

HR Excellence in Research Award

Nine-Year Internal Review — Summary Report

University of Suffolk · Published 18 June 2026

1. Research Context

Established in 2016 (having operated as University Campus Suffolk from 2007), the University of Suffolk is a student-centred civic institution committed to place-based and applied research. Based in Ipswich, we generate research that responds to the needs of Suffolk and the wider East of England across health and social care, digital innovation, creative industries, environmental sustainability, and social justice. We employ 253 academic staff (224.49 FTE), of whom 87 hold Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR), spanning both Research & KE contracts and Learning, Teaching and Research contracts. The institution has five Research Fellows, one Senior Research Fellow, and one KE Fellow, and Early Career Researchers (ECRs) make up 30% of the SRR community. We support 2,700 Ipswich-based students within a total headcount of 19,407 across all premises, and currently have 121 active postgraduate researchers (PGRs), with 41 completions recorded since 2017.

2. Governance, Stakeholder Involvement and Concordat Obligations

Strategic oversight rests with the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research & KE) and operational leadership with the Head of Research Culture & KE. Progress is monitored through the HR Excellence Working Group, the Research & KE Committee, and the Research & Enterprise Committee, where the Award is a standing agenda item that links the Concordat directly to the University’s Research Strategy. The Working Group’s diverse membership — three ECRs, three PGR representatives, research-only staff, and an EDI representative ensures that decision-making reflects lived experience across all researcher groups. The table below shows how the University supports each of the four Concordat stakeholder groups in meeting their obligations.

Stakeholder	Key Concordat obligations	How the University supports fulfilment
Researchers	Take ownership of career development; engage with appraisal and mentoring; act with integrity; support colleagues.	18-day development entitlement and 200-hour research allocation; mandatory research-ethics training; mentoring scheme (90% SRR coverage); ECR Network (100% participation); annual appraisal cycle.
Managers	Support researcher development; provide feedback; protect development time; promote inclusive environments.	Management Development Programme; PI and PGR-supervisor wellbeing training; annual School-level reporting on development-time take-up (from 2026–27).
Institution	Merit-based recruitment; fair employment; enable development; recognise diverse contributions; reduce fixed-term contracts.	Fixed-term contracts cut from 67% to 25% (2023–2025); Athena SWAN Bronze; revised promotion criteria embedding open research and KE; ECR Development Fund (£10,000 p.a.); annual EDI monitoring of progression data.
Funders	Fund development; require Concordat adherence from grant-holders; support good employment practice.	UKRI Concordat requirements embedded in grant management; Leverhulme ECR Fellowship successes; KTP funding; participation in UKRN OR4 and CoARA.

3. Internal Evaluation, Researcher Voice and Gap Analysis

The University conducted its first Culture, Employment and Development in Academic Research Survey (CEDARS) between 1 March and 13 June 2025; 43 of 71 eligible researchers responded. The survey period coincided with an institutional restructure, which shaped sentiment and may have reduced participation among affected staff; a follow-up engagement exercise is planned for 2026–27. CEDARS findings alongside the 2023 HR Excellence in Research Award review outcomes, annual appraisal data, and ECR Network feedback

informed a gap analysis identifying five priorities: (i) job insecurity for research-only staff; (ii) inconsistent workload recognition; (iii) limited visibility of diverse career pathways; (iv) variable awareness of Concordat entitlements; and (v) appraisal completion and quality below target. Strengths included 81% of researchers feeling included in their immediate research environment, alongside strong praise for managerial communication and collegial support.

CEDARS gap	Key finding	2026–2029 response
Job security	68% disagreed that their future felt secure, especially research-only staff.	Bespoke development pathways for research-only staff; redeployment register; fixed-term-contract support guide (Obligation 6).
Workload recognition	Only 35% felt research contributions were adequately reflected in workload allocation.	Consistent workload planning; annual School-level reporting; Concordat entitlements embedded in PDR (Obligations 2 & 7).
Recognition & reward	Promotion seen as insufficiently inclusive of public engagement, open research, and KE.	Dedicated awards for research-only staff and ECRs; promotion-readiness workshops; celebration events (Obligation 7).
Concordat awareness	Variable awareness of entitlements across the institution.	Annual Concordat workshops; enhanced induction; 'You Said, We Did' updates; Research Community Hub (Obligation 1).
Appraisal completion & quality	Appraisal compliance 85% target.	mid-year check-ins (Obligation 8).

4. Progress 2023–2026: Three Concordat Principles

Principle 1 — Environment and Culture. Athena SWAN Bronze, Disability Confident Employer status, Working Families participation, [the NCCPE Bronze Watermark \(2025\)](#), and [the Concordat to Support Research Integrity \(2025\)](#) together form a mutually reinforcing ecology of research-culture improvement, each explicitly aligned to Concordat obligations and embedding public engagement within promotion criteria and workload allocation. Membership of UKRN OR4 (including [University of Suffolk as a case study](#)) and [CoARA](#) connects our open-research commitments to recognition and reward. The Research and KE Hub provides a single access point for all policies, training, and Concordat resources, while the Unlocked online research seminar series brings PGRs, ECRs, and experienced researchers together. Career-progression data is reviewed annually by the EDI Committee, and governance connects the Concordat directly to our Research Strategy and REF.

Principle 2 — Employment. Fixed-term contracts for research-only staff fell from 67% to 25% between 2023 and 2025. Academic promotion criteria were revised in 2025 through two institution-wide workshops engaging 71 academic colleagues, embedding open research, KE, and public engagement as valued, promotable activities. All new research staff receive a full institutional induction and a one-to-one meeting with the Head of Research Culture & KE. Research-integrity training reached a 93% completion rate on Epigeum before transitioning to bespoke University of Suffolk–UKRIO online provision; [the advanced ethics online course co-developed with UKRIO](#) was released sector-wide in December 2025.

Principle 3 — Professional and Career Development. Researchers are entitled to 18 days of professional development per year plus 200 hours of research time. [Development Programme](#) attendance rose from 50% to 60%, exceeding the 55% interim milestone. Between [August 2024 and April 2026](#) the University delivered 103 workshops (830+ attendees), specialist KE training (33 participants), public-engagement workshops (47 participants), and three full-day events (290 attendees). The Research Leadership Development Programme engaged 43 participants across all career stages (2023–26), complemented by Aurora, Emerging Research Leaders, Resilient Leaders, and Executive Leadership routes. The ECR Development Fund was established at £10,000 per annum (in 2025), ECR Network engagement reached 100%, and mentoring now covers 90% of SRR staff with universal provision for new starters. A REF PCE pilot was delivered across three Units of Assessment.

5. Looking Forward: Action Plan 2026–2029

The accompanying Looking Forward Action Plan is set out in the Vitae HREiR Award template, in which success measures and expected impact are recorded in separate columns, with named ownership, deadlines, and carried-over status for every obligation.

Obligation selection and justification. The plan addresses 11 obligations across all three Concordat principles — Environment & Culture (Obligations 1–5), Employment (Obligations 6–7), and Professional & Career Development (Obligations 8–11). This exceeds the Vitae minimum of six obligations (at least one per pillar) and was chosen to give full coverage to the five gaps above and to the University’s civic and regional strategy. All 11 build on 2023–26 commitments: five (Obligations 3 Bullying & Harassment, 4 EDI, 5 Research Integrity, 6 Job Security, and 8 Appraisal) have been separated into standalone obligations this cycle in response to the compliance review of the Looking Back plan, where they were previously embedded within broader obligations; the remaining six are retained and substantively enhanced rather than repeated. Research-only staff are the priority audience throughout and are named explicitly in the Expected Impact column of every obligation.

Principle	Priority actions 2026–2029	Success indicators by 2029
1. Environment & Culture (Obligations 1–5)	Improved Concordat communications strategy: annual updates, enhanced induction, PGR-supervisor training; Research Community Hub; annual Concordat-awareness workshops; CEDARS 2.0 in Spring 2027; annual ‘You Said, We Did’ updates; bi-annual School/Institute culture conversations; annual bystander and dignity-at-work training plus an anonymous reporting mechanism by Sep 2027; ≥95% mandatory EDI training and annual equality impact assessments; UKRIO research-integrity renewal and advanced ethics embedded in the development programme.	CEDARS 2027 Concordat awareness ≥65% (≥20% improvement on the 2026 baseline); culture conversations held bi-annually in all units; ‘You Said, We Did’ published annually; CEDARS 2.0 response rate ≥70% (2025 baseline 61%); ≥95% UKRIO integrity certification maintained; zero misconduct and zero
2. Employment (Obligations 6–7)	Job security: fixed-term-contract support guide; redeployment register; 100% of research-only staff receive a career-development conversation at every renewal; fixed-term research-only contracts maintained at ≤10%. Wellbeing: PI and PGR-supervisor wellbeing training from Nov 2026; central researcher-wellbeing resource; consistent research workload planning prioritising research-only staff. Recognition: dedicated awards for research-only staff and ECRs by Dec 2026; promotion-readiness workshops; Concordat expectations embedded in appraisal and PDR.	Fixed-term research-only contracts ≤10% by 2027, maintained to 2029 (2025 achieved 25%); dedicated research-only award launched by Dec 2026;
3. Professional & Career Development (Obligations 8–11)	Appraisal compliance raised to ≥90% (2027) and ≥95% (2028) with quality audits and mid-year check-ins for research-only staff; managers trained to protect development time, with annual School-level reporting on 18-day-entitlement take-up disaggregated by career stage and protected characteristic; bespoke development pathway for research-only staff from Jan 2027; reverse-mentoring programme and flexible leadership modules; cross-sector career mapping and a secondment/opportunities tracker on the Research and KE Hub.	Appraisal compliance ≥95% by 2028; 18-day development take-up ≥70% by 2028 and ≥80% by 2029 (baseline ~35%); School-level entitlement reporting from 2026–27; reverse mentoring ≥10 pairs by 2028;

Strategic Alignment and EDI

The University’s external frameworks Athena SWAN Bronze, the NCCPE Bronze Watermark, the Concordat to Support Research Integrity, UKRN OR4, and CoARA operate in deliberate, mutually reinforcing alignment with the three Concordat Principles. Career-progression data is reviewed annually by the EDI Committee

against protected characteristics, and the promotion-criteria review was explicitly participatory, consulting ECRs and research-only staff throughout. These governance arrangements connect the Concordat directly to the Research Strategy and the REF cycle, ensuring researcher development is embedded in wider institutional strategy rather than managed in isolation.

Institutional Commitment, Approval and Publication

The University of Suffolk is fully committed to the [Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers](#) and to the continuous improvement of the environment, employment conditions, and professional development available to all researchers, with particular priority given to research-only staff, ECRs, and PGRs. The defining achievement of 2023–2026 the structural reduction of fixed-term research-only contracts from 67% to 25% in 2025 demonstrates that institutional commitment translates into concrete employment security. CEDARS has provided a candid picture of researcher experience and directly shapes every priority in the 2026–2029 plan, whose actions address each identified gap through SMART measures, named leads, and clear timelines. Progress will be reported annually to the Research & KE Committee and the Research & Enterprise Committee, and evidenced at the 2029 Vitae twelve-year review.

Approval and sign-off: This Summary Report, together with the accompanying Looking Back (2023–2026) and Looking Forward (2026–2029) action plans, received final approval and sign-off on 16 June 2026. All documents are published on the [University of Suffolk HR Excellence in Research Award webpage](#).