**Cranfield University Researcher Development Concordat – Annual Report to Council 2021**

**Background**

**Transition from HR Excellence in Research to Researcher Development Concordat**

In 2005 the European Commission launched the European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers which set out some principles for good working conditions for researchers.

The Human Resources Strategy for Researchers is the mechanism through which the European Commission (EC) seeks to ensure that concrete steps are put in place by institutions to enhance working conditions for researchers across Europe as set out in the European Charter and Code. The strategy encompasses a 5 step implementation process for gaining EC recognition for commitment to implementation of the European Charter and Code principles. The European Commission recognition is the 'HR Excellence in Research' Award.

Vitae have agreed with the European Commission that, post Brexit, commitment to implementation of the new UK Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers alongside meeting the requirements for research degrees set out in the UK QAA Quality Code is considered as equivalent to implementing the principles of the European Charter and Code.

A UK-specific process that ensures synergy with current UK mechanisms has been developed and is managed by Vitae, following the same five steps and requirements as the standard process for HR Excellence in Research.

**Cranfield University’s position**

The University was proud to have achieved the HR Excellence in Research Award in 2015 and to retain this award at the substantive 4 year review in 2019.

Having become signatories of the revised Researcher Development Concordat in February 2020, we entered a transitionary period during which focus was needed to manage the migration of the previous HR Excellence in Research action plan into a revised plan which aligned with the standards and obligations of the new Researcher Concordat.

This report summarises the University’s ongoing activities and commitment to the HR Excellence in Research Standard and the support and development of research staff it underpins. It is based on a review of the 2019 - 2021 HR Excellence in Research Action Plan. At the same time, the report summarises our progress in line with our obligations under the revised Researcher Development Concordat. It is an obligation of the revised Concordat that an annual report, including progress against the detailed action plan, is produced and shared with our governing body for review.

**Strategic objectives**

The Researcher Concordat, which was revised from an earlier version from 2008, is aspirational and sets out the conditions required to create the very best culture for researchers to thrive in. It focuses primarily on working practices aligned to three defining principles:

* Environment and Culture - excellent research requires a supportive and inclusive research culture.
* Employment – researchers are recruited, employed and managed under conditions that recognise and value their contributions.
* Professional and Career Development – professional and career development are integral to enabling researchers to develop their full potential.

Unlike the previous Concordat and HR Excellence in Research, responsibilities and obligations are set out against four main stakeholder groups; researchers, managers of researchers, institutions and funders.

On becoming signatories to the Concordat, Cranfield University committed to the following strategic objectives:

* Raise the visibility of the Concordat and champion its Principles within our organisation at all levels.
* Identify a senior manager champion and associated group with relevant representation from across the organisation with responsibility for annual review and reporting on progress.
* Ensure researchers are formally represented in developing and monitoring organisational efforts to implement the Concordat Principles.
* Undertake a gap analysis to compare our policies and practices against the Concordat Principles.
* Draw up and publish an action plan within a year of signing the Concordat.
* Set up processes for systematically and regularly gathering the views of researchers we employ, to inform and improve the organisation’s approach to and progress on implementing the Concordat.
* Produce an annual report to our governing body within 12 months of becoming signatories, which includes our strategic objectives, measures of success, implementation plan and progress, which subsequently is publicly available.

**Process for implementing the Concordat**

Responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the Concordat rests with the HR Excellence in Research Working Group which is a formal subcommittee of Research Committee and is chaired by the Director of Research and Innovation. The lead for HR and Secretary to the Committee is the Head of Talent and Development.

A preliminary gap analysis, comparing the requirements for the HR Excellence in Research standard and those set out for the new Concordat, has revealed significant alignment with our existing good practices and our HR Excellence in Research action plan. However, there are several obligations worthy of highlight at this early stage where additional actions and initiatives are likely to be required for example:

* Effective management of workloads.
* Excellent people management is championed throughout the organisation and embedded in our culture.
* Each researcher encouraged to undertake a minimum of 10 days professional development per annum regardless of career stage.
* Availability of secondments.
* Greater use of open-ended employment contracts for researchers.

This has highlighted the need for the development of new actions, some of which we have not been able to achieve fully, but that will be carried forward into the 2021-2023 plan.

**Progress Review**

The updated implementation plan summarises agreed measures of success and is available to be viewed on our website: HREiR Action plan 2019 2021 It details our key achievements against the HREiR actions and measures of success since July 2019 and illustrates alignment to Concordat Principles in brackets.

Particular highlighted achievements from this progress report against our action plan are:

* Enhanced interventions to promote equitable treatment and fairness in the employee experience such as recruitment, promotion and reward including change to policy and practice;
* Disability Confident level 2 achieved;
* Athena Swan Bronze award re-accreditation achieved;
* More open/improved attitude towards flexible working (managers’ confidence has improved);
* Career development support – improved guidance on the promotion process and sessions held at career development events;
* Development of wellbeing strategy, enhanced wellbeing provision and guidance for managers in supporting their staff;
* Progress made towards embedding our values throughout the employee lifecycle;
* Improved feedback from researchers via a much more extensive and sector wide survey (CEDARS) and twice yearly university wide pulse surveys enabling us to regularly review the quality of the research environment;
* Introduction of a new researcher development programme, initially for research fellows; and
* Introduction of the 75th Anniversary Fellowship scheme.

Issues to be addressed during the next year, and included in the new actions:

* Raising awareness of the Concordat with researchers and their managers;
* Review of management development to ensure managers are equipped to support a ‘gold standard’ research environment;
* Amount of time researchers allocate /are able to dedicate to personal development and how best to monitor this; and
* Continued improvement required in the way we track and measure our progress against ambitions in the action plan.

**Changes impacting HREiR progress since July 2019**

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted both individual and University priorities and has inevitably delayed progress in some of the areas we planned to address. Examples of this include: the inability to easily run planned awareness events and face-to-face development workshops for staff; additional time required to redesign events to be delivered virtually; the cessation of online mandatory training; the impact of furloughing staff, additional workload and the requirement to take a flexible approach to some of the aims and objectives in place.