The Open University Concordat Implementation Plan 4 year Review

**Background and approach to Evaluation**

A 2 year self-assessment was carried out and reported in 2014. This 4 year review sets out the evaluation approach, reports on the key achievements by principle against the plan as updated in 2014, and then identifies the priority areas that will be reflected in planning for the next 2 - 4 year period. The University’s Concordat Implementation Plan 2012-16 (CIP) was introduced in October 2012. This identifies good practice in provision for the welfare and support of The University’s research staff and doctoral research students as well as actions to address perceived gaps. In recognition of its Implementation Plan, the University was awarded the European Commission’s HR Excellence in Research Award in January 2013. The Concordat Steering Group meets three times a year and reports to the Research Committee, which with the Education Committee forms the two main governance committees of the University. In addition, research staff and doctoral research students are represented on all key University and Faculty committees and working groups concerned with strategy, policy and standards relating to research, research degrees and research career development.

The Concordat Steering Group are tasked with monitoring the implementation of the Action Plan. This monitoring provides the foundation for a continuous evaluation of the CIP (Concordat Implementation Plan). During the implementation of this plan major organisational changes were also being conducted including the closure of regional centres. In 2016 seven Central Academic Units transformed into 4 Faculties and there has been restructuring of research support departments and governance procedures. Further challenges and opportunities are available with the implementation of a new academic strategy for the university in 2017.

For this review an additional series of actions were put in place in order to ensure that researchers’ views were taken into account. After reviewing the CIP and the data from the internal Research Support Survey 2016, the Careers in Research Online Survey 2015 and Principal Investigators and Researchers Survey 2015, we conducted a series of focus groups to discuss issues that arose. The focus groups involved gathering data from academics, research staff and research students and the findings discussed at the Concordat Steering Group in September 2016. Findings from the focus group report are influencing and enhancing the effectiveness of the Research Career Development training programme and have also fed into the new Concordat Implementation Plan.

**Key achievements and progress against the 2012-2016 Implementation Plan**

**In support of Principle 1** a review completed in March 2014 resulted in new guidance circulated to all CAUs as part of the standard HR/Bidding Guidance; following on from this the use of fixed-term contracts for Research Staff is now monitored on a monthly basis at CAU level. A revised promotions scheme for Academic and Research staff was implemented in January 2015 after consultation and feedback from research staff, full guidance is now available to academic and research staff. The new scheme offers wider opportunity for research staff to build a promotion case than under the previous scheme. The Academic Staff Promotions Committee reviewed the new scheme in January 2016 and agreed that there would be no changes to the criteria or profiles for the 2016 round of promotions, the outcomes of the 2016 promotions round would be analysed in detail for emerging patterns at the two year implementation point.

In addition, under **Principle 1** the university pledged to create a Graduate School for research students, a Graduate School Director has been appointed (and is a member of the Concordat Steering Group) and the Graduate School was launched in October 2016. The Graduate School will aim to grow the postgraduate research student community and will bring cohesion to postgraduate student policies and become a hub for postgraduate life on campus and online. New objectives from the Graduate School will be in the 2017-2020 Concordat Implementation Plan.

**In support of Principle 2** staff promotion and development has been aided by the successful launch, in January 2016 of the Academic Professional Development (APD) Framework and web environment, through which staff can access information and activities which are organised in four domains, Learning and Teaching,
Research, Leadership and Knowledge Exchange and they are linked directly to the Staff Promotions Scheme and the UKPSF. The APD Framework enables research staff to make informed career choices independently and in discussion with line managers.

The Concordat Implementation Plan 2 Year Report recorded the substantial progress made for research staff who are on fixed term contracts. After receiving legal advice, the University no longer regards the end of a fixed term contract of under two years as redundancy, this is reflected in new terms and conditions for research staff on fixed term contracts; parity with other members of staff in relation to redundancy has been retained. The Open University employment policies around Agile working and parental leave include researchers on fixed term contracts. Fixed term contract research staff can submit funding applications as principal investigator where funding bodies allow this and fixed term contracts can be extended to cover the full period of the project if a bid is successful (again, where the terms of the external funding body allow this).

Despite these actions however, evidence from the CROS 2013 and 2015, and the recent staff focus groups suggests that the perception of research staff (52% CROS 2015) is that they have less equality of opportunity in relation to opportunities for progression and promotion than other staff. The new Concordat Implementation Plan will introduce measures that will seek to address this perception.

In support of Principles 3 and 4 the university offers all research and academic staff the opportunity to work with a mentor when they are first appointed as part of their induction to the university. An internal survey (Research Support Survey 2016) found that 53% of respondents agreed that ‘my career development is supported by opportunities in my faculty/department to either mentor or be mentored.’ Research and academic staff undertake an annual Career Development and Staff Appraisal (CDSA), with 77% of CROS 2015 respondents reporting that they were encouraged to engage in personal career development. Work through the Concordat has been successful in amending advice and guidance to managers and researchers by pointing them to the Academic Professional Development website with opportunities and resources developed in-house aligned to national frameworks (UKPSF). Examples include Applaud, (formerly OpenPad) that offers a supported process leading to HEA accreditation; Research Career Development (RCD) workshops and the VITAE website. The CDSA process allows research staff time to reflect on their career development with their managers. Within the APD website staff are signposted to the Academic Research Staff Promotions Scheme so the one portal has become a source of information for those who are new to the institution, to those who are more advanced in their career and those who are looking for promotion or are managing research staff. Feedback from the focus groups and from external surveys suggests that staff value the CDSA, however, there is some variance in experience around the institution which was reflected in the CROS 2015 results, with only 59% of respondents reporting that they found CDSA useful, this data will be explored in more detail in the next Implementation Plan. Data from CROS 2013 and 2015 shows an increase in satisfaction relating to equality of opportunity for career progression, up from 44% in 2013 to 52% in 2015, reflecting the work undertaken to embed career development for all categories of staff at the OU; the Concordat Steering Group monitor this data as part of the Implementation Plan.

Research students during their induction and first year are introduced to online development resources and face to face workshops via the Virtual Learning Environment (VRE) which also has links to Vitae’s Researcher Development Framework Planner (which the OU has subscribed to) they then build up a portfolio of doctoral training. The VRE has recently been reviewed with staff and students providing inputs for developments that are underway to refresh the website (to be renamed Graduate School Network) when the Graduate School launched in the autumn of 2016. Additionally to support research students employability prospects, (39% of students in the CROS 2015 survey said they would consider employment outside the Higher Education Sector) they have the opportunity to take part in the Brilliant Club, in 2014-15 19 OU PhD students undertook 42 school placements. This scheme is increasing in popularity with good feedback relating to the teaching experiences from those who have participated in the scheme. The OU also offers Postgraduate Internships, which are tailored to the needs of the research student at an appropriate juncture in their study programme and have been used to develop research and technical skills which can then be used during the write up of their theses and employment search.

In support of Principle 5, which recognises the responsibility of individual researchers to be pro-actively engaged in their own career development and lifelong learning the Open University has embedded Academic Professional Development into key HR processes, such as the annual appraisal (CDSA) as described above. In addition, Knowledge Exchange is an area of the APD website which links staff to resources and information from around the university. The university through the Research Career Development Programme hold
regular workshops focusing on publishing work, presenting in multi-media settings and research ethics. Researchers and students are also encouraged to use the Vitae RDF planner to help with personal career development. An annual Research Integrity statement is presented to The Council, the university's executive governing body, the first statement was sent in March 2015. Since the first statement was received by The Council, the Open University has achieved full compliance with UUK Concordat requirements and by March 2016 work had been completed on ensuring faculty intranet sites had information on research integrity requirements and that faculties covered research integrity explicitly in academic and research staff induction programmes.

In support of Principle 6 the Department of Physical Sciences (DPS) has been awarded (May 2016) an Athena SWAN Silver award in recognition of its support for women in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Maths and Medicine). The DPS is the first department in the university to be awarded the Silver award, the Maths and Statistics department holds a Bronze award. Department of Computing and Communications, Life Health and Chemical Sciences, and Engineering and Innovation gained Bronze awards in the April 2016 submission round, and the OU institutional level Bronze award renewal submission was successful. In April 2016 the university launched its Equality Scheme 2016-2020 (Summary of the Open University Equality Scheme 2016-2020) which sets targets for career development for participants in the Aurora and Aspire programmes and has additional targets for the encouragement of black academic staff with the aspiration that 33% of eligible black staff submitting in the next Research Excellence Framework (REF).

To monitor progress (Principle 7) we have established a Concordat Steering Group (CSG) that meets three times a year. The Director of The Institute of Educational Technology Chairs this group. Its membership includes representatives from Research staff and students, the AUT, faculty leadership including the Graduate School Director and senior managers from the units responsible for delivering the action plan. Key CSG responsibilities include: reviewing progress against the CIP plan; managing the escalation of any non-conformances identified; reviewing the results of the CROS, PIRLS, PRES and internal Research Support Surveys to consider any implications for the action plan. Concordat activities are reported to the Research Committee annually.

Key Focus areas for the new Implementation Plan

The format of the new Concordat Implementation Plan has been simplified, two sections are presented, the first 'In Progress' section outlines new actions which have been agreed with the designated lead. The second section, 'Progress: Achieved' outlines the clauses of the Concordat that have been achieved in previous implementation plans but which continue to be monitored by the Concordat Steering Group. The first Concordat Steering Group of 2017 will look towards implementing the actions in the new Implementation Plan.

The university has during the summer of 2016 created a new super faculty structure, in addition to the creation of new administrative and research units; part of the work alongside the restructuring has been the design of a new Academic Strategy. The new Academic Strategy launched in 2017 will have Academic Professional Development as one of its core themes. Work will continue to promote the Academic Professional Development framework and website (Principles 2, 3, 4 and 5) and within that the Research Career Development workshops will be evaluated and refreshed to ensure they remain supportive of the needs of the university and researchers and continue to be mapped to the UKPSF.

Research Students will benefit from the launch of the Graduate School in October 2016 (Principles 1 and 3) which will become the online and physical focus for postgraduate development activities. The Graduate School will bring together training that is being done within faculties with generic doctoral training ensuring the programme from induction to graduation is integrated and allowing students and their supervisors better facilities for networking and knowledge exchange.

In continuing to support Principle 3 and 4 work will seek to address the findings from PRES 2013 and 14 to raise awareness of online transferable skills training for research students and staff. The university will continue to have access to the Vitae RDF Planner, which the university has subscribed to, and will support awareness of research development opportunities through induction activities for all researchers. Initial work from the focus groups carried out in the summer of 2016 suggested that not all research staff and students are currently getting the most benefit from the planner, this was backed up with CROS results where only 11% of respondents stated they had used the tool. An evaluation with students and staff on the use of the RDF planners will take place in 2017 with a view to changing how and when people are signposted to the Vitae
resources. Further advances in researchers’ career development will be supported through teaching, HEA accreditation support and mentoring.

In support of **Principle 6** the university will be working towards the implementation of the new Equality Scheme (2016-2020), which has some challenging targets, in relation to the Concordat these relate to the career development of women, ethnic minority staff, and disabled staff with published targets to be met within each category (Link to Open University Equality Scheme and Objectives) The University will continue to work towards sustaining external recognition for eliminating gender bias and developing an inclusive culture with the Athena SWAN submissions and maintaining Juno Champions status in the Department of Physical Sciences, which complements the aims of the Athena SWAN charter. Additionally Athena SWAN will be rolled out to non-STEM areas in line with the post 2015 Athena SWAN charter, which extends its remit to all disciplines, and professional and support staff.

The university, in support of **Principles 1 and 2** will continue to monitor the management of fixed-term contract researchers to ensure equity with staff on permanent contracts. This monitoring will be via monthly, faculty level HR employment reports, in addition evidence will continue to be gathered from participating in the CROS, PIRLS surveys. Findings from the surveys will be disseminated to the faculties by the Concordat Steering Group and reported to the Research Committee. Evaluation of progress made against the 2012-2016 Implementation Plan has highlighted that collection and monitoring of staff data, such as numbers of staff on fixed-term contracts is difficult because demographics and recruitment data is done at a local faculty or unit level making collating this information at the university level complex. The Concordat Steering Group will therefore endeavour to collate information the University produces more systematically to evidence the actions in the Implementation Plan.

The Concordat Steering Group will continue to be the key forum for reporting actions against the 2017-2020 Implementation Plan. The group will continue to meet three times a year and report to the Research Committee which is chaired by Pro-Vice Chancellor Research and Academic Strategy. The Group will monitor the measures for success alongside the actions in the Implementation Plan. Given the broad membership of the steering group, which includes the Academic lead for Academic Professional Development, Graduate School Director, researchers, research students, senior faculty managers, AUT representative and the Head of Strategic Human Resources the university is confident of the monitoring mechanisms that are in place and the support available at a senior level to continue to push forward positive changes to the research environment in line with the Concordat.

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**On behalf of the Concordat Steering Group**