

The Faculty of Natural and Environmental Sciences is comprised of 3 Academic Units, Oceanography and Earth Sciences, Biological Sciences and Chemistry.

The Faculty has around 170 research staff.



Professor Lindy Holden-Dye became Concordat Champion in 2012.

What was the situation like when you became Concordat Champion and what progress has there been?

When I was invited by the Dean to take on the new role of Concordat Champion **there was nothing at Faculty level for postdocs**. We had seen a few informal groups start up in the various Schools over the years but then they died back when the postdocs moved on. We didn't have anything sustainable – the new position which I took on was a way to provide continuity and to start to address the Concordat principles in a systematic fashion. [see role description below]

I set up the first Faculty wide **Steering Group for postdoctoral researchers and teaching fellows**, with each academic unit and key groups represented - membership consists of two Postdocs and Teaching Fellows from each Academic Unit, plus someone who had just made transition to lecturer. The Steering Group has discussed the principles of the Concordat and prioritised areas that need to be tackled.

How has the Faculty recognised and rewarded its researchers?

We created a Dean's Prize in 2013 (following the Faculty of Physical Sciences and Engineering who set up the first Dean's Prize) and reward was easy in the first year as we gave out 10 prizes as we received that number of nominations. Now we receive more nominations, it makes it harder to choose. We recognise early career researchers and teaching fellows for their wider engagement with the University – for instance we make awards for outreach, enterprise and teaching.

This award reflects what we are aiming for – **we want to develop whole individual**, not lab slaves! At the award ceremony, chaired by the Dean, we displayed the citations for each awardee to disseminate best practise and to emphasize the fact that the Faculty values the broad contributions of its researchers

http://www.southampton.ac.uk/biosci/news/2013/12/18_achievements_recognised_at_deans_award_ceremony.page

http://www.southampton.ac.uk/biosci/news/events/2014/12/15_fnes_deans_prize_2014.page

We are **building a networking community**, where everyone can learn from each other and share. There are examples of this within each academic unit, for example postdocs run seminar programmes and organise outreach. We have built on this at Faculty level by organising a postdoctoral conference. The Steering Group manages all of this and each academic unit has taken a turn in leading – the postdocs decide on the abstracts, bring in speakers etc.

<http://www.southampton.ac.uk/oes/news/events/2015/05/fnes-early-career-research-and-teaching-fellow-conference.page> (The day was attended by 91 people (predominantly post-doctoral researchers) and contained some excellent and diverse talks and posters from the research and

The Dean's Prize

To recognise exceptional contributions in research, education, enterprise, public engagement and citizenship.

All postdoctoral, research and teaching fellows are eligible* and can be nominated by University staff.

Guidelines

This successful initiative in the Faculty recognizes an outstanding level of achievement, commitment or dedication in the following categories:

- ❖ **Education** (e.g. outstanding contribution to curriculum innovation)
- ❖ **Research** (e.g. high quality publication)
- ❖ **Enterprise** (e.g. establishing a successful industrial collaboration; commercialisation of research)
- ❖ **Public Engagement** (e.g. organisation of a high profile outreach event; media activities)
- ❖ **Citizenship** (e.g. broad contribution to Faculty activities such as effective running of seminar programmes, workshops, mentorship, committee membership).



(source: 2014-15 nomination form)

teaching fellows from across the faculty. In total there were 13 contributed talks, 2 keynote talks and 31 posters.)

What differences have there been with appraisals?

Appraisals have always been an issue for postdocs. First of all, uptake was very patchy –when I took on the role of Concordat champion it was clear many either did not have an appraisal or did not really know what one was for. Since then we have been raising awareness through drop-in lunches on ‘what it is for and why do it!’ This has had the full support of the Heads of Academic unit who have put in place mechanisms to ensure appraisal is completed. 100% of postdocs in FNES are now having an appraisal! process.

My next step is to **improve the quality of appraisals- this was one of the key issues that was raised during the Dean's ‘roadshow’ when he met with postdocs across the Faculty on a rolling programme of visits.** It would seem that this largely requires educating PIs about how to appraise postdocs . All PIs involved in appraisals now have training but this doesn't provide specific guidance for the issues pertinent to postdocs. From discussing this with the Steering Group there are clearly examples of excellent practise in this, but there are also some disappointing experiences. We are discussing ways of disseminating best practise through workshops and the possibility of making these part of the induction for all new lecturers.

What career support has the Faculty provided?

We have a number of **careers events and Careers Workshops** organised by the postdocs themselves - we also incorporate careers talks at the annual research conferences and invite alumni who have interesting career paths to events like the Dean's prize. I am very aware of the need to broaden the outlook of postdocs in terms of career possibilities and we do this wherever we can. **Mentoring** has been really important and has developed significantly since 2012. Largely through the enthusiasm of the Heads of Academic unit we have schemes across the Faculty now – in Biological Sciences postdocs are assigned a mentor at Induction, and this might be something that is more widely adopted in the future. Mentoring is a vital component of career support.

Linked to this is induction - we have been looking at the **Induction Pack** for each Academic Unit and have improved them. We have a ‘Welcome talk’ every 3 months in the Academic Unit. A member of the Senior Management Team leads the welcome. This all makes the researchers feel more included and more a part of things.

Since 2012 we have also instigated a change in the involvement of postdocs and teaching fellows in **the committee structure** of the Faculty's academic units. We are putting in place a practise where it will be expected to have post-doc representation on all the main operational committees - this is the case for Biological Sciences now

and this year we will survey the Faculty again and check for the take-up.

Teaching is a mixed experience for postdocs. In some areas they are used rather than supported, it has got better in others – but overall it is still patchy. We are keen that all postdocs who want to gain experience and training in this have the opportunity. Of course they can only do PGCAP if they have the teaching commitment to facilitate this but there are other ways of providing training, through mentorship, peer review and short workshops. All of these are areas we are pursuing. We have highlighted the importance we attach to excellence in education by offering an award for this through the Dean's Prize. We are also endeavouring to change the framework within the Faculty for postdoc participation in education e.g. we have changed our guidelines for **PhD supervision** so that postdocs can now be an official PhD supervisor if their contract extends over the research period. That has been clarified since 2012.

Of course there are other ways of developing career skills - through enterprise, ICURE and R2I for example. **Outreach is a fantastic way for the postdocs to enhance their own career progression.** There are some excellent examples of outreach work in the Faculty and it has enabled people to go onto other things – for example, [Katy Stubbs](#) who is now the Science Communications Officer with the Alzheimer's Research UK. Also, our postdoc community are active participants in a range of professional associations e.g. Jo Bailey <http://www.southampton.ac.uk/biosci/news/2015/10/national-role-for-southampton-neuroscientist.page> and this is something the Steering Group is also involved with. The Steering Group is engaging these dynamic individuals within the Faculty to spread best practice.

What about the Promotions process for Postdocs?

We are **making research staff aware of the promotion process** through discussion and informal 'drop-in' lunch sessions. This is something we will address as the appraisal process takes root.

Data on research staff and the question of 'contact lists' frequently come up at the CDR WG meetings, how has this changed in the Faculty?

The data are improving - I can get a list now! but the detail is missing. I still need to know about the numbers of fixed term] contracts - how long they are- how many renewals etc.- how many go on to full-time contracts. Qualitatively, I know what the situation is from talking to the postdocs and through discussion with the Steering Group, but quantitatively that is a different story. It would be really useful to have more fine-tuned data to track changes over the years.

If you had to summarise, what have been the substantial changes in the past four years?

Making postdocs realise they are staff and part of the University - I hope this has been a change, I think we have made progress. They are becoming aware of their rights and their responsibilities within this framework. I have **encouraged Postdocs to take ownership of the Concordat goals**: they organise their conference, they have a network, they run events e.g. outreach and internal events – they take the initiative. The Faculty allocated a budget for their activity. Each representative on the Steering Group has had to galvanise their own community (in their Academic Unit). I now just give all this a 'nudge'.

It has been important to listen to what the postdocs have to say (that is what the Dean's roadshow was about) and to work with them, guide and support them. They have had ownership of what has developed in the Faculty – this has been more impactful than a centrally imposed programme. I have helped with the progression.

– and we created a SharePoint site (*Faculty intranet site*) for the community.

ROLE DESCRIPTION: The role of the Academic Champion is to support the postdoctoral research and teaching fellows within their respective academic unit. There will be one champion for each academic unit. Typically the post will be for 3 years. The Academic Champions will work with the Faculty Champion to implement the Faculty Concordat Action Plan by;

i) ensure the momentum of activities of the local ECR is maintained e.g. through identifying individuals to join the Concordat steering group and meeting with ECRs on a regular basis

iii) attend the Faculty Concordat steering group meetings

iii) direct ECRs to sources of help e.g. administrative assistance if needed

iv) promote and encourage participation of the academic unit in ECR events, e.g. the postdoc conference

v) ensure sustainability of the group by finding replacements for the local postdoc committee as and when required

vi) assist the Faculty Concordat Academic Champion by collecting information on relevant processes in the academic unit and their compliance with the Faculty Action Plan e.g. completion of ppdr, participation in mentoring, recruitment, induction.