

HR Excellence in Research (HREinR) Award 12-year Summary

This report is supplemented with:

- A progress review report on the January 2021 - January 2024 Action Plan (Appendix 1)
- A forward Action Plan covering January 2024 – January 2027 (Appendix 2)
- Examples of effective practice (Appendix 3)

All documentation about the University's HREinR Award can be found at:

<https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/researcher/hr-excellence-in-research-badge/>

Information about the University's annual Researcher Development Concordat reporting can be found at:

<https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/researcher/hr-excellence-in-research-badge/concordat/>

1. Institutional Context

The University of Liverpool (UoL) was conferred with the HREinR Award by the European Commission in September 2011, and we have uninterruptedly retained this recognition. In July 2020, we reaffirmed our steadfast commitment to creating the very best environment for our research staff to thrive by becoming a signatory to the revised UK Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers (referred to 'The Concordat' in this document).

1.1 Alignment of UoL's Strategy 2031 with the Principles of the Concordat

The Concordat continues to be firmly positioned and specified as a core institutional strategic priority in our new University [Strategy 2031](#) which was launched in October 2023. Strategy 2031 states that *"We will deliver sector-leading support for the development of research talent at all career stages, as exemplified by our commitment to Prosper, The Concordat and wider initiatives..."* (p.5) Providing an inclusive, supportive, and equitable research culture that values the career and professional development of all our research staff is reflected in how Strategy 2031 embeds Concordat action planning and priorities across its key objectives, such as, *"Continue to invest in early career talent, including through the recruitment of Research Fellows, with diversity, cohort-building and leadership development embedded in the process."* (p.5) We are a values-led organisation, and our 5 UoL Values – Ambitious, Collaborative, Inclusive, Innovative and Responsible – were shaped in 2023 in consultation with research staff and the wider university community. Work is ongoing to develop an authentic [Employee Value Proposition](#) [intranet access] to help the University continue to attract and retain the very best research staff talent in order to achieve our ambitions as set out in Strategy 2031.

The primary beneficiaries of the Concordat at Liverpool are our 920 staff on research-only contracts, who are postdoctoral researchers, research associates, research assistants and early career research fellows. Typically, these are staff who have no formal management responsibility and are on the cusp or early stages of research independence. There are also 550 PIs who have been in receipt of grant(s) within the previous 5 years. Separately, we recognise that Concordat activities can benefit all those who are considering developing their research leadership and impact skills, including staff who are considered academics/ lecturers/ research and teaching only staff, clinicians, research-enabling professional support staff and technicians.

1.2 UoL Concordat Governance, Management and Implementation

Governance of the Concordat at Liverpool is refined on an annual basis by the [Concordat Steering Group \(CSG\)](#) to ensure effective alignment with the University's commitment to developing an inclusive and thriving research culture, to accelerate decision making, and to enable efficient communication and implementation of actions. Our transparent approach to Concordat governance is led by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and impact (PVC R&I) who chairs the CSG, which has a diverse, targeted membership and [Terms of Reference](#). Membership includes the Associate PVCs holding portfolios of Research Environment and Research and Impact; the Director of the Academy; the Head of Researcher Development and Culture; HR; the Diversity and Equality Team; the Open Research Team; and the Research Partnerships and Innovation Directorate. Critically, CSG membership includes at least 6 representatives from the University's [Research Staff Association \(UoL RSA\)](#) (of which two are required as part of the quorum) who ensure the Group's accountability to Liverpool's postdoctoral and early

career researchers by galvanising and representing the day-to-day, practical and environmental experiences of research staff at Liverpool. Management and implementation of the Concordat at UoL is overseen by the CSG, which reports to the [Research and Impact Committee](#) (RIC), creating alignment to other internal R&I and research culture-related activities. The RIC in turn, reports to [University Council](#) and the [Planning and Resources Committee](#).

Ensuring that our broad internal sharing of research staff-related practices are informed by strong external engagements and insights, CSG members work with a range of external fora, funders, collaborators and third sector organisations such as [Vitae](#) (including the [CEDARS Steering Group](#)), the [Russell Group](#), the [N8 Research Partnership](#), the UKRI Talent team, the UUK Policy and Research team and the [European Educational Research Association](#). The UoL RSA are also actively engaged with national research staff collectives such as the [UKRSA](#) and [Postdoc Futures](#).

2. The Review Process

2.1 How the Internal Evaluation was Undertaken

To enable CSG members to operationalise the Concordat at the local levels, and to facilitate strategic foresight, a series of targeted workshops were held with CSG members (4 were held in 2022, 6 in 2023). The objectives of each workshop varied from supporting members to review and regularly report against progress; collating input from key stakeholders; sharing effective practice and strategies to overcome challenges in implementation; weaving Concordat priorities across local departmental work; accelerating decision making and enabling efficient communication around research staff experiences.

This methodology has directly contributed to the formulation of the accompanying Appendices 1, 2 and 3 to this document. The robustness of this methodology means that we can report 100% engagement in both the operationalisation and forward planning processes from all 12 institutes/schools across our three Faculties; all research-related departments and the research staff community at Liverpool which remains at the heart of our Concordat work.

2.2 How Researchers' Views were Taken into Account (This section has been co-written by the UoL RSA Steering Committee)

The University's commitment to embedding the research staff voice within all Concordat and strategic research activity to review and enhance the quality of our research environment remains steadfast. Collaboration and co-creation are key to this approach, as captured in Universities UK recent 'Researcher Stories' news item: [Co-Creating the Researcher Development Concordat: Initiatives at Liverpool](#)

In 2023, we achieved a 38% response rate for CEDARS (response rates of 35% in 2020 and 32% in 2021 respectively) underscoring the growing acknowledgement by research staff of the importance of their perspectives in shaping UoL's policies and practices. CEDARS provides evidence to start discussions and drive focus on certain areas via local level committees – which include research staff representation – that help to design and deliver appropriate researcher community-specific actions.

Since February 2018, the UoL RSA continues to be a key forum for research staff to share and enhance their experiences. All research staff are automatically members of the RSA upon joining UoL. The RSA Terms of Reference summarises its unique approach in promoting the interests and development of research staff across UoL through representation, communication, professional development, and community building. One recent example of RSA-driven impact on institutional policy regards a proposed policy to end system access for colleagues leaving the University in October 2023. The RSA were successfully able to lobby for the change to be exempt for those on fixed term Research Only contracts.

The dedicated RSA mailbox is a key source of feedback for RSA members, to which they submit their queries and suggestions regarding a nurturing and inclusive research environment at UoL that the RSA Steering Group are able to consider. The RSA send out weekly e-bulletins covering a range of opportunities and routinely reminding researchers about their 10 development days' allowance. Monthly

welcome emails to new starters also similarly highlight development opportunities and opportunities to engage with Concordat-related work. The RSA host monthly coffee mornings that provide informal mechanisms of feedback for the research staff community. The highly successful [RSA Buddy Scheme](#) offers a valued peer support network and feedback channel for Concordat work across the university. In response to research staff expressing their keenness to contribute more actively to fostering a positive research environment at UoL, the RSA has recently initiated opportunities for research staff to be lead buddies for PGRs in a one-of-its kind PGR-postdoc buddy scheme. Further details are in the accompanying Appendix 3 document.

Additionally, the RSA organises an annual Concordat-themed Lunch and Learn session with external speakers. In May 2022, the RSA facilitated a Lunch and Learn session on [‘What does the Concordat mean for me?’](#) The session featured an interactive panel session of postdocs and research staff at Liverpool who are involved in Concordat initiatives. Specifically signposted was the [Module on The Researcher Development Concordat](#), the development of which was led by the RSA. This new development module is the first of its kind in the sector and further embodies the University’s and the RSA’s focus on sector-leading researcher development. In November 2023, the RSA invited Dr Yolana Pringle, the Head of Policy and Advocacy at Vitae to facilitate a session on ‘Researcher Development, Research Culture, and Me’ in which 25 research staff reflected on values and behaviours that underpin positive research cultures and came away with personalised actions (building on those indicated in this [Miro Board](#)) to take forward in their respective contexts. The RSA produce [detailed annual reports](#) of their activities that are shared with the CSG, and supports researchers in creating their own opportunities to thrive and find their own voice also through the [Researcher Hub blog](#) on the University’s website.

The [RSA Steering Committee](#) – currently 4 co-chairs and 10 deputy co-chairs – includes representation of research staff from across all 12 institutes/ departments and since 2018, meets on a tri-weekly basis with the Academy. In addition to the 6 RSA representatives on the CSG, the co-chairs have separately established a cadence of regular quarterly meetings directly with the PVC R&I to share updates, as well as strategically address issues by leveraging their position to drive positive change across the institution.

2.3 How the review links with existing QA and monitoring mechanisms

The diverse CSG membership informs the review and forward planning of the action plans to occur within the context of other parallel initiatives and QA mechanisms, such as formal management of the [Athena Swan Committee](#), the [Technician Commitment](#), the [Race Equality Charter](#) and the [Open Research Leadership Group](#). The RSA representation across the committees/ leadership groups of each of the above-mentioned quality assurance mechanisms, ensures research staff voice is embedded throughout UoL’s Concordats and Agreements work. Furthermore, [Prosper](#) is a key element of UoL’s Concordat work, and in September 2023, it secured an additional £450k funding and a commitment to regular UKRI reporting of its rollout across the sector. Additionally, the Academy’s employs the Kirkpatrick model of evaluation across its [Making an Impact Series](#) which aligns the Researcher Development and Knowledge Exchange (KE) Concordat capacity-building initiatives. This evidence-informed approach to continuously improving the efficacy of research staff development initiatives, and growing impact on practice has been showcased as a sector exemplar for engaging academics as it was invited case study to the [KE Concordat platform](#) in July 2023.

Taken as a whole, the above-mentioned QA mechanisms and the inherent interconnectedness of initiatives. ensure the quality and effectiveness of UoL’s Concordat review by strategically positioning the CSG as a convergence point for integrated research staff-related practices.

3. Key Achievements and Progress January 2022 – January 2024

We have made substantial advancements in evidencing our commitment to fostering research staff development as detailed in Appendix 1. Our accomplishments centre on establishing more robust structures, emphasising enhanced communication with researchers, and stronger support mechanisms for those who manage them. Below are some highlights that illustrate the impact of our progress:

Principle 1: Environment and Culture

Awareness and engagement

- **Increase in response rate for CEDARS 2023** (from 32% in 2021 to 38% in 2023)
- **68% of our researchers report knowledge of the Concordat** (up from 65% in 2021).

Wellbeing and mental health

- **CEDARS 2023:** 59% research staff agree strongly/agree that they are encouraged to take positive action to maintain their mental health (versus 52% in 2021); 76% research staff agree strongly/agree that UoL actively promotes the importance of good mental health and wellbeing (versus 73% in 2021).
- The **RSA Buddy Scheme** has supported 91 research staff since 2022, with <20% research staff reporting not feeling integrated into the wider community (from 34% in 2021)

Policy development

- In recognition of their impact on UoL policy, RSA members have been invited to **contribute to national research culture events**, such as the UUK Research Culture and Practice Forum 2023; and **recognition at the National Postdoc Conference 2023** (RSA Steering Committee shortlisted for the Organisation Award; and a UoL postdoc won the EDI Champion Award)

Principle 2: Employment

Recruitment and induction

- **Standardised job description templates** have been adopted across all areas, and include a link to paragraph on the Concordat in the Why work here? section, as follows, “*We are a signatory to the Concordat for the Development of Research Staff, aiming to improve the employment and support for researchers and research careers in UK higher education, and have been awarded the HR Excellence in Research Badge in recognition of this.*”

Recognition, Reward and Promotion

- [Project RISE](#) [staff intranet link] has developed a **new Contributions Framework**, which outlines how colleagues with responsibility for research are recognised for different types of contributions.
- 49 and 53 researchers engaged in the ‘[Celebrating Researchers](#)’ summer events in 2022 and 2023, respectively, with the events focusing helping participants recognise their own achievements, strengths and successes, and to harness their abilities to develop their careers. This led to 45 nominations for **Research Staff Community and Culture Champions**

Principle 3: Professional and Career Development

Championing professional development

- Faculties continue to develop aspirational **Research Staff Case Studies** on their local blogs or through The Academy [Researcher Blog](#) (7 in 2022-2023) showcasing the ways that research staff have used their 10 days professional development.

Career development support and planning

- **128** postdocs took part in two [Prosper pilot cohorts](#), reporting significant growth in their abilities to reflect on their personal self, transform their skills to meet what employers beyond academia are looking for, identify opportunities beyond academia, and develop job applications

4. Strategic Objectives and Implementation Plan January 2024 – January 2027

Our internal evaluation process has highlighted the strong commitment we have from colleagues across the university, from the research staff themselves to local Faculty leads, to the University’s senior leadership team, as reflected in our new University Strategy 2031 which specifically states our commitment to the Researcher Development Concordat ([p.5](#)). We recognise that whilst previous Concordat actions are now firmly embedded as ‘business as usual’ across our institution and showcased on the national Concordat Platform of Practice, we need to supplement our overarching Concordat priorities with core themes and actions that will have the most effective impact across and within local faculty researcher groups. The progress of these actions will be reported at our future Concordat Steering Group Meetings and showcased at local Research and Impact fora.

Appendix 2 outlines in detail our commitment between January 2024 – January 2027 to continue advancing our progress in developing a positive research culture for research staff to thrive, deliver excellent research, and be empowered to take charge of their own development. The table below is a summary of the key focus areas:

UoL Focus Area	Key Actions
Principle 1: Environment and Culture	
Policy development	Integrate research staff across various Faculty fora (such as Faculty committees, Away Days, etc) wherein there will be decision-making and operationalisation of Strategy 2031 . (EI7)
Recognition, reward and promotion	Strategic investment in and implementation of the new Research in and Inclusive and Sustainable Environment (RISE) Contributions Framework and associated career stage guidance as the approach for which colleagues with responsibility for research are recognised for all types of contributions, including research staff (ECM5)
Awareness and engagement	Continued investment in recognising the achievements of research staff and their contribution to the research culture and environment at Liverpool via the annual staff awards, and annual Research Culture Champion and Research Staff Community Champion nominations. (ECR1)
Wellbeing and mental health	Introduce a peer Mental Health wellbeing ambassador scheme for postdocs and technicians . (ECI3)
Principle 2: Employment	
Recruitment and induction	Diversify the pipeline of future research leaders via new Vice Chancellors Fellowship Scheme. Ensure that EDI is the forefront of the discussions to design the recruitment and selection approach. (EI1)
People management	Based on the RISE Academic Contributions Framework, scope the development of PDRs by staff category to include specific discussion of strategic priorities and how these manifest in operational deliverables (EI5)
Diversity and inclusivity	A strategic commitment by the university via the Thrive Project to foster diversity and inclusivity in research teams . (EI3)
Principle 3: Professional and Career Development	
Championing professional development	Ensure that rollout of the institution-wide Learning Management System (LMS) encompasses the integration and administration of researcher development activities. (PCDI6)
Career development support and planning	Nurture a coaching culture across the institution , to make more career coaching opportunities to research staff, recognising that moving between, and working across employment sectors can bring benefits to research staff, and support opportunities for researchers to experience this. (PCDR2)
Research identity and leadership	Investment in the Prosper PI network to enable ongoing opportunities to engage with a national community of practice and promote wider engagement and contributions/understanding of the diverse experiences of research leadership and management across the Higher Education sector. (PCDM5)

Anchored by our collective responsibility and commitment to the Concordat principles, the elements above reflect our University's overall vision to be recognised for our outstanding research staff initiatives and working practices that ensure our researchers can undertake their best research within a stimulating and enabling culture; take responsibility for their own development; and are optimally supported in determining and then achieving their next career steps.