



University of Sussex HR Excellence in Research Award Four-Year Report

1. University Context

The University of Sussex was awarded the HR Excellence in Research Award in May 2013 and retained the award in May 2015 following the internal review process.

The University is a research-intensive institution with over 1200 academic staff of which approximately 400 are research staff. To date the University's Concordat implementation activity has primarily focused on the cohort of research staff and is overseen by the University's [Research Staff Working Group \(RSWG\)](#). The RSWG meets three times per academic year to review progress against the Concordat Implementation Plan and oversee [Research Staff Office \(RSO\)](#) activity. The Working Group formally reports to Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee and HR committee. In addition, the group regularly makes recommendations to the University Executive Group, Equality and Diversity Committee, and the Athena SWAN committee. The RSWG is chaired by the Director of Research Staff Development (0.1FTE academic post) and membership includes: HR Director (or nominee), 2x Directors of Research and Knowledge Exchange, 3 x Early Career Researcher Leads, 5x Research Staff Representatives, 1x Head of School, 1x School administrator, Research Staff Officer and Assistant Director Doctoral School.

In September 2016 the University appointed a new Vice-Chancellor, Professor Adam Tickell. As a result, the Institution is currently in a phase of discussion over the new University strategy, which will launch in summer 2017 and will set out the University of Sussex trajectory for 2025. In light of the changing institutional context, the majority of the actions set out in the new Concordat Implementation Plan are deliverable within a two-year period. This will ensure that whilst the Concordat Implementation Plan remains ambitious, the University has the flexibility to update the plan to align it appropriately to the new University strategy.

2. Review Process and Involvement of Researchers

2.1 Review Process

The process leading up to the submission for the four year review is outlined in table 1.

Action	Involvement	Timescale
Review progress and agree external evaluation approach	Research Staff Working Group (RSWG)	April 2016
Ideas generation for new Concordat implementation Plan	Research Staff Reps (meetings April and September 2016) PIs (Practice sharing event April 2016) RSO (Research of best practice July –	

2.2 Researcher involvement

In addition to the involvement of the Research Staff Reps (table 1); much of the new Concordat Implementation Plan and four-year strategy was directly informed by feedback and suggestions from the broader research community generated through a variety of interactions including, but not limited to:

- Researcher Forum (3 meetings per year)
- Researcher induction and welcome lunches (4 per year)
- Researcher development coffee mornings (3 per year)
- CROS 2015 responses - 41% response rate (CROS 2017 in progress at time of writing, 2017 response rate has already exceeded 2015 response rate)
- Research staff appraisal/review survey (October 2016 25% response rate)
- In-person feedback via workshops, group mentoring discussions, 1:1 coaching discussions (rolling)
- Feedback from research staff managers via PI practice sharing event, 1:1 meetings with Directors of Research and Knowledge Exchange, Athena SWAN committee
- Open invitation for feedback on the draft Concordat Implementation Plan (February 2017)

3. Highlights of Progress and Achievements by Concordat Principle

Full progress reporting since the original submission is provided in the [updated 2013-2015 and 2015-17 Concordat Implementation plans](#). Highlights of significant achievements since the original submission are detailed below.

3.1 Principle 1: Recruitment and Selection

In September 2014 the University introduced a review of researchers on fixed-term contracts (FTCs), which led to an initial cohort of 56 individuals (35 f, 21 m) being transferred from FTCs to indefinite contracts. The review of researcher FTCs has subsequently been embedded as an annual process; in 2015, 8 individuals were transferred and in 2016 50 individuals (25 f, 25 m) were transferred (the scope of the 2016 review expanded). The original HR Excellence submission identified researcher induction as a key priority area for improvement. Since 2013 significant progress was made through interventions including:

- o October 2014 introduction of a quarterly research staff induction and welcome lunch.
- o Welcome email for new starters within their first two weeks to provide information about key resources.
- o New [research staff webpages](#) including specific pages for [new research staff](#), [international researchers](#), [FAQs](#) and [practical information](#). The research staff webpages are the most frequently visited pages of the Research and Enterprise site with the research staff homepage receiving 3900 'unique views' in 2016.
- o Jan 2016 Introduction of 28pg [welcome guide for new research staff](#) sent out with appointment letters.
- o March 2016 practice sharing event for School induction coordinators, leading to a template for School induction webpage, rolled out to Schools in July 2016, to date 6 schools have implemented the page.

CROS 2015 results indicated a 36% increase in proportion of 2015 respondents citing institutional induction to be useful/very useful compared to 2013 and a 54% increase in positive responses for School level induction (52.4% positive, 10 percentage points above national aggregate)

To facilitate career development and objective setting at the start of research contracts, in February 2016 new [guidance and templates for start of contract discussions](#) were incorporated into welcome emails and webpages for new research staff. The appraisal/review survey (Oct 2016) indicated that discussions were valued by researchers, but that more work is required to raise take up (currently around 30% new staff participation).

3.2 Principle 2: Recognition and Value

CROS 2013 identified a significant concern about the uptake and perceived usefulness of appraisal amongst research staff. In June 2015, new tailored research staff appraisal documentation and guidance was introduced, along with an annual communications campaign to encourage researcher participation in appraisal. The October 2016 'research staff appraisal/review' survey (90 responses, 25% response rate) demonstrated that 76.7% of 2016 respondents had participated in appraisal (63% increase over CROS 2013 results, 28% increase over CROS 2015 results). The results also indicated that 80% of respondents perceived the appraisal process as 'useful/very useful' overall, representing a 119% increase over CROS 2013 results (36.5% rated useful/very useful) and a 40% increase over CROS 2015 results (57% rated useful/very useful).

To ensure research staff representation in decision making, in August 2015 the terms of reference for School Research Committees were updated to specify that membership should include at least one member of postdoctoral research staff (usually the Research Staff Rep). Another amendment in 2015 ensured that Research Fellows and Teaching Fellows are eligible to stand for and vote in Senate elections. In addition, research staff are members of the University's Athena SWAN committee, and other School level committees. To celebrate and raise the profile of Research Fellow research achievements and impact within the University, in November 2016, the RSO released a series of ['Spotlight Profiles' of Sussex Researchers](#) via multiple communications channels across the University. In the first month alone the Spotlight homepage received 350 unique views and to date the most viewed profile has received over 470 unique views. New profiles are added

on a rolling basis and in June 2017 a 'Spotlight Symposium' will form a key component of [Sussex Impact Day](#). Sussex Impact Day is in its 3rd year and culminates in [Impact Awards](#), one of which is specifically for ECRs. CROS 2015 results indicated that 50% of researchers did not feel equally treated with respect to promotion/progression. To enhance the clarity of the promotions process for research staff, research fellow promotions workshops were introduced in autumn 2015 and are embedded into the annual programme (2015, 12 RF participants, 2016, 27 RF participants) along with communications campaigns in the autumn term. In November 2016 a new [webpage for research fellow promotions](#) was created to better signpost researcher eligibility for promotion. In response to these interventions the 2016/17 promotions round had more than three times the number of promotion applications from research fellows (n=19) compared to 2015/16 (n=6). New '[Principal Investigators: Supporting your research staff](#)' pages, launched in April 2016

The Women in STEMM Mentoring circles scheme, introduced in October 2014, is now in its 3rd year. To date over 65 female postdoctoral researchers have participated in mentoring circle sessions. Scheme evaluations reveal that over 70% of participants agree that their participation in the scheme: provided valuable advice and guidance, helped to clarify issues, provided new perspectives, encouraged them to move ahead in their career, helped them to focus on their professional development.

3.6 Principle 7: Review and Implementation

The University participates in the biennial CROS survey and for CROS 2015 received a response rate of 41%, which was well above the national average response rate of 28%. CROS outcomes informed the Concordat Implementation plans. CROS outcomes and