**Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers  
Northumbria University Annual Progress Report 2023**

1. **Introduction: Purpose and Background**

The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers is an aspirational set of principles, setting out the conditions required to create the best culture for researchers to thrive. As a signatory we agree to improve employment conditions and support for researchers. Management and implementation of the Concordat (originally launched in 2008) is led by Vitae, who also co-ordinates the HR Excellence in Research Award (HREiR) in the UK, underpinned by the Concordat.

1. **Principles and Responsibilities of the Concordat**

The Concordat has three defining principles:

* **Environment and Culture:** Excellent research requires a supportive and inclusive research culture.
* **Employment:** Researchers are recruited, employed, and managed under conditions that recognise and value their contributions.
* **Professional and Career Development:** Professional and career development are integral to enabling researchers to develop their full potential.

Responsibilities and obligations beneath each principle are set out for four main stakeholder groups: researchers, managers of researchers, institutions, and funders. It is the responsibility of all stakeholders within organisations to implement Concordat principles, and to work together to address systemic issues in the employment and career development of researchers. Hence, a signatory such as Northumbria may primarily consider itself an institutional stakeholder but will be expected to consider how each constituent stakeholder group can help implement the Concordat.

There are seven key responsibilities of signatories to the Concordat:

1. Raise the visibility of the Concordat and champion its principles within our organisation at all levels.
2. Identify a senior manager champion and associated group with relevant representation from across the organisation with responsibility for annual review and reporting on progress.
3. Ensure researchers are formally represented in developing and monitoring organisational efforts to implement the Concordat Principles.
4. Undertake a gap analysis to compare our policies and practices against the Concordat Principles.
5. Draw up and publish an action plan within a year of signing the Concordat.
6. Set up processes for systematically and regularly gathering the views of researchers we employ, to inform and improve the organisation’s approach to and progress on implementing the Concordat.
7. Produce an annual report to their governing body or equivalent authority, which includes their strategic objectives, measures of success, implementation plan and progress, which subsequently is publicly available.
8. **The Concordat at Northumbria University**

Northumbria University first became a signatory of the Concordat in 2012. Following the publication of a new Concordat in 2019, Northumbria reaffirmed its commitment to the revised document in March 2020, through the publication of a letter from our Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive and an institutional action plan for 2021-2023. This action plan served as our self-assessment tool for the HREiR. In 2023 we were successful in retaining our HREiR award at the 10-year review point.

1. **Governance and Implementation**

Research Development Strategy Group (RDSG) has been responsible for embedding the principles of the Concordat within relevant initiatives and frameworks and ensuring alignment with other relevant activities. The RDSG is responsible for maintaining high standards in researcher development and training and ensuring that these are continually improved in response to sector developments and evidence obtained about staff experience. Over the last two years the work to enable the Concordat principles has occurred alongside a broader university drive to create a supportive, inclusive, ambitious, diverse research culture that helps all our researchers and those enabling and supporting research to flourish. Our emerging Research Culture Action Plan sets out Northumbria’s commitment to supporting and sustaining an inclusive and healthy research culture. From 2023 the Dean of Research Culture (DRC, appointment May 2023) will Chair a new Research Culture Committee (RCC) to set the ambition for the different Charters, Concordats, and Declarations that we are committed to delivering. The RDSG activity will now report to the Dean of Research Culture through the Research Culture Committee. RDSG will no longer meet on a regular basis but will remain a group that can be convened to progress actions or to perform specific task and finish functions in relation to researcher development aligned to the Concordat.

1. **Progress Review**

In May 2023, we published our HR Excellence in Research Award (HREiR) 10-year review documents and were successful in retaining our award following a review and panel interview process. HREiR is how we formally demonstrate our commitment to the Researcher Development Concordat.

In reviewing the implementation of the Concordat Action Plan 2021-23, the RDSG considers that key responsibilities of signatories have been met:

***Raise the visibility of the Concordat and champion its principles.*** Information about Concordat commitments are included in researcher development training. Action plans and progress reports are shared on the University website and Intranet, and Research & Innovation Services work with Marketing to share information about key milestones through news articles:  
<https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/about-us/news-events/news/northumbria-university-retains-hr-excellence-in-research-award/> Work will take place in 2024 to raise the awareness of our emerging Research Culture Action plan and key messages around the RD Concordat will be part of this marketing campaign.

***Identify a senior manager champion and associated group.*** As of September 2023, the Dean of Research Culture, through the Research Culture Committee has oversight of the Researcher Development Concordat Action Plan.

***Ensure researchers are formally represented in developing and monitoring organisational efforts to implement the Concordat.*** Researchers are represented on the RDSG as are technical staff that support research. Any ongoing RDSG activity will be led by and monitored by the Research Culture Committee.

***Undertake a gap analysis to compare our policies and practices against the Concordat Principles.*** To identify gaps and develop the 3-year forward looking plan (2023-26) RDSG carried out a gap analysis using a theory of change model to prioritise actions against the Concordat principles. RDSG developed a shared vision, key outcomes and activities for the Concordat, putting happy researchers at the heart of the plan with better quality, more impactful research, and integrity and good conduct embedded in our research culture. To achieve the vision, outcomes were described as: improved research environment, better collaboration between industry policy makers and the public, Northumbria is known for its excellent researcher development offer (with better engagement), improved funding applications and better recognition and understanding of the value of academic citizenship.

***Draw up and publish an action plan within a year of signing the Concordat.*** The latest Action Plan (2023-26) was published on the University website in May 2023 and updated in October 2023 following Panel suggestions from our successful 10-year review interview.

***Set up processes for systematically and regularly gathering the views of researchers we employ, to inform and improve the organisation’s culture.*** The Culture, Employment and Development in Academic Research survey (CEDARs) is used to gather the views of researchers, in addition to the University’s annual staff survey. We ran CEDARs in spring 2023. We are also consulting widely on the Research Culture Action Plan which interfaces with the RD Concordat actions and principles.

***Produce an annual report to our governing body which subsequently is publicly available.*** This paper, which will be made available on our webpages, is our annual report covering the last 12 months since publication of our February 2023 Annual Report. This forms part of our evidence for the successful retention of the HREiR award.

This report is accompanied by an updated version of our 2023-26 Action Plan, which sets out how we intend to meet each of the Concordat’s principles under the themes of Environment and Culture, Employment, and Professional and Career Development. Updates to the Plan have been provided, including progress to date and how actions will be developed over the next 12-36 months.

**6)** **Key achievements in 2022-23**

**6.1 Cohort Programmes:** we continue to offer two Researcher Development Cohort Programmes (Early Career and Fellowship Ready) as well as more targeted funder specific cohort programmes aimed at developing a research proposal through to application. The funder specific cohorts currently cover ESRC and EPSRC with plans to widen out to other Research Councils in 2024. The ECR offer is being refreshed following feedback from sessions and surveys as well as consultation with our ECR community and other professional services that offer researcher development. A new ECR Cohort Programme will be launched in Semester Two 2024.

**6.2 Athena Swan:** a RIS Athena Swan submission was developed in 2023, the first professional services team at Northumbria to engage with the process since it opened to non-academic departments. The RIS submission will be reviewed by the EDI committee in January 2024 before we formally submit to Advance HE for assessment.

**6.3 Research Culture Committee**: in June 2023 Professor Matt Baillie Smith took up the new role of Dean of Research Culture, we held our first Research Culture Committee meeting in November 2023. The key principles of the Research Culture Action Plan were discussed and tested at a series of workshops over summer 2023. The principles were also shared at Faculty workshops with Research Group Leads which took place in Sep-Dec 2023. The Researcher Development Concordat work has been aligned to the Research Culture principles and Research Culture Committee will have oversight of the Concordat Action Plan progress.

**6.4 Early Career Researcher Forum:** following the December 2022 relaunch of the ECR Forum there have been two networking events, one in summer and one in December 2023 where we have gathered ideas for future Forum events to take forward in 2024, these include ‘research funding 101’, research ideation and opportunities for interdisciplinary networking.

**6.5 Peer Review of Grant Applications:** to formalise our internal peer review processes and propose recommendations that will support a university-wide best practice peer review for grant applications is now managed via the Worktribe system. Research Development Managers and Research Skills Development Manager held a pilot workshop with academics in October 2023 to discuss best practice in peer review, this workshop will run each Semester. In collaboration with the Technology Enhanced Learning Team we have also developed a 'Principles of Peer Review' animation to underpin the workshop, this is now available on our intranet pages (Oct 2023). <https://livenorthumbriaac.sharepoint.com/sites/RDMFunderHubsTest/SitePages/Peer-Review(1).aspx>

**6.6 Vice Chancellors Fellowship Academy:** the first workshop with the new VCF Cohort took place in November 2023. This was a chance for the group to network and to think about any personal or professional development they need to help them realise their research ambitions and how they want to work together going forward. They were also encouraged to think about any specialist skills and knowledge they could share with colleagues more broadly across the University. The group also shared their 3-year research plans. Discussions from this session will inform VC Fellowship Academy joint activity in 2024.

**7) To be addressed in 2023-24**

**7.1 Environment and Culture:**

**7.1.1 Researcher Development Concordat communication plan:** with the appointment of a Dean of Research Culture, the Concordat obligations and action plan will be aligned to the Research Culture Action Plan. A new Communication Plan around Research Culture will ensure all stakeholders are aware of their Concordat responsibilities, including how to use the [10 days per year development time](https://sway.office.com/jB9MXIKkqiVaN0Qa) committed to in the Concordat.

**7.1.2 Review of content and visibility of online resources:** we will hold small user-feedback Focus Groups (x3) with ECR Forum members from March 2024 (particularly those on fixed contracts) to consult on refreshed research support webpages and the visibility and understanding of Concordat obligations. Focus Groups outcomes will inform website refresh to make sure that our research related policies and practices are easy to find, equitable and transparent.

**7.1.3 Strengthening Research Group Leadership:** we have started to map and understand activity of research groups and how they are a mechanism to support ECRs and contract researchers with the first of a series of Faculty research group workshops which were held in 2023. There is appetite to continue these workshops to share best practice across Faculties and Groups so that research groups are an inclusive and supportive environment where there are opportunities to have conversations and work with colleagues across all career stages across subject areas.   
(See also 2.4 Strengthening Research Group Leadership in Research Culture Activity Paper).

**7.2 Employment:**

**7.2.1 Induction Review:** Organisational Development and RIS will work together to review our Induction process to ensure all new staff have an excellent on-boarding experience with contacts, resources, support and tools to enable them to flourish. We will initially work with the VCF cohort to develop a university wide holistic approach to Induction and interview this group of new starters six months after first appointment to reflect on the experience and improve future offer.

**7.2.2 Career Progression Case Studies:** following the launch of the Academic Development Review we will develop Case Studies around successful promotion through 1:1 interviews which demonstrate different pathways to promotion, particularly highlighting cases of women and **BAME colleagues’ promotion.**

**7.3 Professional and Career Development:**

**7.3.1 Resume for Research and Innovation (R4RI):** a video resource is in development which explains ways to evidence the full range of an individual’s contributions to excellent research and innovation. The video will be used in conjunction with the researcher development cohort programmes to demonstrate how to approach writing a flexible narrative CV template in preparation for the rollout of R4RI will take place in parallel to the development of the new UKRI Funding Service.