

EU HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH AWARD: EIGHT YEAR REVIEW

1. Context

Research and Knowledge Exchange (RKE) activity is focused in 14 University Centres of Research and Knowledge Exchange (UCRKEs) across four faculties. The management of UCRKEs is overseen by the RKE Committee chaired by Professor Richard Greene (Pro-Vice-Chancellor for RKE) and attended by each Faculty Head of RKE and key representatives from Professional Services. RKE Committee reports into the University's Academic Board. Compliance with the Concordat is included in RKE Committee's Terms of Reference and is overseen by an HREiR Oversight Group that consists of representatives from the RKE Directorate, Human Resources, and 3 Early Career Researchers (ECR) from across the Universities faculties. The HREiR Oversight Group typically reports into RKE Committee twice a year.

At Manchester Metropolitan we have two pathways for academic progression, one via research excellence and the other education excellence. The target audience for the Research Development Concordat are those academic staff who have chosen to follow the research pathway. Within this group, our primary target audience consists of 670 teaching and research staff and 174 'research-only' staff (120 on fixed-term contracts), who are identified as full research members of one of our UCRKEs and as such have a 'significant responsibility' for research. Of this primary group, 15% are ECRs who we define in line with UKRI as within eight years of the award of their PhD, or six years of their first academic appointment. At Manchester Met we also support a degree of self-identification due to the diversity of career pathways represented by the ECR community, for example those from a background in industry or practice. Our secondary audience includes a further 750 teaching and research staff.

Following actions completed in the early years of our work to align with the Concordat, most staff have open ended contracts, and less than 10% of academic staff have fixed-term contracts. Manchester Metropolitan is also considered a career destination, attracting researchers from a range of sectors. The central focus of work on the Concordat is therefore on areas *other than* employment and contracts and actions around non-academic careers as these are not currently highlighted as key development areas by our researcher community.

2. Internal evaluation

Evaluation was completed by the HREiR Oversight Group led by the Researcher Development and Training Manager, Head of Research Environment and Impact and the People Development Manager.

May 2021	Oversight Group meeting to review progress against the action plan.
June 2021	Rollout of CEDARS.
September 2021	Oversight Group meeting reviews key findings from CEDARS against the action plan.
October 2021	Oversight Group meeting to develop forward action plan. Workshop with HR Extended Leadership Team. EU HR Excellence item at RKE Committee.
November 2021	Oversight Group meeting to review comments from Vitae and to finalise the report for submission.

Researchers' views were collected in the following ways:

- i. Via CEDARS, we received 241 responses for the survey population representing a return of over 30% of our primary audience of UCRKE members. The response to

CEDARS came from staff at all career stages with a variety of contractual arrangements and represented good coverage of our academic disciplines.

- ii. Through the ECR Forum, which meets each term and includes representatives from each University Centre for Research and Knowledge Exchange.
- iii. Through feedback from researcher career development programmes; Future RKE Leaders (for ECRs) and Good to Great (for MCRs).

The review was supported with data from the 2021 PRES survey and from academic perspectives in our internal Professional Services Quality Survey (PSQS). It is worth noting that our efforts around the Concordat do not exist in 'isolation'. Key members of the HREiR Oversight Group lead workstreams and activity as part of our institutional commitments to Athena SWAN, the Race Equality Charter and the Research Integrity Concordat and therefore this work is supplemented by and enhanced through these connections. Findings from the evaluation are included in sections 3 and 4 below.

3. Key achievements

Ensure that all relevant staff are aware of the Concordat (A2)

62% of staff have heard of the Researcher Development Concordat. This is above the national average of 56% (2021 CEDARS data).

This year marked the first time we have run CEDARS (or CROS/PIRLS). This gave us an opportunity to measure progress since the RKE Strategy was adopted in 2017 and to establish a baseline for forward plans. We decided to run CEDARS at a difficult time when researchers were tackling the demands of the Covid pandemic, the critical 'tail-end' of REF submission and the introduction of a new model for delivering the taught curriculum. Despite this, we felt it was important to proceed and are excited to have initiated this dialogue with our researcher community. We took the opportunity to use the internal communications around CEDARS to build on earlier work to promote the Concordat and are pleased that our results are above the national average.

Promote good mental health and wellbeing (A4)

75% of staff take positive action to maintain their mental health and wellbeing (2021 CEDARS data).

A key achievement has been the successful roll-out of support for staff mental health and wellbeing. This was informed by the launch of the institution's [Mental Health and Wellbeing strategy](#) (pre-Covid). A suite of workshops and resources were developed including awareness raising e-modules, bespoke workshops for high-risk teams, and launch of a 'Wellbeing Community' including 325 members and 18 [Active Listeners](#) trained in mental health first aid who volunteer to be the first point of contact for any staff member. The e-modules alone have been accessed over 10,196 times since they were launched.

Ensure researchers are aware of and act in accordance with the highest standards of research integrity (A6)

65% of staff agree that the University promotes the highest standards of research integrity. 63% have knowledge of the Concordat for Research Integrity against a national benchmark of 48% (2021 CEDARS data).

The 2017 RKE Strategy places a strong emphasis on research integrity, and we have invested in the infrastructure and resources to ensure that all researchers understand their responsibilities. Since our last external review, we have refreshed the content of online research integrity training, delivered regular face-to-face sessions and surgeries, embedded an online system for ethical approval that includes comprehensive information and guidance and developed a governance structure with opportunities for staff to discuss matters that go 'beyond compliance'.

Provide effective line and project management training for managers of researchers (B5)

Managers report high confidence in their ability to acknowledge good performance, provide effective feedback and support career aspirations (2021 CEDARS data).

A further achievement has been in the support for managers of researchers, particularly in response to the challenges of the pandemic. Existing training programmes were replaced with a new self-directed resource area and enhanced 'Mangers Connect' peer support network and talk series. 45% of all 'leaders' at the University engaged in development activities in 20/21 which is a 2% increase on 19/20 despite the impact of Covid. The annual Professional Development Review (PDR) process was reviewed. New guidance and toolkits were developed that have better alignment to the two academic career pathways, supporting academics to choose the most suitable pathway for their career progression.

Provide researchers with opportunities to develop their research identity and broader leadership skills (C5)

90% of evaluation respondents on 'RKE Future Leaders' and 'Good to Great' felt supported to develop leadership skills and 75% improved their research identity.

Our flagship research leadership development programmes, 'Future RKE Leaders', for emerging researchers, and 'Good to Great', for those on track to professorship continue to provide effective support for researchers despite the pandemic. The programmes were successfully adapted to take place entirely online and completed with celebratory review events this summer. Feedback shows that these programmes are highly effective with mentoring support and the opportunity to work across disciplines picked out as highlights.

'I feel more confident in how to progress my academic career, and more motivated to take on the challenges of more senior leadership roles.' – Good to Great participant

4. Strategy for the next 4-years

'We want to create an environment and a culture that will be recognised as a great place to develop your research career' - RKE Strategy

We have made good progress in improving our research environment since the 2017 RKE Strategy was adopted. UCRKEs have become the established intellectual home for RKE activities, and this has enabled us to embed the Concordat into 'secure' structures that support career development. Our strategy is twofold:

1) To further embed existing initiatives

CEDARS has highlighted areas of progress (e.g, support for mental health and wellbeing, research integrity and support for managers). However, comparison with the national benchmarks demonstrates that we need to build on these foundations, particularly as we emerge from the pandemic. A number of actions relate to the re-launch, refreshed promotion and embedding of initiatives that were developed over the last two years where roll-out was disrupted by Covid. Examples include the relaunch of mental health and wellbeing modules (ECI3), EDI activities in research more generally (ECI4), the launch of piloted research integrity seminar series (ECI5) and further promotion of PDR toolkits (EI5).

2) Areas of focus

We have also used CEDARS in combination with input from researchers and HR colleagues to identify three 'focus areas' for our forward-looking action plan.

1) Enhance recognition for academic citizenship

Although CEDARS received some positive responses about researchers' working environment, less than half agreed that they are appropriately recognised for their wider contribution to the institution.

II) Improve transparency of academic promotion processes

Most of CEDARS respondents agreed that promotion pathways are clear, however, only 30% agreed that progression pathways are equal and promotions are made on merit.

III) Increase opportunities for researcher development

Most CEDARS respondents spent 2 days or less on CPD in the past 12 months. Researchers without management responsibility did not feel they had time to develop their research identity and leadership skills.

We are planning to take a holistic approach to address these areas, from multiple angles aligned to the four stakeholders of the Concordat (relevant actions are highlighted in blue on the action plan). Much of this work involves further dialogue with our researcher community and we aim to co-produce actions that will address these issues.

To outline some of the actions that will be carried out in close partnership with staff:

As an Institution

- We commit to running the CEDARS survey annually (run internally when not run nationally), to build on the 2021 CEDARS information, and to continue a dialogue with researchers that changes perspectives (ECI6).
- We plan to enhance existing support centred on academic promotion (EI3).
- We plan to launch new and refreshed researcher development programmes (PCDI1, PCDI4).

As a Funder

- We plan to review our RKE funding, to ensure equality of opportunity, to ensure opportunities are effectively mapped to academic career pathways and to better support opportunities for training and development (ECF3, EF4, PCDF1).

In support of Managers

- We will run focus groups to find out more about how managers work to support their teams. We aim to co-produce new initiatives to address areas of focus (ECM5, EM3).
- We plan to enhance and improve communication around existing resources available to managers when supporting their teams (PCDM3, PCDM4).

As a facilitator of Researchers

- We wish to run focus groups to find out more about these areas and to use the learning from these activities to develop targeted institutional support (ECR5, ER3).
- We will launch interventions to better support researchers to take ownership of their own development (PCDR1, PCDR5).

Moving forward we will embed existing good work and initiate a 'deeper' dialogue with our research community in areas that interface with the Concordat, the R&D People and Culture Strategy and other institutional initiatives that we interact with, including Athena SWAN and the Race Equality Charter. Full details of success measures are included in our forward action plan.