

HR Excellence in Research 15-year review

1. Introduction and context

Since attaining University status in 1967, the University of Salford's commitment to contributing and delivering research that focuses on making a difference in society remains a driving force of our culture to this day. The University of Salford was one of the first UK universities to participate in the HR Excellence in Research Award, first receiving this in 2010 and we have uninterruptedly retained this recognition.

Alignment of University of Salford's Strategy 2025-2030 with the Principles of the Concordat.

Our new strategy for 2025-2030 - 'Innovating to Enrich Lives' - frames how we will work as an inclusive community to take our ethos into the next five years and beyond. Setting enquiry, learning and action at the heart of all we do, our four delivery themes (Developing Cutting-edge Creativity & Innovative Practice, Building Prosperity, Equity & Community, Improving Environment & Sustainability, and Enabling Healthier Living) drive our combined work in research, education and collaborative engagement.

The University's commitment to have an inclusive and vibrant research culture delivering world-changing impact, is highlighted in our three underlying principles, i) collective and unrelenting drive for high impact outcomes, ii) Championing opportunity and inclusion for all and iii) building an inclusive and healthy university community where everyone knows they matter.

Our Research Culture action plan developed in 2025, builds on the underpinning principle that guides all research culture initiatives within the University of Salford, that research thrives when researchers feel that they are part of an engaging, equitable, and collegial environment in which people help each other to succeed. One of the key actions from this plan includes implementing, coordinated and consistent Research and Knowledge Exchange development framework for research active staff which we aim to deliver through our Researcher Development Concordat forward action plan 2025-2028.

The primary beneficiaries of the Concordat at the University of Salford are our 52 staff on research-only contracts, who are postdoctoral researchers, research associates, research assistants and early career research fellows. Typically, these are staff who have no formal management responsibility and in the very early stages of research independence. There are currently 250 principal investigators whose needs are included in the action plan as managers of researchers.

Separately, we recognise that Concordat activities can benefit all those who are considering developing their research leadership and impact skills, including staff who are considered academics/ lecturers/ research and teaching only staff, clinicians, research-enabling professional support staff and technicians.

2. Governance of the HR Excellence in Research action plan

Our action plan is overseen by our Research and Enterprise and Innovation Committee (REIC), which is a sub-committee of University Senate and chaired by the PVC Research and Knowledge Exchange. This committee feeds into and approves an annual update on progress against the action plan each November.

Our Researcher Development Working Group which has representation across all Schools as well as the Library and HR have fed into and reviewed the action plan.

3. How this evaluation was undertaken and researcher views incorporated

To inform our 2025-28 action plan, researcher input has been gathered from our researcher community via an internal survey targeted at research only staff which was followed up with a focus group (took place 16th May 2025) as well as a facilitated discussion at the end of our PDRA cross institutional buddy scheme (June 2025) which discussed the developmental needs of early career researchers.

Following all training sessions a short evaluation survey is provided to all those that attended the session. Questions on the survey aim to capture any gaps in current training and insights and suggestions on how we can ensure all sessions are inclusive and encourage participation.

To provide insights into how we can support our managers of researchers, the final session of a Mid-Career Researcher leadership programme also involved a short focus group where participants were able to share their thoughts on our current training and development provision and how it could be enhanced.

Information and data collected from The Culture, Employment and Development of Academic Researchers Survey (CEDARS) carried out in May 2023 and June 2025 has also provided researcher views not only from our institution but nationally that has also helped guide our Research Development Concordat action plan for 2025-2028.

4. Key achievements 2023-2025

We have made substantial advancements in evidencing our commitment to fostering research staff development as detailed in our backwards action plan. Many of our accomplishments centre on collaborating externally with other universities in our region so that we collectively address support needs for ECRs and the launch of our Research Development Cohort programme specifically for ECR's with little or no experience of applying for research funding to support their transition toward research independence. Below are some highlights that illustrate the impact of our progress.

Environment and Culture

- **Communicating about our concordat commitments (ECI1):** 50% of Research only staff report an awareness of the Concordat. Comparing the results of CEDARS in 2023 and 2025, progress has been made in increasing the awareness of the Concordat to relevant staff with an increase from 20% to 50% of research only staff having an understanding of the Concordat.
- **Engagement with cross institutional buddy scheme (ER1)** – 12 University of Salford's PDRA's participated in a cross institutional buddy scheme with PDRA's from University of Manchester and Manchester Metropolitan University. The scheme ran from March–June 2025. Benefits from engaging in the scheme were described in feedback *“..provided the opportunity to share experiences and resources with each other”*

Employment

- **Launching of Research Development Cohort specifically for ECR's (ECF3)-** The Research Development Cohort programme which launched in 2024 has been established in recognition of the challenges early career academics face in obtaining research funding and establishing their research independence. The programme runs twice a year with approximately 10 ECR's in each cohort and involves (over a 5 month period), a monthly programme of training and

workshops (sessions include research impact, developing research partners and networks and writing retreats) as well as tailored support from our funding development team. Of 37 who have been through the Research Development Cohort programme, 19 have submitted at least one application for external funding, with some submitting multiple.

- **PDRA Bridging fund.** PDRA's can apply for a bridging fund to support them for up to 3 months. Since early 2023, we have supported 10 PDRAs.

Professional and Career Development

- **Established the Greater Manchester Researcher Development (GMResDev) partnership.** Over the last year, our priority has been to collaborate externally with other universities in our region so that we collectively address support needs for ECRs, which are often common across organisations. With the University of Manchester and Manchester Metropolitan University we have created the Greater Manchester Researcher Development (GMResDev) partnership (<https://www.linkedin.com/groups/13025448/>), which, alongside our internal programme of activities, provides development opportunities for our ECRs and peer support and connections with researchers across the different institutions. The success of our collaboration was showcased at a workshop we facilitated at the annual International Vitae Conference in Sept 2024.
- **Better connect and support ECR's and researchers on fixed term contracts and provide regular targeted opportunities (PCDI6, ECI1, ECI2, ECI6).** Regular targeted opportunities for ECRs are communicated via a monthly researcher development e-bulletin. All fixed term contract researchers are offered group and 1:1 meetings with the Researcher Development team to support their professional development. A central hub has been created that provides information on training opportunities and links to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers and our action plan

5. Next steps, moving to triennial review (2025-2028)

To provide a coordinated and consistent Research and Knowledge Exchange development pathway for research active staff the Salford Researcher Development Academy (SRDA) has been established, which:

- Brings together development opportunities for research and knowledge exchange into a single, visible structure
- Addresses key priority skills areas
- Provides a clear structure to help guide academics' development of impactful research strategies
- Is flexible and able to be tailored to individual academics' needs, circumstances and learning styles

The key priorities for research and knowledge exchange skills and knowledge development at Salford are:

- To improve research and knowledge exchange literacy across all career stages, from PGR to professor
- To support the transition of staff into research active academics with the skills and knowledge needed to lead cutting edge, independent research projects
- To support a culture of mentorship and peer learning that ensures effective oversight and appropriate rigour within research planning and delivery
- To provide research leaders with the knowledge and skills to inspire and guide effective and innovative research strategies across groups

The revised Researcher Development Framework (RDF) has been at the heart of the approach used to structure activities delivered by SRDA focusing on the three interconnected areas of Researcher, Research and Research communities.

The development pathway for research-active academics at Salford can be split into the following themes:

- **Learn:** develops the research and knowledge exchange literacy of staff to ensure a strong foundation of understanding around the key points that make a successful research-active academic
- **Grow:** supports the transition of researchers into independent research-active academics delivering impactful, world-leading research and knowledge exchange
- **Lead:** facilitates senior academics to bring together and manage groups of academics to achieve collaborative research agendas through mentorship, line management and leading research projects

As the primary beneficiaries of the Researcher Development Concordat action plan for 2025-2028 are early career researchers, this action plan will mainly support activities that fall within the learn and grow themes, however various topics will be covered by all three themes ensuring all researchers irrespective of career stage have access to appropriate and relevant activities that enhance and develop their leadership and management skills and are mapped to the revised RDF.

The SDRA will drive forward the priorities included in our forward action plan which outlines in detail our commitment for 2025-2028. The table below is a summary of key focus areas.

Table 1. Future priorities at Salford for 2025-28.

Priority 2025-28	Actions and Success Measures
Environment & Culture	
Awareness and engagement; Policy development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve research and knowledge exchange literacy but redeveloping induction for all academics and ECRs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ All ECRs and managers of research to be aware of the Concordat and university commitments via this mechanism and to complete induction checklist within their first year of employment. • Reorganise the Research and Knowledge Exchange Hub to ensure that the Salford Researcher Development Academy is more visible (ECI1) • Utilise monthly e bulletin to provide regular signposting to relevant University policies and initiatives (ECI2). • All relevant committees/working groups to have ECR representation and this to be shared between the different Schools. • Increase the number of responses to CEDARS and actively promote to ECRs to complete via network (70% of ECRs to complete with 70% of respondents agreeing they are recognised and 80% agreeing they have good development opportunities). • Build on pilot cross institutional buddy scheme and support not just sign up but also engagement by introducing an on boarding event. (5+ ECRs to participate fully).
Wellbeing and Health; Bullying and Harassment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 dedicated e-bulletin per term that signposts to mental health resources and provide regular bite-sized wellbeing sessions (ECI3) • Topics covered in these sessions will be guided by responses of researchers to a short poll in the Research Staff Network Teams site. • Ensure all research managers are aware of wellbeing resources via a termly email to all PI's, encouraging them to signpost their researchers as required.

Equality, diversity and inclusion; Research integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the number of ECR's accessing internal calls for funding (e.g. Reignite your Research) and PDRA bridging funding. Ensure this is clearly communicated via Teams/Sharepoint/e-bulletin (ECF3) • To increase the reach of the PDRA bridging fund and to enable forward planning, the bridging fund will be advertised annually as one of RKE's Research Support funds. • Provide access to the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) Introduction to Research Integrity Course to all ECR's and researchers engaging in cohort development programmes. 100% completion for new staff within 12 months of start date (ECI5)
Employment	
Responsibilities and reporting; People management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot new CPD sessions for managers of ECRs with content based around; engaging people management, managing performance and career conversations, developing and enabling your team, attracting and recruiting and retaining the right people (EM2).
Professional and Career Development	
Championing professional development; Career development review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brings together development opportunities for research and knowledge exchange into a single, visible structure (PCDI1) • Launch Salford Researcher Development Academy (SDRA) programme of activities. Actively seek feedback from the Research community via short polls and surveys at the end of each development activity. (50% of ECRs to engage with the annual development programme). • Increased communications will be sent out in advance of PDR milestones to encourage meetings (80% of ECRs to complete PDR within specified timeframes).
Career development support and planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research active staff including ECRs will be encouraged to create profiles on Worktribe (research information system) which will demonstrate their track record.
Research identity and leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide leadership development workshops consisting of individual and peer-group sessions as part of the annual programme of activity (minimum of 5 ECRs to undertake leadership training each year and provide feedback via case studies to support peer learning). • A cohort of ECRs who support PGRs/undergraduates with research to participate in a pilot of a supervisory/management training session (80% of attendees giving positive feedback about the training).
Diverse careers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage ECRs to attend impact and knowledge exchange workshops run within Salford (5+ ECRs to attend workshops and feedback on their learning).