

The University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) received the HR Excellence in Research Award from the European Commission in 2010 and successfully retained it in 2014 after an external review process. As part of our award, we are reporting here on our progress over the last two years against our Concordat Action Plan. The period 2016-18 covered by this report and revised action plan represents a period of significant and strategic change in the provision of support for researchers at the University of Central Lancashire. “Research Excellence” is one of the foundations of the Research Strategy 2018-2020 and is defined as the creation and execution of research that has the potential to be world leading and world changing and recognises the movement towards transdisciplinary working. The people who undertake and support this work are vital to the achievement of that strategy, and to that end, the Pro Vice Chancellor Research, in 2017, commissioned a comprehensive internal review of all the support available to researchers, resulting in the reconfiguration of services into the current structure. The implementation of this model is being led by the PVC Clinical & Health, Professor StJohn Crean; Dr Alexis Holden, the new Head of Research Services, and the Development team within Human Resources, and is being delivered by the Researcher Development Unit within Research Services. This is within the context of the formation of the new Senior Executive Team who are supporting the People Plan which is the overarching approach to improve how it feels to work at UCLan. Great progress has been made in the first year, with staff survey responses for our Key Performance Indicator ‘proud to work for UCLan’ increasing by five percentage points to 85%.

1. How the internal evaluation was undertaken – including how researchers’ views were taken into account

UCLan received confirmation of EU Recognition through the ‘HR Excellence in Research’ process in 2010 and was one of the first 18 Universities to do so. It successfully retained this award during its year four external audit in 2014, at which point the processes supporting the achievement of the Concordat principles were deeply embedded into the university infrastructure. UCLan was due to submit for its six year review in October of 2017, but requested an extension as a result of significant internal review processes and restructure being undertaken in support of research; review processes that resulted in a widespread reconfiguration of support services for research into the now formalised structures including Research Services. Dr Alexis Holden, Head of Research Services – in collaboration with colleagues from HR, and with the support of the Researcher Development Unit within Research Services, has been instrumental in implementing new consultation and review processes, articulated in this overview and accompanying updated action plan.

The University re-introduced Faculty during this period of consolidation, and there are now five Faculties across the organisation. Each of these has an Executive Dean, and a Faculty Director of Research with a remit to support the Concordat principles amongst other tasks. The Faculty Directors of Research are required to attend the University Researcher Development Steering Group – a reconfiguration of the previous Concordat Implementation Group (CIG), and nominate three colleagues from across the research career spectrum who also attend. The Researcher Development Steering Group (RDSG) is chaired by the Head of Research Services, nominated by the PVC Clinical & Health who holds the mandate for Research at the Senior Executive Team level – and attended also by the Leadership Development lead from HR; members of the Universities Colleges Union (UCU); and supported by the Researcher Development Unit lead, Emma Sandon-Hesketh. The Development Group has been set up to share ownership of the action plan, ensure progress is made, and provide the relationship with its constituent areas. A key part of the remit is to encourage dialogue between staff to encourage and enable greater engagement with the Concordat, and support the nurturing and development at all stages of their career (e.g. ECRs to mid career to Reader and Professor) to facilitate their contribution to the vibrant community of academic innovators already representing the University.

The **consultation process with researchers** regarding progress to date, and future objectives, has taken place through a number of different mechanisms. At Faculty level, there are now Research and Innovation Committees, each of which contributes matters arising to the University level Research and Innovation Committee (URIC) via their Faculty Directors of Research as the conduit, and member of URIC. In addition, Research Services in conjunction with HR have hosted the following open sessions to enable staff who may wish to engage directly:

- a) **Research supervisor cafés** – events coordinated (3) to enable research staff supporting Post Graduate Research Students in a supervisory capacity, to meet and discuss the challenges and opportunities of the role, and the development or

support they required. In direct response to these groups, the Supervisor Training programme that has been offered at UCLan for the last five years (reviewed annually) was revised to incorporate a number of different approaches, including a 'Talking Heads' feature now available and growing on the University Intranet, where experienced supervisors offer video masterclasses on common issues. The revised Supervisor Training was launched in February 2018, and will be evaluated after its first year of operation.

- b) Research World Cafes** – open forums (2) for researchers at any career stage to represent their views on the research environment, training, development, opportunities and challenges – direct to the Head of Research Services and HR – and dialogue amongst peers on recommendations for enhancement to existing provision. These were well attended, and all those who participated were given the opportunity to provide feedback in forms shaped around Concordat principles. This feedback, both formally collected and informally shared during and after the events, has been instrumental in shaping the Career Researchers Pathway scheduled for launch in summer 2018, and the Academic Professional Apprenticeship (Research) route.
- c) Research Networks** – the University is in the process of formalising research networks that represent researchers across the spectrum, configured into early, mid-term and Reader/Professor networks. There is already a flourishing Professoriate Network – established in 2011, renewed, and relaunched in 2017. Applicants through the Professors and Readers Scheme are invited to join this network upon approval of their appointment. This network as with those proposed will be supported and administered by the Researcher Development Unit.
- d) Drop In Discussion and Travelling talk points** – a series of events and opportunities to come and talk were advertised to the University as a whole, and targeted to researchers and UCU reps. These were located at a variety of places around the campus to facilitate easy access, were well attended, and further events are being scheduled.

Each of the above events have been recorded and verified, and the feedback gained has contributed to this report and the associated action plan. The most recent version of the Action Plan has been shared with members of the Senior Executive Team and Faculties, the latter via the Faculty Directors of Research – before presentation to the Researcher Development Steering Group. Final sign off for submission rests with the PVC Clinical & Health.

2. Key Achievements and Progress

The development of the revised 2018-2020 Research Strategy – Developing and Delivering Research Excellence has the aim “to improve research quality and quantity, culture and impact, measured by our performance in national and international excellence frameworks”. To achieve that Strategy, the University reviewed the research support infrastructure leading to the creation of a new Research Services unit in summer of 2017. This office brings together strategic and support functions to help underpin research ambitions and highlights the commitment that UCLan has made toward supporting research, researchers, and their activities.

Since the creation of Research Services, achievements supporting the research activities of the University have included:

- a) Development of bespoke stakeholder focused research units within Research Services, as articulated in the diagram in Appendix 1. In this way, transparency is achieved to support researchers in direct access to the most appropriate support, and expertise is built to allow for the full immersion of Research Services based professional staff into the research environment;
- b) The Career Researcher Pathway has been designed in collaboration with researchers from across the University, supported via the Researcher Development Steering Group; Research Networks; Supervisor Cafes; Researcher World Cafes - and strategic local leadership from Faculty Directors of Research;
- c) The Academic Professional Apprenticeship Scheme is in development by Research Services in conjunction with the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT) for delivery in 18/19, incorporating aspects of the Career Researcher Pathway, providing researchers with a number of routes, relevant to level and experience, to achieve their career aspirations;
- d) Internal research assessment exercises have been undertaken as part of the preparation and development for REF2021 with emphasis on the developing Code of Practice to provide a support pathway for those staff who are not currently eligible for return to REF2021 but have aspirations for inclusion in REF2028;
- e) The new Research Strategy – Developing and Delivering Research Excellence 2018-2020 – has been created and is in the final stage of ratification, alongside an operation plan and delivery plan;
- f) The Faculty of Health and Wellbeing has achieved Bronze status in its Athena Swan Application, confirmation received in May 2018. Furthermore, there is a commitment from the University that all other School (within Faculty) applications

will be submitted by November 2019, and the Faculty of Clinical and Bioomedical Sciences are submitting for their Silver Award at the end of May;

- g) The formation of the PVC Research Strategy Group, chaired by the PVC Clinical & Health, with the Faculty Executive Deans and Faculty Directors of Research, plus Finance representation, is a newly formed informal group which identifies, debates and discusses issues of the moment to help drive research and researchers at UCLan to achieve in optimum environments.

3. Next Steps and Measures of Success

The consolidation of research support into Research Services, accompanied by the development of the 2018-2020 Research Strategy has led to the development of a number of initiatives for the forthcoming two-year period, as identified in the attached Action Plan. The emergence of Research Networks, the greater use of the Faculty Directors for Research, the PVC Research Strategy Group and the formal Faculty and University Committees for Research and Innovation will provide greater integration of the principles of the Concordat and their support for researchers, into University culture across the whole. This emerging landscape will be evaluated and reported upon through readily available metrics that will be shared via the University Intranet, University consultative process (as above) and transparently available for all researchers to inform their personal and collective development.

Over the next two-year period, the University will work to implement the actions in the accompanied Action Plan, in particular focussing on:

- i. Distribution and monitoring of the delivery of the Research Strategy 2018-2020 – Developing and Delivery Research Excellence, following final ratification (June 2018);
- ii. Launch of the Academic Professional Apprenticeship Scheme (inc. Research route) Summer 2018/Jan2019;
- iii. Launch of the Career Researchers Pathway – July 2018 – with routes through various blended learning options for all levels of career researcher from early to eminent;
- iv. Creation of a “Celebrating Research Conference” to recognise the significant efforts being made and achievements realised at School, Faculty and University level;
- v. Launch of the expanded Research Network events, to augment the Early Career Researcher Network with Mid Term and Professor/Reader Networks (complementing the extant Professoriate);
- vi. Submission and achievement of further Departmental/School and Faculty Athena Swan awards;
- vii. Re-launch of the University Mentoring Scheme in its refreshed capacity of “Research Mentoring for Researchers by Researchers”;
- viii. Creation of sabbatical opportunities for researchers to have allocated time out for the development of research publications contributing to, and beyond, REF 2020;
- ix. Launch of a newsletter specifically for the Research Community, to ensure communication of all research related activities are distributed fairly and equally in a timely manner by all those within the research community;
- x. Establishment of the DEEP (Development of Esteem and External Profiles Scheme), to support greater engagement in the professional role of an academic researcher;
- xi. Building and promotion of successful collaborations, internally and externally with business and community organisations, as well as other HEIs.

Please see Appendix One overleaf for the structure diagram of Research Services.



ETHICS AND INTEGRITY UNIT

The [Ethics and Integrity Unit \(EIU\)](#), design, develop, manage and operate all ethical protocols and research integrity protocols on behalf of the University. The [e-Ethics system](#) has been running since autumn 2011 and was nominated for the Times Higher Education (THE Awards) Outstanding ICT Initiative of the Year in 2012. The EIU has been instrumental in helping other Universities establish similar systems in consultation with ourselves.

Contact us: EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk

GRANTS AND FUNDING UNIT

The [Grants and Funding Unit \(GFU\)](#) is the team that supports you in identifying and securing external funds to enable the development of your research, innovation and knowledge transfer activity. Once you have successfully secured funding we are also here to support you through the delivery of the project to ensure it is delivered on time, to budget and contract. We are not just here to help with external funds relating to projects. If you are responsible for securing ANY external funds to the University for activities such as sabbaticals, travel, conferences, consultancy or training then please get in touch as soon as you can.

Contact us: GFUinfo@uclan.ac.uk

RESEARCHER DEVELOPMENT UNIT

The [Researcher Development Unit \(RDU\)](#) is responsible for the organisation of training for research staff and postgraduate research students. Training for PGRS includes stand-alone training events covering topics such as 'Writing your Literature Review' to 'Thesis Structure'; Graduate Skills Programme, run at entry points throughout year (on a by demand basis) and mandatory Induction events, again run on a demand basis at entry points throughout the year.

Contact us: RDUInfo@uclan.ac.uk

RESEARCH EXCELLENCE UNIT

The focus of the Research Excellence Unit (REU) is to provide leadership and management for activities such as the [Research Excellence Framework \(REF\)](#). It focuses on providing robust data to: (i) Research Excellence Framework (ii) Oversee the University Research Strategy (iii) Monitor and Benchmark the Research Quality (e.g. Outputs, Impacts) it also manages the [impact agenda, and the University has recently purchased the Vertigo Ventures Impact Tracker software to support this area.](#)

Contact us: researchassessment@uclan.ac.uk

SCHOLARLY COMMUNICATIONS UNIT

The [Scholarly Communications Unit \(SCU\)](#) provides University support around [Research Data Management \(RDM\)](#) through [UCLan Data](#), [Open Access \(OA\)](#), through the [University repository \(CLoK\)](#), and the implementation of ORCID identifier.

Contact us:

Research Data Management: RDMSupport@uclan.ac.uk

UCLanData: RDMSupport@uclan.ac.uk

Open Access: OpenAccess@uclan.ac.uk

CLoK: clok@uclan.ac.uk