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The Concordat

to Support the Career Development of Researchers

Annual report 2022



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Foreword by Professor Julia Buckingham CBE

It is a pleasure to write on behalf of the Researcher Development Concordat Strategy Group to introduce our 2022 Annual Report.

With the pandemic waning, 2022 was a year of growing momentum, with more institutions signing the concordat and publishing their action plans.

As we look to the future, our discussions have had a strong focus on research culture. Research culture goes to the heart of the concordat, which essentially provides a framework to support positive cultural change and foster healthy working environments to enable our talented young researchers to thrive and realise their potential.

We have been hugely encouraged to see the green shoots of positive change. A systemic analysis of our signatories' action plans and the first tranche of institutional annual reports showed a very high level of engagement and ambition, with a degree of commonality of focus and a range of examples of good practice and innovative approaches to dealing with the systemic challenges.

A similar picture was evident at our first annual Research Culture and Practice Forum, which brought together over 300 members of the research community from across the four nations to debate the opportunities and challenges faced by our researchers, their team leaders and their institutions. It has been particularly heart-warming to witness the willingness of colleagues to collaborate, share good practice and discuss problems openly, recognising it is incumbent on all of us to support our developing researchers and that, without doubt, we can do it better together.

There is of course still much to do. The precarity of research careers remains a particular concern both for individual researchers and for the UK as a whole if we are to secure the talent pipeline for the future, and this will be a focus for the Strategy Group in 2023. We plan to launch an open discussion with researchers, funders and employers to explore ways to improve the terms of employment for researchers and to address the systemic issues of short fixed-term contracts, limited opportunities for promotion, and the status of researchers within their institution.



We are also working in partnership with Vitae to gain a better understanding of the career paths our postdoctoral researchers pursue, both in academia and beyond, with the view to improving the career advice and professional development opportunities we offer them and gaining a better understanding of the long-term social, cultural and economic value these highly talented and skilled individuals bring to society.

I would like to express my thanks to my colleagues on the Strategy Group who give their time and expertise so willingly, to the secretariat and Universities UK for their outstanding support, to our funders (Research England, Scottish Funding Council, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, and the Department for the Economy (Northern Ireland) for their generous support, and to the many colleagues across the research community for the expert advice and support they give us.

I hope to see many of you at our 2023 Research Culture and Practice Forum on 13–14 June, which we are running in partnership with the Research Integrity and Knowledge Exchange Concordats and the Technician Commitment.

Julia Buckingham is Chair of the Researcher Development Concordat Strategy Group.



Executive summary

1. This report provides an overview of the work undertaken by the Researcher Development Concordat Strategy Group (RDCSG) in 2022 to monitor and evaluate progress, support signatories, and galvanise a strong community towards improving employment and support for researchers and research careers in UK higher education.
2. To better meet its commitments as the concordat's governing body, the RDCSG expanded its membership and established dedicated working groups to review the concordat, measure success, and increase engagement activities with the research and innovation community. Highlights included developing and launching a dedicated concordat website to support signatories and share good practice, supporting a successful annual research culture and practice forum, and publishing new reporting templates to support monitoring and evaluation of signatory progress.
3. The report also includes a monitoring statement where we analyse a sample of institutional concordat reports and action plans to measure signatory progress in implementing concordat principles. The analysis highlights the vast and varied amount of work universities, research institutes, funders and regulators are undertaking to improve their research environments, employment conditions and professional development of research staff.
4. Overall, there has been notable progress in key areas. Awareness of the concordat among research staff is increasing, as is participation in research culture-related initiatives, interventions and professional development opportunities. Wider skills and contributions by research staff are being increasingly valued in research institutions, as are links between universities and industry.
5. The analysis also reveals what should be prioritised in the next reporting period. This includes support and guidance for researcher managers, embedding reward and recognition into formal promotion and progression practices, and articulating a broad understanding of development and the benefits it brings to researchers.
6. The report also showcases individual statements from RDCSG members, as well as case studies from organisational signatories, to highlight good practice in the sector to support researcher development.
7. The report concludes with RDCSG's priorities for 2023. This includes addressing the systemic issue of researcher career precarity, supporting the development of a tool to track the long-term careers of researchers, and responding to policy developments in the research landscape, including the Concordats and Agreements Review and government consultations.



Background

The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, more commonly known as the Researcher Development Concordat, is an agreement between universities, research institutes and funders to work collaboratively to create, maintain and support a positive, inclusive, and accessible research and innovation culture in the UK.

The concordat was reviewed in consultation with the research community in 2018 and a revised version was published in September 2019. This version reflects developments in the research and innovation community since the initial version, published in 2008. It outlines obligations for institutions, funders, managers of researchers and researchers categorised into three principles: environment and culture, employment, and professional development.

The Researcher Development Concordat Strategy Group (RDCSG) oversees the governance and implementation of the concordat. The group comprises sector representatives who are committed to catalysing positive change in our research culture. In 2021, the secretariat was transferred from Vitae to Universities UK (UUK) following a review by RDCSG of its governance structure, activities and monitoring processes.

Concordat signatories are required to conduct a gap analysis and publish an action plan within a year of signing up, and submit a short annual progress report to RDCSG and publish the report on their institution's website. The concordat is also used by some organisations to support their applications for the European Commission's HR Excellence in Research Award through a process managed by Vitae.

In July 2021, the UK Government evidenced its commitment to improving research culture, employment conditions for researchers and support for attracting global talent with the publication of the R&D People and Culture Strategy. The strategy aims to facilitate a research culture that encourages, supports and celebrates the flow of talent across the whole R&D ecosystem. It sets out objectives categorised by three pillars – people, culture and talent – which, together, support an overall ambition of attracting and retaining an additional 150,000 researchers by 2030. The Researcher Development Concordat is a powerful tool to catalyse the delivery of this strategy, by guiding and galvanising researchers, managers of researchers, institutional leaders and funders to make collective change.



The barriers members of the research community face when navigating their work, life and career progression are recognised in both the Researcher Development Concordat and the R&D People and Culture Strategy. Creating an environment and culture across the whole ecosystem that celebrates mobility across sectors, diversity of experience and inclusive working conditions requires a commitment from key stakeholders to use the concordat as a continuous improvement tool to drive real systematic change.



Researcher Development Concordat Strategy Group activities in 2022

The RDCSG is responsible for promoting the implementation of the Researcher Development Concordat's principles across the UK. The group meets quarterly, and comprises representatives from funding bodies, higher education institutions, and other organisations and associations from within and outside higher education that are concordat signatories.

Find the [full list of RDCSG members and their affiliations on page 50](#).

In between RDCSG meetings, an executive group, comprising representatives from each key stakeholder group, meets to support the secretariat with policy developments and sign-off communications.

As governing body of the concordat, the RDCSG has committed to the following activities:

1. Oversee the implementation and review of the concordat with appropriate sector representation.
2. Provide a platform to share and promote good practice for the benefit of the research community and its beneficiaries.
3. Maintain the concordat as an online living document to reflect changes in the research system and align with relevant legislation, frameworks and other research-related concordats.
4. Publish and regularly update a UK implementation plan for the concordat, including a communications plan, to ensure a coherent and sustained approach by the sector.
5. Set up specific working groups on topics where there are systematic challenges that require engagement of multiple stakeholders.
6. Work with relevant stakeholders to develop a consistent and robust way of tracking the careers of researchers to facilitate better understanding of career pathways, within and beyond academia, to inform concordat-related activities.



7. Commission and publish a major review of concordat implementation.
8. Report annually to the relevant minister and devolved administrations on key activities and progress in implementing the concordat.

This report will provide an overview of the work undertaken by the RDCSG and secretariat in 2022 to meet these commitments.



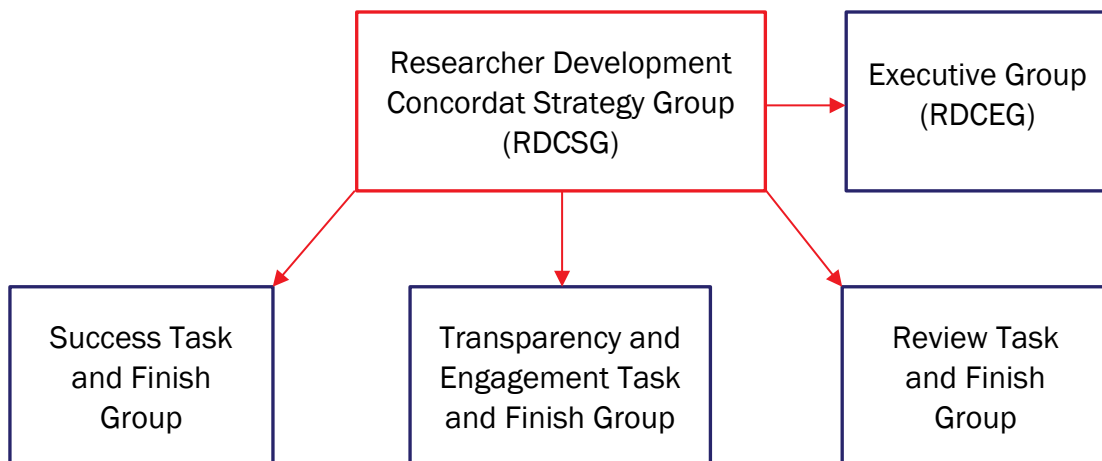
Governance and implementation

Following a review of its governance structure and strategy, the RDCSG made several changes designed to make responsibilities clear, increase transparency and improve accountability.

As part of its commitment to ensuring appropriate sector representation, membership was expanded to include the National Centre for Universities and Businesses and the Academy of Medical Sciences.

Working groups

Three working groups, focusing on governance and implementation strategy, were also established.



Transparency and Engagement Task and Finish Group

This group successfully supported:

- a new dedicated website and Twitter account for the concordat
- a communications strategy for online content
- the publication of a highlight report to update the research and innovation community on concordat progress in 2021
- the 2022 Annual Research Culture and Practice Forum



Success Task and Finish Group

This group produced a list of success measures and actions for the RDCSG to fulfil in meeting its commitments as the concordat's governing body.

Recommendations included effective gender and ethnicity monitoring, a review of working groups to tackle systematic issues for researchers, and incorporating feedback from key stakeholder groups, including government and researchers themselves, into the concordat strategy.

Review Task and Finish Group

This group led an initial high-level review of the concordat, to ensure it reflects or supports policy developments.

The group produced a list of recommendations and considerations for possible revisions to the concordat to enhance its impact. This included making community building a core objective, and introducing a soft, rolling consultation process to engage with key stakeholder groups.

Changes to reporting requirements

As per the concordat obligations, signatories are required to submit an annual report to RDCSG, updating on progress with their action plan for implementing the concordat principles.

To minimise unnecessary bureaucracy and streamline the reporting process, the RDCSG approved two new annual reporting templates for signatories. One is tailored to universities and research institutes, and the other to funders and regulators. The new templates standardise the information that institutions provide, making it easier to monitor continuous improvement in research culture and career provision, both at an institutional and national level.

The new templates have the added benefit of aligning concordat reporting with other reporting processes in the sector, most notably the HR Excellence in Research Award managed by Vitae. Going forward, RDCSG will accept documentation for the award as meeting annual reporting requirements for the concordat, avoiding duplication. The RDCSG has also supported Vitae in the development of [an infographic](#) that provides signatories with a visual aid on the two reporting processes.

Guidance on filling out the new templates can be accessed on the [Researcher Development Concordat website](#).



We want to hear your feedback on the new reporting templates

If you have any questions or suggestions on how the reporting process could be improved, please contact the secretariat at CDRsecretariat@universitiesuk.ac.uk.



Engagement, communications and policy development

In addition to the secretariat's wider engagement work, which includes supporting contact leads at institutions and promoting the concordat to relevant networks or at events, the RDCSG has supported the implementation of a sustained and coherent concordat communications strategy.

This includes developing and launching a new dedicated website and organising an annual forum on research culture and practice.

Website development and content creation

The [Researcher Development Concordat website](#), launched in February 2022, provides a single online presence for signatories to access the latest information, resources and news about the concordat. The project was led by a subgroup of RDCSG: the Transparency Task and Finish Group. The group worked with the website design agency Capsule Marketing, and oversaw content development, creation, design, and an engagement and communications strategy for sustained content.

Since its initial launch, the website has been used for the following key functions:

- Provides key information about the concordat's obligations and principles, reporting guidance, and a full list of signatories.
- Publishes announcements, consultation responses, good practice and blogs from researchers about their personal career development stories.
- Provides a clear web presence for concordat leads at institutions to find resources to support concordat reporting.

During this time, over 6,000 unique individuals have visited the website, with just under 18,000 total page views. Nearly 40% of users reached the website through another source, including links from social media and domains, while just over 35% arrived from search engines like Google, and 25% accessed directly using a bookmark or URL. The top five most popular pages, in order, were: [Home](#), [About](#),



[Resources](#), [information on committing to the concordat](#), and the [institution principles](#).

The [Researcher Stories feed](#) was set up to strengthen engagement with the research community and promote good practice. It provides researchers and research-related staff the opportunity to share their personal experiences of initiatives or interventions at their institutions that are designed to improve employment conditions, culture and professional development. For example, a piece by a postdoctoral researcher, [Co-creating the Researcher Development Concordat: Initiatives at Liverpool](#) highlights the collaborative and inclusive approach to engaging early career researchers with the concordat at the University of Liverpool.

As part of the engagement and communications strategy, the concordat has also launched a dedicated [Twitter channel](#) to share updates and researcher developer events from signatories, and promote other signatory content.

Tell us about your experience of concordat support for researcher career development and how it's impacted your career

Whether you're a researcher, principal investigator, early career researcher, researcher developer or research leader, you can [submit your story](#) for publication on our website. If you'd like to get in touch before writing your story, we would be very happy to support the process. Please contact the concordat secretariat at CDRsecretariat@universitiesuk.ac.uk for support through the process.

Annual Research Culture and Practice Forum

In July 2022, the Researcher Development and Research Integrity Concordats co-hosted an [online forum](#), bringing together the research community to discuss research culture and practice issues, progress and achievements. The forum was open to all research-related staff, and featured speakers from government, industry, membership organisations, as well as researchers, researcher developers and institutional champions of research culture. Sessions focused on researcher career development, research integrity, culture, mental health, wellbeing and sustainable career paths.

The forum's organisation and facilitation was supported by a dedicated working group, comprised of representatives from the RDCSG as well as the Research Integrity Concordat Signatories Group. RDCSG members also supported the forum



in shaping the agenda, promoting the event and volunteering to speak on panel sessions.

The forum provided the vital opportunity to consider the various tangents of the research system as one collaborative solution to better and healthier research in the UK. To ensure sustained knowledge-sharing, forum session recordings were published on the [UUK events YouTube channel](#) and promoted across social media as well as the concordat website.

Don't miss the 2023 Research Culture and Practice Forum, taking place online on Tuesday 13 and Wednesday 14 June

In the spirit of strengthening alignment across the sector, [this year's forum](#) will be hosted by Universities UK in partnership with the Technician Commitment, Researcher Development, Research Integrity and Knowledge Exchange Concordats. Save the date and keep an eye out for further information. To hear more about the forum, or to contribute session ideas, please contact the concordat secretariat at CDRsecretariat@universitiesuk.ac.uk.

Wider policy development

As part of its commitment to support policy development in research culture and maintain the concordat as a living document, the RDCSG has also monitored and responded to recent changes in the research system, as well as supported on systemic issues. This includes:

- Supporting the priorities and objectives of the R&D People and Culture Strategy by responding to government consultations on the New Deal for Postgraduate Research and the Future of Research Assessment Programme (FRAP).
- Representing on the Advisory Board to the Concordats and Agreements Review (CAR).
- Giving evidence at the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee on the precarity and attractiveness of STEM academic careers.



Monitoring statement

As governing body, the RDCSG is responsible for monitoring and evaluating signatory progress in implementing the concordat's aims and principles.

In this section, we provide strategic insight through the analysis of a random sample of 42 signatory annual reports and action plans for the 2021–22 reporting period. The analysis was carried out by the concordat secretariat and is split into general findings and findings by concordat principles.

To capture institutions at varying stages of their journey, universities and research institutes were clustered into groups by how recently they became concordat signatories. Cluster 1 features signatories from 2019–20, cluster 2 from 2020–21 and cluster 3 from 2021–22. Samples from funders and regulators were also included to provide insight into this key stakeholder group.

General findings

This section outlines general findings not related to the specific principles of the concordat, including: structure and formatting, governance, policies and processes, monitoring and evaluation, and the impact of Covid-19 on reporting logistics.

Structure and formatting

In general, there were two approaches to reporting on progress among signatories:

1. incorporating progress updates directly into an existing action plan (more common among funders and regulators, and holders of the HR Excellence in Research Award)
2. an annual report distinct from the action plan

The second structure typically moved beyond listing organisational activities and provided more depth on institutional context, key achievements, challenges and lessons learned. Most universities and research institutes followed this second structure, in line with signatory reporting requirements.

The reports were typically 4–5 pages long and structured around the three concordat principles. Some institutions structured their reports by specific cultural components from their institutional research strategy, particularly those



at an earlier stage in their concordat implementation process. A small number containing smaller research communities explained that listing actions against each concordat principle was overly complex and ambitious, instead choosing to prioritise certain aspects.

While universities and research institutes generally included key stakeholder groups (institutions, managers of researchers, and researchers), there was not often a structured approach to separating them. Stakeholder separation did not apply to funders and regulators, who instead structured their action plans by funding calls, terms and conditions, and grant reporting.

There were interesting cases of institutions using innovative approaches to disaggregate information in their reporting. For example, one institution used a different colour to highlight actions inspired by researcher feedback. Another separated their actions, measures of success and next steps by individual faculties, allowing the institution to measure cross-faculty consistency.

Insight: Institutions are required to give equal consideration to the unique context of each key stakeholder group when submitting annual reports. The new reporting template for universities and research institutes encourages this by including separate sections for each stakeholder group.

Governance, policies and processes

Nearly all universities and research institutes had a dedicated researcher development implementation or working group responsible for overseeing their institution's concordat activity. Their responsibilities typically included strategising, formulating actions, gathering and reporting feedback from researchers and managers of researchers, and monitoring progress.

A key theme was the prioritisation of embedding diverse representation into relevant governance, implementation and committee structures. It was common practice for researchers, across different schools, career stages and diversity characteristics, to be represented on concordat working groups and committee structures. A collective university approach was also facilitated by coordination with central service staff, including human resources, communications and IT, as well as various staff support services.

There was a strong recognition of the importance of senior leadership buy-in. This was evident from the consistent appointment of senior-level concordat champions, which included heads of faculties and services, and sometimes research pro-vice-chancellors. However, governing body sign off was not always transparent in reporting.



There was a less consistent and standardised approach to processes and expectations from funding and regulatory bodies. Most had published action plans and dedicated webpages highlighting their concordat commitment, often with links to key work in related areas. Annual updates on progress against action plans for funders and regulators were not always transparent or easily accessible.

Insight: Governing body oversight is important for ensuring concordat work aligns with other research culture-related initiatives and frameworks. The new reporting template encourages this by asking institutions to provide a statement describing the approval process.

Monitoring and evaluation

The reports provided insight into the various ways that institutions collect information and measure progress. The most common method was through the Culture, Employment, and Development in Academic Research Survey (CEDARS), managed by Vitae. This survey was specifically designed to align with the concordat's principles and is targeted at both researchers and managers of researchers. Other feedback mechanisms for universities included staff pulse surveys, roundtable discussions, interviews, focus groups, communication platforms (for example Microsoft Teams or Yammer) and informal drop-in sessions.

Universities measured their progress by benchmarking results against previous years and against national CEDARS results. Other measures of success included engagement metrics (for example, webpage traffic, attendance numbers, diversity of representation on relevant initiatives and committees), outputs, communications and staff satisfaction (relating to relevant events, services and initiatives, career development opportunities, and performance appraisals).

Funding and regulatory bodies primarily gathered feedback through consultation and sector surveys, as well as qualitative engagement with researchers and researcher developers. Progress was measured by monitoring institution compliance with terms and conditions as they related to the concordat, the publication of outputs (including reviews, action plans, strategies, reports and guidance), and alignment with other funding bodies.

Many universities reported challenges with researcher engagement, particularly early career researchers. Survey response rates among research staff tended to be relatively low, particularly with CEDARS, which was frequently in the 30–40% range.



Insight: Avoid 'survey fatigue' by broadening methods for researcher engagement. Informal drop-in sessions, such as coffee mornings, can be useful opportunities to increase concordat awareness and signpost resources and development opportunities.

The impact of Covid-19

The 2021–22 reporting period saw a return to pre-pandemic activity for most institutions. Despite this, the pandemic continued to have a long-lasting impact on some concordat actions, resulting in delays and adjusted timelines. Many researchers were also still catching up on research activity lost during the pandemic, limiting engagement with development opportunities.

There were, however, positive examples from institutions highlighting how the pandemic had enhanced their commitment to mental health, wellbeing and strengthening researcher communities. An increased focus on flexible and remote ways of working was credited with positive gains in work-life balance and increased engagement with online events and activities.

Findings by concordat principles

Environment and culture

Healthy working environments attract and develop a more diverse workforce, impact positively on individual and institutional performance, and enhance staff engagement. This principle recognises that a proactive and collaborative approach is required to create and develop positive environments and cultures, in which all researchers can flourish and achieve their full potential.

What are universities doing?

A key strength of the statements is the vast and varied amount of activity that organisations are undertaking to support staff and improve their research environment. Trained mental health and wellbeing champions, wellbeing resources, peer support networks, free in-house counselling, and mental health first aid training for managers of researchers were all common practice. There were also examples of new flexible and inclusive workload models designed to improve wellbeing; for example, moving to an hours-based rather than points-based system.



Similarly, commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) was demonstrated through appointed champions, dedicated networks for research staff, tailored programmes to diversity characteristics, increased representation within relevant processes and structures, and training for managers. A joined-up approach with relevant support networks and services was considered useful for aligning activity with wider frameworks and initiatives, such as Athena Swan and the Race Equality Charter.

Universities also demonstrated their commitment to reviewing and developing policies to create a more collegial and positive research environment. Many were reviewing their reporting tools and systems for anonymously reporting bullying, harassment, discrimination and research misconduct. These were being incorporated into faculty hubs with clear guidance. The appointment of specifically trained advisors to support research staff with complaints was also common.

What are funders and regulators doing?

Funders demonstrated their commitment to promoting positive and inclusive research cultures by updating the terms and conditions in their funding requirements. All outlined their expectations for host institutions to align with concordat principles. Some were exploring options for strengthening recognition and reward for concordat implementation through financial incentives; for example, in the consultation to the next Research Excellence Framework (REF) exercise.

There was a shared vision to increase the opportunities and support for underrepresented groups in research. Funding bodies outlined their requirements for institutions to complete an [Equality Impact Assessment](#), or answer questions on their approach to EDI and their accreditations. They were also reviewing guidance for assessing grant applications and ensuring fair and objective funding decisions; for example, through transparent scoring systems and unconscious bias training for reviewers and panel members. Additional support was also being provided directly to researchers, including extended submissions, mentoring access and guidance.

Funding policies that promoted flexible working were common practice, including encouraging part-time grant applications, as well as incorporating entitlements to long-term leave. Funders were also exploring how they could directly support researchers with their mental health and wellbeing; for example, by hosting resilience sessions in network meetings or promoting good practice through cross-sector fora.

Most were active members of the [National Forum on Tackling Bullying and Harassment in Research and Innovation](#). Terms and conditions were reviewed so



that breaches and misconduct could prevent host institutions from applying for future funding.

Conclusions

As a result of this work, institutions have made some notable progress in key areas. Nearly all institutions recorded an increase in awareness of the concordat among research staff, as well as increased participation in research culture-related initiatives and interventions. The enhanced focus on mental health and wellbeing was paying dividends, with an overall increase in research staff feedback on the perceived usefulness of support services. Institutions were also recording improved metrics in representation on decision-making structures.

Despite this progress, there are still some ongoing challenges that should be prioritised in the next reporting period. Line managers need to feel empowered in handling sensitive issues, including mental health, EDI and responding to misconduct complaints. However, feedback from managers suggested this support and guidance was not always available. Additionally, while research staff satisfaction with EDI, mental health and wellbeing initiatives was improving overall, some institutions reported that this was still lower when compared to teaching and professional service staff. It is important to tailor wellbeing initiatives and interventions to research staff to address their specific needs, rather than as part of a broader staff package.

Insight: Funding, policy and regulatory bodies have a key role to play in incentivising and promoting good practice for managers, and clearly and consistently outlining responsibilities and expectations with regards to supporting research staff, particularly in handling sensitive research culture-related issues. Institutions should provide appropriate training to line managers, and signpost to existing guidance including [Vitae's toolkit](#) for managers of researchers.

Employment

This principle recognises the importance of fair, transparent and merit-based recruitment, progression and promotion, effective performance management, and a good work-life balance. There is a need to address long-standing challenges around employment insecurity and career progression, ensuring equality of experience and opportunity for all, irrespective of background, contract type and personal circumstances.



What are universities doing?

The statements showcased the work universities are doing to improve their employment practices for researchers across recruitment, progression and promotion. Many have signed up to the [Declaration on Research Assessment](#), recognising the need to improve the ways in which researchers and their outputs are evaluated in recruitment and promotion practices.

Recruitment and selection processes were being reviewed to increase transparency and strengthen equitability. Examples of recent changes included new recruitment systems to improve applicant journeys, developing standardised job templates and implementing unconscious bias training for panellists.

Celebratory events and awards were increasingly recognising the wider contributions of research staff, including leadership, mentoring, knowledge exchange, citizenship and outreach. Some were also specifically tailored to early career researchers, designed to increase their profile. There was also strong evidence of institutions embedding this recognition of wider contributions through incorporating individual research plans in the development of appraisal resources and training for line managers. Activity dashboards, used to monitor wider development and engagement work, were also being incorporated into performance reviews.

Embedding reward and recognition into pay and grading structures, promotions and benefits scheme was identified as a common priority for the next reporting period. Most institutions were in the early stages of working towards this, collecting data, building the evidence base and exploring methods to address job insecurity; for example, shifting to open-ended contracts, where possible, instead of repeat fixed-term contracts.

What are funders and regulators doing?

Funding and regulatory bodies were reviewing their funding requirements and activities to support career progression, security and sustainability. This included eligibility requirements changes to include broader coverage in recognition of wider supporting skills, balanced funding schemes across career stages and research strategy reviews to consider the optimal duration of awards.

There was a strong emphasis on cross-sector collaboration, working with other funders and organisations to identify barriers to stable employment, and standardising processes and expectations for fixed-term research contracts. Building the evidence base on sustainable careers and supporting institutions with clear guidelines on good employment practice were key priorities.

Auditing and reporting processes designed to improve working conditions were highlighted, requiring host institutions to provide evidence of safe working



environments, appropriate resourcing and infrastructure in their progress reports. Research contracts also included signposting for support and next steps for researchers who did not feel adequately supported by their institution.

Conclusions

There has been notable progress in the value institutions place in the wider skills and contributions of research staff, particularly through events and awards, driving cultural change and fostering broader research identities and communities. Feedback from researchers and managers of researchers also showed positive progress in the effectiveness of appraisal processes. Incorporating individual research plans, activity dashboards, and training for line managers into appraisal processes were all seen as key drivers for this positive change.

The priority for the next reporting period is further embedding this recognition and reward into formal processes, particularly promotion and progression. Feedback showed low scoring perceptions around merit, equitable opportunities and fairness around promotion, particularly among early career researchers. This sentiment is entrenched by the long-standing issue of short fixed-term contracts. Funding, policy and regulatory organisations have a role to play in identifying barriers and incentives behind continued use of time-limited contracts and developing a good practice guide for employment.

Insight: Consistent adoption of [UKRI's Resume for Research & Innovation CV](#) model can support researchers in evidencing their wider skills and contributions, and strengthen transparency around promotion and regrading pathways.

Professional development

Researchers must be equipped and supported to be adaptable and flexible in an increasingly diverse global research environment and employment market. This principle recognises the importance of continuous professional and career development, particularly as researchers pursue a wide range of careers.

What are universities doing?

The reports showed an increasing commitment from universities to provide opportunities, structured support, encouragement and time for researchers to engage in personal and professional development activities. There was a lot of work in promoting and developing guidance to support researchers in taking their



10 days professional development per year, targeted to researchers, line managers, professional services teams and faculty office staff. Many institutions were also incorporating the 10-day requirement into research contracts and timetabling.

Institutions were also strengthening their links with industry and business; for example, funding industry-focused career experts to support researcher engagement with shadow schemes. Alumni who had found success outside academia were an important resource in developing and maintaining those links, as well as mentoring early career researchers. There were also examples of enterprise and industry collaboration pathways being included into academic career frameworks and annual reviews.

The reports highlighted how space to develop research identity and leadership skills was a key priority for researchers. There was a strong commitment to inclusive and contextualised leadership; for example, modules and programmes, both internal and external, tailored across career stages and diversity characteristics.

What are funders and regulators doing?

Funding and regulatory bodies highlighted the range of ways they incorporate specific professional development requirements into relevant funding calls, terms and conditions, grant reporting and policies. Annual progress updates had been reviewed across nearly all organisations, prioritising actions and achievements in professional development and training support, and integrating 10 days of development into funding schemes and reporting guidance.

Other activities to embed development into research assessment strategies, priorities and processes included expanding narrative CV questions in grant applicants, developing guidance on narrative CVs for grant reviewers and developing new competency frameworks.

In acknowledgement that a large proportion of researchers they fund will move on to careers beyond academia, funders were also exploring ways to provide direct support, such as the provision of online series, mentorship, and additional funding and training opportunities outside the sector, such as the Industrial Fellowship Scheme.

Conclusions

There has been notable sector progress in widening opportunities for research staff to engage with professional development activities. Despite this, overall metrics showed that still only a minority of researchers take their full 10 days. It is not enough for these opportunities to simply exist: researchers and managers



need to have a clear understanding of what constitutes development and the benefits it brings. Further progress is needed in demystifying research careers outside academia, and developing sector-wide guidance and definitions that foster a broad understanding of development, allow for exploration and cultivate a wide range of transferable skills.

Insight: Development of a systematic researcher career tracking tool would support institutions in articulating the opportunities and benefits of exploring alternative career pathways. Individual institutions could also consider how they collect evidence and support the sustained career development of their staff and alumni; an example is [this lifelong skills and career development platform](#) at Brunel University.



Individual Statements from the Researcher Development Concordat Strategy Group

In this section, RDCSG representatives provide statements on their respective organisational progress in implementing concordat obligations. The signatory statements are presented here in alphabetical order.

The British Academy

Throughout 2022, the [British Academy](#) has continued to embed EDI principles across its research funding activities. We have initiated a trial of a new approach to the assessment of our Small Research Grants, which significantly reduces the human bias element at the final stage of the judgement, with applications that pass the quality threshold being entered into a [randomised allocation process](#). The results of the first round of awards to be judged under this new process will be announced in April 2023. It is hoped that this new approach will encourage applicants from disadvantaged backgrounds to apply to the Academy, reassured that, if the idea for their research is strong, it will have just as much chance of being funded as any other projects.

We have also introduced a new [additional needs fund](#) to support applicants and award-holders with costs that might otherwise be either a barrier to making an application in the first place or detract from funding that could be used for research expenses. The public announcement of this new call was made in February 2023. The Academy is also a partner with UKRI in supporting the new EDI caucus.

The Academy continues to offer funding at key career transition points for researchers, including: early career through the British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowships scheme, where award numbers have risen to 50 in 2022–23 and to 55 for 2023–24; and mid-career through the Mid-Career Fellowships scheme, where the need for researchers to revitalise their research energy and capacity can be a significant barrier. Funding for the Mid-Career Fellowships scheme has been increased to support 44 new awards in 2023. The Academy also continues to encourage skills development through the Talent Development Awards and knowledge exchange through the Innovation Fellowships.



These award schemes can only support a limited number of researchers, however, and the Academy has recognised the need to extend that support more broadly through the ongoing developments of our Early Career Researcher Network. Piloted in the Midlands, South West England and Scotland, the Academy has secured extended, additional funding to enable the rollout of the network across the whole of the UK in the next three years. More than 2,000 researchers became members of the network in its first year. It aims to continue to be responsive to the needs of the early career research community, and as such creates an environment for early career researchers to lead the discussion of challenges they face, and then work with the Academy on opportunities to explore and address these through events and activities.

In partnership with the Royal Society and other academies, the British Academy has also helped in setting up the [UK Young Academy](#), bringing together early career researchers from across all disciplines, including non-academic research to promote the interests and wellbeing of early career researchers generally. The UK Young Academy is part of the wider network of Young Academies across the world and was the 50th to be set up.

Through these major initiatives and actions, the Academy has sought to ensure that the Researcher Development Concordat's principles continue to be embedded through its role as a funder and supporter of early career researchers.

Cancer Research UK

[Cancer Research UK \(CRUK\)](#) is a proud signatory of the Researcher Development Concordat to support the development of our community of brilliant researchers.

In 2021, CRUK published its first action plan underpinning our commitments as a funder to the development and environment we seek for researchers. The action plan outlines pre-existing initiatives we will continue, and where we commit to new actions.

CRUK has continued in its progress towards achieving [EDI in research](#) action plans. Following on from previous activities to introduce targeted positive action initiatives at school and undergraduate levels to help diversify the research careers pipeline, CRUK launched a new [Black Leaders in Cancer PhD Scholarship programme](#), co-funded a postdoctoral fellowship specifically aimed at Black cancer researchers (together with the [Wellcome Sanger Institute](#)), and hosted the first [Black in Cancer conference](#) to celebrate and showcase Black excellence in cancer research.

CRUK core-funded institutes have produced a standardised approach to group leader appointment, review and promotion that takes personal circumstances into consideration and how these impact upon their progression.



As part of work to improve the working conditions of researchers, CRUK continues to include principles, standards and practices for the management of researchers in standard grant conditions.

CRUK has expanded its support for developing the researchers we fund, achieved in part by implementing our new Continuing Professional Development (CPD) policy for CRUK-funded researchers. This includes requiring host institutions to commit to providing 10 days a year for researchers to undertake CPD-related activities. We have also ringfenced funds as part of CRUK PhD studentships for training and development to ensure researchers are able to engage in CPD early on in their research careers.

CRUK provided targeted opportunities to develop leadership and management qualities, including funded places on the StellarHE programme for diverse leaders. 35 CRUK researchers have already benefitted from pro-bono coaching sessions via the executive coach training firm Meyler Campbell. Our Women of Influence scheme eligibility has recently been expanded to include postdoctoral researchers who aspire to establish their independence as research group leaders, and so will support more women to stay in cancer research and progress to senior positions. A new event will be piloted this year aimed at postdoctoral women to connect, build collaborations and discuss potential solutions to improve progression for women in cancer research.

CRUK has evolved research assessment practices by introducing narrative CVs to value a wider range of skills and experience and to showcase broader contributions in research. As part of our commitments to supporting the next generation of researchers and EDI in research, CRUK has given over 85 early-to-mid-career researchers the opportunity to observe our panel and committee meetings to improve both peer review skills and grant application success rates.

Department for Education, Northern Ireland

The Department for Education (DfE) continued to support the Researcher Development Concordat in 2022 and reviewed our compliance with the funder's commitments. As a condition of core funding, we require Northern Ireland's higher education institutions to provide annual assurance on their compliance with the concordat, and for non-core funding include a standard condition of grant in the letters of offer.

DfE continues to attend steering group meetings and act as a conduit between the Northern Ireland higher education institutions and the work of the steering group. We also contributed financially to support the concordat's secretariat function.



Higher Education Funding Council for Wales

As a national funder, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) engages with institutions, representative bodies, learned societies and other funders across the breadth of the research and innovation landscape. In every interaction, pan-Wales, nationally and internationally, HEFCW upholds the principles of the Researcher Development Concordat. Through research culture and environment as a priority policy area, HEFCW works to assure that Welsh institutions comply with the concordat through our Research and Innovation Review Meetings and Annual Assurance Review processes.

HEFCW's Action Plan for the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers was published in 2021, identifying measures of success against obligations. The action plan is to be reviewed in May 2023 and updated accordingly, identifying areas of continued focus and reflecting HEFCW's progress.

We published our first annual report against Research and Innovation: the vision for Wales in April 2022. This reconfirms HEFCW's commitment to a more equal Wales, through its goals and ambitions. We continue to take this forward through our action plan to ensure HEFCW's funding, regulation and influencing continues to promote equitable, inclusive and positive research cultures and environments.

Support for personal, professional and leadership development for the future research leaders of Wales continues through HEFCW partnership with Welsh Crucible, the award-winning development programme for early career researchers for the 2022–24 period. In July 2022, an agreement between HEFCW and the Learned Society of Wales (LSW), illustrated continued support for the future success of research and innovation and a knowledge-based economy in Wales through investment in researcher development, collaboration and excellence. LSW's recently established Early Career Researchers Network provides career and researcher support, collaboration and community for advancement of research excellence pan-Wales. HEFCW also funds the Welsh Innovation Network, which facilitates networks and collaboration of researchers pan-Wales, strengthening sharing of best practice and supporting career development opportunities.

HEFCW continues to be a member of the international Forum for Tackling Bullying and Harassment, and to engage with the other funding bodies in the UK to design and develop FRAP. The principles of the concordat are reflected in the design and development of FRAP to reflect the prominence of people, culture and environment in any future excellence framework.

HEFCW continues to prepare for its transition into the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research as outlined in the Tertiary Education and Research



(Wales) Act 2022. HEFCW's input is informing the design of the Commission, with a focus on ensuring that people, culture and environment, as well as the principles of the concordat, are prioritised and upheld in the new organisation.

National Institute for Health and Care Research

The mission of the [National Institute for Health and Care Research \(NIHR\)](#) is to improve the health and wealth of the nation through research. Our core workstreams and areas of strategic focus align and support the principles of the Researcher Development Concordat. We aim to ensure that, in our role as a signatory, we take an inclusive approach to ensure the breadth of the NIHR research workforce is considered.

Within our strategy [Best Research for Best Health: The Next Chapter](#) there are several commitments that we have made to improving research culture and embedding EDI throughout our organisation and processes. For instance, we continue to collaborate with the [Medical Research Council](#) and [Wellcome Trust](#) to clearly state to clinical academics' host institutions the standards we expect in their support of our award holders. Work is ongoing across NIHR to ensure that our funding considers the full academic pathway of junior researchers, in order to maximise opportunities and to provide measures by which the impact of funded programmes can be assessed.

NIHR's new open access policy came into force in 2022; providing funding and requiring researchers to ensure that all peer-reviewed research articles arising from NIHR-funded research studies be made immediately open access under an open license, ensuring the peer-reviewed research of NIHR funded researchers has the widest possible and immediate impact.

In September 2022, NIHR launched a new strategy to drive its commitment to embed EDI across its entire research, systems and culture. The new strategy is founded upon five key themes that are designed to foster a more inclusive environment, engage the talents and energy of diverse people across NIHR's work, and improve the relevance and quality of research that is funded. The strategy's associated action plan was published in December 2022 and includes key objectives to improve inclusion and ensure funding calls and their promotion are more accessible, and reach underrepresented groups. NIHR also published its second annual [diversity data report](#) along with new diversity targets, such as committing that by 2027 the professional membership of funding committees and panels for NIHR will include defined targets for disability, ethnic minorities and females.



Research England

Research England is committed to creating and sustaining the conditions for a healthy, diverse and inclusive research and knowledge exchange system in the higher education sector. Working across UKRI, our role in understanding and supporting university success in delivering on and supporting the principles of the Researcher Development Concordat complements the contributions made by the seven disciplinary research councils and Innovate UK. Through our system-level, institutional investments and engagement, we recognise, incentivise and drive activity that increases the appeal and sustainability of research careers. Our recently published Strategic delivery plan (2022-2025) clearly sets out, among other priorities, our plans to support research careers, talent and skills in the sector.

We continue to formally recognise the importance of the concordat in our most recently updated funding terms and conditions, which set out our expectations of higher education providers to adopt the principles, standards and good practice for the management of research staff set out in the concordat.

Alongside the other UK higher education bodies, Research England funds UUK to support the provision of the concordat secretariat, as well as the Vitae Careers Research and Advisory Centre (CRAC) to maintain a live repository, where researchers, research managers, institutions and funders can highlight good practice in delivering the concordat's aims.

We are passionate about ensuring the health of the university postgraduate research community, supporting the UK's skills base and developing the next generation of researchers. We will continue to make significant investments via our QR Research Degree Programme supervision fund. Amounting to more than £330 million in 2022, this annual funding stream contributes to the costs universities face in supervising research degree programmes and developing the next generation of highly skilled professionals, researchers, innovators and entrepreneurs.

Activity in our Research England and Office for Students jointly-run programme to improve access to and participation in postgraduate research study for Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups started in 2022. This fund has provided up to £8 million to 13 providers across England to introduce systemic changes to admissions policies, cultural practices and career pathways to create a more equitable, diverse and inclusive environment for future research leaders.

In 2022, through its Enhancing Culture Fund, Research England allocated £30 million to providers to pilot new and scale-up existing activities that respond to the vision for a research system made up of talented and diverse people with the right skills, working in an environment that nurtures and gets the best out of everyone, as set out in the UK Government's Research and Development People and Culture Strategy. Our Research England Development Fund currently



supports several providers across the country seeking to enhance the career and development experiences and opportunities for research communities at all levels. Examples include the University of Liverpool's Prosper and the University of Cambridge's Action Research on Research Culture project. Other key funding investments that aim to support the concordat's principles include our Expanding Excellence in England scheme.

Finally, Research England manages the national REF on behalf of the UK higher education funding bodies. Analysis of REF 2021's environment statements shows that more can be done to support the professional and career development of researchers. FRAP will seek to address this in producing the framework for the next national assessment exercise. Consideration of the REF's impact on research careers is central to FRAP, and care has been taken to engage with researchers from a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds and career stages throughout.

Royal Academy of Engineering

The Royal Academy of Engineering is committed to creating cultures of diverse perspectives in which everyone can thrive and enrich our collective performance. As a funder of engineering research, the Academy has set out an action plan based on the concordat's defining principles: environment and culture, employment, and professional and career development. It sets out the changes the Academy will make to implement the concordat and records the ways in which the Academy achieves its obligations. The Academy has made progress against the principles of the concordat and continues to improve its offering to support a positive research culture.

To provide additional support to funding applicants from underrepresented groups in engineering, the Academy runs Access Mentoring support. To qualify, applicants need to be from an underrepresented group, specifically women, black people including those with any mixed ethnicity with Black ethnic background(s), and disabled people. The initiative supports applicants through the grant application process through mentoring from fellows or alumni to improve their application in one-hour (or more) focused sessions. Since its pilot in 2021, the Academy has reviewed the initiative through surveys. There have been 61 access mentees from 23 different ethnicities, 40 of which were women, as well as a diversity of institutions represented. Feedback from both mentees and mentors has been overwhelmingly positive. We are currently looking at ways to improve the initiative and this will continue to contribute to improving diversity in the talent pipeline and widening the diversity of applicants and awardees within the Academy's research grant schemes.

In 2020–21, the Academy launched an online series called the Academy CAFÉ (Connecting Awardees, Fostering Engagement) to support professional development by providing engagement with research awardees and alumni, to



ensure they can still benefit from the expertise and experience within the Academy's network. Three events were held in 2022 featuring 11 speakers from across the Academy's programmes, and webinars were held allowing participants to share ideas, challenges and best practice in the current period and beyond. The discussions have included topics on inclusive leadership, spinouts and specialist technical areas. The Awardee Excellence Community, launched in 2022, brings together awardees from all career stages and disciplines to share their expertise and collaborate, through a programme of events and opportunities to connect online.

The Academy has expanded the training portfolio, introducing new webinars in 2023 that offer a mix of online and in-person training that aims to improve awardees' knowledge and skills, as well as provide a great opportunity to network and collaborate with others. The training opportunities cover commercialisation, STEM ambassadors, policy engagement training and the SUSTAIN programme for female researchers. The Academy continues to promote the wellbeing and mental health of researchers, launching dedicated seminars for awardees in 2021. Subjects have included navigating uncertainty in research, burnout and resilience, and wellbeing in academia.

Royal Society

As a signatory of the Researcher Development Concordat, the Royal Society is committed to promoting and supporting best practice, process and behaviours to ensure researchers have the opportunity to realise their potential and thrive in their careers. In 2022, we developed an action plan to address our signatory obligations, ensuring effective implementation of the concordat. The plan is reviewed annually by the Society's Grants Committee including members of the researcher community and fellowship.

Ensuring our funding programmes are inclusive and offer equality of opportunities to different groups of researchers is at the heart of our strategic objectives. Following feedback from past applicants regarding the importance of receiving tailored support in preparation for a fellowship application, we have developed Early Career Fellowship guidance, which includes 'top tips' and useful advice from panel chairs designed to level the playing field. We will also be launching a webinar concurrently with the next round of applicants for the University Research Fellowship, which aims to dispel many of the 'myths' around the programme, ensure transparency of information, and encourage peer-to-peer support for applicants.

We continue to engage with universities, research institutions and other funders to improve equity and diversity in research. The Society co-organised an Association of Research Managers and Administrators study tour to share updates on current EDI activities undertaken by funders, discuss current challenges faced by PhD students and early career researchers, and identify key



areas of work that can be taken collectively by the sector to deliver meaningful changes in removing disparities in academic career progression. We have also worked closely with other funders to ensure the best working conditions and support for PhD students. In August 2022, the Society approved a 13% increase to stipend of PhD students supported through its grants in light of the cost of living crisis.

The Society recognises that excellence can only thrive in a diverse and enriched scientific environment. We are currently undertaking a review of the process for the appointment of committee members to set narrative goals to embed diversity and inclusion into the selection process and monitor progress. We have also published a [policy](#) that sets out the Society's commitment to a research culture where all involved in research activities are treated with dignity and respect. We continue to participate in UKRI's [Forum for Tackling Bullying and Harassment](#).

In March 2022, we started a new collaboration with the Daphne Jackson Trust to support talented individuals who wish to return to research following a career break. The Society will also provide additional career development to Daphne fellows through its training and networking opportunities.

The Royal Society strives to take a leadership role, both in terms of the support it provides to its grant holders and in advocating for the establishment of the best environment for researchers in the UK. A review of the provision of the Society's career development activities was held between July and August 2022 through consultations with research fellows, staff and other stakeholders. The review informed the principles for the new Engagement Plan (2022–25) and harmonised the Society's strategic priorities, concordat principles and training needs of researchers. We also held the Meeting of Minds Conference, the Society's annual scientific conference bringing together early career researchers across our funding programmes.

Scottish Funding Council

The [Scottish Funding Council \(SFC\)](#) became a signatory to the revised Researcher Development Concordat on 10 September 2019. As a funder, we seek assurance of Scottish institutions' compliance with the concordat through the annual Outcome Agreement process for our Research Excellence Grant, and as a standard condition of grant on all offer letters for strategic funds.

SFC contributes towards the secretariat costs of the concordat, and members of SFC's research team sit on the signatories group. SFC presented at the Research Culture and Practice Forum jointly hosted by the Researcher Development and Research Integrity Concordats in July 2022, and is represented on the UKRI Forum for Tackling Bullying and Harassment. An SFC representative sat on the CAR Phase 2 external advisory group, which ran in 2022.



SFC continues to explore ways to promote research culture and researcher development through its activities, as well as to gather evidence to support this work. In June 2022, we published [Mapping the Scottish PGR landscape](#), a report carried out by a Scottish Graduate School of Social Science PhD intern based at SFC to provide us with background on our research culture work. SFC's new [Alliances for Research Challenges](#), announced in March 2023, will promote collaboration across the sector, ensuring specific support for those earlier in their research careers. We recognise the continuing role that research pools and their graduate schools, as well as SFC-funded national graduate schools, play in this space.

Since the last highlight report was published in March 2022, SFC has set up an [Advisory Group on Supporting Scotland's Postgraduate Researchers](#) to provide advice to SFC as it explores opportunities for supporting postgraduate researchers in Scotland that could be harnessed by a national approach. We continue to engage with sector groups such as the Universities Scotland Researcher Development and Training Committee. As part of FRAP, SFC has worked with other UK funding bodies to consider the role of culture in the next iteration of the REF.

SFC's Strategic Plan 2022–2027 sets out a range of priorities with specific relevance to researcher development. Planned outcomes include a clearer collective focus and recognition of the importance of research culture. In 2022–23, we have also asked universities to provide a research culture statement as part of their outcome agreements. This will feed into planned research culture work in the coming year.

SFC's concordat action plan was updated in August 2021 to align it with recommendations from our review of tertiary education and research. We continue to work on these recommendations, including work around research culture and exploring how we can better track the destinations of early career researchers trained in Scotland.

UK Research and Innovation

[UKRI](#) has previously published an action plan to implement the Researcher Development Concordat across its role as a research funder. This year, we have reviewed progress against our action plan and have developed a [revised UKRI people and teams action plan](#) that takes forward our work on the concordat. The plan and report were published on 16 March and provide an in-depth review of progress against our action plan.

In summary, we have made progress against our evidence and engagement type actions, enabling us to understand our diverse communities, their challenges and the gaps in support. We have also developed our data sources, especially the Higher Education Statistics Agency, to build a better understanding of the



research staff community in UK higher education institutions. To align to our ongoing transformation programme, we have moved out substantive assessment and assurance actions into our revised plan, making them the primary focus.

Our revised plan considers our role as a signatory for the concordat, Technicians Commitment, and those roles in between, addressing communities who previously have not felt included in the concordat. The plan focuses on four workstreams, starting with our role as an employer for the research staff that we directly employ across our centres, institutes and units. The funder-facing parts of the plan are structured around our primary incentives: what we reward in, how we allocate funding and clarifying our expectations for how that funding can be used to support our people and teams. Both strands recognise that trained people are a key output of our investment in research and innovation. Our last workstream is engagement to support our community to embed development of skilled people and teams into their assessment, workforce planning, leadership development, and learning and development practice.

Universities UK

As secretariat of the Researcher Development Concordat, [UUK](#) leads on monitoring, supporting and reporting on the progress of the concordat. We develop the papers for the RDCSG and steers strategic discussions to represent the current issues for signatories. We carried out the monitoring statement included in this report, building the evidence base of signatory activity and progress in implementing the concordat principles. We also successfully managed the task and finish groups and implemented their recommendations to review the concordat, measure the success of the strategy group, and increase engagement activities with the research and innovation community.

In addition to our wider engagement work, supporting individual signatories and promoting the concordat, we have also managed the concordat [website](#), providing a place for signatories to access information, guidance and resources, as well as for research staff to publish stories and share good practice. In 2022, we worked with the RDCSG and the Research Integrity Concordat Signatories Group to host an [annual forum event](#) for the research and innovation community to explore the concordat's impact, including sharing practice, networking and learnings from policymakers.

UUK has worked with other organisations to implement the UK Government's R&D People and Culture Strategy, including as representatives on the [ministerial coordination group](#), to ensure policy reviews remain in line with the concordat's aims and values. For example, UUK has worked with UKRI and Wellcome on the [Concordats and Agreements Review](#) to explore alignments, reduce workload and coordinate reporting, while also complementing the work of the Independent Review of Research Bureaucracy. We have worked with UKRI to develop resources to support institutions with [applying the narrative CV](#) and recognising



researchers' wider career experiences, as well as consulted and provided subsequent support on the New Deal for Postgraduate Research.

University of Portsmouth – HR Excellence in Research Award representative

The University of Portsmouth action plan draws heavily on feedback received from our career-stage fora through various routes including fora discussions, focus groups and surveys. Furthermore, the plan responds to a gap analysis that identifies areas in which the university is working towards the obligations of the concordat (eg annual review and induction), and areas where there was already provision (eg opportunities for researchers and their managers to engage with policy development). We triangulated this gap analysis with the university's strategic imperatives, and received feedback through consultation.

This process resulted in our identification of six priority areas centred on research staff, and the support provided to research staff by academic principal investigators and the institution. These six areas align with one or more of the concordat obligations identified within the gap analysis as requiring action; we have provided a cross-reference in the action plan to the relevant obligation. The university's Research Development Group will periodically review all obligations within the concordat to ensure continuing alignment, and where possible, enhancement.

The six interrelated priority areas are provided below:

1. embed 10 days of development time in our research culture and practices
2. effective performance and development reviews for all research staff, and for managers of research staff, with the latter to include specific reference to their responsibilities for researchers in respect of the concordat
3. effective inductions for our research staff
4. prepare our research staff for future careers
5. foster effective engagement (in the issues of the concordat) across all stakeholders and levels: institution, senior staff, principal investigators, managers of research staff, research staff
6. building an inclusive culture

We share progress how we are doing against our action plan on [our website](#).



Vitae

Vitae hosts an extensive programme of work around the Researcher Development Concordat. We host a Platform of Practice containing examples of good practice in implementing aspects of the concordat principles, and a communications campaign to encourage concordat signatories to share their practices.

Vitae also manages the UK process for the European HR Excellence in Research Award, which is based on the concordat. We worked with UUK as the concordat secretariat to align the processes and timings of the concordat and HR Excellence in Research Award, illustrated in an infographic.

Our annual programme included concordat-specific events, such as Ten is Zen: Counting 10 days of Continuing Professional Development that explored definitions of continuing professional development activities and institutional practice. A whole day of the Vitae International Researcher Development Conference 2022 in September was devoted to aspects of the concordat. Throughout 2022, we ran drop-in events for holders of the HR Excellence in Research Award, and a workshop in November 2022 looking at how the HR Excellence in Research Award process can help deliver change in research culture. We also have a series of thematic sessions focusing on specific topics relevant to the concordat.

CEDARS will be open for institutions to run in March–June 2023. This survey gathers the views and experiences of researchers and other individuals involved in the research endeavour, provides valuable insight into progress in implementing the concordat principles, and supports concordat and HR Excellence in Research reporting.



Case studies

A selection of case studies that highlight good practice in supporting the development of researchers in the sector, listed in alphabetical order.

The British Academy: partial randomised allocation of funding

In 2022, the [British Academy](#) decided to trial a new approach to application assessment for the British Academy/Leverhulme Small Research Grants scheme. This scheme offers small-scale funding of up to £10,000 on a very flexible basis to cover a wide range of research, travel and related expenses. It is often used as a pilot study or first grant opportunity, and it enables the Academy to give support to innovative, often slightly riskier research. As such, it offers a suitable testing ground for the effectiveness of randomised allocation of awards.

Previously, this scheme, which attracts around 600–800 applications per round and offers around 150–250 awards, involved a significant degree of assessor time to make what could often be very fine-grained decisions on the ranking of applications to be funded or not. The randomised allocation approach reduces that burden while also encouraging all potential applicants to be aware that, if their research idea is good enough, they will have the same chance as any other applicant. Initial assessments of the application continue to determine whether the application passes the quality threshold or not. However, final decisions are no longer taken by human assessors with their potential biases, but rather by a randomised allocation through a computer algorithm determining between all applications that pass the quality threshold.

This approach is being trialled through six rounds of competition over three years, and the Academy will be monitoring the effects on a range of diversity characteristics and through evaluation of the research outcomes for both successful and unsuccessful applicants. The first headline finding is that the number of applications submitted in the first round to be assessed using this approach rose by 22%.

Brunel University London: Inkpath

In May 2021, Brunel introduced [Inkpath](#): a lifelong skills and career development platform for the central coordination of researcher development. The platform, available online and as an app, provides a one-stop shop for all researchers,



enabling them to plan, book, record and reflect on their formal and informal development.

All of the opportunities presented support researcher development aligned to skills within the Vitae Researcher Development Framework and the [Brunel 3D Researcher Development Tool](#)[®]. This, in addition to goal-setting functions and integrated skills assessment questionnaires, allows researchers to reflect on current skills, identify and prioritise their development goals, and track progress towards these.

Researchers can also add self-identified opportunities to the system, helping to ensure that their development portfolio is complete and inclusive of diverse activities (internal and external).

All Brunel doctoral and postdoctoral researchers are registered on the system with free access as part of graduate school provision. As researchers record completion of their activities, Inkpath automatically tracks progress, which can be exported in various ways, to help them:

- actively manage professional and career development
- structure discussions with supervisors and managers
- support progress reviews and performance development reviews
- prepare for job applications and interviews

Through the system, we can target opportunities to different groups, teams and cohorts, and the app provides a weekly email summary of upcoming activities specifically relevant to individual goals. Research staff, for example, are signposted to a 'Take-Ten' portfolio of opportunities indicating ways that they can use their 10 days or more of professional development time.

The app, along with development plans and records, is portable and accessible for lifelong learning. The lifelong aspect ensures that all users retain access to their accounts even after they leave the university and in perpetuity, allowing them to continue to build their development portfolios over the course of their careers. This is coupled with Brunel's unique offering of continued access to in-house careers support for up to three years *after* the end of contract for all research staff, regardless of where they go.

Imperial College London: Academic's Success Guide

Imperial commissioned comprehensive resources to be developed specifically for principal investigators to support them with their concordat obligations. The resources were developed in response to the recommendations of two scoping projects on assessing the needs of probationary lecturers and principal



investigators. More than 500 Imperial academics contributed to the new online toolkit, called the [Academic's Success Guide](#). The topics covered are:

- navigating induction and probation
- managing yourself and your career
- leading your research group
- managing research projects

Every topic contains links to local sources of support, policy and guidance at Imperial, as well as external services.

The Academic's Success Guide provides perspectives and relevant advice from principal investigators and senior managers from academic departments and professional services at Imperial on the [induction and probation](#) process, as well as a wide range of tools and strategies to support new academics with [establishing their career](#). The sections on managing projects and leading a research group cover processes and offer tried and tested models, along with useful tip sheets and templates to help navigate the day-to-day work of managing projects and people.

This resource is designed to be accessible by everyone and although it has been designed with Imperial academics in mind, the topics covered are universally relevant to all UK academics. The resource is modular and bite-sized, allowing for timely support to new academics as and when needed. To ensure that everyone can get the most out of this comprehensive resource, a short introductory [video](#) has been produced.

This case study was compiled by the [Researchers14 Group](#).

University of Bristol: introducing a new Academic Promotions Framework

What was the problem?

In 2017, the [University of Bristol](#) reviewed academic promotion and analysed our gender employment and pay. The analysis underpinned two new strategic performance indicators (SPIs): one for the percentage of female professors and one for the professorial gender pay gap.

The resulting challenge was to update the promotion criteria to fully capture the aspirations of our strategy while ensuring they were transparent and accessible, and rewarded and recognised the full range of academic contributions and achievements we valued. It also needed to address the underrepresentation of women on the research and teaching pathway and over-representation on the research pathway where promotion opportunities are limited.



What did we do?

After extensive consultation we arrived at the Academic Promotions Framework (APF). It comprises four broad categories with a balance of criteria (15 in total) covering the full range of expectations and experiences across all academic pathways and the full diversity of work at the university. It was first used in [Promotion up to Professor](#) in 2020–21 and has since been extended to cover all academic promotion and movement.

The APF applies to all academics across all career pathways. Depending on career stage and pathway, a different mix of criteria is required to make a case. It is of particular relevance to researchers at the early stages of their career as they can now take a more strategic approach to career planning. The APF also facilitates better career discussions and promises to inform more flexible and inclusive progression for all our academic staff.

What is the impact and what are we hoping the impact will be?

We are on track to meet our SPI targets in 2023: 33% female professors and $\pm 3\%$ professorial gender pay gap. There is increasing evidence of more career discussions using the APF and the number of early- and mid-career researchers applying for promotion has increased since launching, along with the proportion of female cases.

This case study was compiled by the [Researchers14 group](#).

University of Edinburgh: the Research Staff Hub

The [Research Staff Hub](#) (RSH) is a landing page for all research staff at the University of Edinburgh. It showcases and raises awareness of the support available to research staff from across the institution and coordinates all support at school, college and support group level. The RSH supports the research environment and culture at Edinburgh, by being a resource focused on improving communication, engagement and coordination, and a platform to update on concordat developments for researchers and their managers.

Through a period of consultation with researchers, postdoc champions and support staff, information and ideas were gathered on how the university could provide better support to research staff. The need for central-level webpages specifically for research staff, which link to all relevant information from across the university, was a clear message. This along with the need to ensure that there



is consistent and comparable support for all researchers made the RSH a key action in our concordat action plan.

The RSH has been diagnosed in such a way that it brings together resources from across the university to support research staff to undertake their role, develop themselves and progress their career. It contains a wealth of information on topics for doing research; such as open research, ethics and integrity, and research partnerships, as well as funding and impact, health and wellbeing, community and networking, plus much more. There are also dedicated resources to help managers of researchers support the research staff they employ.

The RSH is now well embedded into our university structures and since its launch in June 2021 the site views, and requests by colleagues to add or update content, demonstrate the benefit of and need for this resource.

This case study was compiled by the Researchers14 Group.

University of Leeds: cohort-based career development programmes

At the University of Leeds, we want to offer our researchers not just short-term career solutions but foster their long-term career management skills. We have created three cohort-based career development programmes where researchers play an active role in their own development (and that of their colleagues) to create lasting change over three to six months.

First, our established Career Architect for early career researchers who want to explore career alternatives to academic research in a structured, in-depth career transition programme. Secondly, Career Accelerator, for early career researchers who know exactly what career path they want but who welcome help securing their ideal post, most commonly so far, lectureships. Recently, we piloted Career Catalyst with 60 postgraduate researchers, early career researchers, research technicians and lecturers, to enhance their digital career management skills using LinkedIn and LinkedIn Learning. The diverse pilot community helped to nurture a more collaborative and cohesive research culture across schools, faculties and perceived hierarchical roles.

While we continue to offer individual careers workshops and independent learning materials, development in cohorts is now a core offering. These longer group programmes lead to greater personal motivation and transformation: participants develop stronger bonds and support networks across the university; they tend to thrive in collaborative, shared learning experiences; and the longer, consistent relationships and support mechanisms create greater trust. In turn, this helps researchers finally address issues they have avoided for some time. The most reported benefit of all these programmes is greater confidence in their ability to move forward in their careers.



Of course, there are challenges: group programmes are resource-intensive; they cannot be replicated at scale easily without losing their personal touch; they require experienced facilitators; and participants must be fully committed and open for an extensive group experience. But for the right person, these programmes offer exactly the transformation many of our researchers seek.

This case study was compiled by the [Researchers14 Group](#).

University of Liverpool: postdoc and early career researcher Buddy Scheme

The [Buddy Scheme](#) offers postdocs and early career researchers (ie staff on research-only contracts) the chance to meet new colleagues, expand their networks and enrich their experience of working at the university. It is an opportunity to meet peers at similar career stages across all faculties, to build connections outside of their research group and create informal opportunities for support. It is led by the University of Liverpool's [Research Staff Association \(RSA\)](#), with support from [The Academy](#), and runs twice a year.

The Buddy Scheme is promoted as an opportunity for postdocs and early career researchers to enhance their professional, research and social frames of reference. As it has developed, the scheme has expanded to form a key element of the induction experience for new researchers via the RSA. Existing researcher 'buddies' connect with new researchers, make them feel welcome, answer questions, and help them navigate the university's culture and ways of working. This enables new researchers to feel comfortable sooner by creating a sense of being valued and accepted. Buddies also show new researchers around the university, introduce them to others, keep lines of communication open and offer encouragement: all key elements of creating a sense of belonging.

Each participant is matched with two to three other postdocs or early career researchers and an experienced buddy in each group. All groups have a mix of disciplinary areas, to support cross-institutional networks to form.

The successful impact of the initiative can be gauged as follows:

- 94% of the participants met their buddies within a three-week window and the scheme received hugely positive feedback. A common highlight was the opportunity to recognise and discuss shared challenges and concerns with colleagues from across the university. Participants found the realisation that their experiences were not unique reassuring. Others reflected on the value of taking time out of their day to have a chat with someone new.
- One of the initial buddies, who has now taken up a role as a 'lead buddy', wrote a very well-received [blog post](#) about the experience, giving insights



on how engagement with the scheme offered more than career advancement, in providing a chance to connect with peers at similar career stages.

- Testimonials from new buddies included:
 - “It was amazing to connect with someone who could say: ‘let me know if you need anything for your research from my end!’”
 - “It was great to connect with other researchers, develop contacts and learn from each other.”
 - “I really enjoyed hearing views from other parts of the university, but also making connections with someone from my own department who I’d simply never met before!”
- Many researchers who signed up for the first iteration signed up again for the second iteration of the scheme as volunteer lead buddies. This re-engagement provides evidence of the positive impact of the scheme and its support for our overachieving aim of fostering a positive and inclusive research culture, in which postdocs are supported, valued and empowered.

University of Liverpool: Prosper prepares for national rollout

Prosper was funded in 2019 as a result of a £3.6 million grant from Research England. Led by the University of Liverpool, in partnership with the University of Manchester and Lancaster University, for the past four years it has been working closely with postdocs, employers and research institutions to co-create a new, holistic model of postdoc career development for rollout across the UK; one that provides postdocs with the tools, information and support they need to thrive across multiple career pathways, both within and beyond academia.

In order to develop, refine and test its approach, Prosper ran two pilot cohorts. The first involved 53 postdocs from the University of Liverpool and ran from March 2021–22. The second involved a larger cohort of 75 postdocs from the universities of Liverpool, Manchester and Lancaster, and ran from February 2022–23. Both cohorts were carefully recruited to ensure a diverse mix that reflected the wider UK postdoc population and principles of EDI.

A comprehensive evaluation of the impact of the first cohort demonstrated a significant positive effect on participants’ confidence, perceptions and behaviours relating to proactive career planning and professional development. A similar evaluation of the second cohort is underway. In tandem with the postdoc pilots, Prosper has been running the ‘PI Network’: a forum for principal investigators to drive and share best practice with regard to postdoc career development.



Prosper will be launching nationwide in summer 2023, at which point its offering will become freely available to the wider sector. This will involve the launch of the 'Prosper portal': an online hub drawing together all of the outputs and materials from the two pilots, alongside Prosper's work with principal investigators and employers. The portal will also contain guidance and prepared materials for research institutions to enable local implementation of Prosper in a flexible way, suited to varying needs and budgets, ranging from modular usage through to running Prosper cohorts. Prosper is currently engaging in consultation with institutions across the UK to support early adoption, and will continue to take a leading role in driving adoption following launch, with ongoing staff support at the University of Liverpool.

University of Stirling: Research Culture Awards

The Research Culture Awards were first introduced in May 2020 by Professor Rachel Norman, Dean for Research Engagement and Performance, as part of the [annual Festival of Research](#) to recognise people and groups who actively contribute towards a positive research environment at the University of Stirling. Colleagues are nominated anonymously for outstanding contributions across various categories each year. These include research leadership, collaborator, support from professional services, mentor, early career researcher, activity dedicated to enhancing research culture, and lastly research activity dedicated to EDI. Importantly, nominees receive feedback from their nominations and are also invited to an awards ceremony to collectively celebrate endeavours.

Cognisant of the fact that we are not always good at saying thank you, especially for things that are difficult to measure, the Research Culture Awards aim to encourage collaborative and supportive behaviour by celebrating staff members who demonstrate good role modelling across the career spectrum. The awards also increase the visibility of efforts and often-hidden contributions, and create a shared understanding of what we value at Stirling.

The longer-term aim is to include these aspects and value them more formally, but this informal method has helped develop a community of people who actively think about good research culture and how to replicate it elsewhere.

University of Surrey: early career researcher coffee meetups

The [Doctoral College \(DC\)](#) at the University of Surrey has piloted a new initiative, where the DC invites newly started early career researchers to a friendly and informal meetup over coffee and biscuits. There, they can learn more about the



support and developmental opportunities available to researchers at the university.

The aims of the coffee meetups include:

- Offering early career researchers the opportunity to meet members of the DC and to meet fellow new-starter researchers at Surrey.
- Heightening awareness of the support and development opportunities available to early career researchers across the university, both to support professional development and future career transitions.
- Raising the profile of Surrey's commitment to the concordat, and especially the entitlement of early career researchers to the equivalent of 10 days professional development time per annum.

Brief, interactive presentations are given by a multidisciplinary team on the various supports and opportunities both within the DC and across the university available to early career researchers, but most of the time is offered to relaxed discussion, with plenty of opportunity for questions.

Our Researcher Development Concordat gap analysis revealed that, although there were several formal inductions and onboarding processes for early career researchers, the opportunity for informal cross-faculty connection was limited. The gap analysis also revealed that there existed scope to communicate the breadth and variety of opportunities available to early career researchers at Surrey in a more systematic manner. Initial feedback from the coffee meetups pilot programme had been positive, with researchers highlighting how it made them aware of opportunities and support networks that had not been highlighted in official onboarding processes.



Priorities of the Researcher Development Concordat Strategy Group in 2023

In 2023, the RDCSG is committed to a range of activities to further enhance the effective governance and implementation of the concordat, as well as continue to support policy developments in research culture and career development.

Our priorities

Annual Research Culture and Practice Forum 2023

Building on the success of the previous year, the Researcher Development Concordat will co-host the 2023 Forum with the Technician's Commitment and Knowledge Exchange and Research Integrity Concordats. The RDCSG will support in shaping sessions, promoting the event and volunteering to take part on panel sessions.

Fairness of Employment Working Group

The RDCSG is committed to addressing the systemic issues of precarious researcher careers and job insecurity. A group will be established responsible for organising a roundtable discussion and developing a good practice guide for employment.

Researcher career tracking

In partnership with Vitae CRAC, RDCSG will support the development of a systematic approach to tracking the long-term career paths of researchers. This will help build our understanding of researcher skills and impact, and provide an evidence base for institutions to support researchers in their careers and skills development.



Long-term review of the concordat

The RDCSG will implement a major review of the implementation of the concordat, considering progress, outcomes, and next steps.

Concordats and Agreements Review

The RDCSG will support the outcomes of the CAR and ensure alignment with wider sector initiatives and reduce bureaucracy.

Policy development

The RDCSG will continue to support the R&D People and Culture Strategy in developing and delivering its objectives. We will also inform the response to recent policy developments, including the Research and Innovation Landscape Review and the Science and Technology Framework, as well as anticipate future developments to ensure our work informs and aligns with sector priorities.

Engagement

The RDCSG will continue to engage with the full breadth of stakeholders to support provision to implement the concordat, targeting the following range of stakeholder groups to ensure voices from all areas of the research and innovation system reach strategic level:

- heads of departments, deans, senior research leaders, Institutional concordat champions
- researcher developers
- researchers
- principal investigators
- concordat leads, research and innovation administrators
- industry leaders
- funding leaders
- other concordats and agreements steering groups



Conclusion

The RDCSG and secretariat are committed to supporting the career development of researchers, including improvements to research culture, employment conditions and cross-sector mobility.

We welcome discussions with current signatories, prospective signatories, concordat leaders, funders, senior university leaders, industry leaders and research staff on improving the impact of the concordat.

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