

Annual Report for the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers

Universities and Research Institutes

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Statement on how the organisation creates, maintains and embeds a research culture that upholds a positive and inclusive environment for researchers at all stages of their careers (*max 500 words*)

The University of Southampton (UoS) is a research-intensive, founding member of the Russell Group. From 2022/23 data, our community is 6,245 staff (an increase of 265 since last year, and 17th largest in the UK), and 23,795 students (38th largest in the UK).

The UoS takes pride in its research culture, which prioritises providing researchers with the environment and resources needed to achieve their goals. Through a collaborative and interdisciplinary approach, researchers from different disciplines come together to tackle complex problems and find innovative solutions with real-world impact. Launched in 2022, our University Strategy introduced our Triple Helix of Research, Knowledge Exchange, and Education, which articulates our approach to delivering excellence in these areas, with people at the heart of our work. Research is distinctly intertwined with people at the core of our delivery. Our Strategy is underpinned by a suite of 10 strategic plans with our People, Research and Equality Diversity and Inclusion strategic plans creating positive change and impact for our research community.

Our Research strategic plan has an explicit objective to “attract, support, and retain the next generation of research leaders from across the world, from different backgrounds and experiences”. This objective is also reflected in our People strategic plan which hosts major projects such as Reducing Casualisation, Workload Principles, and Career Pathways.

The Researcher Development Concordat (RDC) is pivotal to informing strategic investments in research culture. Since becoming a signatory in 2009, our commitment to improving research culture and understanding the barriers to positive research culture has been at the forefront of our efforts to uphold our commitment to the RDC. The UoS has a strong commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) and has invested in a programme of equality charters which include the RDC. The UoS is also signatory to the Technician Commitment and is a holder of an institutional Athena Swan silver award, Race Equality Charter bronze award, Student Minds University Mental Health Award and Disability Confident Leader award.

There are multiple themes that intersect across the charters and taking a more holistic approach to action planning and delivery has enabled us to maximise their

impact. The consistent delivery and progression of our equality charters continues to enhance the inclusive culture and environment described in our university strategy.

The five UoS Faculties play a key role in delivering our strategic plans. Central to the RDC is the appointment of RDC Champions in each Faculty who ensure researcher involvement and engagement within and across Faculties. In 2023 we established a RDC Faculty Champions network, which is a successful forum for sharing best practice across Faculties through regular monthly meetings. The network has also provided an important forum for consultation and feedback on policy and guidance changes and reviews.

Further resource which supports our work on research culture includes:

- RDC Advisory Group (CAG), Chair: Associate Vice-President (Interdisciplinary Research); funded 0.2FTE professorial Co-Chair
- Research Culture Steering Group
- Research culture team (Doctoral College)
- Allocated Equality Charter Project Manager
- Communications manager (Wellbeing communications and Engagement)

Provide a short summary of the institution's strategic objectives and implementation plans for delivering each of the three pillars of the Concordat (environment and culture, employment, and professional development of researchers) for your key stakeholder groups together with your measures for evaluating progress and success (*max 600 words*)

Our priorities for this period were informed by a Vision session carried out with key stakeholders in June 2023 and ongoing progress reviews of our current action plan. We also incorporated the lessons learned outlined in our 2023 report, and focus here on enablers i.e., key priorities that facilitate the implementation of other activities.

Priority 1: Environment and Culture. To strengthen governance at Faculty and School levels to ensure we systematically and regularly gather the views of researchers to inform and improve the university's approach to implementing the RDC by:

- **Establishing researcher representation** through the University structure, including at School and Faculty committees / meetings;

- **Working closely with Faculty RDC Champions** to develop and embed implementation plans for the RDC at Faculty and School levels;
- **Improving communication pathways** by establishing a regular cross-Faculty RDC Champions group to discuss, plan and share progress and good practice and feedback to Faculties and the CAG.

Priority 2. Environment and Culture. To enhance the leadership and line management capability of managers of researchers and Principal Investigators, to ensure a high quality, supportive research environment through:

- **Scoping and agreeing a plan** for implementing professional development resources or programmes for the line managers of researchers, and research leaders;
- **Identifying effective methods** of sharing good practice and management tools and resources at a local level;
- **Identifying opportunities** for embedding and recognising actions and responsibilities in line with RDC obligations in appraisal and promotion processes.

Priority 3. Employment. To maximise the outputs from, and impact of, our RDC action plan, by ensuring alignment with University Strategic plans, major strategic projects, and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion charters by:

- **Using Theory of Change/Systems Thinking** to evaluate action plans to measure the scope, progress, and impact of actions;
- **Identifying data collection processes** that enable the analysis of activities and uptake of resources by research career pathways level (i.e., balanced cf. research-only) to better understand research-only staff engagement;
- **Strengthening actions** that are aligned with UoS strategic plans and other EDI initiatives that support a social model approach, such as reviewing Redeployment systems and practices as part of the Reducing Casualisation project;
- **Analysing and reflecting on CEDARS** (Culture, Employment and Development of Academic Researchers Survey) 2023 data and its implications (including the lower response rate);
- **Meeting the go-live implementation milestone** of the Workload Principles project on 1 October 2024.

Priority 4: Professional Development. To enhance career management opportunities for ECRs by:

- **Identifying a university-wide process** for reporting and monitoring the uptake of 10 days of CPD for research staff drawing on examples of good practice in the sector (e.g., Prosper);
- **Implementing a university-wide process** for reporting and monitoring the uptake of 10 days of CPD;

- **Reviewing appraisal and Academic Career Development Committee data** over the next year to understand how many researchers have been appraised, supported through promotion, and whether / what objectives have been included for CPD;
- **Reviewing outcomes and impact** of the Researcher Career consultant in terms of nature and uptake of opportunities and resources.

We have **completed 75% of actions within our action plan** and conducted an impact review to collate evidence of success, support ongoing actions, and inform our upcoming priorities and next action plan.

Summary of actions taken, and evaluation of progress made, in the current reporting period to implement your plan to support the three pillars in respect of each of your key stakeholder groups [Institution; Academic Managers of Researchers (Deans, Heads of Schools/Departments/PIs); Researchers]

Environment and Culture (*max 600 words*)

We have:

- **Promoted awareness of the Concordat** via our Researcher Development Hub (launched 31st March 2022 by CHEP), supported by a communications and engagement plan and monthly monitoring of use. The Hub provides information on a wide range of career development opportunities and support. Since launch, the Hub receives an average of 430 unique viewers per month. The CAG Chair has led Research Culture engagement events with Faculty Boards to promote the Concordat and Technician Commitment through Jan-March 2024. These have been augmented by local sessions delivered by Faculty Concordat Champions. CEDARS data shows our progress in promoting awareness of the Concordat with 45% of respondents in 2023 aware compared with 33% in 2021.
- **Enabled more inclusive institutional practices** following a comprehensive refresh of our formal Employment Procedures from August 2023. A new SharePoint site provides a central resource for accessing information and guidance on the

University's new employment procedures. Since January 2024 we have also strengthened our HR support for staff, providing an in-person drop-in service and bookable appointments with HR advisors.

- **Focused on the management of workloads** via the Workload Principles strategic major project, which has included feedback from nearly 350 colleagues from across all job families and levels in readiness for roll-out in Autumn 2024. A Research England-funded study exploring work-life balance of 58 research-active staff (52% on research-focused pathways) will report in the autumn of 2024.
- **Gathered feedback from researchers** to inform improvements in our research environment. We participated in CEDARS, a whole staff pulse survey in 2023, and the Vitae Research Culture Survey Pilot in May-June 2024.

We have enabled our research teams (including Academic Managers of Researchers and Researchers) to:

- **Undertake relevant EDI training and development opportunities.** We offered the 'Develop from Within' group coaching programme to early and mid-career research staff from under-represented groups. Additionally, 'Compassionate Inclusive Leadership training' was marketed to all staff, especially Managers of Researchers, with positive feedback from those attending. A 'Compassionate Inclusive Leadership Programme for Men' (Jul-Sep 2024) opened for registration on 11th June 2024 and had nearly 10 applicants per place. Due to popular demand, additional dates are being considered.
- **Access mental health and wellbeing training** via a new Mental Health in the Workplace e-learning module launched in October 2023 and subsequently completed by 479 staff and 26 students. We commissioned Solent Mind to deliver workshops promoted to PGRs, ECRs, doctoral supervisors and managers, and to Parent & Carers and REACH (for BAME) networks. Results of a detailed evaluation in

	<p>May/June 2024 with at least one focus group in addition to attendance data are in the pipeline.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage with a healthy writing culture through the Time to Write programme, which supports diverse writing styles and capacities, and includes individuals facing barriers, such as parents, carers, disabled staff, and those with split roles like clinicians. The programme includes expansion of the existing Power Hour of Writing (now running three times a week), monthly one- or two-day writing retreats, and the development of resources to enable colleagues to organise protected writing time locally. • Contribute to policy developments via our Faculty RDC Champions Network. Champions have been included in consultations for updating the Family Leave policy and Career Pathways criteria and guidelines in 2024. They are also included in Faculty-level committees and governance for localised policy development and implementation, including enabling researchers to be project leads and co-leads and embedding the 10 days CPD.
<p>Employment (<i>max 600 words</i>)</p>	<p>We have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formally commenced our Reducing Casualisation strategic major project to improve job security for all staff, including researchers, following approval from the University Executive Board in March 2024. This project aims to ensure staff are employed on the most appropriate terms and conditions, reduce overreliance on non-permanent contracts, and embed effective systems and processes, including for redeployment. • Updated our open, transparent, and merit-based recruitment checklist in January 2023 and added this to the Working as a Researcher website. This provides an independent perspective of the key HR policies affecting researchers, enabling us to check our policies and assumptions. • Introduced a Centralised Induction Portal in April 2023 which includes links to EDI and Centre for Higher Education Practice (CHEP) resources, guidance

	<p>for line managers, and access to institutional policies, procedures, and Trade Unions. Local inductions, alongside the central offer, ensure that comprehensive and consistent information is offered to all Researchers, including our commitment to the RDC.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluated uptake and success of promotion applications according to career pathways (2016-2023). Success across Balanced, Enterprise and Research-only pathways is consistent at 65-67%; only the Education pathway is slightly higher at 74%. This suggests that researchers' contributions are recognised in line with those on most other academic contracts. • Ensured clarity on available funding opportunities for researchers via CHEP's Research Funding Intensive programme, targeting research-engaged staff from early career onwards; and a Research and Innovation Services SharePoint site providing information and support for funding opportunities for ECRs. • Provided formal opportunities to engage with relevant organisational policy and decision-making via the CAG. The CAG is working with HR (Policy Hub), the Change portfolio team, and other key stakeholders, including Faculty RDC Champions, to ensure the voices of researchers contribute to the development of policies and decision-making, including: Family policy consultation (February 2024); EDI policies review (Dec 2022 - January 2024); and the concept paper and business case for the Reducing Casualisation Project (September 2023 - January 2024). <p>Our research teams have benefited from a range of training opportunities and related guidance to support their employment opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CEDARS data shows an increase in uptake of training and professional development activities since 2021 for researchers and managers of researchers. Additionally, data from our Leadership and
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	<p>Management Development Team for 2022-24 show that 265 research-focused colleagues and 794 balanced pathway colleagues attended various training sessions and programmes (including for appraisals, Women’s Development Programme active bystander, and enabling change).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement in appraisals and related training remains an important priority. Appraisal training is available for all managers of researchers via a dedicated SharePoint site which also includes accompanying guidance, key dates in the appraisal annual cycle, useful documents and training resources for appraisees and appraisers, and a link to the most recent university-wide appraisal communications. • We held our first Researchers Careers Day on Thursday 2nd May led by our Specialist Careers Consultant for Researchers. This day recognised the importance of the pipeline from PGRs to ECRs and beyond in career choices and employment options with 89 attendees (10 ECRs and 79 PGRs). The day offered an exciting range of sessions designed to inspire researchers and provide them with information about different job opportunities within academia and industry including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ a 'working in academia' panel discussion with UoS academics; ○ a 'working in industry' panel discussion with UoS PGR alumni working at Citizens Advice, Oxford Science Park, Ilika, and Future Worlds; ○ employer talks by UoS PGR alumni now working at a range of leading organisations; ○ information on how to get a placement in government with Public Policy Southampton.
<p>Professional development (max 600 words)</p>	<p>We are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offering a new approach to supporting women’s development and career progression from April 2023. In collaboration with the Athena Swan Charter, the RISE programme combines internal and external expertise and a wide range of resources to enhance

	<p>women's development at Levels 5 and 6. Cohorts have access to action learning sets after each module and are offered a mentor through the programme. Outcomes are regularly evaluated.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing a range of support including through the 'Beyond the Doctorate' programme following the appointment of a Careers Development Consultant in autumn 2023. ECRs and PGRs can sign up to bespoke workshops and chat sessions to support their career development. ECRs booked 26 spaces on different workshops and career chats in Autumn 2023. All attendees were satisfied with the workshops and reported increased confidence levels in the topic. • Supporting career development through Fellowship applications. This is a major focus for our Research Funding Development (RFD) teams from Research and Innovation Services, who provide Faculty-level support to all Fellowship applicants, including online sessions, 1-2-1 meetings and bid reviews. Since 2018, we have submitted 122 applications to the UKRI Future Leaders Fellowship scheme, with 7 awarded. We have also supported the Royal Society Career Development Fellowship, targeting researchers from underrepresented backgrounds, with 7 applications submitted in 2024. <p>For our research teams:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The promotion of 10 days CPD remains a priority within activities across Faculties, for example through the Faculty Research Culture engagement events led by our RDC institutional sponsor and Associate Vice-President (Interdisciplinary Research). The CAG co-Chair has also led meetings with the Associate Deans for Research and RDC Faculty Champions from April-June 2024. Faculty-led initiatives build on these discussions, providing an overview of the 10 days entitlement coupled with information about the range of CPD opportunities and support available. • We are an early adopter of the Prosper Portal for supporting researcher career development and have invested in staff roles within CHEP to support uptake
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	<p>and implementation. From January to June 2024, our lead Academic Developer for Prosper briefed c.150 staff across all Faculties on resources to support professional development, research identity and leadership. We also introduced the Prosper resources and reinforced core obligations of the RDC to senior research managers (Associate Deans for Research; Heads of School, line managers) and ECRs across all Faculties. Prosper materials were introduced to our Post-Doctoral Anniversary Fellows in June 2024. We liaise closely with the Prosper team at Liverpool, participating in focus groups and the development of the PI network. The next phase of implementation will involve academic developers and career consultants collaborating to create training sessions for managers and researchers using Prosper resources.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Researcher Development Hub augments the work on Prosper and is continuously updated by CHEP as a unique and comprehensive repository for CPD. Online resources, courses and workshops have been created and shared such as the Research Funding Initiative (with 182 places being filled in summer 2023), the supervisor support map, and the Knowledge Exchange and Enterprise (KEE) Hub (with 347 staff attending the top 4 most popular KEE sessions in 2023-24). Attendance data shows an increased level of engagement with CHEP’s activities on CPD, demonstrating that researchers are seeking out and engaging with opportunities to develop their research identity and broader leadership skills.• We have strengthened and continued to build on existing mentoring processes including the development of good practice case studies and other online resources available via the HR SharePoint site. In the second cohort of our reverse mentoring programme, 20 leaders participated in a six-month program, guided by junior staff and students (UG, PG and PGR), from underrepresented groups.
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Comment on any lessons learned from the activities undertaken over this period and any modifications you propose to make to your action plan and measures of success as a result. (max 500 words)

Following recent reorganisation and new investment in our support for the RDC and our wider research culture, and in consultation with our stakeholders, we decided to withdraw from renewal of the HR Excellence in Research Award (HREiR) in April 2024. We are proud to have held the HREiR Award since 2012, which has been very important in helping us develop and enrich our support for our research community. However, with our recent development of a comprehensive suite of institutional strategic plans, a more intense focus on research culture and a regular programme of action planning and reporting for the RDC, we feel now is the right time to step back from HREiR to focus more squarely on the holistic integration of our researcher development and research culture plans within our overall institutional strategy. We will continue to seek peer feedback on these plans and strategy via our membership of the Researchers14 group.

We are currently working towards the co-construction of our new action plan for 2025, involving key stakeholders in the process. To support this, we held two successful Theory of Change workshops in April and May 2024 focusing on our key priorities to map out our activities, outcomes, and evaluation plans for longer-term impact. Ensuring and maintaining wide stakeholder engagement, especially with researchers on fixed term contracts, remains an ongoing challenge which we will continue to work on. Part of the challenge lies with ensuring targeted communication at the right groups, at the right times, for specific opportunities for engagement and feedback. Consequently, we will include in our next round of action planning a critical scoping exercise to establish the clearest and most effective ways of identifying key groups for communication.

We also recognise that our current action plan was too wide-ranging to be fully effective in galvanising activities and enabling the collation of appropriate data to evidence outcomes and impact through this period. In seeking to be ambitious in our approach, we included actions across many areas of activity related to our RDC obligations without first establishing a clear evaluation plan and this has led to challenges with the collation of supporting data. Indeed, access to relevant data, especially regarding the direct impact of initiatives on, or uptake from, researchers and researcher managers is another major challenge for us given the size of our institution and the range of activities taking place within and across Departments, Schools, and Faculties. Therefore, we are aiming for a more targeted and streamlined action plan for 2025 with a clear evaluation plan from the start

including where, how, what, and from whom data needs to be collated to evidence the impact of our activities.

Outline your key objectives in delivering your plan in the coming reporting period (max 500 words)

Our overarching objective for the next period is to ensure a sustained focus on researcher development with a new RDC action plan by November 2025. We will achieve this through:

- **Implementing a Theory of Change framework** which includes early scoping of activities and intended outcomes with key stakeholders that builds on actions and progress so far;
- **Prioritising continuous improvement** by integrating evaluation strategies throughout the planned interventions and activities;
- **Co-creating with our CAG stakeholders a communications strategy** that can effectively identify and define who our different researcher groups are at the UoS to ensure accurate targeting of messaging and activities;
- **Aligning plans and activities with the Technician Commitment** to avoid overlap and duplication of effort while ensuring that the substantial overlapping needs and requirements of these major staff groups are appropriately addressed; dovetailing activities with those of our wider research culture and research strategic plans.

We have three major foci for the next reporting period including more specific objectives for each, informed by our Theory of Change workshops to date. More detailed information will be included in our next action plan:

1. Focus on engagement with key stakeholders:

- Identifying and targeting, as appropriate, attendance of RDC leads at School and/or Faculty level activities to ensure that awareness of the RDC continues to be promoted and feedback from a range of stakeholders can be easily shared with key RDC personnel.
- Ensuring that our network of RDC Champions within and across Faculties is effective in facilitating the flow of information between key RDC stakeholders.

2. 10 days Continuing Professional Development:

- Aligning with the Technician commitment, ensuring actions regarding 10 days CPD and Line Manager development are extended across all relevant staff groups, as appropriate.

- Implementation of 10 days CPD, through active recruitment and piloting, and evaluating the use of Prosper within the UoS, including auditing uptake of CPD opportunities and strategic planning for embedding and maintaining use.
- Clarifying in our communications and Faculty-level policies to whom the 10 days CPD entitlement applies.
- Mapping the pipeline of opportunities to identify how and where the 10 days CPD entitlement can be promoted and embedding targeted processes to support this awareness accordingly.
- Promoting awareness (via our targeted engagement activities) of what is considered CPD (i.e., wider than conferences and courses), and reminding researchers of their responsibilities to curate and document their engagement and uptake of CPD opportunities.

3. Appraisal and career progression:

- Reviewing lessons learned from Line Manager Development Programme to inform strategic plans for future iterations.
- Utilising data from appraisals and promotion applications to understand who our researchers are (according to formal job role) and how their workload is split across contribution areas (i.e., research, education, knowledge exchange and engagement, leadership and management).
- Ensuring researcher engagement so their needs are considered and reviewed within the Reducing Casualisation project.
- Encouraging and supporting researchers to apply for promotion and monitoring the data on this following the publication of the updated Career Pathways guidance (January 2025).
- Promoting awareness of careers pathways outside and within academia for researchers.

Please provide a brief statement describing your institution's approval process of this report prior to sign off by the governing body (*max 200 words*)

The RDC sits within our UoS programme of Equality Charters, where there is a specific focus on maximising the synergies across our six equality charters, focusing on their key areas of impact and where they look to bring about change. As such, an allocated Project Manager coordinates the planning, progression, and evaluation of impact of the RDC. The Project Manager supports the development and structure of the CAG, which is chaired by the Associate Vice-President (Interdisciplinary Research) and co-chaired by a member of our research community who is at professorial level. The CAG has overall responsibility for the UoS's commitment to the Concordat.

The RDC goes through the following governance process, enabling collaboration and further stakeholder engagement, providing oversight to ensure the alignment of university projects. The governance process bolsters the accountability of the action plan and provides an opportunity to share progress with senior leaders.

- HR Senior Leadership Team (HRSLT), 21st August 2024: *Noting*
- Equality Diversity and Inclusion Committee (EDIC), 12th September 2024: *Endorsement*
- University Executive Board (UEB), 8th October 2024: *Endorsement*
- Research and Enterprise Executive Group (REEG), 7th November 2024: *Noting*
- University Council, 19th November 2024: *Noting*

Signature on behalf of governing body:



Sir Ian Diamond
Chair of Council

Contact for queries: diverse@soton.ac.uk

This annual report will be analysed by Universities UK, secretariat for the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, to identify good practices, themes for development and information to improve national research culture policy and practice.

If you have any questions, or suggestions on how the reporting process could be improved, please contact the secretariat at CDRsecretariat@universitiesuk.ac.uk

www.researcherdevelopmentconcordat.ac.uk