



The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers

Action Plan
May 2022 - 2024

Foreword

In 2021, Vice Chancellor Professor Paul Bartholomew signed the new **Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers** which promotes the importance of creating and embedding a positive research environment and culture at Ulster University.



“Ulster University fully supports the Principles of this revised Concordat and we intend to uphold our obligations and responsibilities as a signatory.

In doing so, Ulster University has co-created with colleagues from across the institution a series of value statements which set the tone for our university and provide an indication of the culture within our university – one in which values-led behaviour emphasises collaboration, inclusion, integrity and enhancing potential above all else, and directly aligns with the implementation of the key principles in the Concordat for the Career Development of Researchers particularly in terms of our supportive and inclusive research environment.

We agree to work collectively and engage with initiatives to address systemic challenges in progressing towards a UK research system where researchers work in healthy and supportive environments. We agree that researchers should be recognised and valued for their contributions in research and beyond, supported in their professional and career development, and equipped and empowered to succeed in their chosen careers.”

P. Bartholomew

HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH AT ULSTER UNIVERSITY



Ulster University is proud to hold the HR Excellence in Research Award for its commitment to improving the working conditions and career development of its research staff.

The 'people agenda' is one of three top-level priorities in the emerging new institution-wide strategy. The new Research Strategy 2023-28 aims to address underlying core people priorities and ambitions that will make a material difference to the researcher employment experience at UU. Our new Concordat Action Plan reflects this approach by encompassing a greater depth of focus on standalone strategic work to generate improvements in our research culture and environment.

The University's commitment to the Concordat for the Career Development of Researchers is demonstrated through the implementation of key actions and initiatives aimed at the continuous improvement of our research culture and the career development of researchers.

Ulster University's HREiR Action Plan May 2022-2024 highlights key actions that have been prioritised in response to research staff feedback received in the 'Culture, Employment and Development in Academic Research Survey' March 2022 .

Progress on the actions set out here will be published annually on the new Research Staff Hub and reported to the Research and Impact Committee chaired by the Vice Chancellor. Progress is reported at the People and Culture Senior Management Team meetings chaired by the Chief People Officer on a quarterly basis.

THE HREIR 2022-24 ACTION PLAN IN DETAIL

	OBLIGATION	ACTION	DEADLINE	OWNER(S)	SUCCESS MEASURES
	<i>Environment and Culture</i>				
ECI1	Ensure all relevant staff are aware of the Concordat.	Develop a new website called the Research Staff Hub to include an engaging section dedicated to the Concordat.	March 2023	Research Staff Experience Officer	<p>New Research Staff Hub developed, launched, and widely promoted to research staff via 'Insight' news article, Twitter, direct email, and researcher networking forum.</p> <p>Concordat awareness increased from 42.6% (Research Staff Survey March 2022) to at least 50% evidenced in March 2023 CEDARS survey.</p>
ECI6	Regularly review and report on the quality of the research environment and culture, including seeking feedback from researchers, and using the outcomes to improve institutional practices.	<p>Increase researcher survey participation by promoting CEDARS at researcher networking events and on the new Research Staff Hub.</p> <p>Benchmark CEDARS results with other Universities.</p> <p>Introduce a researcher forum to encourage discussion and feedback on the research culture and environment.</p>	June 2023	Research Staff Experience Officer	<p>Increased participation in CEDARS from 19% in March 2022 to at least 30% in March 2023.</p> <p>Survey results benchmarked against other Universities to identify areas that require further attention and action.</p> <p>Researcher Roundtable Committee established and regularly providing feedback directly to RIC.</p> <p>Quarterly researcher networking events organised and rolled out to include discussions on key researcher issues to</p>

					inform improvements to the research environment and culture.
ECR1	Encourage researchers to actively contribute to the development and maintenance of a supportive, fair and inclusive research culture and be a supportive colleague, particularly to newer researchers and students.	<p>Promote and deliver a new series of quarterly research staff networking events open to all research staff.</p> <p>Deliver induction networking events specifically for new starts from across the University.</p> <p>Promote use of 'Induction Colleagues' to help and support new starts settle into their role as easily as possible.</p>	Mar-24	<p>Research Staff Experience Officer</p> <p>Section Leader – Organisation Design</p>	<p>Quarterly research staff events promoted to all research colleagues including new starts at induction, and via Insight articles, Twitter, direct email, and at researcher events. Attendance and feedback recorded.</p> <p>Induction networking events established and promoted directly to all new starts. Research Staff attendance monitored and recorded.</p> <p>Support and guidance for new research staff and their managers including information about the 'Induction Colleague' initiative published on Research Staff Hub.</p>
Wellbeing and Mental Health					
ECI4	Ensure managers of researchers are effectively trained in relation to wellbeing and mental health.	Design an Employee Wellbeing Training Plan for managers of research staff which is to be informed by outcomes of a researcher wellbeing survey and focus group.	Mar-24	Section Lead Employee Wellbeing and Campus Wellbeing Advisor	<p>Employee Wellbeing Training Plan published and promoted to all research managers.</p> <p>At least 50% of managers of researchers to have participated in training on mental health and wellbeing by March 2024 compared with current rate of 31%.</p>

ECR3	Ensure researchers take positive action towards maintaining their wellbeing and mental health.	<p>Organise 'Personal Resilience' training and mental health and wellbeing awareness courses for researchers.</p> <p>Improve signposting to the various mental health and wellbeing support mechanisms available to research staff via new Research Staff Hub.</p>	Mar-24	Section Lead Employee Wellbeing, Employee Wellbeing Campus Advisors and Research Staff Experience Officer	<p>Personal Resilience and mental health and wellbeing initiatives delivered. Feedback on training and support monitored to ensure quality of delivery.</p> <p>Training and support for mental health and wellbeing promoted on Research Staff Hub.</p> <p>Feedback on next CEDARS Survey to demonstrate that at least 65% of researchers feel that UU promotes the importance of mental health and wellbeing.</p>
------	--	--	--------	---	--

Bullying and harassment

ECI3	Promote a healthy working environment through effective policies and practice for tackling discrimination, bullying and harassment, including providing appropriate support for those reporting issues.	Introduce a new Informal Conflict Resolution Framework which clearly sets out steps that can be taken to report and resolve such matters quickly and effectively as an alternative option to formal processes.	Dec-22	Employee Relations Section Lead	<p>New Informal Conflict Resolution Framework developed (and includes clear guidance on reporting and dealing with incidents of discrimination, bullying and harassment).</p> <p>Framework launched and communicated to all staff on 'Insight' and published on UU website.</p>
------	---	--	--------	---------------------------------	---

ECM3	Ensure managers encourage reporting and addressing incidents of discrimination, bullying and harassment.	Informal Conflict Resolution Framework to set out that all line managers must encourage reporting of all incidents of discrimination, bullying and harassment.	Dec-22	Employee Relations Section Lead	<p>Informal Conflict Resolution Framework launched and included in ENGAGE line management training programme.</p> <p>Recent feedback revealed that 49.5% of research managers would feel confident dealing with concerns raised in relation to bullying and/or harassment. We aim to see an improvement of at least 10% on this score following the roll out of the Framework (evidenced in CEDARS 2023).</p>
------	--	--	--------	---------------------------------	---

ECR4	Ensure researchers use available mechanisms to report staff who fail to meet the expected standards of behaviour in relation to discrimination, harassment and bullying.	Communicate the responsibility that all employees have in reporting incidents of discrimination, harassment, and bullying.	Dec-22	Employee Relations Section Lead	<p>New framework communicated and accessible to staff by Dec 2022.</p> <p>Increased researcher awareness of reporting mechanisms for bullying and harassment (up from 59.9% to at least 65% following the promotion and implementation of the Conflict Resolution Framework).</p>
<i>Recruitment and Induction</i>					
EI2	Provide an effective induction, ensuring that researchers are integrated into the community and are aware of policies and practices relevant to their position.	<p>Enhance the existing managers' induction toolkit to improve local induction and introduce a quarterly staff induction networking event for all new starts at the University.</p> <p>Promote the new Induction process on the Research Staff Hub. Include signposting to online supporting materials, policies and practices.</p>	Oct-22	Section Lead Organisation Design and Change & Section Lead People Development	<p>New Induction Toolkit launched and promoted on Research Staff Hub.</p> <p>Quarterly induction networking events for new starts up and running.</p> <p>The Research Staff Survey 2022 revealed that only 50.4% respondents felt that their local induction was "very useful". New starts will be surveyed in CEDARS 2023 when we aim to see an improvement in scoring by at least 10% to reflect the early-stage success of this action.</p>

Recognition, Reward and Promotion

EI3	Provide clear and transparent merit-based recognition, reward and promotion pathways that recognise the full range of researchers' contributions and the diversity of personal circumstances.	Review the Academic Promotions Scheme and the CRS Promotions Scheme to establish an improved promotions process with clear criteria, assessment and outcomes ensuring equality of opportunity for all prospective applicants.	March - 24	Deputy Director People and Culture – Partnerships and Services	<p>Reviews carried out and implemented in consultation with Trade Union (UCU).</p> <p>Increased number of applications in next round of promotions compared with 2022 figures.</p> <p>Positive qualitative researcher feedback on improvements made in the promotions process compared with feedback recorded in 2022 Research Staff Survey.</p>
-----	---	---	------------	--	--

People Management

EI4	Provide effective line and project management training opportunities for managers of researchers, heads of department and equivalent.	<p>Promote the ENGAGE management training programme to research managers.</p> <p>Develop new line manager toolkit.</p>	May-24	Section Leader – People Development	<p>ENGAGE management training promoted on Insight, on Researcher Staff Hub and at Researcher Networking events. Uptake of ENGAGE training by researcher managers monitored.</p> <p>Roll out new line manager toolkit and promote to researcher managers.</p>
EM1	Managers undertake relevant training and development opportunities so that they can manage researchers effectively and fulfil their duty of care.	<p>Promote participation in the ENGAGE management training programme.</p> <p>Develop and introduce new UU ECR Manager Toolkit (based on Vitae model) to all Research Managers.</p>	May-24	People Development Partner and Research Staff Experience Officer	<p>Research managers successfully sign up for and secure a place on the ENGAGE programme. Positive feedback on value of programme received by course providers.</p> <p>New ECR Manager Toolkit launched and promoted to managers of ECRs.</p>

EM4	Managers actively engage in regular constructive performance management with their researchers.	Promote the Development and Appraisal Review (DAR) process to all Researcher Managers. All research staff to be encouraged to complete appraiser/appraisee training.	March-24	Director of Research and Impact and Research Staff Experience Officer	Information and supporting materials on the DAR process including appraiser/appraisee training made readily available to research staff via the Research Staff Hub. Researcher uptake of DAR and/or regular 1-1 informal development and appraisal conversations increased to at least 60% by March 2024. (Current feedback shows that 50% of researchers have had an appraisal and/or have regular 'one to one' meetings with their line manager and 57.4% agree that they receive constructive feedback on their performance.)
Job Security					
EI6	Seek to improve job security for researchers, for example through more effective redeployment processes and greater use of open-ended contracts, and report on progress.	Negotiate and deliver a Workplace Agreement to offer a permanent open-ended employment contract to research staff with 6 years' service, on two or more contracts (with the exception being where the University has good reason to believe that the post is at imminent risk of redundancy).	Nov-22	Deputy Director People and Culture	Workplace Agreement launched and implemented. Whilst recognising that it will not be possible to move all CRS to permanent contracts, UU is committed to making permanent as many as possible. The number of CRS who have accepted the offer to move to permanent contracts during this reporting period as a result of this new agreement will demonstrate the extent of its success.
Professional and Career Development					
PCDI1	Provide opportunities, structured support, encouragement and time for researchers to engage in a	Use the Research Staff Network and Research Staff Hub to encourage researchers to engage in 10	March-24	Research Staff Experience	Research Staff Development Working Group established.

	<p>minimum of 10 days professional development pro rata per year, recognising that researchers will pursue careers across a wide range of employment sectors.</p>	<p>days' CPD (or equivalent) by showcasing and signposting to a wide range of CPD opportunities.</p> <p>Form a new 'Research Staff Development Working Group' to identify and promote a broad range of CPD opportunities and ensure that CPD opportunities meet the needs of research staff.</p> <p>Agree and implement protected time for CPD.</p>		<p>Officer and Director of R&I</p>	<p>Uptake of full range of CPD initiatives captured and uptake monitored more accurately using LMS.</p> <p>CPD opportunities promoted on Research Staff Hub and at networking events.</p> <p>Formal agreement on allowing protected time for researchers to engage in CPD reached at RIC.</p>
PCDI6	<p>Monitor, and report on, the engagement of researchers and their managers with professional development activities.</p>	<p>Integrate the new learning management system (LMS) into UU's process for monitoring and reporting on researcher engagement in CPD.</p>	<p>May-24</p>	<p>Section Lead - Professional Development</p>	<p>LMS to be embedded by May 2024.</p> <p>More accurate monitoring and reporting of of researchers' participation in CPD opportunities.</p>
PCDM3	<p>Managers allocate a minimum of 10 days pro rata per year, for their researchers to engage with professional development, supporting researchers to balance the delivery of their research and their own professional development.</p>	<p>Ensure that line managers and their teams are fully aware of UU's commitment to allocate a minimum of 10 days' CPD (pro rata) per year for research staff.</p>	<p>May-24</p>	<p>Director R&I</p>	<p>Formal agreement on allowing protected time for researchers to engage in CPD reached at RIC and communicated to managers and research staff.</p>

Career Development Reviews, Support and Planning

PCDI2	Provide training, structured support, and time for managers to engage in meaningful career development reviews with their researchers.	Promote the DAR process and updated guidance materials to all research managers on the Research Staff Hub	March-24	Research Staff Experience Officer	Increased usage of DAR and regular 1-1 development conversations to at least 60% by March 2024. (Current feedback shows that 50% of researchers have regular 'one to one' meetings with their line manager.)
-------	--	---	----------	-----------------------------------	--

Research Identity and Leadership

PCDI4	Provide researchers with opportunities, and time, to develop their research identity and broader leadership skills.	Provide an easily accessible online training package on research leadership.	Mar-24	Research Staff Experience Officer	Launch the new 'Advancing your Research Career' 10 module training package. Promote training package to all research staff by direct email. Record participation and feedback on training package via the new LMS.
PCDI4	Cont'd	Promote engagement in 'The Connected Programme to Promote Research Collaboration across the Education Sector'. (This programme funds opportunities for some research staff to participate in international conferences and other knowledge exchange opportunities with other organisations to enhance their research identity.)	July 2023	Faculty Impact Officer, Innovation and Impact	Successful promotion of this scheme will be measured by the number of research staff who are able to access and benefit from this scheme up until July 2023.

PCDM5	Managers engage in leadership and management training to enhance their personal effectiveness, and to promote a positive attitude to professional development.	<p>Promote participation in the ENGAGE line management training programme which is designed to support managers to realise their potential and develop essential people management skills.</p> <p>Promote 2023 Leadership Masterclass Series to research managers.</p> <p>Develop line manager toolkits to support research manager training.</p>	May-24	Section Lead - People Development and People Development Partner	<p>Participation in ENGAGE line management training promoted to Research Managers at networking events, on the Research Staff Hub and on Insight.</p> <p>2023 Leadership Masterclass Series launched on Insight and promoted to all leaders at UU. Uptake by research managers monitored.</p> <p>Manager How To's and Manager Toolkits developed, launched and made accessible to all managers of researchers. Page views/visits monitored to assess usage.</p>
<i>Diverse Careers</i>					
PCDI5	Researchers explore and prepare for a range of employment options across different sectors, such as by making use of mentors, careers professionals, training and secondments.	<p>UU to procure and implement a new mentoring system (SUMAC) to widen access to mentoring opportunities to a broader range of participants and better manage data collection related to mentoring activity.</p> <p>Offer mentor training to encourage experienced researchers and other colleagues to participate in scheme and support ECRs in exploring options on ways to progress career.</p>	August-23	People Development Partner and Research Engagement Officer	<p>New mentoring system launched and promoted to research community. Uptake and feedback monitored.</p> <p>New mentor training developed and delivered. Quality of training monitored. New supporting materials published on SharePoint. Uptake of mentor training monitored and subsequent participation in mentoring scheme evaluated through mentee feedback.</p>

PCDI5	Cont'd	Include presentations at networking events delivered by experienced research professionals on their personal career journey and range of experience.	March-24	Research Staff Experience Officer	Organise and roll out a series of presentations to research staff at Research Round Table Network events.
-------	--------	--	----------	-----------------------------------	---

Further information in relation to the content of this action plan can be found on the [Research Hub](#).

Abbreviations and glossary	
HREiR - HR Excellence in Research Award	LMS - Learning Management System
EDI - Equality, Diversity and Inclusion	DAR - Development and Appraisal Review
UU - Ulster University	CEDARS – Culture, Employment and Development in Academic Research Survey
CRS - Contract Research Staff	RIC - Research and Impact Committee
R&I - Research and Innovation	ER - Employee Relations
ECR - Early Career Researcher	UCU – University and College Union