

A woman with short brown hair and glasses, wearing a purple and blue striped t-shirt and blue jeans, stands on the left side of the frame. She is holding a white marker and gesturing with her hands as if presenting. In the foreground, the backs of several people are visible as they sit in modern, light-colored chairs, listening to her. The background shows a bright, open-plan office space with large windows and other people working.

Vitae Concordat to support the career development of researchers

An overview of the Francis Crick Institute action plan

APRIL 2023

The Vitae Concordat to support the career development of researchers (the Concordat) provides a framework for improving the work environment of early career researchers (postdocs) and their professional development opportunities. The Crick became a signatory of the Concordat in March 2021, committing ourselves as an institution, and our postdocs and group leaders (managers of postdocs), to implement the Concordat principles in our policies, day to day activities and behaviours.



Researcher Development Concordat: our action plan

The Crick's strategy, Discovery Without Boundaries (DWB) was refreshed in 2021. This refreshed strategy, and our values, core principles and objectives, align well with those of the Concordat. The Crick's strategy sets out our commitments to promoting an open and collegial research culture and to providing outstanding science support for our researchers. As an incubator for early career talent, we aim to provide focused guidance and dynamic, high-quality training and development programmes and opportunities. Our growing international network of alumni provides plenty of networking, mentorship, collaboration, and career development opportunities.

Since becoming a signatory of the Concordat, we have formed a Researcher Development Concordat working group, with representatives from the postdoc and group leader communities, the Academic Training team, and the People Development team. This group has completed a thorough gap analysis of our current practices versus the Concordat's requirements. This work highlighted several areas where there are opportunities for improving our practice. They have been arranged in five strategic categories as follows:

Actions in categories 1, 3 and 5 will be prioritized for implementation in the first year, those in categories 2 and 4 will take place over the next three years. The actions belonging to each of these topics are listed and developed in our detailed Researcher Development Concordat action plan. This action plan incorporates feedback from the Postdoc Committee, and actions based on postdocs' responses to the 2022 Crick Staff Survey. This action plan has been signed off by the Crick's Science Management Committee and has the support of the leadership team.

The Researcher Development Concordat working group and the Academic Training team will have oversight of the action plan and will be responsible for ensuring its implementation. Update reports will be published on the Crick's external website.

This document aims to provide an overview of our action plan, highlighting the areas for future actions in each of the five categories (new actions), and to provide information on the Crick's current practices (appendix).

- 1** Institute-wide communications to support Concordat principles
- 2** Training and support for group leaders
- 3** Training and support for postdocs
- 4** Tracking and reporting 10 days professional development per year
- 5** Implementation of Concordat principles in Performance Development Reviews

1

Institute-wide communications to support Concordat principles

The purpose of the actions within this category are:

To raise awareness of the Concordat principles amongst stakeholder groups and the wider Crick community.

To ensure postdocs and group leaders are fully informed of our existing policies, programmes, activities, and opportunities that align with the Concordat principles, plus any new ones that are introduced as part of this action plan.

To brief the postdocs and group leaders on their responsibilities, as members of a Concordat signatory organisation, and encourage them to apply these in their day-to-day actions and behaviours.

As a result of the work carried out in line with our DWB strategy, the Crick already aligns with the Concordat principles through a wide range of programmes and activities detailed in the appendix, which will be strengthened by the actions below.

New actions

The future actions that will be implemented within this category include:

- ▶ Communicating the Crick's Concordat action plan and other relevant information externally via our website and internally via town halls, intranet articles, internal newsletters, relevant committee meetings, etc.
- ▶ Delivering separate Concordat briefing sessions for postdocs and group leaders and incorporating information from those briefings into appropriate induction programmes.
- ▶ Using the relevant internal communications channels, to continue to promote and develop existing mental health and wellbeing activities, and EDI initiatives.
- ▶ Continuing to support activities that promote a positive research culture, including via the Postdoc Committee, Lab Culture Forum, Staff Consultative Forum, EDI Committee, Faculty Committee, Faculty meetings, Science Management Committee, and Assistant Research Directors.
- ▶ Continuing to communicate the availability and importance of using existing mechanisms to report inappropriate behaviour.

2

Training and support for group leaders

The Crick considers group leaders a key stakeholder group to achieve the objectives outlined in the DWB strategy. This is in part because of their critical role as managers of postdocs: they have enormous impact on the environment and culture of their research groups, they can help postdocs develop to their full potential while at the Crick, and they can support postdocs' career development and wellbeing.

New actions

The Crick's current practices to support group leaders are in line with the Concordat (see sections A1 and A2 of the appendix) and will be further supported by the following actions:

- ▶ Concordat briefing sessions for group leaders: these sessions will introduce the principles of the Concordat, its implementation at the Crick and their responsibilities as stakeholders. Sessions will include how to support postdocs to develop their research identity and participate in 10 days of professional development. During these sessions, group leaders will also be encouraged to support postdocs' involvement in EDI initiatives and consider flexible working requests. The Crick's Code of Conduct and 10 key policies will be highlighted.
- ▶ Group leader onboarding: new starters will be introduced to the Concordat during the onboarding process, which will include appropriate inductions and an explanatory handbook.
- ▶ Wellbeing and mental health training for group leaders: the Crick is considering introducing specific training to help increase group leaders' skills for positively influencing the wellbeing and supporting the mental health of the researchers they manage.
- ▶ Research integrity policy: during their onboarding process, group leaders are made aware of the Crick's Research integrity policy, and we are considering introducing additional refresher sessions.
- ▶ Recruitment: the Crick will continue to review and update the existing training on good interview, selection, and onboarding practices, as well as the Crick's Recruitment policy. Job descriptions for postdoc roles will be reviewed, to ensure these align with the Concordat principles.



3

Training and support for postdocs

Postdocs are one of the largest groups of staff within the institute (>350) and are key to the Crick's scientific output and the delivery of our DWB strategy. A core principle of this strategy is to incubate early-career talent, and the Crick supports postdocs' career development via a wide variety of activities and programmes.

New actions

The Crick's current practice in terms of postdoc support aligns well with the Concordat (as described in sections A1 and A3 of the appendix) and will be further supported by the following actions:

- ▶ Concordat briefing sessions for current postdocs: the briefings will include sections on postdocs' obligations and responsibilities, research culture (developed in consultation with the Postdoc Committee and Lab Culture Forum), Research integrity policy, wellbeing and mental health, the available mechanisms to report inappropriate behaviour (mainly in relation to discrimination, harassment, bullying, and research misconduct), career development activities to prepare postdocs for a range of employment options across different sectors, and the development of their awareness and experience of the wider scientific research system. During these Concordat briefing sessions, postdocs will also be encouraged to engage with the key Crick staff committees and networks. Participating in 10 days professional development per year, and opportunities to develop research identity will be introduced and explained, along with information on available activities.
- ▶ Postdoc Induction: the content of these quarterly events for new starters will be reviewed and updated in accordance with the Concordat principles. New sections will be included to promote the development of research identity & broader leadership skills highlighting a variety of ways to achieve this, e.g. changes in behaviour, seeking out new challenges etc. The opportunity to participate 10 days professional development per year for postdocs will be communicated and explained.
- ▶ Postdoc Career Planning briefing: the content of this mandatory session, aimed at Postdocs in their second or third year will be reviewed to ensure it promotes: 1. the use of career planning tools such as career development plans, 2. how to explore opportunities in different sectors including networking, careers events, work shadowing and work placements, 3. the development of postdocs' awareness and experience of the wider research systems and 4. the development of research identity and broader leadership skills.

4

Tracking and reporting of 10 days professional development

The Concordat recognises the importance of continuous professional and career development, particularly as researchers pursue a wide range of careers in the longer-term. The Concordat states that researchers are expected to participate in a minimum of 10 days per year (pro rata) of professional development activities, to help them grow in their role and explore and prepare for a range of employment options across different sectors.

New actions

- ▶ Develop a framework that supports postdocs to participate in a minimum of 10 days professional development per year (pro rata).
- ▶ Define and communicate which activities will count towards these 10 days, with the Researcher Development Concordat working group.
- ▶ Develop a mechanism to allow postdocs to record their engagement in professional development activities.
- ▶ Communicate expectations regarding the 10 days professional development in group leader and postdoc Concordat briefings.



5

Implementation of Concordat principles in Performance and Development Reviews

The Crick Performance and Development Review (PDR) process provides an important opportunity for staff and managers to dedicate some time to looking back, assessing, and learning from the past year, as well as planning for the year ahead. It helps to support continuous development, giving a shared understanding of achievements, frustrations, areas to improve and growth plans (see section A5 of the appendix). This process will be improved via the actions below.

New actions

- ▶ The existing postdoc PDR guidelines and form will be reviewed to ensure that they accurately reflect the Concordat principles, and prompt discussions about career development and wellbeing. Postdocs will be encouraged to lead their PDR process and discussions. They will be reminded of the relevant information in the Postdoc Induction, at the Concordat briefing, and at the beginning of the PDR season. Postdocs interested in seeking independent positions will be strongly encouraged to make use of the PDR time to discuss options for developing their own research identity (including the possibility of generating preliminary data).
- ▶ The existing group leader PDR and review guidelines and processes will be reviewed, to consider whether any adjustments should be made to ensure alignment with the Concordat principles.



Appendix: Current practice to support the career development of researchers

A1 Institute-wide communications to support Concordat principles

Current practice at the Crick, relating to the three Concordat principles (Environment and culture, Employment, and Professional and career development), includes:

- ▶ Policies: all key policies are provided during recruitment, are available on the Crick's intranet, and are reviewed regularly, including to make sure they follow our EDI standards.
- ▶ Wellbeing and mental health: postdocs are encouraged to attend wellbeing and mental health training and events (e.g. Signposting training, Mental Health First Aider training, Mental Health Awareness, Mindful Meditation, Time Management). Postdocs have access to staff benefits, including via the assistance programme, Occupational Health, and regular sports and social activities. Our Dignity at work and Wellbeing policies are part of the 10 key policies highlighted during onboarding. A renewed wellbeing strategy has been developed by the Crick's new Health and Wellbeing Manager in consultation with postdocs and other groups and will be delivered over the next three years.
- ▶ EDI (equality, diversity & inclusion): the Crick requires all staff to complete our essential training, which includes EDI, Inclusive Crick, and Respectful Communication courses. Our EDI policy is part of the 10 key policies and is highlighted during the onboarding process. Postdocs and group leaders are encouraged to attend events organised by the Crick's Equality and Diversity Manager, the EDI Committee, and the employee groups Prism, Proud and the Family network (e.g. Bring your culture to work day, Science and society lecture series, Disability Awareness training, Race Fluency workshop).
- ▶ Research integrity: all Crick employees are required to comply with our Research integrity policy, Whistleblowing policy, Guidelines on good research practice, and our Code of Conduct. The institute offers several reporting routes (e.g. the Speak-Up online anonymous reporting system), training, and tools and mechanisms for support of employees who would like to raise a concern. The Crick Postdoc Committee created the internal 'Postdoc advice for raising concerns' web page and encourage talking to colleagues, managers, and HR about any concerns. Specific cases are tracked, monitored, managed and reported as appropriate and in accordance with relevant HR policies.
- ▶ Career development and PDRs: postdocs are encouraged to complete their PDRs and use them as a tool to keep track of their engagement with training and career development activities. Training and development of lab members is included in group leaders' PDR form. PDR uptake is monitored.



► Training: postdocs have access to a large training catalogue divided into eight topics (Research - Science technology, Research - Computational & data analysis, Research - Communication, integrity & translation, Leadership & management, Professional & personal development, Safety, health & wellbeing, and Career development). The Crick also offers a wide range of external activities and courses via our partners and other organisations, covered by central budget. The Postdoc Training Programme includes the following mandatory activities:

1. Postdoc Induction: promotes the integration of postdocs into the community, informs about the mandatory training programme and optional training portfolio, provides details on pay scale, pension schemes and other benefits, and highlights career development activities and opportunities for a range of employment options across different sectors. Postdocs are made aware of the Crick's strategy, Code of Conduct and 10 key policies, ways of raising concerns and getting support, as well as contributing to consultative committees.
2. Research integrity training: a seminar covering the Crick Research integrity and Scientific research data management policies, image processing standards and high-throughput sequencing data processing standards.

3. Research proposal submission (three months after starting): proposed by the Postdoc Committee, developing this research proposal engages postdocs and their group leaders in the early development of their research project.

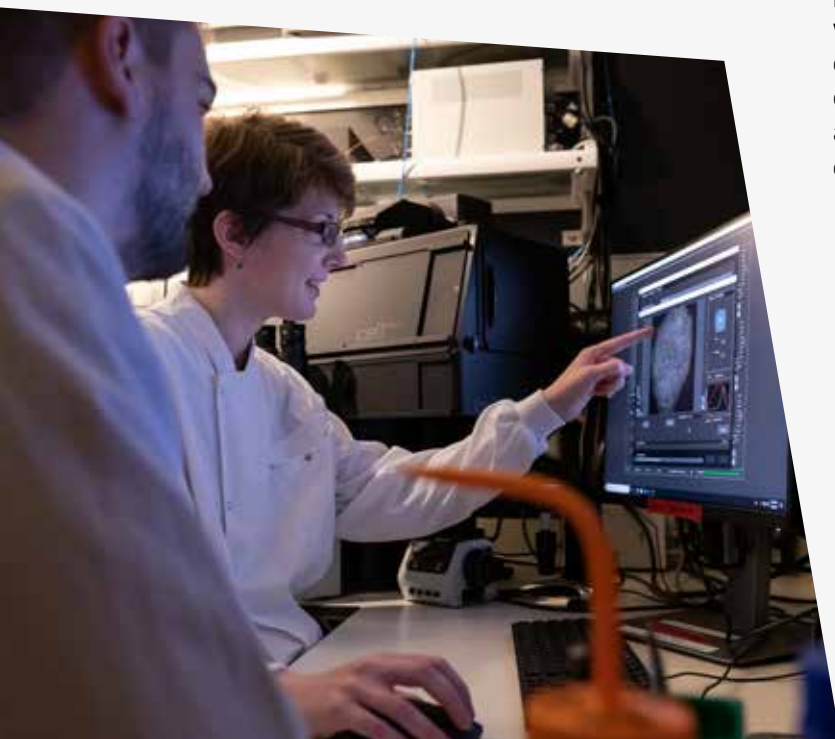
4. Participation in scientific Interest Groups: all postdocs are affiliated to at least one Crick scientific Interest Group, are expected to attend its weekly seminars, and are scheduled to present their project and results to that interest group.

5. Completion of yearly PDR process.

6. Postdoc Career Planning briefing: aimed at postdocs in second or third year. The session aims are to prompt postdocs to think about future career options, remind them of the importance of career planning and taking ownership, and make them aware of the career development resources available to them.

► Monitoring: postdocs' wellbeing, mental health, reward and recognition, engagement with development activities, and other matters relating to research culture and environment, are monitored via the Crick staff survey and the Athena Swan survey. Action plans are produced and implemented as a result of these surveys.

► Employment: Crick postdocs are appointed on a four-year contract which may be extended for up to two years, thereby allowing them to develop and complete an ambitious and long-term research project. Postdocs are placed on an incremental salary scale and we operate a flexible working policy, depending on personal circumstances. The Crick is committed to promoting career planning and development, particularly for researchers on fixed-term contracts.



A2 Training and support for group leaders

In addition to the points described in section A1, the Crick's current practice includes:

- ▶ Group leader training: as part of the Science LEADS programme, new group leaders undertake the EMBO laboratory management course, Crick recruitment and onboarding training, Performance Management, Sickness Management, and discussions with other faculty members. The annual group leader PDR covers their career development progress as well as that of the people they manage. More experienced group leaders participate in the Crick Leadership Programme. The Crick offers a broad training and career development portfolio, available to all staff, covering careers within and beyond academia.

A3 Training and support for postdocs

Further to the postdoc training activities and support described in section A1, the Crick's current practice includes:

- ▶ Postdoc training: we offer a broad training and career development portfolio covering careers within and beyond academia that is available to Crick postdocs (Crick Careers Fest, monthly Careers Talks, Careers Beyond Academia workshops, Career Planning briefing, 1:1 CV writing & career advice support). Postdocs can access a Mentoring programme with over 400 mentors, with mentor and mentee training provided, including during the yearly Mentoring week. Moreover, postdocs can apply for short external work placements, and take advantage of networking opportunities online and in person via the CrickConnect alumni and staff network. The Postdoc Training Programme also includes entrepreneur / translation training, opportunities to participate in public engagement initiatives, training and support for transitioning

to independence (e.g. Crick Postdoc to PI Programme, peer review training, grant and paper writing workshops, Leadership in Action and EMBO Lab Management courses, and participating in the Crick Summer Student Programme), and teaching training and experience via tailored programmes with our partners UCL and King's College London.

- ▶ Scientific events: postdocs are encouraged to participate in internal and external events such as scientific seminars, Interest Group seminars, networking events, research funding-related events, etc. Postdocs organise an annual postdoc symposium with a science and/or career development focus.
- ▶ Committees: the Crick offers postdocs extensive opportunities to engage in various Crick committees, networks and working groups, enabling them to learn about and contribute to the operation of the Crick (e.g. Postdoc Committee, Staff Consultative Forum, EDI Committee, Lab Culture Forum, etc.).

A4 Tracking and reporting of 10 days professional development

The Crick currently records and reviews postdocs' participation in some of our training and development activities, to aid internal monitoring of trends and detection of support gaps, and to aid the continuous improvement of the mandatory Postdoc Training Programme and the optional training catalogue.

A5 Implementation of Concordat principles in Performance and Development Reviews

Postdocs and group leaders are provided with specific guidelines, training, and instructions at the beginning of PDR season. Postdoc and group leader PDR forms include sections on training and development and conversations around these topics are encouraged. PDR uptake is monitored.



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