

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

Funders and Regulators

Name of Institution	The Dunhill Medical Trust
Reporting period	March 2021 – February 2023
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Web address of annual report	https://dunhillmedical.org.uk/23-05-dmt-researcher-development-concordat_annual-report-final/
Web address of institutional Researcher Development Concordat webpage	https://dunhillmedical.org.uk/concordat-annual-report-and-updated-action-plan-published
Contact for questions/concerns on researcher career development	grants@dunhillmedical.org.uk
Date statement sent to Researcher Development Concordat secretariat via CDRsecretariat@universitiesuk.ac.uk	16 th 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).

The Trust is committed to promoting a dynamic, diverse, and inclusive research system. As a funder, we also expect organisations affiliated with our awardees to support their researchers and uphold similar values. In particular, our 2020-25 Strategic Framework identifies equity, diversity and inclusion as a key principle underpinning all of the work we fund.

We are committed to providing a range of support, through a variety of funding mechanisms, to enable researchers from all relevant disciplines, and at different career stages, to undertake ageing-related research (see below for further detail). In particular, we provide targeted support for doctoral students and post-doctoral academics so that promising ageing-related early career researchers are not lost to the field.

As a funder we promote the inclusion of early career researchers – including prospective PhD students in the case of PhD studentship applications – as named co-applicants on grant applications. In addition, at the point of application, applicants are asked to explain how the proposed research/team/involved organisations align with the Trust's principles for research and, accordingly, with the values of the Concordat. For example:

- The approach to capacity building/career development, support and wellbeing.
- The approach to equity, diversity and inclusion (not just an organisational level but specific to the proposed research).

To encourage applicants to embed the above principles into their proposed research, it is made clear that the Trust is supportive of justified costs related to career development, wellbeing, equity, diversity and inclusion etc. being included in project budgets.

Applicants' responses to the above questions form a key element of the assessment of applications. For two-stage calls (the majority of the Trust's research funding calls), the assessment of expressions of interest is primarily principles-based. For single-stage calls, a formal satisfactory response which provides this principles-based information is a condition of funding.

We are now in the process of operationalising a new post-award framework which will place a greater emphasis on these principles/values during the lifetime of a research grant (in regular progress/final updates, for example), and also intend to introduce a new funding

scheme to celebrate researchers who have upheld these principles in their work. Further details on both of these actions are provided below.

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*)

Environment and culture

In 2023 the Trust plans to launch the DMT Academy Excellence Awards, which will help to celebrate success, achievement and ambition in ageing-related research. Awardees will be offered £40k pa for three years, which can be used flexibly. Of particular relevance to the Concordat, nominees will need to explain how they have upheld our research principles, for example:

- Demonstrated leadership in capacity building and/or mentoring in ageing-related research.
- Integrated equity, diversity and inclusion in research.
- Influenced policy/practice in the education and/or training of ageing-related researchers.

We are also currently in the process of operationalising a new post-award framework which will see changes to the way we engage with awardees during the lifetime of their grant. Of relevance to the Concordat, these changes include:

- A greater focus on our research principles in the interim progress updates and final updates that we ask awardees to share with us.
- A mechanism to independently capture the views/experiences of any researchers employed on our grants (especially early career researchers) with regards to:
 - The training and/or career development opportunities they have had access to as a result of working on the grant.
 - Whether they believe they are working in a safe and supportive environment.

We will be providing awardees with the opportunity to feed back on these new changes once implemented.

Alongside the new post-award framework, we will also be reviewing and updating our Terms and Conditions for research grants to make it clear that breaches/misconduct could result in penalties (e.g., not being able to apply to the Trust again for a period of time).

Employment

As well as being an accredited Living Wage employer, we are now in the process of becoming a Living Wage funder. For future funding calls, this will require host institutions to confirm that all posts wholly or partly funded by the Trust are being paid at the real living wage.

The Trust has a number of ongoing and future funding calls which offer targeted support for early career researchers and provide opportunities for career progression and increased job security. In particular, our pilot Proleptic Post-doctoral Fellowship scheme offers support for 3-5 year fellowships (on a co-funded basis with the host institution), with the expectation that by the end of the Fellowship the host institution is fully funding the fellow and have committed to providing them with a permanent academic position. Subject to this pilot being successful, our intention is for this scheme to be run on a regular basis in the future.

Finally, on the advice of our Research Grants Committee, we plan to make it explicit in the relevant call documentation that we will accommodate the salary costs of researchers employed on our grants who may be promoted during the lifetime of the grant (i.e. have reached/are due to reach the upper spine point of their grade). It was noted that some institutions have no mechanism for offering promotions mid-award otherwise.

Professional Development of Researchers

Our application forms and assessment processes will continue to have a focus on the training and development opportunities that will be made available to those involved in the proposed research. As stated above, the new post-award framework also places emphasis on this.

The Trust is in the process of developing the “DMT Academy”, a network of researchers and research-ready community organisations with an interest in ageing-related research. Amongst the planned opportunities available through the Academy will be an informal mentoring scheme.

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

Since the publication of our initial Concordat action plan, we have implemented a number of actions related to our application and assessment processes in support of this ‘pillar’. For example:

- Wherever feasible we give due consideration to family and caring responsibilities in setting timelines and deadlines for funding calls (e.g., avoiding school holidays wherever possible).
- We now include question(s) in our application forms focusing on the proposed approach to equity, diversity and inclusion and how this will be integrated into the research. As mentioned above, this also forms a key aspect of the assessment of proposals.
- We have begun hosting webinars to support prospective applicants to our funding calls – these are recorded and made available online (with subtitles and a transcript) to ensure they are accessible to a wide audience.
- We now actively consider, and make efforts to broaden, our pool of peer reviewers and Expert Panel members – particularly with respect to career-stage.

Prior to any substantial research-related change being made (e.g., a policy or event), we now complete an equality impact assessment to monitor and, where feasible, mitigate, the impacts of this change on different groups of researchers.

Those actions relating to the Trust’s post-award reporting processes, and its Terms and Conditions for research grants, are still underway and are planned for completion during FY2023/24.

Employment

As mentioned above, we have now introduced a scheme targeted at offering proleptic fellowships for talented post-doctoral researchers (with a success-related employment commitment from the host institution).

For a number of our recent research funding calls, we have started to offer flexibility in the type of funding that can be applied for – e.g., seed funding, research project grant, post-doctoral fellowship etc. – to try and provide access to our funding for those at different career stages. In April 2021, we also introduced a new policy which enables early career researchers without tenure to apply as Principal Investigator (and apply for their salary costs) when accompanied by a letter of support from their host institution. For our three

most recent themed funding calls (since these changes were introduced), 50% of lead applicants at the expression of interest stage identified as an early career researcher. This compares to an average of 14% early career lead applicants for our eight research project grant calls from 2018-2020 (before these changes were introduced).

As above, those actions related to the Trust's post-award reporting processes, and relatedly its Terms and Conditions for research grants, are still underway and should be completed in the coming year.

Professional Development of Researchers

Since the publication of our initial Concordat action plan, the training and professional development of all researchers involved in the research is a key element of the assessment criteria for our research funding calls and this is made explicit in any call documentation.

As a funder, one of the obligations listed in the Concordat is to "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." In support of this obligation, in October 2022 we hosted an Early Career Researcher Network event focused on Alternative Careers for Researchers, involving a range of speakers who began their careers in academia and had since gone on to work in other sectors. The event was well-attended and feedback from attendees overwhelmingly positive (100% of those who responded to the post-event survey said they would like to attend similar events in the future).

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)

As outlined above, since the publication of our initial action plan we have implemented several changes to our application and assessment policies/processes to place a greater emphasis on principles relevant to the Concordat, specifically:

- Equity, diversity and inclusion
- Training and career/professional development
- Ensuring access to our funding for researchers from different disciplines and career-stages

Our sense at this relatively early stage (most grants funded since 2021 are either yet-to-start or have only started recently) is that these changes are encouraging applicants to think about these issues in more depth and are resulting in successful applications which are more closely aligned with our funding principles. It also appears that we are receiving a

substantially greater proportion of applications from early career researchers since these changes were introduced.

We can still do more to ensure that awardees are continuing to uphold these principles throughout the lifetime of their grant. A number of actions in our plan – particularly those related to our post-award reporting processes and updates to our Terms and Conditions – will strengthen this but are yet to be completed. A focus of the coming year will be to complete these and, therefore, whilst our updated plan contains some new actions it also contains several outstanding actions with updated deadlines.

Having reflected on the action plan, some actions relating to the Trust’s reporting processes appear to be somewhat duplicative. For example, “Revise the questions in the periodic Progress Reports to...ask PIs about their contribution to promoting an equitable, inclusive, and positive research culture” and also, “Revise the questions in the annual Progress Reports to have an increased focus on working conditions and culture”. Whilst these actions remain in the plan, in practice they will be implemented in a more streamlined manner. Finally, on reflection we have decided not to implement the following action: “Introduce ‘exit interviews’ for researchers who leave the project prior to the grant end date” – in a poll of the Trust’s Early Career Researcher Network, this action was not seen as a priority.

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

Key objectives for the coming reporting period are as follows:

- To finalise and operationalise our new post-award framework, which will encompass those actions related to our reporting processes.
- To review and update our Terms and Conditions for research grants.
- To begin collecting data on protected characteristics from applicants, peer reviewers and Expert Panel/Committee members, in support of strengthening diversity.
- To launch the DMT Academy and associated Excellence Awards.

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 has been internally reviewed and approved by the Trust’s Chief Executive.

Signature on behalf of governing body / equivalent authority:

Carmel Hughes

Carmel Hughes (May 16, 2023 11:59 GMT+1)

Carmel Hughes

Contact for queries: grants@dunhillmedical.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