



# Researcher Development Concordat: Cancer Research UK Action Plan

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Together we will beat cancer



# Introduction

Cancer Research UK (CRUK), as the largest independent funder of cancer research in the world, relies on the best researchers to help us beat cancer. Our top priority is the people at the heart of the research we fund – the researchers and their teams who are delivering the highest quality of research – and this underpins everything we do. Under our [framework for positive research culture](#), we want to help create positive, diverse and inclusive research environments that allow all brilliant minds to collaborate, flourish and progress.

We expect Host Institutions in which we invest to ensure routes for attracting and retaining a diverse workforce, to recognise and value their researchers, to give them every opportunity to develop their skills and experience, and to nurture them in their career development. This includes supporting their professional development, providing inclusive working conditions that enable them to thrive, and preparing them for diverse and flexible careers across the research and innovation ecosystem.

CRUK is a proud signatory of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers (Researcher Development Concordat), an agreement between stakeholders to improve the employment and support for researchers and researcher careers in higher education in the UK. CRUK is committed to meeting the Concordat's obligations for funders. We expect anyone with CRUK funding – researchers, managers and institutions – to follow the appropriate principles, standards and practices required by the Concordat.

Our action plan below aligns with the three defining Principles of the Concordat where we outline pre-existing initiatives we will continue and where we commit to new actions under:

- Environment and Culture
- Employment
- Professional and career development.

In 2022, CRUK plans to publish a refreshed research strategy. As outlined in this action plan, we will integrate the Principles of the Concordat into our approach and implementation plans. CRUK will work collaboratively with other funders, our researchers and their institutions to evolve this action plan. Wherever possible, we will aim to align activities and reduce reporting requirements to minimise any administrative burden and to enable us all to work towards improving research culture.

## COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted research by causing a period of unprecedented disruption, the effects of which will last for several years to come. The disruption period may have disproportionately affected certain groups of people, for example, researchers:

- with caring responsibilities;
- who were seconded into frontline service in the NHS in response to COVID-19;
- who have been furloughed;
- who are vulnerable due to health conditions and may therefore have additional barriers to returning to work.

We ask applicants to outline in their grant applications how the pandemic has impacted them, their research and their team. Our reviewers are asked to take into consideration this period of disruption when assessing applications. We'll continue to monitor the impact of the pandemic on researchers and their careers and consider further actions to take as a funder.

## 1: ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURE: EXCELLENT RESEARCH REQUIRES A SUPPORTIVE AND INCLUSIVE RESEARCH CULTURE

FUNDER RESPONSIBILITIES	ACTIONS	CRUK LEAD	STATUS/TIMELINE
1A: Include requirements which promote equitable, inclusive and positive research cultures and environments, in relevant funding calls, terms and conditions, grant reporting, and policies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to prioritise our commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in research by making progress under our <a href="#">Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in Research Action Plan</a>. We will embed EDI principles into our expectations of institutions, researchers and the research we fund via relevant funding schemes, application guidelines, reporting and policies</li> <li>Continue to review and improve our Guidance for Assessing Grant Applications to ensure fair and objective funding decisions. This guidance includes our commitment to EDI, clear assessment criteria, a transparent scoring system and ways for reviewers to mitigate the potential for bias</li> <li>Continue to take a leading role as a funder in promoting positive research culture, including helping tackle bullying and harassment through setting clear policy expectations and engagement with other funders or policy and regulatory organisations via the <a href="#">Forum for Tackling Bullying and Harassment</a></li> </ul>	Research Operations	Ongoing
1B: Consider how funding opportunities and policies can facilitate different patterns and ways of working, and promote the wellbeing and mental health of researchers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to promote our <a href="#">Flexible Research Careers Funding Policies</a>, including encouraging grant applications on a part-time basis and our long-term leave policy</li> <li>Continue to work with CRUK's core-funded Institutes towards implementation of a standardised approach to group leader appointment, review and promotion that takes into consideration personal circumstances and impact on their progression</li> <li>Continue to hold mental wellbeing and resilience sessions in our network meetings for CRUK early career researchers and promote good practice via cross-sector fora to improve wellbeing and mental health of researchers</li> </ul>	Research Careers	Ongoing

1C: Ensure that funding call requirements and selection processes offer equality of opportunity between different groups of researchers, recognise personal contexts, and promote positive research cultures and working conditions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure our research strategy refresh plans: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Continue to commit to the training and career development of a broad range of cancer researchers</li> <li>- Assess the right balance of funding support for different career stages</li> <li>- Offer a broad range of funding opportunities</li> <li>- Further develop and support the pipeline of high-quality clinician scientists</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Continue to review and improve our Clinical Academic Training Programme (CATP) and launch the CRUK Clinical Trainee Academy, which aims to encourage and retain an excellent and more clinically diverse, community in an oncology academic career</li> <li>• Continue to identify and help remove barriers that female researchers face staying in cancer research and progressing to senior positions, including by providing support through our <u>Women of Influence mentoring programme</u></li> <li>• Fund dedicated career support programmes for underrepresented groups of students and researchers including mentoring and leadership initiatives as outlined in our <u>Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in Research Action Plan</u></li> </ul>	Research Careers	From 2021
<b>2: EMPLOYMENT: RESEARCHERS ARE RECRUITED, EMPLOYED AND MANAGED UNDER CONDITIONS THAT RECOGNISE AND VALUE THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS</b>			
<b>FUNDER RESPONSIBILITIES</b>	<b>ACTIONS</b>	<b>CRUK LEAD</b>	<b>STATUS/TIMELINE</b>
2A: Include requirements which support the improvement of working conditions for researchers, in relevant funding calls, terms and conditions, grant reporting, and policies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to include in our Grant Conditions, Training Account Guidelines and agreements with Centres/Institutes that Host Institutions must follow appropriate principles, standards and practices for the proper management of research and researchers including, in the UK, the principles set out in the Concordat</li> <li>• Review our auditing/reporting process for Host Institutions to consider how best to cover a progress report under the Concordat</li> </ul>	Research Careers	Ongoing

<p>2B: Review the impact of relevant funding call requirements on researchers' employment, particularly in relation to career progression and lack of job security.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure our research strategy refresh implementation plans consider and review how best to improve job security, for example through considering: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- optimal duration of our awards, taking into account the benefit of longer-term contracts</li> <li>- clearer expectations set for Host Institutions of researchers funded under our CRUK fellowship awards, including providing the appropriate status and committing to a formal review process before award end, ensuring transparency and clarity around process with objective assessment criteria, and clear indication of employment options available at award end (subject to review process)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Continue to recognise the importance of wider supporting skills, including personal and scientific development, personal leadership and communication and engagement skills as outlined in our <a href="#">Competency Framework for Fellowships</a></li> <li>• Consider expanding our Competency Framework for Fellowships to further career stages to outline the broad range of experience and supporting skills expected for all grantholders, particularly in relation to leadership and management</li> </ul>	<p>Research Operations with Research Careers</p>	<p>From 2021</p>
<p>2C: Support institutions to develop policies and frameworks to promote sustainable employment and enhance job security, provide opportunities for career progression.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with other funders and Host Institutions via regular cross-sector fora to identify barriers faced by institutions to offering more stable employment regardless of award structures, particularly in relation to time-limited contracts</li> </ul>	<p>Research Careers</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>2D: Consider balance of relevant funding streams in providing access to research funding and its impact at all career levels.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure our research strategy refresh implementation plans review and consider the optimal balance of funding and support for different career stages and pathways through the career pipeline</li> </ul>		<p>From 2021</p>

### 3: PROFESSIONAL AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT: PROFESSIONAL AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT ARE INTEGRAL TO ENABLING RESEARCHERS TO DEVELOP THEIR FULL POTENTIAL

FUNDER RESPONSIBILITIES	ACTIONS	CRUK LEAD	STATUS/TI MELINE
3A: Incorporate specific professional development requirements in relevant funding calls, terms and conditions, grant reporting, and policies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Integrate the requirement for a minimum of 10 days' professional development pro rata per year into relevant funding schemes and ensure Host Institutions commit in writing to it</li> <li>Working with other funders, clarify and communicate what constitutes professional development</li> <li>Continue to offer initiatives to develop and support research leadership and management, including providing access to leadership courses and coaching and mentoring opportunities</li> <li>Ensure Host Institutions provide appropriate incentives and support to researchers to develop good leadership and management qualities by acquiring evidence of effective professional development planning, including development of leadership and management qualities in applications and reporting</li> <li>Continue to ringfence funding in CRUK studentships for training and development</li> </ul>	Research Operations with Research Careers	From 2021
3B: Embed the Concordat Principles and researcher development into research assessment strategies and processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to assess fellowship applicants on their wider supporting skills, in particular leadership and management qualities, using our Competency Framework for Fellowships</li> <li>Expand our narrative-based CV questions in grant applications to include how researchers have supported the development of researchers and contributed to the broader research community</li> <li>Develop guidance for applicants and reviewers to ensure narrative-based CV questions are taken into account by our grant reviewers</li> </ul>	Research Operations	From 2021

3C: Acknowledge that a large proportion of the researchers they fund will move on to careers beyond academia, and consider how they can encourage and support this within their remit.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use next destination career tracking information to build a more complete picture of CRUK-funded Fellows' and PhD students' next role following their award.</li> <li>• Continue to offer training and funding opportunities through our <u>entrepreneurial programmes run by CRUK Commercial Partnerships</u> that aim to develop and nurture an entrepreneurial culture amongst cancer researchers in the UK</li> <li>• Consider continuing partnerships with industry that offer placements and provide an opportunity for clinical trainees to gain skills in translational research and commercial drug development.</li> </ul>	Research Careers	Ongoing
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As a signatory to the Concordat, CRUK has also committed to the following actions:

CONCORDAT SIGNATORY RESPONSIBILITIES		
ACTIONS	CRUK LEAD	STATUS/TIMELINE
Raise the visibility of the Concordat and champion its principles within CRUK at all levels and with our research community	Head, Careers and Discovery Research	Ongoing
The Head of Careers and Discovery Research is the senior manager champion responsible for CRUK's annual review and reporting on progress	Head, Careers and Discovery Research	Completed
Undertake a gap analysis to compare policies and practice against the Concordat Principles	Research Operations	Completed – this action plan is informed by our gap analysis
Report progress annually against this action plan to CRUK's Scientific Executive Board, which will subsequently be made publicly available	Research Careers	From 2022
Set up feedback mechanisms with CRUK's research community to inform our approach to implementing the Concordat	Research Careers	Ongoing – Interactive session in Women of Influence meeting in 2019 to discuss potential solutions for challenges; Survey run in 2019 with early career researchers to gather their feedback under the different areas of the Concordat; Consultation held in 2021 with researchers at different career stages to inform training and career development under research strategy refresh plans

If you have any feedback about our plans, please get in touch: [fellowships@cancer.org.uk](mailto:fellowships@cancer.org.uk).