UNIVERSITY OF CUMBRIA (UOC) – HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH

FOUR YEAR EXTERNAL REVIEW - FEBRUARY 2020

INTRODUCTION

UOC's vison is to be recognised as a catalyst for individual and regional prosperity and pride, with national and international relevance, reach and impact. Our Strategic Plan – 'Enriching People through Place' - positions the institution as a provider of HE for Cumbria and a thriving, lead player in delivering professional higher-level learning to meet the demands of an ever evolving workforce and emerging markets. Our commitment to the Concordat supports the strategic plan by building research communities, highlighting excellent outputs, and providing recognition for the excellent research of our staff.

Accepting that UoC's research community is small does not prevent us from setting our sights high. We open up opportunities for personal, organisational and regional development, and are proud to have received Research Degree Awarding Powers (RDAP) in March 2019. This built on our successful REF2014 submission, which assessed 81% of our research as reaching a standard recognised internationally or higher.

Our refreshed People Strategy aligns with our Strategic Plan through the following aims:

- Working in strategic partnerships with employers, education providers and stakeholders to grow and provide an accessible and research-informed academic offer, which capitalises on place and meets individual, regional, sector and employer needs;
- Providing excellent training, teaching and research environments and student experience, equipping our graduates with skills, attributes, confidence and resilience to succeed on graduation and beyond;
- Contributing to practice, knowledge, place and communities across our locations for social, cultural, environmental and economic benefit; and
- Equipping and enabling our staff to make a strong contribution to our values and collective leadership, with a firm emphasis on celebrating success.

In support of the Strategic Plan, UOC realigned its academic structure in 2019 and has moved from 7 Academic Departments to 5 Academic Institutes. Most significantly, a new 'Institute of Health' brought together three departments to help realise our ambitions for external engagement as well as internal collaboration and partnership across courses, programmes and researchers. Within the institute is the Centre for Research in Health and Society (CRiHS), which aims to transform health and social outcomes locally, nationally and internationally. The institutions Health and Social Care Evaluation Unit (HASCE) expanded its remit to become 'Health and Society Knowledge Exchange' (HASKE) within CHRiS, and has expanded its research staff bank to fourteen individuals.

A Centre for Academic Practice Enhancement (CAPE) has also been launched as a new, virtual centre that will work across UOC to support colleagues in the development and delivery of their academic programmes, and in the development of their own academic practice.

The total number of academic staff on teaching and research contracts at UOC is 395 (323.5 FTE), and we anticipate 70 individuals to be submitted to REF2021. Three staff are on permanent research-only contracts and Research Assistants are employed regularly throughout the year on hourly paid contracts. During 2018 – 2019 UOC had 126 registered PgR students.

The University achieved the European Commission HR Excellence in Research Award in 2016; and retained this award in 2018. The institution continues to enhance and improve its support, guidance and infrastructure that facilitates the continuing development of our researchers. In the original application, we described how we extended the definition of researcher to include all of our academic staff, contract research staff and research students, reflecting the University's commitment to sustaining a thriving community of researchers.

HR and the Research Office review progress against the actions in the plan on a quarterly basis. A detailed report on progress against the 2018 - 2020 action plan and the process of internal review is provided below, followed by an outline of priorities for the next two years (2020 – 2022).

HOW THE INTERNAL REVIEW WAS UNDERTAKEN

The Action Plan together with the progress report have been prepared jointly by the Research Office & Graduate Office (ROGS) and Human Resources (HR) to ensure that we have resources and capability to deliver our stated priorities. Members of ROGS and HR meet regularly to review actions and fulfil commitments to The Concordat.

The action plan and the implementation of the Concordat is the formal responsibility of the University's Research Committee (RC), which is chaired by the Director of Research who has responsibility for all matters concerning research strategy and the management, monitoring and support of research. RC reports directly to the University's Academic Board. Research Staff and Postgraduate Research Students are formally represented on RC and at Academic Board. New action plans have been published online in 2016 and 2018.

During the review period, researchers have been involved through a series of focus groups events; one to one discussions with research only staff; and use of internal online surveys. Feedback has been used to inform our practice, to improve visibility, availability and consistency of information, policies and procedures related to research.

UOCs 'Code of Practice for Research' sets out principles of good conduct for research which employees and students are expected to adhere to, covering expectations, best practice, research misconduct, and processes for reporting, investigation and sanctions. This Code demonstrates our commitment to the Concordat to Support Research Integrity (UUK, 2012) - a national framework for good research conduct and governance.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS AND PROGRESS SINCE 2018

PRINCIPLE 1   **Recognition of the importance of recruiting, selecting and retaining researchers with the highest potential to achieve excellence in research**

In the previous submission we focussed on improving recruitment & selection processes for researchers. In the last two years we have looked at how we retain staff through institutional support mechanisms for achieving research excellence, as well as aspects of personal/professional development. We have **revitalised corporate induction** with a specific focus on research support and representation, and **improved monitoring of staff induction**, leading to overall improved engagement within first three months of employment. In 18/19, 89% of new starters had completed their induction within 3 months, and 90% had met with a mentor.

The **launch of a new benefits portal** in Sept 18 supports retention of staff and ensures they are valued and supported in their professional and personal lives. This was supported by focus group events and global emails to communicate and disseminate. Staff have successfully used the benefits portal to access the cycle to work scheme, holiday exchange, and a range of other discounts and benefits. During the first 2 years (2018-2020), there were 5274 hits from 665 staff. ie 67% engaged with the portal.

UOC appointed **four new professors** and **three new associate professors** in 2018 -19 from within the existing academic staff, evidencing continued opportunities for academics to progress careers to professorial level. A **Learning & Teaching Fest** (annual,140-160 attendees), **staff forums** and **staff conferences** (three times a year across five campuses) ensured wide staff engagement in corporate strategy, including teaching, learning and research.

PRINCIPLE 2   **Researchers are recognised and valued by their employing organisation as an essential part of their organisation's human resources and a key component of their overall strategy to develop and deliver world-class research**

Following a rigorous scrutiny period, the University was awarded **Research Degree Awarding Powers (RDAP)** in March 2019. This evidences and recognises UOCs excellent research, the criticality of our staff in achieving this, and their importance to our ongoing strategy for delivery of world-class research, and our research culture. This supports our submission to REF2021, and an institutional '**REF2021 Code of Practice**' outlines our approach to identifying eligible staff (those with significant responsibility for research - SRR) as well as the selection of outputs, appeals processes and consideration of individual circumstances.

In 2018/19, UOC renamed scholarly leave to **Research and Scholarly Leave** (RASA), and updated processes so that staff are required to a) log their RASA leave in the 'MyHR' online system, and b) indicate what activity their RASA leave was taken for. This has enabled the Research Office to identify what activities staff are undertaking as part of their RASA leave, identify gaps in activity and/or possible training and development activities. Over 50% of staff are now logging their SARA leave in this way.

Finally, we have added specific provisions to the **Professional Development Policy** for research only staff, and implemented a process to ensure managers consult with and advise staff approaching the end of a fixed term contract, making sure they are added to the redeployment register with adequate time to be informed of upcoming vacancies. This increases opportunity for research only staff to continue to contribute to UOC strategy.

PRINCIPLE 3	Researchers are equipped and supported to be adaptable and flexible in an increasingly diverse, mobile, global research environment

UOC implemented an **additional induction for academic staff** that includes meetings with the Director of Research for research active staff and signposting to the support available via other staff in the Research Office and Graduate School as well as online resources, training and guidance to support research. Furthermore, all researchers are required to have an annual PPDR, and the process for this has changed in the last two years to inform the university wide development needs and identify specific needs by department.

Our REF2021 Code of Practice importantly outlines **two pathways for research** - 'significant responsibility for research' (SRR) and an 'emerging responsibility for research' (ERR) pathway with five principles and associated measures that staff can reference when planning their research activities. To be submitted to REF2021, staff need to fulfil the principles within the SRR pathway whilst the ERR pathway is intended to offer practical help and guidance to staff to identify actions and activities that support researcher development. The two pathways will be utilised in a coordinated way across the institution to support and guide career development of our academic communities, by linking them to the:

- **Performance and Professional Development Review** (PPDR) - SRR/ERR pathways referred to in PPDR and linked to use of RASA leave to inform objective setting, research focus and aspirations, and formulation of Research Plans. This will enable researchers to align to Institute and Corporate strategy, and for support (financial or training) to be identified that enables this.
- **Research Mentoring** - ERR/SRR pathways referred to in mentoring guidance and used as a guide to support bridging individuals across pathways. This will enable researchers to grow their confidence and acquire skills that supports career progression.
- **Research Plans** - Principles and measures within SRR/ERR pathways used to inform development of individual research plans, and linked to objectives regarding the PPDR and use of RASA leave. This will enable Directors of Institutes to view Research Plans and identify synergies and priorities within the Institute.
- **Annual Research and Scholarly Survey** - Principles and measures within SRR/ERR pathways mirrored within the survey to ensure data capture. This enables the research activity to have visibility, and supports recognition and distribution of responsibilities and opportunities across UOCs research communities.

PRINCIPLE 4	The importance of researchers' personal and career development, and lifelong learning, is clearly recognised and promoted at all stages of their career

The **Research, Innovation & Enterprise Strategy**, launched in 2018, promotes our nationally and internationally recognised research, and knowledge exchange. By building and utilising staff expertise, the strategy ensures all students experience an academic culture that is research informed. This is supported further by a new **Curriculum Design Framework** for all taught credit-bearing provision up to and including Level 7, which demands programmes have a research and/or scholarly activity, research training and a research/major project.

Related to the work through the Code of Practice and the research pathways, the **research mentoring guidance has been updated and amended.** This was further informed by an evaluation survey that was submitted to mentors and mentees. Following from this, we have made several improvements to how we allocate and monitor mentoring, and provided additional flow diagrams and notes, to help plan sessions in relation to the two research pathways. We have seen growth in mentoring of 13% between 2018 and 2019.

Continued investment has been agreed for **PL development days** over the last two years, along with the implementation of **CPD days,** with staff encouraged to attend a minimum of 4 days (6 total) to utilise from their workload model allocation. This is a new process for ensuring development, delivered through Academic Quality & Development (AQD), Research Office & Graduate School (ROGS) and Organisational Development (OD) with over 100 sessions listed currently on the draft CPD schedule.

PRINCIPLE 5	Individual researchers share the responsibility for and need to pro-actively engage in their own personal and career development, and lifelong learning

The introduction of a specific **academic PPDR**, including further integration of the scholarly and research plan, use of research pathways, and research mentoring (currently 53 staff paired with mentor) will promote proactive engagement in personal/professional development.

ujiBetween 2017/18 and 2018/19 we have engaged with a wider group in the **Research Summer School (RSS) and Research Skills Development Programme (RSDP)**. In 2017/18, the RSDP offered 31 different sessions with 71 staff and/or PGR students attending, and the RSS offered 22 different sessions with 273 staff and/or PGR students attending. In 2018/19, the RSDP offered 35 different sessions with 220 staff and/or PGR students attending, and the RSS offered 26 different sessions with 204 staff and/or PGR students attending. This demonstrates that RSDP and the RSS have been successful in enabling staff to access training related to the Researcher Development Framework. The RSS requires further development to grow attendance and for 2019/20 we are trialling a change of location for the RSS to see if this increases engagement in the event.

PRINCIPLE 6	Diversity and equality must be promoted in all aspects of the recruitment and career management of researchers

UOC is an **Athena Swan** and **Equality Challenge Unit** member, a **Disability Confident and Mindful employer**, and **Stonewall Diversity Champion**. An **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Plan (2017-2021)** has objectives linked to the Annual Operating Plan, and is supported by an EDI Steering Group chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Director of Student & Staff Services). Broader membership is representative of departments and services. The Head of HR serves on the Research Committee and REF Steering Group.

The equality objectives demonstrate our commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity for all our staff and students, who underpin the work that we will carry out until 2021 in terms of our equality agenda. The university is committed to producing an annual **EDI Report**, alongside an annual **Gender Pay Gap Report** and **Equal Pay Audit**, which is completed every two years, to monitor EDI data and themes, across the characteristics and other relevant groups. As well as meeting our legal obligations in alignment with the Equality Act 2010 and related Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), we seek to adopt good practice in providing an environment where all our students and staff feel welcome and can fulfil their potential.

An EDI external website has been updated, including the additional new guidance and signposting. Examples of new additions include the "Trans staff and students in HE and colleges" guidance from ECU and True-vision (info and support on Hate Crime). EDI specific training was delivered to the REF Steering Group (also logged on Blackboard for new members to access and view). EIA documentation was updated and added to the corporate library, and we have a new student maternity, paternity and adoption policy.

PRINCIPLE 7	The sector and all stakeholders will undertake regular and collective review of their progress in strengthening the attractiveness and sustainability of research careers in the UK

UOC engages in regular and collective review of its progress amongst the sector, particularly through its membership of Guild HE Research, Million Plus and the Cathedrals Group. These groups enable continued sector consultation and benchmarking, with academic and professional services staff accessing external networks for support and collaboration on related research issues. This includes through participation at various local and national forums for practice sharing and policy making relating to Researchers. This engagement also enables UOC to contribute to wider improvements in the sector.

STRATEGY OUTLINE 2020-2022

The HREIR Steering Group will be the strategic lead for researcher development issues at UOC, utilising the Research Committee and Academic Board to escalate and adapt to challenges and concerns. This strategy is underpinned by the Action Plan at appendix B and utilises UOC's three research centres to deliver an overall strategic aim of providing opportunities for all our staff to engage in research activity. Our future focus will be: improving HR processes that support researcher development, enhancing induction with critical feedback, developing a research 'toolkit', implementing digital capabilities training, research career pathways, and additional CPD activities, and utilising institutional equality measures to embed diversity and create an inclusive culture. Success indicators include engagement with measures above, research staff representation on the HREIR Steering Group and researcher access of Researcher Support packages (funding and training). UOCs Research, Innovation and Enterprise Strategy 2018-2021, will be reviewed across this period to focus on the interventions outlined within the action plan and ensure alignment with the institutions This includes the capitalisation of the institutions Research Degree Awarding Powers, utilisation of expected income-growth (and increased numbers of research active staff) from a successful REF2021 submission, and further strengthened commitment to the Concordat across academic staff and post graduate researchers.

Appendices
- Appendix A: Case Study – Academic Writing Retreats

- Appendix B: 2020-2022 Action plan for the next 2 years
- Appendix C: 2018-2020 Updated Action Plan to Support the Career Development of Researchers
- Appendix D: 2016-2018 Original action Plan to Support the Career Development of Researchers