

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 is dedicated to cultivating and nurturing a positive and inclusive research culture. A guiding principle of Newcastle's Vision and Strategy is to support all colleagues in reaching their full potential by providing them with the freedom and opportunity to strive for excellence, ambition and creativity.

Newcastle has invested in a Dean for Research Culture and Strategy, and a Research Culture Manager to drive this work forward. Community consultations, including researchers, around our comprehensive Research Culture Roadmap and our first Research Culture Survey were pivotal in evaluating our existing culture and identifying areas for improvement. Subsequently, the Research Culture Action Plan was launched in October 2022 in response to our diverse community insights.

The Research Culture Action Plan aims to support our research community across five primary pillars:

- Have the time, space and opportunities to be creative and enjoy discovering new things;
- Be supported in your career aspirations and decision-making, as well as your continuing personal and professional development;
- Feel part of an inclusive, supportive and safe research environment, where you and your ideas can flourish;
- Be encouraged to embrace best practices and new ways of working to improve the quality and reach of research, either your own or that of others; and
- Be recognised and valued for your diverse contributions to research.

We have a long-standing commitment to researcher development, through the HR Excellence Award, and more recent focus on the Researcher Development Concordat. We recognise our researchers as one part of a vibrant community that deliver and enable research. To nurture our researchers, we must nurture our community, aligning activity where possible. For example, as a founding signatory to the Technician Commitment we have expanded our 10 days development time to technicians and researchers, promoting equity in the research environment. Furthermore, our commitments to the Research Integrity Concordat, Open Data Concordat, and Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) underscores the University's dedication to driving substantive and meaningful change throughout

the institution. These efforts aim to create a research culture that is positive and inclusive but also, at the forefront of best practices in research and development.

Since publication of our Research Culture Action Plan, we are pivoting from community consultation to co-creation and action, including introducing a Research Culture Delivery Group. In the last year, the group's priority projects have included building an EDI Toolkit for Researchers, developing our first institutional guidelines for authorship, and establishing our UK Reproducibility Network (UKRN) Local Network. Continuing to build on this, in 23/24 we are looking to build safer and more inclusive research environments through two new projects: (1) 'Behaviour Matters', which will serve to promote positive behaviours as well as tackle inappropriate behaviours, and (2) Developing Leadership Capacity for Psychologically Safe and Inclusive Research Environments (funded by a £1M award from Wellcome Trust). Projects addressing behaviour and leadership development speak directly to issues highlighted by our researchers, and we will take both projects forward with continued researcher input.

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)

The updated Concordat Action Plan (CAP) (2023-2026) outlines a collaborative, resourced, and embedded approach for meeting the Concordat's pillars and achieving success across the University. Organisational Development is now the 'home' for researcher development, working in partnership with each faculty and the Doctoral College to aid the delivery of the plan. The summary of key strategic priority objectives is as follows:

Delivery of an **online portal** with two aims: 1) to organise and provide valuable research-related training and development opportunities to prepare people for careers inside and outside academia, and 2) to enable collaboration and sharing of expertise among postgraduate students, research colleagues and professional services colleagues. The new system will underpin the CAP and Technicians Commitment to help us explore how career paths can be structured to help create more stable and sustainable careers. *Measure*: successfully implementing the new tool with 'buy-in' from researchers, managers, and professional services colleagues – tracked through system analytics and survey responses.

Enhance **communication** between researchers and their managers to facilitate the sharing of university policies, best practices, and initiatives. Develop a comprehensive researcher communication plan, encompassing a campaign highlighting the obligations outlined in the Concordat and the new CAP for researchers, research leaders, managers, and University stakeholders. *Measure:* Researchers, managers of researchers, and Professional Service colleagues should demonstrate an increased awareness of the Concordat and relevant university policies specific to their role.

Develop methods of collecting insightful **data** to support measuring the Concordat's impact and inform the design and implementation of interventions. This will require regularly capturing insights into our researcher population and its changes over time, surveys (internal and external), focus groups, use of internal systems, and appropriate recording of professional development. The improved data will also support initiatives like the Technician's Commitment and Athena SWAN. *Measure:* Design and implement a process that allows collecting quantitative and qualitative data on research staff engagement, which will then inform the CAP and other areas of work.

Ensure researchers have adequate channels and **representation** at faculty and university levels to voice their concerns and ideas on researcher development. There is transparency on who represents the researcher's voice at local and institutional groups with an open recruitment process. *Measure:* Increased representation of researchers on local and institutional level groups and committees. Researchers report being listened to through surveys and methods of informal feedback—increased evidence of two-way communication between researchers and decision-makers.

The CAP (2023-2026) is an **evolving document** that has a re-launched group to oversee its delivery and monitor its progress. A recent governance review of the groups involved in Research Culture has resulted in a greater alignment of the decision-making process in culture, researcher development and research strategy. *Measure:* The CAP is updated to reflect current policy, strategy, and practices.

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 (max 600 words)</p>	<p>Institution</p> <p>The Developing Excellent Researchers (DER) group has been revamped with a direct reporting line to the University Research and Innovation Committee. The group aims to facilitate collaboration and coordination of activities that support the personal and career development of the researcher community. The group has led the updating of the Concordat Action Plan (2023-2026) through broad consultation. The group comprises at least two researchers from each faculty, totalling six members, and rotates co-chair with the Dean of Research Culture and Strategy. To support this work, the University has made a clear investment in research staff development by appointing an Organisational Development Lead for Researcher Development in June 2023 alongside a Skills Academy Manager (2021). These roles will provide strategic oversight for researcher development across the University and serve as the point of contact for delivery against the Concordat.</p> <p>Newcastle University's 16 Centres of Research Excellence (NUCoREs) were created to prioritise growth areas. NUCoREs emphasise interdisciplinary and inclusive collaboration by providing a supportive research environment that includes community workshops and networking events for stakeholders and researchers across all career stages. This approach enables researchers to engage in unique research missions with colleagues across the University.</p> <p>Academic Managers of Researchers</p> <p>The University has launched an online EDI Toolkit to promote and integrate Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) principles into research culture. The toolkit was developed as part of a Wellcome-funded initiative, with contributions from colleagues and students across the University. Its goal is to empower users, especially those who supervise students and lead research teams, to support diverse teams and become EDI role models.</p> <p>The toolkit provides insights into nine protected characteristics outlined in the Equality Act 2010. It offers information on each characteristic, addresses discrimination in academia and research, and suggests actions for</p>
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individuals and leaders. The toolkit comprises guides on Accessibility, Allyship, Using Inclusive Language, and Modelling Inclusive Behaviours. The aim is to facilitate a culture shift in research by making EDI a core value of the University. Alongside the online launch, the toolkit was promoted widely within academic units, institutes, and faculty meetings.

Although initially aimed at researchers, the toolkit's content is relevant to a broader audience. It is a shared responsibility for individuals at all career stages and roles to promote greater awareness and the adoption of EDI practices for a more inclusive research community that benefits the next generation of researchers. Since its launch in June 2023, over 1100 online visitors have accessed the toolkit, with over 30% from outside the University. This demonstrates the value of the toolkit beyond the University.

Researchers

The University was awarded QR Enhancing Research Culture funding and has apportioned a third to supporting community-driven projects. For example, the fund supported researchers to deliver a two-day cross-faculty symposium called **Researchers Empowering Newcastle University (RENU)**. The event had 290 delegates registered across the three faculties and aimed to catalyse conversations surrounding the University's support of researchers. An outcome of the event was the creation of a researcher-led cross-faculty network that will foster a community of researchers across the University.

Researchers have been included in **decision-making groups**, including each faculty's Research and Innovation Committees and funding panels for awarding QR Enhancing Research Culture funds to the community.

The University held its first **Research Culture Week** in October, allowing all colleagues to learn more about the university initiatives to support research culture and hear about how they can drive positive change as members of our research community. Researchers could attend sessions on how to contribute to the changing research landscape, career development, mastering collaboration, and open research.

<p>Employment (<i>max 600 words</i>)</p>	<p>Institution</p> <p>A project is underway at the University to review career frameworks, pathways, and development initiatives for all colleagues, supported by external benchmarking. The outcome will be to inform a programme plan to achieve excellent career development opportunities, with flexible and fair arrangements that facilitate growth and progression, and value the contributions of all.</p> <p>There has been a collective drive to improve the induction of new researchers across the University and a key action within the CAP. Each faculty has completed or is in the final stages of reviewing their induction process. The new-look inductions include representation from Researcher Development colleagues. Additionally, one faculty is trialling a buddy system at the point of appointment to ease the orientation of new starters and will provide feedback on the project's success.</p> <p>The Research Funding Development team promotes funding opportunities across the University. We provide access to ResearchConnect, allowing all colleagues to access and search for funding by subject or type. This is further supported by the recently refreshed training offer by the team, which includes a dedicated session on Early Career Fellowships and EDI in Fellowships, among more detailed sessions on grant proposals and writing.</p> <p>Academic Managers of Researchers</p> <p>The free online Prosper tool has been endorsed and promoted across the University as a critical resource in supporting managers to have career conversations, build management skills, and stay updated with best practices. The researcher development team is working with the community to identify areas where the tool can be embedded and design a cohort delivery model in the new year.</p> <p>Our Manager's Essential online course has sporadic uptake from academics, and there needs to be more awareness of its existence. A project is underway to review the communications and identify potentially mandatory sessions for appropriate colleagues to undertake.</p>
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A '**failing forward**' project is near completion with the launch of ten videos of colleagues discussing their research journeys in the context of failure (e.g. in funding or publication acceptance). This project has allowed managers of researchers to tell a part of their career stories and showcase the challenges they have faced along the way.

Researchers

Recognising the career bottleneck for postdoctoral researchers transitioning to independence, we committed £30M from 2018 for the Newcastle University Academic Track (**NUAcT**) scheme and have recruited 69 fellows. Each fellow is provided five years FTE to focus on research with a PhD sponsorship and start-up funds. NUAcT differs from similar UK schemes since recruitment will be sustained long-term, and the cohort encompasses all disciplines.

The **Prosper** communication plan encouraged the uptake of the online tool by all researchers. Feedback is collected to support the researcher development team to prepare a pilot cohort in the new year (see key objectives).

As part of Research Culture Week in October, a dedicated session focused on **nurturing talent and careers**. Over 35 colleagues attended the session outlining the versatility and value of research skills in applying to various roles. Recognising that research careers come in multiple shapes and sizes, invited speakers with diverse career journeys shared pivotal moments and the factors that shaped their success.

We initiated a comprehensive review and subsequent updating of a revised **Postgraduates Who Teach Policy** in March 2023. This policy enhances clarity and consistency, outlining the shared responsibilities of Academic Units and postgraduate teachers and contractual options for teaching appointments. This initiative contributes to our ongoing efforts to avoid casualised employment practices. The updated policy is expected to support PGR with valuable, transferable skills beneficial in diverse career paths, emphasising the significance of teaching experience.

<p>Professional development (max 600 words)</p>	<p>Institution</p> <p>A project led by the Skills Academy Manager is underway to develop a digital platform to act as a central hub for organised research-related training to remove current barriers to finding and accessing development opportunities. The project also aims to address the challenges in creating and sustaining networks between our researchers by providing a space to create communities of practice.</p> <p>Through Research Culture QR we have provided a dedicated skills and development fund to allow self-selected development activity to enhance skills outside of their specific project, helping to diversify career prospects.</p> <p>Launch of the "starter for 10" campaign that aims to increase awareness of the allowance of professional development training and provision across five themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research Your Potential - Achieve your career aspirations both within and beyond academia. • Research Skills - Develop your research skills and unlock creativity to enhance your day-to-day work. • Doing Your Best Research - Ensure you design, deliver, evaluate, and present your best research. • Building Your Research Network - Build your network and create meaningful connections to ignite ideas, spark inspiration, and fuel creativity. • Navigating Research at Newcastle - Resources and ideas to simplify navigation to save time and energy for what matters most to you and your research. <p>The communication campaign has been university-wide, and analytics of the engagement are being tracked in addition to the uptake of courses run by Newcastle.</p> <p>A UKRN Local Network was established with a dedicated Teams platform (47 members) and mailing list (over 120 members). The network promotes UKRN and institutional events activities co-led by a researcher and our Open Research Training Officer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ReproducibiliTea Journal Club events are held monthly to share and discuss good practice in open research.
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- Internal planning meetings with local network members to co-create the shape of future network activities.
- External engagement with UKRN and other Local Network Leads through the UKRN community engagement project will provide resources to help facilitate local community activities.
- Newcastle will host the UKRN local network leads retreat in 2024 and has been invited to showcase the work at Newcastle with its researchers.

Academic Managers of Researchers

The University provides free access to a **Research Integrity e-learning programme** for colleagues and students. Introductory-level workshops on Research Integrity, Ethics and Governance are also provided to PhD Supervisors and PS colleagues on a rolling basis. Introductory-level workshops on Research Integrity, Ethics and Governance are also supplied to PhD Supervisors and PS colleagues with a view to expanding this offer to researchers soon.

Researchers

Researchers have shown enthusiasm for the monthly **Research Culture Café events**, an opportunity for the research community to meet and discuss the work happening across the University and connect with each other. Topics have included researcher development alongside research culture initiatives.

Over 35 researchers were supported by the University's **Enhancing Research Culture People Fund**. This fund supports successful applicants in personal and professional development, including coaching, training on new methods and statistics, and setting up peer support groups.

In addition to the local UKRN network, Newcastle is a member of the **UKRN open research programme training working group**, which has developed a schema of topics in which there is a demand for training and a growing timetable of UKRN-accredited 'train-the-trainer' events intended to increase institutional capacity to deliver open research

training. An institutional strategy to recruit trainers to provide training in priority topics at Newcastle is being developed. Two trainers have already been recruited and will deliver the first new training events in late 2023. At least ten trainers will be accredited through this programme, significantly increasing our capacity to develop and deliver open research training.

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 Developing Excellent Researchers group was relaunched, and we added researcher representatives from each faculty to update the CAP. This approach allowed us to consider input from across the university while being mindful of local differences. However, we are just starting to enable researchers at the local level to feed into the reps on the committee adequately. We will continue to build links to ensure reps have access to experiences and insights from across each faculty.

Researcher development is a critical part of the broader initiatives being driven forward by the Research Culture Team, which the Dean of Research Culture and Strategy leads. The close collaboration between the committee and the team has been fundamental in sharing resources and addressing challenges in a joined-up way. The upcoming reporting period will mark the first year of the updated CAP, and the groundwork is in place to actively progress against the objectives outlined in the next section.

It is encouraging that Researchers have shown their engagement by participating in events such as the RENU conference, subsequent Researcher Network, Research Culture café, Research Culture Week, and collaboration coffees. There are colleagues ready to collaborate on improving research development provision and supporting researchers' careers.

Finally, researchers have expressed frustration regarding the need for an integrated web presence on the researcher development offering and transparency of decision-making structures in this area. We recognise there is more we can do to make the experience of engaging with the offering more efficient and effective. A dedicated space is necessary to have a more significant impact on our researchers and managers.

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

The new Organisational Development Lead for Researcher Development will be responsible for operationally implementing the CAP, with specific tasks including:

- Ensuring close collaboration with the 'Researcher Development,' 'Research Culture,' and 'Research Strategy and Development' portfolios.
- Facilitating open dialogue and co-creating solutions in partnership with the researcher community.
- Enhancing engagement and understanding of the Concordat Principles for researchers and managers.

The Developing Excellent Researchers group will continue to engage in activities and monitor progress in the visibility and governance of the CAP. In addition, nine priorities have been identified through the updated CAP to progress in the reporting period ahead:

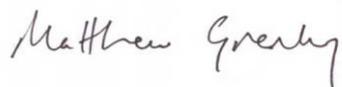
1. **Strengthen the Researcher Development Offer:** Enhance researcher development by incorporating key elements such as research skills, research integrity, open research, and career development.
2. **Embed Concordat Principles in Project Planning:** Integrating the Researcher Development Concordat principles and career development considerations into project planning and funding proposals.
3. **Launch an Online Research-Enabling Platform:** A digital platform should serve as a central hub for organised research-related training to remove current barriers to finding and accessing development opportunities. This will prepare individuals for diverse careers within and outside academia, facilitated through the new online portal.
4. **Build Emerging Networks:** Growth of networks to leverage the expertise within the research community. To be facilitated through the new online portal outlined above.
5. **Pilot a Research Leadership Development Program:** Develop and pilot a cohort-based program for Principal Investigators to instil effective research leadership and values, ensuring consistency in leadership provision throughout a researcher's career.
6. **Pilot Prosper Engagement for Early Career Researchers (ECRs):** Launch a cohort-based program for ECRs through Prosper, offering group and one-to-one coaching to review materials and advocate continued engagement with this career development tool.
7. **Enhance the Mentoring Program:** Review and improve the mentoring program to increase engagement with research colleagues, ensuring that ECRs can access suitable mentors.

8. **Improve Engagement with the EDI Toolkit:** Strengthen engagement with the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) toolkit and integrate the 'Behaviour Matters' action plan into the Researcher Development offer.
9. **Develop Monitoring and Evaluation Measures:** Define the methods and measures for comprehensively monitoring and evaluating progress against the action plan, capturing development across the ecosystem, and providing feedback for further enhancements.

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 new CAP. Co-chaired by Professor Candy Rowe, Dean of Research Culture and Strategy, and a rotating researcher throughout the 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 Strategy and Development, People Services, Library, Doctoral College, 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:



Prof Matthew Grenby, Pro Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation

Contact for queries: Dr Chris Emmerson, Organisational Development Lead –
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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