

Annual Report for the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers

Universities and Research Institutes

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Date statement sent to Researcher Development Concordat secretariat via CDRsecretariat@universitiesuk.ac.uk	4 September 2023

Statement on how the organisation creates, maintains and embeds a research culture that upholds a positive and inclusive environment for researchers at all stages of their careers (*max 500 words*)

We provide an inclusive research environment that enables and recognises the conduct of excellent research which changes our understanding of the world past, present, and future; promotes innovation; and tackles current and future challenges facing societies. For a research-intensive university of our size, this

requires investment in researcher development, leadership and supporting a research culture to enable these ambitions.

Research is structured around four themes which speak to core areas of excellence: two longstanding (Agriculture, Food & Health; Environment) and two more recently co-ordinated (Heritage & Creativity; Prosperity & Resilience). Together these themes provide a distinctive research identity, and function both as intellectual catalysts across disciplinary boundaries, and as an organising principle for research management and support.

Our aim is to sustain and enhance an inclusive research culture that enables and supports research excellence, and to develop researchers at all levels. Recruiting, retaining, recognising, and most importantly developing researchers to be leaders in their areas of expertise, and who support the success of other researchers, is central to this commitment.

All academic staff have an individual staff development account and an allowance supporting their development. This is complemented by a training programme specific to research staff, drawing on professional expertise from across the University as well as external provision; an open staff training programme; and funding for external programmes such as Aurora, Springboard, and StellarHE. Developing research leadership in an open and inclusive way is fostered through our approach to recruiting staff to a wide variety of leadership roles including membership on several university-level research committees and boards.

We have brought diversity and inclusion to the forefront of all our activities, including research. Since 2015, we have a Dean for Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) to lead on the development, implementation, and evaluation of our D&I strategy which sets ambitious staff targets relating to gender, race and ethnicity, and sexual orientation. All our academic Schools have diversity and inclusion champions and very active staff networks for different protected characteristics (Women@Reading, LGBT+ Network, Cultural Diversity Group, Staff Disability Network). We have embraced changes to our staff promotions processes, are delivering on Athena Swan and Race Equality Action Plans.

Our commitment to research staff is reflected in the renewal of our HR in Excellence in Research Award in March 2023, which we've held since 2010. To ensure input of staff in wider research governance, there are reserved places for researchers on the University Board for Research and Innovation (our prime

University body for Research Governance) as well as on the Committee for Researcher Development and PGR Studies.

Professional development of our specialist Technical Services staff is an important part of our commitment to researcher development. UoR is a founding signatory of the Technician Commitment, and in 2017 became a Science Council Employer Champion (only one of 8 in the UK), recognising our commitment to invest in the development of technicians. Our Technical Services have also recently achieved the Athena Swan Silver award – the first professional services team in the UK to achieve this.

Provide a short summary of the institution’s strategic objectives and implementation plans for delivering each of the three pillars of the Concordat (environment and culture, employment, and professional development of researchers) for your key stakeholder groups together with your measures for evaluating progress and success (*max 600 words*)

The Graduate School is now the ‘home’ for researcher development. The School’s remit has expanded to act as the central hub not only for our Postgraduate Research Students (PGRS), but also for the ~300 Research Staff (RS) members that work within UoR.

Informal staff surveys in 2022 highlighted a clear need for more frequent and timely communication, for example on funding opportunities and career development sessions; that most RS do not spend a minimum of 10 days a year on their own professional development; “Take 10” is a key goal within our commitments under the Researcher Development Concordat/HREiR award; that there is a desire to network with RS outside their area of research and a lack of careers support for RS.

Over the next few years, the new remit of the Graduate School will generate a pipeline from postgraduate researchers to postdoctoral researchers. There are multiple benefits to both researcher populations through mentoring, joint skills training and opportunities to network, with efficiencies in many overlapping career development sessions. Importantly, we will act as a single central hub for RS, taking care to not replicate existing provision but working with colleagues in functions and schools, will engage and signpost with our RS.

Our aim is to support local communities of PGRS and RS (Early Career Networks) to meet the development needs identified by the researchers themselves.

Through these local communities, we will enhance the research culture for our researchers and be better able to meet the differing disciplinary needs. Such communities are scalable to reflect cohort sizes and so may be centred on a School/Department, or based around a technique, a research method or a collection.

There is a central role for the Graduate School in acting as a hub, for networking, sharing good practice and leading on career development gaps that span disciplines (such as careers advice, coaching or disseminating novel research methods). The current model of support for postgraduate researchers, with the Graduate School taking responsibility for generic skills and cross-school events such as the Doctoral conference, will complement School specific activities and expand to provide equivalent support for RS. Delivery will blend central session and those delivered within the Early Career Networks.

Various metrics and qualitative success measures are included in the 2022-2025 Action Plan. Many reference the CEDARS (Career, Employment and Development of Academic Researchers) survey as a way of tracking progress across action plans. We will also continue to take on board best practice and keep informed with researcher development training opportunities via Vitae (e.g. 'Developing Success Measures') and refine our action plan as necessary. An important part of assessing the impact of our work will be capturing qualitative information as part of ongoing engagement with the research staff community.

Summary of actions taken, and evaluation of progress made, in the current reporting period to implement your plan to support the three pillars in respect of each of your key stakeholder groups [Institution; Academic Managers of Researchers (Deans, Heads of Schools/Departments/Pis); Researchers]

<p>Environment and Culture (<i>max 600 words</i>)</p>	<p>Institution</p> <p>The HREiR Award was achieved 2 March 2023 for the 12th year running. The Action Plan for 2022-2025 reflects our ambitions for researcher development at Reading and seeks to draw evidence of engagement by research staff (RS) with their own development. This outcome followed a substantial period of reporting on the previous action plan (2020-22) and developing the new action plan in conjunction with key stakeholders across the University.</p>
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Schools with relatively large numbers of research staff (RS) are developing structures whereby their voices are informing policy and practice. Thus, in four Schools a Director of Postgraduate Researchers (or equivalent) has been appointed. We have had discussions with other Schools such as School of Built Environment and Mathematical, Physical & Computational Sciences to encourage similar appointments later this year, which will cover the other larger cohorts of early career RS. Through these, we will develop a community of practice to mitigate the risks of duplicating activities in Schools and centrally, and to share and disseminate best practice.

Academic Managers of Researchers

Training is in place to improve school-based mentoring e.g., School of Archaeology, Geography & Environmental Science, to increase local capacity of mentors and improve the local offer for new research staff.

The Dean of the Graduate School is linked in to post-REF staff surveys and investigations being undertaken by Henley Business School, about how to better support mid-career researchers. Actions resulting from this work will be considered and incorporated into the evolving HREiR action plan if appropriate.

Research Integrity training will be rolled out in the Summer Term 2023 (e.g. VIRT2U and Open Research).

CEDARS (Careers, Employment and Development in Academic Research) biennial survey was carried out 15 May – 15 June 2023. This will capture feedback from RS across the University and will form part of our reporting on the HR EIR action plan to track progress or areas of concern.

Researchers

A high priority for the 2022-25 action plan was to re-establish the Research Staff Committee. This was achieved in December 2022 and is now up and running well. The committee hadn't functioned since pre-Covid and most

	<p>members are no longer at the University. This is a significant omission as the voice of Research Staff is not otherwise heard in Senate or on key University Boards (such as the University Board for Research & Innovation) if no committee exists. We have reviewed the structure, terms of reference and membership of the committee and have recruited members from each research theme alongside professional support members. The Committee meets each term and has a Chair/Co-Chair structure to ensure the staff commitment is sustainable. It is working well and is helping to refine the research staff development needs.</p> <p>The Chair of the Research Staff Committee has been appointed to join the Committees for Researcher Development and Postgraduate Research Studies and the University Board for Research and Innovation. They are key committees where the researcher’s voice can now be heard to influence future developments and policy.</p> <p>A regular programme of informal social events is now in place throughout the year, hosted by the Graduate School, to bring staff together to network, share experiences and promote local best practice (e.g., School of Psychology & Clinical Languages Sciences ECR conference and Dragon’s Den). Participants have been drawn from all four of our research themes and attendance is growing.</p> <p>Some new School based PGRAs groups have been established e.g., School of Chemistry, Food & Pharmacy, which are managed locally to support staff.</p> <p>Research integrity training has been finalised and was launched in the summer term 2023.</p>
<p>Employment (<i>max 600 words</i>)</p>	<p>Institution</p> <p>To encourage adoption of the Researcher Development Concordat principles, we have recently reviewed the Research Division Leader role description and included responsibility for delivering the concordat principles. This provides more direct access to research managers and</p>

provides a local contact where issues arise between researcher and their manager. In the larger schools, this responsibility will be delegated to the School Director of Postdoctoral Researchers.

Research Staff are often on short term contracts, turnover is relatively rapid and many appointees tend to join the University at ad hoc timings. Post covid, induction tends to be directed to policies and on-line materials. The Graduate School has extensive experience in running induction sessions for our PGRS and so intend to run similar, and more regular, events for our RS. This will help to develop a sense of community early on, give us opportunities to embed their rights and responsibilities for personal development and signpost staff to the support structures within the university. The first induction event, specifically for new research staff, took place on 20 June 2023 and aims to deliver an overall improved experience for new staff. 100% of attendees found the event useful.

Academic Managers of Researchers

Nothing new to report at this time. The HR lead for the Concordat has recently retired and a replacement is new in post. An established mandatory training programme, with courses such as those around ED&I are ongoing and managed by HR.

Researchers

The Graduate School are looking at how to further integrate the support on offer to PGR research students and staff. Its webpages will be re-written in due course to provide a 'one-stop-shop' for early career researchers. Currently, information is scattered across the website in multiple locations and can be unclear. The current pages recently migrated to a new format and, in anticipation of our expanding remit, we designed the architecture to allow a research staff presence. Signposting from our web page to existing resources, such as Fellowship opportunities, funding, social events etc., should be much improved by the

	<p>end of 2023. This will provide greater clarification to this community of staff, which has a high turnover, of where to go or who to approach for information to support their development.</p>
<p>Professional development (<i>max 600 words</i>)</p>	<p>Institution</p> <p>As an organisation, we focus on postdoctoral research fellows and research assistants - or Early Career Researchers (ECRs). In due course, we would like to expand to other key research staff members such as some of our technical experts running research instruments or studies; this has been warmly welcomed by our Head of Technical Services.</p> <p>Academic Managers of Researchers</p> <p>A School Director with responsibility for postgraduate researchers (Ass. Prof Christos Pliatsikas) was invited to join the Researcher Development and Postgraduate Research Studies Committee in January 2023. This appointment closed a vacancy that had existed for some time and provides an additional route for raising research staff issues, concerns or sharing best practice across the University.</p> <p>Researchers</p> <p>People Development continue to organise a variety of development opportunities specific to research staff. There have recently been some new courses added to the programme from the Research Engagement Team around the topic of Open Access and Open Research. Some bespoke training will also be commissioned this year specifically for PDRAs to improve communication and influencing skills as it has been raised as an area of need and will support staff's wellbeing if they feel more skilled to tackle situations positively.</p> <p>The Graduate School's doctoral researcher development programme's training offer has been broadened to include ECRs. Feedback from staff identified training needs around soft skills/communication, teaching and IT skills. Therefore,</p>

several courses have been offered to research staff, over and above what is currently available on UoRLearn and within Schools/Departments. Examples include Sage Campus – an online training platform (time-limited until the end of April); Preparing to Teach; Effective CVs; Storytelling and SPRINT for female researchers. This has been positively received by staff. We will continue to review the training programme and identify other courses suitable for ECRs going forwards. This will also help maximise value for money ensuring a greater take up of training places.

Communication improvements - colleagues in the Library and Research Services also wish to be able to communicate rapidly with RS -for example where funding opportunities arise with short deadlines. We have thus established a “Researcher Development” MS Teams site – with approximately 300 members enrolled. This is a significant undertaking given that RS are typically transient; 20% of the membership changed over the 2 months at the beginning of this academic year. The site hosts a general channel that highlights current news or opportunities, funding opportunities, social events, training and development for example, as well as our policy documents for the Concordat and 2022-2025 action plan.

Significant effort has been put into extending links to key functions around the University, such as library services, research services and of course, the staff. Several presentations have been given to local School based groups of staff, to further inform them of the Concordat, the action plan and its priorities. This is generating greater communication between RS and the Graduate School and helping to shape our offer going forwards.

Regular, clear and constructive email communication specific to research staff has been confirmed as the preferred method to share information and is proving helpful in terms of relationship building. This has helped staff in a variety of ways, from raising awareness about who the HR Business Partners are, or how to link into research

	<p>theme distribution lists and awareness of cross-disciplinary lectures/events that staff can participate in outside of their own research discipline.</p>
<p>Comment on any lessons learned from the activities undertaken over this period and any modifications you propose to make to your action plan and measures of success as a result. <i>(max 500 words)</i></p> <p>Securing funding for a Researcher Development Project Officer (appointed in March 2022, 3 years at 0.6FTE) has brought dedicated expertise to evaluate our current provision for research staff, to network with stakeholders (staff, professional services colleagues and academic staff), design our action plan and develop the future strategy for researcher development. This has been critical to injecting momentum to engagement with the RS community and bringing about a step-change in researcher development co-ordination over the last year and achieving key aims such as re-establishing a working staff committee. Additional resources would further improve delivery but under the current financial climate, options such as recruitment or secondment of staff, are on hold. This will be reviewed by senior staff and look to be implemented at a time that makes sound financial sense for the University.</p> <p>Having the direct input from Research Staff Committee members has already proved valuable. Members have carried out informal consultations with local staff and identified preferred communication methods and key areas of concern, such as mentoring availability.</p>	
<p>Outline your key objectives in delivering your plan in the coming reporting period <i>(max 500 words)</i></p>	
<p>Work in the second year will focus on maintaining the momentum gained with research staff, extending the outreach and engagement to remain informed about staff's needs in terms of their development.</p> <p>There is a desire to investigate the feasibility and demand for a research staff conference in 2024, to celebrate and share different areas of research with peers, provide development opportunities such as keynote speakers, conference organiser etc. and potentially invite senior and/or external parties to speak about 'squiggly careers', paths to Professorship for example.</p> <p>Staff have identified that career support is lacking. Working with People Development, we plan to explore what options will best meet the needs of this</p>	

diverse group of staff. Our People Development Advisor (who had worked on researcher development for the last six years) has recently retired and her replacement is new in post (May 2023). People Development will pursue the career support options currently available and decide whether to trial a new offer, such as one-one appointments with a career consultant, or look at other options like working with Henley Business School or the Knowledge Transfer Centre. We may also be able to draw on existing provision within the Reading Researcher Development Programme and integrate sessions for RS with PGRS – for example on topics such open access, research identity (e.g. managing your ORCID) or research integrity training. There is also a possibility of leveraging Henley Business School’s internal coaching programme by partnering coaching trainees with RS who would benefit from the experience.


A new HR IT system is currently being developed. Several improvements have been identified that would aid future reporting for research staff. We plan to work with the project team to raise awareness of the needs for this group of staff early and build in changes to the system that will aid our ability to understand, support and develop our researchers. For instance, improving the current Personal Development Plan process and monitoring by managers/Pis.

Our strategy is to work in partnership with RS to allow them to define their personal objectives and then deliver development opportunities to meet their ambitions. We will continue to embed to Researcher Development Concordat principles and move the Graduate School forwards to include the Research Staff hub.

Please provide a brief statement describing your institution’s approval process of this report prior to sign off by the governing body (*max 200 words*)

This report has been shared with the Committee Researcher Development & Postgraduate Research Studies (RDPGRS), the University Board’s Research & Innovation Committee, Senate and Council. It has also been shared with the newly established Research Staff Committee for comment and awareness.

The Committee for RDPGRS reports into the UBR&I, our prime University body for Research Governance, which includes our two Pro-Vice Chancellors for Research and Innovation, Research Deans from all four research themes and the Director for Research Services. UBR&I has governance and oversight of all research and innovation activities, including researcher development and training. Council is the highest approval authority at the University.

Signature on behalf of governing body: 

Helen Gordon, President of Council

Contact for queries: Susan Glover, Researcher Development Project Officer

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This annual report will be analysed by Universities UK, secretariat for the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, to identify good practices, themes for development and information to improve national research culture policy and practice.

If you have any questions, or suggestions on how the reporting process could be improved, please contact the secretariat at CDRsecretariat@universitiesuk.ac.uk

www.researcherdevelopmentconcordat.ac.uk