



UK Research
and Innovation

Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers

UKRI Funder Action Plan

July 2020





Vision

UKRI aims to enable a dynamic, diverse and inclusive system of research and innovation in the UK that is an integral part of society, giving everyone the opportunity to participate and to benefit. People are the heart of this system, and researchers are a key constituency in the research and innovation workforce. Researchers play major roles in delivering the projects that we fund, but much more than that, they are central to connectivity in the system through the networks that they form along the diverse career paths that they follow.

UKRI expects the research organisations (ROs) in which it invests to recognise and value their researchers and nurture them in reaching their full potential. This includes supporting their professional development as members of the research and innovation community, providing working conditions that enable them to flourish, and equipping them for diverse and flexible careers across the research and innovation system, whether in the private, public or third sectors.

The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers (the concordat) overlaps with other frameworks and commitments in the sector, which together provide holistic coverage of the research system and ensure that research cultures and environments nurture talent and enable excellent research and innovation, with people and ideas flowing freely through the system. Wherever possible, UKRI will work to align activities and reporting requirements to minimise the administrative burden and enable engagement with the core values of these frameworks.



Our ways of working

UKRI will work collaboratively with other funders and engage with employers of researchers, as well as researchers themselves, in co-creating its response to the concordat. It will ensure that policies and approaches are evidence-based whilst also minimising administrative burden on ROs. UKRI will provide advice to ROs and other key groups (managers, researchers) on implementing the concordat principles through its grant terms and conditions, updated guidance and stakeholder engagement activities.

UKRI represents a diverse range of research and researchers and is aware of the shortcomings of one-size-fits-all solutions. It will give constituent research councils opportunity to develop solutions appropriate for their communities, whilst aspiring to establish a baseline expectation of researcher development and support across the sector.

Work across UKRI has identified several themes that encapsulate the approach required to the concordat and its action plan is presented accordingly:

- Leading and communicating
- Changing culture
- Assurance and monitoring
- Gathering and developing evidence

Alongside the new actions presented, UKRI already meets many of the funder obligations through existing work across the organisation. UKRI will provide detail of these efforts and the obligations they match in our annual concordat progress report, including:

- Continuing to harmonise existing examples of good practice from across UKRI where it already meets funder obligations.
- Rolling out changes to terms and conditions resulting from other projects and workstreams where relevant to the concordat.
- Evaluating the effectiveness of existing programmes, for example fellowship schemes, in supporting researchers, and ensure that gaps in provision are identified and addressed.



Additional challenges

The concordat raised several systemic problems for stakeholders across the sector to address, such as the continuing challenges around job precarity and career destination tracking for researchers. UKRI will help develop solutions for these issues through the sector-wide working groups to be established as an obligation of the concordat governing body.

UKRI's response to the concordat intersects with several other ongoing workstreams addressing different parts of the research environment. These efforts target a range of audiences, and although there are clear opportunities for these pieces of work to inform each other, UKRI's approach on the concordat must be clearly focussed on the support and development of researchers.

UKRI's plan is not static and will evolve as other initiatives mature and additional evidence becomes available. UKRI will regularly assess the impact of its interventions and consult with stakeholders, especially the researcher community, to further develop its action plan going forward. The evolution of this plan will be advised and underpinned by evidence, including quantitative, qualitative and narrative, that supports the identification of what works in this context.

Finally, we will keep timing and implementation under review in light of the current coronavirus pandemic and the impacts this will have on research careers, adjusting the action plan as appropriate.



1.

Leading and communicating

UKRI will champion the concordat as part of its wider ambition to drive genuine change in the culture of research and innovation. We will work with other funders, policy bodies and research organisations to co-create a shared vision for supporting researchers and their role in society. We will engage with researchers themselves to give them a voice in how we develop our policies and strategy, recognising the importance and contributions of every team member to our success in research and innovation.

UKRI will join other research funders and research organisations, leading the sector and demonstrating the benefits of a highly trained, well supported and healthy research workforce empowered to reach its potential.

Intended Outcome	Action	Outline success measure	Timeline
Effective internal governance and delivery mechanisms for the concordat and integration with other cross-cutting activities.	1.1 We will establish a senior cross-UKRI implementation group, chaired by the UKRI Director of Talent as SRO ¹ , supported by a small team, and reporting to the existing Talent and Skills Strategy Board, that will:	Establishment of internal implementation group.	Months 1-2
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and liaise with responsible owners for concordat actions; monitor progress on achieving those actions. Develop actions in further detail and define success criteria/measures. Liaise with other key partners and groups (e.g. Concordat Strategy Group). Provide assurance through regular reporting to Executive Committee and UKRI Board. Provide briefing and support to UKRI Executive Chairs and their senior teams in their role as champions for the concordat in their respective disciplines. 	On-time delivery of annual report and 1st year actions.	Year 1
Increased awareness of the concordat's principles, ambitions and obligations amongst researchers and managers (Principal Investigators, grantholders etc.) that are funded by UKRI.	1.2 We will develop a communications package, targeted at researchers and research management, that supports a positive research culture. This will support the "people" theme in the UKRI Communications Plan.	Available survey mechanisms show greater awareness of the concordat amongst relevant communities.	Year 1
Shared vision and standards across the UK funding landscape.	1.3 We will collaborate with other funders to develop consistent narratives, expectations and comparable grant terms and conditions around:	Development of shared vision and expectations for researcher careers that larger funders have signed up to.	Year 1-2 ²
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The roles of researchers within the research system, our collective vision for their development and the relationship between researcher support and the resulting impact of their contributions across the economy and society. The scope of what we consider professional development for researchers and the level of support we expect for researchers, fellows, their managers and associated staff from the research organisations that we fund. How research organisations can redeploy researchers and offer more secure and sustainable employment. 	New shared language in terms and conditions of research funding across major research funders.	Year 1 Onwards

¹ Senior Responsible Owner

² Timescales dependent on stakeholder capacity post coronavirus

Intended Outcome	Action	Outline success measure	Timeline
Stronger researcher voice represented in UKRI concordat activity and greater engagement with our community.	1.4 We will continue to engage our existing researcher (and related professional) advisory groups and create a UKRI wide external advisory group to guide future development and implementation of this action plan.	Establishment of cross council researcher advisory group capable of contributing to future iterations and annual reporting of UKRI's action plan. Contribution of existing council advisory groups to year 1 plan development and reporting.	Year 1
Concordat action plan contributes to and is harmonised with UKRI policies and strategies.	1.5 The action plan for the concordat is and will continue to be developed in full alignment with UKRI's current and future strategies and frameworks, including Talent, EDI and Research Culture.	Concordat features across UKRI strategies and is understood within and outside UKRI to underpin strategy and policy, as appropriate.	Year 1



2.

Changing culture

The health of the research and innovation enterprise depends on the wellbeing of the researchers who work within it. A step change in the support and development of researchers will ensure that the research and innovation system encourages diversity of thought and experience and retains talented researchers of all kinds. We will reward the broad range of activities that researchers undertake that we consider essential to the conduct of excellent research and innovation.

An overall aim of UKRI's efforts in this space will be to harmonise related research culture commitments into a single framework.

Intended Outcome	Action	Outline success measure	Timeline
Strengthened support for research staff through professional development and training.	2.1 Where there is evidenced, demonstrable need for UKRI interventions, we will use existing mechanisms or develop targeted strategic investments in professional development and training in support of researcher development. We will monitor our funding to ensure it meets our objectives and addresses the gaps identified.	Researchers report access to the training and development funding and support they are entitled to as required. We will review this measure with time to consider both coverage and quality.	Year 1-2
Grant review and assessment considers:	2.2 We will review and revise as necessary the guidance and training for our reviewers and panel members, to support their decision-making around:		Year 1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-traditional career paths and equality friendly ways of working. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The impact on track records and ways of working of extended leave, flexible working patterns and non-traditional career paths. 	Proposals with a variety of working patterns of the researchers listed on the grant are fairly considered in the same way as more 'standard' grants.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workload expectations of researchers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The appropriate level of staffing and workload expectations on research grants. 	Proposals with non-standard staffing requests are considered fairly in competition with others.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whether applicants have given sufficient thought to the careers of staff they aim to employ. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How researchers employed on grants are supported to develop their professional and technical skills and how this will add value to their career. 	Professional development support for researchers on grants is considered as standard in assessments.	
Incentivise leadership and management development in research leaders.	2.3 Clear expectations for the leadership and management attributes of grantholders will be developed alongside mechanisms to efficiently integrate these into our assessment processes.	Leadership and management capabilities are considered and assessed as part of the peer review process.	Year 1-2
	2.4 Where there is evidenced need for UKRI interventions, we will use existing mechanisms or develop targeted strategic investments to develop and support research leadership and researcher management to help address the principles of the concordat.	Research leaders develop a broad understanding and acceptance of the principles of the concordat, driving a step change in research culture and the uptake of professional development across the research sector.	Year 1-3

Intended Outcome	Action	Outline success measure	Timeline
	2.5 We will ensure that the new UKRI Funding Service:		Year 2-3
UKRI knows who is employed with the funding it awards and can contact them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows us to recognise and value researchers, by knowing who our grant funding is employing and the contributions and status of everyone involved in the research effort. 	UKRI has the name, contact details/contact permission, and status (for example, Researcher Co-I) for researchers employed on its grants.	
The new funding service is sufficiently flexible to enable research organisations to creatively meet their concordat obligations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides flexibility in the capturing of data (e.g. staff effort, working patterns) to support research organisations in their ambitions to develop bespoke career paths for their researchers. 	Research organisations have the ability to track and develop a range of career paths for researchers.	



3.

Implementing and monitoring

A major obstacle identified in the review of the previous Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers was the need for additional drivers in enabling culture change. The revised concordat places obligations on funders to ensure the concordat achieves its objectives and improves the support and development of researchers.

Although it is important for UKRI to develop assurance mechanisms in this area, we will be mindful of the unintended consequences and potential to drive poor behaviour. UKRI will liaise with other major funders, learned societies and Universities UK to co-design an integrated approach with buy-in from across the sector.

Intended Outcome	Action	Outline success measure	Timeline
Research organisations in receipt of fEC ³ and training grants sign up to the concordat and engage with their obligations.	3.1 We will update the terms and conditions of our fEC and training grants, to refer to the concordat and set clear expectations that the research organisations we fund are themselves signatories who engage with their obligations.	Research organisations in receipt of funding are concordat signatories and up to date with reporting requirements currently in the concordat.	Year 1
Research organisations in receipt of the Research England grant sign up to the concordat and engage with their obligations.	3.2 Research England will consult upon updating their terms and conditions of grant (as set out in HERA ⁴), to ensure research organisations refer to their obligations under the concordat.	Consultation on the inclusion of the concordat in Research England grant terms and conditions.	Year 1-2
UKRI has reliable and representative data on the experience of researchers aligned to concordat principles.	3.3 We will establish processes to collect information on the researchers we fund, ensuring survey data are robust and informative enough to assess the impact of our efforts.	CROS/PIRLS successor or future research culture surveys generate robust and representative data of the UK research population.	Years 2+
UKRI has appropriate assurance of compliance with grant terms and conditions as they relate to the concordat.	3.4 We will develop suitable processes to monitor compliance of research organisations with our terms and conditions of grants as they relate to the concordat and integrate these into a wider programme of non-financial assurance activities around research culture. These will include a set of remedies and/or sanctions where breaches of terms and conditions are identified.	A new non-financial assurance process will include questions relevant to the concordat.	Year 2
Research organisations have greater financial incentive to invest in supporting researchers/ research careers.	3.5 Research England, collaborating with the other UK HE funding bodies, will consult on strengthening the recognition for concordat implementation and wider research environment in the successor to REF ⁵ 2021.	Inclusion of appropriate weighting on research careers and research culture in the consultation on the successor to REF 2021 to drive change in institutional behaviour.	Year 3
The concordat is a holistic part of UKRI's research environment work.	3.6 We will monitor the effectiveness of our interventions in driving genuine changes, as part of a wider programme of monitoring and evaluation outlined in the Research Culture Strategic Framework.	Integration of concordat workstream with research culture and other cross-cutting work for Monitoring and Evaluation.	Year 1

³ Full Economic Costing

⁴ Higher Education and Research Act 2017

⁵ Research Excellence Framework



4.

Gathering and developing evidence

UKRI's interventions must be evidence based, with the aim of achieving our strategic objectives and delivering value for money for the tax payer. Many of the issues around the concordat are poorly understood and UKRI has identified several areas where further information is needed to move forward.

Intended Outcome	Action	Outline success measure	Timeline
Understanding of financial and non-financial barriers to secure employment.	4.1 We will work with Concordat Strategy Group partners to engage with research organisations to identify the barriers they face to offering more stable employment.	Identification of the barriers and incentives behind continued use of time-limited contracts.	Year 1
Evidence base of the benefits of healthy research cultures and well supported researchers to support future interventions and funding bids.	4.2 We will develop and communicate evidence concerning the economic, social and cultural benefits of, healthy research cultures and sustainable careers for researchers.	Evidence synthesis of new and existing data.	Year 1-2
Understanding of the barriers to accessing existing support to inform future strategic interventions.	4.3 We will investigate how researchers have used the existing provision in our grants for career development and identify the barriers that they have encountered.	Evidence of how researchers use existing provision and identification of the barriers they face.	Year 1-2