



## HR Excellence in Research Award September 2023

### Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers Progress Report

#### 1 Introduction and Background

The University of Leicester has held its HR Excellence in Research Award since 2011. During these twelve 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 12 years we have had between 400 and 520 colleagues on research-only contracts, but for the last few years this has increased to 470-520. Our University is structured around three Colleges and the research-only populations at the college level are spread as follows: 60-70% in the College of Life Sciences; 20-30% in the College of Science and Engineering; and 5-15% in the College of Social Sciences, Arts, and Humanities. In addition, we have approximately 800 academics on teaching or teaching and research contracts across the three Colleges and have had an increase in new early career academics joining our institution in the past two years.

The University of Leicester launched a new strategy in 2021, with one of the four aims of the world-leading research strand being: **“Nurture the next generation of researchers to become world-leaders in their field”**. This aim will be fulfilled through completion of the following objectives: 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.

Within the University, the Doctoral College leads on the implementation of the Concordat, in coordination with other teams and Concordats. The Doctoral College supports researchers from postgraduate researchers (PGRs) through to ECRs as well as the managers and supervisors of PGRs, Research Staff, and ECRs. The Deputy Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research and Enterprise (DPVC R&E) is also the Dean of the Doctoral College, with a specific remit for overseeing the training and development of researchers at all career stages across the University.

#### 2 Definitions and Beneficiaries of the HREiR Action Plan

The main beneficiary audience are Research Staff (RS), Early Career Researchers on Research only or Research & Teaching academic contracts, alongside relevant clinicians.

RS are members of staff on research only contracts. They have a wide range of research experience and number of years as researchers. Some are post-doctoral but not all and the majority are on externally funded grants. Many RS 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, but are primarily more senior academic researchers.

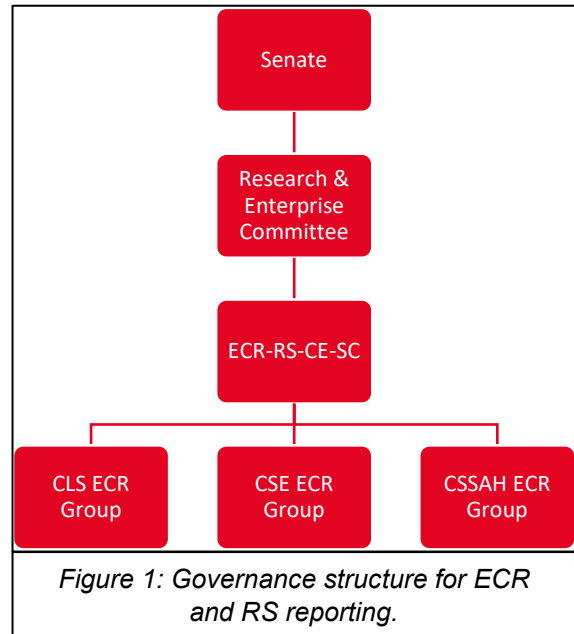


### 3 Governance Structures

The Researcher Development Concordat strategy is led by the DPVC R&E, with operational implementation led by the Head of the Doctoral College.

The Concordat implementation is monitored by the ECR and Research Staff Career Enhancement Sub-Committee (ECR-RS-CE-SC). The University reporting structure for the ECR-RS-CE-SC is shown in Figure 1.

ECR-RS-CE-SC is chaired by the Deputy-Pro Vice Chancellor for Research & Enterprise and Dean of the Doctoral College. The committee membership comprises: Head of Doctoral College, HR, Equalities, a research fellow representative, and from each of the three Academic Colleges, at least one each of: academic ECR lead, ECR representative and Research Staff representative. ECR-RS-CE-SC meets 4-6 times a year and in addition to monitoring the concordat, also reviews researcher development opportunities, policy change impacts, championing RS and ECR experience. The College based ECR groups also meet 4-6 times a year and enable committee engagement with a broader ECR community than ECR-RS-CE-SC alone.



Senate membership includes the Deputy-Pro Vice Chancellor for Research & Enterprise. Research and Enterprise Committee is chaired by the PVC for Research and Enterprise and membership includes ECRs and RS from across the three Colleges, as well as the chair of ECR-RS-CE-SC (Deputy-Pro Vice Chancellor for Research & Enterprise).

Research Staff representatives are also present on other Committees across the University, including: University Integrity and Ethics Committee, Open Research and Scholarship Leadership Group, College Research and Enterprise Committees, as well as mirror teams for some College Leadership Teams. The REF working groups and mirror groups include ECR and RS representatives.

The Researcher Development Concordat review and implementation is conducted alongside and in partnership with other charters and concordats. This includes the Race Equality Charter and Athena Swan. The connection between these is through shared membership and representation on the specific committee or monitoring group as well as strategic and operational leads collaborating on defining ambitions, targets, and measuring success.

### 4 Internal Evaluation Process

The majority of quantitative analysis is formed through analysis of CEDARS, with cross-reference and benchmarking against CEADRS 2021 as well as previous CROS and PIRLS responses. The CEDARS responses are gathered anonymously, through an open survey link distributed to all researchers. The responses are gathered and shared through the ECR-RS-CE-Sub-Committee and then to local areas. This approach ensures highlighting areas of best practice and transparency of process.



In addition to the formal survey capture biennially through CEDARS, we have a number of formal and informal feedback mechanisms. The formal feedback mechanism is through the governance structure outlined in the governance section. Individuals can provide comments and feedback to their ECR lead or representative within the Colleges who would formally report it at the ECR-RS-CE-Sub-Committee. Resolutions and actions, if required, are tracked through the committee meeting notes and communicated to the researcher community through monthly newsletters. This monthly newsletter for our researcher community, also provides updates to any changes within the University, as well as development opportunities, and a reminder of available feedback routes, consultations, and discussions.

There is an independent ECR led group, Post Doc & Research Staff Association (PDRSA), that provides an alternative feedback route for researchers with reports from the PDRSA being shared at the College level groups as well as ECR-RS-CE-Sub-Committee.

There have been a number of Researcher Development Concordat themed workshops, led by the DPVC R&E, to enable researchers to discuss and co-create approaches to supporting their development and working environment. These events are attended by RS and ECRs across the University. The DPVC R&E also leads on a twice-yearly researcher induction (in addition to the formal University staff induction) to ensure new researchers and academic colleagues are aware of the governance and reporting structures within the University, key individuals, as well as the Researcher Development Concordat approach at Leicester. Academics and researchers of all levels are invited to these.

The University was invited to apply for the Wellcome Trust Institutional Funding Research Culture call (January 2023) and this resulted in a substantial review of research culture within the University, with numerous workshops, forums, and short surveys to provide insights and enable co-creation and identification of potential research culture projects to support and benefit researchers of all levels. The in-person workshops & forums were mainly attended by RS and ECR groups, with over 30% of the RS/ECR body engaged through them. One of the outcomes of these workshops was to use mirror teams, comprised primarily of ECRs and PGRs to ensure inclusive and transparent approaches for the institutional research culture programme. The discussions influenced the direction of the proposal and ensured that the intended direction would benefit researchers coming to and at the ECR stage. Members of the ECR-RS-CE-Sub-Committee are part of the project team and mirror team to assist with implementation, awareness and sharing of best practice through the Sub-Committee and associated networks.

The University has conducted multiple round table and town hall events, with facilitators from HR and senior leaders, including the DPVC R&E, to provide open consultation on approaches for staff, including researchers. This covers topics including: development pathways, inclusivity strategy, and reward and recognition. Outcomes and resolutions are reported through the University Strategy internal webpages and communicated through a weekly all staff newsletter. Matters related to RS and ECRs are also reported to ECR-RS-CE-Sub-Committee.

## 5 Past Progress and Achievements

### 5.1 Principle 1: Environment and Culture

Awareness of Concordat and its principles (**ECI1**): Engagement and awareness of concordat increased over the last two years with 84% of ECR CEDARS respondents having some awareness, which is a 20% increase since 2021.



Research Integrity (**ECI5**): Awareness of the Research Integrity Concordat has increased above the target threshold and familiarity with reporting and awareness of initiatives to improve research integrity internally are higher than sector averages for ECRs through CEDARS by 10% and 4% respectively.

As outlined above, there has been considerable work undertaken as part of the Research Culture project, there are some excellent local practices relating to research seminars, and social events but sharing of best practice and extending support to some areas can be improved. Some of these best practices are also captured in CEDARS through: job satisfaction (80% UoL ECRs compared to 72% in sector), feel valued at work (70% UoL compared to 65% sector), and feeling included in research group (75% both UoL and sector). However, through the Research Culture project, ECR-RS-CE-SC, and CEDARS, areas were identified that need addressing, including: recruitment (decreasing use of fixed-term contracts), invitations to inductions, usefulness of inductions, and time spent on training. Communication from both the University and dedicated newsletters for RS and ECRs have been improved following feedback from our community. Feedback from ECR representatives state that these tailored mailings are highly appreciated by the researcher community.

## 5.2 Principle 2: Employment

Improving job security for researchers (**EI6**): The usage or repeated fixed term contracts is still above the desired level for researchers. Whilst there is ongoing work and a policy review underway, this has not resulted in a step change in the last two years. As such, this work will be ongoing and monitored over the next review period. Following consultation with ECRs and advocacy from ECR-RS-CE-SC, a new process for the recognition of team science and transition of the grade 7/8 boundary for research promotion pathways will be launched in the 2023/24 academic year.

Researcher induction (**EI2**): We have implemented a new researcher induction to supplement the University induction. The researcher induction was piloted in Autumn 2022 and continued due to positive reception. The offering of the University induction based on survey responses is lower than expected and continued effort to promote the scheme is needed. The usefulness of the inductions for those that have attended have increased significantly since 2021 (usefulness of induction increased from 35% in 2021 to 56% in 2023).

Leadership approach: Organisational Development have implemented a new strategy for the development of all staff, including researchers and ECRs. This has provided expanded leadership training, guidance, and toolkits.

## 5.3 Principle 3: Professional and Career Development

Training & development (**EM1, PCDI1**): All job descriptions for researchers include the equivalent of 10 days pro rata for dedicated training and development time. However, the CEDARS data indicates that only 14% of our researchers are completing 10 days or more, whilst in line with the sector average (16%), this is still far below the level desired. The Fellowship Academy was launched in Spring 2023 to support researchers who aspire to apply for external funded research fellowships, and provides a cohort approach with bespoke training and mentoring.

Appraisal uptake and usefulness (**EM4, ER3, PCDI2, PCDR3**): Since the last review we have launched and further improved the appraisal process at Leicester. Alongside the launch of the new appraisal manager, there has been extensive guidance and training for all staff as well as dedicated resources for researchers and managers of researchers. This is reflected in over 80% of respondents completing an appraisal compared to sector 70% and those finding it useful being 4% above the sector at 64%. Whilst usefulness is above the sector, this is a drop from the Leicester 2021 measures.



## 6 Strategic Objectives and Implementation Plan

From the reviews, surveys, workshops and ECR-RS-CE-SC meetings held throughout 2022 and 2023, it was determined that the core aspects of research culture that we wish to explore are: recruitment and diversity, training and development for those on precarious contracts, empathic leadership, and inclusion on under-represented groups in the research community. Many of these areas relate directly to the RS and ECR focal group for our concordat action plan and align with the **institutional strategy to nurture the next generation of research leaders**.

### 6.1 Principle 1: Environment and Culture

**Research Integrity (ECI5 / ECM2):** The University is implementing new systems for ethics and integrity monitoring. It is crucial that researchers of all levels engage and that ECRs are aware of the Research Integrity frameworks, processes, and reporting of incidents. A renewed approach to dissemination and engagement will be commencing.

**Diversity and discrimination (ECI3):** There have been significant investment in processes, support, training, and champions for diversity but a small portion of our ECR community have felt discriminated against in the last two years. In conjunction with the Athena Swan and Race Equality Charter action plans, we will continue to promote an inclusive research environment, provide further training, and continue to encourage reporting of any incidents through our Standing Together University wide programme.

### 6.2 Principle 2: Employment

**Induction (EI2):** To continue delivery and evolution of the inductions at Leicester; to increase inductions offered to all new starters as well as providing support for researchers with changes of contracts. The usefulness and relevance of the inductions to those in attendance will be monitored at each delivery and reported yearly to the ECR-RS-CE-Sub-Committee for transparency.

**Appraisals (ER3 & EI5):** Following the successful implementation of the new appraisal manager, the second stage of the work is to ensure system connectivity to enable monitoring and reporting of use by our core Concordat focal group. The guidance and support for both researchers and managers of researchers, particularly those on precarious contracts, will be routinely reviewed alongside consultations from the researcher community.

### 6.3 Principle 3: Professional and Career Development

**10 days of professional development (PCDI1):** Development time is absolutely essential for our next generation of research leaders. Despite significant changes, increased sessions and ranges of topics, survey responses still indicate many researchers are not using at least 10 days to further develop their skills. We continue to consult with the researcher community, provide courses and topics in line with their feedback whilst continuing to promote and deliver existing training and development opportunities for leadership, management, employability, as well as other core academic and researcher packages.

**Research Leadership Academy (PCDI4):** Continued development training for our existing and emerging senior researcher leaders will be provided through the Research Leadership Academy. This will provide role models for ECRs as well as demonstrate the importance of continued development throughout the researcher lifecycle.

**Career development plan and recording (PCDR3):** Whilst the appraisal is the formal record of development, ECRs and researchers on fixed-term contracts require more regular support for continued career development. We aim to pilot a project to further encourage career development discussions outside of the formal appraisal processes as well as providing example plans and further toolkits to assist researchers to keep records of their continued professional development.