

HR Excellence in Research Award September 2021

Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers Progress Report 10 Year Evaluation and Review

1 Introduction and Background

The University of Leicester has held its HR Excellence in Research Award since 2011. During these ten years there have been significant changes at Leicester, including a number as a direct result of the ongoing work to implement the principles of the Concordat for the Career Development of Researchers.

The research population at Leicester fluctuates, but for the past 10 years has had a population between 400 and 520 colleagues on research-only contracts and for the last few years has been 480-520. At the college level, approximately 60-70% are in the College of Life Sciences, 20-30% are in the College of Science and Engineering, and 5-15% are in the College of Social Sciences, Arts, and Humanities. In addition, we have approximately 900 academics on teaching or teaching and research contracts.

The University of Leicester launched a new research strategy in 2021, with one of the 4 aims being: “Nurture the next generation of researchers to become world-leaders in their field”. This comprises: growing the size of postgraduate and ECR communities; creating an inclusive and vibrant research environment; supporting the career development of our researchers and future research leaders; supporting our researchers to apply for prestigious prizes, awards and fellowships.

2 Definitions and beneficiaries of the HREiR Action plan template (2021-2023)

The main beneficiary audience are Research Staff (RS), Early Career Researchers on R or R&T academic contracts and clinicians that also match with these specific communities.

RS are members of staff on research only contracts. They have a wide range of research experience and number of years as researchers. Some will be post-doctoral but not all and the majority will be on externally funded grants. Many RS will also self-identify as ECRs.

ECRs are typically academic staff on research or teaching and research contracts. They are generally early in their research careers (accounting for career breaks and non-linear career progression). They may not yet be fully independent and may be journeying towards research independence or research leadership.

Managers of the beneficiaries may include slightly more advanced ECRs or RS as well as mid/senior career researchers and academics.

3 Internal evaluation (how views taken into account, support structure to incorporate views)

The review was conducted in 2 parts: the majority of quantitative analysis is formed through analysis of CEDARS, with cross-reference and benchmarking against previous CROS and PIRLS responses; qualitative analysis is continuously gathered from the ECR and Research Staff Career Enhancement Sub-Committee (ECR-RS-CE-SC), the groups and committees that report into this, as well as the Post-Doctoral Research Staff Association (PDRSA) and less formal discussion forums.

The ECR-RS-CE-SC is chaired by the Dean of the Doctoral College and has membership that comprises Head of Doctoral College, HR, Equalities, a research fellow representative, and from each of the 3 Academic Colleges, at least one each of: academic ECR lead, ECR representative and Research Staff representative.

4 Key achievements and progress against the previous strategy

A large part of this review period includes measures relating to COVID-19 restrictions. This invariably has changed the way support, delivery and research was conducted. Some researchers never left the labs, due to the nature of their research whereas others were placed on furlough and/or adapted their research methods to allow research to continue. The specific impact against actions on the previous strategy are summarised in the action plan review.

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

Action: "Support for research staff exiting the university, including exit interviews, and capturing destinations"

Exit surveys were revised and introduced in their current format in November 2019, since then 43.7% of research staff completed one. Of those that provided a next destination: 53% have stayed in HEIs in the UK; 20% moved to the private sector; 9% remained in HEIs but outside the UK; 9% to Government bodies; 6% to research institutes; 3% to NGOs.

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*

Action: "Support research staff engagement in activities to develop their careers across teaching, committee membership, supervision, enterprise and public engagement."

The Research and Business Development team within our Research and Enterprise Division have provided further and in depth Grant Funding workshop series specifically targeted at Early Career Researchers, to help development of research proposals.

The perceived value of teaching related activity has increased greatly, there has also been increased support from the University to assist with individuals acquiring a teaching related qualification (Fellow of the HEA).

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*

With regards to CPD in training and teaching, there was an increase in those who undertook this activity from ~22% to 33% and reduction in those that would like to from 54% to ~47%.

For PDDs: there was an increase in both those that had an appraisal (from 76% to 84%) and those that found it useful (52% to 60%). The University has also launched a new PDD process, which has involved heavy discussion to include specific guidance for managers of researchers.

The University of Leicester has revised the criteria for individuals to be formally recognised as supervisors of postgraduate research students (PGR) following discussions at ECR-RS-CE-SC. Where a researcher has a role in shaping the programme of activity, irrespective of their contract length, they can be named on the formal supervisory membership for that PGR.

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

Actions: “Identify pockets of best process/practice (e.g. parental cover for research staff on grants) and disseminate to wider researcher community”

“Ensure PIs and research staff are aware of RCUK’s statement and provision for maternity, paternity and parental leave”

There is now detailed guidance on our intranet for researchers of all levels on types of parental leave available and the associated processes to enable them to take their entitled leave. There are also several case studies, including some from research staff. Of those that took parental leave, 94% returned to work.

5 Next steps and focus of new strategy

The University of Leicester is a signatory of the revised Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers. The new concordat and associated action plan provide opportunity to innovate and challenge ourselves as an institution to further support and develop the next generation of researchers. Coupled with the new research strategy, the overall focus is on improving the experience and development for RS and ECRs. To effectively enable this, the action plan will focus on aspects surrounding training and development (training, career discussions, and appraisals), job security, and mentoring.

From the previous action plan review, gap analysis and the formation of the new action plan, some next steps and focal points:

Awareness of Concordat and its principles (**ECI1**): Awareness of the concordat amongst the very population it supports (Research Staff and ECRs) is lower than that for mid and senior researchers. To counter this, there will be increased communication of the concordat and its principles to RS and ECRs, through enhanced welcome/induction information and an event to celebrate Leicester’s signing of the revised concordat.

Training & development (**EM1, PCDI1**): The researchers themselves should spend 10 days per year undertaking training and development activities. The results in CEDARS 2021 suggest that nearly 80% of ECRs do not utilise this in full. The implementation activity is two-fold: to make managers aware of this training allowance so that they encourage their researchers to undertake more training; and to provide more training options for these researchers (RS & ECRs). This will include creating opportunities through partnerships, such as the Centre for Postdoctoral Development in Infrastructure Cities and Energy (C-DICE) programme.

Appraisal uptake and usefulness (**EM4, ER3, PCDI2, PCDR3**): A new Professional Development Discussion (PDD) system is being implemented at Leicester, this will allow better tracking and thus encouragement to ensure researchers take-up the opportunity. New guidance will also be provided to ensure that PDDs and appraisals for researchers meet their needs and include career development discussions.

Improving job security for researchers (**EI6**): a problem across the sector is job security for researchers. The ECR-RS-CE-SC, through its Chair, is exploring with HR colleagues how this situation can be addressed to better support the researchers affected. There is substantial work ongoing for increased transparency of promotion and re-grading pathways. A strategic view on use of open-ended subject to funding instead of repeat fixed term contracts will be sought during this coming period.

New mentoring approach (**PCDM2, PCDR2**): a new mentoring system is being implemented to help match researchers of different levels and with different needs with experienced researchers and academics to provide support, insight and assist with their general development. The University of Leicester is also part of the Broadening Horizons mentoring scheme funded through the Wellcome Trust, which provides mentors to researchers exploring translation research in the health sector.