

# Concordat for Engaging the Public with Research

A set of principles drawn up by the Funders of  
Research in the UK



## David Willetts, Universities and Science Minister



*I am delighted to introduce this Concordat for Engaging the Public with Research.*

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills is committed to fostering public engagement, recognising its value for research and society. From art and science festivals to school workshops and research projects involving local communities, our universities and scientific and cultural institutions have a rich history of engaging the public with research, across all disciplines.

There does however remain a challenge to embed our public engagement activities, to continue to improve their scope and quality, to bring initiatives together better for greater effect, and to assess their impact.

I therefore welcome this *Concordat for Engaging the Public with Research* and its aims to strengthen public engagement across the research and HE sector. The Concordat provides a mandate for research organisations, research managers and researchers to build on the wealth of existing good practice and foster public engagement so that this activity is better valued, recognised and supported.

The *Concordat for Engaging the Public with Research* consists of a set of principles for the future support of public engagement within research organisations and, under each principle, an explanation of how it may best be embedded into institutional practices, building on the experiences of universities and research organisations across the UK.

One of the main benefits of this Concordat will be to help institutions consider the effectiveness of their existing approaches to support public engagement and demonstrate internationally the breadth, innovation and high standards of public engagement in the UK.

I would like to thank all the signatories and supporters who will be implementing and reviewing the Concordat for their commitment to public engagement, which will enhance the future of research and benefit the UK society and economy.

## Professor Alan Thorpe, Chair, Research Councils UK



*Public engagement enhances research so that it contributes positively to society and results in greater relevance, accountability and transparency.*

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It is particularly important that the public can both access the knowledge being generated for their health, wealth and culture and have their say. Such engagement helps empower people, broadens attitudes and ensures that the work of universities and research institutes is relevant to society and wider social concerns.

We believe that engaging with the public should form part of the role of researchers in any discipline. By engaging with the public researchers can benefit from: improving the quality of research and its impact, by widening research horizons or providing user perspectives; enhancing researchers' communication and influencing skills; higher personal and institutional profiles; new partnerships. Public engagement can also help universities actively contribute to positive social change and the 'public good'.

*This Concordat for Engaging the Public with Research* is part of our efforts to support and encourage researchers to engage with the public and overcome barriers that they may encounter.

A key achievement in this regard has been the Beacons for Public Engagement, established in 2008 by RCUK, the UK Funding Councils and the Wellcome Trust. Successes include universities committing to public engagement within their strategies, creating champions, changes to promotions criteria, job descriptions and appraisals to recognise public engagement, the creation of prizes and provision of training and administrative support to enable researchers to engage.

To build on these achievements and other examples of good practice in the research and HE sectors, RCUK was then pleased to convene a working group of research funders and representatives from the HE sector in March 2010 to develop this Concordat as a tool to inspire research organisations, researcher managers and researchers from across the HE sector to better foster public engagement.

Together we can ensure that the culture of the higher education and research sectors values, recognises and supports public engagement.

# Concordat for Engaging the Public with Research

*A set of principles drawn up by the Funders of Research in the UK*

The signatories of this Concordat recognise the importance of public engagement to help maximise the social and economic impact of UK research.

As such, they share a vision for a research culture that values, recognises and supports public engagement. The aim of this Concordat is to build on previous commitments to public engagement and add value to existing effective practice by providing a single, unambiguous statement of the expectations and responsibilities of research funders in the UK in meeting this challenge.<sup>1</sup> The Concordat provides guidance for those research organisations, researcher managers and researchers who receive our funding to foster public engagement and meet these expectations and responsibilities.

The signatories are encouraged by the body of existing good quality public engagement within and beyond the research and HE sectors.

Public engagement with research describes a diversity of activities including:

- Participating in festivals
- Working with museums / galleries / science centres and other cultural venues
- Creating opportunities for the public to inform the research questions being tackled

- Researchers and public working together to inform policy
- Presenting to the public (e.g. public lectures or talks)
- Involving the public as researchers (e.g. web based experiments)
- Engaging with young people to inspire them about research (e.g. workshops in schools)
- Contributing to new media enabled discussion forums

It is recognised that involvement by researchers in these activities is not restricted to face-to-face interactions with public audiences but can also take the form of collaborative and consultative roles. Gaining an awareness of the social and ethical context of research can also help researchers understand and practise good quality public engagement.

Whilst this agreement focuses on public engagement with research, the signatories recognise that engaging with the public is an approach that can be integrated across HEIs (for example in teaching and learning).

This Concordat complements the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers. It does this through ensuring that public engagement is recognised and valued by the sector; that researchers are equipped and supported to undertake public engagement; and that they share responsibility for developing the skills required for their own personal and career development and lifelong learning.



<sup>1</sup> Such as the signatories' own mission statements and public engagement strategies

## Signatories and Supporters<sup>2</sup>

### **The signatories of this Concordat are:**

Research Councils UK<sup>3</sup>  
Higher Education Funding Council for England  
Higher Education Funding Council for Wales  
Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), N. Ireland  
Scottish Funding Council  
The British Academy  
The Royal Academy of Engineering  
The Royal Society  
Defra

It is recognised that these signatories and supporters only represent part of the research sector; private sector investment in research in the UK (including as employers of researchers) is substantial. The signatories therefore invite private sector research funders to use these principles as a tool to foster public engagement within their own organisations.

### **The supporters of this Concordat are:**

Academy of Medical Sciences  
Academy of Social Sciences  
Association of Medical Research Charities  
Association of Research Managers and Administrators UK  
British Science Association  
The Consortium for Research Excellence, Support and Training  
Department for Business, Innovation and Skills  
Department for Communities and Local Government  
Engineering UK  
Food Standards Agency  
GuildHE  
Home Office  
Institute of Physics  
Institution of Mechanical Engineers  
Million+  
Parkinson's UK  
Royal Geographical Society  
Royal Institution  
Royal Society of Chemistry  
Royal Society of Edinburgh  
Science Council  
Society of Biology  
The 1994 Group  
The Russell Group  
The Wellcome Trust  
UK Association for Science and Discovery Centres  
Universities UK  
University Alliance  
Vitae



<sup>2</sup> An up-to-date list of signatories and supporters is maintained at [www.rcuk.ac.uk/per](http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/per)

<sup>3</sup> The Arts and Humanities Research Council, The Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, The Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council, The Economic and Social Research Council, The Medical Research Council, The Natural Environment Research Council and The Science and Technology Facilities Council

## Definitions

### Researchers

Researchers are broadly defined as individuals whose primary responsibility is to conduct research and who are employed for this purpose. This can include postgraduate students and technicians. It is recognised that this broad category of staffing covers a wide range of staff with different disciplinary backgrounds, levels of training, experience and responsibility, types of contract, and different career expectations and intentions. Given the diversity of research staff experience and expertise, it is impossible to address researchers as a homogeneous group.

### Funders of research

Those institutions and organisations which fund public and private research. It is recognised that funders may also be employers of researchers.

### Research organisations

For the purposes of this concordat, this term is used to describe those institutions and organisations

which fund either public or private research (funders of research) and those institutions that employ or train individuals to conduct research researchers. This includes Higher Education Institutions whilst recognising that they have other purposes other than to undertake research.

### Research managers

Those responsible for managing and supporting researchers, including: supervisors, principal<sup>4</sup> and co-investigators, research team leaders, directors of research and heads of schools or departments.

### Supporters of researchers

Those responsible for supporting researchers in their administrative and other processes related to research as well as public engagement, including: research business managers, research administrators, finance officers, hr staff, staff developers, careers advisors and mentors and outreach or public and community engagement officers.



Dane Comerford University of Bristol

<sup>4</sup> The principal investigator takes responsibility for the intellectual leadership of the research project, for the overall management of the research and for the management and development of researchers

## A. Strategic Commitment

### PRINCIPLE 1 UK research organisations have a strategic commitment to public engagement

1. Research organisations should hold an understanding and definition of public engagement, appropriate to their context, which is shared and used consistently across the organisation.
2. Public engagement should be embedded within research organisations' missions, key strategies and operational plans to help to provide focus, meaning, emphasis and support for public engagement. This may include an organisational public engagement strategy led at senior levels and communicated effectively (internally and externally).
3. It is recognised that senior public engagement champions are essential in fostering public engagement throughout all researcher levels, and these individuals should be encouraged and supported by their research organisations.



## B. Reward and Recognition

### PRINCIPLE 2 Researchers are recognised and valued for their involvement with public engagement activities

1. The benefits of public engagement to researchers should be clearly recognised and promoted at all stages of their career, including its valuable role in developing transferable skills.
2. Research organisations should consider whether public engagement is appropriately represented in staff policies and processes (such as for inductions, performance review, promotions criteria or workload planning) to allow researchers to be involved in public engagement activities without impairing their career.
3. Those responsible for the implementation of such processes, including research managers and relevant supporters of researchers, should receive appropriate briefing and support.
4. Research organisations are encouraged to celebrate and communicate their researchers' successes in public engagement.



## C. Skills, Support and Opportunities

### **PRINCIPLE 3 Researchers are enabled to participate in public engagement activities through appropriate training, support and opportunities**

1. Research organisations are conscious of the attributes required for public engagement, recognising that such attributes are a subset of the skills, behaviours and personal qualities that researchers should be aspiring towards in their professional development (as outlined in the Researcher Development Statement and relevant professional qualifications).
2. Research organisations recognise the importance of professional development in public engagement for researchers and provide access to relevant training and development opportunities (for example by integrating public engagement attributes into institutional professional development plans), ensuring that a lack of skills is not a barrier to engagement.
3. Researchers share the responsibility for developing their engagement practice and are encouraged pro-actively to engage in appropriate professional development.
4. Research managers should support and encourage the development of their teams' public engagement practice (e.g. through professional development and appropriate participation in public engagement activities).
5. Research organisations should facilitate opportunities for researchers to engage with the public.
6. Research organisations should seek to provide practical support for researchers to engage with the public, whether delivered at a departmental, institutional or regional level (e.g. through deployment of staff (supporters of research<sup>5</sup>)). This could include administrative support, expertise, advice, access to information on financial assistance and/or signposts to examples of good practice and potential partners.
7. Research organisations are encouraged to consider how public engagement is coordinated across the institution to enable the sharing of good practice and help ensure activities are consistent with the institution's policy.
8. Research organisations should actively assess and manage potential institutional and personal risks associated with public engagement.

## D. Implementation and impact

### **PRINCIPLE 4 The signatories and supporters of this Concordat will undertake regular reviews of their and the wider research sector's progress in fostering public engagement across the UK**

1. Research organisations should themselves monitor and evaluate the efficacy of the public engagement they support in addressing their strategic aims and the extent to which they are meeting the expectations outlined in this Concordat. This could include seeking feedback from staff, students and the public. by the Funders, through existing reporting structures.
2. This Concordat provides a common framework for regular reviews of progress across the sector
3. Research organisations should work together to develop and share good practice in public engagement and in the implementation of the Concordat.

<sup>5</sup> See Definitions