

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

Name of Institution	University of Central Lancashire
Reporting period	2023-2024
Date approved by governing body	2 nd October 2024
Date published online	22 October 2024
Web address of annual report	https://www.clok.uclan.ac.uk/53357/
Web address of institutional Researcher Development Concordat webpage	https://www.uclan.ac.uk/research/academic-development-research-enterprise
Contact for questions/concerns on researcher career development	Dr Allison McCaig - amccaig@uclan.ac.uk
Date statement sent to Researcher Development Concordat secretariat via CDRsecretariat@universitiesuk.ac.uk	22 October 2024

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 Central Lancashire (UCLan) is home to a community of ~2,600 researcher staff and students, including Teaching & Research and Research Only academics, postgraduate research students (PGRs), and Technical and Professional Service staff.

Our Strategic Plan for 2021 to 2028 with its associated sub-strategies and enabling strategies 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.

Our Diversity and Inclusion Strategy to 2028, *Belonging at UCLan*, 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.

In total, 441 researchers were submitted to REF2021, 35% of our eligible population. It is our ambition to substantially grow this number and proportion by REF2029 by encouraging current staff to undertake high quality, impactful research; and recruiting staff with track records in research. We recognise that this can only be achieved by maintaining a nurturing, 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 signalling 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 responsible research metrics policy (based on the Leiden Manifesto), developed in consultation with its researchers. In 2023, we became members of Coalition on Advancing Research Assessment, with a 5-year action plan published in 2024, further 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 associated, 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 2022/23 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 UCLan and elsewhere. We will use and promote national resources to support institutes and managers in their support of ECRs.

Success criterion – Increasing numbers yoy 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 UCLan colleagues. We will continue to actively promote our research mentoring scheme.

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 scheme.

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. <i>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.</i>
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 • 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 Festival - The University staged a one-week Research and Knowledge Exchange Festival in February 2024. This included an ECR event based on the "three-minute thesis" competition and an MCR showcase event. Elsewhere, the programme included launch of our RKE Institutes, workshops on bid development, a celebration of EDI research, thematic workshop on Sustainable Development Goals, and public focused events around ageing and astrophysics. We had over 1,400 attendees across 64 events. Feedback praised the variety of options, diversity of topics and passion of the staff leading the events. 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.

- **UCLan Staff Survey** – *Launched in 2023* to all staff, this survey includes questions around line manager support, mentoring, and career development. Analysis and comprehensive action planning and reporting took place in 2023/24. The survey included questions around line management and appraisal. The next survey is scheduled to take place in 2025, which will allow us to track progress and refine our strategies based on the feedback received.
- **CEDARS 2023** – Launched to the research community at UCLan looking at research environment and culture. Analysis was undertaken in 2023/24 with action plans in development. The next survey is scheduled to take place in 2025, which will allow us to track progress and refine our strategies based on the feedback received.

Researchers

- **Research & Enterprise Development Programme** – 98 training and development events took place in 2023/24 for our research staff, with 451 people in attendance. 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** – Drop-in sessions were held with both early career and mid-career research groups. ECR sessions focussed on key topics such as getting started in research, providing feedback on the university research environment and culture, and bid writing. Mid-career sessions also gathered feedback on the university research environment and culture, as well as offering support for career progression from mid-career to Reader level.
- **Researcher Welcome booklet and Induction Programme** – A new researcher booklet has been developed for all new research staff and launched in 2023/24. This resource has information around the concordat, support for career development, the University's research environment and culture, alongside representation and feedback. All new starters receive information about the concordat, which is also covered in the researcher induction and RKES personal and professional development programme.

Employment (max 600 words)

Institution

- **Responsible research assessment** - In 2023, the University became a signatory to the Coalition on Advancing Research Assessment, signalling our ongoing commitment to this area. During 2023/24, work was carried out institutionally to develop our 5-year CoARA action plan, a requirement for signatories. This was submitted to CoARA in spring 2024. Responsible research assessment is a standing agenda item for the RKE EDI Group to ensure that progress is made with the action plan. The University is a member of the UK Chapter of CoARA, established in 2024. We are also a member of the Community of Practice for the UKRN OR4 project, which seeks to develop resources to support recognition and reward for open research practices. In 2024/25, we will pilot the OR4's open research "maturity assessment framework" and develop actions accordingly to progress the policy area.
- **Chartermarks** - During 2023/24, the University has worked with staff to develop Mental Health Chartermark and Race Equality Chartermark applications and action plans.
- **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. Subject to funding, these schemes will be rolled out in 2024/25. (i) *PVC Talent Research Retention Scheme (TRRS)*: This five-year fellowship is designed to retain exceptional researchers within the University. (ii) *EC/MC Researcher Promotion Scheme (RPS)*: This scheme provides an opportunity for researchers who are on a research-only track to apply for promotion to higher-graded roles.

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 will launch a Research Ethics Handbook containing a wide variety of policy, guidance and procedural information for research managers, leaders and researchers. A dedicated intranet site which will cover

all aspects of the ethics journey for researchers to access is now in development.

Researchers

- **Wellbeing sessions for Researchers** - The University remains committed to promoting a healthy working environment for our research community. During this reporting period, one wellbeing event was delivered specifically to early career researchers (ECR) and mid-career researchers (MCR) groups, with further wellbeing sessions open to all staff (131 participants in total).
- **Engagement events for Researchers** - Academic Development for Research & Knowledge Exchange have led monthly ECR/MCR network groups for new and current research staff across the institution. During the reporting period, surveys were developed and publicised to the research community around what type of engagement events they require as part of their role. We will develop and implement appropriate engagement events to support this group going forward in response to feedback.

Professional development (max 600 words)

Institution

- **10 days CPD campaign** - During 2023/24, in partnership with our People Team we have developed our campaign to promote our Concordat commitment to 10-days of professional development, to be rolled out in 2024/25. We have developed guidance to support research managers and principal investigators. This guidance aims to help them understand the development opportunities available to them and their teams, and how they can assist their research staff in accessing these training and development resources.

The guidance will be publicised in October 2024. We will invite feedback from research managers and principal investigators, and the wider research community, which will be used to refine the resources. The goal is to increase awareness of available resources and to see a subsequent rise in training requests.

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

- **RKE Portal refresh** - During 2023/24, we have redesigned our RKE Portal, updating the underpinning technology and content. This is due to launch in 2024/25. Resources are mapped to the Researcher Development Framework.
- **Narrative CV training** - In response to local demand, we developed training resources around narrative CVs, required now by many major funders. A pilot workshop was held, targeted at UKRI applicants, with 12 participants and positive feedback. This is now incorporated into our annual training and development programme for 2024/25.

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, building networks and information sharing.

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. Our Action Plan 2023-2025 reflects this, building on a strong foundation to deepen understanding and embed the principles across different areas of the University.

We are taking a reflective approach to our researcher development provision, evaluating our activities with our stakeholders. For example, responding to demand we introduced new training provision on narrative CVs in 2023/24 and this is now incorporated into our annual training and development programme. We held an ambitious, weeklong Research and Knowledge Exchange Festival (February 2024), with broad scope and wide audience. As part of this, we systematically captured lessons learnt throughout planning and delivery of the festival, such that the experience gained by all involved will inform similar activities in future. We also instigated routine evaluation of our training and development activities, emailing all attendees following each event to collect feedback. Response rates were poor, and in 2024/25 we are collecting "on-the-spot" feedback towards the end of each session. EDI monitoring of training and development found that our provision is broadly inclusive. It showed, however, that senior researchers generally do not attend sessions and we plan to address this in the next academic year through targeted communications and clear mapping of audiences.

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 three key priorities to take forward over the period 2023/24 and 2024/25, in addition to our ongoing actions:

- **10-days CPD. Guidance for managers and campaign to raise awareness.** We will continue our 2023/24 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.
- **Build on our commitment to EDI consideration across the research lifecycle.** Expand EDI monitoring of inclusivity of research - developing dashboard for Research4All framework; monitoring of inclusivity of research bidding, with a focus on ethnicity, from training through to successful bids.
- **Participating in the Reproducibility Network's OR4 project** - The University joined the OR4 Community of Practice in 2024. We will support the project's development of tools and resources. We will pilot the OR4 Open Research Maturity Assessment Tool and plan actions to support this area accordingly.

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, Head of Impact & Outputs Unit and Researcher Development Officer (Research & Knowledge Exchange Service), People Team partners, as well as ECR and MCR representatives.

Following input from the Steering Group, 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



Contact for queries:

Allison McCaig, Research and Knowledge Exchange Service -
amccaig@uclan.ac.uk

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