

Annual Report for the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers

Universities and Research Institutes

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Web address of institutional Researcher Development Concordat webpage	HR Excellence in Research (reading.ac.uk)
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Date statement sent to Researcher Development Concordat secretariat via CDRsecretariat@universitiesuk.ac.uk	5 September 2024

Statement on how the organisation creates, maintains and embeds a research culture that upholds a positive and inclusive environment for researchers at all stages of their careers (*max 500 words*)

We provide an inclusive research environment that enables and recognises the conduct of excellent research which changes our understanding of the world past, present, and future; promotes innovation; and tackles current and future challenges facing societies. For a research-intensive university of our size, this

requires investment in researcher development, leadership and supporting a research culture to enable these ambitions.

Research is structured around four themes which speak to core areas of excellence: two longstanding (Agriculture, Food & Health; Environment) and two more recently co-ordinated (Heritage & Creativity; Prosperity & Resilience). Together these themes provide a distinctive research identity, and function both as intellectual catalysts across disciplinary boundaries, and as an organising principle for research management and support.

Our aim is to sustain and enhance an inclusive research culture that enables and supports research excellence, and to develop researchers at all levels. Recruiting, retaining, recognising, and most importantly developing researchers to be leaders in their areas of expertise, and who support the success of other researchers, is central to this commitment.

All academic staff have an individual staff development account and an allowance supporting their development. This is complemented by a training programme specific to research staff, drawing on professional expertise from across the University as well as external provision; an open staff training programme; and funding for external programmes such as Aurora, Springboard, and StellarHE. Developing research leadership in an open and inclusive way is fostered through our approach to recruiting staff to a wide variety of leadership roles including membership on several university-level research committees and boards.

We have brought diversity and inclusion to the forefront of all our activities, including research. Since 2015, we have a Dean for Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) to lead on the development, implementation, and evaluation of our D&I strategy which sets ambitious staff targets relating to gender, race and ethnicity, and sexual orientation. All our academic Schools have diversity and inclusion champions and very active staff networks for different protected characteristics (Women@Reading, LGBT+ Network, Cultural Diversity Group, Staff Disability Network). We have embraced changes to our staff promotions processes, are delivering on Athena Swan and Race Equality Action Plans.

Our commitment to research staff is reflected in the renewal of our HR in Excellence in Research Award in March 2023, which we've held since 2010. To ensure input of staff in wider research governance, there are reserved places for researchers on the University Board for Research and Innovation (our prime

University body for Research Governance) as well as on the Committee for Researcher Development and PGR Studies.

Professional development of our specialist Technical Services staff is an important part of our commitment to researcher development. UoR is a founding signatory of the Technician Commitment, and in 2017 became a Science Council Employer Champion (only one of 8 in the UK), recognising our commitment to invest in the development of technicians. Our Technical Services achieved the Athena Swan Silver award in 2023 – the first professional services team in the UK to achieve this.

Provide a short summary of the institution’s strategic objectives and implementation plans for delivering each of the three pillars of the Concordat (environment and culture, employment, and professional development of researchers) for your key stakeholder groups together with your measures for evaluating progress and success (*max 600 words*)

A step change in framing our researcher support has taken place over the last year. The central body of support co-ordination comes from the Researcher Development Project officer, based in the Graduate School. However, this school was renamed the Doctoral & Researcher College (DRC) in September 2023 to explicitly include research staff. This has created a ‘one-stop-shop’ for staff to find resources and information under each of the Concordat principles, as well information for research managers about e.g. mentoring guidance. This name change was a clear signal to all staff that the DRC is the ‘home’ of support for our early career researchers and the positive impact is demonstrated by the increased traffic to the College. This is allowing us to refine and evolve the support and co-ordination across our professional service teams (e.g. research engagement, research and enterprise services, learning and development).

The Culture, Employment and Development of Academic Researchers survey (CEDARS) survey results (June 2023) informed new priorities for Year 2 (2023-24) of our HREiR action plan, focusing on improving training and development and research staff engagement. The training and personal development offer is now more integrated with the wider DRC and other professional services which is a significant improvement in our offer for staff. The comprehensive Reading Researcher Development Programme (RRDP) has been extended to include ECRs, giving staff a much broader development offer. This has been positively received and demonstrated the popularity of courses like ‘Preparing to teach’, ‘Narrative CVs’, ‘Writing a research grant’ and ‘CVs/ interviews and raising online profiles’ among the ECR community. In addition to this, we are exploring the idea

of a new small cohort based ECR development programme to deliver key outputs that will benefit staff in readiness for future project proposals or grant applications.

Additional work around careers support has been extremely limited due to staff turnover and an institutional 'freeze' on recruitment and constrained financial resources. We have sought opportunities to take advantage of wider support in the sector and have promoted external resources such as 'Prosper' Prosper Researcher: Prosper- Researcher Hub - University of Liverpool (University of Liverpool developed an online careers resource for postdocs at all HEIs) but comprehensive and regular tailored careers support remains a gap in our staff support provision.

A high priority for delivery in 2023/24 was delivering an ECR Conference. Support for the event was gauged from the CEDARS survey (June 2023) and a half day conference took place on 16 April. Around 50 people attended and participated in a series of competitions, talks and Q&A panel sessions. Feedback is overwhelmingly in support of a repeat event in the future; staff found it 'inspirational' and it delivered valuable networking opportunities outside of disciplines.

It has become increasingly clear that more input is required from HR to improve some areas of employment at an institutional level, such as reviewing fixed term contracts, working with Schools to explore open-ended contract opportunities, improving the Personal Development Review process, streamlining job titles and rolling out new promotion procedures. A new way of working has been established with our HR Business Partners, with monthly meetings, which will help address these topics and embed Concordat principles across the Schools.

The Researcher Development Project Officer has been invited to sit on the Committee for Open Research and Research Integrity (October 2023). Recognition of the cross-over of areas between concordats is hoped to support co-delivery and achievement of objectives and importantly links into our wider strategic work around developing a new Research Culture Strategy.

Summary of actions taken, and evaluation of progress made, in the current reporting period to implement your plan to support the three pillars in respect of each of your key stakeholder groups [Institution; Academic Managers of Researchers (Deans, Heads of Schools/Departments/PIs); Researchers]

<p>Environment and Culture (<i>max 600 words</i>)</p>	<p>Institution</p> <p>The HREiR Action Plan for 2022-2025 reflects our ambitions for early career researcher (ECR) development at Reading. Schools with relatively large numbers of research staff (RS) have developed structures whereby their voices are informing policy and practice. Four Schools have a Director of Postgraduate Researchers (or equivalent) appointed and we continue to encourage similar appointments in other schools to help share and disseminate best practice.</p> <p>The biennial Culture, Employment and Development of Academic Researchers survey (CEDARS) was carried out in June 2023. A third of ECR staff responded, matching previous participation levels. The results have informed our work for 2023-24, for instance the indication that only 12% of staff had spent the recommended 10 days on personal development with 74% spending less than four days a year. We have strengthened our messaging around this, particularly at face-face events and will further boost this with the launch of revised Principal Investigator guidance later this year and new staff inductions and promotion workshops.</p> <p>Following a trial this year, we are evolving our approach to inducting new early career researchers and will run regular sessions throughout the year, targeting new starters early on in their contracts and working with Principal Investigators to ensure they are supportive of this investment of time. We will be supported by colleagues in Human Resources, research engagement, training and research services (for funding, grant support etc.) to raise staff awareness about the Concordat and University wide support that is on offer. This will be in addition to local School specific inductions.</p> <p>The University has a very active central Diversity and Inclusion team, lead by Professor Allan Laville, Dean for Diversity and Inclusion. Below are some examples of</p>
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initiatives that have benefitted staff, including ECRs over the past year:

- Procuring a bespoke Disability Awareness training to improve University culture and confidence around the barriers disabled people face and how to best be an ally for disabled colleagues in the workplace.
- A flagship event during LGBT+ History Month, delivered by Dr Sophie Cook on her remarkable life story, becoming the first openly transgender woman to work in Premier League Football.
- Training on Sex Discrimination is being rolled out.
- Producing a guide for employees and their managers on managing the menopause at work.
- Sanctuary Awareness Trainings (part of our University of Sanctuary Action Plan) have begun to help illuminate the experiences from our trans staff and students, contributing to improved culture and representation, which is part of our University Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.

We plan to hold a focus group with BAME researchers in Autumn 2024 to progress actions under the Race Equality Action Plan and address concerns around promotion transparency and mentoring, specifically raised by ECRs to seek to address the inequality seen at senior levels.

A new 5-year Open Research Action Plan was developed and approved for the period 2024-29, building on the progress resulting from the previous plan and stating a clear intention to embed a culture of open research.

The University Committee for Research and Innovation will be establishing a Research Culture Programme Board, led by the Dean for Postgraduate and Researcher Development and the Head of the Research Directorate, which will oversee a work programme covering all aspects of research culture, including research integrity. The programme will involve both academic and professional services staff and will require commitment from all individuals with research leadership positions.

	<p>Academic Managers of Researchers</p> <p>This has not been an area of focus during 2023-24 but it is worth noting that a new position of UKRN Open Research Coordinator - Dr Evangeline Gowrie was appointed in 2023.</p> <p>Researchers</p> <p>The Research Staff Committee, set up in December 2022, has proved sustainable and continues to meet every term. This captures the voice of Research Staff in Senate and other key University Boards (such as the University Board for Research & Innovation). The Chair of the Research Staff Committee has been appointed to join the Committees for Researcher Development and Postgraduate Research Studies and the University Board for Research and Innovation. They are key committees where the researcher's voice can now be heard to influence future developments and policy.</p>
<p>Employment (<i>max 600 words</i>)</p>	<p>Institution</p> <p>The DRC is working in a much more co-ordinated way with HR to improve some underlying Concordat employment principles for staff. Areas of interest include fixed term contracts and moving to open contracts where circumstances allow, streamlining the number of job titles to improve consistency and improve reporting and improving the promotions procedures and criteria and transparency of this with staff. Grade 6-7 promotions workshop will be planned and jointly delivered by HR and DRC in Autumn 2024, with a view that workshops will run 2-3 times a year.</p> <p>Academic Managers of Researchers</p> <p>We are working closely with HR Business Partners to co-ordinate and make progress on the areas identified above. It is anticipated that this will involve increased effort to</p>

	<p>engage Heads of Schools/Heads of Departments and Principal Investigators over the next year.</p> <p>Researchers</p> <p>Since February 2024, the ECRs have dedicated webpages covering all three Concordat principles, providing a 'one-stop-shop' for early career researchers and signposting has significantly improved.</p>
<p>Professional development (<i>max 600 words</i>)</p>	<p>Institution</p> <p>Our focus continues to be on postdoctoral research fellows and research assistants - or Early Career Researchers (ECRs). It remains a goal to expand to other key research staff members such as some of our technicians, but this will be informed by the evolving research culture work and a new strategy that is being developed over the next year.</p> <p>Central delivery of some learning and development aspects have been negatively impacted by HR staff turnover and a difficult recruitment climate. Two posts have been lost that previously supported delivery of professional development aspects and some contracts with external trainers have had to be cut.</p> <p>There has been significant progress in developing research integrity training in 2023, along with the launch of misconduct investigations training. Deployment of the RI training at scale has run in an obstacle with the new software being deployed by HR; the software is expected to allow for monitoring of training, but its scope is unclear, and development have suffered several delays. In addition, the Doctoral and Researchers College, which currently undergo an extremely laborious manual process to monitor training of the 1800 PhDs (some of this training overlaps with that done by permanent members of staff) seems to have not been consulted and internal discussions about this have not progressed far to date.</p> <p>Academic Managers of Researchers</p>

The first cohorts of Research Division Leads (RDLs) completed the RDL Leadership Development Programme and the feedback has been excellent.

Research Integrity (RI) training has progressed significantly. The University now has >20 individuals who are trained trainers and are actively engaged in RI training across a range of disciplines. Interest in and engagement with the VIR2TUE Train-theTrainer programme has remained high and this number is growing, to the extent that we are seen as a model institution for sustainable RI training. We have yet to complete the more basic virtual RI training modules, which we envisage will eventually be compulsory, but these are planned to be recorded by autumn 2024. The University is also benefitting from its membership of the UKRN with respect to broader opportunities for training.

Researchers

The Reading Researcher Development Programme (RRDP) is well established and comprehensive. The training under this programme has been opened up to include ECRs and there has been positive take up on areas around CV's, interview skills, storytelling and preparing to teach. We will continue to review the training programme and identify courses to meet ECRs needs going forwards. One potential new area in development is an ECR Development programme, where a small cohort of staff could work together over a number of months and be supported to produce material in preparation for a grant or fellowship application.

Conference.

Layer 3 RI training is now available to new colleagues of the Natural History Museum, and discussions are under way with the British Museum, and the European Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecast, as per OR Action Plan 2024-29. 6.

Development for Layer 1 (online 1h module) is progressing but slowed. Filming of videos is planned before the summer.

<p>Comment on any lessons learned from the activities undertaken over this period and any modifications you propose to make to your action plan and measures of success as a result. <i>(max 500 words)</i></p> <p>The momentum gained from the new 0.6FTE Researcher Development Project Officer role has accelerated over the past year and is reaping benefits and giving visibility to staff who haven't always felt seen, particularly since Covid and moving to hybrid working, as well as in Schools with smaller cohorts of ECRs. Additional resources to support ongoing delivery are needed to expand and consolidate the work around the Concordat and will be considered as and when budgets allow.</p> <p>The ECR Conference in April 2024 was very well received by staff who felt that it was valuable time spent reflecting on their own career journeys. Not only was it an opportunity to bring staff together from all Schools for the first time in a number of years, it enabled staff to network across disciplines and deepen their own sense of belonging and community. However, staff participation in the competition element was low and there was a high drop off in attendance on the day. Staff noted uncertainty around standards expected and applicability of their research to the audience. A useful suggestion was put forward to add a category for a group entry, potentially opening it out to multi-disciplinary groups, so that staff can build their own network and have peer-peer feedback on presentation skills etc. We will seek future opportunities to repeat the networking benefits of this type of event and incorporate staff suggestions.</p> <p>The Research Staff Committee structure has proved sustainable, and efforts will continue to ensure adequate representation for all research themes for 2024/25. Lessons have been learnt about the best communication methods and this is demonstrated by the increased take up of training courses (centrally offered and RRDP).</p>	
<p>Outline your key objectives in delivering your plan in the coming reporting period <i>(max 500 words)</i></p>	

Once we have agreed priorities with our professional service partners around areas of joint delivery under each of the Concordat's principles, we will roll out our actions and communicate this with staff during Year 3.


We anticipate the third year of the action plan (2024-25) to focus on a) the work with HR, for example bringing clarity to promotions and career pathways and how to meet criteria to demonstrate the beginnings of research independence, b) ongoing maintenance of staff engagement through the committee and formal induction of new staff and c) roll out new and revised guidelines to Principal Investigators, which will incorporate the Concordat principals and emphasise key messages, such as 'Take 10' - the recommendation to take a minimum days a year for professional development.

Comprehensive career support remains a gap. Although progress is limited due to a lack of staff resources, it is our ambition to provide internal support by drawing on expertise and experience across the University, for example leveraging coaching opportunities with Henley Business School and exploring opportunities with our Centre for Quality Support and Development (CQSD) to develop some ECR specific teacher training. Our approach will hopefully maximise opportunities to meet the needs of this diverse group of staff in a financially restrained climate.

Please provide a brief statement describing your institution's approval process of this report prior to sign off by the governing body (*max 200 words*)

This report has been shared with the Committee Researcher Development & Postgraduate Research Studies (RDPGRS), the University Board's Research & Innovation Committee, Senate and Council. It has also been shared with the Research Staff Committee for comment and awareness.

The Committee for RDPGRS reports into the UBR&I, our prime University body for Research Governance, which includes our Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation, Research Deans from all four research themes and the Director for Research Services. UBR&I has governance and oversight of all research and innovation activities, including researcher development and training. Council is the highest approval authority at the University.

Signature on behalf of governing body: 

Helen Gordon, President of Council

Contact for queries: Susan Glover, Researcher Development Project Officer

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This annual report will be analysed by Universities UK, secretariat for the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, to identify good practices, themes for development and information to improve national research culture policy and practice.

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

www.researcherdevelopmentconcordat.ac.uk