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

Name of Institution	The University of Suffolk
Reporting period	2023- 2024
Date approved by governing body	Research and Enterprise Committee Professor Mohammad Dastbaz, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (by Chair Action) on 12 November 2024. Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee, chaired by Professor Emma Bond, Pro Vice Chancellor Research and Knowledge Exchange on 30 October 2024
Date published online	12 November 2024
Web address of annual report	Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers HR Excellence in Research Award
Web address of institutional Researcher Development Concordat webpage	www.uos.ac.uk
Contact for questions/concerns on researcher career development	Andreea Tocca, Head of Research Culture and Knowledge Exchange research@uos.ac.uk
Date statement sent to Researcher Development Concordat secretariat via CDRsecretariat@universitiesuk.ac.uk	12 November 2024

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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 Suffolk is proud to have been awarded the [European's HR Excellence Research badge](#) in recognition of our commitment to the implementation of the [Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers](#) (also known as the 'Researcher Development Concordat'). The university was first awarded the HR Excellence in Research badge in 2017. Since that original award, the university has successfully renewed its badging following a biennial review process. Following a 6-year review in 2023, the university successfully retained and renewed the award for a further three years. To support the implementation of the Concordat, we have published [progress reports](#) (2017, 2019, 2023) and [implementation action plans](#). The University has embraced the principles of the award to shape its 2023-2030 [Strategy for Research Excellence.](#)

The university's journey in the implementation of the UK Concordat started in 2022. In 2022, in [a letter signed by the Vice-Chancellor,](#) the university confirmed its continuing commitment to the Concordat and its principles by becoming a signatory to the [updated Concordat 2019](#) version.
University of Suffolk is committed to fostering a positive research culture rooted in diversity, inclusivity, and mutual respect across all research and knowledge exchange activities, helping us attract and retain talented staff and students. Our goal is to remove barriers, eliminate discrimination, and ensure that all researchers can reach their full potential. To support this, we provide a comprehensive researcher and knowledge exchange development training and research mentoring programme, funded initiatives, interdisciplinary events, and resources for external collaboration. Our research and knowledge exchange development offerings are creating ample opportunities for researchers to connect, learn, and become part of our vibrant research community.

Our [Research Strategy 2023-2030](#) is focused on the strategic priorities of People, Culture and Impact and is underpinned by our commitments to the national Concordats for [Researcher Development](#), [Research Integrity](#), [Public Engagement](#) and [Open Research Data.](#)

The work we are doing is to ensure we uphold the principles of the Concordat and show our commitment to the career development of a growing research community. The work of implementing the Concordat Action Plan is championed by our PVC Research and Knowledge Exchange with support from the Head of Research Culture and Knowledge Exchange.

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Provide a short summary of the institution's 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 forevaluating progress and success *(max 600 words)*

Environment and Culture:
- The university has taken proactive measures to ensure that all relevant staff are informed about the Concordat for the Career Development of Researchers.
- We prioritise inclusivity, equity, and transparency in our institutional policies and practices affecting researchers. Through clear communication with researchers and their managers, we aim to cultivate a fair and supportive research environment that enhances career development and success for all.
- The university emphasises mental health through balanced workload management, supportive practices, anti-discrimination policies, and accessible mental health resources.
- Our comprehensive Research development training and Professional and Organisational Development programmes provide ongoing support and encourage continuous learning. By equipping managers of researchers with essential knowledge and skills, we empower them to effectively promote equality, diversity, inclusion, and well-being, cultivating an inclusive culture that values the diverse experiences and mental health of all researchers.
- Annual review of the Concordat for Research Integrity, the addition of new research integrity training through the research development programme, UKRIO membership as well as revisions to the Institutional Ethics Committee membership are integral to fostering research integrity. These actions support a research environment where managers and researchers are well-informed on ethical standards, actively adhere to high ethical principles, and contribute to the credibility and impact of the university's research.
- Through ongoing assessments of the research environment and culture, combined with regular feedback from researchers, we are committed to continuous improvement. This approach ensures a supportive and enriching research environment, enhancing well-being, productivity, and career growth while fostering a thriving and impactful research community.

Employment

Employee Induction Programs:
- People Organisational Development induction introduces new employees to systems supporting role functions, ensuring accessibility to people policies and procedures.
- Research Induction (1-2-1 with Head of Research Culture and Knowledge Exchange) provided to all new research staff to support transition and align with central research resources.

Revised Academic Promotion Pathways:
- Promotion pathways and academic contracts are incorporated into performance management and appraisals.

Updated Appraisal Guidance and Performance Management:
- There was a successful transition to a new performance management system for 2023/2024, with comprehensive communication to all staff. Appraisal process includes mandatory objectives, monitored by the Academic Appointments and Promotions Committee
- Academic progression is reviewed through 1-2-1 meetings, with adjustments for individual circumstances such as maternity leave or part-time work.
- Statistical data provided to ED&I committee for annual review and improvement.

Committee and Group Representation:
- Membership of all research-related groups and committees are reviewed annually for representation and engagement.

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Professional Development:
- Researchers have allocated 18 days annually and 200 hours research time for researcher professional development, reinforcing a balance between research delivery and personal growth.
- We offer extensive networking through events, workshops and a research mentoring program. We achieved 80% participation in the mentoring program across schools and institutes, engaging staff in mentor/mentee roles.
- We developed a comprehensive Research development programme focused on transferable skills for researchers' career advancement. We facilitated early-career events, interdisciplinary research seminars, and collaboration opportunities, promoting networking opportunities within and beyond the institution. From August 2023 to June 2024, the Researcher Development Programme conducted 32 workshops and training sessions (including REF Day) designed to enhance the skills and knowledge of researchers at various stages of their careers. Over this period, a total of 494 participants engaged in these training sessions. The participants included Professors, Associate Professors, Senior Research Fellows, Senior Lecturers, Early Career Researchers (ECRs), Postgraduate Researchers (PGRs), and other key research support staff. Feedback on the RDP's quality and effectiveness is regularly collected to adapt offerings to meet researchers' needs.
- There is an ongoing review of the Concordat pillars to ensure alignment with stakeholder needs, fostering an inclusive research culture. This proactive approach contributes to a more inclusive research culture and provide researchers with the support they need to advance their careers and contribute to excellent research outcomes.

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,

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Well-being Support and Accessibility of Resources:
- All research staff are fully informed about available well-being resources and encouraged to proactively address concerns, with feedback regularly gathered through appraisals, 1-2-1 meetings, and team discussions.
- Policies and practices relevant to researchers are readily accessible, with regular evaluations ensuring visibility across the intranet, research hub pages, 1-2-1 research inductions, newsletters, staff meetings, and events for Early Career Researchers (ECRs).

Institutional Values and Engagement Monitoring:
- The university measures alignment with its core values and behaviours through recruitment materials, staff surveys, appraisals, probation assessments, exit interviews, 1-2-1 meetings, team discussions, and case studies, providing a comprehensive overview of staff engagement and institutional culture.

Research Plans and ORCID Integration:
- All staff with significant research responsibility (SRR) have established three-year research plans and maintain current ORCID profiles, supporting professional growth and visibility in the research community.

Leadership and Management Development:
- Training programs for line and project managers, including Associate Deans for Research and Knowledge exchange, are provided through the Research Development and POD development programs.
- Managers complete relevant training to enhance their effectiveness and foster a positive culture of professional development within the research community.

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Researcher Representation and Workload Management:
- Researchers hold designated roles on key University of Suffolk research committees, reinforcing the importance of their contributions in academic citizenship, leadership, and governance.

Work-life Balance and Flexible Working Monitoring:
- Staff survey data assesses researchers' perceptions of work-life balance
- Access to flexible working options is reviewed to ensure inclusive support for researchers across diverse backgrounds and needs.

Commitment to an Inclusive Research Culture:
- Through these initiatives, the University of Suffolk fosters an inclusive research environment that values fair recruitment practices, supports work-life balance, offers robust professional development, and encourages collaboration.
- Regular evaluations and feedback enable continuous improvement, ensuring a supportive space for researchers to excel and achieve their potential.

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. 500 words

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To enhance our understanding of the needs and aspirations of our research staff, the University of Suffolk will conduct the Careers, Employment, and Development in Academic Research Survey (CEDARS) in Spring 2025. This survey provides a valuable and confidential platform for research staff to share feedback on their working conditions, career goals, and available development opportunities. As this will be the first time we administer CEDARS, we anticipate that the insights gained will be instrumental in refining and enhancing the University's support and resources for research staff, informing both short-term adjustments and long-term strategic planning. Currently, we have not identified any modifications to the action plan and are confident in the proposed outputs and measures of success. However, we remain committed to revisiting and adjusting the plan as needed in response to the survey results and any emerging needs identified by our research community.

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

- Researcher Development Programme: Increase staff attendance from 50% to 80% by 2026.
- 100% new Principal Investigators and line managers of staff with significant responsibility for research access "management and leadership development opportunities".
- Reduce the number of research only staff on Fixed Term Contracts from 67% (22/23) to less than 50% by 2025.
- 100% of staff with significant responsibility for research are engaged with mentoring program, as either a mentor or mentee.
- 100% staff with significant responsibility for research take their 18 professional development and scholarly activity days.

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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 University of Suffolk has implemented a robust reporting structure and clear accountability mechanisms to effectively oversee the implementation of the Concordat. This structure ensures that all activities and progress related to the Concordat are aligned with institutional goals and support continuous improvement. Progress on the Concordat is closely integrated with the University's work toward the HR Excellence in Research Award, particularly the comprehensive six-year self-assessment process and the implementation of the Looking Forward Action Plan 2023-2026. The Concordat implementation plan is a standing agenda item for the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee, which actively monitors progress and identifies areas for enhancement. This committee reports directly to the Research and Enterprise Committee, ensuring that Concordat-related developments receive focused attention and are aligned with the university's broader research objectives. Finally, the Research and Enterprise Committee reports to the Senate, fostering high-level oversight and institutional commitment to advancing research standards and support for researchers at the University of Suffolk.