University of Brighton: Report for the eight-year review for the HR Research Excellence Award

Background and context
At Brighton, we consider the Concordat in relation to all academic and research staff. As at January 2020, this includes 412 individuals who have Significant Responsibility for Research (SR4R) and 86 staff on research contracts of whom 22 are considered to be research independent and 57 are on fixed-term contracts. Thirty-four staff have been identified as having Early Career Researcher (ECR) status under the REF definition, although at Brighton, we have a policy of allowing anyone self-defining as an ECR to participate in ECR events. Brighton currently has 12 academic schools, all with: a Deputy Head with specific responsibility for Research and Enterprise (R&E), a research mentoring lead and an ECR representative. ECR representatives meet termly at the School ECR Representatives Committee (SERC), which is chaired by the University’s ECR Ambassador, and sit on their School Research and Enterprise Committees. Our Centres of Research and Enterprise Excellence (COREs) have ECR representatives on their management boards and are required to report at their annual review on their contribution to the development of researchers.

Centrally, the Concordat is operationally managed by the Concordat Implementation Steering Group (CISG) who report to the University Research and Enterprise Committee (UREC). The CISG, chaired by a Professor, includes the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (R&E), relevant Heads of Professional Services, three Deputy Heads of School (R&E), three ECRs and the ECR Ambassador.

1 Internal evaluation
The CISG is responsible for tracking progress of the plan and for developing the new plan. The CISG reflected on CROS and PIRLS responses, and then held a series of site-based ECR focus groups to get more qualitative feedback and to explore current issues within the community. Additionally, the SERC considered CROS results, focus group reports and identified potential actions for consideration by the CISG. School representatives were then sent drafts of the implementation plan to comment on.

The Deputy Director of Human Resources and Equality and Diversity Manager both sit on the CISG and ensure that HR policy work undertaken and the delivery of other equalities action plans (eg. Athena Swan, Race Equality Charter and Stonewall) track actions specifically relevant to researchers.

2 Key achievements and progress against the strategy set out in your implementation plan and six-year review
The strategy of our last Implementation Plan (IP) had three main elements as outlined in the six-year review report. Key achievements for each are highlighted below:

i) Enhancing career support
- All Schools now have a research mentoring lead and, as at end July 2019, 269 staff were being mentored. 51% of the respondents to the CROS survey reported that they had been mentored (compared to 25% nationally) (IP26).
- Following a fall in attendance at workshops in our R&E development programme, we re-conceptualised provision so that it is primarily user-led. We now offer 27 “on request” workshops in addition to the centrally-organised provision including a series designed for ECRs entitled ‘An introduction to…’. In 2018/19, 321 staff attended one of these “on request”

1 Doctoral Students are the responsibility of the Doctoral College and do not fall under the remit of this plan.
workshops and 163 attended a scheduled one. Feedback from attendees in 2017/18 and 2018/19 shows 100% of respondents find workshops ‘useful’ or ‘very useful’ (IP, Key success measure, c).

- One of our research staff was supported to obtain UKCGE supervisor recognition in the pilot in February 2019. We will continue to participate in this scheme (New plan, action 17).

ii) Improving the training of managers of research staff

When developing the previous Implementation Plan, it was felt that we needed to focus on those managing ECRs and researchers in order to have a direct impact on our research population.

- All Heads and Deputy Heads of School (DHoS) have undertaken the University’s leadership programme (IP32)
- We have defined a set of online mandatory training for new Principal Investigators (PIs) (IP18).
- The revised Staff Development Review (SDR) process was accompanied by specific training for those conducting reviews for researchers, resulting in a 17% increase in confidence in giving appraisals (PIRLs) (our target was 10%) (IP5).
- The R&E Leadership Team comprising DHoS now meets termly to share good practice including the development of a research-specific induction for all new academic and research staff at School-level (IP12).

iii) Enhancing the external and internal representation of ECRs

- All School R&E Committees now include ECR representatives and the four schools with a critical mass of staff on fixed-term contracts also include a specific position for a fixed-term researcher on their Committee (IP20).
- Our Centres for Research and Enterprise Excellence (COREs) all have an ECR representative on their management boards (IP29).
- The ECR Ambassador now reports directly to the PVC (R&E) and convenes a SERC on a termly basis (IP30) and attends the termly R&E Leadership Team meetings.
- Our new Research Information System enables all staff to curate their own external web presence. 94% of ECRs have engaged with the system and have uploaded a personal profile picture (IP27).
- 12% of ECRs undertake external peer reviewing (IP15).

3 Progress by Concordat principle, reflecting on actions identified in the six-year review and with reference to the original implementation plan, including indicators and metrics where appropriate

Principle 1: Recruitment and selection

We have made considerable progress with the transparency and consistency of our recruitment processes. We have introduced a robust set of procedures around establishment management, which includes challenging all fixed-term posts, and allowing direct recruitment only where a researcher is named on a grant application. All members of interview panels now undertake unconscious bias training (IP3), shortlisting is anonymised and we have updated the recruitment toolkit to enable greater consistency of process (IP4).

Principle 2: Recognition and value

Our new SDR scheme was launched in September 2019 following wide-ranging discussion with the Trades Unions. It was accompanied by training for reviewers including a specific workshop designed for reviewers of research-active staff. Fifty-four participants attended that training and we have seen positive PIRLS results in relation to feeling confident in holding an SDR increase as a result (IP5). We hope that this will feed through into improved CROS results in terms of the usefulness of the SDR (currently 67%).
We have also made improvements in data collection and reporting. The CISG now routinely receives promotions data and was pleased to note that out of a cohort of 80 research staff, 43 had applied for promotion, of whom 30 had been successful. There were no significant differences noted in relation to protected characteristics (IP11).

We have also launched a new Workload Allocation Model (WAM). This enables greater transparency and recognition of time given to the discrete activities included in this part of the allocation.

Satisfaction in relation to the recognition and value questions in PIRLS 2019 increased in all areas and, with the exception of two, were the same or higher than the national average. However, although CROS responses were extremely low, our results did not improve as we had hoped, although they are still broadly in line with the national average (IP, Key success measure, b). Our new Implementation Plan continues to include a focus on recognising and valuing our researchers (Action 6).

Principles 3 and 4: Support and career development

Moving to a demand-led system of research training and development workshops has increased engagement and 100% are reporting workshops as useful or very useful (IP, Key success measure, c). A new workshop on engaging with the media was added to the programme following a request from an ECR, and to date 17 staff have attended this (IP10). When launching our new Research Information System we provided a considerable amount of training in order to ensure that researchers made the best of their external profile. The system includes a personal page for all academic and research staff and all PGRs (IP27).

Our accredited research mentoring programme is managed by a Research Mentoring Group, which reports into the CISG. Members of this have received accredited mentoring training and we are on track to meet our University KPI of 326 undergoing mentoring by 2020 (IP26). We have devised and implemented a research induction template suitable for adaptation and use by DHoS. This includes an introduction to the full range of support and career development pathways, that acknowledges the needs of those from professional backgrounds (IP12 and 13). COREs are monitored on their contribution to the development of ECRs (IP29).

26% of our ECRs are on PGR supervisory panels and 38% have submitted research bids (IP14).

Principle 5: Researchers’ responsibilities

We have introduced a Consultancy Framework (IP23), revised our Ethics Policy (IP24) and introduced GDPR compliance training (take-up of 54% of ECRs) (IP25) in order to ensure that researchers understand their responsibilities in relation to research integrity. We have begun a twice-yearly research integrity seminar series offered jointly with the University of Sussex.

Principle 6: Diversity and equality

We are proud to be well ahead of target in terms of our ambitions with Equalities kitemarks. Our targets were:

- an Athena SWAN Bronze award by 2020/21 for all our academic Schools
- an institutional Race Equality Charter Bronze award by 2020/21
- a Stonewall Workplace Equality index top 100 rating by 2020/21.

As at time of writing, two Schools hold Athena Swan Silver, four have Bronze and all others are working towards a submission. We were one of only 14 Higher Education Institutions to receive the Race Equality Charter Bronze award in November 2019 and are in the top 100 in the Stonewall Index (announced Jan 2019) (IP34). We believe that this has been achieved by a serious shift in culture led by the Vice-Chancellor, whereby equalities issues are openly discussed and embedded in practices throughout the
institution eg. unconscious bias training (IP3), Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) of committee decision-making policies (IP38). Commitment is illustrated in an increase in staff in the Equalities team by 60% since 2016.

Our REF 2021 preparations allow us to fully understand engagement in research for staff with a variety of characteristics through a series of EIAs. The first EIA on researcher independence showed no significant disparities in any of the protected characteristics between those deemed to be independent researchers and those not.

4 Strategy and success measures for the next four years

Our strategy for the implementation of the Concordat for the next four years has three overlapping aspects to it. References to actions in the plan are noted by the relevant action number:

i) Consolidation and reframing

We view the publication of the revised Concordat as an opportunity to relaunch it, together with our new Implementation Plan and a clear articulation around expectations and responsibilities of our research staff, and their managers (1). This piece of work will go hand-in-hand with a proposed institutional restructure, which if approved in April, will be implemented for September 2020. We aim to ensure that momentum on progress is not lost, and that good practice, such as our systematic ECR representation and our mentoring framework is maintained as we align to new structures (5 and 18).

Success measure: Increase of 10% in respondents to CROS having awareness of the Concordat (1).

ii) Addressing ECR feedback

We have worked hard, in this iteration of the Implementation Plan, to address and encourage feedback from ECRs and respond to findings. For example, our CROS survey results showed an inconsistency in induction across the institution and so our aim is to create an induction framework (8). We are formalising reporting lines so that researcher views are routinely considered and we aim to ensure that researchers responses to other institutional surveys (eg. staff survey, exit questionnaires, Race Equality Charter survey) can be identified so that the CISG can address issues as they arise (5). We were disappointed with the responses to the Recognition and Value questions in CROS, which were not as high as we would have liked, and so will focus on the celebration of ECR successes both internally and externally (6).

Success measure: Align results to the national average on the CROS recognition and value responses (6).

iii) Enhancing development and training provision

The University is committed to introducing the 10 development days outlined in the new Concordat, beginning with an articulation of development activities, followed by a promotional campaign to researchers and their managers (12). Our newly-launched Staff Development Reviews will have an emphasis on longer-term career planning (9). We will ensure professional integrity is a key aspect of researcher development (3). We are launching new training in entrepreneurship and commercialisation (16) and will participate in the UKCGE supervisor recognition scheme (17).

Success measure: 75% of SDR outcomes for research staff showing that the development needs from the previous year have been met by July 2022 (12).