

Research Concordat Annual Progress Report 2021 for Council (23rd July 2021)

1) Context/Background

Bangor University is a signatory to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers and as such committed to the three key principles of the Concordat which are:

- **Environment and culture:** Excellent research requires a supportive and inclusive research culture.
- **Employment:** Researchers are recruited, employed, and managed under conditions that recognise and value their contributions.
- **Professional and career development:** Professional and career development are integral to enabling researchers to develop their full potential.

For each of these Principles, the Concordat outlines the key responsibilities of the four main stakeholder groups: researchers, PIs/managers of researchers, institutions, and funders. It is up to institutions how they define “researcher”. At Bangor the decision was made to include research-only staff, staff on T&R contracts and PGRs.

BU has been committed to the Concordat since 2012. However, the Concordat was reviewed in 2019 following sector consultation and as a result a new Researcher Development Concordat was published. In January 2020, Bangor became one of the first universities in the UK to become a signatory to the new Researcher Development Concordat. It is a signatory responsibility of the new Concordat that an annual progress report is presented to the University’s governing body.

Commitment and progress on the Concordat are evidenced via the HR Excellence in Research (HREiR) Award. This is a European award (managed in the UK by Vitae). The HREiR award demonstrates commitment to improving the environment, employment, and support for researchers. Bangor University has held an HREiR Award since 2012. As part of the application for the HREiR award, an Action Plan must be developed in consultation with researchers and those supporting research from across the University. The HREiR award and Concordat Action plan need to be renewed every 2 years.

The strategic aim (as set out in our 2020 HREiR report) for the next 4 years (and the two-year action plan) is to provide robust and comprehensive support for **all** the University’s researchers (but particularly addressing the needs of early career researchers) to encourage the development of an innovative and dynamic research community.

2) Impact of Covid/Restructure

The current Action Plan was submitted in July 2020. During the last 12 months, we have experienced a very challenging institutional context due to Covid, both in terms of remote working and its impact on researchers and due to further rationalisation and restructures.

3) Progress on key objectives

Despite this, significant progress has been made in a key number of areas highlighted in the Action Plan. This report will look at the three principles of the Concordat and the corresponding areas of the Action Plan in turn, focusing on the key objectives of the Action Plan (as defined in our 2020 report) and highlighting progress made over the last 12 months as well as areas where work is ongoing.

3.1) ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURE

a) **Promote and ensure researcher wellbeing** – Ensure that researchers health and wellbeing are promoted and supported within the University's Health and Wellbeing (H&WB) strategies.

BU has developed and is implementing wellbeing action plans for staff and students in line with HEFCW’s Policy Statement on Wellbeing and Health in HE 20-21. Several researcher-focused initiatives have been developed to complement the university-wide H&WB programmes. These include online focus groups, workshops, and an in-person (socially distanced) networking meeting particularly for new researchers.

b) Ensure that researchers' workloads are effectively managed in the University to ensure good work life balance.

BU is committed to developing a transparent academic workload allocation model to ensure equitable and planned workloads that reflect individual job descriptions. The Workload Allocation Model project overseen by the Academic Workload Task and End Group (AW Group), which has representation from Heads of Schools, University College Union (UCU), academic staff, Human Resources and IT Services. A WAM project officer has been appointed and has been in post since June 2020.

3.2) EMPLOYMENT

a) Improve support and management for fixed term contract staff and ensure that all eligible staff are provided with open ended contracts after 4 years employment

A joint HR and Campus Unions working group was established in early 2020 (UCU agreed to take lead on behalf of the three Unions) to look at "casualisation of employment" (including the issue of use of fixed-term contracts), reflecting the discussion of issues at national level on matters such as phasing out zero-hour contracts, converting hourly paid staff to fractional contracts etc. The overall aim is to reduce the number of staff on fixed-term contracts to provide security of employment. The Fixed-term contract policy is one of several policies currently under negotiation with the trades unions.

b) Standardise induction best practice for all new researchers

Communication and engagement with new researchers continued during remote working via emails and the staff bulletin. However, researcher induction has not yet move online. The provision is currently being reviewed and a new Researcher Induction involving all relevant department (IRIS, Doctoral School, Library & Archive Services, IT, HR) will be rolled out in 21/22. This is a priority for the new academic year. The Doctoral School offers separate inductions for all PGRs.

c) Review the promotion and progression process and criteria to ensure an equitable and transparent system to support researcher career development.

The review of the promotion and progression process and criteria has been completed and draft proposals will soon be consulted on with the Unions. The revised process and criteria will further take into account personal circumstances i.e. part-time contracts, fixed term contracts, career breaks etc.

3.3) PROFESSIONAL AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

a) Developing a comprehensive development provision which will ensure that early career researchers (ECRs) can undertake 10 days professional development.

We are currently revisiting our development provisions on a pan-University basis in order to ensure we offer our ECRs the opportunity to engage in 10 days CPD. Examples of this include ensuring all researchers have access to equality training and ensuring the general staff development schedule is accessed by ECRs, in particularly regarding development/training needs in personal effectiveness. We are also working on developing improved monitoring and recording of CPD to be able to evidence progress on this key element of the new Concordat.

b) Ensure that all researchers have a formal opportunity to discuss their career development and objectives through the PDR process

The PDR process has been ongoing over the past 12 months with the University seeing an overall increased completion rate of 80%; however, the system has not yet moved online. The PDR process will be further developed with new HR/Payroll system which will allow us to further embed the PDR process into the monitoring and recording of training and professional development (section a. above).

c) Ensure that all research managers have the confidence and skills to effectively and positively lead research staff.

BU is committed to ensuring that all leaders and managers in the University have the skills, competencies, and confidence to manage staff and resources effectively. HR are developing a handbook for new managers as well as working on a manager's programme. Building on successful BU Research Leadership programmes (in 2018 and 2019), we are currently developing a joint Research Leadership Programme with Aberystwyth University for 2021/22.

4) Researcher Engagement

The input of staff is key to the evaluation and implementation of the University's Concordat Action Plan and research staff views have been taken into account via a number of avenues including:

- During lockdown welcome emails were sent to all new researchers; a "Welcome to new Researchers" from PVC Research ran in the Staff bulletin and informal online welcome sessions were offered to new researchers
- A series of webinars during post-doc appreciation week (in September 2020) which included an Introduction to the Concordat and a chance to meet the PVC Research
- ECR/CRS focus group on experience of remote working Ongoing consultation with Colleges and Schools is undertaken through the Researcher Development & Concordat Group (RDCG) representatives (two ECR representatives from each College sit on this group) and the Directors of Research at College and School level.
- A survey is sent to all research staff ahead of each RDCG meeting asking for feedback/ideas/questions

5) Next steps

A pan-University approach to our commitment and delivery on the Concordat is key to its successful implementation and will contribute to building a positive and supportive research culture at Bangor. A priority is ensuring a comprehensive training and development programme is offered to all researchers in 2021/22. Continued consultation with researchers is key and will include surveys (University staff survey 2022, participation in the UK-wide "Culture, Employment and Development in Academic Research Survey" (CEDARS) from 2023), focus groups, and informal support for ECRs via networking events.

We will continue to support the provision of an environment and culture that supports and rewards R&I performance. We will work in conjunction with the People First Strategy to raise the visibility of the measures used to both reward success and raise aspiration and in doing so we hope to positively re-enforce behaviours and outcomes that support the delivery of the strategy.