

Summary Report HR Excellence in Research Award 23rd June 2023

1. Introduction

The University of Worcester received the HR Excellence in Research award in June 2016. The award was subsequently renewed in June 2018 with a further external review in Autumn 2021. With an HREIR Action Plan more closely on the primary beneficiaries, staff on research-only contracts our plan was reapproved 14 months ago in March 2022.

This report provides:

- An account of the institutional context for research.
- Describes the governance structures that underpin the Concordat action plan.
- Sets out how progress against the plan has been evaluated.
- Gives an overview of progress against our current action plan, highlighting the successes and some of the challenges.
- Sets out our forward-looking strategy.

2. Institutional Context

The University of Worcester was founded in 1946 as a teacher training college, gaining University title in 2005 and Research Degree Awarding Powers in 2010. Since 2005, the University has grown significantly with increased student numbers and a development of new areas including the opening of the Three Counties Medical School in 2023. In total we employ approximately 1100 core staff, (May 2023). In terms of the primary audience of the Researcher Concordat 20 are employed on research-only contracts, mainly located in research centres. Wider beneficiaries of the Researcher Concordat include 300 academic staff employed on teaching and research contracts.

2.1 Research Leadership

Research Leadership is distributed between the RKE Directorate and two College Executive Groups. The RKE Directorate is led by the Deputy Pro Vice Chancellor Research. This directorate also incorporates: the Research Office which has responsibility for coordinating policy and process for RKE funding, strategy, governance, and researcher development (Staff); and the Research School which is responsible for our PGR programmes, PGR student life and research student and supervisor development. In 2022/3 the University refocused its structure and grouped schools into two colleges: Health and Science and Education, Culture and Society. Research is led in each College by a Director of RKE, who work closely with the DPVC Research and School based RKE Co-ordinators.

The University through two internal appointments has reconfigured its support for the Concordat work and the support of researchers. In September 2022 it appointed one of its professorial staff as staff researcher development lead (SRDL) for the University including responsibility for chairing the Concordat Implementation Group and appointed a RKE Facilitator (People and Culture) to support work in this area.

2.2 Research Strategy

The University approved a new 5-year Research and KE Strategy in Summer 2020. The strategy sets out a vision to deliver excellent research and high-quality KE which impacts positively on people's lives particularly in 5 identified Areas of Challenge (Human Health & Wellbeing; Sustainable Futures;

Digital Innovation; Culture, Identity & Social Exclusion; Professional Education). Delivery of the strategy is built on 5 pillars: People, Infrastructure, Culture, Collaboration and Engagement. The People pillar is particularly relevant with 3 core objectives pertinent to the Concordat identified:

- We will seek to recruit and retain excellent researchers at all career stages but with a particular focus on attracting the next generation of researchers and research leaders to the University.
- We will seek to increase the number of Postgraduate Research (PGR) students in identified areas recognising that they are fundamental to a rich, vibrant, and sustainable research culture.
- We will develop and mentor researchers across their research careers (from PGR to Professor).

As we are mid-way through the period of RKE Strategy, the people pillar continues to shape our approach to the Concordat and the HREIR Action Plan. Given the staffing base of our university, and our tradition in learning and teaching although the HREIR Action Plan is focused on the core beneficiaries of staff on research contracts we continue to aspire for the Concordat work to provide development to a much wider group of staff, and specifically those employed on teaching and research staff from ECR to Professor level.

3. Governance Structure

The Concordat implementation plan and HREIR award is overseen by the Concordat Implementation Group (CIG) chaired by the Staff Researcher Development Lead and reporting to the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee which in turn updates the University's Academic Board on progress against the action plan.

The group consists of representatives from groups who are key beneficiaries of the HREIR Action Plan and Concordat and those charged with responsibility for its development and implementation from for example, Human Resources and the Research School.

The following groups are represented on the CIG:

- Research Staff
- Managers of Researchers
- Postgraduate Research Students
- Research Leaders
- Researcher Development team
- Human Resources
- Academic staff with significant responsibility for research

4. Process of evaluation of current plan and development of future plan

The CIG has met regularly throughout the period of the action plan, including the period since reapproval in March 2022. To inform our response to feedback to external review in 2021 and our redeveloped action plan we gathered feedback from research staff by developing and distributing a University of Worcester Survey, drawing on CEDARS and giving every researcher the opportunity to join a peer led focus group, to explore in more in-depth their experiences of the research environment, support for professional career development and working at the University of Worcester.

The results of the survey and focus groups provided us with two levels of insight. A general overview of the experiences of the researcher group to inform key areas of activity in the action plan and base line data to enable us to evaluate current progress against specific areas of the new action plan and create areas where 'stretch targets' could be added to the plan. Our findings in 2021/2 suggested that our immediate priorities should be in two areas:

1. Developing ongoing dialogue and giving voice to researchers through a staff researcher network to ensure they can engage with policy and practice development.
2. Focusing sustained action on professional career development by:
 - Raising awareness of progression and promotion opportunities for researchers
 - Clarifying how researchers engage with the University of Worcester Reward and Progression Scheme to advance their careers and supporting individuals who wish to submit applications
 - Enhancing support for researchers through the Career Development Stream of the Researcher Development Programme
 - Equipping managers to provide researchers with overall career development support
 - Engaging with the University Careers Service to create opportunities to support researchers

As the re-development of the plan approved in March 2022 focused on these priorities, we have made these central to our work during the last year and evaluation. We have drawn on several sources of information to evaluate our progress and inform our future plan:

- Re-run of University of Worcester internal survey a year after its original launch
- Engagement with and feedback from Staff Researcher Network
- Focus groups with Managers of Researchers
- Evaluation data from Staff Researcher Development Workshops
- Engagement with key HR and Learning and Development colleagues to examine how the needs of researchers can be addressed at each stage of the employee lifecycle including career development, reward, and progression.

5. Key achievements and areas that require further development.

The key achievements against our priority areas:

Priority Area	Progress, Achievement and areas to take further
Developing ongoing dialogue and giving voice to researchers through a staff researcher network to ensure they can engage with policy and practice development.	In 2022, we established a sub-group of the CIG consisting of a researcher leader, two research staff, Head of OD, and a Lecturer in Researcher Development to consider approaches to developing a peer network group. The group brought proposals to the CIG in Autumn 2022 and launched a monthly online staff researcher network in November 2023. The group is peer led by two researchers who report feedback from the Network at each CIG meeting. The Chair of CIG reports feedback from the Network at each University RKE Committee.
Sustained action on professional career development	In September 2022 we included in the Staff Researcher Development Programme a new stream of workshops focused on Career Development. These sessions have been well received and attracted researchers and those employed on other contracts. We held interviews with managers of researchers to understand their needs when

	<p>supporting researchers. Taking the employee lifecycle as a structure we subsequently developed resources to provide guidance to managers when supporting researchers. As a university we formally engaged with the British Academy ECR Network West Midlands Hub for the first time and held an onsite meeting for researchers with key BA ECR staff to introduce researchers to opportunities to develop their careers.</p> <p>The one priority area we have made less progress on is engaging with the University Careers Service to create opportunities to support researchers. We are conscious that most of our researchers aims to remain in academia and most are employed on long term contracts, however we seek to develop this further during the lifespan of the new action plan.</p>
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Key achievements against University Core Objectives:

University Core Objective	Progress, achievement and areas to take further
<p>We will seek to recruit and retain excellent researchers at all career stages but with a particular focus on attracting the next generation of researchers and research leaders to the University.</p>	<p>In 2022 during a review of the promotion and reward schemes we clarified the criteria for each level of the academic career pathway. We revised and clarified the guidance to enable recruiting managers to recruit excellent researchers and staff to better understand career progression opportunities and how to provide evidence to meet the criteria for moving between different career stages.</p>
<p>We will seek to increase the number of Postgraduate Research (PGR) students in identified areas recognising that they are fundamental to a rich, vibrant, and sustainable research culture.</p>	<p>We have maintained our PGR numbers during the period of the action plan.</p>
<p>We will develop and mentor researchers across their research careers (from PGR to Professor).</p>	<p>We have developed a University Research Leadership Programme designed to enable researchers to develop their expertise in leadership. We have identified current and future research leaders and delivered three cohorts of the programme to more than 25 colleagues including Research Centre, Unit and Group leaders, RKE Co-ordinators and colleagues working towards professorial appointments. We will run the programme again in 2024 and then review to target other groups, for example new professorial appointees.</p>

	<p>We have started a Staff Researcher Career Stage Project to identify the development needs of staff at each stage of an academic researcher career to inform our work going forward.</p> <p>We have established a research mentoring scheme and associated research compact. There has been some uptake, however we wish to review its effectiveness in providing support across all stages of research careers.</p>
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6. Future Plan

As detailed above we have made progress against the two priorities of giving voice to our researcher community and career development. As well as the specific initiatives targeted to our core group of research staff and their managers, we have made progress with reviewing University of Worcester HR Policy and Process to ensure alignment with researchers' needs. Going forward we aim to maintain and monitor this approach to ensure that researchers are seen as a visible and valued group of staff within the University.

In terms of career development, we again have made progress and redeveloped and extended our researcher development programme in 2022/3. Therefore, we are confident that we have a general development offering that is supporting our researcher community. Our objective now is towards a more nuanced way of working to enhance development and support recruitment and retention. We see articulating and offering a clear and scaffolded approach for individuals to develop their careers including research leadership skills, regardless of their point of entry to the university and access development that is bespoke to their career stage as central to achieving this aim.

To achieve these objectives our key actions are to:

- Undertake a Researcher Career Stage Review (RCSR) Project that identifies and describes the 5 stages of a University of Worcester's research career - ECRs, Mid-Career, New Research Leader, Senior Research Leader and second career Academic.
- Use the outcomes of the RCSR to identify, develop and deliver a series of training and development pathways to enable researchers at each career stage develop and progress
- Review the format, scope and reach of the University research mentoring scheme to ensure it meets the needs of researchers at each career stage
- Support managers of researchers through training development to use the RCSR outcomes when reviewing career development with researchers.

Lynn Nichol, 2nd June 2023