

Annual Report for the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers

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Contact for questions/concerns on researcher career development	Dr Allison McCaig - amccaig@lancashire.ac.uk
Date statement sent to Researcher Development Concordat secretariat via CDRsecretariat@universitiesuk.ac.uk	14 th October 2025

Statement on how the organisation creates, maintains and embeds a research culture that upholds a positive and inclusive environment for researchers at all stages of their careers (max 500 words)

The University of Lancashire is home to a community of ~2,600 researcher staff and students, including academic researchers, postgraduate research students (PGRs), and Technical and Professional Service staff.

Our Strategic Plan for 2021 to 2028 sets out six priorities for this period. Priority 3: Our People Experience; Priority 4: Real World Research and Innovation; and Priority 6: Future-proofing our University outline actions that directly support creation of a world class research culture and environment that values its staff and their wellbeing. This strategy is currently under review.

Our Diversity and Inclusion Strategy to 2028 sets out our ambitions in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), ensuring fair treatment and opportunity for all. Enhancing sense of belonging is core to our aspiration to eliminate or significantly narrow disparities and inequalities that currently present in our staff and learner groups. A new Belonging Strategy will be published in October 2025 that will build on these aims.

441 researchers were submitted to REF2021, 35% of our eligible population. It is our ambition to increase this number and proportion by REF2029 by encouraging staff to undertake high quality, impactful research; and recruiting staff with track records in research. Whilst the external environment impedes our growth aspiration, we continue to recognise the importance of maintaining a supportive research environment and culture, and delivering the commitments set out in our HR Excellence in Research submission (HREiR) and the Concordat to support the Career Development of Researchers.

We have held the HREiR award since 2011. In 2021, we also became signatories to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, further signaling our commitment to the research community. Oversight of this commitment is provided by our Researcher Development Steering Group, with representatives from across career stages, and with formal reporting three times per year to the University's Research, Knowledge Exchange and Ethics Committee. The Research and Knowledge Exchange EDI Group oversees all aspects of inclusivity with respect to research and knowledge exchange.

The University is a signatory to the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment and has a responsible use of research metrics policy (based on the Leiden Manifesto), developed in consultation with its researchers. In 2023, we became members of the Coalition on Advancing Research Assessment, with a 5-year action plan published in 2024, signaling our commitment to ongoing review and improvement of our practices.

All staff are expected to participate in appraisal conversations three times per year, at which progress in achieving research objectives and future research aspirations are discussed. In addition, we regularly engage with staff informally through our three career stage forums (ECR, MCR and Prof/Reader) and formally through institutional and CEDARS surveys. We provide a range of induction and development activities spanning the research and knowledge exchange lifecycle, reviewed annually to ensure that arising needs are incorporated.

Our Research Institutes, first established in 2018, enhance the quality of our research environment, helping us grow and develop our research activity in diverse areas, and providing a vibrant and active environment to nurture our early career researchers.

Provide a short summary of the institution's strategic objectives and implementation plans for delivering each of the three pillars of the Concordat (environment and culture, employment, and professional development of researchers) for your key stakeholder groups together with your measures for evaluating progress and success (max 600 words)

Our three-year strategic objectives and implementation plans remain unchanged from those in our 2024/25 report.

Environment and culture

We will continue to deliver core researcher development activities, including induction, training and development programme, and career stage forums/networks. In addition, we will focus on three priority areas:

1. Consolidating research groupings into a number of large research and KE Institutes, to provide focus for excellence in research and KE. Clear definitions, pathways and support will enable staff to work towards attaining Significant Responsibility for Research (for submission to the next REF) and full institute membership.

Success criterion - number/proportion of staff with significant responsibility for research status increases year on year.

2. Improve our data collection processes and analytical capacity for evaluating inclusivity of research, including training and development provision, and satisfaction around research environment and culture.

Success criterion - decrease in identified EDI-related gaps, increased rate of engagement with training and development, and improved evaluation scores.

3. Updating our Researcher Portal functionality and content, providing a single source of information on training and development opportunities at the University and elsewhere. We will use and promote national resources to support institutes and managers in their support of ECRs.

Success criterion – Increasing numbers year-on-year engaging with the Portal, and quantitative data showing positive evidence of impact (survey/focus groups).

Employment

We will focus on three priority areas:

1. Continuing welcome events, local and School inductions for all new starters (including ECRs/Researchers), including employment policies and practices, setting out expectations and responsibilities for all University of Lancashire colleagues. We will continue to actively promote our research mentoring scheme, which complements informal mentoring.

Success criterion – At least two case studies from new researchers on their experiences of their new starter induction, welcome events or local induction activities; increased uptake of research mentoring.

2. Implement a Researcher Development Welcome resource for new ECRs/researchers to enable easy access to information about the Concordat and available support for research and Knowledge Exchange.

Success criterion – feedback via interviews with the research community on the usefulness of this resource and publicised via internal Researcher Development intranet pages.

3. Improving our responsible research assessment practice, including development of a CoARA action plan and participation in the UKRN's OR4 project, with review of recruitment/promotion guidance (as required), development and communication of resources.

Success criterion – increased awareness in staff survey/CEDARS.

Professional Development of Researchers

We champion all careers with research, placing equal value on the many different career roles and paths our researchers take. Underpinning this value is the need to create a culture where career development discussions are core to research leadership. We will focus on three priority areas which will include:

1. Developing guidance and support for research managers on how to develop their researchers and understand what development provision is on offer; support researchers to self-identify training/development needs.

Success criterion – increased awareness of resources; increased in training requests.

2. Develop and promote research career pathways webpages and CAREEREDGE module, building upon support available through Graduate Research School for PGRs and research staff.

Success criterion - Increasing numbers engaging with the resource, and quantitative data showing positive evidence of impact.

3. Work with the Graduate Research School to develop and implement a career planning system/templates and guidance that can be used by ECRs/Researchers to plan and record their CPD.

Success criterion - Evidence will be measured by the numbers of researchers engaging with the resources. 10 researchers engaging in career planning pilot in year 1.

Summary of actions taken, and evaluation of progress made, in the current reporting period to implement your plan to support the three pillars in respect of each of your key stakeholder groups [Institution; Academic Managers of Researchers (Deans, Heads of Schools/Departments/PIs); Researchers]

Environment and Culture (max 600 words)

Institution

- **REF2029 PCE Pilot** - The University participated in the REF2029 PCE pilot across four of its UoAs. This provided an opportunity to look in depth at our strengths and weaknesses in PCE, as well as the robustness of our evidence collection.
- **Research Committees** - All levels of research staff are represented on the University Research, Knowledge Exchange and Ethics Committee, RKE EDI Group and Researcher Development Steering Group.
- **RKE Awards** - In summer 2025, the University ran its first Research and Knowledge Exchange (RKE) Awards, a celebration of the diversity of excellent research and knowledge exchange activity taking place across the institution. 13 awards were available, spanning the RKE arena and career stages, including Rising Star Award for ECRs, and PGR Student of the Year.
- **RKES Awards** - A complementary awards ceremony was held for staff within the Research and Knowledge Exchange Service (RKES), celebrating the varied contributions of

	professional services staff supporting research and knowledge exchange. • Networking and Mentorship Session Starting September 2025 - We are launching a new workshop in September 2025 called <i>Networking and Mentorship for Career Success</i>. It's open to all research and knowledge exchange staff and will help staff build stronger research profiles and professional networks. We will track how the sessions are being used and review their impact each year to make sure they are meeting staff needs and helping with career development. Academic Managers of Researchers • Research4all Framework - A framework for inclusivity throughout the research lifecycle was developed in 2023/24 and approved by our Academic Board. The purpose of the RKE4All framework is to provide a set of guiding principles and points of enquiry to enable researchers (whether as individuals or teams) to adopt an EDI lens through which to view their research and related activities. Adoption principles, implementation plan and a suite of success measures are in place. A range of communication activities took place in 2024/25 to roll out the Framework. Funding and plans are in place to work with the research community to identify and develop appropriate resources in the next academic year. • Staff Survey - Our biennial staff survey ran in 2025, covering a range of topics including line management, mentoring, career development, and wellbeing. The main themes that came out of the analysis were appraisal and belonging. Action plans are being developed at both school and professional services levels in response to the latest survey. Focus groups are now being held to explore these key areas further, including topics such as appraisal, belonging, and stress. • CEDARS 2025 - Around 230 staff took part, sharing their views on topics such as research culture, stress, belonging, and appraisal. Data analysis is underway, with key themes emerging around belonging, stress, and research culture. Focus groups are being developed to explore these themes further and help shape future improvements.
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	Researchers • Research & Knowledge Exchange Development Programme – 92 training and development events took place in 2024/25 for our research and knowledge exchange staff. These sessions ranged from Concordat engagement sessions through to identifying funding. Feedback forms were collected, and evaluation of the programme and its inclusivity is underway • ECR/MCR engagement – In 2025, two engagement sessions were held for early and mid-career researchers to meet with the PVC for Research and Enterprise. These sessions provided an opportunity to discuss key topics including research strategy, career pathways and the importance of research culture. A total of 30 researchers attended across both sessions. Looking ahead to 2026, we plan to develop a new event, Culture and Conversation, designed to encourage more staff to take part, share their views, and feel actively involved in shaping the research environment. • British Academic Early Career Research Network (ECRN) Northwest Cluster - The University became a collaborating partner for this network, designed to support early career researchers by offering opportunities for professional development, collaboration, and career growth. It's a welcoming and inclusive community tailored to the needs of researchers at the start of their academic journey. So far, around 50 early career researchers from the University have signed up. We're continuing to promote the network and encourage more researchers to join each year. • Schwartz Rounds - Supporting Staff Wellbeing - Schwartz Rounds are open to all staff, academic and professional services, and offer a safe, supportive space to reflect on the emotional side of work. They help improve wellbeing by encouraging empathy, connection, and shared understanding through storytelling and open discussion. 5 sessions (92 attendees) were delivered in 2024, and 4 sessions to date in 2025 (27 attendees).
Employment (max 600 words)	Institution • Responsible research assessment - In 2023, the University became a signatory to the Coalition on Advancing Research Assessment, signaling our ongoing commitment to this area.

	We are delivering against a 5-year action plan which is monitored by the RKE EDI Group, and we are active participants of the UK CoARA Chapter. • Chartermarks - During 2024/25, the University achieved its Mental Health Chartermark and Race Equality Chartermark. We are currently working towards renewing our Athena Swan award. • Addressing precarity and progression - Two career progression schemes received senior management approval in 2024, aimed at fostering the growth and retention of research talent within the University. These will enable progression between grades and extended funding for fixed term contract staff and will be rolled out when funding allows. Academic Managers of Researchers • Research Managers - One large area of focus and has been carried over from the 10-year HREiR Award action plan is around identifying the population of research managers and implement new processes to specifically report upon this population. Work with the People Team to streamline reporting for this group is ongoing. • Research Misconduct Policy - The Ethics, Integrity, and Governance Unit produced updated policy guidance, which sets out the Concordat to Support Research Integrity commitments and Research Misconduct Policy. Moving forward for 2023, EIGU have developed a wide variety of policy, guidance and procedural information for research managers, leaders and researchers with a dedicated intranet site across all aspects of the ethics journey. Researchers • Wellbeing sessions for Researchers - The University remains committed to promoting a healthy working environment for our research community. Two new researcher wellbeing session were introduced in 2024-2025 around adopting a trauma informed approach to research and when researching potentially emotionally distressing topics. Evaluation of these sessions is planned for 2025/26.
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	• Engagement events for Researchers - A review of our ECR/MCR approach was carried out this year and a proposal developed to improve engagement levels through establishment of academic leads and community ownership. This will be implemented in 2025/26.
Professional development (max 600 words)	Institution • 10 days CPD campaign - Our 10 Days campaign launched in autumn 2024, with guidance shared across research and knowledge exchange staff, research managers, and senior leaders. Staff consultation and feedback informed the development of a suite of guidance documents. We will continue to track how staff are using this provision by reviewing CEDARS survey data and staying engaged with staff directly. Academic Managers of Researchers • Introduction of regular appraisal cycle, including training for appraisers. All staff, including research staff, are expected to have a minimum of three appraisal discussions per annum with their line managers where they have the opportunity to discuss their career development options and support for their role. This initiative is ongoing, and we will report further on its progress and impact in the next concordat cycle. In 2023, 69% of staff had had an appraisal in the previous 4 months, 52% saying that it had provided useful personal development goals, and 59% with useful work goals. Participation in appraisals is measured in the biennial staff and CEDARS surveys. Institutional and School/Service level action plans are in place. Researchers • Narrative CV training - In response to local demand, we developed training resources around narrative CVs, required now by many major funders and this is now incorporated into our annual training and development programme for 2024/25 and beyond.

Comment on any lessons learned from the activities undertaken over this period and any modifications you propose to make to your action plan and measures of success as a result. (max 500 words)

The University has made progress to date in implementing the principles of the Concordat, demonstrated by the range of cross-cutting activities outlined in this report. This has been achieved through a coordinated and inclusive approach, which continues to focus on building structures and mechanisms for data collection, communication, networking and information sharing.

Schools and Institutes are now asked specific questions about activities undergone to support research staff at different career levels and to support inclusivity as part of their formal reporting to the University's Research, Knowledge Exchange and Ethics Committee. This allows sharing of best practice and raises awareness of the importance of the Concordat.

In addition, the University participated in the REF2029 PCE pilot across four of its UoAs. This provided an opportunity to look in depth at our strengths and weaknesses in PCE, as well as the robustness of our evidence collection.

Close connections and collaboration with researchers, schools and professional services have been central to this work. Our work to date has also allowed us to identify the areas which require more in-depth focus and effort.

We are taking a reflective approach to our researcher development provision, evaluating our activities with our stakeholders. Engagement from research and knowledge exchange staff has been low due to the local impact of external financial pressures and we have been exploring more creative ways to deliver our training and to ensure that development activities are relevant. This includes online videos, podcasts, and bite-sized content. We are also holding in-person sessions through schools, research institutes, and centres to talk directly with colleagues about the development opportunities available and how we can support them. We plan to give more ownership of our ECR and MCR forums to the members to increase engagement.

The Researcher Development Steering Group has been instrumental in ensuring progress and providing colleagues with an opportunity to feed into developments and plans. This approach will be maintained and developed through our next action plan.

We note the increasing profile in the sector around open and responsible research assessment. We are a member of the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA). Raising awareness amongst the research population is reflected in our 5-year CoARA action plan, along with learning from and embedding sector best practice through membership of CoARA working groups, the UK CoARA Chapter, ARMA Special Interest Groups and other

initiatives such as the UKRN's OR4 project. We are participating in the UKRN's OR4 project.

**Outline your key objectives in delivering your plan in the coming reporting period
(max 500 words)**

We identified four key priorities to take forward over the period 2025/26, in addition to our ongoing actions:

- **10-days CPD. Guidance for managers and campaign to raise awareness.** We will continue our 2024/25 work to promote our commitment to 10-days of professional development, including consultation with staff, establishment of institution-wide guidance, and system for recording and monitoring CPD.
- **Addressing precarity and progression** - Roll-out schemes to support grade progression of Research Only staff and to reduce precarity of fixed-term contracts (subject to funding).
- **Build on our commitment to EDI consideration across the research lifecycle.** Further work to embed our Research4All Framework will include establishment of a small academic team to work with the research community to identify key issues and develop resources.
- **Renewal of HR Excellence in Research Award.** We will submit our HREiR award renewal in March 2026. A key strand of work for the first half of 2025/26 is to work with the research community to identify key objectives for the period 2026 to 2029.

Please provide a brief statement describing your institution's approval process of this report prior to sign off by the governing body (max 200 words)

The Researcher Development Steering Group, chaired by the Director of the Research & Knowledge Exchange Service, leads on implementation of the Concordat and has the responsibility for creating and evaluating our Concordat Implementation Plan and the associated governance. Membership of this group includes Associate Deans for Research and Knowledge Exchange (or equivalent) from each School, Head of Impact & Outputs Unit and Researcher Development Officer (Research & Knowledge Exchange Service), People Team partners, as well as ECR and MCR representatives.

Formal approval of this report was provided by the University Research, Knowledge Exchange, and Ethics Committee, chaired by the Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research & Knowledge Exchange, Professor Stjohn Crean.

Signature on behalf of governing body:

StJohn Crean

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'StJohn Crean', with a stylized initial 'S' and a long horizontal stroke.

Contact for queries:

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This annual report will be analysed by Universities UK, secretariat for the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, to identify good practices, themes for development and information to improve national research culture policy and practice.

If you have any questions, or suggestions on how the reporting process could be improved, please contact the secretariat at CDRsecretariat@universitiesuk.ac.uk

www.researcherdevelopmentconcordat.ac.uk