

Annual Report for the Concordat to Support the Career
Development of Researchers 2025
University of Bristol

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The Researcher Development Concordat at Bristol

This report provides an update on the ongoing implementations of the Researcher Development Concordat at Bristol. Additionally, it offers a brief overview of researcher development support in the 2024 calendar year. As many initiatives build upon work outlined in our [2024 report](#), we will not provide extensive details in this update.

Looking back: 5 years since signing the Researcher Development Concordat

After signing the revised Researcher Development Concordat in 2019, the Concordat group published an ambitious, co-produced [Concordat Action Plan](#) in 2020-21 to support the work environment and career development of its Researchers¹.

In the last 5 years, we have implemented several **key actions**:

- Overhauling of the teaching policy for Pathway 2 staff
- Inclusion of Pathway 2 in the Academic Promotions Framework
- Guidance on costing, appointing and developing research staff
- Rolling out of Principal Investigator Practice programme
- Creating and rolling out of Research in practice programme
- Annual Career Development programme
- Annual Academic Writing Programme
- Fellow support work - career development fund and development retreats

Collaboration is at the heart of the University's Concordat work. For this reason, each School was asked to appoint a Concordat Champion. Concordat Champions (CCs) are key stakeholders. They ensure Schools uphold the principles of the Concordat and represent Pathway 2 issues on School-internal committees such as School Research Committee. They also work closely with the Researcher Rep of their School.

At the same time, the University intensified its focus on Research Culture, appointing an Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor and team who have developed a [Research Culture Vision and Implementation Plan](#). This strategy unites all efforts to improve how we conduct research and the environment in which it takes place. The Concordat sits within this framework, focusing on supporting and advancing researcher careers.

¹ University of Bristol has around 1,200 research staff on open-ended contracts with fixed-term funding (Pathway 2 staff). They make up nearly half of the academic staff at the University of Bristol.

Implementing the Researcher Development Concordat at Bristol – Changes to governance

Research Culture Committee (RCC)

Chaired by the Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research Culture, the Research Culture Committee (RCC) leads research culture activity across the University. It oversees the delivery of Research England's Enhancing Research Culture funding and advises on strategies to promote a positive research culture and continuous improvement.

The Concordat is a key remit: The RCC manages the [Concordat Action Plan](#) and internal assessment processes, consulting key stakeholders such as the Research Staff Reps Committee and drawing on data from the All Staff Survey, regular monitoring, and Research Staff Reps feedback.

In February 2025, the RCC approved several changes to the Concordat governance and reporting processes to improve the decision-making process (addressed in the following).

Concordat Governance Group

The Concordat Governance Group (whose remit was to approve the annual Concordat Report) was replaced with an annual focus on the Researcher Concordat at the spring meeting. The RCC will oversee the implementation of the action plan and our internal assessment processes, which includes consultation with key stakeholders such as our [Research Staff Working Group](#) and the Concordat Champions Forum. It will also draw on data from surveys, e.g. our All Staff survey, regular internal monitoring processes, and data collected through Research Staff Reps.

Research Staff Working Group (RSWG)

Formerly Research Staff Working Party, the RSWG continues to report to the Research Culture Committee. Its small core membership enables more focused, in-depth discussions without placing undue demands on colleagues' time.

Research Staff Reps Committee

The Research Staff Reps Committee represents research staff from across the Institution with at least one Rep per school and facilitates engagement within the University. The Committee meets six times per year. The Reps Co-Chairs sit on the RSWG and the RCC.

Role descriptions for Concordat Champions

Initially, no formal role description was set to allow flexibility across Schools. As their understanding of their role evolved, CCs expressed a need for a formal role description to support visibility, recognition, and accountability. RCC approved the role description as best practice in February 2025 and shared with all Schools.

Concordat Champions Forum

The Concordat Champions network was formalised as a Forum, with three Faculty Co-Chairs appointed in February. These Co-Chairs represent the Forum on the RSWG and RCC, ensuring Concordat-related issues are formally raised through University governance.

Bristol Clear

Established in 2018, Bristol Clear is the University's Research Staff Hub, providing skills and career support for research-focused (Pathway 2) staff. Based within Human Resources in the People Development team, Bristol Clear works closely with the Researcher Reps and the Concordat Champions as well as the Research Staff Working Group (RSWG) and Research Culture Committee (RCC) to strategically advance researcher development.

Update on our 2024 Objectives

Annual Development Review

In 2024, 46% of Pathway 2 staff completed their annual review on Develop, a 5% increase from 2023. This is a positive start, and we recognise that even more discussions have likely taken place. We are now exploring ways to better capture these conversations and will actively work with Schools, Pls, Concordat Champions, Researcher Reps and Research Staff to ensure that the conversations take place and are recorded – where possible.

Academic Line Management Project

The Academic Line Management Project, launched in August 2024 for two years, aims to distribute responsibilities from single-point Heads of Schools to trained academic line managers. This supports staff experience, development, and careers within flexible structures. The project builds on past efforts, including a Working Group and pilot Schools that established key principles for academic line management.

Progress in AY 2024-25 to date has included:

- 6 early-adopter Schools implementing new structures with academic managers currently completing engagement with the revised 5-module LEAP (Leading Empowered Academic teams Programme) core training.
- 8 further Schools starting engagement with the Project reviewing their academic line management structures and support.
- Provision of a range of support to school leadership teams undertaking these reviews and changes: a Roadmap review and implementation plan, academic line manager Role Descriptors (choice from 3 model approaches), a template RACI (responsibility assignment tool), communications resources, facilitation of a School leaders' Practice Sharing Group, championing and steering from an Academic Sponsor and representative Project Board plus Faculty Change Management Partners and HR Business Partners embedded in the project to provide responsive, tailored support at all stages.

Objectives:

- All remaining Schools will commence engagement reviewing structures, making any necessary changes, identifying the best academic line managers and beginning their training and development programme, by the end of AY 2025-2026.
- Training and development provision will be continuously reviewed, with more work to come on extension and embedding of academic line manager knowledge and skill post-LEAP, through mechanisms including recommended peer-learning and digital signposts repository.
- Planning and implementing evaluation of all aspects – principles, support resources, implemented structures and development - at the end of 2025-26.
- Implement modest changes to the Academic Promotions Framework to ensure these best reflect and value the impact of effective leadership and management practices.

Teaching policy

The Research Culture Committee endorsed an update to the [Policy on Teaching Activities for Research Staff \(Pathway 2 Academics\)](#). While the policy itself remains unchanged, a summary of key points has been added to improve engagement and accessibility.

To monitor the implementation of the Teaching Policy, we launched an anonymous feedback form in early 2025. This allows staff to share their experiences with how the [Policy on Teaching Activities for Research Staff](#) is applied in their school. The Research Staff Working Group will review all feedback and provide regular reports to the Research Culture Committee.

Environment and Culture

In 2024 and 2025 significant action has taken place to implement this principle.

1. Management and leadership training

In 2025, the [Leadership Ethos framework](#) will be added to the University's Leadership Programmes and online resources. This will help researchers, research-relevant staff, and managers build leadership skills and improve the research culture.

2. Collaborative resources

The [Working Well Together resource](#) and [Inclusive Research Toolkit](#) have been under development through 2024 and will be launched and accessible in 2025. The former promoting collaborative working, team development and cohesion which will enhance research teams and the latter promoting inclusivity and inclusive practices.

3. Research integrity and open research practices

With the introduction of an [open research community manager](#) role in 2024, we have been adequately resourced to offer extensive open research training programmes as well as building a sense of community, which benefits researchers.

We are also continuing work on embedding and applying guidance on the teaching of research ethics to postgraduate students which will benefit current and future researchers, as well as improving ethics processes for public engagement research.

4. Reviewing the quality of research culture and seeking feedback

Researchers and research professionals can utilise an [open dropbox](#) to report issues and ideas relevant to research culture and these are reviewed regularly by [Research Culture Committee](#) and [acted upon](https://researchculture.blogs.bristol.ac.uk/2025/02/26/listening-and-hopefully-learning/). <https://researchculture.blogs.bristol.ac.uk/2025/02/26/listening-and-hopefully-learning/>

Governance changes have been enacted in 2025 which means that Concordat Champions now sit on Research Culture Committee providing a direct avenue for review and the Research Staff Working Party has been changed to ensure better feed into RCC and a clearer purpose.

5. Policies and practices

Since the development and introduction of the university's [overarching policy on research leave](#), the Research Culture Team has continued to liaise with Schools, principally via the School Research Directors' forum to openly share how Schools have applied this policy and the barriers faced. Implementation of this policy positively contributes to the environment of researchers providing equitable and transparent access to research leave and shared management of workloads. 16 Schools out of 27 have implemented the policy with a further 3 planning to implement key elements.

6. People, Culture and Environment (PCE) sub-profile

Preparatory work is being undertaken to ensure that the University is well-positioned to respond to the requirements for the People, Culture and Environment (PCE) sub-profile once they are announced. Two members of staff from an enabling programme of work called 'The REF Programme' have been retained from January 2025 to lead this within the REF Team.

The current focus is on developing materials and processes for Units of Assessment (UoAs) to consider the five research culture enablers that are being tested through the sector PCE Pilot: Strategy, Responsibility, Connectivity, Inclusivity and Development. This includes creating a framework to surface information relevant to the REF 2029 assessment period (Jan 21 - Dec 28) to understand the journey travelled to date and future direction of travel. Notably, telling this

story in our PCE statements will require documented examples and evidence to support a narrative that honestly reflects the challenges and strengths experienced at both disciplinary and institutional levels. Following a desk-based review, interviews with key informants and stakeholders across the University's diverse and broad research community will be undertaken to ensure a comprehensive view is captured.

6. Understanding Precarity event

In July 2024 we held an event on "understanding precarity" to allow researchers to have an open and constructive conversation to identify potential solutions to fixed-term funding. The Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research Culture hosted the event and summarised proposed solutions in a [blog post](#). In March 2025, a similar event will be held for Technicians and Research Professionals to allow them to have open discussions and voice their ideas.

7. University Research Committee Observer Scheme

Pathway 2 representatives are offered the opportunity to observe a meeting of University Research Committee, the primary research planning Committee for the University. It is chaired by the PVC for Research and Innovation and reports directly to Senate. This new initiative provides valuable insight into University decision-making processes and forms part of the University's commitment to promoting openness and transparency in how we work, as outlined in our [Research Culture Vision](#).

In addition to increasing understanding of how the University is governed and managed, we also hope that the scheme will encourage observers to consider further leadership roles as part of their career development.

8. Highlighting the Researcher Development Concordat

The PD Team have been awarded Research England funding to create a short information film about the Researcher Concordat to familiarise researchers and their managers with the Concordat and act as a conversation starter. The film is scheduled to be released in June 2025.

Employment

1. Ensure open, transparent and merit-based recruitment, which attracts excellent researchers, using fair and inclusive selection and appointment practices.

All our academic pathway 2 vacancies are contested through open access competition and follow our core hiring process and guidance which is inclusive by design. Structural rigour is at the heart of our hiring methodology, aimed at mitigating biases through use of consistent structure and a pre-agreed picture of what strong candidate responses look like. Questioning structure aims to draw out evidence predictive of future strong in role performance. Future work in this area will focus on further developing assessment use and structure to complement the main panel interview, providing additional role specific assessment methods that build a 360-degree evidence base of candidate suitability.

2. 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.

We launched a re-designed process for redeployment in February 2024, that increased accessibility of vacancies for individuals at risk of redundancy, while investing in on the ground support for individuals throughout redeployment. The volume of P2 staff redeployed into new P2 roles in the 12 months post-launch is identical to that of the previous 12 months - this needs to be considered against the volume of P2 staff securing non-research-centric roles in the organisation; this data is more difficult to extract but will be addressed via the soon to be completed internal mobility dashboard. We are soon to relaunch the Pathway 2 survey on redeployment for qualitative feedback on the changes over the first year.

3. 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.

We continue to ensure that the policy framework provided by the Academic Career Pathway Framework and the Academic Promotions Framework remains up to date and continues to provide academic researchers with clear career pathways and describes the academic contributions we value and recognise at the University.

The Pay and Grading project has resulted in several changes to the University of Bristol's pay and grading structure which are being implemented over three years from 2024. While these changes apply to all staff, several changes will directly affect academic researchers including:

- additional spine point to grade I (from August 2024)
- additional annual leave for those on grade I (from January 2025)
- additional spine points to grades J and K and the removal of the bottom spine point from grade I (from August 2025)
- additional spine point to grade L, bottom spine points of Grade J and K will be removed, new grade created for Associate Professors as well as spine points added to the top and removed from the bottom of grade M ranges (from August 2026)

Looking forward, we aim to refresh the University's reward strategy, identifying opportunities to distinguish the university as a top 10/50 employer and compete effectively for talent.

Professional and Career Development

Significant efforts were made in 2024 to enhance career development awareness and support, and this work will continue in 2025.

1. We offer researchers a range of opportunities and structured support to facilitate their professional development. Key resources include the Bristol Clear and Research in practice programmes, researcher development initiatives provided by DREI, and teaching development support through the Bristol Institute for Learning and Teaching.
 2. One of the ways we provide training, support and time for managers to engage in meaningful career development reviews with their researchers is the Principal Investigator Practice programme. The programme is designed to support researchers transitioning into the role of Principal Investigator (PI) and/or leading a research project. It provides guidance for PIs and Research Fellows (RFs) in their practice as new managers while fostering connections among peers at a similar career stage, enabling them to progress together as a cohort. Developed over the past two years and piloted with two cohorts, the programme has now been established as an annual development initiative, open to up to 40 participants per year.
 3. We want to ensure that researchers have access to career management advice. We recognise that we cannot provide advice on all career options for researchers. We have therefore developed resources that researchers can use independently to progress their careers, such as a resource about how to make the most of their 10 days development time. We also run workshops which support researchers create an online presence like LinkedIn workshops. Bristol Clear supports researchers to think about their career early to maximise the time to consider their next steps. In 2024, we highlighted this message by launching a short [Bristol Clear film](#). Reviewers of the film commented that they “found it engaging, positive and empathetic to the unique and complicated position that P2 staff can find themselves in.”
- In 2024, a notable new initiative under Bristol Clear was the Career Development Programme. This programme enabled a cohort of 25 researchers to engage in a three-day exploration of their career aspirations—both within and beyond academia—and identify the steps necessary to achieve their goals.
4. We provide researchers with career development resources, mentoring schemes and 1:1s. These give them the opportunity and time to think about their priorities and develop their research identity. Researchers can practice leadership skills by becoming a Research Staff Rep for their school. They can also apply to attend one of the University’s Leadership Programmes, GW4 Crucible and other leadership workshops provided by Rip.
 5. Moving between employment sectors brings great benefits to researchers. It allows them to broaden their horizons, find new networking partners and collaboration between sectors can result in more creative work outputs. There is a lot of support for the work across sectors, e.g. the Elizabeth Blackwell Institute runs regular collaboration events and is working on a collaboration programme and the Enterprise and Innovation team run regular events and masterclasses that interface between research and the commercial world.

Other examples of employment-related events include the [Annual Aegis Professors Event](#) run by the Science Office. Here researchers and students have the opportunity to meet, hear from and interact with honorary Professors recruited from industry, business and government and, as a cohort, represent a hugely diverse range of expertise.

Working with Faculties

The University has restructured from six faculties to three. Recognising that researchers' support needs vary across faculties, we are actively collaborating with each of our three faculties to better understand their needs and provide tailored support. The newly appointed Co-Chairs of Concordat Champions will work closely with the Faculty APVCs for Research and Innovation to ensure that the Researcher Concordat principles are adhered to in their Schools and Faculties.

Each of the three new faculties has provided a report for work done in the 2024-25 academic year, together with suggested actions for 2025:

Arts & Social Sciences and Law²

The number of Pathway 2 staff within the Faculty of Arts, Law, and Social Sciences tends to be relatively low, which enables a personal approach to mentoring and support.

Pathway 2 staff are usually mentored by their Project Lead, who can offer regular 1:1 meetings, and tailored support, disseminate details of seminars, conferences and workshops, and conduct an annual development review. Individual Schools offer discipline-specific training, which is often highly relevant to Pathway 2 staff, for example, the School of Economics offers interview and presentation training before the annual international "job market" for Lectureships.

The Faculty is a member of the [British Academy Early Career Researcher Network](#) and also has an active ECR network which organises events and activities that are open to all early career academics. It has a mailing list of 170 members and Committee members represent 8 Schools from across the Faculty. In 2024-25, the network has prioritised grant writing and networking with a focus on research collaboration.

Where possible, research committees within Schools include Pathway 2 representation.

An area to review in 2025-26 is Pathway 2 researcher representation within School research strategies; new documents are being prepared in some Schools.

Science and Engineering³

Schools in the Faculty of Science and Engineering have been actively seeking to incorporate the Researcher Concordat aims:

An activity from Chemistry that could be highlighted is related to annual staff reviews for PW2. During one of the last School research committees in 2023, the very low percentage of annual staff reviews for PW2 staff in School of Chemistry (~10%) was discussed concerning the importance of the environment statement for the next REF and was supported by the concordat champion. This question was raised during the School EDI committee and became a key element of our action plan (as part of the Athena Swan action plan). Led by Lucy Shaw, a subgroup of the EDI committee regularly met to establish a strategy to increase the number of PW2 staff reviews within the School. The strategy was based on (1) a more official email sent regularly from School to a line manager when a PW2 staff review is needed and (2) the creation of a set of clear guidance for the reviewer and the reviewee on the topics to be discussed during the annual staff review (and how to fill in the form on Develop). The guidance is available on our School SharePoint This strategy was implemented in the Fall of 2024, and we

² Number of Arts & Social Sciences and Law Pathway 2 staff in Dec 2024 = 80

³ Number of Science & Engineering Pathway 2 staff in Dec 2024 = 542

will closely monitor the percentage of PW2 annual staff reviews completed this year and correct the strategy accordingly.

The School of Earth Sciences has established an Early Career Researcher Forum that provides a school-level forum to discuss issues related to the career development of academic staff who have yet to procure a permanent position. Its main aims include championing a supportive culture for research staff within the School, ensure the School is developing best EDI practices with respect to the ECR Community and to contribute to the Career Development component of the School's Athena SWAN Charter submissions, and to support the School in implementing its action plans.

In early 2024 the Engineering Faculty Concordat Champions and Researcher Reps surveyed both researchers and PIs to gauge the impact of rises in Immigration Costs (visas, NHS surcharge, etc) on the cost of living cost and recruitment and retention of research staff in the Faculty of Engineering. The results showed that the rise in these costs has a detrimental effect, especially on researchers with families, e.g. many grants do not cover the cost of visa fees for family members. PIs in Engineering subjects reported significant difficulties in recruitment and retention of researchers. The plan for 2025 is to try to address this issue at the University level, as many other institutions already cover immigration costs from university-level budgets.

As we implement our strategy in Faculty of Science and Engineering, we will ensure that our ambition to continue to deliver world-class research is underpinned by a robust mechanism for supporting and developing our research staff. We are implementing new ways of supporting fellowship candidates across the faculty, ensuring that no matter what career stage, our fellows receive bespoke training and support to enable success. As part of the launch of our research accelerator programme, we will also provide the staff involved with career development and opportunities to grow. We will continually monitor, evaluate, and refine our staff development activities in consultation with our researchers to ensure best practice is shared.

Faculty of Health and Life Sciences⁴

Researcher representation in decision-making processes: Several Schools in the Faculty are bringing Pathway 2 Representatives into school research committees, to improve two-way dialogue between school management and research staff. Further, many schools now promote involving research staff on grant-funded research staff recruitment panels.

A focus for the coming year is to ensure opportunities for dialogue between researchers (or their reps/advocates) and school management structures in every school.

Researcher Management: The introduction of academic line management in some schools as part of the Academic Line Management Project has provided Section Leads with the opportunity to discuss the management of Pathway 2 researchers as part of their development conversations with the Pathway 1 staff they manage.

Objectives for the coming year: Academic line managers to include management of Pathway 2 researchers in development conversations, as well as better signposting of new PIs to inclusive leadership training opportunities to embed best practice from the start.

Training, mentorship and career support: Many schools now signpost mentoring schemes. Some schools have introduced small pots of money for training opportunities. In Life Sciences we have asked the pre-award Finance Team to highlight opportunities to add costs for researcher (and PI) training and development into grant applications. School Managers regularly remind staff to include training provisions in grants where possible, as well as highlight awards that more junior Pathway 2 staff are eligible to apply for. Some schools have introduced CV

⁴ Number of Health and Life Sciences Pathway 2 staff in Dec 2024 = 569

clinics, grant writing workshops and buddy systems between Pathway 2 researchers and new fellows. An objective for 2025 is to share best practices across all schools within the faculty.

Networking opportunities: Many schools have recently introduced Research Awaydays, or research showcase events to bring together researchers across each school. A new cross-faculty ECR-led event called 'FAB' is being piloted to bring together ECRs from across the faculty to discuss research in progress.

With new school mergers coming next year, we must prioritise events that foster connection and collaboration within schools and across disciplines.

Looking forward - 2025: Building stronger collaborations

For the coming year, our plan is to build even stronger collaborations across the University which support researchers to thrive and conduct high-quality research.

Human Resources has undergone a restructuring, and a Director of Talent and Career Development has been appointed, effective April 2025. This role will oversee the Resourcing, People Development, Reward and Benefits, and Employability teams, driving the "World-Class Careers for Talented People" initiative. We will collaborate closely with the new director to support and advance the careers of research staff. This is a welcome opportunity to implement meaningful changes.

In addition to the objectives mentioned throughout the report, plans for 2025 include:

Research Culture

To improve our collaborative approach to implementing the Researcher Concordat across the University, the Researcher Concordat Reports feeds into the [Research Culture Vision and Implementation Plan](#). We will continue this work in 2025 as this will allow us greater impact.

Key behaviours identified in the 24-25 Research Culture Implementation Plan are:

- Promoting openness and transparency in the way we work
- Empowering staff and students through effective leadership and management at all levels
- Providing a range of stable career opportunities for those involved in research
- Embedding diversity in research and those involved in research
- Encouraging internal and external collaboration and fostering innovative approaches
- Reduce bureaucracies and improve consistencies across the University

REF 2029

We recognise that the Researcher Concordat is closely aligned with the PCE element of REF 2029. We are working in close partnership with the Associate Director of Research Excellence and their team who are preparing the ground, ready to implement the new People, Culture and Environment indicators for REF 2029 at University of Bristol.

Researcher Development Concordat Approval Process

The Research Culture Committee reviews and approves the Concordat Report before it is submitted for final approval by the University Research Committee (URC), chaired by the PVC for Research and Innovation.

Signature on behalf of the governing body:



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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.