

## HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH AWARD Four-year evaluation and review: November 2016

Nottingham Trent University (NTU) received the HR Excellence in Research Award from the European Commission in January 2013. A two-year internal review was undertaken in January 2015 and this document now reports on the four-year review of progress on the implementation of our Concordat Action Plan and demonstrates progress made in incorporating and implementing the principles of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers at NTU.

Since the time of the two-year review of the Action Plan much has changed at NTU. Following the arrival of a new Vice-Chancellor in August 2014, a new and ambitious Strategic Plan, 'Creating the University of the Future' was developed and then launched in 2015. The strategy is built around five core themes: Creating Opportunity, Valuing Ideas, Enriching Society, Connecting Globally and Empowering People. The NTU Strategy Board through the Valuing Ideas Board has commissioned a programme of work focussed on research and scholarship, overseen by the University Board of Governors and with the following vision statement:

*'We possess strong relationships and robust processes that enable discovery, drive innovation, and change the world, our students, and ourselves. They promote our disciplinary breadth, our intellectual depth, and our commitment to working across boundaries'.*

The main approaches that we are adopting in order to achieve this ambition are:

- To implement a robust strategy to expand our research excellence and further our capability and capacity to be a valued partner in projects of high commercial and public salience.

*This includes ongoing investment in new academic and professional support positions. A newly established Researcher Development Team, with researcher and research development responsibilities at its core, is now in place and provides active leadership and co-ordination for the further embedding of the principles and culture of the Concordat across NTU.*

- To invest to sustain outstanding scholarship across all of our provision and continue to expand demonstrable ways in which research, scholarship, and innovation underpin our curricula.
- To develop and nurture the next generation of researchers.

*NTU has adopted a distinctive approach to researcher development which spans our entire researcher base from research students through to Distinguished Professors (and includes: Research Assistants, Research Fellows and Senior Research Fellows - these latter three groups of staff are referred to as research staff in this and related documents).*

*NTU is also committed to applying for an institutional Athena SWAN Bronze Award, under the new expanded framework, by 2017-18.*

NTU recognises that the effective development of researchers requires support from senior colleagues and research leaders across the institution. Thus, the job descriptions for the newly created School Associate Deans for Research and all Professoriate have recently been revised and now include the specific requirement to support the career development of NTU research staff and researchers. This undertaking by our experienced senior academics will continue to develop a supportive culture and enhanced research environment for all our Researchers.

These strategically aligned investments evidence our enhanced commitment to further strengthening NTU's commitment and support for the career development of all our research active staff. Our vision is to be a university employer of choice which is fully committed to creating a dynamic, inclusive and supportive research environment where researchers can flourish, develop and sustain their careers. For example, both academic and research staff can access seed corn funding to support the development of research activities aligned with NTU's new emerging strategic research themes.

## How was the review undertaken?

The four-year review process has provided an opportunity to reflect on activities and outcomes since the original plan of 2013, and has built upon the findings and recommended actions following the 2-year internal review of 2015. The current 4-year review was led by members of the University's Concordat Management Group (CMG). This Group is currently comprised of the Senior Pro Vice-Chancellor and Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research (PVCR), the Head of the NTU Doctoral School (Chair), Cross-University representation from our research staff and our senior academic researchers (including those who manage research staff) and representatives from the Centre for Professional Learning and Development (CPLD), Human Resources, and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. Leadership (Chair) of the Concordat Management Group has changed over the four-year period due to staff retirements (Dr. Stephanie Walker, 2015) and reorganisation (Prof. Thom Baguley, 2016) however core membership and representation has been consistent.

From the establishment of the Concordat Management Group in 2012/2013, the approach has been to track and review progress against the action plan at each Concordat Management Group meeting. This has led to identification and discussion of key actions, action plan progress, and identification and enabling of next steps by all members of Concordat Management Group on a regular basis. This approach has ensured that all members of Concordat Management Group have fed into both the two-year and four-year reviews.

The information which has supported this review has been collated and distilled from a wide range of sources including: Concordat Management Group notes and minutes, data from CROS and PIRLS surveys in 2013 and 2015, CPLD activity and resources, relevant and newly developed HR guidance, and outcomes from University-wide Concordat-led briefing sessions.

Activities of Concordat Management Group are reported to the University Research Committee (URC) through its Chair and URC reports directly to the University's Academic Board. All members of the Concordat Management Group report through their peer networks, engaging colleagues in relevant action plan activities and soliciting views and feedback, etc.

## Key achievements and progress against our original action plan

Full details of progress mapped against the reviewed Action Plan (of 2015) are provided in the updated document, which is available to view online:

[https://www4.ntu.ac.uk/research/research\\_at\\_ntu/concordat/action\\_plan/index.html](https://www4.ntu.ac.uk/research/research_at_ntu/concordat/action_plan/index.html).

It should be noted that our progress since 2013 has been achieved during a time of significant change at the institution. Where organisational restructuring, staff changes and recruitment cycles for some relevant leadership roles has curtailed progress against certain objectives, these areas will be addressed in our 2017-2019 plan.

## Progress on Concordat Principles

**Key progress on Principle 1** has seen introduction of open-ended contracts and a limitation in the use of fixed-term contracts. Introduction of a new e-recruitment system for NTU staff and a review of the redeployment policy for researchers has ensured that processes, procedures and systems are in place for our research staff and are fully compliant with the *Concordat*.

The Recruitment and Selection Criteria and the associated Managers Guide, which are published on the NTU *Staffnet* have been updated and are currently being evaluated (see: <https://www.ntu.ac.uk/corporate-hr/policies-procedures/management-guidelines/index.html>; note: select Corporate HR Portal from the index under Recruitment and Selection).

Data from the 2015 CROS<sup>1</sup> evidences that NTU researchers found recruitment and selection processes to be informative, with an improvement since 2013 (2015: 94-100% of respondents indicated they had

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<sup>1</sup> Note that we had an overall response rate of 30% for CROS in 2013, but this was from a total population of 90 researchers. In 2015 the response rate was 33% from 75 researchers (25 respondents).

received good information in terms job description, details of required qualifications, details of specialist and transferable skills and that recruitment processes were fair, compared with 73-79% in 2013).

**Key progress on Principle 2:** Researchers undertake an annual cycle of individual staff review/appraisal<sup>2</sup> meetings with their line manager. Appraisals are now synchronised with the timeline for other staff and include a 6-month interim review meeting. Briefing sessions on participation in the PDCR process were delivered to research staff and their line managers on an annual basis during the Action Plan period.

For the 2016-17 appraisal cycle a bespoke PDCR Form for researchers has been introduced. Data from CROS evidences that 52% of researchers participated in a PDCR meeting during 2013-2015, up from 37% in 2011-2013, but also that 25% of non-participants stated that they had only recently been appointed, with 42% still on probation (where appraisal does take place with HR Team oversight). A significant highlight from CROS 2015 was that 77% of respondents viewed the appraisal process as useful or very useful, up from 43% in 2013.

NTU research staff have also reported that they are well integrated into their departmental, institutional and wider research communities (80%, 80% and 83% respectively in 2015). 71% of CROS respondents in 2015 (up from 26% in 2013) view the institutional induction as useful or very useful, with 65% (31% in 2013) sharing this view of departmental inductions.

**Key progress on Principles 3 and 4:** The Researcher Development Gateway (RDG) at: <https://now.ntu.ac.uk/d2l/home/279569> has been developed and launched (Spring 2015). This is an online developmental tool based on Vitae's Researcher Development Framework. It is regularly reviewed and updated. We also engage with face-to-face delivery of Vitae support, for example the Vitae "Futures" events which were introduced from Term 1 of the 2016-17 academic year.

Developmental opportunities are disseminated to staff through a number of channels: their PDCR meetings, the CPLD web presence, School-based communications, and by cross-NTU emails. Specific reference for research staff to engage with the Researcher Development Gateway during the appraisal process is now embedded into the new researcher-focused appraisal (PDCR) form and guidelines, launched in 2016. Going forward, the recently introduced termly 'Town Hall' meetings with research staff will act as a forum to engage researchers and provide support for individual career development.

Following reorganisation of research leadership at NTU, the process of appointing School Associate Deans for Research (one for each of our 8 academic Schools; 4 appointed to date) is underway. These staff have a clearly articulated task, embedded within their formal role descriptors, of ensuring active coaching, mentoring and development of research staff in Schools, supported by our Professoriate. Our newly established Researcher Development Team will begin to work with Schools to develop a common institutional approach to induction and mentoring, drawing on the new induction resources for researchers and NTU Mentoring Framework.

To complement recent developments in research infrastructure at NTU, annual Schools' Research Planning and Review was introduced in 2014, to provide strategic and institutional oversight and clear lines of accountability. This process involves the development, implementation and review of forward-looking action plans, considering the needs and ambitions for all research active staff at the institution.

**Key progress on Principle 5** includes *Concordat* awareness-raising via Campus-wide briefings during 2012/13, however, attendance at these sessions was 'patchy'. A key outcome and action from CMG discussions was to include '*Concordat* stands' at upcoming School Research Conferences during the Summer/Autumn of 2014. This initiative was initially viewed as working well, however subsequent CROS data (2013, 2015) suggests that promotion of such resources at School Conferences is ineffective as a means of raising awareness, with 48% not having heard of the *Concordat* (an improvement on 2013 results of 59%). Concordat Management Group has been proactive in addressing this and a more targeted approach to engagement has been developed, including bespoke briefing sessions held on a campus-wide basis for both researchers and their line managers, creation of a specific appraisal (PDCR) for researchers and establishment of Town Hall meetings from Oct 2016.

From the CROS survey results, there is evidence which suggests that NTU research staff think positively in terms of how NTU encourages them to engage in personal and career development, with 72% of respondents agreeing that this was the case in 2015 (2013:74%), 88% of respondents (2013: 72%) reported that they took ownership of their own career development, 56% of respondents (2013, 2015)

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<sup>2</sup> Performance, Development and Contribution Review (PDCR) – the NTU appraisal scheme

stated they had a career development plan and 56% confirmed that they maintained a formal record of their Continuing Professional Development activities (2013: 63%).

**Key progress on Principle 6** has comprised largely of undertaking reviews of equality, diversity and inclusion issues and investigating/discussing specific researcher challenges. Whilst these reviews have confirmed that in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion we believe that researchers are not a group that differs from other HEI staff, promoting equality, diversity and inclusion is at the heart of the NTU ethos. In CROS 2015, 91% of survey respondents agreed/strongly agreed that NTU is committed to equality and diversity (2013: 89%).

NTU now has membership of the Athena SWAN Charter and is working towards an institutional Bronze Award in 2017-18. Four members of Concordat Management Group (including the Senior Pro Vice-Chancellor/ Pro Vice-Chancellor, the Research and Researcher Development Manager, Chair) are also members of NTU's Athena SWAN Self-Assessment Team, ensuring a strong voice for research staff in the University's support of the Charter's principles.

**Key progress on Principle 7** is that NTU ensures participation in both CROS and PIRLS (in 2013 and 2015) with the data from these being incredibly useful for identifying areas of strength and weaknesses, and in guiding discussions concerning outstanding and future actions, for example we will raise awareness of all concordats and other related internal and external initiatives through new Town Hall and Focus Group meetings from October 2016. Thus CROS and PIRLS will continue to be utilised as crucial tool to provide regular information and oversight information to support the ongoing action planning at Concordat Management Group.

### **Next Steps: Strategy, Focus and Success for 2017-2019**

The Action Plan for NTU has been updated and this sets out the focus of the strategy for 2017-19, and is available for review:

[https://www4.ntu.ac.uk/research/research\\_at\\_ntu/concordat/action\\_plan/index.html](https://www4.ntu.ac.uk/research/research_at_ntu/concordat/action_plan/index.html)

This updated plan includes some continuing actions from the previous action plan and further actions that will build on the progress achieved to date.

The CMG will continue to monitor progress against our action plan, with a reporting line to our University Research Committee and Academic Board – alongside relevant briefings through other relevant NTU staff channels.

By 2019, through implementation of this Action Plan, we expect to see:

- Submission of NTU institutional level Bronze Athena SWAN award in 2017/18, aiming for recognition in the same academic year.
- Preparation and submission of two Bronze Athena SWAN awards at academic discipline department level by 2019/20.
- Enhanced professional development resources to support researchers and their line managers through creation of a NTU Researcher Development Framework by September 2017, overseen by the NTU Valuing Ideas Programme Board.
- Enhanced support networks for researchers, initially through regular events and Town Hall / Focus Groups campus meetings.
- Recruitment of new School Concordat Champions by December 2017 with allocated workload management time leading to enhanced engagement of Academic Schools with Concordat Management Group activities.
- A widening pool of applicants for research positions at NTU through regular benchmarking of sector remuneration and regular review of NTU's research environment.
- Improved support for research impact development through active partnership development with a range of centres of academic, business, professional and civic excellence.
- Improved data on, and support for, career progression of researchers through specification of an improved HR system by the end of 2017 which will be implemented by 2020.