

The University of Surrey Four Year Internal Evaluation Report for HR Excellence in Research (2012 – 2016)

The last four years have seen transformational change take place at the University of Surrey; considerable success has been achieved, climbing up all three main league tables for UK universities and securing a top five position for student satisfaction in The Times/Sunday Times Good University Guide 2015. The University of Surrey has achieved this by focusing on what is best for our students and staff, continuously looking ahead, identifying challenges and making decisions about the best way to manage those factors which have the potential to affect our collective future.

In March 2015, the Vice-Chancellor (VC) launched an Operational Review to consider how to build on our strategy to remain a leading UK university and improve our success in international league tables in light of the challenging financial situation facing the higher education sector. This included the existing 4 faculty structure reducing to 3; Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences, Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences and Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.

Later in 2015, it was announced that the Vice-Chancellor would be leaving the University of Surrey, and a new Vice-Chancellor has now been appointed: Professor Lu, previously Provost and Senior Vice-President at the University of Queensland will join Surrey in April 2016.

The University's new Research Strategy began to take shape in 2014 with the ambitions of the University being articulated as; "By 2022 the University of Surrey will be a top 20 university in the UK and top 150 university in the world for international research. The University will grow research income to at least £50m p.a. to help ensure the financial sustainability of the organisation" Delivery of the strategy relies on a number of cultural and support changes taking place across the University; including a focus on world class support for PGRs and ECRs.

To enhance and promote this supportive research culture, a proposal for the development of a "Graduate School" was put forward in 2015. The Graduate School or *Centre for Researcher Excellence* aims to create an environment to support researcher excellence and employability across the doctoral and early career stages of the researcher journey. The HR Excellence in Research future Action Plan will support and complement this development.

These significant changes have led the HR Excellence in Research Committee to take a flexible but focused view on achieving its objectives. Several areas of the previous plan have seen great progress, particularly around mentoring; however, it has also led to postponements in some other initiatives, to allow these actions to be embedded in the emerging structural changes to the University from 2016 onwards.

In light of the ambitious and exciting direction for the University, the developed HR Excellence in Research Action Plan has a clear, achievable focus covering a 4 year period to allow for the development and embedding of the complementary Graduate School and Research Strategy. Priorities have been highlighted for the first two years (2016 -2018).

1. How was internal evaluation undertaken?

The internal evaluation to measure the progress against the original action plan began in 2012 and was overseen by the HR Excellence in Research Steering Group (which met quarterly). In early 2015 the functionality of the HR Excellence in Research Steering Group was reviewed in light of a number of changes to the University structure and senior management team. As a result a revised and more focused HR Excellence in Research Committee was created with representatives from key operational areas including Human Resources, Researcher Development Programme, Equality and Diversity and Research and Enterprise Services along with ECR representation.

The HR Excellence in Research Committee has focused on the delivery of the plan to date and has sought input from existing working groups and committees to feed updates and ideas into it. An example of this, is the development of the Graduate School led by the Graduate School Task and

Finish Group, which reports to the HR Excellence in Research Committee through the Associate Dean (Postgraduate Research)

The input of ECRs has been central to the development of the University of Surrey's HR Excellence Action Plans. In 2012, an ECR Representatives Group was formed which meets quarterly to provide input into the University's researcher development activities and advises on issues of researcher support. This provides an avenue for ECR feedback into the HR Excellence in Research Committee. Beyond these quarterly meetings, focus groups are also held periodically to inform progress against HR Excellence in Research Action Plans and for future planning, for example a series of interviews were carried out with researchers during the summer of 2012 to establish a deeper understanding of the impact of changes in researcher support provision and in 2014/15 a series of focus groups were conducted around the topic of employability support. Furthermore, University took part in Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS), Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES), Principal Investigators and Research Leaders (PIRLS) in 2011, 2013 and 2015. We incorporated the feedback from surveys and focus groups with best practice identified by the HR Excellence Committee to inform the 2016-2018 action plan. There are also a number of monitoring actions within this plan to ensure the success of HR Excellence in Research across the University.

Reflecting on the previous two plans and in light of the developing Graduate School, the Committee felt it is now prudent to refresh the approach to HR Excellence in Research. This new approach will see a further refined HR Excellence in Research organisation, with the creation of a HR Excellence in Research Working Group, which will be tasked with embedding the action plan within the new University structure. This action plan is focused on the key areas of employability and identity, aligning both with the direct feedback from ECRs and the new Research Strategy taking shape during 2016,

2. Key Achievements and progress over the four year period (Jan 2012 – Jan 2016)

Principle 1 & 2 : Recruitment & Selection and Recognition & Value

- *Policies and Employment Conditions:* An equality pay audit was conducted and the temporary employee policy revised to ensure the status of temporary research staff with contracts of 4 years or longer are amended to permanent status. A new e-recruitment process ("Surrey Recruit") was implemented to ensure a fair and transparent recruitment process.
- *Training and Support for management and leadership:* 'Best Practice in Doctoral Admissions' Master class sessions have been embedded into supervisor training, to ensure good practice and equality in doctoral admissions. 473 supervisors have attended to date. Also, the "Induction for New Managers" course was developed to assist staff in general management including recruitment and promotion processes.
- *Induction to University's research culture:* Considerable effort has been given to addressing the gap in inducting researchers into the wider university culture of research excellence. Online and face to face materials have been developed and trialled but will be developed further as a key part of our future HR Excellence in Research Action Plans. A new research induction programme to launch in 2016 complements Faculty induction programmes. A refreshed Learning & Development booklet detailing the full range of opportunities available is sent to every member of staff annually and is supported by a new learning and development website signposting specific skills areas.
- *Recognition for developing and managing researchers:* Key to recognition is to identify good practice. The previous action plan focused on the development of rigorous monitoring of annual appraisal returns, enabling us to identify line managers who are supporting the development of ECRs and those who are not actively doing so. This has been followed up to ensure all researchers have the opportunity to access the resources available and to generate a personal professional development action plan. A training needs analysis is in place for all researchers enabling them to identify their specific professional development needs and to tailor their training plan accordingly. Now that we have the needed monitoring in place, the new HR Excellence in Research plan focuses on recognising and rewarding good practice from line managers.

Principles 3 & 4: Support and Career Development

- *Researcher Development Activities:* The activities of various groups that provide support for researchers (The Researcher Development Programme (RDP), Staff Development and Department of Higher Education) have been reviewed, and a new central website has been created to improve visibility of all available activities. All are mapped against the Researcher Development Framework (RDF), which is used as a basis for the professional development action plans (described above). The number of workshops delivered specifically for ECRs has increased by 258% (229 events) over this four year period, with a 363% increase in up take (805 people attending all workshops) compared to the previous 4 years.
- *Business Facing Skills:* The University of Surrey is known for its close links with industry and has a unique infrastructure that helps to facilitate the development of business skills and the understanding of employer perspectives. This includes an 'Entrepreneur in Residence' and Associate Dean for Entrepreneurship and Innovation who, together with the RDP, have created an Employers Connections Network. This network offers a suite of opportunities for researchers including workshops, networking events, job shadowing opportunities and short placements. The network currently consists of 95 people from a range of businesses who are interested in interacting with, mentoring and/or working with Surrey researchers.
- *Mentoring:* Several specific mentoring schemes have been introduced for researchers at various levels of their careers. Mentoring relationships have been set up with members of our Executive Board for Academic Heads of Department who have attended the recent Leadership Programme and a mentoring programme for female academics taking part in a women's leadership programme is being piloted. Furthermore, another mentoring scheme has been created targeting researchers at the very earliest level, in their final year of a taught programme, prior to starting a research degree. This programme pairing potential researchers with current PGRs aims to smooth the transition into research. Further schemes for ECRs and employer mentoring are in place. The University of Surrey was nationally recognised for the quality of its mentoring support for ECRs with a Times Higher Award shortlisting in 2015 for Excellence in support of Early Career Researchers.

Principle 5: Researchers' responsibilities

- *Embedding the Concordat to Support Research Integrity:* Since its release; the principles of the Concordat for Research Integrity have been embedded into compulsory training for PGRs and new supervisors. Refreshed ethics materials, website and training are provided, offering clearer guidance for researchers on the University's ethical standards which potentially apply to their academic activities.
- *Raising Awareness of Impact:* The University is focused on ensuring that future research active staff and academics are equipped with the skills to produce impactful research/outcomes. The Public Engagement Forum encourages the sharing of ideas for researchers to achieve impact supported by the RDP workshop, Aiming for Impact in Research and the online course "23 things for research" Both of these activities are specifically designed for researchers.

Principle 6: Equality and diversity

- *Embedding Equality and Diversity:* Equality & Diversity plans have been embedded within the University Strategy and HR Strategy and an in-house Equality Analysis package to investigate the impact of research practices and policies on staff groups is a compulsory part of policy approvals. Furthermore, all new staff are invited to undertake an on-line Equality & Diversity course as part of their induction, the uptake of which is monitored.
- *Actively pursuing Athena Swann Awards:* Surrey achieved an Athena SWAN University Bronze Award in November 2012, 4 Departmental Bronze Awards in 2014 and a Juno Practitioner Award and is actively working with Departments on further Athena SWAN Departmental Award submissions.

Principle 7: Implementation and Review

- *Refreshing the oversight of HR Excellence in Research in line within a changing University:* the HR Excellence in Research Committee met quarterly to review the action plan and identify and share good practice across the Faculties within the University of Surrey. The revised HR Excellence in Research Committee has continued to meet and receive updates from various stakeholder groups.
- *Valuing the feedback of ECRs:* the University has participated in CROS, PRES and PIRLS during 2011, 2013 and 2015 to identify areas requiring further support in the career development of researchers. Alongside feedback received through the ECR Representatives Committee, the results are helping to develop future plans. The University also continues to support Vitae and engage in member's events and good practice.

Next steps and the focus of the strategy for the next four years, including success measures. (2016-2020)

A major strand of the research strategy seeks to improve the research culture and infrastructure at the University, ensuring the research environment is inclusive and supportive. A focus area for this strand is to look at the University wide support structure for PGRS and ECRs, evaluating the needs of researchers as they progress throughout their career ensuring all researchers have access to continued support that is tailored to their needs.

The future HR Excellence in Research action plan will be embedded within the University; complementing the Research Strategy objectives and aligning with the development of a Graduate School. As a result the plan focuses on two key outcomes:

- 1) Employability and Professional Development support for ECRs.
- 2) Ensuring ECRs have an identity at the University of Surrey.

Prioritised actions to take place within 2 years include; Identity and Recognition (principles 1 & 2)

- Define "ECR" at the University and where researchers sit within university structures;
- Increase the profile of existing ECR groups by including them in the University's research governance structure and a sub-structure of the decision making research committees;
- Develop an engagement and interaction plan to improve interaction with the ECR community.

Employability and Professional Development (principles 3&4)

- Develop an ECR employability implementation plan.
- Start implementation of plan and begin periodic evaluation.

These priorities are articulated in the accompanying HR Excellence in Research Action Plan 2016-2020, alongside other actions that will ensure the Concordat principles are underpinning the activities to support the ECR community across the University of Surrey.

Success Measures

- Staff survey/PIRLS/CROS 25% increase in uptake of surveys
- Qualitative feedback through ECR Reps Committee, focus groups and workshop participants
- Attendance at events/workshops with accompanying feedback forms - 20% increase in ECR engagement.