

HR Excellence in Research Award: 4-year self-assessment November 2017

Glyndwr University was established in July 2008 following the award of University Title to its predecessor the North East Wales Institute of Higher Education (which was itself established in 1973). The University has its main location in Wrexham (north east Wales, UK), with additional sites in Northop, St Asaph and Broughton (all in north east Wales). In 2015/16, the most recent year for which published data are available, the University had 6,000 student enrolments. There are approximately 200 academic staff, and more than 100 postgraduate research students (PhD, MPhil, Professional Doctorate). The University's commitment to the *Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers* underpins the engagement with and the support offered and provided to all researchers: staff and students. The Concordat Action Plan is particularly concerned with staff development. The University's Research Committee (which reports to Academic Board) has a formal responsibility for overseeing the University's implementation of the Concordat. University staff driving the implementation of the Concordat are the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research, the Researcher Development Tutor, the Head of Research Services and the HR Business Partner for Development and Diversity; these colleagues work in liaison with the Heads of the three University Research Centres.

1. How this evaluation was undertaken

The Research Committee's membership includes research leaders, contract research staff and a postgraduate research student representative. The Research Committee considers and recommends to Academic Board a revised Strategy for Implementation of the Concordat every three years, and monitors progress in delivering the strategy through reports against an Action Plan which is normally updated annually. During the preparation of this self-assessment the Committee recommended a revised Strategy for Implementation of the Concordat to Academic Board in May 2017. In October 2017 members considered results from staff and student surveys undertaken in June 2017, and the Progress Report on Implementation of the Concordat, and then agreed an updated Action Plan for the period 2017 to 2019.

The University is committed to consulting with academic staff and research students to ensure that its support for research engagement, and professional and personal development, is appropriate and accessible. The University is not currently taking part in HEA sector-wide surveys but instead is making its own arrangements, with the aim of increasing response rates. Two online surveys were run in June 2017 (with PGR students, and academic staff). The structure of the surveys is designed to enable comparisons with aggregate results of the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) and the Principal Investigators and Research Leaders Survey (PIRLS). No separate survey of contract research staff has been undertaken in 2017 because we have only one such member of staff at the moment. Both sets of results have contributed to the development of the 2017/18 Research Development Programme, and the staff survey has also made a significant contribution to the preparation of the new Concordat Action Plan.

Inter-professional meetings take place periodically between Heads of University Research Centres, the Researcher Development Tutor and the Head of Research Services, and other professional colleagues depending on topics to be discussed. While these colleagues are all members of the Research Committee, these meetings enable more detailed discussion of practical policy

implementation topics including researcher development issues. Scheduling has proved difficult in 2016/17 and there was only one meeting including URC Heads, in May 2017, for detailed discussion of research capacity in different disciplines and potential approaches to supporting staff at earlier stages of research careers.

Meeting of professional services colleagues also take place, involving the Researcher Development Tutor and the Head of Research Services with Registry and HR colleagues, to consider practical issues around implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan.

The current Strategy and Action Plan have been informed by a Gap Analysis undertaken in June 2016, and review of the 2017 Vitae report "Five Steps Forward: Progress in implementing the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers 2008-2017" has also been helpful.

2. Achievements and Progress against Strategy and original Action Plan

The 2013 Strategy and Action Plan are taken as the baseline for this self-assessment.

The University's HR Excellence in Research Award 2-year self-assessment had indicated that the University had experienced a financial crisis which became apparent in 2013 prompting subsequent academic and operational restructuring, with the consequence that the original Action Plan had not been implemented in 2013/14 and implemented only partially in 2014/15. In 2015/16, review of the University's arrangements for supporting postgraduate research led to the appointment of a Researcher Development Tutor (0.4fte) who took up the post in April 2016 (together with an 0.5fte Graduate Development Officer). Towards the end of 2016 the University appointed a Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research. These appointments enabled substantial progress to be made with regard to provision for personal, professional and career development for researchers (staff and students) at all stages in their careers, and the achievements and progress reported here largely follow on from those appointments.

The University has introduced a Work Allocation Model for academic staff, which enables more explicit agreement on the nature and extent of research activity expected of individual staff. This is now being complemented by a consistent format for the development of Personal Research Plans (PRPs). From March/April 2018, PRPs will enable focussed reflection of developmental needs and ambitions in the annual Performance Development Review process. [*related to principles 2, 4 and 5*]

The 2017 academic staff survey provided an opportunity for staff at earlier stages of their research careers to ask to be contacted for advice and support, and several colleagues did take that opportunity. The Researcher Development Tutor has responded to those individuals; this has led to some staff being assigned to a research mentor. The survey asked staff about their aspirations and experiences in relation to research, and about areas in which they would most value training and development. 75 colleagues responded, a response rate of approximately 38%. Two areas for further development came across strongly: ensuring that individuals feel that they are part of the University's research community, and ensuring that the University can assist individuals in external engagement. [*principle 2*]

In relation to exploring the potential for gaining the Athena Swan Charter, a positive and supportive link with the University of Chester has been established, but recognising that this will be a longer term objective. [*principle 6*]

More substantive progress has been made in establishing a researcher mentoring scheme, which was approved by Academic Board in January 2017. Two colleagues are available to train mentors,

and 5 initial mentors have been trained in 2016/17. A pilot programme is running in 2017/18 with evaluation in 2018; it is anticipated that the scheme will be extended in 2018/19. [*principles 3, 4*]

A Graduate Teaching Assistant initiative was launched in January 2017, creating an additional pathway to academic careers. A review of training and development requirements was to have been completed by July 2017. The timing of the current three appointments (in Criminology, Psychology and Digital Arts) has delayed that, and the review is to be completed by December 2017. [*principle 4*]

A previous effort (in 2014/15) to assist less experienced staff to develop external collaborations had only very limited impact. A new offer of 'Research Development Awards' has recently been launched, with a greater emphasis on supporting prospective applicants in the preparation of proposals. The closing date for the first round of proposals is in December 2017. The University's membership of the CREST network has proved an asset in facilitating external networking, for postgraduate research students as well as for staff. The annual CREST Summer School is well supported (4 staff and 12 students have attended, to date), and two members of staff are attending a CREST Sandpit event in November 2017. [*principles 3, 7*]

A new initiative - the 'Open House for Research' events series - to encourage and facilitate internal networking was launched in 2016/17 and has proved to be very successful, well supported by staff and students. In 2016/17, average attendance at each of the three events was 20 people (staff, students, and individuals falling into both categories). Open House provides an informal setting for staff and students to give short talks about their research – whether plans, activities, or outcomes, and the series is being continued in 2017/18. [*principles 2, 5*]

Although not included in the current Action Plan, the University will indirectly be addressing one of the recommendations in "Five Steps Forward" - Institutions should consider how they can recognise more fully the wide range of contributions made by researchers in areas related to or outside their research areas – through its emerging strategic focus on Civic Engagement.

Actions which have not yet been successfully addressed and which are carried forward into the current Action Plan are:

- Periodic training of research managers (project leaders and line managers) in employment issues including fixed term contracts; appraisal and provision of guidance re. training opportunities; ensuring colleagues' contributions to policy and practice are recognized [*Principles 2, 4, 5*]
- Ensure that support for researchers and research activity is included in induction for new staff [*Principle 2 1, 3, 5*]
- Develop specific Action Plan to maximise effectiveness of the Vitae RDF as a tool for staff and students, including consideration of its working in parallel with *Simitive* software which charts student CPD engagement [*Principles 3, 5*]

3. Next steps / focus / success measures for next 2 years

The University's strategy for implementing the Concordat has developed over time. Following significant changes in structures and academic profile over recent years, the University's current focus (2017 Strategy v3) is on supporting less experienced staff across the academic Schools to begin and to further develop their engagement in research activity. Priority areas for development are shown below, together with associated Actions, and relevant Concordat principles.

- Training and development for project managers (and any other managers of contract research staff)

- Periodic training of academic staff responsible for research assistants and graduate teaching assistants, to enhance their awareness of employment, career and personal development best practice [*principles 2, 4, 5*]
- Ensuring that staff are aware of their own responsibilities in relation to professional development and career progression
 - Ensure that support for researchers and research activity and the University's expectations of researchers are included in induction for new staff [*principles 1, 3, 5*]
 - Identify training and development requirements for Graduate Teaching Assistants [*principle 4*]
 - Ensure relevant training and development for GTA staff is available and included in annual staff CPD & student programmes for delivery [*principle 4*]
 - Encourage staff to prepare and implement Personal Research Plans (PRP) [*principles 4, 5*]
- Establishing a more structured framework to support individuals in planning training and development and recording achievements
 - Develop specific Action Plan to maximise effectiveness of the Vitae RDF as a tool for staff and students, including consideration of its working in parallel with Simitive software which charts student CPD engagement [*principles 3, 5*]
- Enhancing the effectiveness of induction for new staff
 - Ensure that support for researchers and research activity and the University's expectations of researchers are included in induction for new staff [*principles 1, 3, 5*]
- Establishing a structured mentoring scheme
 - Review and evaluate effectiveness of Mentoring Scheme following pilot in 2017/18 [*principles 3, 4*]
 - Extend Mentoring Scheme (if pilot successful) [*principles 3, 4*]
- Ensuring that staff have access to opportunities for external networking and collaboration
 - Assist staff in developing external networking and collaboration opportunities [*principle 3*]

There are also Actions which, while not noted above as current 'priorities for development', are nevertheless important; inclusion ensures their periodic review:

- Put in place an action plan to work towards applying for Athena SWAN membership [*principle 6*]
- Consult with researchers to gain feedback on implementation of Concordat [*principles 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7*]

The availability of resources continues to be a constraint, and so there is no intention of trying to 'do everything at once' (for example, 'maximise effectiveness of the Vitae RDF as a tool for staff and students, including consideration of its working in parallel with Simitive software which charts student CPD engagement', and gaining the Athena Swan Charter are recognised to be significant initiatives which will take time and step by step planning). Likewise, some developments will prove to be more problematic than others (for example, making 'routine' the process of creating Personal Research Plans and reflecting on those in the Performance Development Review process).

The current Strategy and Action Plan, together with previous strategies, action plans and progress reports, are available at: <https://glynfo.glyndwr.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=41> (Researcher Careers)