

**European Commission ‘HR excellence in research’: institutional self-evaluation of progress in implementing the UK Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers**

1. How this self-evaluation was undertaken by the University of Cambridge

The University published its Concordat implementation strategy and action plan in December 2012 (<http://www.cam.ac.uk/staffstudents/research-staff/progress.html>). This self-evaluation was discussed at the University’s Personal and Professional Development Committee (which steered much of the early work on implementing the Concordat in Cambridge). It was also discussed at the University’s Researcher Development Committee, which reports to the Research Policy Committee and which includes postdoctoral research staff, senior academics from each of the University’s six Schools, administrators with responsibility for researcher development within the Schools, and members of central departments with responsibility for supporting the researcher development agenda across the University.

Progress reports against the original action plan have been provided by relevant specialist central departments, including the Careers Service, HR teams, Equality and Diversity, and the Researcher Development team within the University’s Personal and Professional Development department. This self-evaluation also draws on analyses of responses by Cambridge research staff to the CROS surveys in 2009 and in 2011. The self-evaluation was prepared with the active contribution of the RD Committee’s postdoctoral research staff members, and has been reviewed by the Pro-Vice-Chancellors for Institutional Affairs and Research.

1. Key achievements and progress against the strategy, indicators and actions identified in the original action plan
2. *Improving infrastructure and support for research staff*

Our initial application for recognition with the EC HR Excellence in Research Award highlighted our intention to continue working towards a more joined-up approach to supporting research staff. Following the ending of ‘Roberts funds’, the University has made significant progress in moving to a sustainable model of researcher development. From 2012-13, a hypothecated fund of £1.1million per annum has been established within the University’s core funding. This now supports the delivery of initiatives within Departments, as well as central programmes of professional and career development; it is constructed on a model of partnership between centrally located professional and career development specialists and academic Schools.

In April 2012, the University approved a new Committee, the Researcher Development Committee, with the remit of

‘advanc[ing] the University’s researcher development strategy and to oversee the planning, delivery, evaluation and funding of researcher development activities […] The University’s researcher development strategy includes advancing “human capital” within the University’s research environment.’

The Committee reports to the University’s Research Policy Committee and is sponsoring a 1.5-year needs analysis and evaluation project, with a view to sharing existing effective practice more systematically and trialling new tools and methods. During 2011-12. the Committee piloted a new process for reviewing and planning researcher development programmes and initiatives, both at University level and also within Departments; the evaluation project will help to improve this process and its outcomes. A key element of the evaluation project concerns significantly increasing the input of research staff and research students in defining researcher development priorities, developing proposals and assessing outcomes.

In addition, the Vice-Chancellor has given his personal support to the research-staff led ‘Postdocs of Cambridge’ senior society, to create a new role to co-ordinate communications with research staff across the collegiate University and to contribute to researcher development initiatives and networks. Effective communications poses a major challenge for researcher development in Cambridge: we have the largest population of research staff in the UK (approximately 3,000), working within a highly devolved University, associated institutes and Colleges. The appointment to this new role is expected to be confirmed shortly. It is expected that the role will provide continuity and a focus for contact for Cambridge’s very large, diverse and mobile population of research staff.

1. *Career paths and employability*

As one of the world’s leading universities, Cambridge attracts academic and research staff from around the world. The University and Colleges are, at the same time, working within an ever more competitive funding environment and required to make significant cost savings. Cambridge cannot provide long-term academic careers for all who wish for these. The University is deeply conscious of its responsibility to promote open, constructive feedback and career support to research staff.

The completion of a team of careers advisers specialising in working with postdoctoral researchers has seen a significant rise in the numbers of research staff seeking careers guidance; in 2011 50% of Cambridge respondents to CROS said that they had used the service, and 80% of those who had done so said that they had found this ‘helpful’ or ‘very helpful’. CROS responses also show an encouraging increase in percentages of respondents saying that they feel ‘encouraged to engage in personal and career development’ (rising from 60% in 2009 to 74% in 2011).

Much of the support provided to researchers is on a one-to-one basis. In the last year, the careers team has given over 500 hours of appointments, including mock interviews, to researchers exploring careers both inside and outside academia. Each of these events typically attracts 60-100 postdocs. The University also funds a dedicated research staff development programme, which has introduced successful activities addressing self-leadership and research leadership. Participation in the research staff development programme has trebled since it was introduced, three years ago. Deepening our understanding of research staff development priorities, with active engagement by research staff through action research projects and other means, will form a major focus of the next phase of the Researcher Development Committee’s evaluation project.

1. *External influence and change*

In our 2010 application for the EC HR Excellence in Research Award, we set out a commitment to engage with UK and European initiatives relating to researcher careers. We have been active participants in the EC’s HR Strategy for Researchers. The University’s HR Director is also a member of the LERU Researcher Careers Committee and is in the process of taking up a non-executive appointment with CRAC, the parent company of Vitae. He is also the Russell Group representative on EU initiatives, including with work being carried forward on the European Pensions Scheme for Researchers, and related researcher career matters. It is likely that the University will apply to contribute to the peer evaluation process during 2013-14 for institutions participating in the EC’s HR Strategy for Researchers.

1. *Recruitment and selection, recognition and value (Concordat principles 1&2)*

The University’s new ‘Employment and Career Management Scheme’ (ECMS) for research staff was approved and launched in 2011, with communications from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Institutional Affairs and by the Director of HR. To help research staff, PIs, administrators and heads of department implement the Scheme, we created customised shorter, practical implementation notes. We published these online, on a set of web pages created specifically in order to bring together information for research staff, and for those who work with them, which was otherwise distributed across the University’s sizeable website (<http://www.cam.ac.uk/staffstudents/research-staff/ecm/>).

The ECMS highlights the importance of effective inductions and appraisals, in improving working experience and contributing to career planning. Comparison of responses to CROS 2009 and CROS 2011 indicate greater levels of induction and appraisal activity, though there is more work to be done, particularly in encouraging the offering and uptake of appraisal. It is, however, encouraging to find indications of improvements in experience and attitudes: comparison of responses to CROS 2009 and 2011 shows significantly higher percentages of respondents now considering that they are treated fairly by the institution in their conditions of employment (just under 74% in 2011, in contrast to around 45% in 2009), with similar patterns of responses among both male and female respondents. Analysis of CROS 2011 shows that more than 80% of Cambridge research staff who responded to the survey rated their experience at Cambridge as ‘good’ or ‘very good’.

1. *Equality and Diversity*

Since our 2010 application for the EC HR Excellence in Research Award , the University has formally adopted its Equality Objectives. Networks, training, and the work of Equality Champions for Race, Gender and Disability (all highlighted in our 2010 application) continue; we are currently developing a proactive network of senior academics and administrators to support University initiatives that aim to progress gender equality. The University also continues to engage actively in national networks, including the Russell Group Equality Forum and the Higher Education Equal Opportunities Network (HEEON), enabling us to link with other organisations to broaden the range of support we offer all staff and students.

WiSETI (Women in SET Initiative) focuses on the recruitment, retention and progression of women at all levels, including research staff, in SET subjects. WiSETI runs a number of schemes to support the promotion of gender equality, including coordinating a University-wide CV mentoring scheme to support academic women seeking promotion. WiSETI works to advance the University’s engagement in the Athena SWAN Charter, which recognises efforts to address gender equality issues; the University holds an Athena SWAN Bronze Award and is currently seeking renewal of this (November 2012) with aspirations to reach Athena SWAN Silver in due course. WiSETI also works with Departments to support their individual submissions.

While recognising that there is more work to be done, it is encouraging to note that Cambridge research staff responding to CROS 2011 recognised that the University is committed to equality and diversity (85% of female respondents and 81% of male respondents).

1. **Next steps, 2012-14**

*Concordat principles 1&2 (recruitment and selection, recognition and value)*

We will continue to promote the importance of effective induction and appraisal processes. It was encouraging to see responses by Cambridge research staff to CROS 2011 which indicated higher levels of induction and appraisal, in comparison with 2009. As well as promoting induction and appraisal, we will continue to monitor levels of induction and appraisal activity, and increases in perceptions of quality, via a variety of mechanisms including CROS 2013 and relevant internal staff surveys. We will explore ways of improving uptake of induction, appraisal and existing mentoring schemes. We will continue to promote the University’s Employment and Career Management Scheme and good practice in selecting, recruiting and managing research staff. We expect to introduce online learning modules relating to recruitment and selection during 2012-13, and will monitor and communicate uptake accordingly.

The ‘North West Cambridge project’ is a major infrastructural investment in order to develop affordable housing for University and College employees; in effect, many of these will be members of research staff. Work will span many years: phase one is, however, expected to begin in early 2013 and to complete in 2015, with around 500 affordable houses available for University and College staff; many of these will to members of research staff. The North West Cambridge project is intended to contribute a major improvement in the experience of living and working in Cambridge.

*Concordat principles 3, 4 & 5 (personal and career development; researchers share responsibility for their own development)*

The University’s new Researcher Development Committee will play an important part in steering researcher development strategy and initiatives within the University. It piloted an annual quality review and funding mechanism during 2011-12 which was designed to increase input by both research staff and research students into defining strategy and evaluation; we will look for evidence that this is happening, both for central provision and for provision in Schools and Departments. In addition, the Committee’s evaluation project will include active engagement by research staff in researching professional development priorities and formats. The RD Committee will look to engage with other bodies representing research staff interests, including existing networks (such as ‘Postdocs of Cambridge’ society and the postdoc forum of the University’s Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities), as well as the newly created ‘postdoctoral researcher co-ordinator’ (supporting the University’s ‘Postdocs of Cambridge’ senior society), to strengthen communications with Cambridge’s very large, diverse and mobile population of research staff. During 2012-13, the Researcher Development Committee will offer to match fund College associations for a limited number research staff, as a means of contributing to initiatives to increase interactions between research staff and Cambridge College academic communities. Linkages between professional development programmes and initiatives and the Researcher Development Framework (RDF) will continue to be explored and we will consider the use of the RDF planner tool. We will continue to develop programmes in ‘self-leadership’ for research staff, following promising feedback from pilot activities. We will also continue to explore ways of researching factors contributing to leadership in research and self-leadership, in order to contribute to the evidence base for research leadership and personal development initiatives.

*Concordat principle 6 (diversity and equality)*

The University is actively contributing to a project of the International Alliance of Research Universities (IARU), ‘Men and Women in Globalising Universities’ (a comparative study of the nature and shape of challenges to women working in academia). The WiSETI initiative will continue to promote female mentoring schemes. The University will seek to increase the number of AthenaSWAN awards; the Department of Physics will seek to gain a Gold Award in due course.

*Principle 7 (Implementation and review)*

The Researcher Development Committee will receive regular progress reports and will ensure communication with other appropriate University and School committees, notably the HR and Research Policy Committees. Particular emphasis will be given to increasing engagement by research staff in implementation and in review. We will also run CROS during 2013 and will continue to draw on CROS, and on relevant internal surveys, as an important means of monitoring progress in further improving the experience of research staff in Cambridge. The University will continue its engagement with UK and European researcher support and development initiatives and expects to engage in the EC HR Strategy for Researchers self-evaluation process during 2013-14.