

HR Excellence in Research Report 2022

All Key Documents and information about the University's implementation of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers can be found at: <https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/researcher/hr-excellence-in-research-badge/>

1. University of Liverpool (UoL) Background and Context

In September 2011, UoL received the HR Excellence in Research Award from the European Commission, which we have since successfully retained every two years. The University reaffirmed its unequivocal commitment to research staff by becoming a signatory to the revised UK Researcher Development Concordat in July 2020. As part of our internal Concordat governance, we published a Concordat Action Plan mapped against the new obligations and where appropriate, we transferred ongoing actions. Full details are on our new [Concordat webpages](#).

The period 2020-2022 represents a consolidation of the University's sector-leading reputation and practice in relation to researcher development. It is marked by a number of high-profile success, such as the Research England funded [Prosper](#) Project and the hosting of the [UK National Postdoc Conference 2021](#). Our review documentation illustrates the synergies we have been able to realise, by interweaving our development and cultural enhancement activities and embedding 'joined-up' thinking at the heart of our approach. The gap analysis undertaken as part of our UK Concordat signatory obligations revealed additional areas of focus for our Concordat activity. Examples of our actions in response are illustrated across multiple vignettes within Appendix 1 (2020-2022 update), highlighting the positive impact on research staff, while detailed effective practice examples are captured in Appendix 3 accompanying this document.

UoL employs 920 staff on research only contracts and 550 PIs who are in receipt of grants. There has been a 4% increase in the number of early career researchers since 2019 (880 to 920). Significantly, 57% of research staff at Liverpool are on open-ended contracts in 2021, up from 25% in 2019, compared with an overall 2021 sector benchmark of 21%. This is testament to the work we do to attract, develop and retain the best and brightest research talent within an inclusive research environment. The primary beneficiaries of the Researcher Development Concordat at UoL are those early in their research career, including postdoctoral researchers, research associates, research assistants and early career research and tenure track fellows. However, we recognise that the benefits of the Concordat activities extend to other groups who actively engage in research within the University and who are expected to develop their research identity as part of their career progression. These include staff on teaching and research or teaching and scholarship contracts, clinicians, professional support staff and technicians, who are represented on the University's [Concordat Steering Group \(CSG\)](#).

1.1. UoL Researcher Development Concordat Governance

The Concordat is firmly situated as a core institutional strategic priority. The [University Strategy 2026](#), refreshed in 2021, now specifies the University's commitment to the Concordat within the Research and Impact section ([p.10](#)), stating, *"To achieve our strategic goals we will enhance opportunities through Prosper and Cradle to Chair and endorse the principles of the [Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers](#), recognising that a positive and inclusive culture that fosters personal and professional development is key to success."*

This focus on the aims and outcomes of the Concordat is reflected in our transparent approach to internal governance, led by the Pro Vice Chancellor for Research and Impact (PVC R&I) who chairs the Concordat Steering Group (CSG), in liaison with the University's Head of Researcher Development and Culture, a new permanent post established in February 2020. The CSG has a diverse, targeted membership, including the Associate PVCs for Research and Impact, the [University's Research Staff Association \(UoL RSA\)](#), research-related professional departments such as HR, the Diversity and Equality Team, Research Support Office, the Open Research Team and the Academy. Most notably, there are 6 research staff representatives on the CSG, who ensure the Group's accountability to Liverpool's postdoctoral and early career researchers and ensure direct insights into the lived realities of research staff at Liverpool.

1.2. Management and Implementation

The Academy is responsible for coordinating the Concordat, enabling an inclusive approach to the development and implementation of our Action Plan, via 6-8 weekly formal CSG meetings. The CSG reports to the [Research and Impact Committee](#), creating alignment to other R&I activities and, in turn, reports to [Senate](#), [Council](#) and the [Planning and Resources Committee](#). In addition, the Concordat is embedded within parallel activities, including the formal management of the Athena Swan Committee, the Technician Commitment and the Race Equality Charter, ensuring that the clear synergies and common aspirations between these activities are recognised and addressed. Furthermore, the Academy continues strategic collaborations with a range of stakeholders, including the [N8 Research Partnership](#), Russell Group fora ([Researchers14](#)), European collaborators and business and third sector organisations. The Academy's Researcher Development Team actively contributes expertise and leadership within the [UKRSA](#), [Vitae](#), Postdoc Futures (a postdoc collective that leads [National Postdoc Appreciation Week](#) activities), the [European Educational Research Association \(EERA\)](#), the UKRI Talent Team, and the UUK Policy and Research Team, enabling a broader knowledge base to inform our work.

1.3. Effects of COVID-19 and Positive Impact upon the University's Postdoctoral and ECR-related Practices

We are proud that significant progress has been maintained during 2020-21 and the maelstrom of changes arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. While we have had to rapidly pivot all of our face-to-face activity to online and innovate hybrid-forms of practice, we have been able to continue to deliver on our action plan. Indeed, many of the activities we have engaged in have become even more valuable, as we have supported research staff through this extremely challenging time in which they played such a critical role. The University recognised the unique needs and specific concerns of postdoctoral and early career research (ECR) staff. For instance, the University initiated honorary positions for all fixed-term research staff for 6 months after their employment ended, allowing them to retain their University email addresses and access to all UoL development resources. Additionally, regular pulse surveys are undertaken to understand the challenges research staff face in relation to managing their workload, working practices, caring responsibilities, wellbeing and preparation for returning to campus. This has led to the University's [Research in an Inclusive and Sustainable Environment \(RISE\) Project](#), which aims to better understand how we might collectively and positively address aspects of the research environment highlighted by the pandemic. Ensuring clear communication lines is key to all of these activities, and throughout the pandemic the PVC R&I has held bi-weekly/monthly meetings with the co-chairs of the UoL RSA to provide a touch point between the University's Senior Leadership and postdoctoral researchers.

2. The Review Process

2.1. How the Internal Evaluation was Undertaken

Over the last two years, the implementation of the Concordat has been facilitated through dedicated workshops with CSG members (4 were held in 2020, and 5 in 2021). These workshops supported members to review progress, collate input from key stakeholders, share effective practice across Faculties, ensure alignment, accelerate decision making and enable efficient communication around research staff experiences. This approach directly informed forward action planning and the development of the documentation that accompanies this submission. These collaborative processes have been integral to ensuring clear oversight of our performance against our actions and mean that we can report 100% engagement with the consultation on our 2022-2024 action plan, from 16 UoL academic departments, across all three Faculties.

2.2. How Researchers' Views were Taken into Account

Data from the 2020 and 2021 CEDARS surveys (35% and 32% response rates respectively), the 2019 Staff Survey (27% response rate from research staff) and the pulse surveys undertaken since the onset of the pandemic, were analysed at Faculty level and shared with key stakeholders, alongside feedback from 200+ researcher development activities. Research staff identified effective communication as the main opportunity for further improvement from the 2019 full staff survey. During the following 2020 pulse survey, colleagues were asked for their views on priority themes including communication, leadership, wellbeing and change management in the context of the pandemic, as well as their experiences of adapting to working from home. The survey was open to all staff working from home, on campus or on the furlough period. In total, 383 responses (27%) were received from research staff, which indicated that they felt supported through the difficult period of recent change, felt well informed about what was happening at the University and felt the University cared about health and wellbeing.

The UoL RSA continues to provide a critical forum for discussion of researcher development and research culture, including the Concordat and HREIR action plan progress and priorities. All weekly RSA e-bulletins contain a separate section on Concordat-related updates and information, including signposting resources related to wellbeing, EDI, bullying and harassment, HR policies and guidance for research staff on using their 10 days of professional development, for instance. We draw on the outcomes of these institution-wide consultation processes to encourage conversations with the research staff community. In addition, the RSA organises annual Concordat consultation sessions with its 920 members, the most recent a session in May 2021 titled 'Researchers Take Charge: Your culture, your development, your future', aspects of which can be seen on this [Miro Board](#). Summaries of RSA led consultations were shared with CSG members, resulting in improvements to the researcher experience at Liverpool, (see Appendix 3). Placing our research community at the heart of Concordat review processes means we not only provide a voice to those we seek to support, but empower researchers to engage meaningfully in the enhancement of our culture.

2.3. How the Review links with Existing QA and Other Monitoring Mechanisms

Information from this review is presented to the Research and Impact Committee, and University Council. Additionally, through the leadership of the PVC R&I, the authority of the CSG, and the Academy's coordination, the outcomes of the review and the implications of the forward action plan will continue to be aligned to parallel QA and monitoring mechanisms. In particular, close alignment with our [Athena Swan](#) Award renewal in 2022, [Technician Commitment](#) Action Plan, the University's [Race Equality Charter](#) submission and reporting to Research England, as required for the [Prosper Project](#), is designed to segue with the requirements of the Concordat, given the close relationship between these pieces of work and the direct responsibility that CSG members have for these QA mechanisms, ensuring that the CSG is positioned as a hub for synergies across research culture initiatives. Additionally, the Academy's use of the Kirkpatrick model establishes a clear and robust mechanism for evaluating research staff development initiatives. Individuals are contacted at regular intervals to iteratively evaluate the effectiveness and fit of activities and subsequent proposed actions. This effective practice, as embodied in the University's Making an Impact Series, was recently highlighted by Research England in relation to the University's [KEF submission](#).

3. Key Achievements and Progress in Implementing the Concordat at the University of Liverpool

Principle 1: Recruiting, selecting and retaining researchers

- Results from CEDARS 2021 indicate that 86% of UoL researchers feel their recruitment was fair (up from 80% in 2020 CEDARS), 79% felt their recruitment was inclusive (up from 71% in 2020) and 77% felt their recruitment was transparent (compared with 70% in 2020). Additionally, a refreshed Recruitment and Selection training module is available for all research leaders.
- The new [UoL open-access obligatory role-related training module on the Concordat](#) for research staff and PIs is signposted to staff during induction, via the PGR Supervisors' Network, local level e-bulletins. The module is also linked in the 'Development and Support' section of the annual PDR form and to the [Researcher Hub Concordat pages](#). Results from CEDARS illustrate that the number of UoL staff reporting no awareness of the Concordat dropped from 36% in 2020 to 30% in 2021, significantly lower than the 2021 sector average of 45%.

Principle 2: Researchers are recognised and valued

- The recently revised [Statement of Expectations for PIs and research staff](#), emphasises embedding professional practice and a minimum of 10 development days for all researchers, including the [Guidance for the Researcher Annual Professional Development Allowance](#).
- Resources on Holding Successful Career Conversations have been written from PI and postdoc perspectives. Recognising the impact of the pandemic on researchers' motivations, case studies showcasing researchers' career successes are supplemented with synchronous informal panel discussions to share their experiences. Additionally, [Pathfinder: Adventures in Researcher Land](#) was launched in February 2021, a dedicated publication for researchers and research related staff across the University of Liverpool. The 2nd edition was published in November 2021 and included insights from three UoL Tenure Track Fellows on the highs and lows of their academic career journeys.

Principle 3 – Researchers are equipped and supported for the increasingly diverse, mobile and global research environment

- As a result of the £4.4 million, Research England-funded [Prosper Project](#), an online portal of dedicated career development advice and guidance has been developed. 133 contacts from 91 employers have engaged with Prosper, helping to co-create these powerful, up-to-date employer-based resources. The [Prosper blog](#) charts the progress of the project and sharing key outputs. It now has 13 posts with 900+ visitors and is expanding to ensure it provides content that speaks to all key stakeholders.
- The University's flagship Making an Impact Series (MaI) has continued to grow and respond to the current research landscape. Between 2020 and 2021, 123 sessions were delivered for over 1500 individuals, working with 250+ internal and external facilitators who led keynotes, interactive workshops, Liverpool PhD Alumni sessions, panel discussions, seminars, and 1:1 career consultations. The Series was augmented with asynchronous materials including podcasts, recorded talks, toolkits and visual minutes. As a result, [a rich and high quality bank of resources](#) has been generated forming a permanent, highly-flexible open-access library. In recognition of our work over the last 4 years, MaI 2021 was shortlisted for the prestigious national [PraxisAuril Knowledge Exchange Award](#) for Academic Engagement of the Year.

Principle 4 – A researcher’s personal and career development is recognised and promoted

- The University offers opportunities for Academic Practice Development to research staff via formal accredited and informal non-accredited provision and report these on an annual basis to Education Committee. All postdoctoral and early career researchers are encouraged and supported to undertake the Foundations in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education programme, as appropriate.
- Development of Research Leaders, which foregrounds their role in supporting researcher career success, has been augmented since September 2020 via the [PI network](#). The network provides a mechanism for PIs to come together to share and evolve best practice in postdoc career development.

Principle 5 – Researchers share the responsibility for their own personal and career development

- Open Research is a key agenda for UoL and we effectively engage research staff in developing this area of their practice. For instance, material on responsible metrics has been added to PDR training module for reviewers and new training on the responsible use of metrics in recruitment is being created. In line with the implementation phase of the responsible metrics project, the University’s Responsible Metrics policy was agreed at the University Senate in April 2021.
- The University’s [renewed Online Ethics and Research Integrity Modules](#) are regularly signposted to research staff to encourage their continued engagement. New research integrity training resources now available to Liverpool staff include the [UKRIO case studies pack and the UKRIO workshop on authorship](#).

Principle 6 – Diversity and equality

- The development of the [University’s hybrid working practices](#) [staff log-in required] remain a key focus for the university. A set of [Diversity and Equality factsheets](#) are available, covering topics such as Managing Hybrid Teams, Staying in Touch and supporting Parents and Carers. Opportunities for [diversity and equality and hybrid team management training](#) are also provided.
- RSA reps continue to be invited to participate in the development of the University’s Wellbeing Strategy/Action plan. Refreshed [Research Staff Wellbeing webpages](#) underpinned the RSA-led two [Researcher Wellbeing Weeks](#), in 2020 and 2021, focusing on PDRA wellbeing. A dedicated, open-access ‘[Wellbeing Oasis](#)’ was also developed for Postdocs.

Principle 7 – Undertaking regular review of progress in strengthening research careers in the UK

- The University participated in the CEDARS pilot in 2020 (35% completion rate) and ran CEDARS again in 2021 (32% completion rate), which enabled the development of a useful baseline for data. All data were shared across the institution, including key charter operational leads such as Athena Swan. A Prosper blog profiling the UK postdoc population in general, incorporating some findings from institutional surveys, with a particular [focus on postdocs’ equality characteristics, was published](#).
- The University was one of 9 institutions selected to host a national Wellcome Trust Townhall community consultation event on the 12th November 2020 to [understand people’s individual experiences of research culture](#) in the UK. 120 participants from 19 different institutions included technicians, postdocs, academics and Pro Vice Chancellors involved in the conversation at Liverpool.

4. Key Actions and success measures for 2022-2024

The themes revealed by our internal review are reflected in the 2022 - 2024 action plan (Appendix 2) which outlines in detail our ambitious plans for the future, in collaboration with research staff at all career levels. Our rigorous internal processes (see Section 2 of this document) ensure that our action plan contains a balance of activities that will lead to genuinely impactful outcomes for the research community at Liverpool. Below are some highlights that reflect these core priority areas:

Focus	Key Actions
Principle 1: Environment and Culture	
Implementation of the Concordat	Faculties to appoint Concordat Champions / Ambassadors, who will be tasked with leading implementation of the Concordat. (ECI1)
Mental health and wellbeing strategies	Introduce a peer Mental Health wellbeing ambassador scheme for postdocs and technicians using Wellcome ISSF funding to support dedicated EDI & Wellbeing post for co-ordinating. (ECI3)
Highest standards of behaviour	All Faculties continue to raise awareness and encourage use of the University’s Report+ Support reporting tool via staff meetings, handbooks, induction material and webpages (ECR4)
Principle 2: Employment	
Researcher induction	Launch of the University’s central Social Onboarding Hub for a seamless induction process. (EI2)
People management	Faculties to roll out good practice in providing guidance and training for Managers / PIs on carrying out PDRs for research staff to ensure they provide a comprehensive, clear and fair PDR. (EI5)
Recruitment and promotion	Raise awareness amongst PIs of the opportunity to include in their grant proposals the appropriate funding to support the promotion of the research staff, where appropriate and eligible, working on the grant. (EM2)
Performance review discussions	Researchers to provide detailed documentation in support of performance review reflecting on key achievements and highlighting any barriers to the achievement of objectives. (ER3)
Principle 3: Professional and Career Development	
10 days professional development	Cultivate the University’s provision for supporting researchers to balance the delivery of their research and their own professional development. Researchers to be provided with information reiterating that Professional Development takes a variety of forms. (PCDI1)
Exploring and preparing for a diversity of careers	Prosper Project Participants will be monitored throughout the cohort journey including mandatory reflective journal entries, attendance at focus groups and pulse surveys that will provide insights into the experience of participating in the cohort. (PCDM2)
Research identity & leadership skills	Develop a context-based hybrid leadership offer that provides high quality opportunities for research leaders to engage in targeted development alongside their peers. (PCDM5)
The wider research system	Build on the successful ‘Making an Impact Series to offer further high-quality development to all research and related staff and further develop its Research and Innovation capacity-building sessions (PCDR6)

We will continue to actively build an enabling culture of development at the University of Liverpool, which provides our research community with inclusive opportunities to genuinely succeed and realise their aspirations. We will do this through partnership, collaboration and a recognition of the diverse experiences and expertise that make our institution so special.