# Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine progress report on implementation of the Career Development of Researchers Concordat, July 2022

**Background and context**

LSTM signed the Researcher Development Concordat in July 2020 and established the Career Development of Researchers (CADRE) working group to oversee progress towards meeting the commitments set out in the concordat. The group has representation from across LSTM’s four academic departments, including early- and mid-career researchers, research group leaders representative from international sites and our PGR cohort.

The Researcher Development Concordat is one of multiple initiatives adopted by LSTM to improve the research culture. LSTM is also a signatory to the Knowledge Exchange Concordat, the Declaration on Research Assessment, and the Research Integrity Concordat, all of which have many synergies with the Researcher Development Concordat. We have also been implementing a number of initiatives to progress through the Athena Swan Charter Mark system (with plans to submit to the Race Equality Charter within the next 3 years).

A gap analysis was conducted with challenges and priorities identified through departmental and early/mid career researcher consultations and information provided in exit interviews. These were used to develop an institutional action plan that was approved in full by Management Committee in May 2021 and is being implemented across LSTM. The CADRe group meets every two months and oversees the implementation of the action plan.

## Strategic objectives for the reporting year

1. Ensure information on research culture initiatives are accessible to all across the organisation
2. Clarify expectations of Research Group Leaders
3. Ensure ‘wider contributions’ of researchers are accurately recorded and appropriately rewarded
4. Expand wellbeing, mental health and equity and inclusion training offerings
5. Support staff to develop awareness, and experience of the broader research ecosystem, including knowledge exchange

Key achievements and progress – July 2021 – June 2022

This section outlines the key achievements and progress against our planned actions during the first year of implementation, July 2021 to June 2022. Our published action plan contains a more detailed list of actions, listed according to the concordat principles they support; here we have focused on the key activities that support the 5 above objectives.

**Ensure information on research culture initiatives are accessible**

A research culture intranet site has been established that contains information on: Career pathways, CADRe action plan, Expectations and Support for Research Group Leaders, our approach to evaluating research quality, information on Professional Development Opportunities and Principles of Equitable Partnerships.

Regular updates on policies, initiatives, and opportunities to get involved are disseminated in the staff newsletter and townhall events have been held with early/mid-career researchers (EMCRs) and managers of researchers. Information on the work of CADRe and the principles of the Concordat are included during induction.

**Clarify expectations of Research Group Leaders**

Our consultations with EMCRs revealed discrepancies in opportunities afforded to researchers between departments and individual research groups. Managers of researchers also raised gaps in the training or support they received to lead a research team. We therefore prepared an extensive document that sets out the different tasks associated with the role of ‘Research Group Leader’, with signposting to relevant policies, guidance or training and contact points for support. This resource will be regularly updated following feedback from research group leaders and their teams; we are also working on making the information more accessible.

**Ensure ‘wider contributions’ of researchers are accurately recorded and appropriately rewarded**

An activity ‘dashboard’ has been developed and launched, which includes a variety of information on researcher activity. This includes data on publications, research grants, teaching contributions, committee membership, CPD and travel. Updates and improvements to the dashboard are in process; once these are resolved the data will be used to ensure institutional data held is correct, is used in performance reviews and promotions and that workloads are spread equitably.

Promotions and re-grading documentation have been updated to reflect the value the institute affords to research uptake with contributions to Knowledge Exchange activities now being recorded and evaluated.

**Expand wellbeing, mental health and equity and inclusion training offerings**

The ‘Expectations of Research Group Leaders’ document includes a commitment to undertaking training in equity and inclusion, wellbeing and mental health support. It will be used to develop training and professional development for research group leaders and those moving into those roles.

Wellbeing and Mental First Aid Champions have been trained and appointed to provide focal points across the organisation.

**Support staff to develop awareness, and experience of broader research ecosystem, including knowledge exchange**

We have greatly expanded the range of training opportunities in areas related to knowledge exchange with 34 new courses, ranging from 1 hour to 6 week courses in topics ranging from commercialisation, data sharing, community engagement and equitable partnerships. All training offered across LSTM is linked to the Researcher Development Framework to aid EMCRs in identifying, and highlighting transferable skills.

## Measures of success and proposals for improvement

The simultaneous introduction of multiple new initiatives around research culture, and equity and inclusion, involved the establishment of several new working groups. Whilst substantial progress has been made, further work is needed to improve communication between groups and manage workloads. Priorities should be agreed at the highest executive level (Management Committee) and cascaded to all working in this area.

## Learnings from progress

CADRe’s first action plan was overly complex and ambitious. By listing actions against each of the 16 concordat principles the action plan lacked focus, prioritisation was challenging and the available resources were spread too thinly. Hence the 2nd iteration of our action plan is shorter, whilst still addressing 12 of the 16 principles.

For July 2022- June 2023 we have identified 3 key priority areas for CADRe

1. Address issues relating to precarious contracts (by, for example, providing greater clarification on career progression, review teaching and citizenship activities undertaken by non core-funded researchers with an equity lens, reviewing re-deployment policy)
2. Showcase, celebrate and support alternative career pathways outside academia
3. Establish departmental research integrity champions and normalise conversations around ‘questionable research culture’ to identify and address gaps