

## Summary Report HR Excellence in Research Award 19th June 2026

The University of Worcester received the HR Excellence in Research award in June 2016. The award was subsequently renewed in June 2018, 2022 and again in 2024 following a 6 year external review.

### **This report provides:**

- An account of the institutional context for research.
- Describes the governance structures and approach to representation that underpin the Concordat action plan.
- Discusses our approach to evaluation and gap analysis and reviews our progress and achievements against the current plan.
- Articulates our 3-year strategic plan and aims.

### Institutional Context

The University of Worcester was founded in 1946 as a teacher training college, gaining University title in 2005 and Research Degree Awarding Powers in 2010. Since 2005, the University has grown significantly with increased student numbers and a development of new areas including the opening of the Three Counties Medical School in 2023. In total we employ approximately 1000 core staff, (June 2026). In terms of the primary audience of the Researcher Concordat in June 2026, 20 members of staff are employed on research-only contracts, primarily based in research centres with 300 wider beneficiaries of the Research Concordat employed on teaching and research contracts.

In 2025 we moved away from college-based research leadership with research leadership now located within a central RKE Directorate led by the Pro Vice Chancellor Research. The Deputy Pro Vice Chancellor Research has responsibility for strategic leadership in Health focused research and research culture and environment. Commitment to and support for researcher development and the Concordat has been strengthened with the appointment of a Director of Researcher Development and Doctoral Education who has responsibility for chairing the Concordat Implementation Group supported by a RKE Facilitator (People and Culture). The directorate incorporates the Research, Innovation and Impact Office (RIIO) and Doctoral School. The RIIO team has responsibility for coordinating policy and process for fundings, strategy, research integrity and governance. The Doctoral School is responsible for our PGR programmes, PGR student life and research student and supervisor development.

Currently the University is launching a new strategic plan for 2026-2030 and redeveloping the RKE Strategy. The University strategy articulates our 'ambition is to be even stronger as an engine of opportunity, a springboard for our students and a powerhouse for society'. We are committed to deepening social relevance through teaching, research, and civic partnerships. Two of our core principles of 'investing in people' and 'focused on beneficial outcome', with a commitment to celebrate success speak directly to our commitment to and work on the Concordat. Following the launch of the new strategic plan we are redeveloping our University Research and KE Strategy. People is one of the core pillars of our current strategy and the following 3 core objectives identified as being relevant in 2023 continue to drive our approach and commitment to developing our core beneficiaries, staff on research contracts, as well as the wider group of staff with responsibilities for research.

- We will seek to recruit and retain excellent researchers at all career stages but with a particular focus on attracting the next generation of researchers and research leaders to the University.

- We will seek to increase the number of Postgraduate Research (PGR) students in identified areas recognising that they are fundamental to a rich, vibrant, and sustainable research culture.
- We will develop and mentor researchers across their research careers (from PGR to Professor).

### Governance Structures and Representation

The Concordat implementation plan and HREIR award is overseen by the Concordat Implementation Group (CIG) chaired by Director of Researcher and Development and Doctoral Education and reporting to the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee which in turn updates the University’s Academic Board on progress against the action plan. The group consists of representatives from groups who are key beneficiaries of the HREIR Action Plan and Concordat and those charged with responsibility for its development and implementation from for example, Human Resources and the Doctoral School. The following groups are represented on the CIG:

- Research Staff
- Managers of Researchers
- Postgraduate Research Students
- Research Leaders
- Researcher Development team
- Human Resources
- Academic staff with significant responsibility for research

### Internal Evaluation, Gap Analysis and Stakeholder Involvement

The Concordat Implementation Group meets regularly to monitor progress against the current plan and reports 3 times each year to the University RKE Committee. In the context of the new HREIR action plan template and the opportunity to select key obligations to focus on we set up a sub-group of the CIG to undertake more in-depth work on evaluating our position and identifying key elements to take forward. The membership included representatives of the core beneficiaries of the Concordat and the leaders of the Staff Researcher Network. The sub-group’s recommendations were discussed and reviewed by the CIG and presented to and approved by UWRKE Committee in March 2026.

Taking on board recommendations from the 2023 external review that in the context of our small number of core beneficiaries we should move away from using extensive quantitative measures we moved away from using formal surveys to evaluate our progress. Core to our 2023-2026 plan was the development of the peer led Staff Researcher Network. The CIG has extensive contact with the Staff Researcher Network through its co-chairs and they were a vital part of our evaluation approach. A key element of our approach over the past 3 years to meeting the needs of our core beneficiaries has been to work to ensure that the needs of researchers are embedded in general University of Worcester HR practice, therefore we have drawn on the University of Worcester Staff Survey and a range of HR Metrics to inform our analysis.

### Progress and Achievement

Key achievements against our priority areas identified in our 2023 summary report:

Priority Area	Progress, Achievement and Areas to take further
Undertake a Researcher Career Stage Review (RCSR) Project that identifies and describes the	We completed in 2024/5 the Researcher Career Stage Review Project. During the project we built

<p>5 stages of a University of Worcester’s research career - ECRs, Mid-Career, New Research Leader, Senior Research Leader and second career Academic.</p>	<p>a comprehensive understanding of the needs of staff across the university including our core beneficiaries. The project included a series of focus groups with staff in each of the 5 career stages giving voice to researchers on the next stage of development and building qualitative evidence of researchers’ perspectives on the development and wider research environment and culture.</p>
<p>Use the outcomes of the RCSR to identify, develop and deliver a series of training and development pathways to enable researchers at each career stage develop and progress</p>	<p>Using the outcomes of the RCSR and to provide a more targeted approach we have reviewed our researcher development programme and realigned with specific career stages. We have mapped our wider researcher development offering across the university to enable us to provide a more comprehensive and nuanced offering to all researchers. Over the next period we intend to build on our learning from the RCSR and embed this approach even further and use our understanding of career stage to implement further initiatives such as a Researcher Level Scheme and Research Awards.</p>
<p>Review the format, scope and reach of the University research mentoring scheme to ensure it meets the needs of researchers at each career stage</p>	<p>We have continued to provide mentoring when requested however we have recognised in our review of the different mentoring schemes we offer that the current approach is not targeted effectively. Again, we have used our learning from the RCSR to inform our current action, and we aim to launch in 2026/7 a new comprehensive approach and more impactful approach to mentoring, based on a laddering/career development approach with specific requirements to staff at distinct career levels, eg ECR to work with a mentor. We expect this to benefit our core researcher group.</p>
<p>Support managers of researchers through training and development to use the RCSR outcomes when reviewing career development with researchers.</p>	<p>We have presented the findings of the RCSR to Senior Managers. We have developed further support for managers in training and development delivered by our HR colleagues and embedded the needs of researchers into relevant training. We are now taking this forward in 2026 and designing and delivering bespoke training for the managers of researchers delivered by members of the RKE Directorate.</p>

In addition to our progress against our priority areas our analysis of progress across the 2023.-2026 plan (approved 2024) indicates that we have made good progress in the following areas:

- Raising awareness of the Concordat
- Embedding the needs of researchers in institutional policies and practices
- Seeking feedback from researchers
- Training managers of researchers in well-being and mental health and promoting a health working environment
- Promoting a health working environment

- Providing an environment for researchers to engage with relevant policy and decision making
- Provision of University-wide induction for researchers

### Future Plan

We are confident now that we have securely embedded the need of researchers in institutional policy and practice and we have the training, development and support available to support managers and their researchers in a range of areas to ensure a health working environment including well-being, equality and diversity and bullying and harassment. Our focus now is on the individual encounters between managers and researchers and transparent pathways for development, progression and recognition.

Our priorities going forward and associated obligations are to:

- Introduce a University Researcher Level to provide structured career planning and recognition for researchers.
- To launch an Annual Research Awards scheme to provide recognition for individual researchers, research teams and research leaders.
- To support Managers of Researchers with a bespoke training programme to enable them to support researchers at all career stages with effective workload planning.

No.	Pillar Environment and Culture	Aim
2A	Promote good mental health and wellbeing through the effective management of workloads and people.	To develop early intervention strategies to reduce stress and improve workload planning.
2B	Ensure managers of researchers are effectively trained in relation to wellbeing and mental health and promote a healthy working environment that supports researchers' wellbeing and mental health.	To reduce the risk of burnout and support consistent management of workload.
4A	Ensure managers undertake relevant training and development opportunities related to equality, diversity and inclusion, and put this into practice in their work.	To ensure fair access to development and recognition and reduce bias in supervision, workload allocation and progress.
5A	Ensure researchers and their managers are aware of, and act in accordance with, the highest standards of research integrity and professional conduct. And that all members of staff use available mechanisms to report staff who fail to meet the expected standards of behaviour in relation to research misconduct.	To enhance research culture, improve research practice and ensure compliance.
	<b>Pillar Employment</b>	
7A	Ensure open, transparent and merit-based recruitment, which attracts excellent researchers, using fair and inclusive selection and appointment practices.	To provide fair and transparent recruitment processes and outcomes, ensure equitable assessment and improve accessibility and inclusion.
7B	Provide an effective induction, ensuring that researchers are integrated into the community and are aware of policies and practices relevant to their position.	To develop sense of institutional belonging, enhance visibility of researchers and retention.
10A	Provide effective line and project management training opportunities for managers of researchers, heads of department and equivalent.	To enhance leadership and supervision skills and enhance project delivery and workload planning.

10B	Managers undertake relevant training and development opportunities so that they can manage researchers effectively and fulfil their duty of care.	To enable managers to better understand researcher career structures and support consistent decision making and support.
10C	Managers actively engage in regular constructive performance management with their researchers.	To improve planning and objective setting and enhance researcher wellbeing.
<b>Pillar Professional Career Development</b>		
13A	Provide training, structured support, and time for managers to engage in meaningful career development reviews with their researchers.	To strengthen researchers understanding, ownership, planning and accountability for their own careers through a series of initiatives including a revised comprehensive mentoring programme aligned with careers stages/researcher levels, revised research compact as a mandatory element of appraisal and mentoring and bespoke training for managers on using the Vitae RDF and Career stages/Researcher levels to develop career planning.
13B	Managers engage in regular career development discussions with their researchers, including holding a career development review at least annually.	To strengthen researchers understanding, ownership, planning and accountability for their own careers through a series of initiatives including a revised comprehensive mentoring programme aligned with careers stages/researcher levels, revised research compact as a mandatory element of appraisal and mentoring and bespoke training for managers on using the Vitae RDF and Career stages/Researcher levels to develop career planning. Including a revised comprehensive mentoring programme, compact as a mandatory element of appraisal mentoring and bespoke training for managers using the Vitae RDF and Career stages/Researcher levels.

Lynn Nichol, 10<sup>th</sup> June 2026

Director of Researcher Development and Doctoral Education