

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

Funders and Regulators

Name of Institution	The Dunhill Medical Trust
Reporting period	February 2023 – February 2024
Date approved by governing body	6 th February 2024
Date published online	15 th May 2024
Web address of annual report	https://dunhillmedical.org.uk/24-05-dmt-researcher-development-concordat_annual-report-final/
Web address of institutional Researcher Development Concordat webpage	https://dunhillmedical.org.uk/news/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	15 th May 2024

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 Dunhill Medical Trust is an independently endowed charitable funder (registered charity no. 1140372), focused on supporting research into the underpinning mechanisms of ageing, the treatment of ageing-related diseases, and improving quality of life for older people in the UK. We also provide funding and support to community-led organisations providing services and support to older people.

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 (EDI), and capacity building / career development, as key principles 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 early career ageing-related 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, EDI etc. being included in their proposed 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 expression of interest applications is primarily principles-based. For single-

stage calls, a formal satisfactory response which provides this principles-based information is a condition of funding.

We continue to operationalise our new post-award reporting framework, and in our new progress updates – which, typically, grant-holders are asked to complete annually – a greater emphasis is placed on the team’s progress against their plans with regard to these principles.

Finally, since our last annual report, we have formally launched two new initiatives which link to our support of the Concordat’s aims:

- The Dunhill Medical Trust Academy
- Relatedly, the DMT Academy Excellence Awards

Further detail on these initiatives is 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

Following a successful first round in 2023/24, we plan to launch another round of the DMT Academy Excellence Awards (see next question for more details) in 2024. Again, a focus of the shortlisting / selection process will be on the nominee’s contribution to our / the Concordat’s principles. For example:

- Capacity building in ageing-related research, and their contribution to a positive research culture.
- Meaningful integration of equity, diversity and inclusion in research.

We are continuing to operationalise our new post-award framework, which defines how we engage with grant-holders / their team members during the lifetime of their grant. The next question outlines progress made in this regard during the reporting period. Moving forward, a key aim is to introduce a mechanism to independently capture the views / experiences of researchers employed on our grants with regards to:

- The training, support and/or career development opportunities they have had access to (this also links to the ‘Professional Development’ pillar of the Concordat).

- Whether they feel they are working in a safe and supportive environment.

As with all aspects of the new post-award framework, we will be providing grant-holders with the opportunity to feedback on these new changes once implemented.

We continue to capture diversity data on applicants to our schemes, as well as on Trustees / Committee members. Once we have a sufficient amount of data, we will be analysing this to better understand whether our funding opportunities / selection processes etc. are equitable.

Employment

We continue to monitor our funding calls to ensure, as much as possible, that they provide access to research funding at all career levels. In particular, we continue to offer targeted support for early career researchers. For example:

- Our large themed research calls offer flexibility in the type / duration / amount of funding that can be applied for. See our [recent call](#) on 'Age-related hearing and/or vision' as an example.
- Following a successful pilot (see next question for more details), we plan to continue our Proleptic Post-doctoral Fellowship scheme. For the upcoming round, during the application process we intend to ask Heads of Department how they have specifically encouraged candidates from under-represented groups to apply.
- In Spring 2024, we plan to pilot a new early career post-doctoral fellowship scheme, noting that this career stage is in need of targeted support.

As noted in our previous annual report, over the last few years the number of applicants applying to our schemes who define themselves as early career researchers has increased substantially – our aim is for this trend to continue moving forward.

Professional Development of Researchers

Our new post-award reporting processes place a greater emphasis on this 'pillar' during the lifetime of the grant and, as highlighted above, an aim for the coming year is to introduce a mechanism for those employed on the grant to independently provide their experiences in this regard.

Once set-up, this mechanism should provide a means to understand the effectiveness of our other approaches towards professional / career development (i.e. we would expect a high degree of correlation between the support / development opportunities outlined in

<p>the application / progress updates, and the actual experiences of those employed on the grant).</p> <p>In line with our strategic aim of “making connections; convening networks”, we plan to host another Early Career Researcher Event in autumn 2024, which will include opportunities for professional development.</p>
<p>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 (<i>max 600 words</i>)</p>
<p>Environment and Culture</p> <p>As alluded to previously, in September 2023 we launched the first round of the DMT Academy Excellence Awards. This scheme aims to celebrate those who have demonstrated excellence in ageing-related research, as well as made a meaningful contribution to our key principles for research. Awardees receive £120k over three years to spend flexibly on research-related activities. We were very happy with the response to the scheme (27 nominations in total) and, notably, shortlisted candidates outlined a number of plans for the award funds which directly align with the aims of the Concordat. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding to support researchers’ travel to conferences, meetings, multi-disciplinary lab placements etc. • Professional development training for the awardee and/or those in their lab / group. • Supporting those from under-represented groups into research. <p>Since our previous annual report, we have also started collecting optional diversity data from applicants and Trustees / Committee members.</p> <p>As discussed above, we have also introduced a new process for progress updates with our grant-holders. This places an increased emphasis on their progress regarding our research principles, and also offers flexibility in how grant-holders update us – either via a written report, or via a conversation with their dedicated contact at the Trust. Whilst still a new process, so far these updates are making it easier for us to monitor how these principles are being integrated into the research on an ongoing basis. Grant-holders choosing the conversation-based approach have also commented that this feels more collaborative than other funders’ processes.</p>

Employment

Since the last annual report, the Trust has become an accredited Living Wage Funder. Our funding call documentation now states that we expect all posts wholly or partly funded by us are paid at least the real living wage (unless there are specific reasons not to). New grant-holders are also required to provide information regarding this as a condition of award – and we will be tracking this data moving forward.

As outlined above, in 2022/23 we ran a successful pilot of our Proleptic Post-doctoral Fellowship scheme. This scheme aims to support senior post-doctoral researchers with a 3-5 year fellowship (co-funded with the host institution), with the expectation that by the end of the Fellowship the host institution have committed to providing them with a permanent academic position. Two fellows were funded in the pilot scheme – their criteria for progression to a permanent role have been agreed between the Trust and the host institution, and their progress against these criteria will be monitored as part of their annual progress updates.

Professional Development of Researchers

Key to this pillar has been the launch, in March 2023, of the Dunhill Medical Trust Academy, an inclusive, free-to-join network of researchers and community-led organisations with an interest in healthy ageing. Initiatives offered include:

- An informal mentoring scheme.
- Members-only professional development workshops (e.g. CV and application writing).

In November 2023, we also hosted a very well-attended Early Career Researcher Event, which included a mock committee session – with attendees reviewing / discussing a number of genuine (anonymised) research applications. 100% of attendees who completed the post-event survey said they would like to attend similar events in the future, and over half of the respondents specifically mentioned the mock committee session when asked what they most enjoyed.

Finally, in line with the Concordat's aim of supporting / encouraging careers beyond academia, in 2023 we successfully piloted our Innovation Fellowships in Healthy Ageing in partnership with Zinc. As a result, two post-doctoral researchers are now undertaking paid 12-month placements in health ventures. We plan to support another round of this scheme in 2024.

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)

An important learning has been that there is still some way to go in getting researchers to think about their work through the lens of the Concordat principles (e.g. some applicants can easily outline the aims of their proposed research, methodological plans etc., but do less well at articulating how EDI, career development etc. will be embedded). In some cases, applicants may not be aware of the extent to which these aspects form part of our assessment processes. In this regard, our pre-call webinars and events such as the Early Career Researcher meeting provide an important opportunity to emphasise our approach – those in the mock committee session commented that it was helpful to see how these principles form such a key element of the review process, for example. This has highlighted the value of such initiatives, and it is hoped that the DMT Academy will provide further opportunities to encourage / celebrate the upholding of these principles.

It has also become apparent that many of our actions will take time to achieve. In particular, the implementation of our new post-award framework has taken longer than planned and, to some extent, this has had a knock-on effect on those actions related to the update of our Terms and Conditions for research grants. As a result, new deadlines have been assigned to the actions related to these activities, and the intention is for these to be completed / close to completion over the next 12 months.

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 complete the operationalisation of our new post-award framework, in particular:
 - Our new final update processes (following-on from changes to our progress update processes, as detailed in this report).
 - Our mechanism to independently capture the experiences of those employed on our grants.
- To update our Terms and Conditions for research grants.
- To launch our new early career post-doctoral fellowship scheme, alongside continuing to provide access to research funding at a range of career stages through our existing schemes.
- To continue to grow the DMT Academy and develop / support those initiatives aligned to the Concordat's aims.

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, prior to review / approval from our Research Grants Committee.

Signature on behalf of governing body / equivalent authority:

Carmel Hughes

Carmel Hughes (May 15, 2024 16:39 GMT+1)

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