

University of Sussex HR Excellence in Research Award Four-Year Report

1. University Context

The University of Sussex was awarded the HR Excellence in Research Award in May 2013 and retained the award in May 2015 following the internal review process.

The University is a research-intensive institution with over 1200 academic staff of which approximately 400 are research staff. To date the University's Concordat implementation activity has primarily focused on the cohort of research staff and is overseen by the University's [Research Staff Working Group \(RSWG\)](#). The RSWG meets three times per academic year to review progress against the Concordat Implementation Plan and oversee [Research Staff Office \(RSO\)](#) activity. The Working Group formally reports to Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee and HR committee. In addition, the group regularly makes recommendations to the University Executive Group, Equality and Diversity Committee, and the Athena SWAN committee. The RSWG is chaired by the Director of Research Staff Development (0.1FTE academic post) and membership includes: HR Director (or nominee), 2x Directors of Research and Knowledge Exchange, 3 x Early Career Researcher Leads, 5x Research Staff Representatives, 1x Head of School, 1x School administrator, Research Staff Officer and Assistant Director Doctoral School.

In September 2016 the University appointed a new Vice-Chancellor, Professor Adam Tickell. As a result, the Institution is currently in a phase of discussion over the new University strategy, which will launch in summer 2017 and will set out the University of Sussex trajectory for 2025. In light of the changing institutional context, the majority of the actions set out in the new Concordat Implementation Plan are deliverable within a two-year period. This will ensure that whilst the Concordat Implementation Plan remains ambitious, the University has the flexibility to update the plan to align it appropriately to the new University strategy.

2. Review Process and Involvement of Researchers

2.1 Review Process

The process leading up to the submission for the four year review is outlined in table 1.

Table 1 Process for 4-year review preparation

Action	Involvement	Timescale
Review progress and agree external evaluation approach	Research Staff Working Group (RSWG)	April 2016
Ideas generation for new Concordat implementation Plan	Research Staff Reps (meetings April and September 2016) PIs (Practice sharing event April 2016) RSO (Research of best practice July – August 2016) RSWG (Meeting September 2016) Directors of Research and Knowledge Exchange (1:1 meetings October – November 2016)	April 2016 – November 2016
Survey of research staff to evaluate key initiatives	Research staff community, RSO	October 2016
Convene RSWG sub-group to develop 4 year strategy and new action plan	Subgroup included representation from: Director Research Staff Development, RSO, Research Staff Reps, HR, Early Career Researcher Leads	Dec 2016
Share draft submission documents with stakeholders and incorporate feedback into submission documents	Feedback from: Reps, RSWG, Research staff community (mailing list, forum etc), Heads of School, Directors of Research and Knowledge Exchange, Professional Services,	Jan- Feb 2017
Receive feedback from Vitae, Finalise and Sign off submission documents	Vitae, RSO, RSWG, Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee	March - April 2017

2.2 Researcher involvement

In addition to the involvement of the Research Staff Reps (table 1); much of the new Concordat Implementation Plan and four-year strategy was directly informed by feedback and suggestions from the broader research community generated through a variety of interactions including, but not limited to:

- Researcher Forum (3 meetings per year)
- Researcher induction and welcome lunches (4 per year)
- Researcher development coffee mornings (3 per year)
- CROS 2015 responses - 41% response rate (CROS 2017 in progress at time of writing, 2017 response rate has already exceeded 2015 response rate)
- Research staff appraisal/review survey (October 2016 25% response rate)
- In-person feedback via workshops, group mentoring discussions, 1:1 coaching discussions (rolling)
- Feedback from research staff managers via PI practice sharing event, 1:1 meetings with Directors of Research and Knowledge Exchange, Athena SWAN committee
- Open invitation for feedback on the draft Concordat Implementation Plan (February 2017)

3. Highlights of Progress and Achievements by Concordat Principle

Full progress reporting since the original submission is provided in the [updated 2013-2015 and 2015-17 Concordat Implementation plans](#). Highlights of significant achievements since the original submission are detailed below.

3.1 Principle 1: Recruitment and Selection

- In September 2014 the University introduced a review of researchers on fixed-term contracts (FTCs), which led to an initial cohort of 56 individuals (35 f, 21 m) being transferred from FTCs to indefinite contracts. The review of researcher FTCs has subsequently been embedded as an annual process; in 2015, 8 individuals were transferred and in 2016 50 individuals (25 f, 25 m) were transferred (the scope of the 2016 review expanded).
 - The original HR Excellence submission identified researcher induction as a key priority area for improvement. Since 2013 significant progress was made through interventions including:
 - October 2014 introduction of a quarterly research staff induction and welcome lunch.
 - Welcome email for new starters within their first two weeks to provide information about key resources.
 - New [research staff webpages](#) including specific pages for [new research staff](#), [international researchers](#), [FAQs](#) and [practical information](#). The research staff webpages are the most frequently visited pages of the Research and Enterprise site with the research staff homepage receiving 3900 'unique views' in 2016.
 - Jan 2016 Introduction of 28pg [welcome guide for new research staff](#) sent out with appointment letters.
 - March 2016 practice sharing event for School induction coordinators, leading to a template for School induction webpage, rolled out to Schools in July 2016, to date 6 schools have implemented the page.
- CROS 2015 results indicated a 36% increase in proportion of 2015 respondents citing institutional induction to be useful/very useful compared to 2013 and a 54% increase in positive responses for School level induction (52.4% positive, 10 percentage points above national aggregate)
- To facilitate career development and objective setting at the start of research contracts, in February 2016 new [guidance and templates for start of contract discussions](#) were incorporated into welcome emails and webpages for new research staff. The appraisal/review survey (Oct 2016) indicated that discussions were valued by researchers, but that more work is required to raise take up (currently around 30% new staff participation).

3.2 Principle 2: Recognition and Value

- CROS 2013 identified a significant concern about the uptake and perceived usefulness of appraisal amongst research staff. In June 2015, new tailored research staff appraisal documentation and guidance was introduced, along with an annual communications campaign to encourage researcher participation in appraisal. The October 2016 'research staff appraisal/review' survey (90 responses, 25% response rate) demonstrated that 76.7% of 2016 respondents had participated in appraisal (63% increase over CROS 2013 results, 28% increase over CROS 2015 results). The results also indicated that 80% of respondents perceived the appraisal process as 'useful/very useful' overall, representing a 119% increase over CROS 2013 results (36.5% rated useful/very useful) and a 40% increase over CROS 2015 results (57% rated useful/very useful).
- To ensure research staff representation in decision making, in August 2015 the terms of reference for School Research Committees were updated to specify that membership should include at least one member of postdoctoral research staff (usually the Research Staff Rep). Another amendment in 2015 ensured that Research Fellows and Teaching Fellows are eligible to stand for and vote in Senate elections. In addition, research staff are members of the University's Athena SWAN committee, and other School level committees.
- To celebrate and raise the profile of Research Fellow research achievements and impact within the University, in November 2016, the RSO released a series of ['Spotlight Profiles' of Sussex Researchers](#) via multiple communications channels across the University. In the first month alone the Spotlight homepage received 350 unique views and to date the most viewed profile has received over 470 unique views. New profiles are added

on a rolling basis and in June 2017 a 'Spotlight Symposium' will form a key component of [Sussex Impact Day](#). Sussex Impact Day is in its 3rd year and culminates in [Impact Awards](#), one of which is specifically for ECRs.

- CROS 2015 results indicated that 50% of researchers did not feel equally treated with respect to promotion/progression. To enhance the clarity of the promotions process for research staff, research fellow promotions workshops were introduced in autumn 2015 and are embedded into the annual programme (2015, 12 RF participants, 2016, 27 RF participants) along with communications campaigns in the autumn term. In November 2016 a new [webpage for research fellow promotions](#) was created to better signpost researcher eligibility for promotion. In response to these interventions the 2016/17 promotions round had more than three times the number of promotion applications from research fellows (n=19) compared to 2015/16 (n=6).
- New '[Principal Investigators: Supporting your research staff](#)' pages, launched in April 2016, provide a hub of information to support PIs in the career management of research staff. A PI practice sharing event in April 2016 (32 Attendees from across all 12 Schools), explored issues, challenges and best practice surrounding researcher management and the world café session generated a variety of ideas that form a significant component of the accompanying new Concordat Implementation Plan.

3.3 Principles 3 & 4: Support and Career Development

- Following a 2014 training and development review of research staff including surveys and focus groups, a tailored programme of professional development events, the Research Staff Development Series (RSDS), was introduced in autumn 2014. Participation in events has increased each year with 2015/16 hosting 23 workshops with 265 attendances. A two-year review of RSDS (July 2016) indicated that 91% of respondents would recommend RSDS courses. CROS 2015 showed that the proportion of respondents undertaking no professional development had almost halved since 2013 (from 30% in 2013 to 17% in 2015) and proportions undertaking 1-3 days and 4-10 days of development had increased by 12.8% and 69% respectively.
- In June 2015 the RSO initiated a free 1:1 coaching service for research staff. To date 81 coaching meetings have been conducted with 41 individuals across 11 Schools. Feedback is consistently positive with 100% of coachees completing a coaching exit survey stating that they would recommend coaching to other researchers.
- To support researchers and their managers in discussion and planning of professional development activities, in October 2016 the RSWG published [Research Staff Professional Development guidance](#). The document outlines professional development examples and expectations for researchers, managers and the institution and recommends a minimum of 5 working days per year for research staff professional development activities.
- In February 2016 the Research Staff Office implemented an 'end of contract career development email' for research staff entering the final 6 months of their current contract. The email provides information and links to career development support and services around the University. Feedback has been positive and each month the email generates new 1:1 coaching requests, which enable researchers to discuss their future career plans and development opportunities with a qualified coach.

3.4 Principle 5: Researchers Responsibilities

- The [Research Staff Representatives group](#) formed in March 2014 (3 members), has grown to include 15 members from 9 schools. Reps inform and influence the University's Concordat implementation activity and work within their schools to enhance experiences of their fellow researchers. Reps that have moved on have reported using the rep role as evidence in job applications/interviews. Destinations of reps include; lecturerships (6); further postdoctoral research (4); industry (1); charity (1); Publishing (1).
- Each year The Researcher Led Initiative (RLI) Fund awards approx. £18k funding for doctoral researchers and research fellows to organise professional development activities for fellow researchers. In 2015 a group of research staff initiated the 'Postdoc Network' and subsequently secured RLI funding to establish a series of events to bring the postdoc community together; funding was renewed for 2016/17. Other funded projects include: symposiums on the 'Diversity of Career Pathways in Science' and 'Becoming Academic'.
- Researchers are increasingly interested in developing and leading professional development workshops for other researchers through the RSDS programme. To date 16 research fellows have been involved in the design/delivery of 7 workshops. Researchers are taking a proactive role in shaping the RSDS programme and the 2016/17 programme will see 2 new workshops that have been initiated and developed entirely by researchers.

3.5 Principle 6: Diversity and Equality

- To support researchers returning to a research career following a career break the University has sponsored 3 Daphne Jackson Fellowships. The Daphne Jackson Fellows started their two-year fellowships at Sussex in 2015/16 in the Schools of Life Sciences, Psychology, Mathematical, and Physical Sciences.
- All Sussex STEMM departments now hold either Bronze or Silver Athena SWAN awards, the School of Law, Politics and Sociology also hold a Bronze award. The University successfully renewed its institutional Bronze in April 2016 and non-STEMM schools are in the process of preparing Bronze applications.
- In October 2016 the Vice-Chancellor created a full time post of Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Equality and Diversity; the post is shared on a 50:50 basis by Professors Claire Annesley and Andrea Cornwall.

- The Women in STEMM Mentoring circles scheme, introduced in October 2014, is now in its 3rd year. To date over 65 female postdoctoral researchers have participated in mentoring circle sessions. Scheme evaluations reveal that over 70% of participants agree that their participation in the scheme: provided valuable advice and guidance, helped to clarify issues, provided new perspectives, encouraged them to move ahead in their career, helped them to focus on their professional development.

3.6 Principle 7: Review and Implementation

- The University participates in the biennial CROS survey and for CROS 2015 received a response rate of 41%, which was well above the national average response rate of 28%. CROS outcomes informed the Concordat Implementation plans. CROS outcomes and progress are communicated to research staff via mailing lists and the [Sussex CROS website](#). CROS 2015 results were communicated to University Senior Management Group in December 2015 and the new Vice-Chancellor was briefed on key issues in September 2016. A similar communications process will be followed for CROS 2017, which is in progress at the time of writing.
- In the four years since the original submission, reviews/evaluations were conducted on: researcher training and development (2014 and 2016), support for international researchers (2014) mentoring schemes (2015, 2016), appraisal/review (2016). Recommendations informed the Concordat Implementation Plans and activity.
- To facilitate consistent implementation of Concordat principles across the academic Schools in 2016 the RSO hosted two best practice sharing events focussed on (a) research staff induction (for School induction coordinators) and (b) Career support and management of research staff (for Principal Investigators). Practice sharing events will become embedded into the annual programme of events as part of the new Concordat Implementation Plan. Best practice sharing is also facilitated via regular interactions with: Reps group, Directors of Research and Knowledge Exchange, School administrators.

4. Strategy for 2017-2021

The review, ideas generation and consultation process identified the following themes of strategic priority for our next phase of activity. Detailed actions and success measures underlying these strategic themes are outlined in the accompanying new Concordat Implementation Plan.

- A) Develop and implement a comprehensive ‘Researcher Development Strategy’ to support individuals throughout their research careers (All Concordat Principles):** Implementing initiatives to enable early career researchers to develop their skills in research leadership and evidence independent outputs to increase competitiveness for progression and employability. Developing new resources and professional development opportunities for PIs and research staff managers in addition to enhanced marketing of existing provision. Recognising successful research staff management through the academic promotions process and developing case studies of good research leadership.
- B) Celebrating the success and diversity of Sussex researchers (Concordat Principles 2, 5 and 6):** Building on the Spotlight initiative to celebrate Sussex postdoctoral research in university-wide and external fora. Communicating promotions success of research fellows to inspire more researchers to pursue progression. Enhance existing networks of international researchers and Women in STEMM and establish new researcher networks (e.g. carers, part-time and distance researchers).
- C) Maintaining and promoting best practice in School level support for researchers (All Concordat Principles):** Work with Schools to maintain and promote existing good practice. Regularly facilitate events for Schools to come together to share best practice and inform Concordat implementation activity. Provide templates, resources and information to roll-out at School level. Provide Schools with data and information (e.g. from CROS and other evaluation/reviews) to inform Schools’ researcher support activity.
- D) Broadening horizons in researcher career aspirations (Concordat Principles 3 and 4):** Provide opportunities for researchers to engage with other individuals, organisations and sectors via short placements/exchanges, industry days and networking events. Track destinations of Sussex researchers and provide case studies of transitions to careers outside academia. Enhance careers guidance information and online resources for research staff.

Broad Success Measures: Detailed success measures are provided in the new Concordat Implementation Plan. Broadly; Sussex will launch a new ‘Researcher Development Strategy’ by Autumn 2018 to include additional mechanisms to support individuals throughout the research career journey, such as enhanced development provision and resources for emerging and established research leaders. 50% more researchers will apply for promotion annually by 2018 and the value and impact of postdoctoral research will be regularly and publically celebrated via extension of the ‘Spotlight’ campaign and events. There will be new opportunities for researchers to engage with individuals, organisations and sectors beyond their immediate work environment. Sussex will be looking at outcomes of CROS and internal reviews for improvements in researchers’ satisfaction with respect to all Concordat principles.