

Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers Humanities Action Plan Phase 2 2016-2020

Broad Strategy

We will continue and build on the initiatives to support Early Career Researchers developed in Phase 1 (2013-2015) while revising in the light of feedback from ECRs. We will also adopt some new initiatives, in line with the university's key aim of making ECRs feel 'at home' in the university: we will aim to make changes that build support for ECRs into the Faculty structure and that help ECRs to become involved with all aspects of Faculty life.

Our strategy involves five main strands

- Social and Networking Events
- ECR Mailing List
- ECR Individual Meetings/ Champions Report
- Funding Support
- Structural Support and Involvement

Initiatives to Support Early Career Researchers

ECR Social and Networking Events

Social Events

We aim to hold ECR social events either once or twice a year to provide an opportunity for ECRs to network, to discuss issues informally with peers, the ECR Faculty Champion and senior faculty members (Dean/ Associate Dean of Research). They also allow us to emphasize that there is a commitment to support ECRs at both University and Faculty level, to explain the Concordat, and the role of the Champion encourage them to contact him/ her if they are facing difficulties or have any ideas for how we could support them better. However, desire for social events varies between cohorts, so how many sessions – and what form they take - we offer will depend upon feedback from ECRs.

Past Events: December 2012, February 2014, October 2014, December 2015
Next event planned: Spring 2016

ECR Development Sessions

Informal feedback from ECRs suggested a desire for development sessions addressing particular issues, with a particular need for information about funding. Lee Walters arranged three lunchtime ECR Development Sessions in 2014-5 in partnership with FBL and FSHS.

- "Making the best of your time as a researcher: resources available to ECRs", Wednesday 26th November 2014, 13:00-14:00. A session provided by Professional Development, discussing the best strategies for building a successful academic career and covering resources available in the University to support research staff. (20-30 attendees)

- “Domestic External Funding for ECRs”, provided by Bridget Trezize. A session discussing the domestic external funding available for ECRs and the best strategies for applying. (8 attendees.)
- “EU funding and Soton International Office Funding for ECRs” provided by Bridget Trezize and Eleonora Gandolfi. A session discussing the domestic external funding available for ECRs and the best strategies for applying (15 attendees.)

These sessions were advertised to ECRs and they were informed that the sessions counted towards professional development.

This model seems to have been successful. Similar sessions have been planned for 2016 and will continue in following years if feedback continues to be good.

ECR Facebook page

An ECR Facebook page was set up in 2014 to help with virtual networking. The Facebook page had a fair bit of activity initially with the ECR Champion posting relevant links and starting discussion threads. However, it became increasingly difficult to maintain momentum. We will retriail the Facebook page in 2015-16. If successful it will be continued until 2020.

ECR Mailing List

The ECR mailing list has been used to disseminate information relevant to ECRs, to advertise ECR Champion organized events and to pass on relevant messages from other groups (i.e. requests for ECR panel members for PGR events.) It seems to be very successful, with feedback from ECRs describing it as ‘a very helpful service’. We will further develop our use of the mailing list. For example, we will ask relevant services (i.e. the Research & Innovation Service) to produce short ‘What You Need To Know’ Emails that can be sent to ECRs at regular intervals, reminding them of the support that is available in the Faculty and how to access it.

ECR Individual Meetings/ ECR Champion Report

In Phase 1, the ECR Champion attempted to meet with all ECRs individually. These meetings allowed the ECRs to raise concerns, ask for advice, to make suggestions about how the Faculty can support them and to discuss ‘grass roots’ ECR initiatives. They gave the ECR Champion a sense of ECR morale and support around the Faculty. The ECR Champion produced a report based on the meetings and raise concerns where appropriate.

Going forward, we will aim to supplement this strategy by appointing ECR Reps in each academic unit. The ECR Rep will meet with ECRs in their academic unit and all ECRs Reps will meet termly with the ECR Champion. ECRs will also be invited to meet with the ECR Champion if they feel this would be helpful.

Our strategy will be to:

- send a general invitation noting that individual meetings are available for anyone with concerns/who would find this useful
- target ECRs who have joined since the last round of meetings every year
- target other ECRs on a 2 year cycle.

Funding

The key concern raised by ECRs in individual meetings from 2014 was access to funding for conferences and other career development needs. In response to this the first round of the Faculty Small Awards funding was earmarked for ECRs and advertised as such. The availability of such funding was also emphasized to ECRs through the ECR mailing list. We will (a) support the continued earmarking of funding for ECRs; (b) continue to use the ECR mailing list and Lunchtime Development Sessions to improve ECR awareness of the available funding opportunities.

Structural Support

We will continue to use the individual meetings and feedback from ECRs to identify areas in which structural support can be improved.

Current meetings have identified three key areas of concern.

- Voices for ECRs in faculty structures: The ECR Champion has been invited to attend the Faculty and Research Committee and the part of the Promotion Board at which level 4/5 upgrades are discussed. We plan to review Faculty Committees and, where appropriate, encourage a policy of having at least one ECR member of Committees.
- Induction/ Information/ Settling in: Many ECRs in 2014 meetings reported problems with inductions, difficulty working out how things worked in their department/ Faculty. We liaised with HR on this and were informed that they had independently set in motion improvements to induction procedures. We will continue to gather feedback on this and seek improvements where necessary. We will also pass on suggestions for ways departments can support new staff i.e. creation of staff handbooks and job descriptions.
- Mentoring: Most ECRs reported good informal mentoring but little effective formal mentoring. The Dean, Anne Curry, has agreed to look into best practice re mentoring. We will develop a mentoring strategy.
- A key area of concern identified by the Faculty Working Group is policy on maternity and paternity leave and support for returners. We will investigate support measures that the Faculty might implement for returners, including the possibility of a mentoring scheme.