STRANMILLIS UNIVERSITY COLLEGE
A College of Queen's University Belfast

The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers

Implementation Plan

The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, commonly known as the **Researcher Development Concordat**, is an agreement between stakeholders to improve the employment and support for researchers and researcher careers in higher education in the UK.

The Concordat has been created for the benefit of the whole research community within the UK to improve the environment and culture within which research is conducted. It will benefit those conducting and managing research, as well as the quality of the research itself.

The aims of the agreement will be realised through implementation of the Principles of the Concordat, which contain expectations for the stakeholder groups.

The Concordat lists seven 'signatory responsibilities' that Stranmillis, in signing the Concordat, has committed to follow. This implementation plan fulfils items 4 and 5.

1. Raise the visibility of the Concordat and champion its Principles within their organisation at all levels.

2. Identify a senior manager champion (Director of Research and Scholarship) and associated group (Research and Scholarship Committee) with relevant representation from across the organisation with responsibility for annual review and reporting on progress.

3. For organisations employing researchers, ensure that they are formally represented in developing and monitoring organisational efforts to implement the Concordat Principles.

4. Undertake a gap analysis to compare their policies and practice against the Concordat Principles.

5. Draw up and publish an action plan within a year of signing up to Concordat.

6. Set up processes for systematically and regularly gathering the views of the researchers they fund or employ, to inform and improve the organisation's approach to and progress on implementing the Concordat.

7. Produce an annual report to their governing body or equivalent authority, which includes their strategic objectives, measures of success, implementation plan and progress, which is subsequently publicly available.

The Concordat has three defining Principles covering **Environment and Culture, People** and **Professional and Career Development**. For each of these Principles, the Concordat outlines the key responsibilities of the four main stakeholder groups; **researchers, managers of researchers, institutions,** and **funders**.

Below is a list of the Concordat 'obligations' for **Institutions**, **Managers of Researchers**, and **Researchers**, followed by some suggestions of ways Stranmillis is *meeting them or could better meet them.* These are then summarised at the end of the document.

Environment and Culture

<u>Institutions must:</u>

- **Ensure that all relevant staff are aware of the Concordat.**
    - Email staff to summarise aims and scope of the Concordat and links to Concordat website and College research webpage.
    - Implementation plan available on website

- **Ensure that institutional policies and practices relevant to researchers are inclusive, equitable and transparent, and are well-communicated to researchers and their managers.**
    - Ensure that all relevant policies are available to researchers on College website/staff intranet

- **Promote good mental health and wellbeing through, for example, the effective management of workloads and people, and effective policies and practice for tackling discrimination, bullying and harassment, including providing appropriate support for those reporting issues.**
    - The College currently organises a range of regular staff well-being events and initiative under the banner of "*Thrive*"
    - Policies and procedures are in place e.g. Dignity at Work and Study.
    - Support is available for those reporting issues from trained 'Equality Advisors' for staff and students

- **Ensure that managers of researchers are effectively trained in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion, wellbeing and mental health.**
    - Ensure that all PIs have received recent and relevant training

- **Ensure researchers and their managers are aware of, and act in accordance with, the highest standards of research integrity.**
    - Ensure that all relevant staff are aware of the College's *Code of Ethics in Research.*

- **Regularly review and report on the quality of the research environment and culture, including seeking feedback from researchers, and use the outcomes to improve institutional practices.**
  - Carry out an annual survey/review of the quality of the research environment and culture in advance of the review of the annual action plan.

Managers of Researchers must:

- **Undertake relevant training and development opportunities related to equality, diversity and inclusion, and put this into practice in their work.**
  - Ensure all relevant staff receive recent and relevant training (e.g. in-house or through online courses)

- **Ensure that they and their researchers act in accordance with the highest standards of research integrity and professional conduct.**
  - Ensure that all relevant staff are aware of the College's *Code of Ethics in Research.*

- **Promote a healthy working environment that supports researchers' wellbeing and mental health, including reporting and addressing incidents of discrimination, bullying and harassment, and poor research integrity.**
  - Ensure through their induction, training and/or communication that researchers are aware of relevant policies and reporting procedures.

- **Consider fully, in accordance with statutory rights and institutional policies, flexible working requests and other appropriate arrangements to support researchers.**
  - The College has already established norms and policies around flexible working requests and support arrangements

- **Engage with opportunities to contribute to policy development aimed at creating a more positive research environment and culture within their institution.**
  - Engage proactively with researchers to seek their feedback and suggestions for improvement through at least annual review/survey

Researchers must:

- **Actively contribute to the development and maintenance of a supportive, fair and inclusive research culture and be a supportive colleague, particularly to newer researchers and students.**
  - Researchers should be aware of their duty to contribute to a positive working environment through of awareness of relevant policies e.g. *Dignity at Work and Study*

- **Ensure they act in accordance with employer and funder policies related to research integrity, and equality, diversity and inclusion.**
  - Researchers should be aware of all relevant policies.

- **Take positive action towards maintaining their wellbeing and mental health.**
  - Researchers should be made aware of opportunities offered through, for instance, the College's *Thrive* programme.

- **Use available mechanisms to report staff who fail to meet the expected standards of behaviour, particularly in relation to discrimination, harassment, bullying, and research misconduct.**
  - Researchers should be aware of the relevant reporting mechanisms.

- **Consider opportunities to contribute to policy development aimed at creating a more positive research environment and culture within their institution**
  - Researchers are encouraged to take part in annual reviews of Action Plan and other in-College consultations/surveys.

Employment

Institutions must:

- **Ensure open, transparent and merit-based recruitment, which attracts excellent researchers, using fair and inclusive selection and appointment practices.**
  - College must follow all relevant employment policies.

- **Provide an effective induction, ensuring that researchers are integrated into the community and are aware of policies and practices relevant to their position.**
  - Ensure that local induction for researchers is research-specific and highlights relevant policies and encourages integration into College community.

- **Provide clear and transparent merit-based recognition, reward and promotion pathways that recognise the full range of researchers' contributions, and the diversity of personal circumstances.**
  - College has an existing staff promotion policy and is consulting on a proposed revised policy for staff on teaching/research contracts. For staff on research only contracts, role descriptions will be drawn up in line with national benchmarks to allow research staff to identify appropriate development opportunities through the appraisal process and to have roles evaluated against the profiles.

- **Provide effective line and project management training opportunities for managers of researchers, heads of department and equivalent.**
  - Promote relevant training opportunities e.g. through QUB

- **Ensure that excellent people management is championed throughout the organisation and embedded in institutional culture, through annual appraisals, transparent promotion criteria, and workload allocation.**
    - Revised staff promotion policy is being consulted on with the unions
    - The College has a transparent workload contribution model
    - The College has in place a system of annual appraisal and research is integral to this process

- **Seek to improve job security for researchers, for example through more effective redeployment processes and greater use of open-ended contracts, and report on progress.**
    - There are currently very few researchers at Stranmillis and mostly on temporary contracts as a result of short-term projects and associated project funding. The College is committed to seeking more substantial, long-term funding to allow more permanent contracts.

- **Consider researchers and their managers as key stakeholders within the institution and provide them with formal opportunities to engage with relevant organisational policy and decision-making.**
    - The Director of Research and Scholarship sits on Senior Leadership Committee, Academic Planning Committee and chairs the Research and Scholarship Committee. The CREU Research Fellow is a co-opted member of both the REF Steering Group and the Research and Scholarship Committee.

<u>Managers of researchers must:</u>

- **Undertake relevant training and development opportunities so that they can manage researchers effectively and fulfil their duty of care.**
    - Training needs should be identified and discussed through the annual appraisal process to ensure that these are planned in the annual staff development plan and associated budget
    - Ensure all relevant staff receive recent and relevant training (e.g. in-house or through online courses)

- **Familiarise themselves, and work in accordance with, relevant employment legislation and codes of practice, institutional policies, and the terms and conditions of grant funding.**
    - Ensure all relevant staff receive recent and relevant training (e.g. in-house or through online courses). Mentorship programme also works to support less experienced researchers/PIs.

- **Commit to, and evidence, the inclusive, equitable and transparent recruitment, promotion, and reward of researchers.**
    - The College's HR Department manages all recruitment and promotion procedures in line with College policies.

- **Actively engage in regular constructive performance management with their researchers.**
    - All staff engage with the annual appraisal process with their line manager.

- All researchers are given regular feedback and support on their performance in the course of research projects and through reviews of drafts of reports and articles.

- **Engage with opportunities to contribute to relevant policy development within their institution.**
    - Managers contribute to policy development at a departmental / College-wide level via Academic Leadership and Corporate Planning team.

<u>**Researchers must:**</u>

- **Ensure that they work in accordance with, institutional policies, procedures and employment legislation, as well as the requirements of their funder.**
    - Researchers should take time to read carefully all relevant policies and procedures as well as the particular details of the funder requirements.

- **Understand their reporting obligations and responsibilities.**
    - Researchers should take time to read and understand their obligations and responsibilities in line with relevant policies/funder requirements.

- **Positively engage with performance management discussions and reviews with their managers.**
    - Researchers should engage constructively in regular induction / probation / appraisal discussions with their manager.

- **Recognise and act on their role as key stakeholders within their institution and the wider academic community**
    - Researchers should be aware of their important role both within the College and as ambassadors of the College in the wider academic community.

Professional and Career Development

The College is committed to supporting staff Professional and Career Development, including of research active staff, and sets aside related financial resources as part of the annual budget setting processes. This includes funding for academic staff to undertake postgraduate study and related study leave, attendance at courses and conferences and investment in the support provided by a Visiting Professor arrangement. Budgets are not, however, unlimited and so processes are in place to manage applications made for use of the research staff development budget.

<u>**Institutions must:**</u>

- **Provide opportunities, structured support, encouragement and time for researchers to engage in professional development, recognising that researchers will pursue careers across a wide range of employment sectors.**

- Provide opportunities for relevant staff development, subject to budgetary constraints.

- **Provide training, structured support, and time for managers to engage in meaningful career development reviews with their researchers.**
    - This already forms part of the discussions at annual appraisal.

- **Ensure that researchers have access to professional advice on career management, across a breadth of careers.**
    - The College operates a successful mentorship scheme which is open to researchers
    - This is supplemented by further opportunities for advice and support from the College's Visiting Professor(s).

- **Provide researchers with opportunities, and time, to develop their research identity and broader leadership skills.**
    - The College is committed to supporting conference attendance and travel, despite budgetary pressures.
    - Opportunities are offered for staff to engage in Leadership training

- **Recognise that moving between, and working across, employment sectors can bring benefits to research and researchers, and support opportunities for researchers to experience this.**
    - Where appropriate, opportunities should be provided for experience between and across employment sectors.

- **Monitor, and report on, the engagement of researchers and their managers with professional development activities, and researcher career development reviews.**
    - The College HR Department monitor and reports on progress against the staff development plan.

Managers of Researchers must:

- **Engage in regular career development discussions with their researchers, including holding a career development review at least annually.**
    - Discussion of professional development needs already forms part of appraisal discussion.

- **Support researchers in exploring and preparing for a diversity of careers, for example, through the use of mentors and careers professionals, training, and secondments.**
    - The College already has a successful mentorship programme

- **Provide opportunities, structured support, encouragement and time for researchers to engage in professional development, supporting researchers to balance the delivery of their research and their own professional development.**
    - There is already discussion of professional development plans and reporting requirements in appraisal.

- **Identify opportunities, and allow time for their researchers to develop their research identity and broader leadership skills, and provide appropriate credit and recognition for their endeavours.**
    - Staff development is already recorded by the College's HR department and should be reported through annual appraisal.

- **Engage in leadership and management training to enhance their personal effectiveness, and to promote a positive attitude to professional development.**
    - Managers should be encouraged to apply for relevant professional development training through the College's staff development application procedures.
    - The College offers leadership development opportunities for both current and aspiring leaders.

<u>**Researchers must**</u>:

- **Take ownership of their career, identifying opportunities to work towards career goals, including engaging professional development.**
    - Researchers should identify training needs and potential training opportunities, and are encouraged to engage with courses offered by QUB and/or elsewhere, subject to approval by Senior Leadership through the Staff Development application procedures.

- **Explore and prepare for a range of employment options across different sectors, such as by making use of mentors, careers professionals, training and secondments.**
    - Researchers are encouraged to consider all relevant opportunities.

- **Maintain an up-to-date professional career development plan and build a portfolio of evidence demonstrating their experience that can be used to support job applications.**
    - Career development plans form part of the annual appraisal process, but researchers could consider developing a separate career development plan for discussion with their line manager.

- **Positively engage in career development reviews with their managers.**
    - Career development plans form part of the annual appraisal process,

- **Seek out, and engage with, opportunities to develop their research identity and broader leadership skills.**
    - Researchers are encouraged to discuss all relevant opportunities with their line manager.

- **Consider opportunities to develop their awareness and experience of the wider research system through, for example, knowledge exchange, policy development, public engagement and commercialisation.**
    - Researchers are encouraged to seek and take advantage of opportunities which arise in College through attendance at, for instance, regular lunchtime research seminars, College research workshops and report launches etc.

Synthesis of potential actions

Principle	Action	Timescale
Environment and Culture	Appoint Concordat Implementation Group (Research & Scholarship Committee)	Group to meet by end of October 2020
	Communicate the Concordat to staff by way of email, with implementation plan available on College website	Initial communication end of December 2020, with updates as necessary
	Ensure institutional policies and practices relevant to researchers are logged in College online document library	Agenda item for first meeting of Concordat Implementation Group
	Seek training opportunities for managers of researchers	By December 2021
	Hold research environment and culture review annually	By December 2021
Employment	Adapt induction procedures for research/academic staff	By December 2021
	Seek longer-term research funding to allow more full-time and permanent research contracts	By December 2021
Professional and Career Development	Provide opportunities, structured support, encouragement and time for researchers to engage in professional development	By December 2021
	Consider options to facilitate short-term sabbaticals for academic staff	By December 2021
	Maintain and seek to increase budget allocation for conference attendance and travel	December 2021