

## HR Excellence in Research Award: BACKWARD-LOOKING ACTION PLAN 2019-2021

Ref	Aim	Actions for January 2019 – May 2021	Responsibility	Outcomes and success measures	Position as at May 2021	Action Status (completed / carried forward / no longer applicable)
1	<p>Improve induction arrangements for new staff</p> <p>Increase engagement with induction processes and online orientation</p>	Produce training / support materials for line managers emphasizing good orientation process & expectations	Assistant HR Director Learning & Development	<p>Monitor orientation plan completion rate data.</p> <p>Increase completion rate to 50% by December 2019.</p>	<p>The <i>Manager's Induction / Orientation</i> programme has now been published online.</p> <p>From August 2018 to July 2019, a total of 203 employees should have completed the online orientation. From this group, 140 (49.26%) had completed / partially completed the online orientation. Out of the 203 members of staff, 14 were newly appointed research staff, of whom 5 (35.71%) completed the online orientation.</p> <p>Between 1<sup>st</sup> August 2019 and 31<sup>st</sup> July 2020, the University recruited 151 core staff new starters, of these 70 (46.36%) have engaged with their onboarding process- a decrease of 2.9%.</p>	<b>Completed</b>
2		<p>Develop a Research Hub on Portal to provide a range of resources tailored to research staff and Principal Investigators (PIs).</p> <p>Make available on the external website relevant information for research job applicants - to give a fuller picture of</p>	Assistant HR Director Learning & Development with Grants Officer (RIO)	<p>Include information on the Researcher Hub about the following topics by December 2020:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Vision and Strategy</li> <li>2. Principal Investigators</li> <li>3. Research events calendar</li> <li>4. Supporting our staff, including case studies</li> <li>5. <i>Career Pathways &amp; Managing Your Career Guide</i></li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The vision &amp; strategy information is due to be updated after publication of the new institutional <i>Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy</i> in 2021;</li> <li>2. An <i>Information for Principal Investigators</i> page has been added to the Researcher Hub, which provides general advice for PIs about applying for grants and managing / supporting research staff, as well as links to the <i>Vitae Researcher Development Framework</i> and other useful resources;</li> </ol>	<b>Completed</b>

		<p>working as a researcher at the University (e.g. support mechanisms, case studies, role descriptions).</p>		<p>6. Engaging with our community (including impact)</p>	<p>3. A research events calendar has been added to the Researcher Hub home page. This calendar links through to any university event which features the word “research” in its title or description;</p> <p>4. Case studies – A <i>Meet the Researcher</i> page has been added to the Researcher Hub. This displays posters which have been developed by the RIO that allow members of staff to showcase their research. The posters are also available as physical printed versions and some have been produced as zap stands. This opportunity is open to all researchers;</p> <p>5. <i>Career Pathways &amp; Managing Your Career Guide</i> is now available on the portal. The Career Pathways, Career Development Policy/Talent/Succession Planning Policy is still a work in progress and the aim is to implement this by January 2022;</p> <p>6. A new section has been added to the Researcher Hub about impact, which contains internal and external training resources and guidance on the subject.</p> <p>Although it is no longer possible to monitor hit rates on the Researcher Hub pages, positive feedback about the resources has been received from 3 researchers.</p> <p>The external website content is currently being updated and this includes relevant information about research for job applicants.</p>	
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3	Improve job security for researchers	Establish bridging fund to enhance researcher retention and job security for research staff on fixed-term contracts in between grants	Director of Research & Innovation Office	If budgets allow, establish the funding level and criteria by August 2019 to influence funding from the 2019/20 academic year, so that contracts can be longer than grants to facilitate dissemination and impact.	HR data was analysed to establish the extent of breaks in contract for research staff; as a consequence, plans were made to make a bridging fund available. General budgetary constraints continue to limit progress with this proposal but it remains a priority for RIO. Provision for the bridging fund was made in the 2019/20 and 2020/21 RIO budget.	<b>Completed</b>
4	Enhance researchers' preparedness for new roles & improve signposting to support & resources	Enhance the HR exit process to include a reflection on research / generic skills and support for future employment	Assistant HR Director Learning & Development	<i>Managing Your Career</i> online guide and development session together with supporting resources to be made available from September 2020 and monitoring of hit rates thereafter. A link to the document to be emailed to all researchers prior to end of contract.	Progress has been made in terms of centralising various resources on the Researcher Hub including: Career Development and Networking, Coaching and Mentoring, and Conference Funding.  A comprehensive <i>Managing Your Career Guide</i> is now available for all staff to access on the portal.	<b>Completed</b>
5	To improve explicit recognition of researchers' contribution at the local level	Issue revised Performance & Development Planning (PDP) guidance specifically for researchers and also include in training / support materials for line managers	Assistant HR Director Learning & Development	PDP guidance is to be reviewed alongside changes to Workload Allocation Management System (WAMS) protocols, which will take effect from September 2019.  New PDP guidance and manager training is to be implemented from January 2020.  The PDP completion rate for research staff is to be increased to 50% by December 2020.	The new guidance document, <i>My Contribution: Performance and Development Planning and Workload Allocation</i> , was published in September 2020. PDP and workload allocation training are now available for all staff.  The PDP completion rate for all employees was 54.7% for the period August 2018 to July 2019. The completion rate for research staff was 14% (2/14); 19 out of the 33 research staff were subject to the probationary review process and were therefore not required to complete a PDP. PDP completion rate for all staff was 60.78% for the period 1 <sup>st</sup> August 2019 to 31 <sup>st</sup> July 2020 - the highest engagement rate recorded - an increase of 6.08% from 2018/19.	<b>Completed</b>

6		<p>Lobby for reinstatement of information about research within the University's institutional induction (arising from CROS 2019 survey feedback)</p>	<p>Director of Research &amp; Innovation Office / PVC Research &amp; Innovation</p>	<p>Prepare a revised University induction session for September 2019.</p> <p>Generate improved responses to CEDARS 2020 – increase “usefulness of institutional induction” from 50% to 60%.</p>	<p>Additional material about research was added to the University's induction in September 2019. The induction is now also running which includes a short section on RIO services.</p> <p>In answer to the CEDARS 2020 question “<i>when you started with your current employer how useful did you find your induction at institutional level?</i>”, 60% of respondents found it “useful” or “very useful”.</p>	<p><b>Completed</b></p>
7		<p>Develop a guide for researchers and managers to address some of the status issues perceived by researchers.</p> <p>Produce a guide for researchers which addresses issues such as the different types of contract, the volume of teaching and student support work that can be undertaken by researchers, the processes for changing contract type and changing fixed term contracts to permanent etc.</p>	<p>Assistant HR Director Learning &amp; Development</p>	<p>The guide is to be made available on the Researcher Hub and circulated to researchers and managers by December 2020.</p> <p>The impact of this is to be monitored using feedback from research staff and managers about whether the guide has informed and assisted with career planning or monitoring requests for contract type changes (e.g. changes to academic contracts, re-grading, fixed term contracts to permanent etc.)</p>	<p>A guide called ‘<i>Professional</i>’ vs ‘<i>Professional Services</i>’ <i>employment contracts</i> was published in April 2020 and is available to all staff on the portal. The guide contains information about the differences between professional contracts and standard professional services contract for grades OS9 and above, promotional protocols, and role re-evaluation.</p>	<p><b>Completed</b></p>

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8		Review contractual status of all researchers to establish whether any should be prompted to consider the “professional” version of the support contract (if not already offered)	Assistant HR Director Learning & Development	“Professional” contracts are to be offered to all eligible staff (i.e. those who are employed at grade OS9 and above).	A report was prepared in August 2019 which showed that there were 34 members of research staff employed at the University. Out of this total, 8 members of staff were employed at grade OS9 or above and they have been provided with the option to consider a professional contract.	<b>Completed</b>
9		Develop a template to support discussions around career development in probationary and PDP reviews and include in training / support materials for line managers	Assistant HR Director Learning & Development	<p>Training / support materials are to be developed and made available to line managers by July 2020.</p> <p>This will be monitored using responses to CEDARS 2020 relating to aspects of Support and Career Development:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- staff encouraged to engage in development increasing from 55% to 60%</li> <li>- % of researchers with a development plan from 66% to 70%</li> <li>- those keeping records of CPD from 44% to 50%</li> </ul>	<p>The new guidance document, <i>My Contribution: Performance and Development Planning and Workload Allocation</i>, was published in September 2020. PDP and workload allocation training are now available for all staff.</p> <p>The <i>Manager’s Induction / Orientation</i> programme has now been published online.</p> <p>The results from CEDARS 2020 were as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- staff feel encouraged to engage in personal and career development: 60% of respondents agreed with this statement</li> <li>- 60% of respondents had a clear career development plan</li> <li>- 60% of respondents were keeping a formal record of CPD activities</li> </ul>	<b>Completed</b>
10	To improve understanding of the wide range of ways	Draft a <i>Manager’s Recognition Guide</i> and seek approval	Assistant HR Director Learning & Development	A university wide awards framework to be established by September 2020	The <i>Manager’s Recognition Guide</i> is to be implemented as part of the University’s proposed INSPIRE Awards Policy – INSPIRE is	<b>Carried forward (E13)</b>

	researchers can receive recognition	from SET to implement			a mnemonic which represents the University's Values. The INSPIRE Awards are embedded in a wider project, which has been delayed due to the disruption caused by the pandemic.	
11		Hold focus groups with research staff in autumn 2019 to follow up feedback from the CROS 2019 survey to understand responses regarding Recognition & Value and Support & Career Development, particularly in relation to teaching and research supervision.	Assistant HR Director Learning & Development	The purpose of the focus groups is to gain a better understanding of researchers' perceptions of issues, and to help identify appropriate actions and targets by April 2020.  Further actions, outcomes and success measures will be set after the focus groups have taken place for the period up to December 2020.	An invitation to attend focus group meetings was sent to 32 research staff in October 2019. Feedback via email was also welcomed.  Only one researcher responded to the invitation, so a telephone interview was conducted. Issues including workload allocation, promotion and career progression, recognition from the institution, access to grant writing expertise, PDPs and the induction process were discussed. This feedback has been used to inform other actions in the action plan, including the University's proposed <i>INSPIRE Awards Policy</i> , and other resources which are now available on the Researcher Hub including the guidance document <i>My Contribution: Performance and Development Planning and Workload Allocation</i> , and the guide <i>'Professional' vs 'Professional Services' employment contracts</i> .	<b>Completed</b>
12	Establish career development frameworks for different role types within the University	Conduct a review of options to support researcher career progression including an initial exploration into career pathways for researchers which may exist at other HEIs and incorporate a review	Assistant HR Director Learning & Development	Comprehensive review to be concluded by September 2020 for implementation of approved actions through 2020/21 academic year	A comprehensive <i>Managing Your Career Guide</i> is now available for all staff to access on the portal.	<b>Completed</b>

		of researcher job descriptions				
13	Ensure University strategies remain aligned with vision and mission	The <i>People and Organisational Development Strategy</i> to be absorbed into the <i>People Strategy</i> during the next review by the HR Director to align with the University's <i>Corporate Plan</i> .	Assistant HR Director Learning & Development	A revised <i>People Strategy</i> is to be made available to staff by September 2019.	Publication of a revised <i>People Strategy</i> was delayed because a new Vice Chancellor was appointed at the University in January 2020. Subsequently, a new institutional strategy, <i>The Citizen Student Strategy</i> , was published in December 2020, together with a new <i>Research &amp; Knowledge Exchange Strategy</i> in 2021. Following on from this, a revised <i>People Strategy</i> is due to be finalised and published in 2021.	<b>No longer applicable</b>
14	Improve engagement with training on offer	Monitor participation rates of researchers in all Learning and Development events and undertake appropriate marketing of the opportunities for this specific audience	Assistant HR Director Learning & Development	Dates of training events to be highlighted via researcher portal pages, discussion board and bimonthly messages.  Target for participation: 33% (note target is difficult to monitor due to staff turnover and short contracts).	In 2018/19, approximately 32% (558/1750) members of staff participated in developmental sessions in the Learning Calendar. Of the 30 members of research staff, 11 researchers (36.67%) engaged in training 17 times during this academic year. This translates to an increase of 83.3% compared to the previous academic year.  Six members of research staff attended 7 sessions at the Research & Knowledge Transfer Festival in April 2019.  During 2019/20, 68.80% (1195/1737) members of staff attended courses/workshops, which is an increase of 36.8% on 2018/2019 figures. Remote delivery and more engagement with <i>Mental Health First Aid</i> courses have contributed to this positive increase.	<b>Completed</b>
15		Hold focus groups with research staff in autumn 2019 to follow up feedback from the CROS	Assistant HR Director Learning & Development / Director of	A better understanding of the issues as perceived by researchers will enable the identification of appropriate	See action 11 above.	<b>Completed</b>

		2019 survey to understand responses regarding Support and Career development	Research & Innovation Office	actions and targets by April 2020.		
16		Develop & deliver training for academic staff who have come from a professional (i.e. non-research) background to help them maintain & build research activities post-PhD	HR Manager – Development and Diversity and Director of Research & Innovation Office	<p>Deliver training sessions at the annual Research &amp; Knowledge Transfer Festival, in addition to running regular <i>Making Professor</i> workshops.</p> <p>Attendance levels and feedback are to be monitored for enhancement opportunities.</p> <p>One success measure will be the inclusion of a higher proportion of female staff in REF2021 (i.e. more representative of the staff profile).</p>	<p><i>Making Professor</i> workshops were delivered in February 2019 as part of the Diversity Festival.</p> <p>A training session called <i>Transitioning into Research from Professional Backgrounds</i> about developing research for individuals with professional backgrounds was offered at the Research &amp; Knowledge Transfer Festival in April 2019.</p> <p>Unconscious bias training is now delivered to all managers as part of the recruitment and selection training (which needs to be completed every 3 years). An external provider has been commissioned to deliver specific training on unconscious bias in relation to workload. This is awaiting budgetary approval and it is hoped that the training will commence in 2021.</p> <p>The REF2021 Equality Impact Assessment report shows that 42.5% of the 261 staff in Group A are female, compared to 55.6% of the overall group of 656 staff considered. This percentage is somewhat lower than might be expected, and this is a statistically significant difference (<math>\chi^2</math> (1df, N=261) = 29.31 p&lt;0.001). Therefore, female staff are significantly underrepresented in the pool of staff meeting the criteria for inclusion. However, this is a substantial improvement compared to the last two exercises:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- REF2014: 33.8% of submitted staff female cf 52.6% of all academic staff</li> </ul>	<b>Completed</b>



					- RAE2008 37.0% of submitted staff female cf 52.8% of all academic staff	
17		Develop new training/support materials for line managers so they can support career development more effectively and ensure time allocation for research managers	Assistant HR Director Learning & Development / Director of Research & Innovation Office	<p>Training/support materials developed and available to line managers by July 2020.</p> <p>Improved responses to CEDARS 2020 relating to aspects of Support and Career Development:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- encouraged to engage in development increasing from 55% to 60%;</li> <li>- % of researchers with a development plan from 66% to 70% and those keeping records of CPD from 44% to 50%</li> </ul> <p>Collect feedback from managers on the usefulness of resources.</p> <p>Attendance and feedback data on training uptake (date to be set once materials are available).</p>	The <i>Managing Your Career Guide</i> provides a full range of resources for individuals and managers in terms of how to have career conversations.	<b>Completed</b>
18	Improve feedback mechanisms to gather researchers views of their needs and encourage	Seek feedback from researchers via the Research Network, taking a lead from the themes within the CROS / CEDARS survey.	Director of Research & Innovation Office	Increased participation in the Research Network and Research & Knowledge Transfer Festival to 30% of research staff.	<p>The University took part in CROS 2019 and CEDARS 2020. Out of 50 members of staff who responded to CEDARS, 5 (10%) were employed on research-only contracts.</p> <p>The University plans to participate in CEDARS surveys annually, as this data will be used to</p>	<b>Carried forward (ECI6)</b>

	their engagement with the University & other researchers			Participate in CROS 2019 and CEDARS 2020.	<p>measure the impact of action plan implementation.</p> <p>The last meeting of the Research Network took place in May 2019, with a theme of REF2021. Further meetings of the Network had been planned to discuss the issues raised in the responses to CROS 2019. However, due to low attendance numbers at the Research Network meetings, the HR Excellence in Research Award Steering Group decided to suspend the Research Network meetings pending a review of the format and content of the meetings. It has since been decided that the Research Network is no longer needed because there are now improved alternative opportunities for researchers to network (e.g. through the formation of Research Institutions following the implementation of the new <i>Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy</i>, events held at the annual <i>Research &amp; Knowledge Exchange Festival</i> etc.).</p>	
19	Facilitate development via conference attendance	Secure funds in 2019/20 RIO business plan to support conference attendance for career development purposes (rather than for research dissemination) and inform researchers of opportunity to apply	Director of Research & Innovation Office	Continuation of the annual fund, with revised limits (or fewer restrictions) to ensure an increase in applications, so that all funds can be awarded to strong applications.	<p>A conference attendance funding scheme has been in operation since 2017/18. Uptake was initially low, as applicants felt that the grant available was too small, so the grant amount was increased for 2018/19. Funding for researchers is part of a wider scheme to support conference attendance with the criteria for researchers tailored to their career stage. Further revision to the scheme to be considered including removal of link to faculty funding or funding the full amount. In 2019/20, the name of the scheme was changed to <i>Early Career Researcher Fund</i>, but otherwise no changes were made to the T&amp;Cs.</p>	<b>Completed</b>

20	Increase researchers' sense of responsibility for their own development	Develop case studies and other resources which promote examples of how researchers have taken responsibility for their own career development; this will be an element of the <i>Managing Your Career</i> guide referred to at action 4 above.	Assistant HR Director Learning & Development and Director of Research & Innovation Office	At least 2 case studies to be developed and included on the portal as researcher resource by July 2019.	A comprehensive <i>Managing Your Career Guide</i> is now available for all staff to access on the portal. It provides a full range of resources for individuals and managers in terms of how to have career conversations.	<b>Completed</b>
21		Develop a template to support formally recording career and personal development	Assistant HR Director Learning & Development	Improved responses to CEDARS 2020 regarding record keeping of CPD activities.	A learning log has been included in the <i>Managing Your Career Guide</i> , which is available for all staff to access on the portal.  The results from CEDARS 2020 revealed that 60% of respondents were keeping a formal record of CPD activities.	<b>Completed</b>
22	Provide a means to help researchers meet and support each other	Review communication of information about the termly Research Network meetings, vary site for meetings and offer refreshments	Director of Research & Innovation Office and Grants Officer (RIO)	Aim to attract 30% of research staff to attend the meetings.	The Research Network was established in January 2018 and held termly meetings to discuss themes such as: How RIO can help support researchers, consultation on what researchers want from the network, avoiding predatory journals & conferences, revision to the University's Research Strategy, REF2021 and the use of research metrics.  In 2019, more targeted promotional work for the meetings was undertaken by emailing research staff directly, as well as advertising the events on the portal in the usual way. The timing of the events was changed to coincide with lunchtime, with lunch provided, in order to encourage participation.	<b>No longer applicable</b>

					<p>Unfortunately, attendance figures have remained low:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- February 2019: 4 members of staff (of whom 2 were researchers)</li> <li>- May 2019: 5 members of staff (no researchers attended)</li> </ul> <p>As a result, the HR Excellence in Research Award Steering Group decided to suspend the Research Network meetings pending a review of the format and content of the meetings. It has since been decided that the Research Network is no longer needed because there are now improved alternative opportunities for researchers to network (e.g. through the formation of Research Institutions following the implementation of the new <i>Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy</i>, events held at the annual <i>Research &amp; Knowledge Exchange Festival</i> etc.).</p>	
23		<p>Review mechanisms to facilitate opportunities for research staff to connect with other researchers within and outside of their own department, whether professionally or socially</p>	<p>Assistant HR Director Learning &amp; Development and Director of Research &amp; Innovation Office</p>	<p>Mechanism to be decided and promoted by July 2020</p>	<p>There are various resources available on the portal for researchers to use, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Research Mentor profiles</li> <li>- The Research Staff Discussion Board on the Researcher Hub</li> <li>- Meet the Researcher profiles (see action 2 above for further details)</li> </ul> <p>A virtual <i>University of Chester Research 'Speed' Networking Event</i> was organised by RIO to enable members of the Faculty of Science and Engineering to meet other members of university staff to discuss their research interests. The event was well received and similar events are being considered for the future. Staff from other faculties were offered the opportunity to have 15-minute online meeting with any of the 21 Science &amp; Engineering staff about their research. A total of 18 meetings took place.</p>	<p><b>Completed</b></p>

					Furthermore, the implementation of the new Research Institutions will facilitate more opportunities for research staff to connect with other researchers within the University.	
24	Increase engagement of researchers with Diversity & Equality events	Direct email and telephone marketing of relevant events at the Diversity Festival to researchers & managers in January/February annually in order to improve participation, followed by attendance monitoring and feedback	HR Manager – Development and Diversity	Increase participation rates of Researchers in <i>Diversity Festival</i> Events to 10% researchers attending events annually	<p>Direct email marketing to researchers of relevant <i>Diversity Festival</i> events has taken place.</p> <p>The 2019 festival was attended by a total of 774 people, which included 4 members of research staff.</p> <p>The 2020 festival was attended by a total of 1,218 people. 3 out of a total of 24 research staff attended 2 events (12.5%).</p>	<b>Completed</b>
25	Maintain focus across the University on supporting researchers and research careers	Hold termly meetings of the HR Excellence in Research Award Steering Group with expanded terms of reference to monitor completion of actions, and report annually to Research & Knowledge Transfer Committee to coincide with annual reviews of research. PVC (Research & Innovation) to be involved in biannual	Director of Research & Innovation Office and R&KT Committee	Ensure timely completion of actions and feedback to R&KT Committee. Annual report to R&KT Committee in November each year.	The steering group has met once per term with the proposed expanded terms of reference. Annual reports on progress with the action plan were received by R&KT Committee in February 2019 (rescheduled to coincide with the annual reviews of research), November 2019 and November 2020.	<b>Completed</b>

		sign off of action plan and annually through report to R&KT Committee.				
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**Glossary**

D&E	Diversity & equality
ED&I	Equality, diversity & inclusion
H&WB	Health & wellbeing
MHFA	Mental Health First Aid
PDP	Performance & Development Planning
RIO	Research & Innovation Office
SET	Strategic Executive Team
SG	Steering group
WAMS	Workload Allocation Management System
WG	Working group