

University College London HR Excellence in Research Award

Four-year review report

Introduction

This paper outlines UCL's key achievements and progress over the last four years and describes UCL's broad aims and actions for the next two years.

UCL is one of the world's largest research universities and a leading university in terms of its research, impact and influence. UCL aims to develop its researchers to achieve their potential and to contribute to the wider society, both within the UK and internationally. UCL employs 3619 staff employed on research only contracts and 2661 academic staff. UCL research staff are one of the most numerous and most diverse staff group in the university; the gender split is 50.52% female.

UCL was awarded the HR Excellence in Research Award (HRERA) in 2013. The Award demonstrates our commitment to valuing and supporting UCL researchers and to meeting the requirements of the *UK Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers*. The importance that UCL attaches to this agenda can be seen in the appointment of Professor David Bogle (Pro-Vice-Provost of UCL Doctoral School) to chair the 2017 Research Councils' UK review into the Concordat to Support Researcher Career Development. This is something that will also help inform our own institutional policy while supporting the agenda nationally and internationally.

How this review was undertaken

This evaluation was led through the central UCL Research Staff Consultative Group (RSCG) chaired by Professor Bogle in the Office of the Vice-Provost Research. The RSCG was set up in 2015 to provide governance and monitor the implementation of the HR Excellence in Research Action Plans and to support research staff development at UCL. The RSCG membership includes senior representatives from academic faculties, postdoctoral researchers from different disciplines and a number of Professional Services providers including HR Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, HR Policy and Reward, HR Organisational Development, UCL Careers and Public Engagement Unit. Feedback from the wider postdoctoral community was obtained from the Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS), Principal Investigators and Research Leaders Survey (PIRLS) and the UCL Staff Survey (2015). In addition, Faculty views and evidence were sought through the UCL Vice-Deans Research (VDR).

Involvement of the Postdoctoral Community

Detailed consultation was undertaken by HR Organisational Development with representative groups of postdoctoral research staff from the [UCL researcher-led networks](#). Specifically, we asked for detailed feedback reports on the Action Plan including focus-group meetings with the [Early Career Networks \(ECN\)](#) – researcher-led networks organised through the *UCL Research Domains* (large, cross-disciplinary research communities that span UCL and our partner organisations, fostering interaction and collaboration). This exercise provided a deeper level of understanding of our researchers' needs and their engagement with UCL. As a result of the consultations, regular meetings with the chairs of the ECNs are in place for every six months to ensure the continuous engagement of this important research community.

The ECNs, RSCG and VDR were also asked to provide feedback on priority objectives identified in the 2015-17 action plan and to identify actions for the 2017-19 plan.

Key achievements and progress against UCL's original 2013 and 2015 Action Plans

Considerable progress has been made since the initial HRERA Action Plan. Researcher development is now more coordinated and joined-up across UCL, research staff are recognised as a distinctive group within UCL and their needs addressed from policy to practice. Below is a summary of the key achievements since 2013 against each of the Concordat principles:

- 1. Recognition of the importance of recruiting, selecting and retaining researchers with the highest potential to achieve excellence in research.**
 - *UCL 2034*: Our institutional strategy requires the attraction, recruitment, retention and development of all staff at all career stages;
 - *UCL Research Staff Induction*: The need for a central induction for new researchers was identified to complement local inductions. Following the successful pilot of a centrally provided event in the 2016-17 academic year (130 participants; 85 % rated the feedback as excellent or good), termly events are now scheduled for 2017-18;
 - *UCL Wellbeing Strategy*: Successful launch in Jan 2017 with over 500 participants; 40 Wellbeing Champions appointed across UCL to deliver wellbeing initiatives and support staff;
 - A central fund to cover maternity, shared parental and adoption leave, including researchers, was approved in Nov 2017;
 - Recruitment and selection policy training for recruiting managers has been introduced, and since 2017 we increased provision from one to two workshops per month, (797 UCL staff attended in the 2016-17 academic year).

- 2. Researchers are recognised and valued by their employing organisation as an essential part of their organisation's human resources and a key component of their overall strategy to develop and deliver world-class research.**
 - *UCL Research Staff Development Strategy*: This has been developed and will be presented to UCL's Senior Management Team in November 2017 for sign-off;
 - *Research Staff Consultative Group (RSCG)*: Established to monitor research staff support and implementation of HRERA Action Plans. The group provides a voice for research staff and stakeholders of researchers in shaping UCL policies, practices and researcher support;
 - *Early Career Networks*: Researcher-led networks and part of the Research Domains that span UCL; several networks have been established and enjoy both local and central support.

- 3. Researchers are equipped and supported to be adaptable and flexible in an increasingly diverse, mobile, global research environment.**
 - *UCL Arena Two* teaching provision: Provides training and Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy accreditation for postdoctoral staff involved in teaching. Over the last four years 351 research staff have gained HEA recognition and numbers are growing annually;
 - Collaborative events with other London based institutions: increased number of collaborative *Leadership in Action* programmes with Kings College London and the Institute for Cancer Research (currently three per year);
 - *UCL Grand Challenges*: Encourages cross-disciplinary working and supports researchers through funding new initiatives and collaborations across a whole range of disciplines addressing world-wide challenges. The funding opportunities were launched in 2009.

- 4. The importance of researchers' personal and career development, and lifelong learning, is clearly recognised and promoted at all stages of their career.**
 - *UCL Research Staff Development Programme*: A new centrally-run programme for researchers launched in January 2017. In 2017-18 it offered more than 77 courses with 1,989 available. For 2017-18 130 courses have been confirmed with approximately 3,000 places;

- *UCL Careers*: Offers dedicated support services to research staff, delivering around 1,000 one-to-one support and group workshops/events per year;
- *UCL Research Staff Hub*: A new website launched in January 2017 that aims to bring together all relevant information, policies and resources for researchers at all stages;
- An increased number of leadership programmes for PIs and ECRs, from around 5 programmes in 2013 to 15 dedicated PI leadership programmes in 2017. These are highly regarded by the research staff community (85% rated them as excellent);
- *UCL Academic Career Framework*: A new framework launched in 2017-18 with clear criteria for postdoctoral career progression and guidance for PIs;
- *UCL Researcher Conference*: A biennial, centrally-provided, conference bringing together researchers from across UCL that provides insight into the support and opportunities available at UCL. The theme of the 2017 conference was “Transitions in Careers” and had a 90% turnout, compared to 2015, 70% turnout.

5. Individual researchers share the responsibility for and need to pro-actively engage in their own personal and career development, and lifelong learning.

- *Early Career Networks*: Researcher-run networks, chaired and led by researchers and through which they organise a series of events and seminars at local level. Researchers feel empowered to take ownership of their development and benefit from peer-learning;
- *Early Career Researcher Symposium*: A new researcher-led event scheduled for May 2018 and supported by UCL’s Global Engagement Office and HR Organisational Development, with the aim of celebrating the diversity of researchers and research at UCL;
- *Appraisal Policy*: Change in policy to move from biennial to annual appraisals for all staff. This especially benefits research staff on short-term contracts as it brings them in the appraisal cycle.

6. Diversity and equality must be promoted in all aspects of the recruitment and career management of researchers.

- UCL gained 15 Bronze, 18 Silver and 2 Gold departmental Athena SWAN awards and an Institutional Silver Athena SWAN award. UCL is now the third institution to achieve two Golds and has the second highest number of departmental Silver awards in the UK;
- The Institutional Silver Athena SWAN award has enabled aspects of the Concordat to be more closely linked with departmental SWAN action in particular to improving recruitment practice (training and panel composition); representation of research staff on local committees and focus on career progression for female academics;
- Mandatory unconscious bias training is in place for all new UCL staff and equality and diversity training is promoted across the institution as part of induction.

Outline of our strategy for the next two years (2017-19)

UCL is committed to offering the best opportunities to our research community by attracting, developing and retaining highly-skilled researchers. UCL’s location in the heart of London offers unique access to cultural, academic and business resources, which UCL will use to further enhance career development opportunities for our research staff community. UCL aims to sustain its competitive advantage through interdisciplinary research, innovation and enterprise and strategic partnering across the UK, Europe and globally.

UCL’s vision is that research staff will feel listened to, valued and invested in by the university. They will have easy access to a world-leading suite of development programmes and career advice, which will help prepare them to excel in future academic and non-academic roles. By fulfilling the actions

below, researchers will feel supported, developed and enabled to explore and achieve their aspirations and to develop the knowledge, skills and leadership behaviours to do so, whilst also maintaining their desired work-balance, feel listened to, valued and invested in by the university.

Below, are the broad aims and success measures for the next two years outlined against the Concordat principles. Further details can be found in the 2017-19 Action Plan:

Concordat principle 1 and 2:

- Introduce the *UCL Researcher Development Strategy* to underpin UCL's vision of supporting the multi-faceted roles of researchers and the contribution they bring to UCL;
- Introduce the *Code of Practice for Research Staff* to provide clarity and guidance around the roles and responsibilities of researchers and their PIs;
- Build and retain expertise and skills with UCL by reviewing effectiveness of the redeployment process led by HR and increase the redeployment usage by at least 10%;
- Monitor the impact of the new *Academic Career Framework* to improve researchers' views on the clarity of UCL's promotion criteria and seek a 20% increase on the 2015 Staff Survey outcomes, when only 30% of researchers said UCL's promotion's criteria were clear.

Concordat principle 3:

- Support PIs in progressing the career development of ECRs. Researcher development KPIs will be agreed and reviewed annually through the Faculty Vice-Deans Research;
- Engage and raise PIs awareness of researcher development opportunities by creating a communications campaign targeted at PIs and annually monitor their attendance and participation on researcher development programmes.

Concordat principle 4:

- Increase researchers' satisfaction with the appraisal process to help identify career development opportunities. Aim for 10% improvement on the 2015 Staff Survey where 47% reported that appraisals helped them to identify career development opportunities;
- Develop relationships with industry and other sectors, to provide internships and secondments for ECRs and to provide experience in alternative career routes for research staff. Aim for a 10% engagement increase in employer networking events (140 ECRs attended employer-led events and fora in 2016/17) and a 15% increase in ECR-led public engagement-related projects (against a baseline of 17 ECR-led projects in 2016-17).

Concordat principle 5:

- Central support for Early Career Network events and initiatives to enable stronger links with the UCL Research Domains and other researcher-led networks, to empower and value researcher's talent and expertise;
- Build specialist coaching and mentoring capability and capacity by introducing accredited coaching programmes and mentoring training to research staff and monitor take up annually;
- Increase learning and development provision to meet demand by expanding provision through the RSDP, UCL Careers and Higher Education Academy Fellowships for research staff.

Concordat principle 6 and 7:

- Improve data collection for researchers reporting on disability, discrimination, bullying and harassment to promote diversity and equality. Impact to be measured through UCL's Athena Swan Institutional Silver and Chartermark record of success;
- Engage more fully with the academic and the research community to fulfil the HRERA Action Plans by instituting annual reviews by the RSCG of local researcher development KPIs. To be progressed with Vice-Deans Research from each Faculty.