

HR Excellence in Research
Four-year report
September 2015



1. Introduction

Lancaster University first received the European HR Excellence in Research Award in 2011, with an internal two-year review point of 2013. During the last four years there have been considerable changes to the senior leadership team within the institution with the appointment of a new Vice-Chancellor, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, new Pro-Vice-Chancellors and Deans. Lancaster also has a new [Strategy for 2020](#) with a strong emphasis on enhancing both our research capacity and quality. To deliver this, the strategy makes a strong commitment to the appointment, retention and development of high calibre researchers. Aligned with our overall strategy is a new [People Strategy](#) which recognizes the contribution that all groups of staff make to the institution's success.

2. Internal evaluation process

This self-evaluation was initiated by Lancaster's Concordat Monitoring Group-chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research. This Group is formally a sub-Committee of the University's Research Committee and is the governing body with responsibility for ensuring compliance against our [stated actions](#). A sub-group of the Concordat Monitoring Group was formed by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research to conduct the evaluation and consisted of an Associate Dean for Research; a researcher and member of Lancaster's Research Staff Association Steering Group; an early career academic; an HR Partner; and an Organisational Developer. Oversight and strategic input has been provided by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research. A final draft was considered by the Concordat Monitoring Group (which includes researcher representation) and the HR Leadership Team.

This self-evaluation draws on data collected from a number of sources, both to inform the assessment of progress and the forward action plan:

- CROS and PIRLS surveys (2013 and 2015)
- Lancaster's 2020 University Strategy and associated People Strategy
- Lancaster's staff survey 2014
- Evaluation of researcher training and development
- REF results 2014
- Athena Swan priorities and initiatives within the institution
- Faculty/Departmental strategic and operational plans

Progress specifically in relation to Lancaster's action plan 2013-15 is shown [here](#). Highlights from this, together with advances over the whole of the four year period, are reported below.

3. Key achievements and progress 2011-2015

Principle 1: Recruitment and Selection

A key aim within Lancaster's People Strategy is to attract the best staff, with an important measure of success being to broaden the diversity profile of applicants. All interview panels are required to undertake training designed to ensure equity in recruitment practice. Data from the 2014 Lancaster staff survey showed that 93% of researchers believe the University acts fairly with regard to recruitment regardless of age, disability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, religion or sexual orientation.

Lancaster holds an institutional [Athena SWAN Bronze award](#) and is applying for Silver in 2016. Central to the Athena principles is the attraction and retention of women within STEM subjects and Lancaster actively signals its commitment to fair employment practice, irrespective of status, within the recruitment documentation.

Lancaster observes the good practice described in the 'Named Appointments' [policy](#) and reports annually on the number of appointments made each year. Likewise, monitoring the percentage of research posts not advertised also occurs within HR annually.

An outline Recruitment Strategy was approved by the University Management and Advisory Group in late 2014 and work is underway to further implement the aims and objectives within it. One of the key aims within the strategy is to better harness the networks and collective knowledge that our current staff possess, through the use of search committees. As a result the use of search committees is becoming much more prevalent and a set of guiding principles have been developed to support this activity, in addition to training (on a pilot basis) delivered to a selection of Heads of Departments.

Principle 2: Recognition and Value

A 'root and branch' review of Lancaster's Performance and Development system is due to commence however considerable effort to embed good performance management practice in all departments has taken place over the last four years. For researchers, data from the 2014 Lancaster staff survey bears this out and shows that 89% of researchers have had a PDR in the last 12 months (compared with 83% for the whole organisation) and 94% of researchers reported that clear objectives had been agreed as a part of this (compared with 88 for the whole organisation). 88% of researchers also reported that their manager or Head of Department gives them recognition for work well done, compared with 79% for the institutional average.

Principles 3 and 4: Support and Career Development

Lancaster's 2020 strategy explicitly refers to supporting early-career researchers (ECRs) and nurturing talented researchers. Since our 2-year review in 2013, Lancaster has made considerable advances in the developmental opportunities available to researchers. Building on the 'Successful Researcher' event in 2013/14, Lancaster launched the new Research Development Programme in 2014/15, which we believe to be unique in the sector. The Programme was principally designed to align with both the university's 2020 strategy and the Concordat action plan 2013-2015 and was mapped against the Researcher Development Framework, the overarching aim of which is to enhance research effectiveness. The Programme deliberately brings together early career researchers and established academics into the same learning and development space, with customised and facilitated peer coaching networks which recognised the differences in career stage. The coaching encourages detailed reflection and practical analysis and was complimented by a series of master-class events on specific research topics, delivered by subject experts. A total of 37 researchers participated in the Programme from across all four faculties in the institution. The evaluation shows that the Programme is already changing practice and enhancing research performance. Participants report altering their daily working practices in ways that allow space for research, and describe feeling more confident in relation to bid-writing. A personal insight from a participant can be found [here](#). Further initiatives have been designed in the light of the evaluation and aim to embed the benefits of the learning further. These consist of a writing retreat and peer2peer coaching. An enhanced Programme will run again in 2015/16, taking account of data from CROS and PIRLS 2015 and reflecting new institutional priorities. A strand, particularly tailored for Principal Investigators (PIs), will be a particular feature of the 2015/2016 Research Development Programme.

Mentoring is seen as a key component of professional development for all staff and January 2014 saw the launch of a new, pan-institutional 'mentor-match' scheme with direct support from the senior management team. With both an academic and professional services strand, this scheme allowed a renewed focus on the benefits of mentoring and the sharing of experiences across role types and disciplinary boundaries. Researchers and PIs from across the institution have registered both as mentors and mentees and regular training and supplementary [online resources](#) enable colleagues to engage in meaningful mentoring relationships. A total of 124 matches have been made to date since the launch of this institution-wide scheme which includes research staff and academics from all four of Lancaster's faculties.

In addition to institution-wide initiatives, resources to support conference attendance, research, travel and staff development are available in individual faculties and are available to research staff at all levels. Discipline-specific grants and development opportunities are publicised within faculty newsletters and the University's Early Career Small Grant Scheme is open to all.

Specific events showcasing our commitment to the Athena SWAN agenda are held frequently and enable researchers at all levels to access new insight into topics relevant to career development. Some of these events are specific to individual departments and others are open to all staff, such as Lancaster's [annual Athena SWAN lecture](#) or the biennial '[Making Professor event](#)'. 60 staff from across campus attended the last event in 2014 and the next event is scheduled for the 26 September 2016.

Lancaster has also embarked on a new lectureship scheme to recruit and develop the highest calibre of researchers who have the potential to become the next generation of academic leaders. The [50th Anniversary Lectureship](#) scheme operates over a five year period and is supported by a bespoke Performance and Development Review process and a comprehensive, tailored development programme. The programme provides the opportunity to combine individual development goals with the chance to work with a rich and varied group of colleagues from across the disciplines and includes networking opportunities, mentoring, workshops and coaching. Research staff will also be able to participate in some of these activities, and the approach taken to development will be monitored with a view to extending it to other cohorts.

Principle 5: Researchers' Responsibilities

The creation of a Research Staff Association (RSA) in 2014 reinforces the culture described above where early career and experienced researchers are brought together into the same development space. Sponsored by the Vice-Chancellor, the Association provides a voice for researchers at all levels. Key to the effectiveness of the Lancaster model is the link between the Association and the Organisational Development function. The Organisational Developer with responsibility for researcher development leads the Association's Steering Group and as well as providing a constant link (when researcher contracts may vary), this model allows for the needs of researchers to be known and prioritised within development planning and for linkage to be made between the Association and research governance structures. The Steering Group plans the programme of events for the Association which to date have included 'a conversation with the new PVC Research'; a showcase of university resources relevant to researchers; career development workshops. This distinctive approach taken by Lancaster has been recognised by the UK Research Staff Association and has led to the Organisational Developer being invited to act as Regional Research Staff Association Advisor.

Principle 6: Equality and Diversity

Lancaster's institutional [equality and diversity action plan 2013-16](#) is directly linked to the University 2020 Strategy and is monitored regularly by the Equality and Diversity Committee. Annual reporting to all faculties takes place, and faculties are asked to consider issues such as the diversity profile of their researchers.

Across the institution over the last four years and in order to minimise areas for discrimination, a full [equality analysis procedure](#) has been introduced for all new and revised policies and procedures. New, institution-wide policies have also been introduced which apply to, and benefit, researchers such as [shared parental leave](#) and the [Maternity/Adoption Research Support Fund](#) (MARS).

As well as the institutional Athena SWAN Bronze award, individual departments and Faculties have successfully obtained awards (Silver awards for both Physics and the Faculty of Health and Medicine). The institution's Athena Swan Committee actively promotes and supports individual departments and faculties in obtaining local awards and in the implementation of their specific action plans. Greater integration between the Athena and Concordat action plans enable priorities for researchers to be addressed in multiple ways.

Principle 7: Implementation and Review

The Concordat Monitoring Group, chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research, has oversight of the institutional action plan and researcher representation on this group is a valuable element in our assessment of progress. In addition, initiatives such as the Staff Survey, CROS, PIRLS, the Research Staff Association and

growing researcher representation and involvement in Lancaster’s committee structure, all provide vital feedback mechanisms to Lancaster’s senior team on the extent to which we address the needs of researchers. Lancaster will continue to identify structural mechanisms for enabling dialogue between researchers, PIs and Lancaster’s senior team and further embed the ‘researcher voice’ within the institution’s decision-making fora.

4. Strategy for next four years (2015-2019)

Lancaster was ranked 10th among universities for research environment by the REF 2014. Key to further enhancing our institutional capacity for excellence over the next four years is the adoption of a ‘borderless research culture’ where postgraduate students, post-doctoral researchers, early career and established academics are encouraged to learn and develop together as an integrated and vibrant community. We firmly believe that this will enhance Lancaster’s research environment and underpin our ambitious strategic aspirations. To achieve this, our internal evaluation identified 8 key areas of attention:

	Strategic priority	Key measures of success and impact
1	University governance and researcher involvement	Researcher representation on all relevant university committees
2	Pro-active development of future research leaders by way of actively targeting, coordinating and supporting research fellowship applications	Increased number of fellowship applications
3	Reinforcement of Principal Investigator responsibilities as leaders and managers of research staff	Excellent research leadership is recognized internally (staff survey measure) and externally (reputation and awards)
4	Expansion of mentoring practice across the research community	Increased number of staff mentoring and supporting internal colleagues
5	Greater integration of the Athena Swan agenda and institutional priorities within the Concordat implementation	Aligned priorities across related agendas
6	Increased opportunities for all researchers at Lancaster to learn and develop as a collective, cross-disciplinary community, irrespective of role or seniority	Research development opportunities open to all staff and active participation from all levels of staff
7	Monitor and evaluate the 50 th Anniversary lectureships scheme (and supporting development programme) with a view to extending to other cohorts	Feedback obtained from stakeholders regarding the effectiveness of the scheme and opportunities for extending to other cohorts identified
8	As per the People Strategy, further review and refinement of recruitment practices, specifically to introduce an agreed policy and procedure on the use of fixed-term contracts.	New policy agreed with trade unions and implemented. Widespread understanding of the appropriate use of fixed-term contracts and universal adherence to the policy.

This is our overall strategic intent and the specific actions and success measures for the next two years are detailed in the action plan 2015-2017.