

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

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Web address of annual report	The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers HR Excellence in Research Award
Web address of institutional Researcher Development Concordat webpage	The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers
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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

We have retained the HR Excellence in Research Award for four years in 2022, undertaken our first submission to the Research Excellence Framework (REF) in 2021, and are preparing our application for RDAPs in 2025. Our all-staff survey introduced in 2022 gave us robust evidence with which to further evaluate our strengths and identify areas for improvement, and we successfully delivered a university wide action plan (2022-2023) in response to the survey outcomes. By aligning HR Excellence initiatives with other accreditations, awards, and strategies such as the Athena SWAN Bronze Award, the HR Excellence in Research Award, EDI Strategy highlights a comprehensive approach to promoting gender equality, diversity, inclusion, and career development opportunities for our researchers. Our [Transforming Lives: University of Suffolk Strategy for Research Excellence 2023-2030](#) demonstrates a strong commitment to fostering an inclusive research culture and promoting research excellence.

The main beneficiaries for the Concordat are the Staff with Significant Responsibility for Research (SRRs):

Staff whose responsibility is to conduct research and who are employed specifically for this purpose on research contracts (32 staff members)

- Professors: 6
- Associate Professors: 5
- Senior Research Fellows: 4
- Research Fellows: 11
- Research Associates: 5
- Research Assistants: 1

Staff on Learning, Teaching and Research Contracts (76 staff members)

- School of Engineering, Arts, Science and Technology: 70 staff headcounts (58.80% FTE). 23 staff (33%) have significant responsibility for research.
- School of Health and Sports Science: 99 staff headcounts (86.50 FTE). 14 staff (14%) have significant responsibility for research.
- School of Social Sciences and Humanities: 70 staff headcounts (60.90 FTE). 33 staff (47%) of staff have significant responsibility for research.
- Business Engagement, Careers & Employability: 9 staff headcounts (6.44 % FTE). 4 staff (44%) have significant responsibility for research.
- Learning and Teaching (CELT): 9 staff headcounts (8.60% FTE). 2 staff (22%) have significant responsibility for research.

Introducing the Suffolk Academic Model in 2022 increased the number of academic staff with significant responsibility for research to 37% of our academic staff across our schools and research institutes. The increase in the number of academic staff with significant responsibility for research has brought expanded research outputs, increased collaboration across all our schools and research institutes, enhanced our research culture, and has begun attracting talented researchers and PGR students interested in pursuing research-oriented careers. We also introduced a university-wide research mentoring programme for all staff with significant responsibility for research in 2022. Providing mentors for new staff on research contracts and those on learning, teaching, and research contracts demonstrates our commitment to supporting our staff's professional growth and research development.

To ensure that the importance of researchers' personal and career development, and lifelong learning, is clearly recognised and promoted at all stages of their career, the Head of Research Development with the support of the relevant Associate Dean for Research and Knowledge Exchange and Research Institute Directors organized 1-2-1 meetings with all staff responsible for research across all Schools and Research Institutes between February 2023 and June 2023. The data collected from these meetings helped in shaping this annual report. Additionally, the insights gained from these meetings contributes to staff appraisals, providing a comprehensive understanding of the researchers' needs and aspirations.

We ensure that all our researchers adhere to ethical guidelines and principles, promoting responsible conduct in research. An online Research Integrity training session has been implemented for all staff and PGR at the University of Suffolk in 2022 to support them share the responsibility for and need to pro-actively engage in their own personal and career development, and lifelong learning. 83% of the staff with significant responsibility for research has completed the Research Integrity training (Epigeum Online) this academic year.

We prioritise the well-being and work-life balance of our researchers, providing support systems such as flexible work arrangements, counselling services, and resources for work-life integration. We recognise the importance of a healthy work environment in fostering creativity, productivity, and overall satisfaction among researchers.

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

Environment and Culture

The university has made substantial investments in professoriate and research infrastructure to support its strategic priorities towards responding effectively to societal challenges, and cultivating a strong, sustainable research and scholarly culture. One notable achievement is the growth of a vibrant multi-disciplinary Postgraduate Research community (105 PGRs in 2023). This highlights the university's commitment to nurturing the next generation of researchers and creating an environment that fosters collaboration and knowledge exchange across disciplines. By signing the Declaration on Responsible Assessment (DORA) we are demonstrating a commitment to improving the evaluation of scientific research and moving away from journal-based metrics as the sole or primary criteria for funding, appointment, and promotion decisions. We have incorporated training for early-career researchers (ECRs) and academic staff to understand the benefits of open access to publications, open data, and reproducibility as part of the Researcher Development programme (two workshops in the 2022/23).

Employment

We have allocated study leave and dedicated research time to our research staff. Specifically, staff on research contracts, early career researchers (ECRs) and academic staff on learning, teaching, and research contracts receive 18 days of study leave (pro rata) and 200 hours of dedicated research time. Substantial investment in our professoriate and research infrastructure underpins our priorities for effectively responding to societal challenges and transforming research to foster a strong, sustainable research and scholarly culture. By closely monitoring the use of FTCs, the university aims to make informed decisions and take necessary actions to improve employment conditions for research-only staff. The goal is to reduce the number of research-only staff on FTCs from the current level of 67% to less than 50% by 2025.

Recruitment and promotion

We recognize and value the diverse contributions that researchers make, from research assistants to Senior Research Fellows, and aim to acknowledge their efforts appropriately. The University has assured that staff on research-only contracts are recruited to the appropriate grade, evidenced by zero successful appeals against grading, recognising the importance of recruiting, selecting, and retaining researchers with the highest potential to achieve excellence in research. Our promotion pathways and their criteria were reviewed in February 2023. By conducting this review, we demonstrate our commitment to providing robust and equitable promotion processes that recognise and reward researchers' contributions and achievements. Promotion and academic pathways are discussed in performance management and appraisals, enabling researchers to effectively plan and work towards their career goals with clear and well-defined criteria.

Professional Development

Provide opportunities for professional development and career progression for our researchers:

- Research identity and leadership skills relevant to researchers' professional growth. 43 research staff successfully completed our Research Leadership Programme run by Advance HE at the university in 2022/2023.
- We have organised 42 workshops as part of the Researcher Development Programme, including events for early career researchers. With an average of 15 participants per workshop, we have been able to provide valuable development opportunities to a significant number of individuals. We offered an externally funded Research Mentoring Training Programme to colleagues across schools and research institutes. This training aimed to enhance their skills and knowledge by providing them with a more systematic and structured methodology, increasing their confidence in their mentoring responsibilities. 26 mentors and mentees took part in the externally funded mentoring programme between May and June 2022 run as part of the 2021/2022 Research Development Training programme. All research staff are acting as mentors, mentees, or both.

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]

Institution: By regularly sharing updates and reminders about the Concordat via the UoS website, Infozone, and My Suffolk, the university communicates effectively to staff members the importance of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers and its implementation progress. This ensures that everyone is informed and aware of the institution's commitment to researcher career development. Following 1-2-1 discussions with staff with significant responsibility for research, alongside discussions with the Implementation working group, we are organising workshops for research staff in 2023/2024 specifically focused on the Concordat. These workshops will provide an opportunity for in-depth discussions, clarifications, while addressing any queries or concerns related to the Concordat's principles and implementation. By incorporating the Concordat as an agenda item in the Research Management Group, Research and Enterprise Committee and all school execs meetings, we ensure that the topic remains a priority in research-related decision-making processes. Including information about the Concordat in research induction sessions for new staff members is an excellent practice. By involving the Head of Research Development and invited speakers in these sessions, the university emphasises the significance of the Concordat from the start of researchers' journeys. This ensures that new staff members are informed about the institution's commitment to their career development and sets the tone for an inclusive research culture.

Academic Managers of Researchers: The university demonstrates strong leadership and support as it creates a positive and inclusive research culture. Prioritising transparency and fairness in recruitment and selection processes ensures equal opportunities for researchers. As part of the Athena SWAN Bronze Award Action Plan (2023-2028) workload and well-being conversations are implemented to address work-life balance. Templates for these conversations are introduced in annual appraisals and 1-2-1 meetings with line managers. Professional development and career progression are key priorities, supported by the comprehensive Researcher Development program, research mentoring, and access to a very comprehensive research resources hub located on the university intranet. Clear pathways for career progression, promotion, and leadership roles are established, providing guidance for researchers' goals. We have developed a standardised research job description template, ensuring consistency and clarity in researcher roles. Direct feedback from researchers appointed using the template was sought, allowing continuous improvement and customisation at the research institute and school levels.

Researchers: To support the research activities of staff, the university has allocated 18 days' study leave and 200 research hours. This allocation demonstrates our commitment to providing dedicated time for research and supports researchers in their pursuit of excellence. Research Training Leadership was provided to 43 staff on research contracts, including ECRs and academic staff on learning, teaching, and research contracts – a training programme that further supports the professional development of researchers, equipping them with the skills and knowledge needed to excel in their roles.

The Strategic Leadership Programme, attended by the four research institutes directors, equipped research leaders with the necessary skills and knowledge to drive strategic research initiatives and create a positive research culture within their institutes.

With 83% of staff with significant responsibility for research completing the trainings, it highlights the institution's commitment to promoting a culture of integrity and ethical research practices. The completion rates of research integrity training not only indicate the level of engagement and commitment from the research staff but also highlights the university's initiative-taking approach in ensuring that all researchers are well-versed in research ethics.

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

We are reinforcing the Concordat and regularly revisiting the topic through internal communications. It helps to keep the principles of the Concordat at the forefront of staff awareness and emphasizes their importance within the university's research community. By providing practical examples and case studies relevant to each target audience, research staff can better understand how the principles apply to their specific roles and how they contribute to the overall research and working environment.

Guest speakers and Concordat experts will be invited to share additional perspectives and insights as part of the Researcher Development program. Their expertise and experiences can provide valuable guidance and inspire staff to implement the principles effectively. Representatives from funding agencies or researchers from organizations that have successfully implemented the principles will also be invited to offer practical examples and best practices. The continuous update of the resources hub resources staff will be able to continue to deepen their understanding and engage with the principles of the Concordat in a structured way. This ensures that learning and development opportunities are readily available and accessible. Fostering Concordat-related discussions and learning opportunities through the research mentoring program across the Institution can be an effective way to encourage ongoing engagement and reflection on the Concordat principles.

By aligning the UK Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers with Athena SWAN Bronze Award, the HR Excellence in Research Award and the University EDI Strategy highlights a comprehensive approach to promoting gender equality, diversity, inclusion, well-being, and career development opportunities for the University of Suffolk researchers. This integration of efforts can lead to a more comprehensive and impactful approach to supporting the career development and success of our researchers. Overall, the University's comprehensive approach to the self-assessment and implementation of the UK Concordat demonstrates a commitment to transparency, collaboration, and ongoing enhancement of the research environment. By involving various stakeholders, disseminating information and monitoring progress, we create a culture of continuous improvement and ensures that the initiatives aligned with the award are effectively implemented and supported.

Outline your key objectives in delivering your plan in the coming reporting period

The university's key objectives in delivering our forthcoming plan are to firmly embed the Researcher Development Concordat by aligning our Research Staff Development Programme to the three key principles of the Concordat and the statements to Support the Research Integrity Concordat. The two Concordats will underpin our development workshops ensuring that the principles are cross referenced to our workshop descriptors. We will review our researcher development workshops for 2023/24 and align them to three themes with each descriptor incorporating positive action statements encouraging experienced and early career researchers to attend. The university has taken initiative-taking steps to provide additional resources and support for research staff through initiatives such as the Research Resources Hubs, Early Career Researcher network, and the Research mentoring programme. These initiatives play a crucial role in enhancing the research experience and professional development opportunities for research staff. To maximise the benefits of these resources, we will ensure that 100% of the research staff are aware of their availability and how to access them. Campaigning and raising awareness about the support available will significantly increase these initiatives' take-up and impact. Using various communication channels, such as newsletters, emails, and 1-2-1 research inductions and 1-2-1 meetings with staff with significant responsibility for research, we can reach out effectively to research staff and their line managers.

By continuing to provide comprehensive support and guidance, research staff on research contracts will be empowered to engage effectively with promotion and redeployment processes. This not only promotes their career progression but also contributes to a thriving research environment where talent is nurtured and valued. All staff will undertake appraisals with their managers, and this includes our fixed term contracts researchers. However, discussions take place throughout the year to ensure that our research and academic colleagues can undertake their role to the highest standards. We will continue to facilitate networking and collaboration opportunities for research staff to enhance their visibility within the institution and beyond. We encourage their participation in conferences, workshops, and research events where they can highlight their work and establish connections with colleagues and potential collaborators. Such opportunities can expand professional network, open doors for collaboration, and increase the probability of promotion or successful redeployment.

While we are more aware as to why fixed term contracts are used for research-only staff, we will continue to monitor and evaluate the use of fixed term contracts via the institutional research management committee every six months over two years. We will ensure all research staff on fixed term contracts have equal access to career development and training opportunities and increase their engagement with training (monitored via appraisal system). to 100% of fixed term staff engaging with at least one institutional training opportunity annually.

HR Excellence in Research Award: maintaining the HR Excellence in Research Award at the six-year assessment is a key indicator of success. Retaining the award demonstrates the university's ongoing adherence to the principles of the Concordat for the Career Development of Researchers and our continuous improvement efforts to support researchers' career development.

The Concordat working group meets quarterly to review progression made against the actions and revise actions, processes, and workshops to ensure the key principles remain high on the University's Agenda. The Head of Research Development will continue to work with POD, CELT, Associate Deans for RKE and Research Institutes Directors to ensure that future training and development is aligned with the concordat.

Please provide a brief statement describing your institution's approval process of this report prior to sign off by the governing body

The final approval was received from the University of Suffolk Senate on 15 June 2023

The lines of accountability in relation to UK Concordat:

- The strategic lead is the Pro-Vice Chancellor Research
- The operational lead responsible is the Head of Research Development

- The implementation and monitoring of the action plan are undertaken through:
 - The UK Concordat Research Working Group
 - Research Management Group
 - Research and Enterprise Committee

- The final approval: University of Suffolk Senate.

The Working Group membership:

- Senior Business Partner (Talent and Organisational Development)
- Two Early Career Researchers (research fellows on research contracts only)
- Head of Suffolk Doctoral College (deputy chair)
- Head of Research Development (chair)
- Suffolk Doctoral College PGR Academic (secretary).

Monitoring and reporting progress on the action plan at the Research Management Group and the Research and Enterprise Committee highlights the importance placed on accountability and continuous improvement. These standing items ensure that the action plans remain on track and receive appropriate attention and support from key decision-making bodies within the university.