

# HR Excellence in Research 10 Year Report 2022 (Cohort 1)

This report forms part of the University's ten-year submission to the HR Excellence in Research Recognition process. It is supported by:

- A detailed progress report on the 2020-2022 Action Plan
- An 2022-2025 Action Plan
- Examples of good practice (Appendix 1)

This documentation is available on the York [HREiR webpages](#). Information about the University's implementation of the Researcher Development Concordat 2019 are [here](#) and in the links provided.

## Introduction & Context

York's Action Plan 2020-2022 was created during the Covid-19 pandemic; it reflected not just a commitment to the principles of the RD Concordat but also to strengthening **researcher experience and wellbeing, and to developing an inclusive community of researchers who feel supported and recognised**. In the light of continuing disruption to work patterns, a digital pivot, political unrest and financial precarity, **these themes remain even more pertinent**. In creating York's Action Plan 2022-2025, consideration has also been given to the commitment, in the [UKRI's Strategy 2022-2027](#), to making the UK the top destination for talented people and teams, and the 2021 BEIS [R&D People and Research Strategy](#) that notes the need for more researchers who can contribute to GDP. York's University Strategy 2030 aligns with these UK-wide ambitions in its commitment to 'curiosity-driven and action oriented research' enabled by **the creation of a Culture and Community that 'promotes ambition, collective purpose, courage and the continued improvement of all that we do.'** This will be achieved in part through new transformational initiatives, including [Emerging Talent](#) which will support the **'recruitment of a cohort of brilliant and innovative early career researchers from a diversity of backgrounds to help transform research excellence and nurture talent'**. Building on York's top 10 performance in the REF2021, pioneering EDI initiatives and a new focus on research culture, the 2022-2025 action plan will make an ambitious commitment to change for good and is rooted in institutional objectives, including internationalisation, environmental sustainability, equality, diversity and inclusivity, and collaboration cross multidisciplinary boundaries.

Governance structures around the Concordat have been refined to ensure alignment with the University's commitment to developing an inclusive and thriving research culture, to accelerate decision making, and enable efficient communication and implementation of ideas relating to the researcher experience. The [Concordat Implementation Group \(CIG\)](#) continues to be chaired by the PVC for Research, Professor Matthias Ruth, who also chairs the [University Research Committee](#), [Fellowship Coordination Committee \(FCC\)](#) and a newly created [Research Culture Working Group \(RCWG\)](#). Membership of the CIG has been revised to include greater Faculty representation from Principal Investigators (PIs), researchers and the Dean of the York Graduate Research School (YGRS). The CIG and PVC-R sign off the institutional HREiR documentation. The Head of the [Building Research and Innovation Capacity \(BRIC\) Team](#) coordinates the HREiR process and is a member of all key committees. The BRIC team (previously Research Excellence Training Team) has been re-named to reflect an expanded remit including research culture and talent development. The team serves all those engaged in research, from PGRs to Research Leaders, and coordinates and delivers professional development interventions such as coaching, mentoring, and research leadership and training for research supervisors. The team works in partnership internally with both academic and research related professional teams and externally with research funders, Russell Group fora ([Researchers14](#)), the [N8 partnership](#), European collaborators and third sector organisations.

### 1. How did we undertake our internal review? (Including how researchers' views were taken into account during the review and, where relevant, how the review linked with existing QA and other implementation/monitoring mechanisms)

York has approximately 800 early career researchers and 100 Research Fellows. To ensure that York's institutional action plan is both achievable and sustainable, each academic department with 10+ early career researchers was invited to create their own action plan. These are summarised in the new, live [Researcher Development Concordat Data Studio](#), examples of which are given in section 3 and on the [web](#). This discipline specific data is complemented by consultation with staff in professional services functions, in particular HR, EDI and the various teams in the [Research Innovation and Knowledge Exchange \(RIKE\)](#) Directorate, and calibrated with intelligence gathered by the [Research Staff Liaison Officers \(RSLOs\)](#). The current RSLOs are both early career researchers and collaborate with the ECR community to ensure that the lived experience of researchers and PIs is represented. The RSLOs reported a greater appetite amongst ECRs to create their own professional and career development opportunities. To support this, York made available a portion of the Research Culture enhancement fund - provided by UKRI Enhancing Research Culture Fund - to Departments and specifically to ECRs who were invited to submit expressions of interest detailing how they wished to enhance research culture. The funded projects, selected by a small panel including the PVC-R, included innovation, collaboration and positive impact for a range of ECRs. For example, projects in Chemistry explored methods for diversifying recruitment and how to better support reward and recognition; ECRs in Health Sciences focussed on improving research leadership skills and community building; the Department of Mathematics created a framework for the career development of ECRs. Research staff facilitators in Sociology ran an ECR event focused on interdisciplinarity, imposter syndrome, inclusion, impact and ethics, publishing and mentoring. The Research Culture Coordinator, appointed in spring 2022, is working to ensure that these initiatives are showcased and that the model of researcher-led projects continues to be a theme. In addition to this grass-roots driven intelligence, data about the needs of researchers was collected in the evaluation of the [Researcher Festival 2021](#) and this has shaped provision focussing on wellbeing, resilience, and diverse careers. This rigorous and multi-layered approach to consultation and empowerment of ECRs means that more than ever before, **the 2022-2025 Action Plan reflects and is grounded in the ECR experience**.

## 2. Key Achievements and Progress against the 2020-2022 Action Plan

**2.1 Positioning the RD Concordat and HREiR as a key part of the institutional approach to research culture.** The three principles of the RD Concordat: environment and culture, employment, and professional and career development, are key elements of the University's commitment to enhancing research culture. To this end the **RD Concordat has been deliberately represented on the University webpages as an enabler of a positive research culture.** Once created, the University's Research Culture Action Plan will be informed by the RD Action Plan - underpinned by commitments from academic departments. This streamlined approach will enhance the communication, recognition and understanding of the value of the RD Concordat across the university. For example, the new [School for Arts and Creative Technologies](#) (including Music and Theatre Film and Television, interactive and emerging media) held in summer 2022, a series of events with researchers to bring the two departmental cultures together. Early career researchers designed and ran their own ReACT (research in Arts and Creative Technologies) events to **share their experiences and consider the challenges and opportunities for postdocs** including precarity of employment, mental health, gender and research as a creative process. Their visual representation of the discussion can be seen on the [Concordat Implementation](#) webpage. Additionally, the Research Culture Coordinator has worked with the Department of Chemistry to deliver a national [Pathways to Equity in Research Symposium](#). Free and open to STEM researchers at all career stages from across the UK, the symposium supported by the Royal Society of Chemistry and GSK explored the intersectional inequities in research and how to achieve a more equitable landscape that includes a supportive and flexible working environment, fair research development, evaluation and recognition processes. One of the focus groups held in advance of the symposium addressed the challenges faced by early career researchers. These included workload model, job uncertainty, culture change such that activities like mentoring are valued and expected as part of the research role, time to teach and supervise, being recognised, the cost and work-life balance implications of geographic mobility, lack of progress for BAME underrepresentation. **Role models, mentors and training for PI and systematic management of their performance were all identified as goals.** These topics were woven into the broader discussion about EDI, the development of a talent pipeline and working environments and echoed by the keynote given by Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser, Chief Executive of UKRI. The discussions form part of the many explorations about what research culture means at York and how the Concordat can support that.

**2.2 Support for Employment.** Improving employment conditions, providing security and enabling career development remain key to York's support for researchers. Since 2020 there is greater use of the named researcher recruitment policy enabling greater job security for researchers. The University is committed, wherever appropriate, to 'appoint new and existing staff to indefinite contracts unless necessary and objective reasons justify use of a fixed term contract' and to moving research staff already employed to fixed term contracts to indefinite contracts at the earliest opportunity. The university will also review the use of fixed-term contracts where the contract is renewed or extended following a period of two years' continuous service (HR guidance on appointments, contracts and leavers) The Department for Health Sciences have refined their redeployment policy such that **over 95% of contract research staff either have their contract extended or are redeployed within the Department.** This is achieved through a series of early meetings exploring career options, skill set and redeployment within the department conducted with the Head of Research, HR partners and with staff whose contact is at risk. Additionally staff are encouraged to apply for promotion and senior staff are encouraged to recommend highly performing staff for internal awards such as 'Making a Difference' and 'Rewarding Excellence'. The new school of Physics, Engineering and Technology (PET) are using the Concordat to underpin the creation of their ECR culture and actively discussing issues like the use of fixed term contracts at senior management level.

**2.3 Department and Researcher led-Activity aligned to the Concordat.** Engagement with the Concordat has grown over the last two years evidenced by a growth in research staff forum ([currently 18 ECR societies](#)). This has been enabled through consultation with ECRs via the Research Staff Liaison Officers and through the creation of departmental [Concordat action plans](#). In addition the Biology Postdoc Society run sessions as part of the Researcher Festival outlining how to start and implement a postdoc/early career research forum enabling others to learn from their substantial experienced developed over 11 years. Many of the larger departments run specific ECR events (Biology, Psychology, Archaeology and Health Sciences) and Biology conduct an annual postdoc survey, the results of which are reviewed by the Chair of research to shape practice and support. The Department of Archaeology run a departmental culture survey completed each year and this forms part of annual performance reviews discussions. The Biology Postdoc Society have also led on the creation of a series of events to align with Postdoc Appreciation Week (PAW) and developed a Padlet of expressions of recognition from PIs/line managers to their postdocs. The Department of Chemistry also arranged free passes for the York Sports centre as part of PAW.

**2.4 Engagement in Professional & Career Development: Support, Training and Networks.** Since the 2020 report there has been a **43% increase (805 from 563) in participation of researchers in the BRIC-coordinated 'Professional Development and Skills Programme.'** This increase is explained partly by better communication but also by the format of the provision. 81% of research staff say they prefer online training to face to face, an increase of 9% on 20/21 evaluation data. Online training serves researchers' work-life balance, saves on travel costs and supports the environment. 96% of participants were satisfied/highly satisfied with the training, 98% rated the facilitators as effective and 100% said their understanding of the topic had improved or significantly improved. The revision in 2021 of the annual Researcher Conference into a **two-week online Researcher Festival saw record levels of engagement from researchers and PIs** with sessions on diverse careers; successful communication; interdisciplinary research; the power of mentoring; developing a teaching and civic profile; goal setting; thriving in uncertainty, networking and collaboration; Queer voices on research; effective project management; making the most of your postdoc; developing a social media profile; looking after your mental health; knowledge transfer and input from the [The Women in Research Network](#). Since 2020 the WiRN network has more than doubled in members (68 members in 2020 to 188 in 2022) and the schedule of events has expanded to include an annual conference to coincide with National Women's Day, and regular professional development sessions on supporting the menopause, imposter syndrome, wellbeing and identity and childlessness in the workplace. It is championed by the PVC for Partnerships and Engagement and the PVC for Research. At departmental level the new [School for Business and Society](#) has developed a number of **processes to support wider career and development and promotion prospects**, including appointing deputies to all major administrative roles to enable more junior and mid-career staff to train up into more senior roles. In addition, the **new roles of Career Development Fellows (CDFs)** has recently been developed. CDFs are junior academic roles designed to provide scope for postdoctoral scholars to develop their academic careers. Each CDF will negotiate a tailored teaching and research 'development plan', agreed with the CDF Coordinator and the relevant Head of Group (HoG) at the

end of their first month in post. The aim of the development plan (with 6, 12 and 22 month review points) is to ensure that CDFs achieve a level of performance that will support their employability, with protected time to write and publish their research alongside developmental teaching duties that are closely linked to their research expertise. Researchers can also apply for support from a dedicated 'ECR Strategic Development Fund' to support research and impact related training and networking. In the first year, £3000 will be allocated to this fund with further funding subject to review.

**2.5 Fellowship Support & Training.** The [University's Research Fellowship Programme](#) supports early career researchers who are applying for, or currently hold, an independent research fellowship. Since 2021 it has been supported by a full-time Fellowship Coordinator and overseen by the [Fellowship Coordination Committee](#), enabling an expansion of the programme which now provides advice and guidance to applicants, current Fellows and their host Departments. Since the programme's inception in 2019, 48 fellowship specific events have been run and **the number of externally-funded Fellows has steadily increased, with 95 externally-funded early career Fellowship holders as of September 2022, and more due to join in the months following.** The York Fellowship Programme runs a range of events for current and prospective Fellows. Fellows are invited to attend regular social, networking and professional development opportunities, offering them the chance to develop their skills and meet others at a similar career stage. The flagship event of the York Fellowship Programme is **the annual Fellowship Fortnight, now in its second year, which offers two weeks of events aimed at current and prospective Fellows** and research support staff involved in supporting Fellows. Fellowship Fortnight includes the annual **'Preparing for Fellowship Success' (PffS) programme, a 3-day event for early career researchers who are in a position to develop a Fellowship application** with York within the next 6-9 months. PffS is now in its fourth year, and in June 2022 welcomed 25 applicants, including 6 external applicants from 4 countries. Only 3 months after this retreat, 40% (n = 10) of applicants had already submitted a Fellowship application at York. Two of the participants from PffS have been internally shortlisted to be put forward for the prestigious UKRI Future Leaders Fellowships. The Fellowship Coordinator runs regular information sessions relating to Fellowships, focusing on major Fellowship schemes such as those run by British Academy and Leverhulme, and also provides tailored 1:1 support to Fellowship applicants, working alongside Departments and Schools to ensure that applications are as strong as possible and stand up to the scrutiny of what are often extremely competitive schemes.

**2.6 Conduct a comprehensive review of the suite of leadership programmes.** A full review of the leadership provision has been conducted in order to evaluate the content, mode and medium of support required to serve the needs of researchers, PIs and the institution. **Institutional investment in LinkedIn Learning in 2022 enables all staff to engage in online, accessible leadership programmes to suit their needs.** To complement this a pilot programme of supervision training was delivered and evaluated in 21/22 and an online, York developed, 'Being an Effective Research Supervisor Tutorial' (BERST) will be made mandatory for all supervisors, the majority of whom are PIs from 22/23. This programme, in conjunction with a pilot of leadership provision will take place in spring 2023 will ensure that line managers/PIs are fully equipped to support researchers - from PGR to mid career researcher in areas such as wellbeing, integrity, writing, public engagement, professional and career development as well as compliance with York's policies. The pilots will be evaluated and refined to form a comprehensive leadership provision.

**2.7 Consult and develop an institutional list of professional development activities.** The 2020 report stated an intention to develop resources to 'enable PIs, supervisors and mentors to have meaningful conversations about professional development and ensure participation in training is recorded and discussed as part of annual performance review (EC4 & PCDI1)'. The [Looking Beyond Horizons](#) resources were co-created with researchers and PIs over a period of 15 months. Launched in summer 2022, the four stage process supports researchers in taking stock of existing skills, reflecting on future professional and career development options, creating a Professional Development Plan and discussing this with PIs/line managers as part of the annual performance review process. In accordance with the University's commitment to public good, the prompt list includes ways of demonstrating civic duty through outreach, volunteering and mentoring. Monitoring and evaluating the impact of the LBH resources forms part of the University's key priorities for 2022-2025.

**2.8 Mentoring and Coaching to support Professional Development.** York's [mentoring and coaching schemes](#) enable researchers to engage in an impartial discussion with trained colleagues. Since 2020, 102 researchers have taken advantage of the University mentoring scheme and 60 postdoc mentors have been trained as mentors as part of the York [PGR mentoring programme](#). The mentor training develops skills in active listening, empathy, and an understanding of EDI issues. Mentors consistently speak of the value of contributing to the professional development of more junior colleagues, a theme picked up in the 2022-2025 Plan. The York mentoring scheme is part of a suite to support researcher wellbeing and was recognised with the ['Outstanding Award for Postgraduate Student Wellbeing'](#) at the 2022 Postgrad Awards. In addition, several departments run their own complementary buddy and mentor schemes, matching more experienced researchers with those seeking advice and guidance independent of their PI/line manager.

### 3. Next steps and focus of future strategy for the next two years, including success measures

The York RD Concordat Action Plan 2022-2025 details our commitment to the development of an institutional culture that 'promotes ambition, collective purpose, courage and the continued improvement of all that we do' and to enabling the development of a community 'without limits'. In the context of research, this means building an environment where people can thrive and where research is conducted to the highest standards of [integrity](#).

Progress against the institutional actions and Departmental/School level actions (detailed in the [RD Concordat Data Studio](#) - highlights below) will be explored through shared practice meetings, research culture cafes and detailed on the [Showcasing Departmental support for Early Career Researchers](#) webpage. These will feed into achievement of the institutional priorities detailed in Table 1.

**Environment and Culture:** active communication and discussion of the Concordat (English and Philosophy); clear signposting of relevant policies (Computer Science, newly created [School of Physics, Engineering and Technology](#) - PET); Promotion of Mental Health, EDI and Bullying and Harassment (English have a zero tolerance policy on bullying, PET use unconscious bias training as do Chemistry and the new [School for Business and Society \(SBS\)](#), Psychology have introduced wellbeing, ECR and LGBT+ roles on Departmental committees, Philosophy assign ECRs with a Departmental mentor); EDI and research integrity training (documented by the Departments of Environment, Psychology).

**Employment:** specific induction for researchers, 'welcome' coffee mornings (Biology); encouragement for women in applying for promotion (PET); review of workload allocation models and use of end of contract meetings mentioned by STEM departments (PET, Biology and Chemistry).

**Professional Development:** a commitment to using the Looking Beyond Horizons resources is cited by most departments, the School for Business and Society will run a careers campaign; Education will develop a careers guidance group and the Dept of Mathematics are to enhance their fund for building collaborative networks.

**Table 1: Institutional RD Concordat Priorities**

Principle	Action	Success Measures and Metrics
<b>Environment and Culture</b>	Active support for researcher-led grassroots activity; creation of ECR communities through shared practice events and the Researcher Festival; support for individual researchers through the <a href="#">York Research Fellowship Programme</a> .	Increase the number of fellowship applications and participation of external applicants (6/26) in the <a href="#">Preparing for Fellowship Success</a> programme. Increase by 50% the number of Fellowship specific events (48 in the period 2020-22).  Increase from 18 early career/postdoc societies to 20 (two-thirds of all Departments) creating an overarching network across all disciplines to facilitate communication, shared experience to drive the implementation of the Concordat.
<b>Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity &amp; Bullying and Harassment (ECI3)</b>	Evaluation of the implementation of the <a href="#">Dignity at Work and Study Policy</a> .	Monitor the number of researchers using the new staff reporting process for bullying and harassment and engagement with <a href="#">Dignity Contacts</a> . In addition ALL academic Departments will have an Athena Swan award by 2023
<b>Employment:</b> Recognition, reward and promotion (EI3)	Full review by HR of academic and research promotion criteria. Several departments have signaled exploration of workload models.	Consultation and engagement, measured via pulse point surveys, with 50% of the ECR community in identifying the challenges and opportunities for ECRs in making a case for promotion.
<b>People Management (EI5, EI6, EI1))</b>	A new Culture and Community (C&C) Framework will articulate how People at York work with each other. (EI5). A comprehensive institutional Talent Strategy will also be developed 'which balances progression, promotion and retention with the attraction of external talent.'	All researchers and staff are to be given the opportunity to be involved in the consultation around the six pillars of the C&C Framework. The Framework will be signed off by the University and Unions. The Talent Strategy will be cascaded to all Departments and cover all staff.
<b>Research Integrity &amp; Responsibility and Reporting (ECR4, ER2)</b>	Revise the University's <a href="#">Statement on Research Performance Expectations</a> to include support for early career researchers.	Adherence to the expectations evidenced in annual performance review.
<b>Research Identity and Leadership (PCDI4, PCDM2)</b>	Enhance and monitor engagement with: professional and career development, LinkedIn Learning, the <a href="#">Researcher Festival</a> , mentoring and coaching (PCDM2, PCD14), fellowship training, researchers training to be PGR mentors; completion, where appropriate, of York's new mandatory research supervision training.	50% increase in participation of professional development evidenced in a PDP.
<b>Professional and Career Development:</b> Career Development Reviews and Support for Diverse Careers (PCDI1, EI, PCDI6, PCDM1, PCFR4)	Review and consolidation of online resources to support induction and professional and career development (EI1, ER2); implementation and evaluation of the <a href="#">Looking Beyond Horizons</a> resources to support PDP.	75% of all ECR researchers engaging with the PDP resources evidenced through the Annual Performance Review process.