courses were advertised was also revised, making it a lot easier for ECRs to see what development opportunities were specifically aimed at them. Very good feedback from revised development programme.
Researcher Development Strategy implemented	3.8, 3.9	Researcher Development Strategy was approved by URC in June 2017, outlining the importance of HRER to the University's Research Strategy.
Active support from University Research Committee	7.1, 7.2	HRER and research staff development has become a standing item at the monthly URC, attended by senior research leaders. The Chair of the Research Staff Committee continues to represent ECRs at URC monthly meetings and UBRI termly meetings. Researchers know they are valued at all levels in the University.

New institutional induction was introduced in September 2017, following input from the Research Staff Committee	2.1, 3.6	Feedback on the new induction has been extremely positive and it has been shortlisted for the Training Journals Best Operational Programme award (result announced in December 2018).
Launch of 'Faces@Reading' demonstrating the diversity of staff at the University	1.4, 3.2, 4.10, 5.4, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.7, 6.8	Four of 30 Faces@Reading are in diverse research roles (PDRA, Research Development Manager, Senior Research Fellow and Research Scientist). The appointment of the PVC for Research and Innovation position on a job-share basis and the resulting additional female representation on University Executive Board supports this principle.
Reintroduction of the Research Staff Committee, following a period of not meeting after the previous Chair left.	5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6	This provides a valuable mechanism for engaging and consulting with PDRAs and well as providing them with the opportunity to input to University research policies, practices and documents.

Areas of Focus for 2018 to 2020

We have a number of priority areas for the next two years, some of which are linked to ensuring we undertake the actions from 2016 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.

- Implement and embed the Essential Guide for PIs training, which focuses on the PIs' responsibilities towards supporting their ECRs as well as other essential information about managing their research projects.
- Implement and embed the handbook for PIs and the handbook for PDRAs, which focuses on the respective expectations towards supporting PDRAs.
- Support Schools in their actions to embed PDRs and mentoring for those PDRAs who seek these opportunities for career development.
- Increase in the number and range of career development activities for research staff provided by the University Careers and Employability Service, ensuring they fully engage with their role in supporting the principles of the Concordat.
- Implement and embed the Career Planning forms for ECRs across all Schools, to aid the identification of concrete activities they can undertake to support their career development.