

EC HR Excellence in Research Award: six-year evaluation University of Cambridge: progress against published Concordat action plan (2014-2016) and strategy (2016-18)

In his address to the University on the 1st October, 2016, the Vice Chancellor, Sir Leszek Borysiewicz stated that “Our postdoctoral community is the engine that powers our research capacity” and that “providing better conditions has been a particular focus”. In recognising that the University’s postdocs are among its greatest assets, the University aims to encourage personal and career development for all. The Office of Postdoctoral Affairs (OPdA) has published a Progress Review outlining its achievements since its inception in 2013 in further support of the University’s commitment to its early career researchers (see http://www.opda.cam.ac.uk/aboutus/progress_review). Further information about the University’s structures and governance may be found at www.cam.ac.uk/about-the-university/how-the-university-and-colleges-work and a list of acronyms used is appended to this document (Appendix 3).

How did we undertake our internal review? (Including how researchers’ views were taken into account during the review and, where relevant, how the review linked to existing QA and other implementation/monitoring mechanisms)

Senior staff from all the departments referenced in our Progress Report/Action Plan provided updates on developments during the past two years and gave outlines of future work and strategic directions. The 2015 responses from postdocs to the Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS) were examined and utilised. Data from internal surveys and focus groups were reviewed for evidence of impact and needs. Working drafts were reviewed by support providers¹ and representatives of the postdoctoral staff community. A full draft was sent to several senior members of the most relevant University Committees, including Human Resources (HR) and to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Institutional and International Affairs – PVCI – who chairs the HR committee.

Since our last review, postdocs have increasing opportunities within the University to contribute to its strategies for addressing and improving researcher development and career planning. Postdoctoral research staff are on more University and departmental committees than ever before, and the departmental committee network represents over 84% of the postdoc community in Cambridge (www.pdoc.cam.ac.uk/dpccn). In addition, there has been input from both the Postdocs of Cambridge Society (PdOC) and DPCCN which identified 13 ‘Postdoc Needs’ in 2014 based on their evaluation of the Concordat – see appendix 4. Most recently, and after a review of the University’s 2014 Progress Report to Vitae, the DPCCN in 2016 identified a fourteenth need based on well-being. In addition, a focus group session was organised by the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs (OPdA) and attended by the Chair and Secretary of PdOC; the Chair and Vice-Chair of the DPCCN; a convenor of the Postdoctoral Researcher Forum; Researcher Developer consultants; and a member from the Equality and Diversity section. The 2014 Progress Report was discussed in detail and the postdoctoral representatives identified a list of needs collated from feedback from a range of other committees and meetings.

Key achievements and progress against strategy set out in the University’s original action plan and two-year review 2014-16

Embedding Concordat principles in policy and in practice: Concordat Principles 1, 2 - Recruitment, selection, retention and recognition of researchers

The continued development and improvement of online research staff pages, which contain information for all staff and toolkits for managers and administrators, introduction of dedicated induction pages, the further expansion of the returning carers scheme, the emerging people strategy plans, and a central working group to develop a professional approach to the recruitment of academic and research staff. For postdocs there is now a mandatory and dedicated induction programme (Getting Connected) run eight times a year. New training has also been introduced on ‘implicit’ or ‘unconscious’ bias with substantial uptake. Respondents commented extremely favourably about the ‘Returning Carers’ Scheme’ (RCS), reviewed in 2015, and 76% of applications were from research staff, www.hr.admin.cam.ac.uk/policies-procedures/returning-carers-scheme). Since June, 2015, the Scheme has operated on a more regular cycle and has been extended to include reduced working hours.

The development of The North-West Cambridge (NWC) project including a new and permanent 600 sq mtr purpose built Postdoc Centre, opening in the Autumn of 2017, is a significant development for the retention and support of our postdoctoral staff. It will provide direct access not only to the existing postdocs in the University but more immediately (in terms of proximity) to residents (including their families) in the initial 700 key worker NWC units (targeted at postdoctoral researchers at a subsidised rent), the current 206 units already at West Cambridge, and the anticipated further 800 subsidised residential NWC units to be built in the second phase.

¹ The Researcher Development Programme (RDP), the Careers Service, DPCCN, PdOC Society, Human Resources, Researcher Development Executive, OPdA

Concordat Principles 3, 4, 5 - career and professional development:

In the past two years, the Careers Service has seen a 100% increase in its uptake of services from postdocs (over 3,000 of the 4,000 community have registered) and it is actively recruiting an additional staff member to support this need. The Careers Service destination data show that an academic career is still the primary choice for most postdocs and barriers exist for them to secure personal funding. Extending awareness of fellowship opportunities is a key action for the service in 2017. For those who are looking to transition away from academia, there are a number of challenges among them finding relevant work experience. From 2016-2018, the University will expand a small pilot scheme with the OPdA giving postdocs the opportunity to spend time working in a different environment (paid internships).

The establishment of the OPdA and its achievements have transformed the life of postdocs in an unexpectedly positive and exciting way. As well as promoting and supporting academic and personal development, there is an increasing sense of community. Importantly, this further encourages research collaborations, benefiting the experiences and development of many of our early career researchers. This major support of postdocs by the University, and delivered through the OPdA, is also now recognised nationally including through dialogues with other universities e.g. Researchers14², funders and internationally (as outlined in the action plan).

There is evident demand from postdocs for clear, welcoming and interesting information and discussion, and significant progress has been made over the last two years to provide more targeted communications. The OPdA launched its website (www.opda.cam.ac.uk) in 2015 to provide a range of resources, promote opportunities for postdocs, and link with PdOC and EPOC. The OPdA also was instrumental in the establishment of the DPCCN which now covers over 84% of the University's postdocs. The OPdA, PdOC and newly formed EPOC also send out regular newsletters and have growing social media followings. Further development is planned for 2017, including revamping the OPdA website to better serve postdocs as a user-friendly, central repository signposting all the services available to them from around the University, including progression pathways. The Careers Service is also upgrading its website to provide more targeted postdoc provision and the RDP is following suit. There is real and ongoing motivation to ensure that the services on offer are easily identifiable, accessible and all-embracing.

The University's focus has shifted slightly from Staff Review and Development (SRD) processes to development. SRD processes have improved, are highly visible and are on-line, with a review due during 2017. Researcher development has been a key priority, especially since the Researcher Development Executive commissioned a review in 2014-15 analysing the distribution of career development activities to ensure that a broad set of researcher attributes was effectively supported. It subsequently has championed an attributes-based approach that draws heavily on the Researcher Development Framework and its planning tool. The Researcher Development Committee (formed in 2012-2013 and referred to in our last submission) originally had two postdoc representatives but in 2016 this was doubled to four postdoctoral researchers now.

Commitment to improve recruitment and employment experience for all: Concordat Principle 6 - diversity and equality

Policy work on gender was overseen in 2015-16 by the Gender Equality Working Group (GEWG and now called the Gender Equality Strategy Group, GESG). Over the year, GESG has addressed issues for parents and carers, equal and gender pay, analysing academic progression rates for women and consultation towards the University's forthcoming Equality and Diversity Strategy (2017). Athena SWAN awards progressed well with all STEM departments having submitted their applications by mid-2015-16. With the expansion of the scheme to include arts, humanities, social sciences, business and law (AHSSBL) in May 2015, the University focused its attention in this current year on engaging those disciplines and it is expected that the first AHSSBL departments will apply for awards in April 2017. The OPdA also successfully obtained agreement from the University's HR Committee to increase, from 2017, the minimum starting salary for a postdoc to be more in line with other Russell Group universities.

The DPCCN's introduction of the 'fourteenth need' of well-being is significant. The University not only has a strong and positive attitude to addressing this need for all staff (hence the annual Festival of Well-being programme) but momentum is gaining for further developments. The University established a Health and Well-being Working Group, of which the Director of the OPdA is a member, which will report to the HR Committee in 2017.

Active engagement in developing, learning from and sharing best practice: Concordat Principle 7 - regular and collective review of progress Members of University staff have made active contributions to a range of regional, national and international networks including, for example, Vitae's regional hub, Research Staff Advisory Group and Impact and Evaluation Group, as well as the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) research staff task group. The OPdA is a registered Euraxess partner.

² Researchers14 are a grass roots group of professional support staff in 13 Russell Group universities who are actively engaged in working with and supporting early career researchers. All members are the operational lead for the Concordat and "HR excellence in research" at their institutions. A list of the universities is provided in Appendix 5.

The OPdA together with Imperial College was instrumental in establishing a new network entitled Researchers14 comprising 13 Russell Group universities and representing 65% of the postdoctoral community. It is strategic, global, collaborative and is engaging actively with many research funders (including Research Councils) who share similar values in striving to improve support for early career researchers.

The OPdA spent a portion of 2016 developing relationships with and enlisting 11 partners for a European Collaboration Project (six industrial/enterprise partners and five Higher Education Institutions to date) which will develop structured career enhancement support for postdocs and enable them to potentially contribute to different sectors beyond the domain of academia. The project will begin in early 2017.

Next steps and focus for future strategy for the next two years, including success measures

Significant progress has been made in strategic and operational support for researcher career development and monitoring methods are in place. Working groups on pay and promotion, health and well-being as well as growth around mentoring, coaching and internships reflect both the commitment and diversity that the University is evidencing in its push to improve the postdoctoral experience at Cambridge – an experience that is positively valued (CROS 2013, 2015) and consistently through staff surveys. There has been substantial strategic and operational activity around postdoctoral career development involving the Researcher Development Programme (RDP), Careers Service and the establishment of the OPdA itself, since the OPdA now is increasingly recognised by other universities as a model to emulate.

Recognition plays a vital role in careers and the University recently established a working group under its emerging People Strategy. The working group is looking at Academic Career Pathways, and a planned exercise will occur during 2017 looking at Senior Academic Promotion (SAP). This is leading to a review of promotion criteria for research and teaching-only positions. The new Equality and Diversity strategy 2016-2021 will be published during 2017, www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/2016-17/weekly/6445/EqualityandDiversitySAP.pdf and includes wide-reaching staff consultations, surveys and experience of the sector; increasing Athena Swan participation and a focus on best practice sharing.

Momentum continues in the University in seeking evidence of progress and identifying measures for future goals. Researchers14 continues to share best practice for early career researchers by holding two-day meetings three times per annum. The development of Quality Management Plans (to be assessed in April 2017) overseen by the RDX, and requiring approval by the RDX project co-ordinator before funds are released, will ensure sound quality management systems are built into professional development. The inclusion of the arts, humanities and social sciences under the Athena SWAN umbrella means that within the next few years, all departments (which are large enough) will have submitted applications and/or will be accredited (beginning in 2017).

National changes that will affect the UK HE sector include the introduction of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and Brexit. The UK Government is currently bringing HE reforms through the UK parliament which are likely to make the TEF a requirement for HEIs. The TEF is likely to put pressure on institutions to put more weight on teaching ability when they recruit and promote academics. The Careers Service is currently monitoring the potential increase in teaching experience required in the UK academic job market, and it is working closely with postdocs to explain how to access teaching experience and then how the postdocs can clearly demonstrate their experience relevant to teaching in their applications. The University has established a virtual Cambridge Centre for Teaching and Learning (www.cctl.cam.ac.uk/) which supports these aims. The potential loss of EU funding and the automatic right for EEA researchers to work in the UK is a huge concern to UK HEIs.

Appendix 2 outlines key targets for future strategy and includes full details of future deliverables but highlights include:

- supporting promotion and enhancing signposting
- increased number of Careers Service support staff
- additional departmental membership of the DPCCN
- expanding access to entrepreneurial opportunities
- launch of the Centre for Teaching and Learning
- increased opportunities for teaching accreditation
- expanding and developing mentoring programmes
- expanding and developing the internship scheme for postdocs
- embedding the new E&D strategy
- development of programme to develop better capture of destination data.