

# **The University of Portsmouth Evaluation Report for the EC Human Resources Excellence in Research Award at the Ten Year stage - September 2023**

## **Institutional context**

The University of Portsmouth is a modern University with a growing research base and a reputation for excellence, recognised by its strong placing in various league tables. In 2020, following a period of consultation with all staff and many stakeholders, we launched our new University Vision 2030, and University Strategy 2020-25. Our REF 2021 submission evidences significant growth in the number of research active staff, research income and further development of our research environment. We are ranked third of all modern post-92 universities in the UK for research power, which measures the quality and quantity of research submitted into the exercise. Our REF submission included 1,407 research outputs and 54 impact case studies across 16 subject disciplines and involved 603 academic staff. At any given time, the University employs 100-120 Research Staff, depending largely on the number and type of externally funded research grants and contracts. We have retained the HR Excellence in Research award since 2013, and have continued to document and monitor progress against the Concordat principles. We successfully renewed the award at the two-year (2015), four-year (2017), six-year (2019) and eight year stages (2021). In identifying the target audience for our 2021-23 Action Plan we sharpened the focus on support for Research Staff (RS) whilst recognising that such staff are part of the wider research community that extended to include academic staff at different career stages. We maintain this approach in our 2023-26 Action Plan.

## **Governance structures**

Operational oversight for the Researcher Development Concordat falls under the aegis of the Researcher Development Group (RDG), a formally constituted sub-group of the University Research and Innovation Committee that meets three times a year. The RDG is chaired by the Deputy Director of Research and Innovation Services (Environment and Strategy), it includes in its membership representatives of Research Staff (convenors of the Research Staff Forum) and academic staff (convenors of the Professors Forum, Readers Forum and Researchers Network), as well as Faculty leadership for R&I (an Associate Dean for Research and Innovation), HR senior management, the Senior Ethics Advisor, manager responsible for Equality and Diversity (providing a connection to Athena Swan and Race Equality Charter groups), manager from the Graduate School, and staff from the Directorate for Careers and Employability. URIC is chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research, Innovation and External Relations).

## **How internal evaluation was undertaken**

In creating the new action plan we have drawn on feedback received from the Research Staff Forum, Researchers' Network, Readers' Forum, Professors' Forum via various routes including fora discussions, focus groups (3 RS at one online focus group, and 15 at in-person event). We have also taken into account responses to the CEDARS survey (2023) which received 224 responses overall, of which 28 responses were from Research Staff (26% of the cohort)). The main core principles of the new action plan were agreed at the RDG before taking these out for discussion with the focus groups. The focus groups explored issues around the 10 days of development time, communication, PDR as well as proposals for the forward looking action plan. Issues were raised around the time available to Research Staff to undertake professional development and also the precarity of contracts. There was broad support for the proposed action plan, and in particular the postdoc pool concept was warmly received. The action plan has been considered and approved at RDG (including Research Staff representation - see membership above). The action plan, and 10 yr review report have been discussed and agreed by the

University Research and Innovation Committee chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (R&I, and External Relationships).

### **Overarching strategic objectives (previous period, 2021-23):**

At the outset of the last HREiR cycle (2021) we had identified five priority areas to guide our response on the Concordat. Following feedback from the national panel and further consultation within the Researcher Development Group we added 'Building an inclusive culture' as the sixth priority area as a way to better highlight existing actions addressing EDI in the original action plan. The six interrelated priority areas are provided below:

1. Embed 10 days of development time in our research culture and practices.
2. Effective Performance and Development Reviews (PDRs) for all Research Staff, and for managers of Research Staff. The latter to include specific reference to their responsibilities for researchers in respect of the Concordat.
3. Effective inductions for our Research Staff.
4. Prepare our Research Staff for future careers.
5. Foster effective engagement (in the issues of the concordat) across all stakeholders/levels: Institution, senior staff, PIs/managers of Research Staff, Research Staff.
6. Building an inclusive culture.

### **Progress and achievements (previous period, 2021-23)**

- Developed a comprehensive suite of web-based resources for PIs and research staff (induction, PDR, careers, talking heads videos): Intranet stats indicate an increase in unique views of updated induction pages, and good engagement with new pages for career development, and ECRs. Overall awareness of the Concordat has increased since 2021.
- Enhanced induction activities events and communications & series of events jointly delivered by the Research Staff Forum and Researchers' Network to support new and existing research staff (9 events to 270 attendees in period): RS are reporting significantly higher levels of satisfaction of induction at the institutional, faculty and local levels.
- Created a mechanism to provide careers support/guidance to research staff: resources mentioned above, sessions at Festival of R&I, links to entrepreneurs in residence, other sessions e.g. Space, Fora sessions. Managers of researchers have a high level of confidence in supporting their research staff in their careers, increased from 2021 levels, although impact for RS has dropped slightly. Awareness of the institutional careers offer has dropped slightly for RS.
- Following extensive consultation, developed a Researcher Cohort training programme to sit within the Research Leadership training suite of programmes, to be launched Q4 2023.
- We have built the promotion of 10 days research time into events, resources, webpages: however, the proportion of RS having 10 days or more has dropped to a low point, and will be explored further.
- Developed targeted advice to PIs and Research Staff for PDR - phased over 2022 & 23 cycles: 'All about the conversation - email and blog', changes to guidance in the form and in linked pages for 2023 cycle. Uptake of PDR for RS, according to CEDARS, has increased, although perceived usefulness has dropped slightly.
- Greater transparency of progress against Concordat action plan through dedicated [webpage and infographic](#) (new web page is being viewed ~10 views per month)
- Building an inclusive culture: we increased the proportion of BAME colleagues in our working groups by working with staff networks, built opportunities for safe space discussions into events, undertook data analysis of participation in Concordat related events and identified future actions, panel session at Festival of R&I, prepared a suite of resources and sessions for wellbeing.

## **Lessons learned**

The global pandemic impacted society, the sector and the University. It has made some activities more difficult to deliver, not least due to the disruptive effect of changing modes of work (i.e. office to remote to hybrid), and also to specific activities which would have taken place in person. Nevertheless, we have learned that we can deliver effective events online, and that we can deliver activities through the coordination of remotely located multi-function teams. We are still adjusting to the legacy impact of the pandemic, for example we ran a revamped induction session (Priority area 3) which involved presentations from a variety of research support functions online and this attracted 60+ attendees. We then scheduled an in-person induction, which had to be cancelled due to no uptake - we recognise that this was soon after lockdown and staff were still hesitant about returning to in-person activities, with concerns around meeting in large groups, and new habits around remote working. We will remain with delivery of online induction sessions for the foreseeable future whilst planning new/additional in person engagement opportunities. We approach engagement of research staff in a variety of ways (direct contact, through PIs, through faculty-wide engagement, career-stage fora), recognising that researchers all have different drivers and motivation.

In this last cycle we planned our communications around a consistent message encouraging researchers to take ownership of their professional and career development, in tandem with developing new resources drawing from consultation and practice elsewhere. Lastly, in the last cycle we designed our action plan more closely around the strategic ambitions and direction of the University, and sought to reduce duplication or fragmentation of actions. This worked well, and in the next cycle we have taken this a step further, to further align our Concordat related activities, focused on benefits to research staff, to institutional priorities and activities. For example, we have mapped the University's KE strategy to the duties of Researcher Development Group to identify areas of synergy.

## **Reflections on involvement of the 3 groupings (Institution, PIs, researcher)**

At the outset of the last period we revised the terms of reference and membership of the Researcher Development Group, expanding it to cover researcher development more broadly rather than single focus on the Concordat. We refreshed the membership to create vertical alignment with the academic career with representation from the Graduate School, Research Staff Forum, Researchers Network, Readers Forum, Professors Forum. This has enabled us to further embed the perspectives and considerations of the three stakeholder groups of the Concordat. We also piloted CEDARS in 2021 opening it to researchers and academics (PIs), and have increased the promotion of this in 2023 in order to increase feedback from researchers and academics (PIs).

## **New strategic objectives and implementation plan to meet the obligations of the Concordat over the next three years (2023-26)**

For the upcoming three year period the aim has been to create a Concordat Action Plan that delivers tangible benefits for all research staff, is aligned with University strategy and plans, is feasible within existing resources, minimises duplication, and maximises synergy with other relevant concordats, charters and initiatives. The latter point is also influenced by the sector wide reviews of bureaucracy and concordats and charters. We have adopted the idea that we should identify these drivers and synergies at the outset of our concordat planning, rather than trying to retrofit them afterwards. The key strategic drivers for our action plan are:

- New university R&I Strategy
- Athena Swan, REC and other commitments to EDI
- Synergy with other concordats e.g. KE and Research Integrity
- KE strategy

- New University People Strategy
- Gap analysis of University provision against requirements of the Concordat.

Taking all of these factors into account, the Researcher Development Group agreed the following priority areas for the next 3 years:

- **Developing research talent:** Recruitment, development, progression and next job
- Culture: **Enhancing research culture** through EDI, Engagement and Wellbeing
- Using the concept of '**Impact through Knowledge Exchange**' as a lens through which to view research staff experience and development.

What will be the impact/outcome?

- An increase in engagement of Research Staff in all that is offered
- Research staff tell us that they think the culture is good (better than it was/ is now)
- Research staff tell us & demonstrate through their behaviours/practices that UoP is a 'good' place to be a member of research staff (better than it was/is now).

Guiding principles

- Emphasis on the role of the PI (and leaders) in achieving objectives in priority areas
- To look to mentoring as an approach to deliver outcomes for individuals (to include advocacy and sponsorship particularly linked to EDI)
- Ensure that all RS are aware of and can access the new resources developed in the last cycle, and that all RS are encouraged to proactively take up the new opportunities for career development featured in the upcoming cycle
- Striving for excellence - what does excellence look like for this area/action?

Delivery mechanisms

- Core programmes e.g. Cohort programme for Research Staff (this can deliver on multiple obligations, and be grown/developed e.g. mentoring, policy development, wellbeing, ownership of career/progression)
- Applying a Research Staff lens to other concurrent University initiatives, concordats and charters, where our action plan puts 'special effort' into ensuring that Research Staff are addressed/considered etc.
- Central and faculty input
- Career stage fora i.e. Professors Forum, Readers Forum, Researchers Network and Research Staff Forum.

Our strategic objectives and implementation plan to meet the obligations of the Concordat over the next three years, include (see over):

Table 1: Strategic objectives and implementation plan 2023-26

Priority area	Action
<p><b>Impact through KE</b> Maps to: <i>'Professional and career development'</i></p> <p>Primary beneficiary: <i>Research Staff</i></p>	Undertake exploratory work to look at potential learning points from KTP programmes that can be applied to postdoc professional development and careers support. Apply Research Staff lens to KE Concordat actions around skills, induction and resources
	Upskilling Research Staff on research impact
	Engagement with the Enterprise Programme for the benefit of Research Staff
<p><b>Developing research talent: Recruitment, development, progression and next job</b></p> <p>Maps to: <i>'Employment'</i></p> <p>Primary beneficiary: <i>Research Staff</i></p>	Delivery of Research Staff cohort programme
	Carry out a consultation on the possible benefits and implications of including technicians as beneficiaries
	Design through consultation and then deliver specific training for PIs on how to support their Research Staff to excel and progress
	Awareness raising and skills development in preparing Narrative CVs/Resumé for Researchers
	Enhance induction offer through localised school and small group induction sessions.
	Launch a post-doc 'drop-in' service for advice, guidance and signposting
	Review potential for open-ended contracts and review how redeployment process works for Research Staff
	Pilot an internal work shadowing scheme for Research Staff with a view to offering this more widely
	Pilot 'Postdoc pool' approach to maximise opportunities for current researchers on fixed term contracts to continue at UoP
	Create an alumni group for ex Research Staff and develop engagement group

	Developing networking skills for researcher careers. Delivered in partnership with <a href="#">Researchers14</a> .
	Deliver the 'Mentoring Circles' project to upskill managers of researchers in facilitating mentoring circles.
	Engaging with University wide plans for mentoring to ensure relevance to Research Staff & developing on the 21-23 action to explore mentoring, sponsorship and advocacy particularly linked to EDI (a working group has been set up by RDG)
<b>Enhancing Research Culture</b>	Conduct focus groups to understand the difference between 'no shows' at training events between male and female academic staff.
Maps to: <i>'Environment and Culture'</i>	Delivery of Mental Health at Work First Aid training for PIs to better support their Research Staff and creation of a set of guidelines and resources for PIs.
Primary beneficiary: <i>Research Staff</i>	Delivery of the 'Coaching for Research Success' project to upskill managers of researchers in their coaching skills to support their research staff.
	Build concordat requirements into internal funding schemes - exploratory action, leading to impact action for yrs 2 or 3
	Welcome scheme for new Research Staff from outside UK
	Consider broadening scope of beneficiaries in line with <a href="#">Technician Commitment</a> - initial scoping in yr 1 to expand to actions in yrs 2&3
	Reinvigorate the communication and training for managers on 10 days development
	Carry out pulse surveys to gain feedback from researchers and managers
	Include a report and review of researcher engagement as a standing agenda item in RDG meetings.