

Contract Researcher Audit and Survey Executive Summary January 2017

Executive Summary

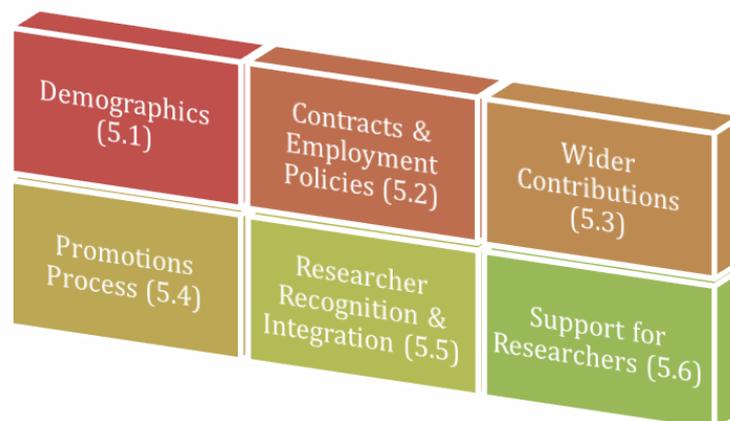
This report summarises and explains work completed in late 2016 into a study of the career development, progression and experiences of members of staff employed as contract researchers within the Faculty of Health and Medicine at Lancaster University, United Kingdom.

Utilising two key data sources the report provides the first stage in a proposed larger piece of work analysing and reporting on the current procedures and attitudes related to contract researchers. It suggests a number of primary recommendations and improvements for the future. The data sources included a human resources (HR) dataset of key demographic and employment information and a research staff survey.

The survey was conducted online alongside the Faculty's Equality Enhancement (Athena Swan) survey in August and September 2016. A number of questions were asked including both those focussed around Athena Swan themes and those aimed towards contract researchers specifically.

A total of 16 responses were gathered for the contract researcher survey which were analysed and processed in order to utilise both quantitative and qualitative data within the results. These results were then analysed together with the provided HR data, giving additional context, to produce a number of conclusions and key ideas to be explored in further detail.

The key themes explored, and their respective report sections, are:



These themes developed key areas for exploration which are included in the report and incorporate aspects of a variety of different issues and challenges associated with employment practices, career development and progression for contract researchers.

The issues identified vary greatly, with some localised smaller issues directly related to the individuals involved, while a number are broader institutional or sector-wide issues, which will require a larger commitment of time and effort in order to resolve. All have varying impacts upon the career development of researchers in the Faculty, and potentially wider applicability to all university researchers.

In order to provide context the results of the survey were compared to two previous surveys, the Lancaster Researchers' survey 2012 and the Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS) 2015, which identify similar issues at university and national levels.

The report is also analysed in respect to the recently reviewed Lancaster University Concordat Action Plan 2015-2017 to identify areas which are already being improved upon and to highlight those which will require further work in the future.

Key Findings

Some noticeable findings of the survey were:

- The Faculty has higher usage of fixed-term contracts when compared to the national average, only 12.2% of researchers within FHM are on open-ended/permanent (referred to as indefinite locally) contracts compared to 33.3% of researchers nationally
- 20% of survey respondents have had upwards of 10 fixed-term contracts at LU
- 64.3% of respondents are not sure if they'll be employed in FHM in 3yrs, cited as due to being on fixed-term contracts and lack of job security
- Only two respondents have experienced funds 'bridging' between contracts and these were informal arrangements by PIs, not using specific bridging funds
- Wider contributions to the Faculty/University outside their contract remit are made by 80% of the researchers who responded
- 60% of respondents described the University promotions process as 'Not known to me'
- Of survey respondents, 60% do not view themselves as "early career researchers" when the phrase is often used to describe all contract researchers, two thirds of respondents have been employed elsewhere for three or more years before joining the Faculty
- Only one survey respondent disagreed that there are adequate opportunities for development and training

Recommendations

Recommendations are included to improve employment practice across the Faculty and University and in order to improve the support and opportunities for career development and progression for contract researchers. The areas detailed are supplementary steps which are not currently identified elsewhere, such as the Concordat Action Plan.

Recommendations for areas of improvement	Impact	Implementation Costs/Resource
Further diversify the workforce in relation to gender, ethnicity and additional demographic characteristics identified by the Equality Enhancement Committee	Medium	Medium
Explore the introduction of structured bridging funds for researchers between contracts	High	High
Make researchers feel valued and part of the Faculty community through increased integration activities	Medium	Low
Reduce the use of the catch all phrase "early career researcher" as a descriptor across the University	Medium	Low
Address the culture of working out of hours and excessive workloads	High	High
Examine the promotions process and opportunities for progression, and raise awareness of this amongst both researchers and managers	High	Medium
Remove the use of the term 'indefinite' for contracts where this is not the case	Medium	Low
Explore approaches of sustainable, secure employment of researchers that avoid a reliance on short/fixed-term contracts	High	High