

University of Manchester HR Excellence in Research Award 12 Year Report 2023 - Summary

i) Institutional context

The University of Manchester employs more than 12,500 academic, research, and professional services staff, based across three large multidisciplinary Faculties: Biology, Medicine, and Health (FBMH), Humanities (HUMS)], and Science and Engineering (FSE). Since securing the HR Excellence in Research Award (HREiR) in 2011, successive EiR Action Plans have sought to improve 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 this report as 'research staff', includes research assistants, research associates and research fellows, and is a diverse and fluid cohort of 1700-1900 staff and represents the target audience for our Researcher Development Concordat.

The University recognises that its 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 and 'provid[ing] a creative, ambitious and supportive environment in which researchers at every stage can develop into and thrive as leaders in their chosen field'.

ii) Internal evaluation

Internal evaluation has been overseen by the Research Staff Strategy Group (RSSG; composed of academic, research and professional services staff across the University, remit and membership detailed below). Both the review of progress against actions outlined in the EiR Action Plan 2021-23 and the development of priorities for the forward-looking Action Plan (2023-26) have been informed by RSSG's consideration of information from a range of channels. These include:

- Progress against the previous action plan (2021-23) has been a substantive agenda item on each meeting of RSSG, and activities relating to its implementation addressed.
- Feedback from research staff reps, and from the research staff reps forums held quarterly in each of the three faculties.
- Results of a university-wide all staff survey (completed by 756 (40%) research staff in 2022), which included discrete questions on research culture and support, as well as questions from the national core Athena Swan question set.
- A bespoke research staff survey (Research Staff Development and Concordat Survey, hereafter 'Research Staff Survey 2023') undertaken in June-July 2023 (completed by 867 researchers, a 49.9% response rate).
- An 'Open meeting' for all research staff held in July 2023 (50 attendees, with in person and online attendance options to facilitate maximum engagement), led by the Associate Vice President (AVP) Research, the research staff leads for each faculty, and the Researcher Development Manager. This meeting explored the results of the Research Staff Survey 2023 and invited discussion of issues and future priorities for research staff. Issues and ideas raised in this open forum directly informed the forward-looking action plan priority areas. The slides for the event (including the survey results) were subsequently shared with all research staff with an invitation to input and shape the draft actions plans.
- The AVP Research and Researcher Development Manager hosted a seminar in July 2023 as part of the monthly Researcher Development seminar series. This invited participants to

comment anonymously on what a good (and bad) research culture looks like and to rank suggestions for future areas of priority.

The engagement achieved via the Research Staff Survey 2023 has notably increased since the previous survey (n=867, a 49.9% response rate, compared to n=198, approximately 11% in 2021). As well as providing evidence of progress in the areas prioritised in the 2021 action plan, this survey asked respondents to rank their future priority areas in each of the three Concordat themes. Open text responses were invited on barriers to undertaking development opportunities and further support needed. The survey data can be disaggregated by faculty, job role, and demographic groupings, allowing us to identify particular areas of concern within the large research staff population.

iii) Governance structures

Research staff development has prominence and is championed at the highest level. The Vice President for Research, reporting to the President, holds ultimate responsibility for EIR Action Plans. Oversight of delivery lies with the Research Staff Strategy Group (RSSG) chaired by the AVP Research and comprised of academic leads for research staff from each faculty, research staff reps from each faculty, and representatives from centralised professional service teams including Learning and Organisational Development (L&OD), People and Organisational Development (P&OD), the Library, Research Degrees and Researcher Development (RDRD), and the academic lead for EDI.

RSSG meets four times a year, and minutes are circulated widely to improve transparency, engagement, and awareness of activities. RSSG has benefited from strong and consistent leadership, membership, and engagement from research staff across the review period.

The AVP Research also chairs the Fellowship Strategy Group (FSG), and both this Group and RSSG report to the Research Strategy Group (RSG) and to the Academic and Researcher Development Board (ARDB). The Vice President for Research chairs both ARDB and RSG, the latter reporting directly into Senate. The AVP Research presents regular updates on individual actions, and an annual report on the implementation of the Concordat to both RSG and ARDB.

The EIR action plans and overview report, developed by RSSG following analysis of data gained from all internal evaluation mechanisms, are considered and approved by the Vice President for Research, and by People and Organisational Development Sub Committee (P&ODSC). Therefore, implementing recommendations from RSSG and the Concordat requires approval at a senior level, raising awareness and visibility of researcher development activity.

Key decision-making Committees across the university include research staff reps in their membership ensuring that their distinct views and priorities are considered. RSSG has a researcher rep from each faculty and receives updates at each meeting. Each of the nine academic schools has a research strategy committee (or similar) and at least six of these have research staff (research only) reps. The academic lead for research staff for each faculty sits on the faculty research and innovation strategy committee or board and are members of RSSG.

The Concordat and associated EIR Award action plans are embedded in the EDI networks and charter mark workstreams, as overseen by the central EDI team in P&OD. The Researcher Development Manager collaborates with the 'Charter Mark Coordinator' to align the EIR action plan with other charter marks, most notably Athena Swan and the Race Equality Charter (REC), both of which will be

submitted for renewal in 2023. The central Researcher Development team are active members of the Athena Swan and REC self-assessment Teams (SAT), the Disability Confident working group, and disabled staff network. The EiR action plan (2023-26) shares actions with the REC and Athena Swan submissions, notably the embedding of Prosper at Manchester and providing of targeted researcher development for underrepresented groups. Action 18 (development of inclusive support for disabled researchers) has been developed with the disabled staff network.

iv) **Past progress and achievements**

Key achievements

Considerable progress has been made against the 25-point action plan from 2021-23. The vast majority of actions in the previous action plan are either completed or will be further developed into the next action plan. Key achievements impacting on researchers include:

Environment and Culture: Development of an active bystander training course including case studies contextualised in research; creation of 'EDI in Research and Innovation' online course; update of the University Statement of Research Expectations in March 2022, in particular including expectations around collegiality. The 2023 research staff survey results show clear progress in many aspects of environment and culture for research staff, notably confidence raising bullying and harassment concerns, wellbeing support, support for mental health, and positive research culture.

Employment: Revision of academic promotion panels' guidance to improve recognition and value given to collegiality and supporting researcher development; automation of the move of research staff who have four years continuous service to open ended contracts. As a result, 517 research staff are now either on permanent or 'finite funded permanent' contracts rather than fixed-term contracts.

Professional and Career Development: Active partnership in the successful development and completion of the 'Prosper project', led by University of Liverpool and providing 42 UoM postdocs for the pilot cohorts which will positively impact the whole sector; the investment in a three-year central Researcher Developer post to embed Prosper at the university 2023-26; development of a 'Leading for Researchers @ Manchester' course available to all fellows from Autumn 2023 which comprises six modules on all aspects of leadership and will support their career aspirations within or beyond academia.

The development and roll out of the PI toolkit have been a significant undertaking in this period and cuts across all three Concordat themes, significantly increasing our support for managers of researchers. Sections include recruitment and induction, managing researchers, creating an inclusive and supportive environment, good research practices, and developing research staff. This resource was co-created with a network of managers of researchers throughout the review period: the PI Working Group. Each section includes peer advice and top tips from PI to PI, as well as information and signposting to further support for PIs. The Toolkit will be an invaluable resource for supporting PIs to support their research staff and recognises the vital role a PI has in the career development of their research staff and in creating a supportive research culture and environment. The further development and promotion of this resource will remain a central part of our 2023-26 EiR action plan.

A number of notable achievements not identified in the 2021-23 action plan have been made including the establishment of a Fellowship Strategy Group in 2022 to facilitate cross-faculty

cooperation and support interdisciplinary initiatives, as well as the creation of a centralised 'Researcher Development @ Manchester' team in 2021 with responsibility for developing and delivering the researcher development provision for all research staff and PGRs across the institution.

Lessons learnt and challenges

While we have benefited from consistent and committed membership and leadership of RSSG, there have been challenges in the review period. Operationally, the centralisation of researcher development support in 2021 while bringing enhanced provision for researchers, meant that some aspects of the EiR action plan progressed at a slower pace than projected as delivery of an institutional researcher development programme was prioritised. Staffing changes for the post of Researcher Development Manager, operational lead for the EiR Award, in 2023 also temporarily impacted delivery of the action plan.

The development of the PI toolkit is a considerable undertaking and completion of this resource took longer than envisaged. The collaborative nature of the resource, co-created with a cross-institutional PI working group to ensure its authenticity and applicability, necessitated considerable input and time from academics.

Due to the large and fluid body of research staff across the institution, engagement of a meaningful proportion of the staffing base is an ongoing challenge and conveying details of the support and resources we offer to all researchers is a priority for the next phase of the award (see forward looking actions 1 and 5, including regular open meetings with research staff). This difficulty is mitigated by the large and active research staff reps networks in each faculty. Reps from each faculty meet quarterly with the central researcher development team to share information and discuss issues and support. The establishment of Microsoft Teams networks for the reps, managed by the Researcher Development team, has also helped in this regard. These will now be further managed and cultivated to raise awareness of development opportunities, encourage discussion amongst reps and support cross-school collaboration and knowledge-sharing.

The Research Staff Survey 2023 showed that progress in several areas of Professional and Career Development has been limited. The decrease in staff taking '10 days' or more of training and development from 18% in 2021 to 15% (regrettably in line with the sector benchmark of 16%, CEDARS 2023), the reduction in staff having accessed mentoring from 40% in 2021 to 28% in 2023 is indicative of this, and the decrease in research staff having a performance and development reviews (P&DR) from 53% in 2021 to 49% in 2023 are indicative of this. Our 2023-26 action plan seeks to continue to prioritise these areas.

v) Strategic objectives and implementation plan

The university's 'Our Future' strategic plan places "attracting, developing and retaining great people" at the core of everything we do. The 'Research and Discovery' theme of the strategy embeds a commitment to "promote a positive research culture" and an environment that has a "built-in emphasis on supporting a research culture that is creative, collegial, collaborative and recognises the contribution of all team members." The EiR action plan 2023-26 outlines a set of 26 actions to operationalise this vision for our research staff, and to further develop a research environment which supports researchers at every career stage to thrive.

Actions focus on improving communications and visibility of the support for research staff, implementing leadership programmes, and enhancing access to and participation in professional development opportunities, particularly support for careers beyond academia. Alongside our commitment to research staff and fellows, this period will see a greater focus paid to support the career development of other staff vital to the research process, such as research methodologists/ technical specialists.

Key actions are summarised under the three themes of the Concordat below. As noted in section 2 above, these priorities have been informed by consultation with research staff via a number of engagement events including the research staff survey, a research staff seminar, and an Open Meeting for all research staff. In each of these, researchers were asked for their priorities areas where we could have the most impact towards improving research culture. The highest priorities area identified by the research staff survey were job security, engagement, and recognition and reward, and these directly informed the EIR actions as outlined below. As noted in section 4, the plateau or decrease in staff accessing ten days of professional development, accessing mentoring, and having a P&DR identified these as ongoing priority areas.

Environment and culture:

- The development of new ways to engage research staff and share resources and important communications through dedicated Researcher Development SharePoint sites and Teams channels for all research staff (building on the successful implementation of such a network for research staff reps).
- Develop specific development support and resources for researchers from underrepresented groups, intersecting with commitments in other charter mark submissions including research-specific disability awareness and support resources and targeted support for researchers from ethnic minority backgrounds to address lower levels of awareness of support and lower levels of satisfaction with provision of researcher development.

Employment:

- Establish a Task and Finish Group to develop a framework for supporting the career progression of 'Research Methodologists'.
- Work with P&OD and research staff reps to review and update P&DRs so they are valuable and relevant for research staff and focus on their career development, as well as delivery of their research project.
- Develop and pilot a novel localised scheme to enhance job security for research staff using a 'talent bench' approach, with a view to expanding this to other areas of the university.

Professional and Career Development:

- Embed the learning and resources from the Prosper project at Manchester. Develop and deliver workshops and development sessions open to all researchers, as well as targeted cohorts for UoM research staff to increase awareness and support for diverse careers.
- Further development and promotion of a portfolio of opportunities indicating ways researchers can use and record their 10 days for professional development, and promotion of the importance of facilitating this time to both researcher and PIs.
- Work to raise research staff awareness of and access to the benefits of mentoring schemes. Work with L&OD to refresh Manchester Gold so that it is attractive and effective for research staff, including expanding the pool and diversity of research staff mentors.