

University of Essex – Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers: HR Excellence in Research Award – 4 Year Review Report

This document outlines the 2018 review of our Action Plan for Implementation of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers following its publication in 2014 and subsequent review in 2016. This review draws from key themes in our People Strategy, in particular a commitment to clear employment policy, equality and diversity and the provision of learning and development for both researchers and other staff groups. Furthermore, this review has been carried out alongside action planning for other staff initiatives such as Athena SWAN awards.

The review was led by Organisational Development (OD), part of the HR Section, with strategic oversight from the Assistant Director of HR (Organisational Development) and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research. Contributions from the key areas within the OD team were from the Head of Employee Engagement and Policy, the Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, the Head of Academic and Professional Practice, the OD Analyst and the OD Engagement Officer. Also central to the review were our Research and Enterprise Office (REO) who supported the review of our professional development programmes for researchers and highlighted progress in our support offer for early career researchers in particular.

Furthermore, we engaged researchers themselves throughout the process of review. We sought the views of a group of 10 researchers via both a face-to-face focus group and an email consultation. We chose researchers at a range of career stages, from Early Career Researchers to current Professors and a mixture of contract types (e.g. Fixed Term or Permanent, with teaching responsibilities or without). We asked researchers how they felt the university supported their career development, with reference to HR policies, research training, departmental support and mentoring and coaching, and what different forms of support they would like to see. We also asked researchers how successful they felt we had been against our action planning and 2016 review. Further, we engaged the employee relations team within HR in an HR focus group to understand issues affecting researchers specifically. Finally, we analysed existing data evaluating our professional development programmes along with feedback on career development opportunities collected as part of our Athena SWAN applications.

In the following we outline our key achievements and progress against our action plan, followed by our strategic focus for the next period of concordat implementation.

Key Achievements and Progress 2016-18

Principle 1: Recognition of the importance of recruiting, selecting and retaining researchers with the highest potential to achieve excellence in research.

- An equal pay review and analysis for all staff was carried out in February 2018 and we committed to further work to understand differences between men and women in length of service before applying for promotion.
- New resourcing guidance sets out our underlying principles for recruitment and selection: inclusivity, values based, fairness and consistency.
- New Essential Training Policy, published in June 2017, sets out expectations in relation to Equality and Diversity and Recruitment and Selection training as well as Unconscious Bias training for staff in senior leadership roles.

Principle 2: Researchers are recognised and valued by their employing organisation as an essential part of their organisation's human resources and a key component of their overall strategy to develop and deliver world-class research.

- In June 2017 we began a review of the role of the Professor at Essex, aiming to understand how our Professors view their roles and to understand how they could be better supported. Professors' views were sought by means of a survey and we committed to follow-up qualitative analysis and review of our support offer, particularly with reference to coaching and mentoring. The survey also resulted in the creation of career development profiles of current Professors to encourage more applications for promotion to the Professoriate, particularly from underrepresented groups.
- In 2018 we introduced Celebrating Research Impact Awards to showcase the impact that has been generated by Essex researchers in different areas and to reward individual or team excellence in this area. Nominations are currently open for six awards in the summer term this year. Winners will receive £1,000 towards their Research Incentive Account or as a PhD Bursary.
- In the academic year 2016-17 we introduced a Doctoral Supervision Award to recognise excellence in PhD supervision at Essex.
- In 2016 Graduate Teaching Assistant roles were added to the University pay scale with contracts and employment benefits in line with other employees, to support doctoral researchers engaged in these roles.

Principle 3: Researchers are equipped and supported to be adaptable and flexible in an increasingly diverse, mobile, global research environment.

Principle 4: The importance of researchers' personal and career development, and lifelong learning, is clearly recognised and promoted at all stages of their career.

- An online induction portal for all new staff was launched in Autumn 2016. This complements existing face-to-face sessions and facilitates a longer term programme of induction. All new staff joining the university since Autumn 2016 are required to complete the online course.
- Online doctoral research supervision training was rolled out to all academic staff in autumn 2016. All new Supervisors are required to complete either face-to-face or online training within their first year of supervising. As of February 2018, a total of 43 doctoral supervisors had completed the online training.
- Our Network for Early Career Essex Researchers (NEwComERs) was founded in the academic year 2017-18 to support researchers in the early stages of their careers. In January 2018 NEwComERs piloted a one week training programme covering research processes, data concerns, impact and grant applications, run by our Research and Enterprise Office, our Library, the Essex Lab and the UK Data Archive, which was attended by 250 participants. Additionally, a NEwComERs mailing list has been set up to facilitate networking and practice-sharing.
- In July 2016 we piloted research-specific coaching to support staff working towards eligibility for submission to REF 2020. Two individual researchers took part in the pilot and were supported to develop publishable material.

Principle 5: Individual researchers share the responsibility for and need to pro-actively engage in their own personal and career development and lifelong learning.

- In the Autumn Term 2017 we launched the Learning Lounge, a suite of online resources for staff to engage in professional development. This resource is part of our Education Strategy and Action Plan. The Learning Lounge features 30 different special interest groups and allows users to filter for content relevant to their role, including research-specific resources and training and a section specifically for the NEwComeERs programme (see above). All members of academic staff have access to the resource and receive email notification of updates via a forum feature.

Principle 6: Diversity and equality must be promoted in all aspects of the recruitment and career management of researchers.

- The School of Health and Social Care (formally the School of Health and Human Sciences) achieved the Athena SWAN Silver Award in April 2017.
- The School of Biological Sciences retained the Athena SWAN Bronze Award in November 2016.
- The Department of Psychology and the Department of History submitted Athena SWAN applications in November 2016 and each achieved Bronze Awards.
- The Department of Mathematical Sciences achieved the Athena SWAN Bronze Award in October 2018.
- The University was in 59th place in the Stonewall top 100 employers list in 2018.
- We joined the Race Equality Charter in May 2017.
- Annual Review Procedures for Academic and Research staff are now revised annually with the involvement of the Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.
- New Essential Training Policy requires all members of university committees and all chairs of selection panels to complete unconscious bias training.

Concordat Implementation Strategy 2018-20

Our focus for the next period of Concordat implementation, which will cover at least the two years 2018-20, will be on supporting researchers at key career transition points. This will enable them to continue to develop themselves and their careers and contribute to the community of practice at the University of Essex. Accordingly, we will undertake work to support academic probation, permanency and promotion. Further, we will look at how we can better support our most senior researchers, our Professors, in continued professional development. At the other end of the spectrum, we will also focus on early career researchers.

Our approach will be based on both policy and development work. In terms of policy, we will review support provided during the probationary period, aiming to provide greater clarity regarding institutional expectations of researchers. At the same time, we will be rolling out our recently piloted Newcomers programme of training and development for ECRs, led by our Research and Enterprise Office, to further cohorts to provide support with the processes of research and publication and networking for new researchers. We will aim to offer these sessions annually and for all ECRs joining the institution in that year to attend. Furthermore, we will focus on our coaching and mentoring offer for early career researchers. Our aim will be to implement systems for all ECRs to be paired with a mentor by the end of this Concordat planning period in 2020.

Connected to this will be work on equipping research managers to support career development for their staff. This will primarily focus on principal investigators working with fixed-term researchers and/or postdocs and supervisors of academic probationers. We aim for all supervisors to complete existing “Coaching Essentials” training and will target a 25% increase in research supervisors attending “Management Essentials” workshops.

Similarly, we will refresh how our promotion policies are presented and increase guidance in order to give researchers clarity on career development and to enable them to set goals. In particular we will review what feedback is provided following promotion applications, whether successful or not, to support researchers in their future development. We will also focus on equality and diversity in the academic promotion process. Analysis of our recent equal pay review showed that female academics at Essex wait on average 1.5-2 years longer than male academic staff to apply for promotion. We will aim to close this gap by 2020, beginning with undertaking a qualitative analysis, consulting with researchers, to investigate the reasons behind this gap. The overall aim of this work will be to see year-on-year increases in promotion success rates and a 10% increase in the number of applications from staff with the appropriate research profile by the end of this period. Internal data has shown a need to focus particularly on female and BAME researchers, and to bring the percentages of promotion applications from these groups in line with the percentages of those staff amongst researchers in the institution as a whole.

We will also be looking in particular at the role of the Professor. In line with the above, we will be supporting those who may be considering applying for promotion to Professor by the distribution of career case studies from existing Professors, especially those from underrepresented groups, resulting from our Professorial survey, and other support including mentoring. Further, we will be reviewing our support for current professors, whether new to the role or more senior. Having carried out a survey on the role of the Professor at Essex that showed that many of our Professors have not accessed coaching or mentoring, we will be introducing action-learning sets for Professors to enable them to engage in this type of development. In the initial stage we will pilot an action-learning set for a group of 5-6 professors this academic year and then evaluate its impact. We will also be continuing to consult our Professoriate on how we can develop a community of Professors and enable networking and support structures.

Finally we will continue to align our Concordat Implementation planning with wider institutional action planning. In line with our Equality and Diversity sub-strategy we joined the Race Equality Charter in May 2017 and we are currently identifying actions that will enable us to work towards a Charter application. Furthermore we will continue to plan Concordat implementation activities alongside action planning for all of our academic departments to achieve Athena SWAN awards.

In this planning period we will also significantly develop our approach to seeking feedback on concordat implementation activities. In line with a new approach to seeking employee views across the organisation, we will send “pulse” surveys to researchers at different career stages at relevant points in the academic year, to assess individuals’ experiences of the probationary period, applying for promotion and continued professional development after permanency or promotion, in line with our focus on career transition points. We will also commit to holding annual focus groups with researchers to assess progress against our implementation action plan and improving researcher representation on university-level research committee.