

# University of Kent HR Excellence in Research Summary 2017

This summary describes the University of Kent's achievements against its commitments to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers ('Concordat'). This summary supports two documents:

- (i) Evidence Review and Analysis (against 2013, 2015 reviews and compliance with principles of the *Concordat*)
- (ii) HR Excellence in Research (HRER) Action Plan for 2017-2021 for further developments aligned to the *Concordat*.

## 1. Context: the University of Kent Vision

The University of Kent is a research intensive institution with 4056 staff (2,066 in academic, teaching and research roles of which 190 are contract researchers). Kent is ranked 17th in the UK for research intensity, with 97% of research being of [international quality as shown by the Research Excellence Framework 2014](#).

*By 2020, we will have firmly secured our position as a UK top twenty university and be a globally recognised research institution. We will build on our distinctive position as the UK's European university to extend our reach and impact across the world and become a beacon of excellence in education and research in our region, the UK and internationally. Our global reputation will be built on the application of our knowledge and expertise to find solutions to some of the world's major challenges.*

### 'Research & Innovation Strategy at the University of Kent'

Kent's Research & Innovation Strategy 2016-2020 includes the following which relate to the *Concordat*:

#### **Objective 1: To increase our output of world leading research**

- Make sure our hire, promotion, development and reward arrangements for our staff will be reflective both of our aspirations and the world leading activity of our staff
- Ensure excellence in our support activities (for individuals) through Research Services, Kent Innovation and Enterprise, Information Services and the Graduate School.
- Provide support that is professional, enabling, simplifying, explaining, and guiding.
- Build (personal) networks of several hundred peers. Typically, from 100 at Lecturer level to 500 at Chair level.

#### **Objective 2: To increase impact and the exploitation of our intellectual activity through partnership with industry, government, charities and wider economy**

- Create an intellectual climate conducive to innovation.

#### **Objective 3: To increase our income from research and innovation**

- Estimate income taking into account the portfolio of research topics and the plans of academics. Expenditure on new staff, equipment and PhD scholarships needs to be planned several years ahead. The transition of externally funded Fellows to Lecturers will be included in the School financial plans.
- Have clear performance expectations and monitor individual research and innovation plans on an annual basis.
- Ensure that partnerships, regional, national and international, are properly funded and sustainable

#### **Objective 4: To increase our postgraduate research programme**

- Provide high quality training to postgraduate research students via our Graduate School.
- Maintain or start Doctoral Training Centres in all three Faculties.

#### **Objective 5: To embed equality and diversity within all our activity**

- Foster equality and diversity as part of a culture of supporting and celebrating our people.
- Offer scope for personal growth for all staff.
- Respect the Research Council UK's expectations for equality and diversity, including participation in schemes such as Stonewall Diversity Champions.
- Promote diversity and equality to Athena silver standard in all research and innovation activities at all career levels.
- Undertake training designed to raise awareness of EDI issues in the workplace, e.g. the 'Every Researcher Counts' resource from Vitae.
- Provide high quality leadership to junior staff, and inspire colleagues. Informal mentoring at all levels of seniority will be part of our research and innovation culture.

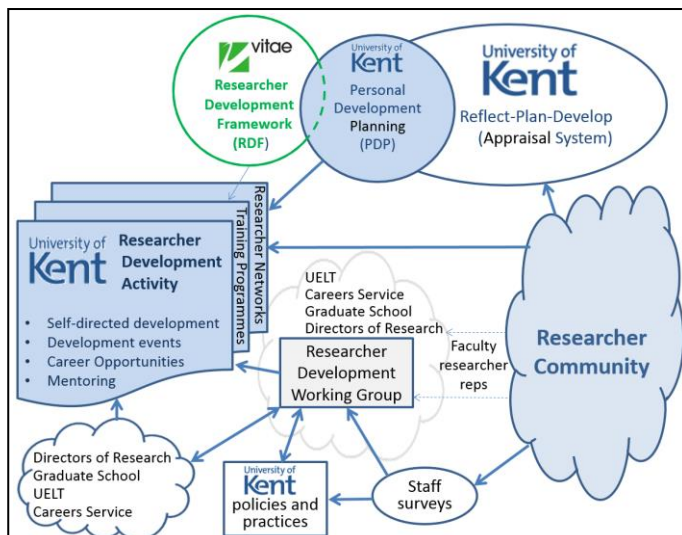
Our **Graduate Strategy** provides [training to postgraduate research students and postdoctoral researchers](#) as well as developing [collaborative training relationships](#) as part of Eastern ARC, CHASE (AHRC), SeNSS (ESRC) and EnvEast (NERC) and to continue to develop high quality collaborative training and research opportunities.

## 2. Mechanisms and structure to ensure the delivery of the *Concordat*

**Researcher Development Working Group:** a cross-faculty group which oversees compliance with the *Concordat*.

**Integration into University Plan, People Strategy, Research & Innovation Strategy and Graduate Strategy:** the *Concordat* highlights selection and development of researchers. Actions are aligned to Kent’s Research & Innovation and People strategies, which recognise the need to recruit, develop, and promote staff and to develop academic leaders.

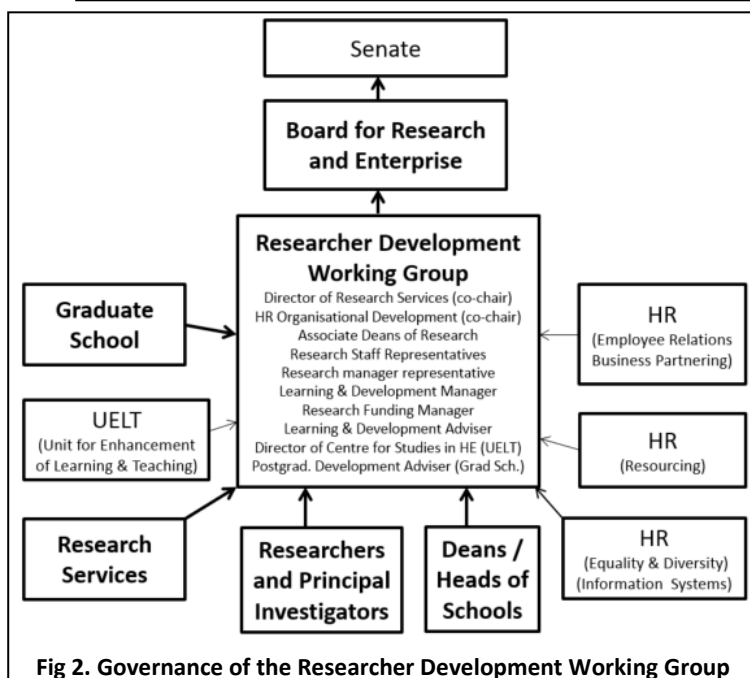
**Monitoring processes:** progress is monitored in researcher surveys and feedback at researcher events and faculty meetings. The University’s new HR system will enable more accurate reporting in future. Monitoring is overseen by the Researcher Development Working Group (RDWG) which is established within the University’s in governance structure to ensure timely and meaningful data collection from support services and faculties to inform and influence future practice.



**Fig 1. Developing researchers at Kent – linking researchers, RPD (appraisal), Personal Development and initiatives overseen by the Researcher Development Working Group.**

## 3. How the evaluation was undertaken (Autumn/Winter 2016/17 HRER Review)

**3.1 Who evaluates HRER?** Researcher Development is continuously evaluated at Kent. Implementation of Kent’s Action Plan is co-ordinated by the Researcher Development Working Group (RDWG), established in 2012. Members include academics and researchers from each faculty plus professionals from service departments and this cross-departmental membership has been an important feature. Each faculty provides one senior research leader and one researcher representative. Other members are from Research Services, the Graduate School, the Unit for the Enhancement of Learning & Teaching (UEL), and HR Learning & Development. Occasional invited participants include representatives from HR Employee Relations and Business Partnering, HR Equality, Diversity & Inclusivity, and the University’s Careers & Employability Service.



**Fig 2. Governance of the Researcher Development Working Group**

**3.2 Governance.** RDWG and HR Excellence in Research are integrated into existing governance structures. RDWG meets quarterly and submits reports to the Research and Innovation Board (RIB), which several RDWG members attend. RIB members include the DVC Research & Innovation, the Faculty Deans and Associate Deans (Research and Innovation), the co-chair of RDWG attends as an observer. RIB reports to Senate.

**3.3 Remit of RDWG.** The working group remit is to ensure that action plan commitments are implemented in line with the principles of the *Concordat* through activity by specific departments and individuals. RDWG’s profile in Kent is reflected by progression of several members (into academic roles, deputy director roles, Dean of the Graduate School) and their high calibre replacements (Deputy Heads of School, Associate Deans of Research & Innovation). RDWG reports are shared with each Faculty Research & Innovation Committee by RDWG researcher representatives and papers are available on SharePoint.

**3.4 Process of Evaluation: the Action Plan and the *Concordat*.** RDWG members reviewed actions arising from 2015 through the summer of 2016 and revisited the plan at two workshops in autumn 2016. They identified key measures for the researcher survey conducted in February 2017. The Gap analysis and action plan has since been reviewed by RDWG members supported by Research Services, Graduate School and HR. Alongside these mechanisms RDWG undertook extensive consultation throughout the period 2013 - 2017 to ensure that researcher views were taken into account. The University’s review in 2013 inspired new researcher networks and researcher surveys were conducted in 2013, 2015 and February 2017.

## 4. Progress since 2013 and 2015

**4.1 Researcher Voice (Concordat Principles 2 and 7).** Improvements are notable at University, Faculty and School level.

- Since 2013 we have:**
- Held researcher forums in all three Faculties at the Canterbury and Medway campuses.
  - Established an on-line researcher development portal, shaped by input from researchers
  - Used biennial Researcher Development Surveys to assess impact of resources and initiatives
  - Involved researchers in informing Kent’s People Strategy using a survey and focus group.

- Since 2015 we have:**
- Updated the Researcher Development Survey to assess new provision, awareness and access.
  - Renewed and enhanced faculty representation in the Researcher Development Working Group.
  - Continued with a Researcher representative on the University’s Research & Innovation Board.

*Additionally, according to respondents of the 2017 researcher development survey;*

- Over half of all researchers are aware of Kent’s researcher development new web portal.
- Graduate School training is attended by 27% of research staff with 64% aware of the offer.
- 43% of research staff have had a career development discussion with their manager.
- RDWG members enhanced external networks, delivering a workshop at the Vitae 2016 Conference
- Faculty and Graduate School collaboration on new events e.g. Medway Research festival

**4.2 Researcher Development (Concordat Principles 3 and 4)** RDWG has established new resources and practices across departments which raise the profile of the *Concordat*, HR Excellence in Research and researcher development at Kent (for example: 78% awareness of Early Career Researcher Network growing from 71% in 2015; increased awareness of Kent’s researcher development fund to 48% from 43% in 2015; a doubling of staff using Vitae (28% from 14% in 2015); and increased awareness of the Vitae RDF (to 40% from 31% in 2015 and just 18% aware in 2013). RDWG aligns HR Excellence in Research practice with other staff development initiatives for researchers including Athena SWAN, Research Impact events, Enterprise & Innovation Network sessions, REF briefings, and the HEA Professional Standards Framework. Increasing proportions of contract researchers are engaging with training, as shown in recent surveys (Table 1). Grant writing (taken up by 22% of those surveyed) and managing budgets (taken up by 5%) were new topics added to the available programme in 2016/17.

	<b>2013</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2017</b>
Career management	7%	14%	7%
Collaboration and team working	14%	14%	<b>14%</b>
Communication and dissemination	15%	14%	<b>21%</b>
Ethical research conduct	21%	10%	10%
Knowledge transfer	10%	8%	11%
Enterprise/commercialisation	1%	4%	<b>5%</b>
Leadership and management	10%	12%	<b>19%</b>
Personal effectiveness	15%	6%	7%
Public engagement	14%	10%	<b>19%</b>
Research impact	13%	6%	<b>20%</b>
Research skills and techniques	39%	12%	28%
Supervision of doctoral/masters students	14%	25%	22%
Teaching or lecturing	40%	20%	20%
Grant writing	Not available	Not available	<b>22%</b>
Managing budgets/resources	Not available	Not available	5%

Our 2017 survey indicated that 75% of research staff feel supported or well-supported in their development. Although less than a third of researchers feel that a fixed-term contract is a barrier to development (improving from 37% in 2015) it remains an area to address (29% in 2013). The proportion of researchers undertaking an ‘RPD’ appraisal has risen by 5 percentage points since 2015, reflecting greater awareness of the process and its benefits (our 2017-21 Action Plan includes our aim to raise awareness further). Furthermore, over two thirds of people that had an RPD appraisal discussion (69%) say it is beneficial. Most researchers (76%) have a mentor (manager or experienced colleague), an increase from 50% in 2015 and 2013.

**4.3 REF contributions (Concordat Principles 2 and 6)** Kent submitted a high proportion of eligible staff (ranked 10<sup>th</sup> in UK) in REF 2014 and, based on data available, our Equality Impact Analysis shows that submission rates for men and women were much closer; part-time much closer to full-time; BME inclusion has remained on par with the overall rate and disabled inclusion now exceeds overall inclusion. The inclusion rate for women with an allowance for maternity leave was comparable with the overall inclusion rate. Kent also had a high proportion of Early Career Researchers contributing to the REF (23%) compared to the national picture of 18% of contributors.

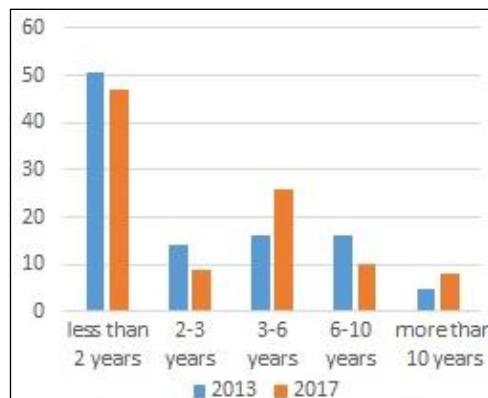
**4.4 Networks and support (Concordat Principles 2, 3 and 4).** Kent specifically encourages several streams of support for researchers, through its networks (Early Career Researchers, Grants Factory, Innovation & Enterprise, Athena SWAN, Aurora women’s leadership) encouragement of RPD (appraisal) and mentoring, and access of research managers to training (to enable them to more effectively support and manage research staff). These provisions are brought together, alongside signposting to external resources in Kent’s on-line Researcher Development portal.

**4.5 Recruitment and retention of contract research staff (Concordat Principle 1)**

Numbers of contract research staff at Kent remains stable from 2013 (187) to March 2017 (190), with 48% of staff working in Sciences, 42% in Social Sciences and 10% in Humanities.

141 research staff (74%) are full-time and 49 (26%) are part-time, (from 65% full-time and 35% part-time in 2013). The gender mix remains largely unchanged with the majority of researchers being female (54% F, 46%M) from 58% female, 42% male in 2013.

Length of service of researchers has increased, particularly newer staff: in 2013 only 14% of staff had 2-3 years’ service and 16% had 3-6 years’; by March 2017 only 7% had 2-3 years’ service, but those with 3-6 years’ service had grown to 28% of contract staff.



**Fig 3. Number of Contract Researchers at Kent by Length of Service (2013-2017)**

Importantly, the number of sequential contracts taken by researchers in 2017 remains as for 2013, with just 10% of staff taking additional contracts. The majority of staff appear to be using contract research work at Kent as a career stepping-stone, rather than having a repeating series of short contracts. Furthermore the uptake of open-ended contracts has increased significantly since 2013 (17% of staff in 2017, up from 15% in 2015 and just 5% in 2013). This aligns with *Concordat* principles concerning sustainability of roles in research.

**4.6 Establishment of the Researcher Development Portal (Concordat Principles 2, 3, 4 and 5)** Kent developed and launched its own [researcher development portal](#) in October 2015 to integrate and signpost provision within and external to the University (including events, on-line resources, Faculty links, HR policy links, career support, researcher networks, news). The site has attracted over 24,000 page views in the past 12 months, with 65.5% of visitors returning to the site and between 100 and 300 sessions a month. The associated twitter account has 263 followers.

**5. Priorities for action (2017-21)**

The gap analysis by the Working Group has identified that the University should pay attention to the following seven major themes. The table below summarises the themes and the *Concordat* Principles addressed by the actions within each theme. Each theme is described by a series of specific actions which are identified on the accompanying 4-page action plan.

<b>Table 2. Themes in the Action Plan for 2017-21</b>	<b>Concordat Principles Addressed</b>
1. Valuing Researchers (page 1, actions 1a-1h of the action plan)	1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 2.2, 2.4, 2.6, 3.3, 3.8, 7.1, 7.3, 7.4, 7.5
2. Networks for researchers, internal events, researcher voice (page 2, actions 2a-2h of the action plan)	1.4, 2.1, 3.1, 3.3, 3.6, 3.7, 3.8, 3.9, 4.10, 4.13, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.6, 6.4
3. Development of research managers to support researcher development (page 2, actions 3a-3b of the action plan)	2.3, 3.1, 3.4, 3.6, 3.7, 6.9
4. Signposting guidance for researchers (via Researcher Development Portal) (page 3, actions 4a – 4h of the action plan)	1.4, 2.5, 2.6, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.8, 4.10, 5.4, 5.5, 6.8
5. Career development including RPD, mentoring and careers advice (page 3, actions 5a – 5g of the action plan)	2.1, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 3.1, 3.2, 3.5, 3.7, 3.8, 3.9, 4.10, 4.14, 5.1, 5.6
6. Equality of Access to Careers and Development (page 4, actions 6a – 6g of the action plan)	1.4, 2.1, 3.6, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.5, 6.6, 6.7, 6.8, 6.10, 7.5
7. Provision of development (external events and materials) (page 4, actions 7a – 7f of the action plan)	2.6, 3.1, 3.4, 4.11, 4.12, 7.4

**6. Analysis and Plan of Actions to meet the requirements of the Concordat**

Specific actions within the 2017-21 plan are assigned to professional service departments, faculties, schools and centres. Implementation of the activities and timescales specified in the action plan will continue to be reviewed by the Researcher Development Working Group, reporting to the University’s Research and Innovation Board.