

University of Manchester HR Excellence in Research Award 10 Year Report 2021 - Summary

Introduction

The University of Manchester employs more than 12,500 academic and professional services staff, based across three large multidisciplinary Faculties (Biology, Medicine and Health, Humanities, Science and Engineering). Since securing the HR Excellence in Research Award (HREiR) in 2011, successive Concordat Action Plans have aimed at improving the support for, and development of, those whose primary responsibility is to conduct research and who are usually supported by external research grant and contract funding. This defined group, referred to throughout the report as research staff, includes research assistants, research associates and research fellows, and is a diverse and fluid cohort of 1800-1900.

The University recognises that our research staff make a significant contribution to its research and teaching ambitions. In January 2020, the University launched a new vision and strategic plan, [Our Future](#), which includes an explicit commitment to supporting researchers within the research and discovery goal, stating that the University will *'provide a creative, ambitious and supportive environment in which researchers at every stage can develop into and thrive as leaders in their chosen field'*.

Internal Review and Evaluation

Oversight of the Researcher Development Concordat Action Plans and the HREiR process lies with the Research Staff Strategy Group (RSSG) chaired by the Associate Vice President Research. RSSG membership includes academic leads, research staff developers and research staff reps from each of the three Faculties along with representatives from centralised professional service teams including Staff, Learning and Development (SLD), Human Resources (HR), the Library and Research Degrees and Researcher Development. RSSG, via the Associate Vice President Research, reports to the Research Strategy Group (RSG) and to the newly established Academic and Researcher Development Board (ARDB). ARDB was established to provide integration and oversight of research and teaching training and development for academics, research staff, PGRs and associated professional services staff. The Vice President Research chairs both ARDB and RSG. The work relating to the development of research staff has prominence and is championed at the highest level. Implementing recommendations from RSSG, for example, revising promotions criteria, has required approval at a senior level, this has improved the awareness of and the visibility of researcher development activity. There has been minimal change to the membership of RSSG in the last two years and with strong and consistent leadership and membership, the Group has embedded activities, developed new initiatives and created a structure that is able to cultivate all aspects of research staff development.

Both the review of progress against the actions outlined in the Concordat Action Plan 2019-21 (CAP 2019-21) and the development of the Concordat Action Plan 2021-23 (CAP 2021-23) have been informed by a range of channels including:

- Regular feedback to RSSG from research staff reps and from the quarterly research staff reps forums.
- RSSG members' consultation and discussion with wider teams in HR, SLD, Faculty-based Researcher Development and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.
- Findings of a culture survey, designed exclusively for research staff, carried out by RSSG in March 2020; completed by 470 research staff.
- Results of the University-wide pulse survey carried out in March 2021; completed by 777 research staff (14% of total respondents).
- Results of a short researcher concordat survey carried out in June/July 2021; completed by research staff only (198).
- An open meeting with 20 research staff in June 2021 to discuss the development of the CAP 2021-23.
- Three PI focus groups held with 25 PIs across all Faculties to inform thinking about the development and support that PIs need to carry out their role as managers of researchers.
- An on-line consultation document, open from May to July 2021, to collect views and ideas on the content of the CAP 2021-23. The document was promoted to all research staff via the monthly update from the Associate Vice President Research. Ten individuals chose to use this channel to provide feedback.

This wide range of sources has provided data against which to measure progress and has generated discussion and ideas for the forward-looking Concordat Action Plan covering the period 2021-23.

Key Achievement and Progress against the 2019-2021 Action Plan

The document 'Update on the Concordat Action Plan 2019-21' comments on progress against the 27-point action plan and the key achievements are highlighted here.

Recruitment and Selection

- The online Unconscious Bias training module was refreshed in July 2020 and completion of the module is compulsory for all members of recruitment and selection panels.
- Feedback from research staff and PIs contributed to the development of a PI Induction Checklist.

Recognition and Value

- The promotions criteria for research staff were revised to align with academic promotions criteria and were widely disseminated to research staff. Research staff have the opportunity to apply for promotion irrespective of their source of funding. Support in preparing applications is provided in the form of research staff-focussed promotion workshops and one-to-one support sessions, which 115 research staff have benefitted from in the last two years.
- The research staff collaboration and conference funds were launched to provide funding opportunities for research staff to develop new collaborations to lead to a research grant or fellowship application or to present research findings and share their knowledge from either a current or previous project at a conference. The conference fund was renamed the dissemination fund in 2020 and its remit was widened to include public engagement, policy-making and other dissemination activities in addition to conference attendance. Over the period 2018 – 2021, 77 awards have been made to the value of £169,426 and the University has committed to the continuation of both funds.

Support and Career Development

- Development of a Statement of Expectations on the Career Development of Research Staff clearly outlining the responsibilities of the institution, the academic-line manager and research staff themselves. The statement recommends a minimum of ten days of professional development pro rata per annum and findings from the 2021 researcher concordat survey indicates progress is being made with increased numbers participating in mentoring and devoting time to training and development opportunities in comparison with 2019.
- Development and launch of an online grant writing resource aimed at research staff making their first grant application. The online resource is receiving an average of 1,454 unique page views annually.
- Research staff have the opportunity supervise postgraduate research students (PGRs). The launch of the PGR Supervisor Toolkit in January 2020 provides support to research staff carrying out the role of supervisor. In response to feedback, additional content, to support inclusive supervision and to support supervisors to identify signs of stress, has been added.

In addition, a number of notable achievements not identified in the 2019-21 action plan, have been made and are summarised below.

- RSSG, in response to Wellcome Reimagine Research report, carried out a research staff culture and environment survey. The survey mirrored questions from Wellcome and the Culture, Employment and Development in Academic Research Survey (CEDARS) survey and generated a rich set of findings and recommendations, which have steered the strategic direction of RSSG.
- RSSG introduced the Research Staff Excellence awards to recognise and celebrate the achievements of research staff. Awards are given in four categories - research staff of the year, best outstanding output by research staff, best outstanding contribution to research impact by research staff and best outstanding contribution to the research environment. The awards are now in their second year and both award winners and those who are highly commended are showcased via the annual research staff conference, Faculty bulletins and all staff updates.
- In response to feedback from RSSG, the Researcher Development Group agreed an internal review process to provide assurance that the content of training and development workshops for both research staff and PGRs is of high quality, appropriate, inclusive, relevant and engaging. In 2020/21, six workshops were reviewed and this provided valuable learning and sharing of good practice at a time when teams had to switch to online delivery.

- Through collaborative working with teaching and learning colleagues and the establishment of the ARDB, Research Fellows can now access the University's New Academics Programme.
- All research staff training and development provision was moved swiftly online following the move to remote working in March 2020. Additional online resources were made available including the creation of LinkedIn Learning playlists mapped to the four domains of the Researcher Development Framework.
- To recognise the role that research staff have played in the writing and development of research grants but where the funders terms and conditions have prevented the researcher being named as PI or Co-I, RSSG developed a process to ensure that the researcher's contribution is added to the awarded Project record and made visible in the researcher's profile.

Future Plans and Strategic Direction

The CAP 2021-23 outlines a set of actions focused on creating a research environment and culture in which research staff and those that manage them are supported and recognised. It has been developed by RSSG in consultation with PIs, research staff, and teams in HR, SLD, EDI to ensure alignment with other initiatives and activities. RSSG is leading an audit of the University's policies and practices against the Russell Group research culture and environment toolkit and actions in the CAP 2021-23 align with the broader ambitions of the University in relation to the research environment and culture.

The 25 actions focus on improving communications and the visibility of the provision and support for research staff, promoting inclusivity, recognising and rewarding the collegiality of those who support the careers and development of research staff, addressing job security concerns, developing leadership programmes and enhancing professional development opportunities. Key actions are summarised under the three themes of the Concordat below.

Environment and Culture

- **Communications:** Introduce a twice-yearly joint research staff/PI newsletter; develop 'new starter' information to be included in all offer letters to research staff; update the online research staff handbook.
- **Inclusivity:** Develop an inclusive researcher toolkit to explore biases and inequalities throughout the research lifecycle; develop active bystander training for research staff.
- **Collegiality:** Promote the revised University's Statement of Research Expectation, which aims to embed improved practices in relation to research culture and collegiality.

Employment

- **Recognition:** Revise promotion panels' and P&DR guidance to improve recognition and value given to collegiality and supporting researcher development.
- **Job Security:** Monitor open-ended contract data; recommend to PIs that all research posts, where funders' terms and conditions permit, are designed for a minimum duration of two years.

Professional and Career Development

- **Leadership:** Development of a PI toolkit to provide resources and support to enable PIs to support their research staff; expand Leading@Manchester for Presidential Fellows programme to all fellows.
- **Development opportunities:** Review mentoring programmes and introduce a mentoring programme for Fellows; refresh CV and careers guidance; support research staff to apply for UKCGE accreditation as a recognised associate supervisor.

The new actions will sit alongside and enhance the existing support, provision and opportunities such as the annual research staff conference, the research staff excellence awards, the collaboration and dissemination funds and the broad range of professional development training. RSSG will:

- Use the University-wide staff survey in 2022, which will include research staff specific questions, open meetings with research staff and feedback from research staff reps and forums to measure progress and identify where further action is needed.
- Engage in discussions with funding bodies and the wider sector about the impact of how research is funded on research staff. This will be achieved through involvement in sector wide groups such as the N8, Russell Group Pro Vice Chancellors Research Group and Researchers 14.
- Share examples of practice with the rest of the sector via VITAE.