HR Excellence in Research Award: Two-year internal evaluation

1.   How the internal evaluation was undertaken

This evaluation is informed by ongoing monitoring since 2012, data from CROS and PIRLS 2013 and from the Athena SWAN self-assessment process at both institutional and departmental levels, and input from individual staff and researchers. The updated strategy and actions based on these data have been discussed and approved by the Research Staff Working Group (RSWG) and the Oxford Research Staff Society (OxRSS). For further information about the context for Oxford's Concordat implementation, please see the introductory sections of the original gap analysis [PDF].

(i)   Ongoing monitoring

The initial gap analysis and action planning was undertaken in October 2011, and approved by the RSWG. As per *Action 7.2*, the RSWG has received a termly update to ensure timely and effective implementation of the action plan. These updates were prepared by a working group chaired by the Researcher Development Officer (RDO) with members from Personnel Services, the Equality and Diversity Unit (EDU), the Oxford Learning Institute (OLI), and the Careers Service. We therefore began this evaluation process having regularly measured progress against the plan.

(ii) Use of data to measure progress and set future strategy

a)   *Athena SWAN*

A key driver that has become increasingly significant since 2012 – in undertaking this internal evaluation no less than in work to implement the Concordat more generally – is Athena SWAN. This internal evaluation and priorities for the future have been informed by the findings from the Athena SWAN self-assessment process at institutional and departmental levels. The institutional Athena SWAN renewal application, submitted in November 2013, concluded that the University provides an excellent range of career development opportunities (including training, networking, web resources, careers advice and tailored inductions) for researchers. Many further opportunities are available at department and divisional level. The challenge we face is to ensure that researchers are aware of what is available, and are consistently supported to develop their careers. New actions in this document are cross-referenced to the Athena SWAN action plan where appropriate.

b)   *Researcher surveys*

CROS and PIRLS were run in 2013 with excellent response rates (26% for CROS and 39% for PIRLS). This has been a key means of evaluating the progress of our implementation of the Concordat, measuring the success of existing actions, and identifying priorities for the next two years (*Actions 7.2 and 7.4*) in a way that is directly informed by researchers' voices. Analysis of CROS and PIRLS 2013 has been benchmarked against previous years (CROS 2009 and PIRLS 2011) as well as considered holistically (reporting has been undertaken by theme, taking CROS and PIRLS together, and incorporating free text comments) to help us define areas to prioritise. Key outcomes are detailed in the updated action plan against specific actions. Reports will be published in the University in Spring 2014.

(iii) Discussion and approval of strategy and actions

The resulting evaluation and action plan, including the strategy for researcher development for the next two years, were subsequently informed, discussed and approved by:

- The Research Staff Working Group (Nov 2013)
- The Oxford Research Staff Society Committee (Jan 2014)

The details of the new priority area of leadership and management, as well as other operational details, are currently being addressed by the Code of Practice Implementation Group with the input and under the guidance of the RSWG and OxRSS. This final evaluation and updated action plan was compiled by the RDO with extensive input from Personnel Services, the Equality and Diversity Unit, the Careers Service, OxRSS, and the Oxford Learning Institute, and has been approved by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Personnel and Equality.

2. Key achievements and the progress against the strategy, indicators and actions identified in the original action plan

As noted in the original gap analysis, there is a great deal of support for researchers available at Oxford from departments locally, from the academic divisions, and from cross-University departments. This provision has continued apace since 2012. For a summary of the extensive support for researchers, please see www.ox.ac.uk/supportforresearchers.

Athena SWAN has given rise to a great deal of activity since the original action plan was formulated, and work to implement the Concordat has increasingly been proactively linked with Athena SWAN as a means of providing a clearer strategy to communicate to departments, to allow a robust, coherent approach to supporting researchers, as well as to avoid duplication of effort. Whilst Athena SWAN's primary focus is women in the STEM subjects, departmental and institutional Athena SWAN initiatives essentially work to change the culture and practice of the University and thereby benefit all research staff in all departments. 85% of our researchers are in science departments, all of whom (save for two which will be applying in April) now have action plans in place which all have significant focus on the career development of researchers, both women and men.

Over the last two years, then, as a result of targeted researcher development work as well as initiatives introduced under Athena SWAN, we have achieved significant change in the key areas of our strategy. An overview of these areas is outlined here; detail against specific actions is in the commentary within the updated action plan below.

- **Engaging and communicating with the researcher community (*Actions 3.6, 5.5, 5.6*)**

Increasing the visibility and accessibility of the extensive provision available for research staff development has formed a key part of the strategy to implement the Concordat. The devolved nature of Oxford makes this a particular challenge and we have made significant progress in ensuring that it is as easy as possible for researchers to access support and resources for their career and professional development. Our wide-ranging communications strategy has successfully engaged a high proportion of research staff and given rise to notable improvement. In PIRLS 2011 and 2013 we added an institutional question on awareness of sources of support for researchers: awareness in 2013 has risen markedly since 2011 (see *Action 5.6* for detail).

Events: 2013 saw the introduction of a new multi-disciplinary research staff conference (*Research Connections*) which was opened by the Vice-Chancellor, and with the involvement of many senior colleagues. The conference was extremely warmly received by its 180 attendees, particularly for the opportunities to meet other researchers, and will run biennially.

The induction event for new researchers continues to be a success (100% of evaluation respondents say that they would recommend the event to a colleague) and is a key means of ensuring that research staff are aware of the support on offer from day one. Participation is increasing, with up to 100 participants at each termly event.

OxRSS: A key achievement in 2013 was the re-formation of the Oxford Research Staff Society (OxRSS). OxRSS is run by researchers with support and continuity provided by the RDO and start-up funding provided by the University. OxRSS was launched at the *Research Connections* conference in July 2013, and organises events, produces a monthly newsletter *Connections*, and engages with the research staff community to establish its needs. The presence of OxRSS has made support for researchers much more visible as well as taking communications beyond an information-exchanging approach to one of close engagement with the researcher community. As well as providing professional and social networking OxRSS is formally recognised as the voice of research staff and OxRSS representatives have been welcomed onto a number of central committees.

- **Equality and diversity (*Actions 1.2, 6.3*)**

Action 6.3 (*Continue to support departments in MPLS and MSD in achieving Athena SWAN silver awards*) is an important element of our Concordat implementation. Significant progress is being made: five departments have achieved a Silver award, and fifteen have been awarded Bronze; six are awaiting the outcome of applications submitted in November 2013 and the remaining two are preparing applications to be submitted by April 2014. The Department of Philosophy is participating in the pilot of the Gender Equality Charter Mark scheme and it is hoped that the extension of this scheme through Humanities and Social Sciences will bring parallel benefits to these disciplines.

- **Researcher Development Framework (*Actions 3.3(i), 3.3(ii)*)**

We have explored, via a longitudinal research study (*Action 3.3(ii)*), ways in which researchers perceive and interact with the RDF. Findings have given rise to a number of actions including the development of a workshop introducing the RDF (new action under *Action 3.3.(i)*). We participated in the pilot of the RDF Planner, and on the basis of the feedback received we will be promoting the Planner to departments and individuals who may wish to subscribe; we are also exploring alternatives that allow researchers to use the RDF whilst accessing the training and resources on offer directly (*Action 3.3(i)*).

- **Personal development review (PDR) and mentoring (*Actions 2.3, 3.9, 4.5*)**

Provision of, and support for, PDR for research staff has been an area of significant development since 2011. Our 2013 HR compliance audit showed that 52% of departments offer PDR for researchers and many more have introduced or are planning schemes. Training has been delivered by the OLI to 14 departments in 2012/13 and we have produced new online resources to support departments, including guidance tailored to those conducting PDR for research staff. Providing researchers with space to think about their development is also being addressed through mentoring schemes. Pilots for divisional mentoring schemes have been launched in Autumn 2013 in the Medical Sciences and MPLS divisions, with the intention of rolling them out across the divisions.

3. Next steps and the focus of strategy for the next two years, inc. success measures

We are very proud of the many achievements since the original gap analysis, and have made significant progress towards further embedding of the Concordat throughout the University. Our strategy for the next two years will remain broadly focused on the same overarching areas as addressed in the original action plan, with the addition of one wholly new area identified largely from CROS and PIRLS data: *leadership and management for research staff (Action 3.3(iii)* – see bottom of table). Athena SWAN actions have been added as part of this action plan where they fit in with the areas identified in the gap analysis; further Athena SWAN actions that will have a positive impact on researchers are available in the Athena SWAN action plan itself. Details of new and existing actions, along with timescales and success measures, are provided in the following updated action plan.

Updated action plan January 2014

Actions are designated as 'Completed', 'Ongoing', or have had a new or revised timescale added. Substantial new pieces of work not included in the original action plan have been added under the Action to which they are most relevant and marked as ***New action.*** Action numbers relate to the corresponding Concordat principle, as outlined in the original gap analysis [PDF].

Action	Description	Lead	Progress and comments	Timescale	Success measure (where applicable)
1.2	Equality and diversity training for REF Unit of Assessment co-ordinators.	EDU	Training complete, and positively evaluated, with supplementary sessions for new appointees run in late 2012 and early 2013.	Completed	
2.3	Online guidance for PIs to support PDR of research staff to be supplemented by new materials, such as a toolkit for supporting research staff development based on existing guidance.	OLI	Online material developed: to be uploaded Spring 2014.	Spring 2014	Number of downloads of online guidance Increased % of PIs saying they are confident conducting PDR (PIRLS 2015)
3.3(i)	Continue work on incorporating the Researcher Development Statement into existing web presence, to increase visibility and to allow effective use.	USG	Work is ongoing via a working group of key stake-holders (including divisions, OLI, Careers Service and Personnel Services). We participated in Vitae's free pilot of the Planner: we shall promote the Planner to departments while exploring alternative ways of engaging research staff with the RDF.	Ongoing	Improved visibility of RDF online
3.3(ii)	Researcher Development Officer and Code of Practice Implementation Group to continue to explore ways of promoting the Researcher Development Statement by working with Vitae and with other institutions and organisations at a national level, and liaising with divisions and	RDO	RDO conducted research into research staff's perceptions of the Researcher Development Framework, via a 9-month project comprising questionnaires and focus groups. 13 research staff participated, with representatives of all divisions except SSD and the results have been fed into a cross-divisional working group.	Complete	

	departments.	RDO	**New action:** In response to the findings of the research, actions have included developing an Introduction to the RDF workshop (piloted so far in one Medical Sciences department, will comprise part of the training for mentees in the pilot mentoring scheme, and which will, from February 2014, be offered as part of the research staff induction event).	Ongoing	No of depts. requesting workshop

Feedback from Welcome Event |
| 3.6 | Continue to ensure promotion of induction activities is as effective as possible via reviewing and maintaining communications strategies. | OLI | A central aspect of induction is improved information about support available as well as improved resources: this will continue to be addressed via the revised communications strategy (see *5.6*). Improvement in awareness of and perceived usefulness of induction has been outstanding:

Induction not offered	*CROS 2009 %*	*CROS 2013 %*
Local role	40	22
Department	51	25
Institution	71	27

Induction very useful/useful		
Local role	39	63
Department	28	48
Institution	13	35		Ongoing	
		OLI	**New action**
Induction for new research staff and the PIs who manage them is being revised as part of a wider University initiative to ensure new staff have the best possible induction experience, and the OLI is	End 2014	Download/ requests for induction materials

			working on making guidance already available in the [Code of Practice for the Employment and Career Development of Research Staff](#) more readily accessible as part of improved induction resource packages for researchers and PIs.		Increased % of CROS respondents saying they received induction, and found it helpful (2015)
3.9	Continue to support departments and individuals in implementing PDR and encouraging those who do not have schemes to develop them.	OLI	The OLI continues to work with departments to support them in implementing PDR, and is developing guidance specific to research staff (see 2.3), to be launched Spring 2014.	Ongoing	
			PDR implementation for academic-related staff in departments is rising and initiatives such as Athena SWAN are increasing visibility of this. 52% of departments offer PDR for researchers and many more have introduced or are planning schemes.	2016	Increased % of research staff receiving PDR to 80% in 2016 (Athena SWAN *Action 3.2*)
			Conducting appraisals was an area of PIRLS 2013 where PIs felt less confident, and 14 training sessions have been delivered by the OLI so far with the number of requests constantly increasing. We were also encouraged to note from PIRLS that 58% of those PIs who do not currently receive PDR would like the opportunity to do so (an increase of 9% since 2011), and will be capitalising on this readiness by encouraging senior researchers to undertake PDR.		Increased % of PIs feel confident about conducting PDR (PIRLS 2015)
4.5	Continue to support and promote the Code of Practice/Concordat and specific opportunities to ensure PIs and RS are aware of the range of mentoring possibilities on offer.	OLI	Many departments are focusing on mentoring as part of their Athena SWAN action plans, so much of this action is being addressed at the local level.	Ongoing	Successful Athena SWAN applications
			New action: Pilot divisional mentoring schemes in Medical Sciences and MPLS divisions (cf. Athena SWAN institutional action plan *Action 3.3b*).	Spring 2014	Mentoring circles established and evaluated

5.5	Continue work to ensure that web presence clearly signposts the comprehensive support offered by the University to PIs and research staff in managing research staff careers.	OLI	The Research Support page of the main University's website has now been revised to contain a comprehensive set of links of use to research staff, including Research Services, divisional training, and University-wide guidance and support: www.ox.ac.uk/supportforresearchers.	Complete	
			Work is underway to develop the Support for Researchers webpage to be more user-friendly and accessible, with greater functionality.	End 2014	Webpage revised and usage monitored for increased traffic
5.6	Continue to provide support, particularly through work to implement PDR and promote the RDS, to enable research staff to pay attention to their career development.	*OLI*	See *3.9* for ongoing PDR implementation and *3.3 (ii)* for RDF. CROS results were encouraging in relation to research staff paying attention to their career development, with the percentage saying they are encouraged to undertake career and professional development rising substantially from 55% in 2009 to 69% in 2013.	Ongoing	
			The revival of the Oxford Research Staff Society is a key means of informing, encouraging, and empowering research staff to develop their careers (www.oxrss.ox.ac.uk).	Complete	
			OxRSS' work to promote and encourage researchers to engage in professional development is complemented by a comprehensive communications strategy, including: • Website (see *5.5* above) • Mailing list for research staff (currently 996 members) • Twitter account @ResStaffOxford (1232+	Ongoing	Continued increase in numbers subscribing to mailing lists/ Twitter; requests for leaflet; depts. requesting visits/info stands. Increase in % of

			followers)		CROS and PIRLS 2015 respondents' awareness of support
			• Research Staff Update monthly bulletin to staff supporting research staff (currently 60 members) • The Researcher Development Officer has been working with departments to produce bespoke briefings or attending departmental careers and/or social events (33 briefings/meetings in 2012-13) to raise awareness of the Concordat and Oxford's support for researchers. • Printed leaflet, distributed to departments Oct 2012; reprinted June 2013. Departments are including this as a key induction material with new researchers' contracts. • Use of other University communications channels (Springboard, Oxford Women's Network, Personnel Services) Results from PIRLS institutional questions on awareness are testament to the effectiveness of the communications effort, shown below as % of PIs saying they are aware of the source of support: | Source	PIRLS 2011 %	PIRLS 2013 %
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Divisional	66	81
OLI	87	93
Careers Service	90	95
IT Services	98	99
Language Centre	85	87
Research Services	95	96	 CROS awareness was also very encouraging, though there are no comparable questions in 2009 to measure improvement.		

		EDU and divs	**New action** (Athena SWAN *Action 3.5b*)*:* Develop a series of case studies and interviews illustrating different career paths. This Athena action has the particular aim of supporting female research fellows to progress to University Lectureship positions, but will be of benefit to all research staff unsure of their career options.	Summer 2014	Departmental Athena applications report higher levels of internal career progression
		EDU and OLI	**New action** (Athena SWAN *Action 3.5a*): Pilot a career development programme to identify and retain the most promising female postdocs.	2014-15	Pilot delivered and evaluated
6.3	Continue to support departments in MPLS and MSD in achieving Athena SWAN silver awards.	EDU	Significant progress is being made: To date, five departments have achieved a Silver award, and fifteen have been awarded Bronze. The remaining MSD and MPLS departments have established their self-assessment panels and are progressing with applications to be submitted by April 2014. The Department of Philosophy is participating in the pilot of the Gender Equality Charter Mark scheme. Awareness of Athena SWAN amongst research staff is excellent, with 75% of CROS respondents being aware as compared with 50% in the CROS benchmarking club.	Ongoing	All STEM departments to achieve Athena SWAN silver awards by 2016

Take-up of Gender Equality Charter Mark scheme in other departments |
| 7.2 | Run CROS and PIRLS to review and evaluate progress. | OLI | Surveys ran during Spring 2013.

Results (including practical information to feed back to respondents) will be widely disseminated in Spring 2014. | Complete

Spring 2014 | |
| 7.4 | Continue to liaise with Vitae and other institutions and organisations to share, disseminate and implement practices to support researchers' development. | OLI | RDO has attended:
• Vitae Policy Forum
• Vitae's CROS/PIRLS Steering Group
• Vitae International Researcher Development Conference | Ongoing | |

			• Visited Cambridge and Imperial		
New action:					
3.3(iii)	Promote and encourage leadership and management development for research staff and PIs	OLI	PIRLS 2013 results indicate that Oxford PIs feel more valued than those in other Russell Group and UK-wide institutions with respect to developing research staff (68% vs 57%/58%) and managing research staff performance (63% vs 54%/52%). However, PIRLS as well as CROS data indicated that the broad area of management and leadership is one in which both early career researchers and PIs expressed relatively low confidence and that further development would be of benefit. The Code of Practice Implementation Group, under the aegis of the Research Staff Working Group, will be working in Spring 2014 to explore further the needs and identify a detailed plan to address this.	Summer 2015	Leadership and management for researchers strategy developed and delivered Increased % of CROS and PIRLS 2015 respondents saying they are confident in management and leadership