

The University of Surrey 6 Year Internal Evaluation Report for HR EiR

Institutional Context

The University of Surrey is one of the UK's top professional, scientific and technological universities. Surrey has a world-class profile and a leading reputation in teaching and research, across a broad range of disciplinary and interdisciplinary specialty areas. Our early career researcher (ECR) population is equally diverse, with approximately 500 newer researchers spanning the sciences, social sciences, arts and humanities, with different contract types and titles. We aim to ensure that our HR Excellence in Research (HREiR) initiative supports and empowers the full spectrum of our newer researcher population.

1. Outline how the internal evaluation was undertaken

The internal evaluation to measure the progress against the 2016 action plan was overseen by the HR Excellence in Research Working Group (HREiR WG), which met quarterly reporting to the Doctoral College Board, which has responsibility for ECR support. The Doctoral College Board reports into the University Research and Innovation Committee (RIC). The HREiR WG, which owns the action plan, comprises representatives from key operational areas that support ECRs including Doctoral College (DC), Researcher Development Programme (RDP), Human Resources, Employability and Careers, Equality and Diversity and Research and Innovation Services. There is also ECR representation from each faculty (inclusive of different contract types) and from the Surrey Research Staff Association (SuRSA). Importantly, the HREiR WG works synergistically with the University Athena Swan Committee through cross-representation on each committee.

The input of ECRs has been central to the development and evaluation of Surrey's HR Excellence Action Plans. In 2012, an ECR Representatives forum was established which continues to meet quarterly. The forum provides input into researcher development activities, advises on issues of researcher support and provides input and feedback on the HREiR action plan. Representatives from the forum sit on both the HREiR WG and the Doctoral College Board.

We continue to benchmark the effectiveness of our ECR support via the CROS survey. Engagement with CROS has improved from less than 5% in 2015 to just under 25% in 2017, thus providing more representative results to help inform and evaluate new actions. Survey data is complemented by 'Have Your Say' focus groups which allow us to better understand issues raised and work in partnership with our ECRs to address concerns.

To further enhance our ECR provision, the University of Surrey actively engages nationally and internationally in best practice sharing. We have presented about our support for ECRs at Vitae and UKCGE conferences and events, as well as publish on the topic (references available upon request). We have learnt a lot from our collaborators and other presenters at a variety of conferences, workshops and events. This shared knowledge has helped us continue to reflect on, evaluate, and develop what we consider to be an internationally competitive programme of career enhancing support and expanding opportunities for our ECRs.

2. Key achievements

Identity (principles 1 &2)

A key achievement of this two year period has been the embedding of ECRs and ECR-related issues within the higher University-wide infrastructure by including this group in the remit of the newly launched Doctoral College (DC), which brought together new high level management and reporting infrastructure with the already well established Researcher Development Programme (RDP). This has provided improved connectedness with University-wide Research and Innovation Committee (RIC), and established senior ownership of ECR related matters, including training and support. It has also ensured a better alignment of University Research Strategy and the HR Excellence in Research action plan. Inclusion of ECRs within the Doctoral College remit marked a step-change in support. This substantial accomplishment has been in large part due to the University's commitment to the principles of the concordat and HREiR.

During the development of the Doctoral College, it was of critical importance to clearly define 'ECR' for the purposes of providing support relevant to this group's needs. Previously, the term 'ECR' had been used in

different ways in different contexts. Through engagement with the academic community and, most importantly, with people who considered themselves to be ECRs, the DC has defined ECRs in a very open and inclusive way. The definition encompasses fixed-term research staff and academic staff who recently completed their doctorates, as well as other categories of staff, such as teaching fellows, who self-identify as ECRs. For Surrey, it was felt that this inclusive definition was necessary because of the wide discipline range, differences in contract types and variety of career pathways of researchers. This definition means that this broad range of staff are all entitled to the support of the RDP, the DC and the HREiR initiative.

Employability and Professional Development (principles 3, 4 & 5)

The DC proposal included a business case for targeted and bespoke careers support for researchers (1 FTE) and additional Researcher Development Programme (RDP) training staff (1.5 FTE). The business case for increased resource was supported by HREiR actions and by the ECR community. The proposal was successful and new RDP staff were recruited in Autumn 2016 and new careers staff in Jan 2017. This additional resource has enabled a considerable increase in RDP and Careers offering for ECRs and a corresponding increase in engagement (>7-fold increase). Specific offerings, beyond our standard transferable skills training, now available due to this increase in resource, include the opportunity for all ECRs to:

- have a professional development coaching session at the start of their contract to: facilitate the creation of a personalised professional development action plan; and signpost to development opportunities the University of Surrey offers;
- be involved in mentoring, as mentors themselves and as mentees, with options to be paired with a more senior ECR, an academic, or someone from a different sector;
- take advantage of virtual support including online resources, e-one-to-one sessions and online course (such as 23 Things) providing inclusive support for ECRs who may not have time or availability to attend sessions on-campus during normal working hours;
- participate in a new first funding programme, with a variety of different opportunities for training and support weaved together in a comprehensive programme utilising resources across various University departments.
- receive academic writing support, including workshops, one-to-ones, and writing retreats (both face-to-face and virtual).
- engage with specialist careers advisers for career management and employability skills support through: workshops and bespoke online materials; networking events, and one-to-one coaching sessions (both face-to-face and virtual).

Alignment of University Initiatives and the Research Strategy (principles 6 & 7)

A further achievement of the past two years is a closer alignment of our Athena Swan initiative with the HREiR process. There is cross representation on the HREiR WG and Athena Swan Committee via the Athena Swan Academic Lead and the RDP lead for ECRs. In this way, both processes are now much more closely aligned and synergistically supporting each other. Both initiatives have benefitted from the new research strategy that explicitly commits to their principles.

3. Outline of next steps

Major theme: ECRs as valued partners (principles 1 & 2)

Analysis of CROS and follow-up engagement sessions with ECRs have revealed that although ECR representation is now embedded in the high level University infrastructure, there are still areas of the University where ECRs do not feel recognised or valued as partners in the University's research culture. Therefore, a series of actions within the updated 2018 action plan address this variation across the University, as well as sharing and embedding best practice in building a positive and supportive research culture for ECRs. Specifically we will:

- ensure there is ECR representation in all departments/schools/research centres and link this local representation with the now embedded ECR higher-level committee representation.
- identify and engage academics to act as ECR 'champions' and advocates at a local level, creating opportunities to share best practice in building and enhancing research culture and providing funding opportunities for new research culture developing initiatives.

- encourage best practice in line-managing ECRs through support for appraisals and formally recognise best practice in supporting ECRs.

Key success measures for these actions will be >5% improvement on CROS questions related to recognition and value, as well as, research culture. Other initial success measures will be the establishment of the necessary infrastructure and evaluation of the impact these actions are having on individuals through feedback surveys and building case studies.

Major theme: Support for professional transitions (principles 3 & 4)

In 2016, the University invested in additional Careers and Professional Development support for researchers, resulting in increased provision and uptake of opportunities by ECRs. Moving forward we aim to continue to develop and enhance this provision through continued reflection on practice and engagement with ECRs. Our goal is to fully support our diverse ECR population as they transition through this critical stage in their career development. We will:

- Continue to invite ECRs to a one-to-one professional development coaching session at the start of their contract. Through this session, we aim to increase engagement with the individualised professional development plan to 50% uptake, and improve engagement with mentoring by 10% year-on-year.
- Continue to deliver, refresh and evaluate our varied suite of training, development and support (both virtual and face-to-face) to suit the needs of all ECRs and a variety of career pathways. (CROS Target 10% increase reported engagement in developmental activities).
- Offer special invitations for careers coaching sessions as ECRs approach the end of a contract. (CROS Target 10% increase reported engagement in career management)
- Launch a Doctoral College ECR Alumni Programme, allowing ECRs continued access to professional development, careers support and networking opportunities beyond their contract, helping them transition into their next position.

Along with targets for CROS, we will be undertaking a variety of strategies to capture and report the longer term impact of the various training and support programme, through feedback surveys and case studies.

Major theme: Empowering and enabling ECRs (principle 5)

Our Have your Say focus groups revealed that a major obstacle to ECR engagement with professional development opportunities was the perception that they were not supported in taking time away from their research (or teaching) to pursue their own development. Therefore, we will:

- provide opportunities and University-level support for engagement with professional/career development activities such as skills training, public engagement, collaboration, widening participation and small scale initial/pilot funding applications.
- establish clear University expectations around protected time for each ECR to engage in the above developmental activities to enhance their career progression – whether that be within, or outside of academia

The desired outcome is that ECRs feel empowered to undertake a variety of activities and training, which CROS results indicate they would like to do, but have not yet been able to.

Major theme: Ensure engagement with the diverse range of ECRs (principle 6&7)

We will aim to increase our engagement with our ECR population, with a target of >30% CROS participation in 2019. We will communicate progress against our HREiR action plan within quarterly ECR newsletters. We will work with We will work closely the University with Athena Swan, Race Equality Charter and Stonewall Workplace Index initiatives to ensure they are complementary to the HREiR action plan, and that ECRs are considered within the context of all University wide initiatives. Importantly, we will aim to share our experiences and best practice nationally and internationally, as well as learn from sector-leading practice. We recognise that it will be critical for us to work across boundaries of institutions and sectors to best support our ECRs, especially in the current climate of significant global changes and challenges.