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

Universities and Research Institutes

Name of Institution	University of Southampton
Reporting period	November 2024-25
Date approved by governing body	21st October 2025
Date published online	27th November 2025
Web address of annual report	
Web address of institutional Researcher Development Concordat webpage	index | Working as a Researcher | University of Southampton
Contact for questions/concerns on researcher career development	diverse@soton.ac.uk
Date statement sent to Researcher Development Concordat secretariat (refer to Researcher Development Concordat Reporting Guidance)	November 2020 Uni_of_Soton-NewConcordatCommitmentLetterNov2020.pdf

Statement on how the organisation 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)*

The University of Southampton (UoS) is a leading research-intensive institution and a founding member of the Russell Group, employing over 7,100 staff and educating 24,100 students.

Launched in 2022, our UoS strategy introduced our Triple Helix approach to delivering excellence in Education, Research, and Knowledge Exchange and Enterprise (KEE), with people at the heart. Co-created with the whole UoS community in 2021, our strategy is underpinned by our community's values and emphasises a whole-institution, collaborative approach. This strategy is enabled by the implementation of several Strategic Major Projects and strategic plans including Reducing Casualisation, Workload Principles, and Career Pathways. Our Research strategic plan has an explicit objective to *"attract, support, and retain the next generation of research leaders from across the world, from different backgrounds and experiences"*.

Enhancing research culture is a core component of our strategy. Institutional leads for research culture (our Associate Vice-Presidents for Interdisciplinary Research) chair a cross-institutional Research Culture Group and the Researcher Development Concordat (RDC) Advisory Group (CAG), ensuring clear communication and cross-fertilisation between the groups. The Research Culture Group has over 30 members driving institutional and sector-wide culture change initiatives. The CAG brings together key members from across UoS including: Faculty RDC Champions, Doctoral College, the Centre for Higher Education Practice (CHEP), Careers, Employability and Student Enterprise, Health & Safety, Research & Innovation Services, Human Resources, and the Technician Commitment (TC) to share priorities and good practice.

We address structural inequalities in research for staff and students through strategic work on the RDC, TC, and other equality charters. We hold Disability Confident Leader (DCL) accreditation, successfully renewed our institutional Athena Swan (AS) Silver award (2022), received our first Race Equality Charter (REC) Bronze award (2022), and were awarded the Student Minds University Mental Health Charter (2024). We remain committed to advancing meaningful

progress through the implementation of upcoming, ambitious institutional and departmental action plans.

The five UoS Faculties are integral to delivering our strategic plans. EDI leadership has expanded, with all faculties appointing Associate Deans or EDI Leads, supported by school-level roles, such that EDI is embedded in senior decision-making. Since 2023, each Faculty also has an appointed RDC Champion who works within and across Faculties to promote awareness of the RDC and ensure our researchers' voices are actively included and heard. RDC Champions are actively involved in Faculty EDI Committees and maintain regular engagement with Associate Deans for EDI and EDI Leads, fostering stronger connections between research development and inclusion efforts.

Led by the co-Chair of the CAG, the RDC Faculty Champions Network has transformed our research community's engagement with the RDC, consistently leading highly impactful activities that contribute to Faculty and University strategic plans, projects and initiatives. Working together supportively and collegially to create an environment where researchers can thrive; share excellent practices and influence policies. Our staff survey (Pulse) shows improved researcher engagement scores, rising by an average of 8.15% across key indicators, particularly in perceptions of support and inclusion.

Provide a short summary of the institution's strategic 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)*

Our overarching objective for the reporting period was to maintain our focus on researcher development, while developing a new RDC action plan to be in place by November 2025.

Environment and culture

We fostered a positive and inclusive research environment by:

- **Implementing a Theory of Change framework to inform RDC action planning**, including early scoping of activities and intended outcomes in collaboration with key stakeholders.

- **Prioritising continuous improvement** by integrating evaluation strategies throughout the planned activities.
- **Strengthening the RDC Faculty Champion network**, which facilitated the flow of information through regular meetings and helped us to identify our different researcher groups at UoS, to ensure accurate targeting of messaging and activities.
- **Aligning plans and activities with the Technician Commitment** to share good practice and foster collaboration. Initial conversations with the Technician Commitment team, which opened valuable avenues for addressing shared priorities, aligned with our broader research culture and strategic initiatives. Both action plans are now embedded in the Research Strategic Plan.
- **Focus on engagement with key stakeholders**
  - Identifying and targeting, as appropriate, attendance of RDC leads at School and/or Faculty level activities to ensure that awareness of the RDC continues to be promoted, and feedback from a range of stakeholders can be easily shared with key RDC personnel.
  - Ensuring that our network of RDC Faculty Champions is effective in facilitating the flow of information between key RDC stakeholders.

Employment

We have continued to strengthen our practices that recognise and value the contributions of researchers through:

- **Reviewing lessons learned from our Line Manager Development Programme** to inform plans for more flexible, appropriate, accessible and timely management development.
- **Utilising data from appraisals and promotion applications** to understand who our researchers are (according to formal job role) and how their workload is split across contribution areas (i.e., research, education, knowledge exchange and engagement, leadership and management).
- **Ensuring researcher engagement** so their needs are considered and reviewed within the Reducing Casualisation major strategic project.
- **Encouraging and supporting researchers to apply for promotion** and monitoring the data on this following the publication of our updated Career Pathways (January 2025).
- **Promoting awareness of careers routes** within and beyond academia for researchers.

- **Aligning with the Technician Commitment**, ensuring actions regarding 10 days CPD and line manager development are considered across all relevant staff groups.

Professional Development of Researchers

We have enabled researchers to develop their full potential through:

- **Implementation of 10 days CPD**, through active recruitment, piloting, and evaluating the use of Prosper within the UoS, including auditing uptake of CPD and strategic planning for embedding and maintaining use.
- **Clarifying in our communications and Faculty-level policies** to whom the 10 days CPD entitlement applies and incorporated this into the Level 4 Research Fellow job description template.
- **Mapping the pipeline of opportunities** to identify how and where the 10 days CPD entitlement can be promoted and embedding targeted processes to support this awareness.
- **Promoting awareness of what is considered CPD** (i.e., wider than conferences and courses) and reminding researchers of their responsibilities to curate and document their engagement and uptake of CPD opportunities.

Overall success indicators:

Having already completed just over three quarters of our action plan at the start of this cycle, we have now successfully delivered 97% of the total actions since 2020. Overall, we have:

- A new, stakeholder-informed RDC action plan to be published on our external website by November 2025.
- Increased awareness of the 10 days CPD entitlement and broader RDC initiatives across all Faculties.
- Improved understanding of researcher roles through analysis of appraisal and promotion data across research, teaching, engagement, and leadership areas.
- Deepened researcher engagement through the consolidation of the RDC Faculty Champions Network.

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 [Institution; Academic Managers of Researchers (Deans, Heads of Schools/Departments/PIs); Researchers]	
Environment and Culture *(max 600 words)*	**Institution** In 2023-24 we identified our three main priorities which continue to shape our activities through 2024-25: 1. Researcher engagement; 2. 10 days CPD; and 3. Appraisal and promotion. Additionally, embedding systems and structures for implementing and monitoring equity and inclusion across all staff groups - including researchers - has been the focus of several strategic projects and activities this year. Specifically, we have: • **Gathered feedback from researchers to inform improvements in our research environment and ensure awareness of the RDC** via a staff pulse survey (November 2024), CEDARS (May 2025), and the REF People Culture and Environment pilot (March 2025). • **Ensured that institutional policies and practices relevant to researchers are inclusive, equitable and transparent, and well-communicated** through the launch of a new Inclusion and Respectful Behaviour Policy in November 2024, which promotes a safe, inclusive environment for all. Managers were encouraged to visit the new SharePoint site that includes guidance on key areas of the policy. The policy was co-created with significant stakeholder involvement. • **Promoted good mental health and wellbeing via** an improved workplace stress assessment process. Monthly training workshops are available for all staff, line managers, and student-facing roles, covering workplace stress awareness, conversations, and coping strategies. Additionally, a recent review of the uptake of Report+Support for reporting harassment, discrimination, or hate crime, led to a new communications plan to raise awareness, and

enhanced functionality to allow two-way communication with anonymous reportees to improve support and safeguarding.

- **Promoted awareness and actions to support the highest standards of research integrity** through a thought-provoking and engaging day in April 2025 of discussions and insights from leading experts in research integrity, funding and policy, hosted by the Research Integrity and Compliance Office and led by Professor Mark Spearing, Vice-President (Research and Enterprise).

We have enabled our research teams (including Academic Managers of Researchers and Researchers) to:

- **Access opportunities for training, development, and contributions to policy development related to equality, diversity and inclusion** through inviting applications from staff across the UoS to join the newly formed REF Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Committee which will support the development and implementation of our REF2029 Code of Practice. The Committee has early-career representatives, to ensure diversity across career stages.

- **Promote a healthy and inclusive working environment** via a new online Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) portal, which was developed with key stakeholders and offers a streamlined process, audit trail, and detailed guidance for reviewing any new policy or initiative, including those affecting researchers. Additionally, our Managing Workplace Stress SharePoint gives guidance to managers about different types of stress assessment and preparing for workplace stress conversations. All staff can also access a self-directed eLearning module on stress awareness training from there.

- **Take positive action towards maintaining their wellbeing and mental health** via our Solent Mind Training for research staff. Supported by Research

	Culture funding, these tailored webinars provide bespoke support for the researcher community. • **Improve inclusive leadership** via our second institution-wide reverse mentoring programme in partnership with Reverse Mentoring Practice Ltd. Pairing Heads of School with mentors from Equality Networks and student groups. 90% of mentees (of 22 pairings) reported improved inclusive leadership, and 88% of mentors gained confidence. We also continue to offer a Compassionate and Inclusive leadership programme, targeted at Principal Investigators, as managers of research teams. • **Actively contribute to the continued development of our inclusive research culture** through involvement in RDC networks and governance at School, Department and Faculty levels, including leading the implementation of new policies and activities for supporting research careers that strengthen expectations and provision for the CPD of researchers, including ringfencing CPD funding for early career researchers.
Employment *(max 600 words)*	Across the UoS, we have: • **Updated our processes and criteria for transparent merit-based recognition, reward and promotion** via a refresh of our Career Pathways, with a renewed focus on accessibility. The new criteria and accompanying guidance, were launched in February 2025. Clear indicators and exemplars of progress on the Research-focused pathway were shared with researchers at Faculty engagement events in April-May 2025. Additionally, a promotion Q&A event for 2024-25 took place in November 2024, with nearly 200 attendees and 140 views of the recording. • **Strengthened fair and inclusive selection and appointment practices** through an evolution of our Super Recruiters programme; re-launched as Inclusive Recruitment Champions. This community

provides critical guidance, advice and challenge to hiring managers, with Inclusive Recruitment Champions now a required part of the hiring processes. By June 2025, 84% of 2,321 staff in research and balanced pathways had passed the mandatory online ED&I training.

- **Improved job security for researchers** through our Reducing Casualisation strategic major project. Significant progress has been made, with Phase 1 focused on staff who had been on successive fixed-term contracts (FTCs) for over 10 years; most are researchers and, those who are eligible, have now been converted to permanent contracts. The project is now engaging with staff who have been on FTCs for >4 and <10 years, aiming to move them to permanent contracts by Dec 25, where possible. Work is also underway to provide a more consistent and fair approach to employing hourly paid lecturers (HPL), supported by a dedicated survey to seek the views of HPL (April-May 2025). Additionally, new guidance and policy updates are in progress, including the development of an 'employment' policy to support line managers with all future employment decisions.
- **Championing excellent people management** through delivering guidance from the co-created Workload Principles introduced in autumn 2024. Endorsed by the Executive Board, these Principles apply to all staff and aim to promote two-way communication, and consistent practices across diverse roles. Their implementation will be monitored through feedback mechanisms, including the annual staff survey.
- **Provided effective people management training for managers of researchers through our Line Manager Development Programme.** Since its launch in March 2020, 48% (of 628) of researcher managers have enrolled, with 32% (of 305) completing the programme. In Spring 2025, building on staff

	feedback, the programme was reviewed and refreshed into a flexible, modular format. • **Encourage participation in relevant organisational policy and decision-making processes** at Faculty level. The Faculty of Environmental and Life Sciences (FELS) developed and implemented a new policy to include 5% of time for CPD in all researcher job applications. The Faculty of Arts and Humanities (FAH) implemented a policy for supporting grant applications from colleagues without an established position, which includes researchers on FTCs. Additionally, our research teams have: • **Participated in the co-creation of our new RDC action plan.** Across all Faculties, researchers were included in consultations between April-May 2025 about the new RDC action plan to identify specific initiatives and challenges that need to be addressed relating to our three RDC priorities. This process strongly informed our lessons learned (below). • **Prioritised understanding of appraisal processes and experience.** The appraisal process for Balanced and Research-focused staff shows strong engagement in the 2023–2024 cycle with, respectively, 94% (of 1,082) and 89% (of 503) of staff in these groups completing appraisals. There were notable differences in how task and professional development objectives are recorded across the two staff categories, with Balanced staff more engaged in recording task objectives, and Research staff showing relatively stronger engagement in CPD objectives. To support this process, 232 staff had attended at least one appraisal training workshop.
Professional development *(max 600 words)*	The UoS has continued to invest in providing opportunities, structured support, encouragement and time for researchers to engage in a minimum of 10 days CPD pro rata per year including:

- **The Southampton Enterprise Development Fund (SEDF)**: small-scale funding supports the development of research outputs towards commercialisation, including enterprise activities for social good. In 2024-25, 50% of the funds were ringfenced for applications led or co-led by early career researchers (ECRs) with eight applications funded.
- **The Research Funding Intensive**: a CHEP bi-annual development programme for research-engaged staff across all career stages to accelerate their funding application journey. A third of attendees (30/94) for 2024-25 were research-focused staff.
- **Beyond the Doctorate**: Since launching in 2023, Careers Employability and Student Enterprise has logged 215 ECR engagements with the programme, with attendance of ECRs doubling between 2024 & 25 (32 compared to 66). More researchers have also accessed accompanying resources.
- **Post-Graduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PGCAP) programme**: Between 2023-25, 47 researchers enrolled (from n=192 overall). Nearly all completed Modules 1 and 2, achieving Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy (FHEA).
- **Implementation and evaluation of Prosper as a tool for enhancing career development:** Throughout 2024-25 we have promoted Prosper through sharing links and information; liaising with Faculties and RDC Champions to embed Prosper into existing and planned activities; and coaching a pilot cohort of 19 researchers. The UoS has increased from 69 to 1342 users in one year, the second highest in the UK.

Led by the strategic plans of the Associate Deans for Research (ADRs), the Faculties continue to play a major role in promoting and funding CPD opportunities for our research teams, including strong reinforcement of EDI principles. Examples of Faculty initiatives include:

- **Faculty of Arts and Humanities (FAH):** continued their Transformational Agenda Consultation which commenced in 2023 when early career colleagues and school representatives voted on their top six priorities including workloads, visibility, belonging and equity. From Spring 2024, weekly email progress updates were sent, and a new consultation phase is underway to discuss updated priorities.

- **Faculty of Environmental and Life Sciences (FELS):** held a Researcher Development and Career Festival event in September 2024 focused on Pathways to Independence. The festival featured talks, workshops, and panel discussions for researchers considering fellowships or industry careers. The event also addressed mentoring, open science, and artificial intelligence, highlighting their importance for researchers' career development and transition to independence.

- **Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences (FEPS):** held a pump-priming sandpit proposal writing event with funds (2 x £2k) ringfenced for Research Pathway colleagues. RDC Champions gave talks on 10 days CPD at Faculty and Departmental events to improve awareness for managers and researchers and led on the delivery of a targeted ECR promotion event focusing on Leadership, Management and Engagement opportunities and input from promotion panel members.

- **Faculty of Medicine (FMED):** hosted a seminar on 'How to start a family when on Fixed Term Contract' including an explanation of the maternity/paternity leave policy and hearing from ECRs who have experienced maternity/paternity or adoption leave. Workshops on 'How to Become a Lecturer' have proved very popular, with plans to develop similar seminars in the other Faculties from autumn 2025.

	• **Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS):** introduced a new • -mentoring and networking initiative for research-active mothers supported by Research Culture funding. Up to £2k per application is also available in the School of Economic, Social and Political Sciences to support CPD for ECRs on FTCs. Faculty RDC Champions have led the development of FSS policy on 'Enabling researchers on FTCs to be named as PIs or Co-Is on funding bids' (approved June 2025).

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. *(max 500 words)*

Our action planning process represents the culmination of our previous learning experiences. Through the Theory of Change (ToC) approach, we shifted our focus from specific or more tailored activities to articulating the broader, long-term changes we aim to achieve. This allowed us to better define the desired impact and ensure that our actions are meaningfully aligned with the strategic priorities of the University, Faculties, Schools, and Departments. The process also fostered a more integrated and collaborative approach, enabling stakeholders from across professional services and academic groups to co-create solutions that are both contextually relevant and operationally feasible.

In June 2023, a Vision Session was held to relaunch the RDC Concordat Advisory Group (CAG) with a refreshed membership and renewed focus. This session laid the groundwork for future priorities and marked the initiation of the RDC Faculty Champion Network, fostering a collaborative environment across the Faculties for sustained engagement.

From April 2024 to February 2025, a series of ToC sessions were conducted to build upon the Vision Session's outcomes. ToC was used as a structured methodology to articulate how and why a desired change was expected to occur in a specific context. In the RDC context, it served as a strategic tool to map the pathway from current challenges to long-term goals, ensuring that all planned activities were logically aligned with intended outcomes.

These sessions brought together CAG members, business owners, and key partners to co-develop ToC frameworks for three core RDC priorities: (1) ensuring researchers have access to 10 days of Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

annually, (2) enhancing appraisal and career progression processes, and (3) strengthening researcher community engagement. The collaborative nature of these sessions ensured that the perspectives of stakeholders, including ECRs and Faculty RDC Champions, were embedded throughout the process.

The finalised ToC frameworks, completed by February 2025, serve as foundational guides for the development of our targeted, evidence-informed action plan. Between March and April 2025, these ToC frameworks were socialised with the wider research community, including researchers themselves, the Associate Deans for Research and other stakeholders, to gather feedback, clarify assumptions, and ensure alignment with institutional priorities. This phase was critical for fostering transparency, inclusivity, and shared ownership of the proposed changes.

The subsequent action planning phase, which ran from March to August 2025, translated the ToC frameworks into a detailed implementation plan for the 2026–2029 period. This plan outlines specific activities, action owners, timelines, and resource requirements. Discussions with business owners and stakeholders ensured that proposed actions are feasible, strategically aligned, and adequately resourced.

Evaluation was embedded throughout the action plan, informed by the outcomes and indicators identified in the ToC. This will enable continuous monitoring of progress, assessment of impact, and iterative refinement of activities. By grounding the RDC action plan in a robust ToC, we hope to ensure a coherent, transparent, and outcomes-driven approach to enhancing the research environment and supporting researcher development.

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

In the coming reporting period we will:

- **Maintain a focus on our core priorities in our new action plan:** Our three priorities that have shaped activities and planning during this reporting period will be continued in the creation and implementation of our new RDC action plan: 1) Researcher Engagement; (2) 10 Days CPD; and (3) Appraisal and Promotion. Our new three-year RDC action plan is a substantial and collaborative piece of work led by the RDC Project Manager and will be implemented from November 2025. The plan will include 20-25 key actions structured according to RDC principles and pillars and our three

strategic priorities. Actions have been co-created with action holders and informed by our ToC process and researcher engagement across the Faculties.

- **Enable and support local ownership of activities and communications:** Our new RDC action plan represents a shared, collaborative vision whose implementation will be supported by strong leadership within the Faculties via their research strategic plans, working closely with the RDC Faculty Champions Network. The Champions network will continue to meet monthly to share updates and good practice and ensure engagement with Faculty representation and governance structures. Designated CHEP contacts for each of the Faculty RDC Champions will continue to ensure clear, bi-directional communication between the Faculties and the implementation of staff development activities aligned with the UoS research, knowledge exchange and enterprise (RKEE) strategy.

- **Seek peer feedback and support on our new RDC action plan:** The UoS is a member of the Researchers14 (R14) network, which is a group of universities who represent 65% of the research staff community in the UK and share good practice in researcher development. R14 group members have designed a light-touch peer review and feedback process for RDC action planning, through which we will both provide and receive formative feedback.

- **Continue to strengthen job security for researchers:** Our Major Strategic Project Reducing Casualisation will continue in this period to support a reduction in the use of FTCs across the UoS, clarify the circumstances of when it is / is not appropriate to offer a new FTC, and collaborate across Faculties to develop relevant guidance and policies.

- **Ensure cross-fertilization of actions and initiatives between commitments to Research Culture, the RDC and the REF:** The UoS Research Culture Group meets bi-monthly, ensuring good communication and coordination between the Faculties, CHEP and professional services for a holistic approach to enhancing research culture. As well as maximising the impact of existing activities, the group aims to uncover any gaps in our provision and initiate new strategic actions to address them. Next year will see a particular focus on mid-career staff involved in research.

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 RDC is embedded within our UoS Equality Charters programme, aligning the efforts of our six equality charters, concentrating on key areas of impact and driving meaningful change.

A dedicated Project Manager oversees the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the RDC's impact. This role also includes supporting the development and organisation of the CAG, which is chaired by the Associate Vice-President (Interdisciplinary Research) and co-chaired by a senior academic from our research community at professorial level. The CAG holds overarching responsibility for ensuring the university's commitment to the RDC.

The RDC follows a structured governance process that promotes collaboration and stakeholder engagement. This process provides strategic oversight and ensures alignment with wider university initiatives, while also strengthening accountability.

- HR Senior Leadership Team (HRSLT), 17th September 2025: *Endorsement of HR actions*
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee (EDIC), 1st October 2025: *Endorsement*
- University Executive Board (UEB), 21st October 2025: *Endorsement*
- Research and Enterprise Executive Group (REEG), 12th November 2025: *Noting*
- University Council, 19th November 2025: *Noting*

Signature on behalf of governing body:

Contact for queries:

This annual report will be analysed by the secretariat for the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, to identify good practices, themes for development and information to improve national research culture policy and practice.

If you have any questions, or suggestions on how the reporting process could be improved, please contact the secretariat via the email address listed on the RDC website: www.researcherdevelopmentconcordat.ac.uk.