

## **University of Essex – Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers: HR Excellence in Research Award – 6 Year Review Report**

Following the publication of our Action Plan for Implementation of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers in 2014 and the reviews carried out in 2016 and 2018, this report outlines the 6-year review process carried out in 2020. Throughout the period 2018-20 we sought the views of researchers through our newly established Professors network, our Newcomers programme and support sessions for early career academics, online consultation on the university research strategy, and our Employee Voice staff survey. We also engaged with teams working to support researchers across the university: Organisational Development, Employee Relations and Reward and the Research and Enterprise Office. Additionally we continued to align the review process with our Research Strategy and People Supporting Strategy and planning for Athena SWAN award applications across the university. As well as qualitative data from our face-to-face consultations and online surveys, we examined quantitative data on our research staff such as numbers of staff on different types of contract, promotion success rates and grant funding success rates to measure our progress against concordat principles and our own action plan objectives. Strategic oversight for the review process came from The Assistant Director of People and Culture (Organisational Development) and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research.

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 2018-20**

*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.*

- We have reduced the use of fixed-term contracts for research staff. In 2018, 17.7% of research staff were employed on fixed-term contracts, compared to the current figure of 14.7%.
- In May 2019 we held the inaugural Celebrating Excellence in Research Awards. In total 9 researchers received awards over 3 categories: "Research Champions", recognising track record of outstanding research and academic leadership; "Exceptional Performance" recognising research over a year; and "Outstanding Early Career Researcher".
- In 2019 we launched our Professors' network, providing our professoriate with regular opportunities to meet and collaborate. This also enabled us to carry out consultation, for example on diversity, research impact, and Pathway to Permanency and gave our professors additional opportunity to feed ideas into our institutional research strategy.
- In 2019 we reviewed our appraisal and PDR process and updated online guidance, with a view to formalising new arrangements from the year 2020-21.

*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.*

- In 2019 we reviewed our probation policy for academic staff. A revised "Pathway to Permanency" process clarifies expectations of new Essex academics and their academic advisers and gives consistent access to mentoring for early career research staff.
- We are currently undertaking a pilot of electronic document management for new Essex academics, with prepopulated forms to simplify the pathway to permanency process and reduce the administrative burden on researchers.
- In October 2019, we produced and distributed revised guidance for mentoring to all academic departments.
- The percentage of probationary researchers successfully applying for permanency in each annual round has continued to increase, from 94.7% in 2018 to 97.0% in 2019.
- The percentage of eligible staff applying for promotion increased from 18.1% in 2018 to 23.8% in 2019. Additionally, the percentage of applications coming from female researchers increased to 51%.
- In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, all researchers on Pathway to Permanency in 2019/20 and 2020/21 have been granted a 1-year extension to their Pathway to Permanency period.

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

- Ongoing work with Professors through the Professors' Network resulted in the creation of case studies from individual Professors outlining the contribution they make at the University and nationally and internationally. The case studies highlighted different pathways to Professorship to encourage promotion applications from underrepresented groups.
- Reflective practice sessions and resources have been produced for early career researchers to encourage and support their continuous learning. For example, the session "Getting the most out of your probation" covered the following topics: Making the most of your probation, Managing research and getting a good work/life balance, Your Probation Supervisor and Reflecting on and writing positively about your experience.

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

- The School of Computer Science and Electrical Engineering and the Department of Language and Linguistics achieved the Athena SWAN Bronze award in April 2019. Essex Business School, The Department of Psychosocial and Psychoanalytic Studies and The Department of Sociology achieved Athena SWAN Bronze awards in November 2019.

- The School of Life Sciences submitted an application for the Athena SWAN Silver award in April 2020
- The University continues to place in the Stonewall top 100 employers list, achieving 93<sup>rd</sup> place in 2019, and 57<sup>th</sup> place in 2020.

*Principle 7: The sector and all stakeholders will undertake regular and collective review of their progress in strengthening the attractiveness and sustainability of research careers in the UK.*

- In the period 2018-20 we significantly increased the level of consultation undertaken with our research community through our Professors and Early Career networks and our two large-scale online consultations.

### **Concordat Implementation Strategy 2020-22**

Our focus during the next period of Concordat implementation, which will cover at least the two years 2020-22, will be threefold. Firstly we will focus on the additional support researchers, particular those in early career stages, need to support their career development during the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond. We will hold online events for new Pathway to Permanency academics to form a network of new Essex academics across departments. We will also provide targeted coaching support to Pathway to permanency academics and their academic advisers and mentors to help them develop the coaching skills needed for development conversations, particularly to address the challenges of carrying out research during the pandemic.

Secondly we will focus on the key themes raised in consultations with our community. Within this we will look at workload issues, particularly for staff groups with both research and teaching in their contract. To address this we will review workload allocation models used in academic departments to remove barriers to teaching and research. We will also take steps to implement our revised flexible working policy, drawing lessons from the new ways of working we developed as a university community during the Covid-19 pandemic. Further, we will continue to streamline our processes for permanency and promotion, using electronic document management. We will also look at awareness of, and access to Professional development opportunities, particularly for fixed-term research staff. We will launch a new Develop at Essex brochure to highlight the support available to different staff groups. We will significantly expand our Newcomers programme, offering year-round workshops in addition to the annual research week. We will also increase our support for research staff to engage with the impact agenda, offering a new 'Impact Academy' training programme and launching an online impact toolkit to support researchers to generate impact and produce case studies.

Thirdly, we will focus on developing research leadership, supporting our staff to develop as research leaders either now or in the future. Having recently engaged with external consultants in this area, we are currently developing a research leadership framework, aligned with the RDF, that aims to clarify expectations and provide support for growing the capacity to lead research for staff at all career stages. This will include an in-depth development programme covering leadership of global projects and partnerships with industry.