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)*:

The University of Nottingham is dedicated to fostering a consistently fair, inclusive, respectful, and sector-leading environment for everyone who conducts, contributes to, manages, enables, and supports our excellence in research and knowledge exchange. Guided by our Pro-Vice-Chancellor for People and Culture, the Research and Knowledge Exchange (RKE) Culture Strategy will direct our efforts until 2034, with formal reviews every three years.

Our strategy aligns with the University's core values:

- **Inclusivity:** We aim to address contract precarity and promote career progression, particularly for underrepresented groups and those in transitional or mid-career roles. Key initiatives include the HR 'Inclusive by Design' project, enhancing visibility and connections within our researcher career development offer, and the REC-HURDLEs Wellcome Trust-funded project, which explores new employment models to reduce precarity. These efforts align with existing initiatives, such as the Athena Swan Gold Action Plan, the Race Equality Charter, and the new Disability Equality Action Plan.
- **Ambition:** We are re-evaluating the rewards, recognition, and development opportunities available to our people, ensuring that leadership, citizenship, and knowledge exchange are valued alongside research excellence. This includes the 'Improving the Researcher Experience' project, which streamlines research processes, and a review of learning and development initiatives to align with our goal of becoming a Learning Organisation.
- **Openness:** We prioritize transparency in decision-making, accountability and credit for work completed – this includes reviewing our internal communications and exploring responsible researcher representation.
- **Fairness:** Championing equal access to support and opportunities is key to our efforts, along with promoting responsible research and innovation. We are reviewing HR policies, including the Nottingham Reward Scheme and academic promotion pathways, to support this. We also continue to champion the Concordat to Support Research Integrity.
- **Respect:** We are focused on fostering healthy, productive teams by implementing strategies to ensure dignity at work and prevent bullying and harassment. This includes exploring workload models and offering training on freedom of speech and constructive debate. These initiatives are designed to build trust, psychological safety, and facilitate Open Conversations.

A crucial component of our research culture is the activity of the University's Researcher Academy, which supports researchers and research support staff through training,

development, and by influencing university policies. It also fosters partnerships across academia, industry, and policy sectors.

We regularly seek feedback from our research community through initiatives such as the 2023 People and Culture Survey; this input shapes our Concordat Action Plan 2024-2027. Our annual Research Culture Conference provides a platform to discuss and celebrate our research culture, with active participation from senior leadership.

Our commitment to fostering an equitable and inclusive environment has been recognised with a Gold Athena SWAN award and a Race Equality Charter Bronze award. Our HR Excellence in Research award has recently been renewed in recognition of our dedication to the Researcher Development Concordat.

The University is a signatory of the Technician Commitment. It also supports technical professionals through our 'Vision for Technical Talent', a three-year plan focusing on visibility, recognition, career development, and sustainability. As part of the Midlands Innovation consortium we also host TALENT, a project driving advancement for technical skills, roles and careers in UK higher education and research.

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 Researcher Development Concordat implementation action plan for 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. The 30 actions in the action plan will enable us to achieve the following objectives over the next three years:

- To ensure 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 through the creation of a framework of an institutional research culture and environment vision by 2026.

  Success indicator: Surveys report an inclusive and diverse research environment with clear expectations for research culture, individual performance and support systems (Research SDP 2022-2027, Theme 1).

- Establish and implement a university-wide process for tracking and monitoring the 'minimum of 10 days pro rata professional development per year' for research-focused staff. Currently, no unified system exists to record and make these activities visible to researchers, their managers, and university administration.

  Success indicator: All research-focused staff recorded as having a training portfolio in the centralised UniCore system (accessible to faculty and professional services staff), allowing researchers and their managers to record and report on professional training and development activities, supporting good ADCs.

- Improve communication pathways between researchers and their managers to enhance the sharing of policies, practices, and initiatives across the University. To better utilise existing channels for researchers to raise concerns at the school, faculty, and institutional levels. Develop a clear communication plan specifically for research-focused staff, including a campaign to raise awareness of the obligations of the Concordat for researchers, their managers, and the University.

  Success indicator: Researchers, their managers, and professional services staff report a higher level of awareness of the Concordat and university policies relevant to their roles.

- Develop a comprehensive evaluation process to capture both quantitative and qualitative data on the measurable impact of the Concordat. This process will involve using surveys (internal and external), focus groups, town halls, and other methods to gather information on engagement and impact. The data collected will also support reporting for initiatives such as Athena SWAN, REC-HURDLEs and the Technician Commitment.

  Success indicator: The implementation of a process that enables the gathering and analysing of information on research-focused staff engagement, informs the Concordat action plan and EDI reporting mechanisms, and aids in the improvement of current provision.

- Collaborate with funders, other universities, and national bodies (such as the Russell Group, Vitae, and Researchers14) to advocate for research-focused staff. Engage in sector-wide discussions on how research funding impacts the research environment, career development, and job security for researchers. The implementation of the Wellcome Trust-funded REC-HURDLEs project (which explores new employment models to reduce precarity and helps under-represented researcher groups to develop, lead and excel) contributes to this.

  Success indicator: Lead discussions that promote a more equitable, transparent, inclusive, and supportive research culture in the UK, with a focus on improving job security for researchers

• The Concordat action plan remains a dynamic document with a regular process for updating or inclusion of actions on new policy and practices. *Success indicator:* A Concordat implementation action plan that is regularly updated and reflects current policy, strategy and practices in a timely manner.	

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**
The Organisational and People Development (OPD) team has launched a university-wide 'Open Conversations' framework and programme **(Action EC6)**, which includes workshops for all staff and sessions specifically for line managers. Tailored workshops cover feedback, wellbeing, and microaggressions. Additionally, the OPD team has published a Staff Wellbeing and Mental Health Strategy for 2024-2026 and is exploring mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of staff wellbeing support.

In the Faculty of Science, efforts to enhance inclusivity and transparency in committee decision-making have resulted in the publication of minutes from the Faculty's Executive Board and Leadership Group meetings on the Faculty's SharePoint site, starting August 2024 **(Action E12)**. Each school has ensured the presence of at least one research staff member on relevant committees; committees under review will ensure representation going forward.

The Faculty of Arts Research Staff Steering Group is formally exploring policy development processes, including how staff understand and engage with these processes. This topic is scheduled for discussion in the group's first meeting of the 2024-2025 academic year **(Action EC13)**. |

Academic Managers of Researchers

The Research Strategy and Development team has taken steps to formalise the roles and expectations of Research Integrity Champions (RICs), whose expectations include delivering faculty-specific research integrity training **(Action EC11)**. Training has been formalised to meet sector standards and share best practice across the institution. Although training delivered by RICs has been successful, it currently occurs on an ad-hoc basis rather than as part of a consistent programme. Over the next 18-24 months, the goal is to develop a more structured programme. The Faculty of Social Sciences has integrated RIC responsibilities into the role of the School Research Ethics Officer instead of appointing a dedicated RIC. A key success measure for this action is for researchers to report a clearer understanding of research integrity expectations and increased confidence that bullying, harassment, and poor conduct are being effectively addressed in their departments. A goal has thus been to raise agreement on this from 32% (as reported in the 2022 Research Culture Survey) to 50%. Accordingly, in the 2023 People and Culture Survey, 56% of research-focused staff agreed or strongly agreed that "Our university ensures that all people are treated fairly and equally."

Researchers

The School of Life Sciences has successfully collaborated with HR to formally recognise the 'Assistant Supervisor' role. This successful initiative **(Action EC4)** will now be used as a case study to explore the appointment of researchers as Assistant Supervisors across other faculties and schools. As a result, the deadline for updating the Concordat action plan has been extended from September 2024 to September 2025 to allow further development of this initiative.

The Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences piloted the 'You Said, We Did' project, conducting school-level focus groups in September 2023 to address workload and other concerns – particularly for early-career researchers, though academic and research-focused staff were also engaged **(Action EC5)**. The focus groups revealed a lack of awareness about the Concordat. Future focus groups will be conducted in all schools and at the faculty level to gain a broader understanding of researcher issues and concerns as well as how to best raise Concordat awareness.

	The Faculty of Science's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion team secured funding to develop recommendations for embedding anti-racism in support for early-career researchers. A report has been prepared, with recommendations to be presented at a faculty 'People and Culture' meeting **(Action EC9)**.
	The Libraries Research Support (LRS) team has revised its Researcher Development programme, which is available to all researcher groups **(Action EC10)**. Recent sessions on Open Access, SciVal, and Research Intelligence have engaged early-career researchers, research-focused staff, and postgraduate researchers across various schools. Future plans include developing tailored sessions on research profiles for research-focused staff and integrating Research Intelligence training into the Researcher Academy's new programmes.
Employment *(max 600 words)*	**Institution** Progress is on schedule for **Action E1**, which is due in May 2025. This action focuses on assessing the efficacy of current recruitment and onboarding processes for the current internal fellowship schemes (Nottingham Research Fellowships and Anne McLaren fellowships), with a view to ensuring the recruitment pipeline enables a diverse pool of applicants and is an accessible and equitable process that supports the very best talents irrespective of personal characteristics and personal circumstances. There were no 'Employment – Institution' actions due in 2024. **Academic Managers of Researchers** Good progress in this area is being made on **Action E4**, which is due for completion in 2026. This initiative aims to provide effective line and project management training for managers of researchers and heads of departments (and others in equivalent roles). As part of this, regularly offered refresher opportunities for all staff will cover university policies and resources, support networks, promotion and regrading processes, expectations for annual development conversation, and ways to report inappropriate behaviour. Furthermore, re-induction or refresher sessions will be provided for staff as their line management responsibilities evolve and when they return from extended periods of leave. There were no 'Employment – Academic Managers of Researchers' actions due in 2024. **Researchers**

	The initiative for the Researcher Academy and HR to create an induction package for new research staff is on track to meet its December 2024 deadline, with the Head of Researcher Development, the Research Leadership Development Manager and the newly recruited Researcher Training and Development Manager for Research-Focused Staff leading on this **(Action E3)**.

Looking ahead, work in this area is on track around **Action E2** and **Action E7**, which are due in 2025. Action E7 is part of the REC-HURDLEs project, which started in May 2024. The aim, connected to employment precarity, is to propose (and have accepted by the University) a series of pilots to reduce our use of fixed term contracts for researchers. Staff have now been appointed to manage the project. An initial literature review is currently underway to examine the use of fixed-term contracts in academia and their impact on researchers, particularly in relation to diversity. The review is also exploring existing solutions and best practices. Data on our university's use of fixed term contracts has been requested – this will provide an initial baseline for the project. Key stakeholders involved in approving pilots at university level have been identified. |
| Professional development *(max 600 words)* | **Institution**

Work around this principle and stakeholder is underway on **Action PCD2**, due in 2026. This action focuses on monitoring and reporting around the engagement of researchers and their managers with professional development activities (i.e. mandatory, statutory, leadership, ADC, supervisory, EDI – including awareness or 'Report and Support', dignity, wellbeing, trans awareness) as part of organisational and cultural development. There were no 'Professional development – Institution' actions due in 2024.

Academic Managers of Researchers

Work around this principle/stakeholder is underway on **Action PCD4**, due in 2025, and **Action PCD1**, due in 2026. The objective of Action PCD4 is for researchers to positively engage in career development reviews with their managers. Action PCD1 aims to provide opportunities, structured support, encouragement and time for researchers to engage in a minimum of 10 days professional development pro rata per year, recognising that researchers will pursue careers across a wide range of |

employment sectors. There were no 'Professional development – Academic Managers of Researchers' actions due in 2024.

Researchers

The Mid-Career Research Leadership programme was successfully launched in 2023/2024 with a cohort of 20, with positive feedback received **(Action PCD6)**. A full evaluation of the programme will be undertaken when more iterations have taken place and a baseline is established.

Work was undertaken by the Institute for Policy and Engagement to demonstrate that moving between and working across employment sectors can bring benefits to research and researchers **(Action PCD8)**. Meeting its completion deadline of August 2024, work on this action has successfully supported opportunities for researchers to experience this through the following:

- The CAPE charity fellowships scheme (incl. up to £10,000 to cover eligible costs per fellow), which has been a highly successful pilot project. Part-time fellowships placed academics within charities, working on policy-facing projects alongside existing research responsibilities (or, where permitted by the faculty, replacing teaching time which the funding could buy out). This supported the needs of the host organisation in accessing expertise, while allowing fellows to develop skills and experience in an organisation outside of their usual environment. Four applicants (from the School of Cultures, Languages and Area Studies; the School of Biosciences; the School of Medicine; and the School of Humanities) were successfully awarded a fellowship, commencing in spring/summer of 2023.
- Seed funding for researchers to work with policy partner organisations enabled long-term collaboration, co-creation, relationship- and trust-building (including a buddying scheme in the Foreign Office); it enabled researchers to learn hands-on about writing and publishing in different formats, and how to collaborate better across policy, practice and research.

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)*:

New actions:

Notable work has been done on projects aligned with the Concordat's principles, but which were not in place when the 2024-2027 action plan was initially written. One key initiative is the Researcher Academy's (RA) Research Leadership Accelerator Programme (RLAP), designed to harness mid-career researchers' leadership potential. The inaugural cohort, consisting of 14 mid-career researchers, led a project examining how employment precarity affects line managers and research groups, with recommendations presented to senior leaders for consideration. Another new initiative involves collaboration between the Head of Technical Services in the Faculty of Science, the RA's Fellowships Manager and the Research Training and Development Manager for Research-Focused Staff, among others, to support and advocate for Research Technical Professionals at the university – including work to align the Concordat with the Technician Commitment, particularly in areas such as recognition and professional development. As the Concordat action plan is a living document, progress in these areas will be incorporated into the 2024-2027 plan.

Revised actions:

In October/November 2024, the university will implement UniCore, a new HR, Finance, and Procurement system which will significantly impact, directly or indirectly, various actions. Where this has been identified, new timelines have been established to accommodate this. For instance, **Action E5**, which involves creating a 'Managing your postdoc researcher' section in each faculty's Principal Investigator toolkit, has been revised. This toolkit will now include guidance on UniCore processes, with the Researcher Academy actively supporting the initiative and the deadline being moved to July 2025.

The Nottingham Reward Scheme (NRS) review is focused on ensuring equity across job families, levels, and gender while maintaining consistency across schools and faculties **(Action E6)**. Case studies are being developed to clarify exceptional performance, behaviours and contributions that merit recognition and reward, including examples from research-focused staff. Significant progress has already been made, with extensive feedback gathered. However, the review's completion depends on the university's broader pay and reward strategy, now expected by March 2025. This has shifted the NRS review's action deadline from December 2024 to July 2025.

Action PCD7, focused on promoting Research Staff Champions and raising awareness of the benefits of mentoring and coaching for research-focused staff, has been impacted by updates to the university's coaching and mentoring programmes to increase fit-for-purpose and up-to-date provision. Consequently, the timeline has been extended from

August 2024 to August 2025. Nonetheless, progress continues in other areas, such as collecting data on email click-rates related to mentoring, coaching, and Research Staff Champions, which will inform future success measures.

The publication of 25 case studies by the Careers and Employability Service showcasing the diversity of professional career options **(Action PCD9)**, has been delayed due to the redesign of their website. The updated site will offer increased provision for research-focused staff, supported by these case studies. The timeline has been adjusted from December 2024 to June 2025, which has allowed the opportunity to ensure the postdoc case studies date from 2020 onwards, thus maximizing their relevance.

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

Key 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; 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).

Key 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.

Key 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 Pro-Vice Chancellor for Equality, Diversity & Inclusion 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).

Key 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).

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).*
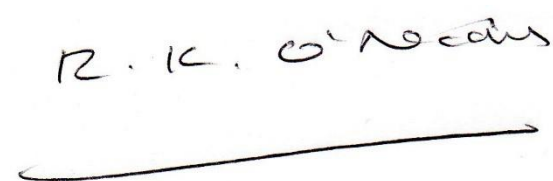
This report has been prepared by the Head of Researcher Development (Researcher Academy), the Chair of the Concordat Steering Committee and the Researcher Training and Development Manager for Research-Focussed Staff (Researcher Academy) on behalf of the Concordat Steering Committee (CSC).

The CSC and the Research Staff Group (RSG) are dedicated University committees responsible for Concordat implementation and reporting. Both committees report to the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee (RKEC) via the Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor for the Researcher Academy & Research Culture Development and via the Director of Research & Knowledge Exchange Excellence and Strategy.

The CSC is chaired by a Researcher Academy Faculty Lead (RAFL), while the RSG is chaired by a Senior Research Fellow. Membership of both groups includes research-focused staff representatives, Research Fellows, academics and professional services colleagues who support researchers (from the Careers and Employability Service, the Researcher Academy, Human Resources, and External Relations).

After CSC approval in September 2024, this report and the Concordat action plan were submitted to the RKEC for approval in October 2024. They were then circulated to the University's Executive Board and finally to the university's Council for endorsement.

Signature on behalf of governing body:

R. K. O'Neacau

Contact for queries: Victoria Sedman, University of Nottingham Researcher Academy (victoria.sedman@nottingham.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