

HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH AWARD

Bangor University Eight Year External Evaluation and Review – 2020

1 Introduction – Institutional Context

Bangor University is a research-intensive institution and research is central to the University and an integral part of our teaching across a broad range of disciplines. Research and teaching are closely inter-linked at Bangor University, almost all research academics teach to ensure that our students benefit from the knowledge created by our research. The University has 929 academic staff that sit within Schools in three Colleges: Environmental Sciences and Engineering (3 schools), Human Sciences (5 schools) and Arts, Humanities and Business (6 schools). In terms of academic staff, 517 are research active staff, 187 early career staff (ECRs), 205 contract research staff. The University has 660 post-graduate researchers.

In the last two years Bangor has undertaken further rationalisation and restructuring which has meant that the University has experienced a challenging institutional context during this period. However, it is very pleasing to note that despite this difficult period, considerable progress has been made to achieve the objectives highlighted in the University's last Concordat Action Plan.

2 The Review Process

The evaluation of Bangor University's Concordat Action Plan against the objectives identified in 2018 was overseen by the University's Strategic Concordat Group (SCG). This Group provides strategic leadership regarding the Concordat and is responsible for monitoring the progress of the University's Concordat Action Plan and identifying University-wide initiatives to support researchers and their career development. The membership of the SCG includes: the PVC for Research, Impact and Innovation (Chair), the Director of Research, Impact and Innovation, the Dean of the Doctoral School, HR Director, Deputy Director HR (Development), Athena SWAN and Research Concordat Manager, a UCU representative and the Chair of the Researcher Development and Concordat Group (RDCG) who is also the Dean and Director of Research for the College of the Arts, Humanities and Business. The SCG reports to the University's Research Impact and Innovation Strategy Group (RIISG) and through RIISG to the University Executive. The PVC for Research chairs both the SCG and RIISG thus ensuring that progress towards achieving the aims of the Concordat Action Plan and relevant initiatives to support researchers in the University are reported and discussed at the most senior level.

Key to driving the on-going researcher support and development agenda in the University is the Researcher Development and Concordat Group. This Group is responsible for identifying interventions to support researcher career development in the University, particularly for ECRs. This Group provided feedback and ideas regarding the 2020-22 Concordat Action Plan. Agenda items frequently include discussions relating to: research culture, employment issues and sharing best practice regarding researcher development events in the Colleges. The minutes of this Group are sent to the College Research Committees to ensure that they are aware of discussions and developments in this area. These minutes are also sent to the University HR Task Group. The Group consists of: 6 early career and contract research staff (two representatives from each College), a representative from the Research, Impact and Innovation Office (RIIO), the Doctoral School, HR and the Library and Archives Service. Recently a PGR representative has joined the Group to provide a link between the Group and the PGR community. The Chair of the Group is also a member of the SCG and RIISG. The six early career and contract research staff are the key link between the RDCG and the researchers in the Colleges. The minutes of this Group are also available for staff on the Researcher Development web site. Bangor was an early signatory to the new Concordat and became a signatory in February 2020.

3 How Researchers' views were taken into account

The input of staff is key to the evaluation and development of the University's new Concordat Action Plan and research staff views have been taken into account via a number of avenues that include:

- Undertaking the CROS and PIRLS surveys in 2019.
- The University-wide Staff Survey in 2020 that enabled us to specifically examine research staff opinions and compare results between permanent staff and fixed term staff.
- Discussions within the RDCG who represent the views of ECRs in the three Colleges.
- A 'Concordat Roadshow' session led by the PVC Research and Chair of the RDCG that outlined the aims and the University's commitment to the new Concordat. Research staff ideas regarding the priorities for the next action plan were discussed.
- An ECR Network session was arranged specifically to discuss what early career researchers would like included in the new Action Plan.
- Consultation with Colleges and Schools was undertaken through the RDCG representatives and the Directors of Research at College and School level. Also, all academic staff were sent a copy of this report and the draft action plan so that further ideas and opinions could be shared through the RDCG representatives.
- PGRs were sent a copy of the report and draft action plans and feedback was provided to the RDCG through the PGR representative.

- UCU were also invited to contribute their priorities for the new action plan.

4 Key Achievements and progress against the strategy outlined in the six-year Implementation Plan

The four key objectives in our six-year plan was to:

1. To identify researchers with leadership potential and support their development through the development of a University Research Leadership Programme.
2. Provide support for researchers and research careers through a career development-planning pathway – this will be primarily carried out through the development of the PDR process and further enhancement of the researcher development programme and networking and engagement with the Welsh Crucible. There will be specific actions to support early career researchers.
3. Deliver a mentoring scheme for publications, grant applications and to support career development.
4. Embed the principles of the extended Athena SWAN Charter in the University.

These objectives have been met and considerable progress has been made to ensure support for researchers' professional career development – specific measures of progress in relation to these objectives are noted below and in the Action Plan update. These actions have provided the University with a strong basis from which to further develop and enhance our support for researchers.

5 Progress against the Concordat Principles since the 6-year Review

Principle 1 – Recruitment and Selection

- We are currently undertaking a comprehensive review through the Casualisation Group (a joint HR and UCU group) with the aim of addressing the issues surrounding casualisation and reducing the number of fixed term contract staff in the University. The Group is also examining how best to improve supporting processes (such as end of contract support) for contract research staff and the University's policy regarding fixed-term contracts. To date a draft updated Fixed Term Contract Policy has been developed, improvements to the process e.g. end of contract letter and actions to improve systems to monitor staff on fixed term contracts have been developed to date.
- The University has improved its redeployment process, which gives staff who are approaching the end of a fixed-term contract prior consideration for roles within the University before the role is advertised externally.
- An equality statement has been added to the recruitment and selection pages emphasising the University's commitment to promoting equality and diversity and creating an inclusive working environment.
- A researcher induction session is now held twice a year and all new research staff are invited to attend. A presentation outlining the University's commitment to the Concordat and development opportunities has been developed for the induction.

Principle 2 - Recognition and Value

- In January 2020 the new electronic PDR process was launched to ensure that all researchers receive an effective PDR.
- Fourteen Travel Grants and University Research Support Awards were awarded in 2018 to provide ECRs with additional opportunities to help them develop research capacity and capability.
- A review of the University's promotion policy, process and criteria for senior lectures has been undertaken to ensure greater clarity and transparency in relation to the promotion criteria process. A decision has now been made to expand the review of the promotion process to all academic grades.

Principle 3, 4 and 5 – Career Development, Support and Researchers' Responsibilities

There has been considerable progress in the last two years to improve support for researchers and provide a wide-range of development provision for researchers. Support and training for researchers is delivered by RIIO, the Doctoral School, Library & Archive Services and HR. All the sessions are now advertised (and bookable) on the Researcher Development calendar. The number of sessions offered has significantly increased in recent years, between 2016 and 2018, 14 events were held for researchers and 78 members of staff attended these events. Between 2018 and up to May 2020, 30 workshops have been held and 137 staff have attended these workshops. Sessions that now appear regularly on the schedule include; sessions on funding opportunities, project development and costing research, training on research data management and open access publishing, media training and ECR network sessions. In addition to this;

- 27 sessions have been held during the period in relation to impact with over 600 academic staff attending these sessions, including ECRs.
- The Academic Mentoring Scheme and Senior Academic Mentoring Scheme was launched in September 2019. The Academic Mentoring Scheme currently has 27 mentoring pairs taking part and the in Senior Academic Mentoring scheme has 17 mentoring pairs. In the evaluation of the Scheme 90% of participants noted that they had found it very useful/useful and

94% said they would recommend the scheme to others. 71 staff have registered to participate in the Scheme in 2020/21. Schools are also required to run an Early Career Mentoring Scheme in order to ensure that all staff at the early stages of their career have access to a mentor.

- A Research Leadership Programme has been introduced and three Research Leadership Programmes have been held and a total of 36 staff have attended. 12 staff will start on the fourth Programme in June. Responses to the Programme has been very positive with 71% of attendees noted that their overall opinion of the Programme was excellent. Many staff who have attended these Programmes were ECRs.
- As well as the University-level ECR network, School-level ECR networks have been set up in some Schools (e.g. School of Ocean Sciences and the School of Health Sciences). The Health Sciences ECR network organised an ECR conference in October 2019.
- RIIO have developed a number of training sessions to support staff with grant applications. RIIO have offered the following sessions twice in 2019: Funding opportunities, Developing a Research Proposal, the Cost of your Research and Grant Evaluation and Review.
- A Careers Programme has been developed for researchers that includes sessions to enable staff to reflect on their career development and 2 presentations with external speakers (to discuss careers outside academia) and a presentation about developing academic career. An on-line guide to the RDF has also been developed to support this Programme.
- Welsh speaking staff can also attend sessions provided on annual academic and research skills programme held by the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol.
- KESS 2 and KESS 2 East, ESF funded projects led by Bangor on behalf of the HE sector in Wales, offer funded PhD and Research Masters opportunities, in collaboration with a company partner. There are 510 projects in Wales. KESS 2 and KESS 2 East create opportunities for academics to develop research links outside academia and opportunities for co-supervision. These industrial links frequently lead to larger grants.
- Welsh Crucible: a pan-Wales initiative to support the professional development of future research leaders. It consists of three intensive two-day workshops. There is an annual competitive call for applications and 30 places are awarded. Bangor has been well represented with approx. 5 successful applicants in each year.
- There has been an increase in staff attending the doctoral supervision workshops (Effective Doctoral Supervision and Examining Doctoral Candidates) and since 2018, 120 staff have attended. The impact of the training has been attributed to a reduction in the number of PGR complaints and improved compliance with relevant regulations. To support ECRs new to a doctoral supervisory role, co-supervision of a PhD candidate has been embedded in our PG regulations and allows ECRs to develop effective supervisory skills and experience.

Principle 6 – Equality and Diversity

- This University currently holds a University Athena SWAN Bronze award. Since 2018 three Schools have successfully applied for awards and one School successfully reapplied for an award. Two further Schools have applied in May 2020.
- There has also been greater alignment between the University's Athena SWAN activities and the HR EIR process. There is cross-representation on both committees and the chair of the Strategic Concordat Group is also the chair of the University's Athena SWAN Group.
- A representative for Contract Research Staff has recently been recruited to the University's Athena SWAN group ensuring that this group of staff are also represented in relation to issues around equality and diversity.
- A survey was undertaken to review how best to support women in leadership positions and examine how to develop female staff who aspire to be leaders. The resultant report contains an action plan that has been agreed by the Strategic Equality Group and will be implemented as part of the University's overall aims in relation to leadership development and the Athena SWAN agenda.
- The University is supporting 6 academic staff to attend Advance HE's Aurora Programme in 2020.
- A four-year Strategic Equality Plan (2020-24) has been developed in consultation with staff through a staff survey to all staff and focus groups.
- An online Unconscious Bias workshop has been introduced to all staff in 2020 following a pilot with senior managers. This training is mandatory for all staff.
- Support has been provided for staff who are parents through the Parent to Parent Network. The Network has been particularly useful in supporting staff during the extended period of home-working. A wide range of support and advice in relation to home working has been provided to staff with regular items on the weekly Staff Bulletin.

Principle 7 – Implementation and Review

- The flow of information and communication structure to and from the RDCG has significantly improved and as already noted, the minutes from RDCG meetings are shared with the College Research Committees. They are also available on the Researcher Development website.
- The ECR representatives on the RDCG have set up online forms for researchers to submit feedback.

- Work has been done during the period to further embed the Concordat in the University and ensure that we consult effectively with researchers. In the Colleges adherence to the principles of the Concordat are included in all the Colleges and Schools Research Committees Terms of Reference.
- CROS has run every two years since 2009. The results are reported to RDC Group, Senate and other stakeholders and inform the development of the Concordat Action Plan.
- The results of the University Staff Survey run in 2020 has also informed the development of the next Concordat Action Plan.

6 Next Steps – 2020-2024 Action Plan

In order to further develop the University's support for researchers in light of the new Concordat, the Strategic Concordat Group are committed to ensuring that the new action plan also contributes to enhancing the research environment in the University and meeting the needs of our research staff. Therefore, an overall objective will link the University's future research strategy with the Concordat Action Plan which is;

To continuously work towards creating a dynamic and supportive research environment that encourages the development of researchers at all career stages and enables them to achieve their full potential. We also aim to create a sustainable and vibrant research community that produces world class quality research, with societal impact.

The strategic aim of the next 4 years (and the two-year action plan) is to provide robust and comprehensive support for **all** the University's researchers (but particularly addressing the needs of early career researchers) to encourage the development of an innovative and dynamic research community. In order to do this the key objectives of the Action Plan are:

ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURE

a) **Promote and ensure researcher wellbeing** – Ensure that researchers health and wellbeing are promoted and supported within the University's Health and Wellbeing strategies.

Success Measure: See success indicators Action Plan EC13.

b) **Ensure that researchers' workloads are effectively managed in the University to ensure good work life balance..**

Success Measure: See success indicators Action Plan EC13.

EMPLOYMENT

a) **Improve support and management for fixed term contract staff and ensure that all eligible staff are provided with open ended contracts after 4 years employment**

Success Measure: See success indicators EI6 in the Action Plan.

b) **Standardise induction best practice for all new researchers**

Success Measure: See success indicators EI2 in the Action Plan.

c) **Review the promotion and progression process and criteria to ensure an equitable and transparent system to support researcher career development.**

Success Measure: See success indicators EI3 in the Action Plan.

PROFESSIONAL AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

a) **Developing a comprehensive development provision which will ensure that early career researchers can undertake 10 days professional development.**

Success Measure: See success indicators PCDI1 in the Action Plan.

b) **Ensure that all researchers have a formal opportunity to discuss their career development and objectives through the PDR process**

Success Measure: See success indicators E15 in Action Plan.

c) **Ensure that all research managers have the confidence and skills to effectively and positively lead research staff.**

Success Measure: See success indicators: EC12, EMI, EM4 and EM5 in the Action Plan.