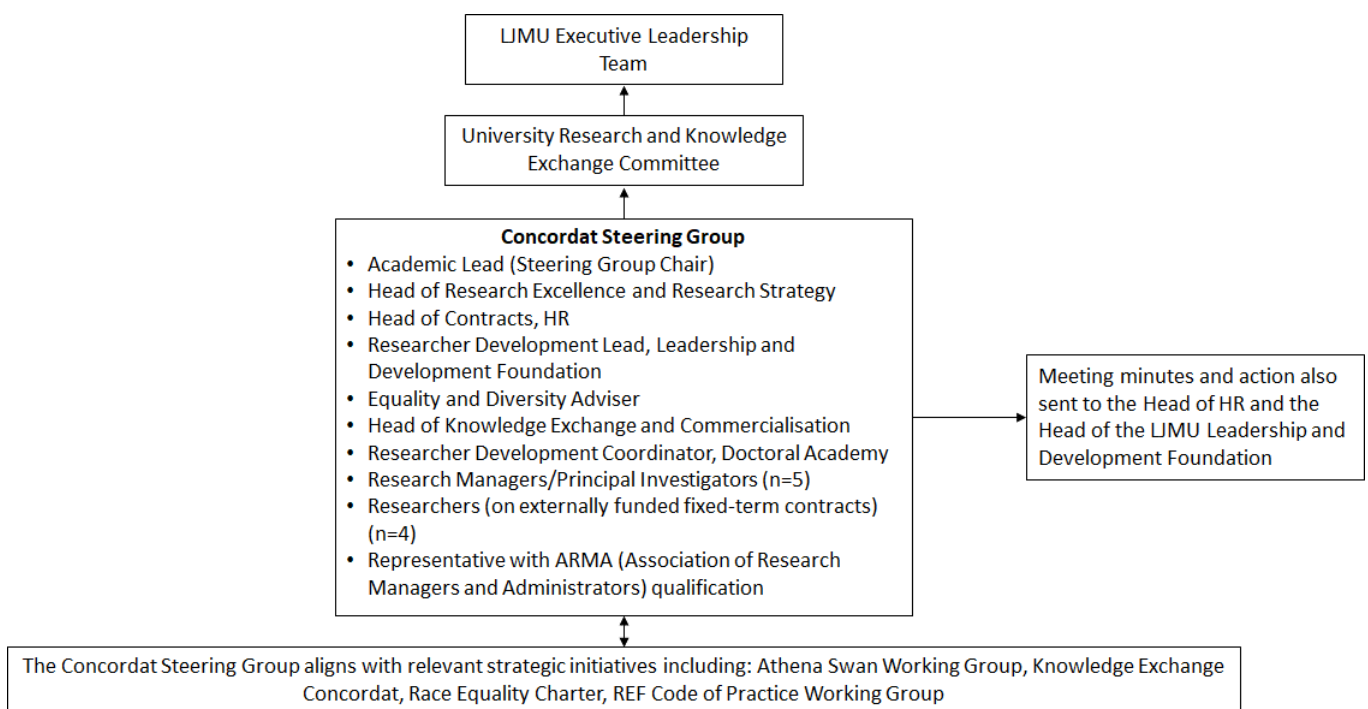


## HR Excellence in Research Award: Eight-Year Progress Review (2018-2020)

### Context

Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) is committed to ensuring that staff are valued and supported to thrive in an environment where personal development and scholarship are central to the delivery of impactful research. LJMU is currently midway through delivery of our 2017-2022 Strategic Plan and through this the University continues to deliver on its ambitions to provide an enabling and facilitative environment for all staff. LJMU have continued to evolve the excellent provision available for researcher development through a variety of programmes offered, including through our Leadership and Development Foundation and our well-established award-winning ACTivator programme. The publication of the revised Researcher Development Concordat in 2019 provided the opportunity for reflection on our previous Concordat progress, resulting in a shift in focus to enable exploration of the specific structural and systemic challenges experienced by researchers on fixed-term contracts. As a result, *researchers employed on externally funded fixed-term contracts* (n at LJMU = 138) are the target audience for our new Concordat Action Plan (CAP).

In line with our shift in focus, we have redressed the balance of our Concordat leadership and simplified our structural and governance arrangements. Where previously a Concordat Task Group provided strategic influence, supported by a Concordat Forum to provide operational support; from 2020 onwards we now have one Concordat Steering Group (CSG) that reports directly to our University Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee (URKEC). Further reflecting this shift, our CSG is now led by a Senior Academic with over ten years' experience of managing externally funded research staff on fixed-term contracts. CSG membership reflects representation across our target cohort and related stakeholders, whilst comprising many of those involved in our previous Concordat activities; thus ensuring consistency and continuity of processes as we transition into the new 2020 CAP. The researchers on the CSG represent Departments with the highest numbers of fixed-term externally funded staff. An overview of our structural and governance arrangements are presented below:



### Internal Evaluation

A number of evaluation activities were carried out across 2020, led by the Academic Lead, including:

**Jan-March 2020:** Focused meetings with key LJMU Concordat representatives (Head of Research Excellence and Research Strategy; Chair of the URKEC; Head of Knowledge Exchange and Commercialisation; Head of Leadership and Development Foundation [LDF]; Researcher Development Lead, LDF; Researcher Development Manager, Doctoral Academy) to explore Concordat activities, action planning, progress to date and barriers and facilitators to progress. Findings were used to inform: composition of new steering group, additional stakeholders to survey/interview and initial views on the target cohort and priorities for the new Concordat. A review of relevant documentation was also carried out during this phase, including: Concordat Task Group minutes and related papers (2017-2019); previous HR Excellence in Research Reviews; Concordat Group Terms of Reference; REF Research Environment review; and CROS and PIRLS 2017 results.

**March-June 2020:** A survey of researcher knowledge, attitudes and perceptions of the Concordat, research environment and culture was originally planned (CROS and PIRLS were not implemented in 2019). However, it was felt that the impact of COVID-19 on lockdown restrictions, home-working arrangements and potential concerns about research contracts/funding could have skewed these findings. Instead, it was decided that in-depth discussions with stakeholders would be more appropriate, allowing opportunity to elicit information from both within and beyond their COVID-19 experiences. A total of ten in-depth interviews took place with Principal Investigators, Research Leaders and Researchers, representing departments including Sport & Exercise Sciences, the Astrophysics Research Institute and the Doctoral Academy.

**September 2020-January 2021:** Inception of the new CSG and gap analysis (by CSG members); including collation of secondary data and additional in-depth discussions with researchers (n=5), and specific staff across the University, including the Head of HR (new in post) and the Head of Contracts (HR), to discuss their experiences and views on the Concordat principles and key priorities. These activities confirmed the key focus areas for our 2020-2022 action plan, ensuring plans aligned with the overarching priorities of the Institution, particularly in terms of exploring opportunities to support longer-term sustainability of fixed-term contracts within our target cohort.

#### Key Evaluation Findings

- Consensus that the breadth and provision of researcher development activities offered at LJMU is excellent, as evidenced through qualitative and quantitative survey responses; and via additional markers of our research environment and culture e.g. a growth in both University research bid submissions (407 bids with a total value of £97.3 million in 2019/20, compared to 366 bids with a total value of £65.1 million for research and enterprise activity in 2018/19) and awards (the University received 169 new awards with a value of £13.9million in 2019/20, compared with 212 awards with a combined value of £9.7 million in 2018/19 (a 43% increase year on year).
- Opportunities for externally funded contract researchers to engage in these activities are limited by time constraints, workload pressures and by line managers and associated staff not being aware of opportunities;
- Awareness of the Concordat amongst all stakeholder groups is low; there was consensus regarding the importance of engaging all researchers across faculties, peer support, mentoring and networks;
- Previous engagement with Concordat activities had been inconsistent (for example, low attendance at some meetings);
- Feelings that opportunities to share best practice in relation to research methods/concepts, resources, career planning and support for training and development could be enhanced;
- Whilst support for staff during COVID-19 had been a key focus for the LJMU Incident Management Team, our target cohort felt that communications during COVID-19 had not taken into account their precarious situation, in terms of uncertainties about research funding;
- Opportunities for career progression and movement towards centrally-funded roles were unclear.

#### Progress and achievements against the strategy set out in the 2018-2020 action plan:

Future Plans aligned to Concordat Principles	Broad Measure of Success
To monitor and evaluate both the implementation process and impact of the University-wide roll-out of the new Workload Allocation Model (WAM), specifically in relation to the process of designating a time allowance for staff with significant responsibility for undertaking research (Principle 2)	<p><b>Target:</b> The proportion of staff with significant responsibility for undertaking research to increase to 60% (from 56%) by September 2020.</p> <p><b>Actual:</b> The proportion of staff with significant responsibility for research (SRIR) stood at 58% (including both academic and research-only staff) at September 2020.</p>

<p>The LDF and Teaching &amp; Learning Academy are preparing to roll-out a mandatory Academic Leadership Development Programme for Programme Leaders (2018/19). The CTG wishes to ensure breadth in its scope and content to include the importance and significance of the Programme Leader role supporting research and research career development (Principle 2)</p>	<p><b>Target:</b> A 10% increase in the proportion of academic and research staff agreeing that their training, learning or development has helped them to do their job more effectively (57% in 2017).</p> <p><b>Actual:</b> Data captured via our 2018 staff survey found that 61.4% of staff agreed that “My training, learning or development has helped me to do my job more effectively”. Data captured via an online survey following all core ACTivator workshops across 2018-2020 found that staff reported the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Was the session a good use of your time? 98.4% yes</li> <li>• Did you benefit from the activities, facilitation and way time was used? 96.9% yes</li> <li>• Would you recommend this session to others? 97.4% yes</li> </ul>																												
<p>To grow the involvement of research leaders in mentoring designed to support less experienced researchers realise their potential to become independent researchers (Principles 3 &amp; 4)</p>	<p><b>Target:</b> A minimum of 20 mentor-mentee relationships supported annually in 2018 and 2019 through a competitive application process.</p> <p><b>Actual:</b> We have implemented an extensive mentoring programme across range of areas and have a large number of mentor-mentee relationships that are currently in place:</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Scheme</th> <th>Scheme start date</th> <th>Mentors (total)</th> <th>Mentees (total)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Academic New Starters</td> <td>Sep-16</td> <td>68</td> <td>82</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Professional Services</td> <td>Jun-18</td> <td>30</td> <td>9</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Supporting Women’s Career Progression - Readership and Professorship</td> <td>Oct-19</td> <td>21</td> <td>19</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Aurora</td> <td>Dec-19</td> <td>12</td> <td>12</td> </tr> <tr> <td>REF</td> <td>Jul-19</td> <td>71</td> <td>87</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>TOTAL</b></td> <td></td> <td><b>202</b></td> <td><b>209</b></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Scheme	Scheme start date	Mentors (total)	Mentees (total)	Academic New Starters	Sep-16	68	82	Professional Services	Jun-18	30	9	Supporting Women’s Career Progression - Readership and Professorship	Oct-19	21	19	Aurora	Dec-19	12	12	REF	Jul-19	71	87	<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>202</b>	<b>209</b>
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<p>Translate the desire of the Concordat Forum to create faculty Staff Research Associations (SRA) into real and engaged entities, with designated academic leaders who are supported by leadership development professionals (Principle 5)</p>	<p><b>Target:</b> SRA’s established in two faculties in 2018/19. All SRA leaders engage with leadership development programmes (100% uptake).</p> <p><b>Actual:</b> The description for the SRA’s was developed and agreed between 2018/19 but this was not progressed further. Our revised Concordat Action Plan includes a specific action (see actions related to objective PCDI6) to address this.</p>																												
<p>Having successfully retained Athena SWAN Bronze Award at institutional level (November 2017 submission), a priority is to ensure all LJMU Schools/departments submit for an award (Principle 6)</p>	<p><b>Target:</b> Submission by all eight of LJMU’s STEMM areas and at least three non- STEMM Schools/departments by April 2020 (Action 12)</p> <p><b>Actual:</b> 3 STEMM departments submitted 2018/2019 (Sport &amp; Exercise Science – successful, Public Health Institute – unsuccessful, Built Environment – unsuccessful); 3 STEMM departments preparing to submit 2021/22 (Astrophysics Research Institute, Humanities &amp; Social Science, Pharmacy &amp; Biomolecular Sciences); 2 STEMM departmental submission dates to be confirmed (Nursing &amp; Allied Health, Natural Science &amp; Psychology); 3 non-STEMM departments preparing to submit 2021 (Liverpool Business School, School of Justice Studies, Liverpool Screen School).</p>																												

## Strategy for the next four years, including success measures:

<p><b>Environment and Culture</b> <i>Support and encourage Research Managers and Fixed-term Researchers (FTRs) to complete all mandatory training and make use of internal and external staff development opportunities.</i></p>	
Key Action/s	Success Measure/s
<p>Ensure that all relevant staff are aware of the Concordat:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include reference to the Researcher Development Concordat (RDC) within FTR job descriptions/person specifications; Include the RDC principles within the LJMU Staff Induction Handbook and Induction sessions; Develop Research Brochures for all Faculties and include the RDC in here, including reference to the Research Staff Association (RSA).</li> </ul>	<p>We will measure awareness via the CEDARS survey and also through our improved data monitoring of researcher development activities (as part of our revised CAP). We will aim for awareness of the RDC to exceed the sector benchmarks (previously 15%, as measured by CROS).</p>
<p>Regularly review and report on the quality of the research environment and culture:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will develop a RSA for FTRs, with the aim of contributing to Institutional policy and practice development, and developing best practice. As well as meeting on a bi-monthly basis, we will provide an online portal containing links to relevant documentation and support.</li> </ul>	<p>CSG to support the development of an active (LJMU-wide) Research Staff Association that engages with FTRs across all Faculties. Engagement with the RSA will be monitored and contributions to policy and practice will be monitored (as detailed within our CAP).</p>
<p><b>Employment</b> <i>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.</i></p>	
Action/s	Success Measure/s
<p>Seek to improve job security for FTRs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A baseline review of staff on fixed-term contracts is currently underway and will be completed during the implementation of this current action plan. The review is exploring the numbers of FTRs, and characteristics including retention and redeployment figures.</li> </ul>	<p>The results and implications of the baseline review to be reported to ELT and used to inform specific actions to improve job security. Success will include improved levels of mental wellbeing and productivity as measured by HR data (retention, sickness) and through CEDARS.</p>
<p><b>Professional and Career Development</b> <i>Our internal ACTivator programme is constantly reviewed and adapted to address emerging needs. We will ensure that Research Managers and Researchers 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.</i></p>	
Action/s	Success Measure/s
<p>Provide opportunities, structured support/encouragement and time for researchers to engage in a minimum of 10 days professional development pro rata per year:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include reference to this obligation within job descriptions/person specifications for FTR posts and in grant/project applications; all research managers and researchers will be expected to discuss and plan opportunities for these activities during appraisals and in regular 1-1 meetings.</li> </ul>	<p>We have no benchmark, but would expect researchers to engage with a minimum requirement of 5 days by the end of Year 1, building to 8 by the end of Year 2. This information would be collected during appraisals and using the CEDARS survey (our revised CAP includes an expectation that 100% of staff should receive an annual appraisal).</p>
<p>Improve quality of monitoring data:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ACTivator (and LDF) data is currently collected by gender, Faculty, School and other broad information. We will add an indicator to collect data on contract type, enabling us to identify progress specific to our Concordat cohort.</li> </ul>	<p>Data collection measures will be embedded by April 2021 and reviewed annually.</p>

Our previous Concordat Action Plans and HR Excellence in Research Reviews are available here: <https://www.ljmu.ac.uk/about-us/structure/professional-services/research-and-innovation-services/concordat>