

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

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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)

Lancaster's commitment to the Concordat is demonstrated through holding the HR Excellence in Research award, first awarded in 2011. The HR Excellence in Research Action Plan (HREiR) has actions against each of the three pillars of the Concordat. All activity towards the action plan is coordinated by the Concordat Implementation Group (CIG), a sub-group of the Research Committee, chaired by the Pro-VC for Research and Enterprise.

In January 2023, a Research Culture Working Group was formed with representation from across the University. This identified the need for a research culture action plan and to engage widely with the research community in its formulation. Workshops with research and research-enabling staff were held in late 2023. These, together with the results from the Vitae CEDAR and All-Staff Experience surveys, provided rich researcher feedback that resulted in Lancaster's Research-excellence Culture Action Plan (ReCAP).

ReCAP was launched at an inaugural Research Culture Day in October 2024, showcasing existing initiatives and offering a further opportunity to consult on future plans. A dedicated academic role of Director for Research Culture (DRC) to lead the implementation of ReCAP was created, to work alongside the existing team comprising the Head of Research Quality and Policy, Research Culture Manager and Researcher Developer. The working group transformed into a Research Culture Strategic Advisory Group, chaired by the DRC.

The RCSAG expanded its membership to be more inclusive and ensure the (representative) voices of all research community groups were being heard and valued. This includes the Chairs of new Faculty Research Career and Development (RCAD) groups offering a local and more tailored resource to replace the former university-wide Research Staff Association. The RCSAG and ReCAP is embedded into university structures with the DRC and RCSAG reporting directly to the Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research and Enterprise (PVCRE). The ReCAP aligns with other institutional initiatives contributing to enhancing research culture. This includes the HR Excellence in Research and Technicians Commitment action plans and those associated with the EDI Chartermarks - Athena Swan (AS) and the Race Equality Charter (REC). The deliverables from the Wellcome Trust £1M project, 'Reimagining research practices: towards a sustainable, ethical and inclusive future', will enhance research culture at Lancaster and across the sector and are also reflected in the ReCAP.

The ReCAP represents a dynamic commitment, maintained through ongoing engagement and feedback from Lancaster communities, with RCSAG having oversight of progress, updates and prioritisations. Evaluative metrics are used to determine the impact of the actions at the institutional level. This is complemented by an innovative approach, the maturity framework, that indexes and contextualises local practices against statements informed by the ReCAP. Departments determine the stage of maturity for each statement- from embryonic to embedded.

The development of the ReCAP also draws on good practice and initiatives outside the institution. For example, Lancaster's membership of the N8 Research Partnership has positioned it as an active member of the N8 Research Culture and Environment working group. Further engagement examples include with Vitae and its research culture framework and the Research Culture Enablers Network.

The institution is in receipt of Enhancing Research Culture funding. This funds a number of roles that take forward research culture activities. It also funds a number of initiatives within the ReCAP to the benefit of researchers, allowing them to be piloted with the intention, if successful, to core fund longer term. Such initiatives include the establishment of the Researcher Career Development (Bridging) scheme, the Academic Conference Probationers Fund and communication and engagement events such as the Research Culture Week, more details are on the [LU Research Culture webpages](#).

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)

From the [Strategic Plan](#), **priorities for research** are to:

- Sustain our commitment to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers
- Work with the Research Institutes and Centres to encourage interdisciplinary research, culture and research-led teaching, as well as influencing policy and practices to create positive change
- Increase the volume and quality of our research income
- Support the Royal Society's Resume for Researchers
- Increase the variety and value of our research

Environment and Culture

- Increasing **researcher voice** through representation of researchers on committees and groups.
Progress/success measures: Researcher Career and Development (RCAD) Groups established and active in each faculty. RCAD chairs, representing the voice of researchers, are active participants at committees/groups including the Research Culture Strategic Advisory Group (RCSAG) and the Concordat Implementation Group (CIG) as well as faculty/departmental research committees.
- Utilise effective **communication channels** for engaging the research community in research culture activities.
Progress/success measures: communication plan developed and implemented. Creation of automated lists of research-only staff for faculty and institutional use.
- Maintaining the **highest standards of Research Integrity and Ethics**.
Progress/success measures: new research staff complete online training in research integrity and ethical research

Employment

- **Provide an effective Induction** that integrates researchers into their research community. **Progress/success measures:** CEDARS and institutional data reporting that researchers feel welcomed into the institution, faculty and department.
- **Promotion opportunities** - the development of a progression pathway from grade 6 to grade 7. **Progress/success measures:** research grant applications are typically costed for a senior research associate at grade 7. Researchers report higher satisfaction with the process for progression (promotion) than evidenced through the CEDARS 2025 survey.
- **Job security** - the running of a Researcher Career Development (Bridging) scheme as one way of supporting researchers coming to the end of their fixed term/ indefinite with end date contract. **Progress/success rates:** the number of researchers supported through the scheme, demonstrable benefits of the scheme to the researchers, including their retention at Lancaster and career and professional development. A robust and transparent process for the scheme, that can be rolled out in subsequent years.

Professional Development of Researchers

- **Career Development** –developing and offering workshops and development sessions to researchers, including on the promotion of career opportunities outside of academia. **Progress/success rates:** The workshop numbers reach their capacity. Positive feedback demonstrates the value of the workshops. Follow up evaluation some period after the workshops demonstrates resulting impact.
- Promotion of **the entitlement of 10-days professional development per year** for researchers. **Progress/success measures:** ensure, wherever possible, this entitlement is built into research grant plans. CEDARS data reports an increase in researchers taking up this entitlement.
- **Researcher Development** - the development of a refreshed researcher development offer responding to need from the research community and increasing the visibility of the offer to maximise uptake. **Progress/success measures:** researcher development opportunities are made available through one portal. The uptake of development opportunities is high, and evaluation helps to establish the impact.

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

Researcher Career and Development Groups (RCADs) have now been established in each faculty; the groups are chaired by **researchers** and supported **institutionally** through an honorarium for the chairs and a small budget for activities. **Researchers** determine a programme of activities which typically include: welcome to new researchers; monthly networking meetings; career development workshops; writing retreats. The groups ensure that there is representation of **researchers** on departmental and faculty committees, and the chairs are represented at both the Concordat Implementation Group (CIG) and the Research Culture Strategic Advisory Group (RCSAG).

Institutionally, the **CEDARS survey** was conducted in May/June 2025 providing valuable insight into the quality of the research environment and culture. Whilst the number of responses was still relatively low - 14% of research only staff and 8% of other academic staff, the response rate increased by 74% from 2023. Summary survey results, including comparisons with the 2023 survey and aggregated results, have been shared with CIG and RCSAG. The next stage is to feed areas that need improvement into existing action plans and/or the next HREiR forward action plan.

Research Staff Communications – a communication plan was approved by RCSAG in April 25. Its aim was to raise awareness of all the opportunities available to enhance research culture at Lancaster. The plan included the following activities:

- **A Research Culture Week** - was held in September 2025. The programme was designed by and for the research community - **researchers** and **research managers**. A call out for expressions of interest to host a session resulted in sessions including: AI in research; open research; fellowships; protecting research time; research with impact. Given institutional and sectoral pressures at the time the engagement from the community resulted in over 30 distinct sessions being run

across the week and over 260 attendees (double the attendance of the previous year).

- Creation and maintenance of [Research Culture webpages](#) - these are kept regularly updated on new initiatives as well as showcasing the impact of initiatives such as the Researcher Career Development (Bridging) scheme.
- The establishment of a Research Culture Teams Channel (to share research culture/ReCAP related news) which is open to anyone at Lancaster, including **researchers** and **research managers**.

An effective communication tool with research – only staff has been an institutional mailing list, maintained manually. Work was underway to make this an automatically updated list and alongside create faculty mailing lists for use by the RCAD chairs. This was helping to address feedback from researchers that they did not always feel included in faculty/departmental activities.

Research Integrity – the **institution** had mandated online training courses in integrity and ethics for new staff on research only and teaching and research contracts and for postgraduate researchers (PGRs) at the start of the 2024/25 academic year. The University Research Integrity and Ethics Committee (URIEC) maintained oversight through a regular report on completion rates. At the present time approximately 50% of staff in scope to take the training do so. Further work is needed with **researchers** and **research managers** to ensure completion rates are in line with other mandated courses of between 90-95%. **Institutionally** automated dashboard and reporting would provide faculties and departments with the tools to monitor and chase their own teams.

In the CEDARS 25 survey the response to questions on research integrity were largely positive, the proportion of research-only staff strongly agreeing/agreeing that: they can raise concerns about research practice was 77%; ethical standards at Lancaster are high was 94%. In both cases, this was a higher percentage than in the aggregated data, across all 53 institutions participating in the CEDARS 2025 survey.

Employment

Induction practices – a report on current practices in departmental/faculty induction has been taken to CIG. This concluded that there are examples of good practice with respect to researcher induction, but this is not consistent across the institution. The CEDARS 2025 survey showed a large variation between research-only and academic staff in how useful they found their induction – 69% to 90% respectively. **Institutionally** a task and finish group is being established to ensure all staff, including researchers, have a consistently good induction experience, regardless of their faculty/department. **Researcher** representation will be included in the group.

Seek to improve job security - existing and new researchers are typically employed on indefinite contingent contracts. The CEDARS 2025 survey showed that only 19% of research-only staff felt that their future at Lancaster is secure. Whilst this is largely a symptom of the grant funding landscape in the UK, it is likely to have been compounded by the limited number of academic posts currently on offer at Lancaster and across the sector.

To help address the challenges of researchers on time limited contracts, the **institution** has set aside some of the Enhancing Research Culture funding to be used for a Research Career Development (Bridging) scheme. This sustains funding and support for researchers with gaps between contracts and provides time for them to pursue professional and career development opportunities as well as making a positive contribution to research culture initiatives. The scheme is running for the third year in 2025/26. [Case studies](#) have been put together that show the value of the scheme to those researchers that it has supported.

The RCAD Chairs, responding to the needs of **researchers** in their faculties, have coordinated sessions from HR that help to clarify redeployment and redundancy practices.

Clear and transparent promotion pathways - the CEDARS 2025 survey highlighted a large gap between research-only and other academic staff at Lancaster in how much they strongly support agreed/agreed that the promotions pathway and process is clear – 36% compared to 76%. The **institution** had approved a new progression pathway for researchers between grade 6 and 7 for implementation in 2024/25. This aimed to clarify the

process, to ensure there was enough budget to cover the progression to grade 7 and encourage flexibility in approaches within faculties, mindful of the time-limited contracts of research-only staff. In the 2024/25 academic year there was a freeze on academic promotions, including research-only staff, which suspended the roll-out of the new progression pathway.

In 2025/26 promotions will resume including progression from grade 6 to 7 and therefore it is anticipated that the benefits of the revised pathway will begin to be realised by researchers.

Professional Development of Researchers

Researcher Development – the **institution** offers a wide range of development sessions for research managers and researchers. Such opportunities are widely promoted, and uptake by **researchers** and **research managers** is consistently high. Responsibility for researcher development moved this year into the research culture team. This allowed a refresh through a development needs analysis to establish what was needed, what was currently offered and where the gaps were. This coincided with the launch of the new Vitae Researcher Development framework, a key tool for the analysis. Researcher voice was fed into the review through the RCAD chairs. A [refreshed programme](#) is being launched in 25/26.

Lancaster is the lead partner for the **British Academy Early Career Research Network** for the Northwest and North Wales Cluster. The network provides a wide range of development and networking opportunities for SHAPE researchers at Lancaster and across the region.

Lancaster has piloted a centrally governed **AI access hub (SAIL)** to support responsible skills development in the use of generative AI for research, teaching, and professional practice, supported by institutional training and guidance.

Following a discussion on **Established Researcher (MCR) provision** at an N8 Research Culture and Environment meeting last year, a small working group has now formed between representatives of the Careers Research and Advisory Centre (CRAC), the Eastern Arc and the N8 including Lancaster. An initial conversation has also taken place with senior leaders from HE institutions that have active initiatives to support MCRs/ERs, UKRI, the British Academy and Royal Society. Recent discussions with Wellcome including participation at their Mid-Career Research Leadership Symposium has led to revision of

the proposal to focus on the development of researcher personas to provide real examples of navigating this stage of career and possible funding mechanisms to enact.

The visibility of the researcher development offer has always been a challenge given that different departments contribute to this offer and have their own systems and processes for communication and administration. Following the successful trial of [Inkpath](#), a dedicated skills and career development software for PGRs it is hoped to be trialled for **research staff**, contingent on a sustained income stream. As well as increasing the visibility of the offer it is anticipated that this will have administrative efficiencies and provide to **researchers** a professional development portal that can be updated and maintained throughout their careers – at Lancaster and elsewhere.

Career Development – the **institution** was a partner in the development of [Prosper](#), a career development portal that allows **researchers** to explore a broad range of career opportunities including in roles beyond academia. Prosper was promoted by and for **researchers** through the RCAD chairs, who hosted an information session on Prosper, followed by a full day event exploring [careers outside of academia](#). This included a panel made up of former postdoctoral researchers now working in industry and government posts, giving an honest assessment of the differences of working both inside and outside of academia. At induction, all researchers are expected to be allocated a mentor, and this is actively encouraged at all career stages. Guidance and workshops on mentoring to ensure mentors and mentees get the best out of these relationships are available.

A Cross institutional Mid-Career Mentoring Scheme has been running in partnership with six other universities for some time. This ran very successfully in 24/25 with 10 mentors and 8 mentees from Lancaster applying to the scheme. An evaluation of the scheme demonstrated the positive benefits to both groups, including the additional benefits offered by the cross-institutional aspect of the scheme.

The institution has a coaching bank, to which all staff, including **researchers** can apply. The initial offer is 3 coaching sessions and is often used to explore career development options.

10 Development Days – the **institution** is commitment to providing 10 days of professional development for researchers. Wherever possible development costs are included in a grant application, although it is recognised that not all funders allow this inclusion. The entitlement is flagged to **researchers** and **managers of researchers** when

development opportunities are promoted. CEDARS 2025 showed that the number of **researchers** taking up this full entitlement is low at 15%, but a higher percentage of Lancaster's researchers are engaging in 5 or more development days than in the aggregated data – 44% compared to 33%.

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)

Research Culture Week 2025

Participation in the week was good and increased from the Research Culture Day 2024. This year's sessions were developed by and for the researcher community, and this is likely to have increased attendance. However, the percentage of the target audience participating is relatively low. More work remains to make sure the programme appeals and is of interest to all the research community.

The week was successful for those attending in energising the research community on the themes of research culture. This momentum needs to be sustained throughout the year. A series of regular research culture cafes, on particular themes, are planned as a way of keeping the conversation live.

Success measures: a series of research cafes scheduled; RC Day/Week 2026 attracts wider interest from the research community

Monitor and report on the engagement of researchers and their managers with professional and career development activities

Monitoring of the engagement of researchers in a minimum of 10 development days remains limited and largely evidenced through the outcomes of the CEDARs survey and feedback via the Faculty Researcher Career and Development (RCAD) Groups. The trial of [Inkpath](#), dedicated skills and career development software with **research only staff**, offers a potential solution to this as it allows reports to be generated on professional development activities. This is reliant on all researchers engaging with the software.

There also needs to be an on-going articulation of what constitutes development, as anecdotal evidence suggests that the assumption that all development happens through organised workshops and programmes remains strongly held. It is therefore likely that the CEDARS data under reports development days.

Success Measure: An increase, from the CEDARS 25 survey results, in the number of researchers engaging in their entitlement to 10 development days.

Researcher Career Development (Bridging) Scheme

This scheme ran institutionally for the second time in 24/25. Case studies put together show clear benefits to the researchers in the scheme. However, particularly in light of the

current climate at Lancaster and across the sector, there was an identified need to prioritise the funding for researchers with a strong likelihood of being retained at Lancaster. The scheme is being revised in 25/26 to reflect this with the pre-award team becoming integral in the selection process.

Success Measure: To develop a process in 25/26 that is viewed as fair, transparent and efficient that can be rolled out easily in subsequent years.

CEDARS survey 2025

Whilst it is pleasing that respondent rates increased from the 2023 survey, this still represents only a small proportion of research only and other academic staff. To increase participation rates for subsequent surveys it is important to communicate the headline findings and the resulting actions, so that respondents are confident that in completing the survey they can have an influence.

Success measures: increased response rates in subsequent CEDARS surveys.

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

The current HREiR action plan runs until September 26, and therefore the remaining period will focus on completing any outstanding actions and agreeing with the obligations that will be prioritised for the next action plan.

Development Needs Analysis (DNA)

This will be completed in 25/26- taking into account sector and institutions objectives and responding to the needs of researchers and managers of research. It will compare the current offer at Lancaster University with what is needed and address any gaps that are identified.

It is recognised that there is less development provision for MCR's than for ECRs, although the Cross-institutional MCR mentoring scheme has excellent feedback from mentors and mentees and good participation from Lancaster. The DNA will, in part, be informed by the Established Researcher (MCR) working group and take into consideration the more advanced development phases in the Vitae Researcher Development Framework (RDF).

Research Integrity and Ethics training

The training has been rolled out to new research staff and institutional measures e.g. embedding in induction/probation and automated emails are in place to encourage take up. During this period enhanced communication to research leaders and new research staff on the importance of the training will take place to encourage take up.

Careers outside of Academia

Lancaster has career support available to all staff, including researchers. To supplement this further support targeted at researchers, building on the engagement with the 'Careers outside of Academia' sessions will be put in place. This is likely to include repeat sessions and new ones such as the use of LinkedIn for job search and a panel session with recruiters from the public and private sectors. The potential of the [Prosper Researcher Hub](#) as a career development tool will be maximised and there will be engagement with the Prosper Exchange a framework for sustaining impact through sharing practice across institutions.

Leadership and Management programmes

A comprehensive review of all leadership and development programmes has recently been completed and will be rolled out in 2025/26. The purpose of this review was to ensure that the development opportunities provided are fully aligned with the University's values and strategic objectives, while also meeting the diverse needs of individuals.

A structured framework has been introduced to support leadership and personal growth. This framework is organised into three core channels:

- **Understanding Self**
- **Understanding Others**
- **Understanding the Organisation**

Each channel offers four progressive levels of learning designed to provide flexible, inclusive and accessible development opportunities, including online resources and courses, interactive workshops and longer-term programmes.

Induction

A wider review of staff induction under the remit of the Athena Swan team will start in this reporting period. The researcher voice will be represented in this review, in recognition of the particular challenges and issues they face.

Communication channels

Automated faculty and institutional mailing lists of research-only staff will be rolled out this year for wider use.

Promotion/Progression

The promotion/progression pathways for researchers and academics will recommence in the 25/26 academic year. Further communication about the progression pathway from grade 6 to grade 7 is needed with researchers, research leaders and staff in faculties involved in administering the process, to fully embed the process and ensure there is clarity, transparency and flexibility.

HREiR Submission in 2026

Preparation for this submission will take place in this period. The institution is likely to use the new 2026 HREiR award process, guidance and templates. Significantly there will need to be consultation with the research community about the priority areas within the Concordat that will then be used to select the obligations for the new forward action plan.

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)

An initial draft of the report was compiled by staff in the Research Culture team. The draft was circulated to members of the Concordat Implementation Group (CIG) in January 2026. Following further drafting of the report it was circulated to members again for feedback and approved for publication and submission to the secretariat on 6 July 2026.

Signature on behalf of governing body:



Professor Jo Rycroft-Malone, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Enterprise

Contact for queries: Chris Atkinson – c.atkinson1@lancaster.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.