



UNIVERSITY OF CUMBRIA

EU HR Excellence in Research: Six Year Review

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James Hodge, Research Manager
Research and Knowledge Exchange

Shell Lemm, Wellbeing and OD
(Organisational Development) Manager
Human Resources

1. Introduction

The University of Cumbria (UoC) is committed to holding the EU HR Excellence in Research Award (HREiR) and has been in receipt of the award for the past six years. Our four-year review was conducted and appraised within the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and as we undertake our six-year review, this global event continues to impact on our professional services staff, our researchers, and wider academic staff groups.

Within this broader context we have sought to implement and update our Action Plan in support of the Concordat for the Career Development of Researchers. This includes via our HREiR Steering Group, with representatives from *HR, Research & Knowledge Exchange (RKE)* and input from Research Centre Directors and Early Career Researchers. The *RKE Committee* has overall responsibility and oversight of this group and reports are received in relation to progress on HREiR. This committee is Chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Health, Environment, and Innovation), with membership including Directors and staff representatives from University Institutes, Directors of Research Centres and key RKE and Library Services staff.

Our four-year review was undertaken in reference to the 2008 Concordat, and with the 2019 Concordat now in place across the sector, we have sought to update our Action Plan accordingly, and have done so for this six-year review.

2. Overall Process for Conducting the Six Year Review

The six-year review was led by the HREiR Steering Group, and specifically the *Research Manager* and *Wellbeing and OD Manager*, in consultation with other staff groups. Our overall process for conducting this review included:

- The HREiR Steering Group facilitating a series of meeting across 2021 to review and update on the original Action Plan (May-October 2021).
- A workshop to update and transfer the 2020-2022 Action Plan onto the new template, to ensure alignment with the 2019 Concordat (October 2021).
- A Steering Group meeting with a range of academic staff in attendance, including ECR's and Directors of Research Centres to review and comment on the action plan (November 2021).

3. Involving Researchers in the Process

We sought to involve researchers in the process of this review but remained continually mindful of the underlying context of Covid-19. This included ongoing capacity issues for staff having to adjust their research and/or teaching to online environments or project/programme changes; responding to changing government and University health and safety requirements; and managing various challenges in relation to health, dependents, and other demands on time and energy.

However, the review team did seek to engage with researchers at appropriate times in the year, and undertook:

- Individual consultation and interviews with research staff, conducted by the *Wellbeing and OD Manager*, on aspects of the Action Plan.
- Engagement with researchers via the RKE Committee and appraisal of Action Plans (and this report).
- An additional event, for staff who joined UoC (University of Cumbria) in the past 2 years (since July 2019), with specific reference to the HREiR award and the University's Action Plan.

4. Key Achievements and Action Plan Progress

4.1 General Achievements

Across the academic year 20/21, the following activities were undertaken to ensure continued support of researcher development:

- The newly formed '*Research, Knowledge Exchange & Graduate School (RKE-GS) Directorate*' completed its first year of operation and has improved coordination for researcher development across the full spectrum of RKE activity. A new Director was appointed and started at the University in October 2021.
- The *Research Ethics Policy* and *Code of Practice for Research* were reviewed and updated in September 2020.
- The *Intellectual Property Policy* has undergone an extensive re-write and is expected to be approved by *Academic Board* in the 21/22 academic year.
- A project has commenced to create a digital system for administering ethics and professorial titles applications and approvals, to be implemented across 21/22.
- Researcher development continues to be reinforced by an enhanced research environment and culture, facilitated by our four [Research Centres and Networks](#). These Centres and Networks are the engine of research activity, sustaining an inclusive, collaborative research culture. Centre Directors and Theme Leads provide additional support to research staff.
- Our REF2021 Code of Practice, and process for identifying staff with 'significant responsibility for research' (SRR) will continue to be implemented on an annual basis, with the intention of more proactively working with this group of 'SRR' staff to support application of the Concordat, and enrichment of research environment and culture.
- Our most recent gender pay gap figures (March 2020) are positive. The median decreased by 1.1% to 7.5% (sector at 13%) and mean gap to 9.1%, falling 2% from 2019 (sector at 14.7%) The median gap is at its lowest figure to date.
- In Feb 2022, UoC achieved Stonewall Silver award for LGBTQ+ equality and in the 2020 THE Impact Rankings, achieved top 90 status internationally for SDG (Sustainable Development Goals) 5, Gender equality (equated to top 15 UK).

4.2 Key 2020-2022 Action Plan Achievements

- The '*Research & Knowledge Exchange Toolkit*' was launched across 20/21 which provides a central resource for documentation, policies, forms etc. (Action 6)
- Online events for researchers and stakeholders have been delivered successfully 20/21, including the online '*Landscapes for Everyone*' Conference (October 2020), with approximately 178 national and international attendees, and enriching researcher development through the Centre for National Parks and Protected Areas (Action 7).
- Exit interviews now include specific researcher-related questions for discussion and feedback to relevant HR groups. (Action 9)
- Digital capabilities pathway completed (Action 11)
- An ongoing events programme (50 in total across 20/21) with regular opportunities for staff to engage in research and knowledge exchange relevant to their field (Action 12)
- Twelve Impact Case Studies submitted to REF2021, with expectation of some aspects of each study receiving at least a 3* quality rating, with content now repurposed to support promotions of our staff research activity. (Action 13)
- The number of RKE bids submitted has increased 10% though the overall value has decreased by a relatively small margin. We consider this to be positive in the context of the global pandemic and we have recently secured two UKRI-funded projects. (81 bids £5.5m value 19/20 v 89 bids, £4.8m value 20/21). (Action 15)
- We have seen a 19% increase in applications to Professorial Titles between the 18/19 and 20/21 round with 8 Titles being granted. (Action 17)

- Guidance for Research and Scholarly Activity (RASA) is being updated in 21/22 to incorporate 'Knowledge Exchange'; providing a more comprehensive set of eligible activity for staff to utilise RASA and improving recognition for staff activity. (Action 18)
- Successful launch of new LGBTQ+ group (Action 22) with 55+ members meeting to share information, experiences, ideas, and concerns in a safe space (including allies).
- Transgender online training introduced to promote awareness & wellbeing (Action 23)

5. Next Steps and Strategy Focus 2022-2024

Our focus over the next two years will centre on detailed analysis, planning and dissemination in relation to the 2019 Concordat; utilising the recent formation of the RKE-GS Directorate and the arrival of its new Director to galvanise awareness and understanding amongst UoC researchers. Specifically, we will work towards the following new actions:

5.1 Environment and culture

- Seek to become a formal signatory of the revised Concordat and meet with the DVC (Deputy Vice Chancellor) bi-annually to update on progress on the HR Excellence Action Plan.
- Launch a new RKE Strategy (led by the Director) under the auspices of the University's 'Towards 2030' corporate strategy.
- Explore the potential for new Research Centres in the Institute of Business, Industry and Leadership and the Institute for the Arts.
- Review and update RKE Staff Hub pages and external web pages to improve visibility of programmes such as the Concordat.
- Update processes for ethics and titles with online system of application and approval.
- Acquire additional resource for EDI (Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity) Officer and recruit Athena Swan lead to assist with Charter marks, including Athena Swan and White Ribbon in 2022, and Mental Health Charter in 2023/24.

5.2 Employment

- Embed wellbeing into policies and procedures with a focus on mental and physical health to support an inclusive workplace aligned to corporate and People Strategy
- Develop a mandatory RKE element of induction for new staff to support awareness of key RKE processes and quality measures (including the principles outlined in the Concordat).
- Develop a new training module on research ethics and integrity.
- Deliver a new Wellbeing Action Plan with six themes across Leadership & Management, Comms & Data, Learning & Development, Information & Support, Inclusive culture & physical environment, Partnerships & Sustainability.
- A new induction hub in line with the new values and strategic aims.
- Development of an agile working policy to support hybrid working in support of better work/life balance.

5.3 Professional and Career Development

- Consult at least bi-annually on an individual basis with the University's research staff (specifically those on research only contracts).
- Update and reissue RASA guidance to incorporate knowledge exchange (KE) activities and support recognition of where research supports KE and vice-versa.
- Focus staff development on helping individuals to achieve SRR (and Early Career Researchers) and reporting this through the University's Annual Operating Plan to improve awareness and leverage support at VCE level.
- Review of PPDR (Personal Performance and Development Review) process to support ongoing conversations on professional/career development and health and wellbeing.
- Further development of Learning and Development pathways to improve management skills, mental health awareness and alignment to digital skills.