European Commission HR Excellence in Research Award: 4-year review of progress on the implementation of the Action Plan; revised report.

Context
The University gained the European Commission's HR Excellence in Research Award in May 2012.

An internal assessment took place in 2014 to evaluate progress two years after having gained the award. The revised report dating from July 2014 is presented together with the original action plan as part of the evidence for the 4-year external assessment.

The present 4-year report presents progress made and actions taken in the past 4.5 years. The report was first submitted for review in September 2016 and revised after external panel feedback for resubmission in July 2017. A new action plan covering the coming 2 years is presented separately.

Internal evaluation
Implementation of the HR Excellence in Research Award has been coordinated through the Research Office during the past 4 years.

An internal 2-year review was conducted in April/ May 2014 led by the Director of the University Research Office along with senior colleagues from Human Resources, Organisational Development and the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Research & Enterprise). The report together with the new 2-year action plan was reviewed and approved at a University Executive meeting in May 2014.

The present 4-year evaluation report and the accompanying action plan for the next two years were prepared by the Head of Research Support Services, previously the Head of Research Grants and Contracts, after consultation with senior colleagues in Human Resources and Organisational Development. The report and the action plan were reviewed by the Director of Research & Enterprise and the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Research and Enterprise).

The initial 4-year report and action plan was approved by the Research & Enterprise Committee at the October 2016 meeting. The revised documentation takes developments between September 2016 and June 2017 into account. The revised action plan was reviewed and approved by the Research and Enterprise Committee on 22nd June 2017.

The evaluation was initially conducted as a desk based review to collate factual information on procedures and improvements in place and their application at University level over the past 4-years, with focus on the past two years. The period of revision before resubmission in July 2017 gave the opportunity to incorporate feedback from researchers in a more coherent way resulting in a revised action plan. Representation from research staff is included in the composition of the University Research and Enterprise Committee. In February 2017, the committee was expanded to include four members of research staff. Further feedback from research staff was provided through the results of the Staff Survey 2016 held in December 2016. 40% of research staff responded to the survey (for comparison: 47% of academic staff and 49% of senior academic staff responded to the survey). Feedback from attendees of the pilot series of Researcher Development Days, held between January 2017 and June 2017, was evaluated to monitor the success of the programme. One event in the series was held as an open space meeting on career progression, which provided concrete ideas for the researcher development agenda at City.

After a lengthy process of reorganising research support operations in general and the departure of key personnel who drove the original implementation of the HR Excellence award, which affected the progress between 2014 and 2016, a newly structured Research & Enterprise Office started operations with 1st August 2016, albeit with transitional arrangements. Staffing of the new Directorate for Research & Enterprise will be completed in July 2017.

Overview of progress
Both the original Action Plan drawn up for the Concordat and the 2-year review report featured two areas of primary activity: the introduction of new terms and conditions of employment for research staff along with associated procedures; and the provision of the University’s Research and Enterprise Development Programme.

(a) Research staff employment (Actions on Concordat Principle 1-4)
The University is committed to the new employment conditions for research staff introduced in August 2012. The majority of research staff at the time chose to transition to the new terms and conditions. The new terms and conditions include parity with academic staff in annual leave and sick leave and the introduction of continuing contracts. The terms of annual appraisal were revised to include consideration of career development needs.

Progress has been made in disseminating the new policies and procedures since the 2-year review report. Guidance on research staff employment matters, the policy on grading for research staff and principles and procedures for bridging funding for researchers are now published on the internal Human Resources web portal. A separate section about research appointments has been created which is accessible from the landing page of the HR web portal. The section had 154 unique viewings between April 2015 and July 2016 and 124 views between August 2016 and July 2017. Usage of the site increased after January 2017 as it became better known through the introduction of briefing sessions for Principal Investigators. Between April 2015 and July 2016 the guidance notes were accessed 60 times. The policy on grading was accessed 43 times. For comparison, about 20-30 new appointments are made per year. The documentation about the mechanism for researchers was only accessed 18 times.

The guidance for the appointment of research staff is cross-referenced in the recruitment policy to ensure visibility. Templates for costing research grant applications reference the key principles on research staff grading. Recruitment forms collate specific information on research appointments so that line management is assigned correctly and continuing contracts can be managed effectively.

The Action Plan foresaw an internal audit and follow-up review of processes and procedures to be undertaken in 2015. Scoping was done for the audit but as it would have coincided with the restructuring process the view was taken by the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Research & Enterprise) to delay the audit until after the new structure was in place. The approach of a desk based review for the preparation of the current report sought to partly fill this gap.

The University has about 130 staff classified under a research staff category on the system with around 85 of those staff members on research-only contracts. The majority of those researchers are placed on continuing contracts as per the new terms and conditions. But since the switch to the new terms and conditions the percentage of new starters being placed on fixed terms contracts has increased from 8% to 26%. This includes staff categorised as researchers due to their job titles but not on research-only contracts. For the purpose of this review only staff on research-only contracts are relevant and to be considered. Looking at the year 2015/16 the situation is as follows: of 32 new starters 6 are placed on fixed term contracts. Two cases clearly fulfil the exceptional circumstances listed in the guidance for research staff appointments. The remaining cases are less clear-cut but relate to staff replacement on research grants for a shorter duration. In a follow-up analysis in January 2017 14% of research staff appeared on fixed-term appointments (equating to 18 staff). However, that analysis also showed inconsistency and errors in how the HR data are reported which makes concrete conclusions difficult.

Overall, use of the new terms and conditions is clearly evidenced. HR staff are briefed on the application of the new terms and conditions. A centralised HR administration team issuing contracts guarantees University-wide consistency. The central HR team also follows up on the end date of funding arrangements for externally funded positions and alerts line managers in time to discuss the situation with the researcher and if needed take steps to initiate redundancy. The outcome of discussions is followed up by the central HR team. But individual cases show that some clarification
on the use of fixed term contracts may be needed. Due to the small scale of the problem the issue is not given priority for the coming 2 years.

The provision to upgrade research staff from Grade 5 to Grade 6 on completion of their PhD is also practised. Initiative for upgrading comes from the line managers which demonstrates awareness of the new policy among academic staff. The process for bridging funding is supported by the use of research sustainability funds which make some of the indirect cost leveraged from grant income directly available for use by Principal Investigators. All schools have policies of allocating such funds. Schools with a larger number of researchers have developed support structures which pool some of the funds into school or research group budgets to ensure wider support beyond the group of Principal Investigators.

Data from the staff survey show that consistent application of the appraisal process for research staff is a problem. Only 53% of respondents confirm to have had an appraisal in the last 12 months. This result is 24 percentage points below the university average. In the 2013 staff survey 71% of the respondent researches confirmed to having had an appraisal in the last 12 months. The breakdown by school of the 2016 results shows huge variances between schools in the performance of appraisals and the HR department has taken action to monitor completion of appraisals. The briefing sessions for Principal Investigators also help to disseminate the importance of appraisals. Feedback from members of the Research & Enterprise Committee highlighted some dissatisfaction with the current process. The same form is used for academic and research staff which appears not entirely suitable for researchers to show progress. The discussion at the open space meeting mentioned above supported the need to review the appraisal process. This will be followed up in the action plan for the next period.

The Staff Survey 2016 results for research staff show an overall more positive response than other staff groups (+15% variance from the university average). 77% of the respondents would recommend the institution as a great place to work, which his 21% above the university average. The three answers scoring below the university average are related to providing excellent support to students and/or services to staff (88% of respondents say they do, 9% below average); appraisal; and the opportunities that exist to feedback views/issues within the department (7% below average, 48% of respondents).

Where possible the comparison of 2013 and 2016 results shows that the results are at the same level: "I have clear work objectives" (89% in 2016, 11% above university average, 93% in 2013), "I feel valued and recognised for the work that I do" (76% in 2016, 24% above university average, 71% in 2013), "My line manager encourages me to undertake personal and professional development in my role" (72% in 2016, 9% above average, 71% in 2013), "I am treated with fairness and respect at City University London" (81% in 2016, 13% above university average, 78% in 2013), and "In my experience, City University London is an employer that promotes equality and diversity" (72% in 2016, 11% above university average, 59% in 2013, compared to 64% in 2011). A question around the usefulness of appraisals shows a marked decrease: "My appraisal helps me to perform better in my job" (47% in 2016, still 9% above University average, 65% in 2013).

A substantial piece of work on gender equality issues was conducted as part of a renewed application for an Athena SWAN Bronze award. An action plan for Athena SWAN has been established and is cross-referenced in the action plan for the next period. As the University ran several staff surveys in the past two-year period and the number of staff participating in the previous round of CROS was small the Pro-Vice Chancellor decided not to participate in CROS and PRILS 2015.

(b) **Research & Enterprise Development Programme (Actions on Concordat Principle 3-5)**

Over the past 4 years the centrally organised Research and Enterprise Development Programme has stalled due to lack of resource and changes in the Organisational Development team until the Research & Enterprise Directorate relaunched the programme in January 2017. A small number of events was held centrally and at school level in 2014-16, mainly to support preparation of grant applications.
A pilot series of training sessions was run between January 2017 and June 2017. As part of this pilot dedicated Researcher Development Days were introduced with a mix of generic skills training, sessions on career development and more academic orientated sessions on grant and publication writing. Attendance ranged between 20-30 people. As the number of places on individual sessions was restricted due to the workshop nature of the events, attendance figures are not necessarily a good indicator of success but take-up was much better than attendance of events aimed at academic staff. Feedback analysis showed that around 70% of attendants scored the sessions 4 or 5 on a score of 1 (worst) to 5 (best), which is a great success for the programme.

Next steps and focus for the next two years

(a) Research staff employment and development (Actions on Concordat Principle 1-4)
The administrative support in Human Resources will remain the key element in securing the continued consistent application of the revised terms and conditions. Focus for the coming years will shift to engaging academic line managers better with their role in the process. The target group are around 98 academic staff (out of 700 staff on education and research contracts) who have had projects in the past three years which included management of research staff and are likely to engage in externally funded research projects. Briefing events are organised by the Research Support Services team for Principal Investigators (PIs) who have line management responsibility. These briefing events have been developed with input from Human Resources staff. A set of three such sessions, held between February and May 2017, has not produced wide engagement with the academic community. Attendance was low. However, those staff who attended were very engaged in the discussion. Different approaches of reaching academic staff will now be considered as the format of training session may not be the most appropriate given the varying number of PIs and the timeliness of the briefing. If possible sessions will be planned through schools and use the support of deans and local Human Resources advisers to increase interest among academic staff.
A long list of questions and answers was collated as part of the briefing sessions which will be reworked into material for the website.

(b) Research & Enterprise Development Programme (Actions on Concordat Principle 3-5)
The Researcher Development Days will be re-run and expanded in the academic year 2017/18 to provide an exchange and training forum for researchers across the University, to stimulate exchange between them, deliver training and career development in addition to subject specific seminars and training events within their departments and research groups. Events will be framed around the Researcher Development Framework. Feedback from such events will be kept under review to inform the schedule in subsequent years.
A training schedule will be developed in discussion with the needs of the different schools. Sessions on funding opportunities and bid writing are highly favoured with an aim to reshape generic workshops into funder focussed, shorter events with participation from funding bodies. The Research Support Services team will work with colleagues from the Knowledge Transfer and Policy & Strategy teams within the Research & Enterprise Office to create a wide and inclusive training programme. Input from other professional service departments will be sought to cover areas such as publications and copyright matters, researcher integrity, authorship & attribution, publicity, engagement with the media, financial and employment matters. Researchers will be able to attend those events as well. However, Researcher Development Days will cover some of these areas as well with a specific focus on early career researchers. This way a wider level of competency and skills among the researcher community can be supported.
Work with Organisational Development and other parts of Human Resources will be undertaken to review the appraisal process. Researchers from the departments/ schools where appraisals have been practiced routinely will be invited for their views on the current form and guidance notes. Members of the Research and Enterprise Committee will be approached for advice and support in gathering a focus group. The work will focus on the specifics of how researchers can present progress made in their appraisal. A piece of work about the use and usefulness of appraisals has been
conducted among academic staff recently through a survey and this piece of work has yielded insights of a general nature into the appraisal process which will inform the appraisal process in general. There is already work going on about developing a researcher profile which is sponsored by the Vice-President (Research and Enterprise). Apart from this high level work, there is need to review existing guidance notes and policies around support for research staff in making grant applications and acting as Principal Investigators. This piece of work will be led by the Head of Research Support Services.

**Measures of success** will include production of a process map for the facilitation between Research Support Services and Human Resources and updated guidelines/forms for research appraisals to be ready for appraisals in 2018; development of a dedicated area for researcher development on the Research and Enterprise staff pages with monitoring of its use; development of alternative channels of dissemination where take up of training sessions is very low, with monitoring of use; participation in the next CROS survey with a response rate that matches the response rate to the staff survey held in December 2016.

The next staff survey and possibly CROS may fall outside the 2-year period of the Action Plan but in any case, answers to questions around appraisal will be an indicator of success in improving use and usefulness of appraisals. The aim is to embed performance of appraisals as part of the line management of all research staff.

We will evaluate feedback from all events. Success would be to keep previous level of ratings and gain feedback on the usefulness of the content to shape future events.

The action plan details the reports and materials to be produced.