

HR Excellence in Research Award: 6-year self-assessment November 2019

Context

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, with additional sites in Northop, St Asaph and Broughton (all in north east Wales). In 2017/18, the most recent year for which published data are available, the University had just under 6,000 student enrolments. There are approximately 175 academic staff, and some 70 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. The University's two Faculty Research Centres are fundamental to implementation of its Research Strategy. The FRCs are led by each Faculty's Associate Dean for Research (one of whom is currently the Researcher Development Tutor), who work closely with 'Research Strand Leads' who act as research champions in their subject areas.

1. How this evaluation was undertaken

The Research Committee's membership includes senior managers, 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. The most recent Research Committee review was undertaken in October 2019; the Progress Report submitted to the Committee forms an Annex to this report.

The content of the Action Plan is influenced by:

- a) Ongoing discussions between the PVC (Research), the Researcher Development Tutor, the Head of Research Services, the HR Business Partner for Development and Diversity and the Associate Dean(s) for Research
- b) Biannual workshop days involving the staff above and the Research Strand Leads
- c) Feedback from Personal Research Plans (which include opportunities to comment on perceived barriers, requirements, etc.) and the annual PDR process
- d) An annual PGR student experience survey

2. Key achievements and progress

A Gap Analysis undertaken in 2016 identified the following as priority areas for development:

1. Training and development for project managers (and any other managers of contract research staff)
2. Ensuring that staff are aware of their own responsibilities in relation to professional development and career progression
3. Establishing a more structured framework to support individuals in planning training and development and recording achievements
4. Enhancing the effectiveness of induction for new staff
5. Establishing a structured mentoring scheme
6. Ensuring that staff have access to opportunities for external networking and collaboration

The Progress Report submitted to the Research Committee in October 2019 indicates positive achievements in some areas, and less progress in others.

Meetings with managers of contract research staff (and Graduate Teaching Assistants) take place at least annually; a discussion is based on a checklist covering employment, career and personal development issues. No specific training has been required following these meetings.

The University employs five Graduate Teaching Assistants at the time of writing. GTAs are PhD students. Their GTA duties are not in themselves research activities, but their dual role is seen as offering an early stage academic career path. The Researcher Development Tutor facilitated meetings with GTAs in 2017/18 the outcome of which was that no specific training requirements were identified. The GTAs now continue to meet informally providing peer support, and are included in all researcher development opportunities.

An expectation that academic staff complete (or update) and submit Personal Research Plans (PRPs) was introduced in 2018/19, with 61% return rate by October 2019. The annual PDR process includes explicit reference to PRPs. PRPs include opportunities to comment on perceived barriers, requirements, etc. as well as a framework for setting out achievements and forward plans.

For PGR students, the University intended to implement *Simitive* software to provide a framework for managing and recording training and development in addition to supervisory interactions. However, this initiative has not been progressed. When initial discussions and developmental objectives for the introduction of *Simitive* began, all students were registered under the University of Wales regulations. However, following the agreement with the University of Chester for them to become our new awarding body in September 2016, whilst PGR student CPD requirements were unaffected, the Annual Monitoring processes for students were complex in comparison to those of the University of Wales and it was not possible to easily align *Simitive* with the requirements of the University of Chester regulations. We are now looking at the SITS postgraduate module instead as a way forward.

Induction for new academic staff has included a session on Research Support and Expectations from 2017/18. 100% of staff attending and responding to the feedback request have reported that they 'feel more confident and informed in relation to research and the expectations upon researchers.' However, not all new academic staff attend Induction (or, all of it); 59% of new academic staff attended in 2018/19.

A structured mentoring scheme was begun in 2017/18 and offered to staff with 5 trained mentors in 2018/19. A review submitted to the Research Committee in October 2018 concluded 'Although we recognise that the mentoring pilot scheme was small scale it has had a number of positive outcomes upon which a foundation has emerged which contributes to the overall research support mechanisms available across the Institution. This has the potential to increase research publications

and enhance individual research profiles', and recommended that a second round of mentor training should take place to enable extending the scheme in 2019/20. However, staffing changes in 2019 have prevented the scheme being extended in the immediate future. Informal mentoring is continuing, but re-establishment of formal scheme will require appropriate resources to become available.

A 'Research Development Awards' scheme was introduced in 2017/18 and is continuing. The main aim of Research Development Awards is to help academic staff to form productive external research collaborations and to generate income from research. Three types of award are available: External Funding; First Collaboration; and Conference Contribution. Four colleagues were supported in 2017/18 and 2018/19; four awards have been approved to date in 2019/20. Every award holder gives a talk about their research at an 'Open House' event. The Open House informal 'research conversation' format continues to be popular, with 15-20 staff and/or students usually attending each session.

The possibility of applying for Athena Swan membership was investigated in 2018 and reviewed again in 2019. On both occasions it was concluded that the University does not currently have appropriate resources for this to be progressed.

There are several mechanisms enabling feedback from researchers regarding the ongoing implementation of the Concordat. The Research Committee's membership includes senior managers, research leaders, contract research staff and a postgraduate research student representative. The University's two Faculty Research Centres are fundamental to implementation of its Research Strategy. The FRCs are led by each Faculty's Associate Dean for Research (one of whom is currently the Researcher Development Tutor), who work closely with 'Research Strand Leads' who act as research champions in their subject areas. One impact of that engagement is work towards identifying clearly defined research themes allowing for more effective collaboration and peer support (within and between departments). The ADRs meet regularly and co-operate extensively to avoid duplication of effort re. researcher development amongst other objectives. Personal Research Plans were introduced in 2018/19, with 61% return rate by October 2019. PRPs are mandatory for PGR supervisors and an expectation for all academic staff; the PDR process includes reference to PRPs. PRPs include opportunities to comment on perceived barriers, requirements, etc. Staff surveys have been superseded by the PRP process. PGR student experience surveys continue annually (supplementing data drawn from Annual Monitoring returns). Response rates are poor, however, and consideration is being given regarding how this might be improved.

In our 4-year HR Excellence in Research Award Review, we noted that, although not included in the formal Action Plan, the University would 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. In October 2019 the University submitted a pathfinder proposal '2025 Movement: Tackling avoidable health inequalities across North Wales' which aims *inter alia* to develop a novel evaluation framework for partnership working.

3. Next steps

During the preparation of this self-assessment the Committee considered the implications of the new Concordat published in 2019, arriving at a consensus on how the University might most effectively respond to ensure that it continues to uphold the Principles set out in the Concordat. A consultation is now in hand seeking the views of academic and academic-related staff regarding the proposed focus of a revised *Strategy for Implementation of the Concordat to Support the Career*

Development of Researchers, which will be submitted to the Research Committee meeting scheduled for February 2020.

Presuming approval of the revised Strategy by the Research Committee and subsequently by Academic Board, The VC will make a public commitment to implement the Concordat Principles. A Gap Analysis will be undertaken which will in turn inform a new Action Plan to be submitted to the Research Committee in May 2020 (to be published following approval along with the Strategy).

The current Strategy and Action Plan, together with previous strategies, action plans and progress reports, are available at: <https://www.glyndwr.ac.uk/en/Research/Ourresearch/>