

# Report

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**Title:** HR Excellence in Research Award – 8-year review

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## Background

The University of Southampton achieved the HR Excellence in Research Award in January 2012, during a period of substantial change that led to the establishment of our '[Simply Better](#)' strategy. Central to the success of the University strategy and underpinning all our activities are four key principles of Collegiality, Quality, Internationalisation and Sustainability. The principle of Collegiality has been highly influential in determining our approach towards implementing the *Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers* within the University of Southampton; enabling us to adopt an inclusive and devolved implementation method.

The process of devolution continued in 2018 with the reorganisation of eight Faculties into five. This change extended our initial approach and additionally shifted emphasis towards a broader collegiate one that resulted in greater operational responsibility being distributed to Faculties, through Faculty Concordat Champions, and to line managers. This change also resulted in greater involvement by the specialist departments in supporting research staff. Enhanced roles have taken by our Research and Innovation Services (RIS), alongside Human Resources' Leadership and Management (HR), Public Engagement with Research Unit (PERU), PublicPolicy at Southampton (PP|Southampton), the Library, Careers Services, and the Centre of Higher Education Practice (CHEP). The International Office, the University and College Union (UCU) and Diversity Team have continued to support research staff within their remits, also.

The *Career Development of Researchers Working Group* (CDR WG) had overseen the Concordat implementation process since 2012, and the reorganisation in 2018 provided us with the opportunity to refresh both our operations and governance structure. The CDR WG was replaced with an interim Concordat Advisory Group (CAG) and whilst the Faculty Concordat Champion role has been retained, it seemed an appropriate point for a new generation of Concordat Champions to be appointed and for the role to be clarified i.e. we created a generic champion role description. The CAG is a strategic body that advises the Vice President of Research and Enterprise (VP R&E), whereas the CDR WG had an operational focus and was not easily aligned with other institutional charters and initiatives. The CAG is an interim body whilst a newly formed governance structure (approved in October 2019 by UEB) led by the Equality Charters Programme Board (ECPB) is embedded. The ECPB is chaired by the VP R&E, and will align the Concordat with other quality charters, such as Athena SWAN and Race Equality Charter. The Chair of CAG sits on the programme board.

## Context

The University has consistently had around 900 research staff since 2012. Our April 2020 snapshot data indicated that: the Faculty of Arts and Humanities (FAH) had 17 research only staff at levels 4 and 5; the Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences (FEPS) had 438; the Faculty of Environmental and Life Sciences (FELS) had 172; the Faculty of Medicine (FoM) had 215; and the Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS) had 57 research only staff. With such a variation in research staff numbers and disciplinary need, it is sensible that each Faculty design and decides its own ways of supporting their researchers. Faculties can choose to additionally include mixed portfolio and teaching only staff in their activities. However, our primary focus is on our Level 4 research only staff, whom we class as early career researchers (ECRs) in this report, and Level 5 research only staff. We are especially concerned with those staff on fixed term contracts (FTCs) who are predominantly at these two levels. On average, 90% of Level 4 and 50% of Level 5 staff are on FTCs.

Each Faculty has a Concordat Champion who works directly with ECRs either individually (i.e. FAH) or via School level representatives (i.e. FELS, FSS, and in FoM there is an established Postdoc Association chaired by the Champion). In the case of FEPS, our largest Faculty, the Faculty Concordat Champion works with local [Concordat leads](#) who in turn work with the ECRs in their departments/institutes. All Faculty Concordat Champions report to their Deans, usually through their Associate Deans Research and/or Research Management Committees. The Deans can then inform the VP R&E and VC at the University Executive Board (UEB) of any issues. In addition, the Faculty Concordat Champions sit on the CAG which reports to the ECPB that in turn reports to the ED&I Committee (partly UEB), which is also chaired by the VP R&E. Research staff have two effective routes to communicate issues: 1) via their Faculty structures and 2) via the ECPB structure.

### **How the internal review was undertaken**

Commencing in November 2018, and once Faculties had appointed new Concordat Champions, the CHEP representative met with each Champion to discuss the needs of research staff and to confirm their approach for engaging with research staff. Concordat Champions held regular internal meetings (see below for details) to discuss their local progress, the new Concordat, institutional progress, and issues overall.

In parallel to Faculty activity, and beginning in June 2019, an informal Equality Charters Group met monthly to review all charter mark action plans, progress, and processes in the University. This group comprised representatives of all the institutional awards and was led by the Director HR Service Delivery and was supported by a Project Manager from the Change Portfolio Office. The CHEP representative worked with the Project Manager to draw up a project plan and schedule of work indicating which actions required information. The group was formally replaced by the Equality Charters Programme Team and Board in October 2019. This new programme team liaised with all the specialist service providers to collect relevant information for this review, i.e. Human Resources Director; the Head of Diversity and Diversity Project Officer; and the Head of Leadership and Management. The Careers Service, Public Engagement with Research unit, PPSouthampton team, Research and Innovation Services, Library and International Office were all consulted and contributed data and/or evidence of their work with research staff.

In May 2019, we participated in CROS and that data has been incorporated into this review, along with internal HR data. The final report was agreed by the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion committee ((ED&I) chaired by Vice President Research and Enterprise) on 8<sup>th</sup> June 2020, having previously been approved by the ECPB on 20<sup>th</sup> May. Minor revisions were made in view of Covid-19 and approved in July.

### **How research staff were involved in the review**

Faculties vary widely in their numbers of research staff, so it was for each Faculty to agree on the structure for engaging with their research staff on the Concordat and for identifying priority issues. Each Faculty had drawn up their own Concordat plan in 2016 and this was a useful mechanism for initiating discussions, as was the publication of the new Concordat in September 2019. Research staff have been involved in the process through multiple Faculty level meetings and events. For example, FELS held regular meetings at Faculty level with research staff representatives from each school to review the Faculty Concordat plan. The FoM Postdoc Association Steering Committee meets five times a year and the Concordat is a standing agenda item. This steering committee also draws on the views of School Research Clubs. FEPS gathered information via School/institute Concordat leads, who met regularly over the period, usually every 6 weeks. They held a Faculty level [Concordat event](#) for research staff, supported by the Dean, where the key issues were explored and a feedback activity gathered researchers' ideas and views. The FAH Concordat Champion met with the research staff in her Faculty on an individual basis to obtain information for the review; and the FSS Champion met with School representatives to survey research staff views. All information has been fed upwards via Faculty Deans/Associate Deans and/or ED&I structures as well as to the CAG.

The CHEP rep held a feedback workshop on Concordat issues in May 2019, for 70 attendees, and solicited and received informal feedback from research staff as well. This information has been included in the review and shared with the CAG. More generally, research staff views have been collected via CROS 2019, which the University has participated in since 2009. There were no new actions arising from CROS data as the key areas, such as around maternity leave and teaching issues had already been identified and noted for action previously.

The CAG met with its new Concordat Champions, representatives from CHEP, HR, Careers Service, Equality Charters Coordination team, and Chair, on 4<sup>th</sup> November 2019 and 27<sup>th</sup> January 2020 to agree terms of reference. The group shared evidence, feedback and experiences obtained from the research staff. Virtual correspondence has been necessary since March 2020, with online meetings held 16<sup>th</sup> June and 14<sup>th</sup> July.

### **Key achievements and progress against the strategy, indicators and actions identified in the original action plan (2012-2020)**

**Structural improvements** – Across the University, research staff representation, engagement and the mechanisms giving voice to their issues have been vastly improved since 2012. All Faculties have clear reporting and communications systems with their research staff. Four Faculties have School level representatives who can communicate information both upwards and downwards. Concordat Champions (indirectly) report into their Deans, who are in turn members of UEB. This has actively ensured there is much greater awareness throughout the organisational structure of research staff issues. In 2010/11, only the Faculty of Medicine and the Schools of Biological Sciences and Psychology had research staff representation and communication structures.

The new Equality Charters Programme board structure was a natural step in view of the progress made to date and will integrate research staff issues and interests further into the operation and strategy of the organisation. 'The aim of the Equality Charters Programme Board is to ensure a coordinated and resource-efficient approach to supporting institutional submissions for Athena SWAN, Race Equality Charter, Concordat, Disability Confident, Technicians Commitment' and to oversee the 'Harassment Initiative'.

**HR processes:** Improvements to HR advice, support and processes have been the area of most profound change for all staff since 2012. The benefits to ECRs have been notable; with 90% of research staff now receiving a written job description (it was 69% in CROS 2011 data), 78% received an annual appraisal in 2019

(it was 52% in CROS 2011 data), and they can be identified as a distinct 'research only' job family within the HR database. We introduced the OTM-R checklist in 2016 and review it regularly.

**Equality, Diversity and Inclusion:** We achieved an institutional Silver Athena SWAN award in 2017 and have extended the Athena SWAN process to all Faculties and Schools as planned in 2016, building on work that began in STEM disciplines in 2012. Closer working with the other institutional award and charter marks has precipitated better collaboration on raising shared issues i.e. maternity leave policy and gathering ED&I data/evidence, identifying marginalised and intersectional staff cohorts, overall. Athena SWAN, Race Equality Charter, Disability Confident, and our staff networks, all help to improve the environment that researchers are employed in.

**Faculty Achievements:** At Faculty level, the Concordat Champions have become embedded in their Faculty structures, with closer working with the Associate Deans for Research and support of Deans. There is a generic role description for the Concordat Champions and the majority have time allocated to the role. The newly appointed Concordat Champions were able to take up their roles and to build on the work of their predecessors swiftly, confirming that the progress made within Faculties had been sufficiently robust to withstand the structural changes of 2018. There has been an increase in the formal representation of research staff (and teaching fellows if the Faculty chooses to include them, which FAH has) at School level. In FAH the representatives have taken responsibility for organising events from the Faculty Champion and in FELS, FoM and FEPS the research staff are actively involved in suggesting and organising events. The mentoring schemes in the Faculty of Medicine and in individual schools/departments, for instance the School of Biological Sciences, Politics and International Relations department, explicitly address research staff needs. Dean's prizes have become a regular feature in 3 of 5 Faculties, recognising and rewarding research staff for the contributions they make that often go unnoticed, such as mentoring students, public engagement and enterprise work. The Faculty of Medicine introduced an award for PIs in 2019. 'By targeting ECRs, small steps have led to a gradual improvement' one member of staff has observed of their Faculty.

#### **Further key achievements and progress against each Principle since 2018:**

##### **Principle 1 – Recruitment and Selection**

We have considerably improved our ability to collect data on our research staff since 2018, for example, we can identify research only staff as a distinct cohort; we can obtain data on the numbers on FTCs, how many staff have moved to open contracts, and the turnover rate. All of which add to a rich picture of research staff. The Leadership and Management team refreshed the Induction portal and CHEP revitalised the [Working as a researcher](#) website; analytics for the WAAR site were collected from July 2018. Contributions to this website are more collegiate now than in 2018, with RIS, PERU, the Library, International Office, CHEP and Careers Service all contributing content. The website acts as a key outward facing information site for research staff, containing professional development advice and specialist information on 'career management' and for 'women in academia'. Being able to see the Top 5 pages (frequently, Funding, Career-pathways, Career support, Concordat) provides a useful insight into research staff interests and marketing.

##### **Principle 2 – Recognition and Value**

FELS, FoM and FEPS continued to offer local awards in recognition of the outstanding contributions research staff have made including the areas of; Citizenship, Enterprise, Teaching, Public engagement/Outreach and Career Achievement. In 2019, FELS made 7 awards and FoM made 4, plus a 'Best PI' award. In 2020, we were able to gather data for the first time on the numbers of research staff receiving staff achievement awards. Deans can now identify who have and have not received an appraisal. However, whilst 90% of Levels 5 and 6 receive an appraisals, the lack of parity for Level 4 staff reminds us that we need to continue work in this area. Two Faculties (FELS and FoM) have, additionally, enquired into the quality of the ECR appraisal experience and FoM introduced new 'mentoring/coaching' sessions on the benefits of appraisal at School level through their Research Clubs in response.

##### **Principles 3 & 4 – Equipped and supported & Personal and Career Development**

We continued to provide an extensive range of training and professional development opportunities. The most notable change since 2018 has been with the greater involvement of a variety of University providers as a result of our distributed model. For instance, [RIS](#) now offer a wide range of funding and impact sessions, and in 2019 held 26 events with 477 attendees. RIS have redesigned their SharePoint portal with bespoke sections each for PGRs and ECRs. The Careers Service continued to provide advice and 1-2-1 coaching to research staff looking for non-academic careers; Faculties offered local careers days and specialist sessions, for instance during an ECR Away day. We populated and published a [Careers Roadmap](#) for medical researchers and have a template for use in other disciplines (currently a Clinician's version is being scoped). [PERU](#) and [PPISouthampton](#) have been building on their portfolio of interventions, i.e. [Making Outreach and Public Engagement Activities More Accessible](#), and PPISouthampton record many of their events for anytime access. [LifeLab](#) continued to provide 'meet the scientist' events and training. The International Office has taken a more strategic approach, promoting partnerships and schemes of benefit to researchers, many of which are linked to institutional strategic partnerships, such as the Japanese RENKIE partnership. A new Worldwide Universities Network Sharepoint site was created in 2020. CHEP developed teacher training for research staff, supported with online materials and piloted them in 2 Faculties in 2019.

There were a number of inaugural events in 2019, that will become annual activities, although the 2020 events have been postponed (from March 2020) due to the coronavirus pandemic. The Library held its first [Open Research symposium](#) in March 2019, CHEP offered an insight into Senior Leadership with the Dean of FEPS (February 2019) and a Career Planning symposium in May 2019. RIS organised the first University GCRF

Showcase in March 2019, enabling research staff to share practice and to meet some of our international partners to network, explore common problems, and to look for research synergies.

Faculties have been providing more local training and events suited to disciplinary needs, particularly around funding. For example, FELS has offered a Grant Review workshop and mock panels; FEPS held a Working with Industry 2-day residential, Future World Spin-out Opportunities workshop with a Dragon's Den, and a specialist EPSRC IAA Information session. FoM have introduced Supervisor skills training as part of their transferable skills programme for ECRs.

#### **Principle 5 – Researchers' responsibilities**

We provide lots of opportunities for research staff to develop their careers and to take responsibility for their own personal and professional direction. For example, RIS issue regular funding mailshots to all academic staff in each Faculty, which all research staff have access to. In addition, there is a University wide (monthly) RIS newsletter and all staff receive [Re:action](#), the research and enterprise magazine. We are increasing the range of our online advice, i.e. the RIS portal cited above, and online training and support materials for research staff to self-help. FoM have a long-established mentoring programme that reports into the Postdoc Association Steering Committee, and mentoring is provided at School level in FELS and FEPS. In 2020, CHEP appointed a Mentoring Champion to liaise with the Faculties and to provide specialist advice and support in mentoring across the University.

#### **Principle 6 – Diversity and Equality**

In 2019 we drafted a revised Family policy (that incorporates maternity leave), yet to be approved, which is much more sensitive to research staff. This new policy addresses a long-standing action - 6.2.i. We opened, also, a specially designed and equipped Family room on our Highfield Campus, with facilities for pregnant women and for breast-feeding mothers, and we promote it to the ECRs and PGRs as well as all other staff. Our improved data collection enabled us to gather information on the numbers of staff decreasing and increasing their working hours; we had not been able to record flexible working changes previously.

We became signatories of the [Technicians Commitment](#) in 2019; this increased the range of charters and awards the University engages with. The self-assessment and action plan were drawn up by the technicians and their representatives, giving these staff a stake in designing their own development and a voice in the Equality Charters Programme board.

#### **Principle 7 – Regular Review**

Faculties now have a greater role in determining the support needed for their research staff, which has in turn increased the role of the Faculty Concordat Champions and research staff representatives they work with. We view this as extremely beneficial and further evidence of our collegiate approach. Whilst the new ECPB reports directly to ED&I committee and will provide institutional oversight of all progress. The board met for the first time in March 2020, and there will be 4 board meetings a year.

#### **Strategic Focus (2020 – 2022)**

We are at a transitional point both in respect of moving between the 2008 and 2019 Concordats and in terms of implementing and embedding our new approach to the Equality Charters and awards, including the HR EIR. The arrival of a new VC, Professor Mark E Smith, 01 October 2019, provided us with a timely and opportune moment as an institution to review progress on several fronts. In reviewing our 2016-2020 action plan, we are keen to draw it to a close and embark on a new phase of staff development, one that is more integrated and addresses the research culture and wider environment. Our review to date, indicates that most of our actions up to 2020 were completed under the terms of the 2008 Concordat and which they were drafted against. Whilst the changes of 2018 interrupted the momentum of some of the initiatives in our 2016-2020 Action Plan, causing us to miss some targets (i.e. actions 2.1.ii, 3.3.ii, 5.1.i and a metric in 6.2) and to close two actions due to the change in policy (i.e. 4.1.i and 4.3), we have, none the less, continued to make progress. The distributed model is more collegiate; research staff are more engaged at Faculty levels than they were; we have a more robust and coherent governance structure; better data collection; increased specialist 'continued professional development' provision; and the fundamental HR policies and processes that benefit researchers, such as appraisal monitoring, are in place. We strongly believe that we are neatly poised to embrace the new version of the Researcher Development Concordat. However, the coronavirus pandemic has significantly impacted our plans and this is reflected in our 2020-2022 Bridging Action Plan.

In June 2020 we launched an institutional survey of ECRs under Covid-19 and the findings from this survey (due in October) will inform our focus into 2021. In view of the current uncertainty surrounding the extensive Covid-19 related impacts on the University, we will become a signatory to the revised Researcher Development Concordat by 31 July 2021, conduct a gap analysis and produce a new action plan by 31 July 2022. We will align Concordat activity with the People Strategy and the ED&I strategy. We need to undertake preliminary work, including consulting with key stakeholders, to understand the scale of the challenge we face and the extent of organisational and cultural change needed to meet the revised Concordat requirements in the wake of Covid-19. We have learned many lessons over the past eight years and have many examples of good practice to build on. We are confident that our Equality Charters Programme Board anticipates the new Concordat and have a new action to continue to develop and embed this governance structure and improve the processes for implementing the Concordat. This will be achieved by mid-2022. We have carried forward six actions (i.e. 1.2, 2.2, 4.2, 5.3, 6.2, 7.3) and will continue to work with those in conjunction with our scoping work.

*End of report.*