

Annual Report for the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers

Universities and Research Institutes

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Statement on how the organisation creates, maintains and embeds a research culture that upholds a positive and inclusive environment for researchers at all stages of their careers (*max 500 words*)

The University of Sussex is a values-led organisation, emphasising integrity, kindness, and inclusion. This is reflected in the Sussex Research Culture Enabling Plan developed through consultation with our research community in 2023 and published in 2024. It is aspirational in terms of the distinctive research culture we would like to see – collaborative and open – as well as recognising and responding to challenges identified. In particular, priorities include achieving parity of support for all our people in their career development to enable them to thrive, and an equal sense of belonging for everyone at Sussex, whatever their career stage and background. The four target areas of the plan are Collaboration, Open Research, Maximising Potential, and Belonging.

Our Research Culture Enabling Plan, focuses on four key areas: Collaboration, Open Research, Maximising Potential, and Belonging. This plan, which provides a clear strategic focus for activities, is guided by the Research Culture Steering Group, a group of academic and professional services staff with expertise across the spectrum of Research Culture and responsibility to deliver on aspects of the agenda. Through a range of initiatives, we are actively working to enhance the research experience for all. These include new mandatory training for all PhD supervisors to enhance support and mentorship, an accelerator programme to help ECRs secure their first grant, and a new women's leadership academy. This pilot programme, will be developed in-house and will provide training and mentoring to empower and advance the career of early-career women academics, a group currently under-represented in STEM fields. The data shows that women in STEM do not apply for permanent positions at the same rate as their male counterpart, and this programme seeks to address the barriers they face.

Recognizing that a large institution encompasses diverse research communities with unique needs, we also have worked to empower change at the local level. We have supported a range of small projects in Schools, such as workshops on interdisciplinary collaboration for humanities researchers, mentoring programs for ECRs, and networking events for scholars specialising in Latin America and the Caribbean. We are also enabling School Cluster within our new Faculties (formed this year) to come together to collaboratively define the research culture they aspire to, identify activities to achieve it, and determine how their leaders can best

support them. We are providing resources to enable Faculties to implement these localized programs, address their unique challenges, and celebrate their successes

A key part of the work of the Research Culture Team is to share good practice we have identified so that others can learn from it. We also celebrate our great research and the achievements of colleagues through a 'Summer of Research' festival, celebrating research and starting collaborative conversations, and Research Culture Awards, rewarding individuals and teams at all career stages, both academic and Professional Services, who exemplify the practices that promote collaboration, open research, ethical conduct, equity, diversity, and inclusion, and strong research culture leadership.

Provide a short summary of the institution's strategic objectives and implementation plans for delivering each of the three pillars of the Concordat (environment and culture, employment, and professional development of researchers) for your key stakeholder groups together with your measures for evaluating progress and success (*max 600 words*)

The University's HR Excellence in Research (HREiR) action plan promotes consistency in the way early career researchers (ECRs) are supported and aims to embed best practice across the institution.

We identified a number of priorities for the action plan, such as establishing a clear induction framework for ECRs in each School and ensuring consistent approaches to teaching and workload allocation. These priorities were identified through direct engagement with ECRs and echoed by the Culture, Employment and Development in Academic Research Survey (CEDARS) 2023 results. CEDARS also highlighted the need for PI training and support.

In collaboration with the Research Culture Team, we have identified joint priorities, including the Women's Leadership Academy pilot, addressing the underrepresentation of women researchers applying for promotion; the First Grant Accelerator Programme, maximizing potential by empowering ECRs to take their next step; and work to tailor the Sussex mentoring scheme for researchers.

Environment and culture

- Implementing a coherent, consistent induction spanning HR, Sussex Researcher School (SRS) and Faculties/Schools, through an audit of current provision/practice, revision of materials, and creation of templates and best practice framework.

- Clarifying the ECR committee structure and ensuring ECR representation is diverse across disciplines by strengthening Terms of Reference and role description, involving School leadership in recruitment, and recognising Reps' contribution in promotions criteria.
- Establishing Community of Practice for staff who support ECRs to share effective models and improve collaboration.
- Increasing engagement with the ECR Symposium and other research culture-driven activities through co-creation with researchers, strategic approach to Summer of Research events, and improved communications.

Employment

- Ensuring policies are inclusive, incorporate ECRs, and are applied consistently across Faculties/Schools, including equitable teaching practices and workload allocation (taking into account School-specific needs).
- Recognising importance of informal supervision and other ECR activities, reflecting in promotions criteria, and targeting promotions workshops at ECRs to improve rate of applications.
- Reducing the promotion applications gender gap through a Women's Leadership Academy, empowering women to forge a research career that works for them.

Professional Development

- Providing PI training across the institution.
- Reviewing the ECR training offer across Organisational Development (OD), SRS and Faculties/Schools to improve engagement and evaluation, and align with the Researcher Development Framework.
- Improving engagement with Annual Development Review (ADR) appraisals through targeted communications and training, embedding CPD and career development for ECRs across Faculties/Schools, and exploring a minimum frequency for ECR one-to-ones.

Evaluation

Activities are assessed through qualitative and quantitative evaluation, including feedback forms, training engagement data, webpage hit rates, and demographic promotions data.

CEDARS and the Staff Survey are key tools for assessing changes in researcher and manager attitudes/experiences, comparing to previous surveys and, for CEDARS, benchmarking against the sector.

<p>Many HREiR measures involve implementation of positive interventions or improved engagement with ECR matters e.g. delivering one OD wellbeing workshop per term at minimum; policy on teaching hours adopted by all Schools.</p> <p>Following HREiR assessment, more diverse measures of success were added:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes to feedback questionnaires, asking about impact pegged to intended outcomes. • Follow-up questionnaires after six months for key interventions, to collect outcomes data and measure longer-term changes in behaviour/skills/confidence. • Data on applications for, and success of, grade 7-8 promotions by gender, to assess interventions on research gender gap. • Pre- and post-activity surveys to assess effectiveness of PI/manager training in raising confidence, knowledge and awareness. • Exploring Report and Support Tool data to assess prevalence of bullying, discrimination etc. and whether interventions lead to reduction over time. • Exploring HR data sources to measure key training outcomes e.g. increased engagement with ADRs, reduction in Report and Support complaints. • Considering focus groups where there is value in collaborating with a target audience or gaining rich feedback. 	
<p>Summary of actions taken, and evaluation of progress made, in the current reporting period to implement your plan to support the three pillars in respect of each of your key stakeholder groups [Institution; Academic Managers of Researchers (Deans, Heads of Schools/Departments/PIs); Researchers]</p> <p>Note that as researchers were not surveyed in 2023-24 (both CEDARS and the Staff Survey being on a two-year cycle), there is little data-based comparative evaluation in this report. This will come in the next annual review, which will look at both the survey results as compared to 2023, and other quantitative success measures now that baseline levels of engagement for various new processes have been set.</p>	
<p>Environment and Culture (<i>max 600 words</i>)</p>	<p>Institution</p> <p>Significant strides have been made in establishing robust governance structures, improving data collection, and implementing monitoring processes to ensure the best chance of success: fixing clear deadlines and responsibilities within annual cycles of business across appropriate</p>

	<p>committees, and quarterly check-ins with key stakeholders to track progress and identify areas of concern quickly.</p> <p>Governance of ECR matters is now aligned with the broader institutional committee structure, raising visibility and setting out clear lines of accountability. Efforts detailed below to define the ECR cohort and clarify responsibilities have facilitated better communication, targeted support, and effective assessment of interventions.</p> <p>HR and OD have streamlined processes related to mandatory training, promotions, and the Staff Survey, ensuring better accountability and a means of tracking engagement at the local level as well as institution-wide.</p> <p>Auto-enrolment and automated reminders on LearnUpon, Sussex's online training platform, are expected to increase engagement, and focus now shifts to setting expectations that Faculties/Schools monitor researcher compliance. Baseline engagement data has also been captured, to enable comparative assessment year on year.</p> <p>Researchers and managers of researchers were involved in policy and decision-making during development of the Sussex 2035 institutional strategy, launching in 2025.</p> <p>Academic Managers of Researchers</p> <p>Membership of the <u>ECR Sub-Committee</u> has been extended to include ECR Leads or equivalent from every School, who now have clear responsibilities for supporting and recruiting their School's ECR Reps, facilitating efforts to bring the researcher community together. This change not only raises the visibility of ECR matters within Schools that were less engaged previously, but also surfaces issues facing ECRs in less typical, non-lab-based areas of the University.</p> <p>A new Cognos report on the Sussex Research Dashboard provides an accurate list of ECRs in each School for the first time. This enables more effective communication and data collection for a clearly defined cohort, allowing for better assessment of HREiR interventions and ECR engagement, and</p>
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	<p>enabling managers of researchers in Faculties/Schools to understand and to bring their ECR community together more effectively.</p> <p>HR introduced a process to monitor use of the <u>Report and Support Tool</u> (a mechanism for reporting bullying, harassment or discrimination anonymously) and report regularly to the University Executive Board, giving academic managers at all levels oversight of such incidents. Clustered issues are reported to Schools for action, while remaining anonymous.</p> <p>The 2024 ADR appraisals form included a section promoting discussion of mental health, ensuring managers promote a healthy working environment and that researchers take positive action towards maintaining their wellbeing.</p> <p>Researchers</p> <p>One of the key parcels of work for the ECR Reps and Sub-Committee was to conduct a review of ECR teaching and informal supervision practices across the University, with the aim of improving recognition and setting out basic standards. As a result, the ECR Sub-Committee is proposing a workload allocation model for staff on research contracts; this has been folded in with Research Culture Steering Group work in the same area. Updated promotions criteria go some way towards recognising ECR contributions formally.</p> <p>A role description and Terms of Reference have been adopted for the ECR Reps Group, as a step towards better recognition of ECR contributions to University governance and to aid recruitment, improving engagement and representation from all disciplines and not just the ECR-heavy sciences.</p> <p>The Report and Support Tool gives researchers an anonymous, safe route for reporting instances of bullying, harassment or discrimination without risk to their immediate environment or broader career.</p>
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	<p>Summer of Research Working Group membership was extended to include an ECR Rep, ensuring that researcher needs and audience were considered at the development stage of the festival (see Professional Development section).</p>
<p>Employment (<i>max 600 words</i>)</p>	<p>Institution</p> <p>HR included ECRs as key stakeholders in their Pay and Conditions review and redraft of academic promotions criteria, with opportunities for both managers and researchers to comment on drafts through the ECR Sub-Committee and Reps Group. The promotions criteria being implemented for 2025 now reflect diverse ECR-specific contributions and recognise the personal circumstances of carers and part-time workers.</p> <p>HR and OD also implemented processes that enable the monitoring of ECR and PI engagement, including auto-enrolment for mandatory online training modules such as Recruitment and Selection, and the capture of relevant grade/role information in the Staff Survey to enable analysis.</p> <p>The survey now includes questions on workload, wellbeing and other key Concordat/HREiR target areas, and has switched to a two-year cycle to give time for responses to be properly analysed and filtered down to departments, and actions to be implemented.</p> <p>ADR appraisals have been embedded across the institution, with revised training promoted to all staff, an introduction of the process in ECR inductions, and a simplified ADR form that links directly to leadership training resources and is appropriate for research-contract as well as teaching staff.</p> <p>SRS established an Inductions Working Group, bringing together School and Professional Services staff, which made significant progress on an onboarding checklist for ECRs/PIs and materials for Schools, to be introduced in Spring 2025.</p> <p>Academic Managers of Researchers</p>

	<p>Beyond enabling monitoring of manager engagement with mandatory training (see above), the focus in this space has been to ensure excellent people management is embedded in the institutional culture, by reviewing and improving both the ADR appraisals process (see Professional Development section) and the academic promotions criteria. The latter is an ongoing project, awaiting final approval ahead of the Spring 2025 promotions round.</p> <p>Researchers</p> <p>Mandatory training on research integrity was introduced in November 2024, for all researchers at the University. Available through LearnUpon, it promotes good conduct and will ensure all researchers and managers of researchers familiarise themselves and operate in accordance with relevant codes of practice.</p>
Professional development (<i>max 600 words</i>)	<p>Institution</p> <p>The <u>ECR Symposium</u> in June 2024 was successfully aligned with HREiR goals, with events organised around the key principles of the Concordat, offering valuable opportunities for ECRs to engage in career development, knowledge exchange and public engagement. The day included a keynote on research careers, a diverse careers roundtable and a Dragons' Den pitching competition for scoping-project funding.</p> <p>Increased integration with the wider <u>Summer of Research</u> and Research Culture Awards, and inclusion of the ECR voice at the organisation stage, led to increased visibility of ECR successes and improved engagement across all events.</p> <p>This is one of the key opportunities for ECRs to engage in CPD, alongside <u>ECR Development Series</u> workshops. As a first step to creating a coherent approach to ECR training across the University, these workshops have been aligned with Researcher Development Framework themes for 2024-25,</p>

	<p>and wider training opportunities captured in SRS’s annual training audit.</p> <p>Academic Managers of Researchers</p> <p>The University’s CEDARS 2023 responses showed only 44% of managers felt confident dealing with poor performance. There was also a mismatch between managers who felt confident providing effective feedback (95%) and managing appraisal processes (83%), versus researchers who felt they received clear, constructive and timely performance feedback (52%).</p> <p>The work on ADRs should tackle this, by providing enhanced appraisals training and a formal framework for progression reviews, empowering managers to conduct meaningful career-focused conversations. Responses to CEDARS 2025 and the 2024 Staff Survey will be analysed to see whether efforts have proved successful.</p> <p>Researchers</p> <p>Changes made to central ECR inductions shifted the emphasis to continuous professional development, introducing the Researcher Development Framework and professional development plans to guide and capture progress. Speakers from other Research and Innovation Services teams supporting ECRs were also added to the session.</p> <p>Following these changes, attendance at SRS welcome events rose during the 2023-24 academic year and into autumn 2024, averaging 13 per session as compared to five in 2022-23.</p> <p>The <u>Research Culture Seed Fund</u>, a funding stream for ECRs that was piloted with research culture money, has been merged with SRS’s annual Researcher-Led Initiatives Fund for both PGRs and ECRs. Funding strands were revised to foreground research culture and collaboration, and the programme updated overall (terms and conditions, policy</p>
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	<p>guidelines, how it functions) to ensure it meets the needs of research staff as well as postgraduate research students.</p> <p>The Fellowship and First Grant Accelerator Programme ran for a third year, supporting around 40 ECRs from all disciplines with training and practical experience towards the next step in their career. The programme is a collaborative effort between the SRS Researcher Development team and the Research Development and Initiatives department that supports funding bids across the institution. Match funding was sought from Schools in an effort to make the scheme more financially sustainable, and outcomes data captured to make the case for continued funding.</p> <p>Sussex again co-organised a cross-institutional speed mentoring event with colleagues from other universities in the south-east, giving ECRs the opportunity for short, focused career conversations with more senior academics across the sector. Applications were up on 2023, and feedback from both mentees and mentors was overwhelmingly positive (see Sussex Broadcast news item, 28 November 2024).</p>
<p>Comment on any lessons learned from the activities undertaken over this period and any modifications you propose to make to your action plan and measures of success as a result. (<i>max 500 words</i>)</p>	
<p>The main challenges for the next reporting period lie in securing funding for key projects - PI/manager training, Women's Leadership Academy, First Grant Accelerator Programme - and ensuring that departments allocate sufficient capacity to conduct the work.</p> <p>The current financial climate and anticipated impact of a Voluntary Leavers Scheme on staffing necessitate a clear, evidence-based case for each project, outlining gaps in provision/researcher need, positive outcomes and feedback from previous participants, and built-in assessment mechanisms to track success.</p> <p>There is a shift towards in-house delivery utilising existing resources, seeking more cost-effective and sustainable solutions that become 'business as usual'. This adapted approach is being applied to both new initiatives like the Women's Leadership Academy and ongoing activities like the Accelerator Programme;</p>	

external consultants will create materials under Sussex's IP, and deliver sessions using a 'train the trainer' model so that Sussex staff take full ownership in 2026.

Engaging Schools with Concordat activities proved more difficult than expected, particularly those in the humanities and social sciences with fewer ECRs, and those like the Business and Medical Schools that function differently. A more bespoke approach is needed to establish relationships with key players and argue the case for prioritising ECR support in those Faculties/Schools. Alternative solutions are also needed to match the needs of smaller cohorts e.g. recruiting one, rather than two, Reps and combining termly ECR forums within disciplines.

Some deadlines have shifted due to external factors. The SRS website relaunch was pushed back to Spring 2025, and a full review of ECR resources and support will take place after that date. The focus for the ECR Symposium and other Summer of Research events will be decided after the publication of the Sussex 2035 strategy.

Sussex is also introducing a new Faculty structure across the institution, which has shifted the timeline for establishing a Community of Practice for School staff who support ECRs; this will be reviewed once the restructure is complete and it is clear where that support role now sits (at Faculty or School level). Relationships will be established with appropriate Associate Deans once they are in post and sitting on the relevant committees, and HREiR action responsibilities will be reviewed and amended where needed.

**Outline your key objectives in delivering your plan in the coming reporting period
(max 500 words)**

The University of Sussex, like many in the sector, is facing financial challenges and in December 2024 launched a Voluntary Leavers Scheme to reduce staffing costs. The outcome of this scheme may impact the ability of remaining staff across the institution to achieve projects currently earmarked in the current HREiR plan for 2024-25.

Once revised staffing is known (by March 2025), the Director for ECRs and Researcher Development Manager will revisit planned projects and timelines with the aim of consolidating ongoing work, prioritising vital activities, and pushing deadlines into 2025-26 where necessary. Budgets will also be reviewed and more low-cost alternatives sought, without compromising broader goals.

Continuous monitoring and evaluation of HREiR interventions will continue, with future ECR activities shaped by both feedback from stakeholders (ECRs, PIs, School research leadership and administration) and the Sussex 2035 institutional strategy.

For 2024-25, the University's Concordat priorities are:

- To increase School engagement with ECR Sub-Committee activities.

Researcher Development will focus efforts on recruiting ECR Reps from social sciences and humanities, working with Faculty Research Managers to find realistic solutions where there are few ECRs. This might include a combined and co-organised Faculty forum in place of individual School forums, bringing a wider ECR community together.

- To consolidate key initiatives such as the First Grant Accelerator Programme and Women's Leadership Academy, delivering sustainable and cost-effective solutions that embed these schemes into existing work patterns.

Plans for both schemes include short-term recruitment of an external consultant to design course structure and materials under Sussex IP, a 'train the trainer' model to work towards in-house (and therefore cheaper) facilitation from 2026, and incorporation of SRS and OD workshops to maximise use of existing resources. Coordination will be shared between existing admin roles as appropriate, improving efficiency and sustainability.

- To implement guidelines across the institution ensuring equitable onboarding / induction for all ECRs.

SRS has brought together colleagues from Faculties/Schools and Professional Services to align HR, SRS and School induction materials for researchers. An onboarding checklist for ECRs and PIs will be introduced in Spring 2025, alongside guidance for Schools.

- To ensure the effectiveness of the central mentoring scheme for researchers.

The Research Culture team and OD will work together to review and expand the existing staff scheme to ensure it meets researchers' needs, followed by a comms campaign to increase awareness and engagement and increase the pool of appropriate mentors.

- To establish a framework of training for PIs/managers of researchers.

PI/manager training is a key aspect of the HREiR plan, addressing all three principles of the Concordat. Initially, the aim was to adapt new supervisor training modules to tailor them to ECR supervision/management. However this would necessitate employing a consultant, which is not cost-effective. Instead, OD and Researcher Development will survey PIs to ascertain current knowledge/skills and appetite for learning/modes of learning, before formulating training where it is most needed and collating existing taught and online resources from both teams.

Please provide a brief statement describing your institution's approval process of this report prior to sign off by the governing body (*max 200 words*)

This report has been drafted by the Researcher Development Manager in SRS with input from the Director for ECRs, who chairs the ECR Sub-Committee and leads the University's work on the Concordat. ECRs were consulted through the ECR Reps Group that feeds into the Sub-Committee.

The report has been discussed and approved by members of the Sub-Committee – including ECR Leads or equivalent from each academic School, and representatives of HR and SRS – before going to the University Research and Innovation Committee (URIC), chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Innovation, for discussion. URIC includes Heads of School and relevant Heads of Professional Services. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor signed off the report as a member of the University's Executive Group.

The University of Sussex introduced a system of regular HREiR monitoring and reporting in Spring 2024. An HREiR progress report is submitted to the ECR Sub-Committee each meeting (termly), and an annual progress report is sent to URIC each autumn. That annual report aligns with this Concordat report and was discussed by URIC in November 2024.

Signature on behalf of governing body: *K. Stoddard*

Contact for queries: Katy Stoddard, Researcher Development Manager

This annual report will be analysed by Universities UK, secretariat for the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, to identify good practices, themes for development and information to improve national research culture policy and practice.

If you have any questions, or suggestions on how the reporting process could be improved, please contact the secretariat at CDRsecretariat@universitiesuk.ac.uk
www.researcherdevelopmentconcordat.ac.uk