

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

Funders and Regulators

Name of Institution	Cancer Research UK (CRUK)
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Contact for questions/concerns on researcher career development	Matt Kaiser, Head of Careers and Discovery Research, Matt.Kaiser@cancer.org.uk
Date statement sent to Researcher Development Concordat secretariat via CDRsecretariat@universitiesuk.ac.uk	18 May 2023

Please provide a statement describing your organisation's funding / regulatory status, and approach to supporting and embedding positive and inclusive research environments (max 500 words).

Cancer Research UK (CRUK) is the largest charitable funder of cancer research in the world, funding around 50% of all publicly funded cancer research here in the UK. Today we invest nearly £400 million annually into cancer research through research funding, conferences, training, initiatives, resources, and a UK-wide network of research infrastructure across discovery, clinical, prevention and detection research, contributing to the UK's outstanding environment for cancer research. We're at the forefront of the global fight against cancer, working with commercial and non-commercial research partners across the world to achieve our ambitious vision for a future when everyone can live free from the fear of cancer.

Given our key focus on beating cancer and CRUK's influential position in the global research landscape, we are fully committed to developing and nurturing positive and inclusive research environments that support researchers' development and potential. CRUK 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. CRUK is proud to be one of the first funder signatories to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers ('Concordat'), which we believe will help deliver both long and fulfilling careers for cancer researchers and also improve outcomes for cancer patients. We expect everyone with CRUK funding – researchers, managers and institutions – to follow the appropriate principles, standards and practices required by the Concordat.

Under CRUK's *Research Strategy*, one of the key enablers is to create a positive research environment and culture. Our research culture framework encompasses different areas, including:

- Research integrity: We will produce the highest standards of reliable, robust and reproducible research, conducted with openness, honesty and integrity.
- Career development: We will ensure researchers are given every opportunity to develop skills and feel supported in career development.
- Equality, diversity and inclusion: We will prioritise equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), so everyone can bring new perspectives to tackle cancer regardless of background.
- Open science: We will promote and enable open practices to maximise the use of outputs from our funded research, foster new collaborations and increase the potential to advance progress.
- Research assessment: We will improve the way we assess research so that researchers are fairly valued for the quality of work, skills and experiences.
- Tackling bullying and harassment: We want everyone involved in our research to treat each other with dignity and respect and feel confident to fully contribute ideas.

CRUK recognises the levers we possess for achieving these aims as an influential funder not only in the life sciences but in the Research & Innovation system as a whole. These include evolving how we assess and fund research; the policies and conditions attached to our awards; providing targeted positive action opportunities to help researchers to develop and thrive; contributing to discussions;

partnering with funders, sector bodies and research organisations; and convening our research community on key issues.

Provide a short summary of the organisation'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) together with your measures for evaluating progress and success (max 600 words)

In October 2021, we published our '[Researcher Development Concordat: Cancer Research UK Action Plan](#)', which aligns with the three defining Principles and funders' responsibilities of the Concordat. Our action plan outlined pre-existing initiatives we will continue and where we commit to new actions.

Environment and culture

CRUK's '[Equality, Diversity and Inclusion \(EDI\) in Research action plan \(2021-2023\)](#)' forms the lynchpin of our implementation of the Concordat's *Environment and Culture* principle, and embeds EDI principles into our expectations of institutions, researchers and the research we fund via relevant funding schemes, application guidelines, reporting and policies. We adhere to the Association of Medical Research Charities *Principles of Peer Review* and we regularly review our guidance for reviewers for assessing grant applications to ensure fair and objective funding decisions. We also take a leading role as a funder in promoting positive research culture through engagement with other funders or institutions to share and embed best practice and pilot new initiatives.

CRUK is committed to promoting positive ways of working that suit the researcher in question and to allow them flexibility where it matters, achieved through our policies for grantholders but also in collaboration with our core-funded Institutes, such as in how personal circumstances are considered during recruitment and career progression. To foster a more diverse research workforce, we encourage and retain a clinically diverse community in academic research, and remove barriers to retaining underrepresented researchers in cancer research, particularly through our Clinical Academic Training Programmes.

Employment

CRUK believes the quality of people management in research is pivotal to the quality of the research itself and to researchers' wellbeing and effectiveness. We ensure high standards for people management from host institutions through our Grant Conditions and regularly review how to monitor this via funding assurance. CRUK is committed to improving job security for researchers and to tackling career precarity, both through our own funding mechanisms and in partnership with other research funders and stakeholders. We review how to improve job security, such as through enabling longer contract durations, and also by setting expectations for Host Institutions on potential employment options available to CRUK fellowship holders at award end and ensuring clarity on process and criteria that will be used. Furthermore, CRUK assesses the optimal balance of funding and support for different career stages and pathways through the career pipeline. Lastly, we work with other funders and host institutions at cross-sector fora to identify barriers faced by institutions to offering more stable employment, particularly related to fixed-term contracts.

Professional Development of Researchers

CRUK recognises that investment in the very best researchers can deliver the research needed to beat cancer and therefore considers the professional development of researchers to be key to enabling them to reach their full potential. We work with other funders to clarify what constitutes professional development for researchers and discuss monitoring adherence to such policies. We work to ensure Host Institutions provide appropriate incentives, opportunities and support to develop leadership, management and interpersonal skills and CRUK itself provides additional opportunities to develop research leadership and management skills through access to courses, coaching and mentoring.

Our research assessment strategies recognise the importance of wider supporting and enabling skills – including personal and scientific development, leadership, communication and engagement skills – as detailed in our [Competency Framework for Fellowships](#). Equally, we apply novel approaches, like narrative CVs, to evidencing applicant experience in grant applications to recognise a broad range of personal backgrounds, research activities and outputs.

In measuring progress and success, we review our research careers portfolio and report to, and discuss progress with, our Scientific Executive Board. We are developing an evidence base of career destinations of CRUK-funded PhD students and fellowship holders to achieve a more complete understanding of professional pathways pursued. In addition, under our EDI in research action plan and diversity data report publications, we monitor and report progress against targets set for underrepresented applicants and award holders.

Summary of actions taken (including changes to relevant funding calls, terms and conditions, grant reporting and policies in relation to host organisations and/or grant applicants), and evaluation of progress made, in the current reporting period to implement your plan to support the three pillars (*max 600 words*)

Environment and Culture

CRUK has undertaken a number of measures designed to create a supportive and inclusive research environment. We have actively contributed to addressing unacceptable workplace behaviours as a member of the [Forum for Tackling Bullying and Harassment](#). We have also developed a range of programmes to enable access to research careers for individuals from underrepresented groups. Our support for researchers from ethnic minorities includes four funded places on [StellarHE's Diverse Leaders Course](#). Our work to tackle underrepresentation of Black people in STEM research includes funding individuals through our new [Black Leaders in Cancer PhD Scholarship Programme](#), [HDR UK internships](#) to provide paid work experience for future Black health data scientists, and also on our [Black in Cancer mentoring scheme](#).

CRUK's partnerships with [In2science](#) and [In2research](#) have helped give young people and undergraduates, respectively, from low-income and disadvantaged backgrounds gain experience of the cancer research field. Our 'Women Entrepreneur of the Year' under the [Innovation and Entrepreneurship awards](#), 'Postdoc futures: empowering women in cancer research' event for women postdocs and the recent extension of our [Women of Influence mentoring scheme](#) to include

postdocs aim to improve gender equity by developing communities and enabling progression for women cancer researchers.

Employment

CRUK has worked to improve researcher job security through our own funding processes and schemes in a number of ways:

- changing multi-year funding awards (awards given in more than one instalment) to full duration, enabling institutions to offer longer duration contracts upfront;
- revising our Policy for Salaries of Investigators to clarify postdoctoral researchers and technology specialists can apply as a Co-Investigator, and may be eligible to apply for their salary;
- requesting host organisations to contribute 50% towards the salary of new senior fellows;
- increasing PhD studentship stipends to facilitate retention of ECRs in research in the wake of the cost-of-living crisis;
- standardising the review and tenure (promotion) process for Junior Group Leaders at CRUK core-funded Institutes to improve transparency and clarity.

Professional Development of Researchers

In collaboration with other major research funders, we implemented our new Continuing Professional Development (CPD) policy for CRUK-funded researchers that integrates into grant conditions the requirement that researchers engage in at least 10 days CPD pro rata per year. Our participation in a sub-group with other funders of the Concordat Strategy Group enabled our alignment on the difference between project skills- and career-based training, and guided our expectations of both researchers and the institutions hosting them to ensure researchers reach the 10-day target. We have further supported this aspiration in ringfencing £2,000 for development activities in PhD studentships.

To further incentivise host institutions' training and development provision, we evaluate fellowship applicants' leadership and management qualities as part of their overall assessment and also as part of our review of Junior Group Leaders at CRUK core-funded Institutes. Alongside host institutions' provision, CRUK has partnered with Meyler Campbell to secure pro bono coaching for nearly 40 cancer researchers to date, offering personalised leadership coaching for CRUK-funded postdocs, Fellows and Junior Group Leaders.

We have evolved our research assessment strategies to recognise a breadth of skills and experiences. Our piloting of Narrative CVs now enables applicants to describe their varying competencies and contributions to the wider research field, ensuring positive research practices and a greater diversity of research outputs are rewarded in grant review. Finally, CRUK runs a highly popular 'observing scheme' for our funding panels and committees. To date, over 100 ECRs have shadowed funding decision making processes, which aims to improve the quality of their grant applications and develop peer reviewer skills and was considered extremely valuable by participants.

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 (max 500 words)

CRUK has been pleased with the engagement of researchers as our initiatives, events and schemes have often received more applications than places available. Where we plan to embed these activities as 'business as usual', we aim to increase their capacity to accommodate more researchers and ensure our interventions can reach the widest group possible.

Our initial action plan encompassed implementation of all obligations of the Concordat and, whilst this broad focus enabled CRUK to drive holistic research culture change, achieving all our scheduled actions was not feasible with the time and resources available. For the future, we will aim to address key strategic areas as well as actions not yet implemented from this current reporting period. Our regular consultation with the CRUK researcher community, through informal feedback, structured events and surveys, has served to identify both professional and personal barriers and ensure these priorities reflect the needs of the cancer research workforce.

Amongst these key strategic areas is the need to address job security and career progression as a requisite to maintaining a diverse talent pool in cancer research. This has grown in urgency since the COVID pandemic disruption, and following publication of our initial action plan, amidst widespread reported reductions in the number of postdoctoral researchers pursuing an academic career. We will continue to consult with key stakeholders and explore potential solutions to enable more stable research careers and establish structured developmental opportunities for the postdoc cohort to complement this.

On top of our consultation activities mentioned above, we are committed to effective monitoring and evaluation of our interventions. This includes recording who applies for and is awarded our funding (captured via our diversity data reporting), who participates in our career support and development initiatives and how useful they were according to their feedback, as well as tracking the future career paths of those we fund via Researchfish.

Importantly, we also recognise it is not always possible for CRUK, as a funder, to definitively measure the impact of our actions. For example, it is not possible to fully define the influence of new/strengthened funding policies on the research system as such policies may initiate change without affecting what we as a funder can easily measure. As we are particularly keen to avoid introducing new data collection mechanisms and, therefore, increasing bureaucratic burden on researchers, we aim to use existing reporting systems to collect data relevant to the audiences of our Concordat action plan.

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

Environment and Culture

Our diversity data indicates that whilst we have made progress in achieving improved application-, success- and award rates across different protected characteristics, some groups are still underrepresented. We will therefore focus on equity of opportunity to ensure a diverse cancer

workforce. We will review the accessibility of our grant funding processes for disabled and neurodivergent researchers to ensure that those identifying as either can have equity of access. We plan to establish an EDI Seed Fund to help diversify the cancer research career pipeline. Seed Fund grants might be used to foster a democratic culture of innovation in EDI by supporting cancer researchers' pilot initiatives exploring and addressing challenges and opportunities for cancer researchers from across protected characteristics.

Employment

Researcher feedback, structured surveys and analyses in scientific media and our own monitoring indicates that researchers are increasingly opting for careers beyond academia, particularly those at the junior postdoctoral stage. We will therefore implement measures to strengthen the academic career path, given the central role academic research plays in cancer discoveries and treatments. This will include developing a clearer and more integrated career support track for clinical academics in training as part of the Clinical Academic Training Programme renewal, addressing the precarious stage between PhD and intermediate fellowship. CRUK will explore new models with host institutions that maintain support for researchers in their trajectory towards scientific leadership, and we will consider how additional support can be provided through awards aimed at those establishing their own independent research programmes. Similarly, and following high demand for CRUK-funded places at The Institute of Cancer Research's 'Pathway to Independence' course, we will establish our own postdoc development programme aimed at supporting development of scientific leadership in up-and-coming cancer researchers.

Professional Development of Researchers

Building on progress to encourage CPD for CRUK-funded researchers, we will engage with our network of institutions where we fund researchers to ensure access to training and career progression support, as well as a clear and transparent commitment towards CRUK fellows' future career trajectory at the host institution. Moreover, we will ensure that our funding panels and committees review these provisions as part of the grant assessment process. We will look to expand our Competency Framework for Fellowships to further career stages to outline the broad range of experience and supporting skills expected for all grantees, particularly in relation to leadership and management. Separately, we will continue in our roll out of narrative CVs as a core component of CRUK funding assessment, including broader guidance for researchers and reviewers on how narrative CVs can be used to encourage diversity in researchers' contributions, experience and skills.

Please provide a brief statement describing your organisation's approval process of this report prior to sign off by the governing body or equivalent authority (*max 200 words*)

This report was initially reviewed by relevant members of CRUK's Research Careers and Funding Policy teams, prior to review by Directors on the Research & Innovation directorate Leadership Team. Our Scientific Executive Board is responsible for the implementation of CRUK's research strategy and has oversight of the funding committees who award grants for investigator-led research.

Signature on behalf of governing body / equivalent authority:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A Bradburn', written over a horizontal line.

Amy Bradburn – Head of Grants Management/Secretariat for the CRUK Scientific Executive Board.

Contact for queries: fellowships@cancer.org.uk

This annual report will be analysed by Universities UK, 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 CDRsecretariat@universitiesuk.ac.uk

www.researcherdevelopmentconcordat.ac.uk