The University of Surrey 8 Year Internal Evaluation Report for HREiR

Institutional Context

The University of Surrey is a research-intensive university committed to teaching and research excellence across a broad range of disciplinary and interdisciplinary specialty areas. The new 2019-2022 Research and Innovation Strategy highlights the University's commitment to supporting early stage researchers with an aspiration to make Surrey nationally and internationally best in class as a place to commence a research career for multiple entry points. For the purposes of our HR Excellence in Research initiative we recognise the diversity of our researcher population with approximately 400 research staff members spanning the sciences, social sciences, arts and humanities, with different contract types and titles. However, in keeping with the spirit of the Concordat, we ensure that early career researchers (ECRs) on fixed term contracts (FTCs) remain primary beneficiaries of this initiative.

1. Outline how the internal evaluation was undertaken

The internal evaluation to measure the progress against the 2018 action plan was overseen by the HR Excellence in Research Working Group (HREiR WG), which is strongly driven by our active ECR forum through committee representation, identification of actions, and feedback. The HREiR WG comprises representatives from key operational areas that support research staff including Doctoral College (DC), Human Resources, Equality and Diversity, Research and Innovation Services, and the three academic faculties. Research staff representation on HREiR WG includes the ECR forum chair and deputy chairs from each faculty, as well as a Surrey Research Staff Association (SuRSA) representative. HREiR WG reports to the Doctoral College Board, which oversees activities which support researchers and enhance the University's research community. The DC Board in turn reports into the University Research and Innovation Committee (URIC). There is research staff representation on both the DC Board and URIC, ensuring the research staff voice is heard at the highest levels of the University's Committee structure. Furthermore, our HREiR initiative is closely aligned with the University's other Quality Assurance initiatives, including Athena Swan, through committee representation and collaborative actions.

The input of research staff has been central to the development and evaluation of Surrey's HR Excellence action plans with considerable involvement from our ECR Forum and its members. This forum was created in 2012 in the early stages of our HREiR journey and has grown in number and in influence over these eight years. Currently, this ECR led forum consists of one to three ECR representatives from each department/school/research centre and provides input into researcher development activities, feedback on issues regarding research environment and culture and input on how employment policies and procedures impact the researcher community. Importantly they actively work with the HREiR WG to input into and feedback on the HREiR action plan. Representatives from the forum sit on both the HREiR WG and the Doctoral College Board. The Chair of the ECR forum sits on URIC.

We continue to benchmark the effectiveness of our research staff support via the CROS survey. Engagement with CROS has remained ~25% over the last 5 years. Survey data is complemented, not only by ECR forum discussion, but also by focus groups and topic specific surveys that allow us to better understand issues raised and then work in partnership with our research staff to address concerns. At this 8-year mark, with the introduction of the updated Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, we have started the process of completing a new gap analysis. In preparation for this HREiR action plan the HREiR WG conducted a reflective analysis of our provision against the institutional expectations outlined in the 2019 Concordat. To gain further research staff input into this process we held two focus groups and solicited feedback from the ECR forum. The 2020-2024 action plan has been created to align with both the 2008 and the 2019 Concordat with actions mapped to both. Therefore, ensuring we are working towards the principles of the 2019 Concordat, whilst still fulfilling the requirements of this submission under the 2008 Concordat.

2. Key achievements

Research staff as valued partners (principles 1 &2)

A key achievement of this four-year HREiR action plan has been the embedding of research staff and research staff-related issues within the University-level strategic planning and implementation, such that they

are now central to the University's Research and Innovation strategy. In 2016 the Doctoral College was launched and tasked with ownership for research staff-related issues, with emphasis on ECR support and development. The ECR forum became integrated into the Doctoral College reporting structure, ensuring ECRs had a voice on research staff related decisions. Over the last two years the ECR forum has doubled in size and now has representation from all areas. Importantly it not only reports into the Doctoral College Board, but also has representation on URIC through the ECR forum chair who now sits on this high-level committee. This means that we now have research staff representation from department level through to the highest research focused committee in the University.

We also have actively promoted opportunities for researchers to lead initiatives to enhance the research culture. Over the past four years, the Building Research Culture fund has enabled research staff and PGRs to bid for money to deliver events and initiatives to build research culture within and across departments. Over the past four years, 78% of the successful bids were research staff-led or co-led (~10-12 awards a year).

Support for professional transitions (principles 3 & 4)

To ensure our research staff have support to develop a wide range of skills for a variety of potential careers, the University has invested heavily in Professional Skills and Career Development for Researchers in the last two years. Our central provision has increased from 1 FTE career development staff to 2.5 FTE and our in-house professional skills development training team has risen from 3 FTE to 4.6 FTE. The last of these posts to be recruited was filled Dec 2019, therefore, we are now in a strong position to move forward with our new Professional and Careers Development plans to support our research staff community.

Over the last two years, our offering and research staff engagement has more than doubled and incorporated a wide variety of different elements beyond workshops. Specific offerings, beyond our standard transferable skills training, include the opportunity for all research staff 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 to raise awareness of the range of development opportunities the University of Surrey offers;
- be involved in mentoring as mentors themselves for PGRs or more junior colleagues, as well as to be mentored by a more senior member of research staff, an academic, and/or someone from a different sector. More details of our research staff mentoring opportunities can be found in the case study provided (See case study);
- take advantage of virtual support including online resources, virtual one-to-one sessions and online courses (such as 23 Things) providing inclusive support for research staff who may not have time or availability to attend sessions on-campus during normal working hours;
- receive academic writing support, including workshops, one-to-ones, and writing retreats (both face-to-face and virtual); and
- 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).

To further support researchers' successful transition to their next career stage, we launched the Doctoral College Alumni programme in Spring 2019. This programme enables ECR and PGR alumni to continue to receive professional development and careers support through the Doctoral College after their Surrey research contracts/degrees have ended through our Doctoral College ECR Alumni Programme. This programme is open to all PGR and ECR alumni to support the transition into their next position and to foster continued connection and engagement with our valued research staff and student alumni https://www.surrey.ac.uk/doctoral-college/alumni.

Major theme: Empowering and enabling research staff (principle 5 & 6)

Along with providing training and support, we have also provided a variety of opportunities for researchers to drive their own development and to initiate and lead events, particularly those that extend researcher networks across disciplines and sectors. Our Institute of Directors (IoD) student membership programme exemplifies this ethos. This programme is open to both PGRs and ECRs, with the Doctoral College

paying the annual student membership fee, available for early career staff members as well as doctoral students, to enable them to engage with IoD members events locally and nationally. A University of Surrey IoD student membership committee has been formed, consisting of both PGRs and ECRs who liaise with the researcher IoD membership and lead the delivery of a variety of bespoke events with our local and national IoD connections. These events provide opportunities for ECRs to build their networks across a range of sectors. For more details see the case study provided.

Although we have made great progress in increasing our provision and research staff engagement, we remain concerned that there are still significant groups within our research staff population that are not engaging with professional and career development activities. Through surveys and focus groups, we have gathered evidence that this may be due to research staff perception that they do not have the ability to take time away from their research to take part in development opportunities. We have used this evidence to present a case to URIC regarding the need to have 10 days per annum protected development time for research staff on fixed term contracts. URIC agreed in principle, and we are currently working with HR on the implementation of this action. This action will be carried forward in our new 2020-2024 action plan (Action 2020_10).

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. Furthermore, the ECR forum has started its own Diversity and Equality subgroup, which holds research staff led events throughout the year and is represented on the HREiR WG.

Embedding research staff Development Support within the Research Strategy (principle 7)

Released in mid 2019, the University of Surrey's Research and Innovation Strategy, embeds our commitment to research staff, to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers and to the HR Excellence in Research process within the University's strategy at the highest level.

*Centred on our Doctoral College, we will strongly support our researchers at all career stages, including embracing the evolving guidance provided by the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers. We are committed to providing researchers with a clear understanding of all doctoral career options and to ensuring their time at Surrey provides them with the experience and skills necessary to take advantage of the wide variety of opportunities available to them in the future. (*https://www.surrey.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2019-05/research-and-innovation_strategy-abridged-final.pdf*, p16).*

2020-2024 Action Plan: Transitioning from the 2008 to the 2019 Concordat

With the launch of the 2019 Concordat, we have taken the opportunity of this HREiR renewal to ensure that our HREiR strategy is aligned with this new Concordat and is meeting the needs of our research staff within this dynamically changing research context. As it has been eight years since our initial HREiR gap analysis, this new plan is informed by a preliminary gap analysis against the institution-level expectations within the 2019 Concordat, and well as progress and researcher feedback on the previous HREiR action plan. To ensure continuity from our previous plans and initiatives, we have linked this new action plan to the previous 2018-2020 plan and the seven Principles of the 2008 Concordat. However, we have also mapped each action against the 2019 Concordat and ensured new actions have been developed to reflect the new expectations, so that this plan is progressive and will support the full transition to the 2019 Concordat.

The University is committed to enhancing the experience of research staff and a target of a 25% increase in the recognition and value and professional and career development CROS scores has been set as a success measure of the Research and Innovation Strategy. This action plan has been designed to enable this target to be met.

Major Theme: Employment (2008 Concordat Principles 1, 2 and 3)

Through feedback from our ECR forum and CROS surveys we recognise the need to improve the appraisal and formal recognition processes, especially for researchers on fixed term contracts (FTC), as well as

ensure that all researchers have a comprehensive induction experience which not only informs them about policies and procedures relevant to them, but also welcomes them into a vibrant research culture. Therefore, we will conduct a full review of the appraisal and promotion processes, engaging with both the researchers themselves and their managers to create a plan of action to change the focus of appraisal from project driven to individual development driven, which is aligned with promotion and recognition policies. Importantly, we will ensure that these revised polices are transparent, highly visible and inclusive.

Complementing the above policy changes, we will overhaul the induction process for researchers. Changes will be informed by researcher engagement in a focus group specifically on induction. The ethos will be that induction is not an event or a day, but a process that supports transition and integration into a job role and into a research community. To do this we will seek to align University-level induction offerings with the local experience from the period of acceptance of a position to the end of probation at six months. By the four year review we aim to increase our CROS score for 'usefulness of appraisal' to 80% (currently 69%). Furthermore, we aim to have greater than 90% of new staff actively engaged in the induction programme by 2024, with a corresponding 15% increase in the CROS score for 'usefulness of induction'.

Major Theme: Professional and Career Development (2008 Concordat Principles 3, 4 and 5)

We are committed to embedding 10 days of protected development time into contracts of FTC researchers within the year. To support this, we will bring together all training and opportunities across the University in a more visible and accessible way. To further support this protected time initiative, it will be important to improve our recording and reporting of professional development opportunities, therefore, reviewing our technical infrastructure and finding a comprehensive solution to recording research staff engagement with professional development time is an important action. This will allow us to capture a baseline measure of overall professional development engagement by our research staff population.

We will also continue to develop our training and careers support provision. To meet the expectations for leadership and management training defined in Principle Three of the new Concordat, we will develop a comprehensive leadership and management training programme supporting all levels of staff, inclusive of research staff and their managers. This training programme will include learning objectives building a culture that supports the professional and career development of all research staff. We will also continue to build on our strong links with employers to create more opportunities for research staff to explore careers outside of academia. Furthermore, we will continue to build our Doctoral College Alumni programme, with a target increase of 10% each year, allowing ECRs access to professional and career development beyond the length of their contract.

Major Theme: Environment and Culture (2008 Concordat Principles 5 & 6)

We recognise the importance of creating a culture that inclusively supports the wellbeing and mental health of staff and students. Surrey, therefore, is undertaking a University-wide programme to up-skill staff in managerial or support positions on wellbeing and mental health, including at Executive Board level. The Doctoral College is leading this initiative for those involved in managing and supporting researchers with in house staff trained to deliver certified Mental Health First Aider training. This training will be offered to all Doctoral College staff, ECR champions and to managers of researchers. A suite of wellness training tools will also be developed to support research staff.

Major Theme: Implementation and Review (2008 Concordat Principle 7)

By our next HREiR review, we will have become signatories of the 2019 Concordat, and further aligned our HREiR process with the review and reporting requirements of this Concordat, continuing to reflect and work with our research staff community to strive for excellence. We recognise that we are the first HREiR cohort to undertake renewal of our award since the release of the 2019 Concordat, and although this does pose some challenges, we feel it is an opportunity for us to embrace the future of research staff support. We are keen share our experience of mapping our provision against both versions of the Concordat and to work with colleagues across the sector in the implementation of the 2019 Concordat.