

Concordats and Agreements Review: frequently asked questions

What is a concordat?

A concordat can be defined as commitments, agreements, voluntary codes of practice and ambitions that aim to support particular areas or communities.

What are concordats and agreements?

Concordats and agreements are a significant part of the landscape of frameworks and practices that contribute to research cultures and environments in which UK research takes place. These initiatives have grown organically, in response to challenges and opportunities, and cover a range of issues to support researchers and their activities.

Who were the project leads?

The project was jointly commissioned by Universities UK (UUK), UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and Wellcome. Leads from each commissioning partner have formed a Project Board to provide advice and momentum.

What was the starting rationale behind this project?

Concordats and agreements are a significant part of the landscape of frameworks and practices that contribute to research cultures and environments in which UK research takes place. These initiatives have grown organically, in response to challenges and opportunities, and cover a range of issues to support researchers and their activities. Until the Concordat and Agreements Review (CAR) Phase 1, there was no assessment of their collective effect on the research cultures and environments in the UK, nor of any gaps in their remit.

CAR Phase 1 for the first time ever mapped this landscape and provided insights on the collective effects of these initiatives.

Phase 2

What were the aims and objectives of Phase 2?

The phase 2 brought together the initiative owners and the research and innovation community to look for potential future alignments to create a positive culture, and increase influence, capacity, and efficiency across the landscape.

It responded to the clear call from both initiative 'owners' and the research and innovation community to explore potential alignments to help reduce burden and coordinate reporting, complementing the work of the [Independent Review of Research Bureaucracy](#).

What were the key outcomes of Phase 2?

The key outcomes of Phase 2 were:

- An agreement to move from concordat centric model to a research culture model.
- An action plan to be co-owned and co-delivered by the initiative owners with suggestions for how Higher Education Institutions and Research Organisations can be involved.

How was the Phase 2 report produced?

The consultancy [Oxentia Ltd](#) was jointly commissioned by Universities UK, Wellcome and UKRI to undertake this work.

It involved the initiative owners and key stakeholders across the research and innovation sector co-creating a way forward collectively. Oxentia supported these groups to co-create a way forward and foster a sector-wide collaboration and understanding on an important feature of research culture in the UK, contributing to ambitions as a Science Superpower.

Who were the participants in the Phase 2 research?

The consultancy [Oxentia Ltd](#) conducted interviews with the initiative owners. These informed the workshops with the research and innovation (R&I) sector, which looked to facilitate co-creation of potential solutions and a corresponding action plan.

A user group was also drawn from a diverse set of people involved in implementing these initiatives.

What was the timeline for the project?

Phase 2 started in July 2022 and concluded in May 2023.

How did you ensure Phase 2 was done to a high standard and reflected the diversity of the sector?

A user group was convened by the consultant to provide input on the project. This group included representatives from Higher Education Institutions and Research Organisation. Users are those organisations that are guided by (and therefore 'use') the concordats and initiatives.

Alongside the user group the project convened an External Advisory Group to advise on the project. This group included representatives from the R&I community, initiative owners, the project board, and the devolved nations.

Was there already a pre-identified outcome for Phase 2?

There was no pre-identified outcome for this project. Joint commissioners of this work, Wellcome, UKRI and Universities UK, make no comment on any of these initiatives to ensure initiative owners and the research and innovation community are fully able to shape and influence the outcome as part of Phase 2.

What happens next?

The Phase 2 output was co-designed and co-developed in consultation with the initiative owners and the R&I community. An action plan set out in the report, will be co-owned and co-delivered by the initiative owners, which includes ambition for alignment across the sector.

The report recognises that initiative owners would benefit from support to convene to drive next steps forward on behalf of the sector and has identified potential sources, eg the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA) Working Group.

Phase 1

What are the aims and objectives of Phase 1?

The aim of Phase 1 was to gather insights on the adoption of initiatives, their effects, and their relationships, to help identify where it can be made easier and more rewarding for research teams and organisations to focus on doing high quality research and developing highly skilled and motivated research staff. We hope the research will help stakeholders improve the ways the initiatives affect research culture and environments. The project was not designed to measure the impact of specific initiatives, it was to look at the overall impact.

What were the key findings of Phase 1?

The key findings of Phase 1 include:

- It is a complex landscape with limited homogeneous experience of both the concordats and agreements (from here on the 'initiatives'), as well as culture/environment, across institution types or roles.
- It is difficult to evidence the direct impact of the initiatives on research culture as they have been embedded into organisations' strategies and processes.
- There is an explicit acknowledgement that they do have an impact/role to play – eg facilitating discussion on sensitive subjects, engaging senior leaders.
- The impact of implementation comes as much from how the organisations put into effect the initiatives as it does the initiative requirements themselves.
- No obvious overlap between aims was found, but collectively they can create an administrative burden.
- There is a clear call from both initiative owners and implementers to explore potential alignments to help reduce the burden and coordinate reporting.

Which concordats did the project engage with?

The project was focused on initiatives that require research organisations to report on compliance, implementation etc, and/or that require research organisations to develop an action plan.

The initiatives engaged in the project included:

- Concordat to Support Research Integrity
- Concordat on Open Research Data
- Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers
- Technician Commitment
- Concordat on Openness on Animal Research

- Concordat for Engaging the Public with Research
- Concordat for the Advancement of Knowledge Exchange in Higher Education
- Guidance for Safeguarding in International Development Research
- San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA)
- Leiden Manifesto on Research Metrics
- Athena Swan Charter
- Race Equality Charter.

Who participated in the Phase 1 research?

172 higher education institutions (HEIs) nationwide including GuildHE, Research institutes and public sector research establishments (PSRE) were invited to take part in the research. 80 institutions provided contacts and 1,085 were invited to take part in the survey. Of these, 510 participated. See Table 1 for details.

Table 1: Research participants

Participants	Number of interviews
HEIs – England	334
HEIs – non-England	81
GuildHE	1
PSRE	6
Research institutes	88
Total	510

How was the Phase 1 report produced?

Basis Social, a research and insight consultancy, were commissioned to produce the CAR Phase 1 report after a competitive tender.

What was the timeline for the Phase 1 project?

The fieldwork for Phase 1 took place between July to September 2021; the final report provides a snapshot of the research landscape in summer 2021.

Some of the Phase 1 data is inaccurate.

This Phase 1 report analysis was conducted in summer 2021 and we recognise that some initiatives may have made progress since then. We have included a disclaimer on the publication statement noting the report is a snapshot of summer 2021.

Is there already an identified outcome for this project?

No. The initiative owners and the research and innovation community will be able to shape and influence the outcome as part of Phase 2.

How did you ensure that the project is done to a high standard and reflects the diversity of the sector?

The project convened an external challenge group to advise the project. The group includes researchers from different parts of the system and at different career stages, research managers and professional services staff, and experienced analysts.

How does this align with the UK Government's People and Culture Strategy?

This complements the UK Government's People and Culture Strategy which called for 'a review of existing concordats and accreditations to ensure that they drive positive change while minimising bureaucracy'.

How does this align with the Independent Review of Research Bureaucracy?

This complements the work of the Independent Review of Research Bureaucracy which wants to examine how 'concordats within UK higher education could be streamlined and made less burdensome' and more recently, encourages 'effective joining up with other complementary activities', such as the Review of the Concordats among other key activities.