# **Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers**

# **Northumbria University Progress Report 2022**

## **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. In becoming a signatory to the Concordat, organisations agree to improve employment conditions and support for researchers, with the different stakeholder groups within the institution committing to meeting the Concordat’s obligations.

Management and implementation of the Concordat, which was originally launched in 2008, is led by Vitae. Vitae also co-ordinates the HR Excellence in Research Award (HREiR) in the UK, which is underpinned by the Concordat. The two initiatives are, therefore, linked. With the publication of a new Concordat in September 2019, organisations were invited to again state their commitment by becoming signatories, undertaking new gap analyses of activity at their institutions, and developing new action plans, both to meet the obligations of the Concordat itself, and to successfully apply for the HREiR award.

## **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*. Though it is research institutions and funders who will sign the Concordat, it is the responsibility of all stakeholders within those organisations to implement Concordat principles, and to work together to address systemic issues in the employment and career development of researchers. As a result, a signatory such as Northumbria University may primarily consider itself an institutional stakeholder, but will be expected to consider how each constituent stakeholder group within the University can help to 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.

## **The Concordat at Northumbria University**

Northumbria University first became a signatory of the Concordat in 2012. Following the publication of the 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, Professor Andrew Wathey CBE, and an institutional action plan for 2021-2023[[1]](#footnote-1).

This action plan also served as our self-assessment tool for the HREiR in 2021, which was first awarded to Northumbria in January 2013 and has been re-awarded at every two-year review point.

## **Governance and Implementation**

At Northumbria, the Research Development Strategy Group (RDSG) is 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. The RDSG develops the action plan that aligns with the principles of the Concordat and drive its implementation in a consistent way across the University and oversees and monitors the implementation and communication of the action plan.

The RDSG is chaired by the PVC Research & Innovation, Professor Louise Bracken. Membership also includes the Director of Human Resources, Jane Embley, and colleagues representing a broad range of academic and professional services colleagues, including:

* A Senior Research Leader from each of the four Faculties
* 2 early career researchers from each of the four Faculties
* A member of technical staff whose role involves undertaking research
* Organisational Development Manager
* Deputy Director of Research & Innovation Services
* Head of Library Learning & Research Services
* Graduate School Manager
* Researcher Development Manager
* Research Culture & Quality Manager

The parent body of the RDSG is Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee. The RDSG reports annually to the Board of Governors, and to external bodies such as Vitae on the progress of Concordat implementation as required.

## **Progress Review**

In reviewing the implementation of the Concordat in the year 2021-2022, the RDSG considers that all seven key responsibilities of signatories have been met:

|  |
| --- |
| *1. Raise the visibility of the Concordat and champion its* *Principles within our organisation at all levels* |
| Regular information events are held on the Concordat, and information about Concordat commitments is included in researcher development training. Information, including action plans and progress reports, is shared on the University website and Intranet, and Research & Innovation Services work with Marketing to share information about key milestones through news articles. |
| 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.* |
| The Researcher Development Strategy Group, chaired by Professor Louise Bracken (Pro Vice Chancellor Research & Innovation), includes representatives from all Faculties, at different career stages, and professional services (see item 4 above). The group has responsibility for the implementation of the Concordat, including annual review of action plans and progress reports. |
| 3. *Ensure researchers are formally represented in developing and monitoring organisational efforts to implement the Concordat Principles.* |
| Researchers are represented in the form of one senior leader, and two ECRs, per Faculty on the RDSG. A member of technical staff responsible for research is also included in the group. Additionally, the group works in conjunction with Faculty research committees, the Early Career Researchers Forum, and University Equality Networks to ensure there is wider consultation on the development of the RDSG’s efforts to implement the Concordat.  |
| 4. *Undertake a gap analysis to compare our policies and practices against the Concordat Principles.* |
| Achieved by the RDSG in the creation of the 2021 Action Plan for the implementation of the Concordat. |
| 5. *Draw up and publish an action plan within a year of signing the Concordat.* |
| In May 2021, the Action Plan was published on the University website[[2]](#footnote-2), within one year of becoming a signatory to the new 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.* |
| 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.  |
| 1. *Produce an annual report to our governing body within 12 months of becoming signatories, which includes our strategic objectives, measures of success, implementation plan and progress, which subsequently is publicly available.*
 |
| This paper is our annual report covering the last 12 months since the publication of our May 2021 progress report[[3]](#footnote-3), which formed part of our submission for the HREiR award. This will be made available on the University’s Researcher Development webpages[[4]](#footnote-4). |

This report is accompanied by an updated version of our 2021-2023 Action Plan, which sets out in detail how we intend to meet each of the Concordat’s principles, for each relevant stakeholder group. Updates have been provided where relevant, to include detail of progress to date and to note how actions can be developed over the next 12 months. Signatories are encouraged to find synergies with existing initiatives that further the Principles of the Concordat, so by working with stakeholders across the institution, our objectives can be achieved both within and outside the RDSG.

Key achievements toward the implementation of the Concordat in 2021-22, and goals for 2022-23, include:

## **Achievements**

* Delivery of a comprehensive Wellbeing programme by Human Resources and Organisational Development, including asynchronous online delivery of training and support materials, and synchronous delivery of group training sessions.
* The University became a signatory of the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment in March 2021, with a Responsible Metrics Working Group reviewing activity at the University and developing initiatives to improve practice in research evaluation and assessment, in support of the creation of clear and transparent processes of recognition, reward and promotion.
* In November 2021, the University became a signatory of the Technician Commitment, to recognise the diversity of our research communities and contributions to research.
* Athena Swan bronze awards were achieved in the Faculty of Business and Law, and in the departments of Geography and Environmental Sciences, Psychology, Nursing, Midwifery and Health, Social Work, Education and Community Wellbeing, and Sport, Exercise and Rehabilitation. These awards acknowledge our efforts to ensuring policies and practices are inclusive, equitable and transparent.
* The University signed the Race Equality Charter in July 2021, with the Self-Assessment Team now following the framework to develop an action plan to ensure racial equality is embedded in relevant policies and practices at the University, including those relating to the employment and career development of researchers.
* Continued investment in professional support for research, including the appointment of a dedicated Researcher Development Manager to deliver bespoke training to researchers, and the appointment of a Research Culture and Quality Manager to monitor the implementation of the Concordat.

## **To be addressed in 2022-2023**

* Following the appointment of Professor Louise Bracken as Pro-Vice Chancellor Research and Innovation in August 2021, in 2022 a new Research Strategy will be published that includes objectives for the development of the University’s research culture, and the recruitment and career development of researchers. The principles of the Concordat will be embedded in this Research Strategy, further increasing its visibility within the University.
* From 1st March 2022, Professor Glyn Howatson will take up the new role of Dean of the Graduate School, with responsibility for enhancing the postgraduate research student experience at the University. This includes reviewing training for postgraduate research students and supervisors.
* The Research Culture and Quality Manager will lead on the creation of a framework for the development of institutional research culture, including a benchmarking survey. Gathering the views of researchers at all career stages will also inform our approach to the Concordat.
* The Early Career Researchers Management group will be relaunched in 2022, focus on key areas of concern for ECRs, including workload modelling, induction and mentoring for vice chancellors research fellows (VCRFs), access to physical and technical resources, and probational periods for VCRFs.
1. <https://northumbria-cdn.azureedge.net/-/media/corporate-website/new-sitecore-gallery/research/documents/pdf/action-plan-21-24-10032021.pdf?modified=20210310114405> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/research/researcher-development/researcher-development-for-staff/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://northumbria-cdn.azureedge.net/-/media/corporate-website/new-sitecore-gallery/research/documents/pdf/hr-excellence-in-research-eight-year-review-report.pdf?modified=20210525123255> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/research/researcher-development/researcher-development-for-staff/> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)