**Newcastle University Report on progress towards The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers 2022**

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**Web address of annual report:** www.ncl.ac.uk/research/support/resskills/#researchers

**Summary**

Newcastle University has a long-standing commitment to researcher development, holding an HR Excellence in Research Award (HREiR) since 2010 (last renewed in 2019). As signatories of thenew [“Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers 2019”](https://researcherdevelopmentconcordat.ac.uk/) (hereafter referred to as the Researcher Development Concordat) launched in September 2019, we have worked to our commitments set out in the Researcher Development Concordat through our HREiR Action Plan. This four-year plan was refreshed two years ago, in 2020. Since then, the University has transitioned from a focus on researcher support to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19, to a gradual return towards provision of a supportive environment to enable our researchers to pursue longer-term research and career goals in line with our Research Strategy. Additionally, in this time, Newcastle University has opted not to renew HREiR membership, and instead to focus our resources and energy wholly on meeting the obligations laid out in [The Researcher Development Concordat](https://www.ncl.ac.uk/research/support/resskills/#researchers). In line with this change, we have taken steps to create a new Concordat Action Plan that builds on the successes of the previous plan and is more readily aligned to the ‘post-pandemic’ higher education landscape. Going forward, all future annual reporting will use the new Concordat Template.

**Background**

Our work in supporting researcher development over the last two years has occurred alongside a broader university shift toward improving research culture for all University students and colleagues that enable, support, deliver and promote our research and amplify its impact. Researchers will be supported by our research culture agenda, and our new three-year Concordat Action Plan will strongly align with a wider University [Research Culture Action Plan](https://www.ncl.ac.uk/research/culture/plan/) launched in October 2022.

The previous 18 months have seen an extended period of consultation with all stakeholders across the University, including researchers. We initially collected feedback on our [Research Culture Roadmap](https://newcastle.sharepoint.com/hub/rsd/Documents/Research_Culture_Roadmap.pdf) that outlines our commitment and planned trajectory; we received responses from over 450 people following a request for input. In spring 2022, we released the University’s first Research Culture Survey that assessed the existing research culture and the changes our research community wanted to see. We analysed these results by role and identified at least 140 responses from researchers. These results have been published openly ([Research Culture survey Report](https://www.ncl.ac.uk/mediav8/our-research/files/RC_SurveyReport_2022.pdf)) and directly influenced our priorities going forward.

This research culture work will have a huge impact on both the research environment and the opportunities offered to our researchers. Alongside a Dean of Research Culture and Strategy, we have invested in a Research Culture Manager and a Skills Academy Manager to help deliver our research culture and skills agendas, and a one-year post to deliver an EDI toolkit and support more inclusive leadership and management for PIs. However, in the last year, we have lost the staff member who has been overseeing researcher development and our HREiR Action Plan. We are now looking to rebuild momentum and ambition through the appointment of a Senior Lead for Researcher Development, to enhance this and the wider research culture agenda.

**Challenges**

As already mentioned, the loss of our Senior Organisational Development Adviser for Researcher Development has been a major challenge and caused some disruption to the progress made over the past year. Consequently, researcher support has moved to the research culture team to ensure a cohesive strategy in providing a positive research environment, promoting the best from our researchers and the best from our research. Going forward, we are looking for researchers to play a more integral role in shaping their environment and maximising opportunities, which we intend to do through a new Concordat Action Plan.

The biggest challenge over the last two years has been the disruption and uncertainty caused by the widespread effects of COVID-19. Many of our researchers are still feeling the effects of time lost to complete research and the consequences. As a result, we saw a drop in the numbers of researchers engaging with professional development opportunities as many increased research focus to ‘make up for lost time’. These numbers have started to rebound in 2022 but we are keen to take action to increase uptake above and beyond previous levels.

A general lack of engagement with training opportunities and the wider University structures has been an ongoing consequence of the pandemic. Added time pressures and the increased complexity of daily activities have severely impacted our researchers. Rebuilding these research communities is a key goal and we are taking steps to enhance the researcher networks that have taken shape over the last year. We are working to promote an open and regular dialog with these groups, support their autonomy, and work with them for efficient dissemination of information.

**Successes**

One of our biggest successes over the last two years has been the improvement to our engagement and communication strategy, including listening to the opinions and insights of our researchers and responding to them. We have openly published our Research Culture Survey results, acknowledging the researcher voice and using it to engage the community and, importantly, to inform our actions going forward. Building networks, and trust within these networks, has helped us to identify priority issues for researchers and identify innovative ways we might address them. We have taken an iterative approach, engaging the research community to determine their values, changes required, the barriers and opportunities for change, and who should be involved. We actively maintain a focus on what people value in our research culture (collaboration and collegiality, freedom to grow and explore, fairness and inclusion, openness and integrity). We continue to collect researcher input and co-creation as we progress in our actions.

As part of this work the University has invested in several key new posts. The new Research Culture Manager will initially oversee the Research Development Concordat and ensure actions to support researchers align with the University's wider research culture work. Incidentally, whilst not a requirement of the role, the post-holder was previously an early career researcher (ECR) at Newcastle and able to use existing RA networks to engage ECRs and promote relevant work.

A new Senior Organisational Development Advisor has been appointed to create a University-wide Skills Academy. The Skills Academy will create a “one stop shop” for existing training offered, identify gaps to deliver new tailored training opportunities, co-created with relevant members of the research community through special interest groups and communities of practice. The 10 days for career and professional development is now featured in all researcher contracts and the Skills Academy will further promote and support the development days, as well as cataloguing case studies and career opportunities to inspire future researchers.

A recently appointed Open Research Training and Development Officer will be a key contact for researchers to explore open research practices, an area in which some researchers highlighted a lack of knowledge. Additionally, the post holder is liaising with our UK Reproducibility Network Local Network Lead to run a popular series of “ReproducibiIiTea” sessions created by and for the researcher community.

An EDI project officer has been appointed to oversee the creation of an equality diversity and inclusion (EDI) toolkit designed specifically for researchers and their managers. A need for improved EDI training and resources was a priority for our researchers and the new toolkit will provide an easily accessible wealth of resources, the creation of which involves extensive community consultation.

Throughout our consultations our researchers have highlighted the need for positive and effective leadership across the organisation. Our new tailor-made leadership training programme “Leading Through Values” aims to build capacity in values-led leadership, and focuses on inclusive leadership and building psychological safety. It has been undertaken by approximately 200 colleagues so far, drawn initially from among the senior management teams, and received enthusiastic feedback. We are continuing to build and roll out this programme and encourage participation from both individuals and teams.

Finally, we feel one of our biggest successes is a change in ambition across the University that will see the creation of a more innovative, progressive and impactful Action Plan for the career and professional development of our researchers. This new Action Plan will strongly engage our researcher community and prioritise regular updates to ensure the intended changes are being made.

**Evaluation and monitoring**

Our new three-year Concordat Action Plan will be approved by our Developing Excellent Researchers (DER) Committee (which includes researchers, managers and institutional leads) along with a finalised list of responsibilities, timelines and processes for monitoring, with named contacts. The Research Culture Manager will hold initial responsibility for regular monitoring in the first instance, and will work in partnership with a new Organisational Development lead with a focus on researcher development who will soon be appointed. An annual report will be submitted and approved by the University Research and Innovation Committee (URIC), which is a sub-committee of the University’s Senate, and reports to the University Executive Board. The DER Committee will support the delivery of the action plan, track progress and formally evaluate impact. The committee comprises researchers and managers from all faculties along with central services representatives including our funding development, wellbeing, organisational development and people engagement teams. Researcher representatives on the DER Committee have been chosen for their participation in other University networks, allowing them broader scope for monitoring Concordat action impact through regular wider consultations.

**Forward plans**

As stated, we have developed a Research Culture Action Plan in 2022, and have been working to refresh our commitment and ambition for researcher development in line with this broader agenda. We have taken steps to create a new three-year Concordat Action Plan that builds on the successes of our previous plan. Researcher consultations we have held were advertised widely across the University, including mailing lists and early career researcher networks and were open to all. In-person and online researcher consultations have already taken place to ensure the new actions are being developed by and for researchers. Additionally, we have been holding manager-specific consultations in all three faculties to ensure that any barriers faced at the managerial level can be identified and addressed in a timely manner. A final draft of the new Action Plan will be taken to our Developing Excellent Researchers Committee in 2022. We expect that the new Action Plan will be submitted for approval to our University Research and Innovation Committee early in 2023. Once approved, we will publish the updated plan on our [external webpages](https://www.ncl.ac.uk/research/support/resskills/#researchers) and directly inform the Researcher Development Concordat secretariat.