

University of Portsmouth
Summary Evaluation Report for HREiR Award
May 2026

1. Institutional Research Context

The University of Portsmouth is a modern University with a growing research base and a reputation for excellence. Located in the UK's only island city, it serves as a key regional partner addressing socio-economic challenges while driving economic growth and social development.

The University Strategy 2030 states its mission as “to create, share and apply knowledge to make a difference to individuals and society,” underpinned by the values of Ambitious, Responsible and Open. Its strategic goal for research is ‘**Driving change through our leading-edge research connected to society’s global challenges**’, and four new underpinning objectives were established in 2025:

- Enhancing our research culture
- Expanding our world-leading research
- Forging strategic partnerships and connections
- Tackling economic, environmental and societal challenges

Our research community includes:

- Research-only staff (fixed-term and project-based roles) - At any given time, the University employs **100 to 120 Research Staff**, depending largely on the number and type of externally funded research grants and contracts.
- Academic staff with research responsibilities - Approximately 900 to 1,000 academic staff (including ECRs)
- 1100 registered PGRs
- Approximately 160 technical staff
- 60 professional service staff who support research or academics/researchers, including finance, library, Department for Research and Innovation, faculty and school-based staff.

Since the start of the 2023–2026 action plan, the University, like many across the sector, has undergone significant organisational change to streamline services, align with a new strategy, and support long-term sustainability in a challenging financial climate. These changes have affected staffing capacity, requiring some activities to be reprioritised to maintain core operations. Key changes included:

- An institutional reset from February 2024, involving restructures and redundancies across faculties and professional services, with formal processes concluding in September 2024.
- Ongoing faculty restructures and operational reviews during 2024–2025.
- A change in Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) in 2025.

Despite the financial challenges and structural changes, the University remained committed to supporting its contract research community, and actions were prioritised that directly impacted their day-to-day experience and career development.

2. Summary of progress and achievements over the last 2-3 years

The University has held the HR Excellence in Research award since 2013, and the 10-year review took place in June 2023, with final approval of the 2023-2026 action plan being confirmed in September 2023.

Due to the challenges faced during this period, there were unavoidable implications for capacity, continuity and timescales within which some actions could be delivered and, as a result, the

implementation of the 2023–2026 action plan has, in practice, been progressed over closer to two years rather than the full three-year period. It has also been necessary to redesign/re-scope a small number of actions within the plan to better align with strategic priorities. These have all been clearly explained within the reporting on the action plan document.

For the 2023-2026 action plan, we focused on support for Research Staff (RS) and their managers. Actions were developed with the two target audiences at the centre, but staff beyond these groups have also benefited directly or indirectly from them. We have not reported on this wider group of beneficiaries within this submission.

(Full 2023-2026 action plan and reporting available [here](#)).

3. Internal Evaluation and Gap Analysis

In evaluating the 2023-2026 action plan and creating the new 2026-2029 plan, including conducting the gap analysis, the following mechanisms and data were used.

- a. **CEDARS survey (2025)** - After piloting CEDARS in 2021 (response rate 14%), having a 22% response rate in 2023, we made a substantial commitment and stronger institutional emphasis on research culture for CEDARS in 2025, resulting in:
 - 49% overall response rate (all eligible staff)
 - 65% response rate for contract research staffThis level of engagement exceeds sector norms and previous UoP participation levels. The University's approach was recognised nationally through being invited by the CEDARS team to present at an event.
- b. **Institutional Staff Survey** data from research staff responses
- c. **Feedback on training and support interventions** delivered to research staff and their managers
- d. **Workforce data** relating to research staff: contract types and duration, internal progression and promotion and participation in development activities.
- e. Feedback and input received via the **Research Staff Forum and network consultation** events
- f. Consultation with the **Research Culture Development Group** (remit detailed in section 4).
- g. Action planning activities undertaken for **other strategies, concordats and initiatives**, including Technician Commitment, Athena Swan, Race Equality Charter, Research Culture, People Strategy and REF 2029.
- h. Qualitative feedback and input gathered from research staff and their managers through **1:1 sessions, focus groups and discussions**.

4. Stakeholder Involvement

Research staff input played a direct role in shaping the six priority obligations within the 2026–2029 action plan. Insights from the data sources detailed in section 3 were synthesised and reviewed,

followed by a prioritisation process to identify the gaps that would have the greatest impact on research staff, particularly in relation to job security, career progression and consistency of management practice.

Wider stakeholder engagement mechanisms (through career stage staff networks and Research and Innovation (R&I) leadership consultation) were used to ensure that experiences of managers and those who lead research activities could also be incorporated into the gap analysis work and supported alignment to institutional strategy and priorities. Full stakeholder engagement is outlined in the table below.

Stakeholder Group	Consultation mechanisms
Research staff	Research Staff Forum discussions, researcher focus groups, drop-ins and feedback sessions, formalised feedback from training, support, CEDARS and staff surveys.
Research Culture Development Group	CEDARS reports, data analysis and review, gap analysis and action prioritisation exercises.
ECR, Mid-Career, Associate Prof and Professors' networks	Gap analysis and action prioritisation exercise, focus group, formalised feedback from training, support, CEDARS and staff surveys.
R & I Leads	Review and input to identify gaps and proposed actions
Research enablers, PIs, other academics and researchers	Anecdotal input and formalised feedback from training, support, CEDARS and staff surveys.

As a result of the above, six priority obligations and the actions to meet these obligations were agreed upon, as detailed in section 6.

5. Governance and decision-making structures

Operational oversight for the Concordat and HREiR award falls to the **Research Culture Development Group (RCDG)**, a formally constituted sub-group that feeds into governance from the University Research and Innovation Committee (URIC), which is chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation). URIC ensures that this work is strategically aligned. (To note, from May 2026, Contract Researchers will be formally represented in the membership of URIC).

The RCDG is chaired by the Institutional Lead for Research Culture. Its remit and membership were reviewed and expanded in 2024 to better reflect the institutional priority for research culture and to include additional stakeholders. It includes in its membership representatives of Research Staff (convenors of the Research Staff Forum) and career stage staff network convenors, a member of the Senior R & I leadership team, along with staff representing HR, Research Ethics, EDI (providing a connection to Athena Swan and Race Equality Charter groups), Careers and Employability, technicians, PhD students and Research Culture.

The Governors' Audit Committee is the formal group that provides governance approval and sign-off for the Concordat and HREiR award documentation.

6. Strategic Plan for 2026–2029

The University strategy aims to ‘Connect and inspire our colleagues and students in an ambitious and **inclusive research community**’. We are committed to building critical mass and resilience as part of our approach to research culture/Strategy, People and Research Environment by ‘**attracting, developing and retaining excellent researchers.**’ The 2026-2029 action plan will be crucial to achieving this for our contract researchers and their managers.

For the upcoming three-year period, the aim has been to create an action plan that **delivers tangible benefits for all research staff**, aligned to University strategy and plans, and is feasible within existing resources, minimises duplication, and maximises synergy with other relevant concordats, charters and initiatives. Priority has been given to interventions that will provide the **greatest impact for staff from the point of induction, to supporting their current roles, through to career planning and development for their subsequent roles and careers.**

It has also been important to build in lessons learned from the 2023-2026 action plan by ensuring that institutional structures/infrastructure are in place to support actions, (or there is scope to review/develop/change these structures if an action is dependent on them), to establish direct alignment with core institutional strategy, to propose fewer, clearer actions in order to enhance sustainability and that impact measurements are realistic within the delivery timescales. In addition, there will be phased implementation of actions, with a combination of ‘quick wins’ and those that will drive longer-term cultural change. Barriers to engagement faced by contract researchers have also been considered in the planning, so that final agreed actions have the greatest potential for success.

The key changes, within the overarching strands, that we aim to achieve over the next three years are:

- **Environment & Culture:** A more collaborative, inclusive research culture with enhanced well-being support targeting actions that can influence multiple metrics. This includes cultural change at the PI level as well as the contract researcher level.
- **Employment:** Improved recognition and reward for research-only staff.
- **Professional Development:** Career pathways supported through access to high-quality and impactful induction, training, mentoring, and career planning resources.

To deliver changes against the gaps, six concordat obligations have been prioritised. Success will be evaluated through a combination of quantitative and qualitative indicators, including:

- Improvement in specific CEDARS and other staff survey indicators (e.g. career development, job security, management support).
- Increased participation rates in training, mentoring and development activities (monitored annually).
- Improved qualitative feedback from focus groups and researcher forums.
- Enhanced retention and internal progression rates.

A summary of gaps, obligations and associated KPIs is provided below. The full 2026-2029 action plan can be found [here](#) and represents a realistic, sustainable and strategically embedded approach to delivering the Concordat and HREiR award obligations and commitments.

Identified Gap	Obligation/s to Address Gap	Key Success Measures
<p>Some responses commented on a lack of transparency in policies and practices for tackling bullying and harassment.</p> <p>A clear gap in support was highlighted for those undertaking sensitive research and/or those who receive external online abuse due to the nature of the research they undertake.</p>	<p>Promote a healthy working environment through effective policies and practices for tackling discrimination, bullying and harassment, including providing appropriate support for those reporting issues.</p> <p>Ensure managers encourage reporting and addressing incidents of discrimination, bullying and harassment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 75% of contract researchers understand the processes and policies related to bullying and harassment - 75% researchers carrying out sensitive research are aware of the resources and guidance available to them and are confident in how to follow any process related to these.
<p>Calls for greater inclusivity, especially for neurodivergent and minoritised staff.</p>	<p>Ensure managers undertake relevant training and development opportunities related to equality, diversity and inclusion, and put this into practice in their work.</p>	
<p>55% of staff feel valued and recognised for the work they do. Recognition issues were common—researchers felt their contributions were often overlooked or attributed to others.</p>	<p>Provide clear and transparent merit-based recognition, reward and promotion pathways that recognise the full range of researchers' contributions and the diversity of personal circumstances.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Annual researcher awards implemented. - 60% contract researchers responding to the survey feel that their contribution to research is recognised.
<p>13% staff accessed 10 or more days of development (14% national) 48% 1-4 days, 17% 5-9 days, Training opportunities were appreciated but often inaccessible due to time constraints.</p>	<p>Provide opportunities, structured support, encouragement and time for researchers to engage in a minimum of 10 days of professional development pro rata per year, recognising that researchers will pursue careers across a wide range of employment sectors.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 25% of researchers are achieving 10 days of CPD. - 75% of those accessing the induction training and/or tools state that they were useful or very useful.
<p>51% have a mentor; Gender differences are notable. 57% of women reported having a mentor, compared to 45% of men.</p>	<p>Ensure that researchers have access to professional advice on career management across a breadth of careers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduction in unmet demand for mentors. - 80% of those who have accessed the mentoring scheme or mentoring circles are satisfied or extremely satisfied with the support provided.
<p>Leadership training is requested by 59% of CEDARS respondents.</p>	<p>Provide researchers with opportunities and time to develop their research identity and broader leadership skills.</p> <p>Managers engage in leadership and management training to enhance their personal effectiveness and to promote a positive attitude to professional development.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 75% contract researchers state they have increased confidence in their broader leadership skills. - 75% managers who accessed the coaching training state that their confidence in leading these conversations has increased.