Aberystwyth University: Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers: 8 year report, December 2018.

This report summarises progress against our published Concordat implementation plans and future plans for the next 2 years. Progress against the specific targets of the implementation plan 17-18 can be viewed in the associated document available at https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/research/researcher-career-development/concordatcareerdevelopmentresearchers/#implementation-and-review-documents.

Institutional Context: Since 2016 the university has undergone significant restructuring as part of a 2-year Sustainability Implementation Plan. Changes to academic and professional service department structures and the associated shifts in personnel and increased levels of uncertainty across the board has led to a difficult institutional context however we are pleased to report that many of the Concordat's actions have been developed in spite of this environment. Whilst actions tied to proposed ICT measures have proved almost intractable to solve at a university wide level we are however pleased to report several key achievements that will allow us to move forward in the next 2 years' action plan. Key achievements around equality and diversity (see Case Study 1: Effective Practice), support and career development will spearhead our next steps and success measures. AU recognises there is a diverse community of researchers to be supported by our action plan including early career staff, postdoctoral staff and in fact all researching staff. Composition of our research (and teaching) staff as of March 2019: 156 Research Only; 300 Teaching and Research; 155 Teaching only (in academic departments).

Implementation and Review (Vitae Concordat Principle 7): Key achievements: Oversight of implementation and formal evaluation and review of the Action Plan is achieved through the Aberystwyth University Researcher Concordat Group (AURCG) which reports to the University's Research Committee. AURCG members are the PVC for Research, Knowledge Exchange and Innovation, Director of the Graduate School, a Research Development Skills Officer from the Graduate School, the Deputy Director of Human Resources, the HR Business Partner to the Institute for Biological, Environmental and Rural Sciences, Research Development Officers from Research Business and Innovation (RBI), a member of the Career Services and researcher representatives from across the academic disciplines.

In addition to the role of AURCG we have supplemented this with the following approaches to engaging with stakeholders:

- Alongside CROS, RBI development officers used a short online questionnaire to collect researchers' view about support needs to develop their careers (August 2017); this was promoted by the website, Aber News and direct email. This had a low response (6) but captured valuable *vox pop* responses **"poor job security, high expectations, long hours, unclear role, generally undervalued"**[1]
- Focus groups were run with postdoctoral researchers, ECRs and staff on teaching only contracts (2017: 3 held with 13 attending. 2018: 3 with no attendees, 2 *ad hoc* sessions with 4 Marie Curie Fellows as part of Research Good Practice training). Impact included 1 PDRA joined AURCG committee: **"No clear job path, lack of mentoring, lack of careers planning".**[2]
- A pragmatic system of gathering feedback on the training needs of stakeholders as part of RBI-led training sessions. Generally this is done informally during the Q and A at end of

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[1] Action 3.1; 3.2; 4.1; 4.2; 4.3 and 5.1

[2] Action 4.3

sessions with opportunities for attendees to leave suggestions anonymously on post-it notes left at the end of the session.   RBI development officers requested feedback in this way during 17-18 from the following training sessions attended by 81 attendees in total (including New Starters and PDRA/Research Fellows): Grants Factory, "10 Key Sentences", Top Tips for Managing Your Research Grant and Research Good Practice training sessions: **"As someone at the very beginning of my research career it was very useful", "motivational in the way it was presented", "training can be overly generic", "more support to early career researchers would be good e.g. help in publishing and grant writing".[3]**

- A new 'Women in Research' network (led by RBI) has met on 4 occasions March 2017-November 2018 (average attendance 23) and the outcome of discussions related to career progression for women has provided useful input into the evaluation and next step planning: **"Universal unconscious bias training for all teaching and research staff, which might be more productive than assertiveness training (or should be in conjunction with assertiveness training) Women's assertiveness looks and feels different"[4]**

- Our ability to communicate by email with different groups of staff has been enabled recently as HR has been able to provide segmented email distribution lists. This is a recent achievement and enables us to communicate directly with externally funded and fixed term research staff and their PIs.

- We have established a 'Research Good Practice' training programme (see Support and Career Development section below) (run as 7 individual sessions on a rolling basis and also a condensed half day session which is compulsory for New Starters offered each term). This now includes a session about the Concordat and how to use the Researcher Development Framework Planner.

- Specially convened reference groups from the post-doctoral researcher community have been recruited through senior PIs to feed into the evaluation of the action plan (2018: 2 meetings), with a view to their ongoing remit in the AURCG.

- AURCG initiated its first National Post Doc Appreciation Week series of events in 2018 (3 held with 3 attending) and the range of support sessions included collection of anonymous sticky notes left after discussion.

Recruitment & selection (Vitae Concordat Principle 1): Key achievement: In terms of recruiting researchers, since 2016 AU has promoted and participated in an annual pan Wales Summer School for Marie Skłodowska Curie fellowships proposal writing workshops funded through Welsh Government (NRN-LCEE and SCoRE). This has seen our own success rate with this scheme achieve 20% in 2017, higher than the UK average success rate of 15.2% (see Case Study 2: Effective Practice).

More broadly any member of staff responsible for recruitment or who is involved in the recruitment process is be required to complete the mandatory web-based Equal Opportunities and Diversity Training which runs on a three year cycle. Staff are also encouraged to access in-house training in Recruitment and Selection through the [Centre for the Development of Staff and Academic Practice (CDSAP).](#) A new development is the introduction of unconscious bias training for leaders of research. Provision is in place for two years after which the online provision will be assessed.

Recognition and Value (Vitae Concordat Principle 2): Key achievements: Since June 2018 HR have provided AURCG with segmented email distribution lists. These have and will provide AURCG with the ability to pinpoint communication about funding and training appropriate to different cohorts

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[3] Action 3.5
[4] Action 2.1

and eventually measure take-up and efficacy of schemes. The lists have been used to encourage representation and participation in the action planning and evaluation process and news about Research Good Practice and National Post Doc Appreciation Week events. Since 2016 RBI have worked with Aber News communications team to develop 6 (so far) "My Research" features on a Postdoct.eg: **Dr Fergus Oakes (July 2017) said: "Life as a postdoctoral researcher also involves moving from task to task regularly. While very rewarding in many ways, it does make it quite hard to establish routines and the peripatetic nature of the role for the first year has meant that sometimes I can feel a rather transient figure in the department."** For the first time, AURCG promoted National Post Doc Appreciation Week and offered 3 support sessions aimed for post-doctoral researchers. The sessions (3 attendees) were 'finding funding', interview techniques and career opportunities beyond academia.

During the reporting period RBI trialled the use of Twitter (postdocsplus@ResDevlp) (208 automated and personalised Tweets; 92 followers) to regularly promote institutional and wider information specifically for the PDRA community. During 2017 a network for the Post Doc community was trialled but was not successful. Now that we have the email distribution list and better engagement on AURCG from post-doc researchers we will try and re-establish the network in our next action plan.

Support and Career Development (Vitae Concordat Principle 3-4): Key achievements: 2017/18: Research Development Officers continue to meet all new staff with 1-2-1 induction sessions to provide overview of opportunities, training, networks and funding specific support. This is offered to 100% of staff with a 60% take-up.

A new initiative in the last 2 years has been the pilot (17-18) and establishment of a Research Good Practice Training Programme (7 sessions with average attendance of 10 per session). From October 2018 it is run monthly and offered to all research staff. It covers all aspects of that which staff need to know to be a researcher at Aberystwyth University. Sessions include: Research Ethics, Open Access and Research Data Management, Engaging the Public with Research, applying for Research Grants, Managing Research Grants, Recording Research Activity on PURE (the university's CRIS). The session is now run on a rolling program advertised by direct email and distribution lists, and from 2018 as part of a three times a year half day session (attendance at one of these is compulsory)- targeted at all new research active staff starting employment. The session has been expanded to include a session introducing the Concordat and Researcher Development Framework Planner, an overview of these sessions is to be made available via *Panopto* video.

A further new development has been the RBI-led development of Women in Research network. This has been developing over the last 2 years (see case study 1).

Researcher Responsibilities (Vitae Concordat Principle 5): Key achievements: An induction pack alerting PIs and their externally funded research staff to their responsibilities was developed, this points to university and wider resources. The aspiration was that these would be emailed to all new project staff that support external fixed term researchers, and that these would be lodged via the university's HR system. Internal systems to check and automate these have remained flawed at a university level. AURCG agreed to include this information in its refreshed Concordat website and Research Good Practice training. New staff are directed to this information when they have their 1-2-1 induction meeting with their Research Development Officer, and new PIs are also directed to the information and their responsibilities during a Project Initiation Meeting at the start of new research grants. Additionally next steps over the next two years will include expanding training aimed at all career stages including PDRAs, including how to use the Research Development Framework and its

planner and how to develop conversations about career development with staff. RBI has continued to provide the training course "Top Tips for managing your research grant" aimed at all new PIs managing an externally funded project and this is specifically aimed at highlighting the roles and responsibilities of PIs when they manage a grant (number of attendees).

Diversity and Equality (Vitae Concordat Principle 6): Key achievements: The University's Annual Equality Report (March 2018) includes coverage of the reporting period 2016-17. The university has continued to make broad progress in several areas e.g. LGBTQI &A issues, including offering specific training (2017-18, 8 sessions with between 20-50 attending) , holding joint events with our community (2017-18, 4 events with 300 attendees) and setting-up a Trans working group for internal policy implementation. We have set-up a Staff Wellbeing Network and started to look at the issues faced by staff with both long term illness and disability (2017-18, 10 meetings with 30 LGBT, 5 BME, 3 Disability and Wellbeing attendees).

The university provides mandatory staff training for all staff on diversity and equality and at the staff first day induction the process is explained. This online tool enables staff to

- Familiarise themselves with equality legislation
- Gain an understanding of the broader issues around equality and diversity
- Raise their awareness of their responsibilities and rights as members of staff

As at July 2017, the university has improved its e-diversity take-up to 72% of staff (with a target to increase this further for 2017-18 to 75%). Bespoke face to face sessions were delivered to more than 1400 staff (including part-time staff) by making sessions available at different times of the day and late evening, as well as different days.

Future strategy, next steps & success measures: Calibrate membership of the AURCG so that it includes appropriate representation from PDRA community, PI membership as well as ECR, and segues with Athena Swan and Equalities roles better. Success measure: Develop and Adopt new Terms of Reference by Easter 2019.

1. Continue to deliver Research Good Practice sessions. Success measures: Offered to 100% new research active staff, 80% attendance as target in year 1 to be evaluated in autumn 19.
2. Move ahead with a discipline agnostic Women in Research network. This has grown out of the RBI-led STEM network which will continue to run (see attached Case Study 1). The Women in Research network has a wider career stage membership and will address issues of equality and career development. Success measures: 6 bi-monthly meetings per annum, reportage fed back to the Equality and Diversity champion.
3. Pilot a Faculty focused program of support for new staff to develop their research publications/profile as they engage in heavy teaching. Success measures: New program developed by autumn 19.
4. Our Strategic Plan 2018-23 emphasizes implementing mentoring for all career stage researchers. Survey current support to get a base line value which will inform us about an appropriate % target. Survey completed by June 2019; Program put in place by January 2020. Trial the establishment of a Post Doc Network: Success Measure: run at least 6 sessions with average membership of 18 attendees by September 2019 and reviewed at that point.