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**The Concordat**  
to Support the Career Development of Researchers

# **Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers**

## **University of Nottingham (UK) implementation summary report (12-year review)**

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## I. INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT TO THE CURRENT REPORT

This report reviews the University of Nottingham's progress made in the 2022-2024 period on the implementation of the Concordat's principles and includes our strategy for the next three years. The University became a signatory to the new and revised 2019 Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers ('Researcher Development Concordat') in January 2021, and all outstanding actions identified from the previous action plans were transitioned and reported against the 2019 Concordat in the Action Plan 2022-2024.

Launched in August 2022 following extensive consultation with the university community, the University's Research Strategic Delivery Plan 2022-2027 sets out the ambitions for our research-intensive university. A key priority in the strategy is the 'People, Culture and Ambition' theme, which seeks 'to develop a research environment and culture that is inclusive, supportive and enables high quality and high performing research' (Research SDP, Theme 1). Key activities within this theme include the launch of the Research Culture project 'Connected Cultures' (which has an Advisory and Advocacy Group to steer the overarching project, and initiatives that champion best practices established through local trials) and the launch of the Researcher Academy. The Researcher Academy is the network of researchers, and staff who support them, at the University of Nottingham; it works to promote a healthy research culture and to cultivate researcher excellence. A working group meets regularly to ensure alignment between the Researcher Development Concordat, Athena SWAN, the Race Equality Charter and Research Culture initiatives. The input of our research and research-support community (across all job families) on how to maintain and improve supportive measures is constantly sought through feedback, including through two university-wide surveys (the 2022 Research Culture Survey and the 2023 People and Culture Survey) and an annual research culture conference.

During the reporting period, the University has experienced changes in the senior leadership. A new Deputy-Vice Chancellor, Professor Jane Norman, was appointed; following the departure of Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Knowledge Exchange (PVC-RKE) Dame Jessica Corner, there were two Interim PVC-RKEs, in 2022 and in 2023. The new PVC-RKE, Professor Tom Rodden, commenced his role in October 2023. The Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor for the Researcher Academy and Researcher Career Development (APVC-RARCD), Professor Lucy Donaldson, left in August 2023; Professor Richard Graham was appointed as Interim APVC-RARCD in November 2023.

## II. HOW AN INTERNAL EVALUATION WAS UNDERTAKEN

The review and evaluation of the University of Nottingham's Concordat Action Plan 2022-2024 was conducted by the Head of Researcher Development with input from academic schools and professional services on behalf of the Concordat Steering Committee and Research Staff Group (RSG). Researchers' views have informed this review through input from the research staff representatives on the RSG (which represents both school and faculty research staff networks), Researcher Academy Faculty Leads (RAFLs) and faculty-level Research Staff Steering Groups/Committees (note that, at faculty-level, some group and committee names have changed as governance has changed in recent years; current terminology will be used going forward). Researchers' views have also informed this review through the 2021 Athena SWAN Survey and the 2022 Research Culture Survey. It is anticipated that the 2023 People and Culture Survey results will feed into future reporting and will be augmented through pulse research culture surveys. In addition, feedback has been gathered on a more ad hoc basis from various training interventions and events held throughout the reporting period.

Each of the five faculties (Engineering, Medicine and Health Sciences, Science, Arts, and Social Sciences) has developed and implemented a faculty-specific Researcher Development Concordat action plan. Led by the RAFLs, faculty-specific action plans have been drafted and written through consultations with representatives from the researcher community, faculty, academics and professional services staff; they have been approved by faculty research boards and faculty senior leaders. Both faculty-specific and institutional action plans have reciprocal planning, reporting and monitoring to ensure the sharing of best practice across the institution.

### III. GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

The Concordat Steering Committee (CSC) and Research Staff Group (RSG) are the main University committees focussed on Concordat implementation. The RSG is chaired by a Senior Research Fellow, Dr Alan Chamberlain, and the CSC by a RAFL, Dr Alexander Tarr. Both the CSC and the RSG report – through the Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor for the Researcher Academy and Researcher Career Development and through the Director of RKE Excellence and Strategy – to the university’s Research Committee. The Research Committee is chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Knowledge Exchange and is a committee of the Senate. The RSG and CSC have clearly defined terms of reference and membership, and are inclusive of research-focussed staff representatives. The RSG membership includes one early-career and one senior research staff member per faculty, as well as academic (RAFLs) and professional service colleagues (from the Careers and Employability Service, the Researcher Academy, Professional Development, Human Resources and internal marketing specialists from External Relations).

### IV. KEY ACHIEVEMENTS AND PROGRESS (2019 CONCORDAT PRINCIPLES)

This section outlines key achievements and significant advancements against the Concordat obligations and actions identified in the review of the University of Nottingham’s Concordat Action Plan 2022-2024; they bolster our current provision of support, policies, training and development initiatives that benefit and assist our researcher community.

#### Principle: Environment and Culture

**Awareness and engagement:** A key objective throughout 2022-2024 was to raise awareness of the Concordat and its principles and obligations amongst key stakeholders, including researchers, line managers of researchers and leadership teams within schools and faculties. This has taken place via several routes, including at faculty level through the RAFLs and at school-level through Research Staff Champion-led talks. At an institutional level, this has taken place through Researcher Academy events and the annual Research Culture Conference. In addition, the Concordat features in monthly institutional e-newsletters, and a centralised Researcher Academy SharePoint page dedicated to the Concordat has been created (EC1 and PCD8, AP 2022-2024).

The creation of the role of school-based Research Staff Champions, who advocate for research-focussed staff within their schools, has been successfully rolled out to all schools who employ more than five research staff. The role has a defined profile with workload allocation and clearly defined processes for recruitment to ensure continuity. To date, the schools that meet this threshold all have processes in place and individuals in post. RAFLs convene regular quarterly meetings of the Champions in four out of five Faculties; the fifth faculty (with <30 researchers) has a Research Staff Steering Committee of researchers. Key faculty initiatives driven by these roles include:

- *Science (FoS)* – The creation of a Career Enrichment framework for researchers; a networking event in July 2022, with presentations on the Concordat, which was attended by 65 researchers.
- *Engineering (FoE)* – Supporting the development of the faculty’s action plan through Engineering Research Futures and Steering Group activities; this was launched in the summer of 2023, at an event attended by 60 research-focussed staff and their line managers.
- *Social Sciences (FoSS)* – The coordination of a response and action plan directly informed by a research staff rep-led survey, and the formation of a follow-up group to monitor progress in 2022.
- *Medicine and Health Sciences (FoMHS)* – A faculty-wide research culture networking event for researchers in July 2023, emphasising key obligations and actions in the faculty’s Concordat action plan and an opportunity to provide feedback on faculty support for research staff.
- *Faculty of Arts (FoA)* – Coordinated with FoSS a joint Research Culture event over two days in the summer of 2023, with a successful drive for mentoring allowance to be included in the ‘citizenship’ workload model for academics.

**Wellbeing and mental health:** A gap analysis of the wellbeing provision was completed in 2022, identifying overall good provision. However, just over half (51%) of research-focused staff respondents to the 2023 Research Culture Survey agreed that their mental health was being supported. Current provisions available to all staff have further been supported by additional initiatives specially aimed at research-focused staff, including a well-being steering group by the Researcher Academy to improve better signposting for and communicate provisions available to research-focussed staff; and the development of a dedicated well-being page for researchers hosted on the Researcher Academy SharePoint.

**Equality, diversity and inclusion:** The university holds a gold Athena SWAN award (awarded November 2023), and a Race Equality Charter bronze award, with implementation action plans for both awards actively driving initiatives. In the 2022 Research Culture Survey, 70% of research-focus staff respondents agreed that leadership where they worked actively supported race equality, whereas only 47% agreed that disability equality was supported. Examples of initiatives launched in 2022/23 include:

- The launch of a toolkit for disabled staff, which includes mandatory training on equality and inclusion, case studies, and guidance on how to make reasonable adjustments.
- Science Faculty held an all-staff neurodiversity awareness session in 2023, which was attended by 283 participants, inclusive of researchers and their line managers.

**Professional conduct and research integrity:** The University of Nottingham's code of professional conduct and research integrity ethics was updated to note that 'all new research students and staff are expected to undertake training in research integrity and ethics'. In the 2022 Research Culture Survey, of the research-focussed staff respondents, 90% agreed that they understood what was expected of them in their research-related role.

- Research Integrity Week 2023 saw an increase in the number of registrants to 990. On-demand Research Integrity training was attended by 895 researchers in 2022/23.
- Over 600 researchers attended briefings on the new UKRI Open Access Policy, and the new initiative 'The Summer of Data' was launched in 2022 to support researchers with research data management plans. The Research Data Management service has had a 25% increase in requests for support by researchers in 2022.

**Research Culture:** The annual Research Culture conference is now a permanent fixture in the university research diary, following the inaugural conference in 2022. The conference brings together researchers, academics and research-support staff in a safe space to discuss, challenge and celebrate the good research culture at Nottingham. In 2022, of the 257 registrants, 19% were research-focused staff and 23% were line managers of researchers, with the remaining attendees comprising doctoral students and technical/ professional service colleagues. In 2023, 17% of registrations were research-focused staff but there was a rise in the engagement of line managers to 29%. In 2022, the programme included roundtable discussions in which attendees were asked to co-create a response to their faculty on the issues raised in the Research Culture Survey. These co-created responses were fed into faculty action plans and ongoing Research Culture discussions at the institutional and faculty level. The 2023 programme included thematic roundtable discussions one of which was led and focussed on initiatives for research-focussed staff.

## Principle: Employment

**Recruitment and induction:** The Faculty of Science's initiative to increase diversity on recruitment panels includes an interview panel training session specifically for research-focussed staff, with the aim of increasing the representation of this job family within the faculty-wide interview pool whilst also supporting people who are looking for the opportunity to develop their experience and skills as interviewers. 19 Faculty of Science research-focused staff attended and are now panel-trained.

A scoping project was undertaken to assess the local school-level inductions for research-focussed staff across the university. Areas of good and bad practice were identified and fed to RAFLs for corrective action (if required). This augments the current provision of HR's 'New Starter Induction' materials (on SharePoint) and the research-focused staff induction delivered by the Researcher Academy and the Careers

Employability Service (in both online and in-person formats to ensure accessibility). In 2022, 46 new starters attended this induction (Action E1, AP 2022-2024).

**Recognition, reward and promotion:** Survey data (2021 Athena SWAN Survey) shows that completion and satisfaction response rates to questions about the Annual Development Conversations (ADCs) remain high, with 80% of research-only staff respondents indicating they have undertaken an ADC in the last 12 months (11% indicated they have not been in post for 12 months and not had an ADC). This is supported by the completion rates for the 2021/2022 ADC cycle, which show that 80% of research-focussed staff completed their ADC (rising to a completion rate of 93% for R&T staff/‘line managers’).

**People Management:** Of the 2021 Athena SWAN Survey respondents who identified as research-only staff, 70% indicated that they strongly agreed/agreed that they had useful discussions about their career progression and career aspirations during their ADC. Similarly, in the 2022 Research Culture Survey, 72% of research staff respondents agreed that ADC meetings supported their career development. To enhance the effectiveness of ADCs for research-focussed staff, several faculty pilots of best practices have been explored:

- The FoS launched, in Autumn 2022, a new balanced framework for researchers; this was circulated to managers and researchers, and is to be evaluated in 2024.
- The FoE’s Concordat action plan includes actions addressing ADCs – such as requiring CPD to be a prominent feature in the conversation, and researchers having an active role in the appointment of their appraiser (E13, AP 2022-2024).

**Job Security:** Access of the redeployment processes and pool by research-focussed staff remains low in comparison to other staff groups. A webinar for researchers on redeployment processes and on how to promote their skillset was delivered in February 2023, with 33 participants attending. The recording remains available for asynchronous viewing (Action E8, AP 2022-2024).

## Principle: Professional and Career Development

**Championing professional development:** Faculty projects are underway to collate information on what a minimum of ‘10 days of CPD’ may look like for researchers in each faculty. This is led by the RAFLs with input from Research Staff Champions and research staff reps, and in consultation with researchers.

Examples of projects and initiatives include:

- In the FoS, a 2-page ‘Guide to Career Enrichment’ and a ‘Guide to 10 days of CPD’ have been produced through collaboration between the RAFLs, research reps, and Research Staff Champions. In 2022/2023, £11k of funding was allocated to researchers to support their CPD activities (PCD2, AP 2022-2024).
- In the FoSS, a template to support the recording of 10 days of CPD has been developed by the RAFL and circulated by Research Staff Champions within schools (PCD2, AP 2022-2024).
- In the FoMHS, an online ‘Researcher Recognition Record’ has been developed to allow researchers to collect information on CPD training. This is being piloted in the School of Life Sciences.

**Research Identity and Leadership:** The successful relaunch of the revised Research Leadership Programmes took place in 2022. The Nottingham Research Leaders Programme had twenty academic colleagues from across all five faculties successfully completing the programme in 2022 and fourteen colleagues in 2023, representing all faculties. Similarly, the 2022 pilot of the Early Career Researcher (ECR) Leadership Programme (open to all faculties) was successfully completed with a cohort of twenty research-focussed staff from four of the five faculties, and was rerun in 2023 with another 20 researchers completing it. The programme comprised workshop settings and group coaching, with an additional workshop in 2023 focussed on training around EDI in research (Action PCD4, AP 2022-2024).

150 researchers (from all faculties) attended the ‘Researcher Profiles: Managing your online identity’ training, which is augmented by online resources on research metrics for self-study available on the library webpages.

**Diverse Careers:** Following the appointment of a dedicated training and development manager in Knowledge Exchange, a new series of training programmes on Knowledge Exchange and Innovation was launched in the 2022/2023 academic year. This is supported by a Knowledge Exchange SharePoint providing signposting and access to recordings of events and training, as well as a dedicated page on EDI in Knowledge Exchange (Action PCD5, AP 2022-2024).

## V. NEXT STEPS AND STRATEGY FOR 2024-27 ONWARDS

The Concordat implementation action plan for 2024-2027 (AP 2024-2027) builds on our previous Concordat implementation progress and continues to focus on creating a research environment and culture in which research staff and their managers are supported, and in which contributions appropriately recognised. These 28 actions will enable us to achieve the following four objectives over the next three years:

**Objective 1: Championing researchers within an equitable research culture** – Research-focussed staff are considered key stakeholders at the university, and are championed across the university to support the development of an inclusive and supportive research culture; to develop a framework for this vision, including appropriate prioritisation and allocation of resources.

*Success indicator:* Create an inclusive and diverse research environment with clear expectations for research culture, individual performance and support systems through the creation of a framework of an institutional research culture and environment vision by 2026 (Research SDP 2022-2027, Theme 1).

**Objective 2: UniCore system rollout with embedding of improved processes** – A single online system for recruitment, induction, mandatory training completion, storing and monitoring ADCs, training portfolios and exit surveys to be rolled out across the institution and all job families.

*Success indicator:* Roll-out of the online system, UniCore as per project timelines.

*Success indicator:* All research-focussed staff to have a training portfolio that facilitates reporting on professional development supporting good ADCs; to see an increase in satisfaction in survey responses on the usefulness of ADCs for professional and career development.

*Success indicator:* Increased completion rates of exit surveys, with processes in place to ensure outputs inform training provision and reviews of relevant processes and practices.

**Objective 3: Implementation of the REC-HURDLES project** – A project which aims to revisit employment contracts and help under-represented researcher groups to develop, lead and excel, this ~£1M grant (funded by the Wellcome Trust) is led by our Vice Chancellor and a team of co-investigators comprising research, professional services, technical and academic colleagues.

*Success indicator:* Achieving the aims, objectives and implementing the workstream activities of the project within the designated time frames (People and Culture SDP and Research Culture SDP, Theme 1).

**Objective 4: The University as a Learning Organisation** – To ensure that research-focussed staff and line managers of researchers are included as key stakeholders and beneficiaries in the implementation of the University as a Learning Organisation.

*Success indicator:* Changes to cultural perceptions of prioritisation of professional development; researchers have a training portfolio and the collection of training and development links to ADCs (People and Culture SDP and Research Culture SDP, Theme 1).