

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

Universities and Research Institutes

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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 Kent is committed to the highest standards of research, reflected in its strong performance in REF2021. The University is a signatory to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, the Technician Commitment, the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA), and complies with the requirements of the Concordat to Support Research Integrity (which are also embedded in the University's Code of Ethical Practice for Research and Code of Practice for the Investigation of Malpractice in Research). Several Schools within the University hold Athena Swan Bronze or Silver awards, and the wider University is a signatory to the Race Equality Charter. Our Student Support and Wellbeing department provides services to our postgraduate research community and offers bespoke support for disabled, chronically ill and/or neurodivergent students, and support for care experienced students. The University also provides additional support for mature, commuting and part-time students, and for pregnancy, maternity, and student parent/carers. Dedicated staff equality networks and student equality networks also provide a space for support, open conversation, and to advocate for continued change to enable equity for all.

The University recognises the importance of enabling and supporting a positive research culture. Senior management responsibility for the development of our institutional research culture and support sits with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) and is supported by the Research and Innovation Board (which reports to the University Senate). The Research Culture and Environment Steering Group (which includes senior representatives from all academic Divisions as well as relevant professional services units) focuses on the development of strategic planning and delivery in relation to specific goals for research culture, and the University Research Excellence Framework (REF) Steering Group, which seeks to use REF preparation as a mechanism for helping to embed good practice for research culture and support across the University. The University has also implemented new structures within its Research and Innovation Support directorate to continue to deliver the strategic ambitions of the University to embed and grow a positive and supportive research culture. The University is also

committed to the central emphasis developing and sharing good practice on positive research culture that is embedded into the Eastern Arc partnership, of which it is a member with the Universities of Essex, East Anglia and Sussex.

Like many higher education institutions over the period covered by this report, the University of Kent has faced ongoing challenges associated with pressures on income associated with the declining real cash value of home student fees, rising inflation and cost of living, the volatility of international student recruitment, falling student recruitment in some subject areas and the insufficient coverage of research costs from research income. The University has responded to these challenges by embarking on an ambitious wider programme of change across all its areas of work. In addition to substantial revision of the content, delivery and size and shape of its taught programmes, change programmes most relevant to research have included a restructuring of all professional services teams (Effectiveness and Efficiency), a review of areas of research with sustainable critical mass and trajectory (Viable Submissions Assessment Panel) and proposals for a standardisation of time for research across all academic staff in the University (the Workload Allocation Framework). Implications of these change are discussed in more detail below.

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*)

During this year, the University has undertaken major change and review processes to inform and support its work on supporting researchers. The Effectiveness and Efficiency process has been undertaken in order to enable more consistent provision across all academic units as well as establishing a structure in which University-wide initiatives can be more easily implemented. This process of change has also sought to maintain the strong working relationships between research and innovation staff and the academic Divisions in which they were previously managed by creating local delivery teams which bring together different professional specialists to support specific academic units. Local delivery team managers operate as key points of contact – with discipline relevant expertise – to support staff with a wide range of queries and to enable development and delivery of strategy across all of our academic units. Alongside this process, a new central online resource for staff has been created by Research and Innovation Support providing information on a wide range of research activities and opportunities, processes for accessing external funding, principles and systems for research ethics compliance, data protection, and wider briefings on relevant external policies shaping research careers and activities. The Viable Submissions Assessment Panel (VSAP) process has also provided a valuable opportunity to review research environment data and needs across all of the REF units of assessment, and insights arising from this are currently being addressed in planning for 2024-25. The University has also introduced a new central Research Environment Enhancement Fund (REEF), which supports initiatives that provide time and facilities for research, enables engagement between academic staff and partner organisations beyond academia, and promotes equality, diversity and inclusion in our research culture.

In conjunction with these changes, existing provision within the University relevant to the Concordat has been preserved, including core researcher induction and EDI training provided by Human Resources, regularised research support and guidance for researchers provided by the annual process of individual research planning (IRP) meetings, mentoring provided through academic units, the maintenance of a wide range of online resources on career development through the University's Graduate and Researcher College (GRC) and the ongoing provision of discipline-relevant training and support through activities delivered in academic Divisions. A clear framework for understanding career goals and progressions at different stages of a research career are also provided in the University's overarching Academic Career Map (ACM), which is a central point of reference for staff

development and promotion processes. Systems for effective peer support and accountability – such as subject-based writing retreats – have also been maintained.

Environment and culture

Key aims for this reporting period have been:

- To develop and implement new professional services structures to support researchers across the University, in particular through the development of new structures within the Directorate for Research and Innovation Support;
- To undertake a substantial review (VSAP) of the current state and needs for researcher support at the level of REF units of assessment across the University;
- To ensure that staff are well informed of, and effectively supported by, a range of well-being resources, in ways that are particularly mindful of pressures created for staff during periods of wider institutional change;
- To continue work on the institutional application for a Race Equality Charter mark.

Employment

Key aims for this reporting period have been:

- To maintain established University systems for equitable recruitment and promotion processes, including a range of support for staff developing applications for promotion;
- To work towards a consistent workload allocation for research for relevant staff across the University through development of the Workload Allocation Framework (WAF) as part of Kent 2030;
- To facilitate career movement between academic and non-academic working environments by funding placements and secondments, as well as other networking and collaborative activities between researchers at the University and external partner organisations.

Professional Development of Researchers

<p>Key aims for this reporting period have been:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To continue to provide discipline relevant training and support through local delivery teams; • To provide centrally funded opportunities for researchers to build up contacts and experience of utilising their research knowledge and skills beyond academic environments; • To extend staff training opportunities through opening up relevant sessions in the University’s Researcher Development Programme to all appropriate staff; • To maintain the system of individual research planning meetings to enable staff to discuss research aims, opportunities and support with managers and other relevant colleagues. 	
<p>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]</p>	
<p>Environment and Culture (<i>max 600 words</i>)</p>	<p><i>Institution</i></p> <p>The University implemented its Effectiveness and Efficiency programme from February to October 2023, with overarching Directorate structures relevant to research subject to formal consultation during summer 2023 and implemented by early autumn 2023. Redeployment and appointment of staff into these new structures has continued during the remainder of this reporting period. The formation of the Research and Innovation Support Culture and Governance team was confirmed as part of the organisational restructure of the Research and Innovation Support Directorate in the summer of 2023. The new team structure was implemented on 1 September 2023. The VSAP review was undertaken during November and December 2023, with follow-up meetings with some units ongoing. The REEF received its first applications and disbursed funding for these in January 2024, with money allocated for a range of initiatives to support staff training and engagement with policy-makers, industry, third-sector organisations and other communities for collaborative research. To support the development of high-quality, complex research grant</p>

applications, the University has also created a Restricted Bids Committee, which reviews and provides formative feedback on applications for external schemes with restrictions on the number of applications that may be submitted by the University. This has already led, in-year, to notable successes from Research England's E3 Scheme and the award of two Leverhulme Doctoral Scholarships programme grants.

The Research and Innovation Support Manager (Culture and Governance) commenced their role in October 2023. They are responsible for monitoring and evaluating Kent's existing research culture and implementing of best practice support into practice and policy across areas such as: staff development; reward and recognition; open research and impact; equality, diversity and inclusion in research and innovation; responsible research and innovation; and nurturing a supportive and collegiate environment. Since their appointment, the Research and Innovation Support Manager (Culture and Governance) has been undertaking a wider review of current data relevant to Concordat principles to provide the basis for more detailed strategic planning to be undertaken early in the next reporting period. Local delivery teams were established in September 2023 and have, since then, been actively providing support to researchers through advising on research grant production, career development and the wider research landscape. Local delivery team managers have played central roles in identifying and delivering on strategic priorities for particular subject areas.

During this reporting period the University has also been developing its application for a Race Equality Charter Mark award. A new institution-wide process of reporting bullying and harassment (Report and Support) has also been established by the University which both enables named or anonymous reports to be made, and for those reporting to be directed to staff and other resources for further support.

The University has also made significant advances in professional support and development for its technicians through its involvement in a new programme for technical development – T-Pike – delivered by the Eastern Arc partnership and supported by a £1.5m grant from the EPSRC.

Academic Managers of Researchers

Academic managers have been actively involved in the development of these new structures and have been regularly informed about staff well-being support. All key academic managers of researchers are members of the Research and Innovation Board, the Research Culture and Environment Steering Group, and the REF Steering Group, and are able in these environments to discuss wider policy and operational issues, reflect on best practice relevant to the Concordat and play active roles in contributing to strategic planning. Academic managers have also been actively involved in developing submissions to the internal VSAP process. Academic managers have also been actively involved in the development of a new strategy and plans for supporting open research led by the research support team within the Information Services Directorate, and actively engaged in the development of the Race Equality Charter award application. Academic managers are also engaged with the wider strategic discussions around the embedding of positive research culture into strategic research planning within the Eastern Arc partnership.

Researchers

Researchers have continued to engage with training and development opportunities, including well-being support, training on EDI and positive research culture, as well as utilising new resources such as Report and Support. Publicity for the launch of Report and Support has also helped further

	<p>to embed awareness of the nature and appropriate responses to bullying and harassment in our staff research community.</p>
<p>Employment (<i>max 600 words</i>)</p>	<p><i>Institution</i></p> <p>The University has continued to maintain its existing systems for ensuring fair recruitment practices of research staff and induction support delivered both locally within academic Divisions and through central researcher induction training designed by the Graduate and Researcher College and delivered by Human Resources. Effective reviews for research staff have also been maintained through the institution-wide annual cycle of broader Reflect, Develop, Plan (RPD) reviews (which focus on overall workload and development issues for individual staff) and individual research planning (IRP) meetings, in which staff are helped to reflect on their wider research trajectory and specific plans, and can receive tailored advice on support for these. In a context of wider institutional change, the University has made proactive use of staff redeployment as part of its agreed Redundancy Avoidance measures, and staff have been actively involved in decisions about wider institutional research policy through representation of a wide range of stakeholders on the University’s Research and Innovation Board, REF Steering Group and Research Culture and Environment Steering Group.</p> <p>To ensure a common allocation for research time in academic units across the University, a Workload Allocation Framework (WAF) has been developed to establish a consistent approach to be used across the institution. At the time of this submission, proposals from this review are under consultation with staff with the aim of introducing this framework into planning for academic staff time from 2025-26 onwards.</p>

	<p><i>Academic Managers of Researchers</i></p> <p>Academic managers have been actively involved in maintaining and developing these approaches to researcher recruitment and support. They are required to undertake EDI and good recruitment practice training as part of requirements for participating in appointment panels. They have been actively involved in discussions around current data and future planning for the University's work in developing its submission for the Race Equality Charter award, participate in consultation and planning groups for all work-streams within the wider Kent 2030 change process and actively participate in wider strategic discussions for the University through their involvement in the University Senate and the Senior Leaders Forum.</p> <p><i>Researchers</i></p> <p>Researchers have continued to engage with these processes through complying with requirements to participate in RDP and IRP meetings, reflecting on their career development in relation to the University's Academic Career Map through applications made for promotion or pay awards and participating in discussions of University strategy and planning for research through regular all-staff briefings and discussions within their local academic Divisions.</p>
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<p>Professional development (<i>max 600 words</i>)</p>	<p><i>Institution</i></p> <p>The University supports a wide variety of ways for its research staff to engage with professionals, projects and practices in non-HEI settings. Supported by REEF and other University funding streams, these activities and initiatives are primarily delivered in ways most relevant to particular disciplines through local academic Divisions. During this reporting period, these have included showcase events which enable researchers at the University to share current</p>
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work and interests with established industry partners, funded fellowships and placements to enable non-HEI professionals to spend time at the University to build collaborative relationships with research staff, placement and secondment opportunities for research staff in non-HEIs, and opportunities for research staff to participate in collaborative research projects with external partners through a match-funded doctoral studentship scheme. The REEF scheme has also provided funding for technicians across the University to engage in knowledge exchange activities, conferences and training to support their professional development and the development of their wider teams. Opportunities for research and knowledge exchange activities are regularly discussed with research staff through the cycle of individual research planning meetings. The University delivers, and provides access to, a wide range of leadership training opportunities.

Professional development has also been supported by a Communities of Practice group led by Research and Innovation Support. Plans to extend resource sharing in professional development are also being advanced through the Eastern Arc Researcher Development network, part of the Academic Research Consortium between Kent, the University of East Anglia and the University of Essex, of which the University of Sussex has also recently become a member.

Internally delivered training is provided for staff at all relevant levels of management experience and responsibility from the entry training programme Horizons, to the Foundations of Management, Stepping Up and Leaders of Areas of Significant Responsibility programmes. The University also provides the Insights training for senior women leaders and has also supported research staff with participating in the Stellar HE Leadership training programme for racially minoritised staff. Research staff are supported in their wider professional development through training delivered by Human Resources, local academic Divisions and the Graduate and Researcher College's

Researcher Development Programme. Levels of staff participation in these training activities are monitored, and the training offer revised in the light of participant engagement and feedback. Academic researchers and technicians have also been able to participate in a new mentoring scheme set up through Eastern Arc in 2023-24 from which more than 230 staff have benefitted.

Academic Managers of Researchers

Academic managers engage in regular periodic discussions with research staff about their wider career development, including developing experience with non-HEI partner organisations through individual research planning and Reflect, Plan, Develop meetings, and encourage colleagues to participate in training and development opportunities offered both within local academic Divisions and by central University Directorates. Managers are also encouraged to participate in the range of leadership training opportunities described above. Participants in the Stellar HE Leadership training programme have helped to disseminate insights from this experience to other colleagues through the annual University all-staff conference and through a focused briefing to the University's Executive Group.

Researchers

Researchers are required to participate in annual individual research planning and Reflect, Plan, Develop meetings, and complete structured reflective documents in preparation for these which form the central focus for discussion in these review meetings. These documents constitute an iterative process in which participants are encouraged to reflect on their achievements, and evolving goals and needs, with regard to their previous year's review. Staff are actively engaged in the range of opportunities described above for engagement with non-HEI partners and the wider range of

	training made available in research and professional development.
<p>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. <i>(max 500 words)</i></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whilst the University already has well-established programmes and systems in place to address the requirements of the Concordat, it has become clear through planning for wider University change processes that there is a need for more central coordination and analysis of relevant data to inform future planning for Concordat compliance. One of the key drivers for the creation of the Culture and Governance team within the Research and Innovation Support Directorate has been to create a clearer central structure through which data relevant to research culture and environment can be collated and then reviewed by relevant University committees and working groups. Within the next 12 months, further work will be undertaken on the development of an agreed dashboard of metrics for internal evaluation of the University's research culture and support for research staff, bearing in mind the emphasis of the Tickell Review on the need to avoid adding unnecessary bureaucracy or overlapping data-collection tasks. • Despite the challenges of cost of living and adjustment back to more face-to-face working after the period of Covid lockdowns, there is a clear appetite amongst research staff for support and development activities which enable them to achieve their research goals. Writing retreats and activities delivered by early career researcher networks have been particularly popular in some Divisions. However, researcher engagement with training and development opportunities is uneven and there is a need to continue to work on identifying factors that affect staff participation. Challenges associated with the ethics review process are being activity addressed. A high-level review has been undertaken to explore value-added, business-critical and waste activity within these processes. Further to this, staff who would manage a project to implement change across the ethics review process are being supported to undertake industry standard Continuous Improvement training. This will ensure that any process improvements provide maximum benefit for all staff and student researchers at the University. 	

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

By the end of the next reporting period (May 2025), the University intends to:

- Complete all aspects of the Kent 2030 change processes relating to research, including the establishment of the Workload Allocation Framework for academic workload allocation in 2025-26;
- Undertake a review of its training provision for academic research staff to ensure current needs are addressed;
- Provide formative support for academic research managers in relation to strategic and operational issues in research support (including in relation to development of pilot People, Culture and Environment submissions for REF 2029);
- Create a new dedicated online ethics platform (for students and staff) to underpin the governance and integrity of research conducted at Kent;
- Submit its institutional application for a Race Equality Charter Mark;
- Using data to provide a baseline of positive research culture enabling practices at the University, and to reveal opportunities to make real and tangible improvements to the people at the heart of research at Kent.

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*)

This report has been initially drafted by colleagues within Research and Innovation Support and the Graduate and Researcher College, drawing on achievements and aims set out in our previous institutional annual report. It has been circulated to the University's Research Culture and Environment Steering Group for further comment and revision, before being circulated to members of the University's Research and Innovation Board for their comments and approval. This agreed text was then presented to the University's Council who have approved it prior to submission to Universities UK.

Signature on behalf of governing body:

Contact for queries:

This annual report will be analysed by Universities UK, 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 at CDRsecretariat@universitiesuk.ac.uk

www.researcherdevelopmentconcordat.ac.uk