

University of Surrey HREiR Award / Researcher Development Concordat : Internal Evaluation Report – July 2022

Introduction and background

Surrey has held the HREiR Award since 2012 and committed itself to the revised Researcher Concordat of 2019. We have worked towards delivering on the initiative's three core principles for our community of around 400 ECRs amidst the demanding backdrop of a global pandemic. Utilising the principles as a framework this report details progress made against the actions highlighted in the 2020-24 action plan, the priorities and actions identified in the gap analysis, and the creation of a new action plan for 2022-24. These documents are available on the Doctoral College's website from July 2022. Due to the pandemic and staff changes a decision was reached with Vitae to move our submission to July 2022 rather than January 2021, and this also enabled the university to align HREiR and Researcher Development Concordat reporting.

Internal review process

The HREiR Working Group has been reinvigorated and is now the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers Steering Committee. It is chaired by Prof. David Sampson, PVC for Research & Innovation and Executive Board member, and membership has been revised to include stakeholders from across the university, energising institutional commitment to delivering the Concordat's principles. The Steering Committee meets quarterly to assess progress made against the HREiR action plan, with researchers represented by the attendance of the chairs of the ECR Forum, and reports to Senate via the University Research & Innovation Committee (URIC).

HREiR and the Researcher Concordat at Surrey

The HREiR award and the Researcher Concordat are now standard agenda items on the [ECR Forum](#)'s agenda (which meets quarterly) both to encourage awareness of and deeper engagement with the concordat's principles. Surrey's submission to the HREiR award, including its retrospective action plan, gap analysis, and forward-looking action plan, has been devised in consultation with the Forum. The Associate Deans of the Doctoral College have also raised awareness of the initiative at Faculty Research Committees and Faculty Research Degree Committees, and reports on progress in the Doctoral College's (DC) newsletter has ensured that knowledge of the Concordat is filtered throughout the university and that the DC and its stakeholder partners are held accountable for the implementation of its principles.

Implementation of the concordat's principles is also assessed through regular consultations with stakeholders. Surrey participated in the Culture, Employment and Development in Academic Research Survey (CEDARS) pilot in 2020, for example, gathering 109 responses from PGRs and ECRs to inform policy and actions. The COVID-19 pandemic meant that the university did not run the survey in 2021 and 2022, but it will run again in Spring 2023 to inform future planning.

Key achievements and progress – 2020-2022

The [university's strategy refresh](#) published in 2021 and alignment with university submissions to other awards and their quality assessment mechanisms has benefited implementation of Concordat principles and afforded considerable opportunity to advance issues that impact ECRs. For example, Surrey's submission to the [Athena Swan Award](#) (May 2018) and Race Equality Charter (February 2022) included actions aimed at ECRs (see Principle 2 below) and new training opportunities developed by HR and EDI include provision for ECRs and managers of ECRs.

The transition from the Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS) that was last undertaken in 2019 to the Culture, Employment and Academic Research Survey (CEDARS), in whose pilot Surrey participated in 2020 and which will next run in summer 2022 has meant that references to CROS 'success measures' in the retrospective action plan have been revised in the forward-looking action plan to align with the new survey.

Principle 1 – Environment and Culture

The specific needs of ECRs encouraged the DC, in consultation with the ECR Forum and in response to CEDARS data that highlighted a lack of awareness of ECR-focused institutional policies and support, to develop a workshop inducting ECRs into 'life' at Surrey, introduced in February 2022. It highlights the resources available for ECRs, explains how they can involve themselves in university committees and decision-making and helps connect ECRs with each other. Initial feedback has been very positive, with one attendee commenting how 'the session was friendly and less formal' and praising the format, especially as they felt 'able to share [their] current circumstances, interact with a member of the staff and get some feedback'. The induction will be revised in future in line with future feedback to ensure it meets the needs of ECRs.

At an institutional level, HR have introduced workshops focused on unconscious bias and race equity as part of the compulsory university induction programme, including those involved in the recruitment of researchers, as well as revamped line management training open to all staff, including staff who manage researchers. HR have also led institution-wide 'People & Culture' workshops, allowing all staff, including ECRs, to help clarify the trusting and empowered culture desired at the university and the institution's now guiding values of inclusion, inspiration, innovation, and integrity.

Researcher-led focused initiatives form key points in Surrey's calendar. The flagship event for PGRs and ECRs remains the Doctoral College Conference, occurring every summer. The DC provides support, but all aspects of the conference are the responsibility of the organising committee, formed exclusively of PGRs and ECRs. The programme often includes professional development opportunities relevant to ECR attendees, such as the New Horizons career panel in summer 2020.

The Building Research Culture and Innovation Competition of 2020-21 included three ECR successes, two from FASS and one from FHMS, and the [funding call for the 2022](#) cohort is now live. There are also a series of ECR-focused awards advertised and administered by the university throughout the year (see Principle 3 below).

Early Career Researchers Forum (ECR Forum)

Formed in 2019 and representing the interests of ECRs to stakeholders across the university, the Forum is led by ECR chairs and the ECR community within each department elects a representative. Alongside a vibrant ECR Forum, recruitment drives for institutional committees often explicitly encourage ECRs to apply, in an attempt to ensure that researchers are represented throughout the university (for one [example, click here](#)).

Principle 2 – Employment

Initiatives of benefit to ECRs have emerged from the university's submission to the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index (October 2021) and the Race Equality Charter (February 2022) and ongoing work with the Athena Swan and Juno awards. Among other examples, Surrey's submission to the Race Equality Charter includes tailored support to help BAME ECRs gain permanent academic posts. The university has also amended the policy concerning Parental Leave for researchers on fixed-term contracts so that they have the same rights as permanent staff.

A University Promotions Committee is to be led by our new Provost & Senior Vice President, leading a review of academic career pathways with HR, including exploring a pathway specifically for researchers. A refresh of the appraisal process is also underway, considering how best to recognise the contribution of ECRs to the university's research output and culture. HR is consulting with the unions regarding these changes and aims to roll out the revised processes in 2022-23.

Principle 3 – Professional Development

Commercialisation Fellowships

Since 2020 the Impact Acceleration Account (IAA) has run a [Commercialisation Fellowship](#) programme aimed specifically at ECRs. In 2021 five ECRs from across all faculties successfully took part in the programme, and the call for applications for 2022 was advertised through more channels to increase uptake (for two notable ECR successes, click here ([example 1](#)) ([example 2](#))). The IAA also launched [Business Boost](#) in 2020, a funded project to encourage PGRs and ECRs in the social sciences to collaborate with business.

Fellowships

Support for ECRs in applying for fellowships has been revised across the university.

- Research Strategy rolled out [Pivot RP](#) in early 2022, a database that gathers together funding and fellowship opportunities from across the globe. Faculty initiatives aimed at supporting ECR fellowship applications are numerous (see the retrospective action plan for more detail), but include:
- FEPs - a fellowship network meeting every other month, linking ECRs applying for fellowships with senior members of staff to share advice and review applications.
- FHMS - a fellowship academy launching in May 2022 after a successful pilot cohort.
- FASS - one-to-one bid development mentoring offered by the Research facilitation Officer.

In line with the UKRI's priorities, faculties have sought to equip ECRs with the skills and knowledge necessary to measure and report on impact. In coordination with Strategic Planning, for example, FEPS hosted a series of externally led workshops focused on impact across February, March and April 2022, and FHMS hosted an afternoon workshop in March 2022 on impact pathways and knowledge exchange.

Career Management Programme

Based on an award-winning Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) developed by researcher career specialists from the universities of Glasgow, Edinburgh and Sheffield, a pilot Career Management Blended Learning Programme for Surrey ECRs was launched in January 2021 led by the DC careers consultants. The success of the Career Management Programme has been built on this year, with the programme further developed through feedback from participants and ran from [Feb – April 2022](#).

Future Plans – 2022-24

In brief, priorities include:

- The more robust collection of baseline data to evaluate more effectively the success and impact of initiatives and when planning future actions.
- Exploring methods that can better inform our ECR community of the support and opportunities available at Surrey.
- Securing 10 days of protected development into relevant contracts.

Work in some of these areas is already underway. A Pan University Professional Development Group is exploring how to record evidence of professional development, including research staff utilising their 10 days protected development time. Both ECR mentoring schemes—one linking ECRs with employers and the other ECRs with senior staff—are now under review to ensure they are fit for purpose, and discussions about how best to collate the opportunities and support available for ECRs across the university are ongoing. For full details see the forward-looking action plan.