

# UK HR Excellence in Research Award 2019 Six Year Review

## How was the internal evaluation undertaken?

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UCL is transforming the way it operates. Since 2017, we have undergone significant change to achieve our academic mission. The Transforming our Professional Services (TOPS) programme has been accelerated, we have a new Chief Operating Officer to lead Academic, Educational and Professional Services. There have also been significant restructures in HR and Organisational Development (OD). A newly refocused OD team are supporting new **UCL Research Strategy** and **HR Strategy** both of which provide a greater focus on research leadership in its broadest sense and at all levels. The new OD team comprises several areas of expertise including Recruitment, Talent Management, Employee Experience, Learning and Development, Innovation and Consultancy and Organisational Culture and Change Management. A core purpose of the team is to find and address gaps in researcher development and support structures to help improve researcher experience. To lead this review OD have undertaken extensive consultation with researchers, Faculties and stakeholders.

In February 2019, OD hosted a **Researcher Development Vision Workshop**, which saw UCL-wide representation of stakeholders including Deans and Vice-Deans. The chief finding was a shared desire to provide a transformative experience for researchers at UCL, bringing a sense of excitement, belonging and collaboration, where people feel supported and developed, and become ambassadors for UCL's distinctiveness. This bold spirit underpins our new draft **Researcher Experience (RX) Strategy**, a ten year approach to help deliver the overarching UCL Research Strategy, especially its aim to 'inspire and empower diverse research leadership'. We are engaging with each of our eleven **Faculties** to improve support for researchers and ensure alignment between central and local initiatives, including mentoring, coaching and career development networks. We participated in the **Careers in Research Online Survey**: we have managed to drive up engagement with this survey by 234% and the interpretation of the results have formed part of this review and informed our draft RX Strategy. The **Research Staff Consultative Group** is a cross-institutional body that monitors our implementation of HR Excellence in Research Action Plan, chaired by Professor David Bogle, Vice-Provost Doctoral School within the Office for Vice Provost (Research), which meets termly. The group also contributed to the recent review of the **Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers** directly. We have now published the 2019 Concordat on our growing Researcher Hub. The **UCL ECR Liaison Committee** brings together chairs of early stage research networks at UCL, both those attached to our nine interdisciplinary Research Domains and representatives of Faculty early stage researcher networks. Members of the committee have contributed to this review.

Further engagement opportunities underpinning this review include UCL's first ever **Postdoc Appreciation Week**, a festival to celebrate early stage researchers' contributions to research and discovery, to raise visibility of researcher's work, and promote supportive initiatives available to them including the **Research Staff Development Programme**. Within the week we held a **Town Hall with Professor David Price** and two Faculty Deans. We also held the first ever **Friday Conversation** an engagement event with researchers to discuss challenges researchers face and co-create solutions. Findings have fed into this review and the draft RX Strategy.

Finally, we also **consulted with colleagues in Professional Services**, including the wider HR team and staff across UCL who provide expert research support in career development, public engagement, research-led education, open science and IT research support. Aside from the RSCG, the review also links to existing mechanisms for monitoring the implementation of the Research Strategy and the HR Strategy. It also links to

key equity monitoring mechanisms, including the institutional steering group of the Athena Swan and Race Equality Charter Marks, where OD is represented.

## What key achievements have been made against the action plan?

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**Concordat principle 1 (Recruitment, selection, retention)** OD is now geared towards supporting the entire employee lifecycle. We are in the process of implementing a new recruitment system that will ease recruitment, selection and redeployment. We have created a new onboarding experience, with phase 1 already complete. We have made the promotions process more transparent. We have reformulated the HR Business Partnering role to strengthen our support for researchers in each Faculty and to this end all 20 HR Business Partners have completed a HR BP Development Programme.

**Concordat Principle 2 (Recognition & value)** The OD team, formed specifically to maintain deep knowledge and understanding of the needs of researchers at UCL, engage regularly with research staff. Our first ever Postdoc Appreciation Week, has helped to raise the visibility and profile of researchers' contribution to UCL. The programme, which we intend to grow and develop, included with a range of high profile engagement events with senior leaders, learning and development opportunities and our 'Postcard to a Postdoc' appreciation campaign.

**Concordat Principle 3 (Support for researchers)** We conducted focus groups with new and established PIs and are now in the process of developing more structured support for them. These include a new blended learning appraisal tool to help PIs be more effective leaders of early stage researchers. We have introduced the Research Staff Digest, a brief fortnightly e-newsletter that informs researchers about the developmental opportunities on offer. The UCL Liaison committee has been formalised as an important forum for researchers that meets regularly and reports into the RSCG.

**Concordat Principle 4 (Personal, professional and career development)** We have successfully launched a new Learning and Development Portfolio. The portfolio, all of which is open to researchers, includes the dedicated Research Staff Development Programme (RSDP), which offers over 300 researcher-focused short courses. We have expanded the availability of services offered by UCL Careers and have seen a significant rise in engagement with careers provision. We have also consolidated and simplified the coaching and mentoring provision available to researchers.

**Concordat Principle 5 (Researchers share in their professional development)** We have formalised and expanded opportunities for researchers to contribute to professional development activity. Researcher-led Initiatives, first trialled with postgraduate research students, provide researchers with funds to lead in development activity and at the same time develop their own skills. In the new Research Staff Code of Practice 2019-20 we set out the expectation that Research Staff should spend a minimum of 10 days per year on personal and professional development. We launched a pilot for a skills development and skills tracking tool for Research Staff.

**Concordat Principle 6 (Diversity & equality)** We have expanded our B-Mentor and Inclusive Advocates schemes for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) researchers and implemented a new Research Opportunity Scholarship for BAME doctoral researchers. New initiatives with a focus on co-creation have resulted in a broader cross-section of researchers participating in Researcher Development activities, women and BAME researchers in particular.

**Concordat Principle 7 (Contribute to sector-wide review and institutional self-reflection)** UCL provided leadership to the Concordat review which has helped to drive the publication of new Concordat 2019, which we are fully committed to. We are developing a bold new RX Strategy to provide innovative research support to researchers that will inspire and inform the sector.

## Next steps: our focus over the next two years

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**Concordat principle 1 (Recruitment, selection, retention)** We will work to ensure UCL is able to attract, develop and retain the outstanding talent needed to deliver our academic mission. We will do this by developing a new Talent Strategy; implementing our new recruitment system (scheduled for July 2020); continuing to transform the Welcome for new starters at UCL and by working to embed the Academic Careers Framework in our practices, including through Academic Promotions Workshops. We will introduce a new blended-learning approach to delivering good staff appraisal, which will include coaching skills for Principal Investigators. Success will be measured in a greater understanding of the overall employee life cycle, greater engagement and awareness amongst staff of opportunities, including via the new staff survey and CROS survey.

**Concordat Principle 2 (Recognition & value)** We aim to enable and celebrate UCL researchers both in effective everyday practices and through flagship initiatives to help restore the sense of playfulness and experimentation to the everyday practice of research. We will consult on and launch the new RX Strategy, to enable, celebrate and develop UCL researchers. We are in the process of consulting on the RX Strategy with each Faculty researcher experience, with the aim for agreement and publication by May 2020. We will expand and develop Postdoc Appreciation Week, specifically through co-creation and inclusivity, which we will measure through specific engagement targets.

**Concordat Principle 3 (Support for researchers)** We will enable research leadership in all its forms. A new course for Heads of Department is in development that will provide new Heads with an induction into their role and a supportive network of peers from September 2020 onwards. We will develop a new Research Leadership development module for all of our new Principal Investigators, such that research leaders know and understand their roles in leading effective research teams and developing early stage researchers.

**Concordat Principle 4 (Personal, professional and career development)** We will consult widely across the institution – engaging at least one third of our research staff - on the aspiration that UCL researchers should dedicate 20 per cent of their time to personal, professional and skills development. We will streamline the RSDP to offer new ways of supporting development, including skills-self assessment, skills-tracking, and scope a new learning and career development model based on a fellowship qualification.

**Concordat Principle 5 (Researchers share in their professional development)** We aim to increase participation in Researcher-led Initiatives by 10 per cent. We are in the process of piloting a skills development and skills-tracking app that encourages researchers to lead their own professional development. Development of a new Alumni Employee Network will enable a larger community of UCL researcher alumni and help us to understand more about career destinations and pathways of researchers.

**Concordat Principle 6 (Diversity & equality)** We will foster a diverse research community from the widest possible talent pool. This includes our aim to reduce the homogeneity of the researcher profile and address the overrepresentation of dominant groups at the top. We will continue to run our specific mentoring and sponsorship channels for BAME researchers, and support Research Opportunity Scholarship for BAME candidates and deliver a new BAME leadership development programme in addition to our existing commitments.

**Concordat Principle 7 (Contribute to sector-wide review and institutional self-reflection)** We will contribute to sector-learning on enhancing the researcher experience in higher education through dissemination, conferences and publication of resources for the sector. We are fully committed to the new Concordat 2019 and expect to sign imminently. We will use HR Excellence in Research Award Action Plan to monitor our progress against our commitment.