



HR Excellence in Research Award

Progress Report: 2 Year Evaluation and Review

January 2023

Context of Institution:

This report focuses on progress made against the University of Lincoln Concordat Action Plan 2020-2022. It also outlines beneficiaries and strategic priorities aligned to a recently-launched UoL Strategic Plan 2022-2027.

The University of Lincoln became a signatory of the Concordat to Support the Development of Researchers in February 2020, and was awarded the HR Excellence in Research Award in December 2020. The University has 2,164 employees and over 19,000 students (500 of which are PGR students). Academics are based in the four Colleges; Arts, Lincoln International Business School, Science and Social Science.

At the University of Lincoln, all academics (up to Associate Professor) have the same contractual obligations. Within the academic contract, two role profile pathways exist: Teaching and Research (T&R), and Teaching, Scholarship and Professional Practice (TSPP). These role profiles allow an increased focus on specific areas of activity for individuals to ensure we achieve our strategic aims as a university. The TR role profile has been developed for individuals who have a focus on research alongside their teaching. The TSPP role profile has been developed for individuals who have a focus on scholarship and/or professional practice, alongside their teaching. Both profiles have the same promotion opportunities but with different criteria and output expectations. As of January 2023, there are currently 396 academics on the T&R profile and 579 academics on the TSPP profile. There are currently 114 employees on research only contracts at the University. Postgraduate researchers, employees on research only contracts and Early Career Researchers on both the T&R and TSPP profiles are the intended audience of ongoing engagement, consultation, development opportunities and the action plan for the Researcher Development Concordat.

Internal Evaluation:

Benchmarking activity took place following the results of the Culture, Employment and Development in Academic Research Survey (CEDARS) 2021. The University of Lincoln ran CEDARS throughout June 2021 and received 107 responses in total, representing 12% of the total academic population. Research-only staff represented 10% of all responses.

Quantitative analysis of the results was compared to:

- An internal UoL survey aimed at academic research staff in August 2020.
- A University of Lincoln All Staff Survey, which ran between July and August 2022, collected responses to 57 questions across 7 themes. The response rate for this survey was 53.3% of the Core workforce, which represented 1142 individuals answering the survey from a core staff cohort of 2098. 474 responses were from academic staff (43.4% of the cohort), with 21.1% of the responses being from researchers. Comments were analysed using Microsoft's Natural Language Processing technology to assess text for sentiment; by using this functionality, you can assess the positive or negative tone of comments.
- CEDARS results were also cross-referenced against national surveys, such as the UKCGE Research Supervision Survey to identify gaps in support and training provision.

PRES was also used to analyse the research culture environment and culture at Lincoln and to set smart measures against activity within the new action plan.

Qualitative analysis was continuously gathered from various University committees through presentation of the Concordat Annual reports in February 2021 and February 2022. Committees included the Research and Enterprise Committee, the Concordat Academic Consultation Committee, and College Research Committees.

Qualitative analysis was also undertaken following discussions held via the established Concordat Consultation group, mainly comprising of academics, researchers, postgraduate research students and professional services staff. Members were invited to contribute to discussions on the backwards looking action plan, as well as areas identified against below-sector responses in CEDARS. In 2022, the group increased to 45 members from a cross section of the University and an array of levels of experience and roles.

Governance Structures:

The University of Lincoln is committed to engaging with Concordat and we ensure that all the principles are embedded to support the career development of researchers. Actions to improve support for researchers have been identified and developed through gap analysis, Concordat Consultation group and survey.

The Deputy Vice Chancellor of Research and Innovation has strategic oversight of research at the University and therefore has overall responsibility for the action plan for the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Research Staff.

Annual reports of progress are produced in relation to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Research Staff action plan for the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), University Research Committee and relevant staff working groups. The Concordat Consultation group currently has 45 members including researchers at various stages of their research careers, including PGR students and professional services staff.

Progress and responses to the gap analysis and action plan are also informed by:

- Research group networks;
- University and school Athena SWAN Action Plans;
- Race Equality Charter and staff support networks that have been developed by the Joint Equality, Diversity and Inclusion partnership

Past Progress and Achievements:

Since first gaining the HR Excellence in Research Award in 2020, continuous improvement has been made to the way in which we support research staff to make the most out of their time here at Lincoln. A main focus of the actions during this time has been on improving and establishing processes as well as offering development opportunities. Our achievements have been grouped according to the 2022 Researcher Development Concordat principles:

Environment and Culture

- Growth in Concordat Consultation Group membership to coordinate the activities around the HR Excellence in Research Award;
- Review of appraisals processes, with the development of a research-only appraisal;
- We have significantly improved the proportion of staff who believe the institution is committed to equality and diversity (increased from 54% in 2019 to 77% in 2021);
- Our new Annual Academic Planning Review (AAPR) has aligned the previous objective setting processes to create a clear and streamlined framework;
- We have launched our Concern Line to help tackle and eliminate any form of discrimination and harassment. The service provides staff the opportunity to anonymously report incidences of discrimination, harassment or any inappropriate behaviour;
- The University's commitment to Hybrid Working was finalised and the associated guidance was published.

Employment

- Improvements have been made to the communication and guidance for induction, which has resulted in increased numbers of staff finding induction useful (increased from 37.7% finding it useful in 2019 to 71.4% finding it useful in 2021);
- The short-term research cover process has been implemented, which seeks to improve job security for researchers by encouraging internal promotion and development, while providing opportunities for researchers to develop their career pathways.
- Initiatives to promote clarity on promotion and reward and recognition routes.

Professional and Career Development

- Review of provision of mentoring/other forms of support for research staff;
- It is worth noting that the number of researchers spending sufficient time on CPD/training is lower than anticipated with just 13% spending ≥ 10 days on training/CPD activities in the past 12 months (2021). Further consideration needs to be given to encouraging the use of these crucial development days and by helping researchers understand what we define as 'development' as many true development activities are not being counted as such;
- It is worth noting that the University has faced challenges around mandatory training completion rates, primarily due to the pandemic but also due to increased turnover.

Strategic Objectives and Implementation Plans:

A new HR Excellence in Research award action plan for 2023-26 has been created in consultation with the relevant stakeholders.

The University of Lincoln's [Strategic Plan](#) covers the period of 2022 to 2027, and marks a major point in our history as we focus on realising our long-term ambition of being seen as a university that contributes significantly to the nation's success through regional regeneration and international connectivity.

To support the success of the Strategic Plan, nine underpinning strategies have been developed, including a [Research and Knowledge Exchange strategy](#) (RKE), which focuses on growth, culture and collaboration:

- **Growth:** we will focus on intensifying research and knowledge exchange activity and areas of strength, and opportunity growing external income;
- **Culture:** we will provide an environment that nurtures a research, knowledge exchange, and impact culture that is ambitious, collegiate, focused, and agile, and upholds integrity; and
- **Collaboration:** we will ground research and knowledge exchange by working with partners to address regional priorities, and address issues of global significance to achieve global impact.

The [People and Culture Strategy](#) focuses on building a diverse and inclusive culture that performs well and supports the mental health and well-being of staff.

Environment and Culture

The University will aim to provide a *“a clear framework of expectations, support, and development opportunities that allows every member of staff including ECRs to fulfil their potential and that rewards success.” RKE Strategy, 2022.*

And:

“Regularly reviewing themes related to diversity and inclusion identified through our staff surveys and encourage localised departmental discussions on the themes to create action plans to address required change.” People and Culture Strategy, 2022.

This will be targeted through the following actions:

- Using evidence-based principles to develop a long/thin research staff and Doctoral School induction, including the provision of additional information to support the research environment;
- Creating institutionally joined up approaches to support mental health and wellbeing of research staff and PGRs;
- Providing support for managers and researchers to undertake a minimum of 10 days development time;
- Embedding EDI practice in research and support mechanisms through an increase in Inclusive Leadership training uptake;
- Creating a dedicated information hub for research staff, which will pull together all the information research staff will need during their time at the University; and
- Piloting a researcher buddy scheme for new research staff, as well as continuing to promote more formal researcher mentoring routes.

The University will respect “...*academic freedom and valuing excellent research of all forms, including challenge-led, disciplinary, interdisciplinary, fundamental, practice-based, individual, collaborative, and co-created research.*” RKE Strategy, 2022

This will be targeted through the following actions:

- Encouraging opportunities for co-creation and collaboration through Doctoral School grants scheme and sharing successes of cross-collaborative research projects.

Employment

The University will demonstrate “... *clear mechanisms for reward and recognition in all roles within the University and widening our leadership and management development to support effective working relationships and outcomes in all areas of the University.*”

This will be targeted through the following actions:

- Encouraging ECRs to attend training sessions as part of Research First, such as bid writing, research impact and KE in order to develop awareness of the wider research system;
- Increasing provision for research leadership development, with a Research Leadership training programme in March 2023;
- Encouraging engagement with UoL KE activities; In 2023, University will offer an internal fund competition to be made available for bridging support for key researchers in between grants; and
- Reviewing the approach to specifying and evaluating knowledge exchange deliverables in role expectations, recruitment, support and promotion pathways, ensuring that there is parity of value with research deliverables.

Professional and Career Development

The University will achieve this through “*Further developing our appraisal conversations to empower, support and enable our people to be ambitious and successful through clear objective setting and career planning.*” People and Culture Strategy, 2022

This will be targeted through the following actions:

- Developing careers provision for PGRs and ECRs via the Doctoral School through specific programmes including the UoL Life Beyond the PhD, by focusing on thematic areas such as Agritech;
- Providing PGRs with entrepreneurial skills in order to support future commercialisation of research;
- Provide support to supervisors to encourage conversations regarding future career progression beyond academia;
- Piloting a new inward and outward secondment scheme as part of the HEIF strategy on impact accelerator, which will be used to impact and to facilitate knowledge exchange between UoL and Industry; and
- Launching a new centrally-funded sabbatical scheme exclusively for staff on research profiles to prioritise research development and maximise the potential of quality-related funding.