**HR Excellence in Research Award 10 Year Review**

In September 2010 Heriot-Watt University (HWU) received the “HR Excellence in Research” award from the European Commission, with successful retention every two years since then. The plan for 2018-20 is subject to internal review in September 2020 with a new 2020-22 plan based on the revised Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers.

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| 1. **About Heriot-Watt University**
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HWU’s “[**Strategy 2025 -** **Shaping Tomorrow Together**](https://strategy2025.hw.ac.uk/)” has been developed by our global community of staff, students, alumni and partners. The new strategy expresses our goals: to educate our students to flourish in their learning and life skills, and to deliver research and enterprise with profound impact on the communities that we serve. We will build flourishing communities by developing the wellbeing of our students and staff, promoting equality and diversity in all its forms, and embedding a culture of listening and engagement. Our four values express who we are, how we behave and the ways we work together across HWU.

* **Inspire** curiosity to learn and find solutions that transform lives.
* **Collaborate** by working in partnership to shape the future whilst taking responsibility for our own actions.
* **Belong** to a diverse, inclusive and international community working together across boundaries and cultures.
* **Celebrate** excellence and take pride in the achievements of our students, staff and alumni.

Our aim of Excelling in Research and Enterprise will capitalise on opportunities to grow research and enterprise across the University. The initiatives contained within the *Enhancing Excellence* strand are designed to grow the excellent work we already do by supporting all of our research staff to develop their skills and expertise within a framework of promoting excellence, extend our capacity to undertake world leading research by recruiting excellent new colleagues and developing our research culture by sharing good practice across our organisation.Our stated strategy outcome outlines our commitment by 2021 to create a supportive research environment across our organisation enabling all research active staff to understand the standard of excellence required and be provided with opportunities to seek external funding for their research projects, publish their work in high quality journals, recruit suitably qualified research students and engage with business on the co-creation of research projects. Four of the nine initiatives within the Strategy are specifically aimed at developing our staff and research culture:

1. Supporting our Researchers: strengthening the work of our Research Futures Academy (RFA) to deliver a comprehensive programme of academic professional development in support of research across our organisation.
2. Bicentennial Research Leaders: recruiting, retaining and developing high calibre research leaders;
3. Global Pioneers: supporting our staff through our values-led approach and our state-of-the-art infrastructure and facilities, enabling them to achieve world-class success in their areas of specialism
4. Developing our Research Culture: achieving greater understanding of opportunities, engagement across the University encompassing both research staff and students.
	1. **University Structures and Committees**

[HWU](https://www.hw.ac.uk/) employs over 2000 staff globally and consists of five academic Schools each of whom undertake research activity: Energy, Geoscience, Infrastructure and Society; Engineering and Physical Sciences; Mathematics and Computer Sciences; Social Sciences; and Textiles and Design. There are 199 Research Associates/Early Career Researchers (as at August 2020) based primarily at the Scottish campuses. Growth in researcher numbers at our international campuses is expected over the next four years. Our Professional Services staff provide support to all of our learning, teaching research and enterprise activities.

The implementation of the Concordat is overseen by the Deputy Principal (Research and Innovation), with updates to the University’s Committee for Research and Innovation (UCRI). Concordat implementation is also considered by the Research Staff Forum (RSF). Regular reports are made regarding employment, career and development issues to HWU’s Staffing Committee. HWU is represented at Scottish and UK committees and other fora related to researcher development (eg Vitae, ScotHERD) to share good practice and to contribute to collaborative opportunities for its research staff.

While this plan is aimed at our Early Career Researchers, support for PGR students is via HWU’s Research Degrees Committee. HWU is also examining the support, development and progression of technicians as part of a review of technical services provision. In addition, short life action groups are set up as required to address specific risks and challenges including considering the impact on staff, students and our wider communities eg Brexit, COVID-19 etc.

**1.2 Management and Implementation**

Resource for managing the HR Excellence in Research process comes from the RFA which forms part of the University’s newly formed Research Engagement Directorate (RED). The creation of RED helps ensure holistic support for researchers, in the context of achieving the University’s research ambitions by providing progressive and comprehensive expertise to unlock potential and achieve research excellence and impact.

**1.3 Key challenges and Opportunities**

1.3.1 Brexit

Specific information points were set up on our web/intranet pages to advise staff on the impact of changes as well as signposting to support and resources. Specific issues relating to individual circumstances (eg Visa and Eligibility to Work) were addressed via the’ HR help system or via line managers and research staff reps. We ran seminars for staff and issued regular updates as more information became available. We will continue to monitor the situation as the new, broader points-based system is introduced.

1.3.2 COVID-19 Lockdown and Post-COVID-19 Economic Recovery

During the COVID-19 pandemic, HWU furloughed a number of staff including RA/ECRs (HWU topped up the payment to 100%). Regular updates were provided by the Principal and University Executive with line managers maintaining regular communication. For staff who were able to work remotely, provisions were made to access office equipment to ensure a suitable home working environment. In addition, two pulse surveys were undertaken to understand the challenges staff were facing relating to managing their workload, working practices, caring responsibilities, wellbeing and preparation for returning to campus. Online information sites and resources have been developed to support staff. Staff were encouraged to undertake development, with much of the provision moving online.

Phasing of staff back to campus is being managed in line with government advice in each of our locations with the highest priority being the health, safety and wellbeing of our staff and students. Our [recovery prospectus](https://www.hw.ac.uk/documents/recovery-prospectus.pdf) illustrates HWU’s commitment to supporting the global recovery efforts in relation to COVID-19. The commitments and actions laid out in this prospectus maximise opportunities for innovation, solve significant issues and drive impactful socioeconomic benefits.

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| 1. **The review process**
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**2.1 How the internal evaluation was undertaken**

The evaluation was managed by an ‘HR Excellence in Research Advisory Group’ comprising the Deputy Principal (Research and Innovation), Global Director of HR, Head of Policy, Strategy and Impact, Professor of Employment and Gender Studies, Chair of the Postdoc Forum (a peer led network) and Head of the RFA. The evaluation was coordinated by a dedicated member of RFA staff (Engagement Coordinator) and included review of progress against previous action plans, input from key stakeholders, consultation with research staff representatives via the RSF and a Postdoc consultation event, and consideration of University policies and practices that impact on research staff.

**2.2 How Researcher's views were taken into account**

Data from the 2019 CROS and PIRLS surveys, and 2019 Staff Survey, was analysed and included where relevant. The RSF provides a forum for discussion of research career and professional development issues, including the Concordat and HREiR action plan progress and priorities, with reporting to UCRI. This forum is Chaired by the Global Director of Human Resources (HR) with membership including research staff representatives from the academic Schools and key staff from the Research Futures Academy (RFA), HR and Academic Registry and a Trade Union Rep. Feedback from HWU development programmes were also taken into account. This feedback helps inform the content and structure of development programmes to meet requirement (eg developing more online materials and bitesize sessions). Additionally, a dedicated Postdoc consultation event was undertaken in July 2020 to review progress and priorities. This will be followed up with a targeted email communication to all Postdoc/ECRs to inform them of the new Concordat, HR Excellence in Research action plans and activities and to invite further feedback throughout the next two-year period. We will also continue to work with the RSF and Postdoc forums to consider further ways to improve engagement and encourage feedback.

**2.3 How the review links with existing QA and other monitoring mechanisms?**

Information from this review is presented to University committees and groups including UCRI and RSF. The review assists in providing monitoring and QA information to other reviews across the HWU such as [ELIR](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/enhancement-led-institutional-review); our [Outcome Agreement](http://www.sfc.ac.uk/funding/OutcomeAgreements/2015-16/HeriotWattUniversityOA.aspx) with the Scottish Funding Council; and our [Athena SWAN Action Plan](https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/docs/athena-swan-application-2013.pdf). In addition HWU’s HR system is being replaced by a new ‘Enterprise Resource Planning’ system which will offer improved integration of business systems and employee data.

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| 1. **Implementing the Concordat at Heriot-Watt University**
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HWU undertook a gap analysis to inform the original action plan in 2010 with subsequent reviews building on this. Key highlights from the 2018-20 and 2020-22 action plans are listed below.

**3.1 The key actions and outcomes since the last review**

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| **Action** | **Outcome** |
| **Principle 1 – Recruiting, selecting and retaining researchers** |
| Ensure clear and transparent recruitment processes | Fully centralised recruitment team and updated web pages outlining employment opportunities. 2019 survey of recently recruited staff undertaken to monitor experience with reporting to University Executive. |
| Diversity of ECR community in line with wider staff profile | Gender profile is in line with academic staff figures. Further work to do in monitoring and reporting disability and ethnicity (Action in 2020-22 plan). |
| Improve support for physical, mental and financial wellbeing for all HWU staff | Below CROS national average for mental health and wellbeing but some improvement from Staff Survey 2019 results. Sickness absence figures for this staff group below sector benchmark.  |
| **Principle 2 – Researchers are recognised and valued** |
| Ensure process of transfer to open-ended contract renewals after 3 years continues. | Process well established. Impact on 2019-20 process due to COVID-19 furloughing  |
| Percentage of research staff advancements in line with wider academic promotions | In line with academic staff figures. CROS ‘Promotion and progression’ score marginally above national average (56%) |
| Ensure researchers are valued and afforded equal treatment. | HWU revised values and commitment to revised Concordat in 2020 |
| **Principle 3 – Researchers are equipped and supported for the increasingly diverse, mobile and global research environment** |
| Increase participation in broad range of career and professional development activities with aim of engaging with 50% of ECR community | During 2018-19 35% of ECRs engaged with RFA development provision. 50% for 2019-20. New programmes developed to support broader careers eg ‘Working with Business’. CROS 2019 for HWU generally below 40% participation in development and varied across subject area.  |
| Delivery of first Festival of Research providing development opportunities, celebrating research success and enhancing research culture. |
| **Principle 4 – A researcher’s personal and career development is recognised and promoted** |
| PDR participation rates for RA’s at equivalent level to wider academic community (90% target). | 73% - In line with broader academic staff but below target  |
| Promote opportunities for development directly to RAs  | Monthly e-newsletter and direct email communication to ECRs. Quarterly meetings of RSF with update on career and professional development opportunities. CROS 2019 66% of respondents are aware of RFA and wider career development opportunities |
| **Principle 5 – Researchers share the responsibility for their own personal and career development**  |
| Continue support for HWU-wide Postdoc Forum for peer-led development and networking opportunities | Funding support continued. Good engagement with Postdoc community via Postdoc Reps.  |
| Maintain research staff representation on School and Institute-wide committees | Revised membership for RSF with meeting moved online during COVID-19 lockdown. ECR representation on School committees including Athena SWAN, Ethics and Staff forums |
| Develop further feedback channels eg focus groups, bulletin boards etc with researcher community.  | Dedicated MS Teams site set up to encourage networking. Improved reporting from Staff Survey to enable RA group results to be identified.  |
| Increase participation in national/institutional surveys | Low response rate for CROS 2019 (29%). 32% response rate for this group in Staff Survey 2019 |
| Encourage senior managers and PI’s to prioritise RA development | CROS 2019 81% agree development is encouraged. Staff Survey 2019 70% of staff have undertaken at least 1 day of development. Further work to do to move towards Concordat aim of 10 days |
| **Principle 6 – Diversity and equality** |
| Successful retention of Athena SWAN awards.  | Submissions in Nov 2020 See [HWU Athena SWAN website](https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/equality-diversity/athena-swan/our-applications.htm) |
| Continued commitment to E&D initiatives to embed good practice and raise awareness | See [Equality Initiatives](https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/equality-diversity/equality-initiatives.htm) and [Doing Things Differently](https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/equality-diversity/doing-things-differently.htm). [DISC](https://gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=EP%2FS012117%2F1) (Disability Inclusive Research Careers) project to support staff with disabilities by enhancing policy and practice and rolling out training to research leaders. |
| **Principle 7 – Undertaking regular review of progress in strengthening research careers in the UK** |
| Increased participation in national surveys CROS and PIRLS – 40 % response rate target | CROS 29% and PIRLS 34% response rates. Staff survey response rate 34%. Further work to do to encourage participation. |
| Representation at local and national fora | Participation in Concordat Review (institutional response) and CEDARS development (member of sounding board group) |

* 1. **The key actions and outcomes for the next review**

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| **Principle 1 – Environment and Culture: Excellent research requires a supportive and inclusive research culture** |
| Awareness and commitment to HR EiR and Concordat for all stakeholder groups | Improved participation rate in CEDARS and Staff Surveys. Improved awareness of HREiR and Concordat principles and commitments at institutional and individual level. |
| ED&I strategy (Embedded outcome and Athena SWAN) | Improved responses to CEDARS and Staff Survey questions relation to ED&I and Bullying and Harassment questions. |
| DISC project outcomes and impact | Embedding of research into policy and practice and rollout of training to improve ED&I performance (CEDARS and Staff Survey measures) |
| Research Culture project – enhancing good research culture and improve engagement, representation and feedback for RA/ECRs. | Improved responses to CEDARS questions relating to research culture and Staff Survey questions relating to Strategy and Values |
| **Principle 2 – Employment: Researchers are recruited, employed and managed under conditions that recognise and value their contributions** |
| Undertake review of Fixed Term Contracts | Move to open ended contracts for all contracts beyond 18 months subject to funding. Improved employee experience (top quartile) |
| Ensure excellence in people management through transparency of responsibilities, training and monitoring of practices (eg Supporting our Researchers and Role of the Manager programmes)  | Improved response to CEDARS and Staff Survey questions relating to line management relationship |
| Ensure representation of ECRs on Forums, committees, panels etc. | Improved responses to CEDARS questions relating to research culture and Staff Survey questions relating to Strategy and Values |
| **Principle 3 – Professional and Career Development: Professional and career development are integral to enabling researchers to develop their full potential** |
| Ensure regular and meaningful career development discussions are held. (Monitor uptake as well as usefulness) | Improved value gained from PDR discussions (increase participation rates, responses to CEDARS and Staff Survey results for Career Development and evidence of new research and leadership skills). |
| Ensure broad range of development opportunities are available, encouraged and utilised. (Monitor uptake as well as usefulness). Increase understanding of what constitutes ‘development’ | Improved response to CEDARS questions on development opportunities and evidence of new research and leadership skills (move towards Concordat aim of 10 days)  |
| Undertake review of career origins for new starters and destinations for leavers. | Improved responses to CEDARS and Staff Survey questions relating to Career Development and Progression (RFA Engagement Coordinator is a member of Vitae’s CEDARS ‘sounding board’ group.) |