

1. Institutional context

Researchers employed on externally funded fixed-term contracts ($n = 167$), based across all Faculties, are the primary target audience for our new Concordat Action Plan (CAP). The publication of the revised Researcher Development Concordat in 2019 and the preparations/discussions prior to submission of this 10-year review have provided an opportunity for meaningful reflection on our previous Concordat progress. This has resulted in a more focussed approach and we aim to shift our efforts to enable exploration of the specific structural and systemic challenges experienced by researchers on fixed-term contracts; specifically, we will define and align support and development. Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) is committed to ensuring that all staff feel valued and supported to thrive in an environment where personal development and scholarship are prioritised to support the delivery of impactful research. LJMU has come to the end of our 2017-2022 Strategic Plan and has just launched our 2023-30 Strategy and associated supporting plans (Research and Knowledge Exchange Plan & People Plan) which articulate our philosophy and activities that will support the delivery of our ambition to provide an enabling and facilitative environment for all colleagues. LJMU have continued to evolve the excellent provision available for researcher development through a variety of programmes offered, including activity coordinated via Organisational Development (OD) and our well-established, award-winning ACTivator programme.

2. Review process

The period between the last review (2021-23) and the current review has been challenging for several reasons, not least the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. LJMU, as an institution, returned to campus in September 2021 and thus activity related to the CAP was adapted until that time to account for increased burden(s) for our colleagues in relation to remote teaching, provision and support and caring responsibility[ies] (i.e., home schooling/adult dependents) and our 'new' way of working. One prioritised action, that organically evolved from the pandemic, was to flip delivery of our development programmes to an online format so that development in relation to research was not abandoned. This was particularly relevant given that LJMU did not furlough any research staff and given that face to face research was on hold, research development activity of colleagues could, in some circumstances, be prioritised.

Despite multiple challenges, we feel that we have displayed agility and adaptability in the face of adversity that facilitated several positive steps to progress our research environment and culture in its broadest sense. These include;

- Inclusion of the impact on researchers in institution-wide reviews over the pandemic period, with £1.9M of funds being committed to research activities, a large proportion of which was on FT extension, with no furlough or redundancies of researchers.
- Embedding the Concordat Steering Group (CSG) lead into the University Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee (URKEC).
- Concordat included as a standing item on URKEC, Faculty/School Management Team meetings.
- Concordat included in institutional documentation with focus afforded in the new 2030 strategy.
- The CSG brings together a broad group of people who don't otherwise routinely meet. The lead has successfully cultivated a functional and established workflow that was maintained during working from home and now hybrid working.
- Significant progress on data management, with HR colleagues developing a better grasp on FT contract researcher, the nuances of the researcher population and attendance at research/employment development.
- For the first time this year, there was a 'rising star' award targeted at Early Career and Fixed Term Researchers at our annual Research and Knowledge Exchange Conference.

- Highlighting employment opportunities, and associated transferable skills, for contract researchers prior to redeployment.

In addition, other key outcomes and impact related to specific actions coordinated by the CSG include;

- Conduct a monitoring and evaluation analysis of the outcomes and impact of attendance at researcher development session(s)/activity(ies)

Led by the (interim) Concordat academic lead with support from key members of the CSG and an intern (financially supported by the Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research and Knowledge Exchange), semi-structured interviews designed to explore the outcomes and impact at researcher development activities were conducted. To support this, a survey was also circulated to all staff/PhD students who had accessed ACTivator workshops between January 2019 and April 2022 ($n=602$), from which we received $n=26$ responses. Although this constitutes a relatively low number, the free text responses were comprehensive and provided a rich dataset. Thematic analysis identified $n=7$ themes and a short report outlined; i) a summary of the ACTivator programme, ii) narrative that contextualises our findings and iii) recommendations moving forward, which has been circulated to colleagues based in Organisational Development. We also intend to produce an infographic to communicate major findings in a more engaging and digestible format. This has led to a review of provision, which will continue to support further evolution of this award-winning programme.

- Distribute, analyse, and interpret the Culture, Employment and Development in Academic Research Survey (CEDARS)

We delayed our original roll out of CEDARS (originally planned 2018-20) as it was felt that the impact of COVID-19 (lockdown restrictions, working from home and the transition to hybrid working, concerns about research contracts/funding) could have skewed these findings. The survey was conducted in summer 2022 (9 months following return to campus). We had $n=211$ respondents, all with research responsibilities, $n=22$ of these were research-only staff (~17% of research-only population). In both distinct groups (all respondents and research only staff) we observed diversity in gender (all respondents= 53% men, 45% women and 2% non-binary; research only staff= 50% women, 36% men, 5% non-binary and 5% not disclosed), which is relevant as a focus on women researchers aligns with Athena SWAN aspirations of LJMU. Most research staff were 31-40yrs old, and UK nationals. 9.1% (8.4% all respondents) were from ethnically diverse backgrounds, 31.8% (16.1% all respondents) had a disability and 27.3% (40.8% all respondents) listed having caring responsibilities. As with the ACTivator evaluation, free text responses provided rich and informing data. These data have been developed into a slide show and are being utilised by Associate Deans for Research in all faculties as part of our awareness raising forward facing actions.

- Communicate with other institutions regarding set up and provision of a staff researcher association

Meetings occurred with key stakeholders between June 2022-January 2023 and discussions at CSG regarding the formation of a research staff association (RSA). This has resulted in a formal proposal and draft Terms of Reference with calls for researchers to lead this association being released in January 2023. These draft documents will be used as a basis for discussions so that final versions are co-created with the LJMU researcher community.

- Internal review

Focused meetings with key LJMU Concordat representatives to explore Concordat activities, action planning, progress to date and barriers and facilitators to progress. Outcomes of this meeting were used to inform the forward-facing action plan, additional stakeholders from the target cohort and priorities for the new CAP.

3. Governance Structure

In line with our shift in focus, we have redressed the balance of our Concordat leadership and simplified our structural and governance arrangements. In 2020, we replaced our Concordat Task Group (who provided strategic direction, supported by a Concordat Forum to provide operational support) with a CSG that reports directly to our URKEC; indeed, the academic lead is a permanent

member of URKEC. This new logistical model has taken some time to transition, and we aim to continue to evolve operations to further project the collective voice of this CSG. Our CSG is led by a Senior Academic with over ten years' experience of managing externally funded research staff on fixed-term contracts and has been covered (maternity) by a mid-career academic with experience of Athena SWAN and equity, diversity, inclusivity, and respect strategic leadership throughout 2022. CSG membership has undulated with circumstantial changes for colleagues over the last window but still aspires to reflect representation across our target cohort and related stakeholders, whilst comprising many of those involved in our previous Concordat activities. Although we have experienced several other uncontrollable factors in relation to governance of the CSG; namely, the early retirement of the long-term Manager of OD in spring 2021, a restructure of OD and long-term staff sickness, we have maintained consistency and continuity of processes as we transition into the new 2023 CAP and seek to further broaden our membership to include more FT researcher representatives. An overview of our structural and governance arrangements is presented below:

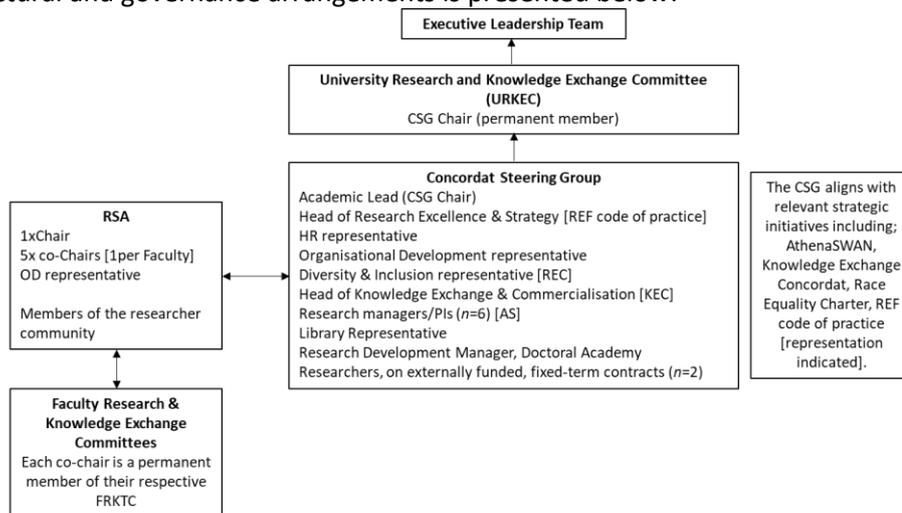


Figure 1. A schematic of the structure and governance arrangements for CSG, and their alignment to associated groups.

4. Review of LJMU Action Plan 2020-22

Key progress and achievements are outlined below according to the three RDC principles.

Environment & Culture

For the first time this year, there was a 'rising star' award targeted at Early Career and Fixed Term Researchers at our annual Research and Knowledge Exchange Conference.

Employment

Inclusion of the impact on researchers in institution-wide reviews over the pandemic period, with £1.9M of funds being committed to support and extend research activities, a large proportion of which was on FT extension, with no furlough or redundancies of contract researchers. All development activities were adapted and moved to an online format; these have continued in hybrid format following return to work and allow for greater inclusion.

Professional & Career Development

There is consensus that the breadth and provision of researcher development activities offered at LJMU is excellent, as evidenced through quantitative survey response, free text responses and semi-structured interview data; and via additional markers of our research environment and culture e.g. a growth in University RKE bid submissions (509 bids £80m total value (£68m of LJMU) funding, compared to 473 bids with a total value of £74 million (£63m to LJMU) for research and enterprise activity in 2020/21 which constitutes a 7% increase in number and value of applications. Plus, growth in awards (the University received 281 new awards with a value of £16million in 2021/22, compared with 189 awards with a combined value of £17.5 million in 2020/21 (a 48% increase in number year on year/ 8.5% reduction in value).

5. Strategic Objectives

Broad strategy for the next four years, with one specific action listed, including success measure(s) and alignment to broader institutional strategy.

Environment and Culture *Raise awareness of the concordat amongst fixed terms researchers (FTRs) and their managers. Support and encourage Research Managers (RMs) [who manage FTRs] and FTRs to complete all mandatory training and make use of internal and external staff development opportunities.*

Key Action(s)	Success Measure(s)	Alignment to Institutional Strategy
Conduct focus groups, per faculty, with research staff & RMs, to collect perspectives on environment and culture and utilise these data to contextualise CEDARs. Awareness raising forum led by respective Associate Deans for Research, supported by institutes. Designed to raise awareness of the concordat, its principles, issues faced by FTRs and how RMs can support.	2x focus groups per faculty (FTRs and RMs), thematic analysis of this data, and development of (Faculty specific) awareness raising slides, and some of broader institution. Attendance at the event by 80% of RMS and FTRs. A short survey will be circulated following the respective workshop/ forum to provide data regarding impact.	Environment and culture are a strategic focus of the University RKE Plan (RKE remains a core activity in university strategy 2030) and in supporting and growing research culture across the University the Concordat is specifically name checked.

Employment *Provide an effective induction process, clear and transparent merit-based recognition, reward, and promotion pathways that recognise the full range of researchers' contributions and the diversity of personal circumstances, with a focus on FTR considerations. Ensure excellent people management is championed. The Concordat, EDI and Race Charter provide our catalysts for change.*

Key Action(s)	Success Measure(s)	Alignment to Institutional Strategy
We will develop a Research Staff Association, conceptualised, and led (on a voluntary basis) by FTRs and facilitated by LDF, with the aim of contributing to institutional policy and practice development and developing best practice. The Association will feed into the Concordat Steering Group and Faculty RKECs which report directly to the URKEC.	By June 2023, the CSG and OD will have developed an RSA that is represented by FTRs across Faculties. This will have 1 chair and 5 co-chairs (1 per Faculty). The RSA will operate via MS Teams and provide a platform for communication & networking, communicate central researcher development opportunities, and represent the voice of FTRs by strategic representation of FTRs on committees that feed into URKEC.	Research staff included in institutional support & development in relation to impact, open data, research data management and public engagement. Several actions relate to the formation of an RSA. To ensure its success we will liaise with key stakeholders & adopt a cocreation approach. We also have support from other institutions who have implemented a similar group.

Professional and Career Development *Our ACTivator programme is currently being reviewed and evolved to address emerging needs based on the data collected via our evaluation exercise. We will ensure that RMs and FTRs make use of available training and structured support; promoting this to FTRs via the planned Researcher Association, induction, and promotional materials, and through School Directors and Research Managers.*

Key Action(s)	Success Measure(s)	Alignment to Institutional Strategy
Provide opportunities, structured support/encouragement, and time for FTRs to engage in a minimum of 10 days professional development pro rata per year. Include reference to this obligation within job descriptions (checked by HR) for FTR posts and in grant/project applications; all RMs and FTRs will be expected to discuss and plan opportunities for these activities during annual appraisals and in regular 1-1 meetings.	We have no benchmark but would expect researchers to engage with the minimum requirement of 10 days and seek to collect this information during annual appraisals (and using the CEDARS survey). Our revised CAP also includes monitoring the completion rate of annual appraisals for FTR, with an expectation of 100% completion, to ensure this data is available.	Research staff can apply for a range of central resource and funding to support professional development activity This can include our annual Policy Support Fund, Participatory Research Fund and Enhanced Research culture fund. If plans do not go accordingly in relation to RSA, then RMs will be sufficiently trained to oversee this while the CSG seek input/learn from colleagues across the sector.

Our vision for the impact of these actions, and our broader institutional strategy, is that they will; i) establish an enhanced sense of community across LJMU and ii) give FTRs a similar experience of being a researcher at LJMU, regardless of their PI or location/Faculty.