



Researcher Development Concordat Annual Report 2022

NOVEMBER 2022

University of Southampton

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Background

The University of Southampton (UoS) became a signatory to the Researcher Development Concordat in 2009. In November 2020, the University of Southampton’s Vice-Chancellor, Professor Mark E. Smith, signed a letter of commitment to a revised version (2019) of the Researcher Development Concordat. Alongside the University’s commitment to the Concordat we have also held the HR Excellence in Research (HREiR) award since 2012.



The Concordat and HREiR are intended to drive positive change in research culture, to increase the appeal and sustainability of research careers in the UK and Europe. It is critical we attract and retain talented researchers, and that each researcher is given every opportunity to thrive and realise their potential in the increasingly diverse, mobile and global environment in which we work.

The Concordat Advisory Group (CAG), chaired by the Associate Vice-President for Interdisciplinary Research, has overall responsibility for the UoS’s commitment to the Concordat and HREiR. The CAG is well-positioned to influence centrally, report and recommend upwards. Accountability for the Concordat and HREiR action plan lies with the University Executive Board, with an annual report to Council.

This report outlines progress on our Concordat action plan since 2021 and describes our priorities and actions for the following year.

Key Achievements & Progress

To facilitate the transition between the 2009 and 2019 versions of the Concordat, we produced a bridging action plan, 2020 to 2022. This enabled us to conduct a gap analysis during 2020-2021 and despite the interruptions experienced during the Coronavirus pandemic, progress continued and we identified five key areas that required further investigative work. Our primary strategic goal in 2021-22 was, therefore, to understand more deeply, through qualitative and quantitative data research and analysis, the experience of researchers at UoS to build clear actions to improve research culture, informed by sector best practice.

In 2021, we established five Researcher Working Groups, illustrated below, to complete the investigative strategic review. The Researcher Working Groups were a collaborative partnership across the Research community, Professional Services and Centre for Higher Education Practice (CHEP).



Figure 1: Five Research Working Groups and Working Group Leads (Concordat Champions)



Figure 2: Three phases of work and timeline to meet the strategic objectives

Phase one, investigation at a School, Faculty and Institutional level to inform recommendations utilising best practice, is complete. These recommendations were developed in consultation with the wider University community (phase two). This included a half-day interactive workshop which brought together those who were able to effect change, including members of the University leadership team, those who were able to deliver change and those who would be most affected by the changes, including researchers from each faculty. The

workshop was highly interactive to foster creativity and innovation to inform bigger, bolder ideas to drive sustainable cultural change. We are now moving into phase three, with the focus on action implementation.

Alongside the strategic review, examples of progress against each of the three Researcher Concordat principles are outlined below:

Principle 1: Environment and Culture

Excellent research requires a supportive and inclusive research culture

- **Awarded Institutional Silver Athena SWAN** (2022 renewal); recognising and celebrating the significant record of activity and achievement by the institution in promoting gender equality at the University.
- **Line Manager Development Programme** developed and being delivered (2021 onwards) to further foster inclusive leadership; 33% (196 people) of academic managers enrolled (July 2022). Commitment of 100% completion by 2023.
- **'Active Bystander' workshops** delivered (2021 onwards); 3,500 staff and students have completed the training and additional researcher-only sessions were made available. The training equips colleagues with practical techniques to challenge unacceptable behaviours to further foster an inclusive culture.
- **Compassionate Inclusive Leadership researcher-only workshops delivered** (2022); the learner-centred workshop aims to support participants in developing ways of working that help to build compassionate and inclusive cultures.

Principle 2: Employment

Researchers are recruited, employed and managed under conditions that recognise their value and importance

- **Commitment to greater use of open-ended contracts (OECs)**; the University recognises the wide use of fixed term contracts (FTCs) is a key issue affecting early career researchers job stability and career progression. Employees on FTCs with four years' service and at least one renewal can request conversion to OEC. Work has also begun on a multi-year project to decrease the use of FTCs and to define a more proactive policy and procedure for the use of OECs, alongside improved governance procedures.
- **Improved maternity support for those on fixed term contracts (FTCs)**; parents will no longer be required to repay contractual maternity pay when the FTC expires and does not allow for the 52 weeks return.
- **New Academic Career Development Committees established** in every school (2021); to identify potential promotion applicants and assign mentors, especially among under-represented groups.

Principle 3: Professional and Career Development

Professional and career development are integral to enabling researchers to develop their full potential

- **New Researcher Development Hub launched** (2022); providing guidance, resources and training, alongside access to our Careers and Employability Service.
- **On-going calendar of researcher specific development and learning**; including writing retreats, power hours for writing and grant writing and leadership talks, alongside a range of CPD opportunities.
- **Third annual Open Research symposium delivered**; over 100 participants attended.
- **New Anniversary Fellowship Scheme launched** (2022); offering an opportunity for exceptional ECRs to advance their research careers. Anniversary Fellows benefit from three-years' independent research funding, the link to a permanent academic post and access to mentoring, career development and networking.
- **New "Black Futures Postgraduate Research Scholarship" programme** launched in the Faculty of Environmental & Life Science (2022); to increase the ethnic diversity of our research community (15 scholarships over three years).

Proposals for improvement during 2022-2023:

The central focus for the following year will be on areas that have arisen from the strategic review, including, but not limited to:

- **Appoint a Level 5 Researcher Careers Development Officer** to liaise with researchers, Faculties, Careers Service and Employers to identify what support is needed for a diverse range of careers.
- **Establish a research staff-led network** with representation in all Faculties/Schools.
- **Monitor and evaluate the impact of the Academic Career Development Committees** on researcher careers.
- **Scope the requirements of a L4 Secondments Co-ordinator** to manage both internal and external secondments.
- **Partake in the Culture, Employment and Development in Academic Research Survey (CEDARS)** in May 2023 and utilise the insight inform future actions.
- **Utilise the Concordat principles and findings in the relevant University strategic plans**, notably the *Research, Knowledge Exchange and Enterprise* and *Wellbeing* strategic plans, and feed in to the 'Modernising the Governance' major strategic project.
- **Increase awareness of and access to the 10 days professional development**, alongside improved data collection.
- **Improve the narrative surrounding the ERE pathway** for researchers through further qualitative research.
- **Establish a co-design group to determine how to offer academic/researcher career planning** from day one.

Success Measures

Alongside timely completion of the specific deliverables detailed in the action plan, the following indicators will be used to measure success:

- A positive trend in CEDARS scores and future Staff Engagement Survey results.
- An increase in knowledge of the benefits of the Researcher Development Concordat across the University.
- A reduction in the use of Fixed-Term Contracts amongst research staff over the next 5 years.
- Increased uptake of the 10 days professional development.
- Increased networking opportunities and sense of belonging amongst research staff.

Further Engagement

The CAG will deliver additional expert-led sessions to explore solutions on how to strengthen and build on our existing mentoring offering, and how we can support research-only staff with funding opportunities.