
Since the previous HREiR review UoS has undergone significant changes, including a new Vice Chancellor (VC) and a restructure. RSO has rejoined the Doctoral School, which moved from Student Experience back into the RES division. A new Head of Doctoral School has co-created an ambitious Enabling Plan, informed by a UKCGE review and supported by the Dean, to enhance how the institution governs and supports emerging researchers (PGRs and ECRs). This includes:

- x a rebrand from Doctoral School to Sussex Researcher School (SRS), reflecting the full range of researchers the department serves;
- x a shift in terminology from 'research staff' to ECR and a clearer institutional definition to promote engagement and more effective data collection;
- x a repositioning of SRS as the central unit with responsibility for emerging researchers, signalling that Sussex prioritises them alongside other researchers.

In August RSO merged with the PGR-focused team to create a single unit under the Researcher Development Manager, working across both PGR and ECR development, including oversight of

¹ Time Higher Education analysis of REF2021, [sussex.ac.uk/broadcast/read/58013](https://www.sussex.ac.uk/broadcast/read/58013) [accessed 24/01/24].

HREiR.² This allows for a more strategic focus and holistic approach to researcher development.

The SRS restructure resulted in temporary resourcing gaps while new posts were advertised and workloads reconfigured. Other key departments have also undergone restructuring and subsequent recruitment, including HR and Organisational Development (OD). This impacted the ability to track and evaluate HREiR success measures and to deliver on actions that were set out in 2021. Nevertheless, Sussex has made progress on key interventions.

While these changes have affected progress in the short term, we are confident they will ultimately strengthen UoS and accelerate developments, and the focus now is on prioritising the Concordat. Both the PVC for Research (PVCR) and VC have been involved in the resubmission, considerably raising the visibility of ECRs and demonstrating a commitment from UoS to value and invest in them. Building on the groundwork laid in the previous period, tracking and reporting of HREiR commitments will be embedded into the annual cycles of business across committees and departments, with ultimate accountability to the University Executive Team (UET).

2. Internal Evaluation

The priorities and interventions identified in the 2023-26 Action Plan are the result of discussions and consultation with researchers, University leadership and the staff who support research across UoS, and align closely with current institutional strategy. An initial gap analysis reviewed ongoing RDCSG-led projects and identified items from the Backward Action Plan to carry forward or develop, with consideration of support and services as they now stand.

This information, coupled with the current action tracker from RDCSG, was combined into an outline of forward actions and a list of projects to carry forward, and presented to key stakeholders in Schools and Professional Services via committees (RDCSG, Research Culture Steering Group, RaKE and UET; the Athena Swan institutional plan was also reviewed for cross-cutting action points). Close consultations were held with the Assistant Directors of HR and OD, RES Director and Head of SRS, who provided key strategy points at department, division and institution level. Final approval was secured from all those with responsibilities, including the Director of HR.

From the earliest stages, ECRs were consulted through the Research Staff Reps Group, which includes 17 representatives from all disciplinary areas. The Group held discussions during the gap analysis, canvassed opinions among ECRs in their Schools, and reviewed

which supports functions across the institution. Its focus is developing policies, practices and initiatives in line with the agreed HREiR Action Plan and the Sussex 2025 Strategic Framework.

Achievement and Development Review (ADR), includes well-defined objectives and timelines for research opportunities, references the Researcher Development Framework (RDF), and aligns with Concordat 10-day professional development guidelines.

- x Bullying and harassment: The new [Report and Support Tool](#) provides researchers and managers with a safe and anonymous route for addressing issues.
- x Mental health and wellbeing: A comprehensive approach to mental health and wellbeing is being pursued for staff across Sussex, and staff mental health support has been integrated into RSO communications. This was a 2021-23 priority.
- x Building community: The ECR Symposium grew from the Research and Impact Day detailed in the previous report, and in 2023 included Centres of Excellence keynotes, a diverse careers roundtable, a research image competition and a Dragons' Den contest. The Dragons' Den in particular was valued by researchers as an opportunity to gain experience in writing pitches, communicating research and bidding for small grants, and building a strong network of peer support and encouragement. Other initiatives include monthly coffee mornings and writing retreats.
- x Research culture: The Seed Fund empowers ECRs to enhance their immediate research environment and to develop initiatives to improve research culture across UoS.
- x Policy and practice : RDCSG/RSO are leading a review of School-level inductions, and reviews of ECR teaching and informal supervision in Schools (instigated by Reps).

5. Strategic Objectives and Implementation Plan

5.1 Aligning HREiP and Institutional Strategy

The [Sussex 2025 strategic framework](#) emphasises disruptive creativity and innovation, and identifies five core values: kindness, integrity, inclusion, collaboration, and courage. Consultation has begun on a new strategy for 2035, which should be in place by Autumn 2024.⁶

The Research with Impact pillar of Sussex 2025 addr

Our approach also aligns with the guiding principles of the RES divisional strategy and the [SRS Enabling Plan](#), with priorities including mentoring, interdisciplinarity, a review of training and induction, equitable policies and practice that are applied consistently, and a communications strategy to support the development of a vibrant and connected community and raise the profile of emerging researchers. Additionally, UoS is [moving to a Faculty structure](#), and introduced Senior Research Managers (SRMs) to oversee work in distinct disciplinary clusters. These SRMs are already embedded in the work of the Concordat, including an active seat on RDCSG.

5.2 High-Level Actions and Success Measures

While significant strides have been made in some areas, the primary focus has been on laying the groundwork for 2023-26, which will promote consistency and aim to embed best practice across the institution. Many of these actions arise from the work of the RDCSG and Reps Group.

These priorities were identified in discussion with ECRs, who specifically highlighted the need for a clear and consistent induction framework in Schools, and for a consistent approach to ECR teaching and workload allocation. These were echoed by CEDARS 2023, where the proportion of researchers who found UoS inductions useful was 21% below the sector average. CEDARS also highlighted the need for additional PI training and support.

Environment and Culture

- x Implementing a coherent, consistent induction process spanning HR, RSO, and Schools, through an audit of Schools, a revision of materials, and creation of templates and a best practice framework.
- x Clarifying the ECR committee structure in line with institutional practice,