**HR Excellence in Research Badge: Two-year Internal Evaluation & Action Plan Update May 2018**

**The HR Excellence in Research Badge**

SOAS University of London greatly values its research staff and has long had in place measures consistent with the provisions of the Concordat for Research Staff for their fair employment and career support. SOAS received the [HR Excellence in Research Award](https://www.soas.ac.uk/staffdevelopment/research/) in May 2012 and retained it through an internal review in 2014 and a four year external review in 2016. This document reviews progress made against the action plan 2016-18 in the form of an internal self-assessment, and reaffirms the School’s ongoing commitment to support its research staff though its Action Plan for 2018-20.

The School’s [Vision and Strategy](https://www.soas.ac.uk/directorate/visionandstrategy/) highlights the continued aim of being “the world’s leading institution for research on Asia, Africa and the Middle East”. For the School this has been a period of restructure and change in academic departments and professional services, including the removal of the faculty structure and role of Dean, however with an improvement in the quality of support in the research office.

The number of research staff has increased slightly to around 50 so this is still a small community many of whom spend substantial periods abroad. Following from advice in our external assessors’ report in 2016 relating to supporting staff who are overseas we have made substantial improvements to the amount of information available electronically, whether by web site, on Moodle, online learning or via targeted email communication. This ensures a better flow of information to all research staff. Staff are additionally supported through the early stages of their research career in their departments and with their PIs as well as through central services.

We are able to report substantial progress in developing support mechanisms as an Ambitious Futures (AF) graduate intern was commissioned to work on this area full time during a four month placement. The [project aims](https://www.soas.ac.uk/staffdevelopment/services/ambitious-futures/) for the placement were to consolidate support and information for ECRs from across the institution and develop support in line with the actions for this award. This document and the associated action plan will detail this and other progress.

**Evaluation of Achievements and Progress: Action Plan 2016-18**

The HR Excellence Award working group has met during this period to ensure the action plan is on target, with papers submitted annually to Research and HR Committees for discussion. The Pro-Director, Research & Enterprise presented the paper to the Research Committee. Termly research staff forum meetings have been held to provide further feedback. A survey to all ECRs and individual follow up interviews took place in November 2017 to evaluate progress against targets and to inform the detailed work of the AF Intern. This informed new processes for communication with ECRs, the content of ECR handbook, web site and Moodle pages. Now all new ECRs whether on academic or research only contracts receive an email within a month of their start date outlining all the support available to them.

The Concordat continues to be highlighted for new staff and during relevant training activities for research managers/principal investigators. We have progressed or completed the majority of the actions due for completion by 2018, and in some areas have been able to deliver more than we expected.

**A: Recruitment and Value**

* The [Recruitment and Selection policy](https://www.soas.ac.uk/hr/procedures/recruitment/policy/) and procedure have been updated and replaced by a recruitment framework. Training has been amended to reflect these changes;
* All panel members must have attended the full Recruitment and Selection course which contains unconscious bias training (or an equivalent recent course). 100% compliance;
* Refresher training for all staff involved in the recruitment process who attended the training before 2010 has been made mandatory.

**B: Recognition and Value**

* Paper written outlining key responsibilities of Head of Department / PIs / research staff which has provided clarification on management responsibilities. Paper uploaded on web site and distributed to ECRs, PIs, REO and HR;
* The automated end of fixed term contract process sends reminders to the managers of research staff. The end of fixed term process includes discussion on redeployment and career development;
* Participation in the School’s Staff Development and Review scheme is compulsory after the completion of probation. Part 3 looks specifically at career and development planning. Participation rates reported to HR Committee and in line with other staff groups;
* Further training courses to support PIs in the management of grants in relation to finances and people developed, and further support offered from REO via new posts for pre-award advice.

**C: Support and Career Development**

* All new research staff receive a welcome pack of materials outlining what support is available to them within one month of starting their initial contract. They are also invited to attend the institutional New Staff Orientation programme as an introduction to the School, to Equality issues and Information Compliance. 40% of research staff attended these courses which is an 18% increase from 2016;
* New research staff are offered a mentor at the start of their contract (80% of respondees had an official mentor);
* Development of Early Career Researcher [web site](https://www.soas.ac.uk/research/early-career-researchers/) and Moodle site;
* Careers web site: Resources for Early Career Researchers site developed containing links to resources, web sites, blogs and the Career Management for Early Career Academic MOOC;
* The Early Career Researcher Handbook: This is a comprehensive guide for new researchers at SOAS, covering basic HR information for getting settled, to guidance on how to access career development support. Advertised in February Research Excellence Newsletter (emailed to all Academic Staff List), raised at REC and REF Steering groups; [ECR Handbook (pdf; 2mb)](https://www.soas.ac.uk/research/early-career-researchers/file127031.pdf);
* [Researcher Essentials Sheets](https://ble.soas.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=10465): These resources are useful one-page summaries on key topics, e.g. Research Contracts, Open Access, Ethics, Research Data Management and more;
* [Researcher Toolkit](https://ble.soas.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=10465): This Moodle space hosts a number of useful external resources and contains up to date information for researchers, as well as slides and resources from training events;
* Access to [Research Professional](https://www.soas.ac.uk/researchoffice/applying-for-external-research-funding/how-do-i-find-funding-for-my-research-ideas/) for all staff improves information on research grant possibilities;
* Comprehensive [programme of training](https://www.soas.ac.uk/researchoffice/events/); 18 sessions of 1 – 3.5 hours; 153 registrations / 125 attendees;
* Impact training provided at institutional level with external facilitator;
* Erasmus+ teaching and training mobility options are communicated to research staff – 1 ECR took up this opportunity to visit a European partner institution in both 206-17 and 2017-8;
* ECR mailing list set up and process for keeping it up to date developed.

**D: Researchers’ Responsibilities**

* The development and implementation of ‘Worktribe’ as a research management system enhances information about, and planning of, externally funded research;
* Worktribe user guides, video guides and training have been developed;
* Dedicated support for research staff (and students) remains available in the careers service.

**E: Diversity & Equality**

* Research staff are included as a separate category in the annual HR Equality report. No equality issues raised by data analysis;
* Institutional submission to Athena Swan (Bronze) following successful application to ECU Gender Equality Mark (GEM). Institutional action plan developed by the working group with input from academic members.

**F: Implementation & Review**

* Insufficient returns from research only staff to report on this group in annual staff pulse survey;
* Numbers of research only staff too small to justify running PIRLS or CROS surveys. Smaller scale bespoke survey undertaken by AF intern in November 2017, feedback from post doc lunches collected; focus group for ECRs held in May 2018.

**Next Steps and Implementation of Actions 2018-20**

The action plan for 2018-20 has had input from the ECR group including a focus group in May 2018, HR, the Careers Service, Staff Learning and Development, the Diversity Adviser, the Research Office, the Digital Services officer, Resources and Enterprise Committee, the Pro-Director, Research & Enterprise plus input and amendments based on discussions at these committees.

Key areas of focus:

1. Improved reach of HR Excellence Award logo and branding - added to recruitment materials, web pages, email signatures where appropriate;
2. Recruitment and Selection training refresher on three year basis; online course developed;
3. 100% of new staff to have a mentor to help with initial acclimatisation and career planning;
4. Increase proportion of ECRs attending new staff orientation programme by 10% per year;
5. Continue to develop the professional development programme for research managers and research staff including online Research Integrity course, practical grant management, managing a research team, writing bids research ethics, authorship, impact etc. Delivery through face to face courses, online courses and podcasts;
6. Continue to develop specific expertise in the Research Office to support researchers and PIs a pre and post award stages;
7. Encourage career and personal development planning for individuals in their departments through mentoring, the staff development and review scheme, use of the expertise in the careers office and case studies / discussion at the post-doc lunches;
8. Advance HE (ECU): Gender Equality Charter Mark – cross-institution working group has been set up to retain bronze level award;
9. Advance HE (ECU): Race Equality Charter Mark – cross-institution working group to work towards the award.

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**Measures of success include:**

* Continued increase in percentage of research staff participating in school processes such as orientation, mentoring and staff development and review;
* At least 4 post doc lunches held per session with at least 50% of ECRs accessing these at least once a year;
* Increased number of development opportunities and take up for research staff and their managers;
* Increased take up of career development planning using the expertise of the careers office.
* Monitoring actions and progress relating to the action plan through regular meetings of stakeholders, reported to Research and Enterprise Committee and Human Resources Committee in Term 3 each academic session.

Professor Matthew Craven, Pro Director (Research & Enterprise)