

2025 Annual Statement

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

Universities and Research Institutes

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*)

Our new [University Research and Innovation Strategy](#) (2024-2030) was published in February 2025. Reflecting significant developments in recent years, it outlines key strategic objectives, including fostering a resilient research culture, enhancing excellence and impact, driving sustainable societal change and maximising research visibility through partnerships and engagement.

Excellence is central to our research strategy. Our research underpins impactful partnerships as well as providing a creative and supportive environment and inclusive research culture for all of those who work at the University. Our strategic objectives are: (i) to support and strengthen a positive and resilient research culture; (ii) to strengthen our culture of research excellence, impact and knowledge exchange by investing in skills and leadership development; (iii) to advance our world-class research to lead a transition to sustainable and fair future societies and; (iv) to build on our strategic partnerships and public engagement to enhance the visibility, accessibility and impact of our research, maximising its potential to make a difference in the real world.

Our research and innovation community comprises a dynamic collective of academic and research staff, professional services staff and research students, united by an ambition to drive discovery, challenge convention and shape a better future. For a research-intensive university of our size, this requires investment in researcher development, leadership and supporting a research culture to enable these ambitions. Our aim is to sustain and enhance an inclusive research culture that enables and supports research excellence, and to develop researchers at all levels. Recruiting, retaining, recognising, and most importantly developing researchers to be leaders in their areas of expertise, and who support the success of other researchers, is central to this commitment. We also signed the [Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment](#) in 2023, to increase fairness and transparency in research assessment and broaden recognition of different research contributions. We are implementing this through our 2024 - 2028 Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA) action plan.

At an individual level, all academic staff have a staff development account and an allowance supporting their development. This is complemented by a training programme specific to research staff, an open staff training programme and funding for external programmes such as Aurora and AdvanceHE. Developing research leadership in an open and inclusive way is fostered by reserving places for researchers on university-level research committees such as the University Committee for Research and Innovation (our prime University body for Research Governance) as well as on the Committee for Researcher Development and Postgraduate Research Studies.

Our commitment to research staff is reflected in our history in securing the HR in Excellence in Research Award, last awarded in March 2023 for the twelfth year running. However renewal of this award is currently on hold, for reconsideration in September 2026 while we appraise the best approach going forwards. It should also be noted that the University's research governance structure has been revised for the academic year 2025-26 in an effort to streamline and reduce duplication, improved decision making and wider involvement of staff in underpinning projects and task and finish groups.

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*)

As part of our commitment to deliver research excellence, a new Research Culture Programme Board was established in 2024 and is responsible for mapping, coordinating, prioritising and evaluating new and existing activity to strengthen our research cultures. The Board is co-chaired by the Head of the Research and Innovation Directorate and the Associate PVC for the Doctoral and Researcher College. The co-chairs and membership represent both academic and professional services functions and all career stages, from PGR students to senior research leaders. The purpose of the Board is to drive the development of a positive research culture, using the SCOPE framework as a guide. Importantly, it will be assessing baseline indicators of research culture using tools being developed specifically for the sector, so that we can evaluate progress against those indicators. It has identified core values that drive the work on research culture, drawn from surveys and discussions with our research communities and will therefore support the Researcher Development (RD) Concordat wider agenda. Our Research Culture Commitment was published in Spring 2025, setting out our ambitions for enhancing our Research culture.

The RD Concordat Action Plan (2025-2030) reflects our ambitions for early career researchers (ECR) at Reading, which routinely number between 270-300 members of staff. Schools with relatively large numbers of research staff have developed structures whereby their voices are informing policy and practice. Four Schools have a Director of Postgraduate Researchers (or equivalent) appointed and we continue to encourage similar appointments in other schools to help share and disseminate best practice. Much of the focus over the last year has been on cementing a more integrated and co-ordinated support offer from professional service partners, community building, career support and conducting the CEDARS survey to gauge how staff views have changed over time.

Following a review of our Rewards and Recognition processes in 2024, we now offer promotion workshops, specifically targeted to our early career researcher community across all Schools. This has been extremely helpful where cohorts of postdoctoral researchers are fewer and where support isn't uniformly available to the same degree locally as in the larger science-based Schools. We intend to use 2025 as a baseline to monitor staff promotions across a range of protected characteristics and monitor progression over the next five years. Linked to this, a new panel is being established to review future University fellowship applications, intended to support mid-career

researchers in the arts, humanities, and social sciences which will supplement existing support provided through our Research, Engagement and Innovation Office and from local mentors.

The Researcher Development Manager recently joined a National Precarity Working group (led by University of Nottingham) to understand best practice and lessons learnt around pilots of new schemes which will hopefully benefit staff on fixed term contracts in the future. Liaising with HR colleagues, we aim to identify feasible steps forwards in reducing the dependency on repeated fixed term contracts and adopt feasible approaches to move research staff onto open ended contracts or pilot innovative alternatives where practicable.

The biennial Culture, Employment and Development of Academic Researchers survey (CEDARS) was carried out in May 2025 (n=103 responses). CEDARS is a tool that has been traditionally used at Reading for measuring progress on our action plans to support research staff. However, increasingly focus is on qualitative feedback using bespoke evaluation forms to increase response rate and gather a more informative response, as well as one-to-one discussions at regular staff events.

The training and development offer for ECRs is now much more integrated with the wider institution. The online content has been mapped to the Vitae Researcher Development Framework (RDF) to increase clarity for skill evaluation and individual gap analysis. The Reading Researcher Development Programme (RRDP) has continued to expand opportunities for ECRs, giving staff a much broader development offer. Since 2021, we are pleased with the steady increase in the proportion of staff taking time for their development. The CEDARS survey 2025 showed staff reporting a doubling of staff uptake of 5-9 days/year of development time since 2021 and a growing percentage taking 10 or more days a year (although this still remains low at 14%). This is further evidenced with a doubling in the number of RRDP courses being undertaken from 2023/34 to 2024/25, with the most interest in 'Effective CVs', 'Applying for research grant funding' and 'Basic statistics refresher' courses. The RRDP compliments bespoke training sessions developed for our research staff. For example, we piloted a new online cohort-based programme called 'Building Blocks' to support staff in readiness for future project proposals or grant applications covering topics such as research impact and storytelling. Early evaluation indicates staff's confidence to generate their own funding applications has significantly increased. This programme will be refined and offered face-face in 2026.

Careers support has improved by establishing links with professional coaches through [Henley Business School](#), a UK Gold Standard Centre for coaching. Staff are offered coaching sessions to explore their career goals. The pilot in 2024 received excellent feedback (100% staff satisfaction) and has been repeated in 2025. Comprehensive

careers support for research staff is not available through our student-facing careers advisory service but access to sector initiatives like [Vitae RDF](#) and [Prosper](#) have been further promoted, with greater effort planned to extend the use of this resource in the coming year.

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 Early Career Researcher Committee has continued to grow and evolve and meets three times a year. It offers staff across the University the opportunity to take on a new development role, raise their profile and represent their peers. The Committee captures the voice of Research Staff to feed directly into Senate and other key University committees. The Chair of the Research Staff Committee is a standing member of the Committee for Researcher Development and Postgraduate Research Studies, a vital forum where the researcher's voice can influence researcher development and policy. The Associate Pro Vice Chancellor and sponsor of the Research Staff Committee, also sits on the University Committee for Research and Innovation.

An article titled 'A PhD, but what comes next?' was published in the ['Doctoral Highlights 2024'](#) brochure to highlight the 'pipeline' of Reading early career researchers and inspire research students to consider postdoctoral research as a potential next step.

An ECR Induction booklet is being developed in response to a lack of face-face engagement and to meet the needs of staff who are not campus based. Three face-face induction events were scheduled but only one took place due to lack of registrations. It will bring together key information from professional service teams, such as research engagement, IT, people development and research services and will act as an ongoing reference tool throughout a fixed term contract.

An Open Research Action Plan was approved for the period 2024-29, stating a clear intention to embed a culture of open research. ECRs were specifically invited to participate in the development of a new research assessment policy in June 2025 as part of this work.

	The Research Culture Programme Board oversees a work programme covering all aspects of research culture, including research integrity, which naturally crosses over to elements of the RD Concordat. Good links have been established to support common aims and avoid duplication of effort as this work progresses. Academic Managers of Researchers 90% of our ECRs are based in six Schools, four of which have a lead role to support ECR communications and engagement. We are working with the two other Schools to establish a similar role and build a network of senior research managers. This has proved helpful to raise awareness around new opportunities, for example the development of a programme of Innovation Seminars (Summer 2025) in our life science Schools, working with an Entrepreneur in Residence, Dr Fiona Marston and showcasing non-linear academic career trajectories to staff. The Researcher Development Manager was invited to sit on a panel of speakers for a careers talk at the School of Biological Sciences ECR Symposium. Outreach to Schools will build on this type of opportunity to highlight opportunities to staff and the purpose of the RD Concordat. Researchers Staff suggested a programme of monthly networking sessions rotated around six Schools (where 90% of ECR staff are based) between Jan-June. We joined up with colleagues who support on research funding, fellowships and enterprise. This pilot had mixed success in terms of level of engagement, but sessions highlighted gaps in knowledge around contracts and costings, intellectual property and relevant contact points. Knowledge gaps were plugged via our dedicated ECR Teams site. A pilot of three wellbeing sessions were run last Autumn, to provide staff with a space to discuss topics related to doing research e.g. managing workload, academic pressure, coping with change and uncertainty. The 1-hour hybrid sessions were run by a psychologist who has extensive experience working with PGRs and with professionals in the workplace. Unfortunately, staff engagement was low and financially unsustainable and so the sessions have not continued.
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Employment (max 600 words)	Institution Following a review of our Rewards and Recognition processes, Grade 6-7 promotions workshop were piloted in Autumn 2024. This provided opportunity for all staff to be better informed about the process and ask questions about further developing independence and how to translate their skills and experience in a promotion application. The workshops were extremely successful with attendance at full capacity and follow up evaluation surveys showing 100% positive testimonials, such as <i>"This workshop was immensely useful to know more about a topic that is not widely discussed and to identify where you are in your career progression"</i>. Validation of the latest round of ECR promotions by HR across all Schools for 2025 is ongoing but it is anticipated that the workshops will be repeated annually to support staff in the development of future applications. We have undertaken a study that examines how UK research fellowships, while critical pathways to secure academic positions, may reinforce systemic barriers to diversity and inclusion in higher education. By combining national-level data (HESA staff statistics and UKRI fellowship outcomes) with qualitative insights from a survey and focus groups at Reading, we have identified persistent disparities in access and progression for underrepresented groups (with a focus on ethnicity primarily but also by gender and disability). ECRs have been actively involved with this review process. The analysis shows that while diversity among fixed-term academic staff has increased, permanent positions and fellowship awards remain dominated by White researchers, with very slow gains for minority groups. Lived experiences highlight opaque application processes, uneven institutional support, and the cumulative impact of bias and structural inequities, which contribute to self-exclusion and unequal career progression. The result is that fellowships are both gateways and barriers: they boost the careers of those who succeed, but their competitive and non-transparent nature can perpetuate exclusion. We are in the process of writing an internal report and academic peer-reviewed publication (by Nov 2025) that will make recommendations for more transparent practices, targeted institutional support, and
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	stronger equity measures from funders to address these barriers and make academic career advancement more inclusive. Academic Managers of Researchers We are working with HR Partners to highlight concerns and make progress on the areas such as simplifying job titles, open ended contracts/alternative contract options etc. Separately, the University is developing an “Academic Expectations Framework” which will clarify the roles and responsibilities of all academic staff – including our research staff. This work is in parallel with a working group exploring workloads. We expect that clarifying roles, responsibilities as well as behaviours, will benefit research staff. Researchers We remain an attractive institution for research staff seeking to develop their careers, both on grants and independent fellowships. For example, we have always supported applications for Leverhulme Early Career Fellowships with a mentoring scheme and support from professional staff, alongside the financial commitment of meeting half salaries. Typically, we have had 1-2 successful candidates per year but, with additional support and guidance, we recruited 6 through the last round. This mirrors success in other schemes from diverse funders.
Professional development (max 600 words)	Institution The first recipients of the newly established Tyler Prize were announced in June 2025, with four early career researchers each awarded £10,000 to support their research ambitions and leadership development. An internal research funding scheme recognising standout published studies by researchers in the initial stages of their careers also announced four ECR Output Prizes Research Output Prizes - Engagement and Impact. Each winner was awarded £1,000 to support the continuation of their research at Reading. A new LinkedIn page has been established for the Doctoral & Researcher College to build the community connectivity, share online resources, sector events as well as joining in celebrating the great research being undertaken by our staff.

	The University is a core member of the UK Reproducibility Network (UKRN), an independent network of stakeholders dedicated to improvement in the quality, integrity and reproducibility of academic research. The University is leading on several projects, mainly within the remit of the Open Research Programme funded by Research England. Work on research integrity training has identified the need for discipline-specific research integrity training. A dedicated workshop for 'Heritage and Creativity' researchers took place to explain what open research and research integrity mean for them. Training has also been delivered to external partners, including the Natural History Museum and Kew. Development of online research integrity training has been delayed but is planned to be completed by summer 2025. Professor Etienne Roesch has been appointed Deputy Chair of the UKRN, which has led to new opportunities, such as leadership of a project on recognising and rewarding open research and an associated maturity framework and self-assessment tool, illustrated with case studies from participating institutions. Our 2025 Research Integrity Statement is available online. Our focus on researcher development continues to be on Early Career Researchers (ECRs) but it remains a longer-term goal to expand this to other key research staff members such as our technicians. This will be informed by the evolving research culture work. Academic Managers of Researchers All academics are required to undertake continual professional development informed by both University priorities and sector level requirements. Thus, all involved in recruitment must attend recruitment and selection training, unconscious bias training, data security and, for example, bullying and harassment training. Specific training is provided to academic leaders and managers in leadership development, including aspects of coaching and SCOPE training. People Development continue to run a varied offer for leadership development courses, such as Aurora, Diversifying Leadership, Inclusive Leader and Leading Through Influence. Researchers The Reading Researcher Development Programme (RRDP) is targeted at research students and ECRs. Staff needs informs the development of
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	the programme and professional service teams are much better co-ordinated now to maximise opportunities for staff. The recent CEDARS survey confirms that more staff, year on year, are allocating time to their development as per the RD Concordat. The percentage of staff taking 5-9 days/year has doubled since 2021 (12%) to 25% in 2025. A growing percentage are taking 10 or more days a year (although this still remains low at 14%). Clearly, there is more work to be done to tip the balance towards more staff making the most of development opportunities, particularly at the ECR stage. Formal coaching is now available to staff by working in partnership with our Henley Business School. Two cohorts have been recruited and either completed or almost completed, the coaching process. Staff evaluation (100% satisfaction) confirms the need to maintain access to this opportunity, which will now be repeated annually. Several Research Engagement resources have been developed into e-learning modules to support flexibility in accessing the information remotely and on demand, making it more accessible to researchers. One example is “Short Introduction to Resume for Research & Innovation (R4RI) Narrative CVs”.
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. <i>(max 500 words)</i> The Doctoral & Researcher College gives a formal focus to an important group of staff dispersed throughout the University and recognises the importance of continuing to develop new researchers from doctoral to postdoctoral stages. The College is increasingly recognised as a ‘one-stop-shop’ for queries around staff development, culture and careers. This was evident following the introduction of the promotion development workshops last year. Staff overwhelmingly fed back their appreciation to have open and honest discussions about their career development which had been lacking in some Departments. In due course, the success of this will in part be measured by HR and the resulting spread of promotions across the Schools in 2025, broken down into some protected characteristics so that it also informs future ED&I efforts. Following the success of our initial ECR Conference in 2024, we plan to repeat an event in 2026 for staff, to be led by the Committee who will shape the event to meet their aspirations. Staff has expressed a desire for more celebration and recognition, so this	

will form part of future conference objectives (staff resources are limited to run a large-scale event more frequently).

It was clear with the lack of take up and cancellations of central inductions, that staff did not feel this was a good use of their time (over and above any local inductions received). Instead, we are targeting efforts to create a new ECR Induction booklet that will be sent to each new member of staff (and available online) and will bring together some key information from professional service teams, such as research engagement, people development and research services. The document will act as an ongoing reference tool throughout the fixed term contracts and will reduce the impact on professional service partners' time delivering face-face training.

The Research Staff Committee membership continues to be work extremely well and represents staff from all four research themes with no recruitment issues during membership turnover. No further changes are anticipated at this time.

The current financial climate limits our ability to deliver more but we will endeavour to utilise our people and team strengths around the University to best effect for staff.

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

As mentioned earlier, continuing with the HR Excellence in Research award (managed by Vitae) is currently paused, for reconsideration in September 2026 while we appraise the best approach going forwards. Vitae are currently reviewing the award process. We will consider the impact of the revisions in due course but a potential option may be to step away from the scheme as the administrative effort required does not match the perceived benefit of having it. We have had positive engagement with Vitae around our concerns and have agreed to an extension to our current HREiR Action Plan until September 2026. A major concern was around the complexity (>50 actions) and duration of the plan (3 years) which is out of step with many institutional strategies and action plans and risked significant duplication with other programmes of work. A key aim over the next year is to significantly streamline our next action plan, extend it to a five-year reporting period and take better account/cross referencing of other ongoing action plans and strategic efforts. This will include the Research Culture Programme, the Technician's Charter, Athena Swan and Open Research Action Plan as well as work on research integrity and responsible assessments of research. We aim to eliminate duplication of institutional effort whilst still supporting the employment and professional development of our researchers under our RD Concordat obligations.

Objectives over the coming year include:

Environment & Culture– Through planned interventions, such as a key event in 2026, to increase recognition and celebration of ECRs; integrate ECRs into wider

institutional initiatives around research culture; increase visibility of our new LinkedIn page to better connect and track the community alumni and share sector updates and events.

Employment - support staff to prepare for the annual reward and recognition round, particularly with ECR development workshops; take account of sector best practice around precarity of contracts and work with colleagues in HR to identify feasible steps forwards in reducing the dependency on repeated fixed term contracts.

Training and Professional Development – further refine the research development programme content in response to staff feedback; agree a communication plan with relevant professional partners around a ‘Take 10’ campaign to increase awareness at all levels of staff taking time for their development; continue to deliver career support where feasible and explore opportunities to extend it further e.g. working with our Knowledge Exchange & External Partnerships (KEEP) team as well as exploring partnerships with other HEIs for co-delivery of development opportunities.

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 shared with the Committee Researcher Development & Postgraduate Research Studies (RDPGRS), the University Committee for Research & Innovation, Senate and Council. It has also been shared with the Early Career Researcher Staff Committee for comment and awareness.

The Committee for RDPGRS reports into the University committee for Research and Innovation (UCRI), our prime University body for Research Governance, which includes our Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation, Associate Pro Vice Chancellors from all four research themes and the Director for Research, Engagement and Innovation Office. UCRI has governance and oversight of all research and innovation activities, including researcher development and training. Council is the highest approval authority at the University.

Signature on behalf of governing body:



Helen Gordon, President of Council

Contact for queries: Susan Glover, Researcher Development Manager

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This annual report will be analysed by Nottingham Trent University, 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 rdc@ntu.ac.uk

www.researcherdevelopmentconcordat.ac.uk