



Researcher Development Concordat Action Plan

NOVEMBER 2021

University of Southampton

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Action Plan

Strategy, aims and timeline

The University of Southampton has been implementing the [Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers](#), otherwise known as the *Researcher Development Concordat*, since 2009. We are fully committed to achieving the aim of the Concordat to create:

'...the very best culture for our researchers to thrive...[and to] identify working practices and clear responsibilities, vital to increase the appeal and sustainability of researcher careers...'

Researcher Development Concordat (3:2019)

We received recognition for our implementation work and achieved the European Commission's [HR Excellence in Research award](#) (HREiR) in 2012. We have retained this award through four reviews (two internal and two external reviews) to date.



HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH

In 2019, a revised version of the *Researcher Development Concordat* was published, requiring individual institutions and funders to sign-up to the Concordat. In November 2020, our President and Vice-Chancellor, Professor Mark E. Smith, signed the [letter of commitment](#) on behalf of the university.

The 2019 *Researcher Development Concordat* is comprised of 3 Principles:

- Environment and Culture
- Employment
- Professional and career development (of researchers and their managers)

Each principle contains a series of obligations/responsibilities for Institutions, Funders, Researchers and Researcher Managers. Becoming a signatory to the revised *Researcher Development Concordat* allowed us one year to conduct a gap analysis and to draw up an action plan. This enabled us to draw our previous action plans to a close, and to reflect on our progress and consider our obligations with respect to the new Concordat.

Action plan

This document provides an overview and narrative summary of our strategy and planned actions until November 2022/23.

Our action plan addresses the twin submission processes of becoming a Signatory to the 2019 version of the *Researcher Development Concordat*, and the HREiR award process. Both processes require the same information, and this document has been prepared for Council in line with the Signatory process.

The Action Plan was considered by the Equality Diversity and Inclusion Committee (13 September 2021), the Research Enterprise Executive Group (30 September 2021), the University Executive Board (26 October 2021) before being presented and noted by University Council on 24 November 2021.

Our achievements

The decade that we have been implementing the principles of the *Researcher Development Concordat* has seen us make some remarkable achievements which have brought benefits to our research staff. We are especially proud of our Concordat Champion model. Champions play a pivotal role in bringing together researchers from all schools and in each Faculty, to provide local support and engagement.

Other notable improvements include:

- The creation of a clear research career pathway that identifies research staff as a 'job-family', which also enables us to produce reliable HR data focused on researchers.
- An online and improved appraisal process that has raised appraisal completion rates for research staff by 50%.
- The introduction of the OTM-R (Open Transparent and Merit-based Recruitment) checklist in 2016.
- The introduction of specific recognition and reward prizes for researchers.
- The incorporation of the *Researcher Development Concordat* within the Equality Diversity and Inclusion structure to align and collaborate with other equality charters.

Gap analysis

Our gap analysis comprised consultations with key professional services directorates and University senior leadership in 2020; a policy review by HR and CHEP staff in 2021; data from the *Culture, Employment and Development in Academic Research Survey (CEDARS)* 2021 (with 690 respondents) and an ECR led [ECR Covid-19 Impact Survey 2020](#) (231 respondents); feedback from Culture cafes and a Postdoc Appreciation Week (September 2020) Townhall event for ~70 early career researchers. This information was combined with actions and learning carried forward from our previous action plan (as associated with the 2008 version of the Concordat) and captured in our [Bridging Actions 2020-2022](#).

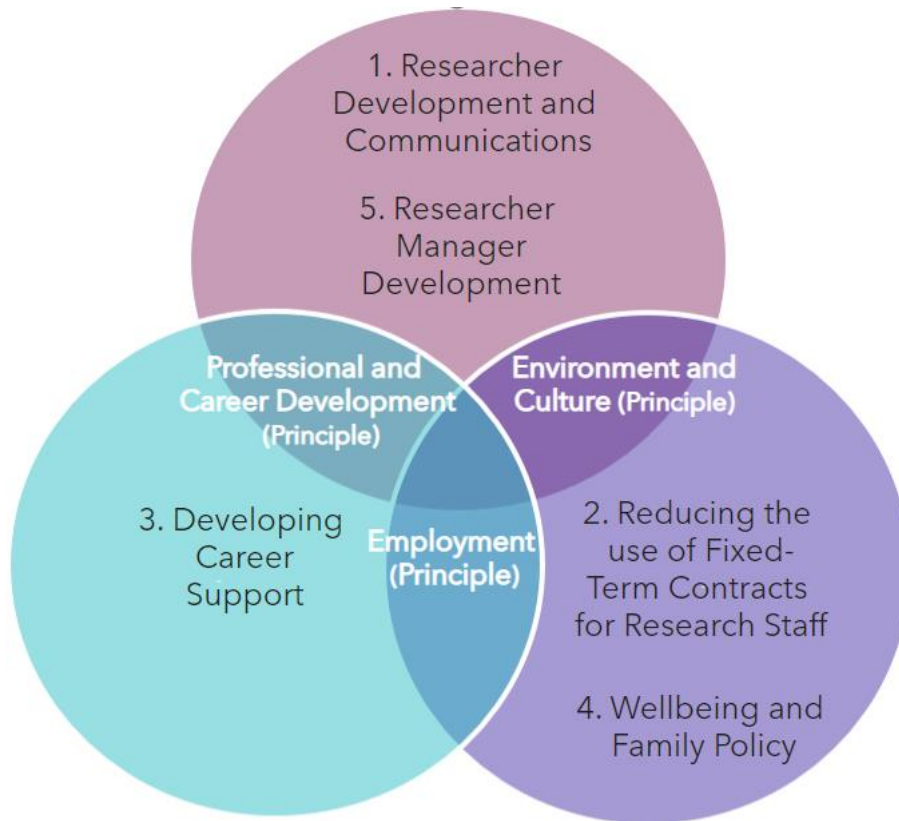
The gap analysis revealed that, overall, we have appropriate policies and processes in place. Our main gaps are around their communication, notably those associated with the management of fixed term contracts, family policy and pay, and our ability to gather operational evidence of take-up/reach/compliance. Further gaps are around assessing the impact of those policies/processes. Additional support for professional and career development, and wellbeing of researchers and researcher managers was also identified.

Five major University projects

From the gap analysis we identified five key strategic areas of action. These have been developed into five major projects and working groups in consultation with the Directors of HR, Careers, and [Centre for Higher Education Practice \(CHEP\)](#). Each project will be carried out by a partnership between a professional service or the CHEP with a working group under the direction of the Concordat Advisory Group (CAG).



The working groups are collaborative and will explore the key areas further. Their findings and recommendations will refine our actions and will be agreed on between June and October 2022. The Venn diagram below illustrates the relationship between the projects and the Concordat principles.



Working groups

Each working group consists of members of the research staff community and is representative of the University. We sought volunteers from across the University for the working groups, ensuring all Faculties, research staff and research managers were represented. Over 100 members of the research community have volunteered to participate in the working groups.

Working groups will consult with other Equality Charter groups within the University, where appropriate, to ensure alignment especially of actions, and will consider the wider research culture issues (with reference to other policies and initiatives, such as the UKRI *Action Plan* and BEIS *People and Culture Strategy*).

Three phases of work are planned:

- 1) Discovery and investigation - up to June 2022
- 2) Identifying, reporting and agreeing on options – June 2022 to November 2022
- 3) Implementation – from November 2022

The Working groups will report their findings and recommendations to the University in June 2022. These will be incorporated into our Action Plan HREiR/Obligations' template, where the detail of our activity is to be found.

Strategic objectives

Our approach is to be curious, inclusive, and transparent; consulting with the researcher community, professional services and governance bodies, seeking out a diverse range of views to ensure inclusivity in the development of the action plan.

Our aim until June 2022, is to use this consultative phase to investigate the five project areas thoroughly to achieve a greater understanding of both the nature of the problems and the range of solutions available. Between June and November 2022, when the working groups will report and when this document will be updated, the relevant governance bodies will decide on appropriate actions and on any necessary investment. Detailed actions will be presented to Council in November 2022 and implemented from then onwards.

Progress will be reported to Council in November 2022 and 2023 and assessed via the HREiR review process in 2022 and 2024. By July 2024, we would expect many of the actions to have been implemented and to have become business as usual.

Quality Assurance

We will ensure our plans are of the highest quality and relevance to our context by:

- Consulting with and taking feedback from across the University i.e. via the key representative bodies of Concordat Advisory Group (CAG), the Research and Enterprise Executive Group (REEG), and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee (EDIC)
- Consulting with and including the voices of researchers, researcher managers and relevant services represented on the working groups, and through reviewing CEDARS data to further develop the plan
- Consulting with the other [Equality Charters](#) to align actions where possible and maximise efficiencies
- Aligning with the refreshed University strategy

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- Engaging with the HE sector i.e. through the Researchers14 group and the HREiR assessment process

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Researcher Development and Communications

Researchers at the University of Southampton have access to a wide variety of professional development opportunities provided through the [Centre for Higher Education Practice \(CHEP\)](#), our [Research and Innovation Services \(RIS\)](#), [Public Engagement with Research Unit \(PERU\)](#), [Public Policy](#) team, and the [Library](#) service. Early career researchers already engage in designing their own professional development interventions in faculties with their Concordat Champions. However, we seek to improve and further develop the range of opportunities available to all levels of research staff.

This working group will:

- Describe the as-is/current situation across the different Faculties and investigate awareness and describe best practice within the sector.
- Understand the development needs and preferences of Southampton researchers, proactivity seeking to include all views.
- Investigate methods of supporting the development of researcher identity and leadership skills.
- Support and advise the development of the CHEP Researcher Development Hub and communities of practice.
- Advise on communicating to researchers and managers of researchers on relevant resources.
- Identify options for implementing the minimum 10 days allowance requirement and ways of recording it.
- Identify success measures and monitoring processes (including CEDARS).
- Identify options for costs (if needed) and/or required additional investment.

By June 2022 this working group will have completed this discovery phase and gathered the evidence into a series of recommendations including identifying next steps.

Our longer-term (3 year) aim: All researchers will be aware of, and engage in, a minimum of 10 days professional development pro rata per year and will have access to a range of researcher focused relevant resources. This will enable individual researchers to build a portfolio and develop their research identity.

Led by Dr Mark Chapman, Concordat Champion for the Faculty of Environment and Life Sciences

In partnership with Professor Shelley Parr, Director of the Centre for Higher Education Practice (CHEP)

Sponsor: Professor John Holloway, Associate Vice-President (Interdisciplinary Research)

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Reducing the use of Fixed-Term Contracts for Research staff

We have piloted the use of open-ended contracts and the lessons learned from the pilot have generated a wider review of our processes. We aim to build on these experiences to better manage the employment experiences of our research staff.

This working group will:

- Describe the as-is/current situation across the different Faculties and investigate and describe best practice within the sector.
- Understand researcher experience of employment continuity including the effects on any protected characteristics.
- Identify a method for obtaining accurate data and tracking the reduction of use of FTCs .
- Identify ways to assess the impact of changes and establishing any financial risks and costs to the University.
- Identify any unintended consequences.
- Identify facilitators and blockers relating to the changes.
- Identify ways of implementing and communicating any new processes.
- Identify success measures and monitoring processes (including CEDARS).
- Identify options for costs (if needed) and/or required additional investment.

By June 2022 this working group will have completed this discovery phase and gathered the evidence into a series of recommendations including identifying next steps.

Our longer-term (3 year) aim: A university wide system in place whereby all research pathway staff on fixed term contract who reach the 4-year threshold are offered open-

ended contracts to enable greater continuity of employment that positively affects their career.

Led by - Dr Russel Torah, Concordat Champion for the Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences and TBC

In partnership with Sarah Hollowbread, Director of Human Resources (Service Delivery)

Sponsor: Professor Mandy Fader, Chair of the Concordat Advisory Group

3 Developing Career Support

Early Career Researchers have access to our [Careers and Employability Service](#), online resources and careers platform, [My Career](#), as well as career coaching 1-2-1s. Recognising that research staff will go on to a range of careers, we aim to improve our provision and support them in their diverse ambitions.

This working group will:

- Describe the as-is/current situation across the different Faculties and investigate and describe best practice within the sector.
- Utilise expert consultant's recommendations to support above assessment.
- Understand researcher needs and preferences for career support.
- Collate information about career possibilities across a range of sectors.
- Secure expertise/advisor(s) as a dedicated resource for researchers.
- Review the current resources and work with the dedicated advisor to identify online and in-person requirements fit for 2020s.
- Identify how to implement career development support through the line manager.
- Identify success measures and monitoring processes (including CEDARS).
- Identify options for costs (if needed) and/or required additional investment.

By June 2022 this working group will have completed this discovery phase and gathered the evidence into a series of recommendations including identifying next steps.

Our longer-term (3 year) aim: Every researcher will have a professional career development plan and have access to dedicated advice and support for academic and non-academic careers, including 1-2-1 advice, to be equipped to move between sectors and to make informed choices about future careers.

Led by - Dr Alison Gascoigne, Concordat Champion for the Faculty of Arts and Humanities

In partnership with Kelly Holder, Associate Director, Student Services (staff)

Sponsor: Professor John Holloway, Associate Vice-President (Interdisciplinary Research)



4 Wellbeing and Family Policy

The University of Southampton is committed to several charter marks related to equality and inclusion; [Athena SWAN \(silver award holder\)](#), the [Race Equality Charter](#), [Disability Confident](#), and we are members of the [Technicians Commitment](#). We have a wide range of resources to support mental health and wellbeing through our [Employee Assistance Programme](#) and [Health and Safety](#). We want to ensure that every member of research staff has access to the support and help they need irrespective of gender, ethnicity, sexual and religious preference.

This working group will:

- Describe the as-is/current situation across the different Faculties and investigate and describe best practice within the sector, including methods of communication and inclusivity.
- Understand the research culture and the perspective of researchers on wellbeing, including bullying and harassment, and discrimination.
- Identify key wellbeing issues and what changes are required to promote and support the mental health and wellbeing of researchers.
- Collaborate with HR on the navigation and utilization of Family policies, identifying what is required to embed and promote these policies.
- Identify success measures and monitoring processes (including CEDARS).

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- Identify options for costs (if needed) and/or required additional investment.

By June 2022 this working group will have completed this discovery phase and gathered the evidence into a series of recommendations including identifying next steps.

Our longer-term (3 year) aim: Researchers and line managers understand how to establish, promote and maintain a healthy working culture. All researchers and their managers understand and apply the Family policies consistently and equitably.

Led by - Professor Delphine Boche, Concordat Champion for the Faculty of Medicine

In partnership with Human Resources: Karen Payso, HR Faculty Business Partner and others tbc.

Sponsor: Professor Rebecca Hoyle, Associate Vice-President (Interdisciplinary Research)

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Researcher Manager Development

In October 2020, the Human Resources' Leadership and Management team introduced the [Line Manager Development Programme](#), a suite of 4 modules (including Situational leadership) tailored to our University Community.

Recognising that research managers are central to all research activity and research staff experience, we aim to ensure we are supporting them to be the best they can be in their roles.

This working group will:

- Describe the as-is/current situation across the different Faculties and investigate and describe best practice within the sector.
- Identify the training needs of researcher managers and highlight the gaps in support.
- Seek to understand the perspectives of researcher managers.

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- Identify the most effective ways or modes of delivery that enable the line managers of researchers to obtain the training, information and support they need to carry out their obligations.
 - Identify the relevant resources researcher managers need and how to access them.
 - Identify success measures and monitoring processes (including CEDARS).
 - Identify options for costs (if needed) and/or required additional investment.

By June 2022 this working group will have completed this discovery phase and gathered the evidence into a series of recommendations including identifying next steps.

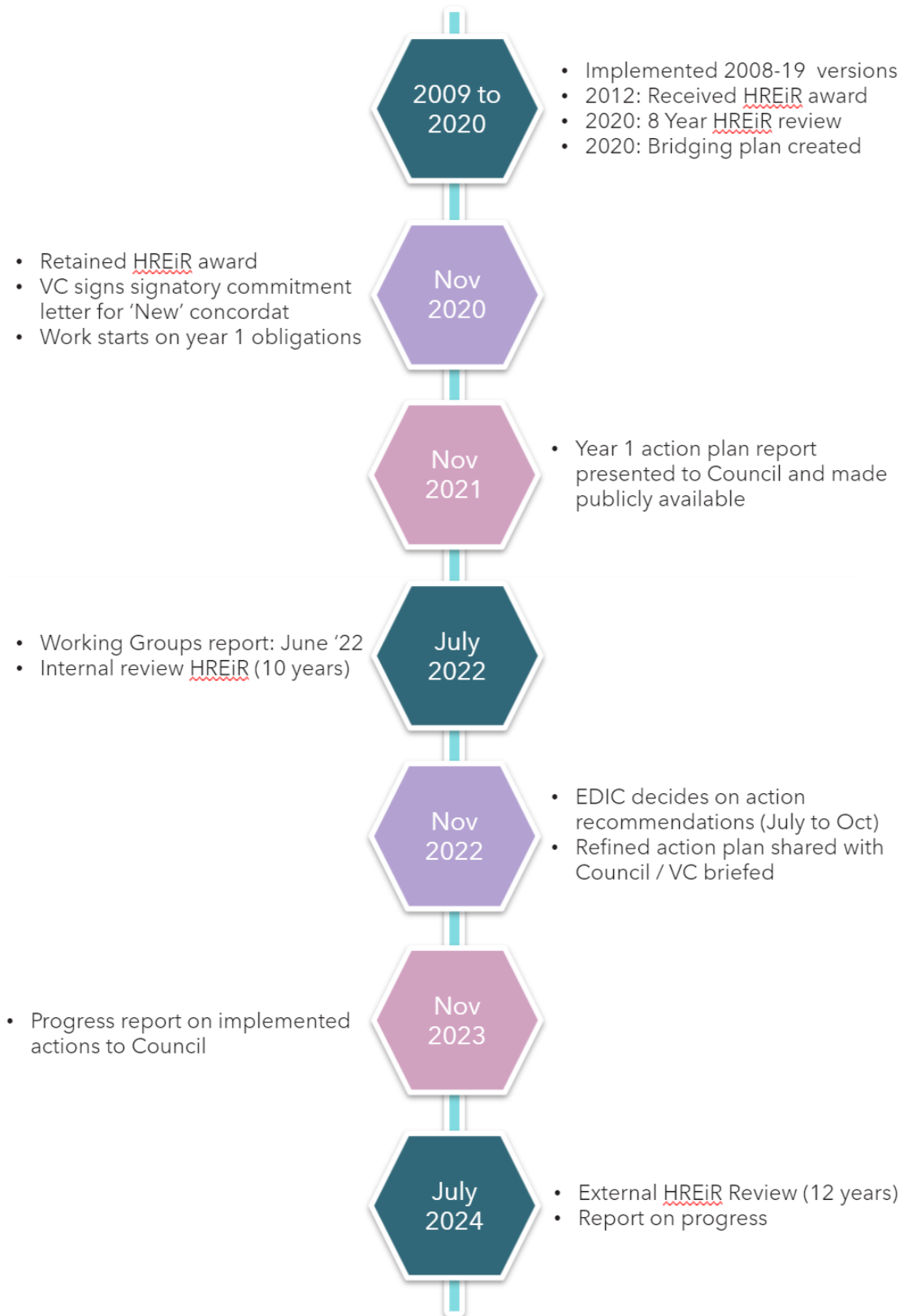
Our longer-term (3 year) aim: All line managers of researchers are equipped, capable and confident of meeting their obligations towards their staff and enacting their roles.

Led by - Dr Meixian Song, Concordat Champion for the Faculty of Social Sciences.

In partnership with Professor Shelley Parr, Director of CHEP, and others tbc.

Sponsor: Professor Rebecca Hoyle, Associate Vice-President (Interdisciplinary Research)

Timeline





Concordat Advisory Group (V1. November 2021)