

Annual Report for the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers

Name of Institution	The University of Suffolk
Reporting period	2024-2025
Date approved by governing body	Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee 5 November 2025 Research and Enterprise Committee 02 December 2025
Date published online	18 December 2025
Web address of annual report	Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers HR Excellence in Research Award
Web address of institutional Researcher Development Concordat webpage	www.uos.ac.uk
Contact for questions/concerns on researcher career development	Andreea Tocca, Head of Research Culture and Knowledge Exchange research@uos.ac.uk
Date statement sent to Researcher Development Concordat secretariat	18 December 2025

Statement on how the organization creates, maintains, and embeds a research culture that upholds a positive and inclusive environment for researchers at all stages of their careers (*max 500 words*)

HR Excellence in Research Award

The University of Suffolk is proud to hold the [European's HR Excellence Research badge](#) recognizing our commitment to implementing the [UK Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers](#) (the Researcher Development Concordat'). The University was first awarded the HR Excellence in Research badge in 2017 and has successfully retained it through multiple review cycles:

- 2017: Initial award
- 2019: First renewal following biennial review
- 2023: Successful six-year review, with the award retained for a further three years
- 2029: Nine-year comprehensive self-assessment due

To evidence our progress, we have published [action plans and review reports](#) at each stage (2017, 2019, 2023).

The University is committed to fostering a positive, inclusive research culture rooted in diversity, equity, and mutual respect across all research and knowledge exchange activities. We aim to attract and retain talented researchers by removing barriers, eliminating discrimination, and enabling all researchers to reach their full potential.

Our support includes:

- Researcher and knowledge exchange development training programme ([external facing brochure](#) and [internal brochure](#)).
- Research mentoring scheme for all staff with significant responsibility for research, alongside the newly established PGR buddy scheme.
- Resources and support for external collaboration
- Opportunities for researchers to connect, learn, and contribute to our vibrant research community as part of our ECR Network, Working Groups and Task and Finish Groups (e.g. HR Excellence in Research Award, CoARA Action Plan, Public Engagement Watermark, Civic University, PRES, just to give a few examples).

Our [Transforming Lives: Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy 2023-2030](#) prioritizes People, Culture, and Impact, underpinned by our commitments to the national Concordats for:

- Researcher Development
- Research Integrity
- Public Engagement
- Open Research Data

Implementation of the Concordat Action Plan is championed by the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research and Knowledge Exchange, with operational support from the Head of Research Culture and Knowledge Exchange, ensuring strategic oversight and accountability for delivering our commitments to our growing research community.

Provide a short summary of the institution's objectives and implementation plans for delivering each of the three pillars of the Concordat (environment and culture, employment, and professional development of researchers) for your key stakeholder groups together with your measures for evaluating progress and success (max 600 words)

Environment and Culture

We have embedded comprehensive measures to foster a supportive, inclusive research environment. All staff are regularly informed about Concordat principles, ensuring shared understanding of our commitments. We prioritize equity, transparency, and inclusivity in institutional policies, while emphasizing researcher wellbeing through balanced workload management, supportive practices, and accessible mental health resources. Our Research and Knowledge Exchange development programme, alongside Professional and Organisational Development offerings, equips managers and researchers with essential skills to promote equality, diversity, inclusion, and wellbeing. Enhanced research integrity training, UKRIO institutional membership, and revised Ethics Committee structures including the launch of the University of Research Ethics Online system ensure adherence to the highest ethical standards. Through regular environmental assessment and structured researcher feedback, we maintain our commitment to continuous improvement.

Employment and Career Development

The University provides robust employment frameworks supporting researcher career progression. All new research staff receive institutional induction and dedicated one-to-one sessions with the Head of Research Culture and Knowledge Exchange. Promotion criteria are integrated into our performance management system, with appropriate adjustments for individual circumstances including parental leave and part-time working. Statistical data on career progression is reviewed annually by our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee, enabling evidence-based improvement.

Researchers receive 18 days annually for professional development, complemented by extensive networking events, workshops, and our research mentoring programme, which achieved 80% participation across schools and research institutes.

Developments (2024-2025)

Research Assessment Reform: In October 2024, we became a [CoARA \(Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment\)](#) signatory, demonstrating commitment to fairer, more transparent research assessment practices. We participated as a case study institution in the [OR4 \(Open and Responsible Researcher Reward and Recognition\) project](#), working with 43 UK institutions to reform how open research is recognized in recruitment, promotion, and appraisal practices.

REF Preparation: The November 2024 "Developing Our Research Culture" conference brought together over 90 participants, featuring analysis of REF 2021 and forward-thinking strategies. We participated in the People, Culture, and Environment (PCE) Pilot across three Units of Assessment, providing valuable feedback to inform the next REF cycle.

Research Integrity: Following successful implementation of Epigeum training (93% completion rate), we transitioned to UKRIO online training in 2024, with 78 staff members now certified. We are collaborating with UKRIO to co-develop an advanced ethics training course launching in December 2025, available sector wide.

Early Career Researcher Support: We supported Early Career Researchers (37% of staff with Significant Research Responsibility), who actively contribute to institutional governance including Ethics Committee, HR Excellence Working Group, and strategic initiatives. A £10,000 ECR Development Fund was introduced, enabling access to professional development and conference participation.

Development Programme Impact: Between August 2024 and July 2025, the programme delivered 51 workshops (330 attendees), specialized Knowledge Exchange training (33 participants), public engagement workshops (47 participants), and three full-day events (290 attendees).

Our comprehensive approach to implementing the Concordat spanning culture, employment practices, and strategic development demonstrates institutional commitment that extends far beyond compliance. By aligning HR Excellence with frameworks including Athena SWAN, CoARA, and our Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy, we have created a cohesive, integrated approach to researcher support and development. The tangible outcomes from high training completion rates and mentoring participation to active ECR engagement and successful REF preparation evidence meaningful progress toward our goal of fostering an inclusive, thriving research community. As we look toward our HR Excellence in Research Award nine-year review in 2029, we will continue to prioritize researcher voices, embrace sector-leading innovations in research assessment, and ensure that career development support evolves to meet the changing needs of our research community.

Summary of actions taken, and evaluation of progress made, in the current reporting period to implement your plan to support the three pillars in respect of each of your key stakeholder groups

The University of Suffolk is committed to fostering a research environment that is inclusive, supportive, and aligned with the highest standards of integrity. This commitment is reflected in a series of policies, practices, and initiatives designed to ensure that staff and postgraduate researchers (PGRs) are well supported, that institutional values are embedded across the employee /student lifecycle, and that professional development opportunities are accessible to all. Together, these measures strengthen the University's research culture and reinforce its dedication to transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement.

Supporting the well-being of research staff is a cornerstone of the University's approach. All staff engaged in research receive comprehensive information about available well-being resources and are actively encouraged to raise concerns at an early stage. This proactive stance helps to prevent issues from escalating and ensures that individuals feel supported throughout their professional journey. Feedback mechanisms such as regular appraisals, one-to-one meetings, and team discussions provide structured opportunities for staff to share experiences and raise concerns. In addition, policies and practices are made readily accessible through multiple channels, including the intranet, research hub pages, personalized research inductions, newsletters, staff meetings, and dedicated events for Early Career Researchers (ECRs) and PGRs. Regular evaluations are conducted to ensure that these resources remain visible, accessible, and responsive to evolving needs.

The University systematically monitors alignment with its core values and behaviours across the employee lifecycle. This monitoring is embedded in recruitment materials, staff surveys, appraisals, probation reviews, exit interviews, one-to-one meetings, team discussions. By adopting such a comprehensive approach, the University gains valuable insights into staff engagement and institutional culture. These insights inform decision-making and help ensure that the University's values are not only articulated but actively lived by staff and students.

To support long-term planning and professional visibility, all staff with Significant Research Responsibility (SRR) are required to maintain up-to-date three-year research plans. These plans provide a clear framework for research activity and ensure alignment with institutional priorities. In addition, staff are encouraged to maintain current ORCID profiles, which enhance professional visibility and facilitate engagement with the wider research community. This dual emphasis on planning and visibility ensures that researchers are well positioned to contribute to the University's academic mission and to engage meaningfully with external partners.

The University recognizes the importance of effective leadership in cultivating a positive research culture. Managers are therefore required to complete targeted training designed to enhance leadership effectiveness and foster a supportive professional development culture. This investment in leadership development ensures that managers are equipped to guide their teams, support individual growth, and contribute to a collaborative and inclusive research environment.

Researchers play a central role in shaping the University's research agenda and governance. To recognize this contribution, researchers hold designated positions on key university research committees and working groups. These roles highlight the importance of research contributions as integral to academic citizenship, leadership, and governance. By embedding researcher voice within decision making structures, the University ensures that policies and practices are informed by those directly engaged in research activity.

The University is committed to supporting work-life balance and recognizes the diverse needs of its staff.

Over the past three years, staff surveys have been used to assess researchers' perceptions of work-life balance, providing valuable insights into areas of strength and opportunities for improvement. Flexible working arrangements are regularly reviewed to ensure that they provide inclusive support across diverse backgrounds and needs. This commitment to flexibility underscores the University's dedication to creating a supportive and adaptable working environment.

The University of Suffolk demonstrates its commitment to an inclusive research culture through fair and transparent recruitment practices, robust professional development opportunities, active support for work-life balance, and encouragement of collaborative research. Regular evaluation and feedback mechanisms are embedded to drive continuous improvement and ensure that the research environment remains responsive to the needs of staff and students alike.

The University of Suffolk continues to strengthen its research culture through a range of initiatives designed to support staff and postgraduate researchers. Structured mentorship programs pair Early Career Researchers (ECRs) with experienced colleagues, while cross-disciplinary research cafés and networking sessions encourage collaboration and knowledge exchange. In addition, buddy systems for PGRs provide peer support and foster a sense of community. Training and skills development opportunities are offered through targeted workshops, including funding application support, public engagement training, research impact training, media training for effective communication, and project management training tailored for research leaders. To ensure continuous improvement, the University has embedded robust feedback and evaluation mechanisms, including anonymous channels for staff to raise concerns about research culture, the publication of action plans in response to survey findings, and benchmarking against sector standards such as the Concordat self-assessment. Together, these measures demonstrate the University's commitment to building a supportive, transparent, and forward-looking research environment.

Comment on any lessons learned from the activities undertaken over this period and any modifications you propose to make to your action plan and measures of success as a result. 500 words

The University of Suffolk conducted the [Careers, Employment, and Development in Academic Research Survey \(CEDARS\)](#) in May-June 2025, providing research staff with a confidential platform to share feedback on working conditions, career aspirations, and development opportunities.

We will adopt a "You Said, We Did" communication approach this academic year that exemplifies transparent and accountable engagement with our research community. This model, successfully implemented by other institutions, ensures that feedback loops are clearly closed and that researchers can directly observe how their input shapes institutional change.

A dedicated hub page will track implementation progress, providing real-time updates on actions taken, milestones achieved, and ongoing initiatives. This visible accountability mechanism demonstrates our genuine commitment to acting on researcher feedback rather than treating surveys as token exercises. To maximize the impact of CEDARS findings, we will integrate survey results with existing institutional commitments, creating a cohesive ecosystem of researcher support rather than siloed initiatives. The timing is particularly opportune, as our HR Excellence in Research Award nine-year self-assessment is due for submission in June 2026.

This presents a valuable opportunity to align CEDARS insights with our Concordat commitments, ensuring that both exercises inform and strengthen each other. By mapping CEDARS findings against our HR Excellence action plan, we can identify synergies, address gaps, and demonstrate comprehensive institutional responsiveness to researcher needs.

Similarly, integration with our Athena SWAN initiatives will ensure that equality, diversity, and inclusion considerations, addressing potential disparities in experience across different demographic groups and career stages. This integrated approach prevents consultation fatigue, demonstrates joined-up thinking, and ensures that limited resources are deployed strategically to maximum effect.

Beyond one-time survey implementation, we are establishing complementary mechanisms for continuous improvement and sustained researcher engagement. Regular researcher forums will provide ongoing opportunities for dialogue, allowing emerging issues to be addressed promptly rather than waiting for the next survey cycle. These forums will serve dual purposes: gathering real-time feedback on implementation progress and creating spaces for peer support and community building within our research staff population. We commit to repeating CEDARS every two to three years, building longitudinal data that tracks progress, identifies trends, and demonstrates sustained commitment to researcher experience. This cyclical approach enables us to measure the effectiveness of interventions, celebrate improvements, and maintain focus on areas requiring continued attention.

By transforming CEDARS from a compliance exercise into a driver of cultural change, the University of Suffolk positions itself among sector leaders in supporting and valuing its research community. This commitment ensures that researcher voices meaningfully shape institutional priorities and resource allocation, creating an environment where research staff feel heard, valued, and empowered. Through transparent communication, integrated action planning, continuous engagement, and longitudinal commitment, we are building a research culture that recognizes our staff as our greatest asset and their development as fundamental to institutional excellence and research success.

Outline your key objectives in delivering your plan in the coming reporting period (max 500 words)

CEDARS Survey Analysis and Action Planning -Integration with HR Excellence in Research Award Self-Assessment: The timing of our CEDARS survey strategically aligns with preparation for our nineyear HR Excellence in Research Award self-assessment, due for submission in June 2026. We will systematically map CEDARS findings against our existing Concordat action plan, identifying areas where survey evidence strengthens our case, reveals gaps requiring attention, or highlights successful initiatives worth celebrating. This integration ensures coherence between our CEDARS response and our broader commitment to the Concordat principles. The Working group preparing the self-assessment will incorporate CEDARS data as evidence, demonstrating our commitment to evidence-based policy development and our responsiveness to researcher voice in shaping institutional priorities and resource allocation.

Launch "You Said, We Did" Communication Framework: Transparency and accountability are central to building trust with our research community. We will develop and launch a dedicated CEDARS/HR Excellence in Research hub page on our research intranet, providing accessible information about survey findings, institutional responses, and implementation progress.

Establish Continuous Engagement Mechanisms

A regular Researcher Forum will be launched, meeting termly to discuss implementation progress, emerging issues, and priorities for future development. This forum will include representatives from different career stages, disciplines, and contract types, ensuring diverse voices inform institutional decision-making.

Please provide a brief statement describing your institution's approval process of this report prior to sign off by the governing body (max 200 words)

The University of Suffolk has implemented a robust reporting structure and clear accountability mechanisms to effectively oversee the implementation of the Concordat. This structure ensures that all activities and progress related to the Concordat are aligned with institutional goals and support continuous improvement. Progress on the Concordat is closely integrated with the University's work toward the HR Excellence in Research Award, particularly the comprehensive six-year self-assessment process and the implementation of the Looking Forward Action Plan 2023-2026. The Concordat implementation plan is a standing agenda item for the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee, which actively monitors progress and identifies areas for enhancement. This committee reports directly to the Research and Enterprise Committee, ensuring that Concordat-related developments receive focused attention and are aligned with the university's broader research objectives. Finally, the Research and Enterprise Committee reports to the Senate, fostering high-level oversight and institutional commitment to advancing research standards and support for researchers at the University of Suffolk.