



Annual Report for the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers 2026

University of Bristol

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Overview of Research Culture at University of Bristol

The [University of Bristol's vision and strategy for research, enterprise and innovation](#) can only be successfully delivered if it can support the people involved in the research process, and create an enabling and supportive environment¹.

The University of Bristol's commitment to fostering a positive research culture is reflected in the creation of the position of [Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research Culture and Environment](#), and the establishment of a **Research Culture Committee**, a formal sub-committee of University Research Committee.

The culture work at Bristol² centres on valuing and supporting the teams and individuals that enable and deliver research in all its forms, through a positive, thriving and sustainable research environment and culture. These are combined in a [Research Culture Vision 2030](#), supported by an [annual implementation plan](#)³.

The 5 key areas of focus are:

- Promoting openness and transparency in how we work
- Empowering staff and students through effective leadership and management at all levels
- Providing a range of stable career opportunities for those who enable and deliver research
- Embedding diversity in those who enable and deliver research
- Encouraging internal and external collaboration, and foster innovative approaches

The **Research Culture Committee** was set up to lead on research culture activity across the University. It includes oversight and delivery of Research England Enhancing Research Culture funding, overseeing the annual implementation plan and advising on strategy to ensure a positive research culture and a cycle of continuous improvement.

Groups feeding into the Research Culture Committee are

Research Staff Reps Committee (RSRC)

Each School has a researcher rep and together they make up the **RSRC**. The **RSRC** discusses matters arising from researchers within the University and feed these matters back to the Research Staff Working Group (RSWG) to ensure that research staff's views and concerns are heard and fed into relevant University decisions and processes.

Concordat Champions Forum

The **Concordat Champions Forum** works to ensure the University of Bristol's commitments under the Concordat are translated into meaningful action. It represents and channels research staff perspectives, informing University decision-making, policy development, and institutional processes.

¹ University of Bristol has 1,500 research staff employed through externally funded projects open-ended contracts "with fixed-term funding". Also termed "Pathway 2", researchers make up 50% of the UoB workforce.

² Bristol's culture work is largely supported by our Research England Enhancing Research Culture allocation.

³ The 2025-26 plan will be published shortly.

Research Staff Working Group (RSWG)

The core membership of the RSWG consists of the **Chairs of the RSRC and CCF**, Research Culture Team and People Development reps. The **RSWG reports directly to the Research Culture Committee** and is chaired by group members on a rotational basis. The group's remit is to ensure that research staff's views and concerns are heard and fed into relevant University decisions and processes following undertaking any necessary additional work.

From 2026 onwards, the RSWG will be responsible for creating and overseeing the Researcher Development Concordat implementation plan and annual report.

Environment and Culture

Management and Leadership training

[Leadership Ethos](#) was developed at Bristol through Enhancing Research Culture funding and is now freely available. It supports the development of inclusive leadership skills at all career stages, helping researchers, research-related staff and managers to strengthen leadership capability and enhance research culture.

Collaborative Resources

Supported by Enhancing Research Culture funding, the [Working Well Together](#) (WWT) resource was co-produced with over 460 staff and launched in 2025. The freely available, self-serve website supports interdisciplinary research groups to reflect on local culture, take action, and embed positive, sustainable research practices suited to their context.

The [Inclusive Research Hub](#), supported by Enhancing Research Culture funding, launched in 2025 as a living resource developed by the Inclusive Research Collective in collaboration with People Development. It supports researchers across disciplines to reflect on inclusive practice, access key concepts, and explore practical, context-specific approaches to making research more equitable, with ongoing contributions encouraged.

Research integrity and open research practices

Our open research community manager continues to offer training programmes across Bristol for researchers and works in collaboration with the UK Reproducibility Network to understand the gaps and opportunities for open research at Bristol.

Workplace Culture and Inclusion

Over the past year, the University has undertaken a comprehensive review of its [EDI governance](#), leading to the establishment of a robust Workplace Culture and Inclusion framework. This approach ensures that the work is embedded as a cross-cutting priority, supporting all staff across the institution. In parallel, a common Terms of Reference has been introduced for Staff Community Networks, providing greater clarity and consistency for these vital peer support groups and reinforcing their role in fostering an inclusive and supportive working environment.

Policies and practice

Work continues to understand and address barriers to equitable local practices on research leave, the Research Culture team continues to review applications of the University Research Leave policy at the local level.

Strategy, people, and research environment

Research Excellence Framework (REF) teams and Research Culture teams are working closely together in 2025, 2026 and beyond to ensure that the University is well-positioned to support Researchers and Research Environment and Culture, helping School Leads and Unit of Assessment Leads to understand their own cultures and practices and where these can be strengthened.

University Research Committee Observer Scheme

Pathway 2 representatives were 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 initiative has been a success with overwhelmingly positive feedback from the Committee and Observers. This scheme continues into 2026. The scheme provides valuable insight into University decision-making and provides experience to observers of what research leadership can be like. It is the hope that this will encourage observers to consider leadership roles as part of their career development, and/or be involved in research decision making at their local level.

Engaging with the Researcher Concordat, Broadening understanding of Researcher Concordat Champions and Researcher Representative roles

To strengthen engagement with the Researcher Concordat among researchers and PIs, Bristol Clear secured internal funding (through Research England) to produce a [short film](#) highlighting Bristol's Concordat activity. Launched in July 2025, the film was supported by a [blog post](#), featured at the 2025 [Festival of Research Culture](#), shared across Schools by Concordat Champions and Researcher Reps. It is included in welcome communications to new researchers on an ongoing basis.

Building on this momentum, Concordat Champions and Researcher Representatives have been awarded internal funding (through Research England) to create infographics and animations describing both of their roles. These will be hosted on People Development webpages and on the institutional Research Culture blog. These resources will serve as assets to help raise awareness of the concordat and representation structure and boost engagement across the institution.

Career prospects beyond academia

Bristol Doctoral College, with support from Research Culture Team is co-developing and piloting a training unit which aims to address the development of industry skills and capabilities for Postgraduate Research Students to increase their employability and career prospects beyond academia.

Employment

Academic Line Management Project

The Academic Line Management Project continues to embed devolved academic line management across the University, redistributing responsibilities previously held by single-point Heads of School to trained academic line managers. All 26 Schools have commenced reviews of their academic line management structures, guided by agreed principles and supported by a senior Academic Sponsor, a representative Project Board, practice-sharing groups, and professional services partners. Academic line management is now well embedded in many Schools and plays a key role in supporting colleagues across academic pathways and career development. Over 180 academics are participating in the bespoke five-module LEAP development programme, complemented by School-based peer learning groups that promote shared learning and good practice, including discussion of common scenarios such as supporting researchers on fixed-term contracts. Core definitions, role descriptors, guidance, and tools have been refined and published on a dedicated intranet site.

An evaluation approach has been developed and piloted in five Schools, with early findings highlighting the value of devolved line management in improving communication, providing regular structured one-to-one support, and enabling more frequent career development and promotion discussions. Variability in practice and clarity of role expectations remain key areas for continued improvement. Minor amendments to the Academic Promotions Framework have been introduced to better recognise effective leadership and management. By July 2026, all Schools are expected to have agreed devolved line management arrangements and scheduled engagement with LEAP, with plans underway to transition the project's principles, practices, and evaluation into business-as-usual activity.

New Manager Support

In parallel, the People Development team is enhancing support for all new managers by developing a more flexible, multi-format management development offer that builds on existing programmes and strengthens peer connection. A strong emphasis across all management development activity is placed on supporting individual career development and fostering a culture in which colleagues can thrive.

Ensure open, transparent and merit-based recruitment using fair and inclusive practices

We have focussed on strengthening the structure and use of assessment methods alongside panel interviews, introducing additional role-specific tools to build a more rounded, 360-degree evidence base of candidate suitability. Over the past 18 months, more than 400 academic staff have completed updated recruitment training, delivered in person or online by the Resourcing Team. This two-hour course supports fair and inclusive decision-making by emphasising evidence-based assessment and the mitigation of bias.

Improve job security for researchers through effective redeployment and increased use of open-ended contracts

A Pathway 2 redeployment survey was conducted in 2025, receiving over 200 responses. The findings are currently being analysed and will inform future improvements to redeployment practices. The survey will be relaunched to gather further qualitative feedback on developments during the first year of change. In addition, a support group for externally funded research

professionals was established in collaboration with People Development to discuss redeployment experiences and challenges; this group will continue to operate in 2026.

National Precarity Network

Bristol is involved in the National Precarity Network⁴ led by Nottingham University. Bristol staff are co-leads on each of the workstreams (data & evidence, outreach & organising, making the ask); this is a significant national sector movement to address career precarity for researchers and research professional staff.

Provide clear, transparent recognition, reward, and promotion pathways that reflect diverse contributions and circumstances

We keep the Academic Career Pathway and Academic Promotions Frameworks up to date, providing researchers with transparent career pathways and clarity on the contributions valued by the University.

The Pay and Grading project is delivering phased improvements from 2024–26, several of which directly benefit academic researchers, including additional spine points across multiple grades, increased annual leave for Grade I staff, the creation of a new Associate Professor grade, and revisions to senior grade ranges. Alongside these changes, work is planned to refresh the University's reward strategy to strengthen Bristol's position as a leading employer and support the attraction and retention of talent.

Enhancing support for all staff – bereavement and carer leave

During the reporting period, the University of Bristol enhanced its staff support provision by introducing two new policies, replacing the previous combined approach to bereavement and caring-related leave. The new Bereavement and Compassionate Leave policy increases paid bereavement leave, removes manager discretion to provide clarity and consistency, extends provision to include pregnancy loss, and broadens compassionate leave to cover a wider range of significant life events. In parallel, the new Dependants, Carers and Domestic Emergency Leave policy provides clearer guidance on emergency leave, simplifies access to carers' leave, and strengthens signposting to additional support for sensitive situations, ensuring more accessible, consistent and compassionate support for staff.

⁴ Working title

Professional Development of Researchers

Significant efforts were made in 2025 to enhance career development awareness and support, and this work will continue in 2026.

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.

Principal Investigator Programme

One of the ways we provide training, support and time for managers is the Principal Investigator Practice programme. The programme supports researchers transitioning into PI or project leadership roles. It provides guidance for PIs and Research Fellows, fosters peer connections, and enables career development through shared learning and cohort-based progression.

Career programme

The Career programme was designed to give researchers space to reflect on their strengths and values and explore future career possibilities beyond academia. *Get Clear on Your Career* was delivered to 19 participants through four online workshops held monthly from October 2025 to February 2026, combining self-reflection, group discussion, and employment sector research. All workshops have now been completed successfully, with peer coaching and guest speakers enhancing the participant experience. An evaluation will inform how the programme is delivered for the remainder of 2026.

Mentoring

Following the success of existing mentoring schemes, including Bristol CLEAR, the University has launched the UoB Staff Mentoring Network to broaden access to high-quality mentoring across the institution. The Network brings together and expands previous provision and is open to all main staff groups, including research and academic staff, technicians, professional services and operational colleagues, at all career stages.

Research staff on all pathways may enrol at any point during the year to seek a mentor aligned to their development goals, including mentors from outside their discipline or beyond academia. This inclusive, flexible approach is intended to enhance the mentoring experience and extend the career and cultural benefits of mentoring across the researcher community.

Faculty Summaries

Following a restructure, the University now has 3 Faculties. 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 Co-Chairs of Concordat Champions are working closely with the Faculty APVCs for Research and Innovation to ensure that the Researcher Concordat principles are adhered to in their Schools and Faculties and have provided a summary on work undertaken in the 2025-26 academic year and planned actions for 2026-27:

Faculty of Arts, Law and Social Sciences (ALSS)⁵

This is the largest Faculty in the University with a diverse range of Schools. Overall, the number of research-only staff remains relatively low, with a mix of independent and collaborative research projects. The new Faculty Concordat Champion Co-Chair roles created in 2024-25 provide a useful focus for connection and engagement across the Schools through the central Concordat Champions Forum as well as 1:1 meetings.

Overall, the number of Concordat Champions and research staff representatives in ALSS continues to grow, and new CCs are offered an individual induction session with People Development and the Faculty Co-Chair as an important first step in building support and communication for research managers as well as researchers.

Day-to-day mentoring and guidance in relation to University structures and wider career development opportunities is overseen by research leads who are usually the Project Lead or named mentor on an individual grant. These relationships lead to strong engagement with formal processes such as Staff Development Reviews and Annual Research Reviews. In some Schools, Pathway 2 staff are REF reviewers and included in calibration exercises. Researchers seeking additional or subsequent funding have full access to internal communication systems such as PIVOT, as well as peer review processes.

Concordat Champions provide another layer of support and guidance, including individual and group meetings, in person and remotely. Mentoring schemes within Schools and the Faculty also offer mechanisms for developing support networks between researchers and Pathway 1 staff. For example, the School of Law runs a mentoring scheme for Pathway 2 and early career staff, while the Faculty is a member of the [British Academy Early Career Researcher Network](#) and also has an active ECR network which is open to all researchers.

Researcher representation at formal committees has been introduced in some Schools, which complements ongoing work to continue to raise the profile of the Concordat among research managers. This has been facilitated by the formalisation of the CC role description and refreshed internal and external webpages.

The School of Humanities is leading on work to develop comprehensive guidance for how responsibilities under the Concordat are actualised at the specific level of the School. This concretises earlier improvements in induction procedures and seeks to make new improvements in methods for collating, advertising and allocating teaching opportunities. Once this has been formalised, guidance will be shared between other Schools and across the University to spread best practice.

⁵ ALSS Number of Researchers/Pathway 2 staff = 128

Faculty of Science and Engineering (FSE)⁶

Over the past 12 months, the Faculty of Science and Engineering has made good progress in improving transparency, visibility and access to development opportunities for Pathway 2 researchers, with several strong examples of effective practice across Schools. Champion-led activity at Faculty level has focused on increasing access to teaching and supervision opportunities, strengthening supervision track records, and improving consistency in employment and development processes.

Central actions led by CADE included the transparent, central advertising of undergraduate and MSc project supervision opportunities, practical workshops to support Pathway 2 staff in developing supervision experience, clarification of processes for inclusion as PhD co-supervisors, and work with HR to improve clarity and consistency in RA/SRA appointment guidance. There has also been exploratory discussion on longer-term models to enhance career sustainability for Pathway 2 staff.

At School level, Pathway 2 researchers have benefited from increased visibility through attendance at School Assemblies, clearer routes to teaching opportunities, and more structured engagement with School governance, including research committees. Several Schools have introduced or strengthened formal mechanisms to increase completion of annual development reviews, support promotion applications, and encourage broader teaching and supervision experience.

Targeted initiatives included strengthened community-building and information sharing in Chemistry, a sustained early career researcher forum and mentoring offer in Earth Sciences, focused development and funder-facing town halls in EEME, and dedicated support in Computer Science to encourage regular career development conversations. Across Schools, there has been continued emphasis on including researcher voices in School-level discussions and improving transparency in local practices.

Key areas for development in the coming year include managing the workload of School Champions and improving the systematic sharing of good practice across the Faculty.

Faculty of Health and Life Sciences (FHLS)⁷

In FHLS over the last few months school structures have changed (going from 9 to 6 schools), however new CCs and PW2 reps are now in place in all schools. All schools have PW2 representation on school level research committees, and many have or are planning dedicated websites, SharePoint or Teams channels for PW2 focused resources and policies. Across the faculty there are increased efforts to share and promote best practice between schools including around induction, promotion of development reviews and mentorship.

Multiple schools within the faculty have held, or are planning, PW2 focused networking events and career development sessions. These range from awayday style events in the Dental school, to the 'Career compass' career development series in Biochemistry and Biomedical Sciences. CCs in the faculty (from the Medical school) are leading on efforts to create accessible videos and infographics to make researchers more aware of the concordat, following a successful application to the Research Culture Fund, made in conjunction with the PW2 reps.

Areas for development of the coming year include making teaching opportunities equitable and ensuring uptake of development reviews.

⁶ FSE Number of Researchers/Pathway 2 staff = 618

⁷ FHLS Number of Researchers/Pathway 2 staff = 733

Key objectives in the coming reporting period

We are in the process of creating a 3-year Researcher Development Concordat Implementation plan and will publish this once it has been finalised. It will be closely aligned to the Research Culture Vision and Implementation Plan.

Strengthening relationships

The Research Culture team are undertaking extensive visits across 2026 to each academic School to understand opportunities and best practices in research environment and culture, as well as the barriers and challenges. This significant relationship building and community understanding will help forge connections to tackle research culture-relevant issues at the local level, which will benefit researchers across Bristol.

The priority focus areas for 2026-2029 are:

- Explore how role progression is implemented at the school level, supporting transparent and equitable researcher career development.
- Strengthen local researcher induction and encourage engagement with staff reviews to ensure consistent access to information, support, and development opportunities.
- Promote awareness and effective use of the 10-day (pro-rata) continuous professional development allocation and share guidance on a variety of approaches to continuous professional development by sharing good practice and increasing awareness across Schools.
- Explore options to strengthen support for international research staff, informed by Concordat commitments to Workplace Culture and Inclusion and sector practice at comparator institutions.
- Support actions arising from engagement with the national research staff visa network.
- Strengthen support for Researcher Reps and Concordat Champions through partnership working and development opportunities.
- Encourage engagement with new academic line management training.

Approval process

The Research Culture Committee, chaired by the APVC Research Culture and Environment, 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:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Guy Poppy". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Guy Poppy
Pro Vice-Chancellor - Research and Innovation

Contact for queries:
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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.