# HR Excellence in Research Award Self Assessment Report

This report describes what has been achieved in relation to the University’s 2009 Concordat Implementation Plan and sets out the new priorities and strategy for the coming years.

# Background

Following the ending of Roberts funding from RCUK, the University set up the Researcher Development Team (RDT) to take responsibility for the career development of both Post Graduate Researchers (PGRs) and Early Career Researchers (ECRs). During 2010/11 and 2011/12 internal evaluation was undertaken by the Head of Researcher Development and other team members through a series of meetings with key internal stakeholders (e.g., Dean of the Graduate Research Faculty, Associate Deans of Research in each College, Directors of Postgraduate Research Students in the Colleges, members of the Research & Knowledge Transfer Management Group, members of the Researcher Development Users Groups i.e. ECRs and PGRs) and through evaluating the feedback received from those who had attended training sessions. The information informed the new Researcher Development plan and this was presented to and supported by the Researcher Development Steering Group and the Research and Knowledge Transfer Management Group.

In relation to recruitment, appraisal, reward, recognition and promotion, ECRs are managed under the same HR policies as all other academic staff. However the University is conscious of the particular training and career development needs of this group of staff and has undertaken a strategic review of ECR and PGRs development needs *(Researcher Development Position Document and Plan 2012-2015)*. A steering group which includes representation from academic staff, ECRs, PGRs and professional services has been set up to implement the plan.

# Key Achievements 2010 - 2012

**Post Roberts funding arrangements for Early Career Researcher Development**

**(2009 plan pt. 4 and 8 - complete)**

The University has put in place policies to ensure that the delivery of training specifically for ECRs and PGRs is financially sustainable in the long term by ensuring that a proportion of PGR fees and many ECR grants contribute directly towards the costs of centrally co-ordinated professional development. In addition, PGR and ECR career development agendas are now more joined-up by locating the responsibility for training provision in Employability and Graduate Development (October 2010) ensuring closer links with the world of work and a greater focus on employability.

In addition a new steering group called the Researcher Development (RD) Steering Group has been constituted to replace the Career Research Staff Strategy Group in response to the restructuring of the University into larger academic Colleges. This has ensured appropriate representation of stakeholders and mechanisms for dissemination of information

**Review of Fixed term Contracts for Early Career Researchers**

**(2009 plan pt. 1 - complete)**

The University made an agreement in 2009 with the Unions regarding it aims to achieve a significant reduction in its reliance on fixed term contracts; that open-ended contracts should be the normal employment arrangement at the University and that fixed term contracts will only be used in specifically defined circumstances which are specified in the Agreement

The University completed a review of all fixed term contracts against criteria agreed with the Unions in Spring 2011 and Human Resources meet with trade union representatives every 3 months to review fixed term contracts which are due to expire. The University now employs more staff now on fixed term contracts than it did in 2009 due to the growth in research funding, together with increases in time-limited project activity and student employability initiatives, however the *percentage* of staff on fixed term contracts has fallen.

July 2009 - 914 fixed term contracts out of 3026 staff (30%)

July 2012 - 992 fixed term contracts out of 3745 staff (26%)

**Performance and Development Review**

**(2009 pt. 5 and 7 – in progress)**

Staff survey data indicates that PDRs are undertaken annually by the vast majority of staff (94% in 2009 and 86% in 2012), however around about half of staff do not find the process useful. It is also been found that some ECRs employed on less than a 12 month contract have elected not to have a PDR or may have left the institution before the PDR process started.A review of academic PDRs will be completed by January 2013 and it is anticipated that this will lead to changes in the way appraisals are conducted for ECRs.

**Summary of Support and Career Development Activity 2010/11 and 2011/12**

**(2009 plan pt 2 and 3 – continual and superseded by new RDT plan)**

The University’s Researcher Development Programme (RDP) is a suite of programmes originally designed for PGRs; it was opened up to and extended in 2010 to include a number of courses specifically aimed at ECRs. RDP is also supported by a series of online interactive training modules called Researcher Development On-Line (RDO).

Development Centres (DCs) for ECRs have been used extensively for the last four years and has involved 82 ECRs demonstrating their abilities against a set of six competencies valued in both academia and industry: Working with People, Persuading & influencing, Planning & Organising, Presenting & Communicating, Adapting & Responding to Change, Deciding & Initiating Action. An individual report is produced which identifies strengths and areas for development. Participants then receive detailed 1:1 feedback. On account of cost and investment in staff time to deliver DCs it is difficult to expand the availability of this provision and has been replaced by a one day career coaching event.

Since 2006/07, 36 individual ECRs have also undertaken the University’s Higher Education Academy accredited programme called *Learning and Teaching in HE (LTHE)*

**Total engagements by ECRs** (including multiple engagements by some individuals)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 2009/10 No. | 2010/11 No. | 2011/12 No. |
| Development Centres | 34 | 17 | 0 |
| RDP | 0 | 25 | 175 |
| LTHE (Stage 1 and 2) | 12 | 44 | 57 |
| Tailored ECR events | 51 | 31 | 60 |
| RDO (best estimates) | 50 | 170 | 180 |
| **Total engagements** | **147** | **287** | **472** |

There has been a significant rise in ECR engagements in training on offer through RDP, RDO and ECR tailored events. Tailored events included: Project Management, Career Explorer, Meet the Editors and Entrepreneurial Practice.

**Researcher Involvement**

**(2009 plan pt. 6 and 8 – complete)**

To enhance interdisciplinary and inter-campus working, two researcher development user groups have been established one in Cornwall and one in Exeter. Each team comprises of PGR and ECR representatives from each College. Team leaders (both ECRs) are also members of the RD Steering Group (see below). The purpose of each team is to coordinate, champion and communicate researcher development activities across Colleges in Exeter and Cornwall and to provide a forum for highlighting RD issues and needs to the Steering Group.

**Equality and Diversity – Athena SWAN**

**(Additional to 2009 plan)**

Exeter University received a Bronze Athena SWAN award in April 2012 and plans are underway to submit discipline level applications which will be at Bronze and Silver level in April 2013 and April 2014. Data analysis for each discipline has begun, coordinated by HR and linked to the Athena SWAN principles. As part of this self analysis each discipline will review the key career stages for research staff and focus on where people leave the field, assessing what can be put in place to retain and support them. For many disciplines, the main focus of action will be aimed at ECRs and include improved mentoring support, early career researcher networks, and an increase in targeted training programmes.

# Next Steps and Strategy for 2012/13 and 2013/14

**Steering Group: enhanced cross-College working and ownership (RDT - Implemented)**

A new Researcher Development (RD) Steering Group has been established to provide a strategic forum to oversee the core work coordinated by the RDT and effect stronger links with Colleges. This Steering Group will be responsible for driving forward the new Researcher Development Position Document and Plan (2012-2015). The group represents a wide range of stakeholders including ECRs, PGRs, Academics, HR, Education Enhancement, Employability and Graduate Development and Great Western Research. The aim is to maximise engagement with and impact upon, both the PGR and ECR communities across all Colleges. This forum, amongst other things, will be used to map training opportunities currently provided centrally and in Colleges.

***New ECR Development Programme* (RDT – in progress)**

A new central and specialist programme for ECRs will be designed, developed and evaluated during 2012-2013 to run in parallel with the Researcher Development Programme. The programme will consist of between 15 and 20 topics (depending on content overlap and popularity) all run across 3 key themes: ‘*Advancing your research career’*, ‘*Careers beyond academia’*, ‘*Enhancing personal effectiveness’*.

***ECR ‘Academic Fast-track’ Programme* (RDT – to action)**

To address the need to increase research income and develop our own research talent, a new ‘Academic Fast Track Programme’ for Independent Research Fellows is proposed and costs will be determined by Dec 2012. Attendance will be by invitation only and is likely to be highly selective (e.g. < 10% of ECRs a year). The aim of this programme will be to develop promising independent Research Fellows to support the strategic award application process and develop their skills to manage larger budgets and teams.

There would be considerable value in using strategic award holders as mentors and the feasibility of this will also be evaluated. Some potential elements of this new programme will be evaluated as part of the new ECR Development Programme.

**Mandatory training (HR/RDT – to action)**

For ECRs, mandatory training would best be discussed and agreed towards the end of 2012/13 after the new ECR programme has been delivered and evaluated.