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

Universities and Research Institutes

Name of Institution	University of Liverpool
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Web address of institutional Researcher Development Concordat webpage	https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/researcher/hr-excellence-in-research-badge/concordat/
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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)***

The principles of the Researcher Development Concordat are embedded within Liverpool 2031, the University's strategy that was launched in 2023; commitment to it is explicitly identified within its key objectives, e.g., "*We will deliver sector-leading support for the development of research talent at all career stages, as exemplified by our commitment to Prosper, The Concordat and wider initiatives.*"

Additionally, the principles are closely aligned with the cross-cutting People and Culture theme, which highlights the vision of the University "*To foster an inspirational, welcoming and inclusive culture in which all can thrive and reach their full potential, recognising and celebrating the strengths of our diverse communities and building collaboration, engagement and high-quality support into all that we do.*"

The governance of the Concordat is undertaken by the Concordat Steering Group (CSG), who ensure that there is impactful and relevant alignment with any policies and activities that affect the researcher community. This group is chaired by the APVC Research Environment & Postgraduate Research (RE&PR) and includes the Faculty leads for Research and Impact, research-related professional departments such as HR, the Diversity and Equality Team, Research Support Office, the Open Research Team, the Academy, and at least 6 representatives from the University's Research Staff Association (RSA) (of which two are required as part of the quorum) who ensure accountability to Liverpool's postdoctoral and early career researchers by galvanising and representing the day-to-day, practical and environmental experiences of research staff at Liverpool. Faculty Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellors for Research and Impact (APVC R&I) meeting biannually with the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Impact (PVC R&I), Chair of the CSG, and Senior Researcher Developer from the Academy to discuss University strategic priorities and their links with the Concordat. Further, the PVC R&I continues to meet with the co-Chairs of the RSA Steering Committee (RSA SC) regularly (who are representative across all three Faculties at the University) to ensure a clear line of communication between the senior leadership team and research staff.

The University of Liverpool has completed the Research in an Inclusive and Sustainable Environment project, the key focus of which was to improve equity and diversity in the research environment to maximise Sustainable Excellence (greater diversity in research teams as a driver for interdisciplinarity, greater excellence and

a more effective and sustainable research base) and Equity (a research culture that ensures inclusive and collegiate behaviours), and assesses the contribution made by the individual to improving EDI. The outcome of this has been the development of a new Contributions Framework, which outlines how colleagues with responsibility for research are recognised for different types of contributions. Further, a new Narrative Professional Development Review template has been created for all academic staff (including academic research only) to use in their annual review process. This has been rolled out for use in the 2024-25 annual review year.

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)***

Environment and culture

Policy development: Integrate research staff across various Faculty fora (such as Faculty committees, Away Days, etc) wherein there will be decision-making and operationalisation of Strategy 2031. [EI7]

Recognition, reward and promotion: Strategic investment in and implementation of the new Research in and Inclusive and Sustainable Environment (RISE) Contributions Framework and associated career stage guidance as the approach for which colleagues with responsibility for research are recognised for all types of contributions, including research staff. [ECM5]

Awareness and engagement: Continued investment in recognising the achievements of research staff and their contribution to the research culture and environment at Liverpool via the annual staff awards, and annual Research Culture Champion and Research Staff Community Champion nominations. [ECR1]

Wellbeing and mental health: Introduce a peer Mental Health wellbeing ambassador scheme for postdocs and technicians. [ECI3]

Employment

Recruitment and induction: Diversify the pipeline of future research leaders via new Vice Chancellors Fellowship Scheme. Ensure that EDI is the forefront of the discussions to design the recruitment and selection approach. [EI1] **People management**: Based on the RISE Academic Contributions Framework, scope the development of PDRs by staff category to include specific discussion of strategic priorities and how these manifest in operational deliverables. [EI5] **Diversity and inclusivity:** A strategic commitment by the university via the Thrive Project to foster diversity and inclusivity in research teams. [EI3] <u>Professional Development of Researchers</u> **Championing professional development:** Ensure that rollout of the institution-wide Learning Management System (LMS) encompasses the integration and administration of researcher development activities. [PCDI6] **Career development support and planning**: Nurture a coaching culture across the institution, to make more career coaching opportunities to research staff, recognising that moving between, and working across employment sectors can bring benefits to research staff, and support opportunities for researchers to experience this. [PCDR2] **Research identity and leadership**: Investment in the Prosper PI network to enable ongoing opportunities to engage with a national community of practice and promote wider engagement and contributions/understanding of the diverse experiences of research leadership and management across the Higher Education sector. [PCDM5]	
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 staff are celebrated for their diverse contributions to the University via <u>Research Culture and Research Staff Community Champion prizes</u>, which received 34 nominations in 2024. All nominees were celebrated at the 'Celebrating Researchers 2024 – Your Path to Independence' event in July 2024, where nominees took part in a workshop that helped

	to consider how their strengths (and nominations) could be utilised in their career and professional development. The Research Culture and Research Staff Community Champion prizes were awarded by the PVCR&I at this event. Research Staff are recognised for their academic contributions via the annual Alan Beeston Early Career Researcher Award, which had 10 postdoctoral researcher nominations in 2024. One postdoctoral researcher was a commended winner at the University Staff Awards ceremony. [ECR1] Following consultation with the faculty EDI leads, the peer Mental Health wellbeing ambassador scheme was further developed into a more comprehensive Mental Health Support Project in the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences, within which 100 staff were identified as having Mental Health Awareness training, 16 staff were trained as Mental Health First Aid Champions and 14 staff underwent Mental Health First Aider training. A mental health network and peer matching buddy system was set up to support all staff who have had Mental health First Aid training. [ECI3] Academic Managers of Researchers: A fixed term employee maternity flowchart has been created to highlight the different options for those whose contracts ends 1.) prior to the expected maternity leave starts; 2.) prior to the conclusion of the maternity leave period; or 3.) promptly or shortly after the expected maternity leave period. This flowchart has been highlighted in the weekly RSA e-bulletin on a rotational basis and specifically highlighted in the quarterly wellbeing e-bulletins. [ECM4] Following the completion of a successful pilot involving all three Faculties, Senate approved the adoption of a new Narrative approach to PDR for all academic staff including Research, Teaching and Research and Teaching and Scholarship, from 5 November 2024. The narrative approach was instigated by the Research in an Inclusive and Sustainable Environment (RISE) work and consultation that started in 2020; this process resulted in the Research and Impact Contributions Framework that enables staff to have a

	broader discussion in their annual review conversations and support them in identifying the contributions they have made across three different categories: Supporting People, Knowledge Generation, and Knowledge Exchange and/or Research Environment. [ECM3]. **Researchers:** The RSA Terms of Reference have been updated in September 2024 to include explicit mention of their role in promoting a healthy working environment: https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/researcher/uol-rsa/terms-of-reference/ [ECI3] A member of research staff is a representative on the Staff Wellbeing Steering Group, regularly reporting updates to the RSA SC and feeding back to them as the voice of research staff. [ECI3] Weekly e-bulletins continue to be sent to all research staff and managers or researchers, with quarterly Wellbeing editions now being included. The most recent Wellbeing Edition (November 2024) included the information on the Wellbeing Hub where staff and students will find resources to support staff wellbeing; the Employee Assistance Programme; Curated wellbeing resources; Researcher Wellbeing Week; Staff Benefits scheme; The University's Sports & Fitness Centre; and the Wellbeing map - a great resource for two campuses (Liverpool and Leahurst) and contains information on places to Be Active, Connect, Support, Take Time Out and Eat Well. [ECR3]
Employment *(max 600 words)*	**Institution:** In 2024, seven University of Liverpool Research Fellows were recruited on a 5-year fellowship with tailored start-up packages. These fellowships include the offer of a permanent post at the end of the 5 years (subject to certain criteria being met). A bespoke development programme was created to support these fellows, which was rolled out to all staff who had started research fellowships in 2024. Working in

	collaboration with the Research, Innovation and Partnerships teams, the Academy-led programme builds in support to develop research partnerships, apply for grants, facilitate collaborations, and receive leadership development opportunities via mentoring and group coaching. [EI1] Academic Managers of Researchers: Twenty-places were funded by the Academy for managers of researcher to attend the Advance HE Research Leadership Development Programme in 2024. This included 13 places at Level 1, 6 at Level 2, and 3 at Level 3. [EI4] Researchers: The CSG Terms of Reference have been updated in October 2024 to widen the definition of the representation from research staff from postdoctoral researcher to academic research-only staff to recognise the diversity of research staff roles at the University, and enabling them to recognise and act on their role as key stakeholders within their institution and the wider academic community. [ER4]
Professional development *(max 600 words)*	Institution: In line with the University's commitment to deliver sector-leading support for the development of research talent, Prosper delivered the University's first 'business-as-usual' Prosper postdoc career development cohort. [PCDI1] Thirty postdocs were admitted onto the cohort running between February and July. In total, by the end of July these postdocs had access to: - 12 sessions and workshops covering a holistic range of career development topics running through Prosper's Reflect, Explore and Act themes, totalling 15 hours (including 6 sessions open to postdocs beyond the University of Liverpool) - 30 minutes of 1-1 career coaching, followed by 6 hours of group coaching (in total across the whole cohort we've supplied 15 hours of 1-1 coaching, and 18 hours of group

	career coaching in groups of no more than 10 postdocs in size) - 2 rounds of a cohort buddy scheme (~ 3 months per round), the first round involving 16/30 participants, the second 18/30 **Academic Managers of Researchers:** The Prosper PI Network has delivered online sessions for PIs/Managers of Researchers on the following topics in 2024: [EM4] - Developing resilience - Strategic academic leadership - Improve your wellbeing with Positive Intelligence - The Prosper portal – a quick guide for PIs These sessions attracted over 160 registrations from 32 institutions. Of all attendees who completed post session feedback, 100% reported an increase in confidence and knowledge. There has been continuous growth of engagement with the Prosper Portal from postdocs, institutions and managers of researchers, with an increase from 133 to over 1200 from 2023 to 2024. **Researchers** Following the success of the initial pilot in 2023, the second round of the PGR-Postdoc Buddy Scheme was launched in September 2024 with all university postdocs invited to become a 'Senior Buddy' to support a group of PGRs, thereby further developing research staff leadership skills and opportunities to contribute to a positive and supportive research environment. 72 PGRs and 29 postdocs took part via 19 in-person and 5 online buddy groups. A blog post from a postdoc about their experience has been written to highlight the scheme's value: https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/researcher/blog/

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 considerable success of the actions completed in 2024 has been due to the continued collaborative of the Concordat Steering Group, which meets four times a year. These meetings include presentations from selected action leads to share best practice and work together to support research staff and managers of researchers. This progress report also highlights the successful initiation of a number of ongoing actions from the HR Excellence in Research Award Action Plan 2024-2027. This action plan seeks to build on the excellent development work that has been undertaken at University of Liverpool since it became a signatory of the revised Researcher Development Concordat in July 2020. Engagement with our development activities remains a particular area of focus, which we have sought to address using the co-creation model of development. The Research Staff Association (RSA) are a vital part of our progress. Co-creation increases the number and variety of events we can organise at Liverpool, and participation on the RSA Steering Committee at Liverpool provides an important development experience for research staff whilst supported by a dedicated researcher development team. , This model was the subject of a workshop do-delivered with research staff at the Vitae Conference in 2024, which has been summarised in a blog. We will continue to maintain this strong relationship with the RSA members and build on this model by facilitating more opportunities for research staff to contribute to wider university processes. Further, we support the RSA Steering Committee, who take an active role in co-development of activities, to reflect on their skills development and articulate their strengths as a part of this model by providing two group coaching sessions per year. As we progress through our HR Excellence in Research Award Action Plan, we will continue to seek out common themes and initiatives that benefit research staff that are included in other sector-level reporting mechanisms, such as through Athena Swan (Liverpool holds an institutional Silver award), Race Equality Charter (Liverpool holds an institutional Bronze award) and Technician Commitment. Further, our CSG governance processes have been aligned to ensure that the Concordat is embedded within the University's review of the People, Culture and Environment (PCE) component of REF 2029, thereby ensuring that we remain forward-looking, innovative and ambitious in our plans to support the career and professional development of researchers.

Outline your key objectives in delivering your plan in the coming reporting period *(max 500 words)*
The delivery of career and professional development for researchers at University continues to be innovative and collaborative, with significant focus on building on our sector-leading initiatives, such as Prosper, into 'business-as-usual' at the University, as well as using the outcomes of projects such as Thrive to drive forward a more equitable and diverse model of research leadership. There are a variety of different Concordat activities that are prioritised over the next reporting period, including: • The launch of CEDARS 2025 in May 2025 to assess the impact of our researcher development interventions and review the staff knowledge of the Concordat (target = at least 5% increase in staff knowledge of Concordat from 65% knowledge in 2023); we also aspire towards a further increase in the completion rate of CEDARS, following a 38% completion rate in 2023 • Redesigning the Researcher Hub webpages to facilitate more clearly signposted signpost institutional policies and practices relevant to research staff, and development activities – including case studies and blogs highlighting return-to-work policies, promotion pathways, and the value of annual professional development reviews • Faculty leads will focus on ensuring that researchers and their managers are aware of, and act in accordance with, the highest standards of research integrity and professional conduct via the implementation of Ethics Action Plan, including enhanced governance to improve both the monitoring and quality of research ethics applications (Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences); capturing data on research staff engagement with research integrity training and actions developed to increase engagement identified (Faculty of Science and Engineering); and running a pilot scheme to 'enhance culture and understanding surrounding research integrity' (Faculty of Health and Life Sciences) Further, we will seek to assess the impact of completed actions and use a continuous improvement model on our existing initiatives to ensure that are our Concordat activities remain valuable for our researcher population. We will also share best practice via success stories and internal events that provide an opportunity for our researchers to see the impact of our Concordat priorities in their working life and research environment.

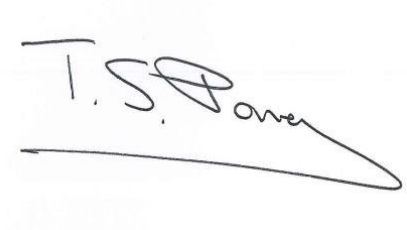
Please provide a brief statement describing your institution's approval process of this report prior to sign off by the governing body *(max 200 words)*

The Concordat Steering Group (CSG) reports to the Research and Impact Committee, creating alignment to other R&I activities and, in turn, reports to the Planning and Resources Committee and Council (the University's governing body). Additionally, through the leadership of the APVC RE&PR, the authority of the CSG, and the Academy's coordination, the outcomes of the review and the implications of the forward action plan will continue to be aligned to parallel QA and monitoring mechanisms. In particular, alignment with our Athena Swan Sliver Award Action Plan, Technician Commitment Action Plan, Race Equality Charter Bronze Award Action Plan, and the University's work in relation to the People, Culture and Environment (PCE) for REF 2029 exercise.

The University of Liverpool Governing Council will review and approve the annual documentation on 12th February 2025, in alignment with the reporting requirements as a Researcher Development Concordat signatory.

The unreserved minutes of the University of Liverpool Council's recent business meetings, including information about approval of the Concordat reports and forward action plans are available at this page.

Signature on behalf of governing body:



Contact for queries: The University's Researcher Development and Culture Team: Researcher@liverpool.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