# University of Exeter - HR Excellence in Research: 10 Year Review 2021

# 1 Governance, the voice of researchers and research culture

Since 2018, the Researcher Concordat Steering Group, has helped co-ordinate activities to support the HREiRA and our Researcher Concordat obligations. Governance and membership has changed to ensure a greater voice for ECRs, direct connection to the Research & Impact Executive Group (RIEG) and a greater focus on research culture.

In addition to this Steering Group whose membership includes ECRs, our activities are informed and evaluated by ECRs, PGRs and researchers at all career stages via: ECR and PGR Liaison Forums, ECR Networks and online hubs; Departmental Research Culture Workshops (30 workshops engaging over 350 research staff, producing over 3,000 separate comments and ideas for action); community related events (sector-leading: running up to 24 sessions a week, over 5,000 engagements in first 6 months of 2021). We also act on data from CROS, PIRLS, CEDARS and PRES surveys and the continuous, evaluative feedback from all our developmental activities.

## 1.1 Researcher Development & Research Culture

Since the last review the University has a new DVC Research & Impact (Professor Neil Gow) and a new Research and Impact Strategy which informs all our work. The Researcher Development team has been renamed “Researcher Development & Research Culture” (RD&RC) with Dr Chris Wood as Head, Cate Bennett as Researcher Development Manager (Research Staff) and Becky Euesden as Engaged Research and Communications Officer (Responsible Metrics).

## 1.2 Unified development and end-to-end provision

The two strategic development services, People Development (PD) and RD&RC now also work closely together formally through the newly formed People Development Directors Group (PDDG), contributing to a joint workplan, chaired by our Director of Research Services. Close collaborative working has enabled RD&RC and PD to devise a high-level map of end-to-end development to support researchers at all stages of their career.

# 2 Impact of the pandemic

This is reported in more detail in our Concordat Signatory Report so only headlines are identified here.

* All sessions in our [PGR Development Programme](http://www.exeter.ac.uk/doctoralcollege/researcherdevelopment/training/) and [ECR Development Programme](http://www.exeter.ac.uk/doctoralcollege/early-career-researchers/development/) were moved online or adapted to online provision.
* Our dedicated careers coach (Kate Foster) provided online coaching sessions alongside web-based resources.
* Specific PGR and ECR comms were created with a dedicated supporting DC web page, complete with FAQ’s.
* Support for PGRs and ECRs with working from home - we expanded our existing webinar programme to include additional sessions to provide support for continuing research remotely.
* Daily writing groups online - ‘Shut Up and Write!’ sessions provided structure and motivation for writing.
* [Researcher 'Hang Outs'](https://doctoralcollege.cmail19.com/t/r-l-jhhkkdud-omxabj-yd/) were provided as initial online support for social interactions.
* New Webinars - ‘Writing 4\* Papers’, ‘Writing Targeted Grant Proposals’, ‘Peer Reviewing’, ‘Imposter Syndrome’ and ‘What Editor’s Want’.
* ‘PGR Pulse Check’ surveys replaced the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey for 2019-2020.
* Online ECR Liaison Forums brought together Exeter and Cornwall ECRs for the first time.

# 3 Key achievements and progress against the strategy

## 3.1 PGR development

Our ‘[*Researcher Development Essentials*’](https://www.exeter.ac.uk/doctoralcollege/researcherdevelopment/training/rdessentials/#a2), represents the ‘core’ of our programme with the ‘[*Career Development Essentials*’](https://www.exeter.ac.uk/doctoralcollege/researcherdevelopment/training/careers/) enhanced with 1-to-1 careers consultations. The rest of the Researcher Development Programme is [detailed from this link](https://www.exeter.ac.uk/doctoralcollege/researcherdevelopment/training/). In total, we engaged 63% of our PGR population, a 14% increase when compared to ‘18’19.

All new PGRs are now required to attend an **induction and complete ‘*Mandatory Training*’** as part of their induction process. Additionally, all new PGRs are required to attend a half-day of Health and safety training.

## 3.2 ECR development

There are a wealth of development opportunities curated on our [ECR Training and Development Hub](https://www.exeter.ac.uk/doctoralcollege/early-career-researchers/traininganddevelopment/training/). In the period 2018-2020 there were 103 different courses on offer through the Researcher Development team. **These are listed in Appendix 1** along with attendance. In addition, a further 183 development opportunities covering a wide range of were accessed by all research staff. **Appendix 2 lists all those attended** during 2018-2020. We saw well over 1,000 engagements in ‘19’20, which is a 20% increase on the previous academic year.

All our ECRs have access to 1-2-1 careers appointments. Additionally, ECRs have access to ‘[Profiling for Success](https://www.teamfocus.co.uk/establishment/university-of-exeter/)’ an online self-assessment tool.

## 3.3 PGR and ECR Mentoring

We have successfully trialed both a peer mentoring/buddying framework and admin system for PGRs in the CMH and across the Cornwall campuses, where a group of 10-12 PGRs meet once a week. We have been running formal schemes for mentoring for staff since 2016. We also support cross-institutional mentoring for particular initiatives. We offer training to all our mentors.

## 3.4 DORA & Research Culture

The University signed the Declaration on Responsible Assessment (DORA) in June 2020 and have established a network of DORA Champions in our Colleges and Services. A new ‘Engaged Research & Communications Officer (Responsible Metrics)’ was recruited in April ‘21.

## 3.5 Research Leadership Development

All leadership and management development (as curated by People Development and Researcher Development & Research Culture) is now mapped in our [Leadership Landscape](https://www.exeter.ac.uk/media/universityofexeter/humanresources/learninganddevelopment/Leadership_Landscape_April_2021.pdf).

The “[Elevate](https://www.exeter.ac.uk/inclusion/support/training/elevate/)” leadership programme, aimed at BAME women working within the GW4 university alliance group, has has received very good feedback. Exeter delivered cross-institutional mentoring for this programme.

Our Award winning ([https://www.uhr.ac.uk/awards/awards-2021/](https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.uhr.ac.uk%2Fawards%2Fawards-2021%2F&data=04%7C01%7CJ.J.Button%40exeter.ac.uk%7Ccb39b569358f4ebabdc008d9156021ac%7C912a5d77fb984eeeaf321334d8f04a53%7C0%7C0%7C637564324912930838%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=RbjvlBQti%2FNU41hTHJuxyZR3rk31LpcrxKAUl8zDhNI%3D&reserved=0)) [Leadership Difference](https://www.exeter.ac.uk/staff/exeteracademic/yourdevelopment/leadershipdevelopment/leadershipdifference/) programme has run for two years, with 75 delegates from all Colleges, including a special cohort of research leaders in response to a specific demand. We now run four successful Engage forums including DoR Engage Chaired by DVC for Research & Impact.

We havedeveloped a bespoke ‘Researcher Leadership Development Programme’ for ECRs, in consultation with an externally provider. The programme has initially run from April to July 2021, for a ½ day a week, covering a 12 weeks period for 25 late stage PGRs and ECRs.

## 3.6 Wellbeing

Since 2019, there is now a dedicated Wellbeing Support role within the Doctoral College for PGRs and Early Career Researchers. This role represents *just one of a series of resources that researchers can go to a*ccess support.

**3.7 Inclusivity**

Throughout the reporting period we have worked closely with our EDI colleagues to ensure that our researchers have been appropriately supported. Going forward this area of work is being specifically examined as part of a new role within Research Services to expand our EDI support, and ensure we have easy access to specific data as part of our HR processes.

**3.8 Reductions in the use of Fixed Term Contracts**

While more work needs to be done here has been significant progress in using more open-ended contracts to both recruit new staff and replace existing FTCs. The biggest change has been the removal, in 2021, of funding-limited open-ended contracts replacing them with open-ended contracts with not limits. See table below for detailed data.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Gender** | **Permanent** | **Fixed Term** |
| **2021 R only staff** | **% 2018** | **%2020** | **%2021** | **Percentage point change since 2018** | **2021 R only staff** | **% 2018** | **% 2020** | **% 2021** | **Percentage point change since 2018** |
| **Female** | 152 | 10.7% | 20.9% | 30.7% | 200% increase | 343 | 89.3% | 79.1% | 69.3% | 22% decrease |
| **Male** | 144 | 12.1% | 20.1% | 28.0% | 131% increase | 370 | 81.9% | 79.9% | 72.0% | 12% decrease |

## 3.9 Education Development

One of the most significant achievements with regards PGRs who deliver significant teaching is the creation of the staff role “Postgraduate Teaching Assistant” (PTA). There are currently 560 PTAs contracted.

# 4 2021 – 23 HR Excellence in Research Action Plan and priorities for the future

## 4.1 Unification with Researcher Concordat action plan

Following guidance from the HREiRA team, we have created our new action plan mapped to the new Researcher Concordat principles rather than continuing those from our previous action plans.

## 4.2 Consolidate end-to-end provision

* **Research leadership** from PGR Supervision through to leading research strategy. Investment from both the Doctoral College and People Development will be co-ordinated with a particular focus on PGR Supervision to engage those who are in most need and especially very early career ECRs.
* **The role of mentorship**. This will support moves to maybe formalise mentoring for early career staff and also increase the prominence (and expectation) of mentoring as a key component for senior job roles.
* **Education training**. There is some confusion around development and accreditation opportunities for PGRs and ECRS who also teach. This will be clarified and the APP Research theme will be explored in more detail.
* Building on **coaching** check-ins from our internal coaching network.
* Reviewing the **researcher development and IIB essentials portfolio** – building on successes, addressing gaps and working with People Development and the Exeter Academic to ensure best coverage is effectively curated.
* Addressing issues around **PGR access** to and booking on courses and mandatory training.
* Improving support for **career development for PGRs** by appointing a 1 FTE specialist Consultant.

## 4.4 Early Career Researchers

* Continue to offer and improve **researcher leadership development** by developing a suite of programmes tailored to meet the varying levels of experience within the ECR community, working with GW4.
* Strengthening **links with the Exeter Academic** to support the development of the leadership landscape in relation to ECRs, evaluating the success of 360 appraisal, Insights and the use of Lego Serious Play.
* Developing opportunities for **specialist development** including project management skills and statistics.
* **Strengthen ECRNs** by working with leads and through University wide ECRN meetings.
* Focus on **personal and team wellbeing**.
* Creating an **online resource portal for ECRs**, exploring the viability of developing a knowledge and skills bank to support peer learning and developing the ECR Hub so that it becomes a portal for ‘all things ECR’.

## 4.5 Postgraduate Researchers

* Conduct a **detailed qualitative analysis** of feedback data from 2015 to the present day
* Focus on developing **projects that combine training and community building** – i.e. SUAW, PGR book club
* Moving to a **digital first training model**, and looking at blended approaches to all face-to-face training
* Continue to develop **working in partnership with PGRs**, developing resources and teaching on the programme.

## 4.6 Research Culture

* Support our responsible metrics ‘Champions’, to **develop and promote the DORA agenda** and initiate the development of a dedicated Research Culture (RC) toolkit.
* The **outputs from our RC workshops will be fully analysed** to be followed by ‘deep dive’ workshops across the academic colleges based on key themes.
* Make **ECR and PGR inductions** more inclusive and accessible
* Enhance our wellbeing support by promoting the healthy living agenda and ‘5 steps to wellbeing’
* Focus on sharing the experiences of our PGRs and ECRs, not just as a student or member of staff, but things colleagues also want to share socially.

## 4.7 Connected and co-ordinated development

The work of the PDDG and RD&RC Ops group outlined in section 1.3 will continue and we will further consolidate our working practices. The impact on our research community will be significant with more opportunities, more variety, greater co-ordination and improved communication.