

## The University of South Wales (USW) HR Excellence in Research Award Four Year Review and Future Strategy (2018-2020)

### **Context: The University of South Wales**

USW is a large dynamic HEI at the vanguard of innovative change within Wales and beyond; it applies its knowledge and research to the real-life problems facing people, businesses and communities. It aspires to be unrivalled for professional, vocationally-focused education and research informed innovation and engagement.

USW offers a full range of qualifications, from foundation degrees to PhD study and employs approximately 2,000 staff of which almost 800 are academics. To manage our research we operate a Research Institute model, which incorporates research groups, that are Faculty based and consist of a group of researchers working together to take research in a particular area forward and research centres, which consist of multiple themes of work or a number of groups. There are 6 Research Institutes which span faculties and are based in subject areas where USW has research strengths. Academics in Research Institutes have protected time to carry out their research and have twice yearly research reviews with their Research Institute Director to discuss their research. We currently have 173 academic staff who are members of a Research Institute.

### Four Year Review:

#### 1. Internal evaluation process:

USW's 4-year review was led by Dr Louise Bright Director of Research and Business Engagement and representatives from across the institution including early career researchers, research professors and professional services staff including the Director of Human Resources. These colleagues form the HR Excellence in Research Steering Group, this approach is similar to the initial HR Excellence in Research Award application and two-year review.

Information has been drawn from a number of sources to inform our work plan including CROS and PIRLS, the 2017 USW Staff Engagement Survey, PRES, the 2016 Review of Postgraduate Research Student Support and the research student annual monitoring process as well as the 2015 survey of Research Institute members. Priorities have been identified via the HR Excellence in Research Award Steering Group and other researcher-led strategic groups such as the Faculty Research Committees and the Athena SWAN Self-Assessment Teams (SATs). Priorities were considered against the QAA indicators, RDF subdomains, Concordat Principles and the RCUK statement of expectations. The ongoing fulfilment of the action plan and strategy will be overseen by the HR Excellence in Research Steering Group which reports directly into the Faculty Research Committees and the University Research Committee.

#### 2. Key achievements and progress:

**Recruitment and Selection** – All those involved in recruitment and selection are required to attend mandatory training sessions arranged by the HR department, the training also addresses unconscious bias. One to one training is given to anyone who is unable to attend the pre-organised sessions. The Governors and Senior Management team have also recently completed in depth unconscious bias training provided by the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education. Since our first HR Excellence Submission, USW has developed job descriptions for research related posts that are available to internal staff including Research Excellence Framework (REF) Leads, Research Group and Centre Leads, Research Fellow, Research Assistant and Research Institute Director roles to help ensure there is consistency across the institution.

**Recognition and Value** – a new university wide appraisal system has been developed, and has received positive feedback from Research Institute members. Our Research Institute member survey showed that there is a high rate of engagement of members participating in an annual review with their Research Institute Director; with 86% of respondents saying that they have participated in a research review, and

many commenting that they found it a useful exercise. This process will continue to run alongside the new appraisal system.

The inaugural USW Innovation and Impact Awards 2017 received 21 applications, falling into three categories; Best Team Collaboration, International Impact and Contribution to Society. To celebrate USW Impact activity, an awards ceremony and reception was held in November 2017.

Research Student Representatives should have a position at all research related committees at both faculty and university level. 2016/17 saw the introduction of four Faculty Research Committees that brings together the aspirations of the research institutes and faculty staff to embed research in faculty thinking. The committees are chaired by faculty Deans or Research Leads, and meet at least 3 times a year. The committees comprise of 10-12 research active staff, which includes research student and early career researcher representation. Colleagues from RBE are also members thus providing a good mechanism for two-way communication. Committee membership allows RBE colleagues to understand the reality of being a researcher in a faculty and also allows academics to hear about the latest developments on topical issues such as REF, Athena SWAN and HR Excellence in Research Award. The Faculty Research Committees have formal reporting lines to the University Research Committee which receives minutes from the meetings. Chairs of Faculty Research Committees are also members of the University Research Committee.

The University of South Wales scored above the sector in the latest Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (2017). This survey is run by the Higher Education Academy every two years and is the only UK higher education sector-wide survey that gives an insight into postgraduate researcher's learning and supervision experience. The aggregate score for the responses at USW was 81% - this is 1.6% above the sector benchmarking group and the Universities Alliance benchmarking group, 1.7% higher than the Welsh benchmarking group and 2.3% higher than the Post-92 benchmarking group.

**Support and Career Development** – RBE run a comprehensive series of CPD events which take place across all campuses at USW to ensure fair access to training opportunities. The calendar of events is launched via Faculty RBE Roadshows. These are lunchtime events, hosted by the Dean of Faculty and are designed to highlight the support available to academics via RBE. They are also an opportunity for academics to network with each-other and with RBE colleagues.

In 2016, RBE launched a survey of academics with a view to understanding what support they need and how our current programme of events meets their needs. The 2016/17 CPD survey showed that 100% of delegates thought that our events were either very good or excellent, which is up 15% up on the previous year. Attendees also agreed that the structure of events i.e. lunchtime bitesize courses were a preference over webinars or day long courses. We are complementing the survey data with information that is gleaned from listening to the academics who have attended our CPD events; we also use this intelligence to inform our future CPD provision to ensure that it is fit for purpose.

The CPD programme consisted of 20 workshops, delivered to 177 academic staff. Workshops included a series of 5 one hour, "bite-size" lunch time sessions covering: Understanding Impact, Career Pathways, Developing Collaborative Partnerships, Developing Commercial Projects to Meet Client Needs and Developing Successful External Funding Proposals. In addition to this, 7 in-depth, specialist, half day workshops using external facilitators were provided to support the funding, intellectual property and impact agendas. We also provide one to one coaching for academics who are considering applications for Reader and Professorial titles. Our CPD is complimented by external programmes, where we work collaboratively with other Welsh HEIs including the Times Higher Award winning Welsh Crucible and the Effective Researcher programme for PhD students (action 3.1.1).

A comprehensive, independent Post Graduate Review took place in 2016. Focus groups for staff and PGR students took place and an action plan with smarter objectives was agreed. The plan highlighted that good support was offered to students and that our governance was in line with the sector. The review identified that with regards to the supervision of PGR students there needs to be standardisation of workload allocation across the university and improvements in the lines of communication to the Faculty Senior Management teams (action 2.6.1).

**Researcher Responsibilities** – the university has invested in a new Comprehensive Research Information System (PURE) and in PhD Manager in order to give researchers the ability to update the information on their research outputs, impact and research student supervision records. Once updated, this information updates their CVs and online presence on the university web pages. It also acts as a useful repository for information and metrics regarding research impact. Although it is very early in the adoption process responses to both CROS and PIRLS indicate that compliance with PURE is good with 72% of respondents saying that they had engaged with Pure. A comprehensive review of research governance is also underway which will include our ethics policy for both research and teaching and learning (action 4.1.1).

**Diversity and Equality** – USW holds the Institutional Athena SWAN Bronze award and has invested in a new Athena SWAN support team to ensure that our work on gender equality continues. In 2016 the University became a Stonewall Champion and submitted for the first time to the Stonewall Equality Index. The University has made a submission to the Stonewall Equality Index having made significant progress in this area with the launch of the Fair Play 30 initiative in Autumn 2017. The Fair Play 30 will act as advocates for promoting equality and dealing with equality issues arising for staff and students in their areas. This network will complement the University's current resources and structures for promoting equality and diversity by providing a network of local equality contacts across the organisation.

**Implementation and Review** – the responsibility for the implementation of the strategy lies with the Director of RBE and the HR Excellence in Research Award Steering Group. A key ethos for our implementation and review is effective communication. We are committed to engaging with the staff and students across the institution to ensure their voices are heard. The HR Excellence in Research Award Steering Group listens to colleagues as well as communicating with them, thus avoiding “top down” messaging and consequently facilitating and encouraging dialogue in a “bottom up” fashion. RBE staff will continue to advocate for research staff by attending Faculty executive meetings and Faculty Research Committee meetings and away days.

### 3. A Summary of Future Strategy

USW's future strategy can be summarised as focussing on four broad areas; 1) Deepening our commitment to equality and diversity, 2) Leadership and management development 3) Supporting academic career development and 4) Professional development of research support staff.

**NB:** reference is made to specific actions in the USW HR Excellence in Research Award Two Year Action Plan.

**Deepening our commitment to equality and diversity** – USW is launching a new initiative designed to provide staff with a safe space to ask questions relating to equality and diversity called "Fair Play 30". We will train 30 Fair Play Champions who will be visible by special lanyards, badges and door signs. Anyone will be able to engage with a Fair Play champion to ask for advice on equality and diversity issues including flexible working. We know from our work with the WiA Network that many female academics are not comfortable discussing potential part time working or flexible working with colleagues as it may be seen as a sign of weakness or a lack of commitment. The Fair Play 30 initiative seeks to address these concerns (action 5.1.3).

We have committed to renew our Athena SWAN institutional Bronze Award (action 5.1.1) and to submit a departmental award in Computing and Maths in November 2018 (action 5.1.2), we have invested in more resource around this agenda to support our equality and diversity work by establishing an Athena SWAN project team as well as increasing resource in equality and diversity support in HR. We will measure our impact via feedback from staff from the WiA Network and from the progression of our female staff who have taken part in our Women Development Programme (action 5.1.4).

Our CROS and PRILS results strongly indicate that there is work to be done about raising awareness of important initiatives such as Athena SWAN and have appointed 17 Athena SWAN Champions and given them a time allocation to be able to embed equality and diversity principles within their areas. We will also hold focus groups on every campus to discuss gender and its impact on academic life. These focus

groups will ask the same questions as the 2015 focus groups so we can measure any impact of establishing our WiA Network and our Women Development Programme. We will also use the focus groups to consider what barriers remain to female academic career progression at USW and design actions accordingly (action 5.1.5). In summary with the focus groups, investment in equality and diversity support, Women Development Programme, appointment of Athena SWAN Champions and the Fair Play 30, it is hoped that these interventions will give rise to a measurable step change in this agenda in the future.

**Leadership, Management and Development** – whilst surveys are useful, RBE staff listen to academics attending CPD events. A common issue reported is that Heads of School do not always have the right information to make informed decisions regarding whether academics should engage in research and innovation activities. To this end, we are launching a mandatory course for Heads of School to help them to understand the benefits of research from a personal development perspective as well as being beneficial to the curriculum and being a tool for student recruitment (action 3.1.2). To accompany the course, a Head of School Forum will be established, the Director of Research and Business Engagement will be a part of that forum to enable two-way communication and continued learning in terms of research and innovation (action 3.1.6). Engaging with the Heads of Schools will enable us to highlight the value of research to those in management positions and to enable academics undertaking research to be recognised and valued for their work. Through the direction of the DVC Academic we are working with the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT) to provide this training and development to ensure that the links between learning and teaching and research are not lost and are indeed highlighted.

**Supporting academic career development** – to compliment the Heads of School training and development course, RBE is also launching a mandatory course for early career researchers, research assistants and new academic staff. This course will focus on the basics including research governance, research funding and university research systems and support (action 3.1.3). RBE will continue to run lunchtime courses and bitesize development opportunities throughout the academic year which will be open for all and will be responsive to the changing and challenging external environment (for example BREXIT and the STERN Review of REF) and to the needs of our academics (action 3.1.4).

To help ensure that we appoint the correct person to the role it is our intention to re-draft recruitment guidelines to ensure that during the recruitment and selection of all academic staff an experienced researcher or equivalent will be engaged in the process, particularly at interview. In the meantime, HR Partners will communicate this message to the faculties in order to address this anomaly (action 1.2).

The Research Mentoring Scheme (RMS) is being broadened to reflect our three routes to academic progression via Readership and Professorial title. In autumn 2017, we will launch our mentoring schemes for innovation and engagement and teaching and learning (action 3.2.1) so that all academics have the opportunity for support whatever their chosen career pathway. We have used the feedback from the original RMS to ensure good practice is continued in the expanded scheme. We will monitor the take up, satisfaction and effectiveness of the mentor – mentee matches annually (action 3.2.2).

We will trial the establishment of Research Forums as our feedback from CROS and from early career researchers at Faculty Research Committees suggests that this form of support might benefit those who are in smaller research teams and are not exposed to others in a similar position as them (action 3.2.2).

**Professional development of research support staff** – support for research and research students is provided by Research and Innovation Services (RISe) within the broader RBE. RISe provides a broad strategic and operational service to academic staff and students which includes support for funding applications, research excellence, research impact, postgraduate students, governance, ethics and the underpinning systems and data management. Staff are highly professional and knowledgeable with over 100 years of experience in the HE context. A number of staff are active members of ARMA, seeking qualifications such as the Certificate of Research Management (action 3.6.2). USW are current Chairs of the Welsh Research Office Liaison Officers' (WROLO) group, which is an informal group of people working in Welsh Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) whose primary role is in the management of research. This group is supported by HEFCW and Welsh Government, and exists to share best practice and where appropriate, contribute to the development of collaborative projects.

## Glossary

<b>AWM</b>	Academic Workload Model
<b>BoG</b>	Board of Governors
<b>CELT</b>	Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (USW)
<b>CES</b>	(FCES) Computing, Engineering and Science (Faculty of)
<b>CPD</b>	Continuing Professional Development
<b>CROS</b>	Careers in Research Online Survey
<b>DVC</b>	Deputy Vice Chancellor
<b>Fair Play 30</b>	University of South Wales Equality Champions scheme
<b>FBS</b>	Faculty of Business and Society
<b>FCI</b>	Faculty of Creative Industries
<b>HEFCW</b>	Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
<b>HEI</b>	Higher Education Institution
<b>HR</b>	Human Resources
<b>LSE</b>	(FLSE) Faculty of Life Sciences and Education
<b>PIRLS</b>	Principle Investigators and Research Leaders Survey
<b>RBE</b>	Research and Business Engagement Office
<b>REF</b>	Research Excellence Framework
<b>RISe</b>	Research and Innovation Services
<b>RMS</b>	Research Mentoring Scheme
<b>SAT</b>	Self-Assessment Team
<b>USW</b>	University of South Wales
<b>VC</b>	Vice Chancellor
<b>WiA</b>	Women in Academia Network
<b>WROLOs</b>	Welsh Research Office Liaison Officers'
<b>WUMS</b>	Women in Universities Mentoring Scheme