

HR Excellence in Research Award: six year review

Recommendations

- Note progress on the delivery of SFC's HR Excellence in Research Award Action Plan.
- Endorse the SFC's draft 2018 HR Excellence in Research Award Action Plan, noting that this will be submitted to Vitae for independent review by 8 September 2018.
- Advise the executive on the prioritisation of the actions detailed in the draft 2018 Action Plan.
- Note that the executive will bring future updates on progress to the Committee at 6 monthly intervals.
- Subject to the outcome of the six year review, note that SFC will undertake an extensive external review of the Action Plan in 2020.

Financial implications

- There are no direct financial implications associated with this paper.

HR Excellence in Research Award: six year review

Purpose

1. This paper invites the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee (RKEC) to note progress against the delivery of the SFC's current HR Excellence in Research Award Action Plan¹ and presents the draft 2018 Action Plan for endorsement. It should be considered in the context of the Committee's ambitions for researcher development as set out in the SFC's Research Strategy (17-18) and Strategic Plan 2015-18 that states that *Scotland will nurture, develop and train the international research leaders and Nobel Laureates of tomorrow.*

HR Excellence in Research Award: background

2. The HR Excellence in Research Award is a UK-wide process that enables UK HEIs to gain the European Commission's 'HR excellence in research' badge, which acknowledges their alignment with the principles of the European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for their Recruitment². The UK process is managed by Vitae and incorporates both the QAA Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes³ and the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers⁴ to enable institutions that have published Concordat implementation plans to gain the 'HR excellence in research' badge.
3. At its 25 January 2012 meeting, RKEC recommended that SFC apply for the HR Excellence in Research Award and provided initial comment on the gap analysis undertaken and the draft Action Plan submitted as part of the application process⁵.
4. The SFC achieved the European Commission HR Excellence in Research Award in spring 2012. This was awarded in recognition of the SFC's continuing efforts to enhance the career development of researchers. Although not a direct employer of researchers, the SFC demonstrated clear progress and commitment to working with Scottish universities to enhance how they attract,

¹ The SFC's 2016 HR Excellence in Research Award Action Plan is published on SFC's website at http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/ResearchInnovation/SFC_Action_Plan_HR_Excellence_2016-18.pdf

² The principles of the European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for recruitment are available at <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/jobs/charter>

³ The QAA code is available at <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code>

⁴ The UK Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers is an agreement between funders and employers of research staff to improve the employment and support for researchers and research careers in UK higher education. It sets out clear standards that research staff can expect from the institution that employs them, as well as their responsibilities as researchers. The Concordat principles are provided at page 7 of the annex.

⁵ RKEC/12/05 – HR Excellence. This paper is now archived. It is available from the executive upon request.

manage and develop research staff⁶. The SFC is currently the only UK higher education funding body to hold this award.

5. The actions detailed in the original and current version of the Action Plan are aligned with the SFC's strategic ambitions for researcher development.

Six year review

Process

6. It is a requirement of the HR Excellence in Research Award that the SFC undertakes a review of its Action Plan at least once every two years and updates this accordingly. The last review was undertaken in 2016 and the SFC was successful in retaining this Award. The 2016 Action Plan is published on the SFC's website⁷.
7. The SFC is now required to complete the HR Excellence in Research Award six year review and submit a revised Action Plan to Vitae for assessment by an independent panel by 7 September 2018.
8. The executive's assessment of progress (see below) is informed by its engagement with Universities Scotland's Researcher Training Sub-Committee (US RTSC). The Committee is invited to note that although external consultation is not required at this review point (as the SFC is not a direct employer of researchers) it was considered important to consult the sector through this forum in order to gain a more informed understanding of the value of the Action Plan and ensure this is fit for purpose from 2018 onwards.

Progress against the strategy, indicators and actions identified in the 2016 action plan

9. The SFC can demonstrate progress against all of the actions and measures of success identified in the 2016 Action Plan. Examples include:
 - The SFC remains committed to supporting researcher development through the allocation of the Research Excellence Grant⁸ (REG). An underpinning principle of the Grant is a commitment to supporting the personal, professional and career development of researchers. SFC provided £231.8M through the REG in AY2017-18;

⁶ The 2012 Action Plan and gap analysis is published on the SFC's website at http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/ResearchInnovation/SFC_gap_analysis_and_action_plan_for_HR_Excellence_in_Research.pdf

⁷ The 2016 Action Plan is published on the SFC's website at http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/ResearchInnovation/SFC_Action_Plan_HR_Excellence_2016-18.pdf

⁸ The Research Excellence Grant supports world-leading research in Scottish universities, ensuring Scotland remains globally competitive and attractive to the best researchers

- SFC has continued to provide funding to universities through the Research Postgraduate Grant (RPG) to invest in the environment for high quality research training and development. SFC provided £34.5M through the RPG in AY2017-18;
- The Outcome Agreement process has been used to set out expectations in relation to researcher development and support, including our expectation that HEIs will build on the progress made during REF2014 in respect to equality and diversity in staff selection;
- SFC has continued to provide funding in support of the research pooling initiative. Funding has been targeted at the maintenance of shared people resource, provided graduate training and supported knowledge exchange activity;
- Funding has continued to be provided in support of the Scottish Graduate Schools;
- SFC has continued to provide funding in support of Advance HE and encourage HEIs to take up the Athena Swan and Race Equality Charter Mark through the Outcome Agreement process;
- The SFC allocated strategic funding in support of the forum convened by US RTSC in June 2018, Supporting and Enhancing Researcher Wellbeing in Scotland Mental Wellness; and
- The number of Scottish HEIs awarded the HR Excellence in Research Award has increased from 11 to 13.

HR Excellence in Research Award Action Plan 2018

10. The draft 2018 HR Excellence in Research Action Plan is annexed to this paper and presented for endorsement. This is informed by the achievements detailed above, advice provided by US RTSC and the results of the latest edition of the Principal Investigators and Research Leaders (PIRLS) and Careers in Research Online (CROS)⁹ that indicates that support for researchers and their development remains a critical issue.
11. The updated Action Plan reflects the capacity of the Outcome Agreement process to be used more effectively as a lever for delivering support for researchers and, critically, monitoring progress. This is aligned with the advice RKEC provided to the executive in the context of the intensification of the Outcome Agreement process and the Outcome Agreement Remit at its 17 May 2018 meeting. The Committee may wish to comment on this approach.

⁹ The PIRLS and CROS surveys collate representative views across the UK higher education sector of the attitudes and activities of research staff and research leaders. The last survey was undertaken in 2017 and the findings and recommendations are published on Vitae's website at <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/vitae-publications/reports/vitae-5-steps-forward-web.pdf>

12. In addition to this, the Action Plan has also been updated to reflect recent or forthcoming developments in higher education that will have an impact on researcher development or present an opportunity to advance this agenda. For example, preparations for the REF2021 exercise, the opportunities presented by SFC's forthcoming review of the research pooling initiative and the future recommendations of the Tapping All Our Talents Review 2018.
13. Members are asked to note that funding in support of the Scottish Crucible programme and PECRE - the post graduate and early career researcher exchange scheme - is to be agreed. See annex, page 3.
14. The executive welcomes comments from the Committee on the updated Plan and advice on the prioritisation of the proposed actions. Are there actions that the executive should deprioritise over AY2018-20?

Six year review: next steps

15. The executive will submit the SFC's 2018 HR Excellence in Research Action Plan and a report of the review undertaken to Vitae for consideration by an independent assessment panel by 8 September 2018. Should the SFC be successful in its bid to retain the Award, the SFC will be required to undertake a more extensive external review in 2020 and RKEC will be invited to advise on and contribute to this exercise at that time.
16. The executive intends to provide the Committee with updates on progress delivering the Action Plan at six monthly intervals.

Risk assessment

17. In the context of the SFC's strategic ambitions for researcher development, it is critical that the SFC should seek to deliver the actions outlined in the 2018 Action Plan and, in turn, retain the HR Excellence in Research Award. SFC's commitment to the delivery of the Concordat principles - recognised through receipt of this award - sends a clear and powerful message to Scottish universities and other higher education funding bodies. It serves to encourage HEIs to deliver the principles of the Concordat and achieve (or retain) the Award themselves. According to US RTSC, the importance of this message should not be underestimated.

Equality and diversity assessment

18. The actions detailed in the 2018 Action Plan are intended to support all researchers and ensure that, irrespective of their age, gender, disability, religion or other protected characteristic, an environment and practices exist to ensure that all are able to contribute equally to the delivery of world class research and progress within their careers. In addition to this, the Action Plan

specifically outlines our intention to use staff data more effectively to inform the Outcome Agreement process and tackle any equality and diversity issues that are identified.

Financial implications

19. There are no direct financial implications associated with this paper.

Recommendations

20. The Committee is invited to:

- Note progress on the delivery of SFC's HR Excellence in Research Award Action Plan;
- Endorse the SFC's draft 2018 HR Excellence in Research Award Action Plan, noting that this will be submitted to Vitae for independent review by 8 September 2018;
- Advise the executive on the prioritisation of the actions detailed in the draft 2018 Action Plan;
- Note that the executive will bring future updates on progress to the Committee at 6 monthly intervals; and
- Subject to the outcome of the six year review, note that SFC will undertake in an extensive external review of the Action Plan in 2020.

Publication

21. This paper will be published on the SFC's website with the exception of the annex. The annex is intended for future publication.

Further information

22. Contact: Fiona Bates, Policy/Analysis Officer, tel: 0131 313 6609, email: fbates@sfc.ac.uk.

