

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

Universities and Research Institutes

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**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*)**

Newcastle University's vision is to be a world-class civic university delivering leading-edge education and research, sustainably and for societal benefit. To achieve this ambition, we recognise the importance of a research environment that nurtures creativity, equips our research community with the skills to realise their potential and career aspirations, and fosters interdisciplinary approaches and collaborative partnerships to increase the reach and impact of our research.

In October 2022, we launched our Research Culture Action Plan, marking the beginning of an ambitious programme of work to build a more positive and inclusive research culture. This plan focuses on the issues that matter most to our research community, identified through extensive consultation and engagement.

To drive meaningful change, we identified a set of Top-Priority Projects for 2023/24. These were selected based on their urgency, value, and potential impact, responding to both internal community-led drivers and external opportunities:

- **Behaviour Matters:** Developing a preventative approach to tackling bullying, harassment, and all forms of discriminatory or inappropriate behaviour, while promoting positive behaviours across the research environment.
- **Releasing Quality Time:** Supporting colleagues to create, protect, and use quality time for research and research-related activities.
- **Open Research:** Enhancing institutional capacity to deliver training in open research practices, in collaboration with the UK Reproducibility Network Open Research Programme.
- **The Research Space (TRS):** Creating an inclusive online portal that centralises access to research skills development, fosters interdisciplinary collaboration, and supports career development.
- **Reimagining Leadership:** Improving, recognising, and rewarding leadership practices that build psychologically safe and inclusive research environments. This project is funded through the Wellcome Institutional Research Culture Fund.

In 2024/25, TRS has successfully transitioned from a project to a business-as-usual service led by Organisational Development. A new priority project has since been introduced:

- **Research Integrity:** Promoting and enhancing training and resources to support ethical, credible, and impactful research.

These projects are delivered through cross-institutional collaboration, involving diverse representation from across the University. Oversight is provided by the Research Culture Development Group, with strategic accountability to the University's Research and Innovation Committee.

Our Researcher Development Action Plan contributes directly to these projects and is supported by other key Concordat-aligned initiatives, including:

- Research Integrity
- Responsible Use of Research Metrics
- Athena Swan
- Technician Commitment
- Race Equality Charter

With the research community at the heart of our work, we continue to place their voices and experiences at the centre of our initiatives. Some notable examples of this in practice include:

- Allocated £75K from QR to an Enhancing Research Culture (ERC) People Fund. This fund was open to everyone in the research community to facilitate the uptake of training and mobility of researchers across sectors, disciplines, and geographies and to support early career transitions.
- The research culture team organised or took part in 24 internal presentations, workshops and listening sessions over the year to continue the collection of community feedback in relation to research culture.

**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*)**

Newcastle University's Concordat Action Plan (2023–2026) is a cross-institutional effort led by Organisational Development, with contributions from Faculties and Central Services. Our strategic objectives align with the three pillars of the Concordat: **Environment and Culture**, **Employment**, and **Professional Development of Researchers**. Many actions are ongoing, and robust governance and evaluation mechanisms support our implementation.

### Environment and Culture

We launched The Research Space (TRS) in May 2025 as a central digital space for researcher development. TRS brings together training, development opportunities, and resources to support researchers at all career stages. By consolidating information in one place, TRS makes it easier for researchers to find and access the skills development opportunities they need—from technical expertise to leadership and professional capabilities. Attracting almost 700 members in its first three months, TRS also fosters a strong sense of community by helping researchers connect with peers, build networks, and discover new opportunities.

The **Wellcome Trust: Reimagining Leadership Project** is a 30-month initiative that explores inclusive leadership practices and reframes leadership in research. Focusing on psychological safety, the project team has reviewed materials, undertaken training, and is delivering sector-specific sessions through our leadership and management programmes and intact teams. The findings, due in late 2026, will inform our broader leadership development work and be embedded into our researcher development offer.

Interdisciplinary research is promoted through Newcastle University Centres of Research Excellence (NUCoREs), special interest groups, and seminars. We aim to increase awareness and uptake of these opportunities, tracked via NUCoRE engagement metrics.

### Success Measures:

- Growth in TRS membership and engagement
- Uptake of local interdisciplinary opportunities
- Feedback from researchers via DER and Faculty-level forums

### Employment

We continue to raise awareness of internal and external funding opportunities, including access to the *Research Connect* database via single sign-on. This supports researchers in securing grants, attending conferences, and pursuing discipline-hopping initiatives.

Our engagement with the **Prosper Portal** continues to grow. We delivered our second cohort in 2025, with a third planned for 2026. Two researcher development

colleagues sit on the Prosper Institutions Focus Group, contributing strategic input. We also offer standalone sessions to broaden access beyond cohort participants.

We are actively promoting **ORCID** uptake across the institution, with notable increases in registrations.

**Success Measures:**

- Increased awareness and use of funding platforms
- Prosper cohort participation and session attendance
- ORCID registration rates

**Professional Development of Researchers**

TRS is the cornerstone of our professional development ecosystem. It provides a one-stop shop for our research community and incorporates previous initiatives, including *Starter for Ten*, centralising access to development opportunities. As TRS grows, we expect increased engagement and awareness of available support.

We streamlined leadership development through Organisational Development, offering five leadership programmes. Uptake by researchers and those transitioning into leadership roles is tracked and reported annually.

Our **monthly newsletter**, launched alongside TRS, provides a direct communication channel that outlines upcoming opportunities and broader university activities. With a mailing list of over 1,200 and an open rate near 50%, it is a key tool for engagement.

We are also part of the **regional British Academy Early Career Researcher (BA ECR) Network**, covering the North East and Northern Ireland. We actively promote this opportunity and track uptake and event delivery by Newcastle researchers.

**Success Measures:**

- TRS engagement analytics
- Applications and attendance at leadership programmes
- Newsletter open rates and click-throughs
- Participation in BA ECR Network events

**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]**

<p>Environment and Culture (<i>max 600 words</i>)</p>	<p><b>Institution</b></p> <p>Open research continues to be a priority and is established as a Research Culture Top Priority Project. In June 2025, the <b>Open Research Conference</b> provided a platform for researchers to share and discuss best practices in open research. A <b>new ethics e-learning module on authorship practices</b> has been launched, supported by three animated videos designed to help researchers understand key aspects of research integrity.</p> <p>A <b>colleague listening session</b> brought together over 200 participants, including both managers and researchers, to share views on what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. The feedback gathered is informing the redefinition of the University's values, with a further survey planned for Autumn 2025 to capture wider input. Alongside this, work is underway to create a <b>new Behaviours Matter hub</b>, bringing together resources, policies, and guidance on tackling discrimination, bullying, and harassment, as well as information on the support available to those reporting issues.</p> <p>The University is committed to fostering cross-disciplinary thinking and collaboration through its <b>Centres of Research Excellence (NUCoREs)</b>. These centres create an inclusive and supportive research environment that enables researchers to work across disciplines and share expertise. Over the past year, two new centres have been established, bringing the total to 18, reflecting the strong demand for collaborative and community-focused models of engagement.</p> <p><b>Academic Managers of Researchers</b></p> <p>We are committed to strengthening confidence in EDI among research managers as a way of enhancing research culture. To support this, we have developed <b>new training for research leaders and supervisors</b>, equipping them to provide inclusive support for early career researchers. The session was adapted from a workshop created for PGR supervisors and shaped by insights from focus groups, ensuring it reflected the lived experiences of our research community.</p>
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	<p>The Faculty of Medical Sciences (FMS) has introduced <b>recognition for Open Research activity</b> within the FMS Workload Reporting System, ensuring that the contributions of Open Research Champions are formally acknowledged. By allocating time in workload models, the Faculty highlights the value of this work, supports sustainability of the champion roles, and reinforces the importance of embedding open research practices within research culture.</p> <p><b>Researchers</b></p> <p>The <b>Newcastle Health Research Partnership (NHRP)</b> Academy, a collaboration between the University, NHS, and partner organisations, provides bespoke training and support to help health and care researchers progress their academic careers. Through its funding of the <b>Fellows Forum</b>, a peer-to-peer network for clinicians, practitioners, and methodologists, it has widened access to career development support. Over the past year, the Forum has delivered six events, engaging 215 participants.</p> <p>As part of the Releasing Quality Time project, we introduced <b>research retreats</b> to provide the research community with dedicated time to focus on research-related work. 14 research retreats have taken place in the last reporting period. Feedback provided an average rating of 4.75/5 for overall experience, and 92% of attendees highlighted that retreats provided 'protected time to focus', and 52% noted an 'Improved sense of wellbeing'. Building on their success, we developed training to equip participants with the skills to plan, facilitate, and evaluate inclusive, engaging, and productive research and writing retreats. In addition, a <b>research retreat resource pack</b> has been created, offering practical materials to support colleagues in hosting their own retreats.</p>
Employment ( <i>max 600 words</i> )	<p><b>Institution</b></p> <p>The <b>Research Space (TRS)</b> was launched this year as a central platform, bringing together training, events, and development opportunities. By connecting researchers through shared learning and networking, TRS supports skills development that strengthens research practice while also enhancing employability. It helps researchers build</p>

	<p>transferable skills, expand their networks, and access opportunities both within and beyond academia.</p> <p><b>The Careers Service</b> offers both in-person and online bookable 1-2-1 appointments for researchers. The <b>START Up team</b> supports researchers interested in working for themselves at any stage, whether exploring an idea or already running a business or freelance career. They provide tailored advice, help with idea generation, and guidance on applying for grant funding. In addition, the Careers Service offers <b>CV and application support</b>, including help with cover letters, CVs, and LinkedIn profiles. Impartial Careers Consultants are available to assist researchers in making informed decisions about their career and education plans, with guidance appointments and mock interviews also offered to enhance employability and professional development.</p> <p><b>Academic Managers of Researchers</b></p> <p>The <b>Newcastle University Academic Track Fellowship (NUAcT) scheme</b> demonstrates the value of transparent career progression by enabling fellows to move onto open-ended contracts following a successful review. This approach provides a model for embedding security and fairness in researcher employment, making a meaningful contribution to addressing precarity. NUAcT has also strengthened the role of line managers, unit heads, and discipline directors in supporting fellows in balancing research independence with integration into their departments. Lessons learned highlight the importance of managers actively advocating for fellows' career progression within School and Faculty structures. Fellows gain employment security earlier than many peers, allowing them to plan long-term careers with greater confidence. Feedback indicates that this security encourages risk-taking in research and collaboration, aligning closely with the Concordat's principles of sustainable careers.</p> <p>A <b>standardised job description</b> for research assistants/associates has been introduced to ensure greater consistency across the University. This is supported by a <b>new recruitment handbook</b>, designed to improve transparency and understanding of recruitment processes and expectations institution-wide. Starting salaries for research</p>
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	<p>assistants are determined in line with the University's salary guidance and follow the same approach as for all staff groups. Analysis has also shown no evidence of a pay gap at this level, with last year's review finding only minimal variation (the highest at 1% and the lowest at 0%). These measures collectively strengthen recruitment practices for researchers, ensuring they are fair, transparent, and inclusive.</p> <p><b>Researchers</b></p> <p>Prosper is a free, online career development platform for postdoctoral researchers, offering a wide range of resources to support career exploration, skills development, and professional growth. The second cohort of the <b>Prosper programme</b> has been successfully delivered, bringing the platform's content to life through structured activities. This includes reflective exercises, action learning sets and networking opportunities that help participants broaden their career horizons, build confidence, and enhance employability. Alongside the cohort, we have developed standalone sessions open to a wider group of researchers, extending Prosper's reach and impact by providing targeted support on career planning, transferable skills, and professional development. Prosper also fosters a community of postdoctoral researchers, encouraging peer-to-peer learning, sharing of experiences, and the building of supportive networks.</p> <p>During the Prosper programme, the Careers Service collaborated to deliver sessions supporting researcher career development, including a new session on <b>informational interviews</b> as a tool for making connections and exploring careers in other sectors. Following the popularity of this workshop, it is now offered as a standalone session, alongside a Career Transitions session that provides in-depth guidance on applying for roles outside academia.</p>
Professional development ( <i>max 600 words</i> )	<p><b>Institution</b></p> <p>The Newcastle Health Research Partnership (NHRP) has launched <b>BRAVE – Breaking ground in your practitioner-researcher career</b>, a leadership development programme for allied health professionals and nurses. BRAVE is designed to strengthen professional development by equipping</p>

postdoctoral practitioners with strategic insight, emotional intelligence, and negotiation skills to support their growth in integrated practitioner–academic roles. The programme aims to build a more diverse and sustainable clinical academic workforce. Alongside this, the **NHRP Open Seat initiative** provides early-career professionals with experience of sitting on decision-making committees, offering valuable insights into leadership and governance.

NHRP and the Research Funding Development Team also invest in personalised support through **coaching and mock interview practice**. Feedback from participants is consistently positive, with many highlighting that the coaching demonstrates the organisation’s commitment to their career development and progression. This targeted support has proven to be a worthwhile investment, contributing to strong fellowship success rates.

#### **Academic Managers of Researchers**

A one-day, in-person workshop was delivered in the School of Computing to support the professional development of academics, researchers, managers, group leaders, and supervisors across career stages. The session, delivered by an external facilitator, introduced a toolkit of concepts and strategies for positive academic leadership, enabling participants to strengthen their own leadership practice while fostering the development of those they manage. Supported by Faculty and School funds, the workshop provided a dedicated space for reflection, skills-building, and discussion of leadership challenges in research. Building on this School-specific initiative, further opportunities were opened up across the Faculty and wider University, including for members of the Research Culture Development Group, to inform ongoing work on re-imagining research leadership as part of our Research Culture Top Priority Projects.

#### **Researchers**

An **open seat initiative** has been introduced on the University’s Developing Excellent Researchers (DER) group for early career researchers (ECRs). This provides ECRs with the opportunity to contribute directly to institutional discussions, while also supporting their own professional development through exposure to strategic decision-making,

	<p>governance processes, and leadership practice. The initiative not only ensures that the perspectives of early career researchers are represented but also helps participants build confidence, broaden their understanding of institutional structures, and strengthen skills relevant to future leadership roles.</p> <p>Additionally, Research Associates were recruited to new committee roles on the <b>SAGE Faculty REF Steering Group</b> and REF PCE Subgroup. These opportunities give researchers direct experience of academic governance and decision-making, helping them to develop leadership, communication, and strategic insight. Involvement at this level also strengthens their understanding of institutional processes and provides valuable professional development that supports career progression within and beyond academia.</p> <p>This summer, the <b>Vacation Scholarship Scheme</b> was piloted in three institutes, providing Research Associates the opportunity to recruit a second-year undergraduate student to support their research for 6–8 weeks. The scheme allowed RAs to develop supervisory and mentoring skills, while also enhancing their project management and leadership experience. It provided valuable insights into equitable recruitment processes. Feedback from the pilot indicates that both RAs and students found the experience highly valuable, and plans are in place to rerun the scheme across the University.</p>
<p><b>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. (<i>max 500 words</i>)</b></p>	
<p><b>Engagement</b></p> <p>Over the past 12 months, the University has faced significant financial challenges, leading to difficult decisions around redundancies. These circumstances have understandably affected morale, with researchers experiencing increased pressure, heavier workloads, and reduced capacity to engage with development opportunities. Attendance at workshops and other activities has therefore been lower than in previous years. To support engagement, we continue to schedule workshops during term time and adapt delivery to offer more flexible formats, ensuring that training and development opportunities remain accessible during this challenging period.</p>	

### **The Research Space**

To help strengthen a sense of community, we launched The Research Space (TRS), providing a dedicated platform for researchers to connect with each other. The rapid growth in membership, even during a pause in promotions over the summer, has demonstrated that there is strong demand for this type of shared space and underscores its value for our research community. Additional content is continually being developed for The Research Space, ensuring it remains a growing and valuable resource for the research community. Engagement and usage are being actively monitored to measure success and ensure the platform continues to meet user needs. In turn, this is expected to support greater engagement with development opportunities, which are highlighted and promoted through the platform.

### **New Development Spaces**

We have learned that our research community highly values in-person sessions, as they provide opportunities to build meaningful connections and network within physical settings. Researchers consistently highlight the benefit of coming together, not only to learn but also to share experiences and develop peer support. To build on this, new dedicated development spaces have been established to host training and development activities, creating an environment that encourages collaboration, engagement, and community building. These spaces also signal the University's ongoing commitment to providing high-quality, accessible opportunities for professional growth.

### **Conversations and Priorities**

Work has been undertaken to prepare for the introduction of Conversations and Priorities (C&P), which will replace the current annual system by July 2026. C&P is designed to agree priorities, align contributions, focus development, share feedback, celebrate achievements, build careers, and support wellbeing. This new approach provides a more meaningful framework for professional development, while making better use of existing channels to promote opportunities. Through the preparation process, we have learned the importance of actively monitoring requests for development opportunities, both to ensure they are being taken up and to confirm that managers are consistently encouraging researchers to engage with them. For example, mentoring has been identified as a particularly valuable form of support, and C&P will create structured opportunities to discuss mentoring needs. To build on this, we will work to identify, develop, and strengthen local mentoring schemes, ensuring they are accessible to researchers across disciplines.

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

As we enter the final year of our current Researcher Development Action Plan (2023–2026), our focus will shift to consolidating progress and preparing for the next strategic phase. Early in 2026, we will engage with stakeholders to identify priority actions for the years ahead. This process will inform the development of a refreshed action plan, aligned with the Concordat’s principles and the evolving needs of our research community.

### **Enhancing Digital Engagement through The Research Space (TRS)**

Following the successful launch of The Research Space, our digital platform for researcher development, we aim to expand its user base and functionality. TRS will continue to support researchers in discovering opportunities and connecting with peers. New content will be developed, including:

- Fellowship pathways and guidance
- Resources for managers of researchers
- Examples of best practice in research culture

We will also utilise TRS and our monthly newsletter meetings to increase awareness and, ultimately, attendance at workshops and events. Engagement metrics will be tracked and reported to the Developing Excellent Researchers (DER) oversight committee to inform future planning and decision-making. In addition, we will pilot physical events under the TRS umbrella to further support connection and engagement across our research community.

### **Piloting Development Time Recording**

Two Faculties will pilot the recording of researcher development time via the annual leave system. This initiative supports our commitment to recognising professional development as dedicated time that should be recorded. Insights from the pilot will inform the design of a new university-wide leave system, ensuring development time is visible, valued, and appropriately supported for researchers.

### **Strengthening Governance and Researcher Voice**

We will refresh the membership of the DER oversight committee to ensure broad representation. Each Faculty will nominate three dedicated researchers, and we will introduce an Open Seat initiative—offering one rotating place per Faculty for researchers to gain experience in strategic-level discussions. This aims to foster transparency, inclusivity, and leadership development.

### **Building Fellowship Community and Belonging**

Through TRS and targeted engagement, we will explore ways to strengthen the sense of community among our research fellows. By connecting fellows across

disciplines and career stages, we aim to support professional development, peer learning, and networking.

### **Revitalising the Mentoring Scheme**

We will undertake a renewed push on our annual mentoring scheme, delivered through Organisational Development. Recent data shows a downward trend in uptake among researchers and academics. To address this, we will:

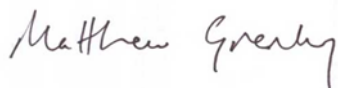
- Promote the scheme more widely (with support from TRS and managers)
- Emphasise its discipline-agnostic nature
- Highlight the benefits of mentoring for both mentors and mentees

The scheme offers structured training, matching, and a safe space for sharing challenges and exploring solutions—contributing to a supportive and inclusive research culture.

**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 Developing Excellent Researchers (DER) group is responsible for overseeing the development and monitoring of the progress of the Concordat Action Plan. Co-chaired by Professor Candy Rowe, Dean of Research Culture and Strategy, and a rotating researcher each academic year, the group consists of academic leads, researcher representatives, and professional service colleagues from the three faculties and central teams. Data for the report is collected from DER members and colleagues in Organisational Development, Research and Innovation, People Services, and Careers. The final approval for the report is granted by the University's Research and Innovation Committee, chaired by Professor Matthew Grenby, Pro Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation.

Signature on behalf of governing body:



Contact for queries: Dr Chris Emmerson, Organisational Development Lead – Researcher Development ([chris.emmerson@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:chris.emmerson@ncl.ac.uk))

This annual report will be analysed by the 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 via the email address listed on the RDC website: [www.researcherdevelopmentconcordat.ac.uk](http://www.researcherdevelopmentconcordat.ac.uk).