

## 1. Institutional Context:

The University of Sussex (UoS) is globally renowned research-intensive university, known for its innovative and radical research, producing Nobel prizes and having an extensive impact on business, government, third sector, health and culture. With a very strong REF2021 submission, the university is on track to better the REF2014 results, which resulted in a rank position of 36<sup>th</sup> and over 75% of research activity at Sussex being categorised as world leading (4\*) or internationally excellent (3\*) in terms of originality, significance and rigour<sup>1</sup>. The University holds an Athena SWAN Institutional Bronze award alongside School level Silver and Bronze awards for all our STEMM Schools. Alongside the Researcher Development Concordat, the university is also signatory to the Research Integrity Concordat, the Knowledge and Exchange Concordat, the Concordat on Openness on Animal Research, the Concordat on Open Research Data, the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) and the Race Equality Charter. The University of Sussex is also a Stonewall Diversity Champion, signed up to the Workplace Equality Index.

Over the past four years, since the last external review, the University of Sussex has undergone several major changes to both structure and staff which have impacted the functions of the Research Staff Office (RSO) and delivery of the HREiR Action Plan 2019-21. The most notable of which has been two separate occasions during 2018-21 of staffing hiatus when Sussex was without a Research Staff Officer (RSO) for a substantial period. A permanent, full-time RSO was recruited in April 2021. Also, towards the end of 2018 (September) the Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research stepped down and was not succeeded until October 2020, leaving a two-year gap before Professor Keith Jones was able to champion and take on the mantle of the Researcher Development Concordat. However, the Director of Research and Enterprise (DR&E), with the support of the Researcher Development Coordinator (RDC) and members of the Research Staff Working Group (RSWG) ensured that the provisions remained in place and were accessible to the Research Staff Community. Both the RSWG and Research Staff Reps (RS Reps) group continued to meet regularly, enabling researchers to voice their issues and concerns in a fair, transparent and safe space. In December 2020 a new Director of Research Staff Development (DRSD) was appointed, Dr Erika Mancini from the School of Life Sciences.

The University and RSO managed the significant impacts of the pandemic, moving all university teaching and support functions online to ensure that services and provisions remained accessible to all staff and students. The RSO worked with exceptional speed and resilience, successfully transferring the entire Training and Development Programme online within a matter of weeks. This has been commended by researchers and senior staff alike, noting that this was an integral provision during a time of uncertainty, enabling researchers to connect with each other and the university during lockdown and isolation. Other functions were also swiftly moved online to minimise gaps in provision, such as the RSO Induction for new members of staff (with introductions from DRSD, HR, Research Ethics and Integrity, Research Development, the Library and Organisational Development), resources from workshops and the 1:1 Coaching, which proved to be very valuable. The RSO also maintained the RS Reps and RSWG meetings, which gave researchers another platform to engage with each other and influence policy changes to accommodate the new remote working policy, especially in terms of access to campus and labs in order to continue their research. The RSWG also identified the need to support ECRs during this difficult time, raising awareness of the support required for researchers with additional caring responsibilities and the effects on project funding and outcomes. The DRSD and the RSO, through discussions with the University, ensured that researchers were supported, by setting up an anonymous COVID Recovery Scheme application process to request help; the RSO managed the process and liaised with other areas of the university to respond and resolve the applicant's queries.

To ensure that the Research Staff agenda is represented at Institutional level and ECRs have their voice heard, the DRSD is a member of several key Committees, such as the University's Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee (which reports into Senate), the Academic Promotions criteria review working group and the DORA working group. Dr Mancini regularly attends School Management Meetings to ensure that Research Staff have representation, prioritising raising awareness of the Researcher Development Concordat to inform both academic and professional services staff. Dr Mancini is also facilitating a Research Impact Webinar, a large scale, university wide event, to be held in March 2022 that will promote the Researcher Development Concordat to Sussex staff, with industry experts as guest speakers. The intention is to develop this webinar into a series, which will be supported by the RSO and become a regular feature at the University.

### 1.1 Structure and Governance:

During 2019-20, the University employed 3,395 staff, the equivalent to 2,615 full time employees. This incorporated 1,610 staff in a Teaching or Teaching and Research role (equivalent to 1,070 FTE), <sup>2</sup>and in November 2021 the Research-only staff population totalled 393 (337.1 FTE)<sup>3</sup>, 14% of whom contributed to REF2021 in March 2021<sup>4</sup>.

The RSO is based within Research and Enterprise Services and was set up to support the career development of the university's Research Staff, it provides a research-specific training and development programme with associated coaching support, that links in with Vitae's Researcher Development Framework to ensure that Research Staff are supported and

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sussex.ac.uk/about/facts/facts-figures> [accessed: 01 Nov 2021 14:43]

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.sussex.ac.uk/about/facts/facts-figures> [accessed: 24 Nov 2021 12:48]

<sup>3</sup> Data Source: Internal HR Database-Cognos [accessed 24 Nov 2021]

<sup>4</sup> Data Source: Internal REF Reporting Database [accessed 22 Oct 2021]

developed throughout their whole career, building a vibrant, exciting and collaborative research culture at the University of Sussex. The RSO works with Schools to ensure that each new member of staff develops at induction a career development with PI which is then supported at the Schools and RSO level.

The RSO is managed by the Research Staff Officer (RSO) and supported by a dedicated Researcher Development Coordinator (RDC). The office reports directly to the PVCR for Research (Prof. Keith Jones), Director of Research and Enterprise (Susan Angulatta) and the Director of Research Staff Development (Dr Erika Mancini). The HREiR Action Plan and Researcher Development Concordat Obligations are governed by two Research Staff bodies; the Research Staff Representatives (RS Reps) and the Research Staff Working Group (RSWG) – recently restructured and renamed to the Researcher Development Concordat (RDC) Steering Committee. The RS Reps consists of Research Staff representatives from each of the schools and departments, with a rolling Chair each semester; this is an opportunity for Research Staff to develop their experience of working on committees and taking a more proactive role. The non-formal committee meets each semester and consists of a current total of 14 Research Staff Reps, the DRSD, the RSO and the RDC; the group discusses HREiR Action Plan progress and reports updates from each of the schools, in relation to Research Staff focused issues and wellbeing. Issues raised from this meeting are then escalated up to the RSWG, chaired by the DRSD with the RSO as Secretary. The RSWG is a formal committee and as such adheres to the Governance and Compliance Office, which supports functions across the university and the University Executive Group (UEG). The restructure comes into effect in January 2022, which improves the previous committee by bringing together more senior members of staff that are able to enact and effect change, as champions of the Researcher Development Concordat; such as including the PVCR for Research and/or Culture, Equality and Inclusion, The Director of Research and Enterprise, the Associate Director of HR, a Head of School, a Head of Professional Services, a Director of Research and Knowledge Exchange, ECR Leads, rolling Chair from RSWG and one other RS Rep, EDI advocates/ reps and members from the Professional Service Staff (i.e. Research Manager).

The RDC Steering Group is overseen by the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee (RaKE), which in turn reports to Senate; Senate are responsible for the academic standards and the direction and regulation of academic matters of the University. Therefore, all governance, monitoring and evaluation is overseen and approved by the Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research (RaKE) and the Vice Chancellor (Senate), demonstrating the University's full commitment and support of the Concordat's Principles and Obligations.

## **1.2 Research Staff Community – Engagement and Culture:**

The University of Sussex's commitment to their Research Staff ensures that they are embedded in the HREiR action plan monitoring and evaluation process; with progress, planning, implementation and review reported to the Research Staff community via the RS Reps and RDC Steering Group, the monthly newsletter, email campaigns and the News and Events Channel on the [RSO web pages](#). We welcome open and transparent communications and feedback from the Research Staff Community, with feedback opportunities after all events and annual surveys, which we cross check against the University Staff Survey, PRES and CROS/CEDARS where applicable.

For transparency and accountability, a Peer Review Group was set up to manage and participate in the 8-year Review process, evaluating the past two years and assessing the future action plan. The group consisted of members from all areas of the University, ensuring fairness and inclusivity, to develop a robust action plan which meets the needs of the Research Staff and clearly identifies the roles and obligations of each stakeholder group.

We are also fully committed to the *'vision of becoming Inclusive Sussex, where all members of our community have equal access to opportunities, experience the University as one that enables them to fully meet their potential, and supports them to make a full contribution to the University. Reducing inequalities and celebrating diversity allows us all to thrive'*<sup>5</sup>. The RSO is a member of the Athena SWAN Committee and is in the process of reinstating membership to the various [EDI Committees](#), such as the Inclusive Sussex Programme Board, School Equality and Diversity Committees and School Research Committees.

## **2. Progress and Review of 2019-21 Action Plan against the Concordat (2008):**

Whilst the Research Staff Office has been affected by the various impacts mentioned above, the office and University have managed to achieve some very positive results and outcomes. Due to the gaps in provision, changes in working practices and influences of the pandemic, some actions have been deemed not relevant and others reimaged and aligned to the new obligations of the 2019 Concordat.

### **2.1 Key Achievements for 2019-21 – 2008 Concordat Principles:**

#### **PRINCIPLE 1: Recognition of the importance of recruiting, selecting and retaining researchers with the highest potential to achieve excellence in research.**

There has been a clear focus on the need to ensure that new Research Staff receive a comprehensive induction to not only the University, but also to their role as a researcher in their school. To retain the best researchers, we have also focused on improving the promotion processes.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.sussex.ac.uk/equalities/> [accessed 10 Nov 2021 16:00]

- School-level induction: Engagement from the RSO with Head of Professional Services and DRaKES, to review School-level Induction process in order to identify workflows and share good practise towards a more cohesive induction process across all schools. As an outcome of the consultation, the plan is for the induction process to include early buddy-system and mentoring enrolment, with clear signposts to EDI groups and campus wellbeing facilities.
- RSO Inductions: New Research Staff are invited to a centrally run induction, which introduces them to areas of the university that support their role as a researcher, outside of their group or School. It is also an opportunity to meet and network with each other and key members of staff. The induction has been designed to address questions that are specific to their contracts and what career development opportunities are available to them.
- The DRSD and a Research Rep are now part of the Academic Promotions criteria review working group, to ensure appropriate recognition of researchers achieving excellence in research.
- DRSD attending Senior Management Team meetings in schools, to ensure Research Staff are represented and resolving issues around contracts, especially in relation to research vs. teaching commitments.

**PRINCIPLE 2: Researchers are recognised and valued by their employing organisation as an essential part of their organisation's human resources and a key component of their overall strategy to develop and deliver world-class research.**

Over the past year, during the pandemic, the RSO has been a forerunner in ensuring that the Research Staff Community has had access to each other and opportunities, to progress both their career and personal development.

- To increase the awareness of the Concordat principles and to ensure that researchers are recognised and valued as key component of School strategy, the DRSD has initiated a programme to attend in turn Senior Management Team meetings in Schools across the University.
- Training and Development Programme that supports career progression, with training on areas, such as funding proposals, grant writing, project management and publications. Also addressing mental health and wellbeing, with workshops that have been specific to researchers during challenging times. Regular communication to highlight events both internally and externally.

**PRINCIPLE 3: Researchers are equipped and supported to be adaptable and flexible in an increasingly diverse, mobile, global research environment.**

The RSO was able to transfer all events, webinars, and workshops online within a matter of weeks during the first lockdown and has since recognised the value in maintaining a blended approach, which ensures that Research Staff with conflicting commitments are still able to access events.

- The [1:1 Coaching Service](#) was also moved online and offered up to three 1-hour coaching appointments are made available for any member of staff on research-only contracts to discuss career and personal development.
- Recording sessions where appropriate (with consent) and collating recordings and materials to include in the RSO Repository and Canvas site.
- [RSO Training and Development](#) Programme designed to align with Researcher Development Framework and link in with [Researcher Development Programme](#) (Doctoral School) and University Organisational Development.
- Tailoring of some elements of this programme for researchers in particular disciplinary areas (for examples fellowship writing for the Life Sciences).
- RSO Induction process includes membership to Research Staff Community communication platform, that allows peers to meet informally online and share knowledge and experiences.

**PRINCIPLE 4: The importance of researchers' personal and career development, and lifelong learning, is clearly recognised and promoted at all stages of their career.**

Research Staff support is fully embedded into the University culture and ethos, having Research with Impact as one of four pillars in our Strategic Framework.

- Highlighting opportunities available via [Academic Development and Quality Enhancement](#), especially in relation to teaching, for example PGCertHE training which is available at the University. With signposting and clear information made available to both Researcher and PI/Managers regarding Continuing Professional Development opportunities.
- Development of Proforma to capture teaching practice and use as career objectives and goals, with certification at the end to use in portfolio/CV.
- RSO Induction offering information on University of Sussex career trajectory within research, and how to actively engage with career and personal development opportunities (also part of Principle 5).
- RSO web pages have dedicated PI/Manager page, with up-to-date resources, policy and information to enhance support for Researchers.

**PRINCIPLE 5: Individual researchers share the responsibility for and need to pro-actively engage in their own personal and career development, and lifelong learning.**

The Research Staff Reps and Research Staff Working Group have played an integral part in voicing the need and areas of concern for the Research Staff Community, which has been particularly critical over the past year and half during the pandemic.

- Successful applications to the [Researcher-Led Initiative Fund](#): Doctoral School run initiative, open to Doctoral Researchers and ECRs, to support short-term, well-defined initiatives focusing on EDI, mental health and wellbeing among researchers, public engagement or researcher training and development.
  - 2019-20 academic year (Spring call for projects) - 9 applicants, all awarded, total claimed £10,025

- 2020-21 academic year (Spring call for projects) - 7 applicants, all awarded, total claimed £8,277.80
- Applications and participation in the Cumberland Lodge, Life Beyond the PhD Conference in July 2021
  - 2 successful Research Staff applicants
- RSO web pages have been redesigned to enhance usability and signpost Research Staff to development opportunities, with access to 1:1, bespoke careers coaching and mentoring training for PI/Managers via Organisational Development.
  - One-to-One Coaching Webpage: 187 views Nov 2019 - Nov 2020 to 214 views Nov 2020 - Nov 2021
  - Funding and Fellowships Webpage: 1291 views Nov 2019 – Nov 2020 to 2965 views Nov 2020 – Nov 2021
- Active encouragement and support from senior management for Research Staff to take 5-10 CPD days.
- Inclusive email campaigns to highlight what the RSO are doing, as well as the University of Sussex. This will be built upon and developed into a podcast/vlog, to showcase researcher stories and experiences.

**PRINCIPLE 6: Diversity & equality must be promoted in all aspects of the recruitment & career management of researchers.**

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion are fundamental to the University of Sussex, with the new appointment of the PVC for Culture, Equality and Inclusion.

- UoS HR launch of Bullying and Harassment reporting tool –purpose and functionality feedback from RS Reps, to ensure privacy and safeguarding measures were met satisfactorily to include Research Staff requirements.
- The RSO has had a particular focus on international researchers and inductions, with a dedicated [International Researchers webpage](#) offering information, links and access to resources to help settle within the community. The RSO held International Researchers Lunch in conjunction with the Researcher Development Programme/Doctoral School (Research Staff and PGR).
- Continuation of Athena SWAN committee membership and sub working group for Carer’s Toolkit.

**PRINCIPLE 7: The sector and all stakeholders will undertake regular and collective review of their progress in strengthening the attractiveness and sustainability of research careers in the UK.**

With new commitment signed to the Researcher Development Concordat (2019), the University of Sussex is maintaining a more transparent and accountable governance process.

- Use of bi-annual Staff Surveys to monitor opinion and feedback of Research Staff.
- Feedback collected after all events and training and development sessions.
- Appraisals to include researcher specific sections, to ensure that Research Staff and PI/Managers are meeting targets/benchmarks, with a focus on their specific career development needs.
- Partially completed (and carried over to new action plan) report to review of sector contracts to make recommendations and roll into activities involved in Institution adopting the new Researcher Development Concordat.

### 3. HR Excellence in Research 2 Year Strategy (2021-23)

The Research with Impact pillar of [Sussex 2025](#), the University’s Strategic Framework, highlights the importance of developing our researchers and building a vibrant, exciting and collaborative research culture. Aims and activities were revised and updated in February 2021 and now targets specific activities to support clear expectations for all research-active staff and establish a development framework for researchers at all career stages.

The RSO has identified a number of synergies, which will strengthen links and widen the development opportunities Research Staff at Sussex. Connections with the Doctoral School and the Researcher Development Programme, Research Ethics and Integrity, Research Quality and Impact, and the Research Development Team will deliver training and best practice. The RSO also plan to link up with the other concordats on campus and the Research Culture Working Group, which will be a foundation of institutional growth in research, improved wellbeing, and cross-cutting disciplinary networking and research. The RSO aims to embed an ethos of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in all initiatives and events, with empowerment, health, and wellbeing at the core.

#### 3.1 Future plans and big ideas

- Continuing to develop of a university-wide programme of research training that moves with the times and is always up to date with requirements.
- Environment scan and stakeholder analysis, to clearly identify key stakeholders and manage relationships more effectively across the whole campus.
- Embracing new ways of working by incorporating a blended approach to the Training and Development programme, inductions, and event, with EDI, wellbeing, and impact at its core.
- Going Digital – to keep in line with the University Sustainability Strategy. Moving all literature online and accessible via resource packs and toolkits.
- RSO Calendar of events to focus on global events/celebrations – Culture, Equality and Inclusion with global-research
- RSO Events which link up with departments and institutions:
  - Research and Impact day event, to be held with the Research Quality and Impact team for Research Staff to network and showcase their research, whilst highlighting the importance of ‘Impact’ in research.
  - Follow up event, will include similar subjects but include other South East institutions, with UoS hosting (this would be likely to be in y2, depending on success of inaugural event).