

University of Salford HR Excellence in Research Two Year Self-Assessment and Updated Action Plan

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

This paper reports on progress with Salford's implementation of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers. It focuses on the period since Salford received the European Commission 'HR Excellence in Research' award in September 2010, and outlines progress with aims set out in a 2009 action plan. This initial plan was the result of a consultation with Salford's research staff community, which included the Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS) 2009 and a follow up feedback event with research staff. The resulting action plan set out a number of short-term targets for activities that would help to improve the experience and support of staff on research contracts. The recommendations related to several themes, which mainly related to principles B (recognition and value) and C (support and career development) of the Concordat: mentoring, induction, researcher development, bidding support, conduct on joint authorship, committee representation, and university research culture.¹ These recommendations are summarised in more detail in each section of this report. In prioritising certain areas for improvement, this plan acted as the University's version of a Concordat implementation plan.

While the current report details the progress made over the last two years in these key areas, it also takes into account that the University has undergone significant structural changes since 2010, with new school and college structures replacing faculties, and changes to the ways in which professional services, including research support, are delivered centrally. The future priorities detailed in this two year evaluation take into account these changes and also reflect that many of them are still in the process of being embedded. Where the Concordat implementation and improvements to research staff support were previously driven by a specific working group with members drawn from across the university, responsibility has now been integrated into a central Research and Innovation Division (R&I), which was created in 2011 to improve the way research support for all academic staff is delivered.

1.2 How this evaluation was conducted

This review has been put together in consultation with key contacts in central services, in particular Research and Innovation (R&I), Human Resources Development (HRD) team and Careers and Employability. The views of researchers have been taken into account in two ways: an online survey on research support was conducted by Research and Innovation in July 2012. This was circulated to all academic staff, and received a response rate of 40%.² This provided valuable data on professional development, bidding support, research culture, research processes and communications. In addition, a target group of research staff, drawn from across the University have been asked for their views on current support for research staff, future priorities, and have provided feedback on drafts of this report.

¹ The action plan based on 2009 CROS survey and research staff consultation is available to Salford staff on the R&I intranet: <http://www.ri.salford.ac.uk/resources/uploads/File/Concordat%20Implementation%20Plan%282%29.pdf>

² The survey was open from 20/07/12 to 29/07/12 and was sent to 884 Academics. 252 responses were received, while 260 were "out of office" during this period. The 40% success rate is based on the response rate of those who were not "out of office".

Each section of this report relates to recommendations made in the 2009 action plan. It details relevant changes since that time, outlines progress and then proposes future priorities for the next two years. In integrating future priorities, this report also acts as an updated action plan.

2. Experience of new research staff: induction, mentoring, responsibilities, review

The first set of actions in Salford's Concordat implementation plan centred on the initial support received at the University by research staff. Our consultation with researchers revealed a demand for mentoring, and many were unaware of the University's existing mentoring guidelines. This indicated broader issues around the induction process, and the kind of information provided to new research staff both centrally (from HR and R&I) and locally, by the line manager/Principal Investigator. Since 2010, HRD and R&I have worked to promote existing resources more effectively, making use of the University's redesigned website for effective awareness raising, and have also improved access to induction packages. At the same time, current university-wide initiatives are helping to clarify the roles and responsibilities of research staff and Principal Investigators and formalising the process of professional review.

2.1 Progress since 2010

2.1.1 Induction

The HR Development team have produced an online induction toolkit (2012), which has improved the accessibility and flexibility of the induction programme.³ The toolkit outlines the main introductory sessions for new staff, explaining which are compulsory and which are optional, and provides links to online toolkits and e-Learning modules, which can be completed remotely. All staff with a probationary period continue to be invited to a face-to-face induction in first two weeks of employment.

The Code of Practice on Induction has been revised and is now more easily accessible online. It is highlighted in the induction toolkit. The revised 2012 version takes into account staff who have changed roles within the university.⁴

A dedicated space on the R&I intranet has been created to signpost relevant policies (institutional, national, and international) and good practice guidelines for research staff and Principal Investigators (2010).⁵

2.1.2 Mentoring and Coaching

Mentoring guidelines have been made more visible and accessible on the university website and are also flagged up as part of the induction process.⁶

³ http://www.hr.salford.ac.uk/development/toolkits/l2_detail.php?type=a%20question&l1=33&l2=71&s=development

⁴ Code of Practice available here: <http://www.hr.salford.ac.uk/policies-procedures/?letter=l>

⁵ Available to Salford staff at: <http://www.ri.salford.ac.uk/researchstaff>

⁶ See <http://www.hr.salford.ac.uk/employee-development-section/mentoring>

In addition to mentoring, the University HRD team is in the process of finalising a coaching framework and guidelines with the aim of encouraging a coaching culture, which will offer more task-focused support to staff at all stages of their careers. Following Vitae training, and interest within the PGR community, the University is also running a pilot peer coaching programme for postgraduate researchers, supported by R&I and HRD. This will be run from October 2012, starting with a small group of trained PhD students as coaches, who will be supported in developing their skills by further in-house and external professional development. If the pilot is successful, it could be extended to include research staff (2013).

2.1.3 Review and Responsibilities

A Performance and Development Review (PDR) Process was launched for all staff in 2011. One of the benefits of this process for research staff is the opportunity it presents for formalised conversations about performance and professional development with their line manager/PI (2011).

An ongoing 'Academic Roles' project, led by the PVC (Academic) and HR Development team, has produced a handbook setting out expectations of substantive and non substantive academic roles, including Research Assistant and Research Fellow, and research project management duties as part of Senior Lecturer and Professor roles. This has yet to be finalised and circulated, but the intention is to embed it as part of induction, PDRs and promotion processes.

2.2 Priorities for 2012 – 2014

Action	Concordat Principle(s) aligned to ⁷	Responsibility
Market induction toolkit and online resources for new staff to line managers and PIs with induction responsibilities. Ensure that induction and mentoring responsibilities are covered as part of new PI training (see section 3).	B; C	HRD, R&I
Finalise and promote the University's coaching framework and guidance (HRD).	C	HRD
Run pilot peer-to-peer coaching programme for PGRs, and scope potential for expanding this to research staff and early career researchers.	C; D	R&I, HRD
Finalise and circulate the Academic Roles handbook, and get it implemented, for example, by embedding it into induction and PDR processes	A; B; E	HRD

⁷ Full details of the Concordat principles can be found at <http://www.vitae.ac.uk/policy-practice/505451/Key-principles-of-the-Concordat.html> A relates to 'Recruitment and Selection'; B, 'Recognition and Value'; C, 'Support and Career Development'; D, 'Researchers' Responsibilities'; E, 'Diversity and Equality'; F, 'Implementation and Review'.

3. Researcher Development Opportunities

Two themes relating to researcher development emerged from the 2009 consultation. Firstly, there was varying awareness of the personal, professional and career development opportunities already available for research staff. Consequently, the main actions in this area were around improving visibility of existing training opportunities. Secondly, certain issues raised in the 2009 consultation revealed the differing experiences of research staff and suggested the value of some consistent guidelines for PIs, and potentially a new programme of PI Research Leadership.

More recently, the results of the research support survey conducted by R&I in July 2012 reinforced the need for PI training. Just over 80% of the academic respondents said that they would value more post-award training for Principal Investigators (48% said this would be valuable, while 32.2% said it would be very valuable). Several respondents also added comments suggesting a demand for training to help manage and deliver projects, and financial training (and these will be offered in the new academic year 2012/2013). Other areas in which support was requested were writing impact statements, and bid writing sessions featuring successful bidders or members of review panels, which have also been scheduled to this year's training provision.

3.1 Progress since 2010

Researcher development opportunities have been more actively promoted to research staff in the last two years. Research skills training offered through the Salford Postgraduate Research Training (SPoRT) programme has been promoted directly to research staff, with a clearer signposting of the target audience for each session, and alignment with the Researcher Development Framework domains to help research staff identify the training that is most relevant to them.⁸

Similarly, training around bidding and publishing, which was set up to support academic staff on an internal scholarship (the VC's Early Career Research scheme), has been opened up and promoted to research staff.

Research staff also took part in a new programme of intensive Writing Workshops which ran in early 2012. Led by an external facilitator, the five week course took a small cross-disciplinary group of participants (ranging from early career researchers to established professors) from the stage of a draft to a finished paper. The feedback for the course was overwhelmingly positive, with participants reporting improved confidence in writing, and enhanced skills at structuring papers and presenting arguments. The cross disciplinary nature of the group was also valued. Follow-up feedback three months after the course revealed that the majority of participants had submitted their papers to a journal.

A new programme of research supervision training is currently running at college level, delivered by the Academic Development team in HRD, in collaboration with experienced supervisors. In addition, the R&I Division is currently developing an updated training programme for staff to be rolled out in 2012-13, which responds to the needs identified in the recent survey. This will include more impact related training, and PI 'post contract' training to help staff manage research projects, and will draw on HRD's expertise in leadership training.

⁸ See <http://www.pg.salford.ac.uk/page/sport>

3.2 Priorities for 2012-14

Action	Concordat Principle(s) aligned to	Responsibility
Develop PI training with a focus on project management, for delivery in 2012 -13	B; C	R&I and HRD
Continue to promote range of research training opportunities to research staff and develop any additional training according to demand; work more closely with contacts in the schools and College R&I Managers to get research managers/PIs to promote training	C; D	R&I
Embed the Researcher Development Framework more clearly within the university wide training for staff. Develop training webpages that bring together all university training in a single accessible space and maps it against the RDF.	C; D	R&I and HRD
Pilot a 'Broadening Horizons' careers management workshop for Salford Research Staff and other early career researchers in 2013. ⁹	C; D	R&I, Careers & Employability, HRD

4. Bidding Support

The recommendations in the original action plan centred on promoting existing bidding support to PIs and research staff, and alerting research staff to relevant internal support funds, such as the Bidding Support and Bridging Fund. There was also interest in setting up interdisciplinary bid writing groups.

4.1 Progress since 2010

The last two years have seen a number of improvements to the University's bidding support. Following the restructuring of the central research support provision, the University now has a central bidding support team - Research & Innovation Development Team - which was established to provide dedicated support for all academic staff who are seeking external funding for research, enterprise as well as teaching & learning projects. The team provides general and bespoke training on every aspect of the funding process, from identifying appropriate funding opportunities, proposal and budget preparation, liaison with project partners, through to the submission and internal peer review process, and post award advice and guidance. Training is delivered at different levels – on a one to one basis, with research centres, and at school, college and university-wide levels. The recent research support survey has confirmed that 95.5% of the respondents have found the support of the R&I Development team useful, essential or transformative for their research proposals.

The R&I team have redeveloped the bidding website, which now offers a range of information relating to the preparation of bids for external Calls for Proposals, from finding relevant funding opportunities, hints and tips on how to develop successful proposal, to advice on costing & developing budgets. The

⁹ <http://www.vitae.ac.uk/policy-practice/74351/Broadening-horizons.html>

website also contains a repository of information, templates and documents to help researchers with the proposal developmental process.¹⁰

The R&I team has been running training sessions for PhD students and early career researchers for the last three years; this training provision has now been embedded into their annual training programme.¹¹

In order to ensure the quality of research bids, improve the proportion of successful awards and comply with new Research Council requirements on demand management, the University has launched a new internal peer review process for the submission of research bids to the UK Research Councils and the British Academy. This is administered through the R&I Development team.

4.2 Priorities for 2012 – 14

Action	Concordat Principle(s) aligned to	Responsibility
Facilitate a university wide training programme and deliver relevant and bespoke training sessions.	C	R&I, HRD
Improve communication with academic community with respect to promotion of the R&I Development team and its services.	C	R&I
Embed the internal peer review process into the research bidding culture at Salford.	C	R&I
Launch & deliver several new key internal initiatives, including the Impact awards, University-wide sabbatical scheme and the Open Access scheme.	B; C	R&I

5. Policy and representation

Two policy related recommendations to result from the 2009 consultation were: Research Committee representation, and guidance on conduct around authorship. Since 2009, the University's Research Committee, which advises Senate on the development, promotion and performance of research and innovation, has included a member of research staff. The chair is currently in the process of identifying a member of Contract Research Staff to join Research Committee from the start of the next academic session (2012-13).

One of the actions relating to authorship was to research best practice into conventions, and to incorporate recommendations into the University's statement on 'Integrity and Self Regulation in Research'.

¹⁰ Available to Salford staff on the intranet <http://www.ri.salford.ac.uk/biddingsupport>

¹¹ <http://www.pg.salford.ac.uk/page/sport1213#C>

5.1 Progress since 2010

The issue of authorship on joint publications remains a topic of debate across the sector, particularly in relation to research staff and early career researchers. The approaches of other HEIs to this issue seem to vary. While one option is to directly address this issue at the level of institutional policy, in other universities, it is not part of policy and research teams are guided more by journal editorial policy, disciplinary conventions or else use the consortium agreements required for collaborative projects to set out expectations about authorship.¹² The solution may be to incorporate a statement in University policy on conduct¹³ but to focus on training for PIs and Research Staff as the main forum for considering authorship conventions and encouraging expectations be discussed by research teams as early as possible.¹⁴ In the meantime, links to Vitae’s good practice on publication and authorship and have been added to the resources for Research Staff on the University’s research intranet.¹⁵

5.2 Priorities for 2012 -13

Action	Concordat Principle(s) aligned to	Responsibility
R&I to liaise with college ethics panels and Governance Services to update the ‘Statement on Integrity and Self-Regulation in Research’, and publicise it to researchers and research managers. The updated statement will incorporate best practice on authorship conventions and will also take into account <i>The Concordat to Support Research Integrity</i> recently launched by Universities UK. ¹⁶	B; E	R&I; Governance; College Ethics Panels
Incorporate guidance on authorship into new training for PIs	B; C; E	R&I; HRD

6. University Research Community

The 2009 consultation suggested that more could be done to improve the integration of research staff into the research culture of the University as a whole. It was also felt that more attention to research showcase events, and more opportunities for research staff to get involved in them, was a key way of helping to achieve better integration. There was an appetite for finding out more about the research

¹² An email discussion on authorship and joint publications on the JISMAIL list (Research-staff-support) generated contributions from staff at the Universities of Bath, Durham, Manchester, Lancaster, Swansea and Cambridge. Access to archives of the discussions are at: <https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?AO=RESEARCH-STAFF-SUPPORT>

¹³ The University of Bath, for example, incorporates this statement into its Code of Practice for the Employment of Research Staff: “Research staff contribution to publications should receive proportionate recognition. Clearly agreed authorship conventions, and the significance of different types of publication, should be part of the induction process.” http://www.bath.ac.uk/hr/atozhrdocs/Code_of_Practice.pdf

¹⁴ For example, by looking at examples of editorial policy on authorship, guidelines used in particular disciplines, such as the Vancouver guidelines, or making use of resources from the Committee for Publication Ethics (COPE), <http://publicationethics.org/>

¹⁵ Salford staff can access this here: <http://www.ri.salford.ac.uk/page/PIs> Vitae guidance on authorship: <http://www.vitae.ac.uk/policy-practice/324181/Publication-and-authorship.html>

¹⁶ <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/media/news/2012news/Pages/120711.aspx>

going on in other schools and for opportunities to work across disciplines. The use of online technologies to encourage more cross disciplinary interaction was recommended.

6.1 Progress since 2010

A strategic focus on core research themes, a new college structure, and the University’s new facilities at MediaCityUK have all played a role in encouraging more cross-disciplinary working. A number of showcase events in 2011 and 2012 brought together the broad range of disciplines within each of the three colleges, and research staff have played an active role in these. Events included a Health and MediaCityUK showcase day in 2011, College of Science and Technology Research Showcase event, College of Arts and Social Sciences research day, and Senior Leaders’ showcase at MediaCityUK in 2012.

The 2012 survey of Research Support indicated the popularity of the University’s research showcase magazine (RISE) as a means of communicating research news internally and externally, as well as for highlighting central research support available to staff.

New training has focused on the dissemination of research. A pilot programme of academic writing workshops (see section 3) successfully encouraged researchers from different disciplines to work together. A suite of training on the uses of social media for research is now offered annually to postgraduate researchers, research staff and early career researchers. This covers the benefit of social media in enhancing research networks, contributing to online academic communities, and the uses of technologies for collaboration and dissemination. Training is supported by one-to-one assistance for individuals and research teams setting up blogs, provided by Salford’s Learning and Research Technologies Officer (HRD). In 2012-13, research related blogs will be brought together through a new virtual research space, ‘the Hub’, the aim of which is to enhance visibility and provide a flexible space for the development of research ideas and projects.

The creation of several central new internal research support schemes reveals Salford’s commitment to supporting research activity. These include the Research Bidding Support Fund, Impact award, International Conference Fund, Open Access Fund, and a University-wide sabbatical scheme.

New posts within the R&I division, including an Impact Coordinator and a central marketing manager, are focused on enhancing the external communication of Salford’s research, and on demonstrating and the benefits of this research to communities and society.

6.2 Priorities for 2012 – 14

Action	Concordat Principle(s) aligned to	Responsibility
A revised research strategy which is currently in consultation, will provide strategic focus on the organisation of research activity across the university.	A; B; C; D; E	R&I

The development of Salford Impact agenda ¹⁷	C; D	R&I
Launching of 'the Hub', Salford's virtual research space	C; D	HRD

Conclusion

The majority of the recommendations from the University's 2009 action plan have now been realised, while those that have not yet been fully met (PI Training, recommendations on conduct on authorship), are very much in progress, and will be achieved during the next academic year. Many of the future recommendations outlined in this report centre on enhancing the recognition and value, support and career development of research staff (Concordat principles B and C), as these were the primary areas identified both in our previous consultation, and in our 2012 needs analysis. In particular, a key priority in recent and future activity is summarised in principle 3 of the Concordat, to ensure that 'researchers are equipped and supported to be adaptable and flexible in an increasingly diverse, mobile, global research environment'. The development and enhancement of training in leadership, research management, bidding and impact for researchers is a key way of achieving this. Inherent in many of the recommendations outlined here is the role of the researcher to share responsibility for their own professional development and to take advantage of development opportunities (Concordat principle D), but we also recognise from recent consultations that improved communications promoting the services and support available are required to help researchers to proactively engage in their development. While acknowledging the needs of research staff as a distinct group, the priorities outlined in this report can most effectively be actioned by feeding into university-wide strategy to enhance the support for all Salford academic and research staff.

¹⁷ <http://www.salford.ac.uk/research/impact/building-the-picture-of-salford-impact>