

Report: HR Excellence in Research Award – 10-year review

From: Professor Mark Spearing, Vice President Research and Enterprise; Professor Rebecca Hoyle, Chair of the Concordat Advisory Group

Date: 01 July 2022

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Context. The University of Southampton achieved the HR Excellence in Research Award in January 2012, and became a signatory to the revised version (2019) of the *Researcher Development Concordat* in November 2020. We used the 8-year review as an opportunity to draw a line under plans aligned with the previous version of the Concordat and to begin the transition to the revised version with a two-year **Bridging Action plan (2020-2022)**. As this period coincided with Covid19 lockdowns, the Bridging Plan followed the University strategy that also identified bridging actions to continue operations under those extraordinary conditions. During this period, we refreshed our institutional strategy. A suite of strategic plans have been drafted to underpin the University strategy, including for Research; People; Knowledge Exchange and Enterprise; Sustainability; International; and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI). In addition, a portfolio of Strategic Major Projects is being established to drive progress.

Our achievements are reported here against both the 2020-2022 Bridging Plan and the Action Plan (2021-2023) that was drawn up and published in November 2021 for the signatory timeframe. This 10-year review process comes midway between planned phases of work and is a milestone for reporting progress against our institutional plans until 2023. Our actions point the way to greater institutional alignment among all equality charters and to increased intersection with university level strategic plans, projects and priorities.

Who is included in our Concordat work? At University level, our plans focus on all research only staff of whom we have a total of 848 staff. These staff are identified at Level 4, i.e. Research Fellows; level 5, i.e. Senior Research Fellows; level 6, i.e. Principal Researcher; level 7 Professor of Research and Clinical Research Staff, with 577, 192, 41, 16 and 22 staff respectively. Research only staff on fixed term contracts (FTCs) are predominantly at Levels 4 & 5 with, on average, 95% of Level 4 and 53% of Level 5 research staff on FTCs. There is variation, also, in the distribution of staff across Faculties; for instance, University snapshot data on 01/06/2022 indicated that: the Faculty of Arts and Humanities (FAH) had 17 research only staff at levels 4 and 5; the Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences (FEPS) had 355; the Faculty of Environmental and Life Sciences (FELS) had 128; the Faculty of Medicine (FoM) had 199; and the Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS) had 58 research only staff. We also include all managers of researchers (~330 balanced portfolio staff, i.e. levels 6 & 7).

We recognise additional beneficiaries of the Concordat include balanced portfolio staff (i.e. Lecturers levels 4 & 5) who will be REF-able and, in some schools, teaching and enterprise fellows, although these are not the main target audience for the Concordat work. In addition, whilst we exclude PGRs, Doctoral supervisors, and Technicians, we intersect and collaborate with other initiatives aimed at these cohorts. For instance, the Athena SWAN, Technician's Commitment and Race Equality Charter working groups, and the EDI strategic plan are addressing some of the Obligations in our HREIR template, and we count this alignment, along with standardised reporting, as a key institutional achievement.

Governance Structure. We continued the process of aligning all equality charters under a single governance structure that began in 2018, with further streamlining in 2021. The Concordat now resides with the EDI team and has a Project Manager (as of January 2022) dedicated to implementation of the action plan. The Concordat Advisory Group (CAG) is a specialist advisory team reporting every 3-4 months to the EDI committee (EDIC). Approval of activity is carried out by EDIC, chaired by the VP Research and Enterprise (VP-R&E), who also takes reports to the University Executive Group (UEB) for their approval. The Research and Enterprise Executive Group (the VP R&E's working group) and the HR Senior Leadership Team (HRSLT) both provide feedback and advice, acting as 'critical friends' to the CAG. The final version of this report was approved at UEB on 26th July, 2022.

Representation. Research staff are represented locally and institutionally and have two effective routes to communicate issues: 1) via their Faculty structures and 2) via the CAG-EDIC structure. Each Faculty has a Concordat Champion, a permanent member of staff, who works directly with research staff, notably early career researchers (ECRs), either individually (i.e. FAH) or via School level representatives (i.e. FELS, FSS, FEPS and in FoM there is an established Postdoc Association chaired by the Champion). Faculties vary widely in their numbers of research staff, so it was for each Faculty to agree on the structure for engaging with their research staff on the

Concordat and for identifying priority issues. Concordat Champions work to address research staff needs and represent their interests at both Faculty and CAG level. Champions report to their Deans, usually through their Associate Deans Research and/or Research Management Committees. The Deans can then inform the VP R&E and VC at UEB of any issues (Deans are, also, more prominent in our 2022-2024 HREIR action plan).

Faculty Concordat Champions sit on the Concordat Advisory Group (CAG), the institutional body with responsibility for overseeing the Concordat. The CAG is chaired by the Associate VP (Interdisciplinary Research), Professor Rebecca Hoyle, and she is joined by the Associate VP (Strategic major projects) – ensuring a direct line of communication to the VP R&E and members of the UEB. CAG membership also includes representatives from Human Resources (HR), the Careers Service, the Centre for Higher Education Practice (CHEP), EDI team, and three early career researchers. CAG met virtually 12 times, July 2020 to June 2022.

Since 2021, our major focus has been five Working Groups on: 1) *Researcher Development & Communications*; 2) *Reducing the Use of FTCs*; 3) *Career Development*; 4) *Wellbeing & Family policy*; 5) *Researcher Manager Development*. Research staff and researcher managers were invited to join the working groups, with over 100 expressions of interest and a core of ~40 actively engaged in the work. A Faculty Concordat Champion leads each working group. We have ensured there is both research staff, including ECRs, and researcher manager representation in all working groups and from all schools and Faculties in the University. We are proud to have achieved such a broad representation in this important work.

How research staff and voices were involved in the review. The research community's voice was included through CAG meetings (see above), CEDARS 2021 data, and the key findings from the research staff led *ECR Covid impact survey* of 2020. The most significant input from research staff and the researcher managers has been from the initial reports and findings from the Working groups. All Working groups were tasked with capturing and reporting on the current situation across the University. Initially all members took feedback from fellow researchers and managers in their Schools and Faculties. Where CEDARS data was insufficient, working groups conducted additional surveys for finer details, i.e., on the level of encouragement for training opportunities and what is lacking in the researcher portfolio. Informal interviews were held with key stakeholders where there was variation, such as on the way FTCs are managed within Faculties.

Key achievements

Since July 2020, we have conducted a gap analysis (November 2020 to November 2021) against the revised Researcher Development Concordat, drawing on actions carried forward from July 2020. Additional key achievements since 2020, by Principle, are listed below.

- **Environment and Culture**

In September 2021, the University was delighted to appoint two staff (executive job share) to the new Associate VP Interdisciplinary Research (AVP-IR) role with responsibility for developing a supportive and inclusive research culture. We received funding to enhance research culture early in 2022, and the AVP-IR invested in activity to support compassionate leadership, mental health and wellbeing, unconscious bias training, open research practices, and a summer internship/mentorship programme for underrepresented groups in sciences, as well as an EDI action plan for public policy, and the preparation of a research fellowship toolkit.

A major achievement by HR has been the agreement by the (Joint) Joint Negotiating Committee to changes to the maternity policy, specifically the contractual maternity pay (CMP) element. The revised policy has addressed concerns regarding women on FTC accessing CMP by removing the requirement to repay CMP where their contract expires and does not allow for 52 weeks return. With large numbers of research staff on FTCs, this will have a significant positive impact on women ECRs. In addition, we established Financial Wellbeing resources, now listed in the A-Z on our Wellbeing SharePoint site, addressing another issue that concerns research staff especially. The University is proud, also, to have been recognised with an Athena Swan Silver Award in 2022; to be the first University with Disability Confident Leader status (2017); become a signatory to the Technician Commitment and Mental Health Charter. We are working towards a Race Equality Charter Bronze Award.

- **Employment**

In 2021, our President and VC, Mark E. Smith, signalled the University's intention to reduce the use of fixed term contracts. However, to achieve this, a dependent project to review the University Statutes and Ordinances was required. In January 2021, a major project [Modernising the Governance](#) got underway, which has a specific work package to 'Review and update our employment procedures to make them easier to access, navigate, read and understand,' including the Ordinance for Fixed Term Contracts. In the meantime, we established a Working group to review the experience of FTCs within the University and wider sector. The group's findings will inform the institutional level work once the changes to the University statutes and ordinances have been achieved. We have created a new Anniversary Fellowship scheme and will offer up to 15 fellowships per annum from 2022 to early career researchers, supporting them in their research and academic career.

- **Professional and Career Development**

Since July 2020, we have provided a wide range of support (training courses, programmes and events) for all research staff, including 170 research and enterprise courses to 2,662 attendees. These interventions were provided by CHEP, HR, the Library, Research and Innovation Services, Public Policy, Public Engagement with Research Unit, and were in addition to Faculty and school level offers. Other key highlights include:

- The Leadership and Management team offered Leadership Circles, Preparing for Promotions training, and an extensive range of online resources, including a Line Manager toolkit with over 300 resources.
- CHEP launched a Researcher Development Hub in SharePoint, signposting all researchers to key information. This expanded a previous ECR SharePoint hub.
- An 'In conversation with our research leaders' series was launched in 2021. We have held five 'conversations' and on such topics as 'How to create and foster interdisciplinary research teams', and for a total of ~250 attendees.
- CHEP expanded the offer around grant writing workshops, with the option to attend online self-paced learning and follow up Q&A sessions (improving accessibility, providing an 'as you need it' option, and connecting attendees to further support). CHEP introduced the Power Hour of Writing – i.e. twice-weekly 'micro-retreats' that had been piloted during November 2021 for AcWriMo.
- A women's action learning set pilot was launched (Spring 2022) by the Leadership and Management team aimed at women in academia, particularly in STEM subject areas (to be reviewed December 2022)
- We held our 2nd and 3rd Open Research Symposia (July 2021 and July 2022) led by the Library, and a Festival of Open Research that celebrated our work with the UK Reproducibility Network (June 2022).
- The Faculty of Social Sciences launched the ECR Development Fund in 2022, (total £87,000). There were 43 ECR applications across all schools and levels. The Faculty Concordat Champion established ECR representatives in all five Schools for the first time and is establishing network meetings.
- The School of Electronics and Computer Sciences opened their series of workshops to researchers across the University. Topics included: Taking the Chair, Project Planning and a female targeted event.

Strategic Focus (2022 – 2024). We are moving into Phase 2 of our Action plan, where we will refine the recommendations, intersect with relevant strategic major projects and priorities, and align with the key strategic plans. Phase 2 includes stakeholder consultations, and agreeing actions and investments up to 2027, and begins with an Action Workshop (or a series thereof) by November 2022 that will bring all the key stakeholders together. We report to Council in November 2022; after that, implementation, Phase 3, will begin. This activity is taking place against a background of institutional strategic planning and projects, where our Triple Helix strategic focus on Education, Research, and Knowledge Exchange and Enterprise, has People threaded throughout.

Of significance to the Concordat are the Modernising the Governance project; the Research Strategic Plan; the People Plan, particularly the ED&I and Health and Wellbeing plans within this; the Future Ways of Working project; and the strategic goals for people in the Knowledge Exchange and Enterprise (KEE) Strategic plan. Our strategic research ambitions focus on People, Interdisciplinary & Mission-oriented Research, Sustainability and Improving our Systems, Processes and Infrastructure by 2027. We will continue to draw on CEDARS (2023), Staff Engagement Survey and focus group data, in addition to other measures detailed in our Action Plan.

By 2024, for each Principle, we aim to have:

- **Environment and Culture**

Identified ways of monitoring and improving our research culture; ensured the researcher community voice is included in all relevant aspects of strategic plans and embedded in university and faculty level activity with respect to: Workload Principles; the ED&I strategic plan; Health and Wellbeing strategic plan; and Dignity at Work policy. We will have achieved the Race Equality Charter Bronze Award.

- **Employment**

Modernised our Governance processes, Ordinances and Statutes, to enable work on the reduction of the use of fixed terms contracts to be underway; ensured the researcher community voice is included in the People strategic action plan with respect to projects on Appraisals; Future Ways of Working; and Workload Principles.

- **Professional and Career Development**

Improved and enhanced our learning and development offer through increased investment in CHEP, specifically to provide better advice and support for researcher managers; meeting the People Plan strategic priority of 'Leadership and Management programme designed by us and for us'; reviewed the Women's action learning set pilots; expanded KEE provision; established provision for specialist career support to research staff; and ensured mentoring opportunities are in place to support academic and research staff.

End of report.