

Cranfield University HR Excellence in Research Award March 2015

Background

Cranfield University is a wholly post-graduate and research University and has pioneered the development of education programmes that enhance the careers of professional learners and the businesses sponsoring them. As the largest UK provider of Masters-level graduates in engineering with a flagship MBA and extensive customised Executive Education and Professional Development programmes, Cranfield's education portfolio is renowned for its relevance to business and government. Research and innovation informs all of our activity – it is part of Cranfield's 'corporate DNA' from research projects for Masters students through doctoral training programmes to researcher-driven programmes in collaboration with other universities and industry partners.

Our specialist expertise combined with excellence in strategic and applied research has enabled us to make significant contributions to the world around us for over 60 years. This is proven in rankings such as the Research Excellence Framework 2014 in which 81% of the research at Cranfield University was judged as world leading or internationally excellent.

Our work informs policy for governments, management best practice and produces new technologies and products for the world of commerce. Global warming, flooding, disease prevention, national security - these are just a few areas in which we strive to apply our research and teaching to real problems.

Our research benefits from the strong synergy that has been developed between the science, engineering and management disciplines. This provides a powerful combination of skills and capability that ensures both industrial relevance and academic rigour.

We focus on excellence in research that is of strategic and practical importance and work with industry in areas where the University's expertise has clear and obvious relevance. We draw on our pool of research to provide our postgraduate students with a distinctive, mature and 'real world' learning environment allowing them to develop as professionals and transfer their new knowledge to the global economy.

Our students also work with our industrial partners to solve real problems giving them experience that is directly relevant to potential employers.

University Staffing levels

Cranfield University employs a total of 1559 staff of which:

- Academic staff = 305
 - Part-time = 23
 - Full-time = 282
- Professorial staff = 93
 - Part-time = 4
 - Full-time = 89
- Research staff = 245
 - Fixed term = 130
 - Permanent = 115

Over the last year 29 fixed term contracts have been renewed for an average of 8 months. 16 fixed term researchers transferred onto permanent contracts after an average of 3.35 years. 87 fixed term

contract researchers have left, of which 50 left at the end of the contract and 26 cited better career prospects as the reason. In the same time span, 28 permanent researchers left and of these 16 cited better career prospects as the reason.

Context of Transformational Change, One University & Cranfield's Corporate Plan

Prior to the new Vice Chancellor and Chief Executive taking up his post in August 2013, the University worked on a fully devolved model whereby Schools worked autonomously and handled most activities for themselves, including the management of all aspects of research and the development of their researchers.

Since February 2014 the University has had a new corporate plan entitled 'One University - shaping our future'. It includes a newly articulated mission statement:

'To be an exclusively postgraduate university that is a global leader for education and transformational research in technology and management'

The Corporate Plan identifies the following 4 areas of strategic priority:

1. To provide a premier learning experience that enhances the capabilities of individuals and their organisations
2. To be recognised for outstanding transformational research that meets the needs of business, government and wider society
3. To grow an efficient, effective and sustainable enterprise
4. To be renowned for our impact and influence – regionally, nationally and internationally.

Our Research and Education Strategies have been developed with delivery of these strategic priorities in mind. They are closely aligned, addressing the quality of inputs made by the university, the impact on our staff and students, and the quality of their outputs across our themes. Currently, our themes are: Leadership and Management, Energy, Environment, Manufacturing, Transport, Aerospace, Defence and Security, and Agri-food; each supported by a Theme Leader who provides strategic direction and thought leadership. Our themes reflect our core strengths; they pull together the breadth of the talent and experience across our University enabling us to work in a truly multidisciplinary way. We are also developing areas that bring together our themes, such as Risk and Resilience.

In order to achieve the performance targets set out in our Corporate Plan the Senior Executive recognised that the University needed to undergo transformational change, introducing a more collaborative approach across the University and a change in the way research, teaching and the support functions underpinning them were organised.

Two of the technical Schools were re-structured to make more sense of their remits, followed closely by a complete transformation in the way central services provide support to the Schools. This has taken the form of all services (including those originally based in Schools) being led by centralised Professional Service Directors with teams embedded within Schools where appropriate. The main purposes of the re-structure were: to provide more effective services with greater consistency across the University; some efficiency gains; and the opportunity to provide services previously not possible. The centralised functions also offer greater development and career progression opportunities for staff working within them.

The lack of a central support function for research and innovation was recognised as part of the Professional Services Review and as a consequence the University committed to establishing a Research & Innovation (R&I) Office in August 2014, headed by a newly appointed PVC Research &

Innovation and run by a Director of Research & Innovation – also a new post. Recruitment for new posts within the R&I Office took place in Jan/Feb 2015 with the Office expected to be fully operational by May 2015.

Research & Innovation

The mission for the Research and Innovation Office is to: **“support researchers in working together to achieve excellence and impact in delivering the University’s vision for research and innovation.”**

Our ambition is to attract the best researchers, who will engage with our projects and wider research community, gaining recognition and promotion within Cranfield University and helping us to build 400 fully active researchers for REF 2020 and beyond.

It facilitates high-quality academic research through leading the development of a research strategy and policy, ensuring compliance with research governance requirements, supporting researchers to access funding and form new collaborations, providing guidance on the management of Doctoral Training Centres, engaging with the development of research information systems and advising on the contracting process. It also oversees key strategic partnerships with both public and private sector corporate clients to maximize their effectiveness and works with a range of stakeholders to identify and bring to fruition new research opportunities.

A Director of Research was appointed within each School in August 2014 to ensure parity of processes enabling research and student support both across the School and across all Schools. The Directors of Research will also feed into the development of research policy and work to develop research strategies for the Schools that flow from the university research strategy.

A Research Committee was set up to drive the research agenda across the whole University. The first meeting was in November 2014. It comprises PVC R&I (Chair), Director of R&I, the School-based Directors of Research, a Researcher/Reader from each School, the Academic Registrar, and research student representatives from each School. It also includes an observer from Information Services.

The principal aims of Research Committee on behalf of Senate are to:

- a. Develop, implement and review the University’s Research Strategy;
- b. Regulate the academic and administrative processes for the management of all research students of the University;
- c. Assure the internal and external comparability of the University’s academic standards relating to programmes of supervised research leading to academic distinctions of the University;
- d. Promote and disseminate good practice in all areas of its responsibility; and
- e. Oversee the University’s preparations for external research peer review exercises.

This Committee agreed that Cranfield University should seek to attain HR Excellence in Research to support the drive for an improved research agenda, including the high quality support and development of researchers. The Committee will drive the implementation of the HR Excellence in Research action plan and will monitor progress over the next 2 years as part of its regular meeting schedule. The HR Excellence in Research Action Group will continue to meet to enable progress and facilitate reviews after 1 and 2 years.

In the spirit of promoting better communication, we have established and published a Research Newsletter. The Research and Innovation team has been appointed with communication and a “can do” attitude in mind.

REF 2014 results

The Research Excellence Framework 2014 (REF) has assessed that 81% of the research at Cranfield University is world leading or internationally excellent. Our submission reflected the areas of outstanding research for Cranfield, reflecting our position as a ‘Top 5’ research institute, based on commercial income.

The University’s research was submitted for REF 2014 in three units of assessment (UoA). Since RAE 2008 we have improved our position in all three of these units, when measured in terms of research power and factoring the size and quality of the University’s submission.

‘Moving towards 400 fully research active staff’ is one of the core goals of the Corporate Plan 2014-19. Part of this goal is to produce a step change in the University’s performance at the REF2020 - where it is clear that the level, and quality of ‘published research’ will remain core to the exercise, and demonstrating the ‘real-world’ impact of our research is also likely to feature more strongly than in REF2014. Supporting and developing our existing academics and researchers to produce high quality research, supervise their students to a high standard and to teach professionally will be crucial; we will therefore strive for performance excellence by providing a clear framework for researcher development and support.

Gap Analysis Process for HR Excellence in Research

It was agreed that Cranfield University should apply for HR Excellence in Research at the Research Committee in November 2014. An ambitious application date was set for March 2014 and a small group was convened to co-ordinate the application (Linda Bryant, Head of L&D and project lead; Dr. Christine Thompson, Director of Research and Innovation Office; Kathleen Campbell-Cave HR Manager (HRM) based in Cranfield Defence and Security at Shrivenham; Dr. Emma Parry, Reader in the School of Management and Alison Price, L&D Consultant based at Shrivenham). The outline project plan was published on the University’s Intranet accessible by all staff and students. Directors of Research/HRMs/R&I Director identified Post Docs/Researchers to run ‘Focused Discussion sessions’ to identify researchers’ perceptions of policy and practice measured against the Concordat. Facilitators were briefed on how to run the sessions for researchers.

Learning & Development invited all 245 researchers to participate and the sessions were set up within each School. A small number of researchers took up this opportunity. The outputs included the facilitator’s perspective as researchers, giving us 9.9% engagement from researchers in total. The outputs from these discussions were fed back to Linda Bryant.

A number of PVC Schools, Directors of Research, Principal Investigators (PIs) and HRMs provided their perspective too. A report from the 2014 Cranfield Employee Engagement Survey specifically identifying researcher responses was also taken into consideration.

All findings were published on the Intranet pages for transparency. A draft action plan and narrative were written by the action group and presented to the Directors of Research meeting on March 10th to discuss and agree before applying for the HR Excellence in Research Award.

Summary findings

Overall the University has a broad range of HR policies and practices already in place to support the personal and career development of researchers as outlined by the UK Concordat. However, reflecting the nature of the University structure prior to August 2014 and the nature of the University's work, there is considerable variation of what is offered between Schools and centrally providing a patchy picture against the Concordat.

Similarly, the perception of researchers themselves about the support available to them varies depending on where they are located and how long they have been in post. There are differing perceptions of the support available for researchers between researchers, research managers/PIs and HR Managers. Therefore the main thrust of Cranfield University's actions will be to raise awareness of the policies and practices, improve the consistency of what is offered and to strengthen the personal and especially career development support available.

In conclusion

Cranfield University has placed HR Excellence in Research at the heart of its ambition to become recognised for outstanding transformational research that meets the needs of business, government and wider society. Only by bringing the best out of existing staff and by being able to recruit high quality new staff will we be able to meet our ambitious target of 400 research active staff by 2019.

We intend to do this by providing a clear and well-communicated performance excellence framework. We recognise that there are improvements that need to be made in our HR processes for Research but our new School and Professional Services Structure will enable us to fill the gaps we have identified by providing common approaches and policies across the University and by promoting better communication, personal and career development for researchers. Accreditation in HR Excellence in Research will send a very strong message to our staff and external stakeholders that we take the careers and development of our researchers very seriously.