University of Sussex: HR Excellence in Research Award - Six Year Progress Review Report

1 University Context

The University of Sussex (UoS) was originally awarded the HR Excellence in Research Award in May 2013, and retained the award following the relevant biennial reviews in 2015 and 2017.

Since the last review, the UoS launched the Sussex 2025 Strategic Framework (autumn of 2018), with four main pillars: Learn To Transform; Research With Impact; Engage For Change; and Build On Strengths. Consequently, the Concordat Implementation Plan (CIP) has flexed in terms of precise activities and timescales in order to align with the roll out of the new strategy, and changes of staff and roles across the teams involved in the plan delivery, specifically the Research Staff Office.

In terms of delivery oversight and governance, the CIP is overseen by the Research Staff Working Group (RSWG) reporting formally to the Research & Knowledge Exchange Committee (RKEC) and HR Committee. The RSWG membership comprises: Director of Research Staff Development (DRSD - the group Chair); HR Director (or nominee); Research & Enterprise Services (RES) Director (or nominee); 2x Directors of Research and Knowledge Exchange (DRKE); 3 x Early Career Researcher Leads; 5x Research Staff Representatives (RS Reps); 1x Head of School; 1x School Administrator; Research Staff Officer (RSOr - the group secretary).

2 Internal Review: process and input from researchers

2.1 Review Process

The process leading up to the submission for the six year review is outlined in the Table 1 below.

Action	Involvement	Timescale
Review progress vs action plan	Termly review at RSWG meetings Research Staff Office (RSO) lead in depth review linking with: RSWG, RS Reps, HR (incl EDI unit), and other colleagues within Prof Services (PS) and Schools incl the Athena SWAN SAT	2017-Jan 2019 Mar-Sep 2019
Information gathering to inform, and generate ideas for report and new Concordat Implementation Plan	RSO review of CROS 2017 results and recommendations	Jan 2018
	RSO collate / review of feedback forms from RSO events, programmes and workshops	Spring-Summer 2019
	RSO solicit (via e-mails and in newsletter), collate & review direct feedback / ideas / issues received from members of RS community	Jan – Sep 2019
	RSO collate / review matters arising from termly meetings between RSO and RS Reps	Summer 2019
	RSO collate / review matters arising from termly RSWG meetings	Summer 2019
	RSO hold discussions with Researcher Developer colleagues at other institutions via informal groups (e.g. SERD; FoResT) and Vitae Conference (Sep 2019) introducing new Concordat	Spring-Summer 2019
	RSO create and run Biennial Researcher "Pulse" Survey (BPS: CROS 2019 questions + additional specific questions) Feed feedback in to the development of the updated CIP	Jul-Sep 2019
Create draft report and new 2 year action plan and seek informal feedback	RSO prepare draft document for discussion and input at RSWG Discuss and seek input from the Chair of RKEC and amend	Sep - Nov 2019
Incorporate feedback and share draft docs with relevant groups	Seek sign off/amendments from RKEC Obtain final agreement / sign off from senior level lead responsible for progress against action plan: RKEC Chair	Early Nov 2019

Table 1 Process for 6-year review preparation

2.2 Input from Researchers

In addition to the all activities linking with the RS community outlined in Table 1, much of the new 2019-21 CIP is directly informed by feedback and suggestions from the broader researcher community generated through a variety of interactions including, but not limited to:

- Researcher induction and welcome lunches (3 per year);
- 1:1 general- or career-coaching discussions;

- Researchers R Us events (9, fortnightly events scheduled between Feb & Jun 2019);
- In-School "Researcher Gatherings" (facilitated by RSO - 4 events in 3 Schools between Mar & Jul 2019);
- Life Sciences "Postdoc gatherings" (organised by Life Sciences ECR lead – at least termly);
- Special, intensive follow up meetings with Reps and PVC-E&S around Teaching & Supervision issues (Spring – Summer 2019);
- Electronic surveys - both mini/specific (e.g. Jun 2019: seminar timing and location) and large (e.g. Jul-Sep 2019 BPS).

3   Key achievements and progress against the action plan

Full progress since the original submission is provided in the updated 2013-15 and 2015-17 Concordat Implementation Plans together with the revised 2017-2019 Concordat Implementation Plan submitted with this report. Key selected achievements from the **last two years** are detailed below, organised by Concordat Principle.

3.1   Overarching / all principles

- The RSWG created a UoS "Principles for Researcher Development" document (**Action 1**), the content of which contributed to the new Sussex Strategic Framework, specifically the Research with Impact pillar.

3.2   Principle 1: Recruitment & Selection

- A "Welcoming and Managing researchers" leaflet was prepared and is sent to recruiting managers when shortlisting for RF posts (**Action 4**). It is also embedded in the specific web page of the RSO web area designed to support PIs; this page was the 14th (of 188) most visited RSO page for the period Jan-Sep 2019 indicating on-going engagement with these materials.

3.3   Principle 2: Recognition & Value

- The "Spotlight" activities (**Action 12**) to showcase the impact of Research Fellows' (RF) research were a success: both in terms of engagement from the community and attendance at the symposium, as well as on-going interest in the RF profiles.
- Life Sciences have been particularly good at celebrating their RF community and achievements – supporting a RF-led Research Symposium in July 2019 as well as engaging with "Postdoc Appreciation Week" in Sep 2019.
- Data from BPS 2019, indicate that the vast majority of participants feel they are perceived and treated as staff (not students) by both their managers and the institution – something that was previously highlighted as an issue by the RS community (**Action 14**).

3.4   Principle 3 and 4: Support & Career Development

- The RSO continue to deliver, review, enhance and innovate a busy programme of L&D workshops/webinars, personal development activities, and pastoral events informed by feedback from, and designed specifically to support, the RS community **(Action 35)**. The L&D programmes of 2017-18 and 2018-19 each comprised 26 events, with average enrolments of 23 and 26 per workshop respectively, and attendance rates holding at an average of 57% across the two sessions.
- Enhanced online support for Research Staff regarding career choices/decisions have been developed and implemented (**Action 24**), and the RSOr offers specialist 1:1 careers sessions with RS.
- The RSO continue to subsidise a wider 1:1 coaching provision for RS, allowing them to in up to 3 sessions with a qualified development coach. This has been a popular offering with 34 and 35 requests for coaching over the 2017-18 and 2018-19 academic sessions.
- The RSO and wider University have built up their mentoring activities (**Action 19**), and have developed and implemented a cross-University mentoring framework and scheme (**Action 25**) launched in 2018. Feedback from mentors and mentees found that >90% found the programme positive.
- Whilst specific training packages to support PIs managing RS have not yet been put in place (**Action 10; 1**), data from the BPS 2019 indicate that 75% respondents felt supported by their managers.

3.5   Principle 5: Researchers Responsibilities

- The pool of RS Reps has grown from 15 at the time of the last HREiR report to 25. All but one School with >5 RS have a Rep.
- This team has worked with their peers and the RSO through 2019 to raise issues faced by the community and share best practice across Schools (via e.g. In-School Researcher Gatherings and e-mails; RS Reps meetings). The Reps have continued to engage in discussion around delivery of teaching and supervision (linked with **Action 13**). Actions arising from engagement activities are included in the new 2-year CIP.

3.6   Principle 6: Diversity & Equality

- As well as the specific achievements noted in the updated action plan (**Actions 30-34** which include the UoS signing up to an expanded suite of equality charters and maintaining and enlarging its Athena SWAN portfolio), holistically the UoS has made great strides in terms of promoting and supporting Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) at the Institution over the last few years.
- Under the leadership of the DPVC-E&D, the University has formed an EDI unit (early 2018) *"responsible for promoting, co-ordinating and embedding equality, diversity and inclusion across the whole university community".* "Inclusive Sussex" (the UoS EDI strategy 2018-25) was published in Jun 2018, identifying 4 key goals (Equal-, Diverse- Accessible-, and Flexible-Sussex) which have been embedded into the Sussex 2025 Strategic Framework
- In May 2019, the University committed to delivering a new Dignity and Respect Policy and to appoint Dignity Champions across the University. Following consultation on a draft document over the summer of 2019, the new policy was launched at the autumn 2019 VC forum.

3.7   Principle 7: Review & Implementation

- The UoS engaged in CROS 2017, the outputs of which were used to inform the action plan updates in Jan 2018 – adding an additional six actions to the CIP. Over the summer of 2019, the RSO created and ran the BPS (including all CROS 2019 questions with additional University-specific questions) engagingthe RS community. The outputs of this helped inform the next 2 year CIP (**Action 35**).

4   Strategy for 2019-21

- Following the review and consultation process undertaken for this report, a range of themes were identified and have been embedded in the revised strategy for the next 2 years. These are listed below and cross referenced to Concordat 2008 principles:
    - University Researcher Development Strategy (CP: 1-7)
    - Employment and Reward Practices (CP: 1, 2)
    - Support for PIs/ Researcher managers (CP: 2)
    - Support for RS (CP: 1-7)
    - Support for "minority" RS groups (CP: 1, 3, 4, 6)
    - Research Environment / Culture (CP: 1-6)
    - Sector awareness & review (CP: 7)
- During this latest internal review process it became clear that the existing action plan had become too large/ unwieldy, and that a streamlined plan was needed for the next period. We have focussed on taking forward actions that were identified in the original gap analysis and areas which are strategically aligned to the Sussex 2025 Strategic Priorities Framework. These are outlined in the accompanying 2019-21 CIP.
- The first strategic priority for the next two years will be to review and renew the assurance / implementation mechanisms for the action plan going forwards (Action 1). Work on this has already commenced with the Chair of RKEC and it is anticipated that the new structures will be in place by January 2020, providing a delivery group and separate oversight governance group.

Success Measures. Detailed actions and success measures are provided in the new accompanying 2019-2021 CIP. In broad terms, we are aiming for:

- Championing of and direct engagement with, HREiR "actions" (project/workstream planning, project team formation, endorsing/funding activities to create deliverables) by senior members of the UoS - to enable delivery of "support" in all its forms for the Career Development of Researchers at Sussex. This will include the University becoming a signatory to the new "Researcher Development Concordat".
- Improved/renewed HREiR action plan/project delivery and governance structures.
- Enhanced awareness of, and engagement with, the suite of CPD/career development resources and opportunities available to RS – enabling them to prepare for their next career step.
- Development, and delivery of a suite of support for PIs/Research Managers to help them achieve excellence in their management of Researchers.
- Substantial progress on improving the range of employment practices and conditions RS face within the sector (e.g. fixed term contract use; allocated workspaces; on-boarding procedures – especially for international researchers).

Annex 1: **Relevant University / Sector documents**

A1   University of Sussex Strategic Framework to 2025

2025-strategy.pdf

https://www.sussex.ac.uk/webteam/gateway/file.php?name=2025-strategy.pdf&site=509

A2   University of Sussex – Research with Impact Pillar

UoS 2025
Pillars_p2.pdf

https://www.sussex.ac.uk/webteam/gateway/file.php?name=uos-2025-pillars-p2.pdf&site=509

A3   Principles for Researcher Development at the University of Sussex

Principles for
University of Sussex

https://www.sussex.ac.uk/webteam/gateway/file.php?name=principles-for-university-of-sussex-researcher-development.pdf&site=377

A4   The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers (2019)

Researcher-Develop
ment-Concordat_Sep

https://www.vitae.ac.uk/policy/concordat