

Concordat for the Career Development of Researchers: Action Plan (2020–2023)

The action plan for 2020–2023 sets out the key priorities for addressing the aims of the Concordat, and indicates high-level approaches for how we might implement them. Rather than detailing exactly how some priorities will be met, we have recognised the advantages of exploring the solutions with the wider sector, and piloting them here or elsewhere before full implementation.

1. Provide clarity of career expectation

Within the Concordat there are systemic challenges that require the engagement of all stakeholders. Signatories are encouraged to collectively engage in initiatives to make progress in these areas. For example:

- *“Seeking ways to provide more security of employment for researchers, such as, through reducing the use of fixed, particularly short term, contracts, providing bridging facilities, and flexible criteria for maternity and paternity benefits.*
- *Sharing examples of emergent practice in implementing various aspects of the Concordat, particularly in tackling difficult and complex issues, such as insecurity of employment.”*

1.1	<p>Develop and implement induction programmes to communicate career expectations to research-only staff, using employment data from the sector and from our own destinations data. Highlight the opportunities for career development within and beyond academia.</p> <p>Understand and improve communication where there is a lack of clarity over particular contractual arrangements, and address common questions or misconceptions (e.g. eligibility for promotion). Draw on good practice from the sector (e.g. Bristol Clear initiative at the University of Bristol).</p>	Y1
1.2	<p>Review the suitability of contracts for research-only staff who have been in the same role on serial contracts for a high number of years, and extend any learning to better support staff on other short-term contracts.</p> <p>Review learning from the implementation of UofG’s new redeployment processes, looking specifically at their impact on research-only staff groups (e.g. through equality impact assessments and associated action plans).</p>	Y1
1.3	<p>Work with funders, Russell Group and other Universities or national bodies to review data on research staff contracts and academic career trajectories. Consider how operational models or good practice from other sectors could be applied to the HE sector.</p> <p>Gather case studies on more flexible ways of working.</p> <p>Explore the use of secondments into other roles as a form of ‘bridging’ between funding contracts.</p>	Y2

2. Provide opportunities for research-only staff to undertake continuous professional development (CPD)

The Concordat requires institutions to:

- “Provide opportunities, structured support, encouragement and time for researchers to engage in a minimum of 10 days professional development pro rata per year, recognising that researchers will pursue careers across a wide range of employment sectors.
- Provide training, structured support, and time for managers to engage in meaningful career development reviews with their researchers.”

2.1	<p>Broaden the definition of CPD opportunities, including both formal and informal activities, and provided either internally or externally, and ensure researcher awareness of these opportunities.</p> <p>Ensure that individuals understand that they are largely responsible for their own career development, and outline the way in which the University can support them in their career ambitions.</p> <p>Promote awareness of CPD in induction, performance and development reviews (PDR), webpages and other communications. These communications will include a UofG Statement on ‘what 10 days of CPD might include’, drawing on existing / emerging practice in the sector (e.g. Vitae or Russell Group) to ensure consistency.</p>	Y1
2.2	<p>Explore opportunities for more formal recognition of supervision by research-only staff of postgraduate researchers (PGR) and also other leadership activities (e.g. seminar series or writing groups). For example, the ‘assistant supervisor’ model introduced at Imperial College London provides a formal title for role and route to recognition through appropriate training or CPD.</p>	Y2
2.3	<p>Pilot and evaluate ways of monitoring engagement in CPD, e.g. through individual development plans and/or by researchers recording their own CPD activity on CoreHR in a similar way to recording annual leave.</p> <p>Facilitate access to these data to allow interrogation of data, e.g. by staff length of service or gender (e.g. through a QlikView dashboard), and to ensure transparent reporting to SMG on engagement by UofG unit. Ideally, this reporting would include an assessment of the quality or value added from the experience or training. This information is also of key interest to those writing Athena Swan applications and will probably be required by funders in future.</p>	Y1
2.4	<p>Promote and support the sustainability of peer-support networks, building on existing good practice (e.g. III NERDs); consider use of action learning sets (e.g. for new Fellowship holders hiring their first students or postdocs).</p>	Y1
2.5	<p>Improve access, delivery and signposting to e-learning (‘just in time’ learning, local provision, MOOCs, LinkedIn learning etc.), particularly to emphasise core research-related orientation or knowledge (e.g. improving your online research profile; publication practice, integrity, data management) and also to clarify both rights and responsibilities, career structures / potential destinations and progression of research-only staff.</p>	Y2

3. Enable and equip research-only staff to pursue a variety of career destinations, including outside of academia

The Concordat requires institutions to:

- “Ensure that researchers have access to professional advice on career management, across a breadth of careers.
- Recognise that moving between, and working across, employment sectors can bring benefits to research and researchers, and support opportunities for researchers to experience this.”

3.1	Collaborate with other HEIs across Scotland to hold careers events for researchers, and explore new ways of delivering these, such as virtually, and address any gaps that emerge following the end of the SFC research pooling initiative. This sector-wide action would create critical mass, making it more appealing to employers to participate in sector-focused events.	Y2
3.2	Engage with alumni and the Research Hub to look for new ways for researchers to build their external networks (with industry, business, charity, policy sectors) and support skills development to enable transition into other sectors.	Y2
3.3	Recognise that moving between, and working across, employment sectors can bring benefits both to research and researchers and therefore explore models for short-term shadowing and secondments for researchers. Learn from the model of the Liverpool Prosper project for supporting industry engagement for postdocs, and engage with funders and other Scottish HEIs to consider a similar programme at UofG.	Y2
3.4	Review opportunities for more research-only staff to contribute to UofG committees e.g. College research committees, REF scoring committees, internal grant review panels. Move beyond token representation to encourage full participation.	Y1

4. Track the destinations of our research-only staff

“Within the Concordat there are systemic challenges that require the engagement of all stakeholders. Signatories are encouraged to collectively engage in initiatives to make progress in these areas. For example: Gathering and publishing data on the career destinations and subsequent career paths of researchers.”

4.1	Find mechanisms to capture and make visible the career destinations of research-only leavers. This would support career decision-making by current researchers, recruitment, longer term partnerships with leavers (e.g. future KE partners or alumni) and reporting to Government on the economic impact of research funding. This mechanism could be similar to that run by the Library to capture and make visible research outputs. Work on changing the culture to ensure that leaving academia is not seen as a second rate option. Engage with other institutions and funders who have been working in this challenging area (e.g. Cambridge, UCL, Next Gen Life Sciences project, Wellcome Trust).	Y1
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5. Provide support for Principal Investigators/managers

The Concordat requires institutions to:

- “Ensure that managers of researchers are effectively trained in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion, wellbeing and mental health.
- Provide effective line and project management training
- Provide training, structured support, and time for managers to engage in meaningful career development reviews with their researchers.”

5.1	Promote and monitor engagement with new / existing online provision to support PI development. Build on findings from LinkedIn learning pilot and collaborate with other institutions or national bodies, where appropriate.	Y1/2
5.2	Run roadshow events to update PIs on Concordat requirements and exchange best practice.	Y1
5.3	Explore the use of 360° feedback tools and coaching or action learning / peer support more widely to advance PI learning and development. Learn from effective use of these tools in other sectors e.g. NHS.	Y2
5.4	<p>Incorporate PI support for careers of researchers into PDR/promotion criteria for PIs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Researcher PDR: Use data on engagement in CPD to pre-populate the PDR form of the researcher and hence trigger discussion during the PDR process around researcher activity to support their career development. ○ PI PDR: Pre-populate the PDR form of the PI with summary data of researcher engagement in CPD and data on the career destination of researchers, in order to review support provided by the PI for the career development of researchers. <p>Consider the use of random sampling of PDR forms (personal development sections) or audits of completion, to be included in annual report to SMG. <i>Note that some funders are considering asking for data on engagement in career development by grant-funded RAs in end-of-grant reporting. Therefore, data collection mechanisms should allow for flexible use.</i></p>	Y1

Communications

C.1	Update the Code of Practice for the Management of Research Staff and ensure awareness of the Concordat and the action plan by all stakeholders.	Y1
C.2	Develop visible institutional mechanisms and structures to promote our support for the career development of research-only staff (e.g. an 'ECDP for postdocs'). Note that the University of Edinburgh is likely to launch a postdoc College (Cambridge and Imperial already have the equivalent).	Y1
C.3	Share institutional good practice: REF2021 environment statements (or equivalent) and local Research Culture or Athena Swan action plans will provide updates on local actions (also via the Research Culture & Careers Group).	Y1

Monitoring

All actions will be undertaken on a rolling annual basis, starting at point of signing and with increased evaluation and reporting of pilot projects throughout Year 3.

M.1	Annual SMG agenda item to monitor progress, including: CPD uptake, culture survey results (see M.2), case studies of good practice, and career destination data of research-only staff.
M.2	Embed questions in annual research culture survey (including perception by research-only staff of quality of career support), coupled with pulse/targeted surveys as required.
M.3	Track and provide visibility of destinations of research-only staff.
M.4	Track uptake and visibility of CPD against minimum requirement of 10 day/yr, to give example to others of the range of provision and the definitions used.

Reporting schedule

Sign up to the Concordat	April 2020
Internal progress monitoring: first annual progress report	September 2021
External reporting The national reporting process has not yet been clarified but we anticipate that we will be required to publish a report annually, similar to what we do with the Research Integrity Concordat	*Annually each October, from October 2021