Concordat Implementation Plan

Salford's Concordat Steering Group was established in April 2009 in order to engage with the needs of staff on research-only contracts and to ensure the University's adherence to the principles of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers.[1]

 In May 2009, the steering group ran the Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS) with research staff within the University.[2] On the 18 September 2009, the steering group ran a feedback event, which presented the main issues identified in the survey to research staff. The event provided an opportunity to hear more about the experiences of this community, and to ascertain what the University was currently doing well, and what it could do better to support research staff. There was a general sense among this group that, more than ever, they felt valued as researchers, with the Research and Innovation Strategy and the new Vice Chancellor having a significant role to play in this. Discussion about improvements centred on community, and ways of enhancing engagement between researchers in different disciplines, as well as between academic and research staff. It was felt that the visibility of research across the university could be improved and that more opportunities and support for cross-faculty collaboration would be welcomed. The event also revealed that more could be done to increase awareness of existing University services that support research, career and personal development, and to tailor some of these services to the needs of research staff. The Concordat Steering group has responded to the suggestions made during the event and has used them as a basis for an action plan, as outlined below.

1. Suggestion from feedback event: *Establish a mentoring scheme*

Response: There are already Good Practice Guidelines in place surrounding mentoring.[3] Anecdotal evidence suggests that not all new staff are actually offered a mentor. It may be that research staff as a group are not necessarily being overlooked in this area, but that low implementation of mentoring is a broader issue across the university. Either way, there needs to be some consideration of the most beneficial mentoring for research staff (eg. PI-based mentoring as part of induction; career support mentoring by a senior member of staff who is not the line manager; or action learning approach of peer support?). The information that goes to new staff and to their line managers could be looked at, as could the timing of this information.

Actions: Short term (early 2010)
- Clarify what information already gets sent out centrally from HR to new research staff
- Update webpages for Research Staff on Research and Innovation website to include links to relevant institutional and national policies and support. To include information on mentoring, induction, the Concordat etc. Ensure that new research staff are aware of this site either through information sent out by HR, or through email via monthly starters and leavers list.
- Use monthly starters and leavers list to alert relevant PIs to University's code of practice on mentoring
- Research models of PI training offered at other universities, and guidelines offered by Vitae.

Mid-term (AY 2010/11)
- Establish a peer support network for new staff using a pool of existing research staff (in each faculty) who would be willing to be contacted informally
- Set up "Research Leadership" training for PIs, which would incorporate information about mentoring of new staff

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[1] An agreement between UK Universities and Research Councils with the aim of improving attractiveness and sustainability of research careers in the UK. http://www.researchconcordat.ac.uk/

[2] A summary of Salford's CROS results and a comparison with the national aggregate data is available on the University's intranet, http://www.rgc.salford.ac.uk/resources/uploads/File/CROS%20summary%20Sep%2009.pdf.

[3] See HR website: http://www.hr.salford.ac.uk/development/mentoring

2. Suggestion from feedback event: *Improve bidding support. Access to faculty level support and bridging fund.*

Response: Plans to expand the university's bidding support are already underway. It was clear from the feedback event that the central funding team were felt to be very supportive, but that some research staff were unaware that this support existed. Although information about this support and associated training is already circulated electronically (eg. through HR monthly employee development updates), it would be beneficial to ensure PIs are also aware of the bidding support that is on offer, so that it can also be promoted verbally to the staff that they manage. Similarly, there was a low awareness of existing internal funds that support bid writing and that bridge the gap between the end of research funding and the start of a new funded project.

Actions: Short term (Nov 2010)
- Identify funding and other development sessions that are particularly applicable to research staff from existing training programmes (Employee Development Programme and SPoRT postgraduate training) and promote these events through RISE publication and website[4]
- Clarify the best channels for communicating with academic staff/PIs (ie. which support staff to contact at faculty rather than RI level, in order to circulate information)
- Alert Research Staff to the location of information on support funds - Research Bidding Support Fund and the Bridging Fund, and sources of funding advice.[5]

Mid term (AY 2010/11)
- Rebrand "SPoRT" training to reflect inclusion of research staff and early career researchers. Determine the specific training and development needs of research staff and if these are not covered by existing programmes, offer additional, tailored training for this group.

3. Suggestion from feedback event: *Establish bid writing groups*

Response: Bid writing groups do already exist within some schools, but there was interest in establishing groups that cross faculties. Activities could follow the EPSRC 'sandpit' style workshop. However, it is expected that Salford's focus on six interdisciplinary research themes will provide opportunity for establishing bid writing groups. The recently awarded VC Iconic Projects for Media City and the forthcoming VC Iconic City of Salford Awards have already provided impetus for cross-faculty collaboration.

Actions: Mid term (early 2010)
- Investigate further the scope for bid writing groups, ensuring that any new groups plug into broader university research strategy and activity surrounding the interdisciplinary themes. See also actions under point 6.

4. Suggestion from feedback event: *Representation at Research Committee level*

Response: Already in place – a research staff representative (Dr Marie Griffiths) is joining the Research Committee in October

5. Suggestion from feedback event: *Code of conduct on joint publications including flexibility on "goodwill"*

Response: The university already has a policy statement on research conduct which could potentially incorporate something on publications.[6] This issue has already been confronted by

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[4] Employee Development Programme, http://www.hr.salford.ac.uk/development/. SPoRT training http://www.pg.salford.ac.uk/page/sport0910
[5] In addition to the University Funding Team, this could collate other relevant advisory service, such as the NIHR (National Institute for Health Research) Greater Manchester Local Academic Network, currently hosted at the University of Salford, which offers advice on research design to NHS researchers in the North West http://www.rds-nw.nihr.ac.uk/

academic journals, for example, by the BMJ, so the university could take its lead from them, and also consider whether/how other universities have dealt with practice surrounding joint publications

Actions: Short-term (Nov 09)
- Research into the approach of academic presses to joint publication practice. Consider also whether/how other Universities have dealt with this area.

Mid term (mid 2010)
- Where appropriate, incorporate recommendations/good practice into university governance statements on research practice and also into PI training

6. Suggestion from feedback event: *Do more to promote research at Salford internally. Enhance cross-disciplinary research community through high profile events, public lectures, or an institutional research conference*

Response: There is clearly a demand for more opportunities to meet and to find out about the work of researchers from other faculties. This is not just about alleviating the isolation felt by some research staff, but it is also seen as a valuable way of developing inter-disciplinary research projects. Future activities and showcases surrounding the new research themes may provide opportunity for this. In previous years, the post-2001 RAE 'Research Fair' provided an alternative format to a conference as a way of sharing research across disciplines. Other modes of raising the visibility of current research within the university are already underway, and these should be actively promoted to, and incorporate research staff.

Actions:
Short term:
- Ensure promotion of any Research Theme related showcase events to research staff community

Mid term (AY 2010/11):
- Establish a network/forum for online interaction between different disciplines. This could be piloted initially with research staff and early career researchers (VC ECR scholarship), before being rolled out across the university.
- Encourage research staff to get involved in R&GC plans to capture the work/research stories of staff and postgraduates in digital form. This material could be communicated via LCD screens within communal spaces across the university, including Media City.

Conclusion

The issues identified within the CROS survey and the research staff consultation event mainly focus on two areas of the Concordat, 'Recognition and Value' and 'Support and Career Development'. The steering group has taken on board the suggestions made and has used these to inform a realistic implementation plan. Progress with this plan will be reported back to the research staff community, as well as to other Concordat stakeholders, including Principal Investigators.

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[6] http://www.rgc.salford.ac.uk/page/research_governance_ethics